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Research Paper

Young people entering work:
A review of the research

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Foreword

Youth unemployment is a matter of considerable contemporary policy debate not least in the context of the growth agenda. Beyond the debates, the growing number of young unemployed, including those outside any formal education and training settings, is a matter of concern to us all. The focus of this evidence review, commissioned by Acas, is less on job creation, and more on how employers might be supported in making workplaces more receptive to young people; and how young people themselves might transition more successfully into workplaces. Early work experiences are core determinants of career outcomes – getting these employment experiences right is critical for young people, employers and the economy as a whole, and Acas is keen to see what role it can play in supporting all the parties involved. This is why we commissioned this review.

This report presents some heartening evidence of responses by public and other bodies to this growing problem. But it also provides evidence that there is further work to be done. Acas is well placed to offer support to employers and I am struck by the evidence and conclusions in this report with proposals on how we might actively intervene to support employers in making workplaces more receptive to young people. The review also suggests that there is work to be done in addressing the needs of young people as they transition to the workplace. All relationships carry challenges and none more so than the employment relationship with its reliance on terms and conditions, but also unwritten terms around reciprocity and responsibilities for all parties. The issue of the so-called 'psychological contract' and how it might be conveyed to young people alongside the more formal aspects of working life is one area that Acas may be able to contribute to.

We will be exploring how we might address this gap and seeking partners to collaborate with us in this respect. Finally the review identifies a gap in the evidence-base revealing limited research on young people's own perspectives of how they feel about moving from education to the workplace: what worries them and what excites them. We hope that interested bodies will take up the challenges to address this research gap and welcome discussion with stakeholders.

Our thanks to Employment Research Australia for this study, and in particular for the international perspective that their work brings.

Ed Sweeney

Chair, Acas

Executive summary

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) commissioned a review of research examining young people's expectations of work, the challenges they face in starting work, and the means by which their transition to work may be improved. It sought to capture the perspectives of both young people and employers. The review was undertaken in the context of high levels of youth unemployment in Britain in mid-2012.

A search of the available research studies and reports found an abundance of literature on employers' views of the skills required by young people entering the workplace, but less on employer strategies for easing young workers into first jobs. There was also a relative paucity of research investigating young adults' perceptions and thoughts about the journey into work and their expectations of jobs and employment, prior to obtaining work. In addition, little research was found that examined how young people in their first jobs experience working life. An issue of some concern is the current gap in the literature relating to the expectations and experiences of young people in Britain, before and after starting work, from the time of the 2008 recession onwards and in the context of deepening youth unemployment.

Views of young people before and after starting work

Studies of young people in the UK point to considerable variation in knowledge of work and labour market conditions. Disadvantaged young people and those from rural areas had limited knowledge while other studies of young people in the round found high awareness of the nature of work and realism about labour market conditions and opportunities for employment. Some found that most young people were aware of limited local job opportunities, yet remained positive about obtaining employment. Recent studies find that high proportions of young people in the UK perceive work experience (or a lack of it) as the main enabler (or barrier) to obtaining work.

Most young people who were anticipating a move into work, or who had started work, felt they possessed high levels of awareness of the soft skills (including enthusiasm, communication and problem solving skills) desired by employers, and in some cases, felt that they possessed these attributes. However, studies of employer opinions regarding whether novice workers were in possession of soft skills indicated mixed findings. Some survey findings demonstrated a majority employer view that young recruits are well-prepared for work, while smaller qualitative studies revealed employer views that novice workers lacked essential soft skills.

The challenges faced by young people

While young people may be aware of the importance of soft skills, or may feel that they possess them, research indicated that they may feel vulnerable, unprepared or lacking confidence when starting work. Young people reported finding the early days of their first jobs intimidating, daunting and anxiety-provoking and felt that employers held unrealistic expectations of their skills and

abilities given their lack of experience. Some reported difficulties adjusting to the work lifestyle, in particular the long hours and level of responsibility involved in their job. Researchers advocate that educators should provide guidance for young people anticipating work, to help them to understand and deal with the anxiety they may experience on entering work, and that employers make an effort to "socialise" young people entering workplaces for the first time.

Before starting work: means of improving young people's work-readiness

Young people's engagement with workplaces before transitioning to post-education employment may take the form of part-time work combined with study, work experience, employer involvement in the education system, vocational and educational training (VET) programmes, and via labour market intermediaries.

Research indicates that workplace engagement prior to transitioning to post-study employment offers a range of benefits for young people. Studies demonstrate that the soft skills required by employers are best developed 'on the job', and that employers increasingly seek employees with some form of prior work experience. Workplace engagement prior to post-study employment enables young people to: develop employability skills and confidence; identify with the benefits associated with employment; avoid the 'culture shock' that occurs when beginning work; improve their post-study job prospects via network and Curriculum Vitae-building opportunities; and help them refine decisions regarding career options and pathways.

Australian studies found structured engagements (school-based apprenticeships and work placements) were valued more by young people for enhancing employability than part-time work or short work experience placements. This compared with UK studies of young people, the majority of whom felt that work experience is the most valuable means of building employability skills prior to starting work.

The report describes the range of mechanisms by which school students and unemployed young people may undertake work experience. Research identifies student views of the deficiencies of such programmes. This has led to employer and advocacy bodies developing guides setting out how work experience can be recast to be more "meaningful" for those involved (students, employers, and schools). More generally, these bodies have begun to promote greater links between employers and educational institutions, and suggest ways in which employers may engage with young people at the local level. The report also profiles a sample of VET programmes and initiatives run by labour market intermediaries which have been found to improve young people's work-readiness.

Young people starting work: employer support at the workplace

Research examining strategies by which employing organisations can provide support for novice workers is canvassed. Key among these are targeted and robust induction processes, close managerial or supervisory support, buddying

and mentoring schemes, and strategies for "socialising" young workers within the workplace culture.

Research indicated a disjunction between the needs of young people entering work and the induction processes provided by employers. Induction processes were found to be generic in nature, and not tailored to address the difficulties young people described when starting work. This resulted in young workers feeling unsupported in the workplace.

However, ongoing support from workplace buddies, mentors and family members was found to be beneficial to young people starting work, and research also indicated that the experience and skill of the employer and supervisors in dealing with young workers made a significant difference to the success of the move into post-study work. Relatively simple socialisation strategies helped build novice workers' confidence and made them feel more at ease in the workplace. Overall, research indicated that it is the nature of the day to day interactions between young people and their peers and supervisors within the context of the workplace that is most important in helping ease young people's transition to work.

1. Introduction

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) commissioned a review of the research literature relating to young people entering work[1]. The review was undertaken in mid-2012, in the context of high and growing youth unemployment in Great Britain. The following areas comprise the focus of the literature search and review:

- Young people's expectations of work: how young people perceive the challenge of workplaces; their concerns, and what daunts and excites them;

- Young people's needs (including skill needs) in entering the workplace; and

- What can be done to smooth the transition to work, and what employers might do to make workplaces receptive to young people.

An initial review of academic literature and reports produced by organisations with an interest in the subject area was conducted to assess whether there was sufficient research literature to produce a discussion paper on the topic. An annotated bibliography was produced in April 2012 which profiled the range of research literature available in relation to young people in the labour market. Articles were sourced through academic search engines and general web searches using relevant keywords. Whilst the search generated a slew of articles pertaining to young people entering the labour market in broad terms, few studies were found which directly addressed the areas of interest to Acas. However, throughout April and May 2012, an increasing number of research reports were issued by UK-based interest groups relating to strategies for reducing youth unemployment, and in particular, the role that employers might play in helping to tackle unemployment among young people. As a consequence, the apparent groundswell of interest in the topic, and rising levels of concern relating to the impact of youth unemployment more generally, were key factors in the decision to produce the paper.

A second-stage literature review was conducted in June 2012. This was broad-based in nature and built on sources identified in the initial annotated bibliography, as well as canvassing additional sources such as new reports issued throughout the April-June 2012 period. In some cases, researchers cited in this report were contacted directly to discuss their research findings and seek advice relating to other relevant research sources.

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[1] The review was undertaken and the paper drafted by Dr Sarah Oxenbridge and Justine Evesson of Employment Research Australia. The research sources surveyed use the term 'young people' with reference to slightly different age ranges, most often but not exclusively to describe those aged between 16-24 years.

2. The research sources surveyed

A survey of the available research literature found that there is a relative abundance of survey research on employer views of skills needed by young people on entering the workplace (often described as skills for 'employability'[2]), or case studies of policy initiatives designed to improve young people's employability[3]. In contrast, relatively little research was found which examined young workers' perceptions of work prior to obtaining employment, or employer strategies for easing young workers into first jobs.

The majority of research relating to young workers' expectations of work appears to have been produced by Australian academics and is qualitative, ethnographic, and in the main, longitudinal in nature. While an extensive search was conducted to identify equivalent studies undertaken by researchers in the UK and other countries, this proved largely fruitless. The findings of the Australian studies were, however, found to be rich in useful detail which might be expected to reflect the views and early work experiences of young people in other labour markets. Nevertheless, it should also be cautioned that this Australian research was conducted in a period of relative economic stability among a cohort of young people who had relatively ample opportunities for workplace engagement (primarily via part-time working and Vocational Education and Training programmes). We might therefore expect some difference in views to be expressed by participants of similar studies which have been conducted in a context of economic recession and high unemployment.

The authors of these Australian studies are among the chorus of commentators lamenting the scarcity of research in which young people transitioning to work are the unit of analysis. Morris et al, surveying the available research in 1999, concluded at the time that, "No good quality research literature has been discovered on young people's attitudes towards employers or the structure of work" (1999:64). Taylor similarly described the literature on youth early career experience as "surprisingly sparse" (2003:3). This remains the situation as the decade has progressed. Besen-Cassino (2008) notes that while youth employment has been studied extensively from the perspectives of parents, educators, and policy-makers, the central actors – young people themselves –

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[2] The literature on the attributes that make up 'employability' skills is not covered in this report. However, a report on work experience by the CBI (2007:12) lists the employability skills that they consider to be desired by employers. They include: self-management; teamworking; business and customer awareness; problem solving; communication and literacy; application of numeracy; and application of information technology.

[3] The literature review also found a wealth of research into young people relating to the following topics, all of which are only touched upon in this report and are not reviewed in any detail: vocational education and training (including apprenticeships); post-school transitions/pathways; young people's future career or occupational aspirations and desired job attributes; the impact of school-aged part-time work on a range of factors; disadvantaged youth and their entry into the labour market; and sources of information, advice and guidance for young people entering the labour market.

have been relatively neglected and young people's motives behind work remain virtually unexplored. Besen-Cassino advocates a subject-centric approach and proposes an understanding of youth labour from the perspective of young people. More recently, Price et al (2011) concluded that there are still few studies of young people and work that focus on young people as subjects. This, they write, has led to a situation where we have little understanding of how young people construct their identities as workers and how they experience their first jobs.

More specifically, Hollenbeck (1996) and Patton and Smith (2010:60) describe how there is only a very small literature on relationships between, for example, the paid part-time work of high school students, their employability, employment outcomes and career development, and of the published literature, very little is qualitative work. Patton and Smith argue that the available literature on this topic "remains theoretically barren and methodologically limited. As a result, the picture we have is inconsistent and incomplete."

