



# YMCA Training's Response to the House of Lords Committee Inquiry into Social Mobility

September 2015



## Introduction

1. The YMCA was established in 1844 and is the largest and oldest youth charity in the world, helping over 60 million people in 120 countries worldwide.
2. YMCA Training, as part of the worldwide YMCA movement, is a locally responsive charity which has helped over one million people to date; it is one of the largest voluntary sector training providers in the country and works with some of the most troubled young people in society with the transition from school to further study and employment.
3. YMCA Training currently has 22 centres which provide courses including vocational training programmes, traineeships, apprenticeships and courses for employers. Our tailored and holistic provision involves employers in the training process, engages and raises aspirations of participants and provides progression routes from pre-16 to level 4.
4. Most of YMCA Training's programmes receive Government funding via the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and the Education Funding Agency (EFA).



## Question One

5. What are the most significant factors that affect the social mobility and employment outcomes of young people in the transition from school into the work place?
6. Factors which affect social mobility are vast and can have a direct or indirect impact on employment outcomes. For this question YMCA Training will focus on factors which we believe can have a direct impact on young people, these include: work experience, academic qualifications, careers guidance, confidence and self-belief.
7. Work experience: YMCA Training often finds that employers are less likely to hire a young person who has little or no work experience due to the cost and time associated with training.
8. Recent statistics have shown that 66% of employers say work experience is a critical or significant factor in their recruitment, however, the proportion of employers offering work experience is just 30%<sup>1</sup>. This has created a 'Catch-22' situation for young people looking to find entry level employment.
9. Academic Qualifications: YMCA Training also finds that qualifications upon leaving school can impact greatly on social mobility. For example, for a young

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<sup>1</sup> UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), 2015. *Catch 16-24: Youth Employment Challenge*. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/404997/15.02.18\\_Youth\\_report\\_V17.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/404997/15.02.18_Youth_report_V17.pdf)

person to gain employment or progress to a college course or further study, GCSE English and Maths at grade A\*-C are often the minimum requirement.

10. Young people without work experience and without English and Maths GCSE's at grade A\*-C are usually left facing very limited options. Unfortunately, this is a situation many young people find themselves in.
11. Careers guidance: A further significant element to consider when assessing social mobility is careers advice during school years. From our experience, we find that young people can often progress through school without knowing what their employment options are should they not follow the A-Level route.
12. Recent research compiled by the Association of Colleges (AoC) found that 63% of young people could name A-Levels as post GCSE course, whereas only 7% named apprenticeships<sup>2</sup>.
13. Additionally, alternative options to the academic route can often seem uninspiring to young people. This in part can be due to alternative options such as apprenticeships being mistakenly viewed as low quality, low skilled options.
14. Confidence: When transitioning from school to the work place, a certain level of confidence, self-belief and resilience needs to be in place for an individual to be able to fully consider their options, to apply for positions and attend interviews.

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<sup>2</sup> House of Commons Library Briefing, 2015. *Careers guidance in schools, colleges and universities*. Available at - <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7236>

15. Far too often young people lack the self-belief needed to consider what they would like to pursue as a career. Confidence and self-belief should therefore be considered as important factors when assessing social mobility and employment outcomes.

### Question Two

16. There is a group of young people aged 14-24 who do not follow the A-Level and higher education route, and are not classified as NEET. What is known about the young people in this group– who are they, why are they in this position and what are their career trajectories?
17. YMCA Training work with a large number of individuals aged 14-24 who have not followed the A-Level route and we will answer the three sub questions in order:
18. Who are they? Our learners range in age from pre 16 to 50+ and comprise of individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds and ethnicities.
19. The majority of the young people we work with are from hard to reach groups in deprived areas or from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our learners can commonly experience dysfunctional home lives, homelessness and mental illness.
20. A number of individuals who take up courses with us are not classified as 'work ready' - they may not have the qualifications, work experience, interview skills or support needed to obtain employment.

21. Why are they in this position? There are a variety of reasons for this, for many young people learning 'on the job' is a much more suitable and accessible way of gaining qualifications and staying in employment long term.
22. A number of young people we work with are also referred to us from school, pupil referral units (PRU's), the Jobcentre and the youth offending service or by carers, parents or housing associations as they may not have the qualifications or work experience needed to gain employment.
23. What are their career trajectories? The career prospects for individuals we work with before they begin a training course or apprenticeship are usually poor.
24. School leavers who approach YMCA Training often have little or no work experience and insufficient qualifications to gain employment. As mentioned in question one, employers are usually less willing to hire young people who have no work experience or qualifications.

### Question Three

25. Does the current transition system support young people who do not follow the A-Level and higher education route to perform better in terms of employment outcomes? If not, why not? What challenges do these young people face in their ability to transition successfully into the workplace?

