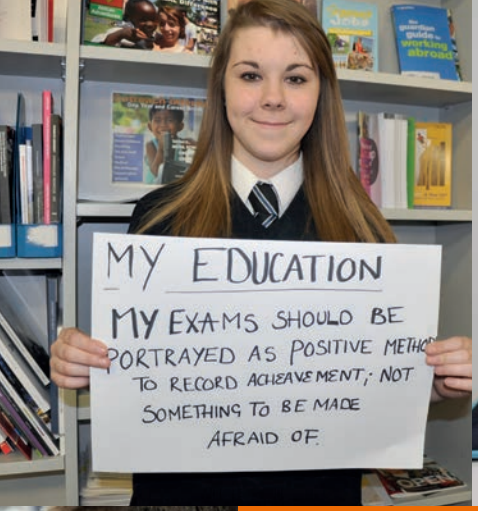
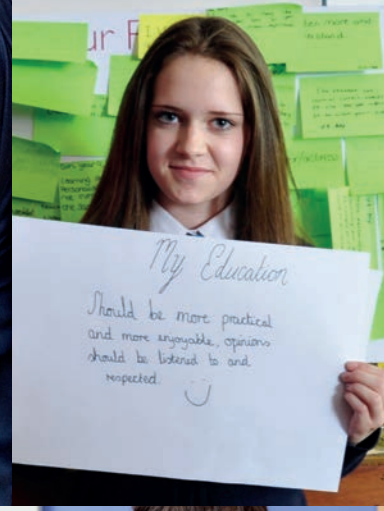






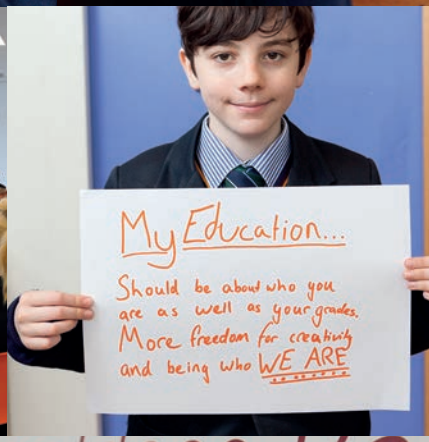






MY EDUCATION



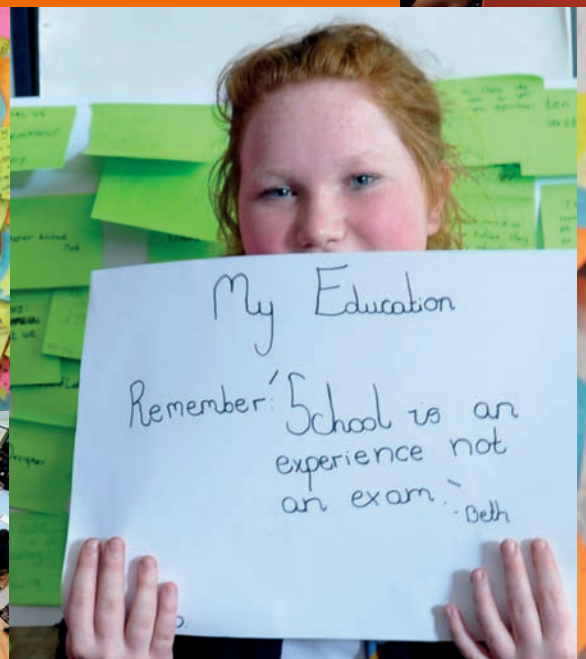




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TeachFirst

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The My Education Youth Ambassadors



Abdul Jawula

Born in Ghana, Abdul Jawula, 18, moved to the UK in 2005. Keenly interested in current affairs, he has spoken in front of US President Barack Obama, and addressed British MPs on social cohesion. Having studied at Barton Peveril Sixth Form College, in Eastleigh, Hampshire, Abdul plans to attend Nottingham University and follow a career in healthcare.
A talented sprint runner, he dreams of competing in Rio in 2016.



Cade Gannon

From birth till now, science was his favourite word and thing to do. Cade Gannon, 15, hopes to be a physicist. No, not just a physicist - a doctor of theoretical physics! After studying at Xaverian College, Manchester, he aims to go to university and gain a PhD.



Chadsley Atkins

Chadsley Atkins, 16, studies at Windsor High School and Sixth Form in Halesowen, near Birmingham, and will soon begin A levels in English, German, mathematics and physics. He hopes to take a degree in physics and German, and dreams about becoming a pilot – or perhaps a teacher – or both!
He regularly volunteers to teach German at his local primary school.



Chelsea Goulding

A student at Barnsley Academy's Sixth Form in South Yorkshire, Chelsea Goulding, 17, has been part of StudentVoice for the last four years and is a member of her local youth council. Chelsea is also active in the UK Youth Parliament, currently campaigning for Curriculum for Life to get more life skills taught in schools.



Haengeun Chi

Haengeun Chi, 19, attended Burlington Danes Academy, in Hammersmith, west London. In October 2013 she will begin a degree in mathematics at New College Oxford, a first step to fulfilling her ambition of becoming a professor. Haengeun has spoken at national events for Teach First, and has served on Hammersmith Borough's Youth Forum.



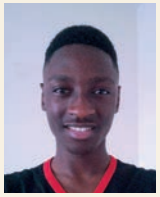
Lizzie Deane

Lizzie Deane, 16, attends Stretford Grammar School, Manchester. She contributes to the Guardian Northerner blog, writing about issues that affect young people including technology in education. Lizzie worked with social media giant Facebook to help bring its site into the classroom environment, and spoke about the experience at the 2013 Sunday Times Festival of Education.



Nabina Ibrahim

Born in the Netherlands, Nabina Ibrahim, 16, has, for the last 13 years, lived in Leicester. She's proud it's officially THE most multicultural city in the country and says it's been a great influence on her, especially in her role representing others. Nabina's dream? To continue being a front-runner for young people's opinions.



Tite-Live Wasolua Kibeti

Tite-Live Wasolua Kibeti, 17, is from Greenwich, south east London. He completed his A levels in summer 2013 and aspires to study engineering or product design at university. Tite-Live served as president of his year council for two years, representing student issues and working with his school's senior leadership team.



Yasmin Rufo

Yasmin Rufo, 15, attends school in Ealing, west London and has already notched up three years as a young politician. In 2012 she was elected deputy member of the UK Youth Parliament, and a year later Ealing's Youth Mayor. Yasmin is the London representative for Student Voice, an adviser to Transport for London, and a member of the National Scrutiny Group, which meets regularly with education ministers.

Foreword from the Youth Ambassadors

This report is a young people's report. Made for young people, made by young people. It is our voice and our dream for the future of education.

Imagine an education where learning is truly meaningful; where students are driven by genuine motivation to explore their interests. Imagine an education where we no longer have to ask, 'what is the point of learning this?', but we start asking deeper questions about 'why' and 'how'. An education in which we start to nurture our inquisitive minds and unlock our full potential.

Time and again, policy makers have failed to listen to our voice. But now, the *My Education* campaign seeks to mould the future of education using the views of young people. As a result, we hope our voice will be empowered and heard.

Inspired by Pearson and Teach First, nine Youth Ambassadors with a shared interest in making education better for young people have come together. We have helped evaluate and explain the findings of the *My Education* school debates and quantitative census, and data from the *My Voice* survey. Together these represent the opinions of more than 8,000 students across England.

Working alongside education professionals, we have helped provide a clearer picture of the research findings. We have had the chance to ensure the views of young people are placed centre stage, and to highlight what needs to be done to improve pupils' experience of learning in a way that will better prepare them for the futures that they want.

As Youth Ambassadors, it is our duty to ensure you hear the voice of young people. So, on their behalf, I ask you to do one thing: to read our report - our stories and dreams - with an open mind and to listen to what we say. As you delve deeper into some of the findings, you will begin to understand how we believe education and schools could change for the better. The *My Education* campaign could be the start of something big.

Haengeun Chi, 19

Keeping our research true to the students

There are likely as many views on education as there are academic professionals. All of us are striving to offer interpretations of what is happening in today's schools – and what we believe should be happening in the future. However well-intentioned, the result is a sector groaning under the weight of theories and ideas.

Collectively we need to stop, pause, and refocus our attention on the needs and aspirations of learners, and hear what they are telling us; what *they* see and know of education, not what *we* see and know of it.

This is why, in designing this study, we took our lead from the Youth Ambassadors. Together we have produced an extensive, qualitative research study, backed by quantitative data, which *starts* by asking what students think about their education. And, more importantly, which experiences make them think the way they do.

This is not a token exercise. At all stages, we sought our Youth Ambassadors' advice; they are the steering group for this work. Our responsibility was to gather, collate, and present findings that stay true to their source, using our professionalism to ensure we neither led nor weighted the opinions offered, nor influenced the debate to suit any academic preconceptions.

