



Department  
for Education

# **Choices that students make between different post-18 routes and whether these choices are effective and reliably informed: Review of relevant literature and evidence**

**Final Report**

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**Peter Dickinson, Institute for  
Employment Research, University of  
Warwick**



**Social Science in Government**

# Contents

Executive summary	7
Introduction	7
Key Findings	7
1. Introduction	14
1.1. Project aim	14
1.2. Background	15
2. Methodology	20
2.1. Focused Literature Review of Academic Articles	20
2.2. Grey Literature	22
3. Choices between Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships	24
3.1. Introduction	24
3.2. Overview of the decision making pathway of young people	27
3.3. Demographic factors impact on choices between Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships	34
3.4. The impact of access to information, advice and guidance on post-18 choices	42
3.5. The impact of job prospects, future financial returns and lifestyle factors on choice	55
4. Choices within HE and FE	67
4.1. Choice of Provider	67
4.2. Choice of Course	71
5. Finance	75
5.1. How does the available information about finance (e.g. relating to fees, loans, bursaries, accommodation rates etc.) influence the choices students make	75
5.2. What is the impact of the funding system on choice in other developed countries	78
5.3. Summary	82
6. Mature Students	83
6.1. Which factors shape mature students' choices?	83
6.1.1. People as individuals	83
6.1.2. Older people in HE	85
6.1.3. People in employment	86

6.1.4.	People not in employment	88
6.1.5.	Summary	89
7.	Summary	91
7.1.	Choices between Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships	91
7.1.1.	Overview of decision making pathway	91
7.1.2.	Demographic factors impacting on choices between Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships	91
7.1.3.	The impact of access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) on young people's choices between HE, FE and Apprenticeships	92
7.1.4.	The impact of future financial returns, job prospects and 'lifestyle' factors on young people's choices between HE, FE and Apprenticeships	94
7.2.	Choices within HE and FE	94
7.2.1.	Choice of provider	94
7.2.2.	Choice of course	95
7.3.	How financial factors influence choice	96
7.4.	Choice factors for mature students	96
8.	Bibliography	98
9.	Websites consulted	106

## List of tables

Table 1: Profile of 16-18 education and training in England 2010-2016 .....	17
Table 2: Profile of 19+ FE education and training in England 2010/11-2015/16 .....	18
Table 3: Profile of HE participation in England 2012/13-2016/17 by mode of study .....	18
Table 4: Abstract review (N = 156) and Grouping of those saved (N = 98).....	21
Table 5: Timeline of decision making from two studies.....	28
Table 6: When young people first started thinking about what to do after Year 11/13 ....	30
Table 7: When young people made the final decision to do the course they are doing now .....	31
Table 8: Likelihood of going to HE when old enough? .....	31
Table 9: Learner characteristics by route.....	35
Table 10: Online sources of information used in decision-making .....	44
Table 11: Proportion of respondents who strongly disagree with statements about IAG by route.....	48
Table 12: Source of information about apprenticeships.....	53
Table 13: Young people's motivations for applying to an apprenticeship .....	57
Table 14: Factors of above average importance on whether to go to university by SEG – Index scores (MaxDiff method).....	61
Table 15: Factors of below average importance on whether to go to university by SEG – Index scores (MaxDiff method).....	61
Table 16: Websites with relevant literature .....	106

## List of figures

Figure 1: Factors shaping individuals' choices and behaviours towards participation in education and learning .....	26
Figure 2: Post-16 cluster compositions extracted from the LSYPE.....	33
Figure 3: Proportion NEET by characteristic in 2013/14 (for those above the national average).....	37
Figure 4: Average rank of test scores at 22, 42, 60 and 120 months, by SES of parents and early rank position.....	39
Figure 5: How likely do you think it is that you will go to university? By gender .....	41
Figure 6: Which tools and resources young people used in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route.....	43
Figure 7: Whether sought information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (% who agreed/strongly agreed).....	45
Figure 8: Extent to which agree with statements in relation to making decisions about education and training by route (% who agreed/strongly agreed).....	47
Figure 9: How satisfied young people are with their current educational choice by route .....	49
Figure 10: Which individuals young people spoke to in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route.....	50
Figure 11: Helpfulness of individuals in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13.....	51
Figure 12: Encouragement from school for doing an apprenticeship.....	52
Figure 13: Why did Foundation degree applicants decide to enter higher education?....	56
Figure 14; Median earnings by level achieved at age 23 and GCSE attainment score ..	59
Figure 15: For those put off by HE costs, which aspects of funding persuaded you to apply to university? .....	63
Figure 16: Reasons given for not considering an apprenticeship or FE college, by socio economic group .....	65
Figure 17: Why did students choose to study at a given institution?.....	67
Figure 18: Influences on which University.....	68

Figure 19: Apprenticeship Programme Starts by Sector Framework and Gender 2014/15 .....	72
Figure 20: Distribution of share women in girls' and boys' aspired occupations, MCS age 14.....	73
Figure 21: Ease of obtaining information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route.....	76
Figure 22: Ease of sourcing funding information about advanced learner loans.....	77
Figure 23: Simplified average income structure of public universities 2014 (rounded up to the nearest multiple of five).....	79
Figure 24: Overview of older people's career decision-making styles .....	85
Figure 25: Percentage of people who participated in training in 2017 and 2010, by age group .....	87

# Executive summary

## Introduction

DfE commissioned the Institute for Employment Research at Warwick University to undertake a review of relevant literature and evidence into choices that students make between different post-18 vocational, academic and technical, and whether these choices are effective and reliably informed.

There were four main research question areas:

- How are choices made *between* HE, FE and apprenticeship routes?
- How are choices made *within* these three routes?
- What role does finance, and information about finance, play?
- How are choices made by mature students?

The review included:

- A focused literature search of academic articles yielding 184 sources of which 143 were reviewed;
- A 'grey' literature review of non-academic published sources identified through a general web search, and targeted searches of 82 websites. 43 websites generated literature of relevance to the study and 85 documents were included in the review.

The 'grey' literature review produced the most relevant sources used in this report.

## Key Findings

### Choices between Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships

#### Overview of decision making pathway

**Most young people consciously make their post-18 choices in Year 9 (when choosing their GCSE options), in Year 11 (the transition point into post-16 education and training), and in Year 12 (for those in HE).**

**Young people tend not to amass a large amount of information before they make a broad decision.** They tend to decide on a chosen route first (based on an array of factors) and then seek out information about it.

**Young people on academic pathways start to think about their post-18 choices earlier than those on technical routes, and make their final decisions sooner.** While 8 per cent of those on a HE (Academic) pathway first considered their future education

choices in Years 7 or 8, only 2% of HE (Technical) learners did so. One third (33%) of those on HE (Academic) routes made their final decision about their post-18 route during Year 12 and just under half (47%) made it during Year 13. This compares to 19% and 63% respectively for HE (Technical) learners on higher level apprenticeships.

**Evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England suggests that there is little movement between different broad types of post-18 pathway (e.g. higher education, technical education or employment), especially after Year 13.**

This suggests that the 16-18 year old transition point is critical for longer term outcomes in a young person's life.

### **Demographic factors impacting on choices between Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships**

**The choice that young people make between HE, FE and Apprenticeships is heavily influenced by their demographic characteristics. In particular:**

- **Socio-economic group (SEG):** Young people from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to progress to HE. Those in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) or a 16-19 Bursary are more likely to follow FE or Technical routes, as are those whose parents did not go to university. However, the role of SEG in learning and skills decision making is complex, given that it is closely related to prior attainment, which is the best predictor of future outcomes.
- **Prior attainment:** Attainment at age 16 is a key determinant of young people's post-18 pathways, with higher attainment at this age associated with higher rates of post-18 participation in education and training and, specifically, higher rates of participation in HE.
- **Gender:** Take-up of the broad post-18 options is relatively balanced between women and men, although women are more likely than men to enter education and training. (Women account for 57% of HE starts and 54% of apprenticeship starts.) There are significant differences in the subjects chosen by men and women on both technical and academic post-18 routes. In terms of apprenticeships, women are more likely to choose subjects like Hairdressing, Children's Care, Learning and Development and Supporting Teaching in Learning and School. Men are more likely to choose subjects such as Construction, Electrotechnical and Vehicle Maintenance and Repair.

### **The impact of access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) on young people's choices between HE, FE and Apprenticeships**

**Young people pursuing different post-18 pathways have different information needs.** Young people are most interested in finding out about course entry requirements and what they will learn on a course, regardless of their post-18 route (Technical HE/FE, HE Academic and Academic). However, young people looking to HE Academic routes are more likely than those on other routes to want to know about: the satisfaction of



previous learners; costs; the availability of financial support; and job, and earnings outcomes. Young people aiming for Technical FE/HE routes are more interested in how the course is assessed. Large proportions of those on the HE Academic, and Technical FE/HE routes also want to know about location and accessibility.

**Most young people would like careers information in one place, and want personalised IAG that is relevant to them.** Their preference would be to speak to someone face-to-face, by phone or text, and this preference is strongest amongst those on Technical FE/HE routes.

**Most young people are broadly satisfied with the IAG available, however, significant minorities have faced issues.** These issues include not finding the information to help them make a decision (<20%), not finding all the information they wanted to make a fully informed decision (<15%) and not being aware of available IAG (<15%).

**A significant minority of young people are also confused about which sources of information they can trust.** 30% of all young people agreed or strongly agreed that 'I did not know what source of information I could trust to give me accurate information'. Young people on HE Academic pathways were most likely to agree with this (40%).

**Parents/carers and other relatives were the individuals consulted most by young people following each of the three routes – Technical FE/HE, HE (Academic) and FE (Academic) – followed by subject teacher, and friends.**

**Those following technical routes were much less likely to have consulted their subject teachers compared with those following academic routes.** 48 percent of those following technical pathways had consulted subject teachers compared to 69% of those following HE (Academic) and 68% following FE (Academic) routes.

**Young people following technical routes were also less likely than those following other pathways to find subject teachers helpful or very helpful.** Three quarters (74%) of those on FE/HE Technical routes found their subject teachers helpful or very helpful, compared to 91% on the HE Academic route and 90% on the FE Academic route. Perceptions about the helpfulness of other individuals, including careers advisers, family, friends and staff during open days, were broadly similar among young people following different pathways.

**There is some qualitative evidence that IAG is perceived to be biased towards academic routes and away from more technical or vocational options.** In particular, studies highlight the often perceived poor quality of information about apprenticeships given to young people by teachers and careers advisers in schools.

**There are also potential issues with the timing of IAG in relation to technical routes.** *When* pupils are told about apprenticeships is potentially important and

**could influence the effectiveness of information received.** In those schools where more than 6% of pupils graduated into apprenticeships, around 70 per cent told pupils in Year 10 or younger compared to just over 50% of other schools.

**Despite these issues, most young people are satisfied with their chosen route.** 87% of those taking the Technical FE/HE route are satisfied or very satisfied, compared with 89% taking the HE Academic route and 90% on the FE Academic route.

### **The impact of future financial returns, job prospects and 'lifestyle' factors on young people's choices between HE, FE and Apprenticeships**

**Future career prospects are of paramount importance to young people following academic and technical routes.** This is true despite the fact many young people on HE Academic pathways do not have a clear idea about what job they want to go into after completing their course. 38% of those on the HE Academic route agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I know what I want to do when I finish my current course', compared to 75% of those on the Technical HE/FE route and 73% of those on the FE Academic route

**Young people also make their post-18 choices with their future earnings in mind.** Higher levels of qualification lead to higher financial returns. Despite the 2012 rise in tuition fees, HE is still considered a relatively good financial investment, and understanding of this among young people has grown over time. The main reason given by young people for applying to university is to improve their job opportunities and salary prospects.

**This holds true for young people of all social classes.** Although those in lower social classes are more concerned about student debt, and feel more reluctant about entering HE, participation rates among this group have actually increased.

**'Lifestyle factors' play a key role in underpinning the decision of many young people to enter higher education as opposed to other routes, such as apprenticeships.** When asked why they did not choose alternatives to HE, the most popular response, given by four out of five HE applicants, was simply that they 'wanted to go to university'. Qualitative research has found that young people consistently speak about non-academic aspects when considering university. For some, university represents a 'rite of passage', in contrast to apprenticeships which were not seen to provide a narrative about lifestyle.

## Choices within HE and FE

### Choice of provider

**In terms of provider choice, most young people entering HE choose providers because they offer the particular course they want to study.** This is the primary reason given by both Foundation degree students and other HE students for choosing a given provider.

**It is also important to potential HE students that a prospective provider ‘feels right’.** In this context, provider open days are important for students in making their choice of provider, and numerous studies have shown that talking to staff at an open day is among the most important sources of information for young people entering HE.

**The reputation of the institution was also deemed important by young people making their choice of provider.** However, university reputation is a greater influence on students from higher SEGs than lower.

**Among those entering FE, provider proximity was a major factor influencing where to study, but this tended to be by default.** If someone wants to pursue a particular course, programme or qualification, there is often only one General FE college in an area, so the choice of provider is limited.

**Location is also an important factor for mature HE students in choosing their provider, but not for young HE students.** Mature students are more likely to have other commitments (such as jobs and family), and are less likely to be able and willing to relocate to study. However, being closer to home was more important to students from lower SEGs. Over one third (36%) of those in SEGs C1-E rated being able to live at home as having some influence and 25% rated it as the major influence. This compares with 19% and 10% of students in SEGs AB respectively.

### Choice of course

**Gender plays a key role in influencing the course choice of young people pursuing both academic and technical pathways.** For example, in all but three of the top 20 apprenticeship frameworks/standards, the percentage point difference between male and female starts is greater than 20. In 13 of the top 20 frameworks/standards, the difference is greater than 50 percentage points.

**Future earnings potential plays a role in young people’s course choice.** 57% of students sought information on what previous learners on a course now earned, but this varied by route. 48% of FE Academic learners sought this information, compared to 56% of Technical FE/HE and 68% of HE Academic students.

**In terms of course choice, there is some evidence that students whose parents are more educated are more likely to choose subjects for intrinsic reasons, such as**

**enjoyment.** Students whose parents had higher levels of education were more likely to choose arts and humanities subjects, and less likely to choose social sciences, law or business, compared to students whose parents had lower levels of education.

## How financial factors influence choice

**Information about the earnings of previous learners was more important to young people than how much the course cost and whether there was financial support available.** This was true for all routes students chose (HE Academic, FE Academic and HE/FE Technical).

**Young people found information about the cost of and financial support available to them easier to locate than information about earnings.** For example, 88% of those on the HE Academic route found information about cost easy or very easy to get hold of. 71% of the same group found information about financial support easy/very easy to access and 65% found earnings data easy/very easy to access.

**The decision making processes of young people in England are similar to those in other countries.** This is relatively surprising, given the higher tuition fees paid by students in the England compared with other countries. Young people develop a predisposition to pursuing a particular route. HE funding is an important component of this decision, but it is not the main one and is offset to a large extent by the deferred repayment of income contingent loans repaid when earnings reach a certain threshold.

**Similar to England, studies from other countries suggest that young people from low income (and other) backgrounds would benefit from more accurate information about HE, which could help them make more informed choices about whether to consider HE in the first place, which subjects to study and which HE providers to attend.**

## Choice factors for mature students

**Older people's aspirations, choices and intentions evolve over time.** While this is similar to the decision making process of younger people, older people's moments of choice are much less predictable and can be prompted by uncertain events e.g. being made redundant, health issues, bereavement, promotion, changes in caring responsibilities etc.

**Like younger people, older people access a wide range of information and support.** Friends and family tend to be heavily involved.

**Older people's participation in HE appears has been significantly affected by the increase in tuition fees.** Part-time student numbers especially have declined.

**When deciding on HE options, location is a much more important decision-making factor for older students, compared with younger students.** Interest in the subject, earnings and careers and flexibility of learning are also important motivating factors.

**Unlike younger people, older people are more likely to have organisations heavily involved in their education and training decisions.** Employers can be the major decision maker for people in employment, while Jobcentre+ advisers play an important role in supporting unemployed people into work related training.

# 1. Introduction

DfE require a review of relevant literature and evidence into choices that students make between academic, technical, and vocational routes after 18, and whether these choices are effective and reliably informed. This work will feed into the evidence base for the Review of post-18 education and funding announced on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

The literature review should improve our knowledge of how students makes choices about their education and training and what information and guidance they use to make these choices.

## 1.1. Project aim

The aim of the literature and evidence review was to improve the Department for Education's (DfE) knowledge of how students makes choices about their education and training and what information and guidance they use to make these choices.

Within this overall aim, the review seeks to answer the following **key research questions (RQs)**:

1. **(RQ1)** Choices *between* Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships.
  - **(RQ1a)** How do students choose *between* HE, FE and apprenticeship routes and who influences the choices they make (for e.g. parents, peers, pre-18 teachers?)
  - **(RQ1b)** What are the most important factors when marginal students (i.e. those on the HE-FE borderline) choose between HE and FE? For similar outcomes and qualifications; why do students choose more costly HE routes rather than lower cost FE routes?
  - **(RQ1c)** How do students seek out FE and apprenticeship courses and opportunities?
  - **(RQ1d)** What is the effectiveness of different information, advice and guidance (IAG) routes, and which routes do students use?
  - **(RQ1e)** When choosing between HE, FE and apprenticeships what role do the following play:
    - i. Location
    - ii. Outcomes/salary
    - iii. Career pathway/ plan
    - iv. Passion/ personal fulfilment/ career calling
  - **(RQ1e)** How have the factors influencing student choice changed over time? (*i.e.* before 9k tuition fees vs. under the current system).
2. **(RQ2)** Choices *within* HE and FE.
  - **(RQ2a)** Which factors influence students' choice of:
    - i. institution,
    - ii. course,
    - iii. mode of study / length of course (full or part-time or accelerated)

- iv. location (i.e. living at home or leaving home).
- **(RQ2b)** When choosing between courses/ pathways what role do the following play:
  - i. outcomes/salary
  - ii. passion/ personal/ fulfilment/ career calling
  - iii. signalling (of the value of the qualification)
- 3. **(RQ3)** Finance.
  - **(RQ3a)** How does the available information about finance (e.g. relating to fees, loans, bursaries, accommodation rates etc.) influence the choices students make?
  - **(RQ3b)** What is the impact of the funding system on choice in other developed countries? [Wales, USA, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Scandinavian countries].
- 4. **(RQ4)** Mature students.
  - **(RQ4a)** Which factors shape mature students' choices?
  - **(RQ4b)** In which ways do these factors impact on mature students in the following groups:
    - i. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds
    - ii. Those seeking to retrain
    - iii. Those who previously pursued an FE or level 4/5 route and go back to HE?

