



Youth Parliament

MAKING OUR MARK

UKYP Scrutiny Report

October 15

2011

The Scrutiny Report is a report from the Youth Parliament Members of Barking & Dagenham, Azaan Akbar MYP and Shekhar Seebaluck DMYP, which identifies the key issues in the borough, investigates into the issues and suggests possible solutions for the improvement of the local area.

Barking &
Dagenham



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The Scrutiny Commission Process

What is the Scrutiny Report?

The Scrutiny Report is an inquiry and study into the issues of the local area; we identify the concerns of our constituents, the young people of Barking & Dagenham, criticise and analyse the aspects of their concerns and seek to address the issues by discussing possible solutions. In essence, we will examine the concerns of young people and consider how to tackle them.

Why is the Scrutiny Report important?

The Scrutiny Report will be the documentation of the issues in the local area of Barking & Dagenham – it is a concise report which will describe the most important issues and suggest how we can go about dealing with the matter in hand. It shows exactly what the young people of Barking & Dagenham are thinking about and want done. This is where young people have their say and have the opportunity to have their view heard by senior authorities who can truly do something about their concerns as well as holding to account the actions of senior authorities.

What will this Scrutiny Report be dealing with?

From the introduction, it may be evident that the core issue that young people of Barking & Dagenham are concerned most about is Education. In light of the recent rise of tuition fees and the removal of Education Maintenance Allowance, education has become a concern for young people in the borough; a questionnaire taken in February 2011 of Barking & Dagenham pupils between the ages of 11-18 displayed that out of 306 respondents, 42% felt EMA and University was the topic they most concerned about. Statistics such as these and more will be analysed to display the concerns of our constituents. The primary concerns of this scrutiny will be Education, Access to Higher Education, Unemployment and Careers & Futures.

Who is this report being compiled by?

The authors who have put this report together are the Members of Youth Parliament who represent the local authority of Barking and Dagenham, Azaan Akbar MYP and Shekhar Seebaluck DMYP.

How was this report compiled?

The methodology of this report consisted of various aspects, including investigation, research, interviews, surveys, polls, information collection, group discussions, meetings and a number of other parts which allowed for the creation of this report. In particular, investigation and research formed the backbone upon which this report has been made. We accessed local authority, central government and public statistics information from employees and politicians of the local area and a depth of other resources to provide further information into the issues.

Background

In 2010, the Government announced a £6.2bn spending cuts plan that would come to affect a wide range of departments. The biggest cuts included cuts to Transport, Communities, Local Government and Education. Today, in 2011, the effects of those cuts are set to leave an impact on the youth of our generation, and in Barking & Dagenham, the biggest concern is Education and employment.

Perhaps the most highlighted effects of cuts to Education have been the rise in tuition fees and the cutting of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). These are certainly issues that have stirred an emphatic response from students across the UK, as seen by the riots of November 2010, where hundreds gathered across cities in the UK to protest against the rise in tuition fees.

The issue extends further than simply cuts and savings being made to education; the riots of November proved that young people are concerned about their future, not simply for their access to higher education but more so for their future career prospects; with such imminent changes, there are fears that the future is bleak for our generation. The job market, particularly in Barking & Dagenham, is evidence that education makes a difference to our careers. UK Youth unemployment in 2011 is at its highest since 1994, rising to 991,000 since 1992 when records began. This thereby pushed unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds to 21.3% in the UK¹. This could be explained by the fact that the number of students fell by 46,000 to 2.2 million overall², thus displaying that education is indeed a vital factor to keep young people's ambitions alive.

To bring this into context, youth unemployment in Barking and Dagenham is at 8.1%. This figure is estimated from the latest statistics available from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The figure is extraordinarily high when taking into consideration the national unemployment rate which is at 7.7%³ indicating above average rates of unemployment. Then, comparing this to adult qualification levels in the local constituencies, 19.4% and 12.3% of adults in Barking and Dagenham & Rainham respectively have no qualifications⁴. From these several statistics, we can certainly draw a correlation between education and unemployment; the less educated you are, the less likely you are to get a job.

¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/12/britain-jobless-idUSL3E7LC1RH20111012>

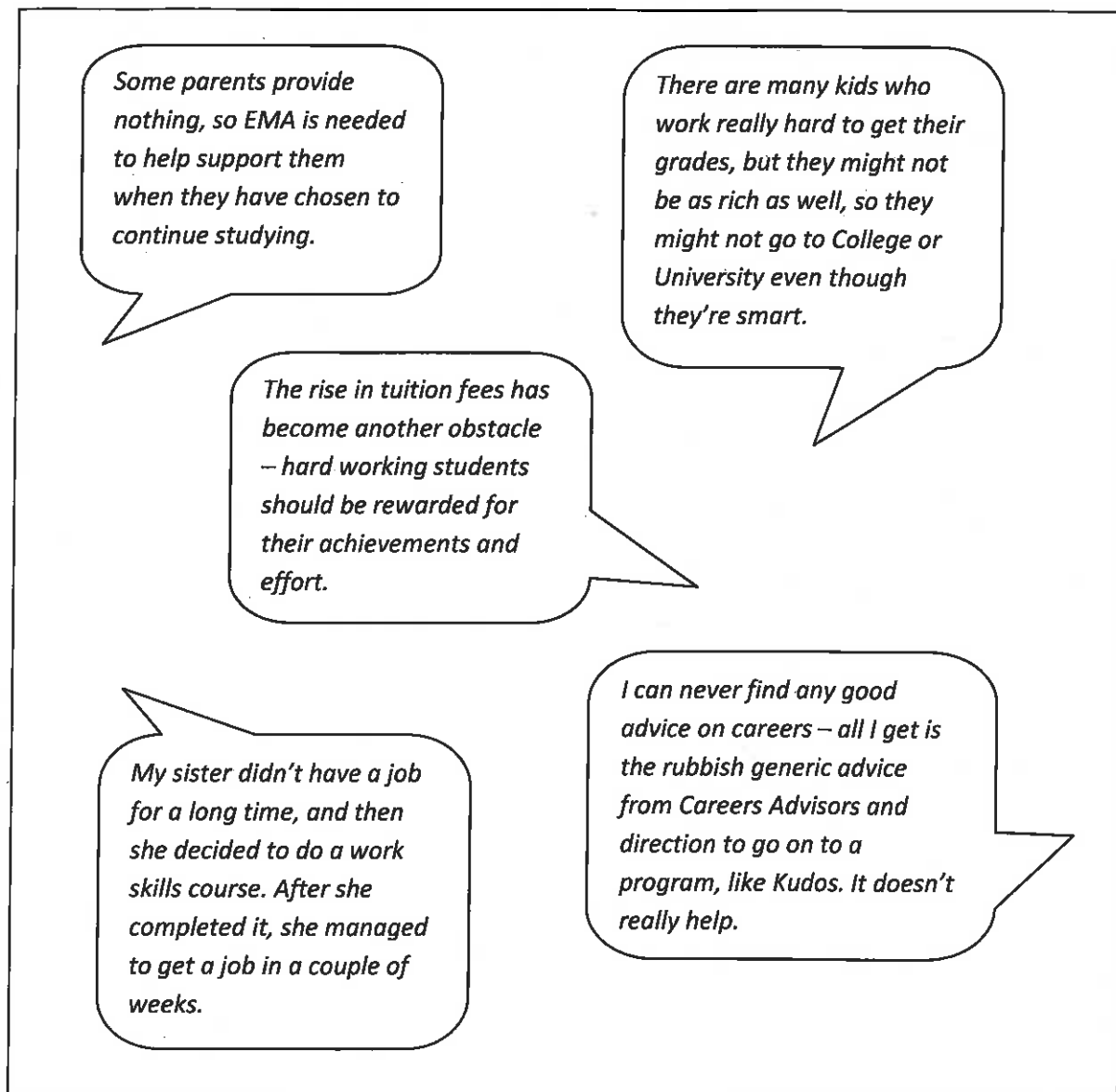
² <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/jobs/8761817/Youth-unemployment-surge-triggers-worst-jobless-rise-in-two-years.html>

³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/12/britain-jobless-idUSL3E7LC1RH20111012>

⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/jul/22/education-gap-by-constituency>

Evidence and Research

In order to substantiate our reasons for scrutinising Education in our local area, we have compiled research to provide evidence and support for our work on the issue. One of the first things we did was to speak to our local constituents through the medium of the local youth council, the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum. There, we engaged in a discussion with the sub-committee for Education on their views on the job market, access to higher education and fears for the future. These some of the concerns they raised to us:



Quotes from the BAD Youth Forum, including Elliot Gatward, Adam Kaspar, Ashlee Reid, Tinashe Masara, Jessica Ojei-Aguaziam, Sara Mbwiti, Salwa Rahman and Kelly Armantrading

The BAD Youth Forum have been operating as a youth council for a number of years and have campaigned for many issues in the borough – their opinions are representative of the young people of Barking and Dagenham as members are elected from every school in the borough.

