



# Youth Unemployment Committee

## Corrected oral evidence: Youth unemployment

Tuesday 20 July 2021

10.15 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Shipley (The Chair); Lord Baker of Dorking; Lord Clarke of Nottingham; Lord Davies of Oldham; The Lord Bishop of Derby; Lord Empey; Lord Hall of Birkenhead; Lord Layard; Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Baroness Newlove; Lord Woolley of Woodford.

Evidence Session No. 22

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 228 - 243

### Witness

I: Mims Davies MP, Minister for Employment, Department for Work and Pensions.

### USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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## Examination of witness

Mims Davies.

Q228 **The Chair:** Welcome to this evidence session of the Youth Unemployment Committee. The meeting is being broadcast live via the parliamentary website. A transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to that transcript where necessary.

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Mims Davies MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. I will invite her first to introduce herself and to make any introductory statement that she would like to make. Minister, welcome.

**Mims Davies:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you for the kind welcome. It is a pleasure to join the committee this morning on what is a very warm day. I am dialling in from mid-Sussex, where I am the Member of Parliament.

I very much welcome the committee's inquiry. I am grateful for the opportunity to answer your questions on the Government's support for getting young people into work and tackling the scarring effects of long-term unemployment. Supporting young people has been a priority for me in all my political life, both in my previous role at DCMS and in the last couple of years at DWP.

Our young people have been some of the hardest hit by the economic consequences of this pandemic, but they have been hit not only economically. I am very conscious of that, as the mum of two girls, one a teenager and one heading that way. As Minister for Employment, getting young people into work and providing those life-changing opportunities is absolutely paramount. I witnessed that at first hand just last week when meeting young people in Derbyshire and in the previous week when meeting young people in Croydon. I have seen the really positive effect that our interventions have on all individuals' lives, and particularly on our young people, through JCPs.

I refer not just to the 44,000 young people who are in a new Kickstart role, which is viewed as a very important part of our offer for young people, but to those engaging in our 13-week Youth Employment Programme and those accessing tailored support at one of our over 130 new Youth Hubs. Many have been working virtually over the pandemic and many are now open physically to make sure that young people can access the tailored support that they need to help them to get back on their feet and to lay down the strong roots that they need for the future.

I strongly believe that my department, DWP, has risen admirably to the great challenges facing this country, creating strategies to prioritise, protect, support and create new jobs. We know that the impact of the last 18 months will require continued, extensive cross-government action and collaboration to make the changes that we need to provide our young people with the opportunities that they deserve.

As I conclude, let me reassure you that the Government are ready to push to build back better, to make sure that our young people are really at the heart of this economic recovery. Thank you.

Q229 **The Chair:** Minister, thank you very much for that introductory statement. Welcome again.

It falls to me to ask you the first question on behalf of the committee. Something that has caused me to stop and think a bit more than I anticipated a few months ago is whether the needs of young unemployed people are being served effectively by the cross-departmental approach to tackling the issue that is being taken in Whitehall and Westminster. Why do we not have a single Whitehall department dealing with the issue and a single Minister?

**Mims Davies:** That is a really important point. When I was at DCMS, I had the responsibility for youth. I believe that that remains the case; we have Baroness Barran with that function over at DCMS. But I strongly agree with you that getting youth opportunity to the top of the agenda is a huge priority. When I was at DCMS working on the youth charter, I saw that as very important.

You are right to offer this challenge to us. I think that the Government are getting it right as regards a cross-government approach to tackling the issue. There is a sea change, but there needed to be one. I know that the engagement that I have with BEIS, DCMS, DfT, and DfE in particular has transformed. This was starting to happen when I came into the role two years ago. When the Prime Minister asked me to do this particular role, it was about the opportunities for the people with the broadest barriers—those people who were left behind in what was a jobs miracle at that point. We had a 45-year unemployment low, but the same people, same areas, and the same young people in particular who were stubbornly still not seeing that benefit.

Tackling unemployment effectively rightly requires a true cross-government approach. We are doing that in a number of ways. The Plan for Jobs was announced just over a year ago. At the heart of that was protecting and supporting jobs, but also the £2 billion Kickstart scheme. Making sure that training, skills and everything offered through DfE and through devolved government is available to DWP claimants, particularly our young people, and that they know how to reach it is crucial. In fact, we have brought out something new: the DWP Train and Progress initiative—DWP TAP. It means that if you are on benefits you can stay on them longer, training for the right sector, the right area and things that are there for you. We have our Sector-based Work Academy Programmes. Of course, we have Kickstart. On average, 500 young people are going into new jobs every working day. That is despite the ongoing tale of the pandemic.

We have developed at pace the right collaborative scheme across the Government, working with Treasury colleagues, who have been incredibly supportive. However, even going back to my relationship as the Minister responsible for youth at DCMS, it is very important to me that we work with partners and stakeholders, local government, understanding local

authorities' needs and the differences in our communities, be they large cities, market towns or coastal communities, to ensure that our products and initiatives work and that we are able to find the right support and individualisation for young people.

The big push that our Secretary of State and I have regarding young people in particular is about outcomes. You can have all the programmes and projects in the world, but it is about the outcomes for the young people. That is what is driving us at DWP, in conjunction with the rest of government.

**Q230 The Chair:** Can I pursue a question about outcomes, because we addressed that very early on when we took evidence from officials? Are you confident, as Minister, that outcomes are being adequately assessed? There is a whole host of initiatives. That is all very welcome, but clearly some things will work better than others. How confident do you feel that the assessment of outcomes to which you have just referred is being done adequately?

**Mims Davies:** We can look at Kickstart, for example. We looked at previous schemes to see how to create the data, the evaluation and everything else that is going into Kickstart, but also how to track the outcomes for young people. In fact, yesterday I was in a star chamber with my fellow Ministers at DWP on all the different evaluation programmes and projects that we are looking at to track outcomes.

There are also wider government interventions. For example, there is the Home Office's serious violence strategy. There is the MoJ's anti-reoffending agenda. All our programmes and interventions also have to dial into those broader agendas. I am very conscious of that at DWP. Yesterday I looked at our SWAPs initiative—the Sector-based Work Academy Programme—in this financial year. This is where you can do up to six weeks' learning and training. You can get certification in hygiene or safeguarding. You can get a construction card to get working there. You get a guaranteed interview, and it is employer-led from start to finish. There is a vacancy that the employer wants to fill, and they want to give people the experience of doing that role.

The thing that guides my conversation with any bid and any focus that we have for our next stage of SWAPs is outcomes. Are we filling the gaps in terms of vacancies? Are we meeting local skills needs? Are we linking with employers' wants?

DWP is the Department of Work and Pensions. We are there for you at any age or stage of your career if you need an intervention to work for you that is individualised. It is about an outcome. I very often say to my officials, who get this, and we are working strongly together on this, that it is about the outcome. It is not about getting people on a programme. That is not an outcome. It is an important part of the outcome, but it is not the outcome. That is something that we need to be very mindful of all across government.

