

# 90% Participation Project Desk Research

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# 1. Executive Summary

## **Context and purpose**

**1.1** The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has an aspiration to raise the participation of 17 year olds in education to 90% by 2015. Detailed analysis of successive cohorts from the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) shows that the single most important influence on post-16 decisions is the young person's level of attainment in school. However, 40% of 16 year olds who achieve 1–4 GCSEs grade A\*–C or 5+ GCSEs grade D–G do not participate in education and training at 16, even though a number of pathways is open to them with these grades.

**1.2** The DfES commissioned this desk research to better understand the attitudes, motivations/aspirations and behaviours of this audience, identify likely barriers to post-16 participation, determine how they are influenced, and make initial recommendations for how this group could be encouraged to participate.

## **Attainment and socio-demographics as determinants of participation**

**1.3** Attainment is the best predictor of post-16 participation, though gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic group (SEG) also cause variance. The effect of gender, ethnicity and SEG on participation is bigger for young people with average and low attainment levels than for high achievers.

**1.4** One explanation for girls' higher staying on rates in post-16 education is that they appear on average to enjoy school more than boys and to be more willing to accept educational values. Some also argue that teaching that involves a lot of reading, writing and listening is biased towards girls' learning styles.

**1.5** The higher participation rates amongst non-White ethnic groups is explained by the greater fear of unemployment and/or discrimination perceived by these groups, and amongst Asian groups in particular, a stronger emphasis on 'bettering yourself' and entering HE.

**1.6** A number of explanations are given for lower rates of participation by lower SEGs. Children from these backgrounds are more likely to experience an anti-learning culture in schools, their parents are less effective at giving careers advice and for some, a difficult home life may disrupt schooling.

## **Why do so many young people drop out of education and training?**

**1.7** A considerable body of research demonstrates that for a significant proportion of young people of moderate or low ability, the curriculum, qualifications system and associated teaching styles are unsuited to their ability, leading to a gradual build up of disaffection. There is strong evidence not only that pupils feel this way, but also that it leads many to decide that they want to leave education and training at 16.

### **The mind-set of the key audience**

**1.8** Clearly the young people that work their way down this spiral manifest a wide range of disaffection. They can range from the persistent truants who hate school and want to get out of the system as soon as possible, to the mildly disaffected who quietly struggle on, but with diminished self-esteem and expectations. Nevertheless, to varying degrees, we can say that the mind-set of young people likely to leave education and training at 16 is as follows:

- **Self-esteem:** They lack confidence in their own ability based on low achievement in tests and exams. This may have been reinforced by being put in lower streams.
- **Lessons:** They do not enjoy school. They see the curriculum and thus lessons as irrelevant and/or boring. They may have dropped into an anti-learning culture as a way of coping with the low self-esteem created by repeated low achievement. They may be truanting to various degrees and deliberately misbehaving in class.
- **Learning:** They would prefer to do more “hands-on” learning, and less conceptual learning.
- **Teachers:** They feel they are not treated like adults in schools. They feel that teachers are more concerned with “academic” pupils.
- **Importance of qualifications:** They recognise that qualifications are important for getting a job, but since they do not expect to do well, this is actually de-motivating for them.
- **Future plans:** Many are anxious to leave the school environment in which they have failed, but most are keen to continue in some education or training. They are also very unlikely to have specific career goals, or to have an awareness of the features of other pathways, such as FE colleges or apprenticeships.
- **Money and the adult world:** Many express a wish to enter a more adult world and start earning money. This may be rationalisation based on their dislike of learning and/or school, rather than a positive choice. Employment may be the better of two bad options. Some, however, do feel that they can get on in employment without qualifications, either because of contacts or because of a belief in their own abilities.

**1.9** Some moderate achievers may also be unaware of other pathways that they can take at 16 if they fail to achieve the GCSE results they hoped for.

Consequently they may get a job without training or become NEET simply because they were unaware of other pathways.

### **Increasing participation of low and moderate attainers through more flexible pathways at 14–16**

**1.10** In fact, research suggests that those moderate and low achievers who have not completely rejected education and learning and may not be aware of non-academic pathways are more likely to stay on in education if they have the option of taking vocational or work-based qualifications at school or college at 14–16 (e.g. through the Increased Flexibility Programme and Young Apprenticeships).

**1.11** They are more motivated by these courses, particularly the latter, for a number of reasons. The learning is hands-on rather than conceptual; the qualifications are relevant to the world of work that they will ultimately enter; the students can be put on a course at an appropriate level (e.g. Entry level or level 1) where they are more likely to get a pass, as opposed to a Grade D GCSE; and assessment is based more what you can “do” than what you can “write”.

**1.12** The measures discussed so far involve offering young people different learning pathways. However, young people also value one-off experiences that allow them to better understand the college-based or work-based options that they may decide to enter after 16.

### **Messages**

**1.13** This all suggests that key messages for this audience should be:

- You do not need five GCSEs passes to follow vocational, work-based (or academic) pathways after 16.
- Vocational and work-based learning is much more “hands-on” than “academic” learning.
- College environments and work-based pathways have a more adult environment. This makes them less like school environments. They can also be a “fresh start”.
- Vocational and work-based pathways enable you to have a taster of what different jobs might be like, and will help you make decisions about future career goals and pathways.
- Vocational and work-based courses are more easily pitched at the learners level of ability than default academic pathways such as A levels.

## **How and when do young people make their decisions about participation?**

**1.14** By the age of 13/14, most young people do not know what career goals they want to follow or the exact pathways they will achieve this by. At 13/14, their main focus is on deciding what subjects they are going to take at 14–16. However, by 13/14, under the influence of their parents, they will have already ruled out a number of options. At 14–16 they begin to consider post-16 options. Most do not narrow this down into a final decision until Year 11. Many low and moderate achievers adopt a strategy of waiting to see how well they do in their GCSEs before making any decisions because they fear that these results will limit their aspirations. In addition, many have not set any career goals simply because they have so little experience of the working world upon which to base a judgement.

## **To what extent do they make an active decision for or against education and training?**

**1.15** Many young people who do actually end up in full-time education may not necessarily be there because they see it as a logical pathway with a defined career choice. Some are very decided about what pathway they wish to follow (e.g. college), but have no specific career goals. They stay on because they do not yet feel ready or confident enough to leave education and face the responsibilities of a job. Others may have chosen to stay on post-16, but actually have no career goals and no commitment to any particular pathway. Research shows that this latter group in particular are very likely to drop out.

## **Influencers**

### *Parents*

**1.16** For all young people, parents are the most influential source of advice on careers and education/training pathways. Parents from lower SEGs are less capable of providing IAG to their children, but are still very influential. They need help in advising their children.

**1.17** Parents with children who are likely to drop out of education or training are a very positive influence on keeping their child in the system. However, they are often in despair, and need help.

**1.18** However, parents of all SEGs do not necessarily provide accurate information, and are unlikely to understand the more complex routes (e.g. work-based, vocational college-based) that may be more appropriate and motivating for young people considering leaving education and training at 16. The qualification system and pathways needs to be communicated to them in a clear and simplified way to enable them to make give their children informed advice. This could prevent some moderate achievers from

believing that they have no other option beyond dropping out if they do not achieve five A\*–C grades.

### *Connexions*

**1.23** Connexions has an important role in providing information, advice and guidance to those who receive little from their parents, especially those in lower SEGs.

**1.24** Young people who end up as NEETs or in work with no training have received less information, advice and guidance in general. This underlines the need for formal channels such as Connexions, and careful identification of those who are not receiving effective information, advice and guidance from parents.

**1.25** There is a bias in the Connexions service towards NEETs, schools in poorer areas, and schools without sixth forms. It could be argued that Connexions is merely targeting its limited resources in those areas of greatest need where it can make the most difference, especially given that parents from poorer SEG backgrounds tend to give less effective or intense IAG.

**1.26** However, some moderate achievers became NEET or entered work with no training because they were unaware of other pathways. They may not necessarily be in schools without sixth forms or in schools in poorer areas. Connexions has a strong role here for raising awareness of vocational and work-based pathways.

### *Careers lessons and careers co-ordinators*

**1.27** The research suggests many careers lessons and libraries are ineffective. The role of careers co-ordinator is often not a priority for the post holder, and they often lack expertise. Libraries vary in quality and consist of a lot of print material that young people either cannot find their way around, or do not want to read. Pupils do not rate careers lessons and prefer CEG which is less didactic and more experiential (e.g. college visits, enterprise education days, company/site visits).

### *Paper-based and multi-media information*

**1.28** Face-to-face communication (e.g. Connexions, careers day), communicating through parents, work experience, and college visits are all a far more powerful way of transferring information to young people at risk of leaving education and training at 16. Paper-based information is one of the least preferred formats, especially when it is, say, in a library, as these young people have difficulty searching effectively for relevant information.

### *Schools with sixth forms*

**1.29** It is alleged that some schools with sixth forms are limiting information on pathways after 16. This could restrict the understanding of moderate and low ability young people about pathways other than the traditional academic sixth form.

### **Income and EMAs**

**1.30** Although financial concerns are an issue for young people who end up in work with no training or NEET, it is not the decisive factor. The analysis suggests that improving motivation at 14–16 may be more effective at improving participation in education and training after 16 than financial incentives such as the EMA.

## 2. Context

**2.1** The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has an aspiration to raise the participation of 17 year olds in education to 90% by 2015. Currently, participation of 17 year olds is around 75%, and has hovered around this level over the past decade.

**2.2** An initial analysis of the Youth Cohort Study shows that attainment at 16 is closely correlated to participation in education or training at 16. In particular, 40% of 16 year olds who achieve 1–4 GCSEs grade A\*–C or 5+ GCSEs grade D–G (i.e. they just miss the five A\*–C cut off point) do not participate in education and training at 16. Non-participation is also correlated to school attendance, gender, ethnicity, parents' educational background, and socio-economic group.

**2.3** The DfES has commissioned this desk research to understand the following, with particular reference to the segment of young people that achieve 1–4 GCSEs grade A\*–C or 5+ GCSEs grade D–G:

1. Identify likely attitudes, motivations/aspirations and behaviours.
2. Identify likely barriers to post-16 participation.
3. Determine how these groups are influenced and which/who are their trusted information sources.
4. Make initial recommendations for how this group could be best reached, and which of their needs could be addressed in order to enable participation. This should help shape the design of communications and information available to 14–19 learners. And could helpfully feed in to the design of products for 14–19 learners such as specialised diplomas.

**2.4** To select evidence on the attitudes of non-participants, we have drawn on sources from public sector organisations involved in further education and work-based learning (e.g. DfES, LSDA), and academic institutions (e.g. Nuffield, education institutes). Published data held by EdComs from market research agencies has also been used, as well as research held by COI Communications. Research by Joan Payne, Joanne Rennison (CRSP, Loughborough University), Nick Foskett (University of Southampton) and Andy Furlong (University of Glasgow) has proven to be particularly useful.

# 3. Attainment and socio-demographics as determinants of participation

## 3.1 Attainment as a predictor of participation

### Attainment

**3.1.1** Detailed analysis of successive cohorts from the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) by Payne (2001b) shows that the single most important influence on post-16 decisions is the young person's level of attainment in school.

- For example, amongst members of YCS Cohort 11 who finished compulsory schooling in summer 2001, 94% of those with eight or more GCSE passes at grade C or higher and 78% of those with between five and seven passes at grade C and above were in full-time education the following spring.
- The proportion staying on fell steadily as GCSE results declined, so that at the bottom end of the attainment scale only 40% of those with one to four GCSE passes at any grade and 35% of those with no GCSE passes at all were still in full-time education.

### Attainment and retention

**3.1.2** The growth in participation in full-time education after 16 in the first half of the 1990s was accompanied by rising rates of drop-out and non-completion of qualifications. Payne's analysis of the YCS also showed that good GCSE results improved the chances of staying in full-time education considerably (Payne, 2001b) though this relationship does not hold for young people doing vocational qualifications or apprenticeships (Payne, 2003).

### The limitations of attainment as a predictor

**3.1.3** A large body of research, both quantitative and qualitative, shows that many other factors also affect young people's choices at 16, over and above their level of attainment (Payne 2003a). The YCS has data on several but not all of these factors. Using a logistic regression model based on YCS cohorts 5 to 8, Payne (2001b) showed that all of the following associations held true after taking into account the differing levels of attainment of these groups, and net of all the other variables included in the model.

- Gender: Young women's high post-16 participation rate relative to young men remained significant, even after taking their better GCSE results into account.
- Ethnicity: Members of minority ethnic groups (MEGs) were more likely to stay on than young white people.
- Parental background: Children of well-educated parents and parents in higher level occupations have higher staying-on rates, while young people from large families had below average staying-on rates.
- State versus independent education: Those who had spent the last year of compulsory education in a selective or independent school had higher staying-on rates than those who had attended a comprehensive school.
- Sixth form: Those who had studied at a secondary modern school or a comprehensive school without a sixth form had the lowest staying-on rates.
- Geography: Staying-on rates were highest in London and the South East and lowest in the North.
- Truancy: A history of truancy from school was very strongly associated with leaving full-time education at the minimum age.

**3.1.4** These patterns also hold for retention on full-time education courses after 16. After controlling for GCSE results and course type, above average retention rates were found for female students, members of minority ethnic groups and students from advantaged home backgrounds. Favourable attitudes towards school and satisfaction with post-16 choices also aided retention, while a history of truancy increased the risk of dropping-out. Other things being equal, Level 3 vocational courses had poorer retention rates than A/AS courses.

**3.1.5** Further analysis used more recent data from YCS Cohorts 9 and 10 to illustrate the relative strength of these factors (Payne, 2001b). In general, their impact tends to be bigger for young people with average and low attainment levels than for high achievers, nearly all of whom stay on in education anyway.

- Gender: No sex gap exists in staying-on rates amongst young people with eight or more GCSEs at grade C and above, but a sex gap of seven per cent does exist amongst those with fewer than five GCSEs at any grade.
- Ethnicity: To illustrate the effect of attainment, young people are divided into the top, middle and bottom thirds of attainment according to their total GCSE points score. In the top third the staying-on rate of ethnic minority young people was three per cent higher than that of white young people. In the middle third it was 19% higher, and in the bottom third it was 28% higher.
- Geography: In the middle third of attainment there was a gap of 17% between the region with the highest staying-on rate and the region

with the lowest staying-on rate, and in the bottom third of results the corresponding gap was 21%.

**3.1.6** The reasons behind different rates of participation and retention according to gender and ethnicity are explored in section 3.2. Patterns according to socio-economic group (SEG) are also explored.

## **Under-achievement**

**3.1.7** Under-achievement at Key Stage 4 (age 16) is defined as scoring one standard deviation below the average score of those who obtained the same score as another pupil at Key Stage 3 (age 14), plus failing to acquire five or more GCSEs at Grades A\*–G. In other words, a young person has under-achieved at 16, say, if they did relatively well aged 14 in their SATs, but did less well in their GCSEs at 16 than other young people who did equally well in their SATs.

**3.1.8** McIntosh and Houghton (2005) found that results shows classic differences based on gender, SEG and ethnicity:

- Gender: Under-achievement is greater among boys than girls, with the gap widening after Key Stage 3.
- Ethnicity: White British and Black Caribbean pupils now have the highest rate of under-achievement of all ethnic groups, while Indian and Chinese pupils have the lowest rate. When attention is focused on under-achievers who fail to obtain five GCSEs at any grade, it is White pupils who are most likely to fall into this category.
- SEG: Under-achievement is on average higher among individuals entitled to free school meals. This is particularly so for White pupils, with the performance of other ethnic groups being much less affected by social deprivation.

## 3.2 Demographic and socio-economic patterns

### Gender

**3.2.1** Girls on average achieve better GCSE results than boys and also have higher participation rates in full-time education after 16. The higher participation rates may simply be a function of higher achievement rates. However, even controlling for attainment, Payne shows that girls are more likely to stay in education after 16 (Payne 2001b). Furthermore, the gap in participation is highest between low-achieving girls and low-achieving boys.

**3.2.2** One explanation for girls' higher staying on rates in post-16 education is that they appear on average to enjoy school more than boys and to be more willing to accept educational values. In addition, some studies suggest that girls go about the process of choosing post-16 routes more efficiently than boys and start to think about their choices earlier (Payne 2003).

**3.2.3** In contrast, girls are much less likely than boys to enter work-based training at 16. In a survey undertaken by Foskett (2004a), pupils in Years 10 and 11 were asked to indicate their current intended destinations at 16. The majority of those who indicated they were likely to choose work or an apprenticeship were boys. Some suggest that this is partly driven by the high number of apprenticeship placements available in crafts that are traditionally seen as male or which currently are male dominated.

**3.2.4** A further explanation for boys' lower participation in full-time education after 16, even controlling for attainment, is that they are more likely to slip into an anti-learning culture. Some also hold that learning has become "feminised". This is explored further in section 4.2.

