





Britain is at a fork in the road. This must now be a moment to think again about the country that we want to be.

We can either go back to the same insecure and unequal economy that's been so cruelly exposed by the virus. Or we can seize this moment, and go forward to a future that builds a more secure and prosperous economy.

This consultation, alongside the Policy Review led by our Party Chair Anneliese Dodds, presents us with an opportunity to set out a bold vision for a brighter future as we emerge from the pandemic.

This is a chance for us to address what matters most to people, and the eight consultation documents reflect this. From ensuring children are at the heart of our recovery from Covid-19, to making the green new deal work for all; from repairing the foundations of our economy, to ending violence against women and girls, this consultation is an opportunity for us to work out what it takes to make Britain the best place to grow up and grow old in.

Throughout the consultation there will be a number of online member events so that my colleagues in the Shadow Cabinet can directly hear your views on the eight consultation topics, and I encourage you to get involved. Whether you submit your views at an event or through Labour Policy Forum, whether as an individual or as part of a group, I look forward to hearing your insights. By connecting all parts of our Party in this discussion, together we can build a brighter future post-pandemic.

Keir Starmer
Leader of the Labour Party

Thank you for your involvement in the Labour Party's 2021 National Policy Forum (NPF) Consultation. Through this consultation we want to listen to our members, supporters and stakeholders on how the next Labour government can make the UK the best place to grow up, grow old and live in.

This paper is one of eight policy documents published by the Labour Party as part of the consultation this year. Each document will look at the current situation in the UK and the policy challenges we face, followed by a set of questions on the way forward. There is no need to answer every one of these questions, nor is there a specific way in which to answer them. We suggest using the questions to stimulate your thoughts on what you think the main issues are in the document's policy area.

You can write your response as an individual, or as a collective through your local party or organisation. Once you have drafted your response, please submit it to us through Labour Policy Forum: www.policyforum.labour.org.uk. For more information on how to make a submission, see **www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/consultation-submission-guide**.

On the website you can also find out more ways to get involved with the consultation, including full information on our programme of member e-roundtable events. You can also read the seven other consultation documents which might be of interest to you as well. While we are primarily asking for policy ideas related to the eight consultation topics this year, if you have an idea or issue on another topic please do submit this on the website too.

We look forward to hearing your policy ideas on how we can make Britain the best place to grow up, grow old and live in.

Want to know more about how Labour makes its policy?

You can learn more about the Labour Party's policy making process on our Resource Hub **www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/resource-hub**.

You can also follow us on Twitter **[@labpolicyforum](https://twitter.com/labpolicyforum)** for all of the latest policy development news and events.

Accessible Materials

The Labour Party is an inclusive member-based organisation that prides itself on being accessible to all who share its values. If you would like an accessible version of these documents, please email us at **policydevelopment@labour.org.uk** to discuss how we can best accommodate your requirements.

Making Britain the best place to grow up: how to ensure children are at the heart of our recovery from Covid-19

On 23 March 2020, schools, nurseries, colleges, and other education providers were forced to close their doors to the vast majority of children; open only to vulnerable children and those of key workers. Since then children have lost 850 million days of face-to-face school, as restrictions have eased and tightened. While the efforts of teachers, parents and carers to home-school children were heroic, there is a growing body of evidence showing a profound impact of these lost days on educational attainment, children's wellbeing and mental health, and social development. Experts have found that all year groups have experienced learning losses, with disadvantaged pupils experiencing greater losses, and many parents have reported concerns about their children's wellbeing and mental health.

This impact has been particularly acute for the growing number of children in low-income households. Latest statistics show that 700,000 have been pushed into poverty since 2010, with 1.7 million children living in food insecure households. Over the last year, the challenges these children face have been brought to the fore and a spotlight shone on the number of children growing up without access to an electronic device to do their homework, and the fact families are having to go hungry without the support of free school meals.

Despite the light thrown on inequality and the unprecedented challenge the last year has posed to all children's lives, the government has been slow to provide support. The provision of free school meals in the holidays was hard won, and then guidance on what should be included was shown to be woefully inadequate to feed a growing child. Similarly, over a million children were left without adequate access to an electronic device for months, unable to participate in remote learning, while the government slowly rolled out its scheme.

