UK Government

Government response to the House of Lords Social Mobility Policy Committee Report

Social Mobility: Local Roots, Lasting Change

Session 2024-26

July 2026

CP 1651

Government of the United Kingdom
Department for Education

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Presented to Parliament by the Minister for Skills by Command of His Majesty

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Introduction

This is the Government's response to the recommendations set out in the House of Lords Social Mobility Policy Committee report on Social Mobility: Local Roots, Lasting Change.

House of Lords - Social Mobility: Local Roots, Lasting Change - Social Mobility Policy Committee was published on 18 November 2025.

The Government thanks the Committee for their report and recommendations, which we have carefully considered.

The Social Mobility Policy Committee published the report following an extensive inquiry into how to improve life chances across the UK. The Committee, chaired by Baroness Manningham-Buller, heard evidence from a wide range of stakeholders in July 2025, including Alison McGovern MP, Minister for Employment and the Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern, Minister for Skills.

The Government welcomes this report and shares its ambition to tackle entrenched barriers to opportunity. Social mobility is central to our vision for a fairer, more productive society.

While talent is spread evenly across the country, opportunity is not, and that starts early in life.

For too long, too many young people have been leaving education and not getting the chance to work – which is one of the most important ways in which we realise the best versions of ourselves.

That's why the Government commissioned Alan Milburn to look at the deep-seated and long-term challenge of youth unemployment, inactivity and sickness. The interim report, published in May, was a powerful rallying cry for change, laying bare the human consequences for life chances and the costs to the country of more than one million young people not in education, employment or training.

The final report later this year will help us build on the significant work we have already undertaken to expand opportunities for young people. As set out in our Post-16 education and skills white paper, we are reforming the skills system to ensure it's a springboard for people to change the story of their lives. We've also brought forward a package of support for young people worth £2.5 billion as an investment in their future and in the country's.

The Youth Guarantee, a joint DfE/DWP programme, is ensuring every young person has a clear pathway into education, training or work, with:

- 300,000 more work experience and training placements.
- The Youth Jobs Grant, offering employers hiring bonuses who take on a young person who has been out of work for six months.

- And a Jobs Guarantee, giving six months of paid work to long-term unemployed young people fully subsidised by government.

Altogether, we expect to create half a million opportunities for young people to learn or earn. This includes 50,000 more apprenticeships, by rebuilding the apprenticeship ladder for young people, including through:

- Introducing foundation apprenticeships.
- Offering hiring bonuses to and fully funding the training costs of SMEs who take on young apprentices.
- And commissioning Skills England to look at which apprenticeships should be prioritised for funding reviews in order to boost apprenticeship starts for young people.

We are also reforming the pathways available to young people by introducing V Levels alongside A and T Levels, new Level 2 routes and stepping-stone qualifications in English and maths to support progression.

Many of the problems young people face do not appear out of nowhere, so we are also doing more to act earlier and prevent them from falling through the cracks, with:

- the NEET Prevention Package, targeted interventions to reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training, including new risk indicators, strengthened school responsibilities and an auto-enrolment backstop for post-16 places
- mental health support and support for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), expanding mental health teams in schools and colleges and delivering SEND reforms to improve inclusivity and transitions
- and our investment to reduce child poverty, because we know children who grow up in poverty are less likely to do well at school, more likely to experience poor physical and mental health, and more likely to be unemployed as adults.

Ensuring young people have the chance to use their talent and energy to the full should be a cause that motivates us all. These measures reflect our commitment to early intervention, local empowerment, and employer engagement. By working with local authorities, education providers, and businesses, we will ensure that every young person, regardless of background, can access the opportunities they deserve.

The Government’s response sets out how we will take forward the Committee’s recommendations and give hope to the country’s young people, to show that we believe in them, we back them and want them to have a better future.

Theme 1: NEETs

Recommendation 1

Endorse Government's commitment to work with local/combined authorities to resolve gaps in responsibility for young people and improve collection/sharing of NEET data locally.

