

NICE HOUSE, GOOD JOB

Improving Educational Attainment in West Norfolk

Nina Mguni and Mhairi Aylott / June 2013



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About The Young Foundation

We are The Young Foundation and we are determined to make positive social change happen. We pioneered the field of social innovation with The Open University, UpRising and Studio Schools. We work closely with individuals, communities and partners building relationships to ensure that our thinking does something, our actions matter and the changes we make together will continue to grow.

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The West Norfolk Partnership brings together local public and voluntary sector organisations to work to improve the quality of life in West Norfolk. One of the core priorities for the partnership is raising the skills, aspirations and attainment of young people. Performance amongst West Norfolk children (aged 5 to 18) in key assessments is, on average, below that of Norfolk as a whole and England. It is imperative that we address this if our young people are to maximise their potential and to play their part in the growth and future prosperity of the borough. It is our aim that children will leave school equipped with the skills they need to succeed in the next stage of their lives – be that employment, an apprenticeship, training or further study. To this end, the West Norfolk Partnership has brought together all those involved in driving up the aspirations and attainment of young people to take a co-ordinated and cohesive approach to raising achievement in West Norfolk.



Related work

Being seen, being heard: This provided research into the emotional wellbeing of children and young people for NHS Buckinghamshire (e.g. links with physical health, career, academic achievement, and future mental health etc). All of these studies drew upon secondary research, literature reviews and stakeholder interviews.

Bounce Back! is a pioneering social and emotional learning programme to support teachers to develop resilience skills in young people. The programme supports teachers and teaching staff to strengthen the pupils' and teachers' wellbeing and particularly their resilience to bounce back from adversity, rise up to challenges and seize opportunities. The Young Foundation provides support to schools to develop a whole school approach and one-day training workshop for head teachers, teachers and teaching staff.

Grit - The skills for success and how they are grown is a thorough examination of evidence from around the world on resilience skills and the link to improved life chances. This publication argues that Britain's schools need to prioritise grit and self-discipline. Drawing on evidence from around the world it shows that these contribute as much to success at work and in life as IQ and academic qualifications.

The Young Foundation is a member of the consortium appointed to manage **Realising Ambition**, a £25 million Big Lottery Fund supported programme investing in projects which have been proven to help children and young people to fulfil their potential, and avoid pathways into crime. Twenty-one organisations based across the UK have received grant funding and a support package to replicate a diverse range of 25 proven interventions, supporting children and young people across school, home and community settings.

The Young Foundation was commissioned by the then Department of Education and Children's Services in the Government of South Australia to explore how best to develop young people's skills for life and work in the school setting. The subsequent research **Skills for Life and Work** explored local, national and global evidence and promising practice, and proposed a framework of 'conditions' necessary for embedding programmes to develop young people's social and emotional skills.

Author biographies

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INTRODUCTION

The Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk is leading an ambitious programme of action which aims to change the landscape of youth transitions in West Norfolk. The council want to equip their young people to leave school with the skills to experience successful transitions to the next stage of their lives – be it employment, an apprenticeship or further study. Currently, academic performance of young people falls behind all other neighbouring districts, as well as national benchmarks, and young people are not fulfilling their academic potential.

This programme will target all young people in West Norfolk, and the council is already working with the ten high schools in West Norfolk, alongside the College of West Anglia, a number of primary schools in the more deprived areas and representatives from Norfolk County Council, to achieve its vision.

The two year programme is working with a range of stakeholders, across five work-streams. These are:

- Leadership
- Curriculum
- Aspirations and options
- Achievement for all
- Business engagement

As part of this work, the Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk approached The Young Foundation to explore how they may add value to the programme. This research invited young people to share their experiences of growing up in Kings Lynn to inform how future support for pupils is developed.

Research method

In order to capture insights from the pupils we used two qualitative research methods: focus groups and ethnography. Focus groups provided a platform for a group of pupils to identify and discuss their experiences. The challenge was to ensure that all participants felt comfortable speaking in front of peers, and were able to talk about difficult and sometimes sensitive issues.

The focus groups enabled us to talk to pupils about their experiences and probe their responses. We ran eight in depth focus groups across four schools in West Norfolk with a cross section of participants – taking into account age, gender, academic ability, and both urban and rural locations. Each focus group had approximately 12 participants and explored the following considerations:

- Key barriers in the key transition stages: primary school to secondary school; Year 9 and choosing options; and life after secondary school;
- Differences in experiences between pupils in urban and rural areas;

- What package of support young people would like to ensure a smooth transition from primary school to secondary school, and from higher education to employment, further education or training; and
- How aspirations are formed.

Following on from the focus groups, we completed eight ethnographies with young people across West Norfolk. Ethnography allows for in-depth research, not only asking about how users experience life but also observing their daily lives. We spent time with the young people at school, in the local neighbourhood and at home where appropriate. This is a useful way to access lesser heard voices and can shine a light on the experiences and perspectives of the young people who participated in this research in West Norfolk. These ethnographies gave us an opportunity to explore the issues raised in the focus groups.

The ethnographic research required additional consent from pupils and their parents, with the additional request to accompany the pupil home and meet their parents. For some young people this proved to be difficult. In some instances, parents were not available to participate due to work commitments, whilst in other cases pupils were not comfortable with us talking to their parents or their parent was not available due to ill health.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- The research findings: transition
- The research findings: aspiration
- What works?
- Conclusion
- Annex which includes eight ethnographic profiles and aspirations by the children and young people.

Key findings and recommendations

The scope of this report was to understand the views and experiences of young people who live and study in West Norfolk. Specifically we aimed to identify the challenges and barriers to attainment encountered by young people as they navigate their way through school and identify factors that influence aspiration. The main findings and recommendations are:

Key findings

- Transition is an unsettling time for pupils. Transition from primary to secondary schools, selection of options at Year 9 and Year 10/11 can present challenging opportunities, which can cause anxiety amongst pupils.
- Pupils rely on a number of sources of information, as well as misinformation, to help them navigate their way through critical transition points. It can be difficult for pupils to evaluate sources of information, whether credible or less so (for instance accounts about levels of bullying in secondary school).
- There are few platforms or opportunities for pupils to talk through their concerns and discuss suitable coping strategies during these critical points.
- Pupils often rely on their peers, parents and social networks to access support when they feel anxious or unable to cope. Few of the pupils turn to their teachers or school resources for support.

- When asked about aspirations, the pupils selected an array of professions. The most popular professions (in order of popularity) were: architect, games designer, hairdresser and armed forces.
- Younger pupils tended to identify visible career aspirations, for instance singer or football player. Older pupils were less likely to aspire to these professions and less certain of their career goals. They also set more short-term aspirations.
- There were some gender differences in preferences – especially amongst younger students.
- Social networks, specifically parental networks, were crucial in informing decisions on aspirations and future goals of the young pupils – particularly younger pupils.

Recommendations

The recommendations set out in this report are reflect the following three themes:

- Start early, for instance in Year 6;
- Support young people at key transition points; and
- Involve school and the wider school community, specifically parents and families.

There are a range of activities, ideas and good practice examples that have been piloted and adopted (see ‘What works?’ section), which could be adapted to address the issues raised in this report. We recommend a collaborative approach between schools and the West Norfolk District Partnerships to identify, test and scale suitable interventions in West Norfolk.

Our findings point to the need for further research to explore the influence of careers advice delivered in schools at transition points (Year 11, 9 and 10/11), and the role of parental advice and guidance on aspiration and attainment.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Transition from Year 6 to Year 11

We invited pupils to comment on their experience in making the transition between key stages, from primary to secondary school, selecting GCSE options and from school to further education or employment. We set out the views and experiences of young people we spoke to below.

Looking forward: from primary to secondary school

When asked about their school experience, pupils were generally positive. Pupils referred to particular subjects they enjoyed. For instance maths and literacy were popular subjects, as well as subjects like home economics. In addition pupils could often identify particular teachers who had contributed in a positive way to their experiences.

The Year 6 pupils we spoke to were excited about the prospect of moving to secondary school. Many of the pupils were looking forward to making new friends, learning new subjects and meeting new teachers. Year 6 pupils talked about having “more responsibility” – feeling older, carrying their own books to school and making their own way between lessons.

However, this also gave rise to anxieties about getting lost in the new school and concerns about how well they will cope with the work. The pupils predicted that the work was going to become difficult, teachers would be stricter, as well as the there being more homework.

Year 6 pupils were also worried about making new friends and leaving old friends behind, particularly those going on to a different school. Younger pupils were concerned about getting lost and getting around the school in between lessons.

Pupils also talked about their fear of older pupils at the school. Many feared being bullied and getting picked on. When we spoke to pupils who were now at secondary school, their worries also echoed those of the younger pupils.

In terms of support networks, Year 6 pupils mainly confide in friends. As one Year 6 pupil said, “they make you laugh when you are upset and they keep a secret”. An equal number of pupils stated that they confide in their pets. A large proportion of pupils also confide in their parents and teachers. But 10 pupils stated they have no-one to confide in when they have a concern or anxiety.

Box 1: Who do you turn to for support?

Talking to pets

“I talk to my rabbit. He is so understanding and he can't tell anyone and he won't answer back and he listens.”

“You can use words you wouldn't normally use.”

“My lizard won't tell my secrets.”

Talking to parents and siblings

“Maybe I would go to my parents if it is a school issue. If it was bullying I wouldn’t tell my mum. It is embarrassing.”

“No, I wouldn’t tell my mum. They would come to the school and embarrass you.”

“Yes, I would tell my family. They would always ask what is wrong. I tell my parents. If not I keep worrying and this helps to get rid of the bad feeling. The teacher might think you are lying but your parents believe you.”

“I have a younger brother and talking to him makes it worse.”

