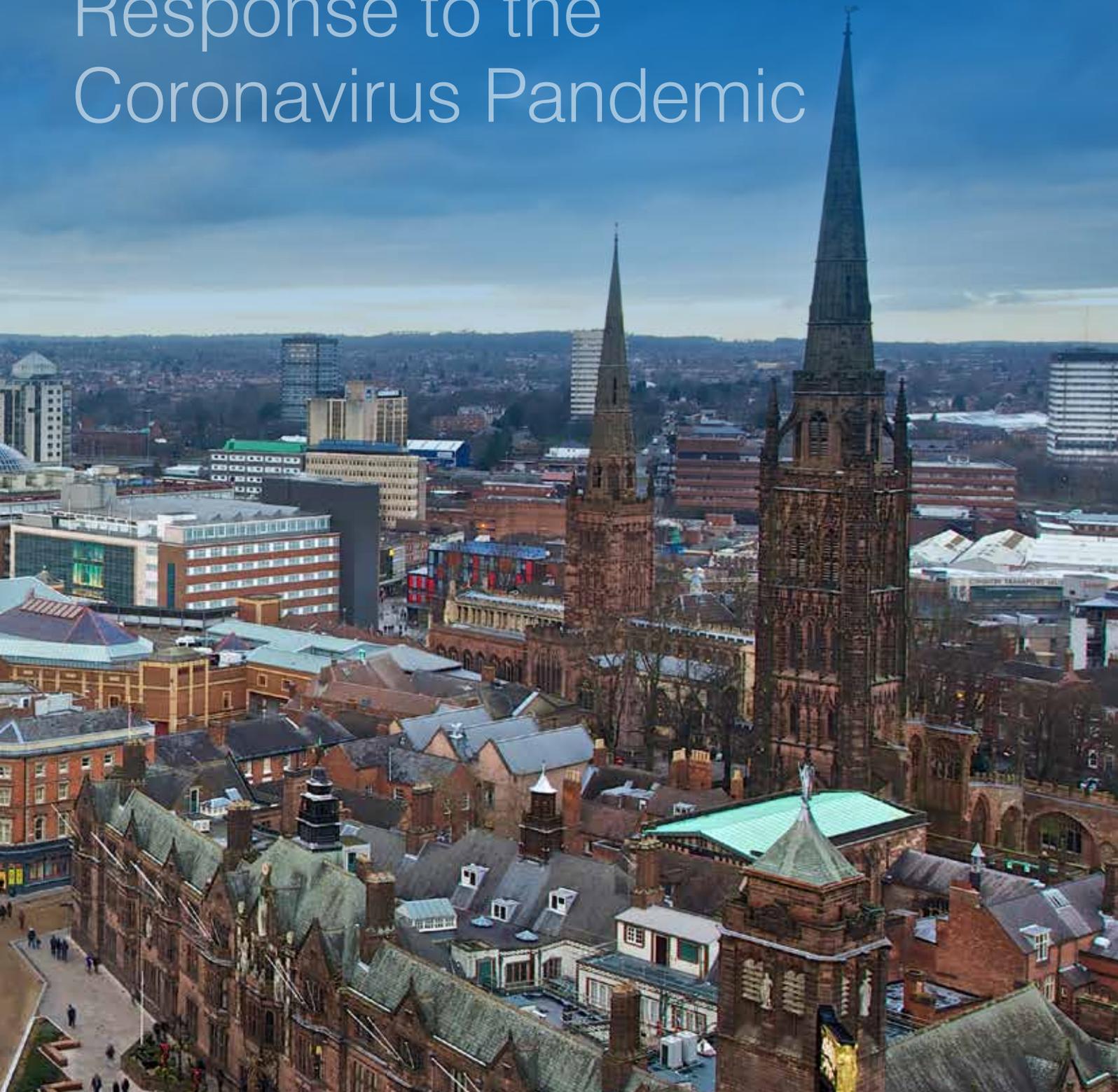


Coventry Employment and Skills Priorities

Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic





Coventry Employment & Skills Priorities

Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

In collaboration with key partners in the city, this paper sets out agreed employment and skills priorities for Coventry in response to Covid 19.

