



From the Minister of State
for Work and Pensions

POS(2)4066/507

Graham Hoyle OBE
Chief Executive
Association of Learning Providers
Colenso House
46 Bath Hill
Keynsham
Bristol
BS31 1HG

DWP Department for
Work and Pensions

Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA

Telephone
020 7340 4000

Email
ministers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
www.dwp.gov.uk

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Dear Graham

Thank you for your letter of 16 February and for sharing your paper on pre-employment support for unemployed 16 and 17 year olds. I very much welcome your support for the Government's strategy, as set out in our December White Paper, Building Britain's Recovery, for helping young people who are not in employment, education or training. I was also interested to read the recommendations in your report on how Government can strengthen this support.

Some of the recommendations fall outside my Department's responsibility and I have therefore forwarded your letter to my colleagues in the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). These predominantly relate to your suggestions for the entry2employment (e2e) programme, the Education Maintenance Allowance and the suitability of support offered through education and learning.

However, I would like to respond to your recommendation which suggests that we should extend Jobseeker's Allowance to 16 and 17 year olds.

The Government's aim is that 16 and 17 year olds have the opportunity to remain in education and training, to gain the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in an increasingly competitive and highly skilled labour market. DCSF is investing more than £650 million in 2009/10 in financial support for 16 to 18 year olds, including Education Maintenance Allowance, Care to Learn and discretionary learner support funds to help young people overcome financial barriers to participation.

Extending eligibility for Jobseeker's Allowance to all 16 and 17 year olds would signal a fundamental departure from the Government's primary aim and would mean that many young people would be denied the opportunity to continue with education and learning. We consider it more appropriate for young people to be supported through the education system, than through Jobseeker's Allowance.

However, we are currently undertaking a review on the financial support that is available to 16 to 19 year olds to ensure that the financial support on offer is as effective as possible in supporting the Government's wider strategy for young people. This will build on the extensive evidence that we have about what works, and be informed by the research that DCSF has commissioned to examine the barriers – financial and otherwise – that young people may face.

DCSF recently published a 'call for evidence' to support this review and would be interested to hear your views. The review will report in Spring 2010 and will inform our approach for future spending reviews.

As well as this, the Government has announced a wide range of support for young people. The September Guarantee, implemented for 16 year olds in 2007 and extended to 17 year olds in 2008, aims to offer all young people a suitable place in learning. In 2009, more than 96 per cent of 16 year olds and almost 90 per cent of 17 year olds said that they wanted to continue in learning and received an offer under the Guarantee. So far more than 1.5 million learners have benefited from a £7 billion investment in the September Guarantee.

However, much of the challenge we face is ensuring that the learning we make available suits the needs and interests of young people. Our 14 to 19 year old Education and Learning reform agenda, which aims to ensure all young people have access to the right learning opportunities, specifically focuses on this issue ensuring that a range of qualifications and learning opportunities are made available.

Apprenticeships are a key element of the 14 to 19 reforms and are focused on ensuring that Apprenticeships are a mainstream option for 16 to 18 year-olds. Since 2001, the Government has invested £7.4 billion in Apprenticeships, of which over £5 billion is for 16 to 18 year olds. We have also recently introduced a recruitment subsidy of £2,500 for employers to create up to 5,000 new places for 16 and 17 year olds, helping us to build towards providing an offer of an apprenticeship place for all suitable qualified young people by 2013.

Therefore, whilst I accept that we must do all we can to support young people and ensure that they are supported as they move into the world of work, I do not consider the benefit system to be the best way of doing this. I hope this response is helpful and thank you again for sharing your interesting paper with me.



Rt Hon Jim Knight MP