

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg backs breakthrough NEET programme

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Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, today backed the expansion of a breakthrough new programme helping disadvantaged young people to become 'job-ready' before they leave school.

ThinkForward intervenes early to give struggling students the skills, characteristics and contacts they'll need to make a successful move from education into work. Developed by the Private Equity Foundation, it builds on a pilot which resulted in 98 per cent of school leavers (over 300 young people) who were at risk of dropping out, being found meaningful places in education, employment or training six months after completion*.

ThinkForward now intends to build on the success of the pilot and reduce the number of NEET young people in the Shoreditch area of London, including Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Islington, by 50 per cent by 2016. Shoreditch has a child poverty rate of 75 per cent. This school term, ThinkForward has doubled the number of young people it helps and it is gearing up for growth into further schools in spring 2013.

The future aim is to roll-out the programme to all schools with high levels of disadvantage or low-achieving young people to transform the NEET landscape nationwide.

Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, today visited George Green's School in East London where he met a group of 15-year-olds who are participating in the scheme. He heard first hand how they are benefitting from the programme during a question and answer session.

Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, said: "These are impressive results showing how helping young people early on can change the course of their lives from being out of work or training to being on track for a great career. For too many young people, opportunities are out of reach and their chances are hampered for reasons as simple as the street they're growing up on. Employers, communities and voluntary organisations all have a part to play in narrowing this gap. ThinkForward is showing just what can be done and I congratulate it on the work it's achieved so far.

"The scheme goes hand in hand with the Government's efforts to reduce the number of NEETs through the Youth Contract. By funding schemes like this, we can see what works and help even more young people in future."

Central to ThinkForward's success is its use of Super Coaches who provide guidance on post-16 choices and application forms and act as advocates for young people at home and at school, support those at risk of exclusion and help with everything from offending patterns to low self-esteem and homelessness. They remain contactable even after a young person has left school.

A key innovation is the involvement of businesses to bridge the divide between schools and the world of work. Barclays has announced a £1 million donation to the programme as well as a commitment to provide mentors for ThinkForward's young people, workplace visits and skills training for coaches.

Antony Jenkins, Chief Executive, Barclays, said: "As a major employer we know that talented individuals are to be found in every community. It's vital that we make sure that everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential. Barclays apprenticeship scheme is part of our efforts and ThinkForward provides another way to provide young people with the tools to prepare them for work."

Shaks Ghosh, Chief Executive of the Private Equity Foundation, said: "The failure of too many young people to make a successful leap from education into work is at the heart of the NEET issue. Half of all NEETs, some 450,000 young people, have been unable to get a first foot on the job ladder.

"ThinkForward prepares students for and supports them through that moment when they leave the safety of the school gate for the last time. Central to its success will be bridging the gulf between schools and businesses. Barclays is leading the way, providing mentors, workplace visits and skills workshops."

* Final report to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Evaluation of School to Work Transition Initiative, Centre for Education and Industry, University of Warwick

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Note to editors

About ThinkForward

ThinkForward is a breakthrough early intervention initiative from the Private Equity Foundation. Developed with pro bono support from Ernst & Young, it aims to significantly reduce the chances of disadvantaged young people from becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

The programme provides in-school 'super coaches' to struggling students from age 14 right up to 19. The highly trained coaches offer stable one-to-one support through challenges at home and school. They provide each pupil with a personalised action plan and help them to access other local initiatives, as well as workplace mentors, providing introductions to business networks and work opportunities.

ThinkForward builds on a pilot carried out in Tower Hamlets which resulted in 98 per cent of the participants being in education, employment or training six months after completion. It is being delivered by Private Equity Foundation portfolio charity, Tomorrow's People across Shoreditch (covering the London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Islington) and is currently operating in ten schools.

ThinkForward is grateful to its founding partners Barclays, Ernst & Young and the Garfield Weston Foundation.

About the Private Equity Foundation

The Private Equity Foundation (PEF) is committed to unlocking the potential of disadvantaged young people. By helping four to 24 year olds at home, through school and into the workplace, the charity aims to transform their life chances and drive down the nearly one million young people currently not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Since 2006, PEF has connected money and pro bono business expertise from the private equity community to the very best youth interventions, to increase their impact and change 97,000 young lives. Where the right breakthrough programmes don't exist, PEF has drawn on its research and international experience to pilot and scale up its own.

To find out more visit www.privateequityfoundation.org
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