

## Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales

Keith Towler

### 4<sup>th</sup> November 2014 – CCFW RESPONSE TO ENTERPRISE AND BUSINESS COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON ASSISTING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO WORK.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales is an independent children's rights institution established in 2001. The Commissioner's principal aim is to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children.<sup>1</sup> In exercising this functions, the Commissioner must have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).<sup>2</sup> The Commissioner's remit covers all areas of the devolved powers of the National Assembly for Wales insofar as they affect children's rights and welfare. They may also make representations to the National Assembly for Wales about any matter affecting the rights and welfare of children in Wales.<sup>3</sup>

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international human rights treaty that applies to all children and young people aged 18 and under. It is the most widely ratified international human rights instrument and gives children and young people a wide range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights which State Parties to the Convention are expected to implement. In 2004, the Welsh Assembly Government adopted the UNCRC as the basis of all policy making for children and in 2011, Welsh Government passed the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure<sup>4</sup>.

### Contact details

Organisation Children's Commissioner for Wales  
Name: Keith Towler  
Title Children's Commissioner for Wales  
Address: Oystermouth House, Charter Court, Phoenix Way, Llansamlet, Swansea  
Post code: SA7 9FS  
Tel: 01792 765600  
E-mail: commissioner@childcomwales.org.uk

### This response is not confidential

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<sup>1</sup> Section 72A Care Standards Act 2000

<sup>2</sup> Regulation 22 Children's Commissioner for Wales Regulations 2001

<sup>3</sup> Section 75A (1) Care Standards Act 2000

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-legislation/bus-leg-measures/business-legislationmeasures-rightsofchildren.htm>

**Issues that the Committee is considering:**

**THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS THAT PREVENT YOUNG PEOPLE FROM FINDING WORK, AND HOW TO CHANGE THE CULTURE AND ATTITUDES THAT ENTRENCH UNEMPLOYMENT FOR MANY**

- **Addressing the Policy Tensions**

The complexities and challenges of providing resolve to youth unemployment requires a long-term and interconnected approach to improving the opportunities that enable young people to fulfil their potential, and I have welcomed the direction taken by Welsh Government in response to this issue. Provisions such as the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework and Jobs Growth Wales have, at least in the first instance, had positive impacts on improving the employment opportunities available to young people in Wales<sup>5</sup> and I look forward to reading the final findings of the review on the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework when they become available.

I do, however, have concerns as to how the policy contexts view children and young people as causal contributors to the social inequalities that Wales faces today and will continue to face in the future:

*“reducing the number of young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET) will have a long-term impact on the lives of not just today’s young people, but generations to come. The cost of not addressing this issue is not just economic, but impacts on levels of unemployment, under employment, crime, well-being, substance misuse, premature death and early motherhood...For many young people, disengaging in this way will prove to be a critical factor which impacts on their ability to make a successful transition into adulthood and the world of work.” (p.2)<sup>6</sup>*

Research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)<sup>7</sup> found that policy assumptions often problematized children and young people (particularly those living in poverty) as passive recipients of intergenerational unemployment. In contrast to these

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<sup>5</sup> Welsh Government Social Research (2014) *Jobs Growth Wales: Interim Report* [.pdf] Available online at: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/2014/140916-jobs-growth-wales-interim-report-en.pdf> Accessed on: 24/10/2014

<sup>6</sup> Welsh Government (2013) *Youth Engagement and Progression Framework: Implementation Plan* [.pdf] Available online at: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/131007-ye-framework-implementation-plan-en.pdf> Accessed on: 23/10/2014

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012) *Are ‘Cultures of Worklessness’ Passed Down the Generations?* [.pdf] Available online at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/worklessness-families-employment-full.pdf> Accessed on: 23/10/2014

assumptions, JRF found no evidence of inherent cultures of worklessness amongst families and that young people “expressed conventional aspirations about wanting a job, and most were very active in seeking work” (p.3)<sup>7</sup>. JRF also found that the long-term worklessness of parents in families was as a result of the complex multiple problems associated with living in deep poverty over years and in despite of these challenges, many parents were active in supporting their children to secure education, employment or training opportunities.

