

## Written evidence submitted by D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership

### **The impact of COVID-19 on Education and Children's Services**

#### **D2N2 Enterprise Advisor Network**

Established in 2010, D2N2 is one of the largest Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in England, with a population of more than two million people and with an economic output of over £42.9 billion GVA (Gross Value Added).

Our purpose is to support and encourage economic growth across Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. Our vision is of a more prosperous, better connected, and increasingly resilient and competitive economy.

We are governed by a private sector-led Board; and supported by high profile and respected leaders from businesses, local authorities, skills and training providers, higher and further education providers, community and voluntary services organisations.

In the D2N2 area, we have a significant productivity challenge compared to the rest of UK. This is reinforced by a long-standing skills gap between the population and the needs of our industries. This gap is projected to widen as a result of low aspiration amongst many of our young people.

Our strategy is to improve the number and quality of interactions between young people and employers to improve understanding of labour market opportunities, increase confidence and aspiration and, longer-term, improve social mobility.

D2N2 LEP, working with partners including the Careers & Enterprise Company, is growing our activity through our Enterprise Adviser Network. The Network seeks to increase workplace interactions for young people whilst embedding long term relationships between schools and employers.

#### **Background**

The Enterprise Adviser Network (EAN) consists of a team of Enterprise Coordinators. They work with local employers and help them to strategically inform and shape careers education in schools across the region. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, we were making significant progress in bridging the region's skills gap and making sure young people were ready for the fast-changing world of work.

The D2N2 LEP currently works with 171 mainstream, alternative provision and special schools across Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. The responses below were correlated by analysing responses from our school Careers Leaders and Senior Leadership Teams. We are happy for our responses to be included in the overall report and identified as contributors.

#### **Challenges to delivery of careers and activities to vulnerable children and young people**

There is a clear correlation between those who are most vulnerable and those who have failed to or have barely access(ed) the online education platforms that schools have provided for them. This is also consistent with those accessing careers-based activities through platforms such as Google classroom, websites or social media.

Schools comment that although there is a wide range of online resources available, a lack of ICT access at home is a significant barrier. Homes with Wi-Fi and a laptop or PC may also be struggling, as parents are not confident with all the different technology to be able to support or check what students are doing.

Typically work with this group would be targeted and personalised and would focus on face to face contact with providers/employers to develop skills and confidence – online resources do not meet this need.

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

As soon as exam cancellations were confirmed, there was a significant drop off in the number of Y11's and Y13's accessing virtual platform formats across the majority of our schools. These year groups remain those using it least but are those who would benefit from it the most. As a result, their access to regular careers and 'next step' related updates have been significantly impacted.

Our analysis shows that a lack of understanding exists amongst some parents about the calculation of grades (especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds). More privileged families, those with understanding and those with high aspirations are widely expected to do more to argue the case for grade uplift or compete harder for progression to courses requiring specific grades. We are concerned that this lack of understanding about routes for appeal and the grading process will place even more disadvantage on certain students.

It is widely acknowledged by the schools we work with that students tend to 'up their game' during exam season and that this added pressure is useful in driving increases in exam attainment. Many students will never get that opportunity to 'push themselves' and will, therefore, be unsure about their next steps and future aspirations.

From a health and wellbeing perspective, an increase in high levels of student anxiety and worry has been reported in nearly 80% of our schools.

### **Careers and progressions support for pupils and families during closures.**

#### **- Impact on messaging from further and higher education providers**

FE and HE providers report good engagement with virtual events they have held including use of student-friendly engagement activities eg Instagram live chats. However, there is no ability to check which students are accessing these services, other than checking in with students individually; again adding risk to the potential increase of disparities in access.

Transitions for students with SEND appears to be a particular concern in our area. Questions around extended transition time or cover of the costs for school staff to do this over the summer with college teams are becoming more frequent.

