

Next Step, Guaranteed

Proposed by the Policy Development Committee

Conference notes:

- A. The Welsh Government's Young Person's Guarantee (YPG), launched in 2021, commits to ensuring that all young people aged 16–24 can access support to move into education, employment, training or self-employment.
- B. That the YPG has successfully brought together a range of existing employability, skills and careers programmes under a single framework, supporting tens of thousands of young people across Wales.
- C. Despite this, in 2024, 1,240 school leavers in Wales were recorded as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) shortly after leaving school, representing 2.2% of all school leavers, with the highest rates among Year 13 leavers (Careers Wales, 2024).
- D. That wider data shows approximately 11–12% of 16–24-year-olds in Wales are NEET at any one time, with significantly higher rates among disabled young people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Welsh Government, 2024).
- E. That evidence from the UK Parliament and Office for National Statistics demonstrates that periods spent NEET are associated with long-term unemployment, lower lifetime earnings, poorer health outcomes, and increased public spending.
- F. That the YPG is an offer of support, rather than a time-limited entitlement to a specific opportunity at the point of leaving school, and therefore does not guarantee a secure transition for all school leavers.
- G. That changes to the post-14 curriculum should expand the vocational offer to pupils in Wales.

Conference believes:

- I. That the point at which young people leave secondary education is a critical moment of risk and opportunity, and that failure to secure a positive destination at this stage significantly increases the likelihood of becoming NEET.
- II. That the Young Person's Guarantee provides a strong foundation, but

would be more effective if strengthened by a specific, school-leaver-focused commitment.

- III. That preventing young people from becoming NEET is more cost-effective than addressing the long-term consequences of youth unemployment and disengagement.
- IV. That academic, vocational and work-based pathways should be treated with equal status and value, and that young people should be supported to choose the route best suited to their skills and aspirations.

Conference calls for:

- 1. A School Leavers Guarantee, designed explicitly to strengthen and operationalise the Young Person's Guarantee at the point of leaving secondary education.
- 2. That this School Leavers Guarantee should ensure that every young person leaving secondary education in Wales receives, within three months of leaving school, a guaranteed offer of at least one of the following, delivered through the Young Person's Guarantee framework:
 - i. Further or higher education, including vocational routes;
 - ii. A paid apprenticeship or traineeship with accredited training;
 - iii. Paid employment combined with recognised training or progression support;
 - iv. Supported employment or training for young people with additional learning needs or disabilities
- 3. the Welsh Government to deliver this strengthened guarantee by:
 - i. Prioritising early identification of pupils at risk of disengagement from age 14, through schools and Careers Wales;
 - ii. Better coordinating existing post-16 education, skills, employability and careers budgets, rather than creating large new funding streams;
 - iii. Requiring local and regional partnerships between schools, colleges, employers, Careers Wales and local authorities to plan sufficient post-school opportunities.
- 4. The Welsh Liberal Democrats to support outcome-based accountability within the Young Person's Guarantee, with a focus on sustained progression into education, training or employment and transparent annual reporting on school-leaver destinations.