

What happened to all the Saturday jobs?

Teenagers are competing with older applicants while also facing tougher workplace regulations, writes Lucy Warwick-Ching

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When 17-year-old A-level student Maizy Clayton started looking for parttime jobs last spring, she hoped to be manning tills or serving coffees within weeks.



But after applying for more than 50 positions in local cafés, restaurants and shops, she has had just three interviews and no job offers. Even the two employers that invited her to do an unpaid trial shift failed to respond afterwards, despite giving positive feedback on the day. “Every phone call, email and message I have sent has been ignored,” she says.

Clayton, who achieved top GCSE results and has good references from her school in Kent, believes her limited availability is holding her back, as she is only able to commit to a couple of shifts per week. “One part-time job I applied for contacted me to say the minimum number of hours I would be required to do in a week was 35, which is not possible for me.”

Her experience is becoming increasingly common across the UK. Teenagers searching for traditional part-time work — a Saturday job or after-school shift — are discovering the entry-level labour market is hard to break into. Employers say they have fewer roles available, older applicants are competing harder for the work and tougher regulations make under-18s more difficult to hire.

Whereas 16- and 17-year-olds once battled against each other for junior roles, employers now report an older pool of applicants applying for the same jobs. This is partly because many graduates are struggling to secure full-time work in a difficult jobs market, so are taking on part-time positions in retail and hospitality while they hunt for permanent roles.

Louise Murphy, senior economist at the Resolution Foundation, says it is becoming much less common for teenagers to have a Saturday job or any kind of paid work while they are in education: “A growing share of young people are entering their twenties having never had experience of the workplace.”

Former health secretary Alan Milburn, who is leading a review into the “lost generation” of almost 1mn “Neets” — young people not in education, employment or training — this month told *The Times* the decline in Saturday jobs meant people were not prepared for the workplace. His review is aimed at ensuring every young person can “learn how to work”. “Young people don’t necessarily have work experience, and what they have learnt at school isn’t necessarily pertinent for the world of work,” he said. The work and pensions committee of MPs last week announced an inquiry into the causes and effects of young people not in employment.

The shift has serious implications. “For some young people it’s fine. If you’re in full-time study, you might welcome the chance to focus on that,” says Murphy. “But it is more worrying that some teenagers now reach their early twenties with very little or no experience of the world of work and more and more employers are seeking this for entry-level jobs.”

Hiring under-18s involves additional regulatory requirements, which recruiters say is making employers more reluctant to take them on. Health and safety rules, for example, have become more stringent for younger workers over the years. Under-18s cannot work late-night shifts, must take more frequent breaks and are restricted from tasks involving heavy lifting or machinery. Employers must also complete specific risk assessments and, in some cases, provide additional supervision.

“The safeguarding obligations have definitely changed employer behaviour,” Murphy says. “This has been a positive change but it has also meant that hiring a 16-year-old now comes with more expectations, and that adds a burden, especially for smaller employers.” Even for work experience placements, many companies now have safeguarding policies stating under-18s cannot be left alone with individual adults.

The squeeze is not only about competition among job hunters. Employers in retail and hospitality — historically big providers of teenage jobs — have been cutting hours and headcounts. Automation, reduced footfall and cautious consumer spending have thinned out entrylevel roles in these sectors.

These trends are occurring alongside a broader deterioration in the youth labour market. The number of 16- to 24-year-olds who are deemed to be Neets has risen by 195,000 since 2022, to 940,000, according to a Resolution Foundation report published in October. It found that three in five Neets were economically inactive, meaning they are not looking for work, and 28 per cent cited disability or poor health.

Milburn has said the government will find “radical” solutions to get young people back into work, prompting predictions that the minimum wage for them could rise again.

“What's very noticeable about the labour market change over the past year is that the reduction in employment has almost entirely been firms freezing or reducing hiring rather than making people redundant,” says Murphy. “That is bad news for young people because if you're trying to get a foothold into the labour market, it's much more difficult than it was two years ago.”

Retail, hospitality and arts and entertainment, all sectors popular with young people, have fewer jobs now, she adds. “If you're looking for those jobs, it's harder.”

Centralised hiring systems also disadvantage some teenagers, by replacing informal conversations and face-to-face interviews with standardised online processes. “Work has become more process driven and a bit less human,” Murphy says. “Older people, younger people and disabled people can lose out because you can't simply have a conversation about the hours you can do or the flexibility you need.”

With traditional job routes narrowing — and parents cutting children's allowances during the cost of living crisis — teenagers are adapting, creating microbusinesses, turning to resale platforms and inventing new ways to earn. Online platforms such as Vinted, Depop and eBay have become de facto teenage workplaces, where selling preloved clothes can typically generate £50-£150 a month.

Almost two-thirds of the 2,000 children and teenagers surveyed by GoHenry, which provides pre-paid debit cards to young people, planned to launch their own business to make money last summer.

For 12-year-old Rodgean, from the West Midlands, the lack of traditional opportunities led him to sell toys, clothes, shoes and bags on Vinted and at local car boot sales. “I started with a clear goal: to declutter the house,” he says. “We had so much stuff, and I thought, why not sell it?” The family tried a car boot sale, and it worked. “We made money, and we got rid of clutter.”

After a few boot sales — where he played the ukulele “to attract buyers” — he set up a Vinted account and reinvested earnings into making craft items to sell. He estimates he has made about £1,000 since last summer, which he saves, partly in a junior stocks-and-shares Isa. “I'm using my earnings to fund my future — university, a job — and to learn how money works,” he says.

His business has helped with practical money management — budgeting, tracking expenses, understanding the difference between profit and revenue. “It even helps with debate club, because you learn confidence and how to speak to people,” he says.

Louise Hill, founder of GoHenry, says stories like his illustrate a wider shift. “With part-time jobs harder to come by, kids are getting creative and building their own businesses from their bedrooms at an early age.”

But many still want the structure, social skills and independence that come with a first job. For Clayton, the difficulty is breaking in at all. “By never having had a job, I have limited experience and the majority of positions I am looking to apply for require experience in the desired industry,” she says.