

# THINKING ABOUT APPRENTICESHIPS

*PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS  
OF EMPLOYERS, PARENTS  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE*



**MARCIA BROPHY, BETHIA McNEIL AND ANNA SHANDRO**

## **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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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2008, the government published *World Class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All*, which set out ambitious plans for Apprenticeships with the aim that one in five young people aged 16 to 18 will be apprentices by 2020. The review also announced plans to guarantee an Apprenticeship place to all suitably qualified 16-18 year olds by 2013.<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

The Apprenticeship Pathfinder Project, funded by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), will support three partner local authorities – Hertfordshire, South Tyneside and Manchester – in achieving the government’s aspirations for Apprenticeships for 16 – 18 year olds.

This report forms part of the initial scoping of the Apprenticeship Pathfinder Project, and provides a snapshot of research into the way apprentices and Apprenticeships are perceived by employers, parents and young people in three local authorities, who are core partners in the project.

This research was conducted, and the summary report produced, prior to the establishment of the government’s proposed definition of the Apprenticeship ‘guarantee’ or minimum entry standards. Since then, the Apprenticeship ‘guarantee’ has come to be known as the Apprenticeship Entitlement. This research was also conducted at a moment in time before the economic downturn of 2009/10 had increased scepticism about future job prospects.



## METHODOLOGY

Focus groups of between four and twelve young people and parents were recruited with the help of local authority youth services and community youth groups. Employers from a range of sectors and sizes were invited to participate in telephone interviews. The responses of all participants were reported anonymously.

The interviews and focus groups were designed to examine:

- how parents, young people and employers perceive Apprenticeships;
- the challenges that the respondents have faced in the past when they have participated in, or considered participating in, an Apprenticeship;
- what would be needed to ensure that Apprenticeships were an attractive and realistic option for employers and young people, and an option that parents would recommend to their children.

## KEY FINDINGS

### IDENTIFYING THE BENEFITS

Over the course of the project, most respondents demonstrated a great deal of enthusiasm for Apprenticeships. They had different perspectives however.

In particular, young people and parents were positive about:

- work based learning and real life experience outside the classroom;
- improving 'soft skills', such as time management and presentation skills;
- increasing employability, and young people's confidence;
- earning a salary while learning.

Employers instead highlighted:

- the effectiveness of on-the-job training;
- the benefits of recruiting, training, and then retaining apprentices within their workforce.

### EXAMINING NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF APPRENTICESHIPS

Employers, parents and young people from all three local authority areas shared many of the same negative perceptions of Apprenticeships. The most salient include:

- "Apprenticeships have a lower status than college-based learning";
- "Apprenticeships are male-orientated";
- "Apprenticeships are most appropriate for manual labour".

Some employers also said that:

- "Apprenticeships involve too much effort for too little return";
- "young people are immature and more of a risk to employ and invest time in".

### BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Employers, parents and young people identified similar barriers and challenges that would have to be addressed in establishing the Apprenticeship entitlement.

- **lack of information:** young people and parents felt insufficiently informed by schools and Connexions, and employers said that they were unsure about where to access information about how to organise an Apprenticeship place;
- **lack of diversity:** there is currently low up-take of Apprenticeships among women and individuals from an ethnic minority background;



- **lack of support from college/training providers:** employers were sceptical of both the quality and the relevance of the college/training provider provision and felt unsupported in the training that they could offer to young people.

## THE STRUCTURE OF AN APPRENTICESHIP

Respondents were invited to think about the core components of Apprenticeships. Most considered the following to be crucial:

- **off-the-job training at a college or training provider;**
- **achieving a qualification,** which would increase the status of the programme and, consequentially, its popularity with young people;
- **mentoring, skills building and personal development,** which would improve the quality of the scheme and the apprentices' employability;
- **financial incentives,** for example travel expenses, childcare costs and student loans;
- **flexible working** in order to cater for young parents.

## EMERGING AREAS FOR FUTURE WORKS

This research highlighted a number of areas for possible policy development and exploration in the Pathfinders.

- **Clear definitions:** To avoid disappointment and misunderstanding, a clear presentation of the core components of an Apprenticeship, and the Apprenticeship entitlement, is crucial.
- **Effective provision of information:** Lack of information about Apprenticeships, how they work and their benefits, was a key problem identified by respondents.
- **Raising the status of Apprenticeships:** Branding, advertising and more effective promotion of Apprenticeships in schools will be key to raising the status and improving understanding.

- **Strengthening relationships between schools, employers, Connexions Services, apprentices and the government:** The processes and relationships that will be required by local authorities and the NAS could be identified and bolstered through the Pathfinder.
- **Increasing & streamlining supply:** The business rationale for employer participation could be promoted and the process of taking on an apprentice made easier. Red tape should be reduced, perceptions of college/training provider support improved and the relevance of Apprenticeships to employers reinforced.
- **Increasing desirability and demand:** Better information on the existing range of careers and sectors that offer Apprenticeships is needed to combat the idea that Apprenticeships are only suitable for male-oriented manual labour. At a local level, this should be translated into information about the breadth of opportunities available to diverse groups of learners.
- **Supporting all young people:** The Pathfinder could investigate the most effective means of reaching and fully engaging with the most diverse pool of applicants possible.



