



Pathways For All: Commission on Post-16 Education and Training

Chaired by:

Laura-Jane Rawlings MBE

CEO of Youth Employment UK

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Foreword

I am delighted to present the Commission's Report. Over the last 12 months, we have explored the impact of the Government's post-16 qualification reform. Our intention was to test the hypothesis that the reforms would likely lead to more young people becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) due to a lack of available and suitable pathways for them where they live.

Our Commissioners have worked hard to explore the risks of the current policy, but also to find solutions that bring together the ambition of the Government alongside the real experiences and needs of young people and providers. Commissioners agree that we should have high aspirations for young people and for the education and skills system that supports them. We agree that this ambition needs further exploration; it cannot be that the cost of this reform is a narrowing of pathways and aspiration. Young people without a pathway are not an acceptable 'collateral damage' of fast paced, non-evidence led education reform.

This Commission has sought the voices and experiences of all actors in the education and skills systems, but importantly it has sought out evidence that should be centre stage when designing system change.

Through this evidence we have made a number of recommendations that we believe will support policy development and also protect young people from becoming NEET.

During the Commission, the plans for an Advanced British Standard was announced and so the Commission used the evidence gathered to also look at long term education and skills reform. I am delighted to bring to this report the Young Person's Entitlement, a new framework for post-16 education. The Entitlement puts young people back at the heart of the education and skills system and sets a bold and ambitious plan for realising a system that will meet the needs of the learner, employer and the future world, whatever that may look like in 10 or 20 years time.

I hope that our work here can begin the start of a conversation about not only a bold ambition, but a bold ambition for everyone, everywhere.



Laura-Jane Rawlings MBE

Chair of the Commission
CEO of Youth Employment UK

"The Young Person's Entitlement is a really great way of ensuring young people have the knowledge and tools to progress into the career that's right for them. I wish it had been around when I was at school! Having the opportunity to work not only on interpersonal skills, but to also gain knowledge and insight into subjects like finance will really help young people feel much more confident about their futures. A lot of the anxiety that young people have comes from fear of the unknown and not feeling prepared to face the challenges ahead, but I can see that the Young Person's Entitlement will help to rectify this and support young people in whatever their future holds."



Ciara
Youth Ambassador
Youth Employment UK

Key Findings

Throughout the Commission, evidence was gathered and heard from a range of expert organisations, providers and young people.

All stakeholders believe in the power of education to level up for young people, recognising the transformative power of education on social mobility, skill building, personal development and career preparation. Experts recognised the intent of the Department for Education and the Secretary of State to raise attainment levels for young people and there is clear evidence that the higher the education level acquired, the stronger the life prospects are for young people.

It was also recognised that raising the esteem in which vocational and technical qualifications are held was important. The world of work is rapidly changing and the education and skills system needs to ensure it is delivering qualifications that meet the demands of employers and the future world of work.

Level 3+ qualifications are not attainable by all young people and personal circumstances and protected characteristics such as SEND can greatly affect educational experiences. It is important to value those who cannot achieve at this level and those who require adjustments equally within the system. Education reform should aim to provide high ambitions for their futures at the most appropriate level, along with the best possible support to meet those high ambitions, and success should be measured by the progress made, rather than the level of achievement.

Throughout the inquiry, Commissioners sought to understand how the reforms might impact different groups of young people in different local areas, in different ways. It was not possible to find this data at a national level, which led to the Commission investigating 2 hyperlocal areas: Kettering and Darlington. Through these case studies, we saw that making national policy decisions that affect very different local areas comes with significant risk and local areas lack the access to data held by national government that can help them to target specific cohorts and measure progress. This means that it cannot be guaranteed that all young people in their local area will be able to access an appropriate pathway based on their needs, ambitions and access requirements.

Throughout the inquiry other parts of the education and skills system were looked at. Evidence was presented on the current issues of English and maths GCSE attainment and what the increasing rates of attainment below Level 4 mean for young people and their post-16 pathway. It was clear to see through the evidence that the English and maths GCSE and resit policy is not working and puts many young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Careers education and work experience were explored as opportunities or barriers to progress for young people. Through evidence it is clear to see that not all young people are receiving appropriate guidance and experiences of work before they have to make significant post-16 choices, which can lead to selecting the wrong pathway and result in increased dropout rates.

