

BREAK DOWN BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITY

**Fixing the foundations to give
children the best start in life**

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Our Labour government was elected on the promise of change – to deliver a decade of national renewal and put the country back in the service of working people.

The hard work of the National Policy Forum in the years before the 2024 election set us on the path to an election-winning manifesto, a manifesto at the heart of our historic election win.

Security and renewal are our twin tasks, and now, we are getting on and delivering that change for working people.

We've fulfilled our pledge to deliver over two million extra NHS appointments – seven months early. We've delivered pay rises for 3.5 million people through a rise in the minimum wage, and average wages are growing at their fastest rate in three years.

We have launched Great British Energy to provide clean, secure, homegrown power. We've established a National Wealth Fund to fuel growth, we've overhauled planning laws to make the dream of home ownership a reality and we've delivered a £1 billion boost to police funding to keep our streets safe. Thanks to Labour, free breakfast clubs are being rolled-out in every primary school, starting with the first 750 from this April, saving parents up to £450 a year.

But the work has just begun. Our Plan for Change sets six clear, measurable milestones that the British people can expect to see delivered by the end of this Parliament: higher living standards; 1.5 million homes built; hospital backlogs ended; police back on the streets in every community; a record proportion of children starting school ready to learn; and secure, home-grown energy.

This can only be delivered with the strong foundations of economic stability, national security, and border security.

The National Policy Forum is a vital part of Labour's democratic policy-making process. We look forward to hearing from you and invite you to get involved in the NPF, to support the Party's policy priorities and build towards the next General Election.

Keir Starmer
Leader of the Labour Party
Prime Minister



Having spent 19 years on the National Policy Forum in a number of different roles, I am delighted to return to the NPF as Party Chair and to have been elected as NPF Chair. It is an absolute privilege now to take up this position to guide our first NPF in Government in more than 14 years.



The strength of our Labour movement produced our brilliant general election victory. But the work doesn't stop there.

Our Labour Government inherited unprecedented challenges, with crumbling public services and crippled public finances. This Government will not shy away from tough decisions: we will always put service before politics.

In this context, the NPF's Annual Consultation 2025 will focus on fixing the foundations to deliver change.

The consultation documents reflect some of the vital areas we must fix if we are to deliver Labour's decade of national renewal and make working people feel more secure. We are getting our economy back on track, boosting living standards, tackling the housing crisis and modernising our public services. We are building a more secure country at home while building our strength abroad.

We all have a role to play in responding to the challenges the country faces. As Party members, supporters and stakeholders your voice plays a vital role in these debates, from sharing your lived experiences, to expertise, knowledge and insight. We are stronger together and it is vital we maintain a strong link between the Party in government and the Party in the country. We encourage you to get involved and play your part in supporting the new Labour Government.

Please consider submitting your views either individually or as part of your CLP or organisation. We also invite you to attend one of the online members' events to hear from my Cabinet colleagues.

Together, our long-term work will deliver a decade of national renewal and a more secure and prosperous Britain.

Ellie Reeves
Party Chair and NPF Chair
Cabinet Office Minister

Thank you to everyone who got involved in the previous cycle of the National Policy Forum (NPF) and helped us produce an election-winning manifesto.

The new cycle of the NPF was launched in January 2025. We were delighted to welcome NPF reps from across the Labour movement to the first online meeting of the full NPF where we heard from the Prime Minister and Cabinet members.

The NPF is made up of the following six policy commissions:

- **Kickstart economic growth**
- **Build an NHS fit for the future**
- **Make Britain a clean energy superpower**
- **Safer streets**
- **Break down barriers to opportunity**
- **Britain reconnected**

This year's consultation runs from 31 March to 8 June.

The theme for this first-year consultation is **'fixing the foundations to deliver change'**. During the consultation, each commission will consult on fixing the foundations to enable the Labour Government to deliver the milestones set out in the Plan for Change and identify future challenges on the path to delivering the decade of national renewal that Labour promised in the 2024 Manifesto.

