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WELCOME TO ISSUE 10

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

DR KATY JONES (GUEST EDITOR)
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From Work First to Good Work: Supporting people into good jobs, not just any jobs

For decades, policymakers in the UK and elsewhere have promoted a 'Work First' approach to getting people into employment. This approach is focused on moving unemployed people into any job quickly, with the assumption that once people get Any Job, they will then get a Better Job, then a Career (the ABC approach). At odds with the evidence base (many people who move into low paid jobs get stuck there) and the ethos many employability professionals want to adopt in their practice, existing systems and funding regimes can incentivise a focus on headline work outcomes, regardless of where people ultimately end up.

However, there is growing consensus that the 'Work First' approach is not fit for purpose: the UK is in a low-pay low-productivity rut and this approach arguably helps to trap us there¹. Meanwhile, a growing interest in 'good', 'fair' or 'decent' work is also gaining traction in other policy fields, with initiatives like Greater Manchester's Good Employment Charter leading the way for promoting the value of better quality work and influencing employer practices relating to core issues including pay, security and equality, diversity and inclusion.

Bringing together the employability sector and the good work movement seems like a no-brainer, but these two

policy and practice agendas are rarely linked up. Supporting people into good jobs which fit their needs, capabilities and aspirations, and creating a system which empowers people to turn down poor quality work is key to better long-term outcomes – not only for individuals but also for our broader economic and social prosperity.

A WORTHY ASPIRATION, BUT HOW DO WE GET THERE?

The theme for this issue is 'supporting people into good jobs, not just any jobs', and how employment support providers can work with employers to support people to move into and progress in good quality job opportunities. In this bumper edition we have contributors from people working in research, policy and practice; from private, public and third sector organisations; and from both the UK and Australia. Articles draw on cutting edge research and evidence, alongside the direct experiences of beneficiaries, employers and providers. It is packed with insights, ideas and practical examples, which help to demonstrate both the possibility and the value of adopting an approach with good work at the core.

Alongside reflections on the fundamental question of 'what is a good job?', several authors consider this in relation to different groups including young people, women and

01



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Over the past decade she has been involved in multiple research projects focused on labour market disadvantage, welfare conditionality and employment support. Most recently she has led the ESRC-funded Universal Credit and Employers project: the first major independent research exploring employer perspectives of Universal Credit and related UK active labour market policies.

An interdisciplinary researcher, she has published widely in journals including the International Journal of Human Resource Management, Social Policy and Administration, Policy and Politics, Social Policy & Society and Political Quarterly. She co-convenes the UK Social Policy Association's Employment Policy Group and serves on the Editorial teams of Social Policy & Society and Studies in the Education of Adults.

Katy is passionate about engaging with policymakers and practitioners to generate impactful research.



¹ Jones, K. and Kumar, A. (2022) *Idleness*. Agenda Publishing

veterans. Positive outcomes from alternative approaches including IPS and supported employment interventions also underline the value of shifting away from the ‘any job quickly’ approach, especially for people with disabilities and long-term health impairments. Others centre their attention on the ‘demand side’, looking at what can be done to encourage (or require) employers to improve job quality.

Practical recommendations for employability professionals include:

- Engaging with good work initiatives including employment charters
- Putting employment rights into employability
- Leading by example through ensuring employability organisations are themselves good employers, and
- Designing support and services around the talents and needs of beneficiaries.

GOOD WORK IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

A core theme running throughout is the importance of partnership working. Shifting the focus to good jobs is not something employability professionals can do alone. The diversity of contributors in this issue helps to underline this point. In addition to national policymakers coming on board, there is clearly an important role for employers and their representative organisations, trade unions, housing providers, local authorities and others to work together on this shared agenda. The critical importance of strong local partnerships and place-based solutions that work for both jobseekers and businesses in diverse local economies also shines through these pieces.

Employers in particular are often a missing link: but as highlighted in a previous special issue², working with them is critical. This includes engaging with small businesses, many of which provide valuable jobs but are too

often overlooked in centrally driven employment programmes. Insights from ground-breaking initiatives like the ReAct Partnership and Employer Innovation Labs also offer promising models for bringing together employability support and working with employers to improve working practices.

IN DEFENCE OF THE WORK FIRST APPROACH?

We hope this special issue helps to inspire professionals, organisations, commissioners and policymakers to connect employability policies and initiatives with the good work movement. Furthermore, we think the contributions we have curated offer a compelling case for policymakers to shift their emphasis from any jobs to good jobs.

However, in the UK we are yet to see any evidence of a shift in approach from policymakers. Incredibly, despite a renewed emphasis on ‘progression’ under the current regime, new policies centred on in-work Universal Credit claimants, appear to simply extend the ‘any jobs’ approach to people who are in work – what I have called a ‘Work First, Work More’ approach³.

Given this apparent intractability, we were keen to include contributors who remain committed to the Work First way when putting together this special issue. Perhaps puzzlingly, we were unsuccessful in finding any. We will therefore end with an offer (indeed a challenge) to those happy with and/or responsible for the current policy regime to contribute their thoughts and evidence to a later special issue. We look forward to the debate!



² Jones, K. (2023) *Working with employers to tackle economic activity*, IEP Journal No.8 https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.myiep.uk/resource/resmgr/docs/docs_2/iep_journal_issue_8_48pp_mar.pdf
³ Jones, K. (2022). Heads in the sand: The absence of employers in new developments in UK active labour market policy. *The Political Quarterly*, 93(2), 253-260. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-923X.13130>

LESSONS FROM SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT MODELS – THE VALUE OF PLACING JOB QUALITY CENTRE-STAGE

While not everybody will agree with Noel Coward’s view that ‘work is more fun than fun’, many people find enough positive aspects of their work to motivate them and to allow them to get a feeling of fulfilment from their jobs.

Of course, being in a job offers a range of potential benefits, especially when compared with being unemployed. Work provides income, social connection, opportunities to learn and deploy new skills, the chance to contribute to an organisation with a wider purpose and the chance to sustain both our physical and psychological well-being. But not all jobs are fulfilling, enjoyable, safe, healthy or secure.

Indeed, there are those who still argue that the grinding toil and indignity of some jobs are necessary if work is to help build character and self-discipline, or to be a part of a citizen’s obligations to their fellows and to be part of the quid pro quo of receiving the protection of the social safety net. One of the defining features of ‘workfare’ approaches to getting the unemployed back to work (where eligibility for benefits is dependent on job search and other pro work behaviours) is that exposure to the disciplines and even the hardships of work are felt to be instructive and beneficial.

The discourse regarding active labour market policy (ALMP) choices in many developed economies has been characterised by a tussle between these two ways of defining work and the impact they may have on job seekers. More recently, we have seen a welcome emphasis on job quality as a route to improving workforce

wellbeing, engagement and productivity in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. Yet, in a somewhat more politicised backwater of the debate, more energy is sometimes taken up with advocacy of ALMPs which incentivise work participation among the unemployed through benefit conditionality and sanctions, where the quality of work is rarely the most important consideration.

There are several ways that we can inform the direction of ALMP through evidence, especially if we can answer the following two questions:

1. Is the maxim that ‘any job is a good job’ always true and do sanctions to get people into any job really work?
2. What have we learned about more individualised and tailored supported employment models (where job quality is an important consideration) and the potential benefits of adopting them more widely?

IS ANY JOB A ‘GOOD’ JOB AND DO SANCTIONS WORK?

There has long been a debate about whether citizens have a civic duty to work. The punitive nature of some workfare programmes and their accompanying narratives are often an attempt to explain labour supply problems, at least in part, as the product of a deficient work ethic



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He has led many studies looking at the ways that employers, policy makers and healthcare professionals can improve the ways the UK can optimise the contribution of the workforce to inclusivity and productivity. He was chief investigator of a major DWP/NHS-funded trial of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) for people with common mental health problems and has been an advisor to several government health and work research and policy initiatives.

Stephen has co-authored two books looking at the future of work (21st Century Workforces & Workplaces, Bloomsbury, 2018) and workforce health (The Healthy Workforce: Enhancing Wellbeing and Productivity in the Workers of the Future, Emerald, 2021). He was appointed Honorary Professor at Lancaster University Management School in 2010.



among the proportion of the labour force. Many advocates of workfare schemes are convinced that being in any kind of work is always more beneficial than being unemployed and that policies which place an obligation to look for and take up any work opportunities should lie at the centre of 'back to work' programmes. But the evidence here is not so clear-cut. Several studies conducted in Europe and Australia now show that being in work is only likely to be beneficial to mental health if the psychological environment is positive and the intrinsic quality of the jobs being done are high (Butterworth et al, 2011; Butterworth et al, 2013; Chandola and Zhang, 2018; Cortès-Franch et al).

In practice this points to work which provides control, autonomy, variety and task discretion. Data from these studies all show that the psychosocial quality of bad jobs is frequently worse than unemployment. In an Australian study Butterworth et al, (2011) looked at those moving from unemployment to employment and found that people **"who moved into poor quality jobs showed a significant worsening in their mental health compared to those who remained unemployed"**. The lesson for policy here is that a focus on job quality as we support the unemployed back to work is not an indulgence but a necessary component of a model of employment support which is both humane and evidence based.

On the issue of sanctions, the evidence of their effectiveness is weak at best (Dwyer et al, 2020; Pattaro et al, 2022). Over 500,000 people (one in 12 of claimants since the pandemic) are on the receiving end of sanctions each year in the UK and the evidence is that a sanction makes you more likely to leave benefits but no more likely to get a job. Even if a claimant finds work, those receiving a sanction earn less and are more likely to languish in poor quality work with fewer opportunities to progress and increase their earnings. Sanctions represent a reliable source of 'red meat' for political leaders to toss to some voters and many socially

conservative journalists but, if we want simple successful and sustainable approaches to helping the unemployed to find work, there are better ways.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT WITH A FOCUS ON JOB QUALITY?

The philosophical gulf between a workfare (work for benefits) and alternatives which emphasises a supported approach to finding the unemployed a well-matched job upon which they can build skills, confidence, agency and wellbeing is substantial. This is why interest in both the mechanics and the results of supported employment models such as Individual Placement and Support (IPS) has grown significantly. These models emphasise an individualised package of support which focuses on reducing the negative impact of a person's own barriers to finding and keeping a job.

It is also because IPS places a higher priority on job quality, especially the power of finding a job which is a good match for the skills and aspirations of the job seeker. It explicitly rejects the 'hair shirt' philosophy which underpins more punitive models of job seeker support which assumes that many unemployed people are reluctant to work and need to be reacquainted with the idea that working is part of their civic duty. It is clear that there is still a political upside to promoting a more punitive approach despite this evidence and at IES, with support from abrdn Financial Fairness Trust, we are leading a Commission on the Future of Employment Support¹ which will set out options for reforming this important dimension of ALMP.

In addition to excellent contributions from a range of stakeholders, our own evaluation research is reinforcing the view that supported employment models including IPS can help unemployed people with multiple barriers to work. One example is the large-scale randomised control trial² (RCT) funded by DWP and DHSC which recruited almost 10,000 people with common mental health problems to

an 'IPS-light' intervention based in both the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and in Sheffield City Region (SCR) (Newton et al, 2023).

This intervention resulted in:

- In WMCA, a positive impact on employment but no significant impact on earnings or health
- In SCR, a small positive impact on health but no significant impact on employment or earnings
- In both locations, among those out of work, IPS had a small positive impact on health and wellbeing
- In a small sub-group of SCR subjects who were in work but struggling with their health, IPS increased job retention and health and wellbeing.

The growing evidence in support of IPS and other supported employment interventions suggests that there are sustainable and cost-effective alternatives to punitive approaches to ALMP. There are several lessons from large scale trials of IPS including the Health-Led trials which should give us confidence that supported employment can work for a variety of client groups. Some of these lessons include:

- Fidelity matters. If the design and implementation of IPS can stick closely to the fidelity criteria it is clear that the benefits to clients across a range of different outcome measures are unlikely to be more positive, sustainable and cost-effective
- One of the reasons that IPS is successful is that it focuses on supportive efforts to reduce the barriers to unemployment being experienced by each individual and that they get sustained support focused on the ways those barriers manifest themselves for each person and, in so doing, building job-search self-efficacy and confidence

¹ <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Working%20for%20the%20Future%20-%20Launch%20Report.pdf>
² <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/health-led-trials-impact-evaluation-reports>

- The capacity of supported employment caseworkers to deliver high levels of support can be an important ingredient to success. This is why manageable caseloads are important, as are high quality training and supervision
- Each supported employment intervention including IPS & IPS light is delivered under different circumstances. In order to truly learn the lessons of implementation it is important to consider whether a process evaluation should sit alongside other forms of evaluation of these programmes. Achieving an understanding of how and why supported employment interventions have been successful or otherwise is vital if supported employment practitioners are to learn lessons and continuously improve their practice
- It is clear from many studies of IPS that the health benefits of achieving sustained employment are much more likely to be derived if job quality is high and that there is a good match between the job and the aspirations and interests of the client.

There will always be those who argue that job seekers need to learn the disciplines of job search and work, and that aspiring to a 'good job' when moving from unemployment is unrealistic. But there is now powerful evidence that psychosocial job quality, especially if it is embedded in the philosophy and practice of supported employment interventions, can deliver better quality, more sustainable and cost-effective outcomes for job seekers with even the most complex needs.

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¹ <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Working%20for%20the%20Future%20-%20Launch%20Report.pdf>
² <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/health-led-trials-impact-evaluation-reports>

UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND GOOD JOBS: WHAT ROLE FOR EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT?

In this article we consider the role of employer engagement in Active Labour Market Policy (ALMP) in influencing access to good jobs.

Employer engagement has long been an aspect of ALMP. This has included, for example, employer participation in providing work-experience placements, but has also extended in seeking to make employment provision more 'demand-led', through the development of pre-employment training programmes, with employer inputs linked to specific local employment opportunities such as sector growth or a large local development.

Aspects like guaranteed interviews or work trials can be part of such provision. One longstanding criticism of some forms of employer engagement is that programmes have tended to be predicated on entries to jobs which were often low-paid, and which might not offer opportunities for training and development or for career progression. Universal Credit (UC) could offer an opportunity to change and challenge some of these issues, but the extent to which it will do so is contingent on the design and delivery of both out-of and in-work support.

The main points we make in the article are that:

- Employer engagement has become an established part of the ALMP 'offer' in the UK over successive programmes. However, this engagement has often been focused on filling bulk low-paid vacancies. If ALMP, including through

UC, is to place greater emphasis on good jobs and progression this suggests a quite different set of logic around employer engagement

- There is only quite limited evidence on how ALMP can encourage good job outcomes in the short- and longer-terms. However, some good quality evidence points towards the importance of targeting entry to good jobs through comprehensive programmes that include significant employer engagement and training for particular sectors and occupations alongside matching individuals to opportunities
- This evidence appears counter to the 'stepping stones' approach to job entry which seems to underpin Universal Credit currently. If under UC access to good jobs and most progression is expected to happen through job moves, this raises an important concern about whether there is sufficient resource and labour market knowledge in the system to support this? There also remains a pressing need to better integrate the employment and skills aspects of policy, something which has been a perennial issue in back-to-work support

The article draws on a more detailed analysis published in our Chapter 'The Weakest Link? Job Quality and Active Labour Market Policy in the UK' in the book [Employer Engagement Making Active Labour Market Policies Work](#).

03



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ACCESS TO GOOD JOBS

The recent focus on good work in employment policy debates in the UK is reflective of concerns with aspects of employment and employment change around pay and benefits, employment security, access to training and other aspects of job design, employee voice and well-being. There are different ways in which good jobs can be defined (for an overview see – [CIPD Good Work Index 2023: Survey report](#)). In this article we are focused primarily on issues of pay, job security and access to training and/or progression opportunities.

In terms of ALMP, a changing orientation can be seen over time from focusing solely on employment entry, towards a greater emphasis on employment retention, and now an emergent focus on progression (Sissons and Green, 2017). There are two ways of thinking about access to good jobs which can be considered in relation to ALMP. The first is around direct entry to good jobs, so that out-of-work benefit claimants are ‘matched-in’ to good employment opportunities initially. Such an approach has typically been problematic in the context of a strict version of ‘work-first’ ALMP, whereby the speed of a match is typically prioritised over its quality, something which negates the ability to ‘hold-out’ for a better employment opportunity.

