CEDAR

The National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth:

EVALUATION OF THE SUMMER SCHOOLS 2004

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2004, seven summer schools were offered by the National Academy of Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY). These were hosted by the universities of Christchurch College, Canterbury; Durham, Exeter, Imperial College, London; Lancaster, Warwick and York. The two new host sites were Imperial College, London, and the University of Lancaster. The seven summer schools catered for over 1 000 children, aged 11 to 16 years, and offered a choice of 53 courses (known as 'strands').

NAGTY selected the universities to host the summer schools on four main factors - reputation for quality teaching and learning; location (to give a geographic spread across the country); the range of courses offered (a combination of range, plus the known specialism/s of the university) and variety of site (to provide students with a choice). Of these, the first was considered the most important, with all seven sites being rated in the Universities Index in the top 30 to 40 UK universities.

To maintain confidentiality in the public arena, in this report, the sites are identified only by a code letter - these were randomly allocated and do not mirror the alphabetical order of the site names. The code key has been given to NAGTY, in confidence, so that NAGTY may liaise with individual sites about any site-specific issues, as it sees fit.

The evaluation of the NAGTY summer schools 2004 was carried out by a team of researchers from CEDAR. The team built on the experience gained by CEDAR through its evaluations of the 2002 pilot summer school at Warwick University (Lindsay, Muijs, Hartas, Philips, 2002) and the first multi-site summer school pilot in 2003 (Hartas, Cullen and Lindsay, 2003).

1.1   Methodology

The methodology adopted was a mixed methods approach, combining face-to-face interviews, questionnaires and the perusal of relevant NAGTY and site-specific documentation. This year, for the first time, residential assistants were included in the sample of staff interviewed. The evaluation this year included, again for the first time,

a follow-up element, with questionnaires being sent to all students and their parents at the end of September 2004, requesting that they be returned by 15th October, i.e. the end of the first half term back at school.

1.1.1 Interviews

Interviews were held during the last week of each summer school with a sample of members of the teaching teams, residential assistants and students from each site. Tailored interview schedules were designed for each group, with overlap as appropriate. In addition, interviews were also held with other key staff, such as site directors, site managers, academic directors, as these people made themselves available to speak to the evaluator visiting their site, and with key staff at NAGTY who had an overview of the summer school programme. Although these additional interviews were not part of the contract for the evaluation, they provided very useful information that helped to illuminate findings from the other interviews and from the questionnaires.

The students were selected from each strand across all seven sites. Within strands, they were chosen randomly, except to ensure an overall mix of sexes, ages, ethnicity and whether or not they had been to a NAGTY summer school before. The database of students with these details included was supplied to the evaluation team by NAGTY. All parents of students randomly selected were contacted in order that they could choose whether or not to consent to their son or daughter being interviewed. Only those students for whom parental permission to interview was obtained were invited to take part in the small group interviews that formed part of the evaluation. With one exception, all the students invited to participate in the small group interviews did so.

The evaluation team members were dependent on the site staff to facilitate access to the staff and students to be interviewed. This, in turn, depended upon the relationships built up between the site director, or other staff member given the task of arranging the evaluation visits, and the strand leaders and senior residential assistants. In site F one 'arm' of this relationship was problematic: the site director stated that he felt that the academics leading the strands regarded him as having no management authority over them - hence no timetable for the evaluation interviews was arranged prior to the arrival of the CEDAR team member. As a result, access to student groups for interview was successfully negotiated with only four of the eight

strands. In all other sites, access was enabled to a member of the teaching team and a group of students from as many strands as possible. Residential and senior residential assistants (S/RAs) were interviewed individually or in groups, as they preferred.

Figure 1.1   Interviews conducted

- Contractual interviews
  - ➢ 49 interviews with teaching staff
  - ➢ 48 interviews with small groups of students
  - ➢ 22 interviews with residential assistants, including some senior RAs

- Additional interviews
  - ➢ 9 interviews with members of the site-based, NAGTY summer school management teams, drawn from four of the seven sites
  - ➢ 2 interviews with NAGTY representatives

Total: 130 interviews

1.1.2   *Questionnaires*

All students attending the summer schools were handed a questionnaire during the last week of the summer school and asked to complete it individually (rather than in consultation with friends) and to give their honest opinion. This elicited a 96% response (N=968).

In order to gain some data about the longer term impact of the summer school, two sets of questionnaires were sent out at the end of September, one to all students and one to their parents. The deadline for return was 15th October 2004 but returns were accepted up until 1 November. At that point, 63.7% of students had responded (N=645) and 66.2% of parents (N=671). Subsequently, a further 10 students and eight parents responded but these have not been included in the analysis.

The response rates are shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2   Questionnaire response rates

a) End of summer school questionnaire to all students

- 95.6% response (N=968)

b) Post-summer school questionnaires to all students and their parents

- 63.7% response from students (N=645)
- 66.2% response from parents (N=671)

Total: 2 284 questionnaires

1.1.3   The documents collected

The NAGTY office provided the evaluation team with copies of the guidance documents given to sites: the handbooks for site directors, site managers, academic staff and residential staff, as well as the handbook regarding reporting on student achievement. The NAGTY office also provided generic job descriptions for residential assistants and senior residential assistants. In addition, while team members were visiting the university sites, the opportunity was taken to collect any site specific versions of the generic NAGTY guidance documents. These were collected at sites A, B and C. At other sites, the generic NAGTY guidance documentation was used.

1.2   Demographic information about the students

The students who responded to the end of summer school questionnaire provided some demographic information about themselves. This is summarised in Figure 1.3, which also provides the comparable statistics for the total summer school student body, statistics provided by NAGTY.

Interestingly, the percentage of students responding to the post-summer school questionnaire who had also attended a previous NAGTY summer school was, at 24.3%, almost identical to the figure given in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 Characteristics of students responding to end of summer school questionnaire*

Sex

- 48.2% were male (50.2%)
- 50.6% were female (49.8%)

Type of school attended

- 82.1% were from state sector (87.6%)
- 15.5% were from independent sector (11.6%)
- 0.3% was home educated (0.9%)

Disability or special needs

- 4% stated they had a disability or special need

Attendance at previous NAGTY summer school

- 24.4% had attended a previous NAGTY summer school
- 74.6% had not

* The figures in brackets are the available comparable statistic for the whole summer school student body, 2004, provided to the evaluation team by NAGTY.

The disabilities or special needs self-reported by the students are set out in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Disabilities and special needs self-reported by the students

Disability or special need	Frequency
sensory impairment (visual or hearing)	8
dyslexia	8
allergies or dietary needs	6
physical impairment	5
other/unclear	5

asthma	4
attention deficit hyperactivity disorder	3
autistic spectrum disorder	2
dyspraxia	2
diabetes	1

The distribution by site of students responding to the two questionnaires is given below in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Student respondents attending each summer school site

Site	End of summer school (%) (N=968)	Post summer school (%) (N=645)
Site A	13.8	14.0
Site B	14.9	14.4
Site C	14.0	14.0
Site D	16.0	16.0
Site E	13.9	13.3
Site F	15.4	16.3
Site G	11.7	11.8

1.2   Data analysis

1.2.1   Qualitative data

The qualitative interview data was analysed thematically, beginning from the topics addressed in the interview questions, with additional themes and issues added as these arose. Around a third of all the interviews were transcribed and analysed using the qualitative analysis computer package, NVivo. The remaining interviews were listened to again and the views expressed were counted up, mainly within existing thematic categories. A small number of new themes were added at this second stage of analysis, and sufficient extra interview data was transcribed to provide the evidence for these additional themes.

1.2.2   Quantitative data

All the data from the three sets of questionnaires were entered into the statistical analysis computer package, SPSS. Initially, descriptive statistical analyses were run,

such as basic frequencies. In order to explore any significant differences between sites, analyses of variance (One-Way ANOVAs) were carried out on each question answered by a scale, for example, where *'very good'* was coded 1 and *'very poor'* coded 4. Where significant differences were found, the Scheffe post hoc test was used to identify where the differences lay. The direction of difference was found by referring to the mean values.

1.3   Presentation of tables in the report

All tables in the report are presented without showing missing values, that is, the number of people who chose not to answer a question. However, the percentages shown were calculated with missing values included; for this reason, not all sum to 100%. All percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

2   RECRUITMENT AND INDUCTION OF STAFF

2.1   The management structure

The NAGTY office produced guidance documents for the university sites regarding the recruitment of staff - generic job descriptions for senior residential assistants (SRAs) and residential assistants (RAs) and handbooks for site directors, site managers, academic staff and residential assistants. Each of these handbooks included a diagram of the prototypical NAGTY summer school management structure, as envisaged by NAGTY. This is reproduced below.

Figure 2.1   Generic NAGTY summer school management structure*
* Reproduced from the NAGTY Site Director Handbook, 2004.
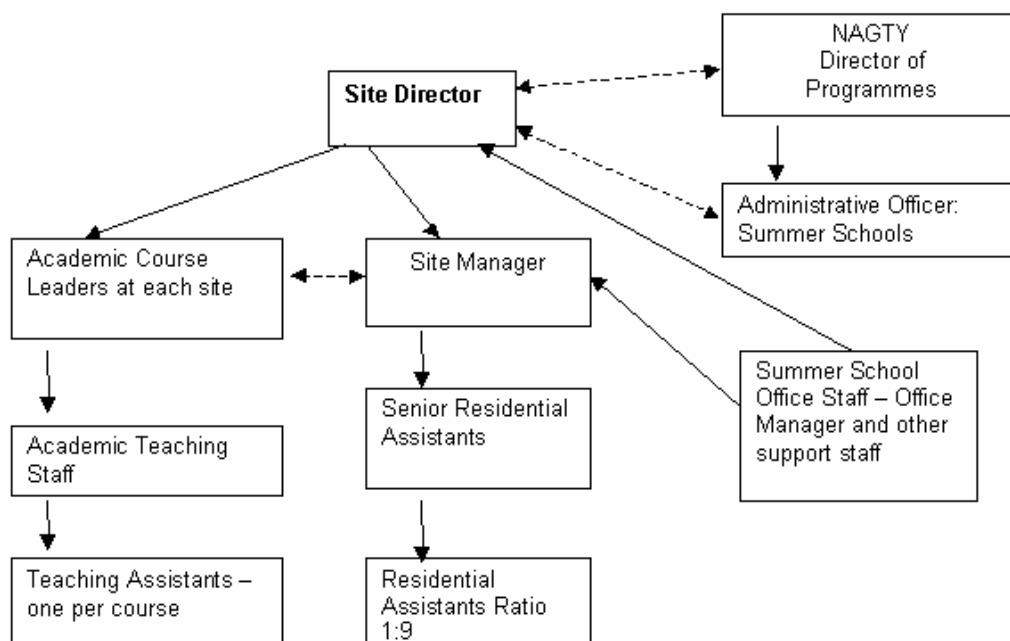
In practice, the management teams at individual sites varied from this. For example, in one site, an academic liaison post was added, while in another site, an academic director post was added - both of these people were responsible for liaison with the strand leaders before and during the summer school, and to address all issues related to the strands, such as access to training/induction and the quality of report-writing. In addition, one of these sites employed a number of extra staff in key roles - a deputy site manager, an operations manager, a resident nurse and a counsellor, all of whom reported to the site manager. The posts of qualified counsellor and full-time nurse were perceived by both academic and residential staff as supportive, providing

a qualified professional approach to situations, such as accidents, illness, mental health, emotional and behaviour problems, which were, perhaps, outside the expertise of other staff. The suggestion was made that NAGTY should include a question to parents on the application form asking whether the child was receiving counselling or support for anger management as, if this is the case, it may be important to arrange for this to continue during the summer school.

Figure 2.2   Examples of some of the additional staff roles

Role: Resident nurse
- Received the same NAGTY summer school training as the site RAs
- Organised the dispensing of daily medication to students
- Looked after staff and students who were poorly
- Acted as gateway to other appropriate medical personnel
- On call
- Offered supportive advice to RAs and other staff about looking after themselves during the hectic, demanding two weeks of summer school
- Attended all senior managers' meetings

Role: Counsellor
- Employed at SRA rate and initially known by that label - but did not hide role as trained counsellor and psychologist
- Had input into the composition of RA groups - based this on ages and on interests expressed on students' personal statements
- Had input into the matching of groups to RAs - based this on experience of RAs - e.g. experience with age group or of children with behaviour problems
- Saw 20 students and followed up five of these on a daily basis
- Adapted style of support to each student - e.g. relaxation techniques for those who were stressed or homesick, provided a safe place to 'let off steam' and reveal information for those with anger and behaviour issues
- Monitored the 'Concern/medical/accident' (CIMR) forms generated by both the academic and residential staff
- Saw main role as supporting students to enable them to enjoy their time at the summer school

[Figure 2.2 continued]

Role: Academic Liaison

- Engaged a range of academic departments to offer strands
- Arranged monthly meetings with strand leaders
- Visited strand departments monthly
- Arranged professional development related to the NAGTY summer school - e.g. related to understanding the client group, appropriate pedagogy, the pastoral element, the OfSTED inspection
- Invited NAGTY personnel and experienced strand leaders to visit and present to site strand leaders
- Liaised with NAGTY over the job description of the qualified teachers within the teaching teams
- Saw main role as developing good relationships with the strand leaders

Role: Academic director

- Contacted every strand leader in December 2003 and asked them to produce a course outline; stayed involved in the strand planning from then on
- Met with strand leaders every month and jointly developed a timeline
- Contacted every school sending students to the site, asking for information about a) the strengths and weaknesses of the students and b) what information the school wanted from the summer school staff afterwards
- Produced a site-specific version of the NAGTY academic staff handbook
- Designed observation sheets for teaching assistants to complete on each student
- Organised daily meetings of teaching assistants during the summer school to ensure communication between the summer school management and the strands
- Sought to embed a shared philosophy about giving students' responsibility for their learning and providing them with the opportunity to *'pursue their dreams'*
- Asked all stand leaders to include time slot within each teaching day when students could reflect on their learning

Role: Deputy site manager

- Deputy to site manager, thus ensuring continuity in case site manager was, for any reason, unavailable or ill
- Responsibility to liaise with the academic strands via the teaching assistants

Other staff appointed over and above those set out in the generic NAGTY management structure diagram included:

- *events manager* - responsible for day-to-day smooth-running of the summer school through liaison with catering staff, accommodation staff, course leaders, residential staff and students
- *events assistant* - based in site office
- *NAGTY schools/OfSTED liaison officer* - provided professional development and support to the teaching teams
- *Marketing manager* - responsible for liaising with external press contacts, the university press office and the NAGTY press office.

The range of staff appointed, in addition to the core staff set out in the generic management structure model, perhaps suggests something of the complexity of delivering a high quality academic, social and residential summer school experience on the NAGTY model.

2.2   NAGTY guidance to sites regarding recruitment of staff

2.2.1   Site directors

The job of site director is a crucial one for the smooth running of a successful NAGTY summer school. The NAGTY handbook for site directors sets out that job's responsibilities in detail, but summed them up as:

"The site director is responsible for all aspects of the summer programme at the site." (p4, NAGTY Site Director Handbook, 2004)

In terms of recruiting the site director (and all other summer school staff), NAGTY expected sites to follow their own university recruitment guidelines. NAGTY sought to work in partnership with individual sites to support them in appointing a suitable candidate as site director. The expectation was that site directors would be capable of taking overall responsibility and were therefore expected to be senior managers who would be able to work with a range of university colleagues, including academics, catering managers and accommodation managers, to ensure a high quality experience for the summer school students.

In practice, all did not go according to plan - owing to unforeseen circumstances, two site directors originally appointed were not able to be in post over the summer school (one moved to a new post outside the host university and one was ill). This meant that site direction was compromised at these two sites and, although those appointed to cover these gaps worked hard to maintain the quality of experience for students, staff interviews indicated that there were some concerns about the quality of experience for staff. This highlights the critical nature of this key post and suggests that the high quality of a NAGTY summer school experience is vulnerable, should anything happen to prevent the person appointed from carrying out the duties of the post.

In addition, from the interviews conducted with site directors who volunteered to do so, it was clear that the job involved a *'nearly intolerable'* burden of work except where additional management staff, such as an academic director, had been appointed to carry some of the load. At sites where this was done, the site director's workload was regarded as *'mainly reasonable'*.

2.2.2   Site managers

NAGTY also expected the site managers appointed to be capable of managing all the non-academic aspects of the summer school, including managing the team of residential assistants (RAs), supported by the senior RAs (SRAs). A substantial handbook (of 44 pages) was produced for site managers covering the following main topics:

- 'Working with your staff'
- 'Orientation and training'
- 'Working with students and parents'
- 'The activities programme'
- 'Policies and procedures'
- 'Summer school management structure'.

Although in 2004, site management seems to have run relatively smoothly, this key post is also potentially vulnerable to staff moves or illness. Equally, it involves an extremely intense workload, particularly during the weeks immediately prior to the

summer school and even more so during the two or three-week period of the summer school itself.

Recommendation 1

- that NAGTY encourage and enable all sites to appoint a 'shadow team' of, at least, a deputy site director and deputy site manager to ensure each summer school may run effectively, even if the site director or site manager leaves post or becomes ill. This approach could also relieve some of the workload associated with these key posts.

2.2.3 Teaching teams and residential teams

NAGTY also produced generic job descriptions to aid the university sites in recruiting appropriate people as qualified teachers on the strand teams, and as SRAs and RAs. The handbooks for academic staff and for residential assistants also set out the respective roles of each type of staff member involved in a NAGTY summer school and covered a range of relevant topics.

Despite the availability of the NAGTY guidance on recruitment of staff and on staff roles and responsibilities, the interview data discussed below indicated that this information either did not always reach those for whom it was intended or it was not always adhered to in practice.

2.3 How staff were recruited in practice

2.3.1 Through networking

The most common method of recruitment for all staff - academic staff, qualified teachers, teaching assistants, and residential assistants - was through networking.

Academic staff were frequently approached by more senior members of their department, or, in some cases, the university, and asked if they would be willing to become involved with the summer school. In other cases, a generalised trawl of a

department led to staff volunteering. One academic, for example, had received a letter from the university pro-vice chancellor, asking if he would be interested in teaching on the summer school. Another university lecturer happened to be in the department office when a telephone call came through asking the relevant department to consider running a course, and, as a result, she volunteered, as did three other staff from the department. Some academic staff had already been involved in similar university-based initiatives, such as providing master classes and outreach classes for children in the area and, as a result, were asked to transfer their knowledge and skills to the NAGTY summer school.

The recruitment of qualified teachers and teaching assistants often followed a similar, networking based, pattern. This networking was, sometimes, on the level of personal friendships, or existing contacts:

> "I'm a personal friend of [the strand leader], and he was involved last year, and he just said, 'Come along.'"

> "I'd taken some sixth formers to a lecture by the academic we've got here, and I'd taken people to the Venus transit master class, and I just met [academics], and I got a phone call saying, 'Are you interested?'"

Sometimes there was a chain of networking which led to the recruiting of qualified teachers. One qualified teacher, for example, had information about the summer schools passed on to him by a former colleague at the independent school where he had worked. However, this appears to have been particularly the case when *newly* qualified teachers were recruited. One newly qualified teacher was approached by a member of staff on his PGCE course, who had, in turn, been approached by a member of the academic department concerned. This type of recruitment was also typical of the recruitment of teaching assistants, who were often post-graduate students in the departments involved in the summer schools. These teaching assistants were often known to academic staff as former, or current, students of theirs.

Residential assistants were also sometimes recruited by networking. This was particularly the case with RAs who were undergraduates at participating universities, and had already been involved with, for example, university outreach programmes:

"Well, I've been a student at [the university] for three years now. I graduated in July, and during those three years I was part of the [university] welcome service, which is a group of students who act as ambassadors for the university, and work on open days, and so on, and from there I got to know [the site manager] and other people who work in her office and [the site organiser]. And it was quite by chance, actually, because last summer I was working in the student recruitment office [...] and it just happened that [the site organiser] was in the office at the same time organising NAGTY [...] and I got a phone call on the Monday. The summer school was starting on the Sunday, and on the Monday [I got] a phone call saying that someone had dropped out. They knew me through the welcome service, and, obviously, I'd been checked out, and 'Was there any chance I could come and do it?'"

2.3.2   Recruitment via more formal means

A small number of summer school staff members were recruited by more formal means than networking. Some were recruited through university-based recruitment services. Of those interviewed, this applied only to some of the qualified teachers and RAs. For example, one newly qualified teacher, who had only finished his PGCE course in 2004, was looking for summer school work to gain a little more experience prior to taking up his first fulltime teaching post. He was unable to find such work until he was advised by his local education authority to apply to the NAGTY summer school organisers.

Some RAs also found out about the summer schools from university job shops, university websites, or other sources.

These various, more formal, methods of recruitment were, nonetheless, the exception to the norm of recruitment by networking.

2.3.3   Recruitment through a private sector partner

One summer school was run in partnership between the host university and a private sector body, a long-standing partnership. At this site, the private sector body was largely responsible for staff recruitment of all the NAGTY summer school staff, be it of academic, qualified teaching staff, or residential assistants.

The private sector body used its own staff as SRAs:

> "I'd done previous summer schools for [private sector body]. I'd been to Swansea and down to Wye College on one week courses, and this is my first two week course. I didn't apply to NAGTY. I work for [private sector body], and [private sector body] asked me if I'd be interested in doing the two week course here, so that's my connection."

Some, at least, of the qualified teachers and academics were also previously employees of the private sector body, or were recruited by them for the NAGTY summer school. For some of these employees, the private sector body had used a networking recruitment process:

> "I am an ex-teacher, and I've known [private sector body employee] for some years, and he asked me to become involved in it, and I was invited to join."

Uniquely, 'mentors', rather than RAs, were recruited at this site. The mentors, all of whom were students of the host university, combined the roles carried out by teaching assistants and RAs at the other six NAGTY summer school sites. This approach was adopted to enable the courses offered to be accredited through the nationally recognised BA Creativity in Science and Technology (CREST) awards at the Gold Award level.

2.3.4. Views expressed about the recruitment process

Across the sites, the predominant feeling among academic and teaching staff interviewed was that the courses they were involved with ran well, and that the course teams were effective and nicely balanced. To some extent, this could have been a result of the personal, networking approach to recruitment that typified the recruitment process on almost all the sites, with the partial exception of the one site run in partnership with the private sector body. Nonetheless, one qualified teacher raised a number of important issues with regard to this type of recruitment process:

> "I think it has worked well, I think that [the strand leader], and [the senior qualified teacher] and I have worked well as a team. We've complemented each other, but at the same time [...] it's just happened to be like that, quite organically. There was no rigorous selection process, and while I think that it

has worked, there was no guarantee that it would [...]. It was one area that I had a question mark over."

These comments raise issues of accountability, equal opportunities recruitment, and the suitability of networking as the primary recruiting mechanism for course staff on the NAGTY summer schools. While the qualified teacher quoted expressed satisfaction at the way the course team he was involved with worked together, he felt that this was, to some extent, a fortuitous outcome, and that it was a matter that needed further consideration.

Recommendation 2

- that NAGTY encourages host sites to ensure that any recruitment through networking adheres to university site guidelines on staff recruitment, paying particular attention to Equal Opportunities legislation, thus opening up NAGTY summer school positions to a wider field of candidates and ensuring accountability and transparency in the appointments made

2.4 Staff induction and guidance

2.4.1 Induction and support for teaching and academic staff

Induction and support for academic and teaching staff varied. There were differences that arose from role, but also differences between courses. On some courses, qualified teachers had, for example, a very limited input into the planning of courses, and found that their induction was limited. On other courses, qualified teachers were more closely involved at an early stage of planning, and, as a result, had a clearer induction. For example, at one site, a manager interviewed noted that most of the qualified teachers recruited had had meetings with their course teams and so became '*owned'* as part of that team

Qualified teachers

The issue of their role concerned a number of the qualified teachers interviewed. They felt that, in practice, their role was not as clearly defined as it might have been. There was a wide range of experience in terms of how qualified teachers were integrated into the course teams. Some courses recruited teachers who had no knowledge of the subject, so, for example, a languages teacher was part of a science course, while a ceramics teacher acted as the qualified teacher on a law course. This was not seen as a problem by these individuals, who felt that they had a supporting, or monitoring role. But, on other courses, qualified teachers interviewed described having had limited or, in some cases, no input into the preparation process. As a result, they were unclear as to their function, and sometimes felt that their skills and subject knowledge were not being taken advantage of fully:

> "It did seem a bit strange that I didn't have any part in the planning, or the preparation of the syllabus, yet I was going to be called the teacher. I was going to be in every lesson, and responsible during the day. But I understood it was more a case of being in touch with management issues, and organising them into groups, taking some of the responsibility away from the mentors during the day, and sort of liaising with the professors."

Another qualified teacher, who was recruited late in the day, had had no input into the design of the course, yet had proved pivotal to it:

> "We've actually changed academic two or three times, so I've been the sort of continuity. Unfortunately, I didn't have any input. Now I've been through the first ten days or so, I've lots of suggestions, because I've been in the classroom for years."

This teacher felt that some academics on the course had not taken into account the needs of younger students, something that she would have tried to plan for, had she been involved earlier. This was also the experience of a qualified teacher who found that he had no input into the design of the course, and little conception of his role. As a result, he felt that he had a difficult time trying diplomatically to encourage the academics to take more account of the age range of the summer school students. He felt that his involvement in the planning stages might have avoided problems which were more apparent to him, as a classroom teacher.

More successful involvement of teachers in the planning and induction stage gave those teachers a clearer idea of their function, and enabled them to contribute fully, drawing on their teaching experience.

