

# **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: CHANGING VIEWS OF WORKING BY THE SEA**

**A report to the Lincolnshire Coastal Action Zone**

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## Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been produced in response to a commission by the Coastal Action Zone in April 2006. The initial brief was primarily to examine the problems associated with attracting candidates from outside Lincolnshire to work in public sector roles on the East Lincolnshire coast, and secondarily to offer some thoughts on the issue of retaining the most able young people to study and work within the Coastal Action Zone Area. We approached this second piece of work from a straightforward qualitative research standpoint, trying to understand simply what drove them away; a great deal of more sophisticated work is being done by others in an effort to embed new structures of learning, and we are not qualified to add to this expertise.
- 1.2 The work programme had three discrete sections. First, we convened qualitative focus groups and one-to-one interviews to establish a cross-section of views from relevant audiences. Second, we audited current recruitment activities to establish whether they were likely to address the issues identified in part 1. Finally, we produced a plan of action (including quick wins as well as more long-term pieces of work) through which we could begin to improve perceptions and raise the profile of working on the coast.
- 1.3 The report is structured around these three areas. For reasons of brevity, I have not attached the reports on the two focus groups undertaken in May and July 2006 and examples of the kind of campaign which CAZ might develop in due course; these were part of a previous draft report, and are of course available on request.
- 1.4 It is important to note that my background and expertise is in recruitment marketing and attraction strategy. While it is beyond question that fundamental economic and social issues are at the heart of the coastal area's long decline – and I do attempt to explain these with particular reference to recruitment – my focus in this project has been firmly on understanding what turns people off the coast, on identifying a target group who will respond positively to the proposition that the coast can offer now, and on suggesting how best to go about broadcasting that proposition. I am delighted to submit this report, and look forward to presenting it to the Chief Executives' Forum.

David Gooda

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**2. Retaining young people in the coastal area: key issues**

**Focus groups:** Monks' Dyke and King Edward VI Grammar schools

**Interviews:** Steve Walker, Connexions  
Meryllyn Coombs, Coastal Academy  
Elaine Lilley, EBP Lincs & Rutland  
Mike Crosby, LSC  
Sue Rothery, Mablethorpe Primary School  
Chris Ingram, First College

## 2.1 Economic monoculture

- 2.1.1 For much of its recent history, the tendency of tourism to dominate East Lindsey's economy has been held in balance by a robust, varied agricultural sector, and the rich mixed economies of the market towns in the region. But as agriculture became industrialised, fishery declined, and the mixed economy dwindled, leisure grew to have an overshadowing pre-eminence which now acts to suppress a sustainable and diversified economy and community on Lincolnshire's east coast.
- 2.1.2 This dominance has resulted in a constriction of mixed investment and opportunity into the region, and speeded up the outflow of talent and resources. The reported lack of investment by big leisure companies into developing the skills base of their workforce is a major contributor to the shortage of managerial and career-path positions in the county. While efforts to promote 'year-round' leisure may go some way towards mitigating this, it should not be seen as a solution to the greater problem of low-skill employment.
- 2.1.3 One of the themes which emerged time and again in our interviews was the damaging ease with which young people could fall into seasonal unskilled work. (Interestingly, however, the sense that there is no real employment choice is not universal amongst school pupils: while comprehensive pupils felt that there was no alternative to the dominance of the leisure industry except the armed forces or careers such as primary teaching, grammar pupils identified the main local industries as farming, building trades and even fishing. Their parents tended to have undertaken further or higher education, and to be self-employed or professional people, which may have the effect of insulating their children from the alternative experience.)
- 2.1.4 On the other hand, any young people who do not want to work in leisure or tourism feel that they are forced to look outside the county for opportunities. Our focus groups produced many comments such as these:
- *My sister moved after university, I don't think she'll come back because she wants to do business management; she can't do that as easily here.*
  - *Some people move away because the jobs they want to do aren't here. My brother moved to Leicestershire to be a design engineer, which was his main reason for moving. He wasn't bothered where he worked – he looked anywhere.*

