

# The facts & the fixes: Public services

**In brief:** We rely on public services throughout our lives to educate our children, to get us to work and to care for our loved ones. In recent years public spending cuts and privatisation have led to falling standards and restricted access to vital services.



## What can we do to improve our public services?

Public services are essential to our lives from cradle to grave, but schools and hospitals are currently underfunded and in a state of crisis. Here are seven policy fixes for improving our public services.

**1 — Cuts to essential public services have to stop.** Cuts to services are a political choice, and the NHS, social care and education are in crisis. Stopping cuts is the first step to saving the public services we and our loved ones rely on.

**2 — Universal provision of high quality childcare.** We need publicly funded childcare to cap family expenditure, to increase training standards, and to ensure better working conditions for childcare workers. This would include a living wage, stable contract hours and pay progression opportunities.

**3 — The government must abandon their grammar school project.** Grammar schools don't improve social mobility and don't reduce inequality. Funding earmarked for this project would be far better spent on a National Education Service that would reduce inequality.

**4 — A publicly funded National Education Service for lifelong education.** In today's job market, adults need to develop new skills throughout their lives, and need educational opportunities from cradle to grave. Making early years education available to all would also reduce inequality in attainment between children of different backgrounds when they reach primary school.

**5 — Reintroduce bursaries for student healthcare professionals.** To avoid a critical shortage of essential workers in the NHS, the government must bring back bursaries. Healthcare students are expected to work full time for long periods as part of their training, and can't rely on employment elsewhere during their studies.

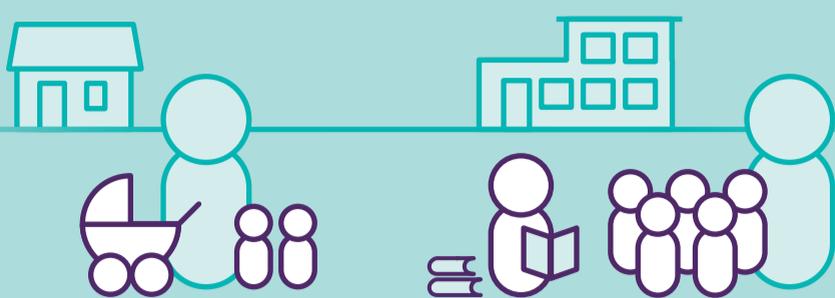
**6 — Privatisation has failed – it's time to renationalise our public services.** Rail privatisation has failed. It costs us more to run our trains, ticket prices are rising faster than wages, and jobs have been lost. Privatisation of the NHS has also increased dramatically, with private companies awarded £3.5bn in NHS contracts in 2014–2015 – 40% more than the previous four years combined.<sup>1</sup> Private companies are therefore making a profit while A&E departments are closing due to lack of funding. The government needs to act to stop profiteering in our public services.

**7 — A new focus on mental health.** Alongside adequate funding for mental health services, we need a government-led strategy to coordinate employers, trade unions and community groups in raising awareness of mental health issues. We also need to encourage employers to take proactive steps to tackle mental health problems in the workplace.

### References

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Public investment pays huge dividends. Investing in universal childcare, paid parental leave and targeted interventions could save the UK £1.5tn in the long term by addressing the underlying causes of crime, mental health problems and drug abuse.<sup>2</sup>



There are 21,660 midwives working in NHS England<sup>3</sup> – an estimated shortage of 3,500.<sup>4</sup> A third of UK maternity units closed temporarily last year because they couldn't cope with demand.<sup>5</sup>



Sure Start centres lead to better child development outcomes and improved life satisfaction for lone parents.<sup>6</sup> Over 350 centres have closed since 2010, and only eight new centres have opened.<sup>7</sup>



99% of schools will have per pupil funding cut by 2020.<sup>8</sup>



There was a 24% cut to the adult education budget in 2015/16. This is on top of a 35% reduction since 2009.<sup>9</sup>



Students on healthcare courses have had grants cut, despite working full time as a course requirement. There was a 23% drop in applications for nursing courses this year (the first with no bursaries).<sup>10</sup>



Travel to work is a major expense. Rail fares have risen by 25% since 2010 – at double the speed of wages – while average weekly earnings have risen by only 12%. £222m was paid out to private rail company shareholders in 2015 alone.<sup>11</sup>



Mental health service budgets were cut by 8% between 2010 and 2015. This is the equivalent of stripping £598m from their budgets.<sup>13</sup>



Due to cuts to social care funding, four in five councils can't cope with demand for elderly care.<sup>12</sup>



NHS waiting time targets for non-emergency operations were effectively abandoned in March 2017. Charities have warned this will leave elderly patients waiting for operations in pain and discomfort.<sup>14</sup>

