

A Talent Match South East Research Project 2017

Barriers Preventing Young People from Accessing Employment:

AN EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

TALENT MATCH



South East

CXK
inspiring people to thrive



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Abstract

CXK undertook a research project, commencing in June 2016, and culminating in July 2017, which sought to dig deep into the barriers faced by young people on the Talent Match South East project. (1). The young people lived in coastal regions of Kent, and had all been out of work for 1 year or more.

The research report, published in June 2017, and subsequent presentation event, which was attended by over 50 stakeholders, young people, and Talent Match practitioners, drew reference to several recurring issues, as told to the research team by the young people who took part.

These issues pointed to a lack of relevant careers guidance whilst at school; infrequent and unfocused work experience activity; a lack of access to contacts who could help move the young person further towards the world of work; and, perhaps most significantly, a wide range of confidence, self-esteem, personal resilience, and mental health issues that the young people were experiencing.

As part of the research, CXK interviewed 8 employers, from a wide variety of sectors, across a geographical area that stretched from Canterbury to Margate, in the east of Kent. During these interviews, employers were asked about their experiences of employing, training, and developing young people in their workforce.

The employers were asked for their views on what they look for in a younger candidate (and employee), as

well as for their thoughts on the changes that could be made, locally and further afield, to educational and training programmes that would be beneficial to both employer and employee.

Initially, the project plan was to add this data to sit alongside information gained from interviewing the young people.

However, it soon became apparent that the wealth of data gained from employers had the potential to be presented in a separate document. The benefits of this were twofold: firstly, two streamlined, albeit still comprehensive, sets of reports would be more condensed, and therefore more audience friendly compared to one large report. Secondly, the emphasis on each separate component of the research – the voice of the young people, and the voice of the employers – would add clarity and a sharpness of focus to each viewpoint.

The data from the 8 employer interviews has been analysed and collated, and forms the main body of this research report. It is essential that, armed with a clearer view of what the requirements and expectations are of a local employer when wishing to employ a young person, future projects delivered by local organisations, such as CXK and The Prince's Trust, should seek to address the views of employers, and build their suggestions into all forms of employability skills programme delivery.

Introduction

CXK interviewed 8 employers between April-October 2016, to gain insight into their experiences of recruiting and training young people, of the skills, knowledge and talent that they look for, and to better understand the views held by employers with regard to the barriers to employment for young people in Kent.

The information and data gained from this exercise provides us with an opportunity to align the data gained from interviewing young people, over a similar timeframe, with the data gained from employers. This enables us to gain a sharper focus on how organisations can prepare young people for the world of work, by embedding employer requirements into future project delivery.

The 8 employers who were approached to take part were chosen to cover a wide variety of vocational areas, so as to give a balanced and representative set of data.

The employers included a restaurant chain, a childcare provider (nursery), a large and a medium sized retail outlet, a leisure firm, a public sector employer, as well as a café and a recruitment consultancy firm. All employers were asked the same questions, which were based around the following four major themes:

- What the employer looks for – the talents, skills and knowledge – when recruiting a young person
- The organisation's approach to recruiting, training and employing young people
- The employer's experience of having employed a young person
- The current landscape – focusing on the recommendations the employer gives for improving the employability skills held by young people

Each employer interview lasted for between 45-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded, and transcribed soon after, and were then later analysed to draw out the main recurring themes. This report will break down the data given by the employers into four sections:

- Recruitment of young people
- Employment of young people
- Advantages of employing young people
- Recommendations

The fourth section, where employers are asked about the nature of support or training that young people require in order to become more employable, will feed directly into the report's key recommendations.

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A national perspective

The Guardian newspaper commissioned the advertisement search company, Adzuna, in 2013, to study 500,000 recent employment advertisements, to find the 10 words and phrases most commonly used by UK employers (2).

The words, and the frequency of their appearance, appear in the table below:

Word	Number of times appears
Organised	99,862
Communication Skills	68,064
Motivated	65,011
Qualified	58,955
Flexible	56,551
Degree	54,049
Commitment	48,686
Passionate	47,971
Track record	40,471
Innovative	36,581

The top 3 – organised, communication skills, motivated – are attributes that every young person on Talent Match has, to greater or lesser degrees. They are personal qualities, rather than specific skills, education levels, or experiences.

