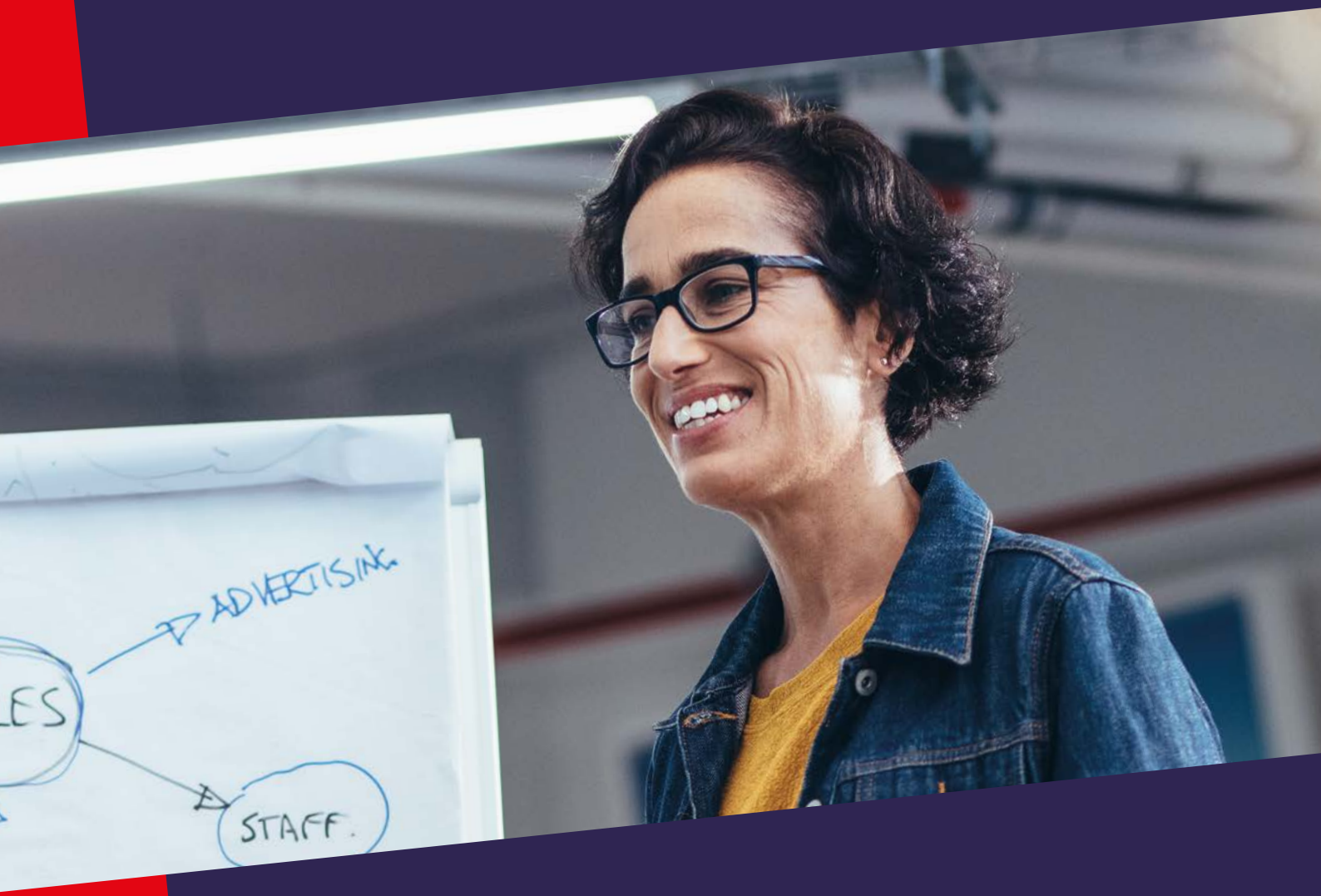
Middlesex University London




# MOVE ON UP?

Measuring the social mobility impact of apprenticeships

# EARLY FINDINGS SUMMARY REPORT






## DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS AND LEVELLING–UP

At Middlesex University we see clear evidence that higher and degree apprenticeships are attracting a diverse cohort of learners. 53% of our apprentices are female, 47% are from BAME[1] groups and 72% are aged over 25 years. Retention rates[2] are also high - 93% overall: 97% retention for our Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship programmes. This is pretty amazing given that these retention rates have been achieved in the context of the pandemic. Alongside improving diversity and high retention, higher education providers need to know if higher and degree apprenticeships are improving social mobility.

