

# Student Success Rates in Post-16 Qualifications

Data from the England and Wales  
Youth Cohort Study

Joan Payne  
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Research Report  
No 272

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## **DISCLAIMER**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Aims

The main aim of this report is to estimate the proportion of young people starting to work for a qualification after the end of Year 11 who, after more than two years, had not gained that qualification. Separate estimates are presented for each of the major post-16 qualifications, and, where sample numbers permit, for the separate levels of these qualifications as defined by their notional NVQ equivalents. The report also examines the impact of Year 11 GCSE results on the risk of being unsuccessful, and compares success rates on different post-16 routes.

## Data

The report is based on Cohort 8 of the Youth Cohort Study (YCS). YCS is a continuing follow-up study of a series of cohorts of young people reaching the end of compulsory full-time education in England and Wales. Each cohort forms a large nationally representative random sample of young people in the relevant age group, and data are collected by means of postal questionnaires. Cohort 8 reached school leaving age in summer 1995 and the first survey, in spring 1996 when cohort members were aged 16 or 17, is known as Sweep 1. Sweep 2 took place two years later, when they were aged 18 or 19.

## Overview of findings

Particular features of the data and the definitions employed in this report mean that estimates of the proportion of students who were unsuccessful are slightly inflated for academic qualifications compared to vocational qualifications. However, after taking into account the 95% confidence intervals for each estimate, the following broad conclusions can be drawn.

- The risk of being unsuccessful was lower for A levels than for either post-16 GCSEs or AS courses.
- In GNVQs, there was a significantly higher proportion of unsuccessful students at Level 1 than at Levels 2 or 3. For Level 2 and 3 GNVQs, the overall proportion of unsuccessful students was similar to A levels. However, for lower ability students, the risk of being unsuccessful in A levels may have exceeded the risk of being unsuccessful at GNVQ Level 3.
- Taking all levels together, BTECs had a lower proportion of unsuccessful students than GNVQs. For Level 3 BTECs, the proportion of unsuccessful students was lower than for either Level 3 GNVQs or A levels.
- The proportion of students unsuccessful in City and Guilds Level 1 was on a par with that for GNVQ Level 1, but at higher levels of these qualifications, City and Guilds students did significantly worse.
- Level 1 RSA students were less likely to be unsuccessful than students aiming either for GNVQ Level 1 or for City and Guilds Level 1. The same was true when comparing all levels of these qualifications taken together.

- For the lower level NVQs, the proportion of unsuccessful students was in the same range as for lower level BTECs.

Though the estimates presented in the report of the risk of being unsuccessful seem high, they are of the same broad order as estimates obtained from other data sources using different methods of calculation.

Although there is policy interest in comparing success rates across different post-16 routes, the fact that young people taking different routes also tend to take different qualifications makes these comparisons difficult to achieve when sample numbers are limited. In addition, sometimes students taking the same qualification via different routes have different average ability levels, as in the case of students working for A levels or GCSEs in school sixth forms or sixth form colleges compared to FE college students working for the same qualifications, or RSA students in school sixth forms compared to RSA students in FE colleges. In such cases, success rates on different routes cannot be sensibly compared unless ability levels are taken into account.

Despite these difficulties, some conclusions about success rates on different routes can be drawn from this analysis of YCS data.

- A level students in school sixth forms and sixth form colleges had a significantly lower risk of being unsuccessful than students in FE colleges, even after taking into Year 11 GCSEs and other relevant factors.
- Similarly, post-16 GCSE students in 6th form colleges did better than students in FE colleges, who in turn did significantly better than students in school sixth forms.
- GNVQ students in both sixth form colleges and FE colleges did significantly better, other things being equal, than GNVQ students in school sixth forms.
- NVQ students were more at risk of being unsuccessful if they were in full-time education than if they were in GST, and this held true both for students with comparatively good Year 11 GCSE results and for students with relatively poor Year 11 results.

## **Definitions**

Unsuccessful students as defined in the report are those who started to work for a specific qualification between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey a few months later, but had not gained that qualification by the Sweep 2 survey two years further on. They include both students who failed to complete their course and students who completed the course but were not awarded the qualification, as YCS does not have the data to enable us to measure retention and achievement separately. The base for the estimates comprises those who were studying for the qualification at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, plus those who started to work for the qualification after Year 11 but dropped it before Sweep 1, plus those who gained the qualification between the end of Year 11 and Sweep 1.

With academic qualifications, the report defines unsuccessful students as those who gained no passes at all (the 'wholly unsuccessful') or those who gained fewer passes than the number of subjects that they started (the 'partially unsuccessful'). With

vocational qualifications, it defines unsuccessful students as those who failed to gain a pass at all (the 'wholly unsuccessful') or those who only gained a pass at a lower level than the highest level they had started (the 'partially unsuccessful').

Note that this report gives student-based estimates, whereas the main official data on retention and achievement rates are qualification-based. This does not make much difference with qualifications like GNVQs where students generally enrol for just one subject, but it does make a difference with qualifications like A levels, where students may enrol for several subjects. With qualification-based estimates, students enrolled for three subjects will each contribute three observations, but with student-based estimates they will each contribute just one. If students pass in two subjects and fail in the third, then this report counts them as partially unsuccessful, along with students who gain only one pass out of two, or two or three passes out of four. In qualification-based estimates in contrast, each separate pass has equal weight. The report details other factors that mean that estimates of success rates based on YCS data cannot be directly compared with estimates of success rates based on official data on retention and achievement rates.

### **The context**

At Sweep 1, 71% of YCS Cohort 8 were in full-time education. Only one in ten had a full-time or part-time job as their main activity, and slightly more were in government-supported training (GST). One in fourteen had neither a job nor a place in training or full-time education. Virtually all those in full-time education had started to work for a qualification, as had nearly seven in ten young people in GST. Outside of full-time education and GST, relatively few had started to work for qualifications.

The majority of students in school sixth forms and sixth form colleges had started to work for academic qualifications (A levels, AS courses and post-Year 11 GCSEs). In GST, vocational qualifications, especially NVQs, were the norm. In FE colleges there was a more even balance between academic and vocational courses. GNVQs were most popular in FE colleges, but were also fairly common in school sixth forms and sixth form colleges.

A level and AS students had in general much better Year 11 GCSE results (as measured by their total points score) than young people working for other qualifications. In contrast, those working for Level 1 or Level 2 GNVQs, BTECs, City and Guilds and NVQs usually had poor Year 11 results, as also did those working for Level 3 NVQs. The average Year 11 results of young people taking post-16 GCSEs, Level 3 GNVQs and BTECs, and RSAs of any level fell in between these two extremes.

### **Post-16 GCSEs**

Between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey, 24% of YCS Cohort 8 started to work for GCSEs. More than half of these started only one subject, and the large majority also started other post-16 qualifications, usually A levels or GNVQs. One in ten dropped some or all of their post-Year 11 GCSEs before Sweep 1. By Sweep 2, 42% had gained no passes at all and another 15% had not gained passes in all the

subjects that they had started, giving an overall estimate of 57% who were wholly or partially unsuccessful.

At Sweep 2, the proportion of (wholly or partially) unsuccessful students still studying for GCSEs was 4%, and the proportion successfully switching to another post-16 qualification was 19% (successful switching being defined here as gaining a pass in a qualification that they had not started to work for by Sweep 1). If we exclude these groups, the proportion of post-Year 11 GCSE students classed as unsuccessful falls to 44%.

Post-Year 11 GCSE students were over-represented in the middle ranges of attainment, as measured by their Year 11 GCSE results. Poor performance in Year 11 GCSEs increased the risk of being unsuccessful.

More than nine out of ten young people who had started GCSEs since Year 11 were in full-time education at Sweep 1, with 45% in school sixth forms, 18% in sixth form colleges and 25% in FE colleges. Sixth form colleges had the lowest proportion of unsuccessful students and school sixth forms had the highest, and this held true for students with good Year 11 results as well as for students with poor Year 11 results.

Young women formed 52% of post-Year 11 GCSE students. When differences in Year 11 results were taken into account, very similar proportions of male and female students were unsuccessful.

Statistical modelling confirmed the associations described above, and revealed a strong link between the risk of being unsuccessful and a history of truancy during Year 11. Modelling also showed that the proportion of unsuccessful students was significantly lower in Outer London and the South East (where participation rates in post-compulsory full-time education are well above the national average) than in the North, Yorkshire and Humberside and Inner London regions (where post-compulsory participation is low).

## **A levels**

Exactly two-fifths of YCS Cohort 8 started to work for A levels between the end of Year 11 and Sweep 1. Of these, 85% started three or more subjects. Over two-fifths of A level students also started other qualifications, most usually GCSEs or AS courses. One in eight A level students dropped some or all of their A level subjects before Sweep 1.

By Sweep 2, 47% of A level students were unsuccessful, equally divided between those who had gained no passes and those who had gained fewer passes than the number of subjects that they had started. However, 16% of unsuccessful students were still studying for A levels and 23% had successfully switched to other qualifications. Excluding these reduces the proportion classed as unsuccessful to 31%.

More than three-quarters of A level students were in the top third of Year 11 GCSE results across the cohort as a whole. Those with comparatively poor Year 11 results were at much greater risk of being unsuccessful.

Almost all young people who had started A levels since Year 11 were in full-time education at Sweep 1. More than three in five were in school sixth forms, with another one in five in sixth form colleges and only one in eight in FE colleges. School sixth forms and sixth form colleges had similar proportions of unsuccessful students. FE colleges had a higher proportion of unsuccessful students, though this difference was less marked for students with poor Year 11 results.

Young women formed 54% of A level students. After taking account of differences in Year 11 results, there was little sex difference in success rates.

Statistical modelling confirmed these findings, and revealed a link with truancy during Year 11. As with GCSEs, students in Inner London were at greater risk of being unsuccessful than students in the rest of the South East. However, students in Yorkshire and Humberside, which had (like Inner London) a very low rate of participation in full-time education after 16, had a significantly lower risk of being unsuccessful than students in the South East. Modelling also showed that A level students whose parents did not have good qualifications were more at risk of being unsuccessful than students whose parents were well qualified.

## AS

Only 6% of the cohort started AS courses between the end of Year 11 and Sweep 1, and most of these started just one subject. Virtually all started other qualifications as well, most often A levels. One in ten AS students dropped some or all of their AS subjects before Sweep 1.

By Sweep 2, 56% of AS students had gained no passes at all and another 4% had gained fewer passes than the number of subjects they had started, making 60% unsuccessful in total. Though only 2% of unsuccessful AS students were still following AS courses at Sweep 2, 16% had successfully switched to other qualifications. These spanned a wide range, the biggest single group being GCSEs. Excluding unsuccessful students who were still working for ASs or who had successfully switched to other qualifications reduces the proportion classed as unsuccessful to 31%.

Like A level students, AS students generally had very good results in Year 11 GCSEs. Once more, those with poor Year 11 results had an increased risk of being unsuccessful, though the impact of Year 11 results was smaller than in the case of A levels.

Virtually all young people who had started AS courses since Year 11 were in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, and 70% were in school sixth forms. Sample numbers for AS students in sixth form colleges and FE colleges were too small for comparison with students in school sixth forms.

AS students were divided fairly evenly between the sexes. There was some indication that young women had a lower risk of being unsuccessful than young men.

## **GNVQs**

More than a fifth of YCS Cohort 8 started GNVQ courses between the end of Year 11 and Sweep 1. The highest level (defined by its notional NVQ equivalent) that more than half of these started was Level 2, while another three in ten started Level 3. Just over half also started other qualifications. 9% gave up GNVQs before Sweep 1, Level 1 students being more likely to give up early than students who started Levels 2 or 3.

Half of GNVQ students had not gained any GNVQs by Sweep 2, while another 1% gained only a GNVQ of a lower level than the highest level they had started. One in eight unsuccessful students was still studying for GNVQs at Sweep 2 and 26% had successfully switched to other qualifications. Excluding these reduces the proportion classed as unsuccessful to 33%. Amongst those who started Level 3 (officially accepted as equivalent to two A levels), 49% were unsuccessful, this figure reducing to 32% after excluding continuing students and successful switchers.

Two in five GNVQ students were in the bottom third of Year 11 results across the cohort as a whole and only one in ten was in the top third. There was a steady fall in the risk of being unsuccessful as Year 11 results improved. However, amongst students in the bottom 70% of Year 11 GCSE results across the cohort as a whole, the risk of being unsuccessful in A levels appeared to be greater than the risk of being unsuccessful at GNVQ Level 3.

Amongst young people who had started GNVQs since Year 11, equal proportions - 36% in each case - were in school sixth forms and FE colleges at Sweep 1, but only 9% were in sixth form colleges. Level 3 students were more likely than those who had started Levels 1 or 2 to be in FE college. Those who were still working for GNVQs outside of full-time education at Sweep 1 were mainly in GST. Overall, young women outnumbered young men by 54% to 46%.

Statistical modelling showed that once Year 11 results were taken fully into account, Level 3 GNVQ students were significantly more likely to be unsuccessful than students who had started Level 2. Full-time students in school sixth forms had a higher risk of being unsuccessful, other things being equal, than full-time students in sixth form colleges or FE colleges. A history of truancy in Year 11 was strongly associated with being unsuccessful, while young people of Indian origin were significantly less likely to be unsuccessful, other things being equal, than young people from the white majority.

## **BTECs**

Only 7% of YCS Cohort 8 started BTEC courses before Sweep 1, nearly two-thirds of whom started Level 3 or higher. Around a third of BTEC students also started other qualifications. 6% of BTEC students gave up their BTEC before Sweep 1.

Two-fifths of BTEC students had not gained any BTEC qualifications by Sweep 2, whilst another 6% gained a BTEC of a lower level than the level they had started. However as many as 18% of unsuccessful students were still studying for BTECs at Sweep 2, and 31% of unsuccessful students had successfully switched to other qualifications. Excluding these reduces the proportion classed as unsuccessful to

26%. Students aiming for BTEC Levels 3 or 4 appeared to have a higher success rate than those aiming for Levels 1 or 2.

BTEC students had on average rather better Year 11 GCSE results than GNVQ students. Just under a fifth were in the top third of the cohort as a whole, and only a quarter were in the bottom third. Success in Year 11 GCSEs was associated with success in BTECs.

More than four out of five young people who had started a BTEC were in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, and the large majority of these were in FE colleges. Outside of full-time education, most were in GST. Small sample numbers forbade any comparison of the success rates of students on different post-16 routes.

Young men comprised 59% of BTEC students. Female students seemed to have the higher success rate, but they also had on average better Year 11 results, and sample numbers were too small to test whether this sex difference in success remained when Year 11 results were taken into account.

### **City and Guilds**

One in twenty cohort members started to work for City and Guilds qualifications before Sweep 1. In terms of equivalent NVQ levels, their study aims were generally lower than those of either GNVQ or BTEC students, though more than a quarter did not say which level they were aiming for. More than a third of City and Guilds students also started to work for other qualifications before Sweep 1. Only 4% dropped City and Guilds before Sweep 1.

By Sweep 2, 71% of City and Guilds students had not gained any City and Guilds qualifications, while another 4% gained a qualification of a lower level than the level they had started. Only 8% of unsuccessful students were still studying for City and Guilds at Sweep 2, though a third had successfully switched to other qualifications. Excluding these two groups reduces the proportion classed as unsuccessful to 47%. Students aiming for Level 1 appeared to have a higher success rate than those aiming for Level 2 or above, and this difference could not be explained by the fact that the higher levels of City and Guilds take longer to complete.

City and Guilds students had on average quite poor results in Year 11 GCSEs. Three out of five were in the bottom third of the cohort, and only one in ten was in the top third. As usual, students with poor Year 11 results were at much greater risk of being unsuccessful than students with better results.

More than half of young people who had started City and Guilds were in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, mostly in FE colleges, while another two-fifths were in GST and 6% in jobs. There was no evidence of any difference between the success rates of students in full-time education and students in work-based learning, though sample numbers were too small to permit any control for Year 11 results.

More than two thirds of City and Guilds students were male. There was little evidence of any sex difference in success rates, though sample numbers for female students were too small to permit any control for Year 11 results.

## **RSA**

Only 3% of YCS Cohort 8 started to work for RSA qualifications before Sweep 1. Nearly three-fifths started Level 1 and only 6% started Level 3 or higher, while almost one fifth did not say which level they were studying for. Well over a third of RSA students also started A levels, and a quarter started GCSE courses - in total, nearly three-quarters started other courses in addition to RSAs. Just 6% gave up RSA before Sweep 1.

By Sweep 2, 56% of RSA students had not gained any RSA qualifications, and another 4% had only gained a qualification of a lower level than the level that they had started. Only one in twenty unsuccessful students was still studying for RSA at Sweep 2, though over a third had successfully switched to other qualifications. Excluding these reduces the proportion classed as unsuccessful to 37%.

The Year 11 GCSE results of RSA students more or less matched results across the cohort as a whole. There was a strong relationship between Year 11 results and success in RSAs.

More than three-quarters of young people who had started RSA qualifications were in full-time education at Sweep 1. Similar numbers were in school sixth forms and FE colleges, with rather fewer in sixth form colleges and most of the rest in GST. Nearly three-quarters of RSA students were female. Sample numbers were too small to compare success rates either on different post-16 routes or by sex.

## **NVQs**

7% of cohort members started NVQ qualifications before Sweep 1. The majority started Level 2, though nearly a fifth did not specify a level. Just under a quarter had started other qualifications as well - a smaller proportion than with any other vocational qualification. One in ten gave up NVQs before Sweep 1.

Half of NVQ students had not gained any NVQ qualifications by Sweep 2, while another 6% gained an NVQ of a lower level than the level they had originally started. However more than one in five unsuccessful students were still studying for NVQs at Sweep 2, and one in six had successfully switched to other qualifications. Excluding these reduces the proportion classed as unsuccessful to 36%. Sample numbers for Level 3 or Level 4 students were quite small, but these students seemed more likely to be unsuccessful than those aiming for Levels 1 or 2. This may have been due simply to the fact that higher level NVQs take longer to complete, and a number were still studying for their qualifications at Sweep 2.

NVQ students tended to have rather poor results in Year 11 GCSEs, with more than half in the bottom third of the cohort. As expected, the risk of being unsuccessful in NVQs fell as GCSE results improved.



Over half of young people who had started NVQs were in GST at Sweep 1, with another third in full-time education, mostly in FE colleges. Outside of full-time education, most were in GST. NVQ students in full-time education were more likely to be unsuccessful than NVQ students in GST, and this held true for those with comparatively good Year 11 GCSE results as well as for those with poor results.

Female NVQ students outnumbered males by 52% to 48%, but there was no clear pattern in the success rates of the two sexes.

# 1 Introduction

## Aims

Widening participation in education and training after age 16 and the introduction of new vocational qualifications has brought with it some new concerns. In the period of full employment in Britain that followed the Second World War, school leavers tended to try a number of different jobs before settling down to a steady occupation. In the later part of the twentieth century, when far fewer jobs were available to 16 and 17 year olds, this 'job sampling' may have been replaced to some extent by 'qualification sampling', with young people starting more than one course before finding one that they are happy with. Others, when they give up the course they first try, may give up the attempt to gain qualifications altogether, or they may persevere with the course but ultimately fail to gain the qualification. Though a certain level of wastage of all these kinds is inevitable, a high level of switching, drop-out or failure would be wasteful of public funds and discouraging for the young people involved. It would also raise questions about whether young people were getting the information and guidance needed to choose the course most appropriate for them.

This report uses data from the England and Wales Youth Cohort Study (YCS) to estimate the proportion of 16 year olds starting courses for qualifications who were ultimately unsuccessful, in that they did not gain the qualification that they originally sought. All the major qualifications that 16 year olds can start to work for are covered, as are students of all types, whether in full-time education, part-time education or work-based learning. The report also explores some of the factors that increased the risk of being unsuccessful.

The way that the proportion of students who were unsuccessful is calculated is constrained by the information collected in YCS, and for this reason the method differs from the method used in official published statistics to calculate achievement, retention and success rates. These differences and their implications are discussed later in the chapter, and the points raised there must be kept firmly in mind when comparing the estimates presented in this report with estimates from official sources.

## The Youth Cohort Study

The report is based on data from Sweeps 1 and 2 of YCS Cohort 8. YCS is a continuing follow-up study of a series of cohorts of young people reaching the end of compulsory full-time education. Each YCS cohort forms a large nationally representative stratified random sample of young people in the relevant age group in both state and independent schools in England and Wales, excluding special schools. Data are collected by means of self-completion postal questionnaires. The first cohort to be surveyed reached school leaving age in summer 1984 and was first surveyed in spring 1985; the tenth YCS cohort reached school leaving age in summer 1999 and will be surveyed in spring 2000.

Cohort 8 reached school leaving age in summer 1995 and was first surveyed in early spring 1996, when cohort members were aged 16 or 17, depending on when their birthday fell. Sweep 2 took place in spring 1998, when they were aged 18 or 19. For brevity, we refer to cohort members at Sweep 1 as '16/17 year olds', and at Sweep 2 as '18/19 year olds'.

There is generally a fairly high level of non-response in YCS. At Sweep 1 of Cohort 8, a total of 15,899 cohort members supplied information, producing a 65% response rate. Only those who had responded to Sweep 1 were contacted again at Sweep 2. At this point information was obtained for 10,130 cohort members, representing 64% of Sweep 1 respondents but only 41% of the original sample. YCS response patterns also generally show a strong bias towards young people with relatively good GCSE results who continue in full-time education. These problems are dealt with by a complex weighting structure. At Sweep 1 of Cohort 8 this was based on national profiles for GCSE results, sex, region and type of school, while weighting at Sweep 2 also used information on the characteristics of those who responded to the first survey but failed to respond to the second. In both cases, the weights reproduce the original achieved sample size. Weighted data are used throughout this report.<sup>1</sup>

### 16/17 year olds in 1996

A brief overview of YCS Cohort 8 will help to set the stage before we plunge into the details of specific qualifications. Table 1.1 shows the young people's main activity at the time of the Sweep 1 survey in the spring following the end of Year 11, when they were aged 16/17. In total, 71% were in full-time education: around one in three in school sixth forms, approximately one in ten in sixth form colleges and around one in five in colleges of further education (FE college). Only one in ten had a job, full-time or part-time, as their main activity, while slightly more were in government-supported training (GST). One in fourteen cohort members was not in full-time education and had neither a job nor a training place.<sup>2</sup>

**TABLE 1.1 YCS Cohort 8: main activity at Sweep 1 (age 16/17)**

	%
full-time education in school 6th form	34
full-time education in 6th form college	11
full-time education in FE college	22
full-time education: no information where <i>(all in full-time education)</i>	4 <i>(71)</i>
full-time or part-time job	10
GST	12
none of the above	7
Total	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>15899</i>

<sup>1</sup> Weighted sample numbers sometimes vary slightly between computations based on exactly the same subgroup of respondents. This happens because of the way that SPSS (the computer package used to produce most of the tables) handles weighted data, and can safely be ignored.

<sup>2</sup> Very few of this group were studying part-time. Further details of the activities of YCS Cohort 8 at age 16/17 can be found in Payne, J., *Routes at 16: Trends and Choices in the Nineties*. DfEE Research Report RR55, 1998.