This is not to say, however, that poverty has no bearing on the employment prospects of young people. It is well recognised that poverty severely blights the life chances of young people – negatively impacting their academic attainment, housing, health and overall social mobility<sup>8</sup>. I welcome the priority level this has been given within Welsh Government’s policy framework. The approach taken by Welsh Government places a central emphasis upon securing employment as a route out of poverty and social disadvantage<sup>9 10</sup>. Whilst, broadly speaking this is true, Wales has seen a substantial rise in the number of families living in in-work poverty and that there are now more low-income working families living in poverty in Wales (285,000 on average in the three years to 2010/11) than there are non-working ones (275,000)<sup>11</sup>. The evidence demonstrates that the challenge of overcoming poverty cannot be achieved by securing employment alone and that, whilst progress has been made, our policies must abandon the deficit-driven assumptions and provide a radical refresh to tackling poverty and to work with young people’s strengths to provide the solutions for addressing the interconnected complexities of social inequality.

In addition to this, a significant tension exists between the provisions introduced by Welsh Government and the approach taken forward by the UK Government’s welfare reform. In a bid to curb the culture of ‘welfare dependency’ the changes to unemployment benefits have increased the levels of conditionality and has resulted in the ‘problem’ of youth unemployment being tangibly felt in the lived realities of young people seeking employment. In my Child Poverty Strategy Progress Report 2013, I reported that many young people feel stigmatized from having to be reliant on the

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<sup>8</sup> Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission (2014) *State of the Nation: Social Mobility and Child Poverty in Great Britain* [.pdf]  
Available online at:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/365765/State\\_of\\_Nation\\_2014\\_Main\\_Report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/365765/State_of_Nation_2014_Main_Report.pdf) Accessed on: 24/10/2014

<sup>9</sup> Welsh Government (2011) *Child Poverty Strategy for Wales* [.pdf] Available online at:  
<http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/1894/1/110203newchildpovstrategy2en.pdf> Accessed on: 24/10/2014

<sup>10</sup> Welsh Government (2013) *Building Resilient Communities: Taking Forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan* [.pdf] Available online at: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dsjlg/publications/socialjustice/130703takeforpovactplanen.pdf> Accessed on: 24/10/2014

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2013) *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Wales 2013* [.pdf] Available online at:  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-exclusion-wales-summary.pdf> Accessed on: 24/10/2014

welfare system and are experiencing a lack of respect from employment service staff - only seeking to address young people's immediate economic inactivity irrespective of need or aspiration<sup>12</sup>.

The employment opportunities available to young people are intrinsically connected the economic wellbeing of their communities, and the impacts of poverty may mean that young people are often facing the challenges of competitive disadvantage when trying to enter into already constrained local labour markets. The jobs requiring limited education, work-based, skills, knowledge and experience are often the only vacancies available to young people – often offering part-time/non-standards hours of work. JRF also found that over three-quarters of such vacancies offered pay below the living wage<sup>13</sup>. Issues surrounding low pay and part-time contracts can pose a real and significant barrier for young people trying to access the job-market – detrimentally impacting on their abilities to cover travel costs, to manage any potential caring responsibilities, to managing combinations of jobs, or to cover additional costs for uniform and equipment.

In addition to this, welfare reform has increased the expectations for young people to search harder and extend the geographical distance they are willing to travel (up to 90 minute each way). Searching for a job is often a job in itself. For the most, young people are often reliant on parents or public transport to access learning or employment opportunities. With increasing travel costs and the increased expectations to travel further, access to affordable transport is acting as a barrier to employment, particularly for those young people living in poverty<sup>14</sup>. I recognise that welfare benefits are a non-devolved responsibility, however, it is unclear to me which system, Welsh Government's or UK government's approach to welfare reform, holds the greatest levels of influence and grip over young people's lives. I am concerned that these ideological tensions and increased conditionality<sup>12 15</sup> are forcing young people to enter into a low-paid, low-skilled labour market economy<sup>16</sup>. With the varying and unstable conditions of low-pay, low-skilled employment, I am concerned that any gains made in youth employment in

