

State of the Region

A Report on the state of young people and youth services in Yorkshire & Humber



Youth Work Unit
Peer Research Group

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Introduction



The idea behind the 'State of the Region' was founded in May 2021, the research project is designed to give young people (us) an opportunity not only to gain experience in research but for us to dive into an area of young people's lives that we are interested in. We hope that by researching these areas, we as young activists, and decision-makers can take better, positive actions in improving the lives of young people who are ultimately the future.

The four areas that the first 'State of the Region' report looks at are:

- 1) **Youth voice and attitudes towards young people** by Will Solomon
- 2) **Enrichment and open access provisions** by Mitchell Winter
- 3) **Youth opportunities and employment** by Jude Daniel Smith
- 4) **SEND youth provisions - access all areas** by Reese Spanton

These four areas cover a wide range of young people's lives and often overlap. However, this report won't be the last of its kind; it's simply the beginning. There are many other research areas out there that young people will look at in the future ranging from transport to sex ed, climate change to carers. These research areas might be broad or be extremely specific but, that's one of the great advantages of this kind of research. Its range, its variety, the different styles you'll see throughout. Each researcher has brought their own angle, experiences and personality to each of their chapters. Future research might not be presented in this style because a film about youth voice can provide just as much insight as an eight-page document. As long as the research presented is accurate, fair and above all useful then it remains valid.

Something that you'll discover as you go through this report (especially in the youth voice chapter) is the difference between consultation and voice. Although both have positives there are two major setbacks with consultation.

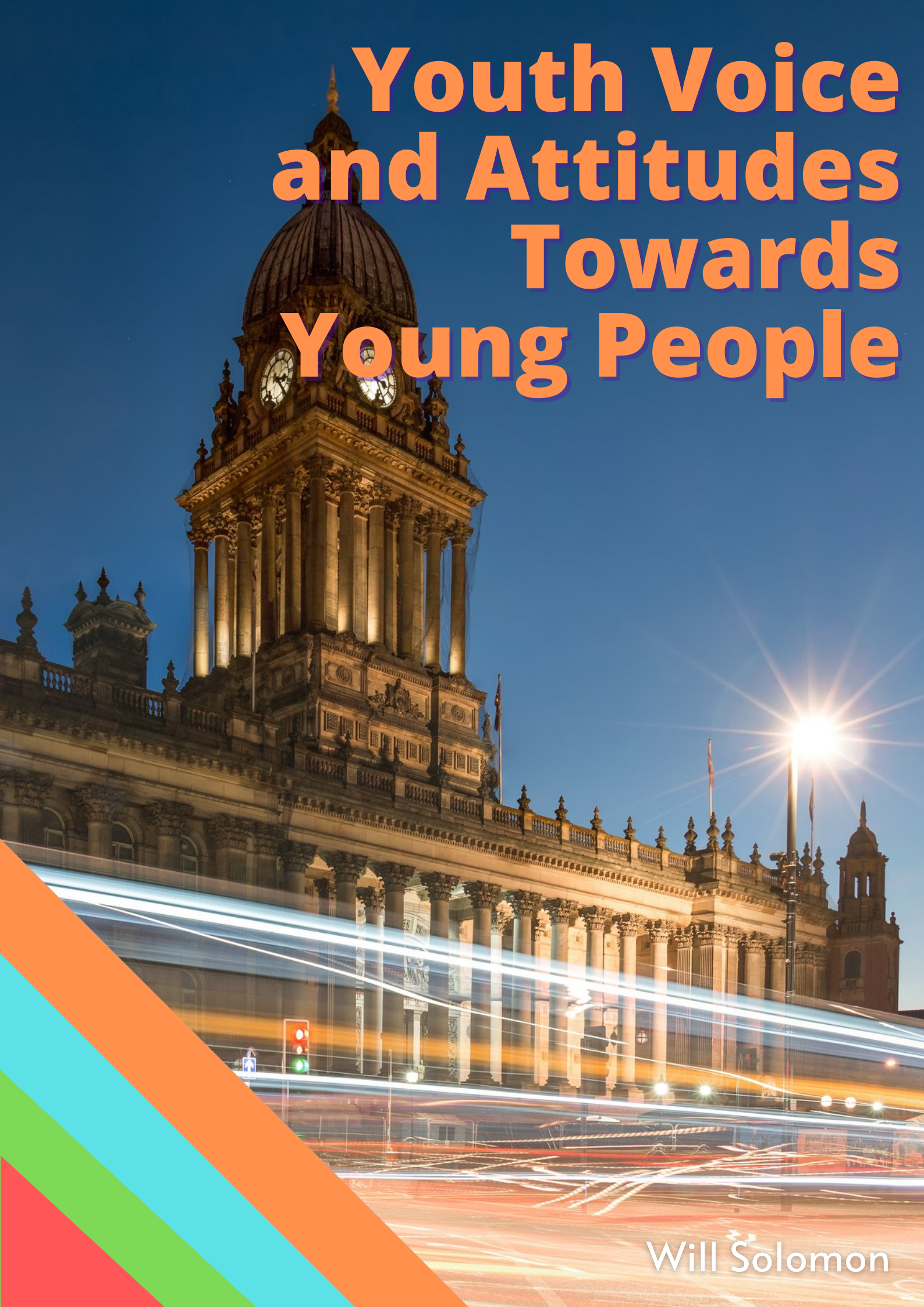
- 1) Its one-sided and doesn't require dialogue
- 2) It assumes decision-makers know what they're on about.

Consultation is very specific, often to a single issue, which seems perfectly logical. But what if that's not the biggest issue that young people are facing. Youth voice gives young people a chance to tell decision-makers what they want, why they want it and how it should be done. 'State of the Region' is just another layer of youth voice. Young people have decided where they want to focus their research, so we carried it out (with much-needed help from professionals) and we saw it through.

Part of the reason we wanted to be a part of this team and carry out this research was that we wanted research focusing on issues we knew affected young people and who better to do that than us. The 'State of the Region' report isn't the end of our research it's just a glimpse of what's to come. Each researcher has provided recommendations for decision-makers so they can be informed when they make those choices that affect young people.

Finally, we'd like to thank the University of Hull and the Youth Work Unit in particular Charlee, Gillian and Christine, as well as everyone we interviewed and spoke to.

Youth Voice and Attitudes Towards Young People



Will Solomon

Do the attitudes towards young people affect the decision making process and are young people genuinely included or is youth voice purely superficial?

Article 12 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child says:

“1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law”.

It is this that means that local authorities have to offer youth voices and make sure that young people are heard. This section of 'State of the Region' reviews youth voices focusing on West Yorkshire (although other parts of the region will come up). It also draws the link between attitudes towards young people and their involvement in the decision making process.

We spoke to Directors of Children's Services, Heads of Youth Services, Youth Workers and young people about youth voice, young people in the decision-making process and how attitudes towards young people affect that.

I define youth voice: “as the inclusion of young people (11-18 or up to 25 with additional needs) in the decision-making process in a capacity where they can advise and scrutinise decision-makers, beyond one-off consultations, or where they can act on their own project”. It's this definition that I'll be using in my analysis of youth voice.

There is a very particular distinction I'd like to draw between voice and consultation. A senior youth worker in Yorkshire & Humber told me:

“I think there is a massive difference between consultation and voice. The reason I say that is; I can consult you ... but I don't have to listen to [you] ... But if I listen to you, if I hear you, if I give you voice and give you the opportunity to participate in the decision making processes that means I have to co-design the answer [with you]”.

Consultation is almost certainly a questionnaire and don't get me wrong, questionnaires can be incredibly useful in understanding the needs of a group (we've used questionnaires in this research) however it leaves that group out of the rest of the decision-making process. This is incredibly different from voice. Proper, effective voice. Voice requires dialogue between young people and decision-makers and gives young people the opportunity to hold decision-makers to account more effectively. A Metro Mayor can send a consultation out to young people but they can only be held truly to account if they have a permanent youth voice group (much like the Sheffield City Region Youth Combined Assembly who advise and scrutinise Dan Jarvis MP - Mayor. A group which was chosen as an example of positive youth voice in a roundtable to the Department of Culture Media and Sport).

However, youth voice doesn't necessarily require a youth group. From my own experiences, as one of the youth representatives and co-optees on my local council's (Calderdale) Climate Change Working Party, young people who are folded into the decision-making process can produce just as effective youth voice as external scrutiny boards. I joined the Climate Change Working Party on my third youth council meeting and have been a part of it for over two years. During that time I and other young people have been a part of decision making of when to set Calderdale's net-zero target (2038), climate communication strategies, our emission reduction pathways and advised on issues around young people & schools. The reason this type of youth voice worked was that it enabled me and other young people to be permanent and listened to part of the decision making process. With the ability to hold to account, follow up and work closely with council staff and councillors. The same ability to advise and scrutinise decision-makers can be found in groups like youth councils, the West Yorkshire & Harrogate HCP Youth Collective as well as other groups in Yorkshire like the Regional Youth Climate Assembly (RYCA) and the Sheffield City Region Youth Combined Assembly.

One of the key frustrations that young people often have with consultation is the lack of feeding back. A youth lead Bradford told me:

"Young people aren't always necessarily fed back to very well about what has happened to what they said so when people come to us and say we want to talk to young people we will say to them what's your plan for feeding back to young people once you've had your chat with them because feeding back [about] difference made [isn't there]. And quite often young people get fed up"

Lack of feedback is a major drawback in any youth voice opportunity and is most often found in consultation. It instantly makes it one way and youth voice requires effective dialogue with decision makers

Attitudes towards young people

There have always been negative stereotypes of young people particularly in media, a roundtable conducted by the Home Office in 2012 into the 'Public's Attitudes to youth crime' states:

"First, they talked about the intimidating presence of groups of young people on the streets and in parks. These groups were not seen as 'gangs' but rather as informal groups that participants found intimidating"

and in Hertsmere Young Researchers report called 'Unbalanced negative media portrayal of youth' the third most common in the 22-65+ group said that 'hanging around in big groups' was a negative image of young people. Actual intimidating behaviour came fifth. A senior youth worker in the Yorkshire & Humber youth work unit said:

"I think groups of young people have always been scapegoated so we've had the mods, the rockers, the punks, the emos, the goths, the chavs. So I think groups of young people have been scapegoated and you see that in media coverage of young people"

When asked the question "How do you feel the community you live in views young people" young people (from across Yorkshire & Humber) told us:

"Bad, chavs, non-educated, immature"

"They view us with fear and think we are up to no good and all we want to do is sit and chill with

friends"

"I think they view young people as people that go around and do what they want and cause trouble or don't do enough and sit around all day"

"They definitely see us as a nuisance. The older people are always complaining in our Facebook community group that we are out on the street or in the parks causing trouble.. but this is a very small minority."

