



Work in Progress

Executive Summary

A report investigating young people's experiences of apprenticeships

April 2017

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The Government is working to oversee a rapid expansion of the apprenticeship system in an attempt to help young people gain the necessary skills to enter into the workplace and progress in their chosen career.

However, despite the political capital afforded to them, in many cases, apprenticeships continue to be seen as a 'second class' option for young people, and for others, not an option at all, echoing wider public perceptions.

To help address the shortcomings with the current apprenticeship offer and tackle these barriers, *Work in Progress* is rooted in the experiences of young apprentices.

Apprenticeships are proving to be a positive experience for the majority of young people

- ▶ Four fifths of young people (79%) reported being satisfied with their experience of apprenticeships.
- ▶ More than three quarters of young people said that going on an apprenticeship helped improve their skills and knowledge (91%), their ability to do their job (78%), as well as their overall career prospects (82%).
- ▶ Almost four in five young people (79%) reported that they were offered a job at the end of their apprenticeship.

However, speaking to young people also reveals a number of significant barriers and shortcomings within the existing apprenticeship system. These are hindering young people's chances of success, and in some cases, even preventing others from starting an apprenticeship.

Apprenticeships are still not being presented as a valid route to many young people

In many cases, those who wanted to undertake an apprenticeship reported a feeling of being 'pushed aside' at school, as focus was put on those individuals who wanted to apply to university. Others were actively discouraged from undertaking an apprenticeship by those around them.

- ▶ Fewer than one in four young people reported receiving support and advice on their apprenticeship from a teacher or lecturer (22%), or from a careers advisor (17%).
- ▶ More than three in five young people (63%) found out about their options using the internet, and more than a third (36%) from their friends and family.
- ▶ More than a third of young people (34%) felt more could be done to improve the amount of support and advice available to them prior to undertaking an apprenticeship.

Often, work commitments are undermining young people's ability to study as part of their apprenticeship

- ▶ Almost a quarter of former apprentices (24%) said they found it difficult to balance the study and work elements of their apprenticeship.
- ▶ More than a third of young people (34%) said they would have liked to have spent more time studying while undertaking their apprenticeship, and that apprenticeships could be enhanced by improving the quality of the study element.

Salaries are not always reflective of young apprentices' responsibilities and living costs

- ▶ Almost two-thirds of young people (63%) said the reason they undertook an apprenticeship was because it was an opportunity to get paid while learning.
- ▶ Only just over a third of young people (35%) said the salary they received enabled them to afford their basic living costs.
- ▶ Fewer than half of young people (44%) believed the salary they got as an apprentice was reasonable for the work they did and the training they received.
- ▶ More than one in five young people (22%) said that they did not feel valued by their employer while undertaking their apprenticeship.

Addressing these weaknesses requires quality to be embedded into the system. It requires a partnership between different stakeholders and it requires the needs of young people being met. Accordingly, based on the views and experiences of the young people participating in this research, YMCA is recommending:

- ▶ Providing improved access to specialist careers advice and information relating to apprenticeships
- ▶ Extending work experience opportunities to better prepare young people for apprenticeships
- ▶ Developing further campaigns to promote apprenticeships in schools and colleges
- ▶ Embedding designated and structured study time within an apprentice's working hours
- ▶ Facilitating young people to develop their functional skills alongside their apprenticeship
- ▶ Offering targeted discounts to young apprentices to help with basic living costs
- ▶ Ensuring apprentices are appropriately remunerated for the work they undertake
- ▶ Highlighting the financial benefits to young people undertaking an apprenticeship.

The research was commissioned by YMCA, with the fieldwork conducted by specialist youth research agency, YouthSight. The sample consisted of more than 400 in-depth interviews with young people aged between 16 and 26 years old, who had experience of apprenticeships. The fieldwork was carried out in England and Wales between November 2016 and March 2017.

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YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.

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