On conducting a survey of the literature, we came to the same conclusion as many of these researchers working in the field: that is, that there is a paucity of published work relating to young adults' perceptions and thoughts about the journey into work, or their deeper expectations of jobs and employment. In particular, with the exception of some survey data reported in later sections, there appears to be little recently-published research conducted in the UK relating to young people entering the labour market against the background of the economic downturn and tightening labour market since mid-2008, or the impact of the Coalition Government's policies on young people preparing for work. This may be in part due to the lag between the conduct and dissemination of academic and commissioned research: recent research conducted in the context of recession and high youth unemployment may not be publicly available for several years to come. Disappointingly, the small amount of British research relating to young people anticipating work, profiled in this report, was primarily published in the early to mid-2000s. Appendix 1 of this report sets out a potential research strategy by which to address this gap in research and inform policy over the coming years.

The sections of this report examine the three areas of interest to Acas in sequence. However, there is some overlap between the material in each of the sections as many of the research articles and reports which were subjected to review tended to address all three topics in an interlinked fashion. Furthermore, the studies examined in this review of the research are diverse in terms of their focus and methodologies, and findings. It has thus proven difficult to draw broad conclusions or establish thematic links across often quite disparate studies. We have instead chosen to organise the report into sections relating to young people's views and experiences both "before and after" starting work (sections 3.1 and 3.2), and means of smoothing their transition to work, again both before and after entering employment (sections 5 and 6). Section 4 examines the particular challenges faced by young people starting work, and Section 7 reflects on the research subject to review and provides summary conclusions.

3. Young people's views on work and the labour market

This section looks firstly at research relating to the degree of knowledge of work environments and labour market conditions held by young people who have not yet entered post-study employment. This includes a review of studies which find, among young people, a high level of awareness of employer requirements for 'soft skills' in the workplace, and among employers, a view that first-time workers are largely deficient in these skills. The second part of this section profiles studies of young people who have started work. It focuses on their views – as well as those of employers - of the skills and attributes needed to successfully transition to work.

3.1 Young people's perceptions before starting work: their knowledge of work and the labour market

The available UK research indicates that expectations of work - and the degree of prior knowledge of work - are not the same for all young people who are about to enter the labour market. Summarised briefly, this is reflected in studies of disadvantaged youth and young people in rural communities who were found to possess little knowledge of job opportunities or of how workplaces operate (Beck et al 2006; Meadows 2001; Spielhofer et al 2011). Those with little knowledge of labour market opportunities or job content were found to rely primarily on sources of knowledge such as family and friends, and in some cases, official sources (Beck et al 2006; Millward et al 2006). In contrast, other studies of young people contemplating work find greater knowledge of labour market conditions and higher awareness of skills needed to obtain employment (City and Guilds 2012; Johnson and Burden 2003; McDowell 2001). This section examines the findings of these studies in further detail.

In the UK there has been a series of studies examining the experiences of disadvantaged groups entering the labour market. This was an issue of acute interest from the late 1990s as it became increasingly clear that high proportions of young men were experiencing under-employment and unemployment. Work funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that examined the experiences of under-achieving young men found that in some cases young men, particularly those that had been in state care or were ex-offenders, had little or no practical understanding of workplaces (Meadows 2001:27). One young man described his misconception in the following exchange in a study in 1999:

> *I thought the workplace would be about 100 people sitting in the same room doing the same thing. I thought it would be like school but you get paid for it.*

As Meadows points out, it is difficult to say how widespread misunderstandings are about the basic nature of workplaces, but the proportions of disadvantaged youths who have limited contact with working people suggest that it is likely there is a greater propensity amongst these groups.

In a study looking at young people's aspirations in rural areas it was apparent that youth expectations of careers were mediated by the circumstances in which

they lived. For young people in rural areas this meant that job and career selection was weighed up against their desire to move or remain in their local community. The study found that information about the local labour market was often lacking in schools and amongst parents. This was seen as curtailing their job horizons as their personal networks were likely to be within the local labour market rather than encompassing opportunities outside of the local area. Moreover, pursuit of opportunities outside of the local area appeared to be partly shaped by practical issues such as access to affordable and reliable transport (Spielhofer et al 2011).

Other studies find that young people in the UK more generally have minimal knowledge of job content and occupational pathways and that sources of knowledge, where used, vary considerably in nature. In a survey of around 3,000 students, Millward et al (2006) found that the young people in their study knew very little about the details of particular jobs that they aspired to and that personal experience or discussions with family and friends were the primary sources of knowledge accessed. Parental advice on jobs was found to be the most used source. Similarly, Bynner et al (2002) note that parents are usually the first adults who young people turn to for advice about jobs.

Beck et al (2006) examined the impact of gender and race on young people's perceptions of the pathways available to them after they complete their compulsory schooling in England. They found that young people received very little practical information and guidance about the consequences of pursuing particular occupational pathways, and that young people from non white backgrounds were more reliant on "official" sources of guidance (as opposed to friends and families) for their labour market knowledge.

These studies stand in contrast to others which show high levels of understanding of labour market conditions among groups of young people contemplating work. Some studies of young people in Britain show that most are realistic about the state of the labour market and the lack of jobs available, yet remain positive about obtaining employment. Johnson and Burden (2003), who conducted interviews with 30 young people in 2003, found that young people in the study understood labour market conditions and accepted that a "job for life" was no longer the norm. McDowell (2001) conducted a study of 23 young men in Cambridge and Sheffield in the year following the end of their compulsory schooling. Study participants were described as working class, and were living in local authority housing. This research found that most of the young men had a clear sense of the changing labour market and knew that more jobs at that time, compared to their fathers' experience at the same age, demanded skills and credentials that they did not have. However, they were confident of finding both interesting and reasonably well-paid work. The views of young people in these studies may reflect the relatively buoyant UK labour market at the turn of the millennium. However, a more recent survey, conducted in the context of recession, yielded similar results. This was an online survey of 3,000 people aged 7-18 conducted by City and Guilds in February 2012 (City and Guilds 2012:6). It concluded that,

Overall, 14-18 year olds are worried about what effect the state of the economy is going to have on their chances to get jobs and earning potential, but the majority are, individually, positive about their chances of getting a job when they leave school. There is a general understanding of the lack of jobs in the market and that they need to make themselves stand out in order to succeed.

Another recent survey of 1,000 young people (aged 16-24 years old) conducted by YouGov (2011:21-22) for the Private Equity Foundation found that 56 per cent of respondents think it likely that they will find a job in the next year, 27 per cent unlikely, and 17 per cent are not looking. Those who were confident of finding a job were more likely to rate their employability/soft skills as very/good and were more likely to have undertaken work experience and to have interacted with employers while at school (soft skills are discussed in the following section, 3.1.1). These results indicate that these young people feel that they are successfully equipped for the workplace in light of these competencies and experiences.

Work experience was most commonly mentioned by survey participants as a factor which would help most when trying to get a job, and the lack of it is mentioned as the main barrier in finding a job (46 per cent) along with recession/poor economy (49 per cent). The survey results were analysed to identify whether differences existed between young people categorised as Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET), and "non-NEET" young people. Analysis indicated that these proportions were similar for NEET and non-NEET participants. NEET respondents were however significantly more likely than non-NEETs to mention personal issues such as a lack of confidence – the third most common response (32 per cent) – as a barrier to gaining employment.

The value of work experience in obtaining work was also stressed by young long-term unemployed people interviewed by Lee et al (2012) for a Work Foundation study. These young people described being caught in a "Catch 22" situation. They had no work experience, but in most cases employers required evidence that they had the skills required for work (p.4). Consistent with the findings of studies profiled earlier, alongside those of research conducted by the UKCES (2012b), the young people interviewed by Work Foundation researchers were found to have realistic expectations of the labour market and "generally had job goals that were grounded in the type of vacancies most likely to be available locally" (p.4).

3.1.1 Contrasting perspectives on soft skills among young people and employers

Studies of the types of skills that employers expect new workers to possess highlight employer preferences for workers to possess an array of 'soft skills'. These are essentially personal qualities or behavioural attributes, as opposed to technical skills or job competencies. They include – among other traits - communication, interpersonal and problem-solving abilities. The handful of studies profiled in this section of the report indicate that most young people anticipating a move into work exhibit high levels of awareness of the soft skills desired by employers, and in some cases, feel that they possess these skills. This contrasts with findings that employers often feel that young workers entering the labour force lack these skills.

Johnson and Burden (2003) found that young people entering the labour market recognised that employers sought soft skills such as the ability to communicate well, remain motivated, and to show initiative; and understood that qualifications alone were not adequate to secure good employment. Most young people in the study believed they possessed those generic skills, having gained them at school, college and/or university. Conversely, the majority of the 39 employers in the study regarded young new recruits as lacking these skills.

Similarly, an online survey of young people by YouGov (2011) cited earlier found that a majority believed that they possessed the soft skills required by employers. Participants in this survey ranged in age from 16 to 24, so it might be expected that those of older ages had some experience of work. A majority of respondents rated their skills very/good in relation to: literacy and numeracy (87 per cent); employability/soft skills (75 per cent); knowledge of the world of work (65 per cent); and technical skills (49 per cent). Differences in perceptions of skills were identified between NEET and non-NEET young people in relation to employability/soft skills with 79 per cent of non-NEET participants rating themselves as very/good, compared with 57 per cent of NEET respondents. Perhaps unsurprisingly - given a higher likelihood of exposure to paid employment - older respondents (22-24 year olds) were more likely to rate their knowledge of the world of work as very/good (71 per cent) compared with 16-18 year olds (53 per cent).

Consistent with Johnson and Burden's findings, a study of graduates and employers by Demos (2006) highlighted an apparent "disconnect between young people and organisations", in part due to a mismatch in perceptions relating to soft skills. They report that employers and those working with young people entering work believe that young people lack critical self-awareness, and face difficulties understanding their strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in skills.

3.2 Young people's perceptions after starting work and the views of employers

Studies summarised in the previous section found high levels of awareness among young people in regard to employer expectations of soft skills. Nonetheless, Demos (2006) and Johnson and Burden (2003) recount employer views that young people are largely unaware of areas of weakness prior to entering the workforce, particularly in relation to their lack of soft skills. These findings sit alongside those of studies of young people who have had experience of paid work and who, according to researchers, appear highly aware of the abilities required of novice workers by employers and who actively seek to foster these traits. Stokes and Wyn (2007:508), for example, concluded that the Australian student workers in their study actively gained learning experiences in workplaces in order to position themselves for their future careers. The authors found that the young people studied "placed emphasis on constructing the capacity to be reflexive, to see themselves as an employer might see them, and in gaining dispositions and attitudes that would enable them to gain employment in particular industries."

