



Parent Power - Unlocking parents' employment networks to provide quality work experiences

1. The issue

Social mobility is often referred to in the context of raising the aspirations of young people to access higher education. But social mobility should not be limited by educational achievement. We believe that opportunities to improve a young person's access to employment and career prospects can be harnessed from local communities.

Work experience is often the first chance a young person has the opportunity to engage with the world of work. The preparation and management of such an important experience should never be underestimated. A bad experience could affect the young person's confidence as well as putting off a prospective employer from offering an opportunity again.

According to DfE statistics 95% of pupils in Years 10 and 11 participate in work experience each year but there is a lack of quality work placements:

"A lack of high quality experience in the workplace excludes many young people from the job market, especially those who are unsuited to or not motivated by an academic pathway. In the current market, there is a lack of high quality work placements that provide credible alternative routes into work" **Private Equity Foundation 2013 – Response to National Traineeship Consultation**

The responsibility for finding a work experience placement is often placed on the parent, who will use their own networks and contacts to find an opportunity.

A recent review conducted for ACAS identified research which showed the importance of parental employment experience and networks on the decisions made by young people about work:

'In a survey of around 3,000 students, Millward et al (2006) found that the young people in their study knew very little about the details of particular jobs that they aspired to and that personal experience or discussions with family and friends were the primary sources of knowledge accessed. Parental advice on jobs was found to be the most used source. Similarly, Bynner et al

(2002) note that parents are usually the first adults who young people turn to for advice about jobs.' **Young people entering work: A review of the research – ACAS 2012**

However nearly 1 in 6 children and young people in the UK live in a workless household, although total numbers have reduced since 1996, this represents 1.75 million children.

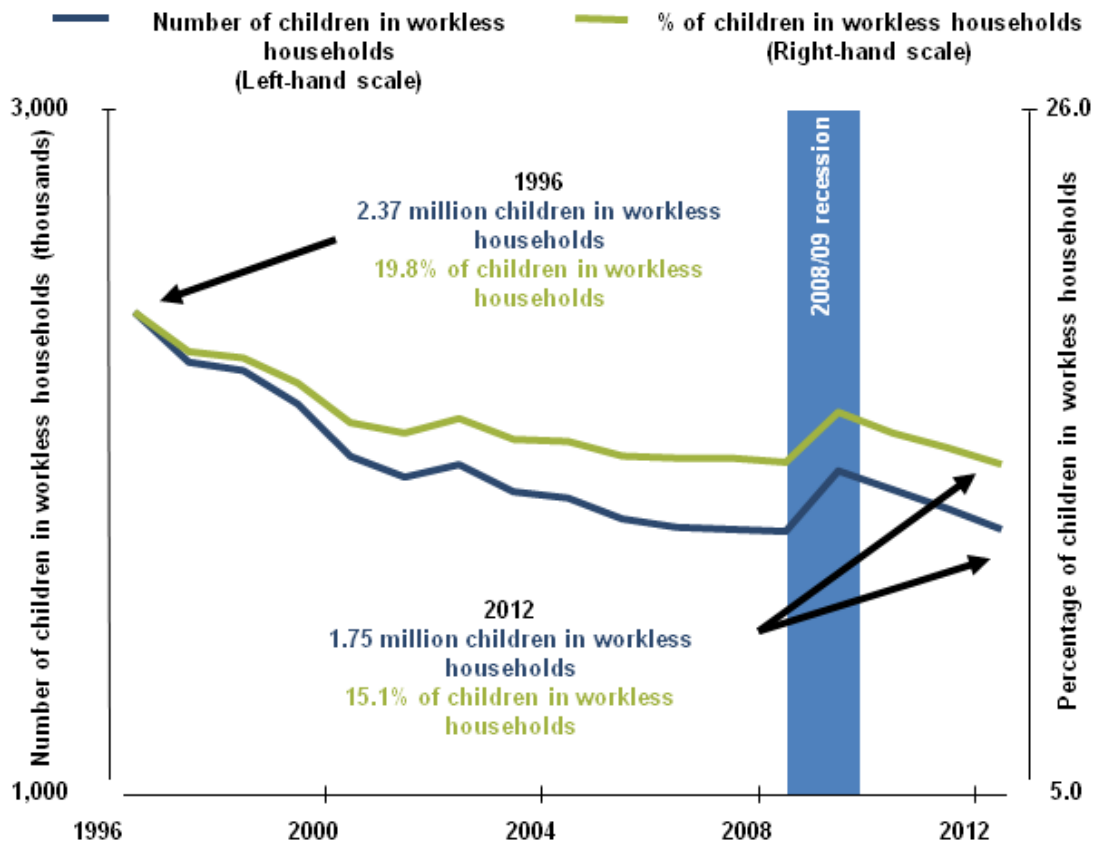


Figure 1 ONS - Working and Workless Households, 2012 - Statistical Bulletin

There were 3.9 million young people in secondary education in England in 2012 (DfE Statistical release 2012). By applying a workless household rate of 15.1% this could represent as much as 600,000 young people in education who are living in a workless household.