In the first phase of debates, we posed broad and exploratory discussion questions, drawing on 30 years' experience of the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA), including the results of QISA's *My Voice* survey carried out in 2012.

At QISA our shared philosophy is that all students have something to teach *us*. We also believe that schools and teachers do not need more work to do, but better tools with which to do their work. This is why we have developed online surveys such as *My Voice* and *iKnow My Class* to help teachers increase their understanding of the student experience. For the students we developed an individualised student learning plan called the MAAP (My Aspirations Action Plan) that captures students hopes and dreams for the future and challenges them to reach those dreams within the structure of the school.

When young people are asked their opinion of their school and learning we have seen increases in self-worth, a more meaningful engagement in learning, and a rise in overall sense of purpose. The natural outcome is improved academic ability, fewer absences and discipline issues, and a much more positive and productive teaching and learning environment.

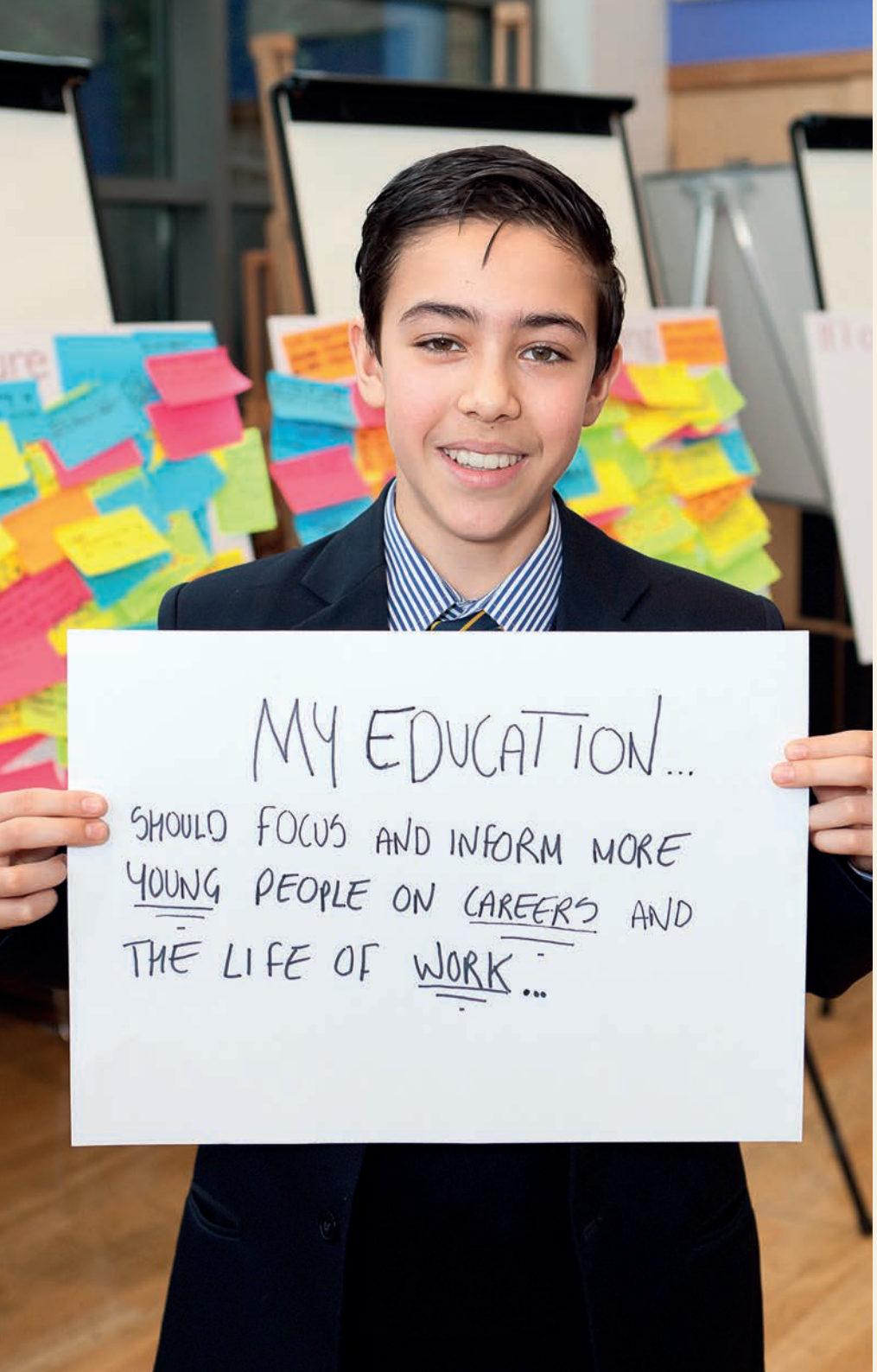
In phase two of the *My Education* study, our researchers used the first set of debate transcripts to gain a deeper understanding of students' views. The approach was one of inductive analysis, meaning that any patterns, themes or categories emerged only as we dissected the qualitative data. There were no preset ideas or theories into which we tried to shoehorn the source material.

The result gave us three strong themes of student concern: *hopes and dreams, current classroom environment,* and *student voice*. Underlying each was a fourth issue, *assessment* -specifically how students express and track what they know - so this too became a theme. These four strands were central to our more detailed, phase two group debates and the census questions. This report presents those findings.

It has been a delight working with the Youth Ambassadors. We are, we hope, providing a platform for their voice, and the voices of other students. Listen and read carefully, we have much to learn.

Dr Russell Quaglia

President and Founder of the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations



About this research

This report draws on three main sources:

- Survey results from *My Voice* data, research carried out by the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA) in 2012, from a survey sample of 5,800 students attending secondary schools in England.
- A *My Education* school debate roadshow, starting at Burlington Danes Academy, Hammersmith, in February 2013, and finishing five months later in July at Djanogly City Academy, Nottingham. During this time we hosted seven debate events involving 420 pupils. The views we gathered form the backbone of this report.
- A *My Education* quantitative census carried out by Populus between 26 June and 3 July 2013, developed to further explore and clarify the findings of the debate roadshow. Researchers gathered the views of 2,002 young people, aged 14 to 21, as part of an online survey. Participants reflect the demographic profile by sex, ethnic group, and school type.

For a full copy of the *My Education* census findings please email *martin.odonovan@pearson.com* or *jdando@teachfirst.org.uk*

Our findings: Hopes and dreams

We know where we want to go – help us get there

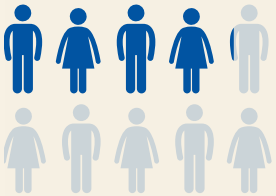
Students taking part in the *My Education* debate groups often said it was difficult for them to connect the relevance of school and learning to their future work aims.

There appear to be three causes of the disconnection: little association between lesson content and career preferences; teachers not knowing their pupils' hopes and dreams; and inadequate opportunities to gain foundation 'life skills'.

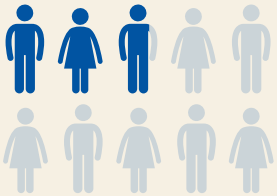
Students expressed the need for learning that relates to their goals. They are hungry for that connection, and speak easily and specifically about what they want to do with their lives. Many aspire to go to university, and understand that means doing well in core subjects. But they also enjoy lessons that link clearly to their career ambitions.

What encourages / encouraged you to work hard at school?

Top 3 results



41%
A desire to achieve future career goals



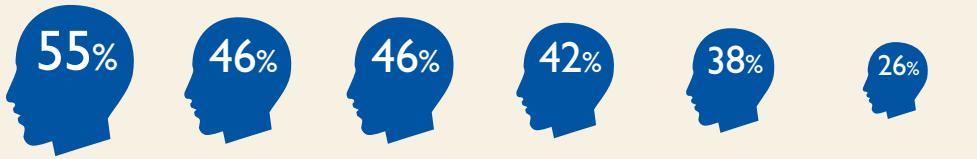
28%
A desire for academic success at school



8%
Support and encouragement from my parents

Our quantitative data shows how seriously students take their futures. More than 90 per cent of those questioned in the *My Education* census believe high-quality qualifications that universities and employers respect are the top factor in helping them reach their goals.

What would help you to achieve your future goals?*

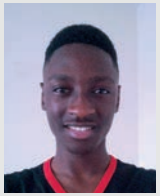


* Full question: Do you agree that each of the following factors is important in helping you to improve your learning and your chances of reaching your future goals? Proportion who strongly agree.

They also share a strong belief in preparing for a vocation, with 83 per cent agreeing that more opportunities for work experience and better careers advice are important. And 88 per cent feel they would benefit from practical life skills such as writing a CV or managing a bank account.

> *"When I have lessons that are more based on my future, it is a fun lesson and I am learning."*

Why do so many give up on their dreams?



I'm approaching the end of my further education. Ever since I was little, I dreamed of doing something for a living that will excite me every day. I never faltered – even though I wished to at times. I kept this dream close to my heart. My persistence made me consistent, and that is thanks to all the people who surrounded me as I grew up.