The second way is a ‘stepping stones’ approach, where initial entry into what might not be objectively viewed as good work is seen as a step to securing subsequent (better) employment opportunities. Such progression could be supported by in-work support elements of ALMP through access to information, careers advice and guidance (IAG) or the provision of, or supporting connections to, relevant training provision. While the precise details of Universal Credit delivery will likely evolve over-time, it seems clear that the overall approach is closer to the idea of stepping stones and the stylised sequence of Any Job > Better Job > Career.

EMPLOYMENT ENGAGEMENT IN ALMP

The idea of ALMP being more demand-led and working more closely with employers as part of national employment policy debates arguably goes back to the New Deal Innovation Fund, which was introduced in 1999 as part of wider changes to the employment support system (Fletcher, 2001). Ideas developed through the programme were subsequently taken forward as part of the Fair Cities Pilot (2004-2008), where pre-employment training designed around large employers’ needs was an important part of the design to meet the aims to support disadvantaged ethnic minority residents to access opportunities (Atkinson et al., 2008). Local Employment Partnerships (2007-2010) further extended this approach; also introducing a recruitment subsidy element (in response to the 2007-2008 recession).

While all these programmes began to work more closely with employers, there is little evidence on the extent to which employer practices changed as a result, and while employer engagement appears across the evaluation literature to have achieved some successes in understanding and meeting employer needs (i.e. becoming more demand-led), and securing job outcomes for more disadvantaged groups, there has been less emphasis on the quality of these. Indeed, it is argued that employer engagement has often been typified by the involvement of employers in sectors which rely on a large supply of low-paid workers; while the depth of employers’ engagement has also often been in practice fairly limited (Ingold et al, 2017).

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY ON WHAT WORKS?

There is surprisingly little high-quality evidence on what works in ALMP to support access to good jobs, and this is particularly true in respect of supporting in-work progression. However, there is some good evidence from the US of employment

programmes which seek to support access to good jobs. The Work Advance model is an example of a ‘dual-customer’ approach whereby a programme seeks to simultaneously meet the participant needs (for good work) and local employer needs (for example addressing particular skills and labour shortages) (Hendra et al, 2016). Such programmes rely on significant and detailed employer engagement in terms of understanding labour market needs and how these might be filled.

Two other aspects worth highlighting are that the evidence from such programmes is predominantly around matching-in initially to good opportunities (i.e. identifying good job opportunities and supporting participants to access these), and that there can be a significant component of occupational training involved (which is more closely aligned to training-first than a work-first approach).

In respect of progression there is some evidence from the Universal Credit evaluations that suggests that the intensity of support being offered may be linked with higher earnings outcomes (DWP, 2018). Other broader evidence on the workforce points towards a positive association between in-depth IAG and moving employers; while lifelong learning which upgrades qualifications can also have a positive effect on earnings (Pollard et al, 2007; Dorsett et al, 2010).

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE LOGICS OF EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT UNDER UNIVERSAL CREDIT?

The move to Universal Credit raises a number of questions around the approach taken to employer engagement. Fundamental to these is the extent to which work-first is strictly prioritised. As detailed above, there can be specific benefits when employer engagement is organised around pathways to good jobs rather than simply meeting bulk employment needs.

There is also a question around how employment services can work with employers in the context of an approach seeking to support the mobility of workers.

Previous rounds of employer engagement in relation to ALMP have often been premised on meeting immediate labour demand needs, but these might be quite distinct from the aims around individual progression – and practically how does a conversation with employers which focuses on progression begin (given it might increase turnover)? Early evidence suggests some employer views are fairly sceptical about the progression aims of UC – with concerns including their ability to provide extra hours to suit workers (rather than to suit fluctuations in business needs); over workers taking on additional jobs; the limited availability of progression opportunities within the firm and the role of the Jobcentre in encouraging workers to seek these; and about staff retention and worker mobility (Jones and Carson, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

Universal Credit introduces the potential to consider more fully the destinations of jobseekers and their impacts over the longer-term. However, the extent to which this has positive impacts for jobseekers is contingent on important aspects of programme design. A strict work-first approach can introduce important limitations, and if first jobs are seen to be simply ‘stepping stones’ it is not clear whether Universal Credit provision is currently well set-up to support individuals seeking job moves and career progression. Furthermore, some of the international evidence points towards the role of fuller vocational training and initial links to good jobs as underpinning positive outcomes (prioritising the quality rather than speed of job-matching).

In practical delivery terms, if the reality is that under UC most progression happens through job moves, is there

sufficient resource and labour market knowledge in the system to support progression? How can individuals be supported to plan their careers? And how will gaps in skills provision be addressed to support ongoing development? Here there is a need to better integrate the employment and skills aspects of policy to open-up more genuine career pathways.

We are attempting to address these and related questions in a new project funded by the Nuffield Foundation on Universal Credit, Good Work and Progression, involving survey data collection and in-depth interviews with UC claimants to understand the effect of their interactions with the Department for Work and Pensions on their ability to secure good work and progression.¹

Employer engagement with ALMP to this point has often been typified by bulk employment with low-barriers to entry, which is often low-paid. It is unclear the extent to which conversations about good jobs and progression will be part of future employer engagement approaches, or the ways in which employers might react to these.

There is of course a wider issue which we have not touched-on here around overall demand and the stock of good jobs, which relies also on other areas of government policy and employer practice.

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¹ This 3-year project, led by Professor Ashwin Kumar and involving Dr Katy Jones, Professor Paul Sissons and Professor Anne Green commenced on 1st October 2023.

CAN 'ACTIVATING' EMPLOYERS THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMMES AND SOCIAL PROCUREMENT LEAD TO GOOD WORK?

The limitations of current employment service delivery

It is now well-known that lack of engagement of employers has limited the successful delivery of employment services, particularly sustainable jobs for candidates (Ingold and McGurk, 2023).

A critical reason for this limitation is the supply-sided (candidate) focus of policies and programmes, at the expense of the demand-side (employers). There are exceptions, most notably the ReAct Partnership¹ formed of Restart Prime Providers.

The limits of supply-side employability programmes have become more apparent during the Covid-19 crisis, especially in the context of rising living costs. A 2023 report by the Work and Pensions Select Committee (HoC, 2023) has highlighted the worsening mismatch between labour supply and demand, mainly as a result of rising economic inactivity and people with health related conditions (50+ and younger aged groups) declaring that they would like to work, while employers struggle to recruit appropriately skilled staff (this is also occurring in the US and Australia [Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023]).

Employment services in the UK, US and Australia are limited by churn of candidates and by challenges around the supply of quality jobs. The lack of sustainable, good quality jobs is a long-standing issue. This demand-side issue needs to be addressed post-pandemic to improve economic prosperity and societal well-being. Current employment services are under scrutiny, most clearly in Australia where the Albanese government has

commissioned a 'first principles' Select Committee Inquiry into employment services². However, policymakers have not sufficiently considered another lever that could be pulled to create sustainable job opportunities for clients of employment services. That lever is social procurement (Macfarlane 2014). But the landscape is changing in all three countries.

Social procurement

Social procurement is 'when organisations use their buying power to generate social value above and beyond the value of the goods, services or construction being procured' [buyingforvic.gov.au]. While employment services delivered by or contracted by public authorities seek to support people into employment, government procurement also seeks to leverage 'social outcomes' from its own spending.

Public procurement is big business, and its importance has grown over the past decade. Public procurement expenditure as a share of GDP increased significantly across the OECD over the last decade, from 11.8% of GDP in 2007 to 12.9% of GDP in 2021. Recent years have seen further increases in the share of public procurement relative to GDP. Across OECD-EU countries, public procurement increased from 13.7% of GDP in 2019 to 14.8% in 2021 (OECD 2023:120).



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¹ <https://ersa.org.uk/news/react-partnership-research-shared-employer-engagement-what-works/>

² https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Workforce_Australia_Employment_Services

Examples of public procurement include government purchasing of goods and services as well as infrastructure such as rail and road projects. In the UK, Section 106 agreements allow local planning authorities to make approvals for land use subject to conditions. For example, granting of planning applications for new supermarkets or industrial parks can be contingent on the opening of employment opportunities for the local community. Not all planning authorities are making use of developer money, according to a recent report by the Home Builders Federation (2023). In recent years, there has been a growing focus on using government contracts to achieve social policy objectives. Notably, in 2012, the UK adopted the Social Value Act and in 2014, the EU introduced directives on public procurement that encouraged public authorities to embrace socially responsible procurement practices, as outlined in the European Commission guide *Buying Social* (2021). In the United States, the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law led to the introduction of the 'Local Hiring Preference for Construction Jobs,' allowing states and project recipients to prioritise disadvantaged workers or individuals from specific areas when hiring for federal highway projects. This renewed interest in leveraging government contracts for social goals has become increasingly prominent.

Public contracting policies have evolved a great deal between 2012 and 2023 in the UK, especially considering the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. Versions of government regulations and guidelines regarding public contracting have been updated more than once, especially at the devolved level where Scotland, and increasingly Wales, have sought to install different spending policies to the UK government.

We are increasingly seeing the inclusion of community benefit (or social benefit) clauses in infrastructure and other publicly procured projects in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to a lesser extent England under the Social Value Act 2012.

There are also set asides where certain types of organisations such as social enterprises or minority owned businesses are given preferential access to public contracts. In the United States, developers, community groups and cities can negotiate community benefit agreements for large infrastructure or redevelopment projects (OECD 2022). In all three jurisdictions, we see that the rediscovery of the 'social' in public contracting has entailed a shift away from pure commercial and legal considerations in the commissioning and procurement process.

Critically, to date it seems that employment services have largely been absent from social procurement. The best example of the leveraging of social clauses for employment services in the UK is the employment and regeneration legacy of the 2012 London Olympic Games. The disconnect between employment services and social procurement seems a missed opportunity given that employment services aim to assist overlooked talent into employment, which is also an aim of social procurement.

Good work and job quality

At the same time as the rediscovery of the 'social' in some areas of procurement, policy agendas on 'good work' have become more prevalent in the UK, Australia and the US. However, it is a broad concept with no universal meaning and surprisingly employers tend to be absent from



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this conversation, as with employment services (Ingold and McGurk, 2023). Recurring key components of good work are rate of pay, employment type, security of contracts, working conditions, opportunities for individual growth, wellbeing, freedom and support (Measuring Job Quality Working Group, 2018). In the UK the Good Work Plan (HM Government, 2018) noted that quality work means different things to different people. While good work is a broad concept with no universal meaning, it is generally related to an individual's wellbeing in employment and the factors which impact this. Recurring key components of good work are rate of pay, employment type, security of contracts, working conditions, opportunities for individual growth – including through training and progression – wellbeing, freedom, and support.

In Australia the state of Victoria is leading the way with its Social Procurement Framework introduced in September 2018, with other states such as New South Wales and Queensland. The Social Procurement Framework in Victoria applies to all the goods, services, and construction that the Victorian Government buys (Victorian Government, 2018). Social procurement encompasses social benefit suppliers such as social enterprises, Disabilities Enterprises and Aboriginal businesses. It also applies to purchasing of goods, services, and infrastructure, requiring potential suppliers to include additional social benefits to improve employment and equality and environmental outcomes.

In the US 'good jobs' are argued to be the foundation of an equitable economy that lifts workers and families and makes businesses more globally competitive. Good jobs include the following qualities: recruitment and hiring; benefits; diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA); empowerment and representation; job security and working conditions; organisational culture; fair, transparent, and equitable pay; skills and career advancement.

SOCIAL PROCUREMENT, EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND GOOD WORK

Surprisingly, employers have tended to be absent from policy conversations around good work and job quality, as well as scholarship. This echoes their absence from employment services design, commissioning and to some extent delivery. The ability of employment service practitioners to assist people into good quality jobs is both an opportunity for skills enhancement.

Critically it is a demand-side issue that requires government and employers to create better jobs. However, employability practitioners play a crucial role in developing relationships with employers and other stakeholders in order to broker and negotiate good job opportunities that meet the aspirations and values of their clients. These elements are likely to be key to the fostering of sustainable job pathways. However, social procurement needs coordination between the procuring agency, successful bidders and employment and wrap-around services.

The key question for our new research project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council is whether social procurement is a lever that can be pulled to foster good jobs. Our countries of focus are the UK, Australia and the US. For more information about the research, or if you would like to take part, please contact: Dr Anne Daguerra at A.Daguerra@brighton.ac.uk

Jo Ingold's book (co-edited with Patrick McGurk) [Employer Engagement: Making active labour market policies work](#) by Bristol University Press is out now. The paperback version will be published in February 2024.

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- <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FX000583%2F1> Grant Number: ES/X000583/1

¹ This 3-year project, led by Professor Ashwin Kumar and involving Dr Katy Jones, Professor Paul Sissons and Professor Anne Green commenced on 1st October 2023.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE INTO GOOD JOBS, NOT JUST ANY JOBS – THE SMALL BUSINESS CASE

Small businesses play an integral role in their local communities, they have an acute awareness of the local issues which surround them.

Small firms account for over 60 per cent of employment in the UK and can thus play an integral role in providing local, good quality jobs. The agility and adaptability of micro businesses means they are often the gateway into employment for those furthest away from the labour market.

This factor is often overlooked by policymakers and larger organisations. Consequently, employment support services can often fail small business employers and jobseekers. Small businesses have played a disproportionate role in supporting individuals from worklessness into employment.

Previous Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) research found small businesses recruited from across the labour market, such as individuals whose highest educational attainment is GCSE equivalent Maths/English Grade C or lower (34%); individuals returning to work after a career break (23%); and people who have English as a second language (24%).¹

JOBCENTRES AND SMALL BUSINESSES

Small and micro employers often struggle to recruit staff from Jobcentres, many often highlight a lack of understanding from Jobcentres

about job vacancies and the employer.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that FSB research in 2022 found only 5 per cent of all small businesses say they collaborate with Jobcentre Plus to meet their skills needs. This number increases to 8 per cent for small business employers who say they employ someone furthest from the labour market. Certain sectors such as construction (10%) and manufacturing (7%) are more inclined to seek support from Jobcentres.^{[1] 2}

This evidence suggests there may be limitations to the 'Any Job First, Better Job Next' approach. Jobcentres should offer a more personalised approach with greater focus on CV support, training and matching candidates with suitable employers. Providing small and micro employers with a consistent level of service is vital. Small employers often lack on site HR support and lack funds to offered specialist recruitment agencies.

ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICIES

Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) can be effective, however, many of these programmes tend not to be designed with small businesses in mind. Where policymakers have listened to businesses, we have seen better outcomes. For example, FSB campaigned for the expansion of the Kickstart Scheme to sole traders.



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¹ FSB, 2019, Small business, Big Heart, <https://www.fsb.org.uk/resource-report/small-business-big-heart-communities-report.html>
² FSB, 2022, Scaling up Skills: Developing education and training to help small businesses and the economy, <https://www.fsb.org.uk/resource-report/scaling-up-skills.html>

There are several barriers to sole traders taking on a permanent member of staff. Some of these are tangible, for instance based on cost factors. The Kickstart Scheme provided many sole traders with the chance to not only help a young person in receipt of Universal Credit, but also to realise opportunities for business growth. Employer involvement in the development, design and implementation of such programmes is essential.³

PLACED BASED INTERVENTION

Small businesses are uniquely placed to identify and lead place-based solutions because they are embedded in their communities. The close relationship with employees and the trust they have developed allows them to create long term solutions.

There should be more focus in developing local partnerships to better support small employers and jobseekers at a local level. The lack of hierarchical structures and less bureaucracy within smaller firms can often lead to greater autonomy, where staff have the opportunity to share ideas, be involved in key decisions and develop their skills.



