



LIVING FOR THE WEEKEND?

Understanding Britain's
young core workers



Acknowledgements

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Section one

Foreword

Trade unions were founded to give ordinary workers a voice in their workplace. We were formed by working people themselves banding together collectively to stop exploitation and win better treatment and fair wages.

Two centuries later, union workplaces are still the safest, fairest and best paid, at all levels of the labour market. And unions have always helped their members in other ways too – supporting them to get an education, improve their skills, become leaders and speak up for themselves and others. So I read this report with some dismay. Unions exist to represent everyone at work. But just 9.3% of low and middle earning 21-30 year olds are in a union.

This report is about those missing young people - who we have called Britain's young core workers, because they are the backbone of our economy now and for decades into the future.

Their voices are missing in much of our movement. Not because they are having a great experience of work – far from it. Reading this report, no-one would say that of the insecurity and lack of opportunity that is present in too many working lives. No, too often Britain's young core workers aren't trade union members because we haven't done enough to help them realise the benefits of trade unionism, in a language and form that is accessible, persuasive and relevant to their working lives.

There can be no more urgent task for a union movement that exists to win great jobs for everyone, than to improve life at work for Britain's young core workers. And the best way to do that is to make sure they are in a union which understands their lives, and is geared up to win the changes to work they need.

So this report is a challenge to me, to the TUC, and to the whole British labour movement. Read it, and get to know Britain's young core workers. They are in your life already - they serve your takeaway coffees, answer the customer services phone line, staff the checkouts in your favourite shop, look after your elderly relatives, make the beds after your night away. But our current models of trade unionism aren't working for them – and they must.

Together, we must kick off the biggest regeneration project our movement has ever undertaken – to make sure that we can keep delivering better workplaces and a better working life for everyone – starting with Britain's young core workers.

It's a challenge we must rise to – and I look forward to it.

Frances O'Grady.

Section two

Introduction

This report sets out who the group of young people are that would most benefit from being members of a trade union. It is intended to help unions in their organising efforts and to guide the TUC's young workers strategy. It sets out some of their key characteristics, some perspectives on their experience of the workplace, and some of the key challenges they face at work. It also attempts to dig deeper – looking at their attitudes and values, and how that guides their behaviour.

The group of young workers of interest to the TUC is narrower than all young people. We wanted specifically to look at young people who have the most potential to benefit from the better workplaces and higher pay¹ that trade unionism brings, so we have chosen an age group (21–30), excluded those in full-time education, and those who earn above the median wage. And for ease we have given them a name – Britain's young core workers, which also points out a key truth about them: that they are the backbone of many workplaces now, and as they grow older, will form the backbone of the British labour market.

Of course, some young workers are in a union – notably in the public sector and in some professional groups, and we should seek to learn from the experiences of organising those workers too – this report does not focus on their experiences, although future TUC work will showcase unions' current work to organise amongst and win for young workers.

The title of this report *Living for the Weekend?* reflects an insight that became apparent during the research. For many of Britain's young core workers, work is necessary but without interest or meaning in itself – and life is what happens outside work, whether it be in their weekend socialising or their weekend with their young families. This does not apply to all of this group – no generalisation ever will – but the lack of opportunity that shone through the data means that for at least some of this group, they do live for the weekend rather than the working week. And of course for many, the opportunity to live for the weekend is one that they do not have – as this analysis shows that they are more likely than others to be working at the weekend themselves.

Section three

Getting to know Britain's young core workers

The TUC has identified a group of young workers who could benefit substantially from union representation, who we have called Britain's young core workers.

These workers are young, aged 21–30, and they work primarily in the private sector. It is clear that, whilst the union movement needs to recruit in all sectors, young workers in the public sector have a greater opportunity to join a union already, and as they mainly work in recognised workplaces, they already benefit from union-negotiated terms and conditions.

The union movement is for all working people, but it is primarily for those on low or average wages, so that is where our analysis concentrates. This includes those young workers who are the lowest-paid or most exploited, but also the middle worker too.

In this paper we concentrate on those who are working either full- or part-time, but are not in full-time education. Those in full-time education, who may of course be working alongside their studies, are unlikely to have settled into a sector where they will be employed for the long-term, and so are less likely prospects for unionisation.

In addition, we wanted to understand those workers who might be in a position to be the organisers and workplace reps of the future. We chose as a proxy having two years or more service with their current employer. It is not a perfect proxy, but we assume that workers with some stability in their jobs (such as two years' service) might be more invested in their jobs, and more likely to have developed relationships in the workplace, which is an important resource when it comes to engaging in union activity.

Britain's young core workers

- Aged 21–30
- Predominantly working in the private sector
- Working full- or part-time
- Not in full-time education
- Earning low to average wages.

Methodology

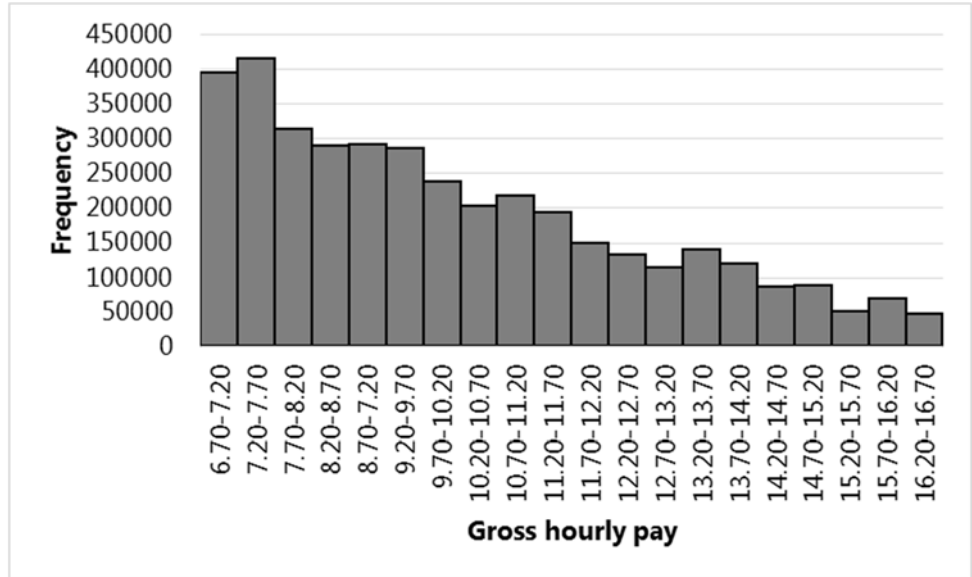
We analysed the UK Labour Force Survey to build up a picture of Britain's young core workers. We then used our findings as the starting point for a literature review. This helped us understand their experience of work and get an idea of some of the problems they face.

The data used in this report (unless otherwise stated) comes from original analysis of the UK Labour Force Survey (LFS). Specifically, the data is from quarter four of 2015. This means that it is timely, and also that statistics are available about workers' involvement in trade unions (as this is only collected in quarter four of each year). Much of the data presented compares the specific group of Britain's young core workers with other young employees and also employees of all ages. The accompanying literature review has been broad-based – encompassing work from government, think-tanks and academics.

