

staying on

**a study of young people's decisions
about school sixth forms, sixth-form colleges
and colleges of further education**

**Wendy Keys
Karen Maychell
with
Cathryn Evans
Rachel Brooks
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Within the NFER, there are numerous individuals who have helped this report to come to fruition and to whom we are very grateful. However, special thanks must go to Jay Day for his contribution to the data collection phase of the research.

WK
KM
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PREFACE

In November 1996, the NFER embarked on two complementary studies concerned with factors affecting young people's decisions about post-16 education. One study, which was carried out in collaboration with the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA), focused on young people who had decided to stay on in full-time education after the age of 16. The other was concerned with pupils who had decided to leave full-time education at the age of 16 and is based on pupils' responses at two points in their secondary education (Years 8 and 11).

This report is about young people who stayed on in full-time education after the age of 16. It is based on findings from students in three types of post-16 educational provision: school sixth forms; sixth-form colleges; and further education colleges. It focuses on the reasons young people decided to continue in full-time education, the factors that affected their choice of course and institution, their views on the careers education and guidance that they received and their early impressions of whether the course matched their expectations. It provides hard evidence of the factors that influence students' choices about post-16 provision and will therefore be of particular interest to everyone involved with young people around this crucial transition point in their lives.

The second report is called *Leaving at 16: Factors Affecting Young People's Decision to Leave Full-time Education*. It focuses on Year 11 pupils and Year 8 pupils who intended to leave full-time education at the age of 16. The report builds up a picture of these pupils, in terms of gender, social class and expected educational achievement. More importantly, it explores the reasons pupils gave for deciding to leave full-time education and the factors that may have influenced such opinions, including their attitudes towards school and their views on the careers education and guidance. The main emphasis is on highlighting the factors that can be influenced by changes in policy and practice. As such it will be of significant interest to all those who are keen to further young people's educational opportunities and career development.

A third publication in this series is entitled *Staying or Leaving? A Literature Review of Factors Affecting the Take-up of Post-16 Options*. It focuses on qualitative and quantitative research carried out in this country about decisions concerning post-16 destination and covers the period between 1988 and 1997. It is available from the NFER Communications Unit, price £5.

FOREWORD

Over the past months, NFER has been conducting a major research project on the ways in which 16-year-olds decide on their next step. The project was initiated and sponsored by the Council of Local Education Authorities (CLEA) and has resulted in three publications.

This report, the third in the series, focuses on young people who have chosen to continue their education after the age of 16. The research on which it was based was jointly funded by CLEA and the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) and carried out in collaboration with FEDA research colleagues. We very much welcome this collaboration which has enabled us to undertake a more detailed exploration of the views and experiences of those who opted to continue their education in a range of post-16 contexts.

We should like to express our gratitude to all the young people who gave their time to participate in this study. We very much hope that their voices will be heard by policy makers, practitioners and others who have the interests of the next generation at heart.

Judy Bradley
Assistant Director, NFER

This report on young people's attitudes to the educational choices they face at 16 is welcome and timely. If we are to continue to improve standards of achievement by young people we will need to reshape our institutions and curricula. Without listening to the voices of young people themselves we will always be in danger of getting it wrong.

From the point of view of FEDA, this research forms part of a programme of Strategic Research. It complements other investigations into individual experiences of learners, gained through longitudinal interview studies, and research into the causes of student withdrawal from courses.

This report presents information which is accessible to all, whether researcher, teacher or manager, parent or learner. It is recommended to all those wishing to understand better how young people perceive their futures.

Andrew Morris
Head of Research and Consultancy, FEDA

1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Previous studies of the factors affecting the choices young people make at the end of their compulsory schooling have largely focused on one of three main aspects. First, a considerable body of research has examined the home background of young people, exploring the impact of their social class, gender and ethnicity on their post-16 destinations. Secondly, in the last decade, studies have focused on the contribution of individual schools to the qualifications obtained by young people at 16, and their subsequent destinations. These have indicated that, although the family background and ability of students are major determinants of achievement levels and post-16 choice, schools in similar circumstances can have very different impacts on their students. Thirdly, some studies have examined the effect of wider influences such as the economic climate and specific educational reforms on the choices young people make.

◆ Academic attainment

There has been widespread agreement amongst researchers that the level of academic qualifications a young person achieves at the end of compulsory education is closely linked to their subsequent destination. For example, Gray *et al.* (1993) argued that:

the formal qualifications young people obtain in the examinations they sit at the end of their period of compulsory schooling are overwhelmingly the most powerful predictors of further educational participation. In general, we have found the relationships to be linear ones. The better their qualifications the more likely a person is to stay on (p.4).

In addition to predicting the likelihood of leaving full-time education or staying, it is clear that attainment is strongly correlated with destinations within each of these two routes. Payne (1995) concluded that:

GCSE results are the biggest single influence on staying on rates. In full-time education after 16, they are closely related to the courses followed and to the chances of leaving after one year (p. v).

◆ Social class

Numerous studies have demonstrated that attainment at the age of 16 is positively correlated with a young person's social class. Drew's (1995) analysis of the Youth Cohort Study data revealed that a student's socio-economic group was more important than gender or ethnicity in predicting attainment at 16, while Lynn (1996) found similar results amongst young people completing their compulsory education in Scotland. Given the strong relationships found between attainment and post-16 destination, discussed above, it is likely that social class will also be strongly associated with post-16 choice.

Furthermore, even when researchers have controlled for academic attainment, social class has been shown to have had an influence on post-16 destination. Cheng's (1995) analysis of data from the Youth Cohort Study, for young people who completed their compulsory schooling in 1989–90, revealed that amongst students with similar GCSE results, those with parents who had high-status jobs and good qualifications were more likely than their peers to stay on in full-time education.

Similarly there is some evidence that the *aspirations* of young people are also influenced by social class. Penn and Scattergood (1992) found that the young people from middle-class families in their study were much more likely to seek professional jobs and higher education than their peers from working-class backgrounds, regardless of which schools they attended, and students with fathers in manual jobs had a greater likelihood of aiming for similar jobs themselves. However, the authors did not link the relative levels of achievement of the students in their sample with their expectations. It is possible, therefore, that the differences could be explained, or certainly strongly influenced, by realistic expectations of different levels of attainment at the end of compulsory schooling.

◆ Gender

Differences in attainment

Numerous studies have documented the differential performance of boys and girls during primary and secondary school (for example: Stobart *et al.*, 1992; Elwood, 1995; Warrington and Younger, 1996; Murphy and Elwood, 1997) and, given the correlation between academic attainment and post-16 destination, it is unsurprising that there are strong gender differences in the proportions of young people who choose to remain in full-time education and those who choose to leave. For example, data from the Youth Cohort Study indicated that in 1996, 75 per cent of 16-year-old women were pursuing full-time education, but only 68 per cent of their male counterparts were doing the same thing (GB. DFEE, 1997). Many researchers and policy makers have sought to explain these differences, suggesting, for example, that boys and girls experience different processes of socialisation in schools (Mac an Ghaill, 1994) and that teacher expectations of boys and girls may be different (Elwood, 1995).

Differences in staying-on rates, independent of attainment

However, Cheng's (1995) analysis of the Youth Cohort Study revealed that, even when attainment in GCSE had been taken into consideration, girls had higher staying-on rates than boys. Similar patterns of gender participation in post-16 education and training were found in Northern Ireland (McWhirter *et al.*, 1988) and in Scotland (Raffe *et al.*, 1994). Amongst those who chose to leave school at 16, McWhirter *et al.* revealed that men were more likely than women to gain full-time jobs on completing their compulsory education, but were also more likely to be unemployed.

A number of studies have suggested that these differences may be determined at an early age: Keys and Fernandes (1995) asked pupils in the final year of primary school and first year of secondary school whether or not they thought they would remain at school or college after the age of 16. Girls, in both phases of schooling, were more likely than boys to intend to remain in education and were less likely to intend to leave school as soon as possible.

Gender stereotyping of subjects

Amongst young people choosing to remain in full-time education, gender stereotyping has been shown to affect the subjects they study (Colley *et al.*, 1994a and 1994b; Sharp *et al.*, 1996; Whitehead, 1996). A report by OFSTED and the Equal Opportunities Commission (1996) noted that:

The most troubling aspect of the gender pattern of 6th form study is that, despite their success in these subjects at GCSE, relatively few young women are taking A-level courses which are wholly mathematical, scientific or technological, thereby denying themselves some career opportunities in science, engineering and technology (p.13).

Similarly, Whitehead (1996) found evidence of gender differences in choices of A-level subjects. Her research revealed that boys showed much more bias in their subject choices than girls, and those boys who chose stereotypically masculine subjects at A-level (such as physics and mathematics) were much more likely to support traditional sex roles (and to conform to traditional notions of masculinity) than girls who chose stereotypically feminine subjects (such as arts and languages). Whitehead suggested that boys may be choosing 'sex-appropriate' subjects in order to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity. By implication, it would seem that a stereotypical notion of femininity is less pervasive amongst girls.