The **Move on Up** study asked 1030 apprentices currently on programme - including around 800 Nursing Associates, Registered Nurses and Police Constables - about their social and economic backgrounds, using a set of tested socio-economic background measures. The study used their responses, alongside 'participation of local areas' (POLAR), Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and other anonymised data to examine what impact higher and degree apprenticeships at Middlesex have on social mobility.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL MOBILITY?

> Social mobility is the link between a person's occupation or income and the occupation or income of their parents. Where there is a strong link, there is a lower level of social mobility. Where there is a weak link, there is a higher level of social mobility.
>
> **(SOCIAL MOBILITY COMMISSION, 2020)**

For example, this means that if a person's parents were in a non-professional job but that person gained employment as a professional, then this would constitute social mobility because they would have moved from a non-professional background into a professional role. This is important for higher education providers as we know that:

> Having graduated from university, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to go into professional jobs.
>
> **(UUK SOCIAL MOBILITY ADVISORY GROUP, 2016)**

As the vast majority of higher education providers in England now provide higher and degree apprenticeships, it is also important to know if this is making a difference by enabling more people who have come from 'low higher education participation', 'non-professional' and disadvantaged backgrounds to access professional careers. In other words, are higher and degree apprenticeships helping to increase social mobility and 'levelling-up'?

The current approach for measuring social mobility largely depends on POLAR and IMD data which are generalised measures based on geographical location. POLAR data measures the proportion of young people who enter higher education aged 18-19 years old by (postcode) area. Areas are classified in 1 to 5 'quintiles', ranging from quintile 1 representing the lowest higher education participation to quintile 5 representing the highest higher education participation.

The IMD is the official measure of relative deprivation in England and it includes seven domains of deprivation: income; employment; health deprivation and disability; education, skills training; crime, barriers to housing and services; living environment. Each domain is weighted to provide an overall measure of deprivation by 'lower-layer super output area' or neighbourhood in England. Neighbourhoods are classified in 1 to 10 'deciles', ranging from decile 1 representing the most deprived areas to decile 10 representing the least deprived areas. We have paired IMD deciles into quintiles to make volume comparisons between POLAR and IMD easier to view. This reflects the approach taken by the Office for Students (OfS).

Continues

1 Black, Asian and Minority Ethic
2 The profile of Middlesex University apprentices as of December 2020

## ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLANS

In order for higher education providers to be able to charge higher level tuition fees, Access and Participation Plans need to be approved by the Director for Fair Access and Participation and monitored by the OfS.

> Access and participation plans set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education.
>
> **(WWW.OFFICEFORSTUDENTS.ORG)**

The OfS provides an online 'access and participation data dashboard[3]' that is designed to inform the process of producing individual Access and Participation Plans and enable higher education providers to measure the effectiveness of the planned actions in relation to OfS Key Performance Measures. For example, Key Performance Measure 1 is to narrow the 'gap in participation between the most and least represented groups'. This is presented as the gap between POLAR quintile 1 and quintile 5. The OfS access and participation data dashboard also provides information on deprivation (IMD), ethnicity, age and disability.

Both POLAR and IMD are currently being used by higher education providers to measure their performance regarding the effectiveness of their plans, to 'improve the equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups'. However, as both POLAR and IMD are generalised measures based on geographical location, they are particularly unhelpful in dense urban environments, such as London, where high and low participation can exist in the same street. How then can we improve the measures used to ascertain the social mobility impact of degree apprenticeships?

## MOVE ON UP? – INDIVIDUAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC MEASURES

The **Move on Up** study used individual socio-economic measures designed to enable employers and higher education providers to better understand what social mobility impact degree apprenticeship are making. This is particularly important for public sector apprenticeships that are delivering the nurses and police officers that communities need. The socio-economic measures used were drawn from reviewing the relevant literature, learning from and closely reflecting an approach used and tested by 43 public and private sector employers and recommended by government[4]. This employer-led approach is particularly relevant as apprentices are first and foremost employees. The survey questions addressed: secondary school type; parental/guardian qualifications; parental/guardian occupation; free school meals eligibility; self-assessment of socio-economic background.

