

resilience in times of uncertainty" from Dr Chris Johnstone, advocating the technique of turning adversity into a story, and imagining if this were a

movie, how the script would play out. His quote, "ships are safer in port, but that's not what ships are for," brought home the fact that challenge is

inherent in achieving a fulfilling life, and that resilience is a necessary part of that.

## ***Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) annual Recruitment, Resourcing and Talent Management conference, London, UK, 16 June 2011***

Catrin Ballinger

Catrin Ballinger is Research Associate, CIPD.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) believes that official youth unemployment figures are often open to different interpretations and distortions and maintains that one in eight rather than one in five is a more accurate indicator of current youth unemployment levels. However, this is still a substantial number who are struggling to find work and as these young people represent the future of the workforce – government, policy makers and employers need to work together to ensure these young people do not become seriously disaffected as this would have clear knock-on effects for UK long-term productivity.

Discussing this issue at the Resourcing and Talent Management Conference, Howard de Souza of the youth charity TAG (Transforming a Generation) and Richard Irwin, head of graduate recruitment, PwC, went on to highlight the role that HR and organizations need to play in helping young people gain valuable work experience.

The session explored the issues that young people face in securing a job in the current economic climate, with Richard Irwin providing an example of how his organization is approaching the challenge to build the skills and capabilities needed for the future from its graduates. Although a different set of challenges may exist for non-graduates in relation to their more educated counterparts, concerns surrounding the employability of young people in the current job market is inclusive of all 18-24 years old. Both Howard de Souza and Richard Irwin agreed that even graduates are not "fit for purpose" in the changing workplace environment. Despite their advantage of obtaining a

foot in the door, "they might have book sense but not common sense."

### **Taking a more objective view to employability**

Howard de Souza acquainted the audience with the work that TAG is involved in – helping those who have more limited career prospects, traditionally due to a lack of further education, get a step up the employment ladder. He highlighted the need for organizations to work in partnership with TAG and like-minded charities to establish a match between the skills and capabilities that organizations are looking for in their employees and those that young unemployed people or NEETs (those not in education, employment or training) actually have.

Rather than judge young people by their educational background, he suggests a more objective approach whereby employers focus on the skills and attributes these young individuals do have, such as courage, creativity and the ability to problem-solve, and offer them the opportunity to develop these raw skills within the organization. Richard Irwin agreed that the landscape is changing for graduate recruiters also, as degrees do not determine the existence of skills needed for the future, such as innovative thinking, curiosity, resilience and pragmatism.

Both presenters agreed that there is a need for closer partnership between employers, and university career services, charities and ultimately the young people looking for work, to really understand what employers want and what makes a young person "employable."