The Impact of Scotland's Developing Young Workforce Strategy on Employer Engagement

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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research

The Impact of Scotland's Developing Young Workforce Strategy on Employer Engagement

Rocket Science

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Executive summary

Aim of the research

The Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Strategy (Scottish Government, 2014) was the Scottish Government's response to the Education Working for All! Report of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce of 2014. The Strategy set out a seven-year plan to 2021 and built on the recommendations of the report (all of which were accepted by the Scottish Government). It focused on ways of ensuring that young people were more aware of the world of work and the full range of its opportunities, were better able to take informed decisions about their future career, and were better prepared to thrive in the world of work. The DYW Strategy aimed to take a whole system approach to deliver work relevant education for young people. This included implementation plans agreed and jointly led with local government.

The Scottish Government, on behalf of Scottish Ministers, commissioned Rocket Science to undertake an impact evaluation of the employer engagement approaches undertaken in the delivery of the Youth Employment Strategy - Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (2014-2021) (DYW) (Scottish Government, 2014). The purpose of this evaluation will be to inform current and future policy development to engage employers in support of young people's employment and education in Scotland. This will also incorporate an evaluation for the employer engagement approaches used in the delivery of the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) (2020-2022).

The fieldwork took place between March and September 2022 through online interviews and telephone calls with employers', practitioners and DYW Coordinators.

Findings

The findings from our research with employers and practitioners can be broken down into nine themes and within three broad areas of focus; strategic, regional and operational.

At the strategic level:

1. **The role and funding of DYW is still vital** with employers identifying the significance of DYW school coordination in helping them to create and sustain engagement with schools and young people.

2. **Focusing on young people who are most disadvantaged in the labour market.** It will be important for DYW Regional Groups to at least maintain – and probably strengthen – their focus on these young people. While employers are willing to engage these groups, the benefits of this

engagement and investment need to be made clear to employers, with additional support available.

At the regional level:

3. **The landscape of support for employers is complex** and most employers did not know who the best organisation to approach is and were confused about the wide range of offers, many of which seemed, to employers, to be similar. The evolution of the No One Left Behind (NOLB) (Scottish Government, 2020) provides an important opportunity for change.

4. **There is a need for a more strategic approach around local labour markets.** We heard frequently from employers about the need for DYW to take a more strategic, long-term, approach to engagement. This includes a focus on a sector where there are recruitment and skills needs and a longer term approach to plan engagement and activities.

At an operational level:

5. **Effective action needs effective collaboration between DYW, employers, teachers and parents.** The recent introduction of DYW School Coordinators was widely welcomed as providing the dedicated time needed to help more employers engage. However, it was felt that there was scope to help them focus their limited time to engage specific employers according to a clear local strategy in terms of the range of current and emerging opportunities for young people.

6. **The quality and quantity of engagements**. Many employers are keen to have a smaller number of high quality or immersive engagements with young people who are interested in their work or sector, rather than providing more general information or engagements with a wider group of young people. They are also keen to start engagement at a younger age.

7. **Virtual engagement as part of a wider, hybrid offer should be considered** as it saves time for employers, increases reach and provides a wider range of opportunities for young people. However, employers were concerned about the difficulty in engaging meaningfully and their preference was for in-person engagement.

8. **Making it easier for employers to engage.** Employers talked about better national promotion of DYW and the opportunities for support, clearer evidence of the benefits which they can expect from engagement with schools and young people, having a clear focus of engagement as examples.

9. **Supporting and developing employer leadership.** The most successful approaches seek to integrate DYW into a wider set of offers for businesses and therefore needs to be seen as a package of support. Public sector

employers should also show leadership as exemplars in supporting and recruiting young people.

Recommendations

Strategic level recommendations:
Recommendation 1: We recommend that the Scottish Government establishes a long-term funding stream for DYW, linked to a stronger strategic approach (as described below), which will build confidence in the sustainability of support.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that DYW Regional Groups review the way in which they currently disaggregate their young person and employer markets to identify ways in which they can further strengthen their focus on young people who are likely to be more disadvantaged in the labour market, and especially those who may be at particular risk of not going into a positive destination because of the lasting impact of COVID-19.

Regional level recommendations:
Recommendation 3: We recommend that DYW Regional Groups work together to explore how they can help employers benefit from the specific skills and insights of disabled young people.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that DYW Regional Groups work with their Local Authorities and Local Employability Partnerships to create a more coherent and co-ordinated offer for employers around their support for, recruitment and training of young people.

Delivery level recommendations:
Recommendation 5: We recommend that the Scottish Government support a national promotional campaign to raise awareness of the support available through DYW, and a common core set of services and opportunities. This should clearly outline the advantages of participation for employers.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that this promotional campaign should draw in the full range of national employer organisations so they can work with their membership to enhance awareness of the opportunities and benefits. This could involve Institute of Directors Scotland, CBI Scotland and SCDI, as well as representative sector bodies.

Recommendation 7: Alongside this, we recommend that the DYW Regional Groups work together to identify a core set of services and offers. These can be broadly drawn to ensure that there remains considerable local flexibility to take account of different needs, issues and priorities.

Recommendation 8: We recommend that DYW Regional Groups are encouraged to further strengthen the development of strategic and long-term approaches around particular sectors or groups of young people that clearly link with employer demand and skills needs within regions.

Recommendation 9: We recommend that DYW School Coordinators help their schools put in place engagement plans for the academic year and use these to encourage new offers of support from employers.

Recommendation 10: We recommend that DYW promote their work to parents/carers and teachers, as well as raising awareness of the range of qualifications and routes to work that are valued by employers. This will support the **cultural shift** away from expecting all young people to get minimum of five 'Higher' qualifications and a university based degree for every job and career type.

Recommendation 11: We recommend that DYW and the Scottish Government give greater consideration to more targeted engagement, from information sessions to immersive experiences and how these link together to provide a more connected and progressive experience of the world of work for young people. Using a hierarchy of engagement, to match level of intensity with the aims for that group of young people, could help to set employer expectations and target activities.

Recommendation 12: We recommend that DYW and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) work closely together to further enhance the digital content available to young people, with the support of the Scottish Government, both in terms of nationally available insights into sectors and roles, and, through building on the current content in My World of Work, with young people talking about their experience of specific roles at work and their routes to these roles.

Recommendation 13: We recommend that DYW Regional Groups consider the extent to which it may be possible to increase the appeal of engagement locally through clearer communication of the benefits to employers, improving support for employers, and tailoring ways of working to suit the local context.

Recommendation 14: We recommend that the Scottish Government review the scale and nature of engagement of public sector employers with schools and young people and identify ways in which they can be helped to play a leading role and be exemplars for other employment sectors.

Background and introduction

About DYW

The Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Strategy (Scottish Government, 2014) was the Scottish Government's response to the Education Working for All! Report of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce of 2014. The Strategy set out a seven-year plan to 2021 and built on the recommendations of the report (all of which were accepted by the Scottish Government). It focused on ways of ensuring that young people were more aware of the world of work and the full range of its opportunities, were better able to take informed decisions about their future career, and were better prepared to thrive in the world of work. The DYW Strategy aimed to take a whole system approach to deliver work relevant education for young people. This included implementation plans agreed and jointly led with local government.

The delivery plan was structured into five 'Change Themes' of which effective employer engagement is a significant part. This report sets out to explore the extent to which Change Theme 5 of the delivery plan has made an impact:

Change Theme 5 – Aimed to build a network of employer hubs supporting partnerships with schools, and a wider range of apprenticeships and investment in young people.

With the inception of the DYW Strategy in 2014, DYW has played a significant role in ensuring young people have a work relevant educational experience. In particular, the establishment of employer-led Regional Groups was a fundamental element of the strategy, designed to bridge the gap between industry and education and assist employers to play an active role in preparing young people for the world of work

The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG), was introduced in 2020 in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market and the publication of the report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery (Scottish Government, 2020). YPG forms part of the wider package of support provided through No-One Left Behind (NOLB) and Fair Start Scotland, which will provide Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs) with the opportunity to combine a range of funding streams to develop, implement and procure a locally appropriate employability service, with a strong focus on supporting the employability of young people.

The YPG has the stated ambition that, within two years, every 16-24 year old in Scotland will have the opportunity to be in paid employment, enrolled in education, actively involved on an apprenticeship or training programme, or engaged on a formal volunteering or supported activity programme. Engaging with employers is a vital part of both the DYW strategy and the YPG. The brief for this evaluation was to explore the extent to which the approaches taken to engage employers in support of the DYW and the YPG have achieved their stated aims. The DYW and YPG

strategies cover a range of actions relevant to employers. Overall, these actions aim to support employers to actively contribute to the development of the young workforce. An update report on the Young Person's Guarantee was recently published, setting out progress over the two years of the Guarantee and the direction of travel going forward.

DYW is not the only key work happening in the sphere of young people and skills development or employer match in Scotland. Other key organisations and schemes in this sector include, but aren't necessarily limited to, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), regional economic development agencies, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), local authorities, Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Confederation of British Industry (CBI), and Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI). It should be noted that while this research is focused on the DYW strategy, this is in practice complimented by other structures, organisations and schemes across Scotland.

Purpose of the study

The Scottish Government, on behalf of Scottish Ministers, commissioned Rocket Science to undertake an impact evaluation of the employer engagement approaches undertaken in the delivery of the Youth Employment Strategy - Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (2014-2021) (DYW) (Scottish Government, 2014). This will also incorporate an evaluation for the employer engagement approaches used in the delivery of the YPG (2020-2022).

The purpose of this evaluation is to inform current and future policy development to engage employers in support of young people's employment and education in Scotland. In summary, taking into account the above background and context, this evaluation assesses the extent to which the approaches taken to engage employers in support of DYW and the YPG have achieved their stated aims by exploring:

- Perceived strengths and weaknesses of the employer engagement approaches since 2014, including what has been effective and less effective, by employer type.

- What motivates different employers to support and engage with the agenda.

- Employers' preferences for supporting young people and the challenges they encounter when delivering support.

- Extent to which the Scottish Government's funding of employer engagement has leveraged input from employers, and how this can be built on further to deliver the YPG.

- Effectiveness of employer engagement.

- What could be improved to increase the breadth and depth of employer support for the agenda.

- The evaluation should assess both the strengths and weaknesses of recent employer engagement approaches and attempt to capture the extent to which the Scottish Government's funding of employer engagement has leveraged input from employers.

This research is not intended as an evaluation of the entire DYW, or YPG. Additional research has been commissioned to collect the insight of education professionals.

Particularly in the light of the impact of COVID-19, it was felt to be important to explore the extent to which employer engagement has contributed to equity and equality. We understand that the Scottish Government need to understand employers' abilities and motivations to support young people facing the greatest barriers to entering employment and how this could be improved. The focus of this assignment was on developing a robust and systematic base of evidence, drawn from data and interviews, which can be used to inform future policy around preparing young people for the world of work.

To answer the research questions and aims of this evaluation, Rocket Science developed and implemented a six stage methodology which is set out below:

Stage 1: Inception and planning
- Understanding the context for the work.
- Agreeing the methodology.

Stage 2: Desk Research and sampling framework
- Desk review of research to date.
- Development of a sampling framework. See Appendix 1 for detailed sampling framework.

Stage 3: Evaluation framework and research design
- Identify employers, practitioners and stakeholders to interview.
- Design research materials all engagements.

Stage 4: Fieldwork
- Telephone and video calls with employers, practitioners and stakeholders.

Stage 5: Analysis and reporting
- Analysis of employers and practitioners using a charting approach.
- A draft and final Report.

Stage 6: Dissemination
- A PowerPoint presentation for use with a range of stakeholder audiences.

A detailed description of our methodology can be found in Appendix 1: Detailed methodology. The remainder of this is section summarises the desk research which informed our approach to engagement with employers and practitioners.

Desk-based review

The first stage of the evaluation was a detailed desk review to explore existing related documentation, including a review of the evidence, management information (MI) data and strategies to draw out relevant findings and insights. The focus was on understanding and articulating common themes of activity and impact, variations in this across DYW Regional Groups, sectors, and populations, and identifying examples of good practice and innovation in terms young person engagement, and preparation for the world of work.

The detailed findings from the desk review can be found in Appendix 2: Desk-based review of data and literature, including links to data sources and references. The summary findings from this research are presented below. This stage was also important in understanding the existing evidence base and to help shape and inform the research materials for this evaluation.

Summary of desk review findings: Employer engagement

Between 2014-2019, the proportion of employers in Scotland providing work placements and recruiting directly from schools remained fairly stable. However, there was a notable decline in the proportion providing work inspiration activities, from 21% to 15% (Employer Perspectives Survey, EPS, 2019).

During the same time period, larger employers were more likely to be offering both work placements and work inspiration activities to young people (EPS, 2019).

There was also notable variation between sectors, with the highest engagement from the Education and Health and Social work sectors, and lowest from primary sector (agriculture, fishing, forestry, mining etc), construction and hotels and restaurants (EPS, 2019).

There is some evidence that employers are motivated to engage with DYW to help young people and 'give back' to the community, rather than for direct economic benefits to them – for example, through improved recruitment.

Appropriate and high quality employer interaction supports young people in acquiring essential employability skills, and specific employer interactions can help with specific needs at different stages (Rocket Science, 2019).

In 2019, 75% of surveyed school headteachers (n=159) said they had established long-term relationships with employers (Senior Phase: Headteacher Survey, 2019).

Barriers to engagement include employers not having suitable roles for work placements, and not having the time or resources to support engagement. Lack of awareness of available standards and guidance presents further barriers to engagement for employers.

DYW Regional Groups

The DYW Regional Groups were felt have been particularly effective as a single point of contact for employers and to be simplifying the DYW landscape for employers, during the formative evaluation of the project (2017-18) (SQW, 2018).

There is some evidence to indicate that employers that have engaged with DYW Regional Groups offer higher quality activities (SQW, 2018).

Just 3% of respondents to the EPS had engaged with their DYW Regional Group in the 12 months preceding the survey. Those who did engage were notably more likely to have offered work inspiration activities and work placements (EPS, 2019).

Employer engagement and COVID-19

Providing virtual activities has been a good alternative for employers to continue engaging with young people throughout the pandemic, and has also broken down geographical barriers, enabling rural and remote employers to engage with DYW more frequently. However, young people who have experienced virtual engagement express a strong preference for face-to-face engagement and recent research with young people highlighted the scale of the problem of digital exclusion in terms of equipment, quiet space and access to broadband (DYW, 2021).

Limited data is currently available on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employer engagement. Information from the Employer Skills Survey provides some context for changes employers have experienced as a result of the pandemic, which are likely to have had an influence on the time and resource available for DYW engagement and on employers' practical ability to deliver activities (Employer Skills Survey, 2020).

Employer and practitioner engagement

Working closely with the Scottish Government, a sampling framework was agreed for both employer and practitioner participants. While this research did not require a systematic sample of employers, the sampling framework for this research does consider the scale, sector and geography of employers to allow for disaggregation in the analysis. The detailed sampling framework can be found in Appendix 1: Detailed methodology.

From the desk research we identified some emerging gaps and areas for exploration in qualitative fieldwork (below). These were used as a starting point in developing the topic guides for primary research with employers and practitioners (see Appendix 3: Core topic guide for and Appendix 4: Core topic guide for practitioners) which were sent to the Scottish Government and Research Advisory Group (RAG) for review and approval.

Emerging gaps and areas for exploration in qualitative fieldwork

Based on the key findings from the data and literature review, the following areas were identified for exploration in the qualitative fieldwork: (See Appendix 2: Desk-based review of data and literature for links to data sources and references).

Employer engagement:

What are employers' motivations for engaging with DYW? Some evidence indicates employers are focused more on the benefits for young people and the community, rather than direct gains to their organisation. It would be good to understand in more depth the reasoning for participating in DYW and how this fits into business planning and if this motivation has changed since the pandemic.

What type of activities work best for employers in engaging with young people, particularly post-pandemic? There is some evidence available on best practice in DYW employer engagement, but there is a need for a post-pandemic perspective on understanding how DYW activities can best suit the need of employers in line with their sector, size, and location.

What level of involvement do employers want in the decision-making and planning of DYW activities in the school curriculum and what would this involvement look like? Some pre-COVID evidence indicates that employers and their DYW activities are not fully embedded yet in the school curriculum. It would be useful to explore further to what extent employers want to be involved in these decisions and how this may be valuable to them.

How aware are employers of the Career Education Standard, Work Placement Standard and Guidance on School/Employer partnerships and have these been useful to them? A 2017 Education Scotland report found that most employers were not aware of these standards and guidance available to them. The interviews could uncover if this awareness has changed, as well as if these resources are useful to employers.

What are the barriers to offering work placements and work inspiration activities and how have these changed as a result of the pandemic? Barriers to offering work placements include not having the right roles and not

having the time or resource to support young people. It will be useful to explore how these barriers may have changed as a result of the pandemic, how they vary by sector, size and location, and the support needed to overcome them.

DYW Regional Groups:

How are different Regional Groups facilitating employer engagement, and what has been their added value? The 2018 formative evaluation of the DYW Regional Groups gave an early overview of impact and added value across four Regional Groups. The qualitative fieldwork will be able to uncover a more comprehensive picture of the differences between all Regional Groups in their facilitation of employer engagement, impact made, and value added.

What are the factors supporting engagement with the Regional Groups? While we know larger organisations are more likely to engage with DYW, just 3% of those who responded to the EPS had engaged in the last 12 months. Research to date suggests engagement with DYW does support higher quality support for young people, so understanding how engagement with DYW is best facilitated will be important.

Has the support needed from the Regional Groups changed as a result of the pandemic? In addition to understanding the added value of Regional Groups in a post-pandemic setting, the interviews can dive further into if there has been a change in the support needed from Regional Groups pre- and post-pandemic.

