

National jobs guarantee can fix Tories' "toxic legacy" on NEETs and boost economy, according to TUC

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The **TUC** has called for an ambitious national jobs guarantee for young people currently not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

The UK faces a growing crisis in young people's labour market participation which spiralled under the Conservatives, the TUC warns.

The TUC says this not only has damaging consequences for young people's prospects – but for the country as a whole.

The government has "laid the foundations" to turn this around – starting with a youth guarantee programme to ensure every young person aged 18-21 has access to learning, an apprenticeship or support to find a job, which is being trialled in regions up and down the country.

The TUC says this should be built on with a national jobs guarantee, which prioritises young people aged 18-24 who have been not in employment, education or training (NEET) for six months or longer and young people aged 18-24 who are at high risk of becoming long-term NEET.

This would offer young people experience of a real good quality job with a real wage; opportunities to gain new skills; and an employer reference – "game changing" factors for young people approaching the labour market.

National jobs guarantee

While a national jobs guarantee would need upfront investment, TUC modelling estimates that in the long term the cost-benefit ratio would be 2.81, with the scheme paying for itself within a decade.

Setting out potential options for a national jobs guarantee for young people:

- 100,000 placements in a 2-year period would cost £1.03bn but return £2.9bn.
- 200,000 placements in a 2-year period would cost £2.06 bn but return £5.8bn.
- 300,000 placements in a 2-year period would cost £3.1bn but return £8.7bn

The TUC says the national jobs guarantee must be designed to promote good work including by:

- Being paid decently, either at the national minimum wage or union negotiated rate for the job
- Meeting local labour market needs with additional roles – so that money is only used to create jobs that would not have been created in the absence of a scheme, ensuring jobs guarantee participants don't replace existing workers.
- Delivering quality training that puts workers on a pathway to a Level 3 qualification and ensure the worker gets experience that will enable them to move into permanent work.
- Being sustainable, so that the placement could transition into an apprenticeship, or with a guaranteed job interview at the end.
- Ensuring quality work which adheres to health and safety law, is accessible and promotes equality, has clear minimum standards for quality and access to a union.

The placements should be allocated proportionately across regions, so there are a greater number of placements in areas where young people face the highest risk of becoming NEET.

Tory legacy

The TUC says the Conservatives failed to support young people throughout the pandemic and ever since, leading to a sharp rise in the number of young people out of work, training and education – leaving yet another toxic Tory legacy for this government to deal with.

Almost a million young people aged 16-24 in the UK are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET), with the total reaching 948,000 in August 2025 – up from 800,000 in 2019.

The TUC says that overall disabled young people are the most affected by this crisis as they're far more likely to be NEET (28.6%) compared to non-disabled young people (7.1%).

TUC analysis also shows that there is a growing number of young people who are being failed by unsupported or poorly designed opportunities.

Analysis of destination data for 16–18-year-olds who left education in 2022-23 found that a year later 14.8% of them had entered work, education or training but had not completed or continued it. This is up from 12.9% in 2017-18– and is far higher for those on free school meals at 26.8% and SEN young people at 25.9% in 2022-23. The TUC says this shows the need for high quality support in education and workplaces.

Another example of the toxic Tory legacy is the proportion of young women and men who have become NEET since the pandemic.

Overall, while rates among both groups have been growing, young men (from 11.8% in April – June 2019 to 13.1% in April – June 2025) are more likely to be NEET than young women (from 11.3% in April – June 2019 to 12.4% in April – June 2025). Young women however are more likely than young men to be economically inactive – not working nor looking for a job.

Other risk factors identified by the TUC include:

- Having a below a Level 2 qualification. This is significant as, according to TUC analysis, 30.9% of 24-year-olds do not have Level 2 English and Maths qualification.
- Having unpaid caring responsibilities

The TUC says the government should build on the positive progress in its Make Work Pay agenda to make sure more good jobs and training opportunities are accessible to all young people, particularly disabled young people and young women with caring responsibilities.

TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak said:

“Under the Conservatives, young people were failed with many let down by the education system and stuck out of work, education and training.

“This toxic Tory legacy has hugely damaged young people’s prospects – and for the country as a whole too.

“With the youth guarantee, stronger employment rights, an industrial strategy and apprenticeship reforms, the government has started to turn this around.

“It’s now time for ministers to build on this progress with a national jobs guarantee for young people. We know that real experience of paid work is the best way to turn the tide on rising rates of worklessness – and that over time this investment will more than pay for itself.

“Young people across the country need access to high-quality training and decent, well-paid work – boosting their prospects and the wider economy as a whole.”