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Young People's Expectations of Work and the Readiness of the Workplace for Young People: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

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Executive Summary

This research examines high-potential Generation-Z's expectations of work and the contemporary workplace. The expectations of these young people on the cusp of making their education-to-work transition are compared with employers' expectations of future young employees to assess contemporary workplace readiness for the emerging workforce, and whether young people's expectations correspond (or not) with the skills and attributes required in modern and future workplaces.

Using the Capability Approach as an analytical lens, the research sought to uncover what young people value in terms of their future working lives. Data collection consisted of a triangulated and three-staged approach, with the aim of capturing a wide range of views and experiences of multiple stakeholders including key informants, young people, and a diverse group of employers. The empirical research design was informed by a literature review undertaken prior to collecting data, and each consecutive stage of data collection informed the design of the next stage.

Findings reveal that the changing nature of work and young people's subsequent expectations of the contemporary workplace, its leadership, and the development of workplace relationships may differ from previous generations. These expectations continue to shape the nature of psychological contracts (implicit employment deal), which are increasingly formed on the principle of transactional (short-term mutual exchanges) as opposed to traditional relational (long-term commitment and loyalty) factors. Moreover, there may be some dissonance between (unrealistic) workplace expectations and realities. For example, employers believed that young people making their education-to-work transition are not always sufficiently prepared and equipped for the world of work. Conversely, some employers may have different – potentially unrealistic – expectations of young workers. Rather than pitch generations against each other in the workplace, there is a need to harness and embrace the synergies that can be derived from high-functioning multi-generational workforces as both younger and established workers each have valued and complementary skillsets.

The report concludes by reflecting on practice implications and offering 10 specific recommendations to employers, and educators and policy makers.

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Introduction

The aim of this research is to examine high-potential Generation-Z's¹ expectations of work and the contemporary workplace. The expectations of these young people on the cusp of making their education-to-work transition are compared with employers' expectations of future young employees to assess contemporary workplace readiness for the emerging workforce, and whether young people's expectations correspond (or not) with the skills and attributes required in modern and future workplaces.

The project encapsulates three key elements:

- Generation Z's expectations of work and the contemporary workplace
- Employer perceptions of the readiness of young people for the workplace
- Employer perspectives on the readiness of workplaces for the emerging workforce

Four guiding research questions directed the study:

1. What are high potential Generation-Z's expectations of work and contemporary workplace design?
2. How do high potential Generation-Z imagine possibilities for their future working lives, and how does this affect how they act in the present?
3. To what extent do employers perceive the work expectations of high potential Generation-Z to be in common, or different, to the expectations of work held by previous generations? If required, are employers able and willing to adapt to, and meet, the expectations of Generation-Z?
4. To what extent are high potential Generation-Z able and willing to meet the requirements of contemporary workplaces?

Using the Capability Approach as an analytical lens, the research seeks to uncover what young people value in terms of their future working lives. Research on workplace experiences of Generation-Z is only emerging, therefore making this research appropriate and timely. The research is also informed through a series of key informant interviews and culminates with practice implications and a set of recommendations designed to be of use to multiple stakeholders.

¹ For this project, we define high-potential Generation-Z participants as aged 16-21 years (e.g., Goh and Lee, 2018), either in full-time education or having recently made their education-to-work transition, and who demonstrate key leadership qualities and attributes (demonstrated through their participation in various groups and entities, e.g., youth volunteer schemes and forums).

Research Context

Driven by an ageing population and concerns about labour market shortages (Szinovacz, 2011) since the mid-1990s, the UK government has moved away from encouraging older workers to take early retirement to make way for younger workers, to encouraging the extension of working lives (Phillipson, 2013). This has resulted in increasingly multi-generational workplaces.

Broadly, ‘generations’ can be understood as groups of individuals born in the same period, experiencing similar cultural contexts, leading to shared understanding (Campbell *et al.*, 2017; Campbell *et al.*, 2015; Eyerman and Turner 1998; Mannheim 1952).² There is a fascination about the impact of different generations on organisational outcomes (Costanza and Finkelstein 2017), including concerns about the potential for conflict between generations (Christensen *et al.*, 2018). The human resource management (HRM) literature has sought to classify the different attributes of each generation to identify ways in which to manage their needs and optimise their talents and these are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Generational Attributes

Baby boomers (born 1945 - early 1960s)	Experienced / Committed / Optimistic / Strong sense of duty / Competitive / Live to work / Immediate gratification / Mentoring / Teamwork / Process oriented / Work long hours/ Value face-to-face and electronic interactions / Value public recognition / Immediate gratification/reward / Personal growth / Challenge authority / Resistant to change / Not technologically savvy / Less trainable
Generation-X (born early 1960s - early 1980s)	Self-directed/reliant / Teamwork / Collaboration/ Value quality of life and developing human relationship / Risk takers / Outcomes oriented / Work-to-live / Comfortable with technology / Do not expect to work for one employer their whole career / Sceptical / Dislike being micromanaged / Value direct communication / Value outward tangible signs of success and immediate gratification
Generation-Y/ Millennials (born early 1980s - mid-1990s)	Optimistic / Teamwork / Outcomes oriented / Civic minded/ Easily accept changes / Multitaskers / Value success, career and money / Technologically proficient and expect electronic communication / ‘Loyalty-lite’ / Need mentoring and constant feedback / Expect instant rewards / Strong social relationships / Work-life balance / Prefer to be coached rather than managed / Uncomfortable with rigid corporate structures / Expect rapid progression
Generation-Z (born 1995-2010)	Technological natives and can teach others / Expect electronic tools and communication / Independent / Entrepreneurial / Aware of personal brand / Outcomes oriented / Expect instant rewards / Expect rapid progression / Prefer digital communication over face-to-face interaction / Prefer individual tasks / Thrive on teamwork / Prefer to work in organisations that are consumers of / Value stable employment and financial security / Low emotional intelligence / Prefer feedback

Source: Derived from Bencsik *et al.* (2016); Christensen *et al.* (2018); Conway and Monks (2017); Deloitte (2018); Goh and Lee (2018); Knapp *et al.* (2017); McGuire *et al.* (2007); PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011).

² Note: Although the concept of generations has a long history (Mannheim, 1952), it is not well theoretically defined or developed (Eyerman and Turner, 1998).

However, it can be argued that much of this literature perpetuates generational stereotypes. These stereotypes may create false assumptions about expected behaviour and are often not supported by valid and robust empirical research (Costanza and Finkelstein, 2015, 2017; Joshi *et al.*, 2011; Lyons and Kuron, 2014; Parry and Urwin, 2017). Managers need to be careful not to pitch generations against each other and instead focus on the integration of a multi-generational workforce. With research on the workplace experiences and expectations of Generation-Z only just emerging (e.g., Bencsik *et al.* (2016), Goh and Lee (2018), Grow and Yang (2018) and Shatto and Erwin (2016)), it is important to extend the research base in this area, uncovering what young people value, rather than resorting to stereotypes, as well as focusing on commonalities between generations in addition to any differences.

The aim of this research is to examine high-potential Generation-Z's expectations of work and the contemporary workplace. A range of disruptors are changing the nature and meaning of work and the contemporary workplace (UKCES, 2014). On the one hand, Generation-Z can expect to participate in increasingly automated workplaces, where many occupations and/or job-tasks may be at high risk of becoming obsolete (Arntz *et al.*, 2016; Centre for the New Economy and Society, 2018; Frey and Osborne 2017). On the other hand, occupational re-design coupled with workforce re-training could promote growth (Bakhshi *et al.*, 2017). Research suggests that businesses expect to extend their workforce to new productivity-enhancing roles, and that automation could lead to the creation of new roles (Centre for the New Economy and Society, 2018). As automation occurs, the work that remains will become increasingly 'human' in nature. Therefore, developing and refining those core human skills that technology cannot (yet) reproduce or replace will be necessary for long-term stability (Bakhshi *et al.*, 2017; Goos 2018; Manyika *et al.*, 2017; Shoss 2017).

Early year's context affects attitudes (Thompson and Gregory, 2012) and thus workplace expectations are likely to be shaped by the post-2008 recession period that Generation-Z grew up in, as well as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic precipitated education and labour market crisis. Since the 2008 economic downturn, young people have followed increasingly complex, delayed and/or individualised transitions into the labour market, becoming trapped in precarious and poor-quality jobs (Coppola and O'Higgins, 2016; Hardgrove *et al.*, 2015; Murgia and Poggio 2014; Otto *et al.*, 2017). Precarious work, often associated with the gig economy (Kuhn, 2016), lacks security and stability, and may involve zero-hours contracts (Hardgrove *et al.*, 2015). The effects of

precariousness have not spared highly qualified and/or skilled young people (Murgia and Poggio, 2014) who are the focus of this research.

The education and labour market crisis precipitated by the Covid-19 pandemic is expected to result in structural adjustments and protracted disruptions, greater than those experienced after the 2008 recession (Bell and Blanchflower, 2020; Pouliakas and Branka, 2020). The disruption that the pandemic has had on young people's education and employment is unprecedented. Final year students across secondary, further, and higher education saw classes move online and/or their education journeys end abruptly with the cancellation of exams (Swinney, 2020a; Universities UK, 2020). As many as 75,000 of those receiving their Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualification awards in August 2020 saw their grades initially downgraded from their teacher's estimates – although they were revised the following week (Swinney, 2020b).

At the same time, sectors traditionally attracting education leaver (e.g., retail, hospitality) have been most affected by lockdown measures (Bell *et al.*, 2020; Henehan, 2020; ILO, 2020; Pouliakas and Branka, 2020). Education leavers who may have previously secured jobs ahead of graduation, may now find that these offers have been withdrawn and that they must accept lower-level jobs than expected (Mayhew and Anand, 2020), which may affect future progression into higher paid jobs (Costas-Dias *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, the scarring effects of a poor-start and/or entering the labour market during a recession on future employment and wellbeing is well-documented (Cutler *et al.*, 2015; Gregg and Tominey, 2005; Liu *et al.*, 2016; Mavromaras *et al.*, 2015; Schmillen and Umkehrer, 2017; Virtanen *et al.*, 2016).