Other young people said

"They don't like us very much"

You would not be blamed for thinking that this was the biggest stereotype that held young people back when taking part in voice but when I asked the question "Do you think there's a link between attitudes towards young people and either the involvement in the decision-making process or the decisions made about them?" this is what youth leads and workers from across Yorkshire said:

"I am not convinced that we listen to them [young people who aren't as articulate and not part of SEND] and can reach them as well as we can do and I'm not convinced that when we do that their views are not as respected. And I think age has something to do with that as well ... and a big part of that is to do with how ideas come out of your mouth"

"Hearing the voice of groups of young people, particularly hearing the voices of young people where the perception is they're being problematic in communities ... very often if we stopped and listen to about what they are telling us about what's going on for them we'd have a much deeper understanding ... and they'd be part of that solution"

Young people who aren't as used to the formal youth council/voice setting are not listened to as well as they should be. Despite them being as compassionate, as intelligent, as insightful and having just as good ideas. Decision-makers can get nervous when speaking to young people because, as one Youth Worker put it:

"Young people are unpredictable"

This is true. We are unpredictable because we're all different with different needs, experiences and insights. Often decision-makers are surprised by the depth of our knowledge or passion in a subject. Our range of opinions spans many, many topics and issues, so a meeting with young people could cover climate change, hate crime, public transport and mental health. Often young people aren't as drilled into social norms and etiquettes. Young people are unpredictable.

This unpredictability is not a reason not to speak to us though, if anything its a reason to speak to us and to ensure youth voice because if you go into a meeting expecting to hear something and then something else comes up that shifts your focus for the better then that meeting has become far more useful than a meeting simply validating what you expected to hear. I've found this when doing this research, often when speaking to someone something unexpected will come up and that's not only important but its one of the cornerstones of voice. Voice requires longer, more in-depth, more meaningful discussion about something allowing unexpected but ultimately incredibly useful and important points to come up. I should stress that young people who are not used to formal settings being excluded is at no

fault to youth workers. Often funding being stripped away from youth services makes it incredibly hard to reach out to people (funding to youth services and young people's role in deciding where that money goes is something I go into more later).

In fact, youth voice can have a positive impact on the attitudes towards young people. Whether that be contained within the decision-making process or in the wider world. Often when you start youth voice and start engagement with decision-makers they become more and more open to including and expanding youth voice. I've seen this through Calderdale Youth Council's relationship with Calderdale Council. We sit on two of the council's committees as co-optees: Climate Change (which I talked about earlier) and Youth Scrutiny (which our MYP sits on). When I ask a Director of Children's Services in West Yorkshire whether youth voice has an impact on the attitudes towards young people they said:

"I think it has to have done ... what we've seen the whole youth voice and the profile and the way that's been publicised and the reports ... we have a lot of social media ... it can't have done anything in my mind other than create a positive view raised the profile of the importance of listening towards young people"

There is another attitude that I want to talk about, not necessarily directed at young people but one that affects us all the same. This is the 'next generation' approach to issues. This is the idea that everything we fight for is for the next generation: "the next generation need better education", "we need to invest in future generations", "the next generation deserves better". A senior youth worker in Yorkshire and Humber said:

"Don't tell me you're the future. You actually deserve services and change now and it's this thing of ... almost climate change is going to happen in the future ... we can make a change to the climate in the future ... it's this idea that everything can change in the future ... you deserve change now ... but because you don't vote and you're parents don't kick off or whoever it's almost like we can ignore you and we're just going to focus on the people who vote for us"

There are issues that span generations, particularly climate change, but too many issues are given over to the 'next generation' which does nothing but delay action. Young people want to see action taken they want to see things change. However, one youth lead told me:

"the cogs of government are often very slow"

In some respects this is good it means there's proper scrutiny however it means that the 'next generation' or generations come and go by the time a decision is made. If it's ever made. This is where youth voice comes in; young people experience the vast majority of problems in the UK which includes the issues that directly affect adults which then affects their children. Young people can offer real insight into issues that face Britain and their solutions. There is an argument that when young people get old enough they can find a job around that issue or vote for change or stand for public office themselves. However, even if you're a 16-year-old who knows there's something wrong in your community and wants to be part of the solution waiting two years to be 18 to vote or get a job that can be too long to wait. So the pressing issues, the ones that can't be left to the next generation (especially climate change) need young people to be involved in identifying the problem and creating a solution, through effective, respected and properly funded youth voice.

Votes at 16

No matter how good youth voice is there will always be a major drawback. We can scrutinise and advise our political leaders as much as we like but we can't choose our political leaders. In Scotland and Wales, the voting age has been taken down to 16, the voting age in England and Northern Ireland must also fall to 16.

One youth lead told me:

"I feel that that the young voice work we've done is very strong and the young people are very clear in what they want I think unfortunately what they actually want is not the direction of travel that the council nor government is going in, in this moment of time ... I think young people were consulted, listened to but then I feel that at times where what they want conflicts with either the nation picture or the local picture of where the council want to go that is when the young people do not see any movement forward. The young people that I work with have extremely strong views about quite a lot of different things ... their main thought, which is very interesting, is if the voting age changed and if it was dropped to 14 or dropped to 16 would there be a difference in how local the views and nationally the views [would be heard] which I think is a very interesting point"

When I ask young people about votes at 16 they said:

"If you give young people the [vote] they will try to elect people who will listen... if we don't have the vote then older people will have more of a say and they're the ones that hold the 'socially acceptable view' if that makes sense... I think its also about a lack of trust but its also about a lack of wanting to give up power... and people thinking we won't have the correct views"

"They'd trust us a bit more [if we got the vote]"

Another youth worker said:

"I think it would change things quite a bit because I think young people would vote quite honestly ... I think that at 16 because of the honesty you'd change it so you wouldn't just have a two-party election... I also think that's quite scary for a lot of people who are used to the way things have been done"

Votes at 16 would be the highest form of youth voice there can be. 16 and 17-year-olds can already live alone, join the military, marry, drink, make medical decisions and more. Throughout this document, you will read about young people's services and lives. Spoiler warning for the chapters you haven't read yet, there are a lot of problems that need to be fixed. Around funding, provisions, opportunities and more. Giving young people suffrage and democratic agency will be a massive step in showing decision-makers (at every level) that these are issues that need to be tackled.

Don't worry its not just me that thinks this, in the United Nations 'Report of the Children's Commissioners of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland' it states "In Scotland and Wales, the voting age is 16 for devolved Parliament and local government elections. The voting age for UK general elections remains 18. It should be lowered to 16."

Case study: cuts to youth services

Youth services funding has been slashed over the past decade (more details and research into youth services are looked into in another chapter). It has meant closures of youth clubs, reducing services and it massively affects young people's lives so when I ask youth workers if young people were included in the cuts process or where they'd like to see remaining funds spent they said.

"As much as we possibly could... we used every contact... to advise young people that we were actually restructuring... We did the best we could ... I'm not sure what came out of the end of the restructure was what young people were asking for because I think young people wanted more youth clubs with better stuff and more workers and what we got was no youth clubs"

"From my point of view no and that's because of how our youth voice works ... as far as I'm aware young people haven't really been consulted about how funding is spent and where across the board."

In fact, the quote I used on votes at 16 came from this question

"I feel that that the young voice work we've done is very strong and the young people are very clear in what they want. I think unfortunately what they actually want is not the direction of travel that the council nor government is going in, in this moment of time ... I think young people were consulted, listened to but then I feel that at times where what they want conflicts with either the nation picture or the local picture of where the council want to go that is when the young people do not see any movement forward. The young people that I work with have extremely strong views about quite a lot of different things ... their main thought, which is very interesting, is if the voting age changed and if it was dropped to 14 or dropped to 16 would there be a difference in how local the views and nationally the views [would be heard] which I think is a very interesting point"

Some of the youth workers attending avoided the question, a response which, in my experiences, guarantees that young people weren't consulted. Cuts to youth services aren't entirely at the hands of councils, their budgets are being cut and a lot of youth work isn't statutory/required. The only requirement for councils is that youth provisions should be 'sufficient'. The power to define what is 'sufficient' is left with the council and young people aren't required to be part of that decision. If we were to ask young people if they thought youth services were sufficient I am certain that the answer would be no. In fact when asked if "Do you feel there is enough to do in your community?" young people from across Yorkshire said:

"No, it is a very rural area. there is a park in the village but that's about it. There is very limited transport too so it is very challenging to travel to places to take part in activities if you can't drive. There are some sports activities in the holidays in one of the nearby villages but you are reliant on getting someone to drive you there. Most other activities are centred in Scunthorpe which is very difficult to get to. There also isn't much to do if you aren't into sport"

"No there isn't."

