



Young People and Employment Task Group

Final Report

Place Scrutiny Committee

June 2015

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To ensure the provision of truly independent careers advice and guidance based on an individual's interests, abilities and aspirations, and to inform students of all the options available to them, including vocational qualifications, through Devon County Council's contract with Careers South West.
2	To urge schools to provide more flexible work experience opportunities for their students, encourage independent learning and cooperate with Jobcentre Plus in order to raise awareness of how to increase students' employability among young people and teachers.
3	Devon County Council to start providing Jobcentre Plus eight-week work experience placements for young people.
4	To urge schools, careers advisors and the business community to build formal channels of integration.

INTRODUCTION

1. The makeup of Devon's economy has some unique characteristics – it has higher levels of employment than the UK average but wages are 14% below the national average. It is also characterised by many small businesses, with 96% of enterprises employing less than 20 people. Another particular feature of the Devon economy is the high level of self-employment, accounting for over 12% of the workforce. This indicates a wealth of entrepreneurial spirit, flexibility and resilience. However, the county is still heavily reliant on public sector employment. In Exeter, for example, 37% of workers are employed in the public sector. Elsewhere in Devon, the proportion ranges from 29% in North Devon to 23% in Mid Devon. Whilst the established tourism, food and agriculture sectors are still strong, the nature of the economy is changing. However, new retail businesses in Exeter and high occupancy rates on industrial estates are encouraging positive signs.¹

2. Skill shortages present a barrier to growth and productivity. Particular challenges concern employability skills amongst some sectors of the population and specific skill sets required for economic sectors. It is essential to ensure that available training responds to the needs of employers. Also important is the generation of a culture of enterprise, especially amongst young people. This task group embarked on finding out how young people can be supported in order to access education, training and/or employment. The group was particularly keen to:

- a) identify barriers employers encounter in recruiting a young person or apprentice and their requirements
- b) compare the three top “hotspot” areas with the highest numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and young people claiming job seekers' allowance (JSA) – Bideford and the immediate vicinity (including Appledore, Northam and Westward Ho!), Exeter (EX2 and EX4 postcode areas) and Tiverton – with high-performing areas in order to establish differences of approach and policy, if any
- c) engage with secondary schools and the wider community in those hotspot areas in order to understand opportunities and/or barriers in the transition from education to work from the young people's perspective
- d) investigate the level of integration of work experience opportunities in the 16-18 curriculum

3. Members of this task group who present this report are Councillors Frank Biederman, Peter Bowden, Andrew Moulding, Ray Radford and Primary Parent Governor Representative Deborah Fontana-Fox.

¹ See Devon County Council's Strategic Plan *Backing Devon 2011-2014*

FINDINGS

4. Statistically speaking, young people in Devon face better-than-average odds in the transition from education to employment, with levels of NEETs and “not knowns” in Devon being among the lowest in the country. However, the NEET figure in Devon persists around the 1,000 mark (1,020 in March 2015), and is particularly high in the so-called “hotspot areas” in Bideford and the immediate vicinity (including Appledore, Northam and Westward Ho!), Exeter (EX2 and EX4 postcode areas) and Tiverton.

5. The task group commends the amount of opportunities locally for NEETs and/or young people claiming JSA, including Devon County Council’s “enterprise in schools” grant scheme, the unsuccessful apprenticeships applicants’ project, apprenticeship support for children in care, targeted support for young people aged 16-18 living in a NEET hotspot area, support for teenage parents, or support for young people through three schemes delivered as part of the Plymouth and South West Peninsula City Deal. Various organisations also provide help and support, including Young Devon which runs an apprenticeship programme in a few locations across Devon, or the Northern Devon Employment & Skills Board which runs a pupil and employer engagement programme for Year 7 pupils who may be at risk of disengaging in education. Devon County Council also commissions careers South West (CSW) to deliver a number of its statutory duties, including identifying NEETs and offering appropriate impartial guidance and support.