They feature in the ‘My Journey Scale’ of the Talent Match Follow Up forms, and are areas that are assessed by mentors, with young people, at 3, 6, 12 and 18-month intervals while they participate on the programme, and, as such, form a focal point of the developmental areas that a mentor works alongside their mentee to improve.

Whereas it is undoubtedly a challenge for many young people, and especially for those who have been out of work for over a year, to be able to demonstrate some of the factors above – track record, degree and qualified, for example - the top 3 are things that almost every young person, with the requisite levels of personal stability and well-being required to gain employment, could be expected to be able to demonstrate.

Motivation, organisation, and good communication skills, according to the data presented here by Adzuna, are therefore key factors that young people need to be able to evidence, and need support to develop, in order to become more employable.

Moreover, all 8 employers cited good communication skills, and the ‘right attitude’, as being of central importance to them when employing a young person. They are key factors that, as the data from the 8 employers will show, keep cropping up.

Summary of data

All 8 employers stated the importance of a professional, clean, smart personal presentation as a factor in recruiting a candidate. This gave the right first impression, and was seen as an indicator of the level of professionalism and personal presentation likely to be attained by the candidate once in employment. It also showed the employer that the young person was taking the interview seriously, and demonstrated that the candidate was properly motivated to be successful.

Employers also placed emphasis on the degree to which candidates had done some background research into the company – above and beyond previous consumer interaction – as this demonstrated the level of preparation the young person had gone to, in order to make the right impact.

5 of the 8 employers (63%) made mention of the concept of ‘work ethic’, and its ensuing importance to them and to the company at large. The term ‘work ethic’ can be construed to mean many things, but judging from our employer data, includes the following:

- Punctual attendance (start of day as well as return from breaks)
- Being open to learning new skills
- Having a hunger to learn from someone else’s experiences
- To work hard
- To have a pride in their performance at work

All employers commented that young people needed to demonstrate having the ‘right attitude’ to fulfilling their tasks and duties, and to interacting with customers, suppliers, and with other team members.

5 out of 8 employers highlighted the frequency with which they received CVs and/or application forms from young people which contained spelling, grammar and punctuation errors. All 5 of these employers felt that this was unacceptable, and would result in a failed application. Employers also commented on the fact that many young people struggled to follow instructions or complete the application process properly – often neglecting to bring a key form of personal identification, or qualifications evidence, with them as requested, for instance.

5 out of 8 employers cited that life skills were lacking, and gave examples of young people not attending an interview on time, or attending an interview looking less smart or professional than was desirable. The same 5 employers felt that evidence of participation in an activity in the wider community, such as volunteering or being a member of a club or interest group, were vital to supporting the development of a young person’s set of life skills.

8 out of 8 employers stated that a good set of communication skills was an essential asset for young people to have in order to thrive in their workplaces. Customer service skills, along with positive interactions with fellow team members, customers, and managers, featured in all employer interviews as a key skill.

Employers held diverging views on the importance they attached to implementing some form of work experience (either through schools, agencies, or colleges). Only 3 out of 8 (38%) strongly felt it had benefited the young person and/or the employer. Others commented on the success of the work experience being very dependent on whether the young person was willing to learn, whether they were able to display the right attitude, and were able to engage with the experience in a positive way. Employers clearly wanted the same qualities that they wanted to see at interview stage throughout the work experience period, too.

There were infrequent success stories – some work experience trials that had gone on to become permanent positions of employment, but largely, employers felt that a work experience period was only effective if the employer had the resources and the time to dedicate to the young person on placement to ensure a quality experience.

5 of the 8 employers used the term 'mould' – to form, fashion, or to develop – as a benefit of hiring a young person, as you can potentially train them to become the ideal employee much more easily than someone who is older, more experienced, and (arguably) less willing to adapt to new circumstances or working practices.

4 of the 8 employers made reference to the lack of confidence demonstrated by young people. This is telling, as it links in with a host of social skills that employers place importance upon – eye contact, open body language, active listening skills, the ability to show interest at interview and in the role. This data resonates with the Barriers to Employment research findings in June 2017, which looked at the barriers from the young person's perspective, and found many instances of young people struggling to come to terms with low levels of confidence, resulting in one of the key recommendations of the first report:

“(More)Programmes that make use of interventions that build confidence to overcome personal hurdles, such as travel training and confident communication sessions” (Employer A)

Employers demonstrated mixed views about the ability and effectiveness of young people in the workplace. 4 employers were almost entirely positive – citing that without recourse to a younger workforce, their company would be unable to function coherently. One employer stated that younger employees can be less expensive to employ, yet are able to fulfil the same effectiveness of role as an older employee, which can play a crucial role in keeping a small, independent business afloat.