## **2.2 Aspiration and education**

- 2.2.1** The assumption that, for most young people growing up on the coast, opportunities simply don't exist begins early. Despite some remarkable efforts by individual schools, (particularly in Mablethorpe, where the primary school has become a multi-disciplinary hub for health and educational interventions) many young people in East Lincolnshire do not develop significant social or occupational aspirations. Because few alternatives present themselves, they may take poorly paid, low skilled, seasonal work in the tourist and leisure industry, which has historically been embedded and supplemented by state support in the low season (although this situation appears now to be diminishing: see Fothergill and others on coastal-proofing benefits).
- 2.2.2** Where young people are academically able, they are directed into the grammar system, which both physically and figuratively removes them from their communities. This begins a lifelong process of deracination; most will travel away to university and pursue careers in cities and regions in other parts of the UK, and it will be extremely difficult to persuade them to return. While grammar schools certainly foster impressive levels of aspiration amongst their own pupils, in the wider context their existence clearly deters the majority of young people from developing real ambition.
- 2.2.3** However, an increasing trend for schools to share teaching, pupils and projects suggests an encouraging future for joint working, which should be promoted. The Coastal Academy Business Plan has a detailed and comprehensive summary of the issues in its preamble, and covers the issue of post-16 education fully as well.
- 2.2.4** The University of Lincoln does not seem to play a very significant part in raising aspirations among schoolchildren. There appear to have been plans to locate one of the University's faculties within the Coastal Action Zone, but it was difficult to establish whether this is still intended or not. A combination of investment (into a school or satellite learning hub) and outreach (visits by staff and undergraduates to normalise and mainstream the idea of higher education) would offer a visible and moral encouragement to those who would like to stay in the area but whose academic ambitions would otherwise draw them away. Where there are opportunities – for example, in the leisure and hospitality, or agricultural faculties – serious consideration should be given to a site in the CAZ.

## **2.3 Scarce opportunity**

- 2.3.1** School leavers are clear that the biggest single obstacle to remaining in the county is a lack of viable 'career-path' jobs. The high number of self-employed people does lead some of them to consider becoming entrepreneurs, but since it's likely that, in common with most start-ups in Lincolnshire, they will remain small and family owned, this is unlikely to make a long-term impact.
- 2.3.2** Some effective work goes on within and through schools: for example, the EBP's programme of placements and acclimatisation between education and business. This appears to be effective but happens on a very small scale. Equally, First College's CoVE recognition will raise its profile amongst school leavers looking for an alternative, but there is still room for extra marketing of these opportunities to school leavers.
- 2.3.3** Apprenticeships brokered by one or other of the county business partnerships are seen as an onerous and (in the context of family businesses) unnecessary extra activity. Apprenticeships generated by employers, or even work experience, rarely get a look in due to the burdens of 'paperwork, salaries and insurance'. In an uncertain economic context, there is little confidence that a permanent job will follow the training.
- 2.3.4** Where they express a career ambition, school leavers talk about the armed forces (because it offers a structured career path), general sales or business management (but crucially see themselves in large national or international firms) or vocations such as teaching, hairdressing or beauty therapy (which they see as portable and likely to help them move away with a saleable skill). However, in the main they do not expect to train near their homes.
- 2.3.5** University students who come to Lincolnshire express an almost universal desire to stay in the county, and even to work in the public sector, which is frustrated by a perceived lack of higher-level opportunities in both public and private sectors. And while they assert that the rural lifestyle is superficially unattractive to young people, the criteria they cite for their ideal first job and place to live match very closely the profile of the Lincolnshire coast.
- 2.3.6** We also heard from students who grew up in Skegness and are now attending Lincoln University, and who are committed to staying in the county if they can. But even they

accept that without a reasonably vibrant jobs market, and affordable housing, they are likely to be forced out. They have a perception that the public sector in Lincolnshire is closed to new entrants save for all but the most low-skilled roles; the exception is possibly the police service, which is seen as the most open of the public sector employers.

