

The UK Commission's youth policy

Key messages:

- By comparison to other European countries, youth unemployment in UK is just below average at around 22%, but it is rising and has been rising since 2005. This suggests **structural causes** beyond the current economic situation:
 - The **labour market** has been changing in ways that impact negatively on young people
 - **Recruitment practices** make it increasingly difficult for young people to get a foot on the ladder
- Only 24% of employers have taken on a young person direct from education in last 2 to 3 years, but out of these, and contrary to popular belief, the majority find young people **well prepared** for work
 - Those who didn't cite **a lack of experience** as the key factor (literacy and numeracy concerns are cited only by a small minority). This puts young people in a Catch 22 situation: no job, no experience; no experience, no job
- A clear business case needs to be made in favour of recruiting young people. There are a number of **benefits** young people can bring to an organisation: they help businesses enter new markets, reduce staff costs, improve retention, provide tailored skills and support business growth as they tend to be flexible, innovative and full of new ideas
- There is a comprehensive (but complex) **public offer** in terms of support available for offering young people a job, an apprenticeship or a work experience placement. Awareness of this offer needs to be made clear to employers
- If there is **just one thing** employers should do, it is **adopt a youth policy**. This can incorporate as much or as little commitment/resource as a business is willing to contribute: from giving feedback to unsuccessful applicants, to visiting schools, to offering an apprenticeship or a work experience placement

UK Commission recruitment of young people:

- In 2008 we made a conscious decision to start offering entry-level roles, as part of a drive to **grow our own talent**
- Since then, and despite the civil service recruitment freeze, we have offered **undergraduate placements, apprenticeships and graduate internships**
- We see these opportunities as a **long-term commitment; internal progression** is enabled and encouraged
- Many of our young recruits have gone on to be offered fixed-term or permanent contracts (7 out of 10 graduates are still with us as of June 2012)
- We are currently working with a Level 3 Accountancy apprentice and a Level 3 Business Administration apprentice. The latter started with us as a Level 2 apprentice, went on to complete the Level 3 and is now taking her HNC in Business Administration
- An undergraduate student is also working with us as part of her year in industry
- We are offering 8 six-month graduate internships in 2012. Our 2011 cohort of graduates have helped to design these, giving us feedback on what went well and what could have gone better
- Our young people work in **every area of the business**, from policy and research to Investors in People to communications and business services
- We encourage them to get involved in as many learning and development opportunities as possible; so far, they have taken management exams, been to writing courses, attended social media workshops and more
- They have brought **initiative, enthusiasm and new ideas** to the UK Commission, and have undoubtedly contributed towards our productivity and efficiency

2011 graduates:

- Highlights: networking at the House of Lords, ghostwriting a Commissioner article and having their reports read by Ministers are among the highlights of the interns' time at the UK Commission
- "I hate it when the media depict graduates as unready for work. Most of us have the components for work. What we are lacking is the opportunity to put these components into practice"
- "I think young people need to be given the chance. Because if you aren't given the chance, how are you supposed to prove people wrong?"