The Build Britain Service

Learning & Earning While Restoring Britain

A design note for A Policy on the Policies (proposal P26) · Second edition · 27 November 2026 (first edition 16 November 2026)

An independent view of SovereignOS™, written by a Restore Britain member and supporter. It is not Restore Britain policy and has not been endorsed by Restore Britain; P26 is a SovereignOS™ suggestion, offered in support of Restore Britain's aims.

'British Government Budgets Are No Longer Opportunistic Looks into the Future; They Are Simply Autopsies of Past Mistakes.'

— Stuart M. Williams

What this is. A national service with choices of how to serve. A young person leaving school, or an adult ready to leave welfare, chooses a route and a pillar of national security, and is paid to learn while helping to rebuild it: food and farming, energy, defence, infrastructure and housing, and care. It is an investment in Britain's future, in the same sense as the companion paper's education-as-national-investment case (P24): money spent now on British people's skills and work comes back as tax paid, welfare not claimed, and capital that circulates in Britain rather than abroad.

Core principle: a two-way street. Britain helps its young people, and every citizen who serves, to have a future: pay, a trade or a degree without debt, and a place in the national effort. In return they help Britain rebuild its security. Neither side gives without receiving. (Stuart M. Williams)

For British people who are able to work. The service is for British citizens who are able to work; nobody who cannot work because of serious illness, disability or caring is asked to. School leavers and people leaving welfare are the main strands. New in this edition, a third strand helps the 3.1 million people on Universal Credit who were in work in July 2026 (DWP) to train into a skill that pays a wage with no government top-up (Tier C, Section 4.1). Career changers and low-paid workers can apply too, with places allocated by a needs test. Wages earned and spent locally create economic vibrancy for all.

Where it comes from. Stuart's essay 'Immigration & Infrastructure' (July 2022, updated August 2025) proposed an American national service paying wages, benefits and tuition in return for building infrastructure. This note adapts the idea for the United Kingdom. Two things are deliberately changed. Healthcare is not offered as a benefit, because the NHS is already free at the point of use. The essay's route to legal status for people in the country illegally is **not** adopted: in Britain it would be an amnesty, would add to net migration and would run against Restore's position on removals.

What it is not. It does not stop or delay any removal, it is not a route to residence, and it does not add a single person to net migration. (Stuart M. Williams)

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SUMMARY

- **A two-way street, for British people who are able to work.** Britain gives those who serve a future; they help Britain rebuild in return. School leavers, welfare claimants and working people on Universal Credit are the main strands, and any British citizen who is able to work can apply (for example career changers and low-paid workers), with a needs test for priority.
- **One service, two routes, five pillars.** Route U (university) is **deferred compensation**: room and board, a £120-a-week stipend, and **one year of university tuition paid for every year served, from one to four years**. Valued in cash, a year served is worth about **£28,615, or £14.67 an hour, against the £12.71 National Living Wage**, and none of it is taxed. Route T (trades): an apprenticeship paid at the **National Living Wage (£12.71) from day one, at every age, against the £8.00 apprentice minimum**, plus a **completion bonus**: £1.39 an hour, the gap to the £14.10 Real Living Wage, banked and paid as a lump sum on qualifying (about £2,710 a year at 37.5 hours). It lasts as long as the trade takes to learn. Service is a **choice of route**, not compulsion: places sit in five national-security pillars (food and farming, energy (P25), defence and resilience, infrastructure and housing, and care), and defence is one option among them.
- **School to work comes first. 981,000 young people aged 16–24 were not in education, employment or training in April–June 2026 (13.0%)**; the total passed 1 million early in 2026 for the first time since 2013 (ONS). Apprenticeship starts in England were **353,500 in 2024/25, against 520,600 in 2011/12** (DfE). The service is the step from school into work, and the next stage of the age-8 Lifelong Sovereign Pathway (P10) and Education as National Investment (P24).
- **Welfare to work is the second engine. 8.4m people were on Universal Credit in May 2026; 1.6m were 'searching for work' and 4.3m had no work requirements at all** (DWP). Able-bodied claimants who have searched for six months are offered a Build Britain job at the National Living Wage; refusing it without good reason is already a sanctionable failure in law (Welfare Reform Act 2012, s.26). A voluntary track serves people on health-related UC who want to work (754,000 long-term sick people say they want a job).
- **From top-up to take-home pay (new).** 3.1m people on Universal Credit were in work in July 2026, 37.6% of all claimants (DWP). Tier C offers them voluntary, flexible training through Route T, around their job, into a skill that pays a wage with no need for a government top-up. Above any work allowance, UC falls by 55p for every £1 earned (GOV.UK), so each step up in pay cuts the top-up and raises tax receipts at the same time.
- **The migrant strand is narrow and removal-linked.** Recommended: **voluntary, paid work inside the detention and reception estate for people awaiting removal or a decision, with earnings banked in a Return Account paid only on departure**. No status, no settlement credit, no delay to removal, no addition to net migration. Compulsory work for people not convicted of a crime is rejected: it would breach ILO Convention 29, which binds the UK whether or not it leaves the ECHR.
- **Open-book delivery contracts.** Public works delivered through the service use open-book contracts with a capped return and tax withheld at source, building on the Construction Industry Scheme (20% deduction) and the Procurement Act 2023.
- **Investment and return (estimates).** Gross outlay reaches about **£5.6bn a year at full scale (2030-31)**. Taxes paid and welfare not claimed return about **£5.4bn** in that year, rising to **£7.5bn by 2036-37** as people stay in work. **On a net basis, central case: a small net cost for 4 years (at most £0.4bn), self-financing from 2031-32, and a net return of about £1.9bn a year by 2036-37; over ten years, a net return of £5.5bn.** Cautious case: a net cost of up to £3.6bn a year (about 0.1% of GDP) and £26.4bn over ten years. Section 7 sets out the gross-to-net bridge. Graduate lifetime returns, such as a doctor's estimated £2.5m of income tax and NICs over a career, come after the window and are not counted.
- **Economic vibrancy for all.** People earning a full wage spend it in their own towns: on the high street, in the pub and on their families. The service works alongside Restoring the British High Street (P49–P60) and The Grandparent Renaissance (P61–P70): one brings town centres back to life, one puts grandparents' time and know-how to work for the next generation, and this one puts more British people into skilled, well-paid work.
- **Where it sits.** A new proposal, **P26**, rather than a new cluster. It is a delivery engine that works on the intersections: it creates eight new ones and strengthens seven, linking Education, Welfare, Housing and Land, Energy, Defence, Local Business, Family, Borders and Tax.

