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GUIDANCE

Supporting young people at key points of transition into training, learning and work during Covid-19 and beyond

This document is aimed at professionals who support young people at key points of transition into work, training and further learning. It will be of special interest to teachers, educational psychologists, social workers, careers advisors, mentors, third sector workers as well as graduate recruiters. Drawing on a robust psychological evidence-base the document offers advice about steps to take in the context of Covid-19, recognising some of the challenges faced by young people and suggesting approaches to support a way forward.

It is important to consider those young people who are at key points of transition into work, training or Further/Higher Education. The concepts of multiple and multi-dimensional transitions are helpful for understanding both the physical and psychological aspects of 'moving on' at different levels. Covid-19 poses challenges to young people and those around them which may make it more difficult to give and receive help. This means that the role of professionals in supporting young people at key points of transition is likely to be of even greater importance (Viner et al., 2020).

Most young people are future-oriented and want to 'go forward' and transition successfully, envisaging a future for themselves and investing psychological resources into making it a reality. At the same time, they may also develop a new identity. This is exciting and we should not forget how it feels or how empowering it can be for young people, despite current and temporary circumstances (White, 2012; Woods et al., 2010).

PREDICTING COVID-19'S IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROSPECTS AT KEY POINTS OF TRANSITION

It is expected that the pandemic's impact will be significant for young people in the UK. A recent [report on the Class of 2020](#) from the Resolution Foundation forecasted that youth unemployment would rise to over one million this year. Recent figures show that young workers are most likely to have lost jobs due to the pandemic while recent decisions about exam results have precipitated distress, disappointment and, in some case, lost opportunities.

Previous recessions and economic downturns have demonstrated long lasting effects on those making key transitions. Not taking action to support young people could, therefore, have widespread, long-term implications for society. Young people who experience unemployment early in their careers are potentially exposed to scarring effects (Brown et al., 2011; Schmillen & Umkeher, 2017). Trends in youth unemployment predict future unemployment, increase the likelihood of poor mental and physical health, and are linked to higher levels of crime (Kelly, McGuinness, & O'Connell, 2012). These outcomes have economic, social and moral costs for our society. This highlights the need for early intervention if prevention is not possible.

IDENTIFYING THE POSITIVES IN CHANGING SITUATIONS

At first glance this paints a very bleak picture. However, with appropriate support it is possible to develop and maximise the positives in a changing situation. This document focuses on how psychology can be applied to support young people in developing and maintaining resilience and a positive mindset (Dwek, 2017; Ginsberg & Jarlow, 2015; Ryan and Deci, 2000).

When working with young people concentrate on:

Creating psychological resilience.

New ways of working that are flexible and responsive in circumstances which are likely to change rapidly and without warning.

Promoting the use of technology and develop skills for engaging with it.

Adapting to the needs of Generation Z for meaningful work that fits their values and emphasise work-life blend rather than work-life balance.

Recognise the opportunity created by Covid-19 for a partial redefinition of work. Consider what needs to take place for realising this positive potential and minimising the negative impact on young people.

Emerging opportunities

At the time of writing, the UK government is planning initiatives to support young people, e.g. the Kick Start Scheme and apprenticeship schemes. Professionals can keep up to date with developments by visiting the UK government [website](#).

ENABLING ACTIONS TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE

The following actions may facilitate young people's transition to different pathways into work, training and learning:

- 1 Inform young people about the types of support on offer and new ways of transitioning. Refer to available services and websites (local and national).
- 2 Monitor and challenge narratives around the negative impact of Covid-19.
- 3 Empower young people with knowledge of coping and resilience strategies when faced with stress, challenge and uncertainty.

- 4 Help young people to recognise that change is inevitable and that new, even better solutions often arise out of problematic situations and community crises.
- 5 Encourage young people to tap into existing – often online – sources of peer communication and support.
- 6 Encourage young people to recognise and utilise their skills and strengths as they move forward.

THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE TRANSITIONING INTO WORK, TRAINING AND POST-16 LEARNING

ADDITIONAL NEEDS

There may also be young people who require more support, especially those who have experienced trauma, disadvantage and loss. Young people from areas of high deprivation and those with an additional support need (ASN) or care-experienced, and those who have a disability are less likely to have a positive outcome (Hedegaard & Edwards, 2019; Morgan et al., 2020). Belonging to a vulnerable group means their need for extra support will be greater during and after Covid-19.

