

Work and Pensions Committee

Oral evidence: Employment opportunities for young people, HC 586

[Monday 5 December 2016](#)

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 5 December 2016.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Frank Field (Chair); Heidi Allen; Ms Karen Buck; James Cartlidge; Neil Coyle; Richard Graham; Luke Hall; Craig Mackinlay.

Questions 81-145

Witnesses

I: Katrina Gardiner, Senior Policy Officer, Skills, Suffolk County Council, Judith Mobbs, Assistant Director, Skills, Suffolk County Council, Hannah Foulstone, service user, MyGo Centre, and Martin Chester, former service user, MyGo Centre.

II: Peter Little OBE, Andrew Scott-Taggart, Chief Executive, The Found Generation, and Carole Easton, Chief Executive, Young Women's Trust.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [The Found Generation](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Katrina Gardiner, Judith Mobbs, Hannah Foulstone and Martin Chester.

Q81 **Chair:** Welcome. Katrina, can you begin our session by identifying yourself for the sake of the record? Then I am going to go down the panel and we will open up for questions. Thank you.

Katrina Gardiner: My name is Katrina Gardiner. I am from Suffolk County Council. I am a senior policy officer there and I lead on the MyGo programme.

Judith Mobbs: Judith Mobbs. I am the Assistant Director for Skills at Suffolk County Council.

Hannah Foulstone: Hannah Foulstone. I am a user of the MyGo service.

Martin Chester: Martin Chester, also using the MyGo service.

Q82 **Luke Hall:** Martin, can you start by telling us a bit about the support that you receive from MyGo?

Martin Chester: Yes. I found it hard before going on to MyGo. I have tried countless interviews and just found it really hard to find the right job for me because I've got physical Tourette's and also I have ADHD. With that it was harder because as soon as you mention Tourette's, people immediately say, "No thank you. We don't want you". Then it got really annoying. With MyGo helping I felt more confident. Now that I've got a job I feel at ease and I feel more happy that I have got a job.

Q83 **Luke Hall:** Thank you, Martin. Hannah, can you tell us a bit about what support you have received from MyGo?

Hannah Foulstone: Certainly. I am very pleased and proud to be here to represent MyGo because they have given me a lot of one-to-one support and tutorage. I left university and was able to find a job but after two years I had to leave because my department was moving and the place that they were moving to didn't have any obligation to keep my contract so I found myself unexpectedly out of work. One of the main things that concerned me was how do I go from here, continuing along my career path. I worked in a very niche field in communications and it wasn't just about finding a job for me but it was about creating a career path and progressing so that I could think about my future in two, five, 10 years' time rather than just jumping into a job.

I spoke personally to an adviser who took all this on board, listened to not only my capabilities for a job but also what I wanted to do, and put me forward for a lot of CV sessions, cover letters, spec letters. It has also given me a programme where I've worked in groups, got to know people, been able to network, so it has been incredibly helpful. It made everything look less scary, less daunting and it has also made me feel better within myself. I haven't been put into an environment where I just



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sign on, take some benefits and then walk out again; I am getting engaged with my community and finding a job at the same time.

- Q84 **Luke Hall:** Fantastic. Can you tell me the main differences between using MyGo and the sort of support you have received before, perhaps at the Jobcentre or the careers advice service at school? What are the main differences? You talked a bit about one-to-one support. Has that been the case for both of you?

Martin Chester: With MyGo, my support worker said my case was interesting because we had to find something that is safeish, then it would allow me—before, not using MyGo, I didn't have a job, I was on ESA and I was just getting lack of motivation. One of my friends told me about MyGo and me and mum tried it and here I am, got a job. Yes, I am just really happy, just glad that I used MyGo as soon as I could.

- Q85 **Chair:** Martin, did you get offered an apprenticeship when you went to work, because McDonald's do apprenticeships, don't they?

Martin Chester: Yes. I have done a year's apprenticeship at Alford Bros in Felixstowe, which is a bike store and I was working with bikes. That is what my dream job is. I was on internships at Otley College in Felixstowe. I was doing that for a year, so that was with Alford Bros. I was working at Sense from Wednesday to Friday and Alford Bros was on Mondays. I passed it but I didn't get any qualification, like paper qualification, so we tried ringing up but nothing really happened. The first job with MyGo was at Summer Fruit Farm, picking up sugar beet. I did it for a couple of weeks, realised it wasn't for me, and I carried on looking for other jobs, and fulltime employment at McDonald's.

- Q86 **Heidi Allen:** Martin, were these various jobs that you tried and eventually found the one that you have stuck with and you enjoy all through MyGo?

Martin Chester: No. The Co-op was by myself. They asked me how to describe Tourette's and when I am put on the spot I find it really hard to try to get words out, because I know what to say but I can't get it out, in a way.

Chair: You are doing pretty well today.

Heidi Allen: I was just thinking that, yes.

Martin Chester: Yes. I've been building it up with Amy from MyGo in Felixstowe.

- Q87 **Heidi Allen:** When you went to the Jobcentre, and you said you were put on ESA, did they make any attempt to find work for you or did they just say, "No, you're on the ESA"?

Martin Chester: Well, I tried looking for jobs but nothing really helps. Like, as I said, they are saying that they don't want me if I say Tourette's. My friend told me about MyGo and me and mum tried it and I've been successful so far.



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Q88 **Heidi Allen:** What about school? When you left school, was there much help there?

Martin Chester: Not really, because that is when I started having Tourette's, at the end of year 11, I believe, at Orwell at 16. I am 22 now and I have still got Tourette's, so it has been quite hard.

Heidi Allen: You have a good job, though.

Martin Chester: Yes.

Q89 **Chair:** Hannah, did you find out by word of mouth about MyGo, or not?

Hannah Foulstone: I made an application for Jobseeker's benefits and I was referred automatically to the MyGo centre. That was where I was assigned two coaches, one who was a work coach who worked with me on finding the job and another who managed the benefits account, making sure that I had enough money to support myself while looking for work.

Q90 **James Cartlidge:** I am a Suffolk MP and I don't think MyGo has an office in my constituency but I am very interested to hear about your experience. Without wishing to repeat the question, what matters to us is what actually makes the difference. Is it fair to say that the MyGo service is slightly friendlier and easier to approach, possibly?

Hannah Foulstone: Absolutely. That was the biggest draw for me, having entered a Jobcentre and having entered the MyGo centre. It is a very open atmosphere; you can see a lot of smiling, engaging, one-to-one conversations going on with work coaches and 16 to 24-year-olds like me. They are all having conversations about what they want to do and what careers would suit them. They are very attentive. They really home in on how to get you into work and they have a very positive, optimistic approach, which I find is very beneficial because a lot of us feel quite disheartened and quite down when we end up unemployed.