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1. WHY BRITAIN NEEDS IT: FIVE SECURITY GAPS AND A STALLED PIPELINE

Britain has to rebuild food security, energy security, defence and infrastructure security, and a care workforce. Each of these is short of trained British people, while about a million young people and 1.6 million adult jobseekers are not working. And 3.1 million people on Universal Credit are in work but still need a top-up. The service connects these problems. Figures below are the latest official ones found (all read November 2026).

Pillar or gap	Latest figure	Source
Food and farming	UK food production-to-supply ratio **60%** of all food and **72%** of indigenous-type food in 2025, down from **78%** (all food) in 1984. **42,900** seasonal-worker visas set for 2026 (41,000 horticulture, 1,900 poultry).	Defra, Agriculture in the UK 2025, ch.14; Home Office seasonal worker guidance
Energy (P25)	Net import dependency **43.3%** of primary energy in 2025; UK energy production at a record low, oil and gas output 75% below the 1999 peak.	DESNZ, DUKES 2026 ch.1
Defence and resilience	Full-time trained strength **127,060** (1 July 2026); about **8,460 (6%) below requirement** at 1 April 2026 (Army 3%, RN/RM 7%, RAF 12% short). Trained reserves 28,880.	MOD Quarterly Service Personnel Statistics; Commons Library CBP-7930
Infrastructure and housing	**208,600** net additional dwellings in England in 2024-25; **437,900** since July 2024, **29%** of the 1.5m target with 44% of the Parliament gone. Construction needs **41,200** extra workers a year 2026–30. Ten-year infrastructure pipeline **£718bn** (March 2026).	MHCLG net supply; BCIS; CITB Construction Workforce Outlook; NISTA pipeline update
Care	**111,000** vacant posts in adult social care in England (2024/25), of 1.71m posts.	Skills for Care, State of the adult social care workforce 2025
Young people	**981,000** NEET aged 16–24 (13.0%), Apr–Jun 2026: 393,000 unemployed, 588,000 inactive.	ONS NEET, August 2026
Apprenticeships	**353,500** starts in England 2024/25 (+4.1%), against **520,600** in 2011/12. Construction 24,590; engineering and manufacturing 46,070.	DfE, Apprenticeships (Explore Education Statistics)
Welfare	**8.4m** on UC (May 2026); **1.6m** searching for work; **4.3m** no work requirements (+1.9m Dec 2023–Dec 2025). Mean UC payment **£1,090** a month (single, no children **£820**). In work while on UC: 3.1m (37.6%), July 2026.	DWP UC statistics to 14 May 2026; and to 13 August 2026
Economic inactivity	**9.091m** aged 16–64 inactive (20.9%), Jun–Aug 2026; **2.74m** long-term sick, of whom **754,000** want a job.	ONS, Employment in the UK, Oct 2026; Learning and Work Institute

Two cautions. Defra notes that the production-to-supply ratio is measured by value and 'is not a definitive measure of food security'. And not everyone counted as inactive or with no work requirements can work: many are seriously ill or caring. The service is built for British people who are able to work and willing to; the health track and the in-work strand are voluntary.

2. THE DESIGN: NATIONAL SERVICE WITH A CHOICE OF HOW TO SERVE

Everyone serves the same country; each chooses a route and a pillar. There are two routes, kept separate as in the essay, plus a welfare-to-work entry, an in-work upskilling strand for working people on Universal Credit, and a narrow migrant strand.

2.1 Route U (university) and Route T (trades): the two pay scales

Scale	Rate	A year (37.5h × 52)	Notes
Statutory floor, age 21+	National Living Wage £12.71/h	£24,785	Since 1 April 2026
Statutory floor, age 18–20	£10.85/h	£21,158	85% of the NLW
Statutory floor, under 18 and first-year apprentices	£8.00/h	£15,600	Apprentice rate
Voluntary benchmark	Real Living Wage £14.10/h (London £15.45)	£27,495	Living Wage Foundation, from 15 Oct 2026

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Scale	Rate	A year (37.5h × 52)	Notes
Route T: trades and apprenticeships	**National Living Wage £12.71/h from day one, all ages + completion bonus £1.39/h**	**£24,785 + £2,710 bonus a year banked**	Pay taxed as normal (about £3,420 a year income tax and NICs). The bonus closes the gap to the £14.10 Real Living Wage and is paid as a lump sum on qualifying
Route U: university route (deferred compensation)	**Tuition credit + room and board + £120 a week stipend; equivalent to £14.67/h**	**£28,615 in value**	£9,790 tuition credit per year served (1 to 4 years) + room and board valued at £12,585 + stipend £6,240. Tax-free

Annual figures are hourly rates × 37.5 hours × 52 weeks. Proposed rates are this note's design choices, not official figures.

