

# BREAK DOWN BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITY

**Supporting our young people to get on 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.**

In the face of the toxic division being peddled by other parties, we need to work together to stand up for unity so we can continue delivering the change our country needs. Labour chooses renewal over grievance, and every day we are getting on with the job of turning our country around.

Already with Labour, NHS waiting lists are down by more than 330,000. Inflation is falling, and interest rates have been cut six times, meaning new mortgages are almost £1500 cheaper a year on average. This is because we made the tough but fair decisions to invest in public services, help people with the cost of living, and restore our public finances.

2026 is the year that Britain turns a corner and that people will start to feel that change. After years of decline and drift under the Tories, 2026 is the year renewal becomes real:

- ✔ Thousands more free breakfast clubs will open giving children a better start to the day and saving parents £450 a year;
- ✔ 3,000 more neighbourhood police officers are on our streets from March making our communities safer;
- ✔ Almost 120 community diagnostic centres will be open 7 days a week across the country by April – as we bring down waiting lists and fix our NHS for the future;
- ✔ New rights for renters and workers will deliver greater security for millions;
- ✔ And inflation, interest rates and mortgage costs are forecast to keep on falling helping to keep costs down .

Many of the policies that are going to make a real difference to people's lives this year came from the work of the National Policy Forum– so thank you.

This year, the National Policy Forum is continuing this important work, supporting our Labour Government and looking ahead to the next General Election. We look forward to hearing from you and invite you to get involved and play your part in our country's renewal.

**Keir Starmer**  
**Leader of the Labour Party**  
**Prime Minister**



**After two decades on the National Policy Forum, I am delighted to continue my work as NPF Chair as we enter the second year of the cycle. It is a privilege to lead the NPF as we shape the next stage of Labour's work in Government.**



Since the Labour movement's historic General Election victory, this Government has delivered major action across all six missions.

We are tackling the cost of living and delivering major planning reforms to kickstart economic growth and build 1.5 million homes. We are speeding ahead with our mission to secure home-grown energy and deliver clean energy jobs. We are restoring neighbourhood policing and making communities safer. Our Child Poverty Strategy, including scrapping the two-child benefit limit, will lift around 550,000 children out of poverty and break down barriers to opportunity. We promised 2 million extra NHS appointments and delivered 5.2 million in our first year as part of our work to build an NHS fit for the future. Our VAWG Strategy will put into action our plan to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. The Employment Rights Act represents the biggest transformation of workers' rights in a generation, and we have reset our relationship with the EU.

Last year's consultation focused on 'Fixing the Foundations to Deliver Change', looking at how the Labour Government can deliver the milestones set out in the Plan for Change, on the path to delivering the decade of national renewal that we promised in the 2024 Manifesto.

This year, our focus moves firmly to the delivery of national renewal.

The 2026 consultation will look at some of the vital areas we must continue to focus on if we are to deliver Labour's decade of national renewal, making working people feel more secure.

This means bringing back pride in our communities, restoring our natural world, supporting young people to get on in life, bringing health services closer to people, securing our borders and restoring Britain as a respected partner in the world.

As Party members, supporters and stakeholders, your voice is imperative to this work. Your lived experience, expertise and insight help ensure a strong link between the Party in Government and the Party across the country.

I encourage you to take part in this consultation, submit your views individually or through your CLP or organisation, and join one of our online members' events to hear directly from Cabinet colleagues.

Together, our long-term work will get Britain back on track to deliver the change and national renewal we promised, as well as looking ahead to future challenges.

**Ellie Reeves**  
**NPF Chair and Solicitor General**

**Thank you to everyone who got involved in the previous cycle of the National Policy Forum (NPF). The new cycle of the NPF was launched in January 2025 following the 2024 General Election. We are now in the second year of the policy development cycle.**

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

This year's consultation runs from 5 March to 11 June 2026.

The theme of this year's consultation is national renewal. Over the spring, each commission will consult on renewing Britain to support the Labour government in delivering the change we promised, while also looking ahead to future challenges. Through this consultation, commissions will consider evidence, review submissions, and develop policy recommendations as part of the ongoing policy development cycle.

Each commission has produced a set of questions to guide discussions, as well as details on the policy context, and some steps Labour has already taken to deliver on our promise of change and get Britain back on track.

You don't need to answer every one of the questions in the document, nor answer them in a specific way. These questions are intended as a guide to stimulate discussions on what you think the main issues are in each policy area.

We welcome submissions from members of the public, Constituency and Branch Labour Parties, affiliated 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 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 coming soon.