Employers also pointed to the higher levels of fitness and energy that young people can often have, in comparison to an older employee.

Finally, all 8 employers felt that young people were broadly unprepared for the world of work, and that schools, as well as further and higher education institutions, were not doing enough to prepare them for employment. Employers held firm and clear views on changes they would like to see initiated in the employability skills training sector – views that will be reflected comprehensively in the section of the report that offers its recommendations.

Research findings

Recruiting young people

Employers held strong and very similar views about how effectively young people are able to meet the challenges of successfully negotiating recruitment processes that are standard in 2017.

Most employers advertised vacancies on their own website or social media pages, while a couple of employers used external websites such as 'Jobs in Kent' or 'Indeed'. Online adverts generally include a Job Description, and larger organisations tended to have an online recruitment process. Smaller companies requested a CV in order to apply for a position.

Employers stated that they were looking for a CV or application that stood out, often remarking that they wanted to see more than just an education history. For example, if the young person had no work experience, then volunteering and hobbies were essential to displaying that they had more to offer, and was a good way to demonstrate other skills that they had learnt outside of a school or college environment.

“...if they haven't got relevant experience I look and see if they've done voluntary work or done something over and above just school work.” (Employer C)

Tailoring the CV and covering letter to the job being applied for was seen as crucial for making it to interview. Too often young people sent a generic CV without thinking about aligning their skills and attributes to what the job requires or what is detailed in the Job Description. This is viewed as a lazy approach to job searching, by sending out the same CV but for very different jobs:

“...actually adapt your CV for the job that you're applying for.” (Employer E)

Another point worth mentioning is around the grammar, spelling and punctuation used in applications. The majority of employers commented on the spelling errors and overall low levels of literacy shown. Often this led to the application being rejected, as the employer's impression was that the young person was unprepared to make a determined effort, or at least get someone to proof-read their application or CV. With a competitive job market, and lots of applicants for most jobs, this can be the difference between being shortlisted for interview or rejected completely.

Employers spoke of occasions when young people didn't fully read the application guidance, which led to incomplete application forms - or worse, applying for jobs that were hundreds of miles from where the young person lived, because they had a similarly named store in another part of the country:

“...with the levels of unemployment... never been short of applicants but I have been short of quality applicants.” (Employer G)

Completing a CV or application form is the first stage that young people need to get through. This is often perceived as being the most difficult because they need to be able to sell themselves on paper before getting the chance to meet a potential employer.

First impressions are important and the employer expects the young person to be well-presented and on time. As well as personal appearance, young people need to be able to communicate effectively by being articulate, polite, and by making eye-contact. These, coupled with a genuine interest in the job, were the main requirements for a successful interview.



It may seem taken for granted that before going to an interview, a young person would prepare in some way, even if it is just to read up about the company, but the findings suggest that this was frequently not the case:

“It helps if they’ve done a bit of research about the company... the information is all on our website.” (Employer B)

This leads to the question of whether young people know how to effectively apply for a job, and prepare for an interview? It may seem obvious to someone older, with experience of work, but job searching and being interviewed should be viewed as a skill that needs to be learnt and practiced. Young people need to be informed about employer expectations, and to focus on getting the basics right. At a time where interview processes seem to be becoming more rigorous, and where young people are assessed more, it is vital that they are prepared and are able to perform well, and show the employer that he/she has potential:

“...our interview process puts them on the floor for two hours.” (Employer D)

Before a young person is offered employment there are, as seen, many barriers that they need to overcome. Submitting a quality application, presenting in a professional manner, and showing enthusiasm at the interview, are essential to securing a job offer.

All employers stated that the right attitude is far more important than skills or knowledge, which indicates that young people should not be put off applying for jobs if they have a lack of qualifications.