# INTRODUCTION

The government has set out ambitious plans for Apprenticeships; with the aim that one in five young people aged 16 to 18 will be apprentices by 2020.

Apprenticeships combine learning skills (leading towards recognised qualifications) with paid employment. Apprenticeships offer young people a clear route into learning and work, and the development of vocational and 'soft skills', supporting the transition to adulthood and independence. Positive and supported transitions are critical in developing young people's wellbeing and resilience.

In January 2008, the government published *World Class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All*. This review set out plans to guarantee an Apprenticeship place to all suitably qualified 16-18 year olds by 2013.<sup>2</sup> Since then, in February 2009, the *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill* has been published, and the proposals for the Apprenticeship Guarantee have come to be referred to as the 'entitlement', in line with other entitlements through the 14-19 phase. This period has also marked the launch of the new National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), which will have end-to-end responsibility for the delivery of Apprenticeships. The Apprenticeship entitlement will support the government's ambitions for Apprenticeships: that one in five young people are engaged in Apprenticeships by 2020, and Apprenticeships are positioned as one of the four main learning routes for young people.



The Apprenticeship Pathfinder Project is one strand of the Local Wellbeing Project, and is funded by the NAS. The Local Wellbeing project, a partnership between the Young Foundation, the London School of Economics (LSE), the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and three local authorities (Hertfordshire, Manchester and South Tyneside), is a unique initiative designed to test practical ways of improving public wellbeing. The project explores how local government in collaboration with national agencies and local communities can improve happiness and wellbeing, both by enhancing existing services and providing or planning new services to address specific needs of individuals, families and communities.

The Apprenticeship Pathfinder project will map and collate an empirical evidence base of the processes and relationships that will be required by local authorities, the NAS, and others, including schools, Connexions, careers services and employers. These are needed to implement and achieve the following government aspirations for Apprenticeships:

- 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.

The project will work with three Pathfinder authorities – Hertfordshire, Manchester and South Tyneside – and will chart their progress towards achieving these aspirations ahead of the statutory timetable. Through this, the project will build a knowledge base for dissemination to all local authorities, in order that this learning can be shared and implemented. Furthermore, the project will monitor the impact of the local authorities' vision for Apprenticeships and associated practical actions on the wellbeing of young people, their families and, where possible, on the wider community.

This report forms part of the initial scoping of the Apprenticeships Pathfinder Project. It provides a snapshot of research into the way apprentices and Apprenticeships are perceived by employers, parents and young people in the three partner local authority areas. It draws together the findings from two reports commissioned by the Local Wellbeing Project – *Employer perceptions of Apprenticeships* and *Young peoples' and parents' perceptions of Apprenticeships* – providing an overview of the key issues and challenges from the point of view of both supply and demand.

The report provides an overview of the findings and emerging areas for further research as the Pathfinder project is rolled out. This report also discusses the emerging findings, and reflects on their implications for the Pathfinder and the government's ambitions for Apprenticeships.

This research was conducted, and the summary report produced, prior to the establishment of the government's proposed definition of the Apprenticeship 'guarantee' or minimum entry standards, and before the increased focus on 'entitlements' as part of the 14-19 phase. This research also represents a moment in time before the economic downturn of 2009/10 had increased scepticism about future job prospects.



## HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS AND EMPLOYERS VIEW APPRENTICESHIPS?

The interviews and focus groups were designed to draw out the respondents' perceptions of Apprenticeships and to explore any commonly-held assumptions that emerged. Their 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 entitlement to an Apprenticeship place.

### IDENTIFYING THE BENEFITS

Young people, parents and employers appeared to be very enthusiastic about Apprenticeships in general, despite the negative stereotypes that emerged during discussions. The young people and employers who were involved in an Apprenticeship at the time of interview were particularly positive about the experiences they were having. The most sceptical respondents were those who had not engaged with Apprenticeships.

### THE VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS:

- Work based learning**  
 Young people, particularly those who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and those who had struggled at school, felt that on-the-job training might suit them better and that learning outside of the classroom would constitute better preparation for the world of work. Furthermore, Apprenticeships were seen as a post-school option which enabled them to discount or avoid college. Despite the classroom-based element of Apprenticeships, they were seen as offering an *alternative* to this type of learning.

- **Employability, soft skills and personal development**

The young people felt that an Apprenticeship would enable them to improve skills they might not learn in a classroom, which they also viewed as being important for their futures, such as time management, problem-solving and communication skills. Young people who were NEET thought that the opportunity to improve their skills on the job at the same time as forming a relationship with an employer would increase both their employability and their confidence in themselves as an employable candidate; two areas where they felt their NEET status disadvantaged them.

