

## SYNTHESIS – 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2016 – Anne Green

17 themes were identified across the four sub-projects and associated external contributions, together with four overarching challenges, making 21 Ps in all.

1. **PRECARIOUSNESS OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR** – In the context of outsourcing of public services the voluntary sector has taken a greater role in delivery of employment-related services to young people transitioning from education to employment. Yet to take advantage of different funding streams the voluntary sector has to remain relevant to survive. Short-termism in funding means that it can be difficult for voluntary sector organisations to remain true to their mission and to survive.
2. **PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SOURCES OF FUNDING** – Since the 1980s public money has represented ‘big business’ for the voluntary sector. Some large voluntary sector organisations have managed to diversify their funding streams – including drawing in more money from private sector sources - as part of a strategy to build reserves and insure against the risks of being dependent on a small number of funding streams. For small organisations the risks of changes in funding streams are more acute than for their larger counterparts.
3. **‘PRODUCTS’ OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR** – To be successful in the face of what can be intense competition, voluntary sector organisations need to understand what ‘product(s)’ that they are selling and to market those products effectively.
4. **PARTNERSHIP WORKING** – When delivering large and complex contracts voluntary sector organisations are often working in partnership alongside organisations who (outside a consortium brought together to deliver a particular project) are competitors. Working effectively in such consortia is key.
5. **PERIPHERAL WORKERS** – Temporary work agencies play a particularly important enabling role in providing access to employment for young people at the periphery of the labour market who are ‘difficult to place’ – i.e. the ‘have nots’ in a polarising labour market.
6. **PERMANENT PRECARIOUSNESS** – A disadvantage of working for temporary work agencies is that they can inculcate a state of ‘permanent precariousness’ characterised by frequent transitions between (low paid) employment and non-employment and a relative lack of employment protection. An important question for policy and practice is the extent to which ‘permanent precariousness’ has become ‘the ‘new normal’.
7. **PICK AND CHOOSE** – By using temporary work agencies employers are able to ‘pick and choose’ which (young) people to have at their premises, and for how long. Those who do not ‘fit’ can be disposed of summarily in favour of those that do.
8. **PRODUCTIVITY CHALLENGE** – The lack of training for individuals working for temporary work agencies is likely to be a factor fuelling the UK’s productivity challenge since use of temporary agency workers tends to be associated with a lack of investment in training by employers.
9. **PREMIUM ON PRESENTATION** – When putting themselves forward to temporary work agencies and to employers for work placement opportunities those young people who ‘present’ themselves well at the outset tend to fair best.
10. **POSITIVE PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT THROUGH TEMPORARY WORK AGENCIES** – Alongside some negative aspects of temporary work agencies there are also positive aspects: (i) they help make employment ‘accessible’; (ii) they can provide ‘immediate’ work; (iii) they enable ‘flexibility’ in working arrangements alongside other activities (e.g. education); (iv) they are a potential stepping stone to employment – through filling gaps in CVs and providing access to

internal labour markets; and (v) they provide a route to employment when there is a lack of other options.

11. **PLACEMENTS** – Work placements provide work experience opportunities for non-graduates and graduates alike. For graduates, sandwich placements of several months or a year were invariably reported as positive career-development experiences and often provided a direct route to subsequent employment with the placement employer. Other types of placements (including voluntary placements) were a useful means of gaining practical experience, which, in some instances, was helpful in addressing qualification deficits. In some instances through one or more extensions, placements provided a pathway to more permanent employment. Evidence suggests that graduates who had placements during their undergraduate years perform better academically.
12. **PARENTS, PERSONAL NETWORKS AND PROACTIVITY** – Young people who have parents who have a University education and/or who have professional and other personal connections across a range of employment sectors are advantaged in gaining (good quality) work placements. Differences in young people's access to social capital, and in young people's proactivity in utilising such capital, operates as a polarising force between different social groups.
13. **PRE-SELECTION** – In the context of a 'War on Talent' for the best graduates / young people placements provide a useful means for employers to test out and pre-select recruits for permanent positions.
14. **PERCEPTIONS BY EMPLOYERS OF A LACK OF AGENCY** – In this same context some employers perceive themselves as lacking agency. Although there are sectoral differences, a key issue across several of the sectors studied was how best to recruit and retain talent.
15. **PLETHORA OF RECRUITMENT CHANNELS** – There is emerging evidence of employers using a plethora of recruitment channels in their attempts to attract the best talent and achieve a diverse workforce.
16. **POWER OF MILLENNIALS** – Some highly qualified young people, especially those with relevant work experience, occupy a powerful position in the labour market in terms of 'writing their own contracts', such that employers have to be responsive to their demands and requirements. While some employers might fear that investment in training will lead to other employers poaching staff in such a context, without investing in training the most highly qualified and ambitious are likely to leave anyway as part of a strategy of continuous investment in themselves.
17. **PACE OF CHANGE** – The pace of change in the labour market – including the rise of freelancing and the so-called 'gig economy' – brings big challenges for conventional policies and institutions.

#### **OVERARCHING CHALLENGES:**

18. **PRECARIOUSNESS** –
  - How permanent is precariousness?
  - Who copes with precariousness? And who does not?
19. **PLACEMENTS** -
  - How can more young people access positive employment placement experience?
20. **PRESENTATION** -
  - How can more young people reflect and present positively on placement experiences?

**21. POLICY AND PRACTICE -**

- What do the research findings mean for policy and practice in a fast-changing environment?