The economic impact of this pandemic is on an unparalleled scale with GDP falling by 20.4%, unemployment more than doubling from 3.4% to 7.8%, and an extra 1.5 million people claiming out of work benefits in the last three months. In addition, there are 9 million workers furloughed across the country.

Coventry's economy started in a relatively strong position when the pandemic hit with an employment rate of 77.2%, in line with the national average. Levels of youth unemployment were significantly lower than the national average and by far the lowest within the West Midlands Combined Authority area. We also have a diverse business base offering jobs across a wide range of sectors. However, the scale of job losses in our city within just a few months has been significant: nearly 8,000 new Universal Credit claimants, youth unemployment doubling from 2.8% to 5.7%, and 38,700 workers furloughed.

Furthermore, there were 170,000 fewer vacancies in the UK in February to April than in the previous quarter- a decrease which has not been seen since the global financial crisis of 2008. It is likely that further job losses will be prevalent in some deeply affected sectors and especially as financial support for furlough ends. The longer-term impact is not yet fully understood so we need our City Priorities to not only reflect the current challenges, but also prepare for the future.

In assessing Coventry's capacity to recover quickly there are a number of advantages and challenges. The city has a broad jobs base with a particular strength in advanced manufacturing, boosted by investment in the UK Battery Industrialisation Centre as well as research projects linked to two leading UK universities. The growing creative and cultural, tourism and hospitality sectors will be boosted by City of Culture 2021 and there has been heavy investment in the city centre to support both the retail and hospitality sectors. Coventry is also benefiting from a construction boom with expansion of both universities, investment in housing and infrastructure, as well as the nearby HS2 project and good transport connections to construction schemes across the West Midlands.

Nevertheless, Coventry faces significant challenges with a high youth population that has been disproportionately affected by job losses, a low skills base and lower than average wages. In addition, Coventry has a higher than average concentration of areas of deprivation. This analysis and the evidence base emerging around the impact of Covid-19 has informed the development of Coventry's priorities.

Work is already underway to establish economic recovery plans across Coventry & Warwickshire as well as at a regional level. It is essential that our local plans also fit into and take advantage of the National, Regional and Sub-Regional plans and stimulus for recovery; including the Government's 'Plan for Jobs' to bring forward capital investment and invest in infrastructure, hospitals and school buildings. In addition, there is a £3bn Green Investment Package, job retention bonuses to help employers retain furloughed workers, a new Kickstart Scheme for young people, apprenticeship and traineeship employer incentives and increased investment for Jobcentre Plus and the National Careers Service. We will continue to respond quickly to further new WMCA or Government schemes and ensure these are implemented locally to benefit our residents.

These priorities and the actions that follow from them, should partly mitigate some of the worst of the impact on communities, helping to protect residents and their livelihoods. We will ensure that emerging trends are identified, resources directed to the most in need, and opportunities to protect jobs and increase available vacancies are seized.

The table below sets out the priorities and actions. Further details and the evidence base that has informed these priorities is contained in the Appendix.

Priority	Rationale	Actions
Young People (16-24)	<p>107% Coventry Youth Unemployment Increase Between February and May 2020, from 2.8% in February to 5.7% in May. Further increases are expected.</p> <p>Potential Increase in School Leavers becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) in Autumn 2020 Concerns after the summer holidays around possible lack of apprenticeships, university places and employment opportunities.</p> <p>High Numbers of Young People Employed in Retail and Hospitality These sectors are expected to have the biggest social distancing challenges: 90 hospitality businesses wrote to the government to warn of challenges to their sector on 16 June 2020. Unclear yet whether newly announced Government VAT discounts and the voucher scheme will help.</p> <p>Changes to Learning Environment Education providers will need to continue with some remote education which presents challenges for those who can't access internet or digital devices.</p> <p>Competitive Labour Market Harder for younger people who may lack skills or experience.</p>	<p>Establish a Coventry Youth Hub (Collaboration between JobCentre Plus (JCP) & the Coventry Job Shop) Developing a new initiative to support young people. Sharing of caseloads, with any young person who makes a claim for benefit in the city referred. Every young person who needs support to find work or training can access this service and will be supported to access paid placements through the national Kickstart Scheme.</p> <p>Employer Incentive Grants £1,500 incentive for businesses that employ a NEET young person, which can be aligned to the national Kickstart Scheme ensuring National Living Wage and full time hours.</p> <p>Responsive Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) Ensuring this is keeping pace with a rapidly evolving labour market and maximising increased Government investment in the National Careers Service.</p> <p>Focused IAG for School Leavers Ensuring school leavers are given support to consider all options available, factoring in challenges around lack of apprenticeship or university places.</p> <p>Education Progression Pathways Ensuring all Further Education (FE) college, Coventry City Council Adult Education Service (CCC AES) and Independent Training Provider (ITP) courses have clear progression pathways on completion which are responsive and lead into the local labour market; through effective intelligence sharing between members of the new Coventry Employment & Skills Taskforce.</p> <p>Pre-September Education Engagement FE colleges and Adult Education need to engage with learners prior to enrolment to help them through virtual processes, and to motivate and inspire.</p>



