More in Common

Milburn, youth unemployment and the social contract

Going from a politics of *trying* to a politics of *can*

The Milburn Review lands at a time when the Prime Minister has made a good first impression and is personally popular, but doubts remain over whether he is capable of taking tough decisions and tackling big structural problems such as Britain's youth worklessness crisis.

Unlike with Keir Starmer, many Britons believe that Andy Burnham *understands*, and is actively *trying* to deliver change.

But while the public welcomed the short term relief in last month's Budget, many were left with questions over if there was a long-term plan. Only 24 per cent said that the government has a clear plan to reduce the welfare bill. And many doubt Burnham is capable of taking tough decisions: 42 per cent say he tends to do what is popular, even if it is not right for the country, compared with 37 per cent who say he makes difficult decisions, even if unpopular.

The government's response to the Milburn Review will be a key test of the politics of *can*.

Key findings

01	**Young Britons feel the social contract is broken, and generations disagree on why**	55 per cent of over-25s say it is harder to be young today than it was for them. But 55 per cent say young people do not work as hard as older generations did, and generations blame very different causes for youth unemployment.
02	**Worry about youth unemployment and job security is high, and AI is adding to it**	63 per cent are worried about youth unemployment, rising to 74 per cent of Gen Z. 59 per cent of Gen Z see AI as a threat to their job, and 62 per cent of Britons would slow AI down to protect jobs.
03	**Most think the welfare bill is unsustainable, and worry more about who can claim than how much they get**	60 per cent say welfare spending is unsustainable and 52 per cent say it is too easy to claim benefits. Opinion is more divided on how much recipients receive.
04	**Britons want the state to invest in young people, but with conditions attached**	72 per cent back a guaranteed job, training place or apprenticeship for every young person out of work, and 73 per cent say young people should lose their benefits if they turn it down.
05	**Britons doubt Burnham will take tough decisions, and voters are split on how fast to go**	42 per cent say Burnham tends to do what is popular, compared with 37 per cent who say he makes difficult decisions. 65 per cent of Labour's current voters prefer slower, fairer cuts, while most 2024 Conservative and Reform UK voters want faster ones.

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Being young in Britain in 2026

Many young people feel they have done ‘everything right’ but are still stuck, and generations disagree on what the problem is.

Many Gen Z Britons feel that the social contract is broken

Gen Z's disillusionment with politics is driven by a sense the **social contract has been broken by successive generations.**

Several factors are combining to generate this sense of unmet expectation: the housing crisis, political strife, the poor job market, the experience of COVID-19 and a persistent sense that they won't be better off than future generations all contribute to a sense of alienation.

> *"It's unbelievable what they're unable to do... Will we any one of us be able to actually own any property or will we, oh, nothing can be happy as they say is the phrase here."*
>
> Samir, Kitchen Worker, Chesterfield

> *"I think if I work so hard, will I have to work 10 times hard[er than] my parents to have the same lifestyle?"*
>
> Sarah, A-Level Student, Birmingham

> *"I think that it's a really tough generation to grow up in and there's a lot of expectations that within today's day and age and economy it's really difficult to meet."*
>
> Hannah, Teaching Assistant, West Sussex

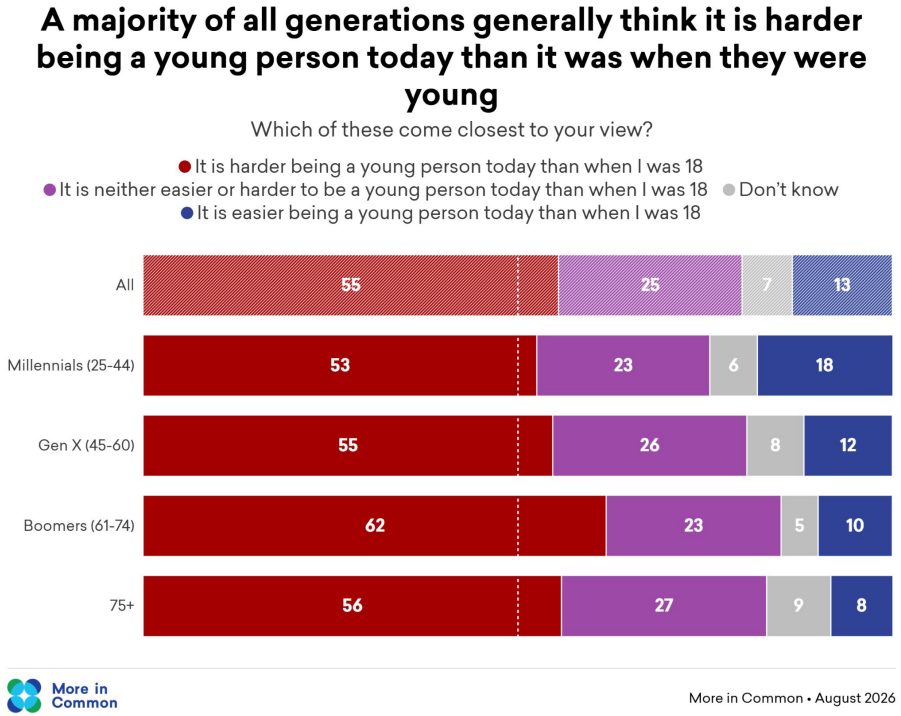
> *"My first year of uni was pretty awful. We couldn't go out, so I spent lockdown with 11 strangers in a flat and it was horrific."*
>
> Jesse, Primary School Teacher, East Sussex

> *"I'm quite uneducated on politics as a whole. I don't really look into it. I think it's most times quite depressing to look at how it causes some of the most pointless arguments between people and sometimes some of the most important arguments as well."*
>
> Edward, A-Level Student, Leeds

Sympathy for young people is high

Despite deepening divisions politically between generations, sympathy for young people is generally high, with a majority of those over 25 (55 per cent) thinking it is harder for young people today than it was for them at the same age. Just 13 per cent think it is easier. This is remarkably consistent across ages and generations.

This extends to a worry that children growing up today will have a worse quality of life than their parents. 39 per cent think that their children's generation will have a worse quality of life than they have now, compared to 18 per cent who think it will be better and 22 per cent who think it will be the same. Over four in ten (42 per cent) of people with children think things will be worse for their children than it was for them.

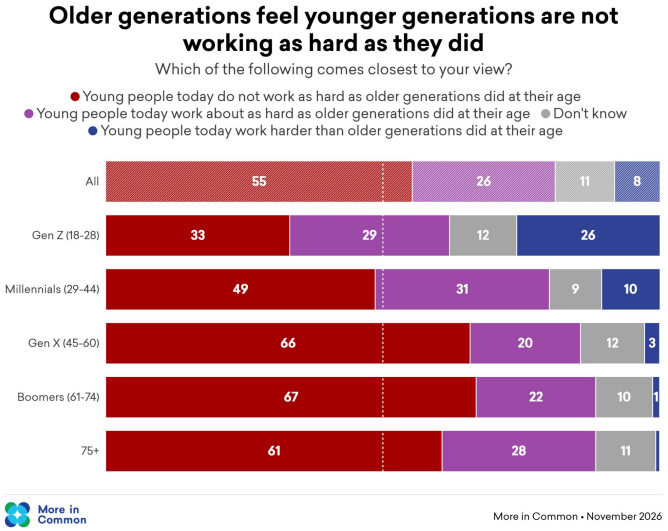


But many older generations do not feel young people work as hard as they did

The flipside of this is that many in older generations feel younger people are not working as hard as they did. Unsurprisingly, Gen Z themselves do not agree.

Overall, 55 per cent say that young people are not working as hard as older generations did at their age, which is especially high among Baby Boomers (61-74) at 67 per cent, with just one per cent of Boomers saying young people are working harder. Politically, this is also divided - 67 per cent of Reform's 2024 voters, and 64 per cent of Conservatives, think young people are not working as hard as older generations, compared to 46 per cent of Labour and 51 per cent of Liberal Democrat voters.

However, Britons are more likely to say the rise in youth unemployment overall is due to factors outside of young people's control (50 per cent) than the attitudes and choices of young people (37 per cent).



"Quite honestly the country's going to a stage where youngsters come straight out of school, going straight up to benefits and maybe not perhaps doing any work at all and not contributing into society at all. Get them back into doing a part-time job or an apprenticeship or something into the country."

Paul, Security Officer, Clacton

Different generations have radically different explanations for the youth unemployment crisis

This age cleavage extends to how different generations view the root causes of the youth unemployment crisis.

Overall, the most common causes named are a lack of apprenticeships (27 per cent), benefits being too generous (26 per cent) and employers requiring experience (26 per cent).

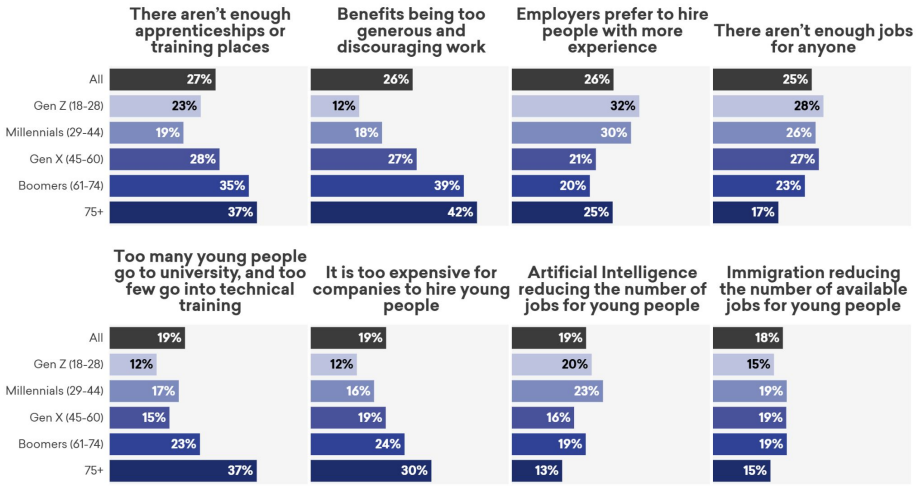
Some issues have big generational divides. Gen Z are most likely to name employers requiring experience (32 per cent), and more than twice as likely (20 per cent) to name poor mental health support as the general public.

Baby Boomers and those over 75 are far more likely to name too many people going to university and benefits being too generous. Those over 75 (42 per cent) are more than three times as likely as Gen Z (12 per cent) to name benefits being too generous.

Older generations blame overgenerous benefits as the main cause of youth unemployment; Gen Z blame lack of jobs and employers requiring experience

Which of the following, if any, do you think are the main reasons for unemployment among young people in the UK today? Please select up to three.

