GOOD QUALITY WORK:
YOUTH VOICES FROM ACROSS THE UK

FINDINGS FROM THE YOUNG PEOPLE CONSULTATIONS

A report for the Health Foundation's 'Young People's Future Health Inquiry'

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Contents

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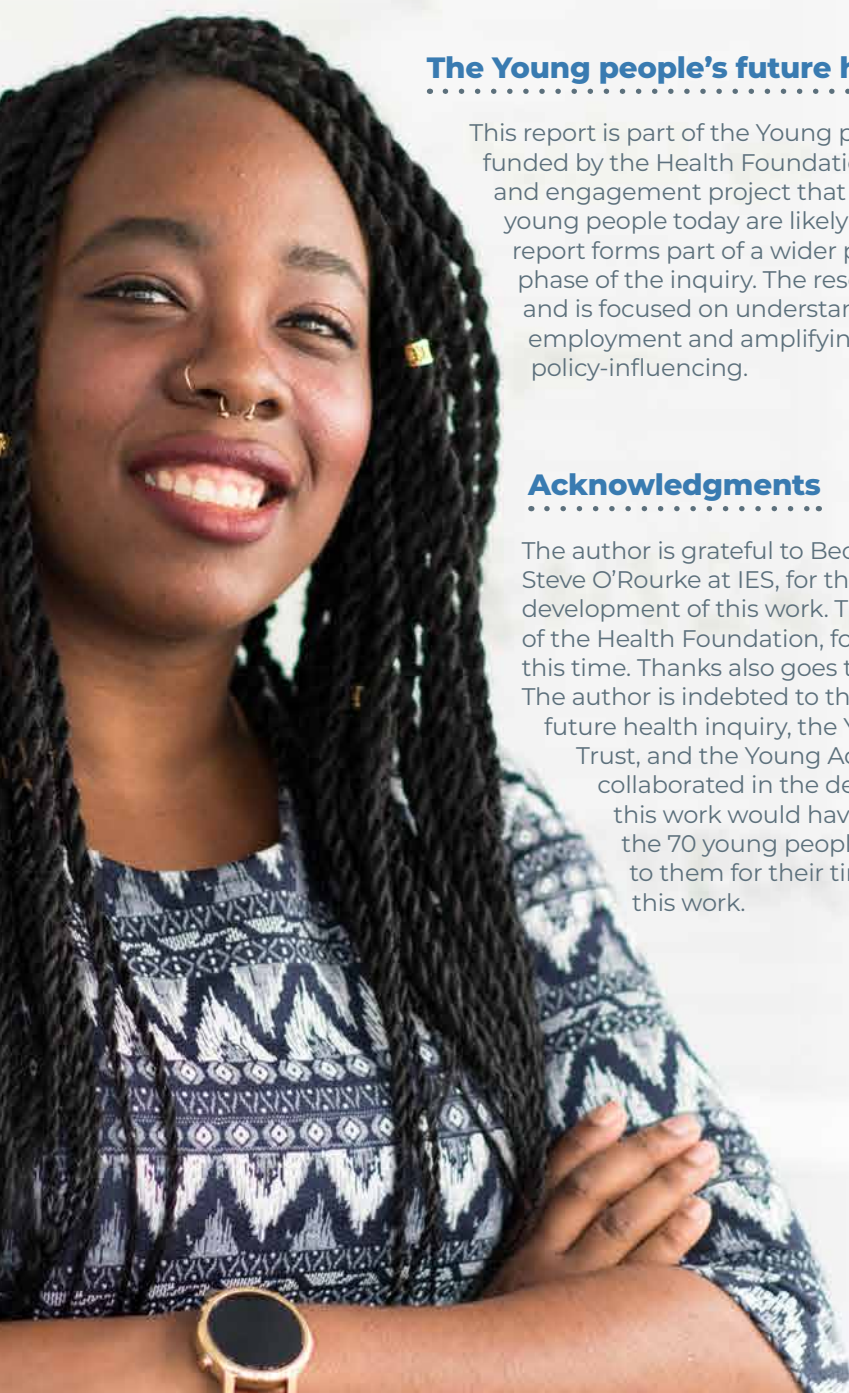
The Health Foundation

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The Young people's future health inquiry

This report is part of the Young people's future health inquiry which is funded by the Health Foundation. The inquiry is a first-of-its-kind research and engagement project that set out to consider how the experiences of young people today are likely to shape their future health outcomes. This report forms part of a wider programme of policy research in the action phase of the inquiry. The research is led by IES across the four UK nations and is focused on understanding how to improve access to good youth employment and amplifying the voices of young people in research and policy-influencing.

KEY FINDINGS

Key Findings

Young people's views of good work

Young people want work that is stimulating and fulfilling, where they have autonomy, develop a wide range of skills, and feel like they are contributing to something meaningful. They want good terms of employment with pay above minimum wage, flexibility, and stable contracts. They want to feel safe and comfortable in the workplace, listened to and recognised for their work. They want to work for employers who care about both their development and wellbeing. Despite their aspirations, many young people feel like good work is a privilege for few due to factors including their age, lack of experience, lack of opportunities in local areas, and negative attitudes amongst employers towards young people.

The barriers to good work encountered by young people

The main barriers young people encounter when trying to access good quality work are tied to: place, both in terms of living in areas where there are few good jobs and living in places where the cost of living is high; socio-economic disadvantage, including lack of adequate networks and connections; discrimination, due to health conditions or disability; lack of adequate transport infrastructure; insufficient or inadequate support around careers information, advice and guidance within educational settings; and employer attitudes including unrealistic expectations when it comes to young people's previous experience. To address these barriers young people would like to see stronger links built between education and employers, improved access to information and opportunities across the full range of post-16 choices, and an increased focus in education on employability skills and work experience.

The types and quality of support young people access

Careers services are a source of support young people are aware of and generally access. Nonetheless, informal networks, such as friends and family, and independent online research, are young people's preferred sources of support. These sources, though not exhaustive, are seen to provide better-tailored and more practical support as well as more networking and connection opportunities, compared to careers services which are perceived to be disconnected from young people's needs and not tailored to their aspirations. To address these barriers young people would like to see person-centred and more inclusive support (eg schemes for students with low qualifications, personalised newsletters, mentoring schemes), more employer engagement in schools, and improved access to information through youth-friendly online platforms.

Young people's experiences of work

For young people, positive experiences of work result from: being provided with a diverse learning experience and being given guided opportunities to actively develop new skills, feeling that their employer is actively involved and interested in their development, and experiencing feelings of personal and professional growth. Conversely, negative experiences emerge where young people feel tasks are not reflective of their interests or skills and where the employer provides little support and training, which leads to negative effects on health and confidence. In terms of knowledge of rights and responsibilities at work, young people lack understanding and confidence to raise issues, partly due to fears of negative repercussions for their employment. For young people, better experiences of work are supported by increased flexibility (particularly around shift times for those doing shift work), adequate training when starting a job and ongoing training opportunities, employer investment in supporting the transition from education to work, and youth-friendly resources on rights and responsibilities at work.

The impact of Covid-19 on access to good work

Negative effects from the pandemic include a 'dampening' effect on prospects and aspirations for many young people, due to disruption to their learning and school or university life. Young people's concerns range from being unsure about their next step to feeling that their employment prospects have worsened because of missed learning. Many young people also report negative impacts on their mental health and confidence resulting from the uncertainty and instability created by the pandemic, particularly for those at transition stages. However, the pandemic also had positive impacts on young people's priorities for work, helping some realise the importance of work-life balance and of doing work which can positively support their health and wellbeing. It has also led some to reconsider the job characteristics they value (job security and stability, flexibility, etc.). The pandemic also influenced young people's choices to stay in education or in work, with some deciding to stay in education to shelter from unemployment. Others who were considering entering education decided not to, as remote learning limits both practical and social aspects of education.

Young people's asks for decision-makers

Young people's asks for decision-makers to improve access to good quality youth employment and training opportunities include:

- **Better regulation and monitoring**, including clear mechanisms to hold employers to account and regular inspections to check working conditions.

- **Expanded access to government support measures**, including employment support schemes such as Kickstart.

- **More career fairs and networking opportunities,** including a wider and diverse range of opportunities to meet employers and training providers.

