

SKOPE Issues Paper 36

June 2020

COVID-19 – Potential Consequences for Education, Training, and Skills

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INTRODUCTION

A considerable and rapidly growing volume of reports on the potential impacts of Covid-19 from international and national government agencies, think tanks, management consultancies, and academics is now hitting our in-boxes and desks. What follows is a very modest addition to this burgeoning literature. A version of the paper has been prepared for the 4 Nations College Alliance 'College of the Future' Commission, and what follows is a slightly amended version. It does not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis, or to duplicate what others have already said. Its main focus is on youth unemployment and wider transitions into work, but it also has some thoughts on adult unemployment and re-training.

This paper is founded upon a basic assumption – namely that if the public money available across all four UK nations to support measures around skills and unemployment is finite, then targeting those most at risk and defining which kinds of measures are the most cost-effective will be important. The information already available (Wilson et al, 2020) suggests that we know reasonably well which sectors, occupations, localities and kinds of people will most likely be hardest hit by the coming recession. The main issues will be deciding:

- What groups to prioritise, which interventions will work best and most cost-effectively, and also which can be delivered to swiftly address the immediate problems liable to emerge as the furlough scheme is wound down and school, college and university leavers hit a disrupted labour market,
- and what additional measures will be needed in the longer term as some groups experience extended periods of unemployment.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The coming recession

Many economic commentators thought that the world was heading towards recession before Covid-19 struck, and there were signs that the UK economy was slowing down and that consumer confidence was limited, not least by levels of household debt that had reached pre-2008 levels. Both Bank of England and OBR forecasts now suggest a deep and potentially quite long-lasting recession (in the UK and elsewhere). This suggests that the 'bounce back' from the impacts of the pandemic may not be as rapid or as strong as some might hope, and what happens in the UK and its constituent nations will be influenced by how well other countries manage to recover. We should also remember that we have yet to fully achieve 'Brexit', and that the bulk of commentators expect that this will deliver at the end of this year (if negotiations are not extended) another short to

medium-term negative shock to the economy and labour market. Taken together, it seems sensible to plan for a U or L-shaped recession, and if it turns out to be V or W-shaped, then so much the better. In other words, it is probably better to assume and plan for the worst in terms of duration and effect rather than for the best possible outcomes.

Moreover, as the IES report (Wilson et al, 2020) on the employment impacts of Covid-19 makes clear, the recessions of the early 1980s, 1990s and the post-2008 crisis all had long-lasting impacts on the shape of the labour market and unemployment. In each case, it took about seven years for the negative shock to entirely disappear. It seems entirely likely that Covid-19's impact will also be long-lived, particularly in some sectors and occupations such as retail, leisure and tourism, and in geographical areas reliant on these industries.

We should also remember that in the UK the evidence suggests that in many localities when the economic tide goes out, it subsequently does not wash as high as it previously did when better times eventually return. There are many communities that have yet to 'recover' from the economic shock administered by the recession of the early 1980s, and much of 'left behind' Britain comprises areas that have local economies and labour markets that are already weak and hollowed out. A lot of these places are disproportionately reliant on parts of the economy that are liable to be permanently scarred or changed by Covid-19, such as retail, leisure, hospitality, and tourism.

This suggests that beyond immediate responses, we need to be planning for a long-haul, particularly in terms of youth unemployment, which over time tends to become cumulative as significant proportions of successive years of students graduating from the education system fail to make a successful transition into stable work and become long-term employed. This effect was very marked in the recession of the early to mid-1980s.

Organisational capacity to cope/respond and its implications

Across the UK and its constituent nations, in many sectors the 'long tail' of poorly managed, low productivity, low innovation firms (Haldane, 2017) will struggle to cope and survive, and will often tend to respond via 'tried and tested' methods of cost-containment/cutting which will have negative implications for job quality, pay and skills (Keep, Mayhew and Payne, 2006). There were already large question marks about the quality of many of the jobs that were created during the 'employment boom' in recent years, in-work poverty had been rising sharply, and under-employment remained a large issue. In other words, things weren't great before Covid-19 struck (or at least not as great as the UK government liked to believe) and given the nature of the Covid-19 economic shock and responses thereto, there is a danger of the emergence of even more of a spot market for casualised, insecure 'labour by the hour', which may save embattled firms money in the short term, but which will impact on the well-being of individuals and families (and indirectly the economy – as spending power will be further reduced). Sisson (2020) argues that in the absence of positive policy interventions we could witness a second, successive 'lost decade' of wage growth (mirroring that which followed the 2008 crash). Rather than heading towards Work 4.0 there is a significant risk that for many we will slide back into Work -3.0. These likelihoods raise major challenges for the Scottish and Welsh governments' Fair Work policy agendas, and more generally for the UK nations' governmental ambitions around productivity and innovation.