Each commission has produced a set of questions to guide discussions, as well as details on the policy context, our inheritance from the previous Conservative Government, and what the new Labour Government is already doing to deliver security and renewal for working people.

You don't need to answer every question in the document, nor answer them in a specific way. These questions are intended as a guide to stimulate discussions on the main issues in each policy area. When considering these questions, it may be helpful to consider examples of best practice in the policy areas, perhaps from your own experience and your local area, or the blockages to policy implementation which need to be overcome.

We welcome submissions from members of the public, Constituency and Branch Labour Parties, trade unions and socialist societies, as well as contributions from expert organisations such as think tanks, businesses and civil society.

Please submit your responses on our new website here:

<https://nationalpolicyforum.labour.org.uk/>

This website also provides further information about this year's consultation and other ways to get involved, including our programme of members' events.

Finally, we recommend looking at our FAQs here

<https://nationalpolicyforum.labour.org.uk/about/> if you have any questions.

Thank you again for getting involved with the NPF. It is through our collective work that we will deliver a decade of national renewal for working people.

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TO KNOW
MORE?**

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new website:



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The Labour Party is an inclusive, member-based organisation that prides itself on being accessible to all. If you would like an accessible version of these documents, please email us at **policydevelopment@labour.org.uk** to discuss how we can best accommodate your requirements.

1. What are the main challenges in improving school readiness and meeting the key Plan for Change milestone of 75 per cent of five-year-olds in England being ready to learn when they start school?
2. How can Labour give children the best possible start in life and break the unfair link between a young person's background and their future success?
3. How can we close the opportunity gap and help all children – including those from a disadvantaged background and children with special educational needs and disabilities – to achieve and thrive in school?
4. How can we ensure that families have the support they need during the crucial first 1,001 days of a child's development?
5. How can early years services be better integrated to improve families' security and boost children's life chances?
6. What are the specific implications of policy proposals in this area for (a) women, (b) Black, Asian and minority ethnic people (c) LGBT+ people, (d) disabled people and (e) all those with other protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010?
7. What consideration would need to be given to policy proposals in this area when collaborating with devolved administrations, combined authorities and other local governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

Opportunity is at the core of Labour's values. Boosting life chances, tackling the scar of child poverty, raising school standards, and striving for economic security for families have been defining pursuits of every Labour Government.

Through its ambitious Plan for Change, the Labour Government of today is tightly-focused on breaking down barriers to opportunity and giving all children the best possible start in life.

Under the last Conservative Government, opportunity was too often stifled, and life chances were diminished for far too many. After 14 years of Conservative failure, 700,000 more children were growing up in poverty.

The Conservatives left a trail of devastation across education – for too many children, standards were falling, and far too many children were not ready for school. As a result, the link between family background and future success became even stronger.

It's only by breaking this unfair link between a child's family background and their future success that Labour can create a fairer Britain in which all children have the opportunity to achieve and thrive.

The Labour Government has set about fixing the foundations so it can achieve just that and – through its Plan for Change – deliver on the milestone of 75 per cent of five-year-olds in England being ready to learn when they start school. That means more children with the key skills needed to be emotionally and physically ready to start school.

To achieve that, Labour is ushering in a new child-centred approach to Government that works to support families and bring security during the crucial early years of a child's development.

This consultation – and the work of the 'Break Down Barriers to Opportunity' NPF Policy Commission this year – is focused on supporting the Labour Government to deliver on its ambitious Plan for Change.

Successive Conservative Governments left a trail of devastation across education, presided over declining living standards and entrenched lifelong inequalities that link future success to family background.

When the Conservatives left office, schools were crumbling and standards were falling. On their watch, 12 children in every class of 30 were leaving primary school having failed to meet core expectations in reading, writing and maths.

The Conservative Government's failure allowed a number of 'baked-in' inequalities to take hold, including a widening of the disadvantage attainment gap and 700,000 more children growing up in poverty compared with 2010.