"No - football nets haven't been replaced for years - you can see the grass/ the ground grown over it - It is now 10 inches tall now because no maintenance :("

"I don't think there is enough because what is available is very very limited and all quite the same unless you are willing to pay something that is quite expensive"

"We are rural, so there is not enough to do maybe not the transport links"

These responses bring up two very important issues:

1. Youth service provisions are not sufficient
2. The importance of public transport.

Mitchel (in a later chapter) will go into much more detail about youth services so I want to focus on transport. Young people have been advocating for a better transport system for years because buses and trains are hugely important to how young people get around. Especially with the closing of many youth services in local communities meaning if you want to access a youth club you may have to travel a long way into town to access it (in Calderdale the only council-run youth centre is the Orange Box in Halifax). By the way, looking into how accessible and useful public transport is in the region could be a whole other peer research project. But as I see it, public transport needs to be more reliable, accessible, appealing; there needs to be fairer fares and passes need to be transregional. Improvements to public transport and particularly the big changes that need to happen must be done with youth voice. Not just consultation.

Consultation would look like:

PUBLIC BUSES YOUTH CONSULTATION FORM

Is public transport important to how to get around?

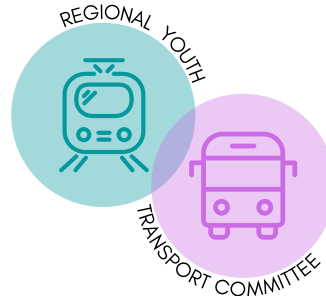
No Not really Can't decide Mostly Yes

Is public transport good enough at the moment?

No Not really Can't decide Mostly Yes

How would you like to see public transport improve?

Youth Voice would look like:



A group of young people who could scrutinise decision-makers, advise them, advocate for young people and conduct a constructive dialogue with decision-makers and make sure that the changes made to public transport have young people in mind.

The Regional Youth Transport Committee has meetings with officials, they sit as co-optees on WYCA's transport committee and their work has managed to get fares for under 21s down to 90p and they're working with other youth voice groups in South Yorkshire and Greater Manchester on transregional passes/ tickets

Solutions and WYCA

There are many positives and many negative to youth voice in West Yorkshire and the wider region/nation and fewer positives when it comes to attitudes towards young people. In this chapter I hope I have shown you that youth voice can take many forms: from youth councils, youth-run bodies to scrutinise decision-makers or young people being part of official decision making bodies. Youth voice requires voice not just consultation. In the beginning I defined youth voice:

“as the inclusion of young people (11-18 or up to 25 with additional needs) in the decision making process in a capacity where they can advise and scrutinise decision-makers, beyond one-off consultations, or where they can act on their own project”.

There are many organisations that fit this description particularly more formalised youth voice settings such as the youth councils or equivalent organisations. However, major issues still remain.

a) not everywhere in West Yorkshire has the same level of youth voice

b) the attitudes towards young people still, in many ways inhibit youth voice

The best way of resolving these issues, I believe, lies with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA), its Mayor and the young people involved in voice work across West Yorkshire. There are 5 key recommendations that I believe these people can do to ensure, encourage and promote youth voice.

1) Set up a Youth Combined Authority / Assembly in West Yorkshire that builds on the success of other youth combined assemblies across metro regions (5/10 metro areas have youth combined assembly). It should have the ability to scrutinise and advise WYCA & the Mayor as well as work with them on the key issues that affect young people. The West Yorkshire Youth Combined Authority /Assembly (WYYCA- sorry I know all the acronyms are a bit annoying) should be permanent and respected in WYCA. This is respect that I have no doubt will be earned very quickly by the young people who are a part of it. WYYCA can be the first step for ensuring that young people are at the heart of decisions made by the Mayor/ WYCA but also making sure those decisions are worthwhile and fair.

2) Reach out to communities where young people aren't usually involved in youth voice and give them the support they need to speak and share their ideas/ experiences. This also requires decision-makers to be open to hearing voices they won't be used to and should never be at the expense of these young people's identities. Reaching out to different, less listened to, communities can go hand in hand with place regeneration.

3) Advocate for, and allocate funding toward, youth voice services and projects and make sure that young people are included in what is classed as sufficient. Then use that definition to ensure that youth provisions are sufficient

4) Place young people at the heart of decisions that you make whether that be around transport, housing, skills or the climate.

5) Advocate for votes at 16 both nationally and at a devolved level, building on the 2 ballot system metro mayor elections have.



Enrichment.
Is it still relevant
to the Modern
Youth?

Mitchell Winter

Introduction

Youth clubs were once a beacon of social interaction and were a part of the average teenager's weekly routine, during the 1970s and '80s and even before that right from the 1930s (See the history of youth work - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgPt8W0Zndw>). Senior members of the Dearne community remarked to me in an interview that Fridays and Saturday nights were reserved at the Dearne youth club for Discos which is where you'd encounter the most admired socialites often found in clusters dancing to the songs of the time while games of pool were conducted in the next room. For certain young people, it was regarded as "the place to be" and often throughout the decades they organised trips away to Blackpool and had arranged for exchange students from Northern Ireland after the troubles. Apart from the social impacts on society youth clubs were a life skills centre in which many people even up to the 1990s learned to drive and gained critical life skills like how to cook and these youth workers were outlets for young people where they could feel trouble-free and wouldn't plague the streets. Modern society stereotypes young people as knife-wielding, hoody wearing, sex maniacs. These stereotypes have come about due to bad publicity which is discussed in the "attitudes towards young people's" section which will explore in more detail how the press have projected young people in today's society.

Charlee Bewsher (Strategic Manager of the Youth Work unit Y&H) stated that the needs of young people "Whether you go back to this history of youth work a hundred-odd-years or tomorrow young people still need places to go, things to do, people to speak to and you need safer spaces to do that in and that's not about just sterile youth clubs". Here Charlee echoes how young people need a place to go but yet that place isn't fixed; the youth service isn't in one place; it is everywhere in housing estates, parks and schools. Adolescence is about taking risks and as times gone on some of these risks have got bigger, the accessibility to narcotics and alcohol has never been as easy so youth provision which acts as a source of informal education and gives information to reduce the damage done by these substances and raise awareness of the effects to the user and the community. Over the past decade, funding was cut yearly and nearly 4500 youth workers were made redundant and nearly 1000 statutory youth clubs closed (see-<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jan/20/youth-services-suffer-70-funding-cut-in-less-than-a-decade>) meaning young people no longer have that consistent adult from the age of 11-25 that they can confide in and talk to about sexual education, gambling awareness and career pathways. Youth workers knit communities together, and helped guide young people whether that was for 1,5 or 15 years yet as the government has cut funding, local authorities felt the need to close their directly delivered provision and turn to the voluntary sector and in some cases transferring assets to them to reduce cost. However, what government and certain local authorities did not consider was the social impact which was that some young people were just managing and that they may have gone to a youth club 3x nights a week and seen a youth worker from 3-6 hours a week in which that youth worker would engage conversation, build relationships and bring communities back together. The APPG report (<https://nya.org.uk/static/dd541a2ccc2078f9e9bac988fbfb8e4c/APPG-Youth-Work-Inquiry-Final-Report-April-2019-ONLINE.pdf>) said "When young people have a sense of belonging communities become stronger".

Ultimately, youth clubs serve the communities and as a local authority representative from Calderdale discussed with the State of the Region team, young people may have wanted more youth clubs and a better quality youth provision but the council couldn't give them this as government policy states the results of funding must be quantified and changing young people's lives isn't quantifiable. Therefore when youth clubs were shut the metaphorical dam was breached and there was a perception that there was a rise in knife crime, core mental health services had a massive increase in demand along with the NHS being put under extra pressure from more young people being taken to hospitals over drinking and drug-related instances. (see PHE Dash board for trends)

Great Houghton Youth Group

Great Houghton youth group was established 27 years ago as a partial solution to anti-social behaviour in the village. D.Coates, then a qualified teacher qualified as a youth worker along with other members of the community to ensure young people had a place to go and people to talk to. Over the years the group has done trips to Disneyland, Alton Towers and many other theme parks to ensure the young people from these disadvantaged communities got the same opportunities to have a good time as the stereotypical middle class. Today the youth group has 5x full-time youth workers and it tries to recruit locals to maintain the same core values as in the past. D.Coates believes that recruiting locally not only helps the community's economy but also ensures that the young people understand where they live and how Great Houghton has a rich history.

Since when the group was founded 26 years ago, they have also relied upon the Barnsley Northeast ward alliance and then have been eternally thankful to the parish council who have always ensured the financial survival of the group by subsidising it for certain unforeseen costs. D.Coates admitted when interviewed by the State of the Region team that she had to be very honest with her youth group that it had to operate within its limits to survive, otherwise it would have been shut years ago. Fundraising has been a secondary source of income for the group and they remarked to me that at a "jumble sale" they would make perhaps £120 - £150. However, since the Covid 19 outbreak, the opportunity to do these "jumble sales" has been limited so online auctions have made the group on average £50 almost halving their normal fundraising income. Furthermore, the youth club was recently burgled and over £1500 of technology for the young people was stolen and the culprits are yet to be found, the PS4's and TVs were used by the club's seniors who were deeply saddened by the loss of their resources which they helped fundraise for.

Moreover, the team at the Great Houghton Youth group have worked tremendously hard through the Covid 19 lockdowns by delivering support packs to young people in the local area. Having begun working at this particular youth club I have already begun to feel the uplifting atmosphere that the youth workers provide to the young people who enjoy a range of activities from autumn wreath making to making apple lollies (more chocolate than apple). Ultimately, this youth club has faced mass financial difficulty like many others in the region yet has managed to sustain its operations to better the lives of young people in Great Houghton because that's what youth work is all about - ensuring young people have somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to.

Great Houghton Youth group active in the community

Jenna (youth leader) delivering free Christmas presents from the Barnsley Toy appeal December 2020



Two young at heart residents receiving plant pots that had been painted & planted up by our young people to cheer them up during the pandemic.

Village cafe visit (supporting local businesses) during a rare easing of lock down rules and during 'Healthy Holiday' provision.



Socially distanced...all Covid 19 rules respected Halloween event & pumpkin carving competition 2020

Young people preparing, cooking & serving beef stew and Yorkshire puddings to members of the social isolation project (over 50's). The kids & the adults loved it.