Finally, we recommend looking at our FAQs here

<https://nationalpolicyforum.labour.org.uk/about/> and we will be sending a 'How to guide' out to roleholders 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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1. What are the reasons for the increase in the number of young people not in education, employment or training since 2021, and how can Labour best support young people to earn or learn?
2. What reforms are needed to break down barriers to opportunity for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions, including young disabled people?
3. What role can youth services play in supporting our young people and equipping them with guidance and support to step into the world of work?
4. How can Labour make progress towards its new target of two-thirds of young people participating in higher-level learning – academic, technical or apprenticeships – by age 25?
5. How can schools and colleges be best equipped to support young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), so that all our children can achieve and thrive?
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? What are the implications of these proposals on reducing the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage?
7. What consideration would need to be given to policy proposals in this area when collaborating with devolved administrations and local government in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

**Every child and young person deserves a fair chance to succeed. Britain should be a country where anyone from any background can thrive if they work hard. But the reality today is that someone's background has all too significant an impact on their future success. One of the defining goals of the Labour Government is to break that link.**

That's why, in 2025, the Break Down Barriers to Opportunity Policy Commission focused on how to give children the best start in life. The Commission found support from stakeholders and members for the Government's approach to prioritise school-readiness, particularly by broadening access to the high-quality early education and childcare that is so crucial to a child's development. The Commission also considered social security and family policy, in particular how upgrades to workers' rights, parental leave rights and, crucially, measures to tackle child poverty are supporting families more broadly. The third strand focused on breaking the unfair link between family background and future success, supporting people into good jobs and boosting life chances for young people across the country.

This year's consultation builds on the final strand of this work by asking how Labour can support young people to get on in life. At Annual Conference 2025, the Prime Minister outlined Labour's new target for two-thirds of young people to participate in higher-level learning – academic, technical or apprenticeship – by age 25. The National Policy Forum will examine how to make this ambition a reality, and how young people can best be supported to then go on to succeed in the world of work.

Nearly a million young people in the UK are currently not in education, employment or training. Most of the rise in the number of 'NEETs' took place under the Conservatives, but it remains too high. Labour will never be content to leave so many young people without the chance to earn or learn. Our action to tackle child poverty is an important tool to address this problem over the long term, as research shows that growing up in a low-income family diminishes employment prospects when children reach adulthood. And it is why the Government has commissioned a report from former Labour Health Secretary Alan Milburn examining the NEET issue, due to be published later in 2026. The Break Down Barriers to Opportunity Commission will this year explore what is driving high numbers of inactive young people, and what the most effective policy solutions are to restore opportunity for this group.

This will include examining how best to support disabled people and those with health conditions. We will also look at young people who are increasingly likely to be out of work because of a mental health condition.

The Commission will additionally look at how schools, colleges and wider youth services can support all our young people to achieve and thrive, following the ambitious Schools White Paper and SEND Consultation which the Secretary of State for Education announced in February. Children and young people with SEND will be a particular focus for this part of the consultation, as the Labour Government looks to improve the quality of support.

**Whoever you are, wherever you come from, our country should be a place where hard work means you can get on life. But far too often young people are being held back from progressing to college, apprenticeships or university – and ultimately, into good employment.**

The Labour Government has worked to spread opportunity far and wide, so every young person has the very best life chances. Starting from the earliest years, Labour has introduced 30 hours of free childcare for working parents, created and expanded school-based nurseries, and is revitalising family support to build on the legacy of Sure Start with a Best Start Family Hub in every local authority area from April 2026.

More and more Best Start free breakfast clubs are giving children the best start to their day, schools will be free of RAAC by the end of the Parliament, and Mental Health Support Teams are being rolled out in schools across the country. Over the school holidays, the future of Best Start Holiday Activities and Food clubs have been secured so they can continue to support families. Crucially, Labour's Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, is working to turn the SEND system around so that every child and young person can succeed and thrive in education. The Department for Education has put tackling the inherited crisis of the SEND system at its heart, investing £1 billion to support children with the most severe learning needs, along with £740 million to create more specialist places in mainstream schools. Labour has unveiled an ambitious plan for training staff across every stage of education on SEND and inclusion, so that teachers and support staff feel equipped and confident to support all students with SEND.

The Government is taking action on children's relationship with mobile phones and social media. As well as launching a national conversation, Labour is taking immediate action by offering parents of under-fives guidance on screen time, and will update guidance to make it clear that schools should be phone free by default.

