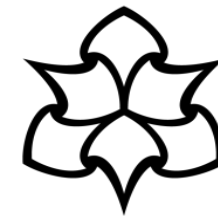


Covid-19 and Young Workers in the UK



Dr Fiona Christie

Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre,
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

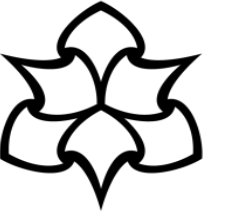


Funded by the British
Academy

Learning Outcomes

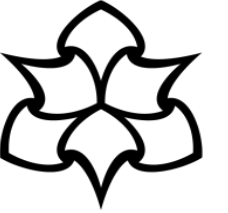
- To discover the consequences of pandemic for young people's work
- To explore how young people are resisting uncertainty
- To consider implications of research findings for practice





Contrasting fortunes of young people





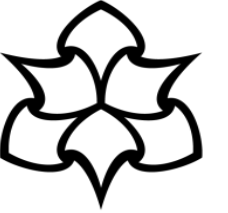
Theorising work: some ideas which influenced the project

Decent Work – access to work, rights at work, social protection, social dialogue (ILO, 2019)

Psychology of Working Theory - Need for survival and power; social connection and contribution; self-determination (Blustein, 2018)

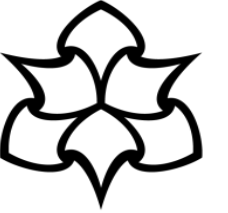
Young workers - Marginalised, liminal, traditional (Furlong et al, 2018)

Covid-19 Context: Lives in limbo - A continuous present (Bone, 2019); The [im] possibility of planning a future (Cuervo & Cesters, 2019); Waithood and Cruel optimism (Pettit, 2019)



**Covid-19 has amplified
existing concerns about
young people and
precarious work**





Our project - *Young People and Work in an Age of Uncertainty*



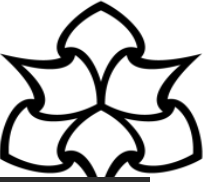
Greater Manchester context



The lived experience of insecure work. Priority sectors included 'accommodation and food'. 'retail' and 'arts, entertainment and recreation'



Twenty one young people (18-30) interviewed twice in 2021. Wave A (n21). Wave B (n19). Complementary data from pilot research with delivery workers (n7).



Chaos and fury as Johnson forces curbs on Manchester

Ten days of talks end in acrimony over size of Covid support package

Government playing poker with people's lives, warns Burnham

Heather Stewart
Josh Halliday
Peter Walker



Andy Burnham accused the government of playing a "game of poker with people's lives" yesterday after Boris Johnson imposed the toughest Covid restrictions on Greater Manchester and across the north, saying a support package for businesses and low-paid workers. After a chaotic day of negotiations, the 10-day standoff between Downing Street and Greater Manchester's leaders came to an inconclusive end despite the two sides being just 24m apart, or 12.5 of the north.

In a televised statement, Burnham warned that local people faced "a winter of real hardship". He accused ministers of halting the region into accepting less than the £10bn that would be expected for businesses and that walking away from the talks amounted to a "calculated act of letting down".

The prime minister confirmed that the 10 measures would be imposed on 2.8 million people in the region from midnight Wednesday, closing pubs and a wealth of hospitality sectors. It means one in ten people in England, nearly 10 million, will be under the strictest curbs. There are no clear rules for the imposed curbs.

Johnson said the day the UK coronavirus death toll rose by 210 - the highest daily figure since the first wave of the pandemic - and new cases exceeded 20,000. Last month, the government's chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, warned the UK was on course for 200 deaths a day by mid-November.

The decision to enforce tighter restrictions in Greater Manchester prompted critics from Tory MPs, a number of whom are understood to have encouraged Burnham and colleagues to push for a better deal. Graham Brady, the Conservative MP for the constituency, told the health secretary, Matt Hancock, in the Commons: "I just do not think it is fair to throw the Greater Manchester people under the bus. It is better to do these things, if they must be done, by consensus".

In a sign of anger among so-called red wall Tory voters, the Manchester Young Conservatives tweeted: "Boris has had about hadging on in the north."

The mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, accused ministers of attempting to "let the region down".

It's time for Boris to go. He's not a conservative. He's got no backbone or genuine desire. He's incompetent. He has now lost all the deals we worked so hard to get for Greater Manchester."