The report is structured around these research questions.

## 1.2. Background

The post-16 education and training landscape has changed radically. For 16-18 year olds: they must stay in education or training until age 18; there has been a change in the number and range of providers; and an increased emphasis on apprenticeships as a mechanism for meeting the vocational aspirations of young people and the labour market needs of employers. The introduction of T-Level qualifications over the coming years will also provide additional options. For 19-24 year olds the main route continues to be HE, despite the financial costs for students being increased. Advanced and degree level apprenticeships have created progression pathways for young people to higher level qualifications and skills outside of the HE academic route. The main growth in apprenticeship take up has occurred amongst adults, but there has been a sharp decline in adult part-time HE take-up, and in post 19+ government-funded FE. Employer investment in skills training has also been declining since the financial crisis. In addition to the growth in adult apprentices, the National Retraining Programme is also being developed, as well as a successor to the European Social Fund (ESF) which traditionally supports disadvantaged learners.

Alongside these radical changes in the topography and funding of education and training, the quality of Government funded information, advice and guidance (IAG) available to young people and adults since the start of the decade has remained patchy. Evidence

from the Education Select Committee<sup>1</sup> and Ofsted<sup>2</sup> (amongst others) highlighted a particular issue with the quality of careers provision in schools. Recognising the need for improvement, the Government published a Careers Strategy in December 2017<sup>3</sup>, this strategy recognised the variable quality in careers IAG available through England, especially for young people at the key transition points. It retains a school and college led careers system, but provides additional support to improve quality by adopting the Gatsby Foundation’s Benchmarks which define excellence in careers provision. The strategy pledges that adults will have: “...access [to] local, high-quality advice from a National Careers Service adviser, with more bespoke advice and support available when you need it most”<sup>4</sup>.

For over a decade there has been an intention to make education and training more demand-led. A key element of the Post-16 Skills Plan is empowering people – young people, adults and their formal and informal advisers – to access IAG in order to make more informed decisions. As we have seen, the education and training landscape is becoming more complex which requires effective careers IAG so that choices are well informed. The Industrial Strategy identified the issues for young people:

“People choosing apprenticeships or courses in colleges currently face significant complexity when selecting and applying for a course... We will therefore explore how to give technical education students clear information and better support throughout the application process, with a similar platform to UCAS, which will also make it easier for students to compare options in technical education and higher education”<sup>5</sup>.

For adults too, there is significant evidence that the provision of high quality, impartial careers information and guidance is key to supporting choices and transitions into education, training and employment (see for example Hooley et al., 2012<sup>6</sup>). It also has a crucial role to play in encouraging and supporting those disengaged or disadvantaged to engage in education and learning activities.

### **1.2.1. Post 16 education and training**

Table 1 provides a context to the report, describing the education and training of 16-18 year olds since the start of the decade. There have been significant falls in the number of 16, 17 and 18 year olds who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

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<sup>1</sup> House of Commons Education Committee March 2015), Closing the gap: the work of the Education Committee in the 2010–15 Parliament. Eighth Report of Session 2014–15

<sup>2</sup> Ofsted (2013), Going in the right direction? Careers guidance in schools from September 2012. See also Ofsted’s Chief Inspectors evidence to the Education Committee 16 September 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education (December 2017), Careers strategy: making the most of everyone’s skills and talents

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> HMG (January 2017) Building our Industrial Strategy: Green Paper, London.

<sup>6</sup> Hooley T. et al (2012) Tackling unemployment, supporting business and developing careers. UK Commission for Employment and Skills.



Whilst there have been slight falls in the number of young people entering full-time education (apart from 17 year olds), this has been more than offset by large rises in young people entering work based learning (which in most cases will be apprenticeships), particularly for 17 and 18 year olds. For these two age groups there have also been large increases in the numbers entering Employer Funded Training.

**Table1: Profile of 16-18 education and training in England 2010-2016**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	% change 2010-2016
<b>Age 16</b>								
Full-time education	556,000	538,500	540,400	556,900	556,400	549,000	537,000	-3%
Work Based Learning	23,200	23,100	20,700	21,300	22,400	24,200	24,100	4%
Employer Funded Training	10,200	10,800	10,300	8,300	11,200	11,200	10,100	-1%
Other Education and Training	27,900	32,500	31,200	32,800	21,500	22,500	20,700	-26%
Not in any education or training - in employment	9,200	6,900	6,900	2,800	2,600	3,600	4,400	-52%
Not in any education, employment or training (NEET)	33,600	35,000	37,800	26,400	23,000	20,000	17,700	-47%
<b>Age 17</b>								
Full-time education	488,800	485,300	484,800	481,800	500,200	493,300	491,400	1%
Work Based Learning	40,100	39,900	39,000	39,900	43,500	45,500	47,500	18%
Employer Funded Training	19,900	20,700	19,200	21,100	21,800	23,500	22,500	13%
Other Education and Training	32,800	38,900	35,600	38,300	27,000	25,000	22,600	-31%
Not in any education or training - in employment	27,500	24,500	25,800	29,600	24,800	23,200	18,200	-34%
Not in any education, employment or training (NEET)	54,100	55,900	46,200	40,800	37,200	31,700	33,000	-39%
<b>Age 18</b>								
Full-time education	334,300	338,500	324,300	327,600	329,600	333,400	326,600	-2%
Work Based Learning	48,100	47,200	51,600	53,800	55,900	59,400	60,200	25%
Employer Funded Training	37,300	36,900	45,000	45,500	50,300	50,400	51,700	39%
Other Education and Training	39,200	42,300	44,000	42,800	36,600	37,900	34,800	-11%
Not in any education or training - in employment	135,200	103,200	108,500	102,500	99,100	106,000	111,700	-17%
Not in any education, employment or training (NEET)	95,000	102,100	97,400	84,100	88,100	74,400	63,500	-33%

Source: National Statistics, SFR various numbers Participation in education, training and employment

Table 2 shows the number and profile of adults (19+) in Government funded education and training. Since 2010/11 there has been a decline of 27% in the number of adults participating in post-19 education and training, including Community Learning and English and Maths (18% and 16% respectively). However, there has been a substantial increase in the number of adult apprentices (35%).

**Table 2: Profile of 19+ FE education and training in England 2010/11-2015/16**

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	% change 2010/11-2015/16
<b>Adults (19+)</b>							
<b>All education and training</b>	3,163,200	3,149,700	3,280,600	2,929,600	2,613,700	2,324,700	-27%
<b>All apprenticeships</b>	665,900	806,500	868,700	851,500	871,800	899,400	35%
<b>Education and training</b>	1,213,400	1,518,000	1,782,200	1,603,700	1,355,000	1,098,500	-9%
<b>English and Maths</b>	961,800	1,083,000	1,049,600	951,800	905,600	803,800	-16%
<b>Community Learning</b>	699,400	683,300	684,700	657,200	609,700	570,600	-18%

Source: National Statistics (2017), Further education and skills: October 2017

Table 3 shows the number of students participating in HE by the level of study and mode of participation. Between 2012/13 and 2016/17 the total number of students fell slightly by 1%. However, this masks a big change between different levels of qualification and mode of study. The total number of part-time students fell significantly by 23%, and for each level of study, especially 'other' undergraduates (i.e. non-degree undergraduates). There were, however, significant increases in the number of full-time under- and postgraduates. As these are the largest groups of learners, this has offset the fall in the number of FTE (full-time equivalent) students. The numbers on full-time other undergraduate courses fell by 45%.

**Table 3: Profile of HE participation in England 2012/13-2016/17 by mode of study**

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	% change 12/13-16/17
<b>Full-time postgraduate</b>	244,055	250,555	251,680	252,105	266,510	9%
<b>Full-time undergraduate</b>	1,075,860	1,095,175	1,099,325	1,143,385	1,180,640	10%
<b>Full-time other undergraduate</b>	64,415	47,745	40,970	36,245	35,730	-45%
<b>Full-time total</b>	<b>1,384,330</b>	<b>1,393,475</b>	<b>1,391,975</b>	<b>1,431,735</b>	<b>1,482,880</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Part-time postgraduate</b>	199,975	194,010	190,905	188,280	190,960	-5%
<b>Part-time undergraduate</b>	182,720	166,945	152,050	143,255	135,100	-26%
<b>Part-time other undergraduate</b>	148,825	120,595	109,165	98,075	83,040	-44%
<b>Part-time total</b>	<b>531,520</b>	<b>481,550</b>	<b>452,120</b>	<b>429,610</b>	<b>409,100</b>	<b>-23%</b>
<b>All students</b>	1,915,850	1,875,025	1,844,095	1,861,345	1,891,980	-1%

Source: HESA (2018), Who's studying in HE?

As has been discussed, these overall numbers hide fundamental and significant changes in the type, level and mode of study, and with further reforms on the horizon and current reforms settling in, further changes are likely.

## 2. Methodology

The approach used in this study was a rapid evidence assessment (REA). This is a structured and rigorous search of published evidence, though it is not as extensive or formalised as a systematic review. The REA was primarily based on a focused review of relevant academic, peer-reviewed journal articles and a review of relevant 'grey' literature published on websites of relevant national and international organisations.

### 2.1. Focused Literature Review of Academic Articles

#### 2.1.1. Search Summary

The focus literature search was undertaken across the following databases: EBSCOhost, Emerald, ProQuest and Web of Science. The search process was in iterative exploratory process the main components of which were:

- The primary search terms were choice OR decision with secondary search terms around education (further, higher, vocational and appren\*), and using search terms for the UK and its composite countries, rather than using geographic limiters for the UK and its constituent parts.
- Combining the above search terms still accumulated a large number 12,000+, however, it was clear that many of these were in the field of health.
- The next step in the process was to use subject area and journal name to target education choice and decision making. This approach excluded all health and medical subject areas and journals, but included those in the fields of behavioural science, economics, education, psychology and sociology.
- A review of publication titles further reduced the total.
- Originally the timeframe for inclusion was the past fifteen years i.e. 2003 to the present day. However, given the abundance of references this was shortened to 2005 onwards. In addition, articles and reports focusing on specific aspects of earlier education policy were omitted e.g. evaluation of Education Action Zones.

As a result of these new searches, 398 titles (or a brief look at the abstract) were reviewed.

Once all duplicates were removed, the total number of abstracts saved for review from all searches (across the four databases) was 184.

#### 2.1.2. Abstract Review Stage

Table 4 shows the number of abstracts that were reviewed against the inclusion criteria and the initial groups they were assigned to.

**Table 4: Abstract review (N = 156) and Grouping of those saved (N = 98)**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Number of abstracts reviewed</b>	<b>Number IDed for full article review</b>
Choice <i>between</i> FE, HE and apprenticeships	398	57
Choice <i>within</i> FE, HE and apprenticeships		38
Finance		36
Mature students		12
<b>Total</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>143</b>

The references have been grouped according to their appropriateness to the four main research questions. References have not been duplicated between the four groups. Given the close approximation of the research questions, a number of sources will cover more than one questions. Therefore, the number of references for each research question will be a minimum of relevant material.

### **2.1.3. Emergent Findings from Abstract Review Stage**

A brief summary is given of emergent findings for each of the groups listed as ‘closest in relevance’ in Table 4, followed by the references to the full articles.

#### **2.1.3.1. Issues at the Abstract Review Stage were**

- There was a disproportionate focus on HE as opposed to FE and apprenticeships. Few sources focus on apprenticeships specifically.
- The review has not focused specifically on the post-18 age group. In part this is due to the decision making process beginning earlier, as well as few articles (apart from HE) focusing on this age group (apart from those that specifically consider mature learners).
- However, the main reason is (from a brief review of the abstracts and experience of research in this area) that decision making and the choice framework are subject to generic influences and parameters. For example, the role of cognitive biases in the behavioural literature, and agency in the sociological literature.

#### **2.1.3.2. Choice between FE, HE and apprenticeships**

- The publications come from a wide range of publications covering behavioural science, careers counselling, economics, psychology, sociology and other subject areas (e.g. urban studies).

- As mentioned above, many sources focus on the 14-19 age range and the determinants of choice and the decision making process of young people.

### 2.1.3.3. Choice within FE, HE and apprenticeships

- Most references relate to choices between different HE institutions.
- A number focus on the gender difference of different occupational (and therefore VET) choices.
- A small number focus on choice of particular subjects (mostly STEM).

### 2.1.3.4. Finance

- Most references focus on the financial decision, as opposed to the use of information about that decision.
- There are a small number of sources looking at financial choices and decision making in other countries.

### 2.1.3.5. Mature

- This group has the fewest number of references.
- However, a number of the references in other groups will be relevant here as they relate to the generic underpinnings of decision making and choice e.g. social capital and rational choice.

## 2.2. Grey Literature

Grey literature consists of materials and research produced by organizations outside of the normal commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels. Common grey literature publication types include reports (annual, research, technical, project, etc.), working papers, government documents, white papers and evaluations. They are not peer reviewed.

The grey literature review covered **82 websites** identified as relevant (through the researchers' experience) to the main research questions. This covered the websites of international organisations (such as the ILO and UNESCO), European and UK governmental organisations (e.g. Cedefop and the Department for Education), other governmental organisations (for example, Ofsted), as well as research institutions and third sector organisations (TSOs). A full list of websites visited is contained in Section 9.

Initially, the research and/or publications page (or similar) of relevant sites was reviewed to identify any literature relevant to the study. In addition, a site search was undertaken using the following search terms separately: choice\*; decision\*; further, higher, vocational and appren\*. Finally, a Google search was undertaken using the search terms of the focused review.

**43 websites** generated literature of broad relevance to the study, and a total of **85 documents** were identified.

## 3. Choices between Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships

### 3.1. Introduction

This section focuses on how individuals make choices between the academic, technical and vocational routes after the age of 18 (i.e. Year 13).

#### Background

Over the past decade the post-16 options of young people have been radically transformed:

- The funding regime for HE (which now includes tuition fees, and no longer includes grant support for low income families) has changed.
- The introduction of the apprenticeship levy has switched apprenticeship funding from the Government to employers.
- There has been an expansion in the number and occupational range of higher level and degree apprenticeships.
- Technical Level Qualifications (T-Levels) are being introduced at Level 3 for 16-18 year olds to provide a high quality technical route as an alternative to A levels.

The new Careers Strategy, based on the Gatsby Foundation's Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance<sup>7</sup> will take time to implement<sup>8</sup>. The Government is investing over £70m each year until 2020, including funding for the National Careers Service and The Careers & Enterprise Company, but it is uncertain what additional funding will be available beyond this period. Although there are debates around the amount and quality of Government funded IAG, there has grown a myriad of alternative information sources, mostly on the internet.

#### Summary of factors influencing choice

There is a wealth of evidence on the barriers and motivators underpinning learning and skills and labour market choices. These (summarised in Figure 1) include<sup>9</sup>:

- Extrinsic factors:
  - Home and family e.g. social background;

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<sup>9</sup> P. Dickinson (March 2011) op cit



- Learning attainment and provision e.g. quality of schooling, availability of progression pathways;
  - IAG e.g. type and quality available;
  - Wider social relations e.g. peer group and other social networks;
  - Work e.g. size and sector of employer; and,
  - Financial e.g. monetary resources available to an individual and their family.
- Intrinsic factors:
    - Progression and aspiration e.g. clarity and linearity of progression routes;
    - Disposition e.g. levels of motivation and self-esteem; and,
    - Attitudes and barriers e.g. attitudes and interest in learning.

As described below, the picture is nuanced. Different drivers and challenges can have different levels of importance depending on what point an individual is in their learning and skills, and labour market pathway.



## 3.2. Overview of the decision making pathway of young people

Research by CFE Research<sup>10</sup> and the Careers and Enterprise Company (Moments of Choice) provide summaries of the decision making process for young people (see Table 5)<sup>11 12</sup>. The research by CFE Research identifies four groups of young people (though does not indicate the relative sizes of these groups), based on how and when they make their post-18 choices:

- **Early deciders**, those individuals with strong career aspirations and self-motivation, who often develop their choices (e.g. in relation to a particular career or a desire to go to university) before 16 years old.
- **Drifters**, those who were more 'risk averse' or without a specific career plan in mind, who were most likely to either drift into continued education.
- **Switchers**, those who were more likely to change route in the final year of college or sixth form with a view to moving into a new programme of study and/or employment.
- **Undecided**, those who remained unclear about their future pathways.

Young people tend not to amass a large amount of information before they make a broad decision. Almost two thirds of young people (63%) consult two or fewer resources (i.e. information sources) when making a decision about what to do after their Year 11/13<sup>13</sup>.

They tend to arrive at a decision on a chosen route first (based on an array of factors) and then seek out information about it. For many young people, their choices are developed before 16 years old, and for many these choices are maintained. That choice may be a particular career or a desire simply to go to university, but it appears that for many young people it is a stable trajectory.

