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Thank you very much for your email of 20 December 2017, enclosing the biographies of the four young people who asked questions, and the questions themselves that I unfortunately did not have time to answer at the All Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment on 19 December 2017. I am very sorry for the delay in responding, and for the fact that you have not received this response in time for it to be included in Youth Employment UK's Report, published last month.

I would first like you to thank all the Youth Ambassadors for their helpful and thoughtful questions on how we can provide more of the right opportunities and advice for young people. Importantly, the questions cover the support needed both as young people prepare for the labour market and as they enter it. I will list the questions you provided here again before giving the answers, so that they can be read alongside each other.

Andri Stephanou asked 'What will government do to encourage school heads and teachers that academics and UCAS are not the only options post- A Level, and to encourage them to talk to students about alternative routes, such as apprenticeships, which may be more suitable to them?'

Andri has understood one of the most important ways we can more widely spread the word about the benefits of apprenticeships. She has raised a valid concern, one that we have recognised too, that young people might not be aware of the full range of options available to them in the careers guidance they receive. I agree that whilst university is a good choice for some people, it is not for everyone. There are other high-quality and challenging options that young people may be more suited to, including technical education and apprenticeships.

In January of this year, we introduced a new legal duty for schools to make sure that a range of different providers can talk to pupils about the technical education qualifications or apprenticeships they offer. We have published guidance setting out what schools, heads and teachers must do so that we can

set an aim for every young person to be able to make an informed decision about what is best for them.

Andri may also be interested to know about Degree Apprenticeships, a new form of apprenticeship that has recently become available. These are a great way to earn while you learn at some of the UK's top universities. They offer a real alternative to a traditional degree course, combining a degree with work and providing the skills and experience young people need. They are a job first and a degree second, and we are planning to make many more available.

Harvey Moreton makes a very similar point to Andri's when he quotes the results of a survey showing that careers advice is overly-focussed on academic options. I fully agree, and in an interview I gave recently I described how we need to change the views many parents and teachers have in this regard. Harvey also asked: 'I read that 500 schools would receive funding to deliver the new strategy - what will happen to those schools and students that don't receive funding?'

We already know that some schools and colleges are starting to put new commitments into place and already have, for instance, dedicated Careers Leaders, which is our aim for every school. Careers Leaders in some cases need training, so we have agreed that some schools, particularly those in areas of the country with the most need, should have further support. They will therefore be chosen first to receive training. These are the schools that will receive the funding Harvey mentions. The Careers Leader will help to embed careers guidance in their school, developing a strategy with senior leadership and making sure that the whole school can deliver a careers programme which meets the world-class expectations we have set.

I am very pleased to be able to give a positive reply to Leanora Volpe's question about apprenticeships and people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, because a lot is happening in this space. Leanora is quite right to be concerned that there should not be any barriers to people with disabilities when she asks: 'Our research showed that 22 per cent of employers would be less likely to take someone on if they had a declared disability, and the figures for apprenticeship starters show that the proportion of apprentices who are disabled lags behind the figure among the general population. How will the Institute for Apprenticeships and ESFA help to support employers to make their apprenticeship standards accessible, and ensure that disabled people don't continue to be excluded?'

We are working with employers to help us improve the opportunities offered to apprentices with disabilities. The Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN) was launched in February 2017. Since then we have been working with the Network, which is still growing, to hear more about what support can be offered to apprentices with disabilities and what more can be done to encourage take-up. The Network's role is not just about disabilities. It supports and promotes greater apprenticeship diversity in a wider sense, to make sure that people from all backgrounds benefit from apprenticeships. The idea behind the Network is that we can share best practice that has proved beneficial with

one employer for others to try. The BBC, for example, has set disability targets that have been successful and might be considered by other large organisations. Many of the Network's employers have themselves set targets. Brighton and Hove Council is running another successful scheme making good use of part-time flexibilities in apprenticeships for learners who have additional needs. This is the kind of best practice we are developing and sharing.

The National Apprenticeship Service, this department's agency, makes clear that apprenticeships are open to people from all backgrounds, including those with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Employers can contact the Service for further information or advice, including about additional funding available to apprentices who have disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Overall, the National Apprenticeship Service works directly with around 6,000 employers, including on ways to widen participation to all.

Leanora may be aware of the 'Disability Confident' scheme run by the Department for Work and Pensions. The scheme aims to help employers make the most of the opportunities presented by employing people with disabilities. We are linking apprenticeships to the scheme via the Find an Apprenticeship portal. Once employers have become Disability Confident, they can use a badge on their website. We are making Disability Confident badging clear for vacancies on the Find an Apprenticeship searches.