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<sup>12</sup> Melrose, M (2012) 'Young People, Welfare Reform and Social Insecurity', *Youth & Policy*, [.pdf] Available online at:

<http://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/melrose-yandp108.pdf> Accessed on: 24/10/2014

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012) *Disadvantaged Young People Looking for Work: A Job in Itself?* [.pdf] Available online at:

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/young-people-disadvantage-jobseekers-full.pdf> Accessed on: 28/10/2014

<sup>14</sup> Sustrans (2012) *Access Denied: Transport Poverty in Wales* [.pdf] Available online at:

[http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/files/Access%20Denied\\_eng.pdf](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/files/Access%20Denied_eng.pdf) Accessed on: 28/10/2014

<sup>15</sup> Children in Wales (2014) *Child and family poverty in Wales: a snapshot of key issues raised by families* [.pdf] Available online at:

<http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/children-and-families-in-poverty-in-Wales.pdf>

Accessed on: 28/10/2014

<sup>16</sup> Office for National Statistics (2014) *Young People in the Labour Market, 2014* [.pdf] Available online at:

[http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_355123.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_355123.pdf) Accessed on: 28/10/2014

Wales will be short-lived and will further entrench the issues of poverty and social inequality<sup>8</sup>.

- **Progression Pathways**

The opportunities available to young people entering the labour market have been significantly affected by the impacts of economic recession. With fewer vacancies, increased competition and general a lack of work-based skills, knowledge and experience, many young people are being competitively forced out of the labour market<sup>17</sup>. Welsh Government's *Youth Engagement and Progression Framework* recognises these social complexities and provides an approach which seeks to holistically meet the needs of young people (particularly those most vulnerable) and in readying them to further their education or enter employment or training; intervening at the earliest possible stage of identification and providing brokerage support to young people – an approach I welcome.

Establishing effective routes of employment progression for young people is a core component to ensuring that the gains made in tackling youth unemployment and to improving overall social mobility are long-term sustainable. Young people are the most likely to work in the lowest skilled, lowest paid jobs in the economy<sup>16</sup> and have traditionally entered the labour market through the retail, hospitality and care sectors. These sectors account for approximately a third of the workforce sectors across England and Wales respectively<sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup>. The evidence, however, suggests that the opportunities to support the progression of workers within these sectors is patchy and limited<sup>20</sup>. If this trend is set to continue, young people will be left behind and there is now a real need to develop a long-term coherent approach to tackling the structural issues of inequality faced by young people within the labour market<sup>8</sup>.

In recognising the current skill shortages and gaps being experienced within the skilled trades and technical professions<sup>21</sup>, I welcome the significant efforts made by Welsh

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012) *Disadvantaged Young People Looking for Work: A Job in Itself?* [.pdf] Available online at: <http://www.irf.org.uk/sites/files/irf/young-people-disadvantage-jobseekers-full.pdf> Accessed on: 24/10/2014

<sup>18</sup> UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2012) *Sector Skills Insight: Retail – Evidence Report 53* [.pdf] Available online at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/304319/Sector\\_Skills\\_Insights\\_Retail\\_evidence\\_report\\_53.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/304319/Sector_Skills_Insights_Retail_evidence_report_53.pdf) Accessed on: 28/10/2014

<sup>19</sup> UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2012) *The Youth Employment Challenge* [.pdf] Available online at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/305736/the-youth-employment-challenge.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/305736/the-youth-employment-challenge.pdf) Accessed on: 28/10/2014

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014) *Improving Progression in Low-Paid, Low-Skilled Retail, Catering and Care Jobs* [.pdf] Available online at: <http://www.irf.org.uk/sites/files/irf/employment-progression-skills-full.pdf> Accessed on: 28/10/2014

<sup>21</sup> UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2014) *The Labour Market Story: The State of UK Skills* [.pdf] Available online at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/344440/The\\_Labour\\_Market\\_Story\\_The\\_State\\_of\\_UK\\_Skills.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/344440/The_Labour_Market_Story_The_State_of_UK_Skills.pdf) Accessed on: 28/10/2014

Government through Jobs Growth Wales, the Apprenticeship Matching Service and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework to address potential skill shortages within the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) professions.