Other young people have dreamt of the same thing, but their passion and desire gradually died away. Some of my classmates decided to stop trying to get an education at a young age.

It worries me because I've come to realise that young people are not given enough chances to fulfil their potential. As a result, they give up on these dreams, deeming them unrealistic. They are becoming individuals who only seek wealth, not what they are passionate about.

All the while, children around the globe are dying to get an education many of us take for granted.

As a society that has so much to offer to its people, we must ask ourselves what is making children who have a much greater chance to achieve their dreams stop trying?

Playing the blame game has no winners. If we solve this mystery we could change the future of young people forever, allowing them to become strong, confident individuals. Together, we can create the world's best education system.

Tite-Live Wasolua Kibeti (17)



You need to know our hopes and dreams, not just our grades

In the *My Education* census, more than four in every five respondents agreed teachers should have more time to get to know them and understand their goals.

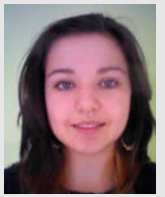
From our debate groups it is evident that few students share such information, despite broad agreement that it was crucial to fulfilling their career plans. Many revealed a perception that teachers do not want to know their goals. As one debate participant put it, 'We don't share, they don't ask. They don't ask and we don't tell them.'

Students often commented that many teachers seem to 'only care about grades.' But they expressed positive enthusiasm for teachers who had made the effort to successfully link their subject to a hobby or career in which they knew their students had an interest.

Young learners clearly want teachers to listen and to engage them seriously in conversations about their future. As one year nine pupil wryly remarked, 'Teachers could make their classes more relevant to my future goals by asking me what my future goals actually are.'

> *"Teachers could make their classes more relevant to my future goals by asking what I wanted to do to in the future and help me try to achieve those targets by helping me in the areas I need help in."*

Teachers can be your best support



Final exams. Fear is surging through your body. It becomes clear just how vital this instant is to your future. It is now that you can solve a problem, or you can give in to fear and admit you just cannot fulfil expectations.

You are only 16 years old. How can you calm and compose yourself? Who should you turn to? The exams your parents sat were vastly different. Your friends are also stressed. You see only one other option, a teacher.

Don't panic! They are human. They understand our stress and can help us deal with it better than most people around us.

During my GCSE exams, there was one particular teacher that recognised I was upset and worried. He approached me, and asked how I was feeling. After explaining my worries, he offered to stay after school and give up his dinner times to help me revise and become more confident with all my exams, including those outside his specialised knowledge.

I don't know so much that it was the extra revision that helped me, as much as knowing this teacher believed in me and genuinely cared. I believe a lot of my determination then came from making myself, my family, and this teacher, proud of my accomplishments on results day.

The relationship between me and this member of staff, among others, has changed vastly through this experience. I now devote myself to learning, and respecting the work teachers do.

Chelsea Goulding (17)

Why are we learning this?

Students expressed a dislocation between their current learning and their plans. Common feelings articulated throughout the *My Education* debates were, 'The school says we have to do all these subjects that don't really help,' and, 'I don't see how subjects are relevant to my career aspirations.'

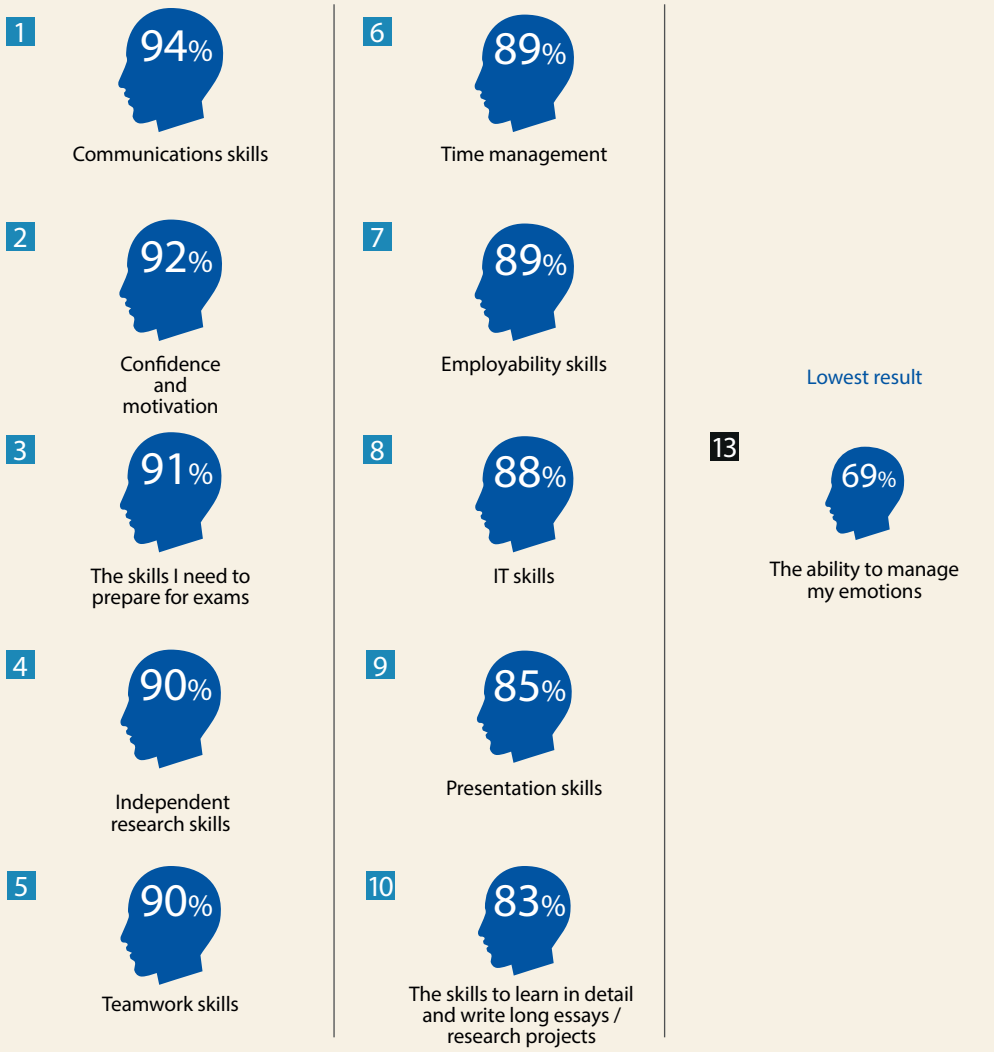
Most students also agreed that they weren't able to study all the subjects they would ideally like. In response to a question about whether what you learn in school will help your future, a year nine student replied, 'No. For example, someone might want to be a musician, but we don't do music. There aren't a lot of options to be honest.'

Lack of practical life skills concerned students. They seemed frustrated by knowing what they want to do with their lives, but not knowing how to get there. Most had an appetite for skills that would help them navigate the employment path. They wanted to learn more about getting a job, managing money, paying for university, different languages and cultures, and generic work skills.

The *My Education* census results confirmed these debate views. Students rated communication, confidence, and motivation as the most important skills they need to learn at school. Following exam technique, they also placed a high value on independent research, time management, and employability skills.

> *"I have never been asked about my hopes and dreams."*

To what extent do you agree that it is important to learn each of the following skills at school? Proportion who agree and strongly agree.



Our findings: Classroom environment

Great teaching is active, passionate, exciting

Our evidence shows that teachers who exude true passion for their subject are the ones that fire students' appetite for learning.

During the *My Education* debates, we repeatedly heard young people speak warmly about teachers who showed eagerness during lessons and clearly enjoyed sharing their knowledge. For them, a passionate teacher communicated the thrill of the topic in an original way. Time and again, students stated that even if they did not like a subject, if their teacher was excited by it, then they liked the class.

As students spend upwards of seven hours of their schoolday in a classroom, they have a finely honed sense of when a teacher makes it or fakes it. As one debate participant remarked, 'If a teacher doesn't enjoy the lesson, they just tell you what you need to know to pass the exam.'

Some 93 per cent of respondents to our *My Education* census said the top qualities of a great teacher are subject passion and an enjoyment of teaching.

