BACK YOUNG PEOPLE. NOW.

CAMPAIGN REPORT · NOVEMBER 2026

The Six Guarantees

Making young people's wellbeing a national priority, and winning the changes that will improve it

Centre for Economic Performance · London School of Economics

Supported by Prudence Trust

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We are building an intergenerational coalition of young people, parents and grandparents, businesses, schools, charities, researchers, practitioners and policymakers with one goal: to make young people's wellbeing a national priority, and to win the changes that will improve it.

Back Young People Now is a 3-year, non-party-political, campaign and is housed at the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics. It is funded by private donors and charitable trusts, including Prudence Trust.

Forewords



Lord Richard Layard
Chair, Back Young People Now

Our young people are much less happy than in any other European country. This is disastrous for their future and for the economy.

Yet there are obvious ways to improve young people's lives. These policies are not expensive and they would save us the huge costs of social failure – school dropout, youth offending and NEETs. Such policies should be central to John Healey's 'preventative' agenda.

The purpose of our 3-year campaign is to put youth wellbeing at the centre of policy-making and to get these specific policies adopted. In collaboration with young people and partner organisations we have identified six guarantees which would transform people's lives. So the success of our campaign will be judged by whether these policies are adopted over the next 3 years. Working with youth and in alliance with all the major youth charities in the UK, we are determined to bring this about. The Chartists achieved five out of their six objectives. We aim to achieve all six.



Dan Lawes
Director, Back Young People Now

I am part of the generation this report is about. We grew up through austerity, a pandemic and a cost-of-living crisis. We watched youth clubs close, waiting lists grow and our phones swallow our evenings. Too many of my friends struggled in silence and were told to wait.

Yet every week I meet young people full of ideas for how things could be better. What they ask for is not complicated: someone to talk to, somewhere to go, a real shot at a skilled job, and an education system that embraces their wellbeing.

These cannot be achieved alone. We hope to build a broad coalition behind them: across generations and political parties, with charities, schools, employers, health leaders and the young people themselves.

To every politician reading this: young people are voting, we are watching, and we are ready to work with you. Back young people now.

Summary

Childhood should be a time of joy and discovery. But for many of our young people today it is a real struggle. This is not new. British teenagers have for some time been less satisfied with their lives than children in any other European country.[1] But in the last ten years they have become even more dissatisfied.

So this is a major **national crisis**. Our children are our future. Wellbeing matters at every age, but wellbeing as a child is also the best predictor of wellbeing as an adult. It makes more difference to our future happiness than all the qualifications we obtain. Therefore youth wellbeing is twice blessed – it matters in itself and for the future wellbeing of our country.

It is also crucial for our **economy**. For happy, well-rounded people will want to contribute to our society. They will be much less likely to be NEET. And, in work, they will have the soft skills that employers want and, as all the evidence shows, they will be more productive. So investing in our young people is one of the best investments we can make.

It is also good **politics**. For there is a huge **inter-generational coalition** that cares about young people – not just the young themselves (including first-time voters) but also their parents and their grandparents. They all worry about the young and this affects their wellbeing. And as the evidence shows, it is people's wellbeing (more than the economy) which determines whether a government gets **re-elected**. The facts are these. Over 85% of parents feel that the government is doing too little for young people, and 69% would be more likely to vote for a party that did more.[2]

So the purpose of this campaign is to make the wellbeing of young people a **central objective of public policy**. We identify six things that are going wrong. And, correspondingly, we propose six changes which would improve the lives of our young people. In the 1840s the Chartists made six demands, all but one of which were eventually achieved. Our six demands are not expensive and will mostly pay for themselves. They should be implemented before the next general election – and they should be repeated as commitments in every party's election manifesto.

1. For sources of statements in the Summary see the main text which follows.
2. Survey of Parents, Children and Young People (2026) undertaken for Back Young People Now by Savanta.

The six guarantees at a glance

We propose the following six guarantees.

1

More than exams

Schools to build competent citizens and measure their wellbeing.

2

Life skills

Life-skills taught professionally by trained teachers for at least an hour a week.

3

Mental health

Ready access to evidence-based therapy and support.

4

Tech

Radical regulation of social media and AI to make tech work for young people.

5

Something to do

Double public funding for youth workers, helping to ensure a 'trusted adult' for all in need.

6

Apprenticeships

Enough craft-level places for all qualified applicants under 21.

These are broad statements of what needs to be done. But within each of them we identify specific, practical changes which are feasible over the next 3 years. They are changes which any government which cares about young people could reasonably be expected to undertake. If these specific policies are adopted, our campaign will have been a success. Let us look at those policies – both the broad idea and its specific implementation.

More than exams

Our schools feel pressured to become exam-factories. This is not the fault of teachers – it is down to the system in which they work. The philosophy for the present system is this. Education should make you a productive worker, by giving you knowledge, and motivating you to learn it by taking exams. So the school becomes an exam factory, where everybody is driven by exam results – from the head to the teachers to the students.

This ever greater focus on test results is one reason why our children are becoming less happy. But it is not even good for exam results, since children learn better when they are happy and have a more inspiring reason to learn.

Every parent wants their child to be happy in school. So what is needed? We propose two interconnected changes.

- Make wellbeing an explicit goal of schools **and** measure it (as seriously as we measure knowledge). Offer children the more inspiring goal of becoming capable citizens, rather than just performing in exams.
- Teach life-skills weekly in an evidence-based way, thus ensuring the teaching has some effect.

The only way to ensure that wellbeing receives enough attention is to measure it. Schools and communities ought to know how the wellbeing of their children is progressing. So **there should be a national system of measuring the wellbeing of all children each year.** There should be (as in many countries) a set of questionnaires held centrally, which each school downloads each year and administers to its children in one lesson. The answers should be processed ventrally and the results reported to the schools. The school results should be confidential to the school (as they are now in Manchester) but they should be published for a wider local area, in order to promote interest and cooperative local action. This is the system currently used in areas like Manchester taking the #BeeWell approach.

However, it is no good just asking young people about their wellbeing unless this leads to action. And the action should involve young people in decisions about the new priorities and curricula. Action should also involve the wider community.

Life skills

If we want to improve people's life-skills, we have to teach these skills explicitly. Life is complicated, and there is much more to be learned about it than is included in the core curriculum. Our government is quite rightly trying to enrich the lives of children by resurrecting the arts, music, drama and sports which are hugely important for a person's wellbeing. But there are also the basic skills of managing your own emotions, and your relationships with others, and of handling the media and AI, coping with mental illness in yourself or others, and managing your finances. These are soft skills which we know are highly valued in the market (on top of knowledge). They are also vital to wellbeing.

In our survey of young people and their parents, they were asked to rank in importance all six of our proposed guarantees. Both children and their parents put the life-skills guarantee as the most important. Yet this is not where life-skills appear at present in the school curriculum. Life-skills are taught in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).[3] This is meant to be once a week (though it is not always that frequent) and a part of PSHE is now statutory. Some teachers do a great job. But for most teachers to handle these difficult subjects effectively, they need to use evidence-based materials which they have been trained how to use. So we recommend that **the weekly teaching of PSHE should use evidence-based materials, with teachers re-trained to use them. In secondary schools PSHE should be a specialist subject for which teachers train in the Postgraduate Certificate of Education.**

3. The only part of the curriculum which is mandatory is what is called Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE).

Mental health

But, however well schools do in general, there will always be children who experience mental health problems. The proportion who are now experiencing them has risen to 20%, up from 12% nine years ago.[4] The proportion is much higher amongst girls than boys. For all these people it is vital that they have ready access to community-based support and, if necessary, to evidence based psychological therapy as recommended by NICE.