The changing nature of work outlined above has important implications for young people's expectations of the workplace, its leadership, and the development of workplace relationships. For example, psychological contracts (implicit employment deal) are increasingly formed on the principle of transactional (short-term mutual exchanges), as opposed to traditional relational (long-term commitment and loyalty) factors (Deepthi and Baral, 2013; Rosseau, 1989, 2011). These changing workplace expectations have important implications for employers and managers through the choices and provision of human resource management (HRM) practices that include, for example, training and development, flexible working, and health and wellbeing practices (Kooij *et al.*, 2013), as well as those practices associated with employee engagement and retention (e.g., Khan, 1990; Khan and Fellows, 2013).

Methodology

The methodology comprised a triangulated and three-staged approach to data collection, with the aim of capturing a wide range of views and experiences of multiple stakeholders including key informants, young people, and a diverse group of local (to Edinburgh) employers. The empirical research design was informed by a literature review undertaken prior to collecting data, and each consecutive stage of data collection informed the design of the next stage.

Stage 1: Key Informant Interviews

The initial stage of the study comprised a series of in-depth interviews and informal conversations with 12 ‘expert’ key informants, or what Gioia *et al.* (2012, p.17) describe as ‘knowledge agents’. A range of organisations from across Scotland, which have responsibility for the development and/or employment of young people were contacted by the research team resulting in 12 organisations agreeing to participate. Interviews took place between September 2019 and November 2020 with eleven being conducted face-to-face and one being conducted online using Microsoft Teams due to Covid-19 restrictions.

A semi-structured format was utilised that included an interview schedule with a flexible structure of questions, allowing for some deviation and ‘grand tour’ (Leech, 2002, p.667) questions to develop particular and interesting lines of inquiry or to delve deeper into topics. Interviews typically lasted around an hour and all were audio recorded with participants’ permission and transcribed verbatim. Interviews followed a protocol comprising six broad themes with one to three questions posed to participants under each theme. The themes were drawn from the earlier literature review and comprised: mutual (employer-young people’s) expectations of work and the workplace; the employment relationship; digitalisation and workplace flexibility; skills and career development; mental health and wellbeing; and macro-economic factors. Analysis of participant responses helped to inform later themes and questions that were asked in stages 2 and 3 of the research.

Stage 2: Focus Groups with Young People

This stage of the research involved a series of five focus groups with young people aged 16-21 years, who were either in full-time education or had recently made their education-to-work transition, and who demonstrated key leadership qualities and attributes (demonstrated through

their participation in various groups and entities). A total of 37 young people took part in a focus group, with the overall composition shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Composition of Focus Groups

Group 1	Secondary school (participants were taking part in the Young Enterprise Scotland programme)	9 participants
Group 2	Secondary school (participants were taking part in the Young Enterprise Scotland programme)	6 participants
Group 3	Young people’s training organisation	6 participants
Group 4	Organisational young employee network	4 participants
Group 5	Organisational young volunteer group	12 participants

Every effort was made to ensure that participants were drawn from a diverse range of backgrounds. All secondary schools with teams participating in the Young Enterprise (Lothian) Company Programme³ were approached in addition to a range of young employee networks and forums in Edinburgh and Fife, which were either known to the research team or recommended by stage 1 interview participants. This process resulted in the five viable focus groups. Focus groups took place between September 2019 and December 2020 with three groups being conducted face-to-face and two online using Microsoft Teams due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

Focus groups are useful for enabling the snowballing of ideas and comparison of views between participants. The focus groups sought to uncover what young people value in terms of their future working lives. The group discussions were structured under three (loose) themes, comprising: hopes and concerns (about future work/career); what makes a good place to work; and expectations of work and the future workplace. Focus groups lasted 60 to 90 minutes and incorporated a highly interactive and participative approach using a pre-defined set of probing questions under each theme, while at the same time allowing for the young people to express their views and ideas. Within the face-to-face groups, flipchart notes were taken on each theme which, in addition to helping to elicit further detail from participants, also aided the data analysis process. The latter online groups were audio recorded and, while they incorporated the same three themes, rather than flipchart notes, participants were encouraged to make use of the online ‘chat’ function in addition to expressing their views verbally. Conducting focus groups online proved more challenging than

³ The Young Enterprise Company Programme encourages students to set-up and run their own company over the course of one academic year. See www.lothianyes.com.

the face-to-face groups (Moore *et al.*, 2015), however the use of online tools encouraged greater participation within the virtual environment.

Stage 3: Modified Delphi Study with Employers

The third and final stage of the research involved a modified Delphi exercise using a panel of employers. The Delphi technique is a process used to bring a group of experts on a particular topic, or 'complex problem' (Linstone and Turoff, 2002, p.3), as close as possible to consensus (Yousuf, 2007). It is therefore generally considered to be a more reliable methodology than a single focus group or questionnaire (Hasson and Keeney, 2011). A wide range of local (to Edinburgh) organisations and employers from across all business sectors were invited by e-mail to take part in the Delphi study. The Delphi study took place between December 2020 and February 2021.

Within a classic or 'pure' Delphi exercise, data are gathered in 'rounds' normally comprising three rounds (or more) of questionnaires, with each consecutive questionnaire developed from the responses to the previous one. In this case, round 1 involved an online questionnaire facilitated by the Novi Survey platform. The questionnaire consisted of eight open-ended questions which were developed from the earlier literature review and themes that emerged during stages 1 and 2 of the research. A total of 15 responses to the round 1 questionnaire were received from our employer panel, and analysis of these enabled the development of the round 2 questionnaire. The round 2 questionnaire was a closed questionnaire, comprising 62 statements which participants were asked to rate using a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'). This time, the statements were grouped under five themes: characteristics of younger workers (16 statements); workplace expectations of younger workers (18 statements); workplace readiness of younger workers (8 statements); readiness of the workplace for younger workers (12 statements); and education and policy makers (8 statements). This questionnaire elicited 12 valid responses from our employer panel. With the objective of a Delphi study being to bring the panel as close to consensus as possible, we utilised SPSS to generate descriptive statistics and establish measures of central tendency (mean and standard deviation). This analysis was then used to develop the round 3 questions.

This research project incorporated a 'modified', rather than pure Delphi exercise (Hasson and Keeney, 2011; Manley, 2013), as our round 3 comprised an online workshop with our employer panel, rather than a third questionnaire. An online workshop was chosen to explore the views of panel members in detail, thereby providing a rich, contextual picture of their views, and adding to

the depth of the qualitative data. Within the workshop, participants were presented with several identical statements to those previously seen in the round 2 questionnaire, and these were grouped under the same five themes. Each theme comprised between four and seven statements and the statements consisted of those that achieved the least consensus or generated the most disagreement among respondents in the previous round and/or where the responses were skewed negatively, indicating that a topic was worth exploring in more detail. The workshop was hosted on Microsoft Teams and was facilitated by two members of the research team. It was attended by 11 participants and lasted for two hours. The workshop was recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim to aid the data analysis process.

Analytical Framework

The Capability Approach provides the analytical framework for this research. It was initially developed by Amartya Sen (e.g., Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009) as an alternative approach to welfare economics. However, it has been applied to a range of social policy domains by researchers disenchanted with using only employment or income as measures. For example, it has been applied to understand young people's complex, insecure and non-linear labour market transitions (Egdell and McQuaid, 2016; Otto *et al.*, 2017) and the scarring effects of having a poor start in the labour market (Egdell and Beck, 2020).

The Capability Approach is concerned with what people can do rather than what they actually do. It frames individuals as autonomous persons who should be able to decide what they wish to achieve, based on their own understanding of a 'good life'. A person is framed as less advantaged if they do not have the opportunity to achieve the things that they value (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009). It recognises that an individual's agency can determine which, and the way in which, commodities (material and non-material resources) can be turned into functionings (what they do and are) (Nussbaum, 1997; Sen, 2003, 2009).

The approach moves beyond resources and functionings to consider an individual's capability-set (all that they can do and be). In considering an individual's capabilities, the conversion factors (personal, environmental and social conditions) mediating the way that commodities are transformed into functionings are accounted for (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009). It acknowledges situations where individuals cannot realise their capabilities because of structural inequalities, low expectations and/or circumstances (Nussbaum, 1997). As such, this approach offers a perspective on Generation-Z's employment expectations that is concerned with their freedom to make choices

that they value, rather than focusing solely on outcomes. It speaks to existing research on young people's workplace expectations which has sought to uncover what young people value in terms of their future working lives, examining imagined possibilities in the future and motivation to act in the present (e.g., Hardgrove *et al.*, 2015).

Findings - Stage 1: Key Informant Interviews

This section presents the findings from the twelve key informant interviews. Six emergent themes from the earlier literature review were used as a guiding structure for the interviews. Each theme comprised between one and three questions and these were posed to interviewees in a semi-structured format.

As an opening question, interviewees were asked to describe the **characteristics of younger workers** (aged 16-21). Words such as ‘ambitious’, ‘creative’, ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘aspirational’ were often used to describe younger workers. Interviewees were keen to challenge the (often negative) stereotypes attributed to younger workers. For example, an interviewee suggested:

“I’m not sure that this generation is all that different from ones that went before them. It’s just that the landscape [of work], the environment and context, has changed, but the values are the same”
(Iv.10)

However, interviewees alluded to younger workers having been ‘shaped’ by the world they have grown up in and being influenced by social media, role models and exposure to their parents’ experiences of work (links can be made here to the Capability Approach which accounts for the role of conversion factors (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)).