One qualified teacher felt that the success of the course was to a large degree dependent on the contact he and the other qualified teacher had with the strand leader prior to the course starting:

> "In terms of working with [the strand leader], me and him have fairly good contact [and] me, [the strand leader] and [the other teacher], knowing what we wanted to do."

Another teacher also stressed the importance of pre-course meetings with the strand leader and other academics:

> "Most of it [the induction] came from meetings with [the strand leader], and to a lesser degree from the lead academic [...] those three or four meetings we had before the summer school started. And, then, obviously, things change, and we discuss them."

Teaching assistants also benefited from early inclusion in the planning process:

> "Yes, we did have several meetings, and we understood as the course started, we understood that a lot of things would be done, kind of spontaneously, as we fitted sessions around the kids [...] That was very nice because, being the junior members of the team, they were supportive of us in terms of encouraging us to develop ideas."

Figure 2.1 What worked well regarding induction for qualified teachers

- roles within the teaching team (strand leader, academic, qualified teacher, teaching assistant) being clearly defined and understood
- being closely involved at the early planning stages
- being enabled to contribute fully, drawing on their experience of teaching the age group attending the NAGTY summer schools

Academics

The usual pattern for academics was that, once they had been recruited to the programme, they were given the freedom to design the courses as they saw fit:

"I was very much left to my own devices."

"I did not feel that I was constrained in what material I could include."

For those academics involved in presenting a course for the first time, this freedom presented some problems, as well as opportunities. Courses had to be designed from scratch, and, in these cases, it appeared that frequent meetings, longer term planning, and other contact, for example, e-mail, were essential. One academic, not a strand leader, described the positive experience of preparing successfully for the course, with key features being early meetings, frequent liaison between those involved, support and direction from the site director, and liaison with other strand leaders on the site:

"Compared to the other ones [outreach classes] I have done through the university, and through the department, this one has been much better run, all very, very well organised, a tight ship. A lot of support, we even had group meetings, as well, a little bit of an idea about the profile of the students we will get, and I found that very, very helpful [...] We started planning over Easter, and then we had a big meeting in May time, and then there has been a lot of ongoing between us and other strand leaders. It's been very good, and I've been very confident that it's all been run properly from the centre [...] and I was confident that all I had to do was turn up and do my bit."

For those academics who had been involved in NAGTY summer schools in 2003, their task was easier, in that they were able to build upon their previous experiences, and course material that they had already prepared. However, some staff were aware that being able to benefit from this continuity also raised the question of future continuity if, as was likely, staffing changed from one year to the next. Commenting on this issue, two members of staff in different sites said:

"The only way I could see that happening [continuity] was if they contacted us and asked us, had that conversation, and that wouldn't be a formalised conversation. In theory, I wouldn't, but, in theory, I could turn around and say, 'Well, I'm not being paid to do that anymore.' So, if there was continuity, it would come out of friendly relationships."

There was also the issue of keeping together particular teams of academics, qualified teachers, and teaching assistants, from one year to the next:

"That is a good question [issue of continuity]. It would be pretty hard. I think we do complement each other in a particularly good way. [Pause] I'd not thought about that..."

Recommendations 3 and 4

- that NAGTY encourages host sites to provide appropriate induction and guidance (including a personal copy of the NAGTY academic staff handbook) for all members of teaching teams, ensuring that there is clarity about specific roles and that qualified teachers are able to contribute their experience with the age group to the planning process
- that NAGTY work with the host sites to ensure that there is at least an adequate paper trail enabling academic departments to learn from experience year by year, despite any changes of teaching personnel

2.4.2 Induction courses for RAs

Induction courses were used in some summer schools to prepare RAs for their role. The courses varied from one to three days, and were varied in content, and, in the view of some RAs, usefulness. The opinion of one group of RAs interviewed, who had attended a 3-day course, was largely positive, although there was some feeling that their summer school also benefited from the fact that all the RAs had previous experience of working with children in a variety of contexts, from summer schools to voluntary work:

> "I think most of us had worked with children before, if there had been anybody who hadn't worked with children before, I don't think it would have been sufficient, but because we all were experienced, then it was ok."

Figure 2.3   Examples of induction courses for RAs

The NAGTY *Site Manager Handbook, 2004* (pp11-16) provided suggestions about what to cover during orientation and training for RAs but stated that sites were free to develop their own site-specific training.

Example 1
One summer school site ran a three-day induction course for its RAs, which covered issues related to gifted and talented children, health and safety issues, dealing with homesickness, monitoring procedures, and teamwork exercises for the RAs.

Example 2
Another summer school site ran a two-day training course for RAs which kept close to the version suggested in the NAGTY Handbook but added in other features, such as a talk on Child Protection, a presentation about the visit by OfSTED and a session on consistency of approach.

One RA compared the training she received in 2004, with the induction course she had experienced prior to a NAGTY summer school in 2003:

> "The training for that [2003] was really good. This year it was a lot different. There were scenarios, which were quite good. I think it was really quite useful if you had never done a residential course before."

At another site, a similar induction course was, in general terms, praised by an RA, who felt that it was a good preparation:

> "I think it was very good. It was very, as I said, very thorough and detailed, and I think it allowed us to really - it defined our role quite well. Everybody knew what was happening, I think."

However, again, this RA felt that some things were being taken for granted, and that those RAs with previous summer school experience were in a stronger position than those who had only benefited from the induction course:

> "But what I will say is, I think it was more the pastoral role was defined very well, but then I think the social activities and organisation, the role we play, that wasn't defined quite so well. So [...] for example, people who were here last year knew how it was going to run and knew what to expect, and ended up organising a lot of activities simply because people that hadn't done it before weren't aware of what was going on until it actually happened. What I'll also say is, I think too much emphasis was placed on last year (I can't remember the percentage of [RAs] who were returners) but, I know a lot of the people who were doing the summer school for the first time felt that a lot of knowledge was taken for granted. [Those who'd been RAs before] said, 'Because this is how we did it last year, so it's how we'll do it again.' And things weren't - especially the social programme, and how things worked that way, that wasn't explained as thoroughly as it should have been."

However, the three-day induction courses for RAs discussed above were not a uniform experience for all RAs across the various sites. Some RAs had only a more limited induction, being informed about NAGTY, how many children there were, background information, and *'additional operating procedures we'd have to use'*. This was felt to be *'useful'*, but, once again, it was felt that there was reliance on the previous experience of RAs.

Recommendation 5

- that NAGTY work with the host sites to ensure that all RAs are fully inducted into

all aspects of their role and are given a personal copy of the NAGTY handbook for RAs, thus avoiding undue reliance on those RAs with previous experience of a NAGTY summer school and avoiding uneven induction experiences across the host sites

2.4.3 Induction and guidance by the private sector body in partnership with a host site

Induction and guidance by the private sector body in partnership with one host site appeared to have taken a generally different form than that typical of other sites. No academics were interviewed at that summer school (despite this being requested) but qualified teachers and SRAs were. The SRAs had little specific induction for the NAGTY summer school, although they had previously been employed by the private sector body to work on its own summer schools. Nonetheless, there was a feeling that aspects of induction, be it a more comprehensive briefing, or meetings with other summer school staff prior to the NAGTY summer school, could have been usefully included. On being asked about how much induction she had had, one SRA replied:

> "Not a great deal. We did have a contract, and we did have information about what roles were going to involve, the pastoral role, but a lot of it I've learnt as I went along really."

This SRA also felt that it would have been useful to meet with the mentors for the summer school:

> "I would have liked to have met [the mentors] because we work very closely with the mentors, because although I knew [name], who is in charge of mentors, and one or two others from previously, we didn't know everyone. I think [...] it would be very nice for everyone to meet on the morning of the registration. Registration's at 12 o'clock; if we met, say, at half past ten, and had a coffee, so we could actually get to know each other and put a face to a name."

Another SRA, with previous NAGTY summer school experience, did not feel that a lack of specific induction was a problem, because she was used to information being

given at the last minute. She attended a NAGTY training day, *and 'a normal training day just before the summer school started'*. A third SRA, with no NAGTY summer school experience, felt that she needed more information than she received:

"A booklet would have been helpful; even if it is just to make sure that you are on the right lines [...] a booklet would be very helpful, more than helpful."

Although there were, therefore, some issues raised surrounding the preparation and induction of staff by the private sector body involved with this one site, the SRAs all felt that they were adequately supported during the course, having easy access to senior staff from the private sector organisation:

"[We] have had support from [the organisation] if we need it. Basically, if there is anything we don't feel is 100%, I ring [names]. I just say to them, 'What do you think?' or, 'How do you feel about this?'"

Qualified teachers at that summer school received an overall briefing from the private sector organisation, which the teachers interviewed felt was adequate in terms of the general framework of the summer school:

"We had a two hour meeting at the end of July when all the teachers got together to brief us, and I think most of us were able to be there, and we were taken through the format of the course, and the role of the mentors, and our role [...] so when we arrived the first day, we didn't know every detail, but we had a good start there."

At a more course specific level, some of the qualified teachers raised issues concerning preparation, confusion over exactly what was required of them, and the use of the CREST awards as part of the assessment process for students, the latter being a feature unique to this site.

"[We] had a lot of very mixed e-mails; it is not at all clear who was in charge. Somebody called in about three days before the whole thing started made a lot of radical suggestions. It was quite confusing. And [the strand leader] was in China. He was supposed to be organising it, so that was quite tricky."

Another qualified teacher attended one preliminary meeting, but was not sure if there had been more, as he became involved in the summer school late in the day. In response to the question, *'What was covered in that meeting?'*, he replied:

"Quite a lot. As much as you can, in a meeting where no-one has met each other before. And for [the private sector organisation], it's the biggest summer school they've run, so you can't predict all the issues that are going to arise [...]. There have definitely been issues that have come up from day one of the course. The main one for me has been the CREST awards, the administration of it. We were told about it at the time of the meeting, but without being given a lot of information about how to run it [...] The academic on my course was away, and he was quite late in submitting details of his course, the content of the course, and also because he was away, he didn't liaise with [the private sector organisation], and he didn't really know that the CREST awards were part of it. I think that this may have happened on other strands too. So he didn't include much time in his schedule for organising the CREST awards."

Another qualified teacher had more pre-course meetings, but still felt that he could have been given more information:

"Most of [the induction] came from meetings with [private sector body personnel] and, to a lesser degree, from the lead academic [...] these three or four meetings we had before the summer school started, and then, obviously, things change, and we discuss them.[...] In terms of content, I was given a timetable before it started. I think, from my particular strand, perhaps a little more could have been made available to me [...] I didn't have a great deal of input, but I reviewed what they had done, which seemed sufficient. [But] a little more clarity would have helped [...] I think I would have liked a little bit more information than I did get, but I know they're always pushed for time, particularly in the summer."

Recommendation 6

- that NAGTY liaise more closely with this unique NAGTY summer school site, run by a host site, plus a private sector partner, to ensure that NAGTY-specific induction is provided for all staff employed on the NAGTY summer school and

that all members of the teaching teams are fully aware of the implications of offering accreditation through the BA CREST Award scheme

2.4.4 The issue of pay

Although the evaluation interview schedules did not ask about levels of pay, the issue was raised by some teaching assistants, RAs, and qualified teachers. According to NAGTY representatives, all RAs across the sites should have been paid at the same rate. This was made explicit to sites to avoid a potential 'internal market' in RAs. Sites were given discretion as to what they chose to pay SRAs within their overall budget. Similarly, all sites were given an amount of funding per strand but then made their own decision as to what rate was paid to the academic and the qualified teacher involved.

RAs and teaching assistants seemed generally satisfied with the pay and other benefits, being aware that, as students (which most of them were) the summer schools provided interesting work, which they felt was good experience, and *'better than working in a plastics factory, which I would otherwise have been',* as one RA put it.

The views expressed concerning pay by the qualified teachers interviewed related to the length of their experience as teachers. One qualified teacher with two years teaching experience commented that pay was a motivating factor, being equivalent to a month of his teacher's salary. However, a qualified teacher with 25 years teaching experience felt differently, explaining:

> "The pay is abysmal, because I was worth £1,000 a week when I was teaching each term, and they only pay me £500 a week here, and the job mushrooms outside the two weeks, so it really is not much that one gets."

Nonetheless, pay was not raised as a major issue by the majority of staff interviewed. However, one member of a site management team stated that the remuneration for the academics was, in his view, inadequate, given the amount of work they had to do, not only during the summer school but in the preceding months also.

Summary of key points from Chapter 2

- A number of sites found that they had to augment the generic NAGTY summer school management structure with additional management positions in order to run the summer school efficiently and with reasonable workloads for the range of staff involved.

- The roles of site director and site manager were critical to the success of the summer school, yet vulnerable to the normal vagaries of life, such as illness and staff turn-over, suggesting that it would be sensible for NAGTY to support sites to appoint 'shadow' deputies for these posts.

- NAGTY guidance on recruitment of staff and on staff roles and responsibilities did not always reach those for whom it was intended and/or was not always adhered to in practice.

- From interview data, it seemed that the most common method of recruiting staff was through networking, raising issues of accountability, Equal Opportunities and transparency.

- The quality and availability of induction and support for staff on teaching teams and residential teams varied within and across sites, despite NAGTY guidance on roles and responsibilities being available. Where induction and support was limited, this had a negative impact, especially on RAs and qualified teachers.

- Involving the qualified teachers in pre-summer school planning and induction enabled them to contribute more fully and satisfyingly to the strand, drawing on their teaching experience.

- For academics, key features of prior preparation included early meetings of the teaching team, frequent liaison among those involved, support and direction from the site director or academic director, and liaison with other strand leaders on the site.

- Sites, especially strand leaders, need to think about how best to capture what the teaching team learned from experience in terms of what worked well and not so well, in order to benefit from this, or pass it on to other teams, during subsequent years.

- Residential assistants and teaching assistants interviewed were satisfied with their pay and conditions. Pay for qualified teachers and academics was not always viewed as commensurate with their experience but this was raised as an issue only by a small minority of interviewees.

3   VIEWS ABOUT THE APPLICATION PROCESS AND THE STUDENTS SELECTED FOR SUMMER SCHOOL PLACES

3.1 Parents' views of the application process

Details about the summer schools, 2004, and how to apply were posted on the NAGTY website (http://www.warwick.gifted). Existing members were sent a booking form directly, whilst new members received one along with their confirmation of membership.

In the CEDAR questionnaire sent to parents after the summer schools, they were asked their views about how straightforward they had found the application process. Their views are set out in Table 3.1, and indicate that about 90% of parents found the process *'straightforward'* or *'fairly straightforward'* and a minority of 10% found it *'not straightforward'* or *'difficult'*.

Table 3.1 Parents' views of the application process for the summer schools

Parent Questionnaire (N=671)	%
straightforward	49.9
fairly straightforward	39.2
not straightforward	6.4
difficult	3.6

The NAGTY website also explained about how the cost of the summer school was to be met, i.e. through a mix of *'heavy'* subsidy from the government, plus family and school contributions totalling £490 for a two-week summer school, rising to £640 for a three-week summer school. Scholarships were available to those who could not afford the family element of this.

The website stated that *'schools may wish to'* contribute £210 towards a two-week summer school or £290 towards a three-week summer school. However, there was no obligation on schools to do so and not all did. In fact, as Table 3.2 shows, over a quarter of parent respondents stated that the school had made *no contribution at all* to the cost of a summer school place. Analysis of variance showed that there were statistically significant differences among sites - $F(6,655)=4.038$, $p=.001$. The Scheffe post hoc test was then used to identify that there were statistically significant mean differences between the responding parents whose children attended Site F and Site D. Parents of children attending Site F were statistically significantly more likely to say that their child's school contributed to the cost than were responding parents whose child attended summer school at Site D. It is possible that this difference

reflects the differential 'reach' and profile of NAGTY in schools in different areas of the country.

Table 3.2 Level of school contribution to cost of summer school place

Parent Questionnaire (N=671)	%
to a great extent	38.9
somewhat	27.4
slightly	6.1
not at all	26.5

On the other hand, 76.5% of responding parents indicated that liaison with the school over a child attending summer school had been *'straightforward'* or *'fairly straightforward'* (Table 3.3). This left a substantial minority of about 19% of responding parents who found working with the school to apply for a NAGTY summer school place *'not straightforward'* or *'difficult'*.

Table 3.3 Liaison with child's school about applying for summer school

Parent Questionnaire (N=671)	%
straightforward	44.9
fairly straightforward	31.6
not straightforward	12.8
difficult	6.1

Statistics made available to the evaluation team by NAGTY indicate that 27.3% of summer school students received full scholarships for the family element of the cost, with a further 27.2% receiving scholarships worth between 10% and 70%. Thus, fewer than half the families with students attending the summer schools paid the full family element cost of a place. Yet, as Table 3.4 shows, about a quarter of responding parents felt financial pressure *'somewhat'* or *'to a great extent'*, owing to a child attending summer school. Further statistical analysis showed that there was a relationship between level of school contribution and level of financial pressure felt by families ($X2=43.799$, df=1, p=<.01). Of parents who indicated the family had experienced levels of financial pressure *'somewhat'* or *'to a great extent'*, only about 18% had received more than a '*slight'* school contribution.

Table 3.4 Level of financial pressure due to child attending summer school*

Level	Parents' views (N=671) %	Students' views (N=968) %
to a great extent	6.0	8.3
somewhat	19.4	20.6
slightly	36.2	28.1
not at all	37.3	39.9

*Parents were asked about this in the post-summer-school questionnaire; students' in the end-of-summer-school questionnaire.

Interestingly, analysis of variance showed that responding parents whose child attended summer school in site G were statistically significantly more likely to say that the family was put under financial pressure by this than responding parents whose child attended the site F summer school $(F(6,654)=2.935, p=.008)$. This may be explicable by the greater likelihood of schools contributing to the cost of children attending the site F summer school as analysis, discussed in relation to Table 3.2, showed.

Recommendation 7

- that NAGTY work with the DfES, LEAs and headteacher associations to raise its profile in all schools, and to encourage more schools to contribute to the cost of pupils attending NAGTY summer schools

3.2 Summer school staff views of the students

3.2.1 Teaching staff views

The overwhelming view of academic and qualified teacher staff was that the NAGTY students almost all displayed characteristics that were felt to be typical of 'gifted and talented' students. The implication was that those NAGTY students who attended summer school were almost all well chosen, their recruitment matching the indicative criteria set down by NAGTY.

Summer school staff commented positively on a variety of characteristics displayed by students:

- maturity,
- enthusiasm,
- diligence,
- group cohesion,
- ability,
- articulacy,
- thoughtfulness,
- reflectiveness.

The following quotations provide a flavour of typical comments made:

"Let me just say that it is satisfying to teach them, and I think that they are very enthusiastic, and they want to absorb the information you give them, and I think that quite a significant number of them turn ideas over in their heads and come up with, it's not surface learning."

"Extremely astute, extremely well-read, fantastic knowledge of current affairs, and just incredible enthusiasm, they are quite astounding".

"They're good students, they're nice kids, they're, it's heartening to see that those kinds of students out there doing things like this [...]"

"These students are brilliant. I think we've been very lucky in our strand [...] we've had brilliant group dynamics. I'm very impressed. They've got a very mature attitude, they are not afraid to contribute, and ask questions, and get involved [...]"

"They are certainly interested in the subject, and that is lovely to have a whole roomful of people who are actually keen on what you are going to do next".

3.2.2   Residential staff views

This positive appraisal of the students' performance in class was mirrored by the views of RAs. All the RAs interviewed had a positive assessment of the students in their care, noting that they were quick to bond together, that they were supportive, and friendly (a finding reflected in the students' experience of friendship at the summer schools). For example, one RA commented of her group:

"They were all quite 'girly' girls, the majority of them, like. Most of them kind of formed quite a tight bunch, a group, really quickly, but there were a couple of outsiders and what I was delighted with was how the girls included those who were quite different and, probably, people who they wouldn't have socialised with at school but, at NAGTY, they all kind of got together and really helped each other out. You know, things like they lent her clothes for the beach party, and things like that, and they, like, lent her a dress for last night. It was really nice; they kind of supported each other and made each other feel welcome and included, which was really good. I was happy with that".

There was some recognition that not all of the students fell into the typical category of motivated, enthusiastic and able. The general feeling was that there were a few students who, for a variety of reasons, did not quite match the typical summer school student. However, this was not felt to be a pronounced issue:

"The majority of them I would characterise as, yes, they are bright children, but not having the quality that says to me, exceptionally bright compared to ...but, then, there is an element of bias concerning my teaching background [a high performing comprehensive] [...] so, barring a couple, the rest would be all in my top set, and perhaps the top of the top set".

"Motivation wise, again, that's been varied. Some of them are highly motivated, and some of them are very clearly, and openly, just enjoy the ability to talk, at length, about history, and I know, from conversation with them, that's what they enjoy, that's what they can't do at school, because they are constrained by the syllabus. So for the vast majority of them the motivation is very high, but I think there is an element of them, you know, I had one comment from one boy that the motivation wasn't very high because it was summer".

Although almost all the staff appeared to be happy with the students they dealt with, one strand leader did raise the issue of wanting to have some input into which NAGTY students were accepted on to his course:

"I think it's very important that, as a course leader, I have quite a high degree of control of the academic side. I *would* like to be able to *approve* applicants to the course. I was presented with 20 students, and, as it happens, they were a great bunch, and the mix is excellent. However, I think that given that applications will become more competitive, that I should have, as happens in university settings, some say over applications, and who gets approved. I would like to, say, choose 20 from a short list of 40. I'm quite happy for there to be quotas on sex and race, and all sorts of other factors, but I think some input, given that I know the task, and know what, for next year I will know the task, I think it will be a good time to start to, perhaps, have some input on application."

Recommendation 8

- that NAGTY implement current plans to enable strand leaders to have the final choice of students for their course from a shortlist provided by NAGTY, and monitor the effectiveness of this change

Summary of key points from Chapter 3

- 90% of parents found the application process '*straightforward'* or *'fairly straightforward'*.
- Over a quarter of parent respondents stated that the school had made no contribution at all to the cost of a summer school place.
- 76.5% of responding parents indicated that liaison with the school over a child attending summer school had been *'straightforward'* or *'fairly straightforward'*. This left a substantial minority of about 19% of responding parents who found working with the school to apply for a NAGTY summer school place *'not straightforward'* or *'difficult'*.
- Fewer than half the families with students attending the summer schools paid the full family element cost of a place. Yet about a quarter of responding parents felt financial pressure *'somewhat'* or *'to a great extent'*, owing to a

child attending summer school. Of parents who indicated the family had experienced levels of financial pressure *'somewhat'* or *'to a great extent'*, only about 18% had received more than a '*slight'* school contribution.

- The representatives interviewed from both teaching teams and residential teams viewed the NAGTY students who attended summer school as almost all well chosen, with their recruitment matching the indicative criteria set down by NAGTY. There were a few students who, for a variety of reasons, did not quite match the typical summer school student. However, this was not seen as a pronounced issue.

4 THE TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE: Views of the teaching teams

4.1 Workload

Perceptions of the workload among the teaching team staff varied most clearly by role - academics were more likely than qualified teachers to regard the workload as heavy.

A minority of academic staff, exclusively those who had prepared a course for the summer school for the first time, indicated that the set-up 'costs' of course preparation had been high in terms of time:

> "It has been a lot of work, 3-4 weeks, but I think it's mainly because we are new to this, so it has taken us a bit more time in preparation."

> There was an awareness that the time spent in preparing courses in future years would be less, providing that the same team was involved, or that there was some way to ensure continuity between years. This would be the case in situations where, as was the case on one strand, the course framework had been built around an accompanying computer package. In other cases, it may well be that high set-up costs would continue to be normal, if no steps were taken to ensure continuity:

> "The co-ordination of it [because it was the first time] took a lot of time, but I don't think that will be something that will happen next year. Next year, I won't be part of it, but it will be up and running. This time, there was a lot of time spent making sure that we had a good product to deliver, because there were these kids, they were coming from all over the country, they were coming to a university, so it was a big thing for them, so I wanted to make sure that it was a good product we were giving them, so it took a lot of preparation because it was the first time we were doing it".

In terms of workload, once the summer schools had started, there was a noticeable difference between the perceptions of qualified teachers and academic staff. Whereas qualified teachers, in general, felt that there was nothing unusual about the

workload, academic staff far more frequently commented that the workload was tiring:

"quite exhausting in terms of the actual days, very prolonged, from 9 to 3"

"quite wearing, but that is just the sheer intensity of it"

"absolutely exhausting at times".

This difference in perception appeared to stem from a number of sources. One was the differing norms of contact time with students for academics and qualified teachers, the latter regarding a day of contact time as being, *'not particularly demanding'*. In addition, there was also the issue of the workload split between members of a strand team. In some courses, academic staff took on the greater responsibility for teaching. For example, when the qualified teachers either had no course-specific knowledge, or where they were not made full use of, there was a tendency for academics to experience a heavy workload, and for qualified teachers to feel that perhaps they could have contributed more. One teacher noted this, saying:

"because I wasn't involved in the planning, the workload in that sense was minimal really, other than I chose to know the topics we were to cover, to go and sit on the internet and refresh my memory".

Even where teachers felt that they were not being used as much as they might have been by strand leaders, there was a feeling that this was appropriate given the hierarchy of roles and status they felt existed between academic staff, qualified teachers, and teaching assistants, or mentors:

"I think that I could have been used more in leading sessions. I have done a couple [but...] I have felt that it is [the strand leader's] baby at the end of the day. I've had work to do [but] in no way do I think I have had too much".

