

# Written evidence from Youth Employment UK [PCW0049]

## About Youth Employment UK

Youth Employment UK is an independent, not for profit social enterprise founded in 2012 to tackle youth unemployment in a time when there were over one million young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). We provide UK-wide careers and skills advice for young people and youth friendly employer advice to companies and organisations.

As experts in youth employment and unemployment, we are ideally placed to understand the complex landscape facing young people, employers and policy makers.

Our interest in this inquiry lies with our interest in youth employment and unemployment - young people will be entering a labour market like no other before. Young people's education, training and employment has not escaped the interruptions that Covid-19 has brought to the economy, labour market and our daily lives. These young people also have to contend with the fourth industrial revolution; this increasingly technological world is changing the skills required for emerging roles and highlighting the disconnect between young people's aspirations and the roles that will be emerging in the coming years.

We are passionate about giving young people a voice on the youth employment issues that affect them and supporting them in building the skills and tools needed to succeed. The majority of the evidence provided is sourced from our Youth Voice Census 2018, 2019 and 2020. This data is further supplemented with individual informal interviews with 16-24 year olds, and the polling and surveying of our Youth Ambassador network.

## Our Response

### **2. What do we know about the possible likely impact on the labour market?**

The impact of the fourth revolution on the UK labour market will be complex, even more so given the impact Covid-19 has had on the economies around the world. The OECD (2019) state that in the UK "13.7% of workers are in occupations at high risk of automation and that the fourth industrial revolution is changing the skills required within jobs".

Young people are 2.5 times more likely to work in low-skilled roles, such as those seen in the retail, leisure, tourism and hospitality sectors (Resolution Foundation, 2020). It is these roles that are at increasing risk to automation; they require less skills and a relatively low level of formal education, are implementing more technology and are semi-routine, offering less chance of progression. Many working in this sector would need 'moderate' training efforts of up to one year (OECD, 2019). It is also worth noting that women, BAME individuals and those with SEND/additional needs are also more likely to be employed within these sectors and are also at risk -of course (Resolution Foundation, 2020), there will be some who fall into more than one of

those cohorts.

It is too readily assumed that young people have the digital skills required in current and future job roles because they have lived in a digital era (Van Lar et al., 2017). Despite the OECD (2019) finding that only 32% of teachers report to be in need of ICT training, our young people feel that the technological world has moved beyond the basics that education has provided them with - coding, web design were a few of the skills young people thought they need to have but do not have. By basic, our young people were referring to the use of digital devices, the internet, office software and social media.

“I’m confident at using all kinds of technology, things like Teams and Zoom I feel I’ve adapted quickly to since lockdown. However when looking at the specifics it depends in terms of digital skills. Using I’m fine with but design not so much, for instance programming I wouldn’t feel comfortable in trying without doing a course first.”

**Laurence, 29**

“I’m pretty confident in my skills, but I think my Microsoft Excel and Publisher are my weak points” **Ciara, 19**

“I’m really not that confident in my IT skills as I am quite outdated. Therefore just know the basics to get me by.” **Anon., 16-24.**

It was no surprise that we also found that those working in roles that heavily relied upon these technical skills were extremely confident about them:

“Given I’m a digital marketing executive and often treated as a member of the IT team as well, I’m personally quite confident” **Patrick, 21.**

“Very confident, enough to teach classes at a coding bootcamp, run robotics workshops, and build websites etc. I’ve been working in tech since 2015 and I’m fortunate to have had many great opportunities to develop my skills. I’m a big believer in lifelong learning. If you know of any other ambassadors that want support/advice/tips, please tell them to feel free to message me” **Nyasha, 23.**

Although automation will remove some jobs, it will make new ones available - the question is whether the framework exists to facilitate the movement of or up-skilling of people from low-skilled employment into other roles that require skills and interaction with technology. We know from the LinkedIn Report (2020) that the emerging jobs are surrounding the creation, building, maintenance and analysing of technological and digital data. Some of our young people feel fairly confident with their skills, however the majority suggest they know the basics but know this is not going to be enough the further we get into the fourth industrial revolution.