Table 1.2 gives the proportion of YCS Cohort 8 who had started to study for each of the major post-16 qualifications between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey. Note that these figures include young people who started a qualification but gave it up before Sweep 1, as well as the few who had already gained qualifications since the end of Year 11. A levels were by far the most popular post-16 qualification, followed by GCSEs and then GNVQs, while other qualifications - AS, BTEC, City and Guilds, RSA and NVQ - were much less frequent. Altogether, over four in five cohort members started to study for one or more of these qualifications.<sup>3</sup>

**TABLE 1.2 Proportion of YCS Cohort 8 starting each major post-16 qualification**

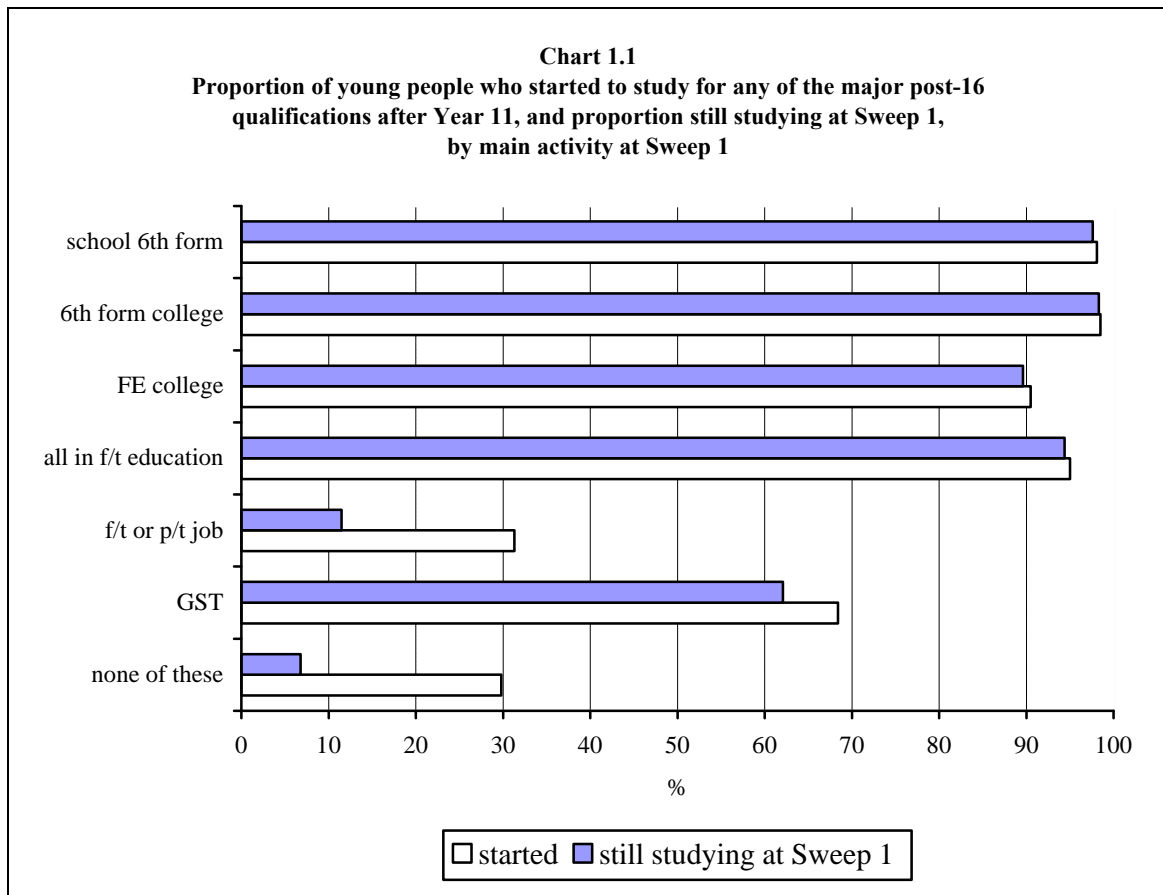
	%
GCSE	24
A level	40
AS	6
GNVQ	22
BTEC	7
City & Guilds	5
RSA	3
NVQ	7
Any of the above	81
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N (15899)</i>	

Chart 1.1 shows how the proportion of young people who had started to study for a qualification varied with their activity at Sweep 1. Virtually all students in full-time education had started one or more of the qualifications listed in Table 1.2, as had nearly seven in ten young people in GST. In contrast, only three in ten young people in jobs had started to study for any of these qualifications, as had even fewer young people who were not in work, training or full-time education at the time of Sweep 1.

The chart also shows that amongst students in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, the proportion still studying for one of these qualifications at Sweep 1 was virtually identical to the proportion who had started to study for one of them after Year 11. Amongst young people in GST at Sweep 1, these two proportions differed only slightly. However amongst young people in jobs and young people who were not in work, training or full-time education, the number who were still studying for qualifications at Sweep 1 was much smaller than the number who had started a qualification after Year 11. This suggests that a number had started out in full-time education or GST after Year 11, but had dropped out before Sweep 1.

Chart 1.2 distinguishes the different qualifications that young people in full-time education or GST at Sweep 1 had started to study for. In school sixth forms and sixth form colleges, academic qualifications (A levels, AS courses and post-Year 11 GCSEs) predominated, while in GST, vocational qualifications, especially NVQs, were the norm. In FE colleges there was a more even balance between academic and vocational courses. GNVQs were most popular in FE colleges, but were also quite common in schools and sixth form colleges.

<sup>3</sup> Very few cohort members studied for qualifications not included in Table 1.2.

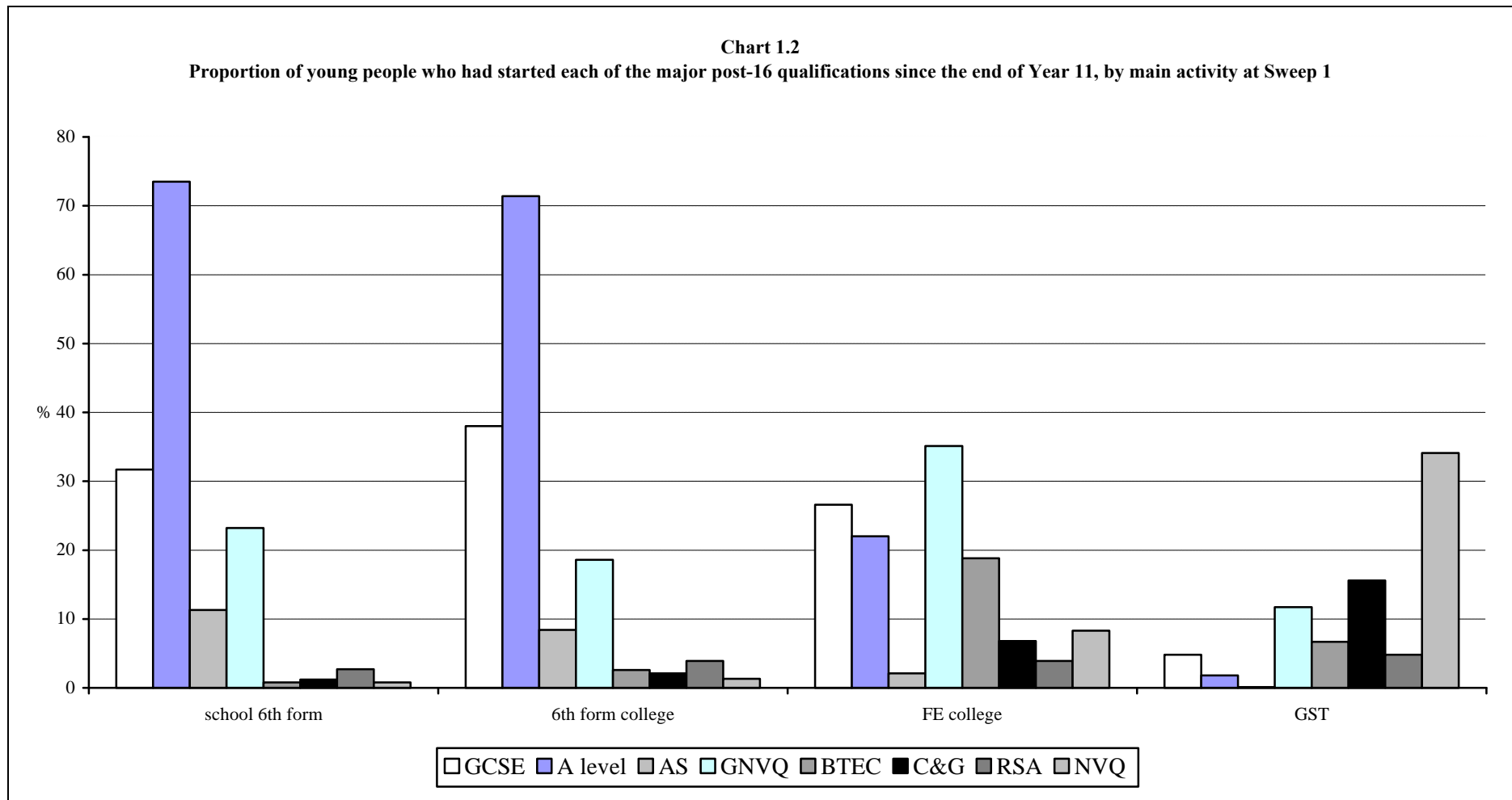


*Weighted Sweep 1 base Ns:* school sixth form 5375; sixth form college 1742; FE college 3581; all in full-time education (including those with no information on place of study) 11390; full-time or part-time job 1509; GST 1834; none of these 1164.

The different institutional contexts in which young people pursue their post-16 qualifications is a factor to be taken into account when comparing the success rates for these qualifications. Another relevant factor is the very different ability profiles of candidates for different qualifications. Chart 1.3 shows how young people working for different post-16 qualifications compared in terms of their total points score in GCSEs gained by the end of Year 11.<sup>4</sup> The chart classifies vocational qualifications by their notionally equivalent NVQ level, following the standard equivalences shown in Box 1. A level and AS students in general had much better Year 11 GCSE results than others. In contrast, young people aiming for Level 1 or 2 GNVQs, BTECs, City and Guilds and NVQs usually had relatively poor Year 11 results, as also did those aiming for Level 3 NVQs. The average Year 11 GCSE performance of young people taking post-16 GCSEs, GNVQ or BTEC Level 3 and RSAs of all levels (including Level 1) fell in between these two extremes.

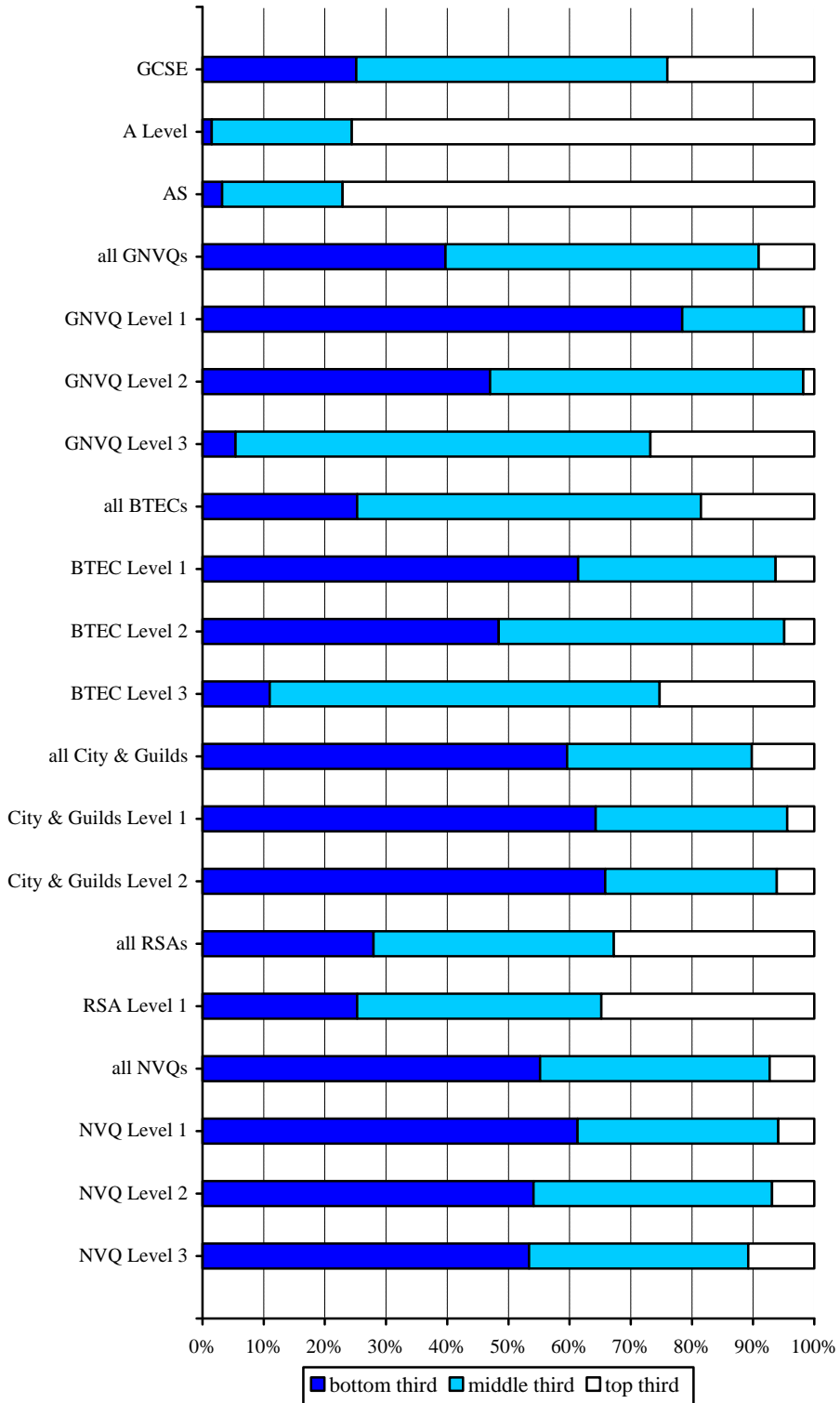
<sup>4</sup> Total points score was calculated by counting 7 points for each A or A\* grade obtained (these were not distinguished in YCS Cohort 8), 6 for each B grade, 5 for each C grade, and so on, down to 1 for each F grade and 0 for each U grade. Double award science contributes two grades to the total.

**Chart 1.2**  
**Proportion of young people who had started each of the major post-16 qualifications since the end of Year 11, by main activity at Sweep 1**



*Weighted Sweep 1 base Ns: as for Chart 1.1.*

**Chart 1.3**  
**Proportion of students in the bottom, middle and top thirds of Year 11 GCSE points score,**  
**by type of post-16 qualification started after Year 11**



Base Ns: See overleaf.

*Weighted Sweep 1 base Ns for Chart 1.3:*

Post-Year 11 GCSEs 3779; A levels 6358; AS 869; all GNVQs 3507; GNVQ Level 1 497; GNVQ Level 2 1913; GNVQ Level 3 1036; all BTECs 1096; BTEC Level 1 142; BTEC Level 2 197; BTEC Level 3 671; all City & Guilds 735; City & Guilds Level 1 295; City & Guilds Level 2 229; all RSAs 490; RSA Level 1 309; all NVQs 1190; NVQ Level 1 208; NVQ Level 2 785; NVQ Level 3 172.

*Note:*

The chart does not show levels of qualifications where the weighted sample number is less than 100.

**BOX 1**  
**NOTIONAL NVQ EQUIVALENTS**  
**OF VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS**

	<i>Equivalent NVQ Level</i>
<b><u>GNVQ</u></b>	
Foundation	1
Intermediate	2
Advanced	3
<b><u>BTEC</u></b>	
First/General Certificate	1
First/General Diploma	2
National Certificate/Diploma	3
Higher Certificate/Diploma	4
<b><u>City and Guilds</u></b>	
Part 1	1
Part 2/Craft/Intermediate	2
Part 3/Final/Advanced Craft	3
Part 4/Career Extension/FTC	4
<b><u>RSA</u></b>	
Certificate	1
First Diploma	2
Advanced Diploma	3
Higher Diploma	4

### **Defining unsuccessful students**

The Sweep 1 survey of YCS Cohort 8 asked three different sets of questions about the qualifications that respondents had started since the end of Year 11:

- the qualifications they had gained since the end of Year 11,
- the qualifications they had started since the end of Year 11 but dropped before Sweep 1 without taking an examination,
- the qualifications they were working for at the time of the Sweep 1 survey.



By combining information from these three sets of questions, we can identify all young people who had started to study for each of the major post-16 qualifications.<sup>5</sup>

As we saw, the Sweep 2 survey of YCS Cohort 8 took place two years later, when cohort members were aged 18/19. This survey did not ask respondents whether they had dropped out from any courses or failed any examinations, but it did ask them about all the qualifications that they had gained since the end of Year 11.<sup>6</sup> By comparing the qualifications that they had gained with the qualifications that they had started since Year 11, we can calculate the proportion who were unsuccessful. Note that unsuccessful students include those who gave up the qualification before completing the course, without attempting the examination or submitting all the necessary course work, as well as those who completed the course, sat the required examination and submitted the required course work, but failed to achieve a pass grade.

This generalised account gives the basic definition of unsuccessful students as used in this report. However qualifications differ in their structures, and this affects how this basic definition is implemented in each case. Further details are given in the relevant chapters. Where possible, these explanations are put in footnotes, so that readers who are not interested in technicalities can skip over them. Other more general points about the data are explained when they first crop up, and not subsequently repeated.

### **Comparison with estimates from official data**

There are a number of differences between the way that unsuccessful students are defined in this report and the method used in published official statistics, which mean that the estimates presented in this report cannot be directly compared with estimates based on official data.<sup>7</sup>

First, the official statistics give information on two different measures: *retention*, defined as the proportion of enrolments surviving for the full duration of the course,<sup>8</sup> and *achievement*, defined as the proportion of completed courses that result in the full qualification being awarded. The overall *success rate* for each qualification can then be calculated by multiplying the retention rate by the achievement rate. In contrast, YCS does not collect the information needed to distinguish retention and achievement, and so can only provide estimates of the overall success rate. Thus for

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<sup>5</sup> A few young people who had studied for these qualifications after the end of Year 11 may have started their courses *before* the end of Year 11: for example, some may have taken GCSE examinations in Year 10, and started A level courses a year earlier than normal. The YCS data give no way of distinguishing these students from those who started their post-16 qualifications after Year 11, and in this report any references to qualifications started since the end of Year 11 should be taken to include those who started post-16 qualifications early.

<sup>6</sup> Sweep 2 respondents were not asked to exclude any qualifications gained after the end of Year 11 that they had already reported at Sweep 1, so we must presume that these qualifications were reported at both sweeps.

<sup>7</sup> See *Benchmarking Data 1995/96 to 1997/98*, Further Education Funding Council, September 1999. The Further Education Funding Council also publishes 'Performance Indicators', which are based on student level data for retention and qualification level data for achievement. See *Performance Indicators 1997-98: Further Education Colleges in England*, Further Education Funding Council, September 1999 (ISBN 0-11-361355-5).

<sup>8</sup> This is the definition of retention used in the Benchmarking Data referred to in footnote 7 above. The FEFC's *Performance Indicators* (also see footnote 7) only count retention within each academic year.

consistency with the terminology used in official statistics, the term 'unsuccessful' in this report covers both drop-out from courses before they were completed (the opposite of 'retention' in official statistics) and failure in examinations or assessed course work (the opposite of 'achievement' in official statistics).

Second, the estimates in this report are based on the individual students taking each qualification and give student-based estimates, whereas official statistics are based on the individual enrolments for each qualification and can be used to calculate qualification-based estimates. For qualifications like GNVQs, where most students take just one qualification, these two approaches come to roughly the same thing. However, for qualifications like GCSEs or A levels, where students usually take several subjects, the two approaches lead to different results. Thus, for example, a student who studies for three A levels contributes just one observation to this report's estimate for A levels, but contributes three separate observations to the official data on A levels. If that student passes in two subjects and fails in the third, then in this report, he or she is counted as partially unsuccessful, along with candidates who pass only one subject out of two, or two or three subjects out of four. In the official data in contrast, each separate pass has equal weight. Clearly the method used in official data can be used to compute a more accurate estimate of the success rate for individual qualifications, but the method used in this report makes it easier to investigate the relationship between being unsuccessful and individual student characteristics.

Third, official data on enrolments in the Further Education sector that form the denominator for the estimation of success rates only include enrolments that are live from November 1st onwards of each academic year. As a result, early drop-out from courses during September and October is ignored; only drop-out after October will lower the estimate of the success rate. In contrast, in the YCS data it is not possible to distinguish drop-out before November of Year 12 from drop-out occurring later in the year. Thus all drop-out adds to the proportion of unsuccessful students, increasing estimates of the proportion of unsuccessful students compared to estimates based on official data.<sup>9</sup>

Fourth, while official data include all course enrolments wherever the students came from, the YCS sample excludes young people who were in special schools in Year 11, regardless of where they were studying after Year 11. Further, YCS almost certainly under-represents young people who were excluded from school in Year 11. This does not make much difference if only a few in these two groups start post-16 qualifications. However, we would expect those who do start post-16 qualifications to have a low success rate, so their exclusion would tend to lower YCS estimates of the proportion of unsuccessful students.

Fifth, while official data are derived from administrative sources, YCS estimates are based entirely on self-report data. Such data are known to be unreliable in some respects, and in particular, there is probably a tendency to under-report qualifications gained when the grades achieved are very low.<sup>10</sup> This would tend to increase estimates of the proportion of unsuccessful students compared to estimates calculated from official data.

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<sup>9</sup> YCS collects information on drop-out taking place before Sweep 1, but it does not ask for dates.

<sup>10</sup> See Bradley, M., *Collecting Qualifications Data from Individuals*, OPCS 1996.

Sixth, estimates based on YCS, unlike estimates based on administrative data, are subject to sampling error. This is particularly important in the case of the less common qualifications, where sample numbers are small.

For all these reasons, YCS estimates of the proportions of young people who were unsuccessful in gaining particular qualifications cannot be directly compared with estimates derived from official data. This report is not intended to offer a rival set of estimates; indeed we should avoid placing too much weight on the exact value of any specific estimate presented here. The aim is rather to use a standardised method that can be applied across different qualifications and different education and training institutions, and does not depend, as estimates based on administrative data depend, on the particular administrative systems in place in each. In addition, the YCS data allow us to link the risk of being unsuccessful to student characteristics, and this is not currently possible using administrative data except in a rudimentary way. Thus the report complements rather than competes with estimates based on official data, and it is hoped that it offers some new and useful information on a topic of considerable policy interest.

One final note - official statistics on post-16 qualifications focus on the positive aspects of the subject in question, namely retention and achievement, from the product of which we can obtain the overall success rate. In this report the focus is on the negative side - the proportion of students who were unsuccessful. This is not out of a desire to emphasise the negative, but simply because the policy interests that triggered this report were more directly translated into research questions about unsuccessful students than into questions about successful students. Clearly, for every statement about the proportion of unsuccessful students, an equivalent statement about the proportion of successful students can be derived - the glass can be half empty or half full, according to the way one looks at it.

## 2 Post-16 GCSEs

### Post-Year 11 GCSE students

This chapter deals with GCSE courses followed after the end of Year 11 - GCSE courses completed by the end of Year 11 are not included. As we saw in Chapter 1, 24% of YCS Cohort 8 started a GCSE course between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey that took place the following spring, when they were aged 16/17.<sup>11</sup> This 24% includes 19% of the cohort who were studying for GCSEs at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, 5% who had already gained GCSEs since the end of Year 11, and 2% who had started GCSE courses but given them up before Sweep 1. These figures sum to more than 24% because some young people fell into more than one category.

Table 2.1 shows the total number of subjects that post-Year 11 GCSE students had started, obtained by adding together the subjects that they were studying at Sweep 1, those they had dropped before Sweep 1 and those they had already taken. The estimates may include an element of double counting: this would arise if students were studying subjects at Sweep 1 in which they had already sat examinations since the end of Year 11, either because they had failed or in order to improve their grades, or if students had dropped one of their post-Year 11 subjects in order to take up another.<sup>12</sup>

As the table shows, more than half post-Year 11 GCSE students had started only one subject, and another fifth had started just two; less than one in ten had started five or more. Some of those who had started several subjects may have postponed taking their Year 11 GCSEs for a year because of illness or other difficulties.

