

Changing Attitudes to Apprenticeships

**Report of Focus Group held with
Women from the Asian Community
in the Milun Centre, Leeds**

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Executive Summary

The Changing Attitudes to Apprenticeships project aims to raise awareness of apprenticeships and encourage young people in BME communities to view apprenticeships as a real and positive career choice, so increasing future take up.

Changing perceptions and behaviour is a long term initiative and involves engaging communities, parents and families as well young people.

Previous research has shown that community leaders and groups have a major influence on what young people do post-16. This research with Asian women explored their current views of apprenticeships, what their aims are for their children and whether they would encourage them to do an apprenticeship.

It also explored what are the most effective and high impact ways of communicating with this specific target audience and what their information needs may be.

The key findings are detailed in this report and the following recommendations are made:

1. Communication and marketing campaigns aimed at this key audience should involve a strong element of engagement and face to face methods.

2. Publications and printed material should be distributed in a targeted way, through local community centres, schools, and shops rather than through household mailshots

3. Identifying and utilising existing networks and community representatives or champions and encouraging peer to peer information dissemination is the most trusted method of communication.

4. Newspaper or broadcast advertising should be carefully targeted. Specialist and free media are the most popular of these channels.

5. Promotional material and information on apprenticeships for this target audience should focus on the quality of the training and range of career options. Outdated myths need to be tackled and reassurance given in terms of quality and overcoming barriers.

6. Publications and marketing material produced should take into account the preferences expressed for format, size and type of material

7. Content should be simple, clear, accessible and not lengthy. Real life case studies and local information is most effective. Translating materials may not be relevant or appropriate.

8. Preferred images on material are of real people rather than models, and should be culturally compatible. Local people have the highest impact.

1. Introduction

Previous research has identified that family members in particular parents have an influence on the career choices made by young people from BME communities. Initial research also indicated that the views of parents and older members of the communities are often based on 'old fashioned' perceptions of apprenticeships and/ or lack of factual up to date information.

As part of the research element of the Changing Attitudes Project, a focus group was held with Asian women at the Milun Centre, Leeds.

Ten ladies took part, all had a number of children with a varied age range, between 11 and 25 years old. Their sons and daughters were in school, education, or work but none of them had undertaken an apprenticeship.

The women were enthusiastic participants, keen to share their views, and several requested more information about apprenticeships following the session.

A number of key findings are highlighted in this report, which lead to recommendations about how this key audience should be targeted with communications and marketing about apprenticeships in the future.

2. Aims

The aims of the focus group were to:

- **explore further current perceptions mothers/ female family members have about apprenticeships and suitability for their children**
Initial research showed that there were negative views and misperceptions of apprenticeships, the aim was to explore these views further
- **identify the key influences and most trusted and effective communications channels for this group**
To understand the best methods of engagement and information dissemination with this key target group, exploring what channels are most trusted as well as most used and why.
- **identify key messages, images and words for use on material which would potentially encourage a view that apprenticeships could be a positive choice for their children.**
This used existing material to explore what the most effective and popular elements were which could have the most impact on this audience.

3. Format

The focus group was held in a community centre which the participants already attend regularly. They all know each other and attend activities as a group. This was important so that the ladies were in an environment where they felt comfortable and at ease and happy to air their views.

The full agenda is attached in the appendices. The session followed this agenda and all topics were covered, although depending on the flow of the discussion, some issues were focused on more in depth than others.

4. Findings

4.1 Current communication channels

Participants were asked how they currently get information and where they would be most likely to see or hear news, articles, and other information. The participants identified a variety of ways they currently seek or get information from and discussed how popular some channels were and why.

These included:

Broadcast media

None of the participants spent much time watching television – some did not watch any at all.

“I never watch TV, I just don’t have time” – several participants agreed with this statement.

Local channels news programmes were most likely to be watched.

One participant said she always watches the local news in the morning to check traffic and weather reports before she does the school run but otherwise doesn’t watch TV at all.

Radio was more popular than TV as it could be tuned into while doing something else, and would most likely be listened to while driving or working in the house.

“Radio is good because it can be there in the background and it’s easy to listen to.”

Local or regional stations were most frequently listened to, those mentioned included Galaxy, Radio Air, Sunrise, Magic and Asian Fever.

Newspapers

Newspapers were read usually only 'occasionally' and most likely to be read if they were free. The Metro and the Weekly Free were mentioned, though it was acknowledged that the delivery of the weekly Free newspaper is unreliable and not all households get it. The women 'very rarely' read the

Yorkshire Evening Post, only if *'something on the front page grabs my eye and I want to know more'*.

Specialist publications such as Asian Express were mentioned, they were more likely to be read than other locals but again most likely to be picked up if they are free, *'a lot of shops or takeaways now give them out and I always pick one up'*

Internet

The internet was not used by the majority of the participants, with only two of the group stating that they regularly use the internet. This was most likely to be used by them in their workplaces, also popular with these women was using the internet for research online or news sites such as the BBC.