Priority	Rationale	Actions
Young People (16-24) continued		<p>September Guarantee Coventry College, along with other training providers, to guarantee a place for all school leavers who apply regardless of expected grades. Assessments at the enrolment stage to ensure young people are placed on a suitable course.</p> <p>Capitalising on New Apprenticeship Employer Incentives Offering £2,000 per apprentice to encourage local employers to create jobs with high quality training</p> <p>European Social Fund (ESF) Funded Young People's Programmes Fully utilising the range of ESF funded employment support programmes in Coventry, modifying provision to meet need.</p>
50+ Age Group	<p>89% increase in 50+ Unemployment Between Feb and May 2020. Further increases are expected.</p> <p>Lack of Digital Skills Concerns apparent around lack of digital skills to find or apply for work.</p> <p>Challenge of Career Change Some may struggle to find work in the same sector and need to identify and develop transferrable skills.</p> <p>Mental Health Impact of Redundancy Concerns about the mental health impact of being made redundant.</p>	<p>Tailored IAG IAG provision which is geared towards supporting career change and is responsive to the labour market.</p> <p>Wide Access to Digital Skills Courses In general, but also specifically focusing on job search activity. Adult Education increasing the digital offer delivered at the Coventry Job Shop.</p> <p>ESF Funded Programmes Fully utilising the range of ESF funded employment support programmes in Coventry, modifying provision to meet need.</p> <p>Addressing Mental Health Needs Ensuring all programmes have suitable specialist provision to support those finding it hard to adapt to the shock of sudden redundancy.</p>

Priority	Rationale	Actions
Supporting BAME communities	<p>Disproportionate Covid-19 Mortality Rates A significantly higher percentage of Covid-19 mortalities have been from BAME communities. Analysis as to why is still ongoing but health considerations around entering employment for this group need to be factored in.</p> <p>Language Barriers For new refugees and migrants, not having sufficient English language skills can be a barrier to work or reduce the likelihood of securing work which matches their skill levels. A more competitive jobs market makes this harder still.</p> <p>Cultural Barriers For newer refugees and migrants, it can be harder to understand UK job market - how and where to find work. This will be compounded by a more competitive jobs market.</p>	<p>Wide Access to ESOL support Ensuring there is sufficient ESOL support across the city with a variety of provision which suits learners from different backgrounds. Ensuring provision is accessible to all, factoring in the challenges of trying to offer ESOL support virtually.</p> <p>Inclusive IAG Making sure IAG support across Coventry is accessible and can be tailored to suit the needs of those from different backgrounds.</p> <p>Tailored Sector Specific Courses Ensuring that sector specific courses can be accessed by all, utilising Government's new investment to increase Sector-Based-Work Academy options and tailoring support for those from different backgrounds.</p> <p>ESF/ ERDF/ MHCLG Funded Programmes Fully utilising the range of ESF, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) funded employment support programmes in Coventry and modifying where required to meet need.</p>
Rapid Response to Redundancy	<p>National Decrease of 600,000 employees from Company Payrolls Between March and May 2020. No Coventry specific figures at present, but it is clear from local requests for redundancy support that high numbers in Coventry have been made redundant.</p> <p>Local Examples of Redundancy Support Requests Businesses in Coventry including IKEA, Barclays and HMRC were already receiving redundancy support prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the pandemic started reports from several Small & Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), as well as information from local and national intelligence, tells us there are more to follow.</p>	<p>Encouraging Employers to access Retention Bonuses Informing employers across our networks of £1000 retention bonus for retaining currently furloughed workers beyond Jan 2021. Encouraging and supporting employers to use the scheme, thereby reducing redundancy numbers in the city.</p> <p>Coventry & Warwickshire Redundancy Taskforce A redundancy taskforce involving Coventry City Council, Warwickshire County Council, Jobcentre Plus, the National Careers Service and the Coventry & Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership Growth Hub has been scaled up, with each partner dedicating more staffing resource and making plans to expand this further if required.</p>

