



Employers Youth Employment Charter

Report from Consultation Focus
Groups with Young People



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Introduction

The INOU was delighted to be approached by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to assist with work the DSP are undertaking on developing a new Employers Youth Employment Charter. Following discussions with the Department, the INOU agreed to:

- Participate in the work of a dedicated Steering Group overseeing the initiative.
- Co-ordinate the aspect of the consultation process which had a specific focus on providing opportunities for young people to be directly involved in assisting the formulation of a proposed new Charter by way of their participation in a series of Focus Group Meetings.

The INOU welcomed the overall DSP approach in developing the Charter and particularly the recognition of the importance of hearing directly from young people as a key aspect in informing the development of the new Charter.

The proposed new Charter originated from a commitment in the main Government employment and activation strategy, *Pathways to Work 2021-2025 to Re-launch and promote the Employer Youth Employment Charter*.

For the purposes of the consultations, young people were defined as aged between 18 and 29.

In addition to the Focus Groups, the DSP also send a survey to young jobseekers on the Live Register.

Consultation Event Format

After discussions about potential format, it was agreed that in-person Focus Groups would be the most suitable mechanism to hear from young people. It was agreed to organise at least two in-person Focus Groups to hear directly from a minimum of 30 young people. Following agreement on this key element of the consultative process, a Steering Group was established. The Steering Group consisted of:

Department of Social Protection

- Siobhán Lawlor
- Paul Carroll
- Anne Keeley
- Peter Trainor
- Darren Mahon

Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)

- Dr. Kara McGann

National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)

- Marie-Claire McAteer (subsequently replaced by Paul Gordon)

INOU

- John Stewart
- Bríd O'Brien
- John Farrell

It was agreed that the Focus Groups would be two-hour events including a short context and introductions from both an INOU and DSP representative (see Appendix 1). The main part of the event involved a Facilitator asking a series of agreed questions (see Appendix 2) and writing young people's suggestions and answers on a flipchart and a notetaker.

Consultation Events

Six Focus Groups were held from October to December, with 57 young people attending. Thirty-two were young men and twenty-five were young women.

The Focus Groups were held at:

- The Den, Finglas with 7 participants, 6 male and 1 female from the Connections programme;
- The Barbican Centre in Drogheda with 10 young people, 8 female and 2 male from Youth Work Louth;
- The SWAN Centre in Dublin with 8 young people, 6 male and 2 female, using SWAN services;
- The INOU in Dublin with 6 young people, 4 male and 2 female;
- Youth Centre in Thurles with 19 young people, 11 male and 8 female from Youth Work Tipperary;
- Accenture in Dublin with 7 young employees, 3 male and 4 female.

We are very grateful to the above Youth groups and Youth Work Ireland for their assistance and support in organising these Focus Groups. We also greatly appreciate the young people who attended these groups and so willingly shared their experiences and perspectives.

Both within and between the youth groups, there were significant differences in young people's experiences and levels of work, education and training. These varied from some young people at the one of the Focus Groups describing themselves negatively and viewing themselves as outsiders and being pessimistic about their future work opportunities through to more positive views being shared by young recent recruits at Accenture.

Report Structure

This report is structured around four sections. There are three main sections, hearing from young people on – Work, Employers and A New Charter. Each section includes a number of relevant questions. The input from young people is included from the 6 Focus Groups under each of the questions they were asked. This approach draws out a number of themes that were repeated across a number, some or all Focus Groups. The fourth section collates useful information that did not link directly to the other sections. A summary of the key points is included at the start of each question.

Hearing Young People: About Work

It was agreed that an important aspect of the Focus Groups would be to hear directly from young people about their perceptions, hopes and experiences of work. The discussion and responses from young people is captured in the answers to five distinct questions below.

What in your opinion, makes a job attractive?

- Good rate of pay
- Working in a job you like
- Progression in job
- Good reputation of employer
- Made to feel welcome, treated fairly and respected
- Good terms and conditions
- Including the pay scale for the position
- Training in job and paid by employer
- Flexibility and choice, e.g. hours, working from home

An interest in a prospective job was a very important consideration for young people across the Focus Groups. At the Finglas Focus Group, young people advised of the importance of being interested in the job. In Thurles, some young people stated that liking the job was important. At the INOU's focus group, young people mentioned about 'Doing the job you like'. At the same Focus Group, there was also an interesting discussion about related aspects such as the usefulness of meaningful work and finding work where your values align with the values and ethos of employer. Similarly, at the SWAN group, some young people discussed looking for work to match their interests.

The rate of pay featured across nearly all of the Focus Groups as an important reason in making a job attractive. At the SWAN focus group pay was mentioned, good wages were referenced in Finglas, proper pay was advised at the Drogheda Group; money was advised in Thurles and the rate of pay in Accenture. At the latter, the cost-of-living crisis and particularly, high rent prices were discussed. At the INOU group, the usefulness of a pay scale, illustrating a pay range and increment points was highlighted.

