

# Young people's attitudes to careers & futures

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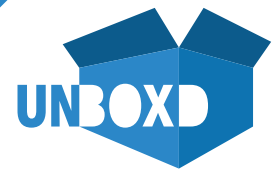
**UNBOXD** Research report 2014/15

**Executive summary written by Simon Shaw**

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## About **UNBOXD**

Founded in 2013, **UNBOXD** is a social enterprise working to enhance social mobility. Through guidance and training, we support young people to make their aspirations a reality.

Our work is centred on values and has two key strands: ensuring young people understand their own personal values; and enabling them to use their values as a tool to plan their route from aspirations to reality.

## The Aims of Our Programmes

Our aims were to both understand young people's values related to careers and, in parallel, develop effective interventions that support young people in using their values to improve their career-related decision-making.

### **Key points**

- There are five key factors that influence young people's attitudes towards their careers and futures. We have called these: 'Feeling Limited', 'Making a Difference', 'Other Priorities', 'Status and Ambition' and 'Family Oriented'.
- Young people are clear on what values are and are also very aware of the connection between values and careers. This builds the case of inclusion for value-led interventions in careers guidance.
- Many young people want to make a difference in their careers. This includes helping and inspiring others.
- Influences such as a lack of personal confidence and internal barriers to the students' personal development does mean many young people feel limited in their career choices.
- There is some indication that the influence of these five key factors can vary with different demographic groups.
- Considerations around having a family were also frequently mentioned, specifically in the students' 20-year plans. This highlights the importance of addressing this factor when helping young people to consider their futures.

## What we do

### **Promote social mobility**

Social immobility is particularly prevalent in economies that already have a high level of inequality, including the UK.

For UNBOXD, the process of supporting young people's decisions about their futures is threefold: we first need to address the attitudes of young people towards careers; then the drivers of these attitudes; and, finally, how we can develop young people's confidence to actually achieve their future aspirations.

### **Support good careers guidance**

Schools in England now have the responsibility to ensure pupils in years 8-13 receive independent careers guidance. This guidance should leave

them inspired and motivated to fulfil their potential, and able to develop high aspirations and consider a broad range of careers.

UNBOXD's programmes help to meet a number of requirements for good careers guidance, fostering a stable careers programme, addressing the needs of each pupil and providing personal guidance.

### **Develop value-led interventions**

Values can be defined as beliefs that guide how an individual should function. Through our programme, we explore the concept of values, careers and aspirations for a range of young people from primary to university level, starting from the standpoint of the students themselves.

## Developing our Programmes: Research

Research and the iterative evaluation of our pilots have helped us to explore four key questions:

1. What values do young people have that relate specifically to careers?
2. Do these career-related values vary with age group, gender and life stage?
3. What methods can we use to help young people become more aware of career related values?
4. Does raising young people's awareness of career-related values increase their confidence in achieving their desired career?

### **What are young people's career related values and how do they vary?**

We developed an attitudes questionnaire to explore this question. Firstly, we conducted qualitative focus groups with a group of 16-18 year olds from the UCL Academy, exploring their thoughts on their futures, careers and aspirations.

From these workshops, a series of value statements and open box questions were developed for the questionnaire. The questionnaire was then completed by over 230 young people from 13 schools and four universities. The questionnaire contained 39 attitude statements that participants rated in terms of their agreement, as well as open box and simple demographic questions.

The subsequent statistical analysis interpreted the values underlying participants' responses to each attitude statement. This allowed us to reduce a large set of statements into five key factors:

Key factor	Characteristics
<b>Feeling Limited</b>	Feeling more limited in various ways, including by choices, money, ability and opportunity. This may be a perception/belief, rather than a reality.
<b>Making a Difference</b>	Wanting to find personal meaning in work, including making a difference to people's lives, inspiring people, being remembered, as well as enjoying work.
<b>Other Priorities</b>	Putting more importance on personal life over career, education and income.
<b>Status and Ambition</b>	Valuing monetary reward, status and recognition, as well as understanding that ambition requires ruthlessness.
<b>Family Oriented</b>	Valuing family and being influenced by family when making decisions, as well as believing in helping others.

Responses confirmed that when we speak to young people about values, they are clear about what we mean. It is clear that young people are also very aware of the connection between values and careers.

This builds the case of inclusion for value-led interventions in careers guidance. The important priorities and things that give young people satisfaction also map well onto the factors identified as being important to young people's decisions about their future, including helping people and family.

