



The Realities of Youth Employment

AN EXCITING YOUTH-LED LEGISLATIVE THEATRE
EVENT ON WORK EXPERIENCE AND EMPLOYMENT
OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

Monday, March 24th @ 4.30pm

Department of Drama and Theatre Arts,
The University of Birmingham



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In February 2025, a diverse group of fifteen 14-17 year-olds from across the West Midlands came together to co-create policy change on work experience and youth employment, using

creative methods of participation: *Asmaa, David, Ellie, Maddie, Miracle, Hollie, Josh, Justyna, Liam, Leo, Kye, Nico, Priscilla, Tayesha, Zahra*

They developed a play based on their experience, “You’re Fried! The Realities of Youth Employment”, which was first presented to the local community and policymakers on 24th March.

This work is part of the [INSPIRE \(Intersectional Space of Participation: Inclusive, Resilient, Embedded\)](#) project, led by [Sonia Bussu](#) at the University of Birmingham and funded by the EU and UKRI. The project involves 10 countries and 17 partners across Europe and aims to foster a more inclusive and participatory society, which starts from the experience and knowledge of marginalised groups to inform more equitable policies.

In the West Midlands, we partnered with the [Young Combined Authority](#), who agreed the focus of the play on youth employment, as one of their main priorities, and the youth organisation [Youth Focus West Midlands](#), with the aim to embed this work in the young people’s local context. The 15 young people participated in a legislative theatre process led by [legislative theatre](#) practitioners Sam Dixon and Lee Grant, mentored by legislative theatre designer [Katy Rubin](#). Sonia Bussu and [Dena Arya](#) support the participatory evaluation of the process. Under Sam and Lee’s expert guidance, the young people developed a play on navigating work placements and employment. The title is a play on words, relating to insecure or low-paid work often open to young people. Scenes delved into poor advice and career support offered in education settings; a lack of work experience opportunities; and intersectional exclusions based on gender, race and class. The dismissiveness young people can experience within educational settings, from employers and in the family hugely impacts their confidence and self-worth. The following policy proposals were developed through the improvisations of scenes in this play by audience members. Policymakers in the audience, including stakeholders from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), the Young Combined Authority (YCA), business community (Severn Trent Water), local charities (Urban Heard) and colleges (Sandwell), made commitments to short and long-term actions based on these policy proposals.

The Policy Team

John Hall

WMCA – Employment Lead

Ridca and Maryam

YCA member

Miriam Aslam

WMCA - Senior Project Lead – Inclusive Communities

Charly Slater

CEO of [Urban Heard](#) and on secondment as Youth Offer Lead Solihull MBC

Sharan Gill

Schools' Relationship Manager | Social Impact/ employability programme for young people (in schools and colleges), Severn Trent Water, Coventry

Nargis Bostan

Assistant Principle at Sandwell College

Policy Proposals

Policy Proposal 1: Family centred/ early age career support

Start career conversations, support and advice from primary school, taking the whole family on the journey. Help young people to explore and expand their horizon of possible careers at different stages, ensuring they and their parents understand available opportunities and access their advocates when needed.

Actions:

- Co-develop programmes with young people that help identify and enhance strengths/passions/skills rather than specific careers from an early age.
- Implement participatory creative approaches such as family workshops to foster employment education from primary school and break generational cycles on lack of career knowledge.
- Promote cultural awareness of people running programmes and workshops for both young people and their parents.
- Support role of community and faith leaders while being aware of undue pressure/influence on young people by their family/ community. This might require safe spaces for young people to explore alternative career pathways and build their confidence

Policy Issue 2: Accessible Careers Support & Advice

Offer accessible career advice in community settings, such as libraries or youth centres, delivered by trained career specialists who can support young people with writing CVs and applying for jobs, as well as other practical support including advocacy for young people. Incentivise employers to be *young-people-ready*.