Fieldwork took place between March and September 2022, involving video and telephone calls with employers. In total, 89 employers and 16 practitioners took part in this research. A table summarising this engagement by different employer and practitioner groups is included in the detailed methodology in Appendix 1: Detailed methodology. The full list of employers and practitioners we spoke to can be found in Appendix 5: Employers, practitioners and stakeholders interviewed.

A range of practitioners and employers were consulted for this research. The types of employers ranged across size, geography, and sector, but included:

- Members of DYW Regional Groups – employers who were involved in activity in one or more DYW Regional Group.

- ERI – employers who had used the Employer Recruitment Incentive (ERI) to support hiring new staff who face the greatest barriers to employment.

- Marketplace – employers who had used Marketplace, an online tool connecting schools and colleges with business.

- 5 Asks/YPG – employers who had signed the YPG 5 Asks, pledging to support young people into the world of work.

- Non-engaged employers – a randomised sample of Chamber of Commerce members, who had not formally taken part in the DYW strategic activity were also interviewed to understand what, if any, work they did to support young people, and to understand the barriers that prevented them from doing so.

Practitioners were considered to be a broad category of those working in the sector to support young people into work, including through training and apprenticeships. These practitioner types included:

- Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) members - SAAB gives employers and industry a role in developing apprenticeships in Scotland. To ensure apprenticeships develop to meet industry and economic need, fair work, and job opportunities. It is led by employers and representatives from industry bodies across a range of sectors.

- DYW School Coordinators – School Coordinators work to support senior management in the school to embed DYW and other employer offers within the curriculum. They create and implement a structure for employer engagement and maintain a network of partners within the local business community. This connects into national priorities around employability, Career Education Standard and Work Placement Standard.

The current and changing context for DYW

This section sets out the current and changing context in which the Scottish Government and DYW operates in. It covers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people, the changing economy and labour market, the No One Left Behind approach, and what this means for the future focus for DYW.

COVID-19 and young people

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated a range of existing inequalities relating to skills and access to work. As employers adapted to home working, and to health and safety requirements for industries that could not transition to remote working, this had an impact on the type and scale of opportunities available to young people.

The recent DYW research report (DYW, 2021) on the Impact of Virtual Engagement on Young People demonstrated that, while online engagement can encourage more employers to volunteer their time, this presents a trade-off, with most young people preferring face-to-face engagement with employers and interactive work which inspires opportunities. This report has set out the importance of holding onto the benefits of greater virtual engagement – particularly in terms of extending the reach of introductory work around sectors and roles – while ensuring a balance in terms of recognising the preference of both employers and young people for face-to-face experiences that are more immersive.

However, there is a further aspect of COVID-19 that is relevant to DYW. Recent research has described the significant and long-lasting impact of COVID-19 on young people's mental health, particularly those in disadvantaged communities (Nuffield Trust, 2022). This makes the quality and coherence of the advice and support they receive around their progress into training and work even more important. DYW has a key role to play in contributing to this focused effort on more disadvantaged young people.

The changing economy and labour market

As a key part of the context for YPG, the recent Career Review, Careers By Design (Skills Development Scotland, 2022) set out the changing context for young people's employment, including:

The climate emergency. The Scottish Government's commitment to a just and fair transition to net zero (Scottish Government Just Transition Commission) is contributing to the creation of a range of new areas of work and changing roles and focus within existing employment. DYW has been part of this change, with some Regional Groups focusing on green jobs and the circular economy as an area of interest for young people.

Industry 4.0 and disruptive technologies. The report recognises the likelihood of *'frequent disruption in the labour market that requires recurring occupational change and a need to significantly and regularly retrain and upskill'* (Skills Development Scotland, 2022)*.* The COVID-19 pandemic was an example of how rapid change in technology, industries, processes and societal norms can be transformed. Overnight, businesses adapted to the pandemic by moving to entirely online and remote working, displacing traditional ways of working. This has changed how we work and the skills we need, and software required to do our day-to-day jobs.

A dynamic labour market. Before COVID-19, a labour supply shortage in Scotland encouraged employers to look beyond traditional ways of recruiting, including working with people who may need additional support at work. As the labour market emerges from COVID-19, the labour supply challenges have not improved, and the this research coincided with many employers recognising that they needed to develop new approaches to recruitment to meet their current and future skills requirements. However, with the cost-of-living crisis and the widely predicted recession, it is likely that unemployment will rise in the medium term and young people will be presented with both fewer opportunities and greater pressures on them to earn.

The nature of work. The Career Review recognises that the changing nature of work places an *"increased emphasis on career management skills, meta skills and wellbeing, as part of a wider approach to fair work".* DYW has a central role to play in helping young people to understand the advantages and risks of non-traditional working models and provide young people with insights into fair work and how to find it. This reinforces the importance of engaging with a wide range of employers and with a particular focus on those who offer fair work.

Put together, these aspects of the dynamism of the labour market reinforce the key conclusion of the Career Review Programme Board, which is that there needs to be a highly collaborative and systematic approach to the task of helping young people to gain the skills, information and confidence to make decisions about and manage their careers. DYW is an important part of this landscape, focusing on drawing employers into this area as a vital partner and ensuring that they are able to play their full role in guiding the curriculum and helping young people to gain a better understanding of, and be better prepared for, the world of work.

Our work has identified the importance of DYW working collaboratively with key partners, particularly local authorities, in helping to identify and fill gaps, respond to issues affecting young people, and creating a more coherent approach to helping young people make progress into the sectors that will be providing appealing and sustainable careers, based around fair work principles.

No One Left Behind

The current evolution of the NOLB approach (Scottish Government, 2020) is an important element in the evolution of DYW. The pooling of the Scottish Government's funding strands around skills and employment, and the devolution of this pooled funding to local authorities, who will work with their LEPs to take forward a locally appropriate and coherent approach to employability, provides two key opportunities for DYW:

- The flexible use of funding locally to ensure that there are coherent pathways for young people into work, and coherent approaches to key sector initiatives. We have heard examples of NOLB funding being drawn on to fill gaps in pathways for more disadvantaged young people on their way to work, and the flexibility of the funding is likely to be an opportunity for DYW, as part of each LEP, to influence the coherence and completeness of these pathways, particularly for young people who are more disadvantaged in the labour market.

- The creation of a more coordinated approach to engaging with employers will provide a range of activities and initiatives around experience of the world of work and intelligence about current and emerging needs. While in the short-term local authorities and their LEPs may have a focus on creating a more holistic and complete service around the needs of individual clients – particularly those further from work – there is scope for the LEPs to also drive a more joined up approach to employer engagement in each local authority area.

What this means for the future focus of DYW

These issues and trends, taken together with our main findings, suggest the following implications for the future evolution of DYW:

- A weakening economy means that employers may find it harder to find the time and resource to support young people, and young people may find it harder to gain work experience and find work.

- The rapid growth of initiatives around some key growth sectors such as digital and those around the green economy and sustainability mean that DYW is likely to have a role to play in helping to ensure that they are coherent and focused for both employers and young people, particularly at a time when some of the more mature sectors, such as retail and hospitality, will remain at risk, with a knock on effect on engagement and job opportunities.

- The ability of local authorities and their LEPs to apply funding more flexibly around specific local needs and relate these to the profile of jobs in the local

economy, creates an opportunity for DYW to play an influential role through creating more comprehensive pathways for young people and a more joined up approach to engaging employers.

- The impact on young people's mental health – and specifically the impact on young people in more disadvantaged communities – suggests that the focus that DYW place on more disadvantaged young people over the next two or three years will make an important contribution to their future progress.

- This work suggests that it will be more important than ever for DYW to have a close working relationship with local authorities and to use these relationships to identify current and emerging issues and needs around more disadvantaged young people and put together appropriate responses with employers.

The key conclusion we draw from this is that DYW is a critical part of the information, advice and guidance 'assets' of a region and, in terms of the outcome from the Career Review, it has the ability to play a central role in helping to ensure that these assets work together effectively around the needs and aspirations of young people and the opportunities and insights that employers can offer. In practice this means:

- It will be important for DYW to play an exemplar role as a partner and collaborator in putting into practice the key theme of the Career Review.

- DYW Regional Groups can provide strong leadership in drawing together a coherent and joined up set of initiatives around recruitment and skills development for young people in locally significant sectors.

- DYW is in a position to draw together intelligence from employers about current and emerging local recruitment and skills needs and combine this with SDS research to use in informing its joint action with local authorities around areas of job opportunity.

- DYW has a central role to play in drawing in a range of employer membership groups and networks to promote engagement and its value and broadening the ownership of the agenda of helping young people make a successful and sustained transition into work.

Findings - employers and practitioners

This section provides a summary of the findings across all employer and practitioner interviews.

Employer motivations

We spoke to a range of employers, including those who had recently started working with DYW and those who already had an established relationship with them. Employers were generally more confident talking about the full range of work they do with young people and schools, often as part of a range of community engagement or workforce planning activities. Many discussed their engagement with DYW within this context, but most did not talk about DYW in isolation.

Employers interviewed had two main motivations for supporting and engaging in young people's education and employment:

1. A sense of social responsibility (the "right thing to do") and personal motivations, such as their own experience with school and the world of work. This includes wanting to help challenge traditional views of the world of work such as "Construction is not for girls", "Women don't do STEM subjects" and "Trades are only for the bad kids". Employers were also keen to highlight non-traditional pathways and move away from the view that, "University is the only way forward".

> "It also gives you that warm and fuzzy feeling". – Large employer, DYW Inverness and Central Highlands

2. To help with recruitment and retention challenges, particularly in securing a pipeline of new talent and meeting future recruitment demand.

> "It's all about keeping a conveyor belt of talent in the local area and keeping on top of that". – Medium employer, DYW Inverness and Central Highlands

Although employers noted that they were experiencing significant skills shortages at present, their main motivations for engaging young people were focused on securing future talent. This is especially true in places like the Borders, and Highlands and Islands where the focus in on keeping local talent in the area. They were happy to take on young people in training and entry level roles but were struggling to find the right people with the right attitudes and desire to work in their sectors.

Those employers who had used the ERI funding consistently reported that this was a key motivation for them to offer training to young people. Most of these employers did not reflect the motivation of supporting communities or meeting a social obligation but were focused solely on their own recruitment needs. This suggests that these types of support may be able to encourage a wider range of employers to engage with young people.

"I was completely motivated by what we needed within [the company]. I was grateful that there was money there to support me, but I didn't take them on just to be nice about it". – ERI employer

The motivations for employers who have had limited engagement with young people also follow the same patterns of social responsibility, especially for those young people who have additional support needs, and ensuring they are put in touch with the right people and the right environment and helping with recruitment and future workforce planning.

In terms of employers engaging with DYW, the main reasons and motivations for this were around connectivity and access to schools and young people, including:

- Access to the right people in schools.

- Access to cohorts of young people.

- Access to different groups of young people – i.e., those who do not know what they want to do, or are not interested in further education.

- Having a contact in schools who understands the world of work and has the time to engage with employers.

- There is also a growing realisation of the secondary benefits of this engagement, including the development opportunity for staff, PR around Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and the potential to help employers to win contracts, for example, from public sector clients.

- A future workforce and customer base. Employers are conscious of their current and longer term recruitment needs, and about the value of a positive image in local communities, and some employers did talk about their motivation in terms of succession planning and marketing.

- A growing recognition that there is talent available which is untapped, and employers need to be much more flexible in their approach to finding staff post-COVID.

Practitioners have seen a shift in employer motivations, and current motivations are predominantly about building a talent pipeline and drawing on the value young people can bring to an organisation. The wide range of motivations have started to converge around the pressing need for hiring people now.

*"Some genuinely want to help young people, but the reality is that employers need bodies now". – DYW practitioner

Rather than taking graduates, some employers are starting to focus more on work-based learning routes and taking young people direct from school to train them

internally. Less the case now, but still identified, are some more mercenary motivations, for example, to receive grant support and a source of cheap labour.

Employers were keen to share with young people what they do and how they do it, and they also wanted to get the views of young people on what they were doing. There was a growing realisation among employers that this is not only their future workforce but also their future customer base.

Many larger employers have structured CSR programmes in place, and they view early engagement with young people as an opportunity to influence curriculum design. SMEs often want to give something back, but also see the opportunity to become better informed about likely future skills shortages as they often don't have time to understand their local labour market.

> "We want young people coming through who want to be in this industry, are prepared and know what is expected for them. Need this to help with skills shortages and progression planning." – Small employer, DWY North East

However, for both larger employers and SMEs there is now more of a continual commitment, and the realisation of the potential for 'getting in early'. In terms of the two-way 'Business to Business' proposition mentioned above, some of the secondary benefits include a development opportunity for staff in engaging with young people, public relations around CSR and that engagement with DYW may help business to win tenders.

There was also a growing recognition from employers that there is untapped talent available among young people, and they need to be more flexible and responsive in their approach to finding staff post-COVID. They have skills gaps which can only be filled by reaching outside their traditional sources of recruitment or making alternative routes available to young people - in particular women and those with protected characteristics.

Limitations, barriers, and challenges

The main limitations on employers engaging or doing more around the DYW agenda were a lack of staff time and the opportunity cost involved, communicating with schools, COVID-19, and the perceptions of young people. These, combined with the fact that most businesses were small and often lack dedicated HR staff, made it difficult for businesses to react. There were also structural issues, and the SAAB recognised that, for some employers, the scale of financial support for apprenticeships remains a barrier. Employers also referred to regular changes in the scale and nature of funding support for in-work training which made it hard for smaller employers to plan ahead. The limitations, barriers, and challenges faced by employers include:

- Capacity and resources – engagement requires time out of the business and incurs a cost for employers.

"It's about a balance between providing support and managing core business." – Small employer, DYW North East

- Communicating and engaging with schools - The main challenges employers have experienced when working with schools include; finding the right person within schools, working within term times, administration requirements, and helping teachers to understand the world of work and the range of opportunities available to young people. There is only a short window of opportunity for employers to engage with young people of school leaving age, so careful planning is needed to encourage employer engagement. This relationship is heavily reliant on the individuals involved and their interest in and ability to develop these opportunities for young people. These relationships are fragile and are not able to be sustained when individuals move on. Employers felt that DYW has helped with this element of engagement with schools, and without them, these relationships would not be sustained.

"We can [provide support] in classrooms or out of the classroom. But you often come up against a brick wall. We do all the prep but there are so many barriers getting into school, so you just don't get in, it's not easy." – Large employer, DYW Inverness and Central Highlands

- A significant barrier which was mentioned by some employers was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This limited their opportunities to engage with young people and made it more difficult to engage with schools.

- Some employers may be reluctant to engage because of negative perceptions of young people – such as being disruptive, uninterested, unreliable, and difficult – and a lack of awareness of the potential benefits of engagement for their business.

"I still think there's prejudice – 'those people' – there's a human being in there." – Small employer, DYW Lanarkshire and Dunbartonshire

- Lack of interest or engagement from young people in the activities that employers deliver can also be a barrier for employers, who are focused on recruiting and promoting their business. Employers would rather spend more time with young people who are interested in their business area.

> **Case study example: DYW Borders**
> One company, a labelling and bottling plant, increased their support for young people by working with their DYW regional group. This gave them access to the right contacts to be able to reach young people. They were keen to raise awareness of their links to STEM careers. Their broad aim is to help create a pipeline of talented young people into this industry.
>
> This approach helped the business to reach the right young person, to enable them to effectively engage remotely, but also their work with DYW and connections into schools meant that schools were receptive to their approach. They are keen to create and promote good training opportunities for young people who don't want to go down an academic route.

The main suggestions from employers to overcome these challenges include:

- Advanced planning of engagement activities throughout the year with schools and other employers to help employers plan and budget appropriately.
- Incentives for employers such as funding to offset the costs of preparing and delivering work experience opportunities.
- Developing a package of support for employers which details the activities, expected commitments, benefits for their business, and a checklist to help them plan and feel confident in supporting young people's education and employment.
- Overcoming the fear factor in employing young people who have experienced different learning approaches. Will they have same work ethic? The job therefore is to allay employer's fears by using engagement such as work experience which gives them a chance to engage more effectively.

Employers who have had limited engagement with young people or DYW feel that they have significant resource and capacity constraints that prevent them from being more involved, but still have a desire to help young people with education and employment opportunities, with a few committing to taking on more apprentices and interns. One employer stated that it was only capacity and resource limitations that prevented engagement.

However, there is an emerging finding from these interviews, which is supported in the regional interviews that some employers may be put off from engaging with young people as a result of bad experiences. Two employers indicated that through their engagement to date they had not received follow-ups from DYW or were able to employ the young people at the end of their work experience / placement. This suggests that communication and active, ongoing engagement between DYW and employers is key to supporting businesses, who in turn can support young people. A robust contact management system could be one tool to assist with maintaining contact with employers, for schools or for DYW Coordinators.

> "It's not straightforward to support young people. There is a disconnect with opportunities – there are so many hoops to jump through to get funding. I

understand why employers would be disengaged, it's very admin heavy and not easy to navigate. It should be made easier for employers to engage and help. Communication has to be clearer. [There should be] a way – like a portal – where employers can share our availability of when we can go into schools." – Large employer, DYW Glasgow

For both employers who had engaged with young people and those who only had limited engagement, there were varying degrees of awareness of DYW and what they could offer. Some employers knew about DYW but were happy to continue on their own, while others had seen some emails about them but did not have time to respond, and a few had not heard of DYW.

For the employers interviewed who have had no engagement with young people, they also had no awareness of DYW. One employer had not even considered getting young people into her business, but as a result of the engagement for this evaluation, would consider how she could do this.

Employers also mentioned that it was challenging to navigate the range of offers and support, coupled with the number of organisations working with young people around education and employment. The DYW offer is seen as being unclear, and the menu of services with which to engage is not well advertised. Employers found it difficult to find the right person to speak to in schools and also struggled to understand which was the best organisation to approach for their needs, for example, DYW, SDS, Apprenticeships Scotland, or the local authority.

