Partnership for Young London

Young people's perceptions and attitudes of their post-16 options summary

Young Londoners are increasingly at risk of being a generation left behind, plagued by long term unemployment and lacking the technical skills vitally needed by employers. Across Europe, labour markets are shifting away from low skilled jobs towards high skilled ones, creating a skills gap with supply failing to meet demand . Recent Governments have tried to address this, focusing on increasing the number of people achieving within an apprenticeship, however figures suggest that take up is being primarily driven by those aged over 25. Our research examined the perceptions and attitudes young people have of their post-16 choices, exploring what influences their decision, such as living in London.

Methodology

- **We conducted six focus groups, with a total of 42 young people.** Groups typically took an hour and a half, and were conducted in their borough, in community centres.
- **Ages ranged between 14-25, with a variety of backgrounds.** Each group represented a different age bracket, with one for 14-15, 15-16, 16-17, 18+, and two mixed groups.
- **Young people came from voluntary sector groups, and local authorities,** coming from nine different boroughs, and different schools.

Key findings

Section 1: Perceptions of post-16 options

- **Apprenticeships are still viewed a second choice option,** with participants seeing them as a 'Plan C', providing less opportunity, respect, and flexibility.
- **Apprentices are more stereotyped than university students,** negatively seen as 'school leavers' or as someone who 'can't do college'.
- **University, unlike apprenticeships, have a strong lifestyle appeal.** Participants have clear positive perceptions about university student life, from independence to societies, which is absent from apprenticeships.
- **Apprenticeships are viewed as more for males under 18,** a reflection on the perception that apprenticeships provide skills for male dominated sectors such as construction and plumbing.
- **There is little to no understanding of traineeships,** with not a single participant being able to describe what one would entail.

Fig. 1 Apprenticeship word frequency

Fig 2. University word frequency

Section 2: Influences on decision making

- **Families are a source of direct pressure to go to university,** with cultural and racial identity and attitudes towards education being significant.
- **Peers and the media can be an indirect influence on decision making,** serving as examples, and positioning university as the social norm.
- **Schools are more focused on students going to university,** with very few participants being told about apprenticeships.
- **Careers advice is failing to prepare young people,** who lack respect for the information gained, and are unprepared with making decisions.

Section 3: Perceptions of context

- **London is a very competitive city of opportunity,** where there are always jobs available, but there are many challenges, both in the labor market, and in terms of cost of living.
- **Perceptions of Brexit remain largely negative,** with young people believing that it will make it harder to get employment, though there is uncertainty exactly how it will.

Partnership for Young London, September 2017
www.partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk
@PYL_London