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## School Placements



Most schools set up work placements in Year 10 and most parents feel that these are a very valuable experience for their children. Many parents thought that the placement was influential in their child's views about possible career options. Not all children were clear about the placement they wanted and many were unable to get their first choice. It is suggested that the etb could explore what could be done to assist schools by developing a programme of placements in SET industries.

It may also be useful to consider developing a programme of placements that young people could participate in at a later stage as well. The current research suggests that career choice is frequently something that happens relatively late for most young people – in some cases after they complete their education. A system of placements for these children may be useful as it would mean that they have an opportunity to consider or re-consider a SET career.

## School Visits

Many parents felt that talks from young, enthusiastic SET professionals to children in Year 9 could be useful in encouraging children to consider SET careers but only if the content was suitably constructed. All parents believe it appropriate for sectors to involve themselves with schools, through talks and fairs, as a means of generating awareness amongst pupils. This mode of interaction with young people backs up a number of approaches to experiential learning – as a result the etb are developing an on-line role-model programme to increase awareness of SET careers amongst young people.

## SET shortages

Few parents had heard of shortages of trained people in SET occupations and therefore, there was a feeling that this was either not a problem or only a minor problem. Parents did not see any evidence of this shortage whereas they did in trade professions, most notably plumbing. Parents felt that the advantage for new entrants of working in areas of shortage would presumably be: more jobs, excellent pay and benefits and rapid progression within the career. Parents were unconvinced that these benefits were available to new entrants in SET careers or that they were likely to materialise. Overcoming concern about job security and providing reassurance on longer-term demand for SET skills is certainly a major issue that requires consideration.

## Research Summary

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# Parents Perceptions of SET Based Careers



The Engineering and Technology Board (etb), a national partnership between business, industry, the engineering profession and education that aims to promote careers in science, engineering and technology (SET), is engaged in a wide range of research into the issues surrounding the engineering profession.



## Background



A priority for the etb and its partners is to increase awareness of career opportunities in science, engineering and technology (SET), particularly to young people. An essential part of understanding the underlying issues related to this remit involves the investigation of public perceptions towards SET careers.

This research has been commissioned by the etb to look specifically at the role of parents of children in Year 9 and Year 11 in influencing their child's decisions about their selection of subjects at school and their child's career choice. Data collection was based upon 10 focus groups, which were carried out across England.

The research contractor met with the etb and their steering group partners to discuss and develop the research brief. The aims were to explore parents' attitudes to SET and in particular to identify:

- + What they consider are the main ways they influence their children
- + What other factors they consider influence their children and how these factors operate.
- + What they think about their children pursuing education and employment in SET
- + If they wished to promote education and employment in SET to their children; what information would they need?

## Main Findings

Parents report that their children use a wide range of sources of information to keep themselves informed about a broad range of topics and that these factors collectively influence them. Information sources include media – the internet (which is seen as a major resource), TV and magazines, friends (another major factor), family and school.

Parents did not feel at all informed about SET careers and had limited knowledge about the wide scale and broad scope of career opportunities in SET. Parents also felt their information on careers was outdated and were unsure where to look apart from a general search on the internet. Parents from across all the groups were unclear about whether SET jobs were in demand or not and that there were national shortages in SET jobs. Many felt that in their locality there were few opportunities for SET jobs. Overall parents were not sure about SET being an appropriate or a desirable long-term career option for their children.

Parents felt that their influence was more indirect than the influence of teachers or friends on both subject choice and career choice. Parents felt that they played a facilitative role, encouraging their child to select choices that they would enjoy and do well in. Teachers were thought to have the most influence over subject choice, but again tended to reinforce the view that students should select the subjects they enjoyed and performed best in.

Parents supported the idea that they should try to keep their children's career options open as long as possible. Some parents even talked about delaying the choice beyond Further or Higher Education. Specialising in any subject areas (such as science or engineering) was seen as something that only a minority of children who are very clear about their post-education career intentions would pursue.

## Implications for career guidance

It would appear from the parents in this study that career guidance in schools is fairly limited. Parents are largely unaware of what facilities are available in school but are sure that their child has not actively used these facilities to explore different career options. The research suggests caution about an approach that involved developing expensive materials for schools detailing career opportunities within SET.

Where materials do already exist and where there are plans to update these, strong electronic visual materials such as DVDs and CD-ROMs would definitely be preferred over written material, especially in the first instance.

Parents are genuinely interested in some of the remarkable achievements of those working in SET industries and it was strongly felt that conveying something of the excitement of the scale and complexity of these achievements would be more attractive than descriptions of the work and possible opportunities.

A few parents mentioned that websites were available to help children identify their vocational strengths and weaknesses and suggest specific job roles. One possibility would be for the etb to explore whether there was any interest in developing a web-based tool that provided information on SET careers and to link to existing career portals. The etb has taken this forward with their decision to expand the development of [www.scenta.co.uk](http://www.scenta.co.uk), a SET careers portal designed to provide information initially to a 16 to 30 audience.