"Needs a framework and all need to talk to each other, so that employers are not passed around trying to get to the right person to speak to. [There needs to be] one place where DYW, SDS, Apprenticeships, YPG all are." – Large employer, DYW Glasgow

There is a need for greater clarity about the respective offers, who does what, and appropriate routing. A one stop-shop or hub was suggested for the YPG, providing a clear single point of contact to explore where to get funding and how to apply. A more visible map of services and support would also be helpful, with links to each of the opportunities. Employers often dropped out at an early stage of engagement as the process proved to be too time-consuming and difficult to understand.

"They just need the funding or someone to bring it all together under one umbrella to make it easier and more straightforward for employers to navigate." – Large employer, DYW Glasgow

Practitioners identified that the challenge post-COVID has been the number of opportunities and not enough people to fill them. However, face-to-face engagement is returning, and both schools and employers welcome this return to normality. According to DYW School Coordinators, young people and particularly young people from more disadvantaged groups want and need face-to-face engagement.

There are also several geographic and logistical barriers. A lot of employers would open their doors for visits, but this was not always possible in rural areas because of the distances involved. Budgeting for travel is a consideration as generally schools fund travel costs, but sometimes individual employers may help with the funding.

Some employers may feel anxious about employing young people. Engagements such as work experience provide a way of allaying some employer's fears about taking on young people from school who are not "work-ready" and do not have the required skills to do the job. Work experience opportunities give employers a chance to try out the relationship from both sides and understand the contribution that the young person could make, as well as ensuring that the young people have the right attitudes and behaviours for the workplace.

The role of a range of influencers is important, notably, parents, teachers, and career advisors. The case study below illustrates the fact that there is much more to be done to educate young people's influencers, such as parents and guardians, and teachers, as to the benefits of apprenticeships. This is a vital function of DYW coordinators, and they provide a key source of information for teachers and families.

Case study example: Influences on young people
A pupil was advised by her parents to go into the family hospitality business as the family could not afford to help her through a degree course. She attended a careers event put on by DYW School Coordinators working with local businesses. One stall was supported by a newly opening whisky distillery who were inviting interest in jobs available and in particular work-based learning routes available through apprenticeships. She asked them to explain again to her mother and father as they had no idea about these options and did not recognise these as an alternative route to a degree course.

Between the DYW School Coordinator and the employer, there was information sharing with the young person on the opportunity and also raising awareness and helping to build confidence in the parents to understand this route to work. Without this careers event, this may not have happened.

DYW School Coordinators described how the employer engagement process has evolved and deepened. Making connections and developing the school's offer takes coordination and it is an important part of their role to maintain and support employer relationships. It was noticeable that in areas such the Borders, and Dumfries and Galloway the relatively low population and settlement size made it easier to build and maintain relationships.

Case study example: Range of employer engagement
A new DYW School Coordinator in a school in the Borders felt that despite engagement by two businesses there were opportunities to improve both the breadth and sustainability of employer involvement with the school. Through additional engagement with the local Rotary Club and DYW, the involvement of local businesses with the school increased substantially.

As a result, a job readiness programme of 8 weeks was introduced, including pre-employment support, CV and cover letter support, interview skills, dress to impress, and social media training. Young people were taken out to businesses and given increased engagement opportunities. A careers fair has now been planned for key businesses.

The example demonstrates a frequently made point about the breadth and depth of engagement needed to ensure a school has range of employer contacts and provides experiences to fully respond to both pupils' interests and needs. In this case, it needed the dedicated time of a coordinator to take forward this initiative

Employer preferences

Employers were asked about what their preferences were for supporting young people, in terms of the type of support they were most inclined and best able to offer. Most employers appear to be highly responsive to the needs of schools at different times and are willing to engage. However, employers did want a more strategic and long-term relationship with schools, with better planning and commitment from schools to make sure that meaningful engagement was possible. Employers are learning about when is the best time to engage with schools, and there is some understanding that this takes time.

The capacity to support young people was based on the business demand and need. There was a strong awareness that supporting young people took away from time on other aspects of the business, and that the nature and format of engagement needed to be as efficient as possible to maximise the benefit for the employer from the time invested.

Employers reported offering a range of types of support, from information, career days and mock interviews to more formal work placements and apprenticeships. They reported a willingness to be flexible and respond to the needs of schools.

However, they reported that they preferred offering support that was more meaningful, for example working with a school over the longer term, and more time intensive work with smaller numbers of young people. The main reasons behind these preferences were that employers wanted to get the most meaningful engagement in return for their effort. They felt that offering fewer, more targeted, and higher quality engagements was a better use of their time, would result in better experiences for young people, and help with their business needs, such as recruitment.

> "We will do whatever is helpful for the school, but it is mostly reactive and short sharp bursts of activity. We want to do more sustained work and engagement to make more of an impact." – Small employer, DYW North East

Although larger careers events offer lots of young people the potential for engagement, employers reflected that this was not the best use of their time. They were putting in time and effort to prepare for and attend events and felt they were not getting quality engagements out of it.

As well as types of activities, employers also reflected on the specific types of information or messaging they found most useful to share from knowledge and expectations of the world of work, non-traditional pathways, and promoting specific industries and challenging expectations, which included women in STEM careers, and alternatives to university.

It was clear from many employers that their focus for types of support they offered was often around a passion for their industry or area of work. This was reflected by more employers than any focus around disadvantaged young people, though this was also a focus for some employers.

> "We want to focus on support secondary school pupils who show an interest in engineering and design, or STEM subjects, like Maths." – Large employer, DYW Inverness and Central Highlands

Many employers instead discussed that they wanted to promote their industry to young people, or a specific skill area. For example, promoting careers in STEM, especially to women and girls, or even to raising awareness of their industry to younger age groups through primary schools, long before they were making choices about qualifications or job applications.

Case study example: Employer specialist interests
Employers reflected on the specific types of information or messaging they found most useful to share with young people. This was driven by their personal experiences of the world of work or their desire to improve inclusivity of their sector. Examples of these are demonstrated below:

Women in STEM

One employer wanted to celebrate "International Women in Engineering Day" in June to promote their business to young people, and in particular, encourage more girls to consider engineering as a career option. The employer reached out to DYW to see if they were aware of any girls in schools who would be interested in a session. They ran a half-day workshop for 15 girls who were accompanied by the DYW School Coordinators and teachers. They discussed the career options within their business, as well as opportunities and careers in engineering more generally.

Women in digital roles

One employer has designed a programme which they promote and run in schools, focusing on encouraging women and girls to get involved in the digital technology industry. They run a number of these programmes throughout the year which have been successful, as well as running workshops and one day programmes which are aimed at girls aged 12 – 16 to teach them how to code and provide more information on the tech industry. They also run webinars for women that have left school, or a career change into tech – in an effort to encourage women to join the tech industry.

For some employers, their focus was simply on supporting their local community, regardless of the industry focus or any specific needs of the young people. This suggests that employers' preferences for support are often intrinsically connected to their motivations for taking part, and that there is a range of reasons for support as well as types of support.

These preferences often may form a hierarchy, both in terms of engagement types (ranging from high numbers but low engagement, to more intensive support with smaller groups), and also with the types of young people (for example, information for a whole school to hands on support to a group of special interest to that company).

Since the introduction of YPG and the 5 Asks, most often work experience opportunities are offered by employers. However, employers find that simply speaking to young people about their careers, how they got to do their current job, and the progression routes available, is always popular as young people and often teachers do not understand how this works. However, DYW School Coordinators find it helpful to have each business identify a project as this shows commitment and buy in.

Part of the interviews undertaken specifically focused on the extent to which employers were providing virtual engagement opportunities for young people and schools. Employers have carried out a range of different types of engagement virtually which has included online videos, interviews with staff, prospectus videos and so on, through to virtual careers fairs and live online demonstrations of elements of their business. Some employers, also talked about the move to remote working in terms of current staff and the ability to work from home and attend online training which was provided throughout the pandemic.

There are mixed views from these employers about the benefits and challenges of virtual engagement, with some taking the view that virtual engagement was the way forward, with others clearly stating a preference for face-to-face engagement with young people. However, most employers did acknowledge that there was a time and place for virtual engagement and that taking a hybrid approach would be the most beneficial options for both young people and employers.

Employer views on the benefits of virtual engagement are influenced by the type of business, sector and the skills employers are looking for. For example, business which are office based are better placed to provide virtual engagement experiences which reflect the office environment, and the experience young people could expect in an office. However, businesses where more manual and hands-on work is required, or are people-facing found it more difficult to provide realistic and effective work experience offers virtually, and as such would not consider doing much virtual engagement in future as they are not able to replicate the business environment to give young people the full experience of what it is like to work with them.

> "Was really hard to give a true reflection of what happens – can't hear the noise, feel the environment and atmosphere, very hard to replicate virtually."
> – Small employer, Virtual engagement sample

Some employers were very positive about the role that virtual engagement can have, with the main benefits identified as:

- Employers are able to save both time and money by reducing travel time, particularly in more remote regions. Some employers also noted that virtual engagement meant they could speak to multiple different schools / classes over one day which was a more efficient use of their time.

- Employers have found it easier to coordinate and agree sessions and events with teachers virtually.

- Virtual engagement increases access to young people within a region but also nationally. So not only are employers able to talk to more young people, they are also able to talk to young people who they had previously not been able to engage with.

However, several employers did not feel that virtual engagement was beneficial for young people and note the following limitations and challenges of taking this approach:

- Employers were concerned about the quality of the experience they were able to provide young people. Employers felt they were not able to offer an "authentic experience" or replicate the work environment well.

- Employers were concerned that not all young people taking part were engaged and therefore were able to participate fully. This extended to concerns about being able to reach more disadvantaged young people and increasing the digital divide.

- Some employers felt that they were not able to gauge how well the young people could work together in a team or were able to get a feeling for other important employability skills such as problem solving, attitude, responses to situations and so on.

- Some employers did move to virtual delivery during the pandemic to ensure they were still able to run their events. However, while engagement was "good" in 2020, several employers noted a significant drop-off in engagement in 2021, citing "digital fatigue" as the "novelty had probably worn off". These same employers have noticed that people now want to engage face-to-face rather than virtually.

- One employer also noted that not all young people would want to engage with strangers and provide an insight into their home life. This employer felt that employers had a duty to be mindful and respectful of young people's situation and ensure they offered young people the choice in how they wanted to engage.

  "Don't go down the rabbit hole of virtual engagement. It is great that the Scottish Government and DYW are looking at ways of improving and supporting employer engagement, but it's not all about virtual engagement." – Small employer, Virtual engagement sample

While there are clear benefits and limitations of virtual engagement, most employers were pragmatic about the situation and felt that there was probably a time and place for virtual engagement options within a hybrid approach:

- Employers noted that virtual engagement opportunities ensure they were still able to engage with and offer young people work experiences throughout the pandemic.

- Employers noted how some roles and types of work experience and engagement were better suited for online delivery. In addition, a few employers noted how elements of their engagement – such as prospectus details and interviews with staff – could be turned into digital content to be shared more widely with young people and schools. However, one employer noted that despite doing this, they did not receive any follow-up and did not know if it had been successful and well received by young people.

- A hybrid approach which combines the best elements of both virtual and face-to-face was suggested by employers, although employers are not clear about what elements would be moved to remote delivery.

  "It is an efficient use of staff time to do some virtual stuff. It's a very efficient use of our time to be able to show young people a video of the factory and then spend the rest of the time focusing on the details of what it's like to work for us and investing more in each young person." – Small employer, Virtual engagement sample

> **Case study example: How virtual engagement can be maximised by employers**
>
> Several employers recognised that there were elements of their young people engagement that could be moved online, such as factory or business tours; interviews with certain members of staff (e.g. female plumbers and engineers); online information about the company accompanied by a video. They felt that moving these into a digital, and reusable format, would result in efficiencies within the business and reduce staff time spent on engagement activities. This would also mean that the time spent by staff was more focused and tailored to the young people and the questions or interests that they might have.
>
> One employer has developed a video and prospectus of their company which they sent to DYW to introduce them to the schools as a way of helping teachers and young people understand what they do. The employer has estimated that between 150 and 600 young people should have seen this video, but this approach hasn't resulted in any work experience or engagement with young people and the employer does not know why this is the case.
>
> While this approach could be useful for employers, it is important to note that promotion of activities, and how this information is used, needs to be given careful consideration.

One employer suggested that DYW could help employers to understand the virtual landscape and what offers and opportunities there were for employers to tap into or partners with other employers or organisations who were already doing virtual delivery.

Support well matched

The employers interviewed were often knowledgeable about recruitment gaps and skills needs in their own sectors or local area, in terms of ongoing and future needs, but generally did not talk about how that fitted into the wider economic need for the region as a whole.

Practitioners felt that more focus was needed on addressing regional skills shortages and planning for skills for the future. Practitioners feel that there could be an opportunity for DYW to be more strategic in terms of identifying the current and emerging skills and recruitment needs and thereby targeting employers and emerging sectors to ensure they are focusing on these main areas of economic need. This could be achieved through better use and cascading of the simplified SDS sectoral and regional analysis to improve targeting of these employers.

> "Some jobs of the future are gaining visibility such as renewables. Planning for this reaches as far away as 2050 so we need a long term approach recognising that this is often a 'new workforce' which is required on top of the need for a skills pipeline to maintain core business activity. To achieve this

additional business need, we need more flexibility in the system and to deal with different individuals, employers, and improve sector-based dialogue." - SAAB EEG

"In the short-term, training opportunities to address skills shortages in the economy and to align with job growth and work-based competencies could be developed. For example ticket-based accreditation such as working at heights. SDS already recognise the skills gaps these work-based competencies help address labour shortages in the short-term are marketable and saleable." - SAAB EEG

On funding, practitioners viewed other funding schemes as being helpful, for example, Kickstart. However, it was reported that there was no joined-up approach for the employer, with different areas having different offers, and 'the goal posts change too often'.

"Some employers want the incentives or have requested for us to find extra support for young people and therefore we use our good working relationship with local authorities to make referrals to ERI. However, there is little signposting or information available on the business process more generally or on the referrals processes." - DYW practitioner

Understanding of qualifications

Employers were asked about their understanding of the range of qualifications on offer, and the extent to which qualifications were important for young people to have.

Most employers interviewed reported a sufficient understanding of the qualifications on offer and they felt a lot of work has been done to simplify the qualifications system. Although while larger employers have a good understanding, smaller businesses need some further help to understand the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

From the practitioners' perspective it was thought that more was needed to help employers understand qualifications and the role they play in recruitment. They felt that schools and parents are still focused on their child achieving five Highers, and there is a need to re-examine the role academic qualifications play in recruitment for certain jobs and roles.

Nearly all employers emphasised the importance of the development of meta skills and soft skills. Meta-skills are innate, timeless, high-order skills that create adaptive learners; able to succeed whatever the future brings' (Skills Development Scotland, 2021). Soft skills are more general skills that employers require, like communication and organisation (National Careers Service)

These skills are what they value the most, and many reflected that they did not necessarily rely on qualifications. Instead, they would rather young people had the attitude and skills that would allow for them to do well in the workplace and be willing to train for specific skills as needed. The exception to this was in sectors or roles where a specific qualification was essential, such as medical roles.

> "The modern apprenticeship has been the game changer. It has been far better received than previous iterations. But we need to get to a place where an employer legitimately questions why you need a university graduate when you can train 'from raw' from school by putting someone through college and on the job training." - DYW practitioner

Other employers we spoke to felt that the most important thing they looked for was young people demonstrating the right attitudes and behaviours. Most felt that work-based qualifications were important for young people, particularly those who did not want to pursue academic routes to employment, and most employers valued these work-based qualifications. Employers felt that if a young person had the right attitude, then helping them get the right skills for the job was easy for them to support.

> "New SME employers entering the market used to be helped by Business Gateway. There needs to be more induction around the range of apprenticeships. People have no clue about graduate apprenticeships and when they talk to career influencers, they are blown away by them." – DYW practitioner

> "On the qualifications themselves the basic understanding is there, and employers will get it, but frequent changes make for a slower process of learning. However, SVQ work based learning qualifications are complex, can be confusing, and require work to understand."- SAAB EEG

> "Schools are quite entrenched on 5 Highers and parents remain 'brainwashed' by them." – DYW practitioner

Practitioners saw employers' attitudes to qualifications changing, with a greater recognition that, while the piece of paper is valuable, the young persons' attitude to work can be more important to the employer. Traditional qualifications in many cases act as a proxy, and prove that a young person can focus and see things through, though attitudes and behaviours which are less easy to teach, or evidence, are what employers really look for.

> "Nearly all employers (95%) emphasise the importance of the development of meta skills and soft skills – for example, how well a person has developed within their own skills sets. This is what employers value the most. Put simply, employers want well motivated young people interested in learning, with good employability skills. With a majority of hiring being for trades and

technical skills there needs to be more focus on hands-on skills suitable for these roles." – DYW School Coordinators

Practitioners suggested employers were starting to see the value of taking on young people on work-based learning routes. However, there was still much to be done to counter the '*we've done it this way for years'* attitude.

"The workplace has changed and there is less status and snobbery around degrees. The UHI [University of the Highlands and Islands] model with entry level modern apprenticeships (day release) and opportunity to stay on to earn and learn has so much flexibility now and much going for it." – DYW practitioner

Although many employers understood and valued the range of work-based qualifications, there was still a perception among some employers, young people, and parents, that these were not of equal value to an academic qualification. It was thought that this is in part due to the range of qualifications and a lack of understanding of what they include and how they function. Awareness needs to be raised, particularly of the importance of foundation apprenticeships, and to position work-based qualifications as a desirable alternative to further education or higher education routes.