Sometimes we can be dismissed as if we are unemployed because we don't want to work; there can be that misconception at times. To be somewhere that does want to put in 110%, and visibly shows that to you—if you are not responding to e-mails, not answering your phone, if you are not showing up at the centre and putting the effort in, then they won't put the effort in with you. You get what you put into the centre and they treat you like you want to work, like somebody who has a right to develop their career path and not just claim benefits.

Q91 **James Cartlidge:** Is that how you would feel about it, Martin?

Martin Chester: Yes. When I first did MyGo there was someone there who I already knew, because I did Prince's Trust and I didn't realise he was working with MyGo, so it was like an old catch-up sort of thing, like to talk back to my first MyGo support worker. We went into Argos one time and he was saying that I've got severe Tourette's and then the manager just said, "Sorry, we don't want you," in a discriminating way. Then next Amy got referred to the Felixstowe branch and I've built so



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much more confidence with Amy, having trust, gaining confidence, trying to build up so I can just go to work and try to feel like a normal person without disabilities.

Q92 James Cartlidge: It is very reassuring. I can understand why a service originating in Suffolk would be very friendly and personable and all the rest of it, but the serious point is that we are here desperately looking for what adds the value and makes a difference. We hear all the time that the welfare system is unfriendly, impersonal and all the rest of it. Do you think it is because it is locally driven? What have you done that gives it what would appear to be a friendlier edge?

Judith Mobbs: I don't think it is all about it being locally driven. There are some things that could be done to make the national system more approachable.

The issue for young people, if you think back to the ages of 16 to 25, is it is a time when you don't necessarily have a huge amount of confidence. You are just starting out in the world and even for the most confident young person that next step of getting a job can be really intimidating. If you are finding that hard, your confidence is sapped, the environment of the Jobcentre becomes even more intimidating than it does for an adult who is unemployed.

It is very small things such as there are uniformed security guards in the Jobcentres. It is very intimidating for any of us to walk past uniformed security guards. At MyGo we still have security guards—they are trained and can deal with an incident if one arises—but they are not uniformed. They wear the same uniform as the rest of the staff and they also operate as hosts and facilitators of work search and learning, so they are not just being security guards but are there should we need them. Interestingly enough, we have had so little difficulty that we have not really needed to call upon them.

Another example is that in a Jobcentre you are not allowed to have a hot drink on the table and having a cup of coffee with someone is a way of breaking the ice and making people feel relaxed. In our centre, you can make your own hot drink and have it at the desk where you are working with a worker. It is very simple things like that.

When we were building it, I said to Katrina, "We want an iStore; we want a nice Apple store crossed with a Costa," and what I was trying to get across is we want an open environment, not one with everybody behind desks. It is those kinds of things that have helped to make it more open. Some of the staff in there are DWP staff, so we have not changed the staff necessarily. The model is some DWP staff and some of our own work coaches who work alongside them.

James Cartlidge: I had better come and see it sometime.

Q93 Richard Graham: Judith, thanks. Can I explore that a bit more? MyGo is a locally conceived project. How is it funded?



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Judith Mobbs: Ipswich had the opportunity to secure a City Deal and as part of the City Deal we identified that in greater Ipswich we had a significant issue of youth unemployment. Overall the employment rate in Suffolk is relatively low but youth unemployment in the area was uncharacteristically high. As part of our City Deal, and to enable the growth of the area to be supported by an appropriate workforce, we needed to address this issue of too many young people who were not able to secure good quality employment. Through the City Deal, we negotiated that the MyGo proposal should be one of the flagship projects. We also had the vision that we wanted to integrate the services of DWP through the local Jobcentre with other local projects that were going on and then to provide a top-up service that filled the cracks between all those building blocks of provision that were there to make it very easy for young people to access what they needed.

To come to your point on funding, we secured some funding as part of the City Deal from Youth Contract underspend, some through European social funding and some through what was then the BIS Employer Ownership pilot project.

Q94 **Richard Graham:** Just to drill a tiny bit further, was the Youth Contract underspend a local underspend or the national pot?

Judith Mobbs: No, it was a national underspend. We negotiated it as part of the City Deal.

Q95 **Richard Graham:** What did you extract from them in cash?

Judith Mobbs: Katrina, if I remember rightly, it was about £2.5 million to £3 million.

Katrina Gardiner: £4 million.

Judith Mobbs: £4 million, yes. The total cash pot was £9 million but it was made up from these three sources.

Q96 **Richard Graham:** With the £9 million you got overall, what has the bulk of that been spent on? People?

Judith Mobbs: Yes. The bulk of that is the cost of work coaches.

Q97 **Richard Graham:** Are the work coaches deliberately recruited as people who are good with young people looking for work?

Judith Mobbs: Yes.

Q98 **Richard Graham:** How do you find them?

Judith Mobbs: It is not easy to find the right people. One of the challenges we had in the first year of operation was that we didn't find all the right people. We have had to work at that because it is very important that you have somebody who is able to be good at working with young people but at the same time there has to be a bit of tough love in there. I would model the idea of the pushy parent. If all our young people had a pushy parent who understood when to support, when to



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challenge and also had the expertise to open the right doors and access the right bits of provision, then young people would all have the right support they need to secure employment. That is what the MyGo coaches are designed to do.

Q99 **Chair:** A parent plus, then?

Judith Mobbs: A parent plus, yes.

Q100 **Richard Graham:** A parent plus. Where do you recruit them from?

Judith Mobbs: We have recruited them from the local area. Some of those people have an existing background in youth services, some have come from the private sector, some have been involved in employment services and some are new graduates.

Q101 **Richard Graham:** There is no specific qualification.

Judith Mobbs: No. It is much more about their skills.

Q102 **Richard Graham:** It is personality, yes. Roughly what have the results been since you introduced this, when was it, 2012 or so?

Judith Mobbs: No. The service has been running for two years. Well, not quite two years; it is about 20 months, isn't it?

Katrina Gardiner: No, it is two years today.

Judith Mobbs: Two years today. Over that time 7,000 young people have registered.

I should emphasise that we offer a service; it is an anytime service. The only criteria for using the service is that you are 16 to 24, so you can come to the service while you are still in employment, when you have just left employment or further on. Some people access what we call our universal offer, which means that they do not have coaching. So, 7,000 young people registered and, of those, 4,000 are receiving or have received coaching and 2,500 have, at this point, a positive progression from that.

Q103 **Richard Graham:** Is it possible to quantify? How many young people who did not have jobs now do?

Judith Mobbs: Katrina, do you want to come in?

Katrina Gardiner: It is 2,500 at this point.

Q104 **Richard Graham:** 2,500 people in the 16-to-24 category who did not have jobs before now do?

Katrina Gardiner: It is quite difficult to quantify those who use the universal offer. Those who enter the MyGo service and are assessed as being very close to the labour market, are going to be able to get a job fairly quickly of their own volition. They use the tools and the centre but they do not necessarily come back and say they have jobs, so we don't know about those who have had the universal offer.