Route T: trades and apprenticeships

- **Pay above the minimum, and a reward for finishing.** The National Living Wage, £12.71, from the first day and at every age, against the £8.00 legal minimum for a first-year apprentice. The service pays half the gap between £8.00 and £12.71 in year one, and the employer pays the full rate after that. On top, **£1.39 an hour (the gap to the £14.10 Real Living Wage) is banked by the service and paid as a lump sum on qualifying**: about **£2,710 a year** at 37.5 hours a week (about £2,890 at 40 hours), so about £5,420 for a two-year apprenticeship.
- **Tenure set by the trade.** The placement lasts as long as the apprenticeship standard takes, usually one to four years, from Level 2 to degree apprenticeships.
- **A full employment package.** Workplace pension (auto-enrolment), 5.6 weeks' paid holiday, sick pay, tools and travel allowances, and a licence or ticket at the end (CSCS card, gas or electrical certification, HGV, plant). Healthcare is not offered because the NHS already provides it.

Route U: the university route

- **Room and board, and a small stipend.** Participants serve in a pillar (for example care, farming, flood defences, reserves or schools) for a year at a time and live in provided accommodation.
- **Deferred compensation.** In Stuart's words, 'it is like getting deferred comp, as their education will be paid for'. Most of the reward for a year served is paid later, as a year of university tuition, while room, board and a stipend cover living costs now. The table below values the package in cash.
- **One year of tuition per year served, for one to four years.** In England and Wales the 2026/27 fee cap is **£9,790** (Stuart's figure of £9,535 was the 2025/26 cap); it rises to £10,050 in England from August 2027 for providers meeting the quality conditions. In Northern Ireland the cap for NI students is **£4,985**. Scottish-domiciled students at Scottish universities pay no fee (SAAS pays it), so in Scotland the credit converts to a maintenance grant of equal value.
- **A retention rule against brain drain.** The credit is a grant for a graduate who then works and pays tax in the UK; it converts to a loan for anyone who emigrates within **five years** of graduating. This extends the logic of P1 (British Graduate Investment Compact) and P7 (Diaspora Return).
- **Choice of course stays free.** The service pays the fee; it does not choose the degree. Medicine, nursing, engineering and teaching places can carry an extra year of credit.

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What a year on Route U is worth

Element	Value	Basis
Tuition credit (England and Wales)	£9,790	2026/27 fee cap, paid per year served
Room, valued in cash	£9,985	£192.02 a week × 52 (average cheapest university-hall room, UK, 2025-26)
Board (food), valued in cash	£2,600	£50 a week × 52 (estimate)
Stipend	£6,240	£120 a week × 52 (proposed)
Total value per year served	**£28,615**	Not taxed: the credit and board are in kind, and the stipend is below the £12,570 allowance
Hourly equivalent	**£14.67**	£28,615 ÷ 1,950 hours (37.5 × 52)
National Living Wage, for comparison	£12.71 (£24,785 a year)	About £10.96 an hour after income tax and NICs (£21,365 a year)

A year on Route U is worth about **15% more than full-time pay at the National Living Wage before tax, and about a third more after tax**. Northern Ireland: with the £4,985 NI fee the total is £23,810 (£12.21 an hour), still above NLW take-home pay; NI participants studying elsewhere in the UK receive the £9,790 credit. Scotland: the credit converts to a grant of equal value, £9,790, so the total is the same as in England. The state's cost of providing board at scale is lower than its cash value (£7,800 a year in Section 7, estimate).

Legal mechanism: a statutory service status

Route U is not employment at a wage, so it needs its own legal status. A **Build Britain Service Act** would create a statutory 'service member' status, modelled on the existing exclusions of the armed forces, including reservists (National Minimum Wage Act 1998, s.37), and of voluntary workers (s.44), and on the status of cadet force adult volunteers. It would place Route U outside National Minimum Wage rules and set a statutory minimum package in their place: the tuition credit, room and board, the stipend, working-hours limits and holiday. **This needs primary legislation.** It cannot be done by regulations or guidance, and it must not be used to undercut paid jobs, so host organisations would be barred from replacing paid staff with service members.

2.2 Who can serve: open to every British citizen, British-first allocation

The service is not only for young people. It is for British people who are able to work. Any British citizen can apply, and people with settled status are eligible in the same way that home-fee status and student finance already require settled status and three years' ordinary residence. There are three main strands: school leavers aged 16–24 (Route T or Route U), able-bodied adults leaving welfare (Section 4), and working people on Universal Credit who want to train into a skill that pays without a top-up (Section 4.1). The service is also open to **career changers and low-paid workers of any age** who want to retrain into a pillar trade or study for a degree, as in the essay's needs-test idea.