Ron Stanger, the Labour leader, said he would form a Commons vote today demanding a "year zero action plan" for areas hit by the 10 restrictions. On a day of fraught talks after a late night ultimatum from the government on Monday, Burnham sought votes in support for businesses and staff affected by the 10 measures, later lowering the request to 175m and then 100m, Johnson offered 100m.

"The mayor didn't accept this [deal] unthinkingly," Johnson said.

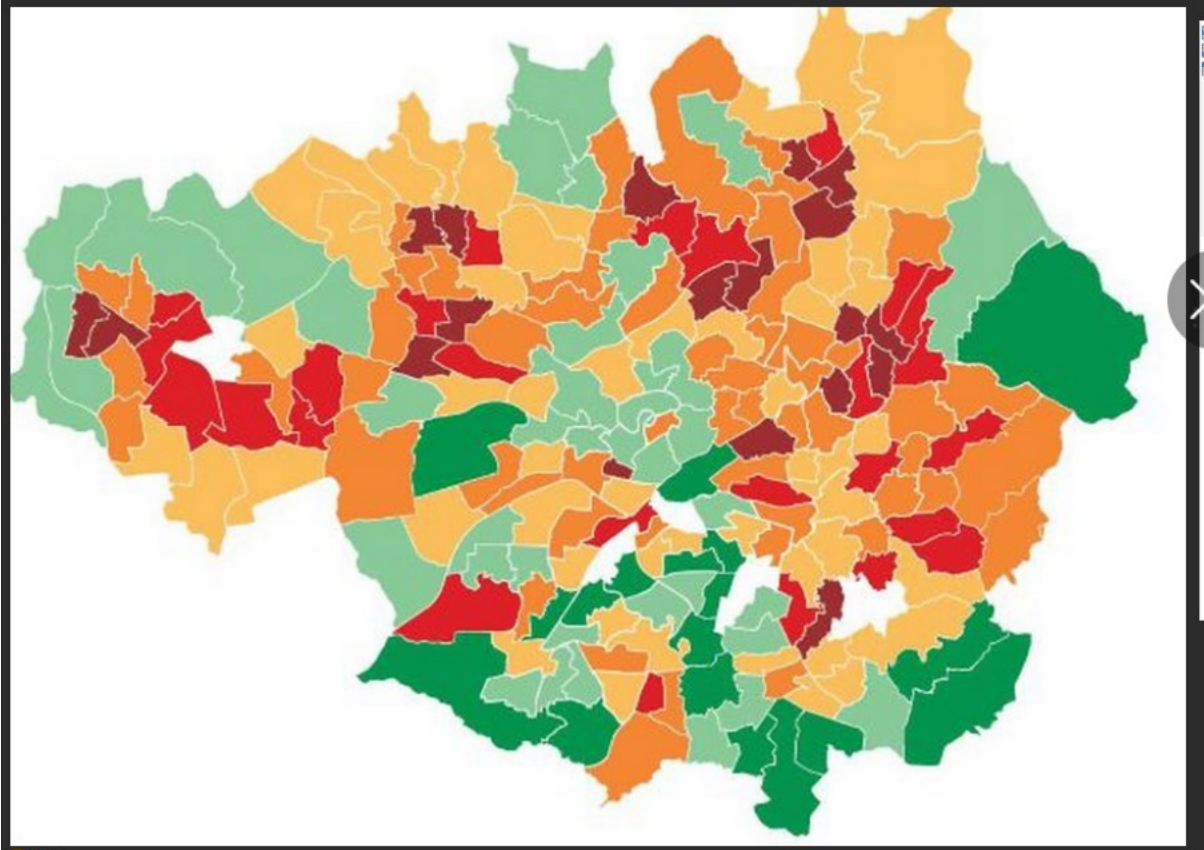
I must now proceed with moving Greater Manchester to the very high alert level. Not to say we've put Manchester's residents at risk. A No 10 source claimed a figure of 175m and another source admitted at least 100m. A No 10 source also said the prime minister is debating strict during a

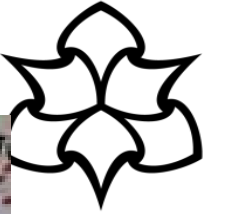
The Guardian says there was "chaos and fury" over the decision, with Andy Burnham saying people faced a "winter of real hardship". The paper says one in ten people in England will be living under the tier three measures, adding that this is the first time they have been imposed unilaterally.