*“Right, so I pitch up for a job interview and an employer asks me what have I done, or what my strengths and weaknesses are or something. How am I supposed to know? I just want to tell him that I want to work and I want to learn and I’m not a bad person, but you can’t do that in an interview, can you? He would give the job to someone who had been to college and had qualifications.”* (Young person, Manchester)

- **Earning a salary while learning**

Young people and parents stressed the practical benefits of reducing the financial pressures of continuing learning or training after the age of 16, but young people also said that being paid like a ‘real job’ would make them feel more valued by the employer – the appreciation of earning while learning went beyond the traditional value attached to the Education Maintenance Allowance, which was viewed as “being paid to turn up”. Most young people felt that the salary attached to Apprenticeships was more “adult”, would give them a real sense of progression and also improve their feelings of self-worth. Parents shared this view, and considered a salary to signify genuine employer investment in their children.

*“Employers aren’t going to fork out for someone they don’t want to train. It’s their money and they want to get good value for it.”*  
(Parent, Manchester)

*“If my kids could get a job and get training I’d tell them to do it. I’d do it myself if I could.”* (Parent, South Tyneside)

## THE VIEWS OF EMPLOYERS

- **On-the-job training**

Across the board, the employers agreed that young, enthusiastic and motivated apprentices often made the best workers, due to the engagement in on-the-job training within their companies. Qualifications were not what mattered; attitude and willingness to learn were more important in most instances.

- **Recruitment and retention**

Employers seemed keen to invest in younger people but the main attraction of taking on apprentices seemed to be their longer term recruitment and retention in the firm. Investing in their own organisations was a much larger incentive than investing in the future of the workforce as a whole.

*“Once trained, we are reluctant to let them go! I try to keep them on in employment...”* (small manufacturing business, South Tyneside)

*“Our junior left, so we advertised for a junior administrator. But only one real ‘junior’ applied- many applying had degrees. There was a concern that young people don’t get chances. We went into it with a business mindset, but saw a need. This prompted the Chamber [of Commerce] to take on apprentices. But it had to have a business rationale”* (small service sector employer, Hertfordshire).

## PERCEPTIONS OF APPRENTICESHIPS

There was consensus across the three groups of respondents when they were asked to identify the main stereotypes surrounding Apprenticeships, particularly with regard to the status of Apprenticeships.

### FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS:

- **Apprenticeships are only available and/or viable in a very limited number of professions:** Many of the young people and parents perceived Apprenticeships to be most viable or appropriate for manual labour occupations.
- **Apprenticeships are stereotypically biased towards males:** the young people interviewed perceived manual labour professions to be male dominated, and Apprenticeships to be dominated by these types of sectors and roles. It was argued that the only Apprenticeships available to women were in childcare and the beauty industry.
- **Apprenticeships have a lower status than college-based or university learning:** Apprenticeships were seen as the best option for young people who struggled in formal, classroom-based learning. Although Apprenticeships were viewed as a *realistic* (and frequently sensible) option for these young people, they were viewed far less as an *aspirational* option as compared to employment or further education (FE). Many parents remembered Apprenticeships as schemes which merely recycled people back into the workforce queue. Parents from black and minority ethnic backgrounds were particularly sceptical about Apprenticeships and would prefer their children to pursue formal learning.



## FOR EMPLOYERS:

- Apprentices have a contradictory status:
  - a) Schools and young people see Apprenticeships as the preferred option for those who have struggled with formal or mainstream education;
  - b) Apprenticeships are filled by the brightest pupils and non-academic young people miss out

Employers expressed two conflicting views on the status of Apprenticeships, sometimes even within the same interview. Many argued that schools pushed non-academic young people into Apprenticeships, leading to them being viewed as the preferred option for those who struggle with formal learning and the achievement of qualifications. However, employers also perceived that non-academic young people missed out on the opportunity to take up an Apprenticeship because the “bright ones” were those who secured the places:

*“We are hoping that as the government does more with engineering diplomas, and pushing through Apprenticeship routes, parents and schools should catch up and see that it is a viable FE option. I am convinced that for a long time the schools would not push forward bright children, so we have done a lot of work with local colleges and schools to promote the idea that an Apprenticeship is a springboard.”*  
(Medium-sized manufacturer, Manchester)

*“An Apprenticeship is and was seen as a guarantee: parents perceive them as gold standard. Schools create a vicious circle by upping the academic ante, and thereby excluding those who can’t achieve academically. Hands-on learning can suit many non-academic kids. Target-driven schools are not interested in young kids who can’t manage.”* (Large employer, South Tyneside)

- Apprenticeships involve too much effort for too little return  
Employers said that Apprenticeships were not always worth the investment. They involved too much red tape, too much time and too much money, particularly given that many of the apprentices move on

after they have qualified. They asked: “what did that leave employers with?”

