

Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Youth employment and the Kickstart Scheme in Wales](#), HC 1006

Thursday 10 December 2020

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Stephen Crabb (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Simon Baynes; Geraint Davies; Ruth Jones; Ben Lake; Rob Roberts; Beth Winter.

Questions 1 - 41

Witnesses

[I](#): Ben Cottam, Head of External Affairs, Federation of Small Businesses Wales; Philip Jones, Director, Prince's Trust Cymru; and Richard Rigby, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Prince's Trust.

[II](#): Mims Davies MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Employment), Department for Work and Pensions; Katie Farrington, Director, Universal Credit and Employment Policy, Department for Work and Pensions; John-Paul Marks, Director General for Work and Health Services, Department for Work and Pensions; and Sarah Pearson, Universal Credit Area Director, Work and Health Services Wales and National Employer and Partnership Team, Department for Work and Pensions.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ben Cottam, Philip Jones and Richard Rigby.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this session of the Welsh Affairs Committee, where we are looking at youth unemployment in Wales, specifically the proposed Kickstart Scheme and how that will be implemented in Wales. We have two panels this morning. On the first panel we have Ben Cottam from the Federation of Small Businesses in Wales, Philip Jones, Director of Prince's Trust Cymru, and Richard Rigby, who is Head of Policy and Public Affairs for the Prince's Trust. On the second panel we will have the Minister and civil servants from the Department of Work and Pensions.

I will start off with a few general questions before bringing colleagues in with more specific questions. If I can remind everyone to be as concise as possible in our questions and answers and that will enable us to cover all of the ground that we want to. I will start by asking each of the panellists to give us a sense of what they and their organisations are seeing right now in Wales in terms of trends in youth unemployment. What was the situation before the pandemic? How has the pandemic changed the youth employment situation in Wales? Ben, from Federation of Small Businesses, if you would like to kick off.

Ben Cottam: I am very grateful for the opportunity to chat to you this morning. Before the pandemic, we had a landscape where there was good interaction between the mechanisms of Government and of organisations like FE colleges and businesses and a raft of support schemes to try to encourage employers to engage with younger people—both qualified and less well-qualified—to try to help them into an employment opportunity. Even at that point, however, we would have said that this work was not particularly as well joined up as it possibly could have been. One of the challenges for businesses in this is navigating that and understanding that network of support that is available.

Since the pandemic, obviously businesses find themselves in a very precarious position, particularly in sectors such as retail, hospitality and tourism, where we know that the pandemic has hit disproportionately. But also those are sectors in which we know that younger people particularly are exposed to some of their first opportunities in employment.

The job retention scheme and extension of that has been very welcome. It has created a huge safety net not only for employees, but also employers in their ability to continue to employ and buy them a bit of space in the businesses. However, there is concern going forward. We do not know how long and how deep the impact of the pandemic is going to be. Smaller businesses particularly find themselves under particular strain, not least because of their capacity to deal with human resource issues, but also we know that individual business owners are struggling



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with the threat to the future of some of their employees, many of whom they will be very close to.

It is a very difficult picture at the moment. We know from our own research work though that employers are holding off to the very last minute to make the move to make people redundant. They are well aware not only of their obligation to employees, but also the need to retain that capacity for growth whenever that opportunity might come.

- Q2 **Chair:** Thank you, Ben. Before bringing in the Prince's Trust, can I follow up on that answer? You have talked about the challenges facing businesses. Right now many of them are working under capacity and are facing difficult decisions themselves about their own workforce. Obviously there are large numbers of people still on furlough. Among the members of the FSB in Wales, is your sense that there is the capacity at the moment for businesses to participate in the Kickstart Scheme and make a contribution to cutting youth unemployment? Are businesses in Wales in a situation where they can participate effectively?

Ben Cottam: When the scheme was announced we had a welcome level of interest from employers, albeit that was in the summer. The sentiment that came through when we spoke to employers was this sense of wanting to play a part. We are well aware of the threat of joblessness and the threat of maintained joblessness for young people. Our members felt that, they are in and of their communities, they see that around them. There is a real sense of being part of a solution.

However, there is a real problem with capacity. Employers do not know where they are with existing employees so there is a challenge in creating new roles within their businesses to bring new employees into those experiential opportunities. It is a mixed picture at the moment. It is difficult to know where businesses are now. However, FSB had approval—along with Adecco Working Ventures—on Monday this week from DWP for our own gateway and we have had 700 employers come forward with opportunities. That is a UK figure; I have not been able to extract the Welsh figure in time for this Committee. But that is an indication that employers are in a space where they want to play into this, notwithstanding the challenges that they face with the business landscape at the moment.

- Q3 **Chair:** Philip Jones, obviously Prince's Trust has been working right at the sharp end of youth unemployment in Wales for many years. How concerned are you at the moment about the youth unemployment picture in Wales?

Philip Jones: The headline is that we are very concerned about the statistics that are out there, from one hand the peak of furlough—which I think was around 400,000 at one stage in Wales, and the most recent statistic I have is 130,000 furloughed; 86,000 of those are in full-time—and how that then transfers into long-term unemployed. A recent statistic I saw was somewhere between 29,000 and 67,000 young people could



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become long-term unemployed as a result of this. We are concerned and it is an additional layer to those young people who we work with who are already finding it difficult to get into the job market.

Just to follow on from Ben's comment and your follow-on question about how well companies are prepared and willing to engage in the Kickstart Scheme, I would look at it from two points of view. First, I absolutely welcome the Kickstart Scheme and employers would absolutely take on the opportunity for salaries to be paid over a period of time. We also need to look at the development of the young people themselves and their mentoring. Also the development of the businesses so they can not only just give a job to a young person and pay their salary, but also develop their employment and wider life skills so that they can become long-term employed as opposed to just a stopgap measure.

Richard Rigby: Just across the UK—the Prince's Trust works right across the UK, for clarity—60% of the drop in employment so far has been on that 16 to 24 age group, so it is very disproportionate. That is 60% on 16% of the working-age population. There is a bit of a double whammy there because not only are young people most likely to have lost a job due to the current situation, they are also least likely to have found a new one. Only one-third of those who have lost a job since February have managed to find a new one. If you look at the mid-30s to mid-40s age group, almost two-thirds of that age group have managed to find a new job, but only one-third of the 16 to 24s.

Q4 Tonia Antoniazzi: Following on from Phil's answer, I would like to say at the beginning of my questions to the Prince's Trust that I worked it out quickly that 30 years ago I completed a 12-week scheme with the Prince's Trust. I know that the lifelong learning and the diverse group of people that was put together to work together, when you were talking about lifelong skills and developing employment skills, it was key to those people in that group, including myself. I would like to thank you for all the work that you have done for over 30 years. It has been absolutely brilliant.

Leading on then from Phil's answer, how confident are you that the Kickstart placements will lead to sustained employment for young people? You spoke quite positively about it. Do you think that a six-month placement is long enough to have that impact?

Richard Rigby: First, I am delighted, it is always wonderful when you hear someone who has been helped by the Prince's Trust. You are the embodiment of the virtuous circle that HRH had when he set up the trust 45 years ago.

There is an external uncontrollable that will influence the answer to your question and that is the pace at which the economy picks up, therefore the degree to which businesses can then pick up on their trade to the point where they can continue their employment of that young person or group of young people beyond the life of the Kickstart Scheme.



The other is the degree to which those young people in the companies perform as a partnership during the Kickstart process and the degree to which they see it as a path towards a long-term process. One of the things that I have been enthused by, although there is lots of worry out there, is the ambition, the endeavour and the get up and go of young people that we see every day. Just as one example, one of the programmes we run is to do with self-employment, the Exploring Enterprise Programme. We have seen a 64% increase year on year of young people looking to become self-employed and therefore coming to us for help to set up their business.

I spoke yesterday with a young lady called Abi Chamberlain, who set up the Welsh Luxury Hamper Co. I would recommend it to all of you for Christmas presents. This is a classic example of a young lady who has come from her individual difficulties and is now contributing to the Welsh economy as an entrepreneur. We would like to scale up those programmes but of course we would be reliant on partnership with UKGov, Welsh Government and the private sector to do that. I see there is hope out there based on the behaviours we see of young people who are desperate not just to get a job, but to seek betterment for themselves and lives in general.

Q5 Tonia Antoniazzi: That is positive because diversification and the ability to think outside the box is a very important life skill, and looking forward and being positive. You have mentioned UKGov and Welsh Government. What further support is needed in addition to Kickstart specifically to ensure these placements lead to sustained employment for young people in Wales?

Philip Jones: The Welsh Government have a number of schemes within their Prosperity for All agenda, which I am sure you will be wholly aware of. Organisations like us would always want to see as much joined-upness between schemes within the devolved area, within Wales, but also between UKGov and Welsh Government as well.

I see there is great complementarity between what Kickstart is looking to achieve and what Welsh Government have as part of their agenda. I would urge Committee members and anyone to work towards triangulating the efforts of organisations like us, who would like to scale up but are dependent on long-term sustainable, financial partnership with public and private sector so that we can reach out not only to the headline statistics, but also those geographic areas, the North Wales belt, the Valleys area, for example, who are horrendously hit with the virus at the moment as well as having the economic impact. The Cardiff capital city region, the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, all those bodies, we have an opportunity to join up at a strategic level so that the tactical impact can be greater.

Tonia Antoniazzi: I do not know if Richard wants to make a comment on any of that.



