

Equality and
Human Rights
Commission

equalityhumanrights.com

Making the extra
years in education count
for all young people

Staying On

Contents

	Page
Executive summary	4
Chapter 1: The Commission, young people and education	10
Chapter 2: What's the problem?	20
Chapter 3: Key issues to overcome and the way forward	30
Chapter 4: Summary	42
Chapter 5: Recommendations	48
Endnotes	54
Contact us	58

Report written by Jason Benetto

Photographs by Suki Dhanda and Julius Honnor

The Equality and Human Rights Commission would like to thank the young people who contributed their views and time to this report.

Thanks also to Envision and Leaps and Bounds who supported our youth debates.

Executive summary

The Commission, young people and education

Realising a child's potential is determined to a much greater extent by their social class than by ability and effort. Race, gender and disability also contribute significant hurdles to securing good jobs and fulfilling lives.

It is disturbing research findings like this that have prompted the Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) to make working with, and for, young people a priority.

Working with our key partners, and as part of the three-year strategic plan, the Commission will create a programme of activities with schools, education regulators, the youth sector and young people themselves.

As well as our own desire to see change, our stakeholders have also made it clear that they see working with young people as a key part of our mandate. This series of initiatives will use the Commission's statutory powers, its policy and research insights and its ability to influence and persuade.

The Commission wants to inspire young people and help them work towards creating a society where prejudices and negative attitudes towards difference and diversity have been eliminated.

Over the next three years the Commission also plans to find ways to narrow achievement gaps and to equip young people from different groups with the education they need to thrive. This includes targeting inequalities in early years learning provision and in access to schools and higher education.

The Commission's Staying On project

The focus of this report is to identify ways to improve the delivery of the Commission's

Staying On initiative, which is in response to the Education and Skills Act 2008. The new legislation will mean that from 2013 teenagers will remain in education or training until at least their 17th birthday, rising to 18 by 2015. The first cohort to stay on entered secondary school in September 2008.

Teenagers will have three choices or routeways. They can stay in full-time education or training, including school and college; carry out work based learning, such as an apprenticeship; or if they are employed or self employed they can do part-time education or training.

The Commission is determined to make sure that the two extra years of learning are not wasted. To help identify the key issues, and barriers to remaining in education or training, we have commissioned three studies to obtain the views of more than 1,000 young people from different backgrounds, education experts, youth organisations and other stakeholders.

The research has focused on improving engagement for all young people, with particular attention on those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and tend to suffer the greatest inequality in learning. Those suffering the greatest inequality are more likely to be young people who are disabled, from lower socio-economic backgrounds, refugees, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, Gypsies and Travellers, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, and young mothers.

The number of 16-18 year olds NEET in England was estimated at 189,500 at the end 2007.

What's the problem?

Our research, combined with official statistics, confirms that disengagement is not a random process. There are common barriers and problems that have more impact on some groups than others - in particular young people who are poor, disabled, from ethnic minorities and teenage mothers.

The findings from our poll of about 1,000 teenagers aged 14-18 in England, also found that the vast majority of young people do want to engage and are hopeful and optimistic. This positive picture does not extend to those NEET - 62 per cent of whom feel they are not doing well.

Another very disturbing statistic is that about one in 10 (11 per cent) of all young people say that they will drop out or have considered dropping out of school or training - the equivalent of approximately 350,000 young people across England.

The Commission's research leads us to believe that part of the current inequality in learning is due to the overwhelming focus on the academic linear route, as opposed to vocational qualifications or 'on the job' training. GCSE and A-Level passes equal success in the minds of most people. Doing well in vocational courses and apprenticeships should also equal success.

Class background is still the strongest indicator of educational attainment and exam success with children from poorer backgrounds doing less well at school than other children. For example the lowest-achieving group is children eligible for free school meals (a proxy for 'working class'). Around 15 per cent of pupils receive free school meals among whom one in seven leave school without a single GCSE pass. This compares with two per cent of all pupils in England who fail to get any GCSEs.

Ethnicity can have a substantial impact. Some 47.5 per cent of black students obtain five GCSE grades A*-C compared to 57.2 per cent of white young people and 60.6 per cent of Asian pupils.

'The findings from our poll of about 1,000 teenagers aged 14-18 in England, also found that the vast majority of young people do want to engage and are hopeful and optimistic.'

There are common factors that appear to have a major impact on whether certain groups engage in learning at school. For example NEET young people are more likely to feel physically and emotionally unsafe, to say they will drop out of learning and to experience obstacles to learning across a range of indicators.

Worryingly a significant number of all young people do not, or did not feel physically (seven per cent or approaching a quarter of a million) or emotionally safe (five per cent or approximately 160,000) at school.

On the issue of careers and curriculum, about one in 10 young people say the subjects they study are not relevant to them. The number is considerably higher among NEET young people (31 per cent). Working class teenagers are

around twice as likely (13 per cent) as middle class teenagers (seven per cent) to say subjects are or were not relevant.

Fear of failure is widespread with a substantial minority – 37 per cent or approximately 1.2 million young people - worried about not succeeding at school.

Gender appears to be a more important differential than social class in accounting for differences in career aspirations. Boys are more likely than girls to expect to work in engineering, ICT, skilled trades, construction, architecture or as a mechanic. Girls are more likely to expect to work in teaching, hairdressing, beauty therapy, childcare, nursing and midwifery.

Key issues to overcome

Our research has highlighted a series of flaws and barriers in education and training that have been largely responsible for the failure of some specific groups of young people to succeed at school, college and in the workplace.

These include:

Socio-economic class - this is one of the most significant influences upon how a young person feels about school and engagement, and what qualifications they take. There are growing concerns that white working class boys are not showing improvements in educational attainment, and are most likely to leave school at 16 compared to boys and girls from other ethnic groups.

Subject information and careers advice - poor and inadequate careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) has been identified as one of the biggest failings and areas for improvement in helping engage NEETs and other groups. About two in 10 young people say they have not had enough information and advice to make the right choices about their future.

The fear of failure - our research shows that some young people develop an ingrained sense of failure. This can be due to the emphasis schools place on academic achievement without giving sufficient support or alternatives, such as vocational courses. Findings show that this can lead to feelings of anxiety and fear, which can result in the student dropping out.

Stereotyping - careers advice, the choice of subjects to study at school and for an apprenticeship, and work experience placements are all subject to stereotyping that tend to have an impact more significantly on distinct groups, including girls, the disabled,

the working class and some ethnic minorities. The result is that young people's options and aspirations are limited at an early age.

Ability to read - low ability in reading is identified as one of the key reasons for disengagement.

Money - getting funds for vocationally based courses is particularly important for young people, particularly teenagers living on their own and young mothers, who may otherwise disengage from learning.

Bullying - it is considered by some to be a key factor in young people leaving formal education. Poor teenagers tend to feel less physically and emotionally safe at school than middle class ones.

Disabled young people - disabled learners are not receiving enough information about opportunities in work based learning and apprenticeships. Plus information about going onto Further Education is often negative.



Conclusion

The landmark Staying On initiative marks a once in a generation opportunity to innovate and make a real difference to hundreds of thousands of underachieving and disengaged young people in Britain.

Our research highlights major issues in the way the current system works. Without changes there is a danger that distinct groups of young people will miss out on the staying on opportunity. We acknowledge that much excellent and effective work is on-going, yet our studies strongly suggest that we need to do more for those who fail the current academic contest. The traditional linear route of GCSEs, A-Levels, and degrees, does not work for many young people.

It also points towards fundamental inequalities in parts of the education system that we believe have been ignored for too long. One such issue is that of white working class young people.

But there is also another picture emerging from our research. Our findings challenge the popular myth of an underclass of ‘not bothered’ teenagers who do not want to grab opportunities. The opposite appears to be true for a large number of disengaged young people. They do care, in fact they are demanding help and effective support to change their lives.

Our recommendations are a step towards bringing greater equality to the system, and helping empower Britain’s young people to help themselves and overcome barriers to learning. Ultimately we want to ensure that all of Britain’s young people are given a fair chance of realising their potential.



Recommendations

Key recommendation

The Commission proposes to look further into the provision of careers advice. We will seek to examine subject and careers education, information, advice and guidance (IAG) for young people in Britain aged from 5-19.

The Commission will explore the IAG issues raised in this report, with particular attention to:

- Gender and ethnic minority stereotyping
- Lack of aspiration and support for professional careers for working class young people
- Lack of access to full subject and careers IAG for some groups
- Treatment of disabled people, and why so few disabled young people are given access to work based learning and apprenticeships
- Marketing and undervaluing of apprenticeships and other vocational training compared to academic routes

Other recommendations include:

To work with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to ensure that the proposed new duty to promote equality linked to socio economic status is applied effectively in education, and specifically to arrangements for the staying on to 18 agenda. This is particularly important in assisting white working class young boys to engage in learning, and white working class girls whose career options are often stereotyped and who experience a high level of fear of failure.

Government to review the current £30 a week Educational Maintenance Allowance, a scheme applicable to young people aged between 16-19 in low income families.

Further Education colleges to consider offering vocational courses to young people who have no GCSEs as a way of re-engaging 16 year-olds who leave school without any qualifications.

DCSF to work with schools to develop and introduce a programme of tasters, work experience and vocational options earlier than at present – possibly from the age of 12 and 13 when disengagement starts.

The Commission to work with the National Apprenticeship Service on initiatives, for example girl buddy groups to open up access for disabled young people and to tackle stereotyping and segregation, that confines young women and ethnic minority young people to low paid apprenticeships.

Other recommendations cover the issues of bullying, smaller class sizes, promoting vocational qualifications, disruptive pupils, linking learning to jobs, curriculum, funding, minimum wage for apprenticeships, and encouraging literacy skills.

1 | The Commission, young people and education

There are currently hundreds of thousands of young people in Britain who are in danger of being excluded from obtaining the qualifications and skills needed to achieve a 'good life' largely because of their background.¹

As the evidence reveals, realising a child's potential is determined to a much greater extent by their social class than by ability and effort. Less able rich children overtake brighter poor children by the age of six.² Race, gender and disability also contribute significant hurdles to securing good jobs and fulfilling lives.³

Disadvantage, inequality and poverty in childhood can lead to the same in adult life – and the same for the next generation of children. Recent research concluded that there had been little change in social mobility over the last 30 years.⁴

It is disturbing findings like this that have prompted the Equality and Human Rights Commission to make working with, and for, young people a priority.

Working with our key partners and as part of the three-year strategic plan the Commission intends to create a robust and inspiring programme of activities with schools, education regulators, the youth sector and young people themselves. As well as our own internal desire to see change, our stakeholders have also made it clear that they see working with young people as a key part of our mandate. This series of

initiatives will use the Commission's statutory powers, its policy and research insights and its ability to influence and persuade.

The Equality Act 2006 states that our duties include helping members of specific groups of people - such as teenagers - to participate in society and work towards the elimination of prejudice against them. The Act defines a 'group' as a number of people or class of persons who share a common attribute, including age.