"There needs to be a national campaign to promote alternative routes. It would be good to have a Scottish Credit Qualification Framework wall map produced to help influencers better understand how these various routes can lead to the same outcome." - DYW School Coordinator

On equalities, engagement, and access, it was felt to be important that data was constantly reviewed across the board to ensure that training and qualifications are inclusive and accessible to disadvantaged or under-represented groups. More needed to be done on diversity and inclusion to ensure a widening of participation in STEM as a priority.

"Why is there such a limited pool of women available to do mechanical and engineering careers? One of the key reasons is that too few girls are taking physics." - SAAB EEG

If schools were better informed about the workplace or industry entry requirements there would be less need for guidance and 'hand holding' with employers, and this would assist more young people.

Foundation apprenticeship schemes are not consistently targeting the right demographic and not always equally available. They should be specifically targeting young people who do not want to take academic routes. Improving the parity of esteem between higher education and work-based training will improve outcomes for both individual young people, and for the job market as a whole.

It was noted that there were times when the qualifications and training frameworks didn't adapt quickly enough to be useful to employers, such as when technology changed. A more agile system of qualifications would better keep pace with a changing context. In particular, inflexibility could be problematic in contractual arrangements with age categories or between frameworks. For example, employers felt that there could be more flexibility to move between engineering and construction. There was also a gap identified between the technical apprenticeships and the manual level apprenticeships with less generalist availability, for example in the BTEC format which covers English and Maths, as well as Customer Service. This could provide a baseline of skills for individuals to then move into an apprenticeship.

Funding contribution rates across the frameworks need improvement as these currently do not support full cost recovery. Apprenticeships are not equally funded, and employers can find this unfair. Construction and engineering are well funded, however, in the care sector funding is adequate for 16-19 year olds but not for older groups. Also, the restrictions on these funding systems prevent the individual from sourcing additional funding themselves.

Supporting young people

In terms of supporting young people with the greatest barriers to employment, most employers interviewed did not have a specific view on this, but examples that were given of doing this focused on care leavers, and young people with special educational needs (SEN). Most employers did not have a specific focus on young people who may be most disadvantaged in the labour market. In terms of the amount of time and resources required, employers were conscious of getting the most out of their engagement with young people. To get the best return on their investment, some employers felt that focusing more on young people who seemed particularly interested in the kind of work that they did was the better option for them. This may have been exacerbated by the significant recruitment issues faced by many employers during the research period and does not mean that employers are not willing to support young people who are most disadvantaged in the labour market.

Many individual employers have faced barriers to education and wanted to give something back, through supporting young people in similar situations. Examples of effective ways to support young people with additional barriers to work or education included, for example, having a DYW School Coordinator, acting as an intermediary between the young person and the employer to collect and articulate information on additional support the young person might need, and then to ensure the employer had the knowledge and skills to best support them.

The SAAB equalities group identified that more could be done through family learning to inform parents about the work-based learning journey. It was felt to be important for employers to target opportunities at the young people who they were not currently reaching through their existing recruitment routes, or those who were

most disadvantaged or low attaining. This issue is not just about skills but the provision of coordinated support around challenges and barriers these young people face at home, in school and at college.

A SAAB EEQ practitioner identified the need to build on all these entry routes to support diversity and inclusion. For example, this could involve developing a checklist at each stage, and setting out actions to ensure that the routes are maximising potential for inclusion and support for diverse groups.

Practitioners thought there was a lot more to do to address parity of esteem, and access to opportunity for SEN groups, for example educators needed to do more in terms of better linking SEN with Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) support. Employers felt they needed more support and information to make sure they were better able to support educational and workplace needs and adjustments. An example provided of this was training for employers on dyslexia, or effective signposting and support. It is more difficult for micro businesses to take on disadvantaged young people because of the time taken to provide additional support. Whilst physical health problems are more easily identifiable and addressed, there is still significant stigma attached to mental health.

From the practitioners' perspective, great effort was being made with more disadvantaged young people to ensure that the match with employers was appropriate and there would be wrap around support available. For example, MIND is happy to go into schools to support particular young people. In Ayrshire, employers are being helped to work effectively with SEN young people by linking employers up with Disability Confident and Access to Work and using the local DICE (Disability Inclusive = Confident Employers) as a coordinator. It is important for DYW staff to know the local landscape of support so that both employers and young people can be supported in the round.

DYW School Coordinators reported that their activity was very much focused on those with the greatest need, and more disadvantaged young people who don't progress onto higher level education. Many practitioners are passionate about inclusive employment and have identified support for young people in schools who have additional needs with programmes they can dip in and out of.

> "In Ayrshire they have developed focus groups recognising that there is more work to do on educating employers on working with young people with barriers. Some are open to it and better links with Disability Confident and Access to Work are important. The local DICE (Disability Inclusion = Confident Employment) is a good example of just such an infrastructure." - DYW practitioner

Pastoral care teachers can be helpful in identifying the right target groups of young people that would benefit most. It is important that, once identified, the young person's needs are placed at the heart of the process and based on these, DYW School Coordinators are able to source the best fit in terms of employer and

opportunity. For example, voluntary and community sector organisations, such as MIND, are happy to go into schools to provide awareness raising sessions on available support for SEN learners to staff. DYW School Coordinators talk about going the extra mile and avoiding "setting up disadvantaged young people to fail" by making sure wrap around support was available. They also pointed out that, for these purposes, virtual platforms worked well in some cases to support quicker connections and new routes for learning.

> "They leave school at 16, if they make it that far, experience two years without support, and the next time you find them is when they claim DWP benefits aged 18." - SAAB EEQ

There is a knowledge gap for employers on neurodiversity and the understanding of the value it can bring to a business, and some employers would benefit from support to help them see the value of a more diverse workforce. Practitioners felt that the flexible workforce development fund could be marketed the same way as the SME apprenticeship levy, to support employers providing opportunities for young people.

Case study example: Supporting young people with complex needs

A tourism business working in the Edinburgh area discussed the suitability of their industry and roles available within in to neurodivergent young people, and likewise the suitability of neurodivergent young people to the tourism industry.

"I genuinely passionately believe that tourism is one of the most dynamic flexible and good industries to work in, with a genuinely fulfilling and meaningful job in tourism, regardless of background, ability, neurodiversity etc. There are good jobs available for people of all abilities and interests. "

This employer reflected that they were interested most of all in getting the right person with the right attitude and aptitude into roles, and acknowledged that school based qualifications, and certainly higher education, were not necessarily the best predictors of that.

Working with young people to provide training and work placements helps them to promote the opportunities in the industry. This includes making it clear that there are lots of roles that suit different skills and aptitudes, and that it is not necessarily a requirement to have a specific qualification in order to do the job.

Another business, working in the clothing industry, discussed that they work to support young people with additional barriers to work, and highlighted the importance of this.

"We give young people a trial – especially if they are long term carers, disabled or ex-offenders – we have a preference to take on these groups. The main purpose is

to see if our company is right for them and that they are happy with the environment."

By having young people do a trial before committing to a job, it helped the company and the young person to see if the role is right for the person. This employer highlighted that the additional support is easy for employers to provide, but that employers need to be aware of what support they can offer, and how to offer this, to best meet the needs of young people and find the right match.

Impact of DYW involvement

Employers were asked to describe the difference that involvement with DYW has made to them, including in terms of recruitment, and the quality of both the match and retention of staff. All employers felt that engaging with DYW has been positive for them, regardless of the length of time they have been involved with DYW. The main challenge has been around the lack of continuity of DYW School Coordinators because of high DYW staff turnover, which has resulted in a lack of momentum and made it hard to build on initial engagement and activities with schools and highlights the fragile employer-school relationship that exists without DYW.

> "Working with DYW is very impactful in a positive way as they recognise that the employer is short on time and resources and needs the links to be made for them. They provide a very important service. We would all be floundering without them." – Large employer, DYW Ayrshire

Employers often reflected on their ways of working with schools and young people overall, not just limited to their engagement through DYW. Those whose work with schools and young people pre-dates DYW involvement reflected that, while they were often ahead in terms of their engagement with schools, DYW had helped them to expand their work, or to enhance it by:

- Increasing reach to a more diverse range of young people.
- Making connections with other schools, colleges, and employers.
- Reducing the time spent on administration and organising so they could focus on core business areas and provide high quality opportunities for young people.

"Having the DYW Coordinators spread around schools has made things a lot easier. We were spending our time reaching out to the schools individually, but you would find yourself bombarding them with lots of requests which isn't great. The Coordinators do the hard work for you in that regard, which is great". – Large employer, DYW Lanarkshire and Dunbartonshire

"It's benefitting us in recruitment. Getting involved in careers fairs meant we could get our name out there, letting people know our offer." Medium employer – DYW Inverness and Central Highlands

"It's definitely helped recruitment; we've employed 3 or 4 people on the back of training they've done with us. We get to know the [young person] better and they get to know if they like working with the environment or not." – Medium employer, DYW Outer Hebrides

Based on our engagement with employers, DYW appears to be focusing on ensuring that engagement with schools and young people is maximised across their region. However, this engagement appears to be reactive, responding to schools' demands, and does not show a demonstrable link with regional economic challenges. Although employers are aware of these challenges, they lack the time and resources, or the two-way communication with schools, to be able to develop well-planned activities which link into the wider economic agenda. There does appear to be scope to strengthen these links, but this will need to be informed by DYW leads in conjunction with other work (notably the SDS Regional Skills Assessments) looking at how the economy is functioning in a particular region.

Based on our employer interviews, there is more work required to help employers understand the full offer and services that DYW can provide to employers. DYW is a strategy, and as such there isn't currently an offer or a product that DYW and schools can take to employers that they understand and can easily engage with. Employers reported that the DYW brand is not well known or fully understood. This means that employers are not making the most of their engagement with DYW and schools and may be underestimating the impact of this partnership. This is partly due to the high turnover of DYW School Coordinators, but also a lack of marketing and promotion of the range of support that DYW could offer.

"Employers still have a certain lack of awareness of the DYW agenda." – Medium employer, DYW Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian

DYW School Coordinators are valued, and employers feel this role is effective in coordinating employers, parents (who may also be employers) and teachers. While there is still work to do in promoting DYW and building relationships with DYW School Coordinators, employers feel that it is important for the Coordinator roles to continue, focusing on understanding how employers and sectors work, and increasing their awareness of the range of opportunities for young people.

"It would be helpful to share good practice for DYW School Coordinators, such as a central location where you can save resources. Every region has their own resources but would do well to share more, for example, career trees, online." – DYW School Coordinator

In addition, there is an expressed need for this engagement to be more strategic, linking together multiple employers throughout the region and in line with the economic priorities of the region.

"Some employers will use skills engagement with schools as a precursor to apprenticeships. They are starting to recruit from schools but there is a long

way to go, and momentum is important – to get over the brow. I would worry if DYW wasn't there as it would have recognition but no drive." – DYW School Coordinator

"DYW is a unifying force. The profile of DYW has grown as a result and has provided greater impact as more than the sum of its parts." – DYW practitioner

However, not all employers agree that the responsibility of preparing young people for employment should sit with schools and DYW. One employer reflected that the responsibility of preparing young people for work should sit with employers and industry rather than with teachers and schools, as they are the experts on the skills and qualifications currently needed in the workplace.

"It's the role of industry (not schools) to teach young people about the world of work, and how to engage in the world of work – employers need to take some ownership of this. Schools are there to teach qualifications, employers are there to support the transition into work." – Employer and member of a DYW Regional Group

Further employer engagement

When asked about how the employer agenda could be expanded and how more employers could be encouraged to participate, employers identified four main themes:

- Better promotion of, and increased marketing of, DYW and specific products or services they can offer to employers.
- Developing a strategic, regional and national approach to increase engagement.
- Creating a package of support for employers, including incentives.
- Developing a more coordinated regional and national approach among agencies working in this area.

Better promotion and increased marketing of DYW, and the service offer. Employers felt better marketing and promotion of the service would ensure more employers were aware of DYW, what they can offer employers, and how this would benefit employers. Other suggestions included reaching out to more local businesses directly rather than waiting for employers to approach DYW and improving the DYW website to ensure employers have a clear idea of the offer.

Part of this includes securing funding for DYW over a longer period to enable momentum and opportunities for DYW to expand their agenda and relationships with schools and employers.

"There's no way that if DYW leaves the scene then employers would engage with schools. It would just go back to what it was before, and there would be

a complete drop off in engagement." – Medium employer, DYW Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian

The development of a clear service offer or products that can be offered to employers needs to be developed by DYW. The case study below, from an employer who also sits on a DYW Regional Group demonstrates how the development of a clear, and accessible offer will increase employer engagement and understanding:

Case study example: Developing a clear DYW offer for employers

"The messages and ask of employers from DYW (and schools) need to be clear. Employers do not have time to try and understand what it is they need to do and what this means in practice. When DYW come to an employer they need to be able to tell the employer exactly what's needed from them and when. This message and the request to the employer has to be clear.

We [DYW] need to understand, and help employers understand that developing the young workforce is not a service or offer to employers, it is a strategy. Employers therefore do not know what is expected of them, what they can do, or how they can contribute.

Unless there is a specific ask of employers (e.g. we want a visit to your manufacturing site), they won't do it. It requires too much thinking, and they have other challenges and commitments.

The DYW employer engagement activity hasn't really worked and that's why the numbers of engaged employers are lower than expected. The messaging to employers is not in industry speak – it's in government public sector chatter – employers don't know what this means. If DYW are doing a cold call to an employer this kind of language is unusual, it's very public sector. The language is not right if you're trying to engage more employers there needs to be more thinking around language. If you want to make a difference you have to change your message – it's the same as it's always been."

Developing a strategic, regional (and national) approach to engagement. To increase employer engagement, employers felt that DYW needed to:

- Connect similar local employers together within regions and join up the different elements of employer engagement to create a package or framework for engagement.
- Build networks for education and employers by connecting employers, schools, and colleges so that they work together to address local and regional challenges.
- Coordinate more closely with other key organisations in young people's education and employment, such as SDS. This will help employers navigate the complex landscape and increase engagement.

- Link in with regional and national challenges and opportunities, tapping into topical issues and events. Use the momentum and public support to encourage more employers to engage. A clear, well-planned calendar of activities will support employers and encourage them to sign up.

Case study example: Reaching a range of employers

DYW Dumfries and Galloway run business 'sector forums' in food and drink, construction, engineering and manufacturing, land and green economy. Businesses encourage other businesses to come together. Although dominated by medium sized companies, the forums provide a unified voice on policy for the sector and brings the various conversations together.

DYW Borders In the Borders, the Rotary Club is a useful contact, as its members represent a wide range of businesses. In order to get partners together DYW are developing a professional video of local businesses as a promotional tool for schools, linking this to the DYW agenda.

Some DYW Regional Groups have been able to develop a more integrated approach to employer engagement. These embed engagement with schools and young people in a wider set of connected services and support, which help employers link their engagement into a longer-term recruitment process, often with a strong focus on sectors which are growing and creating opportunities.

DYW Glasgow has used its Chamber of Commerce setting – and a close working relationship with Glasgow City Council – to stitch together employer engagement approaches which provide a range of opportunities built around key growth and high employment sectors.

Case study example: DYW Glasgow – an integrated, strategic approach to employer engagement

Glasgow Chamber of Commerce have been driving a more integrated approach to employer engagement for some time. They drew on intelligence from a range of partners to identify some specific projects as a focus for an integrated approach.

One focus has been climate change and sustainability and the rapidly growing opportunities around green jobs. My Climate Path is a COP26 education legacy initiative put together by DYW Glasgow, working with DYW Lanarkshire, East Dunbartonshire and DYW West, supported by the Chamber of Commerce and funded by the Scottish Government. It is made up of 11 initiatives (including sustainable fashion, earth allies, and activism) targeted at different year groups and different interests, with a focus on jobs in the circular economy. This is now being rolled out across Scotland. Related to this is the Climate Heroes project, matching one person in employment to every school, looking at green and circular jobs.

Glasgow as a growing digital hub and the Chamber has linked with <u>Scotland IS</u> (Scotland's digital economy membership organisation) to take forward the Digital Critical Friends pilot, which involves employees going into schools to support virtual activities. Scotland IS have lots of willing members and the Chamber has developed a strong collaborative approach with the organisation.

The Chamber has recognised that there are a lot of digital initiatives available for employers, with DYW and SDS asking a lot of employers for things that seem similar. An example is there are three initiatives asking employees about their journey. So, the Chamber are now working more closely with SDS and Glasgow City Council to find out what digital initiatives exist, who is working with whom, and identifying how to make it as coherent and coordinated as possible around some shared objectives.

The key features of Glasgow Chamber's DYW approach have been the development of a range of close working relationships, particularly with Glasgow City Council who is seen as a vital partner in identifying needs and supporting focused initiatives, a strategic approach to key sectors, and ensuring that employers experience a joined-up, integrated approach with 'at scale' offers.

Another example of a focused approach based on an identified need is Step Up Glasgow. This flowed from a recognition that whilst the Kick Start programme worked well for those eligible,15 and 16 year old school leavers were ineligible. Whilst some of these school leavers were work ready, it was identified that others required supportive employers, for example in the third sector. Step Up Glasgow was created to focus on this group with additional needs to partner them with employers who were willing to support the young person for 6 months or more to facilitate progress into employment or an apprenticeship. To date this initiative has involved 140 younger school leavers and has helped to raise positive destinations by 2%. It is now funded through No One Left Behind.

