

UK leader says hard hats as important as graduation caps

3rd August 2026



The United Kingdom has a new prime minister, and he is determined to overhaul Britain's education system. Andy Burnham, 56, came to power on July the 16th. One of his key priorities is to increase access to technical training for youngsters. He wants

schoolchildren as young as 14 to start acquiring the skills they need for the workplace. This is to address the problem of unemployed youth. Britain has more than one million young people not in education, employment or training. They have been dubbed "the lost generation". Mr Burnham said: "Fixing the youth unemployment crisis in Britain will require a major shake-up in how we do things, and that's what this government will do."

Prime Minister Burnham's aim is to reset traditional views on white- and blue-collar work. He wants young people to believe that a career as a plumber, carpenter, or bricklayer is just as valuable as working as a lawyer or doctor. He said: "I want an education system based on parity between academic and technical, which gives all young people a clear path in life. From today, Britain will value the hard hat every bit as much as the graduation cap." He added: "For too long in this country, students have been told that they must take the academic path to do well and to be respected. The whole school system has been built around it, and that has let down young people seeking technical qualifications."

Sources: gov.uk / manchestereveningnews.co.uk / lbc.co.uk

Writing

Blue-collar work should be valued as highly as white-collar work. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

United Kingdom / education system / power / technical training / unemployed / youth / traditional view / blue-collar worker / plumber / path in life / hard hat / graduation cap

True / False

- 1) The UK's prime minister wants to change the UK's education system. T / F
- 2) The prime minister wants all schoolchildren to learn workplace skills. T / F
- 3) A million young people in the UK are part of a "lost generation". T / F
- 4) The prime minister said schoolchildren need a major shake-up. T / F
- 5) Andy Burnham wants there to be more blue- than white-collar workers. T / F
- 6) Burnham believes plumbers are as valuable as lawyers. T / F
- 7) Burnham believes hard hats and graduation caps have the same value. T / F
- 8) Burnham believes the UK school system has let some children down. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. determined | a. called |
| 2. overhaul | b. equality |
| 3. priorities | c. significant |
| 4. dubbed | d. profession |
| 5. major | e. intent on |
| 6. traditional | f. searching for |
| 7. career | g. main concerns |
| 8. parity | h. route |
| 9. path | i. modernize |
| 10. seeking | j. conventional |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think of your country's leader?
- b) What do you think of your country's education system?
- c) What subjects need to be taught at school?
- d) How does school prepare children for the workplace?
- e) How bad is unemployment in your country?
- f) What would you do to shake up your country's education system?
- g) Is life for young people easier or harder than it was in the past?
- h) How will AI affect education and jobs?

Phrase Match

1. he is determined to overhaul Britain's
 2. One of his key
 3. start acquiring the skills they need
 4. address the problem of
 5. They have been dubbed
 6. reset traditional views on white- and blue-
 7. just as valuable
 8. to do well and to
 9. The whole school system has been
 10. let down young people seeking
- a. for the workplace
 - b. built around it
 - c. unemployed youth
 - d. collar work
 - e. technical qualifications
 - f. education system
 - g. be respected
 - h. the lost generation
 - i. priorities
 - j. as working as a lawyer

Discussion – Student B

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) How good or bad was your education?
- c) Are white- or blue-collar jobs best?
- d) Would you rather be a carpenter or a lawyer?
- e) How important is technical education?
- f) What kind of career path would you like?
- g) Is the hard hat as valuable as the graduation cap?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the UK's prime minister?

Spelling

1. ealvourh Britain's education system
2. One of his key siirieptro
3. start ciaqiurgn the skills they need
4. They have been ubdedb the lost generation
5. the youth otepenmnyum crisis
6. require a major esaupkh-
7. Burnham's aim is to reset iornttldaia views
8. a career as a reulmpb
9. as vabelalu as working as a lawyer
10. medccaia and technical
11. to do well and to be deeetrcsp
12. technical acuifqitanlosi

Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. i	3. g	4. a	5. c
6. j	7. d	8. b	9. h	10. f

Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions.
(Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	What does the UK's new leader want to do to the education system?
2.	What does the UK prime minister want schoolchildren to have access to?
3.	What skills does the prime minister want 14-year-olds to start acquiring?
4.	How many young people in Britain are not in school, jobs or training?
5.	What did Mr Burnham say would fix the youth unemployment crisis?
6.	What traditional views does Andy Burnham want to reset?
7.	What does Mr Burnham want parity between in the education system?
8.	What does Burnham believe people should value as much as a hard hat?
9.	What have students been told to take to do well and be respected?
10.	Who did Mr Burnham say had been let down by the school system?

Speaking – Jobs

Rank these with your partner. Put the best jobs at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- Plumber
- Lawyer
- Carpenter
- Doctor
- Bricklayer
- Accountant
- Gardener
- Teacher

Answers – True False

1	T	2	F	3	T	4	F	5	F	6	T	7	T	8	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.