

# Skills Consultation Qualitative Research Programme

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Opportunities for young people

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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# Background

- The draft 'Skills for Londoners' strategy was published in December 2017, and had a six week consultation period
- The public consultation comprised the following elements:
  - Representative polling with a sample of 1,000 Londoners
  - Surveys of the Talk London community (40,000 members)
  - Online discussions with the Talk London community
  - Focus groups and interviews with Londoners, recruited to specific criteria

# Objectives

- A programme of qualitative research was designed to inform thinking around opportunities for young people in London
- This research aims to explore the mindset of young Londoners as they prepare to leave education, with specific interest in:
  - Perceptions of opportunities and barriers for young people in London
  - System for careers advice and guidance
  - Perception of post 16 options
  - Experiences of apprentices

# Methodology

- In December 2017, the Opinion Research and Statistics Team conducted 6 focus groups, and 8 interviews

4 x focus groups with 16-19 year olds	2 x focus groups with teachers	8 x interviews with apprentices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Split by social grade and gender<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4 x groups C1C2</li><li>• 4 x groups C2DE</li></ul></li><li>• Split by geography<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 x Local London</li><li>• 2 x South London Partnership</li><li>• 2 x West London</li><li>• 2 x Central London Forward</li></ul></li><li>• 3 BAME participants per group</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teach 16-18 year olds</li><li>• Range in type of institution, with approx. half teaching at sixth form colleges</li><li>• Range of subjects taught</li><li>• Equal gender split</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Level 2 apprentices:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Business admin</li><li>• Receptionist</li><li>• VFX animation</li><li>• IT</li><li>• Auditing</li><li>• Finance</li><li>• Childcare</li></ul></li><li>• Equal gender split</li><li>• Range in ages<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5 x under 18</li><li>• 3 x 20+</li></ul></li><li>• Ethnicity<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5 x white</li><li>• 3 x BAME</li></ul></li></ul>

# Executive Summary

- Young people anxious about their future in London, and feel under pressure to get a high paying job
  - But have little exposure to the labour market whilst in school/ college, and are uncertain how easy or difficult this will be to achieve
- Schools facing funding challenges are focused on attracting students, leading to pressure to achieve good exam results and high university entry rates
  - Students and teachers agreed that schools/colleges push university as the main option available to students, meaning most go to university, even if they are not best suited to it
- University seen as the best route to a high paid job
  - The debt was a concern, but not a barrier
  - Concern that a degree doesn't prepare you for work and that lots of graduates are unable to find jobs
- Interest in apprenticeships as a way of gaining an 'edge' in employment market
  - Perception that employers really value practical experience
  - But concern that apprenticeships narrow your options, and stigma of taking the 'less good' option also a barrier

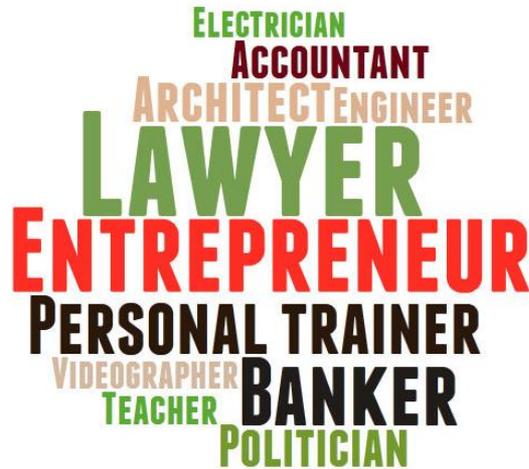
# PRESSURES ON YOUNG PEOPLE

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# Participants had high hopes for the future

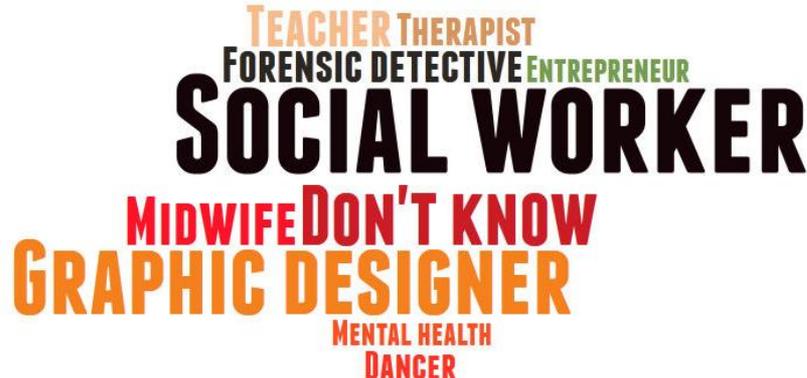
What job are you aiming for?