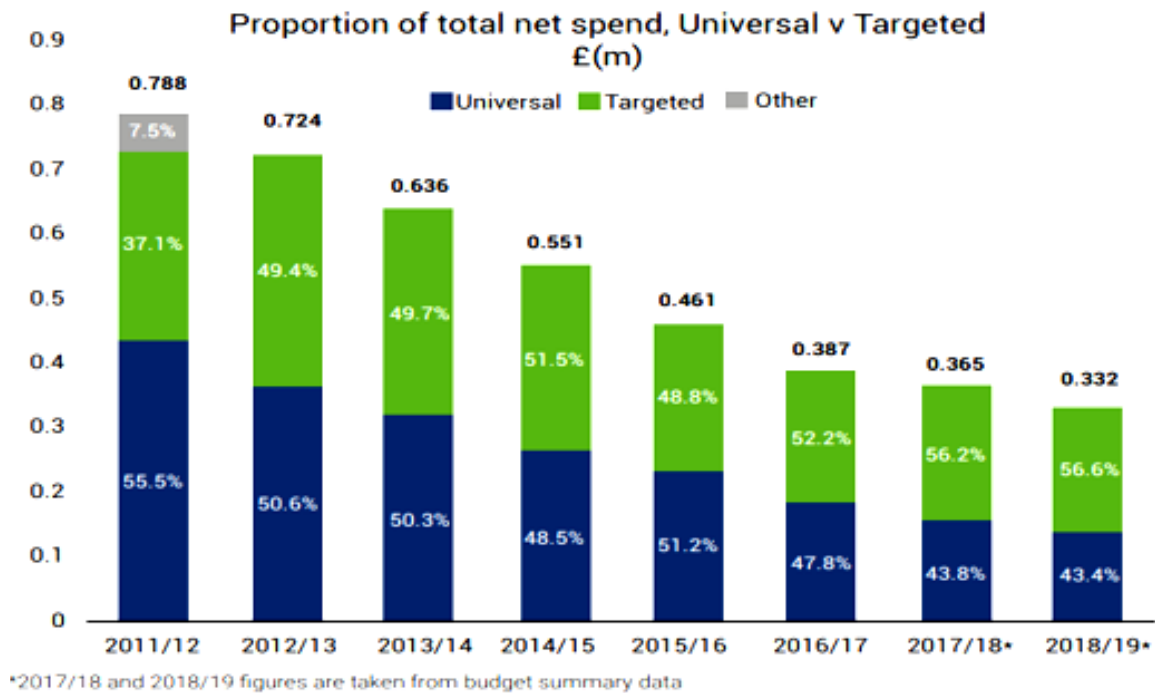


Hand written note from a youth group member to senior citizens who were isolating

Game Zone, specially put together for our senior members. Funded from fund raising, working with other local groups & supported by local councillors.



Finance



As shown in the graph local authorities diverted funding to targeted services which, as a Guardian report (See - Youth services suffer 70% funding cut in less than a decade | Young people | The Guardian) stated; “divert money to frontline services, protecting children at immediate risk of harm.” Which showed how local authorities needed to direct their diminishing resources to targeted provisions. However, with the closure of open access services, it could be argued that enabling young people to access support at an early stage could mean preventing or delaying the need to access targeted or higher level, more intensive and expensive interventions. Demand for these services increased which we shall call the ‘just managing services’ which would deal with safeguarding issues until more intensive services could cope.

When the funding cuts began what we can term as ‘the just managing services’ like youth clubs and libraries were shut and then young people who needed support put pressure on other services including the emergency services as reflected in figures on the Public Health Dashboard. The number of hospital admissions in a 1/3 of local authorities in Yorkshire and Humber are above the national average (Public Health Profiles - PHE). An example is the increase of young people needing to go to hospital for drink-related incidents (see - Alcohol poisoning in children on the rise - BBC News) If an ambulance costs £125 per journey, plus the time and resources at A&E, could these costs, and the impact on wider society if the ambulance was needed by someone for a serious health condition, been avoided if young people had access to youth provision? Youth workers provide informal education promoting a harm reduction message, they advise young people around alcohol, relationships, careers and the big wide world and yet don't cost as much as the emergency services. Surely prevention is better than intervention?

By no means is a great quality youth service the cure to everything, however, I would say that it's a part of a menu of services to young people that plays a crucial role in a child's development. When interviewed Charlee Bewsher of the Youth Work Unit stated “I would say in parallel and in

partnership, youth work is part of a solution and I really do think it has a place in a menu of services for young people". This shows how if "sufficient" funding was put into youth services by Government, it could help build back the countries' infrastructure as more young people would be educated about the wider world and could end vicious cycles of poverty. Furthermore, a representative of Wakefield Council also concurred with many of Yorkshire and Humber youth leads and said that "working to try and improve the lives of children and young people and families is something that the Council will never be able to do in isolation; it has to be a whole range of partnerships" which shows that every part of this menu is intricately linked and the loss of one pushes the others along a narrow edge between closure and survival. Moreover, in the report done by Asenvoe, Mccann and Bailey they stated that "its management has to recognise subtle service issues such as quality, user dissatisfaction, reputation damage and disruption of strategic planning processes and the shared nature of public services requiring cooperation with and input from multiple agencies (Young 2006; Woods 2011)." This clearly shows how service managers have to realise that without good backing, the money they invest into a programme could be wasted taxpayers money, young people need to be consulted and they need to be involved in forging the solution.

The NHS is perceived to be at breaking point since Covid 19 and young people who are victims of funding cuts are pushed onto the NHS and core mental health services like CAMHS, who are underfunded (see - [Mentalhealthfundingreport2_0.pdf \(tuc.org.uk\)](#)) were put under increased pressure when funding was cut to youth and other services, and local 'low level' support from qualified youth workers was reduced/cut. Again by no means is it the only solution but young people need access to a range of services, without long wait times. Prevention is cheaper than intervention (see NSPCC 2019 report).

The APPG report estimated budget cuts that late prevention spending was at a record £17 billion while the NSPCC report, published in 2019, stated that late intervention was expensive and ineffective compared to early intervention which looks at stopping issues in their tracks and preventing other safeguarding issues. Open access youth work can be part of the prevention and detection solutions, supporting young people, families and communities (see article - [No jobs, no homes, no services: how inequality is crippling young people | Young people | The Guardian](#)). As shown in the table below ([23996.pdf \(unison.org.uk\)](#)) starting in 2010 youth service spending was cut by £62M, the following year that figure doubled to £137M and over the next 5 years funding was cut by a total of £387M pounds.

Total cuts in youth service spending, 2010-2016

2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	TOTAL
£62m	£137m	£41m	£24m	£85m	£38m	£387m

The Guardian reported "[£1.4bn in 2010-11 to just under £429m in 2018-19, resulting in the loss of 750 youth centres and more than 4,500 youth workers](#)" this means that £1 billion in funding was cut in 9 years and it shows that as the government cuts to key services grew out of control young people were no longer a priority.

In many communities throughout Yorkshire and Humber young people have been forgotten yet there is a requirement for young people to be part of the decision making process.

Under article 12 of the United Nations convention rights of the child - [Article 12](#)

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law. This article in the United Nations rights of the child reiterates an earlier point that young people aren't to just be consulted but are to be included in forging the solution to issues that affect them, I believe young people are widely stereotyped as "not caring" and it is a myth because young people turned out in their hundreds of thousands for the national 'Make your Mark' ballot.

Furthermore, under article 15 ([1. States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.](#)) young people have the right to assembly and a young person states they feel the community views them as; "They definitely see us as a nuisance. The older people are always complaining in our Facebook community group that we are out on the street or in the parks causing trouble. but this is a very small minority of young people." This will obviously be discussed in the attitudes towards young people section but if young people don't have access to youth groups or a youth club then where can they gather? They are unwelcome in communities and local authorities are struggling to provide a place where young people can freely assemble. Moreover, under Article 28 .1 it states ([Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: \(a\) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all; \(b\) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;](#)) all young people should have the right to access to vocational education. This may for example come in the form of a youth club and by having access to this provision it educates young people which therefore covers articles 31-36 outlining the Government's responsibility to protect young people from harm through appropriate measures which include education and identifying issues as they arise.

Statutory v Voluntary

Over the last 10 years youth services have seen substantial cuts and as the guidance for local authorities on providing youth services states; “Every local authority in England must, ‘so far as reasonably practicable’, secure for qualifying young persons in the authority’s area access to: a) Sufficient educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities; and, b) Sufficient recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities”.

Legally local authorities have to provide adequate recreational activities that benefit young people and are expected to consult with young people on what they want, yet in certain local authorities, young people are not listened to. This does bring in the idea of “consultation vs acting” as a local authority could consult a young person till they are blue in the face but listening is where the LA takes action on behalf of young people (see <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://indefenceofyouthwork.com/2014/10/03/the-importance-of-youth-work-bradford-young-people-speak-out/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1630763830700000&usg=AOvVaw26XGkcV6t83rJwie7neiSm>) also please see the attitudes towards young people's section of the report.

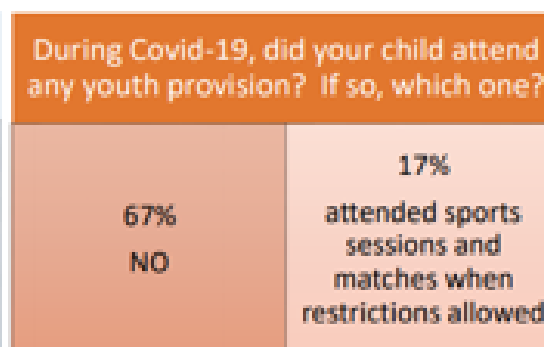
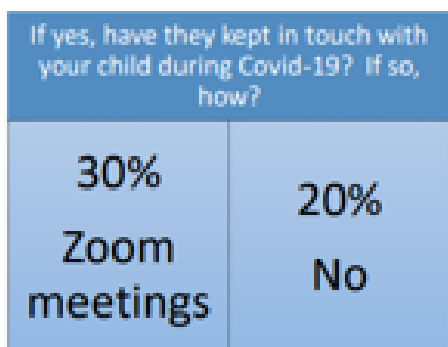
Furthermore, the term ‘adequate’ or ‘sufficient’ is lightly used as this is down to the local authorities yet due to funding, local authorities like Trafford, Medway, Luton and Slough are left without funding from the government and are therefore unable to provide direct youth provision. As a result of local authorities not being able to afford these youth provisions, increasingly people have turned to the voluntary sector who find themselves underfunded. Examples of good practice include projects like Choose2Youth, based in North Yorkshire, which runs an array of activities from disability provision to practical youth clubs, encouraging young people to participate in prestigious awards like the Duke of Edinburgh awards. These recreational activities benefit young people, but could more be provided if funded adequately? As opposed to funding being diverted into early prevention and targeted youth services – see chart below.