Revealed: One in five young people out of work in Greater Manchester youth unemployment hotspots

By Manchester Evening News
15:35, 10 JAN 2013



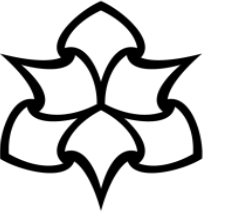


Source BBC News



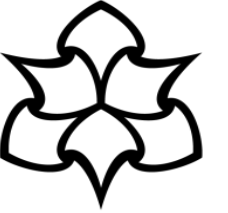
Source - Guardian





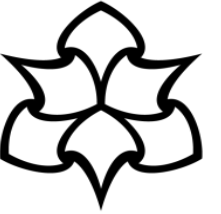
Early empirical findings: Mini-spoiler alert!





Project in progress – Wave A and B (40 interviews so far)

- Value of a longitudinal approach - lots of changes for participants in six months – things do get better.
- Evidence that interventions have helped (via job centre, university placements team).
- Importance of interaction with varied people in positions of support/power – e.g., lecturers, placements and careers staff, job centre advisers
- Famine to feast - Too much work for some young people (e.g., hospitality). Intensification even in work they like (e.g., creatives).
- Desire for meaningful work endures.
- Work remains a painful experience for some young people.



Consequences: Disrupted dreams and delayed transitions

Disrupted dreams –
opportunities
cancelled/postponed

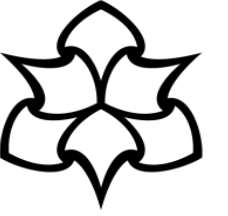
Delayed transitions –
numerous obliged to
return to family home

Lives on hold –
reduced confidence in
planning for the future

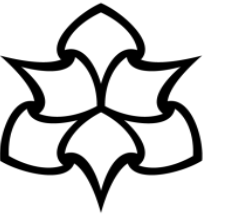
Mental health and
wellbeing – isolation,
anxiety due to changes
experienced

Uncertain lives **reduce**
ability to be active
citizens (temporal
uncertainty)

Economic instability
for all in varied ways

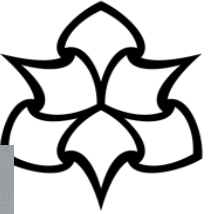


Source – CERIC Leeds



I will say that the pressure that I'm under has forced me to get **mental health** help which is a positive but of course all of these things take so long because of this Tory government underfunding, critically underfunding the NHS... The stress and pressure of not being able to see people as a single person... So it's completely changed my life really, this pandemic and completely changed my work circumstances. Now I'm not really available for any kind of work unless it can be done from home because I can't, I still can't risk my mother's health.

Cherelle, worked as a care assistant, 1st Interview unemployed

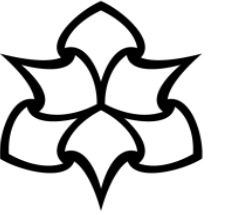


Scope for resistance: rejecting passivity

- New opportunities
- Improvisation. Optimism against the odds.
- Buffering
- Managing welfare benefits systems
- Politically opinionated but not generally active.
- Safety nets and back-up plans