Boys...



A word cloud for boys' aspirations. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape, with 'LAWYER' and 'ENTREPRENEUR' being the largest and most prominent. Other words include 'ELECTRICIAN', 'ACCOUNTANT', 'ARCHITECT', 'ENGINEER', 'PERSONAL TRAINER', 'VIDEOPHOTOGRAPHER', 'TEACHER', 'BANKER', and 'POLITICIAN'.

Girls...



A word cloud for girls' aspirations. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape, with 'SOCIAL WORKER' being the largest and most prominent. Other words include 'TEACHER', 'THERAPIST', 'FORENSIC DETECTIVE', 'ENTREPRENEUR', 'MIDWIFE', 'DON'T KNOW', 'GRAPHIC DESIGNER', 'MENTAL HEALTH', and 'DANCER'.

- Most participants said they knew what they were aiming for
  - Girls less confident in their aspirations than boys
- Jobs chosen reflect limited exposure to jobs market
  - Jobs chosen because they are either high profile or because they know someone in that industry
  - Also a result of cultural influences e.g. CSI= forensic detective, The Apprentice = entrepreneur

*"Maybe starting my own business. Like you know Alan Sugar, you see his program, I want to do something like that."*

16-19, Female, C2DE

# Underneath this ambition, participants were anxious

- Participants were clearly nervous about leaving school/college, and worried about making the wrong decision
  - This was more evident in girls than boys
- Participants felt under pressure to 'have a plan', leading many to latch onto a job without knowing much about it
  - When pressed, participants said they had little idea what their chosen career path would entail or whether they would enjoy it
- Many said that they feel too young to be making these kind of decisions
  - Several participants, especially the girls, said that they didn't know what they wanted to do in life yet, and felt they needed more time to figure it out

*"I feel so unprepared. You don't know what the future holds. I don't feel like I am coming from a place where I am like 'oh this is what I am going to do and this is how I am going to get there.'"*

16-19, Female, C2DE

*"I feel like I haven't had enough life to know exactly what I want to do. I think I want to do psychology because I like it but would I prefer something else? I don't know."*

16-19, Female, C2DE

# Anxiety driven by perception that London is a difficult place to find success

- Participants nearly all wanted to stay in London to start their careers
  - Seen to offer the best opportunities for young people
- But felt that the only way to do so would be to get a high paying job
  - Very worried about cost of living in London, especially cost of renting, and the implications this has for their ability to live independently
- This is driving their aspirations, but they have are uncertain how difficult it will be to achieve
  - Participants were worried that London jobs market is very competitive, but they had little sense of what this means in practical terms for their job prospects
  - Most just assumed that they would figure it out, and preferred not to consider the alternative

*"I feel like there are opportunities in London but they are more difficult to achieve than in other places in the UK because it's so overcrowded here. So there is like probably 20 people or more going for each role that you are."*

16-19, Female, C2DE

*"I try to stay optimistic but I am not sure how it's actually going to turn out because I know that getting a job is hard. Like lots of people who actually get out of uni their rate of finding a job isn't actually that high so it might be hard to achieve what I want."*

16-19, Male, C1C2

# Teachers under a lot of pressure to deliver on exam results

- Schools in challenging times
  - All participants identified lack of funding and recruitment and retention as the two biggest challenges their school faces
- Schools competing to attract students in order to increase their funding
  - Teachers criticise senior leadership for being overly motivated by funding
- As a result teachers under pressure to deliver good exam results
  - Concern from teachers that this results in 'battery learning', where students are spoon fed the answers without having to think for themselves or study independently

*"Results and recruitment and then money because obviously we're funded by all the students who come to our sixth form so we need to get really good results to encourage more students to come here."*