After that, we spoke to number of our friends, peers and upper classmates for their opinions on the issues surrounding tuition fees and the job market;

- “I don’t think the rise in tuition fees is good because a lot of kids might leave their studies because of the price and end up jobless, since employers want people with degrees. I’ve had to think twice about going to University, and may just go back to my home country to study.” – **Zain Naqvi, Year 12 pupil**
- “Going to University is pointless these days if you can’t get a job out of it, especially since you have to pay more fees.” – **Anonymous Year 12 pupil**
- “The fees are depressing, but I’m still hoping to go to University. I want to live at University for the first year to get the experience, but for the second, third and possibly fourth year, I will probably come home.” – **Beth Berrett, Year 13 pupil**

These are just a few quotes from the thousands of opinions young people in the borough hold, but we can certainly agree that the cuts to Education and rise in tuition fees are not being responded to positively.

To further our knowledge of the extent of cuts to Education and the job market situation, we began desk research, and found a number of shocking statistics:

- Barking and Dagenham has the 2nd highest unemployment rate in London, with 12.4% of people out of work.⁵
- 18% of pupils in Barking & Dagenham qualify for free school meals, yet 38% of pupils are from workless homes.⁶
- There are around 5700 single parents
- 38.3% of children are poverty-stricken, making Barking and Dagenham the ninth highest for Child Poverty⁷
- 24% of households earn under £15,000 in Barking and Dagenham, compared to 16% in London.⁸

Firstly, in Barking and Dagenham, the removal of EMA has been replaced by Bursary Funds that are available for pupils in schools and colleges in the local area but are open only to those who are eligible for Free School Meals – the second bullet point indicates that although there are a number who qualify, not all who genuinely deserve it will be able to access their funds, rendering them helpless as they cannot

⁵http://www.bdpost.co.uk/news/barking_and_dagenham_has_the_2nd_highest_unemployment_rate_in_london_1_1088640

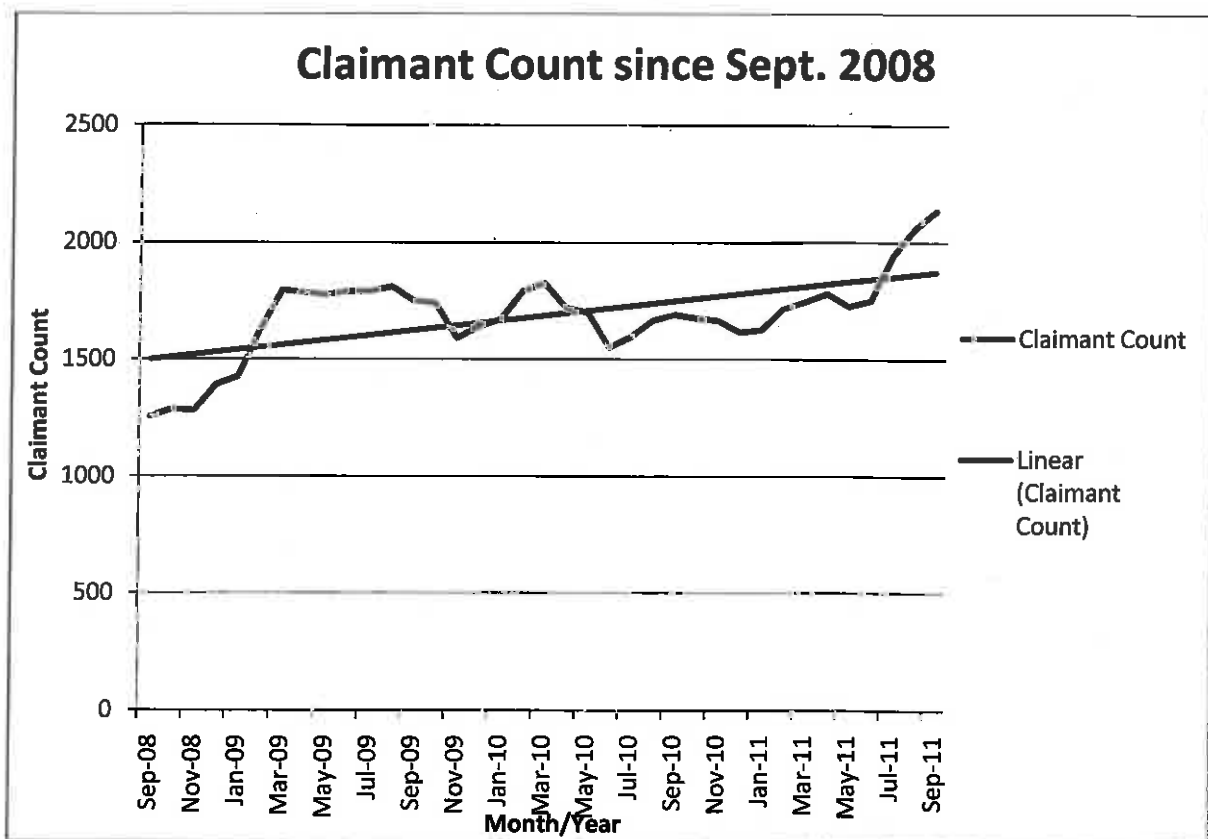
⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/dec/16/school-meals-funding>

