

# I AM ONE IN A MILLION: YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF UNEMPLOYMENT



This research has been undertaken by Frontier Youth Trust and Church Urban Fund on behalf of the Churches Co-ordinating Group on Urban Mission of Churches Together in England



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## Executive Summary

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Youth unemployment is at a record high, affecting over one million young people in the UK. The purpose of this study is to highlight this issue by voicing the stories of young people with first-hand experience of unemployment. Our research is based on 18 focus groups hosted by youth projects funded or supported by Frontier Youth Trust and Church Urban Fund. The key findings are:

- As the experiences of these young people show, unemployment is about much more than not having a job or surviving on benefits. It undermines young people's self-confidence and sense of purpose, and stigmatises them. At its worst, it leads to a loss of hope and dignity when young people should be looking forward to their future.
- The emotional, practical and financial support provided by family and friends is highly valued by young people, helping them to negotiate what is often a complex and stressful situation. Churches and faith-based groups have an important role in providing this kind of informal support, especially to young people who are living independently or require additional help. Young people respond best to relational ways of working, based on strong relationships with leaders who have genuine empathy with young people.
- Young people feel that employers are failing to acknowledge and fulfil their responsibilities – and they feel they are caught in a vicious cycle whereby they can't get a job without experience, and they can't get the required experience without a job. What young people want is to be given a proper chance to show what they can contribute to prospective employers; specifically, they would like more and better quality apprenticeships, work placements or trials that offer a real prospect of a job, and more on-the-job training.
- Churches could and should be doing more, by raising awareness about youth unemployment and tackling the problem in their local community through listening workshops, mentoring and personal development schemes, work clubs, networking with local businesses, and helping to establish social enterprises (see Appendix 6 for further information).
- National churches and faith-based organisations have an important supportive role in keeping the issue of youth unemployment high up the Church's agenda, setting a good example in their own employment practices, disseminating good practice, campaigning on issues relating to youth unemployment, and exploring innovative solutions, such as Job Centre chaplains.

# 1 Introduction

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*"I look around at these people in this group and I think 'why aren't they employed?' They're obviously very skilful and articulate and I don't understand why they don't have employment."*

Project staff member, Leicester

**1.1** This research was undertaken by a working group of the Churches Co-ordinating Group on Urban Mission of Churches Together in England. It reflects the group's concern regarding the extremely high rate of unemployment amongst young people, which reached one million during the course of this research project – or one in five young people.

**1.2** The formal definition of youth unemployment covers 16-24 year olds who are without work and available for, and actively seeking, employment. Also of concern to us - and to policymakers - is another group of young people who, though not formally unemployed, are not in education, training or employment. As part of this research, we talked to young people in both these groups, as well as other young people who had previous experience of unemployment, but were employed - often in insecure or part-time jobs; this latter group brought a useful perspective on what had helped and hindered them in making their first steps into the labour market.

**1.3** The research seeks to:

1. Highlight the issue of unemployment and its effects on young people
2. Voice the stories of young people so that their experiences are known and recognised
3. Gather evidence in order to exert political influence to bring about specific identified change
4. Encourage churches to listen and take action in response to youth unemployment in their own communities

## **Approach**

**1.4** Eighteen focus groups – involving over 100 people - were held with groups of young people with direct experience of unemployment. These gatherings were hosted by churches and youth projects with links to the working group, including several StreetSpace projects, as well as other projects supported or funded by Frontier Youth Trust and Church Urban Fund. Organisations were invited to take part if they were known to be working closely with excluded young people, and to ensure a good geographical spread across the country. A list of locations where these groups were held can be found in Appendix 3.

**1.5** During these focus groups, young people were encouraged to talk about their experiences of unemployment. The sessions were run informally with food and time to talk, but with a loose structure covering: young people's stories of unemployment and their hopes for the future; their perceptions of themselves and how they feel they are viewed and treated by employers and wider society; things that have helped or hindered them in looking for work; and what changes they/employers/government could make to help unemployed young people like them. The majority of the groups were facilitated by members of the research team alongside one of the group's regular youth leaders. Where feasible, the session was recorded and transcribed; in other cases, the facilitators were asked to write up any

stories, views, and ideas that arose from the discussion, using the pro forma supplied. Appendix 1 offers a detailed explanation of the research process.

**1.6** The research team met on several occasions to agree the methodology and how to analyse the data from the 18 focus groups. Firstly, each member of the research team read all of the reports and transcripts and identified the different themes that emerged in the discussions. These were grouped into the five core themes: personal dimension; informal and formal support; employability; employers/recruitment; and government policies/priorities. Each member of the research team then took responsibility for writing up one of the core themes, drawing on relevant material from all of the focus groups. Thirdly, the key findings and recommendations were discussed and agreed by the whole research team. Where appropriate, evidence from the focus groups was supplemented with evidence from published statistics, academic papers, and government reports. Finally, the research was presented to the Churches Together England Co-ordinating Group for agreement over any ensuing recommendations, action and dissemination.

**1.7** The young people who took part came from a diverse range of contexts: socially and culturally, and represented a mix in terms of gender, race and culture. Each group was asked to complete a 'Participant Monitoring' sheet, summarising the age, gender and ethnicities of the young people who took part as well as some information about their current employment status and educational background. Not all of the groups provided this data and some provided it in an incomplete form. However, we know that at least 109 young people participated across the 18 different groups. Of these, a fifth were aged 16-17, about a half were aged between 18 and 21, and about a quarter were 22-25. About two thirds were male and a third female. The majority (about 90%) identified themselves as White British. 60% of participants identified themselves as currently unemployed (about 27% permanently) and about 14% were in education. 63% had been unemployed for less than a year, 16% for 2-5 years and 1% for over 5 years. Although participants in 8 groups had not completed compulsory education, 5 groups contained participants who had undertaken post-compulsory academic studies, 10 contained participants who had undertaken post-compulsory vocational studies and 5 contained degree students or graduates. There was therefore a wide range of academic achievement among the participants. Further information can be found in Appendix 4.

**1.8** The members of the research team, who conducted the research process, were: Dave Wiles, Debbie Garden, and Jonathan Wheatley (Frontier Youth Trust), Sandra Ackroyd (United Reformed Church), and Rachel Newsome, Rebecca White and Tom Sefton (Church Urban Fund). In addition to the research team, the membership of the research working group included: Paul Franklin (Coventry Workcare/Saltley Trust Project), Bishop Roger Sainsbury (Chair of the Churches Together in England Co-ordinating Group), Jenny Sainsbury, Rev. Prof. E. Okeem (Transatlantic and Pacific Alliance of Churches), Archbishop Paul Hackman (Transatlantic and Pacific Alliance of Churches), Chris Beales, and Stephen Willey.

## 2 Background Information

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### Scale of problem

- 2.1 Youth unemployment is at a record high:** according to the latest figures (Sep-Nov 2011), just over a million young people are unemployed. This represents 22% of all economically active young people or 14% of all young people (aged 16-24). A further 10% of young people are economically inactive and not in full-time education. Youth unemployment started to rise around 2005, but rose more sharply during 2008/09 and again in 2011 (see charts 1 and 2).
- 2.2 Young people are being harder hit by the recession than other groups:** the youth unemployment rate is much higher than for older adults (22% vs 6%) and has been rising more rapidly than for other age groups.
- 2.3 The effects of the recession are likely to persist for many years:** following the last recession in the early 1990s, it took seven years for unemployment to return to pre-recession levels. Unemployment rates for young people recovered more slowly than for other age groups.
- 2.4 Youth unemployment rates are particularly high among certain groups of young people, in particular ethnic minorities and those without qualifications:** in 2008/09, the unemployment rate was 36% for young blacks, 27% for young Asians, and 37% for those with no qualifications, compared with 16% for young whites and 11% for young graduates. Young men are more likely to be unemployed than young women (20% vs 14%).<sup>1</sup>
- 2.5 Youth unemployment is substantially higher in more deprived areas:** it ranges from an average of 12% in the 10% least deprived areas to just over 30% in the 10% most deprived areas of England (see chart 3).<sup>2</sup>
- 2.6 But, there is also significant local variation in youth unemployment:** rates are as high as 40% or more in the most affected areas (including some wealthier constituencies), but less than 10% in the other areas.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.7 Over a third of young unemployed people have been out of work for 6 months or more.<sup>3</sup>** And many more experience shorter repeated spells of unemployment. According to government statistics, 45% of young people from low income families<sup>4</sup> and 21% of other young people were NEET (not in education, employment or training) for at least 6 consecutive months between the ages of 16 and 19.<sup>5</sup> 16% of 19-year olds who were not living with either of their parents had been continually NEET for two or more of the previous three years, compared with 2% of young people who lived with both parents.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UKCES (2010)

<sup>2</sup> Own analysis of NOMIS for Jul-Jun 2011.

<sup>3</sup> In 2008/09, 44% of the young unemployed had been out of work for less than 3 months; 20% for between 3-6 months; 18% for between 6-12 months; and 18% for 12 months or more (UKCES, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Based on eligibility for free school meals, which is linked to the receipt of key means-tested benefits.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 5.

## **Impact of youth unemployment**

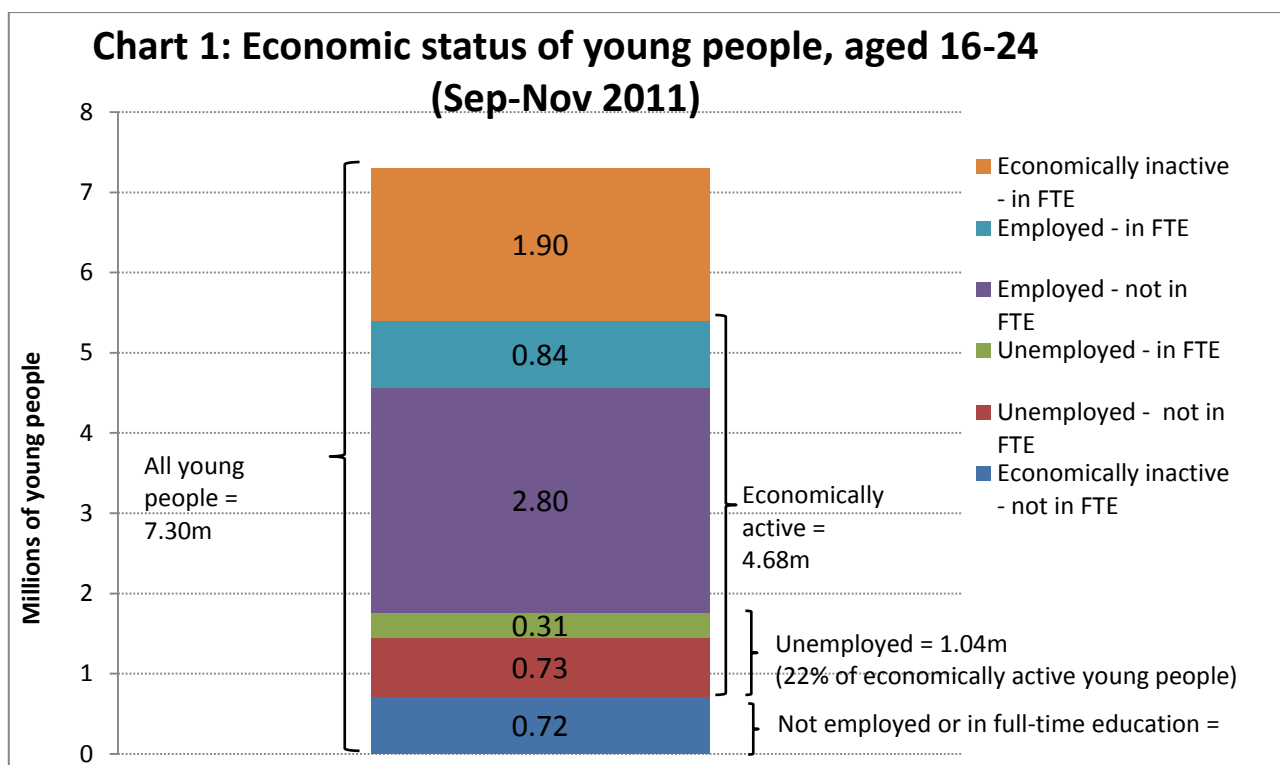
- 2.8 Unemployment has harmful effects on young people's future job prospects and these effects persist for many years:** an early and extended period of youth unemployment increases the likelihood that a young person will experience repeated spells of unemployment in later life and reduces their expected wage for at least 20 years (by between 12-15% at age 42, according to Gregg and Tominey, 2005). The negative long-term effects of youth unemployment are greater for those with low-skills (Burgess et al, 2003).
- 2.9 Unemployment has a significant negative impact on young people's wellbeing and happiness:** unemployment is the primary economic source of unhappiness, as opposed to (lack of) income. Previous research has found that unemployment increases people's susceptibility to illness, mental stress, low self-esteem, depression and fosters feelings of externality and helplessness among young people. Among young people who had been NEET (not in employment, education or training) at ages 16-18, 25% reported depression at age 21, compared with 10% of other young people (SEU, 1999). The unemployed also have a higher propensity to commit suicide. Platt and Kreitman (1985), for example, found that being without work is associated with a twelve times greater-than-average chance of attempted suicide. Furthermore, the psychological impact of unemployment persists, increasing the probability of poor health outcomes in later life (e.g. Bell and Blanchflower, 2010).
- 2.10 Rising youth unemployment leads to higher crime and other social problems,** including an increase in burglaries, theft and drug offences (Fougere et al, 2006). Young people who were previously not in education, employment or training (NEET) are more likely to be involved in drugs and crime in their 20s. And female NEETs are 12 times more likely to have experienced a teenage pregnancy – 60%, compared with 5% of other women (DfES, 2002).
- 2.11 Youth unemployment imposes a huge economic cost on the country:** overall, it costs UK taxpayers an estimated £2 billion a year in unemployment benefits and the productivity loss is even larger - around £6 billion a year in terms of foregone earnings.<sup>66</sup> A separate report by the (then) Department for Education and Skills (in 2002) estimated that for each young NEET, the total lifetime cost to the public finances due to educational underachievement, unemployment, crime and ill-health was £52,000 (or £65,000 in current prices).

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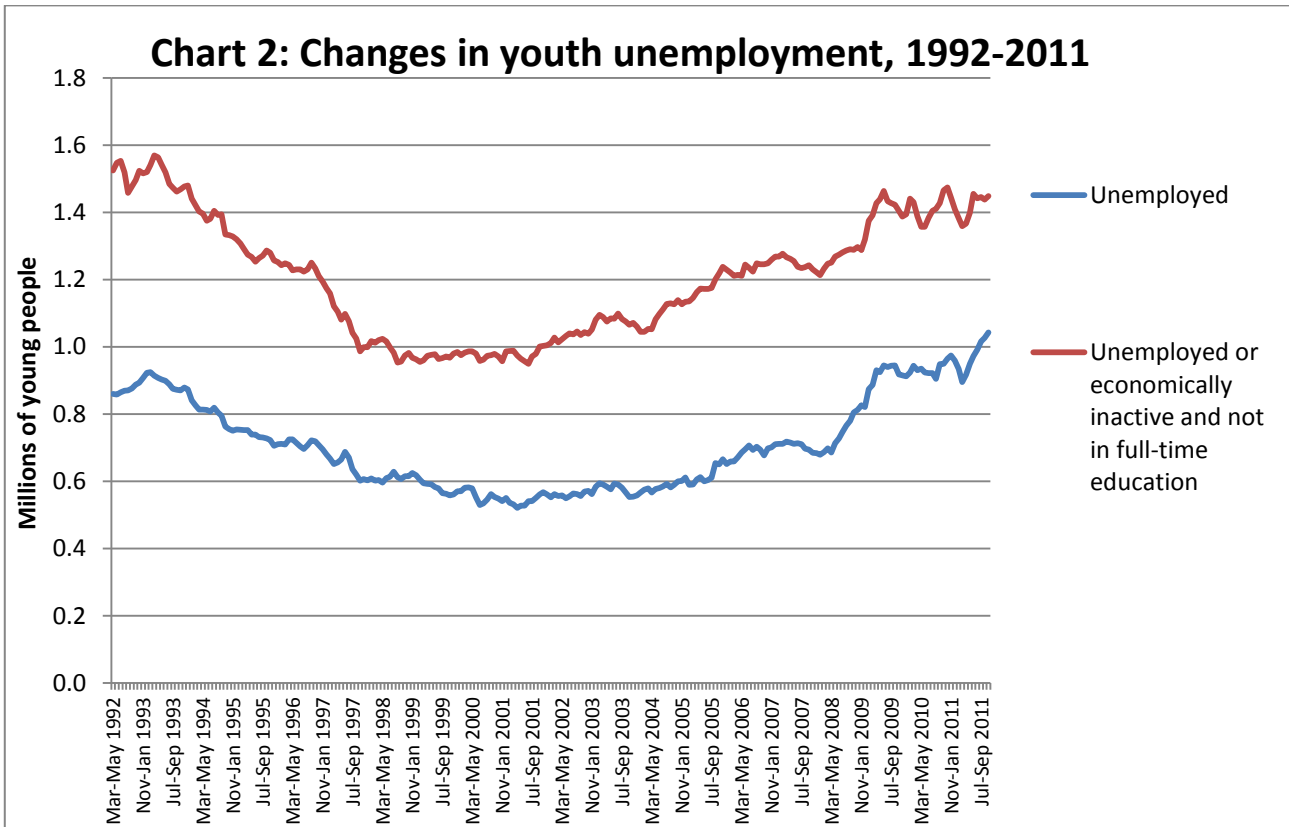
<sup>66</sup> These are based on calculations set out in a report by the London School of Economics on behalf of The Prince's Trust (2007). Their estimates are updated for inflation and using the latest figures for unemployment and benefit rates.