Create a package of support for employers that helps them navigate the landscape, and provides them with clear timelines, expectations, and benefits of involvement. To increase employer engagement, employers felt that DYW needed to:

- More effectively promote the benefits to business of working with young people.
- Provide practical support with processes, logistics, practicalities like risk assessments (e.g. a checklist of what you need in place). This will help employers to better plan for engagement in terms of staff time and costs.
- Highlight the range of different engagement opportunities and how businesses can be involved.
- SMEs may be in a very different position from larger organisations, but they employ large numbers of staff overall and can often provide a well-rounded and supported environment for young people in their first job. There is a

perception that the amount of support a young person may need may be very time intensive and may take away from other aspects of the business. Employers would benefit from being able to see the full menu of possible engagements and the time commitment that would be associated with each of these.

- Some employers felt that financial incentives could have a role to play as workplace support has both time and financial implications. This was also reflected in the focus of employers who had used ERI funding, who were motivated to take on new staff, and the ERI enabled them to do this, regardless of a wider interest in supporting youth employment. However, some employers felt incentives could also include non-financial help and support.

- For many smaller employers, managing the process through to completion is too difficult, and other models such as an Apprenticeship Training Agency model could be applied.

"Definitely financial support – because I am using my time, I would be happy to volunteer some time but as a small business I can't volunteer very much – so if I had to do something like that, I would like some financial support. Assistance with DYW or a college tutor spending time within our business, perhaps giving some on-site training – inductions, health and safety, general rule – and approach." – Small employer, through Random sample from Chamber of Commerce

"Courses for free – such as how to promote your businesses, social media."– Small employer, through random sample from Chamber of Commerce

"I think some people don't engage because they're not aware of the benefits young people could bring. Before we engaged with DYW, we didn't realise the impact we can make. It can be rewarding and enjoyable, and it's actually a good way to develop people with other skills." – Small employer, DYW North-East

"Bring to life the benefit of bringing young people into the workplace. Retaining local skills and stopping the area losing skills to the central belt and wider UK." - Large employer, DYW Inverness and Central Highlands

Developing a more coordinated regional and national approach. Employers referred to the complex and crowded landscape in terms of the range of organisations contacting employers and the range of support schemes for employers. Those involved engagement with Scottish Enterprise / Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) / South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), Skills Development Scotland (SDS), DWP, local authorities (across a range of functions), further education colleges, as well as Chambers of Commerce and DYW. These are further supplemented by the engagement driven by representative organisations, including the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Confederation of British Industry (CBI), and Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI).

The most successful approaches we came across involved Chambers of Commerce that sought to create a more coordinated approach to employer engagement and linking support schemes together around the needs of individual employers.

A SAAB member commented that the quality of relationships varied by Regional Group. If a large employer wanted to launch a national approach it was hard to know where to go. They felt that for national employers it would be valuable to have a single point of contact that could work across the Regional Groups.

Conclusions and recommendations

This section sets out the main findings, issues and lessons learned, which include a summary and conclusion followed by a series of recommendations.

The research has identified nine key themes in terms of the development of successful relationships between employers, schools and young people. These are summarised below:

Strategic level:
1. The role and funding of DYW is still vital
2. Focusing on young people who may be most disadvantaged in the labour market

Regional level:
3. The landscape of support of employers is complex
4. There is a need for a more strategic approach around local labour markets

Schools, employers and DYW Coordinators:
5. Effective action needs effective collaboration between DYW, employers, teachers and parents
6. The quantity and quality of engagements
7. Virtual engagement as part of a wider, hybrid offer
8. Making it easier for employers to engage
9. Supporting and developing continued employer leadership

In this chapter we explore each of these in more depth.

1.   The role and funding of DYW is still vital

Our interviews with employers have identified the significance of DYW in helping them to create and sustain engagement with schools and young people. They are clear that, without DYW co-ordination and capacity, there would be much less employer engagement. There has been a view that, with a significant medium to long-term investment, it would be possible to move to a self-sustaining situation and model. This model would embed habits of engagement, with employers developing long-term relationships with schools at a scale which would provide most young people with insights into the world of work.

However, a theme emerging from our interviews has been the fragility of the relationships between employers and schools. Some larger employers have built strong and possibly sustainable relationships with particular schools. However, relationships are often built around particular individuals – both at an employer and at a school (often the Head Teacher) – and when either of these change, this

impacts on commitment and practice. The nature of short-term funding of DYW has contributed to this, as has the short-term funding of School Coordinators.

It was also raised that there was not a central place for recording and promoting good practice by DYW School Coordinators, and that they did not necessarily have clear performance targets. These could be used to drive a focus on long-term strategic approaches and meeting employers' preference for higher quality engagements.

Short term focus was also an issue for some employers, particularly among SMEs, and especially at the smaller end of the spectrum. Business leaders may be able to offer support for a time, but the level of this commitment may vary.

The level of commitment can depend on a range of factors, from the demands on the business, to the stage of education of the children, and the quality of the relationship with a key individual at the school. What we have heard is that the situation is a long way from being sustainable without a continued investment in people to co-ordinate and support these relationships.

> **Recommendation 1:**
> We recommend that the Scottish Government establishes a long-term funding stream for DYW, linked to a stronger strategic approach (as described below), which will build confidence in the sustainability of support.

2. Focusing on equalities, and young people who may be most disadvantaged in the labour market

Most employers were not focusing on young people who may be most disadvantaged in the labour market. In terms of the amount of time and resources required, employers were conscious of getting the most out of their engagement with young people. To get the best return on their investment, some employers felt that focusing more on young people who seemed particularly interested in the kind of work that they did was the better option. This reflects the challenges young disadvantaged people face in engaging with the world of work throughout their education. This may also have been exacerbated by the significant recruitment issues faced by many employers during the research period.

Many employers did express a willingness to engage with young people who were more disadvantaged in the labour market. The scale and range of mentors recruited by MCR Pathways is a good indicator of this willingness. Some employers were keen to do more to support those young people who needed help to enter and thrive in the world of work, but they were not clear about how they could focus their efforts.

Where employers did reflect a focus on equalities and diversity, this often related to the personal experience or interests of key staff in each business. For example, those in STEM industries who wanted to increase their attractiveness to women

and girls entering these professions. Others, for example, had a particular interest in supporting care experienced young people, or promoting ethnic diversity. These focuses were generally led by staff within the organisations – more so than by a specific strategic focus by the employer. However, working with employers where they have these particular interests is a key opportunity to increase their workforce diversity and to become more appealing to a wider range of young people. This will them allow a greater number of employers to benefit from a diverse workforce.

There are key ways in which DYW can support this agenda and help businesses. DYW staff receiving training in gender competence, particularly in areas where there is a regional focus on STEM industries, will help with this engagement. In particular, DYW School Coordinators can have a key role in bringing these skills and ways of working to employers, and promoting their support of a wide range of young people.

To promote working with disabled young people, there is likely to be scope to link employers to Disability Confident and workplace funding for adaptations and those who can offer support to these individuals. Recent work by the Scottish Union for Supported Employment (SUSE), through their Apt Public Social Partnership, confirms the willingness of employers to reach out to and engage with disabled young people. This active support is particularly required by smaller businesses who lacked the HR capacity and funding to do this without support, but could provide a highly supportive environment and a wide range of experiences. Some employers also talked about the role that specialised third sector organisations could play in helping employers work effectively with disabled young people.

There is a wider understanding among some employers that being appealing to and supportive of a diverse workforce has benefits to a business. However, not all employers have this concept embedded in their ways of working, and some do not know where the opportunities to do this are. DYW work with employers is just as important to this agenda as working to support more disadvantaged young people directly via schools.

There is also growing evidence that COVID-19 has exacerbated the problems faced by disadvantaged young people in making a successful transition to work. This suggests that it will be important for DYW Regional Groups to at least maintain – and probably strengthen – their focus on these young people. This will mean devoting more time and attention to a relatively small group of young people – but they will be young people who are most in need of this support, and for whom it will make the biggest difference. Supporting links between employers and young people who are least likely to have immersive experiences in sectors of interest is likely to be of substantial benefit to businesses and young people. At the same time, it will be important to maintain some universal offers and respond to the needs of a wide range of employers, many of whom may not be in a strong position to support more disadvantaged young people. This in turn suggests an enhanced focus on DYW Regional Group's disaggregation of their markets in terms of:

- The young person cohort and the different groups within this in terms of the scale of the barriers they face to achieving a successful transition to work and the value to them of engagement with – and support from – employers.
- Employers and their ability to provide different types and scales of support over different durations.
- The matches that can be created between young people and employers' ability and their willingness to support this.

Recommendation 2:

We recommend that DYW Regional Groups review the way in which they currently disaggregate their young person and employer markets to identify ways in which they can further strengthen their focus on young people who are likely to be more disadvantaged in the labour market, and especially those who may be at particular risk of not going into a positive destination because of the lasting impact of COVID-19.

Recommendation 3:

We recommend that DYW Regional Groups work together to explore how they can help employers benefit from the specific skills and insights of a diverse range of young people. This may include training for DYW staff in gender competence, as well as offering training and support for employers to work with a diverse range of young people – including diversity in gender, race, socio-economic background, and disabilities.

3.   The landscape of support for employers is complex

Employers reported that they were confused by the current landscape of support to help them engage with young people. Many talked about not knowing where to go for help and suggested that this lack of clarity would be off-putting for non-engaged employers. Employers found it hard to distinguish between the roles of different organisations, for example, SDS, local authorities and DYW, and were confused about the wide range of offers, many of which seemed, to employers, to be similar. The dedicated time that had been created through the DYW School Coordinator posts appeared to be helping some employers make sense of this complexity, but it required the personal attention and knowledge of the DYW School Coordinator to guide them through the different providers and offers.

The evolution of the NOLB approach provides an important opportunity for change. The funding for seven Scottish Government skills and employability programmes is being devolved to local authorities who will work with their Local Employability Partnerships to create a more coherent and comprehensive 'local employability service' which responds to local needs and issues. The initial focus is on joining up services around the needs of clients as well ensuring that they are matched at any

time with the most appropriate service on their journey into and through work. However there will be a need to join up the wide range of services which currently engage with employers. The No One Left Behind approach could present both individuals and employers with:

- A clearer and more coherent array of services.
- Greater clarity about where to go for support.
- An opportunity to co-ordinate a 'no wrong door' approach across the different initiatives and providers which can be facilitated by DYW.

There is a wide range of organisations that contact employers. The focus of these engagements range from regulation (such as planning, licensing, and building regulations in terms of the local authority) to support provided by many stakeholders (local authority business development staff, Scottish Enterprise/Highlands and Islands Enterprise/South of Scotland Enterprise, Business Gateway, Skills Development Scotland as well as DYW).

DYW School Coordinators were proving successful at helping individual employers navigate the different offers and make best use of their contribution. However their time is limited compared with the scale of the task, and there is a need for co-ordination at a system level.

Recommendation 4:
We recommend that DYW Regional Groups work with their local authorities and Local Employability Partnerships to create a more coherent and co-ordinated offer for employers around their support for, recruitment and training of young people.

Recommendation 5:
We recommend that the Scottish Government support a national promotional campaign to raise awareness of the support available through DYW, and a common core set of services and opportunities (See 7). This should clearly outline the advantages of participation for employers.

Recommendation 6:
We recommend that this promotional campaign should draw in the full range of national employer organisations so they can work with their membership to enhance awareness of the opportunities and benefits. This could involve Institute of Directors Scotland, CBI Scotland and SCDI, as well as representative sector bodies.

Recommendation 7:
Alongside this we recommend that the DYW Regional Groups work together to identify a core set of services and offers. These can be broadly drawn to ensure that there remains considerable local flexibility to take account of different needs, issues and priorities.

4. There is a need for a more strategic approach around local labour markets

We heard frequently from employers about the need for DYW to take a more strategic, long-term, approach to engagement. This has two components:

- They were keen to see DYW focus on the key sectors where there were recruitment and skills needs and take forward an approach which focused on the promotion of these sectors and actively engaged with employers in these sectors.
- They wanted a longer-term approach, with a planned programme of engagement and activities that allowed them to plan ahead and ensure that the value of their contribution was enhanced by its wider context and collaborative working with other similar employers.

Some DYW Regional Groups already do this, for example DYW Glasgow has developed sector initiatives around green jobs, and opportunities in digital, hospitality and construction. These have involved close working relationships between DYW and other partners, particularly the local authority.

It is helpful to place this more focused approach in context. Data show that there are:
- 2,469 schools in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2021):
  - 2,001 primary schools.
  - 357 secondary schools.
  - 111 special schools.
- 344,505 private sector businesses (Scottish Government, 2021):
  - Most businesses are small (0-49 employers), which also includes microbusinesses (0-10 employees).
  - 6,220 businesses each employ over 50 people.

Microbusinesses have a significant local presence and FSB research (FSB, 2016). Has shown that they are both keen and able to support young people, and that they tend to under employ young people and, because they may be relatively young business, can be more dynamic, innovative businesses reflecting new growth sectors.

A more strategic approach, building on the insights and intelligence offered by SDS in their Regional and Sector Skills Assessments (SDS, 2022), provides a way of developing a targeted approach to this large number of employers. It also ensures that young people are offered a mix of large or small employers, with a very different set of opportunities and experience, that help them build sustainable careers for the future:

Recommendation 8:
We recommend that DYW Regional Groups are encouraged to further strengthen the development of strategic and long-term approaches around particular sectors or groups of young people that clearly link with employer demand and skills needs within regions.

Recommendation 9:
We recommend that DYW School Coordinators help their schools put in place engagement plans for the academic year and use these to encourage new offers of support from employers.

5. The need for effective collaboration between DYW, employers, teachers, and parents

Employers see teachers, parents, and career advisers as having an important influencing role in helping young people to broaden their horizons, think about new and emerging opportunities and alternative routes to work and qualifications. Employers feel that parents, teachers, and career advisers have a vital role to play from the early years at school in challenging stereotypes and normalising alternative routes to and through work.

For employers, one of the main drivers for working in partnership with DYW and those who will influence young people's career choices, such as teachers, parents and career advisors, is access to high quality information about specific labour markets and the opportunities within these. Examples of this includes work by DYW Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian and DYW Glasgow which has drawn on SDS Regional and Sector Skills Assessments and other publications to produce accessible infographics about their local labour markets. These resources are now being used by pupils and those influential to them and are reportedly helpful in creating a common 'mental map' for these markets and the opportunities they provide.

This kind of analysis could form the basis for longer-term strategic plans by DYW and ensure that the contribution of all these stakeholder groups are aligned and based on accurate information around the main labour market opportunities and trends.

The other aspect of this collaboration is the identification of young people who can most benefit from employer engagement, in terms of understanding alternative routes and exploring wider horizons.

The introduction of DYW School Coordinators was widely welcomed as providing the dedicated time needed to support more employers to engage. It was felt that there was scope to help School Coordinators to focus their limited time better by

engaging specific employers according to a clear local strategy, in terms of the range of current and emerging opportunities for young people.

DYW School Coordinators are well placed to drive some of this alignment between pupils, teachers, career advisers and employers. We heard from employers and practitioners that the role, and the nature of the relationship between co-ordinators and employers, varies from region to region and is dependent, to some extent on how the role is employed. There could be scope to review the role of DYW School Coordinators on the basis of experience to date.

Interviews with employers highlighted that there is still a stigma among parents and carers and, to some extent teachers, towards work based training. The widespread perception is still that young people should get five Highers and go to university, if they want to get a good job. This does not align with the full range of routes into work that employers accept and does not acknowledge that vocational training can be more suited to some job sectors and career pathways.

The more strategic approach described above could create a clearer context and focus for the work of DYW School Coordinators. Employers and practitioners feel that much of their work around engagement can be short-term and ad hoc, and there is scope to shift from a reactive approach that matches immediate need to a more strategic, long-term approach focused more on the quality of the engagements, as well as supporting collaboration and sharing of labour market information with influencers.

Likewise, working to promote the full range of types of qualifications and educate parents/carers and teachers about the role and importance of non-university routes to work, would further expand this agenda.

Recommendation 10:
We recommend that DYW promote their work to parents/carers and teachers, as well as raising awareness of the range of qualifications and routes to work that are valued by employers. This will support the cultural shift away from expecting all young people to get minimum of five 'Higher' qualifications and a university based degree for every job and career type.

6.   The quantity and quality of engagements

Our interviews with both employers and practitioners have helped to identify a hierarchy of connected engagements with, and information about, the world of work. Employer engagement is essential to all of these engagements. These include:

- General information insights and sessions which introduce young people to futures that they may not have considered. There is scope to deliver many of these activities at scale.
- An opportunity to explore in more depth those jobs and sectors that young people are more interested in. These are likely to involve smaller numbers of young people who are interested in particular jobs and sectors or are keen to know more to help them make up their minds.
- An immersive experience into particular opportunities either through direct engagement or at a place of work. This is likely to involve one-to-one experiences, perhaps related to the specific situation, interests and needs of a young person.

This description could be used to describe the of experience of the world of work as young people progress through their school years; as a classification of offers to young people; and as a model for a more strategic long-term approach for engagement.

This hierarchy of engagement, shown as a diagram in Figure 1, forms a structure for planning and shaping engagement activities. Employers often feel they get the most value from more intense engagement, such as immersive experiences. However, information events and activities can allow a wider range of employers to engage, as there is generally less time and resource needed to deliver these.

This structure could also be used as part of work to explain to new employers about the types of engagement and levels of involvement, as part of promoting the DYW agenda with a wider range of businesses. It also reflects the structure of engagement over time. More general, informational events can raise awareness of a particular career or sector at primary level, for young people. Whereas, when they get older and start to refine their future ambitions and choose qualifications they want to pursue, more engaging and immersive experiences can help to shape their knowledge and awareness.