### Ethnicity

*Table 1: Main activity of 16 year olds, by ethnic group, 2002*

Ethnicity	Full-time education	Government supported training	Full or part time job	Out of work	Not stated
White	69	10	14	6	2
Black	82	3	2	8	4
Indian	91	2	4	2	1
Pakistani	77	5	6	9	3
Bangladeshi	79	9	0	5	0
Other Asian	89	3	3	0	0

Source: Youth Cohort Study, Cohort 11, sweep 1, DfES 2002

**3.2.5** Payne's analysis cited earlier noted that young people from all the main minority ethnic groups in the UK are much more likely to stay in full-time education after 16 than young white people, the difference again being

particularly marked for those with below average GCSE results. This is mirrored in localised surveys such as that on Tower Hamlets (e.g. Kysel, West and Scott 1992).

**3.2.6** Studies suggest that both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors seem to be involved.

- Push: Kysel, West and Scott’s (1990) analysis of minority ethnic groups in Tower Hamlets showed that high rates of unemployment in areas where MEGs were concentrated was one consideration driving these people into post-16 education and training. Fear of discrimination by employers was also a consideration.
- Pull: Payne reviews a number of studies which suggest that the parents of some MEGs place more emphasis on continuing with education post-16 than their White counter-parts. For example, many MEG students often re-sit GCSEs in Year 12 in order to improve their grades. Compared to White students, Asian students in particular were more likely to aim for university entrance, would talk of family traditions of ‘bettering themselves’ through education, and would prefer to take A levels rather than vocational qualifications (Payne, 2003; Archer 2005; Hutchings and Archer, 2001).

#### *Ethnicity and gender*

**3.2.7** Young Black Caribbean women have a higher rate of participation in education than their male peers. This reflects patterns in the rest of the population.

#### *Higher participation of Black Caribbean men in college than in school*

**3.2.8** Many studies suggest that Black Caribbean boys experience discrimination in schools from their teachers. For example, Black Caribbean pupils are three times more likely to face exclusion than White pupils. They suggest that teachers perceive Black Caribbean boys as less able and more threatening than Asian boys. This may also contribute to an anti-learning culture (see section 4.2).

**3.2.9** Despite this experience, participation in further education is higher for Black Caribbean males than White males. However, they are more likely than Whites to transfer to an FE college, as this “offers a chance to re-enter education and mainstream opportunities for young people who have been “alienated by previous experiences of schooling” (Aymer and Okitikpi, 2001).

### *Lower participation in apprenticeships*

**3.2.10** Minority ethnic groups are heavily under-represented in apprenticeships. Actual and perceived racial discrimination may be a factor in their under-representation in the skilled manual trades.

## **Socio-economic group**

### **There has been a strong increase in post-16 participation amongst lower SEGs**

**3.2.11** The increase in participation in post-16 education and training in the 1980s has meant that groups of young people who traditionally left education at the earliest opportunity now participate in education and training after 16. These were predominantly those from poorer SEGs and had below average attainment.

**3.2.12** Analysis by Schoon (2003) shows that young people born in 1970 from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to aspire to post-16 education than those born in 1953 – only 10% of young men from the most disadvantaged backgrounds born in 1958 wanted further education beyond minimum school leaving age, compared to 39% born in 1970.

**3.2.13** Furlong (2004) believes that the greater emphasis of poorer SEGs on educational attainment relative to earlier generations has partly been driven by the decline in the manufacturing industry which means that a local job requiring few or no qualifications is rarely an option.

### **Class is still a differentiator**

**3.2.14** Nevertheless, Payne's analysis (2001b) showed that even controlling for attainment, young people were less likely to stay on in education and training after 16 if their parents were from poorer SEG or if their parents had not been in FE or HE. Likewise, Micklewright's (1988) analysis of data from the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS) revealed that family background had a substantial impact on destinations at age 16 even after academic ability and type of school were controlled for.

**3.2.15** Young people from advantaged backgrounds who leave education and training at 16 are more likely than others to be employed in a full-time job, and leavers from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely than others to be without any full-time activity (Wright 2005).

**3.2.16** They are also still more likely to follow vocational rather than academic routes (Helmsley-Brown 1999, Furlong 1992). Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2004a) found that these sorts of patterns were replicated when looking at the social economic environment of schools: more pupils from schools in low socio-economic status environments expressed a

preference for vocational progression routes whereas more pupils from schools in higher socio-economic status environments expressed a preference for academic pathways.

**3.2.17** Similarly, those young people from poorer SEG that do enter HE are more likely to join shorter courses in less prestigious institutions than those from professional SEGs (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, Forsyth and Furlong, 2000).

### **Reasons for lower participation**

#### *Family problems*

**3.2.18** Archer et al. (2005) found that students from poorer SEGs were more likely to have difficult home lives and problems within families. This had a negative impact on young people's ability to concentrate and engage at school, which in turn leads to lower attainment and a reduced likelihood of participation in post-16 education.

#### *Anti-learning culture*

**3.2.19** Section 4.2 also shows that there is more likely to be an anti-learning culture in deprived areas. Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) also found that for a significant proportion of the working-class young people in their cohort, it was 'obvious' that further education and training (particularly the classic A level/University academic route) was 'not for them'. For these young people the end of compulsory schooling offered an opportunity to escape learning (at least for the time-being). However, no explanation for why this is so has been offered beyond the usual generalisations about class values.

#### *Aspirations to HE*

**3.2.20** There is also evidence that some young people from poorer SEG backgrounds feel that universities are not populated by people like them. They therefore do not aspire to HE, which is one less reason for wanting to stay on in full-time education after 16 (Payne (2003a)).

#### *Working class parents provide less guidance, so IAG is all the more important*

**3.2.21** As section 7.2 outlines, students with parents from professional backgrounds can better rely on family resources (information, contacts, support, and money) than young people from poorer SEGs when making decisions about what to do at the end of compulsory schooling. This makes good information and guidance all the more important for young people from poorer backgrounds.

# 4. Why do so many young people drop out of education and training?

## 4.1 The hypothesis

**4.1.1** The discussion above has noted the importance of attainment in explaining participation in education, whilst also noting how gender, ethnicity and SEG creates variances around this. Until recently, attainment up to 16 has mostly been measured through academic qualifications, and all of the compulsory examined courses (Maths, English, and Science) are academic. Vocational GCSEs<sup>1</sup> have been introduced as well as the option of studying in colleges at 14 through the Increased Flexibility Programme, but these are relatively recent developments, and provision is limited.

**4.1.2** Academic attainment is strongly determined by academic ability – more academically able pupils are more likely to get good GCSE passes. You would therefore expect academic ability to be a strong predictor of young people’s participation in education and training after 16. A broad consensus has emerged for how this process works.

- Research suggest that many young people who are less able become increasingly frustrated as they move through secondary school as they struggle more and more with the traditional academic curriculum up to 14. Even at 14–16, their choices are limited by the compulsory “academic” subjects (Maths, English, and Science) and the options that a school is able to offer given its staffing, size and timetabling. Persistent low achievement relative to their more able peers reduces self-esteem. However, it is based on the examinations for these qualifications that their eleven years of schooling is judged.
- Streaming can also reinforce negative perceptions, leaving pupils feeling second-rate, and puts them together with other disaffected students.
- Feeling unable to achieve in school, and struggling to access the curriculum, they are more likely misbehave, and some opt out through truancy. This also brings them into conflict with teachers.

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term “vocational” GCSEs here. This is a convenient short-hand, and not the official term. They are and have been known under various titles such as “Applied GCSEs”, vGCSEs, GCSEs in vocational subjects, and are an evolution of the Part One GNVQs

These behaviours are more prevalent for boys and young people from lower from lower SEGs.

- At 16, some equate any further learning whatsoever with school learning, and simply what to leave the system in which they have failed.
- Believing that academic qualifications are important to employers, and believing that they are unable to succeed these in these qualifications, they see little point in staying on in further full-time education as they will simply fail again. They therefore opt to leave education at 16 for a job (often with no training) or become NEETs.
- They may also rationalise their decision by a greater urgency to start earning or a belief that it's who you know that matters in career development, rather than qualifications. They many also perceive that getting a job is a route into adulthood.
- Some may also be unaware of other pathways that they can take at 16 if they fail to achieve the GCSE results they hoped for. Consequently they may get a job without training or become NEET simply because they were unaware of other pathways.

**4.1.3** Clearly the young people that work their way down the spiral suggested above manifest a wide range of disaffection. They can range from the persistent truants who hate school and want to get out of the system as soon as possible, to the mildly disaffected who quietly struggle on, but with diminished self-esteem and expectations.

**4.1.4** The section below explains the evidence for the hypothesis described so far. Section 4.3 looks in more detail at the spectrum of disaffection, and section 5.2 examines how different policies are required for different typologies.

## **4.2 The evidence**

### **A difficult transition from primary to secondary and/or growing frustration with achievement at secondary school**

**4.2.1** Reviewing a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research, Furlong (2004b) found evidence that some young people experienced difficult transitions from primary to secondary schools and never managed to settle in their new environment. Others who struggled academically and who had been used to receiving extensive support from primary teachers sometimes felt that they were left to their own devices at secondary school.

**4.2.2** Furlong also found that among those who did make a good start in the secondary school, some began to lose interest as a result of poor performance in exams and tests such as SATs at 13/14, or internal school exams. They lost confidence in their ability and lost the motivation to learn. More frequently there was a gradual loss of motivation which could be linked

to patterns of attainment as well as the development of outside interests which began to take up more of their time and energy.

**4.2.3** Likewise, a review by COI (2001) found young people had generally decided whether they fell into the 'academic' camp or not even earlier than 14.

"It's around Year 9 when you realise you can't do it. It's just so much pressure." Year 11, Male, North

"It's when you are about ten. You start to realise you are thick. You start to think you are not as good as other people cos others in the school are doing better." Year 1, Male, North

**4.2.4** This is not simply a story of the least able. Furlong found that among the middle and low attainment groups, attitudes to school were often ambivalent. They appreciated a need for qualifications in order to get decent jobs, but were never stimulated academically and tended to regard school as a chore.

### **Some young people find the curriculum irrelevant**

**4.2.5** Mortimore (1991) summarizes a range of studies suggesting that a number of secondary school pupils consider the curriculum to be:

'...irrelevant...not sufficiently practical... too academic for their (intended) working class jobs..."boring" and "futile".'

Barber (1996) reports rather less favourable attitudes:

'Almost 60% of pupils agree that they "count the minutes" to the end of their lessons. Over 20% believe that work is boring. Over 40% believe lessons are too long.'

**4.2.6** An exploration of young people's attitudes to learning by One World Research & Communications (1998) found that for the less able and/or more disaffected pupils, 'irrelevant', 'useless' subjects included Science, Maths (but not basic arithmetic/ numeracy), English Literature, Foreign Languages, History, Geography, and RE.

"..... things that you are never going to use in your life, like algebra and stuff." Year 11, Male, North

"With maths in any job, if you're not going to be a teacher or great mathematician it's going to be money and change. It's very simple. It's not going to be square roots and things like that?" Year 11, Male, South

Of course, many of these are no longer compulsory. The Science curriculum is now changing, with an emphasis on making it more relevant to the real world, and the Maths curriculum is also under review.

**4.2.7** However, although schools increasingly offer vocational GCSEs now, their staffing is still more geared towards more traditional academic subjects, and the range of vocational qualifications they can currently offer is limited by expertise and in some cases equipment.

### **Assessment sets young people up for failure**

**4.2.8** A further problem is that the subjects that young people take at 14–16 are those that they are judged against through exams. Under the current model, most young people take 8–10 GCSEs, yet around half fail to get 5 A\*–C GCSEs, and similar proportions fail to get at least a grade C in Maths or English. As Tomlinson argued in his 14–19 proposals, the system essentially sets up around half of young people to fail.

**4.2.9** Many of the young people and parents in the One World Research & Communications (1998) felt that this compounded the problem. Pupils were

‘...forced to do subjects that found irrelevant, or forced to choose amongst a restricted menu of subjects that they did not feel warm towards, and were then judged against them – thus further demotivating the student.’

### **Streaming can reinforce negative perceptions**

**4.2.10** Streaming pupils by ability within a subject is common-place now, and has its advantages. In particular, it is easier for a teacher to tailor a lesson to a narrower ability range, than say one where some pupils struggle to read whilst others rank as Gifted & Talented.

**4.2.11** Nevertheless, in the USA, Berends (1995), found streaming actually polarised student attitudes into pro-and anti-school orientations. Given the correlation between ability and disaffection, placing all the least able pupils in one class can create a group identity of being second-rate educationally, which pupils then react to by establishing an anti-learning culture.

### **Young people who are less able are more likely to become disaffected**

**4.2.12** Young people’s enjoyment of school is strongly affected by their attainment:

- A national survey by the Health Education Authority in 1997 found that young people who liked school were more likely to think that their teacher rated their school performance as ‘very good’ than those who disliked school. This feeds into participation post-16. Three-quarters

of those who thought their teachers rated their performance as 'very good' expected to stay in education after 16 compared to around two-fifths of those who thought that they were rated 'below average' (Hasleden, Angle and Hickman 1999).

- The regular Scottish School Leaver Surveys also show that, other things being equal, young people who did well in examinations at age 16 were more likely to have enjoyed their last year at school and to think that it had been worthwhile (Gow and McPherson 1980). Hagell and Shaw (1996) report that the higher the pupil's GCSE scores, the more positive they felt about school.
- Similarly, Blatchford's (1996) longitudinal study showed a correlation between academic self-concept and positive attitudes towards school.

### **Moderate ability pupils feel squeezed out by high-flyers and very disaffected pupils**

**4.2.13** In research into attitudes towards learning by COI (1999), there was a strong feeling from young people that the two groups which were 'rewarded' in the current system were academic achievers and those who were deprived/undisciplined/low achievers:

"I find that, our teacher, if there's someone in our class whose got that – anger management problem – the teachers pays more attention to them. They don't have to do anything – they don't have to go to half the lessons – X, because she's angry – she didn't go the other day because she didn't feel like it ... it was only one petty fight she had." (Girl, Year 10, Langley)

"Under achieving people – they get three days out of the week and go and do what they want. They do (repair) cars and work placements and stuff – things we're not allowed to do." (Boy, Year 10, Sheffield)

The 'middle ground' of children who 'did their best' were, it was felt, 'left to get on with it as best they could'.

### **Young people who have had a bad school experience are likely to slip into an anti-learning culture, and are more likely to truant**

**4.2.14** Those whose attainment is poor in school are more likely to slip into an anti-learning culture. Furlong (1991) argues that this helps to protect their self-esteem. An anti-learning culture,

'...gives pupils a rationale, a philosophy, a way of exploring and dealing with their experience of schooling. By taking part in a sub-culture they may be able to find legitimate reasons for valuing different knowledge, for aspiring to different futures, and for valuing different ways of behaving. The problem for the school is that once pupils have evolved subcultures, once they have a rationale for

rejecting school, then they are much more difficult to bring back on line.'

In some cases, this can be re-inforced by parents, particularly if they themselves had not enjoyed school. The COI (1999) review of attitudes to learning found that there were some parents characterised by:

'indifference or open hostility towards the school and academic values. These children often described their parents as supporting them against the school and teachers.'

**4.2.15** The England and Wales Youth Cohort Study shows that truancy in Year 11 is significantly associated with leaving full-time education at age 16, even after GCSE results, home background and other factors have been taken into account (Payne 1998).

**4.2.16** Rennison (2005) concludes that:

'Disaffection with school is another potential reason for not continuing in education and is associated with entering the NEET group. Using self-reported exclusions from school and truancy to measure disaffection, showed that disaffection was strongly associated with a negative attitude towards post-16 education. It is particularly apparent from the analysis of the data that permanent exclusion from school had been more prevalent among young people in the NEET group, whatever their aspirations, than among young people entering other destinations.'

### **Some pupils become very hostile towards teachers**

**4.2.17** Research by One World Research & Communications (1998) found that the full range of disaffected pupils were very critical of their teachers. They complained of:

- An inability to develop a rapport with young people
- Poor classroom control
- Teachers putting less able pupils down by comparing them with the more able
- Being treated as "wasters" and "trouble-makers"
- Too much abstract and conceptual teaching, and too little "hands-on" or experiential learning

They also feel that teachers do not treat them as emerging adults. This is probably a function of their misbehaviour (Corr Willbourn, 2000).

'It's not enjoyable, do you know what I mean, because the teachers don't treat you with respect and you don't want to do the work for them because they don't treat you right.'

## **Boys are more likely to become disaffected with school learning**

**4.2.18** Maychell et al. (1998) found that significantly more boys than girls held negative feelings towards school. Archer et al. (2005) similarly found that 47% of the boys they interviewed, but only 17% of girls, expressed a desire to leave school and get a job as soon as possible. In particular, a review by COI (1999) into young people's attitudes to learning found that there seems to be stronger peer pressure on boys not to be seen to be trying hard:

“It's bad to be seen as a boffin. You get picked on if you're a boffin. I'd like to be able to work hard without a boffin problem. It's better when you're more mature.” (Year 7, Boys, Roehampton)

Instead, status was often achieved by sporting success or physical prowess, which won more 'street cred' amongst peers than academic success. It was “cool” to pretending to be 'uncaring/disorganised yet physically tough.