Qualities that make a great teacher.*



71%
Having a passion for their subject and enjoying teaching



65%
Being very knowledgeable in their subject: able to add detail, explain why and how things are the way they are, and go beyond what appears in textbooks



61%
Telling students exactly how they are doing and what they need to improve, encouraging them to always do their best

Lowest result



26%
Having high expectations of their students

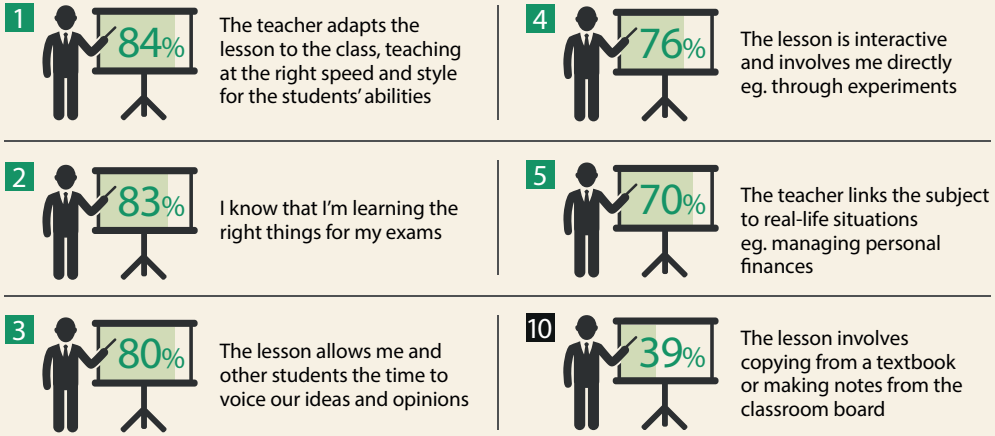
* Full question: To what extent do you agree that each of the following qualities is important for someone to be a great teacher? Proportion who answered strongly agree and agree.

> *"The way he speaks shows he is interested in the subject. You can tell he enjoys it, and that kind of goes into us. You can hear the excitement in the way he speaks and the way he moves around the classroom."*

> *"When the teachers are enthusiastic, it helps motivate me no matter what the subject."*

Students were clear that the spark to learn comes from lessons that combine a mix of teaching methods. Hours spent as passive receptors of knowledge are a huge turn-off, and most said they do not learn when told to copy notes from the board or a textbook. For them, a stimulating lesson is one that includes practical, interactive, hands-on tasks, and gives them the opportunity to contribute ideas and opinions.

What makes a lesson engaging and interesting?*



* Full question: To what extent do you agree that each of the following factors is important in making a lesson engaging and interesting for you?

Proportion who answered strongly agree and agree.

The *My Education* census findings agreed with this view. Three-quarters of respondents (76 per cent) said it is important to make lessons engaging and interesting by actively involving the students. And 80 per cent felt it important for lessons to include topic discussion time.

Scoring even higher, with 84 per cent of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing, was the view that teachers need to adapt lessons to the class, teaching at the right speed and style for individual abilities.

In our debates, almost all students felt able to describe their preferred ways to learn, and agreed it was important for teachers to create the right degree of challenge. As one student commented, 'If a lesson is too hard, I don't pay attention, but if it is too repetitive I am so bored.' Another said he would 'like to introduce an individual learning environment instead of forcing students to work at the same rate of progression.'

A star turn



He leisurely strolled to the front desk like a Blackpool promenade geriatric...a PhD in astrophysics was about to take the challenge of his life - entertaining a bunch of bored adolescents. My luck, I was one of them.

Physics was never an interest of mine. It took three words to make me realise today was going to be different.

'Physics is fun!' exclaimed the Doc.

An uproar of laughter.

He lit up like a firework, exploded a large, feline grin.

The next minutes would be the most exciting, entertaining and enthralling experience. His love for physics was apparent through his expressions and enthusiasm as he explained what seemed the most impossible learning objective ever…the full life cycle of a star.

Amplifying his voice, he sailed us through from birth 'til death. We listened acutely, gripped by what we were being introduced to. To finish, he showed us an unbelievable video of a supernova - a crescendo to his symphony.

The best was yet to come. After inspiring us, our raging questions were endless. But he did not simply reply, he used the class's knowledge with his guidance to reach the answer. None of us thought we'd be capable of this just 50 minutes before.

I am now pursuing A-level physics, and have come across a quote I find interesting: 'If you are not completely confused by quantum physics, you have not fully understood it'. Some people believe I should be concerned. Yet I often reply…'physics is fun!'

Chadsley Atkins (16)

Which of the following materials and resources are most effective in helping you to study on your own?

1	58% Good textbooks	7	15% Learning / interactive games
2	58% Good personal notes	8	13% Videos / TV programmes
3	56% Good revision guides	10	4% Podcasts

Despite these views on what makes engaging and interesting lessons, and the technological aptitude of today's 'digital native' students, it is still good textbooks, personal notes and revision guides that come out as the top choices for self-study. Ensuring that any emerging interactive or technological learning tools capture the same benefits as traditional materials is an important lesson for education professionals.

Top teachers know their students and treat them as individuals

Our research revealed a second important part of a positive classroom environment: student-teacher relationships. For a teacher to truly reach the students, he or she must know them as individuals. Most of the *My Education* debate participants agreed that teachers who forge the best relationships with students also have few discipline issues, because the students respect the teacher.

Unprompted, many students identified teacher relationships as a key ingredient to success and learning. Survey data released for this report[1] affirms this view, although the student experience appears to polarise, with 56 per cent of those questioned agreeing that their teachers made an effort to get to know them, but only 49 per cent believing their teachers cared about them as individuals.

Students recognised the pressure teachers are under to achieve high exam results. Many said this got in the way of teachers taking the time to know them as individuals.

> *"It is important for teachers to know me. I need that relationship to be my best."*

Overall, students were clear and specific about what they need and want from the classroom: inspiring, enthusiastic teachers with whom they have good relationships, and engaging lessons.

1 Survey results from My Voice data, research carried out by the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA) in 2012, from a survey sample of 5,800 students attending secondary schools in England.

We need the right conditions



'Bang!' isn't the sound you want to hear, 'crash!' isn't the sound you want to hear. With these noises going round on an infinite loop as if the class is on repeat, on full volume, how are we expected to learn?

When you learn, you want to focus, learn, and achieve. In your environment, you want tranquility and peace of mind. The environment in which you learn has to have stability and a good friendly teacher, who builds a strong relationship with every student. This means that you will have no ups and downs, and every student can feel confident speaking to their teacher to ask for help.

A personal experience of mine shows exactly why building a positive relationship with a teacher is so important. In a Spanish lesson in late January, a supply teacher was covering for a lesson. I did not get along well with that teacher. Whenever I spoke with a slightest whisper, he would just shout at me, which was very intimidating. As a result, I could not ask for any help, did not enjoy learning, and my grade soon suffered.

On the other hand, in a class where I have a good relationship with my teacher, all the work I do is up to a good standard and my grade moves up regularly.

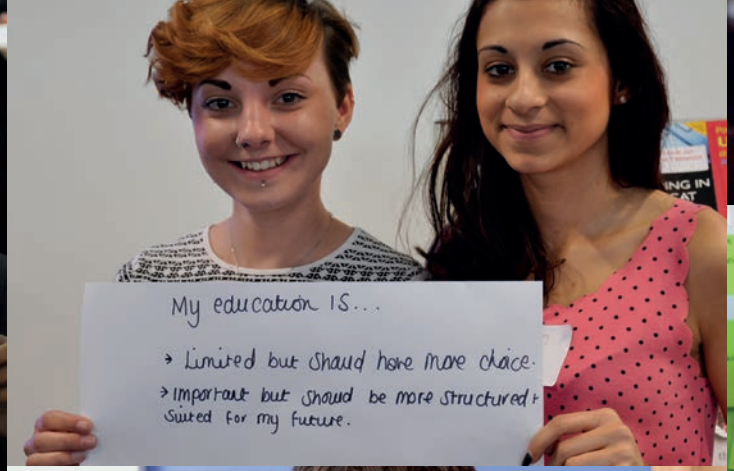
In this environment, I feel like I'm learning and enjoying education. I wish that every teacher could care about students and help us learn to achieve our full potential.

Cade Gannon (15)

"We are at our worst when we are told to copy something down. I am less successful in lessons when we are just copy out of a textbook. I forget things."

"If you're more involved, it's awesome."


My Education...
Should allow me to work in a good atmosphere, allow me to have a teacher who understands me & allow us to spread out our exams rather than having them all at the same time: making me less nervous.

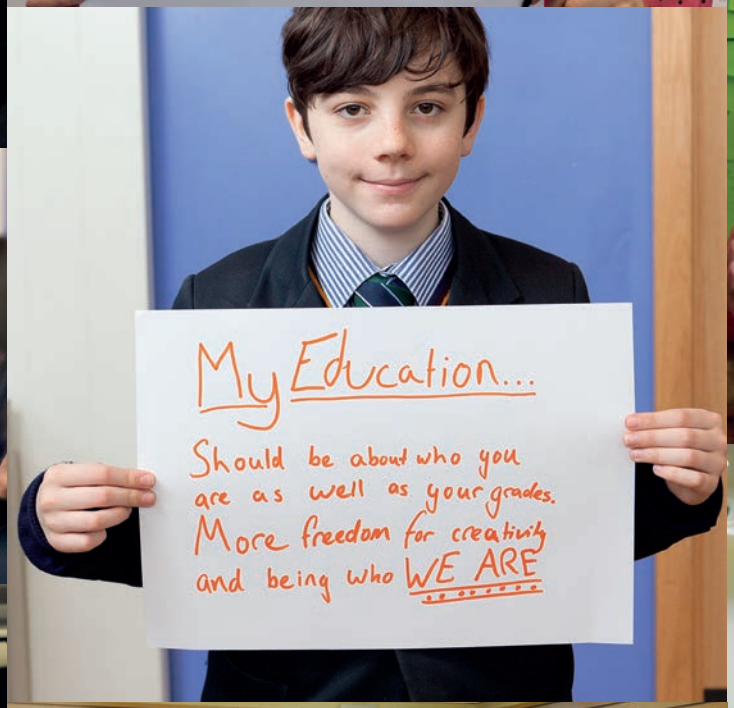

My education IS...
→ Limited but should have more choice.
→ Important but should be more structured + suited for my future.