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Q105 **Richard Graham:** Thank you. What has happened with youth unemployment in Suffolk over the last two years?

Judith Mobbs: Two things have happened. First, obviously there has been an improvement in the economic position overall in the country since we planned MyGo and opened it. From that point of view, it has naturally declined and it has followed the route you would expect for all the employment groups. However, we have seen an improvement beyond that in the position for 16 to 24-year-olds. We have an evaluation programme that is running alongside the project. This is a national pilot and we wanted to ensure that there was very robust independent evaluation. We could share that information with you if it would be helpful to you.

Q106 **Richard Graham:** That is very helpful. At some point presumably the money is going to run out because the Youth Contract underspend will not always exist and will not always go to Ipswich. Is this something that you hope the DWP will absorb with the characteristics needed for work coaches who work well for young people and that they will pick up and run with? Is that going to be the major benefit? Will you be able to keep MyGo going in some diluted form?

Judith Mobbs: This is the challenge that I am particularly working on at the moment. We have about another 18 months of funded time left within the initial funding pot that we secured so now is the time we need to start thinking about this quite seriously. My ambition, when we first started, if you go back to three years ago when we first conceived this idea, was that we would get to a point where we could negotiate some kind of gainshare arrangement with Treasury that would enable us to continue the service without having to be project funded. As we all know, the problem with projects is that it is very easy for them to come and go and good things get lost. In live running there is the opportunity to reduce costs and increase efficiency and as we have opened other locations across the county, we are reducing costs.

You are right, there is the opportunity to reduce the costs and increase the efficiency so that the cost per job outcome goes down dramatically, but there still is a cost. The challenge we have, of course, is that the direct savings that result from a young person not claiming benefit anymore do not come back to the local area. That is a real challenge for us in funding the service so we are looking at whether—

Q107 **Richard Graham:** But you do get the benefits of people being in work, with everything that goes with it.

Judith Mobbs: Of course, yes, but when I am presenting the case to my councillors that is a jam-tomorrow case as opposed to the cost today. There needs to be a way through this that recognises the national benefit and the local benefit in the long term. I can see that we are a little bit further away from a gainshare solution than I had hoped we might be. Given that, we are looking now at whether we can come up with some kind of social investment model that would be a halfway house and



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secure us perhaps another three years of funding while we are able to perhaps have further discussions with Treasury.

The final point I would make is that we are building into that the opportunity to potentially develop the service so it covers the whole county, including the parts that are not covered at the moment.

Richard Graham: Judith, thank you. Chairman, I think that is very interesting. It seems to me that the social investment bond is probably the next step and that could be the subject of a mini inquiry at some point. It is a very interesting area.

Q108 **James Cartlidge:** Also, if you don't mind me saying, you have just given a fantastic justification for devolution to go ahead in Suffolk and include skills.

Judith Mobbs: Absolutely.

James Cartlidge: Of course, we intend to be back but it seems—

Judith Mobbs: That is the challenge for us at the moment.

James Cartlidge: If you can evidence what you are doing, that should feed into the LEP and everybody for pushing for the devolution to include a robust skills and—

Judith Mobbs: If I can say, there is a very strong skills element within the devolution proposal. We work very closely with the LEP. Quite often we lead on the LEP policy development. The LEP are very committed to the idea of a New Anglia youth guarantee and the MyGo service is part of delivering that, so that is there. However, obviously we have the challenges around devolution currently.

James Cartlidge: We work with other partners, don't we, but we might have to cut our own furrow?

Q109 **Neil Coyle:** Did you say how much of the current funding as a percentage was coming from the European Union?

Judith Mobbs: I am going to ask Katrina to give us the funding information.

Neil Coyle: How much of the funding was from, I think you mentioned the European Union?

Katrina Gardiner: £2.4 million is from the European social fund, up to £2.4 million, and that has been very recently—

Q110 **Chair:** Katrina, from the figures you gave us, it seems that you have used just over half your money and you have got 2,500 people into employment.

Katrina Gardiner: Yes.

Chair: If the trend continued, you would get maybe another 2,000 or so in, wouldn't you?



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Katrina Gardiner: I do think the trend will continue—

Chair: Get harder?

Katrina Gardiner: It will go upwards because we are opening more and more centres, we are covering more and more of the area across Suffolk, so we are able to reach more and more young people. It is worth noting that 50% of our cohort are young people who do not claim benefits, so the MyGo model is able to reach, and is more attractive to, a wider cohort of young person. Those who are not traditionally claiming benefits—for whatever reason they don't wish to—are coming into the MyGo and there is a lot more provision. I think we will hit more numbers. It is a lot more efficient.

Q111 **Ms Karen Buck:** What is the unit cost per young person who has gone through your scheme compared with the traditional JCP model?

Katrina Gardiner: I know the costs of going through MyGo. I am not sure of the complete costs compared with the DWP model, but it is roughly about £1,000 per outcome, or per young person at the moment it is £330 per outcome. We have arranged different payment models to use as a lever for our contractor to get better outcomes. We have weighted things towards a sustained outcome rather than just any job, because for us this is about investing in our young people to get decent careers not just get a job, so we weight the payment model to the sixth-month point.

Q112 **Luke Hall:** Are you working with employers themselves differently from the way the normal Jobcentre Plus would? If so, can you tell us a bit about it?

Katrina Gardiner: Yes. The MyGo service is not just for young people; it is also for employers. It is about supporting employers to take on more young people as well and recognising the huge benefits that a young person can bring to their business. Some of the key benefits that MyGo brings are that they can arrange all of the interviews and inductions; they personally vet all the young people who come through; they work very closely with the employer. As we would work with a young person, making sure that the service is individually tailored rather than resource led, they do that with employers as well. They sit down with the employer, find out exactly what the vacancy is that they have and do a training-needs analysis, where need be, to see if there are other avenues that they need within their business, whether that is through apprenticeships or through new vacancies. Then they find out the right sort of person that they are looking for and go back to the MyGo service, have a look at who is on the books and matchmake. We have some quite big names opening up in Suffolk. We have a number of B&M stores; I don't know if you have come across B&M stores.

Luke Hall: Yes.

Katrina Gardiner: They will only recruit in Suffolk through MyGo; they will not use any other recruitment service. We also work quite closely with BT and the BBC has done traineeships, but we are also working with a lot of small businesses, so it is right across the board.



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Q113 Luke Hall: What can the Department be doing differently to support employers to become more confident about hiring young people?

Judith Mobbs: First, it is about perhaps more work trial opportunities and work experience opportunities. It is a tightening labour market so employers are more interested in young people as a group now than perhaps they might have been. More work on building the confidence of young people and their employment skills, so their interpersonal skills, are things employers often talk about. Employers tell us time and time again that they are much more interested in having those skills right than worrying about the technical skills. Also, we find that once a young person has had a trial with an employer then the likelihood of that employer feeling confident to take them on rises.

