Opening Doors:

A Consultation on Employability Services, Employers' Experiences and Young People's Goals in Dumfries and Galloway

DRAFT REPORT

14 October 2022

Summary

Introduction

The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) was introduced by the Scottish Government and aims to connect every 16-24 year old to a work, education or training opportunity. It provides an umbrella under which all employability related organisations deliver services and support to young people.

Sleeping Giants were funded by Dumfries and Galloway's YPG Partnership and Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership to carry out a consultation with young people and employers. The purpose of the consultation was to improve understanding of views and experiences on working, living, training and volunteering in the region to inform the future delivery of YPG services including a potential new pilot project.

A mixed methods approach was adopted so that young people and employers could take part in a way that suited their needs. Measures to achieve accessible and engaging participation included the preparation of promotional materials by young freelancers to recruit young people and the creative use of both verbal and written forms of communication. Through a combination of online and paper surveys, online and face-to-face discussions and interviews, 195 young people and over 60 employers took part in the consultation.

Employability Policy and Research
- To ensure that the consultation methods were embedded in the appropriate context, a scoping literature review was completed as a key first step. The review identified policy and research papers of relevance to youth employability.
- Its findings highlight the challenges associated with tackling youth unemployment: young people face multiple personal (e.g. protected characteristics, caring responsibilities) and structural (e.g. transport, skills, available support) barriers to finding an opportunity that's right for them. Furthermore, the employability landscape is complex with multiple organisations offering different services.
- Scottish Government research (2018) found that relevant, timely and practical support from someone who listens and learns about a young person and is provided when the young person is ready to engage are among the factors that determine the success of interventions.
- Previous research within Dumfries and Galloway found employment to be a top issue for young people (Dumfries and Galloway Council, 2018) and Skills Development Scotland's Annual Participation Measure for 16 to 19 year olds showed that 93% of young people were in some form of work, education, training or volunteering in 2021; this is slightly higher than the national average of 92.2%.
- National statistics provide insight into the type of jobs that are available within the region and show that the Human Health and Social Work and The Wholesale, Retail Trade and Vehicle Repair sectors provide more jobs than any other sector in the region (ONS Business Register and Employment Survey 2020). The same dataset shows that there are fewer knowledge based jobs (Information and Communication, Professional, Scientific and Technical) in Dumfries and Galloway than there are nationally.

Key Findings: Young People's Views and Experiences

- 136 young people completed the survey and represented all 15 DG postcodes, although 3 postcode areas only had 1 respondent. The largest proportion of respondents were aged 16-18 years and female. Around a third were in school and a similar proportion were in work, while 12% (12) were not in work, training or education.
- The focus groups were conducted in a variety of locations across the region and included young people aged 16 to 24 years.
- Young people shared a range of positive and negative views about Dumfries and Galloway as a place to live and work, however a slightly larger proportion viewed it negatively than positively. Challenges young people faced in the region included a lack of social activities, poor public transport and limited range of employment and training options.
- A similar number of young people reported they wanted to stay in the region as those who did not, with females somewhat more likely to intend to stay than males or non-binary / genderqueer young people.
- Most young people had some idea of what they wanted to do in the future with 85% (112) saying they had either a clear idea or some idea. A majority of those with an idea for a career thought they could pursue it in Dumfries and Galloway.
- The young people's career aspirations were coded by sector. The most popular sectors were 'Arts, Entertainment and Recreation' (27%, 31) and 'Human Health and Social Work' (19%, 22).
- Some sectors that had been identified as fairly major sources of employment in the region (e.g. Wholesale, Retail Trade, Vehicle Repair) were rarely mentioned by the young people as potential career options. There was also relatively little discussion throughout the consultation of self-employment.
- When asked about barriers young people experienced when trying to access opportunities, the top two responses related to transport with. The qualitative responses highlighted long journey times, the cost of fuel and difficulties for some young people accessing the recently launched free bus travel scheme as challenges. Connected to this was the perceived lack of opportunities in rural areas in the specific fields young people were interested in.
- The second most highlighted barrier for young people accessing opportunities was lack of confidence (41, 36%) with some young people commenting on how their mental health impacted their ability to connect with services.
- Fear of discrimination was a barrier for 17% (20) when accessing opportunities and was particularly high among non-binary or genderqueer young people.
- If a young person needed help with their career, the first place most would turn to was asking a family or friend for advice (84, 72%). We learned through the focus groups that family support in particular could be hugely beneficial for young people but in other cases it represented a barrier, for example, where parents or carers disapproved of young people's choices.
- There was low awareness of the Young Person's Guarantee, with a fifth reporting they had heard of it, and, perhaps more importantly, a low rate (26, 22%) of young people saying they would turn to an organisation for help.
- When asked about specific organisations, young people who had contact with each of the listed organisations was considerably lower than the proportion who were aware of them. Just under half (40, 47%) of young people were aware of the local authority's Employability and Skills Service but only 19% (13) had contact with them.
- Confidence (33, 35% selecting this option) and mental health (30, 32%) emerged as the key barriers to accessing services. Lack of confidence was particularly an issue for young women.

- Protected characteristics also emerged as barrier to accessing services, with the following all identified: disability (10, 11%) sexual orientation (7, 8%), gender (7, 8%), ethnic background (5, 5%), transgender status (2, 2%) and religion or belief (2, 2%).
- Despite all these barriers, experiences of young people who accessed employability services were generally positive with over 69% (66) rating them either quite good or very good. Only 4% (4) gave a poor or very poor rating.
- Positive feedback was often associated with services where young people felt respected, listened to and given advice that was tailored to their needs. Voluntary sector services and Youth Work seemed to be particularly well-positioned to offer this kind of support.
- Voluntary sector organisations – especially those offering longer-term support or training - were reported as having an important role for young people with Additional Support Needs or facing other substantial barriers to the labour market.
- Experiences of employability support in schools were mixed, including some examples of young people with ASN finding teachers discouraging. Non-academic options were reported as being as undervalued in the school system.
- Meanwhile, when young people who had not pursued an academic path had the chance to do vocational training this was often a very positive experience.
- When asked what other types of support they needed, many young people described the types of signposting, careers advice and youth work that is already available. This adds to the impression that the main challenge for services is connecting with young people rather than making major changes to their offer.
- Another theme was that young people wanted ways to connect with employers or others working in the field informally. Mentoring was mentioned in the focus groups.
- For young people with ASN, there were frustrations at the narrow range of types of support. Some also wanted training (in schools but also of employers) so that more people understood neurodivergence and mental health issues.
- In 1 focus group, young people were dismayed at the lack of support for starting your own business, believing that taking part in Young Enterprise was not sufficient preparation for setting up a business.
- When asked what employers could do to help young people get into work, the strongest theme was that young people wanted them to be willing to hire those who didn't have lots of experience and to offer substantial training.
- Other young people wanted opportunities to be better advertised, with an implication that some employers hired primarily through their networks. Interviews were another aspect of hiring that some young people felt could be improved: some thought alternative or additional methods of hiring should be used such as doing trials.
- As with employability services, young people clearly articulated that they wanted employers to listen to and respect them. Specific areas where young people called for employers to be more understanding were shift patterns (e.g. around exam time) and also around mental health needs.

Key Findings: Employers' Views and Experiences
- Almost all of the 51 employers completing the survey had worked with at least 1 young person in the past 5 years, most commonly as a permanent or temporary employee but two thirds of employers (31, 65%) had taken on a young person as an apprentice, intern or in some form of placement.

- Employers taking part in focus groups reported having difficulties recruiting young people to their vacancies and, when they did work them, described experiencing issues around communication, attitude and work ethic. Some employers felt Covid-19 had negatively affected readiness for employment and others questioned how schools were preparing young people.
- These issues were reported to create a tension for some: employers wanted to support young people but the time required to do this placed other staff under pressure and challenged business productivity.
- However, employers' experiences appeared to vary according to age and work experience; the strongest criticism was directed at the youngest members of the 16-24 age group who entered employment straight from school.
- Employers completing the survey were generally more positive than those taking part in the focus groups about their experiences of working with young people – over two thirds (34, 67%) rated their experience as 'good' or 'excellent'.
- The young people these employers had worked with were often described as keen, interested and willing to learn. Some employers also perceived young people to have good technology and social media skills or capable of bringing a fresh perspective or energy to a team.
- Most of the survey respondents felt that young people had the attitudes/ behaviours, qualifications and skills needed for the workplace.
- Where employers provided training, it was most commonly on-the-job, mentoring or shadowing but provision appeared to vary by size – only larger employers provided formal or accredited training.
- Take up of employer incentives and support schemes was low in the survey sample, but Kickstart was an exception to this – half (23, 50%) had accessed this. Lack of awareness was the most commonly cited reason for not accessing support.
- Funding was the type of support most often cited as being needed to enable employers to recruit young people and help them to thrive in the workplace.
- Around a third (15, 35%) of survey respondents felt that they were able to provide extra support to young people with different needs but more employers (18, 42%) said that their ability to do so depends on a number of factors (e.g. job requirements and individual support needs).

Conclusions and Recommendations
[To be added following the co-production of the recommendations]

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1. Background

The Young Person Guarantee will be the umbrella that sits above ALL programmes for young people, it is the single portal and brand, the simple journey for young people regardless of their circumstances when aged between 16 and 24.[1]

The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) was introduced by Scottish Government in response to the disproportionate effect of Covid-19 on young people. At the heart of the YPG is a commitment to connect every 16 – 24 year old in Scotland to a work, education or training opportunity.[2] Within Dumfries and Galloway, YPG is an umbrella under which employability, education and training organisations deliver services and support. Alongside this work, Sleeping Giants was supporting a consortium of local partners to design and explore the feasibility of a new employability and skills pathway for young people facing the greatest barriers to education, training and employment. As a fundamental early step, the consortium sought to empower and support young people and employers across the region to actively participate in the definition, design and delivery of the new pathway. As any new pathway would become part of the YPG umbrella, it was recognised that the engagement of young people and employers needed to go beyond the pathway and consider the YPG more broadly.

It was within this context that the Young Persons Guarantee Partnership, as a subgroup of the Dumfries and Galloway Local Employability and Skills Partnership, and Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership, a key partner in the new pathway consortium, came together to fund a consultation (see Appendix 1 for a full list of the working group members who contributed to it).

Its overarching aim was to improve understanding of the views and experiences of young people and employers on working, living and training in the region; the findings would then be used to inform and shape future delivery of services in Dumfries and Galloway. Working in partnership with partners and young people, the following objectives were developed and agreed for consultation with the two groups:

Young People:
- Establish what young people want and need
- Explore awareness and understanding of existing provision

Employers:
- Explore experiences of working with young people
- Establish engagement with youth employability services
- Explore the support provided for young people and their ability to create inclusive workplaces

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[1] Begbie, S. (2020). Young Person Guarantee No-one Left Behind. Supporting documents - Youth Guarantee - No-one Left Behind: initial report - gov.scot (www.gov.scot) P8
[2] Growing the Young Person's Guarantee - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

The consultation activity took place between May and June 2022, and the key findings emerging from it are summarised in this report.

1.2.   Consultation Approach

To ensure that the consultation was embedded in the wider policy context and evidence base, a scoping literature review was undertaken as a key first step. The review sought to identify relevant policies, government reports, evaluations and academic articles to provide an understanding of the landscape in which YPG is being implemented. Its findings were then used to inform the development of the consultation tools.

A mixed methods approach was adopted to ensure that young people and employers had the opportunity to take part in a way that best suited their needs. With the young people especially, extra measures were taken to make the process engaging and accessible. This included commissioning young freelancers to produce a short online video to promote the consultation; producing a BSL video; using social media, especially Instagram, to recruit young people; and using creative participative methods to enable communication in both verbal and written forms (e.g. young people had the option to write on paper cut-outs of keys and doors). Easy Read questions which used pictures and clear text were also developed for use in some of our interviews.

Ambitious engagement targets of 200 young people and 50 employers were set to ensure that the consultation captured different views and experiences across Dumfries and Galloway. Through online and paper surveys, online and face-to-face discussions, interviews and other discussions, a large sample was achieved for both groups: 195 young people and over 60 employers. Figure 1 provides a summary of the consultation methods used and the number of people who engaged in each method.

Reflecting the aims and objectives of the consultation, these methods explored:

- Young peoples' experiences of living and working in Dumfries and Galloway, their employment, training and education plans, the barriers faced, and awareness and take up of support; and
- Employers' experiences of working with young people, their take up of employer support schemes and incentives, and how they support young people.

Figure 1: Summary of Consultation Methods

Surveys:
- Two surveys were designed and administered using Survey Monkey and made available online and, for young people, in paper form
- The surveys were completed by:
  - 51 employers
  - 136 young people

Interviews:
- 6 young people were interviewed, some using Easy Read (4 of these participants were in prison, and 2 where it was prefered or other focus group participants didn't turn up)

Focus Groups:
- 3 focus groups were held with employers
- 9 focus groups were held with 53 young people

1.3.   Report Structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:
- Section 2 presents a summary of the key policy and literature on youth employability;
- Section 3 discusses the findings emerging from the consultation with young people;
- Section 4 provides an overview of the key findings from the employers' survey and focus groups; and
- Section 5 discusses the conclusions and recommendations arising from these findings.

2   Employability Policy and Research

2.1   The On-Going Challenge of Youth Employability

The 2020 report, No-one Left Behind[1], set out the aims and ambitions of a new Young Person's Guarantee. The initiative was designed to address the effects of Covid-19 but also long-standing issues with the youth employability landscape.[3] It was intended to facilitate the creation of opportunities for young people by colleges, businesses and third sector organisations and also ways to ensure all young people are reached. A key aim was to simplify the employability landscape. Existing programmes were thought to be very good in places but too complex, inconsistent, and confusing for both young people and employers. The YPG was proposed to make it:

> *easier for young people to understand their learning and career choices at the earliest stage and providing long-term person-centred support for the young people who need this most[4]*

The report suggested that stakeholders, and especially employers, were keen that YPG should be an umbrella that brought all other initiatives together.

Other key aims of the YPG as set out in No-one Left Behind included:

- Focussed on the young person, but also aligned with the skills needed for Scotland's economy;
- Particularly aimed at young people who struggle to sustain work opportunities;
- Work seen as a key way to address inequalities in Scotland;
- Ambition to end in-work poverty for young people - job creation schemes should push employers to make commitments to offer Living Wage opportunities;
- Contracts with third sector organisations to establish an 'eco-system' for supporting young people; and
- Scotland-wide policy but with some flexibility in terms of how it is implemented locally.

Tackling youth unemployment is also a major priority at a local level. The 2021 South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy[5] highlights the need to 'attract and retain younger adults and sustain rural populations' as a high priority and emphasises the importance of quality employment opportunities for all. Furthermore, of the eight Outcomes in the Dumfries and Galloway Council's Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, 2017 – 2027 Outcome One is to support people 'to get into

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[3] This section is based on Begbie, S. (2020). *Young Person Guarantee No-one Left Behind - Initial Report*. Accessed on 25th May 2022 at https://www.gov.scot/publications/youth-guarantee-no-one-left-behind-initial-report/

[4] Ibid. p.10

[5] South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership (2021). *South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy*. Accessed on 25th May 2022 at https://sosrep.dumgal.gov.uk/media/24921/South-of-Scotland-Regional-Economic-Strategy/pdf/South-of-Scotland-Regional-Economic-Strategy.pdf?m=637684500893370000

and sustain employment' and Outcome Two concerns lifelong learning and volunteering opportunities.[6]

The aims of policy documents on youth employability – such as making the employability landscape simpler, offering a wide range of opportunities, and focusing efforts on those furthest from the labour market - are persuasive. However, these are not new aims[7] and engaging young people furthest from the labour market has remained challenging. Previous research has identified the multiple and often interdependent barriers that young people can face. Some insight into the barriers faced within Dumfries and Galloway is provided by an earlier consultation by Sleeping Giants with over 30 local partners and young people from across the region. The identified barriers were categorised as either personal or structural:[8]

Personal Barriers:
- Mental health issues including isolation and low self-confidence
- Belonging to protected characteristic groups such as LGBTQI plus or having a disability resulting in fears, or actual experience, of discrimination
- Being care experienced
- Ability to manage transition

Structural Barriers:
- Access to transport, including confidence using public transport and cost
- Complexity of employability landscape and lack of connections between different services
- Lack of skills and understanding among some employers of young people's needs, especially those with additional difficulties or needs
- Lack of support to keep young people on a pathway and few opportunities for peer support
- Covid-19 has compounded many of these existing barriers
- Lack of opportunities in the early stage of the 'employability pipeline' (i.e. before a young person is ready to engage in training, education or employment)
- Lack of education and training options
- Difficulty accessing work experience and employment
- Employers (and especially smaller employers) lack of capacity to provide adequate support

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[6] Dumfries and Galloway Council (2017). *Local Outcomes Improvement Plan*. Accessed on 25th May 2022 at https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/commplan/media/19587/Local-Outcomes-Improvement-Plan-2017-2027/pdf/0414-17_Local_Outcomes_Improvement_Plan_v2.pdf?m=636982708857770000

[7] Scottish Government (2021). *Opportunities for All: supporting all young people to participate in post-16 learning, training or work*. Accessed on 25th May 2022 at https://www.gov.scot/publications/opportunities-supporting-young-people-participate-post-16-learning-training-work/

[8] Sleeping Giants (2021) 'Equal Chance' Training and Employability Pathway: A new model for Dumfries and Galloway. Internal report.

The importance of mental health and confidence for employability outcomes has also been highlighted by research conducted with larger samples of young people. [9] Other personal challenges identified as shaping employability include caring responsibilities and addiction issues.[10] In addition, and of particular relevance to the local context given Dumfries and Galloway's geography, transport connections have also been found by earlier studies to further compound the difficulties young people face. [11]

Insight into the particular barriers faced by equality groups in the region is provided by a Sleeping Giants consultation for South of Scotland Enterprise. [12] For young people with additional support needs (for example autism or another learning disability), a key barrier to employment was lack of experience. A lack of understanding of their needs or a failure to recognise their potential value (some felt that they were thought to be only 'good for volunteering') emerged reasons for this. For LGBTQI plus young people, there was a feeling of 'having to 'come out' again and again'[13] or that the correct pronouns were not used. It was also reported that some LGBTQI plus young people choose not to use public transport because of a fear of discrimination. For reasons such as these, it was suggested that trans people chose careers where they could work on their own. Although these participants were not necessarily young people, the consultation also highlighted the barriers to employment faced by ethnic minorities when English is not spoken as a first language. For people who are deaf or hard of hearing, a lack of interpreters in the region can make accessing employment opportunities difficult.

2.2   Previous Research on What Works

Despite these challenges, studies of employability schemes have identified some successes and importantly, the factors associated with positive outcomes for young people on an employability journey. For example, a Scottish Government review of evidence identified the following factors as critical to the success of employability schemes for young people:[14]

- Relevance to their interests and how effectively enables them to pursue their desired path;
- Readiness for the programme;
- Timely, practical advice from someone who listens, learns about the young person's specific situation and empathises;

Scottish Government (2018) No One Left Behind: Review of Employability Services, Research of User and Provider Journeys

Scottish Government (2018) *No One Left Behind: Review of Employability Services, Research of User and Provider Journeys*

[10] Copps, J. and Plimmer, D (2013). The JET Pack: A guide to measuring and improving your impact based on the Journey to EmploymenT (JET) framework. Accessed on 25th May 2022 at https://www.thinknpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/JET-framework-FINAL-Jan-2015.pdf

[11] E.g. South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership (2021) *South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy*

[13] P. 9 of Sleeping Giants (2022) Equalities Engagement Project: Key Findings. Draft report for South of Scotland Enterprise, to be published in 2022.

[14] Scottish Government (2018) *No One Left Behind: Review of Employability Services, Research of User and Provider Journeys*, 2018

- Duration: feedback has found some programmes to be too short, pushing young people to transition from support before barriers were addressed; and
- Non-judgemental support, especially during transition points.

The same report showed that providers believed they would run a more effective service if the programmes they offered were more flexible, so they could be more easily tailored to users' differing needs. Overly rigid eligibility criteria were highlighted as an example of the pressures on providers preventing flexibility.

