Creating a high aspiration culture for young people in the UK

Ben Page
Chairman, Ipsos MORI SRI
What we did

- Quantitative and qualitative research funded by the Sutton Trust and HM Treasury
- Telephone survey of nearly 2,000 British adults (including 653 parents)
- Saturday morning workshop in Luton with 25 parents and 23 of their children (7-10 year olds and 11-16 year olds)
Most people say they’re doing what they always wanted to do OR something different but as good or better.
Q Which of the following statements comes closest to how you feel your current or most recent job or occupation compares to what you really wanted or hoped to do when you were still at school? I am doing ... than/to what I wanted or hoped to do back then.

Don't know: 10%

... something different and worse ...: 20%

... something different and better ...: 26%

... exactly or something very close ...: 30%

... something different but as good as ...: 14%

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Comparing then and now

70% of us doing what we wanted to do or something different but as good or better

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Comparing then and now

What I wanted to do/something different but as good/better

All: 70%
ABs: 81%
C1/C2s: 71%
DEs: 56%

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Q Which of the following statements comes closest to how you feel your current or most recent job or occupation compares to what you really wanted or hoped to do when you were still at school? I am doing … than/to what I wanted or hoped to do back then.

... something different and worse ...

20%
Comparing then and now

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
When you were at school, what did you really want or hope to do?
Thinking back to when you were at primary school/at secondary school ... which of the following job or occupation categories most closely matches what you really wanted or hoped to do when you left school? [Top 5 selections]

- Something professional which you need a degree to do: 22% at secondary school, 17% at primary school
- Something else professional: 17% at secondary school, 16% at primary school
- Something creative, artistic or sporting: 13% at secondary school, 16% at primary school
- Skilled tradesman/woman: 12% at secondary school, 11% at primary school
- Something involving personal service: 8% at secondary school, 9% at primary school

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Ideal job or occupation

Something professional which you need a degree to do

- **All (secondary school)**: 22%
- **ABs**: 41%
- **C1/C2s**: 16%
- **DEs**: 13%

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
One in seven would describe their time at school as “a negative experience overall”
Q  Looking back to your time at school, would you describe it as … ?

- Don’t know: 1%
- A negative experience overall: 13%
- A mixed experience overall (sometimes positive, sometimes negative): 40%
- A positive experience overall: 47%

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
### My time at school

**A positive experience overall**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABs</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1/C2s</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEs</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal quals</td>
<td>36%</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A level</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury*
My time at school

A negative experience overall

All: 13%
ABs: 8%
C1/C2s: 13%
DEs: 17%

No formal quals: 30%
GCSE: 12%
A level: 10%
Degree: 8%

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Around 8 in 10 parents have had some involvement in their child’s education in the last couple of years.
Parental involvement in education

Q Please can you tell me which of the following, if any, you have done in the last 1 or 2 years?

- Helped with/supervised your child’s homework: 65%
- Attended a parents’ evening and/or a parents-governors’ meeting: 64%
- Gone to a fund-raising and/or social event at the school: 51%
- Done voluntary work at the school: 30%
- Been a school governor: 5%
- None of these: 18%
- Don’t know: 5%

Base: 653 British adults who are parents of a child age 0-19 (where 16-19s in fte), 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
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- Don’t know: 5%

Base: 653 British adults who are parents of a child age 0-19 (where 16-19s in fte), 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury.
Two in five parents expect their child to achieve a degree or higher degree

BUT

One in seven parents expect their child to ‘peak’ at GCSE
Child’s highest level of educational qualification

Q What is the highest level of educational qualification you think your child is likely to achieve?

- None: 1%
- GCSE (or equivalent): 14%
- A-level (or equivalent): 23%
- Bachelor’s degree: 23%
- Post-graduate qualification: 22%
- Still too young to say: 9%
- Don’t know: 8%

Base: 653 British adults who are parents of a child age 0-19 (where 16-19s in fte), 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Child will peak at GCSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABs</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1/C2s</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEs</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No formal qual</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-level</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>3%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Child will peak at A level

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABs</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1/C2s</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEs</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal qual</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A level</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Child will peak at degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABs</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1/C2s</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEs</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>No formal quals</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A level</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
What do you think your child will end up doing?
Q When your child completes their education, which of the following job or occupation categories most closely matches what you think they will end up doing? [Top 5 selections]

- Something professional which you need a degree to do: 30%
- Something creative, artistic or sporting: 16%
- Something else professional: 13%
- Skilled tradesman/woman: 8%
- Something involving personal service: 5%

Base: 653 British adults who are parents of a child age 0-19 (where 16-19s in fte), 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Ideal job or occupation

Something professional which you need a degree to do

All: 30%
ABs: 48%
C1/C2s: 24%
DEs: 21%

C1s: 31%
C2s: 15%

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Ideal job or occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Skilled tradesman/woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABs</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEs</td>
<td>14%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the job or occupation your child is likely to end up doing will fairly reflect your child in terms of their characteristics, personality, interests, skills, talents, abilities and so on?

- Strongly agree: 30%
- Tend to agree: 43%
- Neither/nor: 12%
- Tend to disagree: 3%
- Strongly disagree: 12%
- Don’t know: 1%
Child’s likely job or occupation: a fair reflection of them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABs</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1/C2s</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEs</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
And yet ...
Three in five parents AGREE that their child’s prospects are BETTER than their own were
Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree that your child’s prospects are better than your own prospects were at the same age?