Other studies of young Australians who have had exposure to workplaces prior to moving into full-time work find that they too place emphasis on, and hold realistic expectations of, the soft skills desired or required by employers. Smith (2003) asked young first-time workers what advice they would give other young people who were starting out in new jobs. Their answers suggested that the main elements required to successfully transition to post-school paid employment were not skill based or technical, but related to being able to cope and deal with unpredictable and unknown factors that would inevitably arise, and to rely on their soft skills and attitudes, such as communication, initiative and enthusiasm. The following table identifies the key lessons that the participants wanted to pass on to other workers starting in their first job:

Name	Status	What advice would you give a person about to start their first job?
Brett	Apprentice	Be punctual; be interested; have positive thoughts; be well-presented; communicate well; offer assistance; ask questions
Heather	Apprentice	Be punctual; don't chat back; be well-presented; look for work; always clean up
Paul	Apprentice	Be confident; tackle each day as it comes; listen to your employer
Graham	Apprentice	Get to know your fellow workers; enjoy what you are doing and don't worry; concentrate; don't get cranky if you are having a bad day; work hard
Maddy	Trainee	Be prepared to get up every day and go to work, and not have holidays; be punctual
Mike	Trainee	Hang off one person; clean up when you have nothing else to do; show initiative; take in as much as you can; offer to work overtime; put in an extra 100%
Cary	Trainee	Be prepared for hard work
Jared	Trainee	Appear keen and enthusiastic even if you don't feel that way; don't give up if you have a problem; someone will usually help you
Tracey	Junior	Listen carefully; don't be afraid of terminology; ask if you are not sure; if you have a problem, face it; write down instructions; be prepared for long days.
Sophie	Junior	Find out about the company before you start work; don't be nervous; ask questions; everyone has started work before; be professional – don't make too many personal phone calls
Shaun	Junior	Have an open mind and not too many expectations

Source: Smith (2003)

In a similar vein, Taylor (2004; 2005a) interviewed 128 mainly male Australian high school students who were part of a construction and building trades Vocational and Education Training (VET) in schools programme which included one day a week at a technical college (TAFE) and at workplaces, over a semester. Taylor (2005a) described how the students in the study were asked to define the skills, abilities and dispositions they think employers seek. As in the aforementioned studies, their responses focused on soft skills. More than half of

the responses in the study referred to work-related behaviours, demeanour and personal attributes. Consistent with the views of young people in Smith's (2003) research, 100 per cent of the young people in Taylor's research rated hard work, showing respect, and punctuality as important to employers. Between 90 and 100 per cent of youths in the study considered that an employer would also be seeking youths who were prepared to do what they were told, not be afraid to ask questions and who were honest. In terms of being able to maintain a job within the industry, most young people in the study believed that they would maintain their jobs if they were punctual, competent and productive in their jobs. They also rated highly respect for authority in the worksite, and character attributes such as honesty, and attitudinal attributes, such as enthusiasm and willingness to pitch in and do what needs to be done.

Of lesser importance in helping them obtain a job on leaving school, according to these students, were factors that can be categorised as job competence (technical skills) and school-related factors (such as marks, certification and behaviour reports). It may be that the latter school-related factors were not viewed as important given the nature of the building and construction industry that these students were planning to seek work in. Taylor (2005a:209) concludes that the "The picture of a young employee being sought after by employers painted by these students was … (a) conventional, reliable, hard-working, deferential and docile worker. The school vocational education and training in this study focused on the acquisition of 'hard' (technical) skills. In contrast, the identification and acquisition of soft skills by students was "presumably incidental and their acquisition was assumed to occur largely by osmosis … at home or from their casual job experience" (pg 210).

Taylor concluded that these young people held realistic views of what employers might look for when employing youth. Matched data from interviews with employers who provided these students with work experience opportunities indicated that, consistent with UK studies, they did indeed look for attitudinal attributes rather than skill proficiency when employing young people, and their list of desirable attributes and skills in young employees reflected those cited by young people in the study. Taylor concludes that employers appeared to be seeking youths with some prior sense of "enculturation into the culture of employment", particularly with respect to their attitude to work and their capacity to follow instructions without needing to be told repeatedly.

These Australian studies indicate that young people who have spent time in workplaces in some capacity prior to seeking post-school employment have a sound awareness of the soft skills and behaviours expected by employers in workplaces. However, studies of employer opinions regarding whether or not novice workers actually *possess* the skills desired by employers indicate mixed findings. A study of employers surveyed by Scottish Government Social Research (2011) found that three in every five of employers who recruit someone straight from school think that the young person is well-prepared for the world of work, while only one-third do not. In addition, the National Employer Skills Survey, conducted by the UKCES (2010), found that, of those employers who recruited 16 year olds, two-thirds (66 per cent) found them to be well or very well prepared for work. Almost three-quarters (74 per cent) thought that 17- or 18-

year old college or school leavers were well prepared for work, and 84 per cent of employers recruiting new graduates found them to be well prepared. The minority of employers who found that their young recruits were poorly prepared for work more often attributed this to a lack of life experience and maturity, or to a poor attitude or personality than a lack of specific skills. However, amongst graduates, as many as 44 per cent of the small number of employers who found their recruits poorly prepared put this down to a lack of required skills and competencies.

A survey of 780 HR professionals conducted in summer 2012 for the CIPD by YouGov found that 59 per cent of employers agreed or strongly agreed that the young people they had interviewed or recruited in the past 12 months had unrealistic expectations about work. On the surface, this suggests an attitude problem in the young people of today – that oft-cited lack of "work ethic". However, among the 68 per cent of employers that have recruited young people (aged 16-24) in the past 12 months, 91 per cent said they were either very or fairly satisfied with these recruits[4].

In contrast, survey data profiled in the Demos (2006) report cited earlier reveals that most employers felt that young people entering the workplace are deficient in "self-management" and other soft skills. The employers surveyed by Demos were reported as wanting young workers to have strong communication and creative skills, while graduates reported feeling awkward in situations at work that required communication (for example speaking up during meetings and giving presentations) and ranked creativity as only the eighth most important "skill for the future". Demos maintain that initiative and creativity are as important for young workers entering the workforce as intelligence and qualifications. The authors cite an earlier Demos publication (Lownsbrough et al 2004) in relation to essential life skills, arguing the notion that "how an employee might respond in a given situation has become more important than what s/he already knows".

The Demos report also highlights the views of employers and those in training organisations who describe how young people are unequipped to respond to the weight of expectations placed on them in advance of going to work, and are unprepared for how much there is to learn in the workplace (p 45). The report's authors further argue that graduates used to working in the peer-to-peer environment of university find it hard to shift to organisational hierarchies, find it difficult to relate to their bosses, and encounter difficulties balancing the pressures of work and life.

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[4] http://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/pm/articles/2012/09/youth-unemployment-beyond-the-blame-game.htm?utm_medium=email&utm_source=cipd&utm_campaign=cipdupdate_260912&utm_content=na_text link_feature3.link1

3.3 Summary

It is somewhat difficult to make broad conclusions about young people's knowledge of workplaces and the skills needed to transition to work smoothly on the basis of the small number of studies found which examine these issues. As noted throughout this report, there is a need for further research in this area. Notwithstanding this caveat, a review of the studies profiled in this section of the report yields the following summary findings. First, the degree of knowledge of work and labour markets among young people not yet in the labour market is mixed, and may be dependent on their personal circumstances, their available networks, and the labour market opportunities available to them. Second, a number of studies showed that young people remain positive about obtaining work despite acknowledging difficult labour market circumstances, and felt that prior work experience was the key factor which would assist them in obtaining employment. Third, most young people anticipating work are aware of the soft skills required by employers, and in some cases, believe that they possess these skills.

Studies of young people with experience of paid work found that they had an accurate view of the skills and abilities required of them by employers. However, research assessing employer views of whether novice workers are in receipt of such skills indicate mixed findings. Some show employer satisfaction with young recruits, while others report employer views that young workers are deficient in essential employability skills and that young workers lack awareness of deficiencies in regard to these attributes.

4. The challenges faced by young people starting work

This section primarily draws on Australian studies which reveal the personal challenges recounted by young people who have started work. The previous section summarised research indicating, for the most part, high levels of awareness among young people of the types of skills and attributes desired by employers, both before and after starting work. However, while young people may be aware of the importance of soft or employability skills to varying degrees, or may feel confident that they possess such skills, their experience of starting work often tells another story, one about being very unprepared or lacking the confidence to navigate the web of interpersonal relationships within many workplaces. The research profiled in this section indicates that many young people experience something of a culture shock when first starting work, and face difficulty negotiating workplace social relations and hierarchies. This underscores the importance of employers setting in place structures to provide a 'welcoming' work environment, as discussed in Section 6.

In a longitudinal study of young people moving from school into fulltime work, Smith (2003:17) recounts how young people experienced high levels of nervous apprehension and describes how they found the first days of work "traumatic and disorienting" despite each of them having engaged in part time work as students. In addition it was clear that most of them had under-estimated the degree of responsibility they would have when they entered the workplace. The key challenges that young people in Smith's study identified when they first commenced fulltime work included getting to work on time and coping with long hours, understanding the norms peculiar to their workplace, coping with difficult and complex tasks, dealing with difficult managers, and a lack of career opportunities.

In a similar study, Taylor (2005b:488) argued that the role of self-confidence is often underestimated in discussions of youth transitions, particularly in the context of the challenge that the unfamiliar poses to young people entering the workforce. Taylor states "It is easy to forget how daunting the movement away from the familiar school context and peer group and into new and unknown situations can be for young people, particularly if they have no reference points or familiar others on site." This may translate into students staying on at school as a means of maintaining their comfort zone. Taylor's study assessed the range of issues that intimidate young people entering the workforce for the first time and the types of situations that provoke anxiety in young workers. The male students in Taylor's study referred to being scared, insecure, and unsure in anticipating and experiencing these new workplace situations. Self-assessments were frequently made to shyness, reticence, anxiety and the relief felt when worksites were subsequently found to be friendly and welcoming and awkwardness was overcome.

A third Australian study (Tresize-Brown 2004) investigated induction processes for young people entering work, in the context of skills shortages. Tresize-Brown found that young people needed employers to understand that they were learning on the job and so required sufficient time and job training to do so. They also discussed the importance of defined boundaries and clear expectations

from employers of their job role, and the need for clear and regular communication between managers and new employees. Section 3 profiled studies of employers who held high expectations of the soft skills held by young, first-time employees, and who were often disappointed by an absence of these skills in young recruits. In contrast, Tresize-Brown's study found that many young people felt that employers had unrealistic expectations of their levels of skill and knowledge given their relative inexperience. In addition, while employers recognised the need for job training of young recruits, very few of them regarded it as an organisational priority.

In light of the difficulties faced by young people entering work, Taylor (2003) argues for a focus on the emotional welfare of novice workers. Employers, she maintains, need to be sensitive to the anxiety experienced by first-time workers and educators need to prepare them for the complexity of workplace social relations. Taylor suggests that first job experiences are influential in the development of self-esteem and the making of the wider transition to adult life, as well as having an important influence on later employment. Two aspects of the transition process are closely connected: the need to undertake initial critical assessments with regard to workplace social relations and the need to deal with the anxiety young people report that they experience when moving into the workplace.

