



Prince's Trust

# ABANDONED AMBITIONS?

The need to support struggling school leavers

A report by The Prince's Trust, supported by HSBC



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# FOREWORD



**IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO INVEST IN VOCATIONAL SUPPORT AND TRAINING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL.**

**– MARTINA MILBURN CBE  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, THE PRINCE'S TRUST**

**This year's school leavers are set to face one of the toughest job markets in history. Those with few qualifications fear they will end up on benefits.**

Last year – in England alone – around 250,000 young people left school with fewer than five good GCSEs including Maths and English. We cannot let a quarter of a million young people abandon their ambitions.

It is more important than ever to invest in vocational support and training for these young people who are not academically successful. Without this, thousands will struggle to compete in our flooded labour market, leaving them hopeless and jobless. It will also have a huge impact on our economy, which needs a confident, ambitious workforce in order to thrive.

At The Prince's Trust, our vocational 'Get into' scheme supports disadvantaged young people – giving them training in sectors where there are jobs available, including retail, hospitality and social care. We know our programmes work, with three in four moving into jobs, education or training even despite the tough economic climate.

More than ever, we believe the public and private sectors should work with charities such as The Trust on schemes that are proven to help young people into jobs. We also need to show young people that they can be a success, even if they don't get five good GCSEs.

With the right support, we can unlock the talent of these vulnerable young people before it goes to waste, as well as saving the economy billions in benefits costs.

**We would like to thank HSBC for supporting this research, and for their commitment to helping disadvantaged young people achieve their potential.**

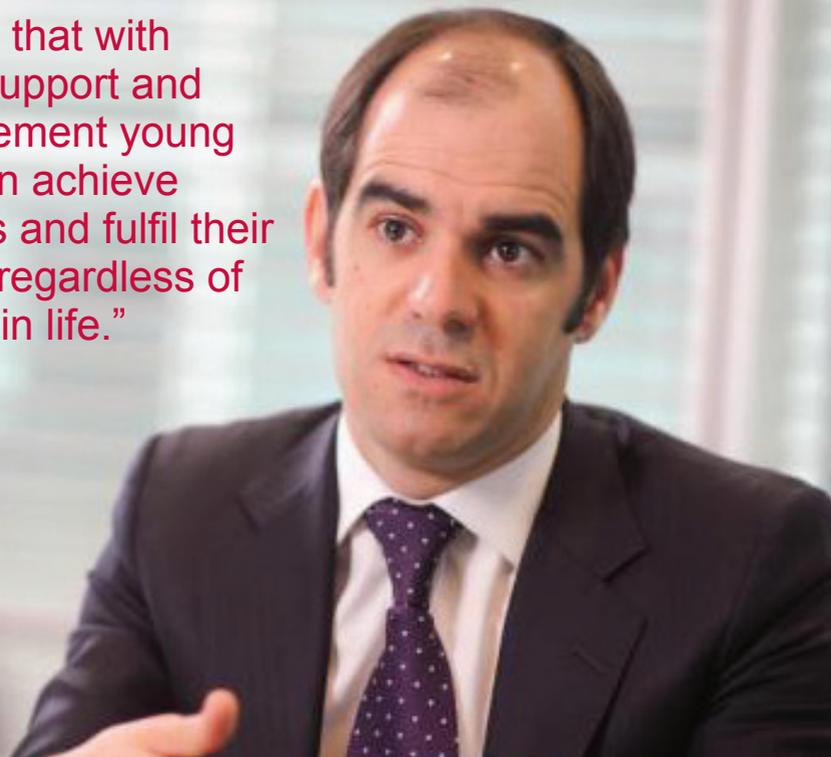
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martina Milburn".

**Martina Milburn CBE**  
Chief Executive  
The Prince's Trust

# ANTONIO SIMOES

HEAD OF THE UK BANK, HSBC

“We know that with the right support and encouragement young people can achieve their goals and fulfil their potential, regardless of their start in life.”