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<sup>10</sup> CFE Research with D. Hughes (December 2017), User insight research into post-16 choices. Department for Education

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Careers and Enterprise Company (2016), Moments of Choice: How education outcomes data can support better informed career decisions

<sup>13</sup> CFE Research with D. Hughes (December 2017)

**Table 5: Timeline of decision making from two studies**

Timeframe	Decision making process
Pre-14 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At this age young people were already engaging with ideas about their chosen career path.</li> <li>Young people recalled that they expressed enjoyment or an aspiration to explore an area of particular interest in more detail.</li> </ul>
At School (14+ and 16+ choices)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When making choices about their 14+ and 16+ options, participants moved to more concrete potential educational and career opportunities.</li> <li>The majority reported making key decisions at age 16.</li> <li><b>Early deciders</b> (those individuals with strong career aspirations and self-motivation) reported the signposting to HE easy to understand compared to FE and apprenticeship options.</li> <li>For the majority of respondents, finance and transport issues came into sharp focus at this stage.</li> </ul>
Sixth Form or FEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The majority of young people had formulated general, and in some cases, very specific views about their plans for when they left formal education.</li> <li>This is the point where key decisions about whether to participate in HE or to follow other options such as apprenticeships became more apparent.</li> </ul>
Final year of College or Sixth form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employability and financial security often came into sharp focus for young people at this stage when a final choice about next stage plans needed to be made.</li> <li><b>Drifters</b> (those who were more 'risk averse' or without a specific career plan in mind) were most likely to either drift into continued education.</li> <li><b>Switchers</b> were more likely to change route at this point with a view to moving into a new programme of study and/or employment.</li> <li>In some cases, respondents remained unclear about their future career pathways (the <b>undecided</b>).</li> </ul>

Source: CFE Research (2017)

# Moments of choice

## Key



**'Hard choice' prompts:** moments where a necessary decision with immediate consequence forces the consideration of career options. These occur at set times, so approximate age is noted in the circle.



**Feedback points:** the resulting experience of a decision, which can either reaffirm a student's choice or lead them to reconsider their career direction. These are represented with a range over which students can develop a view as to their experience.



**Idea-forming events:** can be planned or unplanned, and plant the seed for a student to consider a particular job, career or study pathway. These can happen at any moment, and with varying frequency. They are placed for illustrated purposes only.

## Contextual factors

These factors can inform a sense of what is attainable, and create a 'running hypothesis' of likely career or post-school destination.

### Community setting

- Community destination norms
- Industries & employers that loom large locally

### Home setting

- Parental aspirations
- Family destination norms
- Cultural norms

## Early years and primary school



Childhood experiences



Interactions with and between adults

## Secondary school



Careers depicted in TV programmes and other media

GCSE subject selection

13-14

Experience of GCSE subjects  
- Enjoyment  
- Effort  
- Achievement

15

Work experience

Choice of work experience



Scheduled meetings with Career Guidance Professionals

Post GCSE decision  
- 6<sup>th</sup> Form  
- FE College  
- Apprenticeship  
- Disengagement

16



Careers fairs and open days

Choice of post-18 pathway:  
- University  
- College/Apprenticeship  
- Work

17-18

Work experience

Experience of academic or vocational qualification

## 18+ Path

University

Further vocational training

Paid employment or in-work training

Unemployment

Source: BIT

Source: Careers and Enterprise Company (2016)

Research by CFE Research<sup>14</sup> found that most young people consciously make their post-16 and post-18 choices in Year 9 (when choosing their GCSE options), at Year 11 (the transition point into post-16 education and training), and in their Year 12 (for those in HE).

Young people on academic pathways start to think about their post-18 choices earlier than those on technical routes, and make their final decisions about post-18 routes sooner.

Eight per cent of participants in HE (Academic) reported that they first considered their future education choices in Years 7 or 8, only 2% of HE (Technical) learners did so.

**Table 6: When young people first started thinking about what to do after Year 11/13**

Year	%
In primary school	7%
In Year 7 or 8	8%
When I had to decide on my GCSE options in Year 9	21%
During Year 10	16%
During Year 11	31%
During Year 12*	22%
During Year 13*	10%
I'm not sure	7%

Base=2,017 (For options with an \* the base=620)

Source: CFE Research (December 2017)

Young people on academic routes were also clearer about their decision making pathway: only 7% of FE (Academic) learners were unsure when they made their final decision about what to study after Year 11, compared to one fifth (21%) of those on FE (Technical) routes.

For young people making post-18 choices: one third (33%) of those on HE (Academic) routes made their final decision during Year 12 and just under half (47%) made it during Year 13. This compares to 19% and 63% respectively for HE (Technical) learners on higher level apprenticeships.

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<sup>14</sup> CFE Research with D. Hughes (December 2017), User insight research into post-16 choices. Department for Education

**Table 7: When young people made the final decision to do the course they are doing now<sup>15</sup>**

Year	%
In Year 7 or 8	1%
When I had to decide on my GCSE options in Year 9	5%
During Year 10	6%
During Year 11	51%
During Year 12*	31%
During Year 13*	50%
I'm not sure	12%

Base=2,017 (For options with an \* the base=620)

Source: CFE Research (December 2017)

Research undertaken by the Sutton Trust<sup>16</sup> found that for many post-18 HE choices were increasingly being made before they were 16. When asked how likely or unlikely they were to go into HE, only one in ten 11-16 year olds (11%) said they were not sure in 2017, compared with 19 per cent responding before the financial crisis in 2008.

**Table 8: Likelihood of going to HE when old enough?**

Year	Base:	Very likely	Fairly likely	Fairly unlikely	Very unlikely	Not sure	Not stated	Likely	Unlikely	Net likely
2003	2469	40%	31%	8%	5%	14%	2%	71%	13%	58%
2004	2303	33%	36%	7%	5%	18%	*	70%	12%	58%
2005	2709	34%	35%	7%	5%	18%	1%	69%	11%	58%
2006	2334	34%	37%	5%	4%	19%	1%	71%	9%	62%
2007	2417	37%	34%	8%	4%	17%	1%	71%	11%	60%
2008	2387	39%	34%	6%	3%	19%	1%	72%	8%	64%
2009	2447	41%	32%	6%	4%	13%	5%	73%	9%	64%
2010	2700	39%	41%	6%	2%	11%	2%	80%	7%	72%
2011	2739	39%	39%	7%	3%	10%	1%	78%	10%	68%
2012	2757	38%	43%	6%	2%	9%	1%	81%	8%	73%
2013	2595	38%	43%	6%	3%	8%	1%	81%	9%	72%

<sup>15</sup> CFE Research (December 2017) op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Ipsos MORI (2017), Young People Omnibus Survey 2017. Sutton Trust

2014	2796	36%	42%	7%	3%	10%	2%	78%	10%	68%
2015	2488	36%	43%	7%	3%	9%	1%	79%	10%	69%
2016	2555	36%	41%	8%	3%	10%	2%	77%	11%	66%
2017	2612	33%	41%	10%	4%	11%	2%	74%	14%	60%

Source: Sutton Trust Young People Omnibus Survey; Ipsos MORI 2017

In terms of the broad categories of pathways, analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) found that there were six distinct clusters of post-16 activities<sup>17</sup>: higher education, vocational education, employment after some FE, early work orientation, NEET after some FE, and long term NEET. Figure 2 shows the progression routes of these six clusters over time (for 45 months after leaving full-time education at 16) in terms of the proportion of young people participating in education, employment, apprenticeships and NEET<sup>18</sup>. For example, for those progressing into HE the graph is almost entirely blue denoting that the large majority of young people entering HE took no other route apart from education. This contrasts with the long term NEET group who undertake a variety of provision (education, apprenticeships and employment), before most (more than 80% of this group) become long term NEET at around 32 months after leaving full-time education.

There is little movement between these different broad types of activity, especially after Year 13. This suggests that the 16-18 year old transition point is critical for longer term outcomes in a young person's life. HE is the choice for just under half of young people (45%), followed by early work (21%), and then employment after some FE (15%). As far as young people who are NEET are concerned most stay NEET, whether they become NEET at Year 11 or 13.

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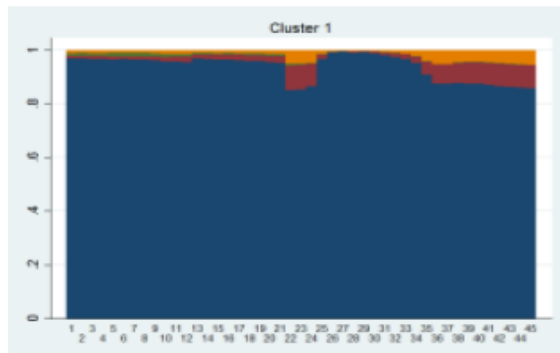
<sup>17</sup> I. Schoon, M. Lyons-Amos (2017), A socio-ecological model of agency: The role of structure and agency in shaping education and employment transitions in England. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* 2017 Volume 8 Issue 1 Pp 35 – 56

<sup>18</sup> The I. Schoon, M. Lyons-Amos (2017) study tracked school leavers between October 2006 to May 2010.

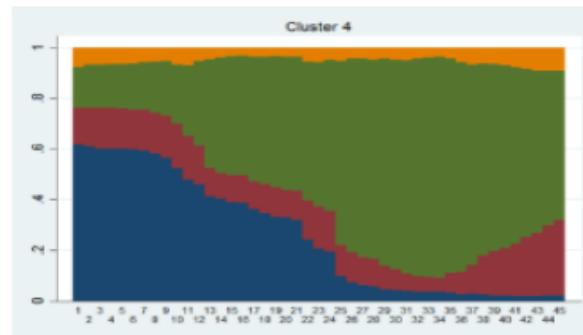


Figure 2: Post-16 cluster compositions extracted from the LSYPE

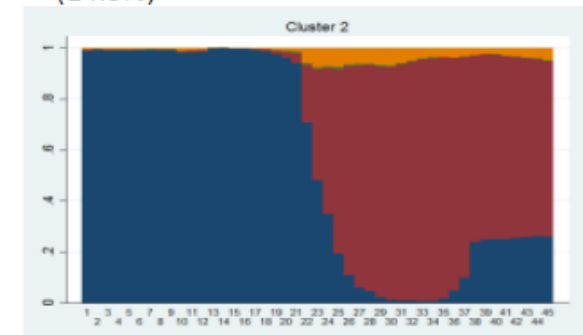
a) Higher education (45.2%)



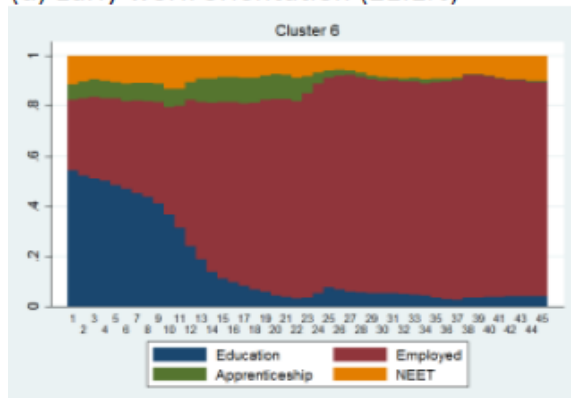
b) Vocational education (6.5%)



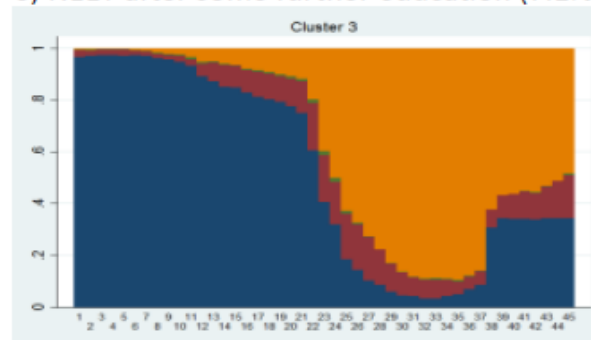
c) Employment after some further education (14.5%)



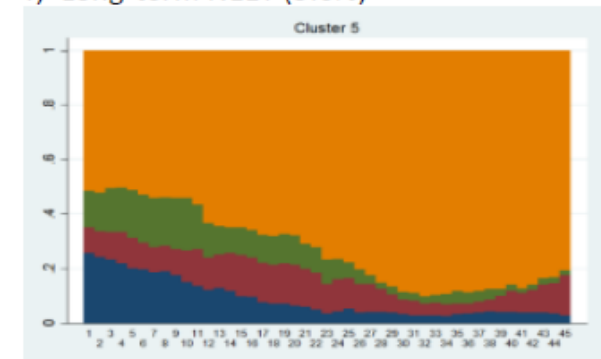
d) Early work orientation (21.1%)



e) NEET after some further education (7.1%)



f) Long-term NEET (5.6%)



Note: X axis = months (1-45 since leaving school in October 2006); Y axis = percent

Source: LYSPE October 2006-May 2010 in Schoon I., Lyons-Amos M. (2017)

### 3.2.1. Summary

**Most young people consciously make their post-18 choices in Year 9 (when choosing their GCSE options), in Year 11 (the transition point into post-16 education and training), and in Year 12 (for those in HE).**

**Young people tend not to amass a large amount of information before they make a broad decision.** They tend to decide on a chosen route first (based on an array of factors) and then seek out information about it.

**Young people on academic pathways start to think about their post-18 choices earlier than those on technical routes, and make their final decisions sooner.** While 8 per cent of those on a HE (Academic) pathway first considered their future education choices in Years 7 or 8, only 2% of HE (Technical) learners did so. One third (33%) of those on HE (Academic) routes made their final decision about their post-18 route during Year 12 and just under half (47%) made it during Year 13. This compares to 19% and 63% respectively for HE (Technical) learners on higher level apprenticeships.

**Evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England suggests that there is little movement between different broad types of post-18 pathway (e.g. higher education, technical education or employment), especially after Year 13.** This suggests that the 16-18 year old transition point is critical for longer term outcomes in a young person's life.

## 3.3. Demographic factors impact on choices between Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships

### 3.3.1. Socioeconomic group

A key feature of the analysis of many studies is that the choice architecture, information, advice and guidance (IAG), and spread of options is much more restricted for those from lower SEGs<sup>19</sup>.

Table 9 shows a variety of learner characteristics by route, many of which are closely related to SEG. For example, those in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) or a 16-19 Bursary are much more likely to be on the Technical FE/HE route, as are those whose parents did not go to university, and if their parent did an apprenticeship.

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<sup>19</sup> There are similar arguments made for other disadvantaged groups (e.g. ethnicity and disability) but it was agreed that the study would not explore these.

Within specific groups of 16-18 year olds, those from disadvantaged areas are less likely to progress to HE and, if they do, are more likely to be undertaking non-degree courses, and attending HE on FE<sup>20</sup>.

**Table 9: Learner characteristics by route**

		FE (academic)	HE (academic)	Technical (FE / HE)
Type of school attended	Maintained School	83.4%	74.3%	87.1%
	Independent	7.1%	10.2%	3.6%
	Grammar School	77.0%	11.4%	5.0%
	Other type of school	0.9%	3.3%	3.7%
	Don't know	0.9%	0.8%	0.7%
	Base	560	510	920
Highest qualification	No qualifications	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%
	Level 1	2.1%	0.0%	5.9%
	Level 2	68.8%	1.7%	47.6%
	Level 3	27.3%	96.4%	44.3%
	Level 4 or above	0.5%	1.3%	0.4%
	I'm not sure	1.1%	0.4%	1.3%
	Base	561	530	926
FSM or 16-19 Bursary	Yes	25.9%	20.7%	36.8%
	No	74.1%	79.3%	63.2%
	Base	491	468	809
Learner has a disability, learning difficult or long-term physical or mental health condition	Yes	11.9%	12.3%	13.7%
	No	83.6%	84.2%	83.2%
	Prefer not to say	4.5%	3.6%	3.1%
	Base	561	530	926
If parents go to university	Yes	41.0%	45.1%	28.6%
	No	57.4%	52.6%	65.7%
	I don't know	1.6%	2.3%	5.7%
	Base	561	530	926
If parent did an apprenticeship	Yes	10.2%	9.6%	15.6%
	No	82.9%	84.0%	74.5%
	I don't know	7.0%	6.4%	9.9%
	Base	561	530	926
Gender	Male	43.5%	59.6%	40.8%
	Female	56.5%	40.4%	59.2%
	Base	561	530	926
Ethnicity	Asian/Asian British	13.7%	14.2%	10.3%
	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	3.6%	2.3%	6.8%

<sup>20</sup> S. Smith et al (September 2015) op cit.

	Mixed / multiple ethnic groups	3.9%	3.4%	3.3%
	White	76.5%	77.7%	76.6%
	Other ethnic group	1.4%	1.3%	1.4%
	Prefer not to say	0.9%	1.1%	1.6%
	Base	561	530	926

Source: CFE Research (December 2017)

The role of SEG in learning and skills decision making is complex. In part, SEG is closely related to prior attainment which is the best predictor of future outcomes (see below). Others believe it is due to the influence of parents either through the socialisation process and/or at the point of decision in encouraging or discouraging various options (see below). Whilst others conclude it is the role of agency and social capital which includes or excludes different options, and young people’s perceptions of which options are ‘right’ for them.

Hedges and Speckesser (2017)<sup>21</sup> examined whether the educational choices that young people make after the completion of their GCSEs (at age 16) are influenced by their peers. The authors conclude that:

“...higher ability peers reduce the likelihood that an individual will choose a vocational course at age 16 after controlling for the individual’s own ability. We also find a very strong effect of household income on education choices, showing that the more deprived a student’s background is, the more likely they are to opt for a vocational trajectory over an academic one”.

Whilst an individual’s ability (as measured by their KS2 score) is the main driver of educational choice (technical or academic) peers significantly impact on the choice as well. Furthermore, the study found that SEG (as measured by deprivation using the IMD) was a significant predictor of education choice.

