

Children's Commissioner's Proposals to Support Children into Work

The Children's Commissioner's Office (CCO) has come up with a series of policies to help children prepare for the workplace and succeed in their chosen careers.

What children have told us

In 'The Big Ask', children's top priority for the future was getting a good job or career. Children from every part of the country told us how ambitious they are for their futures and how they wanted to get on in life and succeed. As one child said: 'I expect great things from myself' – *Gender fluid, 13.*

Children wanted to work not just for themselves, but for others too. A child told us: '[I want] a good career to earn some good money for my family and friends to share and get a nice house and give money to the homeless and try hard' – *Girl, 8.*

Children felt that schools and employers should work together so that there are opportunities for children to understand the workplace and their options after education. They asked for: 'opportunities outside of school to participate in such as work experience, shadowing etc to actually learn what we like' - *Girl, 14.*

We heard from children wanting apprenticeships to give them the skills and training they need to get into work. They told us: 'Apprenticeships are a good route for those wanting to leave formal education post 16 and I feel there needs to be more workplaces offering this' - *Girl, 15.* One girl said: 'I also think that more apprenticeships or workshops with people in our desired careers would be extremely helpful' - *Girl, 14.*

Despite widespread education on careers and opportunities, children wanted some more guidance on how to get the right support to move into the workplace. Children with care experience need advice and support to raise their aspirations and guidance to achieve them.

What this means for policy now as we come out of lockdown

This is an ambitious generation who want to get on in life, they want the opportunity to succeed and do well in their future. In the aftermath of the pandemic, now is the time to set out a clear path for all children leaving education, with opportunities to train and enter exciting careers across a wide range of sectors. There are some key reforms in this area, like the Kickstart scheme, and the Skills for Jobs White Paper which are a cause for optimism.¹

To build on these reforms:

- 1) **The Kickstart scheme should continue into 2022.** This should be better integrated with wider policy and guidance for providers and employers on skills and apprenticeships.
- 2) **An ambitious strategy is needed to improve the quality and quantity of apprenticeships** – so young people can gain the skills they need for their future careers. With a new commitment to creating 50,000 new apprenticeship starts to be available to young people at a range of levels and in a wider range of sectors, including STEM industries. More should be done to encourage girls to take up these opportunities.
- 3) **As recommended by the Augar Review, the expansion and improvement of careers guidance within schools should continue.** So that every secondary school and FE

¹ Kickstart moves up a gear with over 120,000 jobs created so far and government making it even simpler for employers to join, *Department for Work and Pensions*, January 2021, [link](#). Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth, *Department for Education*, January 2021, [link](#).

college is part of a careers hub and guidance is in line with the Gatsby benchmarks of good careers education.

- 4) **More supported internships are needed for children most at risk of becoming NEET.** This should include those with severe special educational needs or a disability and care leavers.

The policies we think will benefit children now

- 1) **Continue the Kickstart Scheme so that more children can benefit from it**

To mitigate the impact of the pandemic on youth employment, the £2 billion Kickstart Scheme was launched. This provides full funding to employers to create 250,000 six-month training placements for young people at risk of long-term unemployment. The CCO strongly welcomes this focus on preventing young people falling out of education and employment.

Continuing the Kickstart programme for at least six months into 2022 would allow for more placements to be established, given the disruption to the scheme caused by this year's lockdown. It would also enable robust evaluation of the efficacy of the scheme for different groups of young people and help to build the evidence-base of what works to tackle youth unemployment. An extension should also ensure that the scheme is integrated more fully with long-term strategies to help young people into work, such as traineeships. This could include incentives and support for Kickstart employers to create long-term jobs or apprenticeship schemes for young people after their Kickstart placement comes to an end.