The overall approach needed is well set out in the Future Minds report produced by a coalition of mental health charities.[5] More recently, the Fonagy report has outlined clearly the community-based support needed for children with autism and ADHD – including the imperative of addressing their needs even without a diagnosis.[6] We strongly support the recommendations of these two reports, and take them as given. It is vital that children with special difficulties get a proper start in life, including early support for those with SEND.

Mental health problems come from many different causes, and they can therefore be reduced by changes in many aspects of our life – not just treatment. All of our guarantees will help with mental health. For all children, much more than treatment is needed to promote their mental health, including our other 5 guarantees. As the saying goes 'mental health in all policies'.

Against that background, our mental health guarantee makes 3 specific proposals which need urgent attention. The first, which is crucial for early access, is a nationwide provision of Early Support Hubs. These are walk in centres where young people or their parents can receive immediate support, and if necessary be pointed to clinical services. These hubs have a vital preventative role. **There should be nationwide provision of Early Support Hubs within three years.**

Turning to clinical services consists of two main end types of organisation. For the most seriously distressed young people, help comes from Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS). It is vital that CAMHS waiting times are reduced, and this can best be achieved by earlier support before the problem becomes acute. For other young people, there are Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) that operate in schools. These began to be rolled out in 2018 and will be nationwide by 2029. Even after that, MHSTs will need to expand their staff, to increase their skill levels, and include more multidisciplinary services.

There will however remain two sets of problems, which will be largely untouched. The first concerns children struggling with persistent behavioural difficulties. Around 5% of children are affected, yet very few of their families receive any professional support. This matters,

4. NHS England (2023). Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023: wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey. Figure 4 quotes 'probable mental disorder'. https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up

5. Future Minds (2026).

6. Department of Health and Social Care (2026). Independent review into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism: final report. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-into-mental-health-conditions-adhd-and-autism-final-report

because these early difficulties are the strongest predictor of later becoming NEET, and of many other challenges in adult life.[7] To handle these problems, NICE recommend programmes of 'parent training', which can also help with other problems like children's anxiety.[8] These programmes can be very effective, even when the children are very young.[9] We therefore propose that **within three years every parent who needs it should be able to access support from 'parent training' teams**[10]. By investing in the adults around a child, we can surround young people with the emotional support they need to thrive from the very start.

Next, as young people move into adulthood, there is one challenge we have not yet discussed: addiction to drugs, alcohol and gambling. Addictions can have many causes including lack of support. Young adults have the highest rates of dependence on drugs, alcohol and gambling, frequently as a way of coping with emotional pain that has gone unsupported. NICE recommends psychological therapy for everyone affected, but very few receive it. Detox is vital, but without support to address what lies beneath, relapse is likely. We therefore propose a **new psychological therapy service, alongside NHS Talking Therapies, for people living with addictions or personality disorders.** Given the high costs of these unmet needs to the NHS, the justice system and the economy, it would pay for itself within two years.[11] It should prioritise young adults first, giving them the support they need to get into work or study and build the lives they want.

Tech

One reason why child wellbeing has fallen is the increased use of social media – especially the platforms that provide an endless stream of algorithmic feeds and influencers. For most children time spent on these platforms replaces genuine face-to-face social connections. On top of that social media shows the best side of others' lives – which makes the normalcy of your own life seem inadequate. And, at its worst, it encourages bullying, gambling, misogyny and self-harm. Almost everyone favours greater regulation, and the British government has now decided to ban the use of social media for users under the age of 16.

7. Rodwell et al (2018). But according to Plenty et al (2021), this difference only holds for males.
8. NICE Guidance CG158. Anti-social behaviour and conduct disorders in children and young people: recognition and management. See also Riise et al (2021).
9. Menting, A. T. A., Orobio de Castro, B., & Matthys, W. (2013). Effectiveness of the Incredible Years parent training to modify disruptive and prosocial child behavior: A meta-analytic review. Clinical Psychology Review, 33(8), 901–913. doi: 10.1016/j.cpr.2013.07.006Gardner, F., Leijten, P., Harris, V., Mann, J., Hutchings, J., Beecham, J., Bonin, E.-M., Berry, V., McGilloway, S., Gaspar, M., Seabra-Santos, M. J., Orobio de Castro, B., Menting, A., Williams, M., Axberg, U., Mørch, W.-T., Scott, S., & Landau, S. (2019). Equity effects of parenting interventions for child conduct problems: A pan-European individual participant data meta-analysis. The Lancet Psychiatry, 6(6), 518–527. doi:10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30162-2 (Scott and Landau joint last authors)Bonin, E.-M., Stevens, M., Beecham, J., Byford, S., & Parsonage, M. (2011). Costs and longer-term savings of parenting programmes for the prevention of persistent conduct disorder: A modelling study. BMC Public Health, 11, 803. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-11-803
10. This proposal is evaluated in MacLennan (2024). It would pay for itself within 2 years. We are conscious that there are many other proposals for new mental health services for young people (e.g. in Future Minds, 2026).
11. The proposal is evaluated in Parkes (2024). It also covers schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder.

But more salient than before, a new source of danger has arisen: AI. Some children now even fall in love with chatbots. Others are encouraged into dangerous habits such as self-harm and violence towards women and girls**. Regulation of AI is urgently needed**. We suggest the following system.

- For everybody. All programmes of AI facilitated psychological therapy/wellbeing support should have to be accredited by NICE. AI tutors should abide by a separate appropriate system. And of course dangerous practices like violent sex, bomb-building, and bullying should be banned.
- For people under 16. AI 'companions' with anthropomorphic features should not be allowed.
- For people under 13. All practices with risk of harm (as defined by the online safety act) should not be allowed. Developers should be required to demonstrate the safety of their products with a Child Rights Impact Assessment before they are released for public consumption.

Something to do

If children are to come off social media and spend less time in their bedrooms, how else will they spend their time? 55% of young people say there are not enough youth clubs and activities in their areas.[12] 16% of young people say they often feel lonely. And 14% say they often feel they have no one to talk to. Six in ten say they often feel bored with nothing to do.[13]

Youth services are designed to address these problems. They provide rewarding activities (sports, arts, music, games, courses) and social interactions with peers and with trusted adults outside the family – a crucial need for most young people. Yet since 2011, local authority expenditure on youth services has been cut by 75%. This has to be reversed. The National Youth Strategy is a step in the right direction, especially through investment in buildings. But we need a permanent change in current spending. As a start we **recommend a doubling of public expenditure on youth services within 5 years**.

Apprenticeships

Let's move on to those aged 18 and over. At present 13% of all 18-year-olds are doing nothing – they are not in employment, education or training (NEET). That is wretched for them, and costly for the rest of us. Equally bad, another 20% of 18-year-olds are in jobs without training – mostly dead-end jobs without prospects. These two problems are linked – if there are no good jobs, why work at all?

12. See DCMS Youth Participation Pilot Survey Executive Survey (2024). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/672b4bcdfbd69e1861921bff/DCMS_Pilot_Youth_Participation_Survey_Findings_Report_final_accessible.pdf
13. Survey of Parents, Children and Young People (2026) undertaken for Back Young People Now by Savanta.

The lack of training is a major national problem. It leads to low productivity, low pay and low wellbeing. And it is so unfair. If you like studying and get your A levels, you can expect to find a university place. But if you belong to the "other 50%", there is no clear prospect. Only 1/4 of young people who apply for apprenticeships get one.