Pinning down Britain's young core workers

The UK Labour Force Survey shows us that in quarter four of 2015 there were 8.75 million young people aged between 21 and 30 in the UK, 6.75 million (77%) of whom were in employment. However, 350,000 of these young employees were in full-time education, leaving 6.4 million who were in employment but not full-time students.

The next step was to consider pay. The UK Labour Force survey measured² the mean gross hourly pay for young employees not in full-time education at £10.44, but median gross hourly pay at £9.23³. This suggests that the data is 'skewed' – there is a large proportion of people with incomes bunched at the lower end of the income distribution (particularly around the minimum wage), and a small number of people earning significantly more, as shown in the graph below.⁴



In order to identify the low to average earners amongst young employees, we grouped the data into percentiles:

Percentile	Pay per hour
10	£6.04
20	£6.91
25	£7.19
30	£7.49
40	£8.25
50	£9.23
60	£10.26
70	£11.54
75	£12.30
80	£13.45
90	£16.35

We chose a cut-off point, set at gross hourly earnings of less than £10.26. This was because 60% of young people aged 21–30 reported earning less than this. Consequently, this reduced the size of the group of Britain’s young core workers to 3.5 million. Of these, 1.6 million had spent at least two years with their current employer, and are thus key targets for unionisation.

Section four

What are the characteristics of Britain's young core workers?

Demography

There are equal numbers of women and men amongst Britain's young core workers, and the LFS data reveals that their average age is 25.3 years old. Britain's young core workers are most likely to be white (90.6%) compared to 88.7% of all employees, and 88.5% of employees aged 21–30. In terms of disability, 9.7% of Britain's young core workers are disabled (as defined by the Equality Act 2010); this is relative to 10.6% of all employees and 8.1% of young employees.

Region

Britain's young core workers differ from UK employees in general in their regional distribution. The two regions which are the most different are the North East (where they are disproportionately more likely to live), and London (where they are disproportionately less likely to live). These are also the regions with the lowest and highest average gross hourly pay. Overall, it appears that Britain's young core workers are more likely to live in more deprived areas.

Region	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Average gross hourly pay (all ages)
North East	5.2	4.1	£11.40
North West	10.9	11.0	£12.20
Yorkshire and Humberside	9.7	8.0	£11.80
East Midlands	8.5	7.2	£12.60
West Midlands	9.5	8.6	£12.50
East of England	9.3	9.6	£13.40
London	10.7	13.5	£17.50
South East	12.9	13.9	£15.00
South West	8.0%	8.3	£13.00

Wales	5.5%	4.5	£12.30
Scotland	6.5%	8.7	£13.50
Northern Ireland	3.3%	2.6	£12.20

Qualification levels

The LFS shows that young employees are generally more highly qualified than employees in general – they are far less likely to have low or no qualifications and significantly more likely to be qualified to degree level. However, Britain’s young core workers do not follow this pattern. Only one-quarter (26.6%) are qualified to degree level or equivalent, compared with one-third (32.8%) of all employees and two-fifths (40.2%) of young employees.

The most common highest level of qualification for Britain’s young core workers is A-level or equivalent, which includes apprenticeships and vocational further education.

Highest qualification (including equivalents)	Proportion of Britain’s young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Degree	26.6	32.8	40.2
Higher education	6.8	9.6	6.6
A-level	30.7	23.1	26.5
GCSE (A*-C)	21.9	20.0	16.2
Other qualification	8.7	8.3	6.3
No qualification	4.3	4.9	2.9

Living situations

According to the LFS, nearly three in ten (28.7%) of Britain’s young core workers have at least one dependent child under the age of 19.⁵ This is substantially higher than amongst the group of young employees (20.9%). This would imply that Britain’s young core workers have children earlier than young employees in general. And six percent (5.9%) of this group are lone parents.⁶ Although this figure is small, only 3.4% of all young employees and 4.4% of all employees are lone parents.

On the face of it, Britain’s young core workers face a very similar housing situation to young employees in general. Roughly one-in-seven own their own home⁷ (14.8%), whilst more than a third (35.9%) live in the home of a parent or other relative.⁸ Roughly a quarter of all young employees live independently in the private rental

What are the characteristics of Britain's young core workers?

sector, as do a similar number of Britain's young core workers (25.1%) . However, 14.8% of Britain's young core workers live in the social rented sector⁹, whereas this only accounts for 7.5% of young employees generally.

Tenure¹⁰	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Own home (owned outright or with a mortgage)	14.8	55.1	20.9
Private rental sector	25.1	15.2	24.8
Social rental sector	14.2	8.8	7.5
Live in home of parent or relative	37.4	15.8	36.5

Section five

What jobs do Britain's young core workers do?

Where they work

Fewer young people work in the public sector than is the case for all employees – and Britain's young core workers were even more likely to be working in the private sector than young employees in general.

	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Private sector	86.7	74.1	80.6
Public sector	13.3	25.9	19.4

We also considered the industries and sectors in which Britain's young core workers work. If we look at the ten most common industries, it is clear that the most common jobs are in the wholesale, retail and repair of vehicles sector – with this industry alone accounting for nearly one-in-four (23.8%) of Britain's young core workers. If we combine the retail industry with the health and social work sector and the accommodation and food services sector, we see that these three industries alone account for nearly half (47.0%) of Britain's young core workers.

Industry section in main job	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Wholesale, retail, repair of vehicles	22.8	14.2	17.3
Health and social work	12.9	14.3	12.9
Accommodation and food services	10.3	5.6	8.1
Manufacturing	9.2	10.4	8.9
Admin and support services	6.7	4.5	5.2

What jobs do Britain's young core workers do?

Education	6.7	11.5	9.3
Transport and storage	4.9	5.0	4.0
Construction	4.7	5.0	5.1
Other service activities	4.2	2.0	2.2
Professional, scientific, technical activities	3.9	6.0	7.0
Financial and insurance services	3.3	4.4	5.0
Total	86.4	78.5	80.0

Further analysis showed that more than three-fifths (63.8%) of Britain's young core workers working in the health and social work industry work in the private sector, compared with less than half (45.7%) of all employees working in the same industry. This implies that Britain's young core workers may be disproportionately represented in the parts of the public sector that have been outsourced, or in the private childcare sector.

Working patterns

Britain's young core workers were substantially less likely to report working full-time than young employees in general.

	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Full-time	74.6	73.9	79.9
Part-time	25.4	26.1	20.1

Full-time employees amongst Britain's young core workers work slightly fewer hours than all employees or than young employees as a whole, but part-time workers put in slightly more.

Total usual hours in main job	Britain's young core workers	All employees	Young employees
Full-time	41.5	42.4	41.9
Part-time	20.24	19.8	19.7

Britain's young workers as a whole are more likely to be exploited than employees in general. For example, 2.6% of all employees describe working on a zero-hours contract, which increases to 3.7% amongst young employees. Similarly, 3.6% of Britain's young core workers describe themselves as working on a zero hours contract.

Due to the industries they work in, Britain's young core workers are also more likely to work weekends. Nearly one-third (31.9%) reported working on either a Saturday or Sunday, relative to one-quarter of young employees (24.5%), and one-fifth of all employees (20.6%).