Moreover, investment in plant, equipment and R&D is liable to fall even further than it has hitherto. This has implications for productivity (already a problem) and, for example, for the pace of digitalisation and the move to Work 4.0. As Frey (2019) argues, the speed and spread of the adoption of digital technologies is dependent upon many factors, and one of these is the willingness and ability of firms to invest in both the hardware, the skills that need to go with the equipment, and in broader changes in organisational structures and processes.

It is also reasonable to assume that in many organisations' (public and private) spending on education and training/learning and development will fall even further (across the UK employer training effort declined in terms of training hours per worker by about 60 per cent between 1997 and 2017, Green and Henseke, 2019), and will be even more narrowly concentrated on a small core of more senior employees. Those among the adult workforce who previously received little by way of up- or re-skilling are now likely to receive even less.

Impacts on the welfare regime

There will be huge impacts on Universal Credit (UC). Demand will soar, the claimant support infrastructure will creak, and the assumptions about reasonable 'conditionality' (e.g. low paid workers to ask for more hours or higher pay as a condition of UC) will collapse. The JobCentrePlus system will come under massive strain – it is largely designed and staffed with the core purpose of processing benefit claims, and its capacity to support and sustain transitions into work is now quite limited. It also has relatively weak links to employers, and is arguably not currently well-positioned to deliver more intensive or larger-scale active labour market policies.

Overview

The foregoing suggests that the cumulative impacts of the coming recession will pose major challenges for many aspects of government policy on inclusive growth, innovation, fair work and employment. We now turn to the potential impacts and options for mitigation as they relate to youth and adult unemployment.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS - SOME ANALYSIS

Young people

It is important to bear in mind that in the UK young people's transitions into the labour market and the consequences of these not working smoothly (youth unemployment and disengagement from education and training) have been with us as a policy issue for a significant period of time. In many senses policy makers and practitioners have continued to grapple with difficulties that have been apparent to a greater or lesser degree since the recession from the early 1980s and the wave of mass youth unemployment that followed. This is not a problem that we have cracked in its entirety, and so the impacts of the pandemic will exacerbate long-standing weaknesses and gaps in the way that transitions from learning to earning take place.

Broader and deeply-embedded problems with youth transitions

It has been apparent for some time that underlying trends in the labour market mean that youth transitions are becoming more complex, conditional and risky across much of the OECD. "Today, the

journey from adolescence to adulthood is far more daunting. It takes much longer, and the roadway is filled with far more potholes, one-way streets and dead ends” (Symonds, Schwartz and Ferguson, 2011:11). The process is no longer linear and the task of finding a place in the labour market is now often prolonged and discontinuous (Quintini, Martin and Martin, 2007), characterised by what one researcher has termed ‘pinball transitions’ (Brozsely, 2017).

It is also apparent that while the global recession occasioned by the financial crash of 2008 worsened the situation, it did not cause it. Youth unemployment levels in the UK started rising several years before recession struck (Wolf, 2011; UKCES, 2011). It can be argued that the recession simply served to amplify the pre-existent effects of long-term structural shifts in the labour market and the employment relationship. In the UK, these trends are multiple and complex, and include, for instance, the need for more older workers to remain in employment for longer, in part due to the pensions crisis (Unwin et al, 2015). In overall terms, the youth labour market in the UK has been shrinking since the start of the 1980s. In 1976, more than three-quarters of 18-year olds were in employment. By 2009, this had fallen to 40 per cent (UKCES, 2011).

The nature of the employment relationship has also changed over time. Three pieces of research can be deployed to illuminate the problems posed by new employment models and a changing employment relationship. The first is the UK Commission for Employment and Skills’ (UKCES) Youth Inquiry, which was launched in 2011 in response to rising levels of youth unemployment and NEETs and which explored what employers could reasonably be asked to do to help combat this. It found that recruitment and selection processes were increasingly taking place via ‘informal’, word-of-mouth personal recommendation from existing employees (see Keep and James, 2010a), thereby often limiting access to opportunities for those from families and communities currently excluded from work. In addition, employers were often obsessed with candidates demonstrating ‘experience’ in a similar job as a proxy for their ability to perform the job opening that was being recruited to. This, coupled with a paradoxical reluctance to offer work experience to young people resulted in what the UKCES termed ‘the experience trap’ (UKCES, 2011).