One of the problems is that SEG is often used as a catch-all term to encompass a range of factors – deprivation, disadvantage and disaffection – which are often not related to SEG.

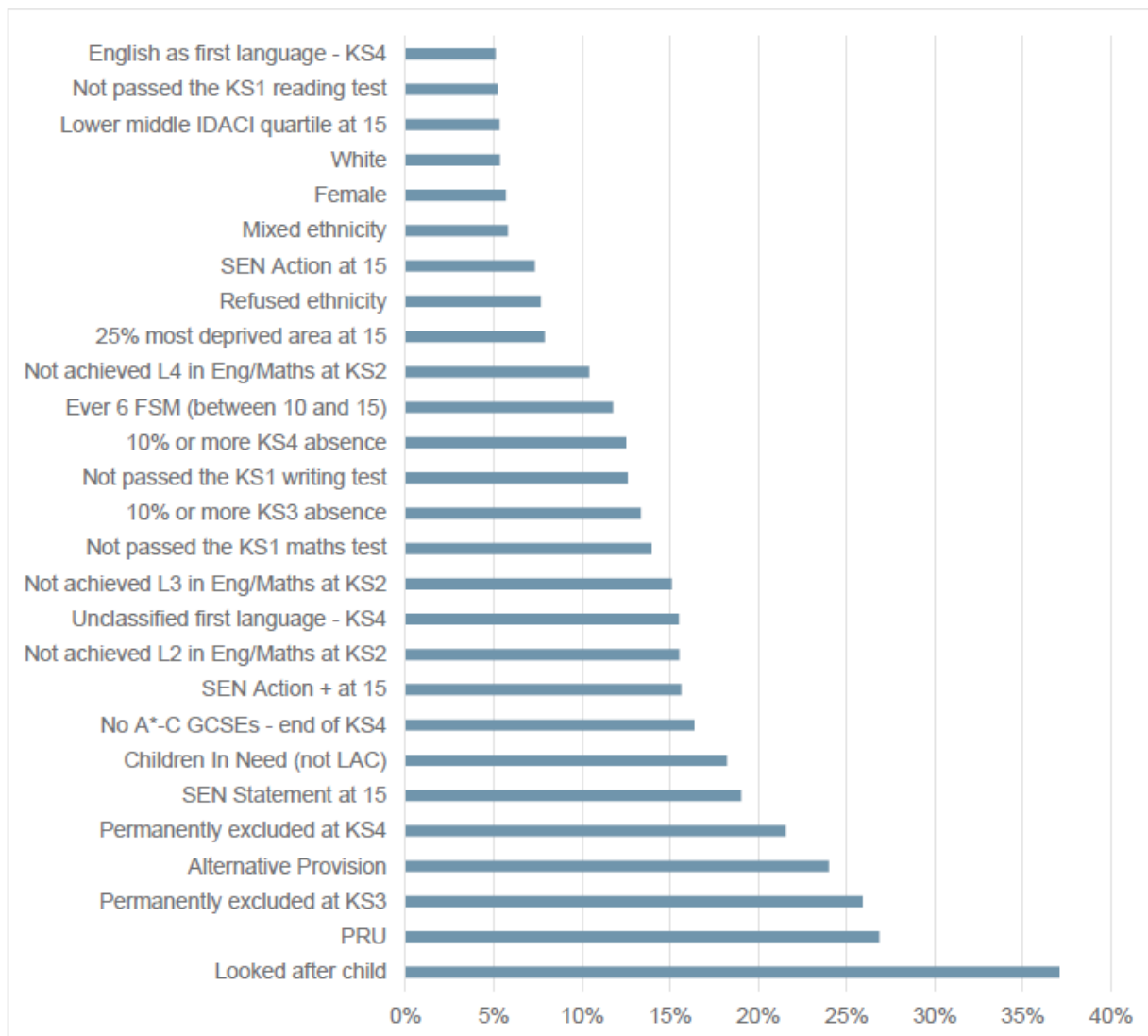
In a study of young people who are NEET<sup>22</sup>, analysis identified the propensity to be within the young people who are NEET group. Figure 3 shows that the top 16 characteristics are not related to SEG but to whether a child is looked after, their attendance, their attainment, and whether they are assessed as having a Special Educational Need (SEN). Of these 27 characteristics only two – Free School Meals

<sup>21</sup> S. Hedges and S. Speckesser (November 2017), Peer Effects and Social Influence in Post-16 Educational Choice. CVER Research Discussion Paper 008

<sup>22</sup> Department for Education (February 2018), Characteristics of young people who are long-term NEET

(FSM) and living in a deprived area – can be identified as indirect measures of SEG, and the latter is marginally above gender and ethnicity.

**Figure 3: Proportion NEET by characteristic in 2013/14 (for those above the national average)**



Source: Department for Education (February 2018)

Linked to the literature on socio-economic group, Anders et al. (2017) found that the subjects that young people study from age 14 onwards is determined in part by the demographic intake of their schools and impacts on their future academic and labour market outcomes<sup>23</sup>. The choice of subject at 14-16 was believed to prime future learning and skills choices. The authors ranked subjects according to their academic selectivity, by calculating the average prior academic attainment of pupils who study for each one. This placed languages and science subjects at the top, and ‘applied’ subjects (e.g. Applied Hospitality) at the bottom. They found that:

<sup>23</sup> J. Anders et al (2017), The role of schools in explaining individuals’ subject choices at age 14. Centre for Longitudinal Studies Working paper 2017/9

“...young people’s prior attainment, socio-economic background, and gender are all associated with the subjects they study at age 14-16. We find that individuals in schools with more advantaged intakes are more likely to study more academically selective subjects, even after conditioning on individuals’ own socioeconomic status. Individuals’ prior attainment is associated with studying more academically selective subjects as, again, is the prior attainment of the school more generally. Overall, schools explain about a third of the variation in the academic selectivity of the subjects that young people study; once we take into account the demographics of the school this is reduced to closer to a quarter”.

However, Callender and Mason (2017) found that there is now little difference between school type when analysing anticipated HE participation. They found that encouragement from teachers played a significant role in expectations of HE participation. But whilst for pupils in 2002, independent schools had a greater positive effect on participation, any difference had disappeared by 2015.

### **3.3.2. Prior educational attainment**

Attainment at age 16 is generally seen as a key determinant of post-16 outcomes: “Higher attainment during compulsory school age is associated with higher rates of [HE] participation. This is a point strongly made across the literature, and according to some this is the single most important predictor of adult participation in education and training”<sup>24</sup>. This report highlights analysis of longitudinal data from the NCDS and BHPS longitudinal survey data which found that early school attainment is the best predictor of progression by age 33 and by age 42.

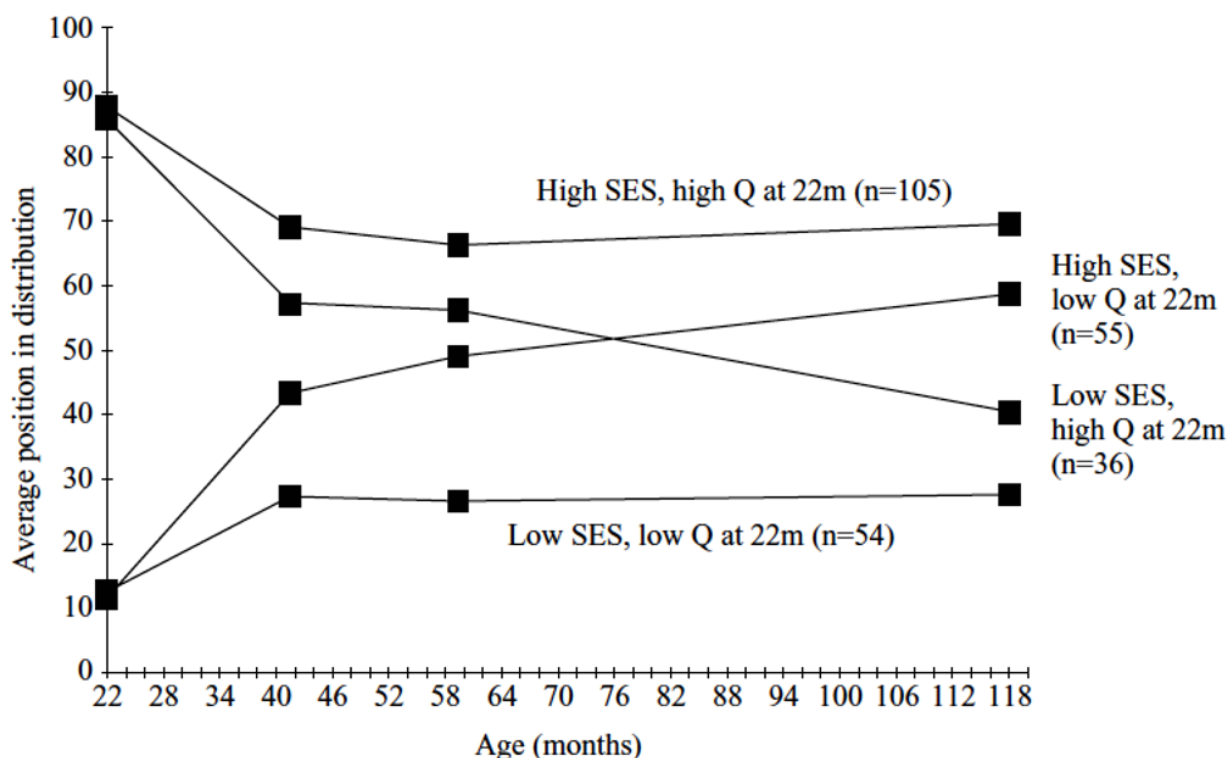
The issue with prior educational attainment as a determinant of outcomes on its own is that it is highly related to SEG. Whitty and Anders present the results of an analysis by Feinstein<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> S. Smith (September 2015)

<sup>25</sup> G. Whitty and J. Anders (December 2012), (How) did New Labour narrow the achievement and participation gap? LLAKES

**Figure 4: Average rank of test scores at 22, 42, 60 and 120 months, by SES of parents and early rank position**



Notes: The definition of categories with sample observations are as follows: high SES - father in professional/managerial occupation and mother similar or registered housewife (307 obs.); low SES - father in semi-skilled or unskilled manual occupation and mother similar or housewife (171 obs.); medium SES - those omitted from the high and low SES categories (814 obs.).

Source: Feinstein (2003) reproduced in G. Whitty and J. Anders (December 2012)

This demonstrates that, even before starting school, children with high cognitive test scores from disadvantaged backgrounds are falling behind less able children from more advantaged backgrounds. This would appear to suggest that, rather than having predictive power on its own, prior attainment is closely related to SEG. The counterargument is that studies highlighting prior attainment’s predictive power usually control for SEG and find the former has more significant explanatory power.

Using the life-course approach discussed above (see Section 3.2), it is possible to conceptualise the interplay between closely related factors:

“While educational attainment at school may be the most important determiner of subsequent adult learning, this does not singly determine the likelihood of the individual to progress. Learning pathways are dependent on the interaction of other factors occurring through the life-course, such as those related to home and family life... Sabates et al. (2007) argue that early educational attainment remains a central determiner: factors ‘...tend to reinforce one another such that those at early disadvantage continue to be at greater risk of non-progression throughout

their lives, while those who established positive early trajectories are more likely to maintain involvement in learning. This may be a reflection of the positive effects of underlying personal factors such as ability or enjoyment of learning, or conversely, the negative effects of difficulties in mastering skills, or antipathy to learning”<sup>26</sup>.

Sabates et al. (2017) go on to say: “However, that propensity to learn is not fixed. It has been shown for example that learning in adulthood can influence attitudes and well-being and that this in turn can encourage further participation in learning”.

In their study tracking the FE Level 3 population longitudinally, Smith et al. (2015) found that some students do not progress into HE immediately but enter 2-5 years later. Similar progression and attainment rates are achieved by people following different trajectories, implying that the non-traditional routes into HE available to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can achieve similar outcomes: “Achievement rates of FE and Sixth Form College students who progress to First degrees at university hold up well when compared to all England figures for both school and college entrants (75% compared to 79% for all England). The proportion of FE and Sixth Form College students achieving a good degree (First or 2:1) was 62% compared to all UK qualifiers where the rate is 64%. When put into the context of the relatively high proportion of students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, these figures illustrate the important role the FE sector has in offering alternative pathways to success and ultimately increased opportunities for social mobility”<sup>27</sup>.

### 3.3.3. Gender

A key factor, especially in vocational choices, is gender. However, the decisions between the broad learning and skills options tends to be quite balanced between women and men.

The proportion of young people (16-24) who are NEET has, historically, been higher for women than it is for men. At the beginning of the decade the gap between men and women who are NEET was around three percentage points, but that gap has now disappeared<sup>28</sup>. However, the reasons vary significantly between women and men.

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<sup>26</sup> S. Smith (September 2015) quoting Sabates et al (2007), Determinants and Pathways of Progression to Level 2 Qualifications: Evidence from the NCDS and BHPS. Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No.21.

<sup>27</sup> S. Smith (September 2015)

<sup>28</sup> Department for Education and National Statistics (August 2017), NEET Statistics Quarterly Brief April to June 2017, England



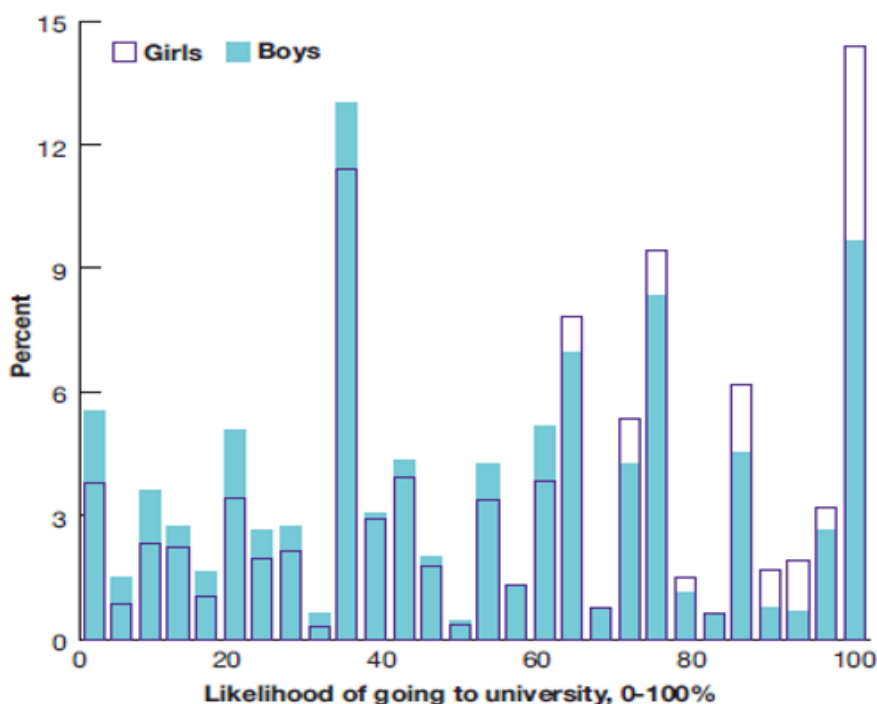
Women tend to be NEET because they are economically inactive<sup>29</sup> whilst men are more likely to be unemployed<sup>30</sup>.

Similarly, whilst apprenticeship rates between men and women are similar, the Standards/Frameworks they choose are very different (see Figure 19). In 2016/17, 54% of apprenticeship starts were by women and 46% by men<sup>31</sup>.

In HE, the gender split was similar to that of apprenticeships with women accounting for 57% of HE starts. As with apprenticeships, it is less the broad option which differentiates men and women but their specific subject choices<sup>32</sup>.

Research by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies found that the HE expectations of girls at age 14 was greater than that of boys<sup>33</sup>. Figure 5 shows that, on average, girls reported a 71% chance of entering HE, whereas the proportion for boys was 63%. Girls also tended to be more certain that they would be going to university with 14% of girls being 100% certain they would go into HE compared to 10% of boys.

**Figure 5: How likely do you think it is that you will go to university? By gender**



Source: Centre for Longitudinal Studies (December 2017)

<sup>29</sup> According to the ILO definition this group mostly comprises people who are studying, looking after a family and/or long term sick or disabled.

<sup>30</sup> According to the ILO, this group comprises people who are without work and are available for, and seeking work.

<sup>31</sup> A. Powell (January 2018), Apprenticeship Statistics: England. House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06113

<sup>32</sup> Universities UK (July 2017), Patterns And Trends In UK Higher Education 2017

<sup>33</sup> Centre for Longitudinal Studies (December 2017), The university and occupational aspirations of UK teenagers: how do they vary by gender? Initial findings from the Millennium Cohort Study Age 14 Survey

### 3.3.4. Summary

- **Socio-economic group (SEG):** Young people from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to progress to HE. Those in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) or a 16-19 Bursary are more likely to follow FE or Technical routes, as are those whose parents did not go to university. However, the role of SEG in learning and skills decision making is complex, given that it is closely related to prior attainment, which is the best predictor of future outcomes.
- **Prior attainment:** Attainment at age 16 is a key determinant of young people's post-18 pathways, with higher attainment at this age associated with higher rates of post-18 participation in education and training and, specifically, higher rates of participation in HE.
- **Gender:** Take-up of the broad post-18 options is relatively balanced between women and men, although women are more likely than men to enter education and training. (Women account for 57% of HE starts and 54% of apprenticeship starts.) There are significant differences in the subjects chosen by men and women on both technical and academic post-18 routes. In terms of apprenticeships, women are more likely to choose subjects like Hairdressing, Children's Care, Learning and Development and Supporting Teaching in Learning and School. Men are more likely to choose subjects such as Construction, Electrotechnical and Vehicle Maintenance and Repair.

