



*Tackling Youth Unemployment and Preventing a 'Lost Generation'.*

**Youth Select Committee 2013 Inquiry: A Curriculum for Life**  
**Official Response from The Found Generation**

**Introduction**

- The Found Generation<sup>1</sup> is a youth-led campaign group which is campaigning for action by politicians to tackle the high level of youth unemployment in the UK. At the time of writing, the most recent figures from the Office of National Statistics suggest that the UK has a youth unemployment rate of 20.7% – **amounting to about one in five young people**. By comparison, the unemployment rate for the population as a whole is 7.8%<sup>2</sup>. 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.
- The group was set up by and is managed by a group of volunteers. We are all young people and many of us have recent first-hand experience of the issues surrounding youth unemployment. In the context of the Committee's inquiry, many of us attended state comprehensive schools and have first-hand experience of being taught – or in many cases not taught – life skills at school. We have also received feedback from a number of other young people about this inquiry and have included their views when writing our response.
- We are replying to the Committee's inquiry because we believe teaching "life skills" in schools is one of the best ways of ensuring young people are prepared for employment and giving young people a better chance of getting and keeping a job. Instead of covering all aspects of life skills, we intend to focus on four main areas in our response due to their relevance to youth unemployment.
  - **Literacy and Numeracy** – particularly the importance of being able to read, write and communicate effectively in writing, and the importance of being able to do basic calculations.
  - **Enterprise Education** – learning what the different types of business are, how to set up and run a business or social enterprise, how to be an "entrepreneur" in business or other areas.
  - **Citizenship/Political Education** – particularly the importance of promoting the benefits of volunteering and social action and of ensuring young people are well-rounded individuals.
  - **Employability/Character Skills** – e.g. written or verbal communication skills, teamwork, leadership, adaptability or flexibility, initiative, self-discipline, confidence, punctuality, ICT and digital skills.

**The responsibility of the education system to equip young people with 'life skills' such as political education, personal finance and cultural awareness**

1. We firmly believe that life skills are absolutely central to the education system and that teaching life skills to young people should be one of the main reasons a school or other educational institution exists in the first place. Every young person should leave school with at least a basic, working knowledge and understanding of the skills required for adult life.
2. In our view, life skills are a critical part of the Department for Education's overarching goal (which we strongly agree with) of achieving "*a highly educated society in which opportunity is equal for children and young people*,

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thefoundgeneration.co.uk>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778\\_307508.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_307508.pdf)

*no matter what their background or family circumstances.”*<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that there is no role for parents or guardians on this front – there obviously is. However, we cannot and should not rely just on parents or guardians to teach life skills. As two young people who gave feedback to us put it:

*“I was fortunate enough to come from a family who talked to me about politics, took me to museums and where my father was a banker and could give me advice about money and budgeting. Not every person in the UK comes from this background and has this level of knowledge. One should not assume that everyone has the same home life or even parents who have the knowledge to pass on to their children.”*

*“It's sad that this has to be a responsibility of the education system, but it definitely should be. I feel like I've been flung in to the world and I don't know anything about personal finance, I don't know how to budget or whether it's cool that my bank is charging me for certain things”*

3. The Department for Education does not prioritise equipping young people with life skills to the extent that they should do, as we will argue later. However, it is clear that they do accept in principle how important life skills are. In a speech at Brighton College in May 2013, the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove MP, defined what he thought an educated person should be: *“literate, numerate, historically aware, culturally curious, engaged by science and technology, aware of the demands of the workplace, ready to take their place as an active citizen in an open democracy.”*<sup>4</sup> The importance of preparing young people for adult life is also recognised in the Department for Education’s Business Plan for 2012-2015<sup>5</sup>.
4. We will cover the merits of specific types of life skills education below (with the exception of literacy and numeracy as the benefits of these skills are fairly self-explanatory).

### **Enterprise Education**

5. Enterprise education in schools helps young people gain useful knowledge about what a business is, what the different types of businesses are and the practical steps required to set up, run and manage a business. Many employers and organisations that work with young people have called for enterprise education to be included in the statutory National Curriculum, as it is not included at the moment.<sup>6</sup> There are many potential benefits:
  - It could encourage more young people to set up businesses (and in turn employ people) or to work for smaller businesses.
  - It could better prepare young people for many jobs. For example, enterprise education might well assist a young person who is interested in going into the legal profession, because many solicitors’ firms require applicants for Training Contracts to have what they describe as *“commercial awareness”*.<sup>7</sup>
  - It could teach more young people about social enterprises – businesses which trade for a social and/or environmental purpose and re-invest their profits into achieving these purposes. Estimates suggest there are approximately 68,000 social enterprises in the UK, employing around 800,000 people.<sup>8</sup> These numbers are likely to continue to grow, making social enterprise an increasingly important employment sector.
  - It could teach young people about being entrepreneurs, not just in business but more generally. Young people could learn how to handle uncertainty, take risks and use their initiative to come up with and implement new ideas, whether or not in a business context.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/what-does-it-mean-to-be-an-educated-person>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-plan-2012-to-2015-department-for-education>