In addition to pay rates, good terms and conditions were consistently referenced. At Thurles, good annual leave was mentioned. This was also advised at the INOU meeting, where young people also noted it would be useful to know if holiday pay is included. Young people at Accenture stated that job security was important and advised that permanent jobs following probation would be useful. Ensuring that breaks were factored in the day's employment was highlighted at the Thurles Group and fewer jobs that are only temporary positions was advocated at the INOU's group.

The working hours were also an important consideration. At the Drogheda Focus Group, some young people discussed that they would find it useful if employers could work more around their hours at college.

Having advance notice from the employer about the number of hours that young people were required to work was referenced as being very useful at the SWAN and Drogheda Groups. Having an opportunity to choose hours that you may work was highlighted at the INOU Focus Group and working suitable hours was mentioned in Finglas. A related point, ensuring greater flexibility around working hours was discussed at the Accenture Focus Group. One aspect of this that was highlighted, at both the SWAN and INOU Focus Groups, was the usefulness of employers providing working hours that are suitable if a young person is dependent on public transport. Greater opportunities for working from home and blended working, where possible was referenced at the INOU Focus Group.

Development, training and learning opportunities leading to progression was also an important factor for most groups. Young people in Drogheda referred to opportunities for progression and training. At the INOU Group, progression in the job was highlighted. Further upskilling opportunities – learning, development and training was mentioned by a number of young people at the Accenture Focus Group. The Thurles Group singled out the importance of training, and young people in Drogheda advised that it would be beneficial if the training was paid by an employer.

Acceptance of different cultures was also highlighted. This varied from individual to ethnicity. At the INOU Group, young people advised that it would be great to be able to express yourself: having tattoos was instanced, as was being able to have different hair colour, in Drogheda and Thurles.

Young people in Thurles mentioned the importance of a good atmosphere and a social aspect to work. Having a good, supportive team around you was referenced at the INOU focus group. A Safe and friendly work environment was also noted as important at the Thurles Focus group.

The Finglas and Drogheda Focus Groups advised that employers should pay the same wages to employees who are undertaking the same work. It was interesting that a different view was highlighted at SWAN, where a young person who had worked for a number of years, advised that experience should be taken into account. In nearly all groups, as we've highlighted, pay increases were seen as important over time.

Young people at the Finglas Group referred to the importance of variety in work. A number of young people at the same group were interested in working in Trades and while they had mixed views on apprenticeships, young people at the Drogheda Group highlighted their value.

There was an interesting input from a young person at the SWAN group where they advised about the importance of positive feedback. They noted that a young person's work was mentioned very positively by another staff member, but they didn't hear that from their manager.

What makes a job less attractive?

- Poor pay and terms and conditions
- Not showing pay levels
- Long unsuitable hours
- Travel distance to/from work
- Poor reputation of employer
- Lack of clear communication, including how many hours a person is likely to work
- Offered minimum hours when expectation was that more hours were on offer
- Insufficient notice for working hours

The corollary of the features that ensure a job is attractive was indicated as unattractive at a number of the Focus Groups. These included not being interested in a job, poorly paid positions, poor terms and conditions, including working long unsuitable hours, unclear communication, a lack of training and development opportunities and an unfriendly workspace. At the INOU Focus Group, not listing the rate of pay was an aspect highlighted as making a job unattractive - as it was advised that the rate of pay is not likely to be good as a result.

Young people at the Finglas Focus Group advised that insufficient notice for work was off-putting. The uncertainty of contracts, often referred to as 'If and When' contracts, whereby being on call, but not getting the expected number of hours was mentioned at the group. Similarly, young people in Drogheda highlighted that some 'Employers offer contracted hours e.g. minimum 8 hours, but advise that more hours will be available, but the person only gets 8 hours'.

Another concern and one that made a job unattractive to young applicants was the focus on aspects that they believed were not necessary. In particular, it was noted at the INOU Focus Group that a significant number of jobs include criteria for the job, sometimes listed as essential, that doesn't appear to relate directly to the requirements for doing the job effectively. Young people at the same Focus Group advised certain criteria should be listed as desirable rather than essential, including experience of doing the job, if those criteria are not essential. A recommendation emanating from the group was that many young people will not apply for particular jobs unless they are given an indication that lack of experience won't be insurmountable to getting the job. A by-line along the lines of 'We welcome applications from people with little or no work experience' was advised.

At both the SWAN and Finglas Focus Groups, young people advised that a job would be less attractive the further away it was from home - an example of over an hour was advised at SWAN.

A lack of clear communication from the manager/employer was listed as being a feature of why a job may be unattractive. At the SWAN Focus Group, poor communication around the numbers of hours that people were due to work was advised.

An aspect that would make a job less attractive, and which was referred to at the Thurles Focus Group, was if an employer had a poor reputation locally.

At the Accenture Group, not being valued sufficiently by an employer was mentioned as a negative aspect that would ensure a job was unattractive and potentially one where young people would not remain. One other aspect that was mentioned at both the Accenture and INOU Focus Groups was that a job would be less attractive if the values of the employer don't align with those of the young person.

The methods of applying for jobs were also flagged, including the negative aspect of prolonged applications.