**3. Attracting people to the coastal area: key issues**

**Focus groups:** University of Lincoln (x 2)

**Interviews:** Penny Baker, Lincolnshire Tourism  
Elaine Lilley, EBP Lincs & Rutland  
Sally Hewitt, Lincolnshire Development  
Sandra Adderley, Job Centre Plus  
Amanda Spalding, Lincolnshire Enterprise  
Dr James Haworth, Marisco Medical Centre

### **3.1 Low awareness of Lincolnshire and the coast**

- 3.1.1** General national awareness of the rich variety of Lincolnshire's communities and landscapes – probably its strongest selling point – is low, and the county is not generally seen as a potential home. Perceptions of the Lincolnshire coast rarely go much beyond an identification of Skegness with the tourist industry. The wilder beauty of the coast north of Mablethorpe, of the Wolds, or the attractive villages and market towns inland is almost unknown.
- 3.1.2** Clearly plenty of people still do visit, and the Fun Coast is a major and growing industry industry; but it must be accepted that in the main, Fun Coast tourists are unlikely to be the target audience which the public sector employers in CAZ want to attract. Indeed, one of the issues which affects health, social and education services hardest is the annual influx of those without confirmed employment or accommodation who make their way to the coast, often with families in tow, because they enjoyed a holiday and want to 'start again'.
- 3.1.3** The sheer scale and variety of the county makes it difficult for any single item to promote the whole offer. The family of Lincolnshire brands is therefore an excellent way for visitors to pursue themes and narratives, and they are well written and produced. But unless they are broadcast and distributed nationally, over a reasonable period of time (as is being done by the North East of England), they will not effect any major increase in awareness.

## **3.2 Communicating the proposition**

- 3.2.1 Jobs are not in general marketed nationally, or by using the most appropriate professional media, and the applicant materials I have seen (with a few exceptions) make little or no effort to sell the lifestyle aspects of working in Lincolnshire. This is a self-sustaining problem – if Lincolnshire is not marketed nationally, it will not attract a national candidate pool. Across the public sector, there is a sense that there is no real alternative, and that as a consequence it is having a recruitment conversation with itself.
- 3.2.2 The tools available are not being exploited to their full potential. On one site, the ‘reasons to work here’ page consists of a list of employment policies; on another, it’s only if you scroll down a list of Lincolnshire’s statistical attributes that you find the phrase ‘Lincolnshire has so much to offer, whether you are looking to set up a business, to advance your career or for a secure, relaxed base to raise a family’ – a key lifestyle proposition.
- 3.2.3 For valid historical reasons, most advertising takes the form of a straightforward localised ‘vacancy announcement’. At best, however, this will simply sustain the ‘merry-go-round’ recruitment market, where staff move from public body to public body, and at worst, will result in a substandard recruitment.
- 3.2.4 A very small proportion of vacancies are advertised outside the county, because there is a wide-spread belief that the geography of the County makes it rare for candidates will be attracted from neighbouring counties, and never from further afield. There is a belief that because organisations will not want to match national salaries, the county boundary is as far as the recruitment net will extend.
- 3.2.5 There is neither a strong agreed recruitment proposition for the county or individual organisations, nor an understanding of its importance. Recent experience with senior vacancies suggests, however, that this may be a trend which is changing, and there are encouraging signs of a more insightful approach from all organisations.

### **3.3 Transport and infrastructure**

- 3.3.1 The housing stock in east Lincolnshire is in many ways attractive – rural farmhouses with land are comparatively common and affordable, but there is a significant gap between the cost of these houses and local salaries. Suburban housing is generally small (with some exceptions), of a poor quality, and undistinguished.
- 3.3.2 While there are plots for sale, and plenty of new-build appearing, it is generally still isolated, large and high specification properties. In a medium sized development, cleverly sited, they might attract sufficient attention and generate sufficient momentum to develop a new small neighbourhood; as individual units, they simply appear out of place and unattainable to the local population.
- 3.3.3 There is also a severe shortage of affordable high-quality rental properties, so crucial in someone's early career. Not only can people not afford to buy houses at this stage, but understandably they are wary of putting down permanent roots while they test the water.
- 3.3.4 Transport is a perennial problem. The road infrastructure has not kept pace with the increase in traffic and the relative dispersal of communities. This is of course a greater problem in rural and coastal areas, where the closure of a local shop may mean a long journey to a new supermarket.
- 3.3.5 Equally, the rail 'desert', bounded by Lincoln to the west, Skegness to the south and Cleethorpes to the north limits the choices for anyone without the means or inclination to run a car. While it seems as though people acclimatise to long, slow journeys quickly – developing "Lincolnshire timings" – this is a less efficient use of time which in turn increases the pressure on existing staff.