3 https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/
4 UK Government Civil Service (2018) 'Measuring Socio-economic Background in your Workforce: recommended measures for use by employers'. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/768371/Measuring_Socio-economic_Background_in_your Workforce_recommended_measures_for_use_by_employers.pdf [Accessed 21 November 2020]



## MEASURING THE SOCIAL MOBILITY IMPACT OF APPRENTICESHIPS

The purpose of **Move on Up** was to compare POLAR and IMD measures with individual social and economic measures and other indicators developed by the University. This involved surveying 1030 Middlesex apprentices on programme between the 9th December 2020 and the 27th January 2021, across 11 apprenticeship programmes, The survey generated close to 200 responses. The POLAR and IMD profiles of respondents closely aligns with the wider group of 1030 apprentices surveyed and although the early findings below are all related directly to respondents, it is reasonable to suggest that these findings are likely to be reflected across the wider group.

### Early findings from the research

**Move on Up** provides strong evidence of the very significant social mobility impact of Middlesex University's apprenticeship provision, as two thirds of our apprentices are accessing professional careers having come from non-professional and low HE participation backgrounds.

- **Move on Up** found that at least 66% of Middlesex apprentices come from low HE participation backgrounds
- 49% of respondents reported that their parents/guardians had 'qualifications below degree level' and a further 17% reported that their parents/guardians had 'no formal qualifications', totalling 66%. It is possible that the percentage with below degree or no formal qualifications is higher as 6% responded 'don't know', 2% responded 'prefer not to say' and 1% did not answer the question.
- Up to 63% of apprentices may be from non-professional backgrounds.
- Only 37% of respondents reported that the highest income earners in their household were employed as 'managers, directors and senior officials' 'professionals', or 'associate professionals'. 1% responded 'don't know', 10% responded 'other' and 6% did not answer the question.
- According to POLAR data for the same apprentices, only 28% are from low HE participation areas. 11% of respondents are from POLAR quintile 1 and 17% are from POLAR quintile 2, totalling 28% from low HE participation areas.
- According to IMD data, only 38% are from the most deprived areas. 17% of respondents are from IMD decile 1-2 and 23% are from decile 3-4, totalling 38% from the 4 most deprived areas.

The differences are stark. **Move on Up** really shines a light on the inadequacies of measures such as POLAR and IMD when considering how apprenticeships contribute to social mobility or 'levelling-up'. In addition, POLAR data measures the HE participation of 18-19 years olds, which is not fit for purpose when measuring HE participation for apprenticeships, as the typical age profile of apprentices is older compared with other students. For example, 72% of Middlesex apprentices are over 25.

### SOME KEY FIGURES

**1000**

Middlesex apprentices surveyed

**200**

responses were received

**66%**

of Middlesex apprentices are from low HE participation backgrounds

**37%**

Only 37% of Middlesex apprentices are from 'professional' backgrounds

## Case studies comparing POLAR, IMD and Middlesex individual socio-economic measures

47% of respondents said that compared to people in general, they would describe themselves as coming from a lower socio-economic background. In addition to the quantitative data comparison between POLAR, IMD and the Middlesex individual socio-economic measures, the following case study examples drawn from the research provide qualitative insight that further illustrates the inadequacies of POLAR and IMD as measures of social mobility. Each example identifies the POLAR and IMD classification for each apprentice who responded to the survey.

The text gathered was in response to the question:

Whatever your background, could you tell us about any social or economic obstacles you feel you faced, in getting onto your **apprenticeship**?

### CASE STUDY 1

**POLAR Quintile:** 4 – High HE participation area
**IMD Decile:** 1 – Most deprived area

My brother and I grew up in a one parent household with my father who was unable to work from my being around 8 years old due to a large stroke he had quite young where he had to learn to walk and talk again and completely lost the use of his right arm which he never regained. With little means we survived on a very low income from benefits and lived in a high rise flat and then a council house on an estate that was heavily crime ridden and had heavy open drug abuse (very high unemployment rate) being one of only two mixed race/black families on the whole estate so there was obvious prejudice. We had very little contact with my mum between the age of approx. 9 – 15.

I did try to go to college on leaving high-school but we needed the additional income so decided to go straight into work...

This apprentice lives in a high HE participation area which is at the same time in the most deprived category.

This seeming contradiction tells us very little about how apprenticeships have provided the opportunity to access a professional career despite the obvious complexities and economic challenges being faced.

Our approach to gathering individual socio-economic data provides the means to measure the social mobility impact that the apprenticeship has had.