A couple of poor practice examples where a job was less attractive was advised at the INOU Group. One young person advised that a company printed the skills, competencies that were required for the wrong job, as a very different vacancy was on offer. The other example mentioned at the same group was where the Interviewer showed no interest in the Interviewee's responses at the interview.

A solely online work experience was instanced as making a job unattractive for a person at the INOU Focus Group and advised that this would be the situation if people value a social aspect and meeting people.

A young person at the Drogheda Group noted that it would be important for them not to be employed where they would be seen working by friends.

What do you think is stopping you (or your friends) from getting a good job?

- Lack of experience / difficult to get opportunities without experience
- Criteria for the job significantly exceeding job requirements
- Lack of qualifications
- Lack of confidence
- Address
- Discrimination
- Poor HR practice
- Not knowing how to best apply for jobs
- Lack of public transport options
- Increased qualifications being sought by employers
- Employers not aware if young people working over certain number of hours/days may affect person's income – e.g. OPFP, JA/JB.

One aspect that was highlighted across the Focus Groups was how seldom employers acknowledge applications and inform people whether they have been successful. Young people at the Finglas Group for example mentioned 'No one is getting back to me. I'm getting no replies. Another at the same group advised that they received one reply 'out of loads of applications'. Some young people also advised that the delay in a response from employers was deterring them from applying for other positions if they were particularly interested in that job.

A number of different aspects were highlighted about qualifications for work. A young person at the Thurles Group advised that not having qualifications was a big issue in stopping them and their friends from getting a good job. They advised that greater assistance is needed. Lack of IT skills was instanced at the SWAN Group.

Young people at a number of the Focus Groups highlighted an emphasis on qualifications inflation and what they perceived as unnecessary qualifications for some advertised vacancies. At the INOU Group for example, a young person noted the increasing higher level of qualifications being sought by employers. At the Accenture group, a young person queried whether the qualifications being sought are necessary. One example was where a young person advised that the expectation for many software related jobs, is no longer an undergraduate, but a postgraduate qualification. Another example was where a young person noted that a driving license was required, though it was difficult from the job-specification to identify how that would be an essential requirement. The 'way a job brief is listed, scaring off potential candidates' was referenced at the Accenture Group, again advising that non-essential criteria, should be listed as desirable rather than essential.

Difficulties with the application process was putting some young people off applying for certain jobs. In Finglas, difficulties uploading CVs to some websites were highlighted. A young person noted that they were unable to upload their CV on the Indeed website. A tip from the SWAN Focus Group was to apply directly to the organisation recruiting, if possible, rather than through the recruitment websites. It was also noted at the same group that an 'awareness of how to apply' would be very useful.

Discrimination was significantly highlighted at a couple of the Focus Groups. At the Drogheda Focus Group for example a young Traveller advised that they have changed their address and their second name on some applications to increase their opportunities to access employment, but without success to date. At the INOU Group, it was noted that Travellers are 'hiding who they are' to significantly increase their job prospects.

A young person in Thurles noted that people from different ethnic groups, including Travellers are 'not getting work opportunities' as a result of their ethnicity. It was noted at the INOU Focus Group 'that some [members of different] cultures cannot hide' their identity. A young person at the Drogheda Group highlighted that it would be very important to see Travellers working in the town.

Across the different Focus Groups, a resounding recommendation was for employers to include a by-line advising that 'Applications from all young people are welcome'.

A young woman in Drogheda advised of being asked for a second interview but advised that it would be necessary to change their hair colour if hired. At the SWAN Group, a young man responded to a job advertisement and was told that they are only looking for female applicants and would not accept his application.

A young person's address was also advised of being a factor in not being able to access jobs. A young person at the INOU Group advised that address is a significant difficulty and that they 'wouldn't get a call back' because of where they live. A tip from another young person at the same group was not to put their address on the CV. A number of young people at the Thurles group also highlighted the difficulties faced by themselves and others finding work as a result of their address. At the Drogheda group it was noted that 'people still can't get a job' because of their address and this stops people from applying for jobs. A young person at the Thurles group advised that this is a 'bigger problem in a smaller town'.

A young person at the Thurles group also advised how a dress code in a local shop would exclude them from working in the shop because of the expense of the clothes. They added that the dress code ensures that young people from less advantaged areas are excluded from applying. At the Accenture focus group, it was noted that it is easier for people from more advantaged backgrounds to progress. A young person at the Thurles group advised that social status – 'how well-off or not a family is' is important.

The difficulties of travelling to work was noted. At the Drogheda focus group for example the lack of public transport outside of the town was highlighted and it would not always be possible to 'get lifts into and out of town'. As a result, some young people advised that 'assistance [is] needed with public transport' both in relation to availability and cost (though the public transport price reductions were noted as being useful).

At both the Drogheda and INOU focus groups, one issue was that employers were not aware of how working over a certain number of hours may affect a person's social welfare payment. It was noted at the latter group was that there is a 'need for greater information' on this issue.

One aspect stopping people from getting work was lack of confidence. This was advised at the INOU Focus group and a young person at the Thurles group noted that 'not having enough confidence' was preventing young people from applying for and getting work.

