Dear Frank

Youth Obligation Support Programme

Thank you for your letter to Alok Sharma dated 9 July 2019 on the Youth Obligation Support Programme data. I have addressed your questions below, repeating your numbering system for clarity.

1. The data published by the Department includes a national level overview of the participants on the Youth Obligation Support Programme showing the month they started the programme and whether they were still on or had completed the journey. The analysis is a summary of what was recorded by work coaches in the data collection process, and was delivered at pace to publish on 1 July 2019.

As you will be aware, the rollout of the Youth Obligation Support Programme was completed in line with the national rollout of Universal Credit in December 2018. Regional analysis was not included in this publication to allow time for all areas of Great Britain to have rolled out the programme for a period of six months before comparisons are made. The next data collection is due to take place in Autumn 2019. We will consider plans to publish more regional comparisons in a subsequent statistical release.

2. The reported tables in the July 2019 release show that overall, 12,270 participants had completed their Youth Obligation Support Programme journey. Of these, 57.3% had secured work and 9.1% had been referred to provision. It is possible that the same participant had been referred to provision and secured work, so this leaves 4,730
participants (38.6%) who left the programme for other reasons ("secured other outcomes"). These reasons consisted of:

(i) The participant chose to close their own claim.
(ii) The participant finished their journey by partaking in the programme for six months.
(iii) The participant was on an easement and reached the age of 22.
(iv) The participant had limited capability for work.
(v) The participant moved to Northern Ireland.

3. Officials are undertaking further work to link Youth Obligation Support Programme data with Universal Credit data to ascertain some demographic characteristics. When a claim is made on Universal Credit, a claimant tells the Department their age, gender, self-declared disability, and whether they are pregnant or have recently given birth. Since early 2016, they've also been able to voluntarily declare their marital status, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion. If the data quality and completion is to a high enough standard to meet that required by the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, we will consider publishing some demographic breakdowns in subsequent statistical releases.

4. Officials are undertaking further work to link Youth Obligation Support Programme data with HMRC earnings data, which will enable the Department to track the job outcomes of Youth Obligation Support Programme claimants. If the data quality and completion is to a high enough standard to meet that required by the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, we will consider publishing in a subsequent statistical release.

5. As you may be aware, the individual components that comprise the Youth Obligation Support Programme have already undergone evaluation.

- Evaluation conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies of the Intensive Activity Period showed that it increased people's confidence, improved the quality of their job applications and increased their search for work.¹
- The Department published a quantitative analysis of sector-based work academies and found that young people who took part on average stayed in employment for 50 days more than those who didn't take part.²
- Work Experience has been shown to be positive for people who take part and is also something that employers are pleased to see on a young person's CV. The Department published a quantitative impact assessment in 2016 which showed that on average participants spent 47 days longer in employment and 10 days less on benefit.³
- In 2017 the Department for Education published early outcomes from a year two survey of the effectiveness of traineeships in England. At the time of the survey

66% of the trainees were in employment, an apprenticeship, further education or training.  

Further plans for an evaluation of the Youth Obligation Support Programme and whether this will be externally commissioned will be considered in due course.

6. The Department has not currently undertaken any work on its assessment of how many participants would have found work regardless of their participation in the Youth Obligation Support Programme. Ideally, this would require a Randomised Control Trial where a control group is set aside which does not participate in the programme. In the absence of this, it might be possible to compare HMRC earnings data for both the 18-21 year-old programme participants and those just too old to participate in the programme (i.e. those aged 22) acting as a control group. I will ask my officials to consider this analysis further.

7. Work coaches spend time with a range of claimants, not just those participating on the Youth Obligation Support Programme. Based on our latest assumptions for the amount of time spent on the elements of the Youth Obligation Support Programme, we estimate the total DWP cost to be £12m in 2017/18, rising to £18m in 2018/19 as the programme is rolled out.

8. Changes to the UC MI Build that will enable automated collection of YOSP census data will be part of subsequent prioritisation decisions.

9. The Youth Obligation Support Programme was implemented on a particularly tight timescale, with the agreement of the Employment and Skills Implementation Taskforce. Ministers at the time understood that this meant that limited management information would be available. The Department will ensure that the challenges and opportunities from such an approach are shared with officials developing similar programmes in the future.

Yours ever,

Mims Davies MP
Minister for Employment

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