Priority when places are limited. Places go first to British citizens. Within that, a needs test gives priority to NEET young people, care leavers, young people from low-income households, adults leaving Universal Credit, working people on Universal Credit training for a better wage, and low-paid workers retraining. The Equality Act 2010 (Schedule 23, para 1) allows nationality and residence conditions set by legislation or ministerial arrangements; the legal route is one of the two points to settle in Section 9.

Costing effect. Places are capacity-limited and adult applicants take places within the totals in Section 7, so opening the service to all citizens does not change the costing. One difference: apprentices aged 25 and over do not get the employer-NIC relief, which slightly raises the host's cost but not the service's. If Parliament funds extra places for adults, each one has roughly the same unit net cost as in Section 7. The in-work strand (Tier C) is not costed in this edition and is not added to the Section 7 totals.

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2.3 A choice of how to serve, not compulsion

Service is a **choice of route**. Each person chooses Route U or Route T and a pillar: food and farming, energy, defence and resilience, infrastructure and housing, or care. **Defence is one option among the pillars, and no route is compulsory**, including the military one. This also keeps the design clearly within ECHR Article 4 and ILO Conventions 29 and 105, which allow compulsory work only in narrow cases such as purely military service. The service is a universal offer and an expectation, made attractive by pay, tuition and qualifications. Conditionality applies only to adult benefit claimants offered a paid job (Section 4), which the courts have held lawful.

2.4 Education and the age-8 thread (P10, P24)

The service is the step from school into work in the Lifelong Sovereign Pathway (P10): the record a child starts at eight (skills, projects, enterprise) becomes the evidence used to match a 16–18-year-old to a route and pillar, and the service record follows them into work. It puts P24 into practice. In the companion paper's check, a 40-year NHS hospital career earns about **£4.8m** in today's money on basic pay and pays about **£2.5m** in income tax and NICs (estimate). A tuition credit of £9,790 to £39,160 is small against that, and the retention rule keeps the return, and the velocity of the money, in Britain. The brain drain is real: **4,179 doctors** who applied for a certificate to work abroad in 2024 no longer held a UK licence (Telegraph analysis of GMC data), and Restore cites **246,000** British nationals emigrating in the year to December 2025.

Intersections created or strengthened. EDU–FAM (fees affordable without debt), EDU–LOC (local hosts), EDU–CAP and TAX–EDU via P24, CIT–EDU (service as shared civic belonging: new), DEF–EDU (reserves and defence tickets: new), EDU–HOU (apprentices into the housing backlog: new).

3. The five pillars and how many places each could absorb

Places are steady-state estimates for illustration (years four to ten), across Route T, Route U and welfare-to-work. They are sized against each pillar's gap, not set as targets.

Pillar	What service looks like	Places (est.)	Gap it fills	Intersections
Food and farming	Land-based apprenticeships; seasonal service blocks in horticulture and poultry; agri-tech; hedgerow, drainage and water work	40,000	Replaces part of the 42,900 seasonal visas over time	HOU (land and water)–LOC, IMM–LOC, WEL–HOU
Energy (P25)	North Sea decommissioning and production trades, grid and substation work, nuclear apprenticeships, home retrofit and insulation	50,000	Import dependency 43.3%; grid queue 765GW (companion paper)	ENG–LOC–WEL chain (P25), WEL–ENG (new), ENG–HOU
Defence and resilience	Reserve-commitment service year, defence-industry apprenticeships, civil contingencies and flood response	20,000	6% below trained-strength requirement; reserves 28,880	DEF–EDU (new), DEF–HOU, DEF–LOC via P12
Infrastructure and housing	Housebuilding trades, rail, roads, water, flood defences; modern methods of construction	250,000	1.5m homes target 29% met; CITB 41,200 a year; £718bn pipeline	EDU–HOU (new), WEL–HOU (new), CAP–HOU (open-book contracts, new), FAM–HOU
Care	Care apprenticeships; Route U for nursing, medicine and allied health	70,000	111,000 adult social care vacancies	EDU–NHS, WEL–NHS via P5, FAM–NHS
Civic and environment (welfare entry)	Restore's work-for-benefits tasks (litter-picking, drain-clearing), upgraded to paid, supervised work with a ticket at the end	60,000	Restore welfare page	WEL–LOC, LOC–FAM
Total		**490,000**		

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Allocation by pillar is illustrative. The costing in Section 7 uses routes (100,000 new Route T starts a year, so about 200,000 apprentices in place on a two-year average; 40,000 Route U service-years; 250,000 welfare placements: about 490,000 in all), not pillars. Most Route T places are within the infrastructure, energy and food pillars.

4. WELFARE TO WORK: FOR PEOPLE ABLE TO WORK, AND UP TO A FULL WAGE

Moving British people who are able to work off welfare and into work is the service's second major goal and its largest fiscal lever. It turns Restore's work-for-benefits idea (litter-picking and drain-clearing) into paid work at the National Living Wage, with training and a ticket at the end. A third tier, new in this edition, helps people who already work but still need a UC top-up to train into a wage that needs none (Section 4.1).