◆ Ethnicity**Post-compulsory education**

Several analyses of data from the Youth Cohort Study and the Labour Force Survey indicated that both African Caribbean young people and those of Asian origin had higher participation rates than white youths in their first year of post-compulsory education, and these differences had widened significantly by their third post-compulsory year (Drew, 1995; Drew *et al.*, 1992; Jones, 1993). The Youth Cohort Study for 1996 indicated that 86 per cent of 16-year-olds from ethnic minorities were engaged in full-time education, but only 70 per cent of their white counterparts (GB. DFEE, 1997). Routes within post-compulsory education have also been found to differ with ethnic group. For example, white young people were more likely to be taking traditional academic routes, and young people of African Caribbean origin, vocational courses (Drew *et al.*, 1992; Drew, 1995;

Gillborn and Gipps, 1996; Jones, 1993). However, to a large extent these differences were related to the qualifications the young people achieved at 16. Drew's study (1995), for example, revealed that the proportion of African Caribbean young people pursuing A-levels at 16 was comparatively small, but this was in large part due to the small proportion who had achieved five or more O-level passes.

Possible explanations for these differences

In seeking to explain these differences in post-16 destinations, researchers have pointed to cultural differences between ethnic groups and differences in their perceptions of the value of education (for example: Basit, 1996; Lightbody *et al.*, 1997). Others have concentrated on the way the education system, generally, impacts upon different ethnic groups (Gillborn, 1997), on the influence of teachers' expectations (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Sewell, 1997; Wrench *et al.*, 1996) and on discrimination in advice provided by the Careers Service (Cross *et al.*, 1990; Wrench, 1990).

◆ Influence of the school

Although the family background and ability of students continue to be recognised as major determinants of achievement levels, and thus post-16 destinations, research has demonstrated that schools in similar social circumstances can achieve very different levels of educational progress (for example: Cheng, 1995; Creemers, 1994; Fergusson and Unwin, 1996; Mortimore *et al.*, 1988; Nuttall *et al.*, 1989; Smith and Tomlinson, 1989). However, a relatively small number of studies have focused specifically on the choices made by young people at 16. One such study, conducted by Gray *et al.* (1993), which examined post-16 participation in full-time education, did reveal substantial differences between schools. Amongst students with similar qualification levels, some schools were found to 'boost' participation and others to 'depress' it, amounting to a variance of ten per cent. Similarly, Paterson and Raffe's (1995) study of those who stayed on in full-time education in Scotland found that the propensity to stay on, of both high and low achievers, depended on which school they had attended. In other words, the influence of the school seemed to have been a major factor. Interestingly, this propensity was found to a greater extent among middle-class males than females or working-class males.

Although studies have not been able to identify firmly the reasons for these differences between schools, researchers have suggested that in some schools, a distinct culture of staying on operates, affecting the decisions young people make at the end of their compulsory schooling (Fergusson and Unwin, 1996). Positive associations have also been found between the staying-on rate and school characteristics such as the rate of teacher turnover in a school (Cheng, 1995).

◆ Careers advice

A number of studies have outlined the sources of advice used by young people as they decide what to do at the end of their compulsory schooling (for example: Foskett and Hesketh, 1997; Witherspoon, 1995) but, once background characteristics were controlled for, these have not provided evidence that careers guidance had any direct effect on young people's destinations (Howieson and Croxford, 1996). However, recent research has indicated that good careers education and guidance has given students increased confidence in their decision-making abilities (Courtenay and McAleese, 1993), a high level of careers-related skills (Morris *et al.*, 1995) and an increased sense of satisfaction with their post-16 choices (Saunders *et al.*, 1996).

◆ Effect of unemployment

Research indicates that the impact of national levels of unemployment on participation in post-16 education and training has varied over the past ten years. In England, during the late 1980s, staying-on rates increased, despite a decrease in national unemployment levels (Gray *et al.*, 1993; Cheng, 1995; Jesson *et al.*, 1991). However, it is likely that the subsequent levelling off of participation rates in post-compulsory education between 1994 and 1996 was due to improvements in economic conditions and the greater availability of jobs for young people, especially as the fall was largely among those with lower-grade GCSEs and no qualifications, a group which has traditionally been more likely to enter the labour market at 16 than those with higher-level qualifications (GB. DFEE, 1997).

The type of work available in the local labour market has also been shown to have had some impact on young people's decisions whether or not to stay on in full-time education. Cheng (1995) revealed higher staying-on rates in areas with larger proportions of people working in the service industries,

and speculated that this may have been because young people perceived a link between good qualifications and good jobs in these industries. Alternatively, Cheng suggested, young people may have been encouraged to stay on because the type of vocational qualifications required in local service industries could be obtained through full-time education rather than through work-based training.

◆ Local differences in post-16 destinations

Disparities have also been found between LEAs (Gray *et al.*, 1993; Smith and Noble, 1995), with participation rates in post-compulsory education ten per cent higher in some than in others. This can be partially explained by the difference in the socio-economic backgrounds and academic achievements of the young people but, even when these variables had been controlled for, some variation between LEAs persisted.

A number of studies have compared the destinations of young people in rural and urban areas (Gray *et al.*, 1989; Sime *et al.*, 1990; Wallace *et al.*, 1993). Although a large proportion of the differences that emerged were explained by the different socio-economic status of the two groups, young people from inner cities who left school at 16 were less likely than their counterparts in other areas to gain a full-time job immediately (Gray *et al.*, 1989). Furthermore, Wallace *et al.* (1993) claimed that young people in rural areas were more likely than their peers in urban areas to enter a full-time job or YTS and much less likely than other young people to stay on at school and study for academic qualifications, suggesting that this may have been as a result of employers' low evaluation of qualifications and the predominance given to manual work in the region. The authors also cited transport as a key problem for many in sparsely populated rural areas which, in some cases, limited access to education, employment and training.

Research has also suggested that the density of settlements in an area and, therefore, the level of post-16 educational provision, can affect young people's decision-making processes (Foskett and Hesketh, 1997). In dense settlements, where young people had a considerable choice between several local institutions, academic reputation was a more important criterion when choosing between institutions to study at than in sparsely populated areas. In the more isolated settlements, however, 'proximity to home' was found to be more important.

◆ Influence of educational reforms

Qualification levels of young people increased considerably in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ashford *et al.*, 1993), and many have attributed this to new forms of assessment introduced with the GCSE in 1988. As discussed above, the higher a young person's level of academic attainment, the more likely they are to continue in full-time education after the age of 16. Thus, the increasing levels of qualification from the late 1980s onwards enabled more young people to stay on in post-compulsory education. It has also been suggested, from analysis of Youth Cohort data, that the GCSE engendered more positive attitudes towards school among young people, which consequently encouraged them to continue their education beyond the age of 16 (Gray *et al.*, 1993).

The introduction of GNVQs in 1992 also affected the choices of young people at the end of their compulsory schooling, offering a vocational alternative to those who wished to remain in full-time education but did not want to study for A-levels. However, one study claimed that they 'were essentially a reactive response to increasing participation rates rather than an incentive to increased participation or achievement' (Hodgson and Spours, 1997, p. 6).

It is likely that increased participation rates in post-16 education have also been influenced by reforms to the higher education system. In the early 1990s, the Government encouraged expansion through a number of different strategies such as providing increased funds to higher education institutions and developing more vocationally relevant higher education in the hope that these would allow more people from different sectors of society the opportunity to enter higher education and thus provide greater numbers of highly educated people to meet the demands of the economy (Connor *et al.*, 1996). Between 1988 and 1992, during the peak years for expansion in the United Kingdom, the number of students enrolled on higher education courses rose from 939,000 to 1,333,000, an increase of about 42 per cent (Parry, 1997), thus giving those who chose to remain in full-time education at the age of 16 a greater chance of moving into higher education. These opportunities were increased by a certain amount of 'spare capacity' in higher education over the same period, as the size of the relevant cohort had fallen (Hillman, 1994).

◆ Summary of literature

Numerous studies have highlighted the correlations between a young person's characteristics, such as social class, ethnicity and gender, and their likelihood of participating in full-time education, training or employment at the end of their compulsory schooling. Research has also been conducted to try to uncover the reasons for these correlations by, for example, exploring socialisation processes at home and at school. However, there has been less emphasis on establishing the reasons for the differences in participation rates *between schools*. Although the literature on school effectiveness and school improvement has engaged with many of the factors which help determine attainment at 16, few quantitative or qualitative studies have been able to establish what underpins the 'staying-on' culture in some schools.

1.2 Research details

◆ Aims

This report presents the findings from a one-year study of the factors that affect young people's decisions about post-16 education. It focuses specifically on young people who had chosen to continue in full-time education after the age of 16. The project had three main aims:

1. to identify the factors that influence young people's decisions about staying on or leaving full-time education beyond the statutory minimum leaving age;
2. to explore, in particular, the factors that affect young people's decisions when choosing courses and locations for post-16 full-time education; and
3. to identify aspects of good practice in the provision of advice to young people on careers and post-16 education and training.

◆ Phase 1: questionnaire surveys

The first phase of the research involved a ten-page questionnaire to Year 12 students in three different types of full-time educational provision: school sixth forms; sixth-

form colleges; and further education (FE) colleges. The questionnaire sought information on their reasons for deciding to continue in full-time education, details of the course they were currently undertaking and their views on it, the reasons for their choice of course and institution, their future career plans, and the information and guidance they had received about post-16 education

The questionnaires were completed by 1,432 students, all of whom were in the first year of a post-16 course. The students attended three different types of institution, as shown below:

- 925 students in 21 FE colleges;
- 367 students in 21 school sixth forms;
- 140 students in nine sixth-form colleges.