## Causes of youth unemployment

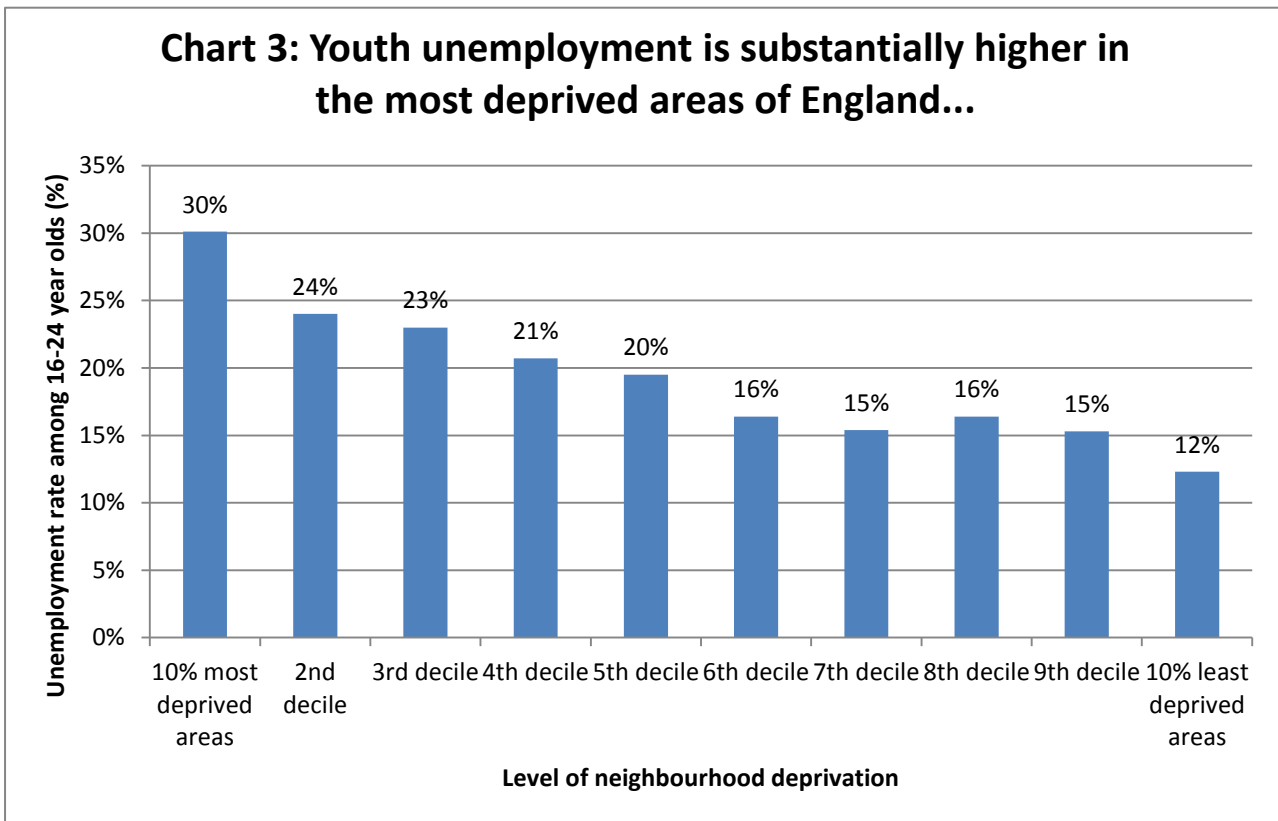
- 2.12 The main problem is that there are insufficient jobs available:** rising youth unemployment is due in large part to low economic growth and falling demand for labour. As in previous recessions, young people fare worse during downturns because employers are reluctant to lose more experienced workers who have ‘firm-specific’ skills and higher redundancy costs. Many employees have accepted pay freezes or even pay cuts to remain in their jobs, which means that employers may be slow to hire new employees as the economy recovers. On the other hand, youth unemployment was rising well before the recession started to bite; this suggests that other factors are also at work, although these are not well understood (see Petrongolo and Van Reenen, 2011).
- 2.13 There is little evidence that youth unemployment is due to inflexibilities in the labour market, such as employment protection, trade unions, or benefit levels:** there is no evidence that young people have been priced out of jobs or that the National Minimum Wage has contributed to the rise in youth unemployment (e.g. Bell and Blanchflower, 2009; Dickens and Draco, 2005)
- 2.14 Immigration can explain only a small part of the increase in youth unemployment.** Some studies suggest that the influx of workers from East Europe has reduced the employment of the least skilled young people, but the effects are usually small and not always significant (e.g. Card, 2005). Therefore, caps on immigration or reductions in the minimum wage are unlikely to have a strong impact on the youth labour market.







Source: own analysis using data from ONS' Labour Market Statistics (Jan 2012)



Source: NOMIS official labour market statistics (downloaded from <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>)

## Case study: two stories of unemployment from Leicester



*I've been unemployed since last April [2010]. Because it's been a long time my confidence has got low.*

*I've re-written my CV so many times – and I've been to 'CV clinics' to get help. I've had a lot of knock backs and that's affected me as a person. I've been trying to get work trials where you go to an organisation and offer to work for them for free for 2 weeks. But they just don't want to know – they treated me like it was a hassle to them for me to be there. I think it was a lot to do with stereotyping – if you're young and you've been out of work for a long time, you must be lazy. But not everyone out there just sits on their backside. There are people who want to work and who really try hard to get work.*

*We need more situations where young people can get together and talk about how to improve their job prospects to help make things better.*

*I've had good and bad experiences of work. I once had a part time job at Wilkinson's and it went really well. Recently I sent a letter to a local Co-op across the road from me – I filled in form, attached my CV – 6 months didn't hear anything. I lost my patience, just gave up. It becomes easier to just go down the job centre and sign on rather than feeling rejection all the time. People say 'just keep trying', but there's only so many times you can just keep trying. It's hard work! You lose hope, you lose confidence.*

*I want any job - just want one chance to prove myself – a foot in the door. I want to show employers what I'm made of.*

### 3 Theme 1: Personal Dimension

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**3.1** This section explores the interaction between unemployment and young people's sense of self and personal circumstances. Unemployment has a negative impact on how young people feel about themselves and how they feel they are seen by others. The research also shows how personal circumstances can exacerbate or help reduce the negative experience.

#### Personal Impact

**3.2** The research clearly outlines the fact that unemployment impacts young people deeply. Young people react to this impact in differing ways. Some see it as a challenge to be overcome whilst others experience it as an overwhelmingly negative fear that can paralyze and immobilize action. The following specific comments are offered from analysis of the research text:

**3.3 Unemployment clearly generates strong negative emotions:** In one focus group, one young man reflects on the rejection that he felt when he received a letter that refused him an interview. In this case the researcher comments specifically on the poignancy of the comment and alluded to the potential for this sense of rejection to be transformed into resignation and hardness. One group highlighted the disillusionment experienced by young people in Tottenham, despite the fact the group were assessed as 'well motivated' by the researcher. One young person said that unemployment was like being "stuck in a hole" and another said it "feels like being drowned amongst the mass of people after the same job". Young people referred to themselves and their circumstances using powerfully negative words like "horrible, stressed and depressed".

**3.4 Confidence is damaged:** This is recorded throughout the research feedback and is amplified through continuing unemployment. This in turn leads to lower likelihood of gaining employment as confidence is eroded. Being confident (e.g. at interviews) is deemed helpful. In some cases this lack of confidence is deeply

*"In 2005, I had 3 jobs. I was a bricklayer and I did 2 retail jobs... I started off with 48 hours of work a week, then it went down to 5 hours. I was made redundant from all jobs because of cut backs.*

*"I saw a plumbing course advertised ...and I applied for it. I met the guy representing the course and it all sounded great. I told him that I'd been out of work for a bit. He wasn't happy about this and asked me how I expected to pay for the course which was £25 a week. There was nothing about this on the advert. He then said I was wasting his time and told me I should apply for a job in McDonald's. I have applied for McDonald's! Burger King and KFC! I've sent out over 30 apprenticeship applications this month and I apply and look for jobs every day.*

*"It's been so difficult without work. There was a period in my life when I tried to kill myself 3 times... My girlfriend was expecting a baby and I was so angry that it would be the government giving my baby money and not me earning it. It's been so hard, but my partner has been a rock in this and I don't know what I'd do without her."*

*Young man, Salford*

expressed as feeling *“disheartened and despairing”* and even *“disregarded”*.

- 3.5 Self-esteem is eroded:** One respondent stated, *“My partner wants a life together. We can’t move forward until we can both do it. I used to be a soldier and walk down the street with pride. I’ve lost my pride, I can’t provide. It’s demoralising”*. One respondent talked powerfully about a sense of worthlessness: *“...It’s going to go back to me feeling worthless”*. Sadly, when the group from Salford were asked to describe how they perceive themselves, one of the participants replied, *“[A] ‘bum’ - I don’t contribute to society, I don’t do anything”*, underlining the negative impact on self-esteem when labels are accepted.
- 3.6 Frustration:** One young person articulated the frustration felt by many saying, *“I’m currently living with my parents, I’m twenty-five, I can’t really see any prospects of me getting out because the work just isn’t there”*. The researcher commented that the young person was frustrated by knowing that s/he could do a lot of the jobs out there but was unable to get them. Some described feeling demoralised and *“stuck in a box”*. One report identifies young people who feel that they are not being taken seriously nor respected.
- 3.7 Purposelessness:** This phrase was coined by one respondent and captures well the sentiment of many others. The respondent said that there is, *“no structure to my life. The one thing I can’t stand is sitting in my house all week with nothing to do. Trying to fill life with things to do, frustration spills over into the household and onto [my] own kids”*. One young person underlined the need for a sense of purpose, saying it was important to, *“have something to do (purpose) not just wander the streets and get picked up by the bizzies (police)”*.
- 3.8 Young people feel under-challenged and under pressure:** This negative impact runs as a theme through respondents’ replies. Other respondents have referred to the ‘boredom of unemployment’.
- 3.9 There is a loss of hope and dignity:** Perhaps one of the most disturbing outcomes of this research is hearing of lost hope. Whilst this may be completely understandable from the individuals’ perspective and experience, the cost to that individual and society is likely to be high. One young person spoke of *“Four years of really looking and I just lost hope at the end, I just actually stopped applying”*. Another said, *“You just feel like you’re banging your head on a brick wall really these days”*. Self-respect and dignity are also eroded by unemployment. One respondent said, *“When you apply for jobs the employers don’t even have the dignity to get back to you to tell you the vacancy’s been taken”*.
- 3.10 Worries about the future:** Contrary to the image of a mythical ‘carefree youth’, young people are worried about their futures. They want secure income, somewhere to live, a family. One young person said, *“It all rolls around security”*. One participant spoke of friends coming out of university who can’t get jobs and *“end up working in McDonald’s, there aren’t enough jobs and they’re over-qualified”*. Comments like *“I don’t want this anxiety hanging over me”* underline the worry that young people feel.

- 3.11 Not listened to:** This theme is implied with regard to young people’s experience of individuals as well as systems (benefit, political, etc.). One young person said of the government that *“they just think people just want to stay on benefits always and that’s not the case”*.
- 3.12 Rejection:** This theme is implied and articulated throughout the research. The consequences of rejection can be stark. *“You get turned down so many times ... eventually you just give up all hope so you don’t even bother going looking. There’s only so many times you can take rejections before it gets you down in yourself”*.

## **Stigma**

**3.13** Perhaps one of the most worrying aspects of unemployment is the stigma that can arise. The impact of negative labelling is well documented sociologically and, whilst the processes leading the acceptance of a negative label remain unclear, the impact of it is well known. Labelling often results in a type of ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’, which is harmful to both the individual and wider society. Many young people feel they are blamed for being unemployed, but they themselves strongly reject the view that “young people don’t have jobs because they don’t try hard enough”; 37% strongly disagreed with this statement and 32% disagreed. Specific reflections based on the research text are offered below:

**3.14 Young people do not want to be stereotyped or generalized:** Young people make many references

*“Some young people do have an attitude, however, society and employers have this definite picture of all causing trouble. Some of them [the young people] should actually not cause the trouble that gives everyone else a bad name. Employers think, ‘They’re young, they’re going to go out all night drinking, and they’re going to be hung-over next morning when they come in, and it’s not going to look very good.’ It’s just helping themselves sometimes. Young people become their own stereotypes, which is what happened in the riots: since they’re being blamed for it, they just think, well since I’m being blamed for it I might as well just go out there and do it. It’ll be worth the blame then.”*

*Security guard, Weston-Super-Mare*

to this, for example, *“getting to know people’s personalities, not just appearance”* and *“not judging on past – giving a chance”*. One young person said, *“I’ve tried to get lots of little jobs so that I don’t have the stigma of living on Job Seekers Allowance”*. The Job Centre was noted as engaging in this kind of stereotyping (see ‘Formal and Informal Support Systems’).

**3.15 The insults of unemployment:** It is not too strong to state that some young people feel insulted about the way they are seen and treated as a result of their unemployment. Two quotes illustrate this. One respondent said, *“I get laughed at - inadequate training”* and another said he was treated like an idiot. Another said that people see unemployed people as *“just thugs”*. The Job Centre system was accused of having *“no people skills”* and perpetuating rudeness to young people who

are unemployed. One respondent felt like he was treated like a “scumbag”, another cited the term “dole dossers”. Some felt they were treated like “shit”.

- 3.16 Shame:** One respondent articulated this saying, “[I’m] ashamed, I have no job and am relying on family. It’s hard when people ask what they’re doing and they have to reply ‘on JSA’”.
- 3.17 Blame:** Despite the wider economic and socio-political context of unemployment, for many the experience becomes intensely personal. As one young person put it, “the focus has been put on us just not being good enough as opposed to we’ve been let down and failed by a lot of powers-that-be and we’re just going through a tough time at this particular moment in regards to the economic climate”.
- 3.18 Accusations of laziness:** One respondent identified and elaborated on this theme, saying he was seen as someone who doesn’t want to work. He suggested that people think, “he just wants to be a bum”. There is a danger that unemployed young people think, “you know what, I’m sick of this, there’s no need, what’s the point of wasting my time, of writing letters all the time, applying all the time, what’s the point?” The danger of stereotypes relating to laziness and a ‘benefit culture’ are well articulated by one young person who said, “Some people are on benefits because they can be, but I was getting depressed being on benefits. It’s absolutely horrible being related to those people who can’t be bothered to work. You just wonder why you bother anymore sometimes”. One young person summed up the tension saying, “I want an opportunity to prove that I’m a hard worker –any job, ‘just a foot in the door’”.
- 3.19 Stigma with regard to personal attributes:** Accents and disabilities are cited as a potential draw backs to obtaining employment. One participant said, “Employers don’t give people a chance, especially those with disabilities. My brother’s girlfriend does also have a disability, and she does get put down a lot because of it. She will go to an interview and as soon as they look at her she knows she won’t be getting the job, because as soon as they look at her, they don’t want to have to deal with all the difficulties of setting her up and all that. It’s not equal opportunities. It’s a hassle for them”.

## Hope

- 3.20** The research itself required young people to list their hopes with regard to employment. Whilst the list can be analysed in full, the following themes are offered as a reflection of the narrative that developed as the research progressed and are offered as a summary of the types of hopes that young people have:
- 3.21 Young people have deep aspirations that are no different to those of adults:** Of the young people surveyed, most young people agreed that “the main reason for working is to earn enough money to enjoy life” (37% strongly agreed and 42% agreed). However, 92% also agreed that “having a job you enjoy is very important” (71% strongly agreed, 21% agreed). So, whilst young people recognise the need to earn a living, most of them are looking for more out of work; job satisfaction, and a perhaps a sense of vocation, are also important. One report says that young people in the group

want, *“to progress in life and to be independent young adults. They want to be believed in and be given a break”*. A wide range of ambitions are outlined by respondents including pharmacist, chef, air hostess, fireman, catering, electrician, forensic scientists, flower arrangement, mechanic, journalist, actor, etc.

*“I’ve reached my goal, I’ve got a job and I’ve worked hard to get there. When you get a job, it’s like a little miracle, and you get your first pay cheque. I was happy, I could give my family a nice Christmas, and I could give them presents. I went on an SIA course, got a badge, worked here and managed to get a job working on the doors. Then I had that experience and now I’ve got a full time job in security which I’m enjoying.”*

*Young woman, Weston-Super-Mare*

### **3.22 Young people are optimistic about work and are making serious efforts to find employment:**

Throughout the research there are numerous references to the effort that is going into seeking employment. For example, *“2 days solid on a computer”* seeking employment, *“applying for 15 jobs a month”*. However this optimism is seriously dented as unemployment continues. One respondent said, *“People do the lottery with better odds than we have of getting a job”*. Respondents who identified themselves using the blob tree self-identification drawing often wanted to be in high places, thus demonstrating ambition and optimism.