Measure	Figure	Source
People on Universal Credit (May 2026)	8.4m (7.2m households)	DWP
Searching for work	1.6m	DWP
No work requirements	4.3m, up 1.9m between Dec 2023 and Dec 2025	DWP
In conditionality regimes where sanctions can apply	24.4% of claimants (about 2m)	DWP sanctions statistics, May 2026
UC sanction rate	5.2% of those claimants (May 2026); 11.8% in January 2017	DWP
Mean UC payment	£1,090 a month; single, no children £820 (£9,840 a year)	DWP
Standard allowance 2026-27	£424.90 a month (25+); £338.58 (under 25)	DWP benefit rates 2026-27
Working-age DWP benefit spending	£136.1bn (2026-27)	DWP spring forecast, as reported
In work while on UC (July 2026)	3.1m, 37.6% of claimants: 2.5m employees only, 0.5m self-employed only, 0.1m both	DWP UC quarterly statistics, 17 Nov 2026
Administrative Earnings Threshold 2026-27	£991 a month, single claimant (18 hours a week at the NLW); £1,597 a couple	GOV.UK, Universal Credit and earnings

Design

- **Tier A (conditional).** A claimant in 'searching for work' for six months who is fit for work is offered a Build Britain job: up to 12 months at the **National Living Wage (£12.71)**, 37.5 hours a week, in a pillar near home, with training. Pay replaces UC; it is a wage, not benefit-plus-work. The host pays 75% of the wage for productive work; the service pays 25% plus training and supervision.
- **Tier B (voluntary).** People on health-related UC who want to work (754,000 long-term sick people say they want a job) can join with adjusted hours and extra support, keeping a guaranteed right to return to their previous award if it does not work out.
- **Tier C (voluntary): In-Work Upskilling.** Working people on UC, employed or self-employed, who are able to take on more or better-paid work can train through Route T around their job, into a skill that pays a wage with no government top-up. Nobody in work is made to join (Section 4.1).
- **Conditionality already in law.** Refusing a work placement or a job offer without good reason is a sanctionable failure under the Welfare Reform Act 2012, s.26(2)(a) and (c). A higher-level sanction removes 100% of the standard allowance for **91 days**, or **182 days** for a repeat within a year (UC Regulations 2013, reg.102). No new power is needed; a direction to apply it to Build Britain jobs is.

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- **Lawful under Article 4.** The Supreme Court held in Reilly and Wilson [2013] UKSC 68 that work-related conditions on benefit are not forced labour, and the European Court took the same view in Schuitemaker v Netherlands (2010). Paying a wage strengthens the position further.
- **It builds on what exists.** The government's Youth Guarantee already funds a six-month paid job for 18–21-year-olds after 18 months on UC (£820m, Autumn Budget 2025). Tier A widens that to all ages after six months and links the jobs to national-security work. Tier C builds on DWP's in-work progression support (Section 4.1).

Per placement (estimates). The service pays about £11,938 a year (25% of the wage and employer NICs on it, training £3,000, supervision £2,000). In return, assuming 70% of placements are additional, the Exchequer saves about £10,840: UC not paid (£9,840, single person, no children) plus income tax, employee NICs and the host's employer NICs. So during the placement it roughly pays for itself. The larger return comes afterwards: each extra person in lasting work is worth about **£16,228 a year** to the Exchequer. The central case assumes 15% of completers stay in work who would not otherwise have done so, fading by 15% a year.

Evidence caution. *DWP's 2012 evaluation of Mandatory Work Activity (four weeks of unpaid placements) found a short-lived fall in benefit receipt and no lasting effect on employment. The design here differs (a paid wage, up to a year, real training and a ticket), but the employment return should be measured as delivery is phased in, with sequencing left to government. Off-flow from people who leave benefits rather than take the job is not counted.*

Intersections created or strengthened. WEL–HOU and WEL–ENG (claimants build homes and retrofit: both new), WEL–LOC and WEL–TAX (strengthened), WEL–EDU via P5, and LOC–FAM (work in the home town).

4.1 From top-up to take-home pay: upskilling working people on Universal Credit (Tier C)

Universal Credit is paid to people on a low income as well as to people out of work. In July 2026, 3.1 million people on UC were in work, 37.6% of everyone on it: 2.5 million employees, 0.5 million self-employed and 0.1 million both (DWP). They are doing the right thing. Many work as many hours as family life allows and still need the state to make up the difference, because their skill does not yet pay enough. Tier C is for them: a route to a skill that pays a wage a household can live on with no government top-up. It is a hand up, not a handout, and it is a two-way street like the rest of the service.

- **Who it is for.** British citizens on UC who are in work, employed or self-employed, and who are able to take on more or better-paid work. It is voluntary: nobody in work is made to join, and nobody has to leave a job to take part.
- **Train without stopping work.** Part-time, evening, weekend and block-release courses through Route T, paid for by the service, in the five pillars and in the trades every town needs, from building and retrofit to care, food, hospitality and repair. Each stage earns a recognised ticket, so progress counts even before the course is finished.
- **A wage, not a top-up, at the end.** Each place is matched in advance to a host employer, or to a self-employment plan, with a target wage at which the household no longer needs a UC earnings top-up. Completers get a guaranteed interview with a pillar employer.
- **Builds on what exists.** Since May 2024, people earning below the Administrative Earnings Threshold, now £991 a month for a single claimant (18 hours a week at the National Living Wage), have been asked to meet a work coach regularly to raise their earnings (GOV.UK). DWP's own research on its in-work progression offer found that over half of

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those groups agreed it would be difficult for them to work more or get a new job (53%, 61% and 62%; Ipsos for DWP, February 2026). Tier C answers that with a real skill and a better job at the end, not just more meetings.

- **Self-employed too.** For the 0.5 million self-employed people on UC, Tier C offers business skills and a trade ticket, linked to Local Ecosystem Capital (P9) and the small-business measures in Restoring the British High Street (P49–P60).

