

The Good Youth Employment Benchmark

Creating an evidence base of good youth employment practice

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Institute for Employment Studies

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1 Introduction

Youth Employment UK is a not for profit enterprise aimed at tackling youth unemployment. At the time of this research, Youth Employment UK has two main resources with which it engages with employers – the Good Youth Employment Charter and the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework. The Good Youth Employment Charter allows employers to sign up to commit to working towards five principles of good youth employment; creating opportunity; recognising talent; fair employment; developing people; and youth voice. Within the Charter, employers are given guidelines, examples and support. The Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework is available to employers that have already signed up to the Charter. This is a manual checklist for employers to provide evidence of their work in three areas of activity – Explore, Experience and Employment.

Youth Employment UK has been working to develop the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework further and create a Good Youth Employment Benchmark. This will progress the Framework into a digitally accessible tool. The online assessment tool will allow employers to review and benchmark their youth employment practice for early careers (school engagement), work experience and employment. In the long term, the Benchmark will collect data and enable comparisons for employers by sector, region, type of opportunity they offer (work experience, apprenticeship etc.), and size of organisation. Bespoke reports will be created for employers highlighting where additional support can help them improve their practices. As Youth Employment UK develop the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework into the Good Youth Employment Benchmark, it is timely to review the strength of the evidence base for the Framework.

A 2017 review into the efficacy of the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework by Dr Anna Carlile at Goldsmiths, University of London, found that the Framework supported employers to develop their organisational policies over time and the review mechanism could help to

‘ensure that the youth-friendly employment initiative stays current and relevant to the changing needs of the organisation’. (p3)

Youth Employment UK was commended for the involvement of young people directly in the development of the Framework. The importance of a youth voice strategy is imparted to employers through the Framework:

‘the Framework supports employers to establish the importance of the skills young people can develop when they are given the opportunity to develop and express their own well-considered views.’ (p3-4)

The evaluation showed the strengths of the Framework in being able to influence employer practice and praised the Framework for directing employers towards ‘important considerations’ in the employment of young people.

1.1 An updated evaluation

Youth Employment UK received development funding from the Youth Futures Foundation, the What Works centre for youth employment. This funding came from the Youth Futures Foundation Infrastructure Resilience Fund to support the development of the Benchmarking project. In 2022, Youth Employment UK commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies to evaluate the Framework and support the development of the Benchmark by answering two key research questions:

1. What existing frameworks and toolkits are aimed at employers?
 - a. How are they utilised by employers?
 - b. What is the research evidence about utilisation (take-up), traction, and effectiveness?
2. What is the evidence base on employer practice supporting youth employment?
 - a. Reviewing the current Framework - what is missing from the current Framework in regard to youth-friendly employer practices?
 - b. Can the Benchmark be used to capture evidence of where there are gaps?

An internet search on HR toolkits and frameworks results in a huge number of hits of toolkits offering advice to HR professionals and organisations on general HR practices, particularly pay and wellbeing. Some concerned good work and what makes a good employer, others focused on one aspect of employment (mental health or recruiting older workers for example) but these tended to be either written by recruiters or careers organisations. Some were based on research evidence such as impact evaluations, quantitative analysis and qualitative findings, but others were not explicit about how they have been created.

There was also a gap in the evidence about how these toolkits and frameworks are actually put into practice, used by employers, and make a difference to youth employment. For this review, a set of Boolean search terms were agreed, to search general business literature, academic literature and research evidence (search terms are in Appendix 2) for evidence on existing frameworks and toolkits. Alongside this, employers were consulted on their views on existing frameworks and the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework more specifically.

A group of employers already engaged with Youth Employment UK, and therefore familiar with the Framework, was invited to take part in a focus group to discuss their approaches to youth employment and use of the Framework. To supplement this, ten employers who were not already part of the Youth Employment UK network (non-engaged) were interviewed to understand their approaches to youth employment and any use of frameworks or toolkits that support youth outreach work, recruitment and progression in their organisations. The interviews took place in the winter of 2022. More information on

the recruitment of these employers and their composition is included in Appendix 3. These interviews aimed to provide more information for Youth Employment UK on employers who are not aware of their support services and could therefore provide an insight into how Youth Employment UK may move forward to engage with more employers through the Good Youth Employment Benchmark.

Finally, further desk research was conducted to give an indicator of the depth of evidence of the features of the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework, to compare and contrast the themes on the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework with another tool aimed at highlighting good youth employment practices – the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) Evidence and Gap Map, and to highlight where the Benchmark can add to the evidence base.

2 Existing frameworks and toolkits aimed at employers

The desk review found frameworks and toolkits aimed at employers which covered a range of topics relating to employment, from how to develop and implement health and wellbeing toolkits (Chandler et al, 2019), employing apprentices¹, and how to embed organisational cultural changes (Social Mobility Group & the Bridge Group, 2010). The review also found a number of examples of toolkits developed locally to support good employment within that area. There were fewer that specifically targeted young people and their employers beyond the Youth Employment UK Framework.

There were an array of other pledges and accreditations that were outside the scope of this review as they did not speak to the whole range of good youth employment practices that needed to be reviewed. These other pledges and accreditations include examples such as Living Wage Employer Accreditation, Disability Confident, Investors in People Standards, and the Social Enterprise Mark, plus professional bodies and membership organisations that offer guidance to members such as the Institute for Student Employers and ACAS.

Duvvury et al (2020) focussed on employment policy toolkits – aimed at policymakers which could promote good practice, collect social indicators, evaluate programmes or provide forecasts and projections. For them, toolkits could include various tools including dashboards of data, sets of reports and resources that can help to establish the evidence for a policy goal, give solutions to a policy problem, give context for different settings or assess the impact of a programme, measure or policy.

This chapter goes on to discuss the two main categories of frameworks and charters aimed at employers: those focused on a specific geography and developed locally, and those targeting one specific theme of employment and supporting employers to understand the topic and how best to embrace it. Overall, the review finds that very few toolkits are based on robust research and most also lack systematic means of collecting data.

2.1 Local charters

There were many examples of Local and Combined Authorities and councils developing their own frameworks or charters for employers in their local area to use. The toolkits

¹ <https://www.the-lep.com/media/2600/employers-apprenticeship-toolkit.pdf>

covered themes including flexible working, implementing the Living Wage, and developing internships for young people.

The **Local Government Association (LGA) good work project** (Allen et al, 2022) showed that good work charters can establish a benchmark that employers are encouraged to strive towards. Charters, sometimes known as a pledge, standard or kitemark, often provide a set of best practices that can deliver benefits to employers, their employees and their communities. Typically, stakeholders will establish a range of criteria for defining 'good work' with support from local businesses, trade unions and community groups. The research for the LGA found that often charters have different levels that employers can declare that they are achieving against – some requiring local government assessment, others accepting employers' own declarations. Sustainability and promotion are keys to the success of such charters – through raising awareness of the employer among their customer base and increasing staff satisfaction.

The LGA good work project (Local Government Association, 2022) has a guide that aims to provide key tips for employers (and local government) to support good work. These tips refer to:

- Developing a business case for adopting good work approaches.
- Being attentive to changes that can be made that impact a business's community and locality.
- Working in partnership.
- Supporting the supply chain to adopt good work practices.

However, the guide does not specifically target young people or other specific employee characteristics. Case study examples highlight how employers go to specialist organisations to support them with youth employment and talent development– such as the Elevate programme² that helps link young people with employers for placements and jobs, and Young Creators³ which facilitates commissioned work for young adults.

The **Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter**⁴ (Crozier, 2022) provides employers with assistance and guidance to help them progress through the 'seven tiers of good employment', covering topics such as fair recruitment and selection practices, good career development opportunities and fair pay. The Greater Manchester Charter has two tiers of commitment – Supporters (making a commitment) and Members (with a rigorous assessment). At the time of reporting, there were around 400 Supporters and 50 Members, covering almost 300,000 workers. From 2023, all new Greater Manchester public service contracts will stipulate that the contractor must support the Charter, offer the Real Living Wage and make a commitment towards achieving net zero. The recruitment strand of the charter highlights the positive gains for diverse and gender-

² <https://elevatelambeth.london/>

³ <https://www.instagram.com/youngcreatorsuk/>

⁴ <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/>

balanced organisations and while there is a strand on employee voice, the charter does not explicitly target young people.

Research on employment charters in the Greater Manchester area also focused on design and implementation. Hughes and colleagues (2017) found that

'there is limited evidence that charters themselves have had a significant impact in terms of changing employer practices. In part this is because monitoring and reporting mechanisms have not generally been designed into such initiatives making it difficult to estimate the additional impact that a charter has had.' (p6)

The researchers suggest that monitoring employer take up could be one way of measuring impact. They also point to the importance of continuing momentum past the initial launch event activities.

The **North of Tyne Combined Authority Good Work Pledge**⁵ is a free scheme which employers can sign up to, that aims to make good work a priority in the North of Tyne. It again focusses on pillars of practices: health and wellbeing, developing a balanced workforce, valuing and rewarding your workforce, effective communications and representation, and demonstrating a social responsibility. Employers signing up to the pledge have to demonstrate that they meet at least two of these pillars and then are awarded Standard or Advanced awards. As with the other charters, there is little explicit focus on young people.

The **North East England Good Work Toolkit**⁶ focuses on work-life balance, pay and progression, wellbeing and lifelong learning, with an aim to support businesses to see the benefits of good work. The toolkit includes references to research evidence, case studies, and links to further resources.

The **Greater London Authority** is developing three toolkits which will support adult education providers to meet the Mayor's Good Work Standards, have an inclusive and representative workforce and support net-zero goals.

