

**Could you tell us a bit about your background, what your goals are and the kind of work you are currently looking to find?**

From school I found chemistry most interesting and decided to do it at university, wanting to do a course that offered a year abroad so I could see more of the world. After 3 years in York and a masters in Brussels I decided pure academic chemistry was not for me. I wanted something a bit more practical and I am concerned about the environment and wanted a career more related to that. Lots of different opportunities around this, recently been looking into more environmental technology but have applied for various things. Have had a few successes getting interviews but lots of it is instant rejections with no chance of seeing feedback, doubtful any real person has read my application. That is if I even receive a response. I do have a job currently but it is part time and in web development, given to me by my old badminton coach. I do not want to do it long term.

**We have seen a lot in the news recently about challenges for young people to find opportunities at the moment, why is it so difficult?**

Lots of different issues are combining at the same time.

Approximately one in eight young people in the UK is currently out of education, employment, or training (957,000, representing a youth NEET rate that rose sharply to a ten-year high of 13.2% according to the Department for Work and Pensions and ONS).

Rising cost of living means companies are spending less.

Minimum wage and NI contribution increases disproportionately affect the hiring of young people.

Increasing use of AI meaning entry level roles are less relevant.

Layoffs mean people with more experience are competing against people with less experience.

More people are more skilled so there's more competition for fewer jobs.

Application processes have changed. AI screening, multiple interviews online and assessments and tasks and other rubbish. Quick apply on sites like linkedin and indeed are useless (with corporate entry-level roles in the UK now receiving an average of 140 applications for every single vacancy according to the Institute of Student Employers, compared to just 38 applications per vacancy twenty years ago).

Older people are staying in work longer meaning there is less churn of workers aging out to make space for new ones (with the average age for leaving the UK labour market hitting an all-time high of 65.8 years for men and 64.7 years for women, meaning over 1.4 million people aged 65 and over are currently remaining in employment according to the ONS and DWP).

**How does this affect your peace of mind, self esteem and spiritual life?**

It is hard to feel wanted. It has been just over a year since I finished my masters and I am in a similar place now as to when I was then. I am transitioning slightly my career path which does

make it harder but I have plenty of applicable skills that can transfer. Having a degree is no longer enough (the government's interim report shows that qualifications are no longer an automatic shield, as 15% of young people currently detached from work hold a university degree, and over 21% hold a Level 3 qualification like A-Levels). Young people are now saddled with huge amounts of debt (average graduate in England owes £45,000) for a qualification that is treated as an entry level necessity compared to before when a degree could practically guarantee any career. With the application process, from my experience 9/10 times if chemistry isn't listed in the acceptable preferred qualifications then I get ignored. For less academically inclined young people, without a degree they are limited more with what options they can apply for, creating further inequality.

Sometimes I feel guilty because I am not spending 8+ hours a day on applications but I need to have a life. I know there are probably opportunities that I have missed, but I have to be selective. There is nothing worse than spending hours on an application only to be rejected and not receive any feedback how to improve.

My whole life feels like a bit of a limbo, I missed out on a holiday with my old uni housemates because it coincided with possible dates of a late stage interview (I didn't get it). I cannot put my life on hold forever waiting for the possibility of a job opportunity. The summer is plenty busy though with things I can look forward to.

I know that things will work and I will get a job, it is just really testing my patience. I am trying hard and doing extra relevant qualifications to boost my CV, I do a ton of volunteering to keep myself busy, I speak regularly to a career coach, I am doing everything right. If it were just me struggling I would feel ok because I know it is something I could work on, but clearly it is a systemic issue.

I do feel a lot of compassion, particularly from my parents, even if we do have disagreements, they are supporting me and I know its because they want the best for me. Other people are supportive too, the community here at the church, the people I volunteer with and more. People are sharing opportunities as they come, things just clearly haven't worked yet.

### **How do other young people feel? Is this a common experience?**

From just talking to my friends, yes. From spending time online, yes. There is a common misconception that young people are just lazy. This is simply untrue. Of course there are people that do not care and will scrounge benefits or genuinely are just lazy, but this has nothing to do with age (the government review found that, despite stereotypes, 84% of NEET young people explicitly want to find a job, education, or training opportunity).

