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[Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work](#)

Evidence from British Red Cross – AYP 17

Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work

British Red Cross Submission

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About us:

The British Red Cross helps millions of people in the UK and around the world to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, disasters and conflicts.

Our volunteers and staff help people in crisis to live independently by providing support at home, mobility aids and transport. We also teach first aid skills.

We are part of the global Red Cross and Red Crescent humanitarian network.

We refuse to ignore people in crisis.

Our work assisting young people into work:

As the British Red Cross in Wales, over the last 5 years, we have seen a significant increase in our engagement with young people, in various guises.

Prior to this, traditionally we offered opportunities in volunteering, particularly within our first aid and retail services and also employment opportunities but without any real strategic drive. However, in recent years we have welcomed and encouraged a spike in the number of young people who are now coming to us as a means of entering the labour market. Supporting this increase is the diversification of what we can now offer across all of our services from first aid, and retail, to our very considerable health and social care activity and administration support.

As a Wales-wide organisation, we have embraced engagement by offering training and employment opportunities for young people through our commissioned services and supported the Welsh Baccalaureate compulsory volunteering component.

We currently have more than 2000 volunteers in Wales, 31% of who are under the age of 26, and 9.5% of our staff (circa 300) are under the age of 26. As of the beginning of the year, 22% of all staff in Wales have been recruited via an engagement pathway, as detailed below:

- Through volunteering opportunities:
 - General Red Cross Services.
 - Inspired Action (Spirit of 2012).
 - Commissioned health and social care services where volunteer recruitment is part of the commissioning framework.

- Through being a user of Red Cross services.

- Through non-salaried opportunities such as internships; work experience; work placements.

- Through salaried employment opportunities such as general Red Cross recruitment; employment schemes (Intermediate Labour Market, Future Jobs Fund and Jobs Growth Wales); apprenticeships.

Issues for consideration:

1. Transport

In our experience, the various schemes which have focussed on Communities First areas have been challenging because of poor transport links and the unavailability of placement opportunities in that area. This has resulted in young people not having the same level of choice of placements as others in more accessible locations and subsequently often their commitment to the placement is less and impacts on their long-term aspiration and ability to secure on-going employment.

2. Effectiveness of schemes

As an organisation, we have proactively sought to support Welsh Government schemes including Jobs Growth Wales, Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) and Future Jobs Fund (FJF). Overall, one of the biggest challenges in working with the young people entering the labour market through these schemes is the time we have to make a real difference.

Many of the young people we engaged through the ILM and FJF, lacked the confidence, attitude, and basic skills to be effective in their roles and required a significant amount of time and commitment from our own staff to support them to develop. In many cases the six months given under these schemes was not long enough to be as effective as possible in getting them to a place where they were ready-for-work.

We also feel that the schemes which have focused on engaging NEETs living in Community First areas are so restrictive that they are discriminatory. We have experienced circumstances where individuals living on neighbouring streets are at the mercy of a postcode lottery, where one is deemed eligible and the other is not.

In our experience, schemes which are operated through training providers are at risk of losing the focus on the individual. Training providers are often more concerned with meeting their targets rather than addressing individual needs and supporting them through a completely unique developmental process.

3. Softer skills

Many of the young people we have encountered through these schemes have lacked the skills to answer the phone in a work environment, undertake an effective interview, or complete a job application. We have also encountered young people who are unable to understand or manage their budget, paralysing them into thinking they cannot afford to undertake placements or employment believing it financially better to remain on welfare benefits. As a third sector organisation, we have the flexibility where our staff were able to spend the time with individuals to improve these skills. However, it should also be considered why these individuals are getting to employment age without the necessary skills to even take the first step in seeking employment opportunities and how this gap can be successfully addressed. Our experience is that young people who lack these skills subsequently feel ill-equipped to look for employment and lack the confidence to apply for employment.

4. Social barriers

Our experience, particularly with 16-18 year olds on placement through FJF, has worryingly identified that many young people lack the very basic understanding of how to present themselves or behave in interview or during employment. This in the main has been because nobody in their immediate family is in employment and they therefore have had no indirect exposure to the work environment.

Successes and solutions:

As highlighted above, we have encountered numerous challenges, however we have also experienced huge successes as demonstrated in the growing number of young people working for and volunteering for the Red Cross in Wales.

5. The third sector has the accessibility, flexibility and opportunities to support young people to develop their skills, and experience. We are perceived by young people as less intimidating than the statutory or private sector.
6. Considering the diverse levels of confidence and skill-base of the young people we encounter through these schemes, we feel strongly that the length of the placements should be lengthened to enable the third sector to really make a difference to the prospects of young people. Furthermore, young people should not be reaching employment age without the basic knowledge or skills to apply for and secure their first job.
7. In our experience, schemes have been most successful when the allocated funding allows us to appoint a dedicated member of staff to support young people. This is because, many of the young people we encounter are living very chaotic lives, they do not have the basic knowledge or skills to undertake an employment or placement opportunity, and they require substantial mentoring and developmental support. We would urge the Welsh Government to make funding available specifically for third sector organisations to appoint a dedicated member of staff to support young people into employment.
8. We have the experience and the variety of opportunities to support statutory schemes and initiatives. However, there are challenges around transport for some of the areas with higher levels of NEETS.
9. The voluntary sector has also the freedom to use different recruitment methodologies. So frequently the experience of the Red Cross has demonstrated that traditional recruitment processes fail this cadre of young people. Our experience is that many young people falling into the NEET category are overwhelmed and put-off by formal job application processes of which they have little to no experience and, as a consequence, so much talent is being missed.
10. Schemes should be developed so that there is no postcode lottery. There should be equality of opportunity based on the individual, not on which street they live.

11. Greater emphasis and recognition should be given to the impact of volunteering for young people in helping them to build the skills, experience and confidence to secure employment. Volunteering is a less formal introduction to the workplace in which they can develop at their own pace in a supported and structured environment.