Instead the employers are using much of the Levy (previously called the Apprenticeship Levy) to subsidise the 'in-service' training of their existing employees. They no longer take the risk of taking on a new young employee, since training such people runs the risk that they will leave once trained. But that of course is why we had the Apprenticeship Levy in the first place – to provide public funds to offset individual employers' natural reluctance to take on youngsters, and to promote their common interest in having a trained workforce. The number of youth apprenticeships at craft-level 3 or below has nearly halved in the last 10 years. This has to be reversed.

The government should now commit itself to securing (within 5 years) enough craft-level apprenticeship places for all qualified applicants under 21. This will require mayors and local authorities to estimate each year the number of places needed and to organise (or outsource) a brokerage service that generates the places.

Young people are facing a worse labour market than any in living memory. Employers have always preferred people whose characters are tried and tested. But now on top of that comes the AI revolution – which leads to a radical cut-back in hiring. Unless we act, we shall let down a whole generation of young people.

Conclusion

Our six guarantees are not the only things that need doing. But they would be a good start, and on their own could transform the lives of young people. The specific changes we are asking for are these.

- **Schools**. The measurement of wellbeing in schools, centrally organised and analysed.
- **PSHE.** A specialism in the PGCE, and teachers re-trained to use evidence-based materials, centrally promoted.
- **Child mental health:**
  - MHSTs to have teams to treat behavioural problems thorough the training of parents.
  - A new psychological therapy service for young adults with addictions.
  - Early Support Hubs to be available nationwide.
- **Radical regulation of AI**: For all users, regulated psychological therapy, and AI tutors. For under 16s, no companion Ais. For under 13s, no practices that risk harm.
- **Youth services.** Double public expenditure on youth services.
- **Apprenticeships.** Enough places (up to level 3) for all qualified applicants under 21 within 5 years.

We cost these proposals in Annex 1. The gross annual cost is £1 billion a year by the third year. But

- the benefits to young people are enormous, and
- the savings to the government from increased employment and decreased social costs are so high that there is **no net cost** to the government.

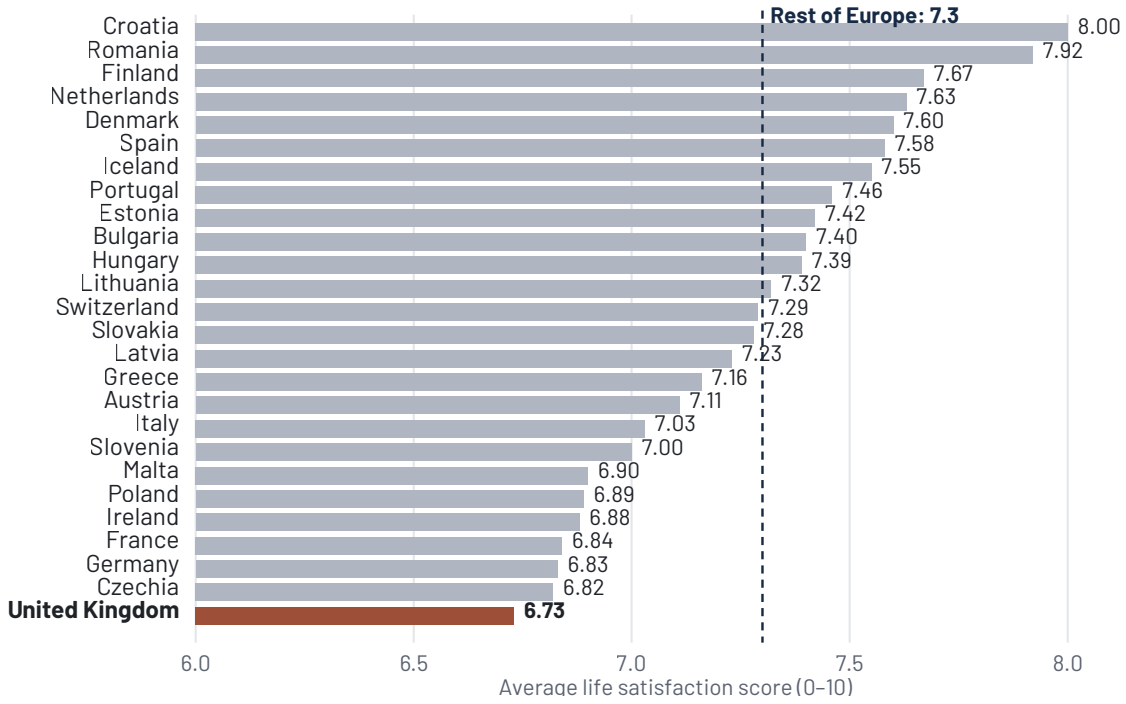
Viewed positively, this is a programme to uplift the wellbeing of young people. Viewed negatively, it is central to any "preventative" programme to reduce the cost of troubled lives. It is a no brainer.

We urge the government to accept these proposals, and we urge each political party to include them in their policy mix for the next general election.

The crisis

We are talking about a very serious situation. British children are the least happy children in Europe. This emerges clearly from the OECD's PISA survey of 15 year olds (see Figure 1). It is also found independently in the WHO's comparable survey of Health Related Behaviour of Children aged 15.[14]

Figure 1. Life satisfaction at age 15 in Europe, 2025



14. See Marquez et al (2024), Table 3.1. Only Ireland is lower.

Source: PISA 2025. Axis starts at 6.0.

Not only are our children less happy than others, but they are less happy than they were ten years ago (6.7 now versus 7.0 then). In fact in the UK our children's average happiness is 0.6 points below the European average. This is as much as an adult's happiness falls when they lose a partner or a job. And it is affecting a whole cohort.

Table 1. Average life satisfaction of children in the UK and in the rest of Europe (2025) (on a scale of 0-10)

	Average life satisfaction (0–10)
Rest of Europe	7.3
UK	6.7
Gap	**0.6**

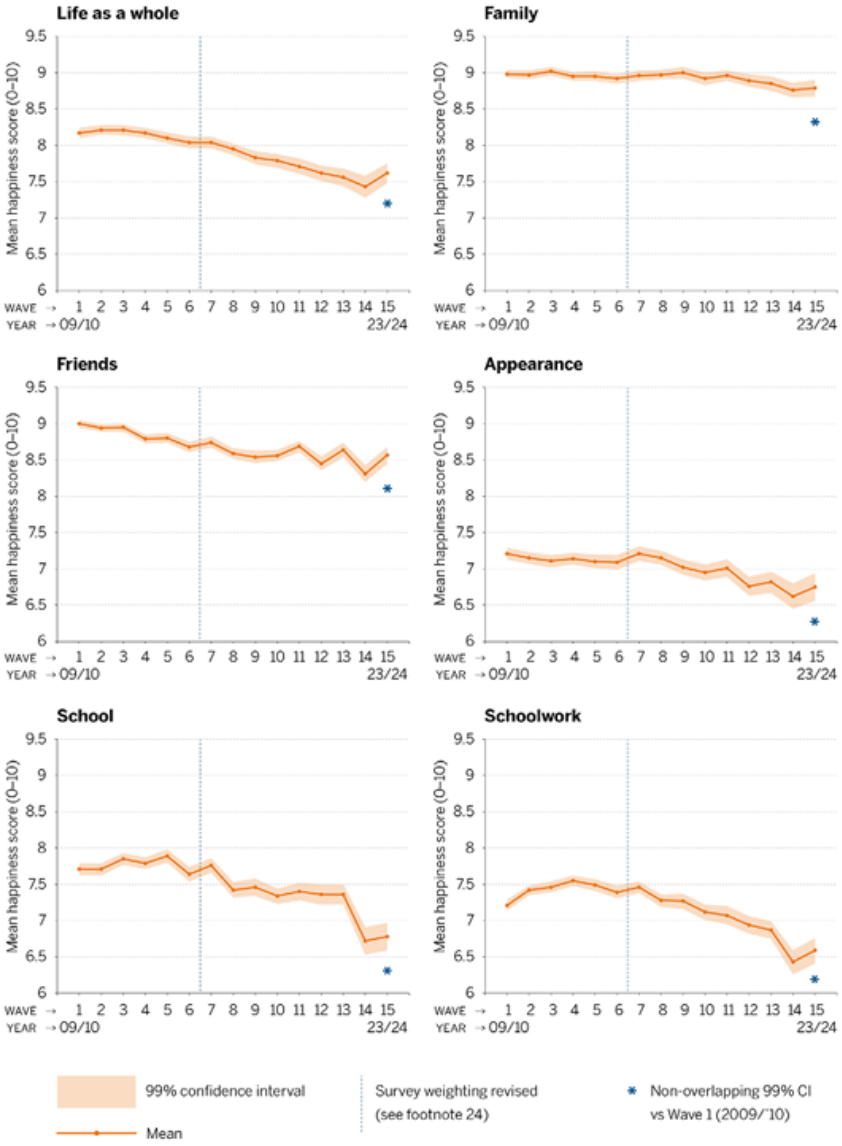
Source: PISA.

