



WP5 Qualitative Research with Young Adults Executive Summary Scotland

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YOUNG-ADULLLT is a European funded H2020 research project that focuses on understanding and analysing **Lifelong learning** (LLL) policies addressed to **young adults**, in situations of near social exclusion at the **local and regional level**.



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Executive Summary

This report provides findings and analysis to comply with the ‘Young Adults’ Project, Work Package 5 (WP5). I have used the requirements and guidance in the WP5 proposal to select, carry out and analyse interviews with policy managers (Level 1), project managers (Level 2) and practitioners (Level 3), collectively known as ‘experts’ in the Project, and as far as possible with young adults aged between 18 and 29 associated with the policies. The template for the report has been specified by the WP5 lead. The individuals interviewed were all associated with the policies on education and skills, the labour market and social issues operating in two functional regions. The regions and the policies were identified from the work carried out for WP3. In the Glasgow City Region the policies are: Developing the Young Workforce (DYW); Working Matters (WM); and Community Benefit Clauses (CBC). In the Aberdeen/shire City Region they are: Developing the Young Workforce; Aberdeen Guarantees (AG); and Opportunities for All (OFA).

Generally speaking, for each policy, one person at each of the three levels of experts was interviewed, although occasionally policy managers and project managers wanted to be interviewed together. For one of the policies one person encompassed both these levels. Before interviewing began with the Level 1 interviewees, assurances were sought, and given, that young adults would also be accessible to interview. In the event, due to the difficulties in sourcing sufficient young adult interviewees for each policy, there was oversampling at expert level. Where experts were ultimately not able to identify individuals in the Project’s age group, or they were no longer in contact with them, further interviews were carried out with experts until young adults could be identified. Similarly, there is oversampling of young adults associated with some policies to compensate for a lack elsewhere in the sample and there were very few non-UK respondents identified by experts for interview.

Analysis

- All of the young adults spoke enthusiastically about the support they received on employability programmes and through apprenticeships, to help them learn new skills. This corroborated with the policy and programme intentions as expressed by the experts, particularly the practitioners who had experience of working directly with the young adults.
- In contrast, whilst some young adults received good careers advice and guidance in school towards a vocational pathway, others were very critical about the lack of support they received and had also experienced pressure, even if only through lack of alternatives, to take an academic path when they had decided against this. The young adults interviewed had left school before Developing the Young Workforce — with one of its aims to promote vocational, alongside academic, pathways — had been fully introduced. Their experiences did, however, underline the need for the policy.
- Young adults reported that when they left school they spent time trying out different vocational options but often without success although other employability programmes (not part of this study) had helped. Those who had been contacted post-school by the Skills Development Scotland careers service — they assumed as a result of referral by their school careers officer — had found that very helpful. This suggests a well-connected school/post-school careers service, albeit not consistently so.
- For young adults, family was still a very important factor for their past, present and future plans and aspirations.
- It seems that the policies under consideration assume three main groups: those who will take an academic pathway with ease; those for whom post-school support is needed for training and employment, and those who require more tailored one-to-one employability support, for example to build confidence and help overcome a variety of social, economic, learning and health barriers.
- No evidence came to light where young adults were involved in lifelong learning, employability or training policy-making.
- Where young people are in training and employment with aspirations for the future they clearly feel they have a stake in it and talked knowledgeably about the industry they were engaged in, which suggested that they might be willing to participate in policy-making if that was meaningful rather than superficial and box-ticking.
- The term ‘lifelong learning’ is seldom used by practitioners or young people though practitioners occasionally refer to ‘life skills’.
- There are insufficient opportunities for young adults over the age of 18 with a seemingly ‘black hole’ of support and provision for young people in their 20s who had to survive the 2008 downturn. There was evidence that this has recently been acknowledged with a new and more inclusive approach from DYW being introduced.

- A condition for contractors carrying out work for the public sector is that they add community benefit clauses (CBCs), for example to recruit young workers/apprentices from the locality. The contracts are often shorter than the length of an apprenticeship and there is no provision to help the apprentices to complete their training. Furthermore, subcontractors are not necessarily bound by the clauses. This means young adults' routes into work can be blighted although this had not affected any of those in the Project.
- There is a gender imbalance between training and job types which needs to be addressed with more males in e.g. construction and more females in city office work.
- There is a great deal of public funding for training. It is not clear from the enactment of the policies where the responsibilities of employers lie. The UK Apprenticeship Levy on employers which is now in place offers the opportunity for a clearer message to employers to engage in more training and sustainable positions for young people.
- Actual policies can sometimes be confused with a re-badging or relabelling or rearranging of existing measures. Where Opportunities for All referred to a policy for vulnerable young people, Aberdeen Guarantees was regarded as a drawing together of available opportunities, including Opportunities for All, under one banner, visible on the AG website.
- Partnership was often mentioned as key to effective delivery of services to young adults. Despite this, there were examples given of a proliferation of measures, or changes, of which experts had had little or no advance notice or consultation, causing some confusion and resentment.
- There was some evidence from the very small sample in this study that careers advice and guidance within- and post-school, has been more amenable to vocational pathways in Aberdeen probably because of the existence of manufacturing and related industries, but also because the downturn had meant a more proactive response was required than in Glasgow, where the pressure to go to university seems to be stronger. Family pressure towards university remains strong, however. Nonetheless, with such a small sample it would be unwise to draw any definitive conclusions.