## 3.4. The impact of access to information, advice and guidance on post-18 choices

There are differences in the type and source of information, advice and guidance (IAG) accessed by young people pursuing different post-18 pathways. These differences are explored in this chapter.

### 3.4.1. Which resources do young people use to choose between HE, FE and apprenticeships

As described above, people tend not to amass a large amount of information before they make a broad decision. They tend to arrive at a decision on a chosen route first (based on an array of factors) and then seek out information about it.

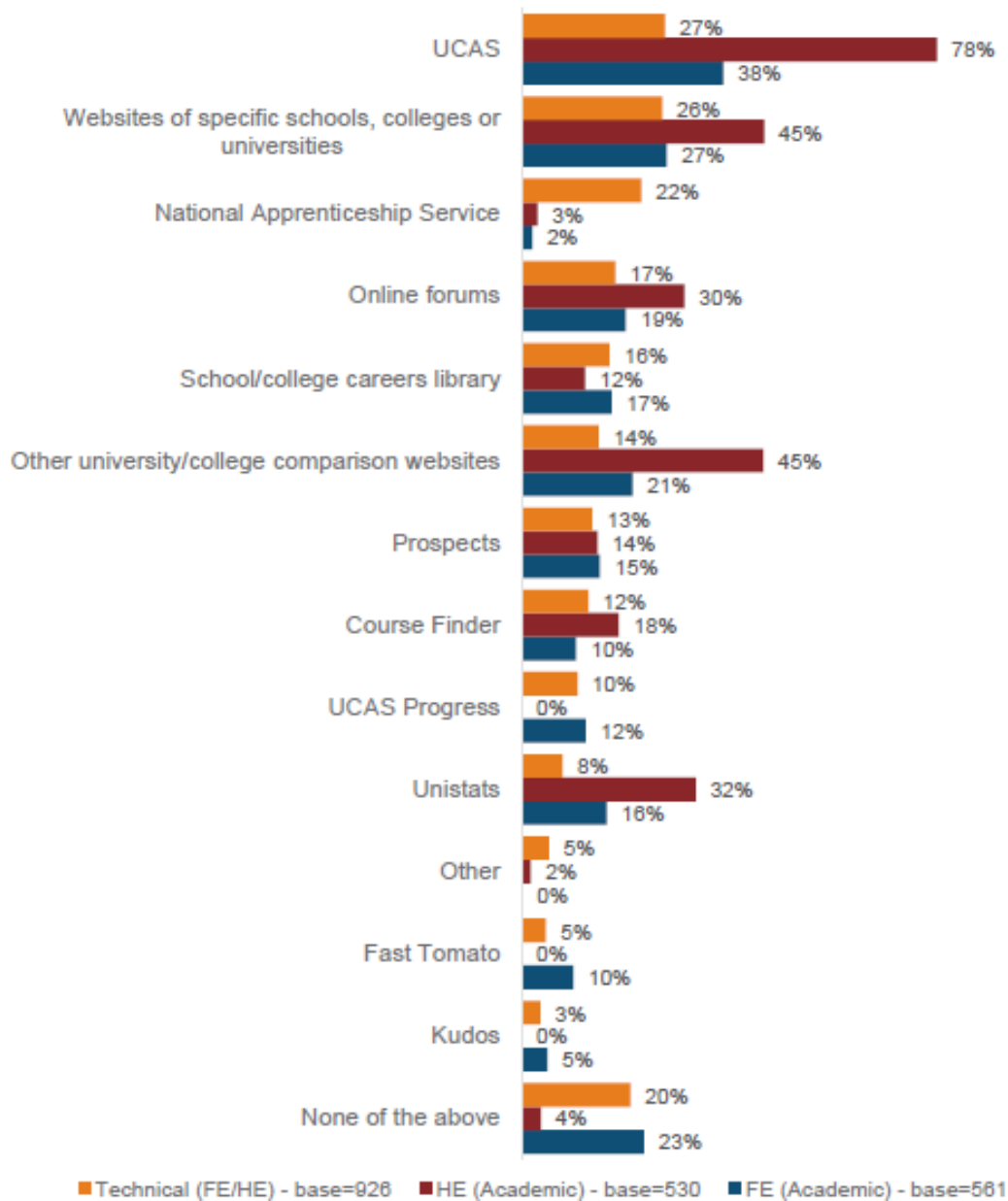
Figure 6 shows the different tools and resources used by young people pursuing different routes<sup>34</sup>. Differences were found in the use of resources by route (i.e. technical, HE or FE academic) and a variety of other learner characteristics. The main differences are due to

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<sup>34</sup> CFE Research (December 2017) op cit

the information content. For example, few people considering HE consult apprenticeship sources<sup>35</sup>.

**Figure 6: Which tools and resources young people used in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route**



Source: CFE Research (December 2017)

Lyonette et al. (2016) asked current HE students which sources of information and support are available and considered most useful when applying to university<sup>36</sup>. Compared to research undertaken in 2008, students were much more likely to use university rankings and online sources of information. But they questioned the reliability

<sup>35</sup> CFE Research (2017) op cit

<sup>36</sup> C. Lyonette et al (October 2016), Richer Information On Student Views: Supporting The HESA Review Of Destinations And Outcomes Data. HESA

and validity of online sources. The most and least popular sources of information are shown in Table 10.

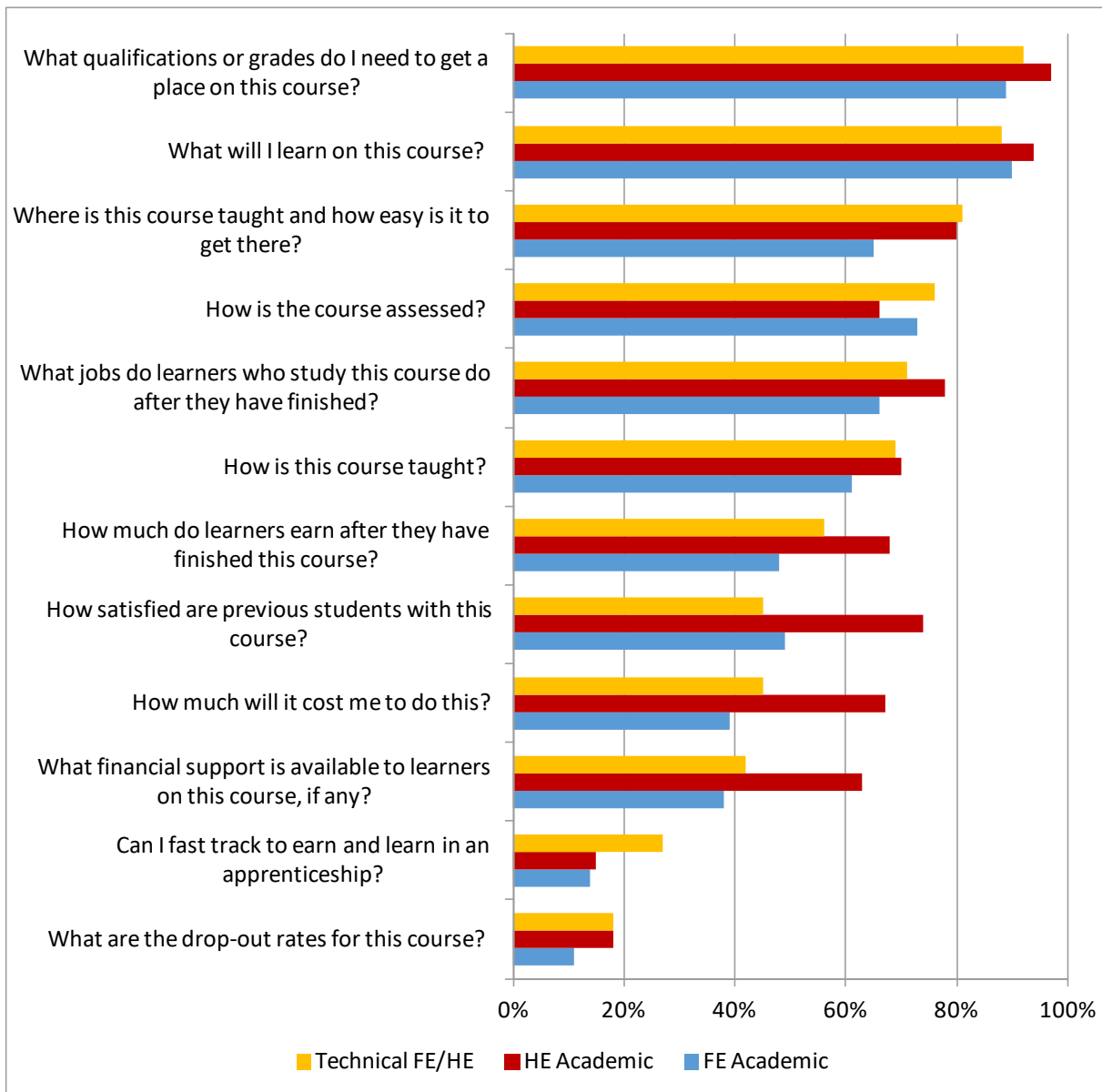
**Table 10: Online sources of information used in decision-making**

<b>Most popular</b>	<b>Mid-popularity</b>	<b>Least popular</b>
The Guardian rankings thestudentroom.co.uk/ Times Higher Education QS World rankings The Times rankings	Student satisfaction surveys Prospects Good Universities Guide Unistats	UCAS National Careers Service Which Uni? DLHE

Source: Lyonette et al. (2016)

Figure 7 shows that young people’s main information needs across the three routes are: course entry requirements and what they will learn. Young people looking to HE (Academic) routes are more likely than those on other routes, to want to know about: the satisfaction of previous learners; costs; the availability of financial support; and job, and earnings outcomes. Young people aiming for Technical FE/HE routes were more interested in how the course is assessed. Large proportions of those on the HE (Academic), and Technical FE/HE routes also wanted to know about location and accessibility.

**Figure 7: Whether sought information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (% who agreed/strongly agreed)**



Source: Warwick IER from data in CFE Research (2017)

These findings chime with other research which has identified entry requirements, location and accessibility, quality and costs as important for FE and HE learners<sup>37</sup>.

### 3.4.2. Young People’s perceptions about effectiveness of IAG

This section of the report looks at differences in the perceived quality of information available to young people pursuing different post-18 pathways.

<sup>37</sup> For example see, P. Dickinson et al (April 2009), Effectively publishing and developing Framework for Excellence: Analysis of user needs Final Report. K. Crowther (November 2011), Informing Choice in Post 16 Education and Learning. BIS

The Moments of Choice<sup>38</sup> study identifies the following elements as constituting effective IAG:

1. Understanding the cognitive context of the decision so that the design of advice works with the grain of the intuitive system, and supports good reflective decision making.
2. Being trustworthy.
3. Being personal to the individual and meaningful to them.
4. Giving young people agency and being transparent about how their input preferences have led to outputs or advice.
5. Structuring information provision so big decisions are broken down into smaller choice sets.
6. Providing information when needed, rather than overloading young people with information that is not salient, relevant or useful to them at that time.
7. Helping influencers (teachers, parents or carers, Careers Advisors) give meaningful advice to young people, and
8. Signposting actions.

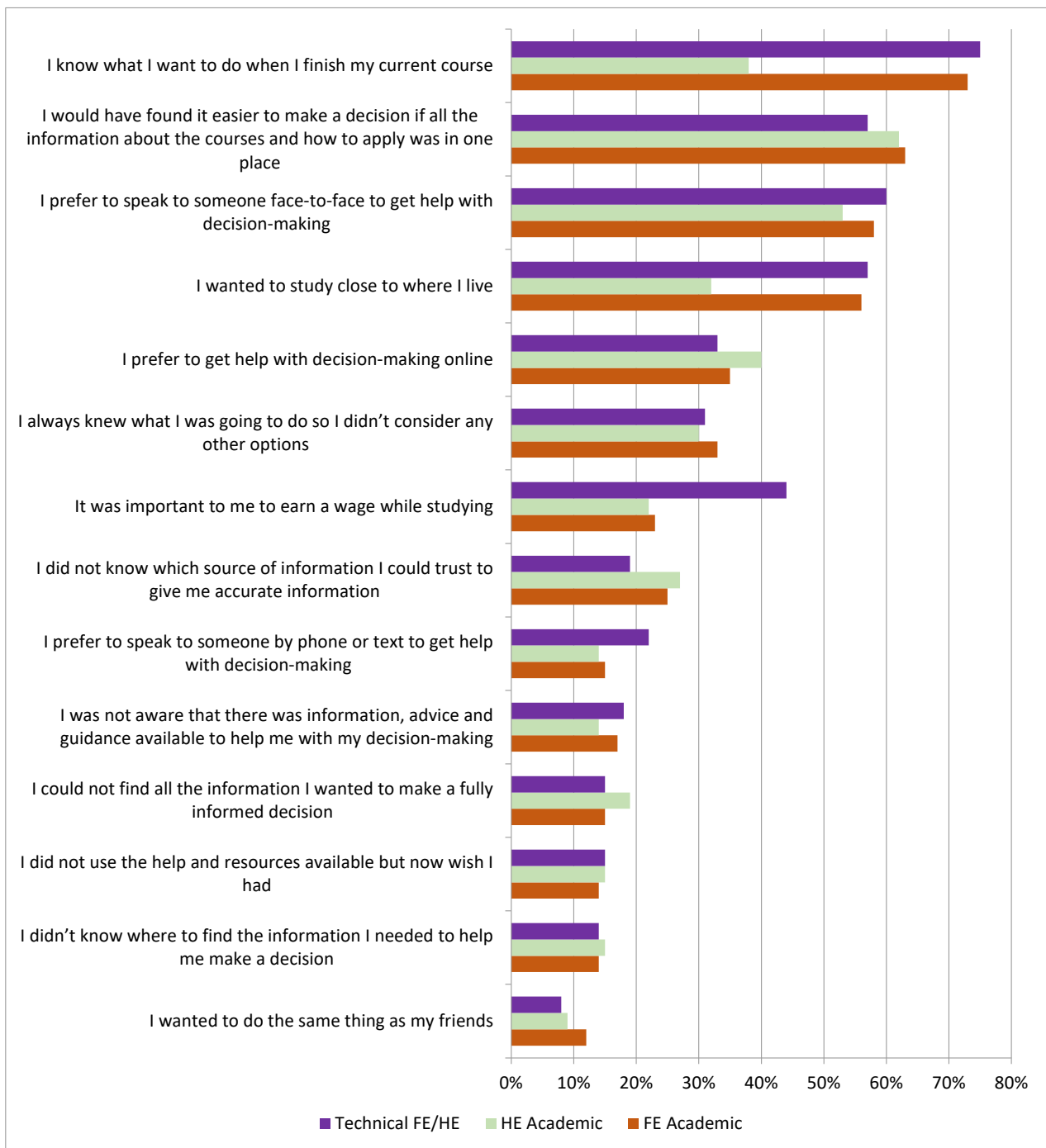
An important quality of IAG is reducing the cognitive burden or overload on young people; when they have so much information, or options to access information, they end up making poor decisions.

As demonstrated in Figure 8, most young people when making a decision would prefer: all of the information in one place; and to speak to someone face-to-face. The largest proportion of young people on Technical FE/HE and FE Academic routes (around three quarters) know what they are going to do after they finish their current course, compared to 38% of those on HE Academic routes. Similarly, those on Technical FE/HE and FE Academic routes are much more likely to say they want to study near to where they live.

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<sup>38</sup> Careers and Enterprise Company (2016) op cit

**Figure 8: Extent to which agree with statements in relation to making decisions about education and training by route (% who agreed/strongly agreed)**



Source: Warwick IER from data in CFE Research (2017)

Table 11 shows relatively high levels of satisfaction with information available, although significant minorities of young people could not find the information to help them make a decision (<20%); could not find all the information they wanted to make a fully informed decision (<15%) or; were not aware of available IAG (<15%). There were small differences between young people following different pathways. Those on technical routes were twice as likely to strongly disagree with the statements: ‘I didn’t know where

to find the information I needed'; 'I did not use the help and resources available but now wish I had'; and 'I did not know which source of information I could trust'.

**Table 11: Proportion of respondents who strongly disagree with statements about IAG by route**

	Technical (FE/HE)	FE (Academic)	HE (Academic)
I didn't know where to find the information that I need to help me make a decision	25%	13%	12%
I was not aware that there was information, advice and guidance available to help with my decisions	24%	19%	18%
I did not know which source of information I could trust to give me accurate information	16%	8%	5%
I did not use the help and resources available but now I wish I had	26%	13%	14%
I could not find all the information I wanted to make a fully informed decision	21%	14%	13%
I wanted to do the same thing as my friends	54%	33%	39%
I would have found it easier to make a decision if all the information about the courses and how to apply was in one place	8%	3%	2%

Source: CFE Research (December 2017)

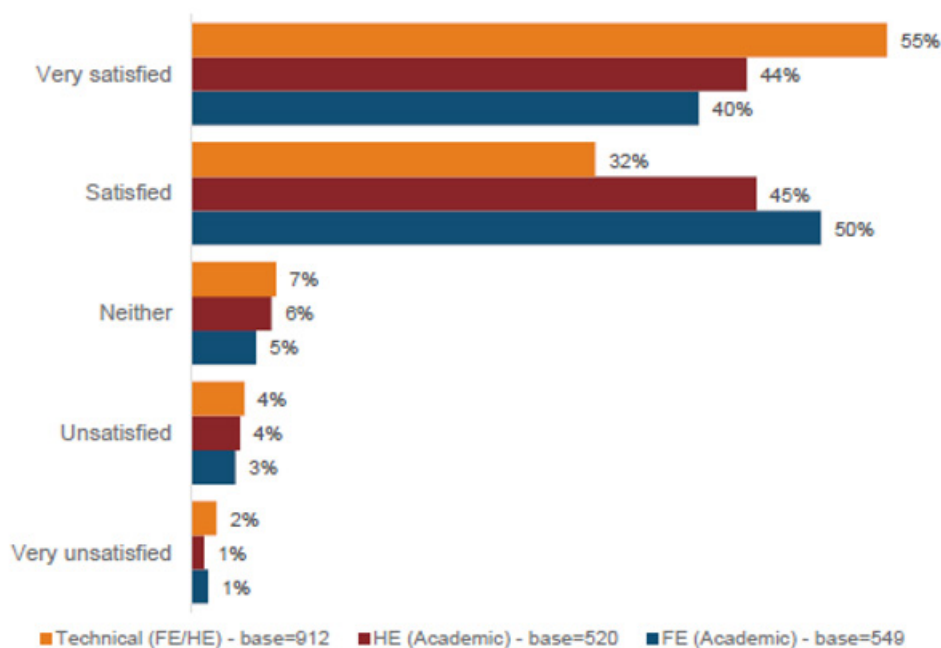
Issues of trust are also highlighted in Figure 8 above. Around one quarter of young people on all pathways agreed or strongly agreed that 'I did not know what source of information I could trust to give me accurate information'. Young people on HE Academic pathways were most likely to agree with this (27%).