Top eight issues

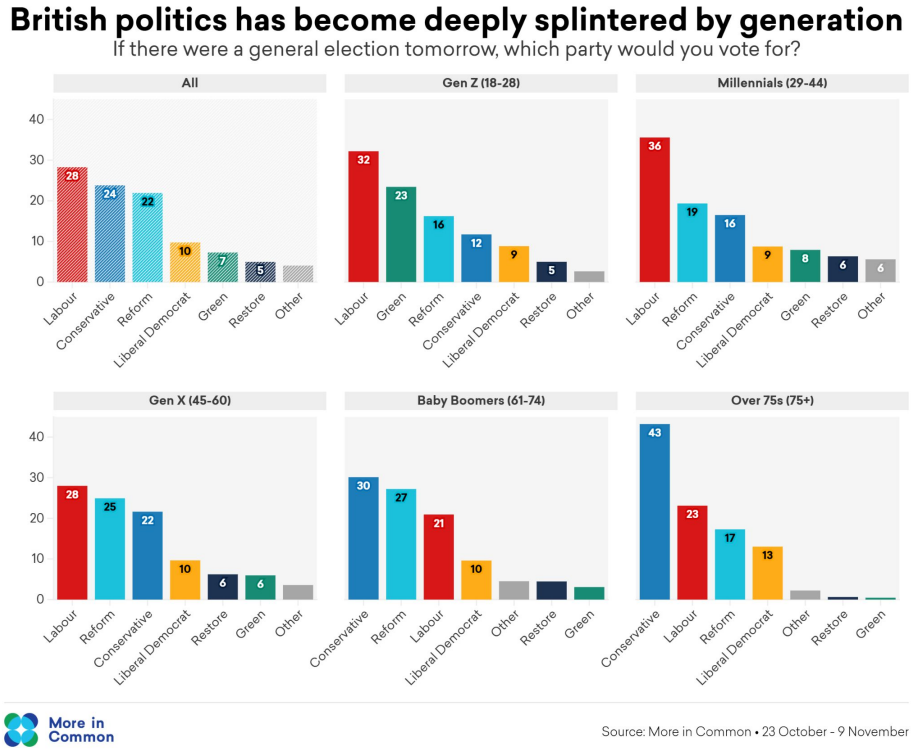


British politics has become deeply generationally divided

Many issues relating to welfare, youth unemployment and jobs have become difficult politically, in part because different generations are inhabiting different political worlds.

Gen Z stands apart from other generations; the Green Party was leading this group during its surge last spring and summer, and still leads with Gen Z women. The right bloc (Conservative, Reform, Restore) averages just 33 per cent here, compared to 51 per cent for the British public as a whole - notably different to most of Europe. While still relatively weak at five per cent, Restore also takes up a higher share of the right bloc than any generation.

This is substantially different from other European countries- in Germany, the AfD won 21 per cent of the vote with the 18-24 demographic in 2025, and 33 per cent for the RN in France's 2024 legislative elections.

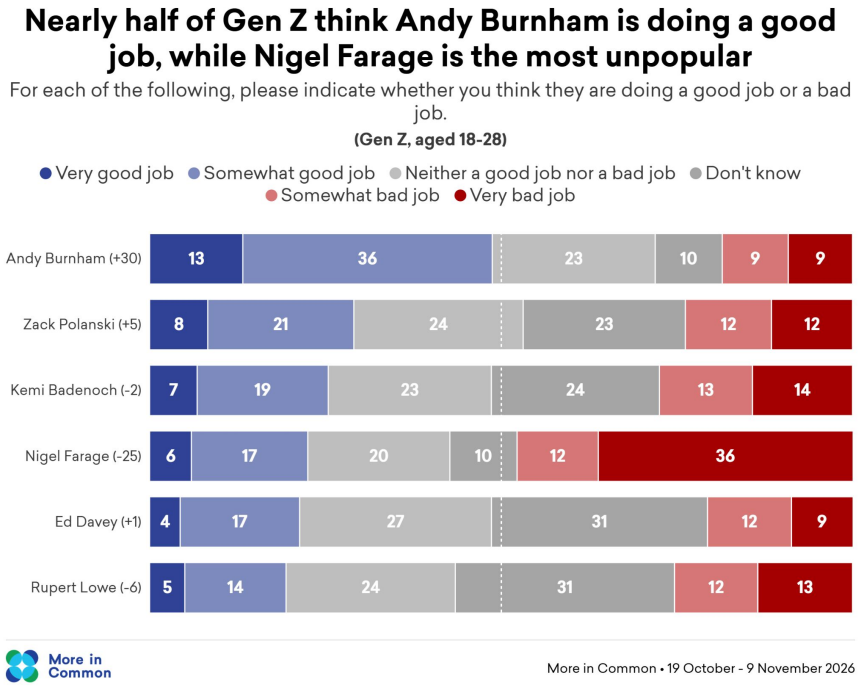


Gen Z trusts Burnham – for now

Burnham, at the moment, has significant political goodwill with Gen Z, which may be helpful in bridging these deep political divides. 49 per cent of Gen Z (18-28) think he is doing a good job, compared to 18 per cent who say he is doing a bad job. Zack Polanski's approval is still positive (+5). Nigel Farage is the most unpopular party leader with Gen Z, with 48 per cent saying he is doing a bad job.

This is a 22-point improvement from Keir Starmer, when Starmer left office in July 2026, 27 per cent said he was doing a good job, and 47 per cent thought he was doing a bad job.

It suggests that, for now, the new strategy of outreach for Burnham has helped revive support with Gen Z. **But the gap between Burnham's approval (49 per cent) and Labour voting intention (32 per cent) is the largest for any generation.**



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Britons and job security

Worry about youth unemployment and job security is high, and AI is adding to it

Gen Z are particularly worried about job security

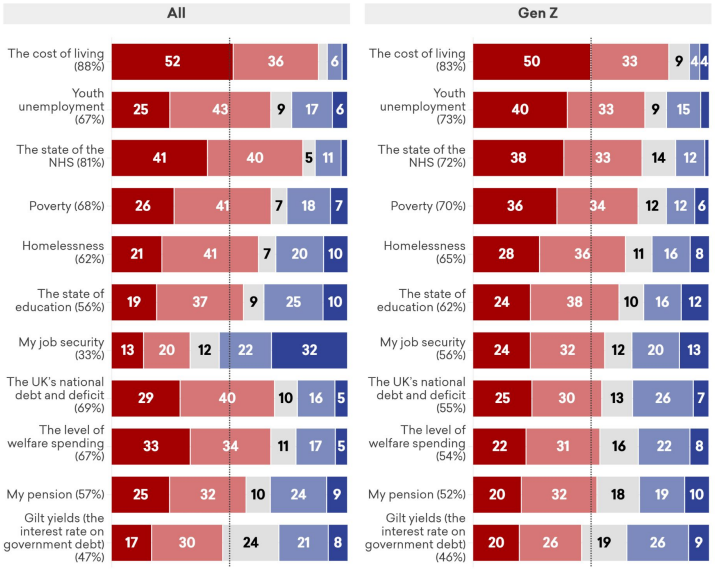
Worries about youth unemployment, job security and welfare are all elevated among the public, including with Gen Z. **Jobs and unemployment rank second on top issues for Gen Z, after cost of living, but sixth overall for the public.**

73 per cent of Gen Z report being worried, including 40 per cent who are very worried, about youth unemployment, and a majority (56 per cent) are worried about their own job security. This contrasts with the public as a whole, where a slim majority (54 per cent) are not very or not at all worried about their job security.

Worry about welfare and debt is comparatively lower with Gen Z than with the public. More than two in three (67 per cent) of the public are worried about welfare spending, and 69 per cent are worried about the debt. This is 54 per cent and 55 per cent with Gen Z.

Gen Z are far more worried than the public about job security, but less worried about the national debt and welfare spending

How worried or unworried are you about the following aspects of the economy?

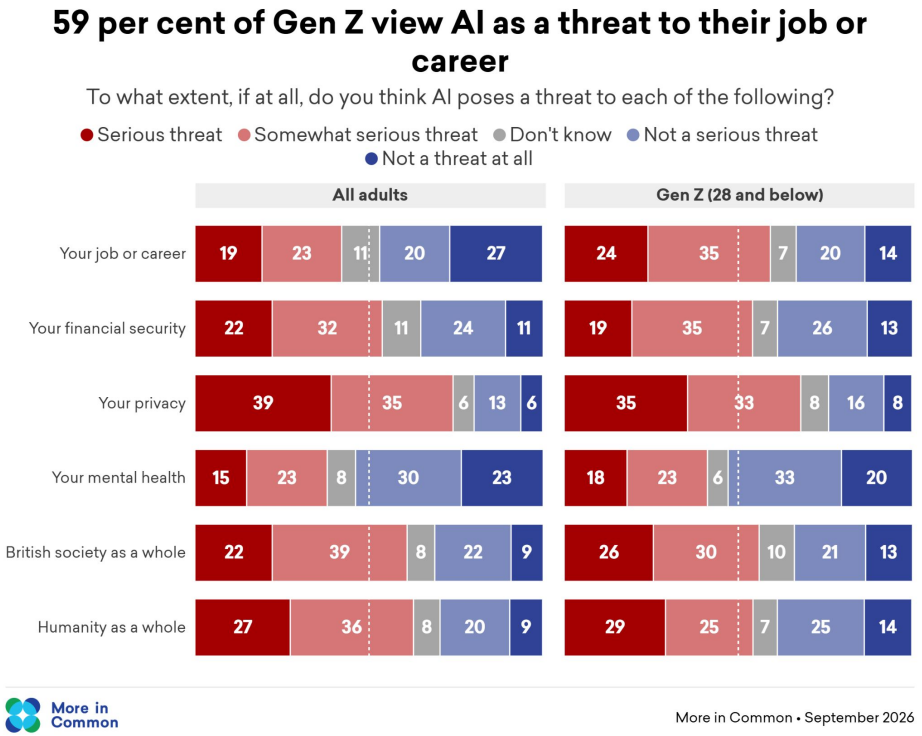


A majority of Gen Z now believe AI is a threat to their job or career

Anxiety about artificial intelligence is also elevated with Gen Z and is driving a feeling of precarity at work.

59 per cent of Gen Z now name AI as a threat to their job, including nearly one in four who say it is a “serious threat” to it. Just one in three (33 per cent) say it is not a serious threat, or not a threat at all.

Interestingly, AI concern as a whole is actually fairly similar to the public as a whole, and Gen Z are actually slightly less worried about AI’s threat to their financial security and society as a whole than the rest of the public. This suggests that AI is exacerbating a specific, rather than generalised, worry about unemployment, rather than this being part of a Gen Z specific pessimism on AI.