We also examined young people's experience of taking responsibility and progression at work. Of course, greater responsibility may come with greater experience, and as such the group of all employees is more likely to contain managers than the group of younger employees. However, those amongst Britain's young core workers are even less likely to be managers or supervisors than all young people.

	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Manager	8.9	24.6	13.9
Foreman or supervisor	11.0	11.0	12.1
Neither	80.1	64.4	73.6

In general, young employees are more likely to engage in work-related training or education than older employees. However, Britain's young core workers are less likely than other young employees or employees in general to experience these opportunities.

In the last three months...	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Taken part work-related in education or training	25.8	27.9	29.3
Offered training or education from employer	8.1	10.3	10.8
Neither	65.6	61.8	59.9

Section six

Britain's young core workers and unions

Young employees are less likely to be union members than employees in general.¹¹ Only 16.2% of employees aged 21–30 are members of a trade union, compared with 24.6% of employees in general. However, Britain's young core workers are even less likely to be union members than young employees, as only 9.4% reported union membership – with just 6.3% being members in the private sector, where the vast majority work. Lower levels of union membership were also apparent in the public sector, with only three in ten (29.4%) of Britain's young core workers being unionised compared with nearly a half (46.3%) of young employees and more than a half (54.3%) of all employees.

Trade union or staff association member	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Private sector	6.3	13.9	8.9
Public sector	29.4	54.3	46.3
Total	9.4	24.6	16.2

When individual sectors are considered, the difference between Britain's young core workers and other groups is slightly less stark. However, even in the sectors like retail and hospitality, where young core workers are concentrated, they are still less likely than other young people or older employees to be union members.

They are particularly less likely to be union members if they work in health and social care. This industry combines a range of occupations, including local authority clerical workers and social care staff (all of whom are likely to be unionised), as well as those working in private childcare settings and care homes (who are significantly less likely to be unionised). However, given their low pay and concentration in the private sector, it is safe to assume that a significant proportion of Britain's young core workers in this industry are in this latter group. This would explain their lower rate of unionisation in this industry.

Trade union or staff association member	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Wholesale, retail, repair of vehicles	9.4	12.7	10.0
Health and social work	15.2	40.6	31.4
Accommodation and food services	1.0	3.6	2.7
Manufacturing	6.4	16.8	10.4
Total	11.5	24.6	16.2

The LFS also looks at awareness of whether unions are present at a place of work. When it comes to the presence of unions, there is less of a significant difference between Britain's young core workers, all young employees and employees in general. It appears that Britain's young core workers are much less aware of unions being present at their place of work if they are employed in the public sector, but the gap is much smaller where they work in the private sector.

Whether unions etc. present at place of work	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Private sector	18.1	21.1	18.8
Public sector	58.6	73.3	63.7
Total	22.4	30.4	24.9

Whether unions etc. present at place of work	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Wholesale, retail, repair of vehicles	23.3	21.3	19.3
Health and social work	30.0	41.5	36.7
Accommodation and food services	4.7	6.1	5.6
Manufacturing	28.6	29.7	31.7
Total	22.4	30.4	24.9

Whether pay and conditions are affected by union arrangements is important, as being covered by collective bargaining agreements leads to higher pay and better

Britain's young core workers and unions

conditions even if the individual is not a union member. As expected, Britain's young core workers are less likely to report that they have their pay and conditions affected by union arrangements than either all employees or all young employees.

Whether pay and conditions affected by union arrangements	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Private sector	10.6	16.1	12.4
Public sector	56.7	60.2	53.5
Total	16.5	27.8	20.5

In retail, Britain's young core workers have a relatively similar level of collective bargaining coverage as the group of all employees. However, those in health and social work, manufacturing and hospitality are less likely to have their pay and conditions affected by union arrangements.

Whether pay and conditions affected by union arrangements	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Wholesale, retail, repair of vehicles	13.7	15.6	12.7
Health and social work	22.1	37.4	31.8
Accommodation and food services	2.4	5.4	3.0
Manufacturing	13.4	21.2	18.1
Total	16.574	27.8	20.5

Section seven

What is Britain's young core workers' experience of work?

After analysing the Labour Force Survey, the next step was to conduct a literature review to understand experience of work for Britain's young core workers. This posed a challenge. Public debate and the research agenda has of late focussed largely on two groups of people: Neets and graduates. Neets are those who are not in employment, education or training. This group are often disadvantaged, and their present inactivity has the potential to have long-term scarring effects on their future employment and earnings. Graduates also give cause for concern. Recent increases in tuition fees mean that young people leave university with significant debt, and a degree is no longer a guarantee of a decent career.

Yet the majority of Britain's young core workers fall into neither category – they are employed and nearly three-quarters (73.4%) did not attend higher education. This group of employed young people without degree-level qualifications has been largely overlooked in public debate, and has often also been absent from the research agenda. They are 'the missing middle'.

Our literature review drew out ten challenges that Britain's young core workers face.

Challenge #1: Low pay

By definition, Britain's young core workers are either low or averagely paid, with self-reported incomes of less than £10.26 per hour.

That younger workers are paid less than older workers is hardly a new finding. A recent report by the Resolution Foundation¹² found that young people are at particular risk of being low paid, where that is defined as gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of below two-thirds of the median. They also found that young people have particularly suffered since the financial crisis, with median hourly earnings (excluding overtime and RPIJ-adjusted) for 22–29 year olds having fallen by 12.7% since 2009, relative to 9.3% for all employees.

Both direct and indirect mechanisms lead to the low pay of young workers. Age can act as a proxy for labour market experience. And the jobs that are open to young people are often in sectors where low pay is prevalent. Low pay is more common in the private sector,¹³ and is most prevalent among those who work in hotels and restaurants, wholesale and retail, and administrative and support services – all significant employers of young people.

What is Britain's young core workers' experience of work?

Age also affects wage through the variation in national minimum wage rates. The TUC is disappointed that the government's recent introduction of the national living wage (currently set at £7.20/hour, but with the aim of reaching 60% of median earnings by 2020) has excluded 21–24 year olds. We believe that this means some young people are being paid less than older colleagues for the same work, which will discourage younger employees and greatly undermines the principle of a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

Young women are particularly vulnerable to low pay. Previous TUC research has shown that amongst young people aged 22–30 there is a gender pay gap of 8.5%.¹⁴ This increases to 15.0% for people who studied vocational qualifications, which is the case for most of Britain's young core workers. This is likely a consequence of the ongoing occupational segregation of young women.¹⁵

We must not neglect the impact low pay has on the lives of young workers. Our analysis has shown that nearly two-thirds (62.6%) of Britain's young core workers live independently of their parents or relatives. We also found that nearly three out of ten (28.7%) have a dependent child to care for. Young workers often face the same cost of living as older workers, needing money for rent, council tax, bills, food, transport and childcare etc. Young people are generally not entitled to the same levels of social security, particularly if they do not have children.¹⁶ It is unsurprising, therefore, that young workers often live in poverty.¹⁷

Challenge #2: Poor-quality jobs

Our analysis shows that Britain's young core workers are concentrated in a relatively small number of sectors, with nearly half (47.0 %) working in retail, health and social care (notably in the private sector) and in hospitality.

