

In search of employment

An insight into how young people look for work



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About Rerezent

Rerezent is a youth engagement social enterprise that works with organisations, companies and the government to reach out and engage with young Londoners. We run London’s only youth-led radio station, Rerezent 107.3FM, which gives us access to large groups of young people from across the capital.

We offer broadcast, consultation and training services.

To find out more about us, visit www.wereprezent.co.uk

Introduction

This report provides an insight into the challenges young people face in searching for jobs and the way they use social media to look for work. 110 young people from South East and East London contributed their views through focus groups, interviews and surveys.

What is the situation?

One in five young people aged 16-24 are currently unemployed nationally.

Over 250,000 young people have been out of work for over 12 months.

A particular concern these figures reveal is the effect unemployment has on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the current economic climate, as graduates often have to take less skilled jobs, those with less education and fewer skills are pushed into unemployment. This is worrying as a number of research findings reveal the devastating impact of long-term unemployment on young people's future life chances and well-being, not to mention the impact on wider society.

Securing employment requires undertaking multiple steps including gaining qualifications and experience, searching for opportunities and preparing for job interviews. In this report, we look into young people's actual job searching experiences, which have received little attention from researchers to date. This is despite the fact that young people's ability to navigate opportunities has become a critical part of achieving success in the labour market.

Using this report

In this report, you'll find information about:

- The platforms and resources young people use to look for jobs and what difficulties they face
- How young people use social media for job searching and the pros and cons of using it
- What would help them better identify and pursue employment opportunities

Amongst the key findings, we believe our consultation emphasises the unique role social media is playing as a job search tool. However, social media alone cannot guarantee young people's successful transition into employment. This study recommends the need to develop a combined approach of online tools, tailored advice, high quality training and aspirations. This requires a joint effort from schools, support providers, employers, recruiters, local authorities and Government.

We hope you'll find this report a valuable tool to engage and support young people into employment.

Youngeun Koo
Lead Researcher

Paul Kilty
Director

Key findings

Heavy reliance on search engines

- **Nearly 60%** of young people said that their first stop when looking for work was search engines. (For training opportunities, 45% used search engines and 30% used schools and colleges)

With search engines, young people are likely to be flooded with job opportunities, which could increase confusion. Without adequate training on how to use this type of platforms, young people could experience difficulties in identifying jobs relevant to them (See Holly's case study on page 6).

Social media as a job search tool

Social media is often the first place young people visit to seek new information. Participants in the study explained more young people are using social media to look for employment opportunities:



80% of 18 – 24 year olds said they have used social media to look for jobs.

1 in 6

said they would visit social media first when searching for employment opportunities.



Twitter is the most popular form of social media for job searching.

The study identifies the following benefits for young people of using social media to look for work:

- **Ease of use and integration into young people's life:** Most young people use social media on a daily basis. Features like hashtags on Twitter make their job search easy. Furthermore, familiarity with social media has enabled the development of a new strategy that optimised their search (See Sonia's case study on page 9).
- **Information sharing:** Due to social media's sharing features, job vacancies sent out from social media accounts can reach more than their direct followers. On social media, young people have more chances of hearing about opportunities.
- **Dialogue with industry experts:** Social media creates an interactive space where young people can directly engage with companies and industry experts and get advice while looking for jobs.

What would help young people's job search

1. **Youth-friendly search tools and information:** The current platforms and provisions do not sufficiently accommodate young people's needs. The development of tools based on a better understanding of what resources young people use and what is currently missing will improve their search results. (Detailed suggestions on page 11 & 12)
2. **Integration of advice into search tools:** Currently, job search sites and career advice are often separated from each other. However, integrated into search tools, advice could become more targeted and meaningful for young people.
3. **Education:** Training that develops young people's skills including research, planning and problem solving would not just improve their job search experience, but also enhance their employability.
4. **Case studies:** The study highlights the lack of practical guidance on job searching. Stories of 'real people' and their job seeking experiences could not only provide a practical guide but also raise young people's aspirations.