The **London Good Work Standard**⁷ is an accreditation scheme that has been developed with employers, trade unions and professional bodies. It is promoted as a way of attracting new staff, reducing absences, increasing productivity and a reputational tool. It can be used by employers as a way to demonstrate social value in public sector procurement.

Hurrell's review of local employment charters (Hurrell et al, 2017) included Croydon Council, Oldham Council and Salford Council. These charters included features seen in the above examples – living wage, focus on supply chains, support for local people and access to networks for employers that sign up to the charters. Their research provides additional case studies to show how such initiatives were designed and implemented. No

⁵ <https://www.northoftyne-ca.gov.uk/projects/good-work-pledge/>

⁶ <https://www.neechamber.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Good-Work-Toolkit.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/business-and-economy/supporting-business/good-work-standard-gws>

robust research evidence was presented showing the impact or effect of such charters in the longer term.

Overall, the lack of specific focus on young people in locally developed charters does suggest that the Good Youth Employment Charter is addressing a gap that would otherwise exist.

2.2 Thematic frameworks and guides

As well as charters that stem from Local and Combined Authorities, the desk research also found a number of charters and toolkits that focussed on particular aspects of 'good work' or of different staff characteristics and these are highlighted below.

2.2.1 Good work

Following the Taylor Review⁸ of Modern Working Practices, there was significant momentum around the notion of 'good work'. The review drove forward an understanding that the UK labour market needs to adapt to technological advancement and new ways of working whilst looking after the wellbeing of employees and ensuring that work is fair and decent.

As seen in the local charters in the previous section, the notion of good work has been adopted within many charters and includes health and wellbeing, reward/pay and progression, effective communication and a balanced workforce. The CIPD Good Work Index⁹ looks across seven dimensions and surveys workers each year to report on different sectors and occupations in order to drive forward progression in job quality.

The Progression in Employment toolkit produced by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) (2020) aims to provide a practical framework for employers to support the career progression of workers on low incomes and minimise the adverse impact of automation and structural change, based on research evidence. The work to produce the toolkit involved cross country analysis of the EU Statistics on Incomes and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), a desk-based review of employer practice, a literature review exploring behavioural insights approaches in organisational policies and practice, and in-depth case studies. The resulting toolkit includes a 'progression readiness' model comprised of eight dimensions: HR philosophy, pay and financial wellbeing, fair contracts and predictable hours, pathways to progression, opportunities to develop, designing jobs for meaning and purpose, supportive line management, and flexibility as default. Employers can use the toolkit to self-assess their current practice and can access resources to support their efforts in developing an approach to progressing low-skilled workers.

Research into employer forums (Demougin et al 2017) such as BITC and Mindful Employers found that members of such forums share knowledge through research

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-work-the-taylor-review-of-modern-working-practices>

⁹ <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/trends/goodwork#gref>

publications, case studies, toolkits, guides and charters. Toolkits and guides available within the forums helped members create new internal policies or adapt practices by offering policy templates. Charters can also be used as codes of conduct.

The policy toolkits found by Duvvury et al (2021) focussed on employment and ageing. They found a similar weakness as this desk review in that many toolkits were based on 'good practice' that is often anecdotal and lack systematic means of data collection to see change over time and keep up with what actually is 'best practice'.

'What practice is en vogue and counts as the 'best' is partly subject to dynamics of herd mentality and groupthink. Not unlike the fashion cycle, perceptions of boom or bust can also change quickly as fresh empirical evidence becomes available.' (p73)

2.2.2 Social mobility

The employer toolkit from the Social Mobility Group and the Bridge Group (2020) was created to increase socio-economic diversity in selected sectors (financial & professional services, creative industries & retail). The toolkit focuses on data collection to understand the current context, leadership and culture to ensure a shared vision for change, reaching as many employers as possible, creating change through recruitment and progression and the importance of networks and advocacy to drive sector-wide change.

The Social Mobility Commission's Building Blocks toolkit (2022) recommends interventions that employers can adopt to improve social mobility – data, culture and leadership, recruitment and outreach, and progression. These echo the features of the Youth Friendly Employment Framework.

2.2.3 Health and wellbeing

Examples found under this theme include the Fawcett Society's sexual harassment toolkit for employers¹⁰ which is supported by a training programme, and also the health and wellbeing good practice guide for the Rail Safety and Standards Board¹¹.

A web-based toolkit for managers who are supporting staff with a possible return to work following cancer, the MiLES¹² intervention (Greidanus et al, 2021), provided interactive videos, links to external sources of information, and practical tools including conversation checklists and tips. This toolkit is discussed more in the next section of this report on how employers use toolkits (section 3.1.2).

¹⁰ <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/tackling-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace>

¹¹ <https://www.rssb.co.uk/what-we-do/key-industry-topics/health-and-wellbeing/healthy-cultures/shaping-the-rail-environment-to-encourage-healthy-behaviours>

¹² MiLES: The Missing Link: optimizing the return to work of Employees diagnosed with cancer, by Supporting employers

2.2.4 Gender equality

The Behavioural Insights Team (2021) produced a guide as part of a wider toolkit on evidence-based actions to improve gender equality at work. Four themes are categorised based on the evidence supporting their effectiveness: leadership and accountability, hiring and selection, talent management, learning and development, and workplace flexibility. Employers are provided with a 10-question list that helps them to understand where gender imbalance is occurring in their organisation. Based on this they can then identify which of the actions presented in the toolkit to focus on. Step-by-step guides on how to implement the different actions are also included.

The LGA created a Twenty-first Century Toolkit¹³ which is specifically targeted at supporting women, parents and carers to stand as local councillors. The toolkit is targeted at councils and supports them to undertake self-assessment, action plan, and then monitor their progress towards supporting women councillors. It includes background research to provide the context for making changes; reference to legislation and theory-based principles to support change; and advice and key questions that councils should consider. Only one page of the toolkit is about monitoring and reviewing progress, and while it is suggested that councils can submit their plans to the LGA, there is no requirement to do so.

2.2.5 Youth employment

The CIPD Learning to work programme¹⁴ aims to promote the role of employers in reducing youth unemployment. Similar to the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework they identify different stages to youth employment – each underpinned by a business case. Theirs are:

- Engage: developing links with local schools, colleges and universities;
- Prepare: encouraging employers to use their expertise to help prepare young people for the world of work and the recruitment process – developing employability skills;
- Experience: work experience and volunteering;
- Recruit: access routes for young people and implement youth friendly recruitment practices – through traineeships, apprenticeships, internships, school leaver programmes or graduate schemes. Thinking about how roles are advertised, providing feedback to applicants;
- Invest: importance of the role of line manager, induction processes, regular feedback;
- Measure: get a sense of return on investment – think about what metrics are needed.

The business case is summarised as

- 'building your talent pipeline

¹³ https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11.152_Equalities_toolkit_v06.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/youth/learning-work>

- young people's unique skills, attitudes and motivation
- workforce diversity, providing different perspectives, skills and values, boosted reputation as an employer of choice
- investing in young people to grow your own workforce is more cost-effective than trying to buy in skills and talent later' (webpage)

As with examples found in the literature, the CIPD have an award for Best Youth Initiative in their annual People Management Awards.

2.3 Employer awareness of charters and frameworks

While the desk research above identified a range of charters and toolkits, the interviews conducted with employers suggests that awareness of these is low. With the exception of one employer, who was aware of the Greater Manchester Good Work Charter, 'non-engaged' employers in the interviews were not aware of any local or national charters, frameworks or toolkits around employment and good employment. There was a view, across interviewed employers, that these resources were not disseminated and marketed sufficiently, and that while they had a willingness to engage with such resources more, they found it challenging to look for them proactively. While employers in the focus group knew that they were working with Youth Employment UK and making use of the Framework and Charter, they were not always aware of whether their organisations were engaging with any other framework, charter or toolkit, outside of the Youth Employment UK Charter and Framework.

These findings suggest that in the short term there may be a gap that needs to be bridged, by business support and intermediary organisations such as Youth Employment UK – to further support employers to develop awareness and understanding of the resources described in this chapter, to identify which may be relevant and useful for them, and to then use them to improve their recruitment, retention and workforce development practices. In the longer term however, there would also likely be significant value in rationalising (and synthesising) these different resources.

3 Utilisation of frameworks by employers

This chapter presents evidence from the literature and the employer interviews on how frameworks and charters are used by employers and what barriers there are for employers in engaging with such resources. Then, the importance of understanding how employers might interact with such tools and change their behaviour is discussed. Finally, potential impacts from employer use of frameworks are presented, based on the research evidence from employers and the literature.

3.1 How frameworks and charters are used

The desk review showed that employers use the frameworks and toolkits to

- develop organisation policies,
- support staff,
- signal commitments, and
- collaborate with others.

There was very little evidence of frameworks and charters being used specifically to improve productivity.

This section now discusses each of these in turn. Much of the evidence related to the toolkits is in the form of case studies – which provide compelling insights into how toolkits have been applied, but there is little independent research about their implementation.

3.1.1 Developing organisation policies

The review found evidence of toolkits being used by employers at local, regional and national levels to develop or improve policies. For example, Croydon, Oldham, and Salford Councils were all given as examples of councils that had used frameworks and toolkits to establish policies including pay grades for employees and to develop advice and support services for their staff (Hurrell et al, 2017).

Others have used toolkits and frameworks to ‘sense check’ or to review their existing policies, to raise awareness of any issues and to make improvements and changes that will have a positive impact on employee experiences.

Chandler and colleagues (2019) found that the health and wellbeing toolkits that they reviewed could drive changes in attitudes and improve policy and practice within the organisations. Organisations saw them as ‘repositories of information and best practice’ (p10) and attractive in terms of design and appearance. They were used in awareness-

raising campaigns, to change attitudes and to make changes in practice. They were also used to inform employer policy.