Actions:

- Co-develop with young people *young-people-ready employer accreditation standards* for employers to demonstrate they can support young employees – e.g., **Disability Awareness; Skill Development; Mentoring; Feedback and Support**
- Training and accessibility of career advisors to happen within both schools and community settings, to support young people through different life stages.

- Invest in community cafes for young people providing support with writing CVs, accessing work experience and preparing for job applications/ interview process etc.

Policy Issue 3: Work experience and mentoring

Offer young people tailored work experience opportunities and interactions with employers.

Actions:

- Work with YCA and youth-led groups to establish programmes to help young people apply for suitable work experience.
- Facilitate visits by employers to schools and community/youth centres.
- Employers to be insured for work experience involving under-18s.
- Provide mentoring from professionals across various career pathways, aligned with the young person's interests.
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Commitments to action:

Nargis Bostan (Policy 1)

1. Developing a bespoke leadership programme for existing faith leaders to better inform our communities of young people's needs
2. Awareness workshops within the community for parents for the current offer in Education i.e., apprenticeship, T levels and Access courses into University
3. Work with employers to design a curriculum based on current needs of employers and young people – linked to accreditation system?
4. Promote courses for females i.e., construction armed forces and actively enrol by raising awareness that all courses/ careers are for all including young people with disabilities

Nargis agreed to lead on the development of *young-people ready employer accreditation standards* (relevant also to policy 2) and work with the young people. **This work could also involve the wider policy team.**

Charly Slater (Policy 1)

1. Talk to Education and Employment Teams at SMBC (Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council) about implementing policy 1.
2. Utilise team around school approach with Community Development team to support approach.
3. Use Youth Voice Model to develop standards for valuable work experience opportunities
4. Link to Urban Heard project – working with 10yr old +

John Hall (Policy 2)

- By March 2026, support voluntary sector and communities to have careers trained advisors.
- Work with local authorities and communities and explore funding for voluntary sector.

WMCA could actively support the youth-led development of a Young-People-Ready Employer accreditation system. Such a tool could prove useful far beyond WMCA.

Miriam Aslam (Policy 2)

1. Work with the YCA and the Inspire group to co-develop the Youth Summit on 10th July 2025 to open more channels for a dialogue with policymakers in WMCA
2. A Dragons Den Day already planned for April, with policy departments making their pitch to the YCA.
3. Create opportunities for young people to share feedback with employers
4. Support ongoing youth engagement activities

Miriam and YCA could play important role in ensuring our three policies feed into the youth employment plan.

YCA (Maryam and Ridca) (Policy 3)

1. Advocate for young people and hold accountable local leaders/policymakers on what they promised at the Legislative Theatre event (Maryam)
2. Connect local young people who want to see change to WMCA policymakers (Maryam)
3. Create opportunities for young people to have a seat at decision-making tables (Ridca)
4. Give visibility to these proposals at the Youth Summit in July 2025 and ensure these ideas continue to be developed with young people in the lead (Maryam and Ridca with whole YCA)

Sharan Gill (Policy 3)

1. Share Severn Trent's Education team outreach offering with all schools in our region- these are opportunities for pupils to gain employer interactions as the sessions that will be developed include curriculum links and career opportunities at Severn Trent.

Start to develop a programme that upskills careers teams/ leaders with current view of apprenticeships and opportunities available at Severn Trent.

Share our good practice with other employers in our network to scale the offer/ develop partnerships so that we can further grow our employability offer.

Develop the Discovery Day programme (school visits to our Head Office), site tours (available for the public to sign up across our region on Eventbrite) and share with all schools in our region the newly revamped work experience application process.

Suggestions from young people for valuable work experience: Reasonable length – a few days work experience is not very valuable; Employers to provide a mentor for the full length of work placement to facilitate shadowing and allow the young person to gain good understanding of the role; More guidance and up-to-date lists of work experience/ placements available, considering geographical and logistical accessibility; No one should be denied work experience because of poor grades or a lack of available options.