Priority	Rationale	Actions
Rapid Response to Redundancy continued		<p>Virtual Jobs Fairs Virtual Jobs Fairs have already successfully taken place in Coventry and this model will to be tailored for different businesses to directly support their staff. Additionally we will support people to identify or develop the skills required to crossover into different sectors, working together with those industries creating vacancies.</p> <p>Virtual Skills Delivery/Blended Learning National Careers Service, Adult Education, FE Colleges and training providers are now set up to deliver their IAG support and training courses virtually, enabling access for staff facing redundancy. IAG will also support those who want to consider career change. Courses will need to continue being delivered flexibly so they fit around work commitments, but there is a large choice of funded courses available for those still in employment, allowing quicker progression back into work after redundancy.</p>
Long Term Unemployed	<p>Competitive Labour Market With a big increase in competition for jobs employers are more likely to hire the 'safer' option of those with recent experience and/or up-to-date skills.</p> <p>Work Experience Barriers It is hard for long-term unemployed people to gain work experience with social distance barriers in place - many employers will be reluctant to offer work experience given the situation.</p> <p>Existing Barriers Further Exacerbated Access to flexible childcare, good public transport and issues affecting mental health can be barriers to employment and potentially made more difficult in the current situation.</p>	<p>Business Rate Funding Scheme Businesses can get up to £2,500 off Business Rates in return for employing someone who has been out of work for at least 6 months.</p> <p>Skills Building Courses Increasing the range of courses that are targeted at skills-building for long-term unemployed; capitalising on recent increased Government funding for higher level courses, designed around the needs of the local labour market.</p> <p>Fully Utilising increased Jobcentre Plus Flexible Support Fund Using this funding innovatively to add value, enabling greater removal of barriers to work – particularly if aligned to local ESF programmes.</p> <p>Creative Work Experience Solutions Looking at ways work experience can be gained, e.g. carrying out elements of work experience virtually from home. Cultivating strong partnership working to share limited work experience opportunities, prioritising those with the highest need.</p>

Priority	Rationale	Actions
Supporting Those with Complex Barriers	<p>Barrier Specific Challenges Many adults with health conditions or disabilities including physical disabilities and learning disabilities, struggle to find employers able to make adjustments for them. This may be magnified by Covid-19, with this group also facing many of the same barriers listed above for Long Term Unemployed.</p>	<p>Supported Internships Continuing and expanding the Supported Internship Programme to ensure help is redesigned to suit employer needs and consider social distancing measures. Coventry City Council Adult Education have secured additional funding for Supported Internships for learners aged 19+ without Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) but who have special educational needs. Ensuring clear progression routes from Supported Internships to both employment and also apprenticeships.</p> <p>ESF Funded Programmes Ensuring that those with a wide range of complex barriers can access tailored employment support or more 'mainstream' programmes with suitable adjustments made.</p> <p>Access to Employer Incentive Grants Making sure this group are given priority for any available employer incentive grants.</p>
Enabling Digital Inclusion	<p>Shift to Online Provision The majority of employment support and educational programmes have shifted to online provision.</p> <p>Lack of Wi-Fi Many rely on mobile data and connect to Wi-Fi at community centres which are now closed. Mobile data can be expensive.</p>	<p>Digital Access Surveying Engaging with a wide range of residents to establish the scale of digital challenges, and how many have barriers to finding work caused by lack of digital equipment including Wi-Fi access.</p> <p>Digital Access Advice Ensuring advice is given across the city on how to get cheaper Wi-Fi deals and digital equipment.</p> <p>Free distribution of Digital Devices Expanding the number of centres in Coventry who are part of the DevicesDotNow scheme and are able to distribute free devices to those in need.</p>

