



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs

**Minutes of meeting held at 5.30pm, Tuesday 11th February
Boothroyd Room, Portcullis House**

Young people's skills and the transition from education into employment

Guest Speakers:

- **Matthew Hancock (Con, West Suffolk), Minister of State for Skills and Enterprise**
- **Adrian Bailey (Lab, West Bromwich West), Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee**

The meeting was chaired by Julie Hilling MP (Lab, Bolton West), Chair of the APPG.

1. Introduction and welcome

Group Chair, Julie Hilling MP (JH) introduced the group and briefly set out the format of the meeting.

JH then introduced **Dom Weinberg (DW)**, Policy Manager, National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS), who spoke about young people's skills and their transition from education to employment, and stressed the importance of hearing from the young people present about their views and experiences.

2. Adrian Bailey MP, Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee

AB introduced himself as the Member of Parliament for West Bromwich West and as Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Select Committee, which scrutinises the Government's policies in these areas. He spoke about the work of the committee under his chairmanship and suggested that the Government has in the past adjusted policy on the basis of recommendations from the Committee.

He said that it is important to hear the views of different people in order to guide the committee's work.

He spoke about his view of the skills and training policy context, highlighting the significant investment made in education in recent years. He said that while one output of this is a good university system with worldwide recognition, we are also in the position that 1 in 6 adults in the UK are illiterate, and 1.19 million people are classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET).

He stated that the committee has heard on a number of occasions that graduates are often not ready to enter the world of work because of the disparity between the amount spent on education and what is provided in terms of skills. This, he said, has a big impact on the wider economy of the UK.

He set out what he believes is needed to improve the skills system in the UK:

- The education system should demonstrate what paid work entails
- There should be reform of the careers service, which is not currently fit for purpose
- Public perceptions of vocational education must be improved
- Schools should also be judged on the number of young people who move into vocational employment

He argued that, in his experience, apprenticeship providers do not think that the Government provides enough support to help young people, and suggested that mentoring, access to finance, and help with housing issues would be a great help to young people. He also argued that the benefits system is not geared to assessing literacy levels and discourages people from going into part-time education and training.

3. Discussion and feedback from young people

JH thanked **AB** for his comments and encouraged young people to ask questions.

Emma from Advocate (Girl Guides) raised the issue of unpaid internships and asked what is being done to tackle this issue.

JH asked whether many attendees had experience of the issue, to which a number of attendees answered 'yes'.

Charlotte Gerada from CityYear spoke about work she had conducted for Unite, the trade union, and said that the problem of unpaid interns is also prevalent in the third sector, not just the private sector. She said that it is particularly concerning that many large charities use unpaid interns even if they have enough resources to pay them.

Jack from NCVYS spoke about his experiences during an unpaid internship with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), during which time he received expenses and travel costs but was asked to extend his internship from 3 months to a year. He said that because the Department kept extending the length of the internship there was a major impact on his studies whilst he worked a full working day.

Tamanna also spoke about her experiences doing an internship at the Department for Communities and Local Government, which involved a considerable amount of travelling across the country. She said that her internship was extended by the Department from 2 days a week to 5 days a week, and from 3 months to 6 months. She also said that this had a significant impact on her university studies.

Jane Bryant from Artswork, and a NCVYS trustee, highlighted the positive work that the creative sector has done to move away from unpaid internships, including through the introduction of a wage subsidy. **JH** asked if there should be a 3 month limit

on internship placements if organisations cannot afford to pay them. There was general agreement that this should be the case.

A young person said that if you are doing equivalent work to a paid member of staff you should be paid to do it, and that there should be a difference in the roles of interns and paid staff. She said that at the very least there should be the agreement that they receive a reference or connections that could lead to paid work in the future.

Joanne from UK Youth said that her organisation had used unpaid interns and said that there are examples of best practice in doing so, including flexible working practices and perks such as going to events, contacts and help with writing CVs. She also advocated opening up internships to those who did not go to university, and argued that there is a case to look at developing a case study of good practice to outline what a good internship looks like.

Alan, a young person from the Prince's Trust and UK Youth, spoke about his experiences of being a NEET for 3 years. He said that it would be beneficial for young people to be given a contract ahead of their internship which sets out exactly what is expected of them.