Participants believed if they wanted to they could access a computer very easily – either at home, at a library or community centre. But the participants who currently do not use the internet were not particularly keen to learn how to nor saw it as a skill they would need.

"We have a computer at home and the kids all use it, but I wouldn't

I don't really think I need to learn how to use it'

'I wouldn't know where to start. I can ask my son to get me anything.'

Advertising

Generally participants felt that outdoor advertising may be noticed but not necessarily acted on,

'if you see ads on buses or at the bus stop you will look at them, but you're not going to write down a phone number from them'

It was thought that attention grabbing adverts on buses or shelters could raise awareness as they were noticeable but would have to be very relevant or interesting to have any real impact.

The impact of newspaper advertising will be limited due to the issues highlighted above and no participant could recall any adverts they had recently seen in any newspaper or magazine.

Publications

All participants felt that informative, concise and attractive leaflets, flyers and posters are useful and would likely be picked up and read. A firm advantage highlighted is the ability to choose to pick up this type of information and to keep it for future reference.

However distribution of printed material was key to what kind of attention would be given to it. Delivery direct to households was not a preferred method

"We get too much junk mail through the door"

"I just throw the leaflets and papers away that come through the letterbox, you get so much of them"

Much more favoured was distribution through schools, colleges, community centres.

"I get less and less from the school but if I do get a letter or leaflet sent home then I do take notice of it"

"If there are new posters or leaflets here [at the community centre] I'll look at them, you know that they'll tell you about something you might want or need. And you can ask someone about them."

There was discussion around whether material should be translated into different languages. There was general agreement that for the Asian communities this was not necessary as most people from these communities would be able to read English and if not would have help from friends or family to read it for them.

Face to face

Much information is gathered and spread face to face or on the 'grapevine'. We have a lot of support and networks and will tell each other good things and bad things.

I go into the school quite often, if the teacher says something you listen.

I find out lots of information when I drop my children off, there's always a group chatting at the school gates.

Because we come to the centre all the time we talk to people who come to see us here and we will then tell everyone else about what we've heard.

4.2 Communications channels: trust and influence

The group were asked to rank the communication channels they had identified to determine which ones were the most trusted and which may have the biggest influence on them and their decision making.

The least influential were thought to be the internet and television, due both to the lack of use by the participants and there were also issues around trusting what information would be given out via these media channels, in particular the internet.

There was general agreement that face to face/ word of mouth methods were likely to be the most influential – friends, family, schools, colleges and community centres and groups are all the most trusted sources of information. However one issue highlighted strongly was the potential competitive element between families which may actually lead to information which is useful not being passed on.

"Sometimes because a family wants their children to do better than others, anything that might help or be useful may not get passed on deliberately."

"It can be quite competitive especially when its about your children's success. My son did well in his GCSEs and I know three other families that went and hired tutors for their children when they heard because they wanted to do better."

"It's more likily my own family members than friends who will keep things to themselves if they think it may give them an advantage."

Overall however, the women agreed that they have strong networks and they know who will be helpful and who to go to for help and information. Being given presentations, talks and information as a group in centres like Mulin was felt to be the best and most trusted way of disseminating useful information.

Recommendation 1

Communication and marketing campaigns aimed at this key audience should involve a strong element of engagement and face to face methods.

Recommendation 2

Publications and printed material should be distributed in a targeted way, through local community centres, schools, and shops rather than through household mailshots

Recommendation 3

Identifying and utilising existing networks and community representatives or champions and encouraging peer to peer information dissemination is the most effective method of communication.

Recommendation 4

Newspaper or broadcast advertising should be carefully targeted. Specialist and free media are the most popular channels.

4.3 Current Perceptions

The majority of participants had heard and could give a view about apprenticeships although perceptions were mainly negative and/ or based on misinformation.

"It's what young people can do if they're not academic"

"You get trained for a trade"

"My friend's daughter did one in childcare and didn't learn anything. Two years later she was still there doing the same thing."

There was some feeling that apprenticeships were perhaps used in negative ways.

"It's cheap labour, that's all the employers want"

"It's just a way for the government to make unemployment statistics look better."

"They've been around for ages, all they do is change the name and pretend its something new".

There were mixed responses when asked whether they would encourage or allow their children to do an apprenticeship. Generally there was agreement that their ambitions for their children were to do A levels, possibly a degree, and follow a career path. However they were also keen that young people did something which was suited to their abilities and interests. There was an

emphasis on qualifications, a proper career path and quality training and skills.

"I guess if any of mine weren't really academic – but I'd still want them to do GCSEs and A'levels first"

"It would depend what kind of career they could go into"

There was a discussion about potential barriers and possible discrimination was cited as a real concern, based on previous experience elsewhere.

"My friend's son wasn't even getting interviews when he was writing off for jobs, so he used his mother's previous surname [a Western name] and that made all the difference."

