

# include YOUTH

**Comments on Department of Economy 'Good Jobs' Employment  
Rights Bill**

**September 2024**

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Include Youth is a rights-based charity for children and young people in or leaving care, from disadvantaged communities, or whose rights are not being met. We work to improve their employability, personal and social development enhancing inclusion, integration and good relations. Include Youth influences public policy, led by the voice of young people. We work with over 800 young people a year aged between 14-25 years old. We have offices in Belfast, Armagh, Ballymena, Derry, Enniskillen, Lisburn and Omagh. We also have bases in Tallaght and Cavan, where our Give and Take programme is being delivered in association with TUSLA

The young people we work with and for include those from socially disadvantaged areas, those who have had poor educational experiences, those from a care background, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people, young people with mental health issues, young people who have come into contact or are at risk of coming into contact with the justice system, misusing drugs and/or alcohol, at risk or experience of CSE. We provide a range of tailored employability programmes for these young people, including programmes delivered in partnership with community-based organisations.

One of our programmes, the Give & Take Scheme, adopts a youth work approach to improving the employability and increasing the self-esteem and confidence of young people aged 16 to 24 who are not yet ready to participate in mainstream training, education and employment. We work across 9 primary sites and a number of outreach locations. The core components are personal development, mentoring, training, work experience, essential skills and transitional support. The Give and Scheme also provides a One to One specialist programme for young people who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

Include Youth also delivers an Employability Service on behalf of two of the five Health Trusts for young people aged 16 + who have had experience of the care system. This service is designed to offer tangible and concrete opportunities to assist young people leaving care to prepare for and engage in work.

Strive is a cross community, cross cultural, and cross border programme that engages young people aged 14-24 in good relations, person development and citizenship. We deliver this with our partners Newstart Educational Centre, Northern Ireland Alternatives, Youth Initiatives and Lifford/Clonleigh Resource Centre.

Our Care for Change project which started in September 2022 will employ 15 care experienced Expert By Experience (EBE) Youth Mentors over the next two years and across 6 Give and Take sites. Our current Youth Mentors are being trained and supported to mentor other young people to become change makers and policy

advocates and to contribute to consultations and policy responses, meet with decision makers and co-facilitate focus groups.

Include Youth also engages in policy advocacy work in a range of areas including employability, education, the care system, youth justice and policing. This work is informed by relevant international human rights and children's rights standards, is evidence based, including that provided by young people and practitioners and is based on high quality, critical analysis.

### **Permissions**

We are content for the name of our organisation to be listed in the Annex to the published departmental responses.

We consent to extracts from our response being included in the published departmental response.

### **General Comments**

As an organisation working to improve the employability of young people who are often furthest from the labour market, we are supportive of any initiative which makes accessing the labour market easier for young people who face barriers. But we want to see opportunities for our young people to access employment that respects their rights, is not exploitative, is appropriate, is flexible to accommodate their needs and sets them on a path where they are seen as a valued employee with a bright future ahead.

Our personalised delivery model is designed to increase the skills and qualifications of care experienced young people, address personal development, build confidence, provide placement and work experience opportunities and support them into mainstream training, education or employment.

As a youth employability organisation we have limited our comments to the zero hours contracts proposals contained within the consultation document, as this area is most applicable to the young people we work with.

### **Specific Questions**

Do you agree with the overarching objective to replace zero hours contracts with contracts that provide flexibility while protecting workers' rights?

Yes, Include Youth agree with the overarching objective to replace zero hours contracts with contracts that provide flexibility while protecting workers' rights.

Should there be an outright ban on zero hours contracts?

Include Youth do not support an outright ban on zero hours contracts. However, we are concerned about the exploitative and inappropriate use of zero hours contracts by some employers and would like reassurance that young people will not be exposed to this exploitation but will rather be protected and have their rights recognised.

### **Specific Comments**

There have been ongoing discussions for several years across the devolved governments of the United Kingdom (UK) regarding banning the use of zero-hour contracts. What impact this form of employment has on young people and on particular cohorts of young people is less than clear. We are especially interested in how young people who already experience barriers to mainstream education, training and employment navigate various forms of employment and how they are particularly vulnerable to being taken advantage of by employers. It is vital to consider the employment experiences of young workers when making reforms to employment rights and standards. To inform our submission to this consultation, we have collated available information on the impact zero hours contracts and insecure employment is having, especially on young people.

In Northern Ireland, there were 106,000 young people in employment and 7,000 young people were unemployed in 2023. During this same year, there were 17,000 young people who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) 1.

It is estimated that around 16,000 employed individuals in Northern Ireland are currently on zero-hour contracts (Department for the Economy, 2024, p. 13). It would be beneficial to know the age breakdown of people on zero hours contracts in NI, to ascertain what percentage of those are in the younger category. Some research has suggested that the main job industries where zero-hour contracts are used include hospitality, the voluntary sector and the health sectors. Of these sectors, the main age groups usually in zero- hour contract jobs were young people. 2

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1 Department of Economy, 2023, Inequalities in the NI Skill System.

2 CIPD Championing Better Work and Working Lives (2022) Benefits of Zero-Hour Contracts Outweigh the Downsides for Most Workers. Available at: Benefits of zero-hours contracts outweigh the downsides for most workers | CIPD

Impacts of zero hours contracts:

A recent poll commissioned by the TUC, revealed that 84% of workers on zero hours contracts wanted to work more regular hours, many are struggling to make ends meet on their current financial situation, 75% of those surveyed were not able to meet living costs as they were not offered enough working hours, two thirds had looked for extra work, and 58% had had their request for more hours refused by their employer. <sup>3</sup>

A 2023 study by the TUC found that 13% of young people were employed on zero-hour contracts and they were 5.5 times more likely to be on these contracts compared to workers that were over the age of 25. <sup>4</sup> As the TUC General Secretary said at the release of the report findings:

*“Every worker should be protected from being sacked for no reason – but three in four young workers can be fired at will by bad bosses. Just imagine working hard in a job for nearly two years – only to be let go with no recourse. Too many young workers are trapped in insecure work, on lower pay and without the workplace rights most of us take for granted. That’s not right.”* <sup>5</sup>

The TUC report highlighted the fact that young people are much more likely to be on zero-hours contracts, and expressed concern that so many young employees are denied essential rights and are in contracts which are characterised by low pay and variable hours. The report highlights that just under half a million young workers (474,000) are employed on a zero-hours contract. It states:

*“This means that despite only being around one in nine (11%) of the total workforce, 16 to 24-year-olds make up two in five (40%) of the 1.18 million workers employed on zero-hours contracts.”*

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<sup>3</sup> [TUC warns Keir Starmer: do not water down ban on zero-hours contracts | Zero-hours contracts | The Guardian](#)

<sup>4</sup> National Union of Journalists (2023) Three Quarters of Young Workers Miss Out on Key Employment Rights, TUC Research Has Revealed. Available at: [Three quarters of young workers miss out on key employment rights, TUC research has revealed \(nuj.org.uk\)](#) ; [TUC: 3 in 4 young employees miss out on protection from unfair dismissal and redundancy pay | TUC](#)

<sup>5</sup> [jobsandpayyoungworkers.pdf \(tuc.org.uk\)](#)

Research from Lancaster University based think tank The Work Foundation has also called for greater protections for young workers and expressed concern about the growing use of zero hours contracts for the younger age group. 6 They note that the numbers of young people on zero hours contracts is at an all-time high claiming that 136,000 more workers were given zero-hour contracts in 2023 compared to 2022, and 65% of these new contracts were handed to 16–24 year olds (88,000). Alice Martin, Head of Research at the Work Foundation at Lancaster University, said

*“Zero-hour contracts have previously been hailed the answer to flexible work, but our research shows too often it is only employers that have choices, workers do not... The data shows these contracts affect certain workers more than others, and it is young workers – particularly young women – who are bearing the brunt of policy-makers inaction. The new data paints a particularly worrying picture for young workers in the UK with an 88,000 additional young people on zero-hour contracts in 2023, compared to 2022 – an increase of 23% (386,000 in 2022 to 474,000 in 2023).”*<sup>7</sup>

A recent report revealed that of individuals on these contracts, approximately only every 1 in 16 individuals are guaranteed a regular income. There is clearly an impact of not having a regular income and this is only exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis.<sup>14</sup>

A study by the Living Wage Foundation <sup>8</sup> found that individuals who were in unstable jobs or zero-hour contracts were twice as likely to have job dissatisfaction or say that their job made them feel ‘miserable’ compared to those who were in stable jobs. This study also found that through zero hours contracts, employees were having to spend more money on transport as they were being informed of working hours at short notice.

Another study<sup>9</sup> found that 36% of participants felt they had “little or no choice” when considering employment opportunities, which could increase the likelihood of young people being in zero-hour contracts. Some participants emphasised how a lack of alternative employment opportunities or access to public transport impacted on their

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<sup>6</sup>[Zero Choices: Swapping zero-hour contracts for secure, flexible working \(lancaster.ac.uk\)](https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/lums/research/news/new-analysis-reveals-uk-continues-to-fall-behind-rest-of-world-as-zero-hour-contracts-reach-record-numbers-and-its-young-people-bearing-the-brunt)

<sup>7</sup> [tps://www.lancaster.ac.uk/lums/research/news/new-analysis-reveals-uk-continues-to-fall-behind-rest-of-world-as-zero-hour-contracts-reach-record-numbers-and-its-young-people-bearing-the-brunt](https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/lums/research/news/new-analysis-reveals-uk-continues-to-fall-behind-rest-of-world-as-zero-hour-contracts-reach-record-numbers-and-its-young-people-bearing-the-brunt)

<sup>8</sup> [Precarious pay and uncertain hours -2023.pdf \(livingwage.org.uk\)](https://www.livingwage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Precarious-pay-and-uncertain-hours-2023.pdf), page 9

<sup>9</sup> Martin, A, Williams, G, Atay, A and Florission, R (2024) Zero Choices: Swapping Zero-Hour Contracts for Secure, Flexible Working. Work Foundation. Available at: Zero Choices: Swapping zero-hour contracts for secure, flexible working(lancaster.ac.uk)

decisions for taking up particular job roles, which could negatively impact on their holistic health depending on the job environment. Research suggests that there is a strong connection between working zero-hour contracts and individuals experiencing mental health issues.

A study by the Mental Health Foundation<sup>10</sup> found that individuals who were employed on zero-hour contracts were 40% more likely to experience mental health issues compared to individuals employed on different contracts. This may be because there is no stability or guarantee that individuals will be given work. However, research also suggests that individuals experiencing mental health issues may opt to work in zero-hour contracts, as it can provide greater flexibility over contracted jobs.<sup>12</sup>

A study by the Scottish Government (2021) has gathered views on young people's experiences of working in unstable or unpredictable employment hours. This study found that many of these young people accepted jobs that had 'precarious' working hours because they either preferred the flexibility of shifts (19% compared to 13% in non precarious/ flexible jobs), they were struggling to find a job (17% compared to 16% ) or they were taking on this employment to top up their income (24% compared to 16% of non flexible jobs).<sup>13</sup>

Another report highlighted that 47% of young people aged between 18-24 years old agreed that zero-hour contracts are bad as 'they don't provide any security and allow employers to exploit their workers'. Alternatively, 30% of the young people participating thought that zero-hour contracts were good as they provided flexible working arrangements for those who's available hours of work could vary weekly.<sup>14</sup>