Priority	Rationale	Actions
Mental Wellbeing and Social Isolation	<p>42% Of Rethink Survey Participants Reported Mental Health Worsened During the Pandemic A Rethink survey published on 18 May 2020 highlighted challenges including social isolation, lack of support services, redundancy concerns and general anxiety caused by the pandemic.</p> <p>Half a Million More People Expected to Experience Mental Ill Health as a Result of the Pandemic Report from Centre for Mental Health published on 15 May 2020.</p>	<p>Tailored Employment Support Programmes Fully utilising the Connect2 European funded programme and other initiatives which bring together specialist partners to provide person-centred, flexible employment support.</p> <p>Workplace Wellbeing Support Fully utilising the WMCA Thrive at Work Programme which supports employers to make changes in the workplace to better look after their employees' wellbeing.</p> <p>Adult Education Wellbeing Courses Expanding the Coventry City Council Adult Education wellbeing offer with courses taking different approaches to supporting wellbeing. Ensuring these courses are fully accessible to all communities and generating wide participation.</p>



Our Approach

1. A ONE Coventry Approach

Bringing together the collective energy and expertise from across the Council in collaboration with a range of public, private and voluntary sector agencies:

We will work collaboratively and with a common purpose, ensuring our resources add maximum value for our businesses and residents. This includes continuing to strongly link our business support ecosystem with recruitment and training opportunities for residents. The recent formation of two essential taskforces – one bringing together various Council services with Jobcentre Plus and another tackling skills shortages in conjunction with FE Colleges and Independent Training Providers – will help further strengthen this approach.

2. Flexing Resource

Targeting our resources to have the most impact, responding to emerging priorities and lobbying for increased investment where it is needed:

We will review and refocus available funds – originally designed to meet the needs of a different labour market – to ensure they meet the challenges facing our city now. Over the last four months we have seen a 102% increase in residents claiming out-of-work benefits and we must adapt our European and other grant funded programmes to meet the scale of this challenge. Where funds are insufficient, or inflexible, we will collectively seek investment to fill the gap.

3. Labour market tracking and rapid innovation

Analysing the latest labour market intelligence and sharing this with educational and other partners to encourage innovative solutions, ensuring Coventry residents can quickly take advantage of available opportunities:

Covid-19 has resulted in an unpredictable labour market. The picture of how this economic shock will play out in the long-term and how each sector is affected is still developing. There is a real concern that as the government withdraws financial protection through the furlough scheme, further waves of economic shock will be felt with much higher levels of redundancy. That is why as a partnership we acted immediately, forming taskforces to plan an appropriate response and introducing practical help such as Virtual Jobs Fairs. This work will continue with digital innovation and creative solutions being developed which capitalise on the Government's 'Plan for work'.

4. Framing the Learning Landscape for the 'New Normal'

Continuing to develop a strong virtual learning offer and more flexible opportunities through blended learning, helping all our residents including those with more complex needs to further develop their skills:

Coventry's learning landscape has radically changed over the last few months with a majority of learners now accessing some form of virtual learning. We will strengthen this offer where online or blended approaches allow greater participation and learners can fully develop their skills. Engagement and enrolment processes will be reviewed to encourage greater uptake, and to re-energise and re-engage school leavers and adults with learning. We will also ensure that safe classroom-based activity is available for certain qualifications, and where access to virtual learning is limited or learners require face-to-face support.

5. Helping employers survive and thrive

High quality employer support with recruitment, grants, bespoke training offers, redundancy and help with staff wellbeing:

Prior to the pandemic Coventry had the lowest level of youth unemployment in the West Midlands region and residents' wages were growing to meet the national average. We need to recapture this success. We will work with our employers to help them thrive again and offer good quality work to our residents as well as jobs with training for our young people. Together with our partners we will help employers access grants and financial support, to recruit people with the right skills to help their business and to support the wellbeing of their workforce.