Young people's job searching experiences

Searching for employment opportunities involves more than simply typing job titles into a search engine. It encompasses drawing on skills people have developed over time including reflecting, planning and research. In addition, for it to be successful, it requires an investment of time and commitment.

We asked young people what platforms and resources they used to look for work and following this, we identified some of the difficulties they faced in job searching.

What platforms do young people use to look for jobs?

The survey (See Figure 1) reveals that young people heavily rely on web search engines when looking for job opportunities. **Nearly 60% of young people said that their first stop when looking for work was search engines.** They used generic sites including Google, Yahoo and Bing and from there they were directed to job search sites.

What was surprising from the survey was that apart from search engines, **young people did not seem to have any obvious alternatives to look for employment.** On the contrary, when it came to looking for training or courses, young people actively used their school or college (30%) as well as search engines (45%).

“Word of mouth is an alternative to not finding jobs online. There isn't really any other known option for young people anyway...”

Nick, 17, Greenwich

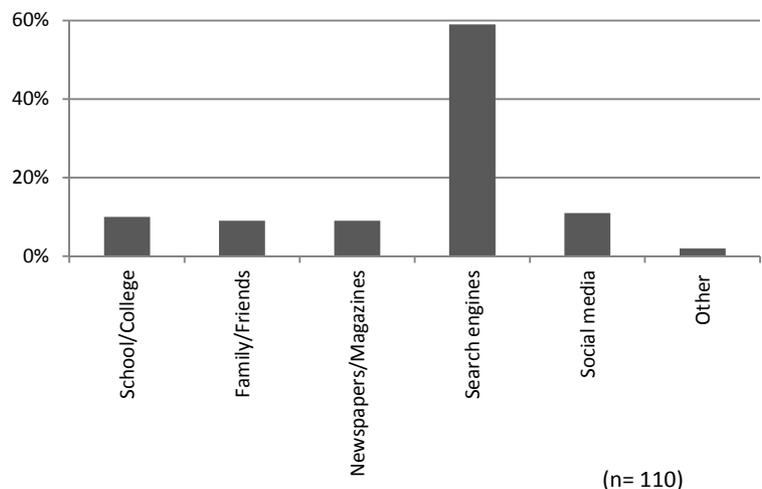


Figure 1: Platforms used by young people for job search

Young people's reliance on search engines implies two things:

- With search engines, young people are likely to be flooded with job opportunities, both relevant and irrelevant, which could increase confusion
- When they use search engines, it is less likely that career advice is available as part of their job search.

This could be particularly problematic for young people as they might not understand specific terminology used in the labour market. The case study in the next page is a good example of this.

Case study 1: Holly (19, NEET)

Holly graduated from music college last year and has been out of work for nearly nine months. She has been mainly using search engines to look for opportunities but has not been successful.

“I barely got any help from school or college... I get hundreds of search results but it’s not easy to find out what’s suitable for me. **Trying to find something that suits both my skills and interest is the most difficult part.**”

Four months ago, Holly applied for a CEO position in a retail company. She did not know what CEO meant at the time and said that the job description did not clearly explain what skills and experience were required for the role. She had had only one work experience placement in retail prior to this.

“I had no clue of what I was applying for at that time. The job description wasn’t clear. Of course, I’ve never heard anything back from them. It’s only after a few months my friend told me what position I actually applied for.”

Holly is still looking for a paid apprenticeship.

The issue in Holly’s case was not simply derived from her reliance on search engines itself. Rather, it was her lack of understanding of basic work-related terms and how to utilise search engines that made job searching challenging. Furthermore, the absence of advice on search engines aggravated her difficulties.

Therefore, this case study demonstrates the importance of adequate education and support to prepare young people for job search and application procedures. Without this, the impact on young people can be detrimental as seen in Holly’s case.

Age and gender differences

We were also able to explore age and gender-related patterns in job search experiences.

In terms of age:

- In the **younger age group** (between 13 and 17), the second most popular method to look for jobs was through **school/college**.
- However, **social media** was the second most popular choice in the **older age group** (between 18 and 24).

When it comes to gender, there were some distinct patterns of what sources young people used for job searching (See Figure 2).

