

APPG Youth Employment: How is mental health affecting young people accessing the labour market and quality work?

AYPH response

Executive summary

- Mental health problems develop in adolescence and are increasing in prevalence
- Access to high quality employment impacts on young people's mental health outcomes. We are particularly concerned about the precarious nature of employment opportunities available to young people
- AYPH has researched, via literature scanning and collecting qualitative evidence, the connection between young people with mental health problems and barriers faced accessing and staying in employment
- There are a range of barriers preventing young people with mental health problems accessing high quality employment, including inflexible and complex systems and discrimination
- Solutions for supporting young people include better link-up between local services supporting young people, long-term and individualised support packages
- We have developed a pathway for supporting young people with mental health problems throughout their employment journey.

Association for Young People's Health

The [Association for Young People's Health](#) (AYPH) works to understand and meet the particular health and wellbeing needs of 10-25 year olds. We want all young people to have the best possible health and equal access to high quality youth friendly services. AYPH convenes the [Young People's Health Partnership](#) (YPHP), a partnership of seven organisations (with VCSE networks across England from the youth and young people's health sectors). We focus specifically on young people's health inequalities.

We are experts in understanding the health needs of young people, making us well placed to respond to the APPG for Youth Employment's Call for Evidence. Our [youth health data hub](#) provides a range of data on young people's health, including mental health outcomes. Through our engagement work speaking directly to young people, we have heard how mental health concerns can impact all aspects of a young person's life. Working in collaboration with YPHP members, we conducted a specific piece of research exploring the links between young people's employment and mental health, directly relevant to this work.

Setting the scene: Young people's mental health and employment status

The prevalence of mental health conditions is high for young people aged 10-25. The [peak age of onset of mental disorders is 14.5 years](#) of age. The most common conditions in the teenage years include anxiety and depression, behavioural disorders, eating disorders, and self-harm. Mental health prevalence is known to be higher for specific groups of young people who may be more likely to experience discrimination in society, such as LGBTQ+ young people, a clear example of health inequalities. Covid-19 and the associated lockdown periods had a major impact on the lives of young people and there have been numerous reports of increasing reports of mental health, isolation and loneliness. It is vitally important that there is good mental health promotion in childhood and

adolescence and the services young people interact with must provide positive interactions and opportunities for young people to thrive. Tackling mental ill health in adolescence will prevent ill health in adulthood.

Young people are transitioning through multiple major life events as they gain independence, one of which is entering the labour market. Ensuring a positive experience of the world of work is critical for young people's transition into adulthood and their ability to lead healthy lives. The impact of poor quality work on both physical and mental health has been widely reported. Good quality work is recognised as a "social determinant of health", having a very real impact on health outcomes. Young people's employment was particularly disrupted during the Covid-19 pandemic, with young people being more likely to be made redundant or furloughed compared to other age groups. The number of young people in the UK who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has declined since 2012, with [10.6% of young people aged 16-24 being NEET in 2021](#). Young people from deprived areas are more likely to be NEET. For young people who are in employment, there is a concern that some may be disadvantaged by working practices such as lower rates of minimum wage and zero hour contracts. In 2021, [9.1% of young people aged 16-24 who were in employment were on a zero hours contract](#), representing more than four times the rate of employed people aged 25-65.

Closing the employment gap

In 2019, AYPH and the YPHP were commissioned by Public Health England, NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care to review the connection between young people who are affected by mental health problems and barriers faced in accessing employment opportunities. The exercise sought to understand how many young people are affected, whether particular groups of young people are affected, what the issues are that young people face, and what practical solutions are available. The research involved conducting a desk-based scoping review of the literature and carrying out interviews / focus groups with 44 young people, 12 employers and 13 mental health providers. Examples of good practice were also submitted via an open call for evidence. The findings are summarised in a [scoping review report](#) and a [Toolkit for better supporting young people with mental health problems into good work](#). We believe the findings remain relevant in 2022.