The other thing is the aftercare. An important part of our payment by results contract for MyGo is the aftercare service with employers. Inevitably, you are talking about a relatively inexperienced individual; you may be talking about a young person who has had real challenges in their life already. Things do not always go right initially and it really helps if there can be someone there to broker that so that the employment placement does not break down with the first halt in the road.

Outside work I am a small employer myself and I have taken a young person on recently. I know some of the challenges involved, such as that they need to turn up every morning on time, things like that. The coach being there to broker that is really important.

Q114 Luke Hall: Can I follow up on the work trial opportunities? In your experience, what is the most successful period of work trial? I remember that 10 years ago there were instances of companies exploiting young people going on work trials. Can you tell us a bit about what has worked and what has not?

Judith Mobbs: I can talk about our own team. We have offered placements to unemployed young people in our team and somewhere between four and eight weeks is enough time for a young person to get a lot of benefit out of that, give a little bit of benefit back—it does depend on the sector and the role they are undertaking—and also for the employer to see the potential of that young person. But it may vary according to the type of occupation and perhaps more flexibility because it is often the rigidity in DWP schemes that makes it quite difficult for them to work for young people.

Q115 Chair: Have you heard employers talking about MyGo at all, Martin?

Martin Chester: When I was at my Felixstowe branch of McDonald's, Steve, who is my main manager, asked how was the job going for me and he was asking is it stressful in any way or asking how the job is going so far. I am loving the job that I have and I am really happy to just have been given a chance, even with my condition.

Q116 Chair: But has your employer said anything about MyGo—about how pleased he is with MyGo representing you?



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Martin Chester: I am not too sure but I can always ask.

Q117 **Chair:** No, I just wondered whether you had. Hannah, what about you?

Hannah Foulstone: The role that I had been working in for two years prior to being unemployed was at Suffolk County Council in my local government and I was very involved in media and press. When the MyGo centre first opened, there was talk about it and our MP was pitching it quite a bit. There was a lot of talk about it and the benefits that it would bring to Suffolk. At that time, of course, it had just opened so it hadn't been tested and there were no viable results to work from but I know that there was a lot of optimism about a centre of that sort. I know that we were aware of a great need for something to tailor specifically to young people because that was the biggest gap we had at that time. Where it has come now two years in, I feel like a lot of the press has gone down, a lot of media attention has gone down, but having experienced it myself it seems like it has done a lot of good since then.

Q118 **Heidi Allen:** Just very quickly I want to say to Martin, I don't know if you realise but you said then about your job, "I'm lovin' it"—that's the whole McDonald's thing, isn't it? *[Laughter.]* Whether or not they made you say that today, I do think you genuinely love your job.

A question for Katrina and Judith. You are obviously dealing with young people in general but clearly Hannah and Martin have different needs, different backgrounds. Is there anything that you think you do differently—and I am aware you are kind of a bit Jobcentre-ish in your staff and things as you described it—about streaming? That is a crude word, but how do you do the best for young people with different backgrounds and different needs? Do you treat them all the same or how does that work?

Judith Mobbs: No. Each young person has an individual plan that starts from understanding their aspirations, their skills, their challenges, what they want to achieve, their hopes. These are young people at the start of their careers. It is really important that that forms the central starting point. The coach will help them to develop what forms the basis of what will happen then. There is a wide menu of different kinds of support. As I said earlier, lots of building blocks already exist of provision from local providers, national providers, DWP provision, all sorts of offers, charitable organisations. Then it is about how you use all those building blocks to make a plan that works for that young person. It is very individualised. There is also an initial assessment at the beginning that enables us to identify the level of support a young person needs.

The only criterion for using the services is age-based and, as you rightly point out, people have widely differing needs. We have a universal offer without a bespoke coach but being able to access lots of general resources and general advisers who are in the centre. Then there is a low, medium and high support service and that depends on the individual needs and the amount of caseworker support, where the level of intensity will change according to the needs of the young person.



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We also review that over time. If a young person has been assessed as having a low intensity need but after a period of time that does not appear to work or be enough then we can step up the support, or indeed it could be stepped down but usually it would be a stepping-up progress.

Q119 Neil Coyle: The Department for Work and Pensions tell us that the work coaches in Jobcentre Plus will be all-singing and all-dancing; they will know everything about physical or hearing impairment; they will know everything about the local employment market. Do you think you would have got jobs without the local support and beyond Jobcentre Plus, and do you think Jobcentre Plus could do it alone without local government involvement?

Hannah Foulstone: Could you repeat the question, please?

Neil Coyle: Sorry. Do you think the Jobcentre alone could have given you the kind of support that you have had?

Hannah Foulstone: Well, I would piggyback a bit on to what Judith has said already, which is that the Jobcentre approach at the moment is incredibly intimidating and, to be honest, it discourages people to approach and even further to ask for help to assist. It almost feels like you are very much on trial to argue that you deserve the benefits and you deserve to be focused on what aspirations you want, rather than just taking the job that they can throw at you. I don't consider myself a disabled person but I do have Asperger's syndrome and social anxiety and I would not have felt comfortable approaching Jobcentre and Jobcentre Plus. At the moment, from feedback that I have received from friends who don't meet the age requirement and don't go through the MyGo centre but go through the Jobcentre, they have felt let down by the services because, again, it is that case of trying to prove that you genuinely want to work.

To be honest, the fact that I reached out to the MyGo centre, for me that was a personal achievement in and of itself. Not only have they helped me but I have developed quite a rapport with my work coach; we are very friendly. I am there every day. I am in a system they do called MyPath, which means every day I am there for a couple of hours doing group activities around CVs, cover letters. Just going off being in that centre on a day-to-day basis, I can hear on the next table, "Here is a list of jobs about driving," or, "I am going to speak to this employer for you because you want to work with that employer." You hear so many different conversations and it encourages you. It makes you feel like these people are listening to your needs and will help you get to where you want to be.

Q120 Chair: Martin, what about you? Do you think you would have got your job without MyGo?

Martin Chester: No, I doubt it. If I had tried any more to get a job without MyGo, I reckon I would have been in a hole somewhere, for instance, like just sitting down, doing nothing, not earning anything. I think I wouldn't get anywhere without MyGo because it has helped so



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much with my needs and that. It is just a big boost of confidence that they can help not just people with similar difficulties to me or disabilities, but other people who have other symptoms as well.

Chair: Great, that is a really good note to end on. Thank you, Hannah, Judith and Katrina. Thank you for the session.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Peter Little, Andrew Scott-Taggart and Carole Easton.

Q121 **Chair:** Peter, you were here at the beginning so you know I am going to ask you to introduce yourself.