**The Chair:** May I say that I agree with you about the issue of outcomes versus outputs? I do not think that you actually said "outputs".

Nevertheless, there is sometimes confusion about what an outcome is. It has to be a real, tangible thing. So thank you for that.

Can I follow up with one last question from me before I pass over to the Lord Bishop of Derby? Can I ask you about the publication of skills gaps? Clearly, if you are going to secure real outcomes, you must have a knowledge base on which to invest as a department. Why do you think that the Government no longer publish skills gaps? Would not more data on skills gaps help to ensure that young people are being prepared with skills for jobs and sectors that are in demand?

**Mims Davies:** The 2020 employer skills gap survey provides data on skills that employers find difficult to recruit from the wider labour market and skills that are lacking from existing employees. This data on skills, need and abilities is held by individuals and used by a wide range of institutions, including local government bodies, which will help us to understand the gaps that exist and the skills that are needed in their area.

We have the labour market intelligence for all service, which provides data, including skills shortage and vacancy data, from the employer skills survey to the post-16 education sector, to help it to guide its provision for local students. The closure of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in 2016 by the Department for Education has meant that it has gone to the Department for Education, which holds the responsibility for the employer skills survey. The most recent survey, published in 2020, provides the data that you are implying we need to know about and be looking for.

Just now we touched on outcomes and, indeed, outputs. I am finding that we are sharing more data than ever with the Treasury, with DfE and more widely. That is very much to be welcomed. One thing that is driving us at DWP is an understanding of local economies and local skills needs. In fact, you will find that very clearly understood through our Jobcentres. We have over 680, with more coming online. Those people work with and understand local employers and the national employer partnership, and have links into local colleges, et cetera. That has been driving how we have been opening up our Youth Hubs.

I understand the challenge, and I know that DfE has a strong focus on it. We have a cross-government sector strategy as well. We are looking at priority sectors, including construction, haulage and logistics, to make sure that we are matching people with sectors and skills. But it really does go down to the local level. If we at DWP have a strong knowledge of local economies and different local community needs—the educational challenges, or whatever is going on in a community—we can help to meet those gaps and work across government on the ground to change outcomes.

You are absolutely right. I believe that at the moment we are probably in the right place and going into a better place, but it has certainly not been quite there for some time. Hence some of the gaps in skills that we had coming into the pandemic have been exacerbated by that, because they were already there.

**Q231 Lord Hall of Birkenhead:** Good morning, Minister. Just now you referred to something that I want to pursue. How formally do the various departments, of which yours is clearly key, join up to discuss, to work out strategies and to work out what you are trying to do? How formally does that happen across government and across Whitehall, both at ministerial level and at Civil Service level?

**Mims Davies:** I think it is better than ever. It is crucial to know and understand what is going on. In the broader levelling-up agenda, in order to know and understand this and to drive the challenges that each department has, they have to share the answers and the challenges with us at DWP. Just last week, for example, I met hauliers in Derbyshire. Preceding that, I met the DfE—sorry, the DfT; there are too many “Df”s there—to discuss the challenges within the whole of that sector, working with Logistics UK, et cetera. Later this week I will lead a cross-government meeting on sectors that need support and on making sure that we are sharing this and bringing together Ministers and officials.

We have very strong links with BEIS and DfE, as you would expect, but we need to be in some of the sectors, such as transport, to drive and help them with challenges. To go to a point that the Chair made a little earlier, we have a pilot, working with Eddie Stobart and other people, to move people into the haulage and driving sector through the Flexible Support Fund that we have at DWP. We need that department and our department to link up and to know that this is what we are working on at the local level.

We are trying very hard to make sure that this works. I am very mindful of the fact that it is not about making it work for government. It is about outcomes for people and communities and for employers and potential employees. We have to make it easier for employers, local communities and those sectors to be able to thrive. We need to make that work. I certainly see it as very important for me to drive that, because my job is to get people into jobs, not in the long or medium term but in the immediate term, to help them to progress. In order to do that, I need to have all the conversations that you said we should be having, and I am making sure that I do.

The Green Jobs Taskforce has made its first report. Some of this is long-term thinking, but there are jobs right now in the green sector, such as fitting smart meters, that we need to fill. It is something that we have to do immediately and to do better in the short, medium and long term, but I think that we are in the right place. I see it as very important that DWP is at the heart of driving this.

**Q232 The Lord Bishop of Derby:** Good morning, Minister. As Bishop of Derby, I am delighted to hear you reference your visits to Derbyshire. Before I ask my scheduled question, I want to ask you about those. You said that recently you had been to visit young people in Derbyshire. Could you share with us what you learned from listening to them?

**Mims Davies:** Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to share my visit to Derby. It is so important to get out of Whitehall and to look, learn, listen and work with Work Coaches. We need to listen to our JCPs and partners.

Since restrictions have been suitable, I have taken every opportunity to get out to meet our teams. My visit to Derbyshire was fantastic. I met hauliers at one female-led business that trains people to go into driving. I met people from the quarry sector and people delivering different kinds of products to hear what they needed.

I went to the Jobcentres to meet the teams there. The one co-located in the centre, with the council, is a very different and very well-known drop-in facility. It is a huge Jobcentre, probably the biggest one I have been to so far. I also went to what we call our REEP site—our rapid estate expansion programme site—which is on Sir Frank Whittle Road. It was lovely to meet the new team there. We have doubled the number of our Work Coaches. We have over 13,500 additional Work Coaches. This is one of our additional sites, where we are meeting people face to face. Face-to-face support, provided in a Covid-safe way, is absolutely crucial, because they need that extra support.

I also went to Chatsworth House to meet the Kickstarters there. There were over 30 Kickstarters, across completely different sectors of the house, from gardening to working in the archive. It was brilliant to meet the young people who were getting exceptional opportunities from a business that is so much part of the community and that knows how much it can help the community and help people to progress in hospitality and other things beyond that.

I have brilliant visits. They are so important to driving policy and outcomes.

**The Lord Bishop of Derby:** Just where you landed there, that is what we hope. You speak of knowing localities and having engagement that works for specific locations. I hope that you discovered and learned new things from the recent visit to Derby and Derbyshire.

You mentioned the employers that you met while you were there. We have heard that employers are faced with a choice between a variety of schemes and programmes; you have mentioned Kickstart, and there are work placements, apprenticeships and other schemes, of course.

Do you feel that enough targeted and appropriate information is made available to the different kinds of employers, to young people who need to be matched up with the right kind of scheme to get them into meaningful and sustainable work, and to the career professionals working with them? Do you think that the right information is being made available to employers, young people and career professionals so that the right match is made and there is no confusion or lack of take-up, so that we have the right young people in the right programmes in the right jobs?

**Mims Davies:** There is so much to respond to on this. I go back to my visit to Chatsworth, where I specifically met two young chaps. One had got up at 5.30 am to start his new job on the Chatsworth farm. It was a long journey, by bus and walking. He was very shy and had been told that some lady was coming to see him. Another young gentleman was joining the gardening team. Just in the couple of hours that I was there,

talking about the opportunities and how exciting it was to be there and speaking with the management team, I could see those young people grow and blossom. In every policy that we make, I am very mindful of the fact that that is what we are looking to do. What employers need and what people need is at the heart of all my decision-making.