### **3.4 Opportunity and ambition**

- 3.4.1 The lack of developmental roles identified by school-leavers has an impact on incoming workers with a spouse or partner who also wants a job. It can be very difficult to find a role comparable to one you have left, simply because of this general shortage of businesses large enough to sustain a career hierarchy, and the economic homogeneity. This puts pressure on relationships and can exacerbate the burden on the social infrastructure.
- 3.4.2 Some incomers we spoke to took a different view. For them, the relatively low housing costs combined with a national salary scale meant that they could afford for one partner not to work, either to care for children or to pursue other ambitions. This is of course a particularly attractive and relevant aspect for many public sector workers who would achieve a relative increase in income by moving to Lincolnshire and to the coast in particular.
- 3.4.3 There is also a perception that a career in a rural area will by definition be sleepier, less demanding, less stimulating and less desired by future employers than a city or large town role. This is clearly not the case, but the perception will act as an initial barrier amongst a significant proportion of potential candidates.
- 3.4.4 Many of the diminishing (Atherton, 2006) band of entrepreneurs on the coast avoid expansion because they have decided simply to work for themselves. They perceive the hurdles to be too daunting, and the risks out of proportion to the potential (and uncertain, in a static or contracting economy) benefits. Without larger or expanding businesses, there are fewer opportunities at graduate / managerial / higher managerial level, as well as in the business-to-business sector, leading to the shortages of career paths and employment for partners identified above.
- 3.4.5 An East Lindsey Entrepreneurs scheme, making a stand-alone proposition and start-up funding available to people with sound plans for online retail, or a boutique B & B, or an environmental tourism business, would attract more commercially aware incomers as well as the encouraging the existing population.

#### **4. Report on current recruitment marketing approaches**

- 4.1.1 Understanding how Lincolnshire communicates its offer to candidates is as important as understanding what people think of Lincolnshire now. Recruitment marketing and attraction are big business – most newspapers, national or local, rely on job ads to keep them afloat – and the range of approaches available to organisations is wide.
- 4.1.2 We spoke to key HR managers in the four main CAZ organisations to understand their perspective on this critical and expensive area of their business. We also attempted to speak to their commercial partners (advertising agencies) but they declined, citing commercial confidentiality. Below is a summary for each organisation.
- 4.1.3 The PCT now conducts all of its recruitment online through the NHS Jobs website, and this is an effective and economical route for experienced candidates from across the country to find their next role. The site is complemented by a range of professional promotion and entry-level information materials, which can be accessed locally or online, or via jobs fairs around the country.
- 4.1.4 Though there are risks associated with so centralised a structure, a large organisation like the NHS can make significant savings on transactional vacancy processes, while retaining the national profile (which used to come from regular advertising) by better marketing and campaigning. Local government would achieve enormous benefit from a similar change, and I believe the IDeA is in fact working on a pilot at the moment.
- 4.1.5 However, at present the county and district councils both operate independent personnel and recruitment functions. East Lindsey DC uses a traditional approach to its vacancies, and reports a low turnover of staff, although annual spend is reasonable at around £140k. Its advertising agency has apparently suggested a move to 'signposting' vacancies and driving candidates to its website – a useful step towards the NHS model above – and I am told that the council will be pursuing this in future. Cost savings from this change tend to run at around 20-40%, and it is certainly a more flexible and economical approach.
- 4.1.6 Lincolnshire County Council also uses a traditional approach, with the complication in their case of having outsourced the process management through the HBS contract. This appears to have led to the conclusion that recruitment advertising is already as cost-effective as it will get, which is certainly not the case. The manager I spoke to was

concerned that a significant amount of money was wasted on inefficient advertising merely to maintain levels of customer satisfaction amongst line managers.

