TASK:

*It has been proposed that school is not good preparation for life and students should be allowed to start work at 14 if they choose.*

*Write an article for a broadsheet newspaper explaining your views.*

**Life After School**

Around the country, millions of fourteen year olds sit at their desks, stare out the windows and otherwise try to pass the time until they’re finally released from school. It’s ironic that they’d get shorter sentences in prison for a violent crime – and at least in prison, they might learn some useful skills. Nevertheless, around the country, our young people are incarcerated in holding pens while they wait for their lives to begin.

Of course, for many students, school is a vital stepping-stone to A-levels, degrees and professional jobs. Nobody would disagree that a doctor or lawyer will need many years of gruelling academic labour to get them ready to serve society. School is engaging and relevant, spoiled only by a disruptive majority who would rather be elsewhere.

So why not do everyone and favour and let young people choose what will serve them best – further study, or a fast-track to work and pay?

Like around 60% of my generation, leaving school for me was a godsend. Released from the classroom, I could train to become qualified in my chosen trade, and for 50 happy years I built homes, helped people realise their dream, and made myself a substantial fortune. By the time I retired, I was employing 25 people, owned a fleet of vans, and had built thousands of houses. Did what I learnt in school help me with any of this? Without a shadow of a doubt, no.

There are doubtless some misguided individuals out there who wring their hands and moan about reading and writing and athematic. They claim that, by allowing students to free themselves of the shackles of exams, stress and cramming pointless facts into their heads, we’re leaving unskilled and helpless as adults. Well, the simple truth is, at the age of 14, I knew how to read, to write, to count, and I was ready to enter the world as an adult and learn my trade. Shakespeare and trigonometry weren’t for me. Knowing the names of all the mountains of the world, or being able to recognise a Picasso doesn’t come up much in the building trade. For me, carrying on at school would’ve been a waste, and this is true for many young people. Fact.

If the government has the wisdom to make these changes, we can look better to a stronger economy and a more skilled workforce. Imagine a country where eager 14 year olds can escape from tedious and unnecessary tasks and embark on a bright future, earning as they learn. Wouldn’t that be something for us all to be proud of? Not to mention allowing our future brain surgeons and rocket scientists to get down to some serious learning without distraction, and help make life better for the rest of us.

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**Robbing Children of Their Futures**

Imagine a world where you allow a toddler to choose not to potty train, or give a dog the option of biting a stranger? Well, allowing a 14 year old to throw away their future and abandon their potential to gain vital qualifications and skills in school is just as moronic.

Firstly, let’s deal with the myth that school is just about memorising facts and figures and passing exams. In fact, the modern secondary school allows students to train in a plethora of practical subjects if they wish, from hairdressing to motor vehicle repair. Students aren’t missing out by staying in school; in fact, they’re getting ready for their future careers. Furthermore, by continuing their education, students are given choices – pursuing A-levels, or choosing practical qualifications, is a decision a student is better prepared to make having followed their courses through to 16, rather than abandoning them at 14.

Likewise, experts agree that students learn a wide range of vital skills in school, from working in groups to managing deadlines. A recent study at Leeds University proved that, compared to the huge range of abilities a 16 year old possesses, a 14 year old is in fact ill-equipped to enter the workplace, and would struggle to survive in a team of adults. Do we really want to banish young people from the supportive atmosphere of their school, only to be bullied and ostracized by the ‘team members’ they’re supposedly learning a trade from?

Most importantly, let’s consider the reality of this proposition. A million 14 year olds leave school in September – are there a million jobs standing empty for them? Are a million employers waiting, with open arms, for unskilled and underage workers? In fact, employment is at the highest it’s been for decades, and fully skilled adults are left to languish in jobcentres. As businesswoman who employs hundreds of salespeople, I can assure you that all this proposal would lead to is inestimable numbers of disenfranchised, hopeless and demoralised teenagers left on the scrap heap. The only reason anyone would employ someone at this tender age, when so many fully trained and qualified adults are applying for each job, is because they’re looking for someone to exploit.

Dogs trust their owners to train them. Toddlers expect their parents to protect them. Surely we would be abusing our power if we allowed this monstrous proposition to go ahead. Whatever a 14 might *think* they want, they’re depending on us – as older, wiser heads – to make their right decisions about their futures. And that means staying in school.