

Public Services Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The transition from education to employment for young disabled people

Wednesday 17 April 2024

4.25 pm

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Members present: Baroness Morris of Yardley (The Chair); Lord Bach; Lord Carter of Coles; Lord Laming; Lord Mott; Lord Prentis of Leeds; Lord Shipley; Baroness Stedman-Scott; Lord Willis of Knaresborough.

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Questions 180 - 187

Witnesses

[I](#): Mims Davies MP, Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, Department for Work and Pensions; Lorraine Jackson CBE, Director, DWP and DHSC Joint Work and Health Directorate; Tammy Fevrier, Deputy Director, Youth and Skills, Department for Work and Pensions.

Examination of witnesses

Mims Davies, Lorraine Jackson and Tammy Fevrier.

Q180 **The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister, for joining us today towards the end of our inquiry. We have taken a lot of evidence, and we are at the stage where we are beginning to form our recommendations, so it would be good to explore some of those with you, particularly from the DWP's point of view. I am going to start, if I may, and then we shall pass on to other people.

It is probably true to say that one of the themes of the evidence that we have received from witnesses is the lack of joined-up working across departments. It is a complaint that you get in almost all areas of public services, but maybe it is particularly difficult with young disabled people who are moving from education to work. We have a number of specific issues we wanted to look at.

Would you just start by telling us how you deal with that and how you structure your work so that, as best possible, you are joining up with other government departments?

Mims Davies: It is a pleasure to appear before you and give you an update on my work and my department's work. I have been working with Tammy and Lorraine for some time on this. I would very briefly ask Tammy to introduce herself and the realm of her work, and then quickly Lorraine, just so the committee and those watching have an understanding.

Tammy Fevrier: I am the deputy director for youth employment and all-age skills policy in the Department for Work and Pensions. I work with the Minister on a range of matters relating to youth employment. That includes our youth offer and all related matters, as well as our cross-government dimension. We will get into more detail on that later.

Lorraine Jackson: Good afternoon. I am the director of the Joint Work and Health Directorate, which is between the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health and Social Care.

My role is really around a whole range of policies and programmes to support disabled people and people with long-term health conditions in their journey within work. We say that we like to help support people to start, stay and succeed in work. It is a real pleasure to be here this afternoon.

Mims Davies: Chair, you pointed out something that, in my time in the department, I have been very clear about. Just so members understand, I was Employment Minister at DWP during Covid, so that was for three years, and then I spent pretty much a year as Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression. I fought very hard for the youth title to reflect the work that we are doing in DWP and across government in terms of the convening role, working with other departments and giving them that point of contact.

Of course, I then moved into this role as Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, but retaining the youth and social mobility focus and the housing focus, because those transitions, where you live and how you live are so key for disabled people. It is something that I recognise.

In my time as Employment Minister, we built up a network of youth hubs for the under-25s. That is very much the starting point for young people. If you think about disabled young people and people with a health condition and wider wellbeing needs, where to start and where to go are absolutely key. Whenever I am putting policy together or testing anything with stakeholders and with our operational teams, I put myself in the place of the person we are trying to help.

I would fully agree with the committee. I would love to come here and say that the garden is rosy. You have spent many an hour finding that the garden is not perhaps as rosy as we would like it to be for young disabled people. That is why, in terms of this role, I have that remit too.

Also, in this role, I have the ability to convene the ministerial champions across all government departments via the Disability Unit in the

Government's Equality Hub. We have also set up the committee between us, DfE and DCMS. Tammy can remember the title. Do you want to get the title right for me?

Tammy Fevrier: It is the cross-government forum for young people, and it is focused on skills for life and for work. It is co-chaired by our Minister and Minister Andrew from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Our new DfE Minister will be part of that forum too.

Mims Davies: It is exactly for those reasons about transition, where to go and who to help you, particularly for the under-25s. I will freely admit this. Previously, I held the charities, civil society and sport brief at DCMS. There is amazing work going on in the charities and in the dormant assets realm, particularly on young people, but I did not feel we were leveraging enough of that across Government.

When I came into DWP, that continued to be a focus so that, for me and Minister Andrew, particularly around the social mobility space, youth hubs, youth clubs and youth work, it had the proper focus that we would all have in this room. I have looked at all your backgrounds. Like me, you are really passionate about making sure young people get their best start. That is how it has been working, and I am sure we will drill into a bit more of the detail.

We also have SPOCs. They are special points of contact, for example for care leavers in our jobcentres. We have our disability employment advisers, who link directly with employers.

Up and down the land, people have a tailored and place-based approach to supporting young people, but also supporting the whole of the labour market and those with needs. Of course, that includes young people with disablement.

The Chair: Let me explore the structure a bit before we perhaps get on to the services. This is a shared worry. I am not only saying that it only now does not work. My own past experience was that you can set up a structure like that where you have a committee of Ministers, but, if there is one department in the driving seat, it is that department's budget. That department's head is on the line, and that is where the responsibility lies. In the best of all worlds, the other Ministers have other things to do where it is their heads on the line and their budget, and they have more power.

What is your feeling about the cross-departmental committees that you have set up? I am assuming that you are the lead department for them. Without criticising your colleagues—because I am not asking you to do that—how do you think it works as a structure? In an ideal world, how would you want to improve that so that it worked even more effectively?

Mims Davies: There has not been a structure for some time. When I was at DCMS, I convened the cross-government youth meeting of all government departments and the Civil Service working on youth policy. There are an extremely large number of people doing that, but if you

were a young person out in the street in Peckham, or indeed Penge, you would not necessarily know that there is a Minister or a whole group of people working for you.

