



A programme led by

GMCVO

Employer toolkit: Adapting recruitment processes to get the best out of young people



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Who we are and why we've done this

Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO) has led youth employment programmes in Greater Manchester since 2013.

We have listened to the 2,200 young people (as of January 2020) we have supported in this time, taking on board what it is they find difficult about recruitment processes.

For many young people, transitioning into the world of work is a time of trepidation, characterised by self-doubting questions such as, 'Am I saying the right things?', 'Am I good enough for this?' 'What if I mess up?'.

Thoughts most of us can identify with.

This toolkit provides employers with easy-to-implement recruitment ideas that can reduce the weight of this uncertainty. The suggestions herein will put young people at ease, allowing them to show their true worth.

The focus is on the recruitment of young people who have limited experience of the workplace - those moving into entry level roles. The advice can however, be applied to recruiting staff members of all ages. The recommendations can also guide in how to recruit to work placement opportunities.

National youth unemployment rates continue to be higher than the rates for older age groups (as of January 2020, the 18 to 24 year old unemployment rate is 10.2% of the economically active — the rate for those aged 25 to 49 is 2.8%). That is a lot of young talent going unrealised.



GMCVO's youth employment programmes have been delivered by commissioned organisations who are community focused. These organisations employ Talent Coaches — youth workers who provide holistic and individualised employment support.



Greater Manchester Talent Match 2013 - 2018

- Young people aged 18-24 who were not in employment, education or training for twelve months or longer
- 137 Talent Coaches worked for 45 organisations across GM
- 2,000 young people supported, 634 moved into employment



Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent 2019 - 2021

- Young people aged 18-25 who have not been in employment, education or training for four months or more and who were not claiming benefits at the time of registration
- 11 Talent Coaches working for nine organisations across GM
- Target of supporting 379 young people

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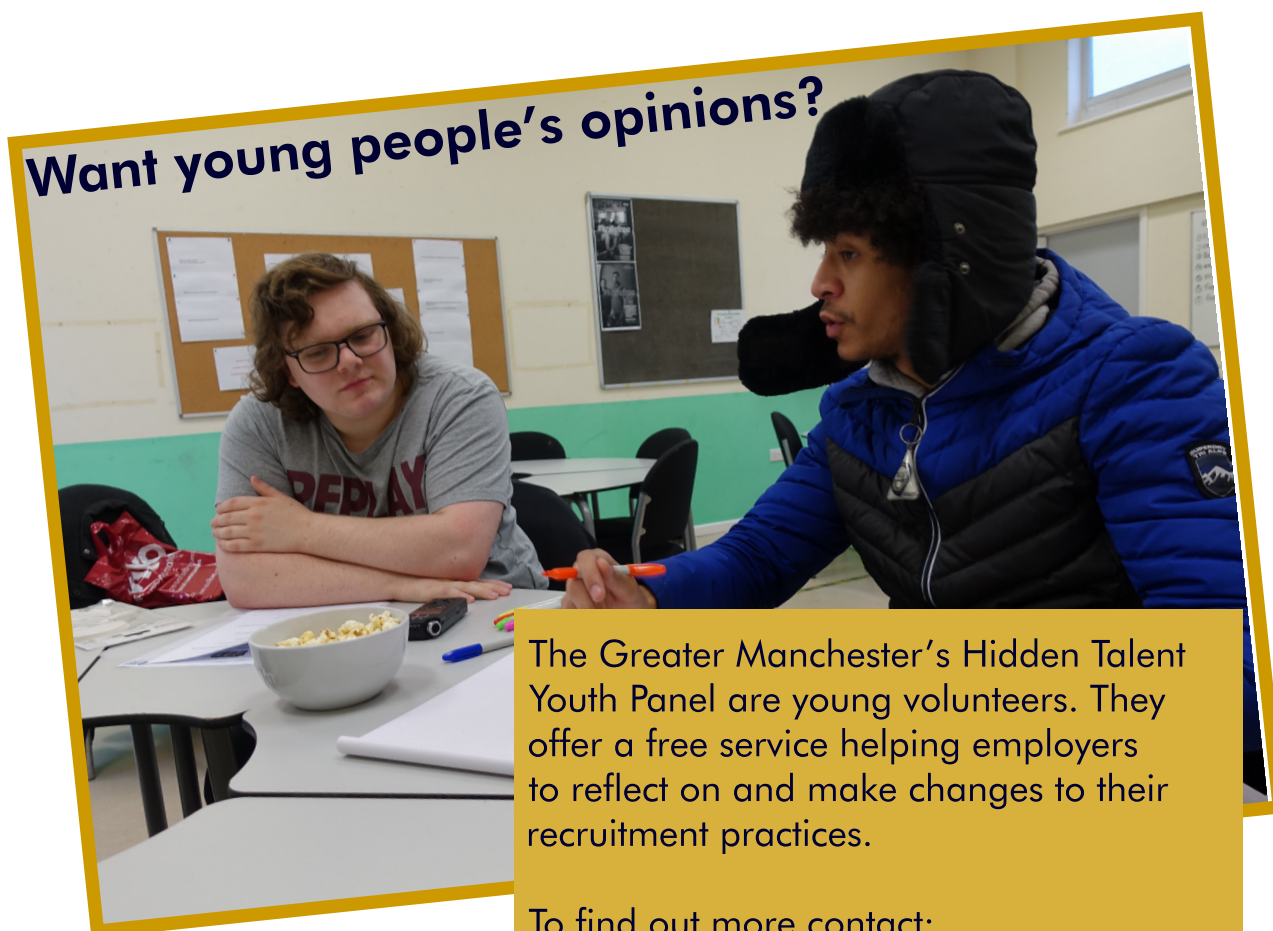
Youth unemployment figures are of course not wholly attributable to off-putting recruitment practices! But, by facilitating transparent and inclusive people-centred recruitment, employers can take full advantage of the diversity and talents across Greater Manchester's communities.

