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demos and
V report on
capability
building and
work-
readiness

Matt Grist
Phillida Cheetham

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experience required

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Foreword

This report makes a significant contribution to the policy debate on young people not in education, employment or training by reminding us that this is by no means a monolithic group. School leavers, teenage carers, graduates and gap-year students, for example, face very different pressures. Yet they can all benefit from acquiring the habits of work, being part of a team, developing ‘soft skills’: these all boost self-confidence and generate an individual sense of purpose.

The Government's approach to helping so-called ‘NEETs’ is not limited to basic skills for unqualified school leavers. Our commitment to expanding apprenticeships flows in large part from a recognition that high-quality, on-the-job training is often the best springboard for a long-term career. From August 2011, Jobcentre Plus, working with employers and training providers, will also be delivering improved pre-employment support. It will include bespoke careers advice and, for those on active benefits, fully-funded training that is tailored to local labour markets. Young people who are not in education, employment or training will be treated as a priority.

We must aid young people in their personal growth – and Britain, through a stronger, more capable workforce.

David Willetts MP
Minister for Universities and Science
May 2011

Executive summary and policy recommendations

This report is about young people who are not in employment, education and training (NEET) – some of whom are 16–18-year-olds for whom neither the education system nor labour market is working, and some of whom are graduates in need of work experience and confidence building. The report argues that government needs to be more imaginative about the opportunities it provides to these young people, especially in an economic climate where youth unemployment is very high. A lack of imaginative policy thinking in this area is partly driven by a limited understanding of the NEET phenomenon, its causes and potential solutions.

There has been a tendency, over the last decade or so, to think about young people who are NEET as a group constituted by a shared identity. This identity is often taken to mean being prone to behavioural problems and experiencing the kinds of disadvantage and vulnerabilities that lead to social exclusion. The stubborn 10 per cent of young people who were classified as NEET during the late 1990s and through the 2000s created the perception of an ‘underclass’ with such an identity.¹ But this perception is false. Recent research has shown that only 1 per cent of 16–18-year-olds are continuously NEET between those ages and up to 31 per cent of the same cohort are NEET at some point during this period.² There never was a stubborn underclass completely disengaged from education and employment. There was simply a fifth of young people ‘churning’ in and out of education and employment. Inadequate data analysis has led to the conflation of a stable percentage with a stable segment of the population.³

There is certainly a very small number of young people who are NEET and ‘socially excluded’ as a result of ‘behavioural problems’. For these young people a more targeted psychological

approach is required and in this report we detail some excellent interventions of this kind (see chapter 2). But our research shows that for a large percentage of young people who ‘churn’ in and out of the NEET category, whether they are 16-year-olds fresh from school or qualified graduates, all require the same opportunity: a set of positive experiences that build skills and confidence connecting them to further opportunities.

For this report we carried out primary research in three further education colleges in England (in Luton, Milton Keynes and Nottingham). We measured the capabilities and attitudes of the young people taking part in a pilot of vtalent year, a 44-week full-time volunteering programme aimed at giving young people who are NEET opportunities to gain positive social experiences and work experience, and to study for qualifications. The programme provided support for the volunteers to undertake a range of placements within the college – for example, volunteering in the library or the sports department – as well as the opportunity to work together on shared tasks (for example, organising a fundraising event in the college).

Our research suggested that through providing such experiences the vtalent year programme positively affected some of the capabilities of participants, notably their confidence to navigate different work and social environments, ability to empathise, and sense of being able to influence their own futures positively. Our research also showed that some of the participants found the time-keeping and planning aspects of taking part in the programme difficult, although this did not appear to be a wholly negative experience – it seemed to be a manageable challenge within a supportive environment. But the most striking finding was the boost to the confidence of the participants actively looking to pursue either further study or a career.

Unlike some work-readiness programmes, we found that vtalent year gave young people the opportunity to be life-ready too – to find out what they enjoyed doing, their strong points as a person, and to incorporate this knowledge into decisions about further study and careers. Although we don’t have detailed ‘progression data’ for the cohort with whom we spoke, we do know that around 75 per cent of a previous cohort went on to either

employment or further study.⁴ And it seemed from our qualitative research that vtalent year provided the kind of experiences that prepare young people not only for work and study, but for work and study that is likely to lead to positive and sustainable (because it is chosen in an informed manner) employment.

Apart from gaining qualifications and specific skills, young people today often require two kinds of experience before they can embark on fruitful careers. One is meaningful work experience, which achieves two things: it clarifies expectations and aspirations around what work is like and what work a person might like to do; and it builds the general work habits and ‘transferable’ skills that employers rate so highly (eg using initiative, developing communication and social skills, problem-solving etc.). The other kind of experience is more informal and harder to pin down, but it consists of working with other people to achieve common goals – perhaps organising an event as part of a team, running a sports session or facilitating a meeting. This is the kind of positive structured activity of which high quality volunteering opportunities often consist.⁵

Young people who are NEET and 16 or 17 years old and somewhat confused about their future careers will benefit from both of these kinds of experiences. Indeed, this is also true of graduates who can be equally confused and lacking direction after a period of unemployment. Our research confirmed that these two age groups benefited significantly from gaining work experience and taking part in positive structured activities. Moreover, our research found the mixing of these age groups to be generally positive in terms of peer-relations.

Our findings have potentially significant implications for employment policy. At one end of the spectrum, some people on out-of-work benefits require targeted psychological support – counselling, mentoring, motivational interviewing and so on. At the other end, some people simply need practical support in applying for jobs. In the middle is a large cross-section of young people who have found themselves NEET, and who require the *experiences* that build general work-related skills and confidence. Those in this large group would benefit most significantly from long-duration programmes like vtalent year. Therefore such

programmes should be an important part of the welfare-to-work landscape.

Our findings also have implications for education policy, as there are clear opportunities to integrate a full-time volunteering programme such as vtalent year with the 16–19 entitlement to free education. Such a step would require a national full-time volunteering franchise that utilises existing public institutions such as further education colleges. This, of course, would not happen for free. But there would clearly be savings made through the contributions the volunteers made to public and community institutions, and also in the routes to re-engagement in learning and sustainable employment that are likely to result from participation.

Policy recommendations

The recommendations presented in this report have three objectives:

- to open up a wider variety of opportunities for young people to gain experience that prepares them for further learning or work
- to dovetail such opportunities into the welfare-to-work and benefits system
- to reform the funding mechanisms for post-16 education so that equity in spending is achieved and funds are available to pursue a wider variety of learning opportunities.

Some of these policy ideas are complex (especially the provision of individual learner accounts) and we don't attempt here to give precise details of how they would be implemented. Such an undertaking would require national policy makers to collaborate with practitioners and other experts. Nonetheless the propositions are sound and evidence based, and require further exploration.

National franchise

Given the importance of experience for developing young people's capabilities and skills we recommend that the Government explores the development of a national, full-time volunteering programme for 16–25-year-olds. Such a programme could follow something like the *valent year* format, by working in partnership with local authorities, public services and education institutions.

We recommend that the Government reviews *valent year*, reducing costs where possible, and begins a wider pilot of a similar programme throughout England.

Places on one version of the programme should be available to unemployed young people claiming state benefits (see below for more on this version of the programme). Financial support should come in the form of continued benefits for participants. Young people not on benefits but wishing to take part in a different version of the programme should be able to spend some of the credits from their individual learner account (see below) on doing so. The costs of both versions of the programme would lie in the central coordination and management of the franchise and pay for local coordinators, plus small allowances for travel, subsistence and other relevant living expenses. Colleges and other public institutions should be motivated to take part in the programme through the chance to gain a team of volunteers improving their services. We recommend keeping the mixed age format of the programme and the current age limitations (16–24-year-olds). The Government should decide whether the programme would be developed as a distinct strand of the National Citizen Service scheme.

We recommend that the body running a national full-time volunteering franchise matches some programme places to public service provision, in a way similar to the National Apprenticeship Service.

In our research we found that what many young people sought from full-time volunteering was the chance to gain meaningful work experience where real responsibility is expected and offered. Germany's *Zivildienst* coordinates public service

provision with volunteers to such an end. This kind of ‘social compact’ would guarantee meaningful work experience, create efficiencies and help generate a culture of volunteering. It would also help to embed a culture of mentoring and teaching on the part of public servants.

Flexibility, pastoral care and localism

The point of the franchise model is to combine national-level efficiencies and quality assurance with local-level flexibility.

We recommend that any expanded national franchise offers a more flexible programme of full and part-time volunteering that combines with part-time work.

valent year is a full-time volunteering programme, and the full-time commitment prevented some participants from undertaking part-time work. A more flexible approach to the scheme that enabled participants to choose between part-time or full-time placements would enable some to gain additional practical work experience and earn money while undertaking voluntary service. Benefit claimants would have to declare part-time work to Jobcentre Plus in the normal way and reductions would be made from their benefits in line with the rules that apply to jobseekers. Efforts should be made to ensure that working part-time does not leave participants worse off.

In expanding a national full-time volunteering franchise we recommend that the Government should adopt the valent year model of a dedicated coordinator employed by the franchise.

Such an individual acts as a key worker who can connect volunteers to opportunities, provide important pastoral care and support, and help volunteers navigate bureaucracy. The franchise model would allow for best practice to be shared among coordinators while also allowing individual creativity and freedom at the local level. A coordinator can be responsible for approximately 15–20 volunteers and this should be the only significant new cost associated with the programme.

Background policy – individual learner accounts and further education loans

Demos has long argued for a more demand-led skills and training regime for post-16 learners (see *The Skills Paradox*⁶). The key to such a system is the provision of individual learner accounts based on the unique identification numbers now supplied to students. The credit added to every citizen's account at birth should cover three years of study between the ages 16 and 19 on validated courses. The account could only be used for validated courses in the 16–19 education sector, with special arrangements for apprenticeships. Any unused credit could be accessed by individuals throughout their lives. The accounts should be simple for individuals to use, with bands of comparable prices for courses. Where individuals have spent all the credit in their learner accounts yet still want to retrain through 16–19 courses, further education loans should be available to them on a basis similar to that of university students (the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is currently investigating introducing such loans and plans to do so by 2013/14).

We recommend that the Government allows funds in individual learner accounts to be spent on accredited full-time volunteering programmes.

If young people decide they want to volunteer full-time for a year on a programme like vtalent year, combining public service with the opportunity to gain academic or vocational qualifications, they should be able to spend their individual learner account funds on this. They should be able to cut short their volunteering if they find work and receive a nominal refund to their learning account for time on the programme they have missed, but refunds should be available only in cases where work is found. With money following students and spent by them, this should help guarantee quality on full-time volunteering programmes.

We recommend that individuals should be able to spend their individual learner account funds on accredited private full-time volunteering programmes.

For example, City Year runs a full-time volunteering programme and provides participants with stipends. We see no reason why young people should not spend their learner account funds on such a programme. This would create healthy competition with any national franchise run by government, and provide greater choice in full-time placements for young people.

The Work Programme and Universal Credit

The Government's flagship reform of out-of-work benefits is the Work Programme. This is a payment-by-results scheme where private and third sector providers offer services to unemployed people in order to help them find sustainable work. Eventually, the Work Programme is to dovetail with the Universal Credit – a simplified single-payment system for out-of-work benefits that creates higher marginal returns for claimants on entering work than is presently the case.⁷

There are many potential difficulties with these programmes that we are unable to examine fully here. However, despite some specific reservations, Demos is broadly supportive of both programmes.

We recommend that the Government creates an enhanced version of a national full-time volunteering programme for recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance (and ultimately the Universal Credit) that dovetails with the Work Programme.

The format of this version of the programme (eg run by a coordinator, based in public institutions) would be much the same as the one paid for through individual learner accounts, but there would be additional support around navigating the benefits system, as well as more conditionality. After three months, participants would have to register on the Work Programme and incorporate specific work-readiness training into their weekly routine, as well as spend time job-searching. The

fact that participants would already be actively volunteering should greatly help their chances of finding work, by improving confidence, demonstrating genuine work-readiness and providing up-to-date references. That Work Programme providers are paid to place participants in sustained employment should mitigate temptations to push participants into unsuitable employment and incentivise them to coordinate job applications with clients' volunteering experiences.

There is no doubt that some of the recommendations above would involve costs to the taxpayer. However, as well as recouping some of these costs through the contributions volunteers would make to the institutions and communities where they were based, there are no doubt long-term savings to be made. These would largely accrue from savings in benefits payments as young people who are NEET successfully enter the labour market. However, there are a range of additional benefits to such a scheme, including:

- expanding the provision of structured, purposeful activities to enable young people to develop their skills in a supported learning environment
- improving the capabilities and work-readiness of jobseekers
- supporting young people to develop more focused career aspirations, leading to sustainable onward employment
- building the capacity of public and voluntary sector organisations and embedding a culture of volunteering among public servants and institutions
- mitigating the negative, scarring effects of long-term unemployment and the associated costs to public services (eg health).

1 The importance of capabilities

A capability is the power to do something
Amartya Sen

What are capabilities?

Capabilities are powers to do things. For example, to study for an exam, someone has to be able to apply themselves, concentrate, have the time to study. So capabilities can be internally and externally located; in the case of taking an exam, they are the ability to both concentrate and have access to a quiet space in which to study. To be concerned about capabilities is to be concerned about people's powers to shape their own lives.