Richard Rigby: On the sustainable outcomes, the programme is going to fulfil a number of different purposes. One is hopefully creating 250,000 new jobs across the UK, which would not otherwise have existed, albeit for a six-month period. Then there is filling these CVs, which are probably the most blank CVs at the moment, and that is where the programme should be targeted. Also getting more businesses involved and engaged in investing in the next generation. That could be a lasting legacy from the programme, as well as sustainable job outcomes.

Q6 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** What groups of young people are most in need of these placements in Wales? Have you identified particular groups?

Philip Jones: They are the same groups that we specifically target with our work. Although we do not have an eligibility criteria, we specifically go out using partnerships with DWP—who work with us very well, incidentally—to ensure those that are hardest to reach, are longer-term unemployed and we feel have lower aspiration levels. If you have greater aspiration you are more likely to find yourself successful in getting into employment. There are issues to do with minority groups that we need to be careful of as well. The Welsh Government are particularly looking at that.

I do not think there is any change. If I could give a very brief analogy, we had a relative wave of prosperity in the last few years that swept along in its wave very many people into jobs, but they were still stuck on the rocks, some barnacles that were hard to budge into employment. Those still need to be our emphasis because there is huge potential in those groups. Every one of those young people is brimming with potential, but we need to continue to make extra effort, not just for the nudge into work cohort, but for those for whom the journey is longer.

Q7 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** That is interesting because you have said you are in a good relationship with the DWP to target the right young people. You talked about the barnacles, but how will you get into those groups? What strategies are you putting in place to get to them? Are they effective? Do you feel like you are getting there?

Philip Jones: Yes, we are. For example, at the start of this business year, from a trust perspective in Wales, we have increased by about 1,000 the number of young people that we are working with or would have worked with by the end of the year. We have specifically gone out to partnerships, with schools, for example, with jobcentres and with other youth organisations to ensure that we are reaching far into the shadows of society where many young people are desperate to move out of and into gainful employment. Not only to achieve that employment outcome, but also to build their life skills and their overall contribution to society. As an organisation individually we are specifically marketing into those areas.

My message both for UKGov and Welsh Government indirectly is where there is opportunity for greater partnership between us and the public



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sector we absolutely are stood by and have proposals ready to allow us to scale up and to help those people that I have just described.

Richard Rigby: The targeting of Kickstart is a very important point. The opportunities should be going to those who are least likely to secure work at the moment. On Jobcentre Plus, the DWP might tell you later that it provided work coaches with a list of indicators that will enable those work coaches to make the best assessment of who is most at risk of long-term unemployment. That is something—and we are also a member of a youth employment group set up in response to the Covid-19 pandemic—that should be kept under constant review. If we find, for example, there are highly qualified young people with bags of experience ending up on Kickstart then it needs to be reviewed and the policy needs to change to get even tighter eligibility.

Also, as the labour market develops next year, hopefully we might see full-time vacancies begin to pick up. If that is the case, then it will call for an even tighter focus on Kickstart reaching those who are unlikely to secure employment.

Q8 **Beth Winter:** I am going to focus on the business experience and perspective. Ben, could you give us your assessment of the level of participation among Welsh businesses in the Kickstart Scheme so far? More specifically, to what extent do you think that those sectors that have been hardest hit by the pandemic in Wales have and will be able to make the most of the Kickstart placements?

Ben Cottam: One of the challenges at the moment is awareness and the bandwidth for communicating with businesses the opportunity of participating in Kickstart. Initially when Kickstart was announced, and certainly when we had our engagement with our membership in September about our own involvement in it, there was a real level of interest and it was pleasing to see. We are keen to see a plurality of intermediaries across Wales so that businesses, no matter what their size, no matter what their circumstance, sector or geography, have the opportunity to engage with Kickstart and provide those opportunities to younger people.

One of the challenges for businesses, particularly in those sectors that I mentioned earlier, is they are the sectors that are most affected by the stop/start nature of some of the restrictions that have been implemented in Wales. Obviously a hospitality business four weeks ago would not necessarily have known that they were going to be affected by the hospitality restrictions that we now see in place in Wales. That is a response to obviously a pandemic. It is unpredictable. However, that unpredictability means that there is a danger that businesses opt for safety rather than opt for that opportunity of engaging.

We cannot guarantee the stability of that environment. The pandemic is unpredictable by its nature. However, what we need to do is capitalise on that sentiment that is expressed by smaller businesses about providing



opportunities and making sure that those young people within their communities do not fall through the net into extended unemployment. But it is a challenging landscape to get through to businesses at the moment. Businesses' bandwidth is confined to such an extent that it is difficult to engage them on issues around the end of the transition. They are having so many different things, there are so many different issues that we want to talk to businesses about, that we want to communicate with them on, but the unpredictable nature of the landscape is getting in the way of that. The only thing we can do is persevere and also identify the champions within the business community, those that can talk to other businesses about the opportunities that there would definitely be in engaging with Kickstart.

It is easy to look at a scheme like Kickstart as the benevolence of Government or the benevolence of employers. I have been involved with the Career Ready programme from Cardiff and Vale College for probably about 10 or 12 years now. As part of that, I mentor young people within this, 16 to 19 years old, and what I am struck by every single time I meet one of those young people is what they teach me, the experiences that they bring that I do not have, their picture on the world that I cannot perceive and I cannot see. I would say to all employers, do not underestimate the value of that perspective and what that can do for your business and your own learning.

Q9 Beth Winter: How well has the DWP responded to some of the criticism about the Kickstart Scheme being difficult for small businesses to be able to access?

Ben Cottam: Early on we had real concern on the announcement of Kickstart that the 30-role tier negated out effectively the majority of the business community. To be fair to DWP, there was a lot of noise about that concern. From FSB's perspective, we were able to work with them. We undertook some focus group work to ascertain what a solution might be that was relevant for smaller businesses. Obviously now we have a solution that means not only that smaller businesses have a gateway into this scheme, but obviously crucially that sole traders, the very smallest businesses, have an opportunity to participate in this scheme. That is going to be important where we look at the geographical spread of the opportunity.

Particularly—not exclusively—in rural areas you have a high proportion of sole traders and we need to galvanise those sole traders. We need to bring them to this scheme to make sure that where the Kickstart opportunities arise they are not simply in those areas of high business density, that the geography is not a boundary to getting businesses involved. That is something that FSB is quite passionate about, given obviously the spread of our membership and the high number of sole traders that we represent.

The frustration has been the length of time from announcement to where we are now, where we have a solution and we have a real depth of



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intermediaries. That aside, DWP has responded to those challenges, to those charges, and I hope we can, now we have those fixes in place, get out into the marketplace and have those conversations with businesses.

- Q10 **Beth Winter:** Turning to Phil and Richard, there has been quite a bit of criticism and concern about the confinement of the eligibility for the scheme to young people on universal credit. What are your views on that decision to only open the scheme to those young people and how it impacts on the accessibility of the placements to young people throughout Wales?

Philip Jones: I would of course want any scheme such as this to be open to the widest possible audience. I am not completely au fait as to the technical rationale as to why it has been limited to universal credit, so I will leave DWP colleagues to answer that. But as a matter of principle, we would always want to have the wider spread, but also to ensure that we prioritise where we can to those young people who are most dislocated, dislocated geographically from the job opportunity, which is broadly an infrastructure issue, but also dislocated in terms of their motivational start point. That is where, from a start point, we should be concentrating our efforts. Of course many of those will be universal credit claimants.

Richard Rigby: The sad reality is that there are far too many young people on universal credit. There is no shortage of people on universal credit who would love to have a Kickstart placement. We are reporting double between March and May and it has barely budged since, so you can understand why the DWP want to concentrate, at least initially, on those on universal credit. We should certainly explore broadening, if we can.

- Q11 **Ruth Jones:** My first question is to Ben. I am looking at how in FSB you balance the needs of the business against the need to ensure the quality placements for the young people. You have alluded to some already, but is there anything else you would like to highlight there?

Ben Cottam: Businesses particularly at the moment will have to consider in their capacity what they can deliver into the scheme. It is important that we also see that the Kickstarters have a contribution to make to the development of the business, notwithstanding the bandwidth issue that I mentioned.

The experience itself and the quality of the experience does depend, to a larger extent, on having a very clear understanding on the part of the business about what they are offering and ensuring that they understand they are there also along the way, along the period of the six-month placement, to undertake work on improving employability. A lot of it will come down to the support that is on offer, whether it be from DWP or from intermediaries, from our own partnership, for instance, our offering to businesses a wraparound service that means that Adecco Working Ventures will work with the employer to deliver in those employability skills.



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Businesses have to be very clear about what this is and what this is not. This is a scheme that is aimed at those who are at most risk of extended unemployment and possibly furthest otherwise from the jobs market. They have to be clear that what they are offering as an employer fits that criteria and fits that opportunity.

There are any number of employability schemes out there within the economy at the moment. Going back to Phil's point earlier, the need for Welsh Government and UK Government to join up on these schemes has never been more important. I have a real concern that beyond the Kickstart experience there is a gap between this intervention and some of the other support that might be available, for instance, through Welsh Government. I went on the UK Government Kickstart website and when it talks about apprenticeships, for instance, it does not link through to apprenticeships in Wales. It does not link through to the devolved nations offering on apprenticeships. That will confuse businesses. I always say, "I should not expect my members to account for the wiring of the different governance structures of the UK".

It is important employers understand from the very beginning whether they have the willingness or the interest of offering a full-time vacancy beyond Kickstart or whether they can work with the partners, with the intermediaries or with DWP to help guide a young person to another opportunity, which may be an apprenticeship. But we can only give hard-pressed employers so much of that job to do. It is important that Government and Departments join up and that we have a long-term view, so it is not just this six months' placement. At the very beginning of that we are thinking, "What are the opportunities for this young person beyond that six-month placement?" otherwise we are going to see a series of missed opportunities. The problem is that those missed opportunities are people.

