Link Up Leigh Park Project: Intervention Development Workshop and Service Evaluation of the Citizen Hub Intervention

Report produced by the University of Portsmouth Link Up Leigh Park Research Team

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Introduction

Background

Leigh Park is a large suburb within Havant, Hampshire, and has a population of approximately 27,500 people. Havant is considered the most deprived district within Hampshire and 18 of its neighbourhoods, including Leigh Park, are amongst the 20% most income-deprived places in England (Hampshire County Council, n.d; ONS, 2021). Furthermore, Leigh Park is considered as one of five "left behind" areas, leaving members vulnerable to higher unemployment rates, worse living standards, and poorer health outcomes than other deprived areas (OCSI, 2019). Prior research suggests that poverty is an obstacle for many young people to continue their education, better manage their health, and seek employment (Malti & Ngoepe, 2021). With just over a third of children in Havant living in poverty (Corcoran, 2024), Malti and Ngoepe's research would indicate that many will struggle to break out of the cycle and improve their living standards.

Nationwide, securing employment has been a significant challenge for young people since the 1980s and the unemployment rate has remained higher for youths than other age brackets (Sanderson, 2020). Youth unemployment has numerous negative effects, such as worsening physical health, self-esteem, and quality of life, increasing the risk of a mental illness diagnosis, and decreasing future career opportunities (Kim, 2024; Schmillen & Umkehrer, 2017; Thern et al., 2017; Vancea & Utzet, 2016). COVID-19 exacerbated the issue, with young people being one of the most vulnerable groups for unemployment (Foley et al., 2020). Another group vulnerable to the economic effects of COVID-19 were those in areas of deprivation (Cross et al., 2022), making young people in Leigh Park particularly vulnerable to financial difficulties and unemployment during the pandemic. Additionally, those from poorer backgrounds were disproportionately affected by the pandemic's educational impact (Anders et al., 2021), potentially making the youths of Leigh Park more prone to the longer term impacts of the pandemic on employability.

Developing access to good education, training, and work experience is vital in improving young people's ability to secure employment (Thompson, 2011). Therefore, the Link Up Leigh Park project was created to remove societal, health, and economic barriers for young people and improve their opportunities in accessing good local jobs (The Health Foundation, n.d.). As part of the project, interviews were held with various stakeholders in order to understand the barriers that young people face in accessing education, employment, and training opportunities (Udell et al., 2023; Udell et al., 2024). The reports found that barriers to employment opportunities related to a lack of networking opportunities, as well as gaps in young people's understanding of career opportunities and steps to achieve them. It was argued that connections between businesses and youths in the local community needed to

be strengthened in order to address the challenges faced by the young people in Leigh Park (Udell et al., 2023).

Intervention Development Workshop

Following the Insight Phase of the Link Up Leigh Park, the Project Manager requested that all intervention development efforts prioritise strategies aimed at strengthening the connections between local businesses and the youth in the community. This focus was intended to foster greater community engagement and collaboration, as connecting local businesses with young people can create a pipeline of talented prospective employees while empowering youth with valuable career insights. Strengthening these ties can ultimately contribute to the overall economic vitality and social cohesion of the community. Therefore, on the 29th November 2024, an intervention development workshop was hosted at the Dickinson Centre at the Park Community School. Organised by the University of Portsmouth team, the workshop was attended by representatives from Havant Borough Council, the Link Up Leigh Park Project Management team, the Youth Hub Team, organisations working with young people from Leigh Park (e.g. Motiv8), local schools and colleges and young people (16-24 years old) from Leigh Park. At the start of the workshop, attendees received a presentation on the findings from the LULP Insight Phase which primarily highlighted the needs of local businesses while also addressing aspects related to young people. Attendees were also presented with information about different types of interventions from a review of the evidence so they had examples of what was possible. Attendees then collaborated in groups to evaluate priorities and design interventions aimed at assisting local businesses in enhancing young people's employability skills. They were asked to evaluate their interventions based on the APEASE criteria (Michie et al. 2014).

A total of four interventions were proposed. Below you can see the description of the four interventions:

(a) Central Hub for young people and businesses

The Central Hub would act as an information hub where young people, schools, and businesses support each other whilst creating opportunities to network. Colleges would be engaged first so businesses could understand what opportunities young people look for. The intervention would run physically with a website information base to signpost businesses and employers to form a partnership with schools. Therefore, material costs would go towards the website and advertising, whilst costs to get establishments involved are negligible. Physical events would include business presentations (with some including apprentices) so young people received information about what opportunities are available to them. Additionally, job and business fairs would be available for young people who were between the ages of 18 to 24 and were in search of employment. This intervention aimed to fill knowledge gaps between businesses and young people of Leigh Park whilst creating an opportunity for businesses to engage with the local community of Leigh Park.