Amartya Sen thinks the capabilities approach offers the best way to settle what is just.⁸ He explains this by describing a situation in which one has to decide to which of three children, Anne, Bob and Carla, to bestow a flute. Anne can already play the flute and has been unhappy lately, so the flute would give her great happiness. Bob argues that he deserves the flute because he is poorest. Carla argues that she needs an operation so that she can walk around and get on with her life, and that selling the flute would facilitate this. Ideal forms of justice would give good reasons to give the flute to different children. A utilitarian might say that Anne deserves the flute because she would derive the most enjoyment from it. An egalitarian might say that Bob deserves the flute because he is the poorest. The advocate of the importance of capabilities would give the flute to Carla because this would give the greatest increase in what any of the children could *do for themselves*.

By focusing on what people can do, Sen is breaking with the view of justice that has recently held sway, that of John Rawls. Rawls is concerned to identify perfectly just institutions

so that the practical pursuit of policy consists in edging closer towards them. Sen leaves arguments about such institutions to others, instead focusing on directly improving people's lives. By doing this, he believes he is in step with the real needs of citizens: 'People across the world agitate to get *more* justice... they are not clamouring for some kind of "minimal humanitarianism". Nor are they agitating for a "perfectly just" world society.'⁹ In this way the Capability Approach is said to be more in tune with everyday conceptions of justice – of overcoming, bit by bit, actual injustices.

However, to be in favour of focusing policy on capabilities is not to disregard the importance of wealth, as the case of Carla shows. Nor is it to ignore income inequalities. In fact, it may be that the Capabilities Approach requires *more* redistribution of wealth, not less. This is because different people need different amounts of wealth to possess the same capabilities. For instance, a blind person might require extra income or resources in order to have the capability to travel freely.

Following the Capabilities Approach is not a magical way to solve all injustices. There may be cases where no one can decide who could do more with scarce resources. And there may be cases where no amount of resources can increase capabilities, for example, where someone has Alzheimer's disease. To take a capability approach to policy is simply to prioritise policies that increase capabilities, where these can be identified, over those that merely redistribute wealth or advance some level of happiness.

Since the question Sen asks is 'How would justice be advanced?', anyone in favour of the Capabilities Approach must focus on capability deprivation. That is, try to improve specific capabilities for individuals and groups in which these are obviously lacking. There are many types of common capability deprivation such as illiteracy and illness. Young people are a group for whom capability deprivation is particularly unjust, since it denies them the power to determine the shape of their future lives.

This project has investigated whether the capabilities of young people in little or no employment have been improved by

taking part in a full-time volunteering programme (see chapter 3). Such a programme can be seen as an example of a capability-building intervention – one where the focus is not mainly on qualifications gained, but on working with others, sticking at things and gaining the confidence to see one’s life as under one’s own control. The present government has rightly invested in skills training – for example, increasing apprenticeships and expanding city university colleges. This is to be commended. But we might also, given their importance, consider the value of schemes that build the capabilities of young people through non-academic routes.

In some ways all a society concerned with justice and equality owes its citizens is an array of capabilities that enable each of them to live the most fulfilling and independent lives possible. Many of these capabilities will depend on external institutions such as families, schools, universities and decent employers, as well as health services. But many will also depend on what’s inside a young person, on how she interacts with these institutions.

It is by no means the role of the state to start interfering with people’s personalities, and warnings against the ‘therapeutic state’ are sometimes warranted. But capabilities represent quite general powers to do things that result from experience. To make an analogy, a soldier could do three weeks training and be thrust into battle, but this would be considered unjust, and rightly so. On the other hand, a soldier could do a year’s training and enter battle well prepared. The difference is between someone who has been through enough of the relevant experiences and someone who hasn’t. The same could be said about young people trying to start careers and find their way in the world. Through combinations of parenting, education and peer-group activity, some have had their capabilities properly trained into being. Others have not. Sometimes this is an injustice due to circumstance, sometimes it may be in part due to an individual’s behaviour. But even where an individual can be held responsible for avoiding the right kinds of experiences, do we not owe her a second chance to improve herself? Do we not owe her the opportunity to gain the experience required?

Capabilities are increasingly becoming more important for today's labour market than technical skills, which can often be quickly trained and developed. What cannot be quickly trained and developed are initiative, confidence and interpersonal and communication skills, yet in an environment where customer service and team working are increasingly important, these are the skills that count.¹⁰ And these are exactly the kinds of qualities that employers continually complain that job candidates lack.¹¹ Moreover, we ignore the provision of experience that prepares young people for working in our service-oriented economy at our peril: despite a recent slowdown in growth in the service sector it still accounts for around 75 per cent of GDP.¹²

For this project we took as a case study the vtalent year programme run by v, the National Young Volunteers' Service. The programme is a structured, 44-week full-time volunteering scheme that aims to boost capabilities and so combat disengagement from education and hasten entry into the labour market. The programme is designed and coordinated centrally by v, and delivered through local public service partners and education institutions which recruit and support a 'cohort' of vtalent year volunteers to undertake specific placements within their services. Delivery partners receive funding to pay for placement supervisors (usually staff already located in the public service or institution), who provide on-the-job training, mentoring and pastoral support to young volunteers. Partners also receive funding to cover travel, subsistence and other basic living expenses for young volunteers engaged in the programme, alongside provisions for a personal development grant, which participants can apply for on completion of the programme to support their onward progression.

Before going on to examine the vtalent year programme in more detail (chapter 4) we turn in the next chapter to the landscape of capability-building programmes in the UK today.

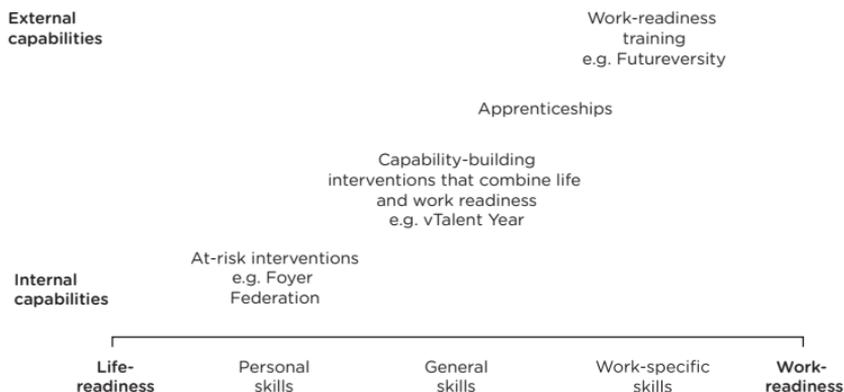
2 Why we need capability-building programmes

In the previous chapter we examined what capabilities are and why it is important for young people to possess them. We argued that they are important for giving young people the power to determine their lives and for entering and doing well in the labour market. This dual importance means that capability building programmes can be described as educational or training programmes that enhance ‘life readiness’ and ‘work readiness’, through the development of general (hence ‘transferable’) skills. Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between life readiness and work readiness, and between internal and external capabilities.

Figure 1 shows that there is a wide range of capability building programmes. At one end of the range lie the more psychological and therapeutic personal development programmes, concerned almost entirely with internal capabilities such as a positive sense of self and emotional self-regulation. In the middle of the range lie the more general capability building programmes, such as the vtalent year programme, which is the subject of a detailed case study in the next chapter. The programmes located here on the graphic concentrate on the relationship between internal and external capabilities and aim to impart general skills like social skills – the confidence to use them and the networks through which they can be used to an individual’s advantage. In addition they may also involve the imparting of some occupationally specific skills, and qualifications to signal their possession. As we move to the right of the range, the imparting of specific skills becomes more prominent, as does the emphasis on external capabilities – the connections, qualifications, courses and job opportunities that facilitate entry into jobs or job-related further study.

As figure 1 shows, there is a large middle section of the range of programmes where life readiness and work readiness are

Figure 1 **The life-readiness/work-readiness scale**



mixed together, and where internal capabilities are developed through the provision of external capabilities. This confluence is to be expected in a service-oriented economy where general personal skills or ‘character capabilities’ are required to succeed in many occupations. Learning to be someone who can regulate her emotions, get on with others in difficult circumstances and apply herself to achieving long-term goals with other people is an investment for a (hopefully) flourishing life as much as it is a valuable preparation for the world of work.

Given the focus of this report – providing experiences that facilitate positive transitions from youth to adulthood and from education to work – we are concerned largely with the middle of the range of capability-building programmes. Before going on to discuss the current provision of these programmes in the UK, it is worth saying a little about the social and economic context within which they take place. There are three salient contextualising factors, all of which are now well established:

- rising and high levels of youth employment;
- a dearth of structured transitions for segments of the population;

- an elongation of the transition from youth to adulthood and from education to work.

It is the combination of these factors in addition to the UK's flexible labour-market and service-oriented economy that makes the middle section of the upward line in figure 1 so important.

Youth unemployment

In spring 2011 youth unemployment stands at 20.4 per cent.¹³ Government policy to reduce it seems to amount to increasing the number of apprenticeships that are available, increasing work experience placements and (rather vaguely) opening up internships to young people from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds through schemes such as the new Civil Service Fast Stream Summer Diversity Internships.¹⁴ All this is to be welcomed, but one might question the current macro-economic orthodoxy that forbids activism by government in the labour market. In *The Forgotten Half* Demos argued that the current state of youth unemployment warrants such activism, and called for a tapered reduction in employers' National Insurance contributions for workers between 16 and 25 years old.¹⁵ The current lack of intervention in the labour market seems to be premised on the idea that economic growth will bring youth unemployment down in due course. How much growth there will be in the economy, and how much youth employment will be affected by this predicted growth, are moot points. But there is reason to be concerned that economic growth will not be enough, and that large swathes of the youth population are ill-equipped to respond to job market growth in the event that economic prosperity returns.

Even in the boom years of the 1980s and 1990s youth unemployment was high – between 5 per cent and 10 per cent higher than the rest of the population.¹⁶ In fact, it has been rising steadily since the early 2000s.¹⁷ No one fully understands why this is. But it is clear that the kinds of entry-level jobs that young people once succeeded in acquiring have all but disappeared

from the labour market, with many young people facing the ‘chicken and egg’ situation of trying to get jobs only to find that without existing work experience they cannot do so. For graduates, internships have filled this gap, but there are problems with making internships an accepted way-station on the road to employment for young people, not least the fact that internships favour those wealthy enough to work unpaid.

Youth unemployment rates of 20 per cent are not extreme by international standards. Spain, for example, has youth unemployment of around 42 per cent.¹⁸ On the other hand, Denmark currently has a lower rate of around 13 per cent.¹⁹ However, although UK youth unemployment is slightly below the OECD average, rates of around 20 per cent are troubling partly because of social habits and norms specific to the UK.²⁰ It is usual for young people in the UK to become financially and socially independent quite early in life compared with other European countries. So on the one hand young people who are unable to enter the labour market for a number of years experience not only economic hardship but also feelings of frustration and perhaps even shame. On the other hand, the UK lacks the social infrastructure necessary to ease the wait for meaningful unemployment. Unlike countries such as Spain and Italy, the UK does not have family traditions of children living with parents well into the late 20s and early 30s. Nor does it have a large enough social housing sector, or controlled or low enough private rents – as is the case for example with Germany – for young people to live independently from their parents on only low-paid or part-time work.

It might also be argued that although they look worrying, unemployment rates in the UK are not historically unprecedented. This is because in the 1980s rates were actually similar if not worse, although since consistent data was not collected then it is hard to make a direct comparison. In 1993 the UK moved to calculating youth unemployment according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition. This definition includes all young people aged between 16 and 24 years old who are ‘jobless, available for work, and actively seeking work’, which means that members of this cohort in full-

time education but still looking for work are included.²¹ Of the current 963,000 unemployed young people, 297,000 are in full-time education. These young people would not have been included in unemployment figures from the 1980s. Moreover, as more young people have entered full-time education in general, the percentage of the cohort actively seeking work or in work has shrunk (from 75 per cent in 1993 to 64.2 per cent in 2010). The effect of this shrinkage is that the same absolute number of unemployed young people in 2010 as 1993 will appear as a larger percentage at the later date.

Yet even if unemployment rates are not as historically unprecedented as they sound, it should be borne in mind that there is considerable evidence that the extended periods of unemployment faced by many young people in the 1980s ‘scarred’ them by harming their earning potential over the course of their lives.²² We also know that sustained unemployment can have other negative effects (such as detrimental effects on physical health and emotional well-being).²³ Youth unemployment is a very serious matter.

16–25 - the new landscape of transition

For the past 30 years or so the template for the transition from education to work as well as to adulthood has been premised on the ideal of a smooth transition from school, college or university into an entry-level job. Although the reality may never have exactly mirrored this model, policy decisions have largely been based on it, particularly through the development of ever more specialised qualifications and the increasing emphasis on qualification attainment above all other educational processes and outcomes. The basic idea is the following: students gain qualifications at school and beyond that allow employers to sift them on ability. Qualifications, then, act as signifiers of ‘human capital’ in an open, flexible and competitive labour market.