## **Situation and Circumstance**

**3.23** The research indicates that young people experience a wide range of different circumstances as a result of their experience of unemployment. This endorses the need for a flexible and broad range of approaches to their individuality. Specific comments and themes drawn from the research are outlined below:

**3.24 Being young:** Simply because they are young, young people lack experience. This was noted as a particular disadvantage when entering the job market for the first time. A graduate in graphic design from Weston-Super-Mare found in her year of unemployment that *“Although I finished just before the summer so you get a lot of summer jobs, the problem is you’ve got a lot of people who have already got the experience who are getting the jobs. Because I had very little work experience, they didn’t find me suitable. I was unemployed for 6 months”*.

**3.25 Students are frustrated by not being able to find work to fund their studies and find themselves disadvantaged by the disruption of leaving jobs to study full-time:** One participant from Luton highlighted that going to university can disrupt job prospects and contact with employers: *“I worked last year at Sports Direct but obviously I went to uni so they took me out of the system and [...] when I came back this summer they didn’t have a job for me. It’s been very difficult to find a job anywhere this summer”*.

**3.26 Young unemployed people who do not have family homes and are dependent on housing benefit are far more disadvantaged than those who are still able to live in the family home:** Participants from Tottenham highlighted that young people who did not live in a family home were disadvantaged by their lower housing benefit tier and its requirement for them to find a single room in a house share.<sup>7</sup> They also claimed that this situation has been exacerbated since housing benefit had recently been cut for 18-25 year olds in London from £90 to £85 per week, despite the high rents in the area. This underlines the reality that the impact of unemployment is not felt equally.

**3.27 Young people who are able to access local support groups receive additional help and encouragement:** See below, Formal and Informal Support Systems.

**3.28 Family background impacts on employment opportunities and financial pressures:** Relationship

*"I'm hoping to get married next year but things are difficult because both my fiancée and I are out of work. We have got part time temporary work at the moment, but this is only for the summer. We also have a child to look after. So it's a struggle."*

*Young parent, Birmingham*

breakdown in the family was cited as an extra hardship in terms of securing employment. Being a young parent can add to the financial pressures of being unemployed and finding work which is compatible with parenting responsibilities was highlighted as particularly difficult. The difficulty of accessing affordable childcare was explicitly raised as an issue in several of the groups. A young mother from Godmanchester said that there were a lot of stereotypes about 'being a mum' which had made it harder for her to find work.

**3.29 Criminal records or tags:** These are seen as circumstantially challenging but also stigmatising. As one respondent said, *"Some kids when they come out of prison they don't get a second chance. They're straight away branded as naughty. Like a lot of our shoplifters have come straight out of prison, and straight away the manager's like 'don't let them in, don't let them in'"*.

**3.30 Nepotism helps you get a job, or holds you back:** See below, Formal and informal support systems.

**3.21 Young people are aware that life chances are distributed unequally between young people from different backgrounds:** Although 79% of young people agreed that "anyone can get on in life if they work hard enough", most participants (87%) agreed that "it's a lot easier for some young people to succeed than others" (see Appendix 2).

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<sup>7</sup>Support for young people living on their own is lower than for older people, as it is assumed they will live in shared accommodation. From January 2012, single people will only be entitled to the shared accommodation rate up to age 35 (increased from 25).



## Case study: a young mum's story from Roehampton, London



*I'm a young mum, and I also go to college, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, full-time. I study lots of things. I study business and I study customer service. I started two months ago and I found it really hard to get into a college or somewhere. I didn't know where I could put my son. I didn't really know what to do.*

*And then Connexions helped me and like they got the ball rolling quickly. Before I knew it I was in college, I was studying, and my son was catered for and paid for and everything at a nursery. So, yes, I'm really happy for that from Connexions, that they helped me really well. I've wanted to be a counsellor for years. At my college I'm going to do an apprenticeship into counselling and see how I like it. I'm going to do it for about a year, working with a counsellor and seeing what everything involves.*

*I live independently, I live on my own with my son. I'm hoping to finish this and pass and then hopefully go in to work full-time when my son goes into primary school. Money is hard at the moment; it's hard to pay bills, gas and electric and then pay for all the stuff for my son and then everything. But when I do get into full-time work, the problem is, is I'll be earning more but everything will go up. Like my rent will be go up higher so I'll have to pay for that. Then it works out that really and truly I might be £50 up or something ridiculous like that. I've actually sat down and worked it out in what I want to get into. So for the future for me, I don't think I'm going to go into full-time work straight away, I'm going to go into uni after college and then study there and hope that gets me into the right direction.*

*I can fully understand, as a young parent, why loads of young mums go out there and have more children and stay on income support and everything because I'm in that situation. I'm just not that kind of girl, I don't want to do it. But I can understand though, I really can. There's nothing going for them at all and they are better off, they seriously are.*

## 4 Theme 2: Formal and Informal Support Systems

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**4.1** Given the extent of the personal impact of unemployment, it is not surprising that sources of assistance and encouragement were also a key emerging theme. When sharing their experiences of looking for employment, the young people consistently recognised the need for support from family and friends, voluntary groups and public agencies. Where this support had been forthcoming, the young people valued it and where it was lacking, they were very aware of what they were missing and had ideas for how they would like to be supported. Churches were rarely mentioned explicitly, but could potentially play an important role here, particularly in providing more informal support for young people who do not have the support network that perhaps other young people take for granted. This section briefly examines the different forms of support that came up in the focus group discussions and how they have helped or hindered the young people we talked to.

### Friends and relatives

**4.2** The importance of support from family and friends came up naturally in many of the discussions as young people shared their own stories of unemployment. This is consistent with our own analysis of the Youth Cohort Study, which found that family or friends are by far the most useful source of young people's information on education and work (cited by 59% of young people).<sup>8</sup>

**4.3** The participants came from different backgrounds and family circumstances: some living at home with their parents; some living independently; and some with partners and/or their own children. Analysis of national surveys shows that the majority of 16-24 year olds (54%) are living at home with at least one parent, 18% are living independently and single, and 18% are living independently with their partner (11%) and/or children (7%). The proportion of young people living independently is significantly higher in more deprived areas, ranging from around one in five in the least deprived areas to nearly one in two in more deprived areas. Among the most vulnerable group of 16-19 year olds, one in seven is living independently (rising to one in five in the most deprived areas).<sup>9</sup>

**4.4** **It is important to receive emotional support and encouragement:** Many young people said it was important to have someone they could talk to and who would “actually” listen, encourage and motivate them, especially when they were going through a difficult time. Often this kind of support is given by relatives, but some of the young people had been helped by friends, sympathetic youth workers or peers with similar experiences. One young person in Birmingham, for example, said how his parents had encouraged him to keep a good work ethic even when he gets frustrated. Without this kind of emotional support, young unemployed people can become frustrated, demoralised and de-motivated. This appeared to be the case with some of the young people in Gillingham group who were living independently and seemed to be missing the encouragement and support that parents often provide: *“We can't get up in the morning, we need someone to get us up!”*

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 5.

<sup>9</sup> Own analysis using data from the Citizenship Survey 2009/10, based on a sample of 1,813 young people aged 16-24 year.

**4.5 Personal support systems play a key role in providing informal practical and financial support:** In several of the groups, young people talked about the practical support they had received from family members, including help with reading through CVs, accompanying them to the Job Centre, sign-posting training and other opportunities, and providing informal careers advice. But this is not available to all young people: *“I know loads of people that don't even have a CV, don't even know what a CV is. [...] Because they haven't had no help, they haven't had family to help them. They just come out of school and that's it.”* Also, some young people said they needed “life advice”, such as “how to pay bills”, which is not always available at home (“it’s just a different culture”). One young man, who is currently lodging with his brother, admitted that moving into his own flat would be a “huge shock” and that he “doesn’t really know how to deal with that”.

Quite a few of the young people mentioned the financial support they have received, most commonly being allowed to live rent-free at home or with a sibling whilst they look for a job, or being able to borrow money. One young person from Birmingham said this has spurred him on to get a job so that he can repay them one day, though others did not like having to rely on others, because it makes them feel a failure or because they feel pressurised to follow parental advice even when they don’t agree with it.

By contrast, the group in Roehampton were very aware of not having the same level of financial support as others: *“Most of us are from single-parents or parents that don't have money... I have many middle-class white friends who were just like me in school, mucked up, but when they were eighteen, guess what? Mummy bailed them out... The majority of people round here don't have that to back up on and so the consequences are just dire. It's all good if you can live with your rich mum and dad who will let you live there for free but a lot of people don't have that opportunity.”* (young woman, Roehampton).

Lack of financial support adds to the stress of being unemployed and can inhibit job search activities (see Policy and Priorities). There were also specific examples where relatively small amounts of money could have made a big difference to a young person’s employment prospects, such as the young person who could not afford the £250 needed to qualify properly as a security guard.

**4.6 Parental/family responsibilities were identified as a motivation for finding employment:** Family responsibilities can help to motivate people to find employment. Three single mothers from the North East group all said that they wanted a job in order to set a good example to their children, and so that they can *“buy them nice things”*. Another young person we spoke to in Weston-Super-Mare wanted to be a good role model to his younger brother and sister (see box below).

*“It helped that I had a little brother and sister as well, because if they see you give up, then it doesn't look good for them, or they start to worry and you wouldn't want to burden it all on them. Kids always pick up on things, they see you and they worry. I want to make an example of myself, trying to teach them that you've got to have money to buy things. We stick together no matter what, so me getting up every day and just taking the kids to school, that was my incentive.”*

*Security guard. Weston-Super-Mare*

**4.7 Finding work is about ‘who you know’, having the right contacts:** One of the issues that came up repeatedly in the focus groups was the benefit of informal contacts in finding employment, which often happens through friends and family members telling you about jobs or putting in a good word for you with a potential employer – *“a foot in the door”*. This is seen to be much more effective than applying by letter or CVs which often do not even get a reply, particularly if you don’t have many qualifications to put on your CV. As one participant from Luton explained: *“most employers want loyalty so if a person gets a word in for you, they feel they have that confidence”*. One young person in Birmingham said that of his six jobs, only one has not been recommended by a friend. Another young person from Roehampton said his sister set him up with a couple of interviews when he moved to London last year, and that most of his jobs have come through people he knew. In some areas, such as Middlesbrough, young people went as far as to say: *“make sure you know people because in Grangetown/ Southbank that’s the only way young people get jobs”*. Of course, the downside is that young people who do not have these contacts are at a major disadvantage: *“It’s all about who you know... Unfortunately, our parents aren’t massive corporation owners, so we’re kind of stuck.”* (Gospel Link, Birmingham)

## **Voluntary Groups and Churches**

**4.8 Voluntary groups, some of which hosted the focus groups, can play an important role in supporting unemployed young people, especially those with greater needs or with less of the informal support described above:** These groups provide a range of opportunities for young people, including: mentoring; peer support groups; paid and voluntary work experience; training and personal development courses; and employment advice. Participants noted the following benefits of being involved with these groups:

- Improved self-confidence
- Meeting with people with similar experiences
- Having something positive to do
- Being inspired to do what they want to do
- Opportunities to gain voluntary work experience
- Linking to other organisations (e.g. local media or music companies)

The young people who attended the St Martin’s Centre in Leicester – part of the Prince’s Trust programme - talked about *“being helped out of a pit”, “gaining more confidence”,* being given a *“fighting chance”* and *“moving forward”*. One young person from this group said it had been very helpful to meet people with similar experiences to support one another and offer advice – a safe place *“where unemployed people can get together and discuss and vent their frustrations”*. Another said, *“If it wasn’t for the Prince’s Trust, I’d be stuck in a rut and doing nothing with my time.... This feels like the first truly positive thing I’ve had in my life for a long time and it’s been a great help to me.”* In the Roehampton group, one young person praised the work of the project leaders who had given them informal help with job applications, such as CV writing, so providing the kind of practical support that is often provided by family and friends (see above). Some of the groups provide

opportunities for voluntary work experience, which helps to develop “professional work attitudes” and is “something to put on your CV”, according to two young people from Weston-Super-Mare.

**4.9 High quality support is based on relationships of trust:** The support provided by this and other similar groups is based on building strong relationships with and between young people, rather than a traditional service delivery model – and led by people who have genuine empathy with the young people they are supporting (*“they want to help people”*). One of the project leaders in Middlesbrough, which works with marginalised young men, many of them unemployed and ex-offenders, stressed the importance of personal relationships and building trust with the young people they work with. This relational approach influences the way they operate: *“It’s not about going in fixing people’s lives, but being part of their lives: “I can’t impose my standards on somebody else. I’ve got to come in and if people like the standards I’ve got, they can emulate them.”* He also emphasised the need to provide consistent support over a long period of time: *“It’s hard work... we’ve got to be here for the long haul, through the tears and through the laughter and a lot of disappointments”*. This is in stark contrast with the way young people are often treated at Job Centres and other public agencies (see below).

**4.10 The church could and should offer more of this kind of support:** Many of the groups who hosted the focus groups were faith-based organisations, perhaps pointing to a greater role for churches in supporting young unemployed people. One project leader in Birmingham, and a Christian, felt that churches should be doing more to tackle youth unemployment. The project leader from Middlesbrough, also a Christian, said that churches should focus more on serving their community, rather than developing their church and that *“the only reason I’m here is because there’s four churches in the area not doing it”*.

*“If we were more proactive, I believe it would make a difference... we could inspire people to do what they want to do... It’s the only place where you will genuinely a load of people who are willing to offer their time, their energy and their resources for nothing and people don’t seem to realise that. Because we’re meant to be on this earth to make a change... yes, our core ethos is evangelism but at the same time we are still here to change lives and to make a difference in our communities.”*

*Christian project leader, Birmingham*

**4.11 Voluntary groups expressed some ambivalence about their relationship with statutory services:** Whilst project leaders see an opportunity to respond to gaps in government provision, particularly in the current economic climate, there is also some wariness about being taken advantage of, as expressed by one of the leaders in Weston-Super-Mare: *“The Job Centre are getting organisations like ourselves to run work clubs, to look at CVs, help them to apply for jobs, get them interview ready. But really what they’re trying to get voluntary groups to do the work of the Job Centre, as we wouldn’t get funding. Now while it’s a great idea, it’s a bit cheeky.”*

## **Careers Advice: Schools, Colleges and Connexions**

**4.12 Young people’s experiences of support offered by schools, colleges and Connexions were variable:** Some young people were positive about the help they had received, such as practice

interviews which helped to build confidence, introductions to employers (018) and support to stay in education after becoming a parent. One young woman from Gillingham, for example, said that: *“Our college is good because they have days when employers come in and you can talk to them, and the college refers some of the best students onto employers to take on. It doesn’t happen often but it’s good when it does.”*

Other participants were less complimentary about the support they had received, referring to a Connexions advisor who only told them what they already knew and schools creating unrealistic expectations and false hopes by making career success look too easy. Another young person was critical about the lack of careers advice: *“We had to answer 30 questions [on the computer] and then it came up with the three jobs that you’re most suited to, but my top job was as a naval submarine officer. I was like that would be my worst job!”* Better schools advice would provide information on what is needed to get into different occupations.

### **Job Centres and Other Employment Agencies**

- 4.13** Young people’s experiences at Job Centres were almost universally negative. The issue came up in almost every focus group and the picture that emerges is very consistent, both in terms of the specific criticisms of Job Centres and in their ideas for improving services. A few young people had more positive experiences, which give an indication as to the changes that are needed.
- 4.14** **Young people find their treatment by Job Centre staff uncaring:** Young people described the staff using words like *“rude”; “unpleasant”; “not bothered”; “don’t want to help you”; “they can’t wait for you to get out”; “they don’t listen to you”; “don’t understand young people”*. One young person said he was hung up on five times, and another’s father was interrupted and hung up on *“for shouting”* when he wasn’t; he rang to explain his son’s situation and to work out a solution.
- 4.15** **Young people find their treatment by Job Centre staff stigmatising:** Many young people felt demeaned by their treatment in Job Centres, in particular the widespread assumption that young people don’t want to work. These were just some of the things that young people said about the staff: *“you’re treated like a scumbag”; “they look down on you because you’re young”; “they viewed me like I was unemployed and it was my fault”; “many of them make you out to be criminals”*. One young person said the advisors *“should stop assuming that you don’t want a job and stop being surprised when you ask for help”*. Interestingly, though, some of the young people were quite judgmental about other Job Centre users, referring to them as *“bums”* and *“all the drunken people”*.
- 4.16** **Young people find their treatment by Job Centre staff anonymous and bureaucratic:** Many young people commented that they were seen by a different advisor each time they visited the Job Centre and only for a short amount of time, which meant that the advisors did not get to know their situation and was frustrating because they had to repeat the same information each time. The young people said they felt they were not treated as individuals: *“just a cog in a machine”; “not interested in me as a person”; “I’m a money bag to them”; “you’re just a number”*.