This toolkit will empower you to:

- write job adverts, descriptions and role specifications that attract rather than alienate candidates
- host interviews and assessments that allow young people to shine
- plan inductions that help young people to settle quickly

It is structured around five key elements of the recruitment process:

1. Establishing the correct mindset
2. Writing job adverts, descriptions and specifications
3. Notifying and feedback
4. Selection processes
5. Inductions/mentoring



Want young people's opinions?

The Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent Youth Panel are young volunteers. They offer a free service helping employers to reflect on and make changes to their recruitment practices.

To find out more contact:
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1. Before recruiting, establish the correct mindset

Make sure your workforce development plan / succession planning accounts for the fact young people need to learn the ropes. Have realistic expectations. If you are employing an apprentice it will take time to see a return on investing in a young person's development. You and your managers / supervisors are there to build an apprentice's competencies and skill set — convey this: 'You are building a knowledge foundation for your career.'

Beyond the obvious need to plug a skills gap, there are wide-ranging advantages to taking on a young staff member...

Wider workforce development

Existing staff members may want to develop their leadership and management skills. The opportunity to mentor a young person offers an ideal means of achieving this.

Consider also that Generation Z (loosely, people born from 1995 to 2010) are 'digital natives': from an early age they have been exposed to the internet, social networks, and mobile systems. Their tech skills offer a great opportunity to implement a reverse-mentoring system and upskill members of your team. It may not necessarily sit within their job description but social media-savvy young staff could boost your online profile. Also, do not underestimate the speed with which young people can complete IT-oriented tasks!

Mould in your image...and let them mould yours!

Young people have not accrued the bad habits that come with 30 years on the job! They can be schooled in the cultural practices of your workplace and quickly inherit and reflect your values.

At the same time, a fresh pair of eyes from outside the business can spot ways to renew your existing systems or processes. As you induct / train the apprentice you may realise that some of your processes could do with a tweak.