Theme 1: Mutual Expectations of Work and the Workplace

Drawing on their experience of working with employers and/or young people, interviewees were asked if they believe employers feel that **younger workers have different expectations of the workplace** than previous generations. In asking this question we sought to understand perceptions of what young people value in terms of their future working lives (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009). Most interviewees mentioned that younger workers are attracted to new and flexible working environments such as flatter structures, no fixed desk, access to cafés and sports facilities, and spaces that foster creativity. It was also highlighted that young people are often impatient to progress in the workplace and are likely to become frustrated by organisational bureaucracy and the slow pace of change (again, links can be made here to the Capability Approach which accounts for the role of conversion factors in mediating the way that commodities are transformed into functionings (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)). Referring to the need to meet the needs of all employees, an interviewee explained:

“An ageing workforce is an issue for organisations, and it is difficult for organisations to cater for those approaching retirement while also trying to cater for a younger workforce. It’s a strange environment for both sets of workers and we are probably just at the beginning of trying to address these situations” (Iv.11)

It was also emphasised that younger workers tend to have greater expectations of employers in areas such as environmental sustainability, diversity, and being treated fairly. It was suggested by most interviewees that while significant progress has been made in many organisations, many employers need to better recognise and adapt to the needs of the future workforce, or risk being left behind. One interviewee highlighted:

“What we are finding now is that employers see that the workplace is changing in a positive manner; young people are influencing [attitudes] of older workers and vice versa” (Iv.3)

However, there was a shared view that some employers have been slow to react and adapt to the skills that young people bring to the workplace. It was suggested that there is a prevailing tension between employer expectations and the preparedness of young people for the workplace.

Interviewees were asked if the rise of the **gig economy and insecure work has shaped the work expectations** of younger workers. Gig work was viewed by interviewees as both positive and negative, depending on the employer and their employment practices. It was highlighted that the gig economy can offer flexibility for young people to balance work and study. According to one interviewee:

“The gig economy gives [young people] more opportunities to work, particularly as they are unlikely to have the expense of running a home, etc. They can pick and choose when they work so that they can balance studying and exams with saving up some money” (Iv.6)

Nevertheless, control over employment was viewed as being heavily weighted in favour of the employer (often with poor employment practices in place) and gig work was not seen as a positive destination for longer-term employment when younger workers are seeking secure and stable employment.

When asked to comment on the likely **impact of a multi-generational workforce on management approaches**, interviewees indicated that as more people choose to retire later in life, there is an associated need for employers to embrace multi-generational workforces. It was mentioned that young workers are likely to leave a workplace where they feel they do not fit in or where other generations are unable to engage with them. Recognising the difficulties for a young person to establish themselves within an older team, the need for employers to build communities of young people to provide peer support was noted as being valuable. Interviewees also highlighted that traditional and hierarchical management approaches still tend to prevail, particularly in more traditional industries and large corporate organisations. However, it was acknowledged that younger workers tend to focus on what they can bring to the workplace regardless of their level or grade.

Theme 2: The Employment Relationship

Under this theme, interviewees were asked to comment on what they believed **young people value in the employer-employee relationship**. By asking this question we again sought to understand perceptions of what young people had reason to value in terms of their future working lives (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009). Most interviewees mentioned that young people want to have a mutually respectful relationship with their employer/manager, for example, “Someone who takes the time to know them; they don’t just want to be a number”, according to Iv.12. Being trusted to work flexibly and autonomously, the ability to contribute meaningfully through their work, and being provided with opportunities to learn and develop were all regarded as being highly valued by younger workers. Interviewees emphasised the importance of health and wellbeing to younger workers, highlighting that young people expect their wellbeing to be openly discussed and looked after. Ethical awareness and alignment of personal and organisation values were also regarded as being important.

When asked about the **impact of the changing nature of work on the psychological contract** (implicit employment deal), interviewees reflected on the classic tension for young people between a sense of increased choice, flexibility, and the notion of a multi-faceted career that develops around a set of meta-skills, versus the downside of this, which often manifests through insecure employment, anxiety and/or young people being over-qualified yet under-valued or under-utilised in the workplace. It was recognised that young people want to feel that they have influence and are valued by employers as individuals. An interviewee explained it like this:

“It’s an emotional contract for them. A young person is going to be more engaged with an employer where there is a social and emotional contract. They place less emphasis on terms and conditions – the paper contract” (Iv.2)

A few interviewees also remarked on the challenge for employers when young people expect to have multiple careers and move from job to job. It was recognised that this can be a deterrent for some employers to recruit younger workers when they are seeking continuity. This ‘transactional’ psychological contract means that young people demonstrate less loyalty to an employer and often have a sense that they will not be part of the future of the organisation but are looking for employers to equip them with transferable skills that they can take into other organisations.

When asked if **employers are making provisions for the next generation of workers**, it was acknowledged that some employers recognise that young people require mentoring and support, whereas others have high expectations that young people should be work ready and be the finished article. In terms of the Capability Approach, this suggests not only different perceptions about the commodities/resources young people hold, but that young people may not be able to realise their capabilities because of their circumstances (their employer’s expectations) and/or conversion factors (Nussbaum, 1997; Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009). One interviewee highlighted:

“Good employers understand that it is their job to help shape the young person. You want employers to recognise that they [young people] are going to be green behind the ears and that they are there to learn...It’s the simple things, like someone just taking you under their wing for a bit” (Iv.12)

It was suggested that as young people seek to balance family commitments and lifestyle choices with work, modern organisations are shifting towards a more quality and outcome-driven focus, rather than expecting people being present in the workplace or working at fixed times.

Theme 3: Digitalisation and Workplace Flexibility

Interviewees were asked if they were seeing evidence that employers are **embracing and considering how technological innovations can influence the employment experience** of younger workers. Most interviewees commented that young people are ‘digital natives’, but also cautioned that while they typically embrace technology and know how to use it, digital skills are often limited to social media and application-based technologies. Interviewees highlighted that young people are bombarded with choices and are influenced by the information they receive via

social media and the internet, including celebrity culture and fake news. Technology was viewed as an enabler of flexible working (in some sectors), but the extent of flexibility is dependent on management trust and organisational culture, i.e., conversion factors mediate the way that commodities are transformed into valuable functionings (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009).

The downside of flexible and autonomous working was also highlighted in the context of creating a culture of long hours and work intensification. According to Iv.2, “The issue is learning to switch off from work...With the rise in technology came an expectation that you would be contactable 24/7”. This was regarded by some interviewees as an important issue that employers need to be manage and put in place arrangements to ensure young people can develop a work-life balance and are able to take proper time away from the workplace.

Theme 4: Skills and Career Development

Within this theme, interviewees were asked about the **career development expectations of younger workers**. It was discussed in most interviews that the career expectations of young people are less traditional and linear than previous generations. In particular, the expectation of having multiple careers means that young people expect to develop an array of transferable (meta) skills. Some interviewees commented on Scotland's Developing the Young Workforce campaign ‘No Wrong Path’⁴ in helping young people realise that what they decide aged 16 does not necessarily determine the rest of their working life. A lack of exposure to employment and workplaces within schools was regarded as a barrier to informed decision-making. Indeed, the fast-paced shift away from more traditional roles towards data science type roles and artificial intelligence were also highlighted as being less tangible in terms of careers advice and planning. It was discussed during some interviews that when young people enter the workplace, they often have no idea about what a career structure or pathway might look like, with organisations such as the Police and Fire and Rescue Service being notable exceptions.

When asked about **skills gaps in the younger workforce**, interviewees commented on poor literacy skills within Scotland, but often referred to the need to develop soft, or meta, skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem solving. Resilience and confidence were most often highlighted as being key skills gaps, meaning that young people might not have the skills and knowledge required to transform resources into capabilities (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009). Yet, it was

⁴ www.nowrongpath.scot/

recognised that these skills often develop alongside life and work experience. For example, “There is a shift from education-to-work and it takes people time to get used to it”, according to Iv.10. Many interviewees also commented on the shift within the education system towards more vocational and work-based learning and suggested that employers often value skills over qualifications. One interviewee explained it this way:

“Young people as they move through their school career are making choices so that they are prepared for when they leave school; they may choose a vocational subject in their final year to get some work experience...This approach is encouraging them to be lifelong learners, so whatever work they end up doing they will be looking for CPD [continuing professional development] opportunities” (Iv.4)

Theme 5: Mental Health and Wellbeing

Interviewees were asked how they believe **mental health and wellbeing impacts young people’s expectations of work**. Mental health and wellbeing are increasingly discussed in society with young people feeling more able to be open and transparent about their mental health. Unrealistic aspirations, peer pressure, and social media and celebrity culture were all highlighted as key internal and external conversion factors fuelling poor mental health among young people. “We need to focus on allowing young people to speak up and talk about their aspirations so that we can try and take away their anxiety”, according to Iv.3. Heightened anxiety and mental health issues among young people were raised within several interviews and these were often mentioned in conjunction with low confidence and resilience. Interestingly, it was suggested that young people are becoming less likely to step outside of their comfort zones and are no longer being pushed to do so. Interviewees commented that young people place a great deal of value on their mental health and wellbeing and expect this to be taken seriously in the workplace. Highlighting a challenge for employers, however, it was suggested in one interview that:

“Young people are encouraged to talk about issues such as their mental health and wellbeing...This is borne out of school culture and societal shifts, but just because people are able to talk about their concerns, it doesn’t necessarily mean it is in any way dealt with better as a result of the disclosure” (Iv.6)

Despite this challenge, increased recognition is being afforded to mental health and wellbeing with modern workplaces, for instance, through the establishment of “mental health first aiders” (Iv.11).