Full details of the survey administration and response rates are given in Appendix A.1.

Most of the comparisons in this report have been made between students in *FE colleges* and students in *school sixth forms*. Although students in sixth-form colleges took part in the study (and their results are shown in the tables), they have been excluded from the statistical comparisons. This is because the sixth-form college sample was too small (nine colleges) to allow us to draw reliable conclusions about the statistical significance of differences between this group and those in other types of institutions.

◆ Phase 2: interview programme

The second phase of the research took place between May and July 1997. It involved follow-up interviews with a total of 42 Year 12 students: 12 in school sixth forms (across three institutions); 14 in sixth-form colleges (in three institutions) and 16 in further education colleges (in four institutions). These interviews were designed to build, extend and illuminate the questionnaire data, allowing exploration of some of the key issues associated with the young people's choices of courses and institutions for post-16 study.

◆ Report outline

This introductory chapter has described the background picture pertaining to other studies of post-16 choices and has provided details of this research. The remainder of the report concentrates on the findings that emerged from this study. Chapter 2 focuses on the young people who took part and describes their plans for the future. Chapter 3 examines students' perceptions of the factors which influenced their choices of post-16 courses and institutions. Chapter 4 describes students' views on the quality of the information and guidance provided by their teachers, careers advisers, families and others about post-16 options and future careers. Chapter 5 draws out the main conclusions and implications from the study.

2: YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

A lot of people from where I live have gone straight into work, are earning £120 a week and think they are rich. They don't realise that in ten years' time when they have got a family, they are still going to be earning that. They think of the short term; I am thinking more of the long term.

(Student in first year of BTEC National Diploma, FE college)

This chapter focuses on the 16- to 19-year-old students who took part in the study. They were already in their chosen institution and following a course of post-16 study when they completed the questionnaire. The chapter begins by describing the background characteristics of these young people, in terms of their gender, age, ethnicity and social class. The chapter then moves on to explore students' reasons for remaining in education and their future career plans.

2.1 Who are the people who choose to stay on?

◆ Gender and age

Just over half of the students in the first year at FE colleges and in Year 12 in school sixth forms were female (53 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively). In terms of mean age, the two groups were very similar (16 years 6 months and 16 years 5 months, respectively).

◆ Ethnicity

About three-quarters of the students in FE college and school sixth forms were White; about 11 per cent of those in FE colleges and 14 per cent of those in school sixth forms were Asian; and nearly seven per cent of those in FE colleges and two per cent of those in school sixth forms were Black (Table 2.1). Six per cent of those in FE colleges and seven per cent of those in schools either classified themselves as 'Other' or declined to respond.

Table 2.1 Students' ethnic group by type of institution

	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
White	76	77	78
Asian	11	14	12
Black	7	2	3
<i>Other/no response</i>	6	7	7
TOTAL	100	100	100
Number of students	925	367	140

◆ Social class

Table 2.2 shows the parental occupation of the students in different types of institution. This was classified according to whichever parent's occupation fell into the highest occupational group (for example, the parental occupation of a student whose mother was in a professional occupation and whose father was in a skilled manual occupation would be classified as professional).

As Table 2.2 shows, the proportion of students in FE college with parents in professional, managerial or technical occupations was considerably lower than the proportion in school sixth forms (28 per cent compared with 42 per cent)

Table 2.2 Students' parental occupation by type of institution

	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Professional/managerial/technical	28	42	51
Skilled manual	32	30	28
Partly-skilled manual, unskilled	29	19	17
<i>No response</i>	11	9	6
TOTAL	100	100	100
Number of students	925	367	140

and the proportions having parents in partly-skilled or other occupations were higher (29 per cent compared with 19 per cent). The proportions of students in each type of institution having parents in skilled manual occupations were similar (just under a third).

An analysis of students' GCSE grades in relation to their future courses and type of institution is shown in Table 2.3. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of students who were going on to do A-levels or AS levels (around 80 per cent of both FE and school cohorts) had achieved grades A–C in their GCSEs. By comparison, only about half the students going on to do BTEC courses had achieved A–C grades; around 30 per cent had got a mixture of A–G grades and just under 20 per cent had got a mixture of D–G grades. Those students going on to do Advanced GNVQ were found to differ between FE and school cohorts: the FE colleges had a higher proportion of GNVQ students who had received A–C grades (58 per cent) than schools (41 per cent).

Table 2.3 Prior GCSE attainment by type of institution and course

GCSE grades	BTEC	A/AS		Advanced GNVQ	
	FE %	FE %	School %	FE %	School %
Mostly A*–C	51	79	81	58	41
Mixture of A*–G	29	14	17	28	46
Mostly D–G	19	4	1	14	14
Ungraded	0	0	0	0	0
<i>No response</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100
Number of students	96	160	271	185	44

2.2 Factors affecting the decision to continue in full-time education

The foregoing descriptions of the samples of students were made using unweighted data. In the remainder of this chapter, comparisons have been made in terms of data which have been weighted to take into account the effects of differences between students in different types of institutions, which may have arisen from differences in gender, social class and prior attainment (in terms of GCSE grades). Information on these variables was available for 867 students in FE colleges, 358 students in school sixth forms and 136 students in sixth-form colleges. Unless otherwise stated, the percentages in Tables 2.4 – 4.8 are based on these totals. Full details are given in Appendix 1. This allows the study to focus on those differences which are more likely to have arisen from other factors, such as type of institution attended or type of course followed.

The chi-squared test has been used to determine the statistical significance of any difference between the students in FE colleges and school sixth forms. (The number of pupils in the sample who went to sixth-form colleges was too low to be significance tested.) The five per cent level of statistical significance has been accepted as evidence of difference between students in different types of institutions; and only those differences which achieved at least this level of statistical significance are reported in the text of this report.

◆ Why did students remain in education after the age of 16?

Students were presented with a list of seven possible reasons for staying on in full-time education beyond the age of 16 and asked to select as many as applied to them. Their responses are shown in Table 2.4. It was found that both FE college students and those in school sixth forms gave the greatest importance to the same three factors:

- the need to obtain appropriate qualifications to get a job;
- the wish to carry on studying; and
- the need to obtain qualifications for university entrance.

However, there were some interesting differences between the responses of students in FE college and those in school sixth forms. FE college students were more likely to say they needed the qualifications to get a job (57 per cent compared with 39 per cent in school sixth forms), whereas those in school sixth forms were more likely to say they wanted to carry on studying (66 per cent compared with 47 per cent in FE) and that they needed the qualifications to go to university (52 per cent compared with 36 per cent in FE).

Table 2.4 Students' reasons for remaining in full-time education

Why continue in full-time education?	P	FE college %	School sixth form %	Sixth-form college %
I needed to get appropriate qualifications for a job	**	57	39	43
I wanted to carry on studying	**	47	66	53
I needed to get qualifications to go to university	**	36	52	48
I didn't even consider leaving	**	15	35	25
I needed to retake GCSEs	**	9	34	29
There were no jobs available	ns	8	9	2
I can't start the job I want till I'm 18	ns	5	4	6
Other	ns	1	3	0
No response	ns	5	3	4
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data (see Appendix A.2).

Percentages may sum to more than 100, since students were able to make more than one response.

*** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.01 .*

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

Two further reasons were cited by about a third of the students in school sixth forms but by much smaller proportions of students in FE college. Students in school sixth forms were:

- more likely to say that they did not even consider leaving full-time education (35 per cent compared with 15 per cent of those in FE college); and
- more likely to say that they remained because they needed to retake GCSEs (34 per cent compared with nine per cent in FE college).

Less than ten per cent of students in all types of institutions cited the fact that no jobs were available as a reason for remaining in education.

Follow-up interviews with young people in their first year at school sixth form and FE college explored more fully their reasons for continuing in post-16 education. They revealed a combination of reasons such as studying to be able to enrol on an advanced course while at the same time taking GCSEs for interest's sake. The following examples are popular reasons given for staying on at school or college.

Studying because of interest

Anthony, a Year 12 student, had decided to stay on at school and continue his full-time education. He was studying for three A-levels — music, history and business studies. Anthony's reasons for choosing these subjects was based entirely on his enjoyment of them rather than with a particular career in mind.

I chose music... even though I'm not that good at it, I really enjoy it. I chose music because its something I want to do — maybe not forever but I enjoy it. I like history I suppose but I don't want to be some bloke with a beard. I don't really want to go into business but I didn't mind the subject so I chose that.

As yet, Anthony was unaware of what career he wanted to pursue, although he felt that he would probably continue into higher education and go to university. This was his parents' wish and he agreed that this was what he should probably do after his A-levels. Anthony explained that he didn't even consider leaving school after his GCSEs. However, he had little idea of what he would study next and had no idea of his long-term career plans.

I've no idea. I didn't think of it like that at all. I've no idea what I want to be. I just picked the subjects I like and I'll see where it gets me afterwards.

Can't start chosen career until aged 18

Caroline was a Year 12 student on an intermediate GNVQ in health and social care at her school sixth form. Having worked in a local hospital as part of her work experience on the course and having also worked in a crèche during the holidays, her long-term aim was to be a nurse working with children.