- 4.1.7 It further appears that several phases of improvement have been started over the past decade, each time remaining incomplete as other more urgent priorities affect the Council, or key members of staff move on and the knowledge is lost. The potential for improvement here is significant and should be addressed as a matter of urgency. I estimate that savings in the order of £300 – 350k could be made in transactional recruitment by some very simple changes to the process which are well within the capacity of the current team.
- 4.1.8 The Police service in Lincolnshire uses an advertising agency in Nottingham, and while the agency is urging the service to adopt a more streamlined approach, it is also currently very traditional. In part, this is down to a sense that demand for their roles (particularly uniformed roles) will always exceed supply. With regard to non-uniformed roles, they use higher salaries as a reliable incentive to attract the best.
- 4.1.9 Despite suggestions during our research that officers accept coastal roles to secure the job and then immediately apply for transfer to more accessible areas, the police do not see that as a problem. Rather, they suggested that his biggest problem was in finding the resources and time involved in handling so many applications.
- 4.1.10 They did not consider either signposting or a single county jobs portal feasible suggestions. In the first case, they felt that the service's jobs needed full description in the newspapers; and in the second, they were explicit that he saw the service in competition with the councils for good civilian staff, and would not welcome any pooling.
- 4.1.11 What is surprising and welcome is that the Linc-Up site (<http://www.lincup.net/jobs/>) currently carries links to jobs for all of Lincolnshire's public sector organisations and is in many ways ahead of the rest of the County. It seems, however, that few from within the public sector and fewer without are aware of this resource or its potential benefits, and it clearly needs better marketing and higher awareness.

## 5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The outlook is challenging. Several issues which are not unique to the coast (but common to rural or remote areas) are combined in a way which does produce unique problems. First, there is both low capacity and low aspiration. Those living in or moving to the area without a firm job offer are statistically unlikely to have the education required for skilled and managerial jobs, or the impetus (given the easy availability of seasonal positions) either to gain that education, or to engage in lower-paid but permanent unskilled work. This leads to a cycle of short-term, repetitive, unskilled employment, with periodical reliance on benefits. The lack of permanent roles acts as a disincentive to gaining higher-level skills, and there is little sense of the 'career-path' as an option.
- 5.2 Second, there simply aren't the opportunities for people to stay and pursue a career, even if (as did several of our interviewees) they would like to. At the wider economic level, the richer, deeper business culture needed to generate higher-level jobs and a business-to-business economy is in the main absent, and such entrepreneurialism as there is tends understandably to focus on high turnover, low-margin tourism, retail and hospitality sector. The proceeds of local businesses generally are not reinvested into the community, and there is little opportunity for an endogenous service industry to develop.
- 5.3 Of course, every year plenty of people (including skilled and professional people) do take jobs in Lincolnshire and relocate. Some grew up in Lincolnshire, so know both what to expect and what is so remarkable about the place. Where those people we spoke to had been successful in securing a well-paid career role, they had nonetheless experienced some trouble with finding the right type and price of housing, or employment for a partner / spouse.
- 5.4 On the positive side of the equation, there is no fundamental problem with the jobs you are offering. In fact, they may be more challenging and rewarding than comparable roles in other districts, precisely because of the unique challenges of the coast. There is also no fundamental problem with the salaries and benefits. The issue in attracting others from outside is to market the coast as a place which has particular and unique attributes.
- 5.5 Our focus groups identified a constituency of people who would be open to Lincolnshire's offer – those who seek an excellent quality of life, perhaps a little quieter than the city or sub-regional town, where families can grow up safely and where schools are excellent;

where life is familiar, unthreatening, and quite traditional. What people treasure about living and working on the coast is its peace, the pace of life, community spirit, and the remarkable environment. The issue is not that we need to generate other USPs, but that we simply need to sell the existing ones better and in a more targeted way.

- 5.6 This report proposes that Lincolnshire's public bodies concentrate on marketing to these sympathetically inclined people, and that they explore ways to bring their strategic recruitment and talent management capacity up to date. Whether funds are available from central government, discretionary sources, or efficiencies in transactional recruitment, this is the only way to begin influencing the national conversation and raise the area's profile.