(b) Work Placements - 15-16 year olds and 16-24 year olds

This intervention provided funding to the Park Community School, Havant and South Down College (HSDC), and the Youth Hub, while work placements were offered to young people between the ages of 14 – 24-year-olds in Leigh Park by local businesses. The funding provided would go towards the Education Business Partnership; at the cost of £100 per placement, they would source the placement and conduct the health and safety checks. Businesses interested in providing placements for young people in Leigh Park could offer these opportunities with the assurance that the Education Business Partnership would conduct the necessary health and safety checks for a fee of £50. Placements would be offered twice within the next year (2024), thus leading to a total cost of £9000. For the young people, 20 placements would be offered by Park Community School, and 10 offered by HSDC and the Youth Hub. Moreover, 10 local businesses would offer one placement each - a total of 100 placements offered across various sectors. The placements offer the opportunity for young people to develop their employability skills and learn about business sectors through experience whilst encouraging local businesses to engage with the young people of Leigh Park.

(c) Employer Training

The employer training intervention supports employers and businesses to understand young people and their career/job needs. This intervention created opportunities for employers to develop their framework of apprenticeships, and adapt these to young people's needs. For growth and large businesses, external and/or internal providers would offer in-person or virtual training to line managers in a workshop. Micro businesses and small to medium enterprises received practical guides to help them optimise their working hours and ensure they are maximising potential opportunities. The training focused on understanding neurodiversity, the needs and recruitment of young people, how to support them in the workplace, and the impact the pandemic had on their education and social development. The training would either entail a series of events for a wide range of local businesses to attend or be a one-off event offered to one business.

(d) Meaningful Work Experience (from school to 25 year olds)

This intervention supported young people by introducing Business Mentors during different transition points. The transition points include transitions between school to college and college to employment. The intervention would help young people gain skills and experiences in employment through apprenticeships, whereby lessons, training, and meaningful work experience for the job role would be provided. The intervention ensured that Business Mentors had contact with local businesses and apprentices to collaboratively develop a comprehensive plan for the programme. Additionally, guidance was provided for businesses to help support young people. There would be £1000 provided per business placement, for running a month-long program, or for 2 part-time months. The intervention

not only aimed for young people to develop new skills but also provided a change in perspective for working in the sector, and changed businesses' perspectives on young people's abilities. Businesses would also benefit from continuous professional development and enhance their promotional and digital skills.