“I have a younger sister and she doesn’t understand.”

“Yes, I have an older sister who is 14. She sorts things out.”

Talking to the teacher

“I’ll go to a teacher if I’m hurt, I have fallen out with a friend or had an argument, or bullied.”

“If it’s something to do with my family it could be embarrassing.”

“They can answer questions about high school.”

Adjusting and fitting in: The new arrivals

The Year 7 pupils we spoke to had been in the school for one term. They were invited to reflect on how their new school differed from their primary school and how they had changed.

Pupils felt that they were generally more independent, that the new school made them behave more responsibly and that they had to be organised. They welcomed the variety of subjects, teachers and resources now available to them. In consequence, some of the pupils thought they had become more organised, and had developed a better ‘attitude’.

Box 2: Adapting to Year 7

“My attitude is better. I used to be quiet and think school was boring. Now school is interesting.”

“I am better at behaving. I am not in trouble a lot.”

“My work is better set out and neater.”

For some pupils, secondary school was an opportunity to try new subjects and develop new interests. For instance, some pupils felt that they were more creative or pursued a variety of interests in sports.

When asked about their top worries, the main concerns were exam pressures, the challenge of maintaining levels and generally harder work. In addition, pupils worried about losing their homework and their timetable.

“I feel nervous. How am I going to do [in the exams]. The homework is harder.”

“I worry about exams, losing my timetable, GCSEs and A-levels.”

Meeting new people presented both a challenge and an opportunity. This is one of the things pupils liked most about new school but for some this was daunting. As one pupil stated, “there are more Year 7s in this year than pupils in my whole primary school”. Making and keeping friends was clearly difficult for a number of young people. However, some pupils commented on their own increased confidence and generally being more talkative.

Also, for a proportion of pupils, either the fear or the reality of being bullied was a concern. For some pupils in one school, the bullying appeared to stem from the older age groups.

Box 3: Bullying

“Getting into arguments with year 9 boys... I try to ignore but they annoy me. Stand in front of you, can't walk past. Feel annoyed – this happens to 8/9 of the group.”

“Walk past people and they laugh at you for no reason.”

“People call you names for no reason.”

“I am scared what parents will think of bullying. There are lots of headlines in the papers of people who commit suicide. Worry that parents will worry if they know of bullying.”

“People ring people on unknown numbers and receive bad messages.”

“Random people are mean – if tell teachers get called a snitch.”

Friends and parents formed the main support network. However, some pupils thought confiding in others was futile. For instance, as one pupil noted, “The majority of pupils go through this; you just have to get over it.”

Box 4: About R

R was worried that it would be rough in the new school and reflected on the stories she had heard of bullying. Asked what had helped her, she talked about the taster week she had attended. “We had a taster week with other year 7s. We had time to get used to the older children. We had a lesson in Science and English, which was a good experience. There was different equipment. It was better than I thought and I was relieved that it wasn't too rough.”

R was asked to comment on who she turns to when she is worried about something. Her mum and dad are often quick to pick up on her concerns and she confides in them. She also talks to her friends at school. “When I am at school, I talk to friends if I am worried. I talk to them if someone has been horrible and I got hurt inside... I don't talk to teachers much. It doesn't feel right. I haven't known them that long.”

At a crossroads: choosing options in Year 9

Year 9 pupils were invited to comment on their experiences of secondary school, reflecting back on how they have changed since starting secondary school. Their comments were in line with the comments from the Year 7 pupils. They perceived that they had become more confident and had matured, but some felt that they worked harder and had a wider network of friends.

Pupils were asked to reflect on their concerns. For those in Year 9, a number of their concerns related to their choice of options. For some this was easy. For others this was a confusing time. Some pupils confided in parents or older siblings, with few pupils opting to talk to a teacher. Pupils recalled teachers telling them that they needed to ‘get the right grades’. They did not often approach teachers for advice on their options.

Pupils are primarily concerned with exam pressure and achieving the required grades at GCSE level. One pupil stated that he was worried about exams, “we didn’t know we had them. I’m still trying to decide what my core subjects are. I’ve already decided to do PE.” Some pupils felt ill-equipped to make decisions about the options for further studies. The statements from the focus group below reflect some of the perceptions of the young people.

Box 5: Comments from Year 9

“I talk to my mum about options and tests and getting the right help.”

“I talk options through with my brother.”

“The school don’t do anything to support you, we don’t get told.”

“The year above us tell what is happening.”

“I am worried about not choosing the right subjects needed to do what I want to do.”

“Getting the right job depends on your school life and what you get, but I don’t talk to anyone about it.”

At this age, there was less reliance on teachers and parents for support when worried. Pupils appeared uncertain about whether teachers would share information with parents and therefore many pupils said they hesitated to confide in teachers.

Box 6: Year 9 pupils

“You are on your own; you can’t turn back the clock. There are fewer options; you don’t always know what you want to do.”

“I’m not sure what I want to do, I don’t know what I want to do.”

“I can’t go back and change, I need to pick the right ones.”

Talking to parents

“My mum and dad think I’m in a higher set than I am, I don’t want them to come in and start to annoy teachers. They will try to get me to do more at home. I can speak to friends, but my dad will flip. I’ve got used to being in the low level.”

“My school life is like a secret life.”

Talking to teachers

“The teachers will call parents about levels and attendance.”

“The teacher doesn’t like me.”

“If you know the teacher’s trustworthy you can talk to them.”

“Talk to [a teacher] if you have had the teacher quite a while.”

“I haven’t gained the confidence to go up to a teacher and tell them – they might tell my parents.”

“I talk to my mum and my brother – prefer to tell my family. My brother is in college.”

Box 7: About L and C

L will start her GCSEs this year. She comments that choosing her options was “easy for me.” An evening session was held with form teachers. During this session she was able to visit different teacher’s classrooms to talk to them about what their subject would be like at GCSE level – “the teachers also told me about what I could do with their subject in the future. It was really useful to talk to them.”

She also talked to her mum about choosing her subjects and took her advice, “my mum wanted me to do a language, and she thinks it’s good for going to university.” L also attended a local careers day hosted within her school where “nurses, local businesses and people from the radio” all came along and spoke to the young people about their jobs, what they do on a day to day basis and what they studied to get into their job. This also helped L pick her subjects.

C picked subjects for GCSE that he liked and that he was good at. He did want to do cooking, but his dad didn’t think it was “practical” to do this. Reflecting back on his choice C comments, “I don’t like to think about it to be honest. I just chose some subjects. Maybe looking back I would have done business. Art is fun to do, but I’m not going to be an artist. Business might have been more useful.” Asked if C spoke to his teachers about his choice, he responded that the teachers were only interested in whether you were picking their subject, “how much you like the lesson, that’s all it comes down to.”

GCSEs and beyond

Unsurprisingly, pupils in secondary school expressed worries about GCSE exams and the results. This anxiety was evident in some of the Year 7 pupils and became more evident for older pupils. Some pupils in Year 9 had started to take their GCSEs and were worried about their pending exams. One Year 9 pupil stated, “I am behind in my tests. I crumble. I feel like you forget it all at the end of the term. I just forget the answers.” One Year 9 pupil had started to identify the grades that they needed to support their career aspirations.

Box 8: Year 11 pupils

“The pressure also comes from teachers who want A*-C to boost their own grade records.”

“I feel pressure from my parents – want you to do well, bit of pressure is ok, but not too much.”

“I need to ride it out and see what happens. Really worried but I don’t think about it.”

Year 10 and 11 pupils linked exam success to their overall life chances. For many pupils in this age category, a positive future was couched in terms of greater independence – being

able to live on their own, having your “own space”, “own life” and “making your own decisions”. The consequence of failing GCSEs is to place this independence in jeopardy. The pupils perceived certain job choices, for example cleaner, bin man, work in fast food, dependency on parents and no financial independence as the inevitable outcome of poor exam results.

Older pupils were aware of the economic climate and the impact this could have on job prospects. When predicting life at 17, one Year 9 pupil said, “It will be an issue to find jobs. There are not many out there.” Five of his peers agreed with this statement.

Box 9: Year 10 and 11 pupils

“Your life is determined by the results.”

“The hard economic climate. The worse grades you get, the harder it is to look for a job.”

“You lose your dreams. You are trapped in a life that you don't want.”

ASPIRATION

An aspiration refers to the career and educational ambitions of young people.¹ It can mean different things to different people and can change throughout a person's life.² Evidence suggests that, despite the current climate, most young people hope to go to university and aspire to professional and managerial roles; there was little evidence of defeatism or of a desire to not work.³ However these aspirations do not necessarily lead to a better outcome. The gap between aspirations and attainment is particularly evident for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds; some minority ethnic groups and females.⁴ The specific factors affecting aspirations will be analysed separately below. In reality, these factors affect and influence each other. We look at this question below through four lenses:

- Personal characteristics
- Social networks
- Institutions: schools
- Environment: urban versus rural

Personal characteristics

Gender

Research suggests that, generally female pupils have higher aspirations than males.⁵ There is also a tendency for parents to have higher aspirations for their daughters than their sons,⁶ a reversal of the norm amongst previous generations. However, while females report higher aspirations, there is a larger gap between these and career achievement.⁷ The low aspiration of white working class males is a growing concern.

During the focus groups there were generally gendered preferences. For instance, female pupils stated a preference for singing, hair and beauty and nursing, whilst male pupils expressed a preference for the armed forces and games design. Also, there were only a few professions which appealed to both genders, namely architecture and the police. Manual roles drew support from male pupils and roles in the caring professions drew support from females. These gender preferences appear to be a feature across the age groups.