Taylor found that the anxiety associated with assessing a workplace when deciding to accept a job offer was a major motivating factor for many young people to stay on at school in Australia to the end of Year 12, rather than taking up jobs in their desired fields. The author concludes that educators do little to prepare first-time workers to deal with entry to a new social setting and its interpersonal relations, particularly during the initial period on the job. In order to assess how educators might better prepare youth for early career workplace relations and culture, Taylor's study focused on young workers' views of the features of 'good' and bad workplaces.

Taylor reports that "Overwhelmingly it was the issue of interpersonal relations, and in particular, being treated with 'respect', made to feel welcome and the feeling of social comfort, especially initially, that were identified as marks of a 'good' worksite" (2003:7). A good workplace was a friendly, welcoming space where people respected each other and were inclusive of the novice. Paramount in their view was a *friendly* boss who *speaks nicely* to young workers. Others reported that their bosses were intimidating, taciturn, or grumpy, and described the anxiety that this caused them. Many of the young workers in the study reported having been the butt of jokes or bullied.

The young workers in the study looked for evidence of respect and recognition and a sociability that can ease the anxiety associated with entering a workplace. Taylor notes "Data such as these remind us that young workplace novices are vulnerable in a myriad of taken-for-granted and rarely made explicit ways. They remind us that, with very little preparation, youth are required to undertake sophisticated assessments of character and interpersonal relations" (Pg 12). She concludes by recommending that 'preparation for work' programmes within schools and technical colleges be re-shaped to "Help make explicit, and assist

youth to think about, the initial critical assessments they are likely to need to undertake with regard to workplace social relations, and help them to understand and deal with the anxiety they report they experience when moving into the new social milieu of a workplace" (p12). More broadly, the author advocates a need for better understanding of the youth experience of the transition from school to work and early career social processes to identify the range of issues that they perceive to be challenging and anxiety-generating.

In the UK, young people and parents were surveyed in a study commissioned by the City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development (Batterham and Levesley 2011). The findings of this study differ somewhat from the Australian studies described above. This survey found that, of the 252 young people in work (aged 15 to 19) who participated in the study, only 24 per cent felt that it was difficult for young people to adapt to working life. When asked to describe the hardest thing about adjusting to working life, 60 per cent believed that adapting to the new lifestyle was the most significant factor. Young people described finding the long hours hard to manage and missing out on aspects of their social lives as particularly difficult.

In summary, the research profiled in this report thus far indicates that young people's accounts of their expectations of work, and confidence in obtaining employment, did not always match their experience in starting work. The process of moving into post-study employment caused much anxiety for the young people in the mainly Australian studies surveyed, with many lacking confidence and finding the degree of responsibility attached to their jobs to be overwhelming. Some felt that employers' expectations of the skills and abilities of young recruits were unrealistic, and at a basic level, young people found it difficult to adapt to a "working lifestyle". Authors such as Taylor (2003) state the importance of educators and employers being cognisant of the anxiety experienced by young people entering work, and helping to prepare young people for the complex social settings they may experience in workplaces. The following sections (5 and 6) examine a range of such strategies for easing young people's transition to the workplace.

5. Before starting work: means of improving young people's work-readiness

This section describes how contact with employers – via work experience, part-time work, vocational education and training, workplace visits or other means – can help smooth the transition to the workplace for young people[5]. The point was frequently made by writers in this field that the best quality learning that a young person can receive to gain employability skills is to have a 'real' experience of work. Taylor (2005a) reports, for instance, that the young people in her study formed and honed their understanding of work-related behaviours and employers' expectations over an extended period of time and from a wide variety of sources, few of which appear to have derived from the school experience. Consistent with Bynner et al (2002) in the UK context, and Smith and Comyn's (2003) study of Australian youth, Taylor concludes that the workplace is where the acquisition or honing of soft employability skills might best be undertaken, although – as noted earlier – she also advocates that educational institutions might play a role in preparing young people for the complex web of social relations within workplaces. In contrast to the views expressed by researchers that soft or employability skills are best learned 'on the job', some employers - when reflecting on their experience with young workers - felt that schools needed to play a greater role in getting workers 'job ready' (Johnson and Burden 2003; Smith 2003).

As described earlier, Taylor (2005a) notes that employers in the Australian context stated a preference for novice workers who had some experience of workplace practices and norms. Similar views appear to be held by UK employers. The UKCES (2012a), for example, reports on a qualitative study of 100 employers conducted in the latter half of 2011 that investigated which skills, experiences and attributes they look for when recruiting young people. All of the businesses in the study highlighted the importance of experience of work, or at the very least, an awareness and basic understanding of work. Employers were found to recognise the value of young job applicants' past engagement with the workplace, whether through part-time work or through voluntary work. Further, Lee et al (2012), in a study of long-term youth unemployed, found that employers consistently sought young workers who had pre-existing work experience. The same report describes how UK organisations such as the CBI and TUC have recently suggested interventions to improve employability and soft skills to support both long and short term reductions in youth unemployment.

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[5] The phrase 'work experience' in this context is used as a broad label encompassing a variety of work experience, work placement and internship schemes available to young people, including those managed by local authorities (for school students) and those administered by government agencies (on behalf of job-seekers) and individual employing organisations (via internship programmes). Section 5.3 provides a description of the range of work experience schemes in operation in the UK.

The following section highlights the positive outcomes stemming from young people's engagement with workplaces prior to entering post-education employment.

It focuses on the range of methods by which young people can build their knowledge of workplaces via a range of modes of contact with employers, prior to starting work. This is broadly labelled 'workplace engagement'. This part of the report begins by firstly summarising research literature describing the various ways in which workplace engagement can help ease the transition to work for young people. It then examines the specific means by which young people may engage with workplaces prior to leaving study and entering the workforce. This may be by way of: employer engagement with education institutions; work experience and internship programmes; vocational and educational training programmes; part-time work while studying; and labour market intermediaries. Each of these modes of engagement is the focus of subsections 5.2 to 5.6.

5.1 The value of workplace engagement: an overview

Studies find that workplace engagement before entering the labour market can improve the work-readiness of young people in a variety of ways, not least by providing them with generic skills - such as communication and teamwork skills and using initiative - which enhance their employability (Education and Employers Taskforce 2012; Smith and Green 2004). Workplace engagement has been shown to provide other benefits. First, it provides the opportunity for young people to identify with aspects of employment such as autonomy, responsibility and receiving an income. Second, it reduces the 'culture shock' that may occur when young people enter the world of work for the first time. As noted earlier, the transition into employment can lead to high levels of anxiety and uncertainty for young people because the norms and expectations in workplaces are very different to those found at school (Demos 2006; Taylor 2003). Part-time work, work experience and VET work placements can provide young people with the opportunity to become familiar with the requirements and culture of the workplace and more generally build their confidence (Smith et al 2004). Smith and Green (2004) for instance, reported that students found work experience valuable because it increased their confidence in interacting with people of all ages.

Third, engagement with the workplace can improve the post-study job opportunities of young people. This may occur through: the potential for gaining permanent employment at the same workplace; contributing to the development of young people's curriculum vitaes; and providing informal networks and contacts that young people may use in seeking post-school employment.

Fourth, studies by Smith and Green (2004), Smith et al (2004) and Taylor (2005b:486) found that work experience (via work placements as part of VET programmes) can help young people refine their choice of post-school job through confirmation of skills, abilities and interests and specific experiences in preferred jobs, which can confirm or deter entrance to that career. Workplace engagement may enable young people to discover what field interests them and

provide them with the opportunity to speak with people in the career area. The young people in these studies valued work experience as a chance to try a job to see how they liked it, before making a big commitment in deciding on a career path. The following sub-sections examine the research literature relating to first, the specific benefits for young people engaging in part-time work during study, and second, young people's views of the value of workplace engagement.

5.1.1 Research demonstrating the benefits of part-time work

Much of the research literature suggests that important work-related behaviours and attributes are acquired as young people learn to function in the job market – for example in the context of part-time or casual work outside of school (Mortimer and Finch 1986). Patton and Smith (2010), in a review of research relating to part-time student workers, conclude that the general consensus of published work is that part-time work by school students develops employability and technical skills to a considerable extent. They quote one study (Mortimer and Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007:258) which notes:

> The work environment is an especially opportune context where adolescents can explore their identities and social roles while developing vocationally relevant skills (eg social skills and problem-solving abilities) and interests.

A number of studies – most of them Australian in origin – find that combining study and part-time work can have a positive effect on young people's prospects after school. Patton and Smith (2010) conclude that part-time student workers were able to gain a clearer understanding of the world of work than those not engaged in part-time work. Further, part-time work allows for the "shading in" of work in the lives of adolescents, such that the transition from full-time study to work is not as "abrupt" as it might be for non-workers.

Smith (2011), in a summary of her work with Australian student workers, concluded that young people consciously seek part-time work in order to improve their later labour market opportunities. They do so in the belief that experience in work provides greater advantages than qualifications alone. She relates some negative features of early engagement in the labour market, such as its impact on study[6], potential stress from work intensification, working in jobs of lower quality, and the possibility of relative disadvantage for non-working students. However she also identifies many positive outcomes from student part time work. These include the enhancement of self-esteem and confidence, development of time management and negotiation skills, and improved career decision making. A national study of Scottish pupils' part-time employment and work experience by Howieson et al (2007) yielded similar findings. The majority of young workers in this study thought that their part-time job gave them scope to learn and develop, including self-management, organisational and decision-making skills. The research also indicated that at least some part-time employment provides opportunities for learning and attaining skills, especially

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[6] Analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) finds that around 11-12 hours of work a week is a "healthy" level of part-time work in terms of enabling young people to develop employability skills. However 12 or more hours or work a week was found to have a negative effect on tertiary education rank scores (NCVER 2012).

certain core and employability skills such as supervising/training others, and dealing directly with customers.

Other studies find a positive impact in terms of the development of employability skills. Taylor (2004), for example, maintains that young people who have held part-time/casual jobs are likely to have an advantage over other labour market entrants in terms of work-readiness because they are able to develop an understanding of the behaviours, dispositions and demeanours required and valued in the workplace. This heightens their awareness of the employer-employee relationship and of what is involved in "becoming" a worker.

Patton and Smith (2010) found that part-time jobs can "provide a buffer against post-school unemployment" for many young people, particularly in the context of an economic downturn, as "young people are quite likely to be walking out of the (school) gates and down the road to the next shift at the part-time job they have had for years" (p57). Similarly, Robinson (1999) in an analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY), found a clear relationship between part-time work while at school and a lower incidence of unemployment in the post-school years. She concludes, "it seems undeniable that Australian school students who have part-time jobs gain a knowledge of the labour market and develop skills and contacts which provide them with some advantage in that labour market" (pg 35). The fact that a job applicant has a history of part-time work may act as a signal to potential employers, who may take it as an indicator of personal qualities such as motivation and initiative.