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. <http://www.cityandguilds.com/~media/Documents/About-us/Policy-papers/Enterprise%20%20Entrepreneurship%20%20October%202012pdf.ashx>, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/yourbusiness/8661915/Employers-call-for-enterprise-curriculum.html>, [http://www.aryouready.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/IMPACTproposal\\_lowres.pdf](http://www.aryouready.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/IMPACTproposal_lowres.pdf), and <http://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/about-us/charter/>. See also <http://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/about-us/charter/companies-that-signed-the-charter/> for a list of over 200 businesses that backed the Young Enterprise campaign.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. <http://www.lawcareers.net/Information/Features/29012013-Dont-be-square-be-commercially-aware>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/about/about-social-enterprise>

- It could also help young people to prepare for the fact that changes in technology, the economy and global culture mean that they face an increasingly complex and unpredictable future – young people are far more likely to do multiple jobs in their working life, and some of the jobs that young people do in the future might not even have been invented yet.
6. There is already evidence about the positive effect on young people of the programmes run by Young Enterprise, the business and enterprise education charity which already helps young people to run a business for a year in schools and colleges around the country. 42% of alumni of Young Enterprise programmes have started their own company and the businesses they created tended to employ more people, have a larger turnover and be more innovative than those not involved in Young Enterprise.<sup>9</sup> It is also worth noting the potential for enterprise education to improve results in other subjects such as English, Maths and Science.<sup>10</sup>
  7. Finally, there is also powerful evidence to suggest that young people are interested in business and enterprise and would therefore benefit from learning more about it. In 2012, City and Guilds undertook a comprehensive survey of 3000 young people aged 7-18, in which 42% of 14-16 year olds and 49% of 16-18 year olds agreed they would one day like to run their own business.<sup>11</sup>

### **Citizenship/Political Education**

8. One of the biggest problems facing young people in terms of tackling youth unemployment is their lack of work experience. Young people are often caught in a situation where they cannot get a job without getting work experience, but feel they cannot get work experience without getting a job. One of the most obvious ways around this conundrum is volunteering. Our personal experience is that volunteering gives young people this crucial work experience, as well as developing their skills and improving their CV – and other young people agree. Of the young people who have worked with the largest youth volunteering organisation in the country, vInspired, 92% said volunteering had improved their confidence, 88% were more motivated, 90% felt they had increased their chances of finding work, and 79% said they were more likely to get involved in other aspects of their community life.<sup>12</sup> Citizenship lessons could potentially be used to encourage young people to do voluntary work and extra-curricular activities.
9. We also believe that good quality citizenship education and political education are important to ensure that young people fully understand and are fully involved and engaged with society. This can help to ensure they are made into more “well-rounded” applicants for jobs.

### **Employability/Character Skills**

10. Employers are usually very keen for young people – or indeed any other employees – to have what are variously called “employability” or “character” skills. As one of our volunteers (a former recruiter) notes: *“the greatest feedback from employers time and time again is that young people cannot engage in the workplace and it is their ‘employability’ that matters.”* It is therefore clearly beneficial for schools to develop these skills and behaviours in young people from an early age – this can be done through the curriculum or through extra-curricular activities.
11. There are various different definitions of what these mean but there are clear overlaps. For example, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills argues that the most common attributes of what are described as “employability skills” are self-management, problem solving, working/communicating in a team, understanding the business environment, use of numbers, use of language, use of IT and a positive approach to work.<sup>13</sup> The

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/resources/50th/50thBook.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/michael-mercieca/make-it-your-business-to-save-a-lost-generation\\_b\\_2294017.html?view=screen](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/michael-mercieca/make-it-your-business-to-save-a-lost-generation_b_2294017.html?view=screen)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.cityandguilds.com/~/\\_media/Documents/About-us/CityandGuildsWaysintoWorkViewsofYoungPeopleReportpdf.ashx](http://www.cityandguilds.com/~/_media/Documents/About-us/CityandGuildsWaysintoWorkViewsofYoungPeopleReportpdf.ashx)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.vinspired.org/whyVinspiredschools>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ukces.org.uk/assets/ukces/docs/publications/the-youth-inquiry-final-report.pdf> - see page 17

Confederation of British Industry list grit, resilience and tenacity, self-control, curiosity, enthusiasm and zest, gratitude, confidence and ambition, creativity, humility, respect and good manners and sensitivity to global concerns.<sup>14</sup> Many of these skills overlap with each other and with the skills listed at the start of our evidence.