Research has shown that there are key ages at which children form ideas and aspirations for future careers. DYW and employers can work to this, to engage with young people at every stage of this process, from career awareness by the age of seven, form these into more realistic ideas, and then further refine these as they get older (McMahon, *et al.,* 2010). DYW School Coordinators and employers can begin to work with young people at primary level of education in order to start raising awareness of a range of careers from an early stage, with light-touch, informational events or activities.
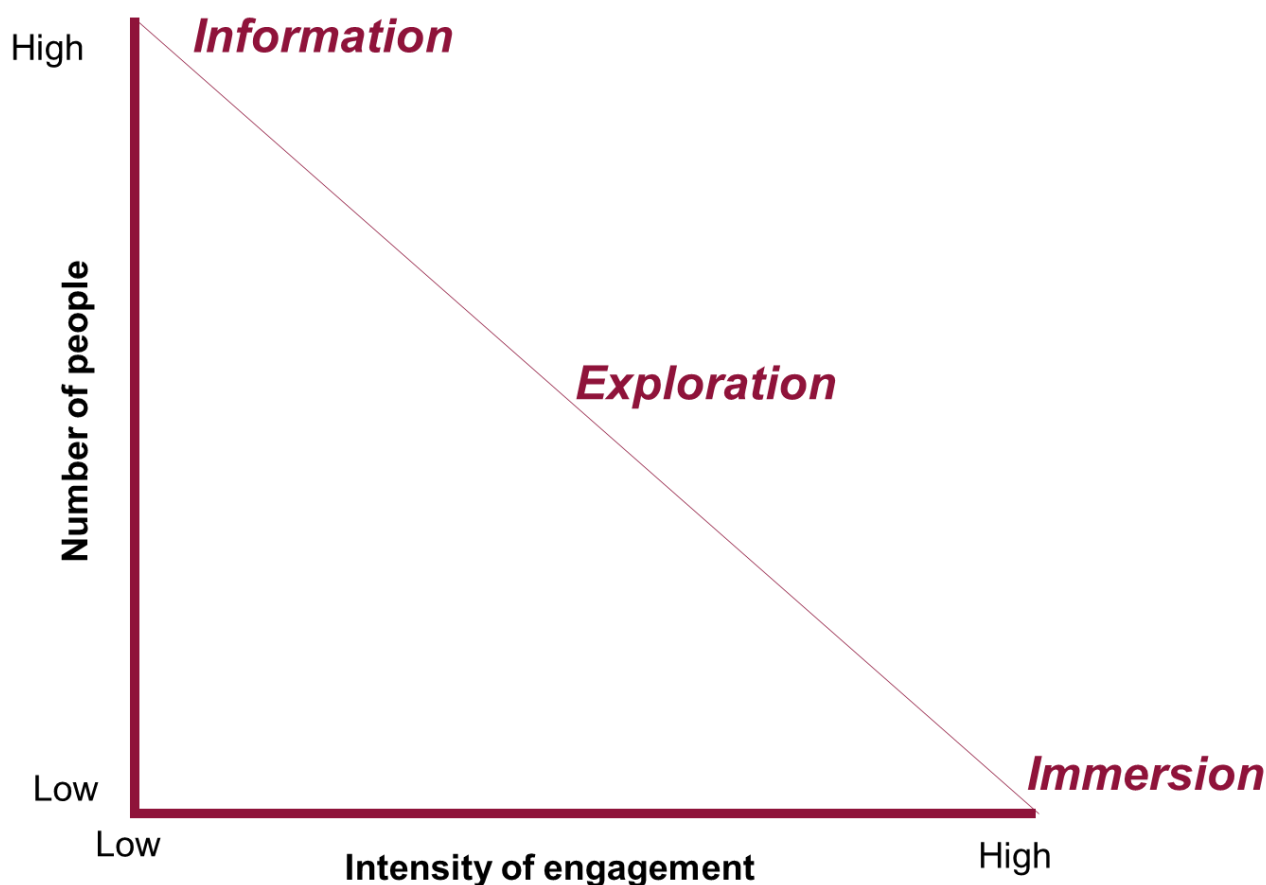
Figure 1 Hierarchy of engagement for young people in employer-led activities

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Recommendation 11:
We recommend that DYW and the Scottish Government give greater consideration to more to match targeted engagement, from information sessions to immersive experiences and how these link together to provide a more connected and progressive experience of the world of work for young people. Using a hierarchy of engagement, level of intensity with the aims for that group of young people, could help to set employer expectations and target activities.

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7. Virtual engagement as part of a wider, hybrid offer

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed the use of virtual engagement between employers and young people. Employers that did engage chose to do all engagements virtually. This achieved several benefits:

- The ability to reach a wider range of young people with a presentation or virtual experience. This meant that the reach was much wider, and young people who may not have previously engaged were now able to do so.

- This particularly benefitted a range of young people: those in rural and remote areas, where there may be a limited range of job opportunities and all employers are SMEs, those who may have found it hard to travel to opportunities pre-COVID, and those who were confined to their home.

However, employers articulated their concern about how hard it was to engage meaningfully with young people virtually and that their preference was for face-to-face, in-person engagement.

There were also some concerns about the impact this would have on disadvantaged groups, further increasing the digital divide. This feedback is complemented by feedback from young people. A 2021 report for DYW on the Impact on Virtual Engagement on Young People (DYW, 2021) demonstrated that online engagement can encourage more employers to volunteer their time, and that online engagement particularly benefits employers and young people living in rural and remote areas who could otherwise not access opportunities. Employer preference is for a hybrid approach to young people engagement which ensures the quality of the experience is maintained for all young people.

Virtual delivery had increased the accessibility of world of work experiences that certain groups might previously have been excluded from, because of their location or backgrounds. In addition, reaching disabled young people or those who have additional support needs was a benefit of virtual delivery. However, most young people preferred face-to-face engagement and believed online support cannot be a substitute for "hands on" experience of the world of work. The report found that both stakeholders and young people agree that virtual experiences should always add value compared to what could be done in-person, enhancing the offer around the world of work. The report also highlighted that the issue of digital exclusion remained significant, despite significant investment in both equipment, skills, and broadband access, a greater focus on virtual engagement would risk excluding many of those who can benefit most from engagement with the world of work. In terms of the hierarchy of engagement set out earlier:

- Virtual engagement and experiences can be useful in providing general information insights and sessions which introduce young people to futures that they may not have considered. This would likely be more of a listening exercise for young people rather than an interactive experience where they are able to speak to employers. An employer presentation can reach a wide audience and be recorded for future use. My World of Work uses a wide range of personal presentations for young people, with individuals describing their role, what it involves, and how they reached the position. There does appear to be scope to make more use of virtual engagement across the area of general information and that this would ensure both greater reach and greater efficiency through repeat use of the same material However, it will be

important to ensure that where engagement is not interactive, it is still meaningful for young people.

- Employers felt that there could be value in engaging virtually to help young people explore more interesting opportunities in more depth. Some of the main opportunities relate to sectors and trends that are Scottish wide, so there may be some scope to create more in-depth exploration virtually and achieve greater reach in doing so. These experiences should be more interactive to allow for more meaningful and bespoke experiences for the young people engaging.
- Employers felt that there was very limited opportunity to provide more immersive experience through virtual means. They wanted to engage personally with young people, and they felt that the virtual equivalent was not as effective in terms of creating an effective working relationship.

Recommendation 12:
We recommend that DYW and SDS work closely together to further enhance the digital content available to young people, with the support of the Scottish Government, both in terms of nationally available insights into sectors and roles, and, through building on the current content in My World of Work, with young people talking about their experience of specific roles at work and their routes to these roles.

8. Making it easier for employers to engage

Most of the employers who offered a view on the profile of DYW felt that awareness of the brand was not high. This included a small number of employers who were actively engaging with schools but not through DYW and they were not aware of DYW.

Employers felt that DYW, the support it could offer and the opportunities for engagement should be nationally promoted. They felt there should be a common national offer of opportunities that employers could relate to. These should range from one-off short-term offers, which may help to draw employers into a longer-term relationship with a school or a group of young people, through to more substantial offers in terms of work placements and foundation apprenticeships. Some employers referred to the value of a 'map of opportunities' so they could see what would work for them, as well as how to pursue it.

This promotion should make it clearer to employers about where employers can go to support young people and schools, for the *different agencies to work closely in partnership* to ensure that there was 'no wrong door' and to link together current initiatives (e.g., DYW with Kick Start, ERI, and apprenticeships). There are good examples of this happening but there is scope to make this a more universal approach.

We heard in particular about how hard national employers – with operations in more than one DYW regional area – found it to put together a national approach, and their request for a single point of entry to help in doing this, like that operated, for example, by Jobcentre Plus.

Employers felt there was a need to be clearer about the benefits of engagement – the difference it could make both to young people and employers. And it would help to be clear about the expectations of employers around each opportunity – what exactly would be involved, how much time it might take (realistically) and how long a commitment it may need to be (e.g., one-off, weeks, months, years). Some employers referred to the appeal and impact of stories from other employers about how they had benefitted, and the difference they had seen in the confidence and personal development of a young person. This would help to demystify engagement and reassure employers about the exact extent of their commitment.

Some employers saw involvement as a moral responsibility, or as part of their commitment to their community, but felt that others may need to be incentivised. In other words, they would need to be paid for at least part of the time they devoted to the task. For example, this might be to cover the greater time spent on induction, training, and support costs of employing a young person who is less work ready. However, there was a recognition that a wider use of financial incentives could transform the ethical basis of DYW which focused on the whole community working together to support young people. Some employers did feel that not all incentives needed to be financial with a few suggesting bespoke training or access to data on the young workforce could be helpful to businesses, particularly smaller businesses

Employers described the importance of understanding how they worked – and the need to align this to how schools worked. This included the timing of engagement (for example, not toward the end of the financial year for smaller employers), the need for a lead in time in terms of preparation and ensuring coverage for the staff involved. It would help to have an annual calendar of events and activities at the start of the school year so an employer could plan ahead with the school.

Employers confirmed that it was important to be clear about the purpose of an engagement – in terms of both the benefit to young people and the benefit to them as an employer, in terms of contributing to their CSR goals, succession planning, achieving placements etc. So, it was important to promote the business case and make sure this is clear. The importance of this up-front discussion with an employer was stressed – at the moment some employers said they felt it was ad hoc and it would be more appealing to shift to a more explicit discussion about needs and situation and aspiration over a period of time, leading to a more planned approach.

Employer networks and peer groups were mentioned by a few employers as being beneficial to encouraging and supporting other employers to engage with young people and schools. Examples of this include:

- Access to case studies and testimonials from other employers who have been involved, with information on challenges and benefits, including expected time and resource commitments.
- In Peebles, an employer has set up a steering group with other local employers to agree a more strategic and joined-up approach to providing work experienced for local young people. The aim is to help DYW make connections with business and make engagement with schools and young people less ad hoc, developing a planned approach to business and engagement and support other businesses in how they might do this.
- One employer wants to build up an "ecosystem" of technology organisations across Scotland as a marketing offer to take to universities and colleges to encourage young people to enter the sector.

There is no single action that will change engagement, but we have identified a wide range of activities and actions that will collectively help to draw more employers into some form of engagement:

Recommendation 13:
We recommend that DYW Regional Groups consider the extent to which it may be possible to increase the appeal of engagement locally by:

National promotion of the brand and a core set of engagement opportunities with a clear description of what it would involve for employers in terms of time and effort.

Creating a single point of entry for large employers who have a number of regional sites.

Promotion of the benefits of engagement, using stories of employers' experience in terms of both business benefit and individual impact, ensuring that employers are clear about the purpose of an engagement.

Developing a stronger mutual appreciation of the situation of both employers and schools, to help ensure alignment and realistic expectations and appropriate planning.

Using the employer leadership of DYW to integrate DYW into a wider set of offers for businesses and ensuring that business development and support services are an integrated experience for employers.

Providing appropriate financial support to help employers (particularly smaller businesses) become involved at the more immersive end of the spectrum, for example, like the support provided by ERI.

Leadership in engagement by public sector employers, being exemplars in terms of approach and promoting the benefits of engagement.

Enhancing the appeal of engagement for some employers by creating a more strategic, long-term approach. Associated sector-based projects could provide a framework around which to focus the time and effort of DYW School Coordinators.

Using the opportunity provided by NOLB to drive a more co-ordinated approach to employer engagement around employability and skills in each local authority area.

Drawing on the reach and influence of a range of employer bodies to raise awareness of the appeal and benefits of engagement through DYW.

Working locally to help schools respond to teacher shortages in key employment areas such as IT and technical studies.

9. Supporting and developing employer leadership

The employer leadership of DYW – and its setting within Chambers of Commerce – is a strength. The most successful approaches seek to integrate DYW into a wider set of offers for businesses, with Chambers developing strong working relationships with their local authorities to ensure that what could be a disparate set of business development and support services are experienced by employers as integrated help.

The Glasgow Chamber of Commerce case study shows the value of developing strong working relationships between the DYW team and local authorities in their area, particularly with education and economic development departments. It also indicates the scope for using these relationships to join up initiatives with different funding sources and to identify gaps that can usefully be filled, for example, creating more coherent approaches around digital initiatives or green jobs.

The importance of public sector employers showing leadership and providing exemplars was mentioned by some employers and stakeholders. The public sector makes up by far the greatest proportion of employment in each area of Scotland (22.1% of total employment in Scotland) (Scottish Government, 2022). They, together with the Scottish Government and their agencies, are a critical part of the common endeavour to support young people, and their public service focus means that they are in a strong position to be significant contributors to providing insights into the world of work for young people.

There are some examples of very effective contributions to the agenda by some public sector employers, but it is important that they are all seen to play their role – as leaders, exemplars and innovators. It will remain harder to encourage private sector employers to play their full role if these public sector employers are not seen to be fully playing theirs.

While DYW is still vital in the short term, supporting these larger public sector employers to play their role will be crucial in enabling the Scottish Government and DYW to take a step back in the medium to longer term which will ensure

engagement with schools and young people is sustained and bridges the gap between industry and education, and that employers are at the forefront of the solution to supporting Scotland's young people.

In addition, employers could be supported to better understand and plan for future workforce skills needs. While many employers are experienced in workforce planning, planning for the workforce of the future is difficult, and support for employers to do this could be valuable. Given the current pressures on employers, support to ensure they are able to recruit and retain talented employees, and their plans are aligned with the wider plans for the future workforce in their region, would help them to address some of the challenges around recruitment. It may also be necessary to target support for smaller employers, who may have less in-house capacity to do future workforce skills needs planning.

Recommendation 14:
We recommend that the Scottish Government review the scale and nature of engagement of public sector employers with schools and young people and identify ways in which they can be helped to play a leading role and be exemplars for other employment sectors.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Detailed methodology

To answer the research questions and aims of this evaluation as set out in the Invitation to Tender, Rocket Science developed and implemented a six stage methodology which is summarised below:

Stage 1: Inception and planning
- Understanding the context for the work, expectations and requirements.
- Agreeing on the methodology and project management terms, including regular meetings with the contract manager and the Research Advisory Group.

Stage 2: Desk Research and sampling framework
- Desk review of research to date to identify gaps and priority areas for consultation with employers and practitioners.
- Agree a sampling framework for both employer and practitioner participants.

Stage 3: Evaluation framework and research design
- Identify employers, practitioners and stakeholders to speak to in line with the sampling framework agreed in Stage 2.
- Design research materials which will include:
    - o Introductory emails and content to send to employers.
    - o An agreed contact plan for employers and practitioners.
- Design topic guides for all engagements.

Stage 4: Fieldwork
- Telephone and video calls with employers, practitioners and stakeholders.

Stage 5: Analysis and reporting
- Analysis of employers and practitioners using a charting approach to develop a full audit trail of the points and issues raised under each topic area so that common threads and variance can be identified clearly.
- Outputs:
    - o A Draft Report, submitted to the contract manager for review and comment by the Scottish Government and RAG.
    - o A Final Report which takes account of our discussions on the Draft Report with the client and the RAG.

Stage 6: Stage 6: Dissemination:
- A PowerPoint presentation for use with a range of stakeholder audiences. This will be designed both for our own presentation and for use by others to further audiences.

Table A.1: Interviewees who informed this research

Scheme	Area / Region	Interviews held
ERI	North Ayrshire	1
ERI	Glasgow	2
ERI	Highlands Council	3
ERI	Edinburgh	3
SUB-TOTAL		**9**
DYW	Glasgow	5
DYW	Inverness and Central Highlands	7
DYW	Edinburgh, Mid and East Lothian	4
DYW	Dumfries and Galloway	4
DYW	North East	6
DYW	Outer Hebrides	4
DYW	Lanarkshire and Dumbarton	6
DYW	Ayrshire	8
DYW	Borders	5
SUB-TOTAL		**49**
Employers using Marketplace		4
Virtual Group[1]		6
Group of Randomised employers[2]		19
Employers signing up to the YPG 5 Asks		2
Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB)		4
DYW School Coordinators (about their work with employers)		7
Apprenticeship support leads		5
SUB-TOTAL		**43**
GRAND TOTAL		**105**

Table Notes:
1. Those who have been involved in virtual activities
2. Chamber of Commerce members which will include some who have not engaged

Sampling framework

A sampling framework was used to ensure that the research was able to articulate common themes of activity and impact, and importantly variations across DYW Regional Groups, sectors, and population differences. While this research did not require a systematic sample of employers, the framework below considers the scale, sector, and geography of employers.

Overall, the selection of employers and practitioners includes:

- All the main urban centres – Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen.
- Rural areas in the north, east and south of Scotland.
- An island grouping.
- Former manufacturing/coal/steel areas now with range of new local businesses and inward investors.

