

Written evidence submitted by Causeway Education

Response to the Education Select Committee inquiry on the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services

Introduction to Causeway Education:

Causeway Education is a charity working to level access to post-18 destinations. In particular, we seek to support young people facing socio-economic barriers to explore post-18 options, make ambitious choices and produce high-quality applications. We are an evidence-led organisation, drawing on the latest research in our interventions, and gathering data from our programmes to feed back into the Widening Participation evidence base. Our work consists of 3 interlinked strands:

1. High-quality workshops and mentoring for young people
2. Research, consultancy and expert training for teachers and WP professionals
3. Practical resources

We are submitting evidence to this inquiry because we want to ensure that the necessary actions are taken to mitigate the likely negative impact of COVID-19 on young people's transition to post-18 destinations, with a specific emphasis on those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This submission addresses three key issues:

1. The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment
2. Support for pupils and families during closures, including the consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on home learning
3. The effect on apprenticeships and other workplace-based education courses

1. The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment.

- 1.1. **We recommend that Ofqual should monitor attainment gaps and be prepared to make any adjustments if any substantial discrepancies appear in comparison to attainment gaps in previous years.** We are aware that Ofqual have carried out an equality impact assessment (Lee & Walter, 2020), but the evidence base on the likely effects of bias on predicted grade (Wyness, 2016) (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2011) should not be fully discounted and actions must be taken if discrepancies occur. It is vital that students who could not take their exams this summer because of the COVID-19 crisis are given grades that are fair. Research by the Sutton Trust found that 43% of university applicants studying for A levels feel that the new assessment procedure will have a negative impact on their grades, and 72% felt that the new grading system is less fair than in a normal year (Montacute & Holt-White, 2020).

- 1.2. **On A-level results day it is imperative that young people, particularly those from under-represented groups regarding access to Higher Education (HE), receive additional guidance and support with making informed decisions about next steps.** There are several third sector organisations, such as Causeway, who could provide this support or the training to those in a position to advise young people, such as teachers or careers advisors. Sutton Trust research with young people found that over half (52%) of state-educated students said they would be likely to take a replacement exam in the autumn if they don't get the grades they hope for, and this increased to 60% for students attending private schools (Montacute & Holt-White, 2020). Attainment is the principal barrier to accessing Higher Education (Chowdry, et al., 2010; Crawford, 2014) and the gap in progression between state-educated and privately educated young people will widen further if pro-active action is not taken to support students with their results this summer.
- 1.3. **Students in Year 11 transitioning to post-16 must not be overlooked and need to be supported on GCSE results day.** Research has highlighted the importance of achieving good grades in Key Stage 4 qualifications for progression to HE, as results at Key Stage 4 have shown to be a reliable predictor for entry to HE (Crawford, 2014). Research by the charity Impetus (Gadsby, 2020) has found that young people are more likely to gain a degree and less likely to end up not in education, employment or training if they have GCSEs in English and Maths, than if they have five GCSEs in other subjects. English and Maths GCSEs make a noticeable difference to outcomes, and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to secure these qualifications that we know boost life chances (Gadsby, 2020). It is imperative that Year 11 students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are supported on results days with decision-making about examination re-takes, and specifically with GCSE English and Maths.
- 1.4. **We welcome the National Tutoring Service, but we are concerned over the targeting of the “catch-up” funding, and early years and college students must not be overlooked.** As part of the Fair Education Alliance coalition who wrote to Gavin Williamson to call for a National Tutoring Service to tackle the entrenched and new educational inequalities that are emerging as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, we welcome the news of the National Tutoring Programme and the wider £1 billion catch-up plan with support for the most disadvantaged.

However, we echo concerns raised by the Education Policy Institute that the funding plan is poorly targeted, as the government has chosen to allocate the majority of extra funding to schools without any reference to disadvantage, implying that a school with an affluent catchment would receive the same funding as a similar sized school in the poorest areas of the country. We were also disappointed to learn that early years and 16-18 year olds in colleges have not been included in this catch-up plan. We hope there will be an announcement very soon that outlines the funding and support available for these phases.

