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Barnardo's

Lost in transition:

The urgent need to help young school leavers into employment or work-based training

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Introduction

As Britain suffers the worst recession for over 50 years, our newspapers are full of stories of rising public debt, businesses closing and the spectre of soaring unemployment.

Unemployed 16 and 17 year olds are, in many ways, the hidden victims of this recession. They have the highest unemployment rate of any age group - with 31.7 per cent unemployed in the three months up to June 2009, or 206,000 young people out of work.¹ While the Government has made great efforts to help unemployed 18 to 24 year olds, little attention has been paid to the many younger school leavers who want to work, rather than return to learning. Many of them left school because they were motivated to earn a wage and support themselves, but with few skills or qualifications and little or no work experience to offer, they find it impossible to get a job.

Government initiatives aimed at this age group have focused mainly on the long-term goal of increasing participation in education and training. By 2013, young people in England will be required to carry on learning until they are 17, rising to 18 in 2015. Barnardo's supported this historic reform as it has the potential to improve the skills, job prospects and life-chances of disadvantaged young people, too many of whom still leave school or college at 16 or 17, only to become trapped in unemployment.

Raising the leaving age (which will apply in England only) should not however mean ignoring the urgent need for targeted employment initiatives to help these young people. Increased participation – as defined by the Education Skills Act 2008 – has never just been about school and college. It must involve a range of provision, including work-based learning and jobs with training for young people who wish to work and learn in the workplace, rather than in the classroom. In any case, the spiralling number of unemployed 16 and 17-year olds cannot wait until 2015 for Government initiatives to help them into a job with training – they need our help now!

This paper highlights the difficulties that unemployed 16 and 17-year olds face in the current economic climate and what more the Government, voluntary sector and employers should be doing to support this group. It draws extensively on Barnardo's research and practice, in

¹ ONS, August 2009 Labour Market Statistics bulletin

particular, what young people have told us about their ambitions and the kind of support they need to achieve them. Alongside this briefing we are producing a separate information leaflet for employers highlighting the benefits of providing work-placement and employment opportunities for young people and how they may work with Barnardo's to provide life-changing opportunities to the young people attending our training and support services².

Why focus on employment initiatives for 16 and 17 year olds?

The Recession and 16/17 year olds – the facts

- Youth unemployment is higher than for any other age group – over 30% of 16 and 17 year olds are unemployed
- The unemployment rate for 16-17 year olds is nearly twice that for 18-24 year olds and 4 times that for the working population
- Long term unemployment for 16-17 year olds is on the increase with those out of work for more than 6 months up 22 per cent in the last year, and those who have been out of work for over 12 months, up 99% on last year

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics bulletin, August 2009. Figures relate to economically active population.

16 and 17 year olds are being hit hard by the recession. Just over 200,000 16 and 17 year olds are currently unemployed.

Long periods of unemployment at 16 or 17 damage future job prospects. Having a generation of young people endure long periods of unemployment before they have even begun their career is more than just a short-term waste of talent, it also risks having a negative impact on their job prospects and the wider economy for years to come.

Experience from previous recessions shows that long spells of unemployment can have a legacy on a young person's earning potential. Youth unemployment of more than six months has been shown to leave an enduring 'wage scar' equivalent to a reduction in wages of 23% at age 33 and 15% at age 42³. This increased chance of lower wages will not only have an effect on the current generation of young people, but also on their families. The Government has pledged to end child poverty by 2020, yet a failure to tackle

soaring youth unemployment now is likely to result in more children growing up in poverty, as today's unsupported 16 and 17 year olds become unemployed parents.

The Government has struggled to reverse the long-term decline in work-based training – in spite of a welcome drive to increase apprenticeships. We continue to have historically low levels of opportunities for young people to enter the workforce and train on-the-job, particularly for 16 to 17 year olds. Despite a high profile Government campaign which has contributed to a healthy overall growth rate of 19% in level 2 apprenticeship starts during 2007/08, the number of 16-18 year olds embarking on this route grew by less than 2%, while completions fell by 6%.⁴ This compares to participation rates in the 1960s of around a third of all male school leavers. Increasing the number of apprenticeships is likely to become harder as the recession continues, as more employers find themselves having to cut costs and lay off experienced workers.

² Barnardo's, September 2009, Opening doors – helping disadvantaged young people to make the transition to work

³ Gregg, P and Tominey, E (2004) *The Wage Scar from Youth Unemployment*, CMPO Working Paper Series No. 04/097. These figures assume no further periods of unemployment.

⁴ The Data Service, June 2009, SFR-03 (table 5.1); apprenticeship data is presented in an age band covering 16-18 year olds inclusive.

Why do young people end up unemployed at 16 or 17?