Peter Little: My name is Peter Little. I am here because I sat on the Maynard taskforce this summer where we were asked to look urgently at what could be done to improve employment prospects in apprenticeships for people with learning disabilities. That followed a report I had written for the Government four years ago and so that is the context in which I am here today.

Carole Easton: I am Carole Easton and I am Chief Executive of the Young Women's Trust.

Andrew Scott-Taggart: My name is Andrew Scott-Taggart. I am here in my capacity as the founder and director of a campaign called the Found Generation, which is a campaign run by young people, a cross-party campaign calling for various policy changes to improve efforts to tackle youth unemployment. It is a campaign I run in my spare time. I am also on the advisory board of another campaign called Youth Employment UK that you may be familiar with.

Q122 **Ms Karen Buck:** All three of you were listening to the evidence that we just heard, which is a good starting point. We know that many young people move in and out of work or apprenticeships without very much intervention possibly, other than school and parents, but many young people have a need or a disability of some kind, black and minority ethnic backgrounds, other disadvantages. What was striking at the end of the evidence you heard was the young lady saying that a Jobcentre can be a very intimidating place to be. When the barriers are there, that could be very difficult. To what extent do we need to reorientate the service in order to make sure that young people don't see the Jobcentre as a barrier or the DWP as a barrier or are able to overcome those barriers and get the support they need?

Carole Easton: The young women we speak to at Young Women's Trust every day tell us they find Jobcentres, sadly, quite intimidating. It is quite rare to hear positive stories. We did a large poll of 350 men and women who went to Jobcentres: 59% of men and women found it humiliating,



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68% of women and 59% of men found it stressful, and only 19% of women said they found it effective to help get work. I always hesitate delivering bad news stories but it is confirmed by the conversations we have directly with young people. The young women we speak to want the culture to shift. They say to us they want work, they are looking for work and—again this sounds quite gender stereotyped—women’s confidence is quicker to take a huge dent and their motivation deteriorates.

Q123 Ms Karen Buck: Is the main message back that they are going into a service that is not specific to young people? Is it that they are moving into an adult world that doesn’t have time for them, or do they think that the whole system is institutionally unsympathetic?

Carole Easton: It is interesting because I reflected on that knowing I was coming today. I think what they want probably would suit anyone of any age, but they need it more because some of them are more vulnerable and they have not been experienced in the work market. They may not have other resources to fall back on. Also it is our key opportunity for setting them on a path believing that they can achieve and motivating them to do so. I think the price we pay for not offering it to them could be greater than offering what should be a satisfactory and supportive service for anyone of any age.

Peter Little: I think it is very interesting because my main focus has not been, if I am honest, with DWP services. One of the interesting things in what we have done this year is looking at a way in which DWP and BIS, as it was, have come together to try to look at improving those opportunities, but we pick up on all of that. I have worked a lot with young people with learning disabilities and other disabilities and it is a real issue in terms of where they have to go and what they feel about things. I think in that sense, yes, it all came together.

Q124 Ms Karen Buck: Would it be true with young people with learning disabilities, in your experience, that many in that group would possibly be mediated by some organisation or—

Peter Little: I think we have to remember that the range of learning disabilities, never mind wider disabilities, is very broad. If we look at those who have come to the attention of social services, then the figures we have of employment rates are under 6%. But there is a wider group, particularly with perhaps a moderate, mild learning disability, who would never come in there and they are quite capable, with some support, of articulating things. We have to be very aware that we are talking about quite a wide range of people here who all have individual needs. In some cases they might cope better than others but for some it is going to be very intimidating indeed.

Andrew Scott-Taggart: I would agree to a large extent with what has already been said by Carole and Peter. I would add that in my written evidence we covered a couple of other polls besides the Young Women’s Trust poll that gave very similar views of asking young people what they thought of Jobcentre Plus and the views were negative. That is also



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reflected partly in my own personal experience, having been a previous Jobcentre Plus user and someone who was young unemployed, and through the research we have done, the other volunteers we have and people we have talked to.

I don't think necessarily it is just an issue of only needing to change things for young people. I would agree that there are wider changes that need to be made in the effectiveness and efficiency and the way that Jobcentre Plus helps people rather than hindering or being counterproductive to them, as happens in some cases. That is more important for young people and that is where things like the MyGo centre, for example, come in, and taking some of the lessons from that. It is also important to help young people who are not with Jobcentre Plus in the first place, which is a key group.

Q125 Ms Karen Buck: But we then need to drill down into that and be very specific. It would be good to have the whole DWP service with more time and more capacity to help everybody, but resource is not unlimited. Working with young people, what does the ideal kind of work coach look like? What would the ideal experience be? Would it be not in a Jobcentre at all and encouraging people into premises that are not associated with a large institution, or does that not matter and what matters is the nature of the work coach? Does a work coach need to be specifically trained to work with young people?

Carole Easton: One of the responses I would make to that is that there definitely needs to be an informed and trained approach to working with young people. Whatever the support—and this may go for older people too—it needs to be tailored and individualised. The coach needs to understand the challenges facing individuals, young women and young men, and particularly vulnerable people. Sometimes vulnerability and disadvantage can lead to anti-social responses, like stress and anxiety make people angry, so maybe they don't communicate so well. It is really important that whoever is delivering the service is trained to understand those sorts of issues.

The diversity of the workforce is very important too. Young people tend to listen more to other young people. I am not saying that has to be delivered, but there should be a sense that the workforce includes young people so that the workforce is informed by and understands the challenges facing young people today. Also from the point of view of my organisation particularly that takes gender into account, it is important to neither funnel nor collude. It is quite easy to say, "Oh, you want to be a hairdresser, well go off and be a hairdresser," and although I am not knocking hairdressers for one moment—we all need them—it might be that the young person has other skills that with the right sort of support and encouragement can be flushed out and they can be encouraged to take a bit of a step outside.

The final thing I would say is that at Young Women's Trust we offer something called Work it Out, which is a remote telephone coaching service for young women wanting to take steps towards work. It is



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completely separate. There is no issue of, "Are my benefits going to be sanctioned?" This is someone who can be on your side, help you identify your strengths, which is not such an easy thing to do. It is easy to say but not so easy to do. Inevitably, Jobcentre advisers and coaches will be seen to some extent as police officers. Maybe that is inevitable if you are going to get your benefit or not. Streamlined, immediate and accessible support alongside that is something we, at Young Women's Trust, would recommend.

Peter Little: Perhaps I can add that for disabled people, the word "job coach" is very common. It is a really important role but it is more about working with that young person and with the employer, of course, to find a way particularly to make sure that they can get into the job and then they can sustain it. I have to say that one of the issues is, and it has been mentioned today—I have worked in that field for many years and one of our strengths of funding was the European social fund and I am quite concerned that in some of the innovative ways of working with young disabled people in things like job coaching, we need to find another way of funding that. There are ways you can fund it through Access to Work and so on, but I think there are ways we need to look at to make sure that some of these funding streams do not dry up.