**TO SUPPORT THIS, THIS SUMMER WE ANNOUNCED OUR NEW OPPORTUNITY PARTNERSHIP, WORKING WITH FOUR UK YOUTH CHARITIES, INCLUDING THE PRINCE'S TRUST, TO HELP 25,000 DISADVANTAGED YOUNG PEOPLE INTO EDUCATION, TRAINING AND WORK, ENABLING THEM TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND WIDER SOCIETY.**

– **ANTONIO SIMOES**  
HEAD OF THE UK BANK, HSBC

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reveals how poor exam results are causing young people to abandon their ambitions. The findings show that young people who leave school with few qualifications are more likely to scale down their aspirations for the future.

### About the research

A total of 2,342 young people (aged 16-25) took part in an online poll conducted by YouGov in June and July 2013. Of the sample, 164 left school with fewer than five GCSEs graded A\*- C, 833 were awaiting exam results and 120 had left school at the age of 15 or 16.

### Key findings

- One in six young people (18 per cent) believe they will end up on benefits for at least part of their lives. This increases to more than one in three (34 per cent) among those leaving school with fewer than five GCSEs graded A\*- C
- Young people with few qualifications are also almost twice as likely as their peers to believe that they will “never amount to anything”
- One in five young people (20 per cent) claim they have “abandoned their ambitions” due to their poor qualifications

**According to the survey, young people with fewer than five GCSEs graded A\*- C are more likely to have faced significant barriers to learning in their home environment**

- More than one in five young people with fewer than five GCSEs graded A\*- C (29 per cent) say they “struggled to concentrate

on schoolwork due to family problems”, compared to just 12 per cent of all young people

- Seventy per cent of young people say they had access to a computer when they were doing their homework. This figure is significantly lower for young people with fewer than five GCSEs graded A\*- C (44 per cent)

**The findings also reveal the extreme pressure that young people face in the wait for exam results**

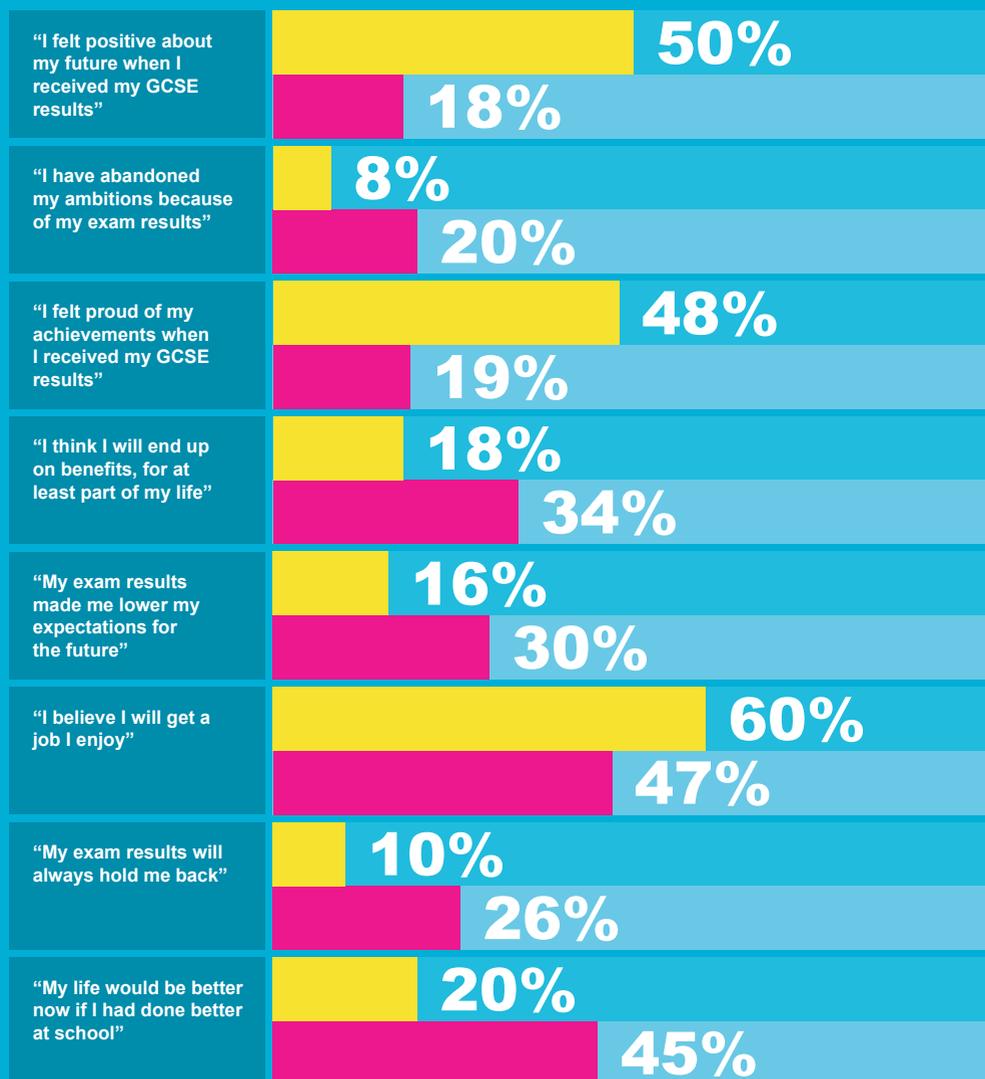
- One in five young people (20 per cent) who are waiting for exam results say that worrying about this is affecting their health
- One in six young people (17 per cent) have experienced panic attacks due to the pressure to succeed
- More than one in 10 (15 per cent) say they are unable to sleep at night
- Almost a third of young people (31 per cent) say that getting a good job is “virtually impossible” without good exam results
- More than one in three young people (38 per cent) believe those who fail their exams will struggle to find a good job in the future