I totally get it. I hear from employers a lot. While I was up in Derby, I did a dial-in with the Prince's Trust with current and potential Kickstart employers to help people to find their way through the opportunities. There are quite a lot of opportunities. I am very mindful of the fact that, as an employer, you are busy running the business. You do not want to be peeling back the layers to try to find the help that you need. Very often employers say to me, "I want a more diverse, more skilled workforce, but I seem to end up with the same situation and the same people". That is quite often because their recruitment process is still the same, because they are busy doing the day job, but we can help them better. That is why we have our National Employer Partnership Team.

For example, recently I did a dial-in with the hospitality sector. We had 23 new employers join our national employer partnership team to work directly with DWP, because they knew that it was there to help them to fill their vacancies and to make sure that they were giving people with the most barriers or the biggest challenges the opportunity to come into their great businesses, which open up an array of careers, skills and learning opportunities for them. Above all, it is a career. Explaining and understanding that is really important.

We have set up an employer help website. There is also a Job Help website. Whether you are looking for work or looking to recruit people, there are ways to link in with DWP and across government. One thing that the pandemic has managed to achieve is to get people to understand that if they go to GOV.UK they will find information there that they need, whether on Kickstart and on using our free "Find a job" service.

We are working with DfE, the Cabinet Office and No. 10 on a new employer initiatives campaign. This will be a multichannel marketing campaign to support not only Kickstart but apprenticeships, traineeships, T-levels and everything you can be involved in that can help to grow your business. We will also help people to go through a business support finder tool. I know that the Skills Minister, Gillian Keegan, is working on a "Find an apprentice" tool as well.

As I said, we also have our Job Help website. I am about to release a new multichannel advert, particularly on younger people's channels such as Snapchat and Instagram, because we should be advertising where young people will see it and not expecting people magically to find us. That is why we have our Youth Hubs. Hopefully, there will be around 140 in total. Over 50 are open now. They are there to help people to know and understand the schemes. They are also places where employers can come to work directly with the local DWP team, the council and anyone else to make sure that they are reaching out to the people with the most barriers and to get those opportunities in front of them.



Some of our Jobcentres do things called Kickstart Quick Start, particularly on Saturdays. They get employers directly in the Jobcentres working directly with the JCP team to get people into those roles. In fact, one of the most pleasing things for me was to see the guys sitting there in their tracksuits in the Jobcentre at our new DWP site in Liverpool and talking to young people about the opportunities that the Kickstart scheme could bring them by working with LFC.

These are proud moments. I think that people know and understand that JCPs and what we can deliver have changed markedly. I call them “jobs, community, progression”. That is what is under that green sign. The more people can know and understand that, both as employers and as potential claimants and people whom we can help to progress, not only in times of peril, the better.

I would like to invite the committee to come and see any of our provision—any of our teams at any time. They would be delighted to show you what is under the bonnet, so to speak. For many of our new claimants, particularly people who have come to see us through the pandemic, it is a completely different experience from the bars on the windows and cards on the wall stuff. It is really nurturing, supportive and tailored. I am very proud of our amazing team of Work Coaches and all that goes on at JCPs.

**Q233 The Lord Bishop of Derby:** Thank you. You spoke about those who are most at risk. Part of that is sometimes about geography. This is a rather more specific conversation about what the DWP is doing to support SMEs to engage with government policies and schemes, particularly in places where people find them difficult to access, such as rural and coastal communities.

**Mims Davies:** Absolutely. It goes back to the point that you can make great policy from Whitehall, with a Starbucks on every corner, but life is not like that. I spent much of my career in South Wales, progressing and getting great opportunities. That gave me a great start in life, but I am very mindful of the fact that a lot of people I know from then have not progressed or had the opportunities. Whether it is location or confidence—confidence is always a massive thing—we need to make sure that our services work for every community.

I very much believe that our model is one of the most advantageous in government, in that we have a seat in the heart of pretty much every community. We know and understand every community, whether it is the fact that the bus fare is a problem when it comes to getting into the JCP or getting started in a role, or the fact that there is a lack of support if you want to go into self-employment because you are in rural Scotland, getting to the JCP or any business support is challenging and your network connection might be difficult.

That is why we use the Flexible Support Fund. It might be about getting someone a phone or a laptop so that they are able to apply for jobs, to train or to upskill. It might be about giving them the bus fare to help them on their journey to the job centre, so that when they come in it is the most meaningful engagement and is worth their time. Once people

get started in a role, we can also help them with the bus fare, a wheels-to-work scheme or a wheel on the car. We can help them with anything that is a barrier to their working. That can include new suits and other things. That is where the Work Coach really dials in to what the person needs and what the challenge is for that particular community.

I have sat in a Jobcentre in Bridgend and had people say, "We know people who haven't progressed in 25 years, and that is because of a lack of buses". That has come up in the in-work progression report. Transport is a key issue. I am very mindful of that.

Let me quickly come on to the point about SMEs. We have an amazing, growing relationship with smaller businesses, through our local employer partnerships, through the Jobcentres, and our national linking-in. Through the 900 gateways that we are working with in Kickstart, including the FSB and the brilliant Chambers of Commerce, I think that our knowledge and understanding of local communities and local business needs are growing. People know that they can get so much more out of us. Kickstart has been brilliant, because it was a deliberate intention to make sure that SMEs could be involved in that programme.

So, yes, there is more to do, but we are definitely on the right track. Whatever community you live in, DWP knows how to help you as a claimant or as an employer to fill those vacancies and skills gaps.

**The Lord Bishop of Derby:** Thank you, Minister.

Q234 **Lord Layard:** Hello, Minister. Could we go back to Kickstart? I have always been a fan of this type of arrangement, because I think it is crucial that young people who cannot get regular jobs get at least six months' meaningful work so that they begin to understand what it is all about and have a better chance of long-term employment.

If it is so good, why are the Government not planning to continue it after the end of this year? It seems to me an absolute no-brainer to have that as a permanent institution. Obviously, its size depends on the state of the economy, but why close down the institution, which is so valuable?

I would like to ask you a couple more questions. There is a problem, which I am sure you know about and we have been told about, of people who are not on benefit and therefore not entitled to enter Kickstart. Is there not some way in which Kickstart could be made available to people who are not drawing benefit, especially people under 18 who are not entitled to benefits?

Finally, there is a general problem of disaffected youth whom the system loses touch with. You have talked about all kinds of interesting initiatives to try to draw people in. Should there not be some sort of tracking system whereby we keep in touch with people so that they get advice even if they are not drawing benefit?

**Mims Davies:** Those are really good points. Where to start on this one? There is lots to say.

Currently, 148,000 Kickstart jobs are being advertised across the DWP network. We are getting more and more out there and working with

employers for young people to know that they are there. With the doom and gloom, the challenge of the pandemic, the tiers and the lockdowns, lots of young people do not know that those opportunities are there. When I have spoken to young people about it, I have said, "Please, please, tell your friends to share this so that other people know that the opportunities are out there".