5.1.2 Young people's views of workplace engagement

Despite a relative dearth of studies which seek to assess the views of young people themselves, a small number of studies investigate young people's perceptions of the value or otherwise of different modes of workplace engagement. Australian studies, in the main, indicate that different forms of workplace engagement are seen by young people to offer differing benefits. Smith and Green (2004) conducted a study of around 150 school students whose workplace engagement took the form of part-time work, work experience, or school-based apprenticeships. They found that the broader the range of workplace experiences provided to students, the more labour market options opened up. Those students who had undertaken *school-based apprenticeships* were more aware and confident in their decisions pertaining to post-school pathways, as they knew more about the industry areas of interest and were provided with support and advice through the process. *Work experience* was of value to respondents in both selecting and rejecting career options, despite the fact that work experience was also criticised by many students for its brevity and the nature of the experiences. *Part-time jobs* were important less as career pathways than as learning opportunities and a means of supporting other study or career opportunities. As noted in the previous section, they also provided significant opportunities for respondents to learn about some of the realities of work.

When comparing the three modes of workplace engagement, students generally found work experience programmes developed their employability skills 'a fair amount' or 'a little bit' rather than 'a great deal' compared with other forms of

workplace engagement. More structured engagements (that is, school-based apprenticeships and work placement) were valued more for enhancing employability than ordinary part-time jobs.

In another Australian study, Stokes and Wyn (2007) also found that part-time work and work placements were regarded in different ways by the young people in their study. Study participants were aware that both contributed to life skills such as communication, time management, developing responsibility and building confidence. However, vocational education and work placement were closely connected to future career identities, while part-time work was seen as an opportunity to have disposable income, to socialise, and to have some work related experience. Most said that their part-time work (in supermarkets and fast food outlets) was not related to their future career.

Nevile (2004) conducted a study of young people (under 25) who were engaged in a compulsory work experience programme (the Australian 'Work for the Dole' program). It found that programme participants value the work experience they receive if they feel they are learning, and value the connection to the labour market from being included in their supervisor's informal network of contacts. Participants indicated that the programme was successful in delivering 'soft outcomes' such as increased self-esteem, improved communication and interpersonal skills, as well as the ability to work in a team and organisational skills. The critical role played by supervisors was emphasised, both in changing the attitudes of participants, in creating an atmosphere in which participants could learn to work as a team, improve their communication skills, and become more self-confident. Supervisors also introduced participants to networks that could assist them in finding employment.

Similar studies have been conducted in the UK which assess young people's views of modes of workplace engagement. A number focused specifically on young people's views of the effectiveness or otherwise of work experience programmes. A study by Johnson and Burden (2003) found unanimity between employers' and young people's views that those who undertook work experience were better equipped than others to enter the world of work as a result. A national study of Scottish pupils' part-time employment and work experience by Howieson et al (2007) likewise concluded that work experience is a valued part of the curriculum for young people. A more recent report, from the Education and Employers Taskforce (2012) details survey research of young people who have undertaken work experience which finds that the great majority agree that work experience enabled them to develop employability skills.

A YouGov survey of 16-24 year olds (referenced earlier) canvassed young people's views on various forms of workplace engagement (YouGov 2011). It found that of the 84 per cent who carried out work experience while at school, 51 per cent found it of use, while 46 per cent did not. The survey captured views of young people regarding the age at which they think work experience would prove most useful (16-17 years), and the duration of the work experience that was felt to be most useful (between one week and a month). Around six in ten had interacted with employers at school, through career days, one-off presentations or ongoing talks. Work experience was seen as the most helpful

factor in finding a job (64 per cent) – consistent with employer views – followed by "contacts through family or friends" (29 per cent) and "good exam results/qualifications" (28 per cent). Consistent with other research, respondents felt that advice from family and friends (36 per cent) and supportive parents (31 per cent) were support mechanisms that would be most helpful in finding a job. The report concludes "… it is experience, education and contacts which are regarded as most helpful when trying to find a job" (YouGov 2011:13).

5.2 Employer involvement in the education system

The increase in youth unemployment levels in the UK has led a range of organisations to advocate greater involvement of employers in the education system as a means of assisting the transition of young people into employment. The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD 2012a:14), for example, puts the case for the value of employer contact with the education system, stating

> *… it helps young people find out more about the working world, can give insight into what careers and jobs are available and what they need to do to get there. Crucially, young people tend to listen more to employers than to teachers or parents so their interventions, such as careers talks, work tasters and advice and guidance, can be very powerful.*

In May 2012 the CIPD launched the *Learning to Work* campaign, which encourages employers to: build closer links with schools and colleges; provide high quality work experience placements; increase access to the professions; and create more opportunities for work-based learning and training. The campaign "aims to encourage employers to help prepare young people for the world of work while at the same time making the world of work more youth-friendly" (CIPD 2012a:5). The CIPD stress the importance of "educating both sides about each other", noting "It's not only young people needing to learn about the world of work, how to fit in and fulfil employers' expectations. It's also about employers and HR professionals, more specifically, learning about today's digitally skilled youth" (CIPD 2012a:11).

Surveys of CIPD members indicate a willingness among employers to play an active role in improving young people's labour market opportunities. The CIPD (2012a:14) reports that over one-third of CIPD members feel that there should be better collaboration between education and employers and cites survey research showing that more than half of Confederation of Business and Industry (CBI) members would like to play a greater role in delivering career services.

Despite this latent support on the part of employers, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES 2012a:5) identifies a number of barriers which have historically prevented businesses working with schools to help improve young people's transition to the world of work. Like the CIPD, the UKCES recommends a range of practical strategies to circumvent these barriers and build better relationships between employers and schools at a local level. They

include businesses providing curriculum materials, arranging site visits[7] and carrying out talks in schools; scheduling more work experience opportunities throughout the school year (rather than solely in the summer term, as has been the practice); and providing up to date information about careers in their sectors.

An earlier report by the Social Exclusion Unit (2000:58) included similar recommendations to those put forward by the CIPD and UKCES, as a means of assisting socially disadvantaged young people to obtain employment. The report profiles a range of case studies of effective transition to work programmes run by not-for-profit organisations, and states

> *One of the ways in which young people, particularly those living in areas of high unemployment, can make contact with the world of work is through community involvement by the private sector. This can be through mentoring, work experience or school-business partnerships, or through secondments from business directly into community projects. Whatever form the involvement takes, it is likely to raise the aspirations of the young people involved.*

In a study of young people and employers in English rural areas, Spielhofer et al (2011:23-24) report that employers nominated the following areas in which they thought they could work with schools in rural areas to improve students' job prospects:

- Reinforcing messages from teachers about skills, qualifications and the world or work, and what is needed to succeed;

- Engaging with year 9 students who are making curriculum decisions;

- Identifying possibilities for employment in their industries and providing details of available jobs in the local area;

- Influencing young people regarding their choice of occupation: for example by generating interest in the trades; and

- Encouraging young people to apply for jobs in their enterprises.

Likewise, Demos (2006) suggest a range of strategies for increasing engagement between young people and employing organisations, including:

- Introducing a form of accreditation for businesses that forge partnerships with educational institutions;

- Universities should work to embed transferable, work-based skills into the curriculum;

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[7] A survey of young people administered by City and Guilds (2012) found that the most useful source of advice on employment and careers for 16-18 year olds was a visit to an employer, with 88 per cent saying it was useful or very useful, but that relatively few (26 per cent) of 16-18 year olds had actually visited an employer.

- The development of a soft skills portfolio (an accreditation system that privileges soft skills and aptitudes) which is jointly awarded and championed by schools and community/business organisations. An example of a similar initiative (an employability charter) was profiled by Spielhofer et al (2011). These charters were made in partnership between schools and local employers in rural areas. Charters comprised a portfolio, moderated by employers, in which young people provided evidence of how they had demonstrated a range of employability skills while at school.

- Consistent with the CIPD, Demos (2006) argues for strong connections and regular dialogue between schools, businesses and community organisations to allow more varied learning opportunities and build understanding (for example, allowing young people to develop problem-solving skills or experiencing 'citizenship' in practice). The Demos report profiles organisations that bridge the gap between schools and enterprise, including Heads, Teachers and Industry[8].

5.3 Work experience and internship programmes

Interest in the operation and benefits of work experience schemes - as a means of curbing youth unemployment - is currently centre stage in the UK. The Department for Education defines work experience as "A placement on an employer's premises in which a student carries out a particular task or duty, or range of tasks or duties, more or less as would an employee, but with an emphasis on the learning aspects of the experience".

A variety of work experience schemes are in operation in the UK. Some are administered by government agencies such as JobCentre Plus and directed at unemployed jobseekers. They include Work Experience placements, Sector-Based Work Academies, mandatory work activity and other work-related experience (described below). Others are aimed at students aged 14-18 and are run by secondary schools and colleges. In the past, local authorities had a statutory duty to provide every young person at Key Stage 4 (14-16 year olds) with work-related learning. This principally took the form of schools and colleges administering work experience programmes.

However the nature of work experience programmes administered by educational institutions has recently undergone change as Government policy in the area of work-related learning and work experience is reformulated. In March 2011 Professor Alison Wolf published "Review of vocational education - The Wolf Report". Recommendation 21 of the report proposed that Government should

> *… evaluate models for supplying genuine work experience to 16-18 year olds who are enrolled as full time students, not apprentices, and for reimbursing local employers in a flexible way, using core funds. Schools and colleges should be*

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[8] The HTI's website describes HTI as "independent, not for profit and non partisan. Our experience lies in improving the life chances of young people through connecting their state or independent school, college, academy, federation or FE Institute with business and government to share best practice, promote knowledge transfer and drive personal development. This, combined with developing and delivering school leadership development programmes, stretches thinking, skills and capacity to achieve greater things." http://www.hti.org.uk/

encouraged to prioritise longer internships for older students, reflecting the fact that almost no young people move into full time employment at 16; and government should correspondingly remove their statutory duty to provide every young person at Key Stage 4 with a standard amount of "work related learning" (Wolf 2011:17).

Local authorities are currently under a duty to encourage work experience for students aged 16-19 years old. To deliver the recommendation from Professor Wolf, the Coalition Government is seeking to remove the statutory duty to provide every young person at Key Stage 4 (14-16 year olds) with work-related learning, with a consultation process on this change which began in late 2011. It is expected that the duty will be removed from the start of the academic year 2012/13. However, schools will still be free to determine whether and how work experience for young people at Key Stage 4 is provided.

In May 2011 the Coalition Government pledged its support for work experience schemes - as a key mechanism for reducing youth unemployment - "by placing work experience at the heart of its overall request to the business community through its 'Every Business Commits' initiative, and also by additional funding for 80,000 work experience places for young people, ensuring that up to 100,000 places will be available over the next two years (HM Government 2011). It set in place a scheme to support jobseekers by allowing them to undertake work experience for up to eight weeks while still claiming out of work benefits. The Government subsequently announced a "Youth Contract" scheme in November 2011, aimed at improving job opportunities for 18-24 year olds. The scheme includes wage incentives and the creation of 250,000 extra voluntary Work Experience and Sector-Based Work Academy places over a three year period. Bivand (2012) notes that under the Youth Contract scheme, either a Work Experience placement or a Sector-Based Work Academy place will be offered to every 18- to 24-year old Job Seekers' Allowance claimant after three months. Bivand reports that Sector-Based Work Academies combine three interventions that together span up to six weeks: pre-employment training, work experience with an employer and a guaranteed job interview.