Table 1: Career aspirations by gender from the focus groups

	Girls	Boys	Total
Architect	2	5	7
Games designer		5	5
Hairdresser	5		5
Armed forces		4	4
Singer	4		4
Artist/ Photography	3		3
Childcare/ Nurse	3		3
Electrician		3	3
Footballer		3	3
Police	1	1	2

Psychologist	2		2
Accountant		1	1
Archaeologist		1	1
Builder		1	1
Business person		1	1
Comics illustrator		1	1
DJ	1		1
Engineer		1	1
Farmer		1	1
Forensic Scientist	1		1
Model	1		1
Pilot		1	1
Social worker	1		1
Solicitor		1	1
Stuntman		1	1
Teacher	1		1
Vet		1	1
Zookeeper		1	1

Age

By the age of 11 or 12, most children can express educational and occupational aspirations.⁸ These aspirations tend to be unrealistic, with many pupils stating aspirations to be a sportsperson or celebrity. But by age 15, aspirations are not primarily unrealistic.⁹ As children mature, their aspirations tend to decline, particularly for those facing multiple barriers. One study of the aspirations of disadvantaged young people found that between 14 and 17, pupils were optimistic about getting good, well-paid jobs. However, by the time they reached the 18 to 21 age bracket, their aspirations had dissipated.¹⁰

In our focus groups, the younger age groups (Year 6 and 7) tended to choose visible and aspirational vocations, such as a football player, singer or cinema owner. There were also some young people within this group that identified careers such as child psychologist, solicitor or architect.

Pupils seemed less certain of their career choices as they got older. Their goals became more short term and less aspirational. A number of pupils in the Year 11 age group stated that they wanted to go to college or university but were unable to articulate an aspiration beyond this limited timescale. In some instances, Year 11 pupils were still not certain of what subjects they were interested in studying when they left school.

Table 2: Career aspirations of the different year groups

	Year 6	Year 7	Year 9	Year 11
Professional class	Archaeologist Architect Businessman Pilot Psychologist Solicitor	Architect Solicitor Vet	Architect Accountant Engineer Forensic scientist Psychologist	Architect Solicitor
Key worker roles			Nurse Police officer Social worker	Childcare Police officer Teacher
Sports	Footballer	Footballer Horse rider	Football agent Referee	
Armed forces	Royal Air Force	Royal Marine		Marines Army
Manual labour	Builder Electrician Farmer			
Hair and beauty	Beautician	Hairdresser	Hairdresser	Hair and beauty
Creative industries	Film maker Model Singer	Actress Artist Sound engineer Stuntman	Artist Comic illustrator DJ Photographer	Games designer Web designer
Other	Cinema owner Life guard Zookeeper	Dog groomer		

Academic attainment

Other personal characteristics which influence career aspirations, which were not explored in this research, include academic attainment and ethnicity. There is a correlation between level of academic ability and aspirations. This effect is called the ‘academic self-concept.’¹¹ Gifted students tend to have higher aspirations than their peers, which then becomes self-reinforcing.¹² However, it is more complicated than mere ability. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who perform well academically are less likely than peers of higher socio-economic status to believe that they can be successful in education and in terms of their career.¹³

Social networks

Parental influence is the biggest factor influencing the aspirations of young people. Young people's aspirations are correlated with their parents' qualifications.¹⁴ There is also a relationship between the aspirations of young people and the aspirations their parents have for them.¹⁵ Despite young people claiming that parents had not influenced their plans, the ambitions of young people often match the aspirations their parents had for them.¹⁶ Young people who discussed their aspirations with their parents also had a clearer idea of the path needed to fulfil their aspirations.¹⁷ Studies suggest that parents' aspirations directly affect cognitive achievements. The single most important parental value or behavioural element in children's Key Stage 2 scores was maternal aspirations, taking into account the effects of family background and previous attainment.

When questioned, some pupils in West Norfolk related their career aspirations either to a parent's current career or an older adult within their family network, for instance a family friend or relative.

Box 10: Learning from others

"My mum's cousin is a beautician and she said it is a good job. It is busy but I need to go to college and get good grades."

"My uncle is self-employed."

"My dad builds houses and is self-employed."

"My parent's friend is a photographer."

During the focus groups, we did not probe on social status, of the pupils or their families. However, social status is clearly a determinant of aspiration. Understanding this link is useful given that pupils often arrive at career aspirations from their parents and their parent's network. Research suggests a gap between aspiration and an understanding of how to fulfil career goals among young people from disadvantaged areas.¹⁸ This, combined with a lack of job availability in these areas and limited work experience, add to this disconnect. There is a noticeable gap between educational aspirations and academic achievement for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.¹⁹

Some studies have suggested that both young people from socially disadvantaged background and their parents tend to have lower aspirations than their more advantaged peers, termed the 'Poverty of aspiration thesis.'²⁰ However, this view is not without its opponents. Some commentators point to the high aspiration of pupils at the beginning of secondary school, irrespective of social class.²¹ This points to other influencing factors for lower aspirations, which impact on pupils at a later date.

Friendship networks are also powerful transmitters of information and values, influencing our beliefs, decisions and behaviours.²² Evidence suggests that this extends to aspirations as well. One study found that "young people from low-income families with friends from high-income families have higher educational expectations and aspirations than similar young people from low-income families without such friends."²³

Pupils who participated in the ethnography were asked to comment on their peers' career choices. These choices often mimicked their own choices, suggesting that peer clusters form and share aspirations within them.

Box 11: M, Year 6

M wants to be a child psychologist when she is older. She talks about having problems with her dad when she was younger and that “she doesn’t want people to be harassed.” She is motivated by her circumstances and experiences to help people, like she was helped. She talks about her older cousins; one who wants to be a vet, another who wants to be a nurse. “We all want to help people.” She speaks to her mum about this idea and she likes the idea and is supportive. M doesn’t talk to her teachers about it, “They don’t ask, I wouldn’t mind them asking, but they don’t.”

School

The effect of school services on aspirations and achievement is mediated by both the community and young people’s parents. For example St. Clair et. al. found that in areas where schools are strongly rooted in the community, factors affecting aspiration emerged at school level, whereas the more economically diverse schools show these patterns to a lesser extent. In addition, schools can play a part in sustaining and realising ambitions.²⁴

At both the primary and secondary school level, pupils from one school identified more aspirational careers than the other school. This may be due to a number of the influencing factors described above, namely the socio-economic characteristics of a catchment area or the cluster effect of their networks – both peers and parents. However, it may also reflect the different approaches to career advice and information provided in each of the schools.

It was noticeable that pupils did not discuss their career choices with teachers in the first instance and were more likely to rely on peers or family members to inform their career aspirations. In a few instances, pupils from specific schools recalled lessons which invited them to share their career choices. In one school, a Year 11 pupil stated that he had opted to be a Police Officer having met one at a careers fair and taster days. These sessions are an opportunity to talk to people in various professions and find out the pathways to success and general information about the role.

However, this approach is not universal. In one school, a number of Year 11 pupils participating in the focus group did not appear to be informed of when they had to complete applications for college and what the immediate steps were beyond completing their exams in the summer. This group also had a number of young people who could not describe their career aspiration.

“When I was in primary school, we had circle time and the teacher would ask us what we want to be when we are older, how do you succeed in life, how do you have a good life and not have anything to worry about”.

In addition, generally, pupils do not discuss career options with teachers.

Urban versus rural

There are some advantages to living in rural areas. This is associated with greater affluence which is in turn linked to higher educational attainment²⁵. In addition, rural schools are more likely to have smaller class sizes²⁶. Whether this leads to lower attainment or not is debatable as both small and large schools in rural areas have been found to have lower attainment²⁷.

However, rural schools are more likely to have a smaller pool of teachers to draw from. They are also less likely to have provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs, and supplementary services such as family support workers, especially in sparsely populated areas.²⁸ In addition, in terms of shaping aspiration, there may be a narrower pool of role models who may have higher aspirations²⁹ and limited employment opportunities may impact on young people's aspirations.³⁰ Lastly, lower wages in rural areas may impact on young people's choice to participate in higher education.

An initial overview of the literature suggests that young people living and learning in rural areas have higher than average secondary school attainment.³¹ When factors like higher social position in rural areas are controlled, however the difference is negligible.³² In fact, certain pupils do worse in rural areas compared to urban.

There is little difference between the aspirations of urban and rural pupils, however, pupils in rural areas can be influenced and (sometimes) constrained by their environment.³³ Other facets that influence rural pupil's aspirations specifically include willingness or ability of parents to subsidise travel or to transport pupils to and from education, training or employment.

In terms of our research, pupils generally enjoy living in Norfolk. Some view West Norfolk as the place they will always live, stating friends and family as the reasons for staying. Others also enjoy the countryside and talk about the fields, dog walking and enjoying nature.

Younger pupils were generally split between staying in Norfolk, and generally within Kings Lynn, and those who wanted to venture further afield. Living in America was a particularly popular option. Otherwise, it was places that pupils had a connection to through relatives who lived abroad. For Year 7 pupils who wanted to move away from Kings Lynn, there was a preference for areas such as Newcastle, Liverpool and Cambridge. This preference is often linked to the nature of the job market.

Older pupils were more likely to articulate the link between career choice and where they would like to live. This is often linked to the nature of job or vocation they choose – for example becoming a DJ, working in fashion or being an architect. Staying close to friends and family and being close to the countryside was often the main reason for those that wanted to stay in Kings Lynn.

WHAT WORKS?

The scope of this report was to understand the views and experiences of young people who live and study in West Norfolk. Specifically, we aimed to identify the challenges and barriers to attainment encountered by young people as they navigate their way through the school system. In addition, we identified the ways in which young people form their aspirations.