We welcome the Committee's endorsement of our policy proposals. We want to establish clear and cohesive accountability for young people who are NEET and are working in partnership with local areas to codevelop our approach to this.

Recommendation 2

Clarify local accountability for young people by defining responsibility for different age groups, ensuring there are no gaps in monitoring, support, or service provision between local and combined authorities.

The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for setting out the requirement for participation in education or training for young people until the age of 18 and be supported to do so. Local authorities have statutory duties to support young people into education and training, including identifying and helping those who are currently NEET. Statutory guidance also sets out the roles of schools and post-16 providers.

To assist local authorities to identify and help young people at an increased risk of becoming NEET, DfE provide additional support, including good practice guidance on identifying risk factors such as a learning difficulty, disability or poor school attendance.

In the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, we have committed to update local oversight and accountability for young people who are NEET, exploring an enhanced role for Strategic Authorities. Part of the rationale for this change is to mitigate the issues identified in the report, where responsibility for the participation of young people at different ages falls to multiple organisations. We are working in collaboration with local areas on this.

Recommendation 3

Establish data-sharing protocols so that information follows young people as they move between age groups and between different educational bodies or government departments.

We agree that improving data sharing at key transition points is essential to supporting young people who at risk of becoming NEET.

In the Skills White Paper we committed to enable local authorities, Strategic Authorities, schools and further education providers to identify, track and share data about young people more effectively. As part of this we will work across government to explore how the data that helps identify young people who are at risk of becoming NEET is accessible.

We are exploring options to strengthen protocols for passing on data between bodies, building on existing work including Sheffield's Community Mission Challenge, which is exploring opportunities and barriers to improved data sharing between Government departments, local government, and regional partners to strengthen Opportunity Mission delivery.

Recommendation 4

Develop a national Risk of NEET Indicators framework, drawing on lessons from the existing RONI approach and the Blackpool Council software tool, with pilots in additional local authorities, appropriate user training, and ongoing monitoring of effectiveness.

We welcome the Committee's focus on improving the consistency and effectiveness of NEET prevention approaches.

In December, the government announced additional investment in the NEET prevention package that we set out in the Skills White Paper, with a £34 million investment to make it easier to identify young people who need support before they drop out of the system. This includes a new Risk of NEET indicator tool, giving local areas more accurate insights to target support where it's needed most.

To support implementation of this approach, the Department has recently published "at a glance" Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) guidance for education providers and made available a local authority RONI tool. These resources are designed to support more consistent identification of young people at risk of becoming NEET, while enabling local authorities to make effective use of data and evidence to target early intervention and support.

This will ensure that those without a tool, or using one of lower quality, have access to a robust version they can implement locally. In addition, the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) is currently piloting a RONI tool for schools, and we will provide specific guidance for education providers in Spring 2026.

The Department recognises the value of local innovation, such as the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) tool developed by Blackpool Council, and the lessons learned from its implementation. Youth Guarantee trailblazers are also developing and testing new RONI and data sharing approaches to enable earlier intervention and sustained engagement in education and training.

These insights will inform current and future work to strengthen early identification of young people at risk of becoming NEET, including developing a RONI that uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance this approach.

The Department is committed to supporting local and combined authorities in their efforts to prevent NEET and to promote strong local partnerships that help young people move back into education, training, or employment. We will continue to work closely with stakeholders to ensure that any future developments in NEET risk indicators complement and build on existing good practice, and that guidance is available to support effective use of these tools.

Recommendation 5

Support local and combined authorities to develop strong local partnerships that help young people who are NEET reconnect with education, training, and employment.

Local partnerships are a critical part of the government's Youth Guarantee, which will provide support to access a job, apprenticeship or training place for all 18-21-year-olds and create more opportunities for young people. Our first step in delivering on the Guarantee was establishing a set of trailblazers in England to test how best to join up services and offer targeted support to young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET through localised approaches. Trailblazers began delivering in April 2025 and we have confirmed that they will continue for a second year, backed by £45m investment in both 2025/26 and 2026/27.