**4.2.19** In contrast for girls there was a culture where it was acceptable and even desirable to be 'academic' and clever. They were also more likely to organise their work and social lives more efficiently and seemed better able than boys to balance these different aspects of their lives:

‘I try to do work at school – get it out of the way – because I like my social life.’ (Year 11, Girl, Bushey)

**4.2.20** There is a considerable literature that attempts to explain this difference. Many argue that learning has become “feminised”. They argue that even in subjects such as Design & Technology once seen as “practical” and “hands-on”, there has been a shift in emphasis from rewarding what you can make, to explaining and evaluating the design process which requires greater amounts of reading and writing. It is argued that this militates against the slight bias in boys' learning styles towards kinaesthetic learning (involving movement) and against linguistic learning (Gurian 2000; Millard, 1997).

## **An anti-learning culture is stronger in lower SEGs**

**4.2.21** Williamson (2004) describes how in deprived areas, there is considerable peer pressure to comply with an anti-learning culture and a culture that approves of truancy. He found that it isn't 'cool to be clever' and that those who enjoy school have to keep quiet about it so as not to 'lose face' in their peer group. If they did stand out as being bright or hardworking, they risked bullying which in turn may lead to truancy anyway.

## **Young people who dislike school are less likely to stay in education or training post-16**

**4.2.22** So far we have established that young people who have moderate or lower ability are more likely to become disaffected with school and even learning. These are slightly more likely to be boys and come from lower SEGs. There is also considerable evidence that young people who dislike school are less likely to stay in education or training post-16.

Rennison (2005) found that more than one-third of young people who had not continued in any form of education or training after 16 gave a dislike of their old school as a reason for not doing so (34.8%). This dislike was particularly prevalent among young people in the NEET group (39.1%). Among NEET young people who had obtained no qualifications, the percentage giving this reason rose to 51.4%.

A considerable body of academic evidence supports this:

- Furlong's mixture of quantitative and qualitative research found that young people whose early experiences had been very negative often had such bad memories that they refused to contemplate any form of employment or training that would involve having to return to a classroom situation (Furlong, 2004b).
- Maychell and Evans (1998) found that well over a quarter of intending leavers in Year 11 gave as a reason for wanting to leave, 'I just don't like school'. Intending leavers were less likely than those planning to stay on to agree that 'I mostly enjoy being at school', even after controlling for sex, parental occupation and attainment.
- Kysel, West and Scott (1992) similarly found that intending leavers were less likely than intending stayers to have enjoyed their last year at school, and a further large-scale longitudinal study of young people in four large towns highlighted the link between negative views of education and leaving at the minimum age (Banks et al. 1992).

**4.2.23** Legard, Woodfield and White (2001) found that young people opting for the work-based route cited negative experiences at school as an important motivation for this decision, whereas positive attitudes towards school were linked to the decision to stay on in full-time education at 16.

## **Young people who are less academically able are more likely to expect to leave at 16**

**4.2.24** So far we have suggested that moderately able and less able young people are less likely to enjoy school and that a lack of enjoyment is correlated to leaving school at 16. There is also data showing a direct link between ability and post-16 choices. Furlong's (1993) statistical modelling of data from the 1970 Birth Cohort showed a very strong association between academic attainment and attitudes to school. He describes the impact on route choice:

'By the age of 16, working class pupils, those with few academic achievements and young women had developed frames of reference which might inhibit them from seeking the qualifications which would allow them to gain entry to the most rewarding positions within the labour market. These young people had often developed negative attitudes towards school...as well as impressions about their own abilities and potential which reinforced their tendency to apply for unskilled jobs. While many young people from lower working class backgrounds and with poor academic achievements had positive attitudes towards work, their impressions about their own abilities and potential are likely to serve as impediments... It is difficult to overcome a reluctance to undertake post-compulsory education among young people who have a negative attitude towards schooling, especially if these young people also see themselves as having narrow skills and potential.'

**4.2.25** Likewise, Maychell et al. (1998) found that the majority of Year 11 pupils who were planning to leave at 16 expected poor GCSE results, while the Year 8 pupils who were planning to leave at 16 rated their school work as average or below average. The national survey by the Health Education Authority in 1997 likewise found that three-quarters of those who thought their teachers rated their performance as 'very good' expected to stay in education after 16 compared to around two-fifths of those who thought that they were rated 'below average' (Hasleden, Angle and Hickman 1999).

**For some, there is no point staying in education if it does not improve their employment prospects**

**4.2.26** Young people may leave education and training at 16 not only because they did not enjoy school, but also because they feel that their ability means that education or training will not increase their employment chances. Payne (2003a) argues that for both post-16 leavers and stayers, the main point of education is to improve their employment prospects.

Rennison's data below makes this clear. Rennison et al (2005) shows that the majority of young people aged 16 agree that you need to have qualifications in order to get a job worth having. Although young people in work with no training or NEETs are less likely than those in full-time education to agree with this, the majority of these two groups do nevertheless agree.

*Table 2: 'Nowadays you need to have qualifications in order to get a job worth having', %*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Agree strongly	45.9	26.8	27.7	32.0	41.7
Agree	43.3	45.5	47.6	48.6	44.3
Neither agree nor disagree	4.6	9.4	8.3	6.0	5.4
Disagree	5.9	17.0	15.5	12.3	8.2
Disagree strongly	0.2	1.3	0.9	1.1	0.5

Base: All young people who were interviewed at age 16 with a responding parent who provided relevant data.

Again, although young people age 16 who are in work with no training or NEET are more likely to disagree with the statement that “You need to have qualifications in order to get a job worth having” than those in full-time education or work with training, the majority of those not in education or training still do agree with the statement.

*Table 3: 'You need to have qualifications in order to get a job worth having'*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Agree strongly	40.1	17.9	<b>20.1</b>	<b>25.3</b>	35.3
Agree	44.7	39.6	39.3	47.0	44.1
Neither agree or disagree	8.0	12.7	12.1	11.2	9.0
Disagree	6.4	25.4	25.6	14.8	10.2
Disagree strongly	0.8	4.3	2.9	1.7	1.4

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at 16.

*Table 4: 'The more qualifications you get the more money you can earn in the long-term'*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Agree strongly	26.6	18.6	<b>21.7</b>	<b>21.9</b>	25.1
Agree	45.2	39.7	39.8	48.3	44.6
Neither agree or disagree	17.7	17.5	15.4	13.4	17.1
Disagree	<b>10.2</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>12.3</b>
Disagree strongly	0.4	1.9	2.7	2.0	0.9

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at 16.

*Table 5: 'Leaving school at 16 limits your career opportunities later in life'*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Agree strongly	19.8	3.2	5.2	8.3	
Agree	43.9	20.2	30.0	37.9	40.3
Neither agree or disagree	15.6	18.1	21.7	20.0	16.7
Disagree	18.8	50.0	38.7	31.3	24.1
Disagree strongly	1.9	8.4	4.4	2.5	2.7

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at 16.

However, if young people believe that the main point of education is to improve their employment prospects, and yet at the same time believe that they are unable to achieve the qualifications they need through education,

then they are likely to see no reason to stay on after the minimum leaving age.

### **An urgency for earning money**

**4.2.27** Rennison’s analysis below shows that a higher proportion of young people in work with no training or NEETs agreed with the statement that “earning money is more important to me than staying on in education”.

*Table 6: ‘Earning money is more important to me than staying on in education’, column %*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Agree strongly	0.9	12.2	16.3	14.1	4.3
Agree	4.2	26.9	28.5	33.7	10.7
Neither agree or disagree	13.2	22.8	23.8	20.4	15.5
Disagree	58.9	33.6	28.5	28.6	51.6
Disagree strongly	22.7	4.6	3.0	3.2	17.9

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at 16

There are a number of possible reasons for this:

- It may simply be a desire to get out of school as soon as possible because of the reasons cited above (ability, disaffection). For this group, moving into work is a “necessary evil” (Corr Willbourn, 2000).
- Earning money is seen as a route into adulthood, and this enhances image. Helmlsey-Brown (1999) found that the students she interviewed who left school at 16 wanted to leave school behind and enter the ‘adult’ world of work. Similarly, McDowell (2003) found that the school leavers she interviewed all regarded employment rather than further education “as the legitimate route to adulthood”.
- Income (this is explored in section 8.2).
- Analysis shows that some young people know exactly what they want to do after 16 and believe that their personality and their intelligence (or street-wise nature) will 'win through'. These particular young people are not looking to simply 'drop out' but rather believe that they will do well in a career by sheer force of their natural talents and aptitudes (One World Research & Communications, 1998 – see Appendix 4).
- A further group may believe that contacts are more important than qualifications. Payne (2003a) found that for a minority of post-16 leavers there was a feeling amongst some that it was not what you knew but who you knew that mattered, and that getting a job was largely a matter of luck. Hagell and Shaw (1996) report that two fifths of those who found jobs after leaving school at 16 did so through personal contacts.

**Despite all of this, far more young people want to stay on in some education or training than actually do so**

**4.2.28** Despite a large proportion of young people becoming disaffected with schools, Foskett (2004a) shows that there is a strong desire during Year 10 and 11 to stay on in some form of post compulsory education and training. He found that about 94% of the pupils who indicated their destinations in Year 10 and 11 had the intention of staying on in some form of post compulsory education and training.

In Rennisons’s analysis, young people were asked what they had wanted to do after completing Year 11, while they were actually in Year 11. Rennison (2005) showed that 39.5% of young people who ended up at 16 in work with no training did want to enter full-time education, with an equivalent figure of 41.5% for young people who ended up NEET at 16. Only 8.3% of young people who ended up in work with no training and 10.5% of those who ended up NEET at 16 actually said they had “no preference” when they were in Year 11.

*Table 7: Young People’s aspirations, %*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Full-time education	92.6	21.9	39.5	41.5	77.8
Work-based training/work	4.8	71.5	52.2	48.0	18.1
Other /no preference	2.6	6.6	8.3	10.5	4.1

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at age 16.

**Moderate achievers in particular may drop in to work without training or become NEET because they are unaware of other pathways that they can take at 16.**

**4.2.29** The analysis above showed that a considerable proportion of young people who wanted to go into further education in Year 11, but ended up NEET or in employment with no training. One of the more common reasons given for not continuing in education or training is the belief that exam results were not good enough. 34% of young people who entered work with no training and 40% of NEETs gave this as a reason. This would suggest that they were unaware of other pathways that they could have followed post-16.

Of those who wanted to go into full-time education and ended up NEET, 25% got a perfectly respectable 1–4 A\*–C GCSEs. This is similar to the figure of 26.5% of young people with equivalent grades who had intended to remain in education and had done so.

Of those who wanted to go into full-time education and ended up in work with no training, 40% got a respectable 1–4 A\*–C GCSEs. Almost 13% of

young people in the NEET group who had intended to continue in education obtained five or more A\*–C GCSE grades.

*Table 8: Post Year 11 destinations by intention and Year 11 achievement*

	Qualification achievement	Full-time education	Work/training	Work no training	NEET
Full-time education	None	2.8	4.9	7.4	27.7
	D–G	12.3	24.7	26.1	34.2
	1–4 A*–C	26.5	45.7	42.6	25.3
	5+ A*–C	58.3	24.7	23.9	12.8
Work-based training / work	None	7.8	9.4	21.9	40.9
	D–G	36.8	35.7	35.8	37.1
	1–4 A*–C	36.8	39.9	33.0	18.1
	5+ A*–C	18.7	15.0	9.3	3.9
Other / no preference	None	15.7	13.1	20.2	59.9
	D–G	21.0	31.1	29.5	14.7
	1–4 A*–C	36.5	41.0	33.3	18.4
	5+ A*–C	26.8	14.8	17.1	6.9

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at age 16.

Rennison concludes that:

‘This evidence suggests that at least some young people who had intended to continue their education ended up in the NEET group because they felt that their Year 11 achievement was inadequate, or that they could not find post-16 courses to meet their needs...It may be that young people in the NEET group had not achieved at a sufficiently high level to pursue the specific course in post-16 education to which they had aspired, and that they were unwilling or unaware of other options available within post-16 education.’

**4.2.30** Furlong mentions a similar finding in Scotland. He notes that those who had not done too well (or had unexpectedly performed poorly at Standard Grade) often felt that all further routes had been blocked and failed to consider any other form of education or training, even where a range of alternatives were available.

Indeed the table below suggests that a significant proportion of young people who enter work without training or become NEET do indeed realise that they have chosen the wrong pathway. Around one quarter of those who entered work with no training stated that they had probably or definitely made the wrong decision.

*Table 9: Post-16 decision making: the right decision*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Definitely right	68.2	69.2	38.3	27.6	62.4
Probably right	27.6	24.1	34.6	32.6	28.2
Probably wrong	3.0	4.4	18.2	22.3	6.0
Definitely wrong	1.2	2.4	8.9	17.5	3.3

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at 16.  
Source: Rennison (2005)

## Problems in finding a school or college place

**4.2.31** Rennison's analysis shows that reported problems in finding a school or college place were also apparent, with around three times as many young people in the NEET group (14.5%) stating they could not get a place at another school or college compared to 6.3% of young people in work and 5% of young people in training. In fact, among young people in the NEET group this was a particular concern for young people with no qualifications (22.9%), who were at least twice as likely to give this reason than those with some qualifications. Overall, almost three in ten (29%) young people who did not continue in full-time education stated that they could not find a course they wanted to do.

## Reasons for not participating in full-time education or work-based training

**4.2.32** The top reasons given by young people for not participating in full-time education or work-based training cited in Rennison's research are as follows:

*Table 10: Reasons for not continuing in full-time education*

	Work with no training	NEET
Needed to earn more money than I could have done	51.2	43.4
Don't like my old school	34.7	39.1
Exam results weren't good enough	34.2	40.0
Couldn't find any courses that I really wanted to do	31.6	29.4
Couldn't find a suitable part-time job to combine	22.0	24.7
Could not afford to remain in education	20.9	21.0
Some of my friends were not continuing	20.6	18.2
It would have been too difficult to travel to school or college	6.9	10.8
Couldn't get a place at another school or college	6.3	14.5
Parents could not afford for me to remain in education	6.3	9.4
Parents did not want me to continue in education	3.3	4.9
Couldn't fit with family caring responsibilities	2.5	9.8

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at 16 who did not continue in full-time education after Year 11.  
Source: Rennison (2005)

## **4.3 The mindset of young people contemplating leaving education and training at 16**

**4.3.1** Section 4.2 mapped out the process by which young people become progressively disaffected with school and develop feelings of inadequacy based on the way the qualifications and curriculum system assesses them. This helps us to build a clear view of the “mind-set” of 14–16 year olds who are contemplating leaving education and training at 16.

- **Self-esteem:** They lack confidence in their own ability based on low achievement in tests and exams. This may have been reinforced by being put in lower streams.
- **Lessons:** They do not enjoy school. They see the curriculum and thus lessons as irrelevant and/or boring. They may have dropped into an anti-learning culture as a way of coping with the low self-esteem created by repeated low achievement. They may be truanting to various degrees and deliberately misbehaving in class.
- **Learning:** They would prefer to do more “hands-on” learning, and less conceptual learning.
- **Teachers:** They feel they are not treated like adults in schools. They feel that teachers are more concerned with “academic” pupils.
- **Importance of qualifications:** They recognise that qualifications are important for getting a job, but since they do not expect to do well, this is actually de-motivating for them.
- **Future plans:** Many are anxious to leave the school environment in which they have failed, but most are keen to continue in some education or training. As section 6.2 will also show, they are also very unlikely to have specific career goals, or to have an awareness of the features of other pathways, such as FE colleges or apprenticeships.
- **Money and the adult world:** Many express a wish to enter a more adult world and start earning money. This may be rationalisation based on their dislike of learning and/or school, rather than a positive choice. Employment may be the better of two bad options. Some, however, do feel that they can get on in employment without qualifications, either because of contacts or because of a belief in their own abilities.

## **4.4 The spectrum of disaffection – typologies**

**4.4.1** As noted above, disaffection can range from boredom and disinterest through to outright hostility to teachers, school and the system.

Work by Steedman and Stoney (2004) segments disengaged young people into three groups, characterised by their attitude to school, attainment, and participation in education or training after 16. This represents a spectrum of

the disaffected young people described in section 4.2. There are divided up as follows:

1. One to four GCSE group: These young people have just missed the five GCSE A\*–C threshold. This may either be down to:
  - limited ability – they have fulfilled all that could have been expected
  - under-achievement, possibly driven by disaffection, family circumstances, and/or a lack of effort
2. Out of touch group: These young people have completely dropped out of all contact with the education system before the age of 16. They are the most frequent truants, deeply hostile to teachers and learning, and very disruptive in lessons when they do appear at school.
3. Disaffected but in touch: These are in between types 1 and 2. This group shares many of the behaviours and attitudes of the ‘out of touch’ (i.e. totally disengaged) group, but not to such extreme lengths. Young people in this group have managed not to lose touch completely with the education system but have probably failed to obtain any GCSEs at Grade C or above.