Some of the employers in the interviews that were not currently engaged with Youth Employment UK or using other frameworks or charters expressed a need for support in progressing their equality, diversity and inclusion policies so that they had a workforce that better reflected the population and could bring forward new ideas. In different sectors, employers recognised the short fall in the diversity of their employees and wanted support to tackle this – in a law firm this was about diversity in economic background, in an electrical contractor this was about ethnic and gender diversity.

3.1.2 Supporting staff

Toolkits and frameworks are also used to help employees more directly. Public Health England and Business in the Community have both created tools to help employees with health issues to access, retain, and/or return to employment. They are also used to identify any barriers that may have possibly prevented the individual from staying in continued employment (Chandler et al, 2019). Chandler et al (2019) also found that the tools could be used to support action which enables people with health conditions to access, retain or return to employment. They can do this through raising awareness of particular issues, and the benefits of addressing health and wellbeing.

An online toolkit aimed at managers who are supporting staff to return to work following cancer was trialled in the Netherlands. The MiLES intervention toolkit (Greidanus et al, 2021) was used by participating managers just before they were due to have conversations with their employees who were returning to work following cancer. Employers in the study reported that they used the tips, watched animations and used conversation checklists to help them prepare for meetings with their cancer-surviving staff. In the study, employers described how the ease of access helped facilitate their use of the toolkit. Some were intrinsically motivated to support staff and therefore made use of the toolkit, others were extrinsically motivated – they were guided to the toolkit by health professionals or their HR managers.

For several of the employers that were interviewed for this research, supporting young people to get their first jobs and give them work experience and employability skills was a key reason for recruiting young people. As well as some altruistic drivers for the interviewees who believed that it was the right thing to do, they were also mindful that to stave off recruitment and retention issues they wanted to recruit young people to develop in-house so that they would stay employed by them for longer. Employers that raised the increased need for mental health support in the workplace specially mentioned the long-term negative effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of young people.

3.1.3 Internal signals and external reputation

Several studies show how employers sign up to charters and for toolkits to boost their reputation as a good employers (Crozier, 2022, and Simms, 2017). Employers that signed up to the North of Tyne Good Work Pledge reported that they did so to signal to

employees and customers how they are working to support their staff and to ensure they have good quality policies.

Case studies for the LGA Good Work Project (Allen et al, 2022) show the importance of signing up to pledges such as the Living Wage, the importance of social value in procurement or public sector employers. One SME employer discussing the good work charter reported that

'[the] important thing about a charter is that it is a clear indicator, for a business, of what good employment looks like. The key thing that local government can do is recognise and promote those businesses who are doing the right thing. What we crave is profile and recognition.' (p13)

Crozier's evaluation of the Manchester Good Employment charter (2022) demonstrated the importance of employee engagement and that all employees need to have a good awareness of their organisations' involvement with the charter

'so that employees at all levels are aware of its vision, mission and their organisation's commitment.' (p43)

3.1.4 Collaboration

The potential for collaboration with other employers in a network or who are also signed up to a charter or pledge was important in many of the studies found.

Allen and colleagues' (2022) case studies of employers in the LGA Good Work Project showed that many of the employers liked the charter for the networking opportunities for the businesses who sign up, as well as cascading information to partners and in supply chains. Others would like to see more opportunities to learn from other employers in similar situations to them:

'It would be great to have a learning network with other organisations to draw on – the good and the bad, and how they are overcoming challenges.' (p16)

For employers in the interviews, there were two main ways of collaborating that they were interested in – with other employers and being able to compare, contrast and learn from the good practices of other employers; and collaborating with support organisations or providers who could provide tailored support and advice.

3.1.5 The Youth Friendly Employer Charter

Finally, employers engaged in the qualitative research were asked about their awareness and use of the Youth Friendly Employer Charter specifically. This highlighted a range of findings. While employers who participated in the focus group had knowledge, contact and involvement with Youth Employment UK and therefore had awareness and had engaged with the Youth Friendly Employer Charter or Framework, the vast majority of the employers in the in-depth interviews had never heard of Youth Employment UK and were not aware of either the Charter or the Framework. Employers in interviews expressed both an interest and a need for more information, guidance and resources yet were not

aware of who could support them to get those. This suggests that among the wider employer population there is still low awareness of intermediary organisations, such as Youth Employment UK, the role they play in promoting good youth employment and how these resources can be used to improve recruitment and retention strategies within organisations.

Among employers who took part in the focus group, the majority had used the Charter or Framework. However, none were able to identify specifically whether they had used the Charter or the Framework, as they did not know the difference between the two. Employers had used resources from and had worked closely with Youth Employment UK, specifically to develop their early careers strategies, their wider strategies for the recruitment of young people, and their strategies for the professional development of younger employees. All employers saw great value in the Framework and Charter and commended its accessibility and highly practical insights, and there was consensus that their adoption had notably changed their organisational culture towards more inclusive, and youth-friendly practices.

3.1.6 Summary

Overall, it is clear that employers do use frameworks and toolkits for a variety of reasons. The literature suggests among the employers using the charters there are benefits, but the evidence is thin and does not explicitly say what has improved within youth employment.

In the primary research with employers, those who had used the Youth Employment UK Charter and Framework spoke positively, there was generally low awareness amongst other employers.

3.2 The impact of toolkits on good work

Primary research with employers for this project highlighted that the employers in the sample were generally not aware of toolkits, frameworks or other types of resources, and very rarely knew about youth-specific resources, with the exception of employers in the focus group who had direct involvement with Youth Employment UK. However, even among employers who had had involvement with Youth Employment UK, there was little awareness of wider resources, particularly around good work, outside the Charter and Framework. The resources they were aware of were primarily viewed as useful to inform recruitment and development strategies rather than being viewed specifically as good work guidance.

The employers that had used the Charter and Framework reported that it was accessible and practical to use. A small number of employers in the focus group gave examples of buddying and mentoring systems, career progression strategies, and providing platforms for voice and representation. Two employers described how they started from scratch looking at the principles for good youth employment and how they could implement that strategically through their processes and procedures. These employers had adopted the

principles of the Charter which had a positive impact in moving their organisational culture towards more inclusive, and youth-friendly practices.

Other research with employers echoes these findings. Employers reported improvements in the practices that were in the charters they had signed up to (Crozier, 2022). Employers and employees were able to make changes to their practice based on the toolkits and used them as a means of 'sense checking' or reviewing existing policy (Chandler et al, 2019).

Earlier, this report highlighted how employers aimed to use charters and toolkits as an external signal regarding their status as a good employer, awards and publicity enabled this to happen for those that score well. A cyclical process of self-assessment, evaluation and revision of their employer standards also supports those that scored less well on the benchmarking measures, so they can also have an impact on business practices. Feedback was an important feature so that practices could be improved over time (Demougin et al, 2017).

In addition to this, IES research for the LGA good work project (Allen et al, 2022), reiterated that

'[a] workforce that reflects diversity both of customers, and of the community in which the business works, is also considered to increase creativity and enable businesses to design products and services for a broader base, leading to better measures on investment and shareholder return'.(p6)

The evaluation of the MiLES toolkit for cancer survivors (Greidanus et al, 2021) found that the most useful parts of the toolkit were textual tips, conversation checklists and communication videos. Almost all (94 per cent) of participating managers indicated that the toolkit at least 'somewhat increased' (p400) their ability to support their staff, and 66 per cent indicated that the intervention at least 'somewhat increased' their motivation to support cancer survivors. These researchers found in their review of other studies of employer interventions that toolkits can have positive short-term outcomes on improved knowledge and behaviour, but effects over time were not measured or disappeared (Greden, 2017, Milligan-Saville et al, 2017, Gayed et al, 2018, and Pransky et al, 2001 in Greidanus et al, 2021).

Monitoring and reporting mechanisms are not built in or designed into the frameworks or toolkits. This makes it difficult for employers to then measure, or at least estimate, the impact that their use has (Hughes et al, 2017). However, there may be the smaller or less tangible positive impacts of initiating conversations and discussions within organisations about improving employee experiences and employer policies and practices outside of the use of frameworks or toolkits, but this is equally difficult to measure.

3.3 Barriers to utilisation

Qualitative research with employers to test whether employers would engage with toolkits (Otaluna et al, 2021) found that some employers would need support in accessing repositories of research evidence. They considered that capacity, capability & motivation were more influential than size of organisation in determining whether an employer will

use a framework. Interviewees in that study reported that employers were reluctant to take risks in new practices and wanted to hear what others had done first, they needed real motivation to change in order to commit resources and needed time to interpret the evidence for adopting new practices. Other research from YFF (2022a) found that a toolkit like an evidence repository needs to be accessible and usable by non-experts (employers) as well as people who are experienced at interrogating such evidence (academics and researchers).

Another barrier found in the research was ease or lack of ease of access due to IT systems. The evaluation of the MiLES toolkit (Greidanus, et al, 2021) found that while a web-based tool enabled managers to access the materials from a location anywhere convenient for them, it also sometimes proved to be a barrier, where their company IT systems (like firewalls) did not allow access.

As highlighted earlier, primary research with employers for this project found that outside of organisations which are already aware and proactively engaging with business support and intermediary organisations, there was not much awareness of these resources. Reasons for this varied, larger organisations with formal systems and policies in place such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and large HR departments were more likely to have engaged with or been aware of such resources. Youth-rich industries (retail, hospitality, leisure and creative) as well as those where graduate programmes were more established also had more knowledge and experience.

