

Apprentice of our Time



APPRENTICE OF OUR TIME
What we've learnt from our Apprentices

*"I'm motivated
by learning: that's why the
Apprenticeship programme
is so right"*



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Introduction

How do you know if an Apprenticeship programme is really working? In January 2020, we embarked on a ten year study of 20 Apprentices to find out.

In the past, we looked for examples of the positive difference which Apprenticeships make to individuals. It's a cause to which everyone at Kaplan is unswervingly committed as the success of every learner is at the heart of Kaplan's purpose. We talked to our clients and Apprentices' line managers during review meetings about the impact they see in the workplace from their Apprentices.

We held focus groups, sought written feedback, analysed achievement data, and surveyed learners on completion of a programme. We asked 'destination' questions six months after they completed. And we will continue to do all of these things as they provide us with significant data, valuable insights, and are the 'voice' of suggestions for improvement.

But it is an approach focused on the short or near immediate term. But it is an approach focused on the short or near immediate term, and we wanted to do something different.

Taking inspiration from the late Michael Apter, who interviewed 14 British school children from different socio-economic backgrounds every seven years from the age of seven in the ITV programme Seven Up, and from Professor Robert Winston's BBC 2 study since the year 2000 of 25 children across Britain, 'Apprentice of Our Time' was born.

Through Apprentice of Our Time, we will gain richer insights into our Apprentices' experiences and be able to evidence the long term impact of Apprenticeships on their development, attitude to work, opportunities and quite frankly, life.

The project started back in Q1 2020 when the Wuhan and Hubei province was experiencing a strain of Covid-19. Little did our Apprentices know at the time that we were all about to face life changing experiences.

The following pages in this report outline the responses in year one, the adaptations made for working during a pandemic, the skills which helped the Apprentices to succeed, and the values and beliefs that motivate the Apprentices



Jenny Pelling
Apprenticeship
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Apprentice of our Time





"The pandemic has made me stronger as a person and I am even more determined to grow as an individual"

Methodology

Apprentice of our Time takes a fresh look at how Apprenticeships are shaping our Apprentices' careers.

SCOPE

In early 2020, we sought 20 volunteers across a range of clients, Apprenticeship standards and levels. With the approval of their employers, these Apprentices ("the Apprentices") were contacted about the commitment needed for the project and the scope of the interview questions they would be asked.

DURATION:

- ▶ Apprentice of our Time interviews will take place over a ten year term from 2020 to 2030
- ▶ Every six months whilst 'on programme', the Apprentices will be contacted by phone/video conference to answer questions on their development, career progression, their perception of the value of Apprenticeships, what they would recommend to others about Apprenticeships, and where they predict they will be in five years' time.
- ▶ After completing the Apprenticeship, they will be interviewed every twelve months.

INSIGHTS:

- ▶ Responses from the interviews will be kept anonymous, but insights and findings will be shared in an annual report.
- ▶ We will also disseminate the findings with our senior leadership team, external assurance board and utilise the Apprentices' insights to inform programme amendments and adjustments to our provision.
- ▶ Our Apprentices' insights will provide guidance to those following in their footsteps and to employers.



Findings

1) Pandemic working practices: gains from being adaptable, but losses of impromptu interactions and office life

2020 was a year of dramatic change for all. Against the pandemic backdrop, the Apprentices' working lives changed significantly with remote working; virtual inductions and not being able to meet their new colleagues in person.

40% of the Apprentices had started their employment in 2020, straight from school and with no previous experience of an office environment. But 100% of them said their employer had been fully supportive, finding opportunities for them to engage virtually with their line manager and ensuring they had support from colleagues.

Apprentices relished the opportunities they had in their roles, with 79% of them seeing their roles change (aside from the necessity of Covid adaptations to roles).

All of them said they were given the opportunity to develop in their role.

