

Employer Links

Providing employability support to young people with challenging lives that have not had an equal start is about so much more than writing CVs, interview technique and job searching.

Inspiring Scotland's first Insight Report – [Falling Through the Cracks](#) published in October, described the personalised, holistic support that is crucial in supporting these young people to become job ready. The focus of this second Insight Report is on describing how the OFN portfolio enables young people to identify, secure and sustain fair work when they are ready to make this step. This work is now even more vital as a result of Covid-19 when young people that were already disadvantaged are being displaced and unable to compete for limited opportunities.

As 2020 draws to a close we remain in the 'Response' phase of the Covid-19 pandemic with the priority to protect lives, businesses and household incomes. Significant restrictions continue through the Five Tier System and the economy remains unstable with a heavy reliance on Government subsidy. Scotland's GDP fell by 3.2% during quarter one of 2020 when the virus emerged. A further reduction of 19.4% was experienced in the second quarter (April-June). There was a 68% decrease in the number of job postings during the same period*. Although there has been growth in some industries including e-commerce and food retail overall, the job market is depressed and employer confidence is low. According to the Scottish Government's Central Forecast, economic recovery to pre-pandemic levels is expected by the end of 2023 and unemployment levels are expected to reach pre-pandemic levels towards the end of Q1 2025.

Young people aged 16-24 years old will be disproportionately impacted by the economic downturn. Those facing additional challenges will be worst affected and are likely to take even longer to recover than the timescales outlined above suggest. With limited opportunities, significant support is required to source, secure and sustain fair work for this cohort. This has been the focus of Inspiring Scotland's Our Future Now (OFN) portfolio since the outbreak of the pandemic and throughout the various levels of restrictions. The need is great and will increase through 2021 as Government initiatives wind down.

The OFN cohort of young people would typically access jobs in hospitality, retail and services at entry level. Not only will these opportunities be fewer, but competition will also be greater. Even prior to Covid-19 the young people supported through OFN would struggle to secure a job through standard, competitive recruitment channels. Many of these young people lack qualifications, experience and skills and the complex challenges that they face present additional barriers. In addition to the core skills, qualifications and holistic personalised support that the ventures provide, a key part of their role is focused on engagement with employers. It is not enough to support a young person to the point of job readiness.

Supply and Demand

With too few opportunities and an increasing number of young people becoming unemployed, there is a growing deficit in supply versus demand. Young people with limited skills and significant barriers are disadvantaged even further and at real risk of long-term unemployment which we know results in lifelong 'scarring'. With at least three cohorts of school leavers (Christmas 2019, summer 2020 and Christmas 2020) entering a labour market that is unstable and contracting as a result of the pandemic, it is important that these young people are engaged and supported quickly.

**Covid- 19 Labour Market Insights – Skills Development Scotland November 2020*

There will be significant displacement in the labour market with vacancies that would be filled by school leavers and young people receiving support being filled by those with more skills and experience. Whilst we aspire to match young people to the growth industries of the future, as a first step into the workplace this can be unattainable, particularly in a competitive job market. Entry level jobs in industries that are of interest to young people provide a vital gateway into the world of work where basic skills can be obtained and etiquette understood. In-work support over a longer period is required for young people to progress and develop further skills and experience to improve their chances of moving successfully into better work with greater prospects. It is at this point that a more strategic approach can be taken to explore industries where there are skills shortages and therefore opportunities.

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The OFN portfolio builds partnerships with employers to assist the people they support to access and sustain fair work. 38 organisations delivering employability services in Scotland contributed to Blake Stevenson's Youth Employment Research, commissioned by the Scottish Youth Employment Group in September 2020. Collectively, these organisations had 1,328 distinct relationships with employers. Significant resource is dedicated to forming these links with employers large and small and a whole range of collaborative approaches are deployed.

Small/Medium Local Employers

The need for a trusted, consistent, flexible relationship between a key worker and a young person is well understood in the employability sector. The key worker is also central in building relationships with local employers.

There are some 350,000 SMEs in Scotland employing 1.2m people. This sector provides a large proportion of jobs to young people but it has been hit hard by restrictions in 2020. In Scotland more than half (53%) of small businesses reported a fall in revenues in Q3 and 43% have forecast revenues to fall in Q4 according to the Federation of Small Businesses (October 2020). The extension of the Job Retention Scheme is likely to delay the full impact of the pandemic on the economy until 2021 but it cannot be avoided.