26. From YMCA Training's perspective, the current system as a whole does not adequately support young people who do not follow the A-Level and higher education route.
27. Challenges young people can face when transitioning from school to employment include the prospect of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training), a lack of secure jobs available and problems with upskilling whilst on unemployment benefits.
28. From April-June 2015<sup>3</sup> 922,000 people aged 16-24 were classed as NEET. While statistics show that overall the number of young people classed as NEET is decreasing, the cause of this decrease is largely contested.
29. Central YMCA in their Two Futures Report 'the Lost or Found Generation' in March 2015 highlighted that certain groups are more 'at risk' of becoming NEET, for example, a young person is twice as likely to become NEET if they have a dependent child, if they have had fewer than three months in post 16 education or if they had been supervised by a youth offending team in the past. Furthermore, a young person is almost eight times more likely to become NEET if they had been NEET previously<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> OECD, 2015. *Youth not in education or employment (NEET)*. Available at - <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/young-people-not-in-education--employment-or-training--neets-/august-2015/stb-neet-august-2015.html>

<sup>4</sup>Central YMCA, 2015. *Two Futures Report; the Lost or Found Generation?* Available at: <http://www.ymca.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Central-YMCA-Two-Futures-Report-v4-NO-BLEED.pdf>

30. These statistics are important to help demonstrate the lack of support certain groups of young people can experience when transitioning from school to employment and the clear need for further support for groups who are 'at risk' of becoming NEET.
31. Young people who do not follow the academic route can also frequently find themselves in low skilled employment without training prospects. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) in their 'Catch 16-24' report highlighted that for young people the labour market is fierce and without the right experience and qualifications young people are finding themselves competing for the lowest paid and most insecure jobs<sup>5</sup>
32. The report found that young people are often recruited into lower level roles and statistics have demonstrated that a fifth of employers said the last young person they recruited was to an elementary role, with only 5% saying that they hired a young person into a professional role<sup>6</sup>.
33. Challenges young people face when transitioning from school to employment can also include problems with the benefits system; one of the most common being the 16 hour rule.

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<sup>5</sup> UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), 2015. *Catch 16-24: Youth Employment Challenge*. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/404997/15.02.18\\_Youth\\_report\\_V17.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/404997/15.02.18_Youth_report_V17.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), 2015. *Catch 16-24: Youth Employment Challenge*. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/404997/15.02.18\\_Youth\\_report\\_V17.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/404997/15.02.18_Youth_report_V17.pdf)



34. The 16 hour rule refers to the maximum number of hours per week an individual can study at college without being classed as a full-time student for the purposes of unemployment benefit.
35. The 16 hour rule can act as a barrier when individuals try to access skills courses due to the lack of part time courses available, this in turn can affect their prospects of gaining employment.
36. The Government recognised that the 16 hour rule can act as a barrier and removed the 16 hour rule for traineeships, YMCA Training believe that the 16 hour rule should also be removed for other short, full time, skills study programmes, for example literacy or numeracy courses.
37. Another significant barrier to employment for young people from 2017 will be the removal of automatic housing benefit entitlement for 18 to 21 year olds.
38. For a large number of young people, claiming housing benefit is not a choice but a necessity and the importance of having a stable home when taking up training or employment is often underestimated.
39. As a minimum, exemptions to the automatic removal of housing benefit should include; all individuals in supported housing, all individuals who have been in care, young people who have a dependent child, homeless young people or those estranged from their parents. Exemptions should also include those who are currently on an apprenticeship or on a study course.

40. The removal of this rule for young people would ensure they are secure in their homes and it would increase the likelihood of them completing programmes and finding long-term employment.

#### Question Four

41. How can the transition from school to work be improved for all young people, particularly for those who do not go on to study A-Levels and higher education?  
How can employers be encouraged to employ more young people from this group?
42. With the participation age rising to 18 this year, it is more important than ever to ensure young people are well informed about the career routes and qualifications available to them.
43. To ensure every child is well informed of their options and to increase the uptake of apprenticeships and other vocational and skills based courses, we would suggest a full review of careers guidance policy in schools.
44. The transition from school to work could also be improved by a greater investment in traineeships as a tried and tested successful programme.
45. Employers could be encouraged to employ more young people from this group if they had better access to Government incentives. For example, smaller businesses often lack the flexibility larger employers have and can lose out on incentives. Also, in certain sectors such as health and care or personal training,

employers are reluctant to hire apprentices under 19 years of age and therefore do not benefit from the full recovery of training costs for apprentices.

46. To ensure all businesses can benefit from this incentive we would like to see the full recovery of training costs extended to those aged 19 and over in sectors where employers are reluctant to hire a younger apprentice.
47. YMCA Training has also found that smaller employers struggle with the requirement that an apprentice must be employed for at least 30 hours per week, except in highly exceptional circumstances<sup>7</sup>. We would suggest that this rule is relaxed and exemptions are broadened to allow smaller businesses and certain sectors to benefit from apprenticeships.

#### Question Five

48. Who should be responsible for improving the system to support the transition into work for school leavers?
49. Local working groups could be developed to improve support for school leavers and consist of employers, schools and training providers to provide localised support for young people. Especially those who chose to not follow the A-Level route.

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<sup>7</sup> House of Commons Library Briefing, 2015. *Apprenticeships Policy*. Available at - <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7278>



## Recommendations

YMCA Training recognise that there are wide ranging factors which can affect the social mobility of young people and through our experience we have developed a number of key recommendations for the Committee to consider:

YMCA Training recommend:

- A full review of careers advice in schools.
- Increased funding for traineeships.
- A review into work experience provided for children of secondary school age.
- The removal of the 16 hour rule for short full time skills study courses.
- Exemptions from the removal of automatic housing benefit entitlement.
- A review into employer incentives and a relaxation of the 30 hour rule.

YMCA Training applaud the House of Lords Social Mobility Committee's work to date and hope we have contributed in a constructive manner. YMCA Training would also be willing to give oral evidence to the Committee should the opportunity arise.