And what they found hardest was:

- 1 Adapting to a lack of impromptu social interaction at work
- 2 Not 'shadowing' colleagues
- 3 Not being able to absorb the ways of working and dealing with matters almost by osmosis
- 4 Not being able to network in person or extend their contacts

Apprentices missed their office culture and said they didn't feel it was the same virtually but understood the imperative for remote working for safety. They said that most of their clients were working remotely and the ones that did travel to client premises for audit work said it was a very different experience with Covid rules in place for their safety.

Almost all Apprentices felt that if they had been in the office their confidence would have grown more readily and that it was hindered by not being around people. Being able to communicate virtually hasn't been easy for all, with several of the Apprentices saying they missed out on reading body language or getting to know individuals and their personalities. Those Apprentices who were 'new to role' during lockdown found virtual meetings to be formal and wondered if it would have been different had they been meeting in person.

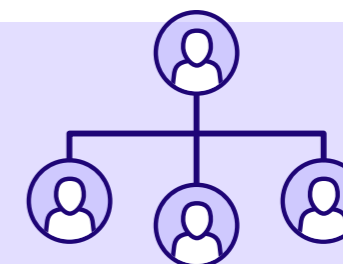
One Apprentice spoke about missing "the buzz of working in a city", dressing in his suit and travelling even though it used to be on a packed commuter train. He felt his sense of purpose had had to adapt.

But Apprentices and their employers did adapt.

Rather than having a quick conversation with a manager to clarify something, the Apprentices used their office systems' chat functionalities or waited until scheduled catch ups. There were multiple examples from the Apprentices of efforts made by their employers to provide a social aspect to work and reduce as far as possible any feelings of isolation. One reported their employer organising weekly lunchtime meetings where they would do just that: eat their lunch together (albeit in a virtual meeting), and work was most definitely off the agenda.

Even though the Apprentices reported that their networking ability had been hindered due to Covid, they adapted to virtual networking events and got to know each other remotely.

Two of our Apprentices took part in a new extended Kaplan business challenge, a virtual business start up game, which assisted their sense of connection with colleagues and helped them to develop leadership skills.



*"The Apprenticeship has made me more **Knowledgeable** and I definitely feel **more professional**"*



2) Wellbeing was centre stage

100% of the Apprentices said that their employers and Kaplan had been mindful of their wellbeing.

Positive examples of this were Apprentices being strongly encouraged to put their laptops completely away and out of sight at the end of the working day. One manager sent an email daily at 5.30pm asking her Apprentice to log off for the day and to enjoy her evening.

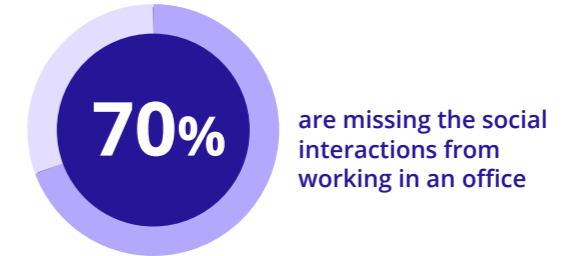
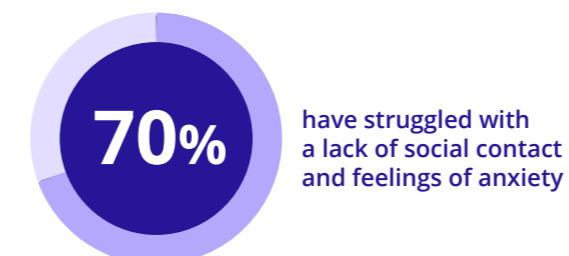
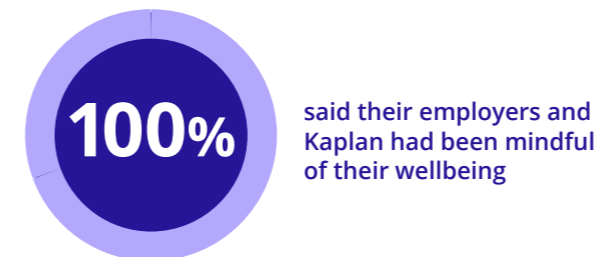
Apprentices said that the way in which Kaplan provided additional resources and planned in regular catch up sessions was very comforting. They all felt they had a clear direction of their learning and appreciated the support they'd had during the lockdown.