Q12 Ruth Jones: That is very helpful. You have highlighted the gaps in the system at the moment. If I can turn to Phil and Richard, how confident are you that the placements that are on offer or that are being offered will meet the expectations in terms of quality but also the actual experiences, it is not just a series of disjointed things but it is a joined-up experience for the young people?

Philip Jones: It is a very good question. For example, we are working with Tesco and Pets at Home right now on specific Kickstart Schemes, so we are working in partnership with them to ensure the quality as well as the efficacy of the process. You are absolutely right, we need to ensure that in any relationship, whether it is through an intermediary like us or direct with those prospective employers, that it is joined up and not seen in isolation. Again, it refers back to Ben's point about complementarity between devolved and UK national Government, but also between partners like ourselves. We have a responsibility as well to ensure that both the journey prior to employment, during the employment and,



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crucially, after that initial employment phase is managed and those young people are mentored and developed as a whole.

As well as the Kickstart Scheme, just to give you two examples, in the last two weeks we have finished two programmes with Marks & Spencer and Admiral in Wales where 24 young people are in employment. One of the great assets of that scheme, which I would perhaps want to see spilled over into Kickstart, is the mentoring that follows at the end of that employment placement through volunteers or with our staff. There is a longer journey over and above the actual Kickstart placement.

Richard Rigby: No matter how well-prepared each of us have been ahead of a new job, you are never really prepared for that first day at work. It is especially the case if you are a young person who has probably had an extended period out of employment. To give you an idea, the Prince's Trust, when we work with these employers—and it is important and welcome that the Government have put some money behind the employability support as part of the Kickstart Scheme; that has enabled this to happen—we will be meeting young people, helping them through the interview process, making sure they feel comfortable and helping them realise their strengths.

They will receive monthly sessions with a youth worker throughout their placement. We will put on employability workshops, aspirational career talks, support for those who feel like they might drop out of the scheme. Then towards the end of the programme, if it looks like they are not going to secure sustained employment with that employer, we will be looking to see how we can broker other opportunities for them. That is possible because of the money that the Government have put in to that; it is £1,500 that employers or gateways get.

I saw a report from Barnardo's yesterday, which talked about there potentially being a Kickstart premium, so more than £1,500. They were talking about care leavers, those who have been homeless or have a disability. You could have potentially a larger amount of money to provide even more support for those particular groups and that warrants consideration.

Q13 **Rob Roberts:** Thank you to the panel for giving up their time this morning. I am interested in the rurality effect and I am wondering how confident you are that this Kickstart Scheme will operate effectively in the more rural areas. As a supplementary to that, whether you think there are currently sufficient gateway opportunities to support the take-up of the scheme in rural Wales.

Ben Cottam: The rurality issue is one that does concern me. If you look at where we are at the moment, the networks that would normally support flagging up opportunities of any kind, let alone this, are not all firing on full cylinders because of the pandemic. Businesses are finding it difficult to communicate with each other, to get together. It is very difficult for the skills infrastructure in FE, for instance, to communicate



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with business. That is, by nature, less well-developed in rural areas at the best of times. We have to work harder in rural areas to make sure that employers not only are aware of the opportunity but are properly supported. I do have a concern, but being aware of that concern means that we can start to figure out how we crack that nut.

There is a danger that where the networks are working well they are either at scale, such as FSB—we have been working virtually now for eight and a half months—or they are well-capitalised, they are well-funded networks. A lot of those happen to be in more urban areas. For those business networks in more rural areas there are fewer opportunities to talk about these kinds of things and for FE colleges and others to talk to businesses.

Part of the answer for this is, as I mentioned, we now have an opportunity to engage sole traders. We should put a lot of effort into communicating with those sole traders, for many of whom this might be the first time they have ever undertaken anything like this. But it engages a positive conversation in some of those rural areas about what businesses, even the smallest businesses, can deliver into this.

In terms of the gateway and the intermediaries, there are a lot of them and that is welcome. From the very start, notwithstanding the fact that FSB has entered into a partnership to be an intermediary, we wanted to make sure that there was a depth and breadth of different providers and partners. Of course they are running the scheme in very different ways with different levels of support. It does require businesses to discriminate between them, to understand what that is. No two support packages are very much the same, but it is important that employers do have choice in that because there will be some of those providers in say rural areas, which are very confined and well-known within that context and will be trusted voices in those areas. It is important that where that trust is there that employers can capitalise on it.

It is very early. I do not want to cast a pall on the operation of Kickstart in rural areas. I am talking about fears I have rather than realities, as we see them. Part of the problem right now is the lack of data. We are in very early days. As I say, being aware of the challenges that exist in rural areas—and these challenges exist at every other time as well—from the start means that maybe we can tilt the scheme proportionately towards those rural areas to try harder in those rural areas to communicate with businesses and make sure they have the link up with intermediaries.

Rob Roberts: Fabulous. I noted a lot of nodding from Philip there. Let's follow on.

Philip Jones: Thank you, Rob. Coming from Brecon, where I am broadcasting from today, I completely get that question. One of the things we have learnt over the last few months in the trust is that by converting every one of our programmes to a blended programme, which means that we can deliver it face-to-face and online, we have managed



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to reach more young people from rural areas than we did before. There are young entrepreneurs from rural areas now who are on our programmes who perhaps would not have taken the train down into Cardiff or Swansea or up to Wrexham, for example, for a programme.

In every programme that we will do on Kickstart, we have designed in online delivery to maximise that opportunity for young people coming from rural areas. It does not completely solve that challenge and so we need to ensure all of us, in every part of this challenge, are communicating clearly to young people in rural areas so they understand there is an opportunity to engage.

I will refer you back to a previous remark I made about that dangerous combination of geographic dislocation and motivational dislocation. Where those two combine, that gives us our greatest challenge. Infrastructure is part of the answer for the former part of dislocation, but you can surmount that challenge by effective communication and raising the aspirational and motivational levels of young people. Technology, I am delighted to say, plays an important part to ensure that we can reach young people in those rural areas.

Rob Roberts: Do you have anything specifically to add to that on rural locations, Richard, or I can move on?

Richard Rigby: Some of the partners we are already working with and their geographical spread, so Tesco with its Kickstart placements, they have looked to map those against high areas of youth unemployment, which is welcome, rather than not targeting at all. Pets at Home are looking at one placement per store, so they are trying to spread it around.

Q14 **Rob Roberts:** Following on from that, we will start with Richard on this one. To see how effective it has been, how should the Government be monitoring the impact of the scheme in Wales during the implementation? What kind of key indicators should they be using to monitor and evaluate the success of the scheme in general?

Richard Rigby: A lot of the initial evaluation will probably be looking at the process and how quickly businesses and young people are getting on to the programme. What is positive is how the Departments are looking to do the evaluation because it is not a policy that is set in stone until 2022. They are looking to evolve and constantly change it based on what they learn, but of course they need to get data in as quickly as possible.

I would want to see the demographics of the young people going on to the programme to make sure that we are seeing it go to those who will benefit most from the programme. Sustained on the programme: if there are lots of people dropping off in the second month of their placement then there is likely to be a problem. Those are the two initial measures I would look at. It is going to be next summer until we find out what the end product, after those six months, is going to be.



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Some of that they need to look at young people and whether they feel they have had a beneficial experience. Hopefully they do not flow back on to universal credit, but it is inevitable that some may. The jobs are not there necessarily to all lead to sustained employment with that employer, but we hope that from that experience, from a valuable six months with skills and experience, perhaps most importantly a boost in confidence, that will enable them to go on to the next job.

Q15 Rob Roberts: Ben, what does “good” look like?

Ben Cottam: Good looks like employment at the end of the scheme, an employer who feels that not only have they contributed, but they benefited. There has to be a qualitative assessment both during the scheme and at the end of it as to how both the employer and employee have found it. Obviously we can look at the success of the process. I do not know the extent—it would be for colleagues from DWP—but understanding and tracking destination beyond it in the same way we do, for instance, with higher education is going to be important, that we understand the number of people that have had a satisfactory move into employment in that business, a movement into employment in another business or a move into another intervention, whether that be apprenticeships. I just bring back that concern that I have about the gap, the danger of young people falling between stools. We need to make a decision for how long we track that because it may be some time after that they gain an opportunity for an apprenticeship.

We need employers to be content with this scheme. We need employers to feel that they are and their business is gaining. Yes, employers want to contribute to this, but it is a very difficult time. It is a leap of faith for a lot of employers, particularly smaller employers, to engage with this scheme. We need to understand the satisfaction they have with this as an intervention, but also satisfaction they have obviously with the role and support of intermediaries. That is going to be important because of the breadth of intermediaries and the different ways in which they work. Different intermediaries are giving different levels of administrative responsibility to employers. We need to understand that process because the real benefit of this is where we get champions, where we get employers who can attest to this being a success and this being a worthwhile intervention.

My members will learn better from each other than they will from me. What I want to see is getting employer voices advocating to each other the need for people to get involved. That point about destination is going to be important to the evaluation and we need to understand how Kickstart has been successful over and above other types of intervention.

Q16 Rob Roberts: Finally, Philip, the key indicators for success in your opinion.

Philip Jones: This is one of the hardest and often unanswerable questions as to how do you measure the impact, both at a point in time



and into the future. There will be some longer-term measurements of success with regards to the raise in economic activity levels of young people, as opposed to just unemployment and employment figures. The performance of businesses will be another indicator because when you take a punt on a young person who perhaps would not have been your first choice, they teach you a lot. We always find with businesses that they become better businesses when they engage with young people in the way that we have described.

