# Labour pledges to clear NHS waiting list backlog in 5 years, Conservatives focus on educational reform



Labour has pledged to clear the NHS waiting list backlog in England within five years. Shadow Health Secretary Wes Streeting announced that Labour, under Leader Keir Starmer, plans to reduce the current backlog of 7.54 million treatments by creating an additional 40,000 weekly appointments, scans, and operations during evenings and weekends. This initiative will cost £1.3 billion, funded by measures against tax avoidance and better utilization of private sector capacity.

Health Secretary Victoria Atkins criticized Labour’s plan, calling it “copy and paste politics,” while health experts cautioned that achieving such targets would require significant effort and might impact other healthcare priorities. Labour’s specific approach includes doubling the number of scanners and potentially enlisting 'crack teams' for weekend and evening operations in hospitals.

Contrastingly, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservatives focus on educational reform, pledging to create 100,000 high-skilled apprenticeships annually by eliminating underperforming university degrees. This plan, estimated to cost £885 million, will be funded by savings derived from closing these “rip-off degrees.”

The Conservatives claim to have delivered 5.8 million apprenticeships since 2010 but face declining apprenticeship starts attributed to the 2017 apprenticeship levy and the pandemic. Labour counters with promises to replace the levy with a growth and skills levy to fund diverse training options, aiming to address the skills gap in the economy.

Sunak’s broader educational strategy includes legislative changes to empower the Office for Students to shut down underperforming degree courses based on metrics like dropout rates and job progression. Education Secretary Gillian Keegan emphasized that this approach challenges the previous Labour government’s focus on increasing university attendance rates.

The forthcoming general election will determine the viability of these competing plans, each party presenting its solution to the interweaved challenges of health and education under current economic constraints.