³ This was also recommended by independent research conducted by researchers at Manchester Met University (Jones and Carson, 2023 Universal Credit and Employers: Exploring the Demand Side of UK Active Labour Market Policy <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-01/UniversalCreditandEmployersFinalReportJan2023.pdf>)

REBUILDING THE CAREER LADDER FOR AUSTRALIAN YOUTH

In 2019 one of Australia's leading think tanks, the [Grattan Institute](#), warned that 'Today's young Australians are in danger of being the first generation in memory to have lower living standards than their parents' generation.'¹

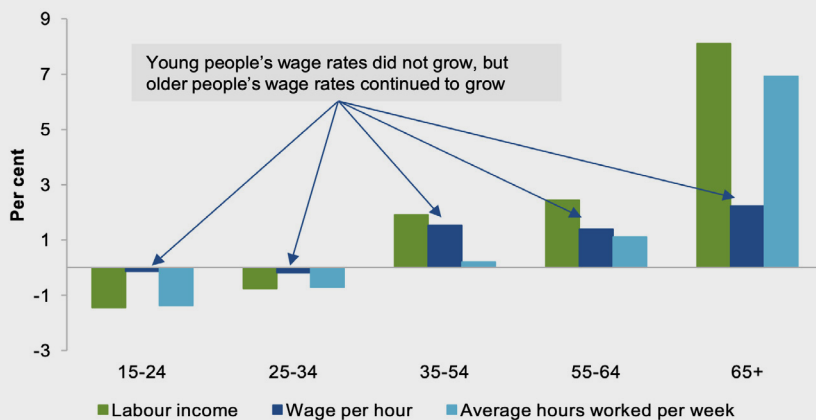
Research shows that young people's incomes have actually been declining relative to older workers, compounding intergenerational wealth inequalities and the disproportionate impact of housing costs on the young.

The explanation is in declining job quality - a combination of increasing underemployment and the fact that young people are entering the workforce in lower skilled jobs and progressing into better jobs more slowly (Figure 1)². The groups hardest hit are young people from less privileged backgrounds. While Australia enjoys higher social mobility than the UK, still, at 24, young people

born into poorer families are five times as likely to be out of work (and of education) than those born into wealthy families³. The deterioration in labour market outcomes for young people is not reflected in headline unemployment rates, which remain historically low. In 2020 the Productivity Commission, the organisation charged with providing economic advice to Australian Government, suggested that:

*'... the unemployment rate may no longer be useful as the primary measure of the health of the job market. Instead, more attention must be devoted to the types of jobs available.'*³

Figure 1
Change in wages and hours worked by age group 2008-2018



Source: Productivity Commission, *Why did young people's incomes decline?*, p41
Young people's incomes went backwards as a result of working fewer hours and receiving lower hourly rates of pay.

¹ <https://grattan.edu.au/report/generation-gap/>

² de Fontenay, C, Lampe B, Nugent J, and Jomini P, *Climbing the jobs ladder slower: Young people in a weak labour market*, Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, 2020.

³ de Fontenay, C, Lampe B, Nugent J, and Jomini P, *Climbing the jobs ladder slower: Young people in a weak labour market*, Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, 2020.



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EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND JOB QUALITY

Since Australia's public employment services were fully outsourced in 1998, they have been focussed on the first available, rather than good quality jobs.

Nearly 25 years later, most clients of employment services who find work (particularly the most disadvantaged) end up in precarious jobs. Precarious employment is associated with poorer mental health, reduced training and development opportunities and, for young people, reduced long term job prospects.

At the same time Australian employers report skills and labour shortages across occupations and industries. Recent analysis shows that employers were more inclined to leave a job vacant than re-think job requirements⁴. In many cases they are receiving applications from qualified applicants but rejecting these because of lack of specific industry experience or other attributes.

Employers are not turning to employment services to help solve these challenges⁵. The 'work first' orientation of employment services means that they are geared to basic job matching, rather than negotiating with employers to secure better quality, higher skilled jobs for their clients.

EMPLOYER INNOVATION LABS

Social Ventures Australia has had a long history of looking at ways of better engaging employers in addressing exclusion. The awarding of an international fellowship to one of our employment experts led to the identification of FSG's Talent Rewire initiative, and its 'Innovation Lab', as a promising practice for Australian employers.

With Talent Rewire's help, SVA adapted the approach for Australia, and has now engaged twenty five medium to large employers in Employer Innovation Labs.

The Employer Innovation Lab is a 12-month program which takes employers through a process of designing, implementing and assessing a small practice change pilot within their organisation. Each Lab kicks off with a two-day workshop structured to allow employers to identify changes in their practices that might provide better quality jobs for less privileged young people, and to design a project to trial these changes in practice.

A key part of this process is bringing in the voices of young people who have, themselves, faced challenges in finding quality jobs. This occurs through focussed [interview research](#)⁶ commissioned by SVA, and through bringing young people into the workshops to meet with employers, providing feedback and advice on their ideas. Following the workshop SVA holds regular coaching calls with employers and works with them to identify good practice, identify success measures, and to connect them with community organisations – particularly employment services - to partner with on implementation.

An important feature of the Lab is that it focuses on piloting practice changes in a small way rather than emphasising large numbers of job placements. The model seeks to achieve impact through testing and proving change at a small scale, then going on to embed and expand practice change across the organisation. Employers are encouraged to apply systems thinking to their pilot, so that it provides a foundation for sustainable, systemic change, for longer term impact.

SVA has engaged leading academics in the field to evaluate the Employer Lab initiative (Professor Angela Knox, University of Sydney and Assoc Prof Jo Ingold, Deakin University). In their [initial evaluation](#)⁷ they reported that:

'Overwhelmingly, the participants interviewed endorsed the Lab, emphasising that it challenged their preconceived ideas as well as their existing policies and practices with respect to recruitment and retention. In doing so, the Lab positively transformed their attitudes toward young people and created a catalyst to develop policies and practices capable of delivering more sustainable win-win outcomes along with the knowledge and support required to achieve those outcomes.'

Many of the first group of employers to participate in the Lab are moving from the initial pilot phase to embedding changes in their businesses as 'business as usual'.

CASE STUDY - CONSEP

Consep is a medium size engineering business in Wetherill Park (New South Wales). Its Managing Director, Grant Steward, recognised that they need to rethink their hiring practices to address ongoing challenges in filling skilled jobs across their company. With SVA's help Consep piloted a 'New Starters Program' to bring young people who were struggling to get decent work into their business. Rather than advertise through their usual channels, Consep held an 'open day' for local young people, sourced through local youth employment agencies. They provided six months paid work placements, rotating through different parts of their business. From this group they have now employed 5 young people. Three have started boiler maker apprenticeships with the company,

⁴ National Skills Commission, 2022 Skills Priority List Key Findings Report, 2022.

⁵ The percentage of employers using the system declined from 18% in 2007 to 4% in 2018: Employment Services Expert Advisory Panel, I want to work, Employment Services 2020 Report, Commonwealth of Australia, 2018. P8

⁶ https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/3228_sva_rebuildingthecareerladder_art_web_lowres.pdf

⁷ <https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/Rebuilding-the-Career-Ladder-Initial-Evaluation-Report-January-2023.pdf>

including one young woman. For the first time, Consep now has women in production and trades roles. An unexpected benefit of the program has been increased engagement from staff across the company who have embraced the Young Starters program. Steward has described the program as 'one of the most profound things I have achieved in my career', and is implementing the program in Consep's Canadian operation. See <https://youtu.be/QsZstuXzlwM>

CASE STUDY - THE NATIONAL TIMBER AND HARDWARE ASSOCIATION

The National Timber and Hardware Association (NTHA) is an industry association which operates a [group training organisation](#)⁸. NTHA came into the Lab conscious of the need to diversify its industry and to address low rates of apprentice retention/completion. Its pilot involved re-engineering their attraction and recruitment processes to ensure that they were accessible to a wider range of young people. They re-worked their recruitment material and introduced a pre-interview site visit for young people. They shifted to a more conversational interview style. New tools were introduced to measure the demographic profile of apprentices and to check in on their employment experience. They increased work support for apprentices and worked to shift host employers' thinking about diversity. At the end of the pilot period, despite overall contraction in apprentice numbers, NTHA reported an increase in the diversity of its workforce - from 15% to 20%⁹. Apprentice retention also improved.

WORKING TOWARDS WIDER IMPACT

Through the Employer Innovation Lab, SVA is providing practical support to employers to create quality jobs for young people. But, in doing so, the wider obstacles to improving employment opportunities for less privileged youth have been brought into focus. Despite evidence of the

powerful effect of socio-economic status on opportunities, very few employers have strategies to address exclusion of young people from poorer backgrounds. The impact of poor-quality jobs on young people is not widely known. Research that we commissioned into employer attitudes to these issues found limited interest in social mobility and the role that employers can play in addressing it.

When we succeed in moving employers towards piloting new quality job pathways for young people, we still have to work hard to ensure that employment services providers support people into these jobs. Limited skills, high turnover, and a focus on administering compliance have contributed to an employment services sector that is often unresponsive - even where opportunities are on offer. Significant cultural change will be needed if we are to move past 'any job' to helping young people into careers.

The Rebuilding the Career ladder initiative is designed to bring attention to employer actions that can increase or limit economic mobility for young people born into less advantaged families. Through Employer Innovation Labs, SVA delivers direct, practical support for employers who are willing to critically examine their employment practices. In the meantime, the Commonwealth Government is conducting a 'first principles' review of our employment services system, which includes revisiting its 'work first' foundations. We hope that this will better align employment services to support long term practice change.

NOTE - A version of this article originally appeared in the [SVA Quarterly](#) in August 2023.

OTHER RESOURCES

Employer Innovation Lab initial evaluation: <https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/Rebuilding-the-Career-Ladder-Initial-Evaluation-Report-January-2023.pdf>

Voices on work: https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/3228_sva_rebuildingthecareerladder_art_web_lowres.pdf

Career Ladder page: <https://www.socialventures.com.au/programs-and-ventures/rebuilding-the-career-ladder/>

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/solving-youth-unemployment-goes-beyond-election-promises-20230315-p5csgn.html>

Lowest decile versus highest decile. <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/short-articles/supporting-young-people-experiencing-disadvantage-secure-work>



⁸ <https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/group-training>

⁹ Diversity here is measured by the proportion of apprentices who are women, Indigenous, Culturally and Linguistically diverse, and/or people with disabilities.

JOBS THAT WORK – JOB DESIGNING THE WAY TO BETTER WORK

The ReAct Partnership is just over two years old. A globally unique industry-funded collaboration, we are co-funded by the eight Restart¹ Prime Providers, facilitating and supporting a continuous improvement community through action research, shared and iterative learning and the development and dissemination of applied, evidence-based resources.

From inception, it was clear that a central focus of the partnership would be building shared, strategic, national partnerships with employers.

In Autumn 2021, the Prime Provider Network was formed to drive that collaboration. We undertook research with large employers asking about their experiences of employment support provision, identifying existing good practice as well as gaps and ways in which providers and employers could work better together².

It was apparent from our interviews that recruitment demands are leading employers to think more broadly about their future workforce as well as how to attract an increasingly diverse range of applicants. There is a clear opportunity for employment services providers to work with employers to support this search. However, many employers interviewed did not recall having had conversations about workforce development at scale with employment providers and were not aware that service was available through programmes such as Restart.

The ReAct Partnership worked with Timewise, a social enterprise focused on creating more inclusive workplaces, to develop a Change Agent programme, designed to support the Prime Providers' employer

engagement teams' expertise in promoting 'fair flexible work from day one of employment' to the employers they work with. This had the aim of unlocking more job vacancies to flexible working for Restart participants who need them most (particularly parents, carers, older workers and people with health conditions or disabilities).

The Change Agent programme consisted of workshops, coaching sessions and masterclasses to build understanding of the levers to engage employers in conversations about flexible working when talking to them about vacancies and recruitment, as well as developing expertise in flexible hiring among provider staff so they could support employers with job redesign, unlocking more job vacancies to flexible work from day one.

The ReAct Partnership evaluated the Change Agent programme to see whether the learning and support provided translated into different conversations with employers, and ultimately, job outcomes. As well as valuing the expertise of the Timewise facilitators, delegates liked the interactive nature of the sessions and the opportunity to hear from peers in other organisations about their experiences of working with employers on flexible working.

07



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→ Jane joined IES in 2021, having been involved in employment and skills for two decades in the UK, US and Australia. Her experience includes the implementation, delivery and management of welfare-to-work programmes; developing new service delivery models; evaluation; and research. Focused on translating policy goals into deliverable interventions, she is interested in sustainable employment for those most disadvantaged in the labour market.

¹ The Restart Scheme is delivered across England and Wales, and gives Universal Credit claimants who have been out of work for at least nine months enhanced support to find work.
² The full report can be accessed [here](#).

Indeed, facilitating peer learning is a key component of the ReAct Partnership, and we deliver Action Learning Sets that bring together staff from across the provider base alongside all our research programmes.

Change Agents engaged in the programme identified that it improved their skills and knowledge, which in turn, increased their confidence in discussing flexible working and job redesign with employers. Prior to taking part in the programme, they tended to take a less interventionist approach with employers - while they were aware of a high demand for flexible work from participants, they were not particularly proactive in stimulating change among employers. The programme led them to be bolder – challenging employers’ assumptions and offering advice, information and guidance to help them change.

Although they noted this can take longer to deliver results, several of the Change Agents we spoke to during the evaluation were able to provide detailed examples of how they had supported changes within employing organisations they had worked with. For example, one had worked with an existing contact to reorganise long shifts into part-time, split shifts.

One Restart provider reported particularly successful outcomes from homeworking starts with 37 out of 38 applicants securing a job. There was also an example of the use of a more flexible recruitment approach and a move towards a new hybrid working model, both of which had resulted in impressive recruitment successes for employers. Another had negotiated a later start time for Restart participants, enabling them to apply for vacancies that they were previously unable to access due to a lack of public transport at the original start time. Notably, we heard about an increase in the number of higher paid, quality part-time roles being offered by employers, and subsequently an increase in the number of participants going into those roles.

Change Agents reported that the sector in which employers operate is a key factor that influenced their openness to discussions on flexible working – and that sector specific evidence was needed to persuade employers of the benefits of change. Manufacturing was highlighted as a particularly difficult to reach sector. Success was more likely to be mixed when approaching employers in hospitality, retail, warehousing and logistics.

Some employers were cautious of the risk they perceived to be attached to changing the status quo, this was particularly evident for those employers concerned that making changes for new recruits might impact on their wider employee base, raising issues of fairness and requests for flexibility across the organisation that they may not be able to honour. Encouraging employers to pilot flexible working approaches was seen as helpful in mitigating some of these barriers. The gradual approach is more attractive to more reticent employers – enabling them to evaluate the impact before committing to more widescale change.

The relationships that employment support providers build with employers are key to developing jobs that work better for the people looking to work in them. The Timewise/ ReAct Change Agent programme highlights an approach in which, with the right resources in their arsenal, employment support providers can work with employers to design better quality jobs that are flexible from day one.

The ReAct Partnership is managed by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES), working alongside the Institute for Employability Professionals (IEP) and the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA).



CONTRASTING PHILOSOPHIES – GOVERNMENT’S ‘ANY JOB’ VS. UNIVERSITY’S ‘PERSON-CENTRED’ APPROACH TO EMPLOYABILITY

The UK benefit system has long adopted a ‘work first’ approach, encouraging customers to apply for jobs not necessarily in their chosen sector. But would it be better to play the long game?

In this article I reflect on my experiences working as an employability professional in two settings – a Jobcentre and a University – two worlds shaped by government policy, but with contrasting philosophies.

REFLECTIONS FROM A FORMER JOBCENTRE WORK COACH AND EMPLOYER ADVISER

In January 2022, the Department for Work and Pensions introduced the ‘Way to Work’ initiative, emphasising an ‘ABC approach’, which urges customers to take any job before considering a better job and career¹. In line with this, the DWP reduced the time a new customer had to look for an opportunity in their previous or chosen occupation from 3 months to 4 weeks². Considering the average time taken to hire is almost 6 weeks³, this seems like an almost impossible expectation. This was also a similar time that work coaches’ autonomy over duration of appointment was revoked, with 10-minute back-to-back appointments becoming the expectation.