However, this way of preparing young people for the labour market rests on a fundamental error: to think of young people as possessing the same educational and training needs as adults who are already established in the labour market. The

whole thrust of qualification and curriculum reform over the last 20 years has been to design stand-alone, bite-size modules of learning whose *raison d'être* is to prepare young people for qualification attainment – for example the modularisation of GCSEs and A levels, and the promotion of NVQs. Moreover, in the vocational sectors of education, incentive schemes like ‘outcome related payments’ (payment on the achievement of a designated outcome such as gaining a qualification), have led to students taking a high number of short, unconnected courses. This is because providers are motivated to enter students into as many courses as possible, and to push students through these courses as quickly as possible.²⁴

Such courses make perfect sense for an adult who already possesses a variety of work-related skills and who seeks to supplement them with specific skills, or who wishes to have skills that she already possesses certified officially. But they are largely unhelpful for young people, who require longer and more holistic arcs of learning. Young people are, lest we forget, *young*, and this means they are building up a whole host of *general* skills or capabilities that are bound up with making the transition to adulthood as much as work.

It is worth casting our minds back to a different approach to the school-to-work transition. In post-war Britain, over a third of young men entered apprenticeships.²⁵ For those who did not and for young women, unless they were part of the very select group attending university (around 5 per cent of young people in 1960),²⁶ entry-level jobs in clerical, retail and other service sectors offered a high degree of on-the-job training, and corresponding opportunities for in-work progression. Furthermore, for those who gained few qualifications and skills, reasonably well-paid low-skilled and semi-skilled jobs were plentiful. However, in the 1970s the number of British apprenticeships began a catastrophic decline, and after 1976 (the end of the era of full employment) the supply of well-paid low- and semi-skilled jobs collapsed too.

The result was high unemployment among the young and a general trend towards university attendance. This trend brought in its wake a greater and greater emphasis on exam grades, since

these were what gained young people entry to the best universities. Since vocational education followed the same trend as universities, courses either became pathways to higher education (eg BTEC Nationals) or signifiers of value in a competitive labour market no longer premised on full employment.

In fact, over this same period youth unemployment steadily rose. Young people were entering a more and more competitive job market where entry-level positions were drying up and apprenticeships had all but disappeared. The result was that the education system was churning out young people armed with qualifications but little else, and some of these qualifications (eg NVQs) were of little value in the workplace.²⁷ Previously, apprenticeships and entry-level jobs had provided a more rounded transition from novice to worker, and from young person to adult. Moreover, with the shift to greater university attendance, employers had naturally started to rely on the free training being provided by Britain's higher education sector.²⁸

As the service sector became more important in the economy, a general education from a university also rose in value. Such an education signalled that a job applicant had acquired logical, analytical and communication skills, and that she could work under her own initiative. These skills had become increasingly important in a flexible and service oriented labour market and university degrees became signifiers of high-level core skills in literacy and numeracy, 'soft skills' and more occupationally specific skills. Hence graduate unemployment was consistently lower than youth unemployment per se throughout the 1990s and 2000s.²⁹ Government had entered into a pact that was very fruitful for industry: the former provided a mass transition route from school to work free of charge to the latter (increasingly, with the introduction of fees and the withdrawal of universal maintenance grants, students themselves have entered into this pact). There was no need any more for entry-level jobs.

In her 2011 report on vocational education Alison Wolf has detailed the increasing lack of entry-level jobs. In the report Wolf uses the term 'churn' to describe the mixture of short-term work contracts, further education and training, and periods of

unemployment that characterises the experience of some of the young people who enter the labour market without going to university. She also showed that the vast majority of young people change jobs and sectors frequently, even those who attend university. In her analysis of data gathered by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, Wolf revealed that young people working between 1998 and 2008 changed jobs 3.5 times, changed occupations 2.5 times and changed sectors 1.8 times.³⁰ But it is among those who don't go to university that 'churn' is highest. Wolf wrote: 'In the cohort born in 1991, 62 per cent of employed young people changed sector in the one year interval between age 17/18 and 18/19. About 40 per cent also changed their broad occupational level.'³¹

The peripatetic nature of young people's employment undermines the policy assumption that specific stand-alone qualifications should be the norm for people taking a non-university route post-16. Rather than specific vocational qualifications, Wolf's report suggests that employers want young people to have good basic literacy and numeracy skills and actual experience of the work environment. The upshot is that the UK's education system has been producing one set of people equipped with general skills and capabilities who are able to profit from the long transition from school to work, especially the high volatility of the early years of employment. These young people are graduates who attend good universities and can increasingly afford to take internships. It remains to be seen whether in the current climate of 'stagflation' graduates will remain as well protected against unemployment as they have been (youth unemployment and graduate unemployment levels coincide at present), but one suspects they will.

However, graduates are not only better-protected against unemployment because of the academic skills they acquire. They are also placed on a conveyor belt at 16 that runs all the way to the early 20s. This conveyor belt of support helps socialise them into being young adults *before* they enter the labour market proper. In other words, the university route, with its long duration and attendant social norms and habits, provides a structured transition into adulthood where social mixing, self-

exploration, extracurricular activities and the self-discipline that degree level study instils all combine to produce the kind of workers that the service economy wants to employ. Or perhaps to turn this around: the service oriented economy becomes dominated by graduates and so being a graduate becomes the social norm.

This conveyor belt is well funded by government and, as has been mentioned, serves as a subsidy on industry. However, private wealth also now plays a big role in extending the reach of the conveyor belt into the first year or two of employment. Graduate internships, now standard in many occupations and sectors, provide the last piece in the jigsaw for graduates before they enter employment proper: meaningful work experience.

Our education system is making some young people life- and work-ready through university and internships. It is taking others only halfway there – in the next chapter we will see that some graduates who do not benefit from internships can leave university lacking in work-readiness. Others have simply found themselves in an inhospitable labour market, which no longer responds to qualifications alone, and requires an equal measure of relevant experience to be successful.

With the resurgence of apprenticeships the government is trying to make up for the removal of the conveyor belt of support for school leavers at 16 or 17. Apprenticeships are an excellent option for some young people precisely because they combine sector specific knowledge with general education and work habits. The decline of apprenticeships in the UK not only signalled the decline of skills based more around manufacturing but also triggered a decline in opportunities for a structured transition into work and adult life.

The role of apprenticeships in providing such a structured transition is best understood with reference to the country that is commonly held to have the best and largest apprenticeship system in the world: Germany. In Germany around 60 per cent of young people still enter apprenticeships (although a significant number of these go on to higher education).³² The German word for what an apprentice is training towards is *Beruf* – a vocation or identity. This identity is on the one hand defined by

sector specific skills gained in both the workplace and through educational institutions (for example, skills in bakery). But it is also defined by having the general identity of being a mature and responsible worker and adult. This latter status is endowed again by both education and on-the-job experience. General education is a big part of apprenticeship provision in Germany, alongside the inculcation of general work habits and the development of capabilities.

The fact that good apprenticeships provide an alternative transition to life and work readiness, in a similar way to a university education plus an internship, can be seen in the fact that ex-apprentices enjoy considerable wage premiums (above average wage returns) even when they change sectors completely (in the UK and Germany).³³ In other words, apprenticeships provide general skills and capabilities that mean a young person is well insulated against a labour market that is volatile and highly flexible. But it is crucial that apprenticeships be long enough, educational enough and demanding enough to impart these skills (for reasons to think some new British apprenticeships might be on the wrong side of these requirements see previous Demos research in *The Forgotten Half*).³⁴ And it is also crucial that the educational system be set up to support young people who are waiting for an apprenticeship place to open up. In Germany at any one time there may be up to a one-third mismatch between supply and demand so that hundreds of thousands of young people are taking part in short holding courses or other activities.

An hour-glass shaped labour market and social mobility

Our economy is increasingly creating an ‘hour-glass’ labour market where there is a stable supply of low-skilled jobs, a ‘squeezed middle’ of semi-skilled and middle-skilled jobs, and a large supply of professional and managerial jobs that require university degrees (although in fact, and very often for no good reason, many jobs in the ‘squeezed middle’ now routinely require university degrees).³⁵ Young people are tending to enter this

labour market at three points: into temporary and unstable low-skilled work; into the middle-level ‘technician’ jobs that are often under pressure from globalisation; and into professional service-oriented jobs.

Young people entering the labour market at these three points are increasingly expected to have already gained relevant experience. Employers, for reasons that are unclear (but undoubtedly connected to the free training available from universities) have simply become used to not having to train workers to any great extent. This premium on experience has affected the bottom, middle and top segments of the labour-market.

At the bottom of the hour-glass, young people without relevant experience often enter jobs in areas like labouring that rarely offer prospects of in-work progression, rather than getting a foot on the ladder of the service sector and a job that more often does offer such progression. Demos’s recent research into the youth labour market in *The Forgotten Half* revealed that since 2000 the number of young people going into sales-related employment has fallen from 10 per cent to 6 per cent. Similarly, the percentage of young people in secretarial or clerical work has fallen substantially from 13 per cent to 0.1 per cent. Conversely, our research showed that the percentage of young people going into labouring and other low-skilled occupations has more than doubled, increasing from 13 per cent to 27 per cent.³⁶

In the middle of the hour-glass, young people fare better, because work experience tends to have been an important part of an apprenticeship, BTEC National or foundational degree. And in the top half of the market graduates use their degrees as badges of the right kind of skills, socialisation and maturity so desired by employers. But here too the pressure to have gained work experience is telling: more and more graduates must spend time on internships and in voluntary positions in order to get a foot in the door.

There are many things that could be done to improve the prospects of young people entering the youth labour market, and Demos has explored some of them (see *The Forgotten Half*). Here we concentrate on the way that experience plays such an

important role in facilitating entry into a service-oriented labour market at the bottom and the top of the hour-glass. The experience that is required is not only work experience. It also includes other kinds of experiences that build 'soft skills' or capabilities. Qualities like confidence, self-organisation, politeness and empathy are only developed through experience, and the kinds of experience that produce such qualities are required in today's labour market.

The need for a wide variety of life and work-readiness schemes

As has been argued, neither the education system nor the economy serves many young people well in supporting the transition from school to work and adulthood. Figure 1 lays out the variety of programmes (excluding university) for which there is demand. Such programmes are required in order to make up for the loss of apprenticeships and entry-level jobs that has left many gaps in the 'conveyor belt' of support from school to work. As figure 1 illustrates, these programmes can be at the personal level and very much aimed at internal capabilities – the kinds of capabilities that enable one to be life-ready enough to go on to prepare to be work-ready. Or they can be aimed more at general competencies and specific work-related skills. The point is that wherever there is shortfall in either life or work-readiness, provision should be available to aid young people to build capabilities and skills. This might be when someone leaves school at 16 with no qualifications, or when someone leaves university yet has no means to gain work experience and is lacking in confidence. If the aim is to move the UK towards producing more apprenticeships then a wide variety of life and work-readiness programmes need to be on offer in order to maintain young people in the system while they wait for apprenticeship places to open up.

Behind the much-trumpeted move to a flexible and dynamic labour market and a service-oriented and post-manufacturing economy lies another story: the story of capability building through structured transitions. Those who have

generally succeeded in such a labour market and economy have received a conveyor belt of support right up until meaningful employment in their early 20s. It is not the case that – as the individualistic philosophy of the times would have it – young people became miraculously able to make this transition unaided. If anything, the fact that young people have had to survive in a less structured and more volatile labour market than ever before has meant that forms of support have become even more important.

3 The current provision of capability-building programmes in the UK

In this chapter the current provision of life- and work-readiness programmes in the UK is examined. We leave aside apprenticeships, as future Demos work hopes to provide a detailed analysis of the state of apprenticeships in the modern UK economy. The programmes are grouped into those on the left-hand side of figure 1 – that is, on life-readiness and internal capabilities – and those on the right-hand side that focus on external capabilities and work readiness.

In order to examine this provision we have conducted a literature review into evaluations of previous and existing projects, and drawn on previous work conducted by Demos on service learning. In addition we have used a series of case studies to define the crucial elements that allow programmes to build capabilities, and made links between private and public sector programmes and the new provision being implemented as part of the Work Programme, the Government's new welfare-to-work initiative.

Who participates in life and work-readiness programmes?

In the next chapter we examine in some detail a case study of a programme that focuses on capability-building for life- and work-readiness, vtalent year. The young people participating in vtalent year come from a wide range of social backgrounds (at least 40 per cent of whom were previously not in employment, education or training (NEET)), including graduates, school leavers and young parents, and native and non-native English speakers. This breadth of intake is indicative of life- and work-readiness programmes in general – these programmes come into

play wherever there is a gap to be bridged by the provision of experience and support. This can be at the beginning of the school-to-work transition where someone is disengaged from learning, or at the end, where someone has been through university but finds they are lacking work experience or social skills to progress into employment.

Programmes like vtalent year and City Year require participants to commit to a year of full-time voluntary work. They are designed to bridge the gap between education and employment, or compulsory and post-16 education. But some young people participate in capability-building programmes while still at school to prepare them for the challenges offered by the world of work. Schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award are completed by pupils alongside their academic studies, and offered as evidence of a 'well rounded' personality to prospective employers and higher education admissions staff.

