

**WORKING YOUR**

**WAY IN:**

**WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE NEED  
TO KNOW ABOUT THE  
JOBS MARKET**





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# YOUNG PEOPLE AND WORK

## WHAT'S THE CURRENT SITUATION?

Finding a good job seems more difficult than ever. There are so many different options and decisions to make. How long should I stay in education? Is a university education for me? What about an apprenticeship? How can I find out more?



For young people, finding work isn't easy. And a lot of this work is precarious – insecure, unstable, temporary, part-time, low paid and offering limited rights at work. There has also been an increase in the 'gig economy' – self-employment or employment where people are paid for specific jobs or projects, often where future work opportunities are uncertain. Much employment agency work is like this. And working on zero-hour or minimum-hour contracts has been on the rise.

Research shows that it is young people who often end up in this type of work. But what does this mean for them? It was to answer this question that we undertook research with young people exploring the difficulties involved in finding and maintaining work in the Midlands. What these young people told us has helped us put together this information pack.

Many young people also told us that it's really difficult to find reliable advice and guidance. So we have also included details of some organisations that might be able to support you as you look for work, or advise you if you are facing problems at work.

# RECRUITING YOUNG WORKERS:

## WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT

We asked different employers about what they looked for when hiring young workers. We found that 'experience', both paid and unpaid, is really important for all jobs.

**EXPERIENCE** ...is important but can come from different activities, not just previous paid work

*Somebody who'd worked in a charity shop and said "I worked on the till every Saturday for three months during my Duke of Edinburgh Award" or something like that, you think "Well, that's a good commitment; that shows reliability".*

**Hospitality Employer**

*We'd be looking for things like hobbies that relate to the job role.*

**Automotive Employer**

*Voluntary work... anything that shows us that they're hard working, dedicated, committed, prepared to get their hands dirty.*

**Advanced Automotive Employer**

### WHAT GOOD EMPLOYERS OFFER:

- Work experience placements
- School leaver programmes
- Traineeships
- Paid internships
- Well-designed apprenticeships
- Graduate schemes

**ATTITUDE AND PRESENTATION** ...are also important

*Their personality, how they come across, especially in interviews. Are they confident?*

**Hospitality Employer**

*Someone who's passionate about joining our company. They know why they want to join.* **Business Services Employer**

### WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

[www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org) lists voluntary work opportunities by post code and you can also search by your interests and your age.

[www.getingofar.gov.uk](http://www.getingofar.gov.uk) for information on traineeships, apprenticeships and work experience

[www.successatschool.org/jobscourses](http://www.successatschool.org/jobscourses) (a non-definitive list of employers offering work experience and apprenticeships in the Midlands/nationwide)

# WORK EXPERIENCE

**Paid work is often difficult for young people to find. With lots of competition for available jobs, getting good experience early on has become even more important.**

*I'd advise anybody to just get started as soon as you can. Building up as much work experience as you can before you join work is such an invaluable thing at the moment. Like leaving school, there's so many people in the market trying to get jobs. Having that bit of work experience can put you on top of the pile.*

**Doug, male, 20,**

*who'd had Saturday and holiday jobs when at school.*

*I needed some money to go off to university eventually, so a lot of it was about money but it's building up a CV so that when you're out there applying for 'proper jobs', you've got a work history, you've got references that you can call on, you've got experience..... and it was enjoyable, actually*

**Holly, female, 24,**

*who worked in a music shop while at school and during vacations.*



**The problem is that it's difficult to get a job without work experience, but it's also difficult to get work experience without having had a job. This can be very frustrating. So what can you do?**

- There are many ways to get work experience. These include doing a work placement, a part-time job, holiday jobs or doing casual or seasonal work.
- But it doesn't have to be paid – employers like voluntary experience and involvement in other activities related to your interests too. It shows commitment, especially if done over a long period.
- Work experience will strengthen your CV and improve your skills and confidence.
- It can also help you to find out your strengths and weaknesses, and what type of work you enjoy.