In addition, an Education and Employers Taskforce has been established. The stated vision of the Taskforce is "to ensure that every school and college has an effective partnership with employers to provide its young people with the inspiration, motivation, knowledge, skills and opportunities they need to help them achieve their potential and so to secure the UK's future prosperity" (Education and Employers Taskforce 2012)[9].

Section 5.1 detailed research literature identifying the benefits of work experience programmes for participants. However, research also points to criticisms of work experience schemes frequently levelled by student participants on the basis that work experience students are very 'low status' and are rarely given responsibility while in the workplace, and the tasks they are assigned are menial, 'make-work' and repetitive, with no scope for learning useful skills that

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[9] www.educationandemployers.org

may assist their efforts to obtain future employment (see for example Batterham and Levesley 2011, Johnson and Burden 2003, Smith and Green 2004).

In order to improve the quality of work experience for young people and employers, employers' groups have issued comprehensive 'best practice' guides to improve the work experience process for both participants and employers. The CIPD has also recently re-issued a guide for employers "… to encourage more employers to deliver high-quality work experience" (2012b:2). An earlier guide published by the Confederation of Business and Industry (CBI 2007) focuses on how employers and young people can make the most of work experience placements in order to embed employability skills. The report suggests that for the work experience placement to succeed, students need to apply themselves and make the most of the opportunity to build their understanding of work. The employer, in turn, needs to provide a good balance of tasks and activities and provide assessments and feedback that are explicitly grounded in improving employability. The school has the role of preparing students for the placement and debriefing students and guiding their reflection once the placement is complete. Under these conditions the study found that the benefits can flow to each of the stakeholder groups. Schools benefit from students increasing their motivation to perform at school; students improve their understanding of work and with it their employment prospects; and employers are able to showcase their industries and workplaces, improve their profile in the community, and secure a pool of potential recruits for their future workforces.

In a report for the Work Foundation, Sissons and Jones (2012) find, consistent with a wealth of research, that young people defined as NEET are experiencing increasing difficulties making the first step onto the employment ladder as the labour market tightens. Their recommendations for improving the employability of NEET young people cohere with those advocated by the CIPD and CBI. Sissons and Jones stress that education and training providers must support young people by providing 'meaningful' work experience, involving a variety of tasks, with those undertaking work experience being assigned a mentor and being properly supervised throughout their placement, with adequate training provided[10].

Business in the Community (BITC) claim that 146,000 work placements for young people have taken place with 538 companies through their Work Inspiration campaign[11]. The CEO of BITC has said that through this campaign, the BITC is "supporting businesses to reduce the gap between young people's expectations of work and what business expects of new recruits"[12]. A literature

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[10] This research was conducted as part of the Work Foundation's 'Missing Million' campaign, launched in 2012 and described as "a two-year, solutions-focused project with the aim of increasing the employment prospects of young people in the UK". http://www.theworkfoundation.com/Research/Socio-Economic/Labour-Market-Disadvantage/Youth-Unemployment

[11] http://www.bitc.org.uk/workplace/talent_skills/work_inspiration/ accessed 31.52012. For more information on the Work Inspiration Campaign, go to http://www.workinspiration.com/

[12] City and Guilds press release, 2 May 2012, "Young people view links to employers as the key to career success". http://www.cityandguilds.com/74594.html

review and evaluation of the programme, via a survey of participants, identified a number of benefits of this and other work experience programmes for employers which were consistent with those described in the CBI (2007) report (City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development 2010). Despite this, survey respondents indicated that costs and resource demands are the main barrier to participation in the programme (City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development 2011).

5.4 Vocational and Educational Training programmes

Vocational and Educational Training (VET) takes a variety of forms, the most commonly known being apprenticeships and traineeships, neither of which are a primary focus of this report. However, the role of VET programmes in enhancing young people's 'work-readiness' has been a focal point of research and this section provides brief examples of such programmes and their outcomes in Australia and the UK.

- In the Australian context, Taylor (2005a) found that the students in her study were receiving employment-related modelling and mentoring from the trade lecturers associated with the instruction component given as part of their technical college (TAFE) training. The instructors' background of industry experience and contacts, together with the adult environment of the technical college, encouraged some understanding of the expectations of a working culture. Students in the study reported that they were impressed by the anecdotes of life-on-the-job from their TAFE trade lecturers.

- In Scotland a 'Skills for Work' programme was piloted which offered courses developed to enable young learners (Key Stage 3 and 4) to receive formal recognition for the acquisition of appropriate, work-related skills through partnerships with local authorities. Almost all who took part in the pilot were school-based learners and, in most cases, Skills for Work courses were delivered through partnership agreements within a Further Education (FE) college. An evaluation of the programme indicated that learners reported gaining employability skills (relating to attendance and punctuality, time management, and working with others) and a significant increase in their self-confidence and self-esteem. They reported that they had become more mature as a consequence of their involvement in the programme and were able to gain an understanding of the world of work and what would be expected from them when they moved into employment (HMIE Scottish Government 2007).

- Future developments in VET in the UK are aimed to improve young people's preparedness for work. In May 2012 the Department for Education announced a new initiative whereby 15 new university technical colleges (UTC) will be opened in 2013-14[13]. Each UTC will be sponsored

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[13] http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a00209646/around-200-local-and-national-employers-back-15-new-university-technical-colleges

by a university and local employers to deliver a "business-like education" through employer links. The 200 sponsoring employers include large companies such as Jaguar Land Rover and British Airways. The state-run colleges will be aimed at boosting practical skills among students between the ages of 14 and 19, offering vocational training alongside academic learning. Students will have access to work placements, guest speakers, and "a curriculum designed by experts in the field," according to government sources. Many UTCs will run longer term times and operate business hours to help prepare students for the world of work. Between them, they are expected to support 20,000 young people into technical roles.

5.5 Part-time work while studying

The existence of age-based minimum rates of pay in the UK and in countries such as Australia may act as an incentive for employers to engage student part-time workers, who are commonly found in jobs in sectors such as retail and hospitality. Several studies find high proportions of paid employment among full-time students, for example Howieson et al (2007) in the Scottish context, and Smith (2011) in Australia. These authors advocate, in light of the prevalence of school-aged part-time work, that students' experiences of part-time work should be structured and incorporated into school-based careers programmes for them to be of benefit in terms of young people's career development. Smith and Green (2004) argue that "co-opting high school students' paid part-time work experiences likely provides more effective means to understand work and working life than can be realised through school-organised work placements and work experience programmes" (p58). This is consistent with the view of Howieson et al (2007) who conclude that the pervasiveness of part-time work among Scottish pupils raises questions for the aims, allocation and delivery of work experience programmes. Howieson et al's study found that levels of part-time work among students were higher than anticipated by teachers, adding that schools cannot therefore assume that work experience is pupils' first, or only, encounter with the working world.

A different picture appears to be evident across the UK at the present time, however. Data from the UKCES (2012b) indicates that the share of full-time learners at 16-17 years old who combine work with their learning has been declining steadily from 40 per cent in the late 1990s to around 20 per cent in mid-2011. This indicates that young people in the UK are leaving education increasingly less experienced, while surveys of employers find that significant proportions rate previous job experience as critical in new recruits.

5.6 The role of labour market intermediaries

Whilst not a specific focus of this report, this section provides a flavour of how various labour market intermediaries can assist young people in transitioning to work. It provides examples of three initiatives in which external organisations attempt to bridge the gap between young people and workplaces.

The first is that of Group Training companies in the Australian context. Given that not all young adults experience transitions to work equally, and some are disadvantaged in relation to the labour market, Smith (2003) suggests that institutional forms outside of the workplace are best placed to support those young people for whom external and internal supports are lacking. In Australia, for example, Group Training companies are a key player in the youth labour market, acting as intermediaries that link young people with training systems and workplaces. They do this by directly employing the apprentice and hiring them out to host employers. It has been argued that field officers in good Group Training companies can assist in smoothing the transition into workplaces while acting as advocates for quality work and training experiences for the apprentices and trainees, who are often entering fragmented industries[14].

A second example, from the UK, demonstrates that intermediaries may take the form of not-for-profit organisations running targeted programmes. Examples in the UK include the Joseph Rowntree Foundation-funded Into Work programme. This programme targeted under-achieving young men in three UK schools in 2002, and was designed to prepare the young men for workplaces (Lloyd 2002). The course included school based sessions covering: interview technique, telephone experience, CV and application form writing, training options, where and how to look for jobs, being a man in the workforce and individual career options. The programme used very practical methods and materials and included visits to workplaces and job centres. It was concluded that the critical factors of success for this pre-work programme were that it:

- was tailored specifically for young men at risk;

- was practical rather 'academic' (in that it required active participation rather than 'worksheets');

- focused on building participants' confidence and encouraging their self-efficacy;

- provided both individual as well as general help;

- had high expectations and was challenging; and

- was led by people skilled in working with young men.

Participants reflecting on the programme underlined the importance of practical engagement such as attending workplaces first-hand, rather than having them described by a teacher or visiting employer. However, course convenors noted the great difficulties they had in securing local employers to be involved. In some cases this was due to previous 'bad experiences' with students from the school in question, in others it was due to limited opportunities and issues such as safety.

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[14] While this model is not without challenges, research has found that the intervention of group training creates work and training opportunities for young people that would otherwise not be available. This is particularly the case where enterprises are unable or unwilling to commit to taking on an apprentice for the duration of their training, with the group training system facilitating the 'sharing of risk' across employers (Buchanan and Evesson, 2003).

Third, whilst not specifically a labour market intermediary, the CIPD has to some extent taken on this role with their Steps Ahead mentoring programme, which is similar in content to the Into Work programme described above. The Steps Ahead programme has been piloted in the West Midlands, matching CIPD members with young unemployed people to provide mentoring sessions on interview skills, confidence building and CV writing[15] Plans are underway to extend the mentoring scheme nationwide (CIPD 2012a)[16].

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[15] Insights from this programme relating to young people's preparedness for the labour market are highlighted in CIPD (2012b: 11).
[16] http://www.cipd.co.uk/publicpolicy/mentoring-steps-ahead-initiative.aspx

6. Young people starting work: employer support at the workplace

A mass of research literature emphasises a need for employers to support young workers in their first jobs on the basis that a lack of support can have detrimental effects on young workers' subsequent labour market experience. At a practical level, workplace support is essential to ensuring that young people are able to work to the best of their productive capacity, and to ensure workplace harmony and individual worker wellbeing.

Occupational psychologists Loughlin and Barling (2001) write that early workplace experiences shape workers' subsequent work-related attitudes, values, and behaviours. In surveying the research literature, they conclude, "To date, researchers have tended to underestimate the potential long-term influences of young people's early work experiences, and research has only recently begun to explore the extent to which young workers are affected by the quality of their work experiences" (pg 546). The literature indicates that opportunities for learning or skill use are critical in teenage employment, and psychological benefits are most pronounced when jobs provide skills that will be useful in the future.