When looking at the Youth Voice Census results it is clear that young people feel they do not know what skills are required across different career paths. To add to this only 10% had ever

received information on the labour market itself. Young people need careers education, more than ever as they are hit with a triad of issues that are set to negatively impact their employment prospects. The covid-19 crisis has disrupted education and employment paths; the fourth industrial revolution highlights the severe skills gap and could place many workers at risk of automation; and as the UK looks down the barrel of recession, we do not know how and when the economy and labour market will recover.

#### **4. Are DWP Work Coaches well equipped to advise people who are looking for work on new and emerging sectors and jobs?**

Young people are not being prepared for the current labour market: the Youth Voice Census (2020) found that 25% of young people believe 'not having the right skills' as one of their biggest barriers to finding employment. 31% thought 'there are no jobs here [in my area]'. This highlights further the disconnect between young people and the labour market that Mann (2020) has reported on and will be discussed below. This can be partially explained with the fact that academic qualifications are still discussed with students more frequently than vocational qualifications, alongside only 23% of young people having conversations about accessing the JCP. That means a huge 77% of young people have never been told how to use a JCP to its best advantage when seeking work (Youth Voice Census, 2020).

The Youth Voice Census (2020) also points out that young people are not being prepared for work and do not know how to use or the value of the JCP. The youth disconnect extends through to the JCP though - 19% responded with 'I thought they just didn't help' when asked why they had not engaged with the JCP whilst not in employment, education or training (NEET). When we speaking to young people in our Youth Ambassador Network we found there to be mixed feelings about JCP work coaches:

"The job coach is amazing, 5/5!" **Arron, aged 21.**

"Too generic, no personalised support, not designed for graduates, try to get you into any old job, a lot of the staff are unapproachable (unless you're lucky enough to get someone better qualified due to having a disability for instance), no long term view, very bureaucratic and inefficient." **Anon.**

"I didn't feel like they really had my interests or at least didn't have the resources to give me proper support." **Anon.**

We also found that young people feel there is a stigma attached to the JCP: "It has a massive stigma about it and when I mentioned I was thinking about using it one day my friends (who I don't talk to anymore) laughed" (Youth Voice Census, 2020). One of our Youth Ambassadors was disappointed with his experience in 2013 at the job centre;

"My personal perception of the Jobcentre is that it would seem like the staff don't listen, they don't care and as long as they make you show you're being proactive... advisors just seem to be doing whatever they can to get people off benefits" **Ben, 29 talking of**

## **his experience aged 22.**

This data is less relevant to the current labour market, however it is still vitally important as it gives an insight into the future workforce -they way they are feeling about the labour market, their skills and the support available around them. Work coaches may well be informed on the future skills required for young people, but if young people do not know that they are there to support them, they will not engage with the JCP.

### **4.1. How could DWP improve the training and advice it offers to jobseekers?**

The Covid-19 crisis has caused major disruption to the labour market, as well as other socio-economic impacts. We could see youth unemployment rise by two million -young people are 2.5 times more likely to work in a shut-down sector of the economy and are at high risk of losing their jobs as businesses seek to survive. We also have up to 500,000 young people entering the labour market this year which could only exacerbate things further. Some demographics will be hit harder than others and the uncertainty of their future exposed.

Young people have told us they need good quality work experience in order to address their low confidence in their skills and how these skills fit into the roles workplaces are requiring. The Youth Voice Census (2020) tells us that careers information is not equal across gender, age, additional needs and for Free School Meals (FSM).

Given the mammoth task ahead, the JCP will need to make use of good quality, third party resources -with work coaches receiving training on them so they can properly and effectively train young people to use them too.

Youth Employment UK CIC has a comprehensive [skills and careers digital resource](#) that is free to access and targeted at 14-24 year olds across the UK. In 2019 the resource had over 1 million views, young people using the free skills programme said that they felt more confident in their skills and career management than before.

Alongside the skills resources for young people there is also a comprehensive [careers hub](#) which provides impartial and inspiring careers information about the key sectors and pathways to careers such as digital, technical, engineering and manufacturing.

Youth Employment UK is a partner to DWP and a number of Jobcentre colleagues discuss and share the services with young jobseekers, but there is room to build on this and ensure all DWP colleagues are aware of the Youth Employment UK service and are able to embed it into their offer and where required help young people to move forward on their journey to employment.