At the Drogheda Focus group, the difficulties of accessing work with little or no experience were highlighted. A number of Focus Groups referred to the situation where it was very difficult to get work without experience, but also being unable to acquire experience without working. At the Thurles group, it was noted that there is a 'need [to have work] experience to get a job', and without that experience they are not being given a chance.

The difficulties with not having work experience when a person is younger was also noted at the Accenture group. It was noted that the lack of work experience is stopping young people from applying for some jobs.

Intergenerational unemployment was also referenced. A young person in Thurles noted that no one in their family had ever worked.

Having a criminal record was referred to at the Thurles Group as a significant barrier to young people accessing work.

The lack of good job search skills, including interview skills was referred to at some of the Focus Groups.

Young people at the Drogheda Group highlighted a difficulty in accessing work, in that even their friends who are working 'wouldn't put in a good word' for them at their jobs. The corollary was highlighted by a young person at SWAN advising that they thought their friends were being lazy by asking them to mention their suitability to the employer. When asked if they would recommend a friend who they knew was a good worker to their employer, they advised in the negative.

If you were offered a job today, what do you think are the important things to know about the job (on your first day)?

- The importance of clear communications and a good induction e.g. knowing where to go and what to do in the organisation and the layout of the premises
- Openness of employer so that young person feels it's okay to ask questions about the role, organisation etc.
- Someone who knows the job to show a young person what to do
- Being advised on what to wear
- An example of good practice whereby the employer organised sit-down meetings for the young person who was starting their job with a number of staff colleagues over their first few days

The dominant theme from the discussions across the six Focus Groups centred on how most young people would like to be prepared for the requirements of the job and the importance of clear communication.

The value of a good induction was highlighted by young people at the Accenture Group. 'Knowing where to go' and knowledge of the job a person is undertaking were both highlighted at SWAN. Similarly, at the INOU focus group, a young person advised that 'knowing where you go [and] what you do' is very important and at the Thurles Group, 'being aware of what you're meant to be doing' was seen as being important. Another young person advised of the usefulness of a walk through by a manager or other staff member and a young person at the Thurles group suggested that it would be very useful if 'someone who knows [the]place [would] show you around'. Similarly, knowledge of the layout of the premises was highlighted at the SWAN Group.

As one young person advised, it would be very useful to have the different aspects of work 'explained as you go along'. At the Accenture Group, young people highlighted that it was useful that there were others also starting their jobs and going through induction giving the 'reassurance that they were in same boat'.

A young person advised that in their current role, a series of sit-down meetings with people across the organisation were held over the first number of days. The person added that this was very useful as it allowed them to get to know people, acquire important knowledge quickly about the work they do and to learn about the organisation.

Knowing what to wear, whether the dress code was formal, semi-formal or informal was mentioned at the SWAN Focus Group. This was also referred to at Thurles and a young person at the Accenture Group advised that it would be useful to be told, in advance of the first day, what was considered appropriate office wear.

Young people at the Accenture Group agreed that information sent out in advance by the company was very useful. They also advised of the usefulness of a point of contact being a person that they had talked to previously.

Young people at the Thurles Group advised that good communications was important, including an openness by managers or other staff members to answering questions – and for an environment or workspace culture where young workers are encouraged to ask questions. At SWAN, being able to discuss work related questions with a person's manager was seen as important.

One aspect that was highlighted as being useful was to know who the managers are and their different levels of authority and responsibility.

Other aspects that were indicated, including having the most important policy and staff handbook features highlighted and readily available online; providing clarity around work practices and procedures, including whether the organisation provides for flexi-time working; the type of training that may be required and the possibility of providing a system where a more experienced staff member is paired up with a new staff member to answer questions and support them through their initial work journey.

If you took-up a good job, what do you think would help you to stay in the job for as long as you wanted?

- Good work culture – good working environment
- Friendly staff and a social aspect
- Work valued by employer
- Flexibility
- Increased pay
- Opportunities for progression
- Values of organisation matching the person
- Making sure you're paid every week

Being supported in the workplace was listed at a number of the Focus Groups. A young person advised at the INOU Group of how another young person felt supported in satisfactorily resolving a potential issue for a client. At the SWAN Focus Group, young people noted that a good working environment and to be treated well would be important in order for a person to remain in the job.

Pay was also mentioned across the focus groups as being a key factor in young people staying in a job. At the SWAN group, a young person referred to the importance of an 'increased rate of pay'; a pay raise and 'being paid more over time' was listed at the INOU group; 'good use of pay scales' was advised at the Accenture group and 'making sure of being paid every week' was highlighted at the Thurles group.

Having an interest in the job would help a young person to stay longer in a job. This was highlighted at a number of the groups. Having a 'job you'd like' was advised at the Thurles group and again, being interested in work was mentioned at the Drogheda and other groups.

The work culture and being treated respectfully was another important consideration. At the SWAN focus group, young people advised that how staff are treated by their employer and at work is important. The Thurles group also singled out being treated well and being respected by an employer would be a key consideration in remaining in a job. Similarly, young people at the INOU group highlighted the importance of feeling welcome at work.