- **Accessible online information and job search platforms**, displaying key employment information and opportunities in one place.

- **Improved information**, advice, and guidance around what young people should know and expect when entering the world of work.

- **Better access to vocational routes**, particularly apprenticeships and traineeships.

- **Increased investment in work experience**, particularly for young people in the 16-18 age group to help them better understand the routes to their preferred careers from an early stage and build up experience.

- **Better support to employers**, through funding to support youth-friendly practices and jobs.

- **Wider policy action**, in areas which are not directly related to youth employment but have a great indirect impact, including increased investment in local area regeneration and improving transport infrastructure.

01 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Background

This report is part of a three-year research project for the Health Foundation's Young People's Future Health Inquiry. The Inquiry focuses on understanding how to develop effective approaches in policy and practice to improve access to good quality youth employment and achieve systemic change across the four UK nations. The Inquiry is a wide-ranging, multi-year programme aimed at influencing the policy agenda to recognise that young people's experiences between the ages of 12 and 25 have crucial consequences for their future health outcomes. Work, and specifically the quality of work, is a key wider determinant of young people's health and wellbeing, both in the short- and long-term (Papoutsaki, et al. 2019).

This is the third of a series of reports looking at good quality work from young people's perspectives. It sets out the findings from consultations, including interviews and focus groups, with 70 young people across the four UK nations exploring respondents' views and perceptions of the quality of work, their experiences in work, and the impact of the pandemic.

Methods

The research reported here uses a youth-centred approach. This means the design and materials were developed with young people's involvement as experts by experience, chiefly through collaborative workshops with young advisers from Leaders Unlocked and young campaigners from the Equality Trust. The interviews and focus groups reported in the research took place between July and September 2021.

Core to the research was the inclusion of the voices and experiences of young people from the four UK nations. The research captured the views of young people across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. When recruiting participants, we prioritised the inclusion of voices from under-represented groups, particularly of minority ethnic groups, disabled young people, and those with health conditions. The breakdown for participants' socio-demographic characteristics is reported in Table 1.1.

AGE		GENDER		NATION		ETHNICITY		DISABILITY	
16-18	26%	Male	46%	England	36%	White ethnic group	66%	No	72%
19-21	39%	Female	54%	Scotland	27%	Minority ethnic group	34%	Yes	28%
22-55	35%	Non-binary	0%	Wales	19%				
		Other	0%	N.Ireland	18%				

EMPLOYMENT / EDUCATION STATUS	
College, further education, or training	31%
Higher education	44%
Not working or studying	6%
Only in employment	19%

A note on terminology

This research focuses on 'young people', defined as those aged 16-25. We recognise that the term 'young people' does not reflect the full range of characteristics and lived experiences that fall under this umbrella term, and that factors such as age, education, employment status, and place, among many others, intersect to determine very diverse experiences. We analyse in particular the experiences of young people who may face additional disadvantage as a result of factors such as gender, ethnicity, disability, and educational and employment status, but recognise this list is not exhaustive and that these issues often interact in creating disadvantage.

Source: IES consultation with young people, 2021

02 YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS OF GOOD WORK

Young people's definitions of good work

The first theme we explored in the research with young people was what a good quality employment opportunity meant to them. There was a diversity of views across young people in different age groups, education stages, and job sectors, but also strong underlying themes that cut across, which included:

- **Stimulation and fulfilment**: Good work has variety and facilitates young people finding enjoyment in their day-to-day tasks, learning on the job, having autonomy, progressing on the career ladder, developing transferable skills and experience, and feeling like the work was meaningful and helped them grow both personally and professionally.

- **Terms of employment**: Good work pays above minimum wage and which rewards young people's labour proportionately and fairly. Good work has secure and stable employment contracts, flexibility around hours and days of work (particularly to fit around studies), and good work-life balance.

- **Working environment**: Good work has a friendly and inclusive workplace where young people feel comfortable and supported, treated fairly and with respect by colleagues and managers, and that their work is valued and recognised.

- **Employer attitudes**: Good work makes an active investment in young people's development, as well as taking a proactive interest in their health and wellbeing, particularly in terms of mental health literacy and support in the workplace. Good work is a safe environment to share feedback and speak up about issues.

'A workplace where you feel supported, where there's room for growth and consideration for your health. A workplace that is comfortable and where there is no hostility.'

'Good diversity and inclusion policy, I would like to see more minorities so I don't feel like I'm on my own. Environment – supportive and patient whilst I learn, kind colleagues that don't make you feel like an outsider.'

'You also want to make sure that the place you are representing is a good place to represent. It's really important to have good work relationships and that the company has values that align to yours and that every employee feels included in the workplace.'

'A lot of it is about the staff, if the work environment is bad, you put in less effort, and the work is less rewarding. (…) Varied work is also important, I like doing different things, get challenged feel engaged, otherwise I feel soulless.'

'Allowing you to have actual breaks, adhering to shift times and providing equal pay for the same amount of work. (…) Zero Hour Contracts are no sign of a good quality job. It must be something you enjoy doing first of all, and where you can gain skills off it. (…) being trained and treated properly, as an individual (…) needs to ensure you are getting enough to keep yourself afloat and that what you're learning isn't restrictive in terms of how you can apply it.'

Young people's perceptions of access to good work

The second theme we explored in the research was whether young people prioritised opportunities they felt to be of good quality when looking for jobs or work experience. From consultations, it emerged that the way young people thought about and valued quality depended on a range of factors, including their age and education level, and the availability of opportunities in the places where they lived.

Young people at later education stages (such as university), those who had a clearer sense of their career aspirations and prospects, and those living in urban centres and wealthier areas tended to place greater importance on the quality of work. This was often related to feeling like they had more choice when it came to work due to a range of determining factors , such as higher qualifications, good quality work experience, high quality support from school and family, and a higher number of opportunities available in the areas where they lived.

'Quality is a big factor, I wouldn't pick up any kind of job (…) I'd choose one that feels that careers wise can help me move forward, that's good for my CV.'

'We [young people] have moved away from the working for minimum pay philosophy. We want personal life and relationships, to be happy and healthy beyond making money.'

'My previous experience has made me definitely consider quality more (…) I have become more fussy. After experiencing [better working conditions] I would definitely not want to go back to just working for the sake of it and a bit of money.'

Young people placing greater importance on the quality of work often reported that they felt to be in a privileged position where they could afford to be selective. They recognised that this position was not the norm for the majority of young people.

'My job is high quality however the jobs available to my peers are not – I was very lucky to find this job, because I am very aware that my friends find their jobs fairly unfulfilling.'

'You have to be in really privileged position to be able to choose jobs – a job is a job if you need money you'll do anything.'

These views were confirmed by young people under 18, those with lower qualifications or lower-quality education, those living in rural or deprived areas, those looking to work in more competitive sectors with poorly designed entry routes, or those who felt unclear or confused about their prospects and lacked support. Among this group reasons explaining why young people felt they could not prioritise good quality work varied. Often individuals felt like they had no options or choice due to their age, their lack of experience, lack of opportunities in the areas where they lived, or the urgency of their need for income.

'Whether it is the most important factor depends on what stage I'm at. Right now if I were to get a job, quality would not matter, income is most important – I cannot choose, because I have little experience.'

'Financial strain, have to work 'some' job to survive, no time or money to look for the ideal job.'

'The jobs available to us are not great (…) not rewarding, you feel like a machine. But the type of work we tend to do, you don't do it to feel rewarded, it's just a financial matter.'

Across all young people, phrases such as 'a job's a job' or 'income is more important' were used frequently, and highlighted how a stable and secure income was often viewed as separate from other aspects of the quality of work. For some young people, good quality work and good pay were viewed as mutually exclusive.

'The financial aspect of the job is an important thing. If they ask me if I'd go to job that pays £9 an hour, or one I like but £4 an hour. I will pick the one I like less but pays better.'

'It's all well and good the quality is good and being treated well, but if you aren't getting enough to keep yourself afloat or what you're learning is restrictive in terms of how you can apply then it's not a good job.'

Young people also recognised that the quality of work had implications for their health and wellbeing. Despite this, being able to align having a job with having a good quality job felt like a privilege to most.