Part of Leanora's question was to ask what the Institute for Apprenticeships is doing to ensure that apprenticeships standards are accessible to people with disabilities. The Institute is an independent body, so I have asked it to reply directly to the All Party Parliamentary Group on these matters.

Colin Bradley asks two questions, firstly about the level of the National Minimum Wage: 'How would the government suggest a young person supports themselves while earning £3.50 per hour?'

Colin frames his question on the minimum wage from the perspective of people who are supporting themselves. It might first be worth adding that most apprentices receive more than the apprentice minimum wage. The Apprentice Pay Survey 2016 estimates that average gross hourly pay received by apprentices in England and Great Britain was £6.70 an hour for Level 2 and 3 apprentices.

The apprentice minimum wage is designed and set at a rate that acknowledges the particular costs for employers, and the benefits for young people involved in the provision of apprenticeships. The important factor to take into account is that the rate does not adversely affect apprenticeship opportunities in the labour market. Additionally, we have recently announced an increase in the National Minimum Wage for apprentices (from April 2018) from £3.50 to £3.70 per hour. This represents a 5.7 per cent increase.

Colin's further question relates to housing benefit, and would be best answered by the Department for Work and Pensions. Speaking broadly, however, I can confirm that certain vulnerable 18–21 year olds or those unable to live with their

parents can still get help with housing costs if they are claiming Universal Credit. For further detail, please see the GOV.UK website at: [www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-costs-for-18-to-21-year-olds](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-costs-for-18-to-21-year-olds).

Colin's second question was about widening access to apprenticeships: 'What plans does the government have to help young people access the opportunities? Is the government open to suggestions and how would I approach this?' This department's main programme to help prepare young people for an apprenticeship is the traineeships programme. Other programmes of support are provided by Jobcentre Plus. These also have the aim of establishing a route to apprenticeships as one of the potential outcomes.

We are also reforming apprenticeships, and we want those reforms to mean more apprentices from disadvantaged areas are undertaking apprenticeships at a higher level. The new way we fund apprenticeships, for example, supports training for individuals from disadvantaged areas by providing a cash payment to providers that are training apprentices living in the most deprived areas.

We have taken a number of steps to grow traineeships since their introduction in 2013. We want traineeships to continue to support as many young people as possible into apprenticeships and sustainable employment. If Colin would like to consider becoming involved in delivering traineeships, he may be interested to know that providers or employers who are interested in offering traineeships can contact the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for guidance and good practice in this area.

Before addressing Kerry Steadman's questions, I must say how much I was encouraged by Kerry's and the other biographies of the Youth Ambassadors. The way the Youth Ambassadors overcame all the barriers they faced is inspiring. Their experiences are testament to the fact that they are ideally placed to offer support and encouragement to other young people who may be experiencing similar difficulties, acting as role models and helping others to achieve their goals.

Kerry is most concerned about pupils and students from the most disadvantaged areas, and wants to know where and how support will be given. I would like to assure Kerry that we are determined to ensure disadvantaged students are properly supported in their post-16 education at college or sixth form. Additional disadvantage funding is provided to institutions specifically for students with low prior attainment, or who live in the most disadvantaged areas. In 2017/18, around £520 million is being allocated to enable colleges, schools and other providers to support, attract and retain disadvantaged 16-19 Year-olds and to support students with special education needs and disabilities.

Another programme of financial support that targets young people who most need help is the awarding of Discretionary Bursaries. For 2017/18 we have allocated a further £130 million to institutions to help disadvantaged young people to access education and training. A further £34 million is allocated for free meals in further education (FE). In addition, the most vulnerable young people can receive up to £1,200 per year to support their participation costs.

Kerry might also have been referring to additional funding for technical education for 16-19 year olds, so it may help if I comment on this. The investment here will rise to an additional £500 million a year, and will pay for the extra provision required by the new T levels. These technical programmes will see an increase of over 50 per cent on current hours, including a substantial work placement, bringing us much closer to the pattern of education in leading international systems. This additional investment is, I think, a clear signal of the importance we attach to post-16 education and training.

Kerry also asks: 'Will the government open up employment support programmes to the growing number of young unemployed people who are not on benefits?' Young people claiming benefits can access a range of support through Jobcentre Plus, including work experience programmes, job search support and referrals to training and careers advice. Various locally-run employment programmes can have different eligibility criteria. Many training courses, however, are available free of charge to young unemployed people to help prepare them for work, whether or not they are claiming benefits. These are funded through the FE system.

