

OPENING THE DOOR TO APPRENTICESHIPS

*REACHING YOUNG PEOPLE
WHO ARE DISADVANTAGED
AND DISENGAGED FROM
APPRENTICESHIPS*

PAPER 1: SETTING THE SCENE



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THE APPRENTICESHIP PATHFINDER PROJECT

The Apprenticeship Pathfinder is one strand of the Local Wellbeing Project, and is funded by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS). The Pathfinder aims to provide empirical evidence of the processes and relationships that will be required by local authorities, the NAS and others, including Connexions, schools and employers, in achieving the Government's aspirations for Apprenticeships, namely that:

- Apprenticeships become a mainstream learning route for young people aged 14-19
- young people meeting the specified entry standards will be entitled to an Apprenticeship place by 2013
- one in five young people are engaged in Apprenticeships within the next decade

A key strand of the Pathfinder project is focused on supporting access and 'opening doors' to Apprenticeships for young people who are disadvantaged and/or disengaged from this learning route.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper forms part of the 'Opening Doors' strand of the Apprenticeship Pathfinder Project. The paper builds upon discussions at a seminar held in April 2009 bringing together experts in the field of Apprenticeships and vocational education. The seminar was convened to discuss the barriers that prevent young people from accessing the Apprenticeship pathway. These barriers are both current and potential, and need to be considered in the light of reforms to 14-19 education.

The paper forms part of the ongoing work of the Apprenticeship Pathfinder Project as it seeks to capture the impact of policies, projects and programmes in 'opening doors to Apprenticeships' for young people who are disadvantaged or disengaged. It surveys the landscape and provides an analysis of the issues. As part one of two linked papers, this first publication looks at the scale of the issues faced by young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged from Apprenticeships. A further paper to be published in the spring of 2010 will look at potential solutions to enable more effective policy and practice responses. These papers will be supplemented by a collection of case studies from around England demonstrating good practice in 'opening doors to Apprenticeships' for young people who are disadvantaged or disengaged.



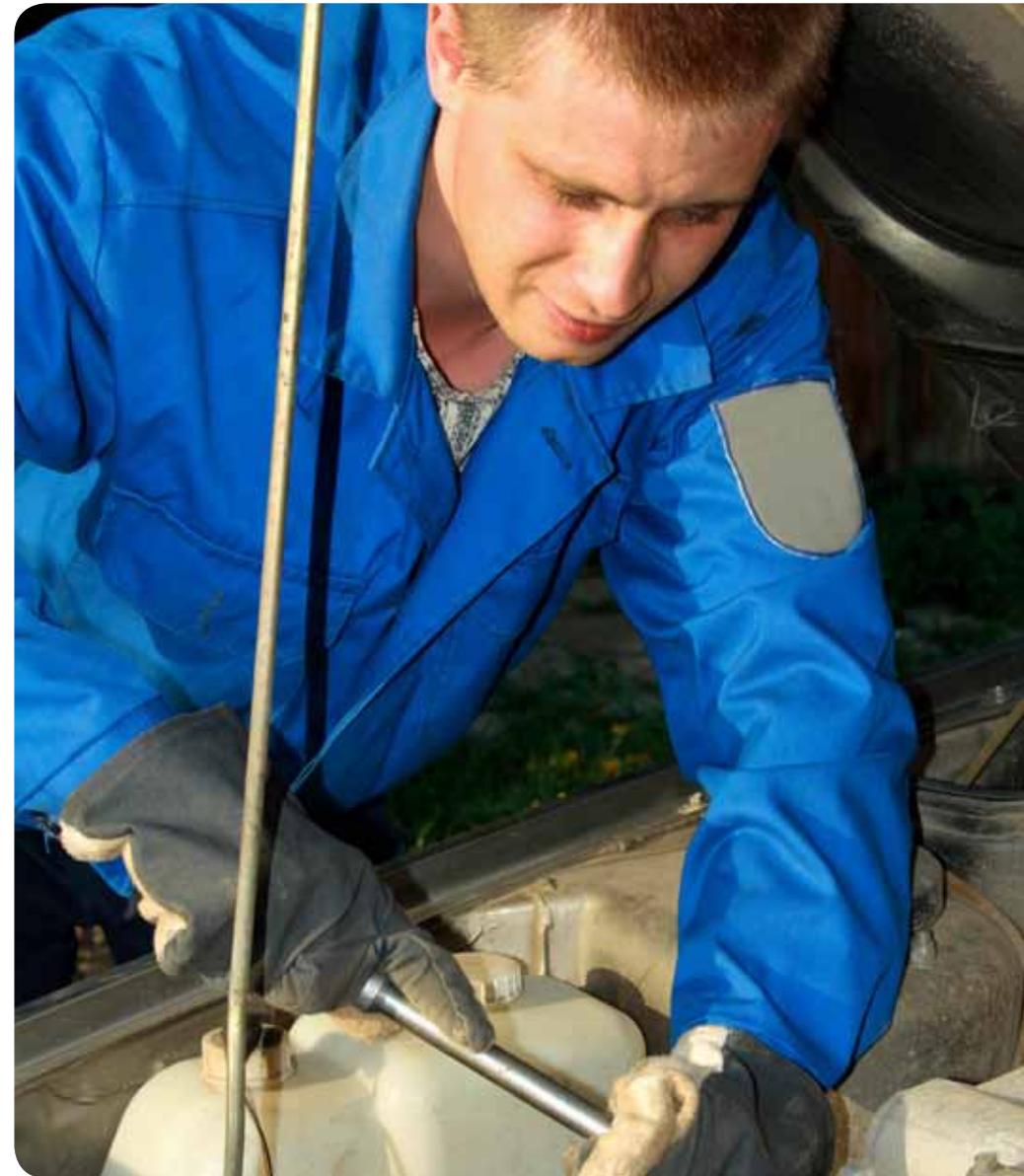


The key issues emerging from the paper:

- it is important to recognise the diversity of experience within the 'NEET group'. Many young people in this group may be highly 'engaged' with Apprenticeships, but experiencing a range of barriers to entry
 - labels can mask the experiences of individuals. Not enough is understood about the impact of gender and ethnicity on access to and completion of Apprenticeships, for example. In addition, more research is needed around the support needs which exist before, during and after an Apprenticeship, and the conditions which can support young people's retention in and progression beyond an Apprenticeship
 - young people in jobs without training are emerging as a priority group for extending the reach of Apprenticeships, but these young people may not be receiving sufficiently focused support as they are officially outside 'the NEET group'
 - there remains a challenge in reconciling dedicated support for young people on the margins to take up Apprenticeships, with the mainstreaming agenda, which prioritises parity of esteem with the other main learning routes within the 14-19 phase
- Apprenticeships have the potential to greatly impact and enhance the wellbeing of 16 to 18 year olds by increasing their confidence of eventual employment and through building their soft skills
 - the impact of recession on young people, particularly those on the margins, cannot be overestimated. The role of Apprenticeships during an economic downturn becomes even more significant, both in supporting economic recovery and participation in learning and work
 - there are fears that the new statutory 'offer' of an Apprenticeship for 'suitably qualified' young people will impact upon young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged, making access to an Apprenticeship place even more challenging
 - information, advice and guidance (IAG) is crucial to young people's awareness/perception of and potential involvement in Apprenticeships. Improving IAG around Apprenticeships is not solely about quantity: how Apprenticeships are presented is also very significant
 - the role that parents can play in supporting the participation of young people in Apprenticeships is also an area for further exploration
 - the importance of flexibility to truly engage young people on the margins of education, training and employment emerged as a key theme, but flexibility in respect of Apprenticeships must be recognised as being largely at the discretion of employers
 - the most important support for young people pre- and during Apprenticeships is often provided through a mentor who can engage the young person through the programme and also provide support in progression after completion. More evidence is needed to understand the impact of differing types of mentoring support on different groups of young people
 - engaging employers in order to drive up the number of Apprenticeship places is arguably the most critical and most challenging element of the Government's aspirations. Communicating to employers the wide range of skills and experience that young people can bring to Apprenticeships, and supporting businesses to develop responsive recruitment and selection processes will be critical.

The paper sets out a number of conclusions, including areas for future exploration:

- not enough is known about understanding the impact of gender, ethnicity and geography on access to and completion of Apprenticeships; simultaneously, further research is needed into the impact of mentoring support on different groups of young people
- the perception of support for particular groups of young people to engage with Apprenticeships needs to shift from the realms of 'special' schemes to the mainstream agenda, and focus on creating a 'level playing field'
- the current recession focuses attention on Apprenticeships as an effective model of supporting young people into the workplace, building their skills and aspirations, and increasing wellbeing; more research is needed to understand the motivation of employers to engage with Apprenticeships, particularly in troubled economic times¹
- there is a need to explore a variety of pre-Apprenticeship routes and programmes which could begin to address and overcome issues around access and status, for all young people; similarly, more creative approaches to IAG are needed to improve awareness and perceptions of Apprenticeships amongst young people and parents alike, particularly those who may not be reached by traditional IAG methods
- flexibility appears to be key in encouraging and sustaining participation for disadvantaged and disengaged young people, including varied start dates, flexible working hours, a range of activities and environments for learning and work, and locally designed programmes; however, flexibility within Apprenticeship programmes is largely untested, but needs to be considered within pre-Apprenticeship routes and programmes.



INTRODUCTION

The Apprenticeship Pathfinder Project, funded by the National Apprenticeship Service, is working with three local authorities - Hertfordshire, Manchester and South Tyneside - to build an evidence base to support progress towards the Government's aspirations for Apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds. These aspirations focus on re-affirming Apprenticeships as one of the four main learning routes within the 14-19 phase, significantly increasing opportunities and uptake, and implementing the new Apprenticeship Offer. Alongside this activity, the Pathfinder Project has a key strand seeking to explore effective support for young people who are 'furthest' from Apprenticeships to take up opportunities and achieve. This could include young people who are experiencing barriers to access, or young people who have never considered Apprenticeships as an option for them.

In order to inform the work of this strand, a seminar was convened in April 2009 bringing together experts in the field of Apprenticeships and vocational education. The seminar focused on the barriers that prevent young people from accessing and succeeding through the Apprenticeship pathway.

The paper forms part of the ongoing work of the Apprenticeship Pathfinder Project as it seeks to capture the impact of policies, projects and programmes in 'opening doors to Apprenticeships' for young people who are disadvantaged or disengaged from this learning pathway. It surveys the policy and practice landscape and draws on discussions at the expert seminar to provide an analysis of the issues. As part one of two linked papers, this first publication looks at the scale of the issues faced by young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged from Apprenticeships. A further paper to be published in the spring of 2010 will report on the progress of the Pathfinder authorities,



and look at potential solutions to enable more effective policy and practice responses. These papers will be supplemented by a collection of case studies from around England demonstrating good practice in 'opening doors to Apprenticeships' for young people who are disadvantaged or disengaged.

The paper is divided up into five sections, exploring the main themes in literature and policy.

1. Defining and understanding young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged from Apprenticeships
2. The role of Apprenticeships for young people who are disadvantaged or disengaged
3. Routes into Apprenticeships for young people who are disadvantaged or disengaged
4. Supporting and enabling participation in Apprenticeships
5. Engaging employers

This paper concludes with a summary of the key themes emerging from research, policy and practice, and suggests areas for further research and exploration.





1. DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE DISADVANTAGED AND DISENGAGED FROM APPRENTICESHIPS

This paper began from the perspective of young people who are disengaged with Apprenticeships as a learning route and/or are disadvantaged in accessing Apprenticeship opportunities. This could include

- young people who want an Apprenticeship place but who experience barriers to access, including:
 - those who lack qualifications for entry
 - those with geographical barriers (location of home, work and college)
 - young people with criminal records
- young people who are furthest from education and training and lack awareness of Apprenticeship opportunities, including those in jobs without training (JWT) and those working in the 'informal economy' receiving cash in hand.

Clearly, young people who are 'disengaged' from Apprenticeships as a learning route could include those who are achieving well academically, and participating in education and training, but who have never considered (or been supported to consider) Apprenticeships as an option for them. This group is a key priority for NAS and local authorities alike, in progressing towards Government aspirations for the take-up of Apprenticeships; indeed, the Apprenticeship Offer plays a central role in achieving this aim. However, concern around the numbers of young people NEET and distanced from the

labour market has led to a greater body of evidence around engaging the most disadvantaged in Apprenticeships, particularly since it is this group who are unlikely to benefit from the Apprenticeship Offer. Similarly, discussions at the expert seminar held in April 2009 were very strongly focused on this group. As a consequence, this paper has more focus on supporting and engaging young people on the margins, but it is recognised that ambitions for Apprenticeships will not be achieved through targeted work with this group alone: indeed, parity of esteem for Apprenticeships alongside other learning routes within the 14-19 phase will only be achieved through supporting universal access to Apprenticeships.

A large number of diverse young people fall into the categorisation of 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training), and this section seeks to explore how far young people NEET are synonymous with young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged from Apprenticeships. The extent to which we understand these young peoples' perceptions and aspirations also needs to be considered, and whether there are groups encompassed within the broader NEET category for whom Apprenticeships would be particularly suitable. The issue of whether Apprenticeships should be viewed as a potential or part solution to the 'NEET problem' is explored alongside Government aspirations for the 'mainstreaming' of Apprenticeships. It must also be recognised that the 'NEET' category does not include young people in JWT, who are increasingly acknowledged as a priority group for Apprenticeship expansion.

There has been much debate about the terminology and language used in relation to young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged from formal education and structures.² The term 'NEET' has been used as a catch-all for a large (1,082,000 16- to 24-year-olds³) and diverse group of young people, to much scepticism⁴: 'NEET' is said to be "a problematic concept that defines young people by what they are not, and subsumes under a negatively perceived label a heterogeneous mix of young people whose varied situations and difficulties are not conceptualised".⁵

Research from The Young Foundation suggests that 'NEET' status stands in the way of individuals and society achieving optimum productivity, social inclusion and good health:

*"It may also perpetuate a worklessness culture that can be passed on to future generations and result in NEET status being reinforced in families and communities across generations, affecting young people's aspirations and life chances."*⁶

Experiences often common to young people outside education, training and employment include poor educational attainment, negative memories of school, persistent truancy, abuse of drugs and alcohol, mental health issues and involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour.⁷ Research⁸ also highlights that structural barriers, and difficult personal circumstances and life experiences are common to young people NEET:

- young people who have been looked after, from certain black and minority ethnic communities, those with physical and learning disabilities and teenage parents, for example, are disproportionately more likely to become NEET⁹
- research shows that disadvantage forms clusters – so that a very young mother is not just more likely to be NEET, but also to experience mental health difficulties, poverty, relationship breakdown and so on¹⁰
- in 2005, 13 per cent of 17 year olds with disabilities or health problems were classified as NEET, compared with just seven per cent of the general population¹¹
- a study by Barnardo's of young people in care found a strong link between being looked after and low educational achievement: 78 per cent of the young people in care that took part in the research had no qualifications¹²
- recent research from the Prince's Trust found that young people outside education, employment and training were nearly twice as likely to feel that life is not worth living, is meaningless and has no purpose.¹³

Looking beyond the NEET label, and in the context of Apprenticeships, it is also important to consider young people who are on the margins of education, training and employment. These young people can face equally challenging barriers to accessing positive learning and work opportunities. This includes young people in work but in low skill, low pay roles, made even more vulnerable by the recession, and young people enrolled on a programme of learning but close to disengagement due to disaffection or the demands of their life circumstances. There are currently 85,000 young people, around six per cent of the 16-17 year old cohort, who are in jobs that do not offer accredited training.¹⁴ Anecdotal evidence also suggests that significant numbers of young people are working in 'cash in hand' jobs in the informal economy.

Young people in jobs without training are particularly recognised as a priority for Apprenticeship expansion, but are unlikely to be receiving intensive support from Connexions Services, for example, since they are in employment and not in receipt of unemployment related benefits which can trigger such interventions. Further, it is often these young people who experience 'churn' between successive learning and work opportunities, followed by a period of being NEET. The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU)¹⁵ highlighted that a critical policy challenge arises from the fact that the NEET group is not a static population, estimating that just 1 per cent of those NEET at 16 remain so from 16 to 18. For many young people, this 'churn' is in legitimate periods of transition between different types of education, employment or training, but a significant proportion still requires dedicated support to enable them to sustain engagement, and progress.

It is in large part the highly diverse nature of the circumstances and experiences of young people NEET that helps to explain the complexity of the issues surrounding the long search for 'the NEET solution'. Despite successive policy interventions, the overall proportion of 16 -18 year olds NEET has remained stubbornly static for the last decade at around 10 per cent, suggesting that answers are not straightforward, or easily achievable.

In fact, the PMDU concludes that much of the major reductions in young people NEET have come through work with young people with relatively low levels of risk of becoming NEET. The reductions have come from those who 'churn' between different education, training and employment options yet have needed relatively low levels of intervention – namely those who are referred to in some literature as 'floating' or transition/gap year NEETs. The PMDU argue that to achieve further gains below the static NEET levels of the last few years requires work with the young people who are considered to be 'hardest to reach' or 'core NEET'.

Other research carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) for DCSF suggests that more than two-fifths of young people who are NEET are generally positive about learning and are very likely to participate in education or training in the short term.¹⁶ It is often issues such as short-term illness or extended waiting times for a place which can act as immediate barriers to participation for these young people. The research found that a similar proportion face multiple personal and structural barriers, and are likely to remain NEET in the medium term. The remaining fifth of young people, classified as 'undecided NEET', who do not face significant personal barriers to participating in education or training, but are dissatisfied with the available opportunities. Responses to (re)engaging young people NEET have historically sought to address all three of these perspectives, and have in part been the stimulus behind the current 14-19 reform.

Research has repeatedly highlighted the importance of disaggregating 'the NEET group' particularly in relation to specific programmes or interventions. Spielhofer and colleagues research with young people who were NEET confirmed that this group is not homogenous. It is possible to identify segments of young people with distinct experiences, motivations and probabilities of re-engaging, suggesting therefore that different policy solutions are needed to engage or re-engage the different segments of young people.¹⁷

Building on the theme: defining and understanding young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged from Apprenticeships

There is strong emerging evidence from policy, research and practice around the diversity of experience within the 'NEET group'. Many young people in this group may be highly 'engaged' with Apprenticeships, but experience a range of barriers to entry. There is also a need to focus attention on young people who are on the edges of being termed NEET – such as those in jobs without training or young people NEET who are focussed on earning and work.

There are some distinct issues which need to be unpicked in order to effectively inform practical work to address these issues. Gender is one such issue, with segregation in Apprenticeships mirroring that seen in employment more generally.¹⁸ A recent report by the TUC¹⁹ found a fairly even proportion of men and women began Apprenticeships in 2006-07, at 54.2 per cent and 45.8 per cent respectively – figures that have remained virtually unchanged since 2002-03. Despite these even proportions, only 1.3 per cent of female apprentices have entered the construction industry, and only 2.5 per cent have gone into engineering. Proportions of female apprentices are highest in childcare (91.1 per cent) and hairdressing (91.7 per cent). This could point to a wider trend, in which women move into traditionally female occupations and are unable to break into well-paid male occupations like engineering.²⁰

These trends could reflect the disparity in the average weekly pay for male (£186) and female (£147) apprentices. As the figures suggest this is likely to be explained by the close correlation between gender and industry sector rather than any particular pay discrimination based on gender.²¹ Not only are young women more likely to train in female-dominated sectors where initial pay rates are lower, but young women are also more likely to be doing Apprenticeships at level 2 rather than Advanced Apprenticeships at level 3 where pay is better. It is likely that disadvantaged young women are particularly affected by these differences as they are more vulnerable to stereotyping than other young women.²² They are also less likely to secure a contract of employment because of the scarcity and competition for Apprenticeship places.²³

The number of black and minority ethnic (BME) people taking up Apprenticeships is markedly low, according to research.²⁴ No data is available which addresses the issues specifically for 16-18 year olds, but all age data suggests that less than seven per cent of apprentices are of BME origin, with participation especially low among Indian (0.6 per cent), black Caribbean (0.6 per cent) and Chinese (0.1 per cent) communities where the percentage of working age population is 1.5, 1.0 and 0.5 respectively. The study also found that apprentices from BME backgrounds are particularly under-represented in traditional craft-based sectors, and in some of the more modern frameworks, such as customer service and hospitality. Only four

Apprenticeship programmes, covering sport, community justice and IT, had 10 per cent or more apprentices from a BME background. Completion of Apprenticeships was also relatively low among the BME group.²⁵ Just one person of Pakistani, Indian, black African, black Caribbean and Chinese ethnicity respectively completed a Construction Advanced Apprenticeship in England in 2006-07, compared to more than 2,400 white Britons. Recent research²⁶ has established that barriers to greater representation of ethnic minorities in Apprenticeships centre on parental views of suitable occupations and a lack of Apprenticeship places. The main barrier identified was engaging young people on to the Apprenticeship pathway due to perceptions about routes into a 'good job'. Other issues include certain groups not being aware of government initiatives, exclusive recruitment practices, direct and indirect discrimination in the workplace, cultural barriers and having few positive role models in Apprenticeships.²⁷

One possible reason for low BME participation in Apprenticeships is that "a lot of these [minority] groups live in London, where Apprenticeships are in short supply" according to Edge.²⁸ This also raises the impact of geography and the need to take into account the accessibility of Apprenticeship places for young people who may not be mobile outside a small geographical area. In the overview of post-16 public policy, rurality for example does not receive special mention; the same issues, challenges and aspirations are assumed to be shared by young people, regardless of where they live.²⁹

Young parents face particular barriers to engaging in Apprenticeships and more attention needs to be paid to the restrictions on their time and mobility. 70 per cent of the 50,000 teenage mothers in England were NEET in 2005 and much more likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods.³⁰ The DCSF have pointed out that ultimately, young mothers' ability to lift themselves and their children out of poverty and disadvantage depends on their capacity to compete in the labour market.³¹ This is where Apprenticeships can make a particular contribution. Major barriers are predominantly around the cost and availability of childcare. The Government's Care to Learn scheme, which provides £160 per week (£175 in London) to pay for childcare and enable the young parent to access education or training, does not extend to Apprenticeships.

These examples highlight different groups of young people who may be *excluded* from Apprenticeships but are not necessarily *disengaged*. In most cases it is the existence of barriers which prevent their engagement. More can still be done to investigate the perceptions and aspirations of these young people. This will help better inform policy makers and practitioners in promoting, creating and recruiting to Apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are an attractive option in addressing 'the NEET problem' for young people, policy makers and practitioners alike, but there remains a challenge in reconciling this approach with the mainstreaming agenda, which can seem to be in opposition to targeted activity to support young people on the margins into these opportunities.



2. THE ROLE OF APPRENTICESHIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE DISADVANTAGED OR DISENGAGED

It is clear that Apprenticeships play an important and pivotal role in developing the skills of young people as they make the transition to adulthood. An Apprenticeship brings together employment and training in a unique approach to work-based learning. Apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds can provide a bridge into the workplace, and the acquisition of both vocational and employability skills. However, far less is known about the role Apprenticeships can and do play in securing successful outcomes for disadvantaged and disengaged young people during this transition and in later adult life. It is important to consider how this vision extends to communities and the influence they may have on young peoples' views and aspirations. The relationship between wellbeing and Apprenticeships is particularly important to address for this group of young people, and especially so during these difficult economic times.

Case studies from a recent report produced by the Young Foundation exploring Britain's unmet needs³² suggest that younger people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, struggle to deal with transitions, such as leaving school, more than young people with stronger social networks, for example:

"[Young people] are likely to be just starting out in the world of work and may not have been through experiences in the past that have shown them the tricks of dealing with challenging situations well. In other words, the foundations required to make a successful transition may not have developed enough for some young people. Helping ensure that young people make these first and seminal transitions successfully may provide them with the resources to cope with other challenges in later life."³³

Not all young people who spend time out of school, training or work will be economically inactive in their adult lives. However, despite the diversity of personal experience of young people NEET, a unifying characteristic is that across a variety of indicators, this group is much less likely to have good economic and social outcomes than peers who continue in education or enter the world of work.

The direct human cost to these young people is significant. They are likely to find it harder to find and sustain work and are thus at risk of a 'revolving door' of unemployment and low-paid jobs. Recent data from the OECD shows that for the first time since 1993, the UK youth unemployment rate has crept above the OECD average.³⁴ In the current economic climate, recent reports have highlighted that it is likely to be young people who are hardest hit during a recession³⁵ and indeed we are now seeing the extent to which the economic downturn has affected the employment chances of this age group. Although the numbers of 16 year olds participating in full-time learning has increased in response to an unstable employment market, recent figures show that the proportion of older young adults NEET is growing.³⁶ Long-term youth unemployment is projected to treble by the end of 2011, rising from 130,000 in May 2009 to 350,000 in December 2011.³⁷ Research demonstrates that the 'trajectory of disadvantage' begins early, characterised by poor family circumstances, limited educational achievement, low aspirations in later life, a lack of qualifications, poor labour market experience and prospects, poor material and financial circumstances, poor health prospects and lack of social and political participation.³⁸

The cumulative financial impact on society is therefore high. In 2007, a report for the Prince's Trust estimated that youth unemployment was costing the UK economy £70 million a week in lost productivity – or more than £3.6 billion a year.³⁹ In addition, the Government was paying out £20 million every week in Jobseeker's Allowance for 18 to 24 year olds – a figure which is likely to have significantly increased since. The report, which was based on research carried out by the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics, found that educational underachievement was also affecting the relative performance of the UK economy. The UK was reported to have

between 10 and 25 per cent lower output per hour than France, Germany and the US – much of which could be attributed to a poorer level of skills and a shortfall in capital investment.

A 2008 study by the Social Exclusion Taskforce in the Cabinet Office examined aspiration and attainment amongst young people in deprived communities.⁴⁰ There were several key findings that help to build a more comprehensive view of Apprenticeships in the context of supporting young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged.

Of principal significance was the finding that young people are more likely to achieve positive outcomes when they develop ambitious, yet achievable aspirations, combined with the self-esteem, self-efficacy, information and inspiration they need to persevere towards their goals:

*"Young people need to be encouraged to think beyond the confines of the school gates or their local town; young people should be enabled to take control of what they want to do in the future, to think big and enter adulthood confident and ambitious."*⁴¹

Apprenticeship schemes have been described as a route which can "ease the critical but often difficult process of transition between education and work for young people".⁴² With young people now able to access a greater range of Apprenticeships than ever before, there is the potential for Apprenticeships to greatly impact and enhance the wellbeing of 16 to 18 year olds by increasing their confidence of eventual employment and through building their soft skills.⁴³ Alongside helping to protect against disadvantage in adulthood, developing these skills improves wellbeing in a multitude of ways,⁴⁴ protect young people against risk, including impacting positively upon a person's emotional health as well as improving their ability to benefit from lifelong learning opportunities.⁴⁵

Ministers have spoken widely about their vision for a renaissance for Apprenticeships. Whilst in the 1960s Apprenticeship schemes which were then rooted in artisan trades were criticised for their exclusivity and male

dominance, recent Government legislation signals an aspiration that Apprenticeships become a mainstream learning route for 14-19 year olds, and the preferred route into employment for this age group. The Department of Innovation, University and Skills (DIUS), now the Department for Business, Innovation and Science (BIS), set out targets that one in five young people are engaged in Apprenticeships by 2020.⁴⁶ Lord Leitch's review of the UK's long-term skill needs recommended boosting Apprenticeship numbers to 500,000 per year, expanding the Apprenticeship route and enabling it to become a pathway open to all suitably qualified 16-19 year olds.⁴⁷

Consequently, Apprenticeships will become one of the four main learning routes within the 14-19 phase, alongside Diplomas, GCSEs/ A levels and Foundation Learning (FL). These reforms are also in line with the Raising of the compulsory Participation Age (RPA), through which all young people will participate in some form of education or training up to the age of 17, and eventually 18.⁴⁸

It is not clear how this vision for Apprenticeships will be interpreted for and experienced by young people on the margins. Many would argue that existing routes into Apprenticeships, alongside successive strategies to reduce the numbers of young people disengaged from learning and work, have not reached these young people, or significantly impacted on their wellbeing or aspirations.

The New Opportunities White Paper⁴⁹ outlined an ambitious vision for improving social mobility in the UK, and demonstrates that the current Government seems outwardly determined to take decisive steps to address this agenda. Of particular significance was a further commitment to Apprenticeships as a key route to achieving these aims. The Paper noted that "another 35,000 places will be provided over the coming year in both the public and private sectors, bringing the total number of apprentices to well over a quarter of a million for the first time ever".⁵⁰

Building on the theme: the role of Apprenticeships for young people who are disadvantaged or disengaged

No one can be sure how long the present recession will last, but the impact on young people, both in the short and longer term, is becoming increasingly apparent⁵¹ with recent unemployment figures for 16 – 24 year olds hitting 947,000 and expected to rise further.⁵² At a recent seminar Professor David Blanchflower commented that any "attempts to cut public spending and withdraw monetary and fiscal stimulus too soon may push unemployment closer to 4 or even 5 million".⁵³

Evidence tells us that the hardest hit are likely to be young people and young adults. It is perhaps useful to look at the current climate alongside past recessions to identify any patterns that may have emerged in an attempt to better understand what challenges to expect in the near future. Apprenticeships clearly have a role to play in engaging the disadvantaged in employment and learning. However there is tension between this approach and the agenda of mainstreaming Apprenticeships which prioritises parity of esteem with the other main learning routes within the 14-19 phase.

Over the last year, the economic climate has had a profoundly negative effect on young people as a whole demographic. For those who are the lowest qualified and those living in deprived areas, the fall in the employment rate over the past year has been higher than the fall in the overall rate which now stands at 49.3 per cent.⁵⁴ Over this period, there was a marked rise in the unemployment rate for the lowest qualified, rising by 4.2 percentage points to now stand at 16.2 per cent.⁵⁵

The Prince's Trust has recently mapped youth unemployment through previous recessions and has found that young people leaving school with no qualifications are twice as likely to claim Jobseekers' Allowance before they are 25 as those with qualifications. The absolute gap between their life chances is likely to grow as recession worsens. Responses include the Government's commitment to funding a huge increase in the number of NHS Apprenticeships with £25 million earmarked for NHS organisations to help create 5,318 Apprenticeships. This is part of the Government's attempts to increase the number of public sector Apprenticeships. Demand will be met not only for NHS services which are expected to increase with Britain's aging population, but also the demand for Apprenticeships from young people.⁵⁶ However, previous experience and evidence would question the extent to which young people on the margins will benefit from such developments. UK Youth, Rathbone, The National Youth Agency and The Prince's Trust, for example, have argued that current and proposed Apprenticeship policy "excludes the excluded" by overlooking young people without formal qualifications, failing to recognise achievements in non-formal and informal learning.⁵⁷ Such recognition would also

support the positioning of Apprenticeships on a spectrum of provision, ranging from formal courses and programmes leading to accredited qualifications to arrangements that are more flexible and responsive where learning takes place in different ways.

The role of Apprenticeships in building wellbeing is also important, particularly the impact of Apprenticeships on self confidence. Recession negatively affects emotional wellbeing and mental health, and research has shown that unemployed young people during the 1980s recession were twice as likely to commit suicide as people who were employed.⁵⁸ Unemployment increases rates of depression, particularly in the young, who form most of the group who have never worked and who are usually worst hit when jobs are few. Research indicates that mental health problems are far more common among 16–18 year old young people NEET than those who are in education, employment or training.⁵⁹ This emphasises the role of Apprenticeships not only in providing economic benefits but also in boosting emotional wellbeing for these young people.

When comparing Apprenticeships with other vocational routes, it has been pointed out that vocational learning and Apprenticeship training provide similar levels of productivity.⁶⁰ The same study – conducted at University College London – did highlight however that the probability of unemployment is substantially lowered by Apprenticeship training. This suggests that Apprenticeships are a more effective approach than other vocational routes to integrating young people into the labour market, and subsequently improves labour market attachment.⁶¹ This is particularly important for disadvantaged and previously disengaged young people who will benefit from the higher probability of continued employment beyond the Apprenticeship, and consequently improved life chances in adulthood. The positive effect of Apprenticeship training on employment is even greater for Advanced Apprenticeships (level 3) but those on the margins are even less likely to undertake level 3 programmes, with women and BME young people particularly underrepresented. Research suggests that wage returns from Advanced Apprenticeships are even greater than for equivalent vocational qualifications, suggesting that the investment in Apprenticeship by apprentice, employer and government is likely to yield substantial benefits to all parties.⁶²

It is clear from past research and the emerging evidence of the impact of the current recession that young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged face particular penalties. There are certainly benefits to be gained from entering an Apprenticeship not only in economic and educational terms but also for the 'wellbeing effect'.



3. ROUTES INTO APPRENTICESHIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE DISADVANTAGED OR DISENGAGED

It is widely recognised that the new statutory entitlement⁶³ to an Apprenticeship for 'suitably qualified' young people will impact upon young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged, with fears that it will make accessing an Apprenticeship even more challenging.⁶⁴ The new Apprenticeship Vacancies service⁶⁵ has been designed to make searching and applying for Apprenticeship opportunities much easier for young people, as part of the Apprenticeship Offer and the related expansion in places. But questions are being asked about how much help the system can provide to those young people who may not have access to IT, or the support to fully utilise it. Foundation Learning provision and Entry to Employment (E2E), as the primary 'routes into Apprenticeship', are also considered in terms of the support they offer to disadvantaged and disengaged young people.

At present, progression to Apprenticeships can come through a range of routes, via formal education, vocational learning or training, employment or indeed unemployment. The E2E programme was conceived in 2002-03, in response to recommendations in the Modern Apprenticeship Advisory Committee report *The Way to Work*,⁶⁶ as a route into Apprenticeship, offering preparation for learning and work. E2E was seen as significant in supporting Connexions services in reducing their numbers of young people NEET. It was also seen as providing insight into the profile of young people engaged in the programme nationally. E2E is likely to be the route through which young people who are disadvantaged or disengaged would seek to access Apprenticeships. Young people participating, achieving and progressing from E2E programmes have also been positively impacted (albeit to a limited extent) by the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) of up to £30 per week.⁶⁷ However, E2E progression rates (into any positive destination) are

variable and have not resulted in the increased uptake in Apprenticeships that was hoped for.

Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP), an initiative between Connexions and the local Learning and Skills Council in eight pilot areas in England established in April 2006, were intended to provide a route into Apprenticeships (alongside other accredited training) for those in jobs without training (JWT). In return for signing a learning agreement, young people in pilot areas were eligible for a financial incentive either in the form of a bonus or wage subsidy. Support for employers was also available. The pilots showed that around 20 per cent of LAP participants engaged in some form of work-based training during the 12-month reference period; around six percentage points higher than it would have been without LAP. Despite these small but positive gains, the pilots ended in 2009.⁶⁸

The development of Foundation Learning (covering all provision at entry and level 1) has been designed to better support coherence and individual progression, with Apprenticeship as one of the intended destinations (alongside first full level 2, Train to Gain and supported employment/independent living.) Foundation Learning is currently being piloted, and will begin to be introduced in September 2010. This clarification of progression routes, alongside wrap around information, advice and guidance (see the following section) is central to the Government's vision for Apprenticeship expansion. The extent to which these developments will assist young people on the margins of education, training and employment to enter Apprenticeships remains to be seen.

Recently released figures have shown a large increase in the numbers of adults gaining vocational qualifications, which is in part attributed to Train to Gain, the Government's national skills service offering access to training and advice for employers.⁶⁹ This includes a growth in adult Apprenticeships latest figures show that the number of adults aged 25 and over commencing an Apprenticeship doubled in 2008/09 compared to the previous year,⁷⁰ which anecdotal evidence is highlighting has already impacted the provision of Apprenticeships for young people aged 16-18. It is amongst this

younger group that the Government has pledged to increase the number in Apprenticeships to one in five – 400,000 young people – by 2020.

Although recently published figures⁷¹ showed record numbers started all-age Apprenticeships in 2007-08 (224,800 people, up 21.9 per cent on 2006-07), the numbers of 16- to 18 year olds taking up Apprenticeships look set to drop sharply this year. Just 63,700 teenagers started Apprenticeships in the first six months of academic year 2008-09 – a drop of 8.3 per cent on 2007-08.

Therefore, as the numbers of 19 year olds and older taking up Apprenticeships increases – by 3.9 per cent in the first six months of the 2008/9 academic year⁷² – the number of young people between the ages of 16 and 18 taking up Apprenticeships is seeing a decrease. Clearly this trend will need to be reversed in order to meet Government aspirations for Apprenticeship expansion.⁷³ Indeed, meeting these targets will surely involve drawing young people into Apprenticeships from a range of existing destinations, including 'A' levels, jobs without training and NEET. In addition, a shrinking pool of Apprenticeship opportunities only stands to further disadvantage young people on the margins, as competition and waiting lists increase. Data from the National Apprenticeships Service shows that demand from young people remains at a high level, with numbers of young people registered on the new Apprenticeship Vacancies service significantly outnumbering available opportunities.

This serves to highlight the importance of the information, advice and guidance (IAG) young people receive at critical options points in the 14-19 phase. Recent Learning and Skills Council (LSC) figures show that two thirds of learners aged 16-18 reported that more Careers Education and Guidance (CEG) in school or IAG around Apprenticeships would have made them more likely to apply, and 92 per cent of learners said they knew what apprenticeships were but had no idea how to apply for one.⁷⁴

The LSC estimates that 77 per cent of those who began Apprenticeships in 2006-07 were already with their employer.⁷⁵ Although there is no national data on how many young people go directly from their school or college into

an Apprenticeship, this indicates that numbers are low.⁷⁶ Furthermore, in 2006-07, while 63.2 per cent of 16-18 year olds were in full time education, only 5.7 per cent were Apprentices.⁷⁷ It is not clear whether the low numbers of young people progressing into Apprenticeships, and the particularly low numbers progressing from another form of learning, are due to low demand or other factors. Emerging evidence continues to suggest that demand amongst young people for Apprenticeships outstrips supply, suggesting instead that the challenge may be more in a lack of opportunities, and unclear routes to access them.

The Government's aspiration for clarifying and strengthening learning routes and opportunities for progression through 14-19 reform is, in part, a response to this challenge. The new 'qualification map' places Apprenticeships alongside Diplomas, GCSEs/'A' levels and Foundation Learning as the four main routes to learning for 14-19 year olds. Progression routes into Apprenticeships have also been clarified by DCSF:

"We want to ensure that there are clear progression routes, for those who want them, from the FLT,⁷⁸ Young Apprenticeships (for 14- to 16-year olds at school) and Diplomas into Apprenticeships".⁷⁹

Since these progression routes have arguably always existed, questions must be asked about young people's perceptions of Apprenticeships or at the very least the efficacy of these routes in supporting progression to Apprenticeship opportunities.

The entitlement to an Apprenticeship place for every 'suitably qualified' young person by 2013 is a central feature of the Government's ambitions for Apprenticeships. This is seen as moving Apprenticeships in line with the other three main learning routes in the 14-19 phase, and supporting their becoming a mainstream option. A statutory duty will be laid on the new National Apprenticeship Service to provide the places required to meet this entitlement as part of the new *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act* passed by Parliament in November 2009.

In part, it is hoped that the Apprenticeship Offer will be seen as an incentive for young people in school who might not be motivated by the learning routes available to them. But, the Offer is not without its conditions: the requirement to be suitably qualified means that there will be young people – quite possibly those who are already disadvantaged and disengaged from formal education, with possibly the most to gain from an Apprenticeship – who will fall outside the realms of the entitlement. The extent to which the Offer will act as a motivator for these young people remains to be seen.

Entry requirements have always been a significant barrier for young people seeking Apprenticeships, particularly for those who are most vulnerable. Even where employers do not ask for particular qualifications in potential apprentices, levels of literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills required can pose challenges to entry or even application. And in an environment where there can be tens or even hundreds of young people applying for one Apprenticeship place, it is almost inevitable that those on the margins will lose out. The Government's introduction of Minimum Levels of Performance for training providers, although significant in driving up achievements rate, has also led some providers to become more selective about their entry requirements and the candidates they accept – further excluding young people without formal qualifications.

The context in which Apprenticeships are operating is made more difficult perhaps by the work underway to roll out the new Diploma. Although Government and the relevant agencies are focusing on ensuring that clear distinctions between Diplomas and Apprenticeships are made and publicised, questions persist about whether young people who are inclined towards vocational learning will fully understand the differences.⁸⁰ The DCSF did however establish that young people who were planning to progress to a work-based route (including Apprenticeship) post-16 had an increased probability that they would plan to take, or consider taking, a Diploma in Years 10 and 11, suggesting that the progression opportunities were recognised.⁸¹ However, witnesses for the recent Skills Commission inquiry noted that "there are a number of issues around the impact of Diplomas upon Apprenticeships which must be acknowledged and resolved if Apprenticeship

recruitment is not to suffer”.⁸² This suggests that the Government’s aspiration in ensuring that there is parity of standing and clear, coherent progression routes between Apprenticeships and GCSEs/‘A’ Levels, Foundation Learning and Diplomas will face a number of challenges.

Initiatives to develop separate or dedicated recruitment and selection processes for young people on the margins have had some success in supporting them into Apprenticeships, but this approach is at odds with the Government’s agenda for Apprenticeships, and has been accused of undermining Apprenticeships’ status as a mainstream yet challenging route into learning and work.



Building on the theme: routes into Apprenticeships for young people who are disadvantaged or disengaged

Young Apprenticeship Programmes and work experience in secondary schools are under-used resources for supporting disadvantaged and disengaged young people onto full Apprenticeships. These offer young people the opportunity to sample what an Apprenticeship could look like, before having to embark upon a lengthy programme requiring significant commitment from individuals who may lack confidence, and feel unsure of their future ambitions and aspirations.

Young Apprenticeship Programmes, excluded from statutory recognition in the *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act*, were proposed as a potential solution to both pre-Apprenticeship preparation and the risks of taking on apprentices in the present economic climate. However, the Young Apprenticeship Programme tends to recruit from the pool of students predicted to achieve five A*-C at GCSE. This cohort has historically poor progression rates into Apprenticeships, with the vast majority moving into ‘A’ levels and ultimately higher education. In a report by the Skills Commission it was identified that the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) submitted an unpublished evaluation of the first two Young Apprenticeship cohorts, carried out on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in 2007. The findings showed that around 90 per cent of young apprentices continued onto further education or training, but with only around a quarter progressing onto a full Apprenticeship.⁸³

Programme-led Apprenticeships also have an insecure position within the *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act*. Ofsted has identified that while there are no published national data to track the rate of successful completion of learners who began programme-led Apprenticeships, around 75 per cent of the providers were able to supply this data. In cases where learners had undertaken an initial period of planned training, and then completed the programme with an employer, success rates were higher and the full Apprenticeship programme was achieved in a shorter time.⁸⁴ There are concerns about the potential status of programme-led Apprenticeships as outside the statutory definition of an Apprenticeship, particularly since this route can offer a vital opportunity for young people outside formal education and training, and can allow providers a window of time to build links with an employer. There is also no room within the *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act* to recognise the range of approaches under the ‘programme-led’ banner, some of which may have closer links with the workplace than others.

Gaining access to Apprenticeship vacancies is the first hurdle in applying and getting onto a programme. The Apprenticeship Vacancies service provided by the NAS is designed as a central platform where young people can view all the available Apprenticeship places in their area and further afield. However, despite rapid technological advancement, not all young people have access to, or are confident in navigating, the internet. The Home Access Taskforce in 2008 identified that 35 per cent of families still do not have access to the internet.⁸⁵ The taskforce recommended that the Government should target the poorest 15 per cent of families to financially support those who wanted home access to support their children.⁸⁶ It suggested the programme should begin in 2010, but further funding in light of the recession remains an open question. Even where young people have access to the internet, or can gain access via a local library or Connexions drop-in centre, for example, support will be required to navigate the system. For those young people who are accustomed to 'failure', there may seem little point in registering on a system where evidence tells us demand outstrips supply significantly.

Foundation Learning has the potential to provide a good stepping stone into Apprenticeships. However, it is unclear how Foundation Learning will differ from Entry to Employment, and as such how it will succeed in building stronger progression routes. Historically E2E has resulted in better access to further education or jobs without training than Apprenticeships, but the Progression Pathways within Foundation Learning could provide a more direct route into Apprenticeships. The counter argument to this is that developing Foundation Learning provision may restrict flexibility through narrow pathways. The Association of Learning Providers (ALP) echo this statement in their memorandum to the Lords on the then *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill*.⁸⁷ They identify that with many coming from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, E2E learners who are not ready to attain full qualifications are hampered by the progression pathways under Foundation Learning (which do not have 'obtaining a job' as an outcome).⁸⁸

Ultimately, evidence suggests that it is highly important for Apprenticeships to have flexibility including tasters and sampling in order to be truly open for disadvantaged and disengaged young people. The Learning Agreement Pilots established this need for flexibility ensuring, where possible, that learning provision was responsive and sufficiently accommodating to the needs of the young person and their employer.⁸⁹ Activity Agreement pilots have also demonstrated this flexibility, backed up by an evaluation of the pilots commissioned by the DCSF.⁹⁰ Activity Agreements are designed to encourage young people who have been NEET for some time back into learning or help them move into employment with training. In return for completing a series of tailored activities designed to move them towards learning or employment, 16 and 17 year olds who have been NEET for at least 20 continuous weeks receive an

allowance.⁹¹ It was estimated that the Activity Agreements were taken up by one fifth of the eligible NEET population; however the evaluation did acknowledge the need for more effective processes in engaging the so-called 'hardest to reach' within this group.⁹²

Research undertaken by the Council for British Teachers (CfBT) Education Trust⁹³ reviewed the different approaches in the last three decades to reducing the number of 16 and 17 year olds not participating in education or training. They identified, from the success - or failure - of historical programmes, the importance of flexibility to truly engage this particular demographic. Flexibility in the most successful programmes was demonstrated through the ability to put in place localised solutions developed from national blueprints, flexible start dates, a range of activities to choose from, and flexible learning environments. All these factors contributed to lower drop out rates, high levels of interest and engagement and an ability to overcome geographical barriers.⁹⁴ However, in respect of Apprenticeships, it should be recognised that many aspects of flexibility are at the discretion of the employer rather than the learning provider.





4. SUPPORTING AND ENABLING PARTICIPATION IN APPRENTICESHIPS

For those young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged from Apprenticeships, a certain level of support is needed in encouraging and supporting entry to and completion of a programme. This section explores in more detail what specific support is required and who the key people are to provide this support. What, for example, is the role of mentors, parents, employers, communities and training providers? The information, advice and guidance (IAG) that young people receive is crucial to their awareness/perception of and potential involvement in Apprenticeships. The provision of both universal and targeted IAG in relation to Apprenticeships remains a contentious issue, although the new *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act* is clear that schools have a duty to provide information on all options to all young people. This, combined with the move towards all young people receiving IAG up to the age of 18 set out in the recent IAG strategy,⁹⁵ means that there is significant opportunity to raise awareness of Apprenticeship across the 16-18 age cohort.

IAG in relation to Apprenticeships plays a pivotal role in raising young people's awareness of their options, and supporting them to make informed choices for their futures. The Skills Commission's recent report stated that current provision of IAG "relating to Apprenticeships in schools, colleges and delivered through Connexions is inadequate",⁹⁶ supporting previous LSC research with similar conclusions.⁹⁷

Clearly, improving IAG around Apprenticeships is not solely about quantity: how Apprenticeships are presented is also very significant. The recent report from the Skills Commission found that careers guidance in schools in relation to Apprenticeships is often only “directed towards those at the lower end of the academic achievement spectrum”,⁹⁸ with businesses reporting that they “receive many references from teachers who have clearly labelled Apprenticeships as an option for school leavers with low academic prospects”.⁹⁹ A key element to the recent Apprenticeships advertising campaign, fronted by Sir Alan Sugar, is to dispel these historical perceptions, and present Apprenticeships as challenging, competitive and aspirational options for young people and businesses alike. Young people with low self-esteem, who are unconvinced that learning ‘is for them’, are arguably unlikely to be motivated to consider Apprenticeships through this portrayal. The role of IAG then becomes ever more critical in widening young people’s horizons, and supporting them to consider all the options available, whilst making realistic choices for their futures. Earlier and more appropriate IAG may indeed prevent increasing drop out at 17 and 18 as young people re-consider their earlier choices around learning and work. The importance of this is increased during a recession which has prompted ever higher numbers of 16 year olds to remain in full-time learning, fearing a declining jobs market, but with little sense of progression post 18.

The Government has stated that it is ‘committed to the concept of impartial information, advice and guidance that is responsive to the individual needs of each young person’.¹⁰⁰ *The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill*’s statement that the Education Act 1997 should be amended to include: “Any consideration... of what advice would promote the best interests of the pupils concerned must include consideration of whether it would be in their best interests, or in the interests of any of them, to receive advice which relates to Apprenticeships”¹⁰¹ has been widely criticised for not going far enough in increasing the scope of IAG around Apprenticeships. It was subsequently amended to cover information on all options for all pupils. The DCSF recently published their Information, Advice and Guidance strategy which extends the statutory duty of school and colleges to provide IAG for all young people up to the age of 18.¹⁰² This will include impartial information, advice

and guidance about learning and work options including Apprenticeships, Diplomas, Foundation Learning and GCSEs/A levels.

The new duty on school staff, along with the decline seen in Connexions’ careers services¹⁰³ will mean the role that teachers play in delivering careers guidance around Apprenticeships will become even more important. The role of parents, the wider community and indeed employers must not be overlooked, particularly for young people who are outside formal education and may not access Connexions. As research by the Young Foundation argues young people are most able to thrive and develop resilience in life through the support of their families and communities.¹⁰⁴

Parents are one of the most important influences on children’s future aspirations, according to research from the Social Exclusion Taskforce.¹⁰⁵ However, young people and their parents are also influenced by the people and places where they live. Communities matter. Young people in certain types of neighbourhood are less likely to develop ambitious, achievable aspirations.¹⁰⁶ Neighbourhoods that have high levels of deprivation are likely to have a negative effect on individuals’ wellbeing. Community and friends are one of the seven most influential factors on our wellbeing.¹⁰⁷



The research also highlighted that certain community characteristics can in some cases be associated with low aspirations – such as particular types of closely knit social networks, a sense of isolation from broader opportunities and a history of economic decline.¹⁰⁸ High levels of 'bonding social capital' and low levels of 'bridging social capital' can restrict young people's horizons and access to opportunities.



There is potential friction in raising supply and demand in parallel with providing sensitive and responsive IAG and support for young people – particularly for young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged. An example of this friction could come about should there continue to be a greater level of demand than supply in Apprenticeship places, with waiting lists for some Apprenticeships. Under these circumstances the status of Apprenticeships more generally may be raised due to their perceived popularity, but this would have serious implications for those disadvantaged and disengaged young people who may find themselves even further from the available opportunities. Ensuring employers play a substantive role in the balancing of raising aspiration alongside managing expectation is a real challenge facing the NAS.

This also points to a potentially wider tension between defining Apprenticeships as high status, challenging learning opportunities whilst simultaneously working towards widening access to encompass those who are disadvantaged and disengaged.

Earlier this year, Lord Young outlined the completion rates for Apprenticeships and stated that “in 2007/08 113,000 people completed an Apprenticeship in England and completion rates reached an all time high of 64 per cent”.¹⁰⁹ While this is a great improvement on recent years, more work needs to be done to understand the individuals’ experience behind these figures. More research is needed around the support needs which exist before, during and after an Apprenticeship for young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged, and what conditions support their retention in and progression beyond an Apprenticeship. Mentoring in the workplace is key in supporting retention and achievement, but inevitably comes at a cost to employers, and therefore may not support the hoped-for expansion in places. Anecdotal evidence is also emerging about the role of Minimum Levels of Performance in providers’ decisions about Apprenticeship applicants. It would appear that providers are becoming increasingly ‘risk averse’ where young people may not complete their Apprenticeship Framework – even where an employer is keen to offer them an Apprenticeship place.

Building on the theme: supporting and enabling participation in Apprenticeships

Research, including from Learning Agreement Pilots, has demonstrated the importance of one to one support in accessing and progressing in work-based learning. The Connexions advisors that took part in the pilots had different skill sets to those of mainstream Connexions Advisers, enabling them to find and engage with the young people, identify and source relevant training provision, and support the young person through their learning. Mentors are a good option in terms of providing thorough, meaningful support but the cost to employers in providing dedicated mentors can be prohibitive. Further, little is known about the mentoring relationship which may already exist between employers and apprentices, or the impact of differing approaches to mentoring on different groups of young people. Recent research has recommended that workplace-based support and mentoring schemes should be improved, to increase take-up and completion rates among 'atypical groups' in Apprenticeship.¹¹⁰ NAS are key partners in a new initiative, called 'Horseshmouth',¹¹¹ a social network for informal mentoring. NAS are working to provide support for existing apprentices by connecting them with a 'graduate' apprentice.

In other countries, subsidies are used to incentivise employers into offering additional Apprenticeship places¹¹² and in some cases to take on disengaged and disadvantaged young people specifically. When the Government launched the Backing Young Britain campaign in July 2009 it was proposed that part of the £40 million of funding would support a mentoring network. The network would help young people find their feet and provide more help from day one of unemployment through job clubs and one to one support. These support networks appear to be outside of the employer-apprentice relationship unlike those in other countries. The role of the learning provider can also be valuable in providing this support.

The conclusions of the CfBT Education Trust's research into past methods of reducing the number of 16 and 17 year olds NEET also have relevance here. Many of the programmes in the last three decades which gave employers financial incentives to encourage them to recruit these young people were, surprisingly, unsuccessful because the majority of employers would only recruit new staff if there was a genuine business need.¹¹³ This same research identified the importance of individual support for apprentices. The most important support is often provided through a mentor who can engage the young person through the programme and also provide support in progression after completion. Some of the most successful programmes have incorporated a strong element of IAG, going beyond providing information about learning and careers decisions and covering a broad range of subjects including financial advice, housing advice and counselling information.

The Foyer Federation is currently developing coaching models focused on the wellbeing of young people.¹¹⁴ Early indications from this work suggest that life coaching may have a role to play, in place of more negatively-framed assessments of young people's background and consequent needs. Centrepiece are also forging the way with roll-on, roll-off courses which ensure that opportunities for young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged come at the right time for them. The Young Foundation's work around emotional resilience, through the UK Resilience Programme in schools and the Faking It pilot with young adults in east London, provides compelling evidence about developing new models for engaging with young people. The Young Foundation have warned that a large proportion of young people have not been adequately prepared for a much tougher economic environment, and emphasise the importance of grit, motivation and resilience, empathy and understanding, and the ability to communicate effectively and work collaboratively.¹¹⁵

A range of research has identified that the IAG provided to young people, specific to Apprenticeships, needs to be improved. Rennison and colleagues point out that for some groups of young people, advice and guidance needs to be available well beyond the end of compulsory education, to ensure that they make successful transitions and minimise the risk of devaluing the benefits of post-16 education provision.¹¹⁶ A more lateral approach should be adopted in light of the 'double stigmatisation' that the most disengaged can experience: The majority of IAG is provided within schools, but those who are already missing school or who are in custody, for example, will have even less access to this vital information. One of the evidence indicators of the IAG Quality Standards set out by the Government establishes the target that "services reach all young people in the local community, including disadvantaged and marginalised groups".¹¹⁷ It remains to be seen as to whether, and how, this can be achieved. This document of quality standards, following consultation with parents, also sets out Government plans to better engage with parents, particularly those who are unemployed themselves. Parents play an important role in shaping young people's learning and work aspirations. Research suggests that a key reason for low uptake of Apprenticeships amongst certain under-represented groups is parents' role as key influencers. This extends to a lack of marketing materials available in community languages to successfully convey the positive message of Apprenticeships to parents.

Gaining broader knowledge about young peoples' current perceptions of Apprenticeships based on the information they receive will better inform the improvements that need to be made. Research by the Young Foundation has found that "[young people's] comments and apprehensions also served to highlight the main areas that would need to be focused on in order to increase the numbers of young people taking up their entitlement¹¹⁸ to an Apprenticeship place".¹¹⁹ The role that parents can play in supporting the participation of young people in Apprenticeships is also an area for further exploration.

A photograph showing two men in a workshop or industrial setting. The man on the left is wearing a white hard hat and a red long-sleeved shirt. The man on the right is wearing a yellow hard hat and a black t-shirt. They are both looking towards the right, where there is a piece of electrical equipment with a 'CAUTION' sign. The background is a brick wall.

5. ENGAGING EMPLOYERS

Engaging employers in order to drive up the number of Apprenticeship places is arguably the most critical and most challenging element of the Government's aspirations. Concerted work is being undertaken by NAS in this area but there are concerns that without dedicated support, vulnerable young people will not benefit from the expansion in opportunities. Simultaneously, concern has been expressed within government, and by employers, that promoting Apprenticeships as a preferred (or protected) option for young people who have struggled at school, runs counter to the mainstreaming agenda – that Apprenticeship should stand alongside the other main routes to learning, with parity of esteem. It is clearly important to explore how employers can be supported to take on disadvantaged and disengaged young people, their motivation in this regard, and how employers can best support such young people.

Research for the Apprenticeships Task Force in 2005 demonstrated that Apprenticeships improve business performance by making contributions to competitiveness, profitability, productivity and quality.¹²⁰ This research also found that the net costs of Apprenticeship training are frequently lower than those involved in training non-apprentices, and the productivity of apprentices enables employers to recover much of the costs involved. Also, apprentices more easily adopt company values and are more likely to remain with the employer than non-apprentices.¹²¹

There are some 25 Sector Skills Councils, which represent employer interests in skills for their sector. They are responsible for the quality assurance of the design of Apprenticeship frameworks, ensuring that they both meet employers' needs and comply with the Apprenticeship Blueprint.¹²² The Apprenticeship Blueprint ensures that all Apprenticeships deliver competence, technical knowledge, transferable skills including application of number and communication skills, and that the apprentice understands employee rights and responsibilities. Currently there are over 180 Apprenticeship frameworks across 80 sectors. It is the responsibility of Sector Skills Councils, through their individual Apprenticeship Frameworks, to set the entry requirements for individual Apprenticeships.

These requirements vary considerably across the wide range of frameworks, with some Apprenticeships requiring higher levels of literacy, numeracy and customer-facing skills than others, for example. However, there is a risk that the qualification requirements attached to the Apprenticeship Offer will eclipse this diversity, dissuading young people with few or no academic qualifications from applying for Apprenticeships, and effectively raising the bar for entry. Communicating to employers the wide range of skills and experience that young people can bring to Apprenticeships, and supporting businesses to develop responsive recruitment and selection processes will be critical.

Clearly, the Government's aspirations for Apprenticeship expansion will not be met solely through clarifying learning routes and the Apprenticeship Offer. Indeed, the challenge of increasing the supply of employer places is considered so significant that the new National Apprenticeship Service has almost double the number of field staff on the employer services side as compared to the learner services function. A strong argument in encouraging businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to take on apprentices is the contribution that motivated and competent young people can make to their workplace and productivity.

Many employers would say that they cannot afford to take a risk on a young person who may not bring the skills and competencies they need, and that qualifications are often the easiest way to assess whether a young person is likely to be a benefit to them or not. For significant numbers of young people who have not succeeded in formal education, Apprenticeships offer an opportunity to gain and demonstrate these skills – but require an employer to take a chance on investing in them. Employers are often keen to extend such opportunities to young people who are disadvantaged (particularly employers who came through the Apprenticeship route themselves, and recognise it as a turning point in their lives) but feel that the economic imperative wins out.

Research has consistently demonstrated that employers are less demanding of technical skills, considering them trainable, if potential employees can demonstrate a range of 'employability'¹²³ and soft skills, and positive attributes.¹²⁴ The greater emphasis on soft skills (for example, interpersonal and communication skills) can be positive for young people with few or no formal qualifications, but assessing or 'measuring' such skills is problematic, and often measurement is based on employers' perceptions of their interaction with candidates at interview.¹²⁵ Amongst the core characteristics employers look for are motivation and flexibility, willingness to work and learn, appearance, behaviour, confidence, and positive gestures and mannerisms.¹²⁶

Those furthest from the labour market can be disadvantaged by employers' recruitment methods. Where employers use informal methods of advertising, such as word of mouth, those without contacts in the workplace are unlikely to hear about job opportunities.¹²⁷ This is of particular relevance given the high numbers of young people starting Apprenticeships with their existing employer. The new Apprenticeship Vacancy service has been developed to be a 'one stop site for Apprenticeships', with the intention that eventually all Apprenticeship vacancies will be available on this site. This should go some way to creating a more level playing field in finding out about and applying for Apprenticeship vacancies, but it may not make a significant difference to those on the margins.

