



world **skills**uk
GO FURTHER, FASTER

***It's all a matter of
perspective –***



***what young people
are thinking about
their careers***

Introduction

WorldSkills UK exists to see young people make the very best start in work and life, inspiring them to make bold and informed choices about their future. Central to doing this has been providing young people with a platform to speak directly to business, education and government. We have spent the past year cultivating a voice for young people beyond skills through our platform of youth engagement and research. We capture the views and opinions of young people on matters that directly relate to their future, sharing these insights and giving a new perspective that will start to change the national conversation in these areas.

This report summarises the findings which have been generated by these activities and what we have learnt this year from a range of subjects, from careers advice, to gender, to how technology is changing the shape of work.

Background

The growing skills gaps in the UK economy is widely reported upon and brought into greater focus by the UK's impending departure from the EU and discussions of 'homegrown skills' to plug them. All of which is made more urgent by the rise of automation or what is commonly known as industry 4.0; creating a pace of change and uncertainty keenly felt by young people. As such, more than ever we need to change how we engage with young people and how we attract them to the areas of work that are needed in the future.

While employers are clear that they feel young people are not yet 'work ready'¹, we must work to overcome this disconnect and maximise the potential that young people bring when making the transition from education to the workplace. Therefore, we carried out a series of engagement events and research, to create this dialogue and help employers conversely to become 'young people ready.'



A Careers Advice Strategy that Works for Young People

The backbone to ensuring that young people have the best possible start in life is providing them with careers advice and guidance that will help empower them to make informed decisions on their education and career pathway. Or as put by the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills Anne Milton: “without access to the best possible careers support, some people will miss out on the opportunities available.”

The Government’s new [Careers Strategy](#) (which is England only) launched in 2017 aims to do just that, providing a framework for schools on how to embed world class careers provision. However, central to making this work is identifying how young people relate to and engage with this provision. Our Youth Summit at The Skills Show in November 2017 worked with participants aged 16 -24 years-old from England and Wales to focus on just that². A range of methods were used to unlock the perspectives of young people on careers advice in England and Wales, which culminated in the young people pitching their ideas on how to effectively improve the provision of careers advice.

What did we learn?

As well as the insightful pitches generated by the young people involved in the Summit there were three overwhelming themes that ran through all the discussion, debates and concepts. We believe that these themes should be considered as we work together to develop a careers advice offer that really works for young people.

- a. Improving the **perception** of careers advice, to inspire and motivate young people to engage with the provision. Careers advice has an image problem, which needs to be addressed. Young people need to be both inspired by and trust the advice they are given. While in a lot of places this is just a perception, we do need to make sure that young people have access to role models they can relate to alongside more formal careers advice.

We need to educate people that careers advice can come in many different guises and sometimes variety can be as important as quantity.

- b. To effectively implement a **personalised** service for all young people. In today’s culture everything is bespoke and customisable to our own tastes and needs. Young people expect nothing less from their careers advice. We believe that young people are looking for careers advice that can be tailored to their own learning style and preferences. This requires providing young people with the skills to both access formal advice as well as self-serve.

We need to be teaching young people how to make the most of the vast amounts of information and support that is available. There will always be the need for professional careers advice, however this needs to support and empower further exploration not be the first and last place young people look.

- c. **Accessibility** – to have a careers advice offer which provides the same level of quality and service regardless of a young person’s background or location. This was a particularly strong theme throughout all the discussions.

The young people at the Summit felt that good quality careers advice can be a huge factor in enabling social mobility and broadening diversity. They believed strongly that careers advice should be a major factor in dismantling stereotypes and promoting a wide range of possible careers regardless of background, race or disability.

Closing the Gender Gap in Careers Advice and Aspiration

We are learning more about what works to tackle gender stereotypes in both schools and employment, while government has committed to deepening the understanding of the gender disparity in subject choices at age 16.

For instance, only 18% of young people are satisfied with the advice they received in relation to STEM³, with gender disparities in STEM subject take-up increasing with age despite no differences in ability. WorldSkills UK and The Careers & Enterprise Company partnered together to develop a better understanding of how gendered career stereotypes impact the career choices of young men and women. We did this with a view to facilitating a conversation amongst key influencers and conveyors of careers advice such as parents, teachers and education practitioners on how we can improve our approach in this area.

What did we learn?