Most employers encouraged Apprentices to focus on fitness. One Apprentice therefore started to walk to the station in the mornings to recreate his "normal routine" and get some steps in. Others took lunchtime walks or runs. Others said they took to baking and supporting their local community with food banks, talking to elderly neighbours from afar, creating a positive impact and helping their own mental wellbeing.

The majority of the Apprentices (70%) reported missing the social interactions from working in an office. They did look forward though to virtual team meetings, and had got accustomed to virtual events (and use of screen blur and virtual backdrops).

Without exception, the Apprentices had received loud and clear the message of how important it was during Covid to maintain a work life balance.

Nonetheless, 30% of the Apprentices found keeping a 'work life balance' was difficult to maintain while working remotely due to still seeing emails coming in outside regular office hours. 70% said they had at some point struggled with the lack of social contact and feelings of anxiety.



3) Resilience became more honed; but prioritisation skills needed to be developed

During the various lockdowns of 2020, our Apprentices exhibited resilience and determination to learn. They showed willingness to work independently and to cope virtually in their teams.

Apprentices said they had to 'grow up professionally, more quickly' this year. They reported taking detailed notes when they were set tasks, as they didn't want to be seen to keep asking questions. They said feedback became even more important to them, so they could gauge how they were progressing, without the normal ad hoc words of encouragement in passing.

Apprentices reported that their Apprenticeship has taught them to face any challenge and to use every opportunity to develop themselves. They spoke of the need to work hard and get stuck in.

Apprentices said their time management skills definitely improved during Covid. These respondents said they managed to get through more tasks in the day as they found there were fewer distractions working from home than in an office and as a result they believed their productivity improved.

80% of Apprentices found working from home to be challenging at times. The challenges ranged from needing to develop their prioritisation skills in the 'working from home' environment and initial uncertainty about how to get information they needed from other team members.

All the Apprentices said they were using new time management strategies.

A minority of Apprentices (10%) said they had concerns about job security and were unsure what the post pandemic commercial world would look like for them. But they turned this into a positive and said they were even more determined to get their Apprenticeship completed to a good standard should there be any job losses in the future.



4) Communication skills were top of the class.

When asked what the most useful skill was that they had developed in the last six months, 70% replied that their communication skills had improved. And it was written communication where the most difference was noted from business writing skills to use of business messaging.

The remainder of the Apprentices referred to team working skills (but again communication skills were referenced in the commentary. "I've learnt that having open communication is the key to succeeding" said one of the group) and learning to contribute. Whilst not the words the Apprentices used, it was clear from those who said they'd learnt to contribute that their initial diffidence had disappeared.

Some of the Apprentices referred to benefits they'd gained from their development session on 'Communicating and Influencing'. Not only had they been able to use this in their roles, but they'd also shared insights from the course with colleagues.

Regardless of which skill they mentioned, almost all Apprentices (90%) said they had been able to apply a variety of skills to their role. And they developed "skills for life" not just theory.

5) Experience in the strangest of times, but it's early days still in our Apprentices' careers

Most of the Class of 2020 were new to their role in 2020. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the Apprentices didn't have any new responsibilities.

Due to the pandemic, some of the Apprentices' planned job rotations were put on hold. However the Apprentices acknowledged the complexity of making this happen in a remote new team.

And yet the changes to working patterns provided unexpected new experiences. 20% of the Apprentices were given new responsibility on projects related to the pandemic and how their business and clients were adapting.