Thirdly is the feedback we get from our mentoring as a follow-on from these programmes, where we are engaged with young people not only to measure whether they are still in employment or moved on to other employment, but how they feel about themselves. This is one of the other less specified aims of all these schemes, not only the employed/unemployed statistic, but also the wellbeing, the mental fitness, the aspirational level, the overall feeling of wellbeing of young people as well as whether they are in a job or not, as crucial as that is.

Rob Roberts: Before we move on to the next one, we have a supplementary from Beth Winter, who wants to come in quickly.

Q17 **Beth Winter:** For me, it is crucial the scheme can be reformulated, adapted and changed. Looking back to what happened in the 1980s with some of the schemes, they just kept going and going without room for adaptation. Do you feel that is an integral purpose of the monitoring and evaluation and is that currently being considered?

Philip Jones: Yes, that principle of learning from experience and adapting programmes to a changing situation is absolutely vital. Nothing would please me more than the lessons from Kickstart being used in an integrated and joined-up way between UK national and devolved Government to ensure a longer-term pathway for young people, as opposed to just through this moment in time.

It is important that we take a moment in six months or a year's time to say, "What have we learnt? How can we adapt the existing programmes to many the Welsh Government have, for example, and how can we use organisations like us and others?" Let alone during this particular crisis, it is the confusion that young people often have because of the fact there are so many schemes out there and the routes to access those schemes can sometimes be difficult and confusing. That would be a good lesson hopefully that we can take in six months to a year's time.

Ben Cottam: What we need to also realise in evaluation is that if this is successful this will be the first time that many businesses have engaged in any of this activity, any of this kind of intervention. What we need to understand is beyond Kickstart, what the willingness is within the community to continue to do this. If Kickstart develops beyond this or if any other schemes are available we need to capture that willingness and that experience of employers to contribute, whether it be working with Prince's Trust or any other mechanism. It is important that we do not



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underestimate the value of capturing the experience of businesses and hooking that willingness.

- Q18 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** I know that Ben has spoken about this, but how well does the Kickstart Scheme align with the support already provided to young people in small businesses in Wales? Ben, you identified issues of gaps, apprenticeships and there not being any links. What more could be done to join up the support available with the UK Government and the devolved nations?

Ben Cottam: Mapping it is important. What we tend to find for businesses is they unfortunately get stuck in between. Quite often the UK Government does not reference Welsh Government support. Welsh Government support does not necessarily reference UK Government support. There is an element of duplication. The Kickstart Scheme is very similar to Jobs Growth Wales. The Welsh Government have announced a £40 million worth package of skills support, which is welcome. It is frustrating though to have to explain time and time again to businesses and FSB finds itself quite often in this position of saying unfortunately the reality is that quite often these things do not join up. That should not be something that we have to do and it should not be an expectation of employers that they have to spend inordinate amounts of times on mapping for themselves.

That challenge to Welsh and UK Governments on this is that we are at a time now where businesses find themselves a limited bandwidth. If we are going to capture this opportunity we need to make it as easy as possible to access. Not just Kickstart, but any skills intervention that might benefit their business but also might benefit not just a young person, but a person of any age. If it is not Kickstart, what is the appropriate intervention? I do not think that is easy to understand right now. If you go to the Kickstart website on the UK Government portion of the website, you will not get a real assessment as to if it is not Kickstart what is the appropriate intervention for your business or what can you offer.

My plea to Governments quite often is do the joining up. This is too important to do badly or to do inefficiently, both for businesses and for younger people. We know that infrastructure that engages, things like Careers Wales, which engages with business and is seen as go-to brands for businesses. They need to be aware. They need to do the joining-up themselves because it is very difficult to explain. It is a very complex landscape. If we can map in one place the support and make sure that even if it is a website that is linking through to appropriate support elsewhere, then that makes life a lot easier for smaller businesses.

- Q19 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Can I be cheeky then, Ben? You spoke about Careers Wales and linking together and mapping; where does that responsibility lie? Who has to sort it out?



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Ben Cottam: DWP, for instance, will have an interface with Welsh Government and DWP through Jobcentre Plus. I do not doubt it has a responsibility to link through to Welsh and UK Governments. Jobcentre Plus will be the interface with employers. It does rest, to some extent, with DWP to make sure that that is done. It seems a basic ask to make sure that the business-facing web portals that both Governments have refer across to each other. This is not a competition. The outcome of this, the intervention is one that should be shared by all.

But it is very difficult to explain to businesses, “We need to go to this website for this support, that website for that support”. I fear we are missing opportunities where businesses do not have the full picture of the opportunities available to them, whether they be from Welsh or UK Government. But there is a role for DWP in making sure that it can provide that link through because Jobcentre Plus will be a well-known and respected brand for both employers and job seekers.

Philip Jones: This is not a moment for divergence. Any opportunity we can take to ensure that there is complementary activity as well as complementary strategic intent—absolute joined-up strategic intent—because you want to get young people into jobs for gainful employment for the betterment of society. There is not a cigarette paper between the devolved and the UK Government on that. There is not one person, there is not one organisation. This is a collective endeavour that is about our collective behaviours as much as the executive decision of one person.

Q20 **Ruth Jones:** I am just looking at the risks associated with the Kickstart Scheme and my question is to Richard and Philip. Obviously the age range is 16 to 24 and there are concerns that those who are 25, 26 could be negatively impacted because the resources are targeted at people younger than them. I do not know if you are aware of this. What do you think and how could DWP manage this risk?

Richard Rigby: We went through a few of the statistics earlier, which shows the 16 to 24 age range as being disproportionately affected, therefore it is right the Kickstart is for this age group. I expect that predominantly the placements should be going to that more 18 to 21, 18 to 22 age range because that is where you would expect to see the least work experience, the one-page CV rather than a two-page CV.

We can imagine a situation where a work coach is presented with a 26 year-old who is long-term unemployed, at risk of even longer long-term unemployed, and a placement comes up on Kickstart in a sector that they have been dying to get into. In that situation common sense should prevail and a 26 year-old could be able to go on Kickstart.

Q21 **Ruth Jones:** Can I very quickly ask Ben about the risks associated with small businesses? What is the danger that Kickstart could replace other jobs? Because that is one of the key criteria, you must not replace. Do you see that being a problem in your sector?



Ben Cottam: I do not think so. The criteria is quite clear and we have been very clear with businesses what this is there to do, what it is not there to do. Kickstart in of itself is not a silver bullet to resolving employment issues. There is a danger that we tone down some of the other interventions, not least for those people that are older.

There is emerging at least a clear understanding among businesses. As we go into the New Year we will be heightening up our own communication with our members and small business communities on the opportunities of Kickstart. We will be reinforcing that this is not there to displace other roles. That this is about not only creating new role opportunities for younger people but also new role opportunities, going back to my point about what can this person bring to your business.

If they are savvy they will sit down and think, "What can someone with that background bring into employment? What can they bring to my business? Therefore what does the role look like that responds to that?" There is a lot of opportunity in that. It will take a lot of coaching for a lot of businesses because there is a bit of a punt at a very difficult time. Some of the risk for businesses engaging in this is that it takes up a lot of their headspace and it takes up a lot of their administrative capacity when otherwise they would be dealing with fighting the fires that we know so many businesses are. This is why it is important that for whatever intermediary support the businesses go for that they are getting the appropriate professional intervention support and administrative support from that intermediary.

It is important for us to reinforce what particularly Kickstart is there to do, while not forgetting that there are significant other portions of the population that are facing long-term unemployment unless we can bring employers to those populations as well.

Chair: We have finished our set of questions for the first panel. Can I just say on behalf of all of the Committee members to Ben, Phil and Richard, thank you very much for what has been an excellent one-hour session? I appreciate the depth of your answers. We wish you all the very best in the work that you are doing to expand employment opportunities for young people in Wales. Please take our very best wishes and have a happy Christmas, Nadolig Llawen.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Mims Davies, Katie Farrington, John-Paul Marks and Sarah Pearson.

Q22 **Chair:** We will start straight away our second panel of this session looking at youth unemployment in Wales and the Kickstart Scheme, how that is being implemented. Delighted that we have been joined now by the Minister for Employment, Mims Davies, along with Katie Farrington, Director of Universal Credit and Employment Policy at the DWP and John-Paul Marks, who is Director General for Work and Health Services at DWP.



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Minister, thank you very much for making time available to us. We have just had an excellent one-hour session with the Prince's Trust and the Federation of Small Businesses hearing their thoughts on the subject that we are looking at and how Kickstart is being implemented in Wales.

A bit of scene-setting from your perspective: what are the particular trends in youth unemployment that you are seeing in Wales and what are the characteristics of this wave of employment on the back of the Covid pandemic that is of particular concern to you and your team at the moment, Minister?

Mims Davies: Good morning. First of all, thank you to the Prince's Trust and the FSB, who have been invaluable with how we are bringing Kickstart forward. If we think that this was announced in July during the Plan for Jobs announcement from the Chancellor, we have had the plan for Kickstart announced in September, placements starting in November and we are starting to see the heft of opportunities coming through.

You asked me to set out why. The reason is, particularly in Wales, we know the unemployment rate regarding youth employment is estimated at around 23,000 young people unemployed in Wales, which is a significant impact. We know that there is about 180,000 young people who are employed in Wales, but we do know—and you will have heard this from the Prince's Trust—that the impact of the pandemic, particularly in Wales around hospitality and the retail sector, has been dramatic and this indeed affects young people. Often those first-start jobs, those jobs around your student work or indeed certainly the opportunities to go into longer-term employment in the tourism sector in Wales. It has been a massive hit.