Shifts in the labour market appear to be worsening the job prospects for Britain's young core workers. A previous TUC report found that there had been significant growth in the number of young people working in elementary occupations between 1993 and 2011 – an increase from 14% to 25% amongst young men, and 7% to 21% amongst young women.¹⁸ More generally, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have noted an increasing proportion of young people working in low status occupations.¹⁹

The growth of low-skilled, low-paid jobs amongst young people may be a consequence of the 'shrinking middle', or polarisation, of the labour force. Since the mid-1990s, jobs which have traditionally been occupied by those with middling skill levels and attracted middling pay (for example white collar administrative roles and skilled or semi-skilled blue collar roles) have been lost – either to foreign countries or to automation. In contrast, there has been a growth in high-skilled 'knowledge intensive' jobs, and also a growth in low-skilled roles. According to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), these trends look set to continue.²⁰ In addition, the shrinking of the public sector means that it employs fewer people, including fewer young people.²¹ This is concerning, as the public sector is

generally a good employer - providing decent pay and pensions, and setting a benchmark in terms of equal opportunities.²²

These long-term shifts mean that Britain's young core workers, even those with relatively strong qualifications, find it harder to secure mid-level jobs. Unable to access the high-skilled jobs, their primary option is to find low-skilled work.

Yet the lower end of the labour market is characterised by low pay and insecurity. The 'shrinking middle' has polarised jobs into those that are 'lovely' and those which are 'lousy'.²³ In retail, for example, many employers have opted for a low road strategy when it comes to profit-making. The highly competitive environment facing many retailers, including as a result of the growing number of discount retailers, has increased pressure to reduce costs.

One consequence of this has been the weakening of job quality. Rather than seeing employees as an asset to invest in, employers treat their staff as machines, with many tasks standardised and 'production line' in nature. Many staff describe their work as stressful, characterised by ever-changing targets, feeling understaffed, overstretched and unsupported by senior management.²⁴

Whilst the data available is limited, there are clear signs that Britain's young core workers feel less fulfilled by their jobs than the rest of the labour market.²⁵ Britain's young core workers appear least likely of any group of workers to feel that they have autonomy at work. More than any other group, this group say that managers do not encourage them to use their own initiative, and they feel least in control of the pace of their work amongst any group of workers. The research also signals that Britain's young core workers are least likely to feel that they can influence decisions over how they do their job, and least likely to feel that management is supportive of a healthy work-life balance.

Challenge #3: Lack of training opportunities

Our earlier analysis showed that nearly two-thirds (65.6 %) of Britain's young core workers had neither participated in or been offered training in the previous three months. This is despite the fact that young workers are generally more likely to receive training than employees generally (only 59.9% of young employees generally had neither participated in or been offered training in the previous three months).

The lack of training for some young workers has been noted by other researchers. In one study, Roberts²⁶ interviewees, who were young male retail employees, consistently reported a lack of genuine training opportunities. Some had been given the chance to gain an NVQ in retail, but those who had chosen to take this had found that it did not represent a programme of learning – it was merely rubber-stamping what they already knew.

It is likely that the limited training opportunities available to Britain's young core workers reflects the industries which they are concentrated in. The Joseph Rowntree

What is Britain's young core workers' experience of work?

Foundation have found that employers in the retail and care sectors invest less per employee and per trainee than employers in the economy as a whole.²⁷ Whilst employers in the catering sector invest an average amount, they found that there was large inefficiencies in this spending, with a large amount spent on induction training as a result of high staff turnover.

In general, the training offered in the lower end of the labour market is often related to an employees' induction, or legal obligations such as health and safety training. At this end of the labour market, training is rarely linked to opportunities for development and progression.²⁸

The underlying cause for low levels of training appears to be an unwillingness for employers to invest in their workers. In sectors with high levels of staff turnover, such as retail, employers are unwilling to pay for training for staff they do not expect to retain. UKCES have also picked up on this: in their evidence to the House of Lords select committee on social mobility they noted that the job roles young people typically enter are also the job roles deemed a low priority for upskilling.²⁹ They argue that this has a direct impact on disadvantaged young people's ability to progress in the labour market.

And yet having access to training is important to young people. Focus group research conducted by ACAS asked young employees (who were mainly based in retail or the health and social care sector) what employers should do to manage young staff better.³⁰ The researchers noted a recurring theme that employers should offer better training. The young people who took part could see substantial scope for improvement, given their own experiences.

Challenge #4: Overqualification

Although our analysis showed that Britain's young core workers were less likely to have a degree level qualification, we also found that they were far from unqualified. Indeed, nearly two-thirds (65.6 %) had qualification levels of Level 3 or above (that is, at A-level or equivalent).

Workers employed in jobs which fail to use the skills they gained through education or training are considered to be overqualified. There is a long-term trend of growing levels of overqualification in the labour market, and that overqualification is especially high amongst young people.³¹ This is true of both graduates and non-graduates.

As the UK higher education sector has expanded, more graduates have found themselves working in jobs that in previous generations would have been filled by non-graduates. There appear to be a number of jobs that state having a degree as a minimum requirement, even when the same role wouldn't have previously have needed a degree and it is not obviously critical to the role. This is true of a number of management and professional jobs, and increasingly of intermediate office, technical and sales jobs too. This phenomenon is known as occupational filtering down.³²

There is also substantial level of over-qualification amongst non-graduates. The recent increase in the number of graduates has changed the jobs available to non-graduates, pushing them into lower-skilled work.³³ The Joseph Rowntree Foundation notes that “the growth in young people’s participation in higher education and the increase in its importance to labour market success have meant that young people today who do not go into higher education are more likely to experience difficulties in the labour market, remain in low-paid work, or not be in education, employment or training than previous generations of young people”.³⁴

Successive governments have tried to increase educational attainment, for example by raising the participation age. Young people now have to stay in education until they are 18. However, as the situation of Britain’s young core workers demonstrates, these supply-side initiatives have not stimulated a corresponding demand, and firms are not effectively using the skills present in their workforce.³⁵ There are still a large number of jobs that require no or low entry qualifications, which means that there has been an influx of fairly qualified workers into low-skilled jobs.³⁶ The impact of this is that 60% of workers in elementary level jobs (which will include many of Britain’s young core workers) report being over-skilled, compared to less than 20% of those in managerial positions.³⁷ This obviously has significant impacts on levels of job satisfaction. Overqualification can also have a long-term scarring effect on wage levels.³⁸

Challenge #5: Weak opportunities for progression

In comparison to young employees in general, Britain’s young core workers are less likely to be a manager.

