

What Employers Want

A programme for those supporting young people and engaging with employers.

Between May-July 2016, 621,000 young people were unemployed. Whilst this figure is down on the previous year, independent research by Learning and Work Institute to inform the Youth Jobs Index (<http://www.impetus-pef.org.uk/policy-initiatives/youth-jobs-index/>) reveals a deeper problem than the government's quarterly statistics indicate, with an average of 13 million 16-24 year olds spending 6 months out of learning or work – and 700,000 out for 12 months.

We frequently hear that employers think young people are not well prepared for the world of work, leaving many young people feeling demoralised and confused about what employers are looking for. In turn, this fuels a perception that young people are not motivated or interested in learning or work.

In our work L&W meet and partner with a wide range of committed and passionate practitioners working to support young people into employment and to succeed in life, and we find some of the most successful approaches used empower and inspire young people. To provide further support to their work we wanted to develop a programme which could be used flexibly in partnership with young people and employers, and would equip young people with additional skills and understanding to help them in their search for work, and add to the wider body of work into employer needs. Our innovative programme – *What Employers Want* – is designed to do just this.

The What Employers Want programme provides the resources for practitioners to train and support unemployed young people to carry out face to face interviews with local employers, in order to help develop their understanding of what an 'employable young person' looks like from the perspective of the employer.

By bringing unemployed young people and local employers together, the programme supports young people to develop a range of skills, as well as to improve their chances of getting a job and progressing in work. Young people get to hear first hand what skills, qualities and experience are most important to employers when they are recruiting a young person. And employers benefit too – supporting young people with their job search and perhaps meeting a future employee!

The programme has developed over time – and one of its key strengths is its flexibility, enabling a wide range of organisations working with young people to adapt it to their own context. Earlier this year, the NOW Group in Northern Ireland successfully adapted the programme to work with young people with a range of learning abilities and needs. Now in its third year, What Employers Want is also looking at how the programme can be used to support care leavers and young adult carers. Currently the project is being delivered by

Barnardo's, Communities First, the Drive Forward Foundation, and Sheffield Futures to further test these flexibilities and the programmes replicability in different contexts.

Practitioners who have used *What Employers Want* reported that it had provided them with a new approach to supporting young people to develop their employability skills, and new resources to share and use with unemployed young people. It also resulted in new and stronger relationships with local employers, and up-to-date knowledge of what employers are seeking when recruiting a young person. All the resources and information needed to deliver the project are available on the *What Employers Want* website, why don't you take a look and see if you might use it: <http://www.whatemployerswant.org/>.

I am delighted to be delivering a workshop at Learning and Work Institute's Youth Employment Convention on the 5th December where I will be providing an overview of the project, its impact (on young people, employers, and practitioners), and its findings. I will also be joined by partners to discuss why they have chosen to use the programme and how they have used its flexible model to best meet the needs of the young people they work with. I hope to see you there to discuss how it might work in your context!