Arguably, the current economic climate has given capability building schemes a double function: not only do they prepare young people for work, but they can also counteract the negative effects of long-term unemployment by keeping young people engaged in purposeful activities which build their resilience, skills and capabilities. Indeed, there is a growing sense that these schemes are no longer merely the preserve of the young, but that they may also play a role in supporting older adults struggling with worklessness. Conversations that Demos has had with individuals close to the previous government's Future Jobs Fund – a scheme which funded a job, work experience or training for six months, and was offered to young people who had been out of work for a year – revealed that the success of the scheme had informed plans to roll out a similar programme to older jobseekers, and individuals on unemployment benefit.³⁷

Although the Future Jobs Fund was cut by the Coalition Government, there are hopes that the new Work Programme will replicate the elements of it that were successful. The need for such programmes has been highlighted by research by Sheffield Hallam University's Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, which has shown that a huge proportion of long-term unemployed people lack the confidence needed to re-enter the

job market, describing themselves as ‘too big a risk’ because they have ‘too little experience’ or are ‘too old’.³⁸

Why we need capability building programmes

As has been argued, we need capability-building programmes to assist young people in making the transition to adulthood and employment in the context of high youth unemployment. In 2004 researchers at the University of Bristol confirmed the presence of a ‘wage scar’ on the potential earnings of young people who were NEET for long periods. Their research showed that at the age of 42, adults who had suffered from early unemployment earned 12–15 per cent less than their peers who had been continuously employed.³⁹ Although there is no direct evidence that capability building programmes can help offset the scarring effects of unemployment, there is a consensus among academics that inactivity due to unemployment is strongly linked to mental health problems.⁴⁰ The labour market expert Professor Steve Fothergill, in conversation with Demos, has estimated that the likelihood of an individual suffering from depression is significantly increased following 18 months on incapacity benefit.

The ill-effects of inactivity are also illustrated by the steady yet striking rise in the amount of male incapacity benefit claimants in the UK.⁴¹ Looking at the figures more closely, the negative effects of long-term unemployment on claimants’ mental health can be inferred from what academics at Sheffield Hallam’s Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research call the ‘lobster pot’ effect: of all the people claiming incapacity benefit in the UK, around half have been on it for five years and a quarter have been claiming for ten years or more. In total 2.6 million people currently claim incapacity benefit.⁴²

Fothergill’s and others’ research into the negative effects of the economic inactivity of incapacity benefit claimants makes a suggestive case for the potential for capability building and work-readiness programmes to act as a safety net for young people.⁴³ In the context of the current labour market, schemes that help people to remain ‘active’ are likely to play an increasingly crucial role.

Capability building at the life-readiness end of the scale

Our primary case study of programmes that focus on the life-readiness of young people is the Foyer Federation. This organisation works with vulnerable young people for whom the transition into adulthood is particularly challenging. These young people include those leaving the care system, ex-offenders, and young people struggling with substance misuse. What distinguishes the Foyer's offer from more traditional social housing services is the organisation's commitment to house and support vulnerable individuals – normally for a period of around 11 months – as part of a 'deal': in return for the support that Foyer offers, residents are contractually obliged to engage with the foundation's personal development services.

Over the past two decades the Foyer Federation has piloted a range of innovative schemes designed to facilitate the transition to adulthood by increasing participants' sense of agency in their lives. The MyNav initiative uses Web 2.0 technology to get participants to engage in informal learning and skills building activities, encouraging users to 'become active producers and consumers of learning'.⁴⁴ By getting them to record their activities on an online forum, MyNav emphasises the role such activities play in skills and capability building. The scheme thus creates a sense among participants that their transition into adulthood is a journey which they have the agency to direct.

The Working Assets programme builds on the 'deal' that expresses the Foyer's ethos, and extends its reach to include the local community as well as residents. As part of the programme, groups of Foyer residents pitch community projects to the Tenants Services Authority. Successful groups are partnered with other people from the local area, and given the support and resources to run the project. The scheme is thus premised on a dual obligation – the obligation on the part of Foyer residents to contribute to the local community being matched by an obligation on the part of the community to provide opportunities for the residents to contribute.

According to the 2008 Foyer Benchmarking Review, since 1992 the 130 Foyers nationwide have,

helped over 150,000 young people to overcome dependency and achieve more independent lives. 75 per cent of young people entering Foyers are able to find pathways into work, housing and education.’⁴⁵

A major factor in the Foyer Federation’s success has come from its openness to innovative approaches to structured transitions from youth to adulthood and employment. The new ‘Open Talent’ scheme, which includes personal budgets, emphasises the need to reconfigure young people’s support services away from a model based on ‘deficit’, and towards one based on potential.

In a recent publication the organisation lambasted the ‘lack of sophistication in the way that we understand, identify and support talent’. Arguing for a change in the implementation of support services more widely, it criticised the current mechanisms of ‘coping and control’ through which social care services are delivered, creating ‘a toxic debt of young people who are ill equipped to take up their future responsibilities’.⁴⁶

In sum, the Foyer Federation runs a number of schemes aimed at providing activities and support that engender the enhancement of capabilities in young people from troubled and disadvantaged backgrounds. These activities tend to focus on building up internal capabilities so that young people can become more life-ready (capabilities like the ability to regulate emotions and retain a stable sense of self). This is an important section of the transition from youth to adulthood and employment, and enables young people to go on to take further advantage of the external capabilities available to them (widen their social networks, build relationships and gain work experience). It is of note, and something to be revisited below, that Foyer Federation’s expertise and success is based on localised experimentation and the spread of best practice rather than centralised control of implementation.

Volunteering and the building of capabilities

Large-scale volunteering programmes are by their nature less focused on individual personal development. Rather, they presume a certain amount of ‘get up and go’ on behalf of

participants in the first place – that they have a certain threshold of internal capabilities, which they then develop further through volunteering opportunities.

Unlike in countries such as Canada and Germany, whose volunteering traditions are still firmly embedded within national military service schemes, in the UK the provision of volunteering opportunities has tended to be more local. Although the previous two governments have both instigated national volunteering programmes, there is still nothing on the scale of Canada's Katimavik or Germany's *Zivildienst*.

International case studies: Katimavik and Zivildienst

Canada's Katimavik is a six- to nine-month volunteering programme during which participants live away from home and volunteer with community groups. Participants complete the programme in teams of around ten, and each group is carefully constructed to ensure that individuals come from a mixture of different backgrounds. The Katimavik programme is structured around a theme, for example, 'cultural discovery and civic engagement' or 'eco-citizenship and cultural identity'. Each group selects its own theme, which is then explored through a range of structured activities. In addition, participants volunteer for a community project for 35 hours per week, providing an important service to the host community. Roles undertaken by volunteers include caring for the elderly, assisting students, volunteering in libraries, assisting in food handling and giving general customer service. Katimavik's work placements are designed to deliver 'experiential learning opportunities', which allow participants to develop a range of life and work skills.

Community partner assessments of the value of Katimavik volunteers to the community they serve have put their Canada-wide value at \$13,845,917.75, with a return of \$2.20 for each \$1 spent by Katimavik.⁴⁷ The programme also appears to have a significant impact on participants' work readiness and levels of civic engagement. Research by the Étude Économique Conseil (EEC Canada) Inc has shown that 95 per cent of participants perceive themselves as being 'more employable' once having

completed the programme.⁴⁸ Participants also gain knowledge of Canada as a whole, with 90 per cent claiming to have a ‘very good’ or ‘good’ knowledge of the country, and to have become more aware of environmental issues after taking part in the scheme. For instance, having completed the course, 92 per cent of participants claimed to practise the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle), as opposed to only 74 per cent before.⁴⁹

Germany’s *Zivildienst* is also strongly integrated within the country’s civil society and public sector, being developed as an alternative to military conscription in the 1970s. Participants, who are known as ‘*Zivis*’, play an important role in supporting Germany’s social services and charity sector. They work in care homes and hospitals,⁵⁰ and assist with the humanitarian work of charitable organisations such as the catholic aid group Caritas.⁵¹ They gain valuable life and work experience. The importance of *Zivis* to the smooth running of the German system has recently been emphasised by the reaction of the charity sector to the announcement that the German government is scrapping military and civil conscription. Many charity representatives claim that a lot of schemes – including support groups for people with dementia – will have to be scrapped because of lack of staff; such is the degree of the charitable and public sectors’ reliance on *Zivis* to perform these key roles.⁵²

Despite its importance for the provision of social services across Germany, recent restructuring of the armed forces means that military conscription – and, by extension, *Zivildienst* – will come to an end in summer 2011. Before 2002 *Zivis* filled 75 per cent of the posts in patient care and patient transport services, but this figure has dropped dramatically: the number of young people in *Zivildienst* positions in 2007 was down 60 per cent compared with pre-2002. Interestingly, a report by Deutsche Bank in 2010 pointed out that the slump in the numbers of *Zivis* working in care services is in part due to cuts to the duration of the scheme. Since 1990 the original 20-month duration has been eroded to just six, making it increasingly untenable for providers to train volunteers to the previous high levels.

Underlying the *Zivildienst* and Katimavik programmes is a social compact that emphasises the mutuality of the relationship

between the volunteers and the community they serve. Both schemes lay a strong emphasis on the role of the volunteer labour force in maintaining and augmenting civil society, while gaining valuable skills in the process. *Zivildienst*, in particular, demonstrates the potential of young volunteers to act as a valuable social asset, building the capacity of key public services. The scheme places a large burden of trust in Germany's young people, and shows an implicit belief in their ability to perform important roles, which have a genuine impact. Crucially, both schemes are structured in a way that allows them to 'piggy-back' on existing services and institutions. This 'piggy-backing' means that the labour needs of charities and community groups direct the distribution of volunteers, and ensures that the volunteer experience is useful and meaningful.

National-level volunteering and capability-building programmes in the UK

There is a potential tension between the UK Government's new country-wide National Citizen Service scheme and the philosophy of localism that is driving current policy. The existing provision of capability programmes in the UK represents an astonishing diversity of grassroots and community-led projects and a range of interesting partnerships between local authorities and local businesses. It is therefore crucial that universal community-service schemes like the National Citizen Service do not serve to flatten the existing smaller-scale schemes, and that funding remains available for existing bodies as well as for new government-led initiatives. Another issue is that the NCS is currently only planned to be available to 16-year-olds and this seems unduly restrictive of when young people might choose to take part in the scheme. It also does not take into account the fact that young people could benefit from taking part at any point between the ages of 16 and 25.

The UK has three umbrella organisations that deliver young people's capability building programmes on a national scale: v, the National Young Volunteers' Service, which has engaged over 1 million young people in volunteering and

community action since 2006; City Year, a UK version of America's City Year volunteering scheme in which young people participate in ten months of full-time community service; and David Cameron's flagship National Citizen Service. The latter two have recently been piloted in the UK for the first time, while v was established in 2006 in response to the Russell Commission, which tasked government with developing a national framework for youth volunteering.⁵³

As we have established, rather than having a long history of state-funded capability building programmes like the countries mentioned above, until 2006 such programmes in the UK were largely the province of private companies and charities. The most well known of the UK's independent capability building programmes are the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, World Challenge and Raleigh. All three run residential trips with an element of volunteering or community service. Girl Guiding UK and the Scouts are also major names in capability building, having run programmes for young people below the age of 18 for over a century.

Although schools can often receive funding to run Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, the overseas projects run by World Challenge and Raleigh are largely the province of young people from wealthier backgrounds. Raleigh, which organises 'adventure expeditions' and volunteering projects for young people aged 17–24 and 25 plus, charges £1,500 for a three-and-a-half-week expedition, and £2,995 for ten-week expeditions. In the past the high up-front costs of these programmes could be justified by the fact that the capabilities they delivered were only needed by those going into high-level management level jobs. They were viewed as an investment by more affluent parents eager to give their children an edge in the labour market.

The past couple of years have seen a growing awareness that the demographic of people benefiting from programmes that build self-confidence, self reliance and interpersonal skills has become increasingly broad. As we saw in the last chapter, there has been a major increase in service sector jobs for which these capabilities are crucial. Moreover, the prevalence of such capability-building programmes for wealthier, university bound

young people reiterates the point made above about there being a conveyor belt of support for some graduates. Against this background there is a good case for some national-level capability building programmes that serve less affluent young people who are not in need of the more targeted support for life-readiness of the kind supplied by the Foyer Federation.

City Year

City Year bears many similarities with vtalent year, which we assess in detail in the next chapter. Established in USA in 1988, City Year operates in 20 cities across the USA. It is a ten-month programme during which 17–24-year-olds participate in full-time community service, working within schools as mentors and classroom assistants, and running workshops on social issues. Participants are paid a stipend and, in the USA, benefit from the cachet of participating in a nationally recognised programme.

A pilot version of City Year – City Year London – was rolled out in North and East London in September 2010. During the pilot year young people from Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Islington will be volunteering in six primary schools, acting as mentors and teaching assistants and running after-school clubs. The structure of the mentoring programme allows volunteers to work closely with individual pupils, and draws on evidence from the US programme of the positive value of ‘near peer-age’ personal relationships.⁵⁴

In the future the City Year London curriculum will be structured around three flagship ‘service programmes’. The first will be the school-based programme in which City Year volunteers work with primary school children. The second will be the City Heroes programme, which sees volunteers running workshops on social issues and promoting civic service for secondary school students aged 11–16, and facilitating youth volunteering projects. The third programme will extend the reach of the scheme beyond schools and into the local community: City Year participants will organise community volunteering projects and run community events to promote civic engagement in the local area.

The newness of the scheme in the UK makes it impossible to assess how effective the transfer from the USA has been at this stage. What is interesting, however, is to look at the terms through which the scheme has been evaluated in the USA. Studies there assess the scheme by measuring its impact on political efficacy, egalitarianism, social trust and general civic engagement, categories which reveal the programme's strong emphasis on supporting civil society and building active citizens. A 2007 survey of the US scheme by the think tank Policy Studies Associates found that City Year was largely successful on this front: participants had a greater sense of political efficacy and higher levels of social trust than their peers, and increased levels of social capital.⁵⁵ It is unclear as yet whether the programme will be able to repeat these successes in the UK, but the many similarities between the US and UK versions make it likely that this will be the case.