Teacher

*"A lot of the skills that we probably would have spent time teaching them we miss out because our only focus is we need to make sure that we've got a certain amount getting A to C. Skills as basic as being able to take notes in a lesson and then going over those at home. Just doesn't happen."*

Teacher

# Teachers were worried about how students would fare in ‘the real world’

- Teachers think students are under a lot of pressure to aim high
  - Because the alternative is not being able to afford to live in London/ being stuck in low paying work
- Teachers concerned that students have unrealistic expectations
  - Teachers concerned that students think they will leave university and automatically get high paying jobs
- Teachers concerned that students lack the ‘core skills’ that they will need to succeed in their careers
  - Teachers worried that students had not learnt how to learn independently, think critically, or deal with failure
  - Teachers noted that students studying BTEC will likely struggle at university because they have not had experience of doing exams

*“I was doing a lesson on jobs the other day and they all said they would never take a job that paid £16,000. They are expecting to walk out of university into £50 salaries.”*

Teacher

*“We don’t have time to teach them the core skills that are going to get them ready for the big changes that are coming to the labour market. Like the ability to construct an argument and sustain it.”*

Teacher

# STEM subjects being pushed as the route to success

- Both students and teachers had a strong sense of a hierarchy of subjects at schools/colleges:
  - STEM = high paying job
  - Humanities = uncertain outcome
  - Creative subjects = low paying jobs
  - Vocational/BTEC = low paying jobs
- Teachers worried that this was resulting in students choosing the wrong subjects for them
  - Students with little ability taking STEM subjects because they feel they should/ they are under pressure from their parents, and then getting bad results/ failing
  - Students not taking humanities/ creative subjects even when they show a real aptitude

*“It is also that to do with the girl thing, I think it is also to do with people always think that the jobs are in STEM and people are always like the jobs are never in art stuff.”*

16-19, Female, C2DE

*“We have pressure from parents to do subjects that they’re not suitable for like they all want to do maths and science and we end up with a few car crashes as a result.”*

Teacher

# SYSTEM FOR CAREERS ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

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# System geared to helping students progress to the next stage of education

## 1. School (Years 7-11)

- Advice on what GCSEs to take
- Advice on what college to attend
- Some exposure to careers



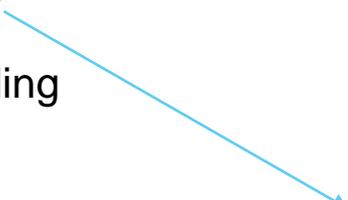
## 2. School/ College (Years 12-13)

- Support with UCAS application

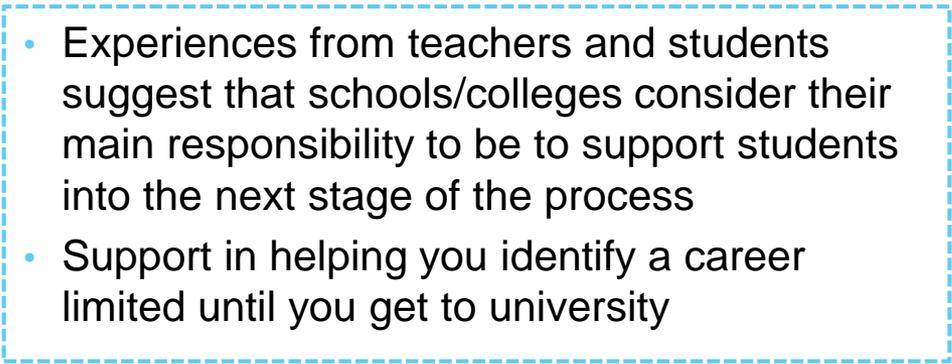


## 3. University

- Support with identifying/ finding the right job



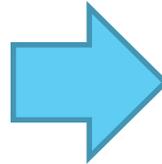
## 4. Job

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- Experiences from teachers and students suggest that schools/colleges consider their main responsibility to be to support students into the next stage of the process
  - Support in helping you identify a career limited until you get to university

# Common features of systems for careers advice and guidance in schools/colleges

## Schools (Years 7-11)

- Careers fairs with alumni coming back to talk about their professional experiences
- Form tutor sessions/ 1:1 sessions to discuss GCSE options/ advise on colleges