None of the Apprentices, at this early stage in their careers, manage anyone. We may see that change in future years' reports. Whilst not a management position, some Apprentices took on the role of 'buddy' to new cohorts of Apprentices. The Apprentices who had this experience reported the sense of self worth from encouraging positive behaviours in others and as a way of reflecting on how much they themselves had developed. They found it rewarding to practise some leadership skills and have found themselves acting as role models. One Apprentice made the point that on her first day, she'd suffered badly from nerves but wasn't sure whether she would be judged for saying that. By telling her new buddy that it's normal to be nervous and that everyone would be supportive, she'd reassured the buddy but also realised how much she'd changed herself.



6) Loyalty and ambition in almost equal measure

It's often said that Apprentices are keen to remain with the employers who first recruited them. This was borne out in our interviews.

- **100% of the Apprentices** saw themselves progressing within their current organisations, after completing their Apprenticeship and felt that the skills which they're developing now will stand them in good stead to achieve.
- **100% of the Apprentices** felt the support they were getting from their employers and the time and investment that was being put into them made them want to stay with their current employer for years to come.
- **Almost all the Apprentices** saw themselves in more senior roles in five years' time and with the same employer.
- **10% of the Apprentices** wanted to take their Apprenticeship experience and qualification to work abroad, but with the same employer.

One Apprentice commented:

"You could start as a school leaver and literally stay until retirement, there are so many development opportunities and departments to move around to further enhance your career".

7) Ambassadorial and determined to inform others about the sector

The Apprentices are keen advocates of their programmes and eager to share their knowledge and experience to date. They have attended school events in person or on-line and spoken at induction events. We asked them whether they would recommend Apprenticeships to others and what they wished they'd known.

- **95% of the Apprentices** said that they would recommend the Apprenticeship to others, but one added the caveat that they would emphasise the need for a strong work ethic.
- **100%** said that their Apprenticeship has so far exceeded their expectations.
- **60%** said they felt they had underestimated the breadth of the Financial Services and Accountancy sector before starting their Apprenticeship. They had been positively surprised by the variety of roles within financial services, accountancy and tax.
- **100%** said they were able to review their own finances better as a result of the Apprenticeship.
- **100%** said the grounding from an Apprenticeship is not something which can be gained from a degree but can only come with experience.
- **40%** felt there is still a stigma around Apprenticeships.

The Apprentices who were university graduates appreciated the independence they'd had at university, but wished they had been given more information about the benefits of Apprenticeships before making that choice. And had that been the case, all of them said they would have chosen to go straight into an apprenticeship.

As one Apprentice said:

"University has its pro's and con's and so do Apprenticeships. But the main point is that the Apprenticeship teaches you to manage yourself; be better organised and manage work, studying and a social life."

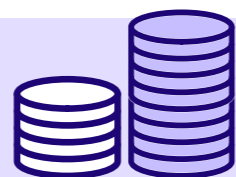


8) Saving and growing: the life-changing impact of earning and learning

What was striking about the interviews were the wider benefits the Apprentices articulated. The recurring themes were "it's life changing" and "it builds my confidence".

Professional qualifications were mentioned, but the Apprentices spoke more about skills they were learning which would help them in their careers and in their broader lives. 25% of them said they've been able to save money particularly during lockdown.

One commented that once life returned to some normality post lockdown, he would change how he spent his money - thinking twice before doing so, in a change to pre-lockdown habits.



All of the school leaver Apprentices said they felt they had matured and grown in confidence, but that would have been even more pronounced if working practices hadn't had to change.

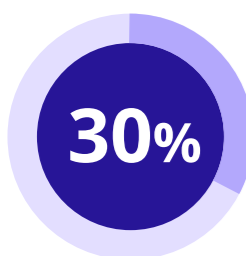
One of the group summarised the impact as:

"I've become more independent. I'm challenged more and in a positive way, have been thrown in at the deep end to be able to learn even further. That's what Apprenticeships are about."