Her reasons for continuing in post-16 full-time education were very clear: she planned to enrol on the Project 2000 nursing course; however, the minimum age for enrolment was 18. Aware that there were few jobs available for someone her age, she had decided to study for further qualifications while she waited to enrol, studying for the GNVQ, starting with the intermediate level and progressing onto the advanced level when she had completed that. Caroline was also studying A-level English and resitting her maths GCSE, in which she had obtained a D grade the year before. She felt the additional qualifications would help her to get a job later on.

Studying to obtain qualifications for university

Becky, a Year 12 student at school, had firmly decided on her future career. The subjects and qualifications that she was currently studying were specifically chosen with this in mind.

Becky wanted to be a teacher and was studying A-levels in psychology, biology and English literature and planned to go to university to obtain a BEd, which would enable her to teach.

Becky appeared to be quite sure about her choices and commented that she had always wanted to go into teaching and therefore knew what qualifications she would need. The hardest decision for her had been to decide which subjects to study at A-level. She knew that she had to choose two core subjects so she chose biology and English as she had obtained high GCSE grades in these and chose psychology out of interest.

Similarly, she had planned further ahead and also decided on which university she would go to.

I plan to go to Manchester University and I needed to choose one subject as a core for the first year to specialise in and I'll choose English. This is for the BEd course. I'll go straight into teaching after that. I already know I want to go to Manchester. I went to a university fair and Manchester had a stand there — it looked really good. I knew I wanted to stay local and will live at home.

◆ Had students considered alternative post-16 options?

Students were asked whether they had considered any post-16 options other than the one they had chosen (Table 2.5). About a third of the students in FE and half of those in school sixth forms said that they had considered other options.

Table 2.5 Consideration of alternative post-16 options by type of institution

Did you consider any other options?	P **	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Yes		33	50	23
No		65	50	75
No response		2	0	2
TOTAL		100	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.01.

◆ Had students considered taking a job with part-time study?

Students were asked whether they would have taken a job offering part-time study had such an option been available to them (Table 2.6). A minority indicated that they would have done so; the proportion was higher in FE colleges than in school sixth forms (17 per cent compared with ten per cent). Substantial proportions of students in both groups (43 per cent in colleges and 47 per cent in schools) said they were not sure.

Table 2.6 Students who had considered a job with part-time study

Consideration of a job with part-time study	P *	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Yes, considered a job with part-time study		17	10	12
No, not considered a job with part-time study		39	43	56
Not sure		43	47	31
No response		0	0	1
TOTAL		100	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

* Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.05.

2.3 Students' plans for the future

The questionnaire contained several questions focusing on students' plans for the immediate, and more distant, future.

◆ What were students' plans for their immediate future?

Students were asked to say what they thought they would be most likely to do once their current course finished (Table 2.7). Students in FE colleges were less likely than those in school sixth forms to say that they intended to go to a university or college of HE (29 per cent compared with 45 per cent in school sixth forms). On the other hand, they were more likely to say they intended to start a more advanced course at college (28 per cent compared with 19 per cent) or to get a job (22 per cent compared with 13 per cent). Similar proportions of both groups were unsure (18 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively).

Table 2.7 Students' plans for the future by type of institution

When course finishes, most likely to:	P **	FE college %	School sixth form %	Sixth-form college %
Start a more advanced course at school/college		28	19	27
Go on to university or a college of HE		29	45	38
Get a job		22	13	13
Not sure		18	20	14
Other		1	2	0
No response		2	1	7
TOTAL		100	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.01 .

◆ What were students' future career plans?

Students were asked whether they had already decided what job or career they wished to have (Table 2.8). About 60 per cent of the students in both types of institution said they had already made up their minds about their future career, although it is, of course, possible that they may change their minds later.

Table 2.8 Students' career decisions by type of institution

Have you decided what job or career you would like?	P ns	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Yes		61	59	53
No		38	41	47
<i>No response</i>		0	0	0
TOTAL		100	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

3: FACTORS AFFECTING THE CHOICE OF INSTITUTION AND COURSE

I wanted to stay in a familiar environment where I know the routine and the people. I wanted to stay where I know what the teachers expect from me and where I know who they are.

(Year 12 student on intermediate GNVQ, school sixth form)

They give you a lot more responsibility here and they treat you like an adult. At school, they treat you as though you are very young and patronise you in a way. Some of the rules are quite ridiculous, whereas here it is a lot more relaxed.

(Student in first year of BTEC National Diploma, FE college)

This chapter examines the factors the students took into account when selecting their institutions and courses for post-16 study and their attitudes towards education in general.

3.1 Factors affecting choice of institution

Students were asked about the factors affecting their choice of institution. Some of the questions asked were similar for students in all types of institution; some were specific to students in FE colleges and others were specific to students in school sixth forms. Their responses are shown in Tables 3.1–3.3. The responses of students in school sixth forms have been given for those who had remained in the school in which they had studied for their GCSEs (N=345). Those who had changed school (N=22) have been excluded from the analyses in this section, since the number was too small to draw any firm conclusions about any differences between their responses and those of students who had remained in the sixth form of the school in which they had studied for their GCSEs.

◆ Questions that were asked to all students taking part in the study

The students' responses to these questions are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Students' reasons for post-16 choice: questions common to all types of institution

Reason for post-16 choice	P	FE college	Sixth form in same school	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
It is near my home/easy to get to	**	33	75	32
My parents wanted me to	**	12	19	13
My friends were doing the same	**	6	24	20
My teachers wanted me to	**	1	6	1
<i>No response</i>		<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

Percentages may sum to more than 100, since students were able to make more than one response.

*** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.01.*

Students in FE colleges were less likely than those in schools to have cited closeness to home or easy access as a reason for choosing their particular institution (about a third compared with 75 per cent of those in school sixth forms).

Students in FE colleges were less likely to have been influenced by the fact that their friends were doing the same than those who had remained in the same school (six per cent compared with 24 per cent of those in school sixth forms).

Smaller proportions of students in FE colleges had selected their institution because 'my parents wanted me to' than those in school sixth forms (12 per cent compared with 19 per cent).

◆ Questions which were asked only to students in FE and sixth-form colleges

Students' main reasons for choosing their particular FE college can be divided into those which related to personal preferences and those which were practical (Table 3.2).

- Reasons related to personal preferences were: I felt that there would be a more adult atmosphere at college (52 per cent); and I wanted to go somewhere different (49 per cent).

- Practical reasons were: it offered the course I wanted to do (68 per cent); my old school does not have a sixth form (34 per cent); my old school has a sixth form but does not offer the course (32 per cent); I heard that the facilities and equipment for my course were good (29 per cent); and the college had a good reputation (24 per cent).

Table 3.2 Students' reasons for post-16 choice: questions unique to sixth-form colleges and FE

Reason for post-16 choice	FE college	Sixth-form college
	%	%
It offered the course I wanted to do	68	55
I felt that there would be a more adult atmosphere at college	52	43
I wanted to go somewhere different	49	60
My old school does not have a sixth form	34	62
My old school has a sixth form but does not offer the course	32	11
I heard that the facilities and equipment for my course were good	29	31
The college had a good reputation	24	49
I was impressed by the college open day/presentation	19	29
I heard that the staff are generally nice/interesting	17	21
I heard that the teachers were very supportive and helpful	17	25
I heard that the standards of teaching are very good	16	34
I heard that the teachers/subjects I wanted to do were good	13	14
I knew I could resit my GCSEs	11	31
Best place if your GCSE results were not so good	7	2
I thought I would feel safe and secure at this college	6	11
I heard it was the best place if you got good GCSE results	3	7
No response	1	0
Number of students	867	136

Weighted data.

Percentages may sum to more than 100, since students were able to make more than one response.

◆ **Questions asked only to students in school sixth forms**

As Table 3.3 shows, the main reason given by students who had remained in the sixth form of the school in which they had taken their GCSEs was that they wanted to stay somewhere familiar (89 per cent). Other reasons, cited by more than half of these students were: it provides the course I want (65 per cent); the teachers are very supportive and helpful (56 per cent); and there is a relaxed atmosphere for sixth formers (54 per cent).

Table 3.3 Students' reasons for post-16 choice: questions unique to school sixth forms

Reason for post-16 choice	School sixth form (stayed in same school)
	%
I wanted to stay somewhere familiar	89
It provides the course I want to do	65
The teachers are very supportive and helpful	56
There is a relaxed atmosphere for sixth formers	54
The teachers are generally nice/interesting	49
The teachers of the subjects I want to do are good	43
The facilities and equipment for my course are very good	38
I can resit my GCSEs	37
I feel safe and secure	34
The standards of teaching are very good	32
The school has a good reputation	29
I was impressed by the information on the sixth form	17
The school has good discipline	11
It's the best place if your GCSE results are not so good	11
My brothers/sisters are at this school	9
It's the best place if you get good GCSE results	8
No response	0
Number of students	336

Weighted data.

Percentages may sum to more than 100, since students were able to make more than one response.

Percentages are based on 336 students studying in school sixth forms.

Students who had changed to another school for post-16 studies have been excluded.

Studying to obtain qualifications for university

Dinesh had decided to continue his full-time education and was currently studying A-levels in physics, maths and business studies. He had chosen to stay on in his school sixth form for a number of reasons. Although college had been a consideration, he was conscious that the college environment would be different to that in school and that it might be difficult to adjust to.