Most Britons, especially lower-income workers, want AI to slow down to protect jobs

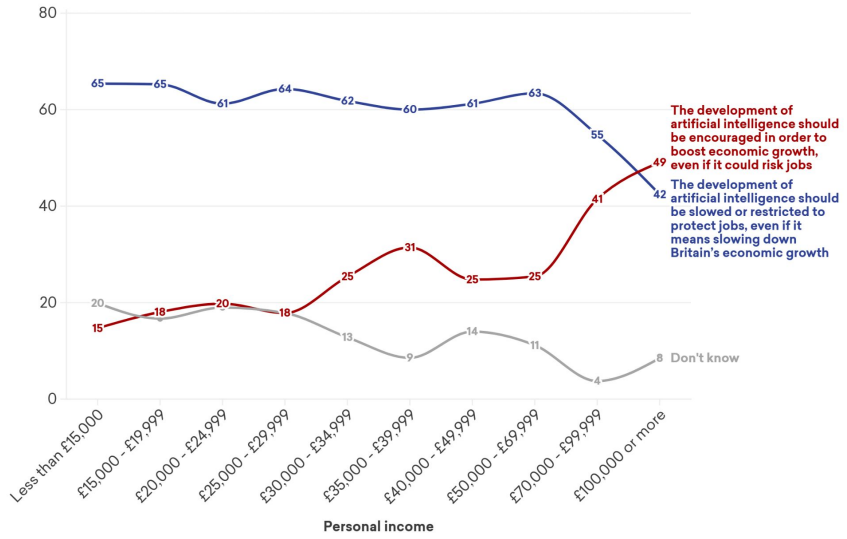
There is a broad majority view that AI development should be slowed down if it risks jobs, which is especially high with workers on lower incomes.

Overall, 62 per cent want the development of artificial intelligence to be slowed down to safeguard jobs, even if it risks growth, compared to 23 per cent who would prioritise growth. Support for this is strongest with the lowest income workers, and only those earning over £100,000 a year are more likely to prioritise growth driven by AI. In a separate poll, 51 per cent supported a moratorium on data centres.

In the American midterms, anger at "Big Tech" and AI for posing threats to jobs helped motivate a 40-point shift in Gen Z towards the Democrats. Given the accelerating distrust of artificial intelligence and climbing concerns about job security, this risk remains potentially politically potent for the government.

Only those earning over £100,000 would prioritise economic growth from AI over a risk to jobs

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



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Gen Z rate the government worse on jobs than on any issue except the cost of living

Compounding these political risks is the government's poor reputation on jobs. Despite the "Burnham Bounce", the government's record on jobs and unemployment is still viewed negatively by the public.

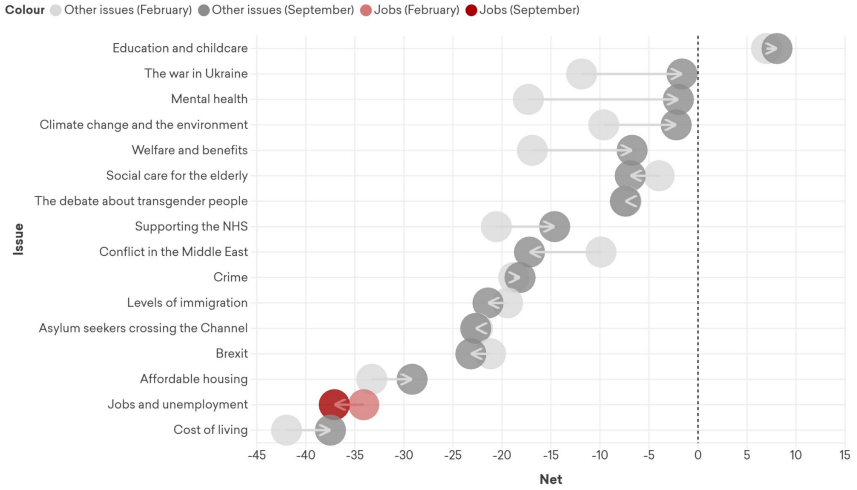
14 per cent think the government is doing well on jobs and unemployment, and 51 per cent think it is doing badly. In February 2026, 13 per cent said it was doing well and 57 per cent said it was doing badly**. This is the second worst issue for government popularity, behind only the cost of living, for Gen Z.**

Disapproval on the government's record on jobs and unemployment has continued to rise among Gen Z despite the accession of Burnham and a substantial boost in Labour's poll ratings. 57 per cent now think the government is handling it badly - up from 52 per cent in February.

Gen Z have a very negative view of the Government's performance on jobs and unemployment

How well or badly would you say the current Government is doing on each of the following issues?

Net score (well minus badly), Gen Z (18-28), February to September 2026



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Source: More in Common • February and September 2026

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Welfare: a broken social contract?

Most think the welfare bill is unsustainable, and concern centres on who can claim rather than how much they receive

For many, the welfare crisis is at the centre of a broken social contract

Worry about the welfare bill and spending has being raised with increasing frequency in focus groups, including in this group in Rawmarsh, the Chancellor's seat. Worries about the scale of spending, and in particular that people are claiming who should not be, are often seen as a fundamental affront to fairness to those who have worked hard.

However, those in focus groups often express real concerns about poverty in their communities, and want to protect those in genuine need from the impact of any potential cuts.

> *"I've got personal experience of it recently, so it's got my backup actually, just that whole system, because I just think you pay into it, it's meant to be there as a safety net, and it's not a safety net. And for some, it is a bloody lilo that they rely on all the time."*
>
> Karen, Restorative Justice Worker, Rawmarsh

> *"All my clients use the welfare system, are on benefits, and every single one of them is struggling. It's such a huge thing. It's so prevalent and it's just not... I don't know the answers, but what they're giving right now, what they're providing right now isn't enough with the cost of living. Obviously, you can't create money. I don't know the answer to that, but I just know that the people that are really, really suffering, it's not doing enough."*
>
> Maya, Mental Health Professional, Rawmarsh

> *"I do know someone that has gone in a wheelchair and they've managed to get top rating PIP, but there's nothing wrong with them. There's people out there taking advantage of the system, which I find really hard. How are they going to actually chop it down to a manageable amount, cutting other people out of the PIP scheme or welfare scheme? I don't know how they're going to do it."*
>
> Roseanne, Retired, Rawmarsh

The salience of welfare has risen – asymmetrically

During the last general election and shortly after, around one in ten named welfare and benefits as a top three issue facing the country, and partisan differences were minimal.

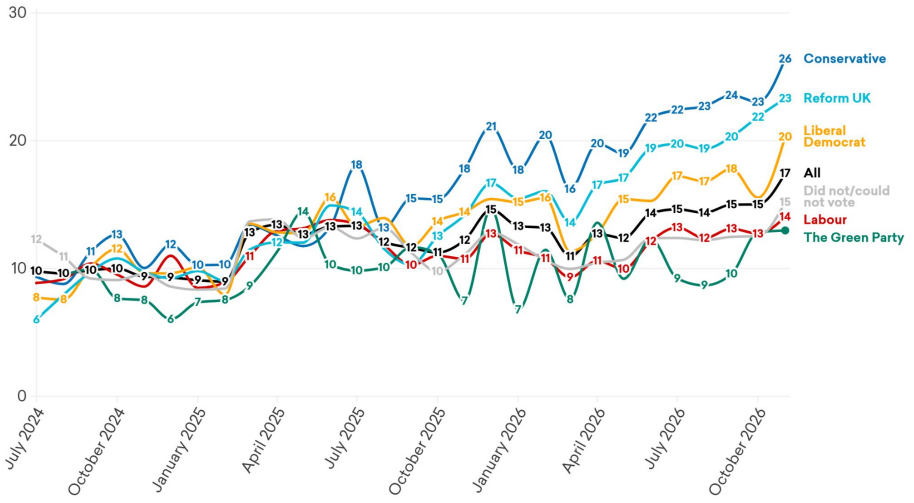
Welfare has been ticking up in salience. Shortly after the Budget, the number naming welfare and benefits as one of the three most important issues rose to 18 per cent – the highest it had ever reached since we started tracking, and ahead of housing, crime and climate change, but still well below immigration, the small boats and the cost of living.

The rise is asymmetric – now, nearly twice as many 2024 Conservatives (26 per cent) name welfare as a top issue compared to Labour (14 per cent). The two segments most concerned are Traditional Conservatives (31 per cent) and Established Liberals (24 per cent).

Welfare and benefits have risen up the agenda, particularly among Conservative and Reform voters

In your opinion, which are the most IMPORTANT issues facing the country today? Please select up to three,

Welfare and Benefits. Monthly average, by 2024 vote



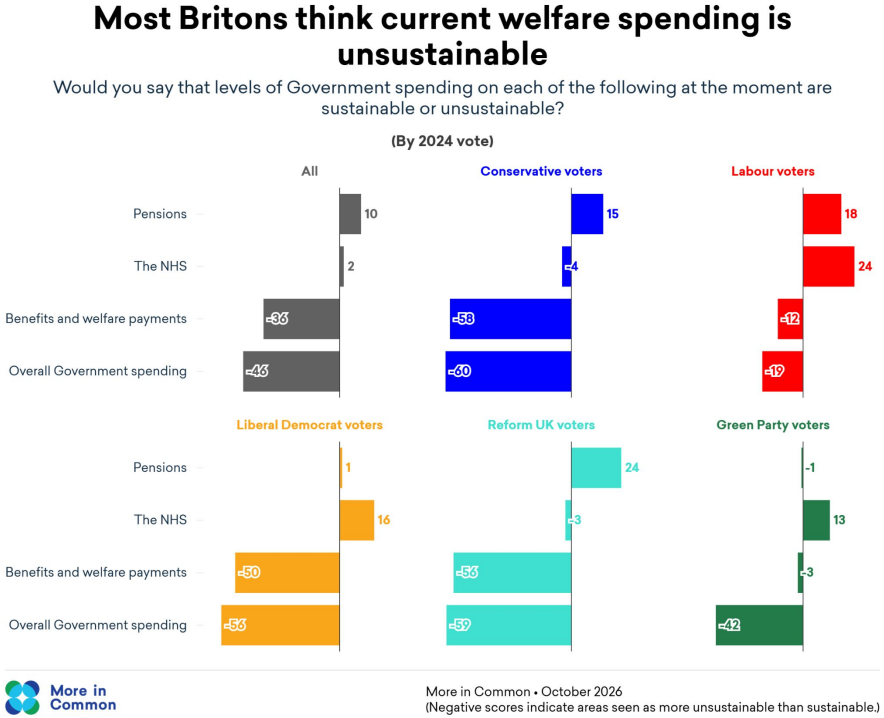
More in Common • July 2024 to November 2026. November 2026 based on first two weeks of polling

A growing consensus that welfare spending is unsustainable

A majority of the public thinks that spending on benefits and welfare payments is unsustainable, but does not extend these concerns to other parts of the welfare state.