Jobcentres could also work closely with Youth Employment UK to invite youth friendly employers who are set in key sectors with emerging jobs to collaborate with the JCP and offer insight and training sessions to work coaches, young people's programmes can be tailored not only to their needs but the growing skills needs this country is facing.

It can be seen across the 2018, 2019 and 2020 Youth Voice Census that young people want one-to-one personalised careers advice: “Notably, whenever young people were given the opportunity to share their opinions, they told us that they needed one to one support to navigate their skills, think about their next options and access work” (Youth Voice Census, 2020). This has not changed across the three years Youth Employment UK have been running the census and will be increasingly important to address in a post Covid-19 and digital skills demands of the labour market.

## **6. What is DWP’s role in ensuring that young people have the skills they need to get into and progress in work?**

Much of what has been said in the previous question is applicable to this question too. An important point to make here is that young people are very clear that they do not just want any form of work, they want meaningful, quality work with prospects for progression. They also state that they do not know the skills many employers are looking for and it is therefore recommended a review is undertaken, with young people, looking at what they see as best practice when it comes to employers developing digital alternatives to early careers engagement, work experience and employment. The Covid-19 crisis has forced organisations, providers and companies into digital alternatives that may be here to stay and should therefore be seriously considered.

The overarching point here is that young people want a personalised approach to careers advice. Understanding the barriers of the individuals, that these are not singular factors that need addressing but rather feed into each other and destroy young people’s confidence -the Youth Voice Census (2020) found that only 13% of young people were confident in finding quality employment in their local area, dropping by a further 10% for those with additional needs. This lack of confidence is propped up by 45% of NEET young people stating a lack of working experience as their biggest barrier to finding meaningful employment. An initial and periodic skills analysis by JCP work coaches could help to address this lack of confidence and experience.

“Personalised support could include a person to check in with the young person for emotional support as well as particular career advice. Job searching can be incredibly draining, particularly if you are receiving numerous rejections on a daily basis. This person could also act as a link between Mental Health support and Job support to make sure the areas are communicating properly with each other, so that for example, if a young person is experiencing a mental health crisis and cannot attend any mandatory job events or meetings that they are not harshly penalised for this.” **Sophie, 23**

This links very closely to the personal advice and support young people want, whether that be in schools, colleges and universities, or through careers services and the JCP. Across all areas respondents in the Youth Voice Census 2018, 2019, 2020 were very clear -they know what they want and that is an approach that helps them. Looking at the individuals experiences, their

skills, their qualifications and training to acknowledge their strengths and things that they need guidance with. This is how young people believe they will move into meaningful work. There is also a gender divide, with young men 'quiet confidence' in finding work: 44% young men compared to 36% young women

Work experience and experience of working are incredibly important to young people in terms of the confidence, understanding of the working world, and improving their skills and experiences (Youth Voice Census, 2020). This was also consistent in the 2018 and 2019 Youth Voice Census, and this year more respondents received work experience opportunities in schools this year as well as visits from apprentices and employers to schools being on the rise too. These are important milestones which will be at risk in the world of social distancing and an economy in recession. In this digital and socially distanced world, the JCP needs to be aware of future potential cohorts entering the labour market with no work experience and lack of employer/apprenticeship visits and the support they will need to provide.

Effective signposting is going to be really important as we move out from lockdown. There are going to be some young people emerging from lockdown with increased anxiety and other mental health problems, some that haven't been able to escape a negative environment or have had to take on the stress of the parents and siblings or have lost their support network. Mental health will not be the only potential factor affecting young people as they leave lockdown so it is important the JCP understand what these may be and provide effective signposting for those affected.

Youth Employment UK has built its free skills resource the [Young Professional](#) resources using the Journey to Employment (JET) Framework that identifies the range of factors that contribute to young person getting and sustaining a job:

- Emotional Capabilities
- Attitudes
- Employability Skills
- Qualifications, education and training
- Experience and involvement
- Career management skills
- Personal Circumstances

Once a person registers for the Young Professional they are supported with a range of content, advice, peer-to-peer stories and activities that can help them build their confidence and skills across these 7 factors.

By building the Young Professional into any job coach/youth obligation programme young people will have 24x7 online support to supplement their face-to-face provision. This support also continues as a young person moves on into education, employment and training and will help develop the early career skills needed for in-work progression.

