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**Subject:** EMBARGOED UNTIL 2200 25/05/24 - Conservatives: A Bold New Model of National Service

## Press Release



[REDACTED]  
25<sup>th</sup> May 2024

**EMBARGOED NO APPROACH UNTIL 22.00 25<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

## Conservatives: A Bold New Model of National Service

- **Introducing a bold new model for National Service for eighteen year olds**
- **Setting up a Royal Commission to design National Service, working with the armed forces and civic society to design a programme**

The Conservatives are today announcing mandatory National Service for every eighteen year old – they will be able to choose between a full-time placement over 12 months in the armed forces or one weekend per month for a year volunteering in their community.

We have so much to be proud of in the United Kingdom, but we also need to be open and honest about the long-term challenges that our country and our society faces. And one of the problems in our society is that we have generations of young people who don't have the opportunities they deserve.

That is why the Conservatives are taking bold action to give the next generation the opportunity to learn real world skills while contributing to our country, their local community and providing them with the foundations for a secure future.

Eighteen year olds will be able to choose between:

- A selective, full-time 12-month placement in the armed forces or UK cyber defence where they will learn and take part in logistics, cyber security, procurement or civil response operations, or;
- Volunteering the equivalent of one weekend per month (25 days per year) in their community with organisations such as fire, police and the NHS as well as charities tackling loneliness and supporting older, isolated people.

This National Service will provide valuable work experience and ignite a passion for a future career in healthcare, public service, charity or the armed forces.

The Conservatives will establish the first Royal Commission this century to bring in expertise from across the armed forces and civil society to design our National Service Programme. The Commission will bring forward a proposal on how to ensure the first pilot is open for applications in September 2025, after which we will introduce a new National Service Act to mandate that every eighteen year old will be required to do national service by the end of the next Parliament.

When fully rolled out, National Service will cost £2.5 billion a year by 2029/2030. £1 billion of this will be funded through our plan to raise an additional £6 billion a year by the end of the next Parliament from cracking down on tax avoidance and evasion. The remaining £1.5 billion will be paid for using funding previously used for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).

We will extend the UKSPF for three years during which time it will be allocated across the United Kingdom on the same basis as before. From 2028/29, the funding will be used for National Service.

The choice at this election is a clear plan under the Conservatives to chart a course to a secure future for you, your family, and the United Kingdom in an increasingly uncertain world. Or Keir Starmer, who doesn't have the conviction, courage, or plan needed to navigate an increasingly uncertain world and secure a brighter future for our country.

Commenting, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak MP, said:

"This is a great country but generations of young people have not had the opportunities or experience they deserve and there are forces trying to divide our society in this increasingly uncertain world.

"I have a clear plan to address this and secure our future. I will bring in a new model of National Service to create a shared sense of purpose among our young people and a renewed sense of pride in our country.

"This new, mandatory National Service will provide life-changing opportunities for our young people, offering them the chance to learn real world skills, do new things and contribute to their community and our country."

ENDS

For further information, please contact the Press Office on [REDACTED] or email us at [REDACTED][@conservatives.com](mailto:[REDACTED]@conservatives.com).

## Notes to Editors

**Summary:** A future Conservative government will introduce mandatory National Service for every 18-year-old, to be spent in a competitive, full-time military commission or spending one weekend a month volunteering in civil resilience.

**We have so much to be proud of in Britain, but we also need to be open and honest about the long-term challenges that our country and our society faces and one of the problems in our society is that we have generations of young people who don't have the opportunities they deserve.**

- **The Covid pandemic showed the value of civic service to individuals and our country as a whole – while national service is a major change in the way our country works, it is completely essential.** During Covid, millions of people contributed as NHS responders, vaccinators, and volunteers. Our vision of a more secure country is one where we rediscover that national spirit. Only by nurturing our shared culture and fostering a sense of duty can we preserve our nation and our values for decades to come. This is an investment in both the character of young people and our security.
- **We want to ensure young people don't waste their best years out of work or in lives of crime.** Research shows that volunteering and community service increases social responsibility and cuts criminality. National service will play an important role in making sure young people not in education, employment, or training, and young people who are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, especially for gang and knife crime, are diverted away from lives of unemployment and crime.
- **Across Europe, other countries are taking steps to shore up their civic resilience and defence with models of national service.** Sweden, Norway, and Denmark already have recently reintroduced modern forms of national service. President Macron in France has announced *Service National Universal* – a one-month residential placement for all 16-year-olds followed by 3 months part-time voluntary service – which will be mandatory when rolled out fully.

