Building Young Lives Through Construction Careers Project Overview

This report is based upon initial project activity between 01/10/2019 and 14/05/2020 and details the findings of preliminary research by Construction Youth Trust, the ways in which the project was due to be delivered and how the Trust has adapted wider delivery in reaction to the evolving challenges and changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was suspended as directed by CITB on 14/05/2020.

Over the course of our project, we planned to test and develop effective pathways into construction for harder-to-reach young people and provide employers, particularly SMEs and supply-chain companies, with proven methods of engaging, recruiting and retaining two priority groups: young people not in education, training or work (NEET) or identified by the authorities as being at significant risk of becoming NEET, and full-time learners currently studying construction and built environment diplomas.

Through a project that would research, develop and test new and existing approaches and pathways (e.g. engagement activities, work-readiness programmes, resources, coaching frameworks, support networks), we wanted to support employers of all sizes, with a focus on supply-chain employers, to connect with NEET young people and full-time FE learners. As well as prioritising young people who have historically been under-represented in the industry (i.e. people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity [BAME] Backgrounds and young women), we also wanted to reach young people who do not currently view employment in the construction industry favourably, and help them to realise the varied opportunities and entry routes available to them.

We conducted 43 interviews over the course of 6 months with a range of employers, referral partners and other organisations to learn from best practice and gain an overarching view on the issues surrounding the attraction, recruitment and retention of young people into industry.

The overriding learnings that emerged from our research was the need for immediate employment opportunities for young people following any kind of pre-employment programme, the need for young people to be as work-ready as possible and ongoing bespoke support for new entrants. We also paid particular attention to exploring existing provisions as well as understanding the labour market needs so we would be able to best prepare our young people for employment, raising their aspirations and be able to meet their expectations of providing appropriate employment opportunities aligned with their skills and interests.

We have collated our key research findings in order to illuminate the barriers to attracting, recruiting and retaining diverse young talent in industry as well as sharing lessons learned and moments of best practice.

Key research findings: Learning from best practice and existing provision

Engaging and building trust with young people

- For a lot of young people, launching into a large engagement session or long-term programme can be very daunting. It can be beneficial to meet young people in small groups or 1-2-1 for initial meetings to establish a trusted relationship before bringing a young person onto a full programm.e
- For those young people used to working in large groups i.e. college students, it can be a good idea to include employers in initial engagements. Including employer engagement

from the very beginning of a programme allows you to set the scene and convince young people of the quality and real employment potential of the programme.

- You have to go to the young people, you can't expect the young people to come to you. Especially for young people who are hard to reach, a lot of the 'typical' engagement locations i.e. job centres, colleges are not places where they feel comfortable or welcome. Organisations need to reach out and go to spaces that vulnerable young people are already using, i.e. a boxing club or a youth club.
- An effective way of gaining the trust of young people is by also engaging and getting 'buy-in' from other professionals they are already engaging with and respect. i.e. the youth workers at their local community centre.
- For a long-term programme to succeed you need to get an agreement of the level of commitment a young people will make to the programme. It can be a good idea to create a formal contract of agreement with all participants.

Long term mentoring and support

- Most employers suggest at least 12 months internal support beginning from employment start date.
- The most effective support is on a 1-2-1 basis.
- Many employers use questionnaires to assess the emotional wellbeing of a young person, asking them to fill them out at strategic meeting points.
- For those employers able to, they have found that it is beneficial to offer an overall and holistic level of support. Young people need support managing many different aspects of their life:
  - Practical support in an apprenticeship could be an employer monitoring college progression or ensuring that the apprentice is covering all necessary practical elements on site.
  - Support could also take the shape of housing or childcare support, dealing with mental health issues alongside a myriad of other possibilities.
- It is important to place the young person with the correct team. There are still instances of discrimination on site and care needs to be taken when choosing the most appropriate team for the young person to begin their employment with.
- Referral organisations are very strong on the need for a line of communication that includes them, the young person and the employer. By being included in young person/employer interactions they can act as an intermediary and help circumvent potential issues. The level of this kind of support a referral organisation can offer is often dictated by the remits of their funded programme.
- Referral organisations typically see it as their responsibility to pick up on the support needed outside of the workplace i.e. setting up a bank account, sorting out child benefits which an employer is unable to provide. Their aim is to solve the problems and deal with the issues that the employer doesn't have time to, to increase the probability of the young person achieving sustainable employment.
- Long-term support needs to be regular and trusted by both the young person and the employer to be effective. If neither party feels they can rely on the support given by an organisation (i.e. a support worker is often late, cancels meetings or turns up ad hoc) then the support will be ineffective and pointless.