**TABLE 2.1 Post-Year 11 GCSE students: total number of subjects started**

		%
one		57
two		20
three		7
four		7
five or more		9
	Total	100
	<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	3769

Four out of five post-Year 11 GCSE students who had already taken GCSE examinations since the end of Year 11 had sat just one subject, and only one in twenty had sat five or more. Nine out of ten reported a pass grade in all the subjects they had taken.

<sup>11</sup> Students who started GCSE courses before the end of Year 11 and did not complete them, but continued to follow them after the end of Year 11 are included in this 24%, though they cannot be separately identified in the YCS data.

<sup>12</sup> Table 2.1 excludes a very small number of students with incomplete information on the number of subjects started. In this and all other relevant calculations, double award GCSEs are counted as two subjects.

The large majority of post-Year 11 GCSE students had also started one or more of the other major post-16 qualifications.<sup>13</sup> As Table 2.2 shows, by far the most usual amongst these were A levels and GNVQs.

**TABLE 2.2 Post-Year 11 GCSE students: other qualifications started since Year 11**

	%
A level	42
AS	5
GNVQ	36
BTEC	5
City and Guilds	2
RSA	3
NVQ	2
any of the above	83
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	
	3779

### Early drop-out from GCSE courses

By the time of the Sweep 1 survey, one in ten post-Year 11 GCSE students had already dropped at least one subject. As Table 2.3 and Chart 2.1 show, students who dropped a GCSE early appeared generally to have started more subjects than other post-Year 11 GCSE students, though this result is partly an artefact of the data.<sup>14</sup>

**TABLE 2.3 Post-Year 11 GCSE students: number of subjects dropped before Sweep 1 by total number of subjects started**

	<i>No. of subjects started:</i>					All %
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 or more %	
<i>No. of subjects dropped:</i>						
none	84	80	72	69	78	81
1	8	4	7	7	3	7
2	-	6	1	3	1	2
3	-	-	8	+	1	+
4	-	-	-	8	1	1
5	-	-	-	-	6*	+
no info. on early drop-out	8	10	11	12	10	9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	2153	761	247	264	344	3769

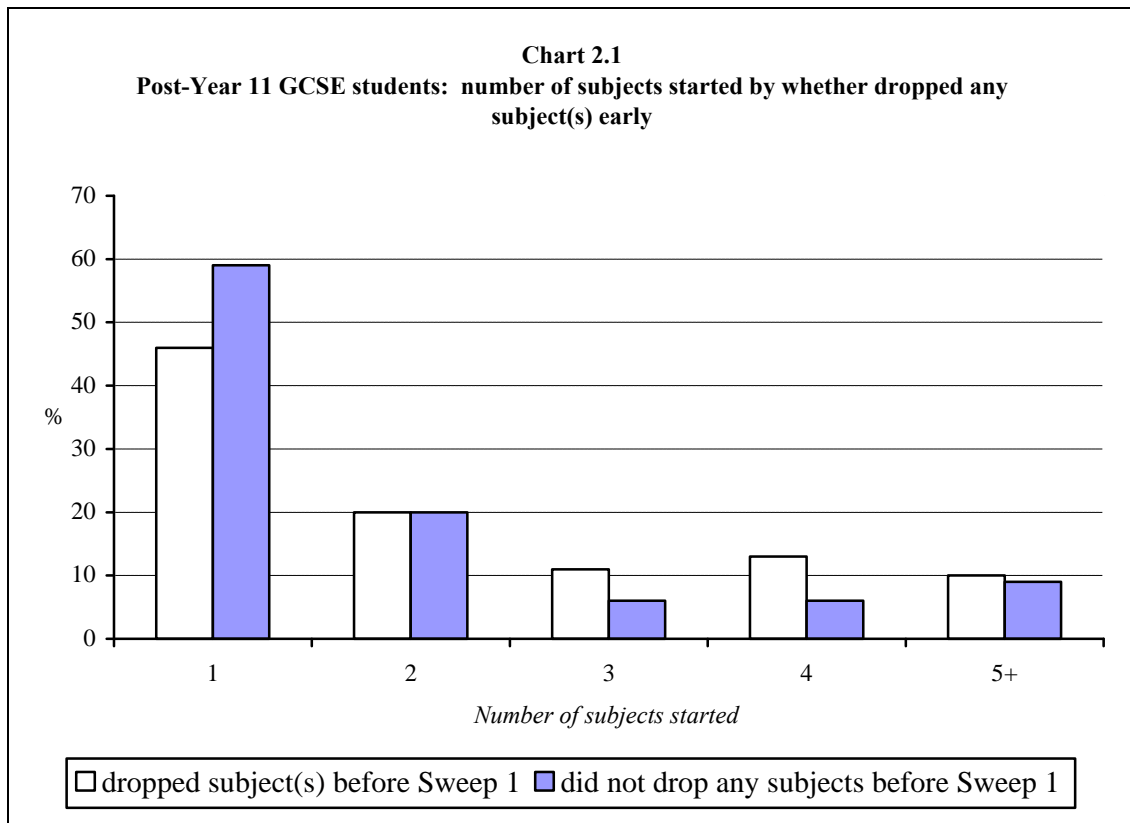
\* All but one of this group dropped all their subjects.

+ 0.5% or less, but not zero.

Two out of three students who dropped post-Year 11 GCSEs early gave up just one subject and fewer than one in five gave up more than two. By the Sweep 1 survey,

<sup>13</sup> This excludes the small proportion of students who were taking relatively uncommon qualifications not shown in Table 2.2, or who named qualifications that could not be coded.

<sup>14</sup> This is because we cannot identify students who switched subjects before Sweep 1, dropping one in order to take up another, as the Sweep 1 survey has no information on either the date that students dropped a subject or the date that they started to work for the subjects they were studying at Sweep 1. Thus a student who started just one subject after Year 11 and then dropped it to switch to another would be counted as having started two subjects, despite never studying for more than one subject at a time.



*Weighted Sweep 1 base N:*

dropped subject(s) before Sweep 1 381; did not drop any subjects before Sweep 1 3039.

three-quarters of early drop-outs had given up GCSEs entirely, and most of the rest were continuing to study for just one or two subjects. The overall proportion of post-Year 11 GCSE students who dropped all of their GCSE subjects early was 7%, and this proportion (shown in the shaded cells on the diagonal of Table 2.3) was similar, regardless of the number of subjects started.

### Post-Year 11 GCSEs gained by age 18/19

One fifth of all cohort members had obtained at least one post-Year 11 GCSE pass by the time of the Sweep 2 survey, when they were aged 18/19.<sup>15</sup> Post-Year 11 GCSE students identified at Sweep 1 formed 69% of this group, which means that nearly a third of cohort members with post-Year 11 GCSE passes started their courses *after* Sweep 1. These students cannot be included in estimates of the proportions who were successful or unsuccessful because YCS has no information on how many young people started a GCSE course after Sweep 1 but failed to gain a pass.

Table 2.4 is based on post-Year 11 GCSE students identified at Sweep 1 for whom there is information in the Sweep 2 survey, so the sample is smaller than in previous tables and charts.<sup>16</sup> It cross-tabulates the total number of subjects that they had started by Sweep 1 with the number of passes that they had gained by Sweep 2. The column

<sup>15</sup> This figure includes any passes gained between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey. For all calculations using data from Sweep 2, the Sweep 2 weights are used (see Chapter 1).

<sup>16</sup> The number of GCSE students who responded to Sweep 2 but did not give full information on the qualifications they had gained is too small to make much difference to the estimates, and these students are excluded from the figures presented in the rest of the chapter.

**Table 2.4 Post-Year 11 GCSE students: number of subjects started by Sweep 1 by the number of passes gained by Sweep 2**

*Percentages of the total sample: weighted Sweep 2 base N=2422*

		<i>Number of passes gained by Sweep 2:</i>											
column	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<i>Total</i>	
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)	(i)	(j)	(k)	(l)	
<i>Number of subjects started by Sweep 1:</i>													
1	26	25	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	+	57	
2	8	6	5	1	+	+				+		20	
3	2	1	1	1	+	+			+	+		6	
4	2	1	1	1	1	1	+		+		+	8	
5	2	+	+	1	+	1	+	+				5	
6	1	+	+	+	+	+	+					2	
7	+	+		+	+			+				1	
8	+				+			+	+	+		1	
9	1	+									+	1	
10	+					+				+		+	
11			+									+	
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>100</b>	

*Note:* Cells with zero entries are left blank.  
+ 0.5 or less, but not zero

(a) total shows that 42% were wholly unsuccessful, in that they had gained no passes at all by Sweep 2. Another 15% were partially unsuccessful: they gained at least one pass, but did not gain passes in all the subjects that they had started by Sweep 1. This figure is obtained by summing the cells in columns (b)-(k) that lie beneath the shaded diagonal cells. Students in the shaded diagonal cells of the table - 34% of the total - gained the same number of passes as the number of subjects they had started, while those in the cells above the shaded diagonal cells (9% of the total) gained more passes than the number of subjects that they had started by Sweep 1. This last group presumably started extra subjects after Sweep 1.<sup>17</sup>

These figures are summarised in Table 2.5, which shows that, in total, 57% of post-Year 11 students were wholly or partially unsuccessful, while a total of 43% were successful.

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>57</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
<i>gained no passes at all (wholly unsuccessful)</i>	42
<i>gained at least one GCSE, but fewer than started (partially unsuccessful)</i>	15
<b>Successful</b>	<b>43</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
<i>gained same number of passes as subjects started</i>	34
<i>gained more passes than subjects started</i>	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	2422

Amongst the students who were wholly or partially unsuccessful, 4% were still studying for GCSEs at Sweep 2. In addition, by Sweep 2, 19% of unsuccessful students had gained another major post-16 qualification that they had not started by Sweep 1.<sup>18</sup> Table 2.6 lists the qualifications that they successfully switched to, and Table 2.7 summarises these findings. It shows that if we do not count students who were still studying for GCSEs at Sweep 2 or who successfully switched to other courses, the proportion of post-Year 11 GCSE students classed as unsuccessful falls to 44%.

### **Results in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11**

Post-Year 11 GCSE students were over-represented in the middle ranges of attainment, as measured by their total points score in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11. Just over half had results in the middle third of the distribution of points scores in the cohort as a whole, with around a quarter in the top third of the distribution and another quarter in the bottom third.

<sup>17</sup> In some cases, the difference between the number of post-Year 11 GCSEs started by Sweep 1 and the number of passes obtained by Sweep 2 will be due to reporting error, but we have no way of knowing how many are explained in this way.

<sup>18</sup> A small proportion of unsuccessful post-Year 11 GCSE students not included in this 19% gained qualifications other than those listed in Table 2.5 or qualifications that could not be classified. The proportion of unsuccessful students who successfully switched to other qualifications was probably greater than 19%, because others may not have finished their new course by age 18/19, and because YCS has no data on switching before Sweep 1.



**TABLE 2.6 Unsuccessful post-Year 11 GCSE students: proportions successfully switching to each of the listed qualifications**

	%
A level	2
AS	2
GNVQ	2
BTEC	2
City and Guilds	3
RSA	3
NVQ	7
any of the above	19
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	
	1381

**TABLE 2.7 Unsuccessful and successful post-Year 11 GCSE students: continued study and successful switching**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>57</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
<i>still studying for GCSE at age 18/19</i>	2
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	10
<i>both of the above</i>	+
<i>none of the above</i>	44
<b>Successful</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Total</b>	
	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	
	2422

+ 0.5% or less but not zero.

As one would expect, students who had done badly in their Year 11 GCSEs were also likely to do badly in GCSE courses taken after Year 11. Table 2.8 shows that 69% of post-Year 11 GCSE students who had Year 11 results in the bottom third of the distribution for the cohort as a whole went on to become unsuccessful in post-Year 11 GCSEs, compared to 58% in the middle third of results and 42% in the top third. Students in the bottom third were also more likely than students with better Year 11 results both to switch successfully to other qualifications and to be still studying for GCSEs at age 18/19.

**TABLE 2.8 Proportion of post-Year 11 GCSE students who were unsuccessful, by results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Position in distribution of Year 11 GCSE points score across the cohort as a whole:</i>		
	bottom 3rd	middle 3rd	top 3rd
	%	%	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>42</b>
<i>of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for GCSE at age 18/19</i>	4	2	1
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	13	10	6
<i>both of the above</i>	1	1	0
<i>none of the above</i>	51	46	36
<b>Successful</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Total</b>			
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>			
	599	1223	599

+ 0.5% or less but not 0.

### Post-16 route

As Table 2.9 shows, more than nine out of ten post-Year 11 GCSE students were in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, with 45% in school sixth forms,

18% in sixth form colleges and 25% in FE colleges. Amongst the small proportion who were not in full-time education, around half had dropped all of their post-Year 11 GCSEs early. Undoubtedly some of this group had initially stayed in full-time education to take these GCSEs, but had given up and left before Sweep 1.

**TABLE 2.9 Post-Year 11 GCSE students: main activity at age 16/17**

	%
full-time education in school 6th form	45
full-time education at 6th form college	18
full-time education at FE college	25
full-time education: no information on where (all in full-time education)	4 (92)
full-time or part-time job	3
GST	2
none of the above	3
Total	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	3779

**TABLE 2.10 Proportion of post-Year 11 GCSE students who were unsuccessful, by main activity at 16/17 and results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Main activity at age 16/17</i>		
	full-time education in school 6th form %	full-time education in 6th form college %	full-time education in FE college %
<b>Poor Year 11 GCSE results</b> (bottom 5 deciles of the cohort)			
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>60</b>
<i>of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for GCSE at age 18/19</i>	2	6	4
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	14	7	11
<i>both of the above</i>	1	1	2
<i>none of the above</i>	56	36	44
<b>Successful</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	476	169	378
<b>Good Year 11 GCSE results</b> (top 5 deciles of the cohort)			
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>47</b>
<i>of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for GCSE at age 18/19</i>	1	1	1
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	6	8	7
<i>both of the above</i>	0	0	0
<i>none of the above</i>	43	31	39
<b>Successful</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	630	248	251
<b>All Year 11 GCSE results</b>			
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>55</b>
<i>of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for GCSE at age 18/19</i>	1	3	3
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	10	7	10
<i>both of the above</i>	+	+	1
<i>none of the above</i>	49	33	42
<b>Successful</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	1105	417	628

Table 2.10 shows that the proportion of post-Year 11 GCSE students who were unsuccessful varied with the type of institution they were attending at Sweep 1, even after allowing for differences in Year 11 GCSE results. Sixth form colleges had the lowest proportion of unsuccessful students and school sixth forms had the highest, and this held true for students with good Year 11 results as well as for students with poor Year 11 results.

## Sex

Young women were in a small majority amongst post-Year 11 GCSE students, forming 52% of the total, and overall they appeared to be slightly less at risk of being unsuccessful than males. However Table 2.11 shows that when results in Year 11 GCSEs were taken into account, there was little difference between the sexes. Amongst those with comparatively poor Year 11 results, the proportion who were unsuccessful was identical for the two sexes, and amongst those with comparatively good results, this proportion differed by only one percentage point.

**TABLE 2.11 Proportion of post-Year 11 GCSE students who were unsuccessful, by sex and results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>sex</i>	
	male %	female %
<b>Poor Year 11 GCSE results</b> (bottom 5 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>66</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for GCSE at age 18/19</i>	4	2
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	11	14
<i>both of the above</i>	2	+
<i>none of the above</i>	49	50
<b>Successful</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	656	550
<b>Good Year 11 GCSE results</b> (top 5 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>48</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for GCSE at age 18/19</i>	1	1
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	7	7
<i>both of the above</i>	0	0
<i>none of the above</i>	39	40
<b>Successful</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	599	717
<b>All Year 11 GCSE results</b>		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>56</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for GCSE at age 18/19</i>	3	1
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	9	10
<i>both of the above</i>	1	+
<i>none of the above</i>	45	45
<b>Successful</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	1155	1267

+ 0.5% or less but not 0.

## Modelling being unsuccessful in GCSEs

Statistical modelling allows us to assess the separate impact of a range of factors on the risk of being unsuccessful, net of other factors associated with this risk. Table 2.12 presents the results of such a model. The dependent variable is a binary which is scored 1 if the cohort member was wholly or partially unsuccessful in post-Year 11 GCSEs (including those who successfully switched courses or were still studying for GCSEs at age 18/19), and scored 0 if the cohort member was successful. The sample is all post-Year 11 GCSE students for whom there is information on success at Sweep 2. The model is parsimonious in that only those terms which significantly improved the fit of the model (at the 5% level of significance) are retained in the final model. The type of model fitted is a logistic regression model, with the estimates of the impact of each predictor variable presented in their exponentiated form. Readers who are not familiar with this type of model may wish to refer to Box 2, which explains how these estimates should be interpreted.

**TABLE 2.12 Logistic regression model for being unsuccessful in GCSEs**

	<i>estimate</i>
Constant	1.51
Year 11 GCSE points score (continuous)	0.99***
<i>Number of GCSE subjects at 16/17</i>	
one	1.00
two	2.38****
three	2.34****
four	3.43****
five or more	3.93****
<i>Main activity at 16/17</i>	
full-time education in school sixth form	1.00
full-time education in 6th form college	0.50****
full-time education in FE college	0.70***
full-time education - no info. on where	0.75
full-time or part-time job or GST	1.06
none of these	2.74**
<i>Regional participation rate in full-time education after 16</i>	
low (North, Yorks. & Humber, Inner London)	1.00
medium (NW, E Mid., W Mid., SW, E Anglia, Wales)	0.96
high (Outer London & SE)	0.74**
<i>Truancy in Year 11</i>	
never	1.00
the odd day or lesson	1.67****
particular days or lessons	2.43****
for several days/weeks at a time	1.71
No information	1.47
<hr/>	
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 N</i>	2422
<i>Unweighted N</i>	2423
<i>Scaled deviance</i>	2993
<i>residual df</i>	2406

*Significance levels:* \* 10% \*\* 5% \*\*\* 1% \*\*\*\* 0.1%

Year 11 GCSE points score is included in the model as a continuous predictor variable, and is highly significant. The poorer the results in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11, the greater the risk of being unsuccessful in post-Year 11 GCSEs.

## BOX 2

### INTERPRETING THE ESTIMATES FROM A LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL

In their exponentiated form, the estimates from the logistic regression model represent the multiplicative effect of each predictor variable on the odds of being unsuccessful. The base or reference category of each categorical predictor variable is set to 1.00, and the effects of the other categories of the predictor variable are assessed relative to this base category. Estimates less than 1.00 indicate a reduction in the odds of being unsuccessful, and estimates greater than 1.00 indicate an increase. Thus for example, in Table 2.12 the odds that a student in a sixth form college is unsuccessful are estimated to be half the odds for a student in a school sixth form. This, of course, is after taking into account the effects of all the other predictor variables included in the model. Similarly, for students who played truant for particular days or lessons during Year 11, the odds of being unsuccessful are nearly two and a half times greater than the odds for students who never played truant in Year 11- again, after controlling for all the other variables in the model.

For a continuous variable like Year 11 GCSE points score, the estimate represents the multiplicative effect of a unit change in the predictor variable. Thus in Table 2.12 each extra point of Year 11 GCSE score reduces the odds of being unsuccessful by a factor of 0.99.

The constant in the model represents the estimated odds of being unsuccessful for a student who is in the base or reference category of each predictor variable. In Table 2.12, this means someone with zero points in Year 11 GCSEs, who started only one post-Year 11 GCSE, was in a school sixth form at age 16/17, who lived in a region with a low rate of participation in full-time education after age 16, and who had never played truant during Year 11.

Note that we have talked about the *odds* of staying on, not the probability. Odds are an alternative way of expressing probabilities; thus

$$\text{odds} = \text{probability} / (1 - \text{probability})$$

and

$$\text{probability} = \text{odds} / (1 + \text{odds}).$$

For example, if 75 students in a class of 100 were unsuccessful, then their probability of being unsuccessful would be 0.75 or 75 per cent, but their odds of being unsuccessful would be three to one on (3/1, or 3.00). If only 25 students in the class were unsuccessful, then their probability of being unsuccessful would be 0.25 or 25 per cent, while their odds of being unsuccessful would be three to one against (1/3, or 0.33).

It follows that the multiplicative effect of a predictor variable on the *odds* of being unsuccessful is not the same as its multiplicative effect on the *percentage probability* of being unsuccessful. Consider for example a hypothetical class where 50 out of 100 boys and 75 out of 100 girls were unsuccessful. For boys the odds of being unsuccessful are 50/50=1.00 (evens), while for girls the odds of being unsuccessful are 75/25=3.00. Thus in this imaginary case, being female increases the percentage probability of being unsuccessful by a factor of 1.5 (75/50), but increases the odds of being unsuccessful by a factor of 3.00 (3.00/1.00).

Significance testing in the logistic model is carried out by adding new predictor variables one at a time and testing whether the term as a whole (such as 'main activity at 16/17') leads to a significant improvement in the fit of the model, conditional on the terms already included. The variable is retained in the model only if it improves its fit. Reported significance levels for individual coefficients (such as being in a sixth form college or FE college) are based on the t-test, which approximates to this test. T-tests for individual coefficients are useful in exploring which specific categories of the predictor variable are responsible for its overall effect on model fit.

The risk of being unsuccessful also increased with each extra subject started. In part this is a statistical effect: each extra subject started gives an extra opportunity to fail to gain at least one of these subjects.<sup>19</sup>

Table 2.10, which related success in post-Year 11 GCSEs to the type of educational institution attended, applied only a very crude control for results in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11. However in the model, results in Year 11 GCSEs are controlled precisely, and other relevant variables are taken into account. The model confirms that students in both sixth form colleges and FE colleges had a lower risk of being unsuccessful than students in school sixth forms.

The risk of being unsuccessful also varied between regions. It was a significantly lower in Outer London and the South East, where participation rates in post-compulsory full-time education are well above the national average, than in the North, Yorkshire and Humberside and Inner London regions, where the participation rate is low.

Finally, the model shows, not surprisingly, that a history of truancy during Year 11 significantly increased the risk of being unsuccessful.

As Table 2.11 indicated, sex was not significantly associated with the risk of being unsuccessful. In developing the model, a number of other potential predictor variables were examined which were also insignificant. These included whether the student was also studying for any other qualifications, the type of school attended in Year 11, ethnic group, and a number of measures of home background including parental occupation, qualifications and employment status, family size and composition, and housing tenure. However for some of these home background variables, the measures available in YCS are not particularly good. For example, there was a lot of missing information on parental occupation, on which subject young people are in any case not always good informants, and sample numbers for members of ethnic minorities were very small. Thus the model may have been unable to reveal some associations that could be observed if we had more accurate measures and bigger samples.

Contact with the Careers Service during Year 11 also had no association with the risk of being unsuccessful. This was measured by a categorical variable, based on retrospective information collected at Sweep 1, that distinguished the following three groups: had an interview on his/her own, had a group interview with other students, had no discussion with anyone from the Careers Service. The large majority of cohort members fell into the first category. The lack of association between this variable and the risk of being unsuccessful may be due to the fact that it incorporated no measure of the quality of the careers guidance that the young person received.

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<sup>19</sup> Part of the association between the risk of being unsuccessful and the number of subjects started is also due to the fact that the number of subjects started by early drop-outs who switched to another GCSE subject is inflated; see footnote 14 above.