**We have a clear plan, taking bold action to introduce National Service for every 18-year-old.**

*Young people will be able to CHOOSE between:*

- **Applying for a competitive, full-time military commission over 12 months in the armed forces or UK cyber defence,** where young people will learn and take part in logistics, cyber security, procurement or civil response operations. This placement will be selective, so that our world leading armed forces recruit and train the brightest and best.
- **Volunteering for one weekend per month (25 days per year) in a civic role,** where they can choose between roles in our communities such as:
  - o Local infrastructure: supporting flood defences and communities during natural disasters
  - o NHS: collecting and delivering food; essential items; prescriptions and other support roles.
  - o Fire services: helping to organise and promote fire safety messaging; distributing fire safety advice
  - o Charity work: volunteering first aid training, ambulance volunteer, wheelchair volunteer, lifeguard, shore crew.
  - o Search and rescue: non-mountain based volunteering opportunities; foot patrols.
  - o Other voluntary roles to be considered by the Royal Commission we will establish.

*We will do this by:*

- **Setting up a Royal Commission to design national service, working with the military and civic society.** The Commission will bring forward a proposal on how to make sure the first pilot is open for applications in September 2025, and we will introduce a new National Service Act to ensure that every 18-year-old will be required to do either military or civic national service by the end of the next Parliament.
- **Reinventing national service will give young people valuable life skills, make our country more secure, and build a stronger national culture.** Young people will receive best-in-class training in critical skill sets for the economy, from cyber to civil engineering to leadership. It will make our country more secure by diverting young people away from crime and unemployment, and training new generations to support their community and our security. And this will build a stronger national culture, where everyone shares a commitment to improving our country, and everyone shares in a sense of belonging.

### **International examples**

**We have seen in recent years how, across the European continent, other countries have taken steps to shore up their national service models:**

- o In 2017, **Sweden** reintroduced a selective model, with 18-year-olds mandated to complete an electronic aptitude test and physical evaluation, with the highest ranked candidates called up for military service. Earlier this year, the Government announced plans to create a new Civilian Defence Service, supporting first-responder agencies and the national grid. (*SDCAA*, accessed 25 May 2024, [link](#); *The Times*, 1 April 2024, [link](#)).
- o **Denmark** intends to reform their national service, including conscripting women, increasing the length of service from 4 to 11 months, increasing the number of conscripts and overall defence spending (*BBC News*, 13 March 2024, [link](#)).
- o **President Macron in France has announced the intention to make *Service National Universel* mandatory** - a one month residential one-month residential placement for all 16-year-olds focused on civic culture and cohesion, followed by 3 months part-time voluntary service (*Politico*, 17 January 2024, [link](#)).
- o In 2015, **Lithuania** reintroduced a new selective model of national service, whereby all 18-23-year-olds (irrespective of residence or dual-nationality) are eligible to be conscripted via an electronic lottery for 9 months military service each year (*Karys.LT*, 3 June 2022, [link](#)).
- o In April 2024 **Norway** announced their intention to increase their conscript numbers from 9,000 to 13,500 (*Euroactiv*, 3 April 2024, [link](#)).

### **Funding**

When fully rolled out, National Service will cost £2.5 billion a year by 2029/30. This will fund 30,000 selective, full-time military placements in our armed forces, as well as the training costs for every other 18-year-old to do national service in their community. We will scale up this funding over the Parliament, starting with funding for the military placements starting from September 2025.

Of the full funding envelope, £1 billion of this will be funded through our plan to raise an additional £6 billion a year by the end of the next Parliament from cracking down on tax avoidance and evasion. The remaining £1.5 billion will be paid for using funding previously used for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). We will extend the UKSPF for three years. During this time, it will be allocated across the Union on the same basis as before. From 2028/29 onwards, the UKSPF will be diverted into National Service and the Royal Commission will be tasked with ensuring an equitable spread of spending across the UK.