As the market responds to changes in demand, however, projections made by the UK Commission on Employment and Skills are suggesting that the country will be facing skill shortages within emerging sectors and the retail, catering and care sectors in the future<sup>20 22</sup>. Although it is too early to identify the long-term impacts on young people, I would like to see a continuation to improve partnership efforts between Welsh Government, the wider public sector, the private and voluntary sectors to support demand-led youth employment and progression. I remain concerned that the delivery of government's ambition in practice will be severely constrained by the reduction of local authority budgets and a reduction of the mainstream services that play such an important role in the engagement and progression of children and young people<sup>23</sup>.

Wales is largely a public service economy and as cited within the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, there are examples of how public sector organisations have developed an innovative and strategic approach to improving youth employment opportunities within their area. Caerphilly County Borough Council has integrated local service delivery to meet the current and future skills requirements of its Local Service Board partners including Gwent Police, the Aneurin Bevan Health Board, GAVO and the Caerphilly Business Forum. The programme specifically assists partners and employers to address local skills gaps by equipping unemployed young people with the specific skills needed to gain and sustain employment locally. Staff work with partners and employers to identify placement and employment opportunities; match skills requirements with skills availability; track and monitor progress and support young people towards sustainable employment.

This model has increased significantly the number of training and employment opportunities available locally and the suitable matching of young people to these opportunities has reduced levels of unemployment amongst those aged 16 to 24. The Council now has an ambitious vision to build on this success and create a Caerphilly wide talent pool and vacancy matching service. It also intends to work with its partners to adopt innovative procurement practices to incorporate targeted recruitment and

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<sup>22</sup> UK Commissioner for Employment and Skills (2014) *The Labour Market Story: Skills for the Future* [.pdf] Available online at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/344441/The\\_Labour\\_Market\\_Story\\_-\\_Skills\\_for\\_the\\_Future.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/344441/The_Labour_Market_Story_-_Skills_for_the_Future.pdf) Accessed on: 28/10/2014

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/uploads/publications/481.pdf>

training clauses into contracts with the private sector (where appropriate) in order to generate greater employment, learning and training opportunities locally.

I am however, unclear about the extent to which all local authorities, health boards and others are picking up the mantle in offering good quality work experience placements, apprenticeships, training and jobs for those under 25. I would expect for practices such as this to be extended as a statutory framework in the future.

### **THE NEED FOR SOFTER SKILLS: E.G., EFFECTIVE INTERVIEW AND JOB APPLICATION SKILLS; READY-FOR-WORK SKILLS**

- **Education Curriculum**

Within my response to the National Curriculum and Assessment Review, I recognised the importance of ensuring that children and young people develop strong literacy and numeracy skills as they progress through education. I did, however, draw reference to the fact that these skills should not be developed in isolation and that the pedagogy of education should adopt a rights-based approach to develop the whole of the child or young person in order to fulfil their potential (Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). Indeed, research conducted by CIPD in 2012 found that many employers expect prospective candidates (in this case young people) to possess high levels of ‘soft’ qualities’ including confidence, curiosity, empathy, motivation, commitment, passion, group work skills, and global knowledge<sup>24</sup>. Within their research, the CIPD found that many employers often recruit young employees on the basis of the candidates’ commitment to organisational values and placed less emphasis on academic and technical skills. Indeed, this is reinforced within by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment on the Aims of Education:

*“Education must also be aimed at ensuring that essential life skills are learnt by every child and that no child leaves school without being equipped to face the challenges that he or she can expect to be confronted with in life. Basic skills include not only literacy and numeracy but also life skills such as the ability to make well-balanced decisions; to resolve conflicts in a nonviolent manner; and to develop a healthy lifestyle, good social relationships and responsibility, critical*