- Strongly agree: 33%
- Tend to agree: 26%
- Neither/nor: 17%
- Tend to disagree: 10%
- Strongly disagree: 4%
- Don’t know: 10%

Base: 653 British adults who are parents of a child age 0-19 (where 16-19s in fte), 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Child’s prospects

- **All**: 59%
- **ABs**: 50%
- **C1/C2s**: 61%
- **DEs**: 68%

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Acceptance of their “lot in life” by lower socio-economic groups?
I've drummed into all of them: “I want you to have these things, I can’t get you these things ... what you need to do is get your backside down to school ... and get it yourself”

You work hard enough, you get the relevant qualifications and you knuckle down ... you don’t have to live on a council estate like we do

I want them to achieve what I didn’t
Barriers to achieving aspirations
Child’s prospects: schools’ influence

Agree that child’s prospects are better than own

- All: 59%
- Agree that child’s school encourages them to aim high: 69%
- Disagree that child’s school encourages them to aim high: 50%

Base: 1,997 British adults, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Achieving job/occupation aspirations – what got in the way?

Q What was it that stopped you from doing the job or occupation that you really wanted or hoped to do when you were still at school, if anything?

Top 12 responses

- Family reasons/commitments: 15%
- Did not get enough/the right qualifications: 14%
- Financial difficulties: 11%
- No/few jobs of that kind in this area: 10%
- Lack of support from my family: 8%
- Disability/injury/poor health: 7%
- Wanted to start earning money as soon as possible: 7%
- Could not afford to go into higher education: 6%
- Was not clever enough: 6%
- Lack of ‘get up and go’: 5%
- Changed my mind about it: 5%
- Realised that it was an unrealistic/an ill-informed choice: 5%

Men: 8%
Women: 22%
None: 15%
GCSE: 11%
A-level: 33%
Degree: 13%

Base: 399 British adults in a different and worse job, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Achieving job/occupation aspirations – what got in the way?

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- Changed my mind about it: 5%
- Realised that it was an unrealistic/ill-informed choice: 5%

None: 13%
GCSE: 18%
A-level: 22%
Degree: 4%

Base: 399 British adults in a different and worse job, 22-26 June 2006, Ipsos MORI Omnibus for the Sutton Trust/the Treasury
Re-iterated by Luton parents ...

- Starting a family, and needing to work around them (can be an active choice, though)
- Needing to support oneself/contribute to the family’s finances
- Not getting ‘essential’ qualification(s) for a particular job

**Plus**
- Redundancy/ “having to start all over again”
- Unstable family life (going into care, early bereavement etc.)
- Difficult time at school
- Getting a criminal record
- “Thinking you know it all” ( “when you know bugger all” )
- Not realising the *importance* of school
- Not getting the right support/advice/guidance at the right time and/or from the right people
As a kid, if someone had shown me a photograph of where I live [now] and my situation and told me “If you don’t get qualifications, if you don’t get a decent job, this is where you’re going to end up living” … if it had been more reality, I would have said “Right! I’m going to school”. I’d have been there at 8 o’clock in the morning.

When you don’t come from a rich background, you know that you could aspire to be whatever you want to be, but if your parents can’t afford to put you through college, or your parents can’t afford for you to not work, you know you can’t do these things.
I wanted to be a window dresser … my Dad said “you’ll end up washing windows”

Not one person encouraged me

It wasn’t in [my parents] to put it into me to go forwards like that because of the way they were brought up
Parents’ expectations for their children are framed by their own sphere(s) of reference.

They need: guidance on helping their children to set their sights high ...
Luton parents told us ...

- Don’t know how to advise children on what their options are (don’t have all the info, what info they have may be out-of-date, often based on only limited experience)
- Can’t assess for sure what their children are capable of, when parents haven’t done it themselves
- Element of chance/luck in children getting the right advice from elsewhere
- Cost of HE may be prohibitive, anyway
I really like art but when I was picking my [GCSE] options my Mum said there’s no point doing it as I don’t want to be an artist.

I would like to be a journalist because my Mum says I’m good at writing stories.

They’re more realistic – I used to want to be in the FBI!

At the end of the day, if you wanted to do something that your parents disagreed with, they’d let you know about it.

I used to want to be a police officer – they thought it would be dangerous.
... and society providing a strong(er) safety net
In general

- An equal quality of education for all (no “postcode lottery”)
- Pro-active encouragement of young people to “think bigger”
- More awareness-raising with them about why they need to do this: the effect on their future life chances, where they’ll live, what car they’ll drive etc. (“the real world consequences of education”)
- More emphasis on developing basic skills and vocational experience (not everyone can, or needs to, get academic qualifications, e.g. A-levels or a degree; we need cleaners as well as brain surgeons)
- More support for parents so that they can support their children
  - Appointments for parents with local guidance service
  - More/clearer advice on information sources they can access and how/where they can find these
- Increase the school leaving age to 18 (more mature/informed decisions about the future)?
Discrete careers education/guidance from a younger age

More attention by providers of guidance to those “in the middle” (not just the very high/very low achievers)

Providers able to offer a fuller range of, and a more sophisticated level of, guidance

- Not just the obvious jobs that can be done with a particular subject, the more obscure ones, too
- Unpicking and explaining all the applications of a particular subject and why it will be useful “in the real world” – specific, but also the generic
- More probing questions re. young people’s interests, aptitudes etc.
Multiple opportunities for work experience, each one of longer duration than a week, and with a structured outcome built in (not just there to make the tea) …

… young people supported financially so they can take up these multiple opportunities …

… no young person left to arrange their own work experience (should be an entitlement) …

… employers encouraged (incentivised?) to offer the fullest range of work experience opportunities (including a dedicated work experience co-ordinator in every company?)
The emerging questions

- Are barriers to achieving aspirations amongst lower socio-economic groups perceived or real?
- Whose aspirations should we be raising – parents’ or children’s or both? And how about teachers’ aspirations for pupils??
- Is the issue just a lack of marketing/ information?
- What can be done by government and others to address this?
Thank you