The National Citizen Service - 'The Challenge'

The National Citizen Service (NCS) – David Cameron's version of a national community service programme – was a feature of all three of the main political parties' manifestos in 2009. It was initially conceived of as a compulsory form of non-military national service. Following consultation with experts from the community and volunteering sectors the scheme became non-compulsory, yet was still designed to be completed by all 16-year-olds in the UK. Its aim is to 'mix young people from different backgrounds in a way that doesn't happen now... teach[ing] them what it means to be socially responsible by asking them to serve their communities.'⁵⁶ The NCS was piloted in 2009 by The Challenge, with 158 15–16-year-olds from Southwark and North Hammersmith. Recruitment was originally driven by outreach work in schools and community groups by Challenge representatives, with the aim that future recruitment will be run in large part by participants from previous years.

The Government's aim is for 11,000 young people to participate in the NCS in 2011, rising to 30,000 in 2012. As the NCS is being delivered by a range of different providers across

the UK, it is hard to ascertain the overarching structure for the course. It seems the programme will run for three weeks full time, followed by 30 hours with young people planning and delivering a social action project within their local communities over a five-week period – this was also the structure of the NCS pilot, run by The Challenge. As the third largest NCS delivery partner, v will be running its programme in partnership with the Dame Kelly Holmes Legacy Trust, which will follow a similar structure to the one outlined above, and include a two-week residential element. However, Catch22, a charity that will run the NCS in several areas of the UK, says its version of the programme will involve a full-time commitment for 7–8 weeks, with a two-week residential element at the start of the programme.

An evaluation of the NCS pilot delivered by The Challenge was conducted by the University of Strathclyde and revealed a range of problems with the programme in its original iteration. While the residential element of The Challenge encouraged social mixing, assessors found that the duration of new inter-peer group relationships was limited, and often only lasted as long as the programme. Additionally, the structure of the NCS was criticised for reinforcing rather than challenging existing class structures: participants from wealthier backgrounds seemed to be more likely to take on leadership roles in the programme, while those from less wealthy backgrounds were less proactive and tended to take a back seat.⁵⁷

A second concern raised by the University of Strathclyde related to the social value of the community projects offered to Challenge participants. Writing about the experience of participants following the ‘Real Challenge’ – the community-based element of the programme, researchers from the university observed:

Some participants perceived a lack of direction and structure in the Real Challenge... This, coupled with a lack of clear impact on the community from these projects, led to a level of de-motivation among some.⁵⁸

The assessment by the University of Strathclyde shows that while The Challenge programme, as a pilot and forerunner to

NCS, does have the potential to provide a valuable capability building experience, in order for the national roll-out of NCS to be successful it will need to address some structural issues. Notably, it must work to ensure that social mixing does not simply lead to the reinforcement of implicit hierarchies. It must also be fine-tuned so that volunteering in the community is meaningful. In order to achieve these aims it seems a good level of national coordination should be married with local-level flexibility. For example, young people should be given the opportunity to take part in the NCS in other geographical areas if they wish, in order to allow for more and varied mixing. If meaningful volunteering in the community is to come about there needs to be considerable coordination between community groups, local councils, local businesses, local and regional charities, and regional bodies. As in the case of the *Zivildienst* and Katimavik, it is only with such coordination that volunteers are able to take up roles with responsibility and meaning in the community.

Capability building in schools

Skill Force

Skill Force began in 2000 as a Ministry of Defence funded initiative bringing ex-services personnel into two schools in Newcastle and Norfolk. Michael Gove recently announced a £1.5 million funding package to extend the Skill Force programme into more schools.⁵⁹ The programme was initially targeted at pupils at risk of exclusion, but now draws participants from across the spectrum of pupils, generally attracting those who are likely to take a vocational rather than academic route post-GCSE. In order to participate in Skill Force pupils drop two GCSE subjects and instead spend one day a week (or two half days) following the Skill Force curriculum.

The Skill Force curriculum has several structural similarities to the other national volunteering schemes discussed here. It is split into three areas: ‘My Character’, ‘My Community’ and ‘My Contribution’. These areas are further broken down into modules, which include Sustainability, Enterprise, Healthy

Living, Outdoors and Survival, Planning for the Future, Public Services and Leadership. Following completion of all three areas of the curriculum participants are eligible to take part in The Challenge, a residential programme during which participants engage in a week long community-based challenge. Examples of what the challenge might involve include restoring community buildings, or initiating and carrying out a recycling drive.

Assessments of Skill Force conducted by the University of London and the University of Nottingham have returned excellent results in terms of increased self-discipline and self-belief, with 78 per cent of students reporting increased self-confidence after participating in the programme.⁶⁰ In addition, the Skill Force website reports that participation in the programme reduced the number of ‘difficult to reach’ students becoming NEET from a predicted 24 per cent to 4 per cent, with participants on Free School Meals being ten times more likely to enter further education than their non-participating peers.⁶¹ The project’s evaluators cite several elements as contributing to the project’s effectiveness, the foremost of which is the positive relationship between participants and the Skill Force instructors.

Participants’ achievements on the scheme are recognised by the provision of alternative education qualifications, similar to those gained by participation in Raleigh or World Challenge. These include Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) awards and the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh award. Skill Force also delivers a range of more specific qualifications such as Lifesaver and Young Navigator Awards.

In addition, researchers evaluating Skill Force sound a note of caution about the project’s links to the military. Although young white males respond well to the use of the army as a framing context, research has revealed the use of military regalia and the predominance of white, male ex-servicemen as instructors can alienate some groups.⁶²

Smaller-scale projects aimed more at work-readiness

As we have argued above, the strength of the UK offer comes from the plethora of projects, which are delivered in the community by smaller independent organisations. These projects either define their target group by geography – delivering projects for all of the young people living within a certain area – or need – directly targeting young people who have been failed by mainstream education.

Here we will briefly examine Auto22, an initiative from the organisation Catch22 that works with at-risk young people, setting them up with work experience. We will then turn to the work-readiness schemes provided by the City of London Authority, looking at how its targeted programmes work to increase local residents' access to jobs in City firms.

Auto22

Assessments of Catch22's Auto22 project must be qualified by the fact that the project has only been running for a limited time. With this in mind we have combined our research on Auto22 with research conducted on a similar programme outside the UK – the USA's national YouthBuild initiative, drawing out the similarities between the two projects so as to better reveal possible outcomes for the UK project. Auto22 is an innovative project in Gravesend, which provides vulnerable young people with work experience and training, running mini-apprenticeships in a professional motor garage managed by two full-time mechanics.

Despite the lack of independent research done on the project, the pilot programme in 2009/10 is being extended across the UK, with new garages set to open over the course of 2011. Of particular interest is how Auto22 functions financially: apprentices are paid a wage, and profits from the business are used to support the larger aims of the charity.⁶³ Auto22 thus combines the traditional model of apprenticeships with that of a social enterprise.

YouthBuild, Auto22's American cousin, was established in New York in 1988 and now exists as a franchise across the USA. Targeted at low-income youth, YouthBuild participants spend 6–24 months on the programme dividing their time between

building affordable housing and studying for the General Education Development Test or a high school diploma. The capability building agenda of YouthBuild is emphasised by the programme's community service element and its 'youth development' and 'leadership development and civic engagement' strands.⁶⁴ In addition, the existence of an elected policy committee allows young participants to have an impact on the direction of the enterprise as a whole. Research into YouthBuild has produced conclusive evidence of long-term benefits to participants, reporting that graduates of the YouthBuild welfare-to-work programme earned an average of \$7.91 an hour in their first job placement, compared with \$6.81 an hour for graduates of other welfare-to-work programmes.⁶⁵

YouthBuild is part-funded by AmeriCorps, the US federal government programme set up by Bill Clinton in 1993. AmeriCorps also funds the City Year scheme, a volunteering programme that has recently come to the UK, and is currently being piloted in London.

Larger scale projects aimed at work-readiness

The Work Programme

The Government's arms-length approach to delivery means that information about what these programmes will entail remains vague. However, guidelines released so far, and responses to the scheme at local council level, suggest that the majority of programmes will seek to include some of the capability building elements defined above.

Below we lay out the structure of three schemes at the core of the Work Programme's provision: the service academies, work clubs and Work Together schemes. All three borrow heavily from the existing provision as we have described it above, and it is therefore useful to consider them in the context of what has already been seen to work, and what we have defined as being less successful.

Financial pitfalls of the Work Programme

The Government's welfare reforms have caused anxiety in

some quarters. This is in part the result of difficulties reconciling the financial needs of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations with the Government's new market-based model for welfare to work. As Margo and Grant pointed out in their report on the Foyer Federation's work-readiness schemes, the voluntary and community sector groups that the Coalition Government sees as being at the heart of the new work-readiness programmes often lack core funding. The Government or franchise providers will therefore need to offer up-front funding to VCS groups if they are to run efficient and sustainable projects.⁶⁶

In addition to the issues facing VCS organisations, the Association of Learning Providers has also voiced a series of misgivings about the current financial structure. Following the publication of the Welfare Reform Bill in February 2011, the Association – which includes eight out of the ten confirmed Department for Work and Pensions' providers – voiced concerns from some of its members that the Government's minimum requirements for moving jobseekers into work were unrealistic.⁶⁷

According to the Government, the freedom of action extended to providers will be regulated by a payment-by-results scheme. This is designed to prevent the Department for Work and Pensions from paying out large sums to unproved providers, and allow them to incentivise providers to work with the long-term-unemployed. However, as the Association of Learning Providers points out, the very high targets demanded by the Government exceed the results achieved by the best performing providers under the New Deal.

There appears to be an implicit expectation within the Department for Work and Pensions that both private and voluntary organisations will provide the community-based elements of the Work Programme – such as the work clubs currently run by Serco – for free. The risk here is that unrealistic targets and a lack of up-front funding may lead to providers defaulting on their contracts. In addition, the Work Foundation's Stephen Overell has warned that in the current employment climate linking results to payment may lead providers to 'cherry pick easier to help groups', leaving the long-term unemployed without the long-term support they need.⁶⁸

Service academies

Service academies are designed to offer the long-term unemployed a way back into employment through a combination of work experience placements and training. Following a two-week course focusing on service skills, participants will take part in a four-week work placement developed through partnerships between local councils and business. This partnership is intended to ensure that service academies are responsive to gaps in the local labour market.

Service academies have been developed with the aim of capitalising on the growth of the service industries in the UK, and will be directed particularly towards the hospitality industry. It is unclear as yet how the burden of training and funding the academies will be divided between councils and partner businesses. One clear target so far is that the Government expects businesses taking part in the scheme to offer full-time work to 20 per cent of participants. How this will be brought about in practice, or how it will be sustainable beyond the first cohort of jobseekers, remains to be seen.

Work clubs

Work clubs are support groups designed to tap into expertise about the local job market. Rather than being run by Jobcentre Plus employees, work clubs will be run by volunteers who feel they have something to offer unemployed people in their area. Since Serco, one of the Work Programme's main contract holders, was running similar programmes as part of the Flexible New Deal, it seems likely that the Government expects that local welfare-to-work contractors may also play a role in delivering these projects under the auspices of companies like Serco.

Work Together

Work Together is the name for the Government's drive to integrate voluntary work into the fabric of job seeking. The aim is to make it easier for Jobcentre customers to volunteer while still in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance, and before they enter the Work Programme. It is unclear exactly how Work Together will

be delivered, and whether it will differ significantly from the voluntary work placements presently offered by service providers.

The nature of volunteering

Volunteering has strong connotations of altruism. But in fact, many people today think of volunteering as both altruistic and serving their own needs. The benefit to self can simply be the ability to show employers on your CV that you are a 'team player' and care about more than 'just the job', as these qualities have become assets in the employment market. Sometimes, though, volunteering may be a way of gaining skills and experience, which are then used to gain future employment. Volunteering may also be pursued merely because it is fun. Sometimes its enjoyment is closely connected to the feeling of 'putting something back' into society, but sometimes not.

Some of the capability-building schemes examined here are definitely 'work' (such as Auto22) but others such as City Year involve a stipend to a volunteer. Payment for volunteering should be seen in light of the fact that expenses for less-affluent participants need to be covered. But also, volunteering is a multifaceted activity ranging from pure altruism, to self-serving CV building, to simply having fun. This diversity of motivations to volunteer should be celebrated rather than narrowed, and small payments that enable participation should not be seen as sully pure charitable motives. Regardless of motivations, skills are gained and capabilities built, and services and support are provided. However, it is important to any volunteer that their activity be meaningful (actually make a difference, achieve something). Unstructured activities that do not work towards a meaningful goal have little benefit for young people. More to the point, they are boring.

Work-readiness programmes in partnership with business

The work readiness training offered by the City of London Corporation is an example of a locally based partnership within which charities, local authorities and businesses work together to provide a broad spectrum of work-readiness and capability-building programmes. The Corporation funds a huge number of initiatives, supporting both discrete programmes delivered by specialist organisations and school-based projects. These initiatives benefit from a level of available funds that is unparalleled within the rest of the UK, but they function at the same time within the context of extreme deprivation.