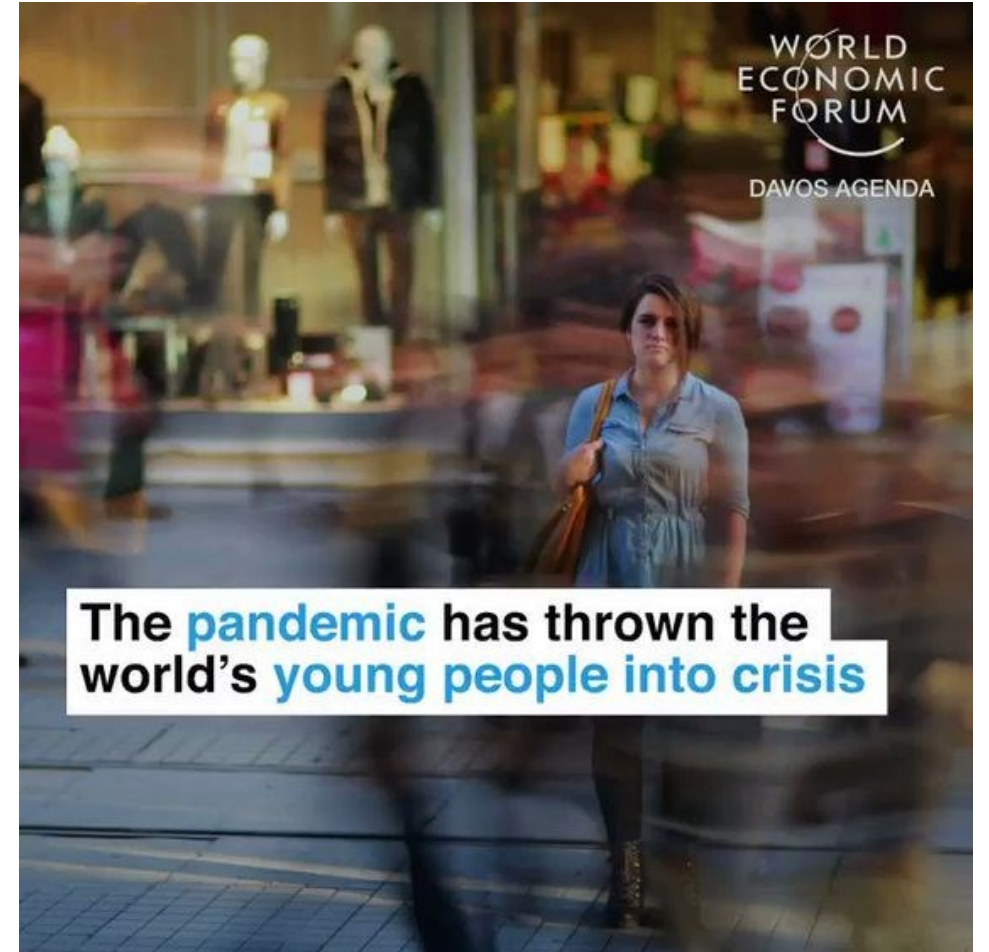


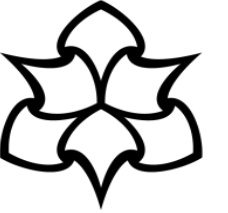
Source Peter Davis



Making sense of uncertainty

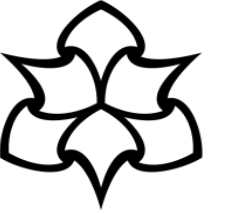
- The elusive grand career narrative (Super, 1980; Blustein, 2006)
- The allure of career calling (Duffy et al, 2007)
- Endurance of toil (Sennett, 1999)
- 'I don't dream of labour' (Srnicsek and Williams, 2016)





Questions of Decent Work? Responding and resisting uncertainty





Defining Decent Work



Earning enough to get by



Happiness/satisfaction



Dignity/being valued



Progression



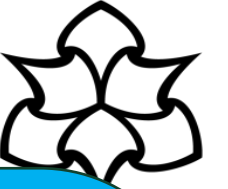
Having rights and protection



Subjective dimension to this – generated interesting insights

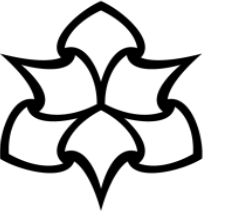


Gratitude touring show



Decent work for me, being happy in your job, having good interactions with people, not feeling depressed, having enough to feed and house yourself and have some leisure time and kind of getting pleasure from your work, you know, yeah. And feel like you're contributing to society and making people happy in some way, in whatever way it is. ...What you're doing, research, trying to help society, trying to help young workers. I think that's decent work.

Blake, self-employed artist



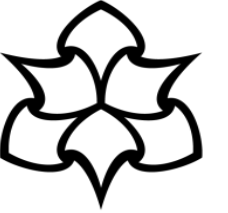
Social dialogue and trade unions: Ambivalent perspectives

- Limited knowledge of trade unions
- Supportive of the concept of collective action
- Not in jobs where unions active
- Trusting of employers – don't need a union
- Cost of joining is a barrier – is it worth it?
- Scepticism re whether unions can have impact

Uber to pay UK drivers minimum wage, holiday pay and pension

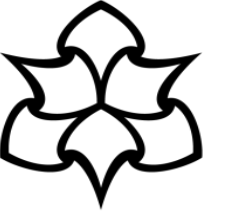
Move follows supreme court ruling that drivers are workers but critics say they are still short-changed





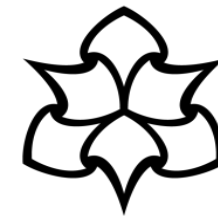
I've joined the IWGB and they want me to be involved more, but to be honest **it's hard to trust people you don't know and who are taking money rather than giving it.** I was reluctant to do so as I want to stay self employed as a sole trader and I only have myself to blame if I make mistakes without it effecting other people.

