



West Midlands Report Launch: Post Event Briefing

July 2019



Impetus transforms the lives of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by ensuring they get the right support to succeed in school, in work and in life. We find, fund and build the most promising charities working with these young people, providing core funding and working shoulder-to-shoulder with their leaders to help them become stronger organisations. In partnership with other funders we help our charities expand and we work to influence policy and decision makers so that young people get the support they need.

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Introduction

Impetus and KPMG held a roundtable on 26 July in Birmingham to launch Youth Jobs Gap Research Briefing 5: The Employment Gap in the West Midlands.

The Skills and Productivity Director for the West Midlands Combined Authority, together with MPs, business leaders, charities, academics, and local and regional policy-makers, reviewed the report's findings, reflected on the challenges facing young people in transitioning from education to employment.

This paper summarises these discussions and presents recommendations for action in the West Midlands to stakeholders to work on together over the coming months.

Context

Youth unemployment has halved since 2010. The news is full of positive headlines about record employment levels. So why are around 650,000 young people not in education, employment or in training (NEET) in the UK? What do we know about this group of young people?

Impetus wanted to get behind these headlines to find out how we can better support these young people to succeed in school, in work, and in life.

In partnership with the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) and the Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER), for the first time, Impetus can shed light on some of these questions. We've been able to use government data to better understand what happens to disadvantaged young people when they leave school and start looking for a job. And for the first time, we've [established that there is an "Employment Gap"](#) between disadvantaged young people and their better-off peers.

Alongside establishing the Employment Gap in the West Midlands, we're working with [our charity partners](#) in the region – Action Tutoring, Magic Breakfast, Place2Be, Power2, and The Access Project – to do something about it.

The Employment Gap in the West Midlands

In our first report of the [Youth Jobs Gap series](#), *Youth Jobs Gap: Establishing the Employment Gap*, we found that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET). And while this report painted a national picture of youth unemployment, our latest report, *Research Briefing 5: The Employment Gap in the West Midlands*, honed in on the West Midlands region specifically.

The report presents findings at local authority area level, including the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) area. We've found that although every locality in the West Midlands has its own story – with its own strengths and weaknesses – disadvantaged young people in the West Midlands are more likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET) than in England as a whole, although, positively, this gap has been closing in recent years. In fact, in Worcestershire, Stoke-on-Trent, and Herefordshire it is better to be better-off than to have qualifications. Disadvantaged young people with top GCSEs in the West Midlands are still much less likely to go to university than their better-off peers.

Summary of key points from our roundtable

The report launch roundtable featured a keynote speech from the WMCA Director of Skills and Productivity, Julie Nugent, who highlighted that while there has been strong economic growth and more jobs being created, there are still areas in the West Midlands where young people are facing persistent challenges in gaining good employment. Julie also pointed out that those young people who are struggling to enter the workforce are living in more deprived areas, tend to come from ethnic minority backgrounds, may have poor mental health and are likely to not have good GCSEs.

Work has been underway to address this through devolved budgets – the biggest of these being the adult education budget (£126m). Movement to Work was mentioned as one partner working to help young people into their first job in the West Midlands. However Julie stressed that while devolved budgets are important, there needs to be much more done to drive better coordination within the wider system, such as child care and mental health support. There was a call for partners and central government to better coordinate efforts to ensure more young people enter employment and for stronger connections with local employers.

Eddie Hughes MP (Conservative MP for Walsall North) said the government should be in a position to be more prescriptive in policy making, which is made more possible by the insights from Youth Jobs Gap data to ensure policy making is fine-tuned to local needs.

Steve McCabe MP (Labour MP for Birmingham Selly Oak and member of the Work and Pensions Committee) highlighted that even within regions there is a fragmentation of needs, which means well-intentioned initiatives delivered at the regional level are too non-specific to provide the right support. He called for more tailored programmes at a more local level, focusing earlier to prevent issues before they arise.

Participants had a lively discussion which included the following points::

- Young people with specific needs – such as those in care, those who are SEND, those who have been in the criminal justice system – need to be better identified and supported.
- There may be a strain on resources to provide quality education which means that employment isn't necessarily a primary focus. There needs to be better connectivity between schools and employers to make transition work successfully for learners.
- KPMG takes the transition from school to employment seriously and design their support around the skills needed to enter employment. More needs to be done to include employers in designing solutions in local areas.
- The government must take a longer-term view of the economic impacts of supporting NEET young people in order to tackle the issues identified in the Youth Jobs Gap report.
- Frontline support for young people needs to be intensive and go beyond qualifications. Young people who are long-term NEET are likely to have complex needs that require more in the way of wrap around support including mentoring, support to become work *experience* ready and then support to be work ready.
- This is a complex picture which requires much more targeted support for areas of critical need. We also need better connectivity between all players who are part of the solution (including schools, employers, local authorities) with an accountable person to ensure this connection happens.

Overall, there is progress in the West Midlands, but there was agreement around the need to build up a range of relevant policies and services to better support disadvantaged young people into employment. Impetus' Youth Jobs Gap series provides a good starting point to understand these.

Calls to action

- The data should be used to inform overall strategic and funding decisions so that money is directed to where it can have the most impact. Specifically:
 - Use the data presented in the Youth Jobs Gap West Midlands report to target interventions at the young people who need them most.
 - Use the data presented in the Youth Jobs Gap West Midlands report to target interventions in the locations which need particular support.
 - Use the data presented in the Youth Jobs Gap West Midlands report to target interventions in areas of underperformance, whether qualifications, access to apprenticeships, access to university or transition to work.

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- Use the data to inform program design when designing interventions and services for young people – whether that is the voluntary sector, the combined authority, local government, schools or employers.
 - Identify mechanisms for better co-ordination between these different decision makers: they all want to the best for the young people in the West Midlands but greater join up and communications between sectors, particularly at transition points, is needed.

Get involved

Impetus is keen to continue to work with relevant people and organisations in the West Midlands to take forward these recommendations. The Youth Jobs Gap series continues and will culminate in a national policy recommendations briefing in Spring 2020. Please contact our team to engage in this project and provide your input via info@impetus.org.uk or vial social media.

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All young people can
succeed at school and work
with the right support

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