**Elevate Equity 2024 – Session 1**

**Ben**

Hello Hello Welcome, welcome. Hi. Hello. Welcome to The Open University’s Elevate Equity harnessing young talent event. Hello to everyone in the room. How you doing? You good? Hello to everyone online as well. Looking forward to speaking to all of you. My name is Ben Hunte. I'm a presenter and journalist. I'm just wrapping up three years at Vice News as their global correspondent based between New York and London, reporting on everything to do with LGBT rights, sexuality, gender and all of that good stuff. I've flown in from New York yesterday into glamorous Milton Keynes. It's 26 degrees in New York right now. It's not 26 degrees here. But nevertheless, it's like it's good to be here. And I'm very excited for today. I was the BBC's first LGBT correspondent. I started that in 2019, again reporting on all things to do with gender and sexuality. I then went on to be the BBC's West Africa correspondent, based across the African continent during the pandemic. I was in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, all sorts covering human rights stories for the BBC across all of their various different platforms. Now I am a 31 year old black gay man. Usually I'm considered young talent, which is exciting. At the BBC, I was the youngest, correspondent at vice. I was the youngest correspondent at Google, where I was working there as a strategy manager. I was their youngest strategy manager internationally. So I've got lots of opinions on all of today's topics. Anyway, we've got a fantastic lineup of speakers and panellists here today who are going to be discussing how employers can enable young talent in the workplace. Young talent is the future of the workforce, but employers are reporting a mismatch between young people's skill levels and employer expectations. 72% of employers have seen a shift in young people's values and priorities in the workplace in the past three years, which suggests that this is an opportunity to better understand this younger generation. To ensure we are providing equitable workplaces. While Gen Z's views and motivations are sensationalised in the media, there is some common ground. Young people have aspirations and ambitions for the future, and we're here today to talk about how we can harness that. So before I introduce our first speaker, we want to get our audience perspective on whether your organisation has found it harder to harness young talent. So we're going to be using Slido, which is very exciting. There should be a code. Yes, in your programme on the screen. If you're joining us virtually, please do scan that. The question is, my organisation finds it harder to harness young talent than ever before. Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree. Please vote now. And we're going to have a look and see how that goes. I will say, a few years ago I gave my first talk in a school. It was 2017, and I was invited in by a teacher to chat in the school about my life and my career and my experiences. And I thought, this is a good opportunity just to show off to young people for a couple of hours. I thought, why not? And I went into this school. It was in Cleethorpes which I'd never heard of, but was very exciting to be there. And in this school, I was fully humbled by these young people, fully humbled. I was asked, where they could see my content, where could they see me being a journalist? And I said to them, you can literally watch me on the 6:00 news. And they said, what's the 6:00 news? I said, excuse me. And then I was speaking about my work, and my experiences, and I said, yeah, 6:00 news on BBC 1. And they said, what's BBC 1? I said, okay, right. Cool. And that led to me signing up an organisation called Find Your Voice, where I literally travel the country to less financially fabulous places. And I speak to young people about their career ambitions and the things they want to do. Basically, I give them a kick up the backside and tell them to get it together, and it's been great because it's given me a network of young people who tell me things about their work experiences, about the things they want to do with their lives. And I've heard over the years that people really struggle with work experience where they can't pick up phones in offices because they've never been speaking publicly before, or their bosses use the wrong pronouns, and that puts them off work for good. Or, they struggle with small talk. One person was like, why am I speaking to people in an office like, why do we need to do that? Why can't I just do my job and then go home? Why do I need to find out about my colleagues dogs and their children and stuff? And it's all of these things, these soft skills. So, yeah, I think, in the work that I've done, I've definitely seen that you are seeing a real difference in the values that young people hold and another generation. So let's have a look at the Slido now. The question was, my organisation finds it harder to harness young talent than ever before. And you'll see that, yes, most people agree. So 45% agree. Strongly agree, 24%. Neither agree or disagree 20%, and disagree 11%, strongly disagree 1%. Interesting. So we're going to be using Slido, throughout the day. So please do make use of that and let's get into it. Our first speaker today is Joseph Lennox. Joseph is a senior strategy advisor working on shaping the future strategies of HMRC. As a former apprentice, Joseph understands the value it brings to both the employer and the apprentice themselves. He's involved in a range of projects to promote apprenticeships, and shares his story to inspire young people to explore alternative routes to a career. Please welcome Joseph.