Selecting the Intervention

Following the intervention development workshop, surveys were sent to the attendees and the Youth Hub users (young people 18-24 years of age) in order for them to select which intervention they would rate most highly, based on the APEASE criteria (e.g. Acceptability, Practicability, Effectiveness, Affordability, Spillover Effects and Equity). A total of 42 people started the survey, including the attendees of the intervention development workshop (n = 34) and young people from the Youth Hub (n = 8). A total of nine people completed the survey (n = 6 workshop attendees and n= 3 young people). Figure 1 and 2 present the results from the surveys.
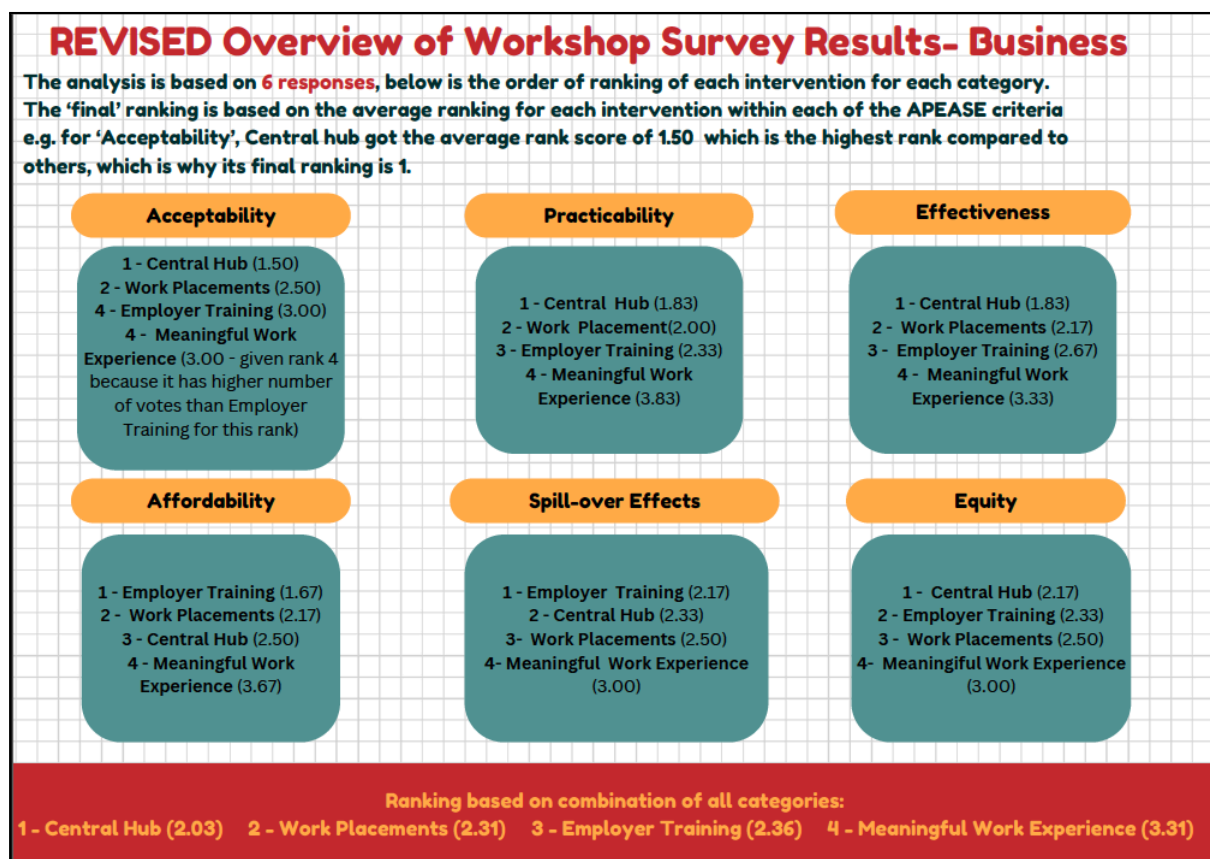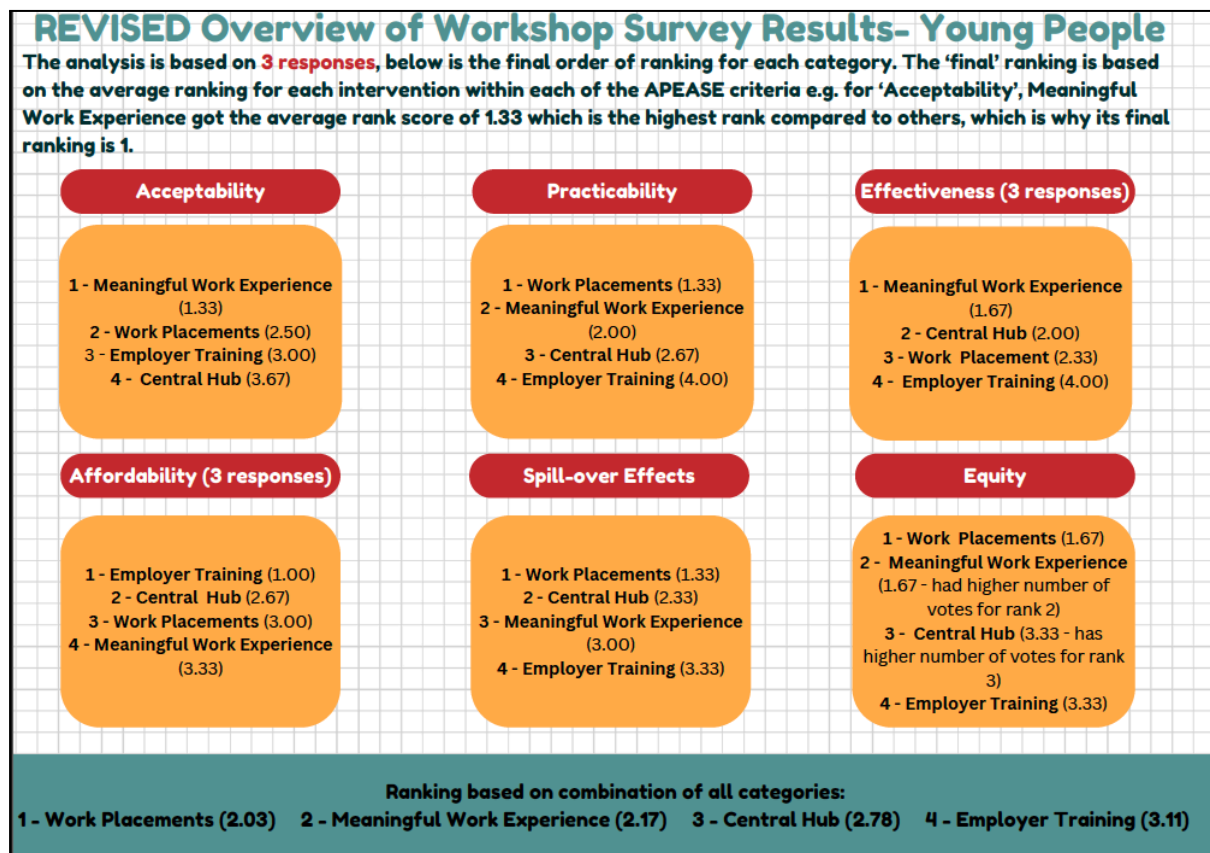
Figure 1. Survey results from the workshop attendees

REVISED Overview of Workshop Survey Results- Business

The analysis is based on **6 responses**, below is the order of ranking of each intervention for each category. The 'final' ranking is based on the average ranking for each intervention within each of the APEASE criteria e.g. for 'Acceptability', Central hub got the average rank score of 1.50 which is the highest rank compared to others, which is why its final ranking is 1.