There has been significant research into progression in the lower end of the labour market. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s investigation into the retail, care and hospitality industries noted few employers in these industries actively supported the progression of staff, and that the “general view of employment in each of the sectors appears to emphasise employment as a ‘job’ rather than as a stepping stone to a career within the sector”.³⁹ In another piece of research, interviews with workers in the café sector revealed that promotion to positions above café assistant was often felt to be unachievable as a result of the relatively small number of roles available, and in some cases undesirable.⁴⁰ The pay rise on promotion was small (20–50p per hour), despite these positions entailing significantly more responsibility and also demanding longer hours and greater employee flexibility. Other research has found weak incentives for progression in the other sectors Britain’s young core workers are concentrated in.⁴¹

There are a number of reasons for weak prospects for progression amongst Britain’s young core workers. The economy has become more hourglass in shape, which has led to the loss of middle-ranking jobs. These had traditionally acted as stepping stones, allowing those in lower-ranking jobs to progress, through promotion and skills acquisition. With the loss of these jobs, many lower end jobs have become dead end, with only a very small proportion of workers able to progress more than a single

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rung up the occupational ladder. Other researchers have suggested it is a consequence of an increasing supply of graduates taking up management roles that previously would have been occupied by non-graduates, as well as a lack of investment in the workforce by employers (as evidenced by the lack of training linked to development).

Overall, the research suggests that opportunities for progression in the sectors employing Britain's young core workers are limited – both in terms of the proportion of the workforce who can hope to move up the job ladder, and also the scale of benefits that promotion brings. As such, it seems unlikely that the jobs the Britain's young core workers work in could become stepping stones to more, secure, better paid work; instead they are likely to become trapped in low pay for long periods of time.⁴²

Challenge #6: Underemployment

Underemployment describes when a worker has a job, but it does not provide as many hours they would like to work.⁴³ It is a significant problem, as workers end up trapped in jobs where they cannot earn the income needed to achieve a decent quality of life.

Previous TUC analysis has shown that young people are significantly more likely to be underemployed than older workers, and this is especially true for young people aged 18–24.⁴⁴ Having updated this analysis, we continue to find that young employees are still more likely to be underemployed than employees generally.⁴⁵ However, Britain's young core workers are especially likely to be underemployed – they are 60% more at risk of underemployment than employees in general. And particularly strikingly, more than a third of part-time workers amongst Britain's young core workers (35.7%) said that they work part-time because they are unable to find a full-time job.

	Proportion of Britain's young core workers (%)	Proportion of all employees (%)	Proportion of young employees (%)
Whether would like to work longer hours, at current basic rate of pay	14.0	9.3	12.2
Part-time workers, who are unable to find full-time job	35.7	15.8	28.1
Total underemployment (excludes overlap)	16.1	10.0	12.3

Young people's vulnerability to underemployment has been noted by a number of researchers. For example, a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report found that the financial crisis caused underemployment to increase for all age groups, but the prevalence and increase was greatest for younger workers.⁴⁶

High underemployment amongst Britain's young core workers is likely a consequence of the sectors they are concentrated in. For example, previous TUC research has noted the prevalence of 'short hour' contracts in retail.⁴⁷ Part-time work is popular amongst retailers as it allows them to adjust and maintain staffing levels for fluctuations in activity, so they can match staff to peak trading days and hours.⁴⁸

Challenge #7: Precarious working conditions

Young people's experience of work is increasingly characterised by precarious working conditions, such as zero-hours or very short-hours contracts, agency work, temporary jobs or fixed term contracts. The flexibility of such contracts can be of significant benefit to employers, especially those in the retail and hospitality sectors where we know young people are concentrated, because they allow employers to respond to fluctuations in demand, and hence minimise excess labour costs.

Some young people do benefit from the flexibility of these contracts, particularly whilst they are in full-time education. However, precarious working conditions are often associated with a significant pay penalty, a loss of basic rights and greater vulnerability to exploitation in the workplace.⁴⁹ There is also significant loss of stability, making it harder for workers to plan for the future.

Precarious working conditions are linked to the previously noted lack of progression in certain sectors of the labour market. For example, a longitudinal study of disadvantaged young people in the North East has found evidence of a significant degree of cycling between insecure low paid jobs, poor quality training schemes and unemployment, with little progress being made towards secure, rewarding permanent positions.⁵⁰

Britain's young core workers work in sectors characterised by precarious working conditions and high staff turnover⁵¹ – which will have an impact on all employees. This was seen earlier, with high staff turnover leading to an unwillingness of employers to properly invest in their staff. And the experience of being an employee in a very transient workforce leads to perceptions of insecurity, and makes workers feel as if they should be grateful to have a job at all. This can make workers feel like they should simply accept their lot, rather than voice concerns and expect the employer to take them seriously.⁵²

Even where the individual's contract in itself is not precarious, a lack of opportunities in a workplace can lead to high turnover. The retail sector is characterised by churn, where workers do not consider there to be opportunities for progression with their current employer, and instead move between retailers to try and further their career. These horizontal job changes are rarely advantageous.⁵³

Challenge #8: Bullying and harassment

Workplace bullying includes offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour, abuse of power or authority which attempts to undermine an individual or group of employees and which may cause them to suffer stress. Young workers can be particularly vulnerable to bullying and harassment, because they are seen by other employees or their manager as an easy target. Some bullying can also be age-specific, for example the validity of young workers' views may be undermined on the basis of their age.

Bullying can have serious negative effects on employees. A TUC survey in 2015 found that nearly half (46%) of people who had experienced it say that bullying has an adverse impact on their performance at work, and the same amount believe it has a negative effect on their mental health.⁵⁴ More than a quarter (28%) say it has a detrimental effect on them physically, and around one in five (22%) have to take time off work as a result of being bullied.

Young women are at particular risk of sexual harassment – that is, unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. Multiple studies have found that young women are more likely to experience sexual harassment in the workplace than older workers.⁵⁵ TUC polling also found this, with young women more likely to have experienced sexual harassment in the past 12 months, and are more likely to experience sexual harassment by phone or email, or whilst travelling to and from work.⁵⁶ Nearly two-thirds (63%) of women aged 18–24 had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the previous 12 months, compared to one in two (52%) amongst women of all ages.

Sexual harassment is often just seen as a fact of life for young female workers. However, there can be serious professional, financial and psychological impacts. For example, the experience led 6% of those surveyed to leave their jobs, and a further 7% wanted to leave their job as a result, but had been unable to due to financial or other factors.

Challenge #9: Pressure on working parents

More than more than a quarter (28.7%) of Britain's young core workers are responsible for a dependent child, significantly higher than amongst other employees of their age group.

Previous analysis has shown that young mothers face particular difficulties in the workplace. Research by the EHRC found that mothers aged under 25 were more likely than average to have negative and potentially discriminatory experiences.⁵⁷ For example six times as many young mothers reported being dismissed from their job (6% relative to 1% of mothers of all ages), and they were also more likely to report feeling under pressure to hand in their notice on becoming pregnant, or being treated

so badly that they felt they had to leave work. One in five young mothers (20%, relative to 15% of all mothers) experienced some form of harassment related to their pregnancy or return to work and they were more likely to feel their needs as a pregnant employee were not willingly supported by their employer (31% relative to 20% of all mothers).

Young women also suffer more in terms of the motherhood pay penalty. The TUC looked at the difference in pay between mothers and women who hadn't had children, controlling for personal characteristics such as education, region and occupational social class.⁵⁸ This showed that by the age of 42, women who became mothers before they turn 33 earn 15% less than women who hadn't had children. In contrast, mothers whose first birth was at 33 or older experience a wage bonus of 12% compared to similar women who hadn't had children.