**Joseph**

Thank you very much. Very good to be here. I haven't travelled from the lovely, glamorous New York I'm from, I’ve come from Birmingham. So take that as you wish. Yeah. So I think Ben's hit on some really, really good things in his opening statement. As a lovely person from generation Z, I have found it hard to grapple with quite a few things. COVID was the biggest shock of my life. Being in a career is still quite difficult as a young person. Soft skills, listening to your colleagues tell you about their gardening because I have always been the youngest in HMRC. And I don't do a lot of gardening. I don't do all that. I’m... So it's a hard time. So I'm going to take you through, sort of, my journey as an apprentice and reflect on that in terms of COVID, in terms of the challenges that young people face. What I’ve seen young people face, what's becoming new to young people? And hopefully inspire them to, basically try something new and hello to the people online as well. I don't know if anyone tried the Slido earlier, but I had no internet in the room so I couldn't even do it. So it might be a bit difficult for the people in the room, but happy for you to engage with me, face to face as well. Let's do it. So I'm going to start off with Slido because I like to get people engaged. And I'm always talking about apprenticeship schemes because as a former apprentice, I think they're life changing. To be able to stand on this stage started with an apprenticeship scheme for me. So I'm always going to grill people on apprenticeship schemes, make sure they’re at the forefront of your mind, because I think is what will unlock that next chapter for most young people. I think university is now becoming more questionable. While apprenticeship schemes are now opening that more accessible option to a direct access to the industry, you need. How many apprenticeship programs were started in August between 2023 and January 2024? That’s last quarter, to last year and January 2024 this year. So I'm not doing too bad. Ooh look at that okay. So if you've sat at 200,500, 200,550, that's where you're at 150. Okay. We're actually doing 50,000 better. So this year we're actually performing a lot quicker than we are last year. Now, this doesn't include all the people who possibly have dropped out of the scheme as well. Those different starts where people might have not completed the scheme, but it's just including those starts that we've had. And that's quite impressive in terms of just from August to January. So a little bit of story about me before 2019. That young person, 19 years old, just coming out of sixth form, had my uni offers in the bag, really wanted to do something in politics after studying politics in, sixth form. And I thought, right, how can I get into politics? Had my international relations politics at uni. But then I thought, I don't necessarily work well in that academic format. I need something to apply that learning. So how do I get that learning and then apply it to real life scenario? And I actually just started googling apprenticeship schemes. Now, I think that's the first challenge for young people. They don't get all the information in school. They don't get provided with all the further education routes they can take, not just the higher education straight to uni. What else can you do? Internships. Why not? Sponsorships a massive thing, but apprenticeships are growing in lots of industries. And I wanted to look for mine so I found one in HMRC work through the a-to-z website of Gov UK apprenticeship schemes, tedious. No one replied to me and I started with the top, Admiral, I thought insurance. Try it, I'll try it. I don't really like insurance companies, but I’ll work for them. But it was also then trying to figure out, as a young person, don't just chuck yourself into a career just for the money. Right? So I work down this list. I'm not going to say how many people even replied to me because I can't remember. And I think, again, that's the next challenge for a young person. Resilience. You're told no or you're not even told an answer, so you don't even know if you're good nor bad. So you're left in this grey area with no feedback and unsure how to progress because no one will tell you how and you don't actually have anything in your previous sort of life yet to tell you how to build that career. 2019 started as a policy advisor in HMRC. And, for me, found this scheme by sheer luck. Like I said, it was on that list. Didn't know what it was, but I thought right. It told me I could get involved in policy, shaping politics. That's policy for the future. Getting involved in that big decision making. I just chucked my name in the hat. Very daunting thing to do. And then came my next challenge as a young person. How do I do these online assessments, never been taught how to do an online assessment, never been taught how to do a proper interview, never been taught how to go to an assessment centre. HMRC had the most gruelling process of recruiting, three stages. An online assessment. Then if you get accepted by that, you then go to a face to face assessment. And then if you make it through that, they'll tell you. But in that assessment it’s broken down to a written policy exercise, a 50 minute interview, and then you're given a presentation topic to present to someone you've never known before. And for a young person, that's daunting. I thought I wouldn't get it because I was in a room with people saying, oh yeah, just got out of Uni, just did my masters in politics. Masters? I've just come out of school. So that's really difficult for a young person to navigate a world where you don't have the experience, you don't have the credentials. And here I am still in HMRC and I'm really, really happy to say that they took the chance. Do I know why? Not necessarily. Was I told that answer? No. Did I get feedback on my process even though I was successful? No. So even then, I'm still in the grey area while having a career. It's very difficult. And then what has it done for me so far? So I've used an apprenticeship scheme to unlock most things that not a lot of young people do, volunteering. And when I go to schools, I tell students, you need to volunteer, because the sad reality is when you go to school, it's a competitive environment. Those people you call your friends, you will have to eventually try to compete with for a job in the real world. And if all your CV's are the same, it makes it very hard for an employer to go, oh, let me take a chance on that one as opposed to this one because they're all the same. So I'm always pushing for volunteering. And I chair a local schools governing body. I am probably the youngest on the board. And for me, I sit on that board and I think, how can we have all, not one young person on the board, but you are here trying to shape the strategic vision of a school for young people. They still used email. I said, have you heard of WhatsApp? Oh, so WhatsApp. And I think these are the young people of today who are using technology. My nieces and nephews use these iPads better than me, and you have to keep up with these young people because they're evolving with technology. AI is the one that scares me now. Just been to a conference yesterday. One found they use an AI to help teachers plan lessons. Impressive and amazing. But very scary as to how much potential that has and how far it will go? Will it take people's jobs? Who knows? Will it be more augmented? So it's just supporting that human aspects. So yeah, I pick up all this stuff. And I've met some great people along the way. All started with an apprenticeship scheme. And that's why I think is so important to young people. But a lot of the young people I speak to go to uni because of the ease of uni, you can get into uni a lot easier than you can get on to an apprenticeship scheme. A lot of people ask me, how's your social life? A lot better when I have money to fund that social life, right? I said, why not get a job? You can go on holiday if you want. You don't have to scrape by. You go oh, I want to go to that party but the uni loan hasn't landed yet. No have a full time and then you can honestly start doing what you want to do. And I change a lot of people's students just for that one aspect of unlocking the salary. So there's a lot that can be done. And winning apprentice of the year at the Apprentice, the Multicultural Apprenticeship Awards last year, and winning the accounting and finance category as well. So using that platform to speak more to students, to the generation that I'm part of and I accept I'm an anomaly. A lot of people tell me you are very strange for your generation. I go, I am, I love a suit. I love staying at home. And I'll, you know, I'll watch a good documentary, you know? And I love a cup of tea. Don't get me started. So, you know, but I think it's that mentality of I've been very hungry for a career. I've been hungry to get started on a career. I want to be, you know, thirty, really getting into my peak, you know, I didn't want to wait around. So I just harnessed that. And I force myself into all these different roles that provide me with the opportunities that you wouldn't necessarily get in a day job. How do you harness talent from a range of different opportunities, supporting the young black man and young Asian woman projects? How do we tap into cultures? Because we speak about barriers, but people forget there are cultural barriers. You know, listening to them saying how certain words and applications don't make them feel welcome. Seeing a workforce when you push out pictures that don't show a diverse workforce. Hard to relate to someone in that workforce. That's the same thing for a young person. Been very hard for me in HMRC being the youngest, I'm not going to lie, I can't have the conversations I want with everyone. I have to watch my tongue a little bit sometimes because I don't know how these older people feel about some of the stuff that I'd say, but I think it's just because they wouldn't relate to my lifestyle. They wouldn't relate to what I've grown up with. Not to say I don't love my colleagues, great colleagues right to work with. So supportive. But on that level of just that age, it does provide that small barrier of I can't relate just on that level, but we can have great conversations and work together. Just a life of my pictures. I love pictures, as you can see, I'm always taking a picture. And I think it's important to document and share your journey as a young person, as an apprentice. So when I see young people apprentices, I say share your journey. Good. Bad. Horrific. Great. Share it. Because someone will take that and go, right. Oh, what can we learn from that journey? You know, it's been a great journey so far, being a public speaker off the back of an apprenticeship scheme, going to all these great conferences where again, we are looking at how do we target young people, how do we target, young black men and young Asian women? How do we get into those culture? How do we break down those cultural barriers, meeting, ministers, who is now the lovely, Victoria Atkins, the Secretary of State for health. So, yeah. And then there's the other stuff of doing speaking as well and just sharing my journey. And then I'll speak about the three important things in apprenticeship program, because I think for a young person, they don't understand apprenticeship programs as much as they should. And I think one of the biggest barriers for that is, people at home. So I speak to a lot of students whose parents don't understand what an apprenticeship scheme is, what it offers. And I get that right, because when you think about uni, you think like, what's the end goal? Ooh right, I get to put on the gown, wear the hat, don the hat, they call my name. I run up the stage, I grab the scroll, look fantastic and take a picture of mums in the crowd. Oh my sons. They graduate. They have. And an apprenticeship scheme is not as glamorous as that. And I get it. But when you start telling them a career at 18 years old, a salary that you can live a life on, a job that guarantees you opportunities from the day you step into that job, you are working on that career from day one. You will not race in to get an academic qualification, to make it to a career that you're not guaranteed. And let's not mention the 9,000 pounds if it's gone out now, I don't know. I never really, you know, as long as it's as long as it's more than apprenticeship schemes. It works for me. But it's it's really, really important that not a lot of people, even me, that was a huge aspect I didn't want. I thought, I don't want that. And if there’s opportunities to do it without getting a large debt. Why not? Yes. And then there's the things that young people, those social skills that I didn't have walking into a corporate world, sorry, driven, organised, dependable, resilient, independent, collaborative and learning from mistakes. So these are the things I had to be taught on the job. I was not organised, as you saw. I still rushed in a bit late today. So I'm working on that. Bear with me. But these are the things that you don't learn in school that are transferable in your career. How to learn from a mistake. I was always scared, to learn, to make a mistake in HMRC because I thought, oh goodness, if I make a mistake with taxpayer money, I don't want to be on no headline. Civil servant has made a mistake with billions, scary stuff. Or be scolded by someone who's much senior than me. So I was a little bit more risk averse, a little bit more safe than sorry. How do I make sure i ask. But that made sure I learned the right process. Nothing wrong with that. So you got to look at the pros and cons. I'm rushing through this now, because I've got nice timer here telling me I've got two minutes, so bear with me. And what should we promote in young talent when you have young talent in the workplace, which we don’t, is be vocal. We should tell young people to be vocal if they see something that doesn't work. Challenge as well. So this works perfectly in tandem. For me I had to challenge HMRC in terms of some of the stuff they were doing with our provider. I didn't want to be with a provider that was rated inadequate by Ofsted. I challenged them on that. We were the only department not to, to not move and eventually we did move. We got a much better learning and it's me sitting in the exams at the end of the day, so I was a champion in that. Don't be afraid to ask for help. A lot of young people scared to ask, can you help me? Could you show me how it's done? Because you know that fear of feeling stupid, right? Should I know how to do this? And alot of the time I'm in HMRC i thought, nah I shouldn’t how how to do this. I'm just going to ask. And a lot of those people you realise will actually take out time to help you. So don't be afraid to ask for help and asking for opportunities. How do you ensure that you get those skills that you won't necessarily be exposed to? You have to ask. I always ask, I ask people to shadow. I asked if I could get involved in different offices. I ask if I could volunteer in different projects. I used to volunteer locally. I found the local school to govern for myself and just put in an application. You have to really be ambitious and creative with your approach as a young person, because what you realise is a lot of companies won't hire us because we don't have experience, and you're stuck in that loop of never having an experience and no one giving you the opportunity for experience. You have to be really creative to pick up those experiences elsewhere. And then, oh, almost, oh my Slido. Oh, there we go. Oh look, you guys already. Oh, who's very in. I don't know who's answered that already. Oh someone said what image? Someone's already jumped the gun on me okay. It's actually this image. I just was when I was making this PowerPoint, I thought this image just stood out to me. So I just thought I’d chuck it in a PowerPoint. And I thought, what do you think when you see it? It's always interesting. I got 46 seconds. What do you think when you see it? Chuck an answer at me. Anyone who's online as well. What do you think when you see this picture? Because I know when I see it it's quite a, I think it probably the most aspects of life. Home life it should nurture. I think there's a lot of support that goes into the roots. Without the roots, it's a pretty sad tree, won’t be alive, but I think again, without the tree you just have roots. What are you nurturing? What are you nourishing? Oh, it's very inspiring. I don't know what was so inspiring because the picture wasn’t up yet. So I really want to know. Growth. Massive one. Yeah. I love the word growth. 10 seconds. Oh, okay. Some of the stats as well. So I just want to quickly touch on some of this where we have some of the issues with ethnicity and where we are now, that we still need to target young people. Not target that 25 category. Upskilling is fine, but we need to make sure we make way for the young people with entry routes, not just upskill your workforce to make them better. And then how can we support more? Oh God, there's some 12 seconds over. There's an element for everyone to do. I think parents and guardians have a real responsibility at home. Schools and education providers have a responsibility to provide access to everything, to make sure there's links with businesses for work experience and individuals you have to, even the young person has to want it. You can't force young people to have all the, create all the opportunities. If the young people look at and go, nah, not for me. So you have to ask them, what do they want, what career do they look for? Okay, so I'm going to tell you the answer to this. 93% of people say that apprenticeships stay in apprenticeship schemes on completion because of the loyalty created with the employer. I love HMRC because they took that chance to invest in me, so I'm quick to defend them. When people say it's just a tax organisation, it's not. It's not. And then recruitment as well. But I'm not going to go into that. I'm going to, I'm going to, I'm going to, I'm going to spare you all of that because I'm one minute over. But yeah. So it's, I think for me it's showing you that journey of a young person. I have been really fortunate enough to do things that not a lot of young people get. But share in that journey, let you guys know that there are things out there for young people, and we have to keep encouraging sectors to do more. And I think employers, large companies, need to want to invest in young people because they're the ones at the end of the day, who's paying for that apprenticeship scheme. So you have to convince them. And that's why I'm on this stage to hopefully show you what it's done for me and how it's changed my life. So thank you. Even though I’m one minute thirty over.

