

# Funding the Future

Article URL

Published: January 12, 2026, 4:49 pm

It is all too easy at present to imagine that everything about politics is to do with Trump, the USA, Ukraine, resulting international crises, threats to peace, the destruction of international aid programmes, and related issues. My own bias in my professional work towards development and issues around international political economy has certainly made me pay attention to those issues.

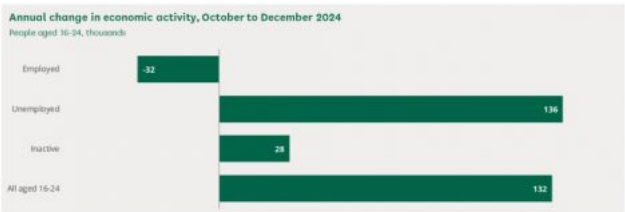
That, however, also requires that I deliberately recall that, important as these things are, there remains a domestic agenda within the UK where deprivation, government neglect, the failure of neoliberalism, the rise of neo-fascism, and the threats that this creates are just as important. In this context, I share this note from [the House of Commons library](#) which is shocking because it provides such clear evidence of the reason why so many young people are alienated in the UK:

In February 2024, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reintroduced [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\) data](#), after issues with data reliability in the second half of 2023.

The ONS have said that the reintroduced LFS estimates should be treated with additional caution, and that the quarterly change estimates are particularly volatile.

In October to December 2024:

- there were 642,000 young people aged 16 to 24 who were unemployed, 136,000 more than the previous year. The unemployment rate for young people was 14.8%, up from 11.9% from the year before.
- there were 3.69 million young people aged 16 to 24 in employment, 32,000 fewer than the previous year. The employment rate for young people was 50.1%, down from 51.5% the year before.
- there were 3.03 million young people aged 16 to 24 who were economically inactive, 28,000 more than the previous year. The inactivity rate for young people was 41.2%, down slightly from 41.5% the year before.



One in eight young people are not participating in education or employment in the UK. Many of them are unable to do so because they are not getting the support that they require to participate in a society where the expectation of what I might describe as a high degree of normality and compliance is making it ever harder for some young people to do so.

The process of integrating people into a world where stereotypicality is what employers desire is becoming increasingly difficult. This is especially so when a great many of the routes for accommodating such diversity that used to exist have now disappeared, with that change being reinforced by the aggressive recruitment procedures of almost all larger employers in the UK.

The consequence of this is alienation, and not just amongst those who have been left on the sidelines. The awareness that this risk and possibility exists is having a massive impact upon the psyche of a great many young people who live in fear that it might happen to them.

It is now de rigueur to criticise life in the 1970s, when I was a young person, and then joined the workforce. This was, supposedly, a terrible decade. I do not, in any way, recall it as such. Looking back, across the quite diverse friendship groups that I had at that time, extending well beyond those that were normal amongst the decided minority who went to university in that era, I have no recall of a fear of unemployment or a lack of potential opportunity.

Whether people left school at the age of 15, which was by then rare, or 16 or 18, my remaining perception is that work was readily available and the hurdles put in the place of those wishing to secure it were not excessive, or unreasonable, or burdensome.

For those applying from university, there was nothing like the current process of job application, where up to six rounds of processing might be required, of which the first three might be AI driven with absolutely no personal interaction, and with later rounds being predicated upon the possibility of failure, and very clear rejection.

If those sitting around in positions of power in the UK wish to know why the world that they have created is so unacceptable to many, I suggest that they look at the way in which they treat young people in this country. It is abysmal, unless you happen to have the advantage of access to opportunity through the privilege that parental wealth or contacts provide.

Neoliberalism has created a society constructed on the basis of prejudice, exclusion, and a straightforward belief that no one has responsibility for those left by the wayside by business that thinks it has no obligation to the society of which it operates.

Worse, this attitude also pervades the government, which is dominated by the same type of thinking.

We might face international crises. What, however, we should never forget is the type of thinking that Donald Trump and JD Van evidence is not that exceptional. Nor is Musk. What they believe is that they have no responsibility to others. To put this in the terminology of microeconomic theory, which dominates their whole political narrative, they do not believe that they are under any obligation to consider the externalities of their actions, the cost of which they presume will fall on others, without ever asking who that might be, or how they will deal with it.

The real crisis that we now face in the world is the societal breakdown that we are seeing almost everywhere as a consequence of this philosophical callousness, and the reality is that unless we learn to care again, we have no hope.