Lessons from Youth Guarantee trailblazers are informing wider rollout of Youth Guarantee measures announced in March 2026, including the expanded Jobs Guarantee and youth employment support package.

Recommendation 6

Introduce differentiated targets for reducing NEET numbers, with separate goals for different categories or tiers of NEETs, informed by the Blackpool model.

The Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper sets out how we will reform the skills system, including measures to prevent and reduce the number of young people who are NEET and our success measures.

This includes a £34 million investment aimed at preventing young people from becoming NEET. These include strengthening identification and support for those at risk, enabling better data sharing between local authorities, schools, and FE providers, and introducing a "Risk of NEET" indicator tool. Schools will also have a stronger role in ensuring every pupil has a clear post-16 destination, supported by revised guidance and Ofsted expectations.

We will measure the percentage of 16 to 21-year-olds in either classroom-based education and training, or a job which provides skills training, to help reduce the NEET rate.

This builds on the Get Britain Working outcome to reduce the proportion of young people (18 to 24) not in education, employment or training (published April 2025 Get Britain Working outcomes - GOV.UK)

Local Authorities have statutory participation responsibilities and are central in the effort to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

We also recognise that the challenges that local authorities deal with vary across the county – for example, some areas face higher levels of disadvantage which can impact the risk of young people becoming NEET. We do not have plans to introduce individual LA targets, but we do acknowledge these broader cohort challenges. We also publish annual contextualised NEET Scorecards which allow LAs to benchmark their performance against other LAs.

Recommendation 7

Evaluate the Blackpool NEET support partnership as a best-practice model and explore opportunities to replicate its approach in other areas of the country.

The Blackpool partnership model is one example of demonstrating the value of strong local collaboration in supporting young people's participation in education, employment and training. Youth Guarantee trailblazers are also developing effective approaches to partnership working

From January 2026, the Department for Education's Regional Improvement Team (RIT) pilot across Sheffield, Barnsley, Birmingham, Kent and Medway will support the development of a more structured, regionally led approach to raising standards and addressing local need, building on lessons from models such as Blackpool.

The pilot aims to establish clear governance and accountability arrangements within the Department of Education to drive system improvement against agreed regional priorities. RITs will draw on sector and industry expertise to strengthen local capacity, support local authorities in fulfilling their statutory duties, and identify effective place based solutions, with tiered support to improve outcomes and contribute to the Government's opportunity and growth missions.

Theme 2: Educational and training opportunities for 16-18 year olds

Recommendation 8

Reform the EBacc framework to provide greater flexibility and stronger support for technical education. Explore the introduction of high-quality functional English and maths qualifications that improve confidence and access to apprenticeships while remaining distinct from GCSEs. Ensure sufficient support for schools, colleges, and employers involved in any new arrangements.

The government was clear in its response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, that we had accepted the recommendation to remove the EBacc and associated performance measures as it had unnecessarily constrained subject choice. This will be in place at the end of 2026.

The government also confirmed its intention to replace the EBacc with a performance measure that better reflects academic breadth and includes valuable subjects such as the Arts. Schools already have flexibility to offer high-quality Level 2 Technical Awards either alongside or in lieu of GCSEs, which are included in school performance tables.

As part of the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, we are introducing a package of reforms to support more students to make progress towards and achieve level 2 in English and maths, and break the cycle of unnecessary resits. This includes a requirement for students to be offered 100 hours each of English and/or maths teaching, to be delivered at any point in the academic year, developing new level 1 stepping stone qualifications that support students to consolidate foundational skills and knowledge, preparing those with lower prior attainment for successful GCSE resits the following year. We want to work closely with the sector and plan to publish a consultation in early 2026 to seek views and set out more details.