Understanding the needs of a young person

- When working with young people facing multiple and complex barriers to employment, there is a consensus between referral partners and best practice employers that there does need to be a realisation that the young person is not yet the finished article and that they will need time and support to reach their working potential.
- It is important to identify the additional qualifications a young person needs to attain before they can attempt to secure employment. These needs might range from functional skills in maths and English to CSCS card training.
- Vulnerable young people often have low self-esteem having been labelled as a "low-achiever" or "at-risk". Crucial to the programme will be empowering the young person to change the way they view themselves and boost their self-esteem.

Facilitating work experience, traineeships and work trials

- A young person can never be fully work ready if they've never worked before. This includes young people who have completed work experience placements.
- Work experience placements work best when they are of at least 5 days in length and as immersive as possible. They should fully engage a young person and make them feel part of a team and working towards a useful end product.
- Any work experience should fully mimic the timings of an actual work day.
- Offering paid work experience placements can help improve a young person's performance and commitment to a placement.

'Try before you buy' work trials of at least 2 weeks

- Allows employers to develop a trust in the young people they are considering taking on - especially for those employers that have been 'burnt' before.
- Allows the young people to demonstrate their potential, free of the restrictions of their past or lack of qualifications.

Ensuring a synergy between employers and young people

- Programmes have to prepare young people for the roles that employers have available (i.e. live application process at the end of the programme). There is no point getting participants fired up about brick-laying if a company doesn't have any corresponding opportunities available for 9 months.
- For certain roles, there are certain skills sets that young people need to hold to be able to succeed in them. This could be something as obvious as a scaffolder not being afraid of heights to the compassion and empathy needed in being a community liaison officer.
- Specialist roles can create a buzz and capture a young person's interest.

Having an immediate route into employment

- Programmes that end without a real chance of gaining employment or moving onto a next step are damaging and destructive to young people. It is no good raising the aspirations of young people to then not have a job available to them.

Key research findings: Benchmarking the current work, enrolment and employment barriers to employing young people

Progression from FE learning and available training provision

- The success of college/employer interaction really differs from institution to institution and organisation to organisation.

    Reported issues:

    - In certain areas the colleges are not fulfilling the needs of the employers' labour market needs and offering the training support for the types of apprentices they wish to employ.
    - It can be hard for employers to locate appropriate training providers in their local area.
    - There is no cohesion between employers and colleges when trying to advertise alternative next steps to students. There have been reported instances of colleges not wanting to advertise apprenticeship opportunities to their students if they are not named as the training provider for the apprenticeship, which is particularly difficult if the college in question doesn't offer the correct training support for the apprenticeship.
    - College employability services aren't always effectively linked in with industry employers.
    - Opinion that vocational college courses are not seen as 'on par' with A Level study and this is perceived to be preventing progression into Higher Level and Degree Apprenticeships.
    - Employers approaching college students with the wrong level apprenticeships.
    - The lack of accountability of a young person at college compared to that at school can be too large a jump for the most at risk young people.
    - Not all colleges are able to provide adequate work experience opportunities for their students resulting in a lack of work readiness.
    - Many apprentices cite their day at college as the least enjoyable part of their apprenticeship.

Lack of necessary qualifications and clarity surrounding eligibility

- Some employers perceive GCSE Maths and English as a necessity and have concerns about a young person being able to complete an apprenticeship if also having to carry out functional skills in addition to the already stated 20% of study.
- Without adequate additional support, it can be difficult for a young person who doesn't learn well in a traditional classroom setting to complete their functional skills.
- It is not always clear exactly what qualifications a young person needs to enter employment and if they don't have those qualifications how they move forward in equipping themselves with those qualifications.

