



Tackling Youth Unemployment and Preventing a 'Lost Generation'.

National Union of Students: Commission on the Future of Work
Written Evidence from The Found Generation (June 2014)

Introduction

The Found Generation is a cross-party, not for profit group of young people which is campaigning for action by politicians to prevent and reduce youth unemployment in the UK. Many of us are students or were students until recently, and some of us have personal experience of youth unemployment.

Our analysis is that there are three main ways of tackling youth unemployment:

- a) Ensuring the labour market creates more jobs which are suitable for young people,
- b) Reforming the education system to ensure it properly prepares young people for employment,
- c) Reforming the welfare system to give unemployed young people much more help and support to obtain sustainable employment.

We also campaign for improved co-ordination of local and national government policy-making on youth unemployment. As a cross-party campaign group, we also campaign for greater cross-party consensus on the issue across the major political parties. For example, The Found Generation was one of the few organisations to campaign for the creation of an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Unemployment, and we are pleased that an APPG on this subject now exists.

Since we were created we have attended numerous events and spoken to many politicians; employers; experts; charities/voluntary sector organisations; and other young people about how to tackle youth unemployment. We have also undertaken extensive research into the various reports and studies on the subject. We provided written and spoken evidence to the British Youth Council's Youth Select Committee (2013) on life skills in the education system, and spoke on a panel at the second Youth Employment Convention (2014). We also contributed to the development process for this Commission, for example by attending and participating in the Students and Work Summit organised by the NUS on Monday 3rd March 2014.

As part of our specific research for our evidence to the Commission, we hosted a workshop at the Oxford Education Conference in Pembroke College, Oxford, on Saturday 10th May 2014. Our workshop was conducted in the form of a 'focus group' to obtain feedback from students on some of the Commission's questions. There were approximately 15-20 young people present at the focus group, mostly current students at the University of Oxford.

This evidence was compiled by volunteers Andrew Taggart and Emma Selinger.

More information on The Found Generation is available on our website (<http://www.thefoundgeneration.co.uk>) or from our Twitter account @TheFoundGenUK (<http://www.twitter.com/thefoundgenuk>).

3) How are the issues experienced and approached differently across localities, regions and nations of the UK? What potential is there for local, regional and national responses?

It is clear that issues in relation to youth unemployment can vary significantly across localities, regions and nations of the UK.¹ Youth unemployment is therefore, at least in part, a local issue which requires some level of local solutions instead of purely national initiatives.

We believe that local youth employment “initiatives” or “partnerships” should be established in as many parts of the UK as possible. These organisations would bring together local councils; Jobcentre Plus; employers; educational institutions; charities & voluntary organisations; and other relevant stakeholders. Crucially, these youth employment partnerships should also include representation of young people – a major weakness of current initiatives such as Local Enterprise Partnerships is that they do not appear to represent young people at all.²

These could be designed along similar lines to the local partnerships proposed by the ACEVO Commission on Youth Unemployment³, or the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission⁴. We would however hope that they are locally designed as far as possible. We only need to consider the success of locally designed and implemented initiatives such as Norwich for Jobs, Ladder for London or the Birmingham Baccalaureate to see what a difference this could make to efforts to tackle youth unemployment in local areas.⁵

These local partnerships could, if appropriate, obtain some government funding, be granted certain powers, or could have some devolved control over national schemes to tackle youth unemployment. Local Government Association (LGA) figures suggest that local initiatives in areas like Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield, Newcastle and Gateshead have achieved significantly better results than the results being achieved by the UK Government’s national Youth Contract scheme⁶. The LGA believe that based on what these local areas are achieving, a devolved Youth Contract across England could help twice the number of young people into work or learning as it is currently helping.⁷

¹ See for example http://www.cesi.org.uk/sites/default/files/event_downloads/ACEVO_report.pdf and <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/Reports/360/The-Geography-of-Youth-Unemployment-A-route-map-for-change>

² See for example http://www.liverpoollep.org/about_lep/our_board.aspx; <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/business-economy/working-in-partnership/london-enterprise-panel-archive/london-enterprise-panel-members>; and <http://www.nelep.co.uk/about-us/board-members/>

³ http://www.cesi.org.uk/sites/default/files/event_downloads/ACEVO_report.pdf

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-the-next-steps>. See also <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/Reports/360/The-Geography-of-Youth-Unemployment-A-route-map-for-change>

⁵ See <http://www.norwichforjobs.co.uk>; <http://www.standard.co.uk/londonladder> and <http://www.skillsforbirmingham.com>

⁶ http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/4033970/NEWS

⁷ http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/4104124/NEWS

4) How well are employers, of various sizes, engaging with the student and study-leaver job market? What support and incentives exist for employers and other stakeholders to improve students and study-leavers experiences in the job market, and what would you change?