## HOW POOR EXAM RESULTS CAN CRUSH YOUNG PEOPLE'S AMBITIONS

Fifty per cent of young people surveyed said they felt positive about the future when they received their GCSE or Scottish Standards results. However, this figure falls to just 18 per cent among young people who received fewer than five GCSEs graded A\*- C.

Figure 1, shown below, shows the effect that poor exam results can have on young people and their ambitions.

■ All young people ■ Young people who have fewer than five GCSEs graded A\*- C



## CASE STUDY: MARIE COPE

Marie's life began to go out of control at the age of 13. Changes at home had a significant impact on Marie and she began skipping school for long periods. As a result her schoolwork began to suffer.

Marie sat just two GCSE examinations in English and Art. She was not interested in other academic subjects and admits that she "couldn't care less" about her future at that time.

However, when results day arrived, Marie was hugely disappointed with her grades.

"I knew I'd totally messed up," she admits.

"Everyone else was celebrating with their parents and I was too ashamed to go home and tell mine."

Marie worried about how she would get a job with so few qualifications.

"I didn't feel confident about my future at all and felt the best I could hope for was a dead-end job."

The next few years were tough for Marie. While friends went on to university, she began a highly destructive lifestyle involving heavy substance misuse and a string of abusive relationships.

Marie went on to have a son and not long after, she found herself a single mother without warning. She owed a substantial amount of money and was afraid to open the door for fear of encountering debt collectors.

Then Marie heard about The Prince's Trust Get into Retail programme which provides young people with the training and experience they need to find work in the retail industry.

After completing the course, Marie secured work with a major retail fashion chain. She has now become a Job Ambassador for The Trust, using her experience to help other unemployed young people find work.

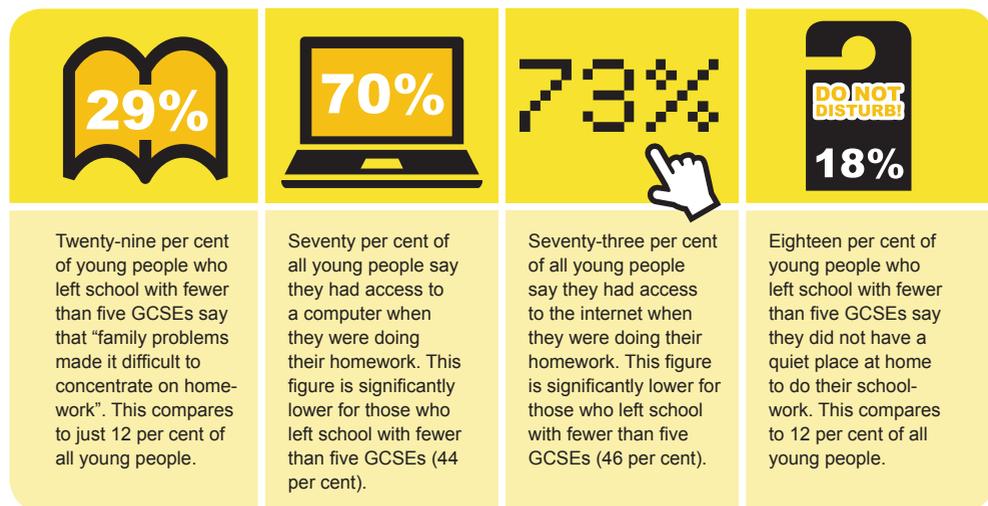
**"I now realise that failing your exams doesn't have to be the end of the world. There are so many opportunities out there, and I hope I can inspire other young people not to give up hope because of their exam results."**

## YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER THAN FIVE GCSEs GRADED A\* - C OFTEN FACE SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO LEARNING AT HOME

According to the survey, young people who left school with fewer than five GCSEs graded A\* - C are twice as likely as their peers to say that they “struggled to concentrate on schoolwork due to family problems”.

As Figure 2 shows, they are also significantly less likely to have had access to a computer, the internet or a quiet place to do their schoolwork at home.

Figure 2:



## LEAVING SCHOOL AT 15 OR 16

Many young people leave school at 15 or 16 without a clear idea of what to do next. These young people suddenly find themselves unemployed, and the lack of structure in their lives can lead to feelings of isolation, depression and low self-esteem. **Twenty-eight per cent of young people who left school at 15 or 16 say they regret their decision to leave.**

Figure 3: Which, if any, of the following statements describe how you felt after leaving school at 15 or 16?



## CASE STUDY: MARTIN MEEUWISSEN

Martin left school with three GCSEs after family problems left him unable to concentrate on his studies.



Martin spent his childhood in numerous countries before settling in the UK at the age of 11. Moving around so much caused anxiety, and a difficult home life led to a speech impediment from a young age.

Bullying was a constant factor in Martin's life and his school life was tumultuous. He got involved in fights, began drinking and misusing drugs and was often excluded from lessons. When his mother died shortly after arriving in the UK, Martin's life went further out of control, and his GCSEs were the last thing on his mind.

Martin says: “Most of my childhood was about surviving from day-to-day – I hardly ever thought about the future. I knew I could have done better at school, but I felt I didn't stand a chance.”

After leaving school with few qualifications, Martin hit his lowest point.

“I already knew I was pretty much stuffed, but my GCSE results just confirmed it. My results made me feel like I had nothing

to lose, so I just took more drugs and drank alcohol to try and forget.”

Martin drifted aimlessly in his 20s before discovering The Prince's Trust. He then decided to join the Team programme, which helps unemployed young people get their lives on track.

After completing the programme, Martin became determined to help other vulnerable young people in similar situations to the one he once found himself in. For a year after he had finished, he volunteered whatever spare time he had with other young people on Team.

He is now employed in a full-time care work role supporting adults who have suffered brain injuries and strokes for Olympus Care Services, a division of Northamptonshire County Council.

**He says: “I'd advise other young people in my situation not to despair – there is support out there to help you get where you want to be.”**