## **The current state of 'life skills' provision in schools**

12. Our assessment is that the current state of life skills provision is inadequate. As above, we intend to cover the question under specific headings.

### **Literacy and Numeracy**

13. While our personal experiences of English and Maths and literacy/numeracy teaching were broadly positive, we remain very concerned that this is not true for many other young people. According to the Department for Education, about 42% of employers need to organise additional literacy and numeracy training for young people joining them from school or college.<sup>15</sup> The education system's failure to ensure all young people finish school able to read, write and use numbers is a large part of the reason for this – one in five children nationally leaves primary school without achieving the expected minimum standards in English or maths.<sup>16</sup> This disadvantages them when it comes to secondary and further or higher education as well as when trying to get and keep a job.

### **Enterprise Education**

14. Enterprise education is currently not part of the statutory National Curriculum, nor are there plans for it to be introduced in the new National Curriculum from 2014 – unlike financial education.<sup>17</sup> There is currently no statutory requirement to provide enterprise education at Key Stages 1 to 3. It is therefore unsurprising that Ofsted has identified weaknesses in enterprise education provision across primary and secondary schools<sup>18</sup> and that a 2011 survey<sup>19</sup> of 1,000 14-19 year olds across the UK showed:

- Over half of those surveyed (51%) would like to be their own boss.
- Only 1 in 5 believed that their school encouraged them to become entrepreneurial.
- 1 in 4 said that TV programmes such as Dragons' Den taught them more about business than their school.
- Over half (56%) thought that business education should be mandatory at school.

15. Certainly from our own experiences, many of us did not receive much or any education about enterprise or business at school unless we had chosen subjects such as Business Studies. This has meant that we have not learnt about it at all, or have had to learn about it through personal study or extra-curricular opportunities. However, young people cannot rely on extra-curricular activities either as many state schools do not have Young Enterprise or similar societies. As one of our volunteers has noted:

*"I attended a state comprehensive school which had no compulsory formal enterprise education or any extra-curricular enterprise societies such as Young Enterprise. I then attended a brilliant state sixth-form college which **did** have a Young Enterprise society I was able to get involved in, but even they had no formal compulsory enterprise education in their curriculum. Instead they wasted my time with compulsory (and useless) A-Level "General Studies" when that time could have been used to do something practical and useful, such as a "Life Skills" class which included teaching of enterprise and financial education."*

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/1845483/cbi\\_education\\_report\\_191112.pdf](http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/1845483/cbi_education_report_191112.pdf) - see page 33

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reforming-qualifications-and-the-curriculum-to-better-prepare-pupils-for-life-after-school>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/get-london-reading/one-in-five-leave-london-primary-schools-without-literacy-basics-8412695.html> and <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/moving-english-forward>

<sup>17</sup> <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/n/national%20curriculum%20consultation%20-%20framework%20document.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/not-yet-good-enough-personal-social-health-and-economic-education-schools> and <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/economics-business-and-enterprise-education>

<sup>19</sup> [http://realbusiness.co.uk/article/5533-schools\\_are\\_failing\\_young\\_entrepreneurs\\_report](http://realbusiness.co.uk/article/5533-schools_are_failing_young_entrepreneurs_report)

## **Citizenship/Political Education**

16. Hansard Society research shows that almost half the population (47%) wish they had learned more 'about politics and how our democracy works' at school.<sup>20</sup> In addition, comments we have received from young people on citizenship were often very negative. For example:

*"Citizenship at my state comprehensive in Cheshire was woeful to say the least. The teachers did not care, students did not care, and it was viewed as something we had to endure, rather than something which could help us in the future"*

*"Terrible! Thrown together and taught by whichever teacher was free that session"*

*"It was tagged on and viewed as almost downtime. I did enjoy it but that is because I was interested in these areas anyway."*

17. There is clear potential for improvement – not just in terms of ensuring citizenship is taught in schools, but that when it is taught it is taken seriously by the students involved and is relevant to them. In addition, we would like to see encouragement of volunteering and extra-curricular activities in these classes. One of our volunteers has told us that in her AS-Level Politics class, her tutor encourages all students in that class to go and get involved in campaigning and voluntary work. This is the sort of initiative we would like to see in all citizenship classes.