Labour is also investing in post-16 skills. Last year, the Government committed to spending an extra £1.2 billion a year on skills by 2028/29. This funding will help fuel the drive to meet the new target of two-thirds of young people participating in higher level learning. It builds on the creation of Skills England, a new body which is working with employers to identify skills gaps, and is helping develop occupational standards, apprenticeship pathways and technical qualifications, so that both young people and adults are supported to get on in a changing economy.

As well as commissioning the Milburn report to investigate the NEET crisis, Labour has already taken bold initial steps. The new Jobs Guarantee will provide six months of paid work for every 18-21-year-old who has been on Universal Credit and searching for work for 18 months. This is a part of the

wider Youth Guarantee for 16–24-year-olds, which comes with £820 million of additional funding to provide extra work coach support, 350,000 more training and work placements, and Youth Hubs – centres where young people can access CV advice, skills training, mental health support, housing advice, and careers guidance – in every corner of Britain. Youth Hubs are just one strand of a broader, cross-government National Youth Strategy, co-produced with young people, which will rebuild youth services over the next decade. £500 million of new funding will revitalise youth centres, launch a network of 50 Young Futures Hubs, and recruit and train youth workers, ensuring every young person has something to do, somewhere to go, and someone who cares.

The Labour Government is acting to provide opportunity for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions, including for young people who face the risk of a lifetime excluded from the labour market. For example, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Pat McFadden has expanded Connect to Work, a supported employment programme which is set to help around 100,000 disabled people, those with health conditions and people with complex barriers to work through integrating employment, health and skills support across local areas. The 'Keep Britain Working' review, commissioned by the Government and undertaken by Sir Charlie Mayfield, highlighted that disabled people and people with health conditions need robust support – including access to meaningful reasonable adjustments – to stay in and return to work. The Government is also looking at how disability benefits can best help disabled people and those with long-term conditions. The Timms Review is doing this by co-producing recommendations for reform with disabled people, the organisations that represent them, carers, clinicians, and other experts.

Poverty too often holds back children and young people: taking away the chances they deserve, narrowing their horizons, constraining their futures. That is why Labour has taken bold action to tackle child poverty. By lifting the two-child limit and expanding free school meals to all children in families receiving Universal Credit, the Government is set to reduce the number of children in poverty by 550,000 by the next election – the largest ever fall in child poverty in a single parliament, thanks to measures opposed by both the Conservatives and Reform UK.

Ultimately, Labour is working to invest in the next generation so that every young person has the chance to see their talents take them where they want to go.

**Over a decade of Conservative rule left behind a trail of devastation, from early years to employment. A childcare pledge without a plan, an absence epidemic in our schools, buildings crumbling, and teachers leaving in droves – and, for young people who should have been taking their first steps in the world of work, a steep rise in inactivity.**

The Tories left our labour market in decline. Economic inactivity – those neither in work nor looking for work – crept up in their final years in power, and the number of people inactive due to long-term sickness reached a record high.

The NEET rate was rising when Labour came into office. Where the Tories wrote people off without support, Labour is taking action. This Government is boosting investment in employment support and reforming social security, for example with a new 'right to try' guarantee so that people can try work without fear of losing health-related benefits if a job doesn't work out. In contrast, the Conservatives offer only vague promises to slash the state, threatening a return to the austerity from which many of Britain's challenges stem.

Shockingly – and in their own words – the Tories left behind a “lose, lose, lose” SEND system in crisis. Meanwhile, Reform UK has admitted that SEND is an area for cuts, claiming that provision is being “hijacked by parents who are abusing the system”. With Labour, the Government is getting on with the job of rebuilding confidence in the system. After years of frustration, rebuilding trust will take time – but Labour is committed to deliver our vision of a truly inclusive education system.

Labour inherited child poverty levels at a record high. Under the Tories, 900,000 children were plunged into poverty. Now, almost three in four children growing up in poverty today are in a working family. That's why Labour is delivering on our long-standing moral mission to tackle child poverty. The last Labour Government achieved historic reductions in child poverty, and this Labour Government will do the same by scrapping the two-child limit, boosting childcare support, and expanding free school meals – while both Reform and the Tories have pledged to reinstate the two-child limit, pushing 450,000 children into poverty.

Labour is demonstrating what real change looks like – rebuilding our schools, providing better services for children and families, lifting hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty, and supporting people into work. Our plans to deliver 1.5 million new homes, boost security at work through our Employment Rights Act, and create 400,000 new clean energy jobs will provide a wealth of opportunities for our young people. This Commission will support the Government's ambition to help young people to get on in life, as part of the programme for national renewal.