### CASE STUDY 2

**POLAR Quintile:** 5 – Highest HE participation area
**IMD Decile:** 9 – Low deprivation area

I grew up in a working-class background. Lived in the [London] borough of Newham with my two older siblings in a council property. (Shared a bedroom with my sister). My mother was a single parent and a registered child minder. She earned very little money, however we made the most of everything and I had an excellent childhood.

Regarding issues within my family - Domestic Violence, this didn't affect my education at the time as my mother is a strong person and got us through it.

Although the process of applying for the apprenticeship via my employer was quite long, I am happy to be here and it is worth it!

This apprentice lives in an area that has the highest level of HE participation and also a very low level of deprivation according to POLAR and IMD data. Yet these measures provide a highly misleading picture of the apprentice's progress from a very low income/non-professional background towards professional status via their apprenticeship.

### CASE STUDY 3

**POLAR Quintile:** 2 – Low HE participation area
**IMD Decile:** 5 – Medium deprivation area

My family was targeted and property destroyed during the unrest in my native country. We had to relocate and that was when things became harder for us. It was economically challenging as well as mentally challenging. We had to do menial jobs to survive.

24% of apprentices responding attended school outside the UK, where neither POLAR nor IMD apply. However, individual social-economic measures can capture this information. The implications for supporting these apprentices will be discussed in the final **Move on Up** report.

### CASE STUDY 4

**POLAR Quintile:** 5 – High HE participation area
**IMD Decile:** 6 – Medium deprivation area

I came from a single parent family, there were issues of domestic violence and low income. As my parents were Scottish there was also prejudice as the view about Scottish people was they were portrayed as drunks and violence was seen as a part of this. Was told by a careers teacher that I would be lucky to get a job in a supermarket as I was socially inept? So never had much encouragement to better myself at the time.



Apprentice 3 lives in a low HE participation area, while apprentice 4 lives in a high HE participation area and both areas are middle-ranked regarding deprivation. Yet POLAR and IMD measures miss the fact that where these apprentices live has very little, if any, bearing on how an apprenticeship has provided to opportunity to progress to a professional career. Both apprentices are from low income, non-professional backgrounds with no parental experiences of higher education. In fact, their circumstances make it truly amazing that they have managed to access university education. What is clear is that gathering individual socio-economic data has the potential to demonstrate the social mobility impact of higher and degree apprenticeships in a way that is valid and reliable and that it is this kind of approach that should inform both institutional strategy and national policy.

## HOW APPRENTICESHIPS ARE HELPING PEOPLE ACCESS A PROFESSIONAL CAREER

The following was not specifically drawn from the Middlesex social mobility research but does illustrate the role that apprenticeships can play in helping people to overcome life challenges and gain recognition as a professional.

29 years old and originally from Jamaica, Nursing Associate Kemoy had always wanted to become a nurse, but it wasn't a feasible financial option giving up employment to go into education.

"I have worked since the age of 18 and 12 years in the health care sector and it's been my dream to become a nurse but it was never quite the right time or circumstances. I had no-one to support me so I couldn't just quit a job and go studying. I know there are loans but I didn't want this to become an issue later on in my life.

She chose the apprenticeship programme:

"because it wouldn't affect my living situation and I wouldn't have to work part time to make ends meet so it was more efficient. I get paid while learning so there's no need to worry. It's a longer route but at the end of the day the same results. My family are pleased I'm making steps to achieve my goal and they have been very supportive.

She plans to become a Registered Nurse and work in adult nursing in a hospital.

Kemoy's story illustrates how higher and degree apprenticeships can transform people's lives. When she completes her Nursing Associate apprenticeship she will become a professional recognised by the Nursing and Midwifery Council and her employer. She will also be able to progress her professional career further by undertaking a Registered Nurse degree apprenticeship.

## THIS IS WHAT LEVELLING UP LOOKS LIKE

We can now prove that social mobility is being delivered through apprenticeships. Performance measures now need to change to recognise this.

The final **Move on Up** report will describe how the set of tested socio-economic measures used in this study could be used more widely to better assess the social mobility impact of apprenticeships including considering in further detail:

- How the **Move on Up** methodology was developed, its origins and rationale
- How the research was conducted, lessons learned and limitations
- The research findings and discussion of key questions
- How the **Move on Up** approach will be adopted for use at Middlesex University
- How the **Move on Up** approach could be widely adopted to measure apprentices' social mobility
- The wider implications of the **Move on Up** approach in measuring social mobility for higher education providers in England.

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