The work-readiness projects run by the City of London provide access to external capabilities rather than building internal capabilities, although the latter are most likely enhanced too. Raising aspirations and opening out career prospects are both important elements of City of London schemes. Inner London has a level of income inequality that is among the worst in the country, with 19 per cent of the population in the top tenth for income nationwide, combined with 16 per cent in the bottom tenth. This financial inequality is coupled with an endemic poverty of aspiration among local young people. Young people growing up in the London boroughs surrounding the City often do so in a context that is totally divorced from the vibrant jobs market available there, with the majority never considering the Square Mile as a viable source of work.⁶⁹

We have focused on the three programmes below because they each cover a different area of work-readiness training. Futureversity offers creative and skills-based courses and volunteering opportunities to school-age young people during the summer holidays. The Brokerage Citylink facilitates groups from inner London schools to take part in work experience placements in City firms, and run the City of London's Business Traineeship scheme. The Training for Life initiative works with long-term unemployed people and the severely disadvantaged to offer in-work training and skills development programmes.

Futureversity

Futureversity (originally Tower Hamlets Summer University) was set up in 1995 as a summer school programme for young people in Tower Hamlets. The programme's success and popularity within its first ten years led in 2009 to the scheme being rolled out across the rest of the inner London boroughs, and demand remains high. In 2009 over 8,000 applications were made for the 2,000 course places, with 1,754 young people attending the 126 courses.⁷⁰ Although the popularity of the courses is testament to the value of the programme, there is a concern that due to intense competition for places, the planned UK-wide expansion of Futureversity could lead to a drop in the number of the most in-need students able to access courses. It would be a shame if the programme fell foul of the 'skills paradox', where those with the most skills gain more, while those with the fewest gain none.

Designed to provide training and workshops to young Londoners between the ages of 11 and 25, Futureversity runs a summer school programme and a year-round volunteering scheme. The courses on offer range from day-long tasters to week or month-long National Open College Network accredited programmes, delivered by a range of providers including local businesses, charities and educational organisations. Courses in the Music and Performing Arts strand included 'Band in a Week' and 'Music Production in a Month, while the Business and Careers section offered Careers in the Legal Sector and Investment Banking (Barclays Capital) courses. Many of these courses are delivered in-house by the firms themselves, offering participants valuable experience of the work environment.

In addition to their skills-based courses Futureversity also offers a work-readiness scheme aimed at young people who are NEET. Called Job Ready, the scheme is currently delivered in partnership with JP Morgan. Job Ready is a three-day-a-week, eleven-week scheme during which participants gain literacy skills and undergo interactive work-readiness training. This is followed by a two-week work placement. Progression data from the scheme show that 56 per cent of participants progress into jobs in the first six months following the scheme.⁷¹

The two main volunteering roles offered by Futureversity are learning mentors, and peer motivators. Learning mentors spend a day a week for 12 weeks assisting with the delivery of numeracy, literacy and IT skills to children attending Playing for Success after-school clubs. Peer motivators help to run the summer schools programme and are trained in ‘team skills’, conflict resolution, venue supervision and disability awareness. An evaluation of the peer motivators scheme by the think tank New Philanthropy Capital revealed that 92 per cent of participants felt that participation in the scheme had improved their self-confidence, while 82 per cent said that they now felt ‘super confident’ about taking responsibility as a volunteer.⁷²

In addition to the impressively high number of respondents to the New Philanthropy Capital survey – 1,447 responded out of a cohort of 2,130 – 94 per cent of participants felt they had learned something new and 93 per cent that they had developed their skills. Following the programme, 80 per cent felt more positive about their future and 70 per cent felt either a lot or a little more in control of their lives and career paths.⁷³

The Brokerage Citylink

The Brokerage Citylink works with City of London firms to offer work experience and placements to young people from inner London schools. The Brokerage’s strong relationships with human resources managers and high level executives in city firms allows it to advocate for local young people, arguing the case for them to be given the chance to prove themselves within the elite working environment of a city firm. Unlike Futureversity or other schemes based on skills and qualifications, the Brokerage’s role is as much about opening employers’ eyes to the labour force on its doorstep as it is about creating new apprenticeship places. Similarly, much of the Brokerage’s work with young people involves broadening aspirations rather than delivering specific training.

The Brokerage Citylink’s flagship schemes are City4aDay and City4aDayNEET. These are one-day workshops delivered by

City firms in their offices. During the sessions young people are invited to quiz employees about their jobs and career paths and to complete tasks related to the everyday work of the firm.⁷⁴ Although the short timescale of these visits makes the impact on young people's skills negligible, they are a step in the right direction in widening awareness of the City among its young neighbours.

A more sustained version of the City4aDay scheme is Allen & Overy's 'Smart Start Experience', which is also facilitated by the Brokerage. This is a week-long programme during which over 100 local young people attend workshops at Allen & Overy's London headquarters. Again, the main impact of the programme is less likely to be on workplace skills – although the scheme's publicity material emphasises the skills-building element of the sessions – and more on the aspirations of participants. The scheme has a concomitant impact on the employees responsible for delivering the programme; anecdotal evidence from the 2010 sessions reveals a definite note of surprise about the higher than expected ability levels of participants.⁷⁵

Training for Life

Training for Life is a London-based training body established with the aim of 'fostering... confidence, self esteem, resilience, persistence and competence in people who are socially excluded'.⁷⁶ These aims are achieved through a series of training schemes with a strong emphasis on practical, work-based learning.⁷⁷ Since 1994 the company has returned 13,000 previously long-term unemployed people into work or training and created 150 new jobs within the organisation.⁷⁸

City Apprentice is a six month pre-apprenticeship programme targeted at long-term unemployed people from the London boroughs. For the first two months of the programme participants are trained in basic office skills, health and safety, computing and administration tasks. The training sessions are followed by a four-month work placement in an entry level job with a city law firm. The transition from training to work

experience is important, adding value to the classroom-based elements of the scheme.

Training for Life also runs a more traditional apprenticeship scheme in the form of two social enterprises: the Hoxton Apprentice restaurant in East London, and the Dartmouth Apprentice restaurant in Devon. The two restaurants provide jobs and training for long-term unemployed people, providing six months placements during which they gain workplace skills and a Level 2 NVQ in hospitality. The scheme acts as a gateway into further employment for individuals who lack academic qualifications and may not have previously had jobs. Testament to the success of the scheme is the fact that both the head chef and the sous chef of the Hoxton Apprentice are themselves ex-apprentices.

Summary: what are the crucial elements of successful capability building programmes?

In this chapter we have seen several patterns emerge. The first is that life-readiness programmes focused on the personal development of internal capabilities, such as some of the Foyer Federation's work, tend to be small-scale and attuned to local needs (although they may belong to a national franchise). This is as it should be, since working with young people at this end of the spectrum requires far more flexibility of response to individual needs and to group dynamics. It also arguably requires a great deal of innovation.

The second pattern is that life-readiness programmes concerned with the interaction of internal and external capabilities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and NCS, tend to be larger-scale national franchises. This is also arguably as it should be since these programmes require a certain level of internal capabilities at the outset, and so do not need to be particularly sensitive to personal development issues at an individual level. Moreover, given that they are concerned with building general capabilities rather than more specific personal qualities or work skills, it is to be expected that they appeal to a much wider audience. These schemes also play a wider role in

shaping national culture around the character of young people and their relation to society.

A third pattern that emerges is that almost all successful work-readiness programmes are locally embedded. This is important, since it is only at the local level that meaningful connections to employers can be formed and maintained in a fast-changing economy. The example given in this chapter of the City Brokerage's City Apprentice scheme demonstrated the importance of strong connections between local businesses, schools and colleges, and third-sector organisations. These relations strengthen over time and provide for quick and easy flows of information so that labour market changes and the changing needs of young people can be conveyed to providers.

A fourth pattern that emerges is that shorter work-readiness programmes tend to focus only on the provision of external capabilities (eg access to information, opportunities and networks). These programmes do not have much to do with connecting internal and external capabilities and so raising substantially the scope and capacity of what young people are able to do. It is only the longer programmes (such as City Apprentice) that transform young people's capabilities considerably. The lesson to draw is that shorter programmes aimed at enhancing specific skills around employability (such as how to fill out a CV) could be rolled out more widely, perhaps reaching national coverage, whereas more intensive and long-term programmes require a higher level of local specialisation.

There is clearly scope for programmes such as NCS to become a national player (indeed that is the ambition) with a franchise that enables (eventually) all 16-year-olds to complete the programme. As long as the franchise model is flexible enough to allow for local-level awareness of volunteering opportunities then the national-level nature of the programme should not detract from the quality of provision. However, some level of oversight needs to assure quality too – especially of volunteering opportunities. For the latter to be really meaningful, as the German *Zivildienst* shows, reliable partnerships need to be built between NCS providers, public bodies and third sector organisations.

When such stable partnerships are established *responsibility* is created on both sides. On the side of the NCS providers this is a responsibility to provide adequately prepared and committed young people. On the side of the bodies and organisations there is responsibility to deliver various services through the young people participating in the programme. It is only when this 'social compact' is established that the NCS will become an established and meaningful form of service learning. However, restricting the NCS to 16-year-old entrants will make it difficult to create such a relationship of responsibility, as what 16-year-olds will be allowed to, and capable of doing, will be limited and perhaps unsuited to meaningful community service.

The NCS needs to provide well planned and structured programmes that will yield a sense of achievement and satisfaction at 'making a difference'. Being told you are making a difference when engaging in tokenistic and pointless activity will not build capabilities, nor dispose young people towards volunteering and community service in the future. Moreover, government should strengthen the NCS alumni offer – supporting 16-year-olds exiting the NCS programme to successfully transition to other learning, personal development and work-readiness programmes.

Into the capability-building landscape of life- and work-readiness programmes described in this chapter steps the Government's Work Programme. With one-to-one support guaranteed for those (rather vaguely defined as) most in need, and an army of service providers ready to offer such support, this landscape seems about to become more populated. No one quite knows what the programmes on offer will look like, but one crucial factor in success will be the involvement of small local-level organisations, which can build up expertise about local social and labour market conditions, as well as psychological expertise in supporting people into work. With so many large-scale private sector providers involved, there is a danger of too many generic approaches being taken. However, in conversation, Demos has learned that some corporate providers intend to contract out most of their provision to charities and social enterprises already working in the regions they are covering. This

approach may have some promise by combining a mosaic of local-level interventions more sensitive to individual needs, with larger scale programmes aimed at the more generic aspects of work-readiness (such as CV writing). But only time will tell.

The landscape of capability building programmes that we have examined in this chapter and visualised in figure 1 teaches us that individuals should enter the landscape at the right point. If someone requires intensive psychological support they need to engage with the life-readiness programmes aimed at personal development, which feature on the left side of figure 1. For example, the Foyer Federation works with many young people to create a 'stable sense of self and of personal possibilities'.⁷⁹ At this point it is mainly internal capabilities that will be built. If someone already possesses reasonably strong internal capabilities then they can enter the landscape at the point where life-readiness programmes concentrate on providing external capabilities through activities (such as NCS). If someone wants to become work-ready and life-ready, then she can enter the landscape somewhere to the right, where general capabilities are built but progress is made towards acquiring more specific skills. If someone is already reasonably work-ready then she can enter far to the right of the landscape and build only specific skills.

What are missing from this landscape are programmes that build general capabilities and work-readiness through means usually preserved for life-readiness programmes, most notably volunteering. Since being life-ready and work-ready start to blur into one another in a service-oriented economy, this omission is surprising. We now examine the pilot of a programme that uses volunteering to build general capabilities and offer the kind of work experience that can lead to progression into employment and further study.

4 vtalent year

Case Study - vtalent year

vtalent year is a 44-week full-time volunteering programme for young people (aged 16–24) who would benefit from building up their capabilities to bridge the gap between education and work, and compulsory education and further or higher education. More than half (54 per cent) of the vtalent intake were NEET before starting the programme.⁸⁰ There are two versions of vtalent year, one that works with local authority children and young people's services, the other with further education colleges. We carried out research at three further education colleges that have been running the vtalent year programme, which runs between 2009 and 2011. The intake of vtalent year is mixed; most notably it comprises non-graduates who have left school or further education and graduates who have left university and found themselves unemployed. For some participants the aim of taking part in vtalent year is to build up experience, contacts and skills to help them enter the workplace. For others it is to do the same but for the sake of entering further and higher education. The programme is designed to attract a diverse cohort of young people. We found the gender, ability and ethnic background of those taking part in the programme to be very mixed.

While on the programme participants receive an allowance, which is intended to be broadly commensurate with the income they would receive on Jobseeker's Allowance, although we did hear anecdotally of some participants receiving a slightly lower income overall, as a result of the complexities of the benefits system. Participants receive the allowance, which covers travel, subsistence and basic living expenses, to enable their participation in the programme. The key area of conditionality is that they spend a minimum of

44 weeks in the college and comply with the requirements of the programme.

The programme is run in the college by placement supervisors, funded by the programme (and usually existing employees of the college) who provide on the job training, coaching, mentoring and pastoral care to the participants, in addition to various teaching and administrative duties. Each participant – or ‘volunteer’ as they are called in the programme – undergoes basic training in health and safety, ‘diversity’ and other forms of training required for anyone working in further education colleges.⁸¹ Each participant then constructs an action plan with the coordinator(s) that includes any proposed study towards qualifications as well as the volunteering project the participant wants to create.⁸² The latter requires the participant to find a department of the college that will accept and support her proposal to volunteer. So for example, if a participant is to volunteer in the sports science department – perhaps running training sessions– she must go to that department and convince staff of the feasibility and worthwhile nature of her project, then work with the department to implement the project.