While the majority of females and males chose to use search engines, the other methods they employed varied significantly:

- **Females** used **social media and newspapers/magazines** much more than males to search employment opportunities.
- **Males** resorted to **word of mouth** (via family and friends) more than females and it was their second most popular method.

The study shows that females tend to do their own research using a range of sources in the public domain including magazines, newspapers and social media. On the other hand, males seem to use their personal connections first before they consider other ways of looking for work.

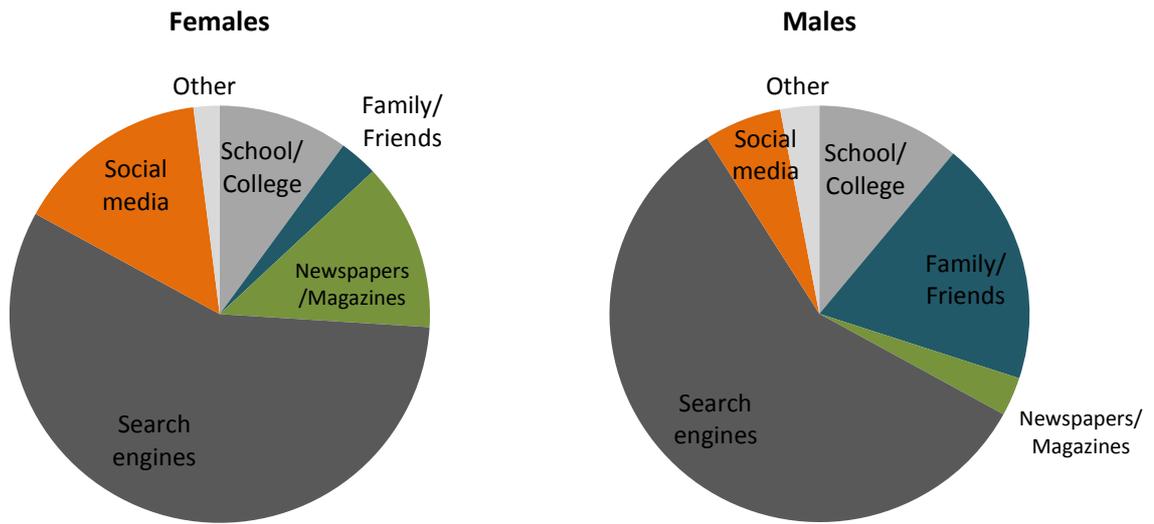


Figure 2: Gender patterns in the use of search tools

Social media as a job search tool

According to Ofcom, nearly 80 per cent of young people use social networking sites in the UK. The data collected through our survey and focus groups also supported the evidence that most young people use social media daily and in various forms.

Our consultation revealed the following benefits for young people of using social media:

- Strengthening existing relationships and making new connections
- Seeking information or entertainment
- Expressing their views and creativity

In particular, social media was often found to be the first place young people would go to seek new information. Hence, we felt it was important to find out how much young people were making use of this new platform to search employment opportunities.

From the survey, we found that:

- **80%** of 18 to 24 year olds said they have used social media to look for work
- **One in six** said they would visit social media first when they look for jobs
- **Twitter** was the most popular form of social media for this purpose.

When we asked young people whether social media was more or less easy to navigate and identify job opportunities in comparison to other conventional methods, young people's responses were mixed. Whereas 40% of them said social media was easier, 25% found it more challenging and 35% said it was a difficult question to answer. While it is not easy to draw a definitive conclusion, the discussions we had with young people revealed the potential of social media as a job search tool.

Benefits of social media

1. Ease of use and integration into young people's daily life

A number of survey participants and young people in the focus groups described social media's user friendliness as one of its strengths for job search. For instance, young people mentioned that features like hashtags made their search easier. One focus group participant explained:

"The way hashtags are used...it makes it easier to navigate and find a wider range of opportunities. Twitter is in some sense better than Google in terms of searching. Your search results are more local like #InternshipLondon."

Nick, 17, Greenwich

In addition, as young people use social media on a daily basis, their familiarity with it has even enabled them to develop a new strategy to optimise their job search. In the following case study, Sonia explains how Twitter is used for job searching among young people and how she has successfully used this tool to look for opportunities.

