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## How are young people today navigating the journey from education to employment?

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As part of the Nuffield Foundation's [Grown up? Journeys to adulthood programme](#), we are exploring how Generation Z is experiencing the transition from education to work, identifying opportunities and where policy, practice and evidence changes are needed. Alongside analysis of trends in education and employment data, we are engaging with young people across the UK to understand what matters to them

We have published a report bringing together the findings from three workshops on transitions to employment. These sessions, held in Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Newport, offer valuable insights into the diverse experience of young people aged 16-24. Expertly facilitated by the social research agency, [Hopkins Van Mil](#), the workshops provided the time and space for participants to reflect holistically and creatively about their hopes and aspirations for the future, and the opportunities and barriers they face in a local context.

### Work that matters and supports wellbeing

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Listening to these young people, what stood out to me was a desire for work that feels meaningful, particularly by contributing to society. There was a strong emphasis on mental and physical well-being, with many participants determined not to let employment undermine this. Young people are aware of their sense of identity and want to be their authentic selves at work. Employers seeking to engage their staff around organisational purpose and values should be encouraged by these attributes.

### Navigating uncertainty and barriers

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The young people's accounts also laid bare the challenges of navigating a way through post-16 education and training and securing a foothold in employment. There was a sense of uncertainty about how to find information and despondency about a perceived lack of work opportunities. It was clear that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were wide-reaching;

it disrupted their education pathways, undermined their confidence, restricted chances to develop skills and the ability to find work. Their experiences varied, but some common insights emerged about what additional support would help make a positive transition from education to work.

## What would make journeys to work easier?

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### *Greater flexibility*

The age and stage at which young people were ready to engage with career planning varied. Participants explained they had missed out on some of the support offered at school, college or university because the timing wasn't right for them, while others felt pressured into making choices too young. Young people who had fallen out of the education system weren't sure how to access support to re-engage with careers services. These issues may help to explain the apparent disconnect between [national data about improving careers provision](#) and the more negative perception of young people reported in [surveys](#) and [research](#).

### *Signposting to online resources*

Across all three workshops, participants had very limited awareness of local or online resources to explore career pathways, build skills, identify personal interests and strengths or find employment. Hardly any participants mentioned using careers websites or specialist AI tools, which could help address the need for flexibility in combining face-to-face and digital tools. At the Nuffield Foundation, we have identified AI and career guidance as a focus for future research following the publication of the [A Learning Curve: A landscape review of AI and education in the UK](#).

### *Appetite for apprenticeships*

Awareness and interest in apprenticeships were strong, with many seeing them as a practical, less costly alternative to university. However, the participants were frustrated that their parents and carers had outdated views on this pathway, favouring university degrees. Many of the young people spoke of reluctance to be saddled with 'graduate debt' and there was a lack of understanding of the [higher education finance and the repayment system](#). There was no mention of higher-level FE pathways at Levels 4 and 5 beyond apprenticeships.

### *More work experience*

The workshop participants spoke eloquently of the 'experience conundrum', noting that employers required experience but seemed unwilling to provide it. Where young people had taken part in taster days and work experience programmes, which seemed to be more the case in Newcastle than elsewhere, they were very positive about how it had helped to build knowledge, networks and skills. [Nuffield-funded research](#) demonstrates the increasing importance of essential skills (such as information literacy and problem solving) in the labour

market and the critical role of employers in supporting young people to acquire these skills as they transition from education to paid work.

The experiences of the workshop participants demonstrated a need for greater coordination between education providers, employers and local skills planning, which has been identified in [cross-UK research](#) and within [skills policy](#). It needs to be clearer how qualification pathways lead to jobs, how to build experience and skills, and to clarify the role of employers in supporting transitions.

Reforms to the skills system in England and [across the UK](#) create a renewed opportunity to listen to young people about what they need to achieve their ambitions for their working lives.

To find out more about the Nuffield Foundation's research priorities on education to work transitions, visit: [Post-16 Education and Skills | Research | Nuffield Foundation](#).