John, 29, Deliveroo cyclist



I was a member of the Musicians Union when I was in college, but that's cos it's a reduced fee. But since then no cos it's really expensive to join and I dunno, I probably should but I just-, and I know a lot of people that don't and a lot of people that do but I personally am not part of that union.

Simone, 1st interview Musician, hospitality worker



Social protection: very welcome

Welcomed political action to support young people, e.g., Opportunity Guarantee

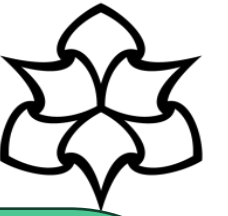
Benefits of certain interventions, e.g., Kickstart, New Enterprise Allowance

Mixed experience of Universal Credit

Critical of different minimum wage thresholds for young people

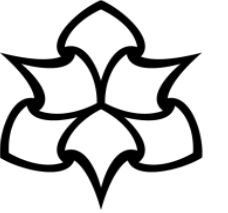
Poor practices and lack of regulation of some employers





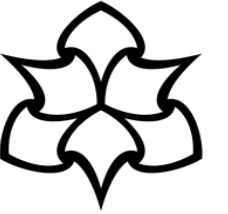
A: ...it's **all minimum wage** which isn't too bad cos I've turned 21 now but I remember when I was like younger or even before I turned 18 the pay was like minimum wage for younger people which is rubbish... Yeah cos they do hire quite a lot of under 18s at work. Been training quite a few at the moment and like **they do get a lot of benefits from hiring younger kids** cos they must save so much money just paying them, I think it's like £4.50 for under 18s. If they hire a 16 year old they can work for them for two years for that much...

Clara – 1st interview - trainee hairdresser and hospitality worker



And so I think that should be a bit more regulated. I think if you're going to open a business and you're going to take responsibilities for employees, **there should be safeguards** there to make sure that you actually do look after the welfare of your employees. You have to pass a driving licence test to get a car **but you don't have to get a business owner's licence to manage people.**

Khaleel, 1st Interview - unemployed photographer



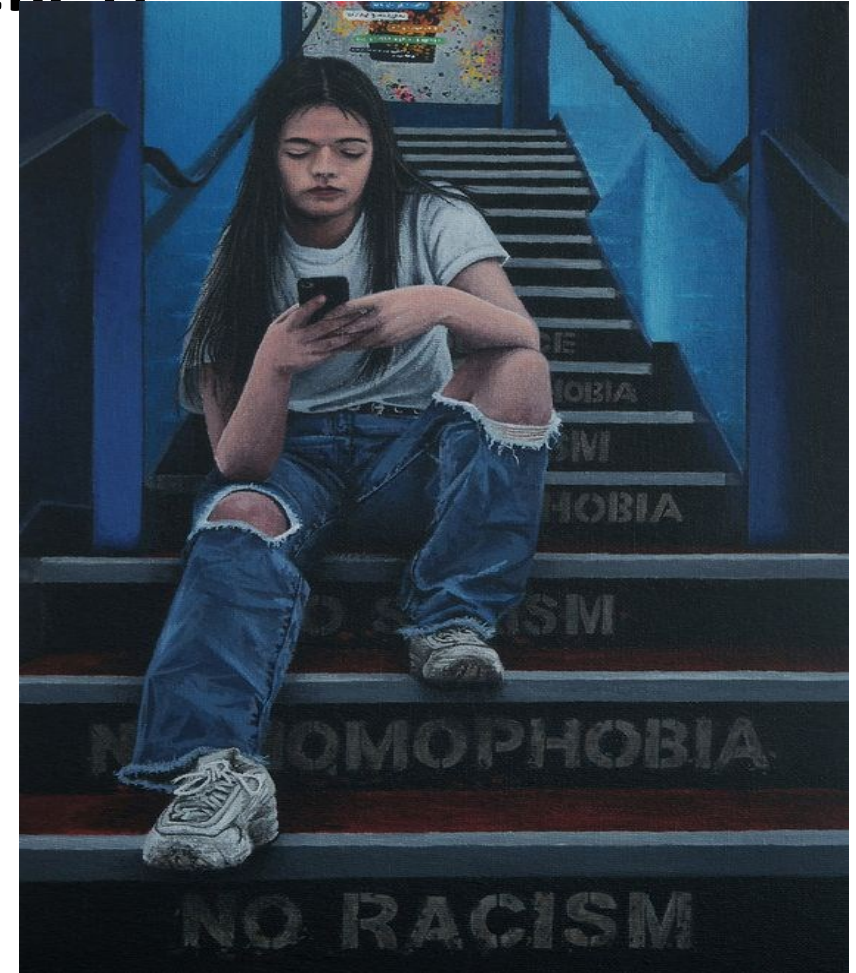
Rights at work: strong instincts but limited awareness