Supply Chain & SMEs unprepared for taking on apprentices

- Smaller SMEs require very clear, practical guidance on the mechanics of applying for funding and setting up an apprenticeship place with a training provider. They don't have any experience of apprenticeships and the whole apprenticeship world feels alien to them.
- A lot of colleges are coming to the end of their government funding allowing them to supply 95% paid for apprenticeships, with an employer only paying 5% to triaging costs. In many areas it will be hard for SMEs to find local training providers who are still receiving the necessary government funding to deliver apprenticeships. Levy transfer funding may be their only option.
- It can take time to set up an apprenticeship position at a company meaning that employers need to be fully confident in their ability to offer an apprenticeship before promising a

position to a young person. However, it could be the case that many SMEs will only consider offering an apprenticeship once they've met a viable young person for the position.
- When section 106 requirements are passed down the supply chain, SMEs are finding it hard to offer apprenticeships, especially those that rely on onsite experience. An employer can't take a local apprentice from a Southwark site to one in Tower Hamlets - that apprentice won't fulfil the new section 106 requirements and a SME isn't always based on a particular site for the necessary extended time needed to complete an apprenticeship.
- Many sub-contractors can only take on apprentices locally when the main contractor promises them confirmed time on a job.
- There is not enough easily accessible information on how to share the apprenticeship levy or alternatively fund an apprenticeship.
- For established and successful industry professionals who began their career journey without the 'correct' qualifications themselves, there can be a reluctance to communicate and work with education establishments that historically let them down.

Supporting young people in employment

- The majority of SMEs are not currently equipped with the necessary structures to support a young apprentice, especially one who is facing multiple barriers to sustained employment.
- In some cases, even larger Tier 1 companies are finding it difficult to deliver fully rounded support to young apprentices to ensure their continued employment.

Attitude and behaviour

- For those young people furthest from employment common issues include:
  - Lateness.
  - Being on the phone.
  - Inability to take direction.
  - Not understanding the rules of the workplace, the expectations and standards of behaviour which can lead to misunderstandings, disagreements and altercations.

Drugs & Alcohol

- Failing drugs and alcohol tests is a massive issue for newly employed young people.
- The outside social factors that can accompany substance misuse have a massive impact on a young person's ability to sustain employment.

Money

- For those young people who have been involved in criminality and experienced earning immediate high amounts of money, initial lower wages can be a massive deterrent. It can be hard for some young people to see the long term benefits of working and pursuing a career.
- A lot of young people want to walk straight into high salaried jobs and there can be a lack of understanding of the time it can take to become a high earner.
- Some young people have a lack of inspiration to work i.e. if their parents work multiple low paid jobs and are still struggling to make ends meet, why should the young person work?
- Not having a bank account.
- Not having money to pay for transport.

Recruitment of young people

- Without the support of a HR department, SMEs have to make all their own decisions about recruitment, an area that they are not expert in. Fears about recruitment include:
  - Young people are disinterested in the industry and just looking for any job
  - What is work ready? What does that mean? Do they have all the skills, like an experienced worker?
  - For enthusiastic young people who don't have the skills, how do you mentor that enthusiasm and effectively turn it into skill?
  - How do I deal with the responsibility of giving a young person a job at the end of their apprenticeship if I can't afford to take them on full time due to an uncertain project pipeline?

Lack of industry networks

- Many young people have low social capital and do not have access to role models or inspiring employer mentors. There is a need for programmes that bring employers and young people together so they can begin to build their own industry networks.

Availability of opportunities

- Some sub-contractors arrive on site already employing new starters or apprentices so don't have the capacity to take on more.
- Sometimes it can be difficult to predict the next need in industry and what form the next set of career opportunities might take. It is no good training a large quantity of bricklayers if no one is building any buildings out of bricks. It is important to have an overview and educated prediction of upcoming need and subsequent opportunities.

Inflexibility of working hours

- Working hours on site start early and, on the whole, remain very rigid. However, it is important to remember that professional and office based roles are open to all young people and can offer a greater flexibility for those who need.

Identified priorities for pilot projects

The interviews undertaken as part of the project research were extremely illuminating and identified a number of priorities for our pilot project:

1. **Understanding our role**

   One of the most important learnings to have come from the interviews is the understanding that the barriers preventing young people, both NEET and construction course college leavers, from entering industry careers are extremely complex. The same is true of the tapestry of support needed to help young people achieve sustained employment. With this in mind, a key priority for the pilot projects was to acknowledge the places where we are the best placed to 'solve' an issue and the moments where we need to call upon our collaborative network of support to bolster our young people.