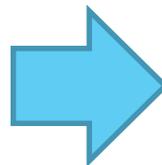
- Some exposure to the labour market
  - Many said this came too early for it to be useful

*“In my school it’s careers focused up to Year 11 and then it switches to UCAS.”*

Teacher

## Schools/colleges (Years 12-13)

- Assemblies on universities
- Careers fairs with representatives from universities and the armed forces
- University open days
- Websites to identify potential career paths/ degree options
- 1:1 sessions with a UCAS advisor
- Emails about apprenticeships



- Strong focus on university applications
- Very little exposure to the labour market

*“When you say careers I feel like most of this is just university. It’s not really careers.”*

Teacher

# Participants felt that they were not being presented with the full range of options

- All said they felt that schools/colleges pushed university as the best option, and that other options were presented as inferior
  - Careers fairs with universities, university open days, UCAS advisors in schools and regular assemblies provide an abundance of information and support on university applications
- Participants said that they had had less exposure to apprenticeships
  - Most said they had had one assembly on it, and had received emails
- Year 13 students describe feeling rushed and stressed over their UCAS applications
  - Many said they had been surprised by deadlines, and only had 2 weeks to write application
  - Teachers echoed this, and wondered why students weren't being encouraged to start considering their options at the end of Year 12

*"I think people need more options. Like apprenticeships the information is there but you really have to go hunting for it whereas universities it's just constant."*

16-19, Male, C2DE

*"They talk more in Year 13 than in Year 12. Like in Year 12 they don't say much and then in Year 13 they just talk non stop. Now we're rushing. Like they just told us about our personal statements. We had like a month to write them. It's very stressful."*

16-19, Female, C2DE

# Participants critical of the quality of advice they are given

- Many highly critical of their experience of visiting careers advisor
  - Common experiences included being pointed to a website with no further guidance, or being given generic advice that didn't help them
  - Participants also said that there was little guidance on whether you had picked the right path, just information on what to do if you wanted to go down X route
- Mixed experiences of assemblies
  - Some positive experiences of external speakers, but many said they tend to switch off if it's not relevant to them
- Result is that students feel under-prepared for the decisions they are making
  - What they want is to be able to sense-check their choice i.e. is this the right choice for me/ what is this job really like/ how feasible is it that I will succeed in this

*"In my school I only saw a careers advisor twice and the only thing they could offer me was college leaflets. They never told me about careers and stuff."*

16-19, Male, C2DE

*"Careers advisors don't really give you much information. I have only talked to one once and he just told me the site to go on and that's it."*

16-19, Male, C2DE

# Teachers said that their schools/colleges do not prioritise careers advice

- Many participants said their school had cut back on funding for careers advice and guidance
  - Most of those working in colleges said they just had a UCAS advisor rather than a general careers advisor
  - One teacher who worked at a larger school with more funding said they had a team of 5, including a dedicated apprenticeship advisor
- Incentives for schools/colleges to push university
  - Senior team motivated by need to attract more students and therefore more funding and see high university entry rates as a way of achieving this
  - No requirements from Ofsted around provision of comprehensive careers advice
- Teachers said they found it difficult to help students
  - Teachers do not feel they have the time or expertise to be able to help students, especially with apprenticeships which require students to choose a career path
  - This was echoed by students who said they did not think teachers had the time to help them/ would be able to answer their questions

*“My girlfriend told me that her school actively declines businesses coming in to promote apprenticeships because they want them to go to sixth form because every pupil is worth £5,000.”*

Teacher

*“I had a student who wanted to do an apprenticeship and was asking me about it. He wanted to know what he should do it in but I didn’t know what to tell him.”*

Teacher

# There were some positive experiences of exposure to the labour market

- Careers fairs with alumni: range of professionals have a stand and students are free to talk to whoever they choose
  - Several students had experienced this in Year 11, and had said they had found it a useful way of understanding more about the realities of the working world
  - Students said they thought it would be helpful to have this type of exposure in Year 12 when they are making decisions about what to do when they leave college
- Links with industry e.g. Sutton Trust, Headstart, City Gateway
  - Teachers thought that students in London were lucky to have the opportunity to connect with industry through such programmes, and that it provided valuable exposure to career paths they might not have considered before
- Work placements got a mixed response
  - Teachers see this as a valuable way for students to gain employability skills e.g. turning up on time, having responsibility etc
  - But students only see this as valuable if it is in something they see as directly relevant to them