Local authorities are subject to large budget cuts which means that youth workers are always in uncertainty when it comes to their jobs, many being made redundant. Statutory youth clubs are subject to delivering specific programmes and meeting targets, PSHE is delivered in these youth clubs and recreational activities such as making soup and small arts and crafts. When young people are consulted on what they want to do to improve themselves socially, emotionally and physically, the most common responses are somewhere to go to meet friends, a place to go to talk to someone when they have issues and finally a football pitch or gym that doesn't cost extensive amounts of money which deprived communities cannot afford.

Moreover, when the statutory sector couldn't cover these basic needs for young people, the voluntary sector was left doing the groundwork and projects like Dearne kids which offers free boxing sessions for young people in the community and consults with the community in order to get the young people what they need to enjoy their childhood and even into their adolescents. The YMCA stated as a part of the APPG report that “Many young people are now missing out on opportunities outside the school setting to engage in positive activities that support their

learning and development, opportunities previous generations took for granted". When we look back through time, the young people have always wanted a place to go whether that be a youth club or a simple organisation like the scouts and they have always wanted something to do like - make Mediterranean food or do assault courses or even have a mock party with some music like they had in the 70s and 80s, as has been shown by social media research. These parties which occurred in 'statutory' youth clubs at the time were all the rage and have stayed in the memories of people for more than 5 decades showing the positive experience they must have had (see - 20252-youth-stories-report-2011_4th-1.pdf (wordpress.com)).

In the East Riding of Yorkshire, research showed that 43% of all youth provision provided in the 957 square miles was community and voluntary compared to the 27% of youth provision which was statutory. Nearly half of all community groups in the East Riding, which is estimated around 1000 groups, are voluntary showing how this local authority has defined "sufficient" as providing only 25% of youth provision to their young people. The report done by ERVAS shows that only 30% of youth groups managed to sustain their connection with young people and 20% failed, meaning that under a 1/3 of young people were unable to maintain contact with the youth service. Therefore as a result of Covid 19 the physical accessibility to youth services, whether that be statutory or voluntary, was massively reduced meaning that even more young people were unable to access the real support they needed.



How does it fit in with other services and young people?

Young people and youth workers must want to work together, therefore youth clubs are the ideal setting as they are neutral ground but they must seem appealing. If activities are organised that won't engage young people then the attendance rate would be reduced compared to an activity that would engage young people and encourage social engagement like laser tag or trips away to the coast. Youth clubs serve as a setting to which young people can openly socialise and have the safety net provided by the youth workers in which they can facilitate engaging conversation. Adolescence is all about risk-taking and pushing boundaries and it's not about youth provisions in a sterile youth club, it's about offering them places of convenience and helping young people, for example, learn what the effects of narcotics are and if they use drugs they do it with the knowledge of the effects. Youth clubs are one of the more accessible youth provisions because they are based in communities which are where young people's social webs are and so it's easy going and it gives that young person somewhere to go.

The communities in Yorkshire and Humber were once proud industry built places such as Barnsley known for its rich mining history and Sheffield for its steelworks which helped to instil the generations before us with pride and a sense of belonging. These characteristics were often left to be instilled by youth clubs like Kettlethorpe youth club or Great Houghton youth group, which has run for 27 years, where residents actually reported that anti-social behaviour decreased as a result of the youth group instilling teenagers with pride. Why should MPs be looking for new provision when one once existed that has become deprived of funding, a provision which for generations has had proven results. However, some people may debate that times have changed and that the way to engage with young people has become more technological with the youth of today spend more time on social media than they do within their community being active. Yet when young people are asked what they want in their communities, a majority of them would answer somewhere to go and to be able to socialise and feel safe. Furthermore, I believe the recent decline in youth club attendance has been because of the lack of appealing activities and the accessibility to youth provisions have been massively reduced due to cuts.

The Way Forward

The national solution would be to increase the amount of funding into the youth service because it plays a massive role in millions of young people's lives and yet has suffered severe funding cuts of over £1bn across the board (which doesn't take into account the amount of asset transferring local authorities have done to cut costs). In antithesis, what these funding cuts failed, in my opinion, to take into account was the social impact and;

“The conclusion is that there is an urgent need for a proactive approach to the assessment of social risks by means of a structured model of decision-making based on social risk metrics and social risk impact analysis that goes beyond conventional risk management practice.- Asenova, Bailey and McCann”

Among young people and even wider communities, every day I hear stories about the good old days when young people showed respect. When I hear this it always comes back to youth clubs that were, and some still are, a safe environment where young people didn't have to be prudent but could express themselves freely. Furthermore, the government should look at an initiative which would bring more people into youth work, maybe the government could offer an incentive to bring new, more qualified youth workers into the field as we have lost thousands over the past 10 years and young people now, more than ever, are at risk of extremism, county lines and gang affiliation so need that informal support. To quantify this "solution" the government should simply look at the statistics - let's say they invested £1bn back into youth work; would the numbers of young people attending hospitals decrease because of gang-related violence or intoxication?. I referred to earlier the cost of an ambulance trip could this money not be better spent on the ambulance going to save someone who's suffering a cardiac arrest instead of an intoxicated 14-year-old who was a victim of cuts to youth services, a youth worker isn't £125 per hour and prevention is more efficient than intervention.

Looking at the way forward in regards to local authorities I believe that they need to consult and act on what young people want, they may be the only ones with a rounded view of a social issue and so they should be hands-on in forging the answers with local authorities. As Barack Obama once said, **"The future belongs to young people with an education and the imagination to create"**. Additionally, the modern youth wants to be respected as young people and so when and even if youth clubs were to have a sudden surge in openings, young people want to design their own rules and suggest reasonable activities which would benefit them and allow them to have fun. Since the Covid 19 outbreak young people's mental health has been subject to an unprecedented strain. In my personal opinion, local authorities need to focus on prevention and begin to treat young people like adults who have real issues. If they keep getting passed off for children, which links to the 'Make Your Mark' campaign of votes at 16, this would be part of a possible solution - you treat 15+ like adults then they're more likely to act like them. Local authorities should also reopen youth clubs and highlight the importance of young people to area councils, who in my opinion are going to be a large part of the implementation of higher quality youth provision which will work arm in arm with other services.

The power of young people doesn't lay within their vision for a better future but their actions which manufacture a greater future.

Jobs and Opportunities



Jude Daniel Smith

Youth Employment, COVID and what must be done

Abstract

COVID-19 has impacted many core parts of our lives – the biggest, second only to the way we socialise and interact, has been our jobs. Some people were made redundant, some moved into different industries, some were furloughed, and some simply worked from home. Despite this, though, these outcomes did not apply to all. Many young people only just making their first steps into the job market had a completely different experience due to the comparatively fluid situations they are in regarding employment than their older and more established counterparts.

Some young people had formal jobs before the pandemic, some had never worked a job before, and others were involved in less formal arrangements, like paper rounds and market selling, or even a role within a family business. A year and a half of minimal activity concerning youth employment has impacted (or will impact) all of these groups in one way or another. COVID has caused people to miss meaningful opportunities like formal work experience and for these opportunities to be far less fairly spread than before.

This mini-report will explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and recent years of funding cuts on the accessibility for young people to engage with opportunities like work experience, apprenticeships, formal work and more. Coming off the back of (hopefully) the worst we have seen of the virus, it is essential to reflect upon its damage to young people's prospects to interact with the job market meaningfully. This is to ensure that improvements can be made in years to come.

Introduction

My name is Jude Daniel Smith – I am a 16-year-old student and peer researcher working on this project from Sheffield. I have been involved in youth representation projects like this for five years now, and I've loved every minute of it. Doing something about the injustices and disparity young people face feels like more of a break than work, as I'm passionate about it more than anything else – that's why this report exists! I'm incredibly fortunate to be helping to produce this report alongside some close colleagues I work with on many other projects. Youth voice has never just been about being heard for me; it has also been about trying to emulate the enrichment I get from working with my friends to everyone on a regional scale. If I can have this much fun and learn everything I have learnt through this report, what's stopping any young person across our county from doing work they want to do and loving it?

This report will come in three parts: Background and Methodology, Research and Analysis, and Conclusion, Key Findings and Recommendations. The first will give some context for the research I have done and how I did it along with some secondary data which plays heavily into the purpose of this piece, the second will go through what I found through my time as a researcher and the conversations I had, and the third will wrap everything up and give a few words on what must be done as a result of this report.

Background and Methodology

Why am I writing any of this?

This project was done in the wake of some reports in the UK, which really impacted my perspective. I had a tough time through COVID, struggling to try and progress in meaningful ways like school and jobs; these reports spoke to me because they showed I wasn't the only one who felt lost.

At a key 'pinch point' (as many of my teachers like to call it) in my life, where I'm supposed to be engaging in activities like work experience whilst also doing well at school, I couldn't do either. I had no laptop to do schoolwork on, and the only computer in the house was in use by my mum, who was working at home – my grades dropped substantially, I went into lower 'bands' in classes, and generally became apathetic toward school due to inaccessibility and my own inability to focus at home. Knowing many others felt the same became a comforting yet horrifying thought. I'm struggling, as are my peers, but is that really how it should be? Of course, COVID was bound to impact our lives significantly, but was everything that could've been done to limit the impact done?