> *'I speak from privileged position – I have a job. My job is only 9-5, (...) If I had to work longer hours my quality of life would go down drastically. But people feel pressure to get into any work now [as a result of the Covid-19 crisis].'*

> *'It's a very big factor – if you don't enjoy it, it will be a lot harder to do it. It affects your whole day and your whole mood. But it depends on your situation, if you're desperate for money a job's a job.'*

Young people broadly agreed that securing good quality opportunities in any sector was becoming increasingly challenging, particularly for themselves and their peers. The reasons they identified for this included a lack of opportunities in their local areas and employer behaviour.

- Many young people indicated that there was a lack of opportunities in their local areas, mainly of entry level jobs, due to high competition, deprivation or rurality. Some young people, particularly those studying or looking for jobs in the arts and humanities, also reported a lack of paid work experience and entry level opportunities in their chosen sectors.

- Young people also identified employer behaviour as an issue, particularly they cited experiences of employers taking advantage of young people due to their limited experience, providing poor working conditions, or being unwilling to provide jobs to young people in the first place due to their limited experience.

> *'I have been doing the work experience I need, but I'm not being paid for it. (...) for the paid jobs you need to be more qualified, but to get the qualifications you need the experience, it's a catch-22.'*

> *'The area I live in is not wealthy at all. The jobs available are really low paying fast food jobs and there are a lot of closed doors for 16-17 year olds. (...) Mostly because we are limited to what we have in town and we want to stay local.'*

> *'The majority of jobs we're able to get are really tough to do in terms of hours, lots of them are hospitality jobs (...) Employers treat younger people with less respect and have less trust in them (...) it has an effect on our self-esteem and mental health.'*

> *'Few companies are targeted towards first time employees, it makes having a good quality job really difficult for a young person.'*

Countering this, there was a group of young people who felt that the quality of the opportunities they accessed now would have an impact on their future career and the quality of their jobs in the future. This group included both young people working full-time and those looking for work experience and part-time work alongside their studies. They expressed concerns that failure to secure good quality opportunities from an early stage in their studies and career would negatively affect their competitiveness in the labour market at later stages

> *'In such a competitive work market it's important to gather as much quality work experience from early on in order to stand out.'*

> *'If you manage to get a good opportunity now it will allow much faster progression, and struggling to get good opportunities will affect your career.'*

Sarah – first-year trainee, 24 years old, Wales

'A good job to me has flexibility and variety, every day looks different and provides opportunities to be creative and work with different people. Ideally, it's a job that feels meaningful, like it's contributing to some kind of social good – this is the reason why I am at my current job. It's a charity helping people. I had the opportunity to do a PhD but a big reason why I chose to do this traineeship is that I feel involved in the social mission to make people's lives better.

I have been in jobs in the past where every single day was the same mechanical procedure. I found the boredom quite degrading, because you know anybody can do that task and eventually a computer will do your job. But I am in a very privileged position where I find my work meaningful and aligned with my values. I would not say I would only ever take a job that is meaningful to me, if at end of the day I needed the money.

With the previous job – it was a strange sensation to be physically tired but mentally under stimulated, there were times they run out of work for us to do. It was long hours and the time dragged because either I was not doing anything or I was doing the same mechanical process. It took a mental toll on me. It's like we were kept under surveillance and not trusted to do a job which was menial and repetitive and boring. It did not foster positive relationships between the people and the company we worked for. Going from university to that job was terrible, from having so much control over your work and then feeling like going back to school was very jarring.

The remote working and autonomy over working hours I have in my traineeship now is great. At a lot of the jobs I had before I was micromanaged and it felt like being in school and that I was not trusted to do my job. Working from home is good for my physical health – I have chronic fatigue syndrome. Being able to set my own working conditions is massively helpful. I can take breaks and work from the environment I feel most comfortable.

My job now is high quality, however the jobs available to my peers are not – I was very lucky to find this job, because I am very aware that many of my friends find their jobs fairly unfulfilling. Some friends are working in retail and say that lots of jobs out there are low quality.'

03 THE BARRIERS TO GOOD WORK ENCOUNTERED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

The barriers to good work encountered by young people

The theme explored in the research with young people was the type of barriers they encounter when trying to access good quality work. From consultations, the following key challenges emerged.

Place

Young people reported that the places where they lived had a strong impact on their ability to access good quality opportunities. Larger towns and cities were viewed as offering a wider range of opportunities compared to rural areas, where jobs for young people were scarce or lacking completely. However, the high costs of living in larger cities or commuting, particularly for young people at the start of their careers, were reported as a limiting factor.

'It was in London, there are many more opportunities there than in rural Scotland or Wales. Young people will gravitate towards cities, because there's more opportunities but the downside is that it's much more expensive.'

'There aren't enough opportunities if you are in certain sectors. I could have looked at Belfast – which meant either two hours of driving or living there, but it's not worth living there.'

'I have friend who lives so far away and goes to college in middle of town, then got a job that's even further and she can't even afford to pay bus fares. She was just spam applying on indeed. The issue is there weren't enough opportunities and she wasn't able to get a job that could fit around what she needed.'

Deprivation

Young people living in large but deprived urban centres or in deprived rural areas reported that the only opportunities available to them were in traditionally low-quality jobs, such as fast-food chains. These young people also talked about the negative impact on their prospects of low-quality education and limited support from family and networks, as a result of coming from a deprived background.

'Very much background, I am from a deprived area. I had support from family, but lots of friends did not have the extra support and that affected their aspirations.'

'Where you live is the first one, living in a poor rural village, the [fast food chain] is the only option for a lot of people. (...) It is the one real option here, the nearest big town is one hour by bus. It costs money and takes lots of time.'

'I come from a deprived area of Glasgow, lots of people here not able to progress to university or some other professional form of employment because they were trapped as a result of factors outside of their control.'

Access to networks and connections

Almost all young people in the consultation mentioned knowing the right people and having access to the right networks as a key enabler, or barrier when this was lacking. Again many young people linked this to socioeconomic status and deprivation. Young people reported that peers who came from wealthier backgrounds had access to opportunities through their education or family and consequently had quicker and easier routes into employment. Some young people talked about belonging to families who had immigrated to the UK in recent years. They felt that the lack of long-standing connections, support networks, and integration resulting from this put them at a disadvantage compared to their peers when it came to accessing opportunities and understanding and navigating the world of work.

'Who you know is also important, depressingly (...) every job I have had or heard about, it was through someone I knew, even the retail or summer job.'

'If I had been from a more privileged background, where people know more people and have more resources, I'd have knowledge and access to more things.'

'With having little to no money, (...) you get stuck in loop of working and nothing else. This changed for me when it didn't really matter if I had experience, but through friends I got better paid jobs. It's crazy how it can be flipped, not from any academic achievement but from having the right links.'

Previous experience

Young people felt that pre-existing work experience is a key determinant when it comes to accessing good quality opportunities, or any type of opportunity. Many reported feeling discouraged when applying for jobs, as most entry level jobs were perceived to have stringent requirements when it came to previous experience. Some young people reported feeling the pressure of having to gain in-depth work experience while studying which could become stressful or hard to achieve. This pressure had an impact on their health and wellbeing. In other cases, the opportunity to gain good quality work experience was not afforded to young people in the first place. Some young people felt that there had been little support to secure work experience or a lack of work experience opportunities in their chosen sectors.

'An ongoing circle of not getting job because no experience, but can't get experience without a job (...) it's a catch-22.'

'Entry level jobs seem to ask for years of experience (...) there's so much reliance on past experience which not many young people have at my age.'

'We are expected to come out of degree with work experience, but lots of people cannot balance a degree with work experience, and not all courses have placement years.'

Discrimination

Young people reported feeling that employers still discriminate based on health or disability. These young people were aware of legislation aimed at preventing discrimination, such as the Equality Act, but felt that given the lack of scrutiny and enforcement mechanisms, particularly at the recruitment stage, employers could 'get away' with ignoring this. Some young people also raised issues tied specifically to poor understanding and support for mental health in the workplace. This was felt to be a key barrier to accessing good quality opportunities.

'I am autistic, if I'd put it down I feel they'd say 'oh we don't want some weird kid working here'

'The world doesn't understand mental health and doesn't make allowances for it (...) Never heard of things like workplace adjustment, supported employment, etc.'