"I've been quite calculating about this. I'm supposed to be the teacher-adviser, not the preparer of material, so I've tried to restrict my contribution to the view of responding when people asked me [...] I've tried to hold back. I've

said, 'Look, I'm in the classroom from the mornings to the evening, and that's jolly wearing, so it's not my role to be going out reading'."

Recommendations 9 and 10

> - that NAGTY work with sites to encourage the strand leaders and qualified teachers to record sufficient information about the work done and the lessons learned from experience to enable an accumulation of knowledge from year to year, rather than new teaching teams having to 'reinvent the wheel' each year
> - that NAGTY work with sites to encourage the strand leaders to discuss with the qualified teacher on their team, well in advance of the summer school, how best that person can contribute to the overall delivery of the strand, thus ensuring a greater sense of ownership and involvement for the qualified teachers and easing the workload for the academics

4.2   Teaching

4.2.1   Variety, interactive teaching and learning

Academic staff were often acutely aware that the NAGTY summer school students were a different cohort of students than the one they were familiar with. Many academics adapted their teaching styles to meet the particular demands of teaching a NAGTY summer school:

- the age group,
- the students' status as 'gifted and talented',
- the concentrated amount of contact time with one group of students.

In addition, qualified teachers sometimes felt that one of their key roles was to facilitate the teaching and learning experience for the students by drawing on their expertise as secondary practitioners.

Academic staff were often aware that, given the length of the teaching day on the summer schools, and the 12-16 or 14-16 year age range (depending on particular course requirements), that there was a need to plan more interactive sessions with the NAGTY students, compared with their usual undergraduate students. Some academic staff appreciated this factor at the planning stage, and created courses that took the special nature of the NAGTY summer schools into account from the start. Further, they were aware that the smaller class sizes of NAGTY students (typically not more than 20 students) also offered greater flexibility for teaching. One academic noted that:

> "I think the issue was how to allocate time, because we had them from nine in the morning until three thirty, with two breaks [...] two one and a half hour sessions, and one, two hour session'.

As strand leader, his response was to build in plenty of role play sessions and computer-based work, along with lectures and discussions. He felt that the big advantage they had compared with undergraduate teaching was numbers:

> "The class size of 19 is very conducive to this sort of format, whereas the first year [undergraduate] course I teach has 250 students."

Many of the academic staff responded positively to the freedom in terms of content and teaching methods that the summer school gave them; a freedom conferred by the free-standing nature of the courses and the enthusiasm of the NAGTY students:

> "Being at the bottom end of a faculty, I find, personally, that this is far better, because we are able to design what we say and how we want to say it, and we haven't got a top-heavy administration telling us how to teach, saying, 'oh, I'm afraid that you can't assess one off performances'. Here, now, we can have debates, pupils can get up and say things, we can have debates, but with undergraduates, it's, 'Is this assessed? Does this go towards my module? Should I bother?' And then we have our administration saying, 'You can't assess that, it can only be in a written format.' This is great, these guys

are learning. I would say they are picking up concepts that some of our third years haven't yet got, which is frightening. But they are doing it because we can use innovative teaching here [at the summer school] that the university is clamping down on."

In addition to utilising *'innovative teaching'*, academic staff often chose to cohere their course around a theme, creating an overall framework within which various teaching and learning strategies were used. For example, one academic, with experience of university outreach work, linked material he had already developed to a unifying theme:

> "I've gathered a small body of material that's useful to that age group, so I was able to give my colleagues a sense of what the age group would find interesting, and I have a library of legal-related DVDs and videos, and so I think, yes, it was quite easy to imagine the audience and their requirements. [...] We wanted the thing to culminate in a product; the three weeks, to lead to something, and so tomorrow's the final day and we're actually producing a moot court, a mock trial, and set in the House of Lords, when all twenty students will participate. We have six members of the House of Lords, four counsel on both sides, solicitors; we even have a court artist and a news reporter. So they all take roles and the idea is that it would all lead to this. We had to find an issue that would be stimulating enough to focus them throughout three weeks. The issue we chose was a decision to separate conjoined twins; a controversial case was decided two years ago in which baby twins were separated despite the parents' objections. So we've created a version of that [...]"

Preparation for this gave a framework for the three weeks of the course, and the students were led through related moral, legal, and philosophical issues, visited the National Museum of Law, where they witnessed a mock trial, then used computer and documentary resources to prepare for their roles in the final event. This teaching and learning experience was largely removed from more typical, lecture-based, teaching and learning experienced by undergraduates.

Another strand leader commented:

"Because we're not dealing with typical undergraduate teaching, I don't do that much straight lecturing. [...] I have shifted even more in the direction of a variety of activities that express your learning in different ways, including role play, arts, drama ..."

This benefits of this approach to teaching were generally, though not always (as the students revealed), understood by the academic staff and this almost certainly explains in part the very high levels of student satisfaction with the quality of teaching on the strands (see Chapter 5).

4.2.2   Flexible adaptation to student group

Some academic, teaching, and teaching assistant staff adopted a more flexible approach to the summer school, creating only a loose framework prior to the start of courses, adapting their teaching methods once they had met the students, and seen what they were like. There was, to some degree, a sense of being unsure about the capabilities of the NAGTY group of students, and, as a consequence, a sense of being unsure how to approach the task:

"Well, basically, the conversations I had with my colleague before it was [that] we'd pitch it as we would to undergraduates, bearing in mind the age levels, the age ranges. ... That would seem to be the best starting point. So, I pitched it a high [level], at a post-A-level sort of level, and hoped that it would fit. So, we're seeing ..."

"When we got to know the kids, we did change it a bit in the way ... It was difficult to know how to pitch it so that it wouldn't be too easy, and it wouldn't be too hard. I suppose we were still thinking very much at undergraduate level. They are bright kids [...] but they are still not undergraduate, and you have to take account of the fact that there is a lot of technical language. They might know the effect of something, but they certainly won't know how to describe it."

"That's been the most challenging aspect of it, in fact. I normally teach undergraduates. In fact, most of my teaching is to part-time students who are mature. So I haven't really taught that age group before, apart from English-as-a-foreign-language teaching many years ago. So it was quite difficult. I toned it down, I suppose, would be the best way of describing it. I approached

it with an open mind, ready to adjust to how I found the group once I was there. It was very difficult to begin with, so I had to be quite flexible."

The problem of pitching the courses and teaching also extended, in some cases, to qualified teachers, with experience of the NAGTY age range:

"Well, I don't normally teach a whole class full of people that are this clever. And some are quite young, and that's bothered me a bit in terms of content though I've, generally speaking, started from nothing and worked up."

There was, therefore, a sense that, for some staff, an important element in their approaching to teaching was to be as flexible as possible, matching their teaching approach to the abilities of their students.

4.2.3   Drawing on prior teaching experience

A flexible, reactive, approach to teaching the NAGTY students was also characteristic of those staff who felt that they had not made any fundamental change to the way they taught:

"I have, I think, adjusted it for the audience, but my teaching method is always to teach appropriately to my audience. I've taught judges, I've taught postgraduates, I've taught undergraduates, and, in a sense, my methodology never changes, and that is to teach appropriately to one's audience."

This was reflected in the approach of a qualified teacher, who commented:

"I personally believe that good teaching is good teaching, so the style of activities I haven't changed, it's just the level of thought required to go into them, and the level of time spent doing it."

This approach, drawing upon certain fundamental tenets of teaching, was closely linked, in some cases, to the belief that a clear view on teaching the NAGTY students could only be obtained once the staff had begun to interact with the students:

"I used to train teachers to use different methods of teaching skills, so it's there, but you never know what you're going to need until you meet the

students and sort of see how they work. You don't know how it's going to pan out and so you just have all this [material ready]."

4.2.4   Other issues: 'homework' and use of lectures

There were two other issues raised by qualified teachers, which were given added interest by the fact that they were also frequently raised by the students. These were the issue of 'homework', and the structure of the teaching day, specifically, the use of lectures on some courses.

There seemed, on some sites, and with some strands, to be confusion about how much work outside of teaching hours the students were supposed to undertake. The official position was that non-teaching time was to be taken up with social activities, meals, and quiet time, but this was not the case on many courses. This inconsistency caused problems for students, and was also raised by some academics and qualified teachers, who appeared to be unaware of NAGTY's views:

> "And we were told that, in the evening, they would have quite a lot of time when they would be able to do their homework, or whatever, but, no. So we spent the first hour and a half today with them, effectively doing their homework as it were, because they didn't have time."

This issue was raised by a number of staff, with the teaching and academic staff often wanting the students to undertake more work in the evenings, while the Residential Assistants were usually concerned that the students should have that time available to take part in other activities, and build their social skills.

Recommendation 11

- that NAGTY liaises with the sites, and clarifies the situation within its Academic Handbook, to ensure that all strand leaders are clear about the structure of the whole day for the students and are, therefore, aware from the start that setting additional work for students to do in the evenings is, generally speaking, not appropriate, as the students' timetable of activities is so packed. This point could also be emphasised in a revised edition of the NAGTY Handbook for Academics.

Another issue, raised by a few qualified teachers (and students), was the over-use of lectures by some academic staff. Qualified teachers sometimes felt that their experience of teaching younger age groups was not taken advantage of by academic staff, and that, sometimes, in consequence, too much use was made of lectures. One qualified teacher made some typical comments in this respect, with regard to her lack of involvement in the planning process, and the use of lecture based teaching:

"I had no input into the design of the course, partly because I was approached late, and partly because it had already been organised. [...] Unfortunately, I didn't have any input. Now I've been through the first ten days or so, I've lots of suggestions, because I've been in the classroom for years. [...] We did quite a lot of talks at the beginning, fifty minute lectures [...]"

This teacher felt that this was a problem and that, when the academic teaching the strand changed, things improved in that they became more interactive.

Recommendations 12 and 13

In order to maintain the high quality of teaching in future years, and to ensure this across all strands and sites:

- that NAGTY works with sites to encourage strand leaders to use the knowledge and professional development available within their own universities concerning best practice in higher education teaching, including the use of lectures that incorporate interaction between the students and the lecturer
- that NAGTY considers arranging professional development seminars for summer school teaching teams to promote the best of teaching practice across the school/higher education divide, perhaps drawing on both the positive and challenging experiences of previous strand teams

4.3   Issues around students' academic reports

For the 2004 summer schools, NAGTY issued a 12-page handbook covering the academic and pastoral reports to be complied for each student. The handbook was based on experience of reporting during the 2002 pilot summer school and NAGTY consultation with the 2003 sites. Concerning the academic reports, the 2004 NAGTY guidance covered the following topics:

- the functions of the academic report
- the reasons for writing a report rather than giving a grade
- the step-by-step process and timeline to be followed
- the tone to be used and the audience of the reports (i.e. the students, parents and teachers)
- A paragraph-by-paragraph guide to academic report-writing.

Despite such explicit guidance documentation being produced, in practice, some staff interviewed spoke about the details of reporting requirements not filtering through to all levels of teaching staff in a uniform way.

On the positive side, on many courses, staff reported that they had been fully briefed about the reporting requirements:

> "Yes, I think that they had plenty of advice, with examples, from the strand leader."

> "I haven't really had a problem with it."

> "Yes, I had a look at the forms, and I think they were fairly well .... Documentation that came with it was alright."

> "We were made very aware at the start that this was something that previous summer schools had not worked on to the same extent that we were anticipating to be doing, so we were made very clear that we will be assessing, so a report will be written on each individual pupil."

Recommendation 14

- that NAGTY encourages all the sites to make a copy of the Reporting Handbook available to *every* member of *every* teaching team to ensure that all teaching staff know what is required for the academic reporting process

4.4   Teaching teams: co-ordination and relationships

There was recognition among course staff that the co-ordination of teaching teams, and the relationship between academic staff and qualified teachers, in particular, was an important element in the presentation of courses. The issue raised most often by staff interviewed was the role of qualified teachers. Some academics and qualified teachers felt that they had experienced an effective, well-integrated, teaching environment, whereas some qualified teachers felt that they had not been made best use of by academics and strand leaders.

Qualified teachers felt that they were able to bring particular skills and knowledge to the course teams. They were aware that the lead was being taken by the university academics, and that the summer schools were designed to challenge the students in a way new to many of them, but the teachers frequently felt that they had age-specific experience that was valuable. One qualified teacher, who regarded the team he was working with as having performed effectively, commented upon this complementary division of skills and knowledge among team members:

> "I think, yes, we've complemented each other here. I have brought things from a school setting, and pitched it [...] in terms of understanding, at the level I would for 'A' level students, and [the strand leader] a bit higher, but I think the variation has helped. [...] In teaching issues he will seek advice, and he is very open about that. He sees his job as providing academic understanding."

This view of good team work, accepting and drawing upon the differing skills of staff, was mirrored in the comments of an academic about a qualified teacher in her team. The teacher did not have course-specific knowledge, but brought his general teaching skills to the course:

> "That's where the role of the teachers has been very helpful, because [the qualified teacher] has been constantly saying to me, 'Make sure you set out

your aims and objectives', which is something I would have done indirectly with my undergraduates, but with these I have to be very specific. [...] It has also been helpful that I've had [the qualified teacher] on board, because he has much more experience at writing those type of reports, and he's been able to do that. Also, he spends most of his time observing in the groups, and he's been making individual notes."

Where the integration of qualified teachers into the course teams was less successful, teachers felt that there were a variety of areas that could have been improved, from the planning to the delivery stage. Many of the teachers who raised such concerns would have agreed with the teacher who commented:

'I think the role of the teacher needs a bit more defining'.

One teacher felt that many of the problems with her role might have been avoided if she had been involved more in the planning process:

"The planning stage [...] I think, perhaps more meetings between teachers and academics, so the teachers know the course content, so if they are expected to lead sessions they obviously need to know what the session is, and how it fits into the bigger picture."

This sense of being unsure about the exact nature of the course as a whole was also raised by another teacher, in her response to the question, 'How much sense have you got of the overall course for this particular subject?'

"Very little. I know my colleague, teaching in the morning, does the poetry and I do the writing. I know that they've had, some of them, gothic, some of them, romanticism. I know there's been some drama [...] but what *concretely*, what they've done in those sessions, I've really had very little idea of."

This teacher regarded this lack of knowledge about the detail of the course as probably undermining the impact of the course as a whole.

Other qualified teachers who were interviewed said they found that they were given very little input at all into either the planning or the delivery of the course. In these cases, there was a sense that such teachers had to create a role for themselves

once the courses had started. They often found this frustrating, and sometimes felt that they had a difficult job to try to insert their own school-based experience tactfully into the process of course delivery:

"At the moment, it's been frustrating for me, because I'm going along presenting nothing, watching other people presenting things, and thinking, 'If I was doing this, I would have done it like this', because I know very well that there are hooks on the National Curriculum on which it could work. Now, as the two weeks have gone on, I've started, gently, making more interventions."

"I very much respect my lead academic, he knows his stuff, and he has inspired his students [...] but there have been times when we had rather a lot of passive listening to a lecture, all morning, or all afternoon."

This teacher felt that the source of this particular problem was that he, and other teachers on the strand, did not have enough input into the planning of the course. Nonetheless he felt that he had got the lead academic to adapt a bit, by intervening, *'quietly and tactfully'*. The course was inspected by OfSTED, and the teacher interviewed noted that the inspector, *'actually made the point to all us teachers afterwards, that she thought we should stand up there, basically, and tell these academics how to teach'*. But he did not feel that such an approach was acceptable:

"That's completely out of order, as far as I am concerned. You just can't do that to somebody who has so much more knowledge in their subject, their area, than the teacher. Also, you can't do that in the middle of a lesson. [...] and if they made clear to them [the academics] that our role was that, I knew it was a bit strange that I didn't quite know what my role was, but it's worked out. But I feel like I've just been making it up as I go along".

Recommendation 15

- that NAGTY works with sites to encourage them to recruit the qualified teacher team members in time for these teachers to have an involvement in the planning of the course

Note: Recommendation 2, made in Chapter 2, is relevant in this context, too.

4.5   Staff participation in future summer schools

The majority of teaching staff who were interviewed expressed an interest in being involved in future NAGTY summer schools. Overall, the response of staff interviewed was that they had enjoyed their participation in the summer schools, and felt that it was, for a variety of reasons, a valuable experience. The few who expressed doubts about whether they would be involved in future years referred to time issues. These issues were essentially concerned with other courses, occupations, or travel that they knew would prevent them from being involved. Nonetheless, a few academics noted that preparation for, and participation in, the summer schools took valuable research and writing time from them during the summer months:

> "There is the time question. The amount of time it has taken out. I'm concerned about my work."

This was, for academics, the main consideration in this respect.

4.6   The overall teaching experience

All, save one, of the academic and teaching staff interviewed commented that they had enjoyed the experience of teaching the NAGTY students. The only drawback, mentioned by a very small number of academics, was the amount of research and writing time that they had lost by taking part in the summer schools.

The following quotations provide a flavour of the very positive view of the overall teaching experience:

> "While it's exhausting, it's also been very rewarding [...], and I've gotten quite a lot out of it." (an academic)

> "It has been valuable in that I've enjoyed it. I've enjoyed the history [...] probably what I've got out of it most is talking about history for the entire day at quite a high level." (a qualified teacher)

In addition to saying how much he had enjoyed the teaching experience, a teaching assistant noted wider benefits:

"We've learnt a lot from the teachers, the two heads of English [...] they are so good at communicating with the kids, not patronising them, not bamboozling them, coming up with interesting activities all the time, and when you think how much effort goes into preparing one little activity, you've got all these activities. In that sense, we've learnt a great deal about that world." (a teaching assistant)

Summary of key points from Chapter 4

- Academics were more likely than qualified teachers to regard the workload as heavy. In part, this was because of the differing norms regarding contact time with students in the two sectors of secondary and higher education but, in some strands, less than optimal use was made of the expertise of the qualified teacher, resulting in a heavy workload for the academic and some sense of dissatisfaction for the qualified teacher.

- Academics involved in preparing a course for the first time thought the set up 'costs' in terms of time were high but were aware that this would lessen in future years, if some continuity could be achieved.

- Many academics adapted their teaching styles to meet the particular demands of a NAGTY summer school - the age group; the 'gifted and talented' status of the students; and the concentrated amount of contact time with one student group. Overall, successful teaching was characterised by a flexible approach, enabling content and delivery styles to be adapted to suit the student group; by the incorporation of a variety of teaching methods; and by the inclusion of interactive approaches.

- Academics and qualified teachers responded positively to the opportunity to develop course content and teaching methods, free from a standardised curriculum.

- On some sites, and in some strands, there was confusion about how much work the students were supposed to undertake outside of the teaching day. This caused stress for some students, RAs and teaching teams.

- Some students and qualified teachers interviewed raised the issue of the over-use of lectures by some academic staff. Some qualified teachers thought that their experience of teaching younger age groups had not been taken

advantage of by academics, who, consequently, relied too much on monologue lectures.

- Despite the detailed guidance produced by NAGTY in the Reporting Handbook, in practice, some staff interviewed explained that the details of reporting requirements had not filtered through to all levels of teaching staff. On the other hand, those who had been briefed were aware of the process and accepted it as appropriate.

- Staff interviewed were aware of the importance to the success of a strand of the co-ordination of teaching teams, especially of the roles of academic and qualified teacher.

- Qualified teachers interviewed spoke about being able to bring particular skills and knowledge to course teams and most valued the complementary division of skills and knowledge among the members of teaching teams.

- Where the integration of qualified teachers into the course teams was less successful, teachers felt that this had a negative impact, from planning through to the delivery of the strand.

- A minority of academics interviewed noted that preparation for, and participation in, the summer schools took valuable research time from them during the summer months.

- The majority of teaching staff who were interviewed expressed an interest in being involved in future NAGTY summer schools. Overall, their response was that they had enjoyed their participation in the summer schools and regarded it as a valuable experience.

5   THE TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE: Views of students

The views of students about their experience of learning on the summer school were gathered through the end-of-summer-school questionnaire and through group interviews with students from most strands across all sites. Students' views, drawn from both sources, are presented thematically.

From the group interviews with students, it was clear that the students' response to their teaching and learning experiences during the summer school was characterised by critical engagement and reflection. They were alive to comparisons and contrasts with their school experiences, were quick to appreciate what staff were trying to accomplish, were open to learning new skills, were appreciative of good practice, and were critical of aspects of teaching they found less successful.

Taken together, the students interviewed:

- were often pleased at the relationship they had with teaching staff,
- generally liked having a comparatively large number of teaching staff in reasonably small classes,
- often felt that their summer school experience of teaching and learning had been a positive one, compared to their normal their schooling,
- felt that learning with peers enabled them to build more effective learning skills.

5.1   Reasons for choosing a strand

NAGTY allows applicants to its summer schools to choose any of the offered subjects, regardless of an individual student's area of gift or talent. For example, a student who is gifted in maths may opt for a summer school strand exploring drama. As Table 5.1 shows, over half the students chose a strand because it covered the subject they were most interested in. Only about 7% chose a strand primarily because it was the one in which they thought they'd do best.

Table 5.1 Reason for choice of course ('strand')

Reason	% (N=968)
subject most interested in	56.1
want to study subject in the future	11.2
relevant for job I'd like to do in future	6.9
thought I'd do best at it	6.5
recommended by parent/guardian	5.7
was the only strand left	3.3
something different	2.4
to improve my skills/understanding	2.4
not first choice	1.9
other reasons (each was <1%)	2.2

Source: end of summer school questionnaire

5.1.1 Views about the teaching experienced on their chosen strand

The questionnaire to students, completed during the last week of their summer school asked them to rate the teaching on their strand in terms of specified factors. The students' responses are presented in Table 5.2.

For each of the specified factors, between 83% and 93% of students rated the teaching on their strand as either *'very good/appropriate'* or *'good/appropriate'*. This is a strong endorsement of the efforts made by the teaching teams to teach using a variety of methods, including interactive teaching styles, and to adapt how they were teaching to suit the student group on their strand (see section 4.1.1).

Table 5.2 Students' views of teaching on the strands, rated by specified factors

Factor	Rating (%) (N=968)				
	Very good or Very appropriate	Good or Appropriate	Acceptable	Poor or In-appropriate	Very poor or Very In-appropriate.
a) Balance between theory and practical examples	36.0	47.8	12.0	3.5	0.3
b) Range of material covered	52.4	40.0	6.3	0.8	0.3
c) Level of challenge	33.3	52.4	11.0	1.9	1.1
d) Coverage of subject matter by tutor	51.5	40.6	6.3	0.8	0.2
e) Quality of teaching	60.1	33.0	5.0	1.1	0.1
f)Appropriateness of teaching methods used	41.0	47.0	9.7	1.3	0.4

Source: End of summer school questionnaire

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to explore statistically significant differences between sites on each variable. The Scheffe post hoc test was then used to identify pairs of sites with statistically significant mean differences. (NB Only the ANOVA F ratios and significance levels are shown, not the results of the Scheffe.) These findings are summarised in Figure 5.1

Figure 5.1 Variance by summer school site in student views about teaching

- *The balance between theory and practical examples* - Students attending **site B** were statistically significantly more likely to rate the balance between theory and practical examples as *'very good/good'* than were students attending sites F and E. $(F(6,957)=4.849, p<.001)$

- *The level of challenge experienced* - Students attending **site B** were statistically significantly more likely to report that the level of challenge was *'very appropriate/appropriate'* than were those attending site G. Students attending **site D** were statistically significantly more likely to report that the level of challenge was *'very appropriate/appropriate'* than were those attending sites C and G. $(F(6,957)=5.616, p<.001)$

- *Coverage of the subject matter* - Students attending **site D** were statistically significantly more likely to report that the coverage of subject matter was *'very appropriate/appropriate'* than were those attending sites A and E. $(F(6,956)=4.248, p<.001)$

- *Quality of teaching* - Students attending **site B** were statistically significantly more likely to report that the quality of teaching was *'very good/good'* than were those attending sites A, E, F and G. $(F(6,956)=6.055, p<.001)$

- *Appropriateness of teaching methods* - Students attending **site B** were statistically significantly more likely to report that the teaching methods used were *'very appropriate/appropriate'* than were those attending sites F and G. $(F(6,956)=4.773, p<.001)$

The fact that student views about the teaching they had experienced on the strands offered in site B were even more positive than the views of students in other sites is likely to be explained by the liaison between, and work done by, the strand leaders and the Academic Director (an additional management appointment there) over the months prior to the summer school. The investment in a management position with overall responsibility for the quality of the strands offered seems to have paid off, in that the students' views of the teaching they experienced were so strongly positive.

5.2   Relations with teaching staff

Students often felt that their relations with academics, qualified teachers, and teaching assistants/mentors, were good. They felt that the staff treated them in a

qualitatively different way from the treatment they received from their school teachers. One student reflected this feeling, but also implied that he appreciated that the teaching staff had more freedom in the summer school:

> "The teaching staff are a lot more informal than the teachers [at school] are - they are allowed to be."

Even where students felt that the summer school staff taught in a similar way to school teachers, there was still a feeling that they were being treated in a more positive fashion:

> "I think they do teach quite like our teachers, but how they teach older students, rather than treating us like idiots."

This was a common theme, with a girl and a boy on one course putting it clearly:

> Girl: "I think that they [summer school staff] are so nice, that you've got respect for them, because they don't treat you like you're at school, the way I thought it might be at first".

> Boy: "They treat you more like a grown-up".

Underpinning this feeling of mutual respect was a sense, among a majority of students interviewed, that the summer school staff were effective and knowledgeable teachers:

> "They know what they are saying; they are not just talking waffle."

> "The lessons are always organised. They always have PowerPoint presentations, as well as lectures, and exercises to do."

> "They've got lesson objectives, as well."