Appendix Priorities Evidence Base

Supporting Young People – 16-24

Summary of challenge:

- **Feb 2020 = 2.8% Youth Unemployment** – well below both West Midlands and National Averages.
- **May 2020 = 5.7% Youth Unemployment** – an increase of 2.9%, more than doubled.
- **107% Youth Unemployment increase** – in the months of March, April and May 2020 an extra 1565 young people claiming out of work benefits. Source for above data: [Claimant Count by Age - ONS \(NOMIS\) Dataset](#).
- **Disproportionally employed in hardest hit sectors** – hardest hit by lockdown measures such as Retail and Hospitality.
- **170,000 fewer vacancies in UK** – as of April 2020. Source: [ONS Labour Market Overview May 2020](#)
- **NEET numbers always increase in September** – due to the data lag for school leavers without destinations, and new identification of young people who do not attend or leave their 16+ provision at the start of September.
- **Estimated 80% decline in apprenticeship starts** – source: a survey of 304 training providers from FE Week in April 2020: [FE Week Training Provider Survey - April 2020](#)
- **Access to FE Colleges and other learning providers' virtual learning** – these include barriers such as lack of appropriate devices and lack of Wi-Fi or mobile data.

Our response:

- **Coventry Youth Hub** – Partnership working between CCC ESS and JCP, building on previous successes in 2013. This approach contributed to reduction of youth unemployment over three years by 138% and taking the level from 5.6% in February 2013 to 1.5% in February 2016. Ensuring Government's Kickstart Scheme is well used locally with CCC ESS widening employer participation so SME businesses can benefit, especially targeting growth sectors with good career prospects for young people. Participants supported to retain employment for longer than 6 months through holistic Job Coaching support.

- **Employer incentive grants** – £1,500 grants for businesses offering minimum six-month contracts to young people. Proven success in the last two recessions by 'de-risking' the young person as an employee, with over 70% of participants maintaining employment afterwards for a period of more than six months. Grants can be in addition to Kickstart Scheme enabling SME businesses to offer National Living Wage instead of Minimum Wage and offer full time hours instead of 25.
- **Clear education pathways** – Responsive to the labour market with guaranteed places within FE will support Coventry's Young people into employment opportunities as we recover.
- **FE/ITPs Pre-September engagement and September Guarantee** – this activity is designed to reduce September NEET numbers, helping every young person to have a destination.
- **Capitalising on New Apprenticeship Employer Incentives** –Engaging with our existing large networks of Employers to encourage more to take on Apprenticeships, with the £2000 Employer Incentive used as an important motivating factor. Ensuring these employers also are linked with the most suitable training provider.
- **ESF Programmes** – fully utilising Ambition Coventry (16-29) and Routes2 (15-19). Both target NEET young people, working with partners to provide holistic/ wraparound support. Further information can be found here: [Ambition, Routes2](#)

Helping those who are 50+

Summary of challenge:

- **89% increase in Universal Credit claims** – From February - May 2020. Source ONS (Nomis): [Claimant Count by Age - ONS \(NOMIS\) Dataset](#)
- **Potential digital skills barriers and challenge of career change** – 39% of unemployed in the 50+ age group stated that applying for jobs is made harder as they find their skills are out of date.
- **Employer perceptions** – 51% of unemployed in the 50+ age group do not feel confident in applying for jobs because of their age. The same proportion also felt employment agencies were not interested in them because of their age. Source for the above two figures from the DWP Fuller Working Lives 2015 report: [Fuller Working Lives 50+ Report - DWP Jan 2015](#)
In addition engagement by JCP, NCS and the Job Shop with customers in Coventry anecdotally confirms above perceptions as does employer engagement undertaken by JCP, NCS, the Job Shop's Employer Hub and CWLEP Growth Hub.
- **Mental health impact of redundancy** – 'Whether expected or sudden, redundancy can cause huge uncertainty, stress and anxiety, and can make existing mental health problems worse'. Source Mind: [Coping with redundancy during the pandemic - MIND](#)
- **Having to change financial plans** – unexpected redundancy may mean changes to plans to pay off mortgages or pension plans, with less to time to rearrange than younger people.

Our response:

- **Offering tailored information, advice and guidance** – can be done through our existing and upcoming programmes funded through ESF (Succeed, Connect2) as well as through good partnership working with the National Careers Service, capitalising on their £32 million of additional Government investment.
- **Adult Education Flex** – flex in our own Adult Education provision as well as influencing new calls from the WMCA to offer bespoke training to the 50+ age group, with a focus on digital skills.
- **Employment support services having a focus on mental health support** – a key focus on delivering Mental Health support will be through the face to face provision at the Job Shop and all partners delivering on ESF contracts, as well as working with the WMCA Thrive at Work programme to allow employers to support and empower their workforce. In addition, all partners across the city delivering employment services are to be supported with staff training around mental health.