**4.17 Young people want committed, assigned advisors:** Whether in Job Centres or with private sub-contractors, young people consistently said they wanted an assigned advisor who would work with them to help them find the right job for the longer-term, who was sympathetic, willing to listen and to take account of personal circumstances, and who was better informed (*“to sit down, even once a month or once a fortnight, with the same person would mean at least they remember who you are”*). One particular example from a private employment agency showed how a more supportive approach can help to create a much more positive experience and outcome (see box below), whereas a description of another sub-contractor implied that the advisors were not being as helpful as they could: *“they skimmed over my CV and said “that looks fine, send it out”*. This group felt that staff should be given an incentive to work hard for every individual, including those who seem more capable.

**4.18 Attending the Job Centre is a negative experience in itself:** One young person said he feels *“the lowest of the low when in the Job Centre”*. Others said it *“deflates you”, “it’s the most disheartening place.”*

**4.19 Young people feel they are being pushed into unsuitable jobs:** Young people are expected to apply for jobs a long way from where they live (e.g. in London for young people living in Leicester) and for jobs they are not interested in: *“They don’t say to you ‘what kind of work do you want to go into? They literally say ‘find a job’, but it might come out cleaning and it might be a man who’s just lost his job as a bus-driver or something. Why is he going to want to go into a cleaning job?”* There was a general consensus that Job Centres should *“help people find jobs that they really want, that they’re going to stay in for years to come”*.

**4.20 Young people are sometimes being sent on pointless courses:** *“I had to do this course for two weeks where you just sit there at a computer, doing online applications which you could do at home, or ones which you’ve already done....So that was a pointless course. Literally from 9am to 5pm and you get very bored. You’re just left to yourself, and a lot of them there weren’t even looking at jobs, they were just looking at gaming sites. I was tempted to but I was on a computer where she could see me.”* (Weston-Super-Mare)

**4.21 Job Centres are experienced as punitive and unfair:***“... if you make a mistake, like miss an appointment, they stop your dole payment, then you have to sign on again and that takes two weeks. If they make a mistake, it’s just sorry, it won’t happen again.”* Young people said this can be counterproductive, forcing them to apply for jobs they are not interested in, as well as demoralising.

*“The guys at Seetec were brilliant. They really wanted to help me. My worker would sit down and have a chat with me, and he could tell that sometimes I was very depressed. You’re going in there all the time, you don’t know what you’re doing, you’ve not got a job. You need to make sure your benefit’s coming, otherwise you can’t live. And he would say “what do you want? Sod the job centre, sod everyone else. What do you want?” And he helped me to get my door badge. They covered the cost for my transport. He did everything he could to help me. And I actually went to him after I got the Poundland job and said look I’ve got a job. He said he’d keep in touch. How many people do that these days?”*

*Security guard, Weston-Super-Mare*

- 4.22 Young people have a lack of time with advisors:** This young person's perspective was typical of views expressed by quite a few participants: *"it's just get you in and get you out again, they see you for 2 or 3 minutes when they're meant to see you for at least 5."* Some people thought this was in part because the Job Centres were stressed and overworked.
- 4.23 One young person from Weston-Super-Mare concisely summarised in three words the type of support that young people were looking for from the Job Centre – *"useful, personal and committed"*:** More specifically, young people wanted there to be less focus on applying for jobs and more on improving skills and gaining experience; more opportunity to talk through options and ideas with their advisors; a more flexible approach that takes into account different people's skills and personal circumstances; and a more supportive, less punitive environment. This, according to one young person from Roehampton, would be more effective, especially in the longer-term: *"I think like the Job Centre is more of a short-term fix for them. They are just trying to get people into work, whatever. But then those same people will probably be back in within six months, looking for another job because they're not passionate about a job... it needs to be more long-term, get to know the person, find an actual job and then get them on the career path that they want to go rather than just getting them into a cleaning job that they don't want to do and then they're back in six months or a year's time."*



## Case study: a young dad's story from Middlesbrough



*I'm not working, I'm doing a full-time carer for my son. So I need a job. I'm nearly 20 now and I just want a job, I'm sick of being sat at home now. I'd do any hands-on job as long as the times on. I couldn't sit behind a desk or something. I've never stopped looking. I'm not even on the dole but I'm going to the Job Centre all the time and printing some sheets out and just sending them off. Like I say there are times you're just going, all you're there for is to sign your sheet and write down the computer that you've showed up and that's it. [The government] is cutting child benefit. It's the worst thing they can do. That'll kill us, that.*

*I've done loads of levels, I've got all my levels from my joinery, plastering, everything like that, done all that. The only thing I don't have is GCSEs.*

*How employers see me now? They don't even notice so, I'm just gone. You send your CV out and you don't hear nowt. You think, 'did they get it or didn't they?' You have to keep phoning them but you just keep getting the same thing like, 'just checking, just checking'. Then they do background checks and stuff like that and then you hear nowt back from them. . [I want them to] want me on that job more than I want that job. That way.*

*There's nothing you can do about it, is there? You just have to deal with it. You know you're not going to get a job any time soon so...and it's not as if you're going to get a letter though the door saying, 'will you come and work here?'.*

## 5 Theme 3: Employability

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- 5.1 What can unemployed people do to make themselves more employable? Employability, in this sense, explores the achievements and activities that might make a potential candidate appealing to an employer. The results show what unemployed young people think are important, and their experiences of how these activities and achievements have been a help or hindrance.

The research shows two distinct areas that are deemed helpful – the first being Education, and the second being Experience. Throughout the research groups there was a swing between the need for qualifications over experience, and vice versa – posing the question of which is more important in finding work. To explore the research findings in more depth, this section focuses on four areas that may impact employability: Formal Qualifications, Training and Apprenticeships, Volunteering/Charitable Work, and Work Experience/Placements.

### Formal Qualifications

- 5.2 It was generally accepted across the focus groups that qualifications are a help in finding employment, and not having them can be a hindrance.
- 5.3 **Working hard on a qualification reflects well on character and builds confidence:** Participants felt that working hard on a qualification reflected well on the hard-working character of applicants as well as demonstrating skills. Often the achievements helped build confidence.
- 5.4 **Qualifications are not always sufficient or appropriate for successfully finding work :** Instances of the acquisition of qualifications actually resulting in participants securing work were not evident. Participants expressed a discord between the requirement and value of qualifications. Also, without experience, qualifications were often deemed useless, while other respondents said that they didn't have the right qualifications to match their own experience. In some cases respondents had been refused work, or knew of people who had been refused work, on the ground that their qualifications were too great, for example, a dog-handler who couldn't get work in a pet store. A worrying potential consequence is disillusionment about the value of education.

*“Students are achieving degrees and still unable to get a job in a supermarket etc. after a year. I received a good degree in electronic engineering a few years ago. However, a few years [into my first graduate job] I was made redundant. I then tried applying for other engineering jobs without any success at all, so I decided to try for anything; caretaking, driving jobs etc. At last I got an interview for an assistant caretaking job in a small school. [...] The day after I was phoned to be told that [...] they knew I could do the job well, but they were not going to give it to me because they said I was over-qualified for the job. [They thought] that I would get a better job and soon leave and they would have to advertise all over again. For 2 and a half years I have been trying to get work and managed to pick up some bits of engineering work for a few weekends.”*

*Engineering graduate, Tottenham*

- 5.5 Degrees aren't for everyone and seem to make minimal contribution in the search for work:** Many participants felt a great deal of frustration about the drive from government and schools for young people to gain degree-level qualifications in higher education, especially without any jobs to go into: *"When I started university the Labour government was telling students that a degree would set them up for life. To go through the system and get to the other side and realise there's no jobs at the end of it is a bit of a kick in the teeth"*. This was mainly because degrees came at such a high financial cost, and to some seemed to make no tangible difference in finding work. Examples included a lawyer having to work in a cinema, someone with a diploma in graphic design not able to enter the graphic design industry, someone with a photography certificate not able to enter the photography industry, and another with a master's degree unable to enter his field of animation. Where young people are not disqualified by being over qualified (see above) and seek employment in 'menial' jobs, there is likely to be a domino effect on less educated young people who will find themselves in competition with greater numbers and more highly qualified applicants.
- 5.6 Many qualifications are out of date or unusable:** Some qualifications were reported to be quickly out of date, unusable, or of no benefit to employers. Examples of this included young people who had gained skills and qualifications in the military like weapons handling, which were non-transferable to civilian life. Another participant reported training for an NVQ in youth work, only to discover that the goal posts had changed and a higher degree was required. Recounting how qualifications had failed to bring work often uncovered a lack of self-worth and a resignation that the participants would never find work.
- 5.7 'Basic Level Qualifications' are not universally defined:** There seemed to be confusion amongst participants about what was required as a basic level of qualification. Some felt they were unnecessary, while others lamented the fact that they didn't have GCSE's in subjects like Maths and English, which had caused them to miss out on work – including work in roles like refuse collectors and toilet cleaners. Participants felt qualifications were unnecessary for such hands-on tasks.
- 5.8 More training in vocational subjects is needed:** Some participants wished there had been a greater emphasis on vocational subjects both at school and in their careers advice, because this might have led to work.
- 5.9 Only 20% agreed that "it's impossible for a young person to find a job without qualifications"** (see Appendix 2): This reflects the limited value which participants attributed to qualifications, perhaps for the reasons above.

## **Training and Apprenticeships**

- 5.10** There is a real mix of feelings around training. Gaining new skills and undertaking training was seen as a help in finding employment, and was a recommendation commonly made by the young people for both employers and Job Centres in improving employability and the un/employment experience. However, many participants who reported having undertaken training also reported that it had been a bad experience and of no use in the long-term.

**5.11 More opportunities and funding are needed for relevant training:** It was felt that there is a distinct lack of opportunity and funding when it comes to training, both from employers and the government – and the high costs of training and education put it out of the price range of many seeking work. There were several requests that the benefit system cover training and apprenticeship costs, and to some extent replace Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) – some felt that it was less patronising, and more useful in helping

*“We’ve got a girl at work... she went for an apprenticeship that she really wanted to do, and they said it’s going to cost her £630. So she’s stuck, unemployed, wants to do this apprenticeship, but she hasn’t got £650, or anyone to help her with that! So why can’t they give her some support to get her into work?”*

*Participant, Weston-Super-Mare*

young people realise their aspirations and get into the job market. In short, training of all kinds is deemed important but far too expensive – and ultimately underfunded. There were some cases where participants were awarded the funds for the main course (e.g. mechanics) but could not fund the pre-requisites (e.g. maths and English GCSE) and so were precluded from experience. In other cases, when funding was available young people reported being encouraged into training that was either unsuitable or irrelevant to their desired field. For example one participant reported that she was refused funding for a beauty course because there were no jobs at the present time as a beautician, and was therefore sent for driving lessons instead.

**5.12 Apprenticeships are consistently poor quality or poorly timed:** Participants universally demanded more and better quality apprenticeships that develop skills in a new workforce; give real opportunities to gain experience of work; offer a suitable wage; provide recognised and useful qualifications; and ultimately lead to jobs. Many participants could recount negative experiences of apprenticeships where employers exploited young people at low wages, failed to up-skill apprentices, or offered no accreditation or job at the end. Furthermore, participants felt that young people need to be placed in high-quality apprenticeships earlier in their academic lives, so that they leave school equipped to do the available vocational jobs. Amongst respondents there was great goodwill about undertaking training and seeking personal development, but many felt that this was not encouraged in schools.

## **Volunteering/Charitable Work**

**5.13** Across the research groups there was an evident distinction between work undertaken on a voluntary basis as part of contributing to society or within a charity, and the more formal work placements to gain experience of working life. While the latter was often voluntary, it was more intentional in developing work-place skills and experiences – therefore they have been treated separately for the purposes of this analysis.

**5.14 Voluntary work is a positive step for increasing your employability:** Participants seemed to identify doing some voluntary work as a positive step individuals could take in the face of

*“I’ve been volunteering with MIGHTY for the past 4 months to build up my skills on my CV. I work in the PR side of MIGHTY which has greatly improved my communications skills.”*

*Participant, Luton*

unemployment, but for a variety of reasons. Some felt it make a positive addition to their CV, adding skills, breadth of experience, and a depth of character. Others identified the benefits it had to the participant, especially building confidence and communication skills. Additional factors included gaining new skills and qualifications (like first aid), exploring work within a particular industry (like youth work with the girl guides), or finding purpose for life. Furthermore, some participants pointed out that it was a good way of filling-time when you're unemployed. Many had found themselves into forced 'voluntary' placements to help them develop skills and there were mixed feelings about whether this was a good policy or not. In general, however, doing voluntary work was deemed a good idea for the unemployed.

- 5.15 Volunteers are often exploited:** Concerns were raised about the quality of the experience for some young people. Many participants described being exploited by agencies, especially in forced placements, because of the lack of pay. Often the term 'volunteer' was used in a derogatory way and volunteers didn't feel part of the team. It was felt that employers taking on unemployed young people into these placements need to provide the resources to ensure those volunteers get trained and qualified – instead of just being an extra pair of (free) hands.
- 5.16 Voluntary work does not always lead to jobs:** The biggest concern was that young people felt misled, having undertaken voluntary work believing it would lead to a job only to find that the agencies didn't necessary have jobs available to offer. However, there were an equal number of responses that explained how volunteering had found them work through good references, experience and contacts built up through their voluntary work.
- 5.17 The benefit system appears to restrict volunteering:** In a few groups, there was discussion about whether the benefit system sets a limit on the number of hours someone can volunteer before they lose their benefits. Some young people had been refused JSA on the grounds that they were doing too much volunteering. According to Direct Gov, this is a myth: "There are no limits on the amount of time you can volunteer for, nor any restrictions on the types of organisation you can volunteer for. The only requirement is that you continue to meet the conditions of the benefit or tax credit you are receiving".<sup>10</sup>

## **Work Experience/Placements**

- 5.18** Although similar to volunteering, discussions around work experience were more focused on intentionally entering the work place to gain skills, understanding and experience for working life and career development. Many of these placements were forced, either through schools, colleges or the Job Centre, although some were arranged independently, through local schemes, or as part of formal internships.
- 5.19 Work experience gets you 'a foot on the ladder':** Many felt that work experience is a positive step towards employability, helping you get 'a foot on the ladder' and gain the necessary experience to secure a first job. It was felt that getting on 'the ladder' in any way was a benefit in the long run

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<sup>10</sup>[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/Gettinginvolvedinyourcommunity/Volunteering/DG\\_064299](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/Gettinginvolvedinyourcommunity/Volunteering/DG_064299)

such as more experience of work, both generally and within particular industries, and improved CVs. Participants also felt that it looked better than training courses. Many vacancies required applicants to have experience, and this disadvantages young people – it was felt that work placements were a good remedy to this barrier, although it was felt the barrier is unjust. One respondent from Weston-Super-Mare said, *“When I was in a work placement, I grew massively in confidence over that time”*, illustrating the effect of experience upon confidence.

**5.20 Finding work experience can be difficult:** The challenge of creating work experience, and the cruel circle of a lack of employment due to lack of experience, was underlined by one project leader that we spoke with who said, *“I contact potential employers in Luton to get work experience for the young people but a lot of them don’t want to know because they say the young people don’t have any experience”*.

*“I went round to 26 different shops in town, not even in Leicester but out of Leicester as well, and none of them will take you for volunteering or work experience or anything.”*

*Young female, Leicester*

**5.21 Forced placements are often negative experiences:** There was strong feeling against forced placements, especially when they hadn’t worked out well for the student. One participant from Plymouth remarked: *“I’ve been put in a work support group through the Job Centre... They don’t really care what you do. Not really interested but I have to do it else I won’t receive any Job Seekers. It’s a waste of time basically”*. The concern is that forced placements are simply cheap/free labour for employers, and they are not designed to benefit those undertaking them. Reported experiences listed a range of complaints with the system, from unrealistic expectations to exploitation of participants to the fact that it is difficult to arrange placements in the first place. Participants felt that there should be more internships available (preferably leading to jobs), and that government should fund and regulate these as a priority to ensure everyone has the experience they need for work.

**5.22 Work experience does not lead to the implied jobs:** The most significant complaint was that many young people were encouraged into work placements on a low/no wage basis with a promise of a job at the end – and in reality these jobs failed to materialise. As a result many participants were cautious about promoting work experience, because the rejection of not getting a job was even worse to bear as the employer had seen the worker in the role and still not offered them employment.

## 6 Theme 4: Employers/Recruitment

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- 6.1 Young people are aware of the need to increase their employability and some of the ways in which they can do this (see above, Employability). However, young people also felt that employers play a significant role in helping or hindering their search for work.
- 6.2 Nearly all young people (94%) agree that “young people have a valuable contribution to make to the economy”, in most cases strongly so. Yet, just over half the young people feel that “employers aren’t interested in taking on young people”; 52% agreed and 48% disagreed with this statement, presumably reflecting their own – often negative - experiences of seeking employment.
- 6.3 The research highlighted three different areas – the responsibilities which employers are perceived to have and how they respond to these; recruitment and selection processes used; and an inclination towards ‘opting out’ of traditional employment. This section explores these areas.