I was with the Gym Group in Croydon a couple of weeks ago asking exactly that. There are over 44,000 young people in those roles at the moment, about 500 per working day, and 247,000 approved roles as of 7 July. These have come from nowhere, frankly. I want to thank the employers, SMEs, large and small, people who are coming forward, and different organisations who are partnering with us in those 900 gateways. It has been phenomenal.

We looked back at previous ways of potentially designing an intervention to try to make sure it was as all-encompassing as possible. You can work with llamas, sea kelp, vegan chocolate factories, digital marketing, heritage crafts down in the West Country—you name it. The breadth of opportunities is absolutely staggering and very exciting. In fact, I think Chatsworth House was going to bring in some type of specific stone masonry as well. There are really exciting ways of future-proofing and renewing skills for young people.

I will be very honest: I am not advocating and pushing for an extension of Kickstart at this precise moment. My job is to fill those roles. As I say, there are nearly 150,000 roles out there for young people, who might be sitting in their bedrooms, worried about their future, who have not left school, college or university in the way they expected, and I want them to have that hope and opportunity for the future. With these jobs and all the ones that we are bringing through, you can still start up to December this year, so you could be graduating next summer.

My priority at the moment is not to extend the runway. It is to turn those jobs into outcomes for young people, and then, as you say, the next stage potentially sells itself. My job is to do that.

On your other points about people who might go unnoticed, I really think that schools and colleges know who the people are to look out for, whether they are starting to go absent or whether they need wider, additional educational help, and we need to capture them as soon as possible. For example, for our Sector-based Work Academy Programmes that cannot currently use 16 and 17 year-olds, I am looking to see whether we can bring that in so that we can fund training and support for kids who are younger so that we do not lose them.

We are actively using our Youth Hubs as a great way of reaching people who may not be on benefits, and we are currently partnering with over 500 partners—the National Careers Service, the NHS, and the Prince's Trust, and others—to create those Youth Hubs. We have one Youth Hub in Rotherham football club. We are placing them in parts of the community that works for that community to capture the widest number of people.

You do not have to be on benefits to come and get support in Youth Hubs. We will be giving them a range of support because of the partnerships we are creating, whether it is mental health support or housing support, whether there are drug or alcohol or chaotic lifestyle issues. Some of them will have important drop-in facilities. I mentioned the Jobcentre in Derby earlier. Many of our Jobcentres are co-located so people can then get support from the council and from wider local interventions of stakeholders. We know that as soon as people can get face-to-face support, which can then lead to working with a Work Coach, it will make the difference in outcomes, and it is so effective.

What we have at DWP is really tailored to make sure that, whatever your circumstances, whether you are 16 and a care leaver, we can help you. We have also introduced Youth Employability Work Coaches to directly support young people. We have under-25 Work Coach teams as well. We know that, whether the signposting is coming through the council or other areas, it has been welcomed by DfE and the Home Office, so that if you are not in receipt of benefit we can get you support.

Do not forget: Kickstart is not the only intervention. It will be right for some people but not others. Traineeships, apprenticeships and work experience—all of that—are so important. Our local authorities have a duty to support people who are NEET and to make sure that they link in those services as well.

I hope that gives you an idea that we are trying to create that one-stop shop for young people at any stage or age of their career when they need that intervention, and that Kickstart is one of our interventions but not the only one.

**Lord Layard:** Thank you very much.

**Mims Davies:** Thank you.

Q235 **Lord Davies of Oldham:** I have, Minister, one or two challenging supplementaries. The committee had a somewhat different experience from talking to young people from what you have described to us today. Quite a number of them have expressed considerable disillusionment and bitterness with what is on offer, and would even shrug away the idea of any emphasis on apprenticeships, because there are so few of them on offer in many parts of the country.

Of all the illustrations that you gave I particularly appreciated Chatsworth House, because when I was a Minister I had a chance to go there too. That was very welcome, but that was the furthest north that I thought you had identified. When the committee went north in July to talk to people in Lancashire, we got a very rough response indeed.

As to the idea that jobcentres are good places for young people to go to look for their future prospects, they expressed very forcefully their fear that if they go to the jobcentre they might be talking themselves out of benefit. I think one has to recognise that among young people there is widespread disillusionment with our wider society at the present time, and it will not do to gloss over that with one or two cosy chats with those who perhaps have been more favourably treated.

The real issue is how much the Government are prepared to put in to support young people and certainly to get Kickstart into many more locations. You described one or two that we could not help but find great favour with, but at the present time young people are in fact an enormous challenge for wider society, and government has to make sure that it responds positively.

**Mims Davies:** Thank you. It is a challenge. I promise you that I have not been only to Chatsworth House. I was recently at one of Rhyl's holiday parks meeting Kickstarters and met a young lady who was joining them to be a joiner. I have been up to Forres in Scotland and various other of our other JCPs there. In fact, we were setting up a care academy to get older people to work in the care sector.

I was in Leeds most recently. I was in Toxteth Jobcentre in Liverpool and met with the youth group at Merseyside, where our Youth Hub. I was in Loughborough and Peterborough. I have met with the Youth Hub at Barrow. I recently opened Kendall Youth Hub with Tim Farron, the MP there. I mentioned Rotherham football club. I recently engaged with the Whitehaven Jobcentre at the Copeland Centre. I have met with the Youth Hubs in Penrith, Derby, Maidstone, Crawley—you name it. I promise you that I do not always do the glamorous trips. It is very important to get out and listen to every community.

In Oldham, we have organised a Kickstart jobs fair, which is imminent, if you happen to be nearby on 28 July. It will be held in the local library with 20 local employers attending, showcasing the local vacancies. Our JCP youth team will be there. They will be doing twice-weekly virtual job fairs as well, and they are working with all the different local employers, such as First Choice Homes, and on jobs such as administration, digital and social media. We are matching people as soon as possible.

I think you are right: we have to break down the stereotypes of the experience of Jobcentres. When was the last time you went to the Jobcentre yourself and listened and engaged? If it was not recently, I would humbly suggest that everybody does, because it is a very different experience. It is absolutely right that we are youth focused and youth centred, hence the Youth Employability Work Coaches and the focus on the under-25s. On the Job Help website, we have an under-25 section as well.

We have to break down the stereotype of what DWP is about. It is about "Any Job—Better Job—Career"—the A, B, Cs—but it is also about what is holding you back. What individual support do you need? Is it maths and English support? Is it help with language? Is it confidence? Confidence comes up consistently at any age for anybody who is engaging with DWP.

You are right: we have to make sure that we have a broad, open offer. That is why we are doing outreach events at libraries, local communities and football clubs. There will be large events at the Olympic Park and at the Emirates stadium in London shortly. We go to people and we are there for people at any age or any stage of their career. It is a very fair challenge, but I think we are up to it and for it.