Clearly the ‘One to four GCSE’ group are of particular interest in this study as significant proportions of this group drop out of post-16 education and training even though they have only just missed the five A\*–C threshold, and have the qualifications to follow a number of pathways ranging from traditional academic through to work-based. Section 5 discusses a number of ways to re-engage them at 14–16.

**4.4.2** However, there is not a simple linear relationship between ability and disaffection – that is to say, it is too simplistic to say that the less able a young person is, the more disaffected they will be. Research undertaken by One World Research & Communications (1998) contains a set of typologies for young people aged 14–16 who are disaffected with school and at risk of dropping out of post-16 education. The typologies were not created with the attainment and demographic criteria of the 90% participation project in mind, but can be categorised according to ability (and by implication, attainment) and attitude to school. These are shown in the table on the following page and described fully in Appendix 4. I have also matched up these typologies with the three narrower typologies of Steedman and Stoney described above. For each group there are policy recommendations which are described more fully in section 5.2.

The table makes it clear that within the ‘One to four GCSE’ group, there is a range of attitudes, ranging from young people who are actually quite able and have chosen leisure over work (e.g. ‘Cool Dudes’), to those who are moderately able and waiting to see how well they do in their GCSEs before deciding on pathways (‘Hedgers’).

*Table 11: Typologies of disaffected pupils*

Typology	Match to Steedman and Stoney typologies	Distinguishing feature	Ability	Attitude to school	Implications for participation
“Angry young rebels”	- Out of touch	Against the system	Moderate to low ability	Very hostile to authority and hence teachers. Disruptive in class.	Although hostile to school, they yearn respect. They can be attracted to college courses that offer opportunities to succeed.
“Quitters”	- Out of touch	Believe they have tried and failed	Moderate to low ability	Any reaction from hostility to passivity.	Need to be offered courses at 14–16 at an appropriate level they can succeed in.
“Rebels without a cause”	- One to four GCSE	Impatient to make their own way in the world of work. Believe their personality will be their key to success.	High to moderate	School is boring, but this group is not hostile to teachers.	Unless their attitudes change, apprenticeships are the only post-16 option of interest. They are keen to get out of learning and start earning money.
“Cool Dudes”	- One to four GCSEs	Life is predicated on having fun, and school gets in the way of this.	High or moderate ability, but under-achieving	Disengaged, but not hostile. Seen as lazy by teachers.	Alternative provision is unlikely to have an effect. Their underlying attitudes to work and leisure drive their under-achievement.
“Hedgers”	- One to four GCSE - Disaffected but in touch	Waiting to commit until they get their GCSE results	Moderate to low ability	Generally positive.	Vocational and occupational options may re-engage them. Again, mentoring can also help to realign their aspirations

Typology	Match to Steedman and Stoney typologies	Distinguishing feature	Ability	Attitude to school	Implications for participation
“Settlers”	- One to four GCSE  - Disaffected but in touch	Have chosen an undemanding life. Sit between “Cool Dudes” and “Quitters”.	Moderate to low ability	Passive	This group is probably masking a fear of failure. Like “Quitters” they need to be offered courses at 14–16 at an appropriate level they can succeed in.
“Escapists”	- Disaffected but in touch	Dream of being “discovered”	Low ability	Disengaged and disconnected.	Vocational and occupational options may re-engage them. Again, mentoring can also help to realign their aspirations
“Strugglers”	N/A	Want to do well, have unrealistic aspirations, but have not given up.	Low ability	Positive and eager to get on.	Need to be offered courses at 14–16 at an appropriate level they can succeed in. Mentoring can also help to realign their aspirations.

# 5. Increasing participation of low and moderate attainers through more flexible pathways at 14-16

## 5.1 The hypothesis

**5.1.1** The analysis in section 4.2 showed that many young people with moderate or low ability become disaffected because of low achievement, partly driven by a curriculum and qualifications system that:

- does not seem relevant to them
- sets up them up for failure (around half of all pupils do not get 5 grade A\*–C GCSEs, and around half do not get grade A\*–C in Maths or English)
- is very conceptual, and does not provide opportunities for hands-on learning
- an anti-learning culture (possibly as a result of the first three of these)

**5.1.2** A strong argument has developed that college-based vocational courses or work-based learning (e.g. apprenticeships) pitched at an appropriate ability level and provided at 14–16 can help to address this because:

- they are relevant to the world of work that they will ultimately enter
- they also allow young people to try out elements of different jobs and see if this is what they want to do in the future
- they can be put on a course at an appropriate level (e.g. Entry level or level 1) where they are more likely to get a pass, as opposed to a Grade D GCSE
- assessment is based more what you can “do” than what you can “write”
- learning is more “hands-on” rather than conceptual

**5.1.3** However, it is not just the vocational/occupational elements of these courses that attract young people. The analysis below also shows that young people aged 14–16 also like learning in college or in work-based programmes because it is not school, the environment is perceived to be “more adult”, and on good programmes they get more personal attention.

**5.1.4** The Increased Flexibility Programme, disapplication from the National Curriculum and the Young Apprenticeship are three examples of this. Under these programme, young people aged 14–16 often take NVQs through learning for 2–3 days in colleges, though a very few schools are able to offer NVQ courses. However, these pathways are not yet an entitlement for young

people aged 14–16, and in the recent past, they have often been used as options for more “troubled” pupils.

**5.1.5** The introduction of vocational GCSEs is a further example, though there is a concern that most of this learning takes place in a classroom setting, and the proportion of “hands-on” learning is limited. Work placements are also not a necessary element of vocational GCSEs, though they are recommended.

## **5.2 Different solutions for different typologies**

### **‘One to four GCSE’ group**

#### **Characteristics**

**5.2.1** These young people have just missed the five GCSE A\*–C threshold. This may either be down to:

- limited ability – they have fulfilled all that could have been expected,
- under-achievement, possibly driven by disaffection, family circumstances, and/or a lack of effort.

#### **Policy**

**5.2.2** For this group Steedman and Stoney recommend offering a broader range of options pre-16, in particular, vocational options in schools. The rationale is that these courses better suit young people who are less interested in academic subjects and what to study something more practical and relevant in terms of employment. They may also use a different teaching style that is more attractive to the young people.

**5.2.3** Nevertheless, some authors point out that we may be deceiving young people into thinking that vocational GCSEs (and A levels) are really vocational and therefore relevant. They argue that vocational GCSEs and A levels are only very “weakly vocational” as they are mostly classroom-based, rely heavily on paper-based case studies rather than real hands-on experience, and cover the content of a broad industry rather than a specific occupation (Stanton, 2004). They therefore argue for the study of occupationally-focused (or “strongly vocational”) qualifications such as BTECs and NVQs (Delorenzi and Robinson, 2005).

**5.2.4** Furthermore, to implement this, schools would need the equipment required for certain vocational options (e.g. lathes for Engineering, kitchens for Catering) and would need to recruit new staff. It is these very difficulties that has meant that the roll-out of teaching of vocational GCSEs in schools has been relatively slow, and led to increasing attention for the provision of learning opportunities in colleges for 14–16 year olds.

**5.2.5** Table 11 in section 4.4 also makes it clear that there are some young people in this group who are actually relatively able, but under-achieving because they have decided to prioritise their leisure life over applying themselves to school work (“Cool Dudes”). Others such as the ‘Rebels without a cause’ are simply bored with school, eager to earn money, and genuinely believe that their own talents rather than qualifications will help them get on. Offering these groups more vocational options in school or college is unlikely to affect motivation.

## **‘Disaffected but in touch’**

### **Characteristics**

**5.2.6** This group shares many of the behaviours and attitudes of the ‘out of touch’ (i.e. totally disengaged) group, but not to such extreme lengths. Young people in this group have managed not to lose touch completely with the education system but have probably failed to obtain any GCSEs at Grade C or above. They could include a range of attitudes, from the “Settlers” of table 11 who have low to moderate ability and have chosen to settle for an easy life of low effort (as an excuse for failure), to “Hedgers” who are struggling with the traditional curriculum, and waiting to see how well they do before deciding on pathways after 16.

### **Impact**

**5.2.7** Steedman and Stoney (2004) find that this group respond most positively to situations in which they are taken out of school for part of the week. This would include spending two days a week at FE college doing NVQ courses and/or participating in Young Apprenticeships.

**5.2.8** A review of the effectiveness of these sorts of programme was undertaken by McCrone and Morris (2004) through interviews with young people. Being taught in college was found to improve motivation and ultimately raised aspirations to stay on in education and training for a number of reasons:

- the ‘greater respect’ they received in college
- the more individual nature of the teaching
- the increased use of group work among students
- the practical nature of courses allowing hands-on experience.

A few quotations from students illustrate how it raised aspirations to stay on in education and training:

“The course was life-changing because I knew how to get it [the qualification] ...the most important thing I learnt was not to leave education too early, to stay on in education and achieve my goals at university.”

“When I did the mechanics course I thought if this is what I want to do then I’ll have to go to college for a couple of years... as soon as I knew that I was going to do mechanics....I knew I would go to college, but before that I didn’t know.”

“I thought ‘I hate school’, I’m going to leave school and get a little bit of money, but then I wanted to do hairdressing...I did the taster course and knew that was what I wanted to do...I had seriously thought about doing painting and decorating – because that’s what my Dad does - but then I did the [taster] course and didn’t like it so decided not to do it.”

“The vocational course changed everything, I wanted to go to college and I want to continue and get the qualifications that I need.”

“I wasn’t sure what I was going to do, but after the college experience I was more sure that I wanted to continue with education...I want a better job so I can have a better future.”

**5.2.9** McCrone and Morris (2004) conclude that these courses have been successful in terms of re-engaging this group of students. However, their research does not allow them to say whether the success is due to the vocational nature of the courses in particular, or simply to the general fact that they are held in colleges, allowing pupils to feel ‘more grown-up’ and to enjoy the increased attention from teachers.

### **Practical issues**

**5.2.10** There are also practical issues. Pupils need to live close enough to the local college, and if they have to return to school half-way through the day, they may simply choose to truant because of their dislike of school. There are also difficulties in timetabling to ensure that the pupil still receives teaching at school for Science, Maths and English three days a week.

Steedman and Stoney (2004) also argue that 14–16 year olds on such programmes may merely have their ideas confirmed that school is not for them. Consequently, their attendance and motivation back at school could actually fall. More generally, schoolwork could suffer simply as a result of being away from school. These difficulties lead some to suggest that these pupils should be entirely taught in colleges. Against this, some colleges find that their staff do not have the expertise to deal with younger pupils, especially those that are disaffected.

### **Alternative assessment**

**5.2.11** Steedman and Stoney (2004) also argue that the goal of five good GCSEs by the age of 16 is not a realistic goal for most of this group, and suggest that young people are passed through a different model of assessment to the standard model of 8–10 GCSEs. Instead they argue that these young people should work towards a set of Level 2 qualifications at their own pace. This is very reminiscent of Tomlinson’s model, in which young people progress up a ladder of Diplomas that are ability-related rather than age-related.

### **‘Out of touch’ group**

**5.2.12** These young people have completely dropped out of all contact with the education system before the age of 16. They are the most frequent truants, deeply hostile to teachers and learning, and very disruptive in lessons when they do appear at school. Although small in size, this group obviously presents a key challenge in terms of how these young people can be re-engaged. Ofsted identifies perhaps 10,000 individuals in any one cohort (between one and two per cent) who have, to all intents and purposes, lost contact with school between the ages of 14 and 16.

For this group, Steedman and Stoney (2004) argue for:

- An assessment model that allows them to work towards Level 2 qualifications or less, rather than the standard model of 8–10 GCSEs
- More “adult” environments, such as work-based learning and college-based learning
- One-to-one mentoring, in particular, treating them as adults.

They stress that unreasonable expectations should not be placed on the progress that this group can make.

## **5.3 Supporting messages**

**5.3.1** The research by McCrone and Morris (2004) as well as Steedman and Stoney (2004) suggest that young people were particularly attracted to the aspects below. These should be clearly communicated to this age group in any future vocational/work-based routes:

- You do not need five GCSEs passes to follow vocational, work-based (or academic) pathways after 16.
- Vocational and work-based learning is much more “hands-on” than academic learning.
- College environments and work-based pathways have a more adult environment. This makes them less like school environments. They can also be a “fresh start”.

- Vocational and work-based pathways enable you a taster of what different jobs might be like, and will help you make decisions about future career goals and pathways.
- Vocational and work-based courses are more easily pitched at the learner’s level of ability than default academic pathways such as A levels.

## 5.4 Supporting measures

**5.4.1** Young people also value one-off experiences that allow them to better understand the college-based or work-based options that they may decide to enter after 16. These include work experience, visits to colleges, visits from business people at careers days or enterprise education days.

### Work experience

**5.4.2** Foskett (2004b) found that work experience was:

‘...the single most important intervening agency organized by schools in the choice processes of the majority of pupils across all schools.’

Many pupils acknowledged the fact that work experience was important both in affirming their post-16 decisions and also in gaining experience of the world of work.

**5.4.3** Rennison (2005) also found that over half of all young people who had participated in work experience found the experience helpful, regardless of their education and training status after they left school.

*Table 12: Was work experience helpful in making post Year 11 decisions, %*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Very helpful	32.6	44.3	30.8	35.8	33.8
Fairly helpful	34.6	28.3	33.4	31.9	33.8
Not very helpful	19.3	14.3	17.1	18.0	18.6
Not at all helpful	13.4	13.1	18.7	14.3	13.8

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at 16 who had participated in work experience.

Nevertheless, many young people have negative experiences. Foskett found that a sizeable number talked of ‘un-met expectations’, the boring and routine nature of work, and having to work long hours for little or no reward.

## **College visits and external visitors**

**5.4.4** In the typologies discussed above, the 'One to four GCSEs' group were mostly taught in school rather than in a local FE college. However, Foskett (2004a) found that young people placed a great premium on visits to post-16 providers such as FE Colleges and Sixth Form College and on concrete experience gained from interacting with outside visitors, say through enterprise education days or careers days.

# 6. How and when do young people make their decisions about participation?

## 6.1 Timing of decisions

**6.1.1** A number of authors (Payne, 2003; Foskett, 2004a, 2004b) have found that by the age of 13/14, most young people do not know what career goals they want to follow or the exact pathways they will achieve this by. At 13/14, their main focus is on deciding what subjects they are going to take at 14–16 (Wild, 1999). However, by 13/14, under the influence of their parents, they will have already ruled out a number of options.

**6.1.2** At 14–16 they begin to consider post-16 options. The Post-16 Markets Project, which surveyed 1,284 Year 11 students from several schools, reports that 42% recalled beginning the process of choosing a post-16 route in Year 10 or earlier, with 5% recalling beginning to choose before the age of 13 (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown 2001). However, most do not narrow this down into a final decision until Year 11.

**6.1.3** This suggests that young people do not need advice on choosing careers or pathways before 14. Instead, their pre-conceptions of what different jobs and pathways entail (academic, vocational, work-based) need to be challenged before they reach 14. This would include understanding the nature of the world of work, education and training, and challenging stereotypes of what sort of people follow different pathways. At 14–16, they should then be given advice on choosing career goals and pathways.

## **6.2 Reasons for late career choice**

### **Vague career aspirations**

**6.2.1** One World Research & Communications (1998) noted that the majority of young people seem to live in two worlds:

- a very narrow world of their own social environment
- an idyllic future, often being represented by some image of 'fame and fortune'.

Few have any real interest in or knowledge of life outside of their own familiar domain. It is not surprising, therefore, that many struggle to know what they want to achieve after 16 because their frames of reference are so limited.

**6.2.2** Wild (1999) also found that the choices of those who are attracted to a particular job, particularly at an early age, are often over-ambitious. Many were attracted to jobs which did not rely on academic or vocational qualifications, but were well paid, high profile, high status jobs offering fame and glamour, but with very limited entry (e.g. becoming a Premiership footballer). It is only as Years 10 and 11 near that they realise that these are unrealistic, yet they resent careers advisors telling them this. However, as they realise that their aspirations are unrealistic, they can become even more despondent.

**6.2.3** Research conducted into the aspirations of 13 to 19 year olds by One Voice (2000) for B SkyB was able to quantify the proportion of young people with these characteristics. Just over a half of 13 to 19 year olds did not know what they wanted to do in the future. Just under a half did know what they wanted to do in the future, but of these around a third did not think that they would be able to achieve them.