Many of these young people are likely to be at a significant disadvantage if they are unable to rely on their parent(s) knowledge, networks and experience of work.

2. A parent's story

In February 2012, I received a generic letter from the school about the requirements for parents to find work experience placements for two weeks in June 2012. The onus was firmly placed on parents to source and contact the employer and let the school know when this had been arranged.

Many of my son's friends relied on the networks of their parents who were self-employed or worked in small businesses and therefore found it easy to provide a experience for their child's friends, some relied on informal swapping; 'you have mine if I have yours'.

There was no engagement with the school's careers teacher nor a requirement or at least an acknowledgement that the work experience needed to be relevant to the careers aspiration of the young person.

When I did manage to get a placement at the local Morrison's, the school refused it on the basis that they did not have the right links with the head office and therefore could not arrange it.

At the last minute my son was taken on by a printing and design company I work with and he is now applying to join their apprenticeship programme. The school never contacted the company about how the work experience had gone.

This experience raised a number of issues for me:

- My son would not have had the opportunity of work experience had I not been able to find one for him. The school had no Plan B.
- The quality and relevance of the work experience placement was of no concern to the school, neither was capturing feedback from the employer nor thanking them for their participation. This makes me think that schools have not thought about retaining an employer's commitment for providing future work experience.
- Work experience is a game of chance, if you have the right networks you can get a decent opportunity for your child.

3. A solution

Parent Power is essentially a service we want to develop that facilitates the exchange of work experience opportunities by tapping into parent's networks in one or a number of schools.

Working on the basis that c600 children attend a secondary school and at least 60% of one or both of their parents are in work, we think there could be at least 360 possible work placement opportunities within these parent's networks that could be tapped into. That is just in one school. Imagine using Parent Power between schools in more deprived areas and those in less deprived areas. The volume of opportunities could far exceed demand and provide opportunities to those young people whose parents are not working. As a conduit for supporting social mobility for young people, especially those less likely to follow an academic route as well as supporting the transition from learning to work, in time Parent Power could also be extended towards securing longer placements and even into possible apprenticeship openings.

We envisage that Parent Power could be delivered through a web-based platform hosted by the school and supported by the careers advisor. It would;

- help to recruit parents and give them the tools to promote the scheme to their employers and employers of their friends and family. In particular using CSR as a lever,
- provide handy information and guides to employers, particularly those smaller and micro enterprises that can be harder to reach but still willing to participate,
- provide an online portal of work experience opportunities that young people can apply for based on their career aspirations and location needs,
- provide young people with toolkits and resources to help them manage their work experience positively,
- capture feedback from the employer and the young person on their experience and possibly link into existing online recruitment platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and,
- create a community of participating employers and reward their involvement through awards and testimonials.

There are existing software packages that provide work experience management tools to schools and colleges. But our searching has shown that there is nothing available through the web which seeks to use parent networks as a route to securing work experience opportunities.

4. What we want to do

At this stage we want to conduct an action research project to;

- test the model to see how this could work practically both for schools and parents through a series of pilots, working with schools in different areas, where there is potential for collaboration,
- determine through a proof of concept method what the technological approach would need to be, the range of functionality required and content, and
- explore the potential for offering rewards to parents as an additional incentive for taking part.

A key feature of this stage is to also look at sustainability and scalability, the business plan and how best this could be delivered (through an existing organization or new social enterprise/CIC).

- If the outcome of the action research project is positive, then we would look for funding to scale up and develop the technology.

Our initial assessment is that there is a sustainable social business that could develop out of this project and its potential to reach beyond England and across the UK and possibly internationally.

5. What do we need?

At this stage we are looking at financial contributions towards the research along with recommendations on and introductions to schools/areas that we could approach to take part in the study. We would like to conduct this research in two areas of the country at least, if we are able to secure more funding then this could be extended.

We want to conduct one or two pilots in London, possibly one working with two schools in one borough and the other working with four schools in two boroughs to test the scale and reach ideally linking less and more deprived areas together. We are also interested in piloting this in the North.

In return for the financial contribution we would;

- ensure you are involved in the design of the research and that areas of your interest are appropriately explored,
- give you attribution to the action research and promote your involvement in the report,
- give you first refusal of being involved in taking the research to proof of concept stage and securing additional funding, and
- explore your involvement as a contributing/founding partner in the enterprise and a shareholder if a Community Interest Company is established.

6. Next steps

We are really excited by this project and its potential to help young people on their journey from learning to earning. The policy direction of secondary education and announcements such as the TechBacc, the new National Traineeship and reform to 14-19 education means that the demand for good quality work experience is going to significantly increase.

Parent Power as a concept has the potential to make a real positive difference to young people's careers, regardless of their household circumstances.

If you would like to get involved through either funding or recommendations of schools or other partners then please get in touch with me.

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Read my blog on my son's journey from learning to earning.

<http://www.rocketsciencelab.co.uk/employability-news-a-journey-from-learning-to-earning-part-2/>