There are other ways to show their potential, and make their CV or application stand out, that appeal more to employers than an education history. As one employer stated, what they are really interested in is:

“...their attitude and their behaviour and their desire to want to do the job you’re offering them.” (Employer H)

Employing young people

Small employers regularly spoke about the need to hit the ground running, and to pick up the pace of the role quite quickly. The smaller organisations we spoke to mentioned that it was a challenge to support the new employee through the initial training period – a time issue, rather than a lack of willingness – and as a result, young people left the organisation earlier than expected. One smaller employer stated that it was probably preferable for a young person to start their career with a medium to large-scale company, where the training environment is a little more established, and where there are more staff to be able to give designated time to support the employee’s development.

One of the smaller employers seemed less concerned about their ability to train and support the new employee than the others, and found it hard to articulate any form of training that was given to their employees – that new employees were really just expected to use their initiative, and learn from other team members, albeit in a non-specified, unstructured fashion. It is clear here that some smaller employers don’t offer the highest level of support packages to employees as would be desirable.

Medium to large employers were better able to demonstrate the breadth of training offered to new starters – mentioning sector specific training, as well as statutory training such as health and safety training, and outlining company training policy frameworks.

One large company mentioned the use of a ‘buddy day’ initiative, where a more experienced member of the team introduces them to colleagues in different roles and positions in the company, shows them where the staff areas and washroom facilities are, checks on essentials such as uniform, expectations of role, initial experiences and queries – and books in a further buddy day in 4 weeks’ time. This level of mentoring-type support can last for up to 12 weeks or 6 months, depending on the organisational approach.

The large-scale employers tended to be able to offer a full in-house training and induction schedule, whereas the medium sized employers were able to use external training providers, especially when it came to the training of apprentices.

Employers all spoke about the need to have good communication skills while in employment with them. One employer said:

“Because we are such a people-based business, it’s important that customer service is key... if they’ve got that general kind of confidence and ability to communicate at all levels, because we’ve got 90-year olds using our facilities, and then we’ve got babies coming in with their mums for their first swim... the range of customers is massive, so they’ve got to be able to relate at all levels”. (Employer B)

What was quite striking, from the employer interviews however, was that although the consistent message came across from all employers about the importance of customer service/communication skills, there was very little evidence of specific in-house customer service training on offer for employees.

One employer in particular (a large-scale, national employer) spoke about the prevalence of online training packages favoured by the company. The employer who was interviewed for this research was unconvinced about the value of this form of in-house training, drawing reference to the large number of online training modules, which the employer felt the employee just clicked through, without engaging meaningfully with, or stopping to pose internal questions or clarifications. Face to face teaching, and more frequent observations of practice, were cited as less used, but still very important methods of ensuring a more rounded approach to developing the skills and qualities of a new employee.

Work experience trials seemed to be infrequently used by the employers we spoke to. Several of the larger companies mentioned arrangements with organisations such as The Prince’s Trust (the Get Into programme), which had been largely positive. Other employers were more negative when they gave their views on work experience trials that had been arranged by the Job Centre Plus, in particular the frequency with which people were sent to the employer for a work trial, who didn’t aspire to work in that sector or with that employer in the first instance.

Other comments from employers about work experience tended to be split between the advantages of having an additional member of staff to carry out a necessary function, and the impact that supervising the young person on work experience can have on the productivity level of the supervising staff member.

Several employers noted a rise in the levels of anxiety of people who had started work in more recent times. One commented that:

“A lot of the time, we employ people, then after a week or two they come to me and say... I can’t really cope, because I’ve got anxiety problems”. (Employer D)

Employers, while noting this rise in anxiety levels, did not articulate ways in which the company was able to support or address these issues.

Employers commented on some interesting generational behavioural differences – mainly with regard to the increasingly pervasive use of technology in all forms of modern life. One employer spoke about observing how young employees seemed to accept, as a norm, the need to listen to music on their headphones while at work. This led to reservations about how this could affect their productivity levels, as well as their ability to gel within the wider team:

“Even in offices...you know they’re working but they’ve all got their

earphones in, listening to music while they work.... I'm like 'why are you listening to music while you're working'...that's like being on the phone while you're driving, you're not really focused and they all look like zombies to me". (Employer F)

Employers gave very consistent views on which employees thrived, and which ones struggled. The 'thrivers' were those who were able to fit in, who had a positive approach, and who were able to show initiative, reliability, and good social skills. These qualities were much more valued by employers than qualifications:

"It's the people that make the business work...it's not the coffee or the waffles it's the people, so if you've got the right attitude then it'll work. I've employed enough people with the wrong attitude over the years to know that". (Employer H)

Almost all employers mention the stock they place in having good literacy skills, and in terms of educational attainment, there seems to be a general wish for good literacy skills rather than a specified level of educational attainment.

