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THE FORGOTTEN GENERATION:

CITY V COUNTRYSIDE DIVIDE REVEALED

Young people in rural and coastal areas are twice as likely to ditch their career dreams compared to city and suburban teens.

- Almost half of firms believe they are supporting social mobility – but under a third of large companies and only 1 in 20 SMEs offer work experience to youngsters outside their local area
- Fewer than 1 in 5 rural teens are able to take part in work experience in their chosen career, compared to 39% in towns and cities
- Lack of opportunities is fuelling phenomenon of ‘social mobility coldspots’, with 51 per cent of rural and coastal youths admitting high costs stopped them applying for university
- Just one per cent of rural teens want virtual work experience – with 27 per cent citing they need in-person internships to build a network of contacts.

YOUNG people from rural and coastal areas face being trapped in ‘social mobility coldspots’ leaving UK companies without a truly diverse workforce, a new report reveals.

A damaging combination of low parental incomes, lack of work experience placements and the absence of professional networks mean children growing up in the countryside and coastal regions are twice as likely to give up pursuing aspirational careers as those in city and suburban areas.

Official ONS figures show around 2.2 million young people live in rural and seaside areas, which are often blighted by high unemployment and few major employers.

As a result – and despite the current focus on British inner cities - inequality of opportunity is considerably worse in rural areas.

The new study from social mobility charities The Talent Tap and The Aldridge Foundation found significantly fewer rural youngsters apply for undergraduate degrees – 19 per cent compared to 39 per cent from urban areas. At postgraduate level, the gap widens even further, with 11 per cent of students coming from inner cities compared to just two per cent from the countryside.

Overall, a worrying 51 per cent of rural youngsters confess high costs and fears around moving to cities stopped them even applying for university. A further 56 per cent have changed their personal career ambitions to reflect what is available locally – with a third claiming there are ‘few or no’ opportunities to follow their career goals in their home town.

The fresh figures highlight a growing city v countryside divide beginning while children are still at school.

The study shows fewer than one in five (19%) rural teens are able to take part in work experience which aligns with their career aspirations, against 39 per cent of urban teens. Furthermore, under a third of countryside youngsters (31%) carry out vital in-person work experience where they can make career contacts, against 34 per cent of city children.

Concerningly, 19 per cent of rural children didn't have any firm careers guidance at school and simply chose a subject area they like – far higher than the 13 per cent treated this way in urban areas.

This bias continues at University with 42 per cent of rural students not taking part in any form of internship or work experience – twice the number of urban students who lacked this vital resource (21%).

Tellingly, while almost half (46%) of city students were able to leverage their family contacts to land internships and work experience, under a third (32%) of rural and coastal students had a professional network in place to do the same.

The study also uncovered that businesses may unwittingly be enforcing social mobility coldspots due to the way firms allocate work experience opportunities.

Despite their business clout employing two in five working adults, under half (42%) of large companies with more than 250 staff believe they are doing enough to promote social mobility.

While 83 per cent of large firms offer work experience, only 30 per cent have a national outreach programme which would target youngsters in remote rural areas. Instead, 42 per cent concentrated on offering work experience to youngsters in their local area, gifting a huge advantage to city and suburban children.

When it comes to small companies who make up 99.9 per cent of UK businesses, the situation is even worse. Despite almost half (47%) believing they support social mobility, only five per cent offer work experience outside their local area and 63 per cent do not offer work experience at all.

On top of this, under a third of all firms reimburse travel costs or offer pay for work experience and internships. Only a third pay for accommodation costs, again disadvantaging young people who live far from London and other major cities.

Of those firms who do offer financial support, once again a third pay in arrears, making it impossible for young people in low-income households to cover the upfront costs.

While some firms have attempted to bridge the gap by offering virtual work experience, rural teens were nine times more likely to want in-person work experience in order to build their network of contacts.

As a result, the study shows a quarter (23%) of rural and coastal young people would not apply for potentially life-changing work experience in a city as they are unable to finance it.

Naomi Ambrose, CEO of The Talent Tap said: “A third of firms say relevant work experience is a factor in who they hire, so missing out has a huge impact on young people. If companies really believe in diversity and equality, much more needs to be done to target young people from the far-flung rural and coastal areas into high quality employment.

“If we don’t support these teens with relevant work experience and networking, there is a danger of them becoming the Forgotten Generation with life chances far behind their city and suburban peers.”

Shona Nichols, CEO of The Aldridge Foundation said: “Talent is distributed evenly but opportunity is not. Greater representation of young people from diverse backgrounds in business is a win-win situation: both helping firms ensure their services and products are relevant to their target customers and fuelling social mobility in the country’s coldspots.

“It’s time for schools, colleges, business and the Government to work together to prioritise social mobility and equalise the opportunities for young people from deprived and underserved communities across the UK.”

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

Research Information:

Poll of 1,000 UK 18 – 25 year olds carried out by OnePoll from March 30 – April 6, 2023

Poll of 1,000 UK Business Leaders carried out by OnePoll from March 30 – April 6, 2023

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ABOUT THE TALENT TAP:

The Talent Tap is the UK’s leading charity targeting social mobility coldspots. Each year the charity provides long term mentorship, residential work experience and career support for hundreds of disadvantaged young people.

ABOUT THE ALDRIDGE FOUNDATION:

The Aldridge Foundation works with young people from disadvantaged communities to develop the enterprise skills and entrepreneurial mindsets to succeed. Through our initiatives, we aim to inspire, skill and mobilise the young people we support on their journey through education and onwards into their careers and lives.