5.2.1   Staff/student ratio

Linked to appreciations of the relationship with the teaching staff was the recognition that the staff/student ratio was higher than most students were familiar with at school:

"In the [school] classroom, you are likely to be 30, and here you are 20, so a third less."

The students were aware that this meant they were able to benefit from more teacher attention than at school:

"You get more teacher attention, because there are more teachers and assistants, and stuff, than you do in the classroom."

They were also aware that being taught by a team gave benefits to the staff, which, in turn, gave a learning dividend to the students:

"Having more than one teacher is more dynamic. They put more into it than just having one teacher."

This factor varied from session to session, and strand to strand. In some sessions, students would be faced with lectures by a single member of staff, perhaps with some teaching assistant support, whereas, in other sessions, students would be engaged in activities supported by teaching assistants, qualified teachers, and academic staff.

Some strands utilised a varied team over the period of the entire summer school. The student's view of this latter factor was mixed, with students appreciating both strengths and weaknesses to being faced with a variety of staff over two or three weeks:

"We've worked with a variety of people, which is really interesting to meet all those people that you wouldn't [normally] get a chance to meet."

However, some felt that the turnover of staff within their strand was too great, arguing that a more stable teaching team might have been more effective, especially in terms of getting to know the staff:

"I felt that it wasn't so good to have three, a different teacher each week for the subject, because you didn't really get to know them well".

In the words of other students:

> Girl: "I think we've had about five teachers altogether. Like the first week we had M[...] and R[...], and then we had T[...]...and R[...], and then now we've got S[...], and someone else, who I can't remember...'
> Boy: 'P[...]. But R's been there all the time so we always know him.' [...]
> *Interviewer: 'Is it good to be exposed to different teaching styles?'*
> Girl: 'Yes, ish. But I'd rather get to know the teacher to be honest'.

There was a feeling that a higher staff/student ratio, and exposure to a team of teachers, was beneficial, but, as the students quoted above indicated, this was a fine balance.

5.3   The contrast between school and NAGTY summer school

The form that summer school strands took varied from course to course, between sites, and from day to day. As the structure of courses was in the hands of strand teams, and, in particular, strand leaders, there was no universal model for the teaching of courses. As a result, some students appeared to have been exposed to a wide variety of teaching and learning experiences, whereas others less so. Interestingly, those that experienced a variety of methods seemed more satisfied with their experience, and were quicker to contrast their school experience unfavourably with summer school. In contrast, where students felt that they were not experiencing a variety of teaching and learning experiences, they were less likely to view their normal schooling in an unfavourable light, and more likely to criticise the summer school teaching and learning experience.

Students liked interactive learning, and they liked choice, and the freedom to follow up points as they wanted. In addition, they appreciated unusual ways of learning, be it a 'murder mystery' approach to chemistry, or acting out the parts of 'villagers' and 'anthropologists', or presenting a mock trial, or dressing up in Roman Army uniform and armour. Debates, discussion, and work with peers were also valued.

Figure 5.2   Teaching for learning - what worked well for students

- variety of teaching methods and ways of learning
- applied and practical approaches - e.g. investigations and role play
- interactive teaching and learning - e.g. debates and discussions
- a degree of choice, especially regarding what to follow-up in more detail
- working with peers - e.g. in pairs, small groups or teams
- well-organised presentations by teaching staff
- clear learning objectives
- knowledgeable teachers
- informality of teacher-student relationships, based upon mutual respect
- smaller classes (c.20 students)
- higher adult-student ratio

There was a good deal of very positive feedback about the teaching and learning experience of many of the students, and some criticism, implied and overt, of school:

"Because you do practicals and stuff, you remember it in a different way. And the way they've made it into a murder investigation. It's just, like, done better [than in school]"

"It's more interactive [than school], and we're not sitting in the same place for an hour and a half."

"It's very hands on; you're working as a team [...] management and team work".

"And it's not too formal; it's quite informal so that you can have fun, as well as taking everything in and learning".

"The teachers might have put a lot more into it than they do at school, because at school they give you this book, and they just say copy".

Boy 1: "More freedom to choose want we want to do".

Boy 2: "As F[...] said, you choose what road you want to go down, and if you want to investigate geological things, or whether you want to do more mathematical things along the same strand, despite being a geology course, you can twist it which way you want".

Boy 3: "It's not completely different [from school], but it's more like a restricted thing at school, I mean. You have much more opportunities open to you here to explore different avenues".

Boy 2: "Here, you make it what you make it".

"It's sort of made me more open to different ideas, like, we have more classroom debates and discussions, and people say things with a different point of view, and I don't really have much of that at school. Because everyone is at different ages and stages of their education, they have different views [...]".

These very positive reflections on the teaching and learning experience, although common, were not universal, and there was discussion of teaching that some students felt was inappropriate (see section 5.5).

5.4   The learning benefits

From both the questionnaire and the interview data, a picture emerged of students being aware of a range of benefits arising from the academic side of the summer school. These are discussed in turn.

5.4.1   Expanded horizons regarding the subject studied

Table 5.3 shows that over 92% of students benefited *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'* through having their horizons extended in terms of the subject studied on their strand. Analysis of variance among sites was significant at the $p<.05$ level (F(6,951)=2.800, p=.011) but the Scheffe post hoc test did not reveal any statistically significant differences between pairs of sites.

Table 5.3 Expanding subject horizons

End of summer school (%)	
To a great extent	68.3
Somewhat	23.8
Somewhat	6.2
Slightly	0.7

5.4.2   Developing problem-solving skills

Over 72% of students indicated that the teaching and learning on the summer school had developed their problem solving skills *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*, as Table 5.4 shows.

Table 5.4 Developing problem solving skills

End of summer school (%) (N=968)	
To a great extent	23.5
Somewhat	49.2
Slightly	21.3
Not at all	5.9

Analysis of variance among the sites showed that students attending **site B** were statistically significantly more likely to state that their strand had developed their problem-solving skills than were students attending sites C, F, G ($F(6,959)=5.795$, $p<.001$).

5.4.3   Improving writing skills

In Table 5.5, it can be seen that about 47% of students found that their writing skills had improved during their time studying on their strand. Given that these were already academically successful students, this is an important academic benefit for them to have gained.

Table 5.5 Improved written skills/written work

End of summer school (%)	
To a great extent	13.5
Somewhat	34.0
Slightly	31.5
Not at all	20.0

Analysis of variance among the sites showed that students attending **site D** were statistically significantly more likely to say their writing skills had improved than were students attending site A (F(6,952)=2.945, *p*=.007).

5.4.4 Learning with and from peers

Students interviewed spoke about often finding the learning environment conducive to learning from each other. This was the case when group teaching methods were used, but students also identified another main source of this benefit. They benefited from working with other students who were as enthusiastic and as capable as they were:

> "We share ideas, and group work."

> "It's a confirmation of my study methods, when I ask myself, 'Am I learning in the right way?', so by sharing ideas with other people I see how they are learning, just by sharing ideas."

This, sometimes, contrasted with their school experience:

> "In school, you've got people who don't want to be there, but, here, everyone wants to be here."

> "We're all, like, mixed ability at school, but here we are all the same kind of ability, yeah. So, here, if I was working, I'm working at the same pace."

> "You're with the people that want to learn, as well. I think that helps you learn."

> "Everyone is the same cleverness."

"It's good because it's streamlined [streamed], because it's just one lesson, like everyone's good at it, and they bring up more interesting questions than you usually get in normal classrooms."

In the end-of-summer-school questionnaire, all the students were asked about the extent to which the academic side of the summer school had helped them in terms of enabling them to share with, and learn from, their peers. Their responses are set out in Table 5.6, which shows that about 86% of the students benefited in this way.

Table 5.6 Extent to which students were enabled to share with and learn from their peers

Extent - % (N=968)	
To a great extent	46.6
Somewhat	39.8
Slightly	10.8
Not at all	2.2

Analysis of variance among sites showed that students attending **site D** were statistically significantly more likely to indicate that they had been enabled to share with and learn from their peers, than were students attending site C.

5.4.5   Increased confidence to contribute views orally

NAGTY summer school students also benefited from the academic side of their summer school experience in terms of increased confidence to contribute their views orally. Table 5.7 shows that about 70% of students responded that they had benefited in this way *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*. It may be that some of the third who did not feel this were already confident in this regard.

Table 5.7 Increased confidence to contribute views orally

End of summer school (%)	
To a great extent	33.8
Somewhat	36.5
Slightly	19.2

Not at all	10.0

Analysis of variance among sites revealed that students attending **sites B and D** were statistically significantly more likely to say that they had benefited from increased confidence to express their views orally, than were students attending sites C, E and F (F(6,956)=7.620, p<.001).

5.4.6 *Becoming an independent learner*

Some of the students interviewed were aware that the summer school expected more from them than their usual schooling experience. It was sometimes the case that students were aware that they had to develop their independent learning skills, and that this necessity was a direct result of the different teaching methods to which they were exposed by the summer school courses.

This benefit resulted from a variety of individual sources. Some students were faced, for the first time, with the need to make their own notes, rather than simply reproducing notes, or copying material from books and worksheets. This meant that they had to make decisions for themselves about what information was important, and how they would record it. One student noted:

> "It's kind of like a new approach which our school doesn't do. Our school tends to have an 'English for dummies' approach, whereas NAGTY doesn't. At school, we'd be copying stuff off a whiteboard, but here, we've got to do stuff ourselves."

This point was extended by another student in the same strand:

> "At school, you're given a few points to start you off, but, here, you are completely on your own."

Other teaching strategies also helped students to develop independent learning skills. Students were pleased to be faced with a variety of sources, rather than being limited to one source. The use of course journals, which was fairly common, was also appreciated by some students.

"Normally, at school, you would get one sheet to look at, but, here, they give you all different types of worksheets and textbooks".

Student, on the use of journals: "It gives you more of a responsibility to do it, rather than just doing the work on that particular day. I don't know, it just gives you the responsibility to work out what to do".

Students valued these new opportunities and their development of their skills. One boy summed up the benefits as:

"Learning how to be responsible, and doing it [studying] the way you think is best."

Another student commented that work on his summer school course was:

"More [a] focus on independent learning, more like university."

He thought that this would help him when he returned to school, because:

"Teachers can't give you everything you exactly need, so you can learn yourself."

Students were also asked in the questionnaire about the extent to which they had benefited from the academic side of the summer school in terms of becoming an independent learner. Their responses are given in Table 5.8, which shows that about 74% experienced this as a benefit of the learning they had done at the summer school.

Table 5.8 Becoming an independent learner

Extent - % (N=968)	
To a great extent	27.3
Somewhat	47.0
Slightly	18.8
Not at all	6.5

Analysis of variance showed that there were statistically significant differences in students responses across the sites (F6, 957)=2.747, *p*=.012) but the Scheffe post hoc test did not indicate any statistically significant differences between pairs of sites.

5.4.7 *Finding out what studying at university would be like*

Table 5.9 shows the responses from the end of summer school questionnaire to the question, *'To what extent did the academic side of the summer school help you in terms of finding out about what studying at university would be like?'* Over 82% of students saw this as a benefit of the academic side of the NAGTY summer schools.

Table 5.9 Finding out what studying at university would be like

Extent	% (N=968)
To a great extent	47.6
Somewhat	35.1
Slightly	12.4
Not at all	4.0

Analysis of variance showed that there were statistically significant differences in students responses across the sites, (F(6,953)=4.314, *p*<.001). The Scheffe post hoc test picked out where these differences lay - students attending site E were more likely to say they had been helped to find out what studying at university would be like than were students at sites A, B and D. This finding probably reflects the fact that all the teaching assistants at site E were students at the host university and doubled up as RAs.

Figure 5.3 Variance by summer school site in student views about the *extent* to which they had benefited academically

- *Developing problem-solving skills* - students attending **site B** were statistically significantly more likely to state that their strand had developed their problem-solving skills than were students attending sites C, F, G (F(6,959)=5.795, *p*<.001).
- *Improved writing skills* - students attending **site D** were statistically significantly more likely to say their writing skills had improved than were students attending site A (F(6,952)=2.945, *p*=.007).

- *Learning from peers* - students attending **site D** were statistically significantly more likely to indicate that they had been enabled to share with and learn from their peers, than were students attending site C $(F(6,955)=3.859, p=.001)$.
- *Increased confidence to express views orally* - students attending **sites B and D** were statistically significantly more likely to say that they had benefited from increased confidence to express their views orally than were students attending sites C, E and F $(F(6,956)=7.620, p<.001)$.
- *Finding out what studying at university would be like* - students attending **site E** were statistically significantly more likely to say they had been helped to find out what studying at university would be like than were students at sites A, B and D $(F(6,953)=4.314, p<.001)$.

As was also shown by the findings summarised in Figure 5.1, **sites B and D** come out well in terms of the students' views about the academic side of those summer schools.

5.5   Negative responses

Not all students interviewed spoke of their summer school experience in terms of teaching and learning in an entirely positive way. Three sources of complaint emerged:

- the overuse of lectures,
- a lack of variety,
- problems with course descriptions.

5.5.1   Over-use of lectures

Students were not averse to lectures, but they sometimes felt that they had been over-used. This was an issue that some qualified teachers also raised (see Chapter 4, section 4.2.4). Some students felt that lectures they had were too long:

Boy: "The lectures are a bit chunky [...] an hour and a half long".

Girl: "Especially as we are not used to lectures".

Boy: "If I miss something for five seconds, I've missed it, whereas in school, if I miss something, I can go back, and get back into it. But here I can't get back into it".

In such cases, students felt that lectures were important and useful, but that, in the words of a student from another strand:

"There should be lectures, but shorter, half an hour lecture, and there should be more time for questions, more talking time."

An apparently atypical case was a strand where almost all of the teaching was based around lectures. This produced some notable criticism from the students interviewed:

Girl 1: "I don't think it has helped me in any way at all, because day after day of lectures, and lectures with half an hour between them, just sitting there staring at a computer screen projected onto a wall, with some guy talking about stuff way beyond our level is not how I want to learn".

Interviewer: "What had you expected?"

Girl 1: "Well, last year when I did it [NAGTY summer school] they made it fun, you actually had hands on stuff, with sheets, and people got up and made idiots of themselves, and debating, and having fun while doing it. So I actually learnt more last year in three weeks in maths than I would in about a term's worth of lessons at my school, because we went through it at a pace everyone got, and because we were all the same age group, we understood it all, and if we didn't understand it, the teacher would stop and go through it again, whereas here we have a big-arsed lecture on one thing and that's it. And if we ask questions they talk in really complicated terms."

Interviewer: "Does anyone want to comment on that?"

Boy: "Yeah. Me and somebody else were having a talk about this exact question about three hours ago, and we both said that most of the stuff we had learnt wouldn't stick in our heads for much longer than a couple of weeks."

Interviewer; "And why do you think that is?"

Boy: "I think a lot of it is pretty heavy."

Interviewer, to another student who had taken a NAGTY summer school in 2003, "You did the course last year, do you want to compare it with what you did last year?"

Girl 2: "Yeah, well, here it's more lectures, you know, a couple of hours of watching PowerPoint presentation, whereas last year we had three lectures during the whole three weeks, and they went at a slow pace, and I understood a lot".

5.5.2   Lack of variety in teaching methods

A second criticism that some students raised was the lack of variety during courses. But this issue was raised by a very small number of students interviewed.

5.5.3   Course descriptions that were too brief

A minority of the students interviewed complained that the course descriptions made available to them prior to choosing a strand were too brief, leading them to choose a course that turned out to be different from their expectations.

Overall, the criticisms made by the students of the teaching and learning on the summer schools were minor, and raised issues that can be easily addressed through use of an appropriate variety of teaching methods on every strand and the availability of clear course descriptions.

5.6   Looking to the students' future

In the questionnaire to students distributed in the last week of the summer school, students were asked about the extent to which they had received formal or informal information or advice about their future education and careers. Their responses are given in Table 5.10. Fewer than half had received some information or advice about future education options (45%) or about future career choices (c. 42%).

Table 5.10 Extent of advice or information about options for the future

End of summer school (N=968) - %				
	To a great extent	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all
a. information or advice about future education options	13.2	31.8	26.7	28.0
b. information or advice about future career choices	13.5	28.2	27.3	30.7

5.7 Students' suggestions for improving the summer school learning experience

Although the students were given the opportunity through an open question in the questionnaire, completed at the end of the summer school, to offer suggestions as to how their learning experience could have been improved, the most common response was no response or one simply stating, *'nothing'* - see Table 5.11. This confirms the qualitative data obtained through group interviews with students that found their criticisms of the teaching and learning experience to be minor ones (see section 5.5.3.).

Table 5.11 Improving the learning/academic side

End of summer school (N=968)	%
no response or 'nothing'	38.0
more practical work	8.8
wider range of teaching methods	6.1
make lessons more enjoyable	5.0
improve group composition	4.6
homework (give less or allow time to do it)	4.6
include more trips	3.6
adapt format of teaching day	3.2
more discussion/interaction	3.2
make sure people understand	2.6
increase challenge of work	2.6
more open-ended or independent work	2.6
other	2.2
longer course	2.0
shorter or less lectures	1.9
more subject-related career info.	1.9
improve logistical issues	1.7
more use of IT	1.3
respect students' opinions	0.7
greater consistency of teaching team	0.4

This was an open question so students could make as many suggestions as they wished.

As Table 5.11 shows, the most common suggestion made was for teaching teams to include more practical work (c.9%) and to use a wider range of teaching methods. In fact, these, and all the other suggestions made, reflect the aspects of teaching and learning at the summer school that the majority of students experienced and valued. Table 5.11, therefore, may be seen as representing the students' view that not every session in every strand was as good as they had come to expect it could have been. It can also be seen as confirmation that most students experienced high quality teaching and learning, most of the time.

Summary of key points from Chapter 5

- Over half the students (56%) chose a strand because it covered the subject they were most interested in. Only 7% chose a strand primarily because it was the one in which they thought they would do best.

The teaching and learning experience

- Between 83% and 93% of students rated the teaching on their strand to be *'very good/very appropriate'* or *'good/appropriate'* in relation to five specified factors - balance between theory and practical examples, range of material covered, level of challenge, coverage of subject matter by tutors, quality of teaching, appropriateness of teaching methods used. This is a strong endorsement of the efforts made by the teaching teams to use a variety of methods and to adapt their teaching styles to suit the student group on their strand.

- Students attending site B were statistically significantly even more positive about their teaching and learning experience than those at other site, in relation to four of the five factors. This site had invested in a management position with overall responsibility for the quality of the strands offered and this seems to have made a qualitative difference to the students' experience of teaching and learning.

- Most students interviewed spoke of good relationships with the teaching teams based on mutual respect and an appreciation by the students that the summer school teaching staff were effective and knowledgeable teachers.

- Students interviewed recognised the benefits of being taught in a learning environment with a much higher staff to student ratio than they normally experienced at school. They were also aware of the benefits of being taught by a teaching team, as opposed to one teacher, but there was a fine balance between the benefits of being exposed to a range of teachers and the negative consequences of too much change-over of staff.

- Each strand team planned and designed the strand content and teaching methods. From the interview data, it was clear that students' experiences of teaching and learning differed as a result. Those who experienced a variety of teaching methods were more satisfied with their experience and were quicker to contrast their school experience unfavourably with summer school than those who did not.

- Students appreciated interactive learning, being offered an element of choice, being allowed to follow up particular issues that interested them, imaginative teaching and learning methods and the opportunity to participate in debates, discussion and working with peers.

The learning benefits

Questionnaire data in relation to seven specified potential benefits are summarised below:

- expanded horizons in relation to the subject studied - 92% of students benefited *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*
- further development of problem-solving skills - 76% of students benefited *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*
- improved writing skills - 47% of students benefited *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*
- learning with and from peers - 86% of students benefited *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*
- increased confidence to contribute views orally - 70% of students benefited *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*
- further development of independent learning skills - 74% of students benefited *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*
- finding out what studying at university would be like - 82% of students benefited *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*
- receiving information or advice about future education choices - 45% of students benefited *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*
- receiving information or advice about future career choices - 42% of students benefited *'to a great extent'* or *'somewhat'*

Criticisms of the teaching and learning experience

- Three issues were raised by a minority of students, relating to a minority of strands - the overuse of lectures; a lack of variety in teaching methods; and course descriptions that were inaccurate or not sufficiently comprehensive to enable students to choose appropriately.

6.   THE SOCIAL AND LEISURE EXPERIENCE

About 90% of the students who completed the questionnaire at the end of their summer schools rated the social aspects of the summer school experience as *'very good'* or *'good'* (Table 6.1). This is a resounding endorsement of the efforts of the site managers, SRAs and RAs to organise an enjoyable, safe, and varied social and leisure programme for the students.

Table 6.1 Students' overall rating of social aspects of summer school

End of summer school (N=968)	%
Very good	53.3
Good	36.3
Acceptable	8.1
Poor	1.4
Very poor	0.4

The high value placed on the social experience was evident from all those students interviewed. They were universally enthusiastic about the opportunity for making and developing friendships with like-minded people. Students often perceived this aspect of summer school attendance as being the most significant benefit they gained from the experience. Many students felt that they were able to make important advances in their social skills. Students often claimed that they had made *'friends for life'*, and there was evidence, from those students who had attended NAGTY summer school in 2003, that the maintenance of friendships, despite geographical spread, was a feature of the summer school group of students.

In terms of the organised social activities, a part of the summer schools that was largely in the hands of the Residential Assistants (RAs), the students were largely enthusiastic, but had some reservations regarding issues of choice, compulsion, 'homework', and private time.

6.1   Making friends at summer school

The most enthusiastic responses from students during interviews were generated by questions associated with friendship at the summer schools and afterwards. Asked if they had found it easy to make friends at summer school, typical responses were: *'yes', 'yes, very easy', 'yeah, everyone is really friendly', 'everyone wants to make friends', 'it's good, it's really, really good'*, and, from a group of students that had been

critical of the teaching and learning experience, a joint, spontaneous *'yes !'*, accompanied by laughter.

Students felt that it was easy to make friends at the summer schools for a number of salient reasons:

- that it was a residential experience,
- that they were with people who had a lot of things in common,
- that other students were supportive.

There was an overlap in terms of these causes, something students were aware of.

6.1.1   Friendships and the residential nature of the summer schools

Students felt that the residential nature of the summer schools helped them make friends:

> "I think it's good for making friends because, not only do you just spend time at the school, when you go back to the things [accommodation and common rooms etc], you have RA groups, and also lots of different things you can do, so you make friends everywhere because you spend so much time together".

> "That's the good thing, when you go back to the university; there are lots of different courses [activities], that's why they have dorm groups, and lots of different activities, and things to play with, so you make friends with all the different people".

> "You've got your RA groups, and you meet people there; you've got your course groups, and you meet people there; and you probably know at least one person, and you [meet] someone else, and ..."

6.1.2   Friendships and being with like-minded peers

Combined with the benefits of a residential summer school, was the feeling among many students that they were with a large group of people with whom they felt they had much in common. Students talked about being surprised to find that there were

so many people with similar interests. One female student, to the agreement of others in her strand group, noted:

"The strange thing is that everybody I have met has the same taste in music - rock."

This observation was followed up by a half-serious comment from another student, *'if you are intelligent, you have good taste'*, which produced more laughter. Not only did students feel that they had similar tastes in music, they also felt that shared motivations, *'like-mindedness'*, and all being members of NAGTY, helped them make friends:

"They have the same sort of interests as you."

"It's about wanting to be here, and wanting to learn, and you've chosen what you want to do."

"We're, like, all on the same level, because I find talking to a lot of people, you have to talk basically about things that are really interesting in a way."

As Table 6.2 shows, the responses from students to a question about this on the questionnaire showed that socialising with like-minded peers was regarded as important by 93% of them.

Table 6.2 Importance placed on socialising with like-minded peers

End of summer school (N=968)	%
To a great extent	65.3
Somewhat	27.7
Slightly	5.1
Not at all	1.3

6.1.3   Friendships and supportive peers

Students felt that they were all in a similar position; they recognised that they had to make friends, but they also felt that shared attitudes and interests also helped in forming friendships. Further, they felt that the atmosphere, both among the students,

and the staff (both RAs and teaching staff) was supportive. *'People are nice here'* was a common comment, while individual students noted:

> "We support each other. When someone's down, we ask them are they ok."

> "We've all got the same sort of experience and are helping each other."

The result of these friendship factors was that many students reported feeling liberated from shyness. They were able to develop their social skills among people they felt comfortable with, and discovered new social capabilities:

> "I'm normally, like, really shy, but here I just sort of, the first few days I just randomly walked up to people and smile and say, 'hello, who are you ?' kind of thing, in differing ways, but, like, you'd just go up to anyone..."

> "Because I'm normally so shy at home, I won't walk up to anyone, but here..."

> "I wouldn't even think of talking to someone normally".

> "I actually find it easier to socialise here, because there is so much you can talk about [...] you've [only] got two weeks to get to know the most about everybody".

6.1.4 Comparing friendship at school with summer school

If many students felt that it was the environment at summer school was conducive to making friends, they sometimes compared their school experience unfavourably with summer school. Typically, students said that they had a much smaller group of friends at school than they had formed at summer school, they also found it harder to meet with other people who had the same interests, and they were sometimes concerned that they had to 'fit in' with the dominant ethos of their school peers, rather than pursue their own interests.

The limited circle of friends that some students enjoyed at school, compared with summer school, was identified by a number of students:

> Boy: "At school it takes, sometimes, longer to make friends, doesn't it?"

Girl: "Yes, because here hardly anyone knows each other [at the start], or they know one or two people, but at school, when you're going into secondary school, you stay with people you know, and stick with them".