In terms of the ease of accessing specific types of information, young people in each of the three routes had little difficulty (see Figure 21). The information young people found it most difficult to get hold of was the earnings and jobs of previous graduates, and dropout rates. But even in these cases people who found it difficult or very difficult never rose above 15%.

CFE Research found that 87% of those taking the Technical (FE/HE) route were satisfied or very satisfied with their chosen route, compared to 89% taking the HE (Academic) route, and 90% on the FE (Academic) route.



**Figure 9: How satisfied young people are with their current educational choice by route**



Base=variable

Participants indicating 'Too early to say' are not included

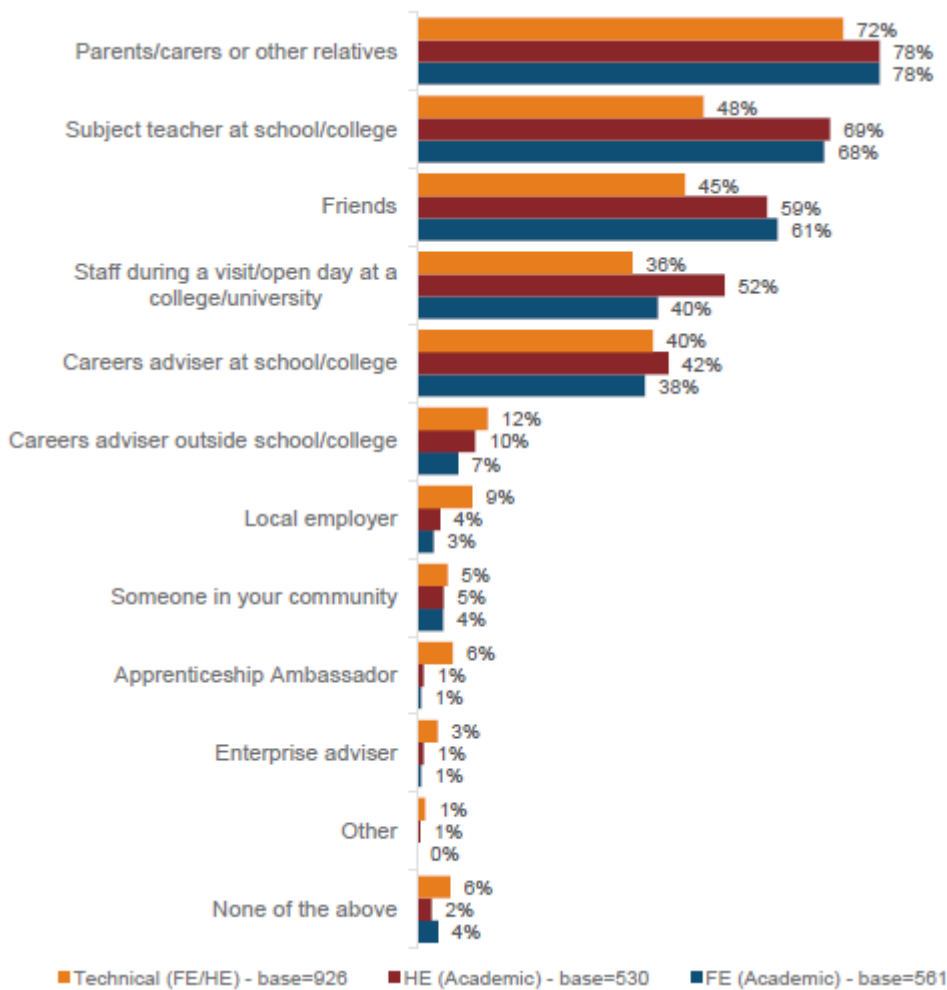
Source: CFE Research (2017)

Similarly, Lyonette et al. (2016) also found that a large majority of HE students were happy with their decision, although some may have chosen a different university or course if they had been more informed about teaching quality and the number of contact hours.

### 3.4.3. The role of individual influencers in helping young people choose their post-18 route

Figure 10 shows the individuals young people spoke to in helping them make their decision about which post-18 route to follow. Parents/carers and other relatives were the individuals consulted most by young people following each of the three routes – Technical FE/HE, HE (Academic) and FE (Academic) – followed by subject teacher, and friends (see Figure 10). Those following technical routes (FE/HE) were much less likely to have consulted their subject teachers (48% compared to 69% / 68% for those following HE (Academic) / FE (Academic) options) and their friends (45% compared to 59% / 61%).

**Figure 10: Which individuals young people spoke to in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route**

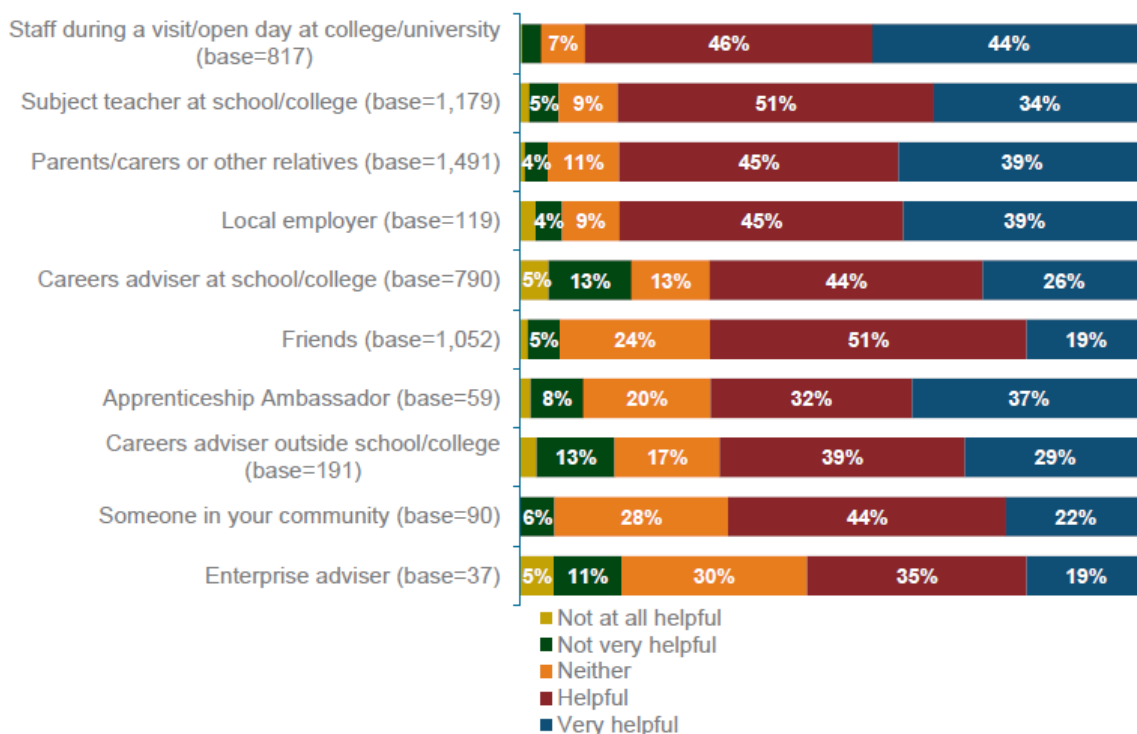


Source: CFE Research (December 2017)

Figure 11 provides rankings of the helpfulness of different individuals in supporting decisions. There were slight differences in the perceived helpfulness of different individuals by young people pursuing different post-18 routes. Careers advisers in schools were seen as similarly helpful for young people in the three routes: for those following FE Academic routes 70% found careers advisers in school either helpful or very helpful compared to 72% on the HE Academic route and 68% on the FE/HE Technical route. Equitable levels of helpfulness for young people on the three routes were also found for external careers advisers, family, friends, and staff during open days.

The biggest difference was for subject teachers. Three quarters (74%) of those on FE/HE Technical routes found their subject teachers helpful or very helpful, compared to 91% on the HE (Academic) route and 90% on the FE (Academic) route.

**Figure 11: Helpfulness of individuals in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13**



Source: CFE Research (December 2017)

Related to this, in their focused study on apprentices at Sheffield University’s AMRC, parents were identified as much more encouraging than schools<sup>39</sup>. Whilst only one quarter of 16-18 apprentices said their schools encouraged them a little or a lot, 90% said their parents were encouraging.

### 3.4.4. Whether young people are receiving objective information, advice and guidance

Despite the relatively high levels of satisfaction with IAG among those on technical and academic pathways, (see Table 12 and Figure 12), there is some qualitative evidence that IAG is sometimes biased towards academic routes, and away from technical or vocational options.

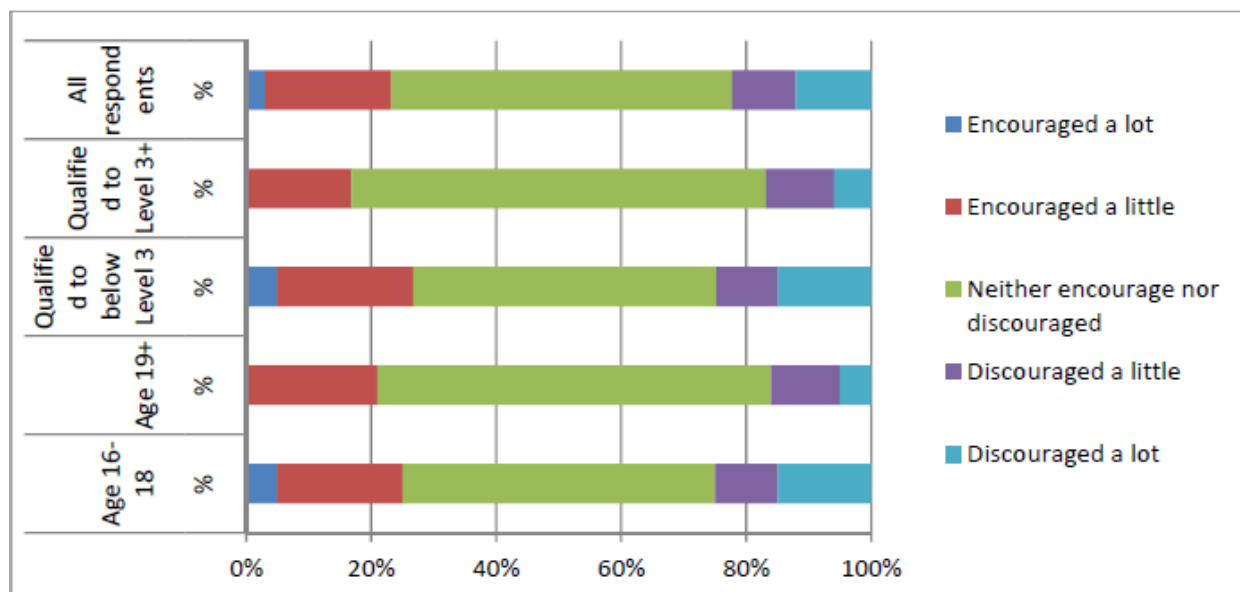
In their focus groups with young people, the Partnership for Young London found that young people struggle to even define an apprenticeship, what they entailed and even which age group they were for. Whilst those aged 16+ had some notion of what an apprenticeship was, those aged 14-16 had none. Young people said they relied on schools and teachers to provide them with impartial advice, but this did not happen. Schools only emphasised progression into their sixth forms. This causes young people to

<sup>39</sup> S. McIntosh (March 2017)

rely on information from their peers. As a result, apprenticeships are seen as unconventional and for those with different learning styles<sup>40</sup>.

In the study of apprenticeship recruits to the University of Sheffield’s Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre, McIntosh (2017) found that most recruits were neither encouraged nor discouraged by their schools<sup>41</sup>. Engineering apprenticeships at the AMRC are in demand and as a result the: “...respondents were young, mostly aged 16-18, well-qualified, almost all having 5 or more good GCSEs including English and Maths, and half having at least one parent in a professional or managerial occupation”<sup>42</sup>.

**Figure 12: Encouragement from school for doing an apprenticeship**



Source: S. Macintosh (March 2017)

Figure 12 shows that 54% of respondents had neither received encouragement nor discouragement in pursuing an apprenticeship. Similar proportions (22%/23%) were either actively encouraged or discouraged. This was marginally higher for 16-18 year olds than 19+. The highest levels of encouragement and discouragement were for those qualified to below Level 3; presumably these young people were making their decisions whilst at school.

With limited encouragement, and active discouragement for some, the apprentices had to rely on other sources of information. Whilst fewer than one third were able to rely on information provided by the school or college they attended, most (56%) sourced information from the AMRC itself, 54% from friends and family, and 39% from the Apprenticeship website. Only 13% received information from a careers advisor.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> S. McIntosh (March 2017), The Decision to Undertake an Apprenticeship: A Case Study. CVER Briefing Note 002

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

**Table 12: Source of information about apprenticeships**

	All	Qualified to below Level 3	Qualified to Level 3+
	%	%	%
The Apprenticeship Website	39	33	56
Current/previous employer	10	12	6
School or college previously attended	31	33	28
The AMRC	56	56	56
Careers advisor, Next Steps, Connexions	13	14	11
Jobcentre Plus	2	0	6
Friends and family	54	58	44
Internet	7	7	6
None of these	5	5	6

Source: S. Macintosh (March 2017)

Reflecting these findings, Education and Employers research found that *when* pupils are told about apprenticeships is potentially important and could influence the effectiveness of IAG. In those schools where more than 6% of pupils graduated into apprenticeships, around 70% told pupils in Year 10 or younger compared to just over 50% of other schools<sup>43</sup>.

The poor level and quality of advice for those wanting to pursue non-HE options is also highlighted by a report by Purcell et al. (2017), which concluded that:

“Participants who left education not intending to go into higher education raised a number of key issues with us. These included the absence of well-structured and supportive advice before leaving, along with counselling that was consistent, well-paced and of high quality. The absence of meaningful advice was further compounded by the experiences of those using Jobcentres. While the careers advice provided by some individual advisors and teachers was much appreciated, there appeared significant variation in its quality and timing”<sup>44</sup>.

Most participants in this qualitative study felt that any IAG they received by the school was too late and rarely detailed enough. Advice provided to them by teachers, lecturers and careers advisers was seen as biased especially in the case of apprenticeships. There was a perception by some respondents that there was an: “...emphasis on getting students into higher education left those not interested in this route feeling ‘pushed to the side’ (Natalie, female, 18, unemployed, Coventry). This echoes the experiences of some graduate respondents who felt that they had been pushed into university without a clear idea of the positive alternatives”<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Kashefpakdel and Rehill (2018)

<sup>44</sup> K. Purcell et al (September 2017) op cit

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

The downgrading of non-HE options is not something unique to the UK. In their comparison of the UK and Denmark, Kersh and Juul (2015) found that: “Although the Danish context differs from the English in several important ways the two countries have in common the problem of lack of parity between the academic and the vocational track. Young people, their parents and society as such tend to attribute more prestige and status to general upper secondary education than to VET”<sup>46</sup>. The authors found that a key difference between the two systems was a greater esteem in Denmark for apprenticeships from employers.

### 3.4.5. Summary

**Young people pursuing different post-18 pathways have different information needs.** Young people are most interested in finding out about course entry requirements and what they will learn on a course, regardless of their post-18 route (Technical HE/FE, HE (Academic) and FE (Academic)). However, young people looking to HE Academic routes are more likely than those on other routes to want to know about: the satisfaction of previous learners; costs; the availability of financial support; and job, and earnings outcomes. Young people aiming for Technical FE/HE routes are more interested in how the course is assessed. Large proportions of those on the HE (Academic), and Technical FE/HE routes also want to know about location and accessibility.

**Most young people would like careers information in one place, and want personalised IAG that is relevant to them.** Their preference would be to speak to someone face-to-face, by phone or text, and this preference is strongest amongst those on Technical FE/HE routes.

**Most young people are broadly satisfied with the IAG available, however, significant minorities have faced issues.** These issues include not finding the information to help them make a decision (<20%), not finding all the information they wanted to make a fully informed decision (<15%) and not being aware of available IAG (<15%).

**A significant minority of young people are also confused about which sources of information they can trust.** 23% of all young people agreed or strongly agreed that ‘I did not know what source of information I could trust to give me accurate information’. Young people on HE Academic pathways were most likely to agree with this (27%).

**Parents/carers and other relatives were the individuals consulted most by young people following each of the three routes – Technical FE/HE, HE (Academic) and FE (Academic) – followed by subject teacher, and friends.**

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<sup>46</sup> N. Kersh and I. Juul (2015), Vocational Education and Training as a Career Path for Young People: Making Choices in England and Denmark. LLAKES Research Paper 52

**Those following technical routes were much less likely to have consulted their subject teachers compared with those following academic routes.** 48 percent of those following technical pathways had consulted subject teachers compared to 69% of those following HE (Academic) and 68% following FE (Academic) routes.

