

Gillian Keegan MP
Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills
Department for Education
20 Great Smith Street
Westminster
London
SW1P 3BT
Thursday 22 October 2020

Dear Gillian Keegan

We are writing on behalf of 93 organisations from the worlds of education and employment. We would like to bring several concerns about the current funding arrangements for the National Careers Service to your attention. The provision of support to help people to manage their careers is more important than ever in the current labour market. The signatories to this letter believe that more needs to be done to support people, at all stages of life to build successful careers and make a contribution to the economy.

The National Careers Service delivers high quality career guidance to adults, helping them to navigate the complexity of education, training, retraining and employment. But, despite the government investing in the Service, restrictions on how the funding can be used may prevent many workers who are facing redundancy or who are currently unemployed from accessing the support they need.

At present, adults aged 25 to 49 who are unemployed for less than one year and young people aged 18 to 24 who are at risk of redundancy are not identified by the government as a priority and this may limit the help that they can expect to receive. Given the current employment crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, we are asking for these restrictions to be lifted.

The government has launched a range of initiatives to stimulate and support employment through the Plan for Jobs, the Winter Economic Plan and the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. The provision of professional career guidance underpins all of these policies and ensures their effectiveness. People need to understand the opportunities that are available to them and seek advice and guidance about the best route forward within a turbulent labour market.

Thankfully the Chancellor agrees on the importance of career guidance, saying that “the evidence says careers advice works, so we’ll fund it, with an additional £32 million to recruit careers advisers and provide bespoke advice and careers guidance for over a quarter of a million more people.”

This new funding should allow the National Careers Service to increase the overall number of people that it can help by more than half. However, the funding arrangements through which the £32 million is put to use, remain inflexible. They need to be reformed to allow the service to have the maximum impact. Without reform these ambitious targets will not be achieved, which will reflect badly on the government and National Careers Service and leave many unemployed workers unable to access the support they need.

In order to address this the government needs to review the way in which the National Careers Service is funded and make the following changes.

Ensure that all adults, from 18 until retirement, who are at risk of redundancy or currently unemployed, are identified as a priority for the National Careers Service. The Service’s funding principles need to be changed accordingly.

National Careers Service providers should be allocated a proportion of the new funding up front to allow them to recruit, train and develop staff to deliver quality services against the new level of demand.

We hope that you will be able to address these issues quickly so that the National Careers Service will be able to deliver the services that are so sorely needed in this challenging economic climate. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss these issues in more detail.

Yours sincerely