The evidence suggests that there is not a well defined causal relationship between attitudes, aspiration, behaviours and educational attainment. This is largely due to the lack of quality evidence available.³⁴ Nonetheless, Goodman and Gregg find that there may be a link between attitudes, aspiration, behaviours and attainment. To this end, for the purpose of this report, when thinking about ‘what works?’, we looked at interventions which address aspiration and attitudes, with a view to addressing some of the barriers identified by the young people we spoke to.

Aspirations of the pupils, and the factors that influence aspiration, are complex. The young people in this report drew in information from a range of sources, which included parents, their social networks and the school.

A study by Goodman and Greg shows that young people’s expectations of higher education, formed by the age of 14, contribute to different levels of attainment between young people. What is also apparent is that there are clear points at which young people make decisions which support their aspirations, namely the point at which they choose their GCSE options and as they consider life after secondary school.

This suggests three considerations for interventions on aspirations:

- Start early, for instance in Year 6;
- Support young people at key transition points; and
- Involve school and the wider school community, specifically parents and families.

Table 3 below sets out potential interventions.

Table 3: Potential interventions to raise aspiration and attainment

Year	Activities
Year 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taster days: Taster days provide reassurance for pupils. They are an opportunity for pupils to ask questions, start to navigate their way through the school and demystify secondary school for pupils. The pupils are often left excited by the prospect of their new school. • Peer led and facilitated support groups: A minority of the pupils discussed participating in discussions about careers in Year 6. There is an opportunity for pupils to participate in structured and peer support groups to discuss some of the issues and queries they face and to address them. This also could be an opportunity to discuss and share career aspirations within a peer setting. • Walking to school project: see box 12 below

Year 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer support groups: as above • Develop an online blog: Young people relayed stories they had heard or anecdotes from their peers. This can often cause anxiety, particularly stories about bullying or whether they will form new friendship groups. An online blog presents an opportunity for pupils to record their first hand experiences of their first term at school, which will help reduce some of the anxieties.
Year 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual life journey mapping (see box 12) • Parent and teacher one to one sessions: The findings suggest that parents are instrumental in providing guidance to pupils and informing career aspirations. This is often done alongside school interventions. An approach which works with parents and pupils may ensure that pupils feel more supported and informed about the implications of choosing options at this transition point. This could be an opportunity to discuss the visual life mapping exercise (see above) and to map options onto career aspirations with parental involvement. • Mentoring: (see ‘<i>Big brother, little sister</i>’ example in Box 12)
Years 10 and 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring and support for pupils: for instance ‘<i>The Brilliant Club</i>’, ‘<i>Changing Mindset</i>’ or ‘<i>Future First</i>’ (see Box 12)

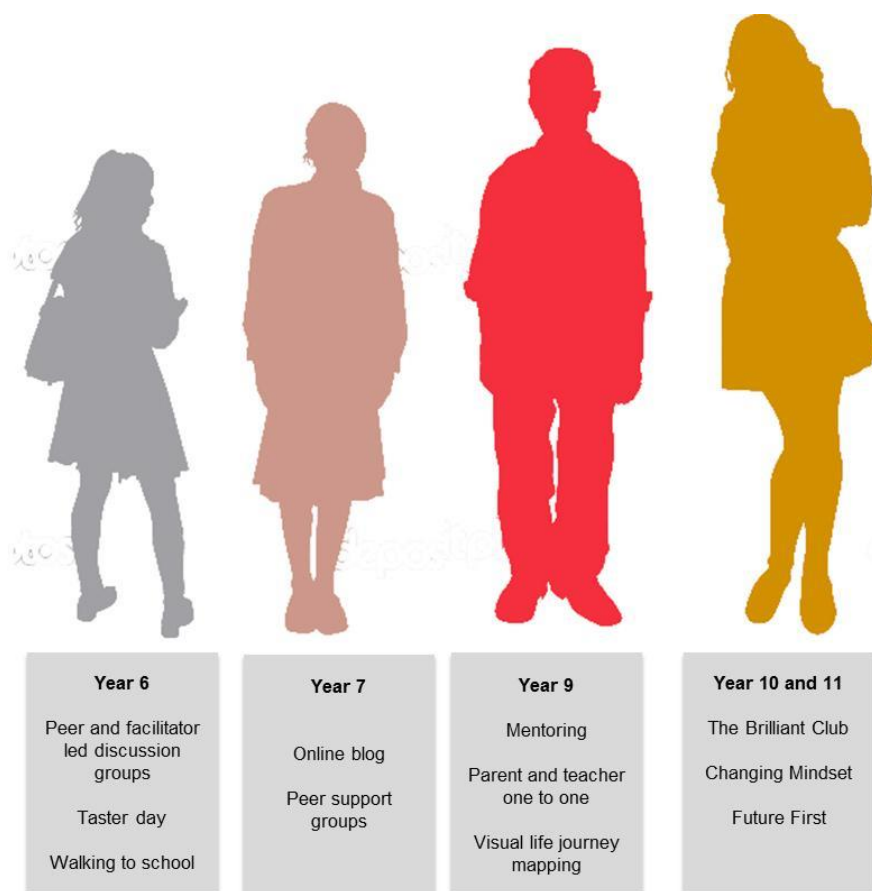


Figure 1: Activities to support transition from Year 6 to Year 11

Box 12: Ideas from elsewhere

Engaging parents

Walking to School: Thousands of parents and students in Merseyside walk to school and feel the benefits. Walking (and other exercise) leads to the release of the body's natural happy hormones, endorphins. Everyone who walks, no matter what your pace, should notice an improvement in mood.

Houston parent-child development centre project: This two-year US project targeted Mexican-American children in Houston. The intervention was multi-faceted and included home visits, family workshops and education-focused classes for parents.

Interventions in the school

Big brothers, big sisters: A national US mentoring programme delivered in schools. Pupils deemed 'at risk' were matched with volunteers for one to one mentoring. Volunteers receive training and meet once a week. The evaluation on impact in the first year shows improvement in overall academic performance, improved quality of class work and academic competence.

The Brilliant Club: The programme exists to widen access to top universities for bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds by utilising the largely untapped resource of PhD students. It recruits, trains and places PhD students in challenging schools serving low participation communities. These PhD students deliver university-style tutorials to groups of outstanding students, developing the skills, confidence and ambition needed to secure places at leading universities. It currently works with over 40 schools in London, Birmingham, Essex and Luton.

Bounce Back: Bounce Back! is a preventative whole-school social and emotional programme that has been developed to support schools and teachers in their efforts to promote positive mental health and wellbeing in their pupils and, in particular, to enable them to act resiliently when faced with challenges and adversity. The programme predominantly focuses on classroom strategies and activities that teach pupils those positive social and emotional skills that might be described as life skills.

Changing Mindsets: Aimed at reaching 2000 pupils in 36 schools, the project seeks to help disadvantaged pupils to understand their capabilities and the importance of putting effort in their learning. The programme involves a nine week course for 6 different schools, where pupils receive support from university students and external agencies on the 'growth mindset' approach, as well as study skills support. The team will also work with 30 schools to train teachers about the importance of teaching pupils about the malleability of their intelligence, and explaining how to reinforce this through more effective communication skills.

Chess in schools: The programme will see chess being taught within normal class time for one hour a week by accredited chess coaches. A 30-week curriculum is used to teach chess, which starts by teaching children how to play chess, before developing thinking skills through the use of chess problems. Each class teacher will also be trained in how to teach chess and will be encouraged to start a chess club in their school.

Future First: Future First is a social enterprise that builds networks of former students to advise and inform state school students about future career and education opportunities.

Currently funded to conduct a free piloting service in 500 schools across England, the programme aims at: 1) allowing schools to collect information about former students; 2) keeping former students updated on developments at the school; 3) enabling schools to develop a network that provides role models to inform and mentor current students; 4) developing networks that provide access to work experience opportunities; and 5) opening up fundraising opportunities for schools to engage their alumni as donors.

Teach First Ambassador Community: Teach First tackle educational inequality through its network of ambassadors. Ambassadors will have completed a two year leadership development programme. The network builds on insights from their teaching experience to identify what works.

Visual life journey mapping: This has been done with young people in Northamptonshire. Life-mapping is a method to make problems more visible and tangible. 30 young people took part in a life- mapping exercise. Using visual aids young people were supported to explore their past, present and future – while considering ambitions, attitudes to work.

CONCLUSION

Young people face a number of critical transition points during their school life. These transition points are viewed as challenging opportunities. The first, from primary school to secondary school, is met with mixed feelings. It is a chance to make new friends, experience new subjects and extra-curricular activities and new roles and responsibilities. This period is also viewed with some apprehension as a result of the loss of existing social networks, the risk of being bullied and the fear of not coping.

As a young person embarks on senior years of secondary school they are required to choose options, and in the last few years of secondary school are closer to realising their ambitions and their aspirations. Again, the future is viewed with excitement, with the opportunity to have more independence and to pursue their career aspirations on the horizon. This excitement is tempered by uncertainty and fear of failure. Young people are very much aware of the uncertain economic climate and understand that poor exam results are detrimental to their life chances.

Young people generally have a clear sense of their aspirations and to the components of a good life. Many of the young people involved in this research can identify a career aspiration and visualise their future. They often reference an adult within their life as a model for their career choice.

Apprehension about transition is often heightened by lack of information. For instance, participation in taster days reduces levels of anxiety about secondary school. However, by Year 9, some young people appear overwhelmed or uncertain about what should inform their choice of options, with some young people expressing regret at the options they have chosen. In addition, young people are often unable to make a direct link between their educational choices and attainment with their career aspirations. Information about the range of career opportunities available to young people, and advice on the personal characteristics and qualifications they might need, was welcomed by participants. Young people rely on social networks to inform their choice of school and their career aspirations. Widening out these social networks and providing more information and advice can increase the choices available and ensure that young people's decision-making is more informed.