Young people at the Thurles group advised that having friendly co-workers and 'not staff who are negative all the time' would be important. A young person noted that a retail position they started had other staff who weren't welcoming, and they didn't stay long.

Opportunities for progression were listed as an important factor at a number of the groups. Career progression opportunities were highlighted by young people at the Accenture group; 'moving up the ladder' was referenced at the INOU group. Opportunities to upskill and expand knowledge were also advised. Having 'opportunities to develop' was referred to at the INOU group and the importance of upgrading skills was highlighted at the SWAN group. Similarly training opportunities and available budgets for training were identified as important.

Good terms and conditions were advised as being another important feature leading to the retention of young people in a job. That 'hours are consistent' and knowing the hours in advance ensuring it is easier to plan the week was advised at the INOU group. At the group, a young person also advised that 'being clear about annual leave' would be helpful, as they recalled an example where there was confusion over the available annual leave.

At the Accenture group, young people advised of additional factors that would assist in remaining in the same job. A young person noted that some organisations provide employees with the option to apply for a year's leave of absence or career-break. Another advised that it would be important that maternity leave would not adversely affect their promotion prospects.

Young people at the INOU group advised of the importance of flexibility from the employer and being treated like an adult. It was also highlighted that flexibility and give and take, will not only secure buy-in from staff, but is likely to be valuable for the employer. Similarly, the group discussed the importance of trust from an employer as being important in helping to remain in the same job.

The social aspect of work was also advised in the context of increasing the likelihood of remaining in work. This ranged from friendships and fun aspects of work highlighted at the Thurles and INOU groups, to the social groups/societies referred to by young people at Accenture.

Where 'you can see the core values of an organisation matching your own' was another reason that was given to remain longer in a job. Another aspect that was highlighted that would assist young people to remain in a job was if the employer was willing to listen and also if the employer was open to changes and new ideas. At the INOU group, a young person advised of useful one-to-one meetings in their work, where staff feel they are being listened to.

There were interesting discussions on the rate of pay. At the Drogheda and Finglas groups, young people advised that a young person whose job is the same as another staff member should receive the same level of pay. At the SWAN, Accenture and INOU groups, young people advised that it was important that wages would increase, and terms and conditions would improve the longer the person remained doing the job. At the Accenture group, a young person advised of an example whereby someone started a similar job on higher pay than an employee who had been working for two years. The person advised that this had a disillusioning effect on the person.

A number of other features were also advised, including 'Not looking for too much from a person' – from a young person at the Thurles group; being enticed to stay; a flatter management structure and nice customers. A young person at the INOU group advised that staff can be penalised in some sectors if they are not working extra hours. Another young person advised that their younger brother who is working in a company is regularly asked if they can start at time before the first bus arrives, though they only have access to public transport.

Hearing Young People: About Employers

In addition to hearing directly from young people about their perspectives on work, a key aspect of the consultations was to explore a variety of employer supports that young people advised would assist them and their friends, short of providing a job, with their job search.

If an employer can't give you a job, what would be useful for them to do for you, your friends and other young unemployed people that might help you to get a job?

- Would like to hear back from employer – lack of a response knocks confidence. Some young people advised that they may not apply for other positions when waiting for response
- Assistance to improve young people's job search skills
- Assist with mock interviews – importance of practice at interviews and more realistic mock interviews
- Encourage applications for jobs from young people
- Have a greater understanding of what a job entails
- Greater use of social media platforms to provide clearer understanding of different job types
- Attend Job Fairs and similar events

We asked young people across the Focus Groups what useful supports employers might provide. We have included the specific comments about the individual employer supports such as work experience, job shadowing, mentoring, site visits in the next question. The more generic feedback is included below.

At a number of the groups, there was agreement that it would be very useful for young people to know what the job entailed and have this explained to them. Similarly, providing information on the different tasks involved and competencies required was seen as very positive. At the SWAN group, for example, a young person advised that a 'steer from [an] employer about the job, [would help to] understand the job'. Similarly, 'Tips [directly from an employer] on how to get a job' and was mentioned at the Thurles group.

One aspect that was highlighted at nearly all of the focus groups, and at many on more than one occasion, was how useful it would be for employers to encourage applications for jobs from younger people.

Another aspect highlighted previously, but which again was prevalent across the focus groups, was how useful it would be for young people to receive acknowledgements and replies from employers. The lack of a reply from an employer was having the effect of deterring some young people for applying for other vacancies.

This appeared to be particularly the case where a young person had identified a job as either one they would really like or one they believed they had a good chance to obtain.

It was also referred to that not hearing from employers also has a detrimental effect on a young person's confidence.

An interesting suggestion at both the Drogheda and Thurles groups was for employers to forward the CV's and job applications of young people to other employers if they were not being offered jobs or job interviews. While the suggestion may be impractical, it highlights that young people are eager to be provided with work opportunities. It also indicates, for instance, the potential role of a pro-active supportive employment service that could operate in this way.