- 1.5. **Applicants from under-represented groups and disadvantaged backgrounds should be given additional consideration if they narrowly miss their offer grades this year.** Some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) already take account of students' socio-economic background and school type when making offers through contextual admissions policies. As described by the Office for Students, contextual admissions “allow admissions teams to identify applicants with the greatest potential to succeed in higher education, rather than relying on the highest-ranked exam results alone” (Office for Students, 2019a). Contextual admissions policies for this year's application cycle should be extended and adapted to account for the evidence that the COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating existing educational inequalities. Sutton Trust research found that almost half of applicants (48%) felt that

the COVID-19 crisis will have a negative impact on their chances of getting into their first-choice university, with working-class students more likely to be worried about this negative impact (Montacute & Holt-White, 2020).

- 1.6. **Young people and their key influences, such as parents/careers, teachers and school-based advisors need support and to be provided with consistent and coherent key messages about what is happening with this year's cycle of HE admissions.** Research by the Sutton Trust has found that a fifth of university applicants have changed their mind about university attendance this autumn or are yet to decide, and working-class students were more likely to have changed their decision as a result of the COVID-19 crisis (Montacute & Holt-White, 2020). Feedback from our networks of partner schools and third sector organisations support this finding, with the addition of students rapidly changing their subject choices to what they perceive may work better for them in an uncertain future, particularly towards science subjects or jobs which they believe will offer better employment prospects. In many cases, these decisions are being made without access to suitable guidance and if students do not have appropriate A-level subjects or a developed interest in their new subject choices, this could potentially lead to fewer offers or more negative outcomes for them with their post-18 destinations.

Teachers in particular play a key role in supporting their students through the application process and decisions such as these on subject choice, but teachers and school-based advisors are uncertain about application requirements for this year's admissions cycle. Teachers in our partner schools have reported they have received little information from universities about how students can account for the lack of opportunities for work experience or enrichment activities that are offered as part of widening participation initiatives.

2. Support for pupils and families during closures, including the consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on home learning.

- 2.1. **The government's access to technology scheme needs to be extended to students beyond Year 10 to account for the fact that the widening participation and enrichment opportunities that under-represented and disadvantaged students need are now taking place predominantly online.** Research by the Sutton Trust found that applicants from working class backgrounds were twice as likely to have insufficient access to internet access, devices for learning or a suitable place to study, compared to those from middle class homes (Montacute & Holt-White, 2020). Many widening participation and enrichment opportunities that would normally be offered in person, are being offered online through webinars, MOOCs or online shadowing opportunities. Although this alternative provision is applauded and will offer the vital information, advice and guidance that thousands of students will need this summer, the digital divide will prevent access for the students that need it the most.

Emerging evidence of impact from the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) (now known as Uni Connect) has found that when students engage with multiple outreach opportunities rather than one-off interventions, they are more likely to have positive outcomes, and there is a positive correlation between the number of NCOP activities students take part in and improvements in their self-reported knowledge, attitudes and intentions towards HE (Bowes, et al., 2019). If students from under-represented groups miss out on these opportunities this year, there is a risk

that the access gap between the most-advantaged and least-advantaged will significantly widen this year.

3. The effect on apprenticeships and other workplace-based education courses

- 3.1. **Apprentices must be able to complete their qualifications and employers and learning providers need support to be able to continue to offer apprenticeship and degree apprenticeship routes.** In early April, employers surveyed reported that on average just 39% of apprenticeships were continuing as normal, with 36% of apprentices having been furloughed, 17% having their off-the-job learning suspended, and 8% made redundant (Doherty & Cullinane, 2020). Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds will be more vulnerable to insecurity, as they are more likely to undertake lower level apprenticeships, are paid less, and are less likely to access remote learning (Doherty & Cullinane, 2020). If fewer employers are able to offer apprenticeships or degree apprenticeships as a result of the COVID-19 crisis fewer places will be available, and with schools and colleges closed, it will be more difficult for young people to access the guidance that they need to make decisions about apprenticeships or degree apprenticeships.

This year Causeway supported a group of college students to apply for a degree apprenticeship, but the course has unfortunately been cancelled for this year's application cycle following the COVID-19 crisis. As degree apprenticeships have been described by the Office for Students as "a route to increased social mobility" (Office for Students, 2019b) it is vital that this route continues to be available to young people, particularly those from under-represented groups and disadvantaged backgrounds.

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