Having worked at the jobcentre at this time, appointments were primarily focussed on how many jobs customers had applied for, rather than the quality

of applications and whether the roles they were applying for were aligned with their skillset. As a work coach, other than in the initial 30-minute commitment appointment where customers were asked to upload a CV, it wasn’t very often that I was able to look at my customers’ job applications, mostly due to time constraints. That being said, I had very little training on quality applications myself.

Although customers are encouraged to look for opportunities outside of their chosen sector, it felt like little was done to give them this insight into roles prior to applying, or to open their mind to new opportunities. More training as a work coach on various sectors and the associated entry-level opportunities would have been beneficial. Instead, it felt like the onus was put onto work coaches to use their initiative and develop their own labour market knowledge.

Much of my time as an employer advisor was supporting the Kickstart Scheme, which was a positive experience with some fantastic outcomes. However, when supporting employers as part of Way to Work, I did see some of the impacts that the ‘quantity rather than quality’ approach had on them.



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→ Ashleigh is a Graduate Opportunities Manager in the Careers and Employability Service at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Previously, she worked at a Greater Manchester Jobcentre Plus as a work coach and employer adviser. Ashleigh worked on the local delivery of the Kickstart Scheme, part of the Governments ‘Plan for Jobs’ initiative.

In her current role, she develops relationships with employers to create graduate opportunities for Manchester Met graduates, with a focus on Greater Manchester based small and medium sized employers.



1 Department for Work and Pensions (2022) *Half a million benefit claimants get jobs in under 6 months*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/half-a-million-benefit-claimants-get-jobs-in-under-6-months>
2 Department for Work and Pensions (2022) *Jobseekers have four weeks to find work before widening their search*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/jobseekers-have-four-weeks-to-find-work-before-widening-their-search#:~:text=Press%20release,Jobseekers%20have%20four%20weeks%20to%20find%20work%20before%20widening%20their,as%20was%20previously%20the%20case.>
3 Total Jobs (2023) *Hiring Trends Index: a look at the recruitment landscape of Q2 2023*. <https://www.totaljobs.com/recruiter-advice/hiring-trends-index/>

Job searching and tailoring applications is time-consuming. Increasing the number of applications inevitably decreases quality. As customers were advised to expand their job search and submit more applications, employers received a higher volume of applications, often lacking suitability. This disproportionately impacted small and medium-sized employers who are less likely to have resource dedicated to recruitment.

In addition, employers reported that customers were regularly failing to attend interviews, which also has time implications. Unfortunately, employers that did successfully recruit jobcentre customers sometimes faced challenges retaining them. This could be in part due to the customers' misunderstanding of the responsibilities and challenges associated with a new sector, deciding that the sector or role wasn't for them, or finding that the role was not aligned with their skillset.

Recruitment can be expensive for employers in terms of time, cost and resource. A high number of unsuitable applications, time reserved for unattended interviews and a high staff turnover is unfortunately likely to put employers off from approaching the jobcentre for future recruitment needs. Building and maintaining a positive relationship with employers, listening to, acting upon their feedback, and considering the impact on them when creating policies and initiatives should be a key focus of the government.

Some customers supported through Universal Credit are those furthest away from the labour market. I believe more training, support and autonomy for work coaches would enable more meaningful interventions for customers. A more customer-focussed approach, empowering them to look for decent work aligned with their goals would result in longer time taken to move them into work, but would also likely improve retention, reduce the probability of future unemployment, and support positive mental wellbeing.

A better approach would be to shift the focus to quality over quantity both in terms of work coach appointments and customer work search. Work coaches should be better equipped and better supported to provide quality support, guidance, and interventions for customers. Customers and work coaches should be given more time to establish a relationship, explore the needs and skillsets of the customer and decide on appropriate sectors aligned with the individual goals and motivations. Government Active Labour Market Programmes should focus on raising aspirations, broadening career horizons, exploring customer skillsets, and giving them the confidence to explore new careers aligned with these, encouraging good quality applications for meaningful and good work opportunities and equipping customers with new skills in line with labour market skills shortages.

A DIFFERENT WORLD: SUPPORTING GRADUATES INTO QUALITY JOBS

Conversely to their approach to the benefit system, the UK government believes that graduates should not be entering the labour market into 'any job', but instead graduates should be progressing into professional or managerial jobs. If a graduate has not done so by the time they are surveyed, 18 months after graduation, they are deemed by the government to be in a 'negative graduate outcome'.

Having moved on from my role in the jobcentre to work at Manchester Metropolitan University, the difference in emphasis is striking to me. We want all students to have the opportunity to gain experiences that enable them to realise their potential and develop their skills and attributes so that they graduate with a credible career plan for a successful future. Underpinned by the University's commitment to maximising the employability outcomes of our graduates, our focus as a team, the Early Career Graduate Team, is to support graduate career success with tailored and meaningful interventions. We support each cohort of graduates for 12 months after graduation.

Our Career Coaches support graduates to create tailored career plans, offering bespoke advice and guidance and giving them the confidence to apply for and secure meaningful and fulfilling graduate-level roles, aligned with their goals. The coaches offer a tailored approach to each graduate to identify and overcome barriers to employment through coaching strategies including setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) targets and empowering graduates. Graduates are supported to explore both linear and non-linear career pathways and to identify and showcase their skills and attributes to employers. Graduates are encouraged to focus on submitting good quality applications for opportunities well-aligned with their goals and skillsets, rather than focusing on quantity. Coaches are supported to attend workshops, webinars and training to support their continuous professional development and to keep up to date on latest labour market trends.

Manchester Met also strives to establish itself as the university of choice for employers and recruiters and aims to develop deep partnerships with sector, city, regional and professional bodies. In my role as Graduate Opportunities Manager, my focus is supporting Greater Manchester based small and medium-sized businesses with recruiting our most recent cohort of graduates. The support for employers is bespoke and tailored but typically includes advising on job descriptions to ensure they are appropriate for the audience, promoting opportunities to suitable graduates, targeting preferred course areas or skillsets, and managing applications so that employers only receive complete and relevant applications. Managing applications allows our career coaches to intervene and offer graduates feedback, advice, and support on their application, giving them the opportunity to improve and re-submit prior to their application being forwarded to the employer. This ensures employers only receive relevant, quality applications whilst giving graduates the best chance at being shortlisted to interview.

Following shortlisting, employers let us know which of our graduates they will be interviewing. This allows the career coaches to reach out and offer the graduate interview preparation support and advice, ensuring that they are well prepared and demonstrating the best version of themselves.

The close working relationship between the graduate career coaches and the graduate opportunities managers allows for better, more informed information and advice for both graduates and employers. Graduates are encouraged to apply for decent and sustainable work and employers are encouraged to create high-quality opportunities aligned with demand. We conduct an internal review of all roles ensuring that they are graduate level, offer a fair salary and provide high quality training and support. Where roles do not meet this requirement, we have open and honest conversations with employers to advise them of this. This has resulted in many employers reconsidering and improving their graduate recruitment process. We also have a graduate recruitment fund exclusively for Greater Manchester-based SMEs which allows employers to invoice us for £1500 when they recruit a recent Manchester Met graduate, showing gratitude, and helping towards initial recruitment and training costs.

The person-centred approach often results in graduates securing meaningful graduate-level work, excellently aligned with their interests, skillset, and long-term career plans. This means graduates are more likely to stay and progress within the organisation. Based upon the previous four years of graduate outcomes data at Manchester Metropolitan University, of 14,000+ graduates, 86% of graduates in highly skilled employment (SOC 1-3) agree that they are on track with their future career plans compared with 50% of graduates in low skilled employment (SOC 4-9). The employer-centred approach often results in employers opting to advertise with us on an exclusive basis and returning for support each time they have a

new graduate recruitment need. This approach not only saves the employer time and money during the recruitment process but improves their retention and shows to employers that we value the partnership.

CONCLUSION

The activities of both jobcentre and university employability professionals are shaped by government policy. However, for graduates an emphasis on long term outcomes enables us to focus on higher quality jobs, whereas for those engaging with jobcentres the emphasis is on moving people into any job quickly. Based on my experiences working in both settings, I believe the university's model is more appropriate for all stakeholders involved and although it may take longer for people to move into good jobs than if they were to take 'any job' it is a more effective and sustainable long-term approach. Policymakers should ensure that all jobseekers are given the space and support required to pursue decent jobs.



BUILDING ON THE LEGACY OF THE KICKSTART SCHEME

09



The Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly had a devastating impact on young people, particularly affecting their mental health, confidence and access to employment.

Young people felt isolated and hopeless whilst at the same time, employers were struggling to recruit staff and businesses were increasingly concerned about their talent pipeline.

That's why the government launched the Kickstart Scheme in 2020, creating paid six-month work placements for unemployed 16-24-year-olds. As the funding landscape changes with the launch of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), many are asking what employment and support services can do for young people.

A report commissioned by City & Guilds¹ towards the end of last year surveyed 5,000 young people and found that 30% of those they spoke to didn't believe they would ever achieve their career ambitions, with nearly one in ten (9%) young people currently studying or out of work saying they never intend to start working.

The findings indicated that many young people feel completely excluded from the labour market, losing hope due to what they see as limited opportunities to get a foot on the ladder and progress. This is on top of an already worrying picture of the impact of the pandemic on young people's mental health and job prospects².

The Kickstart Scheme was developed as a way to help tackle some of these issues, creating a way into work for young people, as well as tailored support to develop their skills and consider future career opportunities. Clarion Futures led a partnership of 80 housing associations and supply chain partners to support nearly 550 young people through the Scheme, bringing together the best of what the social housing sector can do to address inequality in our communities.

Each young person was referred by their work coach at Job Centre Plus to their six-month paid placements which also provided access to weekly group workshops that supported their soft skill development delivered by friendly and approachable youth facilitators. Participants also had access to 1:1 mentoring, job coaching and job searching towards the end of their placement.

**"It gave me the experience I needed to jumpstart my working life."
Kickstart Participant**

WERE OUR KICKSTART JOBS GOOD JOBS?

So, how successful was the Kickstart Scheme? Within the Clarion-led Kickstart Housing Partnership, 42% of employers surveyed continued to employ a Kickstarter beyond the end

HANNAH BRAYSON
Youth Employment Manager
Clarion Futures



→ Hannah Brayson is Youth Employment Manager with the Clarion Futures Jobs and Training Team, a role that was created from the success of Clarion's Kickstart programme in the pandemic. Her role is focused on engaging and supporting 18-25 year olds who are inactive, particularly those who are Clarion residents and part of the wider Clarion community. Hannah was worked at Clarion for 3 years, and have worked with young people for over 10 years.



VICTORIA WHITTLE
Head of Jobs and Training
Clarion Futures



→ Victoria is Head of Jobs and Training for Clarion Futures the charitable foundation of Clarion Housing Group, the UK's largest social landlord. Victoria has over 20 years of experience working in community and regeneration sectors. She started her career in the public sector before moving into regeneration and housing. Clarion Futures Jobs and Training team is a national Award winning service that provides residents with training and bespoke employability support. The team have a strong track record of delivering Government funded programmes including a DWP and ESF programmes. Victoria oversees a Housing-led, £36m ESF Pan London Programme, supporting people into training, work and apprenticeships.

¹ 'Misspent Youth', City & Guilds, December 2022, <https://www.cityandguilds.com/news/december-2022/youth-misspent-uncovering-harsh-realities-for-britains-young-people-in-todays-job-market>

² 'Double Trouble', Resolution Foundation, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/double-trouble/>

of their placement, and approximately 56% of Kickstarters moved into a positive progression after their placement – whether that be further employment, apprenticeships, training or education.

This demonstrates the overall success of the partnership for both the young people and the organisations involved. An evaluation commissioned by Clarion Futures and delivered by the Financial Inclusion Centre³ goes into further detail about what worked, and what learnings can be taken forward.

SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

The first of these is related to recruitment. The report recommends that recruitment processes should be simplified as much as possible and focused on maximising positive engagement. This should include using recruitment language that is simple, jargon-free and accessible, particularly in relation to the job roles available and their associated responsibilities.

It's interesting to note that whilst only 26% of the recruiters found the recruitment process easy, 85% of Kickstarters found it relatively informal. The use of more informal interviews focused on character and attitude rather than technical knowledge or relevant experience was an essential part of the recruitment process.

This suggests that recruiters still need to be encouraged to think about how their organisation can better engage young people, and whilst these changes may not be straightforward, the positive impact on hiring practices could be significant.

As one recruiter said, **“Our only criteria was enthusiasm and having the right attitude”**.

Kickstart opened a door for young people to develop whilst employed, and this meant employers had to be willing to open that door a little wider. Employers noted that only 16% of the Kickstarters they hired had either no

or minimal support needs, but by the same token 74% said their Kickstarter demonstrated positive progression in their placement, with 42% choosing to keep their Kickstarter on as a full-time employee after their placement. When thinking about what ‘good employment’ looks like for young people furthest from the labour market, it's vital that employers recognise their role in opening doors.

SUPPORTING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The report also highlighted the positive impact that high quality careers support has on young people's mental health. It is widely understood that mental health remains the biggest barrier to young people accessing employment at all levels, and with chronic shortages of youth mental health services, employers need to think about support structures within their organisations for young people.

Of course, employment support services cannot and should not replace health services, but the Kickstart Scheme demonstrated there are strategies that employers can deploy which can go a long way in making young people feel more confident and positive as they start their journey into the world of work.

As part of their Kickstart placement, young people had access to both on the job training and additional ‘employment skills’ training on subjects such as ‘Communication at Work’, ‘Managing Feedback’ and ‘Confidence Building’. This holistic support offer was incredibly successful, with the number of those surveyed reporting feeling optimistic about the future moving from 27% before their placement to 76% afterwards.

As one Kickstarter wrote: **“Kickstart helped me with my confidence and feeling like I have a purpose. Previously I felt as if I was at a brick wall and did not see how to move forward...but this experience has made the progression seamless and enjoyable.”**

Whilst the role of good employment in young people's mental health continues to be explored, it is clear that paid work with structured hours supported by a compassionate and patient team plays a vital role in welcoming young people into the workplace.

PROMOTING BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

One other key success of the Kickstart Scheme was the positive impact it had on businesses. 69% of employers surveyed said that a key benefit of taking part in Kickstart was **“greater workplace diversity and the provision of different perspectives, skills and voices”** in their organisation. Members of the consortium also highlighted the benefits gained by working in partnership with others in the sector, being able to pool resources and best practice, and providing a peer network for those Kickstarters who were on placements in smaller organisations. Interestingly, many young people fed back that they would have preferred longer placements – perhaps up to a year. Six months can go past in the blink of an eye when you have so much to learn, and many felt that by the time they had settled into the role, they were already on the way out. The evaluation highlights the scale of the Scheme and that critical balance between quality and quantity of placements – a vital point when considering what represents good value for social housing budgets.

BUILDING ON THE KICKSTART LEGACY

To translate these learnings into action at Clarion, we've created a new Youth Employment Manager role focused on four key areas: mental health and wellbeing, support for those not in education, employment or training (NEET) or economically inactive, in-work support and training and upskilling.

³ 'Building Blocks', Clarion Futures and the Financial Inclusion Centre <https://cdn.clarionhg.com/-/jssmedia/clarion-housing-group/documents/reports/clarion-futures/kickstart-summary-report-2023.ashx?rev=60295576d6bf4ae2af9b8046e0d60172>

⁴ 'Good Work', Resolution Foundation, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/events/good-work/>

We've also recruited a new Youth Employment Officer to pilot new programmes and are exploring opportunities around entrepreneurship and a green skills employment pathway to enable young people to tap into this growing sector and help to tackle skills shortages within the retrofit supply chain.

Looking to the future like this is the only way we can build on Kickstart's legacy, working with our peers to identify innovative solutions to help the next generation to find their feet in the world of work.

The Kickstart Housing Partnership set us on that course, and we're more committed than ever to seeing it through.



GETTING IT RIGHT IS DIFFERENT FOR EACH OF US – SUPPORTING GOOD JOBS FOR WOMEN THROUGH THE GROW PROGRAMME

The women we support on the GRoW programme have so many reasons for wanting a job.