*“I go to City in Islington and they have quite a lot of links with companies and if you go down to careers they can usually recommend somewhere you can get experience.”*

16-19, Male, C2DE

*“When I worked in Yorkshire there was a really strong system for work placements and the kids really got a lot out of, even when it was just working in a café.”*

Teacher

# Some participants said they had experienced a high quality service

- Mandatory 1:1 careers sessions for students on a regular basis
  - Students said that even if the careers advice service was amazing, most people would not go unless they were made to
  - A couple of students went to schools/colleges where regular attendance was mandatory and thought this was beneficial
- Tailored follow up emails to students to point them in the direction of opportunities they might be interested in
  - Students said they tended to ignore emails from the careers department as didn't find them helpful
  - But one student said she got personal emails from her advisor who knew her interests e.g. pointing her in the direction of a free film-making workshop
- Specialist advisors e.g. apprenticeship specialist
  - Teachers worried that they didn't know enough about apprenticeships to be able to answer students' questions
  - Excel London trip to find out about apprenticeships

*"My school has a careers advisor who has her own office and you book an appointment and just talk about your career. It's compulsory to go twice a term."*

16-19, Female, C2DE

*"Last year there was an apprenticeship trip where you went to Excel London for everyone in my year who was interested."*

16-19, Female, C1C2

# Ideas for how system could be improved

- Assembly for parents to explain the full range of options available to young people
- Training session for teachers, potentially hosted by the GLA, to help them better understand apprenticeships
- Careers toolkit for teachers
- Better preparation in Year 12, so that decisions are not rushed in Year 13 e.g. through a summer school session focusing on careers
- More exposure to successful professionals, including those who have done apprenticeships

*"I think that if I were to have a one to one I would have to have that session and then communicate when my parents when I get home. So maybe having an assembly with all the parents to explain that this is not the seventies or the eighties, like things have changed."*

16-19, Female, C2DE

*"At Leyton College we've got quite a large careers service so they have experts in apprenticeships. They invite speakers from different apprenticeships to come in. We have civil service come in last week. They get a lot of ex students to come back as well."*

Teachers

# PERCEPTIONS OF POST 16 OPTIONS

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# Currently university is the default option

- Students and teachers agreed that schools/colleges push university as the main option available to students
  - Parents also seen to be influential in pushing students in this direction
- Meaning most go to university, even if they are not best suited to it
  - Teachers were frustrated that students with low grades were opting for 'easy' university degrees in subjects they didn't care about, when they would be better suited to learning a trade
- Apprenticeships are seen as under-valued, but growing in popularity
  - Both students and teachers said they had noticed increased interest in apprenticeships, and a change in perceptions around them
  - Students said parents needed convincing, but that they also just wanted what was best for them and wouldn't stop them from taking their preferred option

*"I don't think that as young individuals we know much what is out there. I don't think we've been shown. Obviously we know that after college you can go to university but I don't think there is as much awareness of what other careers there are, apart from university."*

16-19, Female, C2DE

*"I just thought business was an easy degree to get, because most jobs want a degree so if I do an easy degree then I can get like a good job."*

16-19, Female, C2DE

# Participants saw many advantages to going to university

- University seen as the best route to a high paid job
  - Perception that a degree is required if you are aiming high and don't want to be limited in how far you can climb
  - Perception that employers default to preference for degrees, because they understand them better, meaning even a degree in an unrelated field is treated more favourably than an apprenticeship with relevant experience
- The experience you gain- and the people you meet- seen to be as important as the qualification
  - Students excited at the opportunity to live independently, and felt they needed this time to mature and decide what they were going to do next
  - Both students and teachers thought the connections made at university were important to professional success
- University means you don't have to decide what you want to do straightaway
  - Students liked the idea of keeping their options open by doing degrees that could be widely applied
  - 'Sandwich' years which provide real world experience very popular

*"I think today regardless of what jobs you're applying for a degree regardless of what it is, is kind of essential."*

16-19, Male, C2DE

*"It allows you to develop yourself a bit more and just personally it allows you to be younger for a bit longer."*

