

## Economic activity and health

### Initial findings from the Next Steps Age 25 Sweep



#### Next Steps Age 25 Sweep

The Next Steps Age 25 Sweep took place between August 2015 and September 2016. A total of 7,707 cohort members took part by web, telephone or face-to-face interviews. Data from this sweep and previous sweeps of Next Steps are available to download from the UK Data Service.

#### Introduction

Millennials in England faced a number of challenges as they entered the world of work. They entered the labour market at the height of the most recent financial crisis and faced higher than ever university fees and student loan debt.

The Age 25 Sweep of Next Steps (previously known as the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England) can help policymakers and researchers understand these

important aspects of the millennial generation's lives.

This briefing paper summarises 25-year-olds' experience with the labour market. More specifically, it explores the nature of the cohort members' current jobs, and the proportion of shift workers, zero-hours contract workers, and unemployed. It also examines the links between labour market relations and self-assessed general health and mental ill health.

#### Key findings

- Over two thirds (66%) of 25-year-olds were employed full time, with a higher proportion of men (74%) in full time work than women (58%).
- 4 per cent were in a top job as a manager, director or Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and the largest single group of employees (15%) were professionals, such as teachers, scientists, accountants or lawyers.
- Having a zero-hours contract and being unemployed were associated with poorer self-assessed general health, after taking into account individual and behavioural characteristics.
- Shift workers, those with zero-hours contracts and those who were unemployed were at a greater risk of reporting poor mental health after taking into account individual and behavioural characteristics.

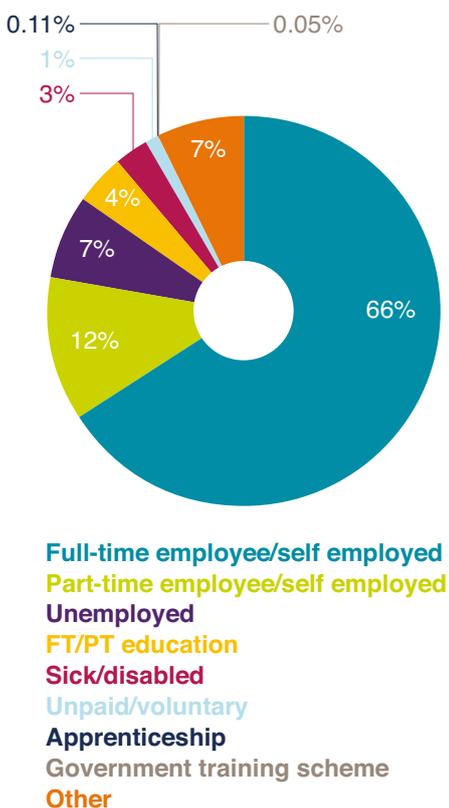
# Findings

At age 25, Next Steps cohort members were asked a series of questions designed to gauge their social status and relationship with the labour market.

## Economic activity at age 25

Figure 1 shows that two thirds (66%) of 25-year-olds were employed full time, while around 1 in 8 (12%) were employed part time. Seven per cent were unemployed, which was just above the UK national average (5.4%) in 2015 (Eurostat, Bureau of Labor Statistics). Small numbers were still in full-time or part-time education (4%), a government employment or training scheme (0.05%), or an apprenticeship (0.11%) at this age. Three per cent were sick or disabled, and 1 per cent were either unpaid or in voluntary work.

FIGURE 1:  
Economic activity at age 25\*



## Working hours

There were some gender differences in relation to labour market participation, as we might expect: a lower proportion of women were in full-time employment (58%) than men (74%). However, this may be driven by the gender differences in part-time work: 17 per cent of women but just 7 per cent of men were employed part-time.

Around a quarter (23%) of 25-year-olds were shift workers (there was no gender difference for shift work), and 5 per cent had zero-hours contracts. A slightly higher proportion of men than women had a zero-hours contract (6% compared to 4%).

## Job status

Table 1 summarises 25-year-olds' employment types according to the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). The SOC is a common classification of occupational information for the UK, which is

used by the government departments including the Office of National Statistics. This generation had a wide variety of jobs. Four per cent identified as managers, directors or CEOs, and 15 per cent were in professional occupations such as teachers, scientists, engineers, researchers, health professionals and lawyers and accountants.

A further 14 per cent of 25-year-olds were in associate professional roles, where they assisted professional occupations, for example as legal associates, paramedics, pharmacists, designers or librarians.

Nine per cent were in administrative and secretarial occupations, and 8 per cent in skilled trades, such as farmers, electricians, butchers, builders and printers. An additional 9 per cent were in caring and service professions such as travel agents, hairdressers, teaching assistants and veterinary nurses, and the same proportion were in sales or customer services, for example as market researchers and sales assistants.

Four per cent were process plant and machine operatives, and

TABLE 1:  
Standard occupational classifications\*

Standard Occupational Classification	Percentage
Managers, Directors and Chief Executive Officers	4
Professional occupations	15
Associate professional and technical occupations	14
Administrative and secretarial occupations	9
Skilled trades occupations	8
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	9
Sales and customer service occupations	9
Process plant and machine operatives	4
Elementary occupations	8
Not applicable	22

\* Where numbers do not add up to 100 per cent, this is due to rounding.

8 per cent were in elementary occupations such as forestry workers and general labourers.

The remaining 22 per cent were unable to identify their job status because they were not participating in the labour market and were instead in education, sick/disabled, or for other reasons.

### Labour market status and self-assessed general health

At age 25, Next Steps cohort members rated their general health on a scale ranging from excellent to poor.