Employers in the research who were not engaged with Youth Employment UK reported a lack of time and capacity, not having thought about engagement and a tendency to proceed with 'business as usual', as well as basing their practice on what other similar organisations were doing, as main reasons for this. There was also a common challenge reported by employers in that they often had capacity to only engage in one type of external engagement and this often included traditional engagement with schools, colleges, universities and careers services, and adopting resources and guidance provided in these settings. This primary research echoes the findings of Otaluna et al (2021) where time and capacity were important factors in engaging with toolkits.

3.4 Behaviour change in organisations

The evidence discussed so far highlights the need to have effective ways of reaching employers and changing their behaviour. The toolkits that have been reviewed have been based either on research evidence from desk reviews and data analysis or from self-reported good practice. Toolkits that focussed on creating change also highlight the important role of leaders and how organisation decisions are made (Social Mobility Group & the Bridge Group, 2020, Simms 2017). This echoes the COM-B model of behaviour change¹⁵ which is cited elsewhere in the literature and the research with employers from

¹⁵ Capability, Opportunity, Motivation and Behaviour from: Michie, S., van Stralen, M.M. & West, R. The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Sci* 6, 42 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42>

Otaluna et al (2021). The COM-B model is a model of behaviour change that suggests that in order for behaviour (B) to occur there must be capability (C), opportunity (O), and motivation (M).

Further research on organisation behaviour change that is relevant to consider when thinking of the approach for the new Good Youth Employment Benchmark is the ORGANISER model (HM Government, 2016). This is an evidence-based behavioural model to understand approaches to influencing organisations. It is comprised of nine themes that cover behavioural factors that are either internal or external to an organisation, and factors relating to decision-making processes within an organisation.

1. Operating environment
2. Relationships
3. Gaining advantage and reputation
4. Aims
5. Norms and organisational culture
6. Internal structures
7. Strategic processes
8. Estimation
9. Relying on trusted sources

Figure 3.1 The ORGANISER model



These themes help policymakers in designing and targeting policy by taking into account the likely behaviours of organisations. It highlights the importance of understanding the context in which organisations are operating, the networks and relationships that may influence their behaviour, their motivations for being involved with new frameworks, and the internal structures and processes which will affect their take-up and implementation of new approaches and behaviours.

One further behaviour change model that can be noted here is the EAST framework from The Behavioural Insights Team (2014). This framework suggests that to encourage a behaviour it must be easy (E), attractive (A), social (S), and timely (T). The model is applicable to a range of settings from policymakers to the design of intervention and tools for individuals and employees.

For employers, Simms (2017) highlights two logics that guide employer actions – Human Resources logic which concerns the benefits to recruiting appropriate staff, and CSR logic which considers the reputation of the organisation as a good employer. This was echoed in the primary research with employers in this study, where the drive to ‘do the right thing’ in taking on disadvantaged and inexperienced young people into employment was a motivator for some employers and a drive to reduce recruitment costs by increasing retention was also found.

4 Strength of evidence for the features of Youth Employment UK's Framework

The Youth Employment Group (YEG)¹⁶ undertook a light touch review of the Good Youth Employment Charter in 2020 in the light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, it is also important to ensure that those 'important considerations' (Carlile, 2017) that employers are directed to within the Framework, are still based on good research evidence and important to review whether there is anything missing from the Framework.

The second part of the desk review aimed to establish whether the features of the framework continue to be based on good research evidence as to effective practice in supporting young people to employment outcomes.

There are three key features to the Youth Friendly Employment Framework:

1. **Explore:** Youth-friendly employers offer young people the chance to explore different careers and industries through a range of activities including taster days, assemblies and careers fairs. Working with schools, colleges, youth organisations and young people directly to open up the world of work.
2. **Experience:** Youth-friendly organisations understand that young people benefit from a range of work experience opportunities. Work experience can take a variety of forms such as work shadowing and short work experience placements. These quality experiences must take place on employer sites and support young people to develop skills and understanding of the world of work.
3. **Employment:** Youth-friendly organisations offer a range of employment and training pathways for young people. These roles meet the highest standard of youth friendly employment and include training and development plans, support and fair opportunities.¹⁷

Within the framework there are examples of what each of these stages can include and these are the basis of this part of the research to establish how strong the evidence base is for the practices that are included in the Framework.

It is outside of the bounds of this research to conduct a fully systematic evidence review of each of the features of good youth employment. Instead, a two-staged approach was taken (see Appendix 2 for methodological approach) – firstly to use existing repositories

¹⁶ The Youth Employment Group is a coalition of youth employment experts with 300 member organisations in the UK

¹⁷ <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/membership/welcome-4/>

of research including the Youth Futures Foundation Evidence and Gap Map¹⁸ to see the scale of the evidence for practices the Framework and the Evidence and Gap Map have in common, and the 'what works' series of research reports from The Careers & Enterprise Company to understand the strength of the evidence for the key features of the Framework. Then, a further search of other grey and academic literature was conducted to capture other papers not previously referenced and draw out individual studies.

What follows here is an indicator of the strength of evidence. This is based on a generally agreed scaling¹⁹ which distinguishes the degree to which programmes have been rigorously evaluated and found to have impact.

- A lower level indicates that logic models suggest impact should be possible or where more research is required (rated 'low' in this paper),
- mid-scale would indicate that a programme is leading to improvement but causal impacts cannot be drawn (rated 'emerging' in this paper), and
- higher on the scale recognises programmes where multiple rigorous evaluations have shown an impact and programmes can be replicated and show the same impact (rated 'good' in this paper).

4.1 Evidence supporting the Framework

Much of the evidence found in this desk review relates to pre-employment activity which comes under the 'explore' theme on the Framework. There are a range of research bodies, funders, focussed on developing the evidence base for engaging young people in careers activity while they are in education. There are also a wide range of activities that fall under this theme, some of which have been analysed collectively and other studies focus on particular activities, again adding the breadth of evidence. The outcomes that are included in this theme include engagement with employment services and educational attainment.

The 'experience' theme of the Framework covers work experience, job shadowing and placements and so a smaller amount of research has been referenced here, reflecting the narrower theme. The outcomes that are sought here are the development of skills that support employment outcomes, increased social capital through new employer networks and contacts for individuals.

More evidence is found again under the third theme 'employment' where a body of evidence is building looking at supporting good work for young people. Activities here include early career entry schemes such as internships and traineeships as well as

¹⁸ <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/our-work/identify/evidence-and-gap-map/>

¹⁹ Two commonly used scales are Nesta's Standards of Evidence https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/standards_of_evidence.pdf and the Early Intervention Foundation evidence scale

apprenticeships. The main outcomes that are sought under this theme is job entry, retention and progression in employment,

4.1.1 Explore

In this section, the research evidence relating to activities that employers can engage in with young people and education providers is considered. These are outreach activities that may take place in schools or in the workplace.

Employer engagement in education and career guidance

The Careers & Enterprise Company (Collins and Barnes, 2017) found that there is an extensive UK and international research base which provides evidence that careers in the curriculum can have some positive impacts on outcomes for young people, however more research is needed to evidence the causal pathways. Embedding careers education in the curriculum, which could involve employers, results in a small but significant impact, especially on young people's personal effectiveness and career readiness.

Another paper for the Careers & Enterprise Company (Williams et al. 2018) looked at the evidence for what works in careers provision in colleges and found that existing literature was 'too sparse' (p13) to provide definitive information on which interventions might be most effective. However, in general terms from the literature that was reviewed and the primary research through expert interviews and case studies, indications were that quality careers provision can support young people to progress into employment.

An evaluation of employer engagement in education concludes that these employer activities can raise economic outcomes for participants. Rocket Science (2021) conducted a desk review of employer engagement in education literature which shows a good evidence base for the positive impact of employer engagement on learner outcomes. They also found a good evidence base for the positive impact of employer engagement on economic outcomes. The review found that work experience is effective for soft skills development, community volunteering is a predictor of positive soft skill outcomes, as well as enterprise activities and careers talks/fairs. Rocket Science also reported on research that found that teachers believed that 'low achievers' benefited most from sustained engagement with employers and 'high achievers' gain from targeted interventions such as careers fairs and mock interviews.

Rating: Good

Research has found that employer encounters can develop skills in self-management, understanding the world of work, improving attainment, career thinking, broadening and raising aspirations, and accessing part-time work.

Career events

Employer involvement in career events can include careers talks, attendance at jobs or careers fairs and carousel or networking events. In a 'what works' review for The Careers & Enterprise Company, Redhill et al (2017a) found a number of high quality studies that

showed evidence of improved employment outcomes for young people taking part in careers events.

More specifically, the authors also looked at mock interviews and CV workshops (Redhill et al, 2017b) and their review found that these are ‘potentially effective’ in influencing employment outcomes for young people – however there are no robust quantitative or large-scale studies on the outcomes experienced by young people following these events. Qualitative studies show that skills such as personal effectiveness, social capital, educational engagement and career awareness were increased after taking part in mock interviews and CV workshops.

Rating: Emerging

Employer involvement in careers events is a likely to be an effective way to support young people to gain skills that improve their chances of employment. It is likely that mock interviews and CV workshops develop employability skills, which may in turn lead to better employment outcomes for young people.

Employer involvement in education and NEET programmes

On the YFF Evidence and Gap Map, when looking at career guidance, there are 101 records: 44 low quality impact, 86 medium and high-quality impact, 11 medium and high-quality systematic papers. Narrowing this down to look at papers which have a positive change in employment status as the aim, there are 38 papers: 19 low quality impact, 15 medium-high quality impact, 4 medium-high quality systematic papers.²⁰

Several papers show that skills-based programmes and active labour market policies are likely to have a positive effect on employment (Kluve et al, 2017, Jetha et al, 2019 Mawn et al, 2017). Engagement interventions for young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET) included the development of social skills, vocational or educational classroom-based training, counselling or one-to-one support, internships, placements, on-the-job or occupational training, financial incentives (subsidised employment), case management and individual support. Programmes that meet the skills needs of employers and were more successful in employment outcomes for young people. Examples in the literature included employers involved in designing the programmes (for example types of computer skills that would be needed), involved in the programme through job placements, or in matching employment opportunities to young people.