Loyalty

If you get the recruitment side of things right you will go a long way to fostering loyalty in a young starter.

This toolkit will help you recruit young people who will prove a good fit with your company / organisation values.

If you show interest in a young person's development, challenge them and support them with difficulties, you will foster loyalty — an important consideration if you aspire to retain their services.

2. Writing adverts, job descriptions and job specifications

Recognise that the job advert is likely the first point of contact with potential candidates. As such, be sure not to inadvertently put people off at the first hurdle! These tips will help:

Use Plain English

- Be careful with acronyms: just because you use them every day, others will not understand them.
- If including technical terms, add a 'jargon buster' section. Workplace terminology like 'flexible working' and 'healthcare packages' will need breaking down and explaining.
- Ask any current young employees to sense-check job descriptions.

Think about what the role *actually* requires

- Do not dress-up a role description to make it sound more interesting - be honest.
- Avoid generic asks such as 'must have excellent communication skills'. Be more specific e.g. 'We want someone with the confidence to coolly handle a complaint', or 'You need to be able to see a customer's point of view.'

Location and hours

Try to be precise when outlining working hours and shift patterns as many young people will be dependent on public transport.

Make sure the working location is clear - especially if you have more than one site. Tell young people how far you are from the nearest public transport stop and consider providing a Google Maps plugin of your location.

Don't over-ask

- Specify minimum academic qualifications only if these are *genuinely* required.
- Consider your tone. Use words like 'exceptional', 'dynamic', and 'passionate' with caution. This vocabulary can create the impression you are only looking for someone *exceptional*. Ask yourself, 'How many of us are actually exceptional at what we do?' Instead, ask for enthusiasm and a willingness to learn.
- For an entry level wage, will someone really have experience of a given task?

Be inclusive and convey your enthusiasm

- Stress your commitment to providing reasonable adjustments to support disabled applicants throughout the recruitment process.
- Explain why you are asking for 'protected characteristics' (gender, race, age, religion etc.): so that your organisation can monitor who is applying for roles and take steps to avoid excluding groups.
- It must be clear that if candidates decide not to complete a diversity monitoring form, this will not have any impact on their application.
- Provide a comprehensive list of gender identification options. Leave a text space for self-identifying.
- Highlight the fact you want young people to join you. Talk about your supportive team dynamic: this could be a young person's first job — let them know they'll be welcomed and supported.
- List perks: leave entitlement, flexible arrangements, staff discounts, healthcare plan.

Do you even need a written application process?

Writing personal statements can be very daunting for a young person. They might never have completed one before, may be unsure how to answer certain questions and may feel they don't have much relative experience to write down. Likewise, CVs can be an intimidating prospect for young people who have recently left education and do not have any specific work-related experience. This can lead to some young people not submitting an application for fear of rejection.

Informal 'meet and greets' could tell you more about a candidate's punctuality, enthusiasm and interpersonal skills. Following initial conversations, a work trial could be offered. Our section on inductions (pages 10-11) can be applied to work trials: it offers guidance on information to provide to candidates before a first day, and on a first day.

You could consider asking candidates to record video-record responses to carefully selected questions about their values and potential. Some young people are better at verbalising their thoughts than writing them down. Bear in mind, not everyone is comfortable with such a rehearsed set-up, and that offering a choice of submission medium (written vs video) is key.

