

Employment support for young people with multiple disadvantages

A new study by Jane Lakey, Helen Barnes and Jane Parry of the Policy Studies Institute examines the support that young people with multiple disadvantages need in order to succeed in the labour market. It looks at the types of support such young people experienced, from New Deal and other sources, and at the support that they would like to be offered. It also presents the views of support workers from specialist organisations working with disadvantaged young people. The study found that:

- f** Young people's personal histories varied greatly, but those who had experienced many difficulties in their lives generally felt a need for understanding and encouragement.
- f** Almost without exception, the young people interviewed were keen to receive more employment support. However, time and resources could be wasted if the kinds of support offered were not appropriate to their needs.
- f** Personal circumstances were not always the main barrier to employment. Young people cited discrimination and the lack of job opportunities in some areas as key reasons why they had been unable to find stable work.
- f** Asked about employment support services, young people were generally positive about the idea of receiving support from a single individual, such as a personal adviser. Views on peer support groups were more mixed: some felt they would be helpful, others felt uncomfortable with the idea of group discussions.
- f** Some young people had benefited from training in specific aspects of job-hunting, such as interview technique, although not all felt they needed such training. There was enthusiasm for work trials and on-the-job training, although some young people had felt let down by previous experiences where offers of work had not materialised at the end of a trial period.
- f** Organisations stressed the importance of providing readily accessible services, so that opportunities for making progress were not lost.
- f** Many organisations felt that disadvantaged young people needed long-term employment support. They stressed the importance of supporting disadvantaged young people while they settled into employment. However, funding arrangements meant that most organisations were only able to offer support in finding a job.

Multiple disadvantage and the labour market

A person's prospects in the labour market depend on the types of work available, the person's own skills, experience and qualifications, and their personal circumstances, including homelessness, disability, and responsibility for children. Changes in the UK labour market have resulted in a decline in jobs for those without qualifications and are tending to reinforce and deepen existing patterns of disadvantage. This research looked at the labour market experiences of young people who had experienced multiple problems including homelessness, disability, poor mental health, literacy and language problems, problems with the law, problems with drugs and alcohol, and family breakdown leading to time spent in care. While each had experienced a different combination of personal difficulties, there were some common themes:

- **Care leavers** were particularly likely to have had frequent moves between schools and to have dropped out of school before taking exams. Lack of confidence and emotional problems could mean that they needed additional support when starting work, but they often had less family support than did other young people. Many were expected to live independently from an early age and felt unable to take on low paid jobs because of the risk of losing housing benefit.
- Many young people had passed through periods of **homelessness**, which made it difficult for them to focus on education or work. Those who had been homeless often took longer to establish themselves in secure employment.
- **Problems with drugs and alcohol** had made it difficult for some young people to continue in employment or education, but employment could also help young people overcome dependence on these substances, particularly where they had additional support.
- Young people who had been involved in **crime** often described this as a phase, which they had grown out of or given up, often in response to a specific event such as having children. Ex-offenders were generally highly motivated to work and most had been in and out of temporary and casual jobs since leaving school. Employment

could help young people stay clear of crime, but employers were often unwilling to take on people with a criminal record.

- Young **disabled people** were particularly likely not to have worked and some had been placed on inappropriate courses. They had often not been provided with adequate support for interviews or in training placements.
- Young people with **mental health difficulties** were particularly likely to be estranged from the labour market, and often did not feel able to cope with a job. They were also more likely to have problems working in a pressurised environment.
- Young people with **literacy problems**, including dyslexia, frequently had poor experiences of the education system, and often felt that they had been labelled as disruptive. Like young people for whom **English was a second language**, they felt they would have benefited from more support at school and college. Basic skills courses were criticised by several young people as being insufficiently flexible to meet their individual needs.
- For **young mothers**, problems finding good quality childcare often created insurmountable difficulties in getting work, particularly where they did not have help from partners or other family members.

Many young people spoke about the lack of jobs in their local areas. More than two-thirds of those interviewed had spent their working lives in and out of temporary, casual or part-time jobs. Several commented that agency work was the only option in their area for people with their skills and experience. Such jobs made it impossible for young people to achieve financial security and independence for themselves and their families, and were not financially worthwhile for those in independent housing.