For me, it is about turning it on its head. If there is a young person in need in one of those communities, where do they go, who helps them and who is responsible? Whether it is LSIPs, mayoral authorities or local partnerships, if they have those budgets and those responsibilities, are they leaning into them?

At DWP, during Covid, we created about 135 youth hubs that are locally led, partnership-led and community-led, with all the different people who are interested in and focused on youth policy and support, including employers, careers services and disability employment advisers. Whatever is deemed to be right in that community—the care leaver lead, for example, for the JCPs—they are in those and they are where young people go. They are where they want to go. They are not necessarily in jobcentres, because, very often if you have a chaotic or difficult life, or something that is going on at home, you are miles away from the labour market. What you need is good support and help.

We are working together to make sure that youth policy is at the heart of all we do as Ministers and that we get the sum of all parts to create more. I do not know whether you want to add to that, Tammy.

Tammy Fevrier: Baroness Morris, you are exactly right to home in on which the lead department is. In many respects, when it comes to employment and transitions into employment, it is us, and the Minister is driving that forward. As you would expect, when you have an outcome that overlaps in terms of employment being important to the Home Office, for example, so young people at risk of serious violence or of offending, you will find that DWP tends to be involved in those forums, as convened by other Ministers.

The Chair: This is about young people with disabilities, so just focus on that. Part of our evidence is that they get lost in all this, because it is not appropriate for them and there are not the specialists. Just before I throw it open more widely, what, within that structure, is there specifically for the needs of the range of people with disabilities?

Mims Davies: You continue, and then I will build on that, Tammy, if I may.

Tammy Fevrier: We have found an opportunity to convene around the various interests that all departments have. The cross-government forum, as a structure, is an opportunity to bring together those Ministers and departments in particular when we know that there are overlapping areas of interest.

In the next session of the cross-government forum, we will look to focus specifically on young disabled people. We have looked at subject areas such as transitions, pathways and partnership locations, but we want to

home in on and use the evidence and insight that we were able to gather collectively across government, as led by the Minister, in terms of the areas of interest, but also the engagement that we have with stakeholder organisations.

We are really keen to prioritise how we better support young disabled people within Jobcentre Plus, recognising that it is a holistic journey in the transition from education into employment, and more broadly, but also the wider support that needs to be made available to young people to enable them to thrive.

Mims Davies: That is about partnerships with local colleges. If I take one in my own backyard, for example, Woodlands Meed in Burgess Hill, one of its big focuses now is transition into work. The headteacher is driving that, working with the local labour market, with Meed's Job Club, with DWP and with the LSIPs, alongside all the other ways that you would expect.

Recently, our Permanent Secretary went to the jobcentre in Walthamstow, which links directly with Waltham Forest College. It has a youth hub and, again, it is about focusing on those with disablement. I would totally agree about getting lost in the system. These are parents and young people, working together, who often feel that. It is my job in this role to unpick those challenges for them.

The Chair: Before I turn to my colleagues, I would like just a short answer to this one. Do these bits of your organisation collect the data in terms of how much of their contact is with young disabled people as opposed to young people in general?

Mims Davies: We collect localised data through our youth hubs to show the impact that we have, particularly for the funding and support that we have for those particular areas. Would I say that it is a national picture? No. We have some wider national pictures. It is something that we would like to do more of. One of our challenges at DWP is that we are always busy doing the day job. Unless it is collected in a non-manual way, we just get on and do the next bit. That is probably an error on our behalf, but it has historically been there.

Tammy Fevrier: That is fair. Lorraine will perhaps give a bit more detail around the specialist support in particular, but we are looking to make sure that that mainstream offer is available to those young people with health conditions.

The Chair: If you do not collect the data, you do not know.

Tammy Fevrier: We know, in the broadest sense, the employment rate for disabled and non-disabled people. There is a mixture of young people within the universal credit claimant cohorts. For example, in that group that is closest to work, we know that there are lots of young people with undeclared health conditions. That is what the Minister is referring to. If you are in a particular cohort with non-work-related requirements, et

cetera, we know who is in there, and that is where the more specialist support will come in.

Mims Davies: When we did Kickstart, seven out of 10 people stayed in work or progressed to further study or other things. We found that many of the young people had health conditions that had not been diagnosed or recognised by themselves or their families. We are sometimes working back to people who would not necessarily have a plan or a recognised condition or know it themselves.

Lorraine Jackson: We can go further in terms of data and making sure that we triangulate the data from different systems and departments. On some of the programmes that I am responsible for, for example Access to Work, we are seeing in the data that we have there a marked increase, for example, in the number of younger disabled people who are making applications to that scheme. It is a bit patchy, but I have examples such as Access to Work.

The Chair: Can you give us that information for our evidence? If you have data on that, that would be really useful.

Lorraine Jackson: We will certainly provide that to you.

Q181 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** I am incredibly impressed with the commitment that you have, and I do congratulate you on that. We cannot find any evidence whatsoever that there has been any improvement in this field over the last five to 10 years. The only person who has done some committed research is Professor Kim Hoque at King's Business School, who made it absolutely clear in his evidence that there is none. The number of disabled youngsters going into employment 10 years ago is exactly the same as now.

Tammy Fevrier: I would gently challenge that. I have data in front of me from our analysts, which we can share with the committee, that comes from the last labour market statistics. It says that the employment rate for non-disabled young people in 2022-23 was 56.9%. That compares with 39.8% for disabled young people. There is an element of data collection in the macro sense that we are able to pull through the labour market surveys. The Minister has described that we need to do more in terms of capturing that information within our systems.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Where has that data come from?