Supporting BAME communities

Summary of challenge:

- **BAME risk of death from Covid-19 is between 10% and 50% higher than for White British** – people with Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, other Asian, Caribbean and other black backgrounds are at most risk from Covid-19. Source: Public Health England (PHE) review: [Disparities Review - Public Health England June 2020](#)
- **Key workers** – PHE report indicates that another factor is the high prevalence of people from BAME backgrounds in key worker roles.
- **ESOL barriers** – for some this can affect gaining work or finding a job at a level that matches their qualification level/skills, as well as their progression while in work. Source: engagement with customers from the Job Shop (including migrant/refugee targeted programme Ignite Integration), JCP and NCS, and the Migrant Friendly Cities regional project.
- **Cultural barriers** – Lack of understanding of UK jobs market, how to apply for roles, UK work practices etc. Source: as above.

Our response:

- **Widening our ESOL support** – CCC AES are the largest provider of ESOL in the city. Utilising the Adult Education budget, we will deliver more courses both on and offline. Key to this city-wide approach will be pressing the WMCA to increase flexibility for other providers such as FE and IPST to deliver ESOL.
- **Strengthening partnership working** – helping partners such as Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, the regional MiFriendly Cities Project and Ignite Integration to match their IAG to the labour market.
- **Tailored sector specific courses accessible to all** – sector specific skills courses across the city to be accessed by all, with linked ESOL provision and partner involvement.
- **Flexing existing funded programmes** – all programmes in Coventry (Connect2, Ambition, Succeed, Routes2, Ignite, MiFriendly Cities) have targets around effectively supporting BAME communities. Continued work to ensure access of ESF programmes matches the needs of BAME communities.

Rapid Response to Redundancy

Summary of challenge:

- **National decrease of 600,000 from company payrolls** – currently there are no Coventry specific figures, but the Employer Hub and redundancy taskforce have seen increased requests for redundancy support. JCP have reported that in the last month HR1 forms submitted for Coventry based employers show in excess of 1000 staff affected. These are all in addition to the large businesses in Coventry including IKEA, Barclays and HMRC that are already receiving redundancy support. Sources: ONS Labour Market Survey June 2020: [ONS Labour Market Overview - June 2020](#) and local JCP intelligence.
- **Competitive labour market** – there were 170,000 fewer vacancies in the UK between February and April 2020 compared to the previous quarter, and 210,000 fewer than the same quarter in the previous year. This national picture will be replicated in Coventry, increasing competition for jobs which causes challenges when supporting companies looking to make staff redundant.

Our response:

- **Encouraging Employers to access Retention Bonuses** – using these as method for reducing number of redundancies. Engaging across employer networks to make sure scheme is understood and employers encouraged to use it.
- **Coventry & Warwickshire Redundancy Taskforce** – exciting new approach with a taskforce set up with Coventry City Council, Warwickshire County Council, JCP, NCS and CWLEP Growth Hub providing immediate, comprehensive support to employers.
- **Online support** – development of the online offer to businesses and staff to allow them to access support quickly, safely and in a way that is tailored to each employer. Following successful Virtual Jobs Fairs and blended support to companies such as IKEA, we have seen significant successes with this approach already.

Long Term Unemployed

Summary of challenge:

- **Work Experience barriers** – difficulties for people who are long term unemployed to gain work experience with social distancing barriers in place. We are anticipating many employers will be reluctant to offer work experience.
- **Existing barriers further exacerbated** – access to flexible childcare, good public transport and issues affecting mental health can be barriers to employment and potentially made more difficult in the current situation.