**Ben**

Okay. Don't run off anywhere. If you want to take a seat. We’ll do some questions. Thank you so much for that presentation.

**Joseph**

Oh. Thank you.

**Ben**

So nice to hear some positive experience about apprenticeships. So, this is going to be interactive. So I'd like to have a, question and answer session with people in the room as well as those online as well. So you can submit your questions via Slido. And I'm going to go through these, but we've also got some roving mics in the room because we are in Milton Keynes for a reason. This flight was necessary. So, we've got roving mic. If there are any questions, let's start in the room. We'll start in the room. Will give people some Slido time. Yes.

**Patrick**

Okay. Thanks so much Joseph. So I work at the Institute for apprenticeships. I’ve heard you speak before. You’re fantastic. Well done. So I think, I've been in this area for about 15, 16 years. I'm married to the head of sixth from at a local school. I think one of the biggest challenges of people going university is that university life. So that thing about moving away from home. And actually having that social aspect as well. Now I know there's things we can do in apprenticeships, but from your point of view, what can we do to try and get that university life fit in the technical education, in the apprenticeship scheme? Because I think that is one thing that's pulling people away from a different route, if that makes sense.

**Joseph**

Yeah, that's, that's a really good question. Difficult one, because I think that social life created by uni is, is almost built into the campus. Right? You live very close to the campus, you live with your friends and you have that experience. I mean, I had a similar, sort of experience with the people I was on the scheme with. And for me, the one thing that unlocks that is a good salary, one to start with. So I was really lucky that HMRC gave me a good salary since 18. I've been living alone. So I've got that independent element of it right. Taught me how to manage my bills so I enjoy that? No. Do I, did I enjoy watching my friends go to uni and gallivanting and partying? No. But what it taught me was how to manage properly, how to budget, but have a good time. I still have a good time, and you can definitely have a social life. And I think your social life tends to be a lot better when you, you can do the things you want to do rather than just doing it, because it's what's happening on the campus is what's going on in uni. And then I would say to people just with that mentality, look at what the, it sounds so horrible to say, but your social life doesn't pay for your life, right? So you can have a social life, but you have to think outside the social life. You have to have a career. Everyone does. So I mean, there's loads of people in this room who have careers and social lives. You just work that good balance. But yeah, you're absolutely right. You can't compete with that you life that that is offered. And it's going to be a challenge.

**Ben**

Thank you. Let's go to Slido. So the first one I'm seeing on here, i’m sure it’s the same on there. Do teachers and careers advisors know enough about the benefits of apprenticeships?

**Joseph**

No. No. So, yeah. Yeah, that's, that's a very. That would be my answer. That. No, I'm joking. I'm. No. So, one of the issues is, is obviously being a school governer gives me that insight into schools. And I think that's why I remain as a governer There's just not the funding for it. They don't have the funding to look after the students who need special needs. They have the funding to put children on the right care plans. They don't have the funding to really, to provide support at home. And there's waiting lists for those people who have special needs requirements and need to get into specialist schools. But there's just no, there's no money for it right. And the school then is restrained because they have these teachers wearing 50 different hats. At one point, the school I worked for, the careers teacher was working as a, as a marketing, sorry. In that side of it and doing the careers until eventually they split her role and now she invests in it 100%. And ever since she's done that, she's managed to get careers fairs, links with local companies. BAE systems. Huge local in our area coming to our school. So no, I don't think they are. And I think there's also teachers will tell you the experience that's most, applicable to them. A lot of them would have gone to uni, right. So they can tell you what uni is like inside out. Not a lot of the teachers would have gone up through the apprenticeship scheme. So it's hard for them to tell you the benefits of something they can't quite see themselves. So I think it is telling, giving teachers more information. And I think there's an element of teachers have to also be proactive in keeping up with what's available to students as well.

**Ben**

Love that. Next question. How can we get more information out to parents, carers and students when schools are still so reticent? Oh, come on, reticent, to promote apprenticeships as an alternative to university?

**Joseph**

Yeah. Yeah. So you have to do both groups. If I'm honest. You do have to start with both. And the schools have a responsibility, I think, to look after students and provide them with all the opportunities they need to do that. I think schools it's hard. It's easy for me to say what they need to do, but I know they don't have the money to do what I'd love them to do, right? If they could have the money to have, you know, careers dedicated people in every school to make sure they just focus on that, great. I’m fortunate my school does. She knows a lot more about apprenticeship schemes and she wants to make that accessible. But then you have that challenge of selling it to the student, and the student runs home, and the parents go never heard of it not happening. You're going to uni. And that's a huge cultural barrier. So in a lot of Asian families, black families, it's very hard to navigate through that with your parents almost dictating where you should and shouldn't go. Right. So you need to also educate them, invite them into the school. Our school does community days where they invite parents in, turn it into apprenticeship days, you know, have businesses. Instead of doing sort of workshops just for students, have an exhibit for parents to walk around and speak to these employers. What are they offering the young person? What will they offer their child? So yeah, I think you have to work with both groups, but I think the school needs to be really ambitious and creative in its approach.

**Ben**

Thank you. Emma, from Thames Water says we struggle to engage our current cohorts to engage in social and team build opportunities. Any tips on how we overcome this? What drives and motivates you?

**Joseph**

Yeah, so that's a really hard one. I think it goes to the social aspect that you speak about in your in your opening sort of statement that young people struggle with the social issues, the small interactions, small talk, even having a conversation just for the networking opportunities, they don't see value in that. I think what I've noticed with young people is they like to see the end point.

**Ben**

Yes.

**Joseph**

And I think TikTok has created this weird world where you can click your fingers and be rich. Everyone wants to be an influencer, and it's great that I can stand on this stage, but it took me four years of volunteering, doing all that work for free to eventually become a speaker. Never planned for it to happen, but it's that investment that young people don't have now. The commitment to the long term for that great end goal. People just look at the end goal, right? Okay, 60k, that's where I want to be. How are you getting there though? Oh I'm not sure. So I think it's, you need to provide the young people now with that outcome more, because it's I think a lot of other people would like that journey. But generation Z, my generation, we like to see the financial side and what we get out of it.

**Ben**

That's really interesting. Yep go for it.

**Patrick**

Morning Joseph, it’s great to hear your story. You mentioned that assessment days are quite daunting for young people. I know for a fact that it stops young people applying for certain roles. So what's your recommendation for employers? What should they do differently?

**Joseph**

This. This comes to building relationships with local schools and with students. So you have that churn in work experience with students going into the office to get corporate life, to ask those very specific questions, how do we get into this organisation? So one thing we do at HMRC, I've taken on the young person's lead role for Stratford. Stratford has high unemployment, high youth unemployment, and why are we a government organisations sitting in this area doing nothing. So I'm trying to create that revolving door. That's what companies need to do. So it gives them the information they need to actually know how to successfully go to an assessment centre and what they need to do to hit the right things in the centre. But it's also building that relationship with the school so the school can actually coach them. I think UCAS did it well because with that platform they created for the universities, it was all packaged beautifully. You need to do this, you need to get this many points. So it created this perfect journey for you to see exactly what I need to do to get there. Well you don't have that for apprenticeship schemes, because employers also recruit differently, so it's not the same throughout. So you have one will do an assessment, one will do a presentation. One might ask you to do a technical sort of, a technical task. So it's really difficult for, for, for, sort of, employers to keep up. I think my mind would be try keep it simple. Maybe if you could adopt a universal way, if everyone did assessments in that way, that'd be great. But if not, work with schools to provide teachers and those institutions with information about how to do it. And then secondly would be, have work experience so you can have students coming in to see that corporate life, get a flavour of your organisation. And then also ask you, as a company and the organisation, how do we get here?