The findings of this research were carried out by Opinium Research in an online survey of 2,000 young people aged 11–19 and 2,001 parents of children aged 11–19, we found:

Gendered stereotypes: are still very much embedded in the career choices young women are most likely to consider. They are still much more likely to consider care-related jobs, such as teaching and being a nurse, whilst young men are more likely to opt for jobs in engineering or IT. This serves to create a self-perpetuating cycle when it comes to the gender pay gap, since the career paths young women are considering are generally lower paid.

Ready for work: in terms of being ready to start work, by age 19 most young people (70%) feel prepared for the workplace. These findings present a real disconnect with employers consistently saying that young people are not well prepared for employment. Not surprisingly, before 16 years of age most young people in education do not feel prepared to start working in a full-time job. Confidence amongst both young men and young women is overall fairly high, but we did find a difference in confidence levels. Young men consistently feel more prepared to start working in a full-time job than young women, even though young women overall have more of the skills that employers are looking for.

Parents: our research demonstrates that parents, especially mothers, are key influencers on their children, with teachers and careers advisers becoming more important as they get older. It is vital that teachers and parents are given the right information to support their understanding of the modern workplace and career opportunities. This, in turn, will lead to young people having higher expectations and aspirations.

How young people learn: our findings also show that young people learn best through hands-on experience. They told us that they are more likely to feel informed if they speak to a current apprentice, visit a workplace or a university. We know from the work already being done through the Enterprise Adviser Network in more than 2,000 schools in England that participating in careers activities increases both boys' and girls' likelihood of reporting that they feel prepared for work. It also increases the salary expectations of young women.

Future work life: young people are most likely to want to work in one type of job for the rest of their life, but in different companies (44%) and least likely to want to work in different types of jobs, in different companies and sectors (23%). This presents a challenge to the plans of employers and those in the education sector who are gearing to move towards a more flexible and informal way of working, and a challenge to young people to adapt to this type of working life. It is also a challenge to teachers, careers advisers and parents to make sure they are appropriately preparing young people for the workplaces of the future.

Young People are Rebooting Engineering and Construction Careers

The struggles employers have in recruiting young people into traditional industries such as engineering and construction are well-founded, particularly when it comes to gender (as highlighted above). There have been numerous campaigns aimed at reversing these trends with varying degrees of success, but we are not yet at the tipping point that will really push us in the direction of overcoming this long term systemic issue.

We felt with changes occurring to technology across these industries, now was the perfect time to reboot this conversation amongst young people and employers, by examining how new technology and career pathways can change the ways in which young people perceive and become more excited about these industries.

As such we hosted two Youth Summits, which aimed to unpack the perceptions that 14-19 year-olds have of the construction and engineering sectors and considered whether the development of new technology can attract more young people into these sectors. The events deliberately aligned with roundtable discussions WorldSkills UK convened with our partners in the governments, industry and education on this subject – to compare and contrast the findings they came up with ([found here](#)) with those of young people.

What did we learn?

There are several themes which cut across both summits and emerged during the dialogue between employers and young people, which are worth further consideration:

- 1. Virtual touch:** Most young people haven't been exposed to, yet alone experienced the development in new technologies. The obsession with social media and technology amongst young people presents a real opportunity to engage them through this. Traditional face-to-face models of careers activities can be unimaginative, through virtual reality and robotics we can build more affordable ways of experiencing these industries.
- 2. Science and Technology:** It needs to be made clear that successful careers in both construction and engineering involve a range of scientific, creative and technology skills. Embedding these broader principles in how both sectors are viewed, and how they can relate to different subjects in schools at an earlier age, is vital. Greater effort needs to be made to explain that many of the roles require academic excellence and the end result is often a higher wage than imagined by young people
- 3. Digital literacy for employers:** employers need to better master all components of online media and how they communicate with young people. This refers to a company's ability to find, evaluate, produce and communicate careers information using clear information through various digital platforms.
- 4. Male-dominated arena:** Doing more to change the image of construction and engineering and marketing opportunities to young women that highlight the growth in new roles alongside more traditionally manual labour jobs will boost the number of young women entering the industry and encourage greater diversity in the sector. Female role models promoted through social media and directly to schools would be helpful.

A Different Perspective?

What Do Employers Need To Do?

What is interesting from our year of finding out what young people think about careers, jobs and their future is that what they are saying doesn't chime with the view business holds of young people. There has been a common theme in the commentary on skills in the UK – employers aren't satisfied with the skills young people have when they enter the workplace. It's not that employers don't value young people and benefit from what they bring to their organisations, it's just that there seems to be a mismatch between the expectations of employers and the skillsets young people say they have.