"My daughter went for an interview for a course wearing headscarf and was turned down. She went back a second time without it and was accepted on the course."

The feeling was there is still discrimination which potentially may prevent young people from even being able to get accepted onto an apprenticeship, and hinder them once they are on courses.

Recommendation 5

Promotional material and information on apprenticeships for this target audience should focus on the quality of the training and range of career options. Outdated myths need to be tackled and reassurance given in terms of quality and overcoming barriers.

4.4 Specific elements of communications and marketing material

Participants were asked to examine past a wide range of leaflets, brochures and promotional material (to get a wide variety of material as possible not all related to apprenticeships) and rate them in term of which they liked best and least.

They then discussed the various elements which had influenced their choices and describe which ones they had liked and disliked and why, as well as what would make them pick up and keep this type of promotional material.

Format

Varying sizes and formats of material were examined, including A4, A5, credit card sizes and non standard formats.

The vast majority of preferred A5 size leaflets, they were more likely to pick them up and looked like they had enough, but not too much information.

"Yes, I could put that in my bag easily."

"If you get really big [leaflets] I think it puts you off, there's too much writing"

The least popular format was the small credit card sized publication. It was seen as too small, too easy to loose and difficult to read.

"It would be hard to read something that size, the type is too small"

"I would loose that, I'd never find it again if I put it in my bag!"

Content

All participants agreed that the best publications were clear, concise and easy to read. Anything that seemed too lengthy or wordy was dismissed.

"That looks complicated, I wouldn't even pick that up"

"If it's too big you don't want to read it"

Information which is directly relevant, gives local information and answers immediate questions such as what types of apprenticeships can you do, what do you get paid, what is available locally, is preferable.

Examples of real people from BME communities who have already experienced apprenticeships were felt to be interesting and influential.

Existing perceptions and views about any organisation which produces the material will also influence whether the material is read and/ or trusted.

"I wouldn't look at that leaflet because they [the organisation] aren't very helpful"

Signposting to where you can get further information was felt to be crucial. There was some discussion around whether it should be just a phone number or a web site address as well - most of the participants said they wouldn't use the internet but may get their children too.

Images

Participants agreed that photographs of real people are the preferred images, they are more likely to take notice of photos of peers or local people, and using real people rather than models or cartoons gives credibility to the material. Participants differentiated between images which used models and which didn't and were most enthusiastic about a leaflet which featured a young person from their area.

"You can spot ones who are models – but they look like real kids, and she is from Leeds which is great."

Although informal material which looked 'amateur' wasn't popular neither was anything too formal or 'corporate' looking.

"That looks like it should be a leaflet on insurance, or something boring."

Finally, at the end of the session 50% of the participants requested further information. There was agreement that apprenticeships and up to date information should be promoted more to their communities and that they could offer a real choice for their children.

"After today it is something that I will definitely talk to my children about."

Recommendation 6

Publications and marketing material produced should take into account the preferences expressed for format, size and type of material

Recommendation 7

Content should be simple, clear, accessible and not lengthy. Real life case studies and local information is most effective. Translating materials may not be relevant or appropriate.

Recommendation 8

Preferred images on material are of real people rather than models, and should be culturally compatible. Local people have the highest impact.

Appendix 1

Focus Groups – Asian Women Agenda

Aims:

- To explore more current perceptions mothers/ female family members have about apprenticeships and suitability for their children
- To identify the key influences and most trusted and effective communications channels for this group
- To identify key messages, images and words for use on material which would potentially encourage a view that apprenticeships could be a positive choice for their children

1. Introduction – what we're here for

2. Current communication channels

What information/ communication channels do they use and how frequently (discussion with list) Get group to write on post its so they can move around. (don't prompt unless necessary) – this may include:

- peers
- family
- community or other groups
- Internet/ electronic media – ask to specify eg facebook, Bebo, emails
- Publications – ask to specify eg titles of magazines, newspapers
- TV – ask to specify
- Radio – ask to specify
- Other marketing collateral – eg ads/ posters/ brochures/ what and where)

3. Trust & influence

Of the list collated in 3. get the group to identify which of these channels are most trusted and which have the most influence (nb these are not necessarily interlinked). Ask why.

4. Current Perceptions

Discussion around what people currently think of apprenticeships and why they have formed this opinion; would they encourage their son/ daughter to do them? If not, why not

5. Apprenticeships – current material

Examine past/ current material – which are 'the good the bad and the ugly'; discuss what they like/ don't like. What catches their eye, triggers response etc.

6. Messages and images

Discuss what words/ messages/images used in relation to apprenticeships in the future would have most impact/ influence on the group

(Don't prompt unless necessary – this could include issues of:

earning money

getting good qualifications

becoming a 'professional' eg accountant

as good as college/ university

case studies

recognition by others

a different name)

7. Summary and finish

Summarise session and explain what happens next.

Collect data and hand out expenses.