### Employers’ Responsibilities

- 6.4 Young people felt that employers are failing to acknowledge and fulfil their responsibilities to treat young people fairly and enable their development. They felt exploited by unrealistic targets and work experience placements.
- 6.5 **Employers should do what they can to maximise employment opportunities:** Young people felt that employers should create more jobs, but also that they should maximise opportunities within existing work by reducing outsourcing to other countries, thereby keeping more work within the UK; by committing to recruiting a certain proportion of their workforce from the local area; and by reducing large salaries and bonuses, thereby releasing funds to pay a greater number of salaries. They also suggested that employers could work with schools and colleges to help young people develop the skills required to make the most of recruitment processes.
- 6.6 **Employers are perceived as not taking ‘equal opportunities’ seriously:** Focus groups described experiences and/or observations of discrimination on the basis of age, gender and disability. Four of the eighteen groups noted that nepotism contributed to appointments, one group claiming that holding interviews was ‘just a formality’ as the outcomes were a foregone conclusion.
- 6.7 **The competitive labour market may result in some young people being exploited by employers:** In addition to the exploitation of work experience/work placements mentioned above (see Employability), some groups felt that employers also exploited young people’s inexperience and need for work by only offering temporary work; setting unrealistic targets (e.g. in marketing roles); assigning them too few or too many hours (e.g. being appointed to a job and then only offered 3 hours’ work per week, or being expected to work long hours); and expecting them to work in cold and

*“Even if we’re employed, it’s called ‘do this or you’re sacked’... there’s no value in anyone... It’s a rat race.” They used to be family run and have a good ethos, but now they don’t care about the workers, and just punish the people at the bottom.*

*Focus group, Birmingham*

uncomfortable environments. In such a competitive labour market, they felt unable to say anything as *“there’s fifty people that are going to step into that role”*.

**6.8 Employers must provide adequate induction processes for employees:** Young people felt frustrated by employers who did not offer them introductory guidance or training but were dissatisfied when they failed to perform as expected. One young man from North East England described being sacked from a job after only 2 week because of his poor telephone skills despite never receiving instructions about how to deal with telephone calls. A participant from Birmingham advised employers, *“Don’t just sit down for 5 minutes and then send them out on the shop floor and expect them to do a good job”*.

**6.9 Employers share responsibility for training with the government and education system:** Many participants felt that employers should be legally obliged to properly train and develop workers, both as part of an induction process and beyond. This should mean that ‘experience’ is not a requirement for basic jobs: if training is given, young people can apply. This may also be accompanied by a lower wage while new employers gain the experience they need. This enables young people to compete with older, more experienced and qualified workers in the labour market. Young people from Luton also commented that they were seeking opportunities to develop and take on responsibilities within work, both for their own motivation and to increase their value to employers.

A few focus groups also expressed frustration that qualifications were not more highly regarded by employers. The group from Middlesbrough argued that qualifications should be counted as equivalent to experience: *“They should at least give us a chance”*. The group from Leicester felt that employers should give greater recognition to the value of qualifications and the benefit to the organisation of having well trained employees.

## **Recruitment and Selection**

**6.10** Participants felt that employers put too much emphasis on initial appearances. They have found that it is difficult to impress potential employers through CVs and application forms as their age means they often have little experience and they may have few qualifications. They would prefer recruitment and selection processes which enable them to demonstrate the contribution they can make to the organisation.

**6.11 There appears to be widespread negative perception, stereotyping and prejudging of young people:** This issue was raised by half of the focus groups. Participants were concerned that they were judged on appearance, that young people were not respected or taken seriously and that they are stereotyped as all being like ‘those who started the riots’. Some had found it difficult to overcome being judged as inappropriate for employment because of past mistakes, even though some of their offences were minor: *“If they looked on my record [...] they’ll still see that I got arrested once when I was fifteen. That’s seven years ago”*. However, even those for whom criminal records were not an issue felt that they were undesirable to employers: *“It does depend on the job*



*but at the same time they just think like you've just come out of uni, you've got no experience so there's no point in giving you it... You don't get any responses if you apply, they just ignore you".*

**6.12 Young people recognise the need to make a good impression and counteract negative expectations:** Several focus groups discussed the importance of 'selling yourself', coming across well at interviews, having a positive attitude and being flexible. A participant from Godmanchester stressed, *"you should prepare, look good, shake the interviewers' hand and make them feel special"*. The concerns young people expressed about dress codes for interviews and the cost of buying suits (see below, Policy and Priorities) also indicates that they consider the way in which they are perceived. For this reason, young people did not like online applications, and said they are *"not easy"*, they would rather *"do it on paper"*, *"go in and hand it in"*, *"make themselves known"* and *"make a good impression"*. One group had very contrasting views, arguing that employers should not judge them but should get to know them and treat them like family or friends. However, their comments stand out because they are such stark variance with those made by other groups.

**6.13 The lack of feedback given on unsuccessful applications/interviews is discouraging, frustrating and unhelpful:** Eleven out of eighteen groups commented on the lack of feedback given by employers. For example, a young man from Weston-Super-Mare said, *"The number of jobs I've applied to since I left college, it's run into the thousands now I reckon, the last couple of years. I only hear back from about half of them. Sometimes they say they're not going to reply, so at least you know. If you've got that one job you've set your heart on, and you get nothing back, you think is it worth it anymore, because you don't hear anything"*. Participants described it as, *"a let-down when you apply for jobs and don't hear anything"* and commented that it *"makes you lose the will a bit"*, can feel like a personal rejection which knocks your confidence and made them feel invisible: *"I don't hear nowt back [...] I'm just miles away... They don't see us. They just don't"*. The groups from Godmanchester and Middlesbrough both reflected that it caused them to wonder if their applications had been received and read. There was also frustration that a lack of 'constructive criticism' meant that they were not enabled to make alterations or improvements. There was some feeling that employers should be legally required to give feedback.

**6.14 Work experience could be used for recruitment instead of traditional methods:** Research groups

*"There's very rigid application procedures. Be willing to offer on-job interviews, because then it becomes less about what is listed down on a bit of paper. I think it's hard, they do get bombarded with applications. But you need to find out their personality, you need to meet them. And from meeting them you'll know whether they'll fit into your organisation or not, by talking to them."*

*Young woman, Weston-Super-Mare*

regularly suggested that work experience placements would be a fairer and more beneficial tool for the recruitment process than application forms/CVs and interviews. For some this was because they found it hard to communicate well in writing, for others it was because they felt the lack of content regarding qualifications/experience made their applications weak and eliminated them from consideration early in the recruitment process. One participant commented, *"You don't even get to the interview stage and I think personality is something really big that employers look for"*.

Young People would like the opportunity to

demonstrate their skills and character within the working environment, on a 'trial run'. This, they felt, would mean that they would not be discriminated against on the grounds of inexperience because they could prove themselves worthy to potential employers. However, a young man from Leicester had found that this was not popular with employers: *"I've been trying to get work trials where you go to an organisation and offer to work for them for free for 2 weeks. But they just don't want to know – they treated me like it was a hassle for them for me to be there. I think it was a lot to do with stereotyping – if you're young and you've been out of work for a long time, you must be lazy."*

**6.15 Employers could conduct recruitment more effectively:** A group from Godmanchester commented on the different experiences they had had in dealing with employment agencies and in responding to advertisements in their local paper. They found that employers who advertised in the local paper seemed to put time into recruitment and that their experiences as applicants were much more satisfying and successful than in other contexts. Several groups commented that advertising of jobs was not always appropriate for the role, especially online advertising for those who have limited internet access.

## **Self-Employment**

**6.16 Self-employment was a recurring hope:** Although participants were not asked about their personal career aspirations, they were asked about their future hopes with regard to employment. At least eight young people in six different groups identified owning their own business as a hope for the future, some commenting that they would like to be able to use their position to help others who have had similar experiences. This issue was not explored further, but it is interesting to note that the concept of being self-employed was so appealing.

*"One of my friends is a tree surgeon and he basically went to learn about trees and went to uni and when he come out of there he kind of started up his own tree surgery company... I hope to start my own business one day."*

*Young mechanic, Roehampton*

## Case study: a young security guard's story from Weston Super Mare



*I started a university degree, but it wasn't for me. I left that, began looking for work. It was the same old story really, they wanted the key word, "experience", which for some jobs you don't have. I was unemployed for nearly a year. It was difficult in that gap, because when you go to interviews you've got to pay for buses, taxis, trains.*

*When you go into the job centre you feel like the lowest of the low, and you've got everyone looking down on you, and I got my parents bugging me wanting me to get a job. I felt like nobody understood me, I was applying for all these jobs and felt like nobody wanted me to work for them. They wanted some skills or some stupid GCSEs I didn't have. For me it's not about what qualifications you have, it's who you are as a person, dealing with that situation, dealing with the jobs.*

*I went on an SIA course, got a badge, worked here and managed to get a job working on the doors. Then I had that experience and now I've got a full time job in security which I'm enjoying. I got into the first job because my boss who owns the company, he runs the gym, when I used to go to the gym I just said to him "have you got any work going?". He goes yeah, he said once you've got a bit of experience, once you've been out there and done the job a few times, it'll be much more easy for you to find work. He gave me that helping hand really, and he's been a good reference for other jobs. I'm glad that he helped me out, I still work for him.*

*Before I got a job, Christmas was coming up, and I was thinking I wouldn't be able to buy my little brother and sister presents. When you get a job, it's like a little miracle, and you get your first pay cheque. I was happy, I could give my family a nice Christmas, and I could give them presents.*

## 7 Theme 5: Policy and Priorities

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- 7.1** This section addresses issues that young people felt were the responsibility of government. It explores 1) young people's suggestions about how the benefit system could be improved, 2) effects of the poor labour market on young people, and 3) young people's comments on wider government priorities.
- 7.2** What was striking was firstly the need for benefits to accommodate young people's needs for clear communication and explanation, payments that are flexible and respond to their frequently changing circumstances, and financial assistance with job-seeking costs. Secondly, there is a need for more jobs that offer young people progression, rather than temporary "dead end" jobs. Thirdly, government needs to engage grassroots youth organisations more effectively, particularly in deprived areas and bridge a perceived gap in communication with young people.

### **Benefits**

- 7.3 Benefit recipients' rights, entitlements and responsibilities need to be effectively communicated to young people:** For young people, the process of claiming JSA was seen as "*daunting*" and "*a hassle*", and some "*did not really understand the whole process*". Such confusion was linked to poor communication and customer service at Job Centres, with some young people from Leicester reporting that:

- Job centres are 0845 numbers and therefore cost up to £1 per minute for a young person to call from their mobile
- They had been switched around on the phone and disconnected multiple times in a row
- They felt misunderstood by personal advisors on the phone

A few participants were evidently unclear about their rights and entitlements as benefit recipients (for example, the confusion identified above regarding whether volunteering alters entitlement to JSA, see Employability).<sup>11</sup>

A few groups commented that benefit sanctions were poorly communicated, and enforced without reference to the individual's circumstances, making them disproportionately punitive. For example, according to one young male from Gillingham; "*they'll dock off £40 from one week's pay and not warn you, or you get a letter later on –you get told afterwards what they're doing*". Missing an appointment meant that dole payments could be stopped, and they have to re-sign-on, which can take up to 2 weeks.

Nevertheless, there was some support for measures to discipline 'lazy' benefit recipients; "*people that just don't want to go out to work, that are lazy, put them on courses, [...] make them go out and pick up the litter a couple of hours a day, make them work for it*". Such statements illustrate a desire for a fair JSA that rewards those actively seeking work. Perhaps then the problem is not the

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<sup>11</sup> A possible explanation for this confusion could be unclear guidance from job centre staff, as the Morgan Report (2008) suggests.

existence of disciplinary measures such as sanctions, but rather poor communication with young people who are unfamiliar with their rights and responsibilities.

- 7.4 Benefits can be complicated and inflexible for those with changing circumstances:** Participants from Birmingham explained that JSA does not respond well to changes of circumstances as it takes a long time to update their details (see below). In total, young people from five focus groups had experienced delayed payments whilst signing on, with delays ranging from a week to two and a half months. These were sometimes due to mistakes and miscommunication in processing their claims and sometimes due to issues linked with working in temporary jobs (see below). Such delays may push some young people at risk of offending into criminal lifestyles, according to one project leader from Colchester; *“can you imagine the temptation [...] they may definitely go out and do whatever they used to do to make money. Because at the end of the day, who really wants to live without money for six weeks?”*.

*“I work at Birmingham City, [my fiancée’s] started at Aston Villa. Your circumstances change like on a regular. So you have to declare when you do work and you don’t work and all the rest of it. One month I might work two or three shifts, the next month there might be nothing or just one shift.*

*When [me and my fiancée] started living together the Job Seekers was calculated in a way where they averaged it out for each month. Now that’s impossible to do because obviously it changes from month to month. So I had about two or three months of complication with that. It’s only late last week actually that I actually got the letter saying I’m getting the full pay but by the time my girlfriend starts working part-time and obviously I have to declare what other things I’ve done, that’s going to change again. So it’s no win.”*

*Young man, Birmingham (007).*

- 7.5 Some young people struggle with a lack of choice over how often to receive benefit payments:** Those young people who find it harder to budget may benefit from more choice over how often to receive benefit payments. For example, a group of younger participants from Gillingham, many of whom lived independently, found that fortnightly rather than weekly payments meant that *“I spend it all and starve for the next week”, having to borrow off of friends and family to get through the second week*”.
- 7.6 Cuts to benefits may disrupt some young people’s financial solvency:** It was noted by many that benefits for young people were too low.<sup>12</sup> Low benefits may push some young people into casual, unregulated work. One young unemployed male from Gillingham said, *“I don’t know how anyone can survive just off of benefits”,* and as a result *“I get by doing odd jobs here and there”*. Another effect of low benefits may be to knock some young people’s confidence in finding work. As someone with cognitive disabilities, one participant from Weston-Super-Mare had been deeply affected by recent disability benefit cuts, indicating that his confidence was undermined by reductions in his disability benefit and not being able to renew his 5 year bus pass.

<sup>12</sup>Income-based Job Seeker’s Allowance is already considerably lower for those aged 18-24 than for those aged 25 or over, with rates at £51.85 per week and £65.45 per week, respectively (IFS 2009 figures). Moreover, working tax credits are not available to under 25s without children.

**7.7 Benefit thresholds do not support young people who take on more paid work:** A striking 44% of responses by participants disagreed, and 38% strongly disagreed with the statement “young people get treated well by the benefits system” (see Appendix 1). The consensus in the North East England group was that “*you have to work silly hours and are no better off than if you stayed on the streets all day on the dole*”. In some cases the young people said working made them only marginally better off. This may be because under-25s are not eligible for Working Tax Credits<sup>13</sup>. Hence, at the point where a young person begins working over 16 hours a week, the income lost from JSA and Income Support is not made up for by Working Tax Credits as it would be for an older adult.

**7.8 Some young parents feel that benefits do not incentivise them to return to education or work:**

Young parents from three different focus groups highlighted the significant barriers in the benefit system that still prevent them from returning to education or work. A young mum from Roehampton (right) explained how sudden reductions in benefits make her only marginally better off for working. The costs associated with working have meant that she has chosen to stay in education for now. This participant explained that others may be tempted to have more children to stay on income support; “*I can fully understand [...] because I’m in that situation. [...] I’m just not that kind of girl, I don’t want to do it. But I can understand though. [...] There’s nothing going for them at all and they are better off, they seriously are*”. This was supported by a single parent from Godmanchester, who felt that benefits simply funded them to be single parents, rather than incentivising them to continue learning or working.

*“When I do get into full-time work, [...] I’ll be earning more but everything will go up. So I’ll probably be earning exactly the same as what I’m getting now [...] Like my rent will go up higher so I’ll have to pay for that. Then obviously my gas and electric. Then my telephone bill then everything. Then it works out that really and truly I might be £50 up or something ridiculous like that, like I’ve actually sat down and worked it out in what I want to get into.”*

*Young mum, Roehampton*

**7.9 Some young people feel that benefits do not support them to stay in education:** A few participants highlighted that benefits tend to reward those who drop out of education between 16-18 years. The amount of support available to a young person in education is lower than if they were to leave and claim JSA or Income Support, effectively penalising them and their parents. Moreover, participants from Gillingham explained that the EMA<sup>14</sup> and other support they had been receiving for staying in college did not reflect their needs as young people living independently, as it depended on their parents’ income and not their own circumstances.

**7.10 Benefits do not support job-seeking activity such as travel, training, and applying for jobs:** Eleven out of eighteen focus groups discussed the failure of JSA to cover job-seeking related activities such as training, travel to interviews, clothes for interviews, and CV printing<sup>15</sup>. One young person had taken a security guard course, but was unable to qualify, as the Job Centre was unwilling to pay the £250 needed for the badge. Travel costs were a particular concern for groups from towns where

<sup>13</sup> See Introductory Guide to Working Tax Credits, <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/leaflets/wtc1.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> EMA has now been replaced by the 16-19 Bursary, which is more purposefully directed towards young people who are disadvantaged or who are living independently.