The book Radical Help[15] presents an interesting example of an employability program called Backr. MeetUps - in which job seekers, those in employment but looking for other opportunities, employers and anyone else interested in a work-related theme meet in a welcoming setting – are central to the program. In contrast to targeted programs, MeetUps are open to as many people as possible. Creating an environment where informal interactions between people interested in a sector can take placed and broadening people's social networks are seen by those running the program as a crucial way to help people take positive steps in their employability journey. The author (and key developer of the program) cites research showing most work opportunities are not advertised, with employers primarily looking to their networks for hiring so making networking central to the program helps people access these hidden job opportunities. (Other aspects are similar to more conventional employability programs.) An independent evaluation of the pilot showed 87% of members made measurable progress through the program including improvement in soft skills, social capital and employment. A key feature of this approach is the inclusion of a wide range of people to enable informal interactions; further research would be required to explore if and how such an approach could be redesigned as an intervention targeted at young people.

Finally, one factor that is sometimes neglected in both research and policy in the Scottish employability landscape is the quality of employment options on offer. An academic study claims that, historically, Scottish policy has focused its efforts on so-called 'supply-side' rather than 'demand-side' issues – that is, skills, training and supporting people to become work-ready, rather than improving the number and quality of employment options.[16] The more recent No-one Left Behind report called for stimulation of the demand side to be a top priority through, for example, supporting SMEs to take on young people and the creation of apprenticeship co-operative schemes. It is perhaps too early though to assess how these recommendations have been implemented.

2.3 Youth Employability in Dumfries and Galloway: Key Figures

10,000 Voices, the largest consultation of young people ever conducted in Dumfries and Galloway, found that employment was one of the top 5 issues young people would like more information on

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[15] Cottam, H. (2018). *Radical Help*. London: Virago.
[16] Montgomery, T. Baglioni, S "Skills and Education for Youth Employment in Scotland: A Critical Discussion" in Boffo, V. Federighi, P. Torlone, F (2015) *Educational Jobs: Youth and Employability in the Social Economy*. Firenze: Firenze University Press.

(it came fourth after alcohol use, crime and law, and drug misuse).[17] In other questions too, employment appeared to be a concern for young people, although often behind other social issues in each area. As a consultation on a wide range of issues affecting young people it did not explore these views in more detail. However, it did reveal that only 45% of young people wanted to stay in the region. Travel, work and study (in that order) were the top reasons for wanting to leave.

Skills Development Scotland's (SDS) Annual Participation Measure[18] for 16 to 19 year olds (from August 2021) shows that in Dumfries and Galloway, 93.1% of young people were 'participating' (i.e. in some form of work, education, training or volunteering). This is around one percentage point higher than the national average of 92.2%. 3.2% of young people in Dumfries and Galloway were 'not participating' which is identical to the figure for Scotland. The remaining 3.7% in Dumfries and Galloway were cases where SDS did not have data compared with 4.6% whose status is 'unknown' across Scotland. Because of the proportion of unknowns, definitive conclusions cannot be made but it appears youth participation in work, education, training or volunteering in Dumfries and Galloway is similar to or even slightly higher than the Scottish average.

These figures may hide other challenges though. A recent study claims rural residents in general are at higher risk of poverty than more urban areas and that this is especially the case for young people.[19] Work in rural areas in Scotland is more likely to be seasonal or irregular, with corresponding unreliable incomes: part time work and underemployment (where additional hours are wanted) are also major issues.[20] So, while a young person may 'count' as employed within SDS's figures, this measure does not tell us about the quality of employment, its security, or whether they are experiencing in-work poverty.

To inform understanding of the opportunities available in Dumfries and Galloway and how this compares nationally, Chart 1 overleaf shows the percentage of jobs in each sector. Human Health and Social Work Activities is the largest employer in the region with 20.8% of all jobs, which highlights the importance of the public sector for local employment. The Wholesale, Retail Trade and Vehicle Repair is the next largest and accounts for 17.0% of all jobs. These two sectors are also the largest employers nationally, although the proportion of jobs in each is higher in Dumfries and Galloway. Other notable comparisons with the national picture include Manufacturing, with 11.3% of the region's jobs being in this sector compared to 7.2% nationally. In contrast, Dumfries and Galloway has relatively fewer jobs in knowledge-based industries, such as Information and Communication, and Professional, Scientific and Technical.

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[17] Dumfries and Galloway Council (2018) 10,000 Voices. Accessed on 25th May 2022 at https://youthwork.dumgal.gov.uk/media/23933/10k-voices-report/pdf/10_000_Voices_Report.pdf?m=637478623152300000
[18] Skill Development Scotland (2021) *Annual Participation Measure*. Data accessed 29th April 2022 at https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/publications-statistics/statistics/annual-participation-measure/
[19] Shucksmith, M., Chapman, P., Glass, J., & Atterton, J. (2021). *Rural Lives Understanding financial hardship and vulnerability in rural areas Rural Lives*.
[20] Skills Development Scotland (2019) *Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland: 2019–2021*. Accessed on 25th May 2022 at https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/45684/skills-action-plan-for-rural-scotland-full-report.pdf

Chart 1: Percent of Employee Jobs by Sector in Dumfries and Galloway and Scotland (2020)

Legend: ■ % of employees D+G ■ % of employees Scotland

Sector	% of employees D+G	% of employees Scotland
Mining and Quarrying	0.1%	1.2%
Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning	0.6%	0.9%
Financial and Insurance Activities	0.8%	3.3%
Water Supply, Sewerage, Waste Management	0.9%	0.7%
Information and Communication	1.1%	3.7%
Other Service Activities	1.7%	1.7%
Real Estate Activities	1.9%	1.5%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	2.4%	2.3%
Administrative and Support Activities	4.2%	8.0%
Construction	4.2%	5.1%
Public Admin, Defence, Social Security	4.7%	6.5%
Professional, Scientific and Technical	4.7%	7.1%
Transportation and Storage	5.7%	4.5%
Accommodation and Food Service	8.5%	7.2%
Education	9.4%	8.4%
Manufacturing	11.3%	7.2%
Wholesale, Retail Trade, Vehicle Repair	17.0%	13.9%
Human Health, Social Work Activities	20.8%	16.6%

Source: ONS Business Register and Employment Survey accessed at www.nomisweb.co.uk.
Note, due to the way that it is collected, the data does not include all agriculture jobs, self-employed people, government supported trainees and HM Forces.

2.4 Local Services that Make Up the Young Person's Guarantee

Figure 2 maps out the main services that sit under the Young Person's Guarantee in Dumfries and Galloway. This has been put together by ourselves (Sleeping Giants) and not the local Young Persons Guarantee Partnership, however it has been designed with input from staff from this group. It shows the complex web of services available to young people and different situations in which different services can – or sometimes must - be used.

[Diagram content finalised in Miro and currently being designed as a graphic by graphic designer]

3 Key Findings: Young People's Views and Experiences

Summary:

- Young people shared a range of positive and negative views about Dumfries and Galloway as a place to live and work, however a slightly larger proportion viewed it negatively than positively. Challenges young people faced in the region included a lack of social activities, poor public transport and limited range of employment and training options.
- A similar number of young people reported they wanted to stay in the region as those who did not, with females somewhat more likely to intend to stay than males or non-binary / genderqueer young people.
- Most young people had some idea of what they wanted to do in the future with 85% (112) saying they had either a clear idea or some idea. A majority of those with an idea for a career thought they could pursue it in Dumfries and Galloway.
- The young people's career aspirations were coded by sector. The most popular sectors were 'Arts, Entertainment and Recreation' (27%, 31) and 'Human Health and Social Work' (19%, 22).
- Some sectors that had been identified as fairly major sources of employment in the region (e.g. Wholesale, Retail Trade, Vehicle Repair) were rarely mentioned by the young people as potential career options. There was also relatively little discussion throughout the consultation of self-employment.
- When asked about barriers young people experienced when trying to access opportunities, the top two responses related to transport with. The qualitative responses highlighted long journey times, the cost of fuel and difficulties for some young people accessing the recently launched free bus travel scheme as challenges. Connected to this was the perceived lack of opportunities in rural areas in the specific fields young people were interested in.
- The second most highlighted barrier for young people accessing opportunities was lack of confidence (41, 36%) with some young people commenting on how their mental health impacted their ability to connect with services.
- Fear of discrimination was a barrier for 17% (20) when accessing opportunities and was particularly high among non-binary or genderqueer young people.
- If a young person needed help with their career, the first place most would turn to was asking a family or friend for advice (84, 72%). We learned through the focus groups that family support in particular could be hugely beneficial for young people but in other cases it represented a barrier, for example, where parents or carers disapproved of young people's choices.
- There was low awareness of the Young Person's Guarantee, with a fifth reporting they had heard of it, and, perhaps more importantly, a low rate (26, 22%) of young people saying they would turn to an organisation for help.
- When asked about specific organisations, young people who had contact with each of the listed organisations was considerably lower than the proportion who were aware of them. Just under half (40, 47%) of young people were aware of the local authority's Employability and Skills Service but only 19% (13) had contact with them.
- Confidence (33, 35% selecting this option) and mental health (30, 32%) emerged as the key barriers to accessing services. Lack of confidence was particularly an

- When asked what employers could do to help young people get into work, the strongest theme was that young people wanted them to be willing to hire those who didn't have lots of experience and to offer substantial training.
- Other young people wanted opportunities to be better advertised, with an implication that some employers hired primarily through their networks. Interviews were another aspect of hiring that some young people felt could be improved: some thought alternative or additional methods of hiring should be used such as doing

3.1   Introduction

Young people from across Dumfries and Galloway took part in a survey, focus groups and interviews to share their experiences of living, working and training in the region. The key findings emerging from these are summarised in this section.

3.2   Young People's Sample

Out of the 136 young people completing the survey, 111 gave the first part of their postcode; although all 15 DG postcodes were represented in the survey sample, 3 areas only had 1 respondent (DG6, DG13 and DG14). In contrast, a quarter (29, 26%) were from either a DG1 and DG2 postcode, 14% (15) from DG11 and 11% (12) from DG7.

Chart 2 shows the age distribution. The largest proportion of respondents were aged between 16 and 18 years (56, 55%) which, at least in part, may reflect a drop in post-school aged young people as some choose to leave the region around this time. Chart 3 shows just under a third of young people were at school (30, 31%); a similar proportion (31, 32%) were in either full or part time employment. As Chart 3 shows, a small number were not in work, training or education (12, 12% were in none of these and either looking or not able to work, train or learn at the moment). Almost all economic activity categories in the survey received at least some responses suggesting the survey managed to reach a range of young people on different employability journeys.

Chart 2: Young People's Survey by Age Group
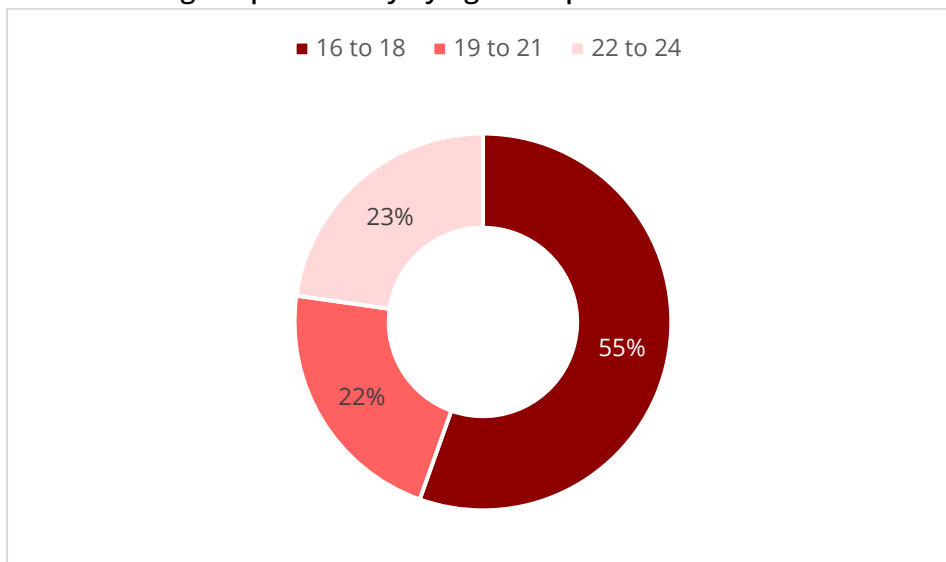
Base: All responses (n=101)

Chart 3: Young People's Sample by Economic Activity
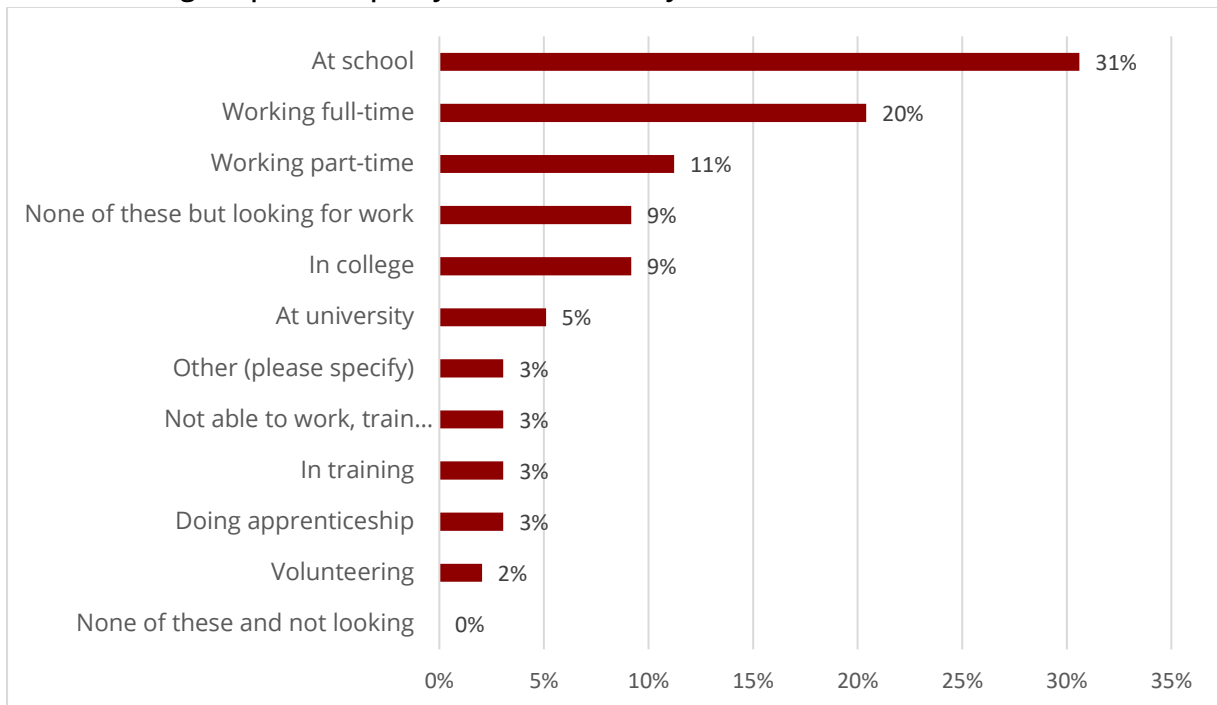
Base: All responses (n=98)

As shown in Chart 4, females were the largest gender group with 48 respondents (51%), compared with 38 (40%) male and 9 (9%) identified as non-binary or genderqueer.

Chart 4: Young People's Survey by Gender
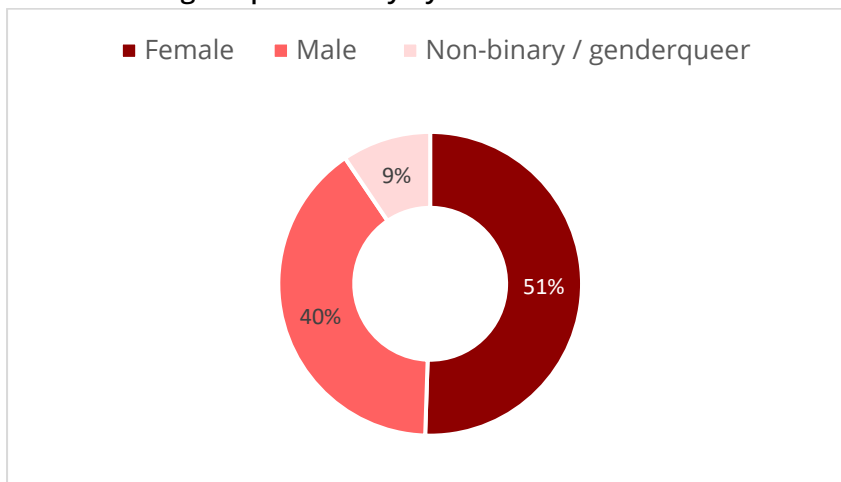
Base: All responses (n=95)

The focus groups were conducted in a variety of locations across the region and included young people aged 16 to 24 years. However, due to the group setting, demographic data were not collected.

3.3 Experiences of Living in Dumfries and Galloway

Young people were asked to rate Dumfries and Galloway as a place for young people to live and work out of 5 stars. As Chart 5 shows, the largest proportions gave it a 3 star rating for both questions (a place to live - 54, 41%; a place to work – 43, 33%). However, more young people gave a 1 and 2 star rating than a 4 and 5 stars.

Chart 5: Ratings of Dumfries and Galloway as a Place for Young People:

To Live

Rating	%
*****	8%
****	15%
***	41%
**	20%
*	16%

Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=132)

To Work

Rating	%
*****	7%
****	20%
***	33%
**	22%
*	18%

Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=130)

An open question asking for further thoughts on 'Dumfries and Galloway as a place to live and work' elicited a wide range of responses through both the survey and focus groups. At the more positive end of the spectrum were those saying it was 'lovely and 'absolutely love it'.
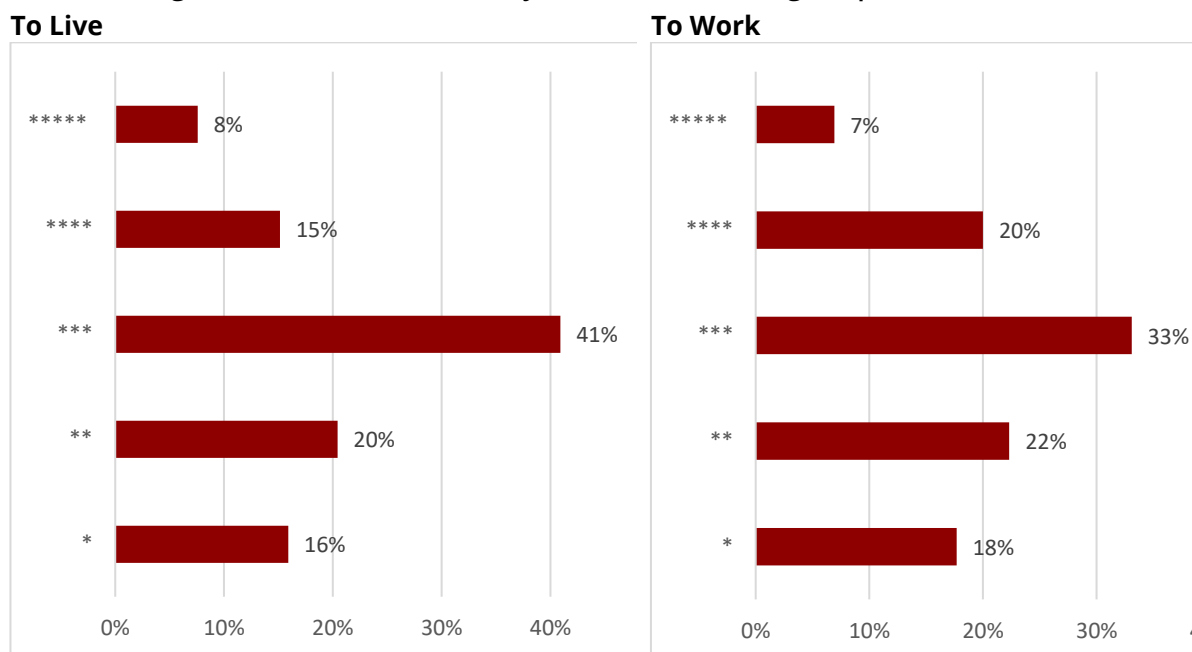
> It's quiet and friendly. (young person, survey respondent)

> Great place to stay and for jobs! (young person, survey respondent)

Young parents told us in a focus group that there were lots of things for children to do in the region and support[21] available for them.