We know because as part of our group sessions we ask them why they want to work and the answers come pouring out: a purpose; a career; a chance to be themselves; a chance to be with other adults; to be called by their own name; to be part of a team; to have the satisfaction of a job well done.

And for many a key desire is the opportunity to be a role model for their children. When they talk about money, they mention having more for their family, but they also value the shift in the power dynamic that paid work gives them in their household. You have more sway when you put in some pay.

So good work for our cohort gives you a purpose, a role, money and status. But we know that those with primary caring roles for children often have to lower their expectations, forfeiting higher paid work for a lower paid job with more flexible hours.

This is backed up by research¹. Academics and policy makers know that one of the most significant barriers to women achieving parity in the workforce is the difficulty in balancing work and family responsibilities. Historically, women have been expected to prioritise childcare and domestic work over their careers.

And as recently as the pandemic it was clear that even with both parents working from home, women did more of the childcare².

The government is taking up this challenge by offering more free childcare. Putting aside genuine concerns over the practicalities of delivery, this is a step in the right direction for many families. But not everyone wants to work full time and a more flexible workforce has long been touted as a key driver of economic growth.

Indeed, at the last IEP Summit employability sector guru Tony Wilson FIEP of the IES said that women and those over 50 are going to be key drivers of that economic growth. We know that people in both those groups want more flexible work, as do those with disabilities, caring responsibilities and mental health conditions. It can also increase general job satisfaction, as employees are able to find a better work-life balance.

It is important to distinguish between the flexibility which enables people to work and that which requires individuals to respond only to the needs of the employer. Zero hours contracts can be good - for example we have a number of mums who have started their return to work as exam invigilators - an ultimate zero hours contract.



LIZ SEWELL FIEP
Director
Belina GRoW CIC



Liz is the Director of the new Community Interest Company Belina GRoW CIC which has been established to research and develop ways of supporting women further from the labour market into work. In their first year they have worked with Jobs 22 on Restart, The Mayor of London's Office and the Heathrow Trust.



¹ <https://press.princeton.edu/news/2019/09/01/claudia-goldin-wins-nobel-prize-in-economics>

² <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/covid19/2021/01/07/too-exhausted-even-to-watch-the-news-a-plea-for-covid-19-policy-that-considers-women/>

But we also have single mums who have come back from the job centre and an adviser has offered them what they see as a flexible job ('You work 6-8am and then 5-7pm as a cleaner') - that's not flexible it is just different fixed hours required by an employer.

How will we get genuine flexibility? Individuals and their advisers can advocate for this and the new right to request from day one that comes in next year will mean that people don't have to wait for six months to make a case.

What will make the real difference is when employers recognise the benefits of flexibility alongside seeing it as an employee benefit. To do that the economic case needs to be made for flexible and hybrid working and as a society we start to rethink the traditional work day, week and year.

At Belina GRoW, team members can choose to work as flexibly as they like. We have work that needs to be done and a culture that gives team members full autonomy over when they do that work. It is not unusual for some of us to be working early - a slew of WhatsApp good mornings is usually in full swing by 8am. Others put in a shift when their children have gone to bed. Why not? - you know when you are most productive. I know that this offer means that I am able to employ great people who would otherwise not be able to work.

One aspect of flexibility we are pushing is for term time working - an option that allows parents to be in work when their children are at school and at home for the major holidays is a real game changer for some families. We do this through a project called FLEX which asks employers to look at how they can become more supportive. It's not for everyone, or all forms of work, but it is about having a range of options that work for families. We were delighted that the mega company Amazon decided to take this up earlier in the year.³

Good work means different things for different people. What we need are more options and a recognition that we can get a broader more diverse and happier workforce, who will be more productive if we are willing to think about the way we work.



³ <https://www.aboutamazon.co.uk/news/company-news/amazon-boosts-employee-flexibility-with-the-launch-of-new-term-time-contracts>

SUPPORTING VETERANS INTO GOOD JOBS – LESSONS FROM RESEARCH ON THE UK PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

There has been a growing focus in the UK on the support provided to the Armed Forces community, with the publication of the Armed Forces Covenant (2011), the publication of the Strategy for our Veterans (2018) and the creation of the first ever Office for Veterans' Affairs (2019).

All these measures have increased the focus on ensuring that those who leave the Armed Forces are appropriately supported in their transitions to civilian life, with an emphasis on lifelong support to veterans. Outside of government policy, wider commitments to veterans have also been made. For example, many employers have signed the Armed Forces Covenant, pledging to provide job opportunities, placements and mentoring. Additionally, there is a substantial Armed Forces voluntary and community sector (VCS), providing significant support across multiple issues.

Supporting the labour market integration of veterans is a key element of this focus, with employment widely recognised as a key factor in supporting people to transition from military to civilian life.

Attention has often focused on employment support provided at the point of, or shortly after, exit from the Armed Forces. Indeed, rapid moves into civilian employment are often considered a key measure of 'success'. However, beyond 'rapid entry' there is a need to consider whether that employment is actually fulfilling and sustainable.

Although many who leave the Armed Forces can move into civilian employment with relative ease, some can face challenges accessing and sustaining employment post-Service. Some of the challenges include the 'culture clash' of entering civilian workplaces, difficulties having to 'start over', difficulties transferring skills from military to civilian employment, and the transition from a very structured work environment to navigating the insecurity which is common in the UK labour market.

Recognising some of these challenges, and the need for support to overcome them, this article draws upon our unique longitudinal research¹ with veterans to help us understand how they are experiencing some of their interactions with the public employment services, and what changes might be required to support lasting transitions into good quality work. Whereas the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has positively made a series of adjustments² to Jobcentre Plus services as part of its efforts to support the Armed Forces community, we found that the overarching emphasis of our public employment service on a 'work first' approach could undermine the potential for more positive and productive job matches.



PROFESSOR LISA SCULLION PHD, FACSS
Professor of Social Policy
University of Salford, UK

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Lisa Scullion is Professor of Social Policy and Co-Director of the Centre for Research on Inclusive Society at the University of Salford. Lisa's work focuses specifically on understanding the impact of UK welfare reforms.

This includes leading a ground-breaking five-year study funded by the Forces in Mind Trust⁵ called Sanctions, Support & Service Leavers exploring veterans' experiences of the social security system, which has been supporting the Department for Work and Pensions in developing their work related to the Armed Forces community. Lisa is a member of the Ministry of Defence Recovery Expert Advisory Board and the Office for Veterans Affairs Academic Advisory Board.



¹ <https://s31949.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/sanctions-support-service-leavers-final-report.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobcentre-plus-services-for-the-armed-forces-and-their-families/armed-forces-enhanced-access-to-jobcentre-plus-services-and-armed-forces-champions>

'PUSHED' TOWARDS UNSUITABLE JOBS

Recent analysis³ of our longitudinal interviews shows that the civilian labour market was a significant shock for some veterans, with the quality of job opportunities they were expected to apply for by the public employment services sometimes lower than expected. Time in the Armed Forces had insulated many from the low pay and insecurity that increasingly characterises the UK labour market.

However, rather than supporting veterans into appropriate and sustainable employment, our research demonstrates the ways in which the 'work first' approach underpinned by conditionality ran in opposition to this. Echoing much existing research on the ineffectiveness of mandating particular work-related activities, many veterans described undertaking counterproductive activities, centring efforts on complying with the conditions of their claim rather than having the opportunity to engage in activities that would genuinely support employment transitions.

In our research we found that there was sometimes a mismatch between veterans' skills and qualifications, and the jobs that they felt 'pushed' towards. For example, one veteran had identified the security industry as the career path most suited to his skillset. However, he felt his efforts to build a track-record of relevant employment experience were undermined by pressure to take 'any job':

"I work in the security industry. I'm only going to look at jobs in the security industry ... 'You're going to go and get a job at Tesco stacking shelves.' Well, no, sorry I'm not... I'm building a good CV for myself in [security]. If I then go and stack shelves at Tesco for eight months, that five years' security experience that I've just got, has just gone void ... That is the way that [employers], now, look at CVs ... [The Jobcentre] don't see it like that. They see it as a job's a job, regardless."

This approach of having to take 'any job' also ran counter to the culture instilled within the Armed Forces, which emphasised specialisation:

"I actually got taught that in the Army as well. When you're working in something, you stick to that thing and push through it. When you start going to loads of different little things, it will just crumble, and it won't make your CV look any good. [Employers will ask] why is this person skipping from that, to that, to that, to that, to that?"

The accounts also demonstrated concerns at being expected to take low-paid work that would leave them financially worse off:

"So, I go in there and say, 'Right, these are the kinds of jobs that I'm going to be looking for, and these are the jobs that I'm applying for.' It was the kind of flat out, 'Actually, if you don't find a job, these are the jobs that we're going to be pushing your way, and you will be attending interviews for them', even though they'd be totally counterproductive. It would actually put me in debt."

Some participants had also encountered being mandated to contracted employment support providers (e.g., through the Work or Work and Health Programme). These experiences were also often described as being ineffective at facilitating movements towards employment, with many veterans feeling that contracted providers did not understand their specific needs, and with examples of being pushed towards unsuitable generic training courses.

A lack of appropriate support here means that neither veterans nor employers are being properly served. Focusing on moving veterans into any job undermines the possibility of productive matches. Here, veterans miss out on opportunities to work in rewarding high quality work, and employers miss out on what are often the highly prized skills and attributes of the ex-Forces community.

GOOD PRACTICE SUPPORT

It would be unfair to say that all experiences were negative, and there were many instances where veterans described positive employment support being provided. The veterans who talked positively were often those who described Work Coaches as demonstrating trust that they (the veteran) were the experts in their chosen career, and were therefore not exerting pressure to take any job:

"[Work Coach] said to me, 'Look, the work you're looking for is kind of specialist. I'll just leave you to it.' ... you weren't forced to do anything."

There was particular praise for the new network of DWP Armed Forces Champions⁴ - who provide specific support to veterans and their families within the benefits system - who were providing personalised support and connecting people to veteran-specific agencies in the VCS. Indeed, it was evident that many veterans were receiving support from organisations outside the public employment service. Accounts of support from the VCS appeared much more positive.

As participation was voluntary, they were less anxious about the consequences of failing to meet requirements. Employment support from the VCS also appeared to be connected to more relevant employers, thus creating more opportunities for better job matching. For example, some veteran-specific VCS agencies provided access to job vacancies, which were not always publicly advertised, and training relating to finding jobs and undertaking interviews, including mock interviews with employers where feedback was provided.

Veterans wanted more opportunities to engage directly with employers to gain valuable experience, and some were keen to undertake voluntary work as a first step towards full-time employment.

³ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09585192.2022.2133574>

⁴ <https://www.firm-trust.org/news-policy-item/forces-in-mind-trust-research-leads-to-better-support-for-veterans-navigating-the-benefits-system/>

CONCLUSION

Our research shows that the 'work first' approach that underpins the public employment service can fail to support the sustained inclusion of veterans in the civilian labour market.

Generic employment support mandated under threat of benefit sanctions was not conducive to helping veterans find meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities. Although there are examples of good practice employment support, there are high levels of variability, with more tailored support more commonly found within the VCS.

The DWP Armed Forces Champions provide an example of how personalised support, appropriate time to deliver support, and staff who understand the needs of specific claimants can significantly improve experiences and outcomes.

Although there are evident areas for improvement in relation to the public employment service, employers also need to recognise that their engagement activities are not consistently reaching veterans who are seeking support to return to work.

More could be done to facilitate connections between veteran jobseekers and those employers interested in supporting veterans. Public employment support should be better linked with wider extensive VCS employment support eco-system. Creating opportunities for employer engagement might also enable more meaningful training and work experience.

Employers could play a role in supporting match, creating clear pathways into employment, and providing work experience for those who are not immediately 'work ready' to gradually transition into work.



⁵ <https://www.fim-trust.org/>

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR – MY EXPERIENCE ON THE KICKSTART SCHEME

My experience on the Kickstart Scheme was a very positive one. I know for a fact that without the Kickstart scheme I'd probably still be unemployed or doing a job that wouldn't be fulfilling.

I left school with 1 GCSE, in Art, and although it's still a valuable GCSE, it is not what most employers are looking for. Due to my results, it never crossed my mind that I would have a job within the Council and I was never made aware that that could be a possibility.

I am not unintelligent and my skills are not defined by what result I got in an exam I sat when I was 16. I understand the importance of knowledge and how qualifications can reflect that, but I don't think that should be the be all and end all. Everyone has different skills and thrives in different ways. There's a saying that I love - 'Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.' I think it's such a clever way of showing why systems changing is so important. The education system and services that support young people's development need to be able to change and adapt to new ways of helping young people to discover what skills they have in order to find career paths that are fulfilling, well paid and enjoyable!

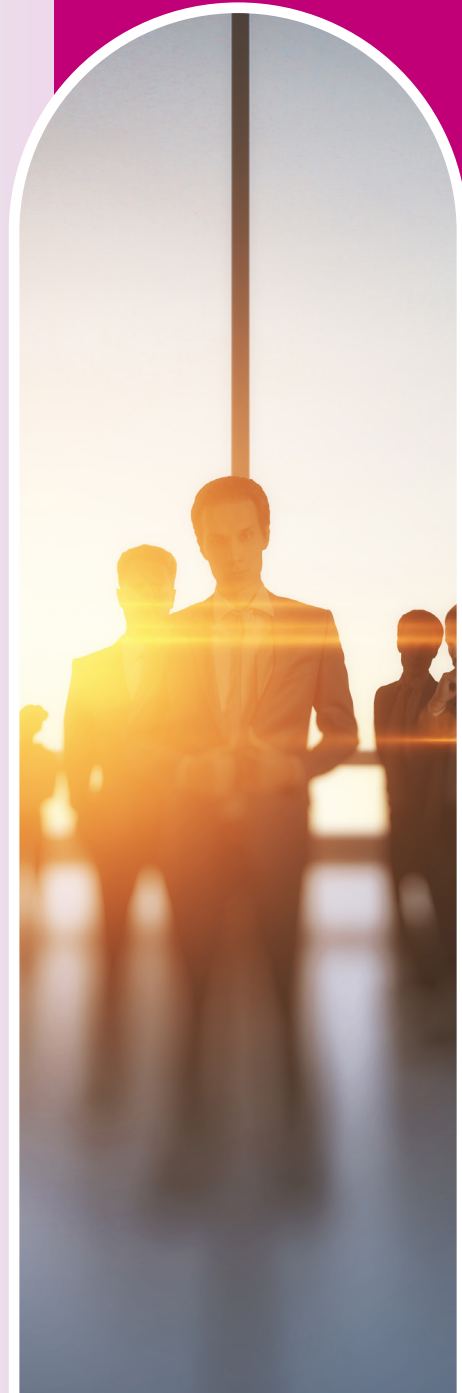
I think any employers thinking of taking on young people through schemes like Kickstart should consider this approach. Employers can sometimes doubt young people's abilities; they may worry about their lack of experience, limited professional skills and ability to complete tasks. I believe that if

employers invest the time and effort to support young people, much as my manager did with me, then they will have every opportunity to flourish. Being given the chance to work for the council by Kickstart helped me to thrive and build my confidence. I really enjoy talking to new people, building relationships and networking, as well as suddenly having this drive to make a difference to the community in which I live. I think the Kickstart Scheme was great because it gave young people like me a chance.

It can be hard for young people in Blackpool to break the cycle of being in jobs where they aren't paid very much and may be considered to some as 'low skilled jobs' because of the barriers such as lack of qualifications. Since completing the Kickstart Scheme I have gained Maths and English Functional Skills level 2, something I never thought I would achieve.

Following Kickstart I was offered the chance to complete a level 3 Apprenticeship in Community Health and Wellbeing, which I am currently working towards as part of the co-production team at Blackpool Council. When I look back to first starting my journey with Blackpool Council I realise how much I have grown not just professionally but personally, I am grateful to have been given the chance to 'kickstart' my career regardless of my qualifications and past experiences.

