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The role of employers in young people's labour market transitions

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Young people's labour market transitions in UK

- Becoming harder, longer and more insecure
- Few systems of job matching in UK labour market
 - Dismantling of careers advice within schools
 - JobCentre Plus provides little support
 - Online applications systems offer little advice and support
- Problematic development of vocational system
- Precarious employment common (dominates?)
 - Not necessarily problematic if it allows young people to experience a wide range of employment
 - But rarely actively chosen

Literature

- Skills agenda
 - Emphasis on young people being ‘work ready’ and ‘employable’
- Organisation studies/HRM literature
 - How policy and institutional contexts shape HR decisions
- Employer engagement with labour market initiatives to promote youth employment
 - Emphasise that employers are key agents both in shaping and engaging with policies (Simms, forthcoming)

Research questions

- How do employers understand their roles in shaping young people's early experiences of employment?
- How do employers shape young people's transitions in to the labour market?
- What explains different approaches to recruiting and managing young workers?

Methods

- Part of a larger 3 year, ESRC funded project: Precarious Pathways to Employment
- 7 sector cases: NHS, banking, automotive, food and drink manufacturing, hospitality, creative industries, voluntary sector
 - Background of sectoral issues
 - Case studies of organisations within the sector
- Desk research
- Interviews with managers
 - 17 interviews to date
- Other projects: historical context, graduate experiences, experiences of young people not seeking to enter HE

How do employers understand their roles in shaping young people's early experiences?

- Largely see themselves as invisible and lacking agency
 - 'Fight for talent'
 - Positions left unfilled
 - Struggling to recruit 'right' workers: values, diversity, etc.
 - Working to raise profile and convince parents and young people
- Differing views about what 'work ready' means
 - Work ready may mean getting to the shift on time
 - Or it can mean 'ready for the management position they expect'
- Expectations of young people higher than employers can deliver
- In short, they see themselves as 'takers' rather than 'shapers'

How do employers shape these transitions?

- Evidence strongly indicates they have more agency than they think
- Factors shaping transitions:
 - Roles offered, terms and conditions, experience required, how advertised, how recruitment takes place
- Outsourcing risk and responsibility: the role of labour market intermediaries
 - Not just agencies; bank, matching organisations (NU Creative Talent)
- Potential for tensions between (young) workers on different entry routes
 - Also brings managerial tensions
- Incentives for apprenticeship now sufficiently high to stimulate action in many sectors and organisations

What explains these patterns?

- Sectoral norms
- Business models
 - Patterns of income
- Professionalisation of skills and HR
 - Size of organisation
- Transferability of skills
- Position in relevant local/national labour markets
- Role of intermediary organisations

Discussion

- 'Employability' and 'work ready' mean different things in different settings
 - Need for a more nuanced approach
- Policy context shapes employer behaviour – but other factors as important, of not more so
- Policy incentives work, but in ways that are patchy and inconsistent within and between sectors
 - Institutions matter, but in mixed ways
- Individual companies and actors also matter to shape experiences of managers and young people