At the other end were those who thought Dumfries and Galloway was 'absolutely terrible': a focus group participant told us they were 'ashamed' to be from here (without articulating why), along with several unprintable responses from others. Negatives noted were the general lack of

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[21] nb. although a service was not explicitly named, the region's Youth Work service offers group support for young parents in four locations.

entertainment options for young people, e.g. gigs, lazer quest, bowling alley and especially the cinema closing. Transport was highlighted as an issue too.

> *I feel the social life for young people is very difficult and requires a lot of effort, especially for those that don't drive (young person, survey respondent)*

> *It's a beautiful area however it lacks things to do for people above 16 and would be good for funding for areas to increases recreational activities (young person, survey respondent)*

A longer response was given by someone who saw the positives but felt these were severely limited by poor transport or things only happening in the larger towns.

> *Dumfries and Galloway is a region with a lot of potential. There are many different organisations which provide interesting opportunities, and the recent rise in programmes and events for young people can make it a very exciting place to be. However, it is inaccessible to most people. Lack of good public transport means that a lot of young people feel isolated [...]. There is also a large issue with gentrification and the fact that events and paid opportunities are often only accessible to the middle classes. [...] more needs to be done to make sure that [working class people and young people] have opportunities in their own areas without having to travel significant distances. (young person, survey respondent)*

The opportunities available in Dumfries and Galloway were also discussed: often young people recognised that although there were opportunities, they did not always match their own interests or were perceived to be of poor quality.

> *It's a good place to develop your skills but it is relatively difficult to find opportunities that take on the skills into a job (young person, survey respondent)*

> *It's okay but not many opportunities for growth and development in my chosen career path (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Very hard to find good well paid jobs (young person, survey respondent)*

> *As a place to work, it's fine I guess, providing you can actually find work in an industry you're interested in- i.e. there's enough work for those interested in agriculture, cleaning, catering and retail, but if you're interested in something like research, advice or more niche industries, D&G has nothing to offer. Furthermore, there is very little opportunity to actually progress in the jobs on offer in D&G- a retail worker might eventually progress to manager, but that's about it. (young person, survey respondent)*

One young person felt it was particularly difficult to access training opportunities that were an alternative to college or university.

> *The area does not have a lot of job prospects for people who didn't go to university or college- more apprenticeship and trainee positions would be beneficial (young person, survey respondent)*

Furthermore, two young people with a disability felt that their employment options in Dumfries and Galloway were limited:

> *There are not many opportunities for young people with disabilities. School didn't work. Nothing for me at college. I don't know about other things (young person, survey respondent)*

> *As a young adult with learning difficulties, there is very little support from local employers to allow anyone with a disability engage in employment (young person, survey respondent)*

Unsurprisingly, given the evidence showing how poor public transport has negative effects on opportunities, this was raised as a key barrier for employment and education.

> *The public transport is very poor. I live on a farm and if I used the bus to work I need to walk 4 miles to a bus stop (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Travel is long and expensive, but places don't have the money to offer reimbursement for this (young person, survey respondent)*

> *It's okay but I live in a rural area and trying to get to college for a specific course it's a 2 hour drive (young person, survey respondent)*

> *There are very limited options for young people. The lack of public transport is a huge part of this (young person, survey respondent)*

The challenges created by transport are discussed further in Section 3.5.

Given these mixed experiences of the region, it is perhaps unsurprising that there was a fairly even split between those who planned to stay (46%, 59 saying either 'Yes, definitely' or 'Yes, probably') and those who did not (45%, 59 saying either 'Probably not' or 'Definitely not'). These responses are summarised in Chart 6 overleaf.

However, views on the region did not always match intentions to stay. For example, family ties were cited by some young people as an important factor in their decision-making process: one young person with additional support needs described how they were reliant on family support and another would not leave because of their own caring commitments. Conversely a few others who wanted to stay felt that they would have to leave to pursue their career ambitions.

Chart 6: Intention to Stay in Dumfries and Galloway
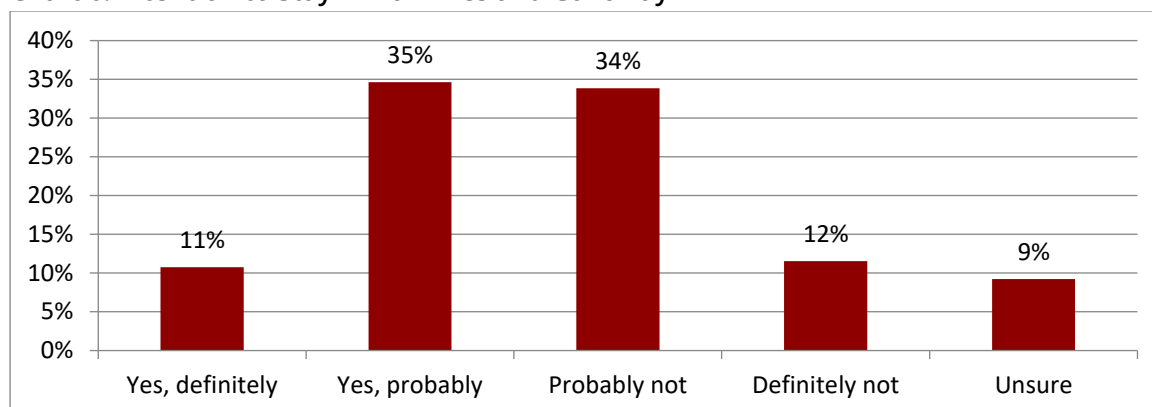
Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=130)

Chart 7 provides a breakdown of intention to stay responses by gender. It shows females were the most likely to want to stay with 58% (28) selecting this option, compared to 29% (11) of male respondents and 2 (22%) non-binary or genderqueer young people. Although non-binary or genderqueer respondents appeared to be the most likely to want to leave the region, there were only nine respondents who identified this way in this survey and therefore no definitive conclusions can be made. No clear patterns emerged in intention to stay by age.

Chart 7: Intention to stay in Dumfries and Galloway by gender
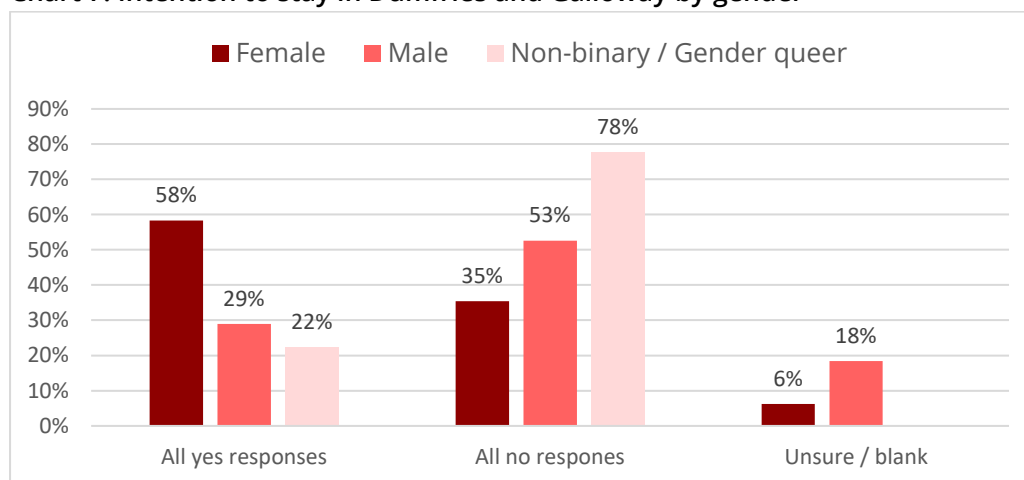
Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: all respondents (n=95)

3.4   Future Plans

Most of the young people completing the survey had at least some idea of what they wanted to do in the future (as Chart 8 shows, 85%, 112 said they had either a clear idea or some idea) and the majority (see Chart 9) thought they could do this in Dumfries and Galloway (20, 19% thought that they definitely could and 47, 44% thought that they probably could). Further analysis shows

that almost a fifth (24, 18%), thought they could probably or definitely do what they wanted in the region but did not plan to stay; which highlights that the decision to stay or leave is influenced by more than just job opportunities.

Chart 8: Percentage of Who Know What They Want to Do

Legend:
- Yes, I have a clear idea of what I want to do
- Yes, I have some idea
- No

15%
43%
42%
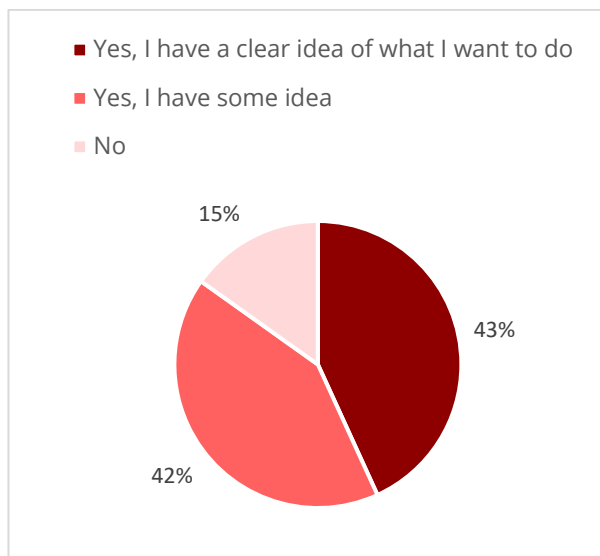
Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=132)

Chart 9: Percentage Who Think They Can do This in the Region

Legend:
- Yes, definitely
- Yes, probably
- Probably not
- Definitely not
- Unsure

8%
9%
19%
20%
44%
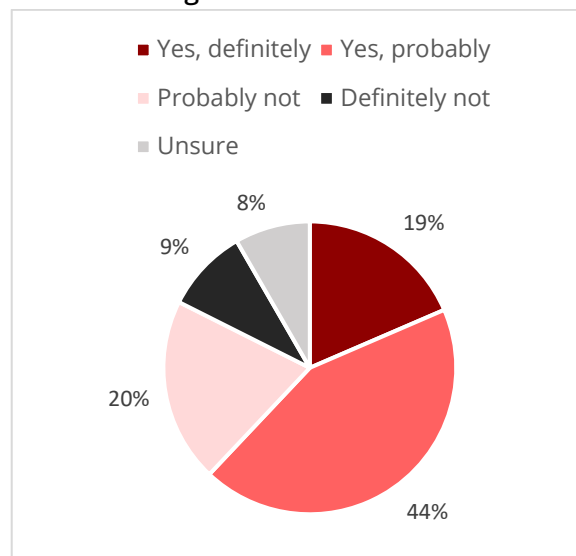
Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=108)

All consultation methods used with young people included an open question asking what they wanted to do in future. This elicited a wide range of responses spanning from 'no idea' to a general idea or an identified next step to those with a clear career path in mind. Figure 3 is a wordcloud which gives a sense of the range of responses. Overall, there was a tendency to choose well-known types of careers with engineering, nursing and construction standing out as common words mentioned.

Figure 3: What young people wanted to do wordcloud

Source: Young person's survey and focus groups
Base: All responses that could be coded into a sector (n=113)

To better understand their 'fit' with standard industry classifications (SIC), these responses were coded by sector and the findings from this are shown in Chart 10.[22] Arts, Entertainment and Recreation stands out as the most popular sector grouping (31, 27%); this sector accounts for just 2.4% of employee jobs in the region, although more could work in the sector on a self-employed basis. Some of these young people were interested in 'glamorous' careers (e.g. 'make music and perform'). However, it is a diverse sector grouping and the following gives a sense of the range of other responses coded under this heading:

Museum or historic work

Conservation

Coach for disability sports

I would like to work in a creative industry

The next most popular sector grouping was 'Human Health and Social Work' (22, 19%); 20.8% of the region's jobs fall within this sector. Some examples of these career choices include:

Paramedic

Healthcare

Children and families

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[22] In addition to standard SIC codes, we also created a 'Work with Animals' category to reflect the frequency of this response.

Be a youth worker or work in a nursery

Counselling, therapy

Chart 10: Analysis of open question on what young people wanted to do, coded by sector
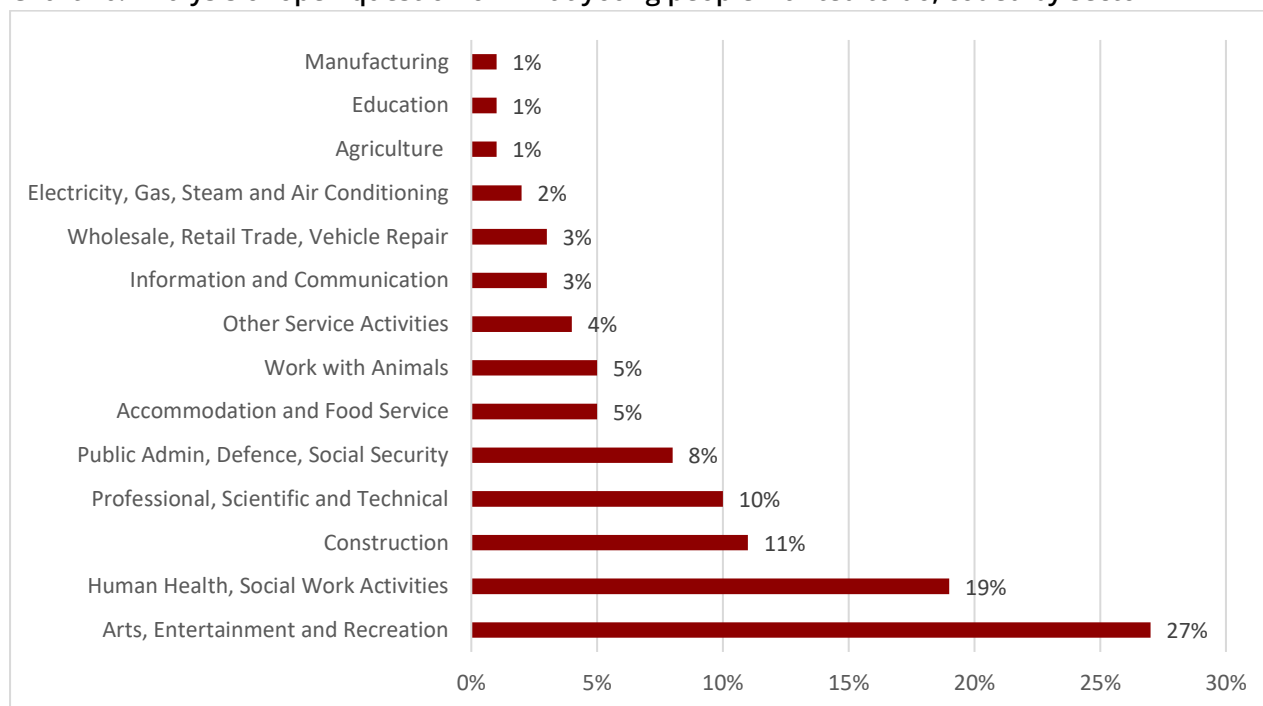
Source: Young Person's Survey and focus groups
Base: All responses that could be coded into a sector (n=113)

More generally, while there was a wide range of sectors represented in young people's aspirations, it does appear that there are opportunities within the Dumfries and Galloway economy that young people either aren't aware of or aren't interested in. For example, career preferences coded under Wholesale, Retail Trade, Vehicle Repair made up just 3% (3) of young people's responses but this sector accounts for 17% of the region's jobs. Likewise, Education was of interest to 1% (1) of young people but accounts for 9.4% of jobs.

With the exception of 1 focus group participant, it's of interest that there was no discussion on the potential home working opportunities created by the Covid-19 pandemic. As this wasn't explicitly explored within the consultation, it's unclear whether young people are unaware of these opportunities, that they do not appeal to them or if they're perceived as inaccessible to them (i.e. lack of home working entry level positions).

There was also relatively little discussion of self-employment as a career option; across all consultation methods, only 4 young people referred to it as something they would consider. One of these already worked in an organisation where freelancing is the norm, and in another case, it appeared to be an option only after they had worked with a company.

Painting decorating - with company then on your own

In a separate consultation, also conducted by Sleeping Giants', focus groups across Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders were asked if there were any barriers to starting a business; for young people with autism and/or additional support needs, a lack of knowledge and understanding of how to start-up emerged as a key theme.[23]

3.5   Barriers to Opportunities

Young people completing the survey were presented with a list of potential barriers and asked to select all those that made it difficult for them to get work, training, education or volunteering opportunities in Dumfries and Galloway. Chart 11 summarises the responses to this question. Consistent with the findings reporting in Section 3.3, transport was the most commonly faced barrier with half (57, 50%) selecting a lack of buses or trains and a third selecting both public transport costs (39, 34%) and lack of driving licence or access to a car (38, 33%). Of the comments added when people selected 'Other', the most common theme was also problems with transport.

> *I currently work from home. If I didn't there is no public transport and I'm not sure I could afford to run my car given the cost of fuel (young person, survey respondent)*
>
> *Lack of money to travel. Living in Gretna, many have suggested I work in Dumfries, however cost of a journey there and back again on both bus and train is worth an hours wage, so working a full week I'd be losing out on close to a days' wages (young person, survey respondent)*
>
> *The free bus travel for young people is great BUT only if you have photo ID. I don't have a passport or driver's licence. So I can't apply for the free bus pass for young people. The folk who need it most can't get the pass. (young person, survey respondent)*

The last of these quotes highlights the difficulties some young people experience in accessing the recently launched free bus travel scheme. Indeed, Scottish Government estimated that only 32.5% of young people in Dumfries and Galloway had applied for free bus travel in June 2022.[24]

A lack of confidence was also a commonly selected barrier (41, 36%) along with worries about starting something new (35, 30%). One person writing in the 'other' comments said

> *I have a lot of struggles with my mental health- I find doing anything is difficult, right now I am looking for jobs and my issue is not knowing where is hiring, who to contact, etc. (young person, survey respondent)*

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[23] Sleeping Giants (2022) Equalities Engagement Project: Key Findings. Draft report for South of Scotland Enterprise, to be published in 2022.
[24] Scottish Government (2022) Free bus pass scheme: FOI release. Accessed on 19th August 2022 at https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202200303539/

Importantly, responses to this question also show that fear of discrimination is a barrier for some young people (20, 17%); 4 out of the 9 respondents who identified as non-binary or genderqueer selected this answer.

Chart 11: Barriers to Work, Training, Education and Volunteering

Barrier	Percentage
Lack of buses or trains	50%
Lack of confidence	36%
The cost of public transport	34%
Lack of driving licence / access to a car	33%
Worries about starting something new	30%
Jobs available pay too poorly	28%
Don't know how to find the right opportunity for me	24%
What I want to do isn't available here	23%
My skills and qualifications	23%
Finding an employer who can provide the support I need	19%
Worries about experiencing discrimination	17%
Other	10%
Childcare or other caring commitments	10%

Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=115)

The remaining qualitative responses to this survey question all related to options for work and study being more limited in a rural area.

> *It's really difficult for teachers to secure a job after probation year due to a lack of jobs (young person, survey respondent)*

> *I need to work full time to support myself and would benefit from increased amount of college courses in evenings to choose from (young person, survey respondent)*

> *The amount of people that may be able to afford having a doula and the demand for it/awareness of it in such a small area (young person, survey respondent)*

> *All jobs are the same, trade, catering or retail. The only available sectors of the work for young people. They are all very boring and there's not much future in them (young person, survey respondent)*

In the focus groups, the barriers were discussed through an exercise in which the young people wrote on paper cut-outs of doors (anything that made accessing opportunities difficult) and keys (anything that could help overcome these difficulties). This way of posing the question brought out some different themes. In the focus groups generally there was more discussion on the role of family and friends in both helping and hindering people's attempts to get into work,

education, volunteering or training. One person in a focus group found advice from her mum helpful because

She had a lot of life experience (young person, focus group participant)

Others shared how committed their families were to supporting them. For others though, their family could hold them back. For example, some young people felt their families were encouraging them to stay in the area even though it wasn't necessarily in their best interests. Another found their carers 'controlling' and made it difficult to pursue the education they wanted. Some young people from a farming background felt pressure to continue working on the farm when it was not really what they wanted to do. One focus group participant simply commented 'my dad is useless'.

