

The true state of UK unemployment, and the alternative

Published: January 13, 2026, 1:17 am

As the [Guardian reports this morning](#):

The true state of British unemployment is more than double its current level at 6.3 million people, if alternative measures including adults stuck in part-time work are used, according to research published on Tuesday.

The TUC, the umbrella body for UK trade unions, said the total is swelled beyond the official figure of 2.68 million if new categories such as underemployed adults are included. Britain bases its jobless data on a widely used formula that defines an adult as unemployed if they are out of work and have actively sought a new post over the past month.

However, the TUC said incorporating six measures of joblessness that are common in the US would paint the UK job market in a much bleaker light. Those include unemployed people who want work but have not actively sought it for six weeks, who number more than 2.2 million in the UK, and "underemployed" adults who are in part-time work because they cannot find full-time work, who add a further 1.3 million to the unemployment total.

Precisely so (and although I advise the TUC I had nothing to do with this work).

I [predicted UK unemployment](#) would increase to more than 4 million when this recession started. What I did not allow for was the massive fall in productivity we have seen, much of which is reflected in part time work and the under-utilisation of people's talent.

In the [Courageous State](#) I argue that the goal of economic policy should be the achievement of people's potential because it is the fact that everyone has the ability to achieve that potential that all people are really equal.

That would mean Courageous States would be driven by principles. Of course they'd also be pragmatic sometimes — politics always is, and has to be an exercise in pragmatism. But principles matter in a Courageous State. This will be a fundamental

change that will differentiate them from the neoliberal states they will replace.

Those principles are reflected in the following beliefs:

- * People come first;
- * People must have the opportunity to achieve their potential;
- * Poverty is unacceptable;
- * Sustainability is essential;
- * Balance is best for human well-being;
- * Government has to work well;
- * Real business deserves strong support.

We are so far from that now, as the TUC show. Which is to the eternal shame of this government and those parties that make it up.