Advantages of employing young people

Mould

Employers were able to articulate many advantages to employing young people within their organisation, in particular with regard to the notion of being able to 'mould' a younger employee much more easily than an older employer, in such a way as to adapt the young person's skills and abilities to fit in with the organisational ethos.

One employer recognised that young people are "vital to our business" because:

"somebody who's in their late 20s or early 30s would be harder to train than somebody who's young and hasn't got any pre-set ideas and stuff" (Employer C)

Another employer stated that they weren't necessarily looking for the candidate with the best level of qualifications, but were looking for "someone I can just mould" and went on to add:

"If they're under that age the good thing about them is that you can mould them into the way you work, and things. They haven't got set work patterns and set work ideas, and I think that's a big advantage of it" (Employer D)

A third employer followed the same theme:

"If it's the first job they've had - because we've got the training...we would then mould them to where we basically wanted them to be within our organisation". (Employer F)



Flexibility

Employers made frequent mention of the greater levels of flexibility with regard to work patterns and rota availability that young people tend to have.

It was often remarked that young people are usually much more available to work at times outside of the traditional, 9 to 5 weekday slot, as they have fewer personal commitments, and are also more likely not to be put off by working unsociable hours:

“We have just upped our recruitment with Christmas coming so we’ve needed to bolster our number of waitresses...most of them will still be at school...they’ll come to do the odd Friday, Saturday night shift for us” (Employer G)

Salary costs

Some employers mentioned that younger people generate the same amount of work output but don’t have the same salary demands as more experienced staff:

“(Young people) ...are critical because without them we probably wouldn’t be able to function. We’re not a rich organisation, we’ve got charitable statusso we’re quite lean and mean, and, unfortunately, ...if you’re older, with a mortgage or rent to pay, a family to support, there’s not a huge amount of our staff who can afford to live on the pay we’re paying...so we get a lot of youngsters that are still living at home, who haven’t got that financial burden...so yeah, at the moment, young people are fundamental to our business”. (Employer H)

Physical fitness

Employers also drew positive references to the fact that young people can often have higher energy levels and physical stamina, especially noted by employers who employed young people to do roles where they were doing long shifts, and were standing, or on the move, for lengthy periods. One employer spoke about there being:

“A big emphasis on the fact that the job is hard, you know, being stood up on your feet for 8 hours, obviously you get a 45-minute break in between, but it’s hard...that doesn’t come easy”.(Employer A)

Summary

Employers were asked about the level of confidence they have in the skills and potential of young people, and were asked about their views regarding the level of work readiness of young people – and what steps they would like to see taken in order to raise the skills, potential and employability levels of young people.

All 8 employers gave very similar views on the areas where they felt young people required specific training or awareness raising:

- Confidence
- Personality
- Life skills (getting up on time, ironing clothing, planning your day)
- Conduct (readiness to shake hands, eye contact etc)
- Communication (social skills)
- Ability to follow instructions
- Interview skills
- Attitude towards work (work ethic)
- Appearance: “someone who turns up smart is 50% of the way there”

The broad narrative from employers is that confidence and initiative are key traits they look for (Appendix 1), with a solid grasp of literacy and numeracy (but not necessarily a requisite need for high level qualifications), as well as evidence of a ‘can do’ nature – something on a CV that demonstrates character, that shows that someone has the motivation to have achieved something outside of school – volunteering, for example, or work experience.

There were, however, broadly consistent views given by employers when highlighting the benefits of employing young people, which gives cause for optimism.

Recommendations

The recommendations set out here need to be considered with reference to the recommendations made in the June 2017 CXK report, which took into account the voice of the young people, and which has been referenced previously in this report.

The recommendations in that report drew attention to the need to increase the exposure young people have to careers advice and to employers, and meaningful work experience while at school. It also outlined the importance of using interventions at school and post-statutory education, to ensure that young people's levels of resilience, confidence and wellbeing factors were improved.

Alongside those recommendations, this report has outlined two further recommendations, which are set out in the section below.