ANNEX 1: ETHNOGRAPHIES

The following section sets out the ethnographic research from the eight participating students.

1. C, Year 6, boy

C is a talkative Year 6 pupil. He is an avid football player, and plays for a local football team. He also likes to do tricks on his scooter. He lives with his mum and dad and two brothers. He is the house captain and a pupil advocate. He was voted into these roles after he wrote and delivered a speech to his class. He is also a pupil advocate.

Going to secondary school

C is excited at the prospect of going to secondary school but also says, “I will miss the teachers because they are funny.” C attended a taster day and is feeling pretty confident about going to his new school. C’s dad attended the same secondary school and his cousin and older brother are current students.

C is keen to continue to achieve good grades when he goes to secondary school. He says “I want to carry on getting good levels in science and home economics.” He is also really excited about the possibility to take up new courses and pursue new interests: “At XX school, you get to make diamonds, you get to cook. I like it as a hobby.”

Hobbies

C likes football. He supports his local football team and trains twice a week. He used to be a goalkeeper but is now a left winger. He also likes to go fishing with his grandfather. After school he generally hangs out with his cousin outside of his house.

Living in Kings Lynn

C likes living in Kings Lynn. He cycles a lot, goes to the parks and fishing lakes and likes the shops in the area. He likes to play on his PS3 and does his homework on his laptop. His grandparents live nearby, at the end of his road, so he sees them often. His extended family live in the area too. C would like to live in Kings Lynn when he is older. When talking about a family holiday to Turkey, C ends one response saying, “I wouldn’t want to live in Turkey as I want to be near my mum and dad.”

His dad is an electrician, but has recently changed jobs and now drives a forklift in a factory. His mum works at the hospital as a cleaner, with his auntie.

Future aspirations

C would like to be a football player when he is older. Alternatively he would like to be an electrician like his dad. He comments: “my dad’s done it and I keep watching him”. C is clear about what steps he might take once he leaves school. He says, “I want to go to college. I might do plumbing and go to West Anglia College. After I go to college, then I’ll get a job. I want to go to college so I can get a job and earn some money. You train, you can earn more and go to different companies.”

He seems more specific on what steps he would take to become an electrician or plumber and doesn't refer to being a football player after the first question. Asked what his friends would like to do, he says, "R wants to be a mechanic or a football player. L wants to be a football player."

Mum

C's mum has always lived in Kings Lynn. Her husband moved to the area when he was very young. She likes the area and compares it with other areas, for instance Maidstone, which she says are too busy. She enjoys the fact that Kings Lynn is relaxed. She also has a lot of family in the area which she enjoys.

When asked to reflect on what determined her choice of secondary school for C, Mum says she chose the school because it is close to where they live, her nephew attends the school and most of her family attended that school.

She also visited the school as part of the parent's evening and took this as an opportunity to look around. She says "I was impressed."

C's mum talks to C about possible career options. However, since the economic downturn she feels that no career is secure. She says "His dad was made redundant, he was an electrician and now he has half his salary. I want him to be an electrician or a plumber – something where he can do a range of jobs." But later reflects that she does not know what to suggest.

2. M, Year 6, girl

M is a year 6 pupil who attends primary school. She lives with her mum, her two younger brothers, her cat and dog. She enjoys martial arts, roller skating and baking with her gran. She often “has sleepovers” with her gran and grandpa in South Lynn, and she also has aunts and uncles in Ely and Plymouth, and is close to her cousins.

School

She has attended her primary school for the last two years. Before this she attended two other primary schools, one private and one state school. She moved from the private school due to the high costs and pressure placed on her by teachers. She enjoys her current school, although comments, “it’s not as good as my old schools.” She draws comparisons between her schools, for example, her old school was stricter with detentions. She found moving between schools fine: “I made new friends and the teachers were friendly.”

M is bright, and talks of winning prizes at celebration assemblies at her school. She loves history and spends a lot of her spare time reading about the Egyptians and the Tudors. She also enjoys art and baking and is looking forward to a school trip in the summer to London to go to the theatre. M will be taking her SATs in May and she thinks she will have to do a fair amount of study for them. She comments that some of her friends worry about their subjects, “grades won’t hurt you, they challenge you to do your best.”

Worries and anxieties

M is a confident and happy pupil but talks of problems with “two bossy girls” in her class. She talks to teachers about these problems but they don’t handle the problem as quickly as she would have liked: “at my old school you would have been sent to the head teacher to sort the problem out.” She also talks about her younger brother who has also had problems with bullying in the school, “once he came home with broken glasses.”

She thinks that teachers will talk amongst themselves about problems. M tends to talk about issues with her mum who then can “get something done” with the school. She also likes to talk to her grandma, “she knows it all, and tells me to ignore it.” She doesn’t like to talk to girls in her class, “they like to earwig” and “talk behind people’s backs.” She likes spending time with her pets if there is something wrong, “but I don’t talk to them.”

Going to high school

M knows which school she would like to go to in September this year. A large proportion of her year group is going there and it falls in the catchment area of where she lives. She has been to visit the school with her mum and was shown round facilities and met some teachers. M is looking forward to going here and especially having a wider range of lessons, including history. She has no particular worries about it, although some of the “bigger kids talk about bullying.” She also worries slightly about making new friends, but she seems more excited about meeting new people and teachers. She knows some older pupils at King Lynn Academy, but she doesn’t talk to them about what school is like, “I don’t want to talk to them about it.”

Living in West Norfolk

When we talk about living in Norfolk M replies that Norfolk is “ok.” She doesn’t know where she wants to live when she’s older, but it has to be “somewhere nice and beautiful”. She talks about the incinerator that may be built in Kings Lynn, she comments that it puts her off living here as there will be “a radioactive smell for ten miles.” She likes the look of

Scotland as it “looks calm.” She wants to live with or near her family, “but I think I would like this to be somewhere outside Norfolk.”

Jobs/future

M wants to be a child psychologist when she is older. She says that “she doesn’t want people to be harassed”. She talks about her older cousins, one who wants to be a vet, another wants to be a nurse. “We all want to help people.” She speaks to her mum about this idea and she likes the idea and is supportive. M doesn’t talk to her teachers about it: “they don’t ask, I wouldn’t mind them asking, but they don’t”.

When we talk about reaching this goal, M comments, “I know I need to study hard, I’ll need to go to university when I’m older”. She talks about maybe going to Cambridge University as it’s fairly close to home and she could still see her family - “I’d be able to visit my aunt in Ely”. She doesn’t know exactly where she wants to go, but she has clear steps in mind to achieving her qualification.

M’s Mum

Mum went to school in Germany. Her father worked in the navy and they often moved. She has now been settled in Norfolk for the last 20 years, living in West Norfolk for 12 years. Although they have lived here for many years, mum comments that “we are not here by choice. Kings Lynn isn’t fantastic, there’s not that much to do.”

Mum talks about M being advanced and she worries that there is not enough at her current school to push her. There are not enough books available and she thinks M would be at a higher standard if she was at another school. At her last school her lessons were “more tailored” and there were more resources.

Mum talks about M going to Kings Lynn Academy. She seems enthused about this, “I hope it makes her back to what she was; she used to be more interested in school and involved”. She is slightly worried about bullying at the new school. If she had a choice she would send her to a different school but she is constrained by the catchment area and here she will get a free bus. She visited the school with M and thought it was a useful experience. She found the transition days useful, and thought that high school teachers should continue to visit the primary schools to help the young people’s transition. She also talks about cluster mornings offered, but would prefer smaller groups to be used.

We talk about M wanting to be a child psychologist: “M really wants to help other kids. I guess you see what your parents do, and you learn from your experiences”.

Mum isn’t sure where M will live when she’s older and doesn’t mind “as long as she is happy.” She is realistic about the practicalities of M staying in Norfolk. She hopes that she stays here but thinks it’s down to opportunity; it will depend what is available for her here and on what she pursues as a career, she may have to go elsewhere to find this opportunity. Talking about Norfolk in general, she comments that there is no university in the area: “I don’t think it would be possible for M to live at home and go to university.” She also talks about the financial support which will be needed for M to go to university: “I worry that she will not be able to make the choices that she wants to make. Location can prevent opportunity.” Transport is also an issue, both across Norfolk and to other areas.

She talks about how the situation is becoming increasingly difficult for young people: “job wise, you need a good qualification, you need a degree, but it’s hard to get grants”. Mum also talks about local job availability in Norfolk: “it’s a small town, there are not many jobs and

not many jobs aimed at young people. There are no apprenticeships. There would be a very slim chance of M being a child psychologist here. I think she would have to do that job somewhere else”. She thinks the council needs to produce more training opportunities: “businesses could sponsor young people to get them into the work place. We need more apprenticeships”.

3. N, Year 7, boy

N has recently started secondary school and is in Year 7. He lives with his mum and grandmother and their two cats in Kings Lynn. N is an only child. His dad is from Morocco and his mum is from Poland. N is articulate and thoughtful in his responses and seems interested in school.

Starting secondary school

Before starting secondary school, N was worried about how he would cope. On reflection he now says, “I worried about school but now it is quite simple”. He went to a primary school nearby, which had about 400 pupils, and he comments that his current school has 1700 pupils.

He feels slightly overwhelmed by the amount of work that he has to do, but seems to enjoy studying. He says, “the amount of homework we get is insane. I have two weeks to make a shield. It sticks in your head and the more you think. ‘oh no’”. However, he later comments that he finds some of the subjects easy, which for him can make the subject “boring”. However, he is keen on some of the extra-curricular activities, such as football and rugby.