Tammy Fevrier: That has come from the labour force survey. We had an update on that from the labour market statistics earlier this week. We can certainly make sure that the committee has access to that information. Those are the broader trends that we are looking at. The gap is closing, although it is still not where we would want it to be. As Lorraine was describing, those initiatives are starting to make a difference, but we need to do more.

Mims Davies: We will give the committee what figures we have, and we are all agreed that we need more. In 2021-22, there was a 26% increase

in the number of disabled people aged 18 to 24 who received a payment from Access to Work. In 2021-22, 4,320 18 to 24 year-olds were in payment. In the following year, 2022-23, it was 5,460, so we have seen an increase since 2021-22 of around 20% in the number of disabled people who get Access to Work provision.

The other side of Access to Work is that there is more knowledge and understanding, brilliant as that is, and so we are starting to see more disabled people of that age knowing that it is possible to apply for that early on. Previously, people perhaps acquired a health condition or had a change of circumstance and then applied, rather than being in an early part of their career. We are very willing to share what data we have with the committee.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Would you fit that in with the statistics indicating that there was a roughly 10% increase in the number of youngsters with disabilities during that time? You have to put that into a context, because far more are being recognised and approached, which is not your fault.

Tammy Fevrier: If I may, I will just correct what I said. That data that I described to you earlier is from the Annual Population Survey. It goes some way towards your suggestion. The information that we have is not as timeless as we would like it to be, but we will certainly make sure that you have access to that.

Lorraine Jackson: But it is a very good point about prevalence and the increases in reporting of this.

The Chair: Do you do it on self-definition? In the data that you are working with, is "people with disabilities" self-defined?

Lorraine Jackson: Yes, the ONS work is self-defined.

Tammy Fevrier: The Minister made the point earlier that many of the young people we see coming through even the mainstream offer have undeclared health conditions, so we do have a spectrum, as you might expect, in the department.

Q182 **Lord Shipley:** I want to go back a stage in this. I am very grateful for what we have heard so far, but I want to ask you whether, in the cross-departmental meetings that you hold, you talk about some of the issues that are prevalent in the press currently.

In the last few weeks, there have been a whole lot of articles about the surge in number of children with special needs waiting a year for local authority support. "Hard-up English councils ration access to special needs tests". Another, from Northumberland County Council, says, "Funding for high needs school students in Northumberland is facing a £4 million overspend". An autistic pupils charity in England says, "Autistic pupils are being denied their basic right to education as absenteeism surges".

In terms of the statement that you made very clearly that transition is so key for disabled young people, and that you want to make sure that young disabled people get the best start, which we all want, is there a resource problem that you talk about across Whitehall? What action is being thought about to address some of the problems that the public are perceiving?

Mims Davies: This is a really important point. To break it down, in my role as Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, there is a whole group of people later in life with acquired issues—musculoskeletal, et cetera—and a bow wave of young people with SEND and other needs coming over the hill. As a department, as a labour market and as a country, that is what the programmes and the interventions that we have are there for. We are looking after that part of the labour market and the new labour market, because this is the reality for employers and for government about who will be working in the labour market and who needs support.

Any constituency MP will know exactly what you are describing, because we are seeing that in our own postbags and in our engagement with councils and schools. Many people are now comfortable and would like to have a label and the support that goes with it.

The other point is Covid. You have the impact of Covid on difficult situations, which may have been exacerbated by the impact of Covid itself. You are absolutely right to that point, and that is something that is seen at DfE, which is England only, but we see it across GB. We absolutely have those conversations and it is vital that we do. Tammy wants to add a brief word on that.

Tammy Fevrier: I would definitely echo what you described there, Minister, and you are exactly right to call that out. As the Minister says, those issues that you describe are very much an earlier part of that system challenge. Increasingly, there is lots more effort, as you would expect, across government to look at the way in which these various systems interact.

From the DWP perspective, we are able to support those young people who come through to us. Ideally, they will come through to us with some form of ECHP or a plan, so that we can work with those institutions to make sure that that is recognised and reflected in the support that we can offer. We are increasingly seeing young people who have not been diagnosed and still have not had that support, and are trying to find ways to better interact with the services that can help them and move them forward on their employment journey. That is one of the themes that we will look to pick up in the next conversation at the cross-forum government.

Mims Davies: There is the statutory guidance around the Autism Act. There is guidance around waiting times. That is why the new Buckland review on employment for autistic young people is groundbreaking. Many employers and sectors say that they want to be inclusive, to bring young

people in and to bring in people with health conditions and wider needs, but then they worry about how to do it.

If government, with specialists and disabled people who know their needs most, can work with employers through those local partnerships that I have described, that will give the opportunities to the talent that is out there. We have Disability Confident, but what we need is talent confident, so that employers looking to recruit are confident about this great young person they can bring into their business.

This is something that we saw with Kickstart. Many young people who came into businesses would never have got through any normal way of recruiting via a CV and interview. It was two people sitting together and saying, "I want to give you a start". "I am ready, willing and able to try that start". We need to break through that when it comes to this bow wave of new conditions and challenges, because the spectrum is the new normal in the labour market.

I have met many employers who say, "This chap does not come in nine to five. I do not expect him to, but he delivers, he does the projects, he is working at 3 am, it all turns up and we love it. If we tried to fit him into how we normally work, it would not happen and that job would not have been done". We need not only to change attitudes but to stop talking about inclusion and just deliver it, and to help employers do that, because that is the labour market that is coming their way.