<sup>15</sup> Currently, this support from Job Centres is a discretionary fund reliant on individual advisors’ recommendations.

there was often a need to travel rather to other towns to find work (e.g. Weston-Super-Mare, Colchester, Godmanchester and Gillingham). One participant from Weston-Super-Mare explained; *“If you’re living on £51 a week from the job centre, so call it £200 odd a month, how are you going to live? Because for a young person –ok if you’re living at home you haven’t got bills- but I always contributed to the bills for my parents. So the rest of my money was going to my parents and the rest was going on interviews which never happened. I went all the way up to Bristol for an interview, and the interviewer didn’t show up.”* Even when funding for travel costs is available, a younger group of 16-19 year olds in Gillingham explained that they still could not pay for travel costs and interview clothes because reimbursement is retrospective and they do not have the money in the first place.

## **Economic Opportunity**

### **7.11 Young people on low wages are unable to afford high living costs in some regions:** Young people

*“If I go and move into my own flat which I should be able to [...] -I’m on a full-time wage. [...] But £650 maybe or more coming out of my wage and then I’ve got think of travel expenses, all that stuff, food. I’m trying to save, I want to save for the future but [...] At the moment, I’m not really thinking about my future. I’m thinking about now. But I’m not thinking about when I have a family in ten years’ time or if I’ll get married [...] because I can’t afford to think of that right now.”*

*Sports coach, Roehampton.*

in expensive areas, such as Roehampton and Tottenham in London, found it difficult to cover the cost of independent living on low wages. According to a young father in Roehampton who works as a council sessional worker; *“London is so expensive. It’s just, very expensive. I don’t get paid enough. Like I said I just get by. After I’ve done my monthly budget, after I’ve spent everything, I’m left with £30 a month to spend on myself for whatever I want. It’s way too expensive.”* With the minimum wage at £3.68 for 16-17 year olds, £4.98 for 18-20 year olds, compared to £6.08 for 21 year olds, it is clear that even some young people on full-time wages still face poor-quality living standards and limited opportunity to plan for the future (see above).

However, as participants noted elsewhere, the lower minimum wage can also be an incentive for employers to take on young people.

### **7.12 Some young people feel they are competing with immigrants for jobs:** Participants from seven focus groups commented that as immigrants are willing to work for less, and illegally below the minimum wage, that the competition for jobs is made worse. Whilst it was accepted that *“the jobs that they’re doing [...] are not what the British people want to do”*, and that *“they should have the same opportunities as us”*, it was also stated that *“they shouldn’t be allowed to work for £2.50”*.

#### **7.13.1 The general lack of economic opportunity and appropriate jobs is a significant barrier to many:**

There was widespread agreement that *“it’s much harder for a young person to get a job now than it used to be”* (with 63% strongly agreeing and 33% agreeing with this statement). This is perhaps not surprising given the current economic climate. With seventeen out of eighteen focus groups raising the issue, it is clear that young people are well aware of the statistical significance of their

unemployment. The media acts as a constant reminder of the odds that they face to get work, with a million currently unemployed. A number of focus groups gave examples of new stores that had been flooded with applicants. For example, in Tottenham, a Primark store that opened 9 months ago received 9,000 applications for only 125 jobs. Two participants in different groups concluded that, *“you’ve got a better chance of winning the lottery”*. These overwhelming odds appeared to be felt more sharply in some areas than others. In a deprived estate on the outskirts of de-industrialised Middlesbrough, young people lamented that the only jobs going were *“call centre, [...] shops like Tesco’s, stacking jobs”*. The solution, they suggested, was *“you’d need to leave the area, simple as that”*, referring to bigger cities such as Newcastle, York or Leeds. Other groups described a disparity between the jobs that were available and the skills and experiences of those seeking work. In some areas, the sheer lack of jobs seemed to be the most significant and insurmountable barrier, even for some well-qualified and relatively experienced young people. These findings are consistent with our analysis of the Youth Cohort Study - a large-scale national survey; according to the sample of young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training), the main barriers to finding employment are lack of experience (cited by 25% of young people) and lack of suitable jobs (24%). Travelling difficulties (13%) and the need for flexible work hours (12%) are also significant factors.<sup>16</sup>

**7.14 Young people are relatively successful in finding temporary employment but these jobs are insecure and offer poor progression:** At least twelve participants (across seven different groups) had been involved in temporary or seasonal work<sup>17</sup> such as catering, retail, entertainment, engineering or building contracts. Although some young people saw temporary work as an opportunity to prove themselves others saw it as a short term opportunity that left them back at square one. Temporary work also offers poor progression prospects, which does not contribute to participants’ hopes that they would *“better themselves”, “get somewhere”* and have *“sustained employment”*. However, there was a feeling that young people need to be prepared to work their way up from the bottom. Speaking about his first job as a ‘dinner-lady’, a sports coach from Roehampton advised; *“you have to start from the lowest of the low to get anywhere [...] I made the best out of what it was. I was only there for maybe four months working alongside two other part-time jobs and then I was in a position to say, look I’ve had enough experience in the three jobs [...] to go full time in the sports coaching”*. Young people need support to find the right short term opportunities that will build their future careers. As young people in Luton explained, it makes sense for *“young people with aspirations”* to go into the field

*“It’s more security that’s worrying. [...] We got funding from the government to employ me in East London for 6 months. But in six months’ time, unless we get more funding, I’m back to part time. So that leaves me in a position like if I move out and get my own flat, yes I can afford it now, but [...] if it’s cut back to my part-time wage, then I’m screwed. [...] I don’t know where to go. [...] What do I do?”*

*Sports Coach, Roehampton (017).*

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 5.

<sup>17</sup> According to the Institute for Public Policy Research, young people were more than twice as likely as other age groups to be involuntarily in temporary work (IPPR, 2009)



they want to rather than “wasting a year doing a basic job and then still not being able to find a job a year later in what they want to do”.

## **Government Priorities**

**7.15 Some young people from poor areas feel neglected by government regeneration:** Focus groups in Middlesbrough and Luton were extremely negative about the lack of government resources directed towards young unemployed people in the UK’s poorest areas. Participants in a chronically deprived housing estate on the outskirts of Middlesbrough spoke of the 3-4 generations of dole, poverty and crime which is getting worse with each generation. Government attempts at regenerating deprived areas were criticised, and three groups expressed opinions that money was going towards buildings, town centres, and “pointless statues” rather than investing in people. There was strong anger in Middlesbrough that over £1 million had been spent on a steel statue close by, when that could have gone towards jobs.

**7.16 Some young people feel that Local Authorities are cutting essential services for young people:**

*“The only reason they’re bothered [about the riots] was because it was affecting people who pay council tax and influence votes. Like, what happened in London, [...] our people see that all the time. But when it’s affecting the rest of society then it’s a problem and they’re, ‘oh, we’d better do something’, and they’ll throw money.”*

*Project leader, Middlesbrough*

Four groups called for government to put more resources into supporting youth services, especially job placement schemes and youth clubs. This was strongly voiced by a group from Weston-Super-Mare, whose youth job placement scheme was about to fall through after the Future Jobs Fund had been cut. As the project leader summarised; “So with Scout Enterprises<sup>18</sup>, part of the Future Jobs Fund, they’ve basically cut something that’s working. We could have got more people that we could have given jobs to, who could have got more experience, who could have grown as individuals”.

**7.17 Many young people do not feel adequately consulted by government:** Five groups argued that policy makers needed to consult and communicate more effectively with young people, to understand their needs and make spending cuts sensibly. Groups from Colchester and Leicester echoed the need for real consultation; “they’ve been wrapped in a security blanket, they don’t know what it’s like to grow up on a council estate”.

A few groups also complained about pay inequality and double standards in government. What was especially striking was the anger expressed by the Salford group at following a local MP’s condemnation of young people wrongly taking property in the riots, when the MP had been part of the expenses scandal.

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<sup>18</sup> Scout Enterprises is a charity specialising in long-term unemployment. It runs various job-finding programmes in the South West, funded by Job Centre Plus.

## 8 Summary and Recommendations

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Youth unemployment is at a record high, affecting over one million young people in the UK. The purpose of this study is to highlight this issue by voicing the stories of young people with first-hand experience of unemployment.

### **Personal impact**

Unemployment has a deeply negative impact on how young people feel about themselves and how they are treated by others. The research also shows how personal circumstances, such as disability, lack of family support, and having a criminal record, can exacerbate these negative experiences. Perhaps most disturbing was hearing about the loss of hope and dignity.

Contrary to the image of a mythical 'care-free youth', the young people that took part in this research are anxious about their futures; they have the same aspirations as anyone else – a family, a secure income, and somewhere to live - and they have a wide range of ambitions, including chef, fireman, electrician, florist, mechanic, pharmacist and underwater welder! Yet, many young people feel they are blamed for being unemployed and stereotyped as lazy.

### **Support systems**

The importance of informal support from family and friends came up in many of the discussions. And where it was lacking, young people were very aware of what they were missing; in the most deprived areas, nearly one in two 16-24 year olds live independently without either parent.

Young people said it was important to have someone to listen to, encourage and motivate them, especially when going through a difficult time. Without this emotional support, young people can easily become demoralised and de-motivated. Participants also talked about practical advice and financial assistance received from family members, such as help with reading CVs and being able to live rent-free at home; others bemoaned their lack of support.

Another issue referred to repeatedly was the benefit of informal contacts in finding employment, through friends and family members highlighting job vacancies or putting in a good word with a potential employer. This is seen to be much more effective than applying in writing, particularly for those with few qualifications. The downside is that young people who do not have these contacts are at a major disadvantage.

Local voluntary organisations play an important role in supporting unemployed young people, for example through mentoring schemes, personal development courses and voluntary work experience. Young people said they had benefited in terms of improved self-confidence, having something positive to do and being encouraged to explore different career options. It was clear that what young people value most from these projects is strong supportive relationships, and having leaders with genuine empathy and a commitment to the young people they work with.

## **Employability**

It was generally accepted that qualifications are helpful in finding employment, by demonstrating a willingness to work hard and helping to build young people's self-confidence. Nevertheless, qualifications are not always seen to be sufficient or appropriate preparation for employment; some qualifications were deemed useless, whilst in other cases, young people said they had been refused a job for being over-qualified. Many participants expressed frustration with the push to get more young people to go to university at great personal expense "when there were no jobs to go into at the end of it". Some wished there had been a greater emphasis on vocational subjects.

Voluntary work and paid work experience were generally seen as a positive step, either as a useful addition to a CV or in building confidence, learning new skills, exploring a possible career path, or simply filling in time. Work placements and apprenticeships, in particular, were seen as a good way to gain the necessary experience to secure a first job. However, concerns were expressed about 'forced' placements, which were seen as exploitative. Young people said they wanted more and better quality apprenticeships that develop their skills; are properly funded; provide recognised and useful qualifications; and ultimately lead to jobs.

## **Employers and recruitment**

Young people feel that employers are failing to acknowledge and fulfil their responsibilities to young people. Common concerns were that employers often refuse to consider people under a certain age or exploit them by only offering temporary work, setting unrealistic targets, paying low wages and not providing adequate induction or training. There was a strong feeling that prior experience should not be required for 'basic' jobs.

In terms of recruitment, young people want to be given a chance to demonstrate the contribution they can make to an organisation, and suggested that work trials would be fairer and more accurate than CVs or interviews. Many commented that the lack of feedback on unsuccessful applications is very discouraging.

## **Job Centres and benefits**

Young people's experiences of Job Centres were almost universally negative. Many of the participants felt demeaned by staff, and used words like "rude", "not bothered", "viewed me like it was my fault" and "you're just a number" to describe their treatment. What young people consistently said they wanted was an assigned advisor who would get to know them and help them to find the right job for the longer-term; who was sympathetic, well informed and willing to listen and take account of personal circumstances.

Young people suggested various ways in which the system could be improved to support those actively seeking work, by:

- being more responsive to changing circumstances;
- covering travel expenses and other costs associated with job-seeking;
- offering greater financial incentives to stay on in education;

- giving more choice over the frequency of benefit payments; and
- communicating clearly about benefit entitlements and sanctions.

## **Recommendations**

**8.1** We believe that churches have a responsibility and an important role to play in addressing the problem of youth unemployment, recognising that every young person is made in the image of God and has a valuable contribution to make to our society. This is not an area where churches are currently very active. According to a recent national survey carried out on behalf of Church Urban Fund, only 3% of churches have organised activities to address a significant problem with unemployment in their local community. Hence the need to raise awareness of the issue and what churches can do about it.

**8.3** Having said this, we are also aware of a number of excellent initiatives that demonstrate what can be done using the people, buildings, resources and social capital available to churches and faith-based groups. The most effective approaches are usually local and relational, but national churches and faith-based organisations have an important supportive role - in keeping the issue high up the church's agenda, setting a good example in its own employment practices, and disseminating good practice. Finally, the Church can use its collective influence to support and campaign for government policies that support unemployed young people to achieve their potential.

### **8.4 General awareness-raising**

Increasing awareness and understanding of the nature and consequences of youth unemployment is crucial in challenging judgmental and stigmatising attitudes, and also in motivating people to pursue changes in systems and in their own practices. Actions in this area could include:

- publicising and disseminating the report itself
- developing a sermon pack/ housegroup materials on youth unemployment
- engaging with a theatre group who are interested in developing the research into a performance
- encouraging [50] churches to host a 'listen & act group 'with young unemployed people from their local area as a first step towards taking practical action to address the issue in their community (see below)

### **8.5 Encouraging local churches**

Local support and advice services and informal support from friends and family were highly prized by young people. Currently, just 3% of churches have organised activities to tackle unemployment in their local area. But, there are some excellent initiatives that demonstrate what can be done using the skills and experience of local church members, and church buildings themselves. Potential actions include:

- **Mentoring schemes:** offering informal one-to-one support to young people who are struggling with unemployment;

- **Work clubs:** providing a place to meet, exchange skills, share experiences, make contacts and get the support they need to return to work. The key requirements are somewhere to meet and a group of willing volunteers, so churches are well-positioned to run this service. GB Job Clubs is a national network of church-based job clubs that exists to share best practice, training and resources ([www.gbjobclubs](http://www.gbjobclubs))
- **Creative projects:** e.g. producing a video or online magazine, helping marginalised young people to engage, learn new skills and explore different career options.
- **Voluntary/work experience:** churches and faith-based groups can offer opportunities for voluntary or paid work to give young people valuable work experience (e.g. in administration or youth & children's work)
- **Personal development:** through initiatives such as SPEAR, which offers an interactive 6-week training programme to support young people into employment, by strengthening life skills, motivation and work-related competencies, followed by a short-term work placement and/or introductions to local employers (<http://spearlondon.org>)
- **Employment hub:** using the contacts and networks of church members to connect young people with local employers.
- **Social enterprises:** Christian organisations like Worth Unlimited and the Milton Keynes Foundation have established a range of small-scale social enterprises, offering work experience, on-the-job training and personal development to young unemployed people. Existing social enterprises include bakeries, car and bicycle repair workshops, caterers, and nurseries. These businesses are rarely self-financing, but revenue from sales of goods and services helps to reduce the reliance on other sources of charitable funding, as well as creating 'real' jobs for young people.
- **Campaigning:** Local churches also have a voice in seeking change in their national networks as well as local government, by campaigning for specific changes requested of national churches and government.

For further information, see Appendix 6 at the end of this report for links to relevant organisations and potential funders.

Church Urban Fund and Frontier Youth Trust are planning a 'Tackling Youth Unemployment Together' workshop in London on 16 May 2012 (to reserve a place at this free event, go to: <http://tacklingyouthunemployment.eventbrite.com/>). Local project leaders will be invited to talk about their work in tackling youth unemployment in order to inspire and equip other local churches and faith-based groups who want to do something to tackle the problem in their own community.

## 8.6 Encouraging national churches

As large organisations and significant employers, churches can set an example by employing a representative proportion of young people. National church bodies are also well placed to campaign for wider change. Some actions in this area may be:

- possible motion at national governance levels (e.g. Synod, Conference) to encourage national church organisations, dioceses and local churches to favour contractors that employ young apprentices

- explore idea of Job Centre chaplains and/or co-location of faith-based charities within Job Centres. The Prince's Trust has been working in Jobcentre Plus centres since early 2011 as part of a new government partnership to help signpost young jobseekers to volunteering and training opportunities (<http://ow.ly/9juz7>)
- consider ways of encouraging more faith-based social enterprises to offer employment and training for young people
- work with other faith groups to tackle and campaign around issues of youth unemployment

## 8.7 Policy considerations

Major changes are being introduced to the support for job-seekers, through the introduction of the Work Programme and changes to Job Centres. There are also major reforms to the benefits system through the introduction of Universal Credit. Based on the needs and experiences expressed by young people in this research, we suggest that the following considerations be taken into account in implementing these changes:

### **Work Programme**

The new Work Programme<sup>19</sup> recognises the need to provide more flexible and personalised support to jobseekers and that certain groups of jobseekers need earlier and more intensive help in finding work. This approach is consistent with the findings from this research, although it is too early to tell how effective the new programme is in terms of meeting the specific needs of young people. There are, however, a number of ways in which the current system could be adapted to provide more support for disadvantaged young people, including:

- Carrying out a more detailed assessment of every young person's needs as soon as they become unemployed, as well as referring more young people into the Work Programme at an earlier stage, focussing on those with the greatest needs.
- Removing the bias against young people in the current "payment-by-results" schedule, whereby contractors receive lower payments for getting young people into employment. These payments ought to reflect the positive impact of employment on a young person's long-term job prospects, as well as the short-term savings in benefits.
- Consideration could be given to awarding higher payments for young people that are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market, including those living in the most deprived areas, who are likely to have fewer opportunities and less informal support.