'Health conditions can be a big barrier, a lot of employers are not supportive of that. They say they don't discriminate, but they do (...) I know of people who found it hard to get jobs because of their health'

Transport

Access to transport and good transport infrastructure was also a barrier discussed by young people in the consultation. Issues ranged from high transport costs within urban areas, such as London, to high costs to travel between urban and rural areas, or poor or limited transport connections between areas. In some cases, young people reported taking jobs that required long travel times, as they could not access any opportunities locally. These long travel times meant that they were unable to fit work around their life, which resulted in stress and had an impact on their health.

'Public transport influences massively, there's this one area where there's one daily bus.'

'Travel is very expensive, especially in London.'

'A person who might live in Manchester but in the suburbs, they would struggle a lot more, they would have to take a train, it would be expensive.'

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Inadequate support

Inadequate access to good quality support within educational settings, such as school or college, was often mentioned by young people as a potential barrier to entering good quality work. Many young people described feeling left to their own means, as advice and guidance was rushed, generic and insufficient. Many explained how the provision offered did not provide them with adequate links to and knowledge of the world of work or further study options. Sometimes young people were not aware of any careers support in their school or college and had never met a careers adviser (in some cases this was due to the limitations of remote learning since the start of the pandemic). This in turn had an impact on how confident and comfortable they felt when reaching out for support.

'Too vague advice from school, can't make decision based on that – because I don't know anyone in that sector, I can't really get the support.'

'You only have so many skills you learned from school, and those skills are not really helpful in work.'

'No one teaches us how to stand out and impress an employer, we're just told try and apply for as many jobs as you can.'

Employer attitudes

Young people also reported feeling discouraged by employer attitudes when it came to accessing good quality work. There was a widespread perception that younger workers were not valued by employers generally. Many young people in the consultation shared a narrative where they felt that given their limited experience of work and lack of specialist skills, it was hard to be viewed as valuable assets by employers. Therefore, they were confronted with increased competition and higher rates of rejection, often with little to no feedback. This experience had notable impact on their confidence which sometimes prevented them from trying to access good or better quality opportunities.

'The mentality that you can easily find another graduate, that's the mentality you're fighting against as a graduate.'

'Large retail companies prefer to hire very young employees simply because they can pay them less money for very taxing labour.'

'Employers take advantage of young people, I have had one job but friends had jobs since 16 and lots of them have been working ridiculous hours for minimum wage.'

What can help address these barriers?

Young people in the consultation also discussed what they felt could be useful ways to address some of the barriers they had mentioned. Among these, they suggested:

- placing more focus on and building stronger links between education and employers, providing more and better exposure to the world of work from an early stage;

- repurposing existing resources within educational settings to focus more on employability skills and work experience; and

- expanding access to the full range of post-16 choices and providing tailored and accessible information on these options to all young people.

'Young people aren't promoted enough [to employers] – we need to get promoted consistently to different employers. The more we get promoted to people the more we'll get opportunities. We need more people pushing for us to be getting these opportunities.'

'There should be more opportunities for people who haven't done well with qualifications, right now if you mess up there's not really many options. What we need is to have more choice, more options. And lower requirements in terms of jobs you can access when under 18.'

'At school, we have one hour of RE and one hour tutorial. In these hours we don't do anything, don't see the point of us doing these things. These two hours could be used for building confidence, communication skills, how to build your CV and other employability skills.'

Zoe – part-time worker, 17 years old, Northern Ireland.

'A good job to me means something you can get skills from, and not just for the field you are in. For example, being a cashier can give me transferable skills to deal with people. A good job should also always try to pay as well as possible, the National Minimum Wage is there as a literal minimum, not for everybody to take advantage and pay that. A job needs to keep you financially afloat. Sure, quality is quite important, being trained and treated properly, as an individual. But other things aren't far behind it – it's all well and good to be treated well, but if you aren't getting enough to keep yourself afloat or what you're learning is restrictive in terms of how you can apply it, then it's not a good quality opportunity.

I have turned 16 in 2020, so I have only been able to work since the pandemic. When I started work, I just wanted to have a job. But then after my first job I realised how much being paid well and being treated well were important to me. In the first job I was working, they'd send me home early and I found out later that instead of giving me a break they just let me finish early. I was there 10 months, and after those months they treated me as if I was new. I was paid £4.55 , the minimum wage for my age. The atmosphere would always make me feel out of place, delivery drivers would often get very angry. I was treated either as young child or grown adult, but never as what I was. I felt they either expected too much of me or too little.

More generally, there's still many barriers to getting into good quality opportunities. I'm a woman – even though it's been getting better in the past 10-20 years, there's still lots of sexism around getting into good work, that or you're being used because you're a woman rather than for your skills. There's still a requirement to specify your gender – if I were nonbinary, I think that despite saying it won't affect the application process it will 100%, because people have opinions and they discriminate based on those. I live in more well-off part of city and I have connections. Connections are the only thing able to help or prevent you from getting a good job – it's the classic case of 'Timmy' would get more support or information because mom and dad knew more people.

Then there's health, I am autistic and I am waiting to be diagnosed. The NHS said they're sure but I am waiting to get proper tests. It's not necessarily something I want to disclose to my employer but feel I need to, because it might be incredibly inconvenient for them. But if I'd put it down they'd probably say "oh we don't want some weird kid working here" . Officially they will say they will not discriminate you, but it will be done subtly.'

04 THE TYPES AND QUALITY OF SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE ACCESS

The types and quality of support young people access

The type and quality of support young people accessed to help them identify and access good quality employment, education and training opportunities was the fourth theme in the research.

Informal networks

Young people generally mentioned careers services as a source of support they were aware of and sometimes accessed. However, the majority of young people mentioned informal networks, such as friends and family, as their main source of support. There was a widespread feeling among young people that family, or peers who had more experience than them, could provide tailored and practical support, as well as networking and connection opportunities. Young people felt this informal support from family and informed peers was more applicable and connected to their needs than support accessed through careers services.

'I don't access [support] at school because they don't have good counsellor. I talk to people who are older than me, friends, to ask for advice. A lot of my friends are at uni and study the courses I want to do so I can go to them for support.'

'Family members can be helpful in making connections especially if they're in a field relevant to you (...) Discussing job searches with friends in similar positions has been helpful in managing expectations, suggestions for places to try applying to.'

'My mom did law degree she's quite involved and she definitely someone who has her head switched on, and I always had someone to look to who could guide me in the right direction (...) without her I wouldn't necessarily know where to get good support.'

Online research

The second source of support most often mentioned by young people was their own online research, using platforms such as jobs and careers portals, YouTube, LinkedIn and Google searches. Young people reported that information accessed online was perceived to be more accurate, useful, and of practical application compared to that received by careers support services.

'Internet student forums usually tend to give a realistic and up to date idea of where to start.'

'No support in college really, I looked at YouTube videos around how to reach out to people on Linkedin. Don't even know if college has a career advice person.'

'Tends to be just looking things up on the internet for me and trying to find any information for actual opportunities – trying to figure out what they're looking for.'

Careers support services

Under-funded and over-stretched

When talking about careers support services, young people across the consultation, including those in school, college, and higher education, shared the feeling that in many cases this was often under-funded and over-stretched. Young people reported that support felt rushed, generic, and sometimes incomplete. Issues included having a limited number of careers advisers for a large number of students, lack of sector-relevant knowledge and expertise, and being provided with little practical support or direction.

'You can have 1:1 consultation, which are 30 minutes long, which isn't that long – especially if you don't have clear idea of what you want to do. (...) Feels quite rushed within the time and not very useful.'

'When I discuss careers areas I like with advisors – they are very general and don't know as much as me (...) Why should I take advice from someone who doesn't work in that industry or graduated 15 years ago – they don't know what the standards are.'

> *'The careers support I got to get into medicine was really poor. (…) We had one person for a lot of students – can't offer everything to everyone.'*

Perceived disconnection

A further issue reported by young people when it came to careers support, which notably contributed to the feeling that it was not a very useful form of support, was a perceived disconnection between students and those providing the support. This ranged from advisers not being easily accessible, either because the service was poorly advertised or because it was only provided remotely, to an expectation for students to be proactive about engaging with careers staff without previous knowledge of the support provided.

