

PAUL KINGSTON/PAUL VICENTE

Jules Quinn had the same fears as tens of thousands of other young graduates when she finished her degree.

"I just knew there weren't many jobs out there," said Quinn, 23, who had completed a four-year fashion degree at Northumbria University in Newcastle upon Tyne. "There were jobs in London with fashion houses, but I didn't want to move down when the rent is so expensive."

So Quinn left university in May last year and the next morning started her own business. From her parents' home in nearby Stocksfield, she launched The TeaShed, selling silky, nylon tea bags imported from Sri Lanka filled with exotic tea leaves. She also designs and sells ceramics, tea towels and cushions.

"I had always wanted to have my own business, but the economic climate encouraged me to start earlier than I might have done," said Quinn, who is expecting to make a profit of £50,000 this year and is set to move into her own premises on Newcastle's waterfront in the new year.

Quinn's story is encouraging. Official figures last week showed that unemployment among 16-24-year-olds had passed 1m for the first time since records began in 1992. Headlines warned of "a lost generation" with the risk that many young people might have their working lives blighted by the worst of starts.

The Bank of England warned that the economy may not grow in the final quarter of this year and probably not for the first half of next year. Many forecasters expect unemployment to continue to rise.

However, talk to Quinn and others and they paint a more upbeat picture. There is free advice out there to help start-ups, they say. And for those not seeking to start a business, other assistance is coming: last week the government pledged to increase the number of apprenticeships by cutting red tape and providing financial incentives.

Quinn even argues that the harsh economic environment gave her motivation. "I wasn't giving up a job or a salary," she said. "I had nothing to lose."

She talks in terms of tough love. "They should get off their backsides," she said of young people who struggle to find work. "You can't just send emails and apply online — everybody is doing that. You have to go and see people."

"There are many ways to make money. You can get a market stall for as little as £20. You've got nothing to lose."

Ben Kutcha, who last year began a business installing and servicing gas appliances for homes and businesses, also advises young people to be bold and "think big". He said: "You can't just curl up into a ball and lie there. I find if you set yourself targets — whether it's starting a business, winning a contract or buying a car — you get there. Don't be scared: nothing is impossible."

JUST how serious is the rise in youth unemployment? According to the Office for National Statistics, joblessness among 16-24-year-olds is now at 20.4%, its highest level since 1986.

Nor is it confined to traditional blackspots. It has risen by more than 30% over the past year in parts of Devon, Hampshire and Kent. Chichester, Hereford and Sevenoaks have seen some of the sharpest increases.

Nevertheless, Britain can take some comfort from the fact that its youth unemployment is still well below the rates in Spain (45%), Greece (42.9%), Italy (27.7%), and Ireland (29.2%). And experts say it is important to remember that within the headline figures there is a lot of movement: young people tend to slip in an out of employment more quickly than older workers.

"I think of youth unemployment as a political problem more than an economic problem," argues John Philpott, chief economic adviser for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. "Generally speaking younger people tend to be out of the labour market for no more than nine or 12 months."

Philpott added: "It is serious, but it is not unprecedented." Young people in the recessions of the early 1980s and 1990s went on to get jobs and careers. "I think the bigger issue is long-term unemployment [of older workers], people who are out of the labour market for years who can struggle to get back into work."

Zoe Jackson, a young entrepreneur from Hertfordshire, says schools and universities are poor at preparing students for work or starting enterprises, which leaves some feeling helpless. She started a performing arts company, Living the Dream, when she was 16. Five years later it teaches dance in 20 locations around the country.



Jules Quinn, founder of TeaShed

I DID IT, SO CAN YOU

With more than 1m young people unemployed, no one denies it's hard to find work. But it can be done. Robert Watts talks to budding entrepreneurs and apprentices about the secrets of success



JESSICA ANUNA, 20

Founded an online fashion magazine for younger generation. Has attracted publicity and readers by landing interviews with celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez, Ne-Yo and JLS



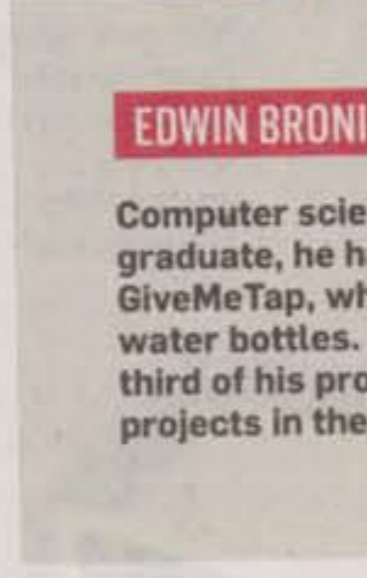
ABDUL KHAN, 25

Launching his own business after being made redundant from an advertising agency. His website Ratethatcurry.com allows diners to recommend Indian, Chinese and other ethnic restaurants



ZOE JACKSON, 22

Launched Living the Dream performing arts company when she was 16. The organisation now holds dance classes in 20 places across the country and provides work for dozens of dance teachers



EDWIN BRONI-MENSAH, 26

Computer science and maths graduate, he has started GiveMeTap, which sells bespoke water bottles. Says nearly a third of his profits go to building projects in the developing world



"I think there should be much more teaching of enterprise, even in primary schools," said Jackson. "It's almost as if you are narrowed down as you go through the educational system just to pass exams and do the same as everyone else is doing."

"It's not just that people at school don't get advice on networking, marketing and producing your CV — it can stifle your creativity."

Pioneers, a group that provides advice from experts and helps young entrepreneurs share their ideas.

Another who knows all about persistence is Jon Goodman, a politics graduate from London, who spent six months on the dole after losing his job at a London council. To escape, he changed career plans and spent almost a year working for his room and board under a scheme called Woof — worldwide opportunities on organic farms.

The experience landed him a job as an apprentice at the Soil Association. "I'm really enjoying the apprenticeship — I can't believe someone is willing to pay me for doing this! It's a proper, full-time job, so I'm earning and I'm training as well."

work. Getting into the habit of working is vital. "Finally, you have got to be prepared to travel, even move, to find work."

Back in Stocksfield, Quinn was last week preparing to set up another market stall, with an early start in prospect. "It's not very glamorous," she said, although there was a flick of pride in her voice when she mentioned that friends had started to call her Deborah Meaden, after one of the investors on the BBC's Dragons' Den programme.

"I miss out on plenty of Friday and Saturday nights out because I've got to be at a market early the next day. You've got to get your head down, but in a few years I think we'll have made something I'll be really happy with."

Additional reporting: Cui Flyn Jobseekers can make own luck with graft, Letters, page 28

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