**Ben**

I love that. Next question from Slido. Let's go with, do HMRC bring in apprentices as a cohort to provide that peer network of support? We struggle to get apprentices to engage in support sessions.

**Joseph**

Yes. So HMRC do. I was recruited as part of a cohort. I didn't. So the issue was the cohort wasn't necessarily in my home department. It was a cohort across the civil service. So I had people in department for transport. I was on the same scheme with that could be scattered around, and we came to really like each other as the cohort. And that's that social aspect we had. Before Covid obviously, we used to go to hotels and have our conference days, and they'll teach us in these lovely learning environments with people we don't work with. But our cohort, and really, really melded with them in that sense. But what was the question? That one.

**Ben**

So what, what can they do to kind of get cohorts to engage more with support sessions?

**Joseph**

Engage more with support sessions? How do you get them to engage more with support?

**Ben**

What did you, did you go to the support? I don’t know if I employers offer sessions where they are kind of like helping you out or.

**Joseph**

That's the issue. I wouldn't say they are. I think that's, that's a really good question in that sense, because if they did offer that in terms of that support and showing you your cohort before would be a great idea to show you who your mingling with. I didn't get that till I was secured. So it was very, I had my apprenticeships scheme and my job, but I didn't know who my who was on my cohort until a couple of months later. And I think we've missed a trick there. If you did that before and let them socialise and get to know their cohort and then introduce into the scheme a lot better, it'll be great if you also married up cohorts where apprentices wasn't going into departments alone. So it'd be great if you had more than one apprentice because it's quite difficult for me. I was lucky that they were former apprentices, but that was the only apprentice that I could find in my team. Which made it very difficult. So if you could create that, and I think it comes back to that social aspect, I think generation Z love the social aspect of not feeling alone. And I absolutely get that. I think that's been amplified by COVID the mental strain of being alone in your house all the time. You always want to be in that social aspect. I get that. And you're absolutely right. I think employers need to do more to promote that and promote, I guess that interconnectedness between young people as well as the employer employee. So you have that cohesion. So. No. Yeah. I didn't really know my cohort, but I think I'm just quite strange in that sense. I didn't really mind. I sort of just chucked myself at problems. And I get that's an issue. Not all young people are like that. And that's one that.

**Ben**

I think that makes sense though. From the young people I speak to through my sessions. Yeah. When they're going into these offices, you know, always people who are older than them. Frequently, if they've been brought in as the first within it. So they're like the first black young man to be. Then they’re again facing differences. So actually to have that cohort available to them and to know that other people, it also means you can code switch a bit. Yeah. So when you're putting on like a posh voice in the office, suddenly you'll be around your cohort and you're like chilling out a little bit. You never know who you actually are before you go back into office mode.

**Joseph**

Sorry, just to add on that. Because there's a lot of networks out there for apprentices that I discovered post apprenticeship, which is again a bit of an issue, but if you spend time on LinkedIn as the Apprentice ambassador network, which works very closely with [...] You have, a lot of people starting the Black Apprentice network, the young Asian women apprentice network. So there are those cohorts, HMRC have an HMRC apprentice network. So there are all those things set up to provide that cohort, of those people who are doing similar things to you so you can sort of vent them, but we don't have the structure in place to make that mandatory. So yeah.

**Ben**

Awesome. Well, thank you very much Joseph. Please give it up for Joseph. Thank you.

**Sophie**

Hi, I'm Sophie Marder from The Nursery, a full service market research agency. We regularly work for OU to understand different audiences internally and externally to the organisation. Every year we run a thought leadership project. And today I'll be sharing some highlights from our most recent one. Coming of Age, Turning 18 in the UK. We conducted a year long research study with 18 year olds to find out what it's like to be an 18 year old today. Our research included interviews, tasks, online communities, and a survey to really get to know about our 18 year olds and what their lives are like. Before we dive into our findings, here's a brief snapshot of what the lives of our British 18 year olds have looked like up until now. They've had more prime ministers in the past 18 years than any other generation. And the first truly digital social media generation. Facebook, was up and running a year before they were born, and then every year since, they've seen a new social media platform and technology pop up, which have been integral to our daily lives. 18 year olds have also grown up against a hectic backdrop, from the financial crisis to the tripling of tuition fees to even more recent events like Brexit and the COVID pandemic. And yes, these things have happened to all of us. But let's remember that for 18 year olds, all of this has happened in their childhood when they're defining who they'll be as adults. When we ask 18 year olds what they cared about most, we found that what they really considered to be most important to them is what's right in front of them. Their close inner circle. Things like passing exams, going to uni, getting a girlfriend, or even going to that Hozier concert. This was a spontaneous, open ended question, so we can see that when asked openly, they're not immediately thinking about big topics like the environment and societal challenges. Instead, they're thinking about their small world first. And of course, like we all are, they’re thinking and worrying about money. They're not sheltered from the cost of living crisis. Overhearing conversations within the family about increasing bills and needing to cut back. When we ask about their hopes and dreams, they cite wanting to pay off their parents mortgages and feeling financially secure in the future. There is youthful optimism amongst 18 year olds. This is a great stage of life, full of formed friendships, fun experiences and new opportunities as they enter adulthood. They're optimistic and ambitious. However, they do feel pressure to perform and do well from a number of different audiences, and we see that 18 year olds today have some new modern pressures from social media. They feel pressure to not get cancelled online or within their social groups. They feel they have to keep their finger on the pulse and have their opinions ready. All of these pressures stem from how they think other people might see them. 18 year olds really care about what other people think of them. They're also fearful. This leads them to question and criticise everything such as authority figures and the way of the world. On our community they even questioned some of the tasks we gave them and the way we worded certain questions, which was a bit of a shock to us as researchers. They're also more cynical about previous generations and their views. When it comes to their own health and happiness, they prioritise and protect this in whatever way they can. This is likely to come into play when they're choosing a career. For example, if they don't feel comfortable in an office, they will opt for a remote role for the sake of their own well-being. But despite these pressures and fears, 18 year old are still determined to achieve, and that youthful optimism still remains strong.

**Ben**

Okay, thank you for that. So next up we have Lauren Mistery, who is deputy CEO at Youth Employment UK. Lauren leads the strategies on research, insights and best practice across the youth and business audiences. She's passionate about ensuring that all young people get the resources they need to understand and support their best next steps, and that there are accessible, quality opportunities available wherever young people live. Please welcome Lauren.