> *'I don't know the careers person in my school. She sends emails to us and keeps us updated but we cannot speak to her. Not sure whether she's located in my school, didn't know if could get one to one support remotely.'*

> *'School expects us to get support from pastoral manager – only met them twice or three times, don't really know her, don't feel comfortable accessing support'*

> *'You have to ask rather than them telling you but really difficult when you don't know who to ask. (…) I have depression and anxiety– hard for me to push myself and get anxious when I try. The system is well set up for people who are not mentally ill.'*

Not tailored

Many young people in the consultation also reported that they felt the careers support the accessed to was not tailored to their needs and aspirations. Some felt there was a 'one size fits all' approach to support at one end of the spectrum, and more tailored support for a limited number of options or better performing students at the other end. This contributed to young people feeling let down by a support system they sometimes felt to be unequal and not fully inclusive.

> *'They would ask what I was interested in and would say maths etc. and they would try and push me down medicine and pharmacy and I would make it clear it wasn't what I was interested in.'*

> *'Unless you're in a niche – want to do medicine, go to Oxbridge, etc. – there's not as much support. I want to do biomedical science – the school provided very little support with it (…) I ended up going to bunch of medicine talks – not what I wanted to do , but at least I can get a sliver of info.'*

> *'In my college there's HE+ programme, for people who achieved 7-8 A+ in GCSE, there they get more taken care of and teachers are more involved around their future. Not fair to people who didn't do as well in GCSE, they don't get the same opportunities.'*

Lack of information about further and vocational education

A further element that contributed to young people's poor perception of careers support was the little information shared on the post-16 options available to them, particularly around further and vocational education.

> *'When you go to the majority of support services – they might have just taken the standard route of university, and not have experience of apprentice. They give you the standard option – go to uni, you'll get something out of it.'*

> *'Not enough info guiding young people on how to make a decision for what happens after college, apprenticeships are not advertised enough.'*

Feeling overwhelmed

The combination of these issues led to young people in the consultation often feeling overwhelmed. Many reported feeling left to their own means and not always knowing where to look for reliable information, advice, and opportunities or not knowing how to navigate things like looking for jobs or recruitment processes effectively.

> *'People do tend to just go online and google – it's overwhelming and confusing, you don't have one source you can trust that's going to provide everything to.'*

> *'You need to go out of your way to look up things – it's unique to my generation that we need to go to the internet and question things ourselves but we're not given a starting point.'*

> *'There's just so much information online – brings up so many results, but things not related to me, not my area, or not my age. Just too much and no one specific website for 16-18s to get experience and skills required in workplace of them.'*

What can help improve access to and quality of support?

To address the issues they identified in the support system, young people discussed ways in which access to and quality of support could be improved.

Tailored and inclusive support

Young people said support should be tailored and inclusive to ensure equality of opportunity. For young people, this included targeted schemes to support early school leavers or those who did not achieve high qualifications to enter positive destinations or to continue education. Young people also suggested the provision of tailored and complementary resources, from personalised newsletters, to access to multiple forms of support in school (eg mentors alongside careers advisers).

> *'There should be more of a focus on schemes that are targeted to people who haven't had opportunities to have higher education, or are looking to develop their skills in a certain area and don't know where to start looking.'*

> *'My college has a careers manager and all the emails are tailored to the subjects you do. (...) When they send email careers manager looked into company they vetted them and tell you everything you need to know (...) so it's easy for everyone to know what to do.'*

> *'We have app called 'My world of work', which helps with templates, and at school we have careers advisors as well as a mentor from the Social Mobility Foundation.'*

School-employer engagement

Young people thought that school-employer engagement should be improved and that careers services should build and strengthen links to large, small, and particularly local employers. Young people's suggestions included having regular engagement with employers across the academic year, through talks, workshops, and fairs, as well as increased opportunities for shadowing and work experience.

> *'My high school did a programme where they got different kinds of previous employees come in and interview you, it was adapted to what you wanted to do- you got to experience how it was like to be in job, gave you feedback, etc. which I found really beneficial.'*

> *'My placement is organised by the uni – they do a lot of work with employers and have their own job listing portal.'*

Access to information

Young people wanted access to information to be improved, particularly through online platforms and tools. They suggested youth-friendly job search portals, with accessible information and selected opportunities tailored to young people, as well as youth-friendly modes of communication to share information and guidance, such as social media and chat apps.

'There should be more platforms catered to students and a platform where companies who are generally open to employ students can put up job alerts.'

'Through the mentor we have this WhatsApp group chat, they send all work experiences they can find and looks useful for us.'

'There are lots of useful sources out there, it's just having someone to put you in contact with them. (…) So many useful things out there but not many young people know about it.'

Mentoring schemes

Young people suggested increasing mentoring schemes within educational settings, providing young people with person-centred and one-to-one support beyond the standard support offered by teachers and careers services. Young people felt mentoring could be particularly beneficial to help them understand and develop their aspirations with the support of someone who had already been on a similar path to theirs and could help them improve their confidence.

'Before I had this mentor, I wasn't sure about my career path (…) It gives me so much more confidence in thinking about my future. (…) She told me about apprenticeship degree and explained the route (…) for uni stuff or work experience, I would just ask my mentor – she's always there for me.'

'Mentor schemes give you clear goals, in a small frame of time. Pushes you to do things you would have been scared of doing otherwise. Hearing from someone in a similar position to you but in the future builds your confidence.'

James – first-year A-level student, 16 years old, Wales

'For people my age it's quite difficult to find a job – right now I'm looking for internships and summer placements. Most opportunities are not paid – I do it to expand my network, connect with people, and increase my skills and experience. There are no real opportunities advertised for my sector, it is really competitive. I am finding all of the opportunities myself, school is not supporting me at all. I asked for references etc. but really I do the searching myself using internet and LinkedIn. I reach out to people on LinkedIn in the sector, they are happy to help, they explain the industry and the opportunities I can approach.

School didn't really provide any support, and family don't know that much either – it's all out of my own initiative. It's passion that drives me – I was always passionate about working in this sector, I am keen to take extra courses, learn more. If you have passion for the industry or career you want to do in future you do more research. There are lots of useful resources out there, but you need someone to tell you about them – not many young people know about them because they may not have the contacts.

It's really difficult to reach out to everyone – social media is helpful, but it's about instilling motivation in people from a young age throughout school. My family values education, but not everyone had that growing up. It's important to instil that in everyone so they will be motivated and confident to look for and access opportunities. It's about self-worth and thinking I deserve these opportunities. School has a big impact on everyone's attitude to work.

But there is no support in my college really. I look at YouTube videos around how to reach out to people. I don't even know if college has a careers advice person. Back in comprehensive school there was a Careers Wales advisor – they helped a lot, we used to have one on one meetings, they told us what different jobs needed, etc. We had careers lessons and used to do research on the jobs we wanted to do, wages and qualifications, etc. But in college now we don't get given any of that.

In my college there's this HE+ programme, for people who achieved 7-8 A+ in GCSE, there they get more taken care of and teachers are more involved around their future. It's not fair to people who didn't do as well in GCSE that they don't get the same opportunities. There's more guidance from teachers for those in HE+. We have Welsh Bac lessons, but teachers don't do much to support us further. They just give us tasks, which are not very useful and we're then left to our means. It also feels that teachers are rushing towards it, doing it for the sake of it rather than to help us gain actual learning from it.'

05 YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF WORK

Young people's experiences of work

The fifth theme in this research concerned young people's experiences of work. All young people who participated in the consultation had some form of work experience or had been in employment. From the consultation it emerged that there was notable variation in the quality of young people's experiences.

Elements of work experience that contributed to positive experiences included being provided with a diverse learning experience and being given guided opportunities to actively develop new skills. In these cases, young people shared the perception that the employer had been actively involved and interested in their growth and had provided a structured pathway for development. Negative experiences tended to be those where young people felt the tasks were not reflective of their interests or focused on helping them learn, and where the workplace did not feel professional.