## 6. Recommendations

- 6.1 The key messages are that working and living on the rural coast is a distinctive choice, which (while not for everybody) offers a unique way of life for some; that there are people out there who want to make a change and will embrace what East Lincolnshire has to offer; and that without major change or development, the CAZ can have a lasting influence on perceptions of the coast nationwide. This message needs to be at the core of any promotional activity undertaken to improve attraction, whether one-off high-impact profile raising projects, or transactional and process elements.
- 6.2 A range of implementation options, with differing impacts and implications, are expressed in the diagram below. You will be able to pursue a selection of these, selected to match your circumstances and ambitions at any time.
- 6.3 You may be able to appoint a single manager to lead on this issue across all the partners, you may even be able to accomplish most of them over the medium term. We hope to be able to discuss these in more detail when we meet with partners on July 27<sup>th</sup>.
- 6.4 The first step should be to bring together those most closely concerned with recruitment and talent management, including commercial partners, HR professionals and senior resource strategists, to agree the scope and nature of the problem and the parameters for improvement. We suggest this is called the Coastal AttrAction Team. This group will decide whether its work should be limited to co-operation on messages and media buying, or whether in fact there are opportunities to combine streamline the service across the partners.
- 6.5 The group will agree its priorities (within the framework of 6.1 above) and decide how best it can advance this objective. For example, each organisation might set its advertising agency a target of £10,000 cashable savings over six months, with an incentive that the savings would be spent with that agency if it were awarded the promotional campaign work. Any proposals which are not cost-neutral must be put to the partners for investment on a business case basis.
- 6.6 This group will also need to be the champions of efficient, modern and more confident attraction methods within the partner organisations. It is critical that a cultural shift takes place in parallel with any improvement activity you choose to pursue. The amounts of

- money involved, and the potential cost of maintaining the status quo, are too significant. This will mean a change in perspective for recruiters at all levels, particularly line managers who may see advertising as the last, transactional part of recruitment, whereas in fact it ought to be seen as attraction, and treated with as much care as job evaluation.
- 6.7 We would also recommend examining the potential for a single shared recruitment service, building on the LincUp site, which could develop into a talent pooling unit. This might start off as a multi-agency steering group and evolve into an income-generating stand-alone service unit. Equally, there may be a simple opportunity to extend the County Council's arrangement with HBS to the benefit of the other CAZ partners, or work with an external provider to develop a tailored multi-purpose site.
- 6.8 Most fundamentally, improved Talent Management strategies will help to minimise the losses of most able staff, and therefore should help to reduce the problem of attracting replacements. The Coastal Action Zone partnership itself offers a structure within which job swaps, secondment, career development plans and other techniques could be used to enhance the value of a position with any or all of the constituent organisations.
- 6.9 This pilot, combined with the Pathfinder bid currently under consideration, offers the Coastal Action Zone an opportunity to set a benchmark for creative talent attraction and management. Our view is that the resources are there, but are currently being diverted by a fragmented and transactional approach to the issue. With confidence and focus on the potential for change, we believe that you can become a model for partnerships in coastal, rural and remote areas across the country.

**Potential improvement actions: impact and requirements**

High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoint a single co-ordinator across the partnership with lead responsibility for this issue</li> <li>• Convene a Coastal AttrAction group of HR managers and advertising agency account directors, pool ideas; learn from others</li> <li>• Raise the issue of media spend with agencies and make it clear that you expect to see major reductions</li> <li>• Build a new 'front end' for the LincUp jobs database which gives a little more detail about living and working in the county without major investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a professional, integrated reputation campaign to promote the area as a destination for life, not just tourism</li> <li>• Attend job fairs and exhibitions, where nominated 'relationship managers' establish links with candidates</li> <li>• Secure coverage for East Lincolnshire in lifestyle and professional journals</li> <li>• Invest in a signature development for the area: hi-tech starter homes in a former airfield, or an eco-resort in Sutton</li> </ul>
Mass impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin to engage line managers with the principles of better and more effective advertising</li> <li>• Establish reliable base data on turnover and cost of failed appointments within partners.</li> <li>• Set up a member-driven organisation to reinstate a community railway (e.g Wensleydale)</li> <li>• Develop a non-competitive retention strategy with partners to eliminate the 'merry-go-round'</li> <li>• Explore the options of using the Pathfinder to pump-prime some of these proposals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a visiting scheme for people who express an interest in relocating to East Lincs, and help to familiarise them once they accept a job</li> <li>• Explore opportunities for shared service arrangement in recruitment across the county, freeing up resources to enhance the campaign (above)</li> <li>• Establish an 'industry sponsorship' scheme for able local school leavers, whereby a bursary is exchanged for two years' post-university service</li> </ul>
Low	Low	High