A higher proportion of Britain's young core workers were lone parents than the groups of all employees or young employees. Single mothers are particularly likely to be in low-skilled work and they have also been identified as one of the groups that find it hardest to progress out of low-paid work once they are in it.⁵⁹

Challenge #10: No voice in the workplace

Very few of Britain's young core workers are members of a trade union (9.4%), or have their pay or working conditions affected by union arrangements (16.5%), even when we take account of young core workers in the public sector. This is likely to be primarily a consequence of the industries that Britain's young core workers are concentrated in, as unions are less well-organised in retail and hospitality, and other increasingly casualised workplaces. Higher casualisation means that they are likely to feel less attachment to their workplace, and are consequently more likely to question the benefits of unionisation.⁶⁰

However, this is not the whole story. If we take health and social care as an example, amongst the group of employees roughly two-fifths (41.5%) are aware of unions being present at the place of work, and a very similar number (40.6%) are union members. Yet amongst Britain's young core workers, three in ten (30.0%) are aware of unions being present at their place of work, but only half this number (15.2%) are union members. This would imply that some of Britain's young core workers are working in unionised workplaces without feeling that unions are relevant for them. This may indicate that Britain's young core workers think of their current job as a temporary stage of their life. Many low-paid workers, particularly in retail and hospitality, have purely functional relationships with jobs and do not consider them central to their life or identity.⁶¹

This could also show that union messages have failed to get through or resonate. Many younger low-paid workers do not understand the role of unions or the benefits or protection that membership could offer. Some may consider that paying for union membership is a low priority when they are struggling to cover household bills on the minimum wage.⁶²

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Yet it is important that young people do have a voice at work. They face problems at work just as other workers do, but they often do not feel that poor treatment at work can be challenged. This may be because they assume that their treatment is the norm, and because they have little awareness of their rights⁶³ or sources of help. ACAS found that young people can be both reluctant to take actions to resolve workplace problems and more likely to respond to problems by leaving their job.⁶⁴ Young people with little labour market experience may find it more difficult than colleagues with more experience to find the confidence to speak out, or may be reluctant to complain for fear that this might jeopardise their position at work.

What are the values of Britain's young core workers?

Background: values modes⁶⁵

The study of values relates to the motivations, perceptions, emotions and behaviours that underpin different societies at different times. While the importance ascribed to different individual values varies dramatically between societies, groups and individuals, the values 'menu' is universal.

Social psychology tells us that there are common patterns to human values. It suggests that by understanding them we can begin to develop better approaches to behaviour change – such as working out how trade unions can encourage Britain's young core workers to consider membership.

Whilst every individual's psychological makeup is different, for analytical purposes we can use a tool called Values Modes, which breaks the population down into three core segments, defined by their dominant needs:

- **Pioneers** (or inner-directed people) are driven by ideas, aesthetics and personal development. They are more likely to be socially liberal, post-materialistic and positive about social change and fairness. They are interested in new information and are often the initiators of change. They tend to have large social networks and value independent thinking above following the crowd. Change and diversity are seen as positives.
- **Prospectors** (or outer-directed people) are driven by the need for self-esteem and the esteem of others. They focus on economic maximisation, meaning job progression, money, competition and social status are important to them. They are generally optimistic about the future but can be either socially liberal or socially conservative. They score highly on self-efficacy and are concerned with appearance and visible success.
- **Settlers** (or sustenance-driven people) are driven by the core needs of safety, security and belonging. Home, family and immediate neighbourhood are important, and the wider world often feels threatening, with crime a particular concern. They have a desire to belong; culture and identity are very important and change is often seen as negative.

As of 2015, the UK population is 38% Pioneer, 37% Prospector and 25% Settler. Whilst people from all three values groups can be found in any socioeconomic group

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or age cohort, one of the most pronounced demographic correlations is by age. Younger cohorts are more likely to be Prospector, with over half of 15-17 year olds in this segment. From selfies to boy racers, it is easy to recognise the key attributes of Prospector behaviour in modern youth culture.

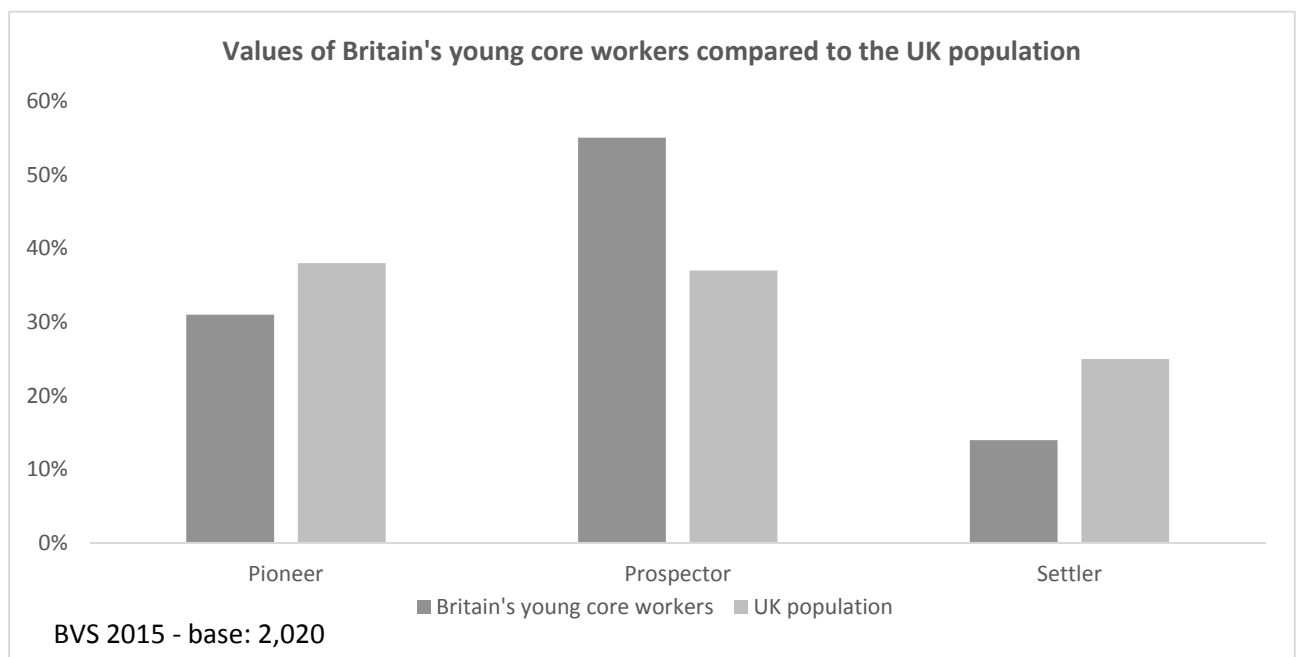
The values of Britain's young core workers

Using data from the 2015 British Values Survey, we can build up a profile of the key values and psychological attributes of Britain's young core workers.⁶⁶ A majority (55%) are Prospectors, with nearly a third being Pioneers (31%) and just 14% being Settlers. Compared to the UK population, this shows that Britain's young core workers have a significantly different values profile to the national average. They are more optimistic, tend to prioritise individual agency and are more competitive. They are status-driven and optimistic – and less loyal to causes or traditions.