"At school, you're not 150 people all thrown together [as you are in summer school], except when you start off in Year 7, and that's kind of a long time ago. At school, basically, I have one particular friend, and a few other people I'm friendly with, and loads of other people I know."

There was also the sense that students felt freer to be themselves at the summer school than they did at school, where the general atmosphere might not be so relaxed:

"I find it freer [at summer school] because you're meeting new people, so you, at school, I would, like, have to fit in with what they think I should be, whereas..."

"Yes, because a lot of people in [...]shire just aren't very clever [laughter]. No, it's true. You can't talk about things like English at school, because you're just thought of as *weird*. But, here, you can, and we have fun conversations as well, and we all have the same sense of humour".

For some students, there was a feeling that summer school was much the better experience:

"I've had conversations with people here, and they were saying that they wish this was the school that they went to."

6.1.5 Student mix

The end of summer school questionnaire asked students how important it was for them personally that the student body on the NAGTY summer schools represented a wide social mix (e.g. of sex, of social class, of ethnicity and of school background. As Table 6.3 indicates, this was viewed as important by about 90% of students.

Table 6.3 Importance of the wide social mix at NAGTY summer schools

End of summer school (N=968)	%

To a great extent	58.3
Somewhat	32.2
Slightly	7.7
Not at all	1.9

This issue was also addressed in the group interviews with students. Those interviewed liked the fact that the summer schools drew children from all over England. They were also aware of class and ethnic differences, but felt that it was good that the student group was diverse. They saw benefits from meeting other students from different parts of the country, and with different backgrounds. They also felt that they had much more in common, being members of NAGTY, being 'like-minded', having the same enthusiasm for learning, than they had differences. There was a sense that the commonality of purpose enabled the students to form friendships which enabled them to benefit from the differing backgrounds of other students:

"I think it's really good, because there are lots of different people and it's really nice, and it's nice that you get to know different types of people. I think summer school is really good for that because you can get to know so many different people, and learn more about different cultures".

"It's good to see that they're just like you, and they're different, as well, we're just like so many individuals here, it's just..."

"It's interesting to see the class barriers broken down, because I've got to meet these people who [are] middle class, and it just does not matter".

"It's a lot easier to make friends with people from a wider background, not all from your own area. I've made a good eight or nine friends, who I wouldn't just call them passers-by, I would definitely contact them again, and speak to them [...] We came here, it was natural, we had a welcome dinner, and we made friends".

"I thought everyone would be really posh, and really clever, but we're all just the same!"

"Everyone's from different backgrounds, they chose to be here, and they have similar interests".

In a contrast to these views, other students appeared not to have thought about the mix of students, and, even when prompted by interviewers, did not really have any comments to make. Instead, they were enthusiastic about the friendships they had made, and it can be inferred that their lack of reflection on the mixed backgrounds of students was a result of their not being concerned about this, as one student put it, *'you do kind of notice, but you don't really care'*.

6.1.6 Keeping in touch with summer school friends

The end of summer school questionnaire asked students to say how important it was to them personally that they had been developing friendships that might continue after the summer school itself was over. Table 6.4 shows that this was rated as important by over 90% of the students.

Table 6.4 Importance of developing friendships that may continue after the summer school

End of summer school (N=968)	%
To a great extent	70.1
Somewhat	22.1
Slightly	6.4
Not at all	0.7

This was also reflected by the students interviewed. When talking about friendships formed at the summer schools, the students were keen to stress that they intended to keep in touch with their new friends, even though, given the geographical spread of students' homes, *'it will be harder to keep in touch'.* Nonetheless, evidence from students who had also attended a NAGTY summer school in 2003 indicated that students have kept in touch with each other to a high degree. The use of texting, mobile 'phones, internet services such as MSN Messenger, and the NAGTY internet forum, have all helped students maintain their friendships. In addition, student friends from the 2003 cohort have also attended reunions in different parts of the country. (The follow-up questionnaire to students of the 2004 cohort also revealed this pattern of maintained friendships - see Chapter 10, section 10.1.2.)

Interestingly, the importance of developing lasting friendships was the only social issue covered on the questionnaire for which analysis of variance among sites revealed any significant differences - $F_{(6,955)}=5.080$, $p<.001$. The post hoc Scheffe test showed that developing lasting friendships was rated as statistically significantly more important by students at **site D** than at site G, and statistically significantly more important to students at **site G** than at site A. The reasons for these differences are likely to be related to the differing numbers of students attending each site who had also previously attended a NAGTY summer school - Site D had significantly more returnees than site G which, in turn, had significantly more returnees than site A. At sites D and G, therefore, there were more people who had already had the chance to experience making lasting friendships from a NAGTY summer school experience and who therefore rated this more highly than those who had not yet experienced this aspect.

6.2   The social programme (leisure activities)

The residential staff at each site organised a site-specific programme, often based on what has been learned from the previous summer schools but also the interests and skills of the S/RA teams. In several sites, the evening activities were themed around different types of activity and this seemed to be very successful. Figure 6.1 provides some examples of contrasting approaches to the structure of activity programmes.

Figure 6.1 Some examples of social and leisure activities programmes

- *Example 1* - Murder Mystery; BBQ and Bouncy Castle; Quiz Night; Shakespeare in the Park; Choice of three (swimming or shopping or ghost tour); visit to zoo, plus practice for Talent Show and Skills Night; activities on the river plus Casino Night (14-16) or Video Night (11-13); BBQ and Beach Party; Casino Night (11-13) or Video Night (14-16); Talent Show practice and Skills Night; Talent Show; Gala Dinner and Awards Night. This programme was arranged prior to the students' arrival.
- *Example 2* - A choice of activities, themed around 'zones' was available every evening. The zones were Main Event; Chill-out; Learning; Creative and Sports. This programme had some slots arranged prior to the students'

arrival but left some open so that activities could be arranged to suit the interests and aptitudes of the student group.

- *Example 3* - A varied programme of activities included: Ultimate Frisbee (an almost universally popular event at all sites where it was offered), attending a concert, visiting museums, and sporting activities.

The RAs invested a great deal of time and effort into planning these activities, and, in the view of most students, they were largely successful.

6.2.1. General responses to social programmes

About 88% of students stated in their responses given in the end-of-summer-school questionnaire that taking part in the social activities was important to them (see Table 6.5).

Table 6.5 Importance of taking part in the social activities

End of summer school	%
To a great extent	52.9
Somewhat	34.9
Slightly	10.1
Not at all	1.3

This was reflected in the positive general response to the social programmes by the students interviewed. Responses like *'fun', 'really cool, really good', 'brilliant'*, and *'good'*, were typical comments about the social programmes. In particular, the students at sites where some choice was permitted appreciated this because it meant that (places permitting) they could match how they felt each evening with a particular activity. As some of these students commented:

"It's good because there is a choice - creative, sport, chill out, thinking."

"I like all the activities, because there's lots of choice."

"I think they [the activities] are quite a good mixture."

However, a few students interviewed considered that there had not been enough choice. This was particularly the case at those sites where the social programme was dominated by sport, as one student noted: *'If you don't like sports, you're kind of stuck, because things are mostly sports'.* This was also an issue when there were problems associated with the availability of places on different options.

6.2.2. Issues with the social programme

There were two main criticisms associated with the social programme - issues of signing up for different activities, and the issue of compulsion. There was a problem at some of the sites associated with particular strands that, for example, had field work, or were being taught away from the main site. Students from such groups tended to find that the lists for evening activities were put up a good while before they returned to the main site. In consequence, they often found it difficult to gain places on their preferred activity:

> "There are lots of different things, but some of them get filled up too quickly, and we get back late from [the strand], and all your friends have signed up for something, and it's full up."

More problematic for students was the issue of compulsion. While they welcomed a range of choices, they were not happy with enforced activity. This was a fairly common theme among students, and was also related to issues of free association in the evenings. Students did not like being compelled to take part in activities every evening. They argued that they sometimes felt tired after intensive study during the day, and wanted to 'chill out' some evenings, rather than being forced to take part in group activities. They also wanted to have more time when they could be with their friends, just chatting and being together. They were aware that there were issues related to supervision, but they, nonetheless, felt that there was greater scope for them to be allowed time to themselves:

> "They have this compulsory Olympics thing, where all the classes can compete with each other, and you feel pressurised into doing something even if you don't want to do it".

> "At the start they had the chill out option, which didn't really have a limit, and you could just sit round watching TV, but for some reason they cut it out. It's

started to get to the point where they say you have to do something. I mean you have the option, but you have to do something, even if you don't really want to. If you come home from the lessons really tired, you still have to do something".

"The mandatory discos are a pain if you're not really interested in that".

"It's good that they have activities, but I don't think you should be *forced* to go on activities".

"They've taken away our chill out options for the next two days, so you have to do something. Sometimes I want to be on my own, but you're not allowed".

"Well, it has been very varied, which is good, but, maybe, some of the compulsory things for everyone, I mean, I know it's difficult if you're arranging for most and you have some people backing out, but, some events, like when they make everyone do something that makes you think, and, like, we don't want to think all the time".

6.2.3 Coursework issues

An issue that impinged on students' participation in social activities and one that was also raised by RAs and teaching staff, was that of coursework, work that was to be completed outside the teaching day. The problem was that different strands set different amounts of coursework to be completed in the evenings by students. Differing amounts of 'homework' caused resentment, and there did not appear to be an awareness on the part of some of the teaching staff that the students had very little time to complete such work, or that the students were committed to the social programme. As one student put it:

"I don't think that we've got too much homework, I think we've got too little time to do it."

Another student identified many aspects related to this issue:

"You don't really have much time to do things. We have things we *have* to do, where other people [on other strands] get options homework. And we get back late. Filling in your logbooks and that, and we've got about twenty minutes to do this, and we've got to fill in our logbooks and do our homework, whereas they've already done that, and are having a social time, just talking, and we can't."

This issue was one of the few sources of stress among students, who felt unhappy that they did not have the time available to do their 'homework' because of the primary demands of the evening social programmes. Most students interviewed came across as very diligent, and expressed the view that they were being put in a position were they could not successfully complete work. RAs also reported that this was a problem, and they frequently felt that academic and teaching staff were being unrealistic in their demands on students. (This relates back to Chapter 4, section 4.2.4 and Recommendation 10.)

6.3   Suggested improvements

On the end-of-summer-school questionnaire, students were given the opportunity to answer an open question about what they would like to improve about the social aspects of the summer school. The most frequent response, as Table 6.6 shows, related to some students' desire to have more time to themselves; that is, time where they did not have to socialise with other people (see also section 6.3.2). Although understandable given the demands of the academic and social programme, it is difficult to see how this can be arranged logistically except through having a chill-out zone available at every site, as was the case at some sites this year. If students were to be allowed to go off to their rooms on their own, all sorts of supervision and safety issues would arise and the RA teams are not large enough to provide supervision of individual's safety if students are dispersed across social activities and different accommodation blocks.

Table 6.6 What would you improve about the social aspects of the summer school?*

End of summer school (N=968)	%
more free time/not being forced to do the activities	27.0
no response or response simply, *'nothing'*	23.9

more choice of activities	18.7
more freedom/independence	12.5
being allowed to mix more within the cohort	7.0
organisational issues (e.g. signing up routines)	4.6
other (each <0.8%)	3.0
more trips	2.5
more age separation within activities	0.8

*This was an open question. Students could make as many suggestions as they wished.

6.3.1   Suggested improvements: encouraging more mixing

There was some feeling among the students interviewed that, given the relatively short time of the summer school, further steps could be taken to ensure even more mixing among students. They were aware that they could meet others in their strand, and in their RA groups, but felt, sometimes, that other initiatives would give them the chance to mix more:

"At the start you tend to sit, for me, in your RA groups, because they're, like, the people you see, whereas it would be nicer if, like, they mixed it up a bit so you could talk to different people at the start".

"Yeah, it would be nice if they had different age groups and different, boy/girl RA groups, as well, because, then, you sort of, when you stick with the RA, you've got to stay with them, because you feel comfortable".

"Because you get taken everywhere in RA groups, so you tend to just stick with your own group in the first week or so".

"Because, I mean, I've got to know people later on, but it would have been nice if I'd been able to talk to them earlier on".

Associated with the question of mixing, there were also issues, on some sites, concerning interactions between girls and boys, especially among older students who often felt that bans on 'demonstrations of affection' were unfair. In addition, some sites forbade students from being in each other's rooms, something that friends found difficult to understand.

6.3.2   Suggested improvements: private time

The typical day for summer school students was very busy, with meals together, classes, 'homework', and organised social activities. As a result, some students felt that they did not have enough 'quiet time', 'downtime', or private time. Some wanted to have more private time when they were free to socialise as they wished, while others felt that they needed a little more time to themselves. Students wanted, *'social time when we are not particularly doing anything', 'more common time and quiet time'*. One student commented:

> "We don't actually get time 'by ourselves, by ourselves'. Like, there are a couple of hours everyday where you can, like, go into the Students' Union and stuff, but if you want to just, like, go to your room by yourself and read, or whatever you want to do, really, then there's not much chance of that".

Recommendation 16

- that NAGTY encourages every site to offer a supervised 'chill-out' option as part of the activities programme, enabling those students who want some personal space to have this opportunity so that they can, for example, read or chat to their friends.

Summary of key points from Chapter 6

- 90% of the students rated the overall social and leisure aspects of the summer school as *'very good'* or *'good'*. This is a resounding endorsement of the efforts of site managers, SRAs and RAs to organise an enjoyable, safe and varied social and leisure programme for the students.
- Students interviewed stated that they had found it easy to make friends at the summer school for three main reasons - that it was a residential experience; that they were with people who had a lot of interests and attitudes in common; and that the students were mutually supportive.
- Socialising with like-minded peers at the summer school was *'greatly'* or *'somewhat'* important to 93% of students. Typically, students interviewed said they found it harder to meet other people with similar interests at school and felt

concerned that they had to 'fit in' with the dominant ethos of their school peers, rather than pursue their own interests.

- The wide social mix of students attending the summer schools was regarded as *'greatly'* or *'somewhat'* important by 90% of students. Those interviewed liked the fact that the summer schools drew students from all over England. Although aware of class and ethnic differences, this was seen as a benefit. There was a sense that the commonality of purpose enabled the students to form friendships that benefited from the differing backgrounds of other students. For many interviewed, this was their first experience of mixing within such a diverse group.

- Developing friendships that might continue after the summer school was regarded as *'greatly'* or *'somewhat'* important by 90% of students. Interview data from those who had previously attended a NAGTY summer school indicated that they had kept in touch with summer school peers, often using a range of communication technology to do so.

- Taking part in the social activities was regarded as *'greatly'* or *'somewhat'* important by 88% of students. The RAs invested a great deal of time and effort into planning and supervising these activities and, in the view of most students interviewed, they were largely successful.

- The two main criticisms of the social programmes were dislike of compulsory activities and logistical difficulties related to signing up for particular activities.

- Additional work being set by some teaching teams for students on some strands caused stress to the affected students and RAs, due to the fact that the students' daily timetable often did not allow time for such work to be completed.

- In an open question on the end-of-summer-school questionnaire asking students what they would like to improve about the social aspects of the summer school, the most frequent response (27%) related to some students' desire to have more time to themselves; that is, more time when they were not doing anything in particular and could just spend some time quietly with friends.

7. THE RESIDENTIAL AND PASTORAL EXPERIENCE

7.1 Student views

In the semi-structured interviews, students were asked about different aspects of the residential and pastoral experience. Questions were asked about accommodation and food, the overall impact of the summer schools being residential, and, finally, about the role of the Residential Assistants (RAs). Reactions to food and accommodation provision varied widely, both from site to site, and between students on the same sites. The general opinion was that the residential nature of the summer schools was a valuable aspect of the experience. In addition, the great majority of students held positive views about the RAs, although there were some issues largely related to rules and regulations that RAs had to enforce.

7.1.1 Food

In the end-of-summer-school questionnaire, students were asked to rate the quality of the food. As Table 7.1 shows, the majority (c. 76%) found the food, *'acceptable'*, *'good'* or *'very good'*. This left about 24% for whom it was rated *'poor'* or *'very poor'*.

Table 7.1 Quality of food

End of summer school (N=968)	%
Very good	14.7
Good	30.6
Acceptable	31.3
Poor	15.2
Very poor	7.5

Analysis of variance indicated that there were significant differences in students' views of the food at different summer school sites ($F(6,954)=24.186$, $p=<.001$). The Scheffe post hoc test was then used to identify pairs of sites with statistically significant mean differences. These are summarised in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1   Variance by summer school site in student ratings of quality of food

- *Site A* - Students attending site A were statistically significantly *more negative* about the quality of food than students in sites B, F and G.
- *Site B* - Students attending site B were statistically significantly *more positive* about the quality of food than were students attending sites A, C, D, E, G.
- *Site C* - Students attending site C were statistically significantly *more positive* about the quality of food than were students attending site D but were statistically significantly *more negative* than were students attending site B.
- *Site D* - Students attending site D were statistically significantly *more negative* about the quality of food than were students attending sites B, C, E, F and G.
- *Site E* - Students attending site E were statistically significantly *more positive* about the quality of food than were students attending site D but statistically significantly *more negative* than students attending site B.
- *Site F* - Students attending site F were statistically significantly *more positive* about the quality of food than were students attending sites A and D.
- *Site G* - Students attending site G were statistically significantly *more positive* about the quality of food than were students attending sites A and D but were statistically significantly *more negative* than students attending site B.

In sum, what Figure 7.1 shows is that there were significant differences between the means of every site on a gradation from the most highly rated (**site B**), through sites F, G, E, C, A in order to the lowest rated (site D). Some of the reasons for this were raised in the interviews with students.

The group interviews with students revealed that their reactions to the food provided varied greatly, with students from the same site having diametrically opposed views of the same food provision. Nonetheless, certain broader issues were apparent, including choice, and special dietary requirements. At one site, a student noted that he had an allergy to cheese, yet all the previous evening's meal options had cheese in them. However, he was unsure whether he had indicated prior to attending the summer school that he had a dietary requirement. At least one Muslim student had indicated that he had dietary requirements, only to find that he faced a very restricted diet at the summer school:

"There isn't much of a vegetarian option, and there should be Halal food too, because I'm a Muslim, and all I can have here is vegetarian."

This was clearly an unfortunate problem. Other students also faced lack of choice when it came to diet:

"Well, I'm vegetarian, and they don't have so much food for vegetarians, which is really hard. My friend's vegetarian as well [...]."

There were also complaints that there were not enough plain options available, with too many food combinations in each meal option. On one site, there appeared to have been a 24 hour sickness bug, which may have been related to food.

Recommendation 17

- that NAGTY encourages all Site Managers to ensure that a range of provision is offered for students who are vegetarian or following a special diet because of medical or religious reasons. As students are asked to provide this information prior to attending, it is reasonable that an appropriate range of food should be on offer to them.

7.1.4 Accommodation

The end-of-summer-school questionnaire enabled students to rate the quality of their accommodation at their site. Almost 93% rated it as *'acceptable'*, *'good'* or *'very good'* (Table 7.2). Within this overall positive view, there were statistically significant differences between sites, as analysis of variance showed ($F_{(6,954)}=49.173$, $p=<.001$).

As with the ratings of quality of food, the post hoc Scheffe test revealed that there were significant differences between the means of every site on a gradation from the most highly rated (**site F**), through sites D, G, A, C, B in order, to the lowest rated (site E).

Table 7.2 Quality of accommodation

End of summer school	%
Very good	26.4
Good	42.5
Acceptable	23.2
Poor	5.5
Very poor	1.7

As specially requested by NAGTY, a question was also included on the end-of-summer-school questionnaire asking students to rate the accommodation in terms of the distance between it and the teaching rooms. Students' views of this were broadly in line with their views on the quality of accommodation generally (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3 Rating of distance between accommodation and teaching rooms

End of summer school	%
Very good	25.1
Good	38.5
Acceptable	25.0
Poor	6.8
Very poor	3.6

Analysis of variance among sites showed statistically significant differences $(F(6,952)=10.414, p<.01)$. The Scheffe post hoc test showed that these statistically significant differences were between the following pairs, so that, in terms of distance between accommodation and teaching rooms:

- site B was rated statistically significantly more positively than site A;
- site D was rated statistically significantly more positively than sites A and E;
- site F was rated statistically significantly more positively than site A;
- site G was rated statistically significantly more positively than sites A and E.

In interviews with students, this issue of distance was never raised as a problem. In general, the interviews with students indicated that they were satisfied with accommodation, although on two sites (B and E) they were housed in accommodation that was scheduled for demolition, and was, in consequence, not as good as it might have been (something that RAs on these sites also commented upon). It was clear that students were mostly frequently concerned about two issues:

- cleanliness,

- the 'unfairness' of room allocation.

For example, in relation to cleanliness, comments at different sites included:

"The kitchen smells."

"The carpets need a bit of cleaning."

"The toilets are horrible."

"In the shower, the air-vent thing, it's got brown mould all over it. It's disgusting; it's put me off having a shower."

In relation to the 'unfairness' of different standards of rooms being allocated to different students on the same sites, the following student expressed a typical view:

"Some people in our corridor have got bigger rooms than me, and it's not really fair, because there's, like, four of us with small rooms, and four of us with really big rooms, so, why did they get the big rooms, and we get the small rooms?"

Nonetheless, complaints were infrequent, and students were just as likely to praise accommodation, or to be indifferent to it.

Recommendation 18

- that NAGTY encourages all Site Managers to seek to ensure high standards of cleanliness in the accommodation blocks used by students, in bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens.

7.1.3 Effects of the residential nature of the summer schools

Students were asked three questions in the end-of-summer-school questionnaire relating to the extent to which participating in the summer school had had an impact

on family life. Their views of the financial impact were reported in Chapter 3. Here other impacts are reported.

As Table 7.4 shows, over half indicated that attending a residential summer school of two or three weeks had had an impact in terms of making arrangements for the summer holidays with over half (c.58%) indicating this had impacted *'somewhat'* or *'to a great extent'*.

Table 7.4 Impact on making arrangements for the summer holidays

End of summer school (N=968)	%
To a great extent	21.8
Somewhat	36.1
Slightly	21.6
Not at all	19.5

It may be, therefore, that it would be helpful to families if the dates of the summer schools were known early on so that they could plan their holiday arrangements.

Students were also asked an open question that allowed them to write about any other impacts on their family relating to their attendance at summer school. Only 20% of those filling in the questionnaire responded to this question (Table 7.5) and 0.7% of the responses were excluded as they repeated information about summer holidays or costs. Interestingly, *'missed family/family missed me'* was the most frequently cited impact on family life but was only noted by c.8% of students. Two per cent of students noted the impact of the cost of travel to and from the summer school site: this is, perhaps, a cost issue that could be included in the scholarships available to families.

Table 7.5 Other impacts on family life*

End of summer school (N=968)	%
No response	80.1
Missed family/family missed me	8.3
I missed out on activities/events/holidays	2.5
Cost of travelling to the site and back	2.0

It was good to have time apart	1.4
Other (each noted by 1 person only)	1.3
Has made me more independent	1.2
The preparation for summer school	0.9
Kept me busy during school holiday	0.5
Made my family proud of me	0.5
Parents lost time at work	0.3
Lost my summer job/unable to do summer job	0.2

This was an open question. Students could identify as many impacts as they wished.

Students interviewed frequently expressed the view that the residential nature of the NAGTY summer schools was an important aspect of that experience. Those who had attended various 'gifted and talented' day schools felt that these did not offer as many opportunities for social interaction as the NAGTY summer school. Others were aware that being away from home, although sometimes difficult, made them more independent, and some students regarded attendance at summer school as a practice run for university.

Some students referred to 'gifted and talented' day schools they had attended under various schemes, and compared these unfavourably with the residential two and three week NAGTY summer schools:

> "I prefer it here, because I did a local summer school [day] and it was just like school, but here it's sort of a mini-holiday. If you go on holiday, you're making friends with people from all over the place. Here as well, it's the same kind of stuff you can do here as well".

Students who had not attended day events were also aware that there were probably benefits from the summer schools being residential:

> "[If it were a day event], you wouldn't make so many friends with people. When you'd see them, you'd go, 'Hiya', but when you're with them all the time. You know a lot about them."

Making friends was seen by all students as one of the biggest gains from the summer schools, and they were highly valued for the opportunity to mix with 'like-minded'

people. Students were aware that this benefit largely stemmed from the residential nature of the summer schools:

> "If you came for the day, it would be more about the learning experience, not about cultivating friends."

Students also felt that advances they made in terms of self-reliance and independence were associated with the residential experience. It gave them a chance to spend time away from home and their parents, build a sense of independence, and obtain a useful insight into life at university:

> "I think it's nicer just to be away from your normal surroundings, and just, totally, having the experience, whereas if you were going home every day, your parents would be, like, asking you about it, and you would be leaving the people [other students] behind, so you wouldn't get so much social time."

> "The summer schools, it's been a sort of pre-university test for me to see if I can actually cope with university. I'm very glad...because I would be very, very nervous about going to university in two years."

7.1.4 Views about Residential Assistants

The students interviewed across all sites were almost universally positive about their relationship with the RAs. Negative issues raised were largely concerned with rules that RAs had to enforce, rather than with the RAs themselves. There was a widespread appreciation that the RAs were friendly, helpful, and an important part of the summer schools arrangement.

Students at all sites frequently talked about RAs being funny, kind, and friendly:

> "He's really funny. He's, like, a really nice person to be around. He's always joking."

> "We've had two accidents in our group, and our RA had to go to hospital [with the students] twice. She's very nice."

> "They're very nice and friendly, and they will help you if you need help."

"They've all got different qualities. They're funny. They're caring."

"In the first week, it was quite important to have them with you all the time."