**Lauren**

Thank you. I have to say, I always love listening to Joseph speak, but I feel like I've changed my script for this session about four times already. Based on the questions I've heard and the things that we have, already thinking about. Really looking forward to hearing from all the speakers and getting to know, all of you in the breakout sessions and those online too. A little bit about Youth Employment UK first. They haven't given me the day off today not to tell you about who we are and what we do. Youth Employment UK is a community interest company founded in 2012 with a real mission to reduce youth unemployment. The insight, intelligence, and work that we'll talk through today, forms three pillars. So we are first and foremost a youth voice organisation. Annually we run something called the youth census, which is a weighted view of how young people feel nationally. Young people for us, Ben, are 11 to 30, unfortunately. But, the data I'll talk to was taken last year. You might just fit in what we're going to talk about today. The youth voice census asks people about everything. It asks them about where they live, how they can travel around that area, what career support they've had, how young people in work are really doing, how they're faring, and everything else in between. We also support, we also support organisations as a membership org, service to. So we have over a thousand members within our network who are small, large, organisations and everything in between, in terms of what we're able to do for those employers is to support them, to think about best practice. The real issues young people are facing and how they can support them from everything from early careers, engagement, attraction, recruiting them physically into the business and retaining them too. We are also a policy and research organisation too. We run the APPG for youth employment, and a series of research projects, the likes of the careers and enterprise company, Gatsby and many others. In terms of thinking about my role here today. And I have to say, as I've sat rewriting my script three times, I feel like we can all really passionately talk about any given subject or topic. I expect us to talk frequently today about work experience in every single session. But when we think about the skills mismatch, and what's going on, I just want to start with the severity of the situation. Young people have for at least the last ten years been three times as likely, to be unemployed as older cohorts. When we're talking about young people here, we're talking 16 to 24. And whilst, there have been challenges and there continue to be issues with collecting the data, around the labour force survey, what we are seeing and what is really concerning is the number of young people who are economically inactive. That means they are not working and they are not looking for work. And as we try and understand that cohort, that 40%, of young people who are not working and not looking for work, and that number has increased over the last year by 100,000 young people. These young people who are, amazing and fantastic, we all know amazing 18 year olds. There isn't one of you here that wouldn't, have that wouldn't hire Joseph today. And, the, and, likely, there will be organisations sitting here that he applied to who couldn't see that potential and couldn't access it and couldn't harness it, in the ways needed to. What we have seen for young people as they've come of age through COVID 19, is a real disconnection and disengagement from some of the services around them too. Our biggest finding of last year’s youth voice census was, how young people are starting to feel in competition about everything. They have seen COVID 19 play out. They are in competition for doctors appointments, dentist appointments, for jobs, for opportunities, to be able to access the mental health and support that they might need now or in the future too. It really feels like everything is going to be really difficult for them. And actually, throughout COVID 19, there were things put in place to be able to support them, to be, whilst they’re in education. But for anyone who has aged out of education during that period of time, things feel really difficult and they are really difficult for them too. And people didn't get those opportunities for work experience. In fact, a third of young people had access to work experience last year, and, young people didn't get those opportunities to go to their first concert. It was more difficult to have a first boyfriend, their first girlfriend. They weren't getting their first jobs. They weren't being able to access those opportunities in the ways that we think they were. I was with a group of employers last week, and we've all for years talked about, you know, the only example young people can give of teamwork is being in their local football team or their local rugby team. And actually for three years, young people didn't have that. And actually as they now age out of education and go into, a cost of living crisis, only 50% of young people did anything, outside of education, that’s extra curricular activities, that’s sports clubs, that’s youth clubs, half of our young people aren't getting the opportunities to understand, explore and even know that they've got these soft skills that we'll talk about today too. There is a real lack of opportunity to grow, harness, invest and engage that with young people to. And that's a real challenge for employers. How can we see potential when we haven't got examples? How can we sit through assessment centres which young people don't feel prepared for and, make them and, and kind of make estimations, assumptions about who these young people can be. And we have seen report after report of employers telling us, the employability skills gap continues. Half of organisation leaders report a mismatch between young people's skill levels and the employer expectations. There's a lot to unpick about that. I do only have nine minutes left, so we can't. It's difficult to know if the employer expectations are too high and actually, as we, as employers in the market space, we are all stretched. We have to increase productivity. There are rising costs. We are all doing more with less and with less staff members than we've ever seen before. Those young people who were in work, as we hosted the youth voice census last year and collected the data set for it, they all told us that, their wellbeing was down for young people in work, and it was because they were doing more than ever before. They'd seen people leave from their team and not be replaced. They were getting extra responsibilities without extra training, and they also were working in an environment where there was more kind of sickness and ill health than there had ever been before too. So they’re missing, work days. So they're missing support from line managers in the same way they miss that across education. We will talk about work experience and the way that it can support a readiness for work, I'm sure, throughout the day too. But just 23% of young people had access to work experience and just 60% of those offered it undertook it. The biggest reason for not undertaking work experience is because people didn't feel ready. The second reason is because the school chose the work experience for them, and they just didn't feel like working in the nursery of the school or in the school admission services was going to be right for them either. Employers and schools are struggling to offer work experience because of hybrid working, because of the opportunities, to be able to actually facilitate it in a really good environment. And I think it's because we're thinking too much about that strict two week experience as a young person. Going in one day a week for four weeks is better than not going in at all or being given an opportunity that isn't right for them. Young people feel like, employers aren't willing to give them the opportunities to train and develop them within the workplace. They read, adverts for jobs, and they feel like the qualification levels are too high. And for the most part is, about 48% of young people won't pass English and maths GCSE, and then when they do, they retakes, only 24% of them will too. So we’ve got an issue with a skills mismatch, we've got issues with qualifications and the expectations we're setting for young people. And we have this issue of self-belief within the cohort of young people too. I love listening to Joseph speak. I love it when we're able to bring our youth ambassadors at Youth Employment UK together. But I know that, there is, there has been the investment in those young people being able to use their voice, be supported and trained them to be able to share that. But that's about 2% of young people. For lots of them, they haven't had any opportunities to be able to do that. And they're left feeling like employers don't want to hire them. They're left feeling as though they aren't ready to start work. 30% of young people believe they could pass an assessment centre. About 23% of young people think employers actually want to hire them when they see adverts, when they see opportunities, they read the qualification descriptions, they see the skills they need. They just don't think that they have them. And so they won't apply. It's why we are seeing growing economic inactivity for young people too. So every year in the youth voice census, we ask young people what they're great at, what they love. It isn’t as might already be suggested, a really, negative view of everything we do. Ask them all the joy, that they have too. And there is. Don't get me wrong, young people believe their skill sets are, if they’re 18 and under, they believe they are great at listening, they believe they are really creative, and they believe that they are able to, use digital skills really well too, which is brilliant. They're all skills we're looking at. And when people hit 19 plus, they think their skills are listening. A common theme, I suppose if you sat in the education system just listening to people tell you what to do for years, 18 year olds believe they are great at problem solving and that they're really good at literacy. Already they believe that their digital skills aren't as good as the cohort coming underneath them. They don't believe that those digital opportunities will be great for them. So we ask people what they're great at, what they're really confident in. And we ask them what they're not so much too. Only 23% of all the young people we asked last year had any self-belief, had any sense that they were going to be able to, achieve what was next for them. And we think about, asking those young people, if they, if they think they know what those employers are looking for, when they, when they're looking at going into the workplace. And about 40% think they have an idea of what employers are looking for, but very few think they've got the skills. They think employers are looking for good communication skills, good teamwork skills and good problem solving. And they are for the most part, we can see it within all of the data and all of the research that we've put forward. But young people are really struggling to connect with what they can do next about it. What that translates to, how they can show that they have these teamwork skills, those problem solving skills. Young people know what they need, but there is a, a gap, a fracture within that relationship of how they can actually show it. Some of it is about, kind of demise in volunteering and opportunities that are available for young people to actually start work, work experience. I feel like we should have a pound every time I say that today. And kind of the knowledge and understanding. We did a series of research with Gatsby this year as they were reviewing the, Gatsby benchmarks that, careers advisers have to work through. And young people, they do know they are getting more. They do see it improving across the last couple of years. Their biggest issue is the translation of skills and information that young people have. They, they just don't know how that translates, what good teamwork looks like in your organisation, as they get in to work. How can they show they've got good teamwork skills, particularly if they're someone who isn't sporty, who isn't an extrovert in any way too. So how can you set them up for success? Ask them. There was a question earlier, around how, why young people aren't engaging in the social and team building opportunities. That's an issue we had too, at youth employment UK. We had two Kickstarters who are phenomenal, in the jobs that they do, but they aren't, confident. They aren't extroverted in any way too. And, and it was a real source of kind of contention, because you know, they should be sociable, but work is different for them than it is for us too. We sat down and ask them, are you, do you enjoy it? When we do these activities, what would you enjoy? Do you mind if we are doing these activities? What would you want to see? What would you want to do? And actually, it's led to one of our kickstarts running. Whenever we have a charity day, we do a quiz and we bake cakes. She runs and leads that. She's really happy being able to support it, but she can't sit there and take part in a quiz in the same way that other people in the organisation does too. It's really important that you co-design and ask. You will have young people in your organisation. Ex apprentices, ask them what they liked, ask them what they did. And as Joseph pointed out earlier within the session too, work with the local organisations, yes, schools, colleges, universities within your reach. The careers and enterprise company and their careers hub, but also the local charities, they're available too, the local youth clubs. They do still exist, although in smaller numbers than before. And in terms of onboarding and the post support available, you have to start with really clear job role responsibilities. You have to say, and legally you have to tell them about company policies and health and safety. But there is also the unwritten rules of your organisation. Actually, if it is that you expect all people to be on your Teams meeting at least a minute before the session starts, tell them that. Don't just sit there and wait for them to, to know and understand. If you expect them to turn up to a meeting and behave in certain ways and take notes in every single meeting, you do have to tell people, and you have to tell people what jobs look like on different days to have too. We have to sit down with our, all of our staff and tell them, actually, we launched a new benchmarking tool for employers next week, cheeky plug. But we have to tell people what it's going to look like and feel like in the office. In the build up to that, it's going to be busy. Some of the senior leaders won't be around as much. If you need something, we've blocked out the time on a Thursday morning where you can drop into the office. It's going to require you to drop some of the business as usual activities, move them to different days. We sit through and work through with them what great days look like when we've all got the time and space and ability to be able to make work, work, and what it looks like when we don't have days opportunities too. In terms of the pace of work, support buddies, mentors, other people that those young people can ask questions to that feel outside of, just, how do I make this spreadsheet work for me? Or how do I, support, how do I make sure this meeting runs really well? People that they can ask questions to about issues that they have, communication styles that they're not sure about, in any ways too. There's mentoring and development plans are really, really important. And I'll leave on one final point. Aside from here too. We do a lot of work with Youth Employment UK to support, good youth employment, youth friendly employers, organisations that young person can look at and see and know that that employer is working towards being better at the work and the way that they engage them. We do a lot of work with Coca Cola, who I know aren't here today but are local, and actually every year we sit down with them and we read the census. It's really important for them to understand where young people are at this year, what's coming next, what can they build into their programs, their apprenticeship support and the wider work? What their line managers need to know about young people to make this really work for everybody? And I'll finish on that. Thank you. Oh no, you’re not.