As well as this main volunteering project participants are able to take advantage of various opportunities to gain experience (including work experience) throughout the college over the course of their 44-week placement. At one of the colleges we visited a participant was placed on the reception desk of the college for a week, developing specific receptionist skills as well as wider social skills, and overcoming her shyness in the process. There was considerable flexibility in the programme, which allowed participants, with support from their placement supervisor(s), to take advantage of opportunities as well as to create them.

Our research

We visited the colleges on several occasions, and on two of these visits we carried out research to measure the capabilities of the participants. We used a range of questionnaires as well as

computer-based tasks, all of which are detailed below in the methodological appendix. We also gathered qualitative data on the attitudes of the participants once they had been in the programme for around six months. Our primary research question was: What effect does taking part in vtalent year have on the capabilities of the participants? Does it improve them? We were also interested in whether we could ascertain if there was a particular kind of person (eg determined by level of ability) who benefited the most from the programme. Behind these queries was the question of whether programmes like vtalent could or should be rolled out as a franchise across England. To answer this final question we assessed how vtalent was implemented across the three colleges we visited, and endeavoured to draw out best practice.

Sample size and basic methodologies

We visited three colleges running vtalent year in August and September 2010 and at the end of February and early March 2011. The colleges were Milton Keynes College, New College Nottingham and Barnfield College in Luton. The participants in the research were simply the volunteers who were taking part in the vtalent year programme in each college. All but 4 volunteers took part in the first round of research, making a total of 41 participants. In the second round of research, 32 participants took part, although only 24 participants completed both rounds of research, as volunteers who had dropped out from vtalent year soon after the first round had been replaced by others. There were also a number of volunteers who were not available to take part in the second round of research. The data from participants who took part in both rounds of research was used to measure changes in capabilities and attitudes. Qualitative data about the experience of taking part in vtalent year was collected from all participants in the second round of research and used in this report.

Questionnaires

We chose questionnaires that measured different capabilities – for example, the ability to plan ahead, defer gratification, empathise and persevere. We also measured social attitudes towards the future and other people through questionnaires on aspects of hope and social value. Finally, we measured attitudes towards self through a questionnaire on self-esteem. The questionnaires are listed in the methodological appendix.

Summary of findings

There were no *striking* changes in capabilities and social attitudes among the sample group. There were moderate changes though:

- There was a noticeable (although not conclusive) change in attitudes towards *being less competitive* (social value orientation).
- There was also a statistically significant increase in the *fantasy aspect of empathy* – the ability to take the perspective of someone else in fictional scenarios. This aspect is directly related to the personal capability to imagine oneself in someone else's shoes.

There was also a change in the levels of hope among participants, with a statistically significant increase in the *agency aspect of hope* – the aspect through which one feels positively about the future through an expectation that one will be able to affect events in the ways one wants.

- There were some noticeable changes in the *difficulties* experienced as a result of taking part in vtalement – getting up in the mornings, focusing on tasks, trusting new people and increased levels of anxiety. However, these changes were not conclusive.

Of course, we do not know that it was taking part in vtalement year that changed these capabilities and attitudes, but it is interesting to note the kinds of changes that took place and the kinds that did not.

There were no changes in the following:

- ‘grit’, or the ability to persevere with things
- self-esteem
- interpersonal trust
- impulsivity.

It is also worth mentioning that despite the wide range in abilities of the participants, the vast majority of them fell into the ‘normal’ range for scores when compared with existing data sets (see appendix). Furthermore, in the first round of research the participants took part in computer-based tests for concentration, perseverance and adaptability. There were no statistically significant correlations between levels of ability in these computer tests and scores for capabilities and attitudes, even though there was a very wide range of ability displayed in the computer-based tests.

The lesson to draw seems to be that what the questionnaires we employed measured were *people’s more stable senses of personal capabilities and attitudes*. This ‘sense of self’ is liable to some change – noticeably in agency, sense of personal difficulties and strengths, and attitudes towards others that are under personal control – but otherwise it appears to be quite firm. The commonality among the capabilities and attitudes that did change was their being under direct control through action. On the other hand, the capabilities and attitudes that didn’t change were perhaps less under direct control – dispositions to impulsiveness, ‘grit’, interpersonal trust and self-esteem.

These results should be treated with caution because of the sample sizes involved, but they suggest that the majority of internal capabilities were stable and ‘normal’ for the participants, and that change occurred only where such capabilities were exercised through external capabilities; for example participants’ sense of agency to affect the future was changed by *opportunities* to change the future. Qualitative research backed this assertion up, where participants reported not so much their personal qualities such as shyness changing particularly, but rather their ability to accept those qualities and overcome them through actual experience.

Qualitative responses also showed that the majority of participants felt their confidence had been boosted. This was the

one capability that showed a massive increase – almost 90 per cent of participants reporting being more confident after taking part in v talent year. Moreover, 100 per cent of participants said they felt the programme had helped them feel ready to find work or continue with education, while 96 per cent felt more hopeful about their futures.

When asked to explain these increases in confidence, hope and work-readiness in open-response questions, participants very often cited work experience in ‘real world’ settings where responsibility was shouldered for the performance of tasks:

Due to the v talent programme I am more confident in my ability to adapt to new situations, and in particular to a work setting. A work environment is no longer a scary thought as I have been exposed to it. I am confident that I can do anything I set my mind to.

Being trusted to do my own thing is the main thing that has improved my confidence. I haven't had to be told what to do so I have more confidence in what I am doing.

I've enjoyed being in a working environment and seeing what things are like for myself. Also receiving training within my work placement has helped me to become confident in dealing with different situations.

There were three main ways in which work experience through volunteering helped the participants build confidence for their futures:

- by providing experiences relevant to a specific study or career routes and which built skills and helped with making applications:

I've been able to experience different job roles which have enabled me to develop my skills. I also believe that the opportunity to study courses in the evening has widened my job prospects.

The whole experience has helped me – before v talent year I applied to do law at university and got turned down because of UCAS points. I then

didn't know what I wanted to do – however, because I have enjoyed my work, I have decided to take a HR [human resources] degree.

- by clarifying expectations about work environments and building the relevant work-ready skills (often the 'soft skills' needed for work):

I don't like talking on the phone but as a part of vtalent I have to deal with queries and ring students about courses. In the beginning it was really hard for me because I wasn't confident on the phone but now I am quite confident to deal with queries and ring students and other people outside of the organisation. Taking part in vtalent has allowed me to gain valuable experience in a work as well as educational setting. As I joined vtalent straight from school I believe I have grown in confidence and maturity as well as gained employable skills such as organisation, marketing skills, admin skills and design skills.

- by taking on responsibility and using initiative:

vtalent has enabled me to help myself and to build my own confidence. Eg. I meet important people like the principal, and vtalent has helped me cope with this.

I now provide tutorial sessions to groups of students whereas before, I would have felt way too nervous.

Other confidence boosting experiences on vtalent year included building positive relationships with co-workers and fellow volunteers:

Things which helped me build my confidence are the people I worked with, for example my line manager, who has guided and taught me different ways to develop.

I have enjoyed communicating with people that I have met through vtalent; I have met people in my department and outside of it. I enjoyed all of the events like working in the office and helping the staff.

And many participants explained that it was simply being part of a team of volunteers, from different cultures and backgrounds, all getting along, that boosted their social skills:

vtalent has introduced me to a diverse group of people that have opened my eyes to different cultures and perspectives. It has been a life lesson knowing these people who I now call my friends, as well as working as a team with them.

I think the best thing about the programme was meeting new people and establishing connections with such a diverse group of people. Just working together and sharing each other's company has been a blast! I have improved my communication skills, my social skills have improved and working with friendly people has helped a lot.

Generally, it was the *experiences* on offer as part of vtalent year that were crucial to helping young people progress into further education or employment (although some volunteers did appreciate the chance to take qualifications):

It's given me time to analyse more options in the world of education, employment and volunteering. Some aspects of the future I really hadn't considered until entering vtalent, like further education.

My best experience so far is mentoring because I am confident dealing with people on a one to one basis and I got a chance to use my psychology degree. I also got the chance to work in HR while doing a diploma; therefore what I learned was applied to work.

Finally, it seems that for some participants it was the financial security and extra income of vtalent year that gave them opportunities to progress in their lives:

It motivated me to continue uni, relieving financial pressure in a tough time.

These findings confirm the idea that vtalent year was aimed at the intersection of internal and external capabilities – that is,

unlike the Foyer Federation project discussed in the last chapter, the programme was not concerned particularly with building up a stable set of internal capabilities around a sense of self and basic dispositions. These latter capabilities were necessary to get the participants to seek out positive experiences through enrolling on the pilot in the first place. But the impact of the pilot seems to have been to modestly enhance the internal capabilities that were directly affected by valuable experiences. However, in the extension of confidence and social and communication skills, and in the provision of work experience, the programme seemed to have a large impact on participants. We can infer that it was the *exercise* of internal capabilities through the provision of various kinds of experiences that fostered this impact.

Observations on the vtalent year programme

As well as the quantitative and qualitative questionnaires gathered, we spent some time at three of the further education colleges participating in vtalent year gathering data ethnographically and through informal interviews. We made the following observations about the programme in the various colleges:

- vtalent year gives a surprising amount of flexibility in running the programme to participating institutions. For example, in one college the coordinator holds the budget and in another the college does. This ‘franchise’ approach – where a ‘broad-brush’ universal model of provision is fine-tuned at the local level – seemed to work well on the whole. Each college’s programme had its own identity and was tailored to fit local needs and opportunities. The autonomy enjoyed by some of the coordinators to whom we spoke enabled them to take ownership of the programme within the context of a framework of centrally set rules. The latter framework warded off complaints about bias or inconsistency, while allowing for initiative and creativity on the part of coordinators and volunteers.

- It was a feature at all the colleges we visited that how the v talent year programme intersected with the benefits system was not completely clear. All understood that no volunteer should lose any benefits by taking part in the programme, yet some volunteers claimed to have lost some benefits and be slightly worse off as a result. All the coordinators with whom we spoke worked very hard to make sure volunteers did not lose benefits and it seemed that losses were minimal and rare. However, there was some confusion among Jobcentre Plus staff about exactly what volunteers were entitled to – a perennial issue that impacts negatively on jobseekers who wish to volunteer while seeking work. The complexity of the benefits system was reported at all three delivery sites, suggesting that this was less to do with v talent year programme design, and more to do with the interactions between volunteering and benefit entitlements.
- We heard from a coordinator and several volunteers that volunteers were frustrated at having to stick rigidly to the 30-hour week commitment to the v talent year programme. This was in the context of volunteers wanting to take part-time work, in order to increase their incomes and gain an even wider variety of work experience than was available on the programme. We see no reason why such part-time work could not be incorporated into the programme in the future.
- At present, participants can apply for a personal development grant of up to £1,500 on completion of the v talent year programme, to support their onward transitions to education, training or employment. In practice, not all participants applied to the fund, and many only applied for smaller sums to support their progression. A number of participants to whom we spoke conveyed how this fund was not particularly a motivation for completing the programme – their own progression and well-being acting as motivation enough. In austere times, and based on the minimal role that the personal development grant played in incentivising young people to complete the programme, we are inclined to recommend that a much smaller yet less restricted fund would be a better option.
- We found that the colleges we visited were excellent places to house volunteers trying to gain work experience and build

social skills. These institutions already have in place procedures to deal with students with a wide variety of abilities, special needs and ethnic diversity. Moreover, colleges possess well-developed 'enrichment' programmes that offer volunteering and other extracurricular activities, and it was clear in some of the colleges we visited that vtalent fitted well into this context. It is already part of the culture of further education colleges to provide placements for students to gain work experience and it seemed vtalent year was extending this to include the backroom operations of colleges such as administrative departments.

- However, it is essential that colleges 'buy in' to the programme, taking it seriously enough to provide meaningful volunteering opportunities. It is also imperative that colleges do not unduly restrict volunteers' opportunities through bureaucratic inertia. We found evidence of both of these impediments to success during our research.
- vtalent year is aimed at young people who are already fairly 'life-ready' but need to become more so, as well as more 'work-ready'. Participants came from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities (and included disabled students) but they were united by being resolved to improve their situations. Our research found that vtalent year was aimed at the right range of participants; it was not a therapeutic intervention aimed at developing very personal capabilities but attempted to improve more general capabilities by providing different kinds of experience via structured volunteering opportunities.
- Experience through volunteering was the essential ingredient in vtalent year. It was important to many participants to take qualifications and study for courses, but these ends were always subservient to garnering experience that built confidence and opened up further opportunities for work and educational progression. For example, if a volunteer was keen to build a career in youth work then she would as part of vtalent year take qualifications that worked towards this end, but what really put her in position to pursue such a career was the varied and extensive experience she gained working as part of a youth services team.

- The different forms of experience the volunteers acquired were formed into a coherent whole so that participants not only gained a variety of experience, but drew all that experience together to inform choices about further study and careers. In league with their placement supervisors volunteers designed and pursued a programme of volunteering that helped them not only be better prepared for work but also decide what kind of work suited their talents.
- Finally, the v talent year programme was designed to create volunteering placements primarily within the participating colleges, in order to complement v's wider investments in community volunteering projects. A future programme could be designed to connect full-time volunteers more directly to local community projects, using the college as a 'hub' for social action. Our research found that in its current form v talent year did not always connect young people to the communities beyond the college gates.