However, not all will know what support is on offer or how to access it. In addition, this group's mental and physical health is at increased risk.

Turning to the positives in the current situation, there are also anecdotal reports that for some families and young people the removal of the pressures of formal schooling has been beneficial. This, perhaps, invites a wider discussion about the structure of work, school and university and how well it has supported all groups of young people (Doyle, 2020).

Links

[Useful website for those who have experienced loss, change or bereavement](#)

[For those who need support for mental health issues](#)

[Useful information for young people who are care-experienced](#)

[For young people in care or leaving care](#)

[For advice on young people's mental health](#)

[Specific guidance for young people with learning disabilities](#)

[For young people with additional support needs going through transitions](#)

[For young people with additional support needs going through transitions podcast](#)

[Education and additional support after 16](#)

[Advice for young people with a range of additional support needs](#)

EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Research into the impact of the pandemic on young people since March 2020 is a developing area. For information, visit the [rcpch website](#).

The normal rites and rituals of passage for young people in transition have been disrupted because of school closures and cancelled graduations. The potential impact of home learning on performance, exam results and qualifications gained are all sources of worry particularly for those with conditional offers from colleges and universities. Arrangements for apprenticeships may change. There are many unknowns. Altered plans for entering work, training and further learning may bring about a sense of loss around anticipated autonomy and independence. Different types of uncertainty may lead some to consider deferring a college or university place.

Feelings of hopelessness, fear and anxiety about the future will be experienced by some. In this context, young people may develop problems with short- and long-term goal setting. They may also lose a sense of connectedness and routine (e.g. because they do not have a job to go to, or can see that they will have unstructured time ahead, or they may be disconcerted by the switch to online learning). This can affect their sense of confidence, self-esteem, and motivation through reduced social contact with peers and partners and, perhaps for some, an over-reliance on social media. The risks associated with this are well-documented. A particular problem may exist for young people entering Further and Higher Education without having had a chance to forge relationships with new peer groups.

Action for all involved with young people

Encourage young people to keep in touch with family and friends. Emphasise the importance of making friends in their new environment

Links

www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/young-peoples-mental-health

www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/pupils-learners-and-apprentices/

www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/70972.html

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

<https://young.scot/>

FINANCIAL WORRIES

Young people in transition may have financial worries because of loss of income, student loans and living costs, either at home with parents or in independent accommodation.

Action: Access support from guidance staff in school, careers advisors, employment centres

Links:

www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/pupils-learners-and-apprentices/

www.myworldofwork.co.uk/SDS-update-and-exam-results

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT KEY POINTS OF TRANSITION

RESPECTING THE VIEWS AND AGENCY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

By fostering a sense of hope and celebrating the enthusiasm and creativity of young people we can emphasise their agency, their capacity to 'control the controllable' around transitions into work, learning or training (Ball et al., 2013; Mason, 2020; Morgan et al., 2020).

As champions of young people, it is important that professionals (e.g. teachers, educational psychologists, social workers, careers advisors, mentors, third sector workers as well as graduate recruiters, etc.) do the following:

Acknowledge their strengths and interests to help find solutions to current problems.

Adopt a future focused narrative within which young people are equal partners in the co-production of resources, many of which are online, to develop new pathways into work, training and Further/Higher education.

Respect the views of young people and their need for greater independence while at the same time realising that they may require many different avenues of support.

Reassure young people that support is, and will continue to be, available.

Emphasise the importance of family, friends and community as support networks and sources of information.

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

Research highlights the need to facilitate smoother, post-school transitions into work, training or further education (Woods et al., 2010). This requires an integrated framework to align systems and enable young people to thrive in a rapidly changing world of work. It will be of benefit to focus upon the development of:

Individual resilience.

Institutional responsiveness.

Policy reflexivity.

We must remember that well-educated, skilled and confident young people will form the basis of a sustainable, prosperous economy in the future. See diagram 1 as an aspirational model (created for this paper) for developing coherent pathways into the world of work, training and learning.