⁷ From a Child Poverty Presentation by the Local Authority

⁸ From a Child Poverty Presentation by the Local Authority

get further support and many may not even be aware if they are eligible for the bursary funds. Secondly, many of these issues, particularly Child Poverty are issues that can be solved through education; as quoted by Kevin Donovan, Children's Rights, Participation and Engagement Manager in the Local Authority, "Education is perhaps the only option young people have to escape Child Poverty." – if no action is made to the inaccessibility to education, then we will continue to receive these kinds of statistics as the years progress.

We also found information on the claimant count in Barking and Dagenham for the ages of 18 -24, and found that unemployment has been rising since January 2006 and was at its highest in September 2011 since 2006⁹. The graph below shows the general trend:



There has been fluctuation over the years, increasing and decreasing, particularly between the periods of September 2009 to May 2011, but has been increasing from there on in. According to the data, 2,135 of people aged between 18-24 in Barking & Dagenham were on the claimant count in September 2011, making around 12% of the population in that age group. An issue like this cannot be ignored, and education is certainly a way that will highly impact and reduce these figures.

⁹ Nomis official labour market statistics

We went on to find more information and spoke to Alan Lazell, Head of 14-19 Education, Training and Employment in the local council, who provided us with further information.

EMA / 16-19 Bursary Fund

- Heads of Sixth Form and Sixth Form Consortia have given the Bursary Fund the highest priority in terms of establishing a system for payment, estimating to provide £20 per week to eligible students.
- The actual impact in terms of numbers of young people returning to post-16 study is not wholly clear at the moment. All of the providers (Schools and Barking and Dagenham College) report lower recruitment than last year. It is expected that young people are staying closer to home to study in order to keep down travel costs.

Although the bursary fund is now being provided, there is less “recruitment” of young people continuing post-16 education, indicating the cutting of EMA has deterred some young people from continuing. Furthermore, it also indicates that there are less students who receive support for education, and that those who do are eligible receive less than before where EMA provided £30 per week.

Skills Centre

- The council has committed to creating a purpose-built building in a key location in Barking to ensure that all resident young people aged 14+ have the best possible opportunity to progress and succeed.
- Councillors have committed nearly £9m adding to a grant of £5m received from the Department for Education. LBBD was one of only 15 successful local authorities from the 243 who applied for funding.
- The Skills Centre will be managed for the Council by Barking and Dagenham College. The Centre will provide an environment to learn that resembles more a place of employment than a school or college, and in a range of vocational sectors (namely construction, ICT, hair & beauty, hospitality and catering and business administration, sustainable technologies) for which there are good regional job opportunities for young people, and clear routes into further or higher education.
- The Skills Centre is set to be completed in late July 2012 ready for the new academic year.

This is an indicator that positive steps are being made to help provide young people with support, thus showing that the Local Council are more likely to provide funding for programs to support Education, Employment and Training in the Local Borough. This can be supported by the following figures obtained from the Budget Book 2011 from Barking and Dagenham Council:

<i>2008/2009 OUTTURN £'000</i>	<i>2009/2010 ORIGINAL £'000</i>	<i>2009/2010 REVISED £'000</i>	<i>2010/2011 ORIGINAL £'000</i>
934	1,837	2,410	4,366

Budget for Skills, Learning and Employment from 2008/2009

The displayed increase in the budget shows that the Local Authority is more likely to fund programs or ideas that are suggested or presented.