Case study 2: Sonia

“I don’t have a LinkedIn account yet because I don’t feel like I have enough experience to create one...but I use Twitter a lot to look for jobs. There is an area on Twitter where you can set up private lists which can only be accessed by yourself. I created a couple of lists and one of them is used to follow job vacancies. On that list, I included all the Twitter accounts that tweet about jobs I’m interested in. I get notifications on my mobile when new opportunities are tweeted on the list. Then I check to see if any of them are relevant to me. I also have a list called political journalism as I’m interested in politics. Beyond its social aspect, Twitter is a very good device for constant updates.”

Through this strategy, Sonia learned about trainee opportunities from ITV last summer. Although she did not get the position, Sonia says:

“I didn’t have enough experience I guess, but it was still a good exercise for me as the whole process really helped me conceptualise how I could achieve my goals.”

A few months later, she found Rerezent on Twitter. Rerezent was hosting a special event which was re-tweeted by one of the accounts on her lists. She discovered the company and applied for a trainee position at Rerezent Radio soon after. Following a successful interview, Sonia is now working as one of the presenters of Rerezent’s debate show. This is her first step towards a career in the media industry.

The strategy described by Sonia helps young people amalgamate opportunities advertised by different recruitment agencies and companies. Also, by creating separate lists, they can avoid job opportunities getting lost among other information.

Most of all, social networking is an integral part of young people’s life. Since young people are using social media anyway, it seems logical to use it for job search whereas deploying other sources would require additional effort for them.

2. Information sharing

The number of social media users in the UK has reached 33 million. This wide user-base creates the right condition for social networking sites to become a hub of up-to-date information including employment

opportunities. Young people in the study also mentioned that their first stop to find out about the latest news, events and debates on different subjects was often social media.

In particular, information sharing was flagged as a powerful function. For instance, Twitter’s retweet and Facebook’s share features allow information to travel further and reach more people. This means job vacancies sent out from social media accounts can reach more people than just those who directly follow them. **Due to social media users who share these opportunities, young people have more chances of hearing about them, which otherwise could have been missed.**

In contrast, it is more likely that opportunities advertised on newspapers and job sites do not go beyond those who directly find them.

Young people also mentioned that a number of companies post job opportunities on their Twitter account before putting them on their website or job search sites. This quick flow of information on social networking sites was also considered to be beneficial amongst young people.

“Nearly everything has a social media account these days. Companies often take the time to advertise jobs and other opportunities on social media.”

Richard, 19, Newham

3. Interaction

As seen in the earlier case study of Holly (See page 5), without advice, young people’s reliance on web search engines can make their route into the labour market challenging.

However, social media, given its openness – which enables the creation and exchange of user-generated content – could provide a solution to it. As opposed to static information offered in conventional platforms including newspapers and job search websites, social media creates an interactive space. This means, on social networking sites, young people can engage in purposeful dialogue with companies and industry experts and get advice while looking for jobs.

“When using social media such as Twitter, it’s easy to look for opportunities and find a direct link to the field you would like to get into. There is always helpful advice on hand from experienced professionals or people who have been in the same situation as you. You can get a piece of advice from miles away.”

Natalie, 16, Lambeth

This quote reflects several other responses from young people in the survey.

Overall, due to its connectivity, immediacy and a plethora of up-to-date opportunities, social media seems to offer an alternative search tool for young people.

Concerns

However, not everyone in the study who used social media to look for work had positive experiences. For instance, some young people pointed out that those with fewer connections and less experience on social media might not enjoy the benefits described above.

“I think social media is a very handy tool to use to search job opportunities. But not everybody knows about it. For me, I don’t know where to go, exactly where to look for, who to follow to look for jobs.”

Michael, NEET, 21, Peckham

Credibility of information

Several people in our consultation indicated that it was not always easy to find reliable information or resources using social media.

While social media’s user-generated content and sharing features allow job opportunities to reach a large number of young people, it also seems to make it difficult for young people to assess the authenticity of the information they find.

