

# What they th



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**THE ADULT WORLD PUTS A PRICE ON EVERYTHING. BUT HOW DO PRICES RELATE TO TRUE VALUE? TESTING THE THEORY THAT CHILDREN ARE GENERALLY MORE HONEST, PAUL SLADE TRIES TO FIND WHAT WE'RE REALLY WORTH BY POLLING 28 JUNIOR SCHOOL PUPILS ON INCOMES, PRICES AND THEIR FINANCIAL AWARENESS**

ELEVEN-YEAR OLD JAMES was in no doubt what he would buy with a sudden windfall of £100: "Hand-grenades." Perhaps we should not have been surprised. After all, it was also James who, when asked what he would like to be when he grew up, opted for a soldier "because you get to use machine guns and you're not being a couch potato".

James, along with 27 of his classmates from Buckland Brewer School in North Devon, had been filling in an *Inside Money* questionnaire to test their financial know-how.

We asked this group – 16 boys and 12 girls aged between eight and 11 – to tell us what they thought various people, from a judge to a shop assistant, would earn in a week, and to guess how much something like an air ticket to Sydney or a private helicopter might cost.

## WHAT DO THEY EARN?

As the table shows, most thought a professional footballer would top our list of 10 earners. Their guesses at a footballer's weekly wage averaged £1,526.36 – although this disguises the fact that Abigail didn't feel footballers (or soldiers) ought to be paid anything at all. In fact, the Football League says the

average professional – taking in not only the Premiership, but also Divisions One, Two and Three – earns about £750 before tax.

The actual highest earner on our list is, of course, the judge, placed fourth by the children. A High Court judge – the example we took – earns a weekly crust of £1,827.90 against the kids' collective guess of £450.32.

The kids were quite right to say that a shop assistant would earn the least of anyone on our list, although their average estimate of £61.52 is less than half the real weekly figure of £153.50. The children's guesses came closest with doctors, where they underestimated earnings by just £1.92.

## WHAT SHOULD THEY EARN?

Asked who deserved to earn most money, seven of the children opted for the policeman, while six picked the doctor. There were four votes for the soldier, three for the bank manager, two for the footballer and one each for judge and train driver. Nine-year-old Lauren had no view on the matter.

Rebecca thought judges should earn only £1 a week, on the grounds that all they did was decide when the court should break for lunch. Thomas disagreed, saying a judge "has to deal with a lot of stuff".

Of those backing the policeman, 10-year-old Luke made his choice because "policemen nick all of the robbers". Eight-year-old Jamie, with a keen awareness of the laws of supply and demand, added: "Not many people want to be a policeman." Sarah thought a policeman ought to earn most "because he says 'allo, 'allo'".

Doctors won their votes "because they save millions of lives a day" (Felicity) and "because they have to work very hard to get a degree in medics" (Edward). James, our hand-grenade fan, backed doctors "because they can prescribe pills and drugs". Certainly it seems that, if James achieves his ambitions regarding heavy ordnance, the rest of us are going to need all the doctors we can get. ➤

**Opposite:**  
The children of Buckland Brewer school with their teacher, Roger Perkins. They're not saying what they think he should earn

## WHAT DO YOU THINK THESE PEOPLE EARN IN A WEEK?

Job	Kids' rank	Real rank	Highest estimate £	Lowest estimate	Average estimate £	Actual earnings £
Footballer	1	3	10,000	0	1,526	750
Doctor	2	2	8,000	10p	804	806
Bank manager	3	5	6,000	£8	523	807
Judge	4	1	4,000	£1	450	1,828
Nurse	5	7	4,000	£1	255	217
Soldier	6	9	3,000	0	245	156
Ship's captain	7	4	600	£3	130	691
Policeman	8	6	800	£5	107	400
Tram driver	9	8	500	£1	77	216
Shop assistant	10	10	300	£5	62	153
Total			£37,200	£24.10	£4,179	£6,026

PHOTOGRAPHS: GEORGE BROOKS

## WHAT DO YOU THINK THESE THINGS COST?

Item	Kids' rank	Real rank	Highest estimate £	Lowest estimate £	Average estimate £	Actual price £
Helicopter	1	1	10,000,000	4	683,964	130,000
House	2	2	9,000,000	5	484,273	62,455
Car	3	3	78,000	2.20	8,075	9,500
Washing machine	4	8	60,000	2	3,791	400
Television	5	7	10,000	1	926	500
Week in posh hotel	6	6	5,000	2	923	1,234
Flight to Australia	7	5	3,000	12.99	697	1,245
Computer	8	4	6,000	1.50	696	1,300
Microwave oven	9	9	2,000	1	293	180
Restaurant meal	10	10	800	5	88	25
<b>Total</b>			<b>£19,164,800</b>	<b>£36.69</b>	<b>£1,183,726</b>	<b>£208,839</b>

## WHAT WOULD YOU BE?

Moving on to consider their own careers, nine of the 28 children – all boys – wanted to be footballers. There were three votes each for soldier, nurse and shop assistant. All three of the aspiring nurses and shop assistants were girls, although Katie, 11, wanted to be a soldier. No one fancied train driver, judge or ship's captain.

