



Working for young women: Young Women's Trust's recommendations for the next Government

More than one million young women face a lifetime of financial, social and emotional disadvantage because they don't have a job or are in low paid, insecure work.

Young women are more likely than young men to be out of work or in low paid jobs with few prospects. Young Women's Trust (YWT) welcomes the fact that a record number of women are in work and youth unemployment has fallen, but more must be done to support young women who are being left behind. Helping these young women into secure work would benefit families, businesses and the economy.

That is why Young Women's Trust is calling on all political parties to publish manifestos that take young women's needs into account from start to finish, and for the next Government to introduce policies that work for young women, especially those struggling to live on low or no pay.

What Young Women's Trust wants from the next Government

Invest in jobs and skills for young women

Despite being more likely to go to university, young women continue to have poorer employment outcomes than young men. This starts very early in women's careers: young women apprentices are paid 21% less than young men, are less likely to receive training and less likely to go onto employment. Often this is because young women struggle to break into better paid sectors like construction and engineering. Just 5% of engineering apprentices are female and it has been that way for over a decade. As employers report increasing skills shortages, supporting young women into relevant apprenticeships and employment opportunities will not only help end the gender divide but is also essential to our economy. Young Women's Trust is calling for the next Government to:

- Improve financial support and pay for young people, many of whom are struggling to afford training. This should include raising the apprentice minimum wage above the current £3.50 an hour and providing loans for those undertaking vocational training, not just those going to university.
- Introduce targets to help more young women into male-dominated apprenticeships and give employers better guidance on the action they can take to do this.
- Revisit the Industrial Strategy so that it explicitly prioritises investing in jobs and skills for young women.
- Establish a cross-industry commission to explore creative ways to address the gender segregation that remains so persistent in the workplace.

Ensure employment support for young women is flexible, personalised and responsive to their needs

Just one in five young women who visited a job centre in the last year told YWT it helped them find a job, and more than half said their time at the job centre was humiliating. Many young women are missing out on employment support altogether because caring responsibilities or disabilities mean

they aren't regarded as job seeking - even though a third say they want to work now. Young Women's Trust is calling for the next Government to:

- Create a more holistic Jobcentre Plus service that improves young women's confidence, skills and employment outcomes. This should include training for job coaches to spot problems with young women's wellbeing and health, and information to enable them to make timely referrals to services with the expertise and time to support young women.
- Run and commission employment services that are open to innovation, provide support outside of traditional 9-5 hours and can be accessed by phone and online.
- Involve young women in the design of employment services, including Jobcentre Plus where many young women have told us they have had bad experiences.
- Monitor the roll-out of Universal Credit to ensure that it does not increase gender inequality.

End age discrimination against young people

Under-25s can legally be paid a lower wage than over-25s for the same job and are entitled to less financial support if they find themselves out of work. Yet living costs and bills are no lower for young people. Housing benefit for 18-21 year olds has also been scrapped, which threatens to plunge many into debt and homelessness. As a result, young people are struggling to make ends meet, unable to move away from home or forced to live in insecure accommodation, skipping meals so they can feed their children and turning to food banks. Young Women's Trust is calling for the next Government to:

- Introduce equal pay for equal work by extending the National Living Wage to under 25s.
- Equalise financial support for under 25s who are job seeking or unable to work, through changes to ESA, Income Support, JSA and Universal Credit.
- Reinstate housing benefit for 18-21 year olds.

Make work an affordable option for people with caring responsibilities

Working is not an affordable or viable option for many young women, partly due to a lack of affordable childcare and insufficient jobs available on a part-time or flexible basis. Although the forthcoming extension to the provision of free childcare will benefit some parents of 3 and 4 year olds, the changes do not go far enough. Young Women's Trust is calling for the next Government to:

- Update flexible working legislation to make the right to request flexible working available from day one of a job. Making jobs and apprenticeships available on a flexible, including part-time, basis should be the norm, not the exception.
- Move towards making free childcare available year-round to help support women into work.
- Improve maternity rights for self-employed women, including by bringing Maternity Allowance in line with Statutory Maternity Pay and giving greater flexibility for keeping in touch with their business while receiving Maternity Allowance.
- Strengthen support for fathers/partners to take paid time off work for childcare.

Mainstream gender across Government

Practically every government policy, strategy and spending announcement has implications for gender equality. That is why it is so important for Government to rigorously assess the likely impact of its decisions on women, and on specific groups of women. Young Women's Trust is calling for the next Government to:

- Strengthen the Government Equalities Office to enable it to more effectively assess gender inequality, ensure the right data is collected and coordinate work across Government.
- Carry out full gender equality impact assessments of new policies, legislation and spending announcements, and make these publicly available.
- Ensure that exiting the European Union does not disadvantage young women.

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