For examples of current models of support and national frameworks, please refer to the following websites:

<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/>

[My World of Work](#)

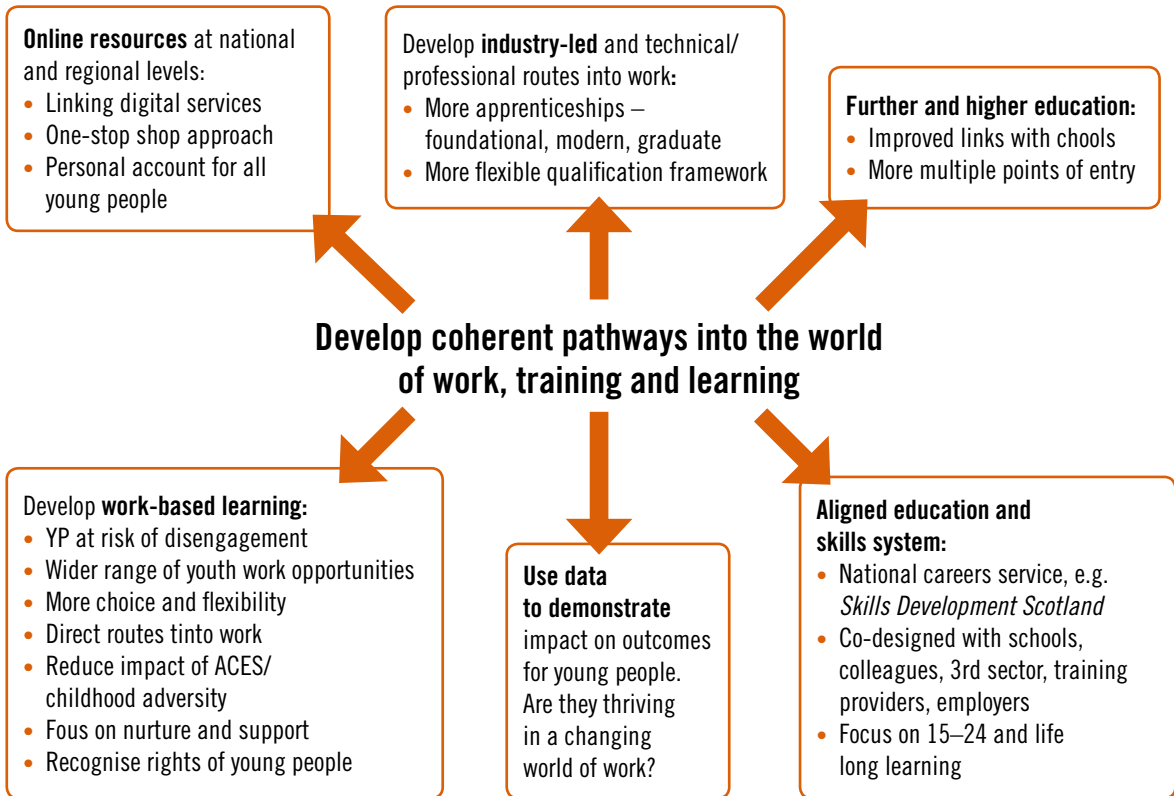
www.gov.uk/career-skills-and-training

[Careers Wales](#)

www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk

[Careers Service Northern Ireland](#)

DIAGRAM 1: DEVELOPING WORK, TRAINING AND LEARNING PATHWAYS



Actions	Who can do this
Develop effective partnerships and networks between industry, third sector, schools, further/higher education to develop new pathways into training, work and learning.	Teachers and academics focused on employability, range of key stakeholders working in partnership at local and national levels.
Provide effective signposting to online resources, websites, career services, and other advisory agencies.	Careers professionals, teachers, academics, parents; those who manage government websites for young people moving into the world of work.
Offer reassurance that jobs, training, and apprenticeships will be available.	Careers professionals, teachers, educators, advisors, practitioners working at the front line as well as other parts of complex interacting systems.

Approve online courses and vocational and academic qualifications from reputable providers.

Careers professionals.

Develop a robust and sustainable framework that supports navigation of post school/ college transitions and career competencies that may buffer the effect of career shock.

Careers professionals, key stakeholders all in partnership with those mentioned above to provide a coherent service to young people.

Encourage young people to stay in touch with key professionals and careers services to develop specific skills around CV writing, developing and polishing online presence; and how to perform in video/ telephone interviews.

Teachers and academics, parents.

Examination of the policy context is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is worth noting that practitioners operate in settings shaped by policy, and their ability to support young people using the approaches described above will be affected by factors such as availability of careers services and access to funding.