Source: Catch 16-24 (2015) UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES).

## RESEARCH YOUR OPTIONS:

**www.icould.com** has articles on work experience and short video clips on specific job roles at different levels, and also has an online quiz that lets you explore what your strengths and weaknesses are, and what kinds of work you like and don't like – and it is fun to do.

**Working your way in:**  
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# MATTHEW'S STORY

It wasn't easy for Matthew, but his persistence paid off and taking advantage of advice along the way, he is now on track for a satisfying career.



**Matthew left school at 16 because he did not have the grades to enter sixth form. He puts this down to difficult teenage years, but his failures at school left him bitterly disappointed.**

With support from a careers worker he did find an apprenticeship in business and administration with a local council, working with clients who needed support. Although the pay for this was low, Matthew said that he "really enjoyed" his training, was awarded an NVQ after two years and got a customer services job with the council. The long hours and shift work were compensated by better pay and he enjoyed working the phones and dealing with the clients.

But his regrets about schooling never left him and after 18 months, Matthew took the "massive decision to quit a full-time job", motivated by his careers adviser. He successfully applied for a place on a social work degree programme offered by a leading university and graduated four years later, having experienced significant debt and financial difficulty along the way.

When we last met Matthew, he was 24 and looking forward to starting his first job as a social worker. He put his success down to a combination of hard work, good fortune and the help of those around him, but had exhibited self-reliance and tenacity in realising his potential.

# APPRENTICESHIPS

An apprenticeship is a job with built-in training to develop industry-level skills for entry to a recognised trade or occupation. But they are variable in quality and there is strong competition for the best opportunities

## APPRENTICESHIPS AT A GLANCE

- An apprenticeship is a time-limited employment contract where the employer agrees to provide employment and training (including, for at least 20% of the time, off-the-job occupation-related training) to enable apprentices to reach industry-level standards.
- This training can be provided either solely by the employer or (more often) in conjunction with an accredited external provider (such as a Further Education College).
- Apprenticeships are offered in a wide range of occupations and sectors, at levels from NVQ2 - 7 (degree level) and range in length from 12 – 66 months, depending on the level and content of learning involved.
- The employer is not required to retain the apprentice once they have successfully completed the apprenticeship.

*The apprenticeship gave me qualifications that I wouldn't have got anywhere else and gave me, not just knowledge of the job, but knowledge in life.*

**Katherine, female, 18, Utilities Sector**

*At the time, I was 18,19 years old, it gave me a path, learning how to be stable, work 9 till 5. It taught me a lot of skills that I would never have learnt, so it was useful to me to do.*

**Iqbal, male, 21, IT Sector**

He had been told that 95% of apprentices on his programme would find work in IT. But finding work was difficult and he was unemployed for 8 months after completing his apprenticeship.

## POTENTIAL PROS AND CONS TO CONSIDER

### PROS

- 'Earn while you learn'.
- Structured training programme plus on-the-job training and skills development.
- Gain widely-recognised transferable occupational skills.
- Experience of working in an organisation as part of a team.
- Lower-cost option than university.

### CONS

- Employer-led with limited scrutiny; poor quality schemes may involve limited training and skills development.
- Apprenticeships don't always lead to full-time and sustainable paid employment.
- Balancing work and study can be challenging.
- Low pay can be a barrier for those without family support (current minimum wage rate is £3.50 per hour for under-19s, going up to £3.70 in April 2018).

## WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

About apprenticeships: [www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships](http://www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships)  
[www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprentices](http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprentices)

About your rights as an apprentice:  
[www.unitetheunion.org/growing-our-union/unite-for-apprenticeships/your-rights-as-an-apprentice/](http://www.unitetheunion.org/growing-our-union/unite-for-apprenticeships/your-rights-as-an-apprentice/)

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# USING EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES TO FIND WORK

For many young people, employment agencies are a popular way to look for work. Employment and recruitment agencies range from multinational companies to single offices in one locality. They advertise permanent and temporary vacancies ranging from highly-specialist professional work to short-term and part-time routine jobs. Like employers, they prefer applicants with work experience.