These PISA scores are confirmed in the year-by-year results of the Children's Society's evidence on 10-15 year olds (see Figure 2). This study is especially interesting because it begins to throw light on the causes of the fall in happiness. It does this by asking about children's satisfaction with different aspects of their life. As Figure 2 shows, they are still just as satisfied with their family as ever, But they have become increasingly dissatisfied with school and schoolwork every year since 2012/13 – when the preoccupation with exam results intensified.[15] At the same time young people have become less satisfied with their appearance – most probably as a result of increased use of social media. Interestingly a similar huge fall in wellbeing has been observed among US 15-year olds.[16] Both the US and the UK have highly individualistic cultures.

Closely related to the fall in wellbeing has been a marked decline in children's mental health, especially since 2017. As a Table 2 shows, the proportion of 11-16 year olds experiencing mental illness has risen since then from 13% to 23%, and the proportion of 8-10 year olds from 11% to 16%. And this was on top of a rise of about 2% points between 1999 and 2017. [17]

15. This intensification is sometimes praised for having raised England's relative place in the PISA score for reading, mathematics and science. But in fact this improvement was due to a worsening of scores in other countries, not to an improvement in England.It is only in the TIMSS survey that our national scores improve over time and the TIMSS tests reflect less a person's skills than their knowledge of a curriculum.
16. Using HBSC. See Marquez et al (2024), Table 3.1.
17. NHS Digital. Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2017.

Figure 2. Trends in children's (aged 10 to 15) happiness with different aspects of life, UK, 2009/10 to 2023/24.



Source: The Good Childhood Report (2026). Based on Understanding Society data. (Age 10-15).

Table 2. Prevalence of mental illness

	8 to 10 year olds					11 to 16 year olds				
	2017	2020	2021	2022	2023	2017	2020	2021	2022	2023
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All	11.2	16.0	17.7	16.8	15.7	13.3	17.6	17.7	20.4	22.6
Boys	13.3	20.0	20.9	20.3	17.7	12.3	15.3	15.6	18.8	22.3
Girls	9.0	12.0	14.8	13.2	13.6	14.3	20.1	19.8	22.0	22.9

Source: NHS Mental health of Children and Young People 2023

But if this is what has been happening at age 15, what has been happening at older ages of 15-24 is equally disturbing.[18] Young adults are no longer happier than the rest of the adult population. Loneliness is also a major problem for many young people. Indeed it is more common among the young than in older age groups.[19] So, what can we do to reverse these trends, and to make life for British young people at least as good as in other comparable countries?

We propose six changes which we would like to see beginning to be implemented within 3 years, and represented in the pledges of all parties for the next general election. The success of our campaign can be measured in two ways.

- First, it can be measured by our proposals being adopted by all political parties, especially the party of government.
- Second, it can be measured by (as a result of this) a marked turnaround in young people's wellbeing of this country. That would mean a reversal of the trends reported above, with a return at a minimum to the position in 2015.

Many of our proposals are universal – they would affect all children. Other proposals (as on youth services or apprenticeship) are more heavily directed at working class children. But even our universal interventions are found to benefit most those young people who start off disadvantaged. So the overall effect of our proposals should be to reduce the intolerable existing inequality in the way our children experience their lives.

18. Blanchflower et al (2026). In terms of the level of dissatisfaction this group is nearer to the European average. (See Marquez et al (2024)).
19. ONS Survey Jan-Feb 2025. % feeling lonely always/often/some of the time reported by 27% of people aged 16-29 compared with 19% for ages 50-69 and 16% for ages 70+

The six guarantees

1

More than exams

Schools to build competent citizens and measure their wellbeing.

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2

Life skills

Life-skills taught professionally by trained teachers for at least an hour a week.

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Ready access to evidence-based therapy and support.

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Radical regulation of social media and AI to make tech work for young people.

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Double public funding for youth workers, helping to ensure a 'trusted adult' for all in need.

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Enough craft-level places for all qualified applicants under 21.

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GUARANTEE 1

1 The ‘more than exams’ guarantee

We educate people for two reasons – to promote their own wellbeing (present and future) and to promote the wellbeing of those they interact with.[20] These “others” include their fellow school children (thus influencing the overall wellbeing in a school) and many others over their lifetime (including the impact of what the children learn on their subsequent performance at work).

All of these impacts are important. But, given the current focus on exams and the skills they test, the wellbeing outcome is inevitably undervalued in most schools. **We believe it will only get enough attention if it is measured**. Only this can effectively alter the balance between the goals of exam performance and wellbeing.

Three quarters of all parents support the idea of measuring wellbeing in schools.[21] And there are countries which already have universal pupil-based measurement of wellbeing in schools. In the Netherlands the survey is annual, focused on social safety, and the results are publicly available school-by-school (even though they are only for a sample in each school). In Wales the survey covers every secondary school pupil, happens every other year, and the results are not publicly available school-by-school (though they are provided confidentially to each school).[22] The key features of these surveys are a common questionnaire (to allow benchmarking) and a simple method of analysis, which is done centrally. In England a similar scheme is operated on a voluntary basis by #BeeWell in Greater Manchester and in the Hampshire area, with about 75% of schools participating.

Of course every school has a different intake. The test for a school is **how the children’s wellbeing progresses as they move through the school**. This is crucial.

In England the present government supports the measurement of wellbeing in schools, but it is doing too little to make this become standard practice. On the positive side, it is developing a proposed standard questionnaire. This has the huge advantage of enabling benchmarking of progress in schools and in areas. But the government is not itself willing to organise the central analysis of the responses, as happens in Wales and South Australia. Instead it insists that each school commissions and pays for the analysis by one of a competing group of suppliers. This makes the whole process so onerous that many schools (or even most) will not

20. National Curriculum states: Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based and which: promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.
21. Survey of Parents, Children and Young People (2026) undertaken for Back Young People Now by Savanta.
22. In South Australia there is a voluntary province-wide census with high response rates. The data are highly confidential.

be bothered to participate. This is a real wasted opportunity and we urge the Department to organise one central processing facility, available for free – and to make participation for all secondary schools universal.

We do not want to see another league table of schools based on the wellbeing of their pupils. So the results should be confidential to the school. But at the wider local level they should be made public – in order to promote the necessary types of civic response. This is the distinction made by #BeeWell and it works well. And the aggregate national results should also be published – and be regarded as a genuine indicator of whether our education system is, or is not, doing well.