There is some indication that the influence of these factors can vary with different demographic groups, but these findings should be explored further. In particular, female students were more likely than male students to agree that they were interested in 'Making a Difference', whereas male students were more likely to agree that they had 'Other Priorities'. Older respondents aged 18+ tended to feel that 'Feeling Limited' was a larger factor for them.

Furthermore, university students felt more external pressure to succeed and achieve status and were possibly more influenced by 'Feeling Limited' than are school students. As may be expected, for university students, having a career

was also significantly more important than it was for school students.

### How can we help young people become more aware of their career related values?

We developed and piloted our own values discovery programme, delivered in a range of educational settings with several target age groups in order to assess the impact the programme had at each key intervention stage.

Our piloting methodology centred on the participatory action research model. We co-delivered the sessions alongside in-house staff, while actively refining and developing the programme as time progressed.

The programme incorporates mixed methods of teaching, including group work, discussion and debates, and individual reflection. Engagement, exploration, explanation, elaboration and evaluation (as identified by Bybee et al's 5 Es model) are integral to our programmes. In particular, students are encouraged to move around during the sessions, helping to keep them engaged with the subject matter. The programme was refined, re-focused and condensed as required.

# Developing our Programmes: Evaluation

## Does raising young people's awareness of career-related values increase their confidence in achieving their desired career?

The programme was evaluated using surveys tailored specifically for the sessions, and was conducted before and after sessions. Overall findings from the survey include:

- Many young people want to make a difference in their careers. This includes helping and inspiring others.
- However, influences such as a lack of personal confidence and internal barriers to the students' personal development does

mean many young people feel limited in their career choices. This indicates that we have identified an important area for young people, and have developed a value-led intervention that begins to address it.

- Considerations around having a family were also frequently mentioned, specifically in the students' 20-year plans. This highlights the importance of addressing this factor when helping young people to consider their futures.

Below are summaries of the evaluation results from the three pilot studies we evaluated:

### Highbury Quadrant Primary School - one 1-hour session for 9-10 year olds

Before the session, not all of the pupils believed they could get their dream job, but after the session all pupils believed they could. After the session, pupils provided answers about their dream job that implied following some sort of dream, aspiration or ambition, whereas before the session, pupils answered the same question with more focus on money, popularity and success. When asked why they believe they can get their dream job, more pupils used words that indicated self-belief, confidence and training or learning opportunities ahead of them.

- Over half of pupils (59%) rated the session 10/10 for enjoyment.
- Over one third of pupils (36%) rated the session 10/10 for usefulness.

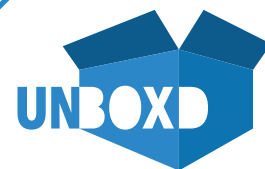
### City and Islington College - two 1.5 hour sessions for 16-18 year olds

After the session there were significant increases in the number of students with a better understanding of what values are and what their own values are. More students had 10-and 20-year plans for where they wanted to be in their lives and over twice as many students had a clear idea about what they would do immediately after college. Importantly, fewer students believed that being realistic meant settling for something. There was also a decrease in students worrying about their futures

- After the session, 7 in 10 students (70%) both knew what their own values were and felt confident researching future careers, compared to half of students (50%) pre-session.
- More than twice as many students (70%) knew what they would do immediately after school than before the sessions (31%).

### UCL Academy - six 1-hour sessions for 15-17 year olds

Feedback from two specific students was particularly striking. One student answered 'Don't Know' to every question in the initial survey, but did attend all six sessions. In the postsession survey this student reported feeling confident about their values and future, and the opportunities available to them. Another student felt strongly confident in their values and how to apply them to their life, and confident in the opportunities available to them after the sessions. Before the sessions, this student's assessment of what they will be doing in 10 and 20 years' time was respectively 'working in a supermarket' and 'still working in a supermarket'. After the sessions, this assessment changed into travelling the world, going to university and having a stable career.



## Our achievements

Our work to date represents a positive first step in exploring young people's values and attitudes towards their careers and futures. We have identified five key factors which influence young people's attitudes towards their careers and futures: 'Feeling Limited', 'Making a Difference', 'Other Priorities', 'Status and Ambition' and 'Family Oriented'.

We explored what impact value-led interventions can have on these attitudes, trying out varied methods for helping people understand and identify their values.

We also explored the varied relationships young people from different age groups, genders and life stages have towards their values. Values-led programmes can help young people overcome their internal barriers of 'Feeling Limited'. We found that raising young people's awareness of their career-related values increases their confidence in achieving their desired career.

However, we do need to gather more data to confirm that we are meeting our aims across wider groups of young people, as well as explore further areas where we can improve in meeting the needs of young people.

## Contact

For a full copy of the research report please see:  
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