Where to find young people in GM for entry level roles

- You can connect with young people by advertising through [Jobcentre Plus'](#) (JCP) ['Find a job' service](#). JCP's network of professional [Employer Advisors](#) can also help by working with you to design a personalised recruitment plan for your business. Jobcentre Plus and Manchester City Council have also created ['The Employer Suite'](#), a free service where employers can advertise jobs and find candidates who are City residents.
- Reach out to colleges and local employment support providers. Colleges understand the local economy and can link you to appropriate apprenticeship providers (some are also providers themselves). On GM's Hidden Talent we commission community-based organisations to provide 1:1 coaching to young people. All of these organisations provide a link between young people and employers. Several run their own employability programmes and are on the look-out for employers to partner with. Visit the [GMCVO website](#) to find out more about these organisations.
- The Growth Company are one of the biggest training providers in the region. They offer guidance around your staff development requirements and provide access to traineeship and apprenticeship candidates. More information at recruitment@gceducationandskills.ac.uk
- The Prince's Trust's work with employers to provide work placements through their ['Get Into' programme](#). Placements run from a few days to several weeks. The Prince's Trust provide pastoral support to young people, offer travel reimbursement and also support lunch and childcare costs.
- Contact your Local Authority's Work and Skills / Employment and Skills team. Local offers vary but there are some fantastic initiatives: free candidate matching services and jobs boards, pre-screening services and funding for both apprentice and non-apprenticeship roles.
- From February 2020, employers within the City of Manchester can register to the ['M-EET Your Match'](#) website to promote employment-related opportunities (jobs, open days, training and volunteering opportunities) to Manchester residents.

3. Notifying

It is good practice to notify candidates who were unsuccessful at the written application stage.

It will benefit the candidate to know how they could improve future applications. It will also help cement in your mind what it is you're looking for – or if you see a common stumbling block, you may need to amend your asks of applicants.

Always take time to provide 1:1 feedback for candidates that made it to interview or assessment centre stage. Consider that those unsuccessful at this stage may fit other opportunities in your supply chain.

In feedback, try to praise where you can but don't raise false hope. Don't be too pointed though. For example, if a candidate's body language suggested they were overly nervous, don't say, 'We thought you were overly anxious on the day'! Instead, you could say something like, 'You're clearly a very bright and capable person, keep trying to put yourself in new situations and practice being assertive.'

When inviting candidates to face-to-face selection:

- Ask again if the applicant needs reasonable adjustments making at the selection stage.
- Offer guidance on what to wear (for more on this, see page 10).
- Be specific on what additional information you would like them to bring along (e.g. forms of ID).
- Be clear where and when the interview will be taking place (provide public transport information) and be specific on how to get into the building and who they need to ask for.
- The day / weekend before the interview, send young people a friendly reminder text. You could call - but consider that young people may not pick up an unfamiliar number.
- Outline what the structure of the day will be. If you'd like them to do a practical test don't be mysterious – give an idea as to what the task will be.
- **BE PERSONABLE:** list the name and job titles of the interview panel members and say how much you are looking forward to meeting the candidate.



The day before the interview send candidates a call / reminder text

4. Selection Processes

Interview questioning

- Flip the question around: instead of asking young people where they displayed something (for example, good customer service), ask them to recall a time when they experienced it.
- Encourage young people to draw on experiences from school / college / family / social life. But try to avoid too many questions that focus solely on one of these spheres as young people may have negative experiences in that part of their life.
- Change from competency-based to strength or scenario based questions: 'what would you do' (rather than 'what have you done').
- DO ask leading questions if young people are struggling to flesh-out a response.
- Do not always use work-based scenarios. Try hypothetical scenarios like: 'Your best friend tells you they are worried about negative comments they've been receiving on social media how you would react?'

Making interview experiences comfortable

- Consider giving the candidates time to look at the interview questions before you interview them (send out in advance or give time to prepare answers on the day).
- Ask a young person to bring with them a photo or item that is important to them. Inquisitive questions around their choice can reveal a lot about candidate's values, interests and personality.
- Get a young person you currently employ to sit on the interview panel.
- Rather than have an interviewee sit waiting nervously to be called, have a friendly colleague chat with them / show them around the office.
- Interviews are two-way processes. Let young people ask you questions. Stress that candidates can ask for further clarification at any point.

Interview bugbears of young people on GM's Hidden Talent

'What are your hobbies and interests'?

Some young people feel this is a 'trick question'. Is it being asked in a chatty, 'put-you-at-ease' way, or is it an 'assessed' question?