Our school's primary concern is ensuring year 11 and year 13 SEND students have positive destinations. Our Colleges are concerned that year 11 students won't have done any formal learning since March. Therefore, assimilation back into a learning environment (especially those with less academic bias) will be very hard, slower to achieve and require greater levels of support.

### **- The effect on apprenticeships and other workplace-based education courses**

The D2N2 LEP recently surveyed apprenticeship providers across our area. Most current apprentices are continuing with at least a proportion of their learning (80%+) regardless of whether they are still in work or furloughed. However, uncertainty amongst many employers means that in most workplaces, commitment to future apprenticeship starts is not being made; disrupting the future pipeline.

In contrast, a recent assessment of Yr11 destinations data in Derby City has identified 259 students (from a cohort of 2800) who had identified an apprenticeship as a desired destination but who had not received a formal offer of an apprenticeship. In these cases, supporting students to make alternative arrangements is challenging, and of the 259, 142 are still proving hard to contact during the lockdown.

Access to work-based learning, usually via public transport for most young people, presents an additional barrier during current circumstances.

Schools are querying if they should be encouraging apprenticeships as a viable option at the moment? The view is that it is 'safer' to stay in education with so much uncertainty in the labour market. However, remaining in academic school-based learning is neither appropriate nor desirable for many young people, and the capacity does not exist even if this could be overcome.

Work experience as part of vocational courses where this is mandatory is also being affected. This will impact the readiness of students both in FE and in University. This situation is most evident in industries most affected by COVID 19, for example, hospitality, health & social care, education and leisure.

### **- Other impacts related to destinations.**

Drawing on the recent Derby research, it is also notable that of the 2800 students currently leaving Yr 11, a total of 640 have no agreed destination in the form of a college place, apprenticeship, employment or continued learning at school.

The current challenges of contacting these students and putting in place plans are worrying, and the city is considering carefully how to avoid a huge rise in NEET numbers. This is an ongoing live situation at this time.

### **The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department's approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need)**

"The longer that schools are not returned to normal the bigger the gap will grow between advantaged and disadvantaged students" is a view repeatedly echoed by most of the schools we spoke to.

Mental health issues reported from SEND group are increasing, along with high levels of anxiety and reports of students struggling with daily routines.

Through the LEP People and Skills Board we have received reports of parents/carers seeking school support to address urgent financial crisis, access to food, and reporting cases of domestic violence, often as a first incident). Some school staff are circulating free school meals to the most vulnerable. At the LEP level, we have connected our Local Resilience Forum's with schools to ensure they are receiving up to date information on food banks and advice services which they can then share.

**What contingency planning can be done within schools in the future to ensure the resilience of CEIAG in case of any future national emergency**

The online platforms that we have developed will not disappear once schools return to normal. They will be developed further to aid and add value to future teaching. This will be a real benefit for CEIAG, as the vast majority of it can be delivered in a format that young people understand and appreciate. The issue we continue to face is that those students who do not have full access to online technology will continue to be disadvantaged.

While these students will be able to use school IT facilities when they return to the classroom, equality of digital access will continue to drive the gaps in social mobility, especially if another lockdown is imposed locally or nationally. As a result of COVID 19, we believe national, and cross-governmental consideration of digital equality and its impact on social mobility and outcomes is essential.

The D2N2 LEP will continue to work with our schools and develop paper-based resources and visual/creative SEN resources to enable students to access information in a range of formats to suit home circumstances and learning preferences.

Access to funding to produce a local bank of sustainable resources/video content for curriculum areas would be very helpful. For example, capturing employer contributions that evidence the relevance of different subjects in different roles - languages in HR, health and law; the contribution of geography to planning, environmental protection and analytics. These resources would be extremely beneficial both in and out of the pandemic.

Lastly, continued development of strong Community of Practice groups across all areas has been the key to sustaining activity during this period and building momentum between headteachers and careers leaders – Sharing resources, knowledge and supporting each other.

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