The second set of research findings comes from a recent large Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project, entitled Precarious Pathways and led by the Institute of Employment Research (IER), which explored the labour market for young people and graduates in the Midlands across a range of large to small employers (Purcell et al, 2017). Its preliminary findings confirmed the problems noted by UKCES in terms of access to employment increasingly occurring via word-of-mouth recruitment, and also employers’ desire for experience - “prior experience...was required even for selection onto unpaid, short-term student work experience placements” (Purcell et al, 2017: 9).

It also demonstrated how different forms of work trials (e.g. internships, agency work, and various aspects of the gig economy), were being deployed by organisations as a way of checking if individuals met their criteria and expectations before offering them any more permanent form of employment (‘try before you buy’) and that this approach to recruitment was displacing more traditional textbook models of R&S, such as reliance on interviews and CVs. The project observed that, “all employers saw different types of precarious labour as a better mechanism than interviews for identifying individuals to recruit as employees” (Purcell et al, 2017: 9). This approach rendered learning to earning transitions complex and hard for those with limited resources, and the research

illustrated how demanding and pressurising insecure work was for young people as they tried to gain a firm foothold in the labour market. The other major finding was that, paradoxically, employers on the whole, “see themselves as having relatively little power in the labour markets in which they work – even when they are one of the largest employers with over 100 applicants for some jobs” (Purcell et al, 2017: 8).

The project’s main conclusion was that:

Many of the problems encountered by young job seekers derive from the sub-division of work. Even the most progressive and ethical employers we interviewed perceived themselves as constrained by market forces, often with little alternative but to concentrate their training and staff development on their core staff and control additional labour costs as tightly as possible, without consideration of the wider social impact and future costs to the community.
(Purcell et al, 2017: 35)

In a sense, the Precarious Pathways project suggests that the problems are even more deep-seated and structural than the UKCES’s Youth Inquiry had argued them to be. They extend beyond R&S practices that implicitly produce a playing field sloping against young candidates, and also embrace models of the employment relationship and of work organisation and job design that are producing insecure and precarious work within which it is hard for young people to sustain themselves. This problem of what Furlong and Cartmel (2004) dubbed ‘fragile labour markets’, has been visible for a relatively long time (see also Keep, 2012; and Shildrick et al, 2012), but the Precarious Pathways work indicates that it is infecting a larger proportion of employers and job openings than may hitherto have been the case.

Thirdly, the findings from a J P Morgan Foundation-funded project reinforce the impression that many employers, especially smaller ones, lack the capacity to manage the R&S process and the employment relationship more broadly in ways that are likely to be conducive to effective youth transitions. The project’s aim was to offer free human resource management/personnel management consultancy support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in three areas (Glasgow, Hackney and Stoke-on-Trent), with the aim of developing employers’ understanding and capacity so that they could take on young apprentices. Unfortunately, in majority of cases all the resource was consumed simply enabling the firms to become legally compliant employers so deficient was their understanding and practice of employment relations (Atkinson et al, 2017).

Finally, underlying much of the above is the argument, noted above, that the UK already has too many ‘bad jobs’ – work that is poorly-paid; repetitive; casualised or insecure; requiring of few skills; offering little opportunity for discretion, enterprise and creativity, and which provides few opportunities for progression and development (Lloyd, Mason and Mayhew, 2008; Lawton, 2009; Gracey and Kelly, 2010; Keep, 2012; Shildrick et al, 2012; Keep and James, 2010b; UKCES, 2011; Clarke and D’Arcy, 2018). It can be argued that in the past UK policy on youth transitions and the labour market implicitly assumed that employers were competent to manage and facilitate labour market entry for young people in ways that would generally be rational, conform with legal requirements and which would also give at least some regard to wider societal and policy goals. The evidence adduced above suggests that this assumption may not always be well-founded.

Adult workers

It is already apparent that significant volumes of the adult workforce in some sectors and localities are likely to lose their jobs, and many others will see their hours, pay and terms and conditions adversely affected. As noted above, employer-provided training was already weak for many workers in the lower tiers of the labour market and occupational hierarchy, and is now liable to fall further in coverage and intensity.