16-19, Female, C2DE

# The debt was a concern, but not a barrier

- Students were very clued up on university finance
  - Figure of 50k widely cited as cost of university degree, including maintenance
  - Student loan system well understood e.g. only have to start paying back when earning above a certain threshold (21k widely cited)/ pay proportionate to earnings/ outstanding debt gets wiped when you reach 50
- Most said the debt would not deter them from going to university, if they thought it was the best option for them
  - Perception that monthly payments will be so low as to be almost unnoticeable and that there is no risk as debt will eventually be wiped
  - Participants didn't like to think they were making such important decisions on the basis of whether they could afford it or not
- But there were other reasons why they thought university might not always be the best option
  - It doesn't prepare you for work, because you leave with no practical experience
  - Lots of graduates are unable to find jobs, because there is an over-supply

*"I don't know how much it will be a month. I think about £7. About the same as paying for Netflix, like not too bad."*

16-19, Female, C2DE

*"If you go to uni you rack up a lot of debt and then you might not get the job you want to get so then you're in a position where you are not earning as much as you thought you would be and you still have all that debt."*

16-19, Male, C2DE

# Interest in apprenticeships as a way of gaining an 'edge' in employment market

- Students and teachers thought apprenticeships offered some clear advantages
  - Start earning immediately
  - Gain valuable work experience
  - Strong chance of employment
- Seen as the best option for students who are not academic or who already have a clear idea of their preferred career path
  - For these students, gaining practical real world experience will be the best way to gain an edge over the competition in the jobs market
- Relatively high awareness that apprenticeships are available in a wide range of professions
  - Majority of students and teachers aware that apprenticeships were available in professions such as banking, accountancy, teaching, IT etc
  - A minority were surprised by this and said they thought apprenticeships were limited to the trades/ manual work

*"I was interested in doing an apprenticeship but I thought it would be a fast track into work and that it would be good to be decisive about what I wanted to do. But I just wasn't sure what path to choose so I think I am going to go to university instead."*

16-19, Male, C2DE

*"It gives you the actual skills instead of just learning stuff that you learn in uni. It's more practical. And afterwards if you've done a good job they guarantee you a place in the company."*

16-19, Male, C2DE

# But concern that apprenticeships narrow your career options

- Top concern for students was that apprenticeships would restrict the opportunities available to them
  - Perception that apprenticeships force you down a single career path and close down other options
  - Perception that there is a ceiling on how far they could rise in an organisation/profession with an apprenticeship qualification, compared to a degree
- Students worried about missing out on an important experience/ opportunity to forge a personal network
  - Perception that apprenticeships do not allow students to be independent and that they do not lead to strong personal networks
- Finance also a concern
  - Pay of £3.20 an hour widely cited, and damaging to perceptions of apprenticeships

*“You need to decide at like 16 or 18 if you wanted to be a plumber or something so it’s hard to choose that for the rest of your life.”*

16-19, Male, C2DE

*“If you do an apprenticeship it is sort of like a ceiling of where you hit. You can only go so far.”*

16-19, Male, C2DE

*“My friend is doing an apprenticeship in childcare and she only makes £3.50 an hour and she can’t get extra work because it’s full time. I don’t think that’s right.”*

16-19, Female, C2DE

# Apprenticeships seen to suffer from an image problem

- Apprenticeships seen to come with stigma of being 'the less good option', and this is a barrier for some
  - Lower grades required by apprenticeships reinforce this perception
  - Apprenticeships seen to suffer from continued association with trades/ manual work
- However, many thought this was changing, and drew parallel with perceptions of BTECs
  - BTECs also seen as an inferior alternative to A Levels when first introduced, but that is changing as more people do them
  - Many thought there had been an increased interest in apprenticeships over the last couple of years- some said they had heard apprenticeships spoken of on the news
- Conversely perception that university degree has become so ubiquitous that it has been devalued

*"Even if apprenticeships are good, most people think they are probably not that good, because the grades you need to get one are not that high."*

16-19, Male, C2DE

*"An apprenticeship makes so much sense but not many people do it. I know there's been a big push recently- it's been on the news."*

16-19, Female, C1C2

# There was some confusion as to how apprenticeships fit with other qualifications

- Some confusion amongst students as to when you can do an apprenticeship
  - Some thought you either choose to do an apprenticeship or go to college, and were surprised to hear that the option to do an apprenticeship is still available after college
- There was confusion amongst teachers as to how A Levels and apprenticeships fit together
  - E.g. if you've got a Level 2 qualification can you still get funding to do another Level 2 qualification?