DISADVANTAGED YOUNG PEOPLE IN HOTSPOT AREAS

6. A number of participants highlighted that young people who are classed as NEET or claim JSA for longer than six months often have a low level of skills which prevents them from accessing or committing to work experience or employment, i.e. a lack of social skills, work ethics and initiative, poor presentation and interview skills as well as a lack of ability for self-help in order to identify and locate opportunities. This might be due for a number of reasons mainly in relation to their backgrounds and include complex issues such as domestic abuse or leaving care. Approximately half of NEETs also have special educational needs. NEETs in Devon currently (March 2015) represented 4.2% of the cohort of young people which is the lowest the figure it has ever been but the remaining NEETs come from very complex backgrounds which makes prevention and early intervention crucial, e.g. via headteachers. Those individuals are able to access specialist support either from schools or other agencies but there is a limit to what can be offered. Devon County Council has established early indicators in Year 9 and 10 and a single-view database where all young people are now automatically highlighted with a lower-than-average progress, who are in care or who have special educational needs.

7. The task group did not detect any specific difference in approach or policy in the three top “hotspot” areas and Jobcentre Plus soft data shows that nearly 50% of JSA claimants had GCSE grades of A-C. The task group recognises that the reason for a comparatively high proportion of NEETs and young people claiming JSA in the hotspot areas might not be a lack of public services but their complex backgrounds as well as historic,

demographic or structural problems in the areas. For example, more businesses in North Devon employ young people straight from school or college than in the rest of England – almost twice the national average. However, North Devon youngsters are perceived to be less well-prepared for work than nationally (see Skills Research Report by the Northern Devon Employment & Skills Board).

CAREERS ADVICE

8. Ensuring young people receive the right kind of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) at the right time is crucial in order to enable them to make informed decisions about their future. Careers South West used to be contracted by Devon County Council to provide impartial careers advice in all secondary schools across Devon. A change in national policy meant that now the local authority only funds the service for pupil premium students and students with special educational needs. Schools now determine autonomously how they provide impartial careers advice and fund any additional provision at their discretion. Providing impartial careers advice is one Ofsted requirement against which schools are inspected but the task group found evidence that the quality and level of the independent and impartial advice and guidance is inconsistent across the County.

9. The task group heard how teachers can be reluctant to excuse students from their classes in order to attend appointments with careers advisors at the school because this affects their attendance figures. Teachers seem particularly reluctant if the student in question performs at grade C or below but especially those students might benefit from careers advice the most. Education providers need to be more proactive in helping to prepare young people for their future. The task group heard how there seems to be a perceived “golden route” for students to progress to of A-levels and university, which must be addressed. Participants expressed a perceived lack of national strategic overview in that vocational qualifications are currently not being promoted as a valuable alternative to a more academic pathway. They called for a “twin-track approach” of vocational and academic qualifications according to the students’ interests, abilities and aspirations.

10. Young people who the task group spoke to expressed that careers advice was not tailored to the individual, their interests, abilities and aspirations. They explained how careers advice, in their experience, was hurried and prescriptive, with the advisers not listening to the young person and what they would like to do or achieve. They described how they felt a push towards A-Levels and university through the careers advice at school. They believe that schools know about vocational routes but did not promote them; careers advice tended to focus on colleges and universities. Some students expressed how they had received no overview guidance of all the options available to them and expressed that, at a time when they came to the end of the academic year, they still did not know what their options were and how they felt underprepared. They felt they were supported and free to make their choices but had received little or no information as to what these choices are.

11. Schools need to have more consideration of apprenticeships and employment with training particularly from the age of 16. The perception that vocational training and qualifications are of lower value and for the less able students needs addressing urgently. The task group heard that teachers might lack awareness of the post-16 landscape and might share this perception. The task group also felt it essential for parents to be better advised of the opportunities available to young people apart from the A-level route. One

participant suggested that work experience could be offered to careers advisors and teachers as part of their continued professional development.

12. Another rather uncomfortable viewpoint was repeatedly expressed to the task group, namely that funding is retained in the education sector if young people remain in education, rather than accessing employment. In other words, schools have a financial interest in keeping young people in education for longer. There seems to be a conflict of interest between what is best for the young person versus the funding needs of the education sector. Providing advice for young people on their career options has to be impartial in order to ensure that the path the young person chooses is right for them and does not serve any education provider's financial agenda.

Recommendation 1: To ensure the provision of truly independent careers advice and guidance based on an individual's interests, abilities and aspirations, and to inform students of all the options available to them, including vocational qualifications, through Devon County Council's contract with Careers South West.