ELSI-MAY CARROLL
Community health and wellbeing
Blackpool Council, UK



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR – ACTIVE BLACKPOOL

13



DAVE ROHMAN
Active Lives Development Manager
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At Active Blackpool, we have always strived to provide high quality employment opportunities through the provision a range of job roles ranging from managerial positions through sports coaching positions, so the Kickstart Scheme was something that we were keen to be involved with when the opportunity arose.

Active Blackpool has demonstrated a keenness to provide opportunities for members of the local community to join its workforce as we are fully aware that by having a face of the community leading an activity can often aid with the removal of barriers to engage and participate through the creation of an ‘if I can, you can’ ethos.

The Kickstart Scheme came with the added opportunity to provide a platform for young people of Blackpool to take their first steps into employment which is something that gave an extra sense of desire to make our opportunity not just exciting and engaging but one that would also provide long term opportunities for those involved to identify, enhance and continually develop their own personal career goals.

The initial level of interest in the roles we had available was encouraging and the standard of candidate we saw at the interview stage was extremely high. This was pleasing to see as we are aware that opportunities within the field of sport and physical activity can often be difficult to access due to the requirement of already possessing relevant qualifications - however the Kickstart Scheme would provide an opportunity for those interested in our industry to gain qualifications throughout their journey with Active Blackpool alongside gaining practical experience to complement their learning.

The first positions that we made available were Sport and Physical Activity Coaches which saw Jack Wyers-Roebuck and Joe Piper being appointed and beginning their first steps into the realms of the industry. Both Jack and Joe settled easily into the Active Blackpool Team and their level of commitment and professionalism was of a standard that we expect to see across all of our delivery teams.

This was largely down to their positive approach to the role and the nurturing support that was provided to them either in the form of working alongside experienced sports coaches or through attending and completing professional development opportunities. A key part of making these high quality roles, was to ensure that they provided varied experiences to develop new skills as we were keen to provide opportunities for both Jack and Joe to gain experiences of as many programmes delivered by Active Blackpool rather than to limit their involvement to ensure that their time working alongside our teams was as fulfilling as possible.

We were keen to help to create a learning programme that would aid their long-term involvement within Sport and Physical Activity and future employment. The range of programmes that they were involved in gave them an insight into working with children, young people and adults of varying abilities for both school-based and community-based programmes.

→ Dave is an Active Lives Development Manager working in the North West of England striving to provide high quality opportunities for all children, young people and adults to be physically active working closely with partners including Sport England, Youth Sport Trust, England Football and Activity Alliance.



As they progressed through their initial six months with Active Blackpool, they were also supported to attend and complete a range of learning and development courses including Safeguarding, First Aid and Disability Awareness, along with sports coaching courses in football and multi-sports.

Towards the end of their Kickstart contract, Jack and Joe were both preparing to go to university. However, they had both demonstrated a passion to continue to work with Active Blackpool and we were keen to retain them within our team. We therefore started the recruitment process to allow them to continue to work with us on a casual basis so as not to be detrimental to their studies. Should one or both of Jack and Joe not have confirmed plans to attend university we would have had no hesitation in welcoming their applications for a contracted role with Active Blackpool.

We are extremely pleased to say that both Jack and Joe continue to work with Active Blackpool on our school and community sports programmes and we hope that this will continue for many years to come.



EMBEDDING GOOD WORK AND EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS IN EMPLOYABILITY

Employment rights are fundamental to the notion of 'decent' or 'good' work. But to what extent do employability professionals embed these ideas in their practice?

In this article, we introduce the concepts of legal and psycho-social literacy, which could empower employability professionals to (1) develop and use their knowledge of good work and employment rights (2) help their clients to evaluate and recognise good work and what this means for them, and (3) help educate employers about how to create sustainable and inclusive work for their employees.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DECENT WORK?

There is no shortage of useful debates, measures, and discussion about 'good' or 'decent' work. Internationally, together with economic growth, 'decent work' is a core United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). There are four pillars associated with the goal: 1) employment creation/access to work; 2) rights at work; 3) social protection; and 4) social dialogue. Principles of dignity, equality, fair income, safe working conditions and worker voice underpin these pillars (ILO, 2019).

In the UK the term 'good work' is more commonly used, with influential reports like the Taylor Review (2017) helping to define good work as well as recognise the erosion of working conditions in some parts of the economy. For example, zero hours

contracts and the platform economy. Notably, while national employment legislation has stalled, devolved regions and nations have stepped in to stimulate good work over and above any UK-wide employment regulation. Across the nations of the UK, the concept of decent work has been borne out in the Good and Fair Work Movement. This has emerged via regional employment charters, relevant professional associations, i.e. the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), as well as through the work of trade unions. For example, the CIPD's annual Good Work Index (Wheatley, 2022), which surveys thousands every year, identifies 7 core characteristics of good work: 1) pay and benefits; 2) employment contracts; 3) work-life balance; 4) job design and the nature of work; 5) relationships at work; 6) employee voice; and 7) health and wellbeing.

Across all definitions utilised in measures, issues emerge relating to objective versus subjective notions of good work, which are helpful to reflect upon. Getting familiar with some of the measures and terminology can assist employability professionals' own competence in integrating this knowledge in their practice, giving them tools to think about 'What is decent work?' and how is it relevant to their own practice.

14



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In the following sections, we delve into this a bit deeper by considering the concepts of legal and psycho-social literacy, along with value they might hold for employability professionals who want to support people into good jobs, not just 'any' jobs.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS! DEVELOPING LEGAL LITERACY

Legal literacy is an overlooked mechanism in good work. It requires not just an awareness of employment rights but also knowledge of how these rights can be realised/utilised. Employability education and training rarely engages with rights awareness, let alone more complex questions around rights in practice. Improving legal literacy provides an excellent opportunity to embed good work into employability learning. This is particularly critical in a UK context, where recent research shows that even basic employment rights like receiving payslips and paid holiday are often not being upheld (Cominetti & Judge, 2019).

Employment rights are a fundamental tool for achieving good work and underpin many of its core aspects (for example, equality). While legal rights alone are not sufficient, they are a necessity. Legal rights provide a floor of protection, and a baseline for fair treatment at work. Crucially, unlike other dimensions of good work which rely on the discretion and good will of employers, legal rights can be enforced externally (for example, through employment tribunals). Legal literacy must also encompass understanding of internal HR mechanisms too such as grievance procedures as these are often guided by and intertwined with the law, and about the role trade unions can play, such as through providing support in grievances, and through collective bargaining over conditions.

It would be disingenuous to argue that access to justice to enforce legal rights is easy (indeed it should be a last resort), or that HR processes are perfect, or even present in all

companies (for example, they are often lacking in SMEs) – but it is important context for building legal literacy. Legal literacy around good-work, should, therefore, focus on both the substance and the process of employment rights. It also requires adopting both a reactive approach (responding to issues), and a proactive approach (creating decent work with good conditions).

For both clients and employability professionals, the foundation to legal literacy is learning about core employment rights and processes. Employment law is complex and dynamic but a focus on core rights such as those around payment of wages, employment status, employment contracts, equality and working time allows a great working basis for assessing whether work may be considered good. Employability professionals could help to promote legal literacy, through:

- Self-study, for example from ACAS or the TUC, or through a training course. Training may be via a private provider, or trade union members may be able to access free training through their union;
- Discussing the core conditions of a role with clients, encouraging them to engage with resources on employment rights, and to make informed decisions about the quality of opportunities. They may also encourage them to ask questions about core rights in the selection process (for example see Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter resources);
- Asking questions about working conditions to any employers they are working with. Ideally, professionals could seek to only work with companies who offer good work. At the very least, conversations about employment conditions may make a company reflect on their practices and helps clients to make informed decisions.



CONSIDERING SUBJECTIVE ASPECTS OF GOOD WORK: DEVELOPING PSYCHO-SOCIAL LITERACY

While adherence to employment rights is an important objective measure of decent work, incorporating broader notions of 'good work' can be harder to operationalise as experiences can be subjective and individualised. Good work can give purpose, meaning and structure to working lives, provide financial security, boost physical and mental health, foster relationships, and help people feel part of something bigger. Talking about good work does not mean ignoring the problem of 'bad work' but encourages us all to aspire to and learn from experiences of work which enhance day-to-day existence.

For example, a retail worker might enjoy chatting to customers whilst another prefers to avoid this and derives satisfaction from organising stock more attractively. Additionally, people are likely to want different things from work at different stages of their lives or under changing circumstances, for example, zero-hour contracts may suit some students in the short-term but not once they graduate and want to secure stable housing.

This is where the notion of psycho-social literacy comes in. The psycho-social importance of work has been extensively researched for decades and there is general agreement that some elements of work can make a real difference, for example, having a good line manager and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Good work can often arise from aspects which are not written down or even openly discussed. For example, behavioural norms, expectations, perceived fairness, feeling valued or being treated with compassion. Tacit knowledge of 'how work works' varies depending on cultural competence or capital. Employers may need to be more explicit about this for some employees (for example, for

career changers, the long-term unemployed, young people, those from different cultures or those who are neurodivergent). Having open conversations about such topics during recruitment and induction can help employees to make informed choices, settle in and feel they belong. Appointing informal buddies and mentors can also help.

For employability professionals, a recognition of the core human needs (Duffy et al., 2016) met through work should be an essential element to pay attention to with clients. Putting this into practice could include:

- Listening to people and engaging in meaningful conversations about what 'good work' means for them; their hopes and aspirations – including, and yet not limited to, the objective dimensions of pay and working conditions. Even poor-quality work offers the opportunity for reflection which can assist workers develop strategies and awareness of better alternatives. Clients can learn from you a deeper awareness of what good work means for them and how to recognise it
- Continuing to work with employees and employers in new jobs for a period of time, especially those entrants who are more vulnerable. Employability professionals can listen to, troubleshoot, empathise with, and advocate for employees, and help signpost employers to relevant training. You can ask questions about the nature of the work that prospective and/or existing employees don't feel they can, that can contribute to improving the quality of work for both employers and employees.

CONCLUSION

Including a focus on good work and employment rights can improve professional practice and empower clients. It also aligns with what many employers who are committed to the best HR practices want. Good work is not a soft and fluffy concept but has been proven to contribute to more

productive workplaces. It requires practitioners to think critically about how some traditional employability learning risks individualising organisational and structural challenges in the labour market. Critically, they must expand what they know and do in order to support clients to move into and sustain good work.

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ACAS - <https://www.acas.org.uk/advice>

GEC - <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/resources/>

TUC - <https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-guidance>

MOVING PEOPLE INTO GOOD WORK – THE ROLE OF GOOD EMPLOYMENT CHARTERS

Many successive Government initiatives have focused on supporting people into work. Often these have focussed on moving people quickly into jobs, with the phrase a ‘sustainable job’ often being used to define a successful outcome measure.

The term sustainable has generally been associated with a target period of time that a person has occupied a job role, rather than the broader range of qualities that would actually make a job attractive, productive and therefore sustainable.

A genuinely sustainable job can be described as a job that has benefits to the environment, society and the economy. It encompasses several aspects that will have a positive impact on an individual and the community, as well as on the planet. Perhaps, over the years, the focus has been placed most heavily on the economic aspect of sustainable and as a result, individuals have been moved quickly into roles that have been created to meet an immediate economic priority, often within the foundational¹ economy.

These jobs are often considered a short term, rather than long term career aspiration. Perhaps job seekers also access roles reluctantly, and merely see it as a means to an end, a transactional arrangement, especially if they have never experienced ‘good work’. As a result, many people find themselves in jobs that are not fit for purpose.

As we know, the world of work has changed considerably over the past four years.

Post pandemic, attitudes and perceptions of work are being challenged by both employees and employers. Conversations with employers involved in the Good Employment Charter tell us that expectations of the workplace are (rightly) higher, and more people want to have a better relationship between work and home life. More people are thinking about job quality, but ‘good work’ will mean different things to different people.

Given that the importance of ‘good work’ has been recognised, most probably by those that are in work, it is timely to consider those job seekers that would benefit from positive experiences by ensuring that jobs of the future can be good, and therefore more fulfilling with a greater positive impact for the economy and for society.

GOOD EMPLOYMENT CHARTERS: A HELPFUL RESOURCE FOR EMPLOYABILITY PROFESSIONALS

There has been much work undertaken to define ‘good’ work and in some areas, including Greater Manchester², Charters have been developed to help provide a framework that can be used as a reference point.



CAROL HALFORD
Head of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter Unit
Good Employment Charter Unit



Carol has a background in post 16 education and skills within the public sector. Roles included planning and funding provision within colleges and independent training providers, at both operational and leadership level.

Now Head of the Good Employment Charter Unit, working with employers supporting them to adopt good work practices.



¹ The parts of our economy that creates and distributes goods and services that we rely on for everyday life. Examples of the foundational economy are: care and health services, food, housing, retailers.

² <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/>

Following extensive consultation, key characteristics of good work that have been identified and incorporated into the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter include:

1. Secure work – employers provide a level of stability and security, minimising the risk of sudden unemployment or income loss. They may offer long-term contracts, permanent positions, minimise the use of unnecessary zero hours contracts and guarantee minimum hours

2. Pay – ensuring fair pay and benefits by encouraging employers to pay at least the real living wage so that employees can meet their basic needs. By promoting fair and transparent pay structures, reducing pay gaps and addressing gender and ethnic pay disparities, also encouraging employers to provide benefits such as paid leave, pensions, sick pay from day one of absence

3. Flexible work – by promoting flexible work to support work-life balance and accommodate individual needs and advocating fair and reasonable working hours, promoting employee well-being and productivity as well as facilitating access to roles by those who have previously been precluded from job opportunities

4. Engagement & Voice – where employers involve employees in decision making processes that affect their work, by promoting effective communication channels between employers and employees to address concerns and provide feedback, and by supporting the establishment of employee representative bodies or engagement with trade unions to ensure collective bargaining power

5. Recruitment – employers that promote fair and inclusive recruitment practices and champion equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. These employers also provide clear job descriptions and requirements to attract suitable candidates

6. People Management – by having strong values and expected behaviours, providing opportunities for skills development and career progression, providing apprenticeships, internships and work experience placements to help raise aspirations and provide practical experience

7. Health & Well-being – by providing training to raise awareness of the importance of mental and physical health, creating opportunities for employees to engage in inclusive activities, providing reasonable adjustments for those that may have a long-term health condition or disability, supporting attendance and monitoring sickness absence trends. Employment charters can help to provide Employment Support Providers with a clear framework for understanding what a 'good job' looks like. Along with employment support providers signing up as good employers themselves, Charters can also be the basis for employability toolkits like the one we recently designed for use in school and college settings³. Equipped with this knowledge and framework, employability professionals can work with jobseekers and employers to shift the focus towards genuinely sustainable jobs in several ways. For example

- With a focus on 'good' jobs, Employment Support Providers can work with individuals and employers to understand what a 'good' job might look like. What constitutes as a good job will vary based on individual and employer perspectives as well as the social and economic context
- They can champion good work by raising awareness of charters and promoting the principles of good employment. This approach will benefit job seekers, employers and other stakeholders. They can highlight the benefits of the charter/good work, emphasising the importance of good quality jobs and encouraging employers to elevate their employment practice

- Employment Support Providers should provide advice and guidance to job seekers to help them understand how the principles of good work apply in practice and what they should expect as an experience of good work. This might include some education relating to rights, fair employment practices, rates of pay and the importance of identifying and seeking good quality job opportunities – not just any job!

- Employment Support Providers need to engage with employers. They can encourage employers to sign up to principles that make up 'good work' and explain the wider business benefits of doing so. There are many resources available to help employers improve their employment practices

- Employers need to consider the design of jobs to make them interesting, flexible, where feasible, and to provide purpose. Employment Support Providers should work alongside employers to re-design roles to ensure that they are attractive and will motivate new entrants to the labour market^{4,5}

- When looking to match job seekers to employers, Employment Support Providers should utilise the principles of good work and prioritise those that can demonstrate good practice, they may be involved in a local charter for example. They can actively promote vacancies from these employers and facilitate the recruitment process so that individuals have access to good quality jobs. The alignment of job seeker and employer values is extremely important during recruitment;

- The CIPD good work index of 2023 indicates that there are significant skills shortages in some sectors with a 40% increase in unfilled vacancies since 2018. CIPD state that 'raising job quality can support efforts to boost labour market participation and help address skill and labour shortages. A growing body of evidence also highlights a link between increasing job quality and productivity growth'.