### **“Wait and see till my GCSEs”**

**6.2.4** For moderate and low achievers in particular, there is a logic for deferring decisions on both options at 14 and options at 16. They recognise and/or fear that their aspirations may be thwarted by their GCSE results. Rather than specifying beforehand what pathways they will take after 16 or what subjects they might study, they wait to see what they think their GCSE results will enable them to do. This also helps them to minimise any feeling of disappointment as well as protecting their image amongst their peers if they do less well than expected (Halsall and Hollingworth, 2005). However, this attitude of wait and see can damage their opportunities:

- they may rely on a late application to college which turns out to be full, leading them to take a less-preferred option that they may drop out of
- they resist seeking or accepting advice from Connexions

## 6.3 To what extent do they make an active decision for or against education and training?

**6.3.1** The data already cited from Rennison showed that around 40% of young people who ended up in work with no training or as NEETs at 16 had actually intended to stay in education or training when they were in Year 11. Only between 8–10% of this group could be described as having “drifted” into that situation (“other/no preference”) deliberately.

*Table 13: Young People’s aspirations, %*

	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET
Full-time education	21.9	39.5	41.5
Work-based training/work	71.5	52.2	48.0
Other/no preference	6.6	8.3	10.5

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at age 16.

**6.3.2** Nevertheless, this analysis of “drifting” can be misleading. Many young people who do actually end up in full-time education may not necessarily be there because they see it as a logical pathway with a defined career choice, but because it was the least bad option for them.

Halsall and Hollingworth’s study (2005) of inner city pupils found that staying on in education became a “default” option for many Year 11 pupils:

Interviewer: “So what made you decide to stay on?”

Student: “I don’t know, like all it was, was I didn’t really have an idea of where I wanted to go anyway, and I just started.”

They also found that “fear of the dole” and absence of “the dole” for 16-18 year olds were also factors keeping many young people in education and training after 16.

**6.3.3** Research by Legard (2001) unpicks these different types by exploring young people’s decisions depending on whether or not they made their post-16 decisions based on a clear view of what “route” (academic/vocational/work-based) they wanted to take, and those that do not. He does not quantify the size of these different groups, but it is clear that a number of groups do “drift” into further education and training. These have been bolded below.

1. **Clear pathway:** those young people who had identified the pathway (e.g. academic/work-based) they intended to follow, which splits into:

- a. Active – wished to follow a certain pathway in order to achieve specific career goals
    - i. Academic pathway – enjoy their subjects, likely to want to enter HE, in the long run want to earn high wages
    - ii. Vocational pathway in school/college – less interested in education per se but were aware of the need for qualifications to enable them to find the kind of employment they sought
    - iii. Work-based pathway – Apprenticeships/NVQs allow them to follow their chosen pathway in employment. This group are also less likely to have enjoyed school.
  - b. **Passive: wished to follow a certain pathway (e.g. academic/vocational), but has no specific career goals:**
    - i. **Academic and vocational pathway: This group stay on because they do not yet feel ready or confident enough to leave education and face the responsibilities of a job. They have also been encouraged to stay on by parents and teachers.**
2. Unclear pathway: Those are unclear or undecided about which route to take. These split into:
- a. **No clear career goals and no clear pathway: Most young people in this group do initially decide to stay in education or training at 16, largely because their parents and teachers urge them to. They also see little point entering the labour market if they do not know what to do. However, a high proportion also drop out, especially where they have little commitment to the subject they are studying, and have negative feelings towards education.**
  - b. Specific career goal, but unclear pathway: These young people are generally well-motivated and know what they want to do in the medium to long-term as a job, but are uncertain if they should follow an academic, vocational or work-based pathway.

**6.3.4** Legard found that those who did not enter education did so for the reasons we have already covered (feelings of inadequacy in the school situation due to low achievement; anti-learning culture; a desire to earn money). The majority of them did not have specific career goals. For some, it was a question of accepting that studying “was not for them” and that they felt more comfortable doing practical, “hands on” work. For others, it was the nature of the school environment that acted as a deterrent to staying on in education.

**6.3.5** The analysis above therefore suggests that for those who intend not to enter post-16 education or training and have no specific career goals, it would be ineffective to try and persuade them, say, through their parents or career advisors to enter education or training, as they may quickly drop out if the pathway is wrong for them. It is more important to ensure that they develop a view on their career goals and pathway and that the pathway (e.g. academic in a school sixth form/vocational in a college/work-based on an

apprenticeship) is appropriate for their preferred way of learning (e.g. “hands-on”), their ability level (e.g. a level 2 vocational qualification rather than, say, a vocational A level) and that the learning environment is positioned as different to school.

In a similar vein, the pupils interviewed by Archer et al. (2005) suggest that financial incentives such as the EMA could potentially “bribe” pupils who were unsure of what to do to stay on “for the wrong reasons”.

Note that this is a different group to that implied in paragraph 4.2.29 with four A\*–C GCSEs who became NEET or entered work without training because they mistakenly believed that there was no suitable pathway for them. This group did aspire to entering education or work-based training, though they may be of type 1b (passively entering a pathway).

# 7. Influencers

## 7.1 Sources of advice

**7.1.1** Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) describe three ways in which young people gain an “image” of different educational pathways or careers:

1. “Contracted images” are those they acquire themselves through direct experience. For example, they will have a contracted image of nursing as a career if they have been in a hospital. However, this will represent only a partial view of the nature of nursing as they will include only those elements of a nurse’s work that they saw.
2. “Derived images” are those acquired from the media through newspapers, television, music, film and advertising. Such images are strong and provide some of the images that young people can most strongly recollect or refer to.
3. “Delegated images” are those passed to the young person by an adult.

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) also emphasise that the images that young people build of certain types of career or certain types of educational pathway from these three sources are constantly compared to the image that they want to build of themselves. Young people ask themselves: ‘how does this image (of career, course, job) compare to the image I aspire to’ and “what will my peer group think’.

Connexions advisors, parents, and teachers clearly fall into third category. This clearly emphasises that they are just one type of influence on young people, and must struggle against the image portrayed by the media and popular culture of certain types of career or certain types of educational pathway, as well as the image that young people want to project.

**7.1.2** Despite all this, young people most commonly cited their parents (81.9%) as a source of advice about what to do after Year 11, followed by teachers and careers advisors. Most authors also find that young people rarely disagree with their parents about education/training pathways (Ryrie, 1984; Taylor, 1992, Wright, 2005).

*Table 14: Sources of advice about what to do after Year 11, %*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Parent(s)	84.2	80.4	77.7	69.0	81.9
A careers teacher or tutor at school	73.4	64.9	62.6	54.8	70.1
Other teachers at school	51.6	30.1	35.4	30.1	46.5
Someone from the Careers Service	43.7	48.7	44.0	39.2	43.7
Friend(s)	43.7	32.1	38.9	36.7	41.7
Brother(s) and sister(s)	25.5	18.8	23.9	19.7	24.2

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at age 16

Source: Rennison (2005)

**7.1.3** McIntosh and Houghton (2005) study of truants illustrates the importance of parents and careers advisors. They found that of those truants who fail to get five or more good GCSEs, the presence of supportive parents, careers advice and work experience while at school was also more likely to lead to participation in further education, especially vocational qualifications.

Furlong (2004) also found that when young people's decisions to remain in education were positively encouraged by their families (particularly when parents always assumed that they would remain in education), early leaving tended not to be seriously contemplated.

Likewise, it is no surprise that young people who ended up in work with no training at 16 or NEET were least likely to report that they had received advice from their parents (77% and 69% respectively). This may be because their parents are effective at advising them (see section 7.2). Young people in these two groups were not only less likely to have discussed options with their own parents than other young people, but were also least likely to have accessed other sources of advice at school, such as careers teachers or tutors, or from the Careers Service. Young people in full-time education were the group most likely to have used informal sources of advice, such as parents and siblings, as well as advice from teachers and careers teachers at school.

## 7.2 Parents

### **Parents set boundaries within which choices are made**

**7.2.1** Most authors find that parents determine the broad parameters of young people's decisions on careers and educational/training pathways, such as leaving education and training altogether at 16, or decisions over academic versus vocational pathways. However, they usually leave narrower decisions to their children, such as which subjects to take, or which institution to attend (Foskett and Helmsley-Brown 2000, Payne, 2003, Wright, 2005).

### **Most young people who do not continue in education and training were advised against this by their parents**

**7.2.2** Analysis by Rennison (2005) clearly shows that the overwhelming majority of young people who did not continue in education and training at 16 were advised against this by their parents. For example, only 4.9% of NEETs and 3.3% of young people who entered work with no training said that their parents did not want them to continue in education.

### **Parental encouragement leads to low achievers staying on in full-time education, but at the expense of drawing them away from work with training**

**7.2.3** Rennison (2005) examined the extent to which young people with low qualifications were more likely to stay on in full-time education if they themselves wanted to stay on, and their parents agreed with them. For young people who got no qualifications at 16, Rennison found that young people were 20.4% more likely to stay on if their parent agreed with the young person that they should do so:

- 43% of young people who had intended to stay on but had achieved no Year 11 qualifications actually stayed on, even though their parents disagreed with their aspirations
- whereas 63.4% of young people whose parents had agreed with their aspirations continued in full-time education.

A similar pattern of results emerged among young people with moderate Year 11 achievement. For young people with 1–4 A\*–C GCSE, young people are 10% more likely to stay on if their parents agree with them that they should do so (86.7% – 76.3%). However, the draw into full-time education appeared principally to come from young people who had intended to enter training.

*Table 15: Young people aspiring to stay on after Year 11: Parent- young person agreement on aims, Year 11 achievement and the young persons' destination, row%*

Year 11 GCSE/GNVQ achievement	Agreement	NEET <sup>1</sup>	Work	Training	Full-time education
No qualifications	Yes	28.6	6.3	1.6	<b>63.4</b>
	No	43.0	7.0	7.0	<b>43.0</b>
D–G GCSE only	Yes	12.4	5.7	3.4	78.5
	No	10.4	12.0	9.2	68.4
1–4 A*–C	Yes	4.7	5.5	3.1	<b>86.7</b>
	No	5.7	6.9	11.2	<b>76.3</b>
5+ A*–C	Yes	1.0	1.6	0.9	96.5
	No	4.8	2.3	4.5	88.3

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at age 16 with a responding 'parent' who provided relevant data.

**7.2.4** Another way to look at this is to examine the extent to which young people with low qualifications were more likely to stay on in education or training if they wanted to enter work or work with training, and their parents disagreed. Rennison found that parents who disagreed with their children about entering work or training at the end of Year 11 did seem to influence their children to opt for post-16 education, in particular among moderate and high achievers. These groups of young people were nearly four times more likely to continue in education if their parents disagreed with their aspiration to enter work/training. However, in most cases the draw appears to come from work with training to full-time education.

For example, looking at young people with 1–4 A\*–C GCSE who wanted to go into work or training, 33.9% went into full-time education if their parents wanted them to go into full-time education, whereas 8% went into full-time education if their parents believed they should go into work or training.

*Table 16: Young people aspiring to work or training after Year 11: Parent- young person agreement on aims, Year 11 achievement and the young persons' destination, row%*

Year 11 GCSE/GNVQ achievement	Agreement	NEET <sup>1</sup>	Work	Training	Full-time education
No qualifications	Yes	48.7	24.0	22.1	5.2
	No	54.3	23.4	13.9	8.4
D–G GCSE only	Yes	25.6	19.0	43.8	11.5
	No	25.0	20.7	29.1	25.1
1–4 A*–C	Yes	11.2	22.0	58.8	8.0
	No	17.0	19.9	33.9	33.9
5+ A*–C	Yes	6.3	20.9	61.4	11.4
	No	10.6	15.9	33.1	40.3

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at age 16 with a responding 'parent' who provided relevant data.

**7.2.5** Although this quantitative data shows that parents are effective, qualitative research (Corr Willbourn, 2000) with parents of young people

likely to leave education and training at 16 shows that parents are often driven to despair:

"Every time we see somebody in a bit of a run down job I try and say 'I bet they wish they had worked harder at school' ... he just says it's going to be different for him."

Many felt varying levels of despair and resignation regarding getting their children to listen to reason and/or toward their children's naïve view of the world outside of the comfort of school:

"They think they've grown up but they've not."

"He thinks he's going to walk straight into a job."

These sorts of parents are clearly crying out for support.

**The parents of young people who are NEET or in work with no training did provide advice to their children**

**7.2.6** Rennison (2005) also shows that it is false to assume that young people who ended up NEET or in work with no training received little input from parents. Only 9.8% of NEETs and 7.3% of young people who were in work with no training at 16 said that their parents were “not involved at all” in decisions about what to do after Year 11. Although young people who stayed on in full-time education were more likely to say that their parents were “involved a great deal” in their Year 11 decisions than NEETs or those who were in work with no training, 70% of NEETs and 73% of young people in work with no training said that their parents were involved either a great deal or a fair amount in those Year 11 choices.

*Table 17: Parents Involvement in their children’s decisions about what to do after Year 11, %*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Involved a great deal	47.1	44.0	35.7	31.9	44.6
Involved a fair amount	37.7	38.1	37.4	37.3	37.7
Involved a little	12.7	13.8	19.6	21.0	14.1
Not involved at all	2.5	4.1	7.3	9.8	3.6

Base: All young people who were interviewed at age 16 with a responding parent who provided relevant data

## But are slightly less involved in those decision

**7.2.7** However, as noted earlier, young people in the NEET group were least likely to report that they had received advice from their parents (69% compared to 81.9% for all young people). They are also less likely to have been involved in other support activities.

*Table 18: Education orientated support activities among parents, %*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Parent's evening attended	89.8	78.8	72.3	55.9	84.4
Open day attended	37.8	26.0	21.7	15.5	33.6
Spoke to teachers about choices for their son/daughter after Year 11	51.1	45.7	43.0	43.6	49.4
Spoken to their son/daughter about meetings with teachers about choices	86.1	79.2	74.2	64.8	82.7
Information obtained on other schools and courses by other means	52.8	40.1	37.3	31.8	48.6

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at age 16 with a responding 'parent' who provided relevant data.

## This may be because middle class parents give more effective advice

**7.2.8** Section 3.2 demonstrated that young people who end up NEET or in work with no training at 16 are more likely to come from poorer SEGs (Payne 2003). One explanation for the lower levels of advice given to these two groups therefore may be that their parents (who are more likely to come from poorer SEGs) are less effective at giving advice. There are a number of suggested reasons for this:

- Middle class parents take a more active role in the decision-making process, expressing clear aspirations, helping them gather information on different post-16 options.
- Working-class parents are more likely to cede decision-making to their child. (Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000; Kysel, West and Scott 1992). Nonetheless, they claim to be on hand to help if required.
- Some working class parents come from a manufacturing or craft background. The manufacturing sector in particular has shrunk. They are less able to give advice on pathways that take their children into service-industry routes. For example, one student in the One World Research & Communications (1998) noted:

"My dad is a builder and he wouldn't know where to go and what courses to do. So they can't really help you really". Year 13, Female, South

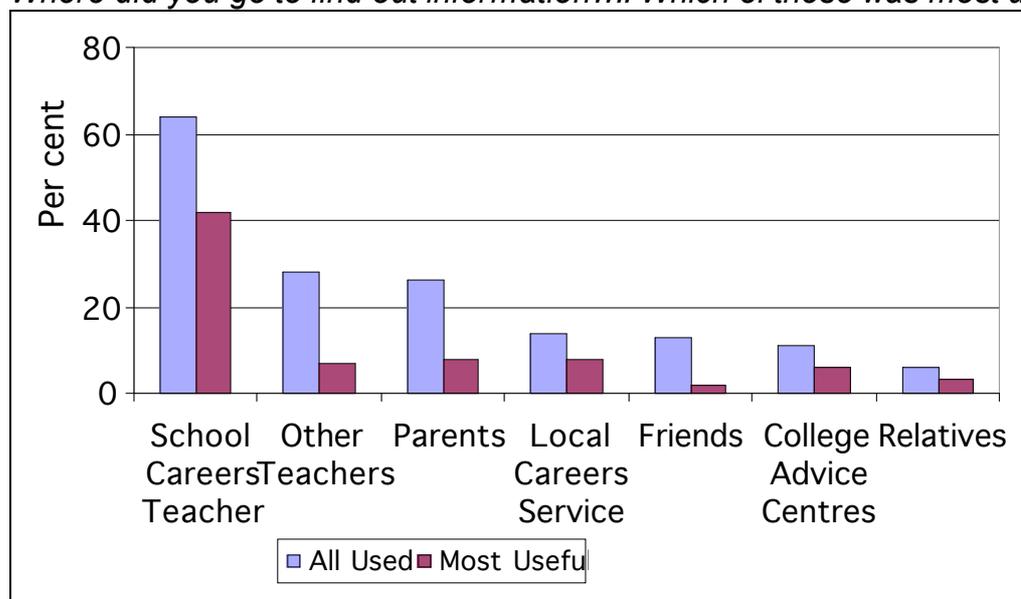
**Despite being the most prevalent source of informal IAG, there are questions over the quality of IAG that parents from any background can give**

**7.2.9** The high proportion of young people who leave education and training at 16 and yet have four A\*–C GCSEs (see section 3.2) would also suggest that their prime advisor (parent) has not advised them well. Parents clearly have the advantage of knowing their child well, but are unlikely to understand the different qualifications and pathways that exist today for those who just miss the 5 A\*–C threshold.