Our FE funding rules make it clear to training providers that they can use government funding for unemployed people not only if they are claiming benefits but also if the learner has no income or a low income and wants to be employed. The same applies if they want to progress into more sustainable employment and the training provider is satisfied the learning is directly relevant to their employment prospects and local labour market needs. Programmes funded by this department include Traineeships and the Princes Trust 'Team' programme. It is also worth mentioning that people aged 19-23 who have not achieved five GCSEs at grade C or above, or two A Levels (or equivalent), can get funded training to achieve those qualifications. The National Careers Service provides free information, advice and guidance to help people make choices about appropriate training.

Sagar Haria asks: 'Has the government considered setting up a certification program for young carers, which would recognise the skills they have gained around financial management, organising and other areas, which would then support them in helping to get a job with an employer?'

Many young carers are of course happy to care for their loved ones and are rightly proud of the contribution they make to their families. At the same time, they should be protected from excessive or, in some cases, inappropriate caring responsibilities that could affect their education, development and opportunities. We are always keen to hear from young carers as this will help us to develop the new cross-government carers' strategy. This call for evidence is designed to capture feedback both from young carers and those who work with them, asking a range of questions about different types of support and how this could improve.

The important skills involved in caring are the subject matter of a new short accredited course. This department and the Learning and Work Institute are

developing a course that recognises and certifies the skills of young adult carers as Sagar has suggested. Part of the course, for instance, aims to 'develop and demonstrate a range of skills through caring and independent living, gain recognition and certification of their skills.' The project will support and enable young adult carers to develop new skills. It is designed to help them become more confident, have a life of their own and achieve their potential in learning and work.

John Lawley's question reflects another area where we have put a number of new measures into place recently and where we have taken on board a number of concerns that John has described. He asks: 'What can we do to open up apprenticeships to young adults who face this barrier (of not having English and maths qualifications)? Could parallel training in basic skills be a recognised solution to open the apprenticeship pathway and remove the barrier for many young adults?'

English and maths are key elements of apprenticeships because good literacy and numeracy are highly valuable for both the apprentice and the employer. They provide transferrable skills outside the workplace, enable further study, help people to adapt and change and drive economic growth to a significant extent. Where possible, we provide all apprentices the opportunity to progress their literacy and numeracy skills, as well as their occupational competency. Taking up John's point about parallel training, we understand that many apprentices will have left school without GCSEs or level 2 qualifications in English and/or maths, so we have built parallel training into apprenticeships. The English and maths requirements within apprenticeships are therefore completion requirements rather than entry requirements.

We also understand that some apprentices will struggle to immediately work towards a qualification at the required level. This is why we fund apprentices to access a range of Functional Skills qualifications and stepping-stones courses in English and maths during their apprenticeship. There may also be instances whereby apprentices with disabilities and/or learning difficulties may be able to achieve the occupational parts of an apprenticeship, but struggle to achieve the English and maths requirements. Last year we introduced adjusted minimum English and maths requirements of Entry Level 3 Functional Skills for apprentices who are assessed as being in this position and who meet certain other criteria.

Ayodeji Ogunleye's experiences and question underline the need for a wider consideration of careers options when he asks: 'What more could the government do to ensure that young people are enabled to find out about their career options and supported to explore different career options without penalty?' I mentioned the new legal duty in an earlier answer and how it will help young people make an informed decision about what is best for them. In December 2017 we published a careers strategy that sets out a plan to build a world-class careers system that will help young people choose the career that is right for them. The Careers & Enterprise Company was established in 2014 to link employers with schools and colleges, opening young peoples' eyes to choices and opportunities and preparing them for the world of work.

The careers strategy has been developed in partnership with the Gatsby Charitable Foundation and will be co-ordinated through The Careers & Enterprise Company. The Gatsby Charitable foundation has developed a set of benchmarks which define excellence in careers guidance.

In the past, vocational qualifications have failed to offer clear progression routes, making technical and vocational education a less than transparent, and often less attractive, option. In many cases they give little impression of the further career development opportunities that might lie ahead. The new T levels that we plan to introduce will provide progression opportunities into skilled work or higher-level study, including degrees. Together, apprenticeships and T levels will provide a comprehensive and high-quality technical option, as rigorous and rewarding as the academic one.

I hope these answers are helpful and that they bring together the ways we are supporting young people in making the best choices and providing the best opportunities. We need to recognise that not everyone will have a straightforward path before them, and it is important to make sure that support and advice is available at critical points. Finally, I would like to congratulate all the Youth Ambassadors on their own achievements, in overcoming barriers in finding employment, obtaining qualifications, building careers and helping others. I am particularly pleased that that they are using their knowledge and experience to support other young adults, and should like to thank them for giving their time to attend the All Party Parliamentary Group.

Best wishes  
Anne Milton

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It was a pleasure to meet  
everyone and I am sorry that  
a written answer doesn't do full  
justice to the questions.