And that's just the education aspect – alongside this, I am expected to be wracking up wins on my CV to brag about to prospective employers and universities – with my performance plummeting in school, I expected to have no lucky streaks on the job front until something extraordinary happened; I got a fantastic job, online! In a moment of 'right place, right time', the campaign myself and some friends started in late 2019 – Teach the Future – got some funding to employ coordinators, a role I went for and got. It was one of the most enriching experiences I'd ever had. I learnt about working in a large NGO (something I am very much considering as a career path); I was funded to do many training programmes like safeguarding and media engagement, whilst also getting brownie points for future employers with every hour worked. Now, that job ended in January this year. Still, it taught me so much about what I wanted for other young people like me – it illustrated just how much educational facilities need to be focusing more upon direct experience in the workplace and less about 'core skills'. These skills are null and void unless they can be adequately applied in a job. It also showed me just how vital a young person's first job is – retrospectively, I believe it to be one of, if not the most, impactful experiences of my life so far.

As for how I've done this paper, it has mainly been either in person or online semi-structured interviews – there has been one written questionnaire filled out by employers, too. My secondary research primarily covered quantitative ground, encompassing raw statistics. My primary research has been qualitative, aiming to gather the authentic experiences of stakeholders and young people around me in rich detail. This mixed-methods approach ensures some tangible, easy-to-understand numbers and some meaningful context behind these numbers.

Due to my location – being a Sheffield resident myself – this research has been South Yorkshire centred but aims to reflect a similar situation to ones around the county. You've probably heard that from the other peer researchers already, so this bit is short and sweet.

Research and Analysis

Literature Review

Institute for Fiscal Studies

The first study I saw – one by the Institute for Fiscal Studies – focused upon the job prospects of young people in the UK and how the pandemic has impacted them. One of the key findings from the paper says that those young people starting to get into the job market are increasingly going into low-wage areas of the workforce, and this has been an ongoing trend for decades. This has coincided with the fact that many jobs that are typically lower paid – those in the hospitality and overall service sector – were hit hardest by the COVID-19.

Over the last decade, young people starting out in the labour market have increasingly been working in occupations that are relatively low-paid. (Dias, Joyce et Keiller 2020)

This was already a dire situation pre-COVID, and it had been getting worse and worse for over a decade. In addition, this doesn't just apply to those still in education who are in their first part-time job - those who are 'expected to be paid low' - this also impacts those who have completed further education and are working full time.

In 2007 around 19% of all people aged between 22 and 25 working in their first full-time job after leaving education were employed in sectors that were essentially shut down during lockdown, while by 2019, this had increased to 22%. By contrast, the share of all employees working in shut-down sectors had fallen slightly from 17% in 2007 to 16% in 2019. (Dias, Joyce et Keiller 2020)

One of the final key findings from this report was one that I can certainly see showcased with many of the young people I know today – it paints a picture of an extreme lack of accessibility for young people into the job market, with COVID acting like reinforcement for the brick wall between young people and their first job.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely dented the career prospects of young people and threatens to have a prolonged negative economic impact on them as a result. Sharp contractions in shut-down sectors will make it harder for young people to take their first step onto the career ladder, while reduced job opportunities will make it harder for them to move into higher-paying occupations. (Dias, Joyce et Keiller 2020)

Office for National Statistics

The next study which I reviewed was one by the Office for National Statistics. The ONS focuses more upon the 'rates' that can be measured – unemployment, percentage of those in education and that sort of thing.

This next quote encapsulates the struggle that those who had jobs pre-pandemic faced when the job market was forced to adapt to the virus. Many were placed onto furlough, but this was not universal. For many, it was only temporary, with many being made redundant, in some cases after only a few months of work.

Young people's employment rate saw a large decline in 2020 compared with 2019, while their unemployment and economic inactivity rates increased. (Blessing M. Chiripanhura 2021)

This next statistic shows just how quickly the impact of the lockdown put in place in March 2020 was felt by young people in employment – it highlights the two hardest-hit sectors, being accommodation and food services, due to their nature of being the markets where young labour is most prevalent. This spotlight on the service industry is continuous throughout all the reports I studied, along with my own research.

The number of young people employed in the accommodation and food services industry who moved to unemployment or economic inactivity increased by more than 50% in Quarter 2 (April to June) 2020 compared with Quarter 2 2019. (Blessing M. Chiripanhura 2021)

The last statistic from this report illustrates the apathy that the weak job market gives to young people – it discusses 'states of being' for an individual in an economic study. One is unemployment, which defines those who are jobless, looking for a job, and available for work immediately. The other is someone who is economically inactive, which is someone who is not in employment who has not been seeking work within the last four weeks and/or is unable to start work within the next two weeks.

Young people who worked part-time moved from employment to economic inactivity at a faster rate than they moved to unemployment in 2020. (Blessing M. Chiripanhura 2021)

The reason why this is so important is that it shows us that young people, now more than ever, are being put off job seeking. In order to stimulate our economy post-pandemic, whilst also enriching young people through employment, this must be fixed. We need all young people to be seeking jobs if they would like to and not be dissuaded by an unattractive, inaccessible labour market.

The Sutton Trust

The last report I utilised was a longitudinal study, researching a very similar issue to myself, only UK-wide. This was the COSMO report by the Sutton Trust, which stood for COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities Study. These examples are from just two of their amazing papers that have been produced. Please do check them out.

One paper of this study looks at apprenticeships, and the conclusion made was particularly gloomy. Being an education style that incorporates workplace experience, apprenticeships are a great model for other forms of education to take inspiration from. There are issues, though, with the apprentice minimum wage being a frankly ridiculous £4.30 an hour, along with the fact that because many apprenticeships teach students how to go into vocational subjects, shifts are usually in person. This meant most apprenticeships were halted when lockdown occurred – statistics show that “just 39% of apprenticeships were continuing as normal, with 36% having been furloughed and 8% made redundant. 17% of apprentices had their off-the-job learning [learning in a college etc.] suspended.” (Doherty et Cullinane 2020). This massive disruption to education can not only take a wage away from these young people (unless they are furloughed) but also has deprived them of their learning.

The COVID-19 health crisis is having significant impacts on apprentices, their employers and learning providers. Companies are furloughing or making staff redundant, off the job learning has been disrupted, and apprentices, already on low pay, have faced additional financial strains. (Doherty et Cullinane 2020)

Work experience was an amazing experience for me, and it taught me a lot. It was a tech-focused (software in particular), a casual office job with so many friendly people - my ideal workplace, effectively. Having conversations with my peers, many of whom were in Y10 (the year in which most local schools used to designate time off school for work experience) when their work experience was meant to take place which was interrupted due to COVID, they often reminisce about what opportunities they could have found for their work experience.

In tandem with this, many of my peers also speak about how they don't have an employer reference for UCAS, something that is really holding them back. If all young people who missed out on work experience got this along with the support they needed to access these opportunities, they would be far better prepared for the early-Y13 careers 'scramble'. This next quote is the one I wanted to finish my literature review on, as it leads to a point that I would like all readers to take from this paper.

Opportunities for young people to get experience of the workplace have been impacted considerably by the COVID-19 crisis. Many firms who previously offered internships or work experience placements have cancelled them, with just over three fifths (61%) of employers surveyed cancelling some or all of their placements. Only about a third of firms continued all their usual placements either in person or online. (Holt-White et Montacute 2020)

In the aftermath of COVID-19 and the massive impact it has had on the idea of universal work experience for young people, there is one takeaway to be had. One of the only parts of my life that maintained itself over lockdown was my volunteering – it went on just as strong due to the immense efforts of my youth workers and my peers; the voluntary sector is a resilient movement in my mind, with enough power to change policy, change lives and change the opportunity gap for young people. With volunteering being far more accessible than work experience, whilst also reflecting the paid sector and the environment of a formal workplace in many ways, volunteering should be held in the same esteem as formal 'work experience' or past jobs are held on applications. Instead of having a 'former employment' section separated from the 'volunteering experience' section, combine the two, as they have both contributed to a young person's enrichment. Volunteering is work, and employers must recognise it as such.

My Research

The Perspective of a Local Business/Employer

The first part of my research I would like to cover was the questionnaire sent out to a popular spot for young people to get lunch, whilst also being a business that regularly employs this same demographic.

I asked them some questions about how COVID, in particular, had impacted their ability to take on younger staff members – pre-pandemic, they were hiring under-18s to work front of house at their deli takeaway.

This had apparently not changed due to COVID, and it actually was not more difficult to take on these young staff members than it was before the virus. This, to me, spoke volumes about how the pandemic can not and should not be used as an excuse by businesses to not employ younger staff – having conversations with peers in school, one told me that they were rejected from a job due to the fact this business had stopped employing 16 and 17-year-olds in a post ‘due to Coronavirus’.

I went on to ask about the differences COVID made to the workplace – I was told that, due to the multitasking nature of the work, along with how hectic it can be at peak time, maintaining the hygiene of the food being worked with does take more time. They spoke about the usage of masks by all staff, regular hand sanitisation for all in the shop, along with usage of gloves when handling food. They stated that the 16/17-year-old staff took part in this process too.

The jobs are usually advertised by word of mouth and posters in the establishment’s window. This later links into my interview with a group in Sheffield working on accessibility to opportunities and especially the ability for young people to find local jobs.

If the UK is to make a full economic recovery, that must include young people, and this means young people’s rights to work in the same posts as their older counterparts must be safeguarded, or we shall risk seeing under-18 (and even under-21) unemployment rise sharply.