Acceptability
1 - Central Hub (1.50)
2 - Work Placements (2.50)
4 - Employer Training (3.00)
4 - Meaningful Work Experience (3.00 - given rank 4 because it has higher number of votes than Employer Training for this rank)

Practicability
1 - Central Hub (1.83)
2 - Work Placement(2.00)
3 - Employer Training (2.33)
4 - Meaningful Work Experience (3.83)

Effectiveness
1 - Central Hub (1.83)
2 - Work Placements (2.17)
3 - Employer Training (2.67)
4 - Meaningful Work Experience (3.33)

Affordability
1 - Employer Training (1.67)
2 - Work Placements (2.17)
3 - Central Hub (2.50)
4 - Meaningful Work Experience (3.67)

Spill-over Effects
1 - Employer Training (2.17)
2 - Central Hub (2.33)
3- Work Placements (2.50)
4- Meaningful Work Experience (3.00)

Equity
1 - Central Hub (2.17)
2 - Employer Training (2.33)
3 - Work Placements (2.50)
4- Meaningful Work Experience (3.00)

Ranking based on combination of all categories:
1 - Central Hub (2.03)   2 - Work Placements (2.31)   3 - Employer Training (2.36)   4 - Meaningful Work Experience (3.31)

Figure 2. Results from the Young People

REVISED Overview of Workshop Survey Results- Young People

The analysis is based on **3 responses**, below is the final order of ranking for each category. The 'final' ranking is based on the average ranking for each intervention within each of the APEASE criteria e.g. for 'Acceptability', Meaningful Work Experience got the average rank score of 1.33 which is the highest rank compared to others, which is why its final ranking is 1.

Acceptability

1 - Meaningful Work Experience (1.33)
2 - Work Placements (2.50)
3 - Employer Training (3.00)
4 - Central Hub (3.67)

Practicability

1 - Work Placements (1.33)
2 - Meaningful Work Experience (2.00)
3 - Central Hub (2.67)
4 - Employer Training (4.00)

Effectiveness (3 responses)

1 - Meaningful Work Experience (1.67)
2 - Central Hub (2.00)
3 - Work Placement (2.33)
4 - Employer Training (4.00)

Affordability (3 responses)

1 - Employer Training (1.00)
2 - Central Hub (2.67)
3 - Work Placements (3.00)
4 - Meaningful Work Experience (3.33)

Spill-over Effects

1 - Work Placements (1.33)
2 - Central Hub (2.33)
3 - Meaningful Work Experience (3.00)
4 - Employer Training (3.33)

Equity

1 - Work Placements (1.67)
2 - Meaningful Work Experience (1.67 - had higher number of votes for rank 2)
3 - Central Hub (3.33 - has higher number of votes for rank 3)
4 - Employer Training (3.33)

Ranking based on combination of all categories:
1 - Work Placements (2.03)   2 - Meaningful Work Experience (2.17)   3 - Central Hub (2.78)   4 - Employer Training (3.11)

Following consultations with Havant Borough Council (HBC) and in consideration of their ongoing initiatives, a decision was made to develop and implement the intervention as a LinkedIn page known as the 'Citizen Hub,' rather than selecting an option from the initial list. The aim of the LinkedIn page was to connect Businesses with local schools, and therefore, local young people.

Aim of the evaluation

The evaluation below is part of a wider project that aims to overcome the societal, health, and economic barriers that young people face. Discussions within the Business Intervention Development workshop in November 2023 revealed the need for networking opportunities between businesses and schools. Businesses also wished to understand the career goals of young people. The Citizen Hub intervention aimed to address these goals by developing a LinkedIn page designed for reciprocal information sharing and included information about recruitment, networking, and business support. This report serves as a service evaluation of the Citizen Hub and its corresponding LinkedIn page. The aim of this service evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the Citizen Hub initiative in fostering a sense of connection among businesses and schools within the local community.

Method

Participants

Questionnaires

In partnership with Havant Borough Council (HBC), links to the questionnaires were distributed to businesses through a business newsletter (for questionnaire 1 only), along with a link to the LinkedIn page being assessed, and an email sent by HBC. Consequently, the questionnaires were accessible to 3,083 businesses via the newsletter, 423 businesses through the email, and 2,572 followers on the LinkedIn page; however, there may have been some overlap among these populations.