It was also recognised that more needs to be done by employers to promote mental health and wellbeing. An interviewee explained:

“A lot of the stigma around mental health has shifted, but there is still work for employers to do to recognise issues and to shape their organisations to make them a better fit for young people” (Iv.7)

Theme 6: Emerging Macro-economic Factors

Under this theme, interviewees were asked about the **implications of the issues discussed during the interview for education, policy makers and the research agenda** in Scotland. There was agreement that the school-level education system is crucial in shaping young people’s expectations of work – which we would argue would support young people in converting resources into valuable outcomes, although other conversion factors could limit this (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009). In terms of workplace preparedness, it was recognised that young people are strongly influenced by careers advice and guidance received at school. Yet, perceptions of the efficacy of careers advice and guidance were varied and seen as a postcode lottery, depending on the school.

It was highlighted that many schools are innovating and making more effort to identify occupational interests earlier in young people’s educational journey, and that careers advice is becoming more comprehensive, often incorporating tools such as ‘My World of Work’⁵, which was noted by one interviewee as actively encouraging young people to reflect on their own strengths and areas for development. However, it was also reflected that:

“We have a traditional middle-class education system that’s predicated on an old career model to feed the professions. However, young people are more likely to [need to] accumulate a range of skills and so the notion of a predictive career becomes almost nonsensical. We need a focus on [a wide range of] skills and attributes...Employment patterns and the education system need to marry up” (Iv.9)

While interviewees acknowledged the complexity of delivering education today and designing education for tomorrow, there was a view that a ‘systems’ approach needs to be taken to make the entire education system more integrated. Most interviewees articulated a need for employers to become more involved in helping to shape educational curriculum and programmes. For example, it was emphasised that “Collaboration sits at the heart of Scotland’s youth employment strategy”

⁵ www.myworldofwork.co.uk/

(Iv.1). Apprenticeship programmes were regarded positively by interviewees, although it was noted that:

“We need to develop the apprenticeship route and persuade parents of ‘high-flyers’ that these are of equal value, if not more valuable, than a traditional degree” (Iv.4)

A few interviewees referred to evidence from Europe where stronger (education-employer) stakeholder collaborations are proving to be successful and could provide exemplars for Scotland. It was acknowledged that government-led interventions (which can be understood as external conversion factors (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)) such as the ‘Fair Work Framework’⁶ and ‘Scottish Business Pledge’⁷ as well as other organisations that encourage collaboration between the education system and employers are making valuable inroads in addressing many of these challenges. In concluding, despite the many challenges, and opportunities, highlighted by interviewees, the contribution of young people to the workforce was recognised as being positive and valuable.

⁶ www.fairworkconvention.scot/the-fair-work-framework/

⁷ <https://scottishbusinesspledge.scot/>

Findings - Stage 2: Focus Groups with Young People

This section presents the findings from the five focus groups. In total, 37 young people (aged 16-21) took part in a focus group.

Each focus group began by asking participants about their **hopes and concerns for their future career** to ascertain the future working lives that they had reason to value and potential conversion factors that might mediate the way that the resources they had access to were transformed into functionings (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009). On the one hand, the young people told us that they hope to find permanent, secure jobs that they enjoy doing. They were keen to work with an employer who provides fair pay and conditions and a culture where they are treated well as individuals. Participants also remarked on the working environment, suggesting that a good variety of work would be desirable, but that a suitable work-life balance is also important.

On the other hand, they were concerned about their ability to secure permanent jobs. This concern stemmed mainly from their lack of work experience and not knowing precisely what to expect in the workplace. Interestingly, the impact of technology and automation on the range and types of work available in the future was also mentioned as a concern as opposed to an opportunity. The potential to be overwhelmed by the prospect of a new work environment and of the possibility of feeling unsupported and/or suffering workplace stress were also highlighted. A participant put it this way:

"I'm hoping for support for my mental health, just asking me if I'm okay and actually listening to me" (Group 1)

In addition, those who took part in the online focus groups (post-Covid-19 lockdown) were worried about the impact of the pandemic on their employment prospects, both in terms of its impact on their examination results and a reduction in potential employment opportunities due to the economic downturn.

When asked about their views on the **personal skills and attributes that they will take into the workplace** (i.e., their personal inputs/resources (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)), participants often highlighted that they are hard-working, enthusiastic, creative, and trustworthy. They also commented on being able to work well as part of a team with good communication and problem-

solving skills. Despite mentioning earlier that they were concerned about being overwhelmed and becoming anxious, a few of the young people used the word 'resilient' to describe themselves. They also advised that, as younger workers, they can utilise and help older generations to use technology in the workplace, and that they bring fresh ideas and knowledge of what the next generation of customers/clients might demand from the business.

The young people were then asked for their views of **what constitutes a good place to work** (i.e., a working life that they had reason to value (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)). Participants described this as a workplace that provides exciting, varied, and challenging work. They mentioned that a good workplace would be one where people are treated fairly, not discriminated against, and where people work well together with high levels of trust and support. For example, "No-one wants to work with people [organisations] who can't show respect to people who are different", according to one Group 5 participant. Participants were keen to emphasise that there should be opportunities to learn and train and that a good workplace would recognise their contribution and provide support to learn from mistakes. Finally, they highlighted the importance of a clean, safe, and comfortable work environment for them, but also one that is ethical and environmentally friendly.

All focus groups incorporated a grid comprising 32 work-related statements. Participants were asked to select the top five statements which they deemed to be most important to them and rank these from A to E (A being most important and E least important). Table 2 shows the statements along with those that participants selected as being in their top-five. 'Good pay and conditions' attracted the most responses (19), which correlates with what participants said about their hopes and concerns. 'Job security' (16), a 'fun/social place to work' (13), 'training, learning and development' (13), 'diversity (all people treated with respect)' (13) were all frequently chosen, which also chimes with what participants mentioned when describing a good place to work. These statements were closely followed by 'being part of a team' (9), 'opportunities to progress' (9), and a 'boss who can motivate/develop me' (9), all of which mirror how participants described a good place to work. Interestingly, nobody selected 'ability work in a range of teams' and the statements that attracted the fewest responses (1) included a 'casual workplace (not too many rules)', 'latest technology', autonomy for the task/responsibility', 'tasks that have a purpose (meaningful)', and 'coaching and mentoring'.

Table 3. 32 Statement Grid

1. Fun/social place to work (13)	2. Exciting projects (5)	3. Fits in with other things I want to do (7)	4. Praise/ recognition & feedback (3)	5. Training, learning & development (13)
6. Being part of a team (9)	7. Supportive when things don't go well (7)	8. Opportunities to progress (9)	9. Encourages creativity (open to my ideas) (5)	10. Casual workplace (not too many rules) (1)
11. Caring about me and my wellbeing (7)	12. Professional organisation (4)	13. Good pay & conditions (19)	14. Good boss (accessible/fair) (2)	15. Busy/fast pace environment (2)
16. Positive values/socially responsible (3)	17. Flexible working hours (5)	18. Latest technology (1)	19. Open/honest communication (8)	20. Job security (16)
21. Diversity (all people treated with respect) (13)	22. Ability to work in a range of teams (0)	23. Apprenticeship (2)	24. Autonomy for the task/ responsibility (1)	25. Boss who can motivate/develop me (9)
26. Tasks that have a purpose (meaningful) (1)	27. Fast pace of change (new things happening) (3)	28. Ability to work remotely (2)	29. Job satisfaction (8)	30. Recognition of individual talent/ potential (4)
31. Understands the impact of stress (2)	32. Coaching & mentoring (1)	Total: 185		

In the final set of questions, the young people were asked **how long they might remain with the same employer before seeking new opportunities**. Most participants said that they are likely to stay with an employer for three to five years, however this would depend on the nature of the work and what suits their life choices at that time. When asked about their **expectations around promotion and career progression**, there was broad agreement among participants that they are more interested in gaining permanent, secure work where they are recognised for their contribution than in seeking promotion/progression. However, a quarter of participants also said that they would also consider self-employment at an appropriate point in their future once they had gained some experience.

When asked about their **knowledge of the gig economy**, many participants were unaware of the concept and its implications. For others, gig work was recognised as being potentially useful for those looking for flexibility but that the unpredictable nature of this type of work means that it would be difficult to make life plans and manage financial commitments, all of which were regarded as being stressful for the employee.

Findings - Stage 3: Modified Delphi Study with Employers

The findings from the three rounds of the Delphi exercise are presented in this section. A wide range of local (to Edinburgh) employers from across all business sectors were invited by e-mail to take part in the Delphi study. The Delphi study data were gathered between December 2020 and February 2021.

Round 1 (Open Questionnaire) Analysis

Within round 1 of the Delphi exercise, the panel of employers were asked eight open-ended questions via an online questionnaire. The questions were derived from key discussion points raised within the previous interviews and focus groups. A summary of responses is provided below, and these were used to develop the round 2 questionnaire that followed.

Participants were asked how they believed young people (aged 16-21) would describe a **good place to work** (i.e., what is the working life that young people would have reason to value (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)). Words like ‘engaging’, ‘lively’, ‘relaxed’ ‘collaborative’ and ‘flexible’ were often used to describe culture. A participant suggested that the ideal working environment would be “Funky, fun, [with] regular breaks and interaction with team members”. Most participants mentioned the importance of employee voice, opportunities for learning and development, and highlighted the expectation of recognition for doing a good job. Words such as ‘diversity’, ‘inclusion’, ‘fairness’ and ‘respect’ also featured prominently, with the expectation of “a strong diversity and inclusion commitment” from the organisation. Indeed, organisational brand and reputation were also mentioned as being important both in terms of “socially conscious” values and career development opportunities.

When asked about the **unique skills and attributes** (if adopting the terminology of the Capability Approach this would be described as their personal inputs and resources (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)) that younger workers bring to the workplace, most participants commented on high levels of enthusiasm and energy, and the ability of young people to bring creativity, curiosity and fresh insights and perspectives to the workplace. It was noted that younger workers are often more able to “embrace technology and changes in working arrangements” and are not afraid to question the status quo. One participant highlighted the value of “reverse mentorship”, where the high digital literacy of younger workers can support the more established workforce.

