

Employment that lifts people out of poverty: discussion 2 - Alloa Academy students and local employers

A group of young people attending Alloa Academy, and approaching school-leaving age, spent some time with local employers – they listened to each other's concerns, experiences and hopes and discussed possible alternative employment futures.

We heard that, ideally, employers would like to be able to choose from applicants who can show relevant experience and the skills and abilities needed for the role. They hope to find young people with an understanding of how business differs to school, who can solve problems and are good at communicating. However, they often encounter candidates lacking self-belief, confidence and ambition, with expectations of employment that are sometimes unrealistic.

However, younger people looking for employment often find themselves in a loop of having no work experience, leading to no job, so still no experience. They don't appear to have (or fail to access) opportunities to learn about the world of work.

Meanwhile at school, students often don't know where to start - to look for career information or to look for a job. They are concerned that their lack of experience and qualifications will count against them, that their young age will put them at a disadvantage. They are concerned that their individual challenges, such as poor health, will be a barrier. They are aware that they will need specific training and skills such as time

management, good organisation and good communication but not sure how to develop these.

However, employers know that knowledge and qualifications aren't everything. They are also looking for resilience, kindness, motivation, flexibility, commitment, creativity, critical thinking, reliability and an ability to learn. How can students be more aware of the need for, and develop, these qualities?

Employers also understand that external factors that can make it hard for a potential candidate including transport links, caring responsibilities and medical factors. As a result, they can be faced with a limited number of people who can match the range of requirements needed to take up and maintain employment.

However, there are changes that could be made to support young people. In addition to more work-related training, interviews could be more accessible and work environments also be more flexible to allow for different working styles and requirements.

Employability programmes delivered in association with or through the employer could focus on the transition into the workplace; the basics of employment, knowledge of the sector, routine building, shadowing, placements, person-centred work experience, specific skills and confidence building.

So, what might help?

Students want to know what to expect and some guidance on 'how the world actually works'. How do they manage their money and budget? How do taxes work? How do they get more hands-on experience? How can they learn to manage living away from home or travelling/working abroad?

They would like work related courses, work experience and placements while still at school. 'Experience of even just being in a work place' would be valuable.

Building such knowledge and skills into pre-employment training, transition-into-work programmes and post-employment support could help candidates to be more work-ready and work-resilient, providing employers with a more stable and skilled local workforce.

The power of collaboration

Employment training partnerships between employers could build more cross-sector skills, more mentoring opportunities and give more clarity about what different employers need from employees.

Introducing a cohort of job seekers to a network of potential employers could, for example, build useful connections.

Students identified that school plays a big role in the support team they would like around them to find their way to employment. Other team members include family and people doing the jobs they are interested in. They would like to spend a meaningful amount of time - not just a day - shadowing, learning what to expect. One student suggested 'start a group or a little room with ideas on how to get jobs'

A future people want to see

We imagined a future where employer academies provide courses that are delivered through companies, with real work opportunities built in. Where opportunities for short training courses are widespread and valued - opportunities to quickly build a new set of skills or deepen knowledge with courses of 1, 3

or 5 days in duration. More people learn work-related skills from home with virtual reality and a holographic facilitator! Work-readiness is now embedded into the school curriculum and recognised in a similar way to the Duke of Edinburgh programme and others.

An 'Engage early to inspire early' approach is now taken. Work readiness is built into 5th and 6th year studies, including work experience programmes and mentoring for everyone.

Accessibility is a standard consideration and any adjustments are implemented by employers to enable employees to thrive.

Schools now put life skills and employability at the centre of their support. Students have the opportunity to spend a good deal of their time in work placements, employment-related training and have a many more jobs to apply for.

Similarly, employers can now provide regular work placements and create entry level jobs to help young people into the workplace. They are supported to help employees develop life skills as part of a workplace induction and transition programme.

Clackmannanshire is now celebrated as an area that has moved from precarious job security to one in which fair, local employment opportunities are prioritised. Ensuring that young people find and maintain employment is now a collaborative, community effort rather than a competitive sport.