We recognise going into Covid, youth employment in Wales was going in the right direction, but we know that there is about a 2.5% difference in Wales in terms of youth unemployment, probably because of those retail impacts and the hospitality impacts. A difficult time. We know a lot of the north Wales economy, for example, is predicated on tourism so it is a real concern and that is why Kickstart is vital.

Q23 **Chair:** Minister, thank you for that answer. Who, in that cohort of unemployed young people that you have just described, is Kickstart really aimed at? Is it aimed at the young people who even before the pandemic kicked in would struggle to find work, struggle to hold down a job opportunity, perhaps because of lacking a certain set of basic skills or a poor academic record? Or is Kickstart also for the young people who perhaps decided that they did not want to go university this year because of problems relating to Covid or perhaps the young people who may have found themselves working in retail, but are sadly now unemployed? Who are you pitching the scheme at primarily?

Mims Davies: It is pitched at people between 16 and 25, so the under-25s. You could be 16, a care leaver and on universal credit and you are absolutely able to join the Kickstart programme. It is predominantly for



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people—as announced by the Chancellor—who are on universal credit, most at risk of long-term unemployment. This is why it is so important that we improve the life chances of those young people. We know it is those young people that have the smallest networks, perhaps the lowest confidence, who are not necessarily, during the impact of the pandemic, going to be able to find their way through in a way that older people do with that broader network, that wider confidence.

We were absolutely focusing on Kickstart for the right person via our work coaches. This is something I would like to make clear to the Committee, our work coaches are empowered to focus on the individual, whether it is Kickstart, a traineeship, an apprenticeship, whether it is helping them with their maths or their English. There can be lots of barriers that have brought that young person to be a claimant with us at DWP.

That is why we are building a youth hub network to help our young people with the choices they need to make. In fact, the first one in Wales opened in Cardiff at Butetown and it is working with the local authority. It is going to be closely followed by a youth hub in Swansea, Wrexham and Rhyl. These are already starting digitally, but in January hopefully with Covid impact, these will stand to land with youth employment work coaches in there and we are also expanding that cadre of youth employment work coaches.

We are very aware that there is a specific challenge that young people have and navigating that through can be difficult. That is why we set up our youth hubs, which brings together all the opportunities for young people. That is our youth employment programme, our work offer, to help people over a 13-week period. I mentioned the youth hubs and that specifically would give tailored support which will last up to six months for that young person. We certainly have a cadre of youth employment work coaches who are important in this as well, so they can stay with those young people.

We have 13 youth work coaches attached to the youth hubs themselves and we have work coaches that I listen to monthly and our Secretary of State engages with from Aberystwyth and Newport as part of our focus group, and the youth offer has been key in those conversations.

Q24 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister. Forgive me, I should have mentioned from the outset we have also been joined by Sarah Pearson, Area Director in Wales with responsibility for universal credit. Maybe I could ask you, Sarah, or any of the other team of officials, the surge in universal credit applications that we are seeing in Wales from young people, that we have seen over the last eight or nine months, is that broadly in line with what you predicted for the impact of the pandemic or is it at the top end or even at the worst end of expectations?

John-Paul Marks: Good morning. Thanks for the opportunity to come along. I am JP Marks. I lead the operation for the delivery of universal



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credit and Jobcentre Plus. Sarah may want to build on this, as she is my director who leads in Wales. Going back to the big picture and where this all started back in March, obviously a huge disruption in terms of the surge in new claims and also the impact of two-metre social distancing and a significant loss of supply for our organisation to deliver our services. We have done a huge amount to equip all our people with the capacity to work from home, to be Covid-secure, but we have, as you say, seen the caseload for universal credit broadly double between March and where we are today from 3 million to 6 million.

To address your question specifically, in Wales it has followed that trend. If I look at my average caseloads, for example, for my work coaches across all my jobcentres—which I look at every week—in fact, the highest increases were around the home counties areas and around the south-east London, where we saw very significant increases in our average caseloads going towards the top end of the range, whereas Wales is more in that average, but the trend has followed. As the Minister said, we do see, particularly for youth unemployment, some of those particular challenges where there is a large dependency on sectors like retail, tourism and hospitality, where we know restrictions have impacted demands. That is why we are doing a number of things, particularly in our jobcentres, around that Covid-secure environment for face-to-face services for those who cannot be supported any other way, but absolutely then empowering our work coaches to talk to their customers through our digital services and over the phone, and then doubling the number of work coaches so that we have the capacity to cope.

I must say, we have tried to learn all the lessons from the Future Jobs Fund and the experience of the last recession to make sure that Kickstart is even better, with more capacity, more flexibility, more scope for all sectors to get involved and, as the Minister was saying, with our hubs integrating in communities and then empowering our teams to do the right thing for their community based on local need. That is what Sarah and her team are focused on doing every day.

Do you want to build on that at all, Sarah, just to maybe give a couple of examples around those hubs and how we are integrating with Welsh Government services to make sure it is as seamless as we can?

Sarah Pearson: Absolutely. Thank you very much, JP, for the opportunity. Just to add a few things to that. We saw a spike in the unemployment claimants during the furlough. That has now steadied off and obviously we know that the furlough scheme has been extended so the true impact will not be known yet.

In terms of those four youth hubs that the Minister covered, we are working with Welsh Government on that, working out and setting out what our plans for our young people are across UC and working with Wales, together on a better youth journey so that our work coaches are empowered and are supported to make the right decision. It is about



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understanding what is right for each of those claimants, whether that be a UC provision or something that the Welsh Government and/or other providers give. It is all about getting the right outcome.

Q25 Simon Baynes: Thank you, Minister, and also your colleagues from DWP. As a Member of Parliament too, I am very impressed by the way that the Department has handled things during the crisis. I have had very few complaints about how support has been rolled out from your Department and that is a great tribute to you all, given the exceptional circumstances we have lived through.

Kickstart is a great scheme. The one thing I would say just before I go on to my question is that I think about some of the organisations who are very keen to use it—and I will give you a couple of examples from my constituency. My constituency is Clwyd South and I am part of the wider Wrexham area. There is the horticultural company, Just Seeds and AVOW, the Association of Voluntary Organisations for Wrexham. Both of them have been in touch with me and what they are saying to me is that they think it is a fantastic scheme, but it is quite difficult at this stage to enact it within their organisations. Judging from what the Minister said in her remarks earlier on, that is fully understood and is catered for by the rollout of help. You have mentioned the digital help in Wrexham and so on. That is great, but just to flag up that issue. There are many people very keen to use it and I look forward to the fact in the New Year it will be possible for them to get going.

To move to my question: how do you envisage the Kickstart placements leading to sustained employment for young people in Wales and are you confident that a six-month placement is long enough to have the desired impact?

Mims Davies: Yes, very happy to respond on these points. I did not get a chance to mention to the Chair that Pembrokeshire County Council and college are doing Kickstart placements and they have two different gateways, opportunities, from catering for a refuge to llama farming, being a chocolatier or a jeweller. It just shows you how amazing Kickstart can be.

In your constituency in Clwyd South you will be pleased to know that two Kickstart applicants in your constituency who started with Tesco have already been offered permanent positions within the business on full-time wages. This does show that there are potential outcomes.

Going back to JP's point that we learnt through the Future Jobs Fund, we wanted this to be as wide as possible, not just focus on charities, local organisations and local authorities. They are still very important but it is the breadth of businesses, large and small, that we want to be part of this, to give our young people some of the opportunities that you just cannot imagine. Indeed, llama farming I think sums it up.

Outcomes are very important here and Sarah mentioned that. That is why the work coaches are on the journey with the young person so that it



may open up their minds to new sectors, new opportunities that may not be with that employer but it may lead to a traineeship, an apprenticeship or the confidence to go back into further education. There is a whole array of outcomes that we can get, but above all they get six months' worth of learning on the job. They get their wraparound employability support.

To the point on access, I will be very honest, this was announced in July, the programme announced then in September, applications and delivery of placements from November. Our gateways have been incredible. Across Wales I have been delighted by the breadth of people who have been part of it. The West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber is now an approved gateway. We have interest from people across Wales, colleges and employers, all across different constituencies and I would urge all members watching this to absolutely talk to their jobcentres about what is available there.

The point about access, we are very aware that it has been difficult early on, partly because we have been inundated with a fantastic amount of applications and we have to look under the bonnet of those applications. The reason for that, and we heard it in the earlier session, is because you could be 16 and a care leaver and on a placement with a company for six months. We need to make sure those jobs are real, they are additional, that that young person is being looked after and there are work coaches confident that that placement will work out. We do have a great gateway through Adecco working with the FSB, which will allow smaller companies to come through.

We are certainly looking at how to adapt and change this. The placements can start now and run through to December next year for the six-month placements. People do not have to be ready right now. We know some sectors are going to take a while to come back and Kickstart can be part of that plan as the economic recovery grows.

Q26 Simon Baynes: I know my colleague, Beth Winter, wants to come in but quickly before Beth does, if our constituents do have specific issues about access, what is the best place for us to go to in terms of drawing those to your attention?

Mims Davies: We have a very significant amount of applications and one of the problems has been that some people have applied six, seven, eight times on top of the additional application. We have been having just a grouping together exercise, if I am completely honest, of all of the offers from some local authorities and some gateways, so if there is an application number they can contact me. There is a dedicated MP and help team but I have been very much linked in it because we want to learn what the application challenges are. We are going to be updating some guidance shortly to help people with these applications and all of that detail is on gov.uk. If there are people finding difficulties they should absolutely let me know. JP can come in on this and probably Katie before we hear from your colleague from Cynon Valley.



