

Customer Voice Research

Aspirations and the Children and Young People Segmentation

Sherbert Research



**Research Report No
DCSF-RR150**

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Objective

To explore, by segment, the aspirations of young people including how they are developed, influenced, shared and communicated

More specifically this research:

- Explored how young people perceive the concept of aspirations?
- Understood what young people's aspirations are and what they value as being important and why?
- Explored how much young people think about the future, and if they do, what is it that they think about?
 - What words do they use? What feelings does it evoke? Do they talk about this with anyone, who and what do they say?
- Teased out the difference in aspirations that young people have in and out of school
 - e.g. learning, development, careers and family, hobbies and interests
- Understood aspirational differences between the segments, how they are described, developed and influenced
- Established whether there is an aspiration 'journey' as children grow up through the different segments
- Ascertained what influences young people's attitudes around aspirations and establish if there are certain triggers
- Understood whether there is a relationship between aspirations and reality, teasing out both the positive and negative relationships

Ultimately this research has provided the DCSF with insights on the aspirations of three segments of young people to support the development of strategic communications and relevant policy targeted at them.

Research methodology

- Twelve one and a quarter hour friendship paired depths with children and young people aged between 11 and 17 (Yr 6 to Yr 12)
- Six with girls, six with boys
- Two friends per paired depth
- Six completed a pre task before coming to the sessions. This involved a short questionnaire / journal relating to their aspirations / hopes and dreams regarding their future

Dates and locations

Research was carried out week of 15 June across England (rural to urban, North to South West)

Segmentation

Sample was split between the following three segments:

- C3 - Breaking the rules
- C4 - Anxious and unsure
- C6 - High ambitions

Key findings

The research methods used and sample size of this project were designed to gain a detailed understanding of the aspirations young people in the following three segments:

- High Ambitions C6
- Anxious and unsure C4
- Breaking the Rules C3

While the insights gained were both rich and fascinating the sample size itself was not 'robust', however, attitudes were consistent within each segment to varying degrees, where some young people held stronger or more formulated views than others. Furthermore there were some interesting and clear differences about aspirations across the segments, which gave rise to some potentially interesting policy and communication implications.

1. High ambitions

Overview: This segment of young people holds a proactive attitude to life and planning their future. They hold very strong meritocratic values and believe that they will succeed if they make the effort and work hard. For them life is exciting and worth making an effort for.

School is regarded as a means to an end. They understand the purpose of learning and education and were motivated to put in the effort to achieve high grades. They cited a range of subjects in which they were interested and many knew they want to do A-levels and were thinking ahead to university. They did admit to feeling under some pressure to achieve high grades, but hoped that the stress will be worth it.

Most of the 'high ambitions' segment have a career in mind, with a backup plan. They begin thinking about this in Year 7 when nurturing other interests and joining secondary school. Some of the over 15s claimed to have looked into this but felt they needed information and guidance on the best route to get there effectively. Money seemed important so that they were comfortable but was not a driver, many felt motivated by contributing to society as well, e.g. paediatrician.

This segment cited having a range of positive relationships in their lives including parents, teachers, club leaders and peers. This helps them feel supported and open to a range of ideas and influence. Their role models tended to be close to home rather than celebrities, such as people around them who have done something interesting with their lives.

School: policy and communications implications

The high ambitions segment want to succeed and are likely to respond warmly to any help they are given. They need information and guidance to allow them to fulfill their potential

Leaving school: policy and communications implications

Choosing the right course and University is important but can be confusing, so they need experienced people to guide them along the way. They would love in-depth advice about University courses content and culture.

Family and friends: policy and communications implications

The generally soft and supportive approach from their parents helps them feel confident in making their own decisions. Young people in this segment rely on their family for guidance. Bringing family into the conversation may be important.

Careers: policy and communications implications

This group are highly ambitious. They know what they want to do. However they would benefit from information that guides them along their career path. They would love opportunities beyond their current environment e.g. business, work experience talks, clear steps for taking action and making themselves more employable.