He has made friends quite quickly in the school and during the focus group appeared to be quite popular. He says, “I have really nice friends. They are in different forms to me. I like art and food and mental tech. For me it is quite simple”. This may have helped him in making the transition from primary to secondary school.

N is also quite adept at talking about his worries. He has developed support strategies, which, in part, he learnt in primary school as well as at home. “In year 5 we would have circle time and we would talk about our problems. The class would try and help you with your problem”. He later goes on to say, “I think it is basic psychology. I usually say ‘don’t worry it will be fine’. I give encouragement. Telling someone about your problems helps them to get fixed”.

Life outside of school

When asked how he spends his evening, N says he generally finishes his homework: “At the moment I am finishing a science project on predators and prey. I am making a model”. He plays with his cats, has tea and plays on his Xbox. He also likes to play football with his friends and read.

His grandmother is usually at home and cooks and cleans for the family. Whilst she has a certificate in English language, she is not very proficient in English.

On the weekend, N participates in a number of activities. He attends an art class on the weekend and plays rugby on a Friday. He also goes to the gym on his mother’s suggestion, “to increase my body strength”.

Every year, N visits Poland to see his family. He likes visiting but feel like he stands out as “there are not too many people with curly hair”. Recently his mum and some family friends drove from Norfolk to Austria to go skiing and snowboarding.

The future

N is thoughtful. When asked about the future, he hesitates and says there are so many things that he wants to do. He says, “My mum says that I have to choose but there are so many things that I am interested in. When I was young I wanted to be a pilot. And now there are

all these fun subjects to do”. One option is to be a lawyer: “I think I would be good at being a lawyer. I can explain things very well. But probably getting evidence will be tough”. Towards the end of the conversation, N appears to change his mind and says “maybe I could be a psychologist”. However, N’s overall aspiration is to “get money, get a house, live in Cambridge and get a dog”.

N reflects on the steps needed before he reaches employment and he mentions how hard exams will be. He says, “I am a bit worried that I won’t pass my tests in Year 11. There will be so much learning. But I know it will pay off and I will get a good job. A good job is the thing that you are good at. If your parents want you to change, you lose who you are”.

N described how his mum worked hard. He seems proud of her achievement but does not shy away from and seems acutely aware of how hard his mum worked. He comments, “My mum went to one of the best university’s to study medicine. My mum is a pharmacist. She always says that if it wasn’t for grandma she wouldn’t have made it. I think my mum will help me out if I need it. My mum wants to support me when I study, moneywise”.

N’s mum

N mum works as a pharmacist. She has lived in Kings Lynn for seven years and likes the city. She moved to Kings Lynn with her company, and feels like it was an “accident” but was happy as it looked like a nice town. However, she thinks they will move in five years.

She was worried about N starting a new school, mainly because she thought he might be bullied. But she is not worried now as the school seems friendly and she observed that “he seems to be mixing well with other children”. She later comments, “he seems fine. He is enjoying it and finding it interesting”.

She did not visit the school before N started, but was aware of the activities available to help him prepare. She says “they had an introduction day, so he was familiar with the school and knew where he was going. He had some written information on what to expect. But it was more for him than for me”.

When asked if there is any additional information she would like, she struggles to identify anything. She also feels that as a working mum she has less time to visit the school and enquire about how N is getting on. However, she doesn’t seem particularly concerned. She reflects that she would like to know if there are any additional extra curricular activities that are available to him.

She hopes that N will go to university and is happy for him to move away if he needs to in order to get a better job. She says “I would never encourage him to stay because I am here”.

She is aware that N worries about his future: “he gets the idea that he won’t be good enough to go to university. I don’t know how well he is doing with his education but he asks ‘what do you think I should do?’ ‘What degree?’ I don’t know what would be best, but he expects an answer”.

She has suggested that he think about architecture, or becoming a vet “because he likes animals”, or possibly engineering. She says, “I don’t want him to go into healthcare as there is a lot of pressure and he is quite sensitive”. She concludes, “I guess he will do G.C.S.Es and then A-levels and then go to university”.

4. R, Year 7, girl

R lives with her mum and dad and three brothers. She also has two dogs and a cat. She is quite shy and reserved. She used to live in Essex but moved to Kings Lynn when her family needed a bigger house and to be closer to family. She likes to cook, draw and to take the dogs for a walk. She also likes drawing Mario cartoons and making rock cakes.

Starting a new school

R seems settled in her new school. Her older brother attends the school and is now in Year 9. However, before starting school she worried that she would not have friends at playtime. She also worried about bullies and that the school would be rough.

Before school terms started, R attended a taster week with other year 7s. Of this week, she says, “we had time to get used to the older children. We had a lesson in Science and English, which was a good experience and there was different equipment. It was better than I thought and I was relieved that it wasn’t too rough. My mum just said to try my best in every subject. I was told to get advice if I see bullies”.

However, she still describes starting new school as “a bit of a shock” but feels like she was prepared for it. Reflecting back on her first term, R says: “my favourite things about new school were making new friends, getting to know teachers, the different classes. I like P.E, dance and swimming and beach ball”. Now, looking back, she says, “I got used to it after a while and I got used to the new people. I was ok with the new homework. Getting new friends was easier than I thought”. But she still misses her friends and teachers from primary school.

Coping with problems

When R has a problem, she tends to confide in her friends and her parents. She says, “when I am at school, I talk to my friends if I am worried. I talk to them if someone has been horrible and I got hurt inside”. She also talks to her grandmother who lives nearby: “I bike to my nans and I sit and have a chat”. She is reluctant to talk to teachers and says “it doesn’t feel right. I haven’t known them that long”.

Much later in the conversation, when we are walking home, R talks about joining a carers group. She started going to the group when a primary school teacher noticed that she was distressed about her older brother’s experience. Her brother has ADHD and, at the time, had been struggling at school. She now goes to the group every week and has a chance to relax with other children.

Aspirations

R would like to be a pet groomer. She would have liked to be a vet, but found out that fine pet hairs trigger her allergies. However, she really enjoys spending time with animals and therefore would like a career that gives her the opportunity to work with them.

She talks to her friend, A, about her future. Her friend would like to be a dancer. R says she thought of being a dog groomer after she saw someone in her neighbourhood doing the job, “it looked interesting and fun”. She also had an opportunity to talk about her career aspirations when she was in primary school: “when I was in primary school we had circle time and she would ask us what I want to be when I am older, how do you succeed in life, how do you have a good life, and not have anything to worry about”.

She would like to stay in the area when she is older or at least in a neighbouring area: “near where my nan lives”. She likes Kings Lynn as she is familiar with the area. She enjoys taking her dogs for a walk and going to the nearby swimming pool. She also likes the fact that she has family and friends nearby.

Ultimately, R says, “I want to get a good degree and get good A-levels and I want to live in a nice big house, get my own business going and get married”.

Mum

R’s brother attends the same secondary school as R. Mum felt that this was a good school for him as he is stated. As a result of mum’s experience of this school, she decided that this would be a good school for R to attend. Prior to R’s brother starting school, mum and dad were invited to attend the school for a meeting to discuss R’s brother. She says, “it was the best school for him. He was there for two years. It is just a brilliant school. I chose the school for her brother.”

R’s mum was not worried about R starting new school. She reflects on how R copes with challenges and she says, “R is always a positive person. If she is worried I tell her she will be alright”. Mum thinks R seems to have adjusted to secondary school quickly. Her mum has noticed R’s happy disposition: “R has settled in really well. She would come home happy. We knew that she would be fine. She tells us about the homework and the teachers. She was pupil of the term for her P.E work and it was reported in the newspaper”.

Mum talks to R about her aspirations to be a dog groomer. She says that she hopes R stays in Kings Lynn when she is older but also adds there isn’t a lot of employment in the area and “I wouldn’t stop her if it was a career move”.

5. L, Year 9, boy

L is in Year 9. L lives with his mum, his stepdad and his four brothers and one sister. He is the youngest child in the family and is 13 years old. His mum works with disabled people and his dad and step dad work in a factory. He sees his dad often, on most weekends and during the week.

L has lived in Kings Lynn his whole life and likes living there. He is quite quiet, but friendly and keen to answer the questions honestly.

Settling in to secondary school

For L, the hardest thing about moving to secondary school was not seeing his friends. He was also worried that he would not make new friends and that “people wouldn’t like me”. However, he was also excited about the prospect of meeting new people. He also worried about getting around the school and whether he would cope with the work. He says that he is small and feels like it is more likely he will get pushed around.

Nonetheless, “nothing surprised me about the new school”. He has a brother in the school, and all his older siblings went to the same school. Earlier in our conversation he says “I find it fine to be the youngest; if I get bullied I have someone to go to”.

He reflects on how he has changed. He feels more confident: “I have changed. I am not afraid to speak out. I can stand in front of the class and not whisper”. On making friends he says, “I like my new friends, I am getting used to hanging around with new people”.

Studying

L enjoys PE and ICT but finds English and Science hard. He is in the lowest set for Geography and Science and is quite anxious about how this is affecting his work. He describes the class as quite disruptive. Student support is often called into the classroom to support the teacher with poor behaviour from students. Of his class mates he says, “they take naughty people out of the class, people that swear and shout and throw things around the room. There are only three of us that sit there and want to do stuff, out of a class of 15 or 20 students”.

This is a very real concern to L. He has approached a teacher to talk about his concerns but this has not resolved the situation: “I went to Miss B, as she did assembly for our house and said if there are any problems we should go to her. I asked her to report it or to move me and my mates up a set so we can get some learning... They took out some of the naughty kids but nothing has really changed”. He has also approached his Head of Year.

In contrast, L is in the top set for maths and English. But he continually refers to how bad the situation is in Science and Geography: L appears to be quite discouraged by this situation. To gauge how bad it is, I ask him to rate how bad the situation is on a scale of one to ten, with one being really bad and ten being very good. He replies, “It is one, it feels really bad”. “I only get five minutes of learning done before the naughty kids start trouble”.