Barriers facing young people seeking work

The research exercise revealed that young people with mental health problems face a range of barriers when accessing high quality work. Young carers and young people who are separated from their families were identified as particularly at risk from being excluded from the labour market. The literature identified the biggest challenges facing young people in maintaining steady employment are difficulties adjusting to the workplace and being unable to find the support they need to keep going. The interviews revealed a broad range of obstacles facing young people:

- Inflexible and restricted job roles, terms and conditions
- Discrimination and stigma
- Balancing the different priorities and needs
- Inadequate access to support services
- Fear of disclosure
- Complex systems and processes
- Intimidating culture and environment
- Poorly located and / or inaccessible offices

Solutions for supporting young people with mental health problems

The literature provides a number of actions that can help young people with mental health problems to get and stay in employment. These cover:

- Preparing young people before they tackle the labour market
- Supporting young people through the first few months of their jobs
- Helping young people if the pathway is not clear
- Working collaboratively through cross agency working at a local level to help young people to access work and remain in work.

These points mirror qualitative feedback from young people, employers and mental health providers, who found the most important things for securing employment to be:

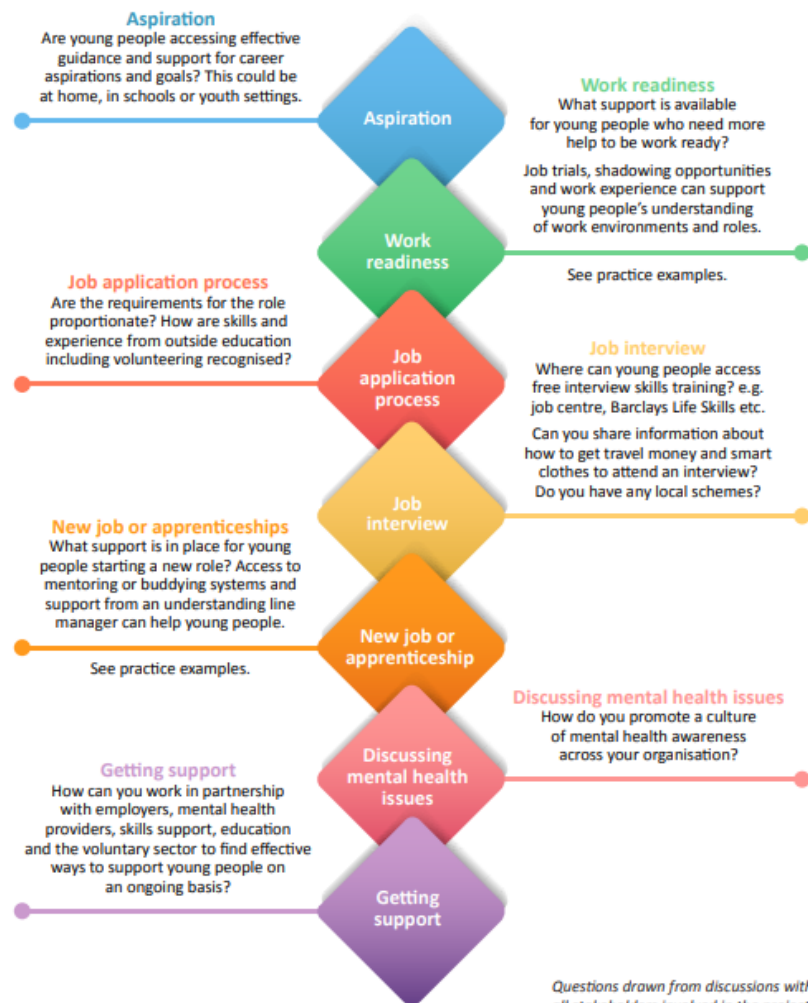
- Clear leadership
- Services that offer extensive, in-depth and long-term personalised support
- Staff with a positive attitude to young people
- Mental health training and awareness
- Flexibility within roles
- Access to tailored 1:1 support
- Importance of involving young people in policy and service developments

The [Toolkit](#) enhances on each of these points in more detail and provides practical solutions for overcoming these barriers. It references to a wide range of resources and best practice examples for further information and consideration. Figure 1 provides a template for practitioners to use when supporting young people with mental health problems into employment. It offers a pathway approach to support the individual young person throughout their journey, with helpful questions and prompts for each stage that were generated through the learning from the interviews and focus groups.

Figure 1: pathway for supporting young people

Supporting young people's pathway into work

Some key considerations for those supporting young people into and at work.



About AYPH

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