³ <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/media/2193/4862gmgec-school-pack-v2-digital.pdf>

⁴ [Acas | Making working life better for everyone in Britain](#)

⁵ [CIPD | CIPD The Professional Body for Human Resources and People Development](#)

Employment Support Providers have a role to play in helping to address skills shortages and working with employers to improve job quality in sectors that are struggling to recruit;

- When job seekers have secured good quality job opportunities, Employment Support Providers should capitalise on the experience of both the employer and the individual by creating case studies and other positive awareness raising collateral. This will help encourage other employers to become involved, especially if they can see an improvement in their recruitment process and a reduction in recruitment costs by getting it right the first time!
- The line manager is crucial in determining whether an individual has a good work experience. Employment Support Providers could provide or signpost training to line managers on how to engage and build trust relationships with new recruits, particularly those that may not have worked for some time. Managers need to be able to connect with their workforce on an emotional level and be willing to be open. For example, we know that the cost-of-living crisis has impacted many and can manifest in mental health issues. Managers need good emotional intelligence and to be perceptive in recognising if someone is not ok. Post pandemic, managers really do need a different skill set and adapt to new ways of working.

Whilst it might be unrealistic to assume that the quality of all jobs can be transformed overnight, many improvements can be made. By leveraging the principles of 'good work', Employment Support Providers can play a crucial role in advancing individuals into good quality jobs, fostering a culture of good employment practices and promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth within their communities.

A shift from moving people into jobs quickly towards a 'work first' approach would surely create a mutually beneficial outcome for both the employer and employee. Given that much of our lives are spent at work, why wouldn't we want to enjoy good work?



HOLISTIC PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT IS NEEDED FOR GREAT JOBS

Our work at Better Connect, spanning multiple employability programmes across several years, has always been about unlocking the full potential of people to achieve the best possible outcomes.

We are a non-profit organisation in North Yorkshire that works with Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE)-sector organisations.

We collaborate with them on partnership projects, then we lead these projects from start to finish. We help partners work together to maximise the benefits to their programme participants, we manage their performance and delivery and we help promote the incredible work they do. All of this has taught us the value of holistic models and working together as a whole that is so much greater than the sum of its parts.

My role as programme manager has involved supporting these partners to deliver effectively, ensuring they're working with as many participants as they can and getting the best outcomes for them. From its inception in 2017 until its close in June 2023, I worked on Action Towards Inclusion (ATI) (first as a coordinator and then as a manager).

It was truly amazing! A European Social Fund/Lottery-funded programme, it ran across all of York, North Yorkshire and the East Riding, with over 50 delivery partners at its height. It was a joy to be a part of, because it helped a large and very diverse range of people to achieve monumental gains in their work lives, wellbeing and so many other areas.

This holistic model was at the core of what made ATI work. We designed it using a proven approach from an earlier large programme we ran with the Lottery in West Yorkshire, Talent Match. This involved having some of the partners delivering as keyworkers (working 1-1 with participants to identify their needs and give them employability support) whilst others were intervention partners (who offered a range of additional services to the same participants, from accredited skills courses to counselling).

Another key part of the success of ATI was the project not being time-bound. Participants accessed it from anywhere between a couple of months and a couple of years, depending on the complexity of their barriers to work and how much support they might require. As one keyworker put it, 'There is a pathway to it. But how long that path is or how complex that path is will depend on the person.'

This in turn linked to the importance of the trust developed – over this longer period, keyworkers formed positive relationships with their participants, helping to get the very best from them. Additionally, whilst it was exclusively for people not in work, apart from that it was generally open to almost anyone. It helped people from all backgrounds and treated them as individuals, not just as statistics.



JOE MCKENZIE
Programme Manager
Better Connect, UK



Joe is a programme manager working in the voluntary sector in North Yorkshire. I manage an employability and social inclusion programme which is delivered by charitable organisations. My role involves supporting these partners with their work to help the individuals they work with in a holistic, person-centred way.



The final results from ATI show it was highly successful. This was demonstrated by research conducted with Dr Annie Irvine from the ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health, part of Kings College London¹. The partners supported 2913 participants across the 6 years. Of those, 1008 (over 1/3) moved into employment by the time they completed support. For a cohort of people with multiple, complex barriers to work, like severe mental health issues, this achievement was significant. But not only were the numbers achieved strong, the jobs that ATI participants accessed were high-quality roles.

Many were able to access career pathways they'd always dreamed of. For instance, the funding on the programme allowed participants to access training opportunities they never otherwise could have, such as beautician courses, leading to self-employment in cosmetic beauty services. Others had been out of the job market for decades and had no idea what current office roles might require, particularly in areas like IT. Keyworkers could refer into interventions within ATI to upskill participants in these areas, allowing them to access roles they may have never thought themselves capable of. Several participants loved the experience of the programme so much that they were fortunately able to gain employment with the partner who had supported them.

This has led to many of them having long-lasting roles as keyworkers, giving back to participants in the very same position they had been in. These have been beautiful examples of the project coming full circle, and it goes to show how lived experience in the voluntary sector can make for long-term careers for those people who want to pass on the same amazing support that they got.

Much of the employability support in our sector is designed to rush through as many people as possible in a very short time, which can make the support less effective in getting

people into good jobs. One keyworker summed up this distinction in comments comparing their ATI work to the DWP work coach support: 'We've got time. They haven't ... They've got 20 minutes, 15 minutes, whatever it is. We've got an hour, three times a week if necessary'.

ATI proved that giving people more time and space to find their true passions, not just any job, made for much more valuable long-term success in terms of the jobs they accessed and how likely they were to stay in these roles. Another keyworker emphasised why finding good jobs was a much better approach: 'The job is not about getting them off the unemployment statistics, for us; it's about helping people use that, so that they can understand how far they've come, get that sense of self-worth, get that sense of pride and change their lives.'

We have been lucky enough to continue the same model on our current local government-funded programme: Reducing Inequalities, Supporting Employment (RISE). This launched just as ATI finished, very much picking up where the last project left off.

Whilst some aspects of it (like the scale of budget and length of the project) had to be reduced due to changes in the wider funding landscape, it has nonetheless retained all the very best elements of ATI – holistic person-centred support offered through a large partnership, working together to help the most disadvantaged people in society achieve their dreams and thus access the very best jobs for them.

As we look ahead, we hope to be able to continue this tried and tested successful model. We also hope to build on it and make it even better, by incorporating in-work support, meaning the partners can actually support people all the way through their journeys into work and beyond. This was inspired by another past programme we ran, Thriving at

Work, which focussed on supporting employed people who were disabled, neurodiverse or had mental health issues, empowering them to live their best working lives, whilst also educating employers about what they could do better to make jobs more accessible. The benefit of this was empowering people who were otherwise excluded from the workplace to gain roles which were much more supportive, thus allowing them to stay employed in the long run.

Ultimately, our ambition is to help people overcome obstacles, get into a great job and continue getting help beyond this point, so that they can ultimately develop the resilience and wellbeing needed to stay, succeed and progress in employment. Of course, like many working in the voluntary sector, the continuation of this work depends on the values of funders - it is crucial that funders recognise that people need time and space to find good jobs, not just any jobs.

Everyone deserves the opportunity to work in a job that makes them happy, and I am extremely fortunate to work on programmes which can help make this dream a reality.



¹ <https://betterconnect.org.uk/our-projects/action-towards-inclusion/research-and-evaluation/>

A FIVE-STAR, GOLD PLATED CAREER SERVICE AND FAIR WORK FOR WEST YORKSHIRE

Introduction

Our economy is transforming in front of us. Major structural changes, such as technological advances and a drive towards net-zero, offer both opportunity and challenge.

At the same time, global and national pressures ranging from the cost-of-living crisis, economic stagnation, issues around Brexit, and the ongoing recovery from the pandemic mean there has been a lack of investment to ensure the current career, skills and training infrastructure and provision is fit to serve our residents and businesses, let alone match the pace of change.

In West Yorkshire¹, the Combined Authority's (CA) vision is to create a brighter, more prosperous region with an inclusive economy and well-paid jobs. To be able to do this, investment in skills, training and education, and support from employers need to go hand in hand to create a diverse, inclusive, and highly skilled workforce with good jobs, leading to sustained improvements in the quality of life for all.

Unfortunately, we are not there yet. Our State of the Region Report for 2022² confirms we are still grappling with structural, long-term, challenges affecting our productivity. These include:

Qualifications: Young people in West Yorkshire are less likely to have achieved a level 2 qualification by the age of 19 than their national counterparts. The proportion is 77%, 5 percentage points lower than the England average.

Employment: Women, people from ethnic minorities, disabled people and older people are less likely to be in employment than the wider population. In addition, the groups listed above and, younger people are more likely to be in severely insecure work³.



- £60.1bn economy (2021)
- 2.4m people, 1.2m workforce
- 95,000 businesses
- 7 universities, 111,000 students & 35,000 graduates every year
- 7 further education colleges
- UK's largest regional finance centre
- Fast growing digital sector
- A global leader in healthcare technology
- More manufacturing jobs than anywhere in the North

¹ https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/media/10561/west_yorkshire_plan.pdf

² West Yorkshire Combined Authority; *State of the Region, Review 2022 & State of the Region 2022 EDI Review*

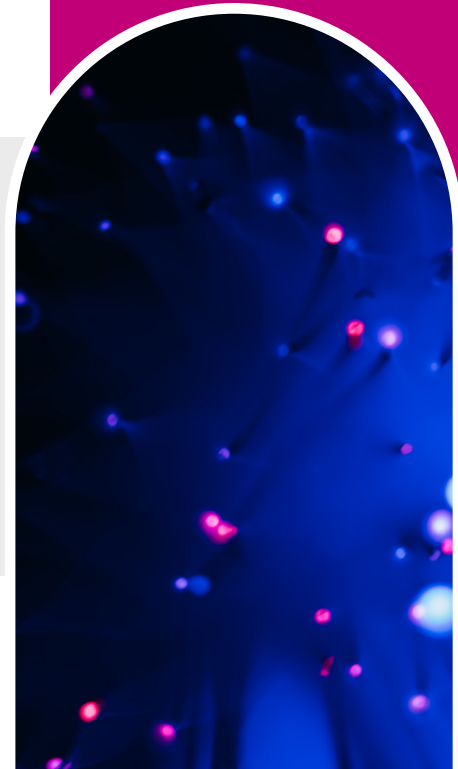
³ Florisson, R. (2022). *The Insecure Work Index: Two decades of insecurity*. Work Foundation, Lancaster University. Workers are classed as being in severely insecure work when experiencing involuntary part-time and involuntary temporary forms of work or a combination of these and other job characteristics including low pay and underemployment.



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Policy Officer, Employment & Skills
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At the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Anika is developing employment and skills policy, working with a wide range of partners. Anika has worked for Combined Authorities in policy, external affairs, political case work and business support delivery for six years. Previous experience includes events and festival delivery within the cultural and creative sector and an educational background in language and business administration (BA), arts and cultural management (MA).



NEET: Around 3,500 people (6.2%) aged 16 and 17 in West Yorkshire were classed as not in education, employment or training or whose activity was not known (NEET) in 2022/23. This is a higher prevalence than nationally (5.2%) and an increase on 2021/22 (5.5%). Being NEET increases the likelihood of unemployment, low wages, or low-quality work later on in life⁴.

Job related training: The proportion of people of working age (16-64) who received job-related training in West Yorkshire in the previous 13 weeks was 4 points lower than for England. Furthermore, people qualified below Level 3 are much less likely to receive job-related training (14% compared to 27% of those qualified at or above Level 4 in West Yorkshire)⁵.

The question is then, how regional policy can break down barriers for people to take up, progress and succeed in learning and quality employment; and to ensure employers recognise the value of a diverse workforce, invest in their talent and support progression in the workplace.

QUALITY CAREERS PROVISION AS A SOLUTION

Career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) has been identified as an area where early, preventive intervention could tackle some of the root causes of our structural employment and skills challenges. West Yorkshire's Future Ready Skills Commission found that an optimal careers system helps the individual make choices, build their skills and manage their careers, as well as maximises their potential in the learning and labour market⁶.

From an employer perspective, effective careers support enables the labour market to operate more flexibly and dynamically by better alignment between skills supply and demand and improving deployment and utilisation of skills.

A recent straw poll at the West Yorkshire Career Hub Conference, attended by over 100 college and secondary school career leads and business representatives provided 99 positive responses to the question: 'Do you [attendee] think work experience and encounters with employers are important, do you see any benefits?'

"Yes, experiential opportunities solidify what learners like and don't like, build skills and confidence. Seeing roles in real life and understanding what opportunities are out there is so important. Encountering and working with role models. Increasing the diversity of roles models is important."

So employers are not just the receiver of 'skills and labour', brokered through quality, locally relevant CEIAG. They also have a critical role to play to raise aspirations, create opportunities for residents and create a more inclusive economy. West Yorkshire has one of the youngest and most diverse populations in the country and the current employment gaps show that there is more to do to encourage and enable more inclusive recruitment and workplace practices. Engaging with education institutions, e.g. by offering work placements, talks on the sector they work in, taking place in CV writing or mock interview workshops or mentoring, and investing in their existing workforce to develop talent are just a few options businesses have to strengthen their involvement.

There are therefore clear links to the Combined Authority's Fair Work Charter, which will be launched in autumn 2023. The Charter includes key themes around opportunity, including inclusive recruitment practices and progression in work, security, including fair pay, safe working and minimising insecure work and fulfilment, including investing in continuous learning for staff.

THE AMBITION

When Mayor Tracy Brabin was elected in West Yorkshire in 2021, she promised a 'five-star, gold plated

career service' for the region where everyone has the skills, information, advice and guidance they need to reach their personal ambitions and gain quality work, contributing to delivering her pledges to prioritise skills and training and support local businesses.

Fuelled by regional, political ambition and in step with the recent precedents set by the West Midlands and Greater Manchester Trailblazer Deals, which both included elements of devolved career powers and funding, an All Age Career Blueprint for the region is being developed.

The Blueprint will set out what a regional approach for all age careers provision in the region could look like, envisaging the following impact:

- Our residents of all ages and backgrounds have the knowledge and support to have rewarding careers
- Our employers contribute to the skills and career development of a diverse and inclusive local workforce
- Increased attendance and engagement in education leading to improved progression and retention in positive destinations
- More people in good work with improved labour market status and a reduction in skills shortages, leading to social and economic growth

Designing an optimal career blueprint will enable system leadership on employment and careers interventions to make evidence-led commissioning and delivery decisions and tackle some of the consistent challenges of the career system.

Early findings from research commissioned by the CA in 2023⁷ suggests the following areas for priority action:

1. Addressing awareness and access barriers for residents of all ages, with a particular focus on adults and those facing disadvantage, is imperative

⁴ Public Health England, [Local action on health inequalities: Reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training](#) (NEET) (2014)

⁵ Annual Population Survey, January to December 2022. Indicator relates to participation in job-related training over a 13-week period.

⁶ [Future Ready Skills Commission: Careers Information and Inspiration: Briefing Paper](#)

⁷ Institute for Employment Studies: Interim Report: All Age Careers Blueprint for West Yorkshire (2023)

2. Digital exclusion is a major barrier for residents to access CEIAG provision online and must be addressed
3. Ongoing collaboration and information sharing among educational institutions, employers, local authorities, and CEIAG service providers is crucial
4. Employer engagement with educational institutions is essential in designing and implementing CEIAG provision that is mutually beneficial and responds to local labour market needs
5. Efforts should be made to establish and enforce minimum standards for the delivery of quality CEIAG
6. CEIAG services should focus on supporting young people during educational transitions and individuals as they enter the workforce, encouraging upskilling, reskilling, and reducing dropout rates
7. CEIAG provision should be equitable across the region
8. Build capacity within the CEIAG Workforce

The Combined Authority has a proven track record in delivering devolved skills programmes including the region's Adult Education Budget. To deliver the Mayor's ambition of a gold plated career service, we are asking for devolution of all careers budgets and increased investment in the future of the workforce. The All Age Careers Blueprint will provide a roadmap to implementation.