From February 2025, adults over 19 at the start of the apprenticeship will no longer need to achieve a standalone English and maths qualification on top of the apprenticeship, where their employer agrees this is not an essential part of their training. This will allow many thousands more apprentices to qualify each year, including in key sectors such as adult care, construction and early years. It will open-up opportunity for many more potential apprentices and allow more apprentices to secure the significant benefits associated with apprenticeship achievement, such as increased wage returns. Upskilling in English and maths will continue to remain a key feature of all apprenticeships. All apprentices will continue to be required to secure and be assessed on the job-specific English and maths skills they need as part of the apprenticeship standard.

Young apprentices who are aged 16-18 at the start of their apprenticeship will continue to be required to achieve English and/or maths qualifications to put them in the best position to progress in their life and careers. We will continue to fund English and maths qualifications for 16–18-year-olds; and for adults wherever their employer agrees a standalone English and maths qualification is necessary as part of the apprenticeship.

Recommendation 9

Retain Applied General Qualifications (AGQs) until the effectiveness of T-levels and any future V-level qualifications, particularly for disadvantaged learners, can be properly assessed.

T Levels were first introduced in 2020. They are already delivering fantastic results for thousands of young people, giving them the skills and confidence for further study, apprenticeships, or skilled employment. There are 21 T Levels available in subjects ranging from Digital to Health, and a new T Level in Marketing was available from September 2025.

92% of T Level students from the third cohort went on to work or further study, with two-thirds working or studying in the same general subject area as their course. T Levels are already demonstrating their value. 57% of T Level completers who take up apprenticeships go straight into higher or degree-level apprenticeships. This is higher than the rate for all level 3 learners (31%) where the majority go on to do an apprenticeship at the same (51%) or lower level (18%).

Further improvements to T Level content and assessment will support providers to deliver them. A new delivery framework for industry placements gives schools, colleges and employers more scope to design placements that work best for their students.

V Levels, Foundation Certificates and Occupational Certificates will be rolled out in phases, with the first new qualifications being introduced from September 2027 onwards.

We are also introducing new T Levels from 2028.

It is important that young people have the opportunity to move to new qualifications when they are introduced, and we are working with the sector to help them with this transition planning. Providers will be supported with the transition to new qualifications, through access to guidance and resources. We also expect awarding organisations to supply specifications, sample assessments and training materials to support delivery and assessment. We have also asked providers to give us transition plans.

We are removing funding from qualifications in existing T Level areas that are 1080 guided learning hours or above from 2027 apart from in health and social care where this will happen in 2028. Other qualifications will remain in the system until related V levels and new T Levels are introduced, at which point they will no longer be publicly funded.

Recommendation 10

Increase the flexibility of the Growth and Skills Levy, including encouraging greater sharing of unspent levy funds, monitoring its effectiveness in creating entry-level apprenticeships, and considering reduced-rate participation by SMEs.

This Government is transforming the apprenticeships levy into a new growth and skills levy in England, giving employers greater flexibility, creating more opportunities for young people, and directly supporting the Industrial Strategy. This government's ambition is to reverse the sharp decline in apprenticeship starts amongst young people – which have fallen by 40% over the last decade. We want to shift the focus towards supporting young people into high-quality training and employment and our reforms will support our ambition for 50,000 more young people into apprenticeships over the next three years.

We have introduced new foundation apprenticeships to give young people a route into careers in critical sectors, such as construction and health and social care and have now expanded these into hospitality and retail (sectors where young people are traditionally recruited).

SMEs are important to the economy and to apprenticeships; they provide valuable opportunities for younger apprentices and apprentices from disadvantaged areas. We are boosting small business starts and youth employment by introducing a new apprenticeship hiring payment of £2,000 for non-levy paying employers, typically SMEs, that hire apprentices aged 16-24 as new employees. Additionally, from August 2026, apprenticeships training will be completely free for non-levy paying employers who hire eligible young people aged 16-24. We've also made £140 million available to pilot, with Mayoral Strategic Authorities, new approaches to better connect young people aged 16-24, especially those who are NEET, to local apprenticeship opportunities.