Money




My Education
Should be more practical and more enjoyable, opinions should be listened to and respected.




My Education...
Should be about who you are as well as your grades. More freedom for creativity and being who WE ARE




ALWAYS LEARNING
My Education...
needs intresting teachers
who Care.


RIVETING READS


ALWAYS LEARNING
MY EDUCATION SHOULD...
PREPARE ME FOR
REAL-LIFE!



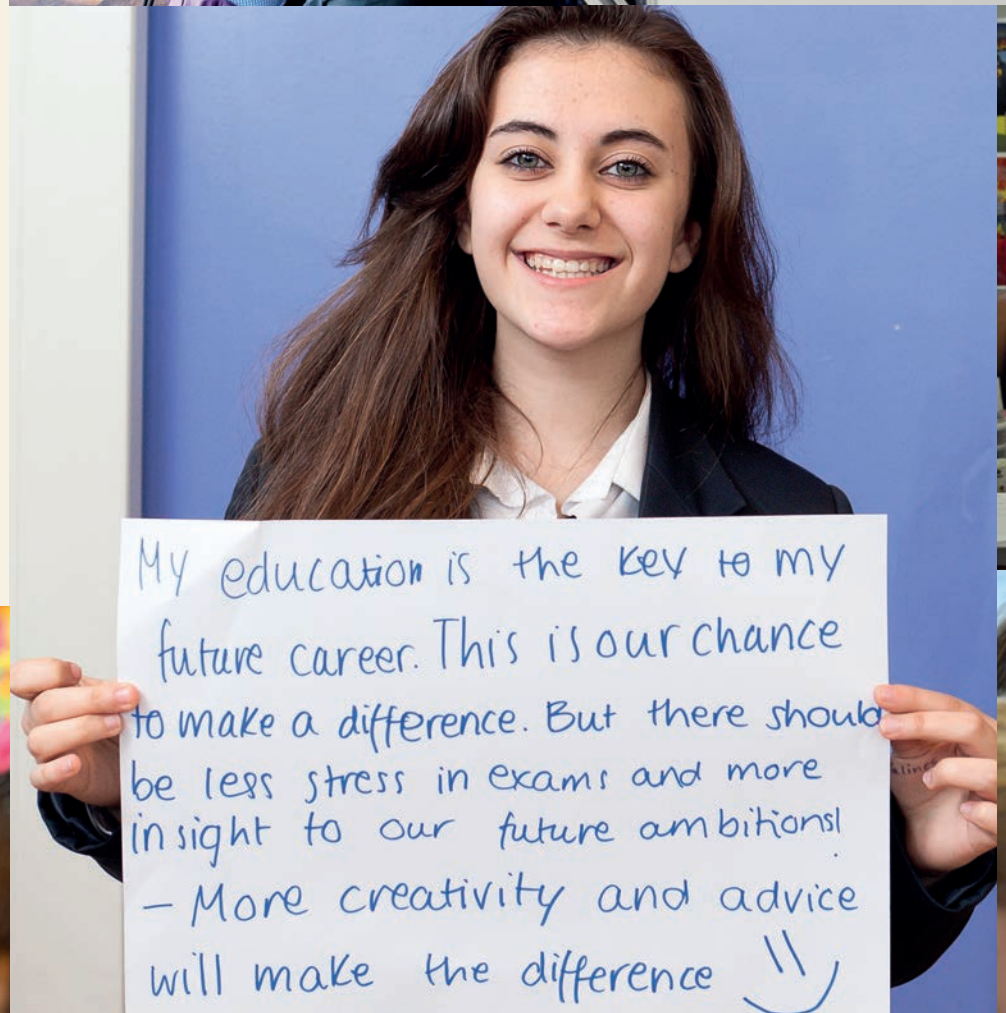


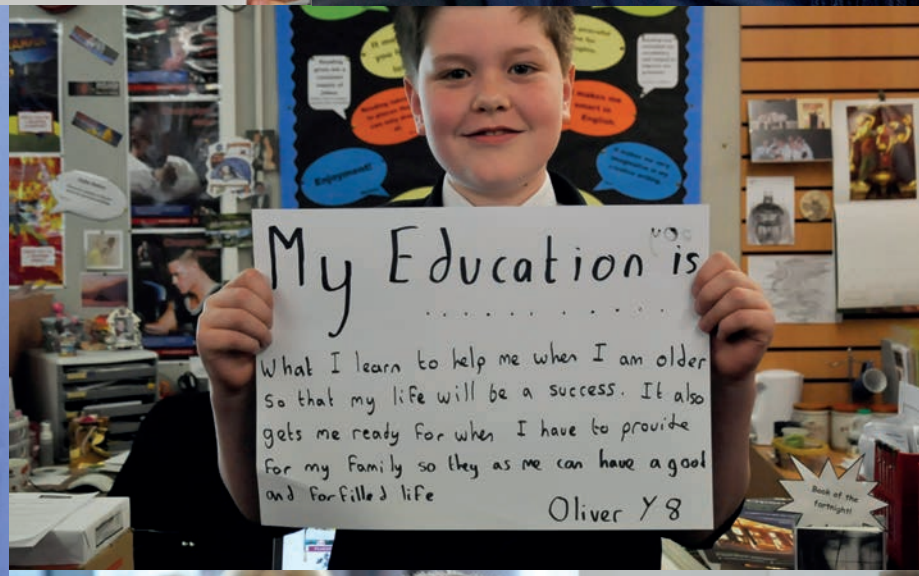



My education should be open to suggest ideas, and to request help with things I don't feel confident with. We should all be treated the same. :)

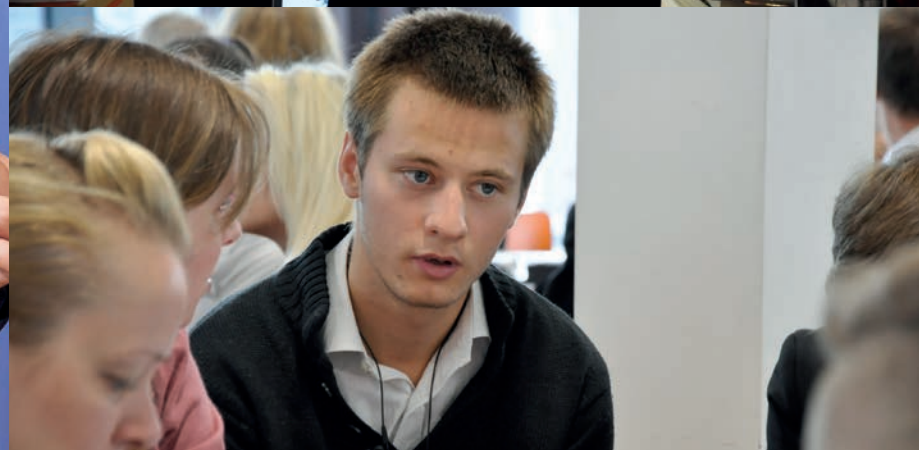





My education is the key to my future career. This is our chance to make a difference. But there should be less stress in exams and more insight to our future ambitions! - More creativity and advice will make the difference :)


My Education is
What I learn to help me when I am older so that my life will be a success. It also gets me ready for when I have to provide for my family so they as me can have a good and forfilled life
Oliver Y8

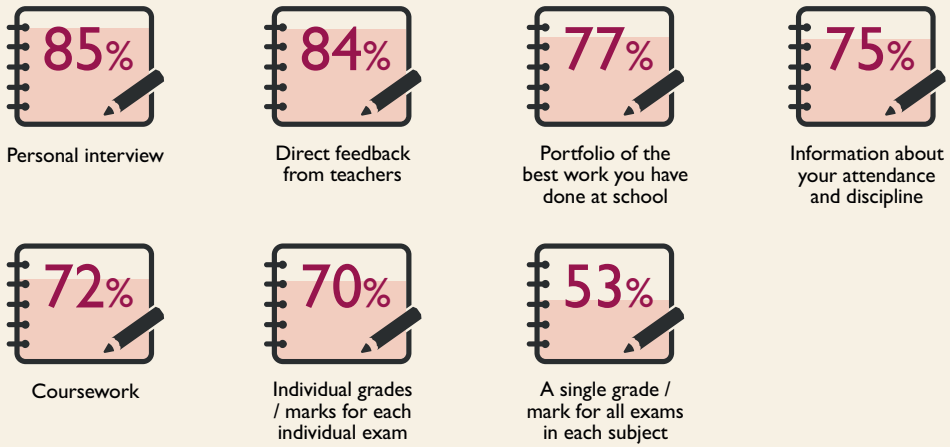

Money



Our findings: Assessment

Measure what we understand, not what we remember on one day

To what extent do you agree that the following forms of assessment are a good way for you to demonstrate your knowledge to an employer or an education establishment (e.g. college, university)?