As part of its work, Commissioners explored what values should be at the heart of education and skills system-change policy. We recognise that it is right to be ambitious, but that ambition for one person is different to the ambitions of another.

The Problem

In February 2024, the ONS Labour Market Analysis showed the youth unemployment rate at **11.6% compared to 3.8% of the all age range**. In addition, the economic inactivity rate for young people sits at 42.1%, almost double the rate of the all working age group of 21.9%, and long term unemployment of over 12 months or more on the rise for young people too.¹

The impact of being unemployed and not in education is significant for young people, and has an impact on the economy and for society as a whole. There are many reasons why a young person might fall into this category including low educational attainment.

While the academic route from GCSE to A level and into university is well understood, **only 37%** of young people take that path in their final years at school or college.²

The routes for the majority are much less clear cut.

While there have been changes to the pathway from A level to degree, other pathways at Level 2 and at Level 3 are changing much more fundamentally. The concern is that these changes will remove a well-respected pathway to higher education and skilled employment from a significant number of young people, particularly those who are most marginalised, and lead some to disengage from education altogether.

For young people, the routes to employment are narrowing.

Only **1 in 3** young people think employers are supportive of hiring them and just under half are not confident that they will progress into a good job. The closer young people get to working age the more likely that they will answer these questions negatively.³

Therefore, the risk to the current education reform policy is that some young people could become NEET as they struggle to access a pathway that suits their aspirations and personal circumstances.

Being NEET is detrimental to a young person's health, wellbeing and life satisfaction, and increases the likelihood of 'unhealthy behaviours' such as drug taking and crime. Being NEET for six months before the age of 21 increases the risk of unemployment or low pay in later life.

The impact of youth unemployment can endure for years, damaging individuals' life chances and work prospects. **'It could potentially cost the economy £10 billion in 2022 in lost productivity, tax revenue, and additional welfare costs'**.⁴

1. UK Labour Market: February 2024 - Office for National Statistics

2. EDSK: Broken Ladders, Why the 'ladder of opportunity' is broken for so many young people, and how to fix it (December 2023)

3. Youth Employment UK: 2023 Youth Voice Census

4. Prince's Trust, Learning and Work Institute & HSBC, 'Facing the future: Employment prospects for young people after Coronavirus', (March 2021)

Recommendations

Pause and review current plans to defund qualifications

Pause defunding in order to carry out and publish a social mobility impact assessment of defunding qualifications.

Carry out and publish a place-based review of the availability of pathways. Do not defund qualifications until there is a quality alternative that is available in all locations.

Review current qualifications

As part of the review of technical qualifications, consider how to ensure that high quality vocational qualifications, including smaller technical qualifications, are available as an alternative to T Levels.

Continue to work towards simplifying the landscape, removing 'duplicate' technical qualifications of the same size and subject content.

Increase local collaboration

Support local partnerships between schools, colleges, independent training providers, and specialist partners such as Supported Employment, along with local councils to review provision and student need.

Increase meaningful work experience

Review industry placements in T Levels to enable flexibility of engagement for employers and build evidence of what makes work experience meaningful.

Improve careers education and guidance

Ensure all young people have timely and high quality guidance and experience of vocational education to enable them to make informed choices about their pathways.

Empower all teachers to deliver careers education by incorporating it into teacher training and offering teacher externships in industries aligned with their subject areas as part of teacher CPD.

Improve apprenticeship support

Review the Apprenticeship Levy to provide extra support for employers to take on younger apprentices, those at L2 and L3, and those who need additional support, for example by ring fencing funding or offering full or partial funding depending on age or level. Remove the need for an EHCP or diagnosis in order to receive differentiated support.

Change requirements for English and maths

Review the policy of compulsory retakes, allow young people to move onto qualifications with support.

Work with employers to make English and maths an exit requirement, rather than entry requirement, particularly for apprenticeships, and provide resources and funding to enable young people to achieve that.

Young Person's Entitlement

Every young person should be able to access a pathway to employment that meets their needs. The Commission recommends developing a coherent framework, based on robust evidence, of curriculum, qualifications and pathways to form a Young Person's Entitlement.

