

Barnardo's Scotland/Action for Children Scotland – Briefing for Scottish Government Debate on Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy

Barnardo's Scotland and Action for Children welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling the growing problem of youth unemployment in Scotland.

The publication of the Youth Employment Strategy is an important step in the right direction and we welcome the opportunity for MSPs to debate and discuss this critical document.

Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy

1. We are concerned that at present the strategy does not fully address the needs of those furthest from the labour market, especially those with complex and challenging needs.

- Those young people with complex and challenging needs often need much more support to get into the labour market beyond simply securing a place in a work or training programme. Although those furthest from the labour market are referenced in the strategy there is not enough focus on this group of young people and how to get them into work. What works best is a holistic approach which combines finance and the wrap around support required.
- Those furthest from the labour market have more than just a lack of educational attainment to contend with. Many come with extremely different and complex backgrounds or live or have lived in chaotic circumstances or had/have dependency, abuse and criminal justice issues to contend with. The strategy needs to recognise this and take account of this to ensure those young people are effectively supported into the labour market.

2. We fully support the Government's recognition of the importance of the third sector in tackling youth employment. However, the third sector needs to be seen as integral part of the solution and employability services need sustainable long term funding packages.

- A major concern for a lot of third sector employment services operated by charities such as Barnardo's Scotland and Action for Children is that they often have to rely on numerous funding sources in order to deliver services. Much of this is funding is short term with rigid eligibility criteria and rules, making it difficult for

services to plan long term and build longstanding relationships with key stakeholders. The strategy should look to ensure that funding sources for employment services are long term.

- The third sector must also be seen as integral partner with Government and not an add-on or just a route to employment opportunities for young people. Capitalising on the experience of organisations like Barnardo's Scotland and Action for Children Scotland of working with those furthest from the labour market is crucial if the Government is to meet its ambition to support all young people into work.

3. We welcome the Scottish Government's *Opportunities for All* programme, however, we have a number of concerns with regards to ensuring that every young person benefits.

- There are those who do not take up opportunities under the 16+ Learning Choices, do not complete them or do not have a positive destination on completion of their placement. The programme must target these individuals, and aim to intervene before they present at Jobcentre Plus at 18.
- The strategy notes the 2011 figure that 89.9% of school leavers are in a positive destination, however, it fails to highlight that in 2009/10 only 44% of looked after children are in a positive destination six months after leaving school, with 47% of them looking for work.
- The Government must also identify those hidden young people who are within the 11% of leaving school without a positive destination and those young people where the original offer is not sustained. This is reflected in the statistics, where 1 in 8 of our young people (11%) leave School with no positive destination, however by the age of 18, this group rises to 1 in 4 (25%) who are looking for employment, further training or education. (DWP Figures which report 1 in 4 18-24 young people actively looking for work).
- The Government must identify those hidden young people between 16-19 who have not been in sustained employment, education or training since leaving school and have not presented at Jobcentre Plus.
- The Government must also give a guaranteed maximum waiting time for young people to get an opportunity under the Scottish Government's *Opportunity for All* programme.

4. The Scottish Government should consider a review of the delivery of Activity Agreements across Scotland. Activity Agreements are being delivered inconsistently across Scotland and are not always adequately focused on the needs of

the young people they are designed to support or reaching all them.

- The delivery of Activity Agreements is patchy across Scotland, with regards to where Barnardo's Scotland operates our Works services, Activity Agreements are delivered well in Highland, and East Lothian Council has recently started to improve. However, Edinburgh and Renfrewshire Council do not appear to have developed Agreements as they should have. We believe that this patchy development in the areas we work is indicative of across Scotland.
- In general, from our experience, it appears that Activity Agreements can be almost any activity from part-time work to 2hours a week literacy classes. The delivery of them is not as focussed as it could be and they are not always linked to a clear pathway to work, education or training. We are also concerned that they are not reaching all the young people they should. Particularly those who have been disengaged from school prior to leaving and are not in touch with Skills Development Scotland. On some occasions some young people find their way on to an Activity Agreement where perhaps a Get Ready For Work programme would be more suitable.

5. The role of further education institutions can be key in providing many care leavers with the opportunity to gain an education beyond school.

- It is good to see the strategy prioritising college places for 20-24 and for those with low skills. Of those 26% of looked after children that are in further and higher education 6 months after leaving school – 96% of them are in further education. College is an ideal positive choice for progression.
- We do have some concern that a number of young people we work with, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds such as care leavers, have faced real difficulties when their benefits are withdrawn when they start college – especially housing benefit. Our employment service staff have reported this as a major cause of drop-out among the young people they work with, since there are so few part-time jobs available. A quarter of care leavers drop out of further education six months after starting.