I didn't want to go to college because at college, you have more freedom and you may misuse it by not going to classes. In the sixth form here, we have registration at the beginning of the day and you have to go to lessons so it's more formal.

Furthermore, he thought he would prefer to be in surroundings that he knew, with friends and working with teachers that he knew and liked.

Learning from the experience of friends who had left school the year before and had regretted it, Dinesh had felt that he needed higher qualifications than GCSEs to get a job with good long-term career prospects. Although at present he didn't know what career he would like, he believed he would go to university after his

I think being in a familiar place was the most important [factor] really. I know the teachers and they know me and the standards that I can achieve. I understand the way they teach and it makes it easier when you know the teacher. It's a good atmosphere here and it is different from lower down the school. We're given more responsibility and trusted more than we were lower down the school.

A-levels. He had therefore carefully chosen his A-level subjects to give him flexibility when deciding on his degree course and also to do subjects that he enjoyed.

Physics I've always liked and I chose maths because a lot of physics is based on maths. They're both things I enjoy. I chose business studies because I thought it would give me more career choices especially if I want to go to university... I want to be able to go to university but I'm not sure for which course. It depends what I want to do and I think by next year I will have decided. It might depend a bit on my A-levels — the results I get and which I end up enjoying most.

Specialised course not available elsewhere

Eddie's decision to continue his full-time education at his local FE college was due to the fact that his school did not provide the particular course that he wanted to study. Whilst he would have been able to study three A-levels at school, he felt that the BTEC National Diploma in Engineering offered at college would be a better course for entry into an engineering or electronics firm. He explained that there was no comparable qualification at school.

This course seemed the most appropriate for what I wanted to go into. The school I went to only did A-levels in separate subjects of maths and physics... this is the all-in-one engineering course, the ideal course that they did not offer at school... I thought this place was better overall for what I wanted to do, more specialised.

Eddie was pleased that he had chosen to study at college, not only because of the relevance of the course he was studying but also because of the different relationship between lecturers and students. He commented that lecturers treated students as adults in the college, whilst at school, pupils were often patronised and treated as children.

For him, continuing his education at college had been a good choice.

I enjoy it... just what I expected, good atmosphere... good standard of teaching, good mates... pretty relaxed, plenty of help with work, if you ever need any help, they are there for you... it is very good.

Familiarity and perception of better quality of education

Fay's primary reason for choosing her school sixth form to continue her studies was because of its familiarity.

I wanted to stay in a familiar environment where I know the routine and the people. I wanted to stay where I know what the teachers expect from me and where I know who they are.

The major factors contributing to her choice were that she liked the school, knew the teachers and would be able to pursue the courses she wanted to study — an intermediate GNVQ in Health and Social Care, two GCSE courses and one GCSE resit. In addition, some of her friends were staying on at school to do the same course. This was a positive factor as she would know people on the course.

Furthermore, she felt that the teachers at school would take a more active interest in the students than those at college would. In her view, staying on at school would give her a better education.

Fay enjoyed the GNVQ course and was pleased that she had stayed at school. She welcomed the teamwork on the course and the fact that students worked together during study periods, discussing assignments. She praised the mixture of coursework and exams as assessment and found the different areas of the course very interesting. Work experience had been stimulating and helpful in learning about employment possibilities.

I had thought about going to a college but I was told by various people that if a teacher wasn't there for a particular lesson, you just had to miss the lesson. At school, you never miss out on a class because they find someone else to cover it.

3.2 Choice of course

◆ Courses followed by students in different types of post-16 institution

The students taking part in the study were asked to indicate which course(s) they were following. As expected, the pattern of courses followed by the school sixth form group was different from the pattern for students in FE colleges, even when differences between the two groups in social class,

Table 3.4 Students' choice of course

Chosen course	P **	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Advanced GNVQ		21	16	36
Intermediate GNVQ		19	29	18
A-levels		15	50	34
BTEC National Certificate/Diploma		11	1	0
NVQ level 2		10	0	0
Foundation GNVQ		5	1	0
GCSE		5	0	8
NVQ level 1		2	0	0
NVQ level 3		1	0	0
A/S-levels		0	0	0
Other		6	0	0
<i>No response</i>		4	3	4
TOTAL		100	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.01 .

gender and prior achievement had been taken into account. Their responses are shown in Table 3.4.

The most striking difference between the two samples was in the proportion of students following A-level courses (50 per cent of the school sixth-form students compared with 15 per cent of those in FE colleges) and intermediate GNVQ (29 per cent in schools compared with 19 per cent in FE colleges).

On the other hand, significantly higher proportions of FE college students were on Advanced GNVQ (21 per cent compared with 16 per cent); and BTEC National Certificate/Diploma courses (11 per cent compared with one per cent).

◆ Factors affecting choice of course

Students were asked to select, from a list of eight possible reasons, all those which had influenced their choice of post-16 course. The majority of students gave more than one reason. Not unexpectedly, there were statistically significant differences between students in FE colleges and those in school sixth forms (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5 Factors affecting choice of course by type of post-16 institution

Factors affecting choice of course	P	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Being interested in the subject	**	60	69	54
Relevant/necessary for my chosen career/job	*	53	47	34
Useful for getting a job	ns	38	43	33
Wanting additional qualifications	**	31	39	35
Necessary for going on to university	**	27	36	39
Being good at the subject	**	19	41	23
The way in which the course is assessed	ns	10	11	18
Being on the same course as friends	**	2	7	4
No response		4	3	4
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

Percentages may sum to more than 100, since students were able to make more than one response.

** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.05 .*

*** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.01 .*

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

The two most frequently cited reasons by both groups of students were:

- being interested in the subject;
- relevant/necessary for my chosen career/job.

However, career/job relevance was more likely to be cited by students in FE colleges (53 per cent compared with 47 per cent in school sixth forms) and interest in the subject by students in school sixth forms (69 per cent compared with 60 per cent in FE colleges).

Students in school sixth forms were also more likely to have selected their courses because they were good at the subject (41 per cent compared with 19 per cent in FE colleges). This may have been, at least in part, because students in schools tended to continue with subjects they were already familiar with from their GCSE courses, whereas many students in FE colleges were embarking on subjects which were new and unknown to them. Another possible reason is that subject specialists in schools are likely to encourage their most able students to stay on.

Students in school sixth forms were also more likely to indicate that they had chosen their course because it was necessary for going to university (36 per cent compared with 27 per cent in FE colleges). Table 3.6, however, suggests that students on similar courses in different types of institutions tend to cite the same factors as influencing their choice of course, i.e. the differences between students in different types of institutions are smaller than those between students on different types of courses.

Students in school sixth forms were also more likely to have chosen their course because they wanted additional qualifications (39 per cent compared with 31 per cent in FE colleges). They were also more likely to cite being on the same course as friends, although the proportions of students selecting this reason were small in both samples (seven per cent in school sixth forms and two per cent in FE colleges).

In both types of institution, students on A-level courses were more likely than those on other courses to say that the fact that their qualification was necessary to get into university was an important influence upon their choice of course and, in general, the pattern of response from A-level students was

similar in both types of institution. However, when the responses of students on A/AS-level courses in different types of institutions were compared (Table 3.6) those in FE colleges were *slightly more* likely than those in school sixth forms to agree that this was an important factor in determining their choice of qualification (62 per cent compared with 53 per cent of those in schools).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that substantial proportions of students on other courses in FE colleges had also considered university entrance when choosing their course: more than a third of FE college students on Advanced GNVQ and BTEC National courses cited this as an important factor.

Perhaps not unexpectedly in view of the type of course, students on BTEC National courses in FE colleges were the most likely to cite their course's relevance to a chosen career as an important factor (there were too few students on BTEC courses in schools to make comparisons).

Table 3.6 Students on A/AS-level, Advanced GNVQ and BTEC National courses: factors affecting choice of course by type of institution

	BTEC National	A/AS-level		Advanced GNVQ	
	FE college %	School %	FE college %	School %	FE college %
Being interested in the subject	75	84	75	64	68
Necessary for going to university	35	53	60	27	37
Relevant/necessary for my chosen career	71	52	52	60	56
Wanting additional qualification	28	45	37	27	31
Useful for getting a job	41	41	36	56	36
Being good at the subject	26	58	33	21	15
Being on the same course as friends	2	6	2	6	0
The way the course is assessed	17	6	10	20	16
No response	0	2	2	0	2
Number of students	95	177	133	56	185

Weighted data.

Percentages may sum to more than 100, since students were able to make more than one response.

◆ Actual and expected GCSE results

The students were asked to indicate how well their GCSE results had matched their expectations (Table 3.7). The responses of students in FE colleges and school sixth forms were similar. About half indicated that they had achieved the results they had expected. The other half were evenly divided between those who said their results were better than expected and those who had done worse than expected.

Table 3.7 Match between actual and expected GCSE results by type of post-16 institution

How did you get on in your GCSE exams?	P ns	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Better than expected		26	28	24
As expected		51	48	34
Worse than expected		23	25	42
No response		0	0	0
TOTAL		100	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

◆ Satisfaction with current course

Students were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their current course on a three-point scale: very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied (Table 3.8). The majority of students indicated that they were either satisfied (nearly two-thirds) or very satisfied (about 30 per cent). There were no differences between the responses of students in FE colleges and school sixth forms. A quarter (overall) commented that their course was good and no other comment was made by more than ten per cent of students.

