

Select Committee on Social Mobility
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

11 September 2015

Dear Sir or Madam,

YMCA England response to the House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility inquiry on 'social mobility in the transition from school to work'

Every year YMCA helps 43,000 young people into training and education. We provide a whole range of employment and training programmes including apprenticeships, vocational training, training courses, informal education and volunteering opportunities. These help to equip young people with the right skills they need to achieve their full potential and to lead independent lives.

Often the young people who access YMCA services have few qualifications and little or no experience of the workplace. As a result job opportunities can be limited and a young person can quickly find themselves in a succession of short-term, part-time, zero-hour contracts. There are many contributing factors as to why a young person reaches a YMCA in this position and there is much the Government could be doing to address this.

The comments and recommendations made within this response are formed after consultation with the young people that access YMCA services and the staff that deliver them across the country.

1. What are the most significant factors that affect the social mobility and employment outcomes of young people in the transition from school into the work place?

- 1.1 The young people accessing YMCA services are often the most vulnerable, with some having experienced family breakdown, abuse, substance misuse and mental health issues. This group of people are likely to find the transition into work particularly difficult. In order to ensure that such issues do not affect their social mobility and employment outcomes it is important that they are provided with support from individuals and organisations that are aware of the potential implications these issues can have in order to be able to succeed in the workplace.
- 1.2 Young people taking part in YMCA consultations felt that they were often discriminated against by employers. Being of a young age, many do not have the necessary experience required by employers but they are unable to get it without first being given the opportunity.

2. There is a group of young people aged 14-24 who do not follow the A-Level and higher education route, and are not classified as NEET. What is known about the young people in this group – who are they, why are they in this position and what are their career trajectories?

2.1 In 2013/14¹ 278,680 people aged 16-24 started an apprenticeship, which represents 63.3% of all of those starting an apprenticeship in the year. While the overall trend for young people has been positive until recent years, the numbers of 16 and 17 year olds starting an apprenticeship has actually declined by 11,070 in the last ten years. In the same time period, the number of older people (aged 25+) starting an apprenticeship increased by 161,560 and this age group now account for 37% of all apprenticeship starts in England. Many of these young people will not have done A-Levels.

2.2 In addition, this group contains many young people in the group who are forced to undertake a series of short-term temporary jobs, which do little to help them achieve long-term and sustained employment. This is often more apparent in the young people accessing job centres who are often forced into agency work. While this is effective in getting people off benefits in the short term, it does little to address the long-term employment outcomes of the young person as they are into a low-pay no-pay cycle with little consideration of their aspirations.

3. Does the current transition system support young people who do not follow the A-level and higher educational route to perform better in terms of employment outcomes? If not, why not? What challenges do these young people face in their ability to transition successfully into the workplace?

3.1 Leaving secondary education without the necessary qualifications can potentially damage a young person's prospects, but too often students who are struggling with the traditional academic path are often not given the necessary support.

3.2 At the heart of YMCA's beliefs is that people should always have the opportunity to better themselves. However, despite having the opportunities in front of them, the journey through the educational system can be disrupted for some young people due to having to deal with difficult personal circumstances that prohibits them from progressing the first time around.

3.3 Accessing training and education at a later stage is vital for these young people; however, a barrier to this is the removal of entitlement to full-time education of those over 19-years-old. Accordingly, YMCA is calling on the Government to extend the upper age limit for funding of training and education from 19 to 21-years-old to help ensure that young people with difficult pasts do not have poor employment outcomes.

¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Statistical Data set: FE data library: apprenticeships
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships>

- 3.4 Regardless of ability, it is difficult to make the right educational and career choices without being fully informed of the scale of options. The quality of careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) has traditionally been patchy at best. IAG should be treated as a specialist service that is delivered by qualified IAG professionals rather than teachers. This service is even more important for those young people who do not wish to follow the A-level to university route.
- 3.5 Accordingly, young people are not being made aware of the different pathways available and especially those alternatives to mainstream education such as vocational training and apprenticeships. These courses can have a huge impact on a young person's ability to find work and their employment outcomes, but in many cases they are simply not known about.
- 3.6 The inclusion of employers and businesses in the classroom and the introduction of compulsory work experience, which is relevant and of a good quality, as a part of secondary school education would also aid in the widening of a young person's level of understanding prior to making decisions on their future. A strong dialogue between schools and employers would also help to tackle the bias towards traditional academic pathways that is often present in schools.
- 3.7 Many young people taking part in YMCA consultations felt that they were not ready for work, and the new challenges that employment would bring. Compulsory work experience would also provide young people with a taste of working life and help them make the transition into employment.
- 3.8 In addition to work experience, work readiness courses should be made available for young people who lack the confidence to enter into the work place. These would provide young people with the skills needed to enter into a working environment and make them more desirable to employers.

4. How can the transition from school to work be improved for all young people, particularly for those who do not go on to study A-Levels and higher education? How can employers be encouraged to employ more young people from this group?