Rating: Good

The evidence shows that employer involvement in skills training for young people who are NEET can have a positive impact on the employment outcomes for young people.

²⁰ Of these 38 papers, 14 were from Europe, 8 from the America, 6 from Africa, 4 international studies, 3 from the UK and 3 from Asia.

Pre-employment mentoring and role models

The YFF Evidence and Gap Map looking at the cross-section of papers for mentoring with employment status here shows 63 records: 39 low quality impact evaluations, 20 medium-high quality impact evaluations, 1 low quality systematic review, and 3 medium-high quality systematic reviews (Kluve et al, 2017 and Mawn et al, 2017) have already been discussed)²¹.

A systematic review of mentorship interventions by Lindsay et al (2015) found a positive effect on employment for young people in post-secondary education and young people with disabilities. Of the studies they reviewed, seven of them had a positive treatment effect in empowerment, self-confidence or self-advocacy, self-efficacy, and self-determination after the mentoring intervention. Other skills which saw improvements in the reviewed studies, were self-regulation, perceived independence, problem-solving, social skills, decision-making (including planning education), preparation for college and employment and transition goals.

The Careers & Enterprise Company have also commissioned a 'What Works' paper on employer mentoring (Hooley, 2016). This review of evidence found that there is a substantial evidence base supporting the role of employer mentoring in school, which is described as moderate to good and there are a number of statistical meta-analyses. The report concludes that while badly organised mentoring can do more harm than good,

'employer mentoring is effective and that it can have positive impacts on the behaviour, engagement, attainment and the educational and career progression of young people'. (p18)

Recent mixed methods research in the Derby Opportunity area (Hughes and Hughes, 2022) tested career related learning through bespoke approaches to tackling gender stereotypes. The project made use of 167 volunteers (from 120 organisations) in the Education and Employers Primary Futures portal.

'The evaluation and impact assessment involved over 1,600+ children, 35 teachers, 104 volunteers and 239 parents. Findings show the positive impact that career-related learning makes to primary aged children, particularly those living in areas of economic and social challenge.' (p3)

Through pre-and-post activity surveys, the study found a positive impact on aspirations and broadening horizons, self-assessed improvement in key skills, and teachers reported that it tackled gender stereotypes. The volunteers took part to help raise awareness of their careers and roles to under-represented genders and children from minority ethnic backgrounds. The Primary Futures portal was thought to make the process of volunteering more straightforward for the volunteers. Easy access to

²¹ The majority of the papers came from America (25), with 17 from Europe, 7 from Asia, 5 international studies, 5 from Africa and 4 from the UK.

volunteers and employers through the portal was identified by teachers as one of the most effective parts of the project.

Rating: Good

The evidence here shows that pre-employment mentoring and role models can have positive effects on young peoples' skills and decision-making in preparation for work.

Young people with additional needs

The Good Youth Employment Framework asks employers to ensure that the opportunities they provide can be accessed by young people with additional needs and that activities are tailored to meet the needs of individuals.

An evidence review for The Careers & Enterprise Company regarding transition programmes (work experience and employer encounters) for young people with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) looked at literature from the UK and USA. Hanson et al (2017) found that the interventions were effective in supporting more employment outcomes, with high quality research evidence to support the use of such interventions. However, many of the studies were qualitative and so causality is harder to establish.

Small-scale qualitative research by Egdell and McQuaid (2014) found that important factors for increasing people's capabilities (what people can do) were empowerment (young people's voice and choice), individual skills and knowledge and capacity to transform resources into capabilities, plus external factors such as labour market conditions.

Much of the other evidence that was found in the desk research related to education or employability programmes with little to no employer involvement and so less relevant to bring into this review.

Rating: Emerging

Employer encounters and work experience can have a moderate impact on the job outcomes for young people with SEND, however more high quality impact assessments and systematic reviews are needed to understand how they can best make a difference.

Impacts on employers (and their employees)

While the focus of much of the research is on the outcomes for young people, it is important to also consider the outcomes for employers and their involvement with good youth employment practices.

An online survey of over 1,000 volunteers for the Inspiring Futures and Inspiring Governance platforms, and a review of empirical research by Percy and Rogers (2021) focussed on the impact on employees of volunteering in education – so being involved in the activities discussed above. They found that key outcomes for employees were:

- Improved skills and competencies, especially in communication, influencing and leadership
- Increased motivation and productivity at work
- Enhanced wellbeing
- Greater work satisfaction and employer loyalty

‘Our survey finds that volunteering in education enhances employees’ skills and competencies at work as well as their sense of motivation and mission, which collectively translate into higher productivity and career gains’ (p20)

The Rocket Science review of evidence for employer engagement (2021) cited some benefits for employers in becoming engaged with schools – widening the recruitment pool, increasing staff motivation, developing staff skills, building reputation in the community and bringing creative, fresh ideas.

Rating: Good

While the evidence for the impact of employer engagement in careers activities is generally good for young people, the emerging good evidence for the positive impact on employers is also worth noting.

4.1.2 Experience

Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits

The evidence reviewed for The Careers & Enterprise Company on work experience placements (Buzzeo and Cifci, 2017) found a lot of formative evidence to suggest that it is a ‘potentially effective’ activity for young people - particularly in developing skills, increasing motivation, and supporting career decision-making. However, there is a lack of robust longitudinal evidence. This paper also reviewed the evidence for job shadowing and workplace visits, and it found that while it was much less extensive, there were still some indicators that these activities can be potentially effective in supporting career-decision making, gaining an understanding of the world of work and increased likelihood of staying in education. The research does indicate some good practice for delivering work experience:

- Informed placement choices which contribute towards careers exploration
- Adequate preparation for students
- Feedback from employers to help students reflect on what they have learnt, alongside feedback from students to help employers deliver high quality placements.

The YFF Evidence and Gap Map shows only one record for work shadowing which is a low-quality impact evaluation, supporting the finding in Buzzeo and Cifci (2017) that the evidence of job shadowing is less robust.

CIPD's description of their Learning to Work programme cites that the majority of employers that offer work experience placements use them as a recruitment tool and can go on to offer employment opportunities to young people afterwards.²²

Rating: Emerging

While work experience is a wide-spread activity that is undertaken by many, the evidence for effectiveness is at a formative stage. More robust research evidence is needed to understand what types of work experience or workplace activities work best for whom.

4.1.3 Employment

Traineeships

In an impact evaluation of traineeships for the DfE, Dorsett et al (2019) conducted analysis of national administrative data and propensity score matching to estimate the effect of participating in a traineeship on the three intended outcomes of progress into an apprenticeship; further learning; or employment. The researchers found that overall, trainees had positive outcomes in the 12 months after starting their traineeship, with 29 per cent beginning an apprenticeship and 57 per cent starting further learning. However, there were differences by age; 16–18-year-old participants were less likely than 19–23-year-olds to begin employment within 12 months. In contrast, younger participants were more likely to start an apprenticeship within 12 months than older trainees. Supplemental Instrumental Variable analysis also found a positive impact on progression to apprenticeships, though the effect size was smaller.

An evidence review by the Learning and Work Institute (2020) found that traineeships, supported internships and apprenticeship programmes deliver positive employment and earnings outcomes for young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Despite the good evidence for Traineeships, it was announced in December 2022 that from August 2023 the Government will withdraw funding from standalone national traineeships due to low numbers of young people participating in the programmes. In areas with devolved skills powers, they may continue in some form.²³

Rating: Good

The evidence for traineeships having a positive impact on employment outcomes and skills is strong, but differentiated by age group meaning that they work better for older young people.

²² <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/people/routes-work/work-experience-guide>

²³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/traineeships--2>

Youth Employment Initiatives

The European Union launched the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in 2013 to support young people through the implementation of a youth guarantee. The features of YEI include an offer of a traineeship, apprenticeship or place in continued education within four months of leaving school.

There are several country-specific evaluations of YEI that show that these measures had a positive impact on youth employment. The YFF Evidence and Gap Map cites 6 records relating to traineeships: 3 medium and high-quality impact, 3 low quality impact. One medium-high quality impact evaluation is of the Bulgarian YEI. The researchers (Consortium Sigma Metrics, 2016) found that these collective measures increased employment and decreased unemployment for the participants, especially those with lower educational attainment.

A counterfactual impact evaluation of the YEI in Portugal (Duarte et al, 2020) showed that participants on internships or hiring support schemes received a positive and long-lasting effect on their labour market outcomes. The effect on the probability of being employed came in after the 'treatment' i.e. the internship. The effect is higher the longer the intervention lasts: shorter internships (1-6 months) have more positive effect for older people in the cohort (aged 25-29) and for those with higher educational attainment. All other activities had higher effects for the least educated participants.

A mixed-method impact evaluation of the YEI in England (Ecorys, 2022) also found that the programme was effective in supporting participants, in terms of the models of delivery and actual delivery of the provision. Self-reported feedback from participants showed the quality of the employment and training offers they received. Participants reported that they had improved their chances of getting a job by participating in a traineeship, almost half of respondents to the evaluation survey were in work six months after leaving the YEI. Furthermore, comparing results to administrative data, the researchers found that on average, YEI participants were in employment for an additional 56 days in the twelve months following support.