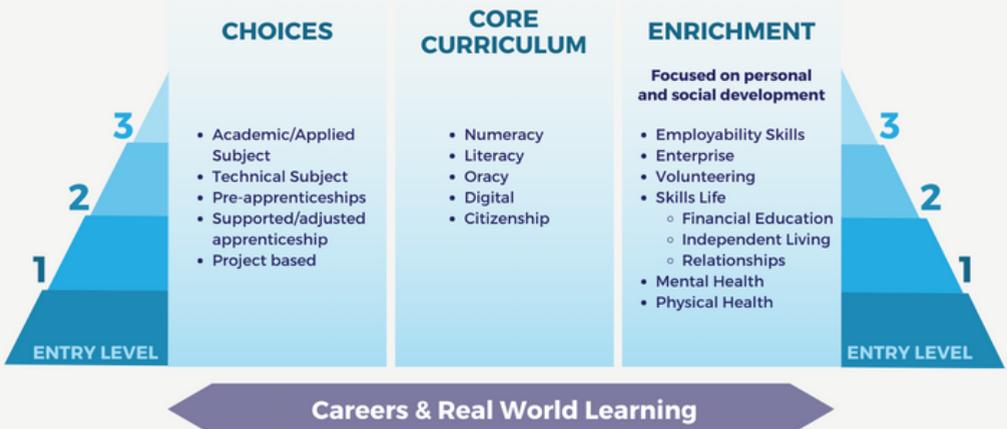
This framework has been designed by Youth Employment UK to support the development of future education reform for young people.

Our design principle is to create an education and skills system that inspires and prepares young people for the future, a system that:

- allows for choice, opportunity and support for personal growth
- develops them for the future, whatever it brings
- prepares them for employment.

The Young Person's Entitlement reimagines how the post-16 curriculum supports young people. The framework sets out young people's choice subjects (academic or vocational), a core supporting curriculum, and enrichment activities as three even pillars. These pillars, available at each level from Entry Level to Level 3, can be flexed to support where young people are in their learning for each. The framework ensures that across each pillar careers and work related learning is woven into session design.

The Young Person's Entitlement provides a framework for what it is young people and employers need to see in an education and skills system. The framework allows for flexibility at a local level and guarantees that young people who are not able to achieve higher levels of education at this time have an equal quality opportunity at the right level for them.



Components of the Young Person's Entitlement

CHOICES:	<p>Young people should have a broad set of choices available to them. All choices should be seen as equal in their quality and only differ in the learning styles, teaching and assessment methods that are used.</p> <p>Practical, vocational, project, applied or academic subjects should offer a quality curriculum that furthers the students knowledge and skills in their chosen area and ensures that the student can complete their choice curriculum and move onto a positive next destination.</p>
CORE CURRICULUM:	<p>The core curriculum should prioritise Numeracy, Literacy, Oracy, Digital and Citizenship. All young people should have appropriate levels of education and training that build their knowledge and confidence in these core competencies and build on the needs of business and the world in which we live.</p>
ENRICHMENT:	<p>The enrichment offer should be balanced alongside the Choice and Core curriculum, recognising that employers and young people themselves need the skills that are developed through enrichment programmes as much as any other education aspect. Enrichment allows for young people to develop resilience and to measure their worth and success through a different lens, to reflect, learn and develop.</p> <p>Enrichment should include cultural, social and economic opportunities that enhance social mobility and level up for young people.</p> <p>All students should have access to pastoral and mental health support during their time in post-16 education. For young people with special education needs and disabilities, this may also include supported work placements or job coaching.</p>
CAREERS AND REAL WORK LEARNING:	<p>Careers and Real Work Learning should be a common thread in all curriculum design. This may include enterprise, careers activity or work experiences.</p> <p>Workplace learning needs to meet the needs of the individual learner and be tailored to their aspirations and career ambitions. For young people with special education needs and disabilities, the placements require expert support for both the employer and the learner.</p>

The Commissioners

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Councillor Robert Alden, Birmingham City Council

Nick Bailey, research fellow in responsible leadership, Birmingham Business School

Rob Brooks, Senior Programme Manager - NHS apprenticeships, NHS Education

Laura Davis, CEO, BASE-UK

James Kewin, Deputy CEO, Sixth Form Colleges Association

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