Overall, 23 per cent view spending on welfare and benefits as sustainable, and 60 per cent view it as unsustainable. Pluralities of every party view it as unsustainable, including 51 per cent of Labour's 2024 voters.

By contrast, the public lean towards thinking that NHS spending is sustainable (41 per cent to 40) and that spending on pensions is sustainable (44 per cent to 34).



Concerns about abuse of the benefits system are high

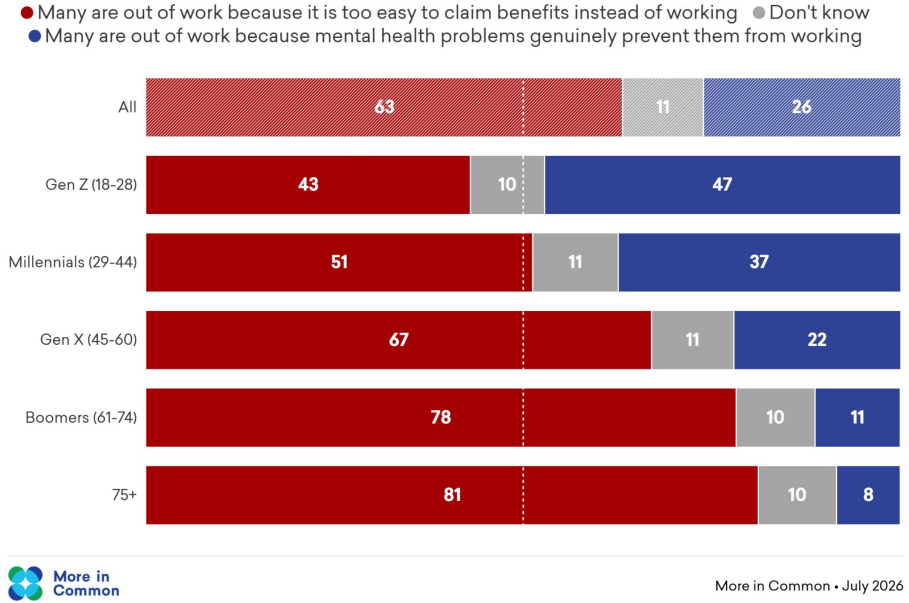
When a choice is forced, the public tend to think that unemployment is driven more by ease of access to benefits, rather than mental health conditions preventing people from working.

63 per cent say the bigger factor behind youth unemployment is that it is too easy to claim benefits instead of working, compared with 26 per cent who say it is mental health conditions genuinely preventing people from working. Only Green and SNP 2024 voters are more likely to name mental health conditions (52 per cent to 39 per cent among Green voters).

Gen Z is almost evenly split on this question, with 43 per cent naming benefits as the larger factor and 47 per cent naming mental health conditions.

There is broad scepticism about young people claiming benefits for mental health conditions

Thinking about young people who are out of work, which comes closer to your view?



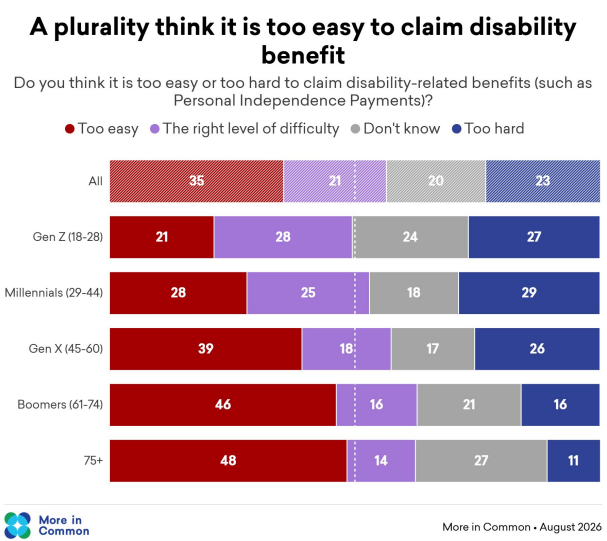
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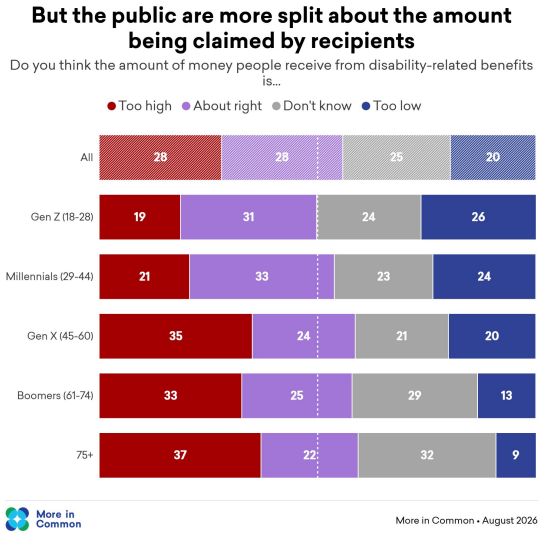
Concern about disability benefit concentrates on *who* is claiming, not *how much* is being claimed

A plurality, especially among older generations, think that it is too easy (35 per cent) to claim disability benefit. 21 per cent think the level of difficulty is about right, and 23 per cent think it is too hard. This is particularly true with older generations.

But opinion is much more split on whether the amount of money recipients get is too high (28 per cent), about right (28 per cent) or too low (20 per cent).

Taken together, the public's concern appears to be more about who can access disability benefits than about how much those who receive them are given.





The public are split on whether mental and physical conditions should be treated the same for benefits

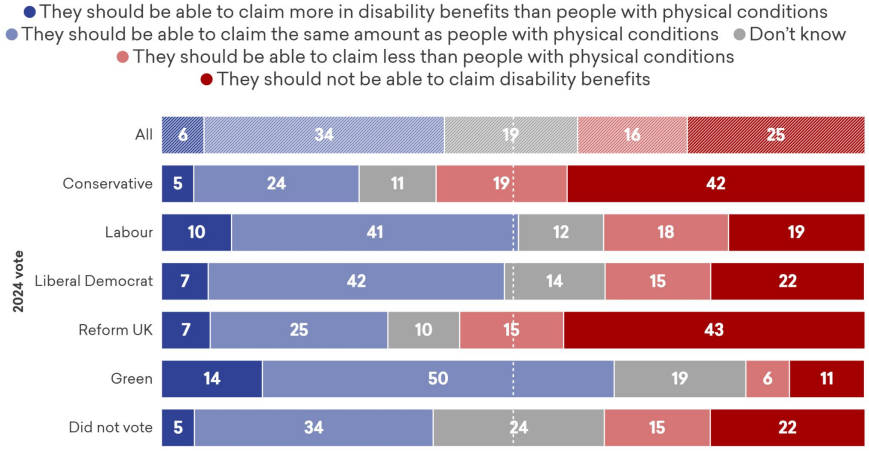
There are, however, sharp political divisions too on whether mental and physical conditions should be treated the same, or differently, for those aged 16 to 24.

Overall, 40 per cent say that those with mental conditions should be able to claim the same or more as those with physical conditions, and 41 per cent say they should claim less or not be able to claim disability benefit at all. **Only around one in four think young people should not be able to claim disability benefits for mental conditions.**

A majority of Labour (51 per cent) and Green (64 per cent) voters say young people should be able to claim the same or more for mental conditions, and majority of Conservative (61 per cent) and Reform (58 per cent) voters say they should claim less, or none at all.

The public are split politically on whether mental health conditions should be treated the same as physical conditions for 16-24 year olds on benefits

Some young people aged 16 to 24 have mental health conditions, such as anxiety or depression, that affect their ability to work or study. Which of the following comes closest to your view?

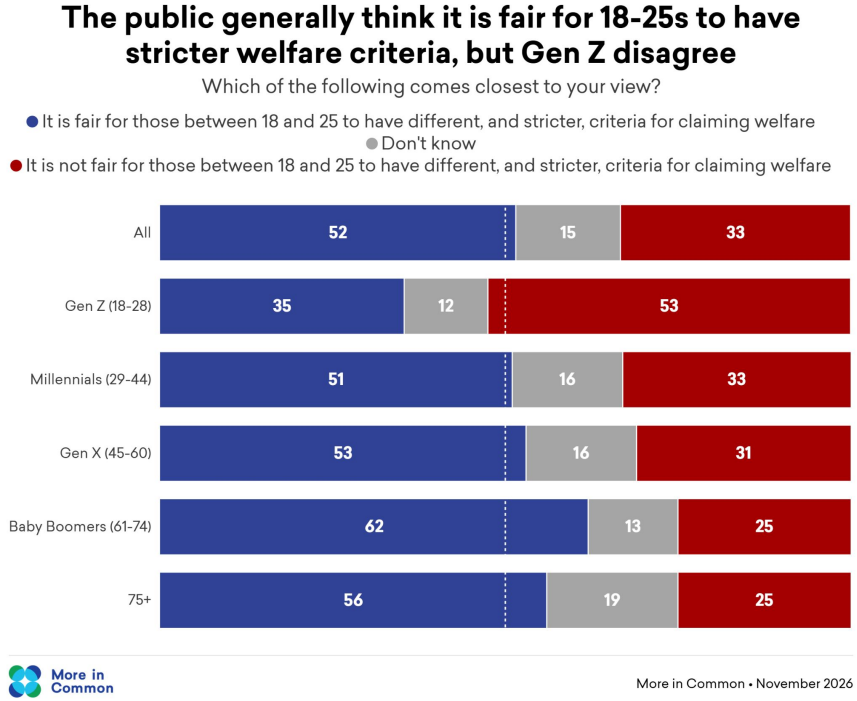


Generations are divided on the fairness of age-distinct welfare criteria

The public lean towards thinking that it is fair (52 per cent) for the under 25s to have different, and stricter, criteria for claiming welfare, compared to 33 per cent who think it is not fair.

But a majority Gen Z themselves do not think that stricter criteria is fair (53 per cent). This number is higher with those in that age bracket, with 26 per cent of 18-25s, viewing it is fair, and 58 per cent viewing it as unfair.

Balancing the difficult generational politics of fairness with age-gradated criteria may, therefore, be difficult.