The aim of measurement is to produce action. This means listening to children and giving them a role in decision-making. But how, more specifically, can schools respond (as of course very many already do)? They can have a wellbeing code of behaviour adopted after serious debate involving pupils, teachers and parents. They can use assemblies, tutor groups, and subject lessons to illuminate what behaviours and activities are good for the wellbeing of self and others. And they can use the weekly PSHE lesson to teach life skills in the most effective way possible.

Action plans based in wellbeing data should involve the community as well as schools. Publishing data at a wider neighbourhood level means that organisations from the NHS to local government to local youth clubs or sports clubs can get involved, together, in planning action. In areas using #BeeWell's approach, youth steering groups also contribute to deciding what to do with the data. This should be done in all areas. The costings in the annex are based in this experience of local action across communities.

But the first issue is what are the values that the system wants their children to absorb. Increasingly since 2010, schools have been told to focus on exam results and this is the objective they have passed on to their students. However, over the same period there has been no increase in the scores of English pupils in the PISA test scores at age 15, neither in maths, literacy nor science.[23] And there has been a massive decline in the children's wellbeing and in their satisfaction with school and schoolwork. It does appear that working for exams is not a sufficiently satisfying goal. So it is time to rethink the motives that are offered to our children, and the values that lie behind them.

We believe that the best society is one where people are enjoying their lives and especially where there is little misery. But if the people's wellbeing is the overarching good, two things follow. First, this should be the target of policy. But, second, the target offered to each young person should be to contribute as best they can to the wellbeing of the community, including their own. Each of us should be a creator of wellbeing.[24]

23. Over the same period many other countries like France and Germany have experienced declining scores, so the English policy may have had some positive effect on cognitive performance.
24. Morality is not just about not harming others; it is about contributing positively to their wellbeing.

This should be central to how we educate our children. They should want to learn, either because it is so interesting or because it will help them contribute to the world. Only positive motivation of their kind can replace the emptiness of working year after year for exam results. We need a huge debate about how to offer young people a purpose in life which goes beyond exam results. Purpose needs to be something that goes beyond protest, though that is important. We need to create a passionate desire to contribute. This desire has to start early, in primary school.

The government and Ofsted have a role in influencing values. But this is also a matter for professional associations and teacher training institutions. We propose, for a start, a major national conference on the purpose of education.

Of course some people always argue that wellbeing (rather than knowledge) is not the business of schools and that schools cannot affect wellbeing: but the evidence is that they do just that. In fact in the city of Bristol which school you went to made as much difference to your wellbeing as it made to your academic achievement.[25]

One reason why young people are less satisfied with life is that they are less satisfied with schoolwork. That is what the evidence has shown. As an overarching goal, exam results are inherently unsatisfactory – stressful in prospect and often disappointing in retrospect. If they are over-emphasised, exams are experienced as part of a lifetime competition – to get better grades, which get you better jobs, which get you higher incomes, compared with other periods. This competitive element is a zero-sum game, since for every person who succeeds someone else has to fail.

Instead we have to offer young people a **positive-sum objective** – to contribute to the wellbeing of others rather than to outcompete them. We have a public education system because we need our citizens to contribute to the lives of others. So why not make this the explicit objective of the school. Of course most teachers believe in this, but it needs to be much more explicit. From the earliest age children needs educating to become creators of happiness. Achievement needs redefining – it is not getting good grades or job but making the contribution. And in the end, as we know, it is giving rather than getting which provides the greatest reward to each of us.

25. Clark et al (2018).

2 GUARANTEE 2
The life-skills guarantee

To manage your life you need many skills. Some of these you learn from your parents. But schools have a major responsibility for building on this – both in the interests of the individual child, but also of the community. These skills include

- understanding of self and the ability to manage your own mental life
- understanding of others and how to relate warmly to them
- knowledge about sex and the relationships going with sex (including parenthood)
- managing your use of social media and AI and other public sources of information and opinion
- managing your finances
- citizenship and your role in the community.

These are some of the most difficult topics to teach. They are mostly covered by the class teacher in primary schools, and in secondary schools by a weekly lesson on PSHE. They are probably taught better in primary schools (where all teachers are trained in how to teach life skills), than in secondary schools (where the lessons are often taught by someone who has a gap in their timetable).

We know little about how effective the teaching is. The last Labour government tried to improve the teaching through a programme on the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). This provided a curriculum and a range of teaching materials that could be used to teach it. But there was no training of teachers, and the material was not highly structured. When independently evaluated in secondary schools, SEAL was found to have no effect on emotional wellbeing, behaviour nor academic results.[26] This was found to be due to lack of training of the teachers and insufficiently structured and evidence-based teaching materials.

By contrast, there are hundreds of life skills interventions for which there is evidence of effectiveness. An example is the comprehensive "Healthy Minds" program which provides materials for a weekly lesson for ages 11-15 and produces significant increases in wellbeing for all children but especially for those whose wellbeing is low.[27] So two steps are urgent.

First, in secondary schools, it should become the norm for most of those who teach PSHE to have **studied PHSE as a specialty** in the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE). This will take time to implement, but the urgent need now is to give **short courses** on the subject

26. Wigelsworth et al (2012).
27. Lordan and McGuire (2026).

to those who now teach it – especially the head of the subject in each school. And the training should be based on an evidence-based curriculum, with associated materials that have been properly tested.

Second, there should be an **inventory** of such materials. At present there are inventories held by Foundations: the What Works Centre for Children & Families (formerly Early Intervention Foundation), the Education Endowment Foundation and the Youth Endowment Fund. But these inventories overlap and are not directly related to the teaching of a specific evidence-based curriculum.

The Department for Education should play the leading role in bringing about both of these changes. In conclusion, there is one crucial point. Having a well-established curriculum and materials in no way undermines the need for skill in the teacher – any more than it does for skill in a surgeon.[28] We really need something that makes a difference, and can be shown to do so.

28. See for example The Checklist Manifesto by the distinguished surgeon Atul Gawande.

GUARANTEE 3

3 The mental health guarantee

Over the last decade there has been a large increase in the number of children and young adults suffering from mental health problems. We are talking now about 20% of children aged 5-18 and an even larger proportion of young adults.[29] Mental health problems arise from a multitude of causes and can be reduced by all six of our guarantees. They should, if possible be prevented. But once they arise, they must be addressed. This requires both community-based support, and if necessary psychological therapy, readily available. The Future Minds and Fonagy reports set out a comprehensive programme of reform which we endorse.[30] Against that background, our mental health guarantee asks for three specific commitments from the government.

First, **we need Early Support Hubs in every community within the next three years,** these provide walk in access to young people (and parents) wanting mental health support or related advice. Early preventative support can be provided, or the person can be directed towards clinical services: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) in schools. MHSTs are still expanding to nationwide coverage and upscaling locally, which is vital. They are also upgrading the skills of their staff. But there are two major types of problem which on present policies will continue to remain largely unaddressed. Treatment is recommended by NICE, but it is not provided.

First come children who have behavioural difficulties. These difficulties make up over a quarter of all child mental health problems and they are a major predictor of school dropout and NEET status, especially for males (a more powerful predictor than anxiety disorders or depression are).[31] Moreover there is an excellent low-cost approach for children with moderate behavioural difficulties, especially those of primary age. It involves group training for their parents. Such parent training is prescribed by NICE but it is not generally provided.[32] So it is imperative and urgent to rollout **teams of parent trainers right across the country.**[33] **This should be done within a 3-year period.**

29. NHS Digital, Mental Health of Children and Young People, latest, and Morris et al (2025).
30. Future Minds (2026); Department of Health and Social Care (2026). Independent review into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism: final report. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-into-mental-health-conditions-adhd-and-autism-final-report
31. Rodwell et al (2018). But according to Plenty et al (2021), this difference only holds for males.
32. NICE Guidance CG158. Anti-social behaviour and conduct disorders in children and young people: recognition and management. See also Riise et al (2021).
33. This proposal is evaluated in MacLennan (2024). It would pay for itself within 2 years. We are conscious that there are many other proposals for new mental health services for young people (e.g. in Future Minds, 2026).

