

Youth employment in the UK 2021: Scotland analysis

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted individuals, businesses and communities across the entire country. However, we know it has had an unequal impact – some industries faced complete shutdown, some had to radically adapt their ways of working, and others thrived. Many employees lost their jobs, others were furloughed or faced working from home, regardless of whether they wanted to or had the space to do so.

Young people have faced additional pressures as a result of the pandemic. [Official figures](#) show there were 243,000 fewer young people (aged 16–24 years old) in the UK in employment in May to July 2021 compared with January to March 2020. These concerns over a lack of employment opportunities and long-term wage scarring led to the creation of the [Young Person's Guarantee](#) in Scotland, as well as UK Government interventions like [Kickstart](#). They also led the CIPD to launch our [One Million Chances](#) campaign, urging employers and governments to create employment, skills development or work experience opportunities for young people.

Coinciding with the launch of the campaign and aiming to shine a light on the challenges facing today's youth, the CIPD carried out an online survey, via a YouGov panel, of over 2,000 young people. The UK-wide findings of this survey are written up in our [Youth employment in the UK 2021](#) report, which explores young people's attitudes to, and experiences of, education and accessing employment. Fieldwork was conducted between 2 and 20 July 2021, and results have been weighted and are representative of UK 18–30-year-olds.

This supplement focuses on an analysis of the Scottish sub-sample (188 respondents) of the same data. While the sample size doesn't allow us to look at issues like youth unemployment, nor is it big enough or weighted to do more detailed breakdowns by age, gender or socio-economic background, it provides useful insight into high-level experiences and expectations of young Scots who responded to the survey in relation to employment and education.

We look at a range of issues across three main areas:

1. the impact of COVID-19 on young people, their mental health, job security and career prospects
2. young people's career expectations, reasons for why these were (or were not) met, and their post-pandemic flexible work preferences
3. education-based careers advice and guidance and its perceived quality.

Key findings

The impact of the pandemic is evident throughout the survey. We find young people report worsening mental health and being less confident about their career prospects, with some concerned about negative effects of homeworking. We see the positive impact that good people management can make to young people's career progression (and vice versa), but overqualification remains a problem. We also find issues with education-based careers advice and guidance – the extent of provision, the type of advice received and how it is rated by those who use it. Employers and governments have a role to play in addressing all of these findings – be it through boosted skills development, improved careers guidance, available work experience or a focus on career progression.

The impact of COVID-19 on young people

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of young people say the pandemic has made their mental health worse.
- Over a third (34%) say they are not confident about being able to achieve their future career aspirations. Almost half (48%) say that the pandemic has somewhat harmed their long-term career prospects.
- Many (59%) feel that they are missing out on social connections due to homeworking, with another 31% reporting a negative impact on skills development.

Young people's career expectations

- Over a third (36%) of young Scots in the survey think they are overqualified for their role.
- A third (33%) believe that their career progression to date has not met their expectations, with the highest proportion (43%) blaming engrained working cultures.
- Looking at future flexible working arrangements, the most popular forms are flexitime (with 79% interested in this) and hybrid working (70%).

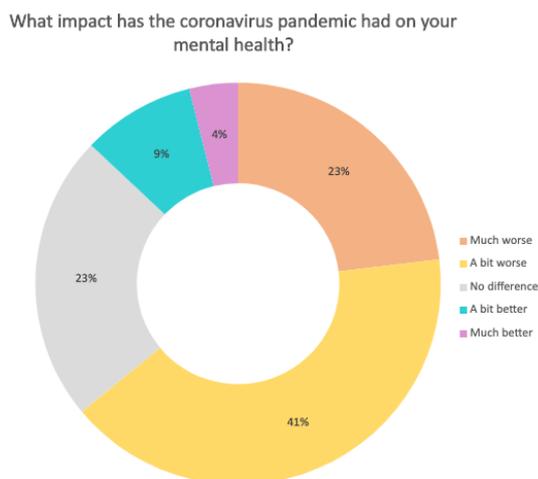
Education-based careers advice and guidance

- A fifth (20%) of young Scots surveyed report having received no careers advice or guidance during their time at school, college or university.
- Out of those who have received some advice, 37% rate its quality as low or very low.
- While 59% received support on applying to university at school, only 6% received help to apply for an apprenticeship. That is despite 63% saying they would have been open to an apprenticeship instead of going to university, had it been available in the subject area of their interest.