Table 3.8 Satisfaction with current course by type of post-16 institution

How satisfied are you with the course you are currently doing?	P ns	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Very satisfied		30	28	30
Satisfied		64	67	65
Dissatisfied		6	4	4
No response		0	0	2
TOTAL		100	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

4: INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

This chapter describes the information and guidance students had received in previous years about the options available to them once they had completed their GCSEs.

4.1 When is information and guidance given?

◆ The introduction of careers information and guidance in schools

Students were asked to indicate when they had first received careers information and guidance at school (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Time at which students first received careers advice by type of post-16 institution

When did you first receive careers information?	P ns	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Year 7 or 8		5	4	7
Year 9		25	29	30
Year 10		44	39	40
Year 11		22	27	18
No response		4	2	4
TOTAL		100	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

A quarter of the students in FE colleges said they had received careers information for the first time in Year 9, 44 per cent had received advice in Year 10 and 22 per cent in Year 11. Very few had received advice before Year 9. The responses of students in school sixth forms were quite similar and there were no statistically significant differences between the responses of the two groups.

A follow-up question asked students whether they thought it would have been helpful to have known about the options available to them earlier (Table 4.2). The students were fairly evenly divided on this issue: just over a third of the students in FE colleges said they would have liked the information earlier; a similar proportion would not have liked the information earlier; and just under a third were unsure.

Table 4.2 Students' views on whether it would have been better to have known about post-16 options earlier by type of post-16 institution

Would it have been helpful to know about the options earlier?	P ns	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Yes		37	39	34
No		35	31	35
Not sure		28	31	31
TOTAL		100	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

There were no differences between the responses of students in FE colleges and those in school sixth forms. Further analyses of the data revealed that, as might be expected, students who had received their first careers guidance in Year 11 were most likely to say that they would have liked to have received the information earlier.

4.2 Opportunities provided in earlier years to inform students' decisions about post-16 options

Students were asked to select, from a list of different sources of information, those which they had been offered in order to help them make decisions about what to do at 16 (Table 4.3). In interpreting students' responses to this question (and to the follow-up question reported in Table 4.4), it should be remembered that students were being asked to recall what had happened about a year previously. It is possible that some students' recollections had been affected by their subsequent experiences and that others had forgotten about some of the opportunities available to them at that time.

The most frequent ways in which students in FE colleges recalled obtaining information and advice on post-16 options were (in order of frequency) by means of: individual careers interviews (79 per cent); written information (such as brochures, leaflets or prospectuses) about other institutions (63 per cent); information about colleges/other schools (medium not specified) (50 per cent); attendance at open-days/evenings at colleges/other schools (40 per cent); careers lessons (39 per cent); presentations by staff from colleges or other schools (32 per cent); talks from outside speakers about their jobs (31 per cent); and group discussions (30 per cent).

The responses from students in school sixth forms were similar in most respects. Students in FE colleges, however, were more likely than those in school sixth forms to recall having had opportunities to attend presentations by staff from colleges or other schools (32 per cent compared with 19 per cent of those in school sixth forms). It is, of course, not possible to say whether these students had transferred to FE colleges as a result of hearing presentations by college staff, or whether they had actively sought opportunities to attend presentations from college staff because they were already considering transfer.

Table 4.3 Opportunities provided in earlier years to help students make decisions about post-16 choice by type of post-16 institution

Opportunities provided	P	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Individual careers interview	ns	79	82	91
Access to brochures	*	63	57	65
Information about college/ other schools	ns	50	48	54
Attendance at open days/evenings at college/other schools	ns	40	40	53
Careers lessons	ns	39	41	35
Presentations from staff from colleges/other schools	**	32	19	41
Talks from outside speakers about their jobs	ns	31	33	30
Group discussions	ns	30	33	25
Careers evening	ns	27	29	35
Other	ns	4	3	3
No response		1	2	0
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

Percentages may sum to more than 100, since students were able to make more than one response.

** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

*** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.01.*

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

Students in FE colleges were slightly more likely to recall having had access to written information (brochures, leaflets or prospectuses) about other institutions (63 per cent compared with 57 per cent in school sixth forms).

Follow-up discussions with students explored the range of information and advice available to them in helping them to make career decisions. The following example illustrates the range of opportunities offered to some students.

Careers information and opportunities on offer

Caroline, studying for an intermediate GNVQ course in Health and Social Care, felt the careers advice and information she had received from her school's careers adviser and from the town's main careers office had been beneficial in helping her choose her course.

In Year 10, Caroline had visited another school that was holding a careers day where there was information about colleges, jobs, universities and careers.

In Year 11, Caroline had a careers interview at school and then went to see people in the main careers office. Her careers teacher in school provided her and other students with information about the GNVQ course — its content, course options and possible careers afterwards. Careers advisers from the main office helped her gain a place on a training scheme in a crèche during July and August before starting Year 12, for which she was paid.

Caroline explained that all Year 12 students had been given the opportunity to have an interview with the careers adviser this year, although not all had done this. She was waiting for her interview, which was due to take place soon.

Students on the GNVQ course also received a form of careers information from the course itself. Aspects of the course focused on different careers in health and social care and, as part of their research on different areas of work, students benefited by hearing guest speakers from a variety of professions talk about their work in detail and answer questions from the students

◆ Advisers on post-16 options

In a follow-up question, students were presented with a list of people and asked who had given them advice about post-16 options (Table 4.4).

The three most frequent responses from students in FE colleges were: parent(s) or guardian(s); careers teacher; and careers adviser from outside the school. Each was cited by more than half of the students in FE colleges.

These three groups of people were also cited by more than half of the students in school sixth forms. However, students in school sixth forms were also likely to have been advised by subject teachers (55 per cent compared with 31 per cent of students in FE colleges). They were also more likely than

those in FE colleges to have been advised by other teachers (25 per cent compared with 16 per cent) and relatives (28 per cent compared with 18 per cent).

Table 4.4 Students' main advisers on post-16 options by type of post-16 institutions

Advice given by:	P	FE college %	School sixth form %	Sixth-form college %
Parent(s)/guardian(s)	**	56	69	52
Careers teacher	ns	53	50	55
Careers adviser (from outside school)	ns	53	49	43
Subject teacher	**	31	55	48
Friend	ns	27	32	31
Relative	**	18	28	27
Other teacher	**	16	25	7
Other person	ns	6	6	5
No response		2	3	2
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

Percentages may sum to more than 100, since students were able to make more than one response.

*** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.01.*

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

◆ How helpful was the advice students received?

A further follow-up question asked students to indicate which of the sources of information and guidance had been most helpful.

Over 80 per cent of the students in both types of post-16 institution responded to the open-ended question which asked them to indicate the types of information and guidance that they had found most helpful. Most students cited one source of information only. Their responses were very diverse. The following people were cited by more than ten per cent of the students in FE colleges and school sixth forms, respectively:

- careers adviser (30 per cent and 22 per cent);
- parents/relatives (15 per cent and 19 per cent);
- careers teacher/lessons (14 per cent and 10 per cent);
- other teacher/tutor (12 per cent and 26 per cent).

The only difference which achieved statistical significance was the fact that students in school sixth forms were more likely to cite other teachers/tutors as having provided the most helpful advice.

Interviews with students also highlighted the usefulness of receiving advice from someone already working in a field they were interested in. Very often, this kind of advice was informal, and the person consulted was a relative of the student. Such students cited this person as a very helpful source of information, sometimes choosing to act on their advice and information above that of a careers professional. The following two examples illustrate the kind of involvement such relatives had and the consequences on the young people's decision.

Experience of relatives and others is more relevant than advice of careers adviser

Howard, a student on a BTEC National Diploma in Engineering at FE college, had received advice and information from a careers adviser and also informal advice from relatives.

Prior to leaving Year 11, Howard had been considering leaving full-time education and joining the army for training as an engineer. Whilst the information he had received from the careers adviser had been very helpful, in his view, his discussions with relatives in the army were more useful, providing him with a greater insight into army life. In particular, he had valued the opinion of his cousin who had spent nine years in the army. He felt that knowing his cousin's experiences had enabled him to view the army from a different perspective and make a more informed choice.

Having decided that he wanted to go to college to obtain qualifications in engineering, the careers adviser had been helpful, sending Howard information about various colleges and courses that he could study.

My cousin just left the army... I can relate to him better than I can a careers teacher. I have known him for years... [Speaking to him] wasn't like going for a quick interview. I spoke to him over a period of seven, eight years. I knew him all the way through the army. He was in the Gulf and Bosnia and I wrote to him all the way through that.

Now at college, Howard commented on the useful informal advice he had received from lecturers who had worked in industry prior to teaching at the college. He had found their information on local firms and types of jobs very helpful as it provided another dimension to the more theoretical advice that the careers adviser would give him.

Reliance on relative's information

Graeme, a student on an intermediate GNVQ course in Leisure and Tourism at his local FE college, cited his aunt as his most useful source of career information.

Graeme was interested in becoming an air steward and sought advice from his aunt, who worked as an air stewardess.

Although his aunt had told him about the type of work that he would be doing and advised him on how to apply for the position, she did not provide him with information about qualification requirements.

I was asking my auntie about the job because she works at British Airways. She brought home a great folder which took me through the basics, to make sure I knew what I was getting into...She gave me advice on when to apply, their recruitment time and she said that nearer the time she will give me advice on interview techniques.

