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Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre

Young people's perspectives on decent and indecent work: implications for careers work - Seminar for CDI Conference 2021

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Greater Manchester Young Workers Project

The British Academy

Funded by the British Academy

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Theorising work: some ideas which influenced the project

- **Decent Work –** access to work, rights at work, social protection, social dialogue (ILO, 2019)
- **Psychology of Working Theory** - Need for survival and power; social connection and contribution; self-determination (Blustein, 2018)
- **Young workers -** Marginalised, liminal, traditional (Furlong et al, 2018)
- **Covid-19 Context: Lives in limbo** - A continuous present (Bone, 2019); The [im] possibility of planning a future (Cuervo & Cesters, 2019); Waithood and Cruel optimism (Pettit, 2019)

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Volatility in Careers provision despite GM Mayoral pledges

- We will implement the **Young Person's Guarantee**
- We will approach all **bigger employers** in GM and ask them to register at **least five job-related opportunities on GMACS**
- We will develop a plan, working with industry and education providers, **to get all under-25s online** and expand digital skills provision
- We will lobby Government for **full devolution of post-16 skills policy**
- We will **continue to build GMACS** as an alternative to the UCAS system

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Our project

What we are doing?

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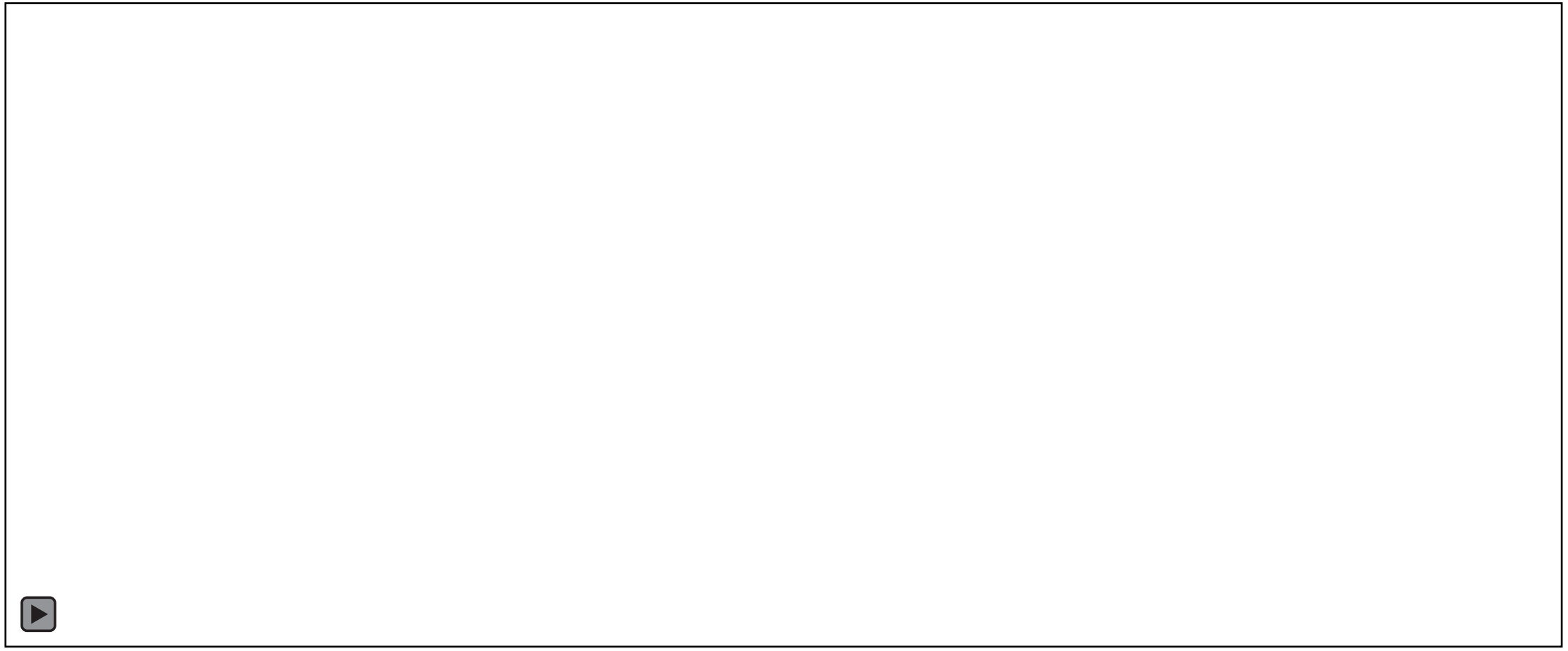
Early empirical findings: Mini-spoiler alert!