### ***Tax avoidance and evasion package:***

- We will **raise at least £6 billion a year by the end of the Parliament** by cracking down on aggressive tax avoidance and evasion, improving tax compliance and closing the tax gap.
- Since 2010 we have introduced over 200 measures, including 40 since 2021, to tackle tax non-compliance. In total, the OBR has scored these measures as raising £95 billion across the forecast – £6.7 billion for each year we've have been in government. As a result, we have delivered a long-term reduction in the tax gap from 7.5 per cent under Labour in 2005-06, to 4.8 per cent in 2021-22. (*BBC News*, 9 April 2024, [link](#); HM Treasury, *Seizing The Opportunity: Delivering Efficiency For The Public*, March 2024, paragraph 1.20, [link](#); Analysis of each fiscal event scorecard since 2010; HMRC, Press Release, 22 June 2023, [link](#)).
- Despite the significant progress we have made since 2010, Covid brought new challenges because of the enormous amount of resource required in HMRC to deliver our financial support schemes. Since the pandemic the “compliance yield”, which measures the effectiveness of HMRC’s compliance and enforcement activities, has been 1 percentage point below the average over the five years prior to Covid. In addition, the unpaid tax liabilities owed by the taxpayer has risen from £14 billion to £44 billion (HoC Committee of Public Accounts, *HMRC Performance in 2022-23*, 21 February 2024, [link](#); National Audit Office, Report on HMRC 2022-23 Accounts, 7 July 2023, page R7, [link](#)).
- That’s why we are committing to raise at least an additional £6 billion a year by the end of the next Parliament, by clamping down on tax avoidance and evasion. This is a cautious assumption. Since 2010 the OBR has scored £94.8 billion of revenue raisers through Tackling the Tax Gap measures at fiscal events, averaging **£6.7 billion** for each of the 14 years. We will do this by:
- **Hiring additional HMRC staff.** It is estimated that an extra pound spent on compliance can bring in as much as £9 or, in some cases, £18 in additional tax revenues (Public Accounts Ctte, *HMRC Performance in 2021-22*, 11 January 2023, [link](#); Commons Treasury Ctte, Oral Evidence: The Work of HMRC (HC 783), 30 Nov 2022, [link](#)).
- **Investing in labour-saving technology such as artificial intelligence**, so that HMRC staff can spend less time on paperwork and administration and more time enforcing the law. This builds on the significant investment we have made in this Parliament into HMRC enhancing its digital services in this Parliament, with over £136 million invested at the 2021 Spending Review (Hansard, 13 May 2024, *WMS S456*, [link](#)).
- **Focussing particularly on problem issues like umbrella companies** (which can deceive independent contractors into underpaying their tax) and regulation of the tax advice market and registration of agents (so that we can go after unscrupulous advisers who lure law-abiding taxpayers into illegal evasion schemes).
- **According to the head of the NAO, the government could raise an additional £6 billion a year by cracking down on fraud, error and tax evasion** (*The Financial Times*, 16 January 2024, [link](#)).
- **The OBR says that ongoing digitisation of the tax system and reduction of the use of cash means there is potential to push down the tax gap further.** It estimates that if the tax gap as a share of GDP fell by 0.3 per cent - just half of the typical decrease between 2013-14 and 2017-18 – tax receipts would rise by £8.4 billion a year. By

extension, a 1 per cent fall would yield £28 billion a year (Office for Budget Responsibility, *The fiscal implications of tax gaps*, March 2024, [link](#))

- **Simply taking the compliance yield – the revenue generated from HMRC’s tax compliance activities – back to its pre-Covid levels would raise an additional £9.2 billion per year.** In 2021-22 and 2022-23, the most recent years for which data is available, this compliance yield stood at 4.2 per cent of total revenue – 1.0 per cent below the average over the five years prior to the pandemic (National Audit Office, Report on HMRC 2022-23 Accounts, 7 July 2023, paragraphs 4 and 6, [link](#)). Total revenues for 2022-23 were £814 billion. We assume a 12.6 per cent increase for 2025-26, in keeping with the expected increase in nominal GDP as per the OBR’s latest forecast (EFO Mar-24, table A.3).  $814 \times 1.126 \times 0.01 = 9.2$