Demos (2006) suggest that shifts in the nature of work provide challenges for employers, as they struggle to find ways to attract, motivate and support a generation of young people with higher debt, different values, and more demanding jobs than ever before. For young people to be engaged, motivated and creative, their work environment "must be one where they feel genuinely at home". The authors of this report assert that organisations must be more human and responsive to young employees, with working environments that are more aligned to young people's values and which provide genuine support when it is needed.

This section examines a range of strategies by which employing organisations can provide support for novice workers. These take the form of – among other strategies – targeted and robust induction processes, close managerial or supervisory support, buddying and mentoring schemes, and strategies for 'socialising' young workers to the workplace culture.

6.1 Preliminary inductions

Studies of induction processes experienced by young people in the UK and Australia have found that, for the most part, they do not address the specific needs of young novice workers which were described in section 4 (Johnson and Burden 2003; Tresize-Brown 2004). In a UK study cited earlier, Johnson and Burden interviewed 30 young people and 39 employers about induction systems for young people starting jobs. They found that despite the strongly held belief among employers that young people lack employability skills, this was not reflected in the induction processes used by those employers. Instead, most induction systems applied to all new employees no matter what degree of previous labour market experience they had and tended to be 'instrumental' in nature, concentrating on informing participants of procedures and obligations.

The processes employers described as inductions tended to cover the first few hours or days when new recruits were introduced to the enterprise. They encompassed a wide variety of practices and content. Formal programmes, which are much more likely to be delivered by large employers (Johnson and Burden 2003, Tresize-Brown 2004), tended to included information sessions about pay and conditions, hours of work, safety issues, some task specific instruction and workplace orientation. The subject matter covered in inductions varied between industry and job type but was rarely modified for different types of worker. The Johnson and Burden study found that smaller enterprises with informal induction procedures were much more likely to individually tailor inductions to the new recruits, and as such were more likely to respond to the specific needs of young people. However, on the whole, according to these studies, induction sessions were not designed with specific consideration of first-time workers. Rather, they were more generic and applied to any worker new to the enterprise, no matter how long their tenure in the labour market.

Employers tended to the view that a couple of weeks was an adequate period for any new recruit to assimilate, and those people that failed to 'fit in' were likely to leave after a short period. Most formal induction processes only lasted between half and day and a week, which researchers regarded as unlikely to be adequate to deal with 'raw recruits' to workplaces. Johnson and Burden found that young recruits that were 'thrown in the deep end' with limited or no induction often felt unsupported rather than positively challenged by the high level of responsibility.

6.2 Beyond induction processes: deepening support

Looking beyond induction procedures, Smith (2003:17) found young people's success in new jobs varied considerably and was shaped by intrinsic and extrinsic factors associated with their individual attributes and the supports they had in place, as well as the quality of managers and supervisors in their respective workplaces. In other words, their success at work was not just shaped by their relative behavioural, technical or cognitive skill levels but was also influenced by the supports they received both on and off the job during the period of their transition. Taylor (2004) found that the relationship between young workers and management ('the boss') is a critical factor in early career experience. Such relationships, she reflected, are extremely important for young workers recently out of school, as their most recent experience of authority has been one of under-status as a child in the hierarchical and authoritarian school system.

Consistent with the findings of studies by Taylor described earlier, Smith described the importance of young people understanding local workplace mores. This suggests that rather than possessing generalised social and communication (soft) skills applicable to all workplaces, there are also cultures specific to individual workplaces that need to be observed, absorbed and responded to by novice workers. Thus individual behavioural attributes that enable young people to deal with social challenges when entering the world of work can facilitate much smoother transitions. Equally, assisting those students who are not in possession of those attributes requires extra support if they are to succeed in work. Smith uses these findings to highlight the importance of employers

supporting transitions into 'real' situations rather than relying primarily on educational and other external players to simulate workplace conditions.

Smith found that the presence of a mentor at work (or, a mentor associated with work, such as a technical college teacher) who assisted in navigating those challenges was beneficial to young people at work (as also described by Taylor 2003). It also appeared that the involvement of an interested and engaged parent, sibling or partner provided useful support to the young person during the early transition. While the self-efficacy of the young person clearly smoothed their transition into work, it was apparent that the experience and skill of the employer in dealing with young workers also made a significant difference to the success of the move into fulltime work (see also Tresize-Brown 2004). It was noted that employers in her study were generally sensitive to the high stress that young people are under when commencing fulltime work in the labour market. But there was also evidence that some supervisors and managers were not sympathetic to those pressures and did not have strategies in place to deal with specific teething problems.

Smith and Comyn (2003) undertook a study of enterprises to assess the methods being used by employers to help young people settle into part time and full time work following full-time education. Employers identified particular challenges associated with young people who: had difficulties with long hours; were reticent to ask questions; did not always recognise their impact on other workers; and some did not possess basic habits such as keeping the work environment clean. However, Smith and Comyn found that most employers anticipated these issues and were willing to assist young people in overcoming them. Employers had put in place formal processes to assist novice workers into their new workplaces, including:

- Recruitment and induction processes;

- Buddying and mentoring systems;

- Different types of training;

- Ensuring placement with supervisors who were experienced in managing novice workers;

- Meetings, assessments and appraisals;

- Managing mistakes, performance and conflict;

- Rotating tasks;

- Calibrating responsibility; and

- Explicitly respecting and recognising novice workers' contribution.

In addition to formal processes, employers described the importance of individual interactions with the young people to encourage their full engagement in the workplace. Simple socialisation strategies such as involving them in social events, engaging them in conversations about their lives and interests, as well as providing clear instruction, praising good work and giving non-threatening

negative feedback were all seen as critical to building young people's confidence and helping them to ease into workplaces. While these interactions often concentrated on how tasks were being performed (technical skills) employability skills were also being developed. More assistance was given to young people who needed it due to their limited knowledge of how to act in a workplace setting. On the whole Smith and Comyn found that employers played a very valuable role in transitioning young people into workplaces. Rather than schools needing to step into the employability skills breech, as has been proposed by others, Smith regarded most concerns about employability in an Australian context as somewhat overstated, while conceding that there are significant groups of young people that are disadvantaged and that school-mediated programs targeted at those young people may be worthwhile.

The CIPD (2012a: 16) provide practical advice about the range of ways in which employers can support young employees in their first jobs. Crucial among these is the importance of careful management and support of young people in order to build their confidence. The CIPD advises that line managers should set clear work plans, provide informal coaching and ongoing feedback, and evaluate tasks undertaken to aid the young person's development. It also recommends that other experienced employees act as a mentor or coach for the young person. Line managers and mentors are able to assist young people in traversing the cultural norms and standards of behaviour particular to workplaces, reducing the likelihood of performance problems emerging[17]. Buddying and mentoring programmes appear to work particularly well for young people as they help them adjust to specific workplaces cultures and develop the 'softer' skills that employers desire (CIPD 2012a; Demos 2006; Johnson and Burden 2003).

Demos (2006) reports that young people in first jobs tend to benefit from a "one up, one across" support structure, where they have people to go to for advice and guidance who are either a year on from them, or who are likely to be experiencing similar problems to them at present. They stress the value of mentoring schemes for young people, with people that they can relate to, but also of management practices that help to nurture the social networks that young people value as safety nets when they arrive in organisations. They conclude that "constant dialogue and ongoing efforts at mutual understanding and support will be key" to bridging the gap between young workers and organisations. They suggest a number of ways in which organisations might narrow the gap between young people and their employing organisation:

- Companies should hold entrance interviews and skills audits for young people entering their organisation to understand what drives and motivates their new recruits and to encourage them to think more explicitly about their strengths and weaknesses;

- Companies might provide "deep support" for young people entering organisations by helping to solve people's "life" issues at work, and offering assistance relating to challenges faced by young workers;

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[17] With the support of the Prince's Trust, the CIPD is producing further advice and guidance on how to manage young people to get the best out of them, including the level of pastoral care needed.

- Organisations should find ways to support the peer to peer networks, both inside and outside their walls, that young people rely on and value so highly when they enter organisations. This might include arranging internal mentoring relationships or brokering relationships with external "peer organisations"; and

- Companies should consider organising themselves into networks, offering short term work placements in a number of different companies or public/voluntary sector institutions. This would enable them to recruit staff from diverse backgrounds, and enable young people to develop a wider range of skills.

Smith and Patton (2009) cite research reporting that young people entering the workforce are unlikely to have well-developed organisational skills because they lack previous experience. The authors' study of teenage student workers and their employers in Australia found that the workplaces in the study (in the fast food and retail sectors) seemed to have systems built around acceptance of these low levels of skills and accommodation for them. In general, the companies felt that it was their role to develop organisation skills in their student workers, rather than expecting young teenagers to arrive with those skills.

In the UK context, Bivand (2012) argues that, to improve young people's employability skills, employers need to structure employment patterns to allow young people to combine learning with work. He notes, "Many employers are already experts at this, such as the large supermarket chains and significant portions of the fast food industry" (p.36). Employers, he argues, should do more to actively support people in building their skills through means such as encouraging apprenticeships, linking employment opportunities to higher education programmes and sandwich courses and promoting arrangements to recruit students to work-related programmes in holiday periods.

In summary, a range of strategies for on-the-job assistance to smooth the transition to employment have been canvassed by researchers. Approaches such as buddying, mentoring, and developing structured and in-depth induction processes are profiled as successful means of helping young people acclimatise to the workplace. However, it is the nature of the day to day interactions between young people and their peers and supervisors within the context of the workplace that is most important in transitioning young workers. A number of researchers and advocacy groups urge employers to create a "welcoming" atmosphere or culture for young workers in order to alleviate the anxieties that many without confidence, skills or support networks may feel on starting a job.

7. Conclusions

Young people entering work: a research agenda

This review sought to locate and analyse the available literature relating to three areas of interest:

- Young people's expectations of work: how young people perceive the challenge of workplaces; their concerns, and what daunts and excites them;

- Young people's needs (including skill needs) in entering the workplace; and

- What can be done to smooth the transition to work, and what employers might do to make workplaces receptive to young people.

An assessment of the literature found little research relating to young people's expectations of workplaces or working life. Research conducted by Erica Smith and Anthea Taylor in Australia at the turn of the millennium was found to come closest to addressing the areas of interest identified by Acas.

This Australian research provided detailed insights into the concerns and anxieties of young people entering work. Alongside others, Taylor (2003:12) advocates a need for further research, to provide a better understanding of the youth experience of early career social processes. Research of this nature would allow policy makers, schools and employers to identify the range of issues that young people entering work perceive to be "challenging and anxiety-generating", enabling these actors to develop tailored strategies to help ease the transition for young people. It might also be expected that provision of such strategies would afford benefits for employing organisations in relation to worker retention, productivity, wellbeing and workplace harmony.

A search of the literature was unable to locate any research which examined expectations with regard to the aspects of transitioning to work that *excited* young people. By comparison, relatively more research – yet still surprisingly little - addressed issues relating to young people's needs in entering workplaces and strategies for smoothing the transition to work.

This indicates that there is a 'niche' for research in which young British people are the unit of analysis, with data collected on their expectations and needs in relation to entering work. This topic is ripe for exploration, with such research providing a useful counterpoint to the many reports recently issued which discuss the ways in which businesses might work to help smooth the transition for young people entering work. Appendix 1 sets out a proposed strategy for the conduct of research of this nature.

