

South West Learning and Skills Research Network Regional Conference

12 July 2007, Bridgwater

‘Dead end kids in dead end jobs?’ - researching young people in jobs without training.

Kim Diment, Lyn Walsh and Hugh Sutherland conducted a workshop at this conference, reporting on (and seeking feedback to) the JWT research that we have been carrying out. Some 20 conference delegates attended the workshop. Following some brief introductions, we asked delegates to suggest their one-word tags for young people in Jobs Without Training (as done previously with the research team and the delegates attending the seminar in Exeter on May 23rd). Suggestions were:

Enjoyment	Flexible	Uncommitted
Dead-end	Independent	Multiple problems
Disengaged	Escaping	Cash

We then broke into 3 small (6/7 delegate) groups to discuss the issues covered in Workshop C of the May seminar – The Future for Young People in Jobs Without Training (see attached appendix). Each group was asked to consider the summarised results reported and suggest areas of agreement, disagreement or omission. After about 20 minutes of discussion, we reconvened for feedback at which each group were asked to put forward 2 key points. These were:

1. Rather than ‘limited horizons’ (item 5 in the summary), the impression was of ‘endless horizons’. This was a *positive* view, the young people are not victims of circumstance.
2. Thus, it was important to present a positive narrative of the research findings.
3. It was important to explore the reasons the young people were not taking up the training that was being offered to them.
4. The research had concentrated on the views on young people. For a rounded appraisal, it would be necessary to explore the *employer’s* needs and views as well.
5. ‘Jobs Without Training’ was defined as Jobs without *Accredited* Training. It was important to recognise the relevance of non-accredited training, particularly given the inflexibility of Accredited Training (fixed course dates, lack of access to modular courses, extended course length, etc).
6. The research had focussed on one age group and one region. For a more rounded view it would be appropriate to extend the period of research to capture older ages and to extend to other regions (and social classes?).

At the end of the session, we had the opportunity to add our own reflections based on our experience of the research. I highlighted the diversity of the young people interviewed (which I characterised as ranging from “16 going on 25 to 16 but aged 12”. The implication is that provision needs to be flexible – the fact that these individuals have all reached some chronological calendar point does not mean that they are at the same stage in life.

Lyn made the point that JWT can be seen as a *positive* transition point, but may require more support than Connexions can currently give.

The implications for adviser resource and flexibility of provision are considerable.

Hugh Sutherland
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THE FUTURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN JOBS WITHOUT TRAINING

1. A Job without training is not necessarily a dead end:

- *I would say that I'm more mature than my friends who're still at college, I know what real work is.*
- *I've got a practical mind...give me a book to learn, I can't learn it, tell me to do something, if I do it wrong, I know what I've done wrong straightaway, I can fix it like that.*

2. A Job without training can be an integral part of building a desired future:

- *For me going to work means that I can live here and I can save my money, I can get to Canada [long-held ambition] so for me, work is brilliant.*
- *I fancied a change (from garage work) because I wanted to see what gardening's like. If I like it, I want to become self-employed.*

3. A Job without training can also represent a state of comfort and confidence:

- *What do you do in a typical day?
Strimming, hedging and planting people's gardens, not big work...It's good, I enjoy it. It makes me feel proud when I stand back and look at the finished job.*
- *I love my job, it's really varied and I like being outside. It's practical and every day is different. I like the animals too.*

- but it can also mean stasis, stagnation and resignation:

- *It's obviously not good to keep things they way they are.*
- *I haven't really thought about moving away.*

Judging the line between the two is very difficult.

4. Insisting on accredited training is counterproductive and punitive, but encouraging meaningful educational opportunities is essential:

- *I couldn't see the point of going on a course, just for the sake of it.*
- *I can't see how it's going to work, keeping us on school [sic] until we're 18.*

WORKSHOP C continued:

5. Young people in JWT understand themselves as constantly personally changing, whilst adults treat them as fixed and as having very limited horizons:

- *I keep changing my mind and my plans.*
- *My line manager said I could work my way up, but I'm not so sure I want a supermarket career.*
- *I'd like to go back to college, but I don't think I will, I've sort of made other plans and things have happened. I've changed my mind on a lot of things.*
- *All I've learnt is that I never ever want to do accounting! [Learning Agreement training provision]*

6. They have a sense of endless future, but the danger is that this can solidify into low-waged and insecure lives:

- *I feel gutted [about leaving FE course for a paid job]. It was a good course but in other ways I've got the rest of my life.*
- *I don't know what I'll be doing in five years' time, just doing what I'm doing now.*

7. Appropriate guidance is essential and valued if seen as directed at the person and not at government targets - but very difficult to deliver. It often comes from informal mentor figures and formal advisors willing to listen and to act beyond the limits of their role:

- *Connexions was sort of my last resort.*
- *I can talk to Ritchie[informal adult mentor] loads, he's helped me out loads.*
- *My Connexions PA, he knows me really well, and he's done so much for me, he even collected me and drove me to the college where the course was.*

8. Creating opportunities for such young people means respecting where they are but also fostering their sense of potential - in short, not treating them as 'dead end kids':

- *When I was young I wanted to be a vet, then a doctor, then I wanted to do this, I wanted to do that...*