In total, eight business representatives completed questionnaire 1 and three completed questionnaire 2. The businesses belonged in the following sectors: Public service, utilities and health (n = 3 Q1), Manufacturing (n = 2 Q1 and n = 1 Q2), software development (n = 2 Q1 and n= 1 Q2), hospitality (n = 1 Q1 and private services (n = 1 Q2). The sizes of the businesses ranged from Micro to Small size business (n = 7 Q1, n= 2 Q2) and medium (n= 1 Q2) and large size (n= 1 Q1).

Interviews

Despite multiple communications being shared, a limited number of participants expressed interest in volunteering for interviews concerning the evaluation of the Citizens Hub LinkedIn page. As there were so few participants, we have taken measures to protect their identity, which include the removal of any details which could impact their anonymity.

Materials

Questionnaire

Two questionnaires were provided to participants: one prior to the launch of the Citizen Hub and another 2-3 weeks after its launch. The objective was to gain insights into local businesses' sense of connection with other local schools and businesses through the Citizen Hub LinkedIn page. The questionnaires included ten questions focused on businesses' connectedness to the local community, organised into three areas:

- Businesses' Ability to Connect (e.g., "My business is able to make connections with schools within the local Leigh Park community.")
- Perceived Ease of Connection (e.g., "I feel that my business can easily connect with other businesses within the local Leigh Park community.")
- Feelings of Disconnect (e.g., "I feel that my business is disconnected from other businesses within the local Leigh Park community.")

The questionnaires also included inquiries about participants' use of LinkedIn and details about their business, such as its sector, number of employees, and any current relationships with HBC or local schools. Questionnaire 2 incorporated three additional questions relating to existing relationships prior to using the LinkedIn page.

Interview

Interview schedule

The participants were asked questions around 4 topics: Assessment of Existing Resources (e.g. How frequently do you usually participate in events or initiatives aimed at supporting youth employment or education in the local community?); Expectations From the LinkedIn Page (e.g. How do you think you could effectively promote career opportunities, share resources or collaborate on youth focused projects through using the LinkedIn page platform?); User Experience and Satisfaction with the LinkedIn Page (e.g. How would you describe your overall experience with Havant Borough Council's LinkedIn page in terms of usability, accessibility, and user-friendliness?), and Suggestions and Improvements (e.g. What additional resources or support services would you like to see added to Havant Borough Council's LinkedIn page to better meet the needs of your business in supporting either youth employment and education?).

The topics covered in the interview schedule are essential as they could provide valuable insights into participants' current involvement and needs surrounding youth employment and education initiatives, allowing for the identification of existing resources and gaps. Furthermore, they would ensure the LinkedIn page was tailored to effectively meet user expectations, improve user experience, and gather constructive suggestions for enhancing support services.

Procedure

Questionnaire phase

HBC's Programme Manager for the Link Up Leigh Park project acted as a gatekeeper and facilitated participant recruitment. A LinkedIn page was created by HBC to promote connections among local businesses and schools. The link to Questionnaire 1, along with a participant information sheet and consent form, was sent electronically to businesses and published on the LinkedIn page.

Participants provided information about their business, including sector, number of employees, and any active relationships with HBC or local schools. Questions about LinkedIn usage were also included to determine account status and utilisation. Following this, participants answered 10 questions regarding their connectedness with other local businesses, schools, and the community at large. Questionnaire 2 was distributed 2-3 weeks after the launch of the LinkedIn page, mirroring Questionnaire 1 while adding questions about existing relationships prior to using the platform. Percentages of agreement were

calculated for each statement on connectedness for those who completed the questionnaire before and after the page's launch.

Data Analytics Phase

HBC also provided the LinkedIn page's traffic data and follower demographics to the UoP research team. These are discussed in the results section.

Interview phase

Again, HBC's Link Up Leigh Park Programme Manager acted as a gatekeeper and supported participant recruitment. Representatives of local businesses were sent the participant information sheet and invited to an interview. Potential participants were asked to contact the University of Portsmouth (UoP) team, using the details in the information sheet, if interested. A total of five participants volunteered to take part, at which point a virtual interview over the video telephone platform, Zoom, was scheduled. At the beginning of the interview, consent statements were displayed and read aloud to the participants, and verbal consent was obtained. A member of the UoP research team then conducted the interview, using the interview schedule. The interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes.

Analysis

Questionnaire data

Participants responded to the 10 questions on connectedness using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). The six response options were simplified for analysis into two categories: "strongly agree," "agree," and "slightly agree" were grouped as "agree," while "strongly disagree," "disagree," and "slightly disagree" were combined as "disagree." This simplification streamlined the analysis, making results clearer and easier to interpret while enabling the identification of trends and patterns in responses.