Students felt that RAs cared for them, and that they were effective in their role because they were young. Several students noted that the RAs (largely made up of undergraduates) were not that much older than the older NAGTY students. As a result, they felt they could confide in the RAs, whom they perceived as understanding them. Further, NAGTY students who wished to find out more about undergraduate life were able to ask the student RAs. They were able to find out about courses, undergraduate social life, and different universities. RAs were seen to be an important source of this information. (Related to this point, see also Chapter 5, sections 5.4.7 and 5.6.)

These findings, from the interview data derived from a random sample of students, are confirmed by the questionnaire data, provided by 968 students (Table 7.6). The majority of students rated the informal interactions with RAs (88.6%) and the support provided by RAs (88%) as *'very good'* or *'good'*.

Table 7.6 Students' views of the RAs

End of summer school (N=968)	a) Informal interaction with RAs (%)	b) Support provided by RAs (%)
Very good	53.4	53.4
Good	35.2	34.6
Acceptable	8.0	8.9
Poor	2.3	1.4
Very poor	0.4	0.9

In the interviews, students identified the two most common problems they had in relation to the RAs and both were associated with the high levels of supervision they experienced, and the enforcement of rules. Students were aware that NAGTY had to maintain high standards of supervision and safety and, even those students who complained about aspects of this, appreciated that safety was a priority for the sites, for NAGTY, and for their parents but some still found it *'frustrating'*:

"It can be frustrating to have them watch over you. It's understandable that they have to, but ... "

"I think it's difficult, as well, because they're trying to be our friend, but ... I think they try and discipline us as well."

"They want safety, but they take it to an extreme."

In particular, students resented having to have an RA escort as they moved around the site:

"Some of them [RAs] are real control freaks. The boys' block is across the bridge from where the main place is, and you can't actually go anywhere outside that building without asking the RAs."

"It's really annoying. [The RAs] are doing something, and you want to do something like go up and have a shower, or go to the shop because you need something, but you can't. You have to wait for another half an hour [...] because our RA's doing something. [...] It wouldn't be so bad if we had to tell them so they knew where we were going and we all went as a group."

The enforcement of rules within sites and across sites was a divisive issue. As Table 7.7 shows, students' views on the appropriateness of rules split roughly into thirds, with 32.4% regarding these as *'good'* or *'very good'*, 32.7% regarding them as *'acceptable'* and 33.5% regarding them as *'poor'* or *'very poor'*.

Table 7.7 Students' views on the appropriateness of the rules

End of summer school (N=968)	%
Very good	7.4
Good	25.0
Acceptable	32.7
Poor	20.6
Very poor	12.9

By comparing what students said in interviews, it was clear that there were differences in rules *between* sites, for example, students being allowed into each others' rooms at some sites but not at others. The rules *within* sites also were not uniformly put into practice. The students interviewed in small groups spoke about

some RAs being more relaxed in terms of rule-enforcement than others. This led to accusations of a lack of fairness:

> "Our RA ... normally lets us go into each others' rooms, or the kitchen, with duvets or stuff, for, like, half an hour to an hour, or something, not everyday, but just sometimes, and we can talk."

> "Our RA makes us put out the lights at the proper time, but some of the other RAs are more lenient."

On another site, students were escorted to their rooms at night by RAs after two students had been found together in one room.

These inconsistencies perhaps explain why analysis of variance among sites showed up statistically significant differences ($F(6,948)=5.908$, $p=<.01$). The Scheffe post hoc test revealed the pairs of sites with statistically significant mean differences to be as follows:

- students at site A rated the appropriateness of the rules statistically significantly *less positively* than did students at site B and C;
- students at **site B** rated the appropriateness of the rules statistically significantly *more positively* than did students at sites F and A;
- students at **site C** rated the appropriateness of the rules statistically significantly *more positively* than did students at site A;
- students at site F rated the appropriateness of the rules statistically significantly *less positively* than did students at site B.

Students' views are not necessarily always the best way to judge the appropriateness of rules, of course. At site A, for example, interviews with students revealed that they were not happy about the 'no public displays of affection' (PDAs) rule which sought to prevent *'snogging displays'*, yet most parents would probably support this rule in the context of the 11-16 year old cohort.

Recommendations 19 and 20

- that NAGTY makes clear to all NAGTY members and their parents what the rules

are at NAGTY summer schools and details the level of supervision that will be in place, thus ensuring that students know what to expect and are aware that these rules and close supervision are in part what ensures a safe, enjoyable time for NAGTY summer school students

- that NAGTY liaises with all Site Managers to encourage consistency in the rules and level of supervision in place across all sites

7.2   Residential Assistants views

All sites were sent the NAGTY Residential Staff Handbook for the summer schools, 2004. This 27-page handbook made clear the scope of the duties and expectations of RAs and SRAs (Figure 7.2), specifically stating the lack of boundaries between being 'on duty' and 'off duty':

> "Working at the Summer School site may take some getting used to. You interact with highly able students for hours on end, formally and informally. There is not always a clear difference between being 'on duty' and 'off duty'. Successful staff members not only appreciate the intensity of the experience but thrive within this community." (NAGTY Residential Staff Handbook, 2004, p3)

Figure 7.2 Roles of SRAs and RAs (NAGTY Handbook for Residential Staff, 2004)

The role of the Senior Residential Assistants (SRAs)
- to work in conjunction with the Site Manager to supervise the residential aspects of the programme
- to supervise the RA team and co-ordinate day-to-day operation of the residential programme
- to provide guidance on planning activities and running the halls [of residence]

- to lead hall-based RA meetings (where required)
- to ensure open communication between residential and teaching staff
- to perform administrative tasks, such as scheduling days off

The role of the Residential Assistants (RAs)
- to supervise and support students when they are not in class
- to implement the recreational programme
- to live with the students in the residence halls and deal with every aspect of residential life
- to plan and supervise the recreational programme
- to work on a 24-hour call basis and be on duty 7 days a week
- to be aware of any special problems a student may be having and thus:
  - to help resolve conflicts
  - to comfort homesick students
  - to help students work through a whole range of academic and personal issues

The Handbook for Residential Staff, 2004, also covered a wide range of topics relevant to the roles of S/RA. These included sections on:

- the role of the residential team;
- working as part of the residential team;
- advice from those who have been there before;
- daily schedule and interaction;
- a typical daily schedule (Monday to Friday);
- working with NAGTY students;
- working with parents;
- understanding gifted students;
- creating a safe and positive learning environment;
- safety, security and medical issues;
- communicating concerns;
- community building;
- activities programme;
- administrative nuts and bolts;
- student code of conduct and site rules for student conduct;
- standards of employee conduct.

Despite the circulation to sites of this handbook for RAs and SRAs, it was clear from the interviews with S/RAs across the sites that not every RA was aware of its existence or of its content. (See **Recommendation 4.**)

7.2.1   RAs' workload

The RAs' perception of the workload that they faced was of a different order to that of the academic and teaching staff. RAs were more likely to think of their workload in terms of hours, rather than difficulty. Other than pre-summer-school training and induction, the RAs' workload prior to the start of courses was minimal. However, once the students arrived, the RAs typically found that they had very busy schedules. The details of the daily timetable for RAs varied between sites, but, generally, they felt that they were on call most of the time. RAs were responsible for the students from first thing in the morning until they went to bed. NAGTY's standards of supervision (which many students felt was very high) meant that RAs were clear that they had to accompany their charges wherever they needed to go, for example, between their accommodation and dining areas, between classes, and whenever they were moving around the sites. When students were in classes, RAs often had group meetings, and free time varied from day to day. On one site, the RAs were termed 'mentors' and had an additional role, in that they also acted as teaching assistants in the classes. In consequence, any time the mentors could take as free time had to be negotiated with individual strand leaders.

One RA gave an account of her workload that, essentially, typifies that experienced by all RAs, and made an interesting point that perhaps more information about the reality of the role should be available at the point when NAGTY is recruiting RAs:

> "Workload before the summer school was nothing really - just the first two or three days of training. But, once the summer school began, it was huge, really, especially in the first week because we had all the social activities to plan. I think by half way through, [...] everybody knew more or less what was going on. It was just the very fine details that had to be finalised, and then people had more free time. But, certainly, at the beginning, a lot of people, certainly people who hadn't done it before, were quite overwhelmed by the lack of free time we had

I think, maybe, when NAGTY are recruiting, they should explain a bit more to people the kind of 'day in the life of an RA' if you like. I mean, you can't say exactly how much free time you're going to have in a day, but I know people who were kind of a bit shocked by that, that they're basically on-call all the time. Even if it's just to pick up something from the main campus, or go and supervise a lunch hour, or something like that, it's quite demanding. I mean the vast majority of people ... accepted it and were fine, but some people didn't quite."

RAs were acutely aware that they were responsible for children, and felt that they had a great deal of responsibility. This sense of responsibility also added to the burden of their often long working days:

Interviewer: "Do you feel that you have a lot of responsibility for the kids in your group?"
"Yes, especially when you've got someone with special needs. I've got a girl in my group who is bulimic, and keeping an eye on that, and knowing what is normal for her, that is quite pressured, because you worry more or less constantly."

The RAs were central to the success of the non-academic side of the summer schools (something that was highly valued by the students), and were often called upon to spend long periods of time on duty, with a close watching and caring brief.

7.2.2   RAs' views on supervision and rules

Like the students, RAs were aware that there were issues surrounding supervision and rules. In addition, they were able to appreciate changes in the groups they were responsible for over the period of the summer school.

Mirroring the view of many students, some of the RAs interviewed also felt that there were problems associated with the strict standards of supervision that had to be enforced, though they, too, were aware why this was:

"The supervision is a contentious topic, I think. I understand why it has to be so high. I mean, the standard is that all students, every student should be seen by an RA at all times. It's really difficult, because having the fifteen and

sixteen year olds, they're used to going off into town by themselves, and they are young adults, and they're quite independent, so coming here, it's a real shock to them. And it's quite difficult to have to enforce these rules that you think are too strict."

"I don't like to enforce [the rules], but, then, I have to; it's my job, so I do. But you feel like a bit of an ogre telling a kid that they can't walk two hundred yards to the toilet, they have to wait for some more people so we can have a toilet run, and things like that. And you get some attitude from kids saying, you know, 'that there's always an RA present'. I think what would be perfect is if we were just invisible and we could see the kids, and they couldn't see us, that would be perfect, but, you know,"

"I think the supervision is a difficult one, because I know students that have been to other summer schools before are like, 'Oh, at [name of university] we could just wander around, do what we wanted, we had, like, independence, and here it's like a prison camp', and you're, like, 'I don't want them to feel like it's a prison camp, that's awful', you know".

Some RAs felt that the solution to this issue lay with rules differentiated by age. This was also raised by some students, who, like some RAs, felt that older students, say those from 14 to 16 years old, should have a more relaxed regime than the younger students. As one RA commented:

"I would gradate the rules on age. I've got 16 year olds, and it's very difficult, and they see why they have to toe the line, but I would give them a lot more freedom at 16. They are used to that freedom. You know, the lights out at 10.30, 'Oh, we don't go to bed at 10.30', you know."

7.2.3   RAs' views on student progress

The RAs were close observers of the groups of students they were responsible for, and had a watching brief in terms of looking out for students who had problems, such as homesickness. The RAs' overall view was that the students in their charge coalesced well, quickly made friends, and, on the whole, made gains in terms of social skills and friendships. The RAs were also aware of the benefits accruing to the

students in terms of independence and self-confidence. These findings mirror the accounts given by the students themselves. Typical comments by the RAs were:

"I would definitely say, as well, that being able to get away from home is, for a large proportion of them, a massive bonus. Because I think, in certain ways, they are a lot higher than other students, I think, in a lot of ways, like independence and things like that; often they are a bit more stunted. And the fact that they can get away and live in an almost university-like atmosphere really helps."

"They get to socialise with kids who are actually on their own level. They are surrounded by people like them."

"I will say, a lot of the girls that were in my group were returners, so they knew what to expect, so in that respect I think there was little change between them and the girls that hadn't been before. But, I think the summer school experience is a great role for all of them, because what I find interesting, is talking to them about their experience of being in NAGTY and at school, and I know a lot of them feel they can't tell their friends and peers at school about being in NAGTY, so coming *here*, and having everybody in the same boat, and this kind of common interest, I think it's brilliant, they're all very accepting of each other, and the people who wouldn't get included at school, are included here, which is fantastic and they all fit in".

7.2.4   RAs' views about the pastoral reports

In the *Reporting Handbook* for the summer schools, 2004, NAGTY made clear that RAs were expected to compile a pastoral report on each of their students and offered three pages of guidance on how this should be done, including an example report. This expectation built on good practice at sites during the 2003 summer schools. The pastoral report was to be only a couple of paragraphs long but was to be an accurate reflection of the student's time at summer school. It was to provide a general overview of the child's time at summer school, noting any major achievements and any concerns about the student's behaviour.

The reality revealed by the interviews with RAs across the sites was that some were unaware that they were to be involved in the process, while others found time constraints hindered their contribution to pastoral report writing:

> "I think this is the first year that RAs have been asked to do pastoral reports on the students, and we've basically been asked to write a paragraph or two on each student. I'm presuming they will go to parents, I presume, with the academic reports. Now, just because of time constraints, we've not really been able to write those yet, so they've said, I think they've said, 'within a week of the end of the summer school', so, a lot of us are going to go away and write these at home, or they may find time today, or whatever, to write those. And we've received guidelines as to how to do those, as well."

Summary of key points from Chapter 7

- Food quality was regarded as at least satisfactory by the majority of students (76%) but with variability among sites and particular concerns about lack of appropriate options for vegetarians, and a minority of students following special diets for religious or medical reasons.
- Accommodation was regarded as at least satisfactory by 93% of students but there was variability in quality across sites.
- The residential experience had an impact on most families' summer holiday arrangements and about 1 in 10 students reported either missing their family or their family missing them. However, the NAGTY summer school was compared positively with non-residential experiences at various 'day school' events.
- The Residential Assistants (RAs) were positively regarded by 97% of students, both in terms of their informal interactions with students and in the support RAs provided for students.
- A third of students had concerns about rules and supervision levels which they regarded as too strict.
- The RAs reported long working hours with difficult distinguishing between being 'on' and 'off' duty and concerns about enforcing rules they considered too strict for older students.

- RAs interviewed had positive views of how quickly the students gelled and made friends and, on the whole, made gains in their personal and social skills.
- Despite NAGTY guidance, not all RAs were clear about their role in writing pastoral reports.

8   OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SUMMER SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: LENGTH, LABEL, LIAISON AND BALANCE

A number of issues that have not already been discussed were raised in the interviews with summer school staff and students. In particular, the issue of the appropriate length of the NAGTY summer schools produced a varied response, with opinion divided on whether summer schools should be two or three weeks. There were also a variety of opinions on the label of 'gifted and talented', with some regarding the label in a less positive light than others, but there was also an awareness that some such term was probably inevitable.

There were two key areas where changes to the summer schools were proposed by a number of interviewees:

- in liaison between the academic and non-academic staff;
- in the balance between the academic and social sides of the schools.

8.1   Length of summer schools

There was no clear overall conclusion with regard to the length of the summer schools, with both support, and questioning, of the two- and three-week formats. Only a minority of staff or students had been involved in a previous NAGTY summer school that was of a different length from the summer school they took part in 2004, so few interviewees were able to base their views on experience. Nonetheless, there was support for both three- and two-week summer schools being offered, along with appreciation of the possible drawbacks of each type of summer school.

8.1.1   Three-week summer schools

Both students and staff who were involved in three-week summer schools appeared to think that a suitable length, for a variety of reasons. Nonetheless, there was an awareness that there were some drawbacks, although these were usually seen to be of a minor nature.

Staff were often in favour of three-week summer schools. Two Residential Assistants (RAs) who had worked on a three week course in 2003, but a two week school in 2004, talked about the social and personal benefits of three week courses:

> "I quite enjoyed it being three weeks last year. [...] It is harder [this year] to get to know everybody well, especially as there were only 60 children in 2003."

> "I think it could be longer [than two weeks]. The kids were filling in these forms last night, and we were planning the gala dinner, and they were, like, 'We're only half way through' [...] I think a lot of them are only just kind of feeling settled in now, and now they can see the end, and they haven't really had time where they were feeling kind of..."

This perception that three weeks allowed the students to settle in, make friends, become acquainted with what was expected of them, then benefit from these social and academic aspects for a decent period of time, was something that students also identified. Two students on a three-week summer school commented:

> "I didn't want to do two weeks because I think three weeks is good, because two weeks, you just make friends, and then you leave."

> "Yeah, yeah, and also, I mean, it will be hard to leave at the end of the week [week three], but at least you've got to know people, and you've had a lot of time with them."

Other students referred to the academic benefits gained from three-week courses:

> "I think if it was shorter there wouldn't be, perhaps, as much time to learn so much. I mean, three weeks is a decent amount of time."

> "Our course was really good, because for the third week we were preparing for our final presentation."

> "The second week everyone got into learning; the third week, it was just like messing about, and having fun together, really."

Even among those students who had been unsure about how they would cope with attending a three-week course, including those who did experience home-sickness early in a summer school, there was a recognition that they had, in the end, enjoyed a three-week experience, while some students on two-week courses wished they had been on three-week schools instead:

Boy: "I kind of thought that I would never be able to spend three weeks away from home, now I'm kind of wishing it was three weeks."
Girl: "Yeah, I wish it were longer now."

"I wanted to go for a two week one, but I'm actually really glad I got, like, a three week one."

"I was quite homesick to start with, and wishing I'd chosen a two week one, but, now, I don't want to go home. It's good."

There was a clear recognition that one of the major benefits, in the eyes of the students, from attending the summer schools was making friends. Some felt that this was partly dependent upon the length of the summer school:

"I don't think two weeks is really long enough to form lasting relationships."

Despite support for three-week summer schools, there was a feeling, among those who were involved in two-week summer schools, that there may well be drawbacks in having three-week schools. Some staff and students felt that, taking their two-week experiences as a starting point, there would have to be changes in, for example, pace and organisation if they were to take part in three-week schools. Two students on a two-week course, discussing the implications of three weeks, commented:

"Three weeks with the people I have met would be good, but three weeks of this type of work would be stressful, because it is quite hard and intense."
"But if you were doing it for three weeks, there'd probably be more choice, because I don't think they'd make you do exactly the same thing for three weeks".

Interestingly, the point made here, that the social side would be *'good'*, but that three weeks of intensive study would not be *'hard and intense'*, was a point made in

reverse by one academic on a two-week school, who was concerned for the staff involved in the non-academic aspects of the summer school:

> "I think the three-week course is probably a good idea, but only if we are thinking about the time structure ourselves [i.e., the academic staff], because the bits that are stressful and tiring are not the bits we are doing really, it's all the outside [i.e. social] activities..."

The view of teaching staff involved in delivering two-week courses that shifting to three weeks would entail a different course structure was a common view:

> "I think the structure of it might have to be different [if it was three weeks]. Over the three weeks, you'd have to structure it differently. I think, I don't know, you might have to, perhaps, differentiate with the age groups..."

These comments, of course, were made by people on two-week courses, rather than by those who experienced a three-week summer school.

8.1.2   Two-week summer schools

There was a strong preference among some staff and students in favour of two-week courses, especially by those on two-week courses, but also by a minority who had experienced both lengths of summer school. The arguments revolved principally around workload, erosion of summer holidays or, for academics, of research and writing time, and concerns about younger students being away from home for three weeks. Some teaching staff expressed their preference for two weeks in an emphatic manner:

> "I couldn't do three weeks."

> "Three weeks, I did argue, was too long. I suppose I was partly worried about recruiting, and I suppose I thought that not many people would go for three weeks, and it nearly killed me."

> "Two is plenty, especially if they're not used to boarding."

"Oh, [three] weeks is too long. Pretty packed days. For some, they have not been away from home. This is a strain, looking after themselves. And they need holidays."

"Two weeks is sufficient."

More detailed arguments revolved around the amount of academic work the children were expected to do, and the differing requirements of different age groups within the 11-16 age band. One qualified teacher, who had taught on a three-week summer school in 2003, and a two-week one in 2004, talked about the long working day for the children (9a.m. - 5 p.m.) on the three-week course:

"It doesn't matter how gifted and talented you are, saying to a 14 year old child, work from nine to five every day for three weeks is a hell of a lot. This year, for us, as a course, two weeks has worked well, certainly by half three, because they are teenagers, some of them will give you more, but I think it is important that they don't [...] I think it could run for three weeks [...] the advantages for the course of a three week school would be extra depth, but, that wouldn't be necessary, and it would mean half of the teacher's holiday."

This was reflected in the comments of another qualified teacher:

"It would be a bit much [three weeks] if it was the same age group, 12-16. I wouldn't mind doing it myself, as a teacher, but I'd imagine they'd flag by the end of it, or they'd need a lot more down time."

These views were echoed by some students, who were often concerned about sacrificing too much of their summer holidays, homesickness, and spending too long studying in the summer:

"I don't really have enough time [to take a three-week course]; my summer holiday is really full. Friends I have made on the course want to come and stay with me after a week, but I don't really have enough time".

"I won't be seeing my friend for about five weeks, as I go back, then I go on holiday, then she goes on holiday, then we've only got four days before we go back to school."

"Three weeks would be just kind of too long, it would take too much of your summer, but two weeks is just like perfect."

"I think two weeks is alright if you're one of those people who gets really homesick, I mean, I'm not like that, but some people did."

"I don't think I'd enjoy a three week course that much, it'd be a bit too long, I think."

8.2 The label, 'Gifted and Talented'

All the members of NAGTY have, after a fashion, been labelled as 'gifted and talented'. Reactions to this labelling were mixed, on the part of students and summer school staff. Whereas many were indifferent, or neutral, to the label, others had reservations, while some were positive towards it. One area of criticism that did stand out, however, was the issuing and wearing of summer school T-shirts, which display the gifted and talented label in a prominent fashion. This was a particular issue for some students and staff when they were off site.

8.2.1 Perceived problems with the 'gifted and talented' label

Summer school staff had reservations with the label, 'gifted and talented', for two main reasons. Firstly, they sometimes felt that it was not possible to have a generally agreed definition of what constituted gifted and talented, and, secondly, there was concern that the label might cause problems for the students among their peers at school. The students also identified these issues, as well as a number of other problems with the term.

Staff reservations about the term often focused on the meaning of the term. It was unclear, they felt, what constituted a gifted and talented child in the context of NAGTY summer schools:

"I don't like it. I think that as far as raw mental ability is concerned, there is often not a great deal of difference between students. I think that where they stand out from the rest is in their attitude. It is not raw ability; it is more an

attitude of going after things. That is something that this group of students have."

"I think 'talented' is quite odd. You would think that was more of the arts side, music side, rather than academic side."

"I am fairly confident that there can be no agreed definition of 'gifted and talented'".

These adult views were also reflected by the views of some of the students, who also felt that it was not entirely clear that lay conceptions of the term matched NAGTY's definition. This was apparent in one exchange between a student and an interviewer:

Student: "I think the words, 'gifted and talented', are very loosely used. I think, personally, that someone I would call gifted is someone who could sit at a piano, and, having minimal piano lessons, because there are children who can do this, and play an entire piece, just listening to it."
Interviewer: "So how would you describe yourself then?"
"Intelligent, but not gifted. I would personally say that there's not many people here who are gifted and talented [...] Something along the lines of 'able', because 'able' is the key word, isn't it? But, again, 'able' is a very loosely used word."

This student's reflections matched those of staff, and other students, on the difficulty of defining the term in a satisfactory fashion. Nonetheless, there was a recognition, that, as one student put it:

"There has to be a word, and, I mean, no word is going to be perfect."

The second objection that staff and students most frequently raised was in connection with the potential for creating peer group problems for the students once they were back at school. Associated with this was the wearing of gifted and talented T shirts by students at the summer schools. A number of staff were concerned that students might have problems with being labelled gifted and talented. While staff were not overly concerned about the children seeing each other as gifted and talented within the summer school environment, they did feel that in other respects there could be problems:

"OK, they are gifted and talented, but I don't think they should be using that label in any other way than that is the name of the course. It's going to lead to problems with their peers at school, I would have thought."

An RA made a similar point:

"What I just said then about not being able to tell their peers at school they're NAGTY, the 'gifted and talented' thing, it's quite kind of boastful, and us going around with 'gifted and talented youth' on the T shirts. I mean, I wish it said 'staff' somewhere, because I don't think I'm gifted or talented! And I know some of the kids, like, they didn't really like wearing their T shirts on trips and things, because, you know, you get teased for being 'swots'."

"The term 'gifted and talented', I think, is one that has quite a lot of stigma, because, you know, it provokes teasing because it's boastful, isn't it ?"

Many students agreed with this view, and also felt unhappy about the T shirts. Talking about the term gifted and talented, students commented:

Boy: "I just keep it secret. You just want to be normal. You don't want people to think...I don't know."
Boy 2: "Yes, and people taking the mick out of you; it's really not nice."

Girl: "I have a big problem with the term 'gifted and talented'. It's highly embarrassing. If you say, I'm going to a summer school or a course in English, you can say it in however many different ways, but as soon as NAGTY comes up, they say, 'Oh, what does that stand for?' It's, like, oh my God, I'm not going to tell you, because you are going to laugh at me."
Girl 2: "Most of my friends, they don't say anything, but you can tell they're thinking *'right!'* [laughter]
Girl: "They come into my classroom, and say, 'Can we have the gifted and talented?' You don't go in and say, 'Can we have the ungifted and untalented?'"
Boy: "My school has this group called, the 'Honours Group', which is much less specific".

"If I had that label [in school] I'd get beaten up. Children at my school find intelligence uncool and bad."