### 3 A Levels

#### A level students

In total, 40% of YCS Cohort 8 started A level courses between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey the following spring. This included 38% who were studying for A levels at the time of the survey, and 5% who had started A level courses after Year 11 but given them up before Sweep 1. Only 0.4% had already taken A level examinations since the end of Year 11. These figures sum to more than 40% because some young people had dropped some A levels while continuing to study for others.

Table 3.1 shows the total number of subjects that these students started. The estimates may include an element of double counting: this would arise if students were studying subjects at Sweep 1 in which they had already sat examinations since the end of Year 11, either because they had failed or in order to improve their grades, or if students had dropped one of their post-Year 11 subjects in order to take up another.

As the table shows, more than three in five A level students started three subjects, and more than one in five started four or more. Only one in six started fewer than three subjects.

**TABLE 3.1 A level students: total number of subjects started**

	%
one	7
two	9
three	63
four	19
five or more	3
Total	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>6356</i>

Sample numbers for cohort members who sat A level examinations between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey are very small. However most - perhaps between two-thirds and three-quarters - appeared to have taken just one subject. More than half reported pass grades; most of the rest said that they were still waiting for their results. This suggests that some who said that they had taken A level examinations before Sweep 1 may in reality have just taken course modules.

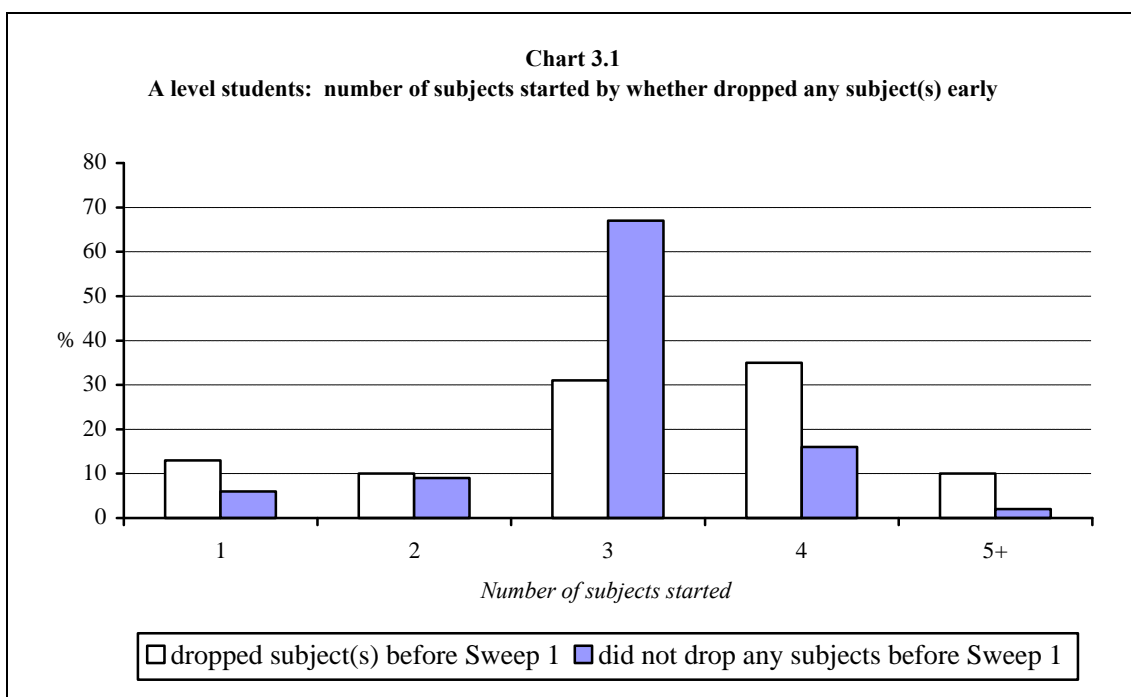
Just over two-fifths of A level students had also started other of the major post-16 qualifications. Table 3.2 shows that the most usual amongst these were GCSEs, followed in descending order of popularity by AS courses, GNVQs and RSA qualifications. BTEC, City and Guilds and NVQ qualifications were chosen by very few A level students.

**TABLE 3.2 A level students: other qualifications started since Year 11**

	%
GCSE	25
AS	12
GNVQ	5
BTEC	1
City and Guilds	1
RSA	3
NVQ	1
any of the above	42
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	
	6356

### Early drop-out from A level courses

One in eight A level students said that they had dropped one or more subjects before the Sweep 1 survey. As Chart 3.1 shows, these early drop-outs were less likely than other A level students to have started exactly three courses: some had started more and some had started fewer. Table 3.3 confirms that the students who were least likely to drop an A level subject early were those who started exactly three subjects. Students who started four or more subjects were particularly likely to give up one or more of them within the first few months, though some of these young people may simply have swapped one subject for another, never studying more than three at any one time.<sup>20</sup> In addition, nearly a quarter of students who started just one subject dropped it early on.



*Weighted Sweep 1 base N:*

dropped subject(s) before Sweep 1 731; did not drop any subjects before Sweep 1 5272.

<sup>20</sup> See footnote 14 above.



**TABLE 3.3 A level students: number of subjects dropped before Sweep 1 by total number of subjects started**

	<i>No. of subjects studied in Year 12:</i>					All %
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 or more %	
<i>No. of subjects dropped:</i>						
none	71	80	89	74	50	83
1	23	6	3	19	23	8
2	-	7	+	1	14	1
3	-	-	2	+	4	2
4	-	-	-	1	1	+
5 or more	-	-	-	-	2*	+
no info. on early dropping	6	7	6	4	6	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	428	582	3997	1176	172	6355

+ 0.5% or less, but not zero.

More than two out of three early A level drop-outs gave up just one subject, and in total, just over a third of those who dropped one or more A levels early on ended up studying for no A levels at all, while two-fifths continued to study for three or more subjects. This contrasts with the picture for early drop-outs from post-Year 11 GCSEs, three-quarters of whom gave up GCSEs altogether. The proportion of A level students who dropped all of their A level subjects early is shown in the shaded cells on the diagonal of Table 3.3. Overall this proportion was just 4%, though for students who had started only one A level subject it reached 23%.

### A levels gained by age 18/19

Just under one third of the full cohort obtained at least one A level by the time of the Sweep 2 survey, when they were aged 18/19. A level students identified at Sweep 1 formed 90% of this group, so only 10% of cohort members with A level passes by Sweep 2 started their course after Sweep 1. This 10% is not included in estimates of the proportion of A level students who were unsuccessful because YCS has no information on how many cohort members started an A level after Sweep 1 but failed to gain a pass.

Table 3.4 is based on A level students identified at Sweep 1 for whom there is information at Sweep 2, and cross-tabulates the number of A level subjects that they had started by Sweep 1 with the number of passes that they had gained by age 18/19.<sup>21</sup> It shows that 24% were wholly unsuccessful, having gained no passes at all. Another 24% were partially unsuccessful, securing at least one pass, but not gaining passes in all the subjects that they started. In contrast, 40% gained the same number of passes as the number of subjects that they had started. For another 13%, the number of passes gained was greater than the number of subjects started by Sweep 1, presumably

<sup>21</sup> The number of A level students who responded to Sweep 2 but did not give full information on the qualifications they had gained is too small to make much difference to the estimates, and these students are excluded from the figures presented in the rest of the chapter.

**Table 3.4 A level students: number of subjects started by Sweep 1 by the number of passes gained by Sweep 2**

*Percentages of the total sample: weighted Sweep 2 base N=4040*

<i>Number of subjects started by Sweep 1 (age 16/17):</i>	<i>Number of passes gained by Sweep 2 (age 18/19):</i>							<i>All</i>
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	5	2	+	+	+			7
2	4	2	2	1	+			9
3	12	4	9	27	10	+	+	63
4	3	1	1	5	8	1		19
5	+	+	+	+	1	1	+	2
6	+			+	+	+		+
7		+	+		+			+
8					+	+		+
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note:* Cells with zero entries are left blank.

+ 0.5 or less, but not zero

because they started additional subjects after Sweep 1. These figures are summarised in Table 3.5.

**TABLE 3.5 Unsuccessful and successful A level students**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>47</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
<i>gained no passes at all (wholly unsuccessful)</i>	24
<i>gained at least one A level, but fewer than started (partially unsuccessful)</i>	24
<b>Successful</b>	<b>53</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
<i>gained same number of passes as subjects started</i>	40
<i>gained more passes than subjects started</i>	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>4040</i>

The proportion of wholly or partially unsuccessful A level students who were still studying for A levels at Sweep 2 was 16%, four times greater than the corresponding proportion of unsuccessful post-Year 11 GCSE students. In addition, by Sweep 2, 23% of unsuccessful students had successfully switched to another post-16 qualification - usually ASs or GCSEs (see Table 3.6).

**TABLE 3.6 Unsuccessful A level students: proportions successfully switching to each of the listed qualifications**

	%
GCSE	7
AS	10
GNVQ	+
BTEC	1
City and Guilds	1
RSA	3
NVQ	3
any of the above	23
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>1917</i>

+ 0.5% or less, but not zero.

Table 3.7 summarises these findings. Excluding students who were still studying for A level or who successfully switched to other courses reduces the proportion classed as unsuccessful to 31%.

**TABLE 3.7 Unsuccessful and successful A level students: continued study and successful switching**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>47</b>
<i>Of which:</i>	
<i>still studying for A level at age 18/19</i>	6
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	9
<i>both of the above</i>	2
<i>none of the above</i>	31
<b>Successful</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>4040</i>

## Results in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11

A level students had much better results in Year 11 GCSEs than post-16 GCSE students. More than three-quarters were in the top third of the distribution of total points score across the cohort as a whole, and almost all the rest were in the middle third.

A level students with relatively poor results in Year 11 GCSEs were at much greater risk of being unsuccessful than students with good GCSE results. Table 3.8 shows that nearly three-quarters of A level students in the bottom seven deciles of Year 11 results were unsuccessful in their A levels. At the other end of the scale, three-quarters of A level students in the top decile of Year 11 results gained passes in all the subjects that they were studying.

**TABLE 3.8 Proportion of A level students who were unsuccessful, by results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Position in distribution of Year 11 GCSE points score across the cohort as a whole:</i>			
	bottom 7 deciles	8th decile	9th decile	top decile
	%	%	%	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Of which:</i>				
<i>still studying for A level at age 18/19</i>	10	5	5	2
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	14	11	7	4
<i>both of the above</i>	3	2	1	1
<i>none of the above</i>	46	35	23	18
<b>Successful</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>1138</i>	<i>878</i>	<i>995</i>	<i>1030</i>

## Post-16 route

Almost all A level students were in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, as Table 3.9 shows. Most of those who were not in full-time education at Sweep 1 had already given up all their A levels. More than three in five A level students were in school sixth forms, with another one in five in sixth form colleges and only one in eight in FE colleges.

**TABLE 3.9 A level students: main activity at age 16/17**

	%
full-time education in school 6th form	62
full-time education at 6th form college	20
full-time education at FE college	12
full-time education: no information on where	3
<i>(all in full-time education)</i>	<i>(97)</i>
full-time or part-time job	2
GST	+
none of the above	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>6356</i>

+ 0.5% or less, but not zero.

Table 3.10 shows how the proportion of A level students who were unsuccessful differed according to their place of study, with a simple control for results in Year 11

GCSEs.<sup>22</sup> Students in school sixth forms and sixth form colleges had a similar risk of being unsuccessful; for those in FE colleges the risk was greater. However the disadvantage of students in FE colleges compared to school sixth forms and sixth form colleges appeared smaller for students with poor results in Year 11 GCSEs than for students with good results.

**TABLE 3.10 Proportion of A level students who were unsuccessful, by main activity at 16/17 and results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Main activity</i>		
	full-time education in school 6th form %	full-time education in 6th form college %	full-time education in FE college %
<b>Poor Year 11 GCSE results</b> (bottom 8 deciles of the cohort)			
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>70</b>
<i>Of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for A level at age 18/19</i>	7	9	12
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	13	10	15
<i>both of the above</i>	2	4	3
<i>none of the above</i>	41	36	40
<b>Successful</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	1128	391	338
<b>Good Year 11 GCSE results</b> (top 2 deciles of the cohort)			
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>48</b>
<i>Of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for A level at age 18/19</i>	3	5	7
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	5	7	10
<i>both of the above</i>	1	1	1
<i>none of the above</i>	19	17	30
<b>Successful</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	1389	403	163
<b>All Year 11 GCSE results</b>			
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>63</b>
<i>Of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for A level at age 18/19</i>	5	7	11
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	8	9	13
<i>both of the above</i>	1	2	2
<i>none of the above</i>	29	26	37
<b>Successful</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	2516	795	502

## Sex

Young women formed 54% of A level students, a slightly bigger majority than in the case of post-16 GCSEs. Table 3.11 shows that, just as with post-Year 11 GCSEs, young men and young women had a similar risk of being unsuccessful. This held true both for students with good results in Year 11 GCSEs and for students with relatively poor results.

<sup>22</sup> Because A level students tended to have better Year 11 GCSE results than students taking post-16 GCSEs, in Table 3.10 the division between 'poor' and 'good' Year 11 results is made at a higher level than the corresponding table for post-16 GCSE students (Table 2.10).

**TABLE 3.11 Proportion of A level students who were unsuccessful, by sex and results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>sex</i>	
	male %	female %
<b>Poor Year 11 GCSE results</b> (bottom 8 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>64</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for A level at age 18/19</i>	9	8
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	13	12
<i>both of the above</i>	3	2
<i>none of the above</i>	40	42
<b>Successful</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	983	1032
<b>Good Year 11 GCSE results</b> (top 2 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for A level at age 18/19</i>	4	4
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	4	4
<i>both of the above</i>	5	6
<i>none of the above</i>	1	1
<i>none of the above</i>	20	20
<b>Successful</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	886	1139
<b>All Year 11 GCSE results</b>		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>47</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for A level at age 18/19</i>	6	6
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	9	9
<i>both of the above</i>	2	1
<i>none of the above</i>	31	31
<b>Successful</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	1870	2170

### Modelling being unsuccessful in A levels

Table 3.12 presents the results of a logistic regression model for being unsuccessful in A levels, based on all A level students identified at Sweep 1 for whom we have information at Sweep 2.<sup>23</sup> Unsuccessful students here include all those who failed to gain passes in all the subjects they started, including those who were still studying for GCSEs at age 18/19, those who successfully switched to other courses, and those who were only partially unsuccessful.

The model shows a strong link with results in Year 11 GCSEs: the poorer these results were, the greater the risk of being unsuccessful in A levels. This was similar to the finding for post-16 GCSEs (see Table 2.12), but in the case of A levels the impact of Year 11 results was greater.

<sup>23</sup> See Box 2 on page 29 for how to interpret the coefficients of a logistic model.

**TABLE 3.12 Logistic regression model for being unsuccessful at A level**

	<i>estimate</i>
Constant	36.19
Year 11 GCSE points score (continuous)	0.91****
<i>Number of A level subjects at 16/17</i>	
one	1.00
two	1.55*
three	1.68**
four	4.81****
five or more	21.12****
<i>Main activity at 16/17</i>	
full-time education in school sixth form	1.00
full-time education in 6th form college	1.05
full-time education in FE college	1.83****
full-time education - no info. on where	1.03
full-time or part-time job or GST	13.60****
none of these	11.25****
<i>Other qualifications started in addition to A levels</i>	
no others	1.00
AS	0.93
GCSE (with or without AS)	1.09
GNVQ (with or without AS/GCSE)	2.26****
BTEC, City & Guilds, RSA or NVQ (with or without AS/GCSE/GNVQ)	0.96
<i>Region</i>	
South East	1.00
North	1.12
North West	0.90
Yorks. & Humber	0.65****
East Midlands	0.98
West Midlands	1.05
South West	1.14
East Anglia	1.06
Inner London	1.80**
Outer London	1.16
Wales	1.31
<i>Truancy in Year 11</i>	
never	1.00
the odd day or lesson	1.29****
more often than this	1.42
No information	1.24
<i>Parents' qualifications</i>	
one or both has degree	1.00
one or both has A levels	1.07
neither has degree or A levels	1.28****
no information	1.74****
<hr/>	
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 N</i>	<i>4040</i>
<i>Unweighted N</i>	<i>5994</i>
<i>Scaled deviance</i>	<i>4634</i>
<i>residual df</i>	<i>5963</i>
<hr/>	

*Significance levels: \* 10% \*\* 5% \*\*\* 1% \*\*\*\* 0.1%*

Table 3.4 had suggested that students taking exactly three A level subjects had a lower risk of being unsuccessful in at least one subject than students taking either fewer or more subjects. However the model shows that once Year 11 GCSE results are taken into account, the risk of failing in least one subject increased with each extra subject studied.

We saw that with post-16 GCSEs, students in FE colleges had a significantly lower risk of being unsuccessful, after controlling for Year 11 GCSE results and other relevant factors, than students in school sixth forms. With A levels the position was reversed: other things being equal, students in FE colleges had a significantly greater risk of being unsuccessful than students in school sixth forms. There was no significant difference between school sixth forms and sixth form colleges.

With post-16 GCSEs, there was no association between the risk of being unsuccessful and whether the student was also taking any other qualifications. With A levels in contrast, students who were also taking a GNVQ were more likely than other students to fail to gain at least one of their A levels. This, it must be remembered, was after allowing for their generally poorer results in Year 11 GCSEs.

The risk of being unsuccessful in A levels varied between regions, though the pattern was different from the pattern found for post-16 GCSEs. Compared to students in the South East (excluding London), students in Inner London were at greater risk of being unsuccessful. However, students in Yorkshire and Humberside, which, like Inner London, had a very low rate of participation in full-time education after 16, had a significantly lower risk of being unsuccessful than students in the South East, where post-16 participation was high.<sup>24</sup>

Not many A level students had played truant in Year 11. Nevertheless, just as with post-16 GCSEs, a modest level of truancy significantly increased risk of being unsuccessful at A level.

Parental qualifications were not a significant predictor of being unsuccessful in GCSEs, once results in Year 11 examinations had been taken into account. However at A level, students were more at risk of being unsuccessful if neither of their parents had A level qualifications than if their parents were well qualified.

In developing the model, a number of other variables were tested but not found significant. These included sex, the type of school attended in Year 11, ethnic group, and a number of measures of home background including parental occupation, family size, family composition, housing tenure and employment status. As with post-Year 11 GCSEs (and perhaps for the same reasons), contacts with the Careers Service during Year 11 also had no predictive power.

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<sup>24</sup> One possible explanation of the good performance of A levels students in Yorkshire and Humberside has been suggested by Judith Watson, who has been engaged in a pilot research project to track students through colleges funded by the Further Education Funding Council. She says that Leeds seems to have good provision of Level 3 vocational courses as well as Level 4 courses in the FE colleges that provide a progression route for them. If the same were true of the rest of Yorkshire and the Humber., this could be predicted to lead to more selectivity in the A Level route. Further reference to this pilot study can be found in Chapter 10.



## 4 AS Courses

### AS students

Only 6% of YCS Cohort 8 started AS courses between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey the following spring. This included 5% who were following these courses at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, plus 0.5% who had started AS courses after Year 11 but had already given them up. Hardly anyone had already taken AS examinations since the end of Year 11.

The large majority (85%) of AS students had started only one AS subject, while 12% had started two subjects and 3% had started three. Very few had started more than three subjects.

Virtually all AS students had also started to study for other post-16 qualifications. As Table 4.1 shows, 91% had started A level courses and 6% had started GNVQs; in addition, 21% had started post-16 GCSEs. Only a few had started other vocational courses.

**TABLE 4.1 AS students: other qualifications started since Year 11**

	%
GCSE	21
A level	91
GNVQ	6
BTEC	+
City and Guilds	1
RSA	3
NVQ	1
any of the above	98
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>869</i>

One in ten students who started an AS course dropped at least one AS subject before Sweep 1. As most had started only one AS, this of course meant that most dropped all their AS courses. Indeed, the number of AS subjects studied appeared to make little difference to the chances of dropping a course early. As we saw, ASs were almost always accompanied by other qualifications, so the combined workload for all the qualifications being taken is likely to have been a more important factor behind the decision to drop one than the number of AS subjects.

### AS qualifications gained by age 18/19

Just 5% of all cohort members had gained AS passes by the time of the Sweep 2 survey at age 18/19. Only 45% of these were AS students identified at Sweep 1, which means that more than half of cohort members who gained AS passes by age 18/19 had not started their AS course by Sweep 1. It is likely that some of these switched from an A level to an AS course in the same subject after Sweep 1, for we saw in the last chapter (Table 3.6) that 10% of unsuccessful A level students gained AS passes by age 18/19, despite not having started an AS course by Sweep 1.

Table 4.2 is based on AS students identified at Sweep 1 for whom there is information at Sweep 2, and cross-tabulates the number of AS subjects that they had started by Sweep 1 with the number of passes that they had gained by Sweep 2.<sup>25</sup> It shows that 56% of AS students gained no passes at all, and that another 4% gained fewer passes than the number of subjects that they had started. In contrast, 36% of AS students gained the same number of passes as the number of subjects that they had started, and 4% gained more passes than the number of subjects that they had started. This last group presumably started additional subjects after Sweep 1, or transferred one of their A level courses to an AS. Table 4.3 summarises these figures.

**Table 4.2 AS students: number of AS subjects started by Sweep 1 by the number of passes gained by Sweep 2**

		<i>Percentages of the total sample: weighted Sweep 2 base N=540</i>						
		<i>Number of passes gained by Sweep 2 (age 18/19):</i>						
<i>Number of subjects started by Sweep 1 (age 16/17):</i>		0	1	2	3	4	5	<i>All</i>
1	48		33	3	+		+	85
2	6		3	2	+			12
3	2		+	+	+			3
4			+					+
<b>Total</b>		56	37	6	1	0	+	100

*Note:* Cells with zero entries are left blank.

+ 0.5 or less, but not zero

**TABLE 4.3 Unsuccessful and successful AS students**

	<b>%</b>
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>60</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
<i>gained no passes at all (wholly unsuccessful)</i>	56
<i>gained at least one GCSE, but fewer than started (partially unsuccessful)</i>	4
<b>Successful</b>	<b>40</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
<i>gained same number of passes as subjects started</i>	36
<i>gained more passes than subjects started</i>	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>540</i>

Only 2% of unsuccessful AS students were still following AS courses at age 18/19. However 16% of unsuccessful students successfully switched to other qualifications. As Table 4.4 shows, the courses they switched to covered a wide range of qualifications, the biggest single group amongst which were GCSEs.

Table 4.5 shows that if we subtract those who were still following AS courses at 18/19 and those who successfully switched to other courses, then the proportion of AS students classified as unsuccessful falls from 60% to 49%.

<sup>25</sup> The number of AS students who responded to Sweep 2 but did not give full information on the qualifications they had gained is too small to make much difference to the estimates, and these students are excluded from the figures presented in the rest of the chapter.

**TABLE 4.4 Unsuccessful AS students: proportions successfully switching to each of the listed qualifications**

	%
GCSE	7
A level	3
GNVQ	+
BTEC	1
City and Guilds	1
RSA	4
NVQ	2
any of the above	16
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>326</i>

+ 0.5% or less, but not zero.

**TABLE 4.5 Unsuccessful and successful AS students: continued study and successful switching**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>60</b>
<i>Of which:</i>	
<i>still studying for AS at age 18/19</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>both of the above</i>	<i>+</i>
<i>none of the above</i>	<i>49</i>
<b>Successful</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>540</i>

+ 0.5% or less but not zero.

## Results in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11

Like A level students, AS students had good GCSE results in Year 11, with over three quarters in the top third of the distribution of total points score across the cohort as a whole.