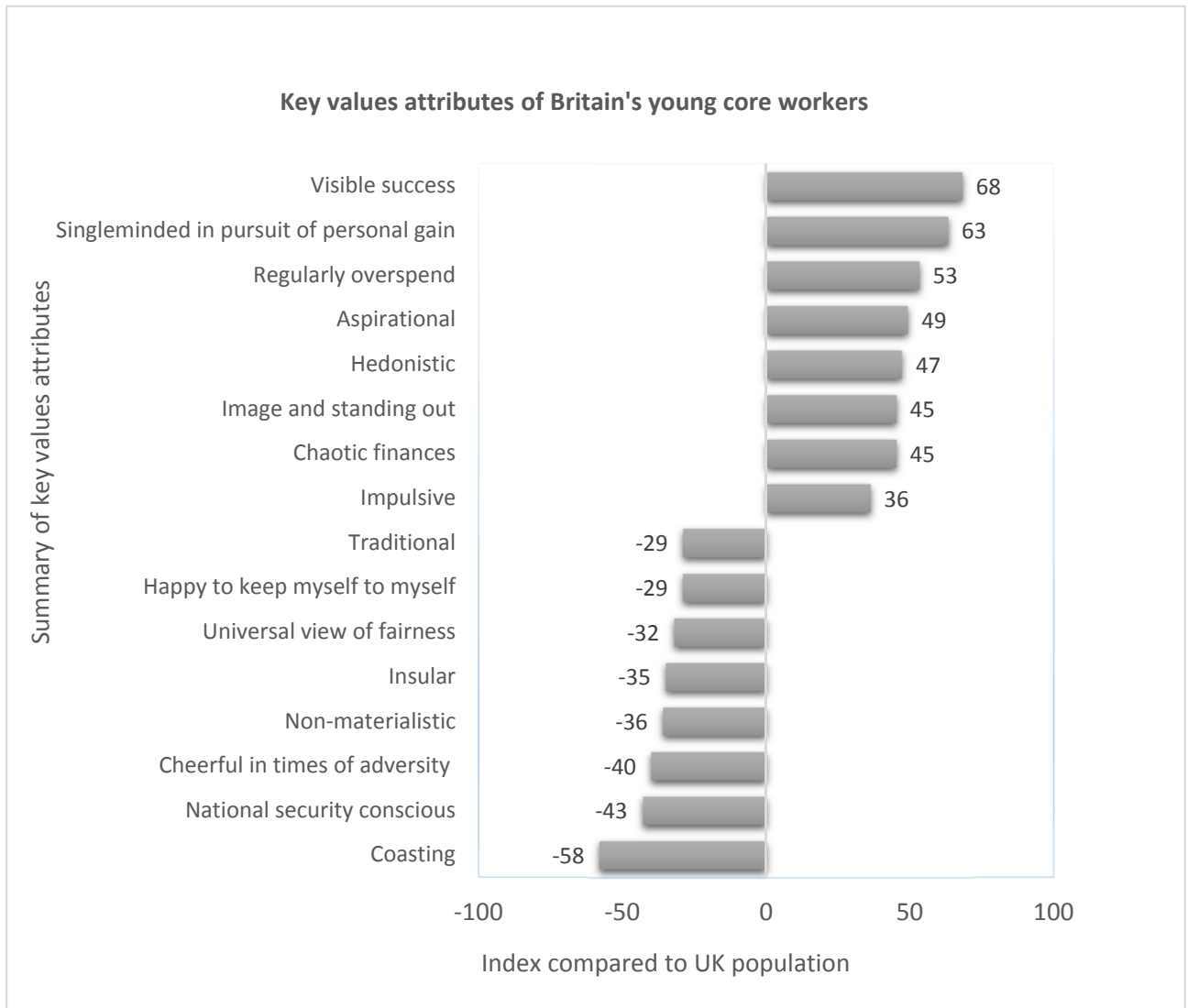
This accords with other reports about the values of young people. For example, a 2014 report notes:⁶⁷

“[Those born after 1980 are] more likely than other cohorts to believe the role of state should be more focused on providing opportunities and less on managing the risks individuals face. [They are] more concerned with personal independence and opportunity than compulsory systems of risk pooling and redistribution.”

Pioneers amongst Britain's young core workers have high levels of optimism and ambition, and in this respect their values makeup has lots in common with the Prospectors in this group.



To build a deeper picture of what motivates and interests this group, we looked at where their values over- and under-indexed compared to the whole UK population.



What we see is that young workers over-index on attributes such as visible success (they tend to agree with the sentiment “*being very successful is important to me. I like to impress other people.*”). They also over-index on the related attribute of aspirational (“*to me, achieving a better position in life is worth a lot of effort. At work, titles and grades are important to show how well I’m doing compared to others.*”) This implies that they are more likely to get involved when they see what the benefit of an action is to them, and how it could make them look good to their peers. Appeals based on

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mutual obligation and the principles of fairness could be ineffective or even backfire, as they may be perceived as 'worthy' and not a good use of Britain's young core workers' time or attention.

The attributes Britain's young core workers reject are those around being content with their lot, wanting security and shunning risk-taking. Two attributes that are overwhelmingly rejected are those which represent steadiness: they do not identify with the values attributes of coasting ("*I'm not at all driven to get to the top. The notion of being successful is just an illusion.*") and cheerfulness ("*I can feel at home almost anywhere. I am cheerful in times of adversity.*") Neither attribute offers the opportunity to fulfil their ambitions and aspirations.

The key driver for this group is a dynamic individualism. Whilst this may represent a barrier to identification with the collective ethos of trade unions as traditionally-framed, their desire for self-advancement does present opportunities.

Section nine

Conclusion

This report sought to identify and understand Britain's young core workers, to help unions reflect their concerns and develop ways to recruit and organise them better.

What it shows is that this group are often at the sharp end of labour market change. The recent shift towards a more hourglass-shaped labour market, as well as the increasing number of graduates, has meant that Britain's core young workers, who are middle-qualified, suffer from low pay, poor job quality and over-qualification. The increasing casualisation of work has disincentivised employers to invest in their workers, leading to fewer training opportunities and poor prospects for progression. These long-term labour market shifts have resulted in Britain's young core workers becoming stuck in dead-end jobs, with very few able to progress more than a single rung up on the occupational ladder.

In summary: young people's experiences of work are measurably poorer than those of previous generations – even if the young people themselves may not identify that. Their qualification levels are often higher than those of their parents and grandparents, but the middle-skill middle-pay jobs that those family members could get are not available to Britain's young core workers.

Trade unionism could offer these workers significant benefits. A priority of the trade union movement should be to enter those workplaces where Britain's young core workers are, with an offer that is calculated to appeal to them. The real gains from unionisation come with collective bargaining and recognition, rather than individual union membership. Increasing the level of collective bargaining over wages, contracts, access to learning and progression and protection from discrimination and exploitation would be of significant benefit to Britain's young core workers, given their experience of work. So the goal should be to increase recognition and group membership in workplaces where young workers work, rather than just membership numbers regardless of workplace.