Once a young person has been supported to produce a plan for securing fair work, the key worker will pro-actively seek out suitable opportunities. This can involve walking into local butcher shops and describing the support that their organisation provides and how that can be helpful to the employer. This might be informing them about the benefits of taking on a Modern Apprentice (MA), accessing wage subsidy programmes and/or the opportunity to provide training. Staff will also advocate on behalf of the individual young person and will offer their support as an 'insurance policy' in the event of any problems arising. SMEs are likely to be lacking in infrastructure to deal with HR issues e.g. if a young person does not arrive for work. The employer can 'outsource' this problem by engaging the trusted member of staff. This connection is then kept live to ensure that any future opportunities are flagged as they emerge.

The success of this approach relies on the staff member being confident that the young person is job ready which is established through their close working relationship. It is also crucial that the requirements of the employer are well understood and that the additional benefits are clearly communicated such that there is sufficient confidence to recruit a young person who on paper may not be given a chance. Trust is key and this is built over time and with significant commitment from the key worker.

Medium/Large Employers

Initial connections with larger employers are made in a range of ways – e.g. open funding applications or approaches offering staff volunteering. Whilst this is valuable, ventures can develop the relationship and explore other ways that employers can provide on-going support that is of even greater value but is low cost. Providing mock interviews in a real work environment or job placements can provide vital experience for young people. Highlighting the benefit of Modern Apprenticeships, tax advantages and positive PR that can result from effective partnership is also key. These relationships are led by more senior executives within the ventures.

Third sector employability partners can also assist large employers to fulfill Community Benefit Clauses within Government contracts.

Community Benefit Clauses (CBC) are an effective means of ensuring that people who are unemployed benefit from employment opportunities being created through regeneration schemes in their local areas. Companies bidding for large infrastructure projects have to demonstrate how they will do this and many rely on partnerships with the OFN ventures and wider third sector. Action for Children has partnered with a range of construction companies including Balfour Beattie, FES and Laing O'Rourke to support the fulfilment of CBCs. The ventures recruit, prepare and train young people and provide access to bursary schemes such as Barclay's Best Foot Forward to cover the cost of tools and other essentials.

The employers gain significant benefits through these partnerships - access to a workforce that is not only job ready but has the qualifications that are required to fulfil a wide range of jobs. This is underpinned by the Key Worker who supports the young person and the employer on site dealing with issues with timekeeping and attendance which is a cost and an inconvenience to site managers. Employers also engage ventures at the procurement stage in detailing how the CBC can be fulfilled. This is a very valuable asset to the employers and can be significant in them winning multi-million-pound public contracts. These projects include iconic buildings including the SSE Hydro, Queen Elizabeth University Hospital and Strathclyde University Science Building and being involved in their construction brings prestige and creates a real sense of pride for young people.

Larger employers can add significant value by opening up access to their supply chains and this in turn creates further opportunities for young people as the following case study demonstrates.

Regardless of the size of employer, the venture can highlight the difference that giving a young person an opportunity can make to their lives and future prospects. Many employers are open to giving a young person a chance but need support to take the risk. The venture can absorb the inconvenience and time that employers can ill afford to resolve issues with their employee and removing the burden of bureaucracy that comes with Employer Recruitment Incentives.

