

Amplifying Young Voices in Employment

Funded by the North East Combined Authority Economic Inactivity Trailblazer

Employer Good Practice Guide

What Young People Need from You

1. Start here: we're not the problem

What

Stop thinking young people need “fixing”.

Why

Most of the barriers we face are built into systems — not about our effort or attitude.

“Young people are not the problem... systems are not set up for them.”

How

- Listen properly to young people
- Challenge stereotypes (lazy, entitled, unreliable)
- Be open to changing how your organisation works

2. Make recruitment less stressful (and more fair)

What

Your hiring process should feel fair, not intimidating.

Why

Right now it often feels:

- scary
- confusing
- designed for people who already know how to “play the game”

For some young people (especially neurodivergent), traditional interviews are a **huge barrier**.

How

- Send interview questions in advance
- Offer different formats (video, practical task, conversation)
- Remove strict time pressure
- Let us bring a trusted person if needed
- Avoid overly formal or vague questions
- Give real, useful feedback

3. See what we CAN do (not just what's on paper)

What

Look beyond qualifications and job history.

Why

We bring skills from real life:

- dealing with stress
- caring responsibilities
- lived experience
- digital skills

But we're often told we're “not experienced enough”.

How

- Value lived experience as real experience
- Ask different questions (not just “what jobs have you had?”)
- Focus on potential, not perfection

4. Fair doesn't mean treating everyone the same

What

Different young people need different support.

Why

Some of us face extra barriers:

- neurodivergent young people
- trans and LGBTQ+ young people
- care experienced young people
- disabled young people

Treating everyone the same can actually **exclude people**.

How

- Offer flexible recruitment and support
- Create targeted opportunities where needed
- Ask: what does this person need to succeed?

5. Create safe and respectful workplaces

What

Make sure young people are **safe, respected and protected at work**.

Why

Young people have shared experiences of:

- sexual harassment
- racism
- homophobia and transphobia
- being ignored when reporting issues

This isn't just culture — it's **safeguarding**.

How

- Have clear reporting systems that actually work
- Take concerns seriously and act on them
- Train staff on:
 - safeguarding
 - equality and inclusion
- Make it clear: discrimination = not tolerated
- Don't expect young people to "just deal with it"

6. Be inclusive of neurodivergent young people

What

Design workplaces that work for different ways of thinking.

Why

Many neurodivergent young people face:

- discrimination in hiring
- misunderstanding in the workplace
- lack of proper support

How

- Offer adjustments like:
 - clear instructions

- quieter spaces
- flexible communication
- Don't rely on people to "disclose everything" to get support
- Provide training for managers (not just goodwill)
- Focus on strengths, not labels

7. Be inclusive of trans and LGBTQ+ young people

What

Make your workplace somewhere people can be themselves safely.

Why

Young people reported:

- misgendering
- harassment
- being ignored by staff when issues happen

This creates anxiety and stops people staying in work.

How

- Respect names and pronouns
- Challenge inappropriate behaviour immediately
- Train staff properly — don't rely on assumptions
- Create visible signals of inclusion (policies, language, culture)

8. Show us what jobs actually look like

What

We need to understand what's out there.

Why

A lot of us don't know:

- what jobs involve
- what routes exist
- how to get started

How

- Run open days
- Visit schools and youth groups
- Show real career journeys (not just "perfect" ones)

9. Support us when we start

What

Don't expect us to just "figure it out".

Why

Starting work can feel overwhelming:

- new environment
- new expectations
- fear of getting things wrong

How

- Provide a proper induction
- Assign a mentor or buddy
- Check in regularly
- Explain things clearly (even the basics)

10. Don't disappear after hiring us

What

Support shouldn't stop once we're in.

Why

A lot of young people leave jobs because:

- support drops off
- expectations are unclear
- confidence takes a hit

How

- Keep regular check-ins
- Offer ongoing support
- Help us progress, not just stay

11. Understand real life pressures

What

Work doesn't happen in a vacuum.

Why

We might be dealing with:

- long commutes
- money struggles
- unstable home lives

Low pay (especially apprenticeships) can make work **unaffordable**

How

- Be flexible with hours
- Think about transport
- Pay fairly
- Don't assume everyone has the same support system

12. Work with others

What

You don't have to do this alone.

Why

Youth organisations understand young people's needs better.

How

- Partner with youth services
- Work with colleges and community organisations
- Co-create opportunities

13. Actually listen to us

What

Don't just ask for feedback — act on it.

Why

Young people know what's broken because we experience it every day.

How

- Involve young people in decisions
- Create paid roles (ambassadors, advisors)
- Show what's changed because of our input

Final message

We want to work.

We want to feel safe.

We want to be respected for who we are.

Right now, too many workplaces expect us to:

- fit into systems that weren't designed for us
- stay silent when things go wrong
- prove ourselves before being given a chance

What we need is simple:

- fair access
- real support
- safe, inclusive workplaces

If you get that right, you won't just hire young people, you'll keep them, grow them, and learn from them too.