Table A.2: Proposed selection of 8 DYW Regional Groups and 4 nested LAs, with rationale

DYW Regional Groups	Local Authorities
Inverness and Central Highlands: Large rural area with a fast growing city	Highlands: Inverness plus range of dispersed rural communities
Outer Hebrides Remote island grouping	
North East Aberdeen – in transition as significance of oil and gas declines - plus large rural hinterland with range of small rural and commuting towns	
Glasgow: Largest city with wide range of employment and significant areas of deprivation wide range of schools and employers	
Ayrshire: Highly varied area including Glasgow commuting, old mining communities, heavy engineering and textiles, and coastal tourist towns as well as market towns and extensive agricultural areas. Shift to services sector (e.g. call centres and light manufacturing. Some high levels of unemployment in areas such as Irvine and Kilmarnock	North Ayrshire: Long standing focus on regeneration, skills and employability with wide employer base
Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian: Fast growing region based on the capital city with range of FINCAP, digital businesses and professions, strong university research base and associated employers, and large public sector employment	Edinburgh: Rapidly growing city with wide range of growing high skill employers
Dumfries and Galloway: Rural area with dispersed communities	
Lanarkshire and East Dunbartonshire: Area formerly dominated by steel and coal and now a range of new industries across manufacturing, service and logistics	

Within these 8 DYW Regional Groups and 4 nested Local Authorities, Rocket Science along with the Scottish Government identified the main engagement approaches which would be used to identify and make contact with the required number of employers.

It should be noted that this sampling framework was used as a guide to ensure that we were able to gather views and opinions from a range of employers and practitioners, whilst remaining responsive to changing priorities and findings emerging from the interviews conducted. The final number of employers and practitioners interviewed is set out in the main report in Table 1.

In the table below we set out the employer and practitioner target framework, which was regularly updated, iteratively, in line with the changing priorities, and emerging findings from the desk research and the interviews with employers.

Where possible, analysis of employer views was conducted according to the size of businesses. These were identified using standard definitions based on number of employees, consistent with Scottish Government statistics Small businesses have from 0 to 49 employees; medium-sized businesses have 50 to 249 employees; and large business have 250 or more employees.

Limitations of this study

The methodology for this research was designed to be robust, but it has some limitations, as is typical for this type of research. Firstly, there was a lower response rate than was initially anticipated, with not all contacts able to make time for interviews for the project. The reasons for these are unclear, but are thought to include:

- The availability of employers was impacted by timing of calls over the summer holidays, when typically more people are on annual leave.

- Although employers were largely introduced to the research through known project contacts, this did not always translate into them having time and resource available to take part in an interview.

- In addition, there was a challenge due to the large number of contacts to be made, which may have been limited by capacity of contacts to make introductions to employers, and to promote this research.

- Finally, while interviews were conducted throughout the summer of 2022, it was found that later interviews were often providing less additional information, due to a critical mass of key information already being derived.

For these reasons, it was felt that the total number of interviews was providing a robust understanding of a range of employer and practitioner perspectives.

Appendix 2: Desk-based review of data and literature

Data sources

Details on the main sources of information drawn upon for this review are provided below.

- Scottish Employer Perspectives Survey (EPS) (Scottish Government, 2019). The most recent data from the Scottish EPS is from the 2019 survey. Data is also available from 2014 and 2016. Results from the 2021 EPS were published in 2022, after the desk based review had been completed (Scottish Government, 2022). However, the findings of the most recent EPS are included in the DYW Evidence Syntheis published alongside this evaluation.

Therefore, data is only included on employer perspectives pre-pandemic. The 2019 survey included 2,652 employers in Scotland. The survey includes specific questions on the Scottish Government's Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) programme. Key findings from the 2019 survey, including comparisons with 2014 and 2016 surveys, are provided throughout the review.

- Scottish Employer Skills survey (Scottish Government, 2020).

The Scottish Employer Skills Survey (ESS) is a large-scale telephone survey. The most recent iteration of this survey surveyed 3,497 employers in Scotland between October and December 2020. Key findings from the ESS are provided in section 1.3

- Senior Phase: Headteacher Survey (Scottish Government, 2019).

Survey of headteachers of secondary schools in Scotland in June 2019. 45% of all headteachers in Scotland responded to the survey.
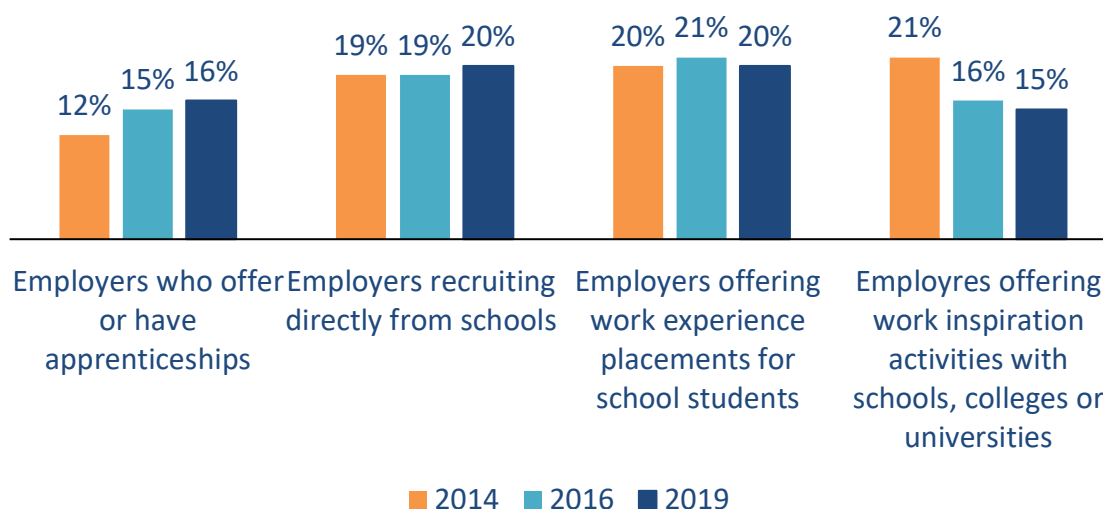
Pre-pandemic DYW employer engagement

The 2018 Rocket Science literature review on *The Impact of Employer Engagement with Schools* for DYW Glasgow found that different forms of engagement have different impacts in terms of pupil characteristics and combinations of employer activities. Young people across the UK found these activities most beneficial in gaining cultural capital (increased confidence and academic motivation). Benefits to employers included low recruitment costs and risk, building a network of local talent, increasing job motivation and satisfaction, and a positive impact on employees' skills development (Rocket Science, 2018).

The EPS provides findings on the proportions of employers across Scotland providing opportunities to young people, including provision of work placements, work inspiration activities (this includes activities such as career talks, mock interviews and site visits) and apprenticeships. An overview of this data from the 2014, 2016 and 2019 EPS is provided in Figure 2 overleaf.

The proportion of employers recruiting directly from schools and offering work experience placements remained relatively stable from 2014 – 2019. However there was a notable fall in the proportion offering work inspiration activities from 21% in 2014 to 15% in 2019, while the proportion offering or having apprenticeships rose. The EPS demonstrates an opportunity to expand the number of employers offering work placements and work inspiration activities.

Figure 2 – Proportions of employers offering opportunities to young people over time [Source: EPS 2014, 2016, 2019]

Legend: ■ 2014 ■ 2016 ■ 2019

Category	2014	2016	2019
Employers who offer or have apprenticeships	12%	15%	16%
Employers recruiting directly from schools	19%	19%	20%
Employers offering work experience placements for school students	20%	21%	20%
Employres offering work inspiration activities with schools, colleges or universities	21%	16%	15%

There is notable (and predictable) variation in engagement between differently sized organisations, with larger organisations more likely to be offering work placements and work inspiration activities (Figure 2). The smallest employers were half as likely as those with five or more employees to provide work placements. 51% of employers with over 100 employees offered work placements to school pupils. Larger employers are also more likely to offer work inspiration activities, with 60% of employers with over 100 employees doing so.

Figure 3 - Proportions of employers offering opportunities to young people, by establishment size [Source: EPS 2019]
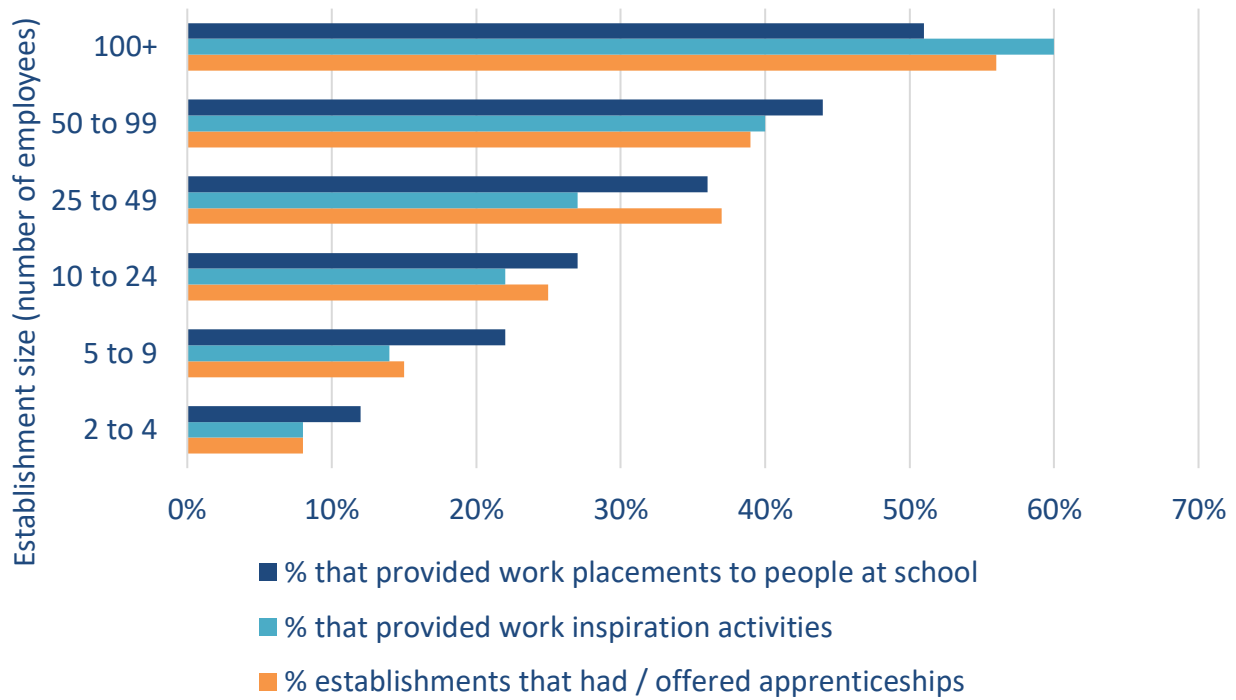
There is also notable variation between sectors in the proportion offering work placements and activities to young people. The education sector was more likely than any others to offer work placements to school pupils; 54% of all employers in this sector did so in the 12 months to 2019. This was followed by Health and social work (34%) and arts and other services (29%). Employers in hotels and restaurants (13%) construction (13%) and primary sector and utilities (12%) were the lease likely to have offered work placements.

Education (39%) and public administration (31%) were the most likely to offer work inspiration activities, and construction (6%) and hotels and restaurants (8%) are least likely.

Figure 4 – Proportions of employers offering opportunities to young people, by sector (EPS, 2019).
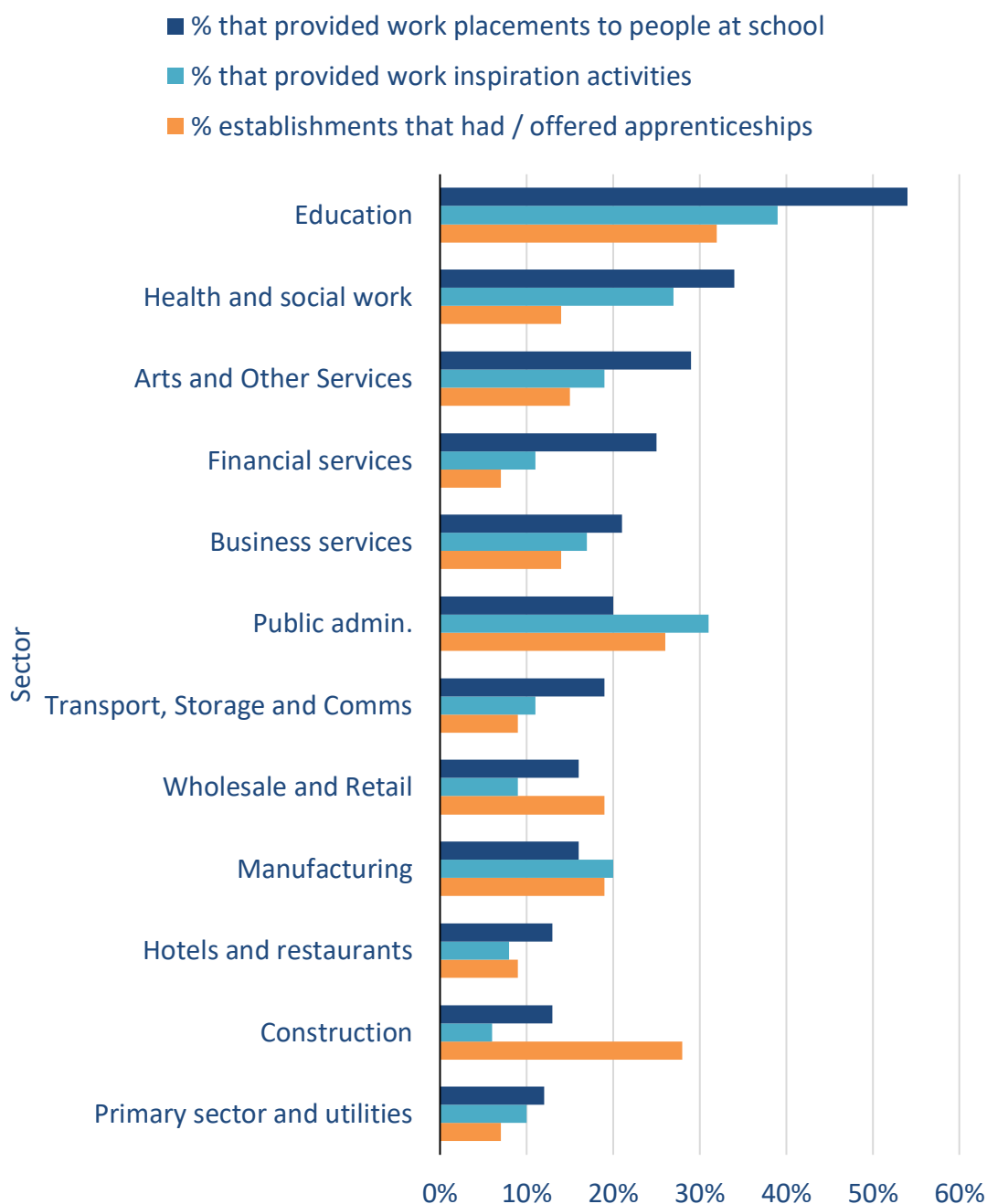
In terms of best practice for employer engagement, Rocket Science developed a *strategic toolkit for DYW schools in 2019* with guidance on getting the best employer engagement for young people, which among other aspects looked at the role and timing of different employer engagement activities based on different types of organisations and sectors. The toolkit included a reference to the DYW guidance on *Employer Partnerships in Education: support for evaluation and improvement* that was developed in October 2018. This describes school-employer partnerships at three levels:

- Engagement, likely to involve a one-off activity by an employer such as an interview session or a career activity.
- Collaboration, a longer-term commitment between the employer and the school, such as regular contextualised learning or work experience.
- Influencing, a long-term partnership where the employer has considerable influence on the curriculum offer of the schools through, for example, an employer contributing to lessons in the classroom (Rocket Science, 2019).

Findings from the most recent *Senior Phase headteacher survey* also show that, in 2019, 75% of surveyed schools had established long-term relationships with employers. These partnerships tended to be focused on opportunities for young people. 84% of Headteachers were seeking direct access to employment opportunities through their partnerships with employers. Headteachers felt that additional time and staff resources dedicated to building partnerships with employers would be helpful. The main factors underpinning successful collaboration between employers and headteachers were:

- Willingness of both partners.
- Recognition of mutual benefits of partnerships.
- Support from organisations such as the local authority and Skills Development Scotland.

Barriers to engagement

There is some evidence of barriers to engagement in the EPS, as well as further literature sources. In the EPS, employers were asked about the barriers to offering work placements. The most commonly mentioned were structural (mentioned by 28%) including not having suitable roles (38%) and not having time or resources (20%) (Internal Publication).

Further to this, the 2017 Education Scotland Review of the implementation of the Career Education Standard, Work Placement Standard and Guidance on School/Employer partnerships aimed to uncover if these standards and guidance were ambitious enough to deliver the aspirations of the DYW strategy. The report found that many employers were unaware of the available standards and guidance. It concluded that the Scottish Government should work with DYW Regional Groups and partners to support the use of standards and guidance in developing school-employer partnerships (Education Scotland, 2017).

The 2020 Education Scotland report on *Inspection Findings: Developing the Young Workforce* also gave further details on the impact of DYW on primary, secondary and special schools across the country. It found that most schools have introduced partnership-working with local employers. These partnerships are particularly effective for around half of secondary schools and bring benefit to young people, but, overall, employers are not yet sufficiently involved in curriculum design or evaluation (Education Scotland, 2020).

Gender inequalities and STEM careers

Supporting young people to get into STEM is crucial for the sustainability of future workforce, as jobs requiring STEM skills are expected to increase at twice the rate of other roles (Archer et al., 2014) and digital careers are expected to grow at 3.46% from 2021-2027 (Careersmart). However, there are currently wide disparities concerning representation in STEM in the UK. For example, despite comprising over 45% of the workforce, women only make up 13% of the STEM field (Careersmart).