Interview data

The qualitative interview was analysed using inductive thematic analysis (TA). TA is a flexible but systematic qualitative data analysis method and its application ranges from relatively straightforward descriptive overviews of key features in data to more elaborate and complex, conceptual readings of data that examine the theoretical implications of the analysis (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). Furthermore, inductive TA aims to be as close as possible to the meanings in the data (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). The six steps of TA (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015) are as follows: 1. Familiarisation: facilitated by an in-depth knowledge of, and engagement with the data set by listening to the interviews, reading transcripts, studying notes so that key ideas can be identified; 2. Coding: systematic process of identifying and labelling relevant features of the data – in relation to the research questions. This is the first step in the process of identifying patterns in the data set; 3. Searching for themes: process of grouping together codes to generate a plausible mapping

of key patterns in the data; 4. Reviewing themes: check whether the candidate (initial) themes exhibit a good fit with the coded data and with the entire data set with each having a clear, distinct meaning or concept; 5. Defining and naming themes: process of writing theme definitions – brief summary for each theme – and selecting a theme name which will provide a roadmap for the final write-up; 6. Writing the report: bring together the analytic narrative based on compelling data extracts. Themes provide a structured framework for data analysis; however, conclusions are drawn across themes.

Results

Website traffic and follower demographics

The 'Citizen Hub' LinkedIn site's traffic data was collected on the 7th of August 2024. There were a total of 2610 followers of the page at the time, with 37 having followed the page within the previous 30 days. The largest percentage of these followers came from the Greater Portsmouth area (26.4%), but sizable numbers of followers also came from the London area (11.1%), Greater Southampton (8.1%), and Waterlooville (6.8%).

Follower demographics by job function type were greatest for Business Development (13.4%), Operations (11.1%), Sales (7.1%) and Community & Social Services (6.6%). Whilst by industry the highest number of followers were Government Administration (17.5%), Public Policy Offices (6.1%), Staffing & Recruiting (5.2%), construction (4.4%), and Higher Education (2.7%). The largest percentage of followers had a company size of 201-500 employees (see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Follower demographics by sample size.
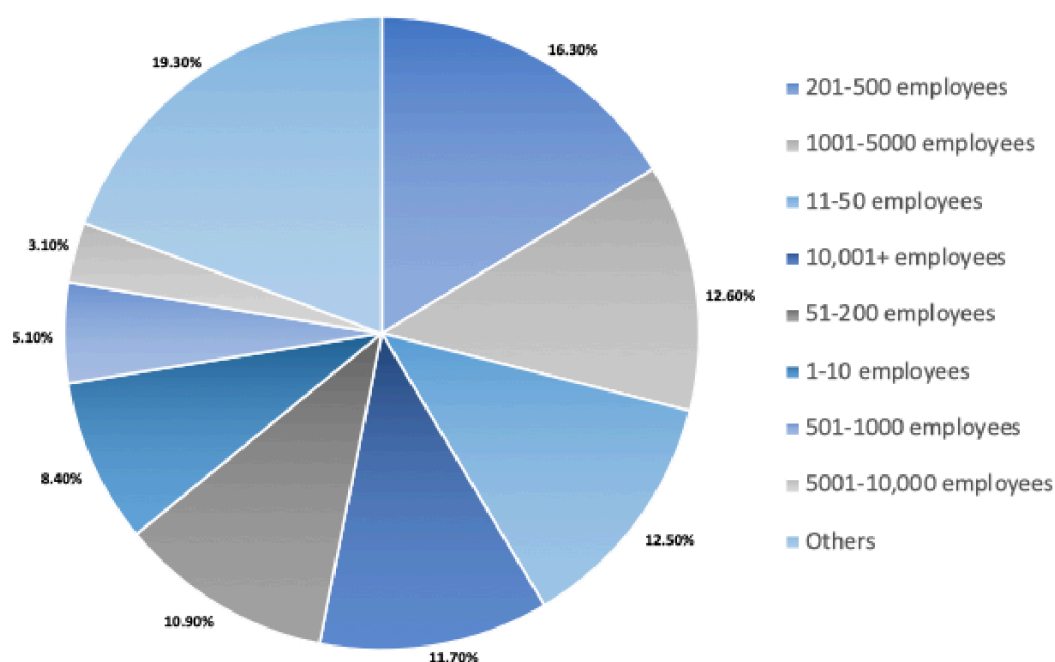
Between the 8th of July and the 7th of August 2024, the total number of impressions (the number of times content was seen) was 4028, with 2465 unique views (the number of different accounts that a post was viewed by). This content had an engagement rate (the total number of interactions on posts) of 4.9%. This would indicate that the content had good engagement, with a good engagement rate typically being around 2% (Lyfe Marketing, n.d.).

Metrics:
- Impressions 4028
- Unique Views 2465
- Clicks 97
- Reactions 87
- Comments 6
- Reposts 6
- Engagement Rate 4.9%

Questionnaire Analysis

Due to the limited sample size, it is difficult to make meaningful judgements about the differences in answers between those who completed the questionnaire before the LinkedIn page went live and those who completed it after. Overall, it would appear that many of the businesses felt a disconnect with the local community both before and after the Citizen Hub LinkedIn page, with 75% or more agreeing to related statements at each timepoint (Table 1.). Businesses generally expressed a positive outlook on their ability to make connections, with 50% or more typically agreeing with related statements at both timepoints. However, their confidence in the ease of making those connections was lower; less than 50% agreed with two-thirds of statements related to the perceived simplicity of networking. These statements aimed to assess how businesses felt about their ability to easily establish relationships with other organisations, including any barriers or challenges they encountered in the process.