There are many reasons why young school leavers may find themselves unemployed and individual stories – much like our own lives – are often complex. However, when we look at the so-called ‘NEET’ population (young people aged 16-18 not in education, employment or training) some common themes emerge:

“The work had no relation to what we were doing. There were a lot of worksheets. I would have preferred more practical stuff. And more hands-on creative stuff. There’s no point just writing about stuff and not actually doing it.”

Young carer, 18

Disengagement from school – Barnardo’s recently carried out research with young people who had left school and were (or had recently been) ‘NEET’⁵. A key theme to emerge was overwhelmingly poor experiences of school, leaving the young people with strong feelings of alienation, low self-confidence and few qualifications. When asked what would have been better, most said they would have preferred more practical, hands-on learning, with more direct relevance to their career aspirations. They complained that school was boring, they had difficult relationships with teachers and peers (with many accounts of bullying), and they often had the feeling that school was not for them.

Lack of suitable jobs or training opportunities locally - There has always been a proportion of young people who left school early, preferring to work or train in the workplace instead of staying on to sit A levels. 40 or 50 years ago approximately 80% of non-grammar school pupils left school at 15 or 16 with no qualifications⁶. However, for that generation of school leavers there were far more options for unskilled work in industry and mining, and large numbers of apprenticeships which allowed them to learn on-the-job, often with day release to a technical college. Today, such opportunities have greatly receded. Traditional low-skilled jobs have largely been replaced by growth in the service sector, often in different areas of the country and requiring more entry qualifications. The resulting pockets of localised structural unemployment have had a disproportionate effect on young job seekers⁷. Apprenticeships remain highly competitive and beyond the reach of many disadvantaged young people who – for a wide variety of reasons – often do not achieve all they are capable of in school⁸.

Personal problems and difficult home circumstances create barriers to learning and employment - Barnardo’s “*Second Chances*” research revealed that young people who drop out of school early often have a range of personal problems, which undermine their ability to cope in school and make finding employment difficult. Barriers experienced by young people using Barnardo’s vocational training and support services include learning disabilities, teenage parenthood, poor physical or mental health, and caring for a sick relative. Poor living conditions and homelessness added complications for young people who were living independently. Some of our research was conducted in “*bed and breakfast land*” neighbourhoods, with a transient population of young people housed in inappropriate and insecure accommodation, making it difficult for them to commit to regular attendance on a course, let alone hold down a job.

⁵ Barnardo’s, March 2009, *Second Chances: Re-engaging young people in education and training*

⁶ Hayward G, Wilde S, Williams R, October 2008, *Rathbone/Nuffield Review Engaging Youth Enquiry*

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ Barnardo’s will separately produce a series of papers in Autumn 2009/Spring 2010 which will explore the achievement gap between poorer youngsters and their better off peers, and highlight a number of policy solutions aimed at tackling this

What helps unemployed young people to get back on track? The Barnardo's experience

"Education and training is the centre of every child's future."
Thomas Barnardo

Barnardo's has extensive experience of helping unemployed 16 and 17 year olds to gain qualifications and find work. We have been helping young people take their first steps towards sustainable employment since the late 1800s, when Dr Thomas Barnardo founded a number of training centres to give young people the skills they would need to enter trades such as carpentry and leather-making.

Today, working in partnership with local employers, schools, colleges and other charities, we train and support over 2,200 young people every year. We work across the UK in a range of sectors including construction-related trades, catering, vehicle maintenance, business administration, horticulture, retail, warehousing and hair and beauty therapy.

Key characteristics of our services which successfully engage 'hard-to-reach' young people

- A high ratio of staff to young people to enable one-to-one support from keyworkers and small group activities
- Outreach capacity to engage young people and sustain their participation
- Flexibility e.g. allowing more time to complete modules and occasional breaks in participation if crises occur
- Informal learning opportunities to develop new skills and build confidence
- Access to targeted support for young people who face specific barriers.

Source: Barnardo's, 2009, *Second Chances – re-engaging young people in education and training*

Barnardo's provides a wide range of services to support young people through the transition back to education, training or into work, where necessary offering intensive support to meet their needs. Key to their success is a strongly personalised approach, working flexibly with each young person and 'sticking with them', even when difficulties occur.

Central to our approach is a commitment to building on young people's strengths and interests, helping them to identify and take steps towards their career ambitions. Opportunities to spend time in a real workplace motivates many young people and we often find that those who have struggled with the rules and restrictions in the school environment rapidly come to understand the need to be punctual, reliable and presentable to get – and keep – a job.

The fact is that some young people learn better by doing, as opposed to theoretical, classroom-based learning. Practical, work-based learning alongside experienced trades people and being treated like an adult can transform the motivation and aspirations of young people who have struggled in school, helping them to achieve more than they ever thought they were capable of.