Emma from Student Hubs argued that there is an issue of access to internships for young people who live outside of London. She noted that in the North East and North West there are far fewer opportunities for young people to undertake internships.

AB suggested that there is an *"inquiry waiting to be done"* on unpaid internships, which could look at exploitation and how those on internships are able to access benefits. He admitted that he had employed his own unpaid intern but subsequently offered her person a paid role in his office. He explained that he had not advertised the post but was approached by a constituent to ask if they could carry out a placement to gain experience. He noted that it was a difficult call to make because of his scepticism about not paying staff.

He accepted that it would be difficult for young people to get jobs in London without being paid or receiving support from their families. He noted that a contract could be a step forward, or a mentoring system to help guide young people, but he said there is a need for a model of best practice to be developed.

Jo from We Have a Voice, asked why education funding for over-18s has been cut at a time of recession when people need skills. Another **young person** argued that if you don't invest in people now you will harm their chances and this might lead to benefit dependency.

Sir Peter Bottomley MP noted that because the Government protected the schools budget they had to make cuts elsewhere, and one area of cuts has been the budget for post-18 education and support.

He expressed his view that volunteers are different from interns, but raised concerns about the lack of awareness by the Civil Service about the number of paid and unpaid interns they employ and how they should be treated.

Questions should be asked about how we organise work so that young people get a good introduction to working life and are awarded for her efforts. He argued that the

public sector, including the Civil Service and BBC, should provide opportunities for young people of all backgrounds to get work experience.

Aaron, an Ealing Council apprentice highlighted that personal circumstances can affect working life, and asked what the Government is doing to support young people to get into employment with help for transport costs, support regarding home life and homelessness. He said that this is done reasonably well in London but that it varies markedly across boroughs.

Alan from the Princes' Trust agreed that we need to look at the support that is provided and raised concerns about the standard of careers advice in schools, which he said teachers are often not qualified to provide. He spoke about peer-to-peer mentors and his own experiences in Luton of working to bring careers support and mentoring schemes into schools. He argued that more needs to be done to successfully aid the transition from education to work.

Louis from NCVYS said that the decision to cut funding for the careers service and giving schools the responsibility for careers guidance, and asked why there cannot be a cross-sector partnership that would allow third sector organisations to fill in gaps like this. **JH** remarked that this was what the 'Big Society' was meant to look like.

Esmay Bear from Ealing Council spoke about the issue of support, and said that it was important that young people from troubled backgrounds who want to go into vocational employment are given additional support for issues such as homelessness. She asked what support is likely to be forthcoming for young people in this area, given cuts to services such as Connexions.

AB said that it was concerning how many people are not coming out of the education system with the skills they need, and spoke about a visit he had made to a training centre in his constituency. He said that the centre had been working to identify people with difficulties and placing them in paid roles with housing associations. He argued that there must be a tailored model for different sectors and locations. He suggested that schools could help to identify those who do not attend school as there are no public sector organisations that can or will do this.

4. Matthew Hancock MP, Minister of State for Skills and Enterprise

MH arrived at the meeting and was introduced by **JH**.

MH spoke about how he worked within the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Education in order to bring the two departments together to provide a link between the education system and the business world.

He stated one of his key concerns is that youth unemployment is too high and there are significant skills shortages, despite there being a high level of vacancies. He argued that it is important to ensure that skills and vacancies 'line up'.

He outlined the key strands of Government policy on skills and training, including:

- **Apprenticeships** – where you work and are paid, while learning at the same time. He noted the popularity of apprenticeships and that there were 1.5 million applications last year alone.

- **Vocational Qualifications** – there is a need to ensure that vocational qualifications are being respected by employers, and he argued that the forthcoming TechBaccs and Tech-Levels will only be recognised if employers start to view them as acceptable qualifications.
- **Careers guidance** – plotting the route from education to work is vital via support from careers staff.

He argued that the job is not done on the issue of skills and training, but that there is an increasing sense that employers are engaging with work experience. There is a definite need, he said, to bring the two worlds of education and employment closer together.

5. Discussion and feedback from young people

JH thanked **MH** for his comments and encouraged young people to ask questions.