The second set of problems are addiction to drugs, alcohol or gambling. This destroys lives. But at present, the state only provides services to help people detox, but almost no psychological therapy to help them address their underlying problems. For this reason we recommend **a new service, parallel to NHSTTs, for people suffering from addictions** and, what overlaps strongly, "personality disorder". Because these conditions impose such high financial costs (through criminal justice, NHS use and lost revenue), such a service would pay for itself within two years.[34] It should initially focus disproportionately on youth. Mental health problems are such a major source of youth economic inactivity that they need urgent attention.

34. The proposal is evaluated in Parkes (2024). It also covers schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder.

4 GUARANTEE 4
The tech guarantee

The government plans a social media ban for under 16s. But serious dangers also arise from AI. Our recommendations focus on these.

But we begin with social media, about which so much more is known. There is ample evidence of the harms of social media and its addictive character.[35] While the majority of scholars agree that there are serious dangers, some believe that the evidence is mixed. We believe however that the weight of evidence goes strongly in one direction. Enough harm is caused to require major action.

On harm, we shall review seven types of evidence, much of it focused on English-speaking countries.[36]

Statements by young people. In the UK a More In Common survey of people aged 16-24 found that 63% believe social media does more harm than good to people under 16. 55% of those surveyed supported a ban for children under 16, while only 22% opposed a ban. [37] In a US Harris Poll of 18-27 year olds, respondents were asked whether they wished the following platforms did not exist.[38] The percentages saying Yes were as follows.

Platform	% who wish it did not exist
X	50%
TikTok	47%
Snapchat	37%
Instagram	34%

Clearly the most harmful platforms are those feeding algorithmic content about influencers and other strangers – not social at all.

Internal studies done by the media companies confirm that large numbers of users feel that their platforms are reducing their self-esteem, body image and sleep patterns.[39]

35. See for example Haidt and Rausch (2026).
36. This section is heavily influenced by Haidt and Rausch (2026), but also by the rest of the World Happiness Report 2026.
37. More in Common. (2025).*Public attitudes to smartphones, social media, and online safety. More in Common.*https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/media/flrnzo5x/public-attitudes-to-smartphones-social-media-and-online-safety-1.pdf
38. Haidt & Johnson (2024).
39. Haidt & Rausch (2026).

We are particularly concerned at how social media platforms encourage social comparisons where viewers are exposed to idealised versions of other people's lives. The result, so often, is feelings of personal inadequacy and reduced mental health.

Statements by parents and teachers. Parents also observe these effects. When asked by More in Common about what things most negatively affect their children's health, the top response (45%) was "social media use/excessive screen time".[40] Teachers surveys show similar results. In an NBC survey, only 3% thought smartphones improved their students' work.[41]

Statements by tech companies. In their review Professors Haidt and Rausch quote very many internal reports by the tech companies themselves which confirm their awareness of the harms they are creating. These include not just the extreme cases of grooming, sex-tortion, cyberbullying and self harm, but the more passive effects on social capacity, attention, self-esteem and sleep.

Studies relating hours on social media to low wellbeing. We turn now from expressions of opinion (by young people, parents, teachers, and tech executives) to direct statistical evidence. Here there have been hundreds of cross-sectional studies which relate hours on social media to various measures of wellbeing. In English-speaking countries the majority of studies show a negative relation between hours of use and individual wellbeing. But this does not prove causality. For this, one has to look at how, when the same person changed their social media use, their subsequent wellbeing changed. This has been done using longitudinal data on US teenagers aged 12-15.[42] It shows that earlier social media use causes a subsequent reduction in wellbeing – while earlier loss of wellbeing does not cause a subsequent increase in social media use.

Experiments with reducing social media use. There have been many randomised experiments where some people have reduced their use of social media. In a meta-analysis of 32 such experiments (with people of all ages), those who reduced their use experienced an extra 0.22 standard deviations of wellbeing – a significant increase.[43] The results were especially strong when the reduction lasted more than a week,[44] though Meta's own week-long randomised trial also showed benefits from not using Facebook for one week.[45]

Natural experiments. Finally, we have the time-series evidence of the effects of rolling out high-speed access to the internet and social media in five advanced countries including England. These all point to decreased mental health when access improved.[46]

40. More in Common. (2025).
41. NBC (2024).
42. Riehm et al (2019)
43. See Table 2 in: Burnell, et al (2025).
44. Thrul et al (2025). This was a re-analysis of Ferguson (2025).
45. Horwitz (2025)
46. Haidt & Rausch. (2026).

So on social media, regulation is clearly needed. The government has opted for a blanket ban on social media accounts for under 16s.

However, there is also serious **danger from AI**. There is unregulated provision of psychological therapy / wellbeing support and of personal tutorials. There are AI which offer friendship and even romantic relationships. And there is a whole range of dangerous material to which children of all ages are exposed.

We recommend

- For everybody. All programmes of psychological therapy/wellbeing support should have to be accredited by NICE. An appropriate separate system should also apply to AI tutors. And of course dangerous practices like violent sex, bomb-building, and bullying should be banned.
- For people under 16. AI companions with anthropomorphic features should not be allowed.
- For people under 13. All practices with risk of harm (as defined by the Online safety act) should not be allowed. Developers should be required to prove their products are safe before they provide them publicly.

Ofcom need to implement these regulations. There is no point in regulations that are not enforced.

GUARANTEE 5

5 The 'something to do' guarantee

If young people are to come off their screens, they need something more rewarding to do. In every survey, young people complain that there is not enough to do, or enough places to go during their leisure time. The lack of such opportunities is one reason why they spend so much time on social media. Even if time on social media is reduced, young people will still spend excessive time alone in their bedrooms unless they are offered better ways of spending their time.

Youth clubs and activities provide for this basic need. They provide things to do that are enjoyable and rewarding (sport, music, arts, games, educational courses and general socialising). And they also provide contact with trusted adults. This is especially valuable for young people from troubled families, but almost everyone can benefit from trusting relationships with adults outside of the family. Thus youth services can develop young people's values, give them confidence in social life, and simply provide fun.

About a third of all young people participate in organised youth activities outside of school on a weekly basis.[47] Yet since 2011, local authority expenditure on youth services has been cut by 75% in real terms – to below £0.5 billion a year.

In London, 30% of youth clubs closed completely between 2010 and 2019 and it is possible to track the effect of these closures on young people living in affected areas. The evidence is that crime among young people aged 11-17 increased by 15% and GCSE performance fell by 0.04 standard deviations (reducing future earnings).[48] This gives us a good idea of the benefits that youth clubs provide when they are open. The estimated total benefits for each £1 spent on youth clubs is £2.28 to private individuals.[49] At the same time the public sector saves £0.45, so that the net cost to the taxpayer is £0.55 and the ratio of private benefit to net taxpayer cost is 4 – good value for money.

In another analysis involving more assumptions, it was estimated that for every £1 devoted to expenditure on youth services, there were total benefits of £1.7 in reduced crime, £1.6 in improved education and employment and £3.4 in improved health – making an overall benefit/cost ratio of 6.[50]

47. UK Youth, SQW & University of Essex (2024). Based on UKHLS (Understanding Society) cohort of 10-16 yr olds. Activities included youth clubs, scouts, girl guides or other organised activities.
48. Villa (2024).
49. Villa (2024) – see Table 8.
50. UK Youth and Frontier Economics (2022). In this study the total gains from one year's youth club work (public and private) were related to the public cost only. On the one hand this claims too much benefit, out it overstates the cost by now allowing for any flowback.