In addition, the pandemic deprived young children of normal social interactions, and widened differences in the quality of home-schooling between those with access to IT equipment and parents with the time and skills to help them learn. The Conservatives did nothing to help those who most needed support.

Across the education and early years landscape, 14 years of Conservative failure have been to the detriment of children's life chances, making it harder for families to get on in life and more difficult for children to achieve and thrive.

Compared with 2010, the number of teacher vacancies in England rose from just 355 to 2,500, while the Conservatives' failure to invest meant they left 234 schools facing the scourge of RAAC concrete (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete).

The number of students severely absent and missing more than half of school has almost quadrupled since 2010, while one in five children are missing a day of school a fortnight or more.

At the same time, the Conservatives presided over ballooning childcare costs and a 34,000 fall in the number of childcare places since 2010.

On top of unaffordable childcare, over 80 per cent of parents have said they've struggled to access vital early years services such as antenatal classes, health visitors, parental support, and baby and toddler groups.

As a result, the Labour Government inherited an early years and education system in crisis; one that wasn't working for families and one that was failing to give children the start in life that they need.

The Labour Government has set out how it plans to meet the scale of this challenge in the face of the appalling inheritance on schools and life chances left by 14 years of Conservative failure.

Through the Plan for Change, Labour is clear that opportunity starts with children's crucial early years, which means delivering integrated services through the first 1,001 days and high-quality early education and childcare.

From that platform, Labour will help every child to achieve and thrive at school with excellent teaching and high standards, and help build skills for opportunity and growth so that every young person can get on in life.

It is through the ambitious, long-term Plan for Change that the Labour Government will give children the best possible start in life and break the unfair link between success and background.

Despite the appalling economic and social legacy left by the Conservatives, the Labour Government has begun delivering on the change promised at the General Election, as it sets out on a decade of national renewal.

The Labour Government is delivering on its promise for free breakfast clubs in every primary school in England, starting with 750 early adopter primary schools from April 2025.

Breakfast clubs are proven to boost children's attendance, attainment, readiness to learn, wellbeing and behaviour. But, under the Conservatives, just one in ten primary schools across England received any government support to provide breakfast clubs.

Labour is making free breakfast clubs available for all primary children to give parents more choices with half an hour of free childcare before the school day starts, saving families an estimated £450 a year, and helping close the opportunity gap and boost life chances.

As promised, the Labour Government has also begun recruiting 6,500 extra teachers, who will focus on subjects with shortages and those areas that have faced the biggest recruitment challenges.

The Government has also committed to investing £1.4 billion to rebuild crumbling schools, with £1.8 billion also confirmed to support the expansion of government-funded childcare.

Labour has unveiled plans to deliver 3,000 new school-based nurseries, providing thousands of additional childcare places where they are needed most, with the first round of funding launched for up to 300 school-based nurseries.

To better support families during the crucial early years of a child's development, the Labour Government has set about strengthening and joining up family services, including investing in Family Hubs and Start for Life programmes.

Labour is investing to drive high and rising standards in early years and schools. That includes extra early language support, rolling out Maths Champions, and a boost to reading and writing skills that will benefit thousands of pupils across England.

As well as raising school standards across the board, delivering high-quality teaching and ensuring that no family is priced out of the support they need, tackling child poverty is a top priority for the Labour Government.

No child should be left hungry, cold, or have their future held back. That's why Labour has launched a cross-departmental Child Poverty Taskforce, focusing on reducing the number of children in poverty.

Labour is committed to bringing about lasting change on child poverty and the Government has set out its approach towards developing a 10-year strategy that will reduce costs, increase incomes and improve early years support for struggling families.

Despite the challenges inherited, Labour is pressing ahead with plans to support families, reform childcare, tackle child poverty, and make sure that every child can access the high-quality education they deserve.

Through the Plan for Change, Labour will have a relentless focus on delivering for Britain's children so we can ensure tens of thousands more children are school ready every year and that every child can have the best possible start in life.