- Apprentices are risky options  
Young apprentices are immature: they are ready to work, but not ready for work.

## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Young people, parents and employers all said that they had faced real challenges when they had considered taking on or providing an Apprenticeship in the past.

- Gender stereotypes  
There was general agreement across all three groups of respondents and geographical regions that Apprenticeships were still viewed as appropriate options for only a small number of jobs and a specific group of people. Put simply, they felt that Apprenticeship = manual labour = white male. The young men interviewed felt it best to opt for manual labour, and the young women felt constrained to childcare, hairdressing or beauty. The young women in the groups were keen for a wider range of options to be available to them, such as opportunities to work in media, the hotel and leisure industry, as well as access to roles that are traditionally considered ‘male’. Employers echoed this and would welcome a more diverse pool of applicants.  
*“I went for an electrician’s Apprenticeship once, and was told to come back with my brother.”* (Young woman, Manchester)  
*“Employing male care assistants is a huge problem for us.”*  
(Small care organisation, Manchester)
- Lack of information  
Other than those involved in an Apprenticeship scheme at the time of interview, the young people, parents and employers demonstrated a considerable lack of knowledge about Apprenticeships. The young people and parents said that information, advice and guidance (IAG) services at school had not informed them of Apprenticeships, and the

employers said that they were unclear about how they would organise one. The employers who were already training an apprentice said that they had found out about Apprenticeships by chance and not through a school, college, training provider or government body.

*"When we have thought about trying to take someone on, we've found ourselves saying we'd need to investigate how to recruit. Who would you go to to help you recruit? I'm not sure where to go. The first thing would be to do it yourself. I have heard of Connexions, I have some good links with the Council, and other manufacturing organisations [...] We tend to get information about things like Train to Gain, but they don't tell you who to contact."* (National employer, Manchester)

*"I'll be honest with you, we found out about Apprenticeships by accident, from a leaflet that came through the letterbox one day, not from any government body."* (Medium-sized employer, Manchester)

- **College/training provider support**

Employers were frustrated by the quality of provision from colleges and training providers and felt that much of the associated teaching was not relevant to the apprentice's experiences in the workplace. Many employers felt a responsibility to fill in the perceived gaps, which entailed more time and more money, and they were left feeling unsupported.

*"There are no supporting courses: [the apprentice] would have gone on a welding course, but the courses available were not suitable for our environment. The colleges said they didn't have enough take-up to put them on, and I am also sceptical about who is teaching. I can speak from experience; I worked as an FE teacher alongside people from industry who couldn't teach to save their lives. It leaves us unsupported."* (Small employer, Hertfordshire)



## WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS AND EMPLOYERS EXPECT FROM AN APPRENTICESHIP 'GUARANTEE'?

At the time of conducting the research, the scope and operation of the Apprenticeship entitlement, or 'guarantee', was not yet known. The focus groups, therefore, explored young people's, parents' and employers' expectations of the entitlement, and some potential challenges in its implementation.

Below is a list of the issues that were raised across the groups and the different responses that were given.

### GUARANTEED EMPLOYMENT VERSUS IMPROVING EMPLOYABILITY

Apprenticeships offer employed status, and the majority result in continued employment with the same employer, although it is clearly not possible to guarantee this. All of the young people involved in the research said they would do an Apprenticeship if there was a job guaranteed for them *at the end*. However, due to the wide range of benefits that young people could identify in Apprenticeships, it was acknowledged that guaranteed employment was more of an ideal rather than something strictly necessary in order to recruit young apprentices.

Employers also perceived having a 'guaranteed employee' at the end of an Apprenticeship to be an ideal. According to them, if apprentices were of a high standard this would be an effective way of recruiting, training and retaining staff. Many were sceptical of the benefits of investing in young people who would simply move on after completion. If employers could not be guaranteed an employee who would remain with them post-Apprenticeship,



they stated that at the very least they would want a guarantee of a 'good worker' throughout the Apprenticeship.

The parents from all three regional areas did not think that a guaranteed job would be feasible as it would be likely to dramatically reduce the number of Apprenticeships made available to young people.

What the project and research unveiled was debate and differing opinions on the term 'guarantee'.

## MINIMUM ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Parents and young people were almost unanimous that there should be no entry requirements for Apprenticeships, with the exception of parents from BME communities, who were in favour of such requirements. The majority of parents and young people held Apprenticeships to be an *alternative* route into employment, and one that was particularly valuable for those who struggled with formal education or who had no confidence in their employability. In particular, many felt that entry requirements that were perceived to be too high would possibly deter these young people from applying.

Employers preferred apprentices with the right attitude rather than the right qualifications, but admitted that this was difficult to discern before working with them. Decisions always had to be made with a business rationale and entry requirements would reassure employers of the standard of the applicants.