IMPROVING EMPLOYABILITY

13. A City & Guilds Ways into Work report revealed that four or more interactions with an employer make it five times more likely for a young person to go into employment or remain in education. Young people are also more likely to take advice and guidance from employers and workplace mentors than teachers. The task group found that the provision of work experience in Year 10 varies from school to school. Schools can also do more to help accommodate flexible work experience placements as well as timing placements so that students gain work experience before they make any choices such as their GCSE or A-Level subjects, which have an impact on their future career choices. Currently, students expressed that they have little or no context of options and opportunities when choosing their subjects. There is also significant scope to encourage more voluntary work experience, e.g. during holidays and promoting more independent learning at school so students learn to make choices and taking responsibility for those.

14. Furthermore, NHS employers, the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service and Devon & Cornwall Police only offer a limited amount of work experience placements at certain times during the year which do currently not coincide with allocated weeks during the academic year for work experience in some schools and attending a placement with those organisations would have a negative impact on students' attendance record which in turn can lead to unfavourable league table results. Some schools are embarking on making their timetables more flexible during the academic year. Some schools are also working towards finding students appropriate, meaningful work experience placements which reflect their aspirations and academic profiles.

15. But schools mainly focus on educational outcomes and producing league table results, rather than the future employability of their students. Schools having employment targets for young people would help significantly because the moment employment becomes an outcome for schools this would change their focus. The task group also heard how Jobcentre Plus has been trying to cooperate with schools in order to deliver employability awareness.

Recommendation 2: To urge schools to provide more flexible work experience opportunities for their students, encourage independent learning and cooperate with Jobcentre Plus in order to raise awareness of how to increase students' employability among young people and teachers.

16. Devon County Council, its contractors and local NHS organisations do currently not systematically offer Jobcentre Plus eight-week work experience placements for young people.

Recommendation 3: Devon County Council to start providing Jobcentre Plus eight-week work experience placements for young people.

MATCHING EDUCATION AND LABOUR MARKET NEEDS

17. The task group heard how there is a perceived mismatch between what employers want and what the education system is producing in terms of getting young people ready for employment. For example, almost a third of responding businesses in the recent Northern Devon Employment & Skills Board's Northern Devon skills survey reported a skills gap, where an employee is not fully proficient at their job, compared to a rate of 18% across England. Of the 341 businesses surveyed, 50% had a vacancy or vacancies in the last 12 months and 22% had experienced difficulties in filling a vacancy. A quarter of businesses had employed staff undertaking apprenticeships in the last three years. Of those offering apprenticeships, the largest proportions operated in manufacturing, health and social care, and construction. As the number of employees increased, so too did the proportion of businesses employing staff undertaking apprenticeships. A slightly higher proportion of businesses, 29%, planned to offer apprenticeships in the next three years. In Exeter, the Met Office in Exeter has for instance experienced difficulties in recruiting for coding-based posts utilising specific digital skills.

18. This information illustrates how there is significant capacity in the labour market, even in NEET hotspot areas, and there seems to be a need for schools, careers advisors and businesses to cooperate much more closely. For example, there is currently no dedicated representative from education or careers advice on the Devon & Cornwall Business Council and no business representative on e.g. the pupil premium networks across schools. Better integration in this area would mean better awareness of local job opportunities and helping address any skills shortages. Schools need to be made aware of labour market intelligence and where labour/skills shortages occur or are likely to occur in the future, in order to link young people's education with employment goals.

Recommendation 4: To urge schools, careers advisors and the business community to build formal channels of integration.

19. University Technology Colleges (UTC) are partnerships between further education, universities and the private sector. The South Devon University Technical College is currently being built in Newton Abbot which seeks to bridge the gap between university and apprenticeships. The private sector sees this as an excellent innovation and pipeline of prospective talent. Young people attending may go on to university at 18 or straight into employment. The feedback from UTCs is that young people who graduate from this type of provision are ready for the workplace. UTCs provide the opportunity to excite young people 14-18 in engineering and provide a steer to careers in that field. UTCs focus on

project-based learning, and applying this learning on a daily basis within a business. This context is invaluable and is something schools should be looking to do as well.

BARRIERS FOR EMPLOYERS

20. Individual businesses who gave evidence to the task group repeatedly expressed that exam results are not important to them as long as a candidate has the right attitudes and skills to do a job. But a C-grade in Maths and English or above is necessary to access apprenticeships and employment; otherwise the employer has to fund the young person to access education in order to obtain those standards. This can be a significant barrier for employment from a small business' perspective. Employers should be able to employ a young person without being penalised.