The value of 'mock' interviews was mentioned at a few of the focus groups. At the INOU group, the example of a person attending several interviews, even when they were not particularly interested in a job, provided great experience and helped them to become more relaxed at interview. It was noted by a young person at the same group that one-to-one interviews are better, easier to be more relaxed. It was also advised that it would be useful to know if interviews were one-to-one or group interviews in advance of the interview.

At the Accenture group there was a good discussion about how various social media platforms might be better used to provide a richer experience of a working day. Young people at the group proposed that 'A day in the life' of a staff member in different job roles could be an interesting series on Tik Tok and other social media platforms.

The group also advised that it would be useful to provide targeted videos and inputs that clearly illustrate what employers require from successful applicants. It was also noted that it would similarly be useful to provide input from successful applicants on how they obtained their jobs.

A tip from young people at a couple of the focus groups was to apply directly to the company who are recruiting, rather than through a recruitment website. A young person advised that they had sent in multiple applications to a large recruitment service but hadn't received any replies.

Young people at a couple of focus groups advised that support is needed to develop young people's job search skills, including ensuring young people have a quality CV and very good interview techniques. Organising Career Fairs and Career workshops was suggested at the Accenture focus group. Central to this was the suggestion that it was important that connections are made with young people.

At the SWAN group, a young person advised that the SWAN programme, Career Leap, which includes a work experience element, utilised role plays which they found useful. At the group, it was also advised that it was very useful to hear of someone's career journey.

There was a discussion at one of the groups about whether it was useful to hand in CVs. It was noted that some Employers take in CVs, and some don't. One young person at the group mentioned how an employer threw a CV into a bin after it was handed in.

Would you be willing to attend any of the following from employers who may be unable to give you employment?

Work Experience

- Valuable work experience
- Essential that the employer is interested
- Might provide an opportunity to secure a job in that organisation or a good chance in a different organisation
- Allows the young person to experience whether that work is suitable
- Useful for CV
- Good for reference
- Value of paid work experience
- The Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP) seen as useful

At a number of focus groups, the value of work experience was highlighted. A young person at the INOU group mentioned that it allowed a person to 'check it out to see if it's for you'. Another young person advised at the Thurles group that 'relevant work experience could be important in showing [a person] can do the job' and at the SWAN group it was noted that work experience provides an opportunity to 'learn through jumping in at the deep end'.

At the Accenture group, young people advised that a lack of experiential learning can make it difficult to know what suitable and quality work experience might be. 'A day in the life of' could provide a better understanding of what it would mean in practice, of letting people know.

It was also suggested that it would be very useful if the work experience worked out well for the employer that it could lead to a job for the person. A young person at the Thurles focus group mentioned that it would be very useful if the work experience 'could turn into [a] paid role'. Similarly, at the Drogheda group a young person advised that they 'wanted real work experience [with the] chance of getting a job'. It was also proposed that it would be useful for an employer to interview a candidate for a job vacancy, following a significant and successful work experience.

In addition to providing this opportunity, others also highlighted that work experience can provide a good reference and be 'good for the CV'. It was also noted that work experience can be particularly useful for young people.

The value of paid internships was highlighted at a number of focus groups, including the Accenture group.

At the Finglas group, some young people advised that they would undertake unpaid work experience for only a short time. When the group were asked if they would be interested in undertaking the Work Placement Experience Programme – which pays €323 a week, the group were very positive about this potential opportunity.

At the Finglas focus group, a young person noted that it is important that work experience is meaningful, and it is not solely doing menial jobs. It was noted that in this situation a young person may not be acquiring the best quality work experience. At the SWAN group, a young person advised of the requirement for work experience to 'do something proper'. It was also advised that for work experience to be useful, it is necessary for employers to be interested and to provide tasks for the young person. Opportunities for young people from less advantaged areas to acquire work experience in wide variety of job types was raised.

Job Shadowing

- Need patient person to undertake job shadowing
- Can be useful for particular roles, though not all roles may be suitable
- The duration of job shadowing may depend on the job

There were interesting discussions on the usefulness of job shadowing. One recurring theme across a number of groups was that the person who was being shadowed in their work would need to be patient. A young person at the INOU group advised that it 'takes the right person who is patient to do this.'

A young person from the SWAN group gave an example of transferring to the Deli section in a Supermarket and how being taught about how to fold the wrap properly was very useful. Similarly, another young person at the same group advised that they shadowed another employee for ten minutes on the till at a supermarket and advised that a longer time would have been more beneficial.

At a number of the groups, young people advised that job shadowing would be more effective if it was for a couple of hours rather than a day, though it was also advised that the optimum job shadowing duration may also be dependent on the nature of the job. At the INOU group, for example, a young person noted that 'certain roles might be more suitable.' At the Accenture group, the corollary was highlighted where certain roles may not be suitable, including for GDPR reasons.

It was also noted that being shown what a job entails is better than being told about the job.

Mentoring

- Useful in assisting with job-seeking
- Someone to seek advice from
- Inform about soft skills, etiquette in office
- Useful to have someone supporting the young person.

Mentoring was noted as being useful across the Focus groups. One facet that was seen as being useful was that a mentor would ensure 'the young person [is] aware of useful information'. At the Thurles group, a young person advised that it would be great to have an 'honest supporter'.