Friends were also mentioned in the focus groups as a potential form of support for some but also a barrier to other young people pursuing their goals. A focus group participant wrote that their biggest barrier was 'lifestyle' and a potential enabler would be

Finding pals who dinnae gan oot (young person, focus group participant)

The interviews and focus groups also identified the different ways in which social groups could affect the opportunities available to them. For example, one of the young people in prison we spoke to highlighted the potential negative effects of a social group, and felt that cutting ties with them would help them to stop offending and find employment. In contrast, a focus group member told us that they had benefited from advice from friends who had worked longer in the region and were therefore well connected. Others too appreciated the emotional support their friends offered. In the next section, we will continue to explore this theme of support (or lack of) from friends and family.

3.6   Accessing Support

If a young person needed help finding a job, volunteering, training opportunity or college/ university course, they were most likely to ask a family or friend for advice (84, 72%) rather than access any other form of support. As Chart 12 shows, less than a quarter would go to an organisation for help and almost a half (55. 47%) would opt to look online. This is an important finding and raises questions about why young people would not choose to ask for help from one of the many organisations that fall within the YPG umbrella. The combination of young people relying heavily on informal advice, and the stark contrasts in how helpful friends and family can be in this role (see Section 3.5) is also worrying and could create inequitable access to opportunities.

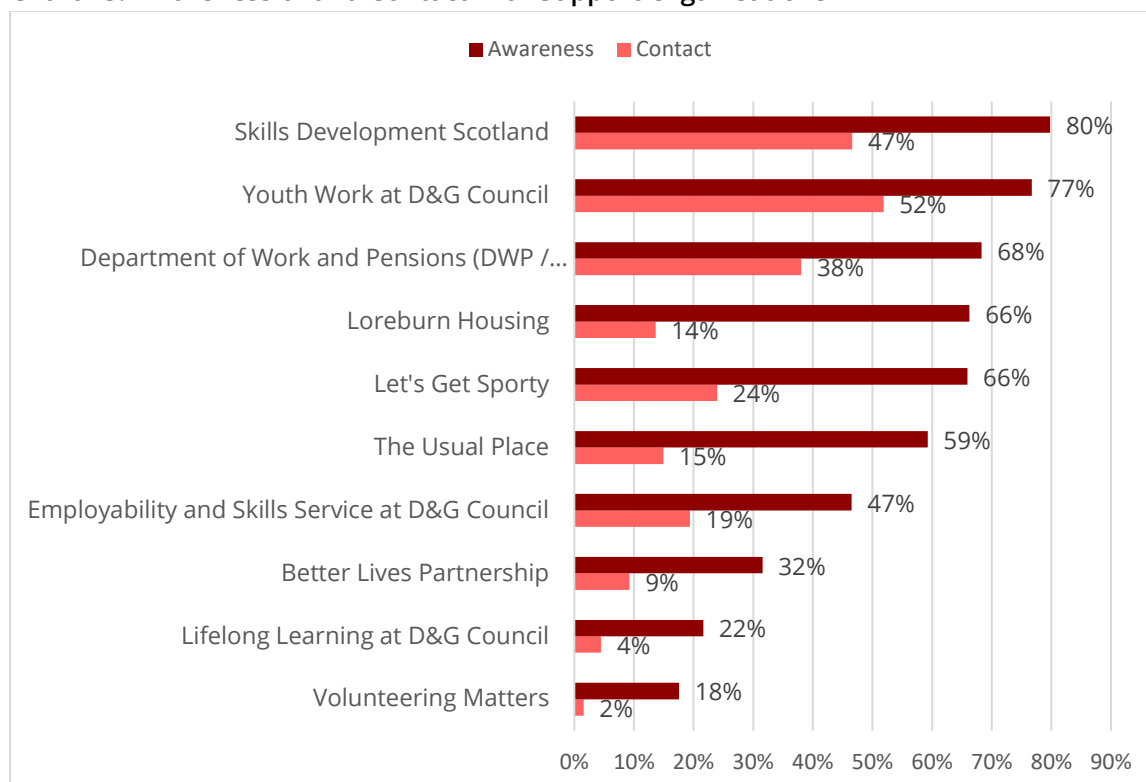**Chart 12: Who Young People Would Ask for Help**
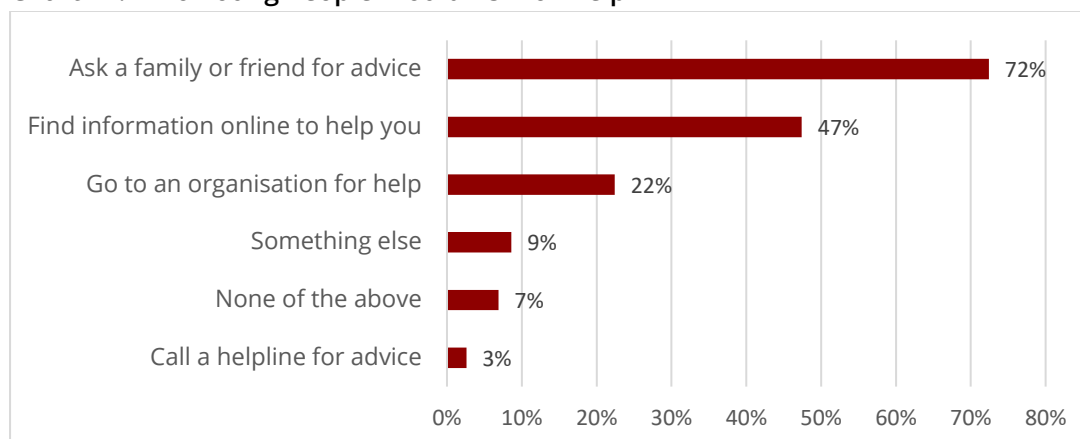
Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=116)

Only a minority (23, 20%) of young people had heard of the YPG before completing the survey and awareness was also low in the focus groups. Interestingly, in 1 focus group arranged with members of an organisation funded by YPG, only 1 out of 6 young people had heard of it. However, this may reflect how YPG is labelled across the region and that young people access a service without having (or needing) a broader understanding of how its funded. Supporting this, awareness of organisations that work within the YPG was higher (see Chart 13). For example, the majority (79, 80%) had heard of Skills Development Scotland and the local authority's Youth Work team (79, 77%).

Chart 13 also shows that the proportion of young people who had contact with each of the listed organisations was considerably lower than the proportion who were aware of them. Although this pattern might be expected, the data suggests that only a small proportion of young people who knew about an organisation went onto have contact with them. For example, just under half (40, 47%) were aware of the local authority's Employability and Skills Service but only 19% (13) had contact with them. Note too that 2 of the most used services are compulsory to use in certain circumstances (Skills Development Scotland sessions in school and DWP when someone is on Jobseekers Allowance). Youth Work services run by Dumfries and Galloway Council stand out as the second most contacted service (42, 52%) and the most contacted where participating is never compulsory. Their role is different to most of the others in this list in that they support young people in a wide range of ways, with employability being just one strand of their work.

Chart 13: Awareness of and Contact with Support Organisations

Legend: ■ Awareness ■ Contact

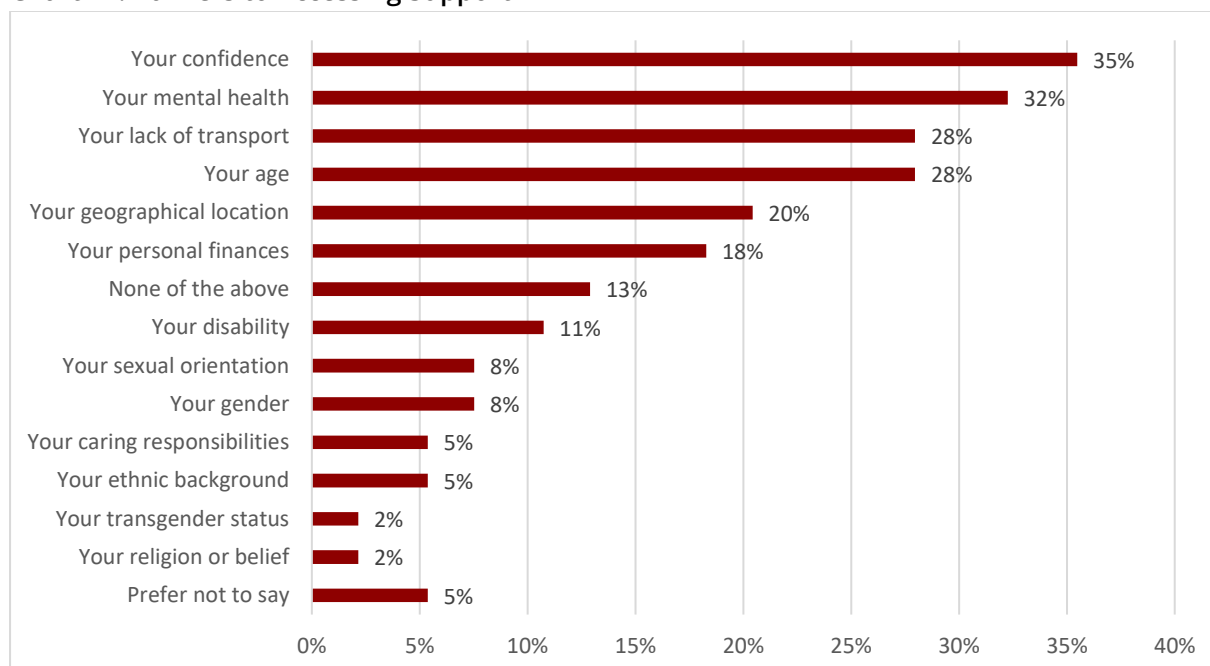| Organisation	Awareness	Contact
Skills Development Scotland	80%	47%
Youth Work at D&G Council	77%	52%
Department of Work and Pensions (DWP /…	68%	38%
Loreburn Housing	66%	14%
Let's Get Sporty	66%	24%
The Usual Place	59%	15%
Employability and Skills Service at D&G Council	47%	19%
Better Lives Partnership	32%	9%
Lifelong Learning at D&G Council	22%	4%
Volunteering Matters	18%	2%

Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=110)

The survey also presented young people with a list of factors and asked them to select those that had made it difficult for them to access the support they needed; the responses to this question are summarised in Chart 14. As with the question on barriers to accessing opportunities, confidence emerged as important here with a third (33, 35%) selecting it (see Section 3.5 for discussion of how it affected young people in work, education and training). Mental health also emerged as a commonly experienced barrier (30, 32%) and affected more young people than a lack of transport. Protected characteristics also emerged as an issue for some, with the following all being identified as a barrier: disability (10, 11%) sexual orientation (7, 8%), gender (7, 8%), ethnic background (5, 5%), transgender status (2, 2%) and religion or belief (2, 2%). One young person with additional support needs commented in the survey

> *We have tried lots of places but because I have a learning disability everywhere says they can't help me (young person, survey respondent)*

Given the importance (morally and legally) of achieving equality in service provision, further research should be conducted to better understand how young people from different equality groups experience employability support in the region.
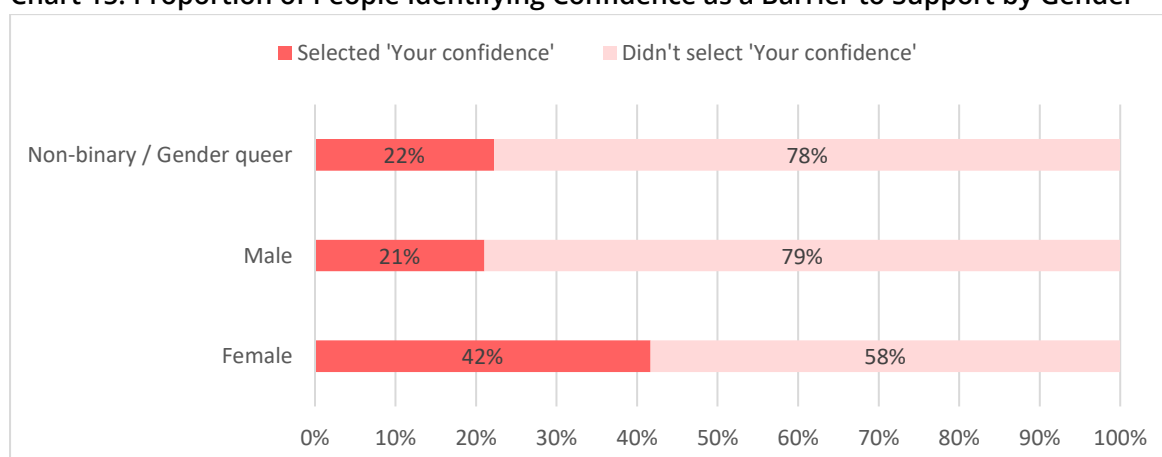
Chart 14: Barriers to Accessing Support

Barrier	Percentage
Your confidence	35%
Your mental health	32%
Your lack of transport	28%
Your age	28%
Your geographical location	20%
Your personal finances	18%
None of the above	13%
Your disability	11%
Your sexual orientation	8%
Your gender	8%
Your caring responsibilities	5%
Your ethnic background	5%
Your transgender status	2%
Your religion or belief	2%
Prefer not to say	5%

Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=93)

Further analysis (Chart 15) shows that a higher proportion of females lacked confidence to access support (20, 42%) than males and (8, 22%) and those identifying as non-binary / gender queer (2, 22%). This resonates with findings with Sleeping Giant's earlier consultation for South of Scotland Enterprise where confidence was reported by women as a barrier to employment[25].

**Chart 15: Proportion of People Identifying Confidence as a Barrier to Support by Gender**

Gender	Selected 'Your confidence'	Didn't select 'Your confidence'
Non-binary / Gender queer	22%	78%
Male	21%	79%
Female	42%	58%

Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=95)

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[25] Sleeping Giants (2022) Equalities Engagement Project: Key Findings. Draft report for South of Scotland Enterprise, to be published in 2022.

24 young people who had not contacted any of these organisations selected the reasons for this from a given list. As Chart 16 shows, awareness emerged as the most common reason, with 12 (50%) indicating that they hadn't heard of them before and 10 (42%) that didn't know how they could help.

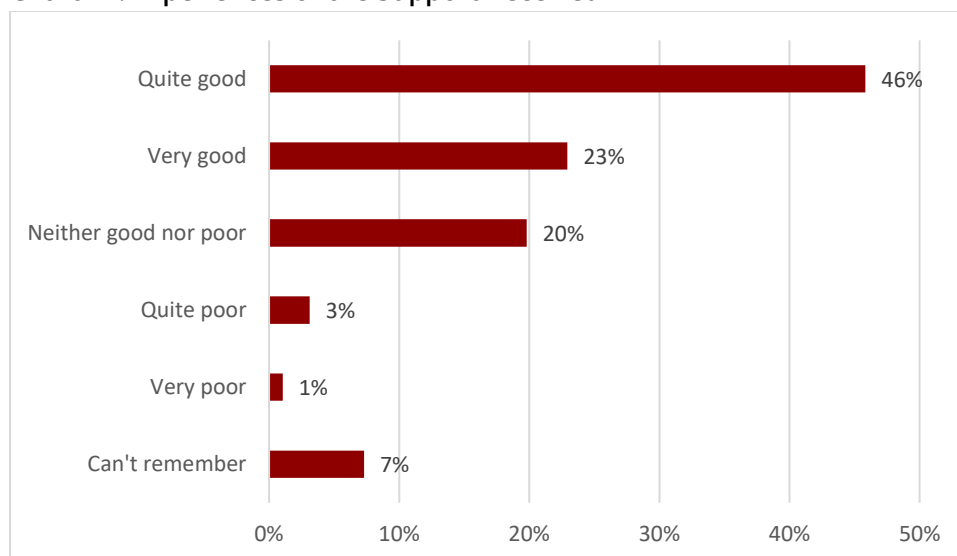**Chart 16: Why Young People Hadn't Contacted Support Organisations**
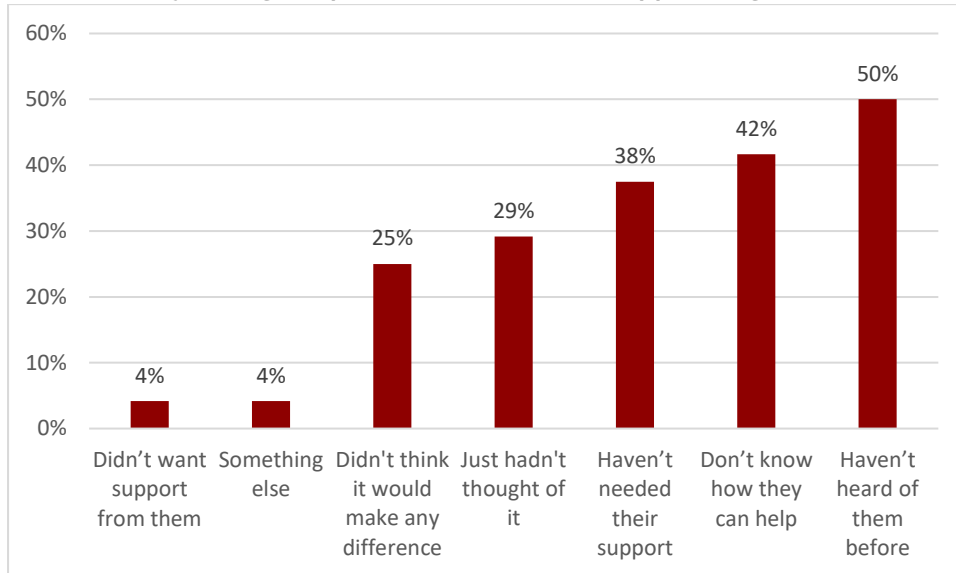
Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: All responses (n=24)

3.7   Experiences of Employability Support

Overall, the experiences of young people who had accessed employability services were pretty good. The majority of people who had accessed a service rated their experience as either quite good or very good (66, 69%) and a fifth (19, 20%) provided a neutral rating (see Chart 17 overleaf). Only 4 people (4%) gave a poor or very poor rating.

Chart 17: Experiences of the Support Received

Response	Percentage
Quite good	46%
Very good	23%
Neither good nor poor	20%
Quite poor	3%
Very poor	1%
Can't remember	7%

Source: Young Person's Survey
Base: all respondents (n=96)

Responses to an open question asking whether these services met young people's needs were mixed. Positive comments included examples of where they had been helped into positive destinations.

> *My time with the DWP has been helpful and they've assisted me in trying to get into employment (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Youth work has given me the opportunity to volunteer to help with primary school children activities and has let us go on trips and participate in things such as first aid courses, cooking classes etc (young person, survey respondent)*

> *'[Third sector organisation] got me into the Open University and youth work got me into a volunteer (young person, survey respondent)*

One vulnerable young person had received support from a wide range of agencies, with some signposting them to another organisation. Although all were described as being helpful, Kickstart was highlighted as being great for building confidence. Because their previous job applications had been unsuccessful, Kickstart was described as something of a lifeline.

> *I don't know what would have happened if it hadn't been available (young person, focus group participant)*

Other feedback on the Kickstart scheme was also mostly positive.

> *These services helped provide me with a way to get into Kickstart schemes and find suitable opportunities for me (young person, survey respondent)*

> *I accessed DWP in order to apply for a Kickstart scheme job. It was quite complicated to start with however now I have the hang of using their service it is a lot easier (young person, survey respondent)*

> *At my present employment under Kickstart scheme and really enjoying my new role in hospitality (young person, survey respondent)*

Others reporting a positive experience described the people they worked with as supportive or that the support had helped them to improve their confidence and mental health.

> *Youth group helps me be more confident (young person, survey respondent)*

> *For making pals and mental health reason (young person, survey respondent)*

> *They were very helpful and very supportive (young person, survey respondent)*

Across all in-person fieldwork, young people seemed less concerned with which organisation they were dealing with than the quality of support, especially for one-off advice or support. It was common for young people to struggle to remember the names of organisations they had dealt with, or only recognise an organisation name when a different person in the focus group reminded them what it was they did.