We also have a 'good relations' mandate which is about people learning to live with each other in a positive environment - schools can be an excellent place for fostering good relations.⁵

Put more simply, the Commission is passionate about issues that concern young people and education because of the importance of creating a level playing field for learning, so that all young people, regardless of their background have an equal chance of success. Furthermore, evidence shows that gender, race and disability affect education achievement and that stereotyping and prejudice limit choices and chances in education and beyond.

The Commission also wants to inspire young people and help them work towards creating a society where prejudices and negative attitudes towards difference and diversity across all ages are eliminated. Our organisation has already begun an ambitious series of youth and education initiatives. Projects in the past year have covered a wide range of themes including:

Good relations and engagement

Our Space summer camp – in which young people from across Britain spent a week at a YMCA centre in Cumbria last year doing activities including leadership skills, equality and diversity training, and adventure pursuits. This group remains in contact with the Commission through a dedicated online social networking space on Facebook.

Young Brits at Art – a national competition for 11-19 year olds. Backed by a team of artist-tutors, young people have been helped to create self-portraits to express the way in which equality and human rights issues affect their lives. The winners will be announced shortly.

Croeso project in Wales – workshops in which groups of secondary school pupils spent a day learning about equality and diversity. They were also shown about how to speak to their fellow students about what they have learnt in a fun and interactive way.

Youth debates – in which about 100 young people came together to debate the Commission's key issues of relevance to them: education, good relations, human rights, equality and discrimination.

Youth panel – 40 young people aged 14-19 who are working with the Commission in 'ambassadorial' roles in their own communities, schools and among their peers. They are already talking about equality and human rights in their school assemblies, helping us attract participants to youth debates, and promoting other Commission youth projects.

Education

Staying On agenda – as part of a project for 'new young voices' three major pieces of research and two youth debates have been carried out for the Commission to canvass the opinions of young people and stakeholders. The findings are discussed in this report and are being used to help the Commission improve the delivery of the Education and Skills Act 2008, which will result in teenagers remaining in education or training until the age 18 by 2015.

Linked to this, the Commission lobbied the Government and MPs to tackle stereotyping in careers advice. This resulted in improved work-related learning guidance and careers standards.

Apprenticeships – are a major routeway into work for young people and in our response to the World Class Apprenticeships Review⁶ and Low Pay Commission,⁷ we pressed for action to tackle persistent inequalities - segregation and low pay for young women, ethnic minority and disabled young people - calling for a removal of the exemption from the minimum wage for apprentices. In May the Low Pay Commission recommended to the Government to pay apprentices a minimum wage.

We are now working with the Learning and Skills Council to develop 'Critical Mass Pilots' to increase representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled young people on non-traditional apprenticeships.

Legal

The Equality Duties – we have assessed progress of government departments on delivering the duties across education and held a joint conference for teachers with the General Teaching Council. In advance of a new single duty to promote equality, if the equality Bill is passed, we have been working with local authority advisers to develop easy ways of putting equality at the heart of day to day planning and delivery of education.

The UK's performance against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – our Shadow Report⁸ called on the UK Government to fully implement the convention. We recommended that the forthcoming Equality Bill should further protect children, for example by including measures to tackle homophobic harassment in schools, and by extending protections against age discrimination.

Working with young people

As well as the above initiatives completed in the past 12 months the Commission is currently working on a major programme of youth work, culminating in a major campaign with young people and partner organisations planned for 2012. The main aim of the wide ranging programme is to support young people and their desire to live in a world free from discrimination where all can flourish irrespective of their background or make-up. This will be achieved through a mix of youth projects, research and analysis, partnerships, and promotional work complementing the Commission's enforcement and regulatory work relating to young people.

Much emphasis will be placed on working directly with young people and on increasing understanding of rights and citizenship. For example the Commission plans to set up a 'Panel of 1000' young people with whom the organisation interacts regularly and supports in

their development as equality leaders. We also want to engage with and understand the transition young people make to adulthood and how 'Generation Y', people in their early twenties, start out in society and employment.

All the projects will be designed to help formulate an engaging, positive and inspirational narrative on youth issues which is championed by young people and supported by partnerships with key players in the youth sector, key national institutions and high profile figures.

Education and young people - making changes

Working with young people to develop a positive picture of equality and human rights is one element of the Commission's work with young people. A second approach is to use the Commission's unique mandate and powers to introduce change on a wide range of issues that have a direct impact on young people, particularly education.

Good education and skills are crucial for opening up opportunities and increasing the chance of a successful life. The Commission has set itself the ambitious challenge over the next three years of finding ways to narrow achievement gaps and to equip young people from different groups and different walks of life with the education they need to thrive.

We will take forward the recommendations for improving engagement and attainment to 18 from our 'Staying On' project particularly focusing on underachievement of white boys from lower socio-economic groups and amongst disabled pupils, stereotyping and segregation in subject and career choices, and homophobic, gender and disability bullying.

More widely we will be targeting inequalities in early years learning provision and in access to schools and higher education. Using the range of powers available to us, and working with the sector, we aim to identify national and local policy and practice interventions that will help to tackle stubborn and systemic inequalities.

Making the equality duties work for young people

One way to bring about change is to ensure that the duties to promote equality in education are applied and used effectively. So we want to strengthen our relationships with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), their delivery arms and local authorities. These bodies exert a very significant influence on schools and colleges, universities and apprenticeships: how they are run, what they teach, and how they interact with pupils and students.

We are also developing our work with education regulators such as Ofsted, to build monitoring of the duties and the possible new single equality duty into inspection frameworks, thematic reviews and to develop a proactive approach to equality inspection and reporting.

To support the education and skills sector in effective delivery of new education and skills duties, we will be creating statutory and non-statutory codes and guidance. We will also need to ensure that these include ways of building the findings and recommendations from the Commission's Human Rights Inquiry into delivery of education.

Building a rich equality and human rights culture in schools

Evidence shows that teachers often lack strategies and tools to help them promote equality and human rights issues, such as citizenship. Lack of confidence and concerns about 'political correctness' and young people can prevent free and open discussion on 'controversial' topics, such as race, religion and sexuality. The Commission wants to offer support to teachers, and schools, and their associations and help them promote equality and human rights.

The school curriculum offers opportunities, which often go unrealised, to promote equality and human rights in the classroom. Student councils, parent-teacher groups, and extra-curricular activities also offer avenues to explore and the current proposals for the new primary school curriculum bring new opportunities.

Building a mutually supportive relationship with the youth sector

Britain has a thriving youth sector which works to promote the welfare of young people in the UK. The Commission would like to strengthen its relationships with these organisations, assess partnership opportunities and learn from their expertise.

Engaging with young people directly

As previously stressed the Commission benefits from having direct contact with young people to listen to their views, inform the organisation's strategy and policy development and test our thinking.

Progress has been made towards building a substantial panel of young people. The Commission would like to expand on this model of engagement and, over the course of the next three years, create a well-supported network of young equality and human rights leaders throughout Britain.

In addition young people are already engaged in activities, clubs and associations outside school. These are places where the Commission could seek to introduce equality and human rights issues too. In the coming months the Commission will explore this possibility.



Sukbir Kaur, a participant at the Commission's Our Space summer camp 2008, shares her thoughts on barriers to education.

The Commission's Staying On project

The importance the Commission places on engaging with young people is powerfully illustrated by the current work on the new Staying On changes enshrined in the Education and Skills Act 2008. The new legislation will mean that from 2013 teenagers will remain in education or training until at least their 17th birthday, rising to 18 by 2015. The first cohort to stay on entered secondary school in September 2008.

The remainder of this report focuses on the best ways to improve the delivery of the 'staying on' initiative. As emphasised at the start of this chapter, the Commission recognises the huge importance of how education can be used to narrow gaps in attainment and reduce inequality.

Our key aim is to make the two extra years count. To help achieve this goal, the quality of the different 'routeways' offered to teenagers need to be improved. We need to understand what aspects of learning 'turn young people off' and create barriers to achievement and engagement.

In order to find out what are the key issues, and barriers, the Commission has been listening to people in education from all sides of the debate. In what is believed to be research focusing on the widest range of young people, we have commissioned three studies to obtain the views of young people, education experts, youth organisations and other stakeholders. The three reports - including a poll of about 1,000 young people in England - will be published in full, but the main findings, endorsed by young people in two youth debates, are discussed in Chapter 2 and 3 of this report.⁹

The research has focused on improving engagement for all young people, with particular attention on those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and tend to suffer the greatest inequality in

learning. Those suffering the greatest inequality are more likely to be young people who are disabled, from lower socio-economic backgrounds, refugees, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, Gypsies and Travellers, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), and young mothers. The total number of 16-18 year olds NEET in England was estimated at 189,500 at the end 2007. Of these 35,900 were aged 16, some 61,100 aged 17 and 92,500 aged 18.¹⁰

Our studies are in response to the landmark Education and Skills Act. Under the new legislation young people will have to remain in education or training until their 18th birthday. Teenagers will be offered a variety of routeways after the age of 16. The three options are to either remain in full-time education or training, including school and college; carry out work based learning, such as an apprenticeship; or thirdly if they are employed or self employed they can do part-time education or training.

While there are many excellent schemes available, the Commission's concern is that unless it is understood why the system is failing specific groups of young people another two years of education could be wasted.

The new research concludes: 'There is a sense that "the system" is failing some young people who find a number of barriers in their way, related to their home, school or themselves.'

But we should not be overly negative about Britain's young people. Our research also suggests that the majority of young people are positive and enthusiastic about their future prospects. The studies also indicate that the majority of young people feel motivated to do well in school. The problem is that the right support is not always available to them.

The crucial lesson for the Commission is that we need to respond to what young people are telling us. Education opens doors to a better life and greater opportunities - opportunities that should be available to every child, regardless of their background or make-up.

The third chapter of this report highlights the major boundaries young people, particularly from disadvantaged groups, face in education, and examines possible ways to help improve the delivery of the 'staying on' initiative. The final chapter looks at some suggested solutions, ways forward and proposes a series of recommendations for future action.

The next steps

The Commission has done its homework to understand how the education system works for some young people and not others and how, by working with the Government, teachers, and young people, we can make changes and reforms to improve engagement and outcomes for all.

We strongly believe that part of the Commission's remit is to help narrow these gaps in attainment and reduce inequality in learning. The Commission is confident that by doing so tens of thousands of teenagers, who are currently in a state of education limbo, will have a far better opportunity of securing a happy, fulfilling and successful adult life.



A youth panel in Birmingham debate the role of schools in increasing aspirations.

Suad Mohammed, 16

‘Education really is a privilege.’

‘Hi’ and ‘bye’ were about the only two English words Suad Mohammed knew when she and her family from East Africa came to live in Britain nine years ago.

Having been born and brought up in a rural part of Norway it was a culture shock for Suad, then aged eight, to suddenly go to a bustling inner city school in her new neighbourhood of Small Heath, a diverse, but economically deprived district in the centre of Birmingham.

‘It was hard at first because I could only speak Arabic and Norwegian. I used to get taken out of class and a lady would help me with the basics - my ABC,’ recalls Suad.

With support from her father, who works as a receptionist, and her mother, both of whom were from Eritrea, Suad and her three brothers worked hard at school.

Jump forward a few years and Suad, now aged 16, is at the highly acclaimed Joseph Chamberlain sixth form college studying four A/S Levels in English literature, psychology, maths and Arabic. She’s already passed eight GCSEs (four A grades, and four Bs) and plans to go to university to study to become a clinical psychologist.

So how did a non-English speaking daughter of East African immigrants break through so many educational barriers?

Suad, an extremely articulate and confident teenager, whose interests include swimming, horse riding, running and ‘shopping’, believes it was a mixture of factors. ‘It was fairly crucial

to have family support. My parents were always there for me. They helped motivate me to do well in my studies.

‘I was also motivated - there was a lot of impoverished families in Small Heath, and homeless people. I thought to myself - I don’t want to end up living like that.’

But by her own admission up until the age of 13 Suad often ‘just couldn’t be bothered and just wouldn’t take my education seriously’.

The turning point came about three years ago when a visitor to her school gave an inspirational talk about how he turned his life around. ‘He told us “whatever you do, do it to the best of your ability and with pride”.

‘To me that acted like a massive wake-up call ‘cause I thought, well, I don’t want to have to go through the process of finding domestic jobs that pay low wages when I have an opportunity right here to do well, to do a lot better than that.

‘Education really is a privilege and I’m lucky to have realised in time to still be able to achieve good grades. Some of my peers didn’t, and consequently failed their GCSEs and their life is going in no direction at all now.

‘To me, being independent - particularly financially - being an African Muslim woman in Europe today, come 10 years is incredibly important.

‘I don’t want to have to rely on anyone for anything, and I have opportunities people in Africa would die for, it would be so wasteful not to care or not to work hard.’

Suad spent about three years at her first school before moving to a nearby religious school where about 90 per cent of the pupils were Muslims.

But while Suad is following a traditional linear path of academic study - GCSEs, A Levels, and probably a university degree - she believes that some of her friends and school mates were given little or no choice of learning.

‘The school assumed that we would go to college or university and follow an educational career. There was no talk or advice about apprenticeships, training or jobs. This was frowned upon. BTECs (national vocational qualifications) were seen as second rate. It was subtle - teachers never really talked about apprenticeships or BTECs.

‘I know students who are not so academically able and have struggled with their studies. Some of them have said they would rather have taken BTECs, done some training, or left school altogether. They weren’t really given any choices.’



2 | What's the problem?

In this chapter we quote the voices of a few of the young people who have struggled - and in some cases failed - to overcome a series of barriers that block them from learning skills and obtaining qualifications after the age of 16.

This snap shot view is taken from one of three pieces of research carried out on behalf of the Commission to find out the ideas and experiences of young people, education and equality experts, and other learning stakeholders. In what is believed to be research capturing the views of the widest range of young people, the Commission has listened to hundreds of people to help identify why so many teenagers are not in education, employment or training, or significantly underachieve, and what can be done to make things better.

‘More info in schools about apprenticeships. There should be more support and information in school.’

(Male, 17, ethnic minority, completing an apprenticeship)

The studies have helped the Commission come up with a series of recommendations and suggestions for ways forward that are aimed at improving the ‘staying on’ initiative that will see all young people from 2015 remain in education or training until the age of 18.

Our research, combined with official statistics, tell us that there are a lot of complex and interlinked issues involved in the process of teenagers opting out of learning and work. No clear pattern of how one particular young person can become disengaged emerges.

In 2008, the Commission designed a project for ‘new young voices’ including three new research studies.

1. ‘Engaging all young people in meaningful learning after 16: a review’

The independent Learning and Skills Network carried out a review of relevant literature and interviewed experts from a range of organisations working with young people.

2. ‘Engaging all young people in learning after 16: a survey’

ICM interviewed 1,021 teenagers aged 14–18 years in England in January 2009. The survey provides a rich dataset with which to understand the attitudes and feelings of young people.

3. ‘Engaging all young people in meaningful learning after 16: a qualitative study’

This report by Dubit, and RAPAR (Refugees and Asylum Seekers Participatory Action Research), examines young people’s experiences of learning before and after the age of 16. The study includes interviews with young mothers, white working class teenagers, young offenders, young people from different ethnic groups, disabled, refugees, asylum seekers, Gypsies and Travellers, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, Not in Education and Training (NEET), and from diverse religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

'They only tell you sixth form is available at my school. I knew there was other stuff but that's all they tell us.'

(Male, 17, white working class, on an employment training course)

But when you look at certain sub groups, a different story emerges. Our work confirms that disengagement is not a random process. There are common barriers and problems - such as access to education - that have an impact upon some groups more than others. In particular young people who are poor, disabled, from ethnic minorities and teenage mothers are most likely to confront barriers and problems.

The findings from the three studies, however, are not all negative. Quite the opposite. Young people in general are often unfairly stereotyped as lazy, inarticulate, selfish and aggressive. The image of the gang of teenage hoodies, skiving off school and hanging around on street corners is a particular favourite.

But our poll of about 1,000 teenagers aged 14-18 in England found that the vast majority of young people do want to engage and are hopeful and optimistic. Most young people describe themselves as performing well and possessing the ability to improve their situation. Overall attitudes to school are upbeat and the majority has formulated their career aspirations. The findings demonstrate the extent to which young people, the future of Britain, want to engage, are supported by their parents and schools and understand the value of getting a job.

For example 95 per cent of young people feel they are doing 'very' well (32 per cent) or 'fairly' well (63 per cent) in their current situation. An even higher proportion - 98 per cent - feel either 'very' able (37 per cent) or 'fairly' able (61 per cent) to improve their current situation. The same percentage (98 per cent) also say it is important to them to get a job, while nearly nine out of 10 (87 per cent) of 16-18 year olds say they were encouraged to do well at school.

This positive picture, however, does not extend to those not in education, employment and training, the so called NEETs. Sixty-two per cent of whom feel they are not doing well. This group also contains a high proportion - 10 per cent NEET, and 13 per cent of disabled young people - who do not feel able to improve their situation.

Another very disturbing statistic is that about one in 10 (11 per cent) of all young people say that they will drop-out or have considered dropping out of school or training - the equivalent of approximately 350,000 young people across England.

Also of concern is the finding that a significant number of young people do not or did not feel physically safe (seven per cent of all young people or approaching a quarter of a million people) or emotionally safe (five per cent or approximately 160,000) at school.

'They [parents] think I should be working. It's not on them what I want to do. It is on me. I want to learn.'

(Male, 16, migrant worker family)

Before examining in more detail some of the poll findings, it is important to consider some hard facts and to spell out who is succeeding, and who is failing, when it comes to academic qualifications.

This is crucial as the Commission's research leads us to believe that part of the current inequality in learning is due to the overwhelming focus on the academic, linear, formal route for those who are doing well. GCSE and A-Level passes equals success in the minds of most people, and certainly the majority of schools and universities.

We believe there is a strong need to improve the association between successful learning methods and pathways through learning that is not academic and that may be less formal or less linear. Doing well in vocational courses and apprenticeships should also equal success.

Socio-economic background is still the strongest indicator of educational attainment and exam success with children from poorer backgrounds doing less well at school than other children. For example the lowest-achieving group is children eligible for free school meals (a proxy for 'working class'). Around 15 per cent of pupils receive free school meals. Of those one in seven leave school without a single GCSE pass.¹¹ This compares to two in 100 of all pupils in England who left in 2007/08 without a GCSE pass.¹²

The social class attainment gap opens as early as 22 months and widens throughout school life.¹³ Only 24 per cent of white working class boys in England got five A*-C GCSEs. Among more affluent white boys, more than twice as many (56 per cent) achieved that level of qualification.¹⁴

Significant and persistent attainment gaps exist for Gypsy and Traveller pupils throughout primary and secondary school. In 2007, 16 per cent of Irish Travellers and 14 per cent of Gypsy / Roma pupils achieved five plus A*-C GCSEs compared to 59 per cent of all pupils.¹⁵

The attainment of children in care is also low. In 2008, 14 per cent of this group achieved five A*-C GCSE passes.¹⁶

Disabled people of all ages also do badly when it comes to passing exams - with 40 per cent having no formal qualifications.¹⁷

'I learnt how to fight [at school]. They need to help people, they need to help... family... I dropped out of school to help my mum.'

(Female, 14, LGBT, part-time work, no current education)

Ethnicity can have a substantial impact. The academic achievement rates of black young people, while improving, still trail white and Asian students. Some 47.5 per cent of black students obtain five GCSE grades A*-C compared to 57.2 per cent of white young people and 60.6 per cent of Asian pupils.

Pupils from some ethnic minority groups are doing well in obtaining formal qualifications, for example, Chinese, Mixed White and Asian and Indian pupils all exceed the national average. Others, particularly Bangladeshi pupils, are catching up quickly.

But attainment at primary level among Pakistani, Black Caribbean, Black African and pupils from other Black backgrounds, as well as Mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage pupils is still a major issue.¹⁸

Girls do better at school than boys at all stages of the National Curriculum. Girls continue to outperform boys, particularly at the higher grades (A*-C) -69.9 per cent of girls achieved five or more grades A*-C compared to 60.9 per cent of boys.¹⁹ Forty-seven per cent of low achievers (no GCSE passes) are white British boys and 14 per cent of low achieving boys (no GCSE passes) are from low socio-economic backgrounds.²⁰ Yet despite having more formal qualifications women's wages are, on average, 17 per cent less than men's wages.

Unsurprisingly the groups which struggle to obtain academic qualifications, are the same young people as those who are heavily represented in the NEET group.

In 2007 an estimated 189,500 (9.4 per cent) of 16-18 year-olds were not in education, employment or training in England. This group largely comprised of teenage mothers, disabled young people, those excluded from school and young people from families on low incomes.

Among all 16-18 year olds in England at the end of 2007, about nine per cent were NEET.²¹ But within certain groups the proportion that are NEET is far higher. Within working class 16-year-olds, 11 per cent are NEET; 13 per cent among those with a disability; 22 per cent among those excluded from school; 32 per cent among those who are persistent truants; and 74 per cent among teenage mothers.²²

Our opinion poll has highlighted a number of factors that appear to have a major impact on whether certain groups engage in learning at school.

In summary NEET young people are more likely to feel physically and emotionally unsafe, to say they will drop out of learning and to experience obstacles to learning across a range of indicators. NEET young people also tend to have low career aspirations.

For example as many as one in 10 of all young people is (or was) not happy at school. This figure is considerably higher among NEET young people and those who believe they are not doing well (43 per cent and 46 per cent respectively). The findings suggest that how young people feel about school can have a considerable impact on what they will do after 16.

Socio-economic status has a considerable impact upon how a young person feels about school and engagement. A third of 'working class' young people believe they will always find it hard to get a job (33 per cent), or will have to take any job they find (22 per cent), significantly more than the 20 per cent and 19 per cent respectively of 'middle class' young people who say the same. This indicates a lack of confidence in their ability to succeed.

On the issue of careers and the curriculum, about one in ten young people say the subjects they study, or studied, are, or were not, relevant to them. The number is considerably higher among NEET young people (31 per cent). Working class young people are around twice as likely (13 per cent) as middle class young people (seven per cent) to say subjects are or were not relevant. Similarly, one in 10 say that the style of teaching does, or did not help them to learn, rising to 41 per cent among NEET young people.

Fear of failure is palpable in the research with a substantial minority – 37 per cent or approximately 1.2 million young people – worried about not succeeding at school. White 'working class' boys and white 'middle class' girls fear failure similar to young people on average, whereas almost half (46 per cent) of white 'working class' girls fear failure, compared to just over a quarter (27 per cent) of 'middle class' white boys. Working class white boys and middle class white girls are equally fearful of failure (both 38 per cent).

Disabled young people are less likely than the population in general to feel emotionally and physically safe at school. In addition, they are less likely to feel able to achieve their potential, to find it easy to learn, to say they have considered dropping out of learning and are more likely to worry that they will fail.

Young people from ethnic minorities tend to be consistent with the general population although there are some areas where their views and experiences diverge. For example, a higher proportion of ethnic minority young people than young people on average worry about failure at school and believe they will always find it hard to get a job.

Nearly two in 10 (18 per cent or approximately 700,000) say they have not had enough information and advice, rising to a quarter of those from ethnic minorities.

'They [teachers] are not very considerate. They are more concerned about how they look, like with GCSE results.'

(Male, 16, LGBT, at college)

Young people are largely positive about their parents or carers: with almost all saying they have been encouraged and helped by their parents. However, while overall just five per cent feel their parents are not there for them, this rises to 16 per cent for NEET young people and 13 per cent of those who describe themselves as 'not doing well'. This highlights the link between parental support and a young person's development.

A large majority (82 per cent) of those who are currently in education expect to work full-time once they have completed all of their education. This figure is dramatically lower among NEETs, of whom just less than four in 10 expect to be working full-time, six months from now. At first glance, this might suggest that these young people have somehow 'opted out' of the system. However, on closer inspection, the picture is more complex. Around one in seven NEETs (14 per cent) expect to be working part-time and a similar number say they will be on an educational course, at college or university

'I think it's a good idea to encourage more people to continue and finish A-Level so they have a better chance of securing a job in the future but... not everyone is suited to education after GCSE and it may not be motivating to young people.'

(Male, 18, ethnic minority, at university)

'Not many people know about places like this. Before people leave school they should get leaflets saying you could go here or you could go there and show the places they can go to.'

(Male, 16, white working class males, on e2e scheme)

(16 per cent) or unemployed but looking for work (15 per cent). Encouragingly, the majority of these young people do not envisage being NEET in six months time.

Gender appears to be a more important differential than social class in accounting for differences in career aspirations and the findings reinforce existing stereotypes to some extent. Regardless of socio-economic group, boys are more likely than girls to expect to work in engineering, ICT, skilled trades, construction, architecture or as a mechanic. Similarly, girls are more likely to expect to work in teaching, hairdressing, beauty therapy, childcare, nursing and midwifery.

If the findings are analysed by gender and ethnicity within class, middle class white boys are around twice as likely as working class white boys to expect to become a teacher or police officer. White C2DE boys are more than twice as likely as ABC1 white boys to expect to become a mechanic. White working class girls are four times as likely as white middle girls to expect to work in childcare and are twice as likely to expect to become a nurse, midwife or nursery nurse.

Wider themes

Our findings present a mixed picture, but they highlight certain trends. This includes the fact that a lot of young people find barriers in the way of a good and fulfilling education experience. These may be related to home, or school or themselves. Fear of failure is palpable. It is, therefore, essential to support young people to remain confident, happy and hopeful.

Our findings also highlight the priority placed on the existing academic system and that testing, targets and league table demands continue to put the focus on traditional academic success.

The Commission acknowledges that reforms to the education system are bringing improvements to the problems of underachievement and disengagement. We also recognise that with courses like e2e (Entry to Employment), the 14-19 agenda, diplomas and apprenticeships, there are moves to provide entry routes for struggling young people, and to introduce vocational options and validate them with NVQ qualifications specifying their equivalency to GCSEs and A-Levels. The system is moving in the right direction, but traditions are hard to break and all our evidence points to little or no impact on many young people who are demanding change.

The traditional system is still seen as the most important. Schools are looking to see if pupils fit into the system and can perform well. If pupils are not able to cope with this, the current set up rarely provides for them. They are all too often left on the margins and neglected. Our next chapter starts to offer some possible solutions to these long running issues, and suggests some ways forward.

'I can only do hands on things really. If they had more courses at school like mechanics and painting and decorating I can guarantee people wouldn't get into trouble.'

(Male, 18, NEET, offended in past, left school at 14)

Paul, 16

'I want my son to have a better education than me.'

Paul used to be too embarrassed to ask for help in class with his reading and writing. Rather than face the humiliation of admitting he didn't understand words on a page he would start fights and disrupt his lessons.

At the age of 16 Paul still struggles. When he goes to buy groceries on his own his girlfriend has to first help him memorise the shopping list. There's no point in taking it, as he can't read most of the words. Assembling flat-pack cupboards is also hard and frustrating work when you can't read the instructions.

But Paul says he is determined to put things right and learn how to read and write. His new motivation is his six-month-old baby boy, Leon.

'I would like to improve my reading so I can read to my boy, so that he will get something that I didn't. Something better in the future.'

Paul's story is a familiar one to agencies that help young people who have been excluded or failed to get any academic qualifications at school.

Paul, like one in seven children who receive free school meals (the vast bulk of whom would be considered 'working class') left school without a single GCSE.

The teenager currently lives with his girlfriend and their son in a rented Victorian

house in a crime-ridden street near Dudley in the West Midlands. Speaking from his neat front room, where a large photograph of his family hangs over the fireplace, he recalls growing up with his two sisters and brother.

'From about six I didn't have much contact with my dad - that affected me, not having a father figure around. As a lad you look up to your dad.'

'My mum didn't have time to read to me. I was always seen as the naughty child and I was pushed out.'

He continues: 'At school I found reading and writing difficult, but I was too embarrassed to ask for help, so I didn't ask. I used to get sent to the back of the class.'

'I couldn't do the work so I was disruptive. I was fighting, not doing work, I was always being sent out of lessons. I was thrown out of lots of schools.'

'I didn't have any teachers I could ask. There was one teacher at a school who started giving me one to one lessons. I wanted to learn the guitar and he said I need to be able to read to do that. He helped me, but as soon as he left I didn't get any extra help, and then I was chucked out of that school.'

Paul remained in mainstream education until about the age of 14 and then went to various special colleges and training schemes, without much success.



At the age of 15 he spent several months in a residential care home after neither of his parents, who are currently out of work, felt able to look after him. But his life has taken a turn for the better after meeting his girlfriend at a training project.

'Now I have got a girlfriend, I'm not afraid to ask things, because I know she will support me,' he says. This includes help with filling in forms and reading job adverts.

He says he knows 'a few people who have passed a few exams'.

'Most of my friends think school and education is rubbish and a boring waste of time. If they don't have to do it, they won't. They never really think about the future, but later on when you can't get a job and put food on the table, it's hard.'

Paul recently gained his first ever qualification - a BTEC performing arts certificate - while on a project run by the charity, Leaps and Bounds.

He is currently on an e2e scheme run through the conservation charity BTCV, in which Paul is learning practical skills such as planting and garden design.

Ali Reilly, his Black Country Connexions' personal advisor, describes Paul as 'charming and insightful'.

She says: 'For Paul we are playing catch up for a situation that should have been dealt with when he was a small boy. At school he was illiterate and everything that came after that was a massive cover up for his embarrassment and difficulty in not keeping up with the class.'

'Now he's bringing into the world a new child who is almost facing the same disadvantages.'

But Paul says he is determined that his son will not experience what he did at school. 'I want him to have a better education than me, so that he can get a decent job - something I can't get now.'

3

Key issues to overcome and the way forward



'I get enraged at the suggestion that there is a link between going to an inner city school and failure. Our school, and others, prove that you can be an inner city pupil and be successful. The link is not the quality of the student, it is the quality of education that they are provided with.'

This is the view of the head teacher of one of the most socially mixed and most successful secondary schools in Britain. The Commission shares the concerns expressed by Barry Day, of Greenwood Dale School in Nottingham.

Our research has highlighted a series of flaws and barriers in the educational system that have been largely responsible for the failure of some specific groups of young people - children and teenagers who come from similar backgrounds - to succeed at school, college and in the workplace. This same education system has also sometimes stifled many of the attempts by educationalists to introduce a more flexible and innovative approach to teaching.

By pinpointing the range of problems and barriers, structural and attitudinal, that hold young people back from achieving their potential, the Commission aims to map out the way forward and suggest future action to help overcome factors that blight so many young lives.

The final chapter of this report will outline specific recommendations, but this chapter focuses on the broader issues and considers the major factors that may motivate young people to remain or return to learning. There are also suggestions for strategies to help overcome these barriers. The analysis draws on our newly completed research and work carried out by the Commission's specialists.

'White boys have the lowest aspirations. Their educational attainment is also failing to improve at the rates of most other ethnic groups.'

Social Exclusion Task Force [25]

The fear of failure

Issue

Our research shows that some young people develop an ingrained sense of failure. This can be due to the emphasis schools place on academic achievement and measuring success by test results and levels of qualification. Findings show that this can result in feelings of anxiety and fear, which can result in the student dropping out of the education system.

The research indicates that fear of failure is widespread with 37 per cent or approximately 1.2 million young people worried about failing at school. Within this large proportion, certain groups are more fearful than others. For example almost half (46 per cent) of working class (C2DE) white girls fear failure, compared to just over a quarter (27 per cent) of middle class (ABC1) white boys.

Way forward

We would like to see more work done towards redefining the definition of success. Careers advisers, schools, higher education, employers and the media all have a role to play. A wider range of skills, attributes and vocational qualifications need to be given greater public value and acknowledgement, rather than the narrow focus on GCSEs and A-Levels.

Stereotyping

Issue

Careers advice, the choice of subjects to study at school and for an apprenticeship, and work experience placements are all subject to stereotyping that tend to have an impact more significantly on distinct groups, including girls, the disabled, the working class and some ethnic minorities, specifically Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean young women.²³

The result is that young people's options and aspirations are limited at an early age, which can have an impact on the rest of their lives.

Research on gender in work experience placements found startling connections between stereotyped work placements and job choice – and that those from lower socio-economic groups, girls and ethnic minority students, were most disadvantaged by the current system.²⁴

The gender gap in wages (women's wages are, on average, 17 per cent less than men's wages) is partly explained by the fact that women tend to work predominantly in stereotypical 'female' occupations. These occupational choices are, in turn, linked to the choice of subjects studied at school, that is, boys tend to pursue technical and science-oriented subjects, while girls choose arts, humanities and social sciences.

Despite girls success at GCSE, three-quarters of women still end up in the five Cs of employment - cleaning, catering, caring, cashiering and clerical. Explanations for this trend include the stereotyping of subject choices at school. Inflexibility in work means that once students have gone along a career path, they find it difficult to change. There is some evidence that teachers and others in education may also contribute towards these trends, consciously or unconsciously encouraging boys and girls to pursue 'gender-appropriate' subjects.

Way forward

Stereotyping in careers advice and guidance needs to be challenged and changed. This includes working with teachers, schools, careers advisors and the media. Suggestions about the way forward are also closely linked to our proposals for improvements to careers information, advice and guidance (IAG).

Socio-economic class

Issue

As previously stressed socio-economic status is one of the most significant influences upon how a young person feels about school and engagement, and what qualifications they take. Middle class students (those belonging to socio-economic group ABC1) are more likely than working class pupils (young people from socio-economic group C2DE) to feel both physically and emotionally safe at school, to find subjects relevant, to feel able to achieve their potential and to find it easy to learn and are less likely to worry about failure.

Middle class white boys, in particular, show a higher level of confidence than any other white group. Working class boys and girls are much more likely than their middle class peers to worry about failure, believe they will always find it hard to find a job and will have to accept any job they can get. Only a quarter of middle class white boys (27 per cent) admit fear of failure, compared to four in 10 middle class white girls and working class white boys and approaching half (46 per cent) of working class white girls.

There are growing concerns about white working class boys, who appear to have the lowest aspirations, are not showing improvements in educational attainment, and are most likely to leave school at 16 compared to boys and girls from other ethnic groups. This was highlighted by the Social Exclusion Task Force in 2008.²⁵

Way forward

There is a need to target struggling socio-economic groups, such as white working class boys. This could include providing them with a stronger sense of direction through more information on what jobs are available and the learning choices needed to get them.

Highlighting work opportunities in the local area is also recognised as a way of improving aspirations and motivation.

A reduction in the size of classes at school was called for by NEETs, white working class boys and young offenders, in our poll. Smaller numbers in class was considered to be the most effective way for struggling pupils to learn - it allows students to work at their own pace and with more one to one support.

The Commission funded review also suggests that strong bonds among family members - known as 'bonding social capital' - can influence the aspirations of young people from lower socio-economic groups. Findings show that parents are a key influence affecting their children's aspirations. It is therefore important to include parents in the provision of IAG and encourage them to support their children's choices.

Qualifications

Issue

The Commission believes that non-traditional qualifications deserve the respect that their counterparts receive. Only then will opportunities widen for young people. Further, top universities do not appear to recognise certain vocational courses and there is a feeling that apprenticeships are seen as second rate by some employers. Similarly with BTEC national vocational qualifications, less than half of all universities recognise them, yet some are worth two A-Levels.

Way forward

One of the main problems for teenagers who struggle with academic subjects is the heavy focus on passing exams. The Commission believes that a more inspiring and varied curriculum would benefit these pupils.

We also think it is important that all qualifications are recognised equally. Many young people see the increasing numbers of new qualifications entering the education system as redundant, as the majority of universities and employers still only want to see traditional academic achievements (GCSEs, A-Levels, degrees). We need to work with these institutions and other stakeholders to help them recognise the experience young people gain by taking part in alternative learning methods. We also need to encourage institutions to put greater value on the knowledge and expertise that these qualifications bring to many young people.

Part of the problem is a gap in communication between secondary education and higher education. One way forward is to encourage universities to re-think their approach to students with vocational backgrounds.

Subject information and careers advice

Issue

Poor and inadequate careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) has been identified as one of the biggest failings and areas for improvement in helping engage NEETs and other groups that currently fail to fulfill their learning potential.

Disturbingly two in 10 young people (18 per cent or approximately 700,000 young people in England) say they have not had enough information and advice to make the right choices about their future. This rises to 23 per cent of young people with a disability and a quarter of those from ethnic minorities.

Also of concern is the finding that nearly two in 10 (18 per cent) of 16-18 year olds have not had a one-to-one interview with a careers or Connexions adviser. Careers advice and work experience placement opportunities have been subject to criticism, in that they can potentially

‘[I would tell people] Do you know that there are other options besides A-Levels?’

(Female, 17, religious backgrounds, school sixth form, part-time job)

constrain young people’s options and aspirations if managed badly and stereotypically.

Barnardos and the head teacher of one of the country’s most successful secondary schools (see Greenwood Dale School case study) argue that a primary means of helping young people to re-engage with learning when they are ready is by providing young people with appropriate IAG when they ask for it.

Way forward

The Commission believes this issue is key to improving the long term prospects of NEETs and other pupils who have disengaged from learning and struggled with qualifications and job prospects, and that we should look further into the subject. Details of the proposed new work are given in recommendations in Chapter 5 of this report.

Our report ‘Engaging all young people in meaningful learning after 16: a review’ also highlighted the importance of providing young people with relevant and accessible IAG.

The review concluded that accessible IAG that is easy to comprehend for young people and their parents, and is tailored to local provision and the needs of the young person, is particularly critical during the transitional periods from primary to secondary school and between compulsory and post-compulsory education.

Currently, what’s on offer during transitional periods is not sufficient. There is also a need to provide IAG to young people who are in informal learning, in order to encourage them to re-engage with learning. It is noted that the introduction of the September Guarantee, the transfer of responsibility to local authorities and the role out of the National Apprenticeships Service are catalysts for the improvement of IAG.

IAG could be more closely attuned to community needs, for example, by emphasising what job and learning opportunities are available locally to 16-year-olds. It is important that young people from minority groups are given appropriate and unsterotypical IAG that supports them to realise their potential, for example, promoting the inclusion of young ethnic minority people in Higher Education and supporting young disabled people to access work based learning and apprenticeships.

More promotion in and out of school is needed about the services that are available to young people.

Many of the young people questioned in our survey complained that they are not given the full picture in terms of the range and types of academic and vocational options available to them once they reach the age of 16. Strikingly all groups of young people questioned raise this as a key issue. There is a perception that schools select routes for people that nearly always involve academic qualifications. In this sense, they feel the decision has been made for them, and for some, this leads to a sense of frustration.

It should be about explaining what is available apart from academic qualifications and providing enough information to allow young people to weigh up the positive and negative aspects of each option.

Ability to read

Issue

The review found that poor reading and writing scores normally translate into low achievement during adolescence with a subsequent lack of motivation. Low ability in reading is identified as one of the key reasons for disengagement; some young people cited this as one of the key factors behind their experience of being bullied and becoming disengaged.

‘The biggest obstacle for white working class boys, and, to a lesser extent, girls, is their lack of literacy skills.’

(Head teacher of highly successful inner city secondary school)

Way forward

Disengagement from learning has been identified as a cumulative process that can start in primary school. This young age at which children can begin to disengage indicates the need for early intervention during the primary school years. This is particularly important given that young people tend to form ideas about their future between the ages of 11 and 14.

Stand-alone literacy programmes should also be encouraged for young people who struggle with reading and writing at secondary school.

Flexibility and variety in learning

Issue

Greater choice for young people pre-and post-16 is important in helping to attract people to stay in education and encourage previously disengaged young people to re-engage. Flexible provision can include part-time, evening and weekend courses. This kind of provision has proved valuable when supporting groups, such as teenage mothers, to re-engage.

‘If people were allowed to leave at 14 and if there were more options you wouldn’t get as many people in here [young offenders institution].’

(Male, 16, young offender, left school at 15)

Some disengaged young people identified FE as a more attractive place to learn than school because they would be treated as more mature and independent learners. But without GCSE passes, FE was closed to them.

The importance of providing learning opportunities beyond formal schooling emerges from the review. Alternative curriculum models, such as learning models that allow young people to learn on the job, are seen as positive in re-engaging young people who are disaffected and excluded from school. An emphasis on life skills or ‘soft’ skills is an important element of this provision because these are essential for helping young people to enter employment and become independent in life.

This issue was highlighted by disengaged young people themselves who explained that they start to struggle and become disenchanted at around 13 and 14 years of age. Because of this, they feel it is important that more options for vocational tasters and different routes of learning are offered at these ages or even before.

Way forward

To help maintain interest, flexible types of learning in different locations should be available and subject and careers advisers should work with young people directly to make them aware of these alternative options.

Cultural and family values

Issue

Some young people’s home and community values may conflict with the culture and values of their school, affecting engagement in learning. The influence of cultural values on young people’s engagement with learning may be particularly relevant for certain young people, for example young Gypsy and Muslim women, causing dislocation and anxiety.

Way forward

The development of positive home-school partnerships can support discussions between teachers and careers professionals and parents and young people and lead to better engagement with learning and work opportunities. They can also help pick up other factors like bullying and racial harassment that might be contributing to rejection of education.

It is important not to stereotype or make assumptions about the education and career aspirations of young people because of their backgrounds. In a recent survey, almost 90 per cent of 16-year-old Bangladeshi and Pakistani girls said their parents supported their choice to find paid work.²⁶

Gypsy and Traveller young people often move around the country, therefore greater flexibility in learning would help, rather than just relying on school based education.²⁷

Linking learning to employment

Issue

Findings from our interviews indicate that young people are more likely to engage if they are told about the direct benefits of vocational options and how they link to their chances of finding work. If they can see that doing a specific course or apprenticeship is likely to improve their chances of getting a specific type of job they are more motivated.

Those involved in the research feel that clear linking between learning and employment will provide them with confidence that this route will help them reach their career goals. In turn, this may improve the likelihood of take-up and help improve attendance on these courses.

Most young people involved in the research believe vocational courses to be of significant value, but only where these cover a sufficient range, are relevant to their particular goals and include quality work experience with appropriate employers. They are also unsure of the usefulness of placements, citing a perceived lack of structure and limited opportunities to get a real taste of the world of work.

Way forward

Increased opportunities for work-based and practical learning may improve young people’s engagement with more formal learning. The suggestion of creating pre-apprenticeships and bite-size vocational qualifications was suggested by several stakeholders in the review.

‘You can get a job and learn in that job... Like McDonald’s have the best training...’

(Male, 16, LGBT, at college)

Teachers and class size

Issue

The influence of teachers in encouraging young people’s engagement in learning is vital. It is suggested that this can sometimes have an even greater impact than that of parents and family. This indicates the importance of teachers’ ability to relate to and understand the young people they teach, as well as taking the abilities and aspirations of all young people into account.

Young people who had disengaged from learning identified teaching styles where they were expected to listen and record information ‘teaching to the test’ as difficult and wanted more interactive learning opportunities. They also described the vicious cycle of large class sizes, where teachers were struggling to control disruption and unable to give attention to those who most needed it, leading to disengagement and sometimes exclusion.

Way forward

Many of those who become disengaged from school before the age of 16 feel that the most effective way for them to learn is through smaller class sizes – a maximum of 10 per class. They perceive this will enable them to work at their own pace and receive the one-to-one support they need to allow them to progress. This is a similar point made by, and about, working class boys.

Money

Issue

Getting funds for vocationally based courses and support for more informal pathways to learning are particularly important for young people who may otherwise disengage from learning.

Our review found the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) has been effective in supporting young people from low-income backgrounds to remain engaged in learning post-16. However, it is important to ensure that methods of claiming are not overly complex.

Young people without funding, such as teenagers living on their own and young mothers, struggle to remain in learning without adequate funding.

The cost of travel to post-16 learning establishments can be prohibitive and there can be course fees to meet and equipment to buy, depending upon the nature of the course.

A key area of concern is that funding arrangements are often inflexible, and can discriminate against certain groups such as refugees and asylum seekers, teenage mothers and those whose families have low incomes. The inflexibility of the system includes funding not covering all courses, which means that young people may have to make a choice based on the availability of cash.

Way forward

The majority of young people involved in the research feel that £30 is not enough to cover their expenses. A rise to £45 or £50 a week is seen as more appropriate.

The Commission believes there should be a review of the level of EMA (see recommendations for further details). It is also important that young people and their parents

are provided with sufficient and accessible information, advice and guidance about available funding and how to apply for it.

Curriculum

Issue

The evidence indicates that the content of the curriculum and the range of subjects and courses on offer fail to adequately reflect the diversity of learners and their needs.

There is evidence that some young people find that the curriculum can be boring and irrelevant to their lives. For example, young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities may fail to see their culture and experiences valued and reflected in the curriculum. Young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or transgendered people may not experience any positive representations of their identity.

Way forward

It is important that young people can identify with the curriculum, and this is a contributory factor associated with disengagement from learning.

Bullying

There is increasing awareness of how bullying at school can lead to disengagement from learning. It is also considered by some to be a key factor in young people leaving formal education.

Socio-economic status plays an important part in how safe a young person feels about school. Middle class teenagers are more likely than young people from a working class background to feel both physically and emotionally safe at school.

NEET young people and those who have a disability are considerably less likely than average to feel physically and emotionally safe. The literature also specifically notes the

common occurrence of bullying of young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or transgendered.

Bullying has a big impact on every young person and influences their views of schools and college often leading to disengagement from learning.

Way forward

The Director of Youth Engagement at Rathbone, described the long-term impact of bullying as a 'corrosive thread' running through the lives of young people.

The review suggests increasing the drive towards tackling all forms of bullying in schools and college environments.

Role models

While a positive relationship between teachers and young people can be a strong catalyst, the importance of other adult and peer role models is also noted. Connexions workers and project workers who work on a one to one basis with young people providing support, advice and motivation can pass on a variety of skills, including soft skills such as communication.

Way forward

Schemes that promote peer role models should be more widely used.

Disabled young people

Issue

About 40 per cent of all disabled people have no formal qualifications, and young disabled people are twice as likely at 16, and three times as likely at 19, to be NEET than non-disabled teenagers.³⁰ The aspirations of disabled and non-disabled young people are very similar, yet in a whole

range of categories, disabled young people appear to be getting a poor deal. The review noted that disabled young people are not receiving information about opportunities in work based learning and apprenticeships, and that the information received on Further Education options is often negative. Our poll found that while the majority of young people aged 14-18 have had a one-to-one interview with a careers or Connexions adviser at school, almost four in 10 (37 per cent) of young people with a disability had not.

Reasons for this lack of information and inadequate guidance were attributed to professionals not believing that young people could cope with certain choices as a result of viewing disability through a medical model resulting in a 'damage limitation exercise'.

Way forward

Special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinators in secondary schools and Connexions advisors need to ensure that they encourage positive aspirations, while offering practical support in overcoming barriers for young disabled people. It is also important that young disabled people are given appropriate and un-stereotypical IAG that helps them access work based learning and apprenticeships.

Moving forward

Identifying and highlighting barriers to learning, along with wider systemic failings, is a crucial first step to change and reform. But pointing out the problems and flaws is only the start. Without imagination, willpower, and a range of partnerships with key players, things will stay roughly the same.

In the next chapter the Commission makes a series of recommendations that are intended to bring about significant improvements and help deliver better and fairer education and training for all young people staying on until the age of 18.

Barry Day, head teacher

‘We show our pupils how they can be successful.’

The school that Barry Day took over 17 years ago would later be likened by his head of governors to a ‘war zone’. At the time it was deeply unpopular with parents and carers, perceived to be racist, and virtually out of control. Attendance stood at well under 85 per cent and only 12 per cent of pupils obtained five GCSEs or more.

‘The corridors were ruled by the pupils, and the exam results were appalling. If Ofsted had existed then, they would probably have closed it as a failing school,’ recalls Day.

With a catchment area that includes some of the most socially and economically deprived households in the country, Greenwood Dale secondary school in south-east Nottingham was the kind of educational establishment that gave inner city schools a bad name.

The school attracts young people from a range of complex and challenging communities. The pupils come from a mixed background - half come from ethnic minority groups, including a large Muslim Asian population, African Caribbean students, and a growing number of eastern European immigrants. The bulk of the white pupils are from working class backgrounds.

Today the economic and social conditions have not changed much. A third of the 1,300 pupils at Greenwood Dale receive free school meals (more than twice the national average), and just over half live in the poorest five per cent of housing in the country.

The students motivation, behaviour and exam success has been transformed. In 2008 a staggering 93 per cent of pupils at

Greenwood Dale gained five or more higher grade GCSEs. Over the past few years it has been the best performing school - when compared to education establishments with similar student intake - in the country.

Owing to its success, Greenwood Dale has received the go-ahead to sponsor its own Academies. By 2011 it plans to run its own primary school and take over another secondary school to create the largest school in the UK with 3,600 students aged from 3-19, at three different sites.

Day, the school’s executive principal and an OBE, is passionate about education at Greenwood Dale and insists it proves that with the right teaching and motivation all pupils, whatever their background, can succeed.

He says: ‘I get enraged at the suggestion that there is a link between going to an inner city school and failure. Our school, and others, prove that you can be an inner city pupil and be successful. The link is not the quality of the student, it is the quality of education that they are provided with.’

Part of the school’s success is the development of a specialist curriculum for potentially disaffected and challenging students. All the pupils at the end of Year 10 are interviewed by Day who identifies which students need extra support.

‘About 50 per cent are in significant danger of not achieving their five or more GCSEs and harming their life chances. We give them a range of support, including assigning them learning mentors,’ explains Day.



Another important tactic is targeting pupils who struggle with literacy. ‘The biggest obstacle for white working class boys, and to a lesser extent girls, is their lack of literacy skills,’ says Day.

About a third of the 11 year olds joining Greenwood Dale are at least two years behind in their reading and writing skills. To help them get up to speed the school runs separate literacy lessons for those pupils who are struggling.

‘It has a real impact. We also do that post-16 to help them succeed in work and university. Many of them do not have role models at home to support them.’

Motivating the pupils and installing ambition is also crucial. ‘From the minute they step foot on our site we show them how they can be successful,’ enthuses Day.

‘For example we have former students who come back and show how well they’ve done. Some ex-students are also being trained as teachers at the school,’ he continues.

Greenwood Dale promotes a wide range of vocational courses, such as fashion, design, construction, and sports, which are tremendously popular with students. Day

believes it was also crucial to show a causal link between students taking vocational courses and apprenticeships and obtaining specific jobs afterwards.

The head teacher is outspoken about the lack of options available at some schools, who just focus on traditional academic qualifications. ‘The drop-out rates are shocking at some places post-16,’ he says.

He fears that the new changes to have pupils stay on at school, training, or apprenticeships until the age of 18 could be a ‘disaster’ for some young people.

‘I think it is a good change if schools put in the right courses, and teach them well, but it will be a disaster if pupils not suitable for academic courses are not given other options.’

Asked what single improvement he would like to help students that are more likely to struggle at school or drop out early, he replies: ‘Good quality careers advice - which is not always available - from a Connexions adviser who has a really good understanding of the options available, plus a wide range of courses with high levels of pupil support. Without this students will risk wasting another two years of education.’

4

Summary

The landmark 'staying on' initiative marks a once in a generation opportunity to innovate and make a real difference to hundreds of thousands of underachieving and disengaged young people in Britain. The Equality and Human Rights Commission is determined to ensure that this opportunity is not squandered, and that significant numbers of teenagers do not waste the opportunity of another two years in learning and education.

Our research highlights major issues in the way the current system works. Without changes there is a danger that distinct groups of young people will miss out on the staying on opportunity. We acknowledge that much excellent and effective work is on-going, yet our studies strongly suggest that we need to do more for those who fail the current academic contest. The traditional linear route of GCSEs, A-Levels, and degrees, does not work for many young people. Success needs to be redefined - people have different levels of ability and aspire to different outcomes in life. Research shows that many young people don't fit into the box that is conventionally labelled 'success'.

There is also another picture emerging from our research. Our findings challenge the popular myth of an underclass of 'don't care', 'not bothered' teenagers, who are lazy, unenthusiastic and do not want to grab opportunities.

The opposite appears to be true for a large number of disengaged young people. They do care, in fact they are demanding help and effective support to change their lives. They realise that unless they can secure good skills, work experience and qualifications, they are unlikely to secure a rewarding and worthwhile job, or a 'good' future life, for themselves and their family. The crucial lesson for the Commission is that we need to respond to what young people are telling us.

But more than that, Britain's young people are aspirational. This is why the Commission, as part of its ambitious and on-going youth strategy, wants to engage with the country's young people and, alongside others doing excellent work in this field, focus on real change.

This underpins our whole approach. We believe that greater equality in learning, education, training and the work place is the way forward to bring about significant and lasting change. Change that will boost the life chances of all of Britain's young people. Change that will help make Britain a fairer and better society, where prejudices and negative attitudes towards difference and diversity across all ages are challenged.

We realise that these ambitious aims will not be achieved over night and that we will need to learn and work with the many excellent organisations in this field and the Government. But with our range of youth and education programmes and strategies, and working with experts and young people, we are confident that we can bring about lasting improvements.

The focus of the bulk of this report, however, is what can be done for the teenagers who have just started to work their way through secondary school, and who will become the first cohort to remain in training, education or on work experience until they are 18 by 2015.

There is clearly no 'magic bullet'. We believe that our work has highlighted a significant number of issues in the proposed system that need to be tackled to create change, especially careers advice and support in selecting subjects to study.

It also points towards fundamental inequalities in parts of the education system that we believe have been ignored for too long. One such issue is that of white working class young people. This group has been badly let down. For example all the figures tell us that white working class boys are the biggest 'failing' group in terms of qualifications, disengagement and underperformance at school. Yet there are few measures aimed specifically at helping them. The Commission believes this should change.

The recommendations we are making will not instantly solve the issues we have highlighted, but are the first step towards bringing greater equality to the system, and helping empower Britain's young people to help themselves and overcome barriers to learning. Ultimately we want to ensure that all of Britain's young people are given a fair chance of realising their potential.



Construction apprenticeships for women

‘You just get stuck in and show them you can do the job.’

The construction industry is often stereotyped as a sector dominated by men with hairy chests and a sexist attitude. A Hertfordshire-based building firm is running a programme that convincingly counters that myth, and also shows that apprenticeships need not be just badly-paid ‘work experience’.

Durkan Group has a proud tradition of providing both top quality apprenticeships, as well as targeting women, ethnic minorities, and disadvantaged groups, such as young people leaving care.

‘The idea that apprenticeships are for the “class room dunce” is long gone,’ explains Paul McCrea, Durkan’s Community Liaison Manager.

‘Our apprenticeship programme is very professional - everyone has to pass exams. It’s the equivalent to an A-Level when completed,’ he continues.

Each year Durkan take on about seven apprentices, about a third of whom are usually female and at least one is from an ethnic minority.

Their three-year apprenticeship provides comprehensive training in all the construction trades, including carpentry, joinery, electrician, plumbing, and brick laying. The apprentices spend time at college and are provided with mentors and help, if needed, in education.

McCrea says: ‘We pay a good salary to our apprentices - they start on about £170 to £200 a week. By the time they finish the

apprenticeship this will rise to £250 to £300. We also pay their college fees.

‘It’s important for our apprenticeships to be attractive - we want young people to know that they are entering a career that pays well.’

Durkan, a group of companies involved in construction, development and regeneration in south east England and Ireland, also offers a range of training schemes, and bursaries for young care leavers to study in further and higher education. In addition the company provides mentoring and works with schools, community groups, local authorities and others to engage with local communities, in particular young people and those who are socially disadvantaged.

In total they have recruited and helped train and educate about 200 teenage girls and women since 2001.

Eighteen-year-old Kristina Ross, from Thames Mead in south east London, fulfilled her ambition to become a carpenter like her father, when she began an apprenticeship with Durkan at the age of 16.

She recalls: ‘No one at school told me about apprenticeships - it was my mum that told me. I started straight from school, I always liked working with my hands and was interested in carpentry because of my dad. I thought it was a good way of getting qualifications and getting paid at the same time - otherwise I would have just left school at 16, and I don’t suppose I would have got much of a job.’

The young woman recently qualified with



distinction and hopes to become a full time carpenter once her apprenticeship ends in June.

The teenager says she has not had any problem being one of the few women on a construction site. ‘You just get stuck in and show them you can do the job,’ she explains.

McCrea stresses that the image of wolf-whistling, sexist building workers has no place at Durkan. ‘We have a zero tolerance policy towards anyone trying to undermine women in construction.’

Part of Durkan’s approach is to target disadvantaged communities in which they work, including housing associations.

McCrea explains: ‘This often involves youngsters who would have dropped out of education. Not every young person has the ability to do academic study, or the circumstances at home mean they may to become a bread winner at a very early age.’

So far all their apprentices have ended up

working for Durkan, or one of their contractors, or set up their own business.

David Lavoile, 22, whose mother is from Haiti, and father from the Ivory Coast, hopes one day to have his own electrical installation business, having nearly completed a three year apprenticeship with Durkan.

‘I heard about the apprenticeship from my housing association. The teachers at my school and sixth form were only really interested in pushing me towards university,’ says Lavoile.

He continues: ‘The apprenticeship has worked out really well. When I’m at college I can see the difference between myself and other students - I’ve got a real advantage because of the work experience I’ve had.’

On the question of why Durkan is taking such a socially responsible approach, McCrea’s response is simple: ‘It’s our contribution to putting something back into society. We also get excellent, well trained people to work for us.’

5 Recommendations

The Commission proposes to look further into the provision of careers advice. We will seek to examine subject and careers education, information, advice and guidance (IAG) for young people in Britain aged from 5-19.

The Commission will explore the IAG issues raised in this report, with particular attention to:

- Information, advice and guidance including differential advice given to girls and boys and ethnic minorities
- Lack of aspiration and support for professional careers for working class young people
- Lack of access to full subject and careers IAG for some groups
- Treatment of disabled young people, and why so few disabled young people are given access to work based learning and apprenticeships
- How to tackle the undervaluing of apprenticeships and other vocational training compared to academic routes
- Better information on the positive benefits of vocational courses for work outcomes
- Role of employers and how academic qualifications compare to vocational qualifications for recruitment
- Better ways to advise young people already disengaged from learning
- Increasing the engagement of parents in IAG and a focus on home and community cultures that are not traditionally supportive of continuing in learning and careers
- Implementation and impact of the Women and Work Commission recommendations on IAG.

The Commission will also examine new ways to intervene earlier and at key transition points, especially from primary to secondary school and between compulsory and post-compulsory education.

In addition, other aspects of advice and support will be explored, such as family networks, mentoring and role model projects that have helped to improve progression, break down stereotypes and open up access to non-traditional and professional jobs. Examples include women thriving in professions such as medicine, law and accountancy.

As part of this, the Commission will examine the role of work-related learning in supporting young people in making their subject and career choices. Research on gender in work experience placements has found startling connections between stereotyped work placements and job choice. Young people from lower socio-economic groups, girls and ethnic minority students were most disadvantaged by the current system. Evidence points to the benefits of using friend and family contacts - sometimes known as 'social capital' - to obtain sought after work experience attachments.

The Commission will also examine how schools and local authority integrated youth support services are performing in delivering careers education and the careers equality standard. This will be done to assess how changes to careers delivery currently in the pipeline, including greater access to apprenticeships and possible monitoring and outcome requirements, can help.

The Commission will consider funding new research including a policy and practice review of IAG, exploring where different groups of young learners end up. This could include a survey of local authorities and listening to the views of teachers, careers professionals and employers. We will also ask young people to help shape up new ideas on IAG inside and outside schools.

Other recommendations

- To work with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to ensure that the proposed new duty to promote equality linked to socio-economic status is applied effectively in education, and specifically to arrangements for the staying on to 18 agenda. This is particularly important in assisting white working class young boys to engage in learning, and white working class girls whose career options are often stereotyped and who experience a high level of fear of failure.
- For the Government to review the current £30 a week Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), a financial scheme applicable to young people aged between 16-19 in low income families, who are in education or unpaid work-based learning. This payment has helped deliver greater engagement among young people from poor families and those living away from home with food, utility and travel bills. The scheme should also be simplified so it can be accessed more easily and provide more information about college top-ups for funding.
- Further Education colleges to consider offering vocational courses to young people who have no GCSEs as a way of re-engaging 16 year-olds who leave school without any qualifications.
- DCSF to work with schools to develop and introduce a programme of tasters, work experience and vocational options earlier than at present – possibly from the age of 12 and 13 when disengagement starts. They could include a roll-out of the Young Apprenticeship scheme across all schools with bite-size apprenticeships for all. Hands-on and work-related learning is most preferred for young people disengaged and losing confidence.
- DCSF to explore the potential benefits of smaller class sizes on young people who are at risk of disengagement or disruptive behaviour.
- DCSF to provide training and support for teachers on classroom management and handling conflict and disruption in class.
- DCSF and DIUS to work with teachers, careers professionals and employers to find ways of promoting the value of vocational qualifications and apprenticeships, which should be recognised as equivalent to GCSEs.
- The Commission to work with the new National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) to boost and promote closer links between learning and jobs. Linking learning to employment is a key principle for improving engagement in learning post-16. Along with the development of diplomas, this could include more practical learning, pre-apprenticeships and bite-sized vocational qualifications.
- The Commission to work with the NAS on the development of critical mass pilots and other initiatives, for example girl buddy groups to open up access for disabled young people and to tackle stereotyping and segregation, that confines young women and ethnic minority young people to low paid apprenticeships.
- The Commission to work with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and NAS to create curriculum resources and recruitment materials for all learning programmes - both academic and vocational - that young people from different cultures and backgrounds can relate to.
- All schools and colleges to include anti-bullying strategies in their equality schemes and action plans. Certain groups, including disabled and LGBT pupils, are more likely to experience bullying and this was identified as a key factor in their disengagement from learning by NEETs young people.
- The Government to review funding for 16-18 provision. The raising of participation age, the transfer of funding to local authorities and the new Young People's Learning Agency, provide an opportunity to re-think funding and be more flexible about who has access to the money.

For example vocational courses run by third sector providers and employers could get the same sort of funding as school and college-based education. Already providers such as Rathbone (a voluntary organisation providing opportunities for young people to re-engage with learning) and YWCA are being called on by schools unable to deal with complex learning needs.

transitional periods from primary to secondary school, and between compulsory and post-compulsory education.

For example assessing all new pupils and identifying which are significantly behind with literacy skills. In response setting up special literacy classes for struggling pupils. This is a scheme championed by Greenwood Dale School in an extremely deprived area of Nottingham, which has seen the number of pupils getting five GCSEs or more rise to 93 per cent last year.

When asked for their top three recommendations to make learning more attractive to all young people, so that everyone can take part and succeed, the top four suggestions from our poll of 1,000 teenagers was:

- To make learning more fun and enjoyable (18 per cent).
- To make a better range of subjects available that are suitable for everyone (17 per cent).
- To make learning more practical/hands-on (16 per cent).
- To offer more help, advice, support and guidance (14 per cent).
- For boys (19 per cent) and working class white boys in particular (23 per cent), those NEET (20 per cent) and disabled (22 per cent), the number one priority is making learning more practical and hands-on.
- For girls (21 per cent), and those in sixth form college (23 per cent), a better range of subjects that are suitable for everyone is key.

McDonald's

'Apprenticeships are good news for the wider economy.'

McDonald's has no problem with the media catchword 'McJob' to describe the fast food chain's planned 10,000 apprentice posts - provided that it does not imply low-paid, low-dignity employment with no opportunities.

The restaurant giant aims to become the UK's largest apprenticeship provider within two years and has a training scheme to match its ambition.

Apprentices receive a qualification through 'shoulder-to-shoulder' coaching, classroom learning and online study. It will be equivalent to achieving five A-C grades at GCSE and will include developing young people's maths and English ability, teamwork and involvement in community projects, as well as training people how to cook burgers.

David Fairhurst, senior vice-president and chief people officer for McDonald's in the UK, explains: 'Apprenticeships will help give our employees the confidence and competence to do their jobs to the best of their ability ... It is not just our people and our business that will benefit. Apprenticeships are also good news for the wider economy.'

He adds: 'They enable those who use a job at McDonald's as a stepping stone to another career, to move on to their next job with a valuable, transferable qualification that helps them hit the ground running.'

The apprenticeships include working in the kitchens and at counters, writing reports, studying hygiene and nutrition and might typically last a year.

A current trial at 80 restaurants is to be extended across all 1,200 in the UK. This year the restaurant chain aims to provide apprenticeships to up to 6,000 of its 72,000 UK workforce, and then up to 10,000 per year from 2010.

One of those involved in the trial, Alix Potts, has had three pay rises and two promotions in a year. Her success on the pilot scheme has landed her a trainee managership at the McDonald's in Sleaford, Lincolnshire.

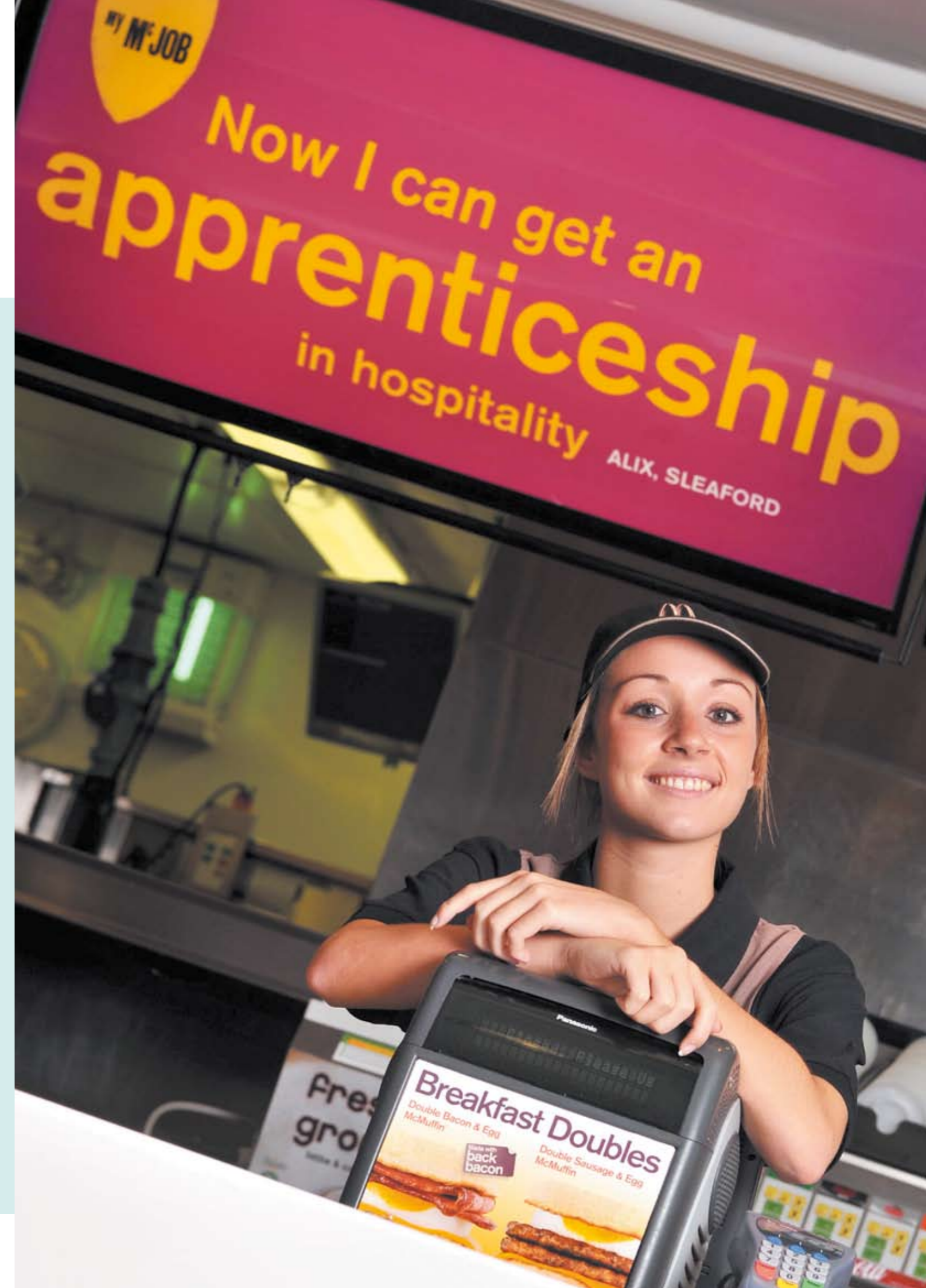
After six years with the company, five as a part-timer working on the front or drive-through counters, she says: 'I didn't do very well at school and messed around in the fourth year. When I was taking GCSEs I did not do as much work as I should. I couldn't get higher than Cs.'

She left, went full-time with McDonald's last year and was soon on her apprenticeship, which she completed in about six months. She has since been helping induct new recruits to the restaurant.

'My friends think McDonald's is really good,' she says. 'They don't have a low perception. No one realised how far you could go.'

McDonald's apprenticeships in multi-skilled hospitality will be externally accredited by national awarding body City and Guilds, and checked by the Ofsted inspectorate.

Chris Jones, Director General of City & Guilds, comments: 'McDonald's is a great example of an employer that is committed to lifelong learning and developing its staff. I've seen first hand that its employees are really engaged and getting value from their training. Best of all, they'll not only gain a national qualification, but also learn as they earn.'



Endnotes

¹ In 2008, over a quarter of a million pupils did not get five GCSEs grade A-C - the recognised indicator of employability. For almost 30,000 young people (40 per cent of 15 year olds on free school meals), the recognised measure of pupil deprivation, failed to get even one or more grades A- C at GCSE. At the end of 2007 an estimated 189,500 young people between 16-18 were NEET - not in education employment and training - a group largely comprised of teenage mothers, disabled young people, those excluded from school, and young people from families on low incomes.

www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000826/index.shtml

House of Commons Hansard, written answers for 4 March 2009

www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=42&pid=343&lid=337&ctype=Text&ptype=Single

² Feinstein, L. (2003), Inequality in the Early Cognitive Development of British Children in the 1970 Cohort, *Economica*, 70, 277, pp. 73-98.

³ Fairness and Freedom: the Final Report of the Equalities Review, Cabinet Office, 2007.

⁴ J. Blanden, P. Gregg and S. Machin (2005), Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America.

⁵ Section 10 of the Equality Act 2006, states that our duties include helping members of groups to participate in society; work towards the elimination of prejudice against members of groups; and promoting good relations between members of different groups. The Act defines a 'group' as a number of people or class of persons who share a common attribute, including age.

In addition, section 6 of the Act sets out our duty to promote awareness of rights and to promote a human rights culture in Britain.

⁶ Response of the Equality and Human Rights Commission to the Consultation: World Class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All

www.equalityhumanrights.com/Documents/EHRC/World_Class_Apprenticeships_response.doc

⁷ Response of the Equality and Human Rights Commission to the Low Pay Commission Consultation on Exemptions from the Minimum Wage

www.equalityhumanrights.com/Documents/EHRC/World_Class_Apprenticeships_response.doc

⁸ The UK's performance against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - Shadow Report from the EHRC

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/policyresearch/h submissions/Pages/Committee_reportonUKperformance.aspx

⁹ 'Engaging all young people in meaningful learning after 16: a review'

The independent Learning and Skills Network carried out a review of relevant literature and interviewed experts from a range of organisations working with young people.

'Engaging all young people in learning after 16: a survey'
ICM interviewed 1,021 teenagers aged 14–18 years in England in January 2009. The survey provides a rich dataset with which to understand the attitudes and feelings of young people.

'Engaging all young people in meaningful learning after 16: a qualitative study'
This report, by Dubit and RAPAR, examines young people's experiences of learning before and after the age of 16. The study includes interviews with young mothers, white working class teenagers, young offenders, young people from different ethnic groups, disabled, refugees, asylum seekers, Gypsies and Travellers, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, Not in Education and Training (NEET), and from diverse religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

¹⁰ www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000751/NEETQuarterlyBriefQ42008.pdf

¹¹ See endnote 1.

¹² DCSF: GCSE and equivalent results in England; Revised, 2007/08.

¹³ See endnote 2.

¹⁴ DCSF, Gender and Education: the evidence on pupils in England, 2007.

¹⁵ See endnote 12.

¹⁶ Improving educational attainment of children in care, DCSF, 2008.

¹⁷ Disability Rights Commission, Increasing life chances through learning and skills: creating an alternative future.

¹⁸ Fairness and Freedom: the Final Report of the Equalities Review, Cabinet Office, 2007.

¹⁹ See endnote 12.

²⁰ Tackling low educational achievement, JRF, 2007.

²¹ Participation in education, training and

employment by 16-18 year olds in England. DCSF, 2008.

²² Prime Ministers Delivery Unit (2005) NEET Design Review Presentation, PMDU, London.

²³ Bhavnani, R. (2006) *Ahead of the game: the changing aspirations of young ethnic minority women*. Manchester: EOC; Francis, B. (2002). Is the future really female? The impact and implications of gender for 14-16 year olds' career choices, *Journal of Education and Work*, 15 (1), 75-88; Francis, B., Osgood, J., Dalgety, J. And Archer, L. (2005) *Gender equality in work experience placements for young people*. Manchester: EOC.

²⁴ *Gender equality in work experience placements for young people*, Becky Francis, Jayne Osgood, Jacinta Dalgety and Louise Archer at the Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University in 2004 for the EOC. Interviews with (EBP) managers; work experience coordinators, 566 pupils in 20 schools. Case studies at four schools. Analysis of national LSC data on over 90,000 work experience placements.

²⁵ Aspirations and attainment among people in deprived communities. Social Exclusion Unit, December 2008 Cabinet Office.

²⁶ Bhavnani, R. and PTI Consultancy (2006) *Ahead of the Game: the changing aspirations of young ethnic minority women*. Moving On Up Series, Manchester, EOC.

²⁷ Gypsies and Travellers: simple solutions for living together
www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/projects/goodrelations/gypsiestravellers/pages/variationsitedefault.aspx

Contact us

You can find out more or get in touch with us via our website at: www.equalityhumanrights.com or by contacting one of our helplines.

Equality and Human Rights Commission helpline – England

Telephone: 08456 046 610
Textphone: 08456 046 620
Fax: 08456 046 630

Equality and Human Rights Commission helpline – Scotland

Telephone: 08456 045 510
Textphone: 08456 045 520
Fax: 08456 045 530

Equality and Human Rights Commission helpline – Wales

Telephone: 08456 048 810
Textphone: 08456 048 820
Fax: 08456 048 830

9am–5pm, Monday to Friday, except
Wednesday 9am–8pm

Calls from BT landlines are charged at local rates, but calls from mobiles and other providers may vary.

Calls may be monitored for training and quality purposes.

Interpreting service available through Language Line, when you call our helplines.

© Equality and Human Rights Commission
Published June 2009

ISBN 978 1 84206 162 6