The Chair: We will come to some of those specifics in our later questioning, so I am not tempting people to ask follow-up questions at this point.

Q183 Baroness Stedman-Scott: It is nice to see you all. I want to put myself in the shoes of a young disabled person who is leaving education and wants to transition into work. What steps are you taking to make sure that they get the right high-quality support during that transition? What are we doing to stop them becoming NEETs? I am not young, but, if I were a young person, who would be taking me on that journey? You have mentioned so many organisations and so many things. As a young person, who takes me on that journey? There is no way that I could do it myself. Can you help us with that?

Mims Davies: It is quite stark. Is it a third of people who are in alternative provision and have a disablement or a health need? Forgive me—it is a quarter. I was close. That is stark, Baroness, and you are right to raise that. I talked earlier about special schools and FE, and those warm handovers. That is exactly what those youth hubs and those partnerships that we have are all about.

That is why the work that DCMS is doing to support young people—the National Youth Guarantee—is really key, so that there is a starting place for people who are exactly in that situation. We have the adjustment planner for students, which was launched in November 2023 by the previous Minister for Disabled People.

The planner is part of a wider adjustment passport policy. You will know that, with many people with health conditions and wellbeing needs, there is a constant requirement to explain what they want and need. It gets very tiring and is hard work, when they just want to get on with the opportunity in front of them. This can transfer from a school or university environment to a new employer, so that the people taking them on have a clear understanding of that customer's requirements and needs, and whether they need support through Access to Work or other reasonable adjustments, or, latterly, occupational health.

Work is under way in the Access to Work Scheme to see how we can overcome the wait times, but the focus is on supported internships. If a young person needs that, they get priority, so they get straight into what they need to do. This was piloted at a university, and I know that Lorraine is biting at the bit to come and say more about how we do that.

Lorraine Jackson: Minister, you make an important point there. As you have said, the transition from education into employment is not an easy one for anyone, but particularly for people with additional needs. If people have had, in that safe environment of a university, support that works for them, it gives them the confidence to feel comfortable asking for that as they approach work. If that job is short-lived or does not work out and they have to move on, they have that discussion for the next job as well. It has gone down very well with students. We piloted it in Wolverhampton, Manchester Metropolitan and King's College. A number of students who have used it really wax lyrical about it.

Mims Davies: I think it is 242.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Is this for young disabled people?

Lorraine Jackson: Yes.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Do you have something that we can look at?

Lorraine Jackson: Yes, we can send you some further information on that. Because we have piloted this as an adjustments planner for the higher education into work transition, we are hoping to take the learning from this to see whether we can apply that to vocational courses as well. We have something that works and we want to make sure that we apply it.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Am I hearing, then, that, in that model, they have one person who takes them through the journey?

Lorraine Jackson: There are different circumstances. There will be a range of support available to the individual at the university or further education setting. A document is produced, which then travels with the individual. We know that individuals emerge from education to a number of places, and there are a number of touchpoints with them.

Another that I might mention is in the jobcentre. The Minister mentioned earlier that, in addition to work coaches, we have disability employment

advisers, who are real specialists in disability and support the work coaches across the jobcentre network to make sure that they really understand what works for disabled people and can tailor the range of options that are available to them. They are advising the work coach who helps the individual to be guided through the system.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: We talked about the young people themselves and how they are helped to make their way through the myriad things around support. What support are you giving to make sure that the organisations that exist for young disabled people are able to function fully?

Tammy Fevrier: There is an awful lot. If I just follow on from what Lorraine was describing there, our jobcentre work coaches in particular, but also our disability employment advisers and our support for schools advisers, do this job. As Lorraine was describing, it depends on where the institution is, if you like.

Our DEAs—disability employment advisers—and our support for schools advisers are working very often in special needs schools, for example, in education establishments with young people with learning disabilities, or in alternative provision. They are going in and informing the young people about the art of the possible as it relates to their employability needs, what that means in terms of CVs and the learning and wider support that is available, as well as opportunities such as supported internships.

That supplements the advice that there is for thinking about what that transition will look like and how you can soften that route, exposing the young people in particular to what the world of work will look and feel like. That is enabled by our engagement with those institutions, and we want to do more in that space.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Could you write to us about the support that you give to organisations that help these people?

Tammy Fevrier: Yes, absolutely.

Mims Davies: There is also the careers work that the DfE does and, as I mentioned earlier, the DCMS intervention, so the guiding hand for exactly those people who are at risk of not being in education, employment or training as they turn 18. Again, it is about helping them make informed choices. Support for schools is demand-led and locally led, where people are at risk. It could be only one or two young people who we are targeting, where we are working with the school and people have said, "These young people are at risk. You need to get in and help". There are the bigger programmes such as Building Futures from DCMS, and some really place-based individual support from us.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Thank you. Bring back Kickstart.

Q184 **The Chair:** I do not doubt that these things exist; I know that they do, but we have not met anyone who has felt that they have worked for

them. I do not think that we have met anyone who has seen a disability coach. We have not met any young person in school who has had specialist careers help and guidance. We have not heard of anyone who goes to a youth hub.

The reality is that the one place that all these young people with disabilities go to is school, so I wonder whether it is the links with the school that matter. I am really reluctant to get into a to and fro. I do not mean to do that, but that is my impression. How many disability coaches do you have—80-odd?

Mims Davies: There are about 750 disability employment advisers.

The Chair: The number has just gone up, but it is still not a lot.