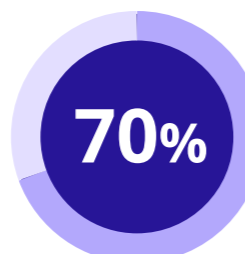
9) The graduation photo on the mantelpiece: shifting parents' mindsets

Where the Apprenticeship did not contain a degree, some of our Apprentices reported having difficulty in persuading their parents of the merits of Apprenticeships over university. A few commented on their parents' expectation of having a graduation experience, with a 'gown and scroll' photo to display at home.

Yet, it was a minority of the Apprentices who had had initial parental uncertainty about their choice. Only 30% of the Apprentices spoke about needing to persuade their parents to allow them to choose an Apprenticeship over university. And 70% of the Apprentices' parents had been the ones to promote Apprenticeship options to their children.



30% of the Apprentices needed to persuade their parents to let them choose an Apprenticeship over university

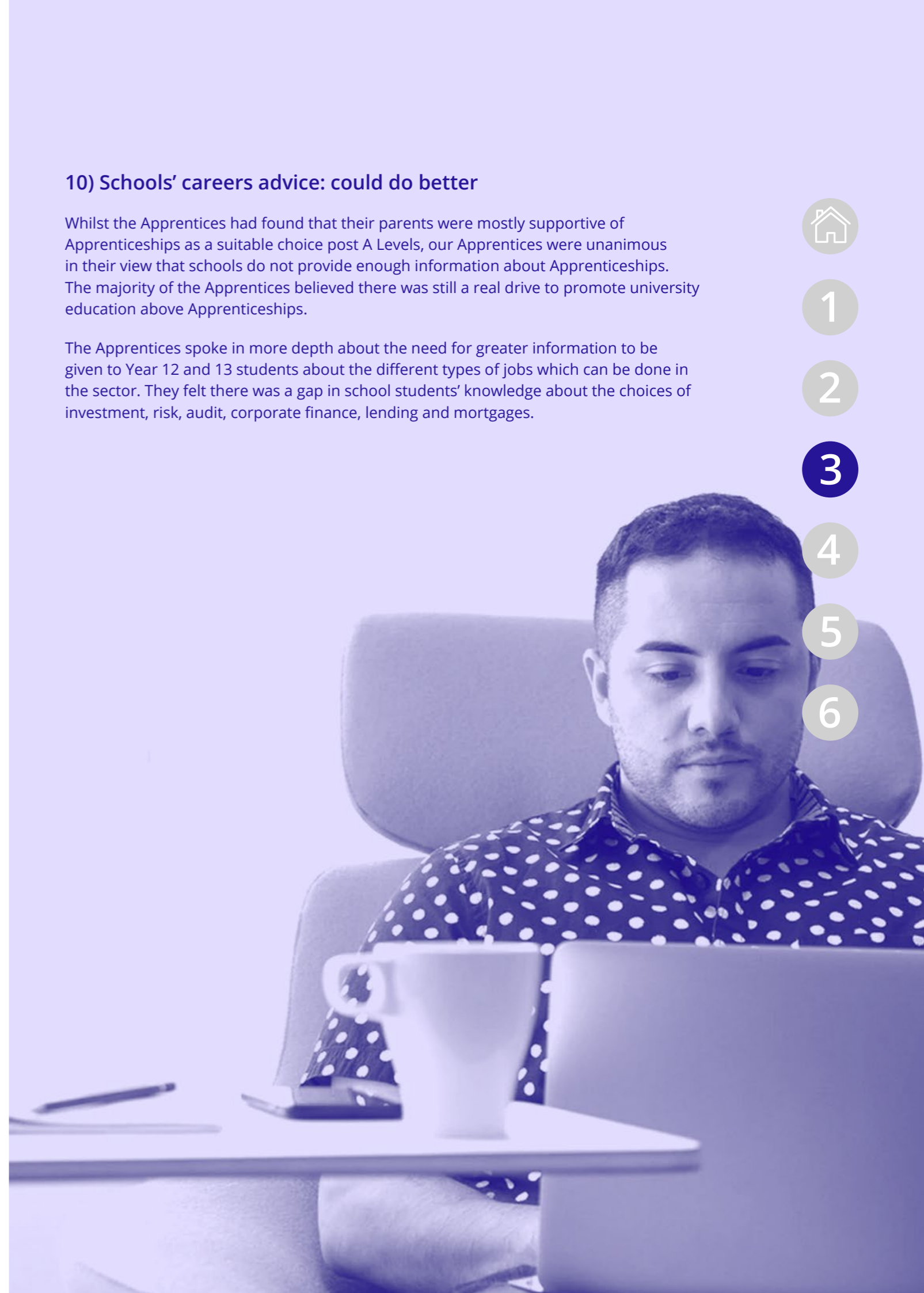


70% of the Apprentices' parents had been the ones to promote Apprenticeship options to their children

10) Schools' careers advice: could do better

Whilst the Apprentices had found that their parents were mostly supportive of Apprenticeships as a suitable choice post A Levels, our Apprentices were unanimous in their view that schools do not provide enough information about Apprenticeships. The majority of the Apprentices believed there was still a real drive to promote university education above Apprenticeships.

The Apprentices spoke in more depth about the need for greater information to be given to Year 12 and 13 students about the different types of jobs which can be done in the sector. They felt there was a gap in school students' knowledge about the choices of investment, risk, audit, corporate finance, lending and mortgages.



Conclusions

2020 was the first year of our ten year Apprentice of our Time project.

As a result, rather than being able to offer comparative analysis in year one, this report provides an anecdotal picture of the impact of Covid on Apprentices and their perception of their development and challenges during a (one hopes) unique year.

The pandemic taught all the Apprentices that they can adapt to any work environment. Their determination to succeed and progress in the sector is unwavering.

There were gains to be had for the group: from the resilience acquired through having to learn to cope with change and some new time management and productivity skills. But pitched against that was a sense of loss of opportunity from reduced social interaction (a feeling shared by so many), not having as many informal and impromptu learning experiences and the more limited chances to shadow others at work. So whilst our Apprentices reported that their confidence levels had improved over twelve months, it was clear they felt this would have been even more pronounced had they been able to work from offices all year.