But a majority think it is worth taking a tougher approach to get young people into work

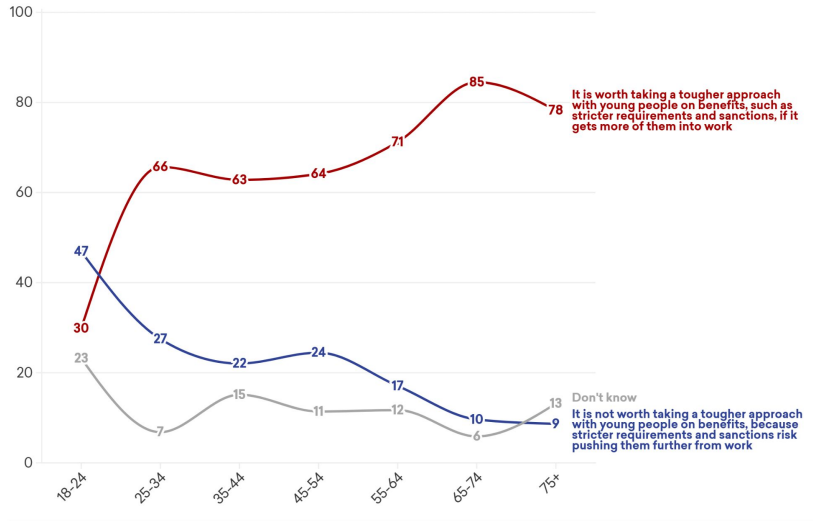
A majority do think that it would be worth taking a tougher approach to get more young people into work.

Three times as many (66 per cent) think that a tougher approach would be worth it, if it gets more people into work, compared to the 22 per cent think it is not worth taking a tougher approach, because sanctions risk pushing people further from work. This is higher with parents (69 per cent) than non-parents (62 per cent).

18-24s themselves have a very different perspective than the rest of the country, with 47 per cent saying it is not worth taking a tougher approach, compared to 60 per cent thinking it is.

Most age groups think that it is worth taking a tougher approach to get more people into work

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



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What Britons want to see from the Milburn Review

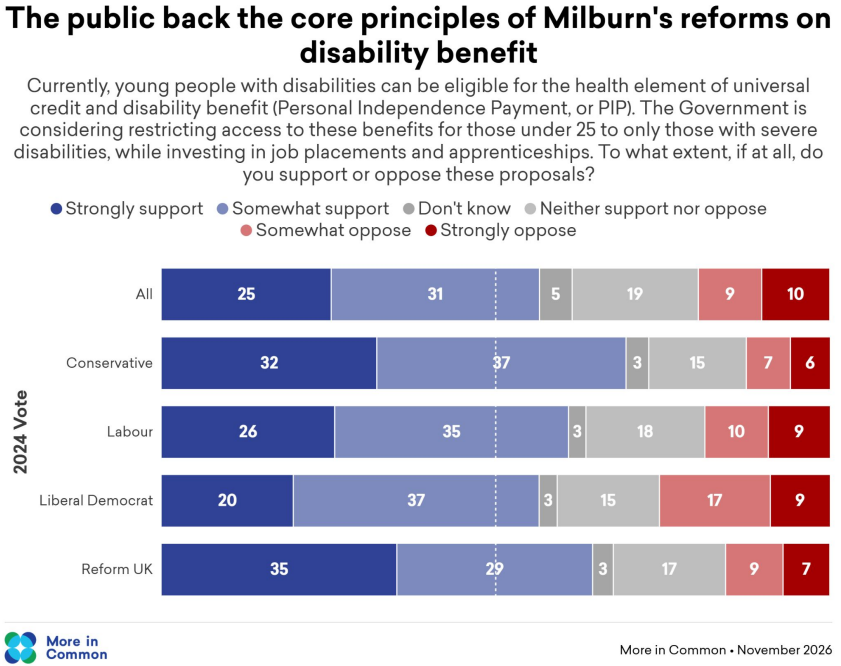
Britons want the state to invest in opportunities for young people, but expect something in return

The core principle of Milburn reforms on disability benefits are popular

Overall, the public back the idea of spending less on disability benefit and PIP, and investing that back into job training and support.

57 per cent support the idea of restricting PIP and the health element of universal credit to only those with severe disabilities, and investing the savings into job trainings and apprenticeships, compared to 20 per cent who oppose the idea. Labour's 2024 base is supportive, 61 per cent to 19 per cent.

Some notable groups are more divided, however. Gen Z is split (39 per cent, 33 per cent oppose), and Progressive Activists, the most left wing segment, lean towards opposing (36-43)



A job guarantee for young people is very popular

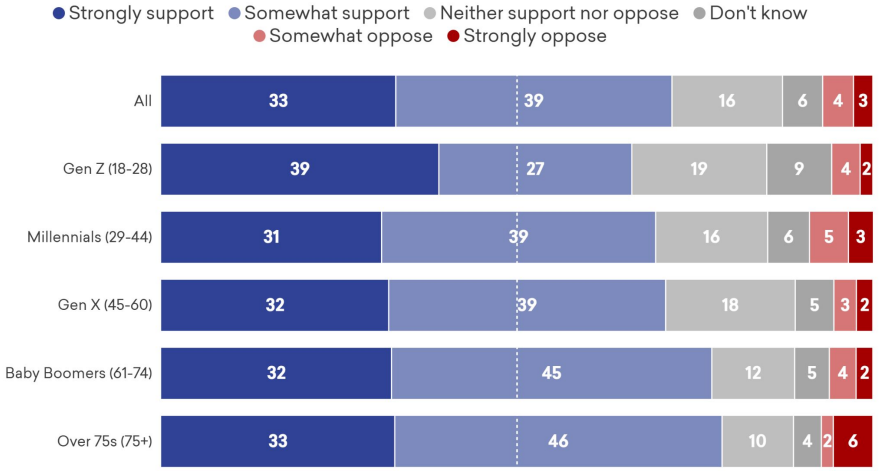
The proposal to invest to guarantee jobs for young people is highly popular across age groups, parties and demographics.

Overall, 72 per cent back the idea, compared to 7 per cent who oppose. This is remarkably consistent across every generation, with the over 75s having the highest level of support (79 per cent).

Funding these ideas could be harder, though, given that, as polling after the Budget showed, Britons are far less supportive of raising taxes to fund spending commitments than they were in 2024.

Seven in ten back a government jobs guarantee, consistent across generations

To what extent would you support or oppose each of the following? A government-funded guarantee offering every young person who is out of work a job, training place or apprenticeship, run by local councils



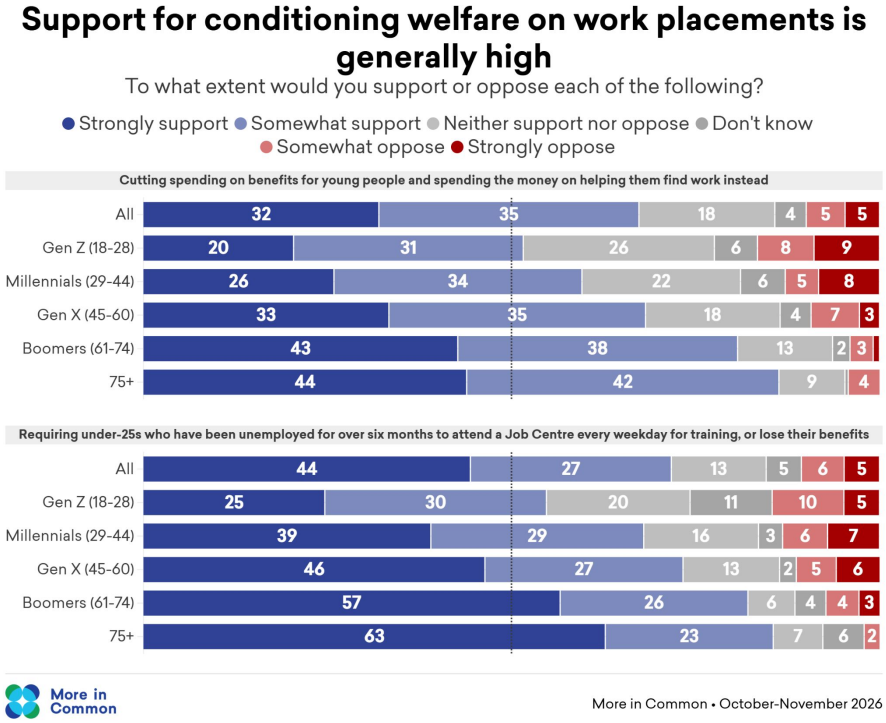
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But most think that support should be conditional

73 per cent say young people on benefits should take up the job, training place or apprenticeship they are offered, or risk losing their benefits. This includes a majority of 18 to 24 year olds (53 per cent) and 76 per cent of 2024 Labour voters.

Redirecting welfare payments on work placements and schemes tends to be popular, as well as compulsory attendance for the under 25s at job centres for training.

67 per cent back the idea of cutting spending on benefits and spending that instead on helping them find work. This includes a slim majority of Gen Z (52 per cent), with 17 per cent opposed, and a majority of Labour's 2024 voters (69 per cent) would also back the change.

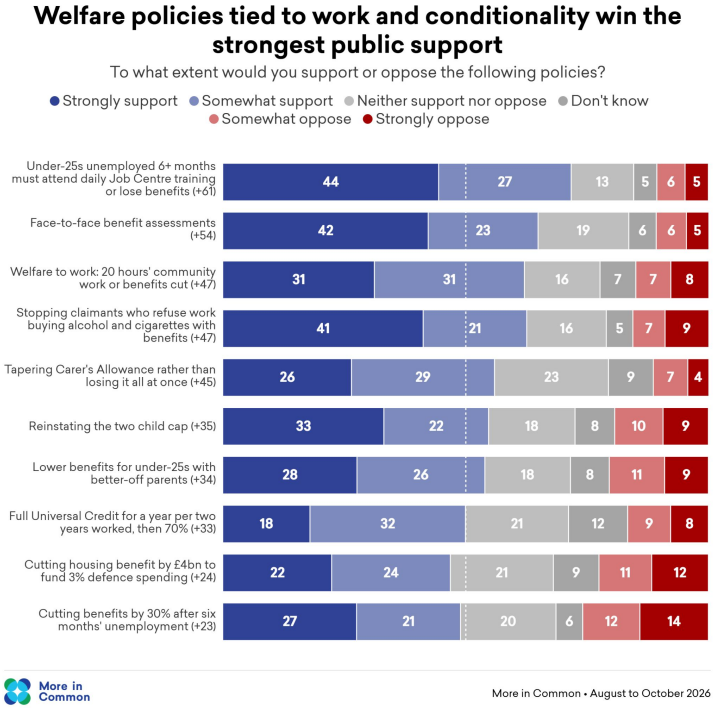


Policies to cut welfare are generally popular, especially when tied to job training or service

Most proposals to reduce or alter the welfare bill formulated in the last few months by various parties have been popular, but the most popular policies centre on the principles of aiding people back to work and community service.

A strong majority (72 per cent), including a majority of Labour's 2024 voters (74 per cent), support the idea of mandatory job centre training appointments for the under 25s. "Welfare to work" – tying welfare to community service – is also popular, with 62 per cent of the public and 62 per cent of Labour voters backing it.