Throughout our *My Education* debates, students expressed strong opinions about end of year exams not being the best way to assess learning, and how there is relatively little opportunity to qualitatively measure ability. For formal examinations in particular, students felt their future rests arbitrarily on their performance on one given day.

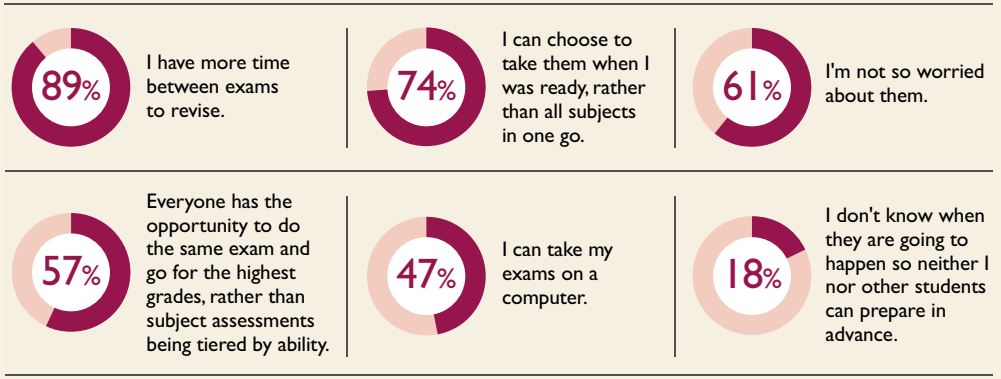
In the *My Education* census, more than four in five respondents agreed that direct feedback from teachers or a personal interview are good ways to prove knowledge to an employer, university or college. And 77 per cent believe that a portfolio of their best schoolwork would be an asset in proving ability. In comparison, exam grades are significantly less popular, whether as a mark for individual exams or, worse, one single grade for the whole subject.

The sway of opinion among *My Education* debate participants was that the pressure and stress of exams often prevent students from showing what they know. And, used exclusively, they do not make for a realistic measure of talent for a subject.

This causes both frustration and anxiety. As one Year 12 student said, 'Exams are a good way to be assessed. It clearly shows whether you've listened or not. However, I'd like to see more presentations on whatever I am learning as I think that's a good way to show your understanding. I failed an exam in January as I got too nervous.'

Students also want evaluation on how they apply knowledge. One commented, 'I think as well as being assessed on your written work, you should be assessed on your practical. Someone may be able to learn it from a book and know all the facts but not be able to complete it practically.'

What impact would each of the following hypothetical circumstances have on your performance in exams? Percentage of students who felt these factors would have a positive impact.



The *My Education* census found students want more control over when they take exams. Some 74 per cent agreed that being able to take exams when they felt they were ready, rather than in one go, would improve their performance. And nearly 90 per cent said having more time between exams to revise would also have a positive impact.

Your future rests on one perfect day



Five years preparing for this moment, and all it took was one litre of orange juice to potentially change everything. Our teachers had invited us for a 'breakfast revision session' before our first and final GCSE English exam. We were handed a bottle of Tropicana and encouraged to drink as much of it as possible.

We were halfway through the exam when a majority of us realised that the fluids had decided to rear up. All those mind maps, homework, practice essays and past papers, yet some orange juice could be the confounding variable to our results.

Have you ever felt so much discomfort that it takes over your body and mind? It's like running out of breath and caring about nothing but oxygen. I wanted to write, but my hand simply would not move. I quickly peered around, gazing into twisted faces. We were in this together.

Thankfully, most of us achieved our potential come results day.

Leaving that exam, I wondered how many pupils across Britain were in similar situations. Perhaps a bereavement or family issue affecting them at the final hurdle.

Examinations are only a snapshot of academic performance. A World Cup with only one match. A tennis match with one serve. To achieve one's potential, everything has to be perfect on the day.

Abdul Jawula (18)

Grades and scores don't show all we know: we need qualitative assessment

In our *My Education* debates, students broadly agreed that assessment is necessary to show improvement or certify knowledge. But what comprises that assessment, and the journey to it, concerns them.

Imagine that you are in charge of the education system for the entire country. To what extent do you agree that each of the following changes would have an impact in making sure that education helps all students achieve their goals?

	Strongly Agree	Agree
1 Encouraging exams that test the understanding of the subject rather than a 'regurgitation of facts' approach	47%	38%
2 Ensuring that qualifications are accepted internationally if students want to work abroad	45%	42%
3 Encouraging tougher discipline for students who misbehave	41%	36%
4 Encouraging lessons which have more links to skills for the workplace	36%	46%
5 Giving teachers more time to know their students as individuals and understand their goals	35%	46%
10 Encouraging lessons that take place outside the classroom	24%	37%

A better path to success

When the *My Education* census asked respondents what changes would help students achieve their goals, 85 per cent strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'encouraging exams that test understanding of the subject, rather than regurgitation of facts'. This is a challenge for assessment design.

Also a popular response, with 45 per cent strongly agreeing and 42 per cent agreeing, was the suggestion that formal qualifications must have international acceptance, perhaps reflecting students' awareness that the job market is now global.

The third most favoured change, gaining agreement from more than three in four respondents, was the idea that students would stand a better chance of achieving their goals if those who misbehaved received tougher discipline. Many students feel that some peers disrupt the learning environment.

> *"Aren't exams testing your memory, not what you've learned?"*

> *"My Education is an experience, not an exam."*

The perfect formula of Mr G



Robots - memorising formulas, regurgitating facts. Pretending that we understood when we didn't have a clue. Playing by the rules of the examiner.

That's before we met Mr G, who rescued us from the education system that failed us all. He was a teacher who relished making you think, and not telling you the answer. The one whose enthusiasm and passion was contagious.

He challenged every student with his thought-provoking questions, showing us there was so much more to maths than just getting the 'right' answer. 'Maths is life', he would say, like Socrates.

And who wouldn't want the greatest sage of all time as their maths teacher? Who wouldn't want to become Plato, Mr G's disciple? As I became thirsty for more knowledge, I found myself going to Mr G every day after school, coming up with extra questions just to challenge him.

Thanks to Mr G, I've been able to open my eyes to the beauty of mathematics. Now, I hold an offer to pursue this passion at Oxford University. I am forever in debt to his encouragement and inspiration.

It upsets me to think there are so many young people missing out on education. Doesn't it upset you to think that thousands of young people across the country grow up never getting a chance to realise their full potential?

We are not robots. We need education that excites and challenges us. No memory test. No examiner's game. Just education and us.

Haengeun Chi (19)

Feedback helps us learn

During our debates, when students talked about what assessment method worked best for them, most said they wanted confirmation they were learning the course material and staying on target.

Students consistently conveyed the need for feedback. Information about performance or progress carries greater value than grades or marks. While accepting they are important, students expressed dissatisfaction with exam scores that come with little or no verbal or written guidance on how to improve. Typical comments heard were, 'I don't always get what I need to do differently,' and, 'I want my teacher to tell me what I am doing well.'

There was a mixed response to the role students should play in assessment. While some thought peer and self-assessment important, others felt that assessment 'is what teachers have been trained for.' From student responses it was clear they have little experience in assessing their own work or having their own assessment count towards grades.

> *"I always want feedback."*

> *"I wish my teacher would share with me if I am on target."*

Nurture talent, don't waste it



'Anyone who cries at this creepy bull**** is literally sobbing IQ points out of their body.'

Did we really just read that? Swearing? In school? In a lesson?

One fearless (possibly slightly crazy) English teacher was brave enough to provide for analysis an article by the infamous columnist Charlie Brooker. From then on I was utterly hooked on English and decided to be a journalist.

I was lucky enough to have the same, brilliant teacher throughout my time in secondary school, a privilege many do not experience. I excelled in English and in other related subjects like history.

The problem was I was totally uninspired and miserable in my other classes. I was not a bad pupil; I just didn't want to be there.

For me, choice in education is essential. Obviously, there must be a compulsory standard in all subjects, which all must achieve. But if pupils want to specialise earlier, if they know where they will succeed and what they want to do, facilitate that. Let kids who want to do science, do more science and less English. Let the ones who don't know yet continue studying a wider spectrum of subjects.