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Project in progress – Wave B in progress (n19) (40 interviews so far)

- Value of a longitudinal approach - lots of changes for participants in six months – things do get better
- Evidence that interventions have helped (via job centre, university placements team)
- Importance of interaction with varied people in positions of support/power – e.g., lecturers, placements and careers staff, job centre advisers
- Famine to feast - Too much work for some young people (e.g., hospitality). Intensification even in work they like (e.g., creatives).
- Desire for meaningful work endures.
- Work remains a painful experience for some young people.

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Decent Work Pillar - Social dialogue: Ambivalent perspectives

- Limited knowledge of trade unions
- Supportive of the concept of collective action
- Not in jobs where unions active
- Trusting of employers – don’t need a union
- Cost of joining is a barrier – is it worth it?
- Scepticism re whether unions can have impact

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Cherelle, 1st interview
Worked as a care assistant, then unemployed

"I like the idea but the only reason I was never part of a union was **I couldn't afford it.** I just couldn't afford it and they can make the cost as low as they want, but I was on such poverty wages all the time in that healthcare job and in previous like jobs. I could just never afford even the tiny extra cost…. But no **I do believe in the power of, you know collective action** and unions and I am grateful for unions because we wouldn't have even a five day working week had it not been for people protesting and you know forcing big businesses' hands."

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Simone, 1st interview Musician, hospitality worker

“I was a member of the Musicians Union when I was in college, but that’s cos it’s a reduced fee. But since then no, cos it’s really expensive to join and I dunno, I probably should but I just - and I know a lot of people that don’t and a lot of people that do but I personally am not part of that union.”

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John, 29, Deliveroo cyclist

"Deliveroo are up to no good. **I've joined the IWGB** and they want me to be involved more, but to be honest **it's hard to trust people you don't know and who are taking money rather than giving it.** I was reluctant to do so as I want to stay self employed as a sole trader and I only have myself to blame if I make mistakes without it effecting other people."

Decent Work Pillar - Social protection

- Welcomed political action to support young people, e.g., Opportunity Guarantee
- Benefits of certain interventions, e.g., Kickstart, New Enterprise Allowance
- Mixed experience of Universal Credit
- Critical of different minimum wage thresholds for young people
- Poor practices and lack of regulation of some employers

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Clara, 1st interview, Trainee hairdresser & hospitality worker

" …it's **all minimum wage** which isn't too bad cos I've turned 21 now but I remember when I was like younger or even before I turned 18 the pay was like minimum wage for younger people which is rubbish… I don't think all employers do that. Yeah cos they do hire quite a lot of under 18s at work. Been training quite a few at the moment and like **they do get a lot of benefits from hiring younger kids** cos they must save so much money just paying them, I think it's like £4.50 for under 18s. If they hire a 16 year old they can work for them for two years for that much then they don't, they're not always very accommodating to like when people have exams…"

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Khaleel, 1st Interview - unemployed photographer

“And so I think that should be a bit more regulated. I think if you’re going to open a business and you’re going to take responsibilities for employees, **there should be safeguards** there to make sure that you actually do look after the welfare of your employees. You have to pass a driving licence test to get a car **but you don’t have to get a business owner’s licence to manage people.”**

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Decent Work Pillar - Rights at work

- General awareness of inequalities and discrimination
- Unfair recruitment and employment practices
- Vagueness about systems designed to help e.g., role of employment contracts
- Some conscious of own positioning in these debates, e.g., privilege or lack of privilege

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Alexa, 1st interview - administrator

"…that experience has taught me a lot about how different kinds of employers treat their employees, that if you're a, if you're not classed as an employee in inverted commas in the legal definition, if you're an agency worker, whatever, **you don't have rights** and they can treat you however they like. And I've had one experience of, again it was a temp job. It was, yeah it was a temp job, not a very nice company."