Indeed, throughout stages 1 and 2 of the research, young people were often described as ‘**digital natives**’. Participants were asked to what extent this was their experience of younger workers in the workplace. It was recognised that the younger workforce is more digitally aware and expect to leverage technology in the workplace. However, echoing the earlier interviews, some participants commented that often advanced digital skills are limited to social media and application-based technology. Participants also expressed concern about younger workers who are socially disadvantaged through lack of access to technology and “who may be falling behind further due to their lack of access to what is expected as normal” within society. Indeed, this point has been elevated by the current Covid-19 education and labour market crisis.

When asked what **employers can do to better support young people** in the current uncertain climate, participants cited the need for clarity about future skills and where these are likely to be in the workplace, together with clear career development pathways and programmes. These can be understood as external conversion factors that mediate the way that young people’s personal inputs and resources are transformed into work functionings that they value (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009). There was recognition that many employers will be in a difficult position following the Covid-19 pandemic when redundancies and lack of opportunities are likely to ensue. For instance, a participant highlighted the need for “honest and frank” conversations with young people.

Increased engagement with programmes such as Investors in Young People⁸, The Prince’s Trust⁹, more targeted recruitment, apprenticeships, and internships were all noted as being important. A participant suggested that “Employability support workshops, CV sessions, [and] mock interviews to prepare for when work becomes available” will be particularly important as we emerge from the Covid-19 crisis. Tailored induction and on-boarding programmes and clear expectations were also noted as being crucial from the outset, for example, through mentoring and regular feedback.

There was broad acknowledgement that many employers may be **under-utilising graduate skills**, particularly as most graduate jobs are entry level and often young workers lack industry experience. However, it was also recognised that skills utilisation is a two-way process, requiring engagement between employers and younger workers. For example, a participant mentioned the need for employers to innovate and “review skillsets carefully to see where they [young people] are best

⁸ <https://thisisremarkable.com/>

⁹ www.princes-trust.org.uk/

placed to support organisations on a long-term basis”. Others commented on the need for an appropriate balance to be struck between graduate and other generic skills and attributes. Participants referred to apprenticeship opportunities as being crucial and debt free opportunities for learning and growth. Indeed, the idea of growing internal talent was noted, for example, by recognising the opportunity for employers to look at job design and the ways in which work is organised, and by extension the type of workforce required for the future.

Participants were asked to comment on the extent to which a balance can be struck between a desire for stable employment with career prospects and the benefits that **flexible working arrangements** can bring. There was consensus that an appropriate balance can be achieved where employers are accepting of flexibility as a driver of recruitment and success (applying the Capability Approach terminology, this acceptance is an external conversion (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)). While certain occupations and roles will always require anti-social hours, the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that many roles can be worked from home or that greater flexibility is possible. In the words of one participant:

“Flexibility will be at the heart of all work going forward now. This may take some time to change, but it will happen”

When asked about the extent to which participants have experienced younger workers being **more difficult to manage** than previous generations, a broad range of views were expressed. Some participants remarked that oftentimes young workers are less well prepared for the world of work, which can lead to management challenges associated with clarifying boundaries and expectations, and additional training. Others highlighted that young people simply need encouragement and mentorship.

The shifting nature of the psychological contract (implicit employment deal) was also alluded to in that young people’s career expectations are notably different from previous generations. For example, a participant commented:

“Young workers expect a career passport with multiple jobs in different companies...This moves the onus from the organisation to the individual...This is a good attribute and sets the sets the youth of 2020 apart from previous generations where they expected their employer to manage their career”

Finally, participants were asked how the **education system could better prepare young people** for the world of work. The need to set clear expectations and better inform young people about the contemporary world of work were viewed as important, including up-to-date information and guidance on specific industries and roles, including new and emerging data-driven roles. Participants suggested the need for better connectivity to workplaces through further strengthening links between educators and employers and increased focus on work exposure and experience.

Round 2 (Closed Questionnaire) Analysis

The round 2 (closed) questionnaire was developed from the analysis of the round 1 (open-ended) questionnaire, as well as lines of inquiry that emerged during phases 1 and 2 of the research. Therefore, building on round 1, the round 2 questionnaire was designed to provide a statistical portrayal of the range of perspectives provided by our expert panel of employers and to determine the extent of consensus among the employer panel. The decision on which statements were carried forward to round 3 was based on two factors: (1) the acknowledgment that round 3 (the online workshop) would be limited to two hours; and (2) one or more of the following criteria were satisfied: consensus was not achieved; the range of responses was widely dispersed; and/or responses indicated that the statement warranted further (qualitative) exploration.

The questionnaire was structured around five themes. The statistical results for each theme along with confirmation of which statements were carried forward to round 3 can be found at Appendix 2.

In summary, the first theme examined participants' perceptions of the **characteristics of younger workers**. In recognition of the time constraints within the round 3 workshop and that generic attributes and characteristics of younger workers were widely discussed throughout each stage of the research, a general question around characteristics was used as an icebreaker question in round 3, meaning that no specific statements from this theme were carried forward.

The second theme comprised participants' (employers') experiences of the **workplace expectations of younger workers**. Of the 18 statements included in this section, consensus was achieved on 11 of the statements. Following careful consideration of each statement alongside the lines of inquiry that emerged during phases 1 and 2 of the research, and taking account of the three criteria noted above, seven statements were carried forward to round 3 for further exploration within the workshop. The third theme focused on participants' experiences of **workplace readiness of younger workers**. Of the eight statements included in this section, consensus was achieved on four statements. This time,

six of the statements were carried forward to round 3 for further exploration. The fourth theme centred around participants' views and experiences of the **readiness of the workplace for younger workers**. Of the 12 statements included in this section, consensus was achieved on only four statements. Due to variety and wide-ranging responses within this theme, nine statements were carried forward to round 3 to be explored within the workshop. The final theme concentrated on participants' perceptions of the roles, responsibilities and effectiveness of **education and policy makers** in preparing young people for the world of work. Eight statements were included in this theme with consensus being achieved on five. Six statements were carried forward for further exploration in round 3.

Round 3 (Workshop) Analysis

The round 3 workshop lasted for two hours and was structured around the same five themes used in round 2. Eleven members of our employer panel took part, and the aim was to explore, in detail, the statements within each theme that were carried forward from round 2. Each statement was discussed in the order they first appeared within the round 2 questionnaire.

Theme 1: Characteristics of Younger Workers

As noted above, in recognition of the time constraints within the workshop and that generic attributes and characteristics of younger workers were widely discussed throughout each stage of the research, a general question around characteristics was used as an icebreaker question in round 3, hence that no specific statements from this theme were carried forward for discussion.

Theme 2: Workplace Expectations of Younger Workers

Seven statements from this theme were carried forward from round 2 for discussion within the workshop. Participants were first asked about their experience or perception of young people being **more concerned about their employment prospects** than previous generations. Participants highlighted that it depends on the individual and the sector, and that the current economic and employment uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated young people's concerns about gaining and retaining secure employment, particularly within sectors such as hospitality and retail. However, it was acknowledged that this may be of less concern to 16- to 21-year-olds as the majority do not yet have financial outlays and commitments.

Participants were then asked to discuss the **importance of diversity management** to younger workers and comment on younger workers potentially harbouring a **stronger sense of workplace fairness**

than previous generations (applying the Capability Approach terminology, this constituted part of young peoples' framing of a 'good' working life (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)). There was general agreement that workplace fairness is important to all generational cohorts but that younger workers may be more likely to vocalise their disapproval to unfairness or discrimination within the workplace. The high level of engagement among young people with the 'Black Lives Matter' movement was highlighted as a current example.

When asked next about young people's **expectations of a relaxed working environment** where they can bring their own personality to the workplace, participants expressed a range of views. One participant summarised their view in this way: "Young people are happy to work within boundaries, where they consider these to be reasonable". Participants agreed that a balance needs to be struck between creating a relaxed and informal culture and establishing appropriate boundaries. This idea of 'boundaries' was raised multiple times during the workshop, for example, participants remarked on the need to establish clear behavioural standards and expectations from the outset concerning issues such as dress code and professional conduct. These boundaries can be understood as examples of the external conversion factors (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009).

A participant from a large corporate organisation highlighted that through regular employee engagement surveys, young people score significantly lower on feeling that they can bring themselves (i.e., their own personality) to work. Interestingly, job engagement among young workers was mentioned by a few participants. It was explained that engagement levels among younger workers are often very high for the first few months and then tend to dip significantly as they learn to navigate the "unwritten rules" of the organisation before rising again.

When asked next about a **desirable work-life balance** being more important to younger workers than previous generations, participants highlighted their experience as a "mixed bag". There was consensus that young people like to have a degree of control over their work-life balance and expect to "work-to-live and not live-to-work", according to one participant. For example, another participant highlighted that within their organisation, it is younger workers who are more likely to take up flexible benefits and wellbeing offerings.

Next, participants were asked about the importance to young people of **regular opportunities to learn, train and develop**. While most participants agreed that learning and training opportunities are important to young people, some participants were of the view that young workers often have

unrealistic expectations about career development and the speed of progression. The value of apprenticeships and the nature of work-based learning was again noted as becoming increasingly important to younger workers. One participant commented that:

“They [young people] see learning, training and development through a wider lens, it is not just about the traditional study/exam learning”

It was suggested that competency frameworks can be a useful way of showcasing career pathways and structures within organisations, however some participants recognised that their organisation has more work to do in developing these pathways. It was explained by a participant in this way:

“We need to get better at showing the flexible pathways that are open to people. I think that is because generally, within our organisation, those in senior positions have followed a very, I would say, hierarchical, traditional career path. It is more difficult for young people to see how they might deviate from that...I think we are still stuck to quite a traditional model”

Lastly within this theme, participants were asked whether younger workers’ **expectations of leadership and management** are different from previous generations. Linked to the discussion around work-life balance, participants highlighted that younger workers often expect managers to consider the impact of their lives in and out of work more than previous generations. Most participants also alluded to the importance of managers providing workplace mentoring and “life support” in addition to traditional managerial duties. The importance of job structure was also recognised by a participant, in that:

“We take the age group straight from school...and funnily enough, they like to be micromanaged, they like to be supervised, they like to have a structure, and they like to have consistency of manager...So they have a team leader, who is responsible for speaking to them first thing in the morning and last thing at night”

A much higher level of mental health and wellbeing awareness among young people was also regarded as being important for managers to be aware of. A participant mentioned that: “I think there is something really refreshing about young people in terms of their willingness to talk about mental health and how they’re feeling”. Nevertheless, it was suggested that some (older) managers are struggling to deal with this as they are less comfortable talking about mental health and wellbeing issues. This can be understood as another example of a conversion factor (i.e., a manager’s

preferences) mediating the way that commodities are transformed into valued work functionings (i.e., a workplace where young people can talk about their mental health) (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009).