## **Employability/Character Skills**

18. A significant number of employers find young recruits to be poorly prepared for the world of work. According to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, just over a quarter of those employers who take on school leavers, a fifth of those who take on college leavers and a tenth of those who take on graduates find them to be poorly or very poorly prepared.<sup>21</sup> According to research from the Prince's Trust<sup>22</sup>, this is even true in terms of digital and computer skills which young people are generally expected to be proficient in.
19. Our personal experience is that while we have developed employability skills, we have often done so through voluntarily undertaking work experience placements or extra-curricular activities rather than through formal lessons. More must be done on developing employability skills in the curriculum, and also with extra-curricular activities as they differ in availability from one institution to another. Extra-curricular activities could be made more effective by ensuring schools provide more such activities (e.g. Young Enterprise societies, debating societies or "coding" clubs) and give greater incentives to students to get involved in them. Alternatively, schools could even make extra-curricular activities compulsory, as in University Technical Colleges (see page 6).

## **Whether the school education system gets the balance right between academia and 'life skills'**

20. Our volunteers and other young people who gave feedback on this all felt there was too much focus on the academic side of education rather than life skills. This is not surprising, considering the issues we have raised.

## **Whether the teaching of 'life skills' should lie within core subjects or as a separate part of the curriculum**

21. We believe life skills should sit both within core subjects (to help make these subjects more relevant to the real world) and as a separate part of the curriculum. A good example of how life skills can be taught both in the curriculum and separately is the system employed at Darwen Aldridge Community Academy<sup>23</sup> with regard to enterprise education:

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/parliament\\_and\\_government/archive/2013/05/15/audit-of-political-engagement-10.aspx](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/parliament_and_government/archive/2013/05/15/audit-of-political-engagement-10.aspx)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.ukces.org.uk/assets/ukces/docs/publications/the-youth-employment-challenge.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about\\_the\\_trust/what\\_we\\_do/research/digital\\_literacy\\_research\\_2013.aspx](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about_the_trust/what_we_do/research/digital_literacy_research_2013.aspx)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.tengroup.org.uk/initiative/research-report-curriculum-models-enterprise-secondary-schools> - see page 33

- An hour a week at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is dedicated to ‘Entrepreneurship’ classes,
- Students have to maintain an entrepreneurship portfolio of their experiences, activities and projects undertaken throughout their time in the Academy,
- Students and staff are awarded with merits/badges based around “enterprise attributes”,
- Enterprise is used as a theme underpinning every area of the curriculum, including in lesson plans.

22. This sort of approach could easily be expanded more widely to cover not just enterprise education, but also areas such as financial education, employability skills, careers education and political and cultural awareness.

### **The support currently available for teachers to deliver lessons and programmes on life skills**

23. We will not be making any comment on this area as we have no particular expertise on it.

### **How much involvement young people have in shaping the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) and citizenship curriculum**

24. In our experience, young people do not have much, if any, involvement in shaping the PSHE and citizenship curriculum, nor is it tailored to the particular needs of young people in a school or local area. It is very important for PSHE/citizenship to be tailored to the local area’s needs, particularly in the context of the points we have made about encouraging volunteering.

### **How PSHE and citizenship teaching is implemented differently in schools**

25. We will not be making any comment on this area as we have no particular expertise on it.

### **What the UK government can learn from others about the teaching of "life skills" to young people**

26. We have already highlighted some examples of good practice in teaching life skills in reply to other questions. At this point we will therefore confine ourselves to highlighting three particularly interesting additional examples of good practice within the UK, all of which are relevant to one or more of our four areas of focus.

27. **University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools** – these are two new types of state school set up by the Coalition Government. They are designed for 14-19 year olds, and both focus on improving the life skills of young people and making them more attractive to prospective employers. UTCs, for example, have a longer school day which aims to match the working day (typically 8:30am to 5pm), actively involve employers in curriculum design, and it is compulsory for students at UTCs to participate in extra-curricular activities.<sup>24</sup>

28. **Get London Reading** – this is a campaign run by the London Evening Standard newspaper to improve literacy in schools in London, through initiatives such as recruiting and training reading volunteers to go into schools and assist pupils with their literacy. The initiative has already proven to be a huge success. At St Mary’s Catholic Primary School in Battersea, where the campaign focused much of its efforts, 100% of pupils achieved at least a Level 4 pass in both English and Maths SATS in 2012 – Level 4 being the expected government standard. In 2011, before the involvement of Get London Reading, only 59% of pupils at the school met those standards.<sup>25</sup>

29. **Code Club** – this is a nationwide network of free volunteer-led after-school coding clubs for children aged 9-11 which aims to teach primary school children how to make computer games, animations and websites. They are focused on primary schools but this idea could also potentially be expanded to secondary schools.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.utcolleges.org/newsfolder/the-government-increases-number-of-utcs-to-45-by-approving-13-more>. See also <http://www.studioschoolstrust.org/what-studio-school> for information about Studio Schools.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/education/st-marys-primary-rises-from-worst-to-best-in-just-a-year-of-our-reading-campaign-8412404.html>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.codeclub.org.uk/>