Building on the theme: engaging employers

There is a need to balance the economic imperative for employers in keeping their own costs to a minimum, against the wider social agenda of widening access to Apprenticeships and effectively supporting young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged through to completion.

A strong business case needs to be presented to employers, outlining the positive cost-benefit path of taking on apprentices, in order to overcome the significant hurdle of costs incurred by an employer. NAS has recently launched a campaign with this information on their website for employers to readily access.¹²⁸

Research has been conducted in a selection of industrial sectors into the net costs for employers in taking on apprentices. Despite the obvious differences across the sectors, the majority of employers recouped their investment in monetary terms within two to three years.¹²⁹ The Institute for Employment Research at Warwick University concludes that employers found a wide range of benefits to taking on apprentices: Apprenticeships allowed the business to secure a supply of people with the skills and qualities that were required, traditional recruitment processes were often more expensive, Apprenticeships were associated with lower labour turnover, apprentices demonstrate company commitment to employees and perhaps most positively, apprentices can bring new ideas and innovation into a business.¹³⁰ The challenge is conveying these positive experiences to employers and further, in ensuring that disadvantaged and disengaged young people are also seen as capable of providing these benefits to a business.

Mentors have already been identified as a potentially positive method of supporting disadvantaged and disengaged young people through Apprenticeships, and in some cases the employer has filled this role successfully. Funding, time and support for the employer is required for this route of mentoring to be truly effective.

Employers are amongst those who have recognised the tension between the mainstreaming and social inclusion agendas for Apprenticeships. With clear communication of the benefits that apprentices can bring, and support provided for both employer and apprentice, young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged will have a chance at success within an Apprenticeship.



6. CONCLUSIONS, QUESTIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is widely acknowledged that young people referred to as 'NEET' are a heterogeneous group that should be thought of, and responded to, in all their diversity. Many within this category may be disengaged from learning and work; others may be keen to participate but experience barriers to access. A large proportion of young people outside education, training and employment are going through legitimate periods of 'churn', between different opportunities. Further, young people in jobs without training fall outside 'the NEET group', but are recognised as a priority group for Apprenticeship take-up.

In addition, there are significant differences between the experiences of young men and young women, those from different ethnic backgrounds and young parents, for example. The location of young people's home and community, and place of study and work, should also be taken into account, alongside the impact that geography can have on opportunities to engage with Apprenticeships. It remains the case that not enough is known about the impact of gender, ethnicity and geography on access to and completion of Apprenticeships. Similarly, progress is needed in shifting the perception of support for particular groups of young people to engage with Apprenticeships from the realms of 'special' schemes to part of the mainstreaming agenda. A key priority for the future is to understand routes into Apprenticeships for *all* young people, across the spectrum of informal, non-formal and formal learning.

Past recessions and previous approaches to youth unemployment have taught us the importance of building work and training opportunities for young people. To avoid the revolving door of unemployment, it is essential for young people to access sustained education and training opportunities. It is recognised that previous recessions, and indeed the current downturn, have had a profound effect on young peoples' wellbeing, particularly for those who are disadvantaged and disengaged from education, training and employment opportunities. If these young people are given the opportunities that an Apprenticeship can bring, the mitigating effect that these opportunities have on the self esteem, motivation and overall wellbeing of young people is significant.

Flexibility has emerged as key to encouraging and sustaining participation for disadvantaged and disengaged young people. Flexibility in the form of varied start dates, flexible working hours, a range of activities and environments for learning and work, and locally designed programmes will all contribute to better opportunities for these young people to access and complete an Apprenticeship programme – although it is recognised that many of these factors are at the discretion of the employer. The Learning Agreement Pilots began the process of exploring flexibility through an open learning centre, or assessor visits at times that fitted into young people's shifts,¹³¹ but progress was limited. Further research into the extent to which flexibility can be accommodated within Apprenticeships is needed.

Similarly, there is a need to explore a variety of pre-Apprenticeship routes and programmes which have the potential to overcome some of the problems of access and status. Current provision such as E2E and Foundation Learning does not always provide access routes into Apprenticeships for young people without Level 2 or 3 qualifications. There is a real need for alternative routes into Apprenticeship that involve high-quality work-based training (which tends to motivate this group of young people) but at a lower level in order to make them more accessible. This coincides with local authorities gaining responsibility for planning and commissioning 16-19 learning provision, and piloting Foundation Learning provision; clearly a challenging agenda for local authorities, who will require significant support throughout, but one which simultaneously offers opportunities.

There is a tension where the mainstreaming and social inclusion agendas are perceived to be in opposition, with Apprenticeships being positioned simultaneously as part of 'the NEET solution' and as one of the four main routes to learning. Apprenticeships clearly have a very important role to play for young people outside, or on the margins of, formal education, training and employment. However, concern has been expressed that developing this role could run counter to the aspiration of positioning Apprenticeships as a challenging, competitive alternative to academic study. This debate is likely to be intensified as we progress towards the Apprenticeship Offer, since re-positioning Apprenticeships will be vital to achieving Government targets for young people taking up this learning route, but also in ensuring the most vulnerable do not become further excluded.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) is critical in developing young people's awareness and perceptions of Apprenticeships, but research highlights that there remain issues around both quality and quantity. Further, the role of parents (and the wider community) is underexplored in advocating the benefits of the Apprenticeship route. More creative approaches to reaching young people on the margins with such an IAG offer need to be explored.

Supporting young people to sustain and complete Apprenticeships is just as important as enabling access. A clear area for further research is the impact of a range of support mechanisms on completion rates, and different groups of young people, such as emotional resilience training, mentoring and parental support.

Levels of future funding and employer subsidies remain a key issue, as does employer engagement in Apprenticeships, particularly for 16-18 year olds, in the current economic climate. Research has suggested that financial incentives for employers have been unsuccessful in the past, and what has been more appealing to employers has been to learn about the advantages and benefits that apprentices can bring to their organisation.



7. WHERE NEXT FOR THE APPRENTICESHIP PATHFINDER?

This paper has set out the challenges for young people who are disadvantaged and disengaged from Apprenticeships, and explored the issues around access to and supply of places, increasing completion rates and supporting progression, and engaging employers. The Pathfinder Project team will continue to work with the three partner authorities in Manchester, Hertfordshire and South Tyneside to develop their activity under the Opening Doors strand of the project, and alongside this will publish a second paper under the theme in spring 2010, setting out emerging good practice and potential solutions. A collection of case studies from around England, demonstrating good practice, will also be published. The project team will work alongside Pathfinder local authorities to monitor their activity, and in particular capture the impact on young people and employers.

A second Opening Doors seminar will be held in the spring of 2010, reporting on the practical actions in the local authorities, and on fresh evidence emerging from policy and research.

Alongside the Opening Doors activity, Pathfinder authorities continue, working closely with the National Apprenticeship Service, to progress local arrangements and relationships in advance of the implementation of the Apprenticeship Offer in 2013.

ANNEX 1 – ATTENDEES AT THE EXPERT SEMINAR, APRIL 2009

Anna Morrison	Hertfordshire Providers' Network
Balbir Chatrik	Centrepoint
Carol Jackson	Community Links
Debra Clothier	Nacro
Dr Beverley Burgess	LSC
Dr Hilary Steedman	London School of Economics
Dr Nalita James	University of Leicester
Dr Susan Maguire	CEI and the University of Warwick
Dr Thomas Spielhofer	NFER
Ginny Lunn	Prince's Trust
Jane Evans	Barnardo's
Jennifer Davies	Rathbone
Mike Johnson	Barnardo's Palmersville Training
Professor Bryan Merton	Independent Consultant
Steve Hillman	The Foyer Federation
Yvonne Richards	UK Youth
Anton Shelupanov	The Young Foundation
Bethia McNeil	The Young Foundation
Dominic Potter	The Young Foundation
Geoff Mulgan	The Young Foundation
Dr Ian Johnston	Senior Consultant to the project
Dr Marcia Brophy	The Young Foundation

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ABOUT THE LOCAL WELLBEING PROJECT

The Local Wellbeing Project is a partnership between the Young Foundation, Professor Richard Layard of the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and three local authorities: Hertfordshire County Council, Manchester City Council and South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council. The aim of the Local Wellbeing Project is to pioneer new approaches in the design and delivery of policies and services to contribute to public happiness and wellbeing, which could be replicated more widely.

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