The offer must feel relevant, compelling and value for money: some of the evidence points to this group of workers being less receptive to unions even in those workplaces where unions are present. Unions need to show that they represent Britain's young core workers, speak about their concerns, understand their values and are present in the places where they spend their time, on- and offline.

The values analysis of Britain's young core workers is instructive – and shows that how they see the world differs from the union officials who seek to organise them. Starting with user needs – what Britain's young core workers need, rather than what unions want to give them – could transform the movement's engagement with this group. Unions need to show that they are a vehicle to help Britain's young core

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workers achieve success in order to convince them of the proposition for trade unionism.

This analysis points up some of issues that may be fertile for unions to explore. For example, many of Britain's young core workers desire external validation and recognition, but are less likely to achieve progression at work or access training that furthers their career. Unions have historically been a route to self-improvement, and have a demonstrated current expertise in education and training, which implies that there may be room for exploration about the learning offer to Britain's young core workers, who miss out on opportunities.

Another example may be pregnancy discrimination. There are high numbers of parents amongst this group (contrary to the stereotype of a footloose young worker without family ties that still holds in much discussion of young workers' issues). Given the prevalence of discrimination against younger pregnant women and new mums, there may be fertile ground for unions to explore, given the strong union record on building workplaces where pregnancy discrimination is less likely and new mums are better supported.⁶⁸

Other issues that look to be fertile avenues to explore include underemployment, pay, bullying and sexual harassment. And given that Britain's young core workers are found in every British region and nation in significant numbers, it may be that a campaign for better jobs, closer to home could speak to their concerns.

Not covered in depth in this report is the need to modernise union communications with Britain's young core workers, but it is undoubtedly key. Although the best forms of union recruitment continue to be face-to-face by a volunteer who works in the same workplace or for the same employer, unions could usefully consider how they use digital to supplement offline organising, build relationships and find contacts for volunteers or paid organisers to approach.

Consumer and public campaigning on workplace issues can put pressure on employers and demonstrate that unions are on the side of Britain's young core workers. And tools such as petitioning can enable unions to find workers at a particular employer to target for membership, which lies behind the development of the TUC's Going to Work platform for trade union-led petitioning campaigns. Plus there are informal digital forums for workers at a variety of companies – such as shift-swapping communities in the hospitality industry on Facebook and self-organised networks of couriers on WhatsApp. Unions should consider how they resource digital-to-offline organising that meets Britain's young core workers where they are, and builds rapport and relationship, with the goal of increasing membership and supporting workers to improve their own working life.

Unions must also consider how they ensure that the membership experience meets the expectations of a group of workers served by digital-first businesses such as Wonga and Netflix (who, whatever we may think of them, offer services used by many of Britain's young core workers at a price point they find acceptable). Unions'

core membership systems need an upgrade if they are to support the seamless joining, updating and help-seeking experience that digital-first companies have made the norm.

One stumbling block to this is the lack of clarity over which union to join for Britain's young core workers, most of whom are based in workplaces where there is not an obvious union to join. Maybe in time there is a need for a common union joining process or gateway period to smooth the first experience of trade unionism for those in workplaces where there is not a union presence. This would appear to be a key area for the TUC to explore.

Finally, once the union movement begins to organise and represent Britain's young core workers, there need to be clear routes to leadership, to help the movement renew and reach out to more of this group, showing that unions are the movement for young workers and can and do improve the experience of work. Key to this is showcasing unions' early wins, where they have delivered for Britain's young core workers and their colleagues, and supporting future leaders through union structures and forums to lead.

Conclusion

Notes

¹ Although there is undoubtedly a question of causality, latest BIS statistics show that the trade union 'wage premium' of 42.7% for employees aged 16 to 24, and 12.8% for those aged 25 to 34. BIS, *Trade Union Membership 2015: Statistical Bulletin*, 2016

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/525938/Trade_Union_Membership_2015_-_Statistical_Bulletin.pdf

² It is well known that the UK Labour Force Survey underestimates pay. For example, in the group of young employees more than 10% reported being paid less than the minimum wage. HMRC data used in the ASHE series suggests that this figure is closer to 0.7% for employees over 21.

³ A good explanation of the difference between the mean and median can be found: <http://www.purplemath.com/modules/meanmode.htm>

⁴ Note: in this graph I excluded those who reported to be earning less than the minimum wage and those earning more than £16.70. This meant that this graph shows the earnings of only 67% of young employees outside of full-time education.

⁵ The Labour Force Survey does not precisely ask this question. An approximation of those responsible for a child was:

- Being the head of household, or the head of household's spouse, cohabitee, civil partner or same-sex cohabitee.
- Having at least one dependent child in the household under the age of 19.

⁶ The Labour Force Survey does not precisely ask this question. An approximation of lone parent status was:

- Being the head of household.
- Being neither married, cohabiting nor in a civil partnership.
- Having at least one dependent child in the household under the age of 19.

⁷ The Labour Force survey does not precisely ask this question. An approximation of those owning their own home was:

- Being the head of household, or the head of household's spouse, cohabitee, civil partner or same-sex cohabitee.
- Living in a house which is either owned outright, or is being bought with a mortgage or loan.

⁸ This is the number of people who report being the head of household's child, step-child, foster-child, child-in-law, brother or sister, step-brother or sister, brother or sister-in-law, grandchild, parent-in-law or other relation.

⁹ Again, the Labour Force survey does not precisely ask this question. An approximation of those socially renting was:

- Being the head of household, or the head of household's spouse, cohabitee, civil partner or same-sex cohabitee.
- Living in a house which is rented.
- The landlord of the accommodation being either LA/ Council/ Scottish homes or a housing association/ charitable trust/ local housing company.

¹⁰ The figures do not sum to 100%. This is because there are small groups whose: head of household is a non-relative, lives rent free or who rent from an employing organisation/another organisation/individual employer/relative of household member. These numbers are relatively insignificant.

¹¹ Note that the LFS figures on trade unions suffer from small sample size, due to the fact that questions about trade union engagement are only asked in quarter four. As such, small differences between groups is ignored in this analysis.

¹² Resolution Foundation, *Low Pay Britain*, 2015 <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Low-Pay-Britain-2015.pdf>

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¹⁴ TUC press release, *Young women with vocational qualifications earn 15% less than men, finds TUC*, 2016 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/equality-issues/gender-equality/equal-pay/young-women-vocational-qualifications-earn-15-less-men>

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Conclusion

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⁶⁴ ACAS, *Young people's experiences in the workplace*, 2014 <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/s/b/1214-Young-peoples-experiences-in-the-workplace.pdf>

⁶⁵ The TUC commissioned the Campaign Company to do an analysis of the British Values Survey (BVS) on their behalf. The BVS has been conducted by Cultural Dynamics Strategy and Marketing (CDSM) since 1973. The data here is based on analysis of the 2015 BVS, an online panel survey with a sample size of 2,020 representative of the UK population.

⁶⁶ The British Values survey does not allow an exact match to the criteria set out above for Britain's young core workers. So in this section we used a proxy of those in full or part-time employment, aged 18-34 and earning less than £20,000 per year.

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