If it is being asked as a genuine selection question, young people told us they feel the need to, 'say what interviewers want to hear', by saying things like, 'I always watch the news', rather than, 'I enjoy online gaming with friends.'

Many young people feel it is not always a relevant question to ask: 'What does it matter what I'm interested in if I am a really good fit for the role?'

'Tell us about a time you overcame a difficulty'

Young people find this question ambiguous. Are they being asked about a difficult situation they dealt with in the workplace, or a personal situation?

Young people with barriers to work may have overcome personal difficulties they do not want to (and should not have to) disclose in a first meeting.

Also, young people who have not worked before would struggle to provide an example of overcoming a workplace difficulty - and therefore may feel compelled to talk about a personal situation.

'How will you make a difference or an impact?'

A lot of young people feel too modest to answer this question. Also, it is tough to answer when you don't know the parameters of a role!

Intermediaries

Young people tell us they are frustrated when interviewed by consultants or agency staff. They want to display their merits to the person(s) who will be managing them / working with them.

Alternative selection processes

- Young people may perform better outside of an interview. Practical activities and work trials can allow candidates to demonstrate that which they may have trouble explaining. Some roles will lend themselves more easily to 'showing not telling'. Unpaid trial shifts should never constitute more than a few hours work and ideally should be paid. Be sure that tasks performed by young people are related to those they can be expected to perform on the job. Candidates are not there to be exploited for employers' gains.
- Offer young people the chance to come in for an informal chat/visit ahead of an interview or trial shift. The opportunity to come in, ask questions and familiarise themselves with your location / friendly faces can put young candidates more at ease when they come back in.
- Roundtable discussions work well for some young people. This set-up can remove the pressure young people feel in having to answer question after question. Candidates can each be asked different questions about scenarios they might encounter. By creating a friendly atmosphere (in which ground rules have been established: no interrupting, no dismissing other people's ideas etc.) young people can offer their thoughts on other candidates' answers. One GM employer has had proven success in hosting 'controversial conversations'. The facilitator will introduce a contentious and relatable statement to a group (e.g. the six week summer holiday is too long and should be scrapped) and open it up to discussion.
- Ask young people to come ready to talk about values that are RELEVANT to the role. Be mindful that some company values are not easy for young people to relate to, e.g. 'We make an impact'. It's likely that young people won't have had a chance to make an impact somewhere before! Some will be too modest to realise where they may have made an impact.
- Provide candidates with evidence of what your values look like — in a way young people can understand. So for a value like 'Courage' you could provide pointers: 'Try to think when you last tried something new? Maybe it was a new sport? Maybe you took a trip somewhere by yourself for the first time? How did you feel before giving it a go? Afterwards?'



- If assessing candidates' teamwork in a practical group activity like bridge building, consider deliberately withholding briefing instructions. This means the young people have to ask questions (e.g. 'What does the bridge have to support?', 'How big-a-gap must it span?'). After the activity, be sure to ask quieter members what they would have done — they may have been talked over by louder group members.

5. Inductions and mentoring

Young people applying for entry level roles may have very limited or no experience of the workplace. They may not be aware of expected behaviours that many of us accept as given. The quicker young people find their feet, the quicker they can start displaying their worth and merits.

Before the first day

Ensure the young person knows where to report to on the first day. Be clear on how to get into the building and who they need to ask for. Also, if you have any car parking or parking restrictions make sure these are communicated.

Clarify start times. To ease new starters in, consider a later start / shorter day.

Provide a dress code. Smart / smart-casual mean different things to different people. To avoid confusion and unnecessary stress, provide several dress code examples in pictures.

Provide a timetable of what the first day will look like.

Text or call the young person the day before they start — tell them how much you are looking forward to them starting.

On the first day

Be clear on hours and any breaks allowed throughout the day.

Make time to discuss all of the implicit 'unwritten rules' of the workplace. What are the arrangements for personal mobile use? Should the young person answer a colleague's phone? Worried about making a good impression, young people may not realise they can get a hot drink or go to the toilet at any time. Make sure the wider team model the behaviours you want to instil.