> *'Had five days of work experience in a car garage – in five days you cannot learn anything, it was chosen for me. Co-workers weren't good, neither the facility, it felt unprofessional and I didn't learn anything.'*

> *'[The work experience] was really good quality – I did it at an engineering firm. They provided us with the resources we needed, the help, it was really fun. There were plenty of opportunities to learn skills and get experience. It was related to my subjects, but it went beyond that – we were working in team, so developed team working skills, then we had to present and developed our confidence, and then some of us were team leaders, so developed our leadership skills.'*

We also asked young people to expand on what they felt made their work experience stand out as a good quality opportunity. Across the board, young people expressed feelings of personal and professional growth. This ranged from feeling trusted and being given responsibility which positively impacted their confidence and motivation, to enjoying the social aspects of work where they were given opportunities to bond with co-workers, alongside person-centred and sustained support from their employer.

> *'[My work experiences] I saw them as insight of what my own life could be like in the future. (…) It was good character building, gave a lot of confidence, contacts as well for advice and references at later stages, really learned to work in a team.'*

> *'Working in pound shop and [big retailer] – very different experience. [Big retailer] was professional, I had support networks, training, trips and competitions , going on all the time, and there was social aspect – I really enjoyed working there. In pound shop there wasn't the same support or appreciation for colleagues.'*

> *'Since I started [my apprenticeship] job my assessor from SVQ and my team leader are supporting me regularly, and trainers showing me job from start to finish, and a year on they're still there for me.'*

Where young people expressed less positive experiences, lack of support from the employer was a widely shared issue. This lack of support often made young people feel like they were 'being thrown at the deep end' with little training or awareness of where to go for support. Consequently, this experience had an impact on young people's confidence and health, leading to increased stress and anxiety in some.

> *'I was working 50hr weeks, because I wasn't feeling supported by my bosses and was having to do stuff above my pay grade – it wasn't the job itself that was negatively impactful but the lack of support and amount I felt I had to be doing to make the content happen.'*

> *'Tried to get part time job but it was overwhelming (…) I went there for the first shift, a new guy came along, I wasn't sure what to do. They got me to train this guy into doing the job – when I didn't know what to do myself, and the manager was just sitting there and I was really shocked.'*

> 'Worked in restaurants, takeaways, and pubs – not much of a training, you're thrown at deep end, even if you don't have experience at all. No training provided not much support, left to your own to learn and do your best.'

Further issues included poor working conditions and a perception that employers did not value young people's time and labour. Issues around this included poor remuneration, poor working environments, and generally poor terms and conditions of employment.

> 'We will make £7k on a really busy night, I'll make £50 out of that. My store manager is so nice, but the area manager he's awful, there's no such thing as a break. (…)There's constantly orders so you can't take any break.'

> 'Everyone was telling me it wasn't too bad as a job because the pay was good, but they didn't understand how challenging it was for me. I felt like I was some type of tool, felt like I was used. they should not only give you money, they should give you stability and make you feel comfortable to come into work.'

Young people in the consultation also shared the feeling that their experiences of work had an important impact on their health and wellbeing. In particular, those who had worked in environments they perceived to be stressful and where they received little support reported significant impacts on their mental health.

> 'As a manager it was the most stressful part, there's not much reward but lots of expectations – there were really heavy expectations on you to achieve targets which many times were unachievable. Definitely felt as well that I could never have a break, that was most detrimental to my mental health and that if I was sick there would be bad consequences.'

> 'Now it's very different [compared to my previous job] – I remember being told to go home if unwell, take it easy, or work from home and to different type of work and be more relaxed. Had really positive effect on my attitude towards work and mental health. There's not a day when I wake up and feel like oh I really don't want to go to work anymore. The support makes all the difference.'

Finally, young people in the consultation were asked about their awareness of their rights and responsibilities at work, their confidence in speaking up about issues, and whether this was tied to their experiences of work and issues they encountered in the workplace. The majority of young people expressed little understanding of their rights and responsibilities along with a lack of confidence. They explained that they did not feel comfortable raising issues at work for fear of repercussions. They also expressed little knowledge and confidence when it came to understanding contracts and navigating relationships and power dynamics with employers and managers.

> 'Not many young people aware the actual procedures and places to go to if you feel like you're being taken advantage of.'

> 'I had no idea – had a perception of national minimum wage, but went in completely blind. There is a lot of dodgy things, which I only now know.'

> 'Employers do take advantage because they know we [young people] don't know the regulation, and wouldn't speak up like an adult who has experience and confidence.'
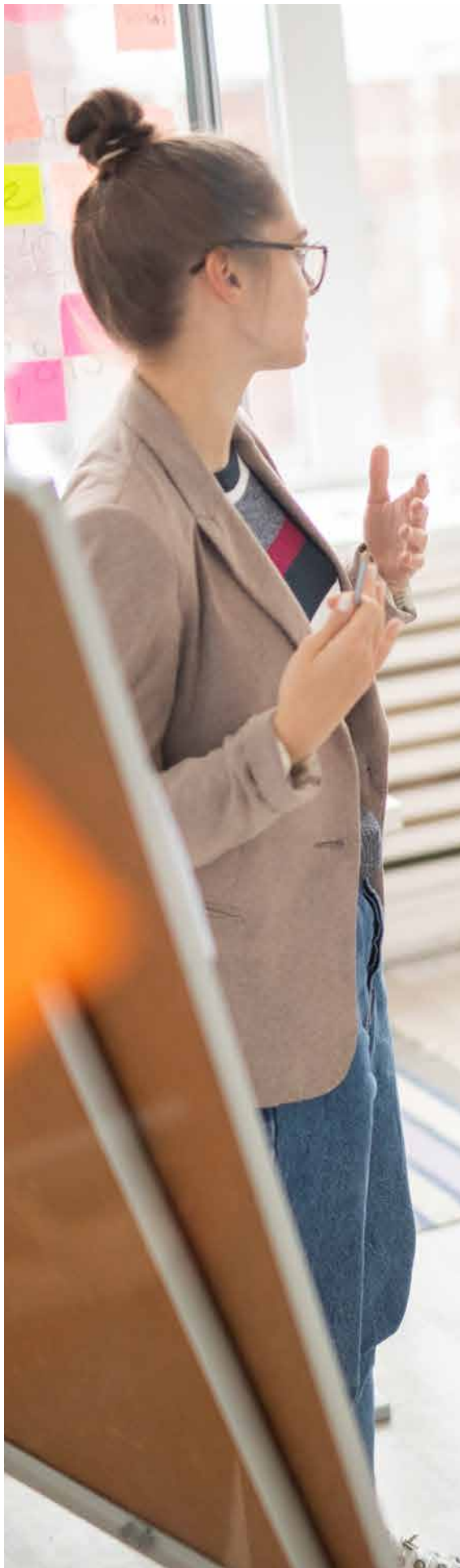
What can improve young people's access to and experience of work? ············

As well as discussing the issues they encountered in their experiences of work, young people also offered ideas for what could improve these experiences:

- Increased flexibility would enable them to fit work around their other commitments and responsibilities, particularly for those balancing work and study.

- Young people wanted to be provided with adequate training when first starting a job, rather than being expected to start with pre-existing experience. They also mentioned their need for training to allow them to feel safe, comfortable and confident in the role.

- They suggested that there should be increased investment by employers towards employees. Particularly in terms of the opportunities for training and progression provided, a supportive workplace culture, and diversity and stimulation in tasks.

- Young people wanted better support in the transition from education to work. They suggested buddy systems, better training for line managers focused on challenges faced by young people during their first transitions into work, and more opportunities for young people to become acquainted with the world of work before they leave education (eg tasters and internships).

- They also suggested youth-friendly resources should be made available to improve young people's awareness of rights and responsibilities at work. This would help them to better understand their position in the workplace and to feel safe w holding employers accountable.

'Let students know that there is work out there providing the right resources and advice – that can sit around their commitment and employers are willing to take in students and adapt times to be flexible around the company and around you.'

'I would like employers to provide more opportunities which involve training, provide that one week training because most employers say 'if you don't have experience we can't hire you'. Instead of that they should provide onboarding training.'

'Young people in general, we are new to the work environment (...) We had meetings every week asking what we wanted to achieve, and having a buddy system which was really useful to guide us, get us comfortable, and get us thinking for our futures.'

'More communication to young people is needed about the regulations for shift length and breaks so that employers don't take advantage of them.'

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Samuel – second-year apprentice, 21 years old, Scotland.