Students who embarked on AS courses having obtained relatively poor results in Year 11 were at much greater risk of being unsuccessful than students with good results. Table 4.6 shows that nearly three-quarters of AS students who were in the bottom seven deciles of Year 11 GCSE points score were unsuccessful in AS courses. At the other end of the scale, more than half of AS students in the top decile of Year 11 GCSE points score gained passes in all the AS subjects that they were started. However the difference that Year 11 GCSE results made to the risk of being unsuccessful in AS courses appeared smaller than the difference they made to the risk of being unsuccessful at A level (see Table 3.8).

**TABLE 4.6 Proportion of AS students who were unsuccessful, by results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Position in distribution of Year 11 GCSE points score across the cohort as a whole:</i>			
	bottom 7 deciles	8th decile	9th decile	top decile
	%	%	%	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>46</b>
<i>Of which:</i>				
<i>still studying for AS at age 18/19</i>	1	1	2	+
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	19	11	5	4
<i>both of the above</i>	1	0	0	0
<i>none of the above</i>	55	55	54	41
<b>Successful</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>188</i>

+ 0.5% or less but not 0.

### Post-16 route

Virtually all AS students were in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey (Table 4.7). Most of those who were not had already dropped all their AS subjects. Compared to GCSE and A level students, AS students were more concentrated in school sixth forms, which catered for 70% of them. This, combined with the fact that only 6% of the cohort were AS students, meant that sample numbers for AS students in sixth form colleges and FE colleges were too small to compare the risk of being unsuccessful with the risk in school sixth forms.

**TABLE 4.7 AS students: main activity at age 16/17**

	%
full-time education in school 6th form	70
full-time education at 6th form college	17
full-time education at FE college	8
full-time education: no information on where <i>(all in full-time education)</i>	3 <i>(98)</i>
full-time or part-time job	1
GST	+
none of the above	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>869</i>

+ 0.5% or less, but not zero.

### Sex

AS students were divided fairly evenly between the sexes. Young women appeared to have a lower risk of being unsuccessful than young men (Table 4.8), but sample numbers were too small to be very confident of this. Nevertheless the same was found both for those with relatively poor Year 11 GCSE results and for those with relatively good results.

**TABLE 4.8 Proportion of AS students who were unsuccessful, by sex and results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	male	female
	%	%
<b>Poor Year 11 GCSE results</b> (bottom 8 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>70</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for AS at age 18/19</i>	2	0
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	18	13
<i>both of the above</i>	0	1
<i>none of the above</i>	54	56
<b>Successful</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	123	112
<b>Good Year 11 GCSE results</b> (top 2 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>48</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for AS at age 18/19</i>	1	1
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	4	5
<i>both of the above</i>	0	0
<i>none of the above</i>	50	42
<b>Successful</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	148	156
<b>All Year 11 GCSE results</b>		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>57</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for AS at age 18/19</i>	2	+
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	10	8
<i>both of the above</i>	0	+
<i>none of the above</i>	52	48
<b>Successful</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	271	267

+ 0.5% or less, but not 0.

## 5 GNVQs

### GNVQ students

In total, 22% of YCS Cohort 8 started GNVQ courses between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey in the spring of the following year. This included 20% who were studying for GNVQs at the time of Sweep 1, and 2% who had started GNVQ courses after Year 11 but given them up before Sweep 1. Only 0.5% said that they had already taken GNVQ examinations since the end of Year 11, and it is possible that some in this group had in reality taken course modules rather than the full qualification.

Table 5.1 shows the level that GNVQ students were (or had been) aiming for - for the 4% of GNVQ students who had started more than one GNVQ, it shows (like all relevant subsequent tables) the highest level that they had started.<sup>26</sup> More than half of GNVQ students had started Level 2 and another three in ten had started Level 3; only one in eight had started Level 1.

**TABLE 5.1 GNVQ students: (highest) level started**

	%
Level 1	13
Level 2	54
Level 3	30
no information on level	3
Total	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>3507</i>

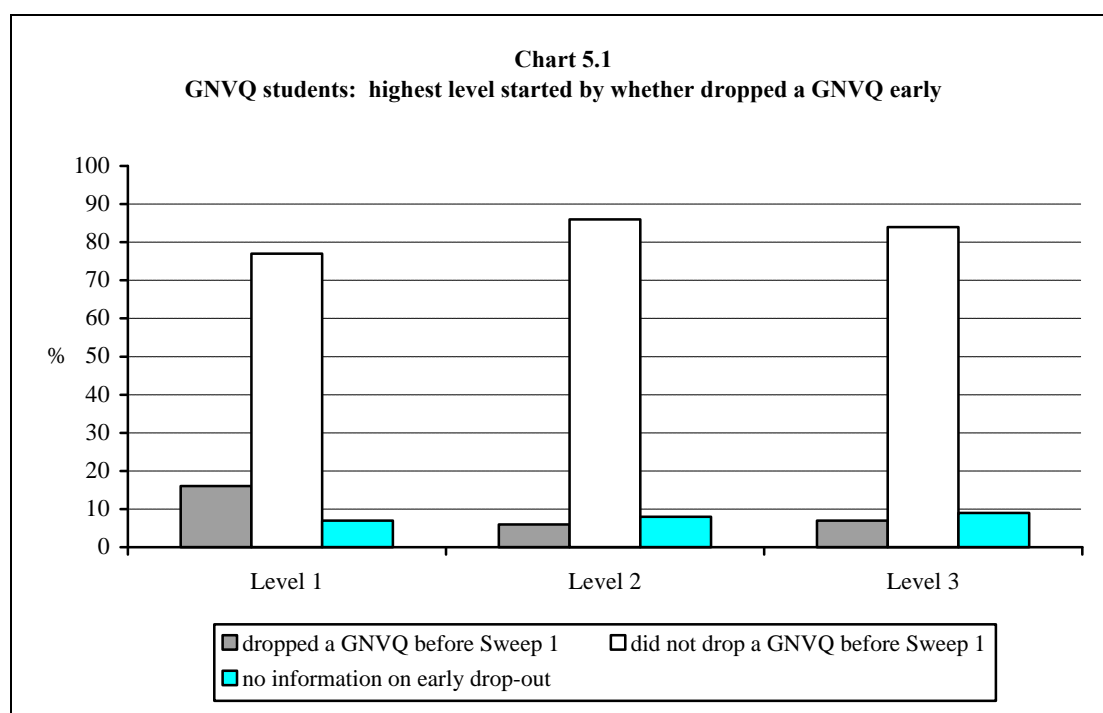
Just over half of GNVQ students had also started other post-16 qualifications. As Table 5.2 shows, nearly two in five had also started GCSEs, and one in ten had started A levels. Other vocational qualifications - BTEC, City and Guilds, RSA and NVQs - were also quite popular.

**TABLE 5.2 GNVQ students: other qualifications started since Year 11**

	%
GCSE	39
A level	10
AS	1
BTEC	3
City and Guilds	2
RSA	2
NVQ	2
any of the above	51
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>3507</i>

<sup>26</sup> The highest level is defined here as the highest amongst the following: the GNVQs they were studying for at Sweep 1, the GNVQs for which they had already sat examinations since the end of Year 11, and the GNVQs that they had dropped between the end of Year 11 and Sweep 1.

Early drop-outs from GNVQs - those who started a GNVQ after the end of Year 11 but gave it up before Sweep 1 - formed 9% of all GNVQ students.<sup>27</sup> Chart 5.1 shows that students aiming for Level 1 were more likely than those aiming for Level 2 or 3 to be early drop-outs.



Weighted Sweep 1 base N: Level 1 458; Level 2 1899; Level 3 1035; no information on level 114.

### GNVQs gained by age 18/19

In total, 12% of cohort members had gained a GNVQ qualification by the time of the Sweep 1 survey, when they were aged 18/19. GNVQ students identified at Sweep 1 formed 90% of this group, so only 10% of cohort members with GNVQ qualifications by Sweep 2 started their GNVQ course after Sweep 1 - the same proportion as for A level qualifications. This 10% is not included in estimates of the success rate because YCS has no information on how many cohort members started a GNVQ after Sweep 1 but failed to gain a pass.

Table 5.3 is based on GNVQ students identified at Sweep 1 for whom there is also information at Sweep 2.<sup>28</sup> It cross-tabulates the highest GNVQ level that they had started by Sweep 1 with the highest level GNVQ qualification that they had gained by Sweep 2. The column (a) total shows that exactly half were wholly unsuccessful, in that they had gained no GNVQ qualification at all by Sweep 2. Another 1% (the sum of the cells underneath the shaded diagonal cells of the table) were partially unsuccessful, having gained a GNVQ of a lower level than the level they had been

<sup>27</sup> This figure *excludes* the small proportion of GNVQ students who dropped a GNVQ early but continued to study for a GNVQ of the same (or higher) level as the GNVQ that they had dropped. It *includes* students who continued to study for a lower level GNVQ.

<sup>28</sup> The number of GNVQ students who responded to Sweep 2 but did not give full information on the qualifications they had gained is too small to make much difference to the estimates, and these students are excluded from the figures presented in the rest of the chapter.

originally aiming for. In contrast, 45% (the sum of the shaded diagonal cells) had gained a GNVQ of the same level as the level they had been aiming for, and 3% (the sum of the cells in columns (b)-(d) that lie above the shaded diagonal cells) had gained a GNVQ of a higher level than the level they had originally been aiming for.<sup>29</sup> These figures are summarised in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.3 GNVQ students: highest level started by Sweep 1 by highest level gained by Sweep 2**

*Percentages of the total sample: weighted Sweep 2 base N=2265*

		<i>Highest level gained by Sweep 2 (age 18/19):</i>				
		did not gain a GNVQ	gained GNVQ Level 1	gained GNVQ Level 2	gained GNVQ Level 3	<i>All</i>
column		(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
<i>Highest level started by Sweep 1 (age 16/17):</i>						
	no info. on level	3		+	+	3
	Level 1	9	2	2		13
	Level 2	24	1	27	2	54
	Level 3	14	+	+	15	30
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note:* Cells with zero entries are left blank.  
+ 0.5 or less, but not zero

**TABLE 5.4 Unsuccessful and successful GNVQ students**

	All GNVQ students %	Level 3 students %
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>49</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
gained no GNVQ	50	47
gained a GNVQ of a lower level than the level started by Sweep 1	1	2
<b>Successful</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>51</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
gained a GNVQ of the same level as the level started by Sweep 1	45	-
gained a GNVQ of a higher level than the level started by Sweep 1	3	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>2265</i>	<i>682</i>

- Not applicable, as Level 3 is the highest GNVQ level available.

A Level 3 GNVQ is officially considered to be the equivalent of two A Levels, and so to facilitate comparison with success rates in A levels, the second column of Table 5.4 focuses on students who had been aiming for Level 3. In total, 49% of these were unsuccessful. This was much lower than in the case of Level 1 GNVQ students, 69% of whom were unsuccessful, but a little higher than in the case of Level 2 GNVQ students, 46% of whom were unsuccessful. These results do not take into account the fact that the higher the GNVQ level aimed for, the better results in Year 11 GCSEs tended to be, and we shall see later in the chapter how this affected the picture.

<sup>29</sup> Most GNVQ students who gave no information on the level that they had started by Sweep 1 had gained no GNVQs by Sweep 2. The number who did gain a GNVQ was too small to affect the estimate of the proportion of students who were successful.



One in eight unsuccessful GNVQ students was still studying for GNVQs at Sweep 2 - amongst Level 3 students the proportion was the same. In addition, 26% of all unsuccessful GNVQ students and 22% of unsuccessful Level 3 students successfully switched to other qualifications. This latter figure was very close to the corresponding proportion of unsuccessful A level students. Table 5.5 shows that these other qualifications were usually vocational. Very few successfully switched to A levels or AS courses, though a number gained GCSEs. Table 5.6 summarises these findings. Excluding students who were still studying for GNVQs or who successfully switched to other courses reduces the proportion deemed unsuccessful to 33%.

**TABLE 5.5 Unsuccessful GNVQ students: proportions successfully switching to each of the listed qualifications**

	All unsuccessful students %	Unsuccessful students aiming for Level 3 %
GCSE	9	8
A level	1	2
AS	+	1
BTEC	2	2
City and Guilds	3	1
RSA	3	2
NVQ	12	9
any of the above	26	22
	<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	
	1169	335

+ 0.5% or less, but not zero.

**TABLE 5.6 Unsuccessful and successful GNVQ students: continued study and successful switching**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>52</b>
<i>Of which:</i>	
<i>still studying for GNVQ at age 18/19</i>	5
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	12
<i>both of the above</i>	1
<i>other unsuccessful students</i>	33
<b>Successful</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
	<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>
	2266

GNVQ students aiming for Level 1 were more likely to be unsuccessful than students aiming for Levels 2 or 3, as Table 5.7 shows.

**TABLE 5.7**  
**Proportion of GNVQ students who were unsuccessful, by highest level started**

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
	%	%	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>49</b>
<i>Of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for GNVQ at age 18/19</i>	4	5	6
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	22	10	10
<i>both of the above</i>	+	2	1
<i>none of the above</i>	43	30	32
<b>Successful</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	289	1219	681

### Results in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11

As a group, GNVQ students had much poorer results in Year 11 GCSEs than students aiming for academic qualifications, including post-16 GCSEs as well as A level and AS qualifications. Two in five GNVQ students were in the bottom third of Year 11 results across the cohort as a whole and around one in two was in the middle third; only one in ten was in the top third. As Chart 1.3 in Chapter 1 showed, GNVQ students aiming for Level 3 had substantially better Year 11 results than students aiming for Levels 1 or 2. However, even Level 3 students had much poorer Year 11 results than A level students, with only 27% in the top third of results across the cohort as a whole compared to 76% of A level students.

GNVQ students with poor results in Year 11 GCSEs were at much greater risk of being unsuccessful than students with better GCSE results. Table 5.8 shows a steady fall in the risk of being unsuccessful as Year 11 results improved.

**TABLE 5.8 Proportion of GNVQ students who were unsuccessful, by results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Position in distribution of Year 11 GCSE points score across the cohort as a whole:</i>			
	bottom 2	3rd & 4th	5th & 6th	top 4
	deciles	deciles	deciles	deciles
	%	%	%	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>43</b>
<i>Of which:</i>				
<i>still studying for GNVQ at age 18/19</i>	5	6	5	5
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	15	13	12	6
<i>both of the above</i>	+	1	2	1
<i>none of the above</i>	48	32	28	31
<b>Successful</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	373	797	705	391

+ 0.5% or less but not 0.

It is hard to make a meaningful comparison between Level 3 GNVQ students and A level students on the risk of being unsuccessful because their Year 11 results were so different. Table 5.9 is restricted to students in the bottom seven deciles of Year 11 GCSE results across the cohort as a whole. It suggests that for students with relatively poor Year 11 results, the risk of being unsuccessful in A levels was greater than the risk of being unsuccessful at GNVQ Level 3.

**TABLE 5.9 Proportion of Level 3 GNVQ and A level students the bottom seven deciles of Year 11 GCSE results who were unsuccessful**

	GNVQ Level 3 students %	A level students %
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>73</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for the qualification at age 18/19</i>	5	10
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	11	14
<i>both of the above</i>	1	3
<i>none of the above</i>	35	46
<b>Successful</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>531</i>	<i>1138</i>

### Post-16 route

As Table 5.10 shows, 86% of all GNVQ students were in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey. Equal proportions - 36% in each case - were in school sixth forms and FE colleges, but only 9% were in sixth form colleges, a much smaller proportion than for GCSEs, A levels or AS courses. Level 3 GNVQ students were more likely than students taking Levels 1 or 2 to be in FE college. Another 14% of young people who had started a GNVQ course after Year 11 were not in full-time education at Sweep 1, but many of these were no longer studying for a GNVQ. Those still working for GNVQs at Sweep 1 were mainly found in GST.

**TABLE 5.10 GNVQ students: main activity at 16/17**

	All GNVQ students %	Level 3 GNVQ students %
full-time education in school 6th form	36	27
full-time education at 6th form college	9	10
full-time education at FE college	36	45
full-time education: no information on where <i>(all in full-time education)</i>	6 <i>(86)</i>	8 <i>(91)</i>
full-time or part-time job	4	4
GST	6	4
none of the above	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>3507</i>	<i>1036</i>

Sample numbers for GNVQ students in sixth form colleges were small, but Table 5.11 suggests that they may possibly have done better than GNVQ students in school sixth forms or FE colleges. For the even smaller sample of GNVQ students aiming for Level 3 there was no evidence of any difference between school sixth forms and FE colleges, and sample numbers for students in sixth form colleges were too small to make any comparison.

**TABLE 5.11 Proportion of GNVQ students who were unsuccessful, by main activity at 16/17 and results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Main activity</i>		
	full-time education in school 6th form %	full-time education in 6th form college %	full-time education in FE college %
<b>Poor Year 11 GCSE results</b> (bottom 4 deciles of the cohort)			
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>49</b>
<i>Of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for GNVQ at age 18/19</i>	7	10	5
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	11	8	12
<i>both of the above</i>	1	1	2
<i>none of the above</i>	36	26	30
<b>Successful</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	390	103	410
<b>Good Year 11 GCSE results</b> (top 6 deciles of the cohort)			
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>41</b>
<i>Of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for GNVQ at age 18/19</i>	4	4	5
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	7	8	8
<i>both of the above</i>	2	4	1
<i>none of the above</i>	28	20	26
<b>Successful</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	365	109	417
<b>All Year 11 GCSE results</b>			
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>45</b>
<i>Of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for GNVQ at age 18/19</i>	6	7	5
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	9	8	10
<i>both of the above</i>	1	2	1
<i>none of the above</i>	32	23	28
<b>Successful</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	783	212	826

## Sex

Overall, GNVQ students were roughly evenly divided between the sexes, with young men forming 51% of the group. However, amongst students aiming for GNVQ Level 3, young women outnumbered young men by 54% to 46%.

Table 5.12 suggests that young men were more at risk of being unsuccessful than young women. This contrasts with the picture for GCSEs, A levels and AS courses, where no sex difference was found. However, as we shall see later in the chapter, statistical modelling revealed that when a fuller set of controls were applied, including a more precise control for Year 11 GCSE results, no statistically significant sex difference was found. For Level 3 students the picture was quite confused, probably because sample numbers were too small to give reliable estimates.

**TABLE 5.12 Proportion of all GNVQ students who were unsuccessful, by sex and results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>sex</i>	
	male %	female %
<b>Poor Year 11 GCSE results</b> (bottom 4 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>54</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for GNVQ at age 18/19</i>	6	5
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	14	14
<i>both of the above</i>	1	1
<i>none of the above</i>	39	34
<b>Successful</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	670	501
<b>Good Year 11 GCSE results</b> (top 6 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>44</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for GNVQ at age 18/19</i>	5	4
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	11	9
<i>both of the above</i>	2	1
<i>none of the above</i>	29	29
<b>Successful</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	495	600
<b>All Year 11 GCSE results</b>		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>49</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for GNVQ at age 18/19</i>	5	5
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	13	11
<i>both of the above</i>	2	1
<i>none of the above</i>	34	32
<b>Successful</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	1165	1102

### Modelling being unsuccessful in GNVQs

Table 5.13 presents the results of a logistic regression model for being unsuccessful in GNVQs, based on GNVQ students identified at Sweep 1 for whom we have information at Sweep 2.<sup>30</sup> Unsuccessful students here include the partially unsuccessful as well as the wholly unsuccessful, regardless of whether they were still studying for GNVQs or had successfully switched to other courses.

The model shows that, just as with post-Year 11 GCSEs and A levels, the better the results in Year 11 GCSEs, the lower the risk of being unsuccessful. Once GCSE results are taken properly into account, Level 3 GNVQ students are shown to be at significantly greater risk of being unsuccessful than students taking Level 2. Level 1 students also appeared to have a higher risk of being unsuccessful than Level 2 students, but the difference was only marginally significant.

<sup>30</sup> See Box 2 on page 29 for an explanation of how to interpret the coefficients of the logistic model.

**TABLE 5.13 Logistic regression model for being unsuccessful in GNVQs**

	<i>estimate</i>
Constant	1.94
Year 11 GCSE points score (continuous)	0.97
<i>Level of GNVQ studied at 16/17</i>	
Level 2	1.00
Level 1	1.33*
Level 3	1.85****
no information	(see <i>Note</i> below)
<i>Main activity at 16/17</i>	
full-time education in school sixth form	1.00
full-time education in 6th form college	0.70**
full-time education in FE college	0.73***
full-time education - no info. on where	0.56***
full-time or part-time job or GST	8.76****
none of these	4.28****
<i>Other qualifications started in addition to GNVQs</i>	
no others	1.00
A level or AS (with or without GCSE)	1.17
GCSE only	0.83*
other vocational qualifications only (without A level, AS or GCSE)	2.31****
other combinations	1.46
<i>Truancy in Year 11</i>	
never	1.00
the odd day or lesson	0.86
particular days or lessons	1.79***
for several days/weeks at a time	3.56***
No information	1.43
<i>Parents' qualifications</i>	
one or both has degree	1.00
one or both has A levels	1.36
neither has degree or A levels	1.22
no information	1.66***
<i>Ethnic group</i>	
white	1.00
black	0.75
Indian	0.50***
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	1.24
other	0.57
no information	0.32*
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 N</i>	2258
<i>Unweighted N</i>	1800
<i>Scaled deviance</i>	2694
<i>residual df</i>	1772

**Note:** The estimated effect of giving no information on the level studied was to increase the risk of being unsuccessful very substantially (estimate=699.33). However this is an artefact of the way that being unsuccessful was defined. If students gave no information on the level that they were studying at age 16/17, we could not say whether they had obtained a GNVQ of the same, higher or lower level by age 18/19. Thus they could only be counted as unsuccessful if they gained no GNVQ qualifications at all - others are excluded from the model.

*Significance levels:* \* 10% \*\* 5% \*\*\* 1% \*\*\*\* 0.1%

The model confirms that GNVQ students in school sixth forms had a higher risk of being unsuccessful, other things being equal, than full-time students studying elsewhere. Students outside of full-time education also appeared to be at greater risk of being unsuccessful, but this is probably a spurious association produced by students who dropped out of full-time education before Sweep 1.

As with A levels, there appeared to be an association between the risk of being unsuccessful and the other qualifications that the student had started. More specifically, students who had started other vocational qualifications in addition to GNVQs were more likely than other students to be unsuccessful in their GNVQs. This also may be a spurious association, produced by young people leaving full-time education before Sweep 1 to enter work-based training. Students taking GCSEs along with their GNVQs had a reduced risk of being unsuccessful that was marginally significant.

The model revealed no significant variations in success rates between regions. A history of truancy in Year 11, however, was yet again strongly associated with being unsuccessful. Young people whose parents had poor educational qualifications also appeared to be more likely to be unsuccessful than the children of highly qualified parents, but this effect reached significance only for those who gave no information on their parents' qualifications.

Unlike GCSEs and A levels, there was a significant association with ethnic group. Other things being equal, young people of Indian origin were significantly less likely to be unsuccessful in GNVQs than young people belonging to the white majority.

Once other factors were taken into account and a more precise control applied for Year 11 GCSE results, no significant sex difference was found. Other potential predictor variables that were not significant included the type of school attended in Year 11, and various measures of home background including parental occupation, family size and composition, housing tenure and employment status. As with post-Year 11 GCSEs and A levels, contacts with the Careers Service during Year 11 also had no predictive power.

## 6 BTECs

### BTEC students

The proportion of young people in YCS Cohort 8 who started BTEC courses between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey was 7%. This included 6.5% who were studying for BTECs at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, 0.4% who had started BTEC courses after Year 11 but already given them up by Sweep 1, and 0.1% who said that they had already taken BTEC examinations since the end of Year 11.