How on the job training can work - Ciaran's story

"I joined Dr B's kitchen in July 2007 after leaving school. I had always wanted to work as a chef and went on work experience from school to a local restaurant, I liked it but they told me I would never be a chef. I was very disappointed but decided to try another work experience at Dr B's Kitchen. They really encouraged me and I started full time when I left school. It was hard work and the staff really helped me understand a lot of things, not just about food, I learned about being a good team member, being reliable, keeping myself safe, improving my reading and writing; there was so much more to learn than I thought.

It's hard to believe that just 2 years ago I was worrying about leaving school and here I am working as a Commis Chef for the Botanic Inns Group at The Northern Whig, where I can continue training. I would like to thank Dr B's for the time and patience in helping me follow my dream career."

Call to action! Barnardo's policy recommendations

Following the Education and Skills Act 2008, there has been a great deal of effort to broaden the learning offer – with new diplomas, more apprenticeships and a foundation learning tier – and overhauling the planning and delivery of 14-19 education and training. There have also been a variety of pilots on re-engaging young people in learning – learning agreements, activity agreements and entry to learning. All this is welcome, but the fact is that not all 16 year olds want to stay on in education. For many, the decision to enter the workplace and train there is a positive choice and one that will play to their strengths better than enduring a further two years in the classroom. Yet a critical element appears to be missing from current Government policy: the employment pathway.

There is also the urgent reality that thousands of 16 and 17 year olds are unemployed now, yet in contrast to the many initiatives to help 18 to 24 year olds find jobs, there appear to be no employment initiatives targeted at younger school leavers, beyond a community service scheme. Barnardo's is therefore calling on the Government to focus urgently on unemployed young school leavers to extend employment and work-based learning opportunities for this age group.

1. Develop a strategy to promote greater collaboration between local employers and training providers, with targeted funding and practical measures to drive an expansion in work and training opportunities for 16-18 year olds.

The challenging economic climate means that many employers are finding it difficult to maintain their current workforce, and the cost and bureaucracy associated with taking on a young person may represent more of an investment than they are prepared to make at present. DCSF and DWP urgently need to sit down with employers and training providers to put together a package of measures to drive an expansion in work and training opportunities for young school leavers. This could include, for example, exploring how to reduce the bureaucratic demands and additional costs on employers; promoting Group Training Associations to make it easier for SMEs⁹ to taken on trainees; requiring public sector employers and contractors to take on more young trainees and training and wage subsidies.

⁹ SME = small and medium sized enterprises.

2. Make unemployed 16 and 17 year olds a priority group for support in finding a job

Many unemployed 16 and 17 year olds look to their local Job Centre Plus to help them find employment. However since most of them are not eligible for Job Seekers' Allowance, and helping them contributes little towards performance targets, they are not considered a priority group. In theory, local Connexions services should fill this gap, but joined-up working between Connexions and Job Centre Plus remains problematic in some areas.¹⁰ Barnardo's therefore recommends that DWP make 16 to 17 year olds a priority group for Job Centre Plus; and that DCSF and DWP should work together to encourage more co-operation between local Job Centres and Connexions services.

3. Drive growth in apprenticeships for 16 to 17 year olds, targeting funding and support at this age group specifically.

While the Government has been successful overall in increasing apprenticeships, growth in apprenticeships for 16 to 17 year olds has stalled. Apprenticeships have a critical role to play in encouraging many more young people to carry on learning for longer and to a higher level; the need for many more opportunities for young school leavers has become urgent in the recession. A targeted approach involving joint work between DCSF and the new National Apprenticeship Service is required, with dedicated funding and better support structures. This will enable young people facing barriers to participation or with additional needs to embark on this route.

4. Continue to fund and recognise work-based, programme-led apprenticeships (PLAs) as a valid early stage of an employed apprenticeship for disadvantaged young people. Work-based PLAs supported by training providers like Barnardo's and Rathbone enable disadvantaged young people – who are capable of succeeding on an apprenticeship, but are not immediately attractive to employers because of a troubled background – to embark on an apprenticeship without needing to be employed. They follow the same programme as other apprentices: doing the same work, spending as much time in the workplace and working towards the same qualifications, certified to the same standards. The only difference is that they are not paid (they are supported only through EMA). Effectively, there is less cost and less risk for the employer, so young people are given a chance they would otherwise not have, to show just what they are capable of. The vast majority progress to employed apprenticeships, with success rates of around 75%.

A Bill currently before Parliament threatens to downgrade this route to a 'pre-apprenticeship' which would lack the status and opportunities for progression of an apprenticeship and close down an important route into apprenticeships for disadvantaged young people. Barnardo's is lobbying against this move, arguing that it would be a retrograde step, running counter to the Government's strategic aims of increasing participation and narrowing the achievement gap in education.¹¹

¹⁰ <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/Archive/912067/Jobcentre-Plus-blamed-failure-New-Deal/>

¹¹ Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill. Barnardo's Bill briefings are available by email from Alison Worsley, Assistant Director of Policy & Public Affairs alison.worsley@barnardos.org.uk.