Young girls and those from deprived backgrounds face several psychosocial barriers which limit their engagement with STEM. For example, research shows that students from deprived backgrounds may have less awareness about STEM and not have mentors that they identify with, leading young people to believe that they are not suitable for STEM careers (Duodu, et al., 2017). These differences in interest and representation in STEM are observable starting in early childhood, making it crucial for initiatives to increase participation from these groups (Emembolu et al., 2020). Research also shows that children form ideas and aspirations about their future careers from a very young age, demonstrating the need to illustrate opportunities in STEM from primary level (McMahon *et al.* 2010).

Evaluation of DYW regional groups

Through desk research, field work with employers and analysis, the 2018 *Formative Evaluation of the DYW Regional Groups* reviewed and analysed what worked well in the DYW Regional Groups of Ayrshire; Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian; Inverness and Central Highland; and North East, and where challenges remain to the implementation of the DYW Regional Groups. DYW Regional Groups aim to fulfil a leadership and communication role in employer engagement, and have an individual set of KPIs in addition to the overarching KPIs for the DYW programme.

Although this evaluation occurred too early to provide a full picture of the impact made, the Regional Groups were so far doing well in creating a single point of contact for employers to engage with education and vice versa. Employers across the four reviewed Groups found the work of the Regional Groups valuable and that it had helped break down barriers for them to engage with schools through a simplified landscape and single point of contact.

The evaluation also found a positive impact on employers as a result of the Regional Groups' work, including offering more and / or better quality work experience placements and taking on more young people and apprentices (SQW, 2018).

The evaluation surveyed employers to uncover how the engagement was going and where the challenges remain:

- Employers tended to engage with DYW activities not because of benefits to their own company, but from a belief in giving back to the community and improving the work-readiness of young people.
- Employers engaged more often in stand-alone activities rather than recurring activities.
- Most employers (90%) undertook at least one activity organised through the Regional Group, most frequently focused on careers and/or skills fairs.
- Schools reported that, through DYW Regional Group engagement, employers had started to offer higher quality and/or more employment activities to students, resulting in a positive impact on students.
- Some employers faced barriers in aligning their activities with school / college timetables and releasing staff (SQW, 2018).

Findings from the EPS also confirm that establishments engaging with DYW Regional Groups are far more likely to be offering work experience or work inspiration activities to young people than those which are not engaging.

3% of employers who responded to the 2019 survey engaged with their DYW Regional Group over the last 12 months while 14% of employers were aware of a DYW Regional Group (this was an increase on the 2014 and 2016 surveys). This means that around a fifth of employers who were aware of a DYW Regional Group engaged with their group. The survey also showed that larger employers are more likely to be aware of and to have engaged with a DYW Regional Group.

72% of employers who had engaged with their local DYW Regional Group had offered work inspiration activities (compared to 15% of all employers). Employers that engaged with DYW regional groups were also more likely to have offered work placements – 84% of those who had engaged with the groups had offered work placements (compared to 36% of all employers). Building on findings from the formative evaluation of DYW regional groups described above, we therefore know that engagement with regional groups correlates both with increased provision of work-related activities for young people and with provision of better quality work-related activities.

Post-pandemic DYW employer engagement

There are few available resources documenting findings on DYW employer engagement since March 2020. While the Scottish Employer Skills Survey does not ask any questions directly related to DYW employer engagement approaches, the most recent results provide context on the on the skills challenges faced by employers in Scotland, including early findings on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as the survey took place between October and December 2020. Due to the timing of the survey, findings are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key findings from the survey relevant to this work include:

- A fifth (22%) of employers said the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their training plans, most commonly because planned courses were suspended or otherwise not available.
- Nearly 65% of employers had furloughed at least one member of staff in response to the pandemic. 12% of employers had made staff redundant or were in the process of doing so.
- There were regional differences in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employers. For example, use of Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) was highest in the West Region (72%) and lowest in Dumfries and Galloway (55%).
- Nearly all (96%) employers surveyed had changed their working practices in some way in response to the pandemic. The most common examples of these were an increase in staff working from home and changes to make workplaces 'COVID secure'. 35% of employers had more staff working from home. Increase in home working was most common in public administration (86%) and financial services (70%).
-

These early findings illustrate some of the additional pressures employers have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these additional pressures and changes in working patterns are likely to have had an impact on the engagement of employers with DYW, for example, by affecting the time or resource available for engagement, and the practicalities of engagement such as bringing young people into the workplace.

The 2021 Rocket Science report *Impact on Virtual Engagement on Young People* for Developing the Young Workforce demonstrated that online engagement can encourage more employers to volunteer their time, and that online engagement particularly benefits employers and young people living in rural and remote areas who could otherwise not access opportunities. Virtual delivery had increased the accessibility of world of work experiences that certain groups might previously have been excluded from, because of their location or backgrounds. In addition, reaching disabled young people or those who have additional support needs (ASN) was a benefit of virtual delivery. However, most young people preferred face-to-face engagement and believed online support cannot substitute for "hands on" experience of the world of work. The report found that both stakeholders and young people agree that virtual experiences should always add value compared to what could be done in person, enhancing the offer around the world of work.

In terms of views of stakeholders, the report found that:

- To increase engagement and ensure a positive learning experience, experiences should be interactive and engaging for young people. Getting the balance right between time spent online and independent learning is important.
- Most stakeholders felt that the move to online / virtual delivery had broken down geographic barriers and had expanded (and increased) their reach.
- Stakeholders identified both positive and negative aspects of the virtual world of work for young people who are disadvantaged.

- Face-to-face, in person engagement is still seen as an important aspect for young people and should be retained.
- The exposure to virtual and remote ways of working was an important experience for young people.
- The way in which the session, course or work experience is structured was a large determinant of how positive the experience is for young people.
- The level of engagement and impact of virtual work experiences for young people was also dependent on the school (and the individual) in terms of their ability to engage and access to devices. Stakeholders are all in agreement that virtual work experiences are here to stay, and a model of blended / hybrid delivery should be adopted (Internal Rocket Science Publication, 2021).

Appendix 3: Core topic guide for employers

Employer topic guide: core questions

- Why do employers engage with schools and young people, and what helps and hinders them in doing this?
- For how long has your organisation engaged with schools and young people to help them understand and explore the world of work – and does this pre-date the Developing the Young Workforce Strategy (2014-present)?
- Please describe the keyways in which you've contributed to and/or been supported by your DYW Regional Group [prompt: in what ways has your DYW Regional Group interactions helped your:
    - Student engagement: work placements, work inspiration activity, career advice etc.
    - Tacking inequality (e.g. affected knowledge and motivation to tackle inequalities by Gender (e.g. STEM), Special Educational Needs and Disability, care experience, ethnicity etc).
    - Partnerships with schools / colleges (including, curriculum design, lesson support, skills planning and alignment).

Employer Partnerships:

- Please describe the ways in which your DYW Regional Group involvement has evolved over time.

- What has been your motivation for supporting young people's education and employment? Has this changed over time?

- Do you have a particular focus of the kind of young people are you looking to support? If so, what are your reasons for this? [Prompt – in local area, those who most need help, challenging gender stereotypes etc].

- To what extent have you found it straightforward to support young people? What has helped you to do this?

- What kind of support or information have you found particularly helpful in taking forward your work on engagement?

- Has anything got in the way of you supporting young people? What could be done to tackle these issues?

- What will influence your ability and willingness to support young people in the future?

- What has been the impact on COVID-19 on your ability to engage with schools and young people and on how you engage? To what extent do you think there will be any lasting impact on the way you engage?

- Are there forms of support that employers find easier to organise and provide?

- What kind of support do you prefer/feel able to offer young people? What lies behind these preferences?

- Does the kind of support you feel able to offer vary over time or in terms of your own circumstances?

The difference that engagement has made:

- To what extent do you feel the Developing the Young Workforce Strategy has made a difference to you – for example in terms of ease of recruitment, school / college engagement, quality of match, retention etc?

Employer awareness, and capacity to support young people:

- To what extent do you find it easy to understand the range of qualifications on offer?
- What is the value that you place on qualifications when recruiting young people, and in subsequent progression at work?
- What do you see as the status or value of work based qualifications? (prompt: versus qualifications attained through academic pathways).
- To what extent has the importance that you place on qualifications changed over time?
- To what extent do you and your staff feel confident in supporting young people - and particularly those who are facing the greatest barriers to employment?
- What support would help you provide support to young people facing the greatest barriers to employment? [Focus on the propensity / ability of employers to help young people with mental and physical disabilities, poor mental health, and/or care experienced into work placements, vocational qualifications and employment].
- How can employer engagement in this agenda be further expanded?
- What could be done to encourage more employers to engage with schools and young people?
- What do you think might lie behind a lack of engagement by some employers with schools and young people?

Final comments:

- Do you have any final reflections or observations about employer engagement in young people's education and employment?

Variations for specific groups:

Employers signed up to the Young People's Guarantee/5 Asks:
- Why do employers engage with YPG, and what helps and hinders them in doing this?
- What was your motivation in joining the YPG?
- Was your joining the YPG part of a longer standing commitment to helping young people thrive in the world of work? If so, what kinds of activities have you been involved in in the past?
- Do you have a particular focus in terms of the 5 Asks? If so, what is the reason for this?

Employers using ERI
- To what extent is your use of ERI part of a wider approach to engagement and recruitment? [eg working with DYW to engage with schools and young people, seeking to recruit local people where possible etc]
- Have you found it easy to recruit using the ERI? Has the right kind of support been available for you?
- What do you think would encourage employers to engage more with disadvantaged groups in this way?
- Has your experience of recruiting through ERI encouraged you to do more in terms of engaging and recruiting from these groups?
- What do you think would encourage other employers to make use of support such as ERI?

Employers using Marketplace
- Why do employers use Marketplace, and what helps and hinders them in doing this?
- How extensive has been your use of Marketplace to support young people?
- Is your use of Marketplace part of wider commitment to helping young people thrive in the world of work? If so, what other kinds of activities have you been involved in?
- What has been your motivation for your use of Marketplace [and wider activities if relevant]?

Additional questions on virtual engagement:
- For how long has your organisation engaged with schools and young people to help them understand and explore the world of work – and does this pre-date the DYW Strategy (2014-present)?
- What kind of virtual/digital engagement have you been involved with over the last 2 years to support young people
- What was your experience of this, in terms of how practical this was for you to organise and deliver?
- What is your sense of the benefits and disadvantages of digital engagement?
- Do you feel that there are particular types of digital engagement that seem to be particularly effective and may be at least as valuable as face-to-face engagements?

- Do you plan to continue to offer opportunities for digital engagement with young people? If so, what particular forms of support will this involve?
- More generally, are there any particular advantages of digital delivery that you would keen to see retained?
- What has been your motivation to engage with young people in this way (i.e. digitally/virtually)?
- More generally, what has been your motivation for supporting young people's education and employment? Has this changed over time?

Employer topic guide: non-engaged organisations

- To what extent have you engaged with young people around their education or training, now or in the recent past?

If some engagement:

- What has your engagement involved? [eg Offering Work Experience, providing insights into your organisation or sector, hosting pupil visits, contributing to curriculum content, hiring an apprentice]
- [IF RELEVANT] How have you engaged with schools/education
- What do you think have been the benefits from your engagement?
- To what extent has the scale and nature of your engagement changed over time?
- Do you plan to change the scale and nature of your engagement in the future?
- What has determined the scale and nature of your involvement? What has encouraged you to get involved? What has made engagement unappealing or difficult?
- What could be done to help you further increase your level of engagement?

If little or no engagement:

- What are the reasons for your current level of engagement?
- Do you have any plans to increase your level of engagement? [If so, reasons for this]
- Do you feel there are particular things that are getting in the way of you from engaging more?
- What would encourage you to engage more?
- More generally, how do you think can employer engagement in young people's education and employment be further expanded?
- What could be done to encourage more employers to engage with schools and young people?
- What do you think might lie behind the unwillingness or inability of other employers to engage with schools and young people?
- To what extent do you think it is clear to employers about what to do and who to contact if they want to engage with young people, schools and colleges? [e.g. do you think it is clear to employers who they should approach if they

wanted to offer Work Experience, hire an apprentice, contribute to shaping the curriculum etc.

- To what extent do you find it easy to understand the range of qualifications on offer?

    o What is the value that you place on qualifications when recruiting young people, and in subsequent progression at work?
    o What do you see as the status or value of work based qualifications?
    o To what extent has the importance that you place on qualifications changed over time?

- To what extent do you and your staff feel confident in supporting young people – and particularly those who are facing the greatest barriers to employment?
- What support would help you provide support to young people facing the greatest barriers to employment? [Focus on the propensity / ability of employers to help young people with mental and physical disabilities, poor mental health, and/or care experienced into work placements, vocational qualifications and employment].

Appendix 4: Core topic guide for practitioners

- Why do employers engage with schools and young people and what helps and hinders them in doing this?
- What are employers' motivations for supporting all young people's education and employment? Do they / their peers think they do enough? To what extent do they have a focus on gender and young people at most disadvantage in the labour market?
- What are the limitations, challenges, barriers that employers encounter in supporting young people? What could be done to overcome them?
- Are there forms of support that employers find easier to organise and provide?
- To what extent is employers' support well matched to perceived needs of regional economies (current and future)?
- What difference has involvement in DYW activities made to employers – in terms of recruitment, quality of match, retention etc?
- To what extent is there evidence that engagement in DYW activities has made a difference to employers – in terms of recruitment, quality of match, retention etc?

Employer awareness, and capacity to support young people:

- How well do employers understand the range of qualifications on offer? Do they hold a parity of esteem for 'academic' and 'vocational' qualifications?
- How has the importance that they place on qualifications changed over time?
- To what extend are employers confident, and skilled at supporting young people facing the greatest barriers to employment?
- What support / encouragement might SMEs, in particular, need to provide such support? (This could include a focus on the propensity / ability of employers to help young people with mental and physical disabilities, poor mental health, and/or care experienced into work placements, vocational qualifications and employment).

Case studies and examples of good practice:

What examples are there of good practice in successful employer engagement, and what evidence-based learning points might this make?

- Engagement with schools and young people.
- Providing accessible, high quality work placements.
- Providing work inspiration activities.
- Providing apprenticeships.
- Providing jobs and widening the accessibility of these jobs.
- Ensuring that schools' curricula and guidance is responsive to learner preference and labour market opportunities.

How can employer engagement in this agenda be further expanded?

- To what extent are employers aware of Scotland's approaches to employer engagement?
- What are their perceptions of the benefits, shortcomings and impact of these approaches?
- What could be done to further enhance the impact of employer engagement in terms of a better alignment between the world of work and young people's understanding and awareness of the world of work?
- Are there any particular attitudes and constraints around the employers who've not engaged? If so, what does this mean in terms of engaging a greater proportion of Scotland's employers in the future.

Appendix 5: Employers, practitioners and stakeholders interviewed

Table A.3 List of employers interviewed

Group	Organisation
5 Asks YPG	Mason Belles Kitchen
	Registers of Scotland
DYW Ayrshire	Ayrshire Film Company
	Chivas Brothers
	Trump Turnberry
	Alderbank Contractors Ltd
	BRICC Ltd
	Hub South West Scotland
	Ashleigh Construction
	EGGER (UK) Limited
DYW Borders	Pearsons Garden centre
	Evolution Bottling
	Farne Salmon
	Plexus
	Roxburghe Hotel - Schloss
DYW Dumfries and Galloway	DuPont
	Eco Group
	Jas P Wilson
	Tarff Valley
DYW Edi, Mid and East Lothian	Rachel Scott Couture
	Double Tree Hilton
	Mercat Tours
	Museums Galleries Scotland
DYW Glasgow	NAF Salon

Group	Organisation
	Beauty Kitchen
	SEC
	ACS Clothing
	Kabloom
DYW Lanarkshire and Dunbartonshire	Belfour Beatty
	Veitchi Group
	Bell Group UK
	TFS
	Robertson Central West
	Direct Devitt Ltd
DYW North East	NHS
	KR Group
	FDF
	Neptune E&P UK Ltd
	Anderson Anderson Brown (AAB)
	Alan Rutherford Wealth Management
DYW Outer Hebrides	BASF
	Omac Construction
	Mowi
DYW Inverness and Central Highlands	Lifescan
	Ross-Shire Engineering
	CapGemini
	Orion Group
	Cairngorm National Park Authority
ERI - Edinburgh	DSD Garage Services
	Pure Property Management

Group	Organisation
	George Nicholson (Decorators) Ltd
ERI - Glasgow	Yomo
	Boveda
ERI - Highland Council	Standfast Construction
	Clyne Heritage Society
	Speyside Wildlife
ERI - North Ayrshire	The Dress Cleaning Company
Marketplace	YCBAD
	EY Foundation
	Investment 2020
	Museum on the Mound (Lloyds Banking Group)
Sample of Virtual Group	SBHA - Scottish Borders Housing Association
	Scottish Borders Council
	Lime Light Careers
	Johnstons of Elgin
Random Sample of CoC employers	Jacobite Cruises Ltd
	Mabbett and Associates
	Innes and Partners Limited
	Springfield Properties PLC - Elgin Office
	Norscot
	Walker Gordon Associates Ltd
	Blue Parrot Events Group
	Kissing with Confidence
	The Shop works
	Regional Screen Scotland

Group	Organisation
	Edmundson Electrical Limited
	CRSmith
	Capella Charity
	Keep Scotland Beautiful
	Orlo
	Leith Walk Police Box
	The City of Edinburgh Council
	AND Digital
	[Independent yoga instructor]
	Glasgow Caledonian University

Table A.4 List of practitioners and stakeholders interviewed:

Group	Organisation
Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB)	Scottish Power
	Leonardo, UK
	National Lead for Employability and Learning, Action 4 Children
	Scottish Engineering
DYW School Coordinators	DYW Borders
	DYW North-East
Apprenticeship support leads	Street League
	Babcock
	Dumfries and Galloway College
	North East Scotland College
	EDETA (Edinburgh & District Employers' Training Association)

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact ruth.mckenna@gov.scot for further information.

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