John-Paul Marks: For MPs, I would say we have established Kickstart Employer Partnership teams in every district across the country, including in Wales. If there are any particular concerns, of course they exchange with that local district leader, but if any members of the Committee would like to talk to Sarah Pearson, myself or Katie Farrington, who is the SRO of the programme, we can arrange to do that with you after this hearing because, as the Minister says, we have had great enthusiasm, some wonderful bids have gone through already, a lot of approvals.

We are very confident that we are going to be getting those out of the door in the next few days as well. I was with the team this morning. They are working flat out overtime this weekend to make more progress and we will be making sure we reach out to all our gateways to let them know before Christmas so they are clear and we will keep going until we have spoken to everyone.

Absolutely, if anyone has any particular concerns and would like to talk to us directly, please do that. We can also set up virtual visits with your local jobcentre district teams to talk you through all the things we are doing in your patches and what more is possible. Katie, I will bring you in.

Katie Farrington: Good morning, everyone. I am Katie Farrington. I am the SRO for Kickstart in DWP. Just to add to the points that JP has made, we are very committed to this scheme. We think it is such a fantastic opportunity to support young people's outcomes as we move through the pandemic and building on the success and what we have learnt from the Future Jobs Fund that went before, where six-month placements were shown to have had a very good impact on future employability incomes. But exactly as the Minister has said, very much changing the way that scheme has run so that as well as the focus on communities, local authority, voluntary sector, which we had in the Future Jobs Fund, we are seeking to engage employers, private sector employers, big and small. It has been absolutely fantastic to see the interest that has come through.

As the Minister says, we have been almost overwhelmed with the interest, which is great, but it is taking us time to make sure we check through all those bids and make sure that they are genuinely good quality for young people, that there is genuine support for their outcomes for employability support in particular, and that those jobs are genuinely additional and we are spending taxpayers' money wisely.

Q27 **Beth Winter:** My question is directed at Mims. We are entering the worst recession on record and that is according to a lot of official statistics. Wales has already experienced a significant increase in unemployment. There has been a 17% increase in youth unemployment and in my constituency, after 10 years of austerity, we again have significant increases in unemployment across the board. Youth services have been decimated. There are very limited employment opportunities for young people.



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What reassurances can you give us that this scheme will lead to genuine well-paid, secure employment for young people? Because if the jobs are not there, then what are these young people going to be doing? Supplementary to that, the Kickstart Scheme has to link with the overall economic and employment strategy of the UK Government. During the pandemic we have seen, as I have said, increases in unemployment, lack of centre specific support for a whole range of industries in Wales. How does this scheme link with your economic employment strategy, please?

Mims Davies: Lots in there and happy to cover all of that. First of all, as JP mentioned, we have Kickstart leaders in our jobcentres and we now have an ability, once we are set up, to focus on growing sectors and supporting where those jobs and opportunities are. In Wales there are growing opportunities in logistics, warehousing, driving and haulage. I know JP is doing a specific project on that. Also the care area and construction, where we have an ageing workforce. In the longer term, green energy—and this is specifically not your patch—and a very big focus on the North Wales Growth Deal, a lower carbon and high value manufacturing digital focus and also tourism.

There are obviously Growth Deals across Wales that are very important. As you said, about linking in also to the local economy and local opportunities, that again is where our jobcentres, 630 plus across the UK, have a plan and they are refreshing them about local recovery plans and how they are going to link in with local employment opportunities and also how it works with our wider Plan for Jobs. It is not just the Kickstart Scheme, we have our £3 billion scheme coming very shortly, the Restart Scheme. We have the wider youth offer and the youth hubs that I mentioned earlier. We have our JETS offer, which is an expansion of our Work and Health Programme. We have our JFS, which is our Job Finding Support Service; that is an extra direction for the work coach support to help people into work. Of course this is predicated on a growing positive economy and that is why moving out of this challenge of Covid is very important.

Absolutely there has been some challenges in Wales specifically, but I do want to point out something in your constituency. Aberdare Jobcentre, one particular young woman was unable to find work after getting a degree in criminology. Working with our work coach we were able, through the Flexible Support Fund, to give her childcare and additional support and she has now joined the Youth Offender Service to help people, got into work and been supported through that to get into full-time work.

I do not think you has visited your jobcentre recently. If you have not, I would very much recommend that you go and talk to our work coaches about that wider link into the local economy, what the challenges are and how we set out to meet them. The Flexible Support Fund can be key in this. It is £150 million additional and that can cover things like childcare, suits for interviews, helping with transport costs. Sarah specifically



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maybe can come in about other dovetailing work that we are doing in terms of linking into Wales and the offer around skills and apprenticeships.

I do know that the Welsh Government are looking at youth learning that we are actively looking into as well. I will just bring Sarah in.

Q28 Beth Winter: I will just come back on one point. In my caseload I have been inundated, and I mean absolutely inundated, with queries and concerns from constituents from people across the age ranges, including young people, who are not in employment or have lost their jobs in my constituency and are in dire need of support. My experience—and I live and have worked in the Valley throughout my life—is very different. I would encourage and welcome you visiting the Cynon Valley at some point. I also want to encourage you to look at Welsh research by the Bevan Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The Learning and Work Institute has done a lot of work about the projection in the increases in youth unemployment and the lack of employment opportunities for young people in Wales. It is a real concern for our constituents.

Mims Davies: Yes, absolutely. That is why I do hope you—have you visited your local jobcentre?

Beth Winter: Several times.

Mims Davies: Great, and have you been there recently, within the last six months of digital engagement at all?

Beth Winter: No, I have not been there recently because of the lockdown.

Mims Davies: As JP said, there is an ability to do virtual visits and there is an array of opportunities from JETS to JFS to the Flexible Support Fund and the other interventions that Sarah will come in shortly with. In order to help with your caseload, I know many MPs have been linking directly with their caseworkers into their jobcentres to see the breadth of support that is there. If that is your experience, we can absolutely help you with these challenges.

Sarah, I don't know if you want to come in specifically around areas in the Cynon Valley particular to the point that Beth was making.

Sarah Pearson: Certainly, thank you. One of the things that I just wanted to share is that we are working with communities for work and also a parents and childcare employment programme. These we deliver in partnership with the Welsh Government, so supporting some vulnerable customers within the area and particularly we have done some work in that with the constituency. Across the programme DWP have around 146 advisers who work with the Welsh Government on this programme. We have developed a caseload of eligible customers out in the community



and helped them to overcome barriers to work, which fix up some of the things that were mentioned around basic skills, homelessness and so on.

Just with the focus on employment, it is a good demonstration about us working in partnership with Welsh Government and with local authorities about helping some of our vulnerable customers. To give you a sense of what that looks like, since the programmes were set up in 2015, they have supported 27,500 customers, helping over 10,000 of those back into employment. The parent and childcare employment has supported around 5,500 parents and around 220-plus of these are back into work.

Q29 Ben Lake: Thank you to the Minister and team for joining us this morning. My first question relates to the accessibility of the Kickstart Scheme. I will kick off by asking how the Department is ensuring that the scheme is accessible to small businesses across Wales.

Mims Davies: We are absolutely working with our gateway. We start, for example, with the fact that 160 gateway organisations, including Welsh local authorities and the National Training Federation of Wales, expressed early interest in becoming gateways and then we have now approved around 500 gateways who have gone from initial expression to being cleared to be gateways. As I said earlier, the North Wales Chamber of Commerce, alongside West Cheshire, is one of our recently approved. As JP said, all over the weekend we were sending out approvals for all of these gateways and different colleges all across the whole part of Wales.

What we will then be doing is building on what JP said, these local partnerships that we already have existing in the communities, to make sure that on the next stage in the next push of Kickstart we really pull people through that way. That is why working with Adecco and the FSB is going to be very important. I can bring Katie in on this. This is where sole traders can work with that gateway to pay an additional person joining them because they do not often do PAYE themselves. We know that that has potentially felt like a barrier, but I will let Katie come in because we have been working extensively on this.

Katie Farrington: Thank you, Minister. To support the Minister's comments, we are very keen in Kickstart that we are open to small businesses as well as to large and we have been excited by the range of opportunities that are coming through the gateways. Chambers of Commerce in particular have come forward with some fantastic quality bids, which are offering a range of small companies coming through their chamber and the chamber helping to support them with employability support, mentoring, training and wraparound support for the young person.

The Minister talked about the gateway that we have just approved through FSB and Adecco, which, as the Minister said, will be paying the salary on behalf of the company. This means that if you are a sole trader and you do not participate in a PAYE scheme and would not otherwise be able to pay the young person, the gateway can pay them on your behalf.



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We know that we have other similar gateways looking to come forward and be part of the scheme. It is very exciting and a great way of opening up the scheme to small companies.

Q30 Ben Lake: Thank you. From what you said there about the sole traders, I know that there will be many in Ceredigion, certainly those who are self-employed as sole traders, who will be able to benefit from this, so I am grateful for that change.

Staying on Ceredigion, what is your assessment of the take-up of the Kickstart Scheme in the more rural parts of Wales thus far? The previous panel did flag it up as a particular concern to ensure that every single part of Wales and the country is able to benefit from it. I am interested to know what your assessment is of the rural take-up thus far. Are there any challenges that you think may need to be addressed as we further refine the policy?

Mims Davies: First, the Ceredigion JCP is absolutely brilliant. Obviously you have the Mid Wales Growth Deal now, which is very important. Kickstart is going to be an important success story, I think, for Ceredigion. You are absolutely right and I have been very mindful of this in the way that we have set this up. We absolutely do not want any part of the country to be left behind because of accessibility issues or indeed because of barriers that our claimants might have. A Kickstart job is treated just like a regular job and all existing schemes like Access to Work can be used. Those options will be discussed by the work coaches with young people. It means that nobody will be disadvantaged by where they live and so on.