Another aspect of the potential value of a mentor was that they would be available to assist in 'jobs you might want help with'. Similarly, at the INOU group, a young person advised that if you were 'having a problem, [you could] go to them'.

Related useful features included that a person wouldn't be afraid to ask their mentor questions and that they would receive informed answers. As one young person highlighted at the INOU group, the mentor would 'not [be]guessing, letting you know what you have to do'.

Some of the useful advice that mentors could provide included developing soft skills and providing information on office etiquette, including how to undertake work functions appropriately.

Employer Talks

- Provide tips on how to apply for jobs
- Employer to explain what the job is about and also what is required, including expected skills, attributes etc for job vacancies
- Usefulness in both employer seeing and hearing from young person and young person seeing and hearing from the employer
- Providing potential networking opportunity

The value of employers meeting with young people, explaining about existing job types and vacancies and providing useful information on how young people might optimise their opportunities of obtaining these jobs were highlighted as being useful.

At the INOU group, young people highlighted that hearing directly from employers about the characteristics that they require in job applicants and the hard and soft skills they expect, was seen as being very useful.

The potential personal connection was also advised as being potentially very beneficial. It was noted for instance that not only would an employer benefit from seeing and meeting with potential young workers, but seeing and hearing from an employer would also be useful from the young person's perspective.

At the INOU group, the value of networking and having a chat with a potential employer was noted as being potentially valuable.

A young person at the Accenture group advised of the value of online Careers Fairs and noted that was where they learned about Accenture and other potential employers. It was noted that opportunities which allow potential applicants to meet and hear from employers, such as employer talks and Careers Fairs, helps to humanise the company and helps to crystallise the idea of that working with that employer might be more attainable than thought.

Some young people at the Thurles group, were worried that meeting an employer as part of a large group could be harmful to their job prospects.

One young person advised that they were worried 'that the job could be completely different from what employer has outlined'.

Site Visits

- Could be very useful for those who were out of employment for a long time or hadn't worked previously. Assists person to better visualise themselves working
- It demystifies the staff-only door
- Provides an opportunity to learn about the company and get a good sense of the business

At the Thurles group, young people advised that a site visit would allow a person to get a 'feel for the job' and another noted similarly, that it would give them 'a sense of what it's about'.

It was also advised at the INOU group, that if a person was not in employment for a significant period of time, contact with employers, including site visits could be very useful. It was also noted that it would be easier for a person to envisage themselves working if they visit a company or factory. It was also highlighted that this would demystify the staff only door for young people that may not have worked previously.

Taster Courses

- Good opportunity to check if this is of interest
- Covers essential aspects of potential job
- Would be useful if designated path from course to employer / job
- Useful if accredited or recognised for CV

The usefulness of taster courses was also highlighted across the focus groups. At the INOU group, the value of taster courses proving young people with a good idea of what's expected in a job and a 'chance to check what you like'.

It was also mentioned that covering essential elements of a potential job in taster courses would be very useful. Similarly, at the Drogheda group, Taster courses were signalled as 'showing what a job is'.

Opportunities for linkages between taster courses and potential work opportunities were also signalled at one of the groups. It was also suggested that having the courses accredited or recognised on CV would be beneficial.

At the Accenture group, a couple of the young attenders advised that online courses would be better, especially job specific tailored ones. At the same group it was also noted that providing taster courses would be useful for open roles and current vacancies.

It was also proposed at one of the groups that shorter tailored taster courses would be preferable.

Assistance with applications, including online

- Useful to hear from employer about their application process and what is necessary to include in application
- Useful to know level of detail required
- Need for good internet, broadband

There were interesting discussions on job applications. Some young people, at the Thurles group, mentioned that it was easier to ignore online applications and that as a result it might be best to deliver the CV to the employer. At the INOU group, a young person noted the opposite that online applications are more useful as it's not necessary 'to drop a CV in'.

Across the focus groups, it was advised that it would be very useful to hear from employers about what they are looking for in their online application. At the INOU group, one of the young people noted that it would be 'useful to know the level of detail you're required to put in fields', particularly when the space for answers does not include a word count. It was also indicated at the same group, that it would be useful to hear directly from an employer about their application process and particularly, the attributes and skills required for that job. At the SWAN group, a young person advised that it would be 'useful to get help' from employers.

At the Accenture group, a young person noted that it would be useful to know the key words that are important in online applications. Another young attender at the same group indicated that it can be difficult for people to identify and name their skills and competencies.

The need for good internet and broadband was noted in relation to ensuring successful online applications.

Interestingly, there was a tip from a young person at both the SWAN and Accenture groups that it would be most useful for people to go through an employer directly and not through recruitment websites.

Interviews/Feedback on interviews

- Like to know if successful or not in getting the job
- Would know for next time and take into account feedback
- Not easy to go for feedback
- Difficult to get interviews

Similar to advising that assistance from employers on applications would be useful, young people from a number of groups highlighted the usefulness of tips from employers to improve interview skills. It was advised at the SWAN group, that this would also provide an opportunity for young people to learn for future interviews.