2. **Providing a direct route into employment**

   For the success of the programme it would have been necessary to ensure that we were working with employers who can offer real opportunities in order to:

- Recruit young people onto the course – neither motivated young people or referral organisations want to take part in just 'another pre-employment programme'. They need the promise of a tangible outcome.
- Set the expectations of employers – if an employer is not aware they are required to or prepared to offer employment opportunities at the beginning of a programme, it is highly unlikely they will suddenly provide opportunities at the end of a programme. Everyone needs to be committed to supporting the young people to secure employment.
- Ensure the success of the programme. Without enough and a variety of employment opportunities, the programme would simply be a dead end for young people.

3. Offering targeted and specific initial engagements

We think it is important to identify individual engagement strategies for different cohorts of young people. We wanted to ensure that we were as effective as possible in creating solid and trusted working relationships that see a high retention rate of young people across the entirety of the programme.

4. Creating a structured, yet bespoke, support programme

Once employment has been secured, the support needs of every young person are dictated by their own needs, the demands of the role and their employer. There is a need to create a structure of support that is flexible enough to respond to every individual situation but that is rigid enough to catch a young person if they need to fall against it.

5. Creating unique engagement journeys for industry employers

We wanted to ensure the creation of an environment on the programme that was an easy and effective way for employers to engage with the next generation. We wanted to ensure that we were able to:

- Utilise the unique offers of employers support to the fullest extent i.e. some companies are best placed to provide site visits, whilst others are more able to provide volunteers for practical sessions
- Create an easy, stress-free opportunity for employers to connect with upcoming talent
- Allow employers to see young people demonstrating the skills that would be beneficial in the workplace in line with their available opportunities

6. Focusing and promoting the pipeline of upcoming career pathways in a local area

We wanted to ensure that our project was straddling the balance of:
- Enticing young people in with known and interesting careers
- Being realistic about the upcoming available opportunities

We wanted to invite specialist employers to support the programme to inspire young people about careers they may have never considered before, but that are needed by industry. When reflecting on the needs of construction course college leavers, who are already familiar with a range of construction careers, it may be the more specialist roles that really peak their interest and give them a career to aspire to.

NB this would have also included opportunities further from site that are accessible through alternative routes i.e. businesses admin progressing onto becoming health and safety or community liaison professionals.

7. **Ensuring the delivery of an immersive and realistic boot camp**

It became very clear that young people need to have a full and visceral understanding of construction careers before they commit to pursuing them so both they, and employers, are assured that it is the right path for them.
Amongst other considerations the boot camps would have seen:
- Start time of, at the latest, 8am (ready to go at 8am, arrive by 7,45am)
- Include an outdoors element
- Be physically demanding
- Be employer-led
- Include drugs and alcohol education

Challenges of a world-wide pandemic and national lockdown

We had decided to base our first two projects in Lambeth and Tower Hamlets. The engagement of both employers and referral organisations had been going extremely well, with initial engagements set up in both locations. However, following the nationwide lockdown in response to the Coronavirus Covid 19 epidemic, the landscape dramatically changed and we faced a number of challenges to the project.

Some of the challenges that threatened the project included:

Availability of opportunities, including apprenticeships

- There were concerns around the futures of private training providers and their ability to survive the lockdown. A reduction in the number of training partners able to deliver apprenticeships would reduce the availability of apprenticeships, particularly in more specialised sectors.
- Despite the pandemic, the same level of commitment to apprenticeships and local labour still contractually exists across established sites. However when weighing up the importance of achieving section 106 agreements against the need to get a site functional and profitable in as short an amount of time as possible to recoup costs, the likelihood is that employing support-intensive apprentices will be a lower priority.
- The lockdown saw a glut of experienced workers looking for employment. Understandably many employers are keen to employ experienced workers who can help them complete work quickly and efficiently rather than, unfortunately, investing in the training of an inexperienced young person.
- As we approached the summer months, all sites would have been looking to 'gather pace' and a large number of opportunities would have been made available. Unfortunately, sites had to slow down drastically and/or close. With the reopening of sites, the number of apprenticeship or training level positions available hasn't risen to the same level anticipated pre-pandemic.