Links

[https://www.coventry.gov.uk/homepage/1163/making the transition to employment and training?your-area-keyword=&your-area-category=1118&your-area-postcode=&your-area-radius=5](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/homepage/1163/making-the-transition-to-employment-and-training?your-area-keyword=&your-area-category=1118&your-area-postcode=&your-area-radius=5)

<https://www.gov.uk/career-skills-and-training>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/maintaining-education-and-skills-training-provision-further-education-providers>

<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/>

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/for-training-providers/sds-covid-19-response-for-training-providers/>

<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/scotlands-careers-services/16plus-data-hub/>

<https://education.gov.scot/media/ccenoip4/final-2020-post-16-paper.pdf>

SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS AND INDUCTION

Positive experiences and resilience can be transferred into the new context (e.g. work and further or higher education) through effective use of enjoyable, quality induction programmes as well as transition schemes.

Action

- Continue to offer post-school transition planning.
- Encourage early contact with education providers and employers; encourage them to provide outreach or induction.
- Provide early intervention to support positive destinations for vulnerable young people.
- Offer online group/tutor social introductions in work, training and college/university settings.
- Deliver effective personal tutoring systems in education and learning establishments.
- Consider small group projects to establish new peer/colleague relationships.

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF PROFESSIONALS WHO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE AT KEY POINTS OF TRANSITION

Those involved in supporting young people at these key transition points should be mindful of the changing landscape. The following list is far from exhaustive but presents some central points to consider when working with young people in a school-career transition.

The most important of which is:

- **Co-produce and create** attractive resources with young people that are meaningful and useful to them.

Do this through the following:

- **Communicate** in an open and honest way because young people need an awareness of the reality of their situation.
- **Raise awareness** of the opportunities currently available and how education and training providers are changing what is on offer. For example, many providers are making courses available online at reduced costs.
- **Know** how exam results are being decided this year and what factors are still within the young person's control, for example the content of personal statements.
- **Keep abreast** of changes in early career vacancies, graduate schemes and apprenticeships, their availability is likely to change as we gradually come out of lockdown.
- **Consider** the best ways to reach young people – especially outside of a normal school, college, university environment. What platforms are they already on? What do they check regularly? How can you ensure your message is getting through? Respect boundaries and use gatekeepers to the online territory used by young people.
- **Be aware** of how to spot when someone is struggling, ensure that signposts to support are clear and that young people know exactly how to reach out for help and who to contact.

- **Understand** the most at risk groups, for example young people with existing disabilities, young carers, young people with neurodiversity, recently bereaved and young people who have experienced trauma.
- **Support** young people in the development of psychological and behavioural skills that will support them in maintaining their mental health, wellbeing and ultimately in achieving career success.

APPLICATION OF EVIDENCED-BASED PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES

In the circumstances of Covid-19, several evidence-based approaches can underpin support and interventions that enable young people to prosper in new ways of working when making transitions; helping them maintain psychological wellbeing and positive mental health in the short term, and greater self-determined career success in the future. The approaches listed in the table below, can be used, for example, in mentoring and peer coaching situations to support short and long-term goal setting.

Approach	Summary	Links
Growth Mindset	Resources based on Carol Dweck's growth mindset concept	https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/growth-mindset-resources https://www.mindsetworks.com/
Career Competencies	Developed by Jos Akkermans the career competencies questionnaire outlines the key competencies required for intrinsic and extrinsic career success	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0894845312467501
Psychological Resilience	Resources based on theirs around coping strategies and developing resilience in young people	www.psychom.net/build-resilience-children/ www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/3420/resilience_in_children_in_young_people.pdf https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience
Self Determination Theory	Focuses upon concepts of competence, autonomy and relatedness	https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/

<p>Solution-focused and strengths-based approaches</p>	<p>Questions, conversations and activities aimed at enabling young people to recognise their own strengths and resources to find solutions to temporary problems</p>	<p>https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/what_we_do/event/the_science_of_happiness</p> <p>https://www.viacharacter.org/</p> <p>https://www.solutions-centre.org/what-is-the-solution-focused-approach/</p> <p>https://www.brief.org.uk/about-us/what-is-the-solution-focused-approach</p>
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ACTION

Provide training to professionals in evidence-based psychological theories and approaches to better support young people at key points of transition.

Raise awareness of the benefits of short and long-term goal setting and future-focused thinking to engender a sense of controlling the controllable.

Use solution focused and strengths-based to support optimism, agency, resilience and hope.

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RESOURCES

www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/class-of-2020/.

www.gov.scot/publications/primary-secondary-transitions-systematic-literature-review/



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