In thinking about the adult unemployed, there is a danger that we write off the skills that the vast bulk of these individuals already hold. It will take a comparatively long time for new sectors and occupations to emerge, particularly ones that are able to absorb significant volumes of labour (research shows that, on the whole, high tech sectors may be important for GDP and exports, but they often employ relatively few people (Crouch, Finegold and Sako, 1999) compared to traditional service sectors [Microsoft has about 30,000 core employees, Walmart about 2 million]). Experience of occupational change over the last four decades strongly suggests that significant shifts in occupational scale occur at a relatively slow rate and that, for example, new job openings in high tech areas may increase quite fast from a very small base, but at aggregate level still make a limited contribution to the overall volume of job creation. Replacement demand exceeds completely new jobs by a ratio of about 9:1 in normal times, and even sectors and occupations, like retail, that will be hit hard by the fallout from Covid-19 will continue to represent a major proportion of employment for the foreseeable future.

We also need to be aware that when people talk about new skills, these often overlay existing skill sets and rely on an underlying set of general employability skills that we have to presume a fair proportion of those who were in work pre-Covid possessed at least to some degree. One example of 'new skills' that are not all that radically new relates to calls for more green jobs and more green skills. Building insulation is not a new skill. Wind turbine service engineers are essentially electrical engineers with some additional skills around safe working at height.

UNEMPLOYMENT – SKILLS POLICY RESPONSES

Introduction and lessons for the past

Whatever is attempted in relation to using skills to ameliorate the employment impacts of Covid-19, there are other aspects to active labour market policies, such as employment subsidies, that may need to be deployed alongside any skills interventions. The closer the alignment between skills and other elements of policy the more effective policy is liable to be. For example, if government decides to try to create a significant number of green jobs, then will be of critical importance that colleges and universities are geared up to deliver the requisite elements of up/re-skilling in the right locations. Moreover, experience from previous recessions and mass unemployment provides a number of useful lessons.

First, timeliness is critical. Putting in place at least some initial measures by the time furlough winds down and the school/college/university leavers hit the labour market will be important. It is unlikely that the full range of measures and interventions can be ready by then, but in each of the four UK nations it will be important for government, its agencies and other partners – schools, colleges, universities, private training providers, trade unions and employers - to plan and agree a

coordinated response. This means making swift progress on arriving at a fairly clear idea what is going to be offered by way of skills interventions for both young and adult unemployed, and to have bolstered capacity in areas like Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CAIG) and also transition support for the most vulnerable categories (for example, ethnic minorities, those with learning difficulties, the disabled, those with health problems and the least well-qualified).

Second, there is a long-standing tendency embedded within policy discourses about youth unemployment that means that sooner or later (usually sooner) some policy makers and commentators will seek to blame the problem of unemployment on 'lack of skills', despite the fact that the underlying problem is a lack of job openings for new entrants to the labour market and adult workers losing their jobs for reasons to do with declining demand for the goods and services that their organisations deliver, and which have nothing to do with skills or the lack thereof. This is what happened in the early 1980s, when youth unemployment was blamed on a lack of skills among young people, rather than a catastrophic collapse in demand for labour (Keep, 1986). There is a danger that the some may seek to revive this way of framing problems with unemployment. It is deeply misleading and extremely unhelpful.

Thirdly, history tells us that 'warehousing' the young unemployed is potentially a costly model. In the early to mid-1980s the policy response to mass youth unemployment was first a work experience programme entitled the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP), which some claimed in reality stood for 'youth off the pavements', and then the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), which provided a mass one-year duration 'training scheme' whose main effect was to warehouse the young unemployed for a while (Keep, 1986). The warehousing model has not gone away. For example, the director of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), Nick Hillman, proposed that home student participation in higher education could be expanded in order to allow young people to ride out the job famine while doing an undergraduate degree, arguing that, "the end result may be a more highly skilled workforce at the end of the current crisis. That would be some kind of silver lining around the dark clouds currently facing the higher education sector and, indeed, entire nations." (Hillman, 2020). In a Radio 4, World at One interview the vice-chancellor of Sunderland University went further, arguing for educational vouchers to enable young people to undertake, for example, postgraduate masters programmes. This latter model represents a very expensive way for an individual to ride out the recession for one year (with fees and living costs we are talking a minimum of between £15,000 and £20,000, depending on the course and institution), and the fact is that the employment impacts of Covid on the graduate labour market will almost certainly last far longer than one year.