**7.2.10** For example, research by Opinion Leader/BMRB for the QCA in November 2004 found that three quarters of respondents (the general public) knew “little or nothing” about the vocational qualifications system. Furthermore, the British Social Attitudes Survey shows that just over four (42%) in ten adults say that if they were advising a 16 year old about their future they would say they should stay on in full-time education to get their A levels. Only one in eight (13%) say they should study full time to get vocational rather than academic qualifications, and 12% that they should leave school and get training through a job (NatCen 2005).

**7.2.11** The fact that they prefer to get their own information and recommendations from word of mouth, rather than properly researching information themselves, is a further reason why they are less likely to provide accurate information (EdComs, 2003).

*Where did you go to find out information.... Which of these was most useful?*



Source: Continental Research (2000): Don't Quit Now Information Pack Evaluation, DfES/COI.

**7.2.12** Research for the “Don't Quit Now” campaign with young people at risk of leaving education or training also shows that school careers

teachers were considered more useful than parents (Continental Research, 2000)

## **7.3 Friends and siblings**

**7.3.1** Young people are more likely to stay in education or training after 16 if their school friends also stay on. For example, Thomas, Webber and Walton (2002) analysed the 1998 sweep of the Bradford Youth Cohort Study, which covered over 2,000 young people from 32 schools. They found that, after taking account of individual characteristics, boys' intentions about staying on were significantly correlated with the proportion of the other students in their year group who intended to stay.

**7.3.2** Nevertheless, few young people choose a particular post-16 route merely because their friends have chosen it. Looking at those young people who did not continue in education or training, Rennison (2005) found that around 20% stated that they decided not to continue because "Some of my friends were not continuing."

**7.3.3** However, friends and siblings are a useful source of information about specific options, especially if they have had experience of the post-16 system.

"I'd ask my big sister about university and A levels. She's there now so she knows what you have to do to get there and about the loans and stuff." Year 10, Brahm (2004)

## 7.4 Connexions advisors

### Young people's views on the usefulness of Connexions

**7.4.1** As stated earlier, parents are considered the greatest influence on careers and pathways post-16. Nevertheless, just under three quarters of young people in Year 11 say that the Careers Service (i.e. Connexions) does have a major or minor role (Rennison, 2005).

#### *Importance of careers services in decisions about what to do after Year 11*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Major role	20.1	30.4	18.6	23.2	21.2
Minor role	52.4	44.7	48.6	44.6	50.7
No role	27.6	24.8	32.8	32.2	28.1

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at age 16 who experienced contact with the Careers Service during Year 11.

### **Around a fifth of young people who ended up NEET state that they were not invited for a Connexions interview**

**7.4.2** Over one-fifth of young people in the NEET group did not recall being invited for an individual interview and, this is much greater than the level of non-invitations reported by young people in other destination groups (Rennison, 2005). However, this may reflect their higher levels of truancy and absence.

#### *Young people's contact with careers services at schools*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Attended individual careers sessions	84.4	88.6	83.8	73.1	83.6
Invited, but did not attend	4.5	4.2	4.9	5.5	4.6
Not invited, did not attend	11.1	7.3	11.3	21.4	11.8

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at age 16.

### **Effect of limited capacity**

**7.4.5** Morris (2004) argues that Connexions only has 50% of the personal advisers that would be needed to ensure manageable case-loads and the provision of a comprehensive service. This means that it is inevitable that '...for the majority of young people without intensive needs, the extent to which Personal Adviser support can be accessed is going to be limited.'

**7.4.6** Foskett (2004a) found that Connexions was perceived overall as the second most significant intervening agency by pupils. However, he also found that Connexions has been highest in schools in poorer areas and in schools without their own sixth form. Consequently, where Connexions had a permanent residential status in schools, pupils express satisfaction with

its role. Connexions was considered very important by pupils in schools with no sixth form, but only regarded as moderately important by pupils in schools with sixth forms.

### **Young people become frustrated that Connexions advisors give information, but not necessarily advice**

**7.4.7** Research from One World Research & Communications (1998) notes that many careers advisors are felt to base their approach on answers to the question “what do you want to do?” As noted earlier in section 6.2, many young people have no idea what they want to do, have totally unrealistic aspirations, or have deliberately decided not to make a choice until they have received their GCSE results.

Furthermore, advisors were felt to structure their advice too specifically on predicted grades. This further de-motivates many, as often their predicted grades are not good enough to warrant exploring perceived more interesting options. Many young people, therefore, feel that the careers guidance amounts to “You can't do A-X, but you could do Y-Z” (with Y-Z typically being seen as menial, undemanding job).

"He just sat there and said 'What do you want to do' and I said 'I don't know'. So he said 'Well why have you booked an appointment?' “  
Year 13, Male, North

"You tell them what you want to do and then they try to talk you out of it," Year 11, Male, North

Likewise, Wild (1999) found that there was a reluctance by advisors to steer young people's career choices, and they tend simply to direct them to information on the careers in which they express an interest.

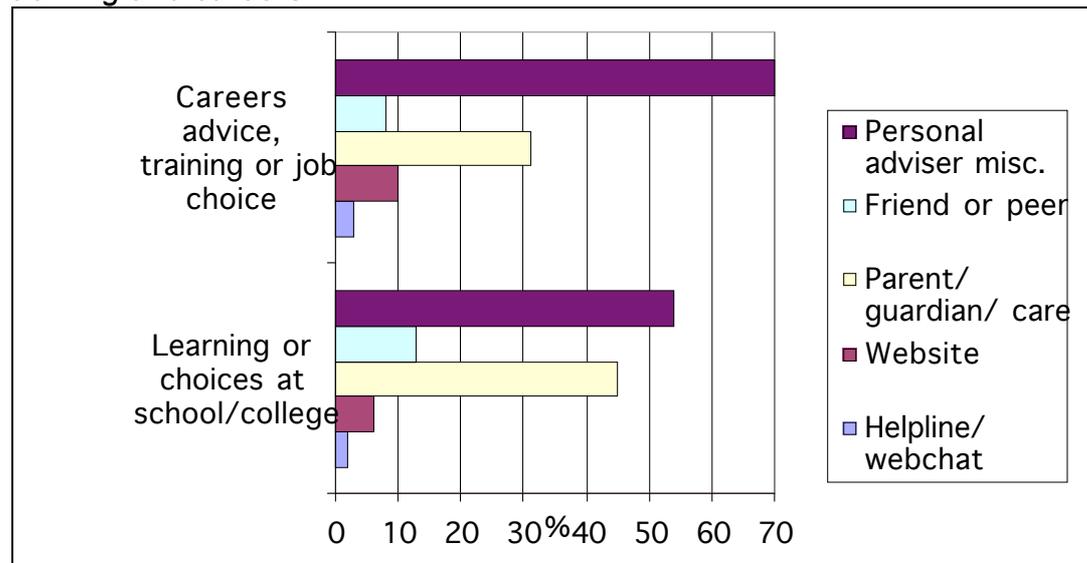
These criticisms imply that many young people expect Connexions advisors to tell them what career to follow, and how to achieve this. If so, there is a clear disconnect as this is not the purpose of Connexions advisors.

Although this research is old, a number of studies have found similar complaints (Halsall and Hollingworth, 2005, Young Voice, 2000).

## 7.5 Connexions website

7.5.1 As with most other topics, young people prefer face-to-face sources for information and advice for education, training and careers, rather than remote sources.

*Young people's preferred sources of information and advice on education, training and careers*



Source: Brahm (2004) Evaluation of the Connexions Direct Pilot, DfES/COI.

Research by Brahm showed that the Internet was not seen as first port of call for seeking information or advice. Reasons for not using the Internet for advice and careers information included the following:

- Family and teachers being more immediate sources
- Frustration with internet searching and imprecise information
- Not being aware of the correct sites
- Simply not thinking to look online for such advice or information.

This suggests that the internet is best used either as a database (as with jobs4U) or as a channel to a personal advisor through advisor online, email advice, or simply showing the number for the helpline.

## **7.6 School careers co-ordinators, libraries and lessons**

### **Careers co-ordinators**

**7.6.1** Research by Wild (1999) found that careers co-ordinators in schools were generally seen as ineffective at providing advice. However, it should be taken into account that this is not their primary role (that is why Connexions advisors exist). The main criticisms are that:

- Many squeeze in their careers role on top of their teaching duties, and consequently have little time to give one-to-one advice. The impression given is that time for careers teaching is taken when space can be found.
- Many are given the role as a way of providing a salary increase.
- They are given very little time on the timetable (usually with PSHE) to give general careers education and guidance to young people.
- They are not proactive - they tend only to offer information to pupils 'on demand', to pupils.
- They tend to provide information to pupils, rather than advise.
- They can be biased e.g. anti-Army, pro-school sixth form and anti-college.
- They lack adequate training.

### **School careers libraries**

**7.6.2** School careers co-ordinators are usually responsible for careers libraries. Wild (1999) identified three main with these libraries:

- Looking up careers information in libraries is generally unpopular among pupils, particularly boys and those with lower academic ability.
- The quality of school careers libraries varies widely and they are often under-resourced. The standard can vary from piles of unsorted and often out-of-date literature, to proper indexed careers files.
- Access to them or to the information they contain may also be limited to certain times of the day (e.g. second half of lunchtime).

### **Pupils are critical of careers lessons**

**7.6.3** Foskett found that only a very small minority of pupils felt that career lessons (which usually take place in PSHE/Citizenship) helped them sufficiently in their choices and post-16 decisions. They are often taught either by the careers co-ordinator, their form tutor, or a mixture. In particular, Foskett (2004a) notes that young people do not like receiving information on careers or pathways didactically. They prefer the more experiential routes

discussed in section 5 (work experience, college visits, and visits by employers).

“Careers guidance in this school does not help a thing, we are always asked to fill in targets every time we have PSHE lessons and the teachers don’t seem to know much about anything else other than their subjects.”

### **Paper-based versus multi-media and experiential information**

**7.6.4** The emphasis on paper-based and text-heavy sources of information is perceived very negatively by young people, especially lower ability young people and boys. They also have difficulty searching for the information they need from libraries and these libraries may not be open at times useful to them. Those who have no idea what they want to do often do not know what to look for, and the way information is stored in school libraries or careers rooms (e.g. in box files) often makes it difficult for them to browse through it for ideas. (Wild, 1999).

**7.6.5** Nevertheless, brochures and pamphlets are in themselves not a bad format, but they must be very visual. Magazine formats with real life case studies are preferred and are particularly attractive to girls.

**7.6.6** Their lifestyle experience is a multi-media one, so CD ROMS and videos are also potential formats provided they can view them either at home or somewhere in the school. However, they find it difficult to search for information on the internet, and prefer to use the internet as a tool for entertainment rather than advice. As noted in section 7.5, the internet is useful to them as a careers database (as with jobs4U), but not advice, as face-to-face contact is their preferred format for advice. Appendix 1 explores young people’s media preferences further in the context of information, advice and guidance.

**7.6.7** Nevertheless it was worth re-iterating the point that leaflets, teachers’ talks and websites are a poor substitute for experiential methods. Young people say that they are much better equipped to make informed decisions through work experience, college visits, and a taster of the college-based courses provided by programmes such as the Increased Flexibility Programme (Foskett 2004a).

## **7.7 Classroom teachers**

**7.7.1** Hemsley-Brown and Foskett (1999) have shown that the knowledge, which teachers have about the labour markets, the nature of specific careers and even the nature of particular education pathways, is poorly developed. Rather like parents and even careers co-ordinators, they are therefore not necessarily the best source of reliable information and advice for young people.

**7.7.2** Nevertheless, when teachers do give out advice, on the majority of occasions it is to encourage their students to stay in full-time education. A survey in Tower Hamlets found that 13% of Year 11 pupils intending to stay in education gave as one of their reasons, “Teachers encouraged me to carry on studying”, and 53% said that teachers had actually advised them to stay. In contrast, only 4% of those intending to leave gave as one of their reasons, “Teachers advised me to leave”, and 11% said that teachers had actually advised them to leave (Kysel, West and Scott 1990).

**7.7.3** However very few said that teacher advice would make them change their mind, either to stay or to leave (Kysel, West and Scott 1992). Similarly, Maychell and Evans (1998) found that Year 11 pupils who were intending to stay on were more likely than intending leavers both to talk to subject teachers about their careers plans and to find these teachers a helpful source of information and guidance.

## **7.8 The presence of a school sixth form**

### **The presence of a school sixth form does increase the likelihood of participation**

**7.8.1** Analysis of the Youth Cohort Study shows that, after controlling for a wide range of student characteristics including GCSE results, young people are more likely to stay in full-time education after age 16 if they spent Year 11 in a school with a sixth form (Payne 1998). The same result was obtained by Connor et al. (1999) from their national study of the intentions of students in the last year of compulsory education.

### **However, schools can give biased advice in order to ensure more able and “easier” pupils go to the sixth form**

**7.8.2** Schools sixth forms and FE colleges are currently funded according to the number of learners in their institutions. This naturally creates competition between these institutions. However, schools with school sixth forms are also the same institutions that provide advice to Year 11s on which types of pathway to follow after 16. Some researchers ( e.g. Foskett, Association of Colleges) argue that many schools with sixth forms deliberately or inadvertently provide little information on vocational paths that

could be followed in local FE colleges to students for whom this might be a more appropriate pathway. They may even prevent FE college representatives from attending careers days, preventing moderate or less able students from being informed about pathways that are alternatives to the more academic route usually on offer in the school sixth form.

## **7.9 Reducing the complexity of information for parents and young people**

**7.9.1** The current qualifications system is extremely complex, and given the solutions to disaffection discussed in section 5, it is unfortunate that vocational/work-based pathways are the most complex and poorly understood routes. Constant changes to the qualifications framework and the names of qualifications has not helped. This means that the information that young people and parents are given on vocational and work-based pathways is baffling. Inevitably, this means that young people and parents struggle to understand the very pathways which might be most appropriate for them (EdComs 2005). Given that young people from lower SEGs are more likely to opt for vocational and work-based pathways, and given that their parents are less likely to provide effective advice, this is doubly unfortunate.

**7.9.2** Foskett (2004b) states that:

“Information can act as a fog rather than a light, a confusion rather than a clarity. .... For those young people with a narrow view of the choices available, information can inform and help refine choice. This is particularly true of the majority of young people from high socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds where the dominant choice of proceeding to A Levels and then to university makes choosing relatively easy. For others the range of potential directions may be seen as greater – a pupil from a low SES background with no family history of post-16 participation has a wide search field to start in when looking for information, and for that pupil the information may confuse and stress rather than clarify and encourage their thinking.”

This underlines the need for better communication of the vocational and work-based pathways in particular to both parents and young people.

## **7.10 Summary: influencers**

### **Parents**

#### **7.10.1**

- For all young people, parents are the first port of call for advice on careers and education/training pathways.
- Parents from lower SEGs are less capable of providing information, advice and guidance to their children, but are still very influential.
- Likewise, parents with children who are likely to drop out of education or training are a very positive influence on keeping their child in the system.
- Parents do not necessarily provide accurate information, and are unlikely to understand the more complex routes (e.g. work-based, vocational, college-based) that may be more appropriate and motivating for young people considering leaving education and training at 16. This may lead to some moderate achievers believing that they have no other option beyond dropping out if they do not achieve five A\*–C grades.

### **Friends and Siblings**

#### **7.10.2**

- For the most part, friends and siblings are not a negative influence as some might fear, and older friends and siblings can be a more accurate source of information than parents.

### **Connexions**

#### **7.10.3**

- Connexions has an important role in providing information, advice and guidance to those who receive little from their parents, especially those in lower SEGs.
- The lower levels of informal advice given to young people who end up as NEETs or in work with no training underlines the need for formal channels such as Connexions, and careful identification of those who are not receiving effective information, advice and guidance from parents.
- There is a bias in the Connexions service towards NEETs, schools in poorer areas, and schools without sixth forms. It could be argued that Connexions is merely targeting its limited resources in those areas of greatest need where it can make the most difference, especially

given that parents from poorer SEG backgrounds tend to give less effective or intense IAG.

- However, the Rennison analysis in section 4.2 suggested that some moderate achievers became NEET or entered work with no training because they were unaware of other pathways. Connexions has a strong role here for raising awareness of vocational and work based pathways.

## **Careers lessons and careers co-ordinators**

### **7.10.4**

- The research on the effectiveness of careers education and guidance provided by careers co-ordinators, libraries and lessons is very negative. The role of careers co-ordinator is often not a priority for the post holder, and they often lack expertise. Libraries vary in quality and consist of a lot of print material that young people either cannot find their way around, or do not want to read. This suggests a very different model for the staffing, resourcing and delivery of careers education and guidance by schools is required that is more experiential and less didactic.