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<sup>24</sup> CIPD (2013) *Employers are from Mars, Young People are from Venus: Addressing the Young People/Jobs Mismatch* [.pdf] Available online at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/MarsVenus%20FINAL%2030%2004%2013.pdf> Accessed on: 29/10/2014

*thinking, creative talents, and other abilities which give children the tools needed to pursue their options in life”<sup>25</sup> (p.4)*

Supporting a rights-based approach to the curriculum would further enable children and young people to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and values that would support their transitions from education to employment; instilling the values of fairness, dignity and equality at the heart of their beings, and providing global awareness and perspectives on the deep-rooted and socio-economic relationship between human rights, corporate social responsibilities and globalisation.

- **Work Experience**

Without a level of work-based skills, knowledge and experience, many young people feel locked into a vicious cycle where they are unable to secure employment opportunities that would provide them with work experience. I welcome the Jobs Growth Wales initiative and the Apprenticeship Matching Service that the Welsh Government has introduced to offer young people such experience. As previously mentioned, however, a significant proportion of young people are not fully informed about the post-16 opportunities available to them and that improvements in raising awareness of such services is needed. In addition to the constraints on local authority budgets, I am concerned that the reduction of funding for apprenticeships from the Welsh Government’s budget will hamper progress and damage the future employment opportunities available to young people.

The provision of high quality work experience opportunities in school is a core component to ensuring young people are equipped for the world of work. Improvements, however, are needed. On work experience alone the United Kingdom is falling behind its international comparators<sup>8</sup>. Less than half of British young people have access to a high-quality work experience placement in comparison to France where 85% of students have completed a placement; the European average is 61%<sup>26</sup>. Young people have told me that they would like clearer information about the choice of work experience placements available to them and that improved support is needed from Careers Wales in securing work experience placements. Many young people described

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<sup>25</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child (2001) *General Comment No. 1 Article 29 (1): The Aims of Education* [.pdf] Available online at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4538834d2.html> Accessed on 05/06/2014

<sup>26</sup> McKinsey Center for Government (2014), *Education to Employment: Getting Europe’s Youth into Work* [.pdf] Available online at: [http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/social\\_sector/~media/mckinsey/dotcom/insights/social%20sector/education%20to%20employment%20getting%20europes%20youth%20into%20work/education%20to%20employment%20getting%20europes%20youth%20into%20work%20full%20report.ashx](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/social_sector/~media/mckinsey/dotcom/insights/social%20sector/education%20to%20employment%20getting%20europes%20youth%20into%20work/education%20to%20employment%20getting%20europes%20youth%20into%20work%20full%20report.ashx) Accessed on: 29/10/2014



to me that they used their family members and schools to secure work experience opportunities instead of utilizing the services provided by Careers Wales.

Young people also told me that they would like to see greater quality and breadth of work experience placements being offered. Access to longer-term work experience programmes is crucial to ensuring that children and young people are prepared for the environments and expectations of work as they make the transition from education to employment. In order to improve the quality of work experience, young people would like access to more robust supervision sessions that would support them in transferring and applying the knowledge they have obtained throughout education to the world of work.

- **Information and Preparation**

In seeking to enter into the labour market, young people are at a competitive disadvantage. It is, therefore, crucial that young people are provided with the right level of information, support and guidance which equips them to explore their options and prepares them for the world of work.

I have welcomed the intent of Welsh Government to provide children and young people with information, support and guidance through the Careers Wales Service, however, more is required to improve the services available to them. In their Annual Report 2012/13<sup>27</sup> found that 71.9% of the young people they surveyed for their research project, *Funky's United Nations Challenge*, felt that they were unable to or didn't know how to meet with careers advisors in schools. They also found that the majority of young people surveyed had not used the internet to access careers advice. This finding is further reinforced by 78.6% of those young people surveyed, at risk of being excluded, had not used the internet to access careers advice, and that in general, many young people were unaware of the post-16 opportunities available to them. This suggests to me that there is a significant need to improve the awareness levels of the careers services available to children and young people, including raising the awareness of vocational education opportunities and the Apprenticeship Matching Service.