Q126 **Neil Coyle:** Just on Peter's point about the very low employment rate for people with learning disabilities, is it simply the fact that the employment rate is so low for young people with learning disabilities or other disabled young people that warrants this specific service provision from the Department, or would you give other reasons for why they should be targeted as specific groups?

Peter Little: I think disabled people do require that. If I look at apprenticeships, for instance, and the way that that can then work with the DWP system, there are a number of ways in which we can add funding there and help employers and the young person as well. But the fact is that if we look at the particular cohort of those with learning disabilities, it is an alarming statistic. Here we are in 2016 and under 6% of those known to social services and overall under 20%—that is estimated, but we do not have final figures on that—are in employment. That compares to about a 50% employment rate for disabled people and about 76% or seventy-something per cent for the population as a whole. That is why Ministers at the time felt they needed a taskforce to quite urgently look at this: are there practical things that could be done to improve that access, specifically in apprenticeships?

Q127 **Chair:** Andrew, how do you answer that question?

Andrew Scott-Taggart: In relation to disabilities?

Chair: Yes.

Andrew Scott-Taggart: I suppose I would echo a lot of what Peter has said, but in relation to young people with disabilities and young people generally I think it is fair to say that there are various reasons why you need that extra support, including the fact that they have additional



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needs but also the fact you have the lower employment rates. Also, when they are just coming out of education or whatever else, they are less likely to have the experience of work and the skills and the resilience in order to be able to deal with whatever comes, whether that is a rejection from a job or a Jobcentre adviser telling them they have to apply for X number of jobs per week even though there are not that many jobs that they want to apply for. Any of those things can be problematic and you need more support for young people in particular to make sure they are able to deal with those situations. That particularly applies to those who have learning disabilities and other difficulties.

Q128 Richard Graham: Andrew, can I just challenge you on this? I think what we have been hearing—and it is fairly easy to find people to tell their stories—is that Jobcentre Plus is an unfriendly place, it creates stress, it is not my sort of place, I feel uncomfortable there, it is intimidating and so on and so forth. But to challenge that, life after school is a different sort of place. It is not going to be like school. Going to job interviews is not all about having hot drinks on the table to share in a cosy way with the person across the table; it is about winning a job that lots of other people want to win.

To what extent do you really believe that we need a totally separate service for young people? The evidence suggests that we have gone from roughly a million unemployed to about 620,000 today, down 90,000 from last year, and this is probably largely as a result of a great many more apprenticeships, many more companies offering them and a work environment where there are many more jobs available. Are we making a huge fuss about putting a lot more money into creating a special service for young people, many of whom should be able to go out there and get jobs in this sort of environment anyway, or should we be trying to separate people with genuine disabilities who do need special care?

Andrew Scott-Taggart: I think there is a case for that in relation to disabilities, but what I am saying is that it shouldn't just be young disabled people or disabled people generally, it should be young people as well. I am not saying there should be necessarily a special service just for them. It can be done to a certain extent within Jobcentre Plus if Jobcentre Plus changed the way it did things in relation to both young people and more generally. Although I take entirely the points you are making about the unemployment rate going down and the question of more apprenticeships, in many ways I would say, certainly from my own experience, I have progressed in employment despite Jobcentre Plus support rather than because of it. I suspect that is true of many other young people.

Q129 Chair: How would you change Jobcentre Plus, Andrew?

Andrew Scott-Taggart: We have a number of ideas, some of which are in our written evidence and some are in our manifesto. I can give you a couple of examples now. One is that in terms of the broader approach, I would like to change the targets of Jobcentre Plus so that they are focused on getting people into sustainable employment. At the moment



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they are far too focused on getting people off benefits and that is not necessarily the same thing. That leads to situations where, for example, you have a young person who is trying to arrange their own work experience and do, say, voluntary work, a work experience placement, an unpaid internship, without necessarily needing or wanting to go to the Jobcentre, and the Jobcentre is coming to them and saying, "Now, hang on, you have to do this through us," or, "You still have to come to an appointment every two weeks," or, "You still have to do however many applications per week," or, "You still have to do this, that and the other." In some cases, they actively frustrate that, and I have heard of cases where that has happened. To a certain extent, I have gone through that as well. That alone would make a big difference.

Q130 Chair: It is about changing into jobs, rather than getting off benefit. Carole, how do you answer the devil's advocate question?

Carole Easton: I accept that the overall unemployment rates have reduced but we still have high youth unemployment rates and in some cities over 20% of young people are not working. I think it is a local issue and worth local investment for the good of those environments and those young people. I am sure I don't need to tell you that the longer they are out of work the harder it is going to be to get in. Although the overall picture might have improved, we are also particularly concerned at Young Women's Trust about the fact that more young women rather than young men are economically inactive. Trying to look at the workless young people and the specific reasons and giving them the support is going to be in everyone's benefit in the long run.

Peter Little: I will just add, and be positive if I may, that we know that apprenticeships now are a major focus with a lot of investment and they are absolutely mainstream, they involve employers, and we are learning a lot about, for instance with young disabled people, getting employers to see the positive benefits of taking apprentices like that. The number of apprentices has increased so much this last year and the last figures I had were—sorry, and this is not just young people—in apprenticeships 50,000 people who are self-declaring a learning difficulty or disability. That is a whole range of disability. We are not talking about small figures here and that is why I think it is still important.

Specialist provision is really important—I run specialist provision myself—but as a springboard into full employment I think apprenticeships potentially offer a great deal for anyone with a disability or a learning difficulty, but particularly for those with a learning disability because of the extreme situation that we find ourselves in. That is why it is entirely justified that we are targeting there and the recommendations that the taskforce made were all accepted by Ministers and I have to say officials are now working on them and something is happening. I am quite optimistic that out of this will come some improvements in access for some young people with learning disabilities into apprenticeships and ultimately into full employment.

Richard Graham: Peter, I totally agree with that and in fact we are



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pushing very hard, Paul Maynard and others on the Maynard taskforce, with this concept of the NI changes for apprentices with disabilities, which I think is really important. What I am more interested in for this session, which is on young people overall, is just the extent to which Carole and Andrew are expecting specialist design programmes with considerable costs—if you look at the £9 million involved in MyGo—to be available for every young person. I am not convinced that that is realistic.

If we need some tweaks to the way that Jobcentre Plus is operating then fair enough, let's have some practical suggestions on that. If we need people at schools to be introduced much earlier to the whole business of getting some volunteering going, getting a Saturday job going, getting things ready, going to job fairs, apprenticeship fairs and skills fairs, which every constituency in the land should be having so that they do not need to go to the Jobcentre Plus—that would be my starting point, that you don't need to go there. Most people should be able to process their way into work without going through the JCP.