Allowing pupils to have a choice of what they study at an earlier age will minimise classroom disruptions and the student dissatisfaction that ultimately leads to less learning. More importantly, we will nurture talent and ambition, not waste it.

Lizzie Deane (16)

Our findings: Student voice

Everyone should have a voice

Students told us that when it comes to improving their education and their future, the chance to speak out, and have their opinions both heard and acted on, is crucial.

Yet while most *My Education* debate participants said this was what they wanted, many find themselves stifled by lack of opportunity or confidence.

Previous survey data[2] found that just over half (51 per cent) of students questioned felt they have a voice in decision-making at school. Comparatively, nearly one in three (31 per cent) said there are not enough chances to share thoughts and opinions with staff in a way that makes their ideas valued.

Do you / Did you feel that at school you had sufficient opportunity to share your thoughts and opinions with staff?



felt they had **sufficient opportunity to share thoughts and opinions** with staff at school.





Older respondents were **slightly more likely** to feel they could voice their opinions at school and that their ideas were valued.

14-16 year olds	17-18 year olds	19-21 year olds
53%	65%	63%

2 Survey results from My Voice data, research carried out by the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA) in 2012, from a survey sample of 5,800 students attending secondary schools in England

What say do we really have in our education system?



'Do as you're told and don't question it.' Words probably every child has heard from their parents at least once. But when you're told that by your headmaster when you question him about how many young people he consulted when he decided to change the rules and regulations of the school, it becomes a different matter.

That was the point where I realised that, for the past 10 years, I was never once asked my opinion or what I thought about the changes that were happening.

Take GCSEs. We have all heard that the Government thinks that GCSEs are easy, standards are slipping, and there is need for change.

Do students really think GCSEs are easy? I don't think so, and most young people I know don't either. You just need to look at how many young people get stressed out when exams come along.

The education system is one of fear. Students are scared and have a lack of confidence in expressing their views and opinions. From a young age, they feel powerless and unimportant, pushed to the margins of society, isolated.

Student voice is lacking in this country. We are rarely consulted or asked our opinion, and when we are there is no outcome. No wonder students feel disengaged and unwilling to learn.

Maybe it is about time the Government and teachers start listening to the people who know the most about the education system, us.

Yasmin Rufo (15)

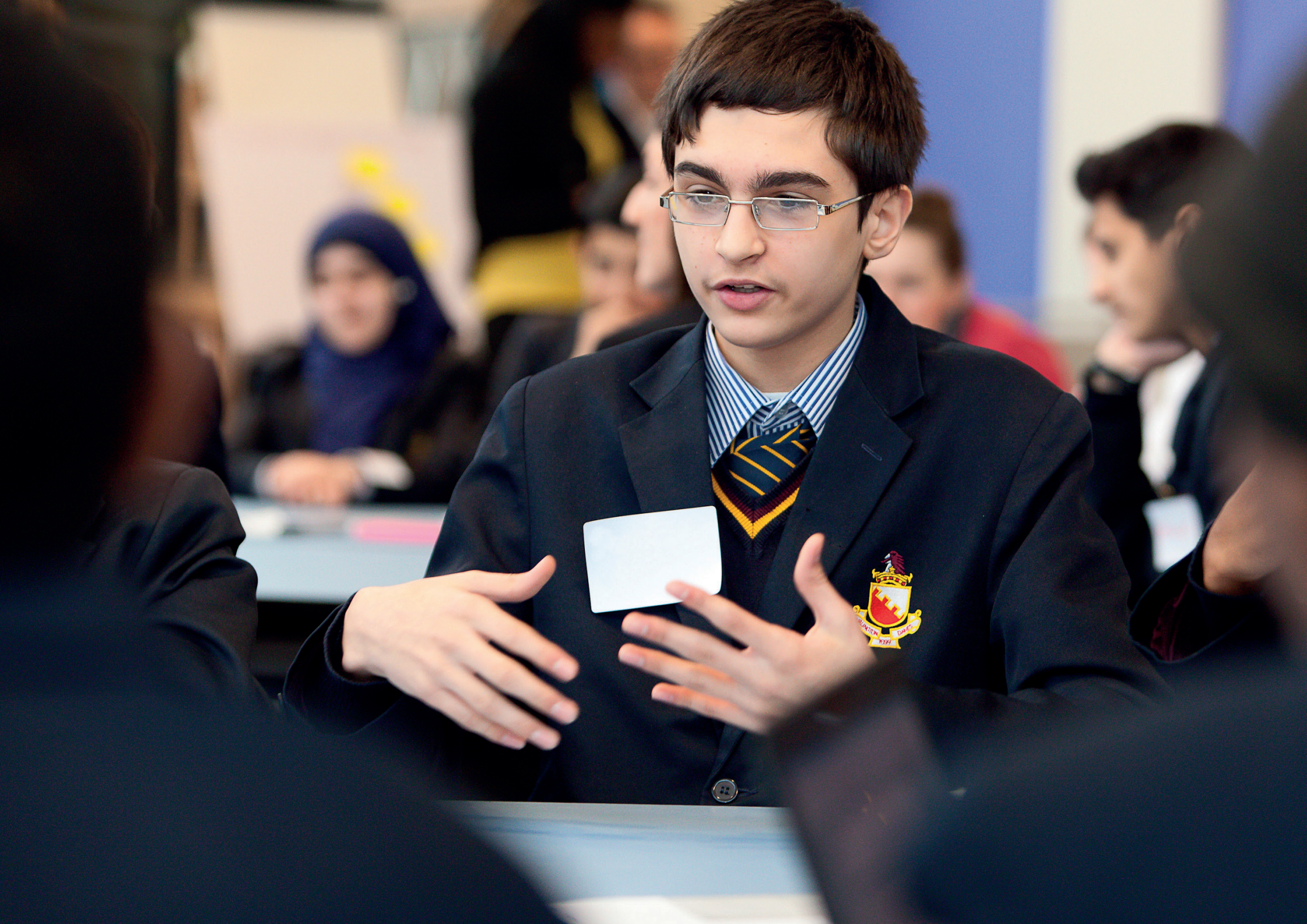
This corresponds with *My Education* census findings, in which three in every five young people said they had sufficient opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions with staff, and that those ideas were valued. Confidence also seems to increase with age: while 53 per cent of respondents aged 14 to 16 agreed with this statement, this rose ten percentage points or more for those aged 17 to 21.

Reasons why students did not feel they had sufficient opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions at school, selected as their top three.

57% Lessons are just about how to pass exams and therefore your opinion is not needed	57% There aren't many opportunities for me at school to speak out	47% Teachers don't value what I have to say
41% Teachers are very busy so rarely get the time to listen to me	23% I'm not confident enough	22% I don't think teachers will understand
18% I'm worried about what people might think of my opinion	8% Other	1% None/ Don't know

However, of those students saying they did not have the chance to share opinions, more than half (57 per cent) said it was because there were not enough opportunities to speak out. The same number agreed that lessons were 'just about how to pass exams… your opinion is not needed.' Many felt teachers didn't value what they had to say (47 per cent) or were too busy to listen (41 per cent). Nearly one in five (18 per cent) said they worried about what other people would think of their opinion.





Our *My Education* debate students expressed similar concerns about intimidation from peers if they spoke out, citing large class sizes as an obstacle to knowing other students well enough to speak their mind.

Whether or not young people are happy to speak out about their learning, underutilisation of the student voice seemed a common experience. It appears as if there are few effective mechanisms – either for pupils or teachers – to act on student opinions or suggestions.

Perhaps because of this, some young people speaking at the *My Education* debates felt that 'usually what the teachers thinks goes'. Few could recall an example of a change of policy or teaching method based on student voice.

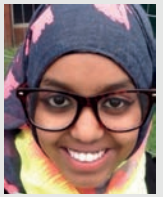
Such an absence of examples signals that young people appear to have little experience of a student voice either making an impact on, or influencing, classroom practice or school management. And while students said, 'teachers need to listen and give students the opportunity to share their voice', they were largely unable to explain how voice might affect their learning or what the benefits could be.

Students mostly interpreted voice in a classroom context, although several expressed the idea that they should have influence in everything the school does. While student councils were suggested as instruments for the student voice, most considered them ineffective.

From these views, it appears that there is a clear opportunity to make the student voice not only heard in schools, but also influential in a tangible way.

> *"The teachers don't move with the interests and opinions of the class at the time, preferring to stick to a rigid lesson plan. This results in students not feeling their opinions are valued."*

Stepping up for change



After two years of complete powerlessness, enough was enough. It was time young people had a say in how the school was run. After all, without us there would be no school, right?

I won the school council election. At that moment I realised everything wasn't perfect. Everyone had different interpretations of the education system. Being a representative, it was my responsibility to find the middle ground.