The T shirt issue was focused almost exclusively on the implications associated with the students wearing them off site, which is when they were required to wear them to aid recognition:

Boy: "Those T shirts, we have to wear with 'gifted and talented' on them. Next year, can we just have 'GTY' and nothing about summer schools"?

Girl: "We get some *strange* looks".

Girl 2: "I got unwanted attention. I had several people asking me about it, and it was quite embarrassing."

In fact, the official NAGTY view is that the T-shirts are meant to be simply souvenirs for the students and are not mean to be worn as an identifying uniform off-site.

Recommendations 21 and 22

- that NAGTY issues clear guidance to all Site Managers stating that the T-shirts are souvenirs, and not to be used as a uniform during off-site trips
- that NAGTY considers running a competition asking NAGTY members to redesign the T-shirts to create a 'look' that is more acceptable to the students

8.2.2 Arguments in favour of the 'gifted and talented' label

Very few of those interviewed were wholeheartedly enthusiastic about the gifted and talented label. A more typical response, on the part of both staff and students, was that the term was a useful, if a little unclear, definition of a particular group of young people. There was a tendency for people to accept the term as evidence of certain characteristics, while, at the same time, different people had their own view of what it meant to them.

Staff reactions to the label were often fairly neutral; often their view was that it was not an issue, or that if the students themselves were happy with the term then it was acceptable. Typical responses were:

"I suppose I have to say I haven't really thought about it an awful lot."

"I think if the kids are comfortable with it, it shouldn't bother us."

"I don't have very strong feelings about it. It's a shame that all kids don't have the opportunity. They're a particular kind of gifted and talented kids here, I think. They've had a lot of support from their schools already, the parents are aware of the fact ... they're already getting a lot of support."

The students themselves, when they were positive about the term, tended to be so in a self-deprecating fashion. There were, however, some students in the interview sample who clearly said that they liked the label:

"I think it makes you feel special."

'It makes us sound good." [laughs]

"I think it's a great thing."

More neutral comments from the students were, for example, *'It's OK'* and:

"I've no problem with the label, really. I think that people pick up that I'm clever anyway. [...] Some people at school don't like the label, but I don't think that it is anything to hide."

8.3   Liaison between the academic and social/residential elements

The issue of improving liaison between the academic, teaching and RA staff was one that people from both the academic and social sides of the summer schools took up. The main issues raised were that:

- the two component parts of the summer schools (the academic and the social/residential/pastoral) were unclear as to the exact role of the other;
- there was a notable difference in the amount of 'homework' that students were set by different strands;

- there was a sense among some RAs that the academic staff had very little idea of what the summer schools were trying to achieve in addition to academic development.

Some of the academic staff wanted to be more involved in the non-academic side of the summer schools, even if it was just to be made more aware of what was going on in that part of the school, as well as getting more formal feedback on the children during those periods outside the classroom:

> "I think there's a lot of quite strong divorce between the academic and residential side, which I think is remedied somewhat by the Saturday meeting when we both can come together to meet the parents, and it may be appropriate, and it may be that that should be maintained. I can't say I'm not jealous to have seen the talent contest that they've participated in. I think, as the academic provider during the day, maybe every academic provider should have the opportunity of attending *some*, maybe just one evening session, to have a sense of what they're doing when we don't have them, and maybe for the RAs, as well, I think they should have an opportunity to sit in on a session with the academics, so that *everyone* has a sense of what everyone else is doing and experiencing."

> "I think it would be quite nice to [see what the students do in the evening]. How tired are they? How intellectually demanding are their evening activities? I have no real comprehension of what it is they do - are they relaxing with computer games mostly? talking? watching television? or are they engaged in other intellectually rigorous activities? And if one has a sense of their evening timetable, one might be able to adapt one's daytime timetable to respond."

> "In terms of the summer school as a whole, there is a lack of liaison. I know what the kids do when they're not with us through conversations with them, but [...] it's two separate strands."

These views mirror those of RAs who also wished to see a more formal structure for liaison between the academic and non-academic staff.

In at least two sites, mechanisms to support liaison between the academic and residential sides of the NAGTY summer school had been set up. For example, in one

site, a daily briefing was produced and taken round to all strand teams, as well as being given to all RAs. This presented feedback (for example, on how strand trips had gone, on press coverage, and progress towards student reports), news about events and visitors for the day, with information about any related logistical issues, and alerts for future trips, events and visitors. It was also used as a way of giving a public acknowledgement, for example, to individuals who had helped with visitors or press coverage or had presented to groups. At another site, a video team recorded each day and presented an edited tape on the following morning, enabling academics to get a flavour of the social and residential sides and the residential teams to get a flavour of the academic strands. In addition, all teaching assistants met as a group on a daily basis with members of the management team and representatives of the S/RAs to enable communication among the strands, the NAGTY office and the S/RAs.

Recommendation 23

- that NAGTY liaises with Site Directors to encourage them to set up formal mechanisms whereby the academic staff can share information, views and experiences with the residential assistants and *vice versa*.

8.4   Balance between academic and social activities

There was a feeling among some of the RA staff, in particular, that there was, perhaps, room for some changes in the balance between academic and social activities.

Some RAs felt that the children were being asked to work for too long at a time. They suggested that either there could be a restructuring of the day, so that, for example, the afternoon was taken up by leisure activities, with academic work in the morning

and early evening, or, that more time should be allocated to 'downtime' or quiet time for the students. In addition, there was a clear feeling that consistent rules should apply to the amount of coursework that teaching staff were allowed to set for the students to do outside the teaching hours (see Chapter 6, section 6.2.3 for students' views on this.). Differing amounts of coursework caused tensions, and the students often found that large amounts of additional set work were not compatible with the evening activities. RAs were particularly concerned about these issues, a result of their role as pastoral carers:

> RA 1: "I think the academic staff think it is supposed to be just an academic experience."
> RA 2: "I think one of the problems is that we look at things, and judge other things, but when we look at the academic side, where we have a lot less input, and I especially find it difficult, because we have kids coming to us because we are their first outlet, they come to us with a problem, and a lot of the time if it is to do with the academic stuff there is nothing really we can do, and we want to try and help them, and a lot of it is unfair when some subjects have got an hour's work, some subjects have got ten minutes work, and some subjects, they've got two and a half hours free time in the afternoon, and some of the academic staff say, 'right, you've got two and a half hours homework', and, for us, they come back to us, and they say, 'oh, we can't do our homework, and we've got so much, and these guys have got, like, only half an hour'. And we're, like, 'We understand, and we completely agree with you, but there is nothing we can do'."
> *Interviewer: "So you think there should be more liaison between your side of things, and the academic side of things?"*
> RAs: "Yeah. Definitely."
> RA 2: "Well, we liaise, and some of the academic staff just don't want to listen to us."

> Senior RA: "I know we are now reaching the stage of writing projects, and the academics want more time for projects, and my attitude is, 'Well, find time in your academic sessions'. I know we are going to have to eat into 4.30-6.30pm slot which is their [students'] time [...] which, at this stage, I'm ok with that, but if it was last week I think I would have stuck up for them [the students] a bit more. They [academics] were talking about eating into their social time, but we put a stop to that."

"I think I'd probably have, personally, put the academic stuff in the morning, and maybe not have so much academic, not go on for so long in the afternoon. I think they should stop at 3pm, or 3.30pm, so they would have longer to give to the social side, which is very important. They are here away from their families, and they need to have time to form relationships with other people."

Summary of key points from Chapter 8

- Students and staff were divided on the appropriate length of the summer school (2 versus 3 weeks): the benefits of extra time for study and to establish social relationships were balanced by the demands of being away from home and the workload.
- The term 'gifted and talented' was generally considered to be problematic and, in particular, the identification of the students as being 'gifted and talented'.
- There was insufficient clarity regarding the relationship between the academic and social sides of the summer schools, and a perceived benefit in each set of staff knowing more about the other aspect.

9 THE LONGER-TERM IMPACT OF THE SUMMER SCHOOL: PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS

The post-summer-school parent questionnaire, which was completed by 671 parents, contained one open question: *'Please tell us how you feel that the summer school has affected your child. Tell us about positive and any negative aspects. Please use another sheet of paper if necessary'.* The parents' responses to this opportunity to write about the impact of the summer school on their child were overwhelmingly positive, with parents seeing a variety of benefits accruing to their children. These benefits ranged from the summer schools having improved their children's social skills, to the experience being *'life-changing'* and, in a few cases, *'life-saving'*, for their children. Parents perceived a smaller number of negative results from their children's attendance at summer school, with, for example, two children being viewed as more *'arrogant'*. However, there was a single negative outcome which was identified 57 times. This was connected with problems associated with the return to normal schooling, problems which had been created, highlighted, or exacerbated by attendance at summer school.

9.1 Positive impacts

The overwhelming response of parents was that their children had benefited in a positive fashion from attendance at the summer schools. Not only were specific areas identified by parents, such as improved academic performance, increased self-confidence, and a desire to attend university in future, but parents also made greater claims for the impact of summer schools. These generalised, but important, responses to the open question, seem to indicate that, for a significant number of students, the summer schools have had a wide impact on many aspects of their lives.

As Table 9.1 shows, eleven main positive themes emerged from the parental responses. Of these, three were mentioned over 100 times: 'improvements in confidence', 'academic benefits', and 'improvements in social skills'. Two other themes were mentioned over 90 times: 'friendships', 'increased independence'. The remaining themes all figured to a lesser, though still significant, extent.

Table 9.1: Themed analysis of parents' responses to the open question: *Please tell us how you feel that the summer school has affected your child. Tell us about positive and any negative aspects.'*

Theme	Frequency (number)
Improved confidence	235
Academic benefits	174
Improved social skills	120
Friendships	98
Increased independence	93
Increase desire to attend university	66
Desire to attend summer school again	62
Problems associated with school	57
Increased interest in learning	38
Increased maturity	26
Improved self-esteem	24
Desire to work harder at school	11

*This was an open question. Parents could write as much or as little as they wished.

Representative statements by parents included:

"It is true to say that NAGTY has changed her life. I can't imagine how the gap would ever be filled if NAGTY ceased to exist."

"[My son] *loved* it - said it was the best thing that he had ever done. Cried when he left - something I haven't seen him do for over 3 years."

"When [my son] returned home this year he was positively beaming - the enjoyment he had over the two weeks was indescribable."

"I would recommend the summer school to anyone; my child only had benefits - no negative respects."

For a few children, the experience of attending summer school appears to have been even more significant than it being *'life-changing'*. One parent wrote about the way in

which the summer school had been a *'life-saver'* for her daughter. This is quoted from at length below to illustrate the importance of the impact that a NAGTY summer school could have on the lives of individual children and their families:

> "The summer school has been a 'life-saver'. Our daughter has had a very unhappy time at school since the age of 6 (now 14). She has been targeted because she has always been bright and well motivated. She has tried to fit in socially in many ways, for example by not taking an interest in school work. [...] This summer was the first time ever where she has been with a group of children and been herself and *fully* accepted. When she has worked hard as a member of the group (in a group project) her efforts have been recognised positively and appreciated. Again, a new experience. She has been with a group of like minded people and it has given her the self-confidence, self esteem to get through GCSE. She has decided to work as hard as she can and get the best results possible. She has a sense of belonging now and because this group is outside her school circle it has made her life simpler, she can keep the two apart.
>
> When I used the word 'life saver' earlier, it was not done lightly. As parents, our daughter's unhappiness has always been a cloud on our horizon for so long. We have felt helpless. She was very depressed, had started having migraines because of all the stress etc at school. We cannot praise the people involved in the summer school enough. Everyone has been totally committed to what they were doing. This is a great scheme, run by people who know what they are doing and why. If our daughter had not been picked by one teacher at her school and put her name forward for membership, her life and ours would be so much more difficult now. Thank you."

This response also raises the question of the problems that some students appear to have in connection with their day to day schooling, an issue discussed later.

9.1.1 *Improved confidence*

The most frequently mentioned positive impact identified by parents from their son or daughter's summer school attendance was the growth in the confidence of their children. This theme emerged 235 times in response to the open question (which compares to 242 times in the student responses in their post-summer-school

questionnaire). Parents who reported benefits relating to confidence frequently did so in clear and enthusiastic terms. There was a noticeable sense of surprise at the degree to which two or three weeks at the summer schools had improved their children's confidence beyond what they, as parents, thought was possible in such a short time:

> "Huge influence on self-confidence in what he does and decides to attempt, plus in his social interaction."

> "I can't adequately describe what an incredible experience summer school was for [my daughter] - it felt like we'd dropped off a child at the start and brought back a young lady, she seemed so mature and self-confident (a lasting effect, I'm pleased to say). She was very reluctant to leave, and would dearly love to go again."

> "Her time away from home among strangers and surviving the experience has given her enormous self-confidence. Her time at the school was rewarding in every way."

> "The main gain has been [my daughter's] tremendous growth in confidence. I really had to persuade her to give summer school a try, and at the end of two weeks she didn't want to come home! She can't wait to hear about next year's opportunities."

> "Her confidence and self-assurance has rocketed! A wonderful experience in *every* way!"

Parents saw the differing aspects of the summer school experience - academic, social, and residential - as boosting children's self-confidence in all these areas. In addition, parents were aware that improved self-confidence in, for example, academic terms, often impacted positively upon self-confidence in social terms. The summer schools were perceived to be safe, supportive, and friendly environments where children could mix with 'like-minded' students and supportive and engaged adults - residential assistants, teaching assistants, qualified teachers, and academic staff. This combination of positive and supportive factors had a profound effect on some students who had particular needs that were met by the overall experience of

the summer school. For example, one student with speech problems gained a good deal in terms of self-confidence:

> "He had a great time. [My son] stammers and the stay away from home among a new group of people improved his confidence enormously."

Table 9.2 shows parental responses to the closed question in the same questionnaire regarding improvements in the student's confidence in social situations.

Table 9.2 How far has attendance at the summer school improved your child's confidence in social situations?

Post-summer-school (N=671)	%
A great deal	44.0
To some extent	41.1
Slightly	9.8
Not at all	3.9

Interestingly, analysis of variance (One-way ANOVA) showed statistically significant differences between the views of parents whose children had attended different sites $(F(6,654)=2.960, p=.004)$. The post hoc Scheffe test revealed that the mean of sites G and E were statistically significantly different, with parents whose child attended **site G** being more positive about the impact on their child's confidence in social situations than those of children who attended site E.

The confidence benefits gained by many students were closely linked by the parents to other gains that arose from differing aspects of the summer school experience. Foremost among these were academic benefits, and the acquisition of new social skills. Both of these themes arose more than 100 times in the parental responses to the open question.

9.1.2   Academic benefits

Many parents were aware that their children had acquired new academic skills, a fresh attitude to academic work, or a renewed interest in, and desire for, academic success. These academic benefits were mentioned 174 times in response to the

open question. Interestingly, parents were aware that the academic gains were related to non-academic elements of the summer school experience.

Students appear to have learnt new techniques and skills that they were able to apply to their day to day learning back at school:

> "The summer school achieved more than I possibly thought could be done. His research and presentation skills have drastically improved. He also does his school homework now."

> "Her subject knowledge and independent learning skills have been enhanced significantly."

> "He has developed analytical skills and applied these processes to his school work."

This additional skills base was matched by increased academic engagement among many students. Parents wrote about their children being enthused by the learning and teaching experience:

> 'He was totally enthralled by the academic challenge - and this had increased these children's motivation for learning."

> "[My son] has become more positive, focused, enthusiastic and motivated academically."

> "Has become highly motivated."

> "Our daughter is no longer self-conscious about achieving high marks and wants to do well irrespective of her peers' reaction."

The parents of some students wrote about problems with regard to the learning environment experienced at school, which contrasted with summer school. Students were aware, in their parents' view, that they had often experienced a different type of learning environment than that to which they were used:

"'Positive attitude to learning - less positive attitude to other students at her school who value learning less."

"Quote: 'At school I get taught and with NAGTY I learn.' NAGTY to her is like a family and is a significant part of her life."

In Table 9.3, the parents' responses to the closed questions on the same questionnaire regarding any academic-related benefits of their child attending a NAGTY summer school.

Table 9.3 Parents' views of level of benefit from academic side of summer school in relation to specified areas

Specified benefit	Level of benefit (%) (N-671)			
	A great deal	To some extent	Slightly	Not at all
a) Learning skills	51.0	39.0	7.5	1.5
b) Enthusiasm for learning	62.1	27.9	6.9	1.6
c) Improved performance at school	25.5	46.3	14.6	8.9

The combined percentages of parents noting *'a great deal'* or *'some extent'* of specified academic benefit are very high - 90% for both *'learning skills'* and *'enthusiasm for learning'* and almost 78% for *'improved performance at school'* - particularly as the cohort were students already identified as 'gifted and talented' and likely therefore to be highly motivated and performing well at school even prior to the summer school. The parents' responses in both the closed and open questions on the post-summer school questionnaire provide strong evidence of sustained academic benefits for the NAGTY members who attended a summer school.

9.1.3   Improved social skills

The third most frequently cited benefit identified by parents was an improvement in their children's social skills as a result of attending summer school. This was

mentioned 120 times by parents in their response to the open question. This is a comparable figure to the 153 times improved social skills were mentioned as a summer school dividend by students in their post-summer school questionnaire. Parents frequently indicated that their children's social skills had improved noticeably, often in conjunction with other benefits, such as maturity, independence, and self-confidence:

> "He has matured a lot and got a lot more confidence socially."

> "Has increased a sense of independence and gaining confidence in social situations."

> "Further developed social skills, became more independent, increased love of subject studied."

> 'It has greatly improved my child's confidence and social skills."

In some cases the impact of summer school on children's social skills was profound. One parent wrote at length about how shy her daughter was, and the problems that arose from this shyness. The girl's parents were amazed, and pleased, to find that they appeared to be collecting a different girl at the end of the summer school:

> "When we went to bring [my daughter] back home, we were surprised and very happy to see her talking and laughing with a group of young people; boys and girls."

Parents characterised the summer schools as having a welcoming atmosphere, a result, largely, of the role played by the young residential assistants. This was seen as enabling shy children to feel at home from the start of their courses:

> "We were very delighted to see young friendly people [the residential assistants] who met all the students. This we think helped [our daughter] make friends with some girls straight away."

9.1.4 Sustained friendships

Although parents identified friendships as being one of the key outcomes of the summer school experience less frequently than did their children (see Chapter 10, section 10.1.2), friends made by their children at summer school were mentioned 98 times by parents (as opposed to 195 times by the students themselves). The friendship experience was clearly a key benefit of summer school attendance. Once again, parents were aware that the benefit of making friends went hand in hand with other benefits that their children received:

> "[Our daughter] was extremely happy during her summer school. She would like to do it again - to learn new things, meet interesting friends, and experience being away from home."

Parents reported that their children found it easy to make friends at the summer school: *'He surprised himself, I feel, at how easily he made new friends'.* The enabling feature of summer school that facilitated the formation of friendships was the sense of being with *'like-minded'* people. Parents frequently remarked on this aspect of friendship forming, noting that their children felt quickly at home with other young people whom they felt shared the same interests and outlook:

> "[He] said that he made the best friends *ever* at summer school. When I asked him why he thought that was, he said, 'Everybody understood me for a change.' I think that says it all!"

> "He is now focused on next year and pinning all his hopes on being able to attend another course, after all, as he puts it - 'I need two weeks of being myself, of feeling normal, to last through the rest of the year.'"

> "Our child looks forward to summer school immensely. It's somewhere she feels she can be herself, make friends, relax and feel part of a community, accepted for who she is, without being made to believe she is weird. Everyone likes her which is a real positive; everyone is friendly with no hidden agenda."

> "The main thing was [our daughter's] enjoyment in mixing with lots of 'clever' children. Her first phone call was *'Everyone* has read Lord of the Rings. They've all got interesting things to talk about.'"

Friendships formed at the summer schools seemed to be lasting friendships, with parents noting, for example, that the size of their phone bills had risen, that *'[our daughter's] MSN contact list has 50 NAGTY members on it!'*, and that children had arranged reunions, and other meetings, with summer school friends throughout the country. This was also borne out by parents' responses to the closed question on the same questionnaire asking how much their child appeared to be keeping in touch with other students from the summer school (Table 9.4).

Table 9.4 How much does your child appear to be keeping in touch with other students from the summer school?

Post-summer-school questionnaire (N=671)	%
A great deal	44.1
To some extent	35.8
Slightly	11.6
Not at all	8.0

Analysis of variance (One-way ANOVAs) indicated statistically significant differences among the views of parents whose children had attended different sites - $F(6,659)=8.443$, $p=<.01$. The post hoc Scheffe test showed that, in parents' view, the children who had attended:

- **Site G** were statistically significantly more likely to be keeping in touch with friends than those who had attended Sites B and E;
- **Site F** were statistically significantly more likely to be keeping in touch with friends than those who had attended Sites B, C or E;
- Site E were statistically significantly *less* likely to be keeping in touch with friends than those who had attended **Sites D, F or G**.

9.1.5 Increased independence

An increased sense of independence on the part of their children was a benefit mentioned 93 times by parents in response to the open question. For most of the children attending summer school, it was the first occasion they had been away from home for any length of time. In addition, they also had to face the challenge of meeting and mixing with a large number of previously unknown people, in addition to facing the academic challenges of the courses they had enrolled upon. The

overwhelming outcome for the young students was a successful boost to their sense of independence:

"My 12 year old became much more mature, independent and enjoyed learning much more."

"Gained a lot of independence, including dealing with homesickness."

"The residential experience has increased her sense of independence."

"He absolutely loved the independence and academic stimulus."

"The main benefit was his increased sense of independence."

"[Our son] became more independent and mature."

This experience of an increased sense of independence, allied to increased self-confidence, the experience of friendship, and academic challenge in a structured, university-like environment also had a further important effect on a number of the children:

"My son has become an independent individual and has no fear of leaving home to attend university now."

These open answers were reflected in parents' overwhelmingly positive responses to two related, closed questions on the same questionnaire (Table 9.5), with over 95% noting increased independence as a benefit of the summer school and over 98% valuing the residential aspect of the summer school.

Table 9.5 Increased independence *and* value of residential experience

To what extent ...	Extent (%) (N-671)			
	A great deal	To some extent	Slightly	Not at all
a) ... did being away from home increase your child's sense of independence?	72.4	22.8	3.0	1.5
b) ... do you think it was				

valuable for your child that the summer school was residential?	89.9	8.6	1.0	0.3

Analysis of variance (One-way ANOVA) showed that there were statistically significant differences in parents' views of the value of the residential experience, depending on which site their child had attended - $F(6,661)=3.184$, $p=.004$. The Scheffe post hoc test showed that those whose children attended **site F** were statistically significantly more positive in the value they placed on the residential side of the summer school experience than those whose child attended site E.

9.1.6 Greater desire to attend university

The student data showed that many summer school students regarded these university-based, residential courses as providing an authentic insight into what university life was like for undergraduates (see Chapter 10, section 10.1.6). For a minority of students, this resulted in either a new, or a renewed, desire to attend university in future. This factor was mentioned 66 times by parents in their responses to the open question. Attending the summer schools had created the perception that being at university was friendly, open, confidence-boosting, and academically exciting (often in a way that school was not); according to the parents, this helped many children decide that university had much to offer them in future:

"[My child] can't wait to go to university."

"She has made a definite decision in her own mind that university is where she wants to be."

"It has reinforced his ambition to get to university."

"He is excited about going to university in future."

"He is interested and enthusiastic about future university life."

"He now has a positive attitude towards the thought of university."

Not only did the summer school experience reignite dormant enthusiasm for university, it also appears to have had a fundamental effect on some children from families without a history of university attendance. For such children, the combined benefits - confidence, academic gains, an improvement in social skills, and friendships - had been particularly important as, without direct experience in the family, university can appear a frightening prospect, as one parent wrote:

> "[Our daughter] is noticeably more confident and enthusiastic about her work. Most of all, she has a great desire to go to university as no-one in the family ever has. [She] is realizing that she does have the ability to do very well and is not afraid of hard work. [She] can work on her own, and is developing an independence ahead of her years. Summer school has encouraged her that university is not as frightening as it did appear at first."

One mother of a summer school student wrote movingly, and in detail, about her daughter's educational life, and the impact of the summer school on her daughter's possible educational future. She wrote that her daughter had underachieved throughout her school career, and believed that this was due to her schools' inability to sufficiently meet the needs of a 'gifted and talented' pupil. As a result, her daughter had *'lost confidence in her ability and dismissed the notion of various careers because she considered them too competitive and challenging.'* However, membership of NAGTY and attendance at a summer school appears to have given her daughter the impetus needed to go on to be the first member of her family to attend university:

> "She appears to be making a new start and I am sure that, had she not gone to NAGTY, this would not be the case. I am grateful to NAGTY for having this affect on my daughter. If [she] goes to university, as she says she hopes to, she will be the first in my and my husband's families to go and I think that for children like her, it is much harder to aspire highly because you have no example or role model in the home to copy and this saps your confidence. I think NAGTY summer schools show such children that universities are for people like them and so dispel some of the fear and uncertainty about what they are like."

9.1.7   Desire to attend another NAGTY summer school

The parents' responses to the open question also produced a number of themes that were of interest, though mentioned fewer times than those themes already discussed. Foremost among these was the issue of future attendance at NAGTY summer schools. Some 62 parents noted that their children were keen to experience the summer school in future years. For some, this issue was of primary concern, with parents stressing that attendance at summer school in 2004 had been so important for their children that they were extremely keen that they could attend in future. For some children, parents felt that summer school was the most positive experience in their lives, and helped them cope with other difficult schooling and social problems.