Barriers to engaging with young people

- At the height of lockdown we were left only with the option of engaging young people solely through remote means. With online engagement we faced four main barriers:
1. Young people not having access to adequate equipment at home i.e. laptops or tablets

2. Young people without internet access
3. Quick implementation of online safeguarding measures by organisations unused to online delivery
4. The need to adapt resources and sessions previously delivered via face-to-face to remote means
- It can be very challenging to create trusted relationships and engage NEET young people when an organisation is able to deliver face-to-face delivery and offer practical engagements. Relying on online communication to establish new relationships with young people, especially with those who are already hard to reach, is an extremely challenging task.

Qualifications and wellbeing of young people

- Students leaving Year 11 and Year 13 experienced an extremely difficult period of uncertainty over their exam grades. The impact on their motivation and self-worth was extreme. For many young people they had to pick next steps that don't reflect their full potential and may limit their options moving forwards.

Loss of funding

- In response to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, CITB had to take a number of steps to enable the provision of additional immediate support and longer-term relief to the construction sector, including suspending funding on the majority of commissioned projects. As a result of CITB's continued limited resources, and the changing priorities within the sector, CITB regrettably advised that the Project will no longer be financially supported by CITB.

Innovation and resilience in times of uncertainty

In response to the challenges and changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, Construction Youth Trust has developed a range of online sessions and programmes to enable our continued support of young people. Over the lockdown months we engaged with almost 800 young people. The well-being of our young people remained a constant at the centre of our adaptation, dictating our new styles of remote engagement and support.

We immediately developed 9 online employability and careers networking sessions that we could offer across our 70 schools partners and wider network of young people.

For young people on the brink of their career journeys, meaningful employer engagements are pivotal when making decisions about next steps. Our online sessions remain employer-led, with industry volunteers engaging virtually ensuring that young people are still able to benefit from their knowledge and experience.

Initial sessions included:

• CV Masterclass

• Cover Letters Masterclass

• Application Masterclass

• Interview Skills

• Mock Interviews

- Finding & Applying to Apprenticeships

- Careers Spotlight

- Apprentices Q&A

- Influencers' Introduction to Apprenticeships

With the return of the 2020/2021 academic year we have continued to adapt our suite of curriculum linked sessions and long-term mentoring programmes to ensure that we continue to support our school partners through bespoke employer-led engagement plans.

We developed and launched an innovative L1 Health and Safety and CSCS card course. Across an 11 day online course, participants engage with dynamic live webinars combining quizzes, polls, videos and expert delivery.

As well as attending comprehensive webinars, all our young people are gifted with the CSCS card app to enable them to continue their practice after the online sessions end. Over summer 109 young people took part in this new course delivery and it continues to be a core offering of our wider programmes and work.

We provided technology and internet support to those most in need by reacting quickly and securing funding from the London Community Response Fund's 'Delivering Differently' grant for 30 laptops, along with data packages and dongles. These laptops now form the basis of an effective laptop loan scheme that enables all young people to have access to online resources.

The funding also covers 5 Zoom webinar accounts for Trust staff and access for young people to well-being resources as well as supporting 10 additional online CSCS revision webinars. The revision webinars were developed to support young people on the brink of taking their test before the nationwide lock-down to ensure that their learning and knowledge wasn't wasted in the interims before test centres re-opened.

We also developed and ran a series of online world of work programmes. The programmes were designed as an alternative to work experience placements, an opportunity that many young people missed out on due to COVID-19. Delivered across 5 consecutive days, the programme combined a range of 1hr sessions, including the use of CAD, to help participants navigate the creation of their own project design. Each session was facilitated by a relatable industry volunteer. 69 young people took part in the programme and we are now looking at the ways in which a work experience placement can be delivered through a mixture of online and face to face world of work activities.

As we move forwards, we are constantly reacting to and navigating our way through the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present to us all. However we are optimistic, as our experience has already demonstrated, that the challenges we currently face will ultimately help us to discover innovative new ways to support young people achieve their full career potential.