Table 6.1 shows the highest level of the qualification that they had started, based on the accepted equivalences with NVQ levels set out in Box 1 in Chapter 1.<sup>31</sup> Over three in five had started Level 3, and only one in eight had started Level 1. Only 4% of BTEC students had started more than one BTEC qualification.

**TABLE 6.1 BTEC students: highest level started**

	%
Level 1	12
Level 2	18
Level 3	61
Level 4	2
no information on level	8
Total	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>1096</i>

Just over a third of BTEC students had started other qualifications as well since the end of Year 11. As Table 6.2 shows, the most popular amongst these were GCSEs, though GNVQs and A levels also figured quite prominently, as did other vocational qualifications.

Those who had dropped a BTEC before Sweep 1 formed 6% of all BTEC students - rather fewer than the 10% we found for GNVQs. Chart 6.1 suggests that the early drop-out rate was broadly similar (allowing for the small sample sizes) regardless of the level of BTEC aimed for.

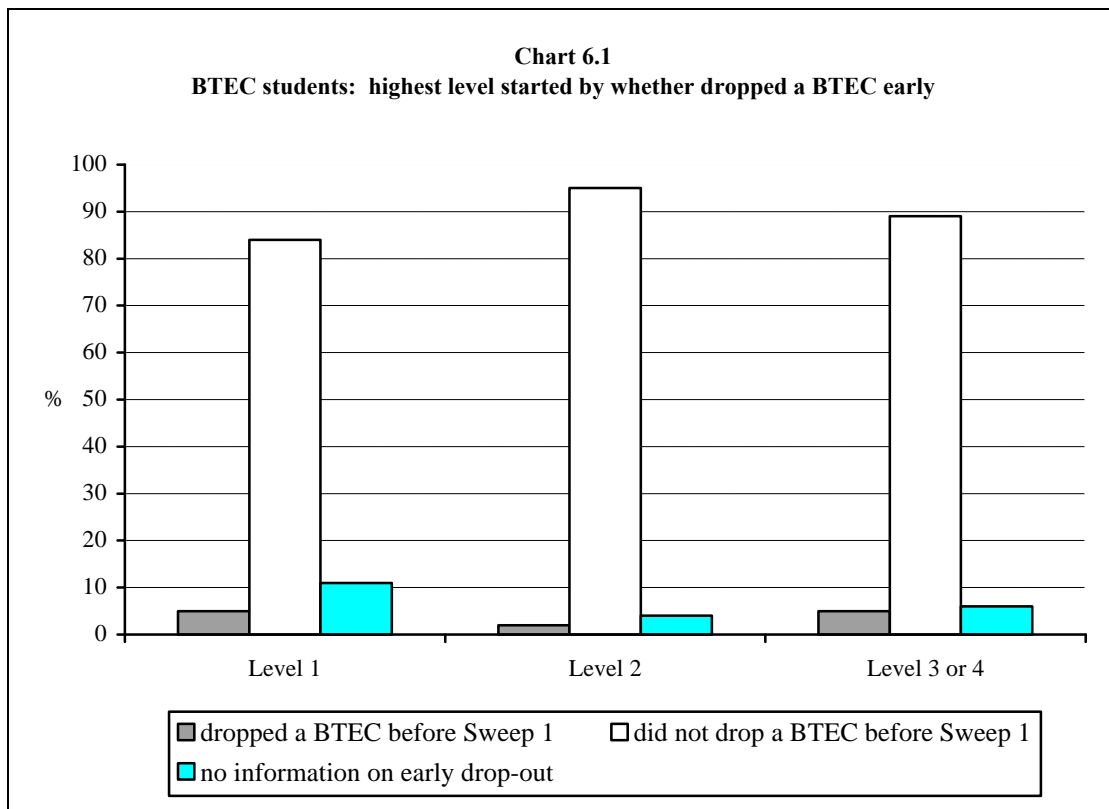
<sup>31</sup> The Sweep 1 questionnaire collected data on the level of BTEC that cohort members were currently studying for in two different ways. The first gave one box to tick for each of the following: First/General Certificate, First/General Diploma, National Certificate/Diploma, Higher Certificate/Diploma, and other BTEC. The second gave a further set of boxes for each of these and asked respondents to tick the relevant NVQ level. There was much inconsistency between the data collected in these two different ways, and many respondents ticked the box that indicated that they were 'not sure' of the NVQ level. In the present analysis, BTEC level is derived primarily from data collected in the first way. However, if 'other BTEC' was ticked, the level of the BTEC is allocated on the basis of the NVQ level recorded. With BTECs taken before Sweep 1 and BTECs for which they started to study but stopped without taking an examination these problems do not arise, as the respondent wrote in the name and level of the qualification, which was coded afterwards. Table 6.1 is based on the level of the highest BTEC amongst those currently studied, taken or dropped.



**TABLE 6.2 BTEC students: other qualifications started since Year 11**

	%
GCSE	16
A level	6
AS	+
GNVQ	8
City and Guilds	4
RSA	2
NVQ	3
any of the above	34
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	
	1096

+ 0.5% or less, but not zero.



*Weighted Sweep 1 base N:* Level 1 128; Level 2 193; Level 3 or 4 691.

### BTECs gained by age 18/19

In total, 5% of cohort members had gained BTEC qualifications by the time of the Sweep 1 survey, when they were aged 18/19. BTEC students identified at Sweep 1 formed 76% of this group, so around a quarter of young people with BTEC qualifications by Sweep 2 started their course after Sweep 1. These young people are not included in estimates of the success rate because YCS has no information on how many cohort members started a BTEC after Sweep 1 but did not gain a pass.

Table 6.3 is based on BTEC students identified at Sweep 1 for whom there is also information at Sweep 2, and shows the highest BTEC level that they had started by Sweep 1 against the highest level BTEC qualification that they had gained by Sweep

2.<sup>32</sup> It shows that 40% of BTEC students had gained no BTEC qualifications at all by Sweep 2, while another 6% had gained a BTEC of a lower level than the level they had originally aimed for. Around half had gained a qualification of the same level that they were aiming for, and only a handful had gained a higher BTEC than the level they had aimed for.<sup>33</sup> These figures are summarised in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.3 BTEC students: highest level started by Sweep 1 by highest level gained by Sweep 2**  
*Percentages of the total sample: weighted Sweep 2 base N=676*  
*Highest level gained by Sweep 2 (age 18/19):*

	did not gain a BTEC	gained BTEC Level 1	gained BTEC Level 2	gained BTEC Level 3	gained BTEC Level 4	<i>All</i>
<i>Highest level started by Sweep 1 (age 16/17):</i>						
no info. on level	7	+		1		8
Level 1	7	1	1	1		9
Level 2	6	1	9	2		18
Level 3	20	1	2	39		63
Level 4	1			1		2
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>44</b>		<b>100</b>

*Note:* Cells with zero entries are left blank.  
 + 0.5 or less, but not zero

**TABLE 6.4 Unsuccessful and successful BTEC students**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>46</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
gained no BTEC	40
gained a BTEC at a lower level than the level started by Sweep 1	6
<b>Successful</b>	<b>54</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
gained a BTEC of the same level as the level started by Sweep 1	49
gained a BTEC of a higher level than the level started by Sweep 1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>676</i>

The proportion of all unsuccessful BTEC students who were still studying for BTECs at Sweep 2 was 18%, higher than the corresponding rate for unsuccessful students aiming for either A levels or GNVQs. The proportion who successfully switched to other qualifications was also high, at 31%. As Table 6.5 shows, most of these switched to NVQs or GCSEs, though some also switched to other vocational qualifications. Hardly any switched to A levels or AS courses.

<sup>32</sup> The number of BTEC students who responded to Sweep 2 but did not give full information on the qualifications they had gained is too small to make much difference to the estimates, and these students are excluded from the figures presented in the rest of the chapter.

<sup>33</sup> This counts the students who gave no information on the level they had started by Sweep 1 but had gained a Level 3 BTEC by Sweep 2 as successful. Virtually all other students who gave no information on the level they had started by Sweep 1 had not gained a BTEC qualification by Sweep 2.

**TABLE 6.5 Unsuccessful BTEC students: proportions successfully switching to each of the listed qualifications**

	%
GCSE	11
A level	+
AS	+
GNVQ	5
City and Guilds	3
RSA	2
NVQ	14
any of the above	31
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	
	314

+ 0.5% or less, but not zero.

Table 6.6 summarises these figures. If we exclude unsuccessful BTEC students who were still studying for BTECs or who successfully switched to other courses, the proportion classed as unsuccessful would be only 26%.

**TABLE 6.6 Unsuccessful and successful BTEC students: continued study and successful switching**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>46</b>
<i>Of which:</i>	
<i>still studying for BTEC at age 18/19</i>	6
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	12
<i>both of the above</i>	2
<i>none of the above</i>	26
<b>Successful</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Total</b>	
	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	
	683

As Table 6.7 shows, students aiming for BTEC Levels 3 or 4 appeared to have a higher success rate than those aiming for Levels 1 or 2.

**TABLE 6.7 Proportion of BTEC students who were unsuccessful, by highest level started**

	Level 1 or 2 %	Level 3 or 4 %
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>40</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for BTEC at age 18/19</i>	6	6
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	18	10
<i>both of the above</i>	2	2
<i>none of the above</i>	24	22
<b>Successful</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>		186
		438

### Results in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11

BTEC students had on average rather better Year 11 GCSE results than GNVQ students. Just under a fifth were in the top third of the distribution of results, across the cohort as a whole, and only a quarter were in the bottom third. Table 6.8 shows

that BTEC students with relatively poor results in Year 11 GCSEs were at much greater risk of being unsuccessful than students with better Year 11 results.

**TABLE 6.8 Proportion of BTEC students who were unsuccessful, by results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Position in distribution of Year 11 GCSE points score across the cohort as a whole:</i>		
	bottom 4 deciles	5th & 6th deciles	top 4 deciles
	%	%	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>31</b>
<i>Of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for BTEC at age 18/19</i>	7	5	6
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	19	12	5
<i>both of the above</i>	4	2	+
<i>none of the above</i>	32	25	19
<b>Successful</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>225</i>	<i>241</i>	<i>218</i>

+ 0.5% or less but not 0.

## Post-16 route

As Table 6.9 shows, 82% of BTEC students were in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, and the large majority of these were in FE colleges. Most BTEC students who were in jobs at Sweep 1 or who were not in education, work or training had already given up their BTEC courses, and had probably changed their activity at the same time. However almost all BTEC students in GST at Sweep 1 were still following a BTEC course. Because there were so few BTEC students outside of FE college, it is not possible to compare the success rates of students on different post-16 routes.

**TABLE 6.9 BTEC students: main activity at 16/17**

	%
full-time education in school 6th form	4
full-time education at 6th form college	4
full-time education at FE college	62
full-time education: no information on where	12
<i>(all in full-time education)</i>	<i>(82)</i>
full-time or part-time job	4
GST	11
none of the above	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>1096</i>

## Sex

Young men were in a clear majority amongst BTEC students, comprising 59% of the group. Young women seemed to be more likely to succeed in gaining BTEC qualifications than young men (Table 6.10). However female BTEC students had on average better Year 11 GCSE results than males: 27% of female BTEC students were in the top third of the distribution of GCSE points score across the cohort as a whole compared to 16% of males, and 17% were in the bottom third, compared to 28% of

males. Sample numbers are too small to test whether the sex difference in BTEC success remains when differences in Year 11 GCSE results are taken into account.

**TABLE 6.10 Proportion of BTEC students who were unsuccessful, by sex**

	<i>sex</i>	
	male %	female %
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>41</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for BTEC at age 18/19</i>	8	4
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	12	12
<i>both of the above</i>	2	1
<i>none of the above</i>	28	23
<b>Successful</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	393	292

## 7 City and Guilds

### City and Guilds students

In total, 5% of YCS Cohort 8 started City and Guilds courses in the months between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey. This group includes 4% who were studying for City and Guilds at the time of the survey, 0.2% who had started City and Guilds courses after Year 11 but had already abandoned them, and 0.2% who said that they had already taken City and Guilds examinations since the end of Year 11.

Table 7.1 shows the level that these City and Guilds students had started, in terms of notional NVQ equivalents set out in Box 1 in Chapter 1.<sup>34</sup> For the 12% who had started more than one City and Guilds qualification, it gives the highest level that they started. The study aims of City and Guilds students were generally lower than those of either GNVQ or BTEC students, though more than a quarter did not say which level they were aiming for.

**TABLE 7.1 City and Guilds students: highest level started**

	%
Level 1	35
Level 2	28
Level 3	8
Level 4	1
no information on level	28
Total	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	735

More than a third of City and Guilds students had started other courses as well since the end of Year 11. Table 7.2 shows that quite a mixture of qualifications, both academic and vocational, were represented amongst these.

**TABLE 7.2 City and Guilds students: other qualifications started since Year 11**

	%
GCSE	11
A level	9
AS	1
GNVQ	10
BTEC	6
RSA	2
NVQ	6
any of the above	35
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	735

Only 4% of City and Guilds students had dropped a City and Guilds qualification before Sweep 1. The level aimed for appeared to make relatively little difference to the risk of dropping out early.

<sup>34</sup> There were the same problems in assessing the level that City and Guilds students were studying for as were encountered for BTEC students, and the same strategy was adopted; see footnote 31 above.

## City and Guilds qualifications gained by age 18/19

By the time of the Sweep 2 survey, when they were aged 18/19, 4% of cohort members had gained a City and Guilds qualification. City and Guilds students identified at Sweep 1 formed only 37% these, so more than three-fifths of young people with City and Guilds qualifications by Sweep 2 started working for their qualification after Sweep 1. These young people are not included in estimates of the success rate because YCS has no information on how many cohort members started working for City and Guilds after Sweep 1 but failed to gain the qualification.

Table 7.3 is based on City and Guilds students identified at Sweep 1 who responded to Sweep 2, and cross-tabulates the highest level that they had started by Sweep 1 with the highest level that they had gained by Sweep 2. It shows that 71% of young people who had started a City and Guilds qualification before Sweep 1 were wholly unsuccessful, in that they had gained no City and Guilds qualifications at all by Sweep 2. A further 4% were partially unsuccessful, gaining a qualification of a lower level than the qualification they had started. Only 16% could be classified as successful, gaining a qualification equal to or higher than the level of qualification that they had started, though another 9% of students gained a City and Guilds but gave insufficient information on qualification levels for it to be possible to classify them as successful or unsuccessful. The number of students who gained a qualification but gave incomplete information on levels was big enough to make a difference to the estimates, and so these students are included in the tables in the rest of the chapter. These figures are summarised in Table 7.4.

**Table 7.3 City and Guilds students: highest level started by Sweep 1 by highest level gained by Sweep 2**  
Percentages of the total sample: weighted Sweep 2 base N=465

	Highest level gained by Sweep 2 (age 18/19):						All
	did not gain a C&G	gained a C&G, but no info. on level	gained C&G Level 1	gained C&G Level 2	gained C&G Level 3	gained C&G Level 4	
<i>Highest level started by Sweep 1 (age 16/17):</i>							
no info. on level	20	3	2	2	+		28
Level 1	22	1	6	4	1		34
Level 2	23	+	3	3	1		30
Level 3	5	+	+	1	+		7
Level 4	1						1
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>100</b>

Note: Cells with zero entries are left blank.  
+ 0.5 or less, but not zero

<b>TABLE 7.4 Unsuccessful and successful City and Guilds students</b>		%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>		<b>75</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
	<i>gained no C&amp;G qualifications</i>	<i>71</i>
	<i>gained a C&amp;G at a lower level than the level started by Sweep 1</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>Successful</b>		<b>16</b>
<i>of which:</i>		
	<i>gained a C&amp;G of the same level as the level started by Sweep 1</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>gained a C&amp;G of a higher level than the level started by Sweep 1</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>Incomplete information</b>		<b>9</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
	<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>465</i>

Only 8% of unsuccessful City and Guilds students were still studying for City and Guilds qualifications at Sweep 2. However around a third successfully switched to other qualifications - even more than in the case of unsuccessful BTEC students. As Table 7.5 shows, most of these switched to NVQs. Table 7.6 shows that if we excluded unsuccessful students who were still studying for City and Guilds at age 18/19 or who successfully switched to other courses, the proportion classified as unsuccessful would fall to 47%.

**TABLE 7.5 Unsuccessful City and Guilds students: proportions successfully switching to each of the listed qualifications**

	%
GCSE	8
A level	0
AS	1
GNVQ	1
BTEC	2
RSA	4
NVQ	21
any of the above	34
	<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>
	<i>349</i>

**TABLE 7.6 Unsuccessful and successful City and Guilds students: continued study and successful switching**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>75</b>
<i>Of which:</i>	
	<i>still studying for City &amp; Guilds at age 18/19</i>
	<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>
	<i>both of the above</i>
	<i>none of the above</i>
<b>Successful</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>Total</b>
	<b>100</b>
	<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>
	<i>465</i>

Sample numbers for students aiming at higher levels of City and Guilds are very small, and so Table 7.7 combines Levels 2, 3 and 4. It suggests that students studying for Level 1 were more likely to be successful by Sweep 2 than students aiming for Level 2 or above. Although the higher levels of City and Guilds take longer to



complete, this did not explain the difference in success rates, as only 5% of students who had started Levels 2 or above were still studying for City and Guilds qualifications at Sweep 2.

**TABLE 7.7 Proportion of City and Guilds students who were unsuccessful, by highest level started**

	Level 1 %	Levels 2, 3 or 4 %
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>86</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
still studying for City & Guilds at age 18/19	6	2
successfully switched to other qualifications	19	31
both of the above	4	3
none of the above	35	49
<b>Successful</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>160</i>	<i>177</i>

## Results in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11

City and Guilds students had on average quite poor GCSE results in Year 11. Three out of five were in the bottom third of the distribution of total points score across the cohort as a whole, and only one in ten was in the top third. Students with poor results in Year 11 were at much greater risk of being unsuccessful than students with better results, as is apparent in Table 7.8.

**TABLE 7.8 Proportion of City and Guilds students who were unsuccessful, by results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Position in distribution of Year 11 GCSE points score across the cohort as a whole:</i>	
	bottom 3 deciles %	top 7 deciles %
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>67</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
still studying for City & Guilds at age 18/19	3	4
successfully switched to other qualifications	23	22
both of the above	2	3
none of the above	54	39
<b>Successful</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>242</i>	<i>223</i>

## Post-16 route

As Table 7.9 shows, more than half of City and Guilds students were in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, mostly in FE colleges, while another two-fifths were in GST. The large majority of students in full-time education, GST or jobs were still working for City and Guilds at the time of Sweep 1; only in the case of

those not in jobs, training or full-time education had a substantial proportion already given up City and Guilds.

**TABLE 7.9 City and Guilds students: main activity at 16/17**

	%
full-time education in school 6th form	9
full-time education at 6th form college	5
full-time education at FE college	33
full-time education: no information on where <i>(all in full-time education)</i>	<i>(52)</i>
full-time or part-time job	6
GST	39
none of the above	3
Total	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>1096</i>

Table 7.10 groups together all City and Guilds students in full-time education (including those who gave no information on their place of study) and contrasts them with City and Guilds students in GST or jobs. It suggests that similar proportions of each were unsuccessful, though unfortunately sample numbers are too small to permit any control for Year 11 GCSE results.

**TABLE 7.10 Proportion of City and Guilds students who were unsuccessful, by main activity at 16/17**

	<i>Main activity</i>	
	full-time education %	job or GST %
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>77</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for City &amp; Guilds at age 18/19</i>	3	4
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	17	29
<i>both of the above</i>	1	4
<i>none of the above</i>	54	40
<b>Successful</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>233</i>	<i>223</i>

## Sex

More than two thirds of City and Guilds students were male. With sample numbers for female students too small to permit any control for Year 11 GCSE results, there was little evidence of any difference between the proportions of male and female students who were unsuccessful (Table 7.11).

**TABLE 7.11**  
**Proportion of City and Guilds students who were unsuccessful, by sex**

	male	female
	%	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>78</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for City &amp; Guilds at age 18/19</i>	5	0
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	20	28
<i>both of the above</i>	4	1
<i>none of the above</i>	45	49
<b>Successful</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	308	156

## 8 RSA Qualifications

### RSA students

Only 3% of YCS Cohort 8 started RSA courses between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey. This included 2.7% who were studying for RSA at the time of the survey, 0.2% who had started RSA courses after Year 11 but had already given them up, and 0.3% who had already taken RSA examinations since the end of Year 11.

Table 8.1 shows the level of the qualification that these students had started (for the one in ten students who had started more than one RSA qualification, it gives the level of the highest). Levels are classified according to the standard notional NVQ equivalents set out in Box 1 in Chapter 1. Nearly three-fifths had started Level 1 and only 6% had started Level 3 or higher. Almost one fifth did not say which level they were studying for.

**TABLE 8.1 RSA students: highest level started**

	%
Level 1	59
Level 2	16
Level 3	5
Level 4	1
no information on level	19
Total	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>490</i>

Nearly three-quarters of RSA students had started other courses as well since the end of Year 11 (Table 8.2). Well over a third had started A levels, and a quarter had started GCSE courses. GNVQs and NVQs courses were also chosen fairly often.

**TABLE 8.2 RSA students: other qualifications started since Year 11**

	%
GCSE	25
A level	37
AS	6
GNVQ	13
BTEC	4
City & Guilds	2
NVQ	12
any of the above	74
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>490</i>

Just 6% of RSA students gave up an RSA qualification before Sweep 1. There was some indication that students aiming at the higher levels may have been more likely to drop-out early, but sample numbers were too small to be sure of this.

## RSA qualifications gained by age 18/19

In total, 4% of cohort members had obtained RSA qualifications by the time of the Sweep 2 survey at age 18/19. RSA students identified at Sweep 1 formed only 28% of these, which means that nearly three-quarters of young people who obtained RSA qualifications by Sweep 2 started their courses after Sweep 1. These young people are not included in estimates of the proportion of RSA students who were unsuccessful because we do not know how many cohort members started working for RSAs after Sweep 1 but failed to gain the qualification.

Table 8.3 is based on RSA students identified at Sweep 1 who responded to Sweep 2, and cross-tabulates the highest level that they had started by Sweep 1 with the highest level that they had gained by Sweep 2. It shows that 56% had not gained any RSA qualification by this date, while 4% had only gained a qualification of a lower level than the highest level they had aimed for. A total of 28% were clearly successful, gaining a qualification of the same or of a higher level than the qualification they had started to study for, and another 13% who gained an RSA gave insufficient details of the level they had started or the level they had gained for it to be possible to say whether they had succeeded or not.<sup>35</sup> Table 8.4 summarises these estimates.

**Table 8.3 RSA students: highest level started by Sweep 1 by highest level gained by Sweep 2**  
Percentages of the total sample: weighted Sweep 2 base N=297

	Highest level gained by Sweep 2 (age 18/19):						All
	did not gain a RSA	gained a RSA, but no info. on level	gained RSA Level 1	gained RSA Level 2	gained RSA Level 3	gained RSA Level 4	
<i>Highest level started by Sweep 1 (age 16/17):</i>							
no info. on level	10	2	7	+	1	+	20
Level 1	33	3	21	3	1		61
Level 2	8	+	2	1	1		13
Level 3	3		2	+	1		6
Level 4	1						1
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Cells with zero entries are left blank.  
+ 0.5 or less, but not zero

**TABLE 8.4 Unsuccessful and successful RSA students**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>60</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
gained no RSA qualifications	56
gained an RSA at a lower level than the level started by Sweep 1	4
<b>Successful</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
gained an RSA of the same level as the level started by Sweep 1	23
gained an RSA of a higher level than the level started by Sweep 1	5
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
Weighted Sweep 2 base N	297

<sup>35</sup> Enough students gained a qualification but gave incomplete information on levels to make a difference to the estimates, and so these students are included in the tables in the rest of the chapter.