The boys were quite clear why they put footballers at the top of their list: "Because you get a lot of money." Only Thomas stood up for old-fashioned sporting ideals, saying he wanted to be a footballer "because it's fun".

Felicity, Pamela and Jill all wanted to be nurses because they liked helping people. Abigail opted for becoming a shop assistant "because it's quite quiet in a shop and if you were a train driver it's noisy".

Nine-year-old Claire hoped to become a librarian "because they have to be quiet". Lauren rejected all the options on our list "because they're boring and I want to be a dog trainer".

Eleven-year-old Lee, on the other hand, fancied his chances as a computer games designer, presumably in the hopes of being paid to play Mortal Kombat all day.

## WHAT DOES IT COST?

We then asked the class to guess what the things shown in the table above would cost. They correctly identified the helicopter as the most expensive, followed by the house and the car, but started to get a bit hazy from then onwards.

Their average estimate for the helicopter was £683,964, against the actual price for a factory-fresh Robinson R-22 two-seater of about £130,000. Luke thought a helicopter might cost as much as £10m, but Thomas

hoped he might pick one up for around £4.

According to the Halifax Building Society, the average price paid for a house in 1993 was £62,455. The children's average guess was almost eight times higher, at £484,273. The culprit this time was Felicity, who guessed that a house would cost £9m, a statistical distortion which even Lance's estimate of £5 could not correct.

The class did well in guessing the price of a car. The typical price of a new car sold in 1993 was £9,500, only 18 per cent more than Buckland Brewer's average estimate of £8,075.48. Eleven-year-old Lee is in for a shock, however, when he discovers that a new car will set him back more than £2.20.

Estimates for the price of a return ticket to Sydney ranged from £12.99 to £3,000. In fact, Qantas quotes a fare of £1,245.

## HOW WOULD YOU SPEND £100?

Nearly a third of the children (31.9 per cent) said they would spend their windfall on a computer or computer games. But this was heavily weighted towards the males, as 52.3 per cent of the boys but only 3.3 per cent of the girls took this option.

The most popular choice among the girls, attracting 40 per cent of their votes, was food. As the table below shows, the rest of the girls' votes were fairly evenly spread – although none opted for hand-grenades.

Rebecca said she would put her £100 towards "a Mr Bean mini for when I grow up". Luke, on the other hand, is saving up for "a big motorbike". The two sexes

showed a roughly equal propensity to save, with 14.3 per cent of the boys and 15 per cent of the girls promising to put their money in the bank.

## WHAT'S A MORTGAGE?

We then asked the children to define a mortgage, a pension and a bank account. They did well on the pension and the bank account, but were less confident about the mortgage.

Only eight of the 28 kids correctly identified a mortgage as "a thing where you loan money from the bank manager and pay it back month by month" (Claire). Eight-year-old Thomas was also on the right lines when he said: "You pay for your house in bits."

Less sure of her ground was Abigail, who thought a mortgage was "a cheque that you have to pay for electric water". Ten-year-old Matthew spoke for the majority when he admitted: "I have no idea."

Two-thirds of our sample knew a pension was "what old people get" (James), although Jamie was more specific, saying a pension was "something very old people get". The most detailed answer came from 10-year-old Rebecca, who explained: "It is when the old people reach 65. You get 20 per cent or 60 per cent or 10 per cent of what you have bought."

Martin thought a pension was "an old fogey" and Clair chanced her arm, defining it as "a thing old people get like Mr Perkins". Roger Perkins, the Buckland Brewer teacher who helped us arrange the survey, is 49.

Half the class were able to describe a bank account, with a neat definition coming from Abigail: "What you keep your money in until you grow up and spend it."

● Thanks to all the children and staff at Buckland Brewer School, especially to Roger Perkins and Cindy Court

## HOW WOULD YOU SPEND £100?

Item	Rank	All %	Boys %	Girls %
Computer/Games	1	31.9	52.3	3.3
Food	2	18.0	2.3	40.0
Bank	3	14.6	14.3	15.0
Car	4	8.3	7.1	10.0
Clothes	5 =	5.5	3.6	8.3
Music	5 =	5.5	3.6	8.3
Tractor	7 =	4.2	7.1	-
Bike	7 =	4.2	-	10.0
Hand-grenades	7 =	4.2	7.1	-
Presents	10	2.0	-	5.0
Lego	11	1.4	2.3	-

Several of the children split their vote among two or three categories. In these cases one-half or one-third of a vote has been awarded to each item mentioned