## ONLINE JOBSITES

The young people we interviewed found these variable.

### PROs

- Convenient and accessible way (e.g. via smartphones) to job search.
- Simple and quick online application process.
- Specialist agencies could provide initial access to opportunities for graduates and those with vocational skills.

### CONs

- The same jobs are often advertised by several job sites.
- The risk of being bombarded with 'spam' after registering.
- Not receiving a response or feedback on applications.

## HIGH STREET RECRUITMENT AGENCIES

### PROs

- Agencies can offer quick access to paid work.
- It might not require an interview with an employer.
- Good for students or other seeking part-time hours and short-term temporary work
- Agency work can be a good way to gain work experience.
- Some good agencies provide advice and feedback to applicants.

### CONs

- Work provided via agencies is often low paid and low skilled.
- It can quickly 'dry up' or 'disappear', sometimes without warning.
- Few of the young people who took part in the research had found long-term or permanent employment via an agency.

## TOP TIPS WHEN JOB SEEKING

**Get help:** make use of careers support provided by your school or college. This can provide information and help with interview and CV preparation.

**Ask around:** visit careers events, make use of local careers services, and let friends and family know that you are looking for work.

**Ask for feedback:** If you are interviewed for a job and don't get it, go back to the organisation and ask for feedback about what you could have done differently in order to be successful.

**Be proactive and persistent:** Find out about organisations where you would like to get work experience or a job, check out their website if they have one, know what you want, and approach them directly by writing to them asking about opportunities, enclosing your CV – or calling. Be confident about what you have to offer!

## ADVICE AND GUIDANCE:

See page 09 for details of organisations providing careers guidance and support in your local area.

Tips on preparing a good CV: [www.reed.co.uk/career-advice/school-leaver-cv-template/](http://www.reed.co.uk/career-advice/school-leaver-cv-template/)

[www.targetcareers.co.uk](http://www.targetcareers.co.uk) also gives useful advice on job applications and interviews for school leavers.



# ZERO HOURS CONTRACTS

Zero hours contracts are common. What do young people really think about this way of working?

*You think that this is how work is, and everybody else that's working with you is in the same boat and you think that this is normal.*

**Barbara, female, 24**

I didn't like having to wait there by the phone constantly.

**Teddy, male, 23**

Oh, zero hours, that's fine, 'cos I'm still studying anyway, I'm in full-time education so a zero-hour contract that works perfectly for me.

**Simone, female, 24**

## ZERO HOURS CONTRACTS

- Zero hours contracts (ZHCs) don't guarantee a minimum number of work hours. Work hours can change week to week.
- Young people may not realise they are being offered a zero hours contract before they accept a job.
- ZHCs are not always problematic – students or carers, for example, may be able to work flexibly.
- But for many others, not having guaranteed minimum weekly working hours is financially unsustainable.

### Potential problems to be aware of :

- Feeling pressure to work even when inconvenient (e.g. if asked to work at the last minute).
- Variable hours and work schedules can make planning ahead difficult.
- Low or variable wages are normal.
- Whether you receive entitlements like sick or holiday pay might depend on your weekly earnings.

## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Employment rights and obligations change, as governments amend legislation and regulation about issues such as minimum wage levels, statutory conditions of employment and contracts between employers, self-employed people, employees and temporary workers.

For more detailed information on zero hours contracts, including your rights and entitlements, visit the TUC's Worksmart website:

[www.worksmart.org.uk/work-rights/atypical-workers/zero-hours-contracts](http://www.worksmart.org.uk/work-rights/atypical-workers/zero-hours-contracts)

Or call the ACAS Helpline:

**0300 123 1100** (call charges may apply)

Once in employment, consider whether it makes sense to join a union. See [www.tuc.org.uk/why-join-union](http://www.tuc.org.uk/why-join-union)

# NICOLA'S STORY

Nicola's school failed to provide much information about alternatives to university, but she is lucky to have a switched-on mum.