The COVID-19 impact

Apart from the most direct physical health impact of the pandemic, there has been increased attention to the effect it has had on our mental health. A global pandemic the likes of which we have not seen in our lifetimes and the economic instability that comes with it, coupled with prolonged lockdowns, significant disruption to normal lives and loss of social connections, have put mental health under strain. This is reflected in our survey too, where, concerningly, 64% of young people say the pandemic has made their mental health worse, with only 13% saying it has improved (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Pandemic impact on mental health (% of respondents)



The economic downturn we have seen as a result of the pandemic has inevitably meant job losses, despite the scale of government intervention. The uncertainty of the trajectory of the pandemic also meant that many of those who remained in employment worried about the security of their jobs. In our survey, we see that over one in ten (13%) say it is likely that they might lose their job in the next 12 months. Conversely, nearly two-thirds (65%) say this is unlikely.

In addition to immediate concerns about job security, our survey shows that young people feel concerned about the impact the pandemic will have on their future careers. We see that over a third (34%) of young Scots surveyed say they are not confident about being able to achieve their future career aspirations. Furthermore, nearly half (48%) say that the pandemic has somewhat harmed their long-term career prospects.

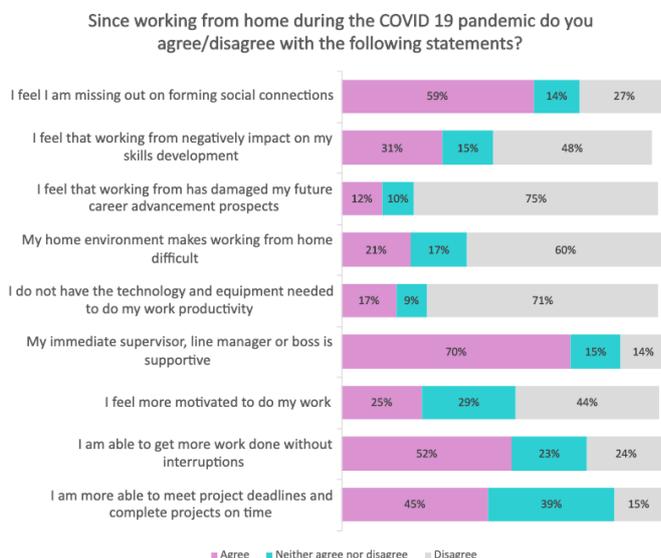
Homeworking: attitudes and experiences

One of the most direct impacts of the pandemic to our working lives was the significant shift to homeworking for those whose jobs can be done remotely. Evidence from other CIPD [reports](#) suggests that homeworking is here to stay, at least to an extent. That being said, it is important to emphasise that government-mandated homeworking has not been a universally positive experience – not everybody has the resources or space to work from home, nor is it everybody's preference.

We asked young people a range of questions around homeworking. The answers are summarised in Figure 2. While we see some positives – 70% saying that their supervisor, manager or boss is supportive, and 52% saying that they get more done without interruptions – there are some concerns that emerge too:

- 59% feel they are missing out on social connections
- 31% feel there is a negative impact on skills development
- 20% feel their home environment makes it difficult.

Figure 2: Attitudes to and experiences of homeworking (% of respondents)



Note: does not add up to 100% due to 'don't know' answers

As workplaces start to transition to the 'new normal', it is important that employers recognise that homeworking is not the only form of flexibility and that other arrangements may suit some employees (and indeed employers) much better. Indeed, in addition to the attitudes and experiences summed up in Figure 2, we look at young people's future preferences in the next section and find that homeworking is not the most popular flexible working option.

Young people's employment attitudes

Irrespective of the pandemic, our survey also sought to explore young people's attitudes to their employment. We know from previous [research](#), for example, that overqualification is a considerable problem across some occupations. This not only impacts on individual job quality and career prospects, but can point to inefficiencies in the relationship between the labour market and the skills development system.

We find that over a third (36%) of young Scots in our survey think that they are overqualified for their current job, with over half (55%) saying that they have the right level of qualifications. Furthermore, 50% of those who responded also say that their educational qualifications were not necessary to get their current job and 69% say they were not necessary to do their job.

Overall, we see that just over half (51%) of young people are satisfied with their job, and over a quarter (27%) say they are dissatisfied. We record better figures for life satisfaction, with 69% satisfied and 18% dissatisfied.

Career progression expectations

In the previous section, we saw how young people in Scotland who responded to the survey felt that the pandemic impacted their career prospects and the ability to achieve their career aspirations. In addition to these questions, we also asked whether they felt their career progression to date has met their expectations. The answers are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Career progression expectations (% of respondents)



Over a third (36%) of those who responded say their career progression so far has met their expectations, with a similar proportion (33%) saying it has failed to do so. As a follow-up question, we also asked why respondents felt this way. The answers underline the importance of good people management, skills and training, as well as relationships in the workplace – all issues that further increased in importance during the pandemic.