The initial comfort of dress down existence was beginning to pale. Apprentices have missed the buzz and interaction from office life and the accessories of professional life - dressing smartly gave them a stronger sense of professional identity.

One hears a lot about a generation of 'snowflakes': these young Apprentices are far removed from that pejorative description of millennials. They have shown great resolve and character in the face of challenges this year. And they have appreciated the efforts made by their employers - wishing to remain with the same employer in the future. Investment in Apprenticeships has, for the Apprentices of our Time, resulted in loyalty.



Recommendations

As we write, leaders of organisations are making decisions on employees' work locations: whether to keep working from home, move back entirely as before Covid, or adapt a more hybrid approach.

Apprentices of our Time have been adaptable, have learnt to adjust and have seen some benefits from not commuting into work. Only one of the group (who has children) was keen to remain working from home.

Our recommendations are:

- A Employers should not lose sight of the loss of learning and development opportunities for young people when working from home. Apprentices without caring responsibilities are craving a return to the workplace.
- B Schools have more of a part to play - more time needs to be allocated in the curriculum to financial awareness and the range of professional roles.
- C Kaplan will increase even further its own range of Careers Information Advice and Guidance resources.
- D Kaplan will develop its time management skills sessions with lessons learnt from the pandemic; guidance on email management, home working and use of productivity apps.
- E Kaplan will enhance further its wellbeing information and ensure all Apprentices are directed to the microsites and content included in newsletters.



*“The Apprenticeship has given me a **real insight** into the working world and the direction I want to take”*



Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all 20 of our fantastic Apprentices who have contributed to this Apprentice of our Time report. Without them we would not be able to share their insights, nor have a benchmark set of responses against which to compare results in successive years. Your commentary and responses help us to improve.

Our thanks go to their employers too for permitting time for their involvement in interviews for this project.



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