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Decent Work in Scotland: Thematic Report 1

What Scotland's future workforce think about 'Decent Work'

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WHAT SCOTLAND'S FUTURE WORKFORCE THINK ABOUT 'DECENT WORK'

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study investigates 82 Scottish secondary school pupils' views on and expectations about decent work.

- The majority expect to get decent work when they leave school
- Participants view decent jobs as jobs that will allow them to live comfortably and be financially independent
- Good bosses and friendly colleagues are valued
- Young people identify the importance of equality and fair treatment in the workplace, and expect they will experience this when they start working
- Most are confident they will get in-work training
- A substantial number of young people believe their future jobs will be valued and worthwhile
- Young people believe they should be protected from exploitative and unsafe work

WHAT WE DID

This report is one of a series produced for the UWS-Oxfam Partnership which explores the notion of 'decent work' from a number of perspectives. This particular report focuses on exploring Scottish secondary school pupils' perceptions and expectations of the adult world of work. One might argue that school students are the furthest away from the jobs market in comparison to other groups. While this is undoubtedly the case in respect of the adult job market, research has shown that having experience of paid part-time work prior to leaving school is a common experience in Scotland, as Howieson, McKechnie and Semple (2006) showed. Their large scale, representative study demonstrated that just under half of all pupils had part-time work experience prior to reaching the end of compulsory schooling.

Investigating the views of those not yet able to join the adult labour market is an important undertaking as, similar to research with adults, research with teenagers has demonstrated the important link between the quality of the employment experience and a range of developmental outcomes, including psychological health (O'Brien & Feather, 1990), job satisfaction and healthy work-related attitudes (Loughlin & Barling, 1998). Recently the 'scarring effect of unemployment' on young people has also been acknowledged (McQuaid, 2015).

For this research project, eighty-two secondary school pupils from eight schools located in the West of Scotland area participated in 16 focus groups between September and December 2015. They were aged between 13 and 17. Most (85%) were below the compulsory school leaving age. More females (63%) than males (37%) participated. In contrast with Howieson et al., (2006) and others, in this study, the majority of the sample (84%) had never experienced paid part-time work. Only eight pupils were currently employed in part-time work, while a further five had past experience. The majority therefore had no direct experience of work.

Each focus group combined group discussion with written workbook and 'card sort' activities. Pupils were asked to reflect on what characteristics of work they felt would make a job good or bad. Their expectations of the world of work were sought via a short opinion survey. Survey questions were designed to reflect the International Labour Organisation's [ILO] indicators of decent work (ILO, 2008). The card sort activity also utilised these definitions and asked pupils to rate each of the measures in order of importance on a 9-point scale (Figure 1). The group could place cards anywhere they liked on the board. Pupils were additionally asked to consider how employers, parents, schools and government could help them obtain decent work post-secondary school.

Most Important			Least Important				
Equal opportunities & treatment of employment		Decent working time					
Work that should be abolished	Social Security	Combining work, family and personal life					
Safe work environment	Employment opportunities	Adequate earnings & productive work	Stability and security of work	Social dialogue, employer & worker representation			

Figure 1. Example for card sort activity based on ILO indicators - what is most important about decent work?

WHAT WE FOUND

What do young people think about ‘decent work’?

Workbook responses indicated the two major aspects of work that school students believe are important in creating decent work are pay and people. In respect of remuneration, pupils identified that ‘good’ pay and jobs that provide sick pay, were positive. They qualified this response indicating that good jobs would pay “enough money to live off”, allow people to “financially support” themselves, and “live comfortably”. Social relationships in work were also important. “Nice and friendly” colleagues were valued, as were “good bosses”. Decent work would also provide “suitable” and “reasonable” work hours, “good holidays”, have a “good atmosphere” and “safe environment”. The kind of work undertaken would be “enjoyable” and “interesting”. The word cloud (Figure 2) illustrates the frequency of terms used by pupils. The larger the word, the more frequently it was used.



Figure 2. What is a good job?

When considering factors that would represent a ‘bad job’, students discussed a wide range of issues (Figure 3). Again pay emerged as the most common issue, specifically “bad pay”, “no sick pay”, “low pay” and being “underpaid”. “Not getting on with”, having “not nice” and “nasty” co-workers and managers in work were likewise perceived as a negative aspect of work. Bad jobs would have “irregular”, “too long” or “unsociable” work hours, combined with “low pay” and “overwork”. “Zero-hours contracts” and work that is “on-call” were singled out for mention. Likewise, “no time off”, “dislike” of the work itself and working in “unsafe environments” were of particular concern to these young people.



Figure 3. What is a bad job?

What are young people's expectations of the world of work?

Students were asked in the survey about their expectations of the world of work. The results generally describe a positive, indeed optimistic view of the workplace and what it can offer them in the future. The statements which follow indicate their views on what work beyond school will be like.

