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Move on UP? Measuring the social mobility impact of apprenticeships, Middlesex University

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The report takes a close look at the use of 'proxy' measures that are currently being used by OfS and other organisations as an indicator of social mobility for apprenticeships but also for higher education more broadly, with regards to participation and disadvantage. The report identifies significant limitations in using proxy measures and proposes using government tested individual socio-economic measures (that are used in the research conducted) with some significant findings and recommendations.

The Move on Up study argues that proxy data known as POLAR and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) – which look at postcode and neighbourhood data respectively – are inappropriate measures of social mobility. The report argues that the IMD and POLAR methods are not reliable or valid measures of social mobility, and they are not designed for this purpose. However, these methods continue to be used by the Office for Students and influence the national policy discourse around the social mobility benefit of degree apprenticeships. The research used the Cabinet Office's questions which are employer-facing and more relevant for apprentices and applied the government's own method to a sample of Middlesex University students in order to obtain a much more informed view of the social mobility impact of apprenticeships. The research discovered 66% of more than 1,000 apprentice students surveyed came from a non-professional background where both parents did not have degree level qualifications, but the figure would have been just 28% based on POLAR data.

The other key findings were:

- 37% of respondents reported that the highest income earners in their household were employed as 'professionals', 'associate professionals' or 'managers, directors and senior officials'.
- 55% of apprentices went to non-selective state schools and only 1% went to independent fee-paying schools.
- 22% of all apprentices responding said they were eligible for Free School Meals.

The report makes the following recommendations:

1. Use Move on Up to develop a new model for measuring the social mobility impact of higher and degree apprenticeships, collaborating with higher education apprenticeships providers, across England. Participating providers would be asked to:
 - Incorporate Move on Up individual socio-economic measures into apprenticeship registration information.

- Compare data from individual socio-economic measures with other data sets, using a shared model of statistical factor analysis.
 - Produce reports and analysis (subject to the same or similar privacy and data controls used in the Move on Up study) for comparison and discussion across participating providers.
 - Share impact analysis to allow further higher level comparison across settings, contexts and employment sectors.
 - Use higher level impact analysis to inform apprenticeship and social mobility policy at local, regional and national levels, across government agencies and departments with an interest.
 - Collaborate to develop and refine the Move on Up model over time.
1. OfS should support a pilot to trial the Move on Up model, to establish evidence for its efficacy across a range of settings.
 2. Involve employer sector organisations and higher education provider networks such as UVAC and UALL in developing collaborative Move on Up partnerships.
 3. Focus on key areas of employment, such as healthcare, policing, digital, leadership and management to gather evidence of social mobility impact to inform policy.
 4. OfS should collaborate with national employers engaged in ongoing social mobility studies, such as the People Survey (Civil Service 2020), and best practices by employers described in the Social Mobility Index (Social Mobility Commission 2019)
 5. OfS should collaborate with IfATE, ESFA and Ofsted to establish a best practice guide to promote an effective and consistent means to gather and report on individual socio-economic information at the point of apprentice on-boarding.
 6. Consideration should be given by UCAS to including the individual socio-economic measures used in the Move on Up study within the data gathered at the point of application to higher education, including apprenticeships.
 7. End the reliance on proxy measures such as POLAR and IMD, to inform policy regarding the social mobility impact of higher and degree apprenticeships.