The Perspective of a Service Director

In my interview with a Service Director for young people in an area of the region, I asked questions about the area’s young people’s access to employment, work experience, volunteering and part-time jobs. I was met with responses speaking about how the council had supported government initiatives like NCS and the Kickstart scheme, along with being presented with the fact that the council was the biggest apprenticeship employer in the district. This was fantastic news: a council taking youth employment and training into its own hands to provide more opportunities is a great thing, and this was definitely an example of such. Despite the fact that both of these national initiatives are problematic and have been shown to have limited impact despite the large amounts of funding that have been invested in them, it was good to hear this area was making good of them. It interested me to hear about the relative success of the Kickstart scheme in this council area, having had disappointing uptake rates in South Yorkshire. The director told me that this was due to a far more localised approach, with the council putting in time and effort to tailor the scheme to the inhabitants of the area. This regional personalisation is definitely an important aspect of ensuring youth engagement in employment and training opportunities.

We also discussed something exciting going on in their council – they have had ‘summit’ meetings every eight or so weeks with many groups from around the area. This included “schools and colleges, leaders from children's support services, children's social care services, health services and GPs, sexual health services, drugs and alcohol services, the police and fire services and a whole range of leaders from the council”. This large meeting sounded like a great way to connect the area – you may be wondering, where do young people fit into this?

I was surprised to hear that, for the past eight years, young people have attended these meetings and have been able to feed into a wide range of discussion topics, with one focusing on “supporting children’s in-school progression and [post] 16 skills”. Obviously, this was interesting, as post-16 skills are very centred around careers, applications to new educational opportunities, and even work experience in some schools – the fact this was tied into ‘in-school progression’ is intriguing and positive, showing that these ideas must be considered in tandem to ensure that young people are receiving enrichment not just in their core-subject progression, but also around skills.

The one shortfall which the head of service noted with candour was the fact that no major employers or local businesses sit on this board, which meant no representation for business but also, it limits young people’s ability to engage with business in their area, as they do not attend the meeting which these young people are a part of. If this was to start happening, I believe opportunities for young people in businesses could be made far more accessible through the scrutiny of young people in the area.

On the topic of scrutiny, this conversation links into the fact that, for the past two years, the Sheffield Youth Cabinet have been presenting issues young people are facing to the Sheffield City Council Scrutiny Committee – this has been a great opportunity for them to represent the people of Sheffield and, as shown by the example of the last one, and my own city, implementation of some sort of youth-lead scrutiny or input into the council would be a good step for improving strategy on key issues like youth employment.

The Perspective of a Local Youth Action Group

My next interview was with the Sheffield Youth Cabinet, mentioned in the last interview. We spoke about the experiences they had had with getting careers advice, whether they were enabled to access opportunities like work experience, and whether they had engaged with decision-makers on key issues like this before.

The consensus when I asked the group about their in-school 'careers' experience was that it was overwhelmingly poor. All members of the group stated that they did not believe they knew enough to go onto the next stage of their education, whether that was post-16 or post-18. A key issue that was highlighted was the idea that access to external, professional careers advisers had been diminishing over the years, and it was stated that COVID 'dealt the final blow to access to proper advice'. Most schools and colleges of the individuals in the group had said careers adviser, but they were only in at inaccessible times – one member said that their careers adviser was only in on 'Thursday afternoons when I had lessons'. They all agreed they would be far better prepared if they had a resource like this.

One of the older members of the group, who is in their twenties, spoke of a 'great initiative' in their school that they had accessed. This aided them to find direct experience and courses relating to a career they would like to move into. Elaborating further, they said they had 'support but freedom' to find a placement in schooltime in either Year 9 or Year 10.

This experience was not shared by the rest of the group, who are mainly aged 13-17. They said that they had not been supported whatsoever to find work experience and, if they did get a placement, they were only allowed to work in the holidays. This is an experience I shared. As I mentioned briefly in the literature review, I 'won' two weeks worth of work experience at a software development firm and was extremely excited – despite this, though, my school were not supportive, and they confined my experience to one week in the February half-term holiday.

Those who were going to be able to find work experience said that COVID ultimately put a stop to this, and they have not been allowed to find anything since by their school or college.

Finally, we discussed the times when they had engaged with local decision-makers on issues surrounding youth employment. One member said they had a representative of a large local employer come into their school, but the engagement was extremely alongside. Apparently, this visitor 'just spoke at the school', and there was no opportunity for questions or anything of the sort. Another had a far more positive experience – they worked on a skills initiative with a large organisation in the area – Sheffield Futures – and stated that they found the experience very positive and that they knew their views were heard and made an impact shaping the project. The only issue is, they do not know if this project will get the funding it needs to continue past 2022, and if it doesn't, they will no longer be able to feed into this work.

A clear takeaway from this interview was that young people need to help shape the careers strategy for schools – they would have far more of an impact if educational facilities actively consulted their students. In addition to this, when decision-makers engage with young people, they must ensure that this engagement is not one-dimensional and allow for a dialogue, not simply a monologue.

The Perspective that really counts

The final interview I would like to cover is with – you guessed it – a young person. That speaks for itself – it was vital to get some representation from the group this whole report is about. This section will be split into the responses to each question I asked.

Have you tried to find a job during COVID-19, and how was the experience if so? Were there any more barriers due to the virus that you had to deal with?

The individual had tried pretty consistently over two periods of time when lockdown has not been in effect, so in the summer of 2020 and since May this year. They said that they felt there were much bigger technology barriers due to the pandemic, with video conferencing like Zoom becoming the norm for interviews and emails becoming the norm for applications. For those who do not have devices needed for this – in particular, a desktop/laptop with a webcam, this has become a significant roadblock to accessing many employment opportunities. They also said that the ability to go around 'handing in CVs' and 'directly engaging with employers' had been taken away due to the pandemic, limiting access to more informal cash in hand jobs in particular.

If you have worked a job through COVID-19, have you felt safe at your workplace in terms of the virus? If you have not, is safety around COVID-19 a reason for you not looking for a job?

Both businesses that the individual had worked at were food-based corporations. They were given masks, and they stated that they did not feel as if they had prolonged contact with customers or other staff that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. They said COVID safety has not so far been a barrier to them accessing a job.

Were you due to have work experience at some point during COVID? If so, was this cancelled or was it converted to a 'virtual' experience opportunity?

The individual tried to get some work experience in their ideal career but was disappointed when they got a reply stating that the paperwork would be too much for making an opportunity like work experience with COVID still being an issue.

Have you tried to start an apprenticeship or new course during COVID? If so, were opportunities scarce and was the experience changed?

They were told to apply for a Level 2 course, which was not what they wanted to do, due to disruption to their education, despite being ready for a higher Level 3 course. They were then told to get in touch with the team at their educational facility to discuss moving up to a higher course after the first term but never heard back. This has added an additional year to their learning experience and didn't allow for any new qualifications aside from Level 2.

Have you faced any negative reactions from prospective employers due to your age? I.e. when applying, upon hearing your age, employers have offered to pay you less than older employees, offer a 'voluntary' role, reject you etc.?

This was where the conversation got more heated and more interesting. They said that just that day, they had spent a couple of hours applying for a job, did a cover letter, personal statement, got through their application process, only to find that the very last tick box was 'Are you over 18' with no prior warning to this. Being under 18, they could not proceed – they felt alienated by this, and despite doing all the work an adult applicant would do, they are barred from an opportunity due to their age.

In addition to this, they went on to speak about how they found it 'frankly ridiculous' that there are different rates of minimum wage based upon your age. (For some context here, the U18 minimum is £4.62, for 18-20-year-olds it is £6.56, for 21-22-year-olds it is £8.36, and the £8.96 rate is only for those aged 23 and over) They said that this was the biggest drain of motivation that they face in the job market – the fact that someone just 6 years older than themselves can make double what they make in an hour for the exact same job.

I had felt like this personally for a while, but the way they put it was so profound. How can we expect young people in society to put in the same amount of effort and labour as their other colleagues for less compensation?

Conclusion, Key Findings and Recommendations

This report has highlighted many barriers that young people face on their long journey into the job market, but being all sad about it will fix nothing. This report is in your hands because it aims to find solutions to these problems, rather than highlight them and 'be done with the yearly review'.

I set about to create this chapter of the State of the Region Report on this topic because it's something important to me. There's no lovely anecdote about why that is; it's simple. It's important to me because I want a good job. I want to have the skills for this job before I wander into it blind. I want my road to getting these skills to be an easy, accessible tarmac rather than rocky and pothole-ridden. This report exists because I want a good job.

So, what are those mystical solutions I was just talking about? Here they are; I have somehow managed to compress them down into just five key points (that's a big deal for a report that's about 5000 words long!)

Decision-makers, stakeholders in young people's lives and those with the ability to change these things: read these! It's crucial that real-world actions occur as a result of this, or I have just wasted a lot of time. Don't make me think I've done this for nothing. Cheers.

(See next page for a lovely graphic about what needs to be done)

JUDE DANIEL SMITH

KEY FINDINGS - WHY IS BREAKING INTO THE JOB MARKET SO DIFFICULT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

State of the Region Report



Young people do not feel prepared

YOUNG PEOPLE GOING THROUGH EDUCATION DO NOT FEEL ABLE TO SEEK JOBS

Young people do not feel supported enough

NOT ENOUGH IS BEING DONE TO ENGAGE STUDENTS - PARTICULARLY DISADVANTAGED ONES - IN CAREERS RELATED ENRICHMENT



Young people feel alienated in the job market

ARBITRARY BARRIERS TO JOBS - LIKE UNNECESSARY AGE RESTRICTIONS - DEMOTIVATE YOUNG PEOPLE AND CAUSE EMPLOYMENT APATHY

Many young people are lacking work experience

STUDENTS ACROSS YORKSHIRE ARE NOT GETTING TIME (OFF SCHOOL) OR SUPPORT TO UNDERTAKE WORK EXPERIENCE SCHEMES AT LOCAL BUSINESSES, DESPITE WISHING FOR THIS



JUDE DANIEL SMITH

RECOMMENDATIONS - HOW TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO JOBS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

State of the Region Report

Dedicate far more time to careers in the curriculum

SCHOOLS AND DFE - WE NEED A CURRICULUM FOR LIFE; EDUCATION THAT WILL LEAVE THE YOUTH READY FOR JOBS - INCLUDING COMPREHENSIVE WORK EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL TIME



Consider volunteering as work experience

EMPLOYERS - YOUNG PEOPLE ARE JUST AS ENRICHED FROM VOLUNTEERING AS THEY ARE FROM WORK. RECOGNISE THIS.