Why it pays (not costed). Above any work allowance, a claimant's UC falls by 55p for every £1 they earn (GOV.UK), and higher pay brings more income tax and National Insurance. So each person who trains into a better-paid skill reduces their top-up and raises tax receipts at the same time, until no top-up is needed at all. Tier C is not costed in this edition and is not added to the Section 7 totals; its returns should be measured as delivery is phased in.

Economic vibrancy for all. A family that moves from top-up to take-home pay spends more in its own town, at the butcher, the baker and the local pub, which is the same aim as Restoring the British High Street (P49–P60). Grandparents in the Grandparent Circles of The Grandparent Renaissance (P61–P70) can help too, as mentors who open doors to local employers for their own families and neighbours. Bottom up: the worker and the family. Middle out: local employers, colleges, councils and Jobcentres. Top down: the national rules on Universal Credit and skills funding that only Parliament can set.

Intersections strengthened by Tier C. EDU–WEL (training instead of a permanent top-up), LOC–WEL (local wages spent locally), TAX–WEL (less UC paid, more tax received) and EDU–LOC (local skills for local employers). No new intersections are claimed.

5. The migrant strand: work while awaiting removal, never a route to stay

In December 2025 the Home Office supported **107,003** asylum seekers, **30,657** of them in hotels; asylum support cost **£4.36bn** in 2025-26. A hotel place cost about **£144.98 a night** in 2024-25 against **£23.25** in dispersal housing (Home Office, via the Public Accounts Committee). In the year to June 2026 there were **40,605 returns (9,669 enforced, 30,936 voluntary)**, and **40,168** people were awaiting an initial decision. The fiscal path already counts ending asylum support (P17). The question here is only what people do while they wait to leave.

Option	Verdict	Why
A. The essay's route: service earns legal status	Rejected	An amnesty. Adds to net migration, rewards illegal entry and runs against Restore's removal policy and the zero-net-migration path.
B. Right to work in the open labour market while waiting	Rejected	A pull factor. Today asylum seekers may work only after 12 months without a decision and, from 26 March 2026, only in RQF 6+ skilled jobs; permission ends when appeal rights are exhausted (Immigration Rules, para 360). Widening it would build ties that make removal harder.
C. Compulsory unpaid work for everyone awaiting removal	Rejected	Forced labour. ECHR Art 4(3)(a) covers work 'in the ordinary course of detention', but ILO Convention 29 permits compulsory work only after a criminal conviction, and the UK ratified it in 1931 and its 2014 Protocol in 2016. Leaving the ECHR does not remove the ILO obligation, and it would also breach the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

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Option	Verdict	Why
D. Voluntary paid Work-to-Return inside the detention and reception estate (recommended)	**Recommended**	Builds on existing law: Detention Centre Rules 2001, r.17 already allow voluntary paid work at **£1.00–£1.25 an hour**, up to 30 hours a week, outside minimum-wage law. Work is on site maintenance, catering, building and grounds, and supervised public works within secure perimeters. Earnings are banked in a **Return Account paid only on departure**, as part of the return package.

Safeguards that keep it removal-linked

- **Statutory bar:** time in Work-to-Return never counts towards any residence, settlement or citizenship route and is never evidence of 'private life' in a removal case.
- **No delay:** participation never pauses a removal; the Return Account is paid at the point of departure, or forfeited on absconding.
- **No displacement of British workers:** work is inside the estate or on secured public sites, never hired out to private employers in the open labour market (also an ILO condition).
- **Zero net migration:** nobody enters, stays or settles because of the strand.

Political considerations, stated plainly. Some will say any paid work rewards illegal entry; the answer is that the pay is a few pounds a day, banked for departure, and replaces idleness in a hotel. Others will call £1.25 an hour exploitation; the answer is that it is voluntary, it is the existing legal rate, and the alternative is no work at all. Local opposition to large reception sites is real, and the strand depends on the capacity of Restore's detention-estate plans. Its fiscal effect is small; its value is order, dignity and faster voluntary departures.

Intersections created or strengthened. IMM–HOU (hotels released for housing: strengthened), IMM–TAX (earnings help fund returns: new), IMM–LAW and IMM–JUD (fewer absconders and fewer ties claims: strengthened).

6. Open-book delivery contracts: every pound visible

- **Open book with a capped return.** Service projects are let on open-book terms with the contractor's return capped (for example, a fixed margin on audited cost) and every invoice, margin and subcontract published on the P8 dashboard. The Procurement Act 2023 (in force February 2025) already requires more contract transparency; this goes further.
- **Tax withheld at source.** The Construction Industry Scheme already deducts **20%** from payments to registered subcontractors (30% if unregistered) on account of tax. The proposal extends withholding to principal contractors on service-funded projects, so tax is settled as the work is paid for.
- **Learning from PFI.** The NAO found in 2018 that existing PFI and PF2 deals still required about **£199bn** of future charges into the 2040s. Open-book terms with a capped return are designed to avoid repeating that.
- **Hosts that train.** A contractor bidding for service-funded work must host Route T apprentices in proportion to contract value, as a condition of award.

Any savings from open-book contracts are not counted in the figures below.

Intersections created or strengthened. CAP–HOU (patient, transparent capital in building: new), TAX–JUD via the 3% rule (P22), TAX–CAP (strengthened).