Graeme also received advice from a careers adviser at the beginning of Year 11. He had discussed his broad career plans in his careers interview and the careers adviser recommended that he study the two-year GNVQ in Leisure and Tourism. Now nearing the end of his first year at college, Graeme reflected that it would have been useful to speak to a careers adviser after receiving his GCSE results, before coming to college. He explained that he had not obtained the necessary GCSE grades to enrol on the two-year advanced GNVQ and had enrolled on a one-year intermediate GNVQ instead, with a view to starting the advanced course after that year.

Now nearing the end of the intermediate course, Graeme had decided that he did not want to spend another two years in full-time education. Instead, he was applying to travel agents for youth training which would provide him with a job whilst working towards an NVQ in travel services.

Thomas Cook have got their own training department...I think you would be following a manual, building up your own portfolio, with all your evidence and things in, and they would be teaching you and everything as well.

Graeme felt that working in a travel agency would provide him with excellent experience which would be considered when he later applied for a position as an air steward. He had not sought the advice of a careers adviser with regard to his decision.

4.3 Is more guidance needed?

Students in FE colleges were less likely than those in school sixth forms to say that they would have liked more help in making their decisions: about 40 per cent of the students in FE colleges compared with nearly half of those in school sixth forms agreed with the statement on this issue (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Students' views on whether they would have liked more help in making post-16 decisions

Would you have liked more help with making your decision?	P *	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Yes		41	50	42
No		59	50	58
TOTAL		100	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

* Indicates that the difference between the responses of students in FE and school sixth form is statistically significant at a level <0.05 .

Students were presented with a list of five possible types of help and asked to indicate which they would have liked (Table 4.6).

Most students selected more than one option. By far the most frequently mentioned type of help was more information on different courses. Students in FE colleges were less likely to cite this reason than those in school sixth forms (66 per cent compared with 80 per cent).

Many students would also have liked more information on different types of jobs. This was cited less often by students in FE colleges than those in school sixth forms (39 per cent compared with 49 per cent).

Table 4.6 Types of help students indicated they would have liked more of in making post-16 decisions

Type of help students would have liked more of:	P	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Information on different courses	**	66	80	45
Information on different kinds of jobs	*	39	49	43
Information on combining work with training	ns	38	42	46
Individual careers interview	ns	31	25	28
Information on other schools and colleges	*	27	36	11
Other	ns	3	2	2
No response		1	1	3
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

Percentages may sum to more than 100, since students were able to make more than one response.

* Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.05 .

** Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is statistically significant at a level <0.01 .

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

Nearly 40 per cent of the students in FE colleges would also have liked more information on combining work with training; and about 30 per cent would have liked an individual careers interview. The responses of students in sixth-form colleges concerning these two options were similar to those of students in FE colleges.

When asked whether they were aware of the range of options available to them if they had achieved better or worse GCSE results than expected (Table 4.7), over 70 per cent of the students in FE colleges and school sixth forms answered in the affirmative.

Table 4.7 Students' awareness of alternative options if they had achieved better or worse GCSE results than expected

Did you know what alternative options were open to you?	P ns	FE college	School sixth form	Sixth-form college
		%	%	%
Yes		71	75	75
No		28	25	25
No response		2	0	0
TOTAL		101	100	100
Number of students		867	358	136

Weighted data.

ns Indicates that the difference between the responses of FE students and school sixth form students is not statistically significant.

The follow-up interviews with students enabled greater exploration of the kind of additional careers advice and information that would have been helpful to them in making their decisions about post-16 choices. The following example relates to the style and approach of careers advisers and teachers in school and useful suggestions for improvements. The next two examples focus on specific suggestions about the type of information that would be helpful.

Giving young people confidence about their choices

Isabel, a student at FE college, was studying for a NVQ level 2 in Catering and Hospitality. Prior to coming to college, she had received careers guidance from her form tutor and careers teacher at school and the local authority careers adviser.

Isabel had criticisms of the quality of careers advice she had received in Year 11. These tended to focus on the attitude of the individuals towards her choice of courses and career path. For example, she felt that her form tutor had put immense pressure on her to study A-levels and go to university, rather than pursue a career in catering. Similarly, she did not feel that the careers adviser had been particularly helpful. At the time that she saw him, she was undecided as to what career she wanted, and she felt he had been little help in exploring what she was good at, what interested her and therefore the kinds of careers that might appeal to her.

I would have liked people to have said what I could have possibly done instead of just [showing me] the prospectus for the college... [I wanted] ideas for what I could be, what I was capable of doing.

For Isabel, a more supportive approach would have been welcomed. She felt it was important for her teachers and careers adviser to have reassured her of her capabilities. She felt that this might have given her the confidence to do A-levels, and would have been preferable to the kind of negative pressure she felt they were imposing on her.

[They] could have given me hope into doing something different. I would have had more of a push into doing... A-levels if they had said I was capable of doing them. I didn't think I was.

On the issue of providing additional information to Year 11 pupils, Isabel believed that pupils would benefit from talking to older students about the courses they were studying in the sixth form or at college.

Actually having people going from the college to the schools and stating which courses they have and taking the information to them. I think that would be helpful to Year 11 from my school – actually going in and having a day talking about the different courses. Or actually having people from the course who have benefited – like someone from my course has gone to the Savoy in London, so if they came along, they could promote the catering course. People would think 'Oh wow, I can get there, I can do it.' I think that would be helpful.

Finally, she felt that Year 11 pupils might benefit from students like herself, who had played truant at school, talking to them about how important it was to go to school and pass their exams.

To be honest, I would actually love to go back to my school and give them a talk, to be an example to them, because I know a lot of people in Year 11 don't go [to school]. I would like to say 'You know, look at my exam results – you have got to go [to school]. I am doing a course now that I want, I am really enjoying it, you have got to get down and do it.' Because, I know what it is like not going, and thinking it is really cool, when it is not.

Work shadowing

Currently in Year 12 studying a GNVQ in Social and Health Care, Jodie had had a careers interview prior to choosing this course in Year 11. She was also hoping to speak to a careers adviser this year as to what further qualifications she should obtain to help her become a children's nurse.

Jodie had strong views about the kind of information schools could provide to pupils approaching school-leaving age. In addition to the compulsory work experience, she felt it was important for young people to have first-hand experience of different careers that interested them, before they decided which course they would take, or whether they would leave school.

People should be able to visit work places and watch what people do so they can see if they like it. It would work better for people to try things before they made their course choices. It would be good to have an idea of what you might like to do and then go and visit the place – if you don't like it you would have time to think of something else and look at that before you have to choose your course.

Practical information about specific courses

Kim was completing an intermediate GNVQ in IT at FE college. After this, he hoped to go on to study for a BTEC National Diploma in IT.

Kim had received guidance from a careers adviser in Year 11 as to which course to pursue in college. He had not had any careers interviews whilst at college because he knew which course he would study after this year.

He did, however, make specific suggestions about the kind of information that the college could give to Year 11 pupils on open days about the courses available at the college. He suggested that prospective students might be told the number of previous students who had passed the course in previous years; the opinions of current students; destinations of previous students; and the relevance of the course to various jobs.

5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that affect young people's decisions about post-16 education. This report focuses on young people who had chosen to continue in full-time education after the age of 16 and compares the responses of students in the FE and school sectors. It explores a number of factors, such as home background, career plans and personal preferences, which are likely to affect students' choices of courses and institutions. The report also examines students' perceptions of the careers information and guidance they were offered to help them make decisions about post-16 education. A complementary report, *Leaving at 16: Factors Affecting Young People's Decision to Leave Full-time Education*, focuses on young people who had decided not to continue in full-time education and explores the factors contributing to that decision.

The findings described in this report are based on the responses to a self-completion questionnaire of nearly 1,500 students in the first year of full-time post-16 education in FE colleges, school sixth forms and sixth-form colleges in England. A small number of these students also participated in a follow-up interview programme. These students' comments on their experiences have been used to illustrate and extend the questionnaire data.

Reasons for continuing in full-time education

Overall, this study found that young people's reasons for wishing to continue with their full-time education were positive. The three most frequently cited reasons were: the need to obtain qualifications to get a job; the wish to carry on studying; and the need to obtain qualifications for university entrance. Only a minority (less than ten per cent) of students taking part in the study said that they had chosen to remain in education because no jobs were available.

However, there were interesting differences in FE students' and school sixth form students' reasons for wishing to obtain further qualifications. FE college students were more likely to give *to get a job* as a reason for obtaining further qualifications, whereas students in school sixth forms were more likely to cite university entrance requirements.

The responses of students in school sixth forms probably reflect the fact that, in general, they tended to be more academically oriented than those in FE colleges. Students in school sixth forms were more likely to indicate not only that they wanted to carry on studying for its own sake but also that they had never considered leaving full-time education.

Although there was evidence that some of the students surveyed had considered other options before selecting their chosen institution and course, this was not the case for the majority. About half of the students in school sixth forms and three-quarters of those in FE colleges said that they had not considered alternative options. Only a minority of students (17 per cent of those in FE colleges and ten per cent of those in school sixth forms) had considered taking a job with part-time study.