Q131 Chair: Do we know the pathways, Peter, of the 50,000 who are in apprenticeships with disabilities?

Peter Little: Yes.

Chair: Shouldn't we just try to widen those pathways?

Peter Little: Yes, possibly. The interesting thing is that on the whole young disabled people mature more slowly and therefore a critical time, if you are talking about 16 to 24, is 19 to 24. Do you know that in 2013, after my report and work, the Government passed an important regulation that prioritises young people with disabilities according to the Equality Act definition? My concern is—and I have said this to officials—there it is and it would help us all, including employers as well, but it has never been publicised. It is there, it is in the regulations but it has never been really publicised. What I am saying is that there is a lot already that we could do and it is that particular pathway. There will also be people older than 25 of course, because more apprentices now are older, but that particular group of 19 to 24 I am quite concerned about because, particularly if we are looking at the learning disability cohort, it is going down. That is because apprenticeships now are highly valued, they are very competitive and employers will pick and choose unless you can advocate well or the young person can do a work interview or something.

Q132 Neil Coyle: Richard, you mentioned the Maynard taskforce and, Peter, this is more your focus, the DWP said it accepted all of the recommendations of the Maynard taskforce. Could the DWP look to apply them beyond apprentices and how should it do that?

Peter Little: One good thing that has come out of the taskforce is that DWP and BIS, as it was—it is the Department for Education now—have worked closer together and that is something that DWP needs to look at. We are talking about young people here across the range who either benefit or otherwise from services and sometimes they are quite dissimilar. You will get a view that looks here or looks there but they do not connect the two things up. As far as this taskforce was concerned,



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one of the important lessons is how much better it is when the Departments work together. This was genuinely a joint taskforce. For those like me who are less familiar with some aspects of DWP work, and similarly on the other side as well, I think that is really important.

Q133 Heidi Allen: We all heard that it is regional: youth employment can be a real problem in some spots and not at all in my constituency, for example. You will have a national view, I am sure. The DWP has a strategy to completely transform Jobcentres through Universal Credit and retrained work coaches who have a different role to that which they had in the past. When you think about nationally where you have looked at this situation, can you see any improvement? Have you come across any Jobcentres that are acting differently because they have Universal Credit there now and they have these new work coaches in place—any examples of that?

Carole Easton: I don't have that sort of granular detail. If I may, I would add two things at this point. The first is I don't think Jobcentres can do it alone, so if money was just invested in Jobcentres, particularly in the hotspots, they would almost be impossible to please because there wouldn't be the opportunities out there for the young people to engage in. The young people are coming back and back and it is creating lack of self-confidence and the motivation depletes and then young people move from being on JSA to be on ESA.

It is perhaps worth pointing out too that apparently, according to ONS figures, only about 42% of young women job seeking are claiming JSA. There is quite a large number of young people, and I think more young men, who are not claiming it at the moment, so they are doing it by themselves somehow. We don't know for sure whether that is because they don't need the money or because they have given up trying to contend with those sorts of conversations.

On apprenticeships, I would say that Jobcentres will fail particularly for the disabled, for those with special needs, for carers if there aren't more flexible and part-time opportunities out there. Our research so far suggests apprenticeships particularly are limited in that offer, so that immediately counts out a whole group of people who might otherwise take them up.

Q134 James Cartlidge: We are often criticised for having an economy with too many part-time and flexible opportunities and not enough full-time. Can you be a bit more specific? Is it specifically apprenticeships you are referring to?

Carole Easton: On both, yes. We are obviously working more with young women and what they need—either because of their caring responsibilities for children or for family members, which they are still more likely to have than young men—is part-time, flexible and relatively local work or apprenticeships. At the moment, part-time, flexible apprenticeships are hard to find.

Q135 James Cartlidge: Is that possibly also because there are some issues



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with the benefit system and 16 hours, 24 hours, this sort of thing? Do you think those are all in that?

Carole Easton: It could be. The detail of it in terms of benefits is not entirely clear but I think there is a limit on how many hours you are supposed to engage with an apprenticeship and that makes it very difficult.

Q136 **James Cartlidge:** Andrew, you were nodding your head there.

Andrew Scott-Taggart: Just because I was thinking about the context of traineeships, for example. I don't think it was until last year that the DWP introduced regulations to allow traineeships to be done at the same time as being on JSA. That is the kind of example of the problems you have in the system by having those rigid targets and not being able to look at the broader picture of what does it take to get someone into employment. That might be "working" by doing voluntary work or otherwise to try to get them into employment. One of the main problems of Jobcentre Plus is that the sanctions and behaviour that it requires can be counterproductive to getting a job in many cases, particularly if you are trying to do your own thing and trying to get employment in your own right, particularly in sectors where Jobcentre Plus might not have as much experience or knowledge.

Q137 **James Cartlidge:** One of the main aims of Universal Credit is that there are parts of the welfare system where there are big cliff edges and it is meant to smooth that out. But the other part of it is, of course, the Youth Obligation; I assume you are familiar with this. Are you concerned at the fact that this is only going to be applying in Universal Credit rollout areas?

Andrew Scott-Taggart: I am not necessarily concerned about that per se at the moment because it may be that you need to refine the scheme to a certain extent before it ends up going out more widely. From that perspective, I don't have an immediate concern at the moment. In the same way as with MyGo, I suppose you are piloting it in one area and the question is do you expand it more widely. The concern I have with Youth Obligation is more is it going to be flexible enough to help all young people who it supports. In many cases it will be and I certainly welcome the idea that you have this whole focus on the intensive support early on, whereas in my case the most helpful support was Jobcentre Plus. When I first engaged with it was later on in the process, by which time I had been unemployed for six months or more.

Q138 **James Cartlidge:** You want more carrot and less stick, but doesn't everyone?

Andrew Scott-Taggart: Yes, I suppose that is fair, but it is looking at what works, essentially, and I am not sure a lot of the current system, as it is, works anywhere near as well as it should do.

Q139 **Richard Graham:** That leads to the question that the current system, you could argue, is working. Youth unemployment has come down very sharply. You have 2 million in apprenticeships, which is more than three



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times what there were before. The question is: where is it not working and what is going to make a difference for the people who need the most help? The difficulty that I am finding is identifying from the three of you how you separate people who need help from people who don't or shouldn't need help. That seems to me the difficult question. Peter, no one is arguing about people with disabilities, that is fine, but what we are talking about is 600,000 people. We are not saying all of them have disabilities. The bit that I am finding hard to get from Carole and Andrew, to be honest, is what more you want the Jobcentre Plus to do, other than have a hot drink on the table ready for anyone coming in, that is going to make a significant difference there rather than trying to reinvent a whole new, different, separate service very expensively for young people that looks and feels a bit more touchy-feely than what they are used to.