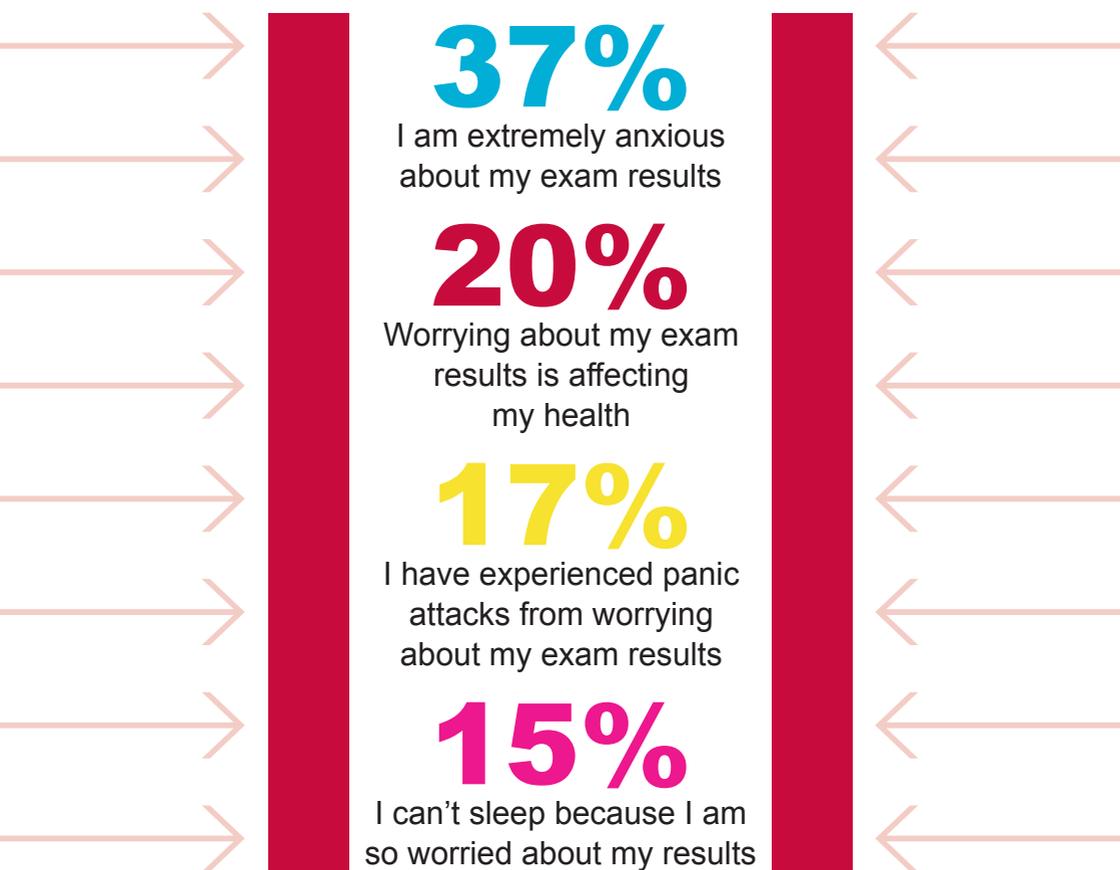
## THE PRESSURE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE FACE TO SUCCEED IN EXAMS

Young people are facing panic attacks, sleepless nights and health problems due to the pressure of exam results.

While more than two-fifths of young people awaiting exam results (43 per cent) said they feel confident about their results, many are struggling to cope with the pressure to succeed.

Those who have struggled at school are worried about finding a job due to the competitive labour market and high youth unemployment rates. More than one in three young people (38 per cent) believe those who fail their exams will struggle to find a good job in the future. Almost a third (31 per cent) say that getting a good job is “virtually impossible” without good exam results.

Figure 3:



## CONCLUSION

The Prince's Trust is calling for more vocational support for young people leaving school with few qualifications, to help them into jobs.

Government, employers and charities must work together to give these young people the chance to succeed in life, even if they do not get five GCSEs.

More than half of the young people supported by The Prince's Trust have left school with few qualifications.

The youth charity runs a range of programmes – with support from organisations like HSBC – to help these young people gain further qualifications or find work.

Young people on courses such as The Trust's 12-week Team programme not only manage to change their lives, they also become positive role models for the next generation. The Trust's Get into scheme is also proven to help disadvantaged young people into jobs, through vocational training in sectors where there are jobs available, such as construction, hospitality and social care.

Three in four young people on Prince's Trust programmes move into jobs, education or training.

### THE PRINCE'S TRUST SUMMER SESSIONS

The Prince's Trust is running a series of interactive events this summer 2013 – the Summer Sessions – to inspire and motivate young people at a time of uncertainty, when they are awaiting exam results or making decisions about their future. Celebrity Ambassadors who have themselves achieved against the odds will be sharing their inspiration and advice with young people in a series of live, interactive events.





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**– MARIE COPE**

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