2. Anxious and unsure

Overview

Among this segment of young people, the future can feel out of their hands. Their attitude to life is dampened and many felt it could be better. They talked about wanting to have a nice life but seemed unsure how to go about fulfilling this.

This segment did not enjoy school and most were looking forward to finishing. They claimed to enjoy the social aspect, but felt that most lessons and the teaching style were 'boring' and did not engage them. All young people in this segment confessed to struggling with academic subjects and preferred practical learning. They wanted to do well and get good grades but did not think that they would achieve and lacked a general confidence in their overall ability. Many struggled to see the relevance of what they learn in school and how it relates to their future.

Anxious and Unsure young people reported a strong sense of family, with strong family input. While this was seen as a positive support, it emerged that for these young people parents and siblings often felt a little over powering and while they want to make them proud and appreciated the support, other family members would seem to drive the agenda. This seemed to cause some resentment and add pressure which seemed to exacerbate the low confidence and self belief that these young people felt.

Most of the 'Anxious and Unsure' young people had no strong career plans. Some admitted to feeling steered by parents' wishes or having listened to wrong advice through school and are not helped to think about what it is they can do; where their skills are; and what they would like to do in their future. They did not seem to have any role models top of mind that inspired them to do or be something in their future.

They did not seem motivated by money, they hoped to live an 'ok' life, enjoy things and not worry too much.

School: policy and communications implications

This segment may benefit from being inspired about their futures at an early age which may include having the opportunity to explore the skills they have and how these relate to their future

Leaving school: policy and communications implications

For anxious and unsure young people, it seems that building confidence and developing skills is really important as they grow through school. This would enable them to make more informed choices about leaving school as they will know where their skills are relevant and can be developed as well as know what they like doing. They risk becoming very lost but with the right support can improve their chances.

Family and friends: policy and communications implications

Family tend to drive and be relied upon for decision making and practical support and guidance. Communication with the parents/carers as well as the young people in this segment is important, but it needs to be written in a tone that supports and empowers the young people to make decisions.

Careers: policy and communications implications

It is important to enable young people to make more informed choices about leaving school, so they will know where their skills are relevant for the big wide world and how they can be developed as they grow up.

3. Breaking the Rules

Overview

The pervasive attitude for this segment was for a better future to 'happen' to them. They tended to be reactive and have very short term thinking. They did not tend to look towards their future or make plans.

For the young people in 'Breaking the Rules' school was not a positive experience. They did not enjoy it and saw little point or benefit in going to school. For them the style of teaching is alienating and they preferred the more practical and social lessons

For many in this sample, their families seemed to be a site of tension. Their experience of school coupled with stressful home life meant that they do not like authority. They spend most time with friends, who appear highly influential in their lives. However this means that peer pressure and the need to conform is strong, especially for those who socialise with people older than themselves, as they may feel the need to behave in 'risky' ways.

The people they cited as looking up to, tended to be celebrities who have come from nothing and achieved notoriety such as Katie Price. This is in part due to their desire to have a better life than their parents and not struggle financially.

The majority don't know what they want to do, only a minority had fledgling career ideas, but they were not sure what they needed to do to pursue them and had not spent time thinking about them or talking to others. This is in part because the future seems far away and they live in the here and now.

School: policy and communications implications

'Breaking the Rules' young people need to have the fun and inspiring aspects of learning demonstrated to them (rather than told). They need to be shown and motivated through what they can do, the skills they have and build on from there. It is important to engage them in exciting ways as they do not respond to more traditional teaching methods. They may also benefit from being exposed to showcases e.g. boy/girl 'done good' through education to make learning seem relevant and applicable to them.