To give employers greater flexibility, in April we launched the first apprenticeship units, focusing on priority sectors including artificial intelligence (AI), construction and engineering. For the first time levy payers can use levy funding for training beyond apprenticeships, they will also be fully funded for non-levy paying employers.

Employers that pay the apprenticeship levy can choose to transfer up to 50% of the funds available to them each year to other businesses, including non-levy paying employers (essentially SMEs). The levy transfer funds the 5% co-investment that the business in receipt of the levy transfer may otherwise have had to contribute to the cost of apprenticeship training and assessment.

While levy-paying employers can use all their levy funds, whether entirely on their own apprenticeships or through levy transfers as well, the majority do not. This allows the government to fund, from the apprenticeship budget, apprenticeships for SMEs. In the 2024-25 financial year government spent around £740 million supporting apprenticeships in SMEs.

There is not significant underspend from the apprenticeship budget, despite widespread misconceptions, with 100% of the budget spent in the 2024-25 financial year.

Regarding the committee's recommendation to extend the levy at a reduced rate to SMEs, HMT is responsible for the operation of the levy.

Recommendation 11

Improve consistency in careers guidance and education through a review of best practice, followed by a programme of improvement to ensure all young people receive high-quality advice on both subject choices and career pathways.

The Government is committed to improving the consistency of careers guidance and education so all young people receive high-quality advice on subject choices and future career pathways.

DfE has adopted the updated Gatsby Benchmarks for good careers guidance into careers statutory guidance. The benchmarks set a vital standard, ensuring that schools and colleges tailor their careers programmes to meet the needs of each young person, with information on a broad range of career pathways. Insights and experiences should include employer and provider encounters, workplace experiences and a guidance meeting with a trained careers adviser. These changes have been introduced alongside independent quality assurance of careers programmes, including peer-to-peer reviews across careers hubs, to help drive continuous improvement.

The new Jobs and Careers Service (JCS) will support people to find meaningful work and progress in work, including through an enhanced focus on skills and careers. Personalised support will be available to adults aged 18 and over and to young people under 18 who are not in school or college. Further details on the design and delivery of JCS have now been published by the Department for Work and Pensions in Get Britain Working: an update on the Jobs and Careers Service (2 July 2026).

Recommendation 12

Raise the household income threshold for maximum university maintenance loans so that it reflects inflationary increases.

This Government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to attend higher education. We are future proofing our maintenance loan offer by increasing maintenance loans in line with forecast inflation every academic year from 2026/27 onwards, and making all care leavers automatically eligible for the maximum maintenance loan regardless of their income from 2026/27

We are also introducing new targeted maintenance grants from academic year 2028/29, which will provide disadvantaged students with up to £1,000 extra per year, on top of existing maintenance loans – increasing cash in student's pockets, without increasing their debt.

We need to ensure that student funding system is financially sustainable. Around £20.7 billion of student loans administered by the Student Loans Company were issued in financial year 2024-25, of which £9.1 billion of maintenance loans were issued to undergraduate students.

The current system targets the highest levels of support at students with household incomes of £25,000 or less, who need it most.

Recommendation 13

Develop an urgent solution for care leavers that enables them to enter employment without losing affordable accommodation.

DWP recognises the challenges care leavers face as they move out of the care system and supports them by simplifying their interaction with the benefit system and helping them into work.

The Department provides additional support for care leavers, such as an Exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) that allows care leavers to claim the higher local Housing Allowance one bedroom rate of Universal Credit until their 25th birthday if they are in the private rented sector.