In my Child Poverty Strategy Progress Report 2013, I reported that young people often find the employment services confusing and the information provided to them is not easy to understand. In addition to providing the educative learning opportunities that

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<sup>27</sup> Funky Dragon (2013) *Annual Report 2012 – 2013* [.pdf] Available online at: [http://www.funkydragon.org/files/1313/9324/6882/Funky\\_Dragon\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2013.pdf](http://www.funkydragon.org/files/1313/9324/6882/Funky_Dragon_Annual_Report_2013.pdf) Accessed on: 29/10/2014

develop young people's softer skills, our education and careers services are well-positioned to enable children and young people to understand the labour market when deciding their options. Across the UK, careers advice has been inconsistent in its success and has been criticised for not effectively preparing children and young people for the world beyond school<sup>8</sup>. Research conducted by the JRF found that in order to enhance their chances of employment success, young people required strong knowledge and intelligence about the labour market<sup>17</sup>. Estyn, however, has found that overall schools do not effective use of labour market information to effectively support children and young people to make informed decisions about their futures<sup>28</sup>.

Connected to the need to improve young people understanding of the labour market is need to improve young people's knowledge and awareness of employers' recruitment behaviour. Although most use the internet to wholly constitute or supplement their recruitment and selection practices, methods for recruitment vary both by job type and locality<sup>17</sup>. Many young people are unaware of these differing recruitment practices and with a general lack of work experience find it difficult to best to 'sell' themselves to secure a job that would provide them with such experience<sup>24</sup>. In responding to increased pressures of having to carry out as many job searches and applications as possible, many young people are adopting a 'scattergun' approach to applications and often employers are receiving a vast amount of applications that may not be relevant to their vacancies. The research conducted by JRF found that this situation is exacerbated further in areas with weak labour markets, where young people had to submit nearly twice as many applications to receive the same number of positive responses as those from areas of economic prosperity<sup>17</sup>.

This approach is damaging young people's confidence by just being unsuccessful or not receiving feedback about their applications<sup>24</sup>. More work is needed within schools and careers advice, in partnership with employers, to practically support young people to develop the appropriate levels of skills required to making the best of the employment recruitment and selection processes available to them. Further work also needed to improve employer feedback to unsuccessful applicants on how to improve their applications and to supporting young people to improve their recruitment chances for the future.

There is, however, an assumption within this context of securing employment opportunities, that young people are passive recipients of the jobs market. I welcome

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<sup>28</sup> Estyn (2012) *Informed decisions: The implementation of the Careers and World of Work Framework* [.pdf] Available online at: <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/download/publication/258012.3/informed-decisions-the-implementation-of-the-careers-and-the-world-of-work-framework-october-2012/> Accessed on: 29/10/2014

the progress that Welsh Government has made in relation to empowering young people to take control and create their own jobs market through its Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy. I would, however, suggest that improvements are needed for effectively promoting a culture of social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship through the education curriculum. Children and young people needed to be provided with the skills, support and knowledge to create their own market economies and to the establishing their own progression pathways in employment and wider life. I welcome Welsh Government's acceptance of recommendations from the Enterprise and Business Committee's Inquiry into Youth Entrepreneurship<sup>29</sup> and would expect Welsh Government to produce a new strategy to deliver on these recommendations in a timely manner.

**WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ASSIST THE GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE MORE AFFECTED BY BARRIERS TO RE-ENTERING THE LABOUR MARKET, FOR EXAMPLE THOSE WITH DISABILITY?**

Many of the points I have discussed above require a long-term approach that seeks to improve the employment opportunities for all young people in Wales; addressing the policy tensions that act as barriers to long-term sustainable employment opportunities, improving relationships with employers, and improving knowledge application of labour market conditions. There are, however, a number of groups of young people that are requiring particular focus:

- **Looked After Children and those Moving to Independent Living**

The final years in school and the progression onto further education, training or employment is a key factor in the lives of all young people. It is, however, particularly important for looked after children and those young people moving on to independent living. For these young people it is likely that their education will have been affected by their experience of moving from home into care and indeed by the circumstances which led to them entering the care system. Good effective support and understanding in the school and transition setting is vital for this group of children and young people.