6. We support the idea of an outcome-focused national employability fund to provide more coherent and flexible pre-employment support for young people and adults. We look forward to seeing further detail of this proposal.

- There is currently little or no mention of the importance of life skills or the need to support people with them as well as work skills. Many of those that we work with need this support in order to successfully undertake a work placement or employment.
- We would like to see that all training or learning programmes include an element of soft skills support to young people to help them make the transition into adulthood and employment e.g. housing, benefits, health advice and coping skills.

7. Government support to encourage employers to give opportunities to young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds is welcome, but such schemes must also ensure that the third sector is leading in providing support to these young people to enable them to successfully engage with these programmes.

- The strategy has stated that the Government will provide flexible support including incentives to employers to support 16-24 year olds from disadvantaged groups such as care leavers and young carers into jobs including Modern Apprenticeships This would indicate a more targeted version of the current Employer Recruitment Incentive, aimed at young carers, care leavers, ex-offenders etc. We welcome this, but the Government must ensure that Third Sector organisations are given the funding support to enable them to work with these young people in the intensive, relatively long term, supportive way that leads them to be ready to take up employment, without it the young people put into employment under such a scheme would be at risk of failing.

8. Ensuring each young person is put on the right work, education or training placement based on their needs and interests is crucial in leading to long term employment prospects.

- Many young people we work with would much rather gain work-based qualifications and skills and do not want to be in a formal learning environment, such as college. The feedback we have received from these young people is that they learn much more effectively in the work place as they can see how their learning links to gaining employment. The Youth Employment Strategy must take account of the needs, interests and wishes of young people regarding their employment prospects.

Key Facts

- Over 100,000 of those aged 16-24 years old are currently unemployed¹.
- The number of 18-24 year olds claiming JSA for more than 12 months increased last month from 3,200 to 3,600 – a 12.5% increase. This figure has now more than doubled in 6 months and has increased by 225% over the past 12 months (ONS).
- There is a particular issue in Scotland regarding the employment outcomes of those young people leaving care. Over two thirds of the 4,000 care leavers currently eligible for aftercare services are not known to be in employment, training or education.
- The social and economic costs of allowing 16 and 17 year olds to become the long term unemployed adults of the future are high. For every young person not in education, employment or training there is an average cost of £56,000 to public authorities over their lifetime.²

Supporting those furthest from the labour market

Barnardo's Scotland's and Action for Children Scotland's services include employability projects, which support disadvantaged young people to access training and employment opportunities. Action for Children Scotland and Barnardo's Scotland are working with a wide range of partners, including local authorities and the private sector, to promote positive outcomes for difficult to reach young people, who often face significant barriers in accessing employment and training opportunities. These barriers can, in many cases, prove insurmountable without the type of personalised, holistic support we can provide through our employability services. This support is often vital if vulnerable young people are to fulfill their potential, and to make the most of their lives.

Barnardo's Scotland

We currently provide six Barnardo's Works projects across Scotland for those aged 16 to 24. These employment services support those young people furthest from the labour market, with specialised training and work placements. This has proved to be a highly successful programme that has made a real difference with many participants securing employment for the first time.

Effective working in partnership with employers has been a key strength of the programme as we encourage, enable, develop and support young people throughout their work placements. We also provide continuing

¹ Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy

² Coles, B., Godfrey, C., Keung, A., Parrott, S. and [Bradshaw, J.](#) (2010) *Estimating the life-time cost of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training*. York: University of York.

liaison and support with employers to enable us to identify any problems and issues with placements early and prevent situations which might lead to young people losing their employment.

Last year Barnardo's Works supported 284 young people and of those 202 went on to find employment, around 65% of these remained in employment at the 26 week stage. Those who dropped out of employment before then were picked back up by Barnardo's Works with a focus on helping them back in to work.

Action for Children Scotland

Action for Children Scotland currently works with over 350 young people per year through a range of employability programmes in 7 local authority areas. This provision is developed based on local needs and in conjunction with local MCMC team, 16+ and arrange of employability partners. The programmes also straddled the Skill pipeline approach in recognition that the young people we support need a wide range of intervention to move them positively towards the labour market. Action for Children has carried out an external evaluation of its Youthbuild programme and wider employability services. The research highlighted the range of issues faced by our most vulnerable young people and the approach adopted to provide practical and deliverable solutions. The report highlighted that the key features to success were, relevant skills and training, business relationships with employers, incentives and remuneration to young people, skills and knowledge of staff and the holistic nature of the service.

Last year – Action for Children supported 356 young people through its employability programmes. Youthbuild (160), Challenge (92), transitions (25, Clyde Gateway (50) and Try it out (39). In total 285, around 80% went on to positive destinations or the next stage within the skills pipeline. Of those who were aligned to the direct Employability programme, 72% found paid work, 64% still in paid employment after 6 months.

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