We also have work at home places through Kickstart. We have been actively trying to, as Katie said, look at the breadth of opportunities, going back to the initial point raised earlier by the Chair in the previous session about using Kickstart as the best opportunity for our young people to get that six months of training, networking, on the job learning, that wraparound employability support, which could really make a difference. We know that scarring effect and the impact that that can have.

There have been over 200 applications in Wales in terms of Kickstart as a whole and that equates to about 9,000 vacancies. Without Kickstart those simply would not be there. Bringing in those small businesses, particularly those one-man bands or people in the beauty industry, for example, I know that an extra pair of hands for six months could make a difference to that person's work journey.

That is the other reason that we need to think about accessibility. I know that in Wales, having been the former Wales Minister, just getting to work can be a challenge. That is where our Flexible Support Fund comes into play and that is where our work coaches will have access. If it is bus fare that is going to stop that person taking up that placement, we can help them with that.



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Ben Lake: Thank you, Minister. I am reassured that it is something that you are keeping an eye on and I just plead that you keep keeping an eye on it because we want to make sure that people in rural parts of Wales can benefit from this as much as their compatriots elsewhere.

Q31 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** What efforts has the DWP made to co-ordinate with the Welsh Government in the design and implementation of the Kickstart Scheme?

Mims Davies: You have heard it from Sarah, and our Secretary of State is meeting the Welsh economy Minister, Ken Skates, later today, alongside the Scottish economy Minister, from the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government respectively. Our engagement has been very constructive on all devolved matters. You will know that because skills and education is devolved and that is so key for JCPs and DWP. It is very important.

I know that there is an economic resilience fund focused around skills. It is around £40 million. You would have heard from Sarah and myself earlier that the Welsh Government are working on a youth journey and we at DWP are linking in with that. You know that I know your constituency very well. I was hoping to head there earlier this year and had a plan to be in Swansea earlier this year. That is one of our key youth hubs as well.

So engagement and understanding, and I know from living in Wales and being the Wales Minister the particular challenges. In any decision that I make at DWP in any of my roles, I am always very mindful that it should work for claimants and work coaches and that again is why our engagement is that we have monthly—it was bi-monthly, but it is now monthly—with our work coach focus group is so important. We hear from Aberystwyth and Newport every week and these work coaches feed in. Sarah is on the ground and hopefully she can give you some further reassurance.

Q32 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** To follow up with the Minister there, I was aware of your visit and you were going to come to the constituency, to Down to Earth, which does valuable work in Gower. I hope that in a post-Covid world you will be able to have that visit.

We heard earlier from the FSB and it was particularly concerned about the lines of communication and the channels from the Kickstart website. We need somebody to hook this all together. Where does the responsibility lie? For example, why was there not closer co-ordination between the DWP and Welsh Government prior to the introduction of Kickstart? Who is driving this forward? Is it DWP? Where do you think the responsibility lies, Minister?

Mims Davies: I think that there has been good engagement and I can check in with Katie on that broader insight. Obviously Sarah is on the ground and making sure that this works with the existing provisions that sit with ESP Wales. We are very aware about how we need to dovetail in.



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I want to assure you that eight claimants in your constituency have been offered jobs with Tesco across Gower and Swansea. That has all been linked in through the Kickstart opportunities that we have been doing with them. We have over 35 of your local employers already engaged to support and a further nine potential local gateways have also been engaged with. At the moment, to date in your constituency, 130 commitments of gateway jobs have been received. I will just let Katie briefly come in on the engagement with Welsh Government and the dovetailing.

Katie Farrington: Yes, we work very closely with our Welsh Government colleagues. As the Minister has said, it is particularly important on the skills and education side where some of the provision is devolved, but it is also crucial on the more employability side too. We talked to our Welsh Government counterparts as the Plan for Jobs was being developed, before it was announced, before the Kickstart Scheme was announced and we have been talking to them ever since. It is absolutely right that we should do so.

On the comments that were raised by the representative from the FSB, I am very happy to look at what more we can do to improve our guidance materials on our website. We are improving those materials all the time, so if there is more signposting we can do to other bits of other offers, then I am sure we are happy to look at that.

Q33 **Geraint Davies:** Hello, Minister, again from Swansea. It is good to see you. Can you just outline the main challenges that have been faced in the early stages of Kickstart in Wales and how they synchronise with what the Welsh Government are doing as well?

Mims Davies: Bore da and hello, Swansea. I just want to say there is a very good piece of work that our Swansea youth hub has been doing, which is digital at the moment, but will be live on The Kingsway fairly soon. It has been doing some great work on the vacancies around the DVLA. These are really good, long-term opportunities that our young people could find as a result.

You are absolutely right to point out that the dovetailing that we need in Wales is specific. For example, at DWP we have our SWAP programme, which is similar to the Employability and Skills Programme, ESP. We have absolutely been aware that there is a similar programme to Kickstart running in Wales and we need to make sure that our work coaches on the ground above all know how to channel young people through and what the right programme and offer is for them. We have been able to develop a similar SWAP model to what we have in the rest of DWP by working and understanding what the needs on the ground in Wales are.

On the point that Tonia was just making, and also to the point that Katie had fed in on the FSB, we stood this programme up in literally a couple of months and it is a very important programme. Is it right from day one? No. Does it need to be more agile? Does it need to reflect what is going



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on on the ground? Absolutely. Do we want to focus on local recovery plans and the local jobs market and the growing sectors? Absolutely. That is why we are just about to update our Kickstart guidance and continue to listen to partners and why the next stage of this is almost like a Kickstart local, so that we can use the knowledge and understanding of how that economy works differently and what those barriers and challenges are for our young people to shape who those employers are.

The other thing that I would like to point out that is different to this in the Future Jobs Fund is our Kickstarters and our employers will be feeding back to us and already are and that is changing how we are doing the assessment methods. Our participants' experiences and outcomes are going to be carefully tracked and understood so that we can help future Kickstarters as well.

Q34 Geraint Davies: That sounds great. It sounds as if there is complementarity. I was wondering whether you felt there were things you could also learn from Wales and what the Welsh Government are doing to bring back to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to enrich what is happening in England.

Mims Davies: Yes, absolutely. We are working with the youth journey, which is something that Wales has. There is also a youth guarantee that Scotland has and all of our DWP jobcentres are linked into this. It is the reason that, as the Minister, I wanted to bring together our youth offer as a whole. We are going to have at least 108 youth hubs linking in all the different stakeholders, all the different support that Sarah described earlier. It could be that you have left care. You could be someone who has been through the hands of the MoJ. You could have just had a really poor experience at school or college or you could be like many young people right now where you were expecting to go into a traineeship or an apprenticeship in a sector that has been impacted by Covid. You just need some very good signposting and help and that is why we are bringing all this under the guise of youth hub.

Q35 Geraint Davies: You would accept there is not a monopoly on good ideas and we should all learn from each other and use best practice for the good of us all across the Union?

Mims Davies: Absolutely. I think that DWP has been exemplary. If I may just point this out, this year we have been agile, swift, claimant-focused, absolutely responding to what is going on on the ground. I know that 27,000 extra hours were worked over the Easter weekend to process and support claimants' universal credit applications so people were supported and paid on time. JP led that alongside our jobcentres, which have been open the whole time for the most vulnerable. We continue to be, despite the impact of lockdowns and tiers. People who are most vulnerable have been able to get support. We have also started our new Saturday opening. About a third of our network was open for the first time on Saturday to support people. I cannot praise our civil servants and our communities enough.



There is no monopoly on good ideas here and I think you make a good point. We have never been through such an issue and pandemic before. We have to come together to find the answers and our employers and our local economies are going to be key to these job opportunities for our young people.

Geraint Davies: Are we helping small employers—

Chair: Sorry, Geraint, we are shortly running out of time, so I am afraid we do have to move on to Rob Roberts.

Q36 **Rob Roberts:** Good morning, Minister. I am delighted to hear about the youth hubs that are coming. Appreciating that one is supposed to be in Wrexham and one is supposed to be in Rhyl, I am going to abuse my position a little bit and ask for one in Flint or Holywell as well, which is nicely in the middle of those two.

My question is what are you doing to mitigate the potential risks of Kickstart, especially in two aspects, ensuring that the jobs are truly additional ones and that the scheme does not negatively impact on the prospects of young people who might just fall outside the age category that you are looking at?

Mims Davies: I am sure Sarah will have heard your ask, Rob. I have been to Delyn. We had a fantastic visit at the start of the year and learnt a lot about what is under the sign of Jobcentre Plus, which for me is jobs, community and progression. People will have learnt a lot about what DWP can offer this year and we will always look to go further where we can.

I think that you are absolutely right. These jobs need to be additional and the way that we are seeing that is in the breadth of the applications that Katie has described, from roofing to digital roles to, as I said earlier, the llamas. I know that there is an opportunity to work potentially in golf and in sport and opportunities to work from home. I would like to bring in JP in a minute to talk about some of our early Kickstarters who have gone into fantastic placements. We are very aware that they need to be additional.

There is a fine balance here of taxpayers' money, that wraparound support, that people have put the trouble in to put an application in and that we give it the broadest support possible. We are also going through all of our applications from day one just to make sure that with extra advice and extra support that those jobs cannot come forward. This is an evolving process to try to help our young people to get the broadest opportunities possible. JP, you might talk about one of our earliest Kickstarters, which is a fantastic story.