An employability curriculum

Analysis of the employer feedback provides us with an opportunity to make some recommendations as to how education curriculums can be adapted to include sessions that improve the employability levels of young people.

These recommendations will take the form of a series of suggestions for sessions that would form the basis of an employability curriculum, where employers, training providers and careers professionals are invited into schools and onto campuses to give input.

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A suggested employability curriculum, which takes into account our 8 employers' specific suggestions, will be included, in table form, as our first recommendation.

This would follow a 5-week structure, with 3 days set aside for each week. The target audience would be Year 12-13 students, or for training providers and organisations, young people who are in the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) group.

WEEK	FOCUS	TOPICS
1	JOB APPLICATIONS AND CVS	Careers Guidance interview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with job search / work experience How to write a CV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailoring CV to each job • Spelling, punctuation and grammar Application forms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and following guidance

2	INTERVIEWS	Interview preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researching company • Mock interviews • Planning travel First impressions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to dress / personal appearance Communication Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye contact, body language, tone of voice Talks from employers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations • Top tips Consider innovative approaches to addressing interviews/ assessment days <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use external providers • Consider role play • Use drama groups or • motivational speakers
3	EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS	Customer Service Team work Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use external providers • Consider role play • Use drama groups or • motivational speakers
4	INDUCTION / FIRST WEEK	Preparation for first day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning travel • Outfit/appearance • Checklist / FAQs
5	WORK EXPERIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement must last a minimum of one week but can be as long as required • Young people can gain a reference at the end of it and add it to their CV • Gaining employer feedback is essential

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The above is a proposed employability course featuring topics that need to be covered, based on employers' feedback.

Weeks 1-4 are classroom-based and focus on the skills required in order to secure a job offer and make a good first impression from day 1 in the job.

The first step is to ensure that all young people on the course receive a one-to-one careers guidance interview. This can be done in partnership with the National Careers Service. Feedback from some employers indicates that young people have unrealistic job expectations. This will help focus the young person's job search and career focus and will help when selecting a work experience placement for week 5.

Week 3 focuses specifically on skills that are useful for every job and that all of the employers highlighted as key skills. Week 3's curriculum could be extended to include accredited qualifications in one or more of these areas. Buying in external provision is essential - it needs to be presented professionally, and in an interactive fashion.

Week 4 sets out what young people need to do to prepare for their first day, including a checklist of questions to ask. This would include knowing who their line manager is, who to go to for help with issues with pay, and what breaks they are entitled to.

Week 5 is an opportunity for the young person to put in to practice some of their learning from the course and to gain valuable work experience, the aim being to gain a reference from an employer which could support future job applications. At this stage feedback can be sought from the employer about the conduct of the young person, what they did well and what they could work on. The length of this placement is to be decided between young person and employer but should be for a minimum of one week.

Workplace mentoring scheme

One employer in particular felt that a mentoring scheme could provide the support levels needed to bring a young person closer to the world of work, stating that:

“There’s got to be some mentoring system for young people.... or a place...where they can go to learn how to be in a work environment... there’s a whole range of attributes that can’t be taught at schools...”
(Employer D)

Another employer talks at length, as seen previously in the report, about how they operate a buddy system – someone to mentor the new starter through their first few weeks and months by providing practical information about the workplace, advising about dos and don’ts, and introducing them to company processes, policies and, crucially, to colleagues.

This report’s second recommendation, therefore, is to place the emphasis on local organisations and delivery providers to work closely with funding agencies, and with local government, to engage with employers to promote the benefits of an accredited mentoring scheme within the workplace.

Although only 2 employers make reference to a mentoring or buddying scheme, the fact that all the employers place emphasis on work ethic, information retention, ability to follow instructions and showing initiative, suggests that a mentoring scheme within the workplace would be of great benefit to employers and employees.

It would not only give crucial support to the new starter, but would also give the mentor the opportunity to learn a set of new skills, to enhance their professional development, and to begin to take on a first step leadership role, in terms of the skills and knowledge required to work with others, from a position of experience and knowledge.

The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) run low cost, accredited one-day national training sessions (3) that support an employer to gain accredited status as a mentoring provider, aimed at helping organisations to set up and manage a mentoring programme.

If county councils or local authorities were to initiate a campaign that promoted the advantages of a work-based mentoring scheme, the potential benefits to employers in taking up such a scheme would be significant.