At the Thurles group, a young attender advised that they would like to see more realistic mock interviews and another at the same group advised that it is difficult to get interviews.

At the SWAN group, a tip from a young person attending was to 'feel like [you are] talking to a friend'.

It was mentioned that it is useful to get feedback from interviews, though it was noted by young people at a couple of the groups that requesting feedback is not easy for them.

Hearing Young People: A New Charter

What commitments would you like Employers to make to help young people access a good job?

- Give opportunities to young people
- Applications welcome from young people
- Applications welcome from young people without experience
- Will treat young people's applications fairly and will treat young staff fairly
- Welcome diversity

A number of points noted in response to earlier questions and discussions are relevant for the type of commitments that young people would like Employers to make to help young people access a job. These included the importance of getting back to young people when they apply for job vacancies.

At the Finglas group, there was a discussion on whether it would be useful if employers included a notification on job vacancies where previous work experience was not necessary, that they would welcome people with no work experience. A young person advised that an employer would be more likely to select a candidate with work experience. This prompted additional discussion and the young person advised that if the employer was giving each candidate equal consideration, 'that would be great [and they] would be more confident'. Similarly, at the Thurles group, a young person highlighted that employers could include information on the job advertisement that previous work experience is unnecessary – if it is not – and that the advertisement and application process would focus on what's necessary for the job.

At the SWAN focus group, young people discussed what commitments would be most useful from employers. They advised that it would be very beneficial for employers to include text encouraging applications from young people when they have job vacancies. Similarly, at the Thurles group, a number of young people noted that it would be great if more employers would give young people an opportunity, one of the group noting that young people should be 'given a chance'.

It has already been highlighted, particularly in the section focussing on what is preventing young people or their friends from accessing job opportunities, that discrimination is a key concern for young people from particular ethnic backgrounds and young people living in certain housing estates. At a number of the groups, young people advised that a very useful commitment that employers can make to young people is to include information on job advertisements that all applications will be treated equally and fairly.

Additional Commentary

The following comments arise from reflecting on the consultations with the young people which the INOU feel are worth noting. In particular the value that the Youth Groups involved in the consultations offer young people – in the provision of services, work, supports and a sense of place. This was very noticeable in the two Youth Work Ireland groups in Drogheda and Thurles, the Finglas Connections programme and the SWAN youth group in central Dublin. For example, SWAN noted that they have a welfare fund to purchase clothes for young people going for an interview.

The importance of good quality career guidance in schools was also identified. One young man spoke of being told that foundation maths was good enough for an apprenticeship when in fact it is not. Schools need to ensure they prepare young people for the world of work. Consideration could be given to the use of Employment Guidance Toolkit in schools which includes modules about what is needed at work. It was also advised by a person overseeing a local youth group that it would be very useful if there was a broad range of good quality work experience modules available to transition students in DEIS schools.

At the Drogheda Focus Group, an increase in the Jobseeker's Allowance rate for young unemployed people was called for – at present the maximum rate for a young person living at home is 59% of the rate for people aged 25 years and over.

There was an interesting discussion at the Finglas Group where a number of young people remarked that they would not take-up a job with monthly pay. They were unaware of Supplementary Welfare Allowance, in particular Payment Pending Wages, which could make moving to such a job more manageable. Welfare-to-work supports need to be made more visible to help people make informed choices. However, for this to happen it is really important that people can access the required supports and services when they need them – at one focus group it was said that 'Intreo never answer phone, or the Tax Office'.

A small number of young people were neurodiverse, and one advised they were autistic. They particularly highlighted the need for clearer communication by an employer at all stages of the job application process, right through to starting with the company.

Volunteering was also noted as being useful at a couple of the Focus Groups. Three positive aspects of volunteering that were referenced as being very useful: acquiring very useful work experience; benefiting from social and networking opportunities and the value of references.

At one of the Focus Groups, a young person gave an example of someone they knew who when they became long-term unemployed had their confidence very seriously dented.

APPENDIX 1

Employers Youth Employment Charter Consultation Event

Agenda

11.50 Light Lunch and Refreshments

12. 05 Welcome

12.10 Context Setting

12.15 Facilitated Group Discussion

12.55 Break

1.10 Facilitated Group Discussion

1.55 Thank you and next steps

APPENDIX 2

Facilitated Questions at Focus Groups

What in your opinion makes a job attractive?

What makes a job less attractive?

What do you think is stopping you if you're not working and/or your friends if they are not working from getting a good job?

If you were offered a job today, what do you think are the important things to know about the job (on your first day)?

If you took-up a good job, what do you think would help you and/or your friends to stay in the job for as long as you wanted?

If an employer can't give you a job, what would be useful for them to do for you, your friends and other young unemployed people that might help you to get a job?

Would you be willing to attend any of the following from employers who may be unable to give you employment?

- Work Experience
- Job Shadowing
- Mentoring
- Employer Talks
- Site Visits
- Taster Courses
- Assistance on Applications, including online
- Interviews/Feedback on Interviews

What commitment would you like to see employers make to help young people access a good job? What would you like to see in a charter / statement from employers about employing young people?