Pay them the same as their colleagues

GOVERNMENT - MAKE THE MINIMUM WAGE OF £9.50 UNIVERSAL TO ALL AGES, NOT JUST OVER 23S. APPRENTICES MUST SEE THEIR MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE TOO.



Include youth voice in youth employment social policy

DECISION-MAKERS - CREATE SPACES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO CONTINUOUSLY FEED INTO DECISIONS THAT WILL IMPACT THEIR ABILITY TO FIND A JOB

SEND provision and voice



Comparison of Local SEND Offers by Local Authority

Background

As part of the Peer Research Project, supported by the Youth Work Unit Yorkshire and the Humber, that took place over the summer 2021, Reece conducted research into what opportunities exist for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Having identified the Local Offer, Reece mapped the whole of Yorkshire and the Humber services provided by their respective Local Authorities. These include SEND youth voice, activities, financial support and mental health services. Each Local Offer and website was rated for accessibility and range of opportunities.

Reece has created a comparison table for easy access and to identify gaps as well as good practice. By clicking on the Local Authority name you will be taken to their site. The Stars indicate how accessible he found each Local Offer Website,

Website provides information on:					Accessibility of information (5 star rating)
AUTHORITY AREA LOCAL SEND OFFER	Positive activities	Youth Voice	Mental Health support,	Finance	
<u>Barnsley</u>	<p>✓ Wide range of activities</p> <p>✓ but mixed in with all support agencies</p>	<p>✓ Have Barnsley SEND Youth Forum</p> <p>✗</p>	<p>✓ Wide range of services</p> <p>?</p> <p>but generic web links</p>	<p>✓ Wide range of services</p> <p>?</p> <p>but links to other web sites, not clear</p>	<p>Nice categories for easy navigation. However there are 2 SENDIASS categories which could confuse people ★★☆☆★</p> <p>You have to use the search request, no headings. Results are for organisations that have no connection to search criteria. Information focused on parents and carers. Doesn't filter for teenagers and tends to link to national orgs ★★☆☆★</p>
<u>Calderdale</u>	<p>?</p> <p>On Facebook, not a programme more single activities. Generic not all focused on SEND</p>	<p>✗</p>	<p>✗ Talks about health</p>	<p>✗</p>	<p>All information is on Facebook directed at parents and carers, not at young people ★★☆☆★</p>
<u>City of York</u>	<p>✓ Clear indication of what is on offer and for who</p>	<p>✓ YP are consulted on lots of issues do inspections</p>	<p>✓ Good link to lots of services and tips</p>	<p>✓ Clear link to what is on offer</p>	<p>Clear labels for each section and layout easy to navigate. Website is easy to navigate. You can find info on the voice group - would be good to know what issues they want to work on ★★☆☆★</p>
<u>Doncaster</u>	<p>✓ Have to click several time to find it</p>	<p>?</p> <p>Unclear what</p>	<p>✓ Information on CAMHS & national services -</p>	<p>✗ Limited information.</p>	<p>Website is poor, opens on a generic image, then requires scrolling to find your section, you think you've gone to the wrong page. Boxes take you to each section, but not young people friendly ★★☆☆★</p>
<u>East Riding</u>	<p>✓ Lots of sport and some drama in one area.</p>	<p>✗</p>	<p>✓ Links to information and services</p>	<p>✓ Really clear and not just benefits, but grants.</p>	<p>Website well laid out, clear. There is lack of things to do and places to go that isn't sport ★★☆☆★</p>

<u>Kingston Upon Hull</u>	<p>✓ Lots of activities (once found)</p>	<p>✗</p>	<p>✗ No clear links to services</p>	<p>✓ Easy to find, with lots of info</p>	<p>Took multiple clicks to find activities. Map is great. Rest of website not youth friendly. Health and Wellbeing takes you to a page, where you then have to click on a letter eg M for mental health ★★☆☆</p>
<u>Kirklees</u>	<p>✓ A wide range</p>	<p>? Consultation when needed on the offer</p>	<p>✗ Under development</p>	<p>✗ Under development</p>	<p>5 - for accessibility as you can change settings to meet individual need 3 -for content. Website is under development, lots of information missing. Wide range of activities ★★☆☆</p>
<u>Leeds</u>	<p>✓ Wide range and for specific groups</p>	<p>✓ Good they have one but limited opportunities to get involved and shape the agenda</p>	<p>✗ Links to other information pages not to the service</p>	<p>✗ Links you to other information pages not to the service</p>	<p>For accessibility easy to use but plain website - not interesting to look at. Website divided activities into different categories ★★☆☆</p>
<u>North East Lincolnshire</u>	<p>✗ Generic information very little for SEND YP</p>	<p>✗ No targeted SEND voice</p>	<p>Share contact details for local services and an emergency helpline ✓</p>	<p>✗ No finance info but there is a link to Gov website for students</p>	<p>Just put all information into one place, rather then consider how to put things into categories. In general the website is presented as all opportunities are available to all young people, with some links for specific services ★★☆☆</p>
<u>North Lincolnshire</u>	<p>✗ Generic, very little activities focused on SEND</p>	<p>✗ Only worked on health and wellbeing</p>	<p>? Only CAMHS</p>	<p>✓ Clear links to information</p>	<p>Information clearly laid out. Pages are direct ★★☆☆</p>
<u>North Yorkshire</u>	<p>✓ Not a lot and very spread out geographically challenging</p>	<p>✓ Flying high - easy application</p>	<p>✓ Contact details for generic services</p>	<p>? But limited for SEND 18+. No link to PIP</p>	<p>Just blocks of text - not very easy to navigate or find information - too many clicks / links ★★☆☆</p>

<u>Rotherham</u>	Split between mainstream, specialist and post 18 - but then no activities listed		Clear information that links you to the next website - NHS, but no specific services / locally	Clear links to information - not too much info and takes you to Gov websites	Looks great, but limited information - is in development. Need to include local services / opportunities, not just links to other sites and contacts. The links are laid out well - short so easy to digest
<u>Sheffield</u>	Lots of activities- but page is hard to navigate and looks dull		Clear tab on side menu, but page dull	But how information is laid out, makes its harder to find	The link to local offer and services not very clear on a page full of writing and other drop down boxes - needs to be more defined. Once you get to this webpage, its laid out ok
<u>Wakefield</u>	Lots of activities - and by age		Clearly laid out with links to a wide variety of services	Clearly laid out, with links and age appropriate	Easy to navigate great - the flites allow you to search in multiple ways - eg by age and topic - keeping it focused. (There is a bug on the search)

There are common trends:

- Information is targeted towards parents and carers, rather than the young people you want to engage with.
- Lack of opportunities for young people with SEND to inform decisions and have a meaningful voice.
- Limited information for example, on mental health and financial support services.

Overall, the regions local offer websites score

Recommendations:

- Develop meaningful young SEND Voice
- Improve the accessibility of websites and information provided in general
- Improve the local offer and the services they promote, with the help from the young people.

Index of research papers



Introduction

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Youth Voice

- Public attitudes to youth crime Report on focus group research (publishing.service.gov.uk)
- to-lockdown-and-back-research-report.pdf (guc19.com)
- The_Poor_Perception_of_Younger_People_in_the_UK_17Aug.doc (if.org.uk)
- Generation blame: how age affects our views of anti-social behaviour | University of Cambridge
- Unbalanced negative media portrayal of youth - final report (hertsmere.gov.uk)

Enrichment

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- Kearney, Joe (2018) 'Alcohol poisoning on the rise in children'. Available at Alcohol poisoning in children on the rise - BBC News
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- TUC Available at Mentalhealthfundingreport2_0.pdf (tuc.org.uk)
- Bawden, Anne (2018) 'No jobs, no homes, no services: how inequality is crippling young people'. Available at No jobs, no homes, no services: how inequality is crippling young people | Young people | The Guardian
- Unison 'The Damage'. Available at 23996.pdf (unison.org.uk)
- United nations, 'Convention on the rights of the child' available at The Convention on the Rights of the Child: The children's version | UNICEF
- Unison (2011) 'In defence of Youth Work' Available at 20252-youth-stories-report-2011_4th-1.pdf (wordpress.com)

Jobs and Employment

Institute for Fiscal Studies

COVID-19 and the career prospects of young people

Monica Costa Dias, Robert Joyce and Agnes Norris Keiller July 2020

Dias, Joyce et Keiller 2020

<https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN299-COVID-19-and-the-career-prospects-of-young-people-1.pdf>

Office for National Statistics

Coronavirus and changing young people's labour market outcomes in the UK: March 2021

Blessing M. Chiripanhura 2021

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarketeconomicanalysisquarterly/march2021>

(Jobs and Employment Index Continued)

The Sutton Trust, COSMO Report;

COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief #5: Graduate Recruitment and Access to the Workplace

Erica Holt-White and Rebecca Montacute July 2020

Holt-White et Montacute 2020

<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Access-to-the-Workplace-Impact-Brief.pdf>

COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief #3: Apprenticeships

Katherine Doherty and Carl Cullinane May 2020

Doherty et Cullinane 2020

<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Covid-19-Impacts-Apprenticeships.pdf>

Social Mobility and COVID-19

Rebecca Montacute April 2020

Montacute 2020

<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-Social-Mobility-1.pdf>

SEND Provision

Local Authority 'Local offer' websites

[Barnsley](#)

[Bradford](#)

[Calderdale](#)

[City of York](#)

[Doncaster](#)

[East Riding](#)

[Kingston](#)

[Upon Hull](#)

[Kirklees](#)

[Leeds](#)

[North East Lincolnshire](#)

[North Lincolnshire](#)

[North Yorkshire](#)

[Rotherham](#)

[Sheffield](#)

[Wakefield](#)