John-Paul Marks: Yes, I am happy to be precise. Again, anybody who would like to talk to local sites about these examples in your patches with Sarah and the team is always welcome. For example, we have had a young carer who was in receipt of carer's allowance, suffered an injury and has now moved into work through Kickstart. It is fantastic. There is



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another young person struggling with autism. I have a list of case studies that get sent to me by my jobcentres every week. That will be going up and up and up all the time.

The only other point I wanted to emphasise, Minister, was that this has just begun. For colleagues who are on the ground where there are employers or gateways who would like to get involved, please do come forward and connect with us. Because 2021, 2022, as the furlough scheme unwinds, that is what this is all about, placements for the long term. We will absolutely continue to trust and empower our work coaches to make the right judgments so that of course if somebody is just over the age threshold or is earlier in their journey, whatever it means for doing the right thing for that customer, we will make sure they can access a traineeship, an apprenticeship, some work experience, some job-finding support for Kickstart. It is there for those longer-term unemployed young people who are otherwise not going to be supported, to make sure no one is left behind.

Mims Davies: Just quickly, Katie, on the additionality point, I wonder if a bit of clarity on that might be helpful for Rob.

Katie Farrington: I am happy to do that, Minister. Yes, when we assess the bids, we look in particular at additionality. We ask the people to confirm, first, that these jobs are not displacing any others or causing redundancies and also to explain very clearly how they are additional. People have chosen different ways of doing that, but one good example is a company that said the normal operating hours for their store would be so many per week and then they are loading the Kickstart vacancies, the 25 hours for the Kickstart people, in over and above those existing operating hours. You can clearly see that the jobs are additional.

Another very good example is a company that supplies workers to construction sites. It has effectively created a new role that does not normally exist for the Kickstarter, which is an assistant role for the site managers. You can see that when they load the employees then into the jobs, they load the Kickstarters in and above the existing roles. Additionality is something we have looked at very closely as we have been approving the bids because, as the Minister says, it is very important we are spending taxpayers' money well.

Q37 **Ruth Jones:** Thank you to the Minister and the DWP team for coming along today. Minister, can I start with you? You mentioned earlier on to the honourable Member for Gower the Kickstart Scheme is not perfect. Can you elaborate on that a bit?

Mims Davies: I think that it is a little bit about teething problems when you design a scheme very quickly. Katie just explained it as well about additionality. How do you prove additionality when if you are applying for Kickstart roles, in some ways that is obvious that it is additional because you do not have them already? How do we explain to those sectors and those areas about what is additional? At the heart of that is that we are



not replacing redundancies; there has not been a raft of redundancies and straight away people are then applying for Kickstarters.

I totally agree with JP's point. This is a top-down programme that we started from here and we are spreading out. The next stage is about those local economies, local jobcentres, local labour markets, colleges, schools and different sectors coming together to offer opportunities. I know that some particular sectors are growing and doing well and do not necessarily feel that they should be applying for Government support for Kickstarters, but I would much rather they had a Kickstarter affiliation to actively make sure that they recruit from that cohort of young people if that is a way that they are going to get involved.

For me, it is absolutely about knowing what works and understanding, learning the best way to bring in sole traders—and you have already heard that—and working out how we bring in the additional employability and wraparound support these young people need. I heard in the previous session, and I was pleased you raised it, about the safeguarding issue. Some of these people could be young and vulnerable and new to the workplace, so it is very important that we have the right journey with them with the work coaches and those gateways and if there are any problems with the placements that there is someone to go and talk to and learn from, and to make sure that in any design and any support it is very clear how that young person gets support.

Q38 Ruth Jones: To follow on from that, how is the Kickstart Scheme being monitored as it is being rolled out now? Objectively, how is it being measured?

Mims Davies: I will let JP and Katie come in on this more broadly, but that is exactly why we have our partnerships teams and our links into our jobcentres, bearing in mind that with some of the gateways and providers we already have those working relationships as employers and as traineeship and apprenticeship providers. I will let Katie come in on evaluation but, as I said earlier, we are listening to our Kickstarters and employers, which is certainly key to that. I will let JP talk about those local links as well.

Katie Farrington: It is exactly as the Minister said: we are listening and we are picking up feedback all the time. That is one of the good things about doing this scheme through our jobcentres. We have been able to pick up issues with individual placements or individual young people and learn and adapt the scheme as we go. We are also doing formal evaluation. We will do qualitative, quantitative evaluation and we will look at the outcomes for the young people after they complete the scheme. We will also look at particular characteristics, so ethnicity, gender or for individuals facing particular barriers.

Q39 Ruth Jones: John-Paul, if you are getting this feedback, how are you tweaking the scheme then to make sure it is more adapted and fit for purpose?



John-Paul Marks: One of the advantages of the way we now deliver our services as an organisation is they are user led. We can iterate with features that we can release regularly, driven, as you say, by evidence and experience. We have been doing that with universal credit for a very long time. Somebody will raise a particular thing and we will be able to, for example, change the way in which we administer the landlord portal, as a recent example of how we administer housing costs.

The reason we can get Kickstart live so fast, from an announcement into the operating environment with customers already benefiting from it, is because of that model of change. The advantage of it is that it absolutely can iterate based on evidence and experience. We have a wonderful product manager in Lara Sampson, who is our director. I must pay tribute to her because she is incredible. That team is all the time looking at the latest user experience, the feedback and the evidence and then translating that into how to make further improvements, making the application as easy as we can but still in control of fraud and error risk, making sure we are slick on that judgment on additionality, as Katie explained, and then getting the vacancies loaded quickly with good referrals and good starts. My team look at that every day. Katie and I look at it basically every day as well and we will keep doing that every week until we are confident that it is optimal. Of course that will take a bit of time but the important thing is that it is live and working now and we have the capacity and infrastructure to iterate it quickly.

Q40 **Ruth Jones:** To follow up on that, obviously you are monitoring daily. What are the targets that you are monitoring against and how are you evaluating the success of the project? Obviously targets are important. Were they preset? Have you changed them since the scheme started?

Katie Farrington: JP, would it be all right if I answer that question for you?

John-Paul Marks: Go for that, Katie, yes.

Katie Farrington: The sorts of things we are monitoring daily, exactly as JP said, is all of those numbers, so how many applications we have received, how many jobs we have approved, how many agreements we have sent out to gateways, to employers, to the voluntary sector, how many agreements have been returned, how many vacancies have been uploaded, how many referrals have been made, how many starts have been made. We are quite a long way through our journey. We have not yet had anyone complete a Kickstart placement because the first people only started on 2 November, but we look at those all the time. We have not changed our big picture target, which is to provide at least 250,000 jobs through this scheme. The number of approvals at the end of November was 20,000, so we are on the way towards that, but clearly we will continue to drive volumes and activity as we go.

Mims Davies: That number grows daily and I know that Royal Mint is offering 40 placements that start shortly as well. Everything that JP and



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Katie have said is absolutely right, but the other point for me is that it is not only about Kickstart. We have a wide-ranging provision, whether it is traineeships, apprenticeships or other types of work. This is part of our Plan for Jobs and our offer and it absolutely has to be right for the claimant. Some people are not going to be right for Kickstart, they do not need to be in this sphere, and some people are absolutely right for it. That is where the work coach's discretion, knowledge and understanding is vital.

On the point that Rob raised earlier, I hear they are looking at a virtual youth hub for Flintshire, so he can keep lobbying for that to become something in situ, but they are certainly looking at that gap.

Q41 Chair: We are coming to the end of this session. Can I pick up on that point, Minister, that you were making about wider provision? In the first session that we had this morning, Philip Jones from The Prince's Trust Cymru was making some very interesting points, I thought, about the number of young people that they work with who are interested in going down the self-employment route. Do you think we have a strong enough offer available to unemployed young people and unemployed adults to help them get started in self-employment in Wales?

Mims Davies: You are absolutely right, there is a breadth of interventions. Our Plan for Jobs is extensive, a £30 billion package. Restart, which we are designing at the moment, starts next summer. We have job-finding support, JETS, this broader youth offer, and Kickstart. We are doubling the number of the work coaches and of course in Wales there is Jobs Growth Wales. There is absolutely a big focus that the Secretary of State and I have on progression. Self-employment can be fantastic for anybody at any point. We know that lots of jobs and businesses spring up during recessions and times of economic challenge. We also know that people's hobbies and loves and interests can lead to that long-term fulfilling employment with the right advice and support.

There are two areas that I am looking at particularly in the New Year because I hope that today's session has shown that at DWP we are really in the right sphere when it comes to youth employment. Over-50s employment is something we want to focus on, and I am looking at how to redesign and bring forward the opportunities in self-employment so that we can work better with BEIS, LEPs, combined authorities, local authorities and all the different provision and providers and opportunities there. This is absolutely key, Chair, and it is something that I am turning attention to. I think it is important that we have that wide range of employment offer, but also in that NEA sphere as well, so that is new provisions that we are looking at going forward.

Chair: Minister, thank you very much. That brings us almost smack on 11.30 and our time is finishing. Can I say on behalf of all of the Committee a huge thank you to you, Minister, and to your team today, to Katie, to JP and to Sarah for being with us? Please take our very best wishes going forward with the work you are doing to expand



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opportunities for young people in Wales. My own experience in recent months with the local Jobcentre Plus team in Pembrokeshire has been excellent. Their engagement with me and my office over the initial beginnings of the Kickstart Scheme locally has been tremendous, and I know they have been working extremely hard on the front-line all the way through the pandemic. Do take our best wishes and thanks to your whole team of work coaches as well. Thank you very much and have a great day, everyone.