## **Paper-based and multi-media information**

### **7.10.5**

- Paper-based information is a poor tool for communicating with young people who are most likely to drop out of post-16 education and training. Multi-media is an alternative format, but in fact, face-to-face communication (e.g. Connexions, careers day), communicating through parents, work experience, and college visits are all more powerful.

## **Schools with sixth forms**

### **7.10.6**

- It is alleged that some schools with sixth forms are limiting information on pathways after 16. This could restrict the understanding of moderate and low ability young people about pathways other than the traditional academic sixth form.

# 8. Economic factors

## 8.1 Labour market

### **High local unemployment in the 1980s was a factor in increasing participation, though this driver has diminished**

**8.1.1** In the 1980s the Scottish School Leaver Surveys indicated a 'discouraged worker' effect, whereby, after controlling for confounding factors, young people were more likely to stay on in areas of high unemployment (Payne 2003). Likewise, Fergusson and Unwin (1996) found that local labour market opportunities appeared to influence destinations at 16. At a time of national economic recession, pupils from low income households formed a substantial proportion of those who stayed on in education and training at 16, and Fergusson and Unwin suggest that such pupils may have been drawn to stay on because of a scarcity of jobs and YT placements locally. However, the opposite is also true. Strong labour markets in certain areas can be a draw out of education and training after 16.

### **The strong labour market in the South in particular is an incentive to leave education and training at 16**

**8.1.2** Bynner, Ferri and Shepherd (1997) found that for the 26 year olds they surveyed who left school at 16, the impact of broad changes in the economy (ie. the decline in manufacturing industry) varied according to where the individual lived. They found that many 26 year olds who lived in areas in the South of England where there was a strong demand for labour could find work without going on a training scheme, whereas for those who lived in the declining industrial heartlands of the North and North West training schemes were often the only option. Similarly, Banks et al. (1992) found far lower levels of participation in work-based training schemes in Swindon (where there was a buoyant unskilled and semi-skilled youth labour market) than in Liverpool and Sheffield.

### **The relatively high wages for unqualified school leavers are an incentive to leave**

**8.1.3** Hannan et al. (1995) show that the wages paid to unqualified school leavers in Britain (based on 1987 data) are comparatively high, and that young people with a basic level of educational qualification receive no wage premium over those who are wholly unqualified. They argue that this has encouraged young people to leave school rather than to stay in education to try to improve their qualifications, despite the fact that young people with no

qualifications at all have a significantly greater risk of unemployment later on than young people who hold a basic level of qualification.

## 8.2 Income and EMAs

### Financial concerns are one factor in post-16 decisions

**8.1.4** Rennison (2005) found that financial concerns were another reason given for deciding against staying on in education. Nearly half (45.2%) of young people who did not continue in education said that they needed to earn more money. This finding was particularly prevalent among young people who had entered work (51.2%). One fifth (20.4%) of young people said they could not find a part-time job to combine with their studies and one-fifth said they could not afford to continue with education (18.3%). These two reasons were more likely to be given by young people in the NEET group or young people in work, rather than young people in training. In addition, 9.4% of young people in the NEET group said that their parents could not afford for them to stay on, as did 6.3% of young people in work.

*Table 19: Reasons for not continuing in full-time education*

	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET
It would have been too difficult to travel to school or college	4.6	6.9	10.8
Couldn't find any courses that I really wanted to do	26.6	31.6	29.4
Needed to earn more money that I could have done	42.5	51.2	43.4
Couldn't find a suitable part-time job to combine	14.4	22.0	24.7
Could not afford to remain in education	13.2	20.9	21.0

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at 16 who did not continue in full-time education after Year 11.

*Table 20: "I couldn't afford to continue studying after Year 11"*

	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Agree strongly	2.4	5.1	5.0	4.4
Agree	13.9	14.8	14.9	14.6
Neither agree nor disagree	9.6	12.6	13.0	12.1
Disagree	61.0	54.4	57.8	57.5
Disagree strongly	13.1	13.2	9.3	11.4

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were not in full-time education.

### Some young people combine part-time working with school work

**8.1.5** The sixth formers and teachers interviewed by Schagen, Johnson and Simkin (1996) noted that many young people were attempting to combine school work with long hours of part-time work during weekends and evenings during the week, with the teachers arguing that long hours of paid work impinged on study time and therefore jeopardised academic attainment.

## **Early quantitative analysis suggests EMA increased participation by 5.9% in pilots**

**8.1.6** Research by Ashworth (2002) found that EMAs had had an impact on participation, but a relatively small one:

- EMAs had raised post-16 full-time education participation among eligible young people in Year 12 by around 5.9% and for the combined eligible and ineligible population by around 3.7%.
- Just over one half of young people encouraged into post-16 education came from full-time work or training, and just under one half would otherwise have been not in education, employment or training (NEET).

This is reinforced by EMA tracking surveys (Act, 2005). When asked “To what extent, if any, would receiving money through the EMA scheme influence your decision to stay on in full-time education or training after Year 11?”, young people aged 15/16 in households with incomes under £30,000 responded as follows:

- On all waves around 7 out of 10 of those currently in Year 11 said they would stay on anyway and just over 1 out of 10 will leave anyway.
- Between 1 and 2 out of every 10 said that they ‘will’ or ‘might’ still reconsider leaving having heard about EMA.

**8.1.7** However, Delorenzi and Robinson (2005) note that the national launch of EMAs did not result in the size of effect on participation in full-time education at age 16 that would have been predicted in the pilots. Participation increased by only one per cent in 2004, partly offset by a fall of nearly half a per cent in the proportion enrolled in work-based learning.

## **EMAs has very little impact on retention**

**8.1.8** However, Ashworth (2002) found that EMA recipients were no less likely than non-recipients to have dropped out of full-time education by the start of Year 13, although drop out rates were higher amongst young people eligible for a full EMA than amongst those eligible for a partial EMA. However, recipients who had received a full EMA in Year 12 were more likely to have completed a one-year course than were their counterparts receiving a partial EMA, suggesting that EMA either encouraged more young people to take one-year courses or that it encouraged them to complete them.

## **Other factors are more important than income**

**8.1.9** In their qualitative research on the EMA, Legard et al (2001) found that the EMA had had a marginal impact on decisions to participate. Other factors were more important in the decision to stay on in FE:

‘The decision to study arose from the intrinsic interest of the young person in continuing with study or from the perceived long-term advantages to the young person of continuing in education.’

They conclude that EMAs only have an impact at the very margins:

‘The evidence suggests that EMA has had a definite impact on participants whose motivation to remain in education is fragile and amongst some participants from households in lower income brackets. The impact is generally more limited amongst participants, from all income bands, who have definite goals for pursuing their post compulsory education and are receiving emotional and financial support from parents to achieve this. The impact of EMA on retention may also be more limited where young people are less reliant on EMA as a central source of personal income.’

Individuals with either a strong dislike of education and studying or individuals highly committed to entering employment or work-based training were unlikely to be influenced to stay on in education by the EMA.

**8.1.10** Furthermore, the EMA was not large enough relative to the minimum wage to act as a financial incentive:

‘...it was clear that the level of EMA was not sufficiently high compared to earnings from full-time employment to keep someone on where they really did not wish to stay on in education.’

Indeed the analysis in the previous section on the labour market reinforces the view that the relatively high wages that school leavers can earn at 16 are a barrier to continued participation in education and training at 16.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Media preferences of young people

The analysis below shows that television (through adverts and storylines embedded in soaps) and cinemas (through adverts) are the most effecting media for reaching young people with messages, though adverts can only convey a simple message.

Advertorials in magazines are effective for reaching young women, but readership is very fragmented. The reach and effectiveness of each of these media is summarised below.

### *Television*

- In terms of frequency and duration of use, television is clearly the most popular form of media for young people, and an effective method for communicating messages to young people. They watch between 2.5 to three hours per week day.
- Just over 80% of 11-16 year olds have access to either satellite, cable or digital TV at home, and consequently can access multi-channel TV. As some adults upgrade their home entertainment systems, they may hand down the television to their children for their bedrooms.
- Advertising can contain a simple message that promotes a change in behaviour. However, because of the short period of time available, TV adverts can only effectively convey one simple message, and raise awareness of where young people can get further information and advice (e.g. a website, GP, helpline).
- Increasing take-up of multi-channel TV and consequent fragmentation of audiences means that is increasingly costly for government to place advertisements that will reach their target audience. However, choosing channels (such as MTV ) or programmes (e.g. the Simpsons, Eastenders) that all young people like can help government overcome this problem to some extent.
- Soaps are a favourite form of entertainment for young people, and young people become particularly involved in the storylines. Storylines about alcohol and other health issues can therefore be embedded in storyline. For example, sexual health messages have been incorporated into plotlines in television programmes such as “ER”, “Friends”, and “Dawson’s Creek”. However, unless themes are long running, young audiences tend to forget embedded messages.

### *Cinema*

- Cinema is extremely popular with this age group. Films offer escapism and excitement heightened by the larger screen and improved sound.
- Going to the cinema is also a social experience, as most teenagers go either with their family, or friends.
- Like television advertising, cinema advertising offers an opportunity to communicate a simple message to young people. The cinema experience makes this more impactful.
- Again, like television advertising, cinema advertising only allows small amount of information to be conveyed, and works better in conjunction with other mass media and non-mass media interventions in providing information and advice or in changing behaviour. Cinema advertisements should always offer details on websites or helplines.

### *Radio*

- Nine out of ten 11-16 year olds have a radio, and around half of all young people aged 13-21 listen to radio for at least one hour a day (or 7 hours a week), and 70% of 11–15 year olds also now have a radio in their bedroom. This makes radio the second most popular media in terms of hours and frequency.
- Despite a high proportion of young people listening to radio, many admit that current listening is passive so advertising or DJ chat covering serious issues such as illegal drugs or alcohol struggles to be heard. This makes radio a less effective medium.

### *Leaflets*

- Detailed print information is unlikely to be read by teenagers. This means that leaflets, pamphlets and text-heavy advertisements are unsuitable.

### *Magazines*

- In general, teenagers are less likely to read printed information such as leaflets or newspaper articles, but magazines are the exception to this rule. As a general rule, magazines are more popular with girls than with boys.
- Most girls buy at least one magazine a month, loyally sticking with their favourites for a few years before moving on to something more grown up. Fifty per cent of girls say that they have a few favourite magazines that they read regularly.
- Girls actually buy magazines to read information about sex, relationships, drugs, nutrition and general health, so it is an ideal media form for advertorials that aim to convey this type of information. They can read articles with information about embarrassing issues in their room or out outside of the house without any concerns about parents finding out.

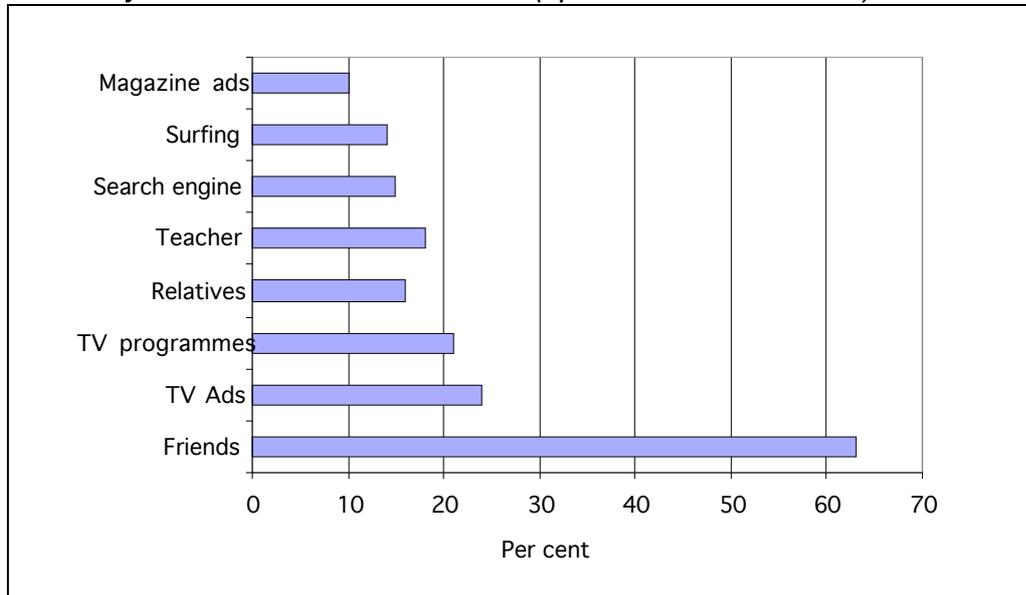
- However, it should be borne in mind that readership is fragmented. Even within a narrow age group, magazine consumption is relatively fragmented for girls. For example, the most popular magazine with 13–14 year olds is Bliss, but only 15% state this, whilst the most popular magazine for 15–16 year olds is Sugar, but only for 20% of these girls. Furthermore, after 16, they begin to consume magazines for adult women.
- Reaching boys with information and advice through magazines is much harder because they tend to buy computer magazines or sports magazines. Health-related information on issues such as illegal drugs or sex would simply not sit well here. Furthermore, the magazine market for boys is even more fragmented than that for girls.

### *Internet*

- Almost all young people aged 11–16 have access to a computer at home (95% in 2004), and half of these had their own computer. Eighty five% of 11–16 year olds have internet access at home via a PC, but only half have a broadband connection at home.
- The main reasons for using the internet for both boys and girls are games, school work and using email, though the ranking of these activities differs by gender. Using the internet for communication and homework is more important for girls, whereas games are more important for boys.
- The internet is not naturally seen as a source of information and advice for sensitive topics. It is more of a “toy” as opposed to a general information tool. The main reasons for using the internet for both boys and girls are games, school work and using email, though the ranking of these activities differs by gender. Using the internet for communication and homework is more important for girls, whereas games are more important for boys.
- Even at 16-18, the chief use of internet is for fun. Qualitative research for Need2Know showed that apart from school or college work and directed search (Google, Yahoo, Ask), 16-18 year olds prefer websites with “silly stuff to giggle over with friends”, as well as sites with “games and cheat sites, ring-tones and downloads.” (Virtual Survey 2004)
- Given young people’s difficulty in finding information, a key issue with any website is raising awareness of its existence. The main source of awareness of any particular websites is word of mouth, not search engines. The difficulty of raising awareness of a public website is illustrated by the Teenage Pregnancy Campaign. After three and a half years of advertising, only 24% of 13-21 year olds could spontaneously recall the RUThinking.co.uk website for the Teenage Pregnancy Campaign. These awareness levels were higher once the website had been described to them (41%). In fact, word of mouth is very important in raising awareness of websites. 65% of young 11-16 year olds say that they find out about websites from “friends”. Only

25% mention TV ads or TV programmes and only 15% mention surfing – emphasising the difficulty they have in finding websites through searches.

*How do you find out about websites (spontaneous answers)?*



Source: NOP Family – Kids.net (wave 7), December 2001

- Reaching the socially excluded: Households without access to the internet at home are more likely to come from poorer socio-economic groups, yet these are often important target groups for health campaigns.

Socio-economic group	% with access
AB	83
C1	72
C2	52
DE	30

Source: MORI, for the BBC Charter review, 2004

*Mobile phones*

- From a very early age, most children aspire to owning a mobile phone – they are an essential status symbol for most young people across the age spectrum. Some children as young as seven have already acquired their first phone, which are normally hand-me-downs from older siblings or parents. Once they reach eleven and start secondary school, mobile phones are a ‘must-have’ accessory and as a rule most own at least one. Among younger teens, mobile phone ownership is seen as a sign of growing up. If these younger teens do not own a mobile phone, they often feel excluded from their peer group (Wireless World Forum, 2005)

- The UK Children Go Online survey found that the mobile phone and text messaging is far more important than the PC as a means of communication for all purposes. Furthermore, mobile phones, as well as all communication technologies, are used by young people to contact friends. However, young people communicate locally. Surprisingly, the study found that “access to these new communication technologies, both mobile phones and IM, have not resulted in larger or geographically wide-spread social circles.” (Livingstone, 2004)
- Text messaging is by far the most popular use for a mobile phone for teenagers. This preference is partly cultural, but the way in which calls and texts are charged also influences this - calls are too expensive and use up too much of their airtime. 77% of boys and 23% of girls are ‘heavy texters’ – they routinely send more than 15 messages a day. Boys aged 13-15 are the heaviest texters, some send more than 30 messages a day. Text messages are used by 78% of 13 and 14 year olds to ask peers a direct question they feel uncomfortable about asking; only 30% said they would use email to ask the same question (Wireless World Forum, 2004).
- Picture messaging is less popular than text messaging. Thirty seven% of young people use picture messaging. This is most popular with 13 and 14 year olds – 51% send picture messages. Purchasing ringtones for mobiles is popular with just over half (55%) of young people who own a mobile. It is most popular with the 11-14 year olds. Downloading music onto mobile phones is also popular with young people. In the past it was seen as a status symbol among peers, but this is no longer the case. It is now a tool for peer group reinforcement. Downloading games onto mobile phones is a much smaller market – possibly because unlike music downloads, people need access to the internet (Wireless World Forum, 2004).
- Parents have a very different view of the purpose of a mobile phone. They justify mobile phones, particularly amongst young children, as a safety device and therefore offer to pay for top-up cards as part of the child’s pocket money, or as an extra.
- The fact that young people see their mobile phone as a tool for communicating with friends, might suggest that it would not be an appropriate entry point for seeking information and advice. However, 70% of young people aged 9-19 in the UK Children Go Online survey stated that they would prefer to use the phone to get advice, as opposed to 14% that said they would use SMS, and 6% who said they would use email or instant messaging (Livingstone, 2004)

## **Appendix 2: Vocational qualifications – a classroom-based route for middle achievers?**

Young people taking vocational qualifications in school or college exhibit a mixture of the characteristics of those who stay on in education to do academic qualifications (female, non-white) and those who drop out of education and training (lower attainment, truancy, less advantaged backgrounds).