I ask what other options are available to him. He seems at a loss to answer. He is reluctant to get his mum involved. “I don’t want to drag my mum in, as I am old enough to sort things out. She knows that I am in the lowest set.”

Choosing options

L has spoken to his family about his choice of career. He wants to train to be a referee. Asked why he wants to be a referee he says, "I am into football, but I am not good enough to be a football player". Alternatively, he would like to work in a garage, as do a number of his friends ("I think you get good money if you work in a garage").

To this end, he has chosen to study P.E as an option and go to college once a week from next year, as part of his study. He has submitted an application to the college and was waiting to have an interview. He also chose geography as an option. L's brothers also chose to attend college for their options. However one brother left after a year and another could not attend as there were insufficient numbers of students enrolled on the course.

L appears to be quite certain of next steps: "The next year there will be exams. I have to revise. Then I will do three years of college, then I will choose my job. I want to be a referee. I have to be fit and healthy. I am doing P.E. I haven't talked to the teachers about my career choice but when I picked my option I was thinking about my career".

Hobbies and life outside school

L is happy living in Kings Lynn. He plays football with friends in a green nearby and also enjoys playing tennis. Most of his friends attends the same school as him but spends a lot of his spare time with his friends too: "I go and see my mates and I will bike over there. We hang out".

Once a year, L goes on holiday to Hunston with his family. He enjoys the arcades, rides and it is generally a fun experience. His whole family goes on holiday with him, including an older sister, who is now married and his 19 year old brother and his girlfriend.

It was down to myself and how I react, so I had to stay calm. I went to my head of house and I asked if I can be moved.

Living in Kings Lynn

L has lived in Kings Lynn all his life and intends to stay in the area. His family live in the area, including a set of grandparents. The other set of grandparents live in Spain. He says, "I won't move too far from Kings Lynn when I am older. I might move to an area nearby, for instance Gayton". L's older siblings both work in KFC and have moved out of the area to a neighbouring area. He says that he might move to the same area that his sister lives in.

On concluding our interview, L says "I hope that I am only in the bottom set this year. I hope that next year I'll be in the top set".

6. G, Year 9, girl

G is in Year 9. She lives with her mum and step dad, cat and dog. She also has a step brother who she sees most weekends. Her mum works in car insurance, and her step dad is a builder. She has lived in Norfolk for most of her life, and has family in Norfolk, London, Scotland and New Zealand.

Moving to secondary school

When G moved from primary school to secondary school she was really excited about it. She talks enthusiastically about meeting new people, learning new subjects, and especially about getting to do art as a specific lesson. She talks about getting lost when she moved to high school, commenting “there were more people in my year than in my old school.” Most of her year group came to this school, although many went to a different house and were not in many of her classes. G talks positively about the move though, and made lots of new friends and settled in fairly quickly.

At school and starting GCSEs

G is happy at school, and is involved with the drama club, helping to do the lighting and props. She loves art, and seems a quiet and conscientious pupil, “I think I am pretty quiet, I just get on with things in my lessons.” She seems frustrated at times with some lessons and misbehaving pupils, getting “annoyed when people shout out.”

G will start her GCSEs this year, and is hoping to study art, history, French, maths and English. She will start in September this year. She comments that choosing her options was “easy for me.” We talk about how G reached these decisions. She tells me about an evening session held with form teachers where she was able to visit different teacher’s classrooms to talk to them about what their subject would be like at GCSE level – “the teachers also told me about what I could do with their subject in the future, it was really useful to talk to them.” She also talked to her Mum about choosing her subjects and took her advice - “my mum wanted me to do a language, she thinks it’s good for going to university.” G schools also hosted a local careers day, where “nurses, local businesses and people from the radio” all came along and spoke to the young people about their jobs, what they do on a day to day basis and what they studied to get into their job. This also helped G pick her subjects.

G is looking forward to starting her GCSEs, and being in a class with people who want to be there, “I want to learn new things and get the best grades I can.” She comments that she is worried that she won’t do as well as she wants, but she talks to her Mum and Nan about this, “they make me feel better when I worry.”

Future careers

After completing her GCSEs, G aims to do 6th form at her current school, “most of my friends will stay here too.” Once she has finished 6th form she wants to “earn some money then think about university.” She doesn’t know yet where she would like to study when she is older, but is sure she wants to go to university.

G has lots of ideas about what she would like to do when she is older, and she currently hopes to work as a veterinary assistant. G does not want to be a vet as she doesn’t “like blood and things” but she wants to help animals. At home she has a cat and a dog who she helps look after, and also talks about family members who own an animal shelter and rescue centre and she thinks this has helped her make her choice. G also spoke to a veterinary assistant at her schools open day, and likes the sounds of this as a job. We talk about what G

will need to do to get this job, “I’ll need A’s to do the operations, but I don’t want to do this. I will only need B’s and C’s to do what I want to do. I want to help the animals after they have had the operation.”

G used to want to be a photographer. She tells me about taking photos of her nans cat, and trips to London where she uses her camera. Her mum’s friend is a photographer, and taught her how to use a camera at a young age. However, G changed her mind when she attended the careers day at her school. She talked to a photographer, and realised that she wouldn’t want to do this day to day, “but I still want to do it as my hobby.”

Living in Norfolk

G likes living in Norfolk. She talks fondly of the family she has there, and likes to spend her spare time with friends, in the park or going out on her bike. Her grandparents live close and she often sees them at the weekend. She also has some family near London and talks about the “atmosphere” she feels when she visits. She has visited a few times with her Mum and Nan, and comments that she would like to live there when she is older. When I ask her why this is she comments, “there are more people, it’s more busy, I think there is more to do. I think there are better opportunities, better jobs, more experiences.”

G also wants to travel when she is older, she has relatives in New Zealand who she would love to visit, but also has family in Scotland. Her mother was born in Malta, and grew up in Germany, traveling with her mother and father (who worked in the Royal Air Force). She talks about having a “bucket list” of where she wants to go, and is inspired by where her family have travelled to and where other members of her family currently live.

7. K, Year 10, boy

K has lived in Kings Lynn all of his life. His dad has M.E but used to work in the local factory. His mum works in a school for people with behavioural difficulties. He has one brother and one sister. His sister attends the same school as him. K is a keen gamer and participates in the war games club at school.

Remembering primary school

His primary school was quite small, with 60 people per year group. He is an air cadet and the war games lead. The group is formed of about 10 people. A teacher started the club and K has now taken the lead.

His grandparents live in Kings Lynn, and live near the school. He sees them every week.

All his friends from primary school moved to the same secondary school as him. He remembers being quite scared and excited about the prospect of attending a new school. But once arriving at school he found that it was difficult at all to make new friends. He found that the lessons weren't as difficult as he had anticipated. He says "I had to adapt. I was used to primary school. But I had friends here already".

Coping with secondary school

K reflects on how he has changed since entering secondary school. He says 'I am more confident now than I was before. I have more friends and I am doing better in my grades'. He feels that the school is supportive of him: "the school helped quite a lot. They help with things that I am struggling in. I got a U grade and they gave me some exercises to help me and boost my mark".

Choosing options

K chose his options last year. He chose ICT, computer science and German and Business, He wanted to do triple science but did not get in and is studying double science instead. He also selected history as an option but the course was oversubscribed. K is a bit upset that he didn't get to do this course, he still reads history books at home and his love of wars games has made him more interested in the medieval and renaissance period. He feels that some people are now doing the course without a genuine interest and "are choosing it as a filler". I ask if he can do history at A-level. He says he can but doubts he will, "I would find it difficult".

Revision and exams

K has a Btec in German and business. He prefers Btec because it relies on coursework instead of exams. He says, "When I have exams I panic, everything goes black".

K is waiting for his GCSE results, he is expecting B's in a number of his subjects. He likes ICT, computer science, physics and applied business. He generally enjoys school. He likes the lessons and likes running the club. He says "I enjoy computers". He wants to focus on computer science, animation or to be a games designer.

He is nervous about his exams, which are soon, and says that he has started to revise. However he feels confident: "I am on track but I need to push myself to guarantee I get the right grades". He acknowledges there are some subjects he needs to work harder in. "In English and Graphics I should be working harder". But there is support that he will draw on, for instance lunch and after school sessions are run.

K is worried about his GCSEs. This worry is made worse by the economic situation and job scarcity: “If I don’t get the right grades I need, with the economy going up and down, jobs are rare. I want to have the best choice. I have learnt a lot in business about how bad the economy really is and how serious it is and just how bad it really will be”.

He has talked to his parents about his anxieties, but says that his mum is quite “mellow”. He says “They say as long as I revise, you will have done the best that you can”.

What next?

He says that he hasn’t done any research into universities as yet, but hopes to go the best university for this subject. His choice of career, in order of preference, is 1) a games designer (2) business or (3) engineering. K later states “I also wouldn’t mind being self-employed”. When asked why he likes these professions, K provides a number of reasons. Firstly, business is his favourite subject, secondly, for a PSHE class someone from an engineering company came and talked to them about engineering and told the class. K recalls that the presenter told them that physics and ICT are important subjects for people entering the profession. Asked about what his friends are interested in, he says that one of his friends wants to be a history teacher.

K also talks to his parents and friends about career choices. His parents have helped him to look up what subjects he has to do to get into the profession. K says “I want to go to university. I talk about this to the teachers, but not as much as I should be”.