A young person said that work experience is highly valuable but questioned whether young people get enough choice in what they do as she felt that she was pushed towards doing something she did not want to.

MH agreed that young people should have a choice in what they do, and that he hopes that the new study programmes will mean that colleges can do better by their students, including introducing flexibility.

MH spoke briefly about 'job shops', which he said more colleges have now. He said that these would help young people to develop the skills they need and help them obtain work experience that would make them more employable.

The two young people who undertook internships with DCLG spoke again about their experiences, to which **MH** responded that the more paid work experience young people can do the better, but that he would be loathed to stop unpaid work experience as it would allow more young people to get work experience than if it was banned.

He spoke about the difference of internships, volunteers and employees. He noted that a key thing is for the Government to enforce National Minimum Wage (NMW) payment, highlighting penalties for the non-payment of NMW have increased, and a new advertising campaign on non-compliance. **JH** referred to comments made about the creative sector earlier in the meeting, and **MH** also praised the retail sector for its work in clamping down on non-payment of NMW.

Charlotte Gerada from CityYear spoke about her work for Unite, particularly regarding unpaid internships in the charity sector.

MH said that more than half of jobs in the UK come through word of mouth, and that work experience and mentoring can open doors for young people, which in some way helps if you are not being paid.

An attendee argued the case for equality of opportunity regarding access to work, and reiterated the concern that people should get paid for work they do.

Jo again highlighted her concerns regarding cuts to funding for over-18s retaking GCSEs and A-Levels. Responding, **MH** said that it was not a decision he made easily but had to do so in order to balance budgets. He noted that funding for vulnerable

students, such as those with learning difficulties, is protected by the Government. He said that often those most disadvantaged are those who drop out at 16 so he also wanted to keep this funding to help 16-18 year olds.

A young person from vInspired said that there is a big problem with young people dropping out of school and highlighted vInspired's work and how helpful she found their help and support. She suggested that the Government should look to provide funding and support to organisations like this. **MH** responded saying traineeship funding is designed to help programmes like this.

A young person spoke about his experiences with gang culture and that joining a structured programme where he received help and advice had allowed him to transform his life. He said that he had worked with people with learning disabilities and is now doing an apprenticeship, but said that some people are not ready for that level of work and need something simpler and more flexible, which is what he was able to benefit from.

Alan asked how we can ensure that young people in traineeships are supported and that young people are not left behind because of cuts in funding to services they need, referring to his own personal experience and the lack of support he received.

MH said that traineeships were designed for young people who were not yet ready for apprenticeships and the idea came from comments made by young people at a similar meeting to this. On support, he said that one of his proudest achievements as a Minister was the removal of the 16 hour rule that would mean that people undertaking more than 16 hours of training would not lose their rights to benefits. This, he said, had been a problem for many years and had finally been solved.

A young person said that employers often want to make budget cuts and so paying interns is often the first place they look in order to cut costs.

Another young person said that cuts are damaging careers advice, which in turn impacts on the ability of young people to understand what they need to do to get into work.

MH concluded saying that he recognises the need for better careers advice and spoke about the Government's all age service. He noted that the Government is about to launch a new advertising campaign on this. He also commented that he enjoyed and valued talking to young people at events such as this because it helps provide him with the information he needs to design policy.

JH closed the session by thanking the speakers and attendees, and highlighting the importance of young people's contribution to the group.

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Julie Hilling MP	Chair of the APPG on Youth Affairs
Sir Peter Bottomley MP	Secretary of the APPG on Youth Affairs
Matthew Hancock MP	Minister of State for Skills and Employment
Adrian Bailey MP	Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee
Andrew Sheldon	Office of Rebecca Harris MP
3FF	
Adviza	
Ambition	
Artswork	
ASSA	
Careers South West	
City Year	
Depaul UK	
Diana Award	
Ealing Council	
Forster Communications	
Just for Kids Law	
Leeds University	
Lindley Educational Trust	
London Youth	
Southern Brooks	
St John Ambulance	
The Scout Association	
UK Youth	
vInspired	
We Have a Voice	
Worcestershire Council	
NCVYS	
BYC	
YMCA	
Connect Communications	