- 4.1 Early intervention is key to help those young people who may struggle to enter into work. Additional funding should be made available to schools to target those young people less likely to succeed, raising their attainment levels and allowing them to have an equal chance of success.
- 4.2 One example of a successful early intervention project is Teesdale YMCA Training Centre which was set up as a direct result of listening to the needs of young people in the area who were struggling within a traditional school environment and in need of accessing education delivered in a different way. The aim of the project is to allow young people to learn in an environment that suits their own style of learning - a more practical way of learning rather than classroom based.²

² <http://www.teesdaleymca.com/training-education-2/>

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- 4.3 While the Government's focus and drive for apprenticeships as an alternative option for young people is welcomed, the application in practice has not been as successful. There still remains a difficulty for particular age groups to access apprenticeships and being able to maintain participation is challenging when in receipt of Housing Benefit or a low wage.
 - 4.4 Accordingly, YMCA is calling for a review of the current apprenticeships policy with a particular focus on what additional incentives would help encourage more companies to take on apprentices – particularly those aged 16 – 24.
 - 4.5 One of the most consistent complaints from young people taking part in YMCA consultations is the regulations around the 16-hour rule and their ability to gain adequate training while on benefits. Due to the limited number of part-time courses available, the 16-hour rule stops a substantial amount of training being undertaken and hinders the development of young people whilst in receipt of benefits, which in turn inhibits their ability to find employment.
 - 4.6 The Government should mitigate this barrier by amending the regulations which prevent young people from participating on course or training for over 16 hours per week whilst still claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit.
 - 4.7 For those young people who have left school without the necessary academic achievements due to substance abuse issues, it is important that a holistic approach to treatment is taken. As such, while it is important that employment support workers help them into work, this must be done in conjunction with continued support and guidance on health needs. Recovering from addiction is a complex process and relapses are frequent. Employers must recognise this and goals and targets must be realistic for the individual.
 - 4.8 More funding should be available for employers to allow for reasonable adjustments to be put in place to support individuals in need into work. This could include the provision of tailored in-work support to help aid people through the transition from unemployment to employment, whether that is internally or externally via a specialist support worker.
 - 4.9 Similarly, those young people whose academic path has been affected by mental health conditions must be appropriately supported when finding and undertaking work. A fear of discrimination and being stigmatised means that young people often do not feel comfortable telling employers about existing health conditions, which can worsen their effects and lead to problems sustaining work.
 - 4.10 Poor mental health can have a dramatic impact on the prospects of a young person's life, yet too often young people are not getting the support they need. For both young people and YMCA staff there is a complete lack of trust or confidence in the National Health Service (NHS) to support them with poor mental health. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are seen as ineffective, unhelpful and poorly operated. The waiting lists for an appointment are too long and young people often get lost when transferring from CAMHS to adult mental health services.

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- 4.11 YMCA is calling on the waiting times for CAMHS to be cut, with access to a first appointment to be available within a week. In addition the age limit for the service should be increased to 21 years old, and where possible a single key worker should be assigned to ensure that continuity and trust can be developed.
 - 4.12 Interventions to help tackle young people's mental health conditions are likely to have a positive impact on the lives of those facing long-term health conditions and help them to access and sustain work. Effective treatment can help to mitigate the effects of such conditions, helping the wellbeing of the young person and improving their employment outcomes.
 - 4.13 Young people taking part in YMCA consultations reported feeling alienated from job centres and the support that they are designed to provide. While examples of good practice exist, the majority of young people felt that job centres were not currently capable of delivering what young people need to find work.
 - 4.14 To help make them more effective in supporting young people through the transition from education to employment, YMCA is calling for Jobcentre Plus advisors to be trained and supported to better understand the difficulties and barriers that young people commonly face to enable them to provide more tailored support.
 - 4.15 Many young people felt that the training courses they needed to participate in were not available via the job centre and this was a barrier to employment. Young people should be able to source their own training schemes and have the opportunity to make the case to their job centre work coaches as to why it will improve their employment prospects.

5. Who should be responsible for improving the system to support the transition into work for school leavers?

- 5.1 A holistic approach is required to improve the system to support the transition into work for school leavers.
- 5.2 This support should be targeted at different stages in a young person's life, not just at the point when they finish school and are faced with the prospect of finding work. Whether it be through appropriate alternative methods of education or impartial careers advice, a young person must be fully equipped to enter the job market when they leave school.
- 5.3 In those cases where a young person cannot immediately find work, it is important that the job centre is effective in providing the employment services it is designed to do. Too often young people's experiences have shown job centres to be ineffective and more of a benefit processing centre than a genuinely supportive service which help young people enter into work and fulfil their aspirations.

If you require any further information or have any follow-up questions regarding our response, please do not hesitate to get in touch using the contact details included.

Yours faithfully,



Denise Hatton
YMCA England
Chief Executive