Carole Easton: You make touchy-feely sound like rather—

Richard Graham: I am trying to provoke you. I am trying to get some creative ideas from you.

Carole Easton: Yes. I think it depends on what culture you are starting out from. Certainly not everyone but the majority of young women who have engaged with us, who we polled, want to work. They are not saying, "Please, please help me find a way not to work." It damages their motivation, their self-esteem and ultimately their mental health. I don't think that some of the changes are that radical. It is about approach, not being humiliated, not having sanctions applied because you are a little bit late because your child happened to be crying before you left home. Those things don't cost; they are about an approach and people feeling there is someone on their side. If you are young and you are not experienced, that hurts maybe a bit more than if you are 50.

Andrew Scott-Taggart: Of course it is in the Government's interest and the taxpayers' interest—if there is persistent Government failure to tackle the specific groups that we know are disproportionately out of work—to tackle it. If that means commissioning a specific service that provides a cup of coffee, then I am assuming you would agree with that. I appreciate that was a local government example rather than a third sector one.

Q140 **Chair:** They are marginal changes, aren't they, Carole? If one had what the Government have piloted, the yellow card system about sanctions, and you could consider seriously whether the bus was late, did not run, child was ill, was upset and then you turn up—

Richard Graham: But the number of sanctions is tiny in the figure of 620,000; they are absolutely tiny. I think 3,000 sanctions is the figure, isn't it?

Chair: No, much greater than that.

Richard Graham: In the last year?

Neil Coyle: Is the sanction system flexible enough to reflect the real needs of those who might have had childcare responsibilities or an



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impairment that means a fluctuating availability?

Carole Easton: From what we have heard, it varies tremendously. Another thing that varies, for example, is there is a pot of money that can be given out to help with transport costs. I am sorry, I cannot remember exactly what it is called right now. It is delivered differently in different places. The sort of service that we are providing alongside for women—we have publicised our service in Jobcentres—we think costs about £340 to £400 per young woman. That is not a huge amount of money and it is being funded through the voluntary sector at the moment, but there are relatively small amounts of money that could make a huge amount of difference to the attitude. You want young people to go out motivated and confident into the job market.

Q141 **Chair:** What I am stressing, Carole, is that these are not revolutionary changes; these are marginal changes that could bring forth some really good responses, aren't they?

Carole Easton: I wouldn't disagree with that.

Q142 **Heidi Allen:** Carole, you mentioned you didn't have the granularity. Do you think it would be possible for you to go away and do a little bit of research for us after the event? I would love to know whether there is an improved service that your young women, or indeed any of the young people that any of you work with, are experiencing when the Jobcentre has Universal Credit and work coaches. We are told that the work coaches will be completely different animals to those that we have all experienced in the past. If there is evidence that you could dig up that would be brilliant.

Carole Easton: Sure.

Heidi Allen: Thank you.

Q143 **James Cartledge:** The previous panel was very interesting for me because they are based in Suffolk. I tried to encapsulate what I thought they were saying, and it was borne out by the users, that it was a friendlier service and made them feel more confident. The thing that seems to have come out of this is to what extent we should have a "good cop" friendly service and to what extent there should be any kind of background threat or "bad cop", to use that turn of phrase, to ensure maximum conversion into employment and so on. You think the balance is wrong at the moment, but do you think that with maybe using more locally driven services you can tweak it enough to make a difference?

Peter Little: I think that is quite possible. There are some good lessons here in the way that young people who perhaps are not going through the Jobcentre process may be coming into the college system and they may then be coming into apprenticeships. I spent an hour this lunchtime visiting a café run by people with learning disabilities in the offices of Southwark Council. Neil has gone now but it is on his patch. What was really apparent to me was that they were working in a real situation and being paid what they called an apprenticeship wage. Unfortunately, because of current regulations around English and maths requirements,



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they couldn't get on to a full apprenticeship. I think what it meant was these young people were perhaps not having to go through some of the process we are talking about now and that may be the case with some young disabled people one way or another. Access to Work is now very flexible and can be used and can be applied to apprenticeships as well, so in that sense I think that is true.

My current experience of Jobcentres is very limited so I don't feel qualified to comment on that, but what I am saying is I think for some young people there are positive experiences out there but for others there are a lot of blockages as well.

Q144 **Chair:** Carole, do you or Andrew have anything to add?

Carole Easton: As I say, I don't think Jobcentre Plus can do it all by themselves. If you look at some of these hotspots, unless there is a strategy on youth employment, Jobcentres are also set up to fail, particularly if there is a mismatch between the skills of the young people and the jobs that are available or there aren't jobs available. I think the close partnership with employers that has been referred to earlier is important, and also working with employers to encourage them to take people on and give them training and work experience while paying them, because the disadvantaged young people that we work with couldn't afford not to be paid during that period. It is about a concerted local strategy that includes Jobcentres and preferably some form of support alongside.

Andrew Scott-Taggart: On that point, there are other examples besides MyGo where that is already happening. MyGo is a good example of where you have Jobcentre Plus working with other local organisations but you also have issues in places like Norwich where you have Jobcentre Plus working closely with other employers and with the educational institutions, the council and everyone else and they are managing to cut youth unemployment quite significantly in those areas that have that local approach. In a way, I suppose, we are not talking so much about things like having a hot drink on the table; we are talking about substantive changes, even if they are sometimes quite small ones, to Jobcentre Plus and how it works. That doesn't necessarily have to cost but sometimes in some respects it might have to cost if you are giving someone, for example, mentoring support or a work coach or a proper assessment when they first come into the Jobcentre in the same way that MyGo do, for example.

If that has to cost then, to a certain extent, it will but equally you have to look at the broader picture. Youth unemployment is still quite high, higher than it should be and higher than unemployment is for the rest of the population, although it has fallen a lot in recent years. In many ways it is going to be the young people who are going to be closer to the labour market rather than further away from the labour market and that is something that needs to be borne in mind, particularly in terms of the cost of youth unemployment to the taxpayer, not just in benefits claimed



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but also health conditions and everything else where you have long-term youth unemployment.

Q145 **Chair:** But you underscore the importance of employers, don't you, Andrew?

Andrew Scott-Taggart: Yes, the importance of employers is a large part of that, of course it is, but it is also about Jobcentre Plus and other organisations working with the employers and engaging with them. Part of the problem with Jobcentre Plus at the moment is it doesn't necessarily have the confidence of many employers, unfortunately.

Chair: Richard, a last request?

Richard Graham: I think it would be useful to get from all three of you your six hot tips as to how you think Jobcentre Plus could be more effective in helping young people in general get into employment. That does assume that you have all been into Jobcentre Pluses recently and seen what they offer. I am assuming that is the case, but your six top tips would be really interesting.

Chair: We are very grateful to you for coming in. Thank you very much.