# UK Government and Opposition Clash on Apprenticeship Policies



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**London, May 28, 2024** - The UK's Skills Minister Luke Hall criticized Labour’s apprenticeship plans, describing them as a step backward. Hall emphasized that the focus under a Labour government would revert to less effective university targets, a policy reminiscent of the Blair era which resulted in the proliferation of low-quality degrees and a decline in apprenticeship opportunities. Hall championed the Conservative approach, under which 5.8 million apprenticeships have begun since 2010, and pitched a new plan to add 100,000 more apprenticeships annually.

**Apprenticeship vs. University Relations**

Hall pointed out that graduates often faced employment challenges, with a significant portion employed in roles not requiring degrees and some worse off financially post-university. Conversely, apprenticeships offer real-world skills and competitive earnings, with apprentices reportedly earning more than graduates in many cases five years post-completion.

**Political and Policy Context**

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has called for an expansion in apprenticeships while scrutinizing university courses deemed as underperforming. This strategy aims to close courses with high dropout rates and poor job progression, directing funds to apprenticeships instead. The policy is estimated to redirect £910 million by 2029/30.

**National Service Proposal**

Sunak has also proposed a national service for 18-year-olds, designed to integrate young people into public service roles, including the armed forces, as part of their development. This move has been framed as a method to boost social cohesion and individual growth.

**Opposition Response**

Labour’s Shadow Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson disputed the Conservative claims, arguing that the current government’s policies had led to a significant decline in apprenticeship starts and achievements. Labour aims to introduce a new Growth and Skills Levy and create Technical Excellence Colleges to reinvigorate apprenticeship opportunities.

**Electoral Implications**

The political debate over education and apprenticeships unfolds ahead of a recently announced snap election in July 2024. Current polls indicate a substantial lead for Labour, and the government’s focus on education and national service is part of a broader strategy to regain voter confidence amidst growing support for alternative parties like Reform UK.