'To me a good quality opportunity is something I can learn from as I work. It's the best of both worlds – you get to experience learning and working. I was studying psychology at university but I wasn't gaining the experience nor could I have access to it because of lack of previous work experience. I decided I needed more customer focused experience, as it would have been impossible for my age to go into care facilities, which is where I wanted to work.

So I got a part time job in a restaurant – part of the job was to speak to many customers. One day I was casually speaking to a customer, telling them I was struggling with my degree – everyone knew something and I didn't know a thing because I had never had work experience. The customer encouraged me to look into council apprenticeships, and I did. Now, I get hands on experience with customers in the sector I want to eventually work in, and this was the kind of experience I was looking for.

I do look at the quality and training provided with the job – for me it's about the training provider, the experiences I gain, and whether it's going to enhance my CV. I am doing my job, I am getting training and a qualification at the end of it as well. I am looking for jobs that give me a booster where you do get something out of it, not just to be sat at a desk. A job that teaches you something in life going forward. At present I feel the job I am in is giving me the best I could have asked for, I get that choice of going on to anywhere afterwards – I am learning about finances, customer care, all types of clientele.

It's a shame apprenticeships aren't talked about more. Initially I approached my school careers service during my Highers but it wasn't of much help, it didn't feel like they gave me a range of options, they only said 'you can only go to university'. They never mentioned an apprenticeship, I had to do the first year of my degree and waste it before discovering apprenticeships. My parents immigrated here so they did not have much information and I live in a good area, but the surrounding area is a very deprived area of Scotland. So my parents didn't know about apprenticeship, but generally if I had been from a more privileged background where people know more people, I'd have knowledge and access to more things.

My experience of work, compared to what I have now with the apprenticeship, has been mixed. I worked in restaurants, fast foods, and pubs – they don't give you much training, you're thrown at deep end, even if you don't have experience at all. Not much support, you're left to your own to learn and do your best. Compared to what I have now, it's a different world – since I started the apprenticeship my assessor from SVQ and my team leader are supporting me regularly, and the trainers show me the job from start to finish and a year on they're still there for me.'

06 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ACCESS TO GOOD WORK

The impact of Covid-19 on access to good work

The sixth theme explored in the research with young people was the impact of Covid on their prospects and aspirations as well as on their experience of work. Young people's views were diverse.

A key concern for young people in the consultation who were still in or about to leave education felt that the pandemic had a 'dampening' effect on their prospects. Young people attributed this dampening effect to disruptions to their learning and school or university life. Many young people had been unable to access practical learning or work experience, or unable to do certain exams as a result of the lockdowns. Young people's concerns ranged from no longer knowing what they wanted their next step to be, to feeling that the missed learning and work experience had harmed their employment.

'Couldn't get work experience, so now do I want to do something completely different? Don't want to end up doing something I hate because of not trying it out.'

'My year will have missed out on a whole set of exams. That's an experience that matters for getting work.'

'With Covid hadn't had opportunity to branch out as much to teachers to explore my options for after – now thinking ok done these two subjects, this is what I'll go on to do.'

A notable proportion of young people in the consultations also explained that the pandemic had an impact on their priorities for work. This was often the case among young people who had already been working before the pandemic, but was also true for some who had not yet started working full-time. In particular, young people emphasised the pandemic helped them realise the increased importance of having work-life balance and of doing work that positively supported their health and wellbeing.

'When I started work, I just wanted to have a job. But then after first job realised how much being paid well and being treated well were important to me.'

'Made me realise something I'd want to prioritise going forward, not put my life on back seat and make my job everything. I would be looking for a much more balanced life.'

'I've learned that I need time (...) Made me realise I work enough and I don't need the money, not worth my health.'

The pandemic also had an impact on young people's career choices, with a number of young people explaining that they had reconsidered the job characteristics they valued following the pandemic. Some became more focused on job security and stability, while others increasingly valued flexibility, and for others still, the space created by the slower pace of life under lockdown supported an increased focus on jobs that have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

'Made me want a more stable and secure career (...) has made me want to take more classes/ courses outside of my degree which would be considered more stable.'

'It has made me consider a change of career to a job that could allow me to work from home.'

'During lockdown tried to see what else there was, gave me more focus on what I want to go into. Helped in terms of what I wanted to go into.'

A large number of young people also reported negative impacts on their mental health and confidence as a result of the uncertainty and instability created by the pandemic. Those transitioning from school to further and higher education, who had less experience, experienced increased anxiety around their immediate prospects. Their anxiety particularly concerned whether the impact of the pandemic on their learning would affect access to future opportunities and anxieties around not being able to secure part-time work to support their income while studying.

'Got more and more difficult to do college work, and grades go down, people are starting to view themselves as lesser and go for worse and worse opportunities.'

'Seeing at start of the pandemic how many people lost their jobs and got laid off. Ask yourself if you have enough savings (…) has made me realise things are a lot less stable than I previously thought.'

'The pandemic has created a fear in job security and the social aspect of working.'

The pandemic also affected young people's choices stay in education or in work. There was a split on how it had affected those who participated in the consultation. Some young people had decided to stay in education following Covid-19, to shelter from unemployment, while others who were considering entering education had decided not to, due to the limitations of remote learning both for the practical and social aspects of education.

'I was really strongly considering doing a PGCE come September, then reconsidered because of the Covid situation – I knew people in that year doing it who found it hard to not have face to face interaction with the kids.'

'Covid forced me to stay in my job – felt like I couldn't leave because I didn't know what was available . (…) Education – can't do the practical work because of Covid, not getting enough out of it for what you're paying.'

'I decided late to do a masters, I felt like if I filled the pandemic with a masters degree and come out the other side ready to apply what I've got, I have a head start.'

Finally, a further interesting finding that emerged from the consultation concerned young people's views on working from home. Again, young people's views on this were mixed. Some young people stated they valued the opportunities that remote working had opened up for them, including accessing jobs which they would have not been able to access due to physical distance and travel time. Others, however, reported experiencing a negative impact. Many young people at the start of their careers resented the lack of in-person networking, socialising, and learning on the job which the lack of physical space and interaction produced.

'Made me think more about whether or not – I want a career where I can work from home but it's harder, made me think of how important it is to be able to go to work in a physical space'

'Made life easier not , because if I had to go to the studio I'd have to travel, then go back home, then cook for myself etc. and there was a lot less time. (…) There's a lot of opportunities to make the most out of this'

'I want to build network and gain exposure into the company and industries. Remote working would prevent that. I am actively looking at positions not being advertised as remote work'

Jenny – second-year A-level student, 18 years old, England.

'My priorities for work have not changed since the pandemic but I definitely feel a greater sense of urgency – now I only have one year left before uni to get some work experience. Especially for those who are leaving home and staying in university accommodation, it's going to be harder to find time for a job. There's a sense of urgency that's grown within me to get as much experience as possible in a really short period of time. There is a nervousness to pick up as much experience as I can before I get to that point in my life.

I am also not sure about how long it will take me to settle in after the pandemic – the longer you haven't done something the longer it will take you to get used to it. You have to keep up with everything, you have to be quick – but multiple lockdowns have taken that away. I need to make sure my CV is up to date and an employer can look at that and say wow you would be fit for job or wow you have good skills range. With Covid there's so much added pressure.

I was really looking to get a job in my first year of A-levels, that's the year where you're a bit more relaxed and have more time. Now I am finding myself questioning whether I will be able to fit jobs around commitments I already have and my wellness and other needs. There's more pressure around organising my time to make up for lost time and making sure I am not doing anything I cannot commit to long term – it's a lot to juggle.

The pandemic has been stressful but so has been coming out of it – it's weird to adapt back into the new world but also try to pick up the rhythm again , throw yourself into an environment you're not really used to, with no transition, particularly for people who haven't worked before. Just after a pandemic it can be a lot mentally. The nervousness behind thinking whether you'll be able to actually do everything and keep up with everything and look after yourself, or is this going to be a lot of weight on my shoulders. Especially for those already having lots on their shoulders and playing catch-up with the past two years of lost experiences.'

07 YOUNG PEOPLE'S ASKS FOR DECISION-MAKERS

Young people's asks for decision-makers

The final theme explored with young people focused on their asks for decision-makers, including government and support services, in terms of improving access to good quality youth employment and training opportunities. Young people shared a wide range of insight and ideas.