Mims Davies: Some people will be dealing with people in their cohorts as mainstream. It depends on what the disability might be and on how big the jobcentre is. In Anglesey, you would probably have a mixed cohort in terms of the number of people you are seeing, but some will have an under-25s group, for example. It will be segmented according to the local needs. I would be very surprised if you met any of those people in this place, and I am very conscious of that. I would really recommend that the committee engage with some of our work coaches, DEAs and care leavers. I am very happy to set up any engagement that you would like.

The Chair: We have done. We have taken weeks and weeks of evidence. We have not been loose in our collecting of evidence.

Mims Davies: I mean on the ground in some of the areas.

The Chair: We have gone to the people who are meant to be using the service and asked them what they thought, rather than going to the people who are meant to be delivering the service and asking them what they thought. That is our job.

Mims Davies: The reason why I set up the Job Help website was that there was not a central repository for people if they did not really understand what was under the bonnet of the jobcentre. For example, we have a homelessness covenant. We have a social mobility covenant. We have work that we do around disability. I recently went to Blackburn, where we are working with people in its youth zone. It could be that many people just do not know what is out there, and I do not disagree with that. That is why the opportunity to highlight this to the committee and to the wider community is really key.

Tammy Fevrier: It is an absolutely fair challenge to throw at us, particularly when it comes to specialist education establishments and making sure that that connection is right.

The Chair: It is more people with disabilities in mainstream who suffer.

Tammy Fevrier: That is where the challenge comes in. It is a challenge for DfE colleagues in particular. We are trying to spread our reach. As you

say, we do not have a huge network, so we are focusing on those specialist establishments where we have been able to maximise the resource and our reach. That would need to complement the wider support that is available.

Mims Davies: I could make an audacious land grab to do even more, but I had better not.

Q185 **Lord Laming:** It is nice to have you here. I am terribly sorry that I have to leave you at 5.15. As the Chair has indicated, we have been trying to drill down into the transition of children with a disability from school to employment. We have taken evidence from all around the country. We have made it possible for people to give evidence remotely to us because of that. We have seen some quite remarkable work that certain individuals or organisations are doing in certain places.

We have also heard some really quite devastating evidence of young people who have been incredibly well supported during their years of education and brought up in an atmosphere where they hear, "We are not going to highlight what you cannot do. We are going to talk about how we can enable you to do more". When they have got to 18, that all ends. Even in the same local authority, the children's services do not communicate with the adults' services, which we found really quite distressing.

We have a picture of extremes, where there are some good things and some really dispiriting things that you can look to. You have picked that up from the questions that we have already put to you. Is there anything in your current work programme that you would wish to point us to that would lead us to think that there is going to be a significant change nationally in the way in which these services are provided, so that young people in the transition from school to employment can be certain and their parents can know where to look to get that kind of help?

At the present time, the evidence that we have had from some parents is that they have been referred from here, there and everywhere, and are lost in this wood, really. Can you help us about what is changing and what might change even more in the future?

Mims Davies: I massively agree with that point, which is why the youth hubs were pulled together, not necessarily just for mainstream but for exactly the point that you make. As mentioned around FE and special schools, they recognise that you go from a really cosseted and brilliantly supportive school, which, often, many children have hard fought to get to, and then there is a cold, hard, difficult world out there. I agree with you on that, and that is why the work with the Youth Employment Group, with the Prince's Trust and with the other youth forums is really key.

I recently met with the National Citizen Service in Blackburn and asked it to do more in the disability and inclusion realm. There is a perception that, if you are a nice, middle-class kid, you get to do a great couple of weeks with the National Citizen Service, you put it on your CV and off you go, but what is it doing in that social mobility and disability space? Mark

and the team there are really keen to lean into what DCMS is leading on in terms of that guiding, helping hand, so there are things to point to there.

Again, it is my job as the Disability Minister to lean into my colleagues through that cross-government forum and to work with DfE, bearing in mind that that is England only, so that we have the reach and engagement with our devolved counterparts. It is also the responsibility of employers, communities and others to reach out and make sure that there are opportunities there. My colleague Virginia Crosbie did a brilliant job in Ynys Môn in terms of a Disability Confident jobs fair.

It works both ways. Do the employers know how to employ and be inclusive in the way that I described earlier? Are they just sitting and waiting, quite often, for the perfect, magical young person to come and do the job? This is the challenge that I always give to employers and those I am working with. We are not the finished article. I am far from it. We are all still working on it. Why on earth are we always trying to recruit a finished article? We have to give people a chance. If they have those special needs or special qualities, we need to make sure that there is a landing space, a start and an opportunity for them.

There is some work around work experience as a whole, but I would love to see more happening in the wider work experience space and to challenge myself across government, whether it is through the NHS or other areas, to stop just putting nice things about inclusion and Disability Confident on websites, and actively reach out to those institutions, communities and charities.

For example, I met with one of the blind charities recently. It has an off-the-shelf way of helping people to get into work. They are the specialists. Let us make sure that they are empowered to work with the labour market to get those people into work. I do not think that there is a silver bullet here at all. I do think that there is more to do and there is work ongoing, but it is a mixture of approaches.

Lord Laming: Somebody has to take responsibility to facilitate employers becoming involved in this. Employers cannot suddenly wake up in the middle of the night and think, "I wonder whether I should be doing something more to employ 18 year-olds with profound disabilities". They need to be facilitated.

Minister, I will try very hard to put this as politely as possible.

Mims Davies: Go on, then. See how polite you can be.