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Blake, 1st Interview – self-employed artist

"Yeah maybe that's just me. Not my generation, just me **and people from my class and my background and education we can choose**, we can study, we can go and study maths or art or music or something like that. Building, engineering you could choose that and then work and eventually get a job in it."

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Decent Work Pillar - Employment opportunities

- The puzzle - awareness of scarcity and competition for some jobs in contrast to shortages elsewhere.
- Creative jobs ‘burden to bear’ of insecure work
- Inefficiencies for employers and young people – high volume job applications and hoops to jump
- ‘Any job’ easy to find.
- Contradictory views on levels of individual control

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Adam, Student – 1st Interview, working for Deliveroo

"Yeah I think I've weathered the storm quite well but of course I've got the benefit of having my student loan that covers my rent with additional top ups from my family. I've managed to find work quite well…. I've had so many jobs and I always manage to find something new and find something quickly. **I really struggle to understand these perspectives from people that say there's nothing out there."**

Chelsie, 1st Interview - retail supervisor

"Because **the lead up to that is stressful, it makes you anxious**, it makes you excited because you start thinking of the possibilities… So I think transparency's really, really important… I know it's hard to do this but I think if you get to a certain stage in an interview process so it's not just one interview and you're either in or not, but I think if you've had to go, like jump through hoops, like apply and then telephone interview and then face to face interview and then maybe like you've got one more interview**, I think if you've not got it there needs to be maybe like a feedback**. You can't just, you should like show people sort of, give some feedback so they can grow…"

Defining Decent Work

- Earning enough to get by
- Happiness/satisfaction
- Dignity/being valued
- Progression
- Having rights and protection
- Subjective dimension to this – generated interesting insights

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Adam, Student cycling for Deliveroo

“Enough to cover your expenses, enough to allow you to do like things you want to do like within reason. Then yeah to cover all your basic needs and then some. A lot of people need the security. Other people, although other people don’t want that and other people favour the flexibility. So it really does come down to the person and their individual definitions of decent work. Now although like the Deliveroo stuff and even a lot of the other jobs I’ve had in the past… even when they are really good and I recommend them, **there are only some that I would class as decent work.”**

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Blake, self-employed artist

"Decent work for me, being happy in your job, having good interactions with people, not feeling depressed, having enough to feed and house yourself and have some leisure time and kind of getting pleasure from your work, you know, yeah. And feel like you're contributing to society and making people happy in some way, in whatever way it is. …What you're doing, research, trying to help society, trying to help young workers. I think that's decent work."

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Wellbeing and mental health (link to UN SDG 3)

- Numerous participants declared a mental health condition. Work can exacerbate of help improve this.
- Wider wellbeing closely tied to their work circumstances.

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Cherelle, worked as a care assistant, 1st Interview unemployed

"I will say that the pressure that I'm under has forced me to get **mental health** help which is a positive but of course all of these things take so long because of this Tory government underfunding, critically underfunding the NHS… The stress and pressure of not being able to see people as a single person, as a single childless person who doesn't really have much in the way of family, it's been a lot to handle. So it's completely changed my life really, this pandemic and completely changed my work circumstances. Now I'm not really available for any kind of work unless it can be done from home because I can't, I still can't risk my mother's health."

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Simone, Musician and hospitality worker

"…when you're an artist, whatever kind of creative thing you're doing, it doesn't really matter, your persona and your like self is so tied into your creations that if that is like, basically if you're told that that's worthless or that you can't do that anymore or it's valueless or like the situation, even worse if the situation around you renders it valueless, then you just, it's a very personal attack it feels like. It feels very, you know it's a very vulnerable place that you make art from so I think it's pretty difficult to go, to be told or to be in a situation where you can't make your art any more or you're told that that it is, you know it doesn't matter anymore."

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