“It [Social media] is open to all people. Things you read might not be real. Anyone can have access to it...also the relationship it holds with advertisement companies... A lot of opportunities presented might be speculative and there to gain information on people.”

Alex, 18, Lewisham

What would help young people's job search

Helping young people get into employment is a key priority for all organisations working to improve the employability of young people. It is also important for businesses to recruit a young workforce as part of their on-going employment programmes. Providing young people with the chance to learn and gain professional experience is not just beneficial for young people themselves. Their involvement in the labour market can bring fresh and new ideas to businesses and boost the economy.

However, the findings from this study show the current platforms and provisions do not sufficiently accommodate young people's needs to make their job search successful. In this section, we look at some ways in which their experience could be improved.

1. Youth-friendly search tools and information

The study suggests that there is an urgent need for the development of 'youth-friendly' tools young people can use to look for work. However, this does not necessarily mean developing a new website exclusively designed for them. Rather, it calls for a better understanding of young people: what methods they currently use, why they use them and what is currently missing.

For instance, a number of young people in our consultation used their mobile phone to look for jobs on social media. However, the majority of them had pay-as-you-go mobiles, which meant that the amount of the data they could use on their phone was limited. They explained that they would do this type of activities, which require more time and energy, in free Wi-Fi zones including public

libraries and their home. Similarly, a recent study by Joseph Rowntree Foundation on youth unemployment also identifies access to internet and the associated costs as one of the barriers young people face in seeking work. This is a significant factor in young people's search for jobs, and without a proper understanding of their search behaviour, efforts to develop meaningful tools for young people would not be as effective as they could be.

Twitter

As a job search tool, social media connects young people with industry experts and allows real-time interaction and information sharing. Therefore, social media can provide an effective platform to reach large group of young people. Since a number of young people in the study were unaware of job initiatives, it would be helpful if career support providers, companies and recruitment agencies were to use social media more pro-actively to engage with young people. For advertising jobs, employers and recruiters could:

- use hashtags to make it easier for young people to find their vacancies
- connect with youth organisations and inspirational figures in their industry who are widely followed by young people

"I think companies need to get themselves out to the public a lot more because it is hard for us to find them."

Christine, 16, Bromley

Online job sites

A number of young people in the focus groups pointed out that most job search sites were too complicated to navigate and that their filters were often not designed for those with limited or no work experience.

However, they also explained that job sites, despite not being particularly youth-friendly, offered a window to the world of adulthood. By hosting a wide range of job advertisements requiring different levels of experience, these sites offered young people the opportunity to consider their long-term career goals.

Therefore, it would be beneficial to improve existing sites by:

- Including more detailed search options and a 'suggestion' function which takes into account young people's skills and interest
- Having a policy requiring companies to write a clear job description with specific skills and experiences required for the role

2. Integration of advice into search tools

Looking for employment opportunities is a learning process for young people. It is natural for young people to be uncertain about what career paths they would like to pursue and what steps are required to get there.

Therefore, advice is often crucial for them to make a successful transition to adulthood.

Nonetheless, a number of job sites currently do not offer advice and even if they do, it may be isolated from the rest of the site.

Furthermore, few young people in the study were aware of career advice sites, and those who were aware about them said that these

sites often did not effectively link advice with available opportunities.

However, as noted earlier in the study, young people particularly valued the possibility of getting advice while looking for work through social media. Hence, integration of advice into search tools would greatly increase the success of young people's job search.

For instance, when jobs suitable for younger people or those with less experience are advertised online, it would be helpful to include an advice section as part of the advertisement page. By including information about education, skills and the experience generally required in a particular industry, the advice would become more targeted and meaningful for young people.

3. Personalised support and training

Young people in the study generally found it convenient to use online platforms to look for job opportunities. However, they also stressed the importance of having an actual place and people they can visit to get personalised support and advice.

“Search engines, social media, etc, is all good but being able to talk to people is also equally important. Some advice on where to look for and how to search [online] would be useful. I didn't know any of these in the beginning, and it would have been nice if there had been someone to help me.”