Further information that Alan Lazell provided was that the most recent data indicated 78% of young people in Barking and Dagenham were in learning. Of this total, approximately 40% were in school sixth forms; 37% in further education colleges; 7.5% in sixth form colleges and 4.5% in employment with training, leaving 22% in either employment or no further advancements whatsoever.

Some other information we obtained from the Budget Book 2011 was that the Local Council were set to make savings of up £22,000 per annum on the Trident Work Experience programs by increasing the unit charge per pupil from £27 to £35, outlined below:

<i>2010/2011 BUDGET SAVINGS PLAN</i>
S-CHS-08 SLE – Trident Work Experience
£22,000 Saving
The savings proposed are to be realised via an efficiency saving by increasing the unit charge made per student, for arranging work placements from £27 to £35. There should be no issue with schools buy back of service as the new rate is market tested and brings the unit charge in line with neighbouring boroughs.

These savings indicate that even though the Council plan to increase the budget for Skills, Learning and Employment, they are saving money by increasing the prices to schools for Work Experience, raising questions as to whether or not the value of the program is worth it for what it provides for young people.

Finally, we sought to interview important people in the local area, people who make a difference to the lives of young people, and firstly spoke to Kevin Donovan, Children's Rights, Participation and Engagement Manager.

Why is Education such an important issue in Barking & Dagenham?

"I think education is a big issue for two particular reasons. One, because there are high levels of child poverty in Barking & Dagenham and two because there are also high levels of illiteracy, both in adults and children in the area, and both of these issues can be solved with education."

Did you go to University? Will children be at more of an advantage by going to University?

"Yes, I did go to University. I think I was at more of an advantage by going to University, but it depends entirely on the individual – office based jobs will certainly require higher level education, especially if you are going into a specialist field like Law, Accountancy and so forth. I think that in light of recent government decisions, kids in our borough have fewer aspirations to go to University.

How do we solve the issues?

"I think that it will be very tough to reverse the cuts to educations, but if I was in charge, I certainly would reduce tuition fees without a doubt. I would try to increase the information available to students to give them more ideas about post-16 study."

Another person we spoke to was Councillor Dee Hunt, a local councillor for Barking and Dagenham. We asked her similar questions:

Why is Education such an important issue in Barking & Dagenham?

“Education is definitely important because it is our future, your future and everyone’s future at stake. Without education, we will only continue to see more children end up nowhere, especially in this climate.”

Did you go to University? Will children be at more of an advantage by going to University?

“I didn’t go to University, but I think I still did well. I don’t necessarily believe all kids will be at a disadvantage if they go to University, many can still make something of themselves. I do think that those who would have wanted to go may not be able to afford the debt after, and I feel sorry for them. But, those who are really determined to go will pay.”

How do we solve the issues?

“Schools need to teach kids more about why University is important, so they can make informed decisions. If I had the power, I would reduce fees, without a doubt, but it is near impossible to reverse such a decision. The best thing we could do is set up some kind of program to help kids for the future.”

Findings and Recommendations

From the evidence we obtained and the research conducted, we conclude that these are the key issues surrounding Education and Employment:

- The rise in tuition fees and the replacement of EMA with Bursary Funds have upset a number of students in Barking and Dagenham.
- There has been an average increase of youth unemployment over the last five years, and is particularly at a high point now, at the time of the writing of this report.
- Many disadvantaged children who should be getting support are no longer getting the support they deserve.
- The budgets for Skills, Learning and Employment is set to increase indicating there will be more development in those sectors.
- The Council are making savings of up to £22,000 per annum by increasing the unit charge of sending pupils on work experience, costing more to schools.

The economic conditions for which this generation and the next are to face are extremely tough especially when the job market is weak – youth unemployment, child poverty, adults without qualifications, disadvantaged children, rise in tuition fees, cutting of EMA, reduction of support; these are all issues that have been discussed in this report, and the recommendations we make cannot solve the issues entirely, but can perhaps make contributions to the improvement of the situations at present. It is our duty as the Youth Parliament Members to secure the future for our generation and the next.

We came up with a whole range of possible solutions, and after evaluating all ideas, we would like to suggest one particular idea that we feel would solve a substantial amount of issues and have already looked into; an employability skills program.