Irrespective of where the support came from, the main factor distinguishing the good from bad was usually speaking to someone who genuinely cared about the young people they worked with and tailoring their support to the individual. However, Youth Work and voluntary sector organisations were somewhat more likely to be able to offer this kind of support.

> *'I can let my feelings out that I can't tell my family' (young person, focus group participant talking about their support worker)*

> *[Befrienders] helped me be less awkward (young person, focus group participant)*

> *Achievements, confidence, volunteering, support with mental health (young person, focus group participant talking about Youth Work)*

In the focus groups organised through voluntary sector organisations, it was common for young people to find the support these organisations offered invaluable. Many of these young people had additional support needs and / or were marginalised in other ways, and had not always had positive experiences at school. This highlights the importance of voluntary sector services in supporting those who most need it, which is again consistent with the findings from our earlier consultation for South of Scotland Enterprise.[26]

Some also reported (e.g. in the quote above) that the Council's Youth Work service had been valuable for building confidence and soft skills. A previous survey of care experienced young people found they rated their experience of Youth Work more highly than most other public

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[26] Sleeping Giants (2022) Equalities Engagement Project: Key Findings. Draft report for South of Scotland Enterprise, to be published in 2022.

sector services, coming second only to school and higher than Social Work, NHS, CAMHS, and the LAC (Looked After Children) Team.[27]

When young people did not have their needs met, sometimes it was due to a lack of specialist knowledge of a particular sector rather than an organisation not listening or trying to offer appropriate support.

> *She was extremely helpful in all the ways that she knows how [but] I feel would perhaps be more helpful if I was working with someone that knew a bit more about this field and could point me in the direction of what is offered locally if anything as it can be very difficult to find thing online if you don't quite know where to go for help. (young person, survey respondent)*

The logistics of attending these sessions could also be difficult for some young people.

> *DWP stuff was kinda exhausting and made me go into town a lot for short periods of time which isn't practical for travelling (young person, survey respondent)*

Discussions of career support in schools in one of the focus groups varied from 'they shout at you' and it 'felt like tick boxing' to receiving 'a lot of help' from their teachers (for example, a teacher signposted a young person to a summer job that turned into full-time employment). For those describing it as more of a tick box exercise, there was a sense that they participated because they had to:

> *It was in school we were made to use Skills Development Scotland but I don't remember it being helpful more just doing it to comply (young person, survey respondent)*

> *The services I used were more of something to do rather than to gain something from I only know them through school etc I can't say I remember much of anything that happened with them (young person, survey respondent)*

One criticism of employability support in schools was the sense that university was presented as the ideal and all other options as second-rate or even ignored. An example highlighted by a focus group participant was the way some of their PSE (Personal and Social Education) classes were split by 'university' and 'non-university' applicants rather than 'university', 'college', 'starting work', 'starting own business', etc. Young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) appeared to be more likely to find advice from teachers or school unhelpful with those in the focus groups telling us they had been discouraging or didn't understand their needs. In contrast, they were usually very positive about experiences of third sector services designed specifically for their needs.

The opportunity to do vocational training was important to some young people. A focus group member told us how a Foundation Apprenticeship really helped them. They liked the combination of valuable work experience and being part of a work environment while still being in the school / college system. Young people training in a third sector organisation were very pleased with the opportunity to develop practical skills in a community context and felt more

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[27] P. 30 of Altug, M (2022) Project: Young Persons Academy. Unpublished internal research paper for Dumfries and Galloway Council.

people should see the valuable work they are doing to train and support those who are often labelled as 'not achieving' at school. When asked about what other sources of help should be provided, a focus group participant at this organisation simply suggested more funding for the organisation.

The interviews with prisoners suggest that the training and development opportunities vary in local institutions; both Young Offenders Institutions and Polmont Prison were perceived to offer a wide range of opportunities whereas Dumfries Prison was thought to offer relatively little in comparison.

3.8 What Other Support Young People Need

The final section of the young people's survey featured several open questions asking what kinds of support young people need. The first of these was 'Please tell us what type of information, advice or support would be most helpful to you to find a job, college or university course, training or volunteering opportunity that is right for you'. Many responses related to general signposting, careers advice or youth work.

Advice on all of the courses or jobs available and how to get them (young person, survey respondent)

Career advisors (young person, survey respondent)

Talking to a youth worker (young person, survey respondent)

Workshops in different application and interview processes, what to expect and how best to prepare (young person, survey respondent)

Having meetings that talk about career paths and that help find the right college and course for you (young person, survey respondent)

I think just knowing where to go to look (young person, survey respondent)

Advice from the right people (young person, survey respondent)

Some asked specifically for a website that brought together the full range of work opportunities in the region.

It would be useful to have a website or something where hiring businesses could put up what they are looking for, and it is all in one place- I'm sure there are websites like that already, but I can never find reliable ones (young person, survey respondent)

One place where you can access all job vacancies in the area instead of having to sift through sites like indeed etc (young person, survey respondent)

Many commented on needing access to qualifications or the right training.

> *I think a course or apprenticeship, something that could give me qualifications/experience would help me greatly in employment. (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Courses to do things that aren't directly in school (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Job centre, Apex Scotland, training courses (young person, survey respondent)*

Moving on to suggestions of new types of support, a sizable proportion of young people wanted to have direct, in-person contact with people in their preferred sector.

> *Having people from different sectors come in and chat (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Better exposure to people in the area (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Events to go and meet and talk to the organisations (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Being put in contact with different companies or young people who had a similar goal to mine, and building a connection with them (young person, survey respondent)*

Some young people in a focus group had taken part in mock interviews with employers while at school. They appreciated their attentiveness and the detailed feedback that was given as well as the chance to meet employers in person.

The value of mentors was also highlighted by focus group participants. Although mentoring wasn't explicitly mentioned by survey respondents, many young people called for the type of support that it could offer.

Although experiences of third sector organisations that specialise in supporting or training young people with ASN were positive (see Section 3.7 for further discussion of third sector organisations), the following quote highlights the frustrations experienced by some survey respondents at the support options available to them:

> *Needs to be better for disabled people. I would like choices not just told to go to the Usual Place because that's where disabled people go (young person, survey respondent)*

Young people with ASN in the focus groups also said they would like more training for teachers on autism and ASN more generally. Another young person in the focus groups would like employers to understand ADHD better and mental health / neurodivergence in general and one called for people with dyslexia to be helped with form filling.

Aside from these additional suggestions, the core features young people with ASN wanted from services was no different to the wider respondent sample: they wanted to be listened to and have support that was tailored to their needs and interests.

As noted earlier, young people rarely showed an interest in starting their own business in response to our questions about aspirations. One focus group member noted the lack of advice available on starting your own business and said Young Enterprise felt a long way away from real work. Another in the survey said

> *The ability for young entrepreneurs to test out businesses is something which I think could reinvigorate the Dumfries high street and bring a new, vibrant culture and energy to our region (young person, survey respondent)*

3.9   How Young People Would Like Employers to Support Them

A question towards the end of the young people's survey asked 'What could employers do to help young people get into a job the suits them?' The strongest theme in the responses was being open to training people who did not have lots of experience.

> *Offer training rather than advertise jobs that require 'x' amount of years experience, essentially cutting young people off from even applying for positions (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Say in job description that training could be provided (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Have more schemes that don't rely on experience (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Provide substantial training (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Ensure they are given opportunities to gain experience in a role rather than being rejected due to a lack of experience compared to other candidates (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Offer training and trial periods/shadowing (young person, survey respondent)*

Some wanted opportunities to be better advertised or advertised at all - perhaps reflecting a perception that employers were taking on staff through their network.

> *Advertise more, offer more formal interviews. (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Don't look to employ same people as last year (young person, survey respondent)*

> *Possibly make it obvious that they are hiring (young person, survey respondent)*

Many felt that interviews should be conducted differently or done away with altogether in favour of different methods of assessing candidates.

> *Make the interview less intense (young person, survey respondent)*

Interviews are very formal and come with a lot of pressure - some people are better with practical tasks rather than talking and they should be allowed to showcase this before a decision is made (young person, survey respondent)

Do trials (young person, survey respondent)

A few of the younger participants (typically 16 to 18) would like a process in which the employer tailors the work to them to some degree.

Ask what they are interested in and go searching for jobs that fit their description (young person, survey respondent)

More than anything else though, young people just wanted support, understanding and encouragement from employers.

Support them with more training, listen to them and take on their advice making them feel heard and their opinions matter. Value them and treat them with as much respect as they do older staff members (young person, survey respondent)

Keeping lines of communication open (young person, survey respondent)

Encourage them to progress, put time and effort into bettering them and make sure it's an enjoyable and comforting environment (young person, survey respondent)

On the job training, periodic appraisals (young person, survey respondent)

Give them polite advice on how to do what they're doing if they don't understand (young person, survey respondent)

Definitely support and understanding that young people need to learn and be supported to gain confidence and experience. This is lacking and I am a student nurse feeling very unsupported (young person, survey respondent)

Give then constructive criticism and not berate them (young person, survey respondent)

Some young people mentioned this support and understanding from employers in terms of mental health.

More understanding of mental health and how it effects everything e.g. turning up late/ avoiding talking to people (young person, survey respondent)

As with the previous question, young people were also keen to obtain training through their work, or develop through being able to try different types of work.

Encourage them to do further training and studying (young person, survey respondent)

Train them properly (young person, survey respondent)

Allow them to move outside of the defined job structure and discover where their skills are/what they most enjoy (young person, survey respondent)

The terms and conditions of employment was another emerging theme, particularly in terms of flexibility for young people in education.

Be lenient with times such as exams and studying when putting them on shifts (young person, survey respondent)

Work with them, keep open communication- be understanding of outside commitments young people have, such as school and extracurricular activities. (young person, survey respondent)

Pay was an issue, with some repeating their concerns about the different minimum wage for those under 24 that we heard previously. Other cited specific needs around pay.

Better pay so I can afford a car (young person, survey respondent)

4   Key Findings: Employers' Views and Experiences

Summary:

- Almost all of the 51 employers completing the survey had worked with at least 1 young person in the past 5 years, most commonly as a permanent or temporary employee but two thirds of employers (31, 65%) had taken on a young person as an apprentice, intern or in some form of placement.
- Employers taking part in focus groups reported having difficulties recruiting young people to their vacancies and, when they did work them, described experiencing issues around communication, attitude and work ethic. Some employers felt Covid-19 had negatively affected readiness for employment and others questioned how schools were preparing young people.
- These issues were reported to create a tension for some: employers wanted to support young people but the time required to do this placed other staff under pressure and challenged business productivity.
- However, employers' experiences appeared to vary according to age and work experience; the strongest criticism was directed at the youngest members of the 16-24 age group who entered employment straight from school.
- Employers completing the survey were generally more positive than those taking part in the focus groups about their experiences of working with young people – over two thirds (34, 67%) rated their experience as 'good' or 'excellent'.
- The young people these employers had worked with were often described as keen, interested and willing to learn. Some employers also perceived young people to have good technology and social media skills or capable of bringing a fresh perspective or energy to a team.
- Most of the survey respondents felt that young people had the attitudes/ behaviours, qualifications and skills needed for the workplace.
- Where employers provided training, it was most commonly on-the-job, mentoring or shadowing but provision appeared to vary by size – only larger employers provided formal or accredited training.
- Take up of employer incentives and support schemes was low in the survey sample, but Kickstart was an exception to this – half (23, 50%) had accessed this. Lack of awareness was the most commonly cited reason for not accessing support.
- Funding was the type of support most often cited as being needed to enable employers to recruit young people and help them to thrive in the workplace.
- Around a third (15, 35%) of survey respondents felt that they were able to provide extra support to young people with different needs but more employers (18, 42%) said that their ability to do so depends on a number of factors (e.g. job requirements and individual support needs).

4.1   Introduction

Employers from across Dumfries and Galloway were invited to share their views and experiences of working with young people via an online survey and focus groups. Both these consultation methods explored the different ways in which employers had worked with young people and their experiences of this; the key findings emerging from the data are presented in this section.

4.2   The Employer Sample

12 employers took part in the focus groups and represented a variety of sectors (e.g. manufacturing, food and drink and agriculture) and geographic locations in the region (Dumfries, Nithsdale, Annandale and Eskdale, Wigtownshire and Stewartry). Several representatives of a support organisation also participated.
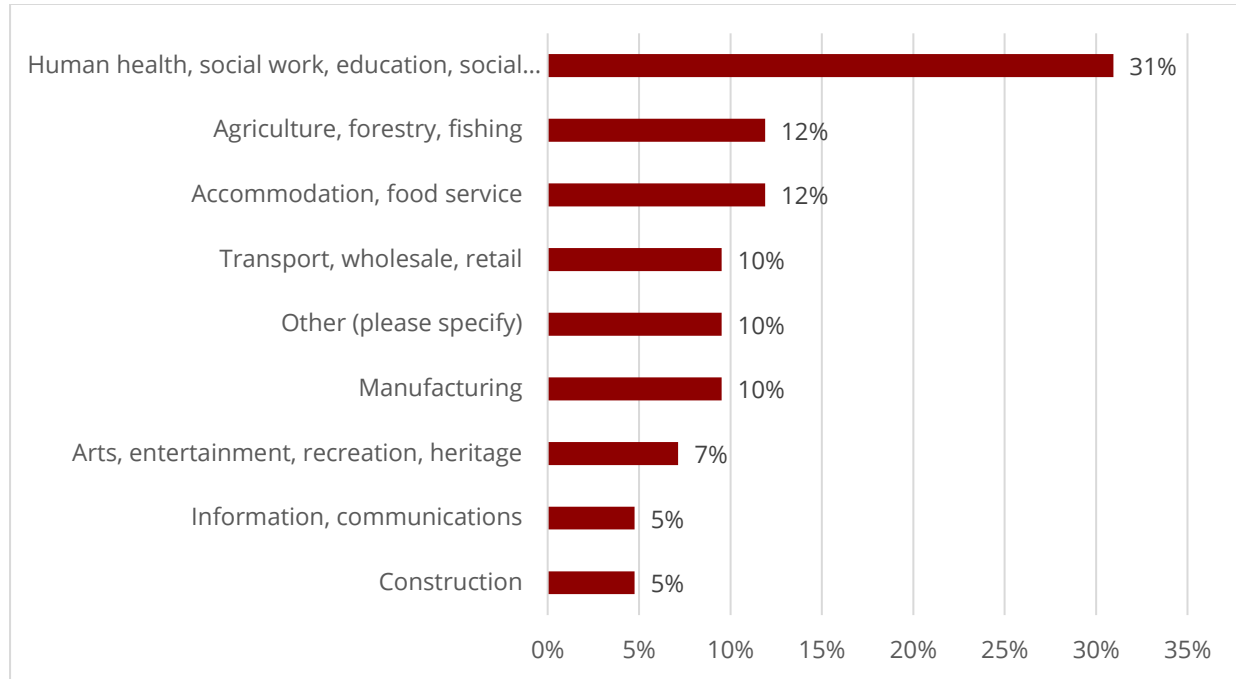
51 employers completed an online survey and were asked to report their size (employee numbers), sector and whether they had any social aims. Over two thirds[28] (27, 69%) reported that they had social aims, which suggests that the majority were committed to bringing about positive social change. When interpreting this, it's important to note that the question did not specify a definition of social aims and therefore these respondents might include social enterprises, charitable bodies as well as for-profit companies who seek to have a social impact by – for example - investing in local services or creating jobs.

As Chart 18 shows, the sectors represented in the sample were varied but the largest proportion worked in human health, social work, education and social security (13, 31%). Office for National Statistics data[29] shows that this sector is the biggest employer in the region and accounts for around a fifth (11,000, 21%) of the region's jobs (see Section 2.3 for further details on regional jobs by sector).

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[28] 39 employers answered this question
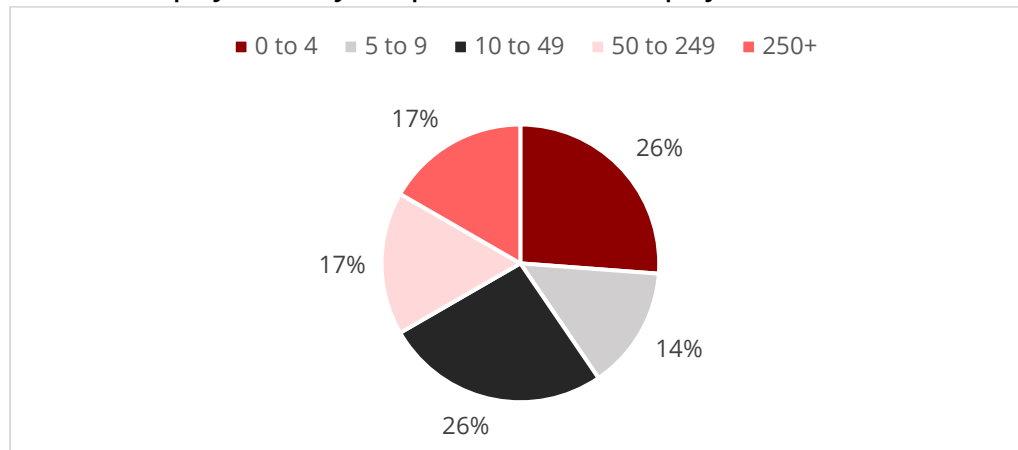[29] Employee Jobs 2020, Business Register and Employment Survey, ONS www.nomisweb.co.uk

Chart 18: Employer Survey Respondents by Sector

Sector	Percentage
Human health, social work, education, social...	31%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	12%
Accommodation, food service	12%
Transport, wholesale, retail	10%
Other (please specify)	10%
Manufacturing	10%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, heritage	7%
Information, communications	5%
Construction	5%

Source: Online Employer Survey
Base: All respondents answering the question (n=42)

A large majority of businesses in Dumfries and Galloway have fewer than 10 employees (5,510, 88%[30]) and although the largest proportion of employers completing the survey were of the same size (17, 40%), the employee number breakdown shown in Chart 19 suggests that larger employers were overrepresented in the sample (compared to the regional business profile). For example, a quarter of the survey sample (11, 26%) had between 10 and 49 employees.

Chart 19: Employer Survey Sample – Number of Employees

Legend: ■ 0 to 4 ■ 5 to 9 ■ 10 to 49 ■ 50 to 249 ■ 250+

Category	Percentage
0 to 4	26%
5 to 9	14%
10 to 49	26%
50 to 249	17%
250+	17%

Source: Employers Online Survey
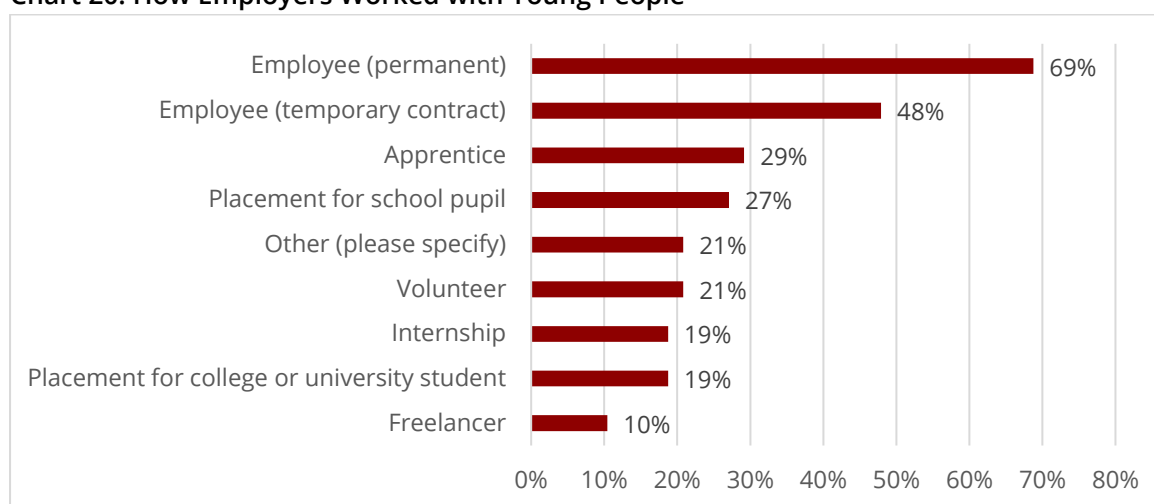Base: All respondents answering the question (n=42)

[30] UK Business Counts 2021; Inter Departmental Business Register, Office for National Statistics; www.nomisweb.co.uk

4.3   How Employers Worked with Young People

Almost all of the 51 employers completing the online survey had worked with one or more young person in the last 5 years. Of the 3 that had not, one explained that this was because they were a start-up business (the other 2 did not provide an explanation). Although half (25, 49%) had worked with between 1 and 5 young people, some had worked with over 20 (13, 25%). The size of the sample prevents the identification of definitive patterns in the data[31] but further analysis suggests that, as would be expected, the larger the employer, the more young people they had worked with. For example, 10 of the 11 smallest employees (with 0-4 employees) had worked with between 1 and 5 young people, while 6 out of 7 medium sized employers (50-249 employees) had worked with over 30 young people.