Lord Laming: What we have had is a lot of aspiration but no evidence yet of delivery.

Mims Davies: There are a couple of answers here, and I am sure that Tammy will want to come in. With Kickstart, we went from nought to 300,000 jobs and got 163,000 young people, many of them with undiagnosed health conditions and needs, into work, because we had our

whole-system approach that we do not want a generation left behind because of Covid. There was a left, a change and a mindset. You can change that, and we should be more challenging to that. There are various international summits later this year around inclusion, so it is not just our own challenge for our own country. It is an international challenge, and it is for all of us.

The other side of it is that it is about showing good practice, how to do it and how to make it easier for people. Schools, particularly FE colleges or special need colleges, are busy doing the day job, so we have to find a way of making sure that they know what the jobs are down the road.

I would turn to my local college, which works with an amazing company that prints out all the hi-vis material for ambulances, police cars and things like that. It is a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. This wonderful company, called PVL, has been giving work experience in days for some of the local youngsters to come and give it a go. It is not for everybody, but it is about the experience of being in the workplace, giving it a go and seeing what you can do. They have taken people on and it has been a brilliant job for them.

That would be my idea of awfulness. I am a terrible jigsawer at the very least. For those young people, that is a brilliant job. Very often, the roles that we may find tedious, boring or uninteresting are perfect for people with certain skill sets. That is where our disability employment advisers come into play, and where jobs fairs and local partnerships are really important. You have your macro and your micro, and it is very important here for DfE to make the linkages.

Lorraine Jackson: There has been an investment in employment support at scale. The last couple of fiscal events have seen things such as the new Universal Support scheme, which is hoping to reach 100,000 people once it gets fully up to speed, and the precursors to that such as Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care, which may not be badged as being for younger people but are so tailored that younger people can benefit.

We are seeing 25,000 people in individual placement and support in primary care. We are seeing that delivered across 42 higher tier local authorities. We are seeing Universal Support that initially aimed to support 50,000 people increasing to 100,000 people. We hope that, because these things are rooted in local communities and involve partnerships that bring together local authorities, jobcentres, health and other actors, they will become much more visible to those supporting young disabled people.

Mims Davies: It is perfectly okay to not know what you want to do. Who here is doing anything that they started out wanting to do? On average, you are going to do seven jobs in your lifetime. It is about working with DfE, the Careers Service or advice for schools to give young people, particularly those with disablement, the confidence in what they can do and to give something a try. In the way that we are structuring the

benefit system, they can do that and it will not impact them being supported, which is really key, so that they can go on a career journey in the same way that anybody else would want to.

Q186 Lord Willis of Knaresborough: I was particularly interested in the Disability Confident scheme. Now that you have made a change to it, what do you expect the reforms to be as a result of the changes that you have made?

Mims Davies: This is a work in progress.

Lorraine Jackson: It is very much a work in progress on Disability Confident. The good news is that we have good take-up of the scheme. About 19,000 employers are now signed up to it, but we want to make sure that it is meaningful to those employers as well as to the people they employ, so that those people see a real sensitivity to their needs in the workplace and real support for them.

We have now had the review and are working our way through the recommendations there. We have made some early strides. We quite recently put out some new managers' guides, so that, if you are in a Disability Confident organisation, there is practical support and prompts that say, "As a Disability Confident organisation, these are the things that you should be doing". That has been published recently, as I said.

We are also looking at making the scheme applicable to all sizes of organisations. One of the recommendations was around small and medium-sized enterprises, for example, both making it proportionate for them to be Disability Confident organisations and making sure that they are really supported where they perhaps do not have the resources to do so.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Can I just stop you there? I know that we are tight on time. I am particularly interested in small businesses, which are clearly the biggest resource for disabled young people going into business. What are you doing that will make a difference there? Rather than telling us words that say, "We would like to do it", what are you doing?

Lorraine Jackson: As I mentioned, we have published the guide.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: You have published the guide and I have read it. The guide tells me nothing as an employer about how I am going to improve what I do for young people. What is going to happen? There is nothing in the guide that says that, if they do not do this, something will happen. There is nothing in the guide that says, "This is the support that we will give you to ensure that the guide is implemented properly". I am not trying to be rude to you. We understand that the government have a real passion for this, and I should say that you have demonstrated that today, but we want to see some real evidence that something is happening.

Tammy Fevrier: There is an important opportunity for us in terms of how we use our Jobcentre Plus network and those relationships that we have with employers to really amplify messages around Disability Confident. One of the challenges that you described is about what looks good on paper and what that means in practice, and bringing together those communities of interest.

What we are increasingly seeing—and we are working with DfE on this in particular in England—is around how those local bodies and structures can be used to amplify messaging. We have some great examples—again, I am afraid it is pockets of good activity—through skills and employer boards and things such as that in other areas where they are bringing together employers with particular interests.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: We have three levels in the Disability Confident scheme. To be on level 1 as an employer, all I have to do is just say that I am on it, nothing else.

Lorraine Jackson: Yes. We are absolutely looking at that.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: If I am in level 2, all I have to do is say, “These are the things that I am doing to improve the situation”. I do not have to publish it anywhere. I do not have to do anything to confirm that. If I get into level 3, I know that I can stay there for the rest of my time as an employer without ever being asked again. These 19,000 are people who might not even employ somebody with a disability. Am I being unfair here?

Mims Davies: No, you are absolutely right. It is a work in progress. We have given you the shiny stuff. We have worked with the CIPD. We have the disability business leaders and professional advisers group working directly with SMEs. As I said earlier, the reality is that, if you want to put on your website that you are inclusive and Disability Confident, the chances are that you can do that at this juncture. As the Minister, that does not feel enough. We should be challenging and having some kind of benchmark.

