Samantha Broad

What made a job desirable in the 1950s?
Rationale

There are several purposes of this set of lessons. Aside from accessing and handling contemporary data, it is intended that students gain an understanding of the impact of deindustrialisation in Britain as well as considering the different variables that make a particular career path fulfilling and rewarding.

This series of lessons will require students to have access to two datasets; a survey carried out by the Board of Trade in 1904 and a household expenditure enquiry conducted in 1953-4. The theme of the lessons is to consider the relative wages earned by five of the major manual occupations of that period; agriculture, building, textiles, shipbuilding and coal mining. Together these accounted for the majority of working class occupations during the first half of the twentieth century. Students will have to use their ICT skills to filter and sort data in order to find out the average wages earned by these occupations. By using their ICT skills, they can access data themselves in order to gain an understanding of how statistics can be both very useful and easily manipulated to prove a wide range of hypotheses.

The idea of the first two lessons is for students to consider the rise and fall of these five occupations and how national events affected the fortune of these occupations. Up until the 1970s, heavy industry was a huge employer in the UK, and these lessons will demonstrate to students how dependent the economy was on heavy industry. Although agricultural workers were not working in heavy industry they have been included as the mechanisation of farming has led to a large loss of jobs. In addition to this, students can start to consider how some jobs are more profitable than others, and ultimately how it is possible to be both employed and yet still not make enough money to uphold a decent standard of living, as shown by both the comments made on the 1904 survey "Sir, the truth is we are half starved" (no.890 coal miner, nr Glasgow), or even how the best paid workers in 1953 were still unable to go on holiday or own their own home, as shown by the 1953-4 enquiry.

The final lesson gives students the opportunity for them to plan their own enquiry into the employment statistics. Students will need to consider what other factors will make a chosen career path attractive. The lesson starts by asking students to look at photographical evidence of mining in the Second World War, and consider students how these occupations were more than the sum of the wages earned for the workers. Mining was, and is, frequently dangerous. Farming can be an isolating occupation and ship building was physically demanding. The 1953 household expenditure enquiry provides further illumination into the working conditions and benefits afforded by each occupation. Students can firstly use the dataset to test some theories given to them. Once they have gained confidence in how to use the data, they can plan their own investigation into a range of variable; whether being self employed was financially

viable, which occupations were most likely to take holidays, what kinds of people were still employing residential domestic help by the 1950s, which occupations had the largest number of unemployed, in which types of households were women and children likely to be employed also, as well as which types of occupations were most likely to own their own home. There are just some of the enquiries that students can devise and carry out using the information provided in the 1953 dataset.

By the end of the lesson sequence, students should be asking questions about not just about wages and occupations in the past but considering how these issues affect their families and themselves when they are entering the job market. It is hoped that they will consider how the rise of the service industry in this country has come about as the result of the exportation of manufacturing jobs abroad; how the local can be affected by the national; wages can both rise and fall as the result of the national events and they can start to consider what they themselves might find desirable in a future occupation.