**Ben**

No this is great.

**Lauren**

Great for young people in.

**Ben**

Young at heart. So we're going to be doing question and answers now. If you would like to get some questions in via Slido, that would be amazing. Oh, we've already got some. That's me being late. There we go. Let's see if I can refresh that. Boom. And we've got roving mics in the room as well. So if there's any questions in the room, let's kick off with a slider question then. Have casual weekend jobs been in decline. What impact has that had on young people?

**Lauren**

Yes, they have. And particularly not just because of COVID 19, but it was a, it was a theme in a thread we saw before COVID 19 too, and, and young people again at the time were telling us that actually hiring them felt like a risk. They would rather have someone that was looking for more casual work, someone that they didn't have to explain how to stack the dishwasher to, or be able to, to make that work, to make that work as well. I think what we've also seen, though, is quite a lot of what, kind of the education, the attainment, the things we expect young people to do. We expect them to do well in all different subjects and all different areas, all ten of their GCSE, they need to excel in, even though they're all totally different, and to have extracurricular activities and to have the job. And for a lot of young people, it's just not possible or it's not possible for their parents to take them to work. There's a lot in the youth voice census about local access to opportunities. Young people don't feel like there are great opportunities where they live. And for a lot of young people, the reality is, isn't safe for them. It doesn't feel safe for them to travel within and around their local area to get those jobs too. so yes and yes it is. There's, those kind of Saturday jobs. Those weekend jobs feels like, felt like, really safe ways to make a mistake. It felt like really safe ways to get to meet loads of different people from different, age brackets and different demographics. And they're just not available anymore.

**Ben**

Yes. In fact, one of the sessions I did, I think it was in Bolton and they were telling me that there just were no jobs. Like, it's like if you want a job, it's like online things. So a lot of them were selling random things for like, they were getting from wherever and reselling them on eBay and stuff, and that is their job. But it's not social. You're not actually going out and speaking to people. Still, you're not really doing customer service because it's an organisation’s managing it for you. So what skills are you actually getting from those. Wild, crazy times? We've got a question in the room. Just here.

**Lauren**

Hi, Patrick.

**Patrick**

Thank you, thank you Lauren, thank you very much for that. We've heard today a lot from Joseph and yourself about employees and young people and their views of things. But, Lauren, what do you say to those employers who are complaining about not being able to hire young people because of the way they are or because they're not applying, but then they're not changing how they're doing their applications as well?

**Lauren**

Yeah, it's really interesting. Is it? And then there's a couple of things in there. We are seeing more young people become economically inactive. We're seeing young people. What feels like and some of the narrative are kind of opting out of employment, but it's not an active, opting out choice. Aside from that too. Young people really firmly believe they're not ready for work, or they're not going to be able to get, to get a job. And we can see within that environment too, it's something, as Joseph was talking about, challenge, challenge, challenge. Actually, the reverse of that is employers thinking young people feel entitled. We'll all sit here. And you all nodded along to go, yeah, challenging. I really want to be challenged by these young people. I think we all know the reality is we probably have situations where apprentices come in and and it feels like they're questioning everything that you do, too. It really, makes a difference to know and understand where you are. We launch next week. I'll give you the Employment benchmark, which is a tool that employers can sign on, use and understand exactly where they are at the moment. It is a view of, where you can be evidence based and evidence led in terms of your early careers, exploration, the work experience you offer and how you run employment programs isn't a public view. So people can see how good or bad you are. It gives you an action plan and next steps to just slowly improve and start making those changes within there too. It is something though, that has to come through across all levels of line management. I was on the phone with a major retailer this week, and they're really struggling because you can't pass their assessment centre if you've had no work experience before. And actually we've seen 23% of young people get work experience. If you live in the West Midlands, you're 10% less likely to get work experience than anywhere else in the country, which is bonkers. And so it's about really being able to know, train and understand and relearn what we're looking for and how you're able to really show those skills. I think also looking at the skills audit, too, I think what happens within organisations is we see an apprentice, six nine, a year down the line. We look at Joseph today and like, yeah, apprentices are fantastic. I know Patrick is ex apprentice too. Yes. They're fantastic. I bet you were. I mean, excellent, but only half as good as that, right? On your first day, within the workplace. And I think as they see these apprentices go through the business, they're like, oh, this is what they should start with. This is where they should start at. Actually, what I loved about what Joseph said was the development that you've been on, how you're still learning all of those skills. And I think it's really hard for employers to go back and see who they were, who those young people were as they started, and the development that's gone into them, too. So that was a wild way around answering that question, but hopefully it did.

**Ben**

Love that. Yeah, go for it.

**Question**

Lauren, thank you. That was excellent. I'm going to ask a vaguer question. That might be quite hard to answer. I don't know. But do you think young people have enough hope that work will work for them? And what do you think we could do about that? That's a difficult question I appreciate.

**Lauren**

That is a difficult question. Well hope. I think young people are, while defining the sense that, there felt like a lot of hopelessness from young people, I think that they don't believe that employers want to hire them. They don't always believe if they start in an organisation, they'll be trained and developed in the way that they'll need to be able to do it. They really do worry for lots of young people. And actually for those with any protected characteristic, also less likely to feel hopeful that they’ll do well, that people will invest in them and that people want to hire them. I think in terms of what you can do about it, it's showing them, it is going to schools, it is supporting your enterprise hub the enterprise company runs in your local area it's your staff signing up. I mean, governors of those local environments, too. You don't have to offer work experience if it's difficult. We are a small organisation at Youth Employment UK. What we do do is we go into schools, we send our apprentices into our local schools and environments too. It can be an hour's worth of a session where you're just showing young people something slightly different, and allowing them to see another adult, another person for their network, another thing they've seen and heard. It's hard for teachers to know everything about every apprenticeship route that's available. In that way, university does seem easy for them to kind of promote, but who knows it better than the young people actually doing it right now and the employers looking to hire them? I think also, as you go more into schools, we go in and we run CV workshops. You really understand what young people think their skills are in the local environment and actually can then either put in programs or go in and run extra support sessions with that school to boost communication skills, self-belief, confidence or resilience.

**Ben**

Love that. Great question. Let's go back to Slido. This is a good one. Should employers be doing more to pre-skill talent between offer of employment and Day 1 on the job? I guess the answer is yes. With this help with promoting career readiness and what can employers do in between that phase?

**Lauren**

I think so. I think there's certainly more employers need to do before young people start. And that's everything from, sending round like pictures of all the staff team and just growing their confidence that young people feel like when they get there, it isn't going to, be too overwhelming. I think in terms of preskilling, I think there are lots of pre apprenticeship programs with a lot of pre support programs doing great things that are no longer supported. I think Kickstart was excellent when it worked really well. I think it's just that challenge of when it becomes work. So yes, overall, I believe that employers could do more to either preskill or just understand the baseline skill level that they're working with, suggests great things young people can access online and support programs. But if they then start working for you because they're doing this preskill work, there might be a kind of a slight challenge and issue there. I suppose.

**Ben**

Thank you. Next one is how can we support young people to build up their resilience, positive work environment and picking up skills from others ‘in the office’ in a remote setting?