As Chart 20 shows, young people most often worked as either a permanent (33, 69%) or temporary employee (23, 48%). Apprenticeships were also relatively common with over a quarter of employers (14, 29%) offering one; this is higher than the 1 in 5 reported to offer apprenticeships nationally[32]. Further analysis shows that around two thirds (31, 65%) of employers had taken on a young person as an apprentice, intern or through a placement (school, college/university or another type such as Kickstart). Employers of all sizes reported having either an apprentice, intern or placement of some form. Given this, and the low number of employers who had not worked with young people, the data suggests that employers who were more engaged with young people completed the survey. As focus groups were organised with the support of key youth employability stakeholders, it is likely that these participants are also representative of more engaged employers.

Chart 20: How Employers Worked with Young People

Employee (permanent)	69%
Employee (temporary contract)	48%
Apprentice	29%
Placement for school pupil	27%
Other (please specify)	21%
Volunteer	21%
Internship	19%
Placement for college or university student	19%
Freelancer	10%

Source: Employers Online Survey
Base: All responses (n=48)

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[31] This is particularly applicable to a sector analysis: 9 different sectors were represented in the employer survey sample and the number of employers within each of these sectors is too small to enable the identification of any patterns.
[32] Scottish Employer Perspectives Survey 2021; Apprenticeships - Scottish Employer Perspectives Survey 2021 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

4.4   Experiences of Working with Young People

Both the survey and focus groups explored employer experiences of working with young people. For participants in 1 focus group in particular, a key challenge was attracting young people to their vacancies and placement opportunities:

> *So there's a few challenges but the main thing is just getting people through the door, it just seems like it's where are they?*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

In response to a lack of applicants, these employers described the different ways in which they were trying to engage with them, for example:

- 1 employer had changed their practice of offering temporary posts on entry to the company (permanent contracts had previously only being offered after a person had become established in their role) to offering permanent posts above minimum wage to all new starts;
- Another had adapted its written application to make it easier for young people to progress to the second stage of their recruitment process; and
- A third employer was working with Developing the Young Workforce to help signpost young people to them, but despite this had not received any applications for the 7 full time permanent posts advertised this year.

Salaries and driving licences/ access to a car were cited as potential reasons for these difficulties but an employer also questioned the effectiveness of their communication channels (i.e. are young people accessing their adverts?).

Communication issues also emerged as a broader theme in the focus groups; employers described the difficulties some of their older staff faced in communicating with young school leavers. For example, an employer described how their '*old school tradesmen'* found it difficult to change their ways to enable them to communicate in a different way with young people. The challenges associated with multiple generations working alongside each other were perceived to be increasing by another employer; they described how it was becoming more difficult to '*get into the psyche of kids'.* In recognition of this, they stated that '*it's now time to grasp the mantle and do something about it.'* Indeed, several of the employers in the focus groups described how they were taking steps to upskill their employees to enable them to interact more effectively with young people. This point is discussed in more depth in Section 4.7.

Although some more positive experiences were reported, focus group participants were often critical of young people; in addition to a perceived lack of communication skills, their attitude and work ethic were highlighted as particular issues:

> *Communication is shocking, time keeping is shocking and kind of the attitudes that we're getting at the minute, the attitudes are that we owe them.*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

We're paying across the board now £10 an hour regardless of age. What we're finding is when they come in, their attendance is atrocious, their time keeping is atrocious. They don't particularly need great communication skills but they need to be able to read and write which can be a challenge for some of them. Again, it's the attitude, it's as if they're still in the classroom and we're having to look after them. They don't get that they're here, getting paid to do a job. The supervisors are finding it increasingly difficult with some of the characters that come on board, it feels like a classroom environment sometimes rather than a workplace.
(Employer, focus group)

And also, just the sort of entitlement that they feel, that they don't need to work for things… But they don't come with the skill set that you think they would need but whether or not our expectations are too high I'm not sure. There's certainly something lacking between them leaving school and getting a job…
(Employer, focus group)

Another employer, who despite having an overall positive experience of working with young people, felt that understanding the rules and expectations of the workplace was a common issue:

…They were great, they were enthusiastic some of them, 1 of them in particular that we've kept on has been brilliant but you know, these things that we're attached to permanently, having to say them, you can't actually be attached to a phone for 6 hours a day when you're in a workplace. It's just not acceptable. So there's that part of it, I think they're not prepared for the fact that workplace has rules and constraints and you have to be able to go along with that when you come in…
(Employer, focus group)

A focus group participant went on to describe how they felt that readiness for employment had been negatively affected by Covid-19:

The last 2 years of Covid certainly haven't helped the kids we've got at the moment. You can certainly see they haven't had that last of couple of years at school to get their minds focused what it is that next step is meant to be.
(Employer, focus group)

For these employers then, there what was a mismatch between employers' expectations and the behaviour and attitude of young people in the workplace. There was however some recognition that behaviours, attitude and readiness more broadly varied according to the age of the young person. For example, 1 of the few focus group participants who reported having a more positive experience described how they tended to work with young people via Kickstart and Community Jobs Scots and fewer young people who were entering employment directly as a school leaver. For them, the only negative was that the placements offered by these schemes were time limited. Similarly, another focus group participant who also reported more positive experiences, described how the young people they had worked with had usually worked elsewhere for a year or so before starting with them. Indeed, some of the strongest criticism appeared to relate more to the youngest members of the 16-24 age group who enter employment straight from school. For example, 1 employer felt that 16 year olds are *'too young nowadays'* and another that its *'taking them to sort of 20 or 21 before they actually get it and turn into what we used to have at 18.'* A

third described how they had recently participated in an event with 16 and 17 year olds preparing to leave school and found their behaviour to be '*appalling'*. Covid-19 was again identified as a potentially important factor here:

> *I know this could be Covid related, well we're assuming it was Covid related, but the level of maturity of these young people… their behaviour was appalling. They didn't have any employability skills at all. That could have been a product from Covid because they have been locked up, they haven't had interaction with people other than through a computer for the last couple of years. But we were finding that these youngsters, 16 17 year olds, their behaviour was shocking.*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

It was within this context that several employers in a focus group questioned how schools were preparing young people:

> *What are the schools teaching them? The last few years at school, what are they getting out of that?*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

For another employer though, parents were to '*blame'* for '*mollycoddling'* children. Because of perceptions such as these, a few employers expressed frustration that they (rather than young people) were expected to change:

> *…the old school way that we think it should still be but it's not like that and to employ these young people it seems that we're the ones that have to change and adapt. And that's tough for old school.*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

Similar negative experiences were also reported by survey respondents, albeit by a small minority of them. The survey asked employers to rate their experience of working with young people on a 5-point scale (excellent – good – mixed – not so good – awful). As shown in Chart 21, only a small number provided a not so good (2, 4%) or awful rating (2, 4%), and 11 (22%) a mixed rating. Consistent with the themes emerging from the focus group, a perceived lack of 'softer skills' such as time keeping, reliability and motivation was cited as the reason why 6 employers gave such a rating:
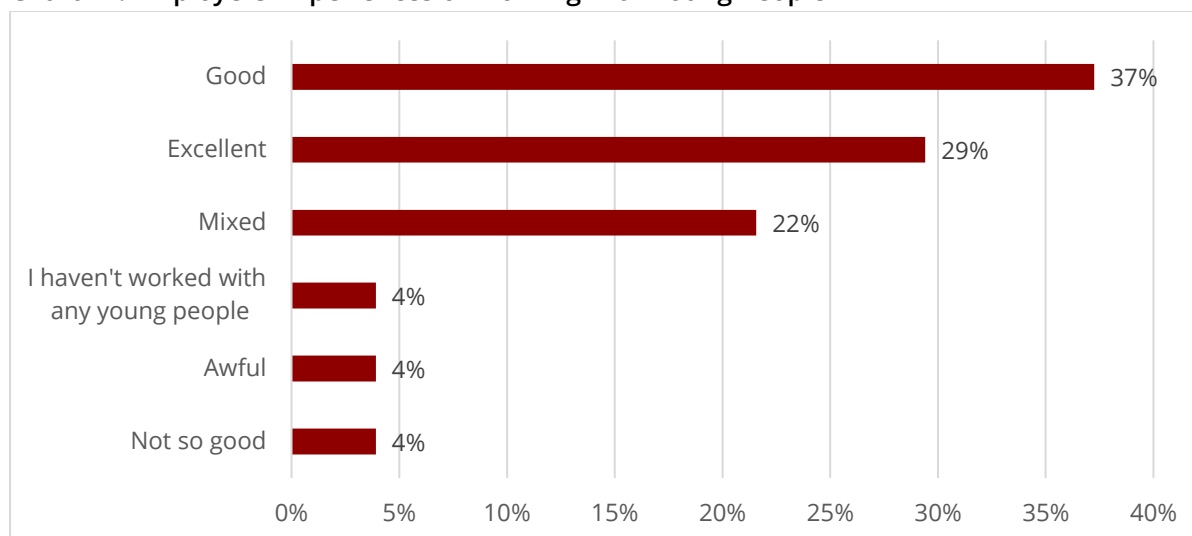
> *Some have been very good, others have been poor, due to attitude, reliability, effort.*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *Extremely poor attendance. Not recognising that there are consequences for not turning up to work, with poor sickness excuses. Addicted to mobile phone.*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

Chart 21: Employers' Experiences of Working with Young People

Source: Employers Online Survey
Base: All responses (n=51)

Like focus group participants, 3 survey respondents also described how young people had misconceptions around what was expected of them in the workplace and 2 felt that the young people they'd worked with were not ready or able to be in employment:

> *I have had some amazing young people work with me and some who have not just be in the right frame of mind to work. There seems to be a lack of understanding what a job actual involves for some young people with some off sick a lot.*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

Other comments made by survey respondents to explain their mixed or negative experiences included:

- An employer felt that there had been little support from employability organisations and that the work and attendance rate of young people created challenges for managers;
- Another employer who had taken on apprentices and various work placements commented that the paperwork takes '*too much effort. No feedback on how we do.*"
- 1 of the 2 employers who reported having an awful experience (but had not worked with any young people in the past 5 years), had a very negative perception of young people and described them as '*rude, self entitled, woke, ignorant, inarticulate, selfish, opinionated trouble makers.*'

However, as Chart 21 shows, the majority of employers' completing the survey reported having a positive experience of working with young people (34, 67% provided a 'good' or 'excellent' response to this question). Being keen, interested and willing to learn was the most commonly cited reason for this (19 employers described them in this way). For example:

> *The young people we have recruited have been enthusiastic and keen to learn.*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

They all worked hard and were always keen to learn from other staff.
(Employer, survey respondent)

They are keen to learn and listen, full of energy and willing to give most jobs a go.
(Employer, survey respondent)

It is of interest that, where a focus group participant did describe young people more positively, they too referred to those that they'd worked with as *'quick learners'.* Another described how it was this ability to learn quickly that meant that young people could adapt quickly in the workplace.

Other survey respondents reporting a positive experience cited:

- Good technology and social media skills (5 employers):

  They brought a freshness and energy to the team. And knowledge we didn't have e.g. social media
  (Employer, survey respondent)

  Young people have a unique set of skills, particularly in IT and social media which older people in the workplace don't have
  (Employer, survey respondent)

- Young people brought a fresh perspective, ideas or energy to the team (6 employers):

  Young people bring an energy and freshness to our work and new ideas
  (Employer, survey respondent)

  We have found them eager to learn skills and they have helped with revitalising our organisation post Covid
  (Employer, survey respondent)

- The young person had developed or progressed into other employment (6 employers):

  They have come into the organisation and gained confidence and new skills either going onto more permanent roles, been promoted into other roles or went in to work with an organisation.
  (Employer, survey respondent)

  I love seeing young people blossom during their time with us and know I have the skills and the team to ensure they have a positive experience which means they quickly become a valuable asset
  (Employer, survey respondent)

Further insight into how prepared young people were perceived to be for the workplace was provided in response to a series of survey questions that asked if young people had the required skills, qualifications, work experience and attitudes/ behaviours. As Chart 22 shows, responses were generally positive with more employers perceiving young people to have what was needed

than those stating that they did not. Experience was an exception to this though, with two thirds (32, 68%) of employers stating that young people definitely did not or didn't really have the required experience.

**Chart 22: Perceived Preparedness for the Workplace**
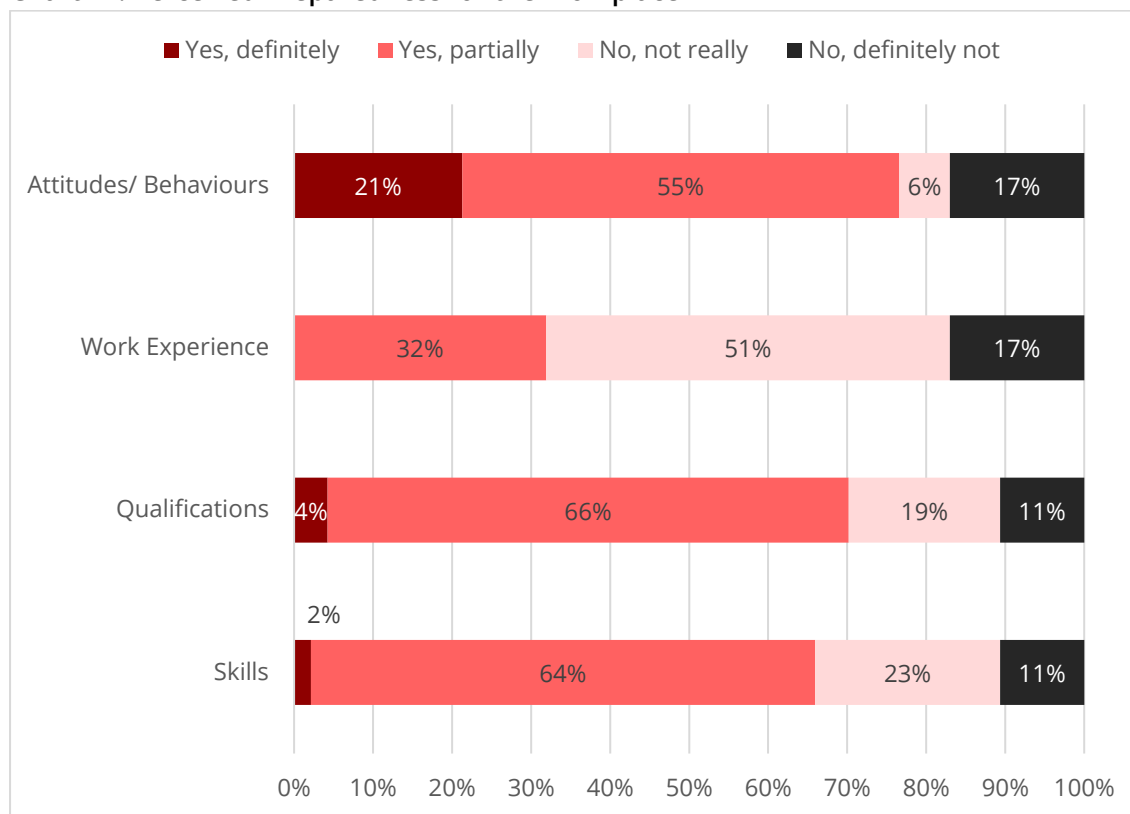
Source: Employers Online Survey
Base: All responses (n=47)

As attitudes and behaviour emerged as an important theme from both the focus group and qualitative survey data, further analysis of how prepared young people were perceived to be for the workplace in this respect was conducted by employer size, sector and social aims. There were no clear patterns in terms of either social aims or sector, but it is of interest that all 10 employers with 0-4 employees thought that the young people they had worked with had the attitudes or behaviour needed (either definitely or partially). In contrast, 4 out of 6 employers with 5 to 9 employees thought that they did not have the required attitudes and behaviours.

4.5   Training Provision

On-the-job training was the most common type of training offered by employers completing the survey (38, 84%), followed by mentoring (29, 64%) and shadowing (28, 62%). Chart 23 shows the other types of training provided.
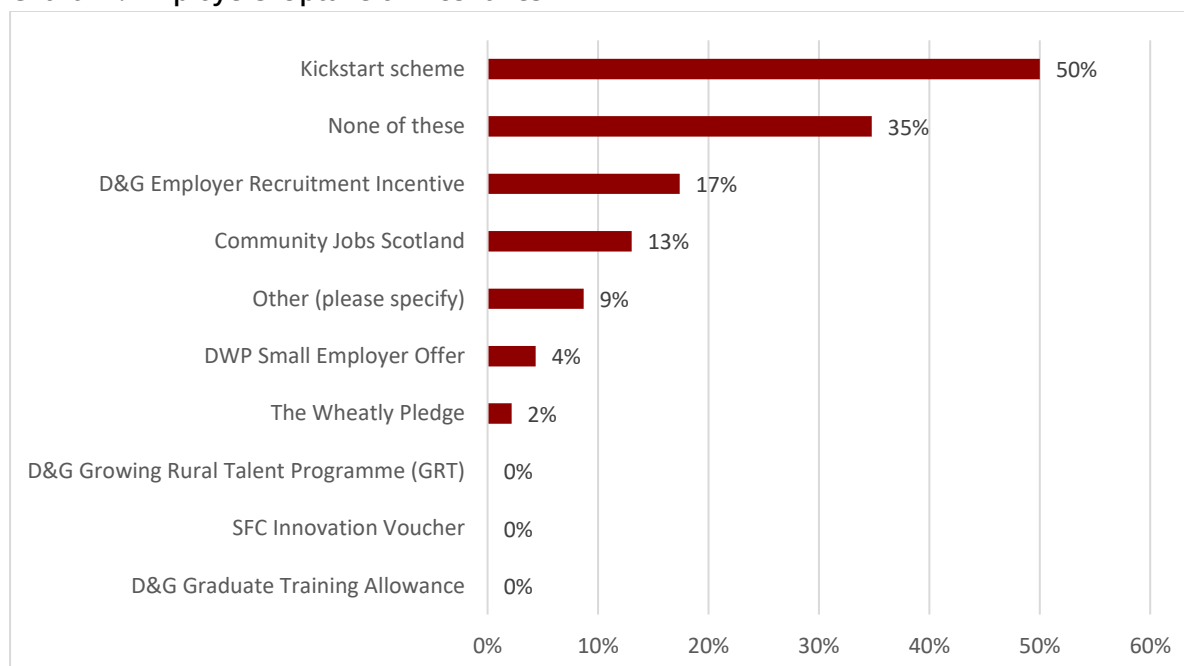
Chart 23: Training Provided
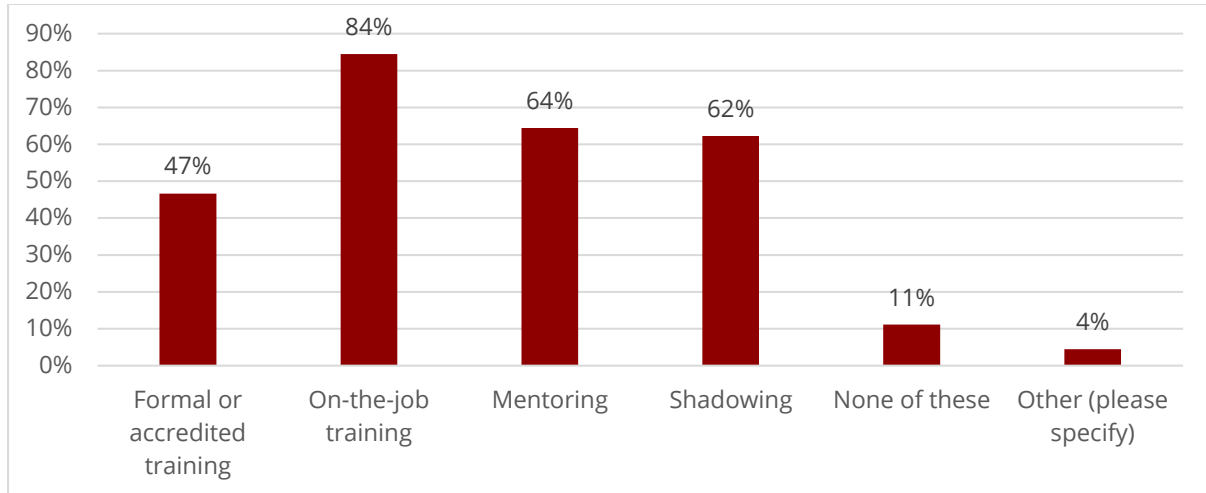
Source: Employers Online Survey
Base: All responses (n=45)

The available data suggests that training provision varies by employer size; for example, no employers of 0-4 people reported providing formal or accredited training, but 6 employers of this size did provide on-the-job training.