Theme 3: Workplace Readiness of Younger Workers

Six statements from this theme within round 2 were carried forward for further exploration in the workshop. First, participants were asked to comment on young people's **preparedness to make their education-to-work transition**. It was acknowledged that this often varies depending on the young person's background and the support they have received at school and at home. Commenting that young people's expectation of work are often unrealistic, one participant reflected on a careers workshop where a young person stated that their "Plan A was to become a forensic psychologist and plan B was to be a dancer". There was also a general view that more could be done by schools to help young people prepare for job interviews, for example, how to dress and conduct themselves.

Participants were then asked to comment on whether young people in their organisation are generally **well informed about the range of career opportunities** available to them. Most participants felt strongly that this is not the case and that more needs to be done at multiple levels in terms of careers information and guidance. For example, the critical role of schools was emphasised in proactively promoting career opportunities and journeys. A participant suggested that "school guidance seems to be in the dark ages", with another adding that "it's all down to the individual school and its programme of engaging with employers". Participants again referred to new and emerging data-driven roles, some which do not even exist yet, and recognised the challenge for schools to incorporate these into career guidance.

Next, participants were asked about the extent to which young people are aware of workplace expectations and **know how to behave in the workplace**. Again, the general view was that it depends upon individuals' educational and social background. The idea of clear expectations and boundaries was again raised with participants highlighting the importance of tailored induction programmes, structure, consistency, and on-going support such as mentoring or buddying.

When asked to comment on the extent to which young people **work well as part of a team**, participants were generally positive about this despite the range of views being widely dispersed within round 2. However, when asked about whether young people in their organisations are **generally confident individuals**, the response was more varied. A participant highlighted that this is a complex question, suggesting that "They [young people] are confident in some areas and not others", a point

corroborated by another participant who said: “Yes, but in certain circumstances”. For example, conflict avoidance was identified by a few participants as being more prevalent among young workers. Moreover, participants unpicked the definition of ‘confidence’, asserting that although young people are often more vocal and forthright, there is often still an underlying lack of confidence.

Lastly within this theme, participants were asked if young people generally have **realistic expectations about work and working life**. The general view was that expectations are “more unrealistic than realistic”, often fuelled by unrealistic expectations about the (slow) speed of change and organisational politics – referring again to the ‘unwritten rules’ within organisations (i.e., conversion factors (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)). For example, a participant explained that “Young people struggle to understand why organisations are not faster to change and why they do things in certain ways”.

Theme 4: Readiness of the Workplace for Younger Workers

Due to the variety and wide range of responses to this theme obtained from round 2, nine statements were carried forward to round 3 to be explored in more detail. Building on a previous statement concerning young people’s expectation of a **desirable work-life balance**, participants were asked to comment, from an employers’ perspective, on the extent to which this can be achieved. Participants highlighted that while it depends on the job and sector, there is no doubt that the Covid-19 crisis has accelerated home/flexible working and has likely changed how organisations will operate flexible working arrangements in the future. However, the pandemic has also segmented the workforce into those who can work from home and those who cannot. It was recognised that some employee groups currently working from home might claim to have developed a better work-life balance than ever before, whereas others on the front line would likely claim the opposite. Participants also cautioned that it can be difficult to meet young workers’ expectations about work-life balance and mentioned the importance of mutual (employer-employee) expectations.

Participants were asked about the extent to which they believe **leaders and managers are aware of the needs of younger workers**. Again, referring to the importance of mutual expectations, one participant reflected that “It works both ways, there needs to be a better understanding of where the other party is coming from”.

When asked if **managers require additional training on managing the young workforce**, while it was recognised that training can be beneficial, the benefits of mentoring and, specifically ‘reverse

mentoring', were again mentioned. Chiming with the views of the earlier interviewees, participants warned against stereotypes, labels, and "putting people in boxes", instead suggesting that "It's about considering everybody's needs in the workplace and making sure people are aware and considerate of them". Participants felt that the same was true of **older workers requiring training on the needs of the young workforce** and some spoke of becoming values-driven organisations and therefore focusing more on behaviours than age.

Participants were then asked if employers need to put **more effort into helping younger workers understand what is expected of them at work**. There was agreement that sometimes young workers need to be shown what is expected, for example, through good role modelling and mentorship. The value of introducing 360-degree feedback early in a person's career was highlighted as being beneficial in helping the young person understand their strengths and development needs. When asked if the younger workforce **needs significant additional support in the workplace**, the importance of tailored induction and on-boarding processes, in tandem with support from line managers, were again emphasised. The role of team leaders and/or line managers was viewed as being critical to the young person's development and employment experience.

Next, participants were asked to comment on whether the **skills of young graduates are routinely under-utilised in the workplace**. All participants generally agreed with this statement and highlighted that more value should be placed on work, rather than relying solely on the undergraduate degree route. The value of work-based learning programmes and apprenticeship routes were again raised in a positive light. It was also recognised that while graduates may enter the workforce with the requisite technical skills or qualification, those soft, or meta, skills aligned with leadership and people management typically take longer to develop.

When asked if workplaces are generally **proactive at responding and adapting to the needs and expectations of younger workers**, the establishment of peer groups, project groups, and youth forums were all referenced as having been successful in some organisations. A participant also mentioned that they had "recently put efforts into breaking down barriers to encourage young people to speak up", while others mentioned increasing efforts around mental health (counselling) provision and wellbeing support. Participants were also asked if **organisations find it difficult to retain younger workers**. There was acknowledgment that the labour market is changing in that young people are more likely to move between employers and have multiple careers, however it was suggested that the Covid-19

pandemic has generated uncertainty around employment and may in fact lead to more employment stability in the short-medium term.

Theme 5: Education and Policy Makers

Six statements concerning the roles and responsibilities of education and policy makers in preparing and supporting young workers were carried forward for further exploration in round 3. First, participants were asked about the extent to which they (as employers) **value personal skills and experience over formal qualifications**. All participants agreed with this statement, indicating that formal qualifications can be taught or gained at a later stage. The value of utilising the graduate apprenticeship scheme was highlighted by a participant, who explained it this way:

“If we take them [young people] straight from school that basically means they work full-time apart from three blocks of two weeks per year... We’re now on our third year and, actually, that works really well because they come out [with their degree] having worked for four years – four years’ experience, four years pay, and no debt... and they are far more mature at 22 as opposed to a 22 year-old that has come straight from university, absolutely poles apart”

When asked about whether **educational curriculum is effectively aligned with labour market skills requirements**, the general view was that **more needs to be done at all levels** (school, college, university) to help young people transition from education-to-work (i.e., transforming their inputs and resources into valuable functionings (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009)). In terms of more effectively integrating education and work, participants were asked about whether there should be **more focus on vocational and apprenticeship programmes** rather than reliance on higher education (university). Apprenticeship programmes and associated opportunities in the future were very highly regarded among the panel of employers.

Finally, participants were asked to comment on the government funding landscape, and specifically, if they believe there may be **less opportunities in the future to invest in young people**, for example, through reductions in funding. There was agreement that government funding is complex and will always be subject to change based on the political landscape and economic circumstances. While some concern was expressed about the impact and legacy of the Covid-19 crisis on the availability of government funding, there was also consensus that programmes such as apprenticeships and employer-university partnerships are only likely to increase. When asked whether **employers need more government funding** to create opportunities for younger workers, there was a general view that

any funding to grow apprenticeship and work-based learning programmes would be welcomed, but that employers also need to be innovative about creating opportunities for young people.

Conclusions

The aim of this research was to examine high-potential Generation-Z's expectations of work and the contemporary workplace. The expectations of these young people on the cusp of making their education-to-work transition were compared with employers' expectations of future young employees to assess contemporary workplace readiness for the emerging workforce, and whether young people's expectations correspond (or not) with the skills and attributes required in modern and future workplaces.

Using the Capability Approach (Sen, 1985, 2003, 2009) as an analytical lens, the research sought to uncover what young people value in terms of their future working lives. The Capability Approach frames individuals as autonomous agents who should be able to decide what they wish to achieve, based on their own understanding of a 'good life'. The approach moves beyond resources and functionings to consider an individual's capability-set (all that they can do and be). As such, this approach offers a perspective on Generation-Z's employment expectations that is concerned with their freedom to make choices that they value, rather than focusing solely on outcomes. It speaks to existing research on young people's workplace expectations which has sought to uncover what young people value in terms of their future working lives, examining imagined possibilities in the future and motivation to act in the present (Hardgrove *et al.*, 2015). Some overall conclusions to the study are drawn below, and these are followed by a set of recommendations and practice implications in the following section.

Generation-Z's Expectations of Work and the Contemporary Workplace

In line with the Capability Approach, this research focused on how high potential Generation-Z imagine possibilities for their future working lives. The young people described themselves as hard-working, enthusiastic, creative, and trustworthy, and envisage a workplace that provides exciting, varied, and challenging work. They highlighted that they communicate well and can work effectively as part of a team. They described the ideal workplace culture using words such as fun, creative, lively, relaxed, and flexible. The inference is that they aspire to bring themselves and own personality to the workplace and not feel the need, or pressure, to conform to others' expectations or norms (Khan, 1990; Khan and Fellows, 2013). In terms of their contribution to the workplace, young people often described themselves as being good with technology and able to support more established workers in the adoption and leveraging of technology in the workplace. They also

highlighted that they are best placed to understand the younger customer/client base and their needs and expectations of the business.