**Lauren**

Remote’s really hard and it's really difficult for young people. I think the biggest thing we can do in terms of building resilience is create and foster this environment of good feedback and supporting and allowing all team members and all staff members to get great feedback within those environments too. Young people don't have that baseline of what good feedback is, how they can get it, how it's a positive thing in terms of how they can be supported next to develop their skills. Actually, what we do is we then talk about them when they're off the court. Oh, she didn't do this. Oh, that's really frustrating. Oh did you see she only had a sweatshirt on and this was a meeting like this. We don't stop and give those feedback in the moment if we haven't created and fostered that environment. They don't know that they're doing it wrong. But also giving good feedback in a really clear away is a great chance for young people to hear something that's a bit uncomfortable and hear how they can do something about it. And then in the next sense too. So whilst that feels really small, what tends to happen is it builds up and builds up and builds up. Is a big conversation and young people either they don't respond in the right way or they feel, differently about what they're hearing. And we perceive that as a lack of resilience. But we're not testing their resilience at any point and in any moments in the build up to that.

**Ben**

Yes. In fact on that point another question says, what are the future skills employers do expect candidates to have?

**Lauren**

It’s challenging because you’ll see big stuff come out across government and it’ll be green skills and digital skills with never real any definition as to sort of what they are and what they're going to be. I think as employers, what we hear, it will still be those same things. Employers will always say that they want someone who can communicate well, has good teamwork skills and can problem solve. I think as we look at those skills and we keep building on them, that's really important. And arguably between the training providers and the employers, the rest of it can be taught in terms of whether that be digital, whether that be a magical green skill that's going to appear, whatever it is. I think the rest of it is the responsibility to work together on.

**Ben**

Amazing stuff. Well, thank you so, so much. Really appreciate that. Please give it up for Lauren. Fabulous. You’re still with me. You’re feeling good? Yeah. Great. Okay, cool. Let’s keep going. So next up, I’ll be joined on stage by Lynne at Peabody. Lynne joined the EY Foundation in March 2014 before becoming CEO, Lynne was a member of the leadership team with responsibility for the charity’s strategic partnerships and collaborations, the diversification of income streams and expanding work with employers. Lynne has supported the charity to reach over 20,000 young people. Basically Lynne’s been busy. Lynne’s been really, really busy. Thank you for joining me. Please give it up for Lynne.

**Lynne**

Thanks.

**Ben**

How are you doing today? You’re good?

**Lynne**

Thank you. Yeah. Great. Loving the talk so far so thank you.

**Ben**

Yes. Thank you for joining us. Question one is firstly, can you provide an overview of your work at the EY Foundation, please?

**Lynne**

Yep, sure. So, essentially we are, I guess a social mobility charity. So we were set up by the corporate Ernst and Young so EY back in 2014 and we focus on supporting young people from lower income backgrounds. So we use free school meals as our proxy for that and we provide young people with paid employability skills training, paid work experience placements, and mentoring as well.

**Ben**

Paid work experience.

**Lynne**

Oh, yeah.

**Ben**

Wow, that must make a big difference. Yeah, that's amazing.

**Lynne**

It makes a big difference. And I would say it changes the conversations that we have with employers. I think, you know, it’s been talked a lot about young people having a sort of lack of confidence. And actually it's one thing to me say, no, honestly, you've got skills that employers really want. It's another thing for the employers to pay those young people, for those skills and to demonstrate those skills. So, and also it wraps around all sorts of other things like financial literacy, budgeting, all of those kind of good skills. So, yeah, it's a core part of what we do.

**Ben**

It's interesting because it's one of the reasons I set up the organisation that I run was when I started off as a journalist, I had to do six months unpaid work for the BBC in order to get in. So I was photocopying. I was doing all of that stuff for like the initial days, and then I moved to actually doing a job. I was a social media manager for the BBC. I was cutting up things for, social media from their programs. I was going on filming things all for free. No money. Was just like, it got to the point where I couldn't afford the Christmas party and at that point I said to them, look, I can't even come, I can’t afford the ticket. And at that point they moved me into a different team where I could get paid for that work. But yeah, for six months, absolutely no money at all. And that's just the expectation. Wild things. I'm seeing here it's EY Foundation's 10th anniversary. Congratulations and you've been there throughout the last ten years, and you are now the CEO. So how do you ensure that the programs offered actually remain relevant and effective in a rapidly changing job market?

**Lynne**

Yeah. Good question. So we well, we constantly, I guess, evolve and iterate our programs anyway based on the feedback that we get from young people and employers. What we've done well, I think over the last sort of six years is doing sort of more sectoral focused programs, because the entry level routes for different sectors vary wildly. You know, to get to professional services, you have to do lots of online tests, maths tests, psychometric tests, all of these kind of things. But actually, if you want to go into, say, a tech role, it's a very different recruitment pathway. So, that sectoral focus has really, really helped. We do lots of work looking at the role of emerging tech. AI in particular is used a lot by a lot of big corporates already in their recruitment processes. So for example, in our programs now, we have a whole session or a couple of sessions around AI. So getting in people to understand what AI is, generative AI, the implications, on that sector, but also helping them to play the game, to be honest, because you know, there are sort of ingrained biases in some of the recruitment systems out there. So it's about helping the young people think about the buzzwords that they need to make sure that they've got when they do the cover letters or their CV to make sure that they're not filtered out from the get go. So there's really simple things like that that we've started to integrate into our programs. I think the other thing that we do is, during the employability skills week and actually during their work placement week as well, we ensure that one day of that is remote and we do that on purpose. So the things like, you know, Lauren talked about, young people really struggle with remote working, a lot of it, particularly for the young people that we we work with. They don't want people to see their home environments. A lot of them don't necessarily have a quiet space where they can work. So there's really simple things about actually giving them spaces or if we, you know, if they're doing remote working, teaching them things like how you blur the background of your camera so you have a little bit more privacy, all these kind of things. They’re very, very simple. But actually they help the young people kind of build the confidence to kind of interact better in those environments.

**Ben**

Has the mission of the company changed at all over the past two years?

**Lynne**

No, we haven't the mission. I think what has changed is the number of young people on free school meals. So it's growing. It continues to rise. So there's nearly one in four at the moment that are eligible for free school meals. And I think, you know, this audience will be well versed with kind of the implications of what that means for young people. If you're in receipt of free school meals, and not only your job prospects, but your, you know, your health and wellbeing outcomes. So one of the things that we have done is to, refresh our ambition to state that we want to support all 2 million young people on free school meals, which some people are like, yeah, yeah, great. It's moon shot, I get that. But I think the reality is, the same issues that we're talking about today were the same 20 years ago. So I think it's about being more collaborative, about being a bit more innovative with some of the solutions that we can throw at this problem.

**Ben**

Yes. I'm seeing that in a recent Open University survey found that 46% of employers struggle to recruit young people. Why do you think that is? And what's the solution to fix that?

**Lynne**

I think there is a huge disconnect still in the labour market between the young people and employers. So I think, you know, that stat says it all, but I think there are some presumptions. I think employers don't really have the opportunity to talk to young people/aren't taking up opportunities to talk to young people. Speakers for Schools did a good report. It was a couple of years ago now, but, just under 70% of business leaders stated that they were really confident that they knew what the aspirations and hopes were for young people. And then actually, when you asked the young people, they were like, it was, you know, borderline. 20, 20%. So there's a , a huge disconnect. I think some of the mechanisms that we've got out there aren't being utilised. Say, for example, when the local skills improvement plans were being formulated, there were only a handful where young people were asked their opinions. So we worked really closely with the Greater Manchester Chambers of Commerce when they were putting together the LSIP and we had a number of roundtables with employers and young people so that all of those views could be collated and fed into the LSIP. But I think there were vehicles for change that we’re not really utilising at the moment. I think, employers are, this is a very long winded answer.

**Ben**

Oh, this is good. We're learning. We’re learning.

**Lynne**

I think employers are basically doing a lot of the same things that they did ten years ago. They're not reaching out into schools with areas of high deprivation. I don’t think they're leaning into careers advice and guidance. But what I would say is for employers, I think it's a really messy landscape out there. You know, you've got work experience ask , you've got T levels, and then you've got things like, I don't know, Andy Burnham's Manchester baccalaureate T levels, then you've got careers hubs, enterprise business partnerships. It’s such a messy landscape out there for them. So, I empathise a little bit with employers, but there's absolutely more they need to do.

**Ben**

Yes. I love what you said about getting out into schools actually. Get out into schools. Get out into schools. Yes. Anyone watching this go to schools. It's mind blowing to me that some of these schools are just left to just cope by themselves. Why? These huge organisations with so much money, and all of us in our fabulous jobs don't actually just go and engage with them to help them out a little bit, is just giving that sprinkle of inspiration to these young people, but they can escape from whatever they're currently going through. That literally is all I do, just like, it's just that. It's just a little bit of magic for an hour and it makes such a difference. It's incredible.