Lowering benefits for under 25s with wealthier parents is also popular, although slightly less so, with 54 per cent backing it.



Topping up wages and funding workplace adjustments is popular across the political spectrum

Funding adjustments for disabled people to ease them into work could help bridge the gap and commands broad support.

Topping up wages of those with disabilities to get them into work, and funding workplace adjustments, are popular across the political spectrum.

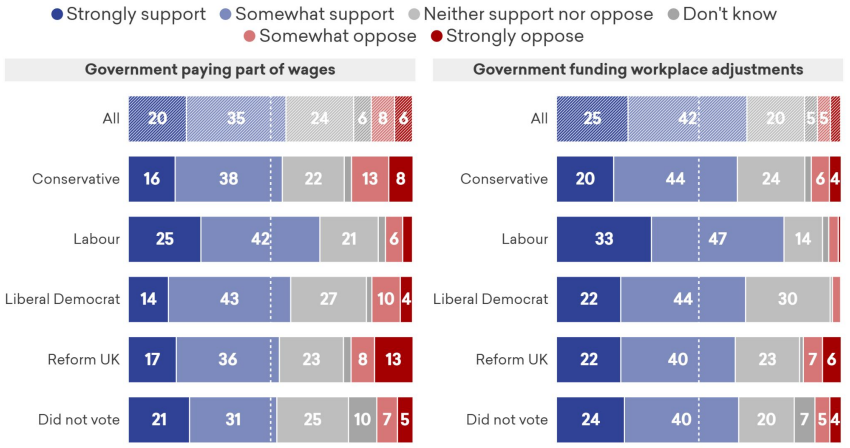
55 per cent support the government paying part of the wages of those who are disabled. While Labour's 2024 voters are the most supportive (67 per cent), a majority of Reform voters (53 per cent) also back it. Just 14 per cent of the public oppose the measure.

Funding workplace adjustments to get disabled young people into work is also popular - 67 per cent back this, including 80 per cent of Labour's 2024 voters.

Topping up pay for those with disabilities and funding workplace adjustments commands cross-party support

To what extent would you support or oppose each of the following?

By 2024 vote



More in Common • November 2026. Full wording: "Government paying part of wages" – The government paying part of the wages of young people with health conditions or disabilities who can only work reduced hours. "Government funding workplace adjustments" – Government funding for workplace adjustments for young people with health conditions or disabilities.

Faster access to mental health treatment is the most popular route into work

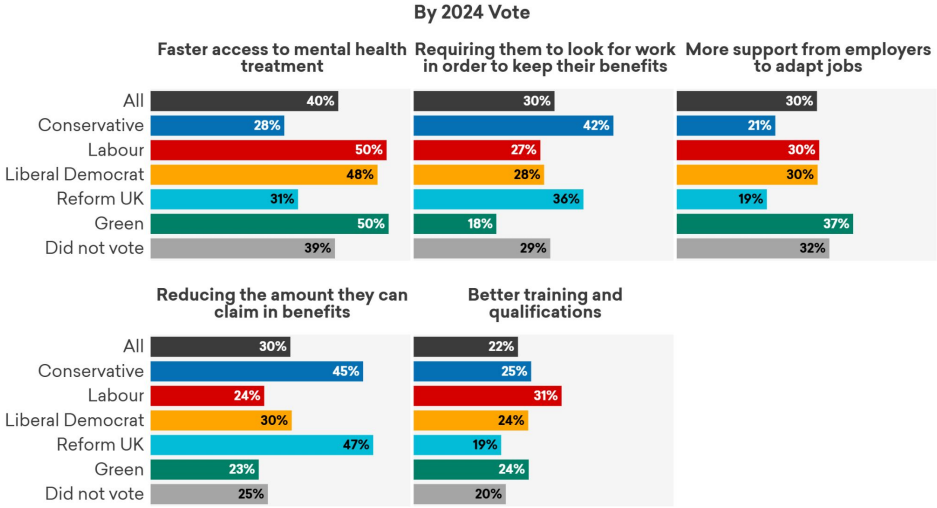
However, the most popular option to get young people with mental health condition is better mental health support (40 per cent), with welfare restriction as the second priority.

There is significant political difference on what the first priority of the government should be in reducing youth unemployment for those with mental health conditions.

For Conservative and Reform voters, reductions in benefit payments are the first priority, with 47 per cent of Reform and 45 per cent of Conservatives naming reducing the amount claimed in benefits as the first priority. For Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green voters, faster access to mental health treatment ranks first, with 50 per cent of Labour and Green voters naming this, and 48 per cent of Liberal Democrats.

Left-leaning voters think mental health care should be prioritised; right leaning voters prioritise benefit restrictions

What do you think would do most to get young people with mental health conditions into work? Select up to two.

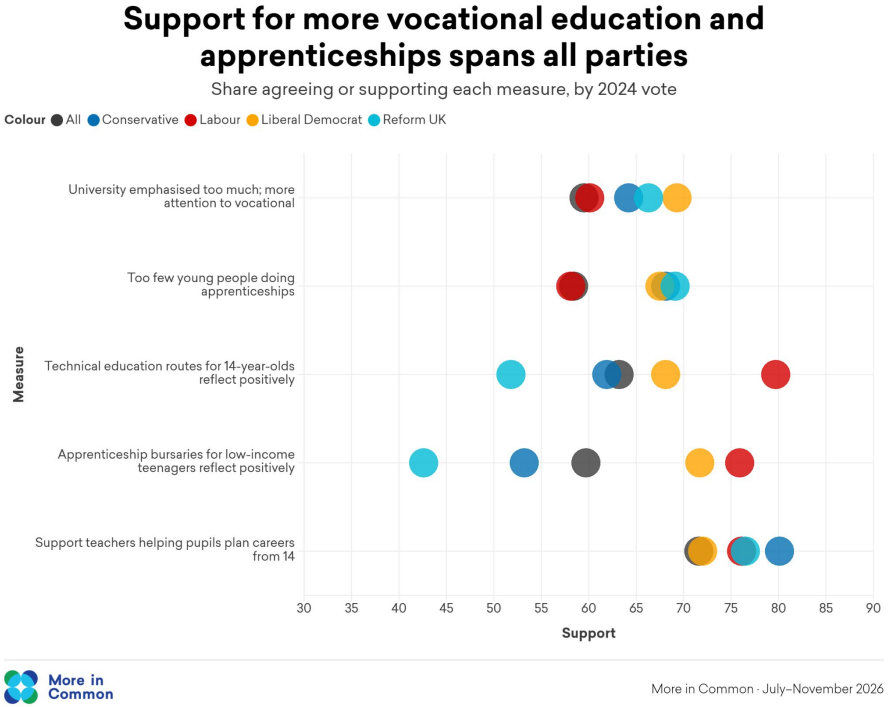


Switching gears in the education system to vocational training is popular

Placing more emphasis on practical and vocational education, and less emphasis on obtaining degrees from university, is broadly popular across a range of framings.

72 per cent support teachers being involved to help children plan their careers from the age of 14, with just 7 per cent that oppose. 60 per cent also feel that vocational training has been neglected in favour of university education, compared to eight per cent who think the reverse.

Earlier proposals to give bursaries to low-income teenagers to bolster their income are also very popular – 60 per cent think it reflected well on Burnham, compared to nine per cent who think it reflected negatively.



But many feel 14 is too young for a vocational route

There are nuances over *when* the public think it is appropriate to focus education mainly on job support, rather than academic achievement.

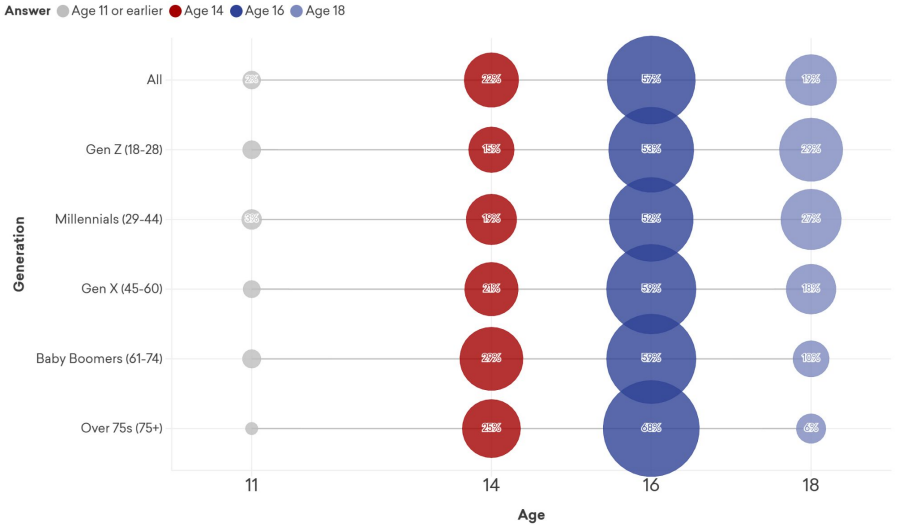
In general, starting job training at 14, rather than 16, is not popular with the public, and even less so with young people just entering the job market. A majority think the right age to start offering this is 16 (57 per cent), compared with 22 per cent who think the correct age is 14.

Support for offering vocational rather than academic qualifications at 14 is lower with Gen Z than the rest of the public. Nearly twice as many think the age should be 18 (29 per cent) than 14 (15 per cent).

> *"I feel as if I had to choose my A-level calling to the degree I want to do, but then I feel as if at 16 I can't trust what I think I want to do... I feel as if I'm going to choose this degree next month, but that's for the rest of my entire life and I just don't feel like I'm old enough or informed enough to make that decision at all."*
>
> Sarah, A-Level Student, Birmingham

A majority think 16 is the right age to offer a choice onto the vocational route

At what age do you think children should be able to make the choice to start moving away from academic qualifications and onto technical and vocational qualifications?



Source: More in Common • August 2026

More in Common

The politics of welfare reform

Britons doubt Burnham will take difficult decisions, and voters are divided on how far and how fast to go

Britons think Burnham does what is popular, where Reeves was seen to take tough decisions

The Milburn Review comes as Burnham remains relatively popular, but with widespread doubts that he is willing to take the tough decisions Britain needs.

Just over a third of Britons (37 per cent) say Andy Burnham tends to make difficult decisions, even if they are unpopular, compared to 42 per cent who say he tends to do what is popular, even if it is not right for the country. 22 per cent say they don't know.