Choice of course

Over 90 per cent of the students in all types of institution were satisfied or very satisfied with their chosen course. The main reasons given by students for selecting their particular courses were: interest in the subject; the needs of their future career; a desire for further qualifications; and university entrance requirements. Students on A-level courses, irrespective of type of institution, were more likely to cite interest in the subject and university entrance requirements. They were also more likely to say that they had chosen their course because they were good at the subject(s) they had chosen. Not surprisingly, students on vocational courses were slightly more likely to cite job relevance as an important factor in their choice of course.

◆ Choosing between staying on at school or going to FE college

Choice of course is clearly an important factor. Indeed, the availability of a particular course was given as a reason for choosing their institution by about two-thirds of the students in FE colleges and school sixth forms. However, the results suggest that students' personal preferences also play an important part in their choice of institution for post-16 study.

It seems clear that, if the needs of all students are to be met adequately, different types of post-16 provision should be offered in more than one type of institution. Students'

personal preferences were amongst the most frequently cited reasons for choosing a particular type of institution. This was especially true for those in school sixth forms, nearly 90 per cent of whom said they wanted to stay *somewhere familiar*, where they knew and liked their teachers, were confident of their teachers' continuing support and interest, and comfortable with the way they were taught. Furthermore, about half of the students in FE colleges said they had chosen to go to college because they felt there would be a more *adult atmosphere* or because they wanted to go *somewhere different*.

Advice and information on careers and post-16 courses

Students' recollections suggest that there were inconsistencies in the timing of careers advice to young people — while the most common time to have *first* received careers advice was in Year 10, about a quarter of students had first received advice in Year 9 and slightly fewer in Year 11. On the whole, the young people themselves were divided as to whether they would have preferred to have first received advice earlier. However, as one would expect, those who had received their first careers guidance in Year 11 were most likely to say that they would have liked to have received the information earlier. There were no differences between the responses of students from different types of post-16 institution.

Students' recollections suggest that a range of sources was used to obtain advice and information on careers and post-16 options. The most frequently used sources were: individual careers interviews; written information (such as brochures, leaflets or prospectuses) about other institutions; attendance at open days in other institutions; careers lessons; presentations by staff from colleges or other schools; talks from outside speakers about their jobs; and group discussions.

Students in FE colleges were more likely than those in school sixth forms to recall attending presentations by staff from colleges and other schools and to recall having had access to written information about other institutions.

It is interesting to note the differences between the recollections of students in FE colleges and those studying in a school sixth form about the people who had given them advice on careers and post-16 courses. Whilst roughly similar proportions of students in both types of institution had been given advice by careers teachers and advisers, students in FE

colleges were less likely than those in school sixth forms to recall having been given advice from their parents or subject teachers.

The difference regarding advice from subject teachers may arise from the fact that a higher proportion of potential FE students were considering pursuing courses not included in their school's post-16 curriculum. In contrast, those students who wanted to continue their education at school were possibly more interested in discussing the *content* of courses in specific subjects (information likely to be most readily available from their subject teachers) than in information on the wider availability of courses and institutions in the locality. It is also possible that subject teachers in schools actively encouraged their most able students to remain in school to follow an A-level course in their subject.

When asked to identify the most helpful sources of careers advice, it was notable that students were more likely to cite people than written information, presentations by speakers from other organisations, and visits. People mentioned included: careers advisers; parents/relatives; careers teachers and other teachers.

Clearly, there is a need for more advice and guidance on careers and post-16 options. The research found that more than 40 per cent of students said they would have liked more help in making decisions. Most of these students made more than one suggestion for the type of help they wanted, implying that very real improvements could be made simply by increasing the availability of information and guidance to young people considering their post-16 educational choices.

Whilst the majority of all students requested more information on the range of courses available to them, this was particularly the case among school students, many of whom would also have welcomed information on different kinds of jobs and courses available in other schools and colleges. This may be because many of these had relied for advice on their parents and subject teachers. Discussions with these people may have focused more on course content and their ability to do it and ignored the wider arena of the range of jobs available and of other institutions where they could study. It could also be that students whose personal preferences were for the (perceived) more adult environment of FE had actively sought information on courses available in this type of institution. It would be interesting to know whether

information on FE courses had been offered by the school to all Year 11 pupils or whether it had been made available only to those who asked.

Discussions with young people about the kind of information and advice they wanted highlighted the importance of speaking to people with personal experience of a particular career, or course or institution. This seemed to be the preferred medium for accessing information, rather than written materials. Schools could consider, for example, inviting former pupils to talk to younger pupils about their experiences of particular courses, the relevance to their chosen career and the advantages and disadvantages of their choice. Given the diversity of post-16 options available to young people, it is crucial that they are given the most comprehensive range of information possible to enable them to make an informed choice about their future.

Concluding comments

This research has highlighted the importance of two factors.

Firstly, it is important to provide young people with a choice of institutions in which to follow post-16 courses. At 16, some young people are ready for a change and are looking forward to studying in an environment which they perceive to be more adult. Subject to their chosen courses being available, these students would seem to be best served by an FE college. Other 16-year-olds, as the survey showed, have very strong preferences for remaining in a familiar environment, amongst friends and with teachers they know. These students, again subject to course availability, would seem to be best served by a school sixth form.

Secondly, the research identified a need for more information and advice for young people on careers and post-16 options. Even though the majority of the students surveyed were content with their choice of courses and institutions — which may say as much about the adaptability of young people as about the appropriateness of their choices — it was clear that many of those surveyed would have welcomed, and no doubt benefited from, a greater knowledge and understanding of the career, education and training options available to them in the immediate and more distant future.

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APPENDIX

A.1 Survey administration and response rates

◆ The survey in school sixth forms and sixth-form colleges

The survey in school sixth forms and sixth-form colleges was carried out by NFER's Field Research Services department in collaboration with the project team.

The survey of Year 12 students in schools took place at the same time as the surveys of students in Years 8 and 11 (Maychell *et al.*, 1998). The sample of schools for the Year 12 survey consisted of the 11–18 schools which took part in the surveys of Years 8 and 11 (N=46). The sample of schools was stratified by the percentage of pupils entitled to school meals, region (North; South; and Midlands) and type of LEA (metropolitan, non-metropolitan). A sample of ten sixth-form colleges was selected from the areas served by the 11–16 schools taking part in the survey of Years 8 and 11.

In January 1997, questionnaires were despatched to the 25 schools and nine sixth-form colleges that had agreed to take part. They were asked to administer the survey during a two-week period in February to students in one mixed ability tutor group selected by the school. Students were provided with individual envelopes in which to seal their completed questionnaires, and administrators were asked to stress that any information they gave would be treated as confidential and would not be seen by anyone in the school/college. The questionnaire for students took about 25 to 30 minutes to complete. Schools and colleges were asked to complete a short questionnaire seeking background information on the institution. They were also asked to indicate, on a consent form, whether they would be willing to allow students to be interviewed, at a later date, by members of the research team. At the end of February, reminder letters were sent to those schools and colleges that had not returned the materials. The questionnaires were completed by: 367 students in 21 school sixth forms (84 per cent response); and 140 students in nine sixth-form colleges (90 per cent response).

Non-response was due to entire schools or sixth-form colleges failing to return completed questionnaires for their students; in those institutions that responded, response rates from students were close to 100 per cent.

◆ The survey in colleges of further education

The survey of colleges of further education was carried out by the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA).

A desired sample of about 1,000 students was required and it was planned to survey about 50 students in each college. In order to achieve this, a sample of 27 colleges which served the same areas as the school sample was selected. Colleges were asked, if possible, to select a random sample of full-time students who had completed their compulsory education in 1996. If this was not possible, they were asked to ensure that the sample of about 50 students was broadly representative of their own college's profile in terms of gender; ethnicity; programme area; and ability level. Questionnaires were completed by 925 students in 21 FE colleges (84 per cent response rate).

A.2 Weighting data

Previous studies (see, for example, Foskett and Hesketh, 1997) have shown that young people's attitudes to, and perceptions of, education are related to their gender, their social class, and their own academic attainments. Studies (Foskett and Hesketh, *op. cit.*) have also shown that students attending school sixth forms, sixth-form colleges and FE colleges differ in terms of these factors. Hence, differences in the attitudes of students in different forms of post-16 education are due, at least in part, to these differences in the characteristics of the students.

Comparisons reported in this study were, therefore, based on weighted results. The largest group of respondents consisted of students in FE colleges, so this group was taken as the reference group. For the sixth-form college students, weighting factors were calculated so that the results presented for this group are estimates of the results which would be

obtained if the sixth-form college respondents were equivalent to the FE college respondents in terms of gender, social class and GCSE achievement. Similarly, weighting factors were calculated for the school sixth form respondents.

Information on all three weighting variables was available for 867 students in FE colleges, 358 in school sixth forms and 136 in sixth-form colleges. Unless otherwise stated, the percentages in Tables 2.4–4.8 have been based on these totals.

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This report is about young people who stayed on in full-time education after the age of 16. It is based on the findings of a survey of students in three types of post-16 institutions: FE colleges, sixth-form colleges, and school sixth forms.

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- their reasons for deciding to continue in full-time education;
- the factors that affected their choice of course and institution;
- their views on the careers education and guidance that they received; and
- their early impressions on whether or not the course matched their expectations.

It provides hard evidence on the factors that influence students' choices about post-16 provision. It will therefore be of particular interest to everyone involved with young people at this crucial transition point in their lives including teachers in schools and colleges, careers advisers, parents and policy makers.

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