4.6   Access to Employability and Employer Support Schemes

A range of incentives are available to employers to recruit young people; the survey asked employers which, if any, of these they had accessed. As Chart 24 shows, there was little or no take up of some of the available schemes (no employers had accessed the Growing Rural Talent Programme, SFC Innovation Voucher or Graduate Training Allowance and only one had taken up the Wheatly Pledge); over a third (16, 35%) had not accessed any of the listed schemes. In contrast, half (23, 50%) had accessed the Kickstart scheme (and another employer stated that they had tried to but it was oversubscribed). Employers of all sizes had accessed Kickstart, but 6 out of the 23 employers had more than 250 employees and 9 worked in the human health, social work, education and social security sector which is indicative of higher levels of take up within the public sector amongst our survey sample. In contrast, only 2 employers with 0-4 employees had accessed Kickstart and none of the manufacturing or construction employers completing the survey had done so.
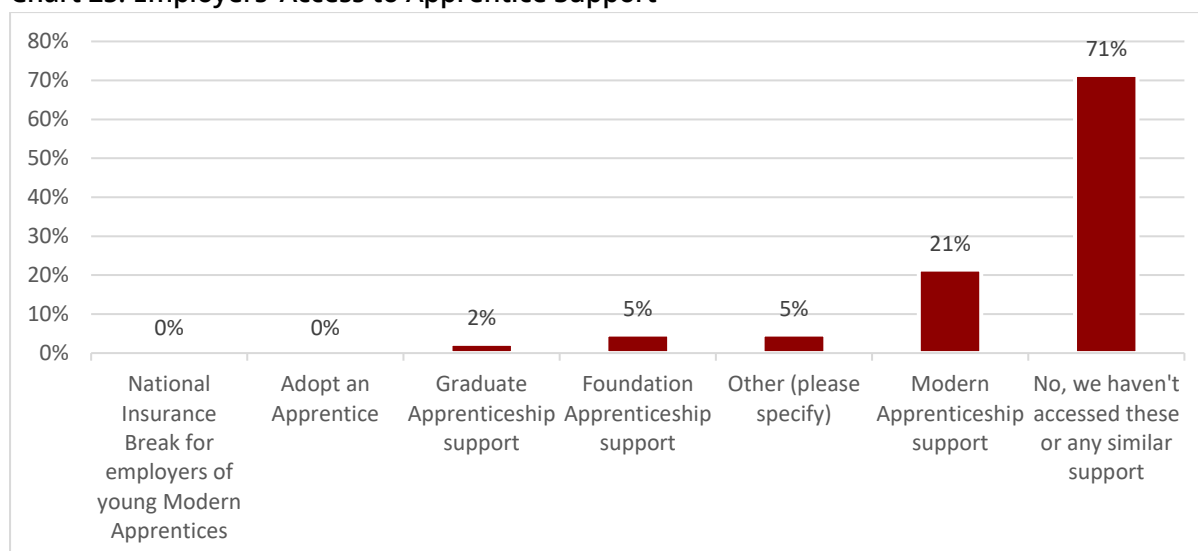
Chart 24: Employers' Uptake of Incentives

Category	Percentage
Kickstart scheme	50%
None of these	35%
D&G Employer Recruitment Incentive	17%
Community Jobs Scotland	13%
Other (please specify)	9%
DWP Small Employer Offer	4%
The Wheatly Pledge	2%
D&G Growing Rural Talent Programme (GRT)	0%
SFC Innovation Voucher	0%
D&G Graduate Training Allowance	0%

Source: Employers Online Survey
Base: All responses (n=46)

Employers were also asked if they had accessed any support for recruiting apprentices and the largest proportion (30, 71%) had not. Where support had been accessed, it was most frequently for Modern Apprenticeships (9, 21%).

Chart 25: Employers' Access to Apprentice Support

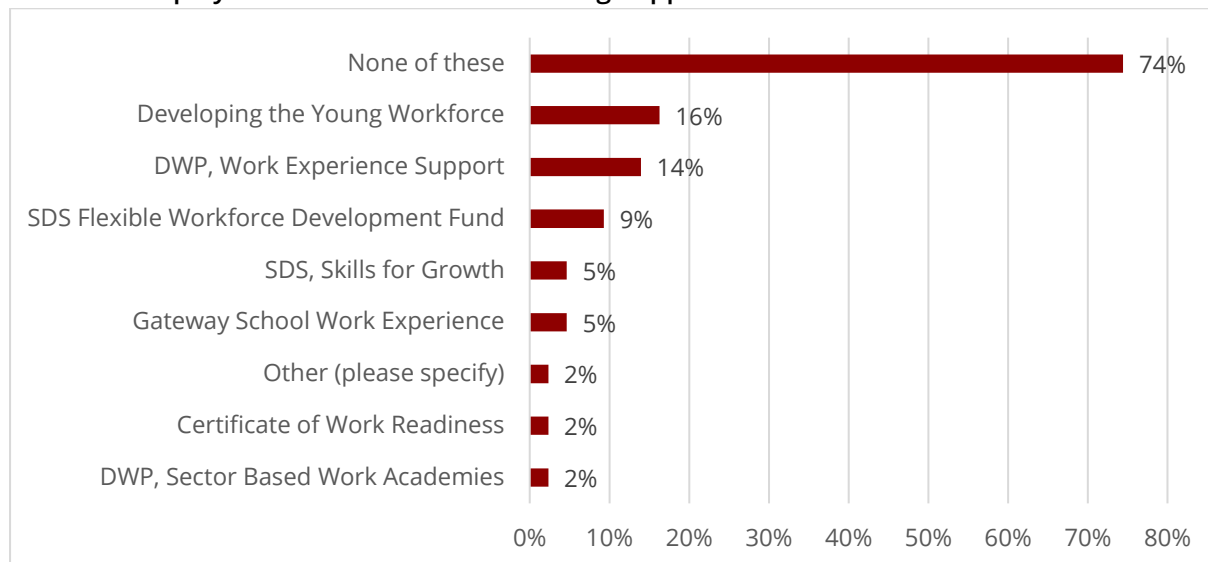| Category	Percentage
National Insurance Break for employers of young Modern Apprentices	0%
Adopt an Apprentice	0%
Graduate Apprenticeship support	2%
Foundation Apprenticeship support	5%
Other (please specify)	5%
Modern Apprenticeship support	21%
No, we haven't accessed these or any similar support	71%

Source: Employers Online Survey
Base: All responses (n=42)

Similarly, only small numbers of employers had accessed HR, recruitment, training, work experience and workforce development support. As Chart 26 shows, where support had been

accessed for this, it was most frequently from Developing the Young Workforce (7, 16%) and DWP's Work Experience Support (6, 14%).

Chart 26: Employers' Access to HR and Training Support

Category	Percentage
None of these	74%
Developing the Young Workforce	16%
DWP, Work Experience Support	14%
SDS Flexible Workforce Development Fund	9%
SDS, Skills for Growth	5%
Gateway School Work Experience	5%
Other (please specify)	2%
Certificate of Work Readiness	2%
DWP, Sector Based Work Academies	2%

Source: Employers Online Survey
Base: All responses (n=43)

Kickstart was the most commonly accessed scheme by employers completing the survey and the majority of comments provided on how the different schemes had met employer needs related to it. Of the 14 comments made by survey respondents about Kickstart, 9 were positive; these employers made a variety of statements about the scheme from more generic descriptions about how it had met their needs (without providing further details on how) to information about the progression or further employment of the young person. For example,

> *Kickstart was a beneficial experience for both the young person and our department and met our needs as an employer*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *Kickstart has enabled the young person to develop skills and gain work experience while being paid*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *I feel I am able to recommend the kickstart person for employment*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

2 employers referred to the support provided via the scheme:

> *The Kickstart scheme was fantastic, from initial interview to our candidate and the support from her work coach*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *Kickstart support and discussion has been crucial to the ongoing learning and development of young employees*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

Another employer completing the survey described how Kickstart had enabled them to *start up a project at scale by offering us 6 months of secure funding…'*

A smaller number of employers (5) provided a more mixed or negative description though; several of these referred to either a difficulty accessing the scheme or lack of take up by young people:

> *No Kickstart applicants came forward*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *We offered 10 kickstart places but only had 2 people on it. I was not aware of the other schemes or support packages available*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *We tried to get help to recruit an apprentice but SDS could not help us. There were no local training providers offering warehouse SVQs. When we contacted JCP about Kickstart we were advised that most of the young people had been assigned to the council and NHS. We were eventually referred 2 people, only 1 applied. There was no support to us as an employer, no paperwork to explain the process and nobody checked how things were going. I was also surprised that we were not visited by JCP or someone to check that we were appropriate for a young person*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

Of the 2 other employers reporting a negative experience, 1 felt that the young person was unsuitable and had *'totally wrong attitude and no respect'* and the other felt that there was a mismatch between the young person and the appointed role:

> *Kickstart wasn't ideal- the young needed more time spent with them to identify appropriate area of work. It was more difficult for the team as a result of the mismatch*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

8 employers referred specifically to apprenticeships in their comments and again, varied experiences were reported. For example, 2 described apprenticeships and the support they had received positively:

> *Apprenticeship programmes supported by SDS are good*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *The Foundation Apprentice support for employers was excellent this year (I feel like it's finding its feet now)*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

For 4 other employers though, apprenticeships were not without challenges and described the difficulty they had had finding the right candidate or course:

Currently we have 1 modern apprentice and are considering future candidates in mechanical engineering and land drilling. As an employer it is a case of finding the best fit which is a compromise to some extent. These are ongoing processes
(Employer, survey respondent)

Apprenticeship Degree is meeting our needs. However, we a really struggling to find courses to put our young recruit on to build his skills in design
(Employer, survey respondent)

The after care and support for employers and young person is lacking. Training providers for MA's are very limited locally and young people may not have ability to travel to providers
(Employer, survey respondent)

The other comments made were more varied and referred to:

- The Dumfries and Galloway Employment Recruitment Initiative (2 comments):
  An employer felt that the application process was slow and long winded but in contrast, a second employer stated that it provided financial support to enable them to employ someone that they would otherwise have been unable to.

- Community Jobs Scotland (2 comments):
  Both of these comments were positive, with 1 employer describing it as a '*very effective scheme*' for them and they had taken on 3 young people through the scheme, all of whom had gone onto longer term employment with them.

- Time implications (2 comments):
  These employers did not explicitly refer to a specific scheme but rather referred to the time required to support the young person in the workplace:

  I don't think it has met needs as an employer as having a placement is very time consuming but it is very positive for the young person and gives them good experience
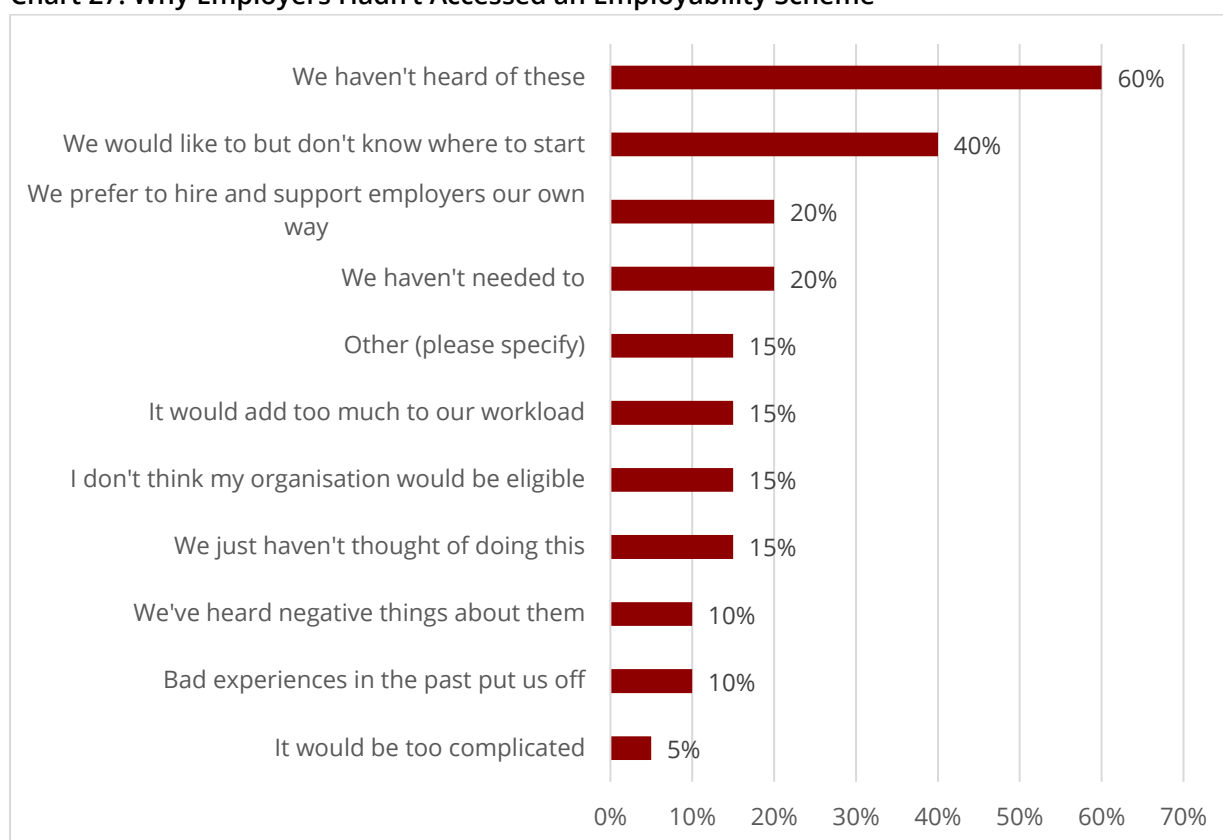 *(Employer, survey respondent)*

  Somewhat [met needs]*, but time is required to work with the individual which can stretch resources*
  (Employer, survey respondent)

- Application process (1 comment):
  The application process of '*these schemes*' were perceived to lengthy and lack clarity – they reported having a 5 month wait to employ 2 young people on a scheme (they did not specify which).

- Training providers (1comment):
An employer questioned why young people are signposted to large colleges for training rather than smaller providers.

The employers that had not accessed a support scheme were presented with a list of possible reasons for this and asked to select all those that applied to them. As Chart 27 shows, a lack of awareness of what is available was the most common response (12, 60% - 5 of whom had 0-4 employees), followed by 'we would like to but don't know where to start' (8, 40%). This suggests that there is more to be done across the region to ensure that employers have the opportunity to access local sources of support.

Chart 27: Why Employers Hadn't Accessed an Employability Scheme

Reason	Percentage
We haven't heard of these	60%
We would like to but don't know where to start	40%
We prefer to hire and support employers our own way	20%
We haven't needed to	20%
Other (please specify)	15%
It would add too much to our workload	15%
I don't think my organisation would be eligible	15%
We just haven't thought of doing this	15%
We've heard negative things about them	10%
Bad experiences in the past put us off	10%
It would be too complicated	5%

Source: Employers Online Survey
Base: All responses (n=20)

4.7   Employers' Support Needs

Survey respondents were asked 'is there any support that your business or organisation needs to recruit young people and/or help them thrive in the workplace?'; responses were varied but, as might be expected, funding or youth employment incentives emerged as the most commonly cited (by 9 employers). Responses of this type included:

> *We would love to have more young people be part of our business but need support to pay them*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *Incentives like Kickstart*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *100% grant to cover wages, transport, equipment, safety gear, training*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

Dedicated mentoring or peer support was also mentioned (by 4 employers), 2 of these comments called for such support in the early stages of a placement:

> *Capacity to free up a buddy/mentor in the first few days/ weeks of the placement. It makes all the difference and in very little time, the resource can be reduced but it is far more effective than having to manage the impact of someone who has struggled*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

Another 2 employers called for mental health or '*pastoral care*' support:

> *We find we need some element of pastoral care for younger people - we have to fund this ourselves at the moment*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *Professional mental health support and someone dedicated to mentoring, rather than part time support from existing staff*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

Although the remainder of the comments were more varied, some made reference to a need for greater connections between services and partners:

> *It would be great to have more knowledge of the support or training that is out there for them to develop themselves, that we could signpost them to*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *More effective contact with school career staff*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *A dedicated partner that can guide us*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

Other comments made were:

> *Currently the educational system doesn't seem to promote the skills and learning for non-academic personalities. There is a value in further education appropriate for more manual tasks / careers which could be better supported to educate young people of the possibilities in the workplace*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *Retaining young people in D&G and attracting recruits to the area is challenging. Promotion of the area would help*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

Focus group participants were asked what they needed to support young people in the work place and several described the mechanisms and processes they already have in place. For example, 1 offered pre-apprenticeships but was frustrated by the perceived preference amongst schools to signpost to local colleges rather than training providers like themselves. For them, local authority support on this issue was needed.

More broadly, the key theme to emerge from these discussions related to the young people's readiness for the workplace. Employability programmes were perceived by 1 employer to fail to adequately prepare young people and *'that's not helping employers'.* As a result of their reported lack of readiness, other staff were reported to be under pressure to provide the required support:

> *We're putting pressure on our good staff to look after and support these young kids and actually that can have a negative impact because the good staff that we do have, they can get sick of that and not necessarily want to support that young person. So we don't want to lose our good staff...*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

The role of schools in signposting young people to different career options and preparing them for employment (e.g. the encouragement given to find a part time job whilst at school) was also questioned in the focus groups. Resonating with the views of some of the young people (see Section 3.7 for a description of careers discussion in schools), a few employers perceived schools to push young people towards college or university rather than employment and called for better engagement between schools and employers. The lack of time or opportunity within the curriculum to engage with schools was a frustration:

> *They're far too busy but surely 1 of the most important things is to get them out and give them a taste of industry but they don't seem to happen because, oh they've got their exams, they've got this that or the other...*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

These employers felt that they would benefit from knowing who might be interested in working with them and then work placements could be arranged for them: they wanted to make connections with young people before they left school. Work placements emerged as a common theme throughout the discussion, with employers noting the increased readiness for employment brought about by such experience. Reflecting this, an employer called for funding for young people for short term work placements.