The *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill* (2009) sets out the minimum requirements for the Apprenticeship entitlement as a full level 1 qualification. Despite this, it was noted from the research that employers and some providers perceived increasing difficulty in hiring young people without level 2 qualifications, due to the pressure of performance targets. Even if an employer was willing to invest time and energy in an apprentice without qualifications, colleges/training providers may not be able to. This debate points to the important role provision through the new Foundation

Learning Tier Progression Pathways will play in preparing young people for the Apprenticeship route.

*"We have 38 per cent of all apprentices that come from the most deprived areas in the country. You have to balance that with Minimum Performance Levels, it's a very hard balance to strike. In the past we would take a chance on those without GCSEs, but if you take too many chances you lose your contract. So those who don't have GCSEs may slip through the net; we've seen this happening since success rates came in. There was a 45 per cent performance level rate set this year."* (Training Provider, Manchester).

## ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION

All of the respondents agreed that qualifications were a vital element in Apprenticeships. Young people felt that this would improve not only their employability but also the scheme's status and, consequentially, its desirability and popularity amongst young people. It would also be an additional source of motivation for young people to complete the Apprenticeship.

Parents concerned with their children's employability were clear that they would not recommend an Apprenticeship to their children unless it gave them a professional qualification, such as a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). Parents from a BME background expressed the strongest opinion here, and said that they would not recommend an Apprenticeship unless it was equivalent to degree level.

*"If I went for a job next to someone with qualifications, then they would get the job every time. You have to have them these days."* (Young person, South Tyneside)

## COLLEGE/TRAINING PROVIDER ATTENDANCE

The majority of the young people and all of the parents and employers interviewed agreed that Apprenticeships should include a mandatory college-

based component. A small minority of the young people argued that an apprentice should be able to choose to train for longer in the workplace instead of going to college or to a training provider.

*"I wouldn't mind training for two or three years if I came out the other end of it a qualified mechanic for instance. This is proper training. It would show me that the training is thorough and worthwhile. I would be happy to go to college for one day a week for this."* (Young person, South Tyneside)

*"I hated school, never went. Why would I want to go to college?"*  
(Young person, Manchester)

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, SOFT SKILLS AND MENTORING

Young people and parents said that an Apprenticeship would be more attractive if it provided soft skills training and mentoring. Employers were in agreement and would be willing to invest as much time and money as possible in mentoring Apprentices and improving their skills. However, they stressed that mentors also needed support, and that all of this required more funding.

## PERCEIVED INCENTIVES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- **Financial incentives:** young people and parents both argued for financial incentives, such as travel expenses, childcare costs, money for tools and materials required for work, and interest-free student loans.
- **Flexible working:** the young women and young parents in particular stated that part-time options would enable young people with children to participate in Apprenticeships and to continue learning while caring for their family.
- **Taster courses:** Half of the group of young people in South Tyneside (including all of the young people NEET in South Tyneside), and 90 per cent of all other young people and parents thought that taster courses would enable students to choose the Apprenticeship framework they

were interested in and would reduce drop-out due to boredom or unsuitability.

- **Employment rights:** young people and parents thought that signing a contract, working the same hours and having the same holiday entitlements and rights of redress as other employees would make an apprentice feel more secure in his or her post and would make him or her feel like part of the team.

## EMERGING AREAS FOR FUTURE WORK

A number of areas for further policy development and clarification emerged from this scoping research, some of which can be explored and evaluated further in the Pathfinder project.

### CLEAR DEFINITIONS

It will be crucial to provide, both to young people and to the wider public, a clear message around the Apprenticeship entitlement and the minimum entry requirements.

### EXPAND, COORDINATE AND IMPROVE INFORMATION SOURCES AND ADVERTISING

Many of the respondents suggested using a centralised information hub so that information is consistent and clear and so that interested parties know where to go. Since the research was conducted, the NAS has been launched, alongside an expanded website ([www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)) and the new Apprenticeship Vacancies Matching Service. The NAS will function nationally and regionally to support schools, Connexions and other services in the provisions of information, advice and guidance.



## BETTER BRANDING AND MARKETING

Branding will be key to reducing negative assumptions and historical misconceptions about Apprenticeship schemes. The Pathfinder provides a valuable opportunity to explore the impact of a 'new and improved' Apprenticeship brand, and to monitor changes in people's perceptions of Apprenticeships as the policy and practice develops.

It will be important to move away from the image of Apprenticeships as the best option (or "dumping ground") for less able young people, and as the preferred option for white males who want to go into manual labour. It will also be important to improve understanding of the minimum entry standards, why they are necessary, and how they can be achieved through pre-Apprenticeship preparation. Similarly, realistic expectations about ultimate job outcomes and lifelong earnings potential need to be promoted both to counter the 'manual' association, and to persuade some parents hoping for professional careers for their children that rewarding and high-profile careers can be achieved through Apprenticeships. A wider use of tasters might be part of this.

The young people and parents in Manchester suggested running local competitions in schools and youth clubs to support awareness-raising around Apprenticeships. This could also be a useful exercise that may reveal more about what young people are looking for in an Apprenticeship.