*"No one ever told me anything about apprenticeships. I would be quite interested but I think it's too late now because I am already in college and they start at 16 don't they?"*

16-19, Male, C2DE

*"So a travel and tourism student got Level 3 extended diploma and BTEC. They then decide to do a Level 2 say in hairdressing. So they do their Level 2. But then if they want to do Level 3 by the letter of the law they cannot progress unless they pay for it themselves."*

Teacher

# Students and teachers thought both options should be given equal parity

University advantages	University disadvantages	Verdict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Employers like it</li><li>✓ It leads to higher lifetime earnings</li><li>✓ It's an important life experience</li><li>✓ It gives you a network</li><li>✓ It keeps your options open</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ Debt</li><li>✗ Everyone has a degree so doesn't give you an 'edge' in labour market</li><li>✗ Doesn't prepare you for employment- no work experience</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• General view that both are important options to have, as each will suit different people<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• University best for the academically minded and those who are unsure of their career path</li><li>• Apprenticeships best for less academic, practical learners and those who are sure of what they want to do in their careers</li></ul></li><li>• Both students and teachers felt that a re-balancing was needed in how options were presented<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Both options should be presented as equally viable, and students should be advised as to the best option for them</li></ul></li></ul>
<h3 data-bbox="92 876 691 952">Apprenticeships advantages</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Get paid to learn</li><li>✓ Gain valuable experience</li><li>✓ Practical way to learn</li><li>✓ Guaranteed a job</li></ul>	<h3 data-bbox="707 876 1306 952">Apprenticeships disadvantages</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ Limits your career choices</li><li>✗ Limits how far you can rise</li><li>✗ Not as fun an experience</li><li>✗ Lose out on personal network</li><li>✗ Low pay</li></ul>	

# APPRENTICE EXPERIENCES

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# Participants had found out about apprenticeships off their own back

- Variety in route taken:
  - 1 straight from school. 3 started college and then decided it wasn't for them after first year / 3 had finished college and then decided they didn't want to go to university
- Most heard about apprenticeship through friends, and then researched them online
  - Several said that in their schools/colleges there was a culture of going on to do apprenticeships
- Nearly all said their school/college tried to dissuade them
  - But once they made it clear that was the route they wanted to go down, then they were supported in their application
  - Parents said to be initially unsure but supportive once they understood they would be getting a qualification in their chosen field

*"The school kept saying they believed I would do better in college because I did have good grades so they wanted me to stay. I thought I can't just be here to benefit my school. I have to do it for myself."*

Apprentice, Female, 17

*"My parents didn't got to university so they were hoping I would be the first one. But when I explained that this was better because I would get experience they were ok with it."*

Apprentice, Male, 17

# Participants all had similar reasons for wanting to do an apprenticeship

- All said they were doing an apprenticeship because they thought it was the best option for them
  - Didn't enjoy academic work/ exams and thought they would be better suited to practical learning
  - Knew what they wanted to do and thought this was the best way to get ahead in their chosen field
  - Wanted to start earning as soon as possible
- Cost of university a secondary, but still important, consideration
  - Participants were pleased that they were avoiding university debt, but also said this was not their main motivation – they chose to do an apprenticeship because it was the best option for them, not because it was the 'cheaper' option

*"I went to sixth form and then in the second year I decide that having an apprenticeship is an easier and more effective way of my getting into the real world of working."*

Apprentice, Female, 17

*'I spoke to people in that industry and they all said experience was the most important thing. So that was my motivation, and I didn't want the debt.'*

Apprentice, Male, 20

# Most found their apprenticeship through a provider

- Several said they initially tried to go through government website, but got no responses
  - Participants described similar experience of sending off dozens of applications and never hearing anything back
- Participants used a variety of providers to find their apprenticeships
  - Including Tech City, Leadership through Sport and Business, QA Apprenticeships, Workplace, LDN London Group, Future London
- All described similar experiences
  - Initial assessment of numeracy/ literacy
  - Training including interview practice, elevator pitch, advice on how to present yourself
  - Exposure to a range of companies e.g. through Dragon's Den style interviews or work experience
  - Successful match first time round with an employer
  - Follow up support to make sure you are happy with placement