Only one in twenty unsuccessful RSA students was still studying for RSA at Sweep 2, though over a third successfully switched to other qualifications that they had not started by Sweep 1. Many of these gained NVQs, and some gained GCSEs or other vocational qualifications (Table 8.5). Very few gained A level or AS qualifications. If we do not count students who were still studying for RSAs at Sweep 2 or who successfully switched to other qualifications, the proportion classified as unsuccessful is reduced to 37% (see Table 8.6).

**TABLE 8.5 Unsuccessful RSA students: proportions successfully switching to each of the listed qualifications**

	%
GCSE	7
A level	1
AS	2
GNVQ	4
BTEC	3
City & Guilds	3
NVQ	20
any of the above	35
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	
	<i>175</i>

**TABLE 8.6 Unsuccessful and successful RSA students: continued study and successful switching**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>60</b>
<i>Of which:</i>	
<i>still studying for RSA at age 18/19</i>	2
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	19
<i>both of the above</i>	2
<i>none of the above</i>	37
<b>Successful</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Total</b>	
	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	
	<i>294</i>

Sweep 2 sample numbers were too small to compare the success rates of students aiming for RSA qualifications of different levels.

### Results in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11

The Year 11 GCSE results of RSA students matched the distribution across the cohort as a whole quite closely. Exactly a third of RSA students were in the top third as measured by their total points score, while 39% were in the middle third and 28% were in the bottom third. This meant that they had on average much better GCSE results than City and Guilds students. Table 8.7 shows that RSA students with relatively poor Year 11 GCSE results were at greater risk of being unsuccessful than RSA students with relatively good Year 11 results.

**TABLE 8.7 Proportion of RSA students who were unsuccessful, by results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Position in distribution of Year 11 GCSE points score across the cohort as a whole:</i>	
	bottom 5 deciles %	top 5 deciles %
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>51</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for RSA at age 18/19</i>	2	1
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	32	10
<i>both of the above</i>	3	1
<i>none of the above</i>	33	40
<b>Successful</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>129</i>	<i>165</i>

### Post-16 route and sex

As Table 8.8 shows, more than three-quarters of RSA students were in full-time education at the time of the Sweep 1 survey. Similar numbers were in school sixth forms and FE colleges; rather fewer were in sixth form colleges. Most other RSA students were in GST. Unfortunately Sweep 2 sample numbers for RSA students were too small to compare the proportions on different post-16 routes who were unsuccessful.

**TABLE 8.8 RSA students: main activity at 16/17**

	%
full-time education in school 6th form	30
full-time education at 6th form college	14
full-time education at FE college	28
full-time education: no information on where <i>(all in full-time education)</i>	5 <i>(77)</i>
full-time or part-time job	2
GST	18
none of the above	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>490</i>

Young women formed 74% of RSA students. Again, Sweep 2 sample numbers were too small to compare the success rates of the two sexes.

## 9 NVQs

### NVQ students

Young people who started NVQ qualifications between the end of Year 11 and the Sweep 1 survey formed 7% of YCS Cohort 8. Nearly a fifth of NVQ students had started more than one NVQ, and 4% had started three or more. Some of these young people had already taken an NVQ qualification and were studying for another, or had dropped one to start another. In total, 6.6% of the cohort were studying for NVQs at the time of the survey, 0.8% had started an NVQ after Year 11 but had since dropped it, and 0.5% had already gained an NVQ. Table 9.1 shows that the highest level that the majority of NVQ students had started was Level 2, though nearly a fifth did not say which level they had started.

**TABLE 9.1 NVQ students at 16/17: highest level started**

	%
Level 1	9
Level 2	58
Level 3	14
Level 4	1
no information on level	18
Total	100
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>1189</i>

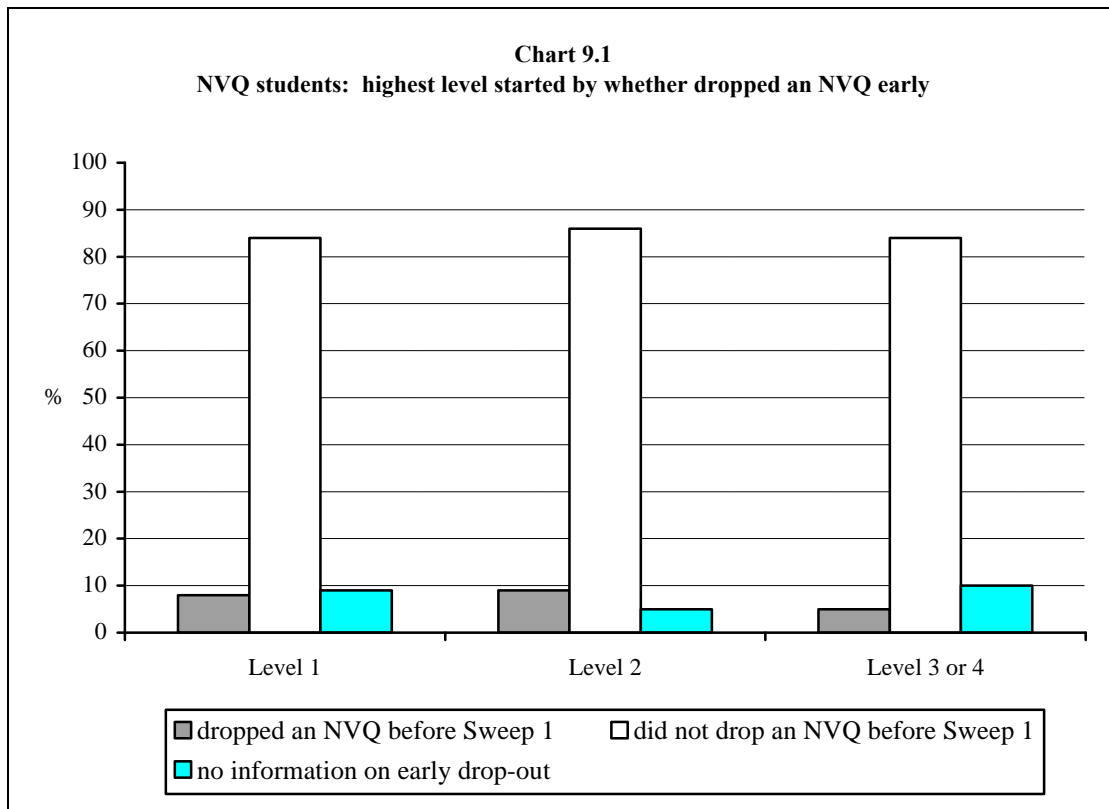
Just under a quarter of NVQ students had started other qualifications as well - a smaller proportion than for any other vocational qualification. As Table 9.2 shows, the most frequent amongst these were GCSEs and GNVQs, though City and Guilds and RSA qualifications were also quite common.

**TABLE 9.2 NVQ students: other qualifications started since Year 11**

	%
GCSE	7
A level	3
AS	1
GNVQ	7
BTEC	2
City and Guilds	4
RSA	5
any of the above	23
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>1190</i>

One in ten NVQ students dropped NVQs before Sweep 1. Chart 9.1 suggests that students aiming for the higher levels may have been less likely to drop-out early than students aiming for Levels 1 or 2, but the proportions failing to answer the question on early drop-out makes it impossible to be sure of this.





*Note:* Those who continued to study for an NVQ of the same or higher level as the one they dropped are not counted as drop-outs.

*Weighted Sweep 1 base N:* Level 1 105; Level 2 684; Level 3 or 4 181.

### NVQs gained by age 18/19

In total, 12% of cohort members obtained NVQ qualifications by the time of the Sweep 2 survey, when they were aged 18/19. However, NVQ students identified at Sweep 1 formed only a third of these. This means that two-thirds of young people who had gained NVQs by age 18/19 had not started to work for this qualification by Sweep 1.

Table 9.3, based on NVQ students identified at Sweep 1 who responded to the Sweep 2 survey, cross-tabulates the highest level that they had started by Sweep 1 with the highest level that they had gained by Sweep 2. It shows that 50% of NVQ students had not gained any NVQ qualifications by Sweep 2. Another 6% can be classed as partially unsuccessful, as they gained an NVQ of a lower level than the highest level they had started by Sweep 1. Successful students formed 36% of the total, 30% gaining an NVQ of the same level as the highest that level they had started, and 6% gaining a higher NVQ than this. However, another 8% of NVQ students gained an NVQ, but did not give enough information on levels to be classified as successful or unsuccessful. These figures are summarised in Table 9.4.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> NVQ students are counted as achievers if they had achieved the full NVQ award; those who said that they had achieved 'certain units only' are counted as unsuccessful.

**Table 9.3 NVQ students: highest level started by Sweep 1 by highest level gained by Sweep 2**

*Percentages of the total sample: weighted Sweep 2 base N=771*

	<i>Highest level gained by Sweep 2:</i>						<i>All</i>
	did not gain an NVQ	gained an NVQ, but no info. on level	gained NVQ Level 1	gained NVQ Level 2	gained NVQ Level 3	gained NVQ Level 4	
<i>Highest level started by Sweep 1:</i>							
no info. on level	11	1	2	3	1		18
Level 1	4		2	3			9
Level 2	28	2	1	25	3		58
Level 3	6		+	5	3		14
Level 4	+			+			1
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>100</b>

*Note:* Cells with zero entries are left blank.

+ 0.5 or less, but not zero.

**TABLE 9.4 Unsuccessful and successful NVQ students**

	<b>%</b>
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>56</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
<i>gained no NVQ qualifications</i>	50
<i>gained an NVQ at a lower level than the level started by Sweep 1</i>	6
<b>Successful</b>	<b>36</b>
<i>of which:</i>	
<i>gained an NVQ of the same level as the level started by Sweep 1</i>	30
<i>gained an NVQ of a higher level than the level started by Sweep 1</i>	6
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>771</i>

More than one in five unsuccessful NVQ students were still studying for NVQs at Sweep 2, a higher proportion than for any other vocational qualification.<sup>37</sup> One in six unsuccessful students successfully switched to other qualifications, usually choosing GCSEs or other vocational qualifications (see Table 9.5). Table 9.6 summarises these movements. If we exclude unsuccessful students who were still studying for NVQs at Sweep 2 or who successfully switched to other qualifications, the proportion classed as unsuccessful falls to 36%.

**TABLE 9.5 Unsuccessful NVQ students: proportions successfully switching to each of the listed qualifications**

	<b>%</b>
GCSE	5
A level	1
AS	+
GNVQ	2
BTEC	3
City and Guilds	3
RSA	4
any of the above	16
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>431</i>

+ 0.5% or less, but not zero.

<sup>37</sup> This includes those who said that they were studying for 'certain units only' as well as those who said that they were studying for the full award.

**TABLE 9.6 Unsuccessful and successful NVQ students: continued study and successful switching**

	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>56</b>
<i>Of which:</i>	
<i>still studying for NVQs at age 18/19</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>both of the above</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>none of the above</i>	<i>36</i>
<b>Successful</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>771</i>

Sample numbers for young people who started Level 3 or Level 4 NVQs were quite small, but Table 9.7 suggests that they were more likely to be unsuccessful than young people aiming just for Levels 1 or 2. This is probably because the higher level NVQs can often take three or more years to complete, whereas we only have data on qualifications completed by part way through the third year after the end of compulsory full-time education. We have already noted the comparatively high proportion of NVQ students who were still studying for NVQs at this point.

**TABLE 9.7 Proportion of NVQ students who were unsuccessful, by highest level started**

	Level 1 or 2	Level 3 or 4
	%	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>81</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for NVQ at age 18/19</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>both of the above</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>none of the above</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>50</i>
<b>Successful</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>517</i>	<i>115</i>

## Results in GCSEs taken by the end of Year 11

NVQ students tended to have rather poor results in Year 11 GCSEs, as measured by their total points score. More than half were in the bottom third of the whole cohort, and only 7% were in the top third. Table 9.8 shows how the risk of being unsuccessful in NVQs fell as GCSE results improved. Two-thirds of students in the bottom two deciles were unsuccessful, compared to less than half of students in the top six deciles.

## Post-16 route

As Table 9.9 shows, over half of NVQ students were in GST at the time of the Sweep 1 survey, while another third were in full-time education, mostly in FE colleges. The large majority of NVQ students on each of these routes was still studying for an NVQ at Sweep 1. In contrast, roughly half of those who were in jobs at Sweep 1 were no longer studying for NVQs, and the same was true of nearly all of those who were not in jobs, GST or full-time education.

**TABLE 9.8 Proportion of NVQ students who were unsuccessful, by results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Position in distribution of Year 11 GCSE points score across the cohort as a whole:</i>		
	bottom 2 deciles	3rd & 4th deciles	top 6 deciles
	%	%	%
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>46</b>
<i>Of which:</i>			
<i>still studying for NVQs at age 18/19</i>	11	9	12
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	8	5	8
<i>both of the above</i>	1	1	2
<i>none of the above</i>	46	39	24
<b>Successful</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	246	259	268

**TABLE 9.9 NVQ students: main activity at 16/17**

	%
full-time education in school 6th form	3
full-time education at 6th form college	2
full-time education at FE college	25
full-time education: no information on where	4
<i>(all in full-time education)</i>	<i>(34)</i>
full-time or part-time job	8
GST	53
none of the above	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 1 base N</i>	<i>1190</i>

Table 9.10 shows that NVQ students in full-time education were more likely to be unsuccessful than NVQ students in GST. This held true for those with comparatively good Year 11 results as well as for those with poor results.

**TABLE 9.10 Proportion of NVQ students who were unsuccessful, by main activity at 16/17 and results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>Main activity</i>	
	full-time education %	GST %
<b>Poor Year 11 GCSE results</b> (bottom 3 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>55</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for NVQs at age 18/19</i>	15	7
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	5	8
<i>both of the above</i>	3	1
<i>none of the above</i>	47	39
<b>Successful</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>109</i>	<i>202</i>
<b>Good Year 11 GCSE results</b> (top 7 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for NVQs at age 18/19</i>	11	10
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	12	8
<i>both of the above</i>	1	2
<i>none of the above</i>	32	20
<b>Successful</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>129</i>	<i>214</i>
<b>All Year 11 GCSE results</b>		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>47</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for NVQs at age 18/19</i>	12	9
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	9	8
<i>both of the above</i>	2	1
<i>none of the above</i>	38	29
<b>Successful</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>240</i>	<i>416</i>

## Sex

Female NVQ students outnumbered males by 52% to 48%. There was no clear pattern in the success rates of the two sexes. As Table 9.11 shows, amongst those with poor Year 11 GCSE results, young men appeared to be more at risk of being unsuccessful than young women, but the position was reversed amongst students with better GCSE results.

**TABLE 9.11 Proportion of NVQ students who were unsuccessful, by sex and results in Year 11 GCSEs**

	<i>sex</i>	
	male %	female %
<b>Poor Year 11 GCSE results</b> (bottom 3 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>61</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for NVQs at age 18/19</i>	14	7
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	5	8
<i>both of the above</i>	3	0
<i>none of the above</i>	44	46
<b>Successful</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	230	156
<b>Good Year 11 GCSE results</b> (top 7 deciles of the cohort)		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>50</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for NVQs at age 18/19</i>	15	8
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	6	11
<i>both of the above</i>	1	1
<i>none of the above</i>	23	29
<b>Successful</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	159	227
<b>All Year 11 GCSE results</b>		
<b>Unsuccessful</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>54</b>
<i>Of which:</i>		
<i>still studying for NVQs at age 18/19</i>	14	8
<i>successfully switched to other qualifications</i>	5	10
<i>both of the above</i>	2	1
<i>none of the above</i>	36	36
<b>Successful</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Incomplete information</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Weighted Sweep 2 base N</i>	388	386

## 10 An overview

The last eight chapters have examined each of the major post-16 qualifications separately - now it is time to draw together these analyses. This chapter starts by comparing qualifications according to the risk of being unsuccessful in each, and goes on to look at how the estimates presented in this report relate to the information that is available from other sources. Finally it considers the evidence provided by this report on whether the different routes through which young people pursue their post-16 qualifications have any impact on the risk of being unsuccessful.

### Comparing qualifications: some cautionary notes

The estimates of the proportion of students who were unsuccessful in each qualification are based on different sized sub-samples, and so carry with them varying degrees of precision. The tables and charts in this chapter give the 95% confidence intervals for each estimate. We can have a fair degree of assurance that the true value lies within these bounds, but when the sample is small, these bounds are very wide.

In Table 10.1 and Chart 10.1, the proportion of students who were unsuccessful in each qualification is calculated as a percentage of all students who started that qualification and who responded to the Sweep 2 survey. The figures include those who did not give enough information at Sweep 2 for it to be possible to classify them as successful or unsuccessful. However the proportion of students who were unclassified varied a lot from one qualification to another. Missing information was a particular problem for qualifications like NVQs that can be taken at different levels, for if respondents failed to say which level they started or which level they gained, we cannot say whether they achieved the level that they were aiming for. The amount of missing information depended partly on how clear respondents were about what they were doing, and partly on the format of the relevant question in the Sweep 1 and Sweep 2 questionnaires.<sup>38</sup> This makes it difficult to decide what is the best strategy for handling unclassified students. Thus, this chapter reports two sets of estimates: while Table 10.1 and Chart 10.1 include unclassified students in the base for each estimate, Table 10.2 and Chart 10.2 exclude them.

Another feature of the data means that estimates of the risk of being unsuccessful are slightly inflated for academic qualifications (GCSEs, A levels and AS) compared to vocational qualifications. This problem arises from the different structures of these qualifications, and should be kept in mind when comparing academic and vocational qualifications.<sup>39</sup> We need also to remember that the criterion for being successful was

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<sup>38</sup> For BTECs, City and Guilds, RSA qualifications and NVQs, the questionnaires gave respondents the opportunity to write in 'other' names for the qualification they were taking or had obtained, different from the official names of the recognised levels, and these 'other' qualifications could not be assigned to levels. For GNVQs, no opportunity was given to write in the names of 'other' GNVQs, and as a result there was very little missing information on levels.

<sup>39</sup> Because there are no data on when cohort members started to work for the qualifications they were studying for at Sweep 1, there is no way of distinguishing between, for example, a candidate who started studying for three A levels after Year 11 and dropped one before Sweep 1, and a candidate who started studying for two A levels, but dropped one subject before Sweep 1 to switch to another. If both

somewhat stricter for academic qualifications than for vocational qualifications, in that students who failed to gain a pass in just one of the subjects they were taking were classified as unsuccessful, even if they passed in others.

### **Comparing qualifications: findings**

We look first at Table 10.1 and Chart 1, which include students who could not be classified as successful or unsuccessful in the base for each estimate. They show that A level courses clearly produced a lower proportion of unsuccessful students than either post-16 GCSEs or AS courses. The risk of being unsuccessful on AS courses appeared higher than the risk of being unsuccessful in post-16 GCSEs, though their 95% confidence intervals overlapped.

Level 1 GNVQs had a significantly higher proportion of unsuccessful students than GNVQ Levels 2 or 3. For Level 2 and 3 GNVQs, the overall proportion of unsuccessful students was similar to A levels. However, for lower ability students, the risk of being unsuccessful in A levels may have been greater than the risk of being unsuccessful at GNVQ Level 3.

Taking all levels together, BTECs had a lower proportion of unsuccessful students than GNVQs. For Level 3 BTECs, the proportion of unsuccessful students was lower than for either Level 3 GNVQs or A levels.

The proportion of students unsuccessful in City and Guilds Level 1 was on a par with that for GNVQ Level 1, but at higher levels of these qualifications, City and Guilds students did significantly worse.

Level 1 RSA students were less likely to be unsuccessful than students aiming either for GNVQ Level 1 or for City and Guilds Level 1. The same was true when comparing all levels of these qualifications taken together.

For Level 1 and Level 2 NVQs (combined because of small sample numbers) the proportion of unsuccessful students was in the same range as for BTEC Levels 1 and 2. For Levels 3 and 4 (again combined), the proportion of unsuccessful students was much higher than for BTECs and approached the figure for the higher levels of City and Guilds. However this was probably because of the length of time needed to complete the higher level NVQs, remembering that we were only able to follow students up to the spring of the third year after the end of compulsory education.

Taking all vocational qualifications apart from GNVQs together, the overall proportion of unsuccessful students was similar to that for A levels, and similar for all

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gained two A level passes by Sweep 2, both were classed as unsuccessful, because for academic qualifications unsuccessful students were defined as those who had gained fewer passes than the number of subjects they had started. Compare this with the student who dropped one GNVQ before Sweep 1 to switch to another GNVQ of the same level. If the student obtained that qualification, he or she would be classed as successful, because with vocational qualifications, successful students were defined as those who gained a qualification of the same level or higher than the highest qualification they had started by Sweep 1. One way round this problem would be to restrict estimates to cohort members who were studying for qualifications at the time of the Sweep 1 survey. However this would mean ignoring all drop-out that took place before Sweep 1, and thus seriously underestimating the proportion of unsuccessful students.



**TABLE 10.1 Proportion of students who were unsuccessful by type of qualification, based on all students *including* those not classifiable as successful or unsuccessful**

Qualification	% of students who were unsuccessful	95% confidence intervals		Sweep 2 weighted base N	Un-weighted base N	% of students who were not classifiable
		Lower %	Upper %			
<b>GCSEs</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>2430</b>	<b>2431</b>	<b>0.3</b>
<b>A levels</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>4042</b>	<b>5997</b>	<b>0.1</b>
<b>AS</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>1.8</b>
<b>All GNVQs*</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>2266</b>	<b>1804</b>	<b>0.4</b>
GNVQ Level 1	69	62	76	289	162	0.0
GNVQ Level 2	46	43	50	1219	842	0.0
GNVQ Level 3	49	45	53	683	755	0.2
<b>All BTECs*</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>683</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>1.5</b>
BTEC Levels 1 & 2	49	41	58	186	131	0.4
BTEC Level 3	39	35	44	443	458	1.0
<b>All City and Guilds*</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>9.0</b>
City & Guilds Level 1	65	55	75	160	97	2.3
City & Guilds Levels 2, 3 & 4	86	80	92	177	119	1.6
<b>All RSAs**</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>12.9</b>
RSA Level 1	55	48	62	180	206	4.8
<b>All NVQs*</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>773</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>8.5</b>
NVQ Levels 1 & 2	48	43	54	517	345	2.5
NVQ Levels 3 & 4	81	72	89	116	86	0.0
<b>All vocational quals exc. GNVQs*</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>2557</b>	<b>2081</b>	<b>14.2</b>
Level 1	44	39	49	418	343	4.0
Level 2	45	41	50	838	572	2.9
Levels 3 & 4	48	44	52	645	606	3.1

*Note:* In most cases the weighted base N for the estimate differs from the unweighted base N. To avoid distortion, the 95% confidence intervals are calculated on the weighted data, with the weights multiplied by the ratio of the unweighted base N to the weighted base N, so that for each sub-group the weighted base N equals the unweighted base N.