The tensions faced by employers when trying to both meet the needs of young people whilst maintaining the productivity of their business also emerged as a key theme from the focus groups. This led 1 employer to question whether introducing a support worker into the workplace was feasible. They suggested that upskilling their staff to enable them to communicate with young people was perhaps a better way forward for them:

> *...I would be more upskilling your workforce to actually work with these young people. Because I think that's where the gap is, I mean you can't expect a 17 year old to go in and work with a 40 year old. Communication styles are completely different...*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

Their ability to develop the mentoring skills of their staff would however be dependent on funding and they were unsure who could provide this. 2 other employers taking part in the focus groups also described how supporting young people placed additional demands on their other staff. For them, a potential solution was to liaise with DWP and other work-based learning teams to develop the ability of their staff' to communicate with and meet the needs of young people:

> *Maybe for the young person it's actually, how do we work with them – what skills do we need as staff? What is it, how do we have conversations with this 17, 18 year old? What is it we need to think about to be able to support them? I wonder if it would be useful for our organisation to have that better support with what's gone on, you know, to have that from DWP support a little bit more in our workplace to speak to those mentors that are working with those young people to say, what's going on? What are the challenges? Have you thought about working with them like this? Have you thought about working with them like that? To be able to engage with them on a more personal level. So that could be something that we may be interested in. The work-based learning team are trying to do that with our current staff at the minute but we've got limited skills on how to work with young people. So that support for us might be something we could tap into if it was out there*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

> *...So giving the supervisors and the staff that are mentoring that these ones some help on how to deal with them and how to get the point across in a way that's not sort of, I don't want them to feel like they're back in a classroom again. We want them to develop as workers so support there would help*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

4.8   Supporting Young People with Different Needs

The survey provided insight into employers' perceived ability to support young people with different needs, for example learning difficulties, a physical disability, mental health issues, people who speak other languages or are LGBTQI plus. Around a third (15, 35%[33]) felt that they were able to provide extra support, 21% (9) said that they were unable to do so but most (18, 42%) said that 'it depends'. 32 employers provided a comment to explain their answer and these

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[33] Based on 43 employers answering this question

responses suggest that the question was interpreted differently by respondents. For example, 6 employers, referred to the physical or manual nature of the work offered and as a result 3 said that they were unable to support different needs and 3 that 'it depends':

> *Job requires physical fitness*
> *(Employer, survey respondent – answered 'no')*

> *Nature of machinery and the work requires full physical health*
> *(Employer, survey respondent – answered 'no')*

> *It is a factory operation with machinery, working shifts and the work is quite manual*
> *(Employer, survey respondent – answered 'it depends')*

3 other employers referred to a physical aspect of their workplace that may affect their ability to provide extra support (all 3 answered 'it depends). However, a more common response was that support was already being provided or that they had an inclusive workplace (16 employers). 10 of these employers said that they were able to provide extra support and 6 that it depends. The explanations given for the 'it depends' response included:

> *We have supported young people with mental health and physical disability, but we do not regard ourselves as professionals. More complex issues like addiction would require us to have professional input or more in house training*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *We are supporting a great deal of need and we need to balance our resources*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *Hard to generalise here, but we have provided support for people with some of the needs specified. If someone presented with needs we could not cater for, we would seek support for this. We have encountered that specialist support for BSL interpretation is not generally supported and is very expensive*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

> *We are an inclusive and welcoming workplace, well adapted for physical disabilities, but do not have a big enough staff / sufficient resources to support someone with significant learning difficulties on a one-to-one basis*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

Similarly, 2 other employers (who did not state they were already providing support or had an inclusive workplace) gave a similar response:

> *We have the skills and willingness but simply lack capacity as a small business. We'd love to if we were able to offer the right support. Not only would be need the young person's salary subsidised but we would also need our time to support them subsidised in the early days particularly.*
> *(Employer, survey respondent)*

The focus group discussions were also similarly varied. Employers in 1 focus group were particularly engaged with work based learning initiatives and described that as a result they would take on young people with autism, ADHD, dyspraxia and with other additional needs. The initial shadowing process was identified as important here. For example, an employer described how they often took on autistic people as volunteers who then progressed to employees. They had recently completed training offered by a third sector organisation and suggested that this was a potentially valuable resource for local employers. Another described how they had found working with people with mental health issues challenging; they recognised that their workplace was a busy place and had introduced a mental health lead to help support needs. However, they highlighted the tension faced between striving to be an inclusive workplace yet maintaining productivity:

> *...it takes up an awful lot of their time. It then gets to the point where it's not productive and you know, we just find that the whole process can become quite difficult because we don't necessarily have a lot of experience in that and how to deal with things and then where you go and when it's not working. We're sort of struggling with that...*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

Similarly, another focus group participant who was part of a large national organisation described the challenges they faced: although their organisation had mental health first aiders and other sources of support, they were not always present when issues arose. Upskilling staff was again referred to as a potential solution.

> *We've got an ageing workforce, totally different 60 40 year old coming in working with a 17 year old who doesn't know how to put his mobile phone down but that's literally the way that they communicate. It's actually we have to embrace that and it's about you know understanding that and it's the same with that mental health thing, it's about how do we include that into our workplace and how do we do it safely without the fear of it getting it wrong or putting yourself at risk. Again, upskilling and knowing that there's something there that can be accessed easily either by clicking a button, phone call or face to face chat with somebody on a training course would happen on that local level.*
> *(Employer focus group)*

Another employer described how having additional support needs *'doesn't necessarily preclude them from the workplace'* but the right opportunity has to be identified and support needs considered. To demonstrate what this meant in practice, they described how they had offered a young person a job 8 months after they were initially interviewed:

> *...It's not about saying if someone has a challenge that we can't employ them, it's thinking about where we could employ them and putting them in a place that's going to be good for the business and for them. There will be some jobs that they can't do, there will be some things that you can't offer them because of a physical condition or whatever but that doesn't mean that we wouldn't look to see where we could employ somebody like that. It just takes a little bit more thought and support*
> *(Employer, focus group)*

These responses highlight a key challenge for employers: they may be committed to offering an inclusive and supportive workplace but do not necessarily have the organisational capacity to meet all needs. Indeed, those stating that they could provide extra support tended to be larger employers (out of the 15 employers who were able to provide extra support, only 2 had fewer than 10 employees). Although the sample size prevents definitive conclusions from being drawn, it also appears that whether an employer has social aims is important here: 12 of the 15 employers stating that they were able to provide extra support indicated that they had such aims. Further research is needed to explore the key factors that shape local employers' ability to meet different needs in the workplace (for example, dependency on the receipt of grant funding or other incentives).

5　Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1　Introduction

This consultation sought to provide young people and employers with an opportunity to share their views and experiences on living, working and learning in Dumfries and Galloway. With almost 200 young people and over 60 employers participating, its findings provide a valuable evidence base for the region. In this final section, we consider the strengths and limitations of the consultation before going onto discuss the conclusions and recommendations arising from the findings.

5.2　Strengths and Limitations

To provide young people and employers with the opportunity to take part in a way that best suited them, a mixed methods approach was adopted. Both groups could, for example, choose to participate in focus groups or share their views more anonymously through a survey. In the focus groups with young people in particular, techniques were used to encourage and support active engagement. For example, in addition to group discussions, opportunities were created for young people to participate through written feedback on cut out keys and doors.

Furthermore, the breadth of the project's working group helped to facilitate access to a range of groups and stakeholders across the region. As a result, those engaged included the seldom heard voices of young people with a learning disability and young people in prison. Whilst these are important successes, we acknowledge that some demographic groups and geographic communities may not be fully represented in the data. The consultation timescales (which coincided with the exam period) meant that, despite the support of the working group, engaging a wide cross section of young people and organisations was challenging. For example, none of the region's schools engaged via either survey dissemination or focus group participation and the employers represented in the sample are likely to include those that most actively seek to work with young people (employers were engaged with the help and support of the Dumfries and Galloway Council's Developing the Young Workforce team). We also recognise that, although their views have in some cases been captured through other groups and the survey, we did not secure the engagement of organisations who work specifically with the following equality groups: LGBTQI plus youth, young people with physical disabilities, ethnic minorities, travelling communities and care experienced young people. We therefore recognise that further consultation may be needed to ensure that services offered within the YPG umbrella in Dumfries and Galloway are inclusive. This is particularly important given the finding that fear of discrimination acts as a barrier for some young people both in terms of accessing supporting and finding an opportunity that's right for them.

5.3 Conclusions

- **There is a need for better and stronger connections between young people and services**
  This was a key theme to emerge from the consultation with young people: for example, contact with support organisations was much lower than awareness of them and more young people said that they would ask for help from friends and family than any other source of support. Despite this, the support young people wanted appears to align with the core employability services offered by SDS, Dumfries and Galloway Council, etc. This indicates that addressing the barriers to accessing support should be a key consideration for service providers.

  The available evidence suggests that confidence and mental health also act as barriers to accessing services, particularly for young women. Covid-19 may be an important factor here but, as the consultation did not explore its impact in any depth, further research would be required to fully understand how its effects. Whatever the cause, the findings highlight the importance of considering wider wellbeing as part of the YPG umbrella offer to ensure that young people can connect with its services.

- **Increasing awareness of the broader youth employability landscape might help support organisations to signpost more effectively**
  The focus group data suggests that where young people were connecting with available sources of support, the complexity of the landscape meant that they were not always being signposted to other potentially relevant services. Therefore, consideration should be given to raising awareness of what's available within the region amongst support organisations as well as young people.

- **Young people and employers wanted to engage more with each other**
  Both called for more opportunities to interact with each other either at school or through more informal networking. Employers wanted to be better able to identify those young people who were most interested in their industry and provide opportunities for them to gain experience whilst they were at school, which in turn could improve the transition from education to the workplace. Where young people did have an opportunity to meet with employers in school, the experience was described positively.

  For some young people and employers, the improved promotion of non-academic pathways in schools was important and identified by employers in particular as a means of improving connections. A reframing of employment or vocational training as a positive rather than 'second best' to academia was also called for.

- **Family and friends are important sources of support for young people**
  As family and friends emerged as an important source of support, their potential to both help and hinder young people to find the right opportunity should be considered: the knowledge, understanding, beliefs and aspirations within these informal networks emerged as an important factor shaping young people's choices. For example, some young people described

how their own aspirations misaligned from their family's expectations and they therefore felt pressurised to enter a family business or pursue their parents' preferred career. In contrast, where a parent or friend was perceived to be knowledgeable or well connected, the young person benefitted from their networks.

Because more young people were choosing to approach friends and family than formal support organisations, this finding raises questions about how to ensure all young people in the region have an equal opportunity to purse the job, course or training that's right for them. Ensuring that young people are aware of and able to connect to other sources of information, advice and guidance is therefore particularly pertinent. However, assuming that family and friends remain an important source of support regardless of any changes made to the YPG provision, steps to provide parents and carers with additional information and support to enable them to fulfil this informal role more effectively could also be considered.

- **When young people did use formal support services, they generally rated them positively**
  Young people often described these services as helpful and cited how they'd supported them to access a variety of opportunities. Empathy, feeling listened to and a perceived connection with a staff member appeared to be key factors here. Although perceptions and experiences of services within the YPG umbrella were broadly similar, the more intensive programmes offered by third sector organisations and Kickstart emerged as being particularly liked. Third sector organisations were identified as crucial sources of support for those young people taking part in focus groups and both employers and young people were positive about their experiences of Kickstart: it gave young people an opportunity to find work while also meeting employers' needs.

- **Recruitment processes were challenging for both young people and employers**
  Employers described having difficulty securing applicants for their advertised posts and some had taken steps to change their processes in response (e.g. offering increased salaries, reducing the written application requirements). For young people, job adverts needed to state that training would be provided rather than specifying the required number of years of experience. There was also a perception amongst young people that some opportunities were not being advertised but instead offered to those already known to employers. For some, interviews were a difficult and pressurised process and trials were suggested as an alternative, or supplementary, recruitment approach.

- **Young people wanted employers to be understanding and encouraging**
  The available data suggests that young people simply wanted to feel valued and respected in the workplace. A supportive employer who listens and encourages young people was identified as important here. The young people in our sample were also open to receiving advice and guidance on how to develop and improve in the workplace. There was also a call for employers to develop their understanding of mental health and how it can affect a young person in the workplace.

- **Some employers were frustrated by young people's attitudes, behaviours and readiness for the workplace more broadly**
  Differences in communication styles across the generations and a perceived sense of entitlement amongst young people were often cited by employers, particularly in the focus groups. More broadly, these employers felt that young people failed to recognise and understand appropriate workplace behaviours (indeed, mobile phone use was mentioned by several employers as a particular issue). The available data suggests however that there are important differences amongst 16-24 year olds and therefore this group should not be perceived as homogenous. Work experience was identified as an important variable here and further highlights the need to consider how to better connect young people with regional employers so that they can take up placement opportunities.

  Supporting young people to adapt to the workplace, in that it placed demands on the time of other staff members, was described as a challenge by employers. Although some were frustrated that they were expected to change to accommodate young people's needs, other employers felt that they had to find ways to adapt through, for example, upskilling their workforce to enable them to act as mentors. Overall, there appeared to be a willingness to support young people to thrive in the workplace; however, managing the demands on staff time so that productivity is not compromised is a key tension here. Some employers called for grant funding to enable them to absorb the costs associated with providing such support.

- **Other employers had a more positive experience of working with young people**
  The survey respondents were generally more positive about their experiences of working with young people and often cited enthusiasm and a willingness to learn as reasons for this. Young people were also perceived to bring technology and social media skills as well as new ideas and perspectives to a business. Its perhaps of relevance here that positive outcomes for young people are typically viewed as any form of work, education, training or volunteering rather than the match between a young person's aspirations and a job or course. Given the perceived importance of enthusiasm and an eagerness to learn though, the YPG's ability to connect young people in new and different ways with opportunities that they are passionate about may bring about improved and more sustainable outcomes for both young people and employers.

- **Despite the reported challenges, take up of employer incentives and wider support schemes was generally low amongst the survey sample**
  Take up was explored within the employer survey, where experiences of working with young people were generally more positive than those reported in the focus groups, which might offer some explanation for this finding. Nevertheless, survey respondents not taking up the offer of such support cited low levels of awareness as key reasons for this and steps to address this should therefore be considered. The Kickstart scheme emerged as an exception to this though, with half of survey respondents having taken on one or more young person on a placement. The potential role that incentivised placement schemes could play in the future to provide the work experience employers want and young people need to connect with an opportunity that's right for them should be considered.

- **Better promotion of, and support for, self-employment as an option for young people**
  Self-employment was rarely mentioned as an option by young people and is similarly absent from the policy literature and promotion of YPG more specifically. Some young people participating in this consultation also commented on the gap. National statistics show that micro businesses (those with 0-9 employees) account for a higher proportion of jobs in rural areas than the rest of Scotland and rural self-employment rates are double those elsewhere.[34] This consultation did not explicitly explore how self-employment is promoted within schools or to young people more broadly; however, partners may like to consider the role of the region's Business Gateway, for example, in promoting self-employment to young people and providing support to those interested in this option.

- **Some groups of young people face additional barriers and may require different support**
  Young people with additional support needs face numerous additional barriers when accessing education, training, volunteering or employment, such as prejudice, poor understanding of how to support their needs, and difficulties with the work environment. Funding has been allocated to third sector programmes to provide support, and the consultation evidence suggests that young people with ASN often benefit greatly from these. However, there was a perception that the options available to them are limited and both mainstream services and employers could do more to increase their accessibility. The young person survey also identified that other protected characteristics acted as a barrier to accessing services (disability, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, transgender status and religion or belief); more must therefore be done to counter this and educate employers especially on the needs of diverse groups of young people living in Dumfries and Galloway.

- **Transport is a key barrier for young people accessing services and employment**
  Transport was raised repeatedly as a factor making living, working and learning more difficult for young people in Dumfries and Galloway. This can compound the challenges associated with the relatively limited education and employment opportunities available in rural areas (compared to urban areas). Free bus travel is now available to all 5-21 year olds in Scotland and consideration should be given to how to promote this better. It is also possible that employers could do more to help young people with transport issues, such as offering more flexible work patterns. Although Covid-19 has created new home working opportunities and could therefore potentially help to alleviate problems with transport, the young people in our sample did not suggest this as a solution. We do not know if this is because they were unaware of this option, because it isn't appealing to them or because working from home isn't realistic in many of the jobs young people are applying for (e.g. hospitality).

  More broadly, the region's rurality and transport infrastructure emphasises the importance of exploring new and different approaches to better connect young people with the employment options available locally.

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[34] Scottish Government (2021). Economy and Enterprise - Rural Scotland Key Facts 2021 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

- **Together, these findings portray a disconnected picture of youth employability activity in Dumfries and Galloway**
  Young people want employers who understand their needs and who can provide the support and training to enable them to thrive in the workplace, yet employers describe being unable to fill their vacancies or communicate effectively with young people. Employers want to find ways to engage with young people so that they can find those with an interest in their industry but schools are perceived to promote academia as the preferred pathway to the world of work.

  More positively, many of the employers taking part in the consultation were committed to providing an inclusive and supportive workplace (but will need investment to enable them to fulfil this aim while maintaining business productivity). Furthermore, the commissioning of this consultation is evidence of a wider commitment amongst key, regional decision makers to deliver YPG in a way that meets the needs of both young people and employers. The challenge now then is to use this evidence base to inform discussions on how best to create the connections required to achieve it.

5.4   Discussion Questions

[Recommendations will be co-produced with partners and will then replace these questions in the final draft of the report. The following questions reflect our own thinking following the analysis and are included here to inform discussions with partners]

a) How can we enable young people to use services that would be helpful to them, keeping in mind that confidence and mental health are the key barriers? Is there a way for services to be offered more informally or made more welcoming?

b) How can we ensure people working in employability services have all the information they need to connect the young people they are working with to other services?

c) What can be done to enable young people and employers to connect with one-another? This is particularly relevant to schools, as both employers and young people wanted more opportunities to connect in schools. But it is also of interest to 'older' young people and may help address some of the other issues highlighted e.g. difficulties in recruitment and young people's lack of knowledge of the full range of careers available in the region.

d) Is there anything employability services can do to make it easier for parents / carers to support young people and encourage them to use formal services?

e) Is there anything we can learn from third sector support? Five third sector organisations are already directly supported by YPG: should others have a greater role? Kickstart was also highly rated highly by young people and employers. What can we learn from this?

f) Recruitment seems to be challenging for both young people and employers. Is there a way to encourage employers to ask for less experience, offer more training, and give young people more opportunities? Could employers include alternatives to a traditional interview format? Looking back to theme a), could more informal contact between young people and employers prior to hiring make the process easier for all parties involved?

g) Young people wanted employers who were empathetic and supportive. They also wanted increased awareness of mental health issues. What can be done to encourage this? How can we build the skills and capacity of employers to better understand young people and engage with them more effectively?

h) Meanwhile, employers were often frustrated at young people not understanding appropriate workplace behaviour. This appears to apply particularly to younger young people with less work experience. What can be done to enable more work experience among this group?

i) Could there be grant funding available for employers to take on less experienced staff, and provide mentoring or other forms of support? This is important because of the reported tension between providing the required support and maintaining productivity.

j) Despite the challenges reported by employers, take up of available support was generally low. How can awareness be increased?

k) Employers valued young people's role in their organisations most when they were enthusiastic about the work. This highlights how important it is to help young people find employment that matches their interests. The YPG defines any form of employment as 'success': is this a problem and do employability organisations recognise in practice that they need to support young people's aspirations and not just getting any job?

l) How can self-employment be better promoted as an option for young people? What support is already available, and can Business Gateway be more explicitly promoted as a service for young people?

m) Is the current landscape and the services that exist within it sufficient to support the needs of local young people? Do more services (e.g. third sector) need to be added? And how are the changes above going to be driven forward / by whom? Who will take on the co-ordinating role? To what extent could Equal Chance add value to the way YPG is being delivered?

n) How can we best support those who face the most barriers, including those with ASN, who are already acknowledged as needing more support but still facing barriers? What can services under the YPG banner do to counter discrimination of LGBTQI+ young people and other protected characteristics groups?

o) What potential solutions are there to barriers so many young people face around transport? Could better promotion of the free bus travel help or a simpler process for applying to it? Is there any scope for employers to alleviate young people's transport issues by, for example, allowing more flexible shift patterns?

Appendix 1: WORKING GROUPS MEMBERS

Lesley Sloan, Young Person's Guarantee Partnerships Officer, Employability and Skills, Dumfries and Galloway Council

Melanie McEwen, Development Manager, Employability and Skills, Dumfries and Galloway Council

Graeme Galloway, Programme Director, Developing the Young Workforce (DYWDG)

Helen Keron, Executive Manager, Glenkens Community and Arts Trust

Jan Hogarth, Galloway Glens Education and Community Engagement Officer, Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme