

Perth CAB is campaigning to increase young people's knowledge of employment rights and to let them know where to access advice

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Knowing your Rights

Employment issues facing young people



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Employment issues have disproportionately affected young people in recent years, and have hit the Perth and Kinross area particularly hard. Research shows that:

- approximately three in ten people under 25 claim Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) in Scotland – this is a staggering 79% increase in 18-24 year olds claiming JSA from 2009-2010 ¹
- in Perth & Kinross the greatest percentage of people claiming JSA as a proportion of the resident population of the same age are the 18-24 age group, despite under 25s making up only 13% of the workforce ²
- in Perth & Kinross the number of people unemployed and seeking work has increased from 6.7% to 9.7% from 2000 to 2010. This coupled with the high JSA claimant rate among 18-24 year olds, means the unemployment rate in the P&K district is clearly a cause for concern ³
- Skills Development Scotland asserts that Perth & Kinross school leavers from deprived areas are more likely to be unemployed and seeking work than in any other area of the region ⁴.

With unemployment high amongst young people in Perth & Kinross, it is important that when they find a job, they are treated fairly by their employer. Unfortunately case evidence from Perth CAB tells a different story: young people are often unfairly and unlawfully treated by rogue employers who can take advantage of their inexperience and lack of knowledge of employment rights.

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Unfair Dismissal

According to government research, young people have been disproportionately affected by redundancies and dismissals during the economic recession⁵. This is locally relevant within Perth & Kinross with the numbers of young people aged 18-24 on Job Seekers Allowance rising from 280 in March 2008, to 625 in May 2012: a rise of 123%⁶. Case evidence from Perth CAB shows that young people are being dismissed without notice and without pay. Evidence also suggests that many young people are not aware of their employment rights and therefore unable to enforce their statutory rights in regards to unfair and wrongful dismissal.

Informal contracts

Many of the young clients seeking employment advice from the CAB had never received a written contract. Some of these young people were dismissed after a very short working period, and a verbal agreement was the only contract between the employee and employer suggesting that they were dismissed before being fully aware of the terms and conditions. Although verbal contracts are legally binding, they make it significantly more difficult for employees to prove the agreement if they choose to formally dispute any aspect of it. A verbal contract can therefore be used as a means of limiting the ammunition used by the employee to raise grievances against the employer, weakening the support of grievance claims, restricting workers rights, and fuelling unfair treatment in the workplace.

Lack of experience and unawareness of employment rights

Employers often view younger workers as less skilled and less experienced, and the fact that young people are cheaper to make redundant due to their having worked for fewer years can mean this age group suffers the greatest with employment problems⁷. Due to a lack of knowledge concerning their rights, young people frequently report of employers who neglect to fully inform them of their rights and who abuse the system by withholding pay, enforcing overtime, and unfair dismissal.

Perth CAB's campaign

In order to ensure that young people who find work do not suffer through a lack of knowledge of their employment rights, Perth CAB is asking young people to complete a short survey to find out more about this issue: we want to know which sectors are mostly affected, how much young people know about employments right, and if they know where to get advice if they need it.

We would really appreciate your help – if you are between 16 and 24 please complete our survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PerthCABcampaign> or fill out a paper copy. We will be publishing our findings later this year. Thank you for your support.

A young client who was dismissed after only one day's work with no pay feels that he was owed £52 in wages. There was a verbal agreement between the employer and employee, but no written contract had been drafted. The client was unsure how to proceed and wondered whether the employer had a right to do this.

A young client had worked for ten days and was told that he had been sacked. The client was not aware that he did not qualify for pay in lieu of notice and therefore was not entitled to any pay. The client was confused and upset, as he was not fully aware of his rights and what he was entitled to.

¹ *Being Young, Being Heard* (2011), Citizens Advice Scotland, p6.

² *JSA claimants by age duration* (May 2012), NOMIS, Labour market profile for Perthshire and Kinross

^{3, 4} *Perth and Kinross Council, Community Planning Partnership Report* (February 2012), Skills Development Scotland, pp. 7-11.

⁵ *Future Jobs fund Update* (2009), Perth and Kinross Council, p27.

⁶ *SDS Local Authority Profiles: Perth & Kinross* (June 2012), Skills Development Scotland.

⁷ *Being Young Being Heard*, p26.