5 Conclusion

We have seen from the last chapter that full-time volunteering programmes offer a promising route to building capabilities for the sake of work-readiness. In the executive summary of this report we made a number of policy recommendations on how a full-time volunteering programme might be implemented.

In conclusion we note some of the factors involved in successful full-time volunteering programmes that aim to build capabilities and prepare young people for entry into the labour market (or, indeed, further study).

Programmes should be targeted at the intersection of internal and external capabilities

Our research found that some internal capabilities (basic personal qualities like impulsiveness, and fundamental attitudes to others such as trust) did not really change. Internal capabilities that were more active – imagining oneself in other people’s shoes, imagining one’s future – did change moderately. But the most significant effect of the vtalent year programme was that confidence was raised and goals and options clarified by volunteers having opportunities to gain work experience, as well as other forms of experience, such as organising events as part of a team. It is the provision of external capabilities through these different forms of experience that allowed individuals to develop their skills and build their confidence.

It is experience that is the agent of change, not reflection on self-conceptions through therapeutic or cognitive interventions

The conclusion we draw from the importance of experience in the vtalent year programme is that general capability-building

programmes should not aim to focus on self-reflection for the sake of changing thoughts and self-conceptions, these changes then in turn modifying behaviour and increasing confidence. Rather, it was simply access to different kinds of structured experiences that made the difference for the volunteers on vtalent year. For example, a volunteer with autism, who worked in the college library, gained a great boost in self-confidence from this experience.

Volunteering builds initiative

It was a common theme among volunteers that having to design their own volunteering project, convince the relevant part of the college to accept their proposed project, and to implement the project well, enhanced initiative. This taking on of challenging personal responsibility in a supportive environment seemed a feature of full-time volunteering that was very apt to developing initiative and confidence.

Full-time volunteering that ‘piggy-backs’ on existing institutions creates mentors and teachers as well as volunteers

One obviously good aspect of vtalent year was the fact that it made use of existing further education college infrastructure, administration and expertise. Although college bureaucracy was not always helpful, the way vtalent year was able to plug in to existing staff and systems made it a potentially very efficient programme to run. But perhaps more important is that volunteering placements within colleges – for example, within the administrative department or library – also create *mentors* and *teachers* out of workers. As long as such roles are not too demanding they should enrich workers as well as volunteers, making the college a hub of learning beyond classrooms and workshops.

Methodological appendix

Data analysis of questionnaires

Social value orientation

We used the version of the tool cited in Van Lange, P. A. M., Agnew, C. R., Harinck, F., & Steemers, G. (1997), 'From game theory to real life: How social value orientation affects willingness to sacrifice in ongoing close relationships?' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 1330–1344. The tool is designed to measure whether participants express competitive, individualistic or pro-social attitudes. These attitudes were calculated using the five-item criterion (if five or more items were scored consistently the participant was deemed to be displaying one of the three orientations).

The more stringent six-item criterion led to a much higher number of ambiguous orientations and was therefore not used.

The orientations of participants completing the first and second questionnaire are summarised in table 1.

Table 1 **Orientation of participants completing the first and second questionnaires calculated using the five-item criterion**

Orientation based on 5-item criterion	Q1	Q2
Competitive	4	0
Individualistic	12	11
Pro-social	16	16
Mixed/unclear	9	5
Total	41	32

It is notable that when the second questionnaire was administered no participants were deemed to have a competitive orientation. However, given that the make up of the group changed (with participants dropping out and new ones being recruited before the second questionnaire was administered) this shift in orientations should be interpreted with caution.

Looking more closely at the 24 individuals who completed both questionnaires (rather than just the first or just the second) it is possible to make some very tentative inferences about how social value orientations changed, with the most interesting patterns being *a shift away from competitive orientations and a tendency to maintain pre-existing pro-social orientations*:

- All four who initially showed a competitive orientation moved to either a pro-social or individualistic orientation.
- The eight who initially showed an individualistic orientation moved to a mix of unclear, pro-social and individualistic orientations.
- The eight who initially showed a pro-social orientation largely maintained this, although one moved to unclear and one moved to an individualistic orientation.
- The four who were initially unclear moved to a mix of unclear, pro-social and individualistic orientations.

Although the numbers involved make it hard to draw firm conclusions these shifts certainly warrant further qualitative and quantitative exploration.

Interpersonal reactivity scale

We used the version of the scale cited in Davis, M. H. (1980). 'A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy'. *JASAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*, 10, 85. The scale is designed to measure dispositional empathy through various different constructs. The 24 participants who completed both questionnaires showed average reductions in overall reactivity scores, and in each of the four sub-scales: fantasy (FS),

perspective-taking (PT), empathic concern (EC) and personal distress (PD).

A series of paired samples t-tests were run using PASW Statistics 18 (formerly SPSS). There was found to be a statistically significant difference in *overall reactivity*. However, the only sub-scale that showed a statistically significant difference was fantasy (FS).

Trait hope scale

The Trait Hope Scale measures dispositional hope (cited in Snyder, C. R., Harris, C., Anderson, J. R., Holleran, S. A., Irving, L. M., Sigmon, S. T., Yoshinobu, L. R., Gibb, J., Langelle, C., & Harney, P. (1991), ‘The will and the ways: Development of an individual-differences measure of hope’. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 570–585). When comparing all participants who completed Q₁ against those who completed Q₂ there was an increase in overall hope, as well as in each of the sub-scales (agency and pathways) (table 2).

Table 2 **Comparison of agency and pathways of participants completing either the first or the second questionnaire**

	Agency	Pathways
Q1 (40 participants)	24.275	24.2875
Q2 (31 participants)	26.258064516129	25.9354838709677

This increase remains when only considering those participants who completed both Q₁ and Q₂ (table 3).

Table 4 Paired samples test

	Paired differences						
	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference	t	df	
				Lower	Upper		
Pair 1 HOPE_1 - HOPE_2	-2.542	8.408	1.716	-6.092	1.009	23	.152
Pair 2 AGEN_1 - AGEN_2	-1.750	3.674	.750	-3.301	-.199	23	.029
Pair 3 PATH_1 - PATH_2	-.792	5.532	1.129	-3.128	1.544	23	.490

Table 3 **Comparison of agency and pathways of participants completing both the first and the second questionnaire**

	Agency	Pathways
Q1 (24 participants)	24.275	24.2875
Q2 (24 participants)	26.258064516129	25.9354838709677

Further analysis of the 24 participants who completed Q1 and Q2 via paired samples t-tests reveals that out of the two sub-scales it is only the change in agency that is statistically significant (at $p < .05$) (table 4). The changes in the pathways sub-scale and in the overall levels of trait hope were not found to be statistically significant.

Strengths and difficulties

We used an adapted version of the self-reporting version of the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (originally cited in Goodman R (1997) 'The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: A Research Note.' *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 38, 581–586). The questionnaire was adapted so as to be appropriate for young people and adults. The questionnaire is designed to measure emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and prosocial behaviour.

As a result of the changes in the make up of the participants (drop outs and new joiners) it is hard to draw firm conclusions about changes in individual items on the questionnaire. There appear to be some notable shifts (but these could be ascribed to changes in group make up).

Based on subjective visual inspection of the graphs reported in the appendix, results suggest a pattern of increased:

- difficulty getting up in the morning (question 9)
- difficulty focusing on a difficult task (question 13)
- difficulty trusting new people (question 18)

- levels of anxiety (question 20)
- tendency to lose track of time when absorbed in a task (question 21)

There were also shifts in the more positive strength-focused items, but in most cases the direction of shift was unclear, or appeared to be a relatively small change.

Self-esteem (Rosenberg)

We used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (originally cited in Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press). The scale is designed to measure self-orientation in terms of evaluations of self-worth. When comparing all participants who completed Q₁ against all those who completed Q₂ there is only a very subtle shift in levels of self-esteem (table 5).

Table 5 **Levels of self-esteem in those completing the first and second questionnaires**

	Q1	Q2
Low	5	5
Normal	31	22
High	5	5

(Normal is defined as a score of 15–25)

When considering only the 24 participants who completed both questionnaires a paired sample t-test revealed that the change in average self-esteem score was not statistically significant.

For these 24 participants there appeared to be a lot of movement between low, normal and high levels of self-esteem and this occurred in both directions. Notably, of the 16 who initially were deemed to have a normal score, four actually moved down to have a low score (with one moving up to high and the rest remaining normal).

Grit scale

We used the Grit scale originally cited in (Duckworth, A.L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M.D., & Kelly, D.R. (2007). 'Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals'. *Personality Processes and Individual Differences*, 92 (6), p. 1087). This questionnaire is designed to measure perseverance combined with the passionate motivation to pursue goals. When considering all participants who completed Q₁ and all those who completed Q₂ there was only a small difference in grit scores – moving from 3.50 up to 3.55.

A paired sample t-test on the scores of the 24 who completed both questionnaires failed to reveal a statistically significant difference between them.

Interpersonal trust

The questionnaire used was Rotter's Interpersonal Trust Scale (Rotter, 1967; Scale reproduced in full in Robinson et al., 1991 (Eds.) *Measures of Personality and Social Psychology Attitudes*. The questionnaire measures levels of trust towards other people and wider society. Scores for overall trust were calculated by summing across all items (reversing the values of certain items as appropriate). One participant from Q₁ was immediately excluded from analysis as the data from the last page of their questionnaire was not available.

When comparing the average scores for the remaining 40 who completed Q₁ and the 31 who completed Q₂ there was a very slight decrease in levels of trust.

Scores for the 24 participants who completed both using a paired sample t-test revealed no significant differences between scores before and after.

Barratt impulsiveness scale

The Barratt Impulsiveness scale 11 is originally cited in Patton, J.H., Stanford, M.S. and Barratt, E.S. (1995), 'Factor structure of the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale'. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*,

51, 768–774. The scale measures impulsiveness through three subtraits: attentional impulsiveness, motor impulsiveness and non-planning impulsiveness.

The second order factor items were calculated for version 11 of this scale resulting in three sub-scales. In some cases participants marked two adjacent options and these items scored based on an average. On the whole unanswered items were rare and were distributed across items and participants, and should not therefore have an appreciable effect on results. However, for the statistical analysis one participant who failed to answer several items in a row was excluded.

Comparing the average scores for the 39 participants who completed Q₁ against the 31 who completed Q₂ there is a mixed picture, with one sub-scale slightly increased, one slightly decreased and one largely the same.

Twenty-three participants completed both questionnaires. One of these did not complete several items and was therefore excluded, leaving 22 for the paired-sample t-tests. These revealed no statistically significant differences when comparing before and after.

Quantitative data from open questionnaires

The responses to yes/no questions from the open response questionnaire are reported below.

1. *After taking part in vtalent year do you feel more connected to your local community?*
A roughly even split in responses: 14 No; 17 Yes
2. *Has taking part in vtalent year helped you feel ready to find work or continue with education?*
100 per cent responded 'yes'. This clearly suggests that participants felt positive about vtalent year, although it doesn't in isolation identify why this was, or what was particularly useful.
4. *Has taking part in vtalent year made you more hopeful about your future?*
27 Yes; 1 No
5. *Has taking part in vtalent year made you feel more confident?*
25 Yes; No 4

7. *Do you think that taking part in vtalent has helped you to fulfil your potential?*

27 Yes; 1 No 1

9. *After taking part in vtalent year do you think you are more likely to volunteer in the future?*

25 Yes; 1 No 4

Computer tests

We used two computer tests on our first visit to the vtalent year colleges in August and September 2010 designed to measure (among other things) perseverance, concentration and adaptability. We carried out the tests to see if we could discern any correlation between changes in capabilities and attitudes and ability levels for these characteristics. We found no such correlations.

The two tests we used are briefly detailed below.

Trail Making Test

In the first part of this test participants are given a display with (eg) 15 circles and asked to draw a line between them in the correct order. In the second part the participants are given twice as many circles, half with letters. Participants have to draw lines between the circles, alternating between numbers and letters (eg A, 1, B, 2, C, 3, etc).

Test of Variables of Attention

This is a simple go/no-go task, which is commonly used to diagnose ADHD and other attention disorders. On each trial participants are presented with a black square with a small white square positioned either at the top (target) or at the bottom (non-target). Participants have to respond to targets as fast as possible, avoid missing targets and avoid responding to non-targets. Thus the test provides a range of variables (mean reaction times, variability in reaction times, omission errors and commission errors).

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Youth unemployment has been steadily rising for some time and currently sits at its highest level since comparable records began. Demos has recommended changes to the education system that would counteract youth unemployment in the long-term. But the question remains of what can be done in the short and medium-term for those young people who are NEET – not in employment, education or training.

Experience Required argues that government has failed so far because it has misunderstood the problem. Previous attempts have often regarded NEETs as a ‘stubborn underclass’ who are socially excluded. In fact, the vast majority of NEETs are simply young people moving in and out of education and employment, who would benefit from stable, long-term capability building programmes.

These young people require a set of positive experiences that build skills and confidence and connect them to further opportunities. To understand how such experiences can be supplied, we surveyed the landscape of capability building programmes in the UK. As a result of our research, we argue that the Government should explore developing a full-time volunteering programme at the national level. Such a programme could help provide young people with the experience required to succeed in today’s tough labour market.

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