### **Job Centres**

Young people in our research are looking for "useful, personal and committed" support from Job Centres. Based on their experiences, we would suggest the following improvements:

- Dedicated, personal advisors working with the same young person, following the deep values of effective public service relationships outlined by Community Links<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup>The Work Programme, DWP: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/the-work-programme.pdf>

<sup>20</sup>"Deep Value: A literature review of the role of effective relationships in public services", Community Links <http://www.community-links.org/uploads/editor/Deep%20Value%20-%20final%20web.pdf>

- Clear advice on their responsibilities as well as their rights as job seekers. Specifically they would benefit from clear communication around sanctions and their rights to volunteer.
- A way to be “listened to”; to feedback their customer experiences to Job Centres outside of the formal complaints procedure.
- Support with job-seeking related costs, such as training, travel, clothing, printing and postage.
- Strong links between subsidised job/ work experience placements and further opportunities. This would enable them to find the right short-term opportunities that will build their future careers (see section 7.14). They could benefit from help in finding the right placement, and during their placement receiving on-the-job training, personal development, on-going careers advice, and links with other employers.

### **Universal Credit**

Some of the difficulties that young people in this research experienced with benefits are already being addressed through plans to introduce Universal Credit in 2013. These proposed major reforms are considering the need for benefits to respond flexibly to changing circumstances, for a simplified personal calculation for each claimant, and for a more gradual taper that rewards rather than penalises work. Specifically, our research has identified these considerations that will be important for young people:

- Young people starting in low-income or part-time work need benefits that support them as they take on more hours of work. There is currently a gap in support for those young people who work over 16 hours a week, as Working Tax Credits are not available to under 25s (see section 7.7).
- Young people would be helped by a flexible benefit system that quickly and automatically responds to changing personal circumstances, for example moving in and out of temporary work or education.
- Some young people need choice over how often they receive benefit payments. For example, those who find it hard to budget may benefit from weekly payments to help them to spread out their spending.

8.8 We recommend that the CTE Urban Affairs Group establish a youth unemployment action group, including the research team, to define and implement the proposed responses.

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## Appendix 1 – Research process used

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This research is the result of the Co-ordinating Group on Urban Mission of Churches Together in England working on youth unemployment. For an explanation of the motivation behind this research and information on how it will be used, please see “Research Introduction and Timeline”, which accompanies this document. The aim of the process outlined below was to draw out the views, experiences and ideas of young people who had experienced unemployment first hand, with the expressed intention of future action and/or campaigns. Assuming that some participants may not have competent literary skills, this process was designed to be as accessible as possible to the broadest possible audience.

Focus groups were hosted by a group facilitator, and set in a quiet, comfortable venue accompanied by a meal. Groups usually had 6 – 8 participants (and no more than 12). As a gesture for their time towards the research, participants did not have to pay for their own food; and sessions lasted no-longer than two hours. Research data was be written up into a standard form following each session for clear and fair interpretation. Write-ups of completed consultations were returned by **November 16<sup>th</sup> 2011**. A Story Keeper in each session kept note and wrote up any good quotes and personal stories that arose from the exercises and general discussion. They clarified stories, filling in details, during the free times of chat. These were then be used as anecdotal evidence.

### Main Research Process

The running order of the sessions varied by circumstance, although the exercises were loosely run in the order outlined below, interspersed with food and drink as appropriate. Time to chat, network and share stories was valuable for researchers and participants alike. The group facilitator was responsible for leading each exercise and recording outcomes/data as the process unfolded. Flip-chart paper or lining paper was used to record and/or highlight the key ideas that arose from each exercise.

**Experiences** – As an introductory activity each participant was encouraged to introduce themselves, tell their story of unemployment (recorded by story keeper), and identify one thing, in the light of this context, they hoped for in the future – recorded on flip-chart/lining paper as a group. It was recommended that the ‘researcher’ and others who were helping to facilitate the research join in this process if they had experience of unemployment too.

**Perceptions** – Using the *Blob Leaps* picture (we suggested a copy for each participant with pens – and asked participants to put their name on their blob sheet too) to discuss the perceptions that participants had of how they were seen. Each participant was asked to identify one Blob person that captured how they viewed themselves and one that represented how they would like to see themselves. This was repeated for how they felt they were viewed/treated and how they would like to be viewed/treated by employers and by society. The Story keeper recorded verbal stories, and the group highlighted/photographed pictures with comments.

**Helps/Hindrances** – The group were asked to identify and list things that, in their personal experience, have (a) helped and (b) hindered them in looking for work.

**Responses** – The group worked to identify changes that could make a positive difference to young people who are unemployed in the UK. They considered (a) things they could do themselves to increase their employability, (b) things that employers could do to make it easier for young people to find work and (c) things that the government could do (e.g. changing the benefit system). This was an opportunity to hear new ideas – the ideas were recorded on flip-chart/lining paper with an explanation of how they might work. A “top 3” was identified

**Statements** – These statements were read aloud and participants asked to write down a number to indicate their response: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.

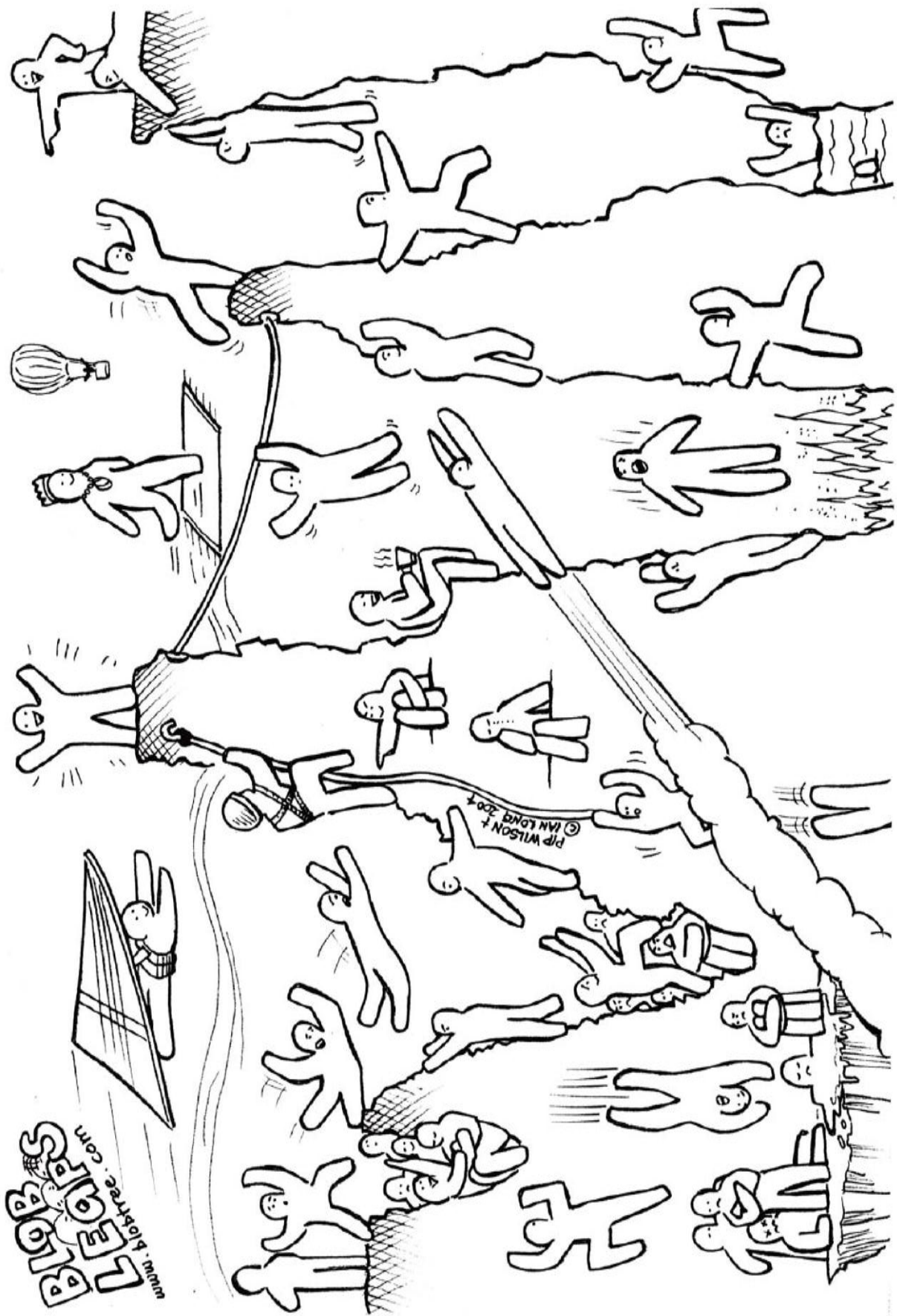
- A. Anyone can get on in life if they work hard enough
- B. Young people don't have jobs because they don't try hard enough
- C. Young people have a valuable contribution to make to the economy
- D. It's impossible for a young person to get a job without good qualifications
- E. Young people get treated well by the benefits system
- F. Employers aren't interested in taking on young people
- G. Having a job you enjoy is very important
- H. It's much harder for a young person to get a job now than it used to be
- I. The main reason for working is to earn enough money to enjoy life
- J. It's a lot easier for some young people to succeed than others

### **Additional Recording**

**Participant Monitoring** – During each session the local youth worker or a supporting volunteer filled in the form recording the ages, genders, ethnicities, employment statuses, lengths of time unemployed, etc. of the group. These helped ensure balanced research.

**Closing Observations** – This process was participatory research in the sense that researchers dined, chatted and participated alongside participants. After the session the researchers took some time to write up their encounters, any stories that stand out, or any other comments arising from the process.

Write-ups of completed consultations, and any queries, were directed to Dave Wiles, Debbie Garden and/or John Wheatley at Frontier Youth Trust. It was emphasised to participants that no real names would be used in any publications, and participants would always remain anonymous. Young people were asked if they would be willing to be involved in future aspects of the research, such as presenting recommendations to MPs, and if so to provide contact details (e.g. mobile phone number and email address).



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## Focus Group Recording

Please attach or enclose any stories and experiences recorded by the *story-keeper* and other researchers to this document in a presentable format. Where possible, please check written accounts with participants during the session

**Focus Group Details** – Describe the focus group, including any distinguishing features and an overview of the group. Attach/enclose the participant monitoring form with this document.

### Experiences (Hopes)

List the things that participants hope for in the future, in the light of the unemployment context

### Perceptions (Blob Leap)

Attach/Enclose with this document photos or highlighted diagrams of Blob Leaps pictures of the three perceptions from each participant. Record a description with each Blob.

### Helps/Hindrances

List the things that participants consider to be helpful and unhelpful in the search for work

### Responses (Three Ideas for Change/Intervention)

List the group's top 3 ideas. Please also send the flipchart sheet, or scan and email it.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Statements**

	Number of participants who answered...			
	1 – Strongly Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Agree	4 – Strongly Agree
A				
B				
C				
D				
E				
F				
G				
I				
J				

**Researcher's Observations**

As a team include any observations or comments you may have. Enclose any additional stories in a separate, presentable format.

**Return Address:** (Please return by **November 16<sup>th</sup> 2011**. Thank you.)

Youth Unemployment Research  
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## Participant Monitoring

**Location:**

**Age and Gender:** Please record the number of participant in each of these groups

Age	No.	Gender	No.
16-17		Male	
18-21		Female	
22-25			

**Ethnicity:** Please record the number of participants from each of these ethnic groups

Group	No.	Group	No.
White British		Black Caribbean	
White Irish		Black African	
Other white background		Other black background	
Indian		White and black Caribbean	
Pakistani		White and Black African	
Bangladesh		White and Asian	
Chinese		Other mixed background	
Other Asian background		Any other ethnic group	
Do not wish to state ethnicity			

**Experience of unemployment:** Please indicate the number of participants in each category

Current employment status	No.	Length of time unemployed	No.
Unemployed permanently		1 – 6 months	
Unemployed temporarily		6 – 12 months	
Employed permanently		1 – 2 years	
Employed temporarily		2 – 5 years	
		More than 5 years	

**Educational background:**

Please make some comments about the educational background and levels of qualifications held by the participants in this group.

**Contact information:**

Please record the phone numbers/email addresses of any participants who are willing to be involved in future aspects of the research.

## Appendix 2 – Responses to the “Statement”

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At the end of each focus group, the young people who took part were asked whether or not they agreed with a series of statements about youth unemployment. This elicited around 80 responses (as not all the focus groups were asked about this due to time constraints). The key findings are:

- Of the young people surveyed, 71% strongly agree and 21% agree that “having a job you enjoy is very important”. But, most young people also agree that “the main reason for working is to earn enough money to enjoy life.” (37% strongly agree and 42% agree with the latter statement.) So, whilst young people recognise the need to earn a living, most of them are looking for more out of work; job satisfaction, and a perhaps a sense of vocation, are also important.
- Nearly all young people (94%) agree that “young people have a valuable contribution to make to the economy”, in most cases strongly so. Yet, just over half the young people feel that “employers aren’t interested in taking on young people”; 52% agreed and 48% disagreed with this statement, presumably reflecting their own – often negative - experiences of seeking employment.
- Most participants (87%) agree that “it’s a lot easier for some young people to succeed than others”, so young people are aware that life chances are distributed unequally between young people from different backgrounds.
- At the same time, most young people (79%) agree that “anyone can get on in life if they work hard enough” and only 20% agree that “it’s impossible for a young person to find a job without qualifications”, suggesting that this group of unemployed young people is not fatalistic about their situation and recognises the value of hard work in overcoming barriers facing young people, particularly in more deprived areas.
- However, there is widespread agreement that “it’s much harder for a young person to get a job now than it used to be” (with 63% strongly agreeing and 33% agreeing with this statement). This is perhaps not surprising given the current economic climate.
- Many young people feel they are blamed for being unemployed, but they themselves strongly reject the view that “young people don’t have jobs because they don’t try hard enough”; 37% strongly disagreed with this statement and 32% disagreed.
- The benefits system, and Job Centres in particular, which should be helping young people back into employment comes is frequently criticised. Only 19% of young people think that “young people are treated well by the benefits system” (and 44% strongly disagreed with this statement).



	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree strongly
A. Anyone can get on in life if they work hard enough	6%	15%	57%	22%
B. Young people don't have jobs because they don't try hard enough	37%	32%	25%	7%
C. Young people have a valuable contribution to make to the economy	0%	6%	38%	56%
D. It's impossible for a young person to get a job without good qualifications	27%	53%	16%	4%
E. Young people get treated well by the benefits system	44%	38%	13%	6%
F. Employers aren't interested in taking on young people	12%	36%	46%	6%
G. Having a job you enjoy is very important	0%	9%	21%	71%
H. It's much harder for a young person to get a job now than it used to be	0%	4%	33%	63%
I. The main reason for working is to earn enough money to enjoy life	5%	15%	42%	37%
J. It's a lot easier for some young people to succeed than others	0%	13%	55%	32%

## Appendix 3 – List of focus groups and the codes assigned to them

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List of focus groups and the codes assigned to them:

Godmanchester (1)	YUR001
Tottenham	YUR002/002a
Colchester	YUR003
Grimsby	YUR004
Godmanchester 2	YUR005
Plymouth	YUR006
Birmingham	YUR007
Middlesbrough	YUR008
Luton	YUR009/009a
Weston-Super-Mare	YUR010
Leicester	YUR011
North East England	YUR012
Salford, Manchester	YUR013
Dundee	YUR014
Hull	YUR015
Portishead	YUR016
Roehampton	YUR017
Gillingham	YUR018

## Appendix 4 – Tables showing participant monitoring data

### Age:

Age	No.
16-17	18
18-21	46
22-25	25
25+	3
Unknown	4

### Gender:

Gender	No.
Male	62
Female	35
Unknown	1

### Ethnicity:

Group	No.
White British	90
Pakistani	1
Other Asian background	1
Black Caribbean	1
Black African	4
White and black Caribbean	2
White and Black African	3

### Experience of unemployment:

Current employment status	No.
Unemployed permanently	29
Unemployed temporarily	34
Employed permanently	18
Employed temporarily	10
Part time/Saturday work	2
In education	15
Full-time parenting	1

Length of time unemployed	No.
1 – 6 months	24
6 – 12 months	20
1 – 2 years	14
2 – 5 years	11
More than 5 years	1

### Educational background:

Level of qualification	No. of groups*
Less than GCSE	8
GCSE	4
Post GCSE academic	6
Post GCSE vocational	10
Diploma	3
Degree	5

\* This refers to the number of groups where this qualification was identified as the highest qualification held by one or more participants. Most groups included participants across a range of categories

## Appendix 5 – Analysis of Youth Cohort Study

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The analysis presented here is based on a national government-sponsored survey of around 8,500 young people who were aged 19/20 when the interviews were conducted in 2010.<sup>21</sup> Young people were asked a range of questions about their education and employment history; their experiences of (un)employment; and their attitudes to work.