This report also includes an estimation of impact on employers participating in the YEI, based on anecdotal evidence. Providers reported that employers had good experiences with traineeships and had gained good employees from the scheme and had a better understanding of the barriers that young people who are NEET face.

Rating: Good

Taken together, these impact evaluations, which include quantitative analysis as well as qualitative findings, show a positive picture for the evidence for traineeships in supporting young people into sustained employment.

Apprenticeships

There is a large body of work evaluating the impact of apprenticeships. In the YFF Evidence and Gap Map, there are 38 records for apprenticeships: 24 low quality impact

evaluations and 14 medium-high quality impact evaluations. Much of this evidence is international evidence. Given the differences in apprenticeship models, even comparing England to the other home nations, the priority for review here has been on studies of apprenticeships in England.

Apprenticeships are an established method of delivering skills that are welcomed by employees and employers (IFF Research, 2020). Benefits to employers include improved productivity, skills development that is relevant to the organisation and higher staff morale. Where employers recruit into apprenticeships rather than converting existing employees, apprenticeships can also bring down the wage bill.

However, this reduction in the wage bill is due to the lower pay that apprentices can be paid, and the Young Women's Trust (2017) has found that the low pay for apprenticeships is a barrier to participation. They also found in their survey of 500 current and former apprentices, that women's wage growth after completion of an apprenticeship is slower than men's, in part down to the gender segregation of apprenticeship – with men more frequently undertaking apprenticeships in higher paid sectors with good progression.

As well as studies that look at apprenticeships as a whole, there is also evaluation evidence that highlights the impact of apprenticeships in particular sectors. For example, an impact evaluation of accountancy apprenticeships (Dickinson, 2020) found that apprenticeships were an effective mechanism for recruiting entry level staff and training them through the pipeline of progression, in comparison to other training methods. The study found that for employers there was an initial net cost to recruiting and training apprentices, but this cost was recouped in wider benefits of productivity, workforce retention and progression. As seen above, apprentices themselves also experienced a net cost during their apprenticeship due to the lower wage while undertaking the training, and this was recouped in higher salaries in the medium term.

An OECD working paper (Kuczera, 2017) into apprenticeships also highlighted the benefits for employers (investing in their future workforce) and the apprentices. Where apprenticeships work well, apprentices get a smooth transition into the workforce and are well-prepared for their chosen career.

Rating: Emerging

While the case for apprenticeships is generally strong, there is also evidence that impact of apprenticeships are such that can maintain gender pay gaps and while low pay for employers can be beneficial, it is also a barrier to young people.

Internships

A summary of the research evidence in the Wilson review (2012) found that there is strong evidence for the impact of internships and placement years (as well as other work experience). As with the evidence for apprenticeships and work experience, employers make use of internships as a recruitment tool or more controversially where a sequence of interns fill a single vacancy at lower cost. The internships may be paid or unpaid and the report recommends that subsidies could help create more paid opportunities. The

review highlights that much of the evidence for the efficacy of graduate internships comes from larger employers and it is more difficult to find out about the impact of internships at small-medium organisations.

In contrast, a systematic review of rigorous evaluation literature on internships and work placements by Inceoglu et al (2019) found that the evidence for career outcomes is mixed. They found that pre-planned placements that were embedded into a wider education experience were often paid. They found that internships had a small but positive effect on career outcomes. Graduates who completed a work placement found employment more quickly. Results regarding income were mixed in the studies they looked at – some graduates earning more money after placements, with others experiencing no differences in income compared to non-placement graduates. Work placements did change students' perceptions of self-efficacy, their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. As seen in the Wilson review, this research highlights that one-third of entry-level position with graduate employers are taken by graduates who have completed an internship or work placement (High Flyers, 2015 in Inceoglu, 2019).

While not covered explicitly in these papers, research elsewhere (Roberts, 2017) has established that internships are inaccessible for young people due to financial barriers and can reduce social mobility and unpaid internships do not provide the same advantages as paid internships.

Rating: Emerging

The evidence for graduate internships and placements is mid-scale with some evidence of their positive impact for graduates on skills development and employment outcomes.

Recruitment methods

The YFF and CEBMa evidence review (2022a) looked for evidence on the effectiveness of different recruitment practices for marginalised young people. They found that there was little robust evidence about recruitment practices specifically discussing (marginalised) young people. However, they did find that marginalised groups tend to rely on personal contacts rather than using traditional and online media to find employment, with the research evidence suggesting that reaching out directly to young people could be more effective. Targeted marketing may also be effective to enhance the awareness of job opportunities among young people.

The review also highlighted barriers that disadvantaged young people face in securing employment due to biased selection practices. Good practices identified in the review included ensuring valid selection methods are used that reflect the skills and abilities needed in the job, having consistent and correlated scoring methods during recruitment, and using tests that do not discriminate or bias against ethnic minorities.

Rating: Emerging

The evidence on recruitment methods that have positive impacts on diverse young people is starting to emerge – for example targeted marketing of vacancies and reducing potential bias in

recruitment processes. However, much of the evidence is based on the experiences of the general population so more evidence is needed on the specific experiences of young people.

Retention

Young people or employees from a minority background may leave organisations for reasons that differ from non-minority employees. Studies on diversity and inclusion can highlight insights into the experiences of young people. Diversity in the workplace (surface level/observable characteristics and deep-level diversity characteristics) has been found to have positive and detrimental outcomes including ‘turnover, absenteeism, intention to leave job stress, and mental health’ (p12, YFF and CEBMa, 2022b). Nevertheless, diversity management efforts have been found to have positive outcomes on inclusion which means that practices should move beyond simply promoting diversity and towards actively managing the translation into an inclusive environment. This same evidence review (YFF and CEMBa, 2022) found good evidence for the moderate positive impact of diversity training.

Rating: Low

This evidence review highlights the lack of evidence specifically speaking to the experiences of young people when discussing turnover and retention in the workplace.

5 Lessons and Recommendations

This research is intended to answer two questions – around the effectiveness of existing frameworks aimed at employer; and the evidence base on supporting youth employment.

On the first question, the review found a range of frameworks, but common challenges around awareness and take-up, and a lack of evidence on effectiveness. On the second question, the review found that Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework is based on a range of good evidence and of different types - robust quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Two key lessons for implementing the Good Youth Employment Benchmark can be drawn out from this current research involving a review of the evidence-base and employer interviews – the need for the Benchmark to be accessible to employers and for it to be engaging once they have registered.

Following on from this, a number of recommendations are provided which can help Youth Employment UK develop a benchmarking tool that encourages employers to take on the best-evidenced practices, self-assess how they are progressing in delivering these practices, collect data on the reach of these practices to help increase the evidence-base, and ultimately make a difference to supporting young people into good employment.

5.1 Lessons for the Good Youth Employment Benchmark

5.1.1 Maximising employer take-up

The range of toolkits that were discussed in Chapter 2, plus other pledges and accreditations that were not included, shows the array of similar-termed toolkits that employers navigate. There would be value in rationalising and synthesising these different resources. Employers need to be able to recognise the need for support, find the right toolkit and for that to be easy to use and accessible. Accessibility for employers appears to be about relevance, suitability, practicability, and brevity; and what is accessible for employers (and their staff) may not match up to policy stakeholder requirements.

It is important that the toolkits and frameworks that are implemented are relevant for different users at all levels within an organisation and that the appropriate language and terminology for the users and their industry is used. They specifically need to be suitable for those who have little experience of using toolkits and frameworks, or of using evidence to inform practice, compared to those who are more familiar with the techniques and methods employed. The Fawcett Society (2020) suggested that it is important for employers to involve their employees in any policy development, as this may help to

improve the overall effectiveness of the policy once it has been implemented. For Hughes et al (2017) it is important for charters to reflect local requirements.

Suggestions coming from employers who took part in the focus group were less about improvements to the principles, and more about how these were shared. One employer mentioned they would welcome a more interactive approach to the Youth Employment UK website, using bite-sized resources, and to how the Framework and Charter were disseminated, as they felt quite text-heavy. This echoes findings in Chandler et al (2019) where employers called for toolkits of a shorter length.

Qualitative research with employers, carried out by YFF and FutureGov (2021) tested the hypothesis that employers, practitioners and policymakers would engage with toolkits and evidence stores and change their practice. They found that

‘a traditional [What Works Centre] toolkit will not meet the needs of employers and practitioners who require more practical, immediately applicable guidance to help them make use of evidence about what works. However policymakers will continue to benefit from more detailed and rigorous toolkit models.’ (p19)

Their interviews found that having the ‘capacity (time/resource), capability (training and skills) and motivation (drive and interest) to spend time engaging with research topics/policies is more influential’. In addition, organisations also had to have the conditions required for change – for example leaders who want to make a change and financial incentives to do so.

5.1.2 Making it engaging

Employers must have an incentive to engage with a charter or benchmarking tool – marking themselves out as a good employer for many will be the primary incentive, but Youth Employment UK have also considered soft incentives such as access to networks, publicity, employer guidance and training. Harder incentives include access to their jobs board but could go further in terms of access to funding.

As seen in Chapter 3, understanding how and why organisations make decisions and change their behaviour is important for the Benchmark to gain traction. Behavioural insights such as the EAST²⁴ framework suggests that to make effective and efficient changes the process should be easy, accessible, social and timely. The ORGANISER model suggests different ways that the Benchmark could be rolled out: norming through the use of case studies (N); making it more than just an HR endeavour by tapping into wider internal structure (I); identifying and making use of trusted sources (R) for example local Chambers of Commerce, Business in the Community, CIPD; thinking about employers’ motivations in what ways they want to gain advantage – CSR or HR drivers (G).