Building young people's 'emotional intelligence' to help smooth the transition to work

Our review of the research found that expectations and knowledge of work and workplaces differ among young people in the UK. Some studies indicated that subsectors of the youth labour market (specifically disadvantaged youth and young people in rural communities) may possess little knowledge of either how workplaces operate, or job opportunities, and that those with minimal knowledge relied primarily on family and friends for information and guidance. In contrast, studies of young people as a whole found higher levels of knowledge of labour market conditions and awareness of skills needed to obtain employment.

Within the literature, certain Australian studies by Smith and Taylor are distinctive in revealing the personal challenges faced by young people entering work. Many young people experience considerable anxiety and confusion when first starting work. A key conclusion drawn from the available literature is that young people did not necessarily feel *unequipped* with the soft or technical skills needed to enter work, but that they lacked confidence, and faced difficulties dealing with interpersonal relationships particular to workplaces – that is, relationships within those hierarchies of authority and power. A focus of the recommendations within these studies is on equipping young people with the support and emotional intelligence needed to alleviate the anxiety caused by their relative inexperience in dealing with the distinctive social relations at play within workplaces. Taylor, for example, advocates that educational institutions or VET intermediaries should play a role in preparing school students for negotiating interpersonal relationships at the workplace. In essence, this would require such institutions to venture into the area of building young people's "emotional intelligence" to allow them to survive and thrive in workplaces.

A range of strategies discussed in this review of the research might potentially be employed to this end. Employers, when visiting schools to talk to students about working life, might describe how organisational hierarchies work and discuss some of the challenges of interpersonal relationships in workplaces. Demos (2006) advise that young people are best supported by "peer networks". If this is the case, novice employees from local employing organisations might be encouraged to visit schools and talk about the elements of work they found most difficult when starting jobs, strategies for organisational support of first-time workers, and what an average day at work entails for them. In addition, as some writers suggest, guidance from 'peer' mentors within the workplace might also help new workers to navigate and negotiate workplace relationships.

Generating soft skills

Most young people entering the labour market were aware of employers' desire for new workers to possess soft skills such as self-management and communication skills, confidence, and showing initiative. Many studies highlighted employers' preference for employees to arrive at the workplace with ready-made soft skills, at the same time reporting employer views that new recruits largely lacked these skills. But where do young people learn these skills? Most research indicates that these somewhat intangible personal qualities are best, and most often, developed by young people on the job, through a variety

of modes of workplace engagement (including part-time student work, work experience and VET programmes).

Student part-time working, vocational education and vocational work placements were all found to lead to better outcomes for young people transitioning from study to full-time work, in part through the development of these soft employability skills. But what are the options available for young people to learn such skills where these opportunities are not available? School-based work experience is one solution. However some research indicates that participants find the experience to be of little use in developing employability skills. In response, and in recognition of the potential value of exposing young people to workplaces through work experience programmes, the Coalition Government, along with bodies such as the CIPD, the Employers and Education Taskforce and Business in the Community, have all recently committed to improving the quality of the work experience 'experience' for young people. Other strategies are put forward by the likes of Demos (2006) and Spielhofer et al (2011), who profile mechanisms for the development of individual soft skills portfolios.

More generally, a number of British organisations (the UKCES, CIPD, and Demos, HTI, EET, The Work Foundation and BiTC) are arguing for stronger connections and regular dialogue between schools and businesses to allow more varied modes of engagement between business and young people.

In addition, the role of intermediaries acting as links between education/training and work, assisting with the transition specifically experienced by young people, is also an area that appears to deserve greater consideration. While this was an area of research focus that was largely beyond the scope of this paper, references to the advantages that these models might have for disadvantaged young people, and to support the involvement of disengaged employers, did emerge as a theme worthy of further discussion.

Employers' role in smoothing the transition to work: modes of workplace engagement

As well as aiding in the development of soft skills, opportunities for workplace engagement allow young people to acquire the norms and skills particular to workplaces. Research finds that employers prefer to recruit young workers who have had some form of enculturation in workplace life and norms. The onus is therefore on young people 'fitting in' within the workplace and its pre-existing norms. However, as the CIPD (2012a:11) note, both parties must work at the relationship and understand each other's needs. The CIPD and Demos, among others, stress the importance of making workplaces "welcoming" environments, with research indicating that young workers perform better where support structures are in place in their work environments in the form of mentors, supervisors, or supportive induction schemes.

Several writers recommend that students' experiences of part-time work should be structured and incorporated into school-based careers programmes for them to be of benefit in terms of young people's career development. Given the positive impact of student part-time working on future job opportunities, more thought may be given to encouraging employers to take on greater numbers of

student part-time workers. Whilst the youth rate in the British National Minimum Wage offers the most obvious incentive for employers to take on younger workers, some thought may be given to other incentives for employers to create jobs for student workers. Lee et al (2012:41) discuss a range of strategies for reducing long term youth unemployment which centre on the provision of wage subsidies. Some involve improving access to part-time jobs. One example is a scheme proposed by the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) and advocated by the Work Foundation, which takes the form of a guaranteed part-time job for six months, combined with intensive support to find unsupported employment.

Finally, as well as working with educational institutions, intermediaries and other organisations to smooth young people's transition to work, an important focus of this report is on how employers help young people transition *within* the workplace. Strategies include robust induction processes, close managerial or supervisory support, focused guidance and assistance from novice workers' supervisors and peers, buddying and mentoring schemes, and means of 'socialising' young workers to the workplace culture.

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Appendix 1: Potential research design for a study of young people's expectations of work

Research design

There is a lack of empirical work that directly examines the experience of young people transitioning into the labour market for the first time in the UK. This literature review has outlined elements from many studies that touch upon this general area but, with the exception of work done in Australia by Anthea Taylor and Erica Smith and her colleagues, this review of the research literature was unable to find any UK studies that look specifically at this topic through the eyes and experience of the young person.

Anthea Taylor has noted that whilst there is some aggregate-level survey data relating to young people's career aspirations or pathways taken, using predetermined categories, this data does not adequately reflect youth perceptual organisation and experience. In-depth qualitative work would best capture this, however research of this nature is time consuming, particularly where longitudinal approaches are taken.[18] Patton and Smith also note, with regard to conducting studies of young people, that " ... there are problems in accessing large numbers of young people, problems that multiply when researchers attempt to follow up these initial data sets in the quest for longitudinal data" (2010:60).

Mindful of these problems, this section outlines a research design for a longitudinal study focussed on collecting data from the young people themselves, to overcome the current deficiencies in the data. Much of the qualitative research profiled in this review is small-scale in nature: for example, Smith's (2003) study, while yielding extremely rich and insightful data, was drawn from interviews with only 11 individuals, while Johnson and Burden (2003) in the UK context, interviewed only 30 young people. Thus, there is scope for a larger study to be conducted with a broader representation of young people, as described below.

Longitudinal in-depth qualitative study of 100 young people

To generate data that looks at the expectations of young people as well as their experiences in their first jobs, a longitudinal study is required. The research participants would be young people who are coming to the end of study and are intending to take up fulltime work. At least three waves of interviews would be needed to enable the collection of quality data that covers key milestones and allows for examination of expectations of work, initial experience, and reflection on their experience after a year. Whilst it is often acknowledged that young people are increasingly 'tech-savvy' and are most easily reached via online research, our view is that face-to-face interviews (as used by Smith 2003) will yield the most detailed data, not least because they will allow for branching questions to be asked.

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[18] Paraphrased from e-mail communication between Anthea Taylor and the report authors, dated 29 May 2012.

Wave 1: Before commencing fulltime work

The first wave interviews would need to take place prior to the young people commencing their first job. This would allow researchers to ask questions about the following areas:

- what they are expecting of work;

- their perceptions of the challenges of entering work;

- the particular issues that concern and daunt them;

- prospects of work that excite and enthuse them;

- their perceived needs in entering work;

- how they intend to get a job;

- what they are looking for in a job;

- what they think employers are looking for in new recruits;

- engagement with workplaces to date (work experience, part-time work etc) and perceived usefulness;

- sources of knowledge and information about the labour market and jobs in general; and

- characteristics/demographic data using life history questions.

The latter will provide contextual information about their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds as well as other factors that might shape their expectations and experiences of work.

Wave 2: Within 3 months of commencing fulltime work

The second wave of interviews would take place with each participant within three months of commencing employment. The interviews would concentrate on their initial experiences of work, including the level of support given to novice workers by their employing organisation. A key question would be asking participants what advice they would give to other young people starting their first jobs (similar to the approach used by Smith in her longitudinal study (2003)).

Those participants who have not achieved employment six months after the first wave would be interviewed to gather data about their progress and their experiences of looking for work, as well as their evaluations of the skills needed to obtain a job and whether the skills they have match the jobs available in the labour market at that time.

Wave 3: 12 months after Wave 1

The third wave of interviews would take place with all participants 12 months after the initial interviews in wave one. This would allow participants a period to enable deeper reflection on their experience of work as well as allowing for an examination of issues associated with retention. Any participants who have not achieved work over the period would also be interviewed to examine the barriers they experienced.

An optional 4th wave two years after the first wave of interviews might be considered. This 'follow-up' method was used by Erica Smith in a longitudinal study of 11 young people and allowed her to make observations about transitions after commencing work. For example, she found that many young people went in and out of both work and study during the first few years of their entry into the labour market. The 4th wave is not essential for examination of the issues being considered by Acas but might add value to the study with minimal additional cost.

Participant selection

The study would include a total of 80-100 young people from key groups based on the general nature and level of their achieved educational attainment level before entering the labour market fulltime. It is expected that this approach is likely to elicit the participation of young people from a range of backgrounds. Consequently the primary selection criteria for participation would be ensuring recruitment of approximately 10-12 young people from each of the following groups **intending to go into fulltime work** after:

1. Leaving university

   a. With a vocational degree (eg accounting, teaching, engineering, lawyering, doctoring, nursing etc.)

   b. With a non-vocational/ general degree (eg, humanities, political science, economics etc)

2. Leaving college of further education

   a. With a vocational qualification (eg child care, metallurgy etc)

   b. Non-vocational/general (eg A levels; business and administration)

3. Leaving school at highest attainment level (achieved A levels)

   a. Into a vocational employment arrangement (eg apprenticeship)

   b. Into work with no expectation of a qualification

4. Leaving compulsory school education (GCSE?)

   a. Into a vocational employment/training arrangement (eg apprenticeship)

   b. Into work with no expectation of a qualification

Factors to consider across the groups to ensure participation of young people with other key demographic and experiential characteristics include:

- Gender balance (that is, near equal numbers of young men and women in each of the key groups)

- Paid work experience (include participants who have had experience of part time work)

- Socio-economic status (that is, a range of social economic backgrounds)

- Disadvantaged groups (that is, participants from identified disadvantaged groups, such as under-achieving young people, young people with a disability, young people from rural areas etc.)

In addition, strategies to deal with attrition will need to be built into the research design given the longitudinal nature of the study.