## RAISING THE STATUS OF APPRENTICESHIPS

Closely linked to branding is the need for a shift in culture around the value of Apprenticeships in general.

It will be important to ensure a consistent level of quality in each regional area through standardised assessments, and the availability of mentoring programmes, for example. At the time of writing, the consultation of the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards in England (SASE) is open for responses, and will inform the development of a new 'blueprint' for Apprenticeships, due to be published in August 2009.

## BUILDING A STRONGER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

The success of an Apprenticeship relies on effective collaboration between several different stakeholder groups: employers, young people, colleges/training providers, schools, IAG services and the government (via the NAS). The Pathfinder can play an important role in mapping the key stakeholders, identifying the weakest links and investigating the most effective ways to improve communication and coordination. This will be an important step in identifying areas of focus for the new NAS.

Two potential relationships to focus on were identified by the respondents:

- **School involvement** prior to starting an Apprenticeship. More young people would apply for Apprenticeships if schools and Connexions offered a more rounded, thorough representation of these opportunities.
- **College/training provider support** during Apprenticeships. Employers often felt unsupported in providing training and were concerned about the relevancy/quality of the courses provided off-the-job. In turn, young people were least positive about this element of Apprenticeships.

The Pathfinder should ensure that schools, training providers/colleges and Connexions are well-informed about Apprenticeships and the entitlement, the format and structure, entry standards, outcomes and the benefits of the Apprenticeships route for young people and the local workforce as a whole.

## MONITORING AND RECONCILING SUPPLY AND DEMAND

During the period when the research was conducted, there was still a certain level of uncertainty as to whether efforts needed to be focused on encouraging more young people to apply or on encouraging more employers to take on apprentices. Since then, as the effects of the economic downturn have become apparent, it is clear that attention must be focused on stimulating the provision of employer places. Further work is also needed

in relation to *reconciling* supply and demand across the local authority areas. The Pathfinder can monitor both so as to prepare the NAS and other stakeholders as best as possible.

## INCREASING SUPPLY

The Pathfinder could promote the business rationale for employers, particularly in the current economic climate. Although employers seemed to recognise the social and economic benefits that Apprenticeships bring to wider society, employers were most interested in what the benefits would be to their business.

Employer participation in Apprenticeships should be rendered as easy as possible by finding ways to reduce red tape, keeping employers well-informed and supported, and developing confidence in the relevance and flexibility of college/training provider provision. This is a key function of the new NAS.

## INCREASING DEMAND

In addition to branding and effective advertising, the Pathfinder could investigate the feasibility of the following suggestions raised by young people:

- Building understanding of the existing range of Apprenticeship frameworks and seeking expansion in occupations linked to local labour markets
- Flexible working hours to cater for young parents (and others with caring responsibilities)
- Raising awareness of the wage associated with employed status, as 'financial incentives' for young people considering Apprenticeships.

## SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN APPRENTICESHIPS

Parents, young people and employers all rated mentoring highly, though employers were concerned about cost and would look for additional funding.

The Pathfinder should play a key role in monitoring the extent to which the entitlement to an Apprenticeship is effective and accessible for *all* young people and in developing the appropriate support systems for diverse groups.

Areas to research and develop further include:

- effective and targeted advertising in a diverse range of environments, for example in schools, community centres, youth clubs, local cafes, local newspapers and bus stops, targeted workshops or open days in schools and community centres
- how to work most effectively with schools and Connexions to increase young people's self confidence and to navigate their options for learning and work
- the format of a strong mentoring and support system for this cohort.



## TAKING IT FORWARD

**THE APPRENTICESHIP PATHFINDER STRAND OF THE LOCAL WELLBEING PROJECT HAS NOW MOVED INTO ITS OPERATIONAL STAGE, AND WORK IS UNDERWAY IN THE THREE LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS, DEVELOPING ACTION PLANS AND PATHFINDER TEAMS**

The views of young people, parents and employers reported here will aid the design of the Pathfinders and should inform further policy developments and responses to consultations.

Over the next six months the Apprenticeship Pathfinder Project will:

- establish in each area a local authority-led pathfinder team including local NAS representatives and others to develop a local action plan including:
  - a) mapping key local players, roles, contributions and relationships
  - b) analysing local labour and training markets, so any gaps in supply or demand of relevant Apprenticeship places can be identified
  - c) gearing-up schools and Connexions to understand the entitlement offer, the benefits of the Apprenticeship route, and local opportunities and prospects.
- develop a research framework covering the processes for monitoring Pathfinder activity, and including an appropriate approach to tracking the wellbeing of apprentices and any wider community impacts.
- develop an overall approach to engaging young people in Apprenticeships who may not have considered this route previously, and identify delivery mechanisms in each area to be included in the local action plan.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

This research took place during spring 2008.