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A note for America

The idea began as an American proposal, and America could take a leaf out of this book. **South Carolina is set to scale SovereignOS™ in all 46 of its counties, and Indiana's SovereignOS™ journey is just beginning in Muncie** (Stuart's statements), connecting the same thread from school to work at state and city level. Other states are testing parts of the exchange: Maryland's Service Year Option pays 18–24-year-old school leavers at least **$15 an hour** for a term of at least nine months, with a **$6,000** completion award and access to a registered apprenticeship, and California's College Corps pays students up to **$10,000** for 450 hours of service ($7,000 living allowance and $3,000 in education awards).

7. INVESTMENT AND RETURN OVER TEN YEARS

Costs are presented as an investment with a return. Everything here is an **estimate** in 2026-27 prices, static (no behavioural or growth effects beyond those stated), with the service starting in 2027-28 and reaching full scale in year four. Hosts' shares of wages on productive work are paid from project budgets already in the infrastructure pipeline and are not counted as new spending (a key assumption to test).

Unit	Gross cost	Savings in period	Basis
Route T apprenticeship start (2 years)	£15,845	£10,189	Half the gap £8.00 to £12.71 in year 1; completion bonus £2,710 a year × 2 at 60% completion (est.); training £7,000 (est.); admin. Savings: tax on NLW pay and the bonus; UC not paid by NEET starters
Route U service-year	£22,882	£2,423	Stipend £6,240; board £7,800 (cost of provision, est.); tuition credit £9,790 at 75% take-up; admin. Saving: student-loan write-off avoided (33% RAB)
Welfare Tier A placement-year	£11,938	£10,840	25% of the wage and NICs on it, training, supervision. Savings: UC not paid and tax, at 70% additionality; then about £16,228 a year for each extra person in lasting work
Work-to-Return participant-year	£3,375	£566	Pay £1.25 × 30h × 50 weeks plus supervision. Saving: faster voluntary departures (dispersal support at £23.25 a night)

The tuition credit and the RAB charge. DfE forecasts that **33%** of Plan 5 full-time undergraduate loan outlay will not be repaid (the RAB charge, 2025-26), and only **55%** of 2025/26 starters are expected to repay in full. So when the service pays a £9,790 fee instead of a loan, about £3,230 of it is money the Exchequer was already expected to write off. The bridge below shows the credit gross and the write-off avoided as a saving, so the net new cost is about **£6,560 per year of tuition**, and the graduate starts work with no fee debt.

Gross-to-net bridge

Every figure in this note is on a **net basis**: the gross cost of the service, less the savings it produces for the Exchequer.

£bn, 2026-27 prices	First full-scale year (2030-31), central	2030-31, cautious	10 years, central	10 years, cautious
Gross cost of the service	5.63	7.37	47.9	62.7
less: welfare no longer paid (UC)	−2.92	−1.98	−29.4	−19.2
less: income tax and NICs from wages	−2.37	−1.71	−23.1	−16.1
less: student-loan write-offs avoided	−0.10	−0.10	−0.8	−0.8
less: asylum support saved (faster voluntary departures)	−0.01	−0.01	−0.1	−0.1
Net cost (+) or net return (−)	**+0.23**	**+3.57**	**-5.5**	**+26.4**

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The savings grow after full scale is reached, as people who completed the service stay in work. ***Others, not counted:*** *graduate lifetime tax after year ten, the value of the homes, energy and food produced, lower seasonal-visa demand, open-book contract savings, and benefit off-flow.* ***Asylum hotels:*** *ending asylum support and hotels (£4.36bn in 2025-26) is already counted in the fiscal path (P17) and is not repeated here; only the extra saving from faster voluntary departures appears in the bridge.*

Year	Gross cost	UC not paid	Tax and NICs	Loan write-off and asylum	Net, central	Net, cautious
2027-28	1.42	0.58	0.50	0.03	+0.31	+1.03
2028-29	2.84	1.29	1.08	0.06	+0.42	+1.96
2029-30	4.24	2.07	1.70	0.08	+0.38	+2.80
2030-31	5.63	2.92	2.37	0.11	+0.23	+3.57
2031-32	5.63	3.23	2.57	0.11	-0.27	+3.31
2032-33	5.63	3.49	2.74	0.11	-0.70	+3.08
2033-34	5.63	3.71	2.88	0.11	-1.06	+2.89
2034-35	5.63	3.90	3.00	0.11	-1.37	+2.73
2035-36	5.63	4.06	3.10	0.11	-1.63	+2.59
2036-37	5.63	4.20	3.19	0.11	-1.85	+2.47
10 years	**47.9**	**29.4**	**23.1**	**0.9**	**-5.5**	**+26.4**

£bn a year, 2026-27 prices. Savings columns are for the central case. Positive = net cost; negative = net return. ***Central case:*** *70% additionality during placements; 20% of Route T and 15% of welfare completers in lasting work who would not otherwise be, fading 15% a year; hosts pay 75% of welfare wages; 60% of apprentices qualify for the completion bonus.* ***Cautious case:*** *50% additionality; 10% and 8% lasting-work effects; hosts pay only 50%.*

How it fits the ten-year fiscal path

- **Central case, net basis:** a net cost of at most £0.4bn a year for 4 years, self-financing from 2031-32, and a net return of about **£1.9bn a year by 2036-37** (£5.5bn over ten years). That fits inside Parliament 1's £155bn of staged savings without changing the path.
- **Cautious case, net basis:** a net cost peaking at **£3.6bn a year** (about 0.1% of GDP) and £26.4bn over ten years. The path still closes the deficit; it adds about 0.1 percentage points to spending in 2036-37.
- **No double counting.** The path already assumes Restore's working-age welfare savings (phased to £75bn) and the end of asylum support. The service is one way to deliver part of the welfare saving. Its own returns are shown separately here and are not added to the path.
- **Not counted:** graduate lifetime returns after year ten (a doctor's estimated £2.5m of tax over a career), output from the homes, energy and food produced, lower seasonal-visa demand, open-book contract savings, and off-flow from benefits. The in-work strand (Tier C, Section 4.1) is not costed.