**Young people following technical routes were also less likely than those following other pathways to find subject teachers helpful or very helpful.** Three quarters (74%) of those on FE/HE Technical routes found their subject teachers helpful or very helpful, compared to 91% on the HE (Academic) route and 90% on the FE (Academic) route. Perceptions about the helpfulness of other individuals, including careers advisers, family, friends and staff during open days, were broadly similar among young people following different pathways.

**There is some qualitative evidence that IAG is perceived to be biased towards academic routes and away from more technical or vocational options.** In particular, studies highlight the often perceived poor quality of information about apprenticeships given to young people by teachers and careers advisers in schools.

**There are also potential issues with the timing of IAG in relation to technical routes. When pupils are told about apprenticeships is potentially important and could influence the effectiveness of information received.** In those schools where more than 6% of pupils graduated into apprenticeships, 70 per cent told pupils in year 10 or younger compared to just over 50% of other schools.

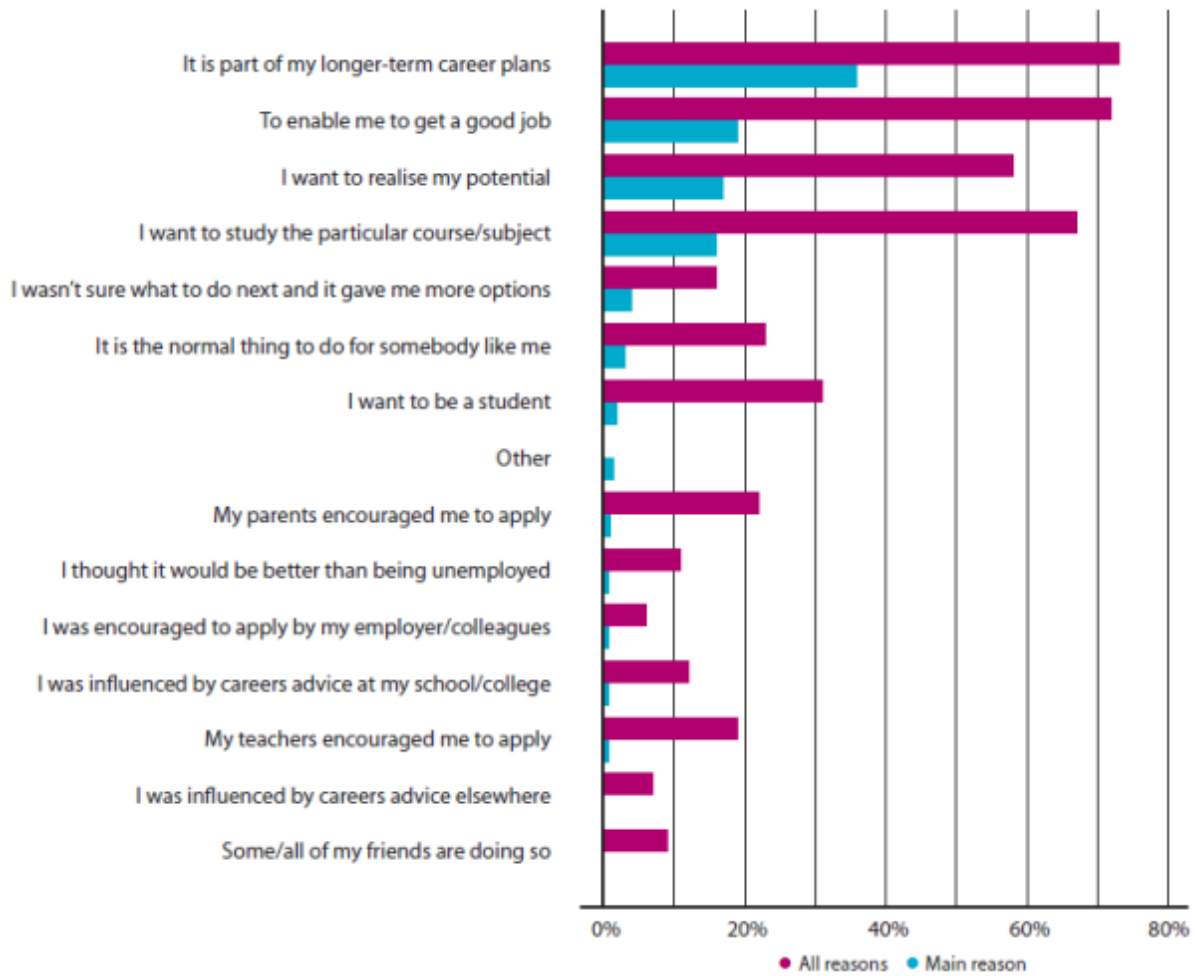
**Despite these issues, most young people are satisfied with their chosen route.** 87% of those taking the Technical FE/HE route are satisfied or very satisfied, compared with 89% taking the HE (Academic) route and 90% on the FE (Academic) route.

### **3.5. The impact of job prospects, future financial returns and lifestyle factors on choice**

#### **3.5.1. The impact of job prospects on choice**

Higgins et al. (2010) asked students why they decided to enter HE. Figure 13 shows that career and job outcomes were paramount in their decision, as a reason and the main reason. Wanting to study a particular course or subject was the fourth most important reason.

**Figure 13: Why did Foundation degree applicants decide to enter higher education?**



Source: Higgins et al. (2010)

In Kashefpakdel and Rehill's (2018) analysis of the LSYPE, future job expectations of those who had entered an apprenticeship were the most important concern (97% agreed or strongly agreed with a statement about the importance of career prospects). 96 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their reason for doing an apprenticeship was that it was 'a well recognised qualification'. The practical nature of the choice, as well as the ability to work and train at the same time were also important.



**Table 13: Young people’s motivations for applying to an apprenticeship**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
<b>Reasons for doing an apprenticeship</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
It is a well-recognised qualification	47.6	48.6	3.2	0.5
I wanted to do something practical rather than academic	45.5	44.4	10.2	-
I liked the idea of getting a job and doing training at the same time	45.2	54.3	0.5	-
It provides the qualifications you need to enter certain occupations	43.9	52.4	3.7	-
I have a good career prospects on completing the course	42.6	54.8	2.7	-
It provides good pay prospects for the future	35.1	60.1	3.7	1.1
It allows me to keep my options about the future open	28.9	63.6	7.5	-

Source: Kashefpakdel and Rehill (2018)

The certainty of young people about what they will do after their current course is lower for those following HE Academic routes than others. 75% of those in the Technical FE/HE route and 73% of those on the FE (Academic) route agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘I know what I want to do when I finish my current course’. This compares with only 38% of those on the HE (Academic) route<sup>47</sup>. Although this figure is much lower than other HE research.

Higgins et al. (2010) in a study of Foundation degree students found that (on a scale of 1 ‘Clear idea’ to 7 ‘No idea’) 58% of foundation degree students provide a rank of 1 or 2, as did 53% of all HE students. The figures for those scoring 6 or 7 were 5% and 8% respectively<sup>48</sup>.

### **3.5.2. The impact of future financial returns on choice**

Many studies highlight the importance of future wages and salaries as a determinant of post-18 choices. Figure 14 shows that the median earnings of 26 year olds rises with highest level of qualification. This holds true for each of the three categories of GCSE attainment<sup>49</sup>. The increase in earnings to Level 6 (degree equivalent) from Level 3, and Levels 4/5 is greatest for those with the highest top third of GCSE attainment. The

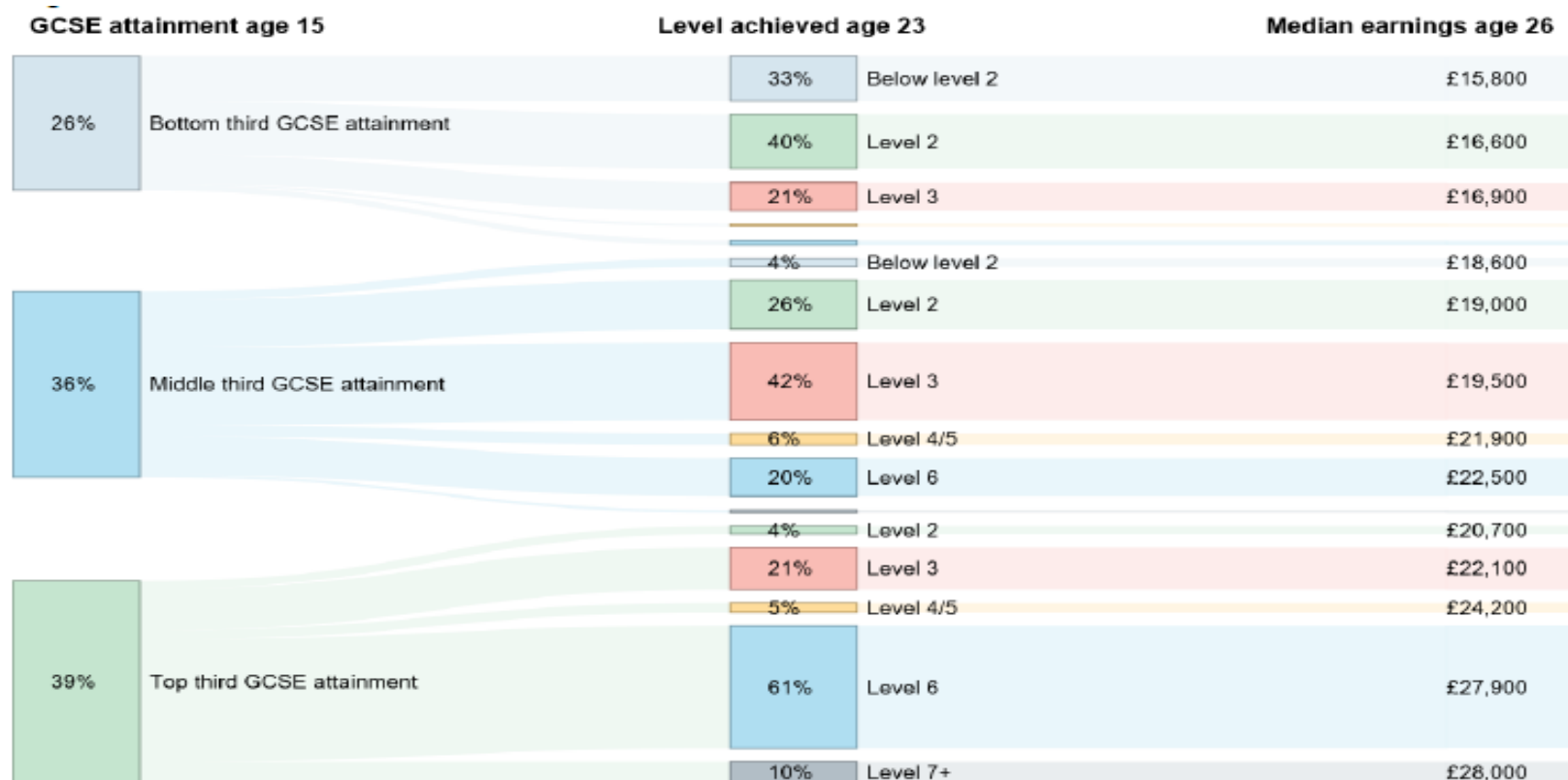
<sup>47</sup> CFE Research (2017) op cit

<sup>48</sup> H. Higgins (August 2010), Students’ experiences of full-time Foundation degrees: A Report to fdf

<sup>49</sup> Department for Education (May 2018), Post-16 education: highest level of achievement by age 25 England

earnings premium for those in the top third GCSE attainment with a Level 6 qualification, is also much higher than those in the middle third of GCSE attainment.

Figure 14; Median earnings by level achieved at age 23 and GCSE attainment score<sup>50</sup>



Source: Longitudinal Education Outcomes Study.

1. Age is based on academic age, which is age at the start of the academic year, 31 August.
2. This chart includes the 410,300 individuals in the cohort who were in sustained employment in the 2016-17 tax year.
3. GCSE attainment group splits the cohort into thirds based on GCSE point scores assigned to grades. The bottom third have a point score below 272, the middle third have a point score of between 272 and 349 and the top third have a point score of 350 or higher.

<sup>50</sup> Department for Education (May 2018), Post-16 education: highest level of achievement by age 25 England

Thus as far as earning returns are concerned, it makes sense for people to achieve a higher level of qualification at all attainment levels. But the greatest absolute and relative returns are for those in the highest GCSEs attainment group with a Level 6 qualification. The incentives for other learners of gaining an additional qualification are much less.

Whilst the earnings returns may be lower for other groups of learners and qualifications, for example those doing apprenticeships, all the recent studies in this review have reported earnings premiums. In their analysis of the returns to apprenticeships, Cavaglio et al. (2017) found:

- For men with a Level 2 apprenticeship, taking into account observable factors (such as prior attainment), at age 28 men earn 23% more than those who left school with only GCSEs and roughly 16% more than those who left education with a level 2 vocational qualification. For women, those who start an apprenticeship earn 15% more than those who left school with only GCSEs and about 4% more than those who left education with a level 2 vocational qualification.
- At Level 3, the returns for men are much greater. Men who start an apprenticeship earn about 37% more than those who left education with A-levels (and did not progress any further), and 35% more than those who left education with a level 3 vocational qualification. For women they are not significantly different. Women Level 3 apprentices earn about 9% more than those who left education with A-levels by the time they are age 28. They earn roughly 15% more than those who left education with a level 3 vocational qualification.

Other studies also conclude that there are higher returns for both academic and vocational qualifications, although these vary by level and type of qualification<sup>51</sup>.

Some post-18 routes (especially HE) involves substantial financial investment. Table 14 and Table 15 shows what factors were most and least important for young people from different SEGs on whether to go to university. For all applicants, those from SEG AB, and from SEG C1-E, wanting to improve their job opportunities/salary prospects was the main influencing factor<sup>52</sup>. Financial costs of HE – getting a loan, living costs and tuition costs – were amongst the least influential. Although they did rank higher for those in SEG C1-E than those in SEG AB.

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<sup>51</sup> For example, A. Bhutoria (September 2016), Economic Returns to Education in the United Kingdom: Foresight Report. Government Office for Science

<sup>52</sup> S. Fagence and J. Hansom (March 2018), Influence of finance on higher education decision-making: Research report. Department for Education

**Table 14: Factors of above average importance on whether to go to university by SEG – Index scores (MaxDiff method)**

Index scores from MaxDiff (100=average)	Applicants	Higher socio-economic applicants (SEG AB)	Lower socio-economic applicants (SEG C1-E)
Wish to improve my job opportunities/salary prospects	231	234	227
Wish to achieve the qualification	225	228	221
Wish to pursue my interest in a specific subject	222	226	217
Getting on to the course I want	215	219	208
Getting the university I want	174	183	162
Wish to experience a different way of life	119	123	112

Base: all English applicants (n=1,427)

**Table 15: Factors of below average importance on whether to go to university by SEG – Index scores (MaxDiff method)**

Index scores from MaxDiff (100=average)	Applicants	Higher socio-economic applicants (SEG AB)	Lower socio-economic applicants (SEG C1-E)
I just always expected to go	76	86	62
Getting a student loan towards living costs	59	49	74
Getting a bursary or financial help from a university	42	30	59
Living costs	38	33	45
Getting a non-repayable grant/bursary towards living costs	34	24	48
The level of tuition fees	25	23	28
My parents expect(ed) me to	21	22	18

Source: S. Fagence and J. Hansom (March 2018)

Recent research shows that future earnings are related to type of school attended. The earnings, for both men and women, are much greater for those attending independent schools compared to those who attended state schools, even for the top SES quintile of state schools: "...there is still a considerable difference between the top quintile of state-schooled people and graduates who went to independent schools. The gap grows with age so that 7 years after graduation privately educated women earn £5,000 more than

the top quintile of state-educated women and privately educated men earn £7,000 more than state-educated men”.<sup>53</sup>

One reason for the high ranking of financial/status benefits of job and pay, and the much lower ranking of costs is that degrees may now be seen as a must have qualification. In their study of young people living in London (focus groups with 42 young people), Partnership for London found that: “London was largely seen as a city in which getting a degree was a near necessity to working, with opportunity being less for non-graduate roles”<sup>54</sup>.