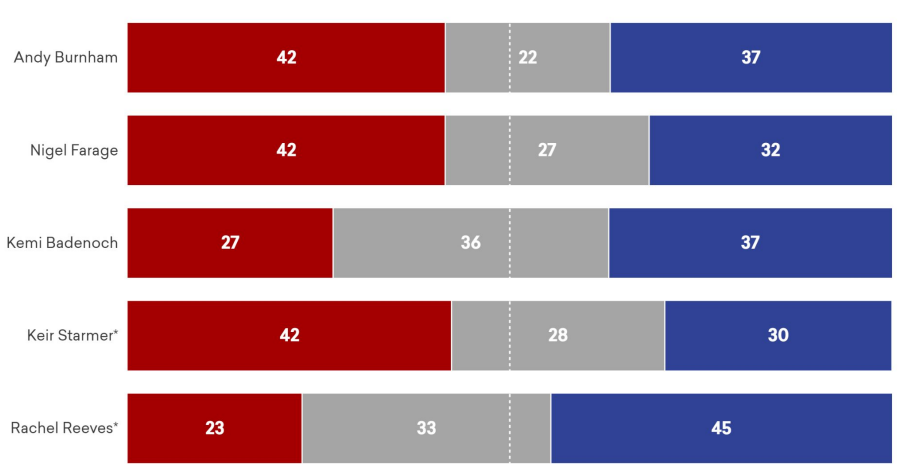
In focus groups, some Britons describe a concern that Andy Burnham is a 'people pleaser'.

"He seems to be doing some things that are like people pleasers to try and get little things (…) for quick popularity."

Julie, Marketing Manager, Rawmarsh and Conisbrough

42 per cent think Burnham does what is popular, 37 per cent think he makes difficult, but unpopular, decisions

For each of the following party leaders, which comes closest to your view?



More in Common • November 2026
*Starmer and Reeves from November 2025

Few Britons see a clear plan to cut the benefits bill

The Budget left the public with many unanswered questions, particularly on welfare.

Only a quarter (24 per cent) think the government has a clear plan to reduce the cost of the benefits bill, the second lowest of the eight priorities tested. Even among 2024 Labour voters, more think its plan on the benefits bill is unclear than clear (48 to 44 per cent).

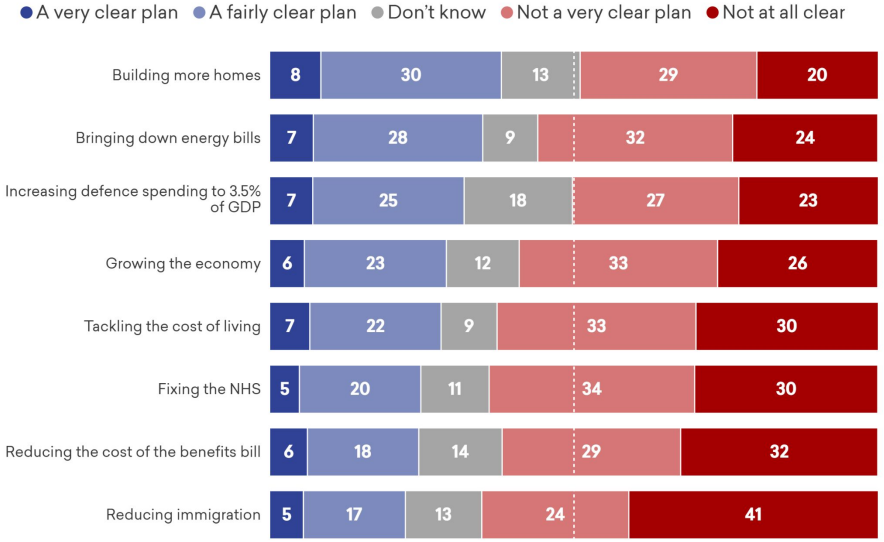
In focus groups, many felt Labour simply didn't have a plan to bring spending down, and that Burnham's desire to 'appease people' might stand in the way of making the tough decisions needed.

> *"You just hope that they do flesh it out (…) you do worry that you think, are they just going to try and not do anything when something does clearly need to be done?"*

Hannah, Events, Portsmouth

Few Britons think the Government has a plan to cut welfare spending or reach the defence spending target

To what extent do you think the government has a clear plan on each of the following?



More in Common • October 2026

Few think the Budget met Burnham's welfare promises

Burnham's Budget was not seen to live up to his promises– and this was true for both reducing youth unemployment, and for reducing the welfare bill.

Just 19 per cent say the Budget lives up to Burnham's promises on reducing Britain's welfare bill, while 49 per cent say it does not. On reducing youth unemployment, 23 per cent say it lives up to his promises and 45 per cent say it does not.

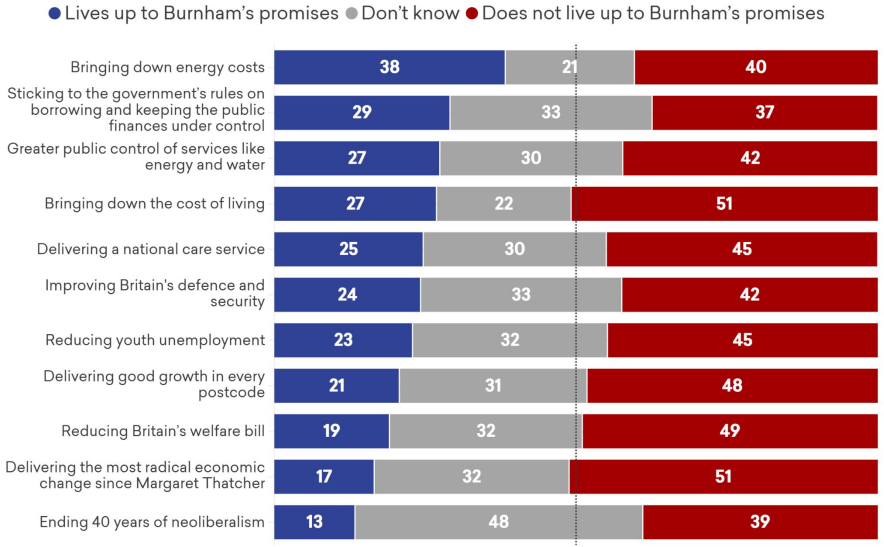
This places political pressure on both the Milburn Review and the ten year plan to provide, in the eyes of the public, a substantive way forward to deliver on Burnham's conference speech promises.

> *"It feels to me like they're treading water just to get by and tick the boxes that another Budget's been done. I don't see the bigger picture yet."*

Sophie, Clinic Assistant, Portsmouth

On every issue, more Britons say the Budget falls short of Burnham's promises than say it lives up to them

On each of the following issues, would you say that the Budget lives up to the promises Andy Burnham has made?



More in Common • October 2026

Labour leads on welfare, but not on tax and debt

Labour is trusted more than the Conservatives and Reform UK on welfare and benefits, but its lead disappears on the fiscal issues.

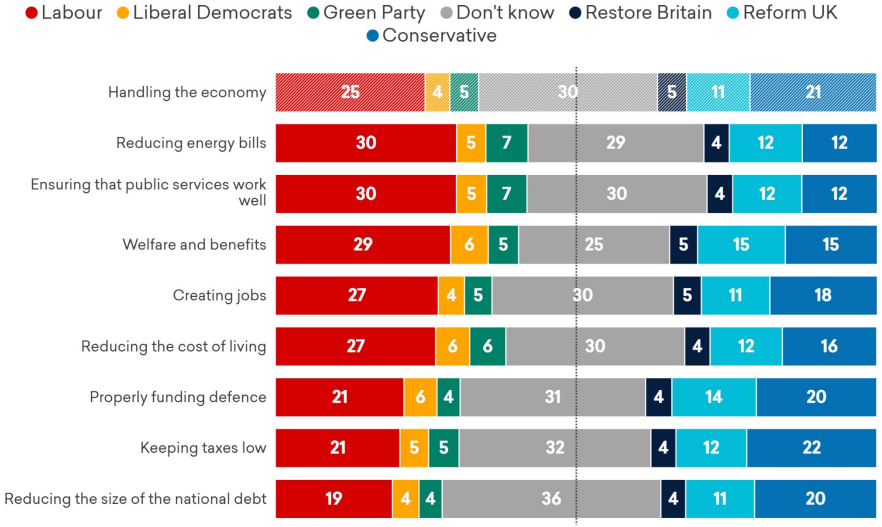
29 per cent trust Labour most on welfare and benefits, against 15 per cent for the Conservatives and 15 per cent for Reform UK. A quarter (25 per cent) don't know.

Labour also leads on creating jobs (27 per cent to 18 per cent for the Conservatives).

But on keeping taxes low, 22 per cent choose the Conservatives and 21 per cent Labour. On reducing the national debt, the figures are 20 per cent and 19 per cent.

Labour leads on the cost of living, public services and reducing energy bills, but not on tax or debt

Which party do you trust more on the following?



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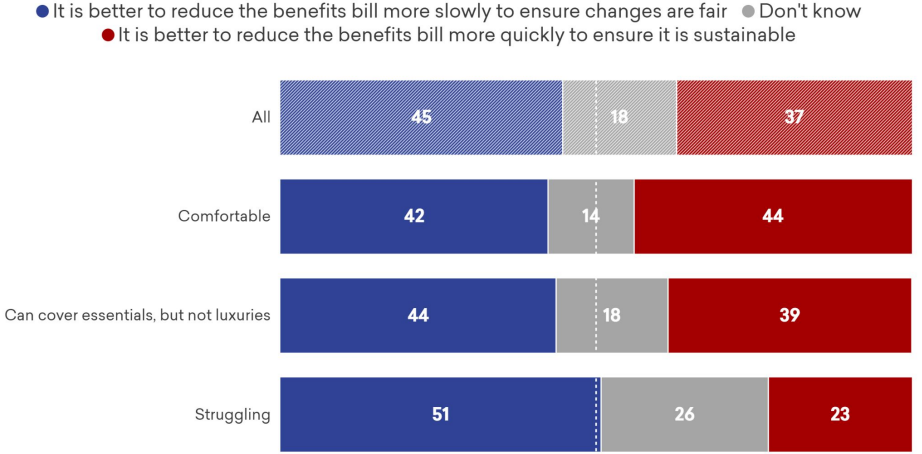
The public are split on whether they want faster cuts now, or slower cuts that are fairer

But when asked about the contrast in approaches between the Labour and Conservative leaders, **a narrow plurality lean towards Burnham's position of slower reductions to prioritise fairness, rather than deeper cuts to prioritise financial sustainability.** Gen Z leans this way, 47 per cent to 27 per cent.

There are stark divisions by the cost of living – the Squeezed Middle and Comfortable Britons are split almost evenly, but a majority of those struggling to afford essentials would prefer slower cuts.

Those struggling with the cost of living want benefit cuts to go slower

This week the Chancellor said that the benefits bill would not start to fall during this Parliament and would only start to go down after 2030. Which of the following comes closest to your view?