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10 Mental Health Foundation (2022) Zero-Hour Contracts and Mental Health: What the Evidence Tells Us. Available at: [MHF\\_ZHC-Report\\_Plain-English\\_Summary.pdf](#) ([mentalhealth.org.uk](#))

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12 Farina, E, Green, C and McVicar, D (2023) Zero Hour Contracts and Self-Reported (Mental) Health in the UK. An International Journal of Employment Relations. Available at: [Zero hours contracts and self-reported \(mental\) health in the UK](#)

([wiley.com](#))

13 Scottish Government (2021) Young People's Experiences of Precarious and Flexible Work- A Report by Progressive Partnership for the Scottish Government- Main Report. Economy and Labour Market. Social Research. Available at: [young-peoples-experiences-precarious-flexible-work-report-progressive-partnershipscottish-government-main-report.pdf](#) ([www.gov.scot](#))

14 YouGov UK (2024) Are Zero-Hour Contracts Good or Bad? Available at: [Are zero-hour contracts good or bad?](#) ([yougov.co.uk](#))

The issue of zero-hour contracts offering individuals more flexibility has been cited as a positive, particularly for young people who are studying, as this can provide more flexibility around when they work and when they can study.

Furthermore, a study by CIPD (2022)<sup>15</sup> found that individuals employed on zero-hour contracts reported being more satisfied in their job (62%) and they experienced less stress in their employment as their workload wasn't as demanding.

While the preceding information gives some insight into the range of research and views on the pros and cons of zero hour contracts, it is clear that there is currently a lack of evidence available regarding the use of zero-hour contracts in Northern Ireland, the numbers of young people affected and how young people would be impacted by an change in legislation. This lack of evidence makes it challenging to reach a definitive position on the use of zero hours contracts.

It is evident that there is gap in research specifically on young people's views and experiences on zero-hours contracts. Therefore, it is vital that additional research is completed surrounding this topic, to understand the full impact that these contracts are having on young people. Through gathering the views of young people, it will help ensure their concerns are being considered on this issue. We would welcome the Department engaging directly with young people to ascertain their experiences of employment generally and what their views are on what constitutes 'good employment'.

## **Young People's Views:**

As part of our process in responding to this consultation we sought the views of young people who are currently engaged with our Give and Take programme. The following is an overview of their direct feedback.

### **What do you think of zero hours contracts?**

#### **Positive comments:**

*They give you flexibility.*

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<sup>15</sup> CIPD Championing Better Work and Working Lives (2022) Benefits of Zero-Hour Contracts Outweigh the Downsides for Most Workers. Available at: [Benefits of zero-hours contracts outweigh the downsides for most workers | CIPD](#)



*They're good because you get paid, and you can get skills if you want to find a similar job.*

**Negative comments:**

*Zero hours – you are just used and abused when you are needed.*

*Jobs that do zero hours contracts clearly use and exploit young adults.*

*Zero hours contracts are scummy jobs that could make you work either too much or too little.*

*They are bad because they take advantage of young people.*

*It gives you flexible times but you have to show up when they call you.*

*It's not a proper job.*

*They take advantage of you.*

*No control of fairness in what's offered.*

*There could be favouritism.*

**Suggestions for change:**

*You need a contract that has set out hours that are guaranteed.*

*A contract would be better as you have pay certainty, to know when pay is coming in and how much and then you can plan. If you don't have this you can't save and plan ahead to get in a position to pay your own bills.*

*If work is not regular, you're not given the opportunity to build up skills properly and then if you're not skilled you will be less likely to be offered employment.*

*They should look more towards training schemes with guaranteed offer of employment at the end.*

**Concluding Comments**

We welcome the opportunity to comment on this aspect of the consultation document and are looking forward to seeing the outcomes of the consultation process. Should

any further information or clarification on the comments made in our submission be required, please do not hesitate to get in touch.