That is something that I am currently working on. I cannot say too much more at this committee at the moment, but it bends into Access to Work, the disability employment goal and other areas such as the Buckland review. We also have the Lilac review, which is around entrepreneurship for disabled people. For young disabled people, access to cash and opportunity for that is really key. Employment and building a business that can flex around their needs also needs to be seen as equally achievable and possible for them.

You issue a fair challenge. Have we made some improvements? Yes. Is there more to do? Should it be more than a badge? Absolutely, yes. Larger companies are very often leading the way. Microsoft is doing a brilliant job. They would do, would they not? We would expect them to and thank them for that. What you are challenging on is something that I am currently looking right at. I cannot say much more to the committee

at the moment, but I can say that we have heard this loud and clear from this committee and others. You are, sadly, far from the first person to raise the challenge. It is a fair challenge and we need to step up to it.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: I was really pleased that you have looked at the Disability Confident scheme and are looking at improving it. When will the guidance be published?

Mims Davies: That new guidance has come out and we are continuing to engage with disabled people to hear their voices and what they need in it. As I say, it is a work in progress. That is probably the fairest thing that I can say at this juncture.

Lorraine Jackson: We have done some other small steps, but you are right that there is more to do. The Find a Job website is the Government's jobs website. We are starting to very easily highlight Disability Confident employers on there. About 18% of the jobs on there now are from Disability Confident employers. There is the interview scheme that comes with Disability Confident, where we are tightening up the guidance so that people know what to do to make those interviews accessible and supportive for people who are disabled. We are looking at what more we can do, as the Minister has said.

Mims Davies: It is about sharing best practice and where we get it right within sectors, as much as it is about going, "How do you eat an elephant?" There are certain sectors, certain roles and certain ways that we can really work with those businesses and areas. I have described some of the jobs that will really work for being Disability Confident employers. We have to turn that ambition into reality rather than just having that on the website.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Minister, you have Access to Work, which the committee would agree is an excellent scheme, but people are delayed for so long before accessing the work that they drop out. What are you going to do to make sure that there is an official time limit on Access to Work?

Lorraine Jackson: We are definitely prioritising those who are due to start work within four weeks, or where someone is already in a job and in receipt of an Access to Work grant, and a renewal is needed. We know that more people than we would like are waiting longer than we would like at the moment, but there is prioritisation going on there. We have increased the numbers of people who are working on administering the Access to Work scheme. The demand for it is huge, as you have said, and that is creating these longer waits.

We talked earlier about the supported internship schemes and apprenticeships. We understand that a young disabled person taking up an apprenticeship might have 39 weeks of an apprenticeship, and we do not want them to have to wait until way into that before they get the Access to Work. What I was saying there is that we allow them to apply early.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Unless there is some legal enforcement on some of these things, they are never going to happen. In terms of reasonable adjustment, there is not a time limit. Should we try to get government action that puts a legal time limit on reasonable adjustment?

Mims Davies: I have, I hope, hinted to the committee that these particular areas in terms of Access to Work are well and truly in my sights. As Lorraine has described, we are looking at what is currently in our hands and what the right things to do are, as she has described. There is some work up stream that we should be doing around occupational health and what is reasonable adjustment.

I also described working with particular conditions and sectors on what is off the shelf and what is much easier to do than being in a queue for Access to Work. It is a well-funded government programme and a positive success story, but, if employers are sitting there waiting for what are reasonable adjustments due to a lack of knowledge around what they need in order to go through an Access to Work process, that is where our disability employment advisers come into play in the locality to say, "You can do this and we can work with you to get the right equipment".

Equally, it is about making sure that it is an Access to Work adjustment. There is an educational piece here. It is about working directly with sectors, with charities and with those who have those needs. It is very much about listening to disabled people as well, but it is a holistic assessment. We have brought in some digitalisation, which is very helpful, so we are trying to see the learning from that. It is one of those points, which is well made, where there is more to do.

As I spelt out, I hope, in the figures earlier, it is because we are getting more young disabled people with needs coming through the door. First off, we need to know whether they need to come through our door. Is this an Access to Work application? Is there another way of getting that young person supported sooner through other kinds of grants or interventions? All of this is very much in my sights, and it is an engagement that I have around employment with the Disability Benefits Consortium, which I am very much listening to. Above all, we need to get this right for those people we want in work.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: I wanted to clap at the point when you talked about flexible working and recognised, as a Minister, just how fundamental it is to have access to flexible working in order to maintain a job, particularly if you are a young disabled person with particular health or mental health problems, but there is no requirement at all for an employer to put that in place.

One of the young people on one of our committees had moved to a job, and suddenly she was required to work in particular ways and could not meet those hours. Therefore, she just had to leave the job. I just wonder whether you are going to look at a series of legal requirements to make sure that, on reasonable adjustments, flexible working or other matters, you protect these young people from it, and an employer knows that

when they take somebody on. We have to be fair to employers as well.

Mims Davies: This is when you tempt me again into an audacious land grab of that which is not mine. That is where, working across government with the disability ministerial champions, it is really important that those messages are understood.

I would take a step back from legislation here and mention the work that we have done around menopause. The largest group of people in the labour market are women over 50. Women are being impacted by debilitating experiences while in work. Someone will be experiencing that in most workplaces. We have really good guidance, support and structure, and we really push for good leadership conversations.