²⁴ <https://www.bi.team/publications/east-four-simple-ways-to-apply-behavioural-insights/>

The next section of the report discusses the eight recommendations coming from this review.

5.2 Recommendations for the Good Youth Employment Benchmark

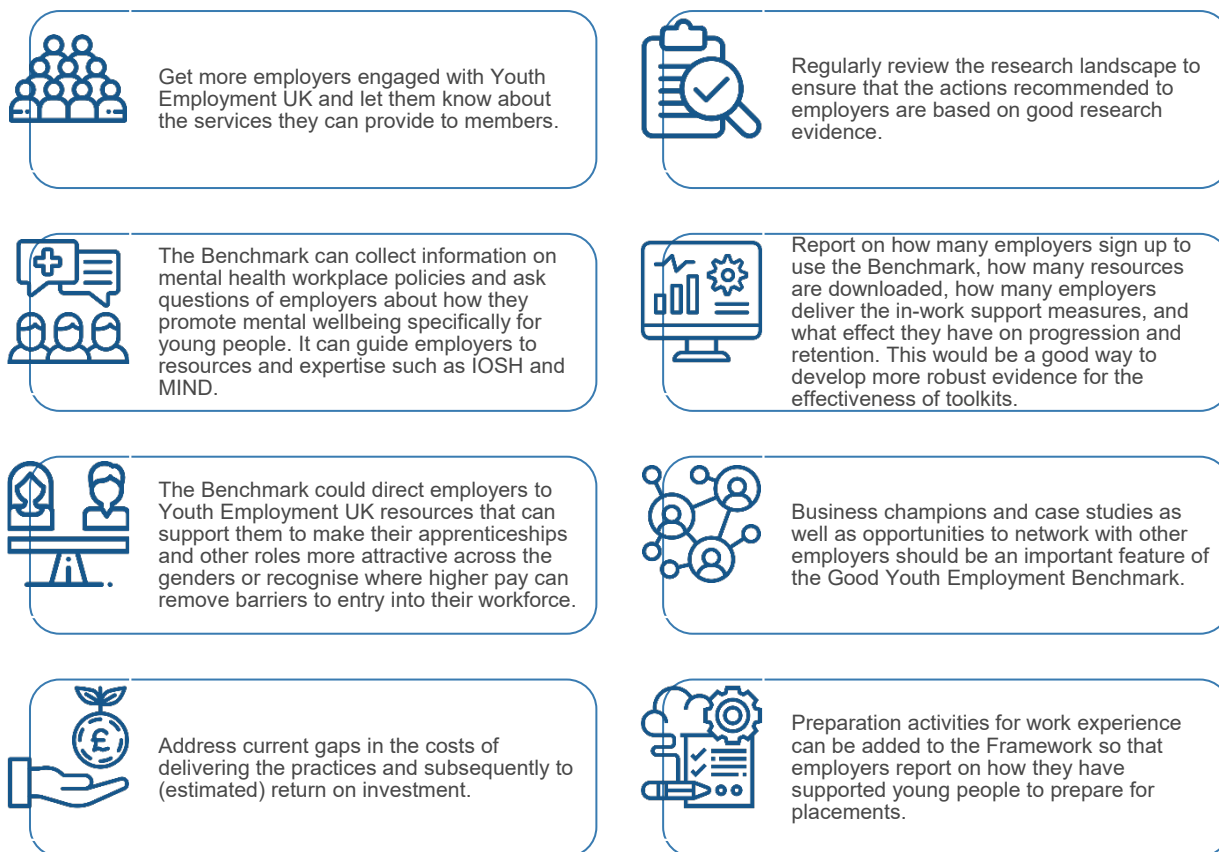
A key feature of Youth Employment UK is how the organisation works with young people, policy makers and employers to drive positive change in the youth employment landscape. Because of the strength of working directly with young people and employers through their Good Youth Employment Charter, the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework and the upcoming Good Youth Employment Benchmark, Youth Employment UK are well-placed to drive changes to employers' practice.

The evaluation of the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework (Carlile, 2017) shows that it already meets many of the features of such frameworks and charters:

- it aims to have a sustainable impact over time, with regular review mechanisms included;
- it has been co-constructed with young people so is 'fully user-informed' and supports participating employers to develop their own approaches to including meaningful youth voice;
- it is based on up-to-date information;
- the focus on 'creating opportunity' encourages the networks that have appeared in the desk review as so important for employer members;
- support new entrants to the labour market through a focus on recruitment and application processes;
- it considers fair employment through performance reviews, financial and other rewards to encourage length of service and development over time;
- It is usable by employers and can reflect different specifications of different employers in different sectors.

Nevertheless, this current research included employers who did not know about Youth Employment UK and discussed their unmet needs in terms of support they need to get their job adverts to reach young people, or support to know how to do better outreach with schools. Employers need to understand how the Framework and Benchmark can benefit them. Given the context of labour and skills shortages and the potential benefit of directly reaching young people there is a clear case for employers signing up to Youth Employment UK resources. **The first recommendation from this report is to get more employers engaged with Youth Employment UK and to let employers know about the services they can provide to members.** This could be through employers' existing trusted source such as Chambers of Commerce, sector bodies and CIPD.

From the information gathered from the evidence review and from speaking with employers, a number of other recommendations are made that can support the development of the Good Youth Employment Benchmark.

Figure 5.1 Recommendations for the development of the Benchmark

Source: IES, 2024

The recommendations are next discussed in more detail.

5.2.1 Pillars of good employment practice

While the evidence for whether toolkits have an impact on good employment practice is limited (see section 3.4), this review also set out to review the strength of the evidence base on employer practice supporting youth employment.

Pillars of practice or tiers of good employment are a common theme in the charters reviewed as well as in the Youth Employment UK resources. All employers who took part in the research, both in the focus group and in-depth interviews, fully agreed with and shared the five core principles of the Good Youth Employment Charter and Youth Friendly Employment Framework. Few could speak about the practices that they specifically implemented which demonstrated these principles, but there was a shared sentiment that the principles informed the ethos and culture of employers' organisations. Those who had adopted specific practices mentioned buddying and mentoring systems, career progression strategies, and providing platforms for voice and representation. However, these practices were not specific or tailored to young employees and were rather part of

wider workplace practices. While these will have a positive effect on young employees who are included, they do not provide additional targeted support to overcome some of the specific barriers that disadvantaged young people face. Most employers felt there were no additional principles which should be added to the existing ones, and that those were comprehensive and addressed employers’ responsibilities towards young people holistically.

As social research moves towards more replicability in studies through the use of randomised control trials and quantitative impact evaluations, the strength of evidence for positive impacts for the features of the Framework will continue to build.

The evidence presented earlier in this report (Chapter 4) shows that many features have good evidence for their positive impact on young people, while others are emerging or have smaller effects, and this has implications for the recommendations.

Table 5.1 Summary of evidence supporting the Framework

Good:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employer engagement in education and career guidance Career events Employer involvement in education and NEET programmes Pre-employment mentoring and role models Impacts on employees Traineeships Youth Employment Initiatives
Emerging:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career events Young people with additional needs Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits Apprenticeships Internships Recruitment methods
Low:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retention

Source: IES, 2024

The reviews of recruitment and retention practices by YFF and CEBMa (2022a and 2022b) highlight the need for more robust evidence specifically on the experiences on (marginalised) young people. **Youth Employment UK should ensure that they regularly review the research landscape to ensure that the actions recommended to employers are based on good research evidence.**

Additional themes

The Talent Match evaluation (Damm et al, 2020) found that young people increasingly need support with mental health as it presents as a major barrier to youth employment. Support with health and wellbeing was also mentioned by employers in this research as a theme where they would like to see additional support. One employer in the focus group who has used the Framework wanted there to be more on mental health. Another employer in the interviews talked about their perception of the high prevalence of mental

health needs and anxiety of young people specifically since the Covid-19 pandemic. **The Benchmarking Tool can collect information on mental health workplace policies and ask questions of employers about how they promote mental wellbeing specifically for young people. It can guide employers to resources and expertise such as IOSH²⁵ and MIND²⁶.**

The Progression In Employment Toolkit developed by IES (2020) is an example of a toolkit grounded in research evidence that supports people once they are in work. However, there is no tracking of how this toolkit is used by employers, as is the case with most of the toolkits found in the desk research. The Framework and Benchmarking Tool presents an opportunity to add much needed evidence of impact. **Youth Employment UK can report on how many employers sign up to use the toolkit, how many resources are downloaded, how many employers deliver the in-work support measures, and what effect they have on progression and retention. This would be a good way to develop more robust evidence for the effectiveness of toolkits.**

Apprenticeships are still highly gendered which has an effect on the wage-earning potential of women in particular, who are more prevalent in apprenticeships in low paying sectors like hair and beauty, childcare and education. Employers in the interviews described how they would like better information about how they could increase gender diversity in some of their roles. The Benchmarking Tool could support employers to report on and recognise gender disparities. **The Tool could direct employers to Youth Employment UK resources that can support them to make their apprenticeships and other roles more attractive across the genders or recognise where higher pay can remove barriers to entry into their workforce.**

5.2.2 Encourage partnerships and networks

Employers in the focus group who were already engaged with Youth Employment UK and therefore already have an awareness of the Framework and Charter would like to see a more interactive approach to the resources. Some also wanted more opportunities for networking with other engaged employers. Employers in the interviews also mentioned they would welcome more opportunities to connect with employers who are signed up to the charter, to share learning and good practice. This echoes the findings of the literature review on the need for frameworks and benchmarking tools to encourage partnerships and networks (for example Hughes et al, 2017 and Greidanus et al, 2021).

Employers need to understand how their performance compares to others and understand how the Framework and benchmarking their practices has made a difference. As such, business champions and case studies as well as opportunities to network with other employers should be an important feature of the Good Youth Employment Benchmark.

