

EUROPEAN AGENDA FOR ADULT LEARNING

Employability Skills for Young Unemployed Adults

1. Context – the challenges

High levels of youth unemployment have been a key driver of government education and skills policy during the last five years. Whilst recent labour market figures show a welcome reduction in the numbers of young people claiming Jobseekers' Allowance (April 2015, 18-24 year olds, 167,500), this only accounts for part of the picture of youth unemployment:

- 735,000 young people aged 16-24 were unemployed in January to March 2015 (this includes all young people looking for and available for work, whether or not they are claiming benefits)
- The proportion of unemployed young people (not counting students) who are not claiming Jobseeker's Allowance and therefore are not receiving official help with job search is now 76.1% and has risen by over 20 percentage points since October 2012.
- The unemployment rate for young people aged 16-24 for January to March 2015 was 16.9%, compared to just 5.5% for all adults over the age of 16.

High levels of youth unemployment have extensive social and economic costs for society - estimated at £28 billion over the next decade. Being out of learning and work while young, particularly for a sustained period, also has negative and long term personal consequences. A young person who experiences a period NEET will, on average, lose up to £50,000 in earnings over their working life. In addition, research shows that young people who are NEET are at higher risk of regular periods of unemployment during adult life; teenage pregnancy and earlier parenting; persistent youth offending resulting in custodial sentences; insecure housing and homelessness; and mental and physical health problems.

In the context of youth unemployment, the UK also faces a number of wider challenges that create complexity and uncertainty for young people entering the labour market, including:

- The changing structure of the UK economy. Whilst there are emerging skills gaps and skills shortages, there are also less entry level jobs available for young people – a consequence of this is that it is difficult for many young people to take their first step onto the careers ladder.

- During the next decade there are projected to be 13.5 million job vacancies, yet only 7 million young people entering the labour force – this highlights the critical importance of ensuring that all young people have the skills required to meet the needs of the labour market.
- Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to achieve positive outcomes in learning and work than other young people – this is important in creating an inclusive and fair society, and in ensuring that all young people are fully equipped with the skills required by the economy.

2. The policy response in England

Government has introduced and prioritised a range of policies to address the youth employment challenge and equip young people with essential skills for employment, including:

- Traineeships – targeted at young people aged 16-24 who are motivated to work and qualified below level 3, comprised of three core components – work preparation training, work experience and maths and English. Participation data from the Skills Funding Agency show that there were just 10,400 traineeship starts in 2013/14. Latest provisional data show that there were 9,200 traineeship starts in the first two quarters of the 2014/15 academic year.
- Apprenticeships - paid jobs that incorporate on and off the job training leading to nationally recognised qualifications. Recent research by IPPR and LGA concluded that *“There is a big gap between the function apprenticeships should have in our economy and how they’re being used in practice: the majority of apprenticeships are being used to train older people, and those who are already employed at their company, instead of taking on young people out of work.”* The Government’s target of creating 3 million new Apprenticeships is intended to address this challenge.
- Plans to replace Jobseekers’ Allowance for 18-21 year olds with a new Youth Allowance that will require them to ‘learn and earn’.

3. NIACE's Work as UK Co-ordinator

What are employability skills? What are employers looking for in young recruits? How can young people develop skills for employability?

These three questions were the key focus of NIACE's 'employability skills for young unemployed adults' project, delivered throughout 2012/14 as part of NIACE's role as UK Co-ordinator of the European Agenda for Adult Learning, with additional support from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES).

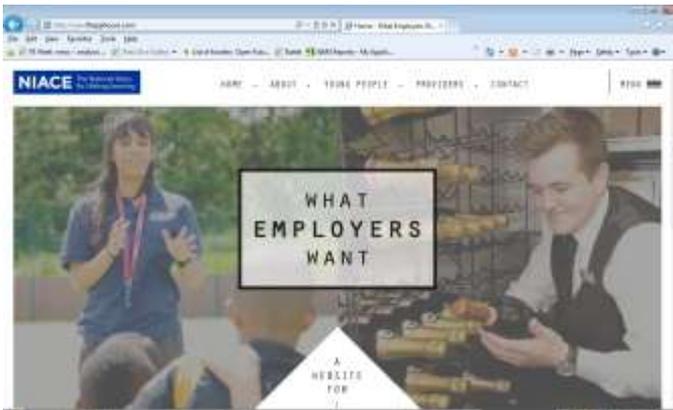
We frequently hear that employers think young people are not well prepared for the world of work. This leaves many feeling demoralised and confused about what employers are actually looking for. To help address the challenge, NIACE worked with learning providers in England, Scotland and Wales to train and support 31 unemployed young people to carry out face-to-face research interviews with 30 local employers. The purpose of the interviews was to identify what an 'employable young person' looks like from an employer's perspective.

By bringing unemployed young people and local employers together, the project supported young people to develop a range of skills and improve their chances of getting a job and progressing in work. Young people got to hear firsthand what skills, qualities and experience are most important to employers. Employers benefitted too – supporting young people with their job search and perhaps meeting a future employee! The research found that when recruiting a young person employers are looking for:

- Positive attitude – employers want young people to be 'sparky', they want them to show enthusiasm, commitment and energy.
- 'Soft skills' – the basic personal skills that enable young people to 'get on well at work', such as communication, time management, team work and problem-solving skills - which are transferable to different jobs.
- 'Hard skills' – many of which are job specific, but employers place particular value on literacy, numeracy and IT skills, which are considered important for almost all jobs.
- Qualifications – even though employers recognise that not all the qualities they are looking for can be measured through qualifications, they are valued by employers.
- Experience – a range of different types of experience, particularly work experience and volunteering.

A key output of this project is the 'What Employers Want' website, which provides a range of information and resources for use by both young people and providers who support young people to gain skills for employment.

What Employers Want – website - www.fbappphouse.com



[Click here](#) to watch a short film featuring a number of employers talking about the benefits that young people bring to their businesses and the skills and attributes they value.

4. Questions to the Forum

Over the next five years a key priority for government will be to move unemployed young people off Jobseekers' Allowance (or the new Youth Allowance) and into an Apprenticeship (or a job) as quickly as possible. This is likely to be effective for young people whose personal circumstances and motivation will enable them to make this transition, but what about some of the most disadvantaged young people in our society? Many of these young people have complex needs and deep rooted barriers to learning and work and therefore require intensive support.

- How can we promote the approach developed through the 'employability skills for unemployed young adults project' to enable these young people to develop the skills they need, to move them closer to employment?
- Which organisations does NIACE need to engage/work with?
- What challenges do such organisations face and how can we support them to overcome them and secure impact from the approach that we have developed?

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