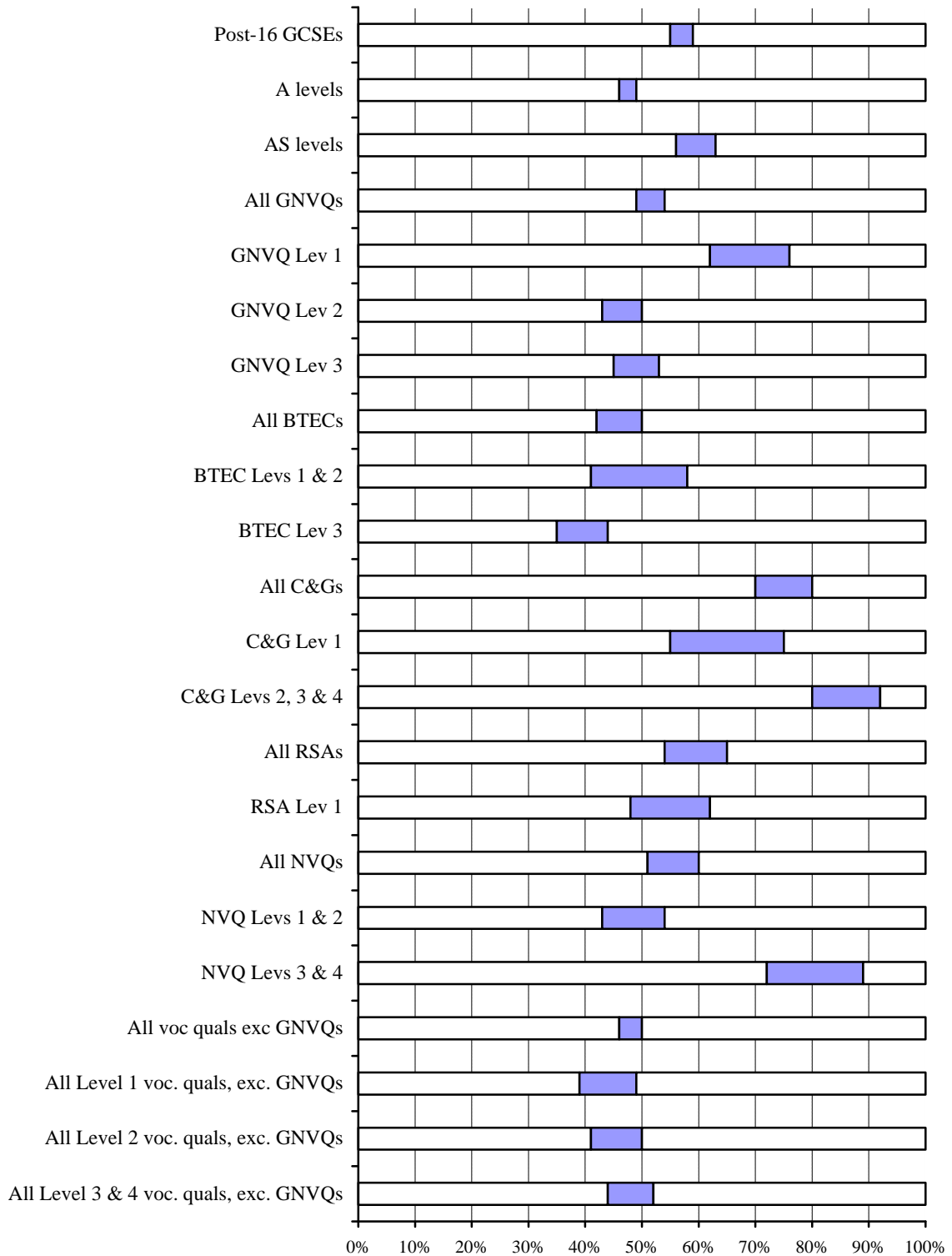
\* Including those for whom there is no information on the level.

\*\* Including those for whom there is no information on the level & those studying for Level 2 & above.

levels. This was because relatively few students had started the higher levels of City and Guilds and NVQs, which had a very high the proportion of unsuccessful students, and the low proportion of Level 3 BTEC students who were unsuccessful pulled down the average for all vocational qualifications.

Table 10.2 and Chart 10.2, which exclude unclassifiable students, show slightly different estimates for some qualifications, but the overall pattern is very similar and the broad conclusions outlined above remain the same.

**Chart 10.1**  
**95% confidence intervals for the proportion of students who were unsuccessful, by type of qualification: all students, including those with no information on success**



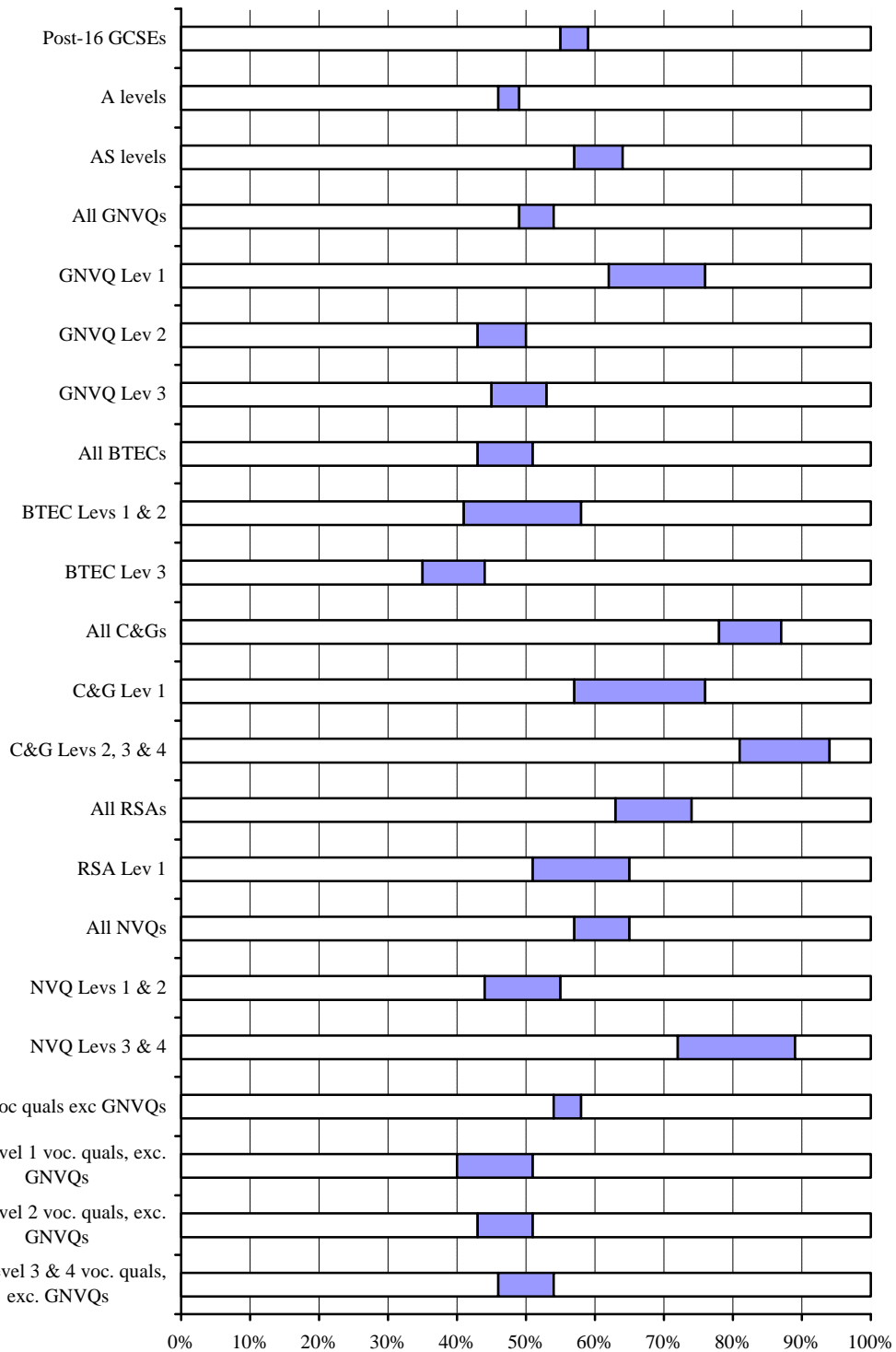
*Note:* Base Ns as in Table 10.1; see also the notes to Table 10.1.

**TABLE 10.2 Proportion of students who were unsuccessful by type of qualification, based on all students *excluding* those not classifiable as successful or unsuccessful**

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>% of students who were unsuccessful</i>	<i>95% confidence intervals</i>		<i>Sweep 2 base N</i>	<i>Un-weighted base N</i>
		<i>Lower %</i>	<i>Upper %</i>		
<b>GCSEs</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>2422</b>	<b>2423</b>
<b>A levels</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>4040</b>	<b>5994</b>
<b>AS</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>538</b>	<b>792</b>
<b>All GNVQs*</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>2258</b>	<b>1800</b>
GNVQ Level 1	69	62	76	289	162
GNVQ Level 2	46	43	50	1219	842
GNVQ Level 3	49	45	53	682	754
<b>All BTECs*</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>619</b>
BTEC Levels 1 & 2	50	41	58	185	130
BTEC Level 3	40	35	44	439	454
<b>All City and Guilds*</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>236</b>
City & Guilds Level 1	66	57	76	156	94
City & Guilds Levels 2, 3 & 4	87	81	94	174	116
<b>All RSAs**</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>289</b>
RSA Level 1	58	51	65	171	195
<b>All NVQs*</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>707</b>	<b>481</b>
NVQ Levels 1 & 2	50	44	55	504	336
NVQ Levels 3 & 4	81	72	89	116	86
<b>All vocational quals exc. GNVQs*</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>2193</b>	<b>1765</b>
Level 1	46	40	51	402	325
Level 2	47	43	51	814	552
Levels 3 & 4	50	46	54	625	588

*Note:* See Notes to Table 10.1.

**Chart 10.2**  
**95% confidence intervals for the proportion of students who were unsuccessful, by**  
**type of qualification: excluding students with no information on success**



*Note:* Base Ns as in Table 10.2; see also the notes to Table 10.1.

## Comparison with other estimates

The high proportion of young people in YCS Cohort 8 who started post-16 qualifications which they either failed or did not complete may come as a surprise to some readers. In order to reassure ourselves that the estimates presented in this report are not the product of some peculiarity of the definitions or data used, we need to look at other estimates of success rates.

Chapter 1 showed how estimates of success rates derived from official data on retention and achievement rates could not be directly compared with estimates from YCS data, because of a number of important differences. The reader is referred back to that chapter for further explanation of these points. Despite these differences, it is still worth checking whether estimates derived from official data are of approximately the same order as the estimates presented in this report. The academic years 1995/96 and 1996/97 relate most closely to YCS Cohort 8, and official data for those years are available for Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications in sixth form colleges and FE colleges.<sup>40</sup> As explained in Chapter 1, these official data count each qualification enrolment separately, rather than counting each student separately. The different levels of each qualification are defined in terms of their notional NVQ equivalences, and so, as well as vocational qualifications of the appropriate level, Level 2 in the official data includes GCSEs, and Level 3 includes A levels.

For Level 2 qualifications taken by 16-18 year olds in sixth form colleges and FE colleges, the estimate of the success rate based on official data on retention and achievement in both 1995/96 and 1996/97 is 48%. Turned the other way around, this gives an estimated 52% of enrolments that proved unsuccessful. This compares with the following estimates of the proportion of students who were unsuccessful, based on members of YCS Cohort 8 who were in full-time education in sixth form colleges and FE colleges or in GST at Sweep 1:<sup>41</sup>

Level 2 vocational qualifications excluding GNVQs	47%
GNVQ Level 2	44%
Post-16 GCSEs:	
gained no passes at all	38%
did not gain a pass in all the subjects started	57%

For Level 3 qualifications taken by 16-18 year olds in sixth form colleges and FE colleges, the estimated success rate based on official data is 59% in 1995/96 and 58% in 1996/97. Turned the other way around, this gives an estimated 41% or 42% of enrolments that proved unsuccessful. This compares with the following estimates of the proportion of students who were unsuccessful, based on members of YCS Cohort 8 who were in full-time education in sixth form colleges and FE colleges or in GST at Sweep 1:<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See *Benchmarking Data 1995/96 to 1997/98*, Further Education Funding Council, September 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Young people in GST are included here because many young people taking qualifications through GST are likely to be enrolled part-time in FE colleges.

<sup>42</sup> Some of these YCS estimates differ from those given earlier in the report (for example, in Table 3.5); this is because, for the purposes of comparison with official data, students in school sixth forms have been excluded.

Level 3 vocational qualifications excluding GNVQs	45%
GNVQ Level 3	49%
A levels	
gained no passes at all	27%
did not gain a pass in all the subjects started	62%

Though the comparison is rough at best, this exercise suggests that the estimates presented in this report of the proportion of students who were unsuccessful in post-16 qualifications are broadly consistent with the picture obtained from official data.

Other estimates to compare with those presented in this report come from a pilot research project carried out by the University of Greenwich and the University of Leeds, which tracked individual students through colleges funded by the Further Education Funding Council in three case study areas in England.<sup>43</sup> Students in these areas who were aged 16 at the start of the academic year 1995/96 can be compared with YCS Cohort 8. Amongst full-time students enrolled in colleges as full-time students on Level 2 courses (excluding GCSEs) that were due to be completed within the academic year, 61% were unsuccessful in that they did not gain a Level 2 qualification.<sup>44</sup> This figure can be compared with the following estimates of the proportion of students who were unsuccessful, based on members of YCS Cohort 8 in full-time education in sixth form college or FE college at Sweep 1:

GNVQ Level 2	40%
Level 2 vocational qualifications excluding GNVQs	45%

We would expect fewer members of YCS Cohort 8 to be unsuccessful, as they had over an extra year in which to complete their qualification before being surveyed at Sweep 2. In addition, the case study areas in the Greenwich/Leeds study included more inner-urban dwellers than the England and Wales average, and there was probably also some under-reporting of achievement in colleges because the administrative systems involved were still new in 1995/96.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless the comparison suggests that the YCS data are unlikely to have produced gross over-estimates of the proportion of unsuccessful students.

The Greenwich/Leeds study also tracked unsuccessful students into the academic year 1996/97. This exercise revealed that 25% continued to study for a Level 2 qualification, 6% transferred to a lower level course or a course of unknown level, 13% transferred to other courses and 56% did not re-enrol in a college in the same area. These relatively high levels of continued study and course transfer also accord with YCS findings.

### **Comparisons between post-16 routes**

<sup>43</sup> This is an ESRC- funded project, reference R000222781. The three areas are the city of Leeds, the county of East Sussex including Brighton and Hove, and the London boroughs of Bexley, Greenwich and Lewisham.

<sup>44</sup> These figures were presented by Judith Watson and Patrick Ainley to the FEDA conference on *Research in Further Education* that took place in December 1999. As with official estimates of success rates, only those who were enrolled at some time after November 1st 1995 were included in the study, so the proportion who were unsuccessful does not include those who dropped out early in the academic year. As with the estimates based on YCS presented in this report, course level was based on the notional NVQ equivalent of the highest level course that they were taking.

<sup>45</sup> I am grateful to Judith Watson for these points.

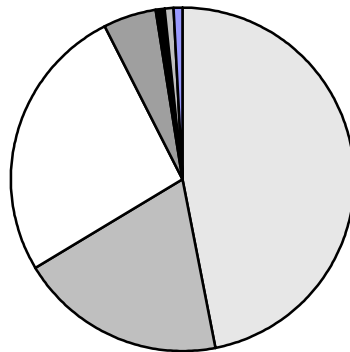
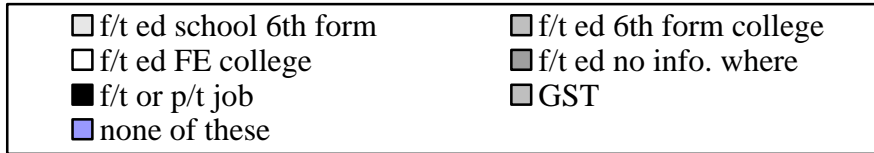
There is considerable policy interest in comparing success rates for particular qualifications across different post-16 routes, but the association of particular qualifications with particular routes makes these comparisons difficult to achieve when sample numbers are limited. Chart 10.3 shows how the share that each post-16 route had of young people working for qualifications at Sweep 1 varied substantially according to the qualification concerned. Note that the chart is based on young people who were still working for these qualifications at Sweep 1, not (like Chart 1.2 in Chapter 1) on all those who had started these qualifications since the end of Year 11. The chart shows, for example, that nearly two-thirds of A level students were in full-time education in school sixth forms, but less than half of post-16 GCSE students were on this route. Full-time students in school sixth forms and FE colleges accounted for equal shares of GNVQ students, whereas with BTECs, nearly two-thirds of students were in full-time education in FE colleges and hardly any in school 6th forms. City and Guilds students were largely divided between full-time education in FE colleges and GST, whereas school 6th forms took as big a share of RSA students as FE colleges and the majority of NVQ students were in GST. Sixth form colleges took a moderate share of a level, AS and GCSE students, but the only vocational students that they catered for in any numbers were those working for RSA qualifications and, to a lesser extent, GNVQs.

Comparison of success rates across post-16 routes is further complicated by the fact that in some cases students taking the same qualification via different routes had different levels of ability as measured by their results in Year 11 GCSEs. Table 10.3 shows that the mean total points score in Year 11 GCSEs of students working for post-Year 11 GCSEs or A levels in FE colleges was lower than the mean score of students working for the same qualifications in school sixth forms or sixth form colleges. Similarly, the mean score of students working for RSA qualifications in FE colleges was lower than that of students working for RSA qualifications in school sixth forms. In the case of every qualification examined in this report, the better the student's Year 11 results, the less likely he or she was to be unsuccessful. Thus when students taking the same qualifications on different post-16 routes have different profiles of Year 11 results, success rates on different routes cannot be sensibly compared unless Year 11 results are taken into account.

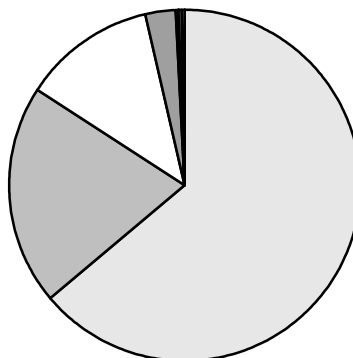
Despite these difficulties, some conclusions can be drawn from the preceding chapters. In the case of A levels, students in school sixth forms and sixth form colleges both had a lower risk of being unsuccessful than students in FE colleges. Although A level students in these institutions had on average better Year 11 GCSE results than their counterparts in FE colleges, statistical modelling showed that school sixth forms and sixth form colleges retained a significant advantage when Year 11 results were taken into account along with a number of other relevant factors. In the case of post-Year 11 GCSEs, 6th form colleges tended to do better than FE colleges, which in turn did better than school sixth forms - a finding that was also confirmed by statistical modelling. Similarly, GNVQ students in both sixth form colleges and FE colleges tended to do better, other things being equal, than GNVQ students in school sixth forms.

**Chart 10.3**  
**Young people studying for each of the major post-16 qualifications at age 16/17:**  
**percentage of total on each post-16 route**

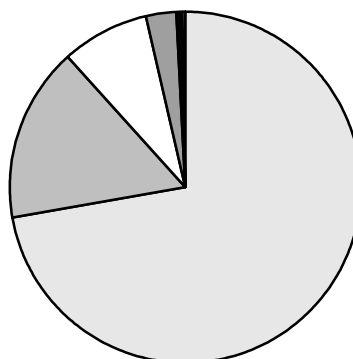
Key:



**Post-Year 11 GCSEs** (*weighted Sweep 1 base N 3048*)



**A levels** (*weighted Sweep 1 base N 6097*)



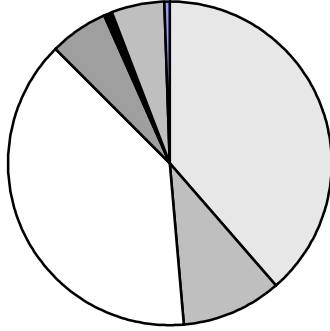
**AS courses** (*weighted Sweep 1 base N 794*)



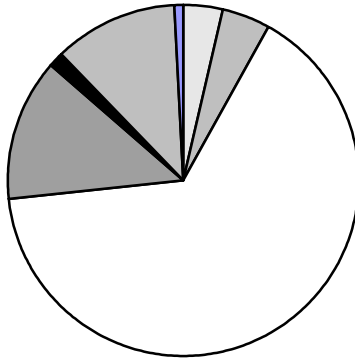
Chart 10.3 continued...

Key:

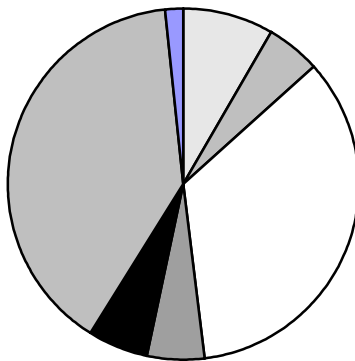
□ f/t ed school 6th form	■ f/t ed 6th form college
□ f/t ed FE college	■ f/t ed no info. where
■ f/t or p/t job	■ GST
■ none of these	



**GNVQs** (weighted Sweep 1 base N 3175)



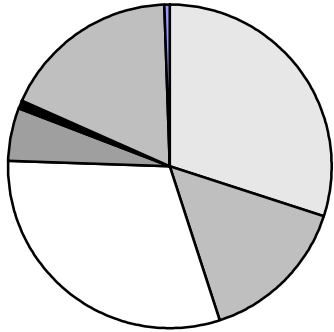
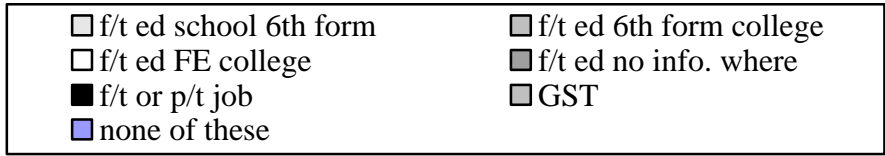
**BTECs** (weighted Sweep 1 base N 1031)



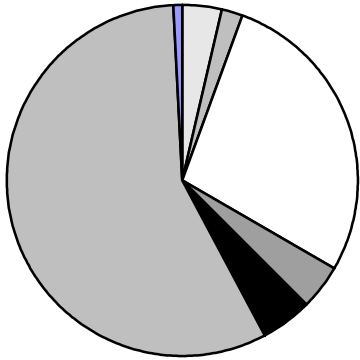
**City and Guilds** (weighted Sweep 1 base N 686)

Chart 10.3 continued...

Key:



RSA (weighted Sweep 1 base N 428)



NVQs (weighted Sweep 1 base N 1044)

Sample numbers for AS, BTEC and RSA qualifications were too small to compare success rates across post-16 routes. With City and Guilds qualifications, there was no evidence of any difference in the success rates of students in full-time education and students in work-based learning in jobs or GST. However, young people working for NVQs were more at risk of being unsuccessful if they were in full-time education than if they were in GST, and this held true both for students with comparatively good Year 11 GCSE results and for students with relatively poor Year 11 results.

**TABLE 10.3 Young people working for qualifications at Sweep 1: mean total points score in Year 11 GCSEs by qualification and main activity at Sweep 1**

<i>Working for:</i>	<i>Main activity at Sweep 1</i>			GST
	<i>Full-time education in:</i>			
	school 6th form	6th form college	FE college	
Post-Year 11 GCSEs	<b>39</b> <i>1428</i>	<b>40</b> <i>598</i>	<b>34</b> <i>795</i>	
A level	<b>55</b> <i>3903</i>	<b>54</b> <i>1230</i>	<b>50</b> <i>748</i>	
AS	<b>56</b> <i>573</i>	<b>54</b> <i>129</i>		
GNVQ	<b>31</b> <i>1227</i>	<b>32</b> <i>318</i>	<b>31</b> <i>1235</i>	
BTEC	<b>36</b> <i>673</i>	<b>34</b> <i>116</i>		
City & Guilds				<b>23</b> <i>269</i>
RSA	<b>48</b> <i>129</i>		<b>36</b> <i>130</i>	
NVQ			<b>27</b> <i>291</i>	<b>25</b> <i>593</i>

*Note:* Means are given in bold; weighted Sweep 1 base Ns are given in italics. Means are not reported where the weighted base N is less than 100.