**Lynne**

100%. I think that cannot be underestimated enough. And I think, you know what we find a lot with the young people that come into our programs, and the reason we do the pre employability skills programs is you can't generally just take young people from the lower income backgrounds, particularly, and then just plonk them in a big shiny corporate and expect the young person to get the most out of it and the employers to get the most out of it. They need to have the confidence to walk into these buildings. I mean, you know most corporate buildings are meant to intimidate. They're meant to show off power, wealth and how great we are and how shiny we are. That's really intimidating, as intimidating when you're going for a job, when you've, I don’t know had a career for 20 years, let alone if you're a 17 year old who might potentially come from a workless household, who knows, but doesn't have that kind of network, and support around them. But I think also back to that point that's been talked about a lot about resilience and okay to fail. I think it's really important when you put role models in front of young people. I think often role models stand up and they're like, this is my career journey. This is how great it's been. I've managed to do X, Y, and Z. Actually, what the young people really need to hear is I did this job, I really didn't like it, but this is what I love. Here's how I messed up when I did X, Y, and Z. That's what young people need to hear.

**Ben**

Exactly that. Want to ask more about work experience as a core part of EY Foundation's pre employability programs. How has that benefited young people and the employers that you're working with?

**Lynne**

Yeah it's huge. It's essential. I mean we've you know, we've already talked about the stats of how employers want it, young people want it, but it's just not been given. 23%. I mean, it's absolutely shocking and huge. I think really the big part and I've already kind of mentioned this is for people to believe it's for people like them. That's what we hear. So there are so many myths and misconceptions that the young people have when they come into any place of work and charities included. I have lots of young people say to me, Oh Miss, I can't believe you work for free. And I'm like, whoa, whoa, like, I love my job, but I've got bills to pay, but, you know getting young people for example, to go into a law firm or two, I don't know, it could be a retailer and be like, oh, there's people that look like me. I hear a lot. Oh, they're actually quite nice, aren't they? And it's like, yeah, they’re human beings like, you know. But even just like little things like, oh, they've got a vending machine. All of this kind of stuff. Like get them excited about it. Like, you cannot underestimate enough the power of work experience and it doesn't have to be a full week. It doesn't have to be that. It could just be a half day. It could just be a tour around your office. It doesn't have to be overengineered.

**Ben**

Love that, the barriers faced by young people, access and work experience and employers hosting placements is well documented. What needs to change to improve work experience for young people and their employers?

**Lynne**

So I think we need a complete work experience revolution, if I’m honest.

**Ben**

Tell me more. Let's go.

**Lynne**

I think we need to rip it apart and rebuild it. I think co-design and co-creation is absolutely key to that. We need young people. We need employers coming together to build this alongside educationists as well. You know, I think we need to move away from this - it's a static week in year ten, and everyone must have this, you know, week, and it must be then. Rubbish. It doesn't have to be that. You know, we work with a lot of care experience young people. Actually for them to do a full week of work experience, it's really intense. And with all the other meetings that they have with the social care workers and all these other kind of things, it's not very manageable for them. Why does it have to be? It doesn't have to be a week. Imagine if we could build it up. And I'm talking from primary school because this is when young people start forming these sort of career limited beliefs about what's for people like them and start closing down barriers already. But if we could start you know, integrating careers education much, much earlier in primary schools, giving work experience tours, days in the offices, tailoring it for young people, it could be amazing. We could have young people picking options in year nine, knowing that if I choose this subject over this subject, it might equal these paths rather than these paths. So I think we need to completely do a bit of a work experience revolution. Ultimately, we need some funding. Because money, money is needed. I think we also need to think about, sensibly using technology. I don't think technology is the silver bullet for this. I really don't, but I do think it can open up opportunities for young people that can't get into, I don't know, they might be living on the coast and they can't get into a big shiny office in London or Birmingham or Milton Keynes. So just these little scenarios that we can use now with technology, but it needs to be cheap. It needs to be pretty simple on the technology front to make sure it can reach all.

**Ben**

I love what you said there. I think one of the things I see in the discussions I've been given, around the work experience time when they're getting the, I don't know, they're putting the applications in and getting the feedback back, back about whether they're going to get the weeks or not, is that they're very aware of who has the best placements and it may not be that they've taken place within their school. They might be on TikTok and they've seen that whoever's got this law firm or whoever's got this place of like, free lunches, oh my goodness. And it's all of these things that actually almost creates a class divide, in like the level of work experience that they’re getting because in some of the schools I've been to, like the private schools their families are connecting them with various different individuals who are giving them the best work experience opportunities. And then, like you say, the others are left with like a local nursery and they are very aware of feeling like there is that difference in the kind of work, the level of workspace they're able to achieve based on the school that they go to. It's quite interesting to me. So yeah, I agree. Something needs to be done about that. You've said your thoughts on how digital solutions could elevate equity. Is there a risk that new technology such as generative AI does the reverse of that? What do employers need to be mindful of when deploying generative AI?

**Lynne**

I think employers need to start leaning into the conversation a little bit more, if I'm honest. I think a lot of employers that I talk to, are really looking at how GenAI is going to help their business on a commercial front, but they have no awareness of the fact that they're already using AI in their recruitment model for example. I think there's kind of just a oh, well, let's just sit back and see how it evolves. You know, the government have got a task force on it. It's all being sorted out. I think employers really need to step up and start entering the debate around social mobility and the role of GenAI, because if I'm honest, I don't think they're doing enough on that front, at the moment. I think there's another element I'd note about this is we did some work with our young people looking at the metaverse and the role of the metaverse and sort of the future of work. And one of the things that we found, I think was really interesting is the young people totally got it. They understood how, you know, the future of work might use metaverse in different forms, but what we found at the end is they were like, yeah, it's great. We get it. We really like it. But it's not going to be for people like me, and it's not going to be for people like my communities. And for us that was really, really worrying because it's not about necessarily just making sure young people have the access to technology. It's that, I guess, intrinsic motivation to want to engage in that technology in the first place. If they feel they're already counted out, they're not going to engage. So I think there's culturally more that we need to be doing, not just on the employer level, but schools, colleges, government, as well to address that point, yes.

**Ben**

We're going to talk about the soft skills among young workers. The Open University survey found a 54% decline in soft skills among young workers. What can employers do to bridge that gap? That's a shock to me, 54%. Oh my good lord. That's what? It's crazy.

**Lynne**

Do you know what though, I don't think it's a stat that we've. Yeah, it would have been the same about ten years ago to be honest. I think it's up there. As Lauren said, the things that employers want now are things they kind of noted ten years ago. But I do think with GenAI kind of coming in and all these emerging techs, there is going to be a heavier reliance on kind of EQ and those kind of skills. I think a lot of it has already been talked about. Employers need to get into schools and colleges. I appreciate sometimes that can be easier said than done because some schools and colleges have very good gatekeepers and aren't willing to open the doors. But there are lots of good membership organisations, Youth Employment, UK Business In The Community. There's lots of charities already doing great works with lots of schools and colleges. So I think employers need to do that, just to kind of have conversations with young people, but also from a skills development perspective, it’s also really, really good for their employees as well to go in and do that volunteering. Yes. I think one of the things that employers could also look to do is think about their, you know, their recruitment practices. So at the moment it's very much like send in your cover letter, covering your CV. But actually, if you want EQ and you want to test people's EQ skills, is that the best way to do that? You know, there is lots of technology that's coming out at the moment. Vizzy is one, for example, that not aimed at Gen Z. It's looking at Gen Alpha, the next workforce that's going to come in. How do we target those? How do we test their EQ skills? So I think employers need to kind of think a little bit ahead of Gen Z as well.

**Ben**

Sounds good. We've got one minute left. So to conclude, what are three things that employers can do to harness that young talent? You kind of already mentioned it there, but three distinct points that people can do.

**Lynne**

So think about your recruitment practices, as I said, like get in touch with schools and colleges. You can advertise your roles there. Get to know the young talent that you've got in your vicinity. But when you think about your recruitment practices, think about where you're recruiting your roles. Think about giving young people the questions in advance. A lot of the young people that we work with, their confidence is really low. Actually, I think, oh, can I do that? Oh, I don't know. Maybe I can't. Actually, if they see the interview questions in advance they’re like yeah I can, I can answer that. So that being one. Pease lean into the conversation and the debates around social mobility. And AI I think it really needs more employers to kind of get involved in that conversation. Work experience. It doesn't matter if it's one placement, doesn't matter if it's ten, it's needed. So do that.

**Ben**

Amazing. Thank you so much, Lynne. Thank you for joining me.

**Lynne**

Thank you.

**Ben**

You can stay there. Part one. Done. So it's actually going to be time for a break. We're going to be back in, I think half an hour, no less that, half past we’re going to be back. So 11:30, for a panel discussion. Thank you for joining me. See you soon. Thanks, guys.