So there is a strong case for expanding youth club provision.[51] On top of the existing National Youth Strategy, we propose a **doubling of public spending on youth work** – an increase of £0.5 billion a year. This would transform the lives of millions of young people – providing enjoyable activities and, equally important, new relationships with other young people, and trusted adults.

51. For a fuller explanation, see the Back Youth Alliance (2025) evidence review: BYA-Rapid-Evidence-Review-Thematic-Summary-Annotated-Bibliography.pdf.

6 GUARANTEE 6
The apprenticeship guarantee

British children do well in school academically – at 15 they do better in PISA tests than those in France or Germany. It is after school that things go wrong. At that stage, we do well at educating 50% of the population (in universities) but we do abysmally at educating the other 50%. If you get your A-levels and apply to university, you can expect to get at least one offer – this is the Robbins Principle that has been applied for 60 years. But for the "other 50%" there is no clear route forward. What most of them want is an apprenticeship, but only 1 in 4 applicants find a place.[52]

This is terrible for economic growth (to which we will return). It also kills opportunity. At age 18, 33% of our young people are not longer receiving any education or training – with 14% NEET and 20% in dead-end jobs.[53] This is much higher than in comparable countries. And only 8% of young people (aged 21 or under) get to start a Level 2 apprenticeship, and 13% a Level 3 apprenticeship – and these figures include much overlap.[54]

Why so few apprenticeships? The problem is simple. Individual employers have always been anxious about taking on young new hires – because, once trained, they may leave. That is why the state steps in and pays for the off-the-job cost, since it is in the **collective** interest of employers (and taxpayers) to have a skilled cohort of young people coming through. For that reason the Apprenticeship Levy could originally only be spent on young people. But for over a decade now that restriction has been relaxed, and employers are now largely using the Levy to pay for in-service training of their existing employees and for higher apprenticeships. The number of youth apprenticeship starts has nearly halved since 2015 – a whole cohort of young people is being put at risk.

The solution is clear. First, the government has to state its **objective.** This should be **"enough apprenticeships up to Level 3 for all qualified applicants under age 21**". The government should say it will ensure this within 5 years. From a clear objective would follow a **strategy**. Every mayoral or local authority should be asked to make an annual assessment of the number of places needed and have a small team to promote the necessary supply of places (or use external brokers to do so).

52. From Wave 3 of the Young Lives Young Futures survey of young people now aged 19-20 (conducted by KCL and Edge Foundation). Data compare those who got an apprenticeship with those who ever applied. The same 25% ratio applies to those who apply via the government's Find An Apprenticeship matching system. (See DfE, Apprenticeship Vacancies: Demand and supply data).It is also of course true that we would like more people to consider an apprenticeship – through better vocational guidance, more pre-apprenticeship courses and so on.
53. DfE, Participation in Education Training and Employment at ages 16-21, 2025.
54. Standard data on starts relative to a standard cohort size.

This can be made to work. The Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD) has done an employer survey which included 2 questions:[55]

(i) Do you support or oppose the introduction of an apprenticeship guarantee for the under 24s? 86% supported it, 11% opposed. Would you be able to offer one or more young people an apprenticeship place beyond what you are currently able to if a guarantee was brought in? 60% said Yes.

To promote apprenticeship the government now offer a recruitment subsidy of £2,000 to any SME hiring a new apprentice under 25. And they are gradually restricting the way in which larger firms paying the Levy can use this to finance older workers or higher qualifications.

This all makes excellent sense. According to DfE research, someone who completed a Level 3 apprenticeship earns an additional 13% and is 3 percentage points more likely to be employed.[56] (Similar figures apply to Level 2). These gains bring huge benefits to the individual. They also bring crucially important gains to the Treasury – increases in taxes and reductions in welfare payments. Thus within 16 years the Treasury recaptures the full original public cost of the apprenticeship off-the-job training.[57] This makes it a hugely favourable investment compared with say roads, which never recapture their costs.[58]

We welcome any small step in the right direction. But what is now required is a strategy. We urgently need a government commitment to secure enough places up to Level 3 for all qualified applicants under age 21 within 5 years.

Without this the danger is that employers will continue to turn their back on this generation of youth. Only a strongly stated government commitment can reverse this highly dangerous situation.

Conclusion

> **These are six major changes that would transform the experience of our young people – replacing pessimism with hope. They involve no net cost (see Annex 1). We urge the government to accept these and all political parties to include them in their next election manifestos.**

55. Crowley (2024).
56. Department for Education (2021).
57. Frayman (2024).
58. Frayman et al (2027).

Annex 1: Costs and benefits

None of these proposals will require a huge charge on taxpayer funds. The costs are either small or they pay for themselves to the government (in higher tax receipts and lower social expenditures). We shall begin with the gross cost of each programme and then move to benefit/cost ratios (BCRs).

1. The 'more than exams' guarantee

The annual cost of measurement in schools with subsequent action planning (involving community partners) has been estimated by #BeeWell as follows.

Item	Annual cost (£)
Data platform management	5.0 million
School engagement	0.6 million
Promoting local response to findings	11.0 million
Programme oversight	0.5 million
Total	£17.1 million

Other measures to reflect altered priorities can be financed within the total expenditure already envisaged.

2. The life skills guarantee

The main cost is training teachers as life-skill teachers.

(i) New teachers taking the PGCE

We assume these are people who would otherwise have studied a different subject – therefore no net cost. (The number of student-hours in school will be unchanged).

(ii) Upgrading existing teachers

As an illustration, Bounce Forward train teachers to teach Healthy Minds. They get 5 days during term-time each year for 4 years at a cost per teacher per year (including backfill) of £3,000.[59] Suppose 10,000 teachers were trained along similar lines each year. This would cost £30 million per annum.

59. Lordan and McGuire (2026).

3. The mental health guarantee

(i) Mental Health Support Teams in schools

We should aim by Year 3 at 1,300 extra therapists (some part-time).This would cost £71 million per year.

(ii) Psychological therapy for addiction among young adults

A service of this kind was proposed by DHSC for adults of all ages in the last Spending Review. A revised proposal focused largely on young people could employ 2,000 therapists in the third year, costing roughly £200 million. All first year outlays would be on RCTs.

(iii) Early Support Hubs

There are now about 70 hubs and we might need another 84. A typical hub has a current cost of £1.25 million. So by the final year, the extra cost would be £100 million. Annual capital outlays for the expansion would be about £50 million. (Not all these costs would be borne by government).

4. The tech guarantee

No cost to the state.

5. The 'something to do' guarantee

To double youth work expenditure would cost £0.5 billion.

6. The apprenticeships guarantee

This would be totally financed from the Growth and Skills Levy. (The total gross cost of doubling the number of places in the 4th year would be £500 million.[60] But this would cost the Treasury nothing).

Thus, by Year 3, the total additional gross annual cost to the Exchequer of our guarantees would be £1 billion (see Table A.1).