## **7. How could DWP work more closely with employers to ensure that claimants have the skills they need to find work in the future labour market?**

The two reports below from Education and Employers inform us of the disconnect between vacancies and projected vacancies and the career aspirations of young people. Mann (2012) states “young adults who recalled ‘four or more employer contacts’ are five times less likely to be NEET”. This is still relevant in 2020, even more so given Chambers et al. (2020) points out that there is a disconnect between aspiration and opportunity, with a three-fold disconnect or worse in almost half of the UK economy (Chambers et al., 2020). We know that young people want one on one support and this could be best delivered with support obtaining quality work experience, improved understanding of job descriptions and the adoption of the Youth Friendly Employer Mark as the most effective ways of closing this disconnect and ensuring claimants have the correct skills to find work in the future labour market.

“I think that many young people would benefit and are in need of one-to-one support and advice on which type of career they would like and this would allow them to adapt their job search and be more effective whilst searching in today’s job market” **George, 22.**

Work experience has been discussed so far throughout this response, the need for quality work experience that introduces young people to the skills required in the labour market -this has been consistently expressed across the Youth Voice Census 2018, 2019 and 2020. In 2020, we found that 66% of respondents were offered work experience during their time in secondary school. Whilst this is a majority, and most enjoyed their experience, there is still more work to be done. For many, it was not compulsory for schools to provide work experience opportunities and this leaves young people relying on their or their parents network and further feeds into social mobility issues facing the UK. This is where the JCP can ensure they are up to date with emerging jobs in the UK labour market, aware of the skills required to undertake this role and begin to build individual skills programmes with work experience opportunities.

The Prince’s Responsible Business Network (2017) found that across 65 vacancies, 3 in 5 did not have a clear job description and summarised its findings with “2 in 3 young people found the job description they were reviewing difficult to understand”. This has been confirmed within our Youth Ambassador network and we believe it feeds into young people not knowing what skills are required and their lack of confidence in their skills.

“I haven’t found them [job descriptions] too complex, but I know people who have struggled. For me, I think that when a lot of employers put that work experience is not required, they should honour that because there are too many accounts of a young person (including myself) feeling like they did really well in the interview and meeting most (if not all) of the criteria but still not getting the job.” **Ciara, 19**

At Youth Employment UK, we have developed the Youth Friendly Employer Mark that we suggest should be adopted by all employers, with the JCP endorsing this and referring to it in their sessions with claimants. The Youth Friendly Employer Mark is a standard of best youth

employment practice to help employers amore inclusive environment where young people are enabled to be the best they can be. It has been endorsed by The Institute for Employment Studies as best practice in a 2019 report into the future health of young people. To obtain the Youth Friendly Employer Mark, employers must sign up to and maintain five principles:

1. **To create a range of opportunities** –for young people to gain the skills required for their working life and wider life
2. **Recognising the talent** –young people have to offer right now and acknowledging they still are developing. This means assessing them fairly based on their ability, talent and potential, whilst recognising limited experience and/or education.
3. **Fair employment** –by removing barriers for young people to enter the workplace, offering fair rewards based on the role they are recruiting for and in accordance with the highest industry standards.
4. **To develop people** -by training and supporting the development of young people. This will increase motivation to be responsible for their careers and have the skills to progress.
5. **Youth Voice** – listening to young people and providing the platform for their voices to be heard across all levels of the team, organisation, community.

This mark has already been adopted by large numbers of micro and macro employers, who collectively in 2019 created more than 64,000 youth friendly opportunities including and notably the Department of Health and Social Care. We now encourage all civil service departments to follow suit and are working in some regions to create Youth Friendly places.

“I think employers need to have a slightly different approach when it comes to recruiting and hiring young people. If we're being realistic, young people are very unlikely to have the type of work experience employers will be looking for when they are applying for their first jobs. Employers need to alter the types of questions they ask in interviews, so that they can get a feel for a young person's potential and current skills rather than focusing on lack of experience. “ **Ciara, 19**

Our existing benchmarking tool allows employers to look at their own policies and see if these are up to standard before reviewing their early careers outreach, work experience programme and employment programmes against best practice standards.

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