- 2) **Increase the number of apprenticeships available to young people**

The CCO welcomes the commitments in the Skills White Paper to encourage more apprenticeship starts, particularly in SMEs and to reform the funding mechanisms to make it easier for employers to hire more apprentices. In line with this agenda, we would like to see the quality and quantity of apprenticeships to continue to improve with a new commitment to creating 50,000 new apprenticeship starts to be available to young people at a range of levels and in a wider range of sectors. This should include:

- a. The creation of a separate ring-fenced funding stream for apprenticeships for 16–18-year-olds.
- b. Advice and support for small businesses to take on apprentices based on further evaluation of the barriers faced by SMEs in taking on apprenticeships. This should include raising awareness of the apprenticeship programme and making the system as easy as possible for businesses to engage with. The cap on numbers of apprenticeships for SMEs should be removed, or at least raised in the first instance to encourage SMEs to introduce apprenticeships.
- c. A reassessment of how functional skills training is incorporated into apprenticeship training.
- d. Close monitoring of data on apprenticeship take-up and completion, combined with a targeted plan to incentivise employers to offer apprenticeship starts in regions and sectors with low rates.

- 3) **Continue to improve Careers Guidance in schools**

The Skills White Paper has committed to continue with the roll out of the careers infrastructure and extend the coverage of careers hubs, as recommended by the Augar Review.² The guidance for schools will be updated and Ofsted will undertake a thematic review of careers guidance in schools. The Skills White Paper also committed to introduce further measures to enforce the ‘Baker Clause’, which requires schools to provide opportunities for pupils to learn about apprenticeships and technical education options.

The CCO supports a continued expansion and improvement of careers guidance within schools in line with the Augar Review and would like to see a commitment that every secondary school and FE college is part of a career’s hub. About half of FE colleges (155) and 45 per cent of secondary schools (2,090) are in a career’s hub, according to the CEC.³

We are also calling for the Sir John Holman Review to be broadened to include the quality of careers advice. This would be with a view to ensuring that every child can access high quality careers advice in school with good information about non-academic career routes including into sectors that enable career progression such as STEM industries.

Dame Rachel de Souza DBE sits on the Gender Equality Advisory Council for the G7. As part of this work, she has made recommendations on initiatives that could encourage girls to take up careers in STEM industries, including the Gender Action award scheme for schools, which promotes and supports whole-school approaches to tackling gender stereotypes. Schools have a host of competing incentives and demands, from improving attainment to supporting well-being. Rolling out this kitemark, including into further education, could be a way to reward and acknowledge those schools and colleges that take the initiative to address gender imbalances.

- 4) **Provide more supported internships so all young people can access the workplace**
Supported internships are structured, work-based education and training programmes for young people aged 16-24 who have special educational needs or disabilities. They typically last for a year and are designed to help young people to gain the skills and confidence needed to secure long-term employment.

From September 2013, the Access to Work fund was extended to include supported internships and traineeships, to fund travel costs and the costs of support workers and specialist equipment for the days that a young person is at an employer’s premises. Approximately 36% of supported internships have resulted in paid employment for participants. This is in comparison to the national average employment rate for people with learning disabilities, which is 15%.⁴

The CCO is calling for increased funding for supported internships so that they are paid opportunities, to ensure young people of all socioeconomic backgrounds can participate. Clearer, and more structured, pathways and progression routes are also needed to help young people achieve paid employment at the end of the internship.

² Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth, *Department for Education, January 2021*, [link](#).

³ Careers and Enterprise Company, *FE Week*, March 2021, [link](#).

⁴ Supported internship trial for 16 to 24 year old learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: An evaluation, *Department for Education*, December 2013, [link](#).

To build on this programme, we would recommend new initiatives to encourage, incentivise and support businesses to offer supported internships, to ensure such opportunities are extended into a diverse range of sectors. A national campaign could be launched to promote supported internships more widely among young people with SEND, particularly those with a learning disability, as part of the intention to reform careers guidance for young people.

Since 2017, more than 250 care leavers have been awarded places on the Government's Care Leavers Internship Scheme. In 2020, 500 new internship opportunities were created for care leavers to work in a range of government departments, where they remain underrepresented. These 12-month paid placements are intended to equip care leavers with a range of professional skills that will help them in securing long-term employment.

The Care Leavers Internship Scheme should be continued, and the number of places available should be extended in future years, to ensure many young people can benefit. The scheme could be promoted more widely among young people at schools and colleges, as part of the government's intentions to reform careers guidance for young people. In addition, incentives and support for businesses to adopt similar internship schemes to the Care Leavers Scheme, would ensure such opportunities for care leavers are extended into a range of other sectors.