A recent survey by the British Chambers of Commerce stated that 'Young people lack workplace skills': nine in ten businesses in the survey said young people just out of school were not ready for the workplace, three-quarters cited poor work experience and over a half pointed out a lack of 'soft skills' such as communication. This, however, is in direct contradiction to what young people are saying in our research with the Careers & Enterprise Company, as cited earlier, 70% of young people feel they are work ready with the soft skills employers are asking for.

Our experience of young people is that they not only significantly contribute to a workplace, but can also bring fresh thinking and renewed energy to a business. However, creating an environment where young people can thrive may require a concerted change in leadership and management from many employers: they need to become Young People Ready.

What we learned

If employers don't adjust to ensure they get the most out of young people, they are missing out on the high flying workforce of tomorrow. That is why we have developed a five point check list to ensure employers are Young People Ready. It means the following:

- 1. Being apprentice ready:** Apprentices need support and that means being far more prepared to take the time to invest in and manage their apprentices. It's common practice for firms to have graduate schemes for new starters fresh out of university, so given the expected growth of apprenticeships, there needs to be more specially tailored programmes for technical learners making their first steps into working life too.
- 2. Being mental health ready:** We need to talk about mental wellbeing. We're at a breakthrough moment for mental health. Governments across the UK are all committed to addressing mental health alongside physical health and the stigma of mental health is being tackled. The daily pressures of social media and the huge expectations on young people can often leave them overwhelmed. So, workplaces need to be alert to this and have proper comprehensive approaches towards the mental health of young workers in place.
- 3. Being mentor ready:** Starting your first job is often a daunting experience: new surroundings, new colleagues, perhaps a new place to be living for the first time in your life. For a young person fresh out of school, college, or just beginning an apprenticeship programme, the gradient is steep. Good employers will make sure they make things as navigable as possible by assigning mentors to help manage this life transition.
- 4. Being mindset ready:** Research shows that what really makes the difference to high – and even world class – performance in young people is the right combination of skill set and mindset: the ability to perform under pressure, to adapt when things go wrong and to draw on your teammates to help each other achieve results. Employers need to be prepared to invest in continuous development of young people so that employers and young people reap the reward throughout their careers.
- 5. Being inclusion ready:** Bringing more young people into a workforce presents a clear challenge and an opportunity in itself. Age, diversity and inter-generational understanding needs to be carefully managed to ensure high performance teams. The ability to celebrate who you are in the workplace – whatever their background - is something young people today expect. Getting this right will bring more loyalty from younger workers and higher productivity.

Conclusion and Next Steps

What is clear from our year of hearing from and speaking with young people is that they have an important voice that needs to be heard by more leaders in business, government and education. The UK is facing a number of challenges which are only going to be met by the young talent that currently exists in this country.

However, there is a risk that we will miss the opportunity to capitalise on this potential if we do not properly inspire, advise and train the next generation of young people. This is not an easy task and will require fresh thinking and new perspectives, this is why we are committed to increasing the ability for young people to be part of this conversation.

Therefore, for the year ahead, we aim to be bold and ambitious in how we work with young people as an organisation to authentically capture their views and provide the opportunity for them to share this with governments, employers and education.

As such we have committed to the following:

- 1. WorldSkills UK will implement the 'seeing is believing' philosophy on technology through a dedicated area focused on inspiring young people through the Year of Engineering and Industry 4.0.**
- 2. WorldSkills UK and partners will publicise and share the report with networks and key stakeholders.**
- 3. We will host a follow up Youth Summit with delegates at WorldSkills UK LIVE 2018 (formerly The Skills Show), which will look at how we can push forward the conclusions of the report as a group.**
- 4. We will use our inspiring network of Skills Champions as a voice for young people, to help shape our direction of travel as an organisation and champion excellence in technical education, apprenticeships and skills.**

WorldSkills UK

- WHAT WE DO:** We are an accelerator for young people in the start-up phase of their careers: fast-tracking their development.
- WHY WE DO IT:** To change the national conversation so that apprenticeships and technical education are seen as prestigious career routes for all young people.
- HOW WE DO IT:** Research, thought leadership, new tech competitions and using insight into training and employability skills from key global economies to inform new employer programmes.

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