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<sup>29</sup> NAFW (2013) *Youth Entrepreneurship* [.pdf] Available online at: <http://www.assembly.wales/Laid%20Documents/CR-LD9553%20-%20Enterprise%20and%20Business%20Committee%20-%20Report%20on%20the%20Inquiry%20into%20the%20Youth%20Entrepreneurship-14112013-251662/cr-ld9553-e-English.pdf> Accessed on: 03/11/2014

Although we have seen small improvement over the years, the educational attainment of looked after children and young people remains a cause of concern<sup>30</sup>. Only 35% of care leavers in Wales achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A – G in 2011<sup>31</sup>. The targets set for local authorities have been low historically and this appears to have fostered a culture of low aspiration and expectation. Even though those low targets have been removed, it would appear that a negative culture of low aspiration still persists. This level of attainment is low compared with the school population as a whole, and corporate parents must do more to ensure that effective educational support for children and young people in care is a priority.

The experience of the young people moving on to independent living suggests that whilst support is in place for children in care the quality and provision of such support is variable, and knowledge and understanding about the personal difficulties that children in care may be experiencing is often patchy and inconsistent. Young people can benefit from early discussions with the designated teacher for looked after children on their interests and choice of subjects so they can decide what they want to do when they are older. Careers advice and support is key at this point in any young person's life. Schools must also think much more carefully about how they manage the role of the designated teacher and the impact that this role can have on the lives of looked after children in their schools.

Whilst support for looked after children and those transitioning to independent living remains for those who choose to pursue education or training, many looked after young people felt that there less support is in place for those deciding to move into employment<sup>30</sup>. Whilst there are initiatives such Symud Ymlaen which supports looked after children and young people moving on to independent living to secure employment opportunities, current regulations curtail support from social workers and personal advisers after age 21 for those young people moving on to independent living who do not continue on in education or training. A looked after young person who decides not to go to university and get a job will not have access to the same level of support as they would if they were in higher education nor would there be any support from the local authority after age 21.

Young people transitioning onto independent living are often critical of this artificial distinction and within my Lost After Care Report called for support to offered regardless

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/uploads/publications/250.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Wales Audit Office (2012) *The educational attainment of looked after children and young people* [.pdf] Available online at: [http://www.wao.gov.uk/system/files/publications/The\\_educational\\_attainment\\_of\\_looked\\_after\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people\\_English\\_2012.pdf](http://www.wao.gov.uk/system/files/publications/The_educational_attainment_of_looked_after_children_and_young_people_English_2012.pdf) Accessed on: 29/10/2014

of whether they were in education or not. For many young people continuing in an academic course of study after 16 may not be the choice they would make if they could be reassured that they could stay in care or continue to receive support (post 21), even if they decided to secure employment. Regardless of their decision and choice, all young people who have moved on to independent living should be offered the same levels of support and guidance from local authorities as their corporate parents.

- **Young People with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs**

Within my Child Poverty Strategy Progress Report 2013, I reported that many children and young people those with learning disabilities and special educational needs are facing substantial difficulties in accessing opportunities and services that enable them to develop the skills and experience necessary to successfully secure employment – voicing concerns about the lack of job opportunities, training and support options available to them that took account of their specific needs and vulnerabilities. Young people said they need a job centre mentor (especially for young people with learning disabilities), they talked about poor treatment/lack of respect for young people by employment service staff and said there is a need for a better range of opportunities such as volunteering and education.

Disabled young people were also concerned about a lack of services and problems associated with the built environment (for example pavements) which make it difficult for them to get around the city.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keith Towler', with a horizontal line underneath it.

**Children's Commissioner for Wales**