Make introductions to the young person's immediate team and give them a tour of the premises.

Don't expect a young person to read all of your policies: the key ones (health and safety, email protocol, internet/mobile usage) should be covered in the induction. Make sure pay procedures, arrangements for booking holidays and sickness reporting protocols are explained.

Include all of the above in an induction pack. This could include a timetable for the first few weeks.

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As you go

Assign a young person a dedicated mentor who is NOT the line manager. This person should exhibit characteristics like openness, confidentiality and trust. Make sure this mentor DOES meet — rather than simply offering to meet the young person.

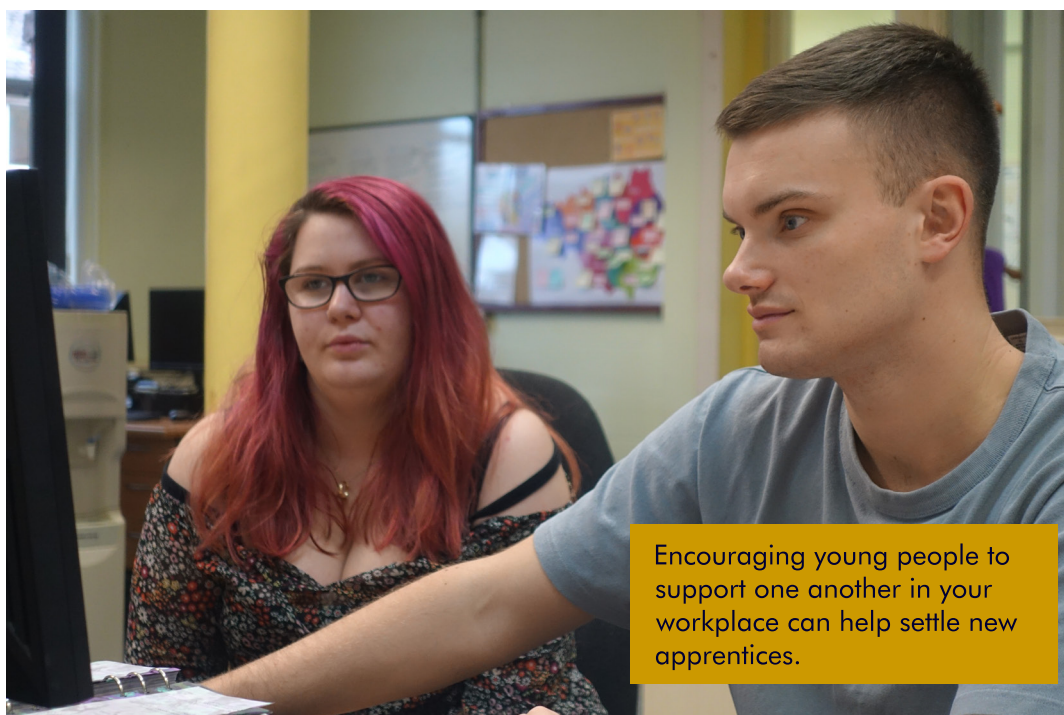
Consider whether or not the young person has done a task before – ask how well they understand what has been asked of them.

Find out (ask and observe) where a young person's emerging interests lie – this can have huge future benefit for the business / organisation. Work with your training provider to arrange training around emerging challenges / interests.

Mentor in informal situations (have a brew, step outside the office). Take an interest in the individual's learning and progress.

Don't assume that because a young person is progressing well, there will not be hiccups. Remember, if this is a first job there will be bumps in the road.

Approach any concerning behaviours in private (don't reproach in front of colleagues, this can be very damaging for self-esteem). Also don't label negative behaviours with statements such as 'you're too chatty.' The employee won't listen if they feel personally attacked. Instead, focus on discussing why the behaviour is an issue.



Encouraging young people to support one another in your workplace can help settle new apprentices.

GREATER MANCHESTER CENTRE FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION

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