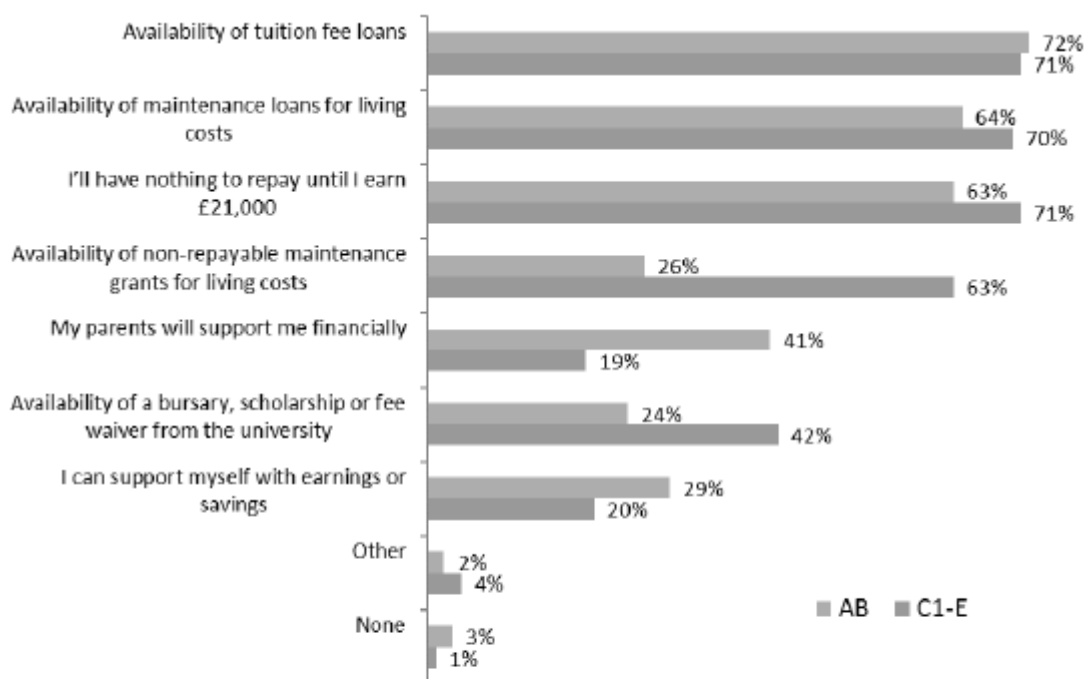
This is not to say that finance is an insignificant factor in the equation. Figure 15 shows that for those who were put off by the cost of university but still applied (54% of all applicants) those from lower SEGs were more likely to mention: the repayment threshold (71%), maintenance loans (70%), maintenance grants (63%) and the availability of a bursary from the university (42%). Those from higher SEGs were more likely to mention the ability of their parents to support them financially, and being able to draw on their own earnings or savings.

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<sup>53</sup> C. Belfield et al (June 2018), The relative labour market returns to different degrees Research report. DfE

<sup>54</sup> Partnership for Young London (September 2017), Young people's perceptions and attitudes of their post-16 options: Full report

**Figure 15: For those put off by HE costs, which aspects of funding persuaded you to apply to university?**



*Base: Applicants who were put off by the cost of university (AB n=398, C1-E n=376)  
 Question text: C3. Which, if any, of the following helped persuade you to apply/go to university despite being put off by the costs?*

Source: S. Fagence and J. Hansom (March 2018)

Callender and Mason (2017)<sup>55</sup> appear to confirm the findings from the Partnership for London study (see above) in that HE is considered a relatively good investment, and that this understanding had increased over time. In 2015, 74% of students agreed with a statement that “borrowing money to pay for a university education is a good investment” compared with 52% in 2002.

### 3.5.3. The impact of cost of study on choice

The 2012 increase in tuition fees has led to higher levels of debt aversion, particularly among lower SEGs, but HE participation rates have not been affected.

Callender and Mason (2017) found that students from lower SEGs are more likely to be debt averse, and this debt aversion has increased over time. Between 2002 and 2015: “...debt averse attitudes increased among lower-class prospective students, the gap in

<sup>55</sup> C. Callender and G. Mason (2017), Does student loan debt deter Higher Education participation? New evidence from England. LLAKES Research Paper 58

attitudes between lower- and upper-class students widened, and fear of debt negatively contributed to lower-class students' anticipated higher education participation relative to other social classes"<sup>56</sup>.

However, whilst young people from lower social classes may have felt more reluctant to enter HE, participation figures show that when it came to the decision participation rates increased: "The percentage of 18-year-olds entering higher education aged 18 or 19 from the lowest participation areas of the country (which correlates closely to lower socio-economic status) increased from 21% to 26% between 2011 and 2016"<sup>57</sup>.

Quoting the findings from another study, the National Audit Office reported that, as a result of the 2012 rise in tuition fees, we are likely to find that: "Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less geographically mobile and more likely to live in their family home while studying"<sup>58</sup>. However, more recent analysis<sup>59</sup> found that it was students from higher socioeconomic groups that were more likely to study closer to home post-2012. Azmat and Simion (2017) also found that the funding changes in 2012: "...had an insignificant negative effect on participation...[and]... do not seem to negatively impact students from lower socio-economic backgrounds more".

The authors suggest that lack of negative impact is down to the fact that HE attracts no ex ante financial cost on participation, and that many students will never have to pay off the full amount<sup>60</sup>.

#### **3.5.4. Lifestyle factors**

Fagence and Hansom asked HE applicants why they did not choose other alternatives to entering HE. Simply wanting to go to university was the main reason given by four out of five HE applicants in both SEGs.

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<sup>56</sup> C. Callender and G. Mason (2017) op cit.

<sup>57</sup> National Audit Office (December 2017), The higher education market

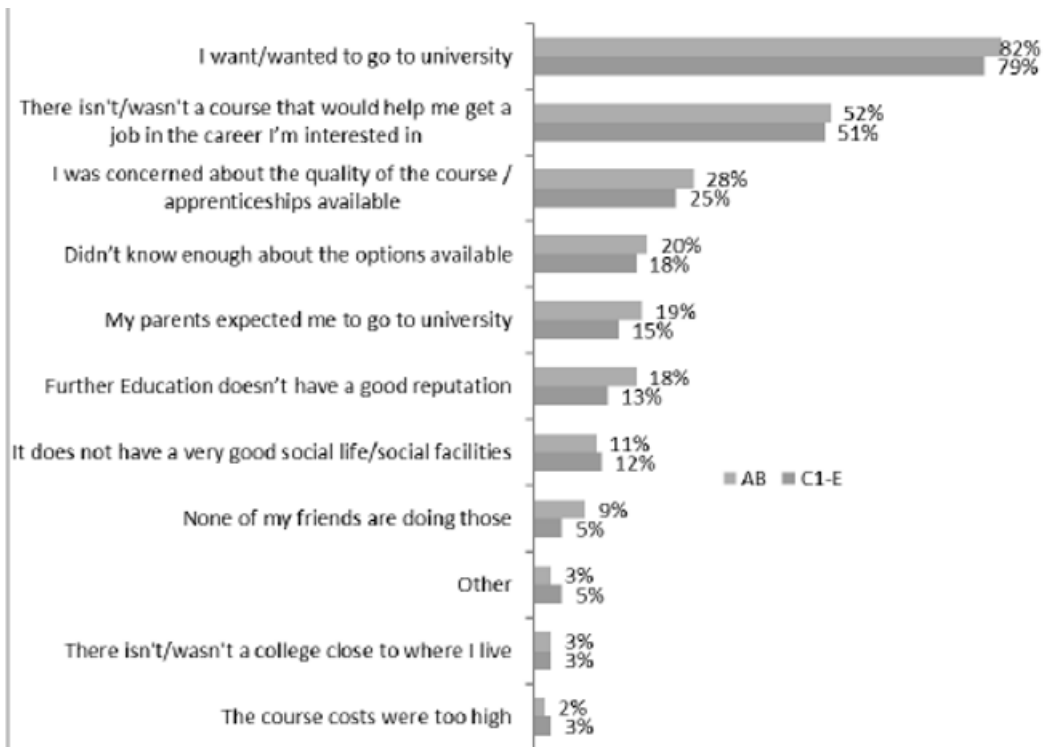
<sup>58</sup> S Gibbons and A Vignoles, 'Geography, choice and participation in higher education in England', *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, vol. 42 issue 1, 2013, pp. 98–113 in *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> G. Azmat and S. Simion (October 2017), Higher Education Funding Reforms: A Comprehensive Analysis of Educational and Labour Market Outcomes in England. CEPR Discussion Paper No. DP12389.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*



**Figure 16: Reasons given for not considering an apprenticeship or FE college, by socio economic group**



**Base:** All applicants who did not consider an apprenticeship or studying at an FE college as an alternative to university, including AB respondents (n=648) and C1-E respondents (n=602)

**Question text:** A6. Why are you not considering/did you not consider doing an apprenticeship, or studying at a further education college?

Source: S. Fagence and J. Hansom (March 2018)

University as a lifestyle choice was also found in Partnership for Young London's study:

"...the most significant contrast between the way in which apprenticeships and university was perceived was in relation to non-academic aspects, like the lifestyle. Young people consistently spoke on non-academic aspects when considering university, from societies, parties, and peers. For some, university represented a rite of passage, into adulthood, and away from parents. Apprenticeships, in the minds of our participants, did not provide a narrative about lifestyle, and the perceived working nature of apprenticeships limited any assumptions that apprenticeships provided a positive opportunity to make friends, meet new people, and grow as a person. As such, apprenticeships were not seen as enjoyable of a choice as university, a view which negative experiences of low pay and unsupportive employers added to.<sup>61</sup>"

<sup>61</sup> Partnership for Young London (2017)

### 3.5.5. Summary

- **Future career prospects are of paramount importance to young people following academic and technical routes.** This is true despite the fact many young people on HE Academic pathways do not have a clear idea about what job they want to go into after completing their course. 38% of those on the HE (Academic) route agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I know what I want to do when I finish my current course', compared to 75% of those on the Technical HE/FE route and 73% of those on the FE (Academic) route.
- **Young people also make their post-18 choices with their future earnings in mind.** Higher levels of qualification lead to higher financial returns. Despite the 2012 rise in tuition fees, HE is still considered a relatively good financial investment, and understanding of this among young people has grown over time. The main reason given by young people for applying to university is to improve their job opportunities and salary prospects.
- **This holds true for young people of all social classes.** Although those in lower social classes are more concerned about student debt, and feel more reluctant about entering HE, participation rates among this group have actually increased.
- **'Lifestyle factors' play a key role in underpinning the decision of many young people to enter higher education as opposed to other routes, such as apprenticeships.** When asked why they did not choose alternatives to HE, the most popular response, given by four out of five HE applicants, was simply that they 'wanted to go to university'. Qualitative research has found that young people consistently speak about non-academic aspects when considering university. For some, university represents a 'rite of passage', in contrast to apprenticeships which were not seen to provide a narrative about lifestyle.

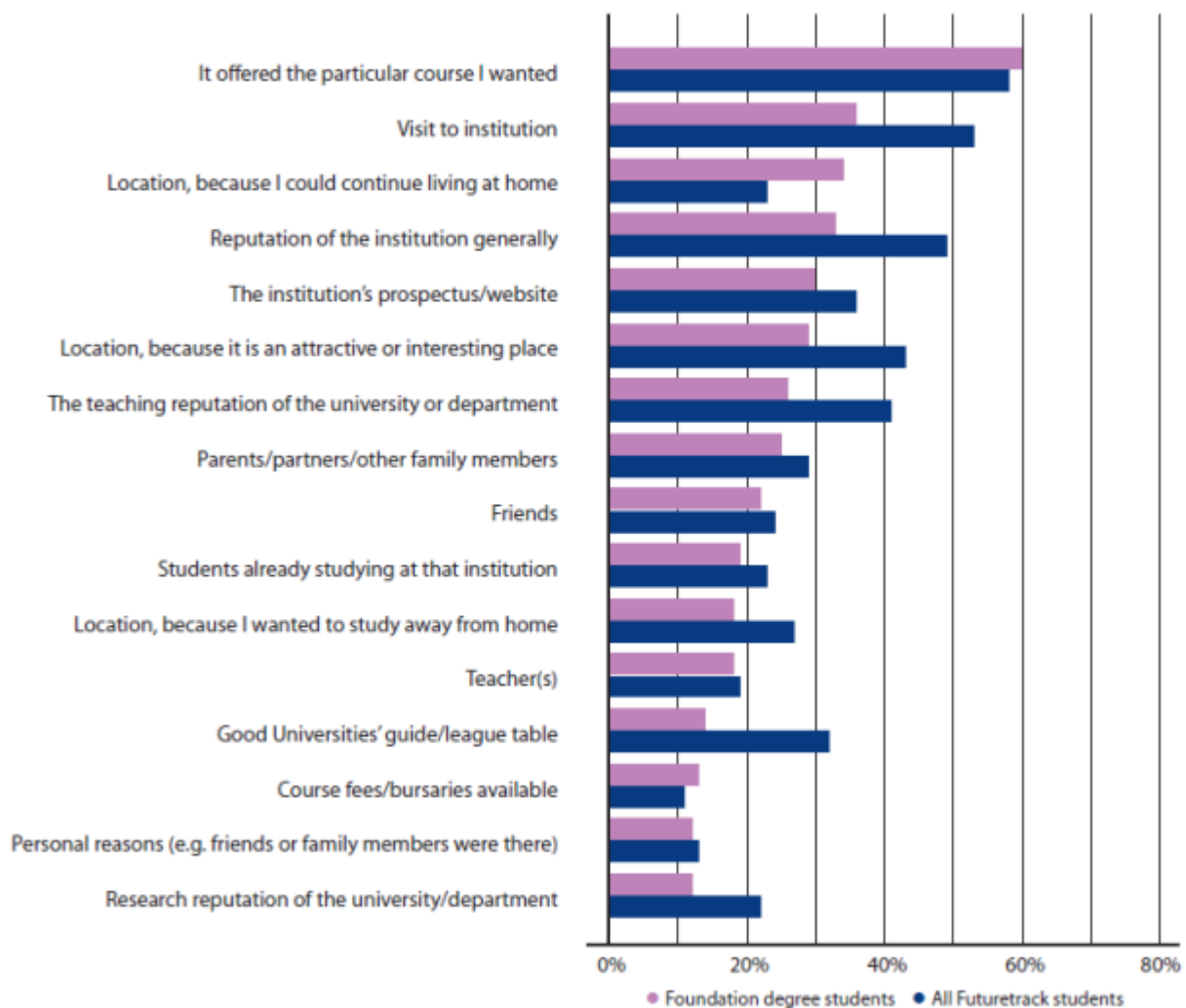
## 4. Choices within HE and FE

This section looks at the choices within FE and HE, which factors influenced choice of provider, course and where to study.

### 4.1. Choice of Provider

For HE institutions, course provision is a key factor in determining provider choice. Higgins et al. (2010) found that 'it offered the course I want', was the primary reason for choosing a given institution for both Foundation degree students and other HE students<sup>62</sup>.

Figure 17: Why did students choose to study at a given institution?



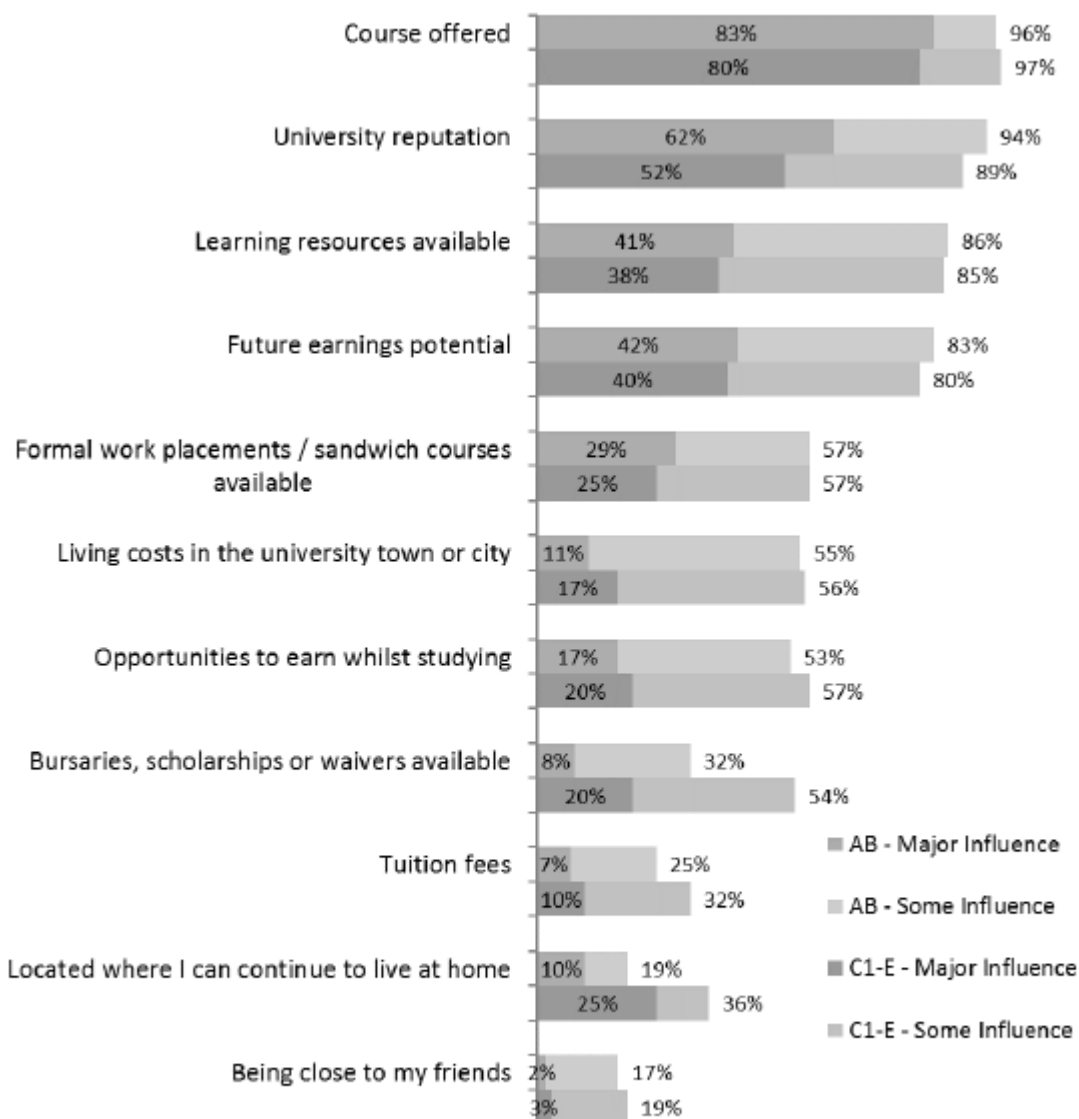
Source: Higgins et al. (August 2010)

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<sup>62</sup> Higgins et al (August 2010) op cit

Fagence and Hansom's (2018) more recent study also found that the course offered was the main factor, and this was for people