#### FOCUS GROUPS WITH PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The parents and young people in each local authority area were interviewed in focus groups of between 4 and 12 people. They were asked to explore the following areas:

- Their perceptions of Apprenticeships in general
- What would be needed to make an Apprenticeship an attractive and realistic choice
- What types of Apprenticeships would be attractive to girls, compared to those for boys
- How young people could be reached in any future marketing of Apprenticeships.

#### EMPLOYER INTERVIEWS

Employers were invited to participate in telephone interviews lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes each.

The interviews were designed to mirror the parents' and young people's focus groups and examined the following areas:

- Employer perceptions of Apprenticeships



- The challenges and obstacles employers have experienced when they have taken on, or made inquiries into taking on, apprentices
- The type of support that employers would need and how it could best be provided

## RECRUITMENT AND DIVERSITY

### PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people and parents were recruited for the focus groups with the help of local authority youth services and local community youth groups. Separate groups of young women and black and minority ethnic (BME) groups were interviewed in order to explore any particular employment and training issues facing these groups and to see whether their attitudes and perceptions were markedly different to those of other young people and parents.

The tables below show a breakdown of the respondents by gender, ethnicity and education.

**TABLE 1: ALL FOCUS GROUPS: MALE AND FEMALE BREAKDOWN**

Groups	Male	Female	Total
Young People	22	18	40
Parents	3	28	31

**TABLE 2: ALL FOCUS GROUPS: GEOGRAPHICAL BREAKDOWN**

Groups	South Tyneside	Manchester	Hertfordshire	Total
Young People	24	12	4	40
Parents	19	12	0	31

**TABLE 3: ALL FOCUS GROUPS: ETHNIC BREAKDOWN**

Groups	White	BME	Total
Young People	37	3	40
Parents	22	9	31

**TABLE 4: YOUNG PEOPLE FOCUS GROUPS: EDUCATION BREAKDOWN**

Groups	Apprenticeship	(Not in education, employment or training) NEET	At college	Total
South Tyneside	12	12	0	24
Manchester	0	6	6	12
Hertfordshire	2	0	2	4

### EMPLOYERS

Employers of varying sizes and sectors were recruited through links with the Pathfinder authorities, maintaining a balance between different services, local and national organisations, and small and large organisations. Employers with different levels of experience with apprentices were selected, including employers who had apprentices at that time, employers who had had apprentices in the past, and employers who had never taken on apprentices.

## EMPLOYERS INTERVIEWED

### HERTFORDSHIRE

Employer	Size	Sector	Local/National
Baker Watkins	Small (16 employees)	Financial Service: Chartered Accountants	Local
Bromwall Ltd	Small (12 employees)	Financial service: Insurance Brokers	Local
CAMS Fire and Security PLC	Small-Medium (41 employees looking to double its size)	Manufacturing & Retail: Security systems provider	Local
Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce	Small (21 employees)	Service	Local
John Lewis (distribution)	Large	Retail & Distribution	National
Ridgmond Training	Medium (70+ employees)	Service: Training Provider	Local: 3 locations
Shanoc Electrical Systems	Small (30+ employees)	Manufacturing	Local
Stevenage Borough Council	Medium-Large (620 employees)	Service: Local Government	Local
Stevenage Sheet Metal Co.	Small (37 employees)	Manufacturing	Local

### MANCHESTER

Employer	Size	Sector	Local/National
Asian Elders	Small (11 employees)	Service: Resource Centre for Elderly People	Local
British Gas	Large	Service: Energy Provider	National
Clockworks	Small (33 employees)	Service: Childcare Provider	Local
Holyrood Nursery	Medium (11 nurseries)	Service: Childcare Provider	Local
Lucas Fettes	Large (10 offices across UK)	Financial Service: Insurance Broker	National
Manchester City Council	Large (25000 employees)	Local Government	Local
Manchester Solutions	Large (1100 employees)	Service: Training Provider	Local
New Prospect Housing	Medium	Service: Housing Maintenance	Local
Thomas Storey	Medium (230 employees)	Manufacturing	Local
University of Manchester	Large	Service: IT provision	Local



### SOUTH TYNESIDE

Employer	Size	Sector	Local/National
Barkston Plastics	Small	Manufacturing	Local
Cell Pack Solutions	Small (15 employees)	Manufacturing	Local
Concept to Manufacture	Small (5 employees)	Manufacturing	Local
Cotton Brush Ltd	Small (35 employees)	Manufacturing	Local
Dickson's Pork Butchers	Small-Medium	Retail	Local: 20 outlets
Harlow Printing	Small (97 employees)	Manufacturing	Local
Kaytu Systems	Small (35 employees)	Manufacturing	Local
Sola Solve	Small (12 employees)	Manufacturing	Local
Solar & Wind Applications	Small	Manufacturing	National (3 bases)
South Tyneside Council	Large (3000 employees)	Local Government	Local