Over the last twelve months, Labour has consistently called for more support for children, young people, parents and all those who work in our education system. From first calling for the provision of free school meals in the summer holidays, through to a lockdown over October half-term to minimise disruption to schooling. As we look to the nation's recovery, Labour is clear that children must be at its heart. We must emerge from the pandemic with an inspiring and ambitious vision for every child, teenager and young adult growing up in the UK. To rise to that challenge, we must transform education, our society, and our economy.

That is why the Early Years, Education and Skills Commission will be focussing this year's consultation on ensuring children are at the heart of our recovery from Covid-19 as part of Labour's plan to make Britain the best place to grow up in.

The challenges

Throughout the last year, we have heard stories of the extraordinary efforts of frontline education staff; from transforming remote teaching overnight and delivering packs of work to children without a device, through to head teachers walking miles every day to hand deliver lunch to local families. The education system has risen to the challenge, and shown itself to be a vital public service that is relied upon by so many. Sadly, despite this enormous effort, the impact on children's education, wellbeing and development of the pandemic is unprecedented and is likely to be a generation-defining challenge.

Recent evidence found that Year 2 pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics was around two months' behind where it would otherwise be, and a widening of the attainment gap to seven months between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. These findings reflect analysis by the Sutton Trust that suggested pupils lost several months of learning in the first lockdown, ranging from 2.4 months for those in the least deprived schools to 3.7 months for those in the most deprived.

This disruption and lost learning will not only have an immediate impact on children's academic achievement, but also risks lowering life chances in the long term. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that, if students had lost an average of six months of schooling, they could see a reduction in their lifetime income of 4%. This could equate to a total of £350 billion in lost earnings for the 8.7 million school-aged children in the UK. Similarly, the Centre for Economic Performance estimate an 11% decline in future social mobility levels.

Not only have children suffered severe disruption to their education with potentially lifelong consequences, they have missed months of socialising with their friends and peers. For some this has had only a small impact, for others it has meant isolation affecting their wellbeing and mental health, or months in challenging home circumstances. Recent research found that 89% of mums felt lockdown took a big toll on the mental health of children and young people, and 77% of mums are more worried about children missing out on social skills as result of lockdown. Labour understands that securing children's wellbeing is a priority, and goes hand in hand with addressing learning losses.

Ensuring children, from those in early years education through to young adults leaving school or starting university, are not held back as a result of the pandemic is therefore a key policy challenge in the coming months and years. So too is securing the mental health and wellbeing of the nation's children and young people. As the pandemic has evidenced, for children who already face barriers to achieving their potential, this need is even more acute.

It is important to recognise, however, that the inequalities laid bare in the last few months are deep rooted. Even before the impact of the pandemic is accounted for, less well-off children are 18.1 months of learning behind their peers by the time they finish their GCSEs, and the gap at primary school increased last year for the first time since 2007. As we look to rebuild our country, Labour is clear that returning to the status quo cannot be the height of our ambition; we must have a bold vision for an education system that ensures every child can reach their potential.

The way forward

Labour's vision is for the UK to be the best place to grow up in and, as we emerge from the pandemic, Labour believes children must therefore be at the heart of the nation's recovery.

As part of that vision Labour has called for the implementation of 'catch-up' breakfast clubs; a universal entitlement to a free healthy breakfast at school, to ensure children are ready for the day of learning ahead. These clubs would support children's wellbeing with extra time to socialise, while also giving schools extra time to provide targeted tuition or catch-up support.

Labour has also launched our Bright Future Taskforce; a taskforce of educational experts that will help, alongside this year's consultation, to develop a national strategy to ensure all children recover the learning and social development lost during the pandemic and have the chance to reach their full potential. The taskforce will be holding discussion events across the country and will focus on children's whole experience of the education system, from early years through to becoming adults.

As we emerge from the pandemic, and the true impact of a year of school, nursery and college closures is understood, bold policies will be needed to ensure no child is held back. That is why this year's Early Years, Education and Skills Commission seeks the views of the Labour movement on how we support every child to recover and achieve their potential, and guarantee a world-class education system that is innovative and enriching, and that meets the needs of learners, employers and wider society.

Questions:

1. What does a strategy for children's recovery look like?
2. What policy changes would ensure every child and young person is able to achieve their potential, both in terms of this cohort's recovery from the pandemic, and rebuilding our education system?
3. What measures could support children's mental health and wellbeing as we emerge from the pandemic?
4. What guidance, capacity, or resources does the education system need to deliver to support children and young people's recovery?
5. What specific support could help pupils in key transition years, such as those moving into year 7, college or university?