Researchers also suggest that vocational qualifications have become positioned as a general qualification route for “middle achievers”, rather than a route for those that actually want to take a vocational pathway.

### **Lower attainers**

Good GCSEs greatly increase the likelihood of taking academic qualifications. In Cohort 11 of the Youth Cohort Study, Payne (2004) found that 84% of young people in the top third of GCSE results had an academic qualification as their main study aim and only 11% had a vocational qualification as their main aim. For those in the middle third of GCSE results the corresponding figures were 32% academic and 46% vocational, while in the bottom third they were 7% academic and 46% vocational (Payne, 2004).

### **A route for lower achievers?**

Course choice in Year 12 is strongly influenced by GCSE results, and students who opt for A levels have on average substantially better results in GCSEs than students who choose vocational courses. This pattern is of course partly determined by entry requirements for A level courses, but Payne found that A levels remain the choice of the very large majority of students with good GCSE results in preference to Advanced GNVQs (“vocational A level”).

However Wolf (1997) argues that, in reality, young people who take these qualifications do not choose to take them because they want a vocational option. She argues that GNVQs (an ancestor of vocational A levels) became ‘a general education award for the middle achievement level of 16-19 year olds’ (Wolf 1997). She argues that a tri-partite structure has developed in education and training at age 16 to 19 of academic A levels, broad vocational GNVQs and occupationally specific.

### **Demographic patterns of those taking vocational qualifications**

Just as young people with poorer GCSEs are more likely to drop out of post-16 education, they are also more likely than high achievers to do vocational qualifications. The demographic characteristics of those taking vocational qualifications are very similar to those not participating in education or training.

A multinomial logistic regression model was used by Payne (2004) to explore differences between three groups of 16/17 year olds defined by their main study aim (academic, vocation or no qualifications). It showed that:

- Gender: although overall young men were slightly more likely to be taking vocational qualifications than young women, the sex gap was reversed when GCSE results were held constant, with females significantly more likely to choose vocational qualifications than males with similar GCSE results.
- Ethnicity: Young people from minority ethnic groups who had good GCSE results were more likely than young whites with similar GCSE results to take academic qualifications. However if they had poor GCSEs, they were more likely than their white peers to take vocational qualifications rather than none at all. As with overall participation rates, the same pattern was found for all the minority ethnic groups for which sample numbers were big enough to be treated separately.
- Truancy: Past truancy was slightly associated with taking vocational rather than academic qualifications, but much more strongly associated with taking no qualifications at all.
- Less advantaged background: Those with a less advantaged home background, measured by parental occupation, education and housing tenure, were more likely to take vocational rather than academic qualifications.
- Negative school experience: Those who had had a negative school experience were more likely to take vocational than academic qualifications

## Appendix 3: Work-based learning – increasingly a positive choice

Apprenticeships have to a certain extent overcome the negative image associated with earlier government-supported youth training schemes. Nevertheless Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) found that Year 11 students gave a number of reasons for not choosing a Modern Apprenticeship (now simply called an Apprenticeship). They believed that the qualifications it led to were not high enough for their career needs; that the apprenticeship route was not available for their chosen career; that the vocational route was too narrow; that vocational qualifications had little market value; and that they could get vocational qualifications more quickly full-time at college than through an apprenticeship. Overall, the authors considered that work-based training was a 'second tier' choice.

In contrast to this negative picture, Payne (2000) found that the large majority of young people who had left school to enter work-based training rated 'learning a skill' and 'being trained to do a job' as very important factors in their choice of route, and that these factors ranked slightly higher than 'finding a secure job' or 'earning money'.

Likewise, Rennison (2005) found that over half of all 16 year olds agreed that "The qualifications you get on government training schemes are just as valuable as those you can get at school or college."

*Table 21: "The qualifications you get on government training schemes are just as valuable as those you can get at school or college"*

	Full-time education	Work with training	Work with no training	NEET	All
Agree strongly	3.1	15.2	5.8	7.3	4.8
Agree	42.5	59.0	53.5	51.9	45.6
Neither agree or disagree	40.5	18.0	28.3	26.6	36.3
Disagree	13.0	7.3	12.1	12.7	12.4
Disagree strongly	1.0	0.5	0.3	1.5	0.9

Base: Combined cohorts of young people who were interviewed at 16

### *Low retention on apprenticeship courses*

Retention in "government-supported training" (GST - i.e. the equivalent of today's apprenticeships) was studied in YCS Cohort 10 by (Payne, 2003). A quarter of the group left their first GST place within four months, and by the spring of the third post-compulsory year, when they were aged 18/19, only three in ten had stayed more than a year in their first GST place. However, these indicated that it was the quality of the training on offer rather than the characteristics of the trainees that made the difference; notably, no significant effects were found for GCSE results, sex or ethnicity.

## Appendix 4: One World Research & Communications Typologies

This appendix reproduces the descriptions of the typologies of disaffected young people created by One World Research & Communications (1998) discussed in section 4.4.

### Rebels Without A Cause

These young people were characterized by being:

- bright
- articulate
- clearly capable
- ambitious - but not through the vehicle of formal education

The only learning they claim to be interested in is the so-called 'university of life'. They were clearly moving away from formal education including further education. While they recognise that they will not be qualified in the formal, standard way they believe that their personality and their demonstrable intelligence (or street-wise nature) will 'win through.'

Importantly, therefore, these particular young people are not looking to simply 'drop out'. In marked contrast, they were quite ambitious - believing that they will do well in a career by sheer force of their natural talents and aptitudes.

Those still at school - and those who have already left school attest to this – are impatient to leave and 'get out into the world and test themselves.' School is characterised by being boring and unchallenging:

'School was a complete waste of time ... all I ever wanted was to leave and get a job and get on with my life.' Year 12. Male, South

'I just got bored. It's not challenging and it's not interesting. So you just bog off and do something else.' Year 13. Male, North

'I know many people older than me who have left school straight away and are in really well paid jobs and they have no qualifications. They happen to have the mouth and confidence, like me, to chat their way up.' Year 13, Female. South

'I enjoy working - it's better than being at school,' Year 12, Male, South

'I can earn £150 a week at Burger King. Why go to school - what's the point? I know I'll make Assistant Manager once I've left school -from there I can go anywhere.' Year 11, Male, South

They do not feel that formal education is for them and they feel resentful that they are forced to partake in the system. They are also seemingly asking for no help in terms of training opportunities. If anything, they simply want a door left open for them should they decide later (early to mid twenties) to return to formal education.

### **Angry Young Rebels**

These young people were also undoubtedly bright and capable, yet appear to be deeply enraged at the enforced discipline of school life. In many ways these young people appear to be polarity responders - that is, they react with hostility (either overt or passive) to most requests or suggestions. In other words, they are seemingly compelled to do the opposite - even when they 'know' that what they are being asked to do is, ultimately, for their own good. Polarity responders are hence those people who 'cut off their nose to spite their own face.'

Unlike 'Rebels Without A Cause' who are moving away from formal education, 'Angry Young Rebels' seem to put enormous energy into moving against the system.

Of course, once a person adopts this moving against posture it is very difficult to encourage co-operative behaviour. -Disciplinary action generally tends to further entrench the position.

However, if we look beneath the manifest behaviour, it is quite clear that these young people are desperate for recognition and respect. Herein lies the central paradox. To be 'desperate' for something, like respect, makes its absence more noticeable and makes its occurrence virtually impossible. Thus the Moving Against pattern is self-reinforcing. It is not surprising, therefore that these young people - by their own admission - are, in the school context, disruptive, disengaged and disdainful of the very people (ie. teachers, those in authority) from whom they crave respect:

'I hated school. I didn't like people telling me what to do when I was at school. I can't stand being told what to do by people.' Year 13. Male. North

'I'm not interested in training to get a job. I can't be arsed.' Year 10. Male, North

'What does the Government get out of us getting good grades?' Year II. Female. North

Many of the black young people men spoken to seemed to fall into this category. Their experiences of school were characterised by conflicts with teachers, perceived racial discrimination and this resulted in a complete alienation from the educational system. These young people need a very different learning context ie. one that enables them to experience their own

competence and progress and, despite their 'Moving Against' attitude, much hands-on guidance. In other words their need for respect needs to be cleverly subverted. Being told they are respected or being encouraged to work hard in order to receive respect is highly unlikely to work. They must experience respect for themselves through their own actions. Coercion no matter how well disguised is unlikely to work.

### **Cool Dudes**

Like the previous two groups, 'Cool Dudes' were obviously able but quite seriously under-applying themselves. They know and can quite readily acknowledge - in contrast to 'Angry Young Rebels' that they do want a good education. However, now is 'not the right time for them.' Life is predicated on having fun - even if this means simply 'hanging out with mates doing nothing'.

Their basic position is that you only live once so 'why spoil it by working hard at school-work.' In many senses these particular young people are enjoying an extended childhood. While 'Angry Young Rebels' are clearly traumatized by their predicament, 'Cool Dudes' are not at all traumatized – quite the contrary. They feel that they are in no danger from being under-qualified - as at the back of their mind they 'know' they will 'knuckle down' in due course - but only in their own time.

Overall, they are disinclined. Because of this they can be labelled disruptive. However, their disruptive behaviour is not fuelled by the anger and resentment of 'Angry Young Rebels.' It is fuelled simply by the need to get out of studying/ working for as long as possible. While they are not traumatized by their situation they are, of course, subject to many pressures from school and/or parents. But these pressures and restrictions are just 'part of the game' - challenges to avoid or defeat:

'I like doing anything but work.' Year 10, Female, South

'I enjoyed going in (to school) to see my friends ... that was it really'  
Year 12, Female, North

'Yeah ... overall school has been good. You get to see your mates every day' Year 11, Male, North

'You enjoy school for prattling around - seeing what you can get away with.' Year 11, Female. Midlands

In terms of education and training, these young people do want to achieve. However, they want to do this in their own time. For many they cannot see themselves 'settling down' as such until their early to mid twenties. In this respect training courses that they can see value in, for example, have little or no appeal to them at this stage of their life.

### **Quitters**

Unlike the former three groups display, 'Quitters' very obviously lack self-confidence. In essence they believe they have tried and failed. But this sense of failure is profound. They seem to really feel that they have failed - period. Therefore, they cannot see much point in continuing to struggle with studying any further.

Further study is seen as without purpose as it will only lead to further failure. These young people are profoundly discouraged and disempowered. They do hope (almost against hope) that 'one day' they will get a decent job that 'pays well'. However, they seem to lack any sense of how they, themselves, can help bring this about. In many ways whenever they think about studying, training, or making their way in the world, the task seems so large and overwhelming that they are 'defeated' before they've even started. Some of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys were characterized by this outlook.

These young people seem to need realistic encouragement and very small sized tasks which they can begin to succeed at. Importantly, these tasks must be self-contained in the young person's perception. If they are seen simply as a step onto something bigger then they can quickly feel overwhelmed and hence defeated again.

### **Settlers**

These young people often appeared to be very similar to 'Quitters.' However, on deeper probing it became clear that they have settled for an undemanding life. Rather than feeling defeated they have actively 'resigned'. They achieve and do the minimum to 'get by'/'have a quiet life'. In contrast to 'Cool Dudes' they are not really ambitious in any noticeable way. Their ideal job is one that pays well (very well) yet makes little, or ideally, no demands on them at all. They are, in essence, disinclined.

'Settlers' do not display this sense of low self-belief. In contrast, they seem quite content. We suspect that the underlying dynamics are quite complex, and involve a denial of certain feelings of low self-confidence. That is, they project a level of self-confidence and justify their lack of ambition and diligence in terms of 'why bother to work hard - I'm doing alright as I am'.

We suspect though that this stance masks a very real fear of failure which would be predicated on a lack of self-belief. Thus, it is likely that 'Settlers' are a sub-set of 'Quitters.' What is clear - from an operational viewpoint - is that 'Settlers' seem to respond more to the 'stick than the 'carrot'. Unlike 'Angry Young Rebels' we doubt if they are polarity responders and hence suspect that they can be motivated by, for example, withdrawal of privileges. These young people need, we believe, to be shown that they can achieve – with achievement in itself being a confidence building and hence virtuous process.

## **Strugglers**

In many ways 'Quitters' and 'Settlers' could be said to be struggling. However, the distinction we are making here is that 'Strugglers' were clearly lacking suitable support/role models. For them learning is hard and they experience no consistent guidance. Again the lack of role models and informed parental support seemed to affect Pakistani and Bangladeshi young men particularly.

What distinguishes 'Strugglers' is that they often had a burning desire as a child to 'be a somebody' and still harbour this desire. While they may well feel that the dream is all but extinguished, they equally still believe in it and genuinely believe that given the right help would - at the very least - begin to achieve some measure of success. Thus 'Strugglers' have not quit or 'settled for an easy life' - rather they feel profoundly stymied:

'I really wanted to be an actress but nobody ever took me seriously. I still want to be an actress but I know it's not going to happen.' Year 13, Female, South

'I never really got a chance at school. They never really gave me a chance.' Year 12, Female, North

Not surprisingly, "Strugglers" were invariably from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Undoubtedly, many do have social problems which need to be addressed before they can engage in any meaningful way in concerted studying/ training. We also found that these young people were often benefiting from informal mentoring - often with a teacher performing this role:

'My form tutor - he really cared about my problems with my family (being in care etc) and he helped me.' Year 12, Female, North

These particular young people are quite at risk from drifting into things like alcohol and drugs as a palliative. However, it is important to stress that they do want to do well and are the group, across the typology, who would, we feel, benefit the most from ongoing mentoring.

## **Escapists**

Unlike 'Quitters' these young people dream of being 'discovered and achieving 'fame and fortune'. They are waiting. Waiting for teachers and the world to, recognise that underneath their lack of interest and achievement they are, in fact, talented.

This group are probably more than any other most at risk from becoming involved in inappropriate behaviour; truancy, drugs, petty crime:

'I've just been in court a few days ago for assault.' Year 10, Male.  
North

In many ways, these young people feel victims of the system. A system that they believe does not recognise or nurture their talents. Important to say, though, that their talents - such as music, DJ-ing - do not include formal educational subjects - at least in an obvious sense. '

Thus, in terms of formal education they are both disinterested and disconnected. The need is, we believe, to find ways to recognise, and utilize their talents. While this poses obvious challenges it is, we believe, feasible to find ways of gearing elements of the National Curriculum, for example, toward these wider, non-scholastic interests.

### **Hedgers**

This group posed some difficulty in profiling. It was extremely difficult to tell from their self-reports whether these young people are able or not - and whether they are 'Strugglers' or 'Quitters.'

On balance though, we feel that they are a distinct group. The distinction is that these young people are not directionless but simply unwilling to commit themselves until they know the outcome of exams, job prospects etc. They seem therefore, to need an abundance of re-assurance and hands-on support.

Of course, many students go through periods of 'hedging their bets'. However, 'Hedgers' appear to take this behaviour to an extreme. That is, they adopt it as an attitude which comes to dominate their thinking.

Having said this, we believe that these young people are not lost to education emotionally - although they could easily be lost due to their uncommitted approach. We do not feel that these young people are in any way disaffected. While they, in all probability, demand more from teachers and career-guidance professionals than more secure students they are, we feel, not properly part of the disaffected cohort, unless failure (at exams or job interviews) 'pushes' them into adopting a more resigned attitude. In this case "Hedgers" may well be latent "Quitters":

"I don't know what I'll do. If my grades are good I'll stay on. If not, well, I'll just have to wait and see". Year 10, Female, South

It could be argued that 'Hedgers' are simply being disingenuous. Indeed, this is precisely what we thought during our initial analysis. On further reflection we would argue that they are, while not being disaffected, certainly an at risk group.

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