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Written evidence submitted by Catch22

Dear Public Accounts Committee,

I am writing from Catch22 in response to your request for evidence on the operation or effectiveness of the Kickstart scheme and the value for money it represents.

[Catch22](#) is a charity and social business, delivering over 120 public services across England and Wales and supporting 120,000 people a year to be more resilient and lead more purposeful lives. At Catch22 we were among the first to join the ranks of Kickstart Gateways, very shortly after the DWP announced the programme. Catch22 is a big supporter of Kickstart, and we are committed to its spirit and ambition of providing jobs for 250,000 young people.

We set up [Kickstart Community](#), a programme that combines Kickstart placements with civic service and skills building, to be the 'best-in-breed', with long term impact at its heart. While we have been working with the Department, JCP and officials since inception – and the road has certainly been bumpy at times – we now feel it important to submit evidence on the challenges, along with possible solutions for the remaining duration of the scheme. Young people have borne the brunt of the pandemic's damage – in terms of life prospects and mental wellbeing – and we are writing in the spirit of wishing for Kickstart to have the success that all of us committed to from the start.

Kickstart programme – operational issues and possible solutions:

1) **Issue:** delays in approving Kickstart placement providers and/or placements.

Impact: it can take four weeks or more to approve individual Kickstart placement providers or job descriptions before they are advertised. This creates problems in maintaining employer interest, while they eagerly await their Kickstarters.

Solution: we have seen a significant improvement from submitting grant variations to getting organisations approved. The process can still take up to 4 weeks, which in most cases is not a problem for us as we manage expectations with employers. Individual roles are now approved relatively swiftly; it used to be four weeks, but we have seen a turnaround in a few days in some cases. With approvals of batches of vacancies, some in the batch can take days while others can take weeks with limited reason (and we have no means of checking progress).

We would welcome a system for tracking approval workflows for placements as a solution. Similarly, employers who have already been approved (with us or other Gateways) should be fast tracked (by receiving a unique identifier); it feels that the same due diligence is applied at each variation.

2) **Issue:** young person is encouraged to contact placement provider by their coach, rather than being referred to the placement provider for engagement. As a Gateway, we and our employers are told of referrals, but we might never hear from them nor receive any details.

Impact: the young person is typically expected to make contact, and while we have set up inbound text, phone, and email, we see fewer than 20% of referrals make contact. Some of our roles get more than 50 referrals, but not a single young person gets in touch. While we agree with the general view that building self-sufficiency is a

good thing, there can't be a 'one-size-fits-all approach', as some of the harder cases may fall through the cracks (young people who lack confidence or face barriers). If Kickstart is helping only the 20% most motivated young people, this might reflect poorly in impact evaluation (including from HMT 'deadweight' perspective).

Column1	Referrals: Gateway	JCP Referrals	% referrals received at Gateway
Arcus FM Ltd	57	256	22%
Anti Graffiti Systems LIMITED	7	35	20%
Est Ethics LTD	22	109	20%
Kier Limited	15	96	16%
Network Plus Services Ltd	20	102	20%
RockCorps Limited	5	33	15%
Totally Wild Food LTD	26	83	31%
Unique Style Platform Ltd	5	42	12%
THE FACULTY OF PHARMACEUTICAL MEDICINE OF THE ROYAL COLLEGES OF PHYSICIANS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM	4	19	21%
Pentland Brands Limited	45	116	39%
CATCH22 CHARITY LIMITED	90	424	21%
AVERAGE			22%

* **Catch22 referral data as of 27.10.21**

Solution: we believe that in all cases, sharing the young person's contact details (via a consent form) is best practice. That way as a Gateway support provider, we can get in touch if we have not heard for a few days. It would be our role to build up their confidence so that they can apply for jobs autonomously in the future. We do find that good job coaches have motivated young people effectively, but this is currently a mixed picture. In addition, because there is not a universal expectation that Gateways provide wraparound support, including pre-employability, the scale of job coach input required varies – as does their knowledge of what to do with specific providers.

- 3) **Issue:** mixed messaging on policy from individual job coaches, due to the huge scale-up in coaches across JCP network.

Impact: we have seen instances of young people who applied for Kickstart placements and were waiting for interviews with our placement employers, while their job coaches told them they would be fine to take on part-time work in the meantime. They then discover that this disqualifies them from a Kickstart placement. In most cases, the young people have only gained a few extra hours working to top up their UC, but because they are seen to be motivated enough to get a job, their Kickstart placement is withdrawn.

Solution: clarification on the policy about Kickstart eligibility is needed, and whether securing interim part-time work is a disqualification. Our view is that only a full-time, permanent job that the young person wants should be the disqualification (if we believe that Kickstart is meant to support those young people most in need).

- 4) **Issue:** there can be instances where young people don't show or are not taken forward by employers while they await interviews (though we have not experienced this often).

Impact: prospective candidates fall away before being interviewed by employers.

Solution: Gateways should be required to facilitate JCP-employer transitions, including supporting young people through the application process, working with their job coach, and understanding the in-depth induction requirements of the employer.

5) **Issue:** quality of placements and Gateway interventions can be varied.

Impact: quality of placements on offer (in the broadest sense, including the quality of the 'work') may be poor, and where post-placement employment/apprenticeships may not be realised.

Solution: stronger minimum standards and expectations in the specification for what a 'Gateway' is and does, to include the support needed to facilitate youth jobs outcomes ([as the IES evidence review for YFF underlined](#)). One way of auditing practice could be to look for markers of a quality placement (e.g., we require employers to enforce a secondment checklist). Additionally, Gateways should be expected to measure 'distance travelled' as a means of self-evaluating (e.g. we use [Outcomes Star](#) and feedback surveys throughout the placement and beyond).

6) **Issue:** DWP have communicated decisions which impact delivery without any prior warning. The fill rate (how many available placements are filled by a young person) which was used to make the decision was also unclear. There was no clarification on whether the fill rate was measured against total placements that was approved in our agreement or against actual live placements that could be filled at that time by the job centres.

Employers	Total Placements	live placements	vacancies pending approval	Places filled	Fill rate on Total (including removed)	Fill rate on live
38	159	98	5	70	44%	71%

***Catch22 fill rate data as of 27.10.21**

Impact: We were informed on 06.10.21 that due to our fill rate and approved/live placements ratio being below 50% (based on the total fill rate rather than the live fill rate) we would no longer be able to request a variation to increase the number of placements, add employers to our grant agreement or move placements between their existing employers. We were not given any prior notice or deadline for this to commence. At the time we were about to submit 10 different employers with 19 different roles to the DWP that week for approval but having not met the 50% threshold and not given any time to implement a contingency we unfortunately had to inform the new employers that we could no longer process their placements which will impact Catch22 and Kickstart's reputation.

Although we did not meet the DWP fill rate ratio (below 50%), we were not given clear parameters on which sets of data were being used to calculate this, as our fill rate for live placements is significantly higher.

Solution: DWP should give a minimum notice period prior to making significant changes to contracts. Clear parameters for the data should be communicated in advance of decision making.

7) **Issue:** Varied support/communication timeframes from Work Coaches at JCPs and sometimes no clear line of communication per role.

Impact: It can take weeks to find the correct point of contact at JCP's as all JCP's work differently. Whilst some work coaches are very proactive and supportive some can take up to 2-3 weeks to respond. This creates delays in getting positions filled and often prospective participants lose interest and find other placements.

Solution: A clearer structure and minimum requirements for work coaches and JCP's.

We would be very happy to discuss any of the above in more depth or provide additional data should that be helpful for the committee.

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