8. Where it sits in A Policy on the Policies

Decision: a new proposal, P26, not a new cluster. The fifteen clusters are policy areas; the service is a delivery engine that works across them. Adding it as a cluster would add a box without adding a measured connection. As P26 it occupies the intersections, as P5 and P24 do, and it carries P5 (Workforce Transition and Skills Compact) forward from training to paid, pillar-based service.

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Intersection	Type	How P26 creates or strengthens it
WEL–HOU	New	Claimants and apprentices build the homes the 1.5m target needs
WEL–ENG	New	Retrofit, grid and North Sea trades for people leaving welfare (with P25)
EDU–HOU	New	Apprenticeships aimed at the construction shortfall (CITB 41,200 a year)
EDU–WEL	New (with P5)	School to work replaces school to NEET to UC
CIT–EDU	New	Service as shared civic belonging across class and region (social cohesion)
DEF–EDU	New (with P4)	Reserve-commitment service year and defence-industry tickets
CAP–HOU	New	Open-book, capped-return contracts for public building
IMM–TAX	New	Work-to-Return earnings help fund departures; hotel costs end
EDU–FAM	Strengthened	University without fee debt for families (tuition per year served)
EDU–LOC	Strengthened	Local hosts, local trades, home-town placements
WEL–LOC	Strengthened	Work-for-benefits upgraded to paid local work
WEL–TAX	Strengthened	Welfare savings and new tax receipts in the fiscal path (P17, P19)
ENG–HOU	Strengthened	Retrofit and grid connections for new homes
IMM–HOU	Strengthened	Hotels released
DEF–HOU	Strengthened	Flood defence and resilience works

Pensions and fairness. More people in work raises receipts without raising rates, which protects the triple lock in the path and answers the fairness question that pensioners have carried more than their share. **SovereignOS™ from age 8 (P10)** supplies the record used to match people to routes. **Social cohesion** comes from mixing British young people from every background in a shared task, and economic vibrancy for all comes from more British people earning a full wage.

Bottom up, top down, middle out. SovereignOS™ looks at a nation as a stack of levels, each resting on the one below: the individual, the family, business, the community, the county, nature and the country. P26 works on all three layers of the Sovereignty Stack at once. Bottom up: individuals and families who choose a route, and working people on Universal Credit who train for a better wage. Middle out: host employers, colleges, councils, Jobcentres and local high streets. Top down: the Build Britain Service Act, the national pay scales and the Universal Credit rules that only Parliament can set. It strengthens the individual (skills and pay), the family (income without a top-up), business (skilled British workers), the community (wages spent locally) and the country (the five security pillars).

9. Considerations for implementation

- **Choice, not compulsion.** Service is a choice of route and pillar, with defence as one option; no route is compulsory. The service is for British people who are able to work. Only adult benefit claimants who are able to work and out of work face conditionality, and that is lawful (Section 4). Tier C, for people already in work, is voluntary.
- **Route U legal status.** A statutory service-member status taking Route U outside National Minimum Wage rules (Section 2.1) needs primary legislation. Expect challenge on displacement, so the Act must bar replacing paid staff.
- **British-first allocation.** Fits existing student-finance rules; the Equality Act Schedule 23 route needs confirming.
- **Displacement.** Host contractors must not replace existing staff with subsidised places; an additionality test and union consultation help.
- **Devolution.** Education, skills and some welfare delivery are devolved; Scotland's free tuition needs the maintenance-grant equivalent.
- **Detention capacity.** Work-to-Return depends on the scale of Restore's detention and reception estate.

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- **In-work upskilling.** Tier C courses must fit around shifts and childcare, host employers must offer a real wage at the end, and the work coach's role becomes progression to a full wage. Skills funding is partly devolved, so delivery needs agreement with the devolved governments.

Two points to settle in delivery

The design choices are settled: the university route is deferred compensation under a statutory service status; service is a choice of route, with defence as one option; the service is for British people who are able to work; the in-work strand is voluntary; the brain-drain clawback is five years; Route T pays the National Living Wage plus a completion bonus; implementation sequencing is left to government, with delivery phased in. Two points remain for delivery:

- **Equality Act.** Whether British-first allocation can rest on Schedule 23, para 1 of the Equality Act 2010 (ministerial arrangements), or needs express provision in the Build Britain Service Act.
- **Job outcomes.** The lasting-work effects that drive the return are estimates. The 2012 evaluation of unpaid Mandatory Work Activity found no lasting employment effect, so outcomes should be measured as delivery is phased in.

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Estimates or not verified: *all costings and place numbers; the cash value of board (£50 a week); proposed pay rates; training and board costs; additionality and lasting-work effects; the Equality Act route; the in-work strand (Tier C), which is not costed; South Carolina and Indiana SovereignOS™ plans (Stuart's statements).*

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