And, as announced in the recent Budget, from Autumn 2026, working-age residents, including care leavers, living in Supported Housing or Temporary Accommodation will benefit from new tailored earned income disregards in Housing Benefit that will commence from Autumn 2026. This will remove a significant financial barrier to entering work or increasing hours, ensuring that work pays and residents are better able to achieve financial independence.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) can be paid to those entitled to Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs. This includes shortfall in rent and for costs associated with moving such as rent in advance, rent deposit or removal costs.

From April 2026, DHPs in England will be incorporated into the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) becoming the CRF Housing Payment. DHPs will continue in Wales following 1 April 2026.

At the same time, the Government is prioritising addressing the fundamental issue of lack of housing supply. For England, the Government has set the foundation to deliver on its Plan for Change commitment to build 1.5 million homes in England this parliament and will deliver the biggest boost to social and affordable housing investment in a generation.

Theme 3: Data

Recommendation 14

Publish a timetable for linking the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) dataset and the Pupil Parent Matched Dataset (PPMD), including milestones and expected availability for research and policy use before the end of the current Parliament.

We will work towards publishing a clear timetable for the LEO-PPMD dataset linkage, including key milestones and the anticipated point of availability for research and policy use, by the end of March 2027.

Recommendation 15

Develop a broader dataset linking parental income and educational outcomes that covers a wider population than those receiving specified benefits.

The DfE is currently exploring options for further data linking across government, to improve the granularity of disadvantage data and the coverage of parental income data, beyond those in families claiming benefits. While it is not yet clear what will be achievable, we will aim to set out any feasible options for widening this coverage by March 2027, alongside the proposed timetable for the LEO-PPMD linkage.

Recommendation 16

Provide a progress update on the review of the exclusion of health and social care data from the Digital Economy Act 2017, including a clear completion deadline.

DHSC recognises the value in keeping the arrangements for health data in the Digital Economy Act 2017 under review, to ensure health data can be used appropriately to improve public services and support essential research, in a legal, secure and proportionate manner. Any consideration of amendments to the existing data sharing powers under the Digital Economy Act 2017 to include health and adult care bodies in the scope of the provisions must be in line with the expectations of the public as to how their health information is used, so as to preserve public trust.

Theme 4: Leadership

Recommendation 17

Minister for Skills should continue to sit in both DWP and DfE and take lead responsibility for social mobility, possibly supported by advisory body.

The Minister for Skills sits across both DfE and DWP to have strategic oversight over support for young people and adults to gain the skills they need to succeed in work and in life and help drive economic growth by addressing skills shortages in our economy. The Minister is supported by a joint strategy team, as well as the Office for Equality and Opportunity in her capacity as Minister of State for Women and Equalities. Future configurations of government departments and ministerial remits are a matter for the Prime Minister of the day.

Recommendation 18

Build on eight youth trailblazers; expand remit to social mobility pilots; increase number and ensure mix of strategic/local authorities from different areas.

The Youth Guarantee trailblazers are focusing on what works locally in preventing young people from becoming NEET and supporting those who are NEET to rejoin education, employment or training. A key part of their work is also testing what works in identifying and supporting "hidden NEETs"; young people who are not in receipt of benefits and therefore harder to identify and support. To build robust, consistent data and evidence, trailblazers must remain focused on their starting objectives.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the 8 Youth Guarantee Trailblazers and the 9 Economic Inactivity Trailblazers, the Department for Work and Pensions has commissioned an evaluation, starting in December 2025, which is expected to build evidence on the effectiveness of the initiative at achieving employment outcomes, reducing levels of economic inactivity, associated health and well-being indicators, increasing participation in education and training, and effectiveness of systems integration. We expect to publish interim findings during the next two years and will develop the value for money assessment once longer term impacts have developed.

The Department for Work and Pensions is also working closely with Trailblazer areas to support the design of their own local evaluations which, along with findings from the national evaluation and the management information which is being collected by areas and will be shared with the Department, will inform the future design and development of the Youth Guarantee, and the role of local areas in supporting young people.

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