21. Further barriers, which are particularly pertinent to Devon with its high percentage of enterprises employing less than 20 people, are time constraints and a potential loss of earnings when training a young person. Especially small businesses might not have the capacity and skills to develop a young person in addition to fulfilling their business commitments with often very few people. Businesses need more information on how successful developing a young person can be. Businesses also expressed a lack of information on where to find information on employing a young person or apprentice, as well as the struggle to recruit apprentices because of the businesses' low profile among students, schools and careers advisers.

BARRIERS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

22. Participants expressed that transport, especially in rural areas, is a barrier for young people to access employment. Although some funding can be made available to cover transport costs during someone's first month of employment and help schemes are available, e.g. the Devon Wheels to Work scheme, this problem seems to persist. Young people struggle covering transport costs with their job seekers' allowance or low wage in addition to other financial commitments. In addition, there are many jobs where it appears to be necessary for the young person to have their own transport, especially in rural areas. The lack of public transport in some parts of the County is also a real barrier to employment. There are some excellent cycle routes but they often do not tie in with cycle route to retail parks etc.

CONCLUSION

23. This investigation has shown that although young people in Devon have a favourable starting point compared to their fellows nationally, there is still much room for improvement locally, especially in provision of truly independent careers advice and guidance based on an individual's interests, abilities and aspirations as well as the integration of the education, careers advice and business sectors.

24. The task group would like to thank all those who participated in the process, for the detailed evidence they gave to the task group, for their time and effort and continued commitment to helping to shape this review and its recommendations for improvement.

***Councillors Frank Biederman, Chairman
Peter Bowden
Andrew Moulding
Ray Radford***

Deborah Fontana-Fox, Primary Parent Governor Representative

Copies of this report may be obtained from the Democratic Services & Scrutiny Secretariat at County Hall, Room G31, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4QD or by ringing 01392 384383. It will also be available on the County Council's website at:

www.devon.gov.uk/index/councildemocracy/decision_making/scrutiny/taskgroups.htm

If you have any questions or wish to talk to anyone about this report please contact Janine Gassmann, Scrutiny Officer, tel. 01392 384383 or email janine.gassmann@devon.gov.uk

WITNESSES AND EVIDENCE

During the course of the review, the task group interviewed:

- Careers South West
- Devon & Cornwall Business Council
- Devon County Council apprentices
- Devon County Council's economy and enterprise service
- Devon County Council's education and learning service
- Devon Youth Service which ran a survey of young people on the task group's behalf
- Members of the Devon Youth Parliament
- Education Business Partnership
- Exmouth Community College
- Exeter & Heart of Devon Employment & Skills Board
- Individual business owners
- Jobcentre Plus
- Northern Devon Employment & Skills Board
- Parents
- St James School students
- St Luke's Science and Sports College
- Tiverton High School
- Young Devon

The task group also reviewed a wide range of additional evidence, including, but not exclusively:

Apprenticeship Reform – reports and consultation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/apprenticeship-changes>

Helping Young People into Work

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/helping-young-people-into-work>

HM Government: Building Engagement, Building Futures: Our Strategy to Maximise the Participation of 16-24 Year Olds in Education, Training and Work (2011)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-sets-out-strategy-for-helping-young-people-access-education-training-and-work--2>

Increasing opportunities for young people and helping them to achieve their potential (incorporates Raising of the Participation Age)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/increasing-opportunities-for-young-people-and-helping-them-to-achieve-their-potential>

Local Government Association – Young People

<http://www.local.gov.uk/young-people;jsessionid=39425DA352675879C5962F1DB6750CE8>

Lord Young – Enterprise Education Report

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/338749/EnterpriseforAll-lowres-200614.pdf

National Careers Service website

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

**Skills Research Report by the Northern Devon Employment & Skills Board,
December 2013**

<http://mediafiles.thedms.co.uk/Publication/CW-NDevT/cms/pdf/Northern%20Devon%20Skills%20Research%20Report%20-%20December%202013.pdf>

Ways into Work: Youth Employment Research

http://www.cityandguilds.com/About-Us/What-We-Do/Our-Purpose/~/_media/Documents/About-us/Policy-papers/Ways%20into%20Work%20%20Youth%20Employment%20May12.ashx