We believe that employers are not doing anywhere near enough to engage with the student and study-leaver job market, or with young people generally. For example, according to a major UK Commission for Employment and Skills survey, only 27% of UK employers had hired a young person or offered a young person work experience in the preceding year.⁸ It has also been highlighted by both Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg MP and Skills Minister Matthew Hancock MP that the vast majority of employers do not hire apprentices.⁹

We believe that a number of policies need to be introduced by the Government to provide additional support and incentives for employers to hire young people or offer them other opportunities such as apprenticeships, traineeships or work experience. These should partly be focused on improving the skills, abilities and 'employability' of young people (see, for example, our response to question 5 below). However, there also needs to be a focus on policies which will make it easier for employers to hire young people or provide an extra incentive for them to do so. These could include measures to reduce tax or regulatory burdens, particularly on smaller businesses.

One measure that we would support is for the Government to back a national 'kitemark' for 'youth friendly' employers. Such a kitemark – known as the Youth Friendly Badge – has already been developed and established by Youth Employment UK (a campaign group and community interest company) and it is free for employers to apply for the Badge.¹⁰ The Badge is designed for both large and small employers.

We also believe there is much more that local and national government can do through the procurement process to encourage or incentivise contractors under procurement contracts to offer apprenticeships, traineeships or employment opportunities to young people. This has been recommended by numerous reports¹¹ and is already being done by the Department for Work and Pensions as well as a number of local authorities.¹² For example, Leeds City Council supported the creation of 82 apprenticeships in relation to the construction of Leeds Arena through its procurement policy.¹³

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scaling-the-youth-employment-challenge>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/matthew-hancocks-speech-on-world-class-apprenticeships> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/deputy-prime-ministers-speech-at-the-cbi-presidents-dinner>

¹⁰ <http://www.yeuk.org.uk>

¹¹ For example <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmpubadm/123/123.pdf> and <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmbis/83/83.pdf>

¹² See <http://www.smith-institute.org.uk/file/Apprenticeships%20-%20how%20local%20government%20is%20making%20a%20difference.pdf> and <http://www.scribd.com/doc/80111605/Public-Procurement-and-Apprenticeships-by-Robert-Halfon-MP>

¹³ <http://www.smith-institute.org.uk/file/Apprenticeships%20-%20how%20local%20government%20is%20making%20a%20difference.pdf>

5) How important is the development of a culture of enterprise amongst students and study-leavers and what support would be required to achieve this?

In our evidence to the British Youth Council's 2013 Youth Select Committee on life skills in the education system, we argued that developing a culture of enterprise amongst young people was critically important, particularly through some sort of requirement for a minimum level of 'enterprise education' in the National Curriculum.¹⁴

We made this point then and we make it now on the basis that the evidence – for example on the effectiveness of organisations like Young Enterprise – suggests that enterprise education can encourage more young people to set up a business; it can improve their commercial awareness; it can improve young people's 'life skills' generally by making them more willing and able to come up with new ideas and use their initiative; and it could also improve their knowledge of social enterprises.¹⁵

Since our submission to the Youth Select Committee we believe the case for an expansion of enterprise education in schools has grown significantly and is even stronger now than it was before.¹⁶

We believe there is a case for enterprise education to be made compulsory in the National Curriculum as well as encouraged more widely in extra-curricular activities such as expanding Young Enterprise into more schools. It is particularly noteworthy that a poll of UK employers by Young Enterprise found that an overwhelming 92% of them supported the inclusion of enterprise education in the National Curriculum¹⁷. There is a case for these requirements to apply in every school, including free schools and academies which are not required to teach some parts of the National Curriculum.

