



McDonald's UK Launches Nation's Largest In-Person Work Experience Programme

- *Launched as the UK nears one million young people who are NEET, the programme aims to help young people make it by directly tackling root causes of youth unemployment.*
- *The nationwide initiative will offer 2,500 paid placements initially, focusing on NEET hotspots, with an ambition to scale the commitment year-on-year.*
- *McDonald's UK has commissioned its inaugural Youth Confidence Index, revealing two thirds of young people (67%) say they would love to do work experience but there are not enough opportunities for them to do so.*

Wednesday, 22nd April 2026: McDonald's UK has today announced the launch of the nation's largest in-person work experience programme. Offering 2,500 paid placements in the first year in local communities across the country, the programme has been designed to tackle the root causes of rising youth unemployment and support young people who are struggling to get their first step on the career ladder.

With the UK nearing one million young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), McDonald's believes it has both a responsibility and a unique opportunity as one of the UK's largest employers of young people, to help address this issue. Utilising McDonald's scale and presence on high streets and in communities across the UK, the new programme will help thousands each year to overcome initial barriers to employment and set them up for successful careers.

To better understand the key barriers affecting young people today, McDonald's has undertaken in depth research with young people from across the UK, to inform the release of its inaugural Youth Confidence Index. The findings reveal a generation that believes strongly in its own potential but feels shut out of the job market. While eight in ten (80%) young people who are in education, employment or training say they have something positive to offer society, this falls to 57% among those who are NEET.

Crucially, two thirds of young people (67%) say they would love to do work experience but there are not enough opportunities to do so. They say the lack of work experience opportunities in their local area (69%) and not being able to afford to do unpaid work experience (61%) are the major barriers they face.

Facilitated by McDonald's Franchisees, local business owners who know the communities they serve inside out, the programme will address these issues and the wider societal backdrop head on. It will focus on communities where access to opportunity is lowest, with a target for 25% of placements to be offered to young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.

Commenting on the programme, **Lauren Schultz, CEO of McDonald's UK & Ireland**, said: *"At McDonald's, we believe in the potential and ability of young people and want to help them make it. With over 100,000 employees under 25 across the UK, we have the reach to make a real difference and are uniquely positioned to open doors at scale. Everything a young person needs to learn about the world of work, from communication to financial skills, can be mastered at McDonald's. By helping thousands gain this exposure and build confidence, we are creating a genuine pathway into employment and demonstrating the transformative power the hospitality sector can have on our national workforce."*

Pat McFadden, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, said: *"We're tackling youth unemployment head on by backing young people with the skills and support they need, while working with employers to open more doors. McDonald's have a strong track record of supporting and training up young people, and it is fantastic to see them using their position to help even more overcome barriers and set them up for successful careers. This shows what's possible when Government and business help young people into work."*

Rt Hon. Alan Milburn, Chair of the government's Young People and Work Review, also added: *"The scale of youth unemployment and the NEET crisis facing the UK is a national outrage with long-term consequences. Young people want to work, but too often the system shuts them out. High-quality work experience delivered at scale can*



be transformative, and McDonald's commitment shows the kind of leadership employers need to demonstrate if we're serious about giving every young person a fair start."

Haroon Chowdry, Chief Executive at the Centre for Young Lives: "Our research is clear: young people want to work. They have hopes and ambition, but what they often lack are opportunity and support. Every young NEET is a person who has been let down by the system, because they did not receive the help they needed – such as key skills, experiences, or support for SEND or mental health – when and where they needed it.

"It is possible to turn the tide on the number of young NEETs, but this will require joint ambition and action from the whole of government – not just DWP, but also schools, colleges, local authorities, health, family hubs and youth support. It also relies on employers stepping up – which is why we welcome today's announcement from McDonald's that will unlock new opportunities for thousands of young people across the country."

Lee Elliot Major OBE, Professor of Social Mobility at the University of Exeter: "We don't have a shortage of talent in this country, we have a shortage of opportunity. By offering paid work experience at scale, McDonald's is showing how businesses can boost social mobility and productivity, potentially transforming the life chances of thousands of young people."

Over the five-day work experience placement, participants – who will be over the age of 16 – will gain hands-on experience in key restaurant operations to learn exactly how a business functions. By tackling real-world business and hospitality tasks such as inventory checks, Drive-Thru operations, and customer service they will develop vital transferable skills such as leadership and problem-solving, all of which are valued by employers. All participants will perform their role under the guidance of an experienced member of the restaurant crew.

Participants will also build their knowledge on interview techniques and time management skills to fully prepare them for entering into and succeeding in the world of work.

This announcement continues McDonald's UK&I's long-standing commitment to supporting young people, a legacy of job creation and award-winning initiatives spanning over five decades. Since 2006, McDonald's UK&I Apprenticeship Programme has supported over 22,000 individuals in earning degrees while developing their careers. Further impact has been made via programmes such as Fun Football, which provides free coaching for 5–11-year-olds and Taste for Work, which has equipped over 210,000 young people with essential employability skills.

Alongside today's announcement, McDonald's has partnered with two leading think tanks: the Centre for Young Lives and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). The Centre for Young Lives has published a new report, *Turning the Tide on Rising NEETs*, setting out evidence based recommendations to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training and unlock the potential of future generations. The IPPR is also undertaking a significant two-year research programme, *State of a Generation*, which will develop a framework for change to help restore opportunity and promise for young people across the UK.

Today's announcement supports the government's drive to get young people earning or learning as part of their Youth Guarantee programme.

More information about the McDonald's Work Experience programme and the Youth Confidence Index can be found at our website: www.mcdonalds.com/gb/en-gb/latest/youth-opportunity

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Notes to editors

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About McDonald's UK & Ireland

McDonald's has been operating in the UK since 1974. The business currently operates more than 1,560 restaurants across the UK and Ireland, serving over three million customers each day. McDonald's is one of the UK's largest private sector employers, employing more than 159,000 people and works with over 29,000 British and Irish farmers.

About the Youth Confidence Index

Republic conducted an online survey of 1,521 young people in the UK between 3rd - 16th March 2026. This included:

- 505 young people aged 14-16 in school
- 506 NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) aged 16-24
- 510 young people aged 16-24 in full time education or in work

The survey was scripted and hosted by our operational partner Omnisis - MRS Company Partners and members of the British Polling Council.

Centre for Young Lives

The Centre for Young Lives report, 'Turning the tide on rising NEETs', can be accessed [here](#)