**Lord Davies of Oldham:** Thank you.

Q236 **Baroness Newlove:** Good morning, Minister. I can hear the passion listening to this, and it is great to hear that. For me, it is really important that we listen to the young people, like you say, and I agree that you need to visit a jobcentre. You are like me: if you are going to say something, you need to understand it and visit it yourself.

We have listened to a lot of young people on this committee and there is a lot of confusion for young people. Young people are very concerned about losing access to benefits when accessing training and apprenticeships, so there is a bit of confusion here for them. Does the current policy in essence disincentivise young people on benefits from accessing the training that might help them in the labour market?

**Mims Davies:** I think that is a very fair ask, and that is why we have Work Coaches who go into schools to talk about what Jobcentres do, but also to talk about life on benefits. I have spoken to young people who have gone into work, some of them most recently in Croydon on Kickstart. A couple of them previously worked in the cultural centre and now have a long-term job that fits around their acting and singing and other things that they know and love and want to go back to when the time is right.

The confidence and what comes out of people from having that wage packet and that sense of worth is so inspiring. I am glad you hear my passion, because I am hugely passionate about this. This is not about a one-stop shop of making people go into something that is wrong for them. It is about understanding what is holding them back. As I say, whether it is maths or English, or whether it is language barriers, we need to make sure that we are helping people to progress.

At Toxteth Jobcentre I met three young guys who are going on the first of our 9,000 Google learning programmes, where you get a level 3 qualification. It is the first in the country to come over from the States to us, and it will really open doors for them. You should have seen the smiles on their faces when they realised the long-term opportunities that it was going to mean.

So, yes, providing support when needed and the life that is needed if you are on benefits is important, and being there when people need that support is key. But helping people to progress and move forward and perhaps to see things in themselves that they never knew were there is so exciting and drives me. In fact, the Jobcentre in Warrington is working with the Youth Hub and the Verve to support care leavers, those with complex needs and young people in the local area.

That is where our understanding of the local community, the local economy and who has the barriers really comes into play. That is why I want people to know and understand what is actually behind the doors in the Jobcentre, not the perceptions. We have to bust those perceptions, and it is my job to help people to know and understand our young people in particular.

Things are really different. That is why our channels of young people talking about their experiences and what they have got from DWP are so powerful. It is those young people sharing those stories with other young people—when Kickstarters share with other Kickstarters, and with potential employers, just how amazing it is—that really makes a difference. There is so much to go for here. We cannot leave this pandemic generation behind, and I am very conscious that people who were left behind before this pandemic cannot be left behind once again.

**Baroness Newlove:** Thank you, Minister.

Q237 **Lord Empey:** Good morning, Minister. You have challenged us to go to jobcentres, quite rightly. I had the responsibility in Northern Ireland for the jobcentres when I was Employment Minister, so I spent a lot of time in them. They are an evolving business. I would also say that the local partnerships that they put up through local authorities and with other organisations locally have a huge role to play, and a key role.

Lord Layard mentioned it before, but I want to take you back to Kickstart, if I may. How successful do you think it has been in getting young people to start placements and to stay in employment and training, because, as has come through in this session and as you have said, it is about the outcomes? Getting people on to particular courses is one thing. How successful do you think it has been? Is there data to establish how many people have been through the scheme, and do you know what groups have benefited most from it?

**Mims Davies:** I mentioned DWP Train and Progress earlier, which we have progressed. That is where you can train and stay on benefits for up to 12 weeks. It also links into the new DfE bootcamps, where you can be on benefits and be supported for up to four months. The bootcamps and being able to have that flexibility with benefits so that there is no cliff edge for people is really important. One hundred and twenty new bootcamps have been announced in construction, digital, manufacturing, engineering, green skills and rail. We are trying very much to make sure that if people come to us and want to progress, whether it is through Kickstart or any other area, there is no cliff edge for them, and we are supporting them on the next stage, which is absolutely key.

On the evaluation of Kickstart, we are very much looking at the sectors that people are going into. I mentioned heritage crafts and growing areas such as green jobs. We know how many jobs are in environment and land, government services, healthcare, hospitality, food, law, legal, travel and tourism, teaching or education, for example. We are tracking all of that. As I mentioned, we will be tracking the outcomes. Everyone who goes on Kickstart will get a certificate and proof that they have been on it. We are already starting to see many of the people convert that into traineeships and apprenticeships. We have been working with employers to try to help people to move on to the next stage of their career and learning journey.

As I said earlier, Kickstart is right for some young people. Some people need our youth employment programme, which is 13 weeks and helps with CVs and interviews. Some people just need work experience. Some

people are ready for a job that is already out there. They do not need a Kickstart role. Some people are absolutely right to convert from traineeships into apprenticeships, and that is what we have been doing through our Jobcentres and our local links, which you described so eloquently. So, yes, absolutely, we will be tracking the outcomes of this programme.

I am sure that some people on the call will be pleased to know that many of the employers I have spoken to who have been so enthusiastic about this scheme and about bringing people forward through it have actually been YTS trainees themselves. They have been through their own experience of getting their start in life.

One thing I have said to people is, "Remember your start into your career—how green and how nervous you were. You may not have had that confidence and network. Be realistic about the young people who are coming into your organisation and business. Give them the help and the start". This is about that leg-up into employment land. It may not be somewhere where you stay, but it will give you the confidence to train or to do something different, to go back to study or to go on to that traineeship or apprenticeship, or you may stay with that employer. It is so brilliant when you see how much these people are blossoming. It is the people who go back to when they first started, when they did not have a pandemic to contend with as well, who have been brilliant in opening up opportunities and sharing them with young people.

There has been a payback in both directions, because the young people coming in with fresh ideas, fresh thoughts, new skills and challenging those employers has been a joy to behold. I would definitely talk to Kickstart employers too, because they have absolutely loved being able to open up the jobs that they have. I spoke to TalkTalk about it and to various other large and small employers. Those people would never have got through the CV or interview process without Kickstart. It is joyous, and I really hope it will have a legacy like the YTS one I have just described.

**Q238 Lord Empey:** That leads me neatly on to the next question. Have you considered retaining the Kickstart scheme in its current or possibly revised form for the future? If not, what policies will be in place to reduce long-term youth unemployment? We know that it was not a permanent scheme, but what are you going to do with it?

**Mims Davies:** There are no current plans to extend Kickstart, or indeed the eligibility, but we are keeping it under review and we are learning as we go. It is really important to understand that a year ago we put together the plan for jobs. I spent the summer putting together interventions such as JETS and JFS. JFS is extra help and support, over what the Work Coaches give, for people three months unemployed. JETS is similar, but it is for those who are six months unemployed.

We work with other partners such as Reed, and that has been incredibly successful. We are just bringing through our new Restart programme for people who are one year unemployed. That, again, is developed with a really strong understanding of the local economy and the local challenges



that may be holding people back. That is only just starting to bed in, and we will start to see that three-year programme coming through probably more formally in September.

Kickstart is one of a suite of measures for people, including the Youth Hubs, our youth employment programme, traineeships, apprenticeships, work experience and SWAPs, which I mentioned. We have to get those young people into those 150,000 jobs. What was really pleasing for me in the most recent employment figures is that we have seen 356,000 people going back on to payrolls within the last month, nearly half of whom were young people.

