

**Westminster Employment Forum policy conference:
Next steps for youth employment and improving pathways to work**

Timing: Morning, Tuesday, 8th September 2026

*****Taking place online*****

Draft agenda subject to change



- 8.30 Registration
- 9.00 **Chair's opening remarks**
Sonia Kumar MP
- 9.05 **Examining the youth employment landscape and drivers of economic inactivity in the context of the Government's upcoming *Young People and Work Report***
Professor Ewart Keep, Chair, Education, Training and Skills, University of Oxford
- 9.15 **Tackling structural barriers to youth employment**
implications of the Employment Rights Act 2025 for young people's access to sustainable employment opportunities | improving workplace accessibility and implementing reasonable adjustments | findings and recommendations from the Keep Britain Working Review | service coordination between employers, health providers and local employment services | impact of reform to zero and low hours contracts on employer recruitment strategies | improving employer confidence and engagement | cost, administration and operational pressures | impact of AI on workforce planning, recruitment and retention practices | tailoring stay-in-work strategies for young people | approaches to supporting young people with health conditions, disabilities, or ill mental health, including potential expansion of an Individual Placement and Support Service
James Crichton, Head, Talent Management and Early Careers, Royal Mail Group
Fliss Miller, Director, Skills and Employment, East Midlands Combined County Authority
Lee Knifton, Director, Research and Lived Experience, Mental Health Foundation
Katy Neep, Head, Employer Engagement and Partnerships, Youth Futures Foundation
Emma Hughes, Partner and Head, HR Services, Browne Jacobson
- 9.40 Questions and comments from the floor
- 10.05 **Priorities for delivering sustainable employment opportunities for young people - skills development, cross-sector partnerships and the role of youth voices**
Laura-Jane Rawlings, CEO, Youth Employment UK
Questions and comments from the floor
- 10.25 **Chair's closing remarks**
Sonia Kumar MP
- 10.30 Break
- 10.40 **Chair's opening remarks**
Lord Evans of Rainow
- 10.45 **Assessing the role of employers in delivering community-based support and opportunities for young people**
Clare Sumner CBE, Chief Policy and Social Impact Officer, Premier League
- 10.55 **Examining pathways into work - measuring quality, framework design and alignment with skills needs**
impact of reform in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper | implications for quality, completion and progression | introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships and modular apprenticeship units | aligning scheme design and resource allocation with employer needs | practical considerations for implementation of expanded Youth Guarantee provisions, including the Jobs Guarantee and Youth Jobs Grant | eligibility and referral routes | impact of the Growth and Skills Levy on employer behaviour | role of youth voices in framework design and development | improving access to career hubs
Sharon Weetman, Head, Youth Employment and Apprenticeships, Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Gemma Kenyon, Director, Employability, City St George's, University of London
Mike Blakeley, Executive Director, Partnerships and Apprenticeships, Exeter College
- 11.10 Questions and comments from the floor
- 11.35 **Approaches to tackling regional inequalities and socioeconomic barriers to work**
Resham Kotecha, Deputy Chair, Social Mobility Commission
Questions and comments from the floor
- 11.55 **Priorities for expanding access to employment opportunities for young people - employer participation, local delivery and job quality**
strategies for reducing key barriers to employers hiring young people | funding and incentives for smaller businesses, including apprenticeship training support and employer incentives | support for employers recruiting eligible young people on Universal Credit | addressing regional variation in access to jobs | improving local provision, including transport links and digital infrastructure | access to careers guidance, workplace experience and Youth Hubs | tailored support for care leavers and young people with SEND | introduction of the new Jobs and Careers Service from October 2026 | coordination between local authorities, education and training providers, employers and other local partners | considerations for predictable hours, job security, fair treatment and progression routes | employer standards and duties | long-term considerations for youth service funding, local employment support, accountability and outcome benchmarks
Arthur Fyfe-Stoica, Policy Advisor, Federation of Small Businesses
Joanne Cairns, Head, Research and Policy, Usdaw
Tom Dower, Principal and CEO, UTC South Durham
Melissa Milner, Director, External Affairs and Partnerships, Catch22
Naz Kauser, Head, Employment Enterprise and Apprenticeship, Ealing Council
Questions and comments from the floor
- 12.45 **Next steps for youth employment policy - delivery, accountability and outcomes**
Katya Srivastava, Deputy Director, Youth Policy, Department for Work and Pensions
Questions and comments from the floor
- 13.10 **Chair's and Westminster Employment Forum closing remarks**
Lord Evans of Rainow
Harry Nelson, Westminster Employment Forum