Life now in the UK is objectively better now than it ever has been in so many ways. For instance many major illnesses are curable or at least manageable. Communication is instantaneous, allowing us to connect with people all over the world. Learning something new is as easy as clicking a button. Travel has enabled people to easily visit new countries and become more tolerant towards different people. Social consciousness and support has increased for previously marginalised communities. Technology has enabled life to become so accessible for so many people. (talking about over consumption and the environmental toll is outside this discussion) This just means the types of struggles have changed.

Young people reportedly have more mental health struggles than ever before. Yes this is partly due to an increase in understanding about diagnosis but it is also due to the amount of accessible information regarding every disaster at every possible point of time. Algorithms that are designed to hijack the brain induce outrage to keep people engaged for just another second so another penny of advertising revenue can be extracted. Far right organisations target young people because they want to make them hateful for their whole lives. So many young people feel so overwhelmed that the brain will just shut down. This is not young people being lazy, this is a natural survival instinct to try and escape the manufactured world that has been given to them.

On top of that the struggles of the job market that have been previously mentioned is a nail in the coffin. Young people want to work but are unable to be given the opportunities because they need experience, which they cannot get because they cannot find the roles (market data highlights this experience trap, showing that 60% of young people currently out of work have never held any paid job before, compared to 42% twenty years ago).

### **Why not just take any low paying entry level job to start?**

Not only are there fewer low paying jobs (as traditional starter options like retail saw a massive recent annual drop of 94,000 positions, and construction openings plummeted by 32.4% according to the ONS), people want a life that can support them. No one wants to spend years in a dead end job working long shifts for little pay. Is it that bad to aspire for more? To put the skills learned at college or university or apprenticeships into practice? To have a job that can support them without worrying about cost of living increases? It has long been the way that young people are seemingly supposed to struggle in the beginning and accept worse roles but a traditional career no longer looks like that. People stay in work for longer, reducing other's chances of promotion and associated pay rises (ONS data confirms the unemployment-to-vacancy ratio has climbed to 2.5 unemployed people for every single empty job across the UK, matching the tightest non-pandemic market levels since 2014). The lack of meaningful pay increases across the whole market also means people are moving from job to job, looking for the constant improvement of position and salary that they deserve with more experience rather than face stagnation in their current position from lack of internal mobility. The lack of loyalty from employees has come from a lack of respect from the companies that employ them.

The cost of unemployment in young people is estimated to cost them lots of money over their lifetime (the government's interim report notes that remaining detached from work up to the age of 24 faces a lifetime earnings loss penalty of up to £300,000) which impacts future chances at paying for a house. Home ownership is traditionally seen as a key aspiration which enables people to start a family and feel secure. This is so unaffordable it is already a daydream for loads people of any age who pay so much money into rent that they cannot afford groceries. Let alone young people who normally have lower wages (historical ONS data demonstrates this massive shift: in 1997, the average home cost about 4.4 times the average annual salary, but today it costs 7.6 times the average full-time salary, and spikes to a staggering 12.4 times annual earnings for a young worker on the National Living Wage).

### **What can communities do to help the young people in their lives?**

Firstly just have a bit of understanding. The world has changed rapidly over the past 20 years, and even more in so the past few. Truly we are "living in unprecedented times".

There is an air of resentment from young people generally towards older generations who are seen to have everything handed to them. There is also an air of resentment from older people towards younger generations who are seen to have everything handed to them. Two things can be true at the same time. This is one of the hardest times ever to find a suitable job and it is not looking at improving any time soon. Doesn't mean it wasn't hard before and won't be hard in future (even during the severe 1980s recession, the government actively encouraged older workers to take early retirement to open up entries for school leavers, but today the natural upward churn of the UK economy has faced a structural freeze). Only by communicating and understanding does anything productive come from this conversation.

The world is different now, particularly regarding jobs, no longer can you just hand a CV in anywhere and get hired. In many cases it is about who you know rather than what you know. The second thing to do to help is use any sort of contacts or opportunities to directly try and help the young people (especially since research from the Social Mobility Commission shows that fewer than 15% of working-class young people currently have access to professional networks or mentors who can help them navigate applications). It may not work out but a key conversation with an experienced person in their chosen industry might be just what someone needs to land a role. This human connection in such an inhumane process is very important. Applications are very isolating, relying on being stuck hunched over a computer with no in person experience, everything is online. By providing actual connection, communities can best give the support for young people who do not feel it. There is a big emphasis on risk management, young people do lack experience so it is often preferable to hire someone with more experience but a good referral can go a long way.