- A high proportion of respondents (59%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the job they will get on leaving school will be 'decent'. Only 7% disagreed.
- 88% thought that the job they will do when they leave school will be 'valued by society and socially worthwhile'.
- When addressing whether their future work will be 'stable and secure', 69% either agreed or strongly agreed, only 2.5% disagreed. 12% believed they would be subject to a zero-hour contract, 61% expected not to be.
- 82% expected to be working in a safe environment, no-one expected not to be.
- With regard to working time, 52% thought that they would get regular hours 'at a time that suits me', 12% thought not; while 69% were positive that the hours of work would allow them to enjoy a personal life, 2.5% disagreed.
- 83% agreed or strongly agreed that the job would pay them 'enough to live on'. Only 1% of the sample were pessimistic about this. Pupils were less confident (but mainly positive) about their prospects of receiving equal pay - 75% felt they would: 16% felt they wouldn't. Males (86%) were surer of this than females (69%).
- In respect of paid holidays, 57% thought they would get paid holidays. However, 43% were unsure of this, suggesting a lack of understanding of pay and holiday arrangements in the workplace.
- 71% were sure they would not experience discrimination in the workplace. 12% thought they would, while 17% were unsure.
- Most were confident they would get training in the workplace (72%).
- 56% were sure their employers would be understanding if they were sick, however 34% were uncertain of this.
- A similar proportion, (36%) were unsure if their employer would listen to their problems; however most (63%) felt that they would.
- 65% agreed or strongly agreed that their voices would help shape their future work but a third (29%) were uncertain.
- In consideration of future employment opportunities, 21% believed it would be easy to get a job on leaving school, while 33% believed it would not be easy. The remainder (46%) were unsure of their future employment prospects.

These results suggest that young people expect many of the features of what could be considered decent work to be in place when they enter employment after school. Pupils believed their future jobs will be valued, stable and safe. Pay will be adequate for independent living and training will be provided. Conditions of work and pay will be fair and without discrimination. In contrast some benefits of work, such as paid holidays, were less recognised, which perhaps suggests a lack of understanding of the detail of being an employee among young people still in school. Pupils were similarly uncertain about whether their employers would listen to their problems or be understanding about sickness absence. A significant uncertainty surrounded their future employment prospects with almost half unsure of their post-school job opportunities. Nevertheless, overall, school students held positive expectations of the adult workplace.

How important are different aspects of work?

We asked the young people to directly consider each of the ILO (2008) measures of decent work and rank these in order of importance (see Figure 1). Ranks and average scores for each indicator were calculated, with lower scores indicating more important concepts and higher scores demonstrating less important issues (Figure 4).

The ranking system provides some differentiation between indicators of decent work, for example, equal opportunities and work that should be abolished are rated more important than in-work social dialogue and representation is. Nevertheless, overall, all items were rated on the 'most important' side of the scale. Students gave priority to jobs where all workers are treated equally with respect to pay and opportunities to progress. Also important was protection in the workplace, both from exploitative work and work that is unsafe. Earning enough to support independent living and having opportunities to learn in work were also identified as central components of work that is decent.

Ranking	DECENT WORK INDICATOR (ILO)	Score
1	Equal opportunities & treatment of employment	1.6
2	Work that should be abolished	1.7
3	Safe work environment	2.1
4	Adequate earnings & productive work	2.4
5	Social Security	2.6
6	Stability and security of work	2.8
7	Decent working time	3.2
8	Combining work, family and personal life	3.4
9	Employment opportunities	3.5
10	Social dialogue, employer & worker representation	3.9

Figure 4. Index of Decent Work Indicators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, pupils were asked to consider, what could be done to help them obtain decent work post-education. In this report we shall focus particularly on their responses related to governmental action.

Pay: Government should set minimum wages and sick pay legislation and ensure everyone is paid it. Pay should be equal and the minimum wage should be increased so people can "live a normal life". Government should ensure people are paid "fairly".

Safety: Government should make workplaces safe by passing Health and Safety legislation and enforce safe work environments by "sending inspectors to ensure businesses are following laws".

Hours: Government should "cut zero-hour contracts" but also "limit the working week" to prevent overworking.

Opportunities: Government should create new jobs and modern apprenticeships to ensure there are jobs available for young workers. University education should be free and people encouraged to go. Government should support young people leaving school.

Equality: Government should regulate and enforce equality of rights in work. Government should ensure equality of opportunity, fair treatment, and prevent employment discrimination.

These views are compatible with current government thinking on Curriculum for Excellence, Developing Scotland's Young Workforce and the most recent consultation on Creating a Fairer Scotland. These documents emphasise young people's access to better and more relevant work experience, careers opportunities and advancing equality in terms of gender, disability, ethnicity and support for care leavers. The proposed integration of work-relevant qualifications and foundation apprenticeships into the education system will potentially improve young people's awareness of post-school employment opportunities and provide better preparation for the world of work.

Earlier sections of this report identify that young people's perception of the workplace is generally an optimistic one. These perceptions may, at times, be at odds with the reality of the current labour market. Young people have important views about work which should be taken seriously in any policy debate. In this report we have focused on their views of the role of government in regulating work and ensuring fair work practices. Future publications will consider their thoughts on the role of employers, schools, parents and themselves in helping them to obtain decent work.



Figure 5. What can government do?

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