Plainly it makes excellent sense to try to fill existing college and university places, but beyond that using additional, lengthy and sometimes very expensive higher education courses to allow young people to try to 'ride out' a depressed labour market represents a very resource-intensive approach, and would be dependent upon the commitment of significant additional financial support from government. For every 'voucher' to pay for one masters-level student, 15 to 20 of the adult unemployed could be offered a £1,000 bite-sized course in digital skills. As ever, the trade-offs between different kinds of intervention aimed at different types of individuals within the unemployed 'cohort' will be vital, and will need to be led by clear priorities in terms of who most needs public support, and by some kind of basic cost/benefit analysis.

Besides the potential waste of money and false hopes created, it is also the case that the education system runs the danger of setting itself up to fail if it promises too much by way of its ability to ameliorate the employment impacts of Covid-19. If underlying demand is not stimulated, all education can really do is move individuals up and down a job queue for what limited openings are available – if at any given moment there are 80,000 job openings and 200,000 potential applicants, then education can move some individuals closer to the front of the queue while ‘bumping’ others down the queue (so those with masters degrees might bump back those with degrees, and those with degrees take jobs that in other times school leavers with far lower qualifications would have filled), but in and of itself it does little to create new job openings. In severely congested labour markets one outcome is that there is usually considerable positional competition for what job openings are available (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011). We need to bear in mind that most of the unemployment created by Covid-19 will not primarily be caused by a lack of skills on the part of those who either cannot get a first job or who have been made redundant from existing jobs.

Crystallising the shape, scale and nature of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Besides lessons from the recent past, we also need to bear in mind an increasingly pressing current issue – the fact that much of the existing infrastructure and provision currently aimed at supporting the young unemployed across the UK has been funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and this money will soon cease to flow after Brexit. It will be extremely important for the UK Government to now swiftly decide on the scale of and management systems for the new Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) that will replace the ESF, as uncertainty about this is becoming a major problem across the UK.

Some good news

Amidst all the gloom, there is some good news. In contrast to previous recessions, thanks to the ability to collect and analyse huge volumes of web-based job advertisements and further particulars, we now have the ability to acquire real time data on job openings and skill trends. This will make it much easier to identify emerging job opportunities and skill needs at a level of granularity that was impossible from the traditional employer surveys. It will be vital that this data is shared in an accessible format with government agencies, employer bodies, E&T providers, and (via CIAG) to job seekers.

Youth unemployment responses

It will be essential that young people at risk of unemployment are identified and tracked. Relying on the benefits system to do this is unrealistic as it not designed or staffed to deliver such a service. There is reasonable capacity to do this in relation to the current NEET (not in employment, education or training) population, especially younger NEETs in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but the infrastructure to achieve this in England is patchy at best, and youth unemployment and NEETs have not been a particularly high policy priority at national level in England in recent times. This will have to change.

The most vulnerable young people will need more intensive support to undertake and then sustain successful transitions into work. The efforts that have been focused on those at risk of falling into the NEET category will need to be expanded, as the number of those joining this group is going to expand quite dramatically over the next few months.

Given the stress placed on employers on experience (discussed above) and lessons from previous periods of high youth unemployment, it is likely that various forms of work experience will need to be incorporated into whatever 'offer' is made to the young unemployed. It may not be needed for all, but it will be relevant to many, particularly those who are most disadvantaged. However, we need to acknowledge that employer capacity to offer this is finite and will be under massive pressure (until social distancing is relaxed, it may be more or less impossible on any large scale). At present, employers are being asked to provide work placements/work-based learning for:

- Foundation apprenticeships (in Scotland)
- A range of apprenticeships, which varies across the four nations
- Degree apprenticeships
- A wide range of school and college students (including for the new T levels)
- A wide range of undergraduate and masters-level HE students

If it is now going to be necessary to try to establish a significant volume of provision for the young unemployed (aimed at young people with a range of qualification levels) then there is need for an honest dialogue between governments and employers about what the priorities are and what can realistically be delivered. It is already apparent in England that the volume of apprenticeship places for young people is falling and will remain a source of difficulty for some time to come.

Given constrained financial and other resources, it will be extremely important to test any proposed intervention/policy/scheme in a cost-benefit analysis (however approximate) relative to other proposals, and also to constantly bear in mind the need to target what can be delivered towards those individuals, groups and localities that will be most in need.

