



FROM CLASSROOM TO BOARDROOM

The journey from education into work can be long, confusing and full of potholes. *Insider* asked four former students of North West schools about their journey so far, and how they think education can be shaped in the future

DANIEL LEINHARDT

In a world where many people have no idea about what they want to do, those who do often decide young. Daniel Leinhardt, who is now in his third year at university, says he always knew that aviation was the right path.

"Everyone should try and get work placement opportunities," he says. "It's a lot more difficult to get them now than before. I managed to get some experience when I was 15 at an airport and now they aren't offering it any more."

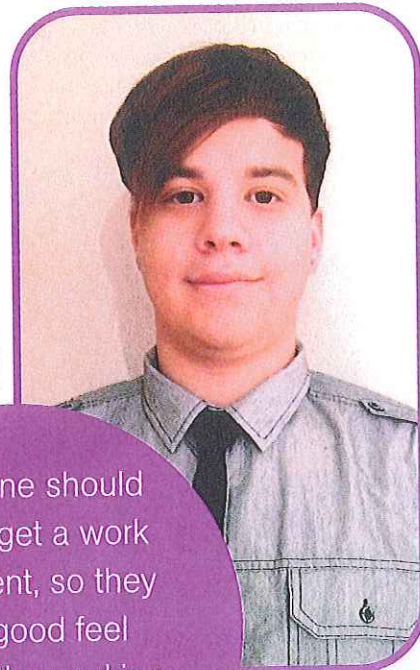
"You might not always know what you want to do, but if you get that experience, you get a good feel for what the working environment is like."

Leinhardt studied psychology, geography and environmental science at Abbey College in Manchester and is about to complete a degree in Air Transport Operations and Management at City University in London.

"Because I wanted to do something specific to aviation, no school could offer me that, but in terms of the way Abbey set me up for university... the class sizes are really small, so you've got to speak up and develop your communication skills; and they also structured the work and essays to help me."

"I know they say they don't feed you at university, but when I got here in the first year they literally did expect us to go away and do the research," he adds.

Leinhardt decided on City because it was one of the only universities in the country to offer a pilot's licence with the course. But when he found that this would have to



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be self-funded, he decided to opt for the management pathway instead.

In any case, on a niche course with a small group of students, the employment opportunities are good. "I think City University said last year it was ranked 10th for graduate employment in the country," he says. "And it's done what it said it would do. All of us communicate with each other on where the work placements will be – one of last year's graduates started in the management department at Airbus in September and another one has gone to easyJet."

When *Insider* asks what schools could do better to help their students in this tough jobs market, Leinhardt says his experience has been good, but suggests that the wider issue

BY RUPERT CORNFORD



Understanding the journey from school into work has never been more important. Youth and

graduate unemployment figures make for sobering reading, whether you are a parent or a student. Here, we hear from four individuals who went to school in the North West. We ask what path they took after A-levels, the courses they went on to study and their path into paid employment. Plus, they give some interesting views about how the system works.

They are each at a different stage of the process, in a world that is changing by the day; a world in which schools are waking up quickly to changing demands of the economy. "Everything is more acute at the moment with the economic situation as it is," says Sarah Clark, head at Queen's School in Chester. "I still believe in learning for learning's sake but you do have to develop skills that are helpful and useful in an economic sense."

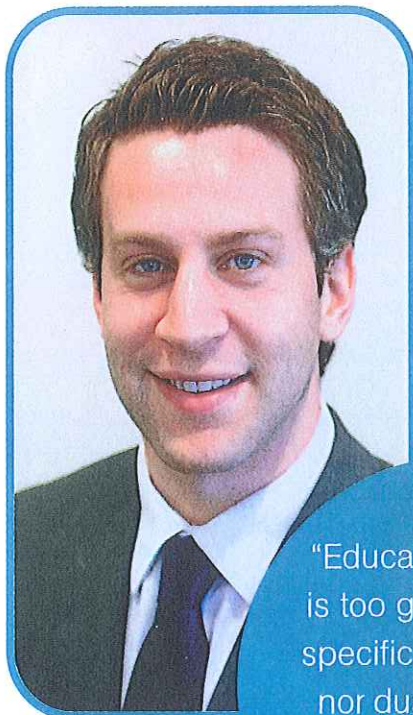
"If you are academic, then following that route is still beneficial because you are developing other thought patterns; if you not interested in this area then don't push yourself into a university application if that isn't where you will flourish."

is careers advice. "I think in general schools could do better in discussing what options are available and how the world actually works," he says. "You only get a small insight into it at college; everything is easy, apart from exams, of course."

MARC SHIRMAN

"A lot of the skills you need for work – such as negotiation and dealing with politics – are learnt when you get thrown in at the deep end," says Marc Shirman, a former pupil at Manchester Grammar School, who works as head of structured finance for RBS in the city. "At school you are spoon fed everything, whereas at work, you are expected to get on with it."

Shirman studied politics, history and maths at A-level, before doing a degree in accountancy and finance in Leeds. He says school instilled good academic principles, a strong



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Marc Shirman

work and team ethic, but no practical skills. "I knew I wanted to work in corporate finance and even economics wasn't considered a pure enough academic discipline so it wasn't offered as an A-level course in my day," he says.

"While school gave me a good network, confidence and helped me to shape who I was in the world, I think teaching people to regurgitate facts isn't a good test of intellect."

He's taken that on himself now and is just

coming to the end of a three-year MBA at Manchester Business School. He also believes there's an opportunity to help students earlier in their development.

"I think MBAs should be offered to undergraduates as a shorter course," he says. "I don't think there is any one course in the UK that offers exactly what you need to know to run a business, and to reserve MBAs for sponsored or older students seems a bit short-sighted."

Shirman is also passionate about helping schools to broaden their vocational focus. Early this year he will go back to Manchester Grammar School with a plan to formalise links with the bank. When students have three months holiday each summer, why not spend one or two weeks working in the bank and getting to know how it all works?

This is a fundamental part of what he believes students need to do to make informed decisions about their future. It's also something that they aren't always incentivised to do, he says.

"Go and try it; immerse yourself and even offer yourself for free," he says, before explaining about a friend who went to London, worked for six months

without pay, and said 'if you want to keep me after that, start paying me, if not I'll walk away'. He now has a job.

But there is a wider story here about the UK education system. He says: "Generally, I think education in the UK is too generic.

It is not specific, like Germany, nor dual, like Japan, and funnily enough

we therefore have weaker manufacturing skills than those countries.

"If we are to compete internationally, outside the service sector, we will need to allow for younger people with a focus to get specialised training earlier if they want it," he adds.



"Kids should be allowed to go to trade shows, which may be better than doing the odd work placement here and there."

Helen Wheatley

HELEN WHEATLEY

Education doesn't necessarily lead people into the business world, according to Helen Wheatley, a former student at Queen's School in Chester, but the opportunities available are changing.

The Young Enterprise scheme, which sets students the task of building a company and selling products for profit, is commonplace, and sixth formers are visited by people from a cross-section of industries talking about their own experiences.

These stories were common when *Insider* spoke to a number of former pupils from independent schools across the North West. As competition for jobs has become more intense, head teachers are tuning into the fact that they need to educate on business to a greater extent.

But when Wheatley did her A-levels in 2000, fewer such schemes were in place and she claims she learnt much of what she knows about business from her father. After studying business studies, maths and French, Wheatley went on to study business management, French and social policy at Royal Holloway, University of London.

She got a job with an advertising agency selling space before landing a role with incentives business EdenRed, where she has stayed to this day. Her job is to implement online schemes for large companies to reward and incentivise staff. It's hard work,