We are turning the dial on this. We need to get people into those Kickstart roles, and we need to use those other suites of measures, keep them under review and go from there. Of course, there is a spending review coming up, and the Treasury is very interested in what we are doing with our plan for jobs. But my priority right now is making sure that the people who might be sitting at home wondering what is next for them know about Kickstart and all the other interventions that we have through our Jobcentres, our outreach and our Job Help website.

**Lord Empey:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Minister, might I pursue the issue of Kickstart just so that we have the record absolutely straight? As I understand it, you are saying that Kickstart will not be extended but that it is under review. Clearly there is an impact from the pandemic to date, but who knows what the current extent of the spread of the Delta strain will be on employment and the nature of employment over the next few months?

You have said that Kickstart was part of a suite of measures, because there are other things, quite clearly. I am puzzled about why you would stop something that clearly works well. You have spoken of it in glowing terms and about the fact that it will have a legacy. I cannot now work out the timing of the autumn spending review with that review—you are keeping Kickstart under review—together with actually making it operational so that there is a seamless transfer from the current scheme to its continuation. To be clear, has there been a decision to stop it, or might it be revived in four or eight weeks' time, with an announcement made to extend it?

**Mims Davies:** You ask a very clear and fair question. The decision is that there is funding for 250,000 placements and the final ones can begin in December this year and finish the following summer. My job is to deliver that programme and to get those 250,000 people into starts to change lives and outcomes for the roles that we have. I am not a Treasury Minister, so I cannot write myself an additional cheque for the next stage. You will know the processes that we have to go through. My job is to deliver Kickstart in the form I was asked to—a plan for jobs—to deliver those outcomes and to make sure that the employers waiting for young people and the young people who want opportunities get them.

The point about Kickstart being under review is that we did not have a chance to pilot this programme; we just had to get it up and running. Of

course, we are looking and learning. If, for example, someone is 26 or 27, and there is a job that is right for them, we will always make sure that we are as flexible as we can be with the programme and the funding, within reason. By keeping it under review we are just making sure that we are not holding anyone back, and that we are delivering it in a way that gives it the best chance of progressing long term, to my mind. My job is to do the job in hand at this precise point.

You are not the only one asking. Every stakeholder and sector is asking that. My concern above all is that, if I extend the runway, or if there is any perception that the runway is extended, we will not get people into the jobs that are there in the here and now. I want to be doing that. If there is an opportunity in the future to do more to support young people in whatever form it takes, I would grab it. But, for me, it is about those starts and those opportunities, and those employers and the young people in their local community getting those opportunities and changing their lives, as well as using all the other suite of interventions.

**The Chair:** Minister, that has been very clear. Let me ask one further question for clarity of the record. Will your department make a bid to the Treasury for an extension of Kickstart as part of the spending review?

**Mims Davies:** We are not in that shape at the moment. We are still putting together our bids and our interventions. At this precise point, we are not fully there, and it is still early days on that. As I say, in some ways the next stage could write itself if we deliver this, but my job at the moment is to deliver this, because it is about the people, some of whom have been waiting 18 months already to get an opportunity to progress. That is where we are at the moment. At present, I cannot say any more. I hope you understand.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for that very clear response.

Q239 **Lord Baker of Dorking:** Minister, could I begin by congratulating you on your knowledge, your commitment and your passion? You are by far the most impressive Minister we have met so far. You know more about the mitigation of youth unemployment than any Minister in the Government, and you are a Parliamentary Secretary. I am not being condescending. I was the most junior Parliamentary Secretary in Ted Heath's Government, so junior I was often left off the list of Ministers. My job, Ted Heath told me, was to try to reduce the Civil Service.

As a Parliamentary Secretary, I had to go and see the Defence Secretary, Peter Carrington; the Chancellor, Reggie Maudling; the Business Secretary, Peter Walker; and say, "Will you please reduce the size of your department?" A Parliamentary Secretary saying that. I only wish you were the Secretary of State, because if you were, with your knowledge and commitment you could have real influence, not only on the mitigation of youth unemployment but the causes of it.

Let me give you an example. The Minister from the Department for Education who appeared before us did not even know the level of youth unemployment. Nor did he know the number of NEETs. That is extraordinary. With your knowledge and commitment, if you were

Secretary of State and you were asked the question the Chair just asked you, you would make up your mind to speak, level to level, with the Chancellor, and you would make it very clear that you wanted to keep Kickstart, for example. You could also go the Secretary of State for Education and say, "What about data skills? There is a shortage of 100,000 data people in the country, rising daily, and you do not have a policy for it".

I very much believe that there should be one Minister dealing not only with the mitigation of youth unemployment but with the causes of it, because the causes of it include a major re-skilling of the country. So I think you should be a Secretary of State.

**Mims Davies:** Thank you very much. I am very touched by those comments. It is a mission for me. I slightly spelt that out at the beginning of this committee. I have been quite boring about it in my time at DWP, but I very strongly agree with many of the points that you have made and the fact that we should have a very strong youth focus as a Government, and I make that bid very often. If I was being told to do more on it, I would absolutely.

My Secretary of State, I must say, is very supportive of me. We have a brilliant working relationship and a strong ministerial team. I am using this central role to really make sure that across government we are driving those outcomes in relation to sectors and gaps and to get a proper understanding. That is what I feel. I strongly agree with you that we need to change the dial, because, as we said earlier, it is the people with the barriers who are coming into this who we need to double down on, and we need to make sure that it is those people who start to rise in this next stage. That drives every decision that I make.

Q240 **Lord Baker of Dorking:** Thank you very much. I have one short question on work experience. We all know that it is very important to have work experience, but ordinary schools are barred by law from having it at 14 to 16, which is extraordinary in itself. With the new T-level exam coming in, each student has to have 45 days' work experience. From your knowledge, do you think that there are many companies that could provide 45 days' work experience? It is an expense to a company. It does not come cheaply. You will know that, because you deal with employers. It is a cost. Somebody has to spend time teaching what is happening in their business and explain what they do. Is that a realistic target, in your view?

**Mims Davies:** I mentioned a little earlier that when you go back to the start of your career and what you needed, and you are realistic about your recruitment and your requirements, you get a much fairer outcome in recruitment opportunities, particularly for young people with the broadest barriers. Very often, our employers want ready-made young people who are perfect to slot into their business. They do not mean to screen people out accidentally.

With Kickstart and with really good work experience, you are screening people in. That is what we need to be doing. We work with a brilliant programme called Movement to Work, which links in with the Civil

Service and DWP and is absolutely marvellous at doing this. We have some amazing employers, including the Range, that are brilliant at work experience, and they really see this as a way of bolstering their recruitment and helping young people.

Again, it goes back to that confidence point. I have had conversations with Gillian about the National Careers Service and making sure that this is really embedded in our education and in people being not just educated but ready for work. Through learning about resilience during the pandemic we can teach people coming into the workplace about being ready to learn in the workplace, and that it is about a life of jobs, not a job for life.

