

Work and Pensions Secretary speech: Movement to Work CEO Summit

By thinking hard and digging deep in the roundtables you're about to have, how to turn ideas into action at this Summit, you could also be back next year to celebrate the great achievements that come about from the thinking that's been made today here, across the Movement to Work network and beyond.

I really appreciate what you're doing to support so many talented young people to reach their potential.

And wow, Britain really does have talent. I am assured of that every time I walk through the doors of one of our jobcentres – I see the commitment from young people, determined to get on.

Getting great support from our work coaches, so they can get the skills, experience and connections they need to get a foot through the door with local employers in particular – getting that regular pay packet is paving the way to a rewarding future career.

And let's be candid, there are people out there as well who need a lot more encouraging to make sure they take advantage of the opportunities as well and there has been a mixture of things happening through Way to Work which I'll come onto.

But we do know that work is about more than money.

As well as financial independence and resilience, we know it improves overall wellbeing, mental health and self-worth.

Increased support following the pandemic

These benefits that work provides help prospects for many young people that were badly affected by the disruption caused two years ago when the pandemic hit.

Just as many were about to take their first tentative steps into the world of work –

Then out of the blue, the world itself changed – with most of the economy closed for business.

Now the furlough scheme was a great success in protecting millions of jobs through our furlough scheme.

And through our Plan for Jobs, I hope you can see that we've provided extra support to the highest risk groups, including young people.

So, we expanded and increased the intensive support offered by DWP to young jobseekers through our Youth Offer providing additional support to young

people on Universal Credit.

We have extended that support until 2025.

And, indeed, widened eligibility for the extra support of the Youth Offer to 16 and 17 year olds, in addition to traditional 18 to 24 year olds.

Now, DWP has over 160 Youth Hubs open across Great Britain – providing skills, training and help to find a job, as well as support for other barriers to work like mental wellbeing or housing.

And through the Kickstart scheme, which is coming to end, over 152,000 young people have been able to take a confident first step into the workplace.

And when I hear young people talk about how they are now thriving in a job as a result, it really shows how this scheme has helped.

And as I say, although it is now concluding, its legacy, I hope, will last much longer.

Take Sam, who graduated in summer 2020 with a biology degree.

His ambition was to put his degree into practice and work in the conservation sector,

but he had almost given up hope due to the limited number of opportunities throughout the pandemic.

Sam's work coach told him about Kickstart and he secured a place with the Bumble Bee Conservation Trust in Edinburgh.

He received excellent mentorship during the placement, so he said.

When this ended, Sam was successful in getting a job with The Wildlife Trust and moved to take that on.

Then there was Maddi, she had found it hard to secure work due to the pandemic – had battled with her mental health after losing her job.

Maddi took on a Kickstart role of Assistant Community Coach at the football club she had supported since she was a child.

Supported by her work coaches at Epsom Jobcentre, she was able to land her dream role at AFC Wimbledon Foundation.

And they're just two success stories and I'm sure there are CEOs present here who know their organisations have taken on young people in similar roles.

In the summer, we are looking to showcase and celebrate some of those Kickstarters who got the most out of their experience, many have landed permanent jobs in the organisations they went to.

And indeed, others have recognised that certain careers aren't for them, but having that experience has been a huge platform indeed, as we said, the first

rung of the ladder on getting into the world of work.

Although the Government funded the placements, I really want to recognise those employers who really took the scheme to heart.

While it's easy enough perhaps for us to hand over money, of course it's the time you gave, the opportunity costs in a way, that you chose to invest in these young people, and I really do appreciate that.

So a big thank you to those who did get involved.

Work placements are such an important way for young people to get experience and break free from the 'no experience, no job' cycle.

And I know Movement to Work has done a lot of work in this area – providing over 135,000 placements, I understand, since the network started.

Youth unemployment

What I do hope is that thanks to the measures we took to protect, support and, indeed, create jobs together with the vaccination programme, I hope you can see yourselves the economy is bouncing back and life is certainly returning to normal.

Unemployment is back to the low levels we actually saw before the pandemic and the number of 16 to 24 year olds who are now out of work has fallen by a quarter since summer 2020.

In fact, over the last year, over a quarter of a million [253,000] young people have moved into work.

And the ONS estimates that there 1.3 million vacancies – we have a buoyant labour market.

So there are many opportunities available for young people.

And want to continue to make sure they get the skills and support they need to move into the jobs that you employers and our wider economy, UK PLC, needs too.

My colleague Nadhim Zahawi continues to champion the T levels, designed with employers, are helping people in that 16 to 19 year olds bracket develop the technical knowledge and practical skills to thrive in the workplace.

And the new Institutes of Technology – I think we just announced another 9 – are offering higher level technical education to help close skills gaps in STEM areas.

Skills Bootcamps are helping young people over 19 to build up sector-specific skills and fast-track to an interview with a local employer.