Our response:

- **Business Rate Funding Scheme** – businesses can get up to £2,500 off their Business Rates in return for employing someone who has been unemployed for a period of at least six months. Twenty places are available as part of a pilot, to be expanded if deemed successful and demonstrating long term savings to both council and central government budgets.
- **Skills building courses** – increasing the offer across Coventry and sharing data and resources across FEs, ITPs, and CCC AES. These will be co-ordinated by CCC ESS in order to provide the best range of provision that is responsive to the local labour market.
- **Creative work experience solutions** – looking at alternative ways work experience can be gained, e.g. undergoing part of a work experience placement virtually from home. Strong partnership working between FEs, ITPs, CCC AES and CCC Job Shop and other employment support providers to ensure limited opportunities are given to those with highest need.

Supporting Those with Complex Barriers

Summary of the challenge:

- **Only 53.2% of those with disabilities in paid employment** – as of December 2019, 53.2% of people with disabilities were in work compared with 81.8% of people without disabilities, a 28.6 percentage point gap. The employment rate is lower still for people with learning difficulties, of which just 17.9% are in work. Source: ONS disability and employment UK 2019: [Disability & Employment - ONS 2019](#)
- **Just 5.9% of adults with learning disabilities who are known to councils with Adult Social Services are in employment** – source: British Association of Supported Employment (BASE): [Employment Rates - BASE 2018/19](#)
- **Barrier specific challenges** – in addition to facing the same barriers as people who are long term unemployed, many with severe health conditions or disabilities may struggle to find employers able to make adjustments for them. The reasons for this can vary, from employers who feel they cannot purchase extra equipment or reconfigure work spaces to help someone with a disability (especially in light of social distancing measures), to budgetary pressures caused by the pandemic. Employers may not know about the government Access to Work scheme which is generally underused.

Our response:

- **Supported Internships** – fully utilising existing Supported Internships delivered by Hereward College and CCC ESS/AES and expanding Supported Internship provision where funding allows. CCC AES have already secured additional funding from the WMCA to deliver Supported Internships to those who have not got EHCP's but have been identified as eligible by the CCC Special Education Needs Team.
- **ESF programmes** – using Connect2 to provide tailored support for people with disabilities/severe health conditions as well as ensuring other ESF programmes (Succeed/Routes2/Ambition) are fully accessible with staff trained to support those with complex needs.
- **Grant priority** – ensuring where appropriate that those with disabilities/severe health conditions are given priority for use of Employer Incentive Grants.

Enabling Digital Inclusion

Summary of the challenge:

- **Shift to online provision** – the majority of employment support and educational programmes have shifted to online provision due to the pandemic.
- **Lack of Wi-Fi and devices** – many people at risk in this category rely on mobile data and connect to Wi-Fi at community centres which are now closed. Mobile data can be expensive. Many are attempting to do online learning or job search activity on smart phones as they do not have laptops or tablets. Source: engagement with JCP, FE, CCC AES, NCS, CCC Job Shop customers and learners.

Our response:

- **Digital access surveying** – engagement with a wide range of residents to establish the scale of digital challenges. To be done by Coventry College, CCC Job Shop and CCC AES.
- **Digital access advice** – ensure advice is given across the city on how to get cheaper Wi-Fi deals and digital equipment. Can be carried out by CCC Job Shop Money Advice service.
- **Free distribution of digital devices** – expand the number of centres in Coventry who are part of the DevicesDotNow scheme and able to distribute free devices to those in need. CCC AES have applied and others will be encouraged to do so.

Mental Wellbeing and Social Isolation

Summary of challenge:

- **2% of Rethink survey participants reported their mental health worsened during the pandemic** – challenges listed include social isolation, lack of support services, redundancy concerns and general anxiety caused by Covid-19. Source: Rethink survey published 18 May 2020: [Mental Health Services Impact - Rethink 2020](#)
- **At least 500,000 more people are expected to experience mental ill health as a result of the pandemic** – source: report from the Centre for Mental Health published on 15 May 2020: [Mental Health Forecast - Centre for Mental Health 2020](#)

Our response:

- **Using ESF funded programmes** – Connect2 has tailored employment support provision for those with mental health needs in partnership with Rethink and other specialist providers.
- **Workplace wellbeing support** – fully utilising the WMCA Thrive at Work programme which includes support for employers to make changes to positively impact employee mental health.
- **AES wellbeing courses** – expanding the CCC AES wellbeing offer with a wide range of courses including horticulture, craft-based courses, bakery, fitness and dance etc. These can all positively impact mental wellbeing through the activities themselves as well as the social engagement they can bring.