We also support the recent recommendations of Lord Young of Graffham for an elective enterprise module to be made available by all universities to all of their students, and for every university to have a fully supported and active enterprise society.¹⁸

¹⁴ <http://www.byc.org.uk/media/215785/EV18%20-%20The%20Found%20Generation.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.byc.org.uk/media/215785/EV18%20-%20The%20Found%20Generation.pdf>

¹⁶ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enterprise-for-all-the-relevance-of-enterprise-in-education>; <http://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/mps-rally/>; http://www.cityandguilds.com/news/October-2013/making-education-work#.U6_6V_lDXE1; <http://liambyrne.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Enterprise-and-Youth-Unemployment.pdf>; and http://www.thersa.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1532715/RSA_A_manifesto_for_youth_enterprise_09-13.pdf

¹⁷ See <http://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/YE-Unleash-the-Potential-6pp-2.pdf> and <http://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/fsb-announces-young-enterprise-as-its-new-charity-to-inspire-the-next-generation-2/>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enterprise-for-all-the-relevance-of-enterprise-in-education>

7) How strong is student and study-leaver voice in the job market? What would you change, if anything?

We believe that student and study-leaver voice in the job market is not as strong as it could be. A number of the young people at the Oxford Education Conference felt that they did not have enough of a voice in the job market or to the government, with one commenting that they felt they were “*at the whim of employers*”.

There are many ways to tackle this, which other organisations may wish to make a more detailed comment on.

One particular solution which we advocate is for the Government to create a Minister for Youth Employment with cross-government responsibility for youth unemployment policy, backed by a cross-government unit or agency on youth unemployment. This could be implemented either as a stand-alone position (as in Scotland¹⁹) or added as an additional portfolio to the responsibilities of an existing ministerial position (as with the Minister for Cities position in the UK Government and their cross-government Cities Policy Unit²⁰).

As part of their position, this new Minister would be responsible for actively seeking out and consulting young people, whether through representative groups such as the NUS, through campaign groups such as The Found Generation, or more generally. They should also have specific mechanisms attached to their position to ensure this happens. For example, the Youthforia (North West Youth Forum) Youth Employment Commission recommends that the creation of a ministerial portfolio on youth unemployment should be accompanied by mechanisms to ‘youth proof’, test out and review youth employment policy – perhaps using a system based on the British Youth Council’s National Scrutiny Panel as a starting point²¹.

The Youth Friendly Badge scheme, which we have already referred to in our evidence, could also play a role in this – for example by making young people aware of which employers have been certified as ‘youth friendly’ and which ones have not been.

¹⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-15984120>

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/greg-clark>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/giving-more-power-back-to-cities-through-city-deals>

²¹ <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1144957/minister-champion-youth-employment>

8) What is the role of volunteering, work experience and other placements (such as internships) in improving students and study-leavers employment prospects, and what would you change?

It is uncontroversial that volunteering, work experience or internships, as a general rule, improve the employment prospects of students, study-leavers and young people. There is extensive evidence in support of that proposition.²² This is further supported by the success of voluntary programmes like National Citizen Service²³ and City Year²⁴. Participants at the Oxford Education Conference agreed, with one commenting that “*Volunteering has made me more employable*”.

We believe that the Government should encourage volunteering, work experience and internships as much as possible. It could do this by expanding volunteering opportunities in schools; by requiring Jobcentre Plus to encourage volunteering, work experience or unpaid internships by young people on Jobseekers Allowance (in our experience Jobcentre Plus was more likely to discourage this); or by better regulating unpaid internships to ensure they provide a useful, time-limited experience and to ensure that they are as fair and accessible as possible.

15) Do you have any other comments? Please give evidence of key challenges or solutions that have not been covered by the above questions.

One theme which arose strongly from the Oxford Education Conference workshop was the feeling among students that schools and universities could do much better on careers advice and guidance – for example by ensuring that young people know how to write CVs and deal with interviews, or by offering more mentoring opportunities.

Another theme which came up at the Conference was that universities do not do enough to signpost students to alternative career routes – a number of students felt they were being pushed towards careers in large law, accountancy, or management consultancy firms. Students thought that universities need to do more to signpost young people to potential opportunities to work in small or medium-sized businesses. They also wanted universities to encourage and assist them to start their own businesses. The University of Bristol’s ‘Base Camp’ scheme is one initiative that other universities could consider following the example of²⁵.

²² <http://www.educationandemployers.org/research/taskforce-publications/work-experience/>;
http://www.bitc.org.uk/sites/default/files/transforming_work_experience_into_work_inspiration_report.pdf;
http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/1138544/cbi_action_for_jobs_oct11.pdf;
http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Experienced_required_-_web.pdf?1307027227 and
<http://www.stepuptoserve.org.uk/evidence/>

²³ <http://natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/evaluation-of-national-citizen-service-pilots/>

²⁴ <http://www.cityyear.org.uk/ivr-yearthree.pdf>

²⁵ <http://www.businessbasecamp.co.uk/>