Table 1.

Percentage of agreement between participants for each statement related to connectedness

Question	Group 1 (before LinkedIn page launch)		Group 2 (After LinkedIn page launch)	
	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
My business is able to make connections with a diverse group of other businesses within the local Leigh Park community.	75	25	66.7	33.3
My business is able to make connections with schools within the local Leigh Park community.	50	50	66.7	33.3
My business is able to make connections with a diverse group of 16- to 24-year-olds within the local Leigh Park community.	50	50	66.7	33.3
I feel that my business is disconnected from other businesses within the local Leigh Park community.	87.5	12.5	100	0
I feel that my business is disconnected from schools within the local Leigh Park community.	87.5	12.5	100	0
I feel that my business is disconnected from 16- to 24-year-olds within the local Leigh Park community.	75	25	100	0
I feel that my business can easily connect with other businesses within the local Leigh Park community.	37.5	62.5	33.3	66.7
I feel that my business can easily connect with other schools within the local Leigh Park community	50	50	66.7	33.3

I feel that my business can easily connect with 16- to 24-year-olds within the local Leigh Park community	37.5	62.5	33.3	66.7
I feel that my business is disconnected from what goes on in the local Leigh Park community.	87.5	12.5	100	0

Interview Themes

As there were minimal participants in the interview phase of this evaluation we considered the value of including their data in this report. However, reporting themes from those participants can still offer valuable insights by highlighting their unique perspectives and experiences which deserve attention. While the findings may not be generalisable, they can provide a deeper understanding of individual challenges and needs, guiding the development of interventions or programmes. Additionally, the qualitative data may uncover specific issues relevant to similar cases, serving as a useful starting point for further inquiry. Therefore, the themes from the participants are as follows:

Four main themes emerged as a result of the interview. Three themes reflected the participants' appraisal of the intervention and were named (1) feelings around intervention, (2) perceived effectiveness of intervention, and (3) intervention coherence. The final theme related to the participant's expectations and suggested improvements. Each of the themes are discussed in more detail below.

Feelings around intervention

Overall, the participants' feelings towards the LinkedIn page were largely negative. Participants made comments such as it being basic, boring, and failing to capture interest throughout the interview, *"But um my impressions, given I've been on you know lots of different LinkedIn pages, it didn't it didn't capture my interest at all. It was it was like... it was very boring"*. The participant also felt that the page had been developed with low effort, going so far as to say that *"it's like someone's done that on their lunch break"*

Perceived effectiveness of Intervention

Answers from the participants would indicate that the perceived effectiveness was low, with the participants questioning the appropriateness of the method for targeting 18–24-year-olds, e.g. *"I think you should look at different initiatives, away from LinkedIn if you wanted to target that um demographic"*. Additionally, they indicated that it would also be unlikely to effectively target businesses, unless that business was looking for something specific:

… we don't have time to do anything right, so we're working flat out to try and save our business so when it comes to LinkedIn pages and things like that, of relevant – you know we're not going to be even stopping to look at that, you know it's not going to be you know a thought. You know if I came across that page you know I wou– unless I was looking for something specific, I wouldn't even think to stop and read that page at all.

Furthermore, the participants did not believe that the page would enhance networking opportunities with the way it is currently being run but could see potential in this area.

I: Alright, thank you so much, so the next question is um do you think the LinkedIn page will contribute to enhancing your networking opportunities generally?

P: Uhh no, I don't— I mean if you think carefully about it, then yeah I'd say there's definitely ways you could utilise it to do that. But it's not obvious to me and it would take time for me to to understand that potential.

Intervention coherence

It became clear through the participants' responses that they did not understand the purpose of the LinkedIn page being to foster connections between young people and businesses.

Um.. nothing about that page– if I'm honest with you shouted out 'young people' to me. Like like it was like, if that's the ultimately the service it's offering, um i i it really didn't– it came across as just an umbrella of this is us— you know we're just– you know, it's just a LinkedIn page, it do— you need to definitely target or improve the– you know the what you're actually looking for, because it's not apparent to me.

This is a concern considering that the participant believed "*it would be great if there could be like a connector*" between their business and young people (albeit university students or graduates specifically), suggesting that even businesses whose views and desires align with the goals of the Link Up Leigh Park project may not understand the purpose of the LinkedIn page.

Expectations and improvements

Improvements were suggested by the participants in several areas to meet their expectations and make the intervention more effective. The participants mentioned several things that related to better capturing interest, such as including more descriptive detail and making the page more unique, trendy, and memorable. The participants also mentioned the potential use of visual content, such as infographics or short videos.