Out of those young Scots in our survey who said their career progression has met their expectations, the top reasons cited were as follows:

- They received good-quality training when they first entered the workplace (36%).
- They benefited from good-quality line management from their direct manager at key points in their career (36%).
- They built relationships across the organisation (32%).
- They received effective training and development programmes at work (30%).

Conversely, those who said their career progression has failed to meet their expectations cited the following as the main reasons:

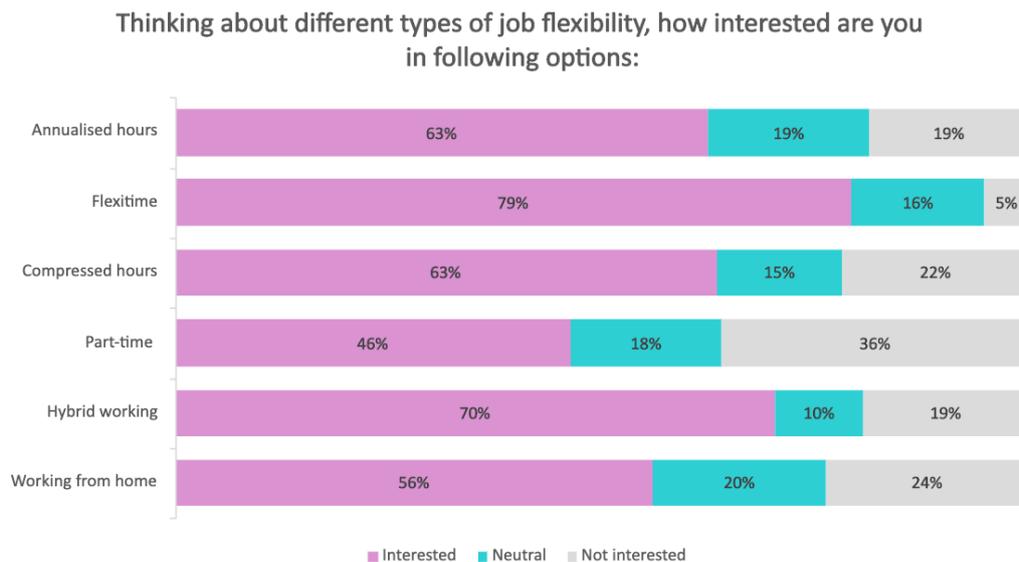
- Engrained working cultures have made it hard to progress (43%).
- They were not able to get on an effective graduate programme after completing a degree (39%).
- There was a lack of effective training programmes at work (38%).
- They received no training or inadequate training when they first entered the workplace (37%).
- There was a lack of flexible working opportunities (37%).
- They experienced poor-quality line management from their immediate manager when they entered work or at key points during their career (37%).

Future flexible working preferences

In the first section of this report, we saw that young people who responded to the survey expressed a range of attitudes to homeworking – both positive and negative. When thinking about the future of the workplace, it is important to remember that the experiences of the last 20 months will shape employee attitudes. Overall, we find that 61% of those who responded say they feel positive about hybrid working, with 13% saying they feel negative. The remaining quarter (26%) say they are neutral or don't know. This underlines that organisations need to look beyond homeworking and hybrid working to make flexible work an option for more employees.

Figure 4 shows how the degree of interest varies across the range of flexible working options. We find that the most popular option is flexitime (79% interested), which is consistent with previous [research](#) by the CIPD. This is followed by hybrid working (70% interested), annualised hours (63%) and compressed hours (63%). Only then do we see working from home, with 56% interested.

Figure 4: Future flexible working preferences (% of respondents)



Education-based careers advice and guidance

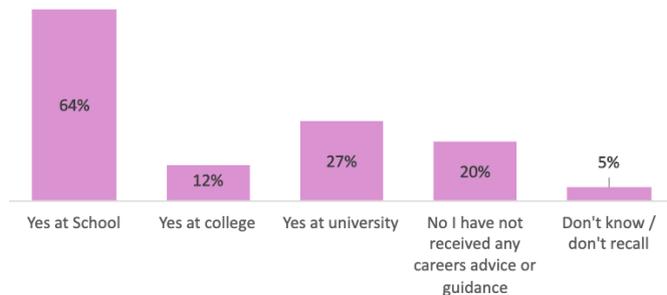
Quality careers information advice and guidance are vitally important in ensuring that young people can make informed choices about their educational and career options and pathways. Scotland's careers services are currently the subject of an ongoing review, and our survey highlights that, despite the many positive developments and [underlying strengths](#) of Scotland's system, there is progress to be made if we want to ensure all young people have access to high-quality careers education.

Out of those young Scots surveyed, a fifth (20%) report not receiving any careers advice or guidance during their time at school, college or university. Just under two-thirds (64%) report receiving advice at school (see Figure 5).