## APPENDIX 2: THE PATHFINDER LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS

### 1.5.1 HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire is located immediately to the north of London, and has a population of just under 1.1 million. Hertfordshire has a strong agricultural heritage with a history of market gardening and a malting and brewing industry based on local barley. A move away from manufacturing was offset by growth in the services, computers, financial and pharmaceutical sectors. The pattern has continued with high technology industries experiencing massive growth. Hertfordshire now has one of the strongest research and development clusters in the UK. Another thriving sector is the film industry. Hertfordshire also holds the headquarters of many large and well-known UK companies. Many jobs fall into the distribution and banking sectors, with the banking sector having grown the fastest of all the employment sectors since 2004. Hertfordshire is a relatively affluent county but has pockets of deprivation. At September 2008 the rate of unemployment in Hertfordshire was significantly lower, at 3.7 per cent, than the national average (5.3 per cent).

A survey of the directions of Year 11 school leavers in 2008 has shown that 86 per cent went on to continue with full-time education and only 1.37 per cent went into training. Just under 6 per cent were in paid or voluntary employment and 4 per cent were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

### 1.5.2 MANCHESTER

The Greater Manchester Urban Area has a population of more than 2 million. It is the UK's third largest conurbation. The City of Manchester lies at the centre of the wider Greater Manchester Urban Area, with a population of 500,000. Manchester is famous for being in the vanguard of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century. Across the span of the twentieth and into the twenty-first, however, much of its employment has shifted into

the service sector. According to the 2001 Census, Manchester reported the second lowest proportion of its population in employment of any area in the UK, although a primary reason for this is the high proportion of the population who are students.

As of 2007, its economy is the fastest growing in the UK. Major activities include: financial and professional services, creative, cultural and media, manufacturing and communications. Manchester is ranked the fourth biggest retail area in the UK by sales. 88.7 per cent of workplaces are small organizations of up to 24 employees, which is lower than the national average of 92.7 per cent. Small to medium employers (SMEs) and large organizations make up a greater proportion of the total number of employers in the Manchester area than is the case nationally (10.6 per cent in Manchester, 0.6 per cent nationally).

Schools results are improving but are behind the national average, and this impacts on the ways in which young people can access both higher education and the workplace. In 2008, 82.1 per cent of Year 11 school leavers went on to full-time education, 2.6 per cent went into full-time training, and 2.3 per cent into employment with training (including Apprenticeships). 2.4 per cent took up employment without training and 6.7 per cent went on to be not in employment, education or training (NEET). Although unemployment is significantly higher in the City of Manchester as compared to the national rate (Nomis – part of the Office for National Statistics - figures were 9.2 per cent in Manchester and 5.3 per cent nationally at September 2008), Manchester is currently bucking the national trend of increasing youth unemployment, with a 4.8 per cent reduction to November 2008.

### 1.5.3 SOUTH TYNESIDE

South Tyneside is England's smallest metropolitan borough with a population of just over 150,000. There are three main towns: South Shields, Jarrow and Hebburn, together with three larger villages (Cleadon, Whitburn and The Boldons). There is higher unemployment here than the national average: the latest figures published by the council rate unemployment at 7.1 per cent. This

is largely due to a decline in industry. The main economic and employment sectors are retail, catering, health and social work, and manufacturing. In the manufacturing sector there is a shift underway from traditional heavy engineering, towards smaller-scale and often technologically advanced manufacturing activities, such as food processing. The council is the top employer in the region. Tourism is an important and growing industry.

75.25 per cent of Year 11 school leavers in 2008 continued with full-time education and 9.31 per cent went into training. 5.5 per cent of young people entered into paid or voluntary employment, and 8.8 per cent were NEET.



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We would like to thank SHM, who produced *Employer perceptions of Apprenticeships* and Denise Goodall who undertook the *Young peoples' and parents' perceptions of Apprenticeships* research.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> *World Class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All*, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, January 2008

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

# THE LOCAL WELLBEING PROJECT

The Local Wellbeing Project is a unique initiative launched in 2006 which aims to test out practical ways of improving both individual and community wellbeing and resilience in three very different areas of the UK - Hertfordshire, Manchester and South Tyneside.

The project brings together the three local authorities with the Young Foundation, one of the world's leading centres for practical social innovation; Professor Lord Richard Layard from the LSE's Centre for Economic Performance, who has led much of the debate about promoting happiness in public policy, and the Improvement and Development Agency, leaders in local government innovation. The project is also backed by the key government departments.

## MORE INFORMATION

Marcia Brophy, Wellbeing Programme Leader  
at the Young Foundation:

[marcia.brophy@youngfoundation.org](mailto:marcia.brophy@youngfoundation.org) or phone 020 8709 9248

Bethia McNeil, Project Manager: Apprenticeships,  
Local Wellbeing Project at the Young Foundation.

[bethia.mcneil@youngfoundation.org](mailto:bethia.mcneil@youngfoundation.org) or phone 020 8908 6263

### Project Partners:



South Tyneside Council

### Project funder:



### Core Partners:

