

PRESS RELEASE – For immediate release

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The other story: With the right support disengaged young people overcome the odds to attain five A*-C GCSEs

It is a fantastic outcome that 69% of the more than 600,000 students who sat their GCSEs this summer have achieved five GCSEs at grades A*-C. It is also positive to see that the attainment gap between students from the wealthiest and most disadvantaged backgrounds is closing.

However, there is another story to tell. It is critical that attention is turned to the other 31% or 186,000 students who were unable to achieve the government benchmark in their exams, since, in addition to providing opportunities to advance to further study, good attainment at 16 is proven to be essential for longer term success in the labour market.

Research has shown that young people who do not attain five GCSEs at grade A*-C are seven times more likely to end up not in education, employment or training (NEET). Currently almost a million young people are NEET in the UK, with an estimated lifetime cost to society of £35bn.

There are a whole host of factors that must be taken into account when trying to understand why these young people did not achieve benchmark results. Putting it down to a lack of effort or academic ability is far too simplistic and fails to highlight important questions that should be asked about why our education system is letting these young people down.

This year, ThinkForward Progression Coaches supported 350 young people identified as being most disengaged, to prepare for their GCSEs. These young people were predicted to fail their GCSE Maths and English at the start of the ThinkForward programme and this year just over 50% of them achieved 5 or more GCSEs grade A*-C.

Considering these young people were predicted to fail Maths and English at the start of the ThinkForward programme, their achievements have defied the odds originally stacked against them. With the support of their Coaches, many have overcome complex challenges in school, at home and in other areas of their lives, to get to where they are today.

Young people start the ThinkForward programme underachieving at school and with behavioural and attendance issues. Some may be under the care of social services or youth offending teams.

ThinkForward Coaches dismantle the barriers preventing the most disengaged young people from progressing from education into employment by working intensively across all aspects of a young person's life - at home, in school and linking to existing community support services - until they reach 19. We are delighted that the intensive one-to-one support they received from our highly qualified Coaches has enabled them to realise their potential and given them a chance to succeed.

Reflecting on the GCSE outcomes for the young people on ThinkForward's programme, Kevin Munday, ThinkForward's managing director said:

"ThinkForward is evidence that with the right support, young people who are expected to drop out can achieve the results they need, to prosper in further education or employment. We are calling for more targeted support across the country, to ensure that the most disengaged young people realise their potential and become economically active members of society".

At a GCSE celebration event on the afternoon of results, young people from the programme talked about how they felt about their results and their plans for the future

Ciaran, 16 from Bethnal Green Academy achieved seven A*s and four As and will go on to sixth form to study A'levels in Maths, Physics, Chemistry and Drama. He aims to study natural sciences at Cambridge University and to become a lecturer or professor. He said: "ThinkForward has provided me with lots of different work experiences, which has helped me learn more about the workplace and what people there are like. Having my Coach behind me, encouraging me to do as many activities as possible before submitting my university application, has made a big difference."

FeliFernandes, 16, from Islington Arts and Media School, achieved 9 GCSEs grades A*- C, including an A* in Spanish, A in English and B for Maths. He will go on to study A'levels and pursue a career in Finance. He said: "ThinkForward has helped to keep me on track. My coach has been amazing in keeping me grounded and on the straight road, making me realise that we should not take opportunities for granted and that when they arise we should grab them with both hands."

Laura, 16, from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School was pleasantly surprised to have achieved five Bs and a C for her GCSEs. Although she has a place at college she has decided to take on an apprenticeship, where she will have the chance to gain qualifications in customer service and business administration. She said: "ThinkForward has helped me so much, I honestly don't know where I would be without it. Since I started on the programme I've had lots of opportunities to do different things, which has helped to build my character and develop and grow as a person. My Coach encouraged me to do what I really want to do."

-ENDS-

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Notes to editors

1. ThinkForward ensures that young people who are disengaged from or underperforming at school receive the support they need to transition successfully into higher education or sustained employment. It does this by providing them with an experienced and trusted Progression Coach, who provides long-term personalised support, helping them to overcome challenges in and out of school and to build employability skills and confidence.
2. ThinkForward is a charity and is delivered in partnership with Tomorrow's People. For more information visit www.think-forward.org.uk