Leaving school: policy and communications implications

It seems essential to inspire these young people early on about career options. Then showing how further learning can help get them to where they want to be. Encouraging participation throughout their school career may help build confidence and tap into resources they do not know they have and linking these to the bigger picture may be useful. It may also help them see the relevance of school beyond the academic. This will enable these young people to make more informed choices about leaving school as they will know where their skills are relevant and can be developed

Family and friends: policy and communications implications

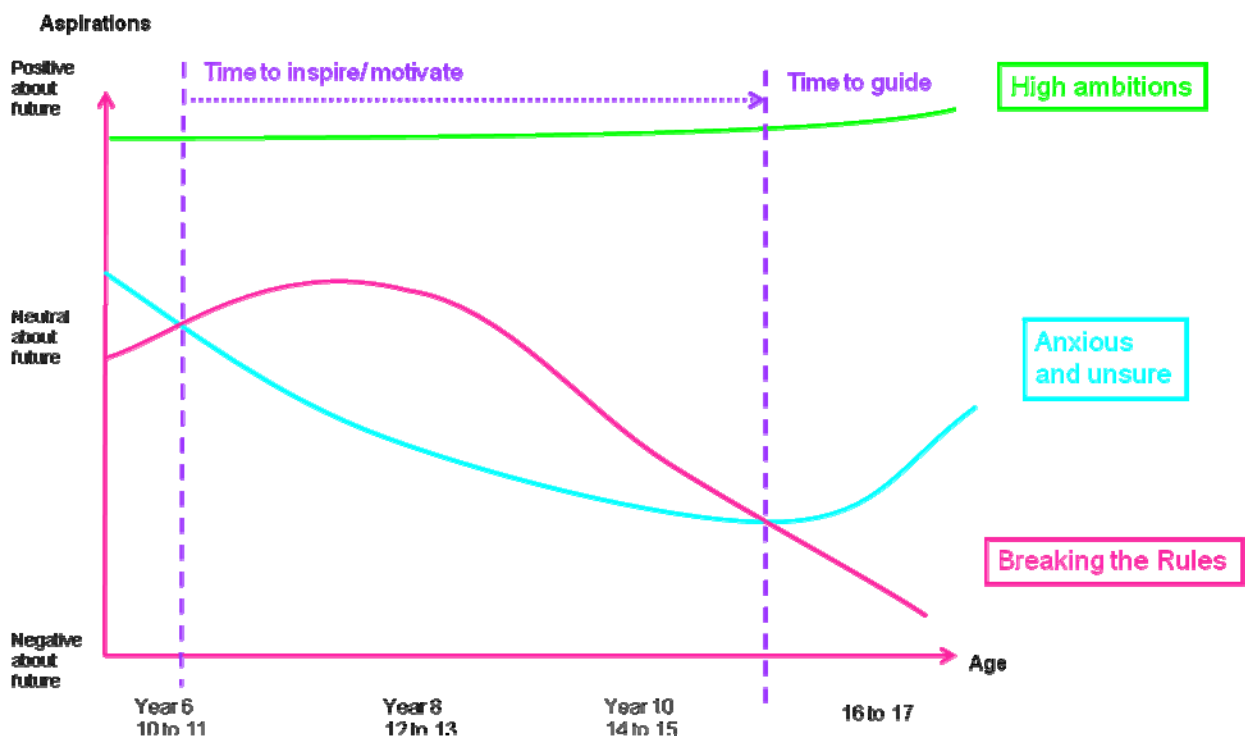
Family cannot be relied upon as the sole source of support and guidance for young people in this segment regarding developing their aspirations

This segment is dependent on a stronger input from impartial and reliable sources and these may need to be multimedia and interactive as well as people who relate well with them.

Careers: policy and communications implications

Building confidence seems important with this segment. This is so they believe in themselves and have sense of self esteem so they can pursue something independently from their friends. If they developing an understanding about careers early on in school, they may stay inspired and think about their future realistically.

Figure 1: A mapping of young people's aspirations journey- year 6 to age 17



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