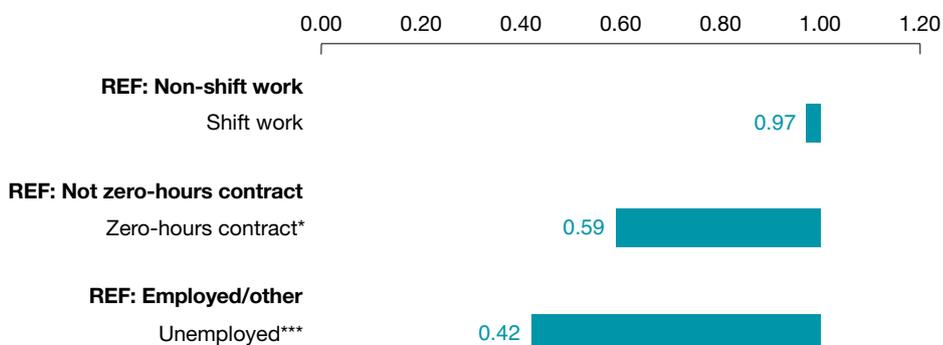
There was no statistically significant association between shift work and reporting good, very good or excellent health, after taking into account gender, ethnicity, social class, prior mental health, sleep duration, frequency of exercise, and body mass index (BMI).

However, Figure 2 shows that having a zero-hours contract reduced the odds of reporting good health (OR 0.59,  $p < 0.05$ ) compared to those who were not on such a contract, even after other factors were taken into account. In addition, those who were unemployed were less likely to be in good health (OR 0.42,  $p < 0.001$ ) compared with those who were in work.

### Labour market status and mental health

At age 25, Next Steps cohort members responded to the General Health Questionnaire, a set of 12 questions used to measure general, non-psychotic and minor-psychiatric disorders.

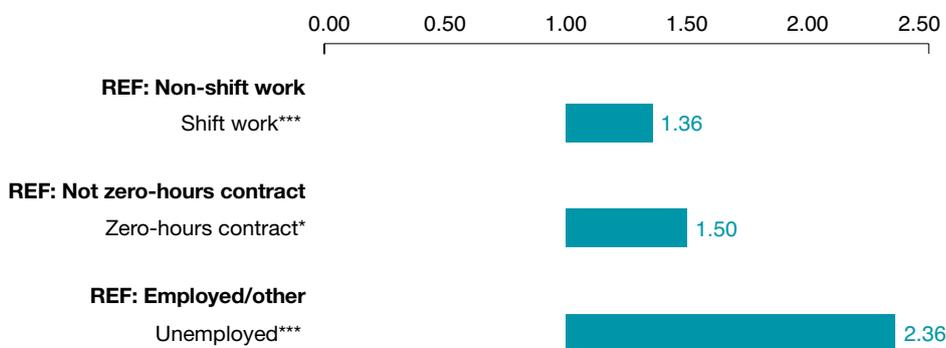
FIGURE 2:  
Self-assessed general health by employment characteristics



Controlling for gender, ethnicity, social class background, diet (fizzy drinks, takeaways), sleep duration, frequency of participating in sports/exercise and BMI.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , +  $p < 0.10$

FIGURE 3:  
Mental ill health by employment characteristics



Controlling for gender, ethnicity, social class background, prior mental health (at ages 14 & 16), sleep duration, frequency of participating in sports/exercise and BMI.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , +  $p < 0.10$

Figure 3 shows that shift workers were at higher risk of mental ill health than non-shift workers (OR 1.36,  $p < 0.001$ ), after taking into account gender, ethnicity, social class, prior mental health, sleep duration, frequency of exercise, and BMI. Those with zero-hours contracts were also at

greater risk of poor mental health than those not on such contracts (OR 1.50,  $p < 0.05$ ), even after other factors were taken into account. Those who were unemployed had more than double the odds of having psychological disturbance compared to those who were in work (OR 2.36,  $p < 0.001$ ).

## Conclusions

These initial findings indicate that the majority of 25-year-olds are in full-time employment and of those who are employed, the largest single group (15%) are in professional occupations.

There is also evidence that those with a precarious relationship to the labour market (shift workers, zero-hours contract holders and

the unemployed) are more at risk of poor mental and physical health than their peers. One explanation for these findings is that financial stress or the stress associated with having a low-status job increases the risk of poor mental health. However, it may be that unhappy or less positive job seekers are less likely to be able to get stable jobs in the first place.

## About Next Steps

Next Steps (previously known as the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England) is following the lives of around 16,000 people born in 1989-90.

The study began in 2004, when the cohort members were aged 13/14, and collected information about their education and employment, economic circumstances, family life, physical and emotional health and wellbeing, social participation, and attitudes for seven consecutive years.

In 2015, 7,707 cohort members took part in the Age 25 Sweep. This eighth sweep of the cohort broadened the scientific remit and value of the study, collecting information on health, education, employment, family formation, and wellbeing.

Data from the study have been linked to National Pupil Database records, which include the cohort members' individual scores at Key Stage 2, 3 and 4. Other administrative linkages are also planned.

Research based on Next Steps has had a significant impact on UK policy, in areas such as educational funding, bullying and educational trajectories. It will continue to provide a vital source of evidence for policymakers and researchers addressing social challenges for years to come.

The first seven waves of the study were managed and funded by the Department for Education. In 2013, Next Steps was transferred to the UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies. The Age 25 Sweep was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

## Future research

This briefing has highlighted some initial findings on employment status among 25-year-olds, and has revealed some interesting differences in associated outcomes. However, there is a great deal more information in Next Steps about education, job status and current activities, which would enable researchers to identify whether individuals are forced to accept jobs that do not match their current education or experience level, for example.

## Acknowledgements

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