These open responses reflected the parents' responses to related closed questions, asking a) how much attending the summer school had increased their child's desire to become involved with other NAGTY activities and b) to what extent they thought their child would benefit from attending another NAGTY summer school (Table 9.6).

Table 9.6 a) Desire to become involved with other NAGTY activities *and* b) benefit from attending another NAGTY summer school

To what extent ...	Extent (%) (N-671)			
	A great deal	To some extent	Slightly	Not at all
a) ... has attending the summer school increased your child's desire to become involved with other NAGTY activities?	62.6	28.3	6.6	2.2
b) ... do you think your child would benefit from attending another NAGTY summer school?	84.5	12.1	1.6	.4

Recommendation 24

- that NAGTY explains to its members as soon as possible about its changing

position on members attending a NAGTY summer school more than once and makes widely available information about alternative opportunities for residential courses and other ways of building on the summer school experience

9.1.8   Improved learning skills, self-esteem, and maturity

A final group of three, less frequently made, but nonetheless important points were made by smaller groups of parents in connection with the impact of summer school attendance in terms of their children's interest in learning, their self-esteem, and maturity. Some 38 parents noted that their children had a renewed, or new, interest in learning, both at school, and in more general terms. Improvements in self-esteem were identified as an outcome by 24 parents, and 26 parents noted that their children appeared to be more mature following their summer school experience.

9.2   Negative impacts

A variety of negative outcomes were mentioned by parents. However, these were, with one notable exception, of a minor nature, in terms of the issues raised, and the number of times those issues were identified. For example, two parents noted that their children seemed to be more *'arrogant'* as a result of attending the summer school, while three noted that their children did not appear to have been inspired by their courses, and two felt that their, 17 year old, children were not extended by the work.

9.2.1 School problems highlighted, created or exacerbated by having attended a NAGTY summer school

The exception to this was the notable number of parents who identified problems that their children were suffering at school, problems which were highlighted, created, or exacerbated by their children's experience of a NAGTY summer school. This issue was mentioned 57 times. Within that bloc of 57, the issue fell into three broad categories:

- problems that their children had with peers at school;

- problems associated with school indifference to their children's attendance at summer school; and,
- problems associated with the learning and teaching experience at school compared with that at summer school.

One parent's comment seemed to encapsulate the sense of frustration felt by this particular group of parents:

"Enjoyed it [summer school] immensely, being with like minded children. Felt that she could be herself. Makes going back to normal school slightly difficult. No comparison to summer school."

One of the problems faced by such children appeared to be the attitude of their school peers to learning and education, and, in some cases, where it was known, to their having attended summer school. For some children, the problem was the disturbing issue of bullying, sometimes for having an interest in learning. For others, it was a question of fitting in to a prevailing peer group culture that was hostile to learning:

"He enjoyed his time at summer school, but the bullying continues at his school, just worried he will not continue to try hard and do well because of it."

"[Our daughter] attends a comprehensive in a fairly middle class area and has been in upper ability sets for 4 years. We completely underestimated the extent and degree of anti-academic/achievement peer group pressure. Such was her anxiety over being labelled, only 1 close friend knew of the summer school."

"He was very enthusiastic when he came home. However, back at school he feels different and just wants to fit it."

A minority of parents were unhappy with the response of their children's school to the NAGTY summer schools, and/or their children being identified as 'gifted and talented'. The main problem here appeared to be the feeling among some parents that their children's school had made little attempt to recognise that a pupil being a member of NAGTY, or having attended a NAGTY summer school, might need some recognition and follow-up. One parent, whose daughter was one of seven NAGTY

members in the school, but the only one to attend a summer school, felt that her daughter faced almost total indifference to her experience:

"Since returning [to school], her tutor did ask once if [my daughter] had had a good time. That has been the only mention of it. I find it very sad that not one person (i.e. the English Department, as [she] did Creative Writing) has asked how she got on, what she did etc. It appears to me, they are just not interested. This does upset and annoy me."

This was not a unique experience:

"It seems to me that my son's school have almost completely ignored his involvement with NAGTY and have no sign of even trying to understand what Summer School will have meant socially or educationally. There is no sign that they have taken into account any aspect of the whole experience."

"The negatives are not to do with summer school, but are about having to readjust to being back in a less than perfect school. Quote: 'There's no point being gifted and talented at school, it doesn't mean anything, they just ignore you and expect you to get everything right.'"

One parent provided a long, detailed account of her son's school's failure in this respect. She was particularly angered by the fact that she had to turn to her trade union for financial help, as the school expected her to pay most of its contribution, despite the fact that *the school received money from NAGTY and appeared in our local paper advertising their involvement.'* This sense of the school's opportunistic 'support' for NAGTY was exacerbated by the particularly negative reaction of one teacher:

"This time last year, I attended parents' evening at my son's school. Before I sat down to talk to my son's form tutor, she bellowed 'Gifted and talented, that's a laugh'. I was mortified, and the look on [my son's] face was beyond description."

These problems might be contrasted with another school's practice, as identified by a parent:

"The school my son attends has now formed a club for gifted/talented children and plans to have outings and extra activities for the members. [My son] is very happy about this as many of his friends are included."

The final problem identified by parents related to the students comparing the educational experience of summer school with that of school, finding the latter to be wanting. This problem focused, in the parents' accounts, on issues relating to work that failed to stretch former summer school students, limited scope for self-directed learning, poor teaching practice, and boredom:

"The quality of teaching [at the summer school] was so high, she is now more aware of less skilled instruction at her current secondary school. Likewise, the work level now seems *more* tedious, less challenging."

"Has become highly motivated and really enjoyed being in a 'non-judged' situation. At school she has become far more frustrated being taught in mixed ability classes - almost to the point of wanting to leave. She cannot 'stretch' herself without being judged and sneered at by less able peers. [She] *adored* summer school and describes it as a life changing experience. School, she says, is boringly 2D."

"Summer school was a fantastic experience for my daughter but it has only highlighted the fact that the school cannot cater for abilities so going back to school was, as she realised it would be, a complete anti-climax."

Recommendation 25

- that NAGTY continues to develop its links with schools and LEAs and its programme of continuing professional development for teachers, in particular, by finding ways of sharing with school and LEA staff the approaches to teaching and learning that have been successful on the summer schools

Summary of key points from Chapter 9

- Parents overwhelmingly reported positive outcomes for their children, particularly in improved confidence, academic benefits, increased independence and improved social skills and friendships.
- Over 8 out of 10 parents thought their child would benefit a great deal from attending another NAGTY summer school.
- The only substantial negative impact concerned problems highlighted, created or exacerbated by the return to school; these ranged from indifference by staff to bullying.

10   THE LONGER-TERM IMPACT OF THE SUMMER SCHOOL: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

The final question of the post-summer-school student questionnaire, which was completed by 663 students, was an open question, asking respondents to: *'Please tell us what effect/s you feel that the summer school has had on your life'.* This question generated a variety of responses, which showed a high degree of commonality, and were grouped into 16 themes. Of these, five themes were mentioned more than 100 times by respondents - 'improved confidence', 'friendship', 'improved social skills', 'improved academic performance', and 'feelings of independence'. A further three strong themes emerged - 'an increased interest in attending university', 'extended learning', and 'an increased interest in the subject studied'. The remaining eight themes occurred to a lesser degree, but contained some interesting issues, such as a feeling of dissatisfaction with teaching and learning at school as a result of the summer school experience. With the exception of three students, *all* the respondents indicated that they felt that the summer schools had been a positive experience.

Table10.1   Themed analysis of students' responses to the open question*: 'Please tell us what effect/s you feel that the summer school has had on your life'.* *

Theme	Frequency (number)
Improved confidence	242
Made strong friendships	195
Improved social skills	153
Improved academic performance	146
Became more independent	117
Extended knowledge	93
Increased interest in attending university	80
Increased interest in the subject studied	51
Dissatisfaction with their own school	25
Helped in making career choices	21
Helped mixing with different types of people	20
Happy memories	13
Little impact	7
Improved organisational skills	6
Worked harder at school	5
Negative impact	3

*This was an open question. Students could write as much or as little as they wished.

10.1 Students' views of the longer term positive impacts

10.1.1 Improved confidence

The most frequently mentioned benefit resulting from summer school attendance was its impact upon the confidence of students. This improvement in student confidence was felt in many areas of the students' academic and non-academic lives. It was frequently linked to both the learning *and* social experience of the summer schools. Students said that they felt more able to tackle academic tasks, and to mix more easily with people. Extra knowledge, improved academic and social skills all helped boost the self esteem of students.

> "I feel more confident at meeting people and making conversation for the first time."

> "I feel that the summer school has made me more confident because I can now go up to people and make conversation. Unlike before."

There was a clear linkage in students' minds between the ease with which they made friends at the summer schools, their improved sense of independence, and extra knowledge - all notable themes to arise in response to the question - and their sense of increased confidence.

> "I feel more independent, a lot cleverer, more confident and I feel it was a great experience and I am pleased with myself. I can't wait until the next time."

> "Summer school has made me more confident. I made lots of friends and I am continuing to use the social skills that I have learnt. Also, when I go outside, it's nice to know about the history of the Earth that I'm standing on!"

> "I'm more confident and I have made some great friends of whom I have kept in contact with."

The students frequently saw improved self-confidence as being part of a general package of benefits arising from attendance at the summer schools:

> "It has [made] me feel that I can be proud of being Gifted and Talented. I made so many friends there and we are all meeting in a month! I am so much more confident."

The students' responses to closed questions on the post-summer-school questionnaire, relating to the effects of the summer school on confidence in particular situations, are given in Tables 10.2 to 10.5. Where applicable, these responses are given alongside those from the end-of-summer-school questionnaire to the same, or very similar, questions to illustrate the lasting effects of stated benefits.

Table 10.2 Increased confidence to contribute views orally/in class

End of summer school (%) (N=968)		Post summer school (%) (N=645)	
To a great extent	33.8	High impact	36.0
Somewhat	36.5	Medium impact	37.5
Slightly	19.2	Low impact	18.0
Not at all	10.0	No impact	8.2

Table 10.3 Increased confidence in written work/Improved written skills

End of summer school (%) (N=968)		Post summer school (%) (N=645)	
To a great extent	13.5	High impact	22.2
Somewhat	34.0	Medium impact	43.4
Slightly	31.5	Low impact	20.9
Not at all	20.0	No impact	13.2

Table 10.4 Increased confidence to work with peers

End of summer school (%) (N=968)		Post summer school (%) (N=645)	
To a great extent	46.6	High impact	41.2
Somewhat	39.8	Medium impact	35.0
Slightly	10.8	Low impact	15.5

Not at all	2.2	No impact	8.1

Table 10.5 Improved self-confidence in terms of practical work in the class

Post summer school (N=645)	%
To a great extent	36.0
Somewhat	38.4
Slightly	16.1
Not at all	9.1

10.1.2 Making lasting friendships

Some of the most enthusiastic responses to the question came from those students who wrote about their experience of making friends at the summer schools. This aspect was mentioned 195 times in the returned questionnaires. Students frequently mentioned that they found it very easy to make friends at the summer schools, largely because the participants shared similar interests, were 'Gifted and Talented', and were all in the same circumstances at the summer schools.

"I made loads of new friends and got to talk to people with the same interests and different. Just meeting generally nice people all round."

"Everything was brilliant. I found it easier to make friends and made several very good friends."

For some students, this was a life-changing experience, with, for example, one student noting that she had been *'completely changed'* for the better by the experience:

"Completely changed me! Taught me the true value of friendship and that there are some very special people in the world!"

A prominent aspect of friendship-forming at the summer schools was that students maintained friendships made, once they had returned home. Use of the internet, texting, telephones, the NAGTY website, and reunions, as well as personal visits, has enabled students to overcome geographic spread. Students frequently mentioned that they had remained in touch with their friends. This included

friendships from previous NAGTY summer schools, in addition to the 2004 summer schools:

"I've made so many friends over the past 2 summer schools, all of which I am extremely close to and keep in close contact with!"

"I have also made a few very good friends who I meet up with, despite the distance, because we get along so well since we have similar interests."

"I made a lot of friends at the summer school which I keep in touch with regularly."

"It was one of the best things I've ever done! I made so many good friends who I'm still in touch with."

The post-summer-school questionnaire also included two closed questions about the friendships made at the summer school. The responses to these are given in Table 10. 6 and show that almost every child who returned the questionnaire made at least one good friend at summer school (98.6%) and also kept in touch with at least one friend from summer school (92.4%).

Table 10.6 Making lasting friendships

How far do you agree with the following statement?	Extent of agreement (%) (N=645)			
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) I made at least one good friend at summer school.	90.2	8.4	1.1	0.2
b) I have kept in contact with at least one friend I met at summer school.	81.2	11.2	5.3	2.2

Table 10.6 also draws attention to the tiny number of students who failed to make at least one good friend at summer school.

Recommendation 26

- that NAGTY encourages site managers and residential teams to be alert to the possibility that a very small number of students attending summer school may fail to make friends and may, therefore, be particularly vulnerable

10.1.3 Improved social skills

The social side of the summer schools was highly valued by the students, with 153 students commenting on this aspect of the summer school experience. The effect of being on a residential course with a large number of similarly-motivated students, the mixing that occurred in the academic and RA groups, and the organised social activities all helped many students to feel that they had developed long-lasting social skills that they were able to deploy in other situations. Improved social skills were highly valued by students, and they saw benefits in terms of their regular school life, and beyond.

"I feel that the summer school has helped me to improve how I socialise with other people, and increased my confidence both at school and out of it."

"The summer school has made me feel less isolated from my peers, because I know that there are other people of the same ability as me."

"I feel so much more confident since attending summer school, academically and, especially, socially, as before I was quite shy. Summer school has definitely helped me to overcome this shyness."

"The summer school has helped my social skills, and improved my ability to learn."

Two closed questions on the post-summer-school questionnaire also sought to capture the extent to which the social benefits, evidenced in responses to the end-of-summer-school questionnaire, had had a more lasting effect. The responses to these questions are given in Table 10.7.

Table 10.7 Impact on a) socialising at school *and* b) confidence to take part in sport and other leisure activities

How far do you agree with the following statement? 'Attending the summer school has ...	Extent of agreement (%) (N=645)			
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) ... made socialising at school easier for me.'	34.9	45.0	16.4	3.3
b) ... made me feel more confident about taking part in sport and other leisure activities.'	32.4	44.7	17.8	3.9

10.1.4 Improved academic performance

Improved academic performance at school was identified 146 times by the respondents as being a key impact of the summer schools on their lives. Attendance at summer school helped students who had experienced negative peer pressure in their day to day education to realise that being interested in academic work was not as unusual as they had thought. In the words of one student:

> "[Summer school] showed me that being keen to learn and being clever is cool."

This contrasted with the general awareness of being seen as *'geeky'*, or *'a boff'*, or a *'keeno'*, in their normal educational lives. The enthusiasm for learning nurtured in the summer schools brought about, in some students, a change in their attitude to learning at school, which, in one case at least, had an even wider effect on the student's life:

> "The summer school [...] improved my ability to learn. I have also realised how important learning in school is, and left my old group of friends because I felt they were dragging me down. I now have a new group of friends more like the people I met at NAGTY."

The sense that learning was important, or, more frequently, the confirmation of that perception by being with a large group of like-minded, and similarly able, students, was also matched by a heightened awareness, on the part of some students, of their passion for learning:

"It has helped me realise the opportunities I have to explore, the potential I have to fulfil, and the avidness to learn I experience when interested in the subject."

Summer school also gave many students vital learning skills, which they felt they were able to apply to their learning in general. Analytical techniques, independent learning skills and methods, combined with the heightened sense of self-confidence in group situations gave many students an enhanced ability to tackle academic work. One student summed up these benefits as:

"The new ways of thinking - analytically and rationally; independent research and mixing with like-minded people."

Students' responses to the closed questions on the post-summer-school questionnaire relating to the longer-term impact of the summer school on their academic performance are given in Tables 10.8 to 10.11. Again, where relevant, these are presented alongside students' views expressed in the end-of-summer-school questionnaire to illustrate the lasting nature of the academic gains made.

Table 10.8 Improving problem solving skills

End of summer school (%) (N=968)		Post summer school (%) (N=645)	
To a great extent	23.5	High impact	22.9
Somewhat	49.2	Medium impact	59.1
Slightly	21.3	Low impact	13.8
Not at all	5.9	No impact	3.6

Table 10.9 Improving independent learning skills

End of summer school (%) (N=968)		Post summer school (%) (N=645)	
To a great extent	27.3	High impact	28.1
Somewhat	47.0	Medium impact	44.7
Slightly	18.8	Low impact	18.9
Not at all	6.5	No impact	7.8

Table 10.10 Improving ability to learn more effectively at school

Post summer school (N=645)	%
High impact	29.0
Medium impact	47.0
Low impact	17.4
No impact	5.6

Table 10.11 Increasing enjoyment of learning at school

Post summer school (N=645)	%
High impact	24.8
Medium impact	39.7
Low impact	20.2
No impact	14.9

In the open question, many respondents combined their observations on improved academic performance, with comments on the role of the social skills, increased self-confidence, and independence that they had gained from attending the summer schools.

10.1. 5 Increased independence

Students were aware that their total gains from participation in the summer schools were a result of the complete social and academic package, rather than from any one aspect of the summer school. An increased sense of personal independence was a factor that was highlighted 117 times in response to the open question, and was frequently linked to other benefits:

"I believe that the summer school has improved my independence and organisational skills. The need to motivate yourself, not only in lessons, but in social and residential situations, is very useful for all aspects of life."

"I feel that the summer school was a great experience for me as I learnt how to live independently, and I also made good friends."

"It was a valuable experience, which made me more independent. It really affected my life!"

Students were able to see that a greater sense of personal independence brought about by living away from home on a residential course, having to learn new social skills, but in a friendly and welcoming environment characterised by common interests and motivations, brought a variety of benefits. The responses indicated that they were aware that individual benefits, such as a greater sense of independence, or improved learning skills, were dependent on other benefits, like increased confidence and new social skills.

The data from closed questions on the post-summer-school questionnaire relating to the longer-term impact of the residential experience (Table 10.12) confirms the data from the open question with over 90% of students stating that they found the residential experience had been a valuable experience that had increased their sense of independence and given them greater confidence about being away from home in the future.

Table 10.12 Longer-term impact of residential experience

How far do you agree with the following statement?	Extent of agreement (%) (N=645)			
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) 'Being away from home was a valuable experience for me.'	68.5	26.0	4.2	0.9
b) 'Spending 2 or 3 weeks away from home has made me feel more independent.'	66.8	26.0	5.6	1.2
c) 'I feel more confident about being away from home in the future.'	67.3	26.0	5.7	0.6

10.1.6 Whetted the appetite for university life

A significant number of respondents addressed the issue of living and learning in a university environment. While they were aware that they had not experienced an undergraduate lifestyle, they felt that they had, nonetheless, gained an authentic 'taste' of university life. This was heightened by the general feeling that they had benefited from university standard teaching, which was evidenced for them by the presence of university teaching staff, and the different teaching and learning skills they had been exposed to. This sense that they had experienced a 'preview' of university life had a number of benefits, as identified by the respondents.

The overwhelmingly positive social and academic experiences they had had provided an incentive for them to work harder at school. For example, one student noted that:

> "I'm less afraid to work in class as I'm less bothered about people who don't want to work. Also I'm going to do well in exams so I can go to uni."

It was common for students to feel apprehensive about university, and it was clear from their responses to the open question that many of these were particularly unsure about university life and what it entailed. As one student put it:

> "The experience has given me a taste of what it would be like to leave home and go to university, and although it was strange and scary to be alone at first, I soon made many friends and thought it was one of the best experiences I have ever had. I loved it."

Again, it is clear that the *overall* experience of the summer schools added value to different specific benefits accruing to students.

10.1.7 Increased knowledge and interest

A large group of students mentioned the acquisition of extra knowledge (93 responses) or an increased interest and engagement (51 responses) in their chosen subject as a lasting impact of their summer school experience. They frequently wrote about having been surprised at the amount of material that they had covered in two or three weeks.

"I feel that I have learnt a lot more in the lessons for 2 weeks in [summer school] than 2 years of music lessons at school."

There was frequent mention of *'learning a lot'* - *'I learnt a lot about a subject I'm interested in! It was amazing!'* - and, for those students who had chosen subjects that they were also studying at school, there was also a direct benefit in terms of the possession of additional understanding and information*: 'I learned lots on my course, and apply it in school.'* This benefit appeared to be most often gained in subjects, such as mathematics. There was also an appreciation that courses in other subjects provided an exciting broadening of understanding, and an enhanced interest in the subject.

"Inspired me to take an interest in different forms of literature. Broadened my perceptions and understanding of different cultures."

"I am much more interested in the subject I studied and feel that I would like to develop it further."

Students' answers to the related closed question on the questionnaire (Table 10.13) showed that 83% of them had found a lasting impact from the knowledge gained at the summer school in that they were able to use this learning in their normal school context. This is important evidence of the lasting benefit of the academic side of the summer schools.

Table 10.13 Expanding subject horizons/Adding knowledge able to use in school

End of summer school (%) (N=968)		Post summer school (%) (N=645)	
To a great extent	68.3	High impact	48.8
Somewhat	23.8	Medium impact	34.6
Slightly	6.2	Low impact	12.4
Not at all	0.7	No impact	3.3

10.2   Unintended impact: resulting dissatisfaction with school

There was a very clear feeling among a small minority (25) of respondents that, although they had benefited greatly from summer school, their attendance at the summer schools had the unfortunate consequence of highlighting what they had come to see as failings and problems with their normal schooling. The issues that arose centred on what the students had come to view, in the light of their summer school experience, as the narrowness of the school curriculum, the lack of educational challenge they experienced at school, and more general problems concerned with the atmosphere and teaching at school.

One student noted that school did not offer the challenges that summer school had, writing that the problem in school lay with*, 'the restrictive nature of the curriculum and teaching methods'.* Teaching issues were also raised by another student, who commented:

> "It's made me feel that the teaching at my school isn't as good as it could be (compared to the summer school), which is a bit disappointing."

More frequently, this sub-group of students identified the problem as a sense that school work was not sufficiently challenging:

> "Summer school has made me feel that my school work is considerably less enjoyable, as the experience has given me the opportunity to work with like-minded people of equal ability on subjects that extend my knowledge and challenge my capabilities."

> "It made me realise that I enjoy further studies outside school, and I do not find school challenging enough."

> "The only negative impact is that it has made school seem more boring."

> "Although I have had very positive experiences of the NAGTY summer school, when I got back to real school I found the work a shock. It was underwhelmingly easy and I have become bored with being back at school. This is because of the great stuff we were taught [at summer school]".

10.3   Negative impacts: a minority view

In answer to the open question on the post-summer-school questionnaire, only *three* respondents wrote that the summer school had had a negative effect on them. The three points made were generalised, and it was difficult, therefore, to ascertain the exact source of the negative impact on the students. To enable readers to make their own interpretations, the three comments are given in full.

"It hasn't helped me [word illegible] with peers, never doing another one again!"

"Generally made me more depressed, convinced me NAGTY are doing everything completely wrongly (other years were ok) and generally I'll never be promoting SS again. Well, certainly not if the downhill trend continues (looks like it to me...)."

"Negative effects. I have become rude and lazy. This would simply not [have] occurred if the other children had not been rude."

These three responses were at variance with all other responses to the open question about the effects of the summer school on students' lives. The overwhelming response to the summer school experience was enthusiastic and positive. As one student commented, *'It was the life changing experience that was promised'*. Phrases like, *'the most amazing three weeks of my life'*, *'the most enjoyable 3 weeks of my year'*, *'a fantastic opportunity'*, *'life-changing'*, and *'the best experience of my life'* appeared frequently. Students often expressed a desire to attend further summer schools, were anxious that they would not be able to gain a place in future, or expressed regret that they would be too old to apply in future.

Figure 10.1 provides one student's thoughtful and reflective account of the impact of the summer school, an example that typifies the overall picture of the data collected on the student experience.
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Figure 10.1 One student's account of the impact of the summer school that typifies the view of the majority of students

"The summer school has had an enormous effect on my life. I met some incredible people, several of whom I am still in a lot of contact with, and many others who I occasionally talk to. Without [the summer school], I would never have met people who are now among my closest friends. I feel that being with people 24/7 for two weeks created really strong bonds between us as friends.

Being constantly surrounded by other 'gifted and talented' students was also an important experience. Whilst I fear that I have become slightly elitist, I cannot fail to comment on how much more friendly, interesting, and funny the people were there, in comparison with a random cross section of the population.

I gained enormously in terms of confidence whilst there. I felt people were interested in what I had to say, that I could make friends a lot more easily than I thought and I was at home.

Academically, the experience was also outstanding. I had always had an interest in philosophy but now it has become one of my passions. The quality of thought, debate, teaching, openness, and tolerance in the group was unparalleled in my experience. I felt stimulated, as if we were discovering something together. I gained a lot of knowledge and insight from those sessions.

I also felt part of something amazing. [...] I took pride in being part of the summer school when we went off site. I met so many people who presented ideas to me that have changed my way of thinking. I learnt that if you fold up your clothes and then put them in the drier you don't need to iron them much, if at all. I found out a lot about myself. I learnt a lot about philosophy. And I learnt a lot about friendship, which has come in useful on starting college. I met other people like me. I had the most intense, brilliant two weeks of my life so far."

Summary of key points from Chapter 10

- Over 99% of the students who responded to the post-summer-school questionnaire reported that the summer school had been a positive experience.
- The most commonly cited lasting effects were improved confidence, having made stronger friendships, improved social skills, improved academic performance in school and a greater sense of academic and personal independence.