

Key Findings and Recommendations

Young Lives, Young Futures is a six-year ESRC longitudinal study investigating how England's vocational education and training system can better support the school-to-work transitions of young people who don't go to university (currently 51% of 18-24 year olds). The project is concerned with examining the availability and accessibility of educational and employment opportunities for this group of young people and of resources for helping them make and enact decisions about their futures. The study consists of a 3-wave nationally representative survey of more than 10,000 young people, and qualitative interviews with 123 young people and 75 local policymakers and practitioners from across four local authority areas with contrasting labour market opportunities, social and economic geographies and education and training provision.

1. Alienation of young people from secondary school is widespread; almost one in two 15-16-year-olds report they do not like being at school.

- The narrow academic curriculum and test-focused culture of the classroom are leaving those interested in more hands on, practical and creative subjects and approaches to learning feeling disengaged, frustrated and having little choice over their education.
- Many young people also experience discrimination from peers and teachers on the basis of their 'race'/ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, size and appearance.

Recommendations:

- The narrow, top-down exam-focused school accountability system should be replaced by a more developmental, 'intelligent' school accountability system.*
- This should be accompanied by a less prescriptive school curriculum. This would help to re-professionalise teaching and free up the space, time and resources teachers need to build relationships with their students and develop curricula and teaching methods that are more fully responsive to the full range of young people in the classroom.*

2. Careers information, advice and guidance is inconsistent and often inadequate, with young people routinely being denied access to good quality, impartial advice from professionally trained careers advisors.

- Advice is often skewed towards encouraging students to stay on at school rather than steering them in the direction of education or training routes that may be a better match for their interests and aspirations.
- Those who are not in school or college often do not access any careers advice.

Recommendations:

- The Baker Clause, designed to build bridges with vocational provision, should be properly embedded in the school system.*
- A locally administered, national, independent careers service operating outside the school framework should be established to give all young people – including those who are not in school or college – access to professional, independent and non-judgemental careers information, advice and guidance.*

3. High numbers of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) report experiencing feelings of anxiety, stress and mental health difficulties and serious barriers to their learning at school. These include:

- Not having their learning difficulties diagnosed and recognised;
- Not receiving the support they need; and
- Being expected to complete courses within a time frame that is unrealistic for them.

Recommendations:

- The ongoing Curriculum and Assessment Review should consider how the curriculum and assessments can be designed to ensure success for students with SEND.*
- A national network of local youth forums for young people with SEND should be established to advise on and support practice in this area.*
- Set up and ensure robust provision for early recognition and diagnosis of learning difficulties and ensure that all teachers are skilled in recognising and meeting the needs of their students with SEND.*

4. Demand for apprenticeships from young people is far greater than the supply available. In our sample of young people in Year 13 (or equivalent):

- **Only 4.5% of young people obtained an apprenticeship** in the two-year period after taking their GCSEs.
- **Almost twice as many young men as young women got apprenticeships** (or tried to get them and failed).
- **For every young person who obtained an apprenticeship, three tried to get one and failed.** 16% of our respondents in the three most deprived IDACI deciles tried and failed to get an apprenticeship. This compares with 9% in the three least deprived.

Recommendations:

- Ringfence Apprenticeship Levy allocations for the under 25s so as to increase the level of funding currently available to this group.*
- Monitor the 'Baker Clause' statutory provision to ensure that young people at school have access to good quality information about the availability of apprenticeships and to establish a good practice evidence base for use by schools.*
- Provide more funding to strengthen local and regional support for mentoring and advice to SMEs offering apprenticeships for young people, to improve retention and to encourage their continuing the offer in the future.*
- Devolve the budget for SME-based apprenticeship training to combined mayoral authorities, on the same basis as the adult skills budget.*

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