Inquiry Questions

1. Are the summers announcements #PlanForJobs ambitious enough to address the youth unemployment challenge?

The #PlanForJobs is welcomed by the careers guidance sector, but as indicated in the responses to questions 2 and 3 below, it does not go far enough in addressing the challenges facing young people in the midst of the pandemic and beyond. At this stage it is difficult to comment in sufficient detail as the #PlanForJobs has yet to be realised in localities. It offers funding for a range of short-term incentives to employers and for other training infrastructure to be put in place, however the effectiveness of this will only be known when delivery plans are agreed and activities are under way. There have been many questions posed to Government departments in response to the Chancellor’s announcement and the level of responses thus far have been very light on detail.

The #PlanForJobs lacks ambition in the fact that it is a short term response and whilst it is understood that an urgent response is needed, given the fact that we are entering a period of economic recession, it is likely that it may come up short in terms of the intended impact due to the time taken to launch and deliver the proposed interventions. From a systems perspective many prospective providers will be faced with managing the life cycle of these projects in a very short window. The capacity building required for new provision and the residual liabilities to providers in an outcomes based funding regime, need a longer period of operation to ensure that programmes delivered are of the quality able to deliver the intended impact. It is understood that this will require an even greater commitment from the Exchequer, but without such a guarantee it is possible that the #PlanForJobs will fail to gain the traction needed to address the long term effects of the pandemic on many thousands of young people.

1. Are their gaps and tensions that may cause a rise in further inequalities amongst groups of young people such as those furthest from the labour market?

There are both gaps and tensions to be managed. Firstly, there was already a significant number of young people who were NEET prior to the pandemic. Many of these have cycled in and out of available education and training provision and employment but have failed to sustain this. This is due to a number of factors, some personal, some a product of a mismatch between what has been on offer and what was needed, and some due to a lack of independent careers support for individuals. In addition, the lack of a basic guaranteed income for many young people make the choices available less attractive and at times unaffordable, a fact which is reflected in low participation levels in some areas. These young people are now faced with greater competition from higher-skilled and qualified young people who are entering the uncertain labour market for the first time, a fact which is compounded by the devastating effect the pandemic has had on certain sectors of the economy where lower skilled employment offered opportunities for their engagement and advancement, e.g. the service sector: the hospitality industry in particular.

Many young people with SEND have struggled to gain a foothold in employment and the rate of progression into work or higher levels of education and training has been hampered by the absence of a personalised pathway and support system as they enter the labour market. It is likely that this group of young people will be left further behind as employers are encouraged to offer opportunities to a wider group of young people, who may otherwise have progressed without the need for the additional traineeship, apprenticeship or Kickstart programmes launched under the #PlanForJobs.

There will be a need for these new or additional programmes to engage and progress young people quickly and this may manifest itself in pressures to fill programme places at the expense of what is right for individuals, leading to low levels of completion and achievement and higher levels of churn.

The Government has provided additional funds to the National Careers Service, but there appear to be few linkages with this provision and the additional training, apprenticeship and Kickstart provision that will come on stream. In addition, the additional funding for the National Careers Service does not appear to sufficiently address the challenges that the pandemic has created in that there are many individuals who will face redundancy who do not feature in the National Careers Service’s Priority Group customers; this includes young people at risk of redundancy. The fact that these are not young people per se, i.e. people above the age of 24, they are no less in need of the type of support that the Service can provide if properly funded to do so. While The Careers & Enterprise Company provided significant assistance to Careers Leaders during Covid-19 school closures to enable them to continue to support students on the cusp of transition (through resources such as [My Week Of Work](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/news/leading-employers-line-support-young-peoples-careers-education-during-lockdown) with Oak National Academy, ‘[Work It’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncPkKawuz_k) and [My Choices](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/my-choices-transition-resources)), the National Careers Service does not provide direct help to young people between the ages of 16 and 18 and it is this group who will be experiencing arguably the most difficult transition as they leave education this year and next.

The Kickstart programme will be out of reach for the vast majority of 16-18 year olds who are NEET due to the fact that they do not ordinarily qualify for Universal Credit. This should be relaxed to extend eligibility to this group. As these young people will be in the receipt of services via local authority NEET engagement and participation operators, they will not be known to Jobcentre Job Coaches and will therefore miss out on opportunities.

1. What more needs to be done to accelerate impact and ensure no young person is left behind?

There needs to be active cooperation and joint planning between the DWP and DFE to ensure that the different parts of the #PlanForJobs connect. All young people should be offered access to independent careers guidance and this should be enshrined in the Traineeship, Apprenticeship and Kickstart programmes administered by DWP.

Young people should be guaranteed the type of careers support that enables them to understand the short and long term implications of the choices they make and have a personalised career plan that codifies this in such a way as they are able to navigate options over time. This personalised career plan should have value for the individual and act as a tool that they can use in applying for and negotiating opportunities with education and training providers and with employers. This would be supported by the roll-out of Careers Leader training and Careers Hubs, as called for by the Augar Review.

Planning the opportunity infrastructure must be done in association with employers and training providers at the local level. It must be informed by the needs of individuals as mediated by careers professionals to ensure that mismatch of needs and opportunities are reduced or eliminated if possible.

Local Youth Employment Strategy Groups comprising education/training providers, employers, careers providers should be established in every LEP area to inform and influence the necessary iterations of local industrial strategies put in place prior to the pandemic. These Groups should link into existing careers education infrastructure already working with LEPs, such as the Enterprise Adviser Network and Careers Hubs.