K likes living in Kings Lynn. He says, “I like the familiar atmosphere, I know where everything is”. He lives close to his extended family, which includes grandparents and cousins. K would like to stay in the area, but admits that he is not sure that there are many jobs in the area, though he thinks there are some jobs in engineering. He wants to visit other countries, he is intrigued by Russia, but concedes “I would feel bad about leaving the area but would enjoy the experience of living somewhere new”. He doesn’t want to live in London, because he finds it too busy. He recalls a previous visit when “It took almost an hour to travel because of the traffic!”

When asked to describe his life at 30 K says “I will be in the games industry, I will have a house near my job and have a family”. He thinks he will stay in Norfolk: “I enjoy the atmosphere, I like the views. I have spent my whole life here”. I ask K to explain what gaming is and he quickly responds. “I have been obsessed with gaming for a long time. I then started to animate on the computer and make my own characters. I think about the characters a lot”. I then ask him if he knows other gamers and he says that he knows other people’s work. He then adds “I haven’t met a one... but I would love to”.

8. C, Year 11, boy

C is in Year 11. He is currently sitting his GCSEs and will be leaving school in ten week. He currently lives with his dad, and his brother and sister between North Lynn and Middleton and has stayed in this area all of his life. C is a friendly and outgoing pupil, although commented to be “cheeky” by teachers during my time with him. He is aware of the first names of many teachers, and sits on the school council.

Picking and studying GCSEs

C is currently studying his GCSEs and is due to sit his final exams imminently. He is taking Art, History, PE, Geography, Maths, English and Science BTEC. His favourite subjects are History and PE. C tells me that he picked subjects for GCSE that he liked and that he was good at. He did want to do cooking, but his Dad didn’t think it was “practical” to do this. Reflecting back on his choice C comments, “I don’t like to think about it to be honest, I just chose some subjects. Maybe looking back I would have done business. Art is fun to do, but I’m not going to be an artist, business might have been more useful.” I asked if C spoke to his teachers about his choice, and he responded that the teachers were only interested in whether you were picking their subject, “how much you like the lesson, that’s all it comes down to.”

Life after school

C is aiming to go to a local college after completing his GCSEs and he has an interview in April. He wants to study BTEC Level 3 in sports, which will enable him to get a sport scholarship when he is older -“I want to study PE as I know what I’m doing there, I know I’m good at it.” At times it seems like he has a thought out and considered plan for his future – he wants to do 2 years at a local college, then he will use this to get a sports degree in the USA. He wants to study in Florida, and after completing University he wants to join the military. On the other hand, when I ask why he chose to study PE at college he comments, “it was a box ticking exercise; I didn’t go to a college open day.”

Yet his long term goal and approach is thought out and considered, C feels he would be in a better position if he joined the military at 22 with a degree rather than joining the UK army straight after completing his GCSEs. If all goes to plan, C will study in the USA, move back to the UK, then work and eventually retire in the USA. I ask him if he has a back up plan in case this doesn’t work out, he looks uneasy and comments, “If this doesn’t happen I won’t know what to do, I used to want to be a vet, but I now know I’m no good at science. I guess I could join the uniformed services over here, but I want to go to the USA.”

Making choices

We talk about how C reached this decision. He tells me about his Uncle who is in the American Air Force, “I look up to him, he had told me what I need to do to join, I know I need to get involved at University, and I need to get a scholarship to do this.” C doesn’t talk to his Dad about wanting to move to America, and his Dad doesn’t know what he has planned. He is also unaware that C spends time with his uncle - his uncle is on his Mums side of the family and C doesn’t want to upset him by talking to his uncle. He says he will tell his father in time, but isn’t sure when.

C also speaks to his careers advisor about his goal to move abroad, and she supports him, providing websites and phone numbers for him to contact to get further information – for the college, army and other information support services. -“she is in school every Wednesday, I’ve seen her about once a month.” C would also like to talk to his teachers, but

doesn't think they "are interested or are much help." He also comments, "If I talk to them about moving, they see anti-moving, especially to the USA. Some of them don't like it, they just don't respond." He does have one teacher though called Mr X, who he likes to talk to. He is C's history teacher, "he doesn't just teach the lesson, he's friendly with everyone, he jokes, has some banter, and we learn with him. He pushes us all, but he's also very involved, he is dedicated." C also feels close to his form tutor who he has known for 5 years, having had the time to build up trust and rapport with him.

Living in Norfolk or America?

In his spare time he enjoys playing football and spending time with his friends. C enjoys living in Norfolk, and prefers it to other city areas "I much prefer the country compared to places like London and Manchester, there's less hustle and it's much cleaner in the village." He comments that "everything is perfect" where he stays, "it fits my every need, it's nice for walks, it's near the sea."

I ask C about what it is about America that he likes, and he tells me about when he used to visit Arizona every year with his siblings and Mum. "There's something about the USA that I like, I think it's got everything in one country, mountains, coast, the countryside." C wants to travel, and think this job gives him an opportunity to do so, "I think I would like to live in England, Turkey, Germany and France, this job gives me a chance to do this, I would have to move around every four years, like my Uncle. I would like to come back to Norfolk, but I don't know if it would be the same." C says he would miss Norfolk though if he moved, "I'll miss my friends and family, I know how it works here, I know every street, I can get places."

ANNEX 2: CAREERS AND ASPIRATIONS OF PUPILS

- hair & beauty ♥
- london /
- kids / 30
- married.
- holidays
- drive

Sixth Form here: (Live at home)

- Media Studies (making magazines etc)
 - Computer science (coding, making apps)
 - Applied ICT (Building computers)
 - Sociology (studying society)
- Also want to

 - Get a job
 - Ledn to drive

Be a builder or
electrician



age 21-28



need family

first house

King's Lynn

Married
1 son

[Signature]

I would like 2 kids and to be married.

I would live in a house.

I would like to live in another country.




And I don't know what job I would like.

I would like to be a solicitor of a pilot because you get a lot of money.

I think I would live in a ~~fairly~~ big house in somewhere quiet.

Married with two children.

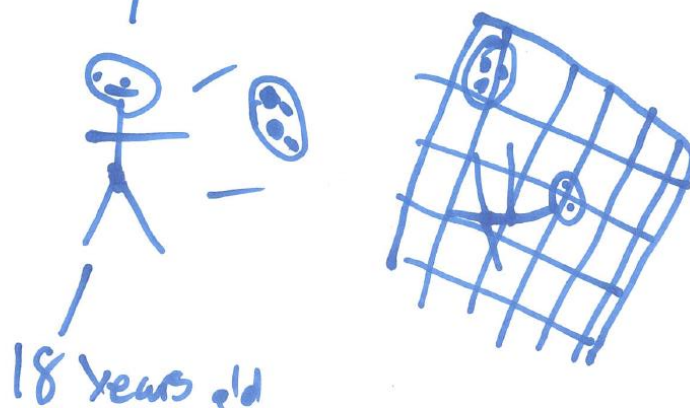
I would have decent cars with motor bikes.
↑
and
expensive

- Nice house (not with parents) 
- Good job, that pays well.
- Go to a good uni. 
- Go to a good sixth form/ collage.
- Meet nice friends. 
- Have a family. (married + children)
- Have leftover money for luxuries. (car etc.)
- Be HAPPY 😊

Working as an engineer
Living somewhere in ~~Norfolk~~
Norfolk in a house with a
girlfriend and a dog

living in
England

me playing for
a football team.



In the future I'll be
living in an apartment
in London or the US with
the job ^{as} of a forensic
scientist. I'll be living with
my friend and we'll work
together ~~and~~ in our jobs
and we'll be able to
afford nice stuff and
hopefully someday ill
settle down + have
kids 1 boy 1 girl.

Big house 30
good job (police, Lawyer)
(DS, Music Ind)
girlfriend who's pregnant
~~engaged~~ engaged
living in Norwich/
Salford.

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End notes

- ¹ This definition is broadly used and is convenient for the purpose of this paper. However, despite the wide use of the term, there is a lack of an agreed definition and whether it actually makes a difference to educational and occupational outcomes
- ² Akerman, R and Gutman, L (2008) Determinants of Aspiration, Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No.27, Institute of education
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- ⁵ Evans, K, Golden, S, Marshall, H, Mundy, E, Pomati, M, Spielhofer, T, Styles, B 2011, Barriers to participation in education and training, Department for Education
- ⁶ This is not true for all ethnic groups. More traditional families who want their daughters to marry young are likely to hinder educational and occupational aspirations. This is a particular issue in Pakistani and Bangladeshi families, Gutman and Akerman, 2008
- ⁷ Akerman, R and Gutman, L (2008) Determinants of Aspiration, Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No.27, Institute of education
- ⁸ Croll, P. & Fuller, C. (2012) Understanding Young People's Aspirations. *University of Reading*, The Forum. [blog]. Available at: < <http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/the-forum/2012/01/30/understanding-young-people%E2%80%99s-aspirations/>> [accessed 19th March 2013]
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- ¹⁰ The Prince's Trust, 2004
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- ¹² Akerman, R and Gutman, L (2008) Determinants of Aspiration, Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No.27, Institute of education
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- ¹⁶ Croll, P. & Fuller, C. (2012) Understanding Young People's Aspirations. *University of Reading*, The Forum. [blog]. Available at: < <http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/the-forum/2012/01/30/understanding-young-people%E2%80%99s-aspirations/>> [accessed 19th March 2013]
- ¹⁷ Croll, P. & Fuller, C. (2012) Understanding Young People's Aspirations. *University of Reading*, The Forum. [blog]. Available at: < <http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/the-forum/2012/01/30/understanding-young-people%E2%80%99s-aspirations/>> [accessed 19th March 2013]
- ¹⁸ Kintrea, K, St. Clair, R, Houston, M (2011), The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- ¹⁹ Akerman, R and Gutman, L (2008) Determinants of Aspiration, Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No.27, Institute of education.
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