Being agile, resilient and able to learn throughout your career, and being ready to do so, is so important so that you can transition, bounce and do everything that you need to do in a changed labour market. I am afraid that we are not honest with our young people or ourselves about careers. We all need to have that ability, and we need to instil in our young people that, yes, you will be learning at school, but you will be learning more at work and learning continuously. We must absolutely give them that ability.

For me, work experience is really important, but starting to have an honest conversation about a changing labour market and a changing world of work is key. That is where our schools linking better into local communities comes in. That is why our work coaches also go into schools. I strongly believe that we can and must do more here. There needs to be a better joining up of work experience, getting young people ready for the world of work, and that changing labour market.

We have just seen how much change there is in the way we work in this pandemic. That will not change. That is now the guarantee, and that is the sort of conversation about employment that we should be having throughout our school life. If we get that right, it will help young people coming into work and make it so much easier. They kind of feel that education is done by the time they get to the workplace. As we all know, it is beginning, and so it should be. That is what keeps us enthusiastic and progressing.

This is a broad answer to the question, but the more we are honest with children and schools, and the more time we spend with proper careers advice and proper insight about what is going on down the road, the better. You could live next to the Cadbury factory but never have been in. You could live near Shakespeare's Globe but never have been in. We need to make sure that people know what is on their doorstep and be ready to take those opportunities, and that is an honest conversation about work experience and the world of work all the way through. If we all do that working with employers, we will end up with the skilled workforce that we need, which will clear some of the gaps that are building up as well.

**Lord Baker of Dorking:** Thank you very much.

Q241 **Lord Clarke of Nottingham:** My question is supplementary but sticks

with Kickstart. Minister, I, too, have greatly enjoyed your obvious enthusiasm for Kickstart and for youth hubs. You have dealt very skilfully with the question you have been pressed on about why Kickstart needs to end in December this year. Obviously you cannot answer that before the spending review, but I hope you and your department are working on it.

Then there is the other question, about Kickstart being available only to people who are claiming universal credit, and I wonder whether you could address that. Youth hubs are not confined like that. I assume that the rule comes because your department is the DWP, and it is your jobcentres and you deal with people who receive benefit. If a school careers adviser, for example, were to refer a 16 to 17 year-old to the jobcentre for help, would you just turn them away saying that you cannot help? What kind of support do you give?

Looking at working across things, we have this intractable problem of NEETs. Your answer was that that is a local authority matter. Local authorities' success in dealing with it is extremely variable. Do you encourage them to try to get these NEETs motivated to go to the jobcentre? What sort of support and advice would you give to somebody who is beginning to show some faint interest in getting into the jobs market? Do you think there is much more to be done in working across these boundaries? How far are your jobcentres able to deal with the people I describe, particularly those who do not claim universal credit and who are at the moment not eligible for Kickstart, and with NEETs, if anybody ever refers a NEET to the local jobcentre?

**Mims Davies:** First, Kickstart was set up to meet a need, so it had to be targeted in the urgency of the situation that we have. That is why it was set up in those policy terms. Some 16 and 17 year-olds can claim Universal Credit. They could be care leavers and therefore on Kickstart. But there are other options available to them. Forgive me, I should have said to Lord Baker that we also have our mentoring circles and other ways in which we bring young people together to share the same experiences and we help them with the right interventions.

As regards working with local authorities and the interventions at Youth Hubs, they were set up exactly in the way that suits the local community to reach the hardest-to-reach groups.

I am sure we will come later to the replacement of FSF and other interventions. Those, again, are particular interventions for the people who may not come to jobcentres, who are the hardest to reach and who have the broadest barriers. Hopefully, we have a mixture of interventions that are right for people. That is why that drop-in ability through Youth Hubs is very important for people.

No, we are not going to be turning people away. We are going to find the right tailored provision for people, whether it is work experience, whether it is DWP Train and Progress, whether it is the Google certificate that I mentioned earlier—whatever it is that is right for the young person. Whether it is the Jobcentres or working with our stakeholders, including local authorities, combined authorities, LEAs, mayors—you name it—we will make sure that we have the right tailored interventions.

We also have the flexible support fund whereby we can buy in local provision. If there is a very specific NEET problem, and as DWP we need to address that, we can buy in and tailor that provision through local procurement. I very much feel that we are the most agile government department for using funds—we have an extra £150 million in the Flexible Support Fund—to help people, whatever the challenge, which is very specific to that location and those young people.

As I said earlier, education will know the people who are going off track at 13, 14 and 15, when we need to be making those interventions as soon as possible. It is that cross-government and cross-community work that will make the difference. Otherwise we tend to see people coming back into our jobcentres who have been via a stay with the MoJ and other things that have added extra barriers to their progression. We need to get this right. You are absolutely right about that.

As to our interventions with the hubs and with JCPs, we have the signposting and we can put that local support in where appropriate, working with charities and stakeholders in local areas so that people are not left behind.

**Lord Clarke of Nottingham:** Do your people sometimes refer people to schemes that are not your department's? We have heard very little about bootcamps, for example, and where they fit in. You do not just concentrate on getting people into Kickstart and so on. How wide do you go? Do your people have the necessary knowledge and skill to direct people to a programme that is outside your department?

**Mims Davies:** Very much so. The Prince's Trust, one of our key partners, will be situated in Jobcentres and in Youth Hubs, and is a key partner for us. That is where we can buy in provision. I recently spoke to my south-west team who were working with a local charity on an employment support programme that was very specific to them and their local needs, and that was bought-in provision. We absolutely have that agility.

I was with Gillian Keegan, the Skills Minister, on Friday at Wilton Park at our Sussex export event, which was very exciting, helping SMEs and other people to find out what is there. One thing she mentioned to me, which was very pleasing—this is my understanding, and I hope I have this right; I am sure officials will correct me if I do not—was that all the people who were going on the bootcamps at this precise point had been directed through their Work Coaches. This is a key link to the DfE for the people with the biggest needs. The knowledge of our work coaches is phenomenal.

As I said, we are at the heart of the 120 new bootcamps that were announced on 15 July. DWP Train and Progress allows Universal Credit customers to access those bootcamps, one of which is in Rhyl, as I said. We have had them for some time in the Sector-based Work Academy Programme, where you can train for up to six weeks. These bootcamps are more extended. They are all across the country. I have a list here—I am sure my officials can share it with you, but you can find it on GOV.UK—of what you can do right across the country and who you would be working with.

In Rhyl, through our sector-based work academy, 100% of people go into jobs. It is generally employer-led in Rhyl from start to finish if you get the right people. They are incredibly lucrative careers and you can move up quickly. People with a NEET background have quite often had a stay with the MoJ and other things in the meantime. They get into that job and never look back, because it is absolutely right for them. These work trials and work opportunities and the uniqueness that we can bring in through DWP makes a difference. Again, it comes back to what is driving this—outcomes.

**Lord Clarke of Nottingham:** Thank you very much indeed.

**Mims Davies:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Minister, I pursue one issue with reference to bootcamps? Could you explain to the committee why they are called bootcamps? Why that specific term?

**Mims Davies:** Skills bootcamps offer free flexible courses for up to 16 weeks for adults aged 19 or over who are either in work or recently unemployed. As I say, we can get our universal credit customers on them. The skills bootcamps are helping to retrofit where some of the needs are—in construction, rail or other areas or where there are specific gaps—and we are linking directly with employers working across multiple locations. DfE named them bootcamps to try to get across the fact that they are very focused on filling the needs in specific sectors.

There are construction bootcamps, for example, in the east Midlands, London and the south-west. There are artificial intelligence bootcamps available through the University of Bath, but you can do that at multiple locations. You can also learn and work in cloud and data through the University of Bath. You can learn CAD and work with it through the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. There is all sorts of coding, from the West Midlands to the East Midlands to the north-west.

I have masses of examples of what is there. These are linked specifically to what employers need in that area and where there are jobs and vacancies, and it is very focused on that sector. The ask from DfE was, “How can you help people to do this training and learning?” We lent into the Treasury and asked it, and the answer was, “Yes, these people can stay on universal credit to do these skills bootcamps and then go into the sectors where there are the gaps”. This is pipeline support and helping people to transition. I hope that was helpful, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that explanation.

Q242 **Lord Hall of Birkenhead:** I am delighted to hear that there is an AI bootcamp, because AI will change everything and is changing everything.

Could I ask you, Minister, how you target certain groups? We know, for example, that there are higher unemployment rates among certain groups than others. Last autumn, for example, the rate among young black people of 16 to 24 was over 40%. The rate among a similar contingent of young white people was, I think, just over 12%. How do you and your department ensure that underrepresented or other

demographic groups that are more likely to be affected by youth unemployment than others—it could be to do with ethnicity or with disabilities—are effectively targeted by your policies?

**Mims Davies:** You are absolutely right that the challenge for young people to get on sometimes can be their background. I have also been working with MPs, because some young people with that background who want to go into self-employment and their own business find access to finance extra hard, which is unjustified and unfair. We have our wider youth offer, which I have mentioned, which is part of the plan for a jobs package and includes the youth unemployment work coaches, and helps to link into the people with the most significant and complex needs, whether that is disability, background, barrier, language, or whatever is holding them back.

We have been taking a targeted approach in 20 local authority areas. We have selected that by looking at a combination of population, the employment rate gap and the gap between white and ethnic-minority employment rates. Together, these local authorities represent about half of the national ethnic-minority employment gap.

I have some examples of direct action that we are taking. In Merseyside, we are working with a youth hub with the flexible support fund grant that I mentioned earlier, working with the Merseyside Youth Association to try to help participation in job-seeking activity and really help people to get that early support in the most disadvantaged communities. In Leicester, Work Coaches are being placed in local libraries in three wards with the largest ethnic-minority communities and are working directly with the local council. Our Work Woaches are also working with local training providers and support organisations to really help to know and understand those claimants' needs and to help them to reach those individual goals.

Across the country, there is a national programme of mentoring circles, which I mentioned it earlier. This is for all young people aged 16 to 24, but we are also bringing them in for the over-50s. These are really helpful. They are developed with business in the community and are part of the Prince's Trust to facilitate sessions with national organisations. I am sure you will be pleased to see the involvement there of the BBC, Google, the National Grid, Microsoft, Avon Fire & Rescue, Exeter football club, and Gwent Police.

These are employer mentors who lead meetings to help strengthen jobseekers' confidence and to help them gain an understanding of the opportunities within different work sectors. It also helps the employer to meet talented young jobseekers who may have those broader barriers. The employers participate and can really adapt what they are doing and delivering to try to attract young people into their businesses. In our first wave, which was back in 2018, we had over 80 businesses as part of this, and it has been rolled out more broadly.

We are also increasing the number of our Disability Employment Advisers, which will take us up to 1,000 nationally, to help young people and anybody with barriers to make sure that they are getting the right



support when it comes to getting into work. Again, it is about knowing what people need on the ground, making sure that that is led by the local Jobcentre and local employers, and understanding that your postcode or your background should be no barrier to your success.

**Q243 Lord Hall of Birkenhead:** Thank you very much. We know that gender pay gap reporting and all companies' insistence on that has made a big difference and has focused on a really important issue. Why not extend that to ethnicity pay gaps? We did that in my last job, and it was a phenomenally useful tool for ensuring that you focused on equity not just globally across the organisation but by grade and by department. Why not insist on companies reporting in that way, and maybe likewise, following on from what you were just saying, Minister, insist on CV-blind recruitment practices or encourage them widely?

**Mims Davies:** We know that sunlight is always the best disinfectant, don't we? Absolutely, what has been done on the gender pay gap has been brilliant, but we need to do more. Pay gap reporting is a BEIS policy area. The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities published its report in March, and we are awaiting a response from government on that, which will, of course, come from BEIS. It is really important, and we all welcome the opportunity to consider the commission's findings. Give them the light that, as I say, is so important for changing things in consulting on that. Pay gap reporting is important. Actively working with employers to help to increase their ethnic-minority employment and reduce that gap has an important part to play.

Again, I said earlier that many of our employers end up with the same type of people. They want different people coming into the room at the table making decisions but find it really hard to do that. We were making some really great progress on this before the pandemic, with workshops with the City of London financial sector and linking in with our DWP local Jobcentres to make sure that they were not overlooking talent that was on their doorstep. I was really pleased to be part of those interventions. We have also written and delivered a guide on helping local businesses to increase their ethnic-minority employment by working with the local enterprise partnership network of 38 different partnerships. There are details on how to do that on GOV.UK.

In this space we are actively helping employers, whether it is through Disability Confident, Kickstart or the Access to Work programme. In fact, Disability Confident has offered over 60,000 specific work opportunities for young people who may be disabled or have a health condition, and that includes work experience, trials and so on. We have a mixture of interventions. Most employers want to be more diverse. Their difficulty is how to do it. In DWP we can showcase the talent that they have on the doorstep to make sure that those young people are getting into those roles.

Mentoring circles are a really important approach of ours. I have been to some of them. I find it really important to go to and get on the programmes that people are part of. That really makes a difference to seeing whether they are making those interventions and really do work.

It is opening up people's eyes and bringing those partnerships together that will make the difference. I am keen to be out there as much as possible, because people will ultimately make up their minds about who is a good employer and who is doing the right thing. For me, all these interventions would be welcome, but the point about pay gap reporting is specifically for BEIS to respond to.

**Lord Hall of Birkenhead:** Thank you very much. I will add to other people's congratulations. Well done in getting out there and seeing stuff as it happens. It is fantastic.

**Mims Davies:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Minister, time presses, and our allotted 90 minutes are up. Thank you very much indeed for giving us your time this morning. Indeed, the extent of the commitment that you have personally to the role that you are undertaking is very evident. Thank you very much indeed for sharing with us your experiences to date in the role and your plans for the future. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much indeed.