*'I don't like applying through the government website because of them you don't hear back from. Workplace make it really easy for you.'*  
Apprentice, Female, 22

*'I heard about Future London through my mate. They train you in like interviews and stuff. Then you get one day with each company. Do an interview and get to see what it's like. You can see which one you preferred.'*  
Apprentice, Female, 17

# Participants had some concerns before starting their apprenticeships

- All said they were nervous before starting, and unsure whether they had made the right decision
  - Wondered if the work would be too menial/ not interesting/ too stressful
- All had very low salary expectations
  - Expectations based on minimum £7,000 a year salary
- Some concerns around affordability, especially from older participants
  - Younger participants were just happy to be getting paid anything
  - Older participants felt there was a greater expectation from their parents that they would contribute to household rent and bills

*“When I was researching online everyone wrote that the salary was £3 an hour. I think that’s ridiculous but in reality it isn’t that low.”*

Apprentice, Female, 17

*“I was living with my parents but neither of them work. When I was working I was paying a lot towards the food bill and stuff like that. So when I took the risk of an apprenticeship I had to talk to them about it and borrow some money from my brother.”*

Apprentice, Male, 23

# All said apprenticeships had exceeded their expectations

- Participants had all had positive experiences:
  - Better paid than they expected- only one participant on the lowest band salary, with others earning up to £12k
  - Treated as one of the team, rather than ‘just the apprentice’- given real responsibility
  - Well supported by mentors, and given opportunity to feedback on their experiences
  - Opportunity to attend events/ forge professional networks
  - Sociable and fun- especially for those in a larger cohort of apprentices

*“I knew it would be paid. I just didn’t know how much so as the time I wondered if it would be like an internship where they just pay for your travel. I was really surprised when I found out how much I would be paid. That was good.”*

Apprentice, Male, 20

*“My expectations were actually I’d just be sitting there watching. But it’s been more or less thrown in the deep end and taught to swim, with guidance.”*

Apprentice, Male, 23

# Some were struggling with affordability

- Most said they were managing on their salary
  - Living at home made it affordable, with some saying they were even managing to save
  - Young person's Oyster/ Apprentice Oyster meant most had discounts on travel
- One participant was having to rent, and was really struggling
  - Participant on the minimum £7,000 a year salary, had had to move out of his home due to family issues and spending over half his salary on rent
- Those travelling from outside London were struggling with travel costs
  - Two participants coming in from Kent/ Essex said they were spending almost half their salaries on travel
  - Had been told they were not eligible for Apprentice Oyster card because they did not live in London
  - Had received small amount of support from employers
- Participants did not report any problems opening a bank account

*“When I was living with my mum it was alright but since I’ve moved out it’s been quite difficult. I just wish there was something available to help. I pay half of my wages on rent.”*

Apprentice, Male, 18

*“We can’t apply for the apprentice railcard. The others get a decent discount whereas we’ve got to pay full price, on top of the cost of the trains.”*

Apprentice, Male, 20

# All felt they had found a career path

- Participants were very pleased with their decision to do an apprenticeship
  - Clearly felt they had gained a lot in terms of confidence and new skills
- All had been kept on by their employers
  - In many cases employers had offered to fund further qualifications e.g. AAT exams
- Participants felt the apprenticeship had given them a sense of direction
  - Several said they had identified what they wanted to do through the apprenticeship, and had a clear idea of how to get there
- Several also said they thought they might go to university further down the line
  - Felt that the option would always be there should they decide it was something they wanted to do, whereas apprenticeships were only funded up to age 24

*"I really like the fact that's it's been very much hands on industry experience. I have learnt a hell of a lot more than I would have learnt doing another academic course in the same sector."*

Apprentice, Male, 20

*"I'm very pleased now that I've finished it. I know where I want to go. I've got the qualification and I know what the next step is. I think I'm in a better position than my friends at college because I'm just one step ahead."*

Apprentice, Female, 18