We also asked young people to rate the quality of the advice they received on a scale from very low to very high. Out of those who received any advice or guidance, we find that 37% rate the quality as low or very low and only 20% rate it as high or very high.

Figure 5: Education-based careers advice and guidance (% of respondents)

Did you receive any careers advice or guidance in your time at school, college or university?



Looking at careers services in school in particular, we find that 60% of young Scots in our survey received a face-to-face careers guidance interview. However, only 44% think this was effective, with 54% saying it was ineffective in helping them understand and plan their next steps into further education, training or work.

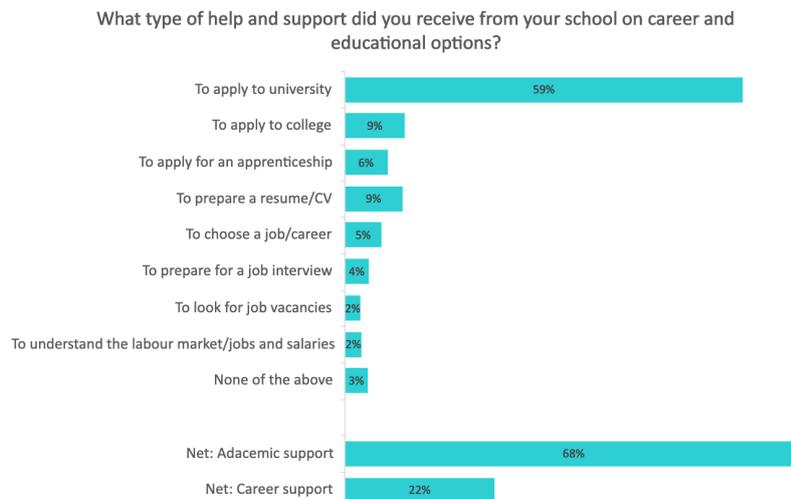
In fact, a concerning 71% of all respondents in Scotland do not believe their school or college spent enough time helping them understand future career options or pathways.

The type of support received – be it face-to-face or otherwise – is just as important to young people’s career prospects. Our survey asked young people about the range of different types of advice received at school, for both further education and career support (see Figure 6).

We see that much more attention is given to academic support, with help to apply to university the most common type of help received (59%). Just over a fifth (22%) received any type of career support, be it help with CVs (9%), job vacancies (2%) or the labour market as a whole (2%).

Only 6% report having received help with applying for an apprenticeship. This seems to be a significant gap and is especially concerning considering the proportion of young people responding positively to the idea of choosing an apprenticeship route if it was available in their subject area of interest instead of going to university. In our survey, 28% answered ‘yes’, with another 34% saying ‘perhaps’.

Figure 6: Type of career and educational support received at school (% of respondents)



In addition to careers advice and guidance, work placements in the senior phase of school can make a difference to young people’s career prospects by providing first-hand experience of a workplace. Across our survey, we find that nearly two-thirds (65%) took part in some form of arranged work experience while at school. We found that 41% rate it as good, with 29% rating it poorly.

We also know that there are clear benefits for those who combine work with full-time education; it provides young people with real-world experience of the workplace, builds skills and helps smooth the transition from education into employment. The vast majority (84%) of young people who responded to the survey in Scotland were in some form of employment while in full-time education (for example, weekend jobs or holiday work). The majority (70%) say that this helped them with gaining subsequent employment and 82% agree it helped them develop their soft skills.

Conclusions

The findings in our UK report and this Scottish supplement show that young people across the country are concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their future careers. Furthermore, we find perceived gaps in the type, quantity and quality of careers advice young people receive during their time in education and see how different workplace experiences so far impacted young people’s career progression expectations.

Preparing young people for the world of work is key to Scotland's and the UK's long-term productivity and competitiveness. Developing young people also benefits organisations through improving workforce diversity, bringing in new ideas and skills, and helping to build talent pipelines. Supporting and encouraging employers to provide opportunities for young people to access employment and training opportunities is vital.

This is why the CIPD has launched its [One Million Chances](#) campaign, which aims to get employers to create a million opportunities for young people (aged 16–30) – be it through jobs, internships, work experience or apprenticeships. Our dedicated [CIPD guide](#) shows employers in Scotland a range of programmes that they can get involved in.

However, government has a role to play too – be it through the [apprenticeship system](#) or careers guidance. On the latter in particular, the snapshot from our survey suggests that the careers services review is very timely, with several gaps to address. The Government will need to act on its recommendations fast and support their delivery through sufficient funding and the prioritisation it deserves.

This report represents the findings from Scotland from the CIPD's *Youth Employment in the UK 2021* report. Click [here](#) to access the full report.