Nicola did well at school, and although she had no idea of what she wanted to do career wise, she always presumed she would go to university. As her time at college progressed, however, she became certain that university was not for her, and was uncertain what to do next. Her teachers were not supportive about this decision and she felt frustrated by the relative lack of careers support she was given.

Her mum suggested an engineering apprenticeship in the advanced automotive sector, suggesting that engineering would suit her, since her strongest subjects were Maths and Physics. Nicola liked this idea, and applied via a local employer's online application process. She felt ill-prepared for the process by the guidance received at college, but was encouraged by various family members and along with her own

research on the company, this helped prepare her for the multi-stage selection process. Although she had little mechanical knowledge to draw on during the interview process, she was able to talk her experience of doing her bronze and silver Duke of Edinburgh Award while at college.

Nicola has enjoyed the apprenticeship programme, especially the first year of training, which was college based. That said, now based primarily in the workplace, as a young woman working in a male dominated environment, and with many of her immediate colleagues considerably older, she does sometimes feel a sense of social isolation at work. Nevertheless, she is keen to continue working for the company in the future if there are sufficient opportunities available.

# SOURCES OF FURTHER

# INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

## NEED HELP GETTING WORK EXPERIENCE?

### NATIONWIDE:

The Princes Trust helps young people aged 11 – 30 get into jobs, education and training via a range of initiatives including work experience programmes.

[www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk)

National Citizen Service offers 4-week programmes aimed at helping young people aged 15-17 develop their skills and confidence.

[www.ncsyes.co.uk](http://www.ncsyes.co.uk)

### IN LEICESTER:

Leicestershire Education Business Company (LEBC) organises work experience placements for 4,500 young people across a variety of different sectors.

If your school/college does not offer work experience, or you would like an additional placement, LEBC can arrange this for you. [www.leics-ebc.org.uk/](http://www.leics-ebc.org.uk/)

### IN BIRMINGHAM:

The Learning Hub is a purpose built training centre offering pre-employment training, advice and guidance, and work experience programmes for 18-29 year olds. [www.learninghub-uhb.co.uk/courses](http://www.learninghub-uhb.co.uk/courses)

University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust offers a range of work experience opportunities to students. [www.uhb.nhs.uk/work-experience.htm](http://www.uhb.nhs.uk/work-experience.htm)

### IN COVENTRY:

Coventry City Council offers work short and long-term experience placements and internships to job seekers and those who are still in education. [www.coventry.gov.uk/info/91/jobs\\_and\\_careers/724/work\\_experience\\_and\\_internship](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/91/jobs_and_careers/724/work_experience_and_internship)

NHS Coventry and Warwickshire offer work experience programmes to young people from the age of 14

[www.nhsjobroutes.org.uk/](http://www.nhsjobroutes.org.uk/)

## CAREERS ADVICE

**IN LEICESTER:** Connexions offers advice and guidance to young people aged 16 to 19 on finding a job, training course or apprenticeship in Leicester

<http://www.leicester.gov.uk/connexions>

**IN BIRMINGHAM:** Birmingham Careers Service

Careers advice to young people aged 16 to 19, who are not in education, training or employment

[www.birminghamcareersservice.co.uk/](http://www.birminghamcareersservice.co.uk/)

**IN COVENTRY:** Careers Advice Shop

Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce

Drop-in service every Wednesday from 2-4pm

[www.cw-chambertraining.co.uk/careers-advice-shop/](http://www.cw-chambertraining.co.uk/careers-advice-shop/)



Find out more about our research at [www.warwick.ac.uk/paths2work](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/paths2work)

This booklet draws on research led by a team from the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick, working with colleagues from Aston University, Birmingham University, the University of Leicester and the Open University, and supported by other Midlands youth labour market stakeholder organisations.

Copies of this booklet and a short video based on the research can be downloaded from that website.

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