Young people's views on using employment support services

Young people were generally positive about the idea of receiving support from a single individual. Those with complicated issues in their lives welcomed the idea of not having to keep repeating their personal details to a series of strangers. Some young people

had benefited from a good relationship with their New Deal personal adviser and valued the support they had received. Others had not found their personal advisers supportive, or felt ambivalent about receiving support from an agency with the power to make decisions on their continued receipt of benefit.

Views on peer support groups were more mixed, with some young people feeling that they would be helpful. Others thought that they would feel exposed discussing their personal issues in a group, or would be 'dragged down' by hearing about other people's problems. Some of the young people had benefited from training in specific aspects of job-hunting, such as interview technique and preparing a CV. Others would have liked similar help, although not all young people felt they needed it. There was enthusiasm for work trials and on-the-job training, although some young people felt let down where previous offers of work had not materialised at the end of a trial period. Young people who lacked confidence sometimes valued the help of advisers who spoke to employers on their behalf. Organisations working with such young people also found this to be a particularly effective way of working.

Organisations' perspectives on providing employment support

The organisations interviewed were providing a range of innovative types of support. They tended to work with disadvantaged young people who were less job-ready than those interviewed. Many were focused on a particular target group, such as ex-offenders or homeless young people, which meant that their advisers had specific expertise in the types of support required.

Support workers from these organisations provided suggestions for ways of:

- encouraging young people to take up employment support;
- helping them to set goals and prepare themselves for work;
- providing opportunities to succeed;
- building resilience and helping people learn to cope with rejection; and
- working with employers to counter discrimination and break down barriers to employment.

They stressed the importance of providing services which are readily accessible, so that opportunities for making progress are not lost. Organisations tried to avoid waiting lists and qualifying time periods, and often used drop-in surgeries and outreach.

The organisational representatives also emphasised the importance of supporting disadvantaged young people when they started work. This time of transition can be a stressful one, and many jobs are not sustained beyond the first few weeks. Providing support for job moves was also seen as important in making sure that disadvantaged young people achieved long-term success in the labour market, rather than remaining trapped in entry-level jobs. However, only a minority of the organisations interviewed had this sort of long-term involvement with clients. Many said that they would have liked to do so, but described their work as constrained by funding arrangements linked mainly to the short-term objective of finding a job for their clients.

Implications for policy

The research suggests a number of implications for policy development in this area:

- Many young people require additional support in school, either as a result of special educational needs, such as dyslexia or English as a second language, or because of personal circumstances, such as bereavement, family breakdown, or being in care.
- Young people with multiple disadvantages travel longer and more complex paths from education to the labour market than their peers. They are likely to require support beyond the age of 19, when support from the Connexions service ends, particularly as they may not be in contact with their families. Care leavers are particularly likely to need long-term support.
- As time goes on, young people remaining unemployed are increasingly those with multiple problems, who may be some distance from being able to take work. Many such young people need flexible and intensive forms of support in order to achieve a stable position in the labour market.
- Funding for employment support work needs to

reflect the long-term and incremental nature of the process of redressing labour market disadvantage, and should not necessarily end when somebody finds a job.

- Disadvantaged young people need to be given a chance, but many employers are not prepared to take the risk. The expansion of new types of job provision such as 'social firms' and 'intermediate labour markets' could provide one source of vacancies for people who find it hard to get a foothold in the labour market. Mainstream employers could also be encouraged to employ more disadvantaged young people, and could be given more support when they do so.

About the project

The report is based on in-depth interviews with 49 multiply disadvantaged young people and the workers in 20 organisations providing employment support to various disadvantaged groups. The young people were selected from two Employment Service surveys of entrants to the New Deal for Young People, and had combinations of the following disadvantages:

- problems with the law;
- homelessness;
- problems with drugs or alcohol;
- time spent in local authority care;
- disability or long-term health problems affecting work;
- poor mental health;
- problems with literacy or English language.

The young people interviewed were 20 women and 29 men, aged between 20 and 26, and were divided almost equally between white and minority ethnic groups. They lived in three areas of the country: London and the Southeast, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the West Midlands. The organisations were selected to be representative of a range of disadvantaged groups, and included both statutory and voluntary sector organisations, funded from a range of sources, and working in a variety of ways. They were based in London and the Southeast, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the Northwest.

How to get further information

The full report, **Getting a chance: Employment support for young people with multiple disadvantages** by Jane Lakey, Helen Barnes and Jane Parry, is published for the Foundation by YPS as part of the Work and Opportunity series (ISBN 1 84263 032 6, price £13.95).