In the case of what sounds like a lovely young person, what a disappointing outcome that was. To the point that I made earlier about the labour market being a particular shape and size, this is who you have got. Employers and sectors, with government, have to wake up to this. "Who do we have down the road who is waiting for a chance and who, with the right support, will shine?" You will end up with the most committed, dedicated people in your business if you give them the support.

To my mind, it is about good leadership, best practice and engagement. It is much more expensive to go out and try to find that golden nugget once again. It is about employers understanding how to have positive conversations. It is about that young person being able to confidently say, "I can really achieve what you want around my condition with flexibility. Let us give it a go". That is certainly something that we saw in the Kickstart realm as well.

I do not think that legislation is necessarily the answer here. By tackling presenteeism, being really bold in the way that we support people and being understanding, we will get the employees, the support and the change in the labour market that we all wish for. We need to help employers think that that is the way forward. What we have seen with Kickstart and other programmes is that people have progressed, moved out of benefits and moved up within the business.

This is one of the things that employers have learned, particularly with young people, but it is right as well for disabled young people and those with health conditions. Lots of people want to understand young people, because they want to sell, market and work with them. Unless you have them in your business, it is, unfortunately, much more difficult.

Those people who thought that they were giving young people a start because it was the right thing to do during Covid have learned so much from them. It has changed their recruitment and they understand young people so much better. There is so much benefit in bringing someone in to understand and learn from, and to properly diversify your workforce, and I do not think that you need pure legislation for that.

Q187 **The Chair:** We picked up one tiny thing with Access to Work that seems

to be such a quick win, unless we have misunderstood. After you go through all that process and spend all that money, the person with the disability cannot take with them to a new job whatever equipment has been provided to them. It is in the ownership of the employer. Why is that? It would save money and time if it was portable and just went with them to a new job.

Lorraine Jackson: That is something that we may look at.

The Chair: I can understand that some things cannot be moved, but lots can, and it is not allowed.

Mims Davies: It is something that some employees have rightly negotiated, and that is a really good challenge.

The Chair: It is all public money, is it not?

Mims Davies: Indeed, it is.

The Chair: That just seemed to us a really quick win in some circumstances.

Lorraine Jackson: Some employers retain the equipment or the adjustment, whatever it is, which is good, because they are able to employ or support another person.

The Chair: But it is very individual by the nature of the grant, is it not?

Lorraine Jackson: Yes, some of the things are extremely individual, but some of them are a bit more in the equipment space.

The Chair: They need a bit of flexibility on that.

Lorraine Jackson: Yes.

The Chair: I have a round-up question just to finish. You have said several times that some of the things that you are very proud of and think are part of the answer are, at the moment, in different parts of the country, so they are not a universal service. In terms of making it a universal service, is that part of your plan, and how optimistic are you? I know that you do not have a universal service overnight, but what are some of the barriers for your Department in making these good things more universally available for all people?

Mims Davies: Whether it is the Access to Work passports or what is coming down the line with WorkWell and Universal Support, you are going to see some of this very macro change. What I have felt strongest in my time at DWP, which is not far off five years, is that where things really work is with local understanding and local partnerships, through the special school, the FE college or the university, because they put the person at the heart of this.

It is about making sure that, when listening to disabled groups or those with particular health conditions, there is real understanding. A place-based, tailored, individualised approach, which is what we take as a

whole in DWP, has changed exponentially, even in my time in the last five years, to be really individual and holistic. That is where you get the change, because your postcode should not necessarily dictate what your future is, and we know this very well. If you do not know what is down the road, and they do not know that you are down the road, you are never going to get the opportunities that people deserve.

For young disabled people, it goes back to the very start. We need to give people the start, because that is where, at any age or career stage, you will thrive with the confidence of someone believing in you and giving you the chance. Whether it is the work that DfE, DCMS or we are doing, it is all about giving that young disabled person the confidence to start, and we will give them the further tools. We need to learn from them about the other ones that they might need to fly.

Tammy Fevrier: The Minister is exactly right. Increasingly we find that, while this is a national framework, it is place-based at its core, so that you get that tailoring. To what Lord Willis mentioned about Disability Confident employers, how do we bring those consortiums together in place so that you have that connection between the individual, the parent and the employer, and are homing in on those transitions in a meaningful way? We have a lot to add to that.

Mims Davies: ERSA was at DWP this week about it. Communities that Work was in this morning around social housing, with a lens particularly on disabled people and what you can do. We were discussing pop-up job clubs in social housing, but also going to people. We have to go to where people are.

Lorraine Jackson: Exactly as Tammy was saying, it is about having a tailored local system that is built on something that we know can work everywhere. Things such as Universal Support that I mentioned earlier are based on a very evidence-backed model. When that is rolled out, we will know that it will work.

We have things such as Employment Advice in Talking Therapies, which can support people of all ages who are suffering with common mental health issues. Again, that started with a trial approach. Now that we know that it works and we have the evidence back, our aspiration is to have that everywhere in England across the course of next year. That is the way in which we have gone traditionally. We have tested, we have evaluated, and we have rolled out.

The Chair: It sounds like a good model. We are very grateful for your time. You have given us more than an hour, and I know that you have been very busy. You did not expect to be here at 5.30 and we are very grateful for your time.

Mims Davies: You can see that we are enthusiastic.

The Chair: That has certainly come over. We are grateful for that enthusiasm and for the extra information that you have given us for our

inquiry. We very much look forward, when we have written our report, to liaising with your officials and you to see whether we can contribute to the work that you are doing. Thank you.