After a year of chairing the school council, I still wasn't satisfied. I wanted things to be better for school children across the county. By sending in a manifesto to the youth council at the town hall, I became Head of the Central Ward Representative Team.

I faced many tribulations along the way. No amount of drama could prepare me for a scrutiny meeting or neighbourhood conferences. For a 14 year old, my weekends looked pretty full, but I didn't let that stop me.

What was to happen next would surpass any ambition I ever had.

I was recommended to apply for a place at the national StudentVoice office. Nerves almost got the better of me. However, remembering what the main aim was pushed me to win a place.

Words cannot describe the amount of joy I felt after knowing I was representing my ENTIRE youth constituency at the board. I was the voice of ALL young people in my area.

The moral of the story? Change comes to those that strive for it and there is always a way.

Nabina Ibrihim (16)

Our responsibility

It's time to listen and learn

We embarked upon, and completed, this project as champions of student voice. Through our work over many years with schools, colleges, teachers and young people, we know that students of every age are likely to become more effective learners if they share the direction of and responsibility for learning, and contribute to their teaching.

The data shared in the final section sends a warning shot to the *My Education* project team: talking to young people and listening to their views is not enough. Action is key.

When learner voice is supported seriously and well, it is not a gimmick to be demonstrated then put to one side, but a real, continuous commitment to partnership, sharing, and joint engagement in learning. This requires collective action and shared endeavour on the part of educators and learners to improve education's relevance, currency, and authenticity.

In the past months, we have heard consistent messages from the young people we have had the privilege to speak with. Good teaching is paramount. Learning comes alive when it is linked explicitly to personal aspirations and goals. The same applies even to testing and assessment – students do better when they understand why something is important. Ambitions are high even where confidence to speak out in class may be low.

Underpinning each of these insights is a thirst for an education that is personal and responsive to individual talents and aspirations. Yet when we asked our students what they could do to engineer and access educational experiences that would prepare them for their future, they struggled to articulate their own role. '*My Education*' might be someone else's responsibility.

If we truly want to succeed in preparing young people for their and society's future challenges, this insight is critical. Our task is not only to offer learner voice, but also to stimulate the thinking behind it and create the mechanisms that will actively inform developments in education.

Learners have a view of their future, so part of their influence must be to help create a more agile education system, to apply their keener concern for the future, and to better position us all to respond to the changes ahead.

Schools and exams will always, to some extent, be reliant on consistent structures and ways of doing things, while learning is a deeply personal act. These two facts do not need to be at odds.

We should lead by example, showing students our own capacity for creativity, and committing to refresh and reshape our approach to meet their evolving needs. But a critical part of this is encouraging and developing students' efforts to take a driving seat in their own learning.

Talking and listening to young people more will build their confidence to speak out. The next step is to build their confidence and capacity to take action.

Dr Russell Quaglia
President and Founder of the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations

Gavin Dykes
Independent Education and Technology Adviser

Give teachers the tools to make diamonds

The demand from students is loud and clear. When you educate, do it *with us*, not *to us*.

Teach First believes young people deserve the opportunities and skills to forge successful futures and break free from educational disadvantage. And they tell us inspiring teachers are the best role models to help them achieve this. We couldn't agree more. It's why we search for that magic ingredient in every new teacher – those with the gift of fire in their belly to excite and motivate.

Many teachers learn their craft at some of the country's most inspiring schools and with outstanding classroom leaders, and the vast majority are driven by a desire to bring learning alive and help young people to succeed. Yet too many young people find themselves dismissed as 'no hopers'. It pains me to recall the head teacher who shrugged when I asked about his pupils' goals. 'You have to understand', he said, 'it's impossible to make diamonds from coal'.

This report shows such a resigned attitude could not be further from the truth. Young people have the highest aims for themselves and their futures. It is a challenge the entire education community must match. We need to work tirelessly, ensuring that every student reaches their fullest potential.

And how can we educate young people successfully if we never ask what inspires them or how they want to learn? Pupil voice must be central to our work.

This is why we're introducing QISA's *iKnow My Class* pupil survey. Offered to the students of more than 3,000 Teach First teachers, it will give them the chance to comment on their learning experiences, helping teachers understand what inspires them to succeed.

Teachers will use the survey results to monitor progress, and change or adapt their classroom methods based on their pupils' experiences. We'll use this alongside a new student attainment tracker to identify how each young person learns, and how teachers can make a tangible contribution to their achievement.

Learning within the classroom is not just for pupils. We education professionals need to commit to listening, and creating policy and practice that suits today's students. To do this we must learn from the most important people in education – young people.

Brett Wigdortz OBE
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Teach First

We must be as ambitious as the learners we work with

At Pearson we aim put the learner first. To fulfil that pledge, we have to dedicate more time to listening and responding to young people.

The eagerness and discernment about what a good education should be, shown by the students involved in the *My Education* campaign, inspires me. They know their education is central to improving their lives. That's why they want more control. As one student put it, '*My Education* is important to my future, but it is limited to what others think I should learn.'

We live in a time of extraordinary change in the way people live, work and communicate. Skills that once seemed good enough are no longer sufficient. Students increasingly demand the skills and the tools that will give them the confidence to succeed, and they need their teachers to prepare them for life beyond exams.

One of the greatest lessons we can learn from the campaign is that education too often focuses on complying with targets, at the expense of the things that will more greatly contribute to progress in life.

There is on occasion a sharp contrast between our own well-intentioned but sometimes unimaginative ideas, and the talents and aspirations of students. Our ambition for what education can do needs, as a minimum, to match theirs. That's something we don't always achieve.

Our focus should be on results, but not just exam grades. Rather, we should also understand students' aims for their future as another important context for learning. That means setting ourselves a higher bar in how we design our schools, lesson plans, and assessment techniques.

We've made a start in Pearson. When we develop our degree programmes, we involve students as 'co-creators' in both the design and evaluation. As a result of the *My Education* campaign, we're going to be extending that principle of actively involving learners in development and feedback across everything we do - in schools, colleges, as part of our apprenticeships, and with universities too.

Inside our own organisation and beyond, I'm going to be asking 'How can we be more ambitious?' at every turn. Only by pushing our own boundaries, and indeed only by working with and challenging learners to think even bigger, will we create education worthy of this generation.

Rod Bristow
President, Pearson UK

It's been important to start the '*My Education*' conversation because...

'…it allows us as a team to understand and develop each other's thoughts and opinions, to hopefully give the students' perspective of a better education system.'

Chadsley Atkins

'…it's provided a great opportunity for young people to have their say on what education means, and empower the voice of young people.'

Haengeun Chi

'…it lets students know how education is changing, that we have a voice and that this voice will be heard and taken into serious consideration.'

Cade Gannon

'…it's crucial to explore the issues that concern us as young people and the education system is one of these. Discussing the ideas we have should be an important part of the planning process.'

Chelsea Goulding

'… it has allowed young people to discuss the issues they are facing with the education system. It has also allowed young people to voice their opinions and have a direct impact on changing the face of education.'

Yasmin Rufo

'…young people can innovate learning in a way that greatly increases their potential. This conversation also places young people on an equal footing with adults, restoring trust in a system which has ignored their voices for so long.'

Tite-Live Wasolua Kibeti

For those committed to improving education in the UK, *My Education* highlights five main challenges.

These are:

- To ensure that education encourages the ambitions of students, reflects the global competition they face, and gives them the support and advice they need to achieve their goals.
- To assess students in a way that deepens their understanding, and rewards their creativity.
- To create a classroom environment that engages all in learning, and allows everyone to contribute positively.
- To develop the tools, and carve out the time, for teachers to interact with their students as individuals, and support their specific learning needs.

And, above all

- To recruit the minds of students to tackling these challenges. There are nearly 4 million secondary school students in the UK. Our small start through *My Education* has told us that learning will be at its most enjoyable, engaging and effective if we work with them.

We'd like to thank

Our advisory board:

Dr Russell Quaglia, President and Founder of the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations

Gavin Dykes, Independent Education and Technology Adviser

Dawn Haywood, Chief Executive, Student Engagement Trust

James Westhead, Director of External Relations, Teach First

Jonathan Dando, Senior Public Affairs and Policy Officer, Teach First

Jacob Pienaar, Managing Director, Schools and Colleges, Pearson UK

Natalie Whitty, Director of Communications, Pearson UK

Martin O'Donovan, Head of Press and Public Affairs, Pearson UK

Schools that hosted My Education debates:

Burlington Danes Academy, Wood Lane, London, W12 0HR

Kingsbury School and Sports College, Kingsbury Road, Erdington, Birmingham B24 8RE

Folkestone Academy, Academy Lane, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5FP

Passmores Academy, Tracyes Rd, Harlow, Essex, CM18 6JH

Bolton St Catherine's Academy, Stitch-Mi-Lane, Harwood, Bolton, Greater Manchester, BL2 4HU

St Michael's Catholic Academy, Beamish Road, Billingham, Stockton-On-Tees, TS23 3DX

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