Generation-Z's desire to achieve an effective work-life balance also featured prominently, for example, the young people indicated that they aspire to 'work-to-live and not live-to-work', and that work should be flexible enough to fit around other interests and personal circumstances. Young participants' expectations of work and the workplace point to the changing nature of the psychological contract (implicit employment deal). None of the young people envisaged the concept of a 'job for life' and most stated that they expect to move on to new employers or opportunities every three-to-five years, and sooner if they are unhappy. This means that the idea of the traditional 'relational' and long-term psychological contract based on trust and loyalty was considered obsolete and young people were more interested in shorter-term 'transactional' arrangements based on employer-employee reciprocity (Deepthi and Baral, 2013; Rosseau, 1989, 2011).

Indeed, young people spoke about expectations of regular training and development opportunities that are not merely aimed at their current job, but that enable the development of transferable, or meta skills, that will be desirable and beneficial to other employers and future job opportunities. Participants also described expectations around leadership and management, often linking these expectations to support for mental health and wellbeing. This was summarised by an employer as providing "life support" in a world where the boundaries between work and personal life are increasingly blurred. For instance, young people highlighted that they expect a manager who gets to know them as individuals and genuinely cares about their welfare and wellbeing. They were also particularly interested in ethics and fairness, often mentioning that they expect employers to be environmentally friendly and that employees should be trusted and treated fairly in workplaces that are free from discrimination. Young people's main concerns were connected to finding permanent and secure work that they enjoy doing. Indeed, from the list of 32 statements shown within each focus group, the two statements that were selected most often were 'good pay and conditions' (selected 19 times), and 'job security' (selected 16 times).

Employer Perceptions of the Readiness of Young People for the Workplace

Data gathered from the panel of employers via the Modified Delphi Study (including the two-hour workshop) elicited a general view that employers believe that young people making their education-to-work transition are not always sufficiently prepared and equipped for the world of

work and this is often dependent upon their background and the support they have received at home and at school. However, there was some debate about what is meant by ‘work ready’ and the extent to which young people entering the labour market can be work ready. For example, it was acknowledged that employers often have different, and sometimes unrealistic, expectations of young workers who have amassed little or no work experience. Similarly, employers highlighted that some young people also have unrealistic expectations of work and the workplace, for example, relating to the (often) slow pace of organisational change, and speed of their career progression. The inference was that more advice and guidance while at school would be welcomed in helping young people navigate the wide range of career choices and prepare to make their education-to-work transition.

There was agreement that young people offer a wide array of skills and attributes, for example, pertaining to the adoption and use of digital technologies. Employers spoke about the synergetic effects of high-functioning multi-generational workforces in that both younger and established workers each have valued and complementary skillsets. The imperative for employers (and managers) lies in their ability to harness and leverage the collective skillsets for competitive advantage. The combined use of mentoring and reverse-mentoring were viewed positively in helping to integrate different generational cohorts in the workplace.

The need for continual development of ‘meta’ and transferable skills in young people was widely recognised. Confidence and resilience were signalled as particular skills gaps in young workers, although it was recognised that these skills often develop alongside life and work experience. The shift within the education system towards more vocational and work-based learning was viewed positively, and employers highlighted that they often value personal qualities and attributes over formal qualifications. Employers expressed a desire for closer engagement with curriculum design to help inform and shape the skills and attributes of the next generation of workers.

Employer Perspectives on the Readiness of Workplaces for the Emerging Workforce

It was recognised that a balance needs to be struck between creating the workplace culture desired by young workers and the establishment of appropriate structure and boundaries. Many employers have implemented bespoke activities to attract and support younger workers. For example, induction and on-boarding programmes were viewed as being particularly important when employing young workers. Employee engagement levels among younger workers were discussed in this context and employers highlighted a trend for engagement to dip while the new recruits are

attempting to navigate the ‘unwritten rules’ and establish themselves within the organisation (e.g., Khan, 1990; Khan and Fellows, 2013). The inference is that young workers may require longer-term support, for instance, through being allocated a mentor following their formal induction period. The role of line managers was also considered to be critical in leading and supporting young workers as they embed and develop within the organisation.

Work-life balance and flexibility, where appropriate, were acknowledged as being important aspects of workplace culture in contemporary workplaces, particularly for younger workers. Interestingly, while the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have shaped how organisations will operate flexible/remote working in the future, it has also segmented the workforce into those who can and cannot work remotely. As such, there was recognition that flexibility offerings may play an enhanced role in young people’s career choices in the future.

Organisational support for training and development was also recognised as being central to workplace culture and the development of the young workforce. These opportunities move beyond the provision of training courses and encapsulate broader learning opportunities that are crucial in the development of meta skills and, in some cases, formal qualifications. A need to develop and more effectively showcase multiple career opportunities and pathways was recognised by employers as being important to the recruitment and retention of young workers.

Organisational support for the mental health and wellbeing of the young workforce was also regarded as being a high priority. While the increased spotlight on mental health alongside young people’s openness and willingness to discuss mental health was viewed positively, and “refreshing” in the words of one employer, it was recognised that sometimes more established managers are struggling with these conversations. This raises important implications for how mental health and wellbeing are discussed and managed within organisations, as well as the range of support that is available to young people.

In conclusion, high potential Generation-Z has much to offer in the contemporary workplace, yet young workers, irrespective of their background, also require specific forms of support, which employers and managers need to be cognisant of. This project has foregrounded young people’s expectations of work and the contemporary workplace. It has shone a light on multiple examples of how a panel of employers are adapting to and meeting the needs and expectations of younger workers.

Recommendations and Practice Implications

This study shines a light on a wide range of implications for practice. These are divided into recommendations for employers, and more general recommendations aimed at educators and policy makers.

Employer Recommendations

There was a strong view communicated by both interviewees and employers that scope exists for **employers to engage more effectively with education curriculum design** and provision of work experience opportunities. This engagement is a response to employers' perceptions that young people are not always well prepared and equipped for the contemporary world of work and their education-to-work transition. The research suggested a need for young people to gain more insight into modern working practices and that this exposure should perhaps begin earlier and continue throughout their educational journey (through school, college, university) in a more consistent basis than is often currently the case.

Interviewees and employers highlighted scope for organisations to better **showcase the range of career structures, routes, and opportunities** available to younger workers at both organisational and sectoral levels (organisations such as Police and Fire and Rescue Services are notable exceptions). However, while many organisations can clearly demonstrate hierarchical promotion pathways, lateral and experiential pathways are often less well articulated and may be a contributory reason for younger workers moving onto opportunities within other organisations or sectors. Increasing the potential for organisational collaborations, for example, to provide short secondments or inter-disciplinary projects, may also be beneficial. Useful examples of such collaborations can be found in Scotland's public services.¹⁰

Employers who have experience of recruiting younger workers pointed to the value of **structured, and often bespoke, workplace induction and on-boarding** processes for young workers. Young workers making their education-to-work transition may benefit from a more structured approach to induction including, for example, specific guidance on dress code, behavioural expectations, (in)appropriate use of social media, etc. Employers highlighted a trend for workplace engagement levels among younger workers to dip after the first few months of employment as they learn to

¹⁰ See Collective Leadership for Scotland, www.collectiveleadershipscotland.com.

navigate the ‘unwritten rules’ of the organisation. Therefore, an extended on-boarding period may be useful in supporting young workers as they settle into the organisation and working life. This might take the form of a buddying or mentoring and regular contact with line managers.

Indeed, the **value of mentoring and ‘reverse mentoring’** were identified as being mutually beneficial to younger and more established workers. In the quest to better integrate and facilitate multi-generational workforces and move away from a focus on traditional generational stereotypes, employers may wish to consider scaling up mentoring provision to younger workers and/or the introduction of reverse mentoring (where a younger worker acts as a mentor to a more established worker). The skills and knowledge that younger workers can offer in this regard are often located in the adoption and use of technology in the workplace, and in their understanding of the younger customer/client and their expectations.

Employers also referred to the value of setting-up **youth forums or young people’s peer/ project groups**. Special interest groups around topics that younger workers value and are passionate about may be an excellent source of organisational knowledge and culture development. Moreover, seeking feedback directly from and calling on the existing younger workforce to help recruit and induct new younger workers may also prove beneficial in providing a welcoming and supportive environment for young workers.

Topics of high importance to younger workers were **mental health and wellbeing and associated organisational support**. Employers may wish to review the range of (hard and soft) provisions that are in place to promote and support mental health and wellbeing, especially the mechanisms through which this dialogue takes place. Line managers are particularly important in supporting the wellbeing of younger workers as they make their education-to-work transition and integrate into the workplace. For example, this was described by an employer as providing “life support” as the boundaries between work and personal lives are often blurred.

Educator and Policy Maker Recommendations

Interviewees and employers alluded to **scope to improve careers advice and guidance in schools** to better prepare and equip young people for the contemporary labour market and world of work. The quality of such provision was thought to be inconsistent and dependent on the individual school. In some cases, employers believed that careers advice in schools is outdated and needs to be modernised. For example, young people were often unaware of modern employment practices

and terms such as ‘gig work’, and ‘zero hours contracts’. Educators and policy makers may wish to consider how employers could be more involved in the provision of careers information and exposure to work and working practices for young people. The stage at which young people are provided with such exposure may also be worthy of consideration, for instance, it was suggested by employers that careers talks should begin at an earlier stage and continue through the young person’s educational journey.