More in Common • October 2026. "How well off would you say you feel?" Comfortable = "I am very comfortable financially" or "I am relatively comfortable financially"; Can cover essentials = "I do not have money for luxuries but can normally comfortably cover the essentials"; Struggling = "I can only just afford my costs and often struggle to make ends meet" or "I cannot afford my costs and often have to go without essentials like food and heating".

Moving too fast on welfare could split Labour's base

Both Labour 2024, and current, Labour voters prioritise fairness over speed when it comes to welfare cuts.

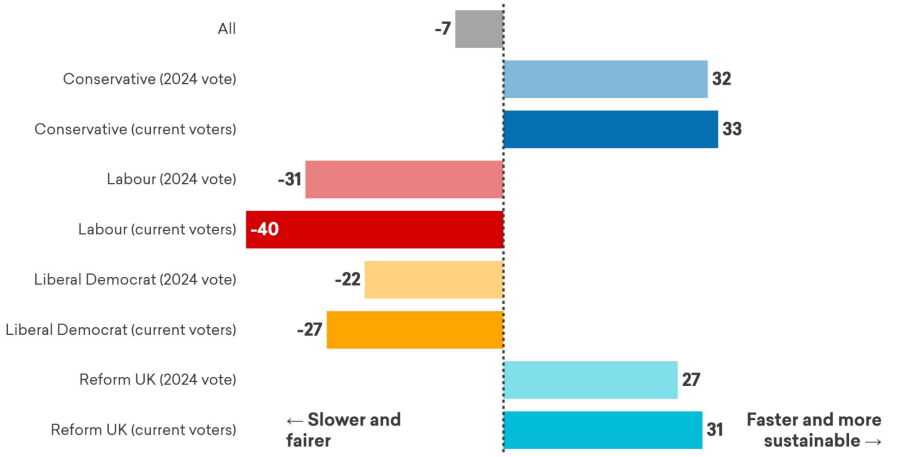
65 per cent of Labour's current voters and 60 per cent of Labour 2024 voters, want slower cuts to prioritise fairness. **Just a quarter of current Labour supporters (25 per cent) want deeper cuts that are more sustainable.**

The picture is mirrored on the right. 62 per cent of Conservative 2024 voters, and 58 per cent of Reform voters, want quicker and more sustainable cuts. Despite higher anxieties about welfare than Labour voters, Liberal Democrats favour the slower and fairer approach, 56 to 34.

Labour's 2024, and current, voters want a slower approach to cutting welfare

This week the Chancellor said that the benefits bill would not start to fall during this Parliament and would only start to go down after 2030. Which of the following comes closest to your view?

Net score: Positive = Faster and more sustainable, negative = slower and fairer



More in Common

More in Common • October 2026

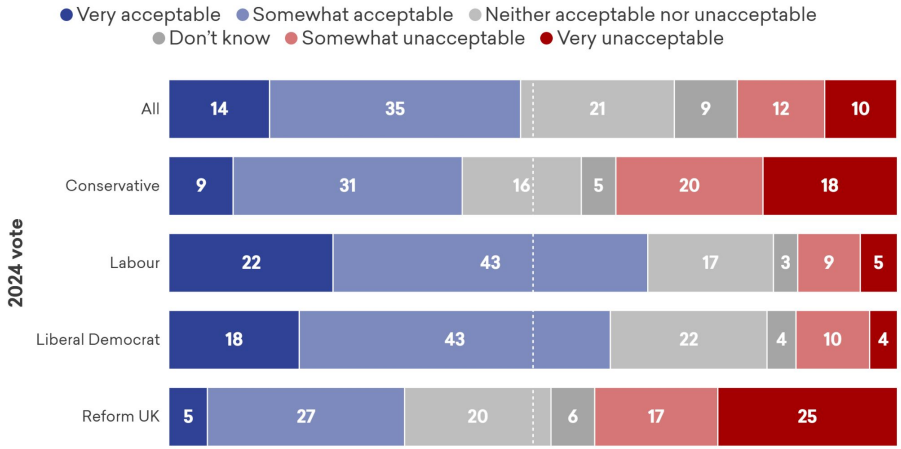
A majority are willing to accept a short term increase in welfare- for a long term decrease

In the short term, a plurality of the public are willing to accept an increase to the benefits bill to get more young people into training and apprenticeships- 48 per cent would find it acceptable, compared to 22 per cent who would find it unacceptable. Only 2024 Reform voters are more likely to find it unacceptable (42 per cent) than acceptable (32 per cent).

However, this is with the expectation that the benefits bill will fall in the long term. 47 per cent think that spending more, overtime, would reduce the benefits bill by getting more people into work. 25 per cent think it would get more people into work, but not reduce the benefits bill, and 21 per cent think the money would be wasted. **Of those who say it would be wasted, 42 per cent find spending rising unacceptable, and 24 per cent find it acceptable.**

The public lean towards thinking that it is acceptable to spend more in the short term to reduce youth unemployment

Would it be acceptable, or not acceptable, for government spending on the welfare bill to rise over the next few years, if it meant that more young people received funded placements for apprenticeships or job training?



Labour must appeal to a voter base divided on welfare

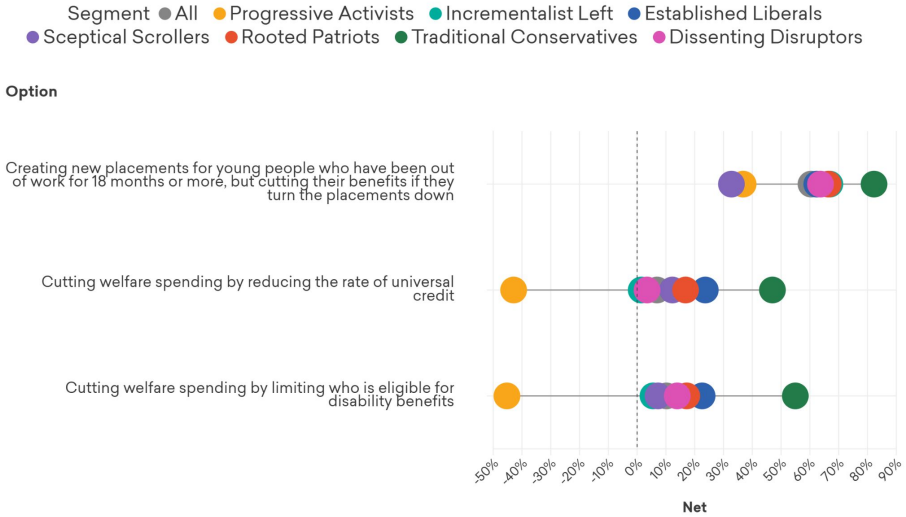
Progressive Activists, the most left wing segment of the population that powered the Polanski wave and the Burnham bounce, **are not opposed to mandatory work places, but are strongly opposed to headline cuts to welfare spending**.

63 per cent would feel limiting who is eligible for disability benefits would reflect badly on the Government, compared to 17 per cent who feel it would reflect well. They also feel restricting universal credit would reflect badly, 15 to 58. However, other key parts of Labour's coalition are more supportive of welfare cuts: Rooted Patriots, who are patriotic and feel let down by politicians, and Established Liberals, who are comfortable, confident and trust institutions.

Keeping a principle of fairness and tying reforms to job support, reducing unemployment, with a willingness to be tough where necessary rather than "crude cuts", is thus key in preventing welfare rifts in Labour's complex coalition.

Progressive Activists are the most opposed to welfare cuts, and Traditional Conservatives the most supportive

If the Labour Party adopted the following policies, would it reflect positively or negatively on them? Net (positive minus negative), by segment



Headline rate cuts could split Labour's coalition

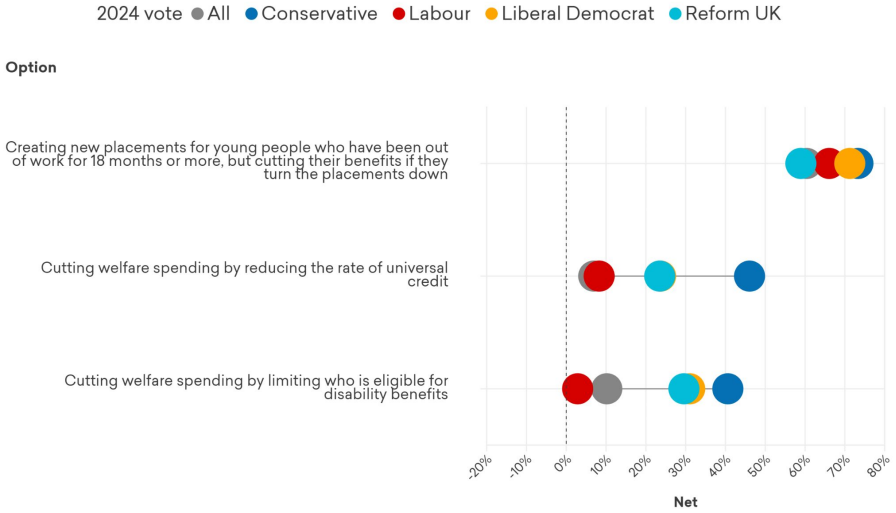
A nuance is that while most cuts and reforms are popular in isolation, taking the reforms in aggregate reveals a larger political risk to Labour if they substantially cut welfare.

Labour's 2024 voters overwhelmingly think providing placements, but cutting benefits for those who turn them down, would reflect well (75 per cent). But Labour's 2024 voters are split on whether cutting universal credit would reflect well (41-32) and are split on restricting eligibility for disability (40 to 37). Liberal Democrats are as likely as Reform voters to want cuts to welfare, with 46 per cent backing universial credit cuts and 55 per cent backing restricting disability benefit eligibility.

The Conservatives' 2024 base is consistently more positive on *headline* rate cuts for universal credit and restricting disability benefit than Reform's base, although both groups are positive on the idea.

Conditional placements win across the board; Universal Credit and disability cuts splits the Labour Party

If the Labour Party adopted the following policies, would it reflect positively or negatively on them? Net (positive minus negative), by 2024 general election vote



More in Common

The country is politically split on the best approach to reduce youth unemployment

There is an almost even split on the question of whether reducing benefits, or providing more support, is the most effective way to reduce youth unemployment. Overall, 49 per cent lean towards thinking cutting benefits is the most effective way, compared to 51 per cent who think that providing more support is.

Conservative (62-38) and Reform UK (68-32) voters lean most strongly towards cutting benefits, and Labour (60-40) and Liberal Democrat (62-38) lean towards the more support approach. There are generational divides, too - Gen Z leans towards more support (72-28), and Baby Boomers lean towards cutting benefits (58-42).

There is a sharp partisan split on whether cutting benefits, or providing more support, is a more effective way of reducing youth unemployment

Please place yourself on the 1-4 scale depending on which comes closest to your view. Which would make more a difference in reducing youth unemployment, in your opinion?