Sam, 22, Hackney

For instance, school visits by career advisers and professionals from different industries could provide hands-on advice for young people. Mentoring sessions with them could further help young people identify the

problems they face in job searching and as well as help draw a personalised career plan.

In addition, the findings in the study suggest that, beyond advice, adequate education and training in how to utilise different resources and tools to look for work would help young people greatly.

A number of participants in the focus groups mentioned that they did not have any education on job searching and their parents were not in a position to help. Some of their parents were not up-to-date with the latest job market situation and others were out of work themselves or worked long hours. Having been unsuccessful with job searching online, these young people spent days in vain dropping off their CVs at shops on high streets with their peers.

Therefore, training in career development should become more an integral part of the school curriculum. It should include not only strategies for job search including how to use filters and keywords online, but also life skills such as problem solving, planning and research. This would not just improve young people's job search results but, more importantly, enhance their employability.

4. Case studies

A number of young people in the study explained that it was difficult to find practical guidance on searching for jobs. In relation to this, young people said that hearing success stories of 'real people' and their job search experiences would be helpful.

They explained that they would like to know what skills and experiences these people had, how they found work, what steps they took, what was successful and the challenges they experienced in their journey to employment.

“Case studies are good. The whole journey, How they applied, what they did in the interview...yeah, I would like to know all those practical things.”

Hannah, 17, Peckham

In addition, our discussions also revealed that case studies could act beyond the role of guidance. They could raise young people's aspirations. As a young person in one of the focus groups said:

“A lot of job initiatives really don't inspire you...like lower classes like us...you only get that if you're born in a rich family. I would like to hear people's real stories, their voices. How they have got there.”

Victor, 19, Newham

This is important as a lack of aspirations has been widely discussed as a crucial factor in the under-representation of young people from less privileged backgrounds in higher-paid sectors and specialist jobs. Therefore, the development of case studies that both raise aspirations and match them with available career paths would greatly benefit young people.

Considering the popularity of video sharing sites and apps among young people, video case studies, including video recordings of school visits by professionals and career advisers, would help inspire a wide group of young people.

Recommendations

Education (schools/colleges/training providers) and Careers Advisors

- Provide specialist training to teach young people key employability skills in research, planning and use of search tools such as social media and online job sites
- Offer personalised advice and tailored support to meet individuals' needs
- Develop case studies of young people who have successfully secured jobs and developed their careers to inspire and give guidance for young people moving into employment

Online job sites

- Develop youth-friendly search tools with schools and youth organisations to better accommodate their needs
- Include an advice section as part of search and advertisement pages to link advice to real opportunities
- Work closely with companies to ensure job descriptions are clear and vacancies are promoted through social media to reach a wide group of young people

Employers/ Recruiters

- Partner with schools and youth organisations to provide industry-specific, hands-on advice on what employers are looking for in young people
- Use social media more pro-actively to promote job opportunities and engage large groups of young people
- Promote examples of young people who have secured jobs and who have become influential in their industry to inspire and give guidance to a young workforce

Appendix

Media

In conjunction with the study, we broadcast a special radio show to gather views from a wider group of young people. To find more about the show, visit <http://bit.ly/1ciFJIE>.

Sample

We undertook a study with young people from South East and East London. 110 young people contributed their views through focus groups, one-to-one interviews and a survey. Of them, we carried out face-to-face consultation with 35 young people to gain in-depth information about their job searching experiences and the difficulties they have experienced.

We obtained informed consent from all the participants involved in the research to use their data anonymously.

Young people who participated in the study were aged between 13 and 24 (average 18). 25% of them were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

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About us

Our main aim is for young Londoners to have a voice so they can better represent themselves and their communities.

We run Reprezent 107.3FM, London's only youth-led radio station, broadcasting 24/7 to a large young audience. Alongside the station we deliver a youth media training programme that develops young people's skills, confidence and talents.

We also work with companies, organisations and local authorities across London, helping them to communicate, engage and support young people more effectively.

Our services

We run media campaigns that reach and connect with a large youth audience.

We provide youth consultation services, enabling our clients to learn and understand what young people think on issues and topics.

We deliver youth training programmes, developing skills and progression into education and employment.

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