Awareness of inequalities and discrimination

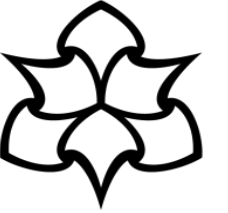
Unfair recruitment and employment practices

Vagueness about systems designed to help
e.g., role of employment contracts

Some conscious of own positioning e.g.,
privilege or lack of privilege

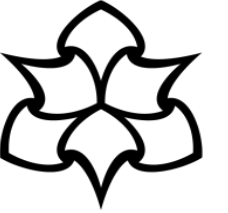


Source Peter Davis



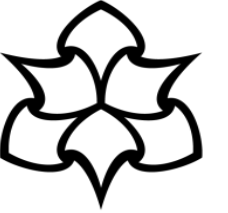
...that experience has taught me a lot about how different kinds of employers treat their employees, ... if you're not classed as an employee in inverted commas in the legal definition, if you're an agency worker, whatever, **you don't have rights** and they can treat you however they like. And I've had one experience of, again it was a temp job. It was, yeah it was a temp job, not a very nice company.

Alexa, 1st interview - administrator



Yeah maybe that's just me. Not my generation, just me **and people from my class and my background and education we can choose**, we can study, we can go and study maths or art or music or something like that. Building, engineering you could choose that and then work and eventually get a job in it.

Blake, 1st Interview – self-employed artist



Availability of Employment opportunities: complexity

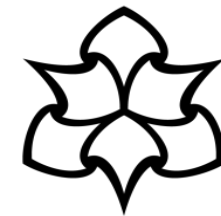
The puzzle - awareness of scarcity and competition for some jobs in contrast to shortages elsewhere.

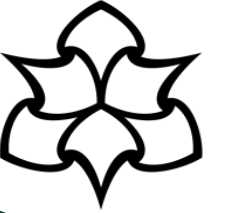
Creative jobs 'burden to bear' of insecure work

Inefficiencies for employers and young people – high volume job applications and hoops to jump

'Any job' easy to find.

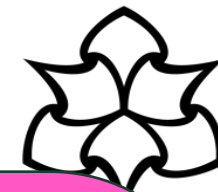
Contradictory views on levels of individual control





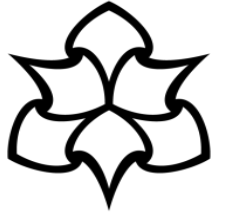
Yeah I think I've weathered the storm quite well but of course I've got the benefit of having my student loan that covers my rent with additional top ups from my family. I've managed to find work quite well.... I've had so many jobs and I always manage to find something new and find something quickly. **I really struggle to understand these perspectives from people that say there's nothing out there.**

Adam, Student – 1st Interview, working for Deliveroo



...your persona and your like self is so tied into your creations that if that is like, basically if you're told that that's worthless or that you can't do that any more or it's valueless or like the situation, even worse if the situation around you renders it valueless, then you just, it's a very personal attack it feels like. It feels very, you know it's a very vulnerable place that you make art from so I think it's pretty difficult to go, to be told or to be in a situation where you can't make your art any more or you're told that that it is, you know it doesn't matter anymore.

Simone, Musician and hospitality worker



Questions for today? Implications of our research

How to juggle realism and optimism in career interventions with young people?

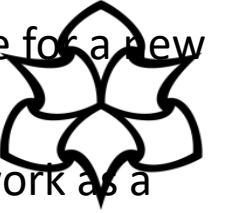
How to manage and provide careers support services in a volatile policy environment?
Morale and motivation of practitioners/managers?

How to marshal evidence that interventions work and argue this with confidence?

As careers professionals, how to navigate the tensions between individual, organisational and socio-economic issues? What can a social justice approach offer?

What can employers, politicians, professionals and young people do to help improve working lives for young people?

How can careers professionals use the concept of Decent Work in their practice?



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