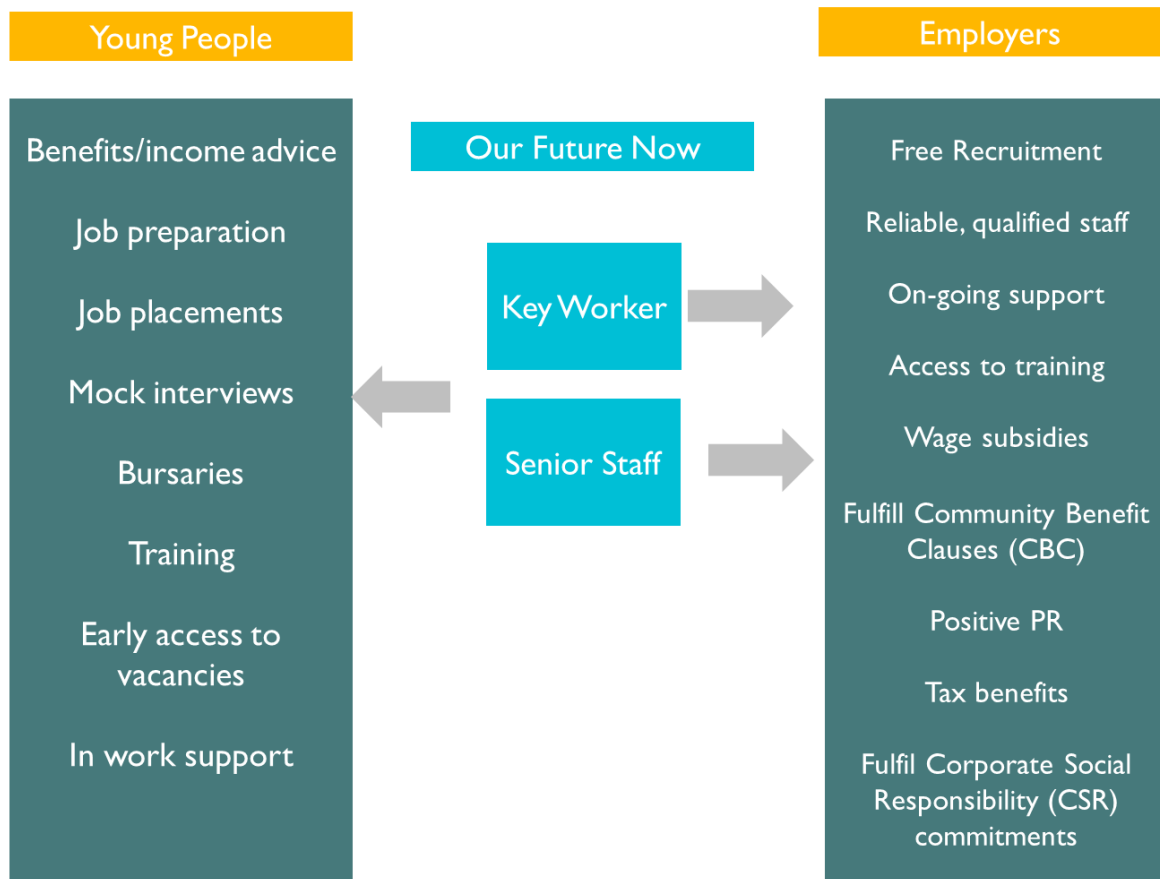
Street League approached the local Amazon depot seeking opportunities for local young people that were being supported in Inverclyde. A partnership was formed with Amazon successfully recruiting through Street League for packing jobs. In addition to the holistic support that is provided, Street League ensured that young people were also equipped with specific skills to fulfill the requirements of these roles.

Menzies is part of the Amazon supply chain and an introduction was made to Street League. Amazon could verify the strong track record that Street League had built however, at that time Menzies was working with another employability provider. This provider had let them down and they challenged Street League to fill 11 driver vacancies for them. In conjunction with the local Jobcentre Plus they supported people to fill all of the vacancies. This proved their capability and solved a problem for the employer and as a result a partnership was formed with Menzies. In addition to the ongoing supply of opportunities from Amazon, two young people have been employed by Menzies during the past two months with further opportunities in the pipeline. The frontline venture staff now maintain these relationships and quickly match suitable young people to opportunities as they arise. The next stage of development is to attempt to scale this model at other Amazon/Menzies depots.

In Work Support

The challenges faced by young people supported through OFN tend to be ongoing. Securing a job is an important milestone but sustaining it can be more difficult for young people with complicated lives. This presents a risk for employers that can be managed by the OFN portfolio. If an issue arises, the employer can call the key worker and this is likely to result in a quick and effective resolution, minimizing the cost to the employer. The importance of aftercare and ongoing support cannot be overstated. This provides a safety net that can avoid a young person losing their job over a relatively small issue. It is also vital in enabling young people to progress beyond entry level jobs to employment with greater opportunities.

The graphic below summarises the win-win scenario that effective employer engagement can create for both employers and young people facing barriers. Meaningful employer engagement requires trusting relationships that are flexible, responsive and bespoke to each employer and each young person.



Looking Ahead in Partnership

There is hope of the economy being able to 'restart' in the first half of 2021 as the roll out of the first vaccine is now underway. A more stable operating environment will enable more accurate projections on the industries that will not recover, those that will transform, those that will diversify and those that will emerge. The OFN ventures are tracking and scanning the labour market to identify the opportunities that will exist for the young people that they support. This will influence the qualifications and skills that will be delivered in order to equip them for the post Covid-19 world of work. There will be displacement in the labour market with jobs that OFN young people would access being filled by those with more experience and skills.

The Advisory Group on Economic Recovery Report (June 2020) highlighted that collaboration needs to be raised to new levels if are to effectively deal with the unemployment crisis facing our young people. This was endorsed by Sandy Begbie in the Young Person's Guarantee No-one Left Behind Initial Report published in September 2020 which also highlighted the need for 'stimulating the demand side of the labour market'. The work being undertaken by the OFN portfolio with employers is responding to this need together with the jobs that can be created within their own services. Community Jobs Scotland (CJS) facilitates this stimulus and is a valuable means of recruiting young people into fair work.

Inspiring Scotland is committed to working collaboratively with employers and across all sectors to ensure that the aspiration outlined in the Young Person's Guarantee: 'to be truly inclusive so no-one is left behind including those that were already furthest from the labour market prior to the impact of Covid-19' is achieved.

To have a conversation about this paper and our work in this area please contact:

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