These are some of the key findings from these surveys that are most relevant to our research:

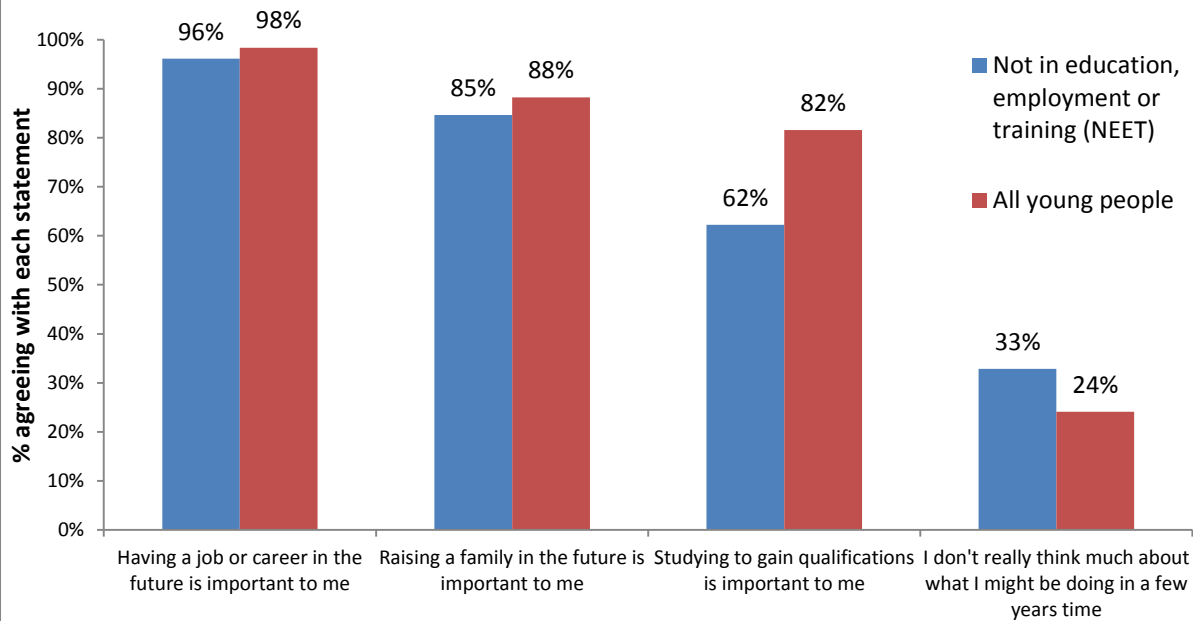
- Young people from low income families<sup>22</sup> were nearly three times more likely to be NEET (not in employment, education or training) at age 19 than young people from better off families – 34% vs 12%;
- Nearly half of young people from low income families (45%) were NEET for at least 6 consecutive months between the ages of 16 and 19, compared with 21% of other young people;
- 16% of young people who lived with neither parent had been continually NEET for two or more years, compared with 5-7% of young people from single parent families and 2% of young people who lived with both parents;
- Young people who are NEET are much less likely to be satisfied with life (58%) than young people in employment or education (77% and 85%, respectively);
- Nearly all young people (97%) say that “having a job or career in the future is important to me” and only 24% of young people do not really think much about what they might be doing in a few years’ time;
- 83% of young people agree that having almost any job is better than being unemployed and only 14% say they would “pack in a job” they didn’t like even if they didn’t have another one to go into;
- Family or friends are by far the most useful source of young people’s information and advice on education and work (cited by 59% of young people) and are also the single most important factor helping young people to find employment (cited by 20% of young people, as against the 9% who cited Jobcentres);
- According to young people who are NEET, the main barriers to finding employment are lack of experience (cited by 25%) and lack of suitable jobs (24%). Travelling difficulties (13%) and the need for flexible work hours (12%) are also significant factors.

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<sup>21</sup> Analysis is based on wave 4 the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) and wave 7 of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England, which can be downloaded for free from the ESDS website.

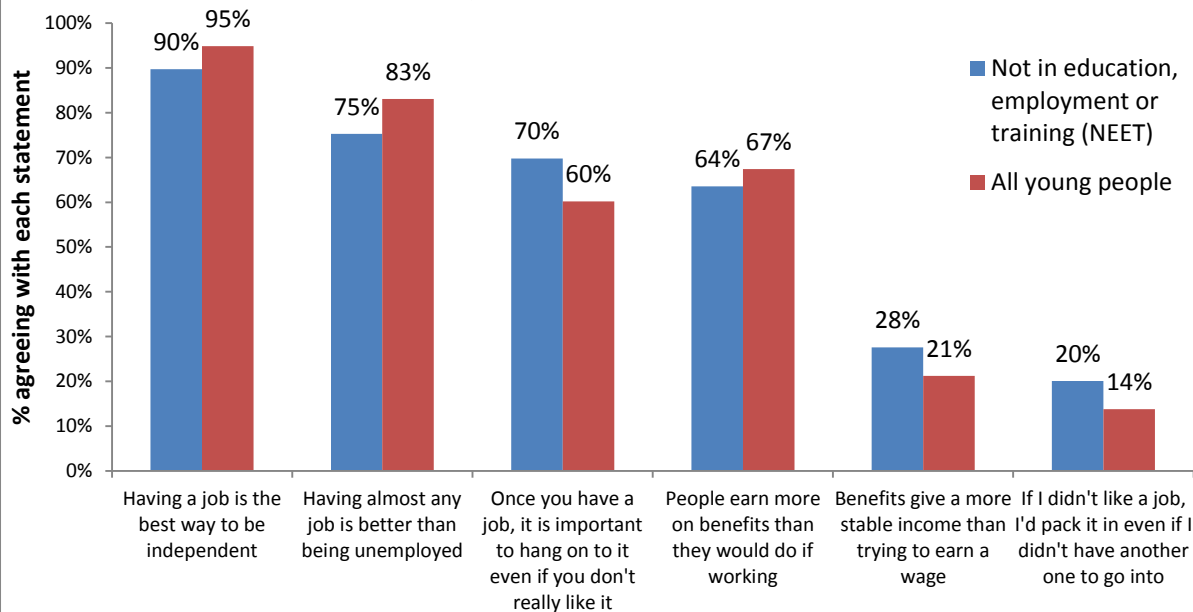
<sup>22</sup> All young people that are eligible for free school meals; this is linked to the receipt of key means-tested benefits.

## Nearly all young people say that having a job is important and only a minority are not concerned about their futures...



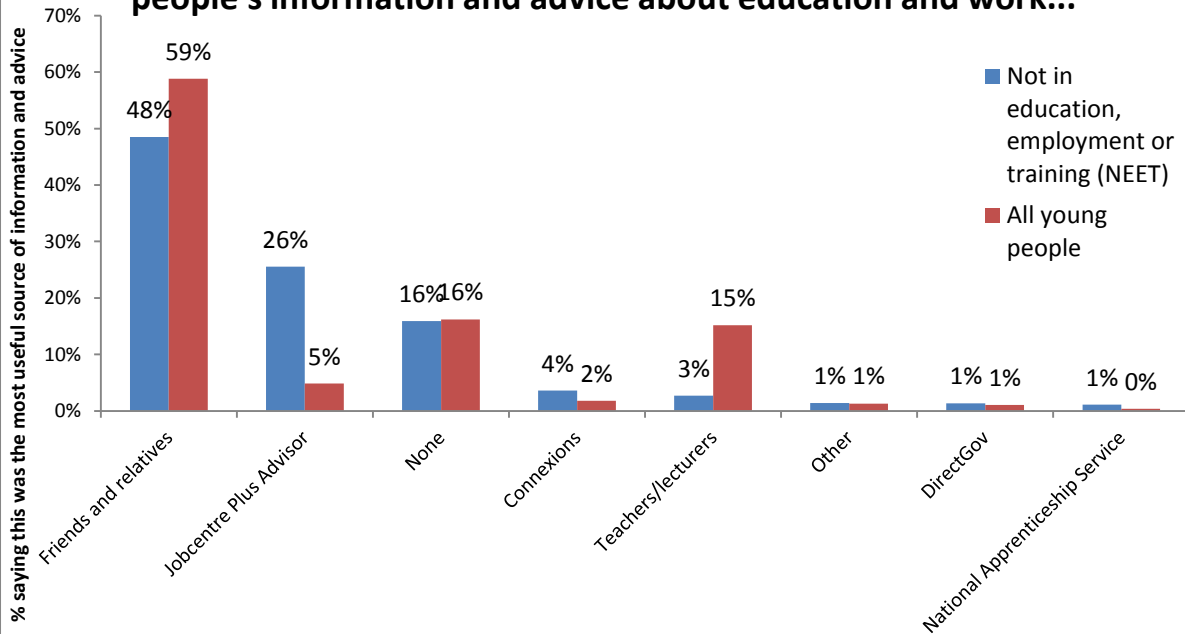
Source: own analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) wave 7, based on responses of 5,942 19-year olds, including 589 young people who were NEET at the time of interview.

## Most young people, including those who are NEET, have a strong attachment to work...



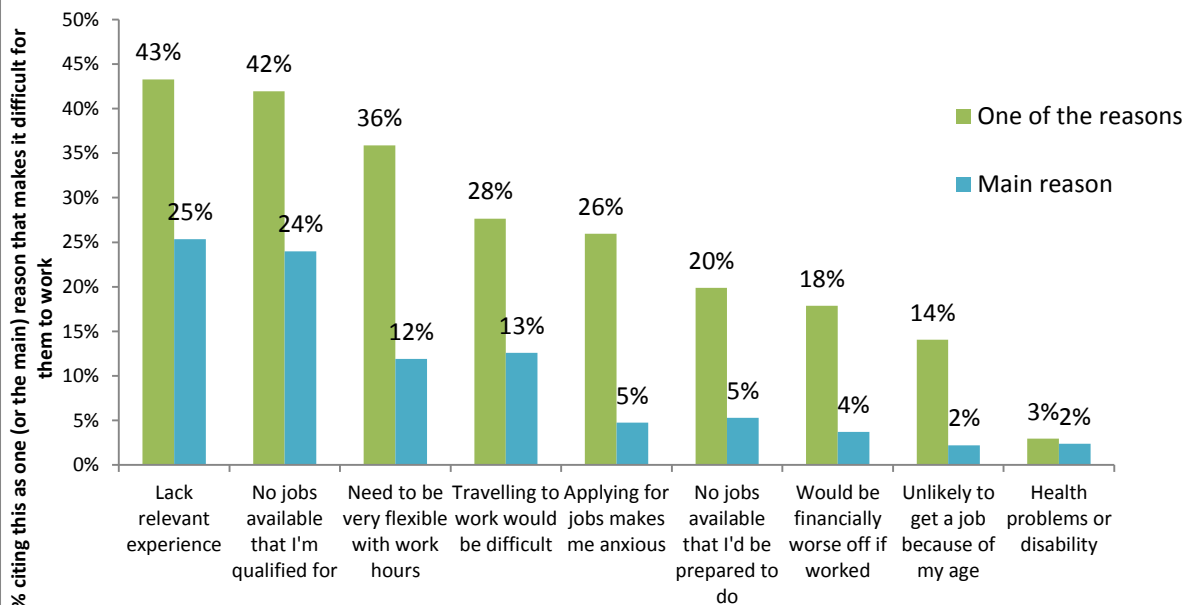
Source: own analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) wave 7, based on responses of 8,647 19-year olds, including 588 young people who were NEET at the time of interview.

### Friends and relatives are far the most useful source of young people's information and advice about education and work...



Source: own analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) wave 7, based on responses of 8,637 19-year olds, including 584 young people who were NEET at the time of interview.

### Lack of experience and lack of jobs are seen to be the main barriers to finding jobs...



Source: own analysis of the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) wave 4, based on responses of 415 19-year olds who were NEET at the time of interview (and did not have a disability that prevented them looking for work).

## Appendix 6 – Resource pages for churches and faith-based groups

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### Events

#### **Youth Unemployment Workshop**

<http://tacklingyouthunemployment.eventbrite.com>

Church Urban Fund is running a **free** workshop in partnership with Frontier Youth Trust to inspire and equip your church to support young people who are unemployed. You will have the chance to listen to experienced practitioners in the field and meet local activists doing something in their areas to tackle youth unemployment.

### Resources

#### **Frontier Youth Trust**

<http://fyt.org.uk/resource,print,1.htm>

General resources for Christian youth workers supporting disadvantaged young people.

#### **Junction49**

<http://www.junction49.co.uk>

An online youth community resource for sharing ideas, where young people can find help and expertise in setting up their own community projects.

#### **Church Urban Fund – Job Clubs**

<http://www.cuf.org.uk/sites/default/files/Responding%20to%20the%20Recession-Job%20Clubs%20in%20Churches.pdf>

A short introduction to opening a Job Club in a church.

#### **DWP Work Club Guide**

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/work-club-guide.pdf>

A short guide by the DWP on setting up a Work Club.

#### **Faithworks Funding Guide**

<http://www.faithworks.info/research-and-resources-/funding>

A general introductory guide to funding.

### Funding

#### **Church Urban Fund**

<http://www.cuf.org.uk/act/cuf-funding>

The Mustard Seed Grant programme aims to provide grants of up to £5,000 to enable churches and faith-based organisations to engage in social action, by supporting them to initiate or develop community work.

#### **The Hedley Foundation**

<http://www.hedleyfoundation.org.uk/?section=objectives>

Supports charities working within young people's education, recreation, support, training, health and welfare.

### **Paul Hamlyn Foundation**

[www.phf.org.uk](http://www.phf.org.uk)

This foundation provides funding for organisations to integrate marginalised young people within the UK around arts, social justice, education and learning – up to the age of 30.

### **Prince's Trust Community Cash Awards**

[http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/need\\_help/grants/community\\_cash\\_awards.aspx](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/need_help/grants/community_cash_awards.aspx)

Grants up to £3,000 for young people to set up their own youth-led community project.

### **The Equitable Charitable Trust**

<http://www.equitablecharitabletrust.org.uk/Grants/GuidelinesforApplicants/tabid/317/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

Makes grants for charities that work with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, through formal education and accredited vocational learning.

### **Earnest Cook Trust**

<http://www.ernestcooktrust.org.uk/grants/index.html>

This grant programme includes charities and not-for-profit organisations wishing to raise levels of literacy and numeracy among young people.

### **Live Unltd**

<http://www.liveunltd.com/about-us-2>

Provides young social entrepreneurs with funding of up to £5,000 to start their own social venture.

### **Dulverton Trust**

<http://www.dulverton.org>

Among other work, this trust awards major grants to national or regional charities that provide youth opportunities.

## **Partnering**

### **GB Job Clubs**

[http://www.gbjobclubs.org/?page\\_id=32](http://www.gbjobclubs.org/?page_id=32)

A national network of church-based job clubs that exists to share best practice, training and resources.

### **SPEAR**

<http://spearcourse.org>

Offers an interactive 6-week training programme to support young people into employment, by strengthening life skills, motivation and work-related competencies, followed by a short-term work placement and/ or introductions to local employers.

### **Worth Unlimited**

<http://www.worthunlimited.co.uk>

Partners with local churches to establish small-scale social enterprises, work experience, and on-the-job training. Ventures include bakeries, and car and bicycle repair workshops.



**Prince's Trust**

[http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/need\\_help.aspx](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/need_help.aspx)

Works with partners to deliver local programmes to help young people into work, education and training, as well as increasing educational achievement, supporting their enterprises, and improving their health and wellbeing.

**Catch22**

<http://www.catch-22.org.uk/apprenticeships>

Works with businesses to set up apprenticeship programmes.

**Young Million**

<http://youngmillion.commonpurpose.org.uk> 44 (0)20 7608 8100

Free leadership workshop for unemployed young people that draws together sector-based expertise from employers; partnering with local organisations across the country to put together workshops for young unemployed people.

**Examples of Good Local Projects****City Gateway**

<http://www.citygateway.org.uk/projects/youth/welcome-to-our-youth-projects>

Provides a range of services for young unemployed people in Tower Hamlets through partnerships with 30 international firms. Services include training, apprenticeships, and employability sessions such as CV workshops.

**Milton Keynes Christian Foundation**

<http://www.mkchristianfoundation.co.uk>

An experienced faith-based charity that has supported young people through social enterprises (mechanics training, childcare experience, catering business, housing provision) for many years.

**Ascend, South Oxhey**

<http://www.ascend.org.uk/digdeepgarden.asp>

Ascend's "Dig Deep Community Allotment Project" provides unemployed people of all ages with a chance to train and develop through gaining construction, numeracy, literacy, and horticulture skills. It also offers a NVQ in Horticulture.

**The Source, Rushmoor**

<http://www.thesourceforyou.co.uk/index.shtml>

Provides general support through a youth cafe, as well as mentoring and support for young people.

**Safe, Southampton**

<http://www.safe.org.uk/index.cfm>

Helps disadvantaged people – including young people- to rethink their lives and progress into work or further learning. It partners with local churches in Southampton to deliver its Youth Choices course, which offers job-related mentoring and support for young people.