²⁵ <https://iosh.com/media/4730/iosh-mh-benchmarking-questions-v2.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/workplace-wellbeing-index/>

5.2.3 Data and monitoring

The desk research shows how important data and monitoring are to understand what is being delivered and drive forward business improvements (Duvvury, 2021, Hughes et al, 2017 and Allen et al, 2022). It is reasonable to expect a toolkit to suggest solutions to problems and collect data to assess the longer-term impact – as is anticipated for the Good Youth Employment Benchmark. This should be a regular activity and not a one-off so that it can be seen as a valuable on-going commitment and provide evidence on impact for employers.

The Benchmark will be a good way to increase the amount of data that is captured for the different types of practices that are included. **Where the tool could address current gaps is in the costs of delivering the practices and subsequently the (estimated) return on investment.** This type of data can be a powerful argument for employers considering introducing new practices. **The Benchmark could support the production of visual data products such as spider graphs so that employers can more easily compare their data with others’.**

Work experience was a perhaps surprising area where there is less robust research evidence of the highest quality. The Benchmark can help by capturing data on the number of placements for different types of students and the detail of what is offered during such work experience placements. Youth Employment UK can explore how similar employers offer work experience and work with organisations to track longer term outcomes. Employer feedback is a good practice indicator for work experience and is already included on the Framework, **another indicator, adequate preparation, could be added with employers reporting how they have supported young people to prepare for placements – ie pre-meetings, tours, and job descriptions.**

The Benchmark can also support evidence gathering on the long-term effectiveness of graduate placements by capturing data from SMEs who are offering placements, and from all employers about who is on placement and figures on how many are retained/recruited from placements.

5.3 Summary

The current Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework and the Good Youth Employment Charter are based on practices that generally have good research evidence for their positive impact. This limited evidence review has found that it is often the case that toolkits are produced based on good evidence but there is little longitudinal data to see the impact on practice and the lives of those targeted by the toolkits.

The recommendations in this paper will help Youth Employment UK move forwards with the development of the Good Youth Employment Benchmark knowing where the evidence is stronger and where the Toolkit can help bridge the gap and show that toolkits can make a difference to practice.

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Appendix 2: Desk review methodology

Once the research questions were agreed between Youth Employment UK and IES, key search terms were established to firstly review the evidence on what toolkits and frameworks were being used by employers and what impacts they have on good employment practice.

These search terms were used across different platforms to find a selection of academic and grey literature: Google and Google Scholar, ProQuest, IBSS, EBSCO, and VOCEDPlus.

Papers were selected to be within scope based on several criteria, firstly whether they were published in last 10 years. The reviews aimed primarily for research from England, with the UK as a second choice and thirdly international evidence if there were gaps in the England/UK evidence. Because the review had originally intended to include only 20 papers systematic reviews (reviews of multiple pieces of research) were prioritised and then impact evaluations for their more robust research methods. Qualitative research and case studies were included where there were not sufficient systematic review or impact evaluations.

Table 5.2 Research question 1: search terms

First tier	Second tier	Third tier
Youth +employ*	Frameworks	Recruitment
Young +employ*	Toolkits	Selection
	Benchmark	Onboard*
	RAG rat*	Entry
	Self-assessment	Work experience
	Standards	Induction
		Mentoring
		Coaching
		Employment support
		Interventions
		Outreach
		Retention / retain
		Development

Transition

Source: IES, 2024

For the second research question the main strands of the Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework were used as search terms within the YFF Evidence and Gap Map to see the volume of research evidence on those themes. Medium and High-quality systematic reviews were prioritised for inclusion. The Careers & Enterprise Company 'What Works' series of papers were mapped to the Framework themes and included for review. Finally, additional searches of the databases were conducted using the terms best practice, recruitment, selection, employment, young/youth. Again, prioritising systematic reviews and impact evaluations from the past 10 years.

Papers were screened on their titles, abstracts or executive summaries for relevance to the theme. Information relevant to the research questions were 'extracted into a common framework.

Appendix 3: Employer interviews

A key part of the research was to include employers' views and experiences, around youth employment and the use of frameworks, toolkits, and other support resources, to help inform the development of Youth Employment UK's Good Youth Employment Benchmark. As part of this, the research team led one focus group, with five employers who were part of the Youth Employment UK employer network, and ten interviews with employers recruited from a wider sample and who were not necessarily involved with Youth Employment UK, to gauge the variation in views and experiences depending on their involvement with the organisation.

The employer interviews and focus group aimed to capture three things:

1. What is their current practice and what are their future ambitions for youth employment?
2. What is their current use of youth employment frameworks, toolkits and practical support?
3. Are they aware of the Youth-Friendly Employment Framework, its contents?
 - a. Are they aware of the Youth-Friendly Employment Framework, its contents?

There were two ways that employers were included in the research – a focus group with employers that were already aware of Youth Employment UK and one-to-one interviews with employers that were not already engaged with Youth Employment UK.

Employer focus group

There were five employers in the focus group, four were from large organisations and one was from a medium organisation. Their sectors included manufacturing, food, recreation and leisure, hospitality, and information and communication. All the employers had experience of employing young people, in ages ranging 16-24, with the majority providing apprenticeships and graduate schemes through established programmes.

Employers in the focus group had a range of experience doing outreach with young people, particularly around partnering with education and support organisations to develop outreach initiatives. This ranged from traditional routes, such as schools, colleges, and universities, to working with wider partners, such as the Careers Enterprise Company, the National Careers Service, and the Prince's trust, among others. Reasons for engaging in outreach ranged from wanting to build a talent pipeline of skilled young people to meeting Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion ambitions, with most employers working to achieve both ambitions in tandem.

Employers in the focus group also talked through their organisation's strategies and frameworks to support the progression of young employees. Practices varied, but in all cases included structured and transparent routes, such as talent mapping as apprentices or graduate employees were transitioning onto the next stage of their career, regular career progression conversations as part of line management, matching performance to aspirations and creating development plans based on these.

Employer interviews

Employers that were not already engaged with Youth Employment UK were recruited by Qa research using the Dun and Bradstreet database. Where the focus group included medium and large employers, the interviews aimed to recruit mainly employer representatives from small enterprises (0-49). The sampling used five broad sector categories and the aim for the interview was to ensure a spread across each.

Table 5.3 Employer interviews

Size	
Large	3
Medium	2
Small	5
Sector	
Business services eg accountancy, consultancy, finance etc	1
Energy, manufacturing, construction, transport & logistics	3
Health, care & charity	1
Public administration and public services	2
Retail, hospitality, leisure and creative	4
Total	10

Source: IES, 2024

All employers who took part in interviews had experience of hiring young people. This ranged from school leavers to graduates, depending on the sector employers were working in. Large and medium employers were more likely to have apprenticeship and graduate schemes, some employers had work experience and internship schemes. In terms of outreach, most employers engaged with schools, colleges, and universities, often in their local area. Some employers also recruited young people through the local Jobcentre and through recruitment agencies, others advertised positions using social media (especially Facebook) and found those useful, as it was more likely young people would apply through those routes. In terms of ambitions for development and progression of young people, large and medium employers were more likely to have structured progression routes and talent strategies, while small employers were more likely to use informal and ad hoc practices.

Appendix 4: Youth Employment UK terminology

The Good Youth Employment Charter

The Good Youth Employment Charter is a free to access toolkit available for employers committed to or working towards the 5 principles of good youth employment; Creating Opportunity, Recognising Talent, Fair Employment, Developing People and Youth Voice. It provides a framework to support, inspire and recognise all those employers who are committed to providing good quality opportunities to young people.

Each principle is underpinned with guidelines, examples, and support, as well as a list of charitable organisations who endorse these principles and can offer specialist help.

The Good Youth Employment Charter was co-created with young people and a range of partners by Youth Employment UK in 2012. The Charter was updated by the Youth Employment Group in 2020 in response to rising youth unemployment.

The Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework

The Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework was designed as an advancement to the Good Youth Employment Charter, open only to those who had signed the charter. The Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework was available as a document. It required manual auditing and did not allow for thorough demographic, geographic or sector wide evidence and evaluation and comparison.

This comprehensive award ensures the quality of opportunities being provided to young people. It recognises employers offering high quality opportunities, whilst also supporting organisations wishing to develop their youth employment practice.

The Youth Friendly Employer Award has three key areas of activity that it assesses – Explore, Experience and Employment with the 5 principles woven throughout.

Across each of these areas, the assessment criteria look at whether an organisation ensures that:

- Young people have a greater understanding about the world of work and the opportunity to develop their skills, learning from experts
- All opportunities are accessible and inclusive, this includes recruitment processes, payments, reward structures etc
- There is a training or learning plan with clear outcomes tailored to meet individual needs

- There is quality support and guidance available from experienced staff
- Young people give feedback on the opportunities but also can design and lead on some activities.

The Good Youth Employment Benchmark (In development)

The Good Youth Employment Benchmark will elevate and enhance The Youth Friendly Employer Award Framework to be a digitally accessible tool.

The Good Youth Employment Benchmark will be an online assessment tool for employers to review and benchmark their youth employment practice for early careers (school engagement), work experience and employment.

Long term, the benchmarking tool will:

1. Benchmark and 'rag rate' employers by sector, region, by type of opportunity (i.e. work experience, apprenticeship etc), and size of organisation.
 - i. The benchmark data set will provide an in-depth look at how youth employment practice within organisations is targeted to engage those from marginalised backgrounds and how this translates into these groups accessing opportunities.
2. Create bespoke reports for employers on where they can improve their score; what additional work they can do and highlight additional places for support.