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## Pocket Watch (2016/5) ‘Young and ignored.’ The Lords report on school to work transition. April 2016



### Introduction

It's been a fertile area of debate for policy makers and professionals for some time with heavyweight reports to prove it and last week a Committee of the House of Lords added its thoughts about how to make the transition from school to work for many young people a bit easier.

### Why is this report important?

So this isn't the first report into this area and may not be the last but is important for a number of reasons.

First because of its subject matter. A number of previous reports have looked at young people in general but this one focuses specifically on what it calls '*the forgotten middle*,' those young people who don't take the academic route to university and yet are not NEET either. As the report title suggests, this group is often '*overlooked and left behind*' when it comes to progression from school and yet interestingly they form a larger group than those taking A' levels, 53% to 47% on 2013/14 statistics.

Second, because the report draws a strong connection between the problems these young people face at this key transition point and potential long-term disadvantage: "*Making a good transition into work can overcome earlier disadvantage. Making a bad transition can mean a lifetime of poverty.*" Shades here in other words of the: '*if at first you don't succeed, you don't succeed*' maxim.

Third, because the report highlights the importance of collecting robust data not just on destinations but also on social class, family background, ethnicity and so on. The Prime Minister has called for much better profiling of those applying to higher education and this report suggests that this should be extended to the whole 16-24 age cohort. Some of this data is being collected as part of the new accountability arrangements for 16-19 but it generally only covers those who complete a full qualification and lacks robustness.

And fourth, because the labour market is changing all the time as a result of globalization, technology, the hourglass effect, growth of part-time work and so on and this report is the latest to reflect these changing circumstances.

### So what's the report saying?

Essentially that the current transition arrangements aren't working very well for many young people and that this is damaging both to them and to society generally. The university route is pretty well established, there's growing attention on the apprenticeship route, even though that too needs a lot of work but for those in the middle, there's very little in the way of help, support or clear progression pathways.

Para 287 puts it plainly: '*we tried to find out how they make the transition into work. We could not.*'

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## What's it recommending?

The Committee sat for nearly eight months, heard from 48 witnesses and gorged on a mound of evidence arguably ending up in a familiar place, namely a better informed, better funded, 14-19 system of learning.

The 2004 Tomlinson report remains the touchstone on 14-19 reform for many people and it received a respectful nod during the hearings and is reflected in some of the eight recommendations. Recommendation 1 on a coherent 14-19 phase of learning built around a core curriculum with *'tailor made academic and/or vocational courses'* and Recommendation 2 on *'high-quality vocational courses'* and *'meaningful work experience'* for instance, both come straight from the Tomlinson stable.

Recommendation 2 goes further and calls for a much stronger system of independent careers guidance linked into market information and job returns, a reflection no doubt of the unhappy state of affairs in this area since it was decommissioned in 2011. Recommendation 8 builds on this and calls on the government to cost out a full return to independent careers advice to schools. From memory, the 2014 Gatsby report was one of the more recent attempts to do this, and it worked out that a substantive programme (it defined eight criteria) would cost about £50+ per student.

As for Recommendations 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, these are aimed primarily at government. Recommendation 3 proposes that a Cabinet level Minister should take a lead for this area of work, collecting data on things like earnings and regional trends as suggested under Recommendation 4, working with the Social Mobility Commission on related issues as per Recommendation 7, co-ordinating regional bodies so that they work together to support young people as under Recommendation 6 and reporting the results to Parliament each year as per Recommendation 4.

## What next?

As indicated there's been no shortage of reports in this area not all of which have seen the full light of day. The wider reform of the 14-19 phase of learning may still be some way off although the present Shadow Education Secretary has indicated her interest in it. Likewise careers guidance, where despite numerous critical reports, the government seems intent on relying on current mechanisms such as the Careers and Enterprise Company, Employers Taskforce, Apprenticeship Ambassadors, Primary Futures and other related services.

We're unlikely therefore to see radical shake-up of the 14-19 system in the short-term but that's not to say this report will have no impact. The government has put the Life Chances of young people high up its agenda, is due to respond to the Sainsbury review of professional and technical training routes for young people in the coming months and has lined up a post-16 Skills White Paper sometime this summer. The Lords report has helped set the context for all of this.

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