Table.A.1. Total gross cost of our proposals (in Year 3)

Guarantee	£ million a year
More than exams	20
Life skills	30
Mental health	**420**
Behavioural difficulties	70

60. Frayman (2024).

Guarantee	£ million a year
Addiction and personality disorder	200
Early Support Hubs	150
Tech	0
Something to do	500
Apprenticeships	0 (covered by existing Levy)
Total	**970**

Savings and benefits

Against this has to be set the **savings** generated to the Exchequer and the **benefits** to the public. These enable us to calculate the **benefit/cost ratio** of each of these expenditures. We estimate them as follows.[61]

Table A.2. Benefits relative to Net cost (present values)

Guarantee	Benefit relative to net cost
Life skills	27:1
Mental health	
Behavioural difficulties	No net cost (within 2 years)
Addiction and personality disorder	No net cost (within 2 years)
Early Support Hubs	Insufficient evidence
Something to do	At least 4:1
Apprenticeships	No net cost (within 16 years)

Thus most of the original expenditure is more than fully recaptured. The remaining expenditure gives great value for money. (By comparison, road building averages a BCR of 2.8:1 and rail even lower).

61. See Frayman et al (2027). Also, on life-skills, MacLennan (2025); on MHSTs, MacLennan (2024); on addiction, Parkes (2024); on youth services, Villa (2024); on apprenticeship, Frayman (2024).

Annex 2: Board members

The Back Young People Now campaign is steered by its board members.

Lord Richard Layard

CHAIR

Co-Director, Wellbeing programme, Centre for Economic Performance

Alastair Campbell

Broadcaster and Communications expert

Andrew Haldane

President, British Chambers of Commerce

Baroness Anne Longfield

Chair and Founder, Centre for Young Lives

Lord Mark Price

Formerly Waitrose and John Lewis Partnership

Kadra Abdinasir

Associate Director of Policy, Centre for Mental Health

Prof Jan Emmanuel De Neve

Director, Wellbeing Research Centre, University of Oxford

Fozia Irfan

Formerly Chief Officer for Children at Children in Need

Lord Gus O'Donnell

Former Cabinet Secretary and Ambassador at Frontier Economics

Mark Williamson

Director, Action for Happiness

Notes

1. For sources of statements in the Summary see the main text which follows.
2. Survey of Parents, Children and Young People (2026) undertaken for Back Young People Now by Savanta.
3. The only part of the curriculum which is mandatory is what is called Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE).
4. NHS England (2023). Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023: wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey. Figure 4 quotes 'probable mental disorder'. https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up
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9. Menting, A. T. A., Orobio de Castro, B., & Matthys, W. (2013). Effectiveness of the Incredible Years parent training to modify disruptive and prosocial child behavior: A meta-analytic review. Clinical Psychology Review, 33(8), 901–913. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2013.07.006
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   Bonin, E.-M., Stevens, M., Beecham, J., Byford, S., & Parsonage, M. (2011). Costs and longer-term savings of parenting programmes for the prevention of persistent conduct disorder: A modelling study. BMC Public Health, 11, 803. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-11-803
10. This proposal is evaluated in MacLennan (2024). It would pay for itself within 2 years. We are conscious that there are many other proposals for new mental health services for young people (e.g. in Future Minds, 2026).
11. The proposal is evaluated in Parkes (2024). It also covers schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder.
12. See DCMS Youth Participation Pilot Survey Executive Survey (2024). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/672b4bcdfbd69e1861921bff/DCMS_Pilot_Youth_Participation_Survey_Findings_Report_final_accessible.pdf
13. Survey of Parents, Children and Young People (2026) undertaken for Back Young People Now by Savanta.
14. See Marquez et al (2024), Table 3.1. Only Ireland is lower.
15. This intensification is sometimes praised for having raised England's relative place in the PISA score for reading, mathematics and science. But in fact this improvement was due to a worsening of scores in other countries, not to an improvement in England. It is only in the TIMSS survey that our national scores improve over time and the TIMSS tests reflect less a person's skills than their knowledge of a curriculum.
16. Using HBSC. See Marquez et al (2024), Table 3.1.
17. NHS Digital. Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2017.
18. Blanchflower et al (2026). In terms of the level of dissatisfaction this group is nearer to the European average. (See Marquez et al (2024)).
19. ONS Survey Jan-Feb 2025. % feeling lonely always/often/some of the time reported by 27% of people aged 16-29 compared with 19% for ages 50-69 and 16% for ages 70+
20. National Curriculum states: Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based and which: promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.
21. Survey of Parents, Children and Young People (2026) undertaken for Back Young People Now by Savanta.
22. In South Australia there is a voluntary province-wide census with high response rates. The data are highly confidential.

23. Over the same period many other countries like France and Germany have experienced declining scores, so the English policy may have had some positive effect on cognitive performance.
24. Morality is not just about not harming others; it is about contributing positively to their wellbeing.
25. Clark et al (2018).
26. Wigelsworth et al (2012).
27. Lordan and McGuire (2026).
28. See for example The Checklist Manifesto by the distinguished surgeon Atul Gawande.
29. NHS Digital, Mental Health of Children and Young People, latest, and Morris et al (2025).
30. Future Minds (2026); Department of Health and Social Care (2026). Independent review into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism: final report. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-into-mental-health-conditions-adhd-and-autism-final-report
31. Rodwell et al (2018). But according to Plenty et al (2021), this difference only holds for males.
32. NICE Guidance CG158. Anti-social behaviour and conduct disorders in children and young people: recognition and management. See also Riise et al (2021).
33. This proposal is evaluated in MacLennan (2024). It would pay for itself within 2 years. We are conscious that there are many other proposals for new mental health services for young people (e.g. in Future Minds, 2026).
34. The proposal is evaluated in Parkes (2024). It also covers schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder.
35. See for example Haidt and Rausch (2026).
36. This section is heavily influenced by Haidt and Rausch (2026), but also by the rest of the World Happiness Report 2026.
37. More in Common. (2025).*Public attitudes to smartphones, social media, and online safety. More in Common.*https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/media/flrnzo5x/public-attitudes-to-smartphones-social-media-and-online-safety-1.pdf
38. Haidt & Johnson (2024).
39. Haidt & Rausch (2026).
40. More in Common. (2025).
41. NBC (2024).
42. Riehm et al (2019)
43. See Table 2 in: Burnell, et al (2025).
44. Thrul et al (2025). This was a re-analysis of Ferguson (2025).
45. Horwitz (2025)
46. Haidt & Rausch. (2026).
47. UK Youth, SQW & University of Essex (2024). Based on UKHLS (Understanding Society) cohort of 10-16 yr olds. Activities included youth clubs, scouts, girl guides or other organised activities.
48. Villa (2024).
49. Villa (2024) – see Table 8.
50. UK Youth and Frontier Economics (2022). In this study the total gains from one year's youth club work (public and private) were related to the public cost only. On the one hand this claims too much benefit, out it overstates the cost by now allowing for any flowback.
51. For a fuller explanation, see the Back Youth Alliance (2025) evidence review: BYA-Rapid-Evidence-Review-Thematic-Summary-Annotated-Bibliography.pdf.
52. From Wave 3 of the Young Lives Young Futures survey of young people now aged 19-20 (conducted by KCL and Edge Foundation). Data compare those who got an apprenticeship with those who ever applied. The same 25% ratio applies to those who apply via the government's Find An Apprenticeship matching system. (See DfE, Apprenticeship Vacancies: Demand and supply data).It is also of course true that we would like more people to consider an apprenticeship – through better vocational guidance, more pre-apprenticeship courses and so on.
53. DfE, Participation in Education Training and Employment at ages 16-21, 2025.
54. Standard data on starts relative to a standard cohort size.
55. Crowley (2024).
56. Department for Education (2021).
57. Frayman (2024).
58. Frayman et al (2027).
59. Lordan and McGuire (2026).
60. Frayman (2024).
61. See Frayman et al (2027). Also, on life-skills, MacLennan (2025); on MHSTs, MacLennan (2024); on addiction, Parkes (2024); on youth services, Villa (2024); on apprenticeship, Frayman (2024).

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