

## **Royal College of Podiatry response to Get Britain Working White Paper**

### **Executive Summary**

The Royal College of Podiatry welcomes the UK government's 'Get Britain Working' White Paper, which recognises the pressing challenges of economic inactivity driven by long-term sickness and youth unemployment. This response outlines two interconnected yet distinct strategies where podiatry can play a transformative role:

Reducing health inequalities through targeted podiatric interventions in deprived communities. Promoting podiatry apprenticeships as a dual solution to youth unemployment and the healthcare workforce gap. Together, these approaches demonstrate the profession's alignment with the White Paper's goals of integrated health and employment support, while contributing to a healthier, more economically active population.

### **Reducing health inequalities**

#### **Introduction**

Health inequalities in the UK are exacerbated by socioeconomic disparities, with deprived communities experiencing higher rates of chronic long-term conditions (LTCs) such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Podiatrists play a crucial role in the management of these LTCs, mitigating the complications by providing early detection, preventive care, early intervention, and education. Aligning podiatric services, in both NHS and independent sectors, with the 'Get Britain Working' White Paper's emphasis on integrating health and employment support can further enhance their impact.

The 'Get Britain Working' White Paper identifies long-term sickness as a significant contributor to economic inactivity, with 2.8 million individuals affected. It emphasises the need for integrated health and employment support to address this issue (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024). Podiatrists, as specialists in foot and lower limb health, are well-positioned to contribute to this integrated approach, particularly in prevention and management of LTCs that disproportionately affect disadvantaged populations.

#### **The role of podiatrists in addressing health inequalities**

Podiatrists identify early signs of complications in chronic LTCs, such as diabetic foot ulcers, which are more prevalent in low-income populations. Early intervention can prevent foot ulceration, infection, hospital admissions, and amputations, reducing long-term healthcare costs and improving quality of life (NHS Digital, 2023). Deployment of adequately staffed podiatry services within community health services, especially in areas with high deprivation indices, ensures accessibility for those who may face barriers to traditional healthcare facilities. This approach aligns with the White Paper's call for localised health interventions (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024). Podiatrists educate their patients on foot health care, promoting self-management and helping to reduce the risk of complications. Educational initiatives can be tailored to address cultural and socioeconomic factors, thereby influencing health behaviours.

## **Recommendations**

The Royal College of Podiatry makes the following recommendations:

- Allocate resources to support podiatric outreach programmes targeting high-risk populations, in line with the White Paper's investment in health-related employment support (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024).
- Encourage research on the impact of podiatric interventions on health outcomes in deprived communities to inform policy and practice.

## **Promoting Podiatry Apprenticeships to address youth unemployment and health inequalities**

### **Introduction**

Youth unemployment remains a pressing issue in the UK, with 1 in 8 young people not in education, employment, or training. The 'Get Britain Working' White Paper introduces a Youth Guarantee to provide opportunities for this demographic (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024). Establishing podiatry apprenticeships could simultaneously address youth unemployment and health disparities by training young individuals to provide services within their communities.

The White Paper emphasises the need for accessible education and training pathways for young people aged 18-21, including apprenticeships in key sectors (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024). Podiatry, as a healthcare profession facing workforce shortages, presents an opportunity for targeted apprenticeship programmes that could empower this demographic and improve patient outcomes in traditionally underserved areas.

### **Benefits of Podiatry Apprenticeships**

Apprenticeships can address the shortage of podiatry professionals, ensuring a sustainable workforce to meet the growing demand for foot health services, especially in ageing populations. Through provision of structured training and employment opportunities in podiatry, the rates of young people not in education, employment, or training could witness a marked reduction, offering young individuals a clear career pathway in healthcare. Apprentices trained within their local communities are more likely to remain and serve these areas, enhancing access to care and addressing localised health inequalities.

### **Implementation Strategies**

The Royal College of Podiatry is ready to collaborate with higher educational institutions to embed existing apprenticeship programmes that combine academic learning with practical clinical experience. Utilising the Growth and Skills Levy to fund podiatry apprenticeships would guarantee financial support for both apprentices and employers (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024). Placement opportunities and mentorship for apprentices could be provided through engagement with both NHS Trusts and the independent sector.

### **Conclusion**

Podiatrists are integral to reducing health inequalities through preventive care, community engagement, and education. By aligning their services with the strategic objectives outlined in the

“Get Britain Working” White Paper, podiatrists can contribute significantly to improving health outcomes and reducing economic inactivity due to ill health.

Podiatry apprenticeships offer a dual solution to unemployment and health inequalities. By investing in these programmes, the Department for Work and Pensions, along with the Royal College of Podiatry, can play a pivotal role in developing a skilled workforce committed to improving preventative population foot health across diverse communities. It will help to reduce health disparities and youth unemployment, enhancing both individual wellbeing and national economic resilience.

### **References**

Department for Work and Pensions. (2024). Get Britain Working White Paper. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper>

NHS Digital. (2023). National Diabetes Foot Care Audit Report. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/national-diabetes-foot-care-audit>