Employability Skills Program

In terms of trying to solve the issues involving education, the main cause for concern is of course the increase in tuition fees and the cutting of EMA, as well general cuts to Education and it is of course near impossible to reverse government decisions – what we can do is seek to resolve other issues that may surrounding education and more particularly, it is evident that we have highlighted youth unemployment and the situation job market as a primary concern of young people in the borough, as well as being an issue that needs to be resolved. We recognise that although tuition fees have gone up, the majority who would have gone to University will still aspire to go to University; but the value of the degree has eroded as more of the population end up with a University degree. This is displayed by the following table¹⁰:

Qualification	In 1993		In 2010	
	Median hourly pay (£)	Pay gap to GCSE (%)	Median hourly pay (£)	Pay gap to GCSE (%)
Degree	10.29	95	16.10	85
Higher Education	8.13	54	12.60	45
A Levels	6.25	18	10.00	15
GCSE Grades A*-C	5.29	0	8.68	0
Other qualifications	4.74	-10	8.07	-7
No qualifications	4.18	-21	6.93	-20

¹⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/aug/24/earnings-by-qualification-degree-level#data>

As we can see, the pay gap between degree and GCSE less over the years has decreased, meaning that the value of the degree has gone down. If this is the case, why should students pay more for something which is less valuable, even if there is a higher demand for it? Surely, students need to get something out of their degrees, and more than often that reward would be a job. To compliment this, the number of students getting into employment after their degrees in retrospect has been on the rise; graduate employment in the UK from full-time first degree students has risen to 90.4% from 89.9% with those studying medicine & dentistry and veterinary science having the highest rate – yet those degrees have near 100% employment rates; there is still a need to support the other majority who do not study subject fields which will lead into a career, and employers argue that the importance of employability skills is now greater¹¹ - a report published by the Confederation of British Industry explained that in a survey they held, 82% of employers said that 'improving students' employability skills' should be something that Universities prioritise.

But why should we start only from University? We, the Members of Youth Parliament resonate with the views of our constituents that work experience is simply not enough, particularly since it is now a higher cost to schools - we should develop students' employability skills to give them better chances in highly competitive markets. This is why we believe an employability skills program is fundamental to the progression of the young people in not just Barking and Dagenham, but across the UK.

What do we propose to do?

We propose to create and design an employability skills program in which practical workshops, teaching guides and lessons can be delivered by local businesses, companies and employers. The programs can be delivered through lessons such as PSHE during school time or as separate programs, perhaps after-school or as a program that young people can choose to come to.

The program would consist of a wide range of skills that many employers place a heavy emphasis, which includes working effectively in teams, being able to take telephone calls, hold meetings, writing memos and agendas, interview skills, presentation skills, communication skills, adaptability skills and a wide range of abilities that are necessary and useful in a working environment – work experience does not do enough to provide insight into those skills and at a higher price for work experience, there is more demand for a program like ours.

Furthermore, schools are unable to facilitate the advancement of skills such as those stated and consequently, it can be argued that youth unemployment is so high because of a lack of these skills. If they do not hold some of the most basic skills required in the working world, how can employers possibly employ young people?

¹¹ http://educationandskills.cbi.org.uk/uploaded/HRE_091_Future%20Fit%20AW.pdf

There is support for our program – the BAD Youth Forum (the local youth council), the interviewees from this report, Jon Cruddas MP (MP for Dagenham & Rainham) and a clerk from the Worshipful Company of Chartered Surveyors have all expressed that they would support the development of a program like ours.

There is still development remaining for the program before we can go on to design and deliver it, but certainly, our suggestions would increase the skills that young people from our local area would have making them more employable; they are now more likely to go to University as they would be more likely to get a job at the end of it, thus reducing unemployment rates, increasing the number of University enrolments from our borough, and over a long period tackle child poverty and illiteracy rates.

We, the Members of Youth Parliament, care for our local area and want to see it be the best it can possibly be; it is our generation we want to help and will help with support and guidance from those who can truly change things.

By Azaan Akbar MYP and Shekhar Seebaluck DMYP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the completion of this report, we would like to thank:

Sally Allen-Clarke	Senior Youth Worker
Erik Stein	Group Manager - Integrated Youth Services, Extended Schools & Engagement
Alan Lazell	Head of 14-19 Education, Employment and Training
Terry Regan	Group Manager – Employment and Skills
The Barking & Dagenham Youth Forum	
The young people of Barking & Dagenham	
UK Youth Parliament	