> *Okay so so I reckon it's got to be unique [...] I reckon it's got to be fun and engaging. I think it should be made to captivate the audiences and be clear in what it's about. Erm I don't think it should be– you should overload people with loads of information, I think there's there's novel ways of putting that across to people. Um you know infographics and that type of thing. I would expect presentation videos for sure 30 second bitesize chunks, you know little little videos expressing you know your USPs and you know what what you're focused on. Erm introductory videos about us page, you know contact us page.*

The participants acknowledged the importance of including demonstrations of support for the site, going so far as to say *"you know I would think twice about um.. using any service that didn't didn't have any testimonial to it"*. More generally, one participant acknowledged the importance of usability, with expectations surrounding it being easy to navigate, speedy, and mobile-friendly throughout the interview. They also discussed the expectation of it being secure, with *"SSL and security certificate and the like"*.

With perceived effectiveness being low and the participants questioning the appropriateness of LinkedIn to target youths, they discussed numerous methods that they believed would better target this demographic, such as incorporating influential people or using social media.

> *But I definitely think it's worth um integrating or affiliating yourselves with the the countries finest, the entrepreneurs you know. Alan Sugar you know (inaudible word) whatever they're called, you know all those Dragons Den lot. Become, become affiliated with the people— with the role models again and get them ... and uh make that go through tiktok an and through social media and that that's how you should re-engage with with (...) the younger generation in my opinion.*

The participants also discussed their desire for connection with *"potential hires"*, indicating that the LinkedIn page needs to improve on this. The participants were specifically looking for a more direct contact, such as uploading and accessing portfolios, but believed that the page should also more generally facilitate job opportunities.

> *I'd expect it to um make it easy for um university students to maybe offer their portfolios like— like if they're into marketing, have like a page where they could upload their you know a small portion of their portfolio to to offer— to to show and and what they're looking for from employers going forward for a short-term basis or a you know a fixed period. You know that type of thing like almost like setting up like helping them become apprentices or what's the word they call them, I can't remember they called them ... Yeah internships that type of thing yeah yeah. T t to facilitate that sort of thing I would imagine this website to have that function as well.*

Discussion

Although the data indicates a diverse follower base and satisfactory engagement, it is crucial to evaluate how effectively LinkedIn fulfils its goal of connecting young individuals with businesses. Participants expressed mixed feelings about their ability to network, suggesting systemic barriers that hinder meaningful engagement. This emphasises the necessity for comprehensive strategies that address these barriers and facilitate stronger connections. Research indicates that young people, particularly those in economically disadvantaged areas, face significant challenges in connecting with businesses and entering the job market. Thompson (2011) highlights that youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET) frequently experience social exclusion, limiting their engagement with potential employers. These challenges can be worsened by digital divides, where access to and proficiency with online platforms like LinkedIn vary significantly among youth populations.

The effectiveness of LinkedIn in facilitating business-school connections can be influenced by various factors. Hargittai (2002) argues that mere access to digital platforms is insufficient; the ability to effectively navigate these platforms—termed the "second-level digital divide"—is crucial in determining outcomes. Thus, while LinkedIn may serve as a platform for connection, the capacity of businesses to utilise it effectively varies considerably. The challenge is not just access but also the ability to engage meaningfully with educational institutions and young people.

The disconnect between the platform's potential and its perceived effectiveness highlights the importance of addressing systemic barriers. Sadler et al. (2015) note that NEET youth often lack the social capital necessary to forge connections with potential employers, which can result in limited job information access, fewer personal connections, and a reduced understanding of workplace norms. To overcome these challenges, more holistic and participatory approaches are needed. Udell et al. (2024) emphasise co-designed interventions for youth employment, which would ensure that strategies meet the real needs of young people. This might involve integrating online platforms with offline support, skills training, and mentorship programs to enhance networking capabilities and build essential social capital. Effective strategies may include:

- Targeted mentorship programs pairing businesses with schools or youth groups
- Skill-building workshops focusing on both technical and soft skills
- Networking events designed for businesses to interact with educational institutions
- Internship or work experience programs providing hands-on exposure to various industries

These multifaceted approaches can better address the challenges faced by both businesses and young people, fostering sustainable employment pathways and bridging the education-industry gap. Moreover, Cross et al. (2022) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified existing inequalities in employment opportunities for young people. This underscores the need for targeted strategies tailored to specific local contexts rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

In conclusion, while LinkedIn offers potential for connecting schools and young people with businesses, the barriers identified by participants indicate significant obstacles to overcome. Addressing these challenges will require comprehensive strategies that incorporate digital literacy training, personalised support, and efforts to build social capital among disadvantaged youth. Future initiatives should focus on these multifaceted approaches to ensure that online platforms like LinkedIn effectively bridge the gap between young job seekers and potential employers.

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