WHAT WE ARE BUILDING ON

The West Yorkshire Careers Hub, co-funded by the Careers and Enterprise Hub (CEH), has been highly successful in supporting the region's secondary schools and colleges to have a modern, gold-standard careers system, rooted in local information and careers support. Special educational needs and disability (SEND)/ Pupil Referral Units (PRU) and alternative provision schools, apprenticeship and in-work training providers and businesses are part of the hub

with the ultimate aim of raising the aspirations, resilience, employability, destinations and social capital of our young people.

In addition, a focus on career information, advice and guidance (CIAG) and employability is embedded in all our adult skills and employment programmes by design.

Procured Adult skills providers will be required to be good or above Ofsted rated and Matrix accredited. All courses and training include an element of career advice. This is not a direct result of devolution. WYCA currently has no devolved career related powers or funding. Our efforts to integrate CIAG, employment support and adult education provision are driven by a shared commitment to improve outcomes for our residents and businesses – and that includes making proactive connections between business need and labour market supply.

Evaluation of our Employment Hub programme, centrally coordinated and locally delivered by local authorities, has shown that place-based responses can be highly successful⁸. The Return on Investment was £4.80 per £1 invested into the programme, compared to a Return on Investment of £1.65 for every £1 invested for the national Kickstart programme. A considerable ingredient for success of this programme, which is now in its third iteration and offers employment support, including careers advice, to people of all ages, helping them move closer to, enter or return to the labour market or progress within their current work, is the robust partnership approach. Strong partnerships with local employment and skills, children and young people services as well as a strong relationship with Jobcentres, businesses and proactive community outreach are the foundation of the programme.

The Combined Authority has also shown that regional interventions can be highly successful in terms of reaching a more diverse audience. The Mayor's Screen Diversity Programme

aims to address under-representation within the screen industries by breaking down perceived and actual barriers that can prevent people aged 18-30 from diverse backgrounds starting and establishing meaningful careers within the industry. Applicants are offered a bespoke training package to prepare them for a wide range of industry jobs, involving industry masterclasses, CV and interview workshops, mentorships, one-to-one support, and detailed careers information. This also includes internships and work experience placements for a proportion of the trainees. The first cohort in 2022 was 5 times over-subscribed and supported 58% women, 50% BAME and 33% people with disabilities, surpassing all original targets.

CONCLUSION

For careers provision to enable sustained, positive education and employment outcomes for individuals and support the reduction of skill shortages and productivity growth for businesses, all constituent parts of the system need to work together. The West Yorkshire Combined Authority has been able to build in quality careers provision into existing regional commissioning and delivery of employment support and adult skills programmes despite limited devolved powers and funding. We believe a gold-plated career system for the region to raise aspirations and prosperity is what our residents and businesses deserve.

⁸ Leeds City Region Employment Hub: Final Evaluation, May 2022

GOOD WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE – HOW CAN THE EMPLOYABILITY SECTOR HELP?

The latest figures from the Labour Force Survey showed a sharp rise in young people outside education and work, equating to nearly 1.1 million individuals.

This is the highest figure since the first Covid-19 lockdown¹. The employment support sector has a vital role to play in ensuring that these young people are supported into good quality work and learning opportunities that satisfy their needs and puts them on a path towards a fulfilling working life.

A key question for the sector is: how can we ensure that there is an emphasis on helping young people secure not just any work, but good work? This article considers this question by drawing on new research conducted by the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) and the Education Development Trust.

WHAT DOES GOOD WORK LOOK LIKE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

Young people are not a homogenous group; different people will want different things from work. However, research from the Institute for Employment Studies, which surveyed 1,275 young people, revealed that the top three priorities for over one-third of respondents were: having a job that is interesting and fulfilling; fair and good pay; and security and stability in work². However, we know that for those already in employment, young people are more likely to be in insecure, low-

paid and non-unionised work which can lead to bad socio-economic and health outcomes.³

Young people also have different needs. For example, there is a growing number of young people in touch with mental health services which can impact their ability to find and sustain work.

While the World Health Organization states that decent work is good for mental health, poor working environments such as including discrimination and inequality, excessive workloads, low job control and insecurity, pose a risk to mental health⁴. Therefore, ensuring that young people are moving into 'good work' in the first instance is important.

LESSONS FROM RESEARCH ON NEET AND CARE LEAVER SUPPORT

Recently, the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) and the Education Development Trust published a joint piece of research titled, 'Entry and Retention in the Labour Market: Narratives and Solutions for NEET and Care Leaver Employment Support'⁵ in which included surveys of employability practitioners and interviews with young people.



HENRY FOULKES
Policy and Public Affairs Lead



Henry joined ERSA in 2021 and now leads on ERSA's policy and public affairs work. He is currently focusing on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, engaging with political parties ahead of an upcoming general election; and ensuring that best practice is continually shared amongst ERSA's membership.



¹ Institute for Employment Studies, Labour Market Statistics, September 2023

² Christina Orlando, 'Not just any job, good jobs!': Youth voices from across the UK, Health Foundation and Institute for Employment Studies, November 2021

³ <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/work-foundation/our-work/insecure-work/how-and-why-insecure-work-negatively-impacts-mental-health>

⁴ World Health Organization, Mental Health at work, September 2022

⁵ Henry Foulkes, Madeleine Winnard and Jack Farnhill-Bain, Entry and Retention in the labour market: Narratives and solutions for NEET and care leaver employment support, June 2023

The research set out to find:

- What is currently offered in terms of in-work support for young people and care leavers?
- What are the key barriers to employment, education and/or training (EET) for young people and care leavers who are not in employment, education and/or training (NEET)?
- What is currently offered to young people and care leavers in terms of entry to EET support?
- What types of provision are most effective at dealing with the barriers young people face to EET?

In terms of barriers, mental health and a lack of confidence are overwhelmingly considered the biggest barriers to employment, education or training for NEET young people. 92% and 90% of responding organisations in the survey, respectively, selected mental health and a lack of confidence as the biggest barriers to EET for the young people they support.

The report also revealed that good work was central to good outcomes. Successful retention of young people in employment is often due to flexibility and empathy on the part of the employer, but establishing relationships with employers is currently built informally from the bottom up, requiring a lot of time expenditure on the part of practitioners to identify and persuade these employers to their cause.

Various practitioners described how establishing good, working connections with understanding employers ensured that there was flexibility in the employers' expectations of young people.

During the research, one care-experienced young person revealed she was in full-time work within a council as a result of the organisation ring-fencing this opportunity for a care leaver. Prior to this, she had been

applying for multiple vacancies but had not been successful. She was thriving in her new role and reported that she 'love[s] the job'. She felt grateful for the fact that the council was a flexible employer, allowing her to take time out to attend mental health-related appointments. Our interviews suggested that without this ring-fenced opportunity with a sympathetic employer, this young person would likely still be NEET.

The report makes a number of recommendations for both policymakers and practitioners on how to support young people into good work, including:

- **For Policymakers** - Develop a national network of corporate employers who can accommodate employing NEET young people who may require a role tailored to their needs, allowing flexibility with routine, and undergoing trauma-informed training.
- **For Practitioners** - Employ young people or individuals whose backgrounds match that of the typical caseload to act as consultants in the development and design of services, or as peer mentors.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Employability practitioners have a massively important role to play in supporting young people into good jobs. Through attending ERSA's nationwide communities of good practice and regularly engaging with stakeholders such as young people and employers, the sector has to play a vital role in ensuring that young people not only find 'any job' but one that satisfies their needs and puts them on a path towards a fulfilling working life. This will likely involve working against the 'any job, better job, career' (A.B.C) policy of the current government. This approach tends to act detrimentally against the priorities of young people and pushes them into a cycle of short-term, insecure work. For our sector, it puts the onus on employability organisations to ensure that employers are genuine

when it comes to giving young people opportunities and not merely viewing them as cheap, expendable labour.

For young people to access good work, it is integral that employability professionals should encourage and challenge employers to go against the status quo when hiring people and try other approaches to recruitment and retention. This happened during the Kickstart Scheme when employability providers mediated between individuals and employers. During Kickstart, Gateways, who were organisations that acted as intermediaries and applied for funding on behalf of an employer, worked with employers in adapting job opportunities and provided wrap-around support to young people throughout their placements and beyond.

Advisors need to educate young people on good work opportunities and organisations should work with and support 'good employment charters', like the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter⁶, and the Youth Employment UK list of 'Youth Friendly Employers'⁷. It was refreshing to see Fedcap recently announce a 'Customer Advisory Group', which seeks advice from previous and existing customers when designing new employment support services. There is a huge amount of good practice taking place throughout the sector, and organisations need to continue sharing this and regularly engaging with stakeholders such as young people and employers to improve further. The sector has to play a vital role in ensuring that young people not only find 'any job' but one that satisfies their needs and puts them on a path towards a fulfilling working life.

⁶ <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/careers-advice-help/look-for-the-youth-friendly-employer-mark/>

IDLENESS, THE FIVE GIANTS, A NEW BEVERIDGE REPORT, JONES AND KUMAR (2022) AGENDA PUBLISHING



ANITA HOUGHTON MIEP, MAODE
Project Manager
IEP



I write this review not from an academic critical analysis viewpoint, but from how it relates to 'my world' of employability.

I have experienced first-hand employability challenges, supported Adult Apprenticeship Provision, worked within Adult and Community Learning, supported organisations delivering the Restart Scheme and more recently, endeavours within the IEP. And yet, the word 'idleness' has been used more in my household banter (parent of teenage children) than to describe the many unemployed people I have encountered through my work.

Jones and Kumar begin by quoting Iain Duncan Smith 2010, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. He stated his intentions to slay the institutional idleness identified by Beveridge and which The Welfare System has helped to create. Jones and Kumar, however, very quickly discard the term 'idleness' as not relevant in today's labour market.

They highlight the changes in labour market since the Beveridge Report was commissioned in 1941, in very brief terms, as:

- Much higher levels of employment
- A lesser impact that recession seems to have on employment rates,
- An increase in women's employment. They make the argument that, due to the part time nature of women's work, and part time work generally being lower paid, in-work poverty is now more common than out of work poverty.

They suggest that if idleness means the 'habitual avoidance of work' this applies, at most, to 1% of the population.

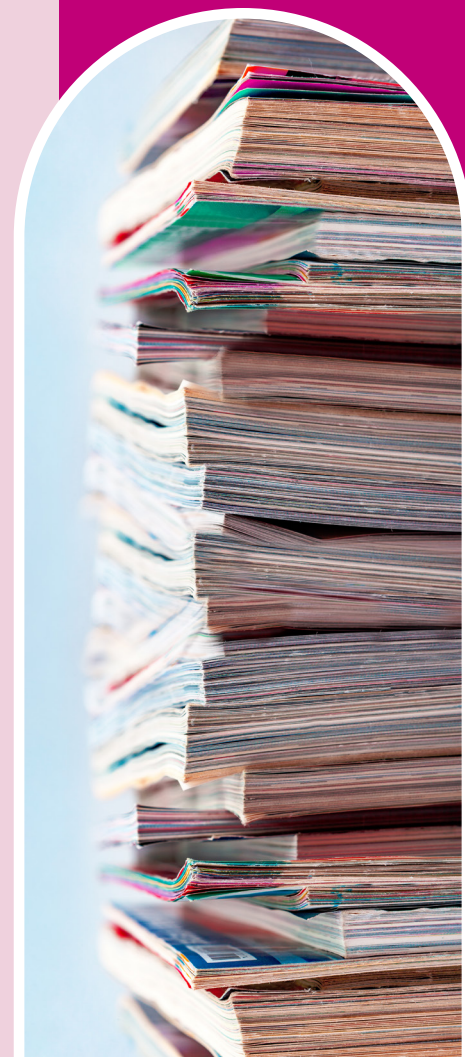
In essence, through clear, easy to understand explanations, it becomes apparent how absurd the term idleness is in relation to today's unemployment issues. In delivering their short and swift dismissal of the term, Jones and Kumar touch on two things which resonated the most with me. Firstly, the need to develop skills and training and secondly gender inequalities (to name just one inequality which they examine).

The development of skills and training is explored as a vehicle to plug the UK's productivity gap and as a strong contender to reduce in-work poverty. Jones and Kumar suggest employers may be hesitant to invest in training, due to the free rider effect (why invest in training to make somebody higher qualified for their next employer) and public good effect (why train to benefit society rather than the immediate needs of the employer).

A little over a decade ago, Higher Apprenticeship Schemes became the new kids on the block and held so much promise. One of the programmes I was involved with targeted public sector managers (most of whom had fallen into management roles without any substantial training).



Anita is a project manager within the Institute of Employability Professionals. She has extensive experience of employability and skills, teaching and training, from within educational settings and a prime provider delivering the Restart scheme. Current work projects include development of the Centre for Employability Excellence and progressing the IEP's International Activity.



Training managers not only plugged a much needed skills gap but created a positive impact on employees and in turn businesses. Subsequent years saw Apprenticeship funding changes and many discussions about targeting funding at new employees not existing ones. Subsequently volumes of Apprenticeships have declined. Was it perhaps too big an ask to expect employers to navigate funding requirements and resolve their 'public good' or 'free rider' issues?.... maybe.

Would a transformation of the Apprenticeship Schemes offer an opportunity to develop skills to decrease in-work poverty? A definite yes from me, but Apprenticeships were my first love, so perhaps I'm biased.

Turning towards preparation for employment, which I feel is also an area of missed opportunities, Jones and Kumar highlight that the objectives of many work coaches involve moving people into work quickly. This is not a very skill centred or empowering approach. Adult and Community Learning providers (my second love) empower people through engagement, one small step at a time. This approach is often the long game, different from quick fix, 2-week course and straight into any job. And yet, job outcomes are often the success measures on relatively short programmes, programmes that are not even long enough for some people to develop the skills needed to enter employment or equip them to embrace opportunities to continue to develop skills for higher paid work once in employment.

I feel it is also important to note that many community teachers are highly trained, qualified individuals, trained to transform lives through education. Do all professionals supporting job seekers have this level of competence before they start supporting job seekers? I witnessed first-hand the surge of recruitment at the commencement of the Restart Scheme, with many organisations trying to employ enough advisors to meet the referral numbers. They weren't necessarily equipped at

the onset with expertise, and when coupled with job outcome measures this doesn't instil confidence in it being a skills development and empowering approach. There is a lot of food for thought here, about how we train our practitioners and about the focus of commissioned employability programmes.

It won't be a surprise, from my education background, that my views align with the authors': skills are a vehicle to address the UK's labour issues, but a fascination with idleness is not. There are broadly three areas of skills to consider: individual job seeker skills, the skills of the practitioners supporting the job seekers and the skills of the employers. Jones and Kumar also address this final point and share several projects which have made a positive difference to employers.

The final aspect of the book which resonated with me was the highlighting of inequalities, childcare being one example. Jones and Kumar view access to childcare as fundamental in dealing with low pay and low productivity. The stark reality in my household of teenage children (or young adults as they like to be known) is that I have a stereotypical boy and a girl. My boy is currently more 'idle' than my girl and yet in future years, due to childcare issues and potential low pay if choosing to work part-time, my girl may be seen as 'idle' if stuck in a low pay, low productivity job. In 2023 this seems outrageous that this possibility exists, and our current benefit system seems to do little to solve this.

This book provides compelling and factual arguments, not only about what is wrong with the current benefits system but also what could have a positive impact. There are many more points raised in the book which I haven't touched on, but my advice would be to have a read; there will be things which resonate with you and present you with data and evidence, very likely in support of what you already believe, plus a much wider view of aspects you may not have experienced.



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A hand is shown holding a pen over a document. A yellow arrow points upwards and to the right, indicating growth or progress. The background is a vibrant mix of purple, pink, and red geometric shapes.

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