And the 'Get the Jump' Skills for Life campaign launched at the start of the year, bringing together, for the first time, all the education and training

choices for young people in one place, with a specific spotlight on technical education routes to help them get the best start to their working lives.

Now this isn't in the script, but I do want to say that I've been working pretty hard over the last two years to try and get some change in thinking on the use of the apprenticeship levy, and Greene King has reminded me today they use all their apprenticeship levy, but I have to say there are a lot of employers out there who don't seem to.

So I want to encourage you to really take up the offer the Chancellor made in the Spring Statement to put across how the levy could work even better for you and your organisation.

Because I'm determined that we do take this opportunity to boost the skills of people, not just going into work for the first time, but also those in work so they can progress in work as well, and candidly you are the best people to make that happen.

Way to Work

Now, filling posts means fulfilling potential. So at DWP, we are helping young people on Universal Credit to move to jobs more quickly – or certainly that's the aim of – our Way to Work campaign.

We're giving people more dedicated face-to-face time with Work Coaches and better connections with local employers to improve their chances of finding work.

And in particular I want to thank Marriot, Bupa, M&S, British Heart Foundation and the Army, who are members of Movement to Work and guarantee interviews as part of that scheme.

It's really helpful because right now we've been through a situation where we've subsidised jobs through Kickstart, business incentives to take on apprentices.

Underpinning this, we now in a situation with so many vacancies that we have to employ our ABC approach – any job now, gives you a Better tomorrow to will help you build a future Career.

This is a win-win. Meaning a young person can start getting the practical experience from a job sooner to then take a further step forward into another job.

And for an employer, it means they can get their vacancies filled.

Now, hundreds of job fairs will be taking place over the next few months for people of any age and at any stage of their lives. I was at one just the other week at Blackpool Pleasure Beach. Hundreds of people came.

And employers used it to tap into local talent through jobcentres to fill their vacancies – and I'm pleased to report that 65 people walked away with a brand new job.

And that is just one example of what is happening across the country as we invite employers to come into our jobcentres and meet them in every part of the country.

So I do want to invite you all here, you all have professional HR, I recognise that, you'll have your own systems.

But do consider people who are claimants, who are customers at jobcentres as people who you could help into work, and take advantage of that.

Support for disadvantaged young people – prison leavers

One of the things that I'm really impressed by is your constant focus on youth, and one of the challenges in the way of being in Government is also the fact we have people with all sorts of levels that we need to try and help.

It so happens that today I was at the Employment Advisory Board in HMP Warred Hill, at my constituency in Suffolk.

And it was fascinating to hear about somebody who had got a job form there, who actually didn't have the opportunity to come to the meeting today, but they talked about how employment was the light at the end of the tunnel – that kept them going.

And we're very keen as a Government to make sure that prisoners go straight from prison to getting a pay packet and we need to continue to try and work on that.

Now those prisoners put themselves in a bad place, but they still need a handout and a help up in order to make sure reoffending is not their preferred career in the future.

Now I appreciate you're often helping young people who may well have been the victims of those people currently in prison.

And I encourage you, and really commend you for what you are doing, recognising that people have not always have the privileged opportunities that we may have enjoyed, not by luck but by focus of a mentor or other people who helped us on our way.

And I appreciate what you are doing that regard.

A look ahead

I think one of the key challenges you will be facing is actually the challenges of moving to hybrid working.

And one of the things that's clear from speaking to young people: they really don't want to work remotely.

They really do want to be in a factory, in office or in a setting where they are with other people.

And I'm very conscious you will have much more senior, higher executives or indeed people with families and others who actually enjoy working from home and want that hybrid.

And I think it's really important as you think forward in the next few months, couple of years about how this situation evolves to make sure that the pipeline of talent you're bringing into your organisations now, can really carry on going up the ladder.

And if you think back on some of the experiences you would have had, about the benefit of absorbing, of learning from the senior people around you, I think that's something that not just employers here today but employers right across the country are thinking about.

It's all well and good when you haven't had changes in your team, your glue is already there, you've already had shared experiences, but I'm sure, a bit like myself at DWP, having new people come into our department you can start to see where that is missing, and the connectivity isn't there.

So for the people you're helping move into work, I know you are talking about helping move up in work as well. To that end I encourage you think about that carefully too.

So, can I just say a big thank you to Movement to Work for inviting me along today.

We do need to continue to work together with a whole range of organisations.

Employers.

Youth organisations.

Training providers.

Charities.

And informed by the Youth Summit in November, where young people shared their experiences about the barriers to employment they have faced, and this CEO Summit brings those views and voices to us all as we seek a way to break down those barriers.

I am sure you will have a very productive event today and that the discussions you have will spark the next set of solutions to go even further to help young people into work.

Gillian – thank you again for inviting me.