Adult unemployment responses

Given earlier points about the existing skills held by many of the adult unemployed, and the relatively slow speed of change in occupational openings at aggregate level, it is likely that for many adults enhanced job search support, good information on emerging job opportunities, and some relatively brief top-up re-skilling or skills updating will be the most feasible approach. This means bite-sized chunks of learning and modular, credit-bearing courses rather than full or part-time masters (although there will be science/digitally-based industries and occupations that will demand some of this longer kind of course). Scotland has a head start in this area, as it already possesses a credit-based qualifications structure, which makes it easier to find ways to certify these smaller, modular courses and also design ways in which they can be combined to add up to a larger qualification acquired over time. Involving employers in the design of such offerings would be very beneficial.

Incentives to flex provision into short courses and 'night school' offerings, plus building up staff capacity to deliver this kind of offer, will be essential. At present it is an open question how many staff in either colleges or HE are available to deliver basic and more advanced digital skills. Some re-tooling of the college workforce will be required and this needs to start sooner rather than later.

Given the potential scale of the downturn, the immediate and short-term impact of this activity on the unemployment statistics will probably be limited. We need to be realistic about what re- and

upskilling can and will deliver for adults, particularly in localities where the economic impact has been severe.

Over-arching skills responses

An important initial over-arching response concerns the need to build up the in-house training capacity of employers (individually and sometimes groups of employers). In the short term, the delivery of more and better work experience provision means confronting the limited capacity that many employers, particularly SMEs, have to design and provide well-structured and meaningful work experience placements. In the longer term there will be a need to try and improve both the volume and quality of learning in and through work, via on-the-job training and development. This means that policies around Group Training provision, shared trainers and training-for-trainers courses will all need to be on the table. Colleges have an important role to play in supporting this, as potentially does the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) in England.

Second, once the immediate task of putting in place some quick response measures has been completed and as employment and skill trends around the creation of new job openings (replacement demand as well as new kinds of jobs) become discernible, and once the provider base (colleges, private providers and universities) has stabilised its finances and staffing, it will be important for national governments to undertake systematic reviews of the scale, pattern and modes of delivery for both existing initial and adult provision at all levels, and the statutory obligations, funding systems and incentive structures that underpin provision. Given the costs and consequences of change, this will need to be undertaken in a careful and rigorous fashion.

Third, it is apparent that in the medium to longer-term the economic and employment shock delivered by Covid-19 will make a closer integration of economic development, business support and improvement, innovation, fair work and skills policies even more important than hitherto. Experience from previous UK recessions suggests that after an initial wave of outright business failures, many other firms will limp along, often adopting a 'low road' survival strategy that will cause significant challenges for government ambitions around innovation, productivity and job quality. Helping them to think differently and do better will be essential if policy goals are to be realised.

This means that the availability and quality of business support and improvement services will really matter, and suggests that the agenda around colleges' role in business improvement and innovation support set out in the Scottish government-commissioned Cumberford-Little (2020) report will be of considerable importance (in Scotland, and beyond). Both colleges and universities have a potentially key role to play in helping drive up business performance. It may also be worth thinking, in the medium term, about trying to work with sectors (particularly those hardest hit by the recession and economic change) to create sector development and productivity plans, under which could sit skills investment plans (hopefully with considerable co-investment built into them).

Questions for colleges and their stakeholders/partners

Given the foregoing, there are a range of questions relating to responses to unemployment that need to be considered by universities, colleges, independent training providers and those they work with. The national policy contexts across the four UK nations will vary, as will the shape, scale and

funding of the national interventions aimed at the young and adult unemployed, and it is imperative that governments establish the broad lines of what they propose sooner rather than later, and certainly before the current academic year ends and students emerge into a very hostile labour market environment. Once these lines of policy development have been set, hopefully in cooperation with colleges, there will, be a range of fairly immediate questions to answer:

1. In any college/university/other provider's locality and local labour market which groups of young people and adults are most likely to be at risk of becoming unemployed?
2. Which areas of current provision are likely to face the biggest challenges in placing their students in jobs (and work experience opportunities)?
3. Where are new job opportunities likely to emerge, and what can be done to help refocus provision towards these?
4. What will be possible in terms of funding and delivery capacity in mounting work experience and/or re- and upskilling offers to adults and young people? How best can such offers be designed and delivered, and who will need to be partners in this effort?
5. What kinds of support will be needed to identify and support those young people at risk of unemployment and disengagement from education and training, and what role will colleges, universities and independent providers and adult learning services need to play in these support processes and structures?
6. What will be new needs around CIAG? How and by whom will these be met?
7. In the longer term, what responses to the recession will be required in terms of colleges and universities' roles in business improvement and innovation?

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