Third sector organisations, who have influence locally, could design a briefing session for employers, outlining how a mentoring scheme could work – number of sessions, mentor/mentee role and expectations, professional boundaries, planning for each session etc -which could be funded by the employers. On the basis of a 2-hour delivery time expectation, the costs would be unlikely to be prohibitive.

Conclusion

The 12 hours of transcribed feedback from employers has enabled us to present a clear view of the employer perspective, in relation to the barriers facing young people in their attempts to find, and to sustain, employment.

Much of the data given to us tells us what we perhaps thought we already knew. Nonetheless, confirmation of what we thought we knew is important. It shows that, however rapidly the face of work has changed in recent years – with the gig economy, characterised by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work – employers still place an emphasis on values and skills that have been in vogue for decades – personality, flexibility and social skills, for example.

As one employer stated, what they really wanted was somebody who had:

“willingness to stand up and show a bit of personality, happy to get involved, smiley, eye-contact...you know, you don’t have to be a fantastic communicator, but they need to show a level of confidence.... or do their best get involved”. (Employer B)

Perhaps a greater emphasis on supporting young people to acquire the social and life skills required for employment, rather than an emphasis on qualifications, is what is most required from education providers at this time, along with a greater commitment from employers to offer in-work support to newly appointed, younger members of their workforce.

References

1. ‘What are the Barriers Preventing Young People from Accessing Employment - a Talent Match South East research project’, June 2016 - May 2017, CXK Ltd.
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2013/apr/22/top-10-things-employers-looking-for>
3. <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/mentoring-and-befriending/events/in-house-training>

Appendices

Appendix 1 - The Employer Questions

Appendix 1 – The Employer Questions

Outline of Research

This project is designed to get closer to and understand the underlying barriers to youth unemployment in Thanet. By helping to support in this project you have committed to answering a series of questions designed to unpack some of the barriers that young people are experiencing. CXK are committed to working with employers and young people; your perspective is very important to this project and CXK encourages frank discussion. The project, on behalf of CXK, aims to help young people not in education, employment or training improve their prospects by understanding barriers to employment. Your answers will help CXK place its efforts with ever closer alignment to the experiences of employers and young people, so that we continue to make a difference.

Confirm:

1. The consent form has been signed and agreed.
2. The interview is being recorded and the participants are entitled to a transcribed copy of the interview.

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Semi-structured questions – these can be asked in any order and deviated from as appropriate. You may need to outline what you mean specifically by ‘young person’.

Talent/ Skills/ Knowledge

When advertising vacancies how specifically are the requirements of the applicants outlined?

What type of knowledge is very important to your business?

What type of knowledge can be taught/ trained on the job?

What skills or knowledge are you less concerned about?

What type of skills are you most concerned about?

What signifies to you in an interview that in particular a young person has the ‘Talent’ you are looking for?

Are there specific types of behaviours that you would look for in a young individual during an interview?

Are there specific types of behaviours and attitude you look for on a C.V?

Hypothetically two people applied for a job with your company. If one individual had less skills and knowledge than another applicant, but evidently the type of attitude you wanted – which applicant would you give the job to?

Experiences

Can you describe the last time you employed a young individual and what happened to that individual within your company?

Can you reflect back and explain how the organisation in general views young employees?

Can you give your personal view about hiring young inexperienced people to work in an organisation such as this?

What do you think about young people and their skill base today when they start to look for employment?

What views do you hold about the way young people conduct themselves when applying for work?

Organisational approach

Can you outline how this organisation approaches the hiring of young inexperienced people?

Can you outline the training that is offered to employees in general, who work for this organisation?

What do you take into consideration to ensure the smooth running of the organisation when hiring young people?

What are the most important factors to an employer such as yourself when recruiting applicants under 24 years of age?

What types of work experience, if any, does your organisation offer?

Can you describe the usefulness of this is to you as an employer?

Current landscape

How would you describe the ‘work readiness’ of any young people that you have recently employed or interviewed?

How confident are you on a scale of 1-10 with the potential and skills of young people today?

How did you reach that number?

What would take that score to 1 or 2 points higher?

What support/ training do you believe young people require in order to be ‘employable’ once they leave education? Or do you believe that schools, colleges and universities have the balance about right?

If you were to design a course that helped young people be work ready, what three pieces of course content would you insist were included?

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