Better regulation and monitoring

Young people asked for improved mechanisms to hold employers to account and for regular inspections focusing on employees' working conditions. Issues young people felt should receive more scrutiny included: compliance with health and safety policy, fair pay, and transparent practices on docking pay. They also called for better policy to guarantee minimum hour contracts, as opposed to zero hour contracts, and for a review of National Minimum Wage, to reduce gaps in pay between different age groups (eg between those under 18 and those aged 18-20).

'Get companies to give people a certain amount of shifts and make it consistently available (…) there should be minimum guaranteed hours as opposed to zero-hour contracts.'

'Check working conditions for young people, ask young people how they're being treated – ensure they are not being treated unfairly and mistreated.'

'There should be massive tightening [of controls] on whether young people are actually being paid the right amount.'

Expanded access to government support measures

Many young people across the consultation were aware of national and local employment and employability support schemes, such as Kickstart, and found them to be of great value. However, they felt the reach of these measures, which are mostly only available to young people on benefits, was limited and excluded the majority of those needing support. They called for all young people to be eligible to access support schemes, particularly those under 18, who have high support needs, and are rarely eligible for.

'There are really helpful schemes in place like Kickstart – but it only applies to young people receiving Universal Credit and that limits the group. Young people generally need that help. Also, you can't receive Universal Credit until 18 and you don't receive it if you are a student – so it excludes so many young people in need.'

'A lot of councils have programmes to improve employability – but they don't give the same opportunities to young people who are not on benefits.'

More career fairs and networking opportunities

Young people called for a wider and diverse range of opportunities to meet with employers and training providers, learn about different types of careers as well as further study options. They thought these should be across all education stages from school to university. Young people placed great importance on networking, as they felt it gave them direct access to employers and providers, enabled them to build contacts, and gain practical and tangible insight as to whether an opportunity would be the right fit for them. In particular, young people felt they would benefit from knowing more about the opportunities available in their local areas, and they called for more careers events focused on local businesses and providers.

'Where I live, what the council did for past few years – they would have an event where they would gather all the local providers, like a networking event, for sixth form students. That was really amazing, it helped me learn a lot about what I wanted.'

'If you don't come from a professional background the people you meet from these places [careers fairs] are really important. Local councils, universities, and businesses all need to target a wider range of audiences and have more careers events.'

Accessible online information and job search platforms

Young people want to be able to access all key employment information and opportunities in a single place. Many young people expressed the need for a single, trusted platform where they can find information and carry out job searches, to address the challenges encountered when looking for information online, where the volume and varied quality of information can feel overwhelming They suggested a single portal where they could access careers advice and labour market information (eg youth-friendly employers and employment sectors, skills needs for different industries, sectors with high vacancies) as well as job opportunities tailored to young people specifically (eg jobs with youth-friendly recruitment processes).

> *'Having a website dedicated to employment for young people which has the jobs opportunities, careers advice, and information all there in one accessible place.'*

> *'Government has websites when it comes to public service jobs, but always catering towards a certain demographic. Why not do a similar service but for people leaving education?'*

Improved information, advice, and guidance

Young people want guidance on what they should know and expect when entering the world of work. Young people in the consultation called for improved resources and support on aspects ranging from rights and responsibilities at work, to navigating the opportunities and challenges of part-time work, among other aspects. There was a strong feeling among young people that while general careers advice and guidance is readily available, there is less information around what happens once they start working and how to navigate the different aspects of working life and culture.

> *'There's obviously modules you do in school 'learning for life and work', but nothing currently around taxes or rights and responsibilities at work.'*

> *'No one ever explains to students what part time work is, what you should expect, how much you should do , the type of jobs, and why you should do them.'*

> *'An online help desk that people could go to with questions, or even FAQs (…) Just give advice on what to do if you're having issues at work or how to tell if a job is good quality.'*

Better access to vocational routes

The majority of young people in the consultation stressed the importance of having access to good quality information on all post-16 education options besides university, particularly apprenticeships and traineeships. Many valued vocational routes over higher education, but they felt that they had been provided with partial or insufficient information to make informed decisions. Some young people felt that while higher education subjects were widely explored as part of careers support, not all vocational education options, and not all local training providers, were talked about. As part of their asks, young people called for a reframing of vocational education in more positive terms and better information and support pathways around these routes.

> *'More traineeships – more incentives for companies to hire undertrained people. There's reluctance to hire people who don't know already how to do the job. Not good for young people but also not good for people trying to progress in different roles and different industries.'*

> *'It's good that there are so many schools that give a pathway to uni – it would be really good to show other viable options. They tell you about it but discourse is if you're not good enough for uni here's what there is – when actually apprenticeship or work after school might be even more valuable or useful to some young people. But not talked about that way.'*

Increased investment in work experience

Young people, particularly those in the 16-18 year old age group, expressed a need to better understand the routes to their preferred careers from an early stage, and to build up experience in the world of work. They reported that this experience was needed both to feel prepared to take the correct next steps in education and training. They also needed to be able to show they had previous experience when looking for opportunities in the future. Young people unanimously called for more and better resources to support them in accessing good quality work experience from as early as possible. Their suggestions ranged from government-funded programmes to increase employer participation in work experience schemes, to smaller measures such as shadowing and taster experiences organised by schools with local employers.

'We need more programmes for under 20s , so those who haven't worked have guaranteed possibility to gain experience (...) Support schools to provide more work experiences.'

'More support in school – give more work experience from a younger age (...) More opportunities to shadow people in their work (...) and programmes designed to get young people with little to no experience into a career.'

'Having "pathways" to certain fields, so if a student knew they wanted to become a teacher then having a relevant work experience programme that a student could embark on would be so good in making the most of their time and getting them to that career goal.'

Better support to employers

Young people advocated for funding to support youth-friendly practices and jobs. They called for greater and improved collaboration between government and businesses to develop the adequate support and infrastructure, for both employers and young people, to enable the creation of and access to good quality youth employment. Some suggested policy makers should introduce training incentives to encourage employers to recruit young people with little experience. Others suggested policy makers should introduce incentivised quota systems whereby employers are required to recruit a certain number of young people with certain characteristics (eg age, gender, ethnicity, disability) each year.

'More support to employers that enables them to create more roles for young people specifically. A stronger collaboration between industry and government. (...) More focus on supporting employers to provide permanent work for young people, rewarding them for training young people.'

'There should be a scheme where places that have lots of job opportunities should liaise with education and make a scheme where they have to employ a certain amount of young people every year. If different businesses (eg hospitals, restaurants, etc.) worked directly with education there would be so many more opportunities coming through.'

Wider policy action

Finally, young people also called for wider policy action. They identified areas for improvement which are not directly related to youth employment, but would have an indirect and complementary impact upon it. These areas were linked to the barriers to good work young people talked about in the consultation. Young people called for both local area regeneration, to encourage businesses and young people to stay in or move to certain areas and create local opportunities, as well as for improved transport infrastructure, to allow young people to access opportunities outside their local areas.

'The jobs available to me are in places that are not good, not attractive, need to regenerate so those places are attractive to create businesses and work in.'

'Some more support across the board is needed (...) More focus needed on travel and access to affordable public transport and better transport networks.'

Nate – third-year university student, 20 years old, Scotland.

'Most times I just look for information by myself, going on to the university careers service website. But sometimes I can't find the information I need there so I google it or speak to people in my family , or people I've done volunteering for before.

However, the number of different places to look for careers info is quite overwhelming. From a generic google search, it probably is harder to find the right information, because it will just come up with everything it finds on CVs or interviews. Stuff like this discourages young people, it puts us off.

Having a website dedicated to employment for young people which has the opportunities listed there and careers advice and information all in one place would be so great. If it was all in one place and easy to access all young people would use it. It should include things from how to do a CV , job application, or general interview questions to advertising job postings for sectors that need more young people or have shortages of workers.

In this way young people who are undecided about which career to go into, could look at this list of sectors and jobs. If this website also listed work experience opportunities in those areas, then people who didn't know what career they wanted could do work experience and if they realised they enjoyed that job then that would help them find a career path they enjoyed.

In this way it would be serving two purposes of both filling vacant jobs without enough applicants and allowing people to explore ways of getting into work they enjoy.'