Employers highlighted the need for **increased collaboration between stakeholders**. These stakeholders include, for instance, young people, their parents, education providers, employers, and policy makers. Employers suggested that a more integrated ‘systems thinking’ approach to young people’s education and employment transition journeys could be beneficial. The intention would be to create multiple and visible ‘pathways’ through school, apprenticeships, vocational training opportunities, college, university and into the workplace, while highlighting diverse routes, linkages and inter-connections between them.

Interviewees and employers praised the **increase in apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities** at all levels. Employers expressed a strong desire to grow apprenticeship opportunities. In particular, the Graduate Apprenticeship programme was noted as being extremely valuable in providing a suitable balance between education and work experience. However, interviewees and employers commented on the need for **more information on the value and academic equivalence of apprenticeship programmes** to be provided to both young people and their parents to enable them to make informed choices. Interviewees and employers believed that there is a need to better ‘sell’ apprenticeship opportunities due to a prevailing view that exists among young people and their parents that apprenticeship and vocational training opportunities are aimed at those who are under-achieving academically.

Appendix 1

Summary of Methodology and Scope of Participation

Interview composition (key informants)

12 interviews, drawn from central and local government; business / sector representatives; young persons' organisations and charities; education providers

Interview protocol

Six themes each with 2-3 questions: mutual expectations of work and the workplace; the employment relationship; digitalisation and workplace flexibility; skills and career development; mental health and wellbeing; and emerging macro-economic factors

Focus group composition (young people aged 16-21)

5 focus groups, 37 participants in total (listed alphabetically): organisational young employee network (4); organisational young volunteer group (12); secondary school (9); secondary school (6); young people's training organisation (6)

Focus group themes

Three (loose) themes: hopes and concerns; what makes a good place to work; and expectations of work and the workplace (including top five statements from 32 statement grid)

Modified Delphi process (employers)

Three-round process: Round 1 open-ended questionnaire (15 responses); round 2 closed (Likert scale) questionnaire (12 responses); round 3 online workshop (11 participants - 4 public sector; 5 private sector; and 2 third sector)

Modified Delphi process themes

Five themes: characteristics of younger workers; workplace expectations of younger workers; workplace readiness of younger workers; readiness of the workplace for younger workers; and education and policy makers

Appendix 2

Round 2 (Closed) Questionnaire Results

Theme 1: Characteristics of Younger Workers

Item	Mode of Consensus	Strength of Consensus	Mean	Std. Deviation
Young people possess markedly different skills and attributes than previous generations	Strongly agree/ agree	58.4%	3.67	.888
Young people bring fresh ideas to the workplace	Strongly agree/ agree	100%	4.42	.515
Young people embrace technology more than previous generations	Strongly agree/ agree	91.7%	4.42	.669
Young people are passionate about learning	Consensus not achieved	-	3.50	.552
Young people are resistant to change	Strongly disagree/ disagree	66.6%	2.25	.622
Young people are generally good communicators	Consensus not achieved	-	2.92	.900
Young people often lack important social skills	Consensus not achieved	-	2.92	.900
Young people are generally innovative	Agree	66.7%	3.67	.492
Young people have different career expectations from previous generations	Strongly agree/ agree	58.3%	3.75	.965
Young people are well equipped for the world of work through their educational experiences	Strongly disagree/ disagree	66.6%	2.25	.622
Young people expect to make a quick and positive impact in the workplace	Agree	66.7%	3.67	.492
Young people are more difficult to manage than previous generations	Consensus not achieved	-	2.58	.900
Young people are impatient to progress up the career ladder	Consensus not achieved	-	3.33	1.073
Young people are well informed, global citizens	Consensus not achieved	-	3.33	.651
Young people are overly influenced by social media	Agree	83.3%	3.83	.389
Young people are more likely to become frustrated by rules and bureaucracy	Strongly agree/ agree	66.6%	3.75	.622

Theme 2: Workplace Expectations of Younger Workers

Item	Mode of Consensus	Strength of Consensus	Mean	Std. Deviation	Progress to Round 3?
Young people have clear expectations about what constitutes a 'good place to work'	Strongly agree/ agree	83.3%	3.92	.996	No
Young people are more concerned about their employment prospects than previous generations	Consensus not achieved	-	3.25	.965	Yes
Task variety and regular exposure to new experiences are important to younger workers	Strongly agree/ agree	91.6%	4.00	.426	No
Younger workers value explicit recognition for their contribution	Agree	75%	3.75	.452	No
Young people expect to work for organisations whose values mirror their own	Strongly agree/ agree	91.6%	4.00	.426	No
Job security is less important to young people than previous generations	Consensus not achieved	-	3.33	.778	No
Younger workers care more about an organisation's stance on corporate social responsibility than previous generations	Strongly agree/ agree	66.7%	3.83	.718	No
An organisation's approach to diversity management is more important to younger workers than previous generations	Strongly agree/ agree	58.3%	3.67	1.073	Yes (strength of consensus is weak)
Young people have a stronger sense of workplace fairness than previous generations	Consensus not achieved	-	3.25	1.055	Yes
Young people expect a relaxed working environment where they can bring their own personality to the workplace	Strongly agree/ agree	58.4%	3.67	.888	Yes (strength of consensus is weak)
Flexible working practices are more important to younger workers than previous generations	Agree	83.3%	3.75	.622	No
Younger workers expect to 'work to live' and not 'live to work'	Strongly agree/ agree	75%	3.75	.754	No
A desirable work-life balance is more important to younger workers than previous generations	Strongly agree/ agree	75%	3.75	.965	Yes (key line of inquiry)
Regular opportunities to learn, train and develop are more important to younger workers than previous generations	Consensus not achieved	-	3.25	1.055	Yes
Young people expect instant success in the workplace	Consensus not achieved	-	3.50	.798	No (covered elsewhere)
Younger workers crave opportunities to be innovative at work	Consensus not achieved	-	3.25	.622	No (covered elsewhere)
Younger workers expect regular feedback on their performance	Strongly agree/ agree	83.3%	3.92	.515	No
Younger workers' expectations of leadership and management are different from previous generations'	Consensus not achieved	-	3.50	1.000	Yes

Theme 3: Workplace Readiness of Younger Workers

Item	Mode of Consensus	Strength of Consensus	Mean	Std. Deviation	Progress to Round 3?
Young people making their education-to-work transition are generally well prepared for the world of work	Disagree	66.7%	2.42	.669	Yes (key line of inquiry)
Young people are generally well-informed about the range of career opportunities available to them	Consensus not achieved	-	3.08	.900	Yes
Young people do not always know how to behave in the workplace	Agree	66.7%	3.50	.798	Yes (key line of inquiry)
Young people are resilient and can easily bounce back from setbacks	Consensus not achieved	-	2.92	.515	No (covered elsewhere)
Younger workers generally work well as part of a team	Strongly agree/ agree	58.3%	3.58	.793	Yes (strength of consensus is weak)
Young people entering the workplace are generally confident individuals	Consensus not achieved	-	2.92	.793	Yes
Younger workers are less trustworthy than older workers when working flexibly	Strongly disagree/ disagree	83.3%	2.00	.853	No
Young people generally have realistic expectations about work and working life	Consensus not achieved	-	2.75	.866	Yes

Theme 4: Readiness of the Workplace for Younger Workers

Item	Mode of Consensus	Strength of Consensus	Mean	Std. Deviation	Progress to Round 3?
Despite an employer's best efforts, a desirable work-life balance cannot always be struck	Agree	58.3%	3.25	.965	Yes (key line of inquiry)
Employers are more open to flexible working since the COVID-19 pandemic	Strongly agree/ agree	91.7%	4.33	.888	No
Leaders and managers are aware of the needs and expectations of younger workers	Consensus not achieved	-	3.27	.786	Yes
Managers require additional training on managing the young workforce	Consensus not achieved	-	3.42	.669	Yes
Older workers need training on the needs of younger workers	Consensus not achieved	-	3.17	.835	Yes
Employers need to put more effort into helping younger workers understand what is expected of them at work	Agree	75%	3.67	.651	Yes (key line of inquiry)
The younger workforce needs significant additional support in the workplace	Consensus not achieved	-	3.00	.853	Yes
The skills of young graduates are routinely under-utilised in the workplace	Consensus not achieved	-	3.25	.866	Yes
Workplaces are generally proactive at responding and adapting to the needs and expectations of younger workers	Consensus not achieved	-	2.92	.900	Yes
Generally, workplaces are equipped to meet the needs and expectations of younger workers	Consensus not achieved	-	2.75	.866	No (covered elsewhere)
Employers need to make more effort to attract a younger workforce	Strongly agree/ agree	66.6%	3.67	.778	No
Organisations often find it difficult to retain younger workers	Consensus not achieved	-	3.17	.835	Yes

Theme 5: Education and Policy Makers

Item	Mode of Consensus	Strength of Consensus	Mean	Std. Deviation	Progress to Round 3?
Employers place value on personal skills and experience over formal qualifications	Consensus not achieved	-	3.08	.900	Yes
Educational curriculum (school, college, university) is effectively aligned with labour market skill requirements	Strongly disagree/ disagree	91.6%	2.00	.426	Yes (key line of inquiry)
Schools, colleges and universities need to do more to help young people transition into the world of work	Strongly agree/ agree	83.4%	4.25	.754	Yes (key line of inquiry)
Young people would benefit from improved careers guidance	Strongly agree/ agree	100%	4.25	.452	No
Graduate skills in young people, e.g., critical analytical/research skills, are of high importance in the workplace	Consensus not achieved	-	3.58	.793	No (covered elsewhere)
There should be more focus on vocational and apprenticeship programmes, rather than reliance on higher education (university)	Strongly agree/ agree	83.3%	4.33	.778	Yes (key line of inquiry)
There will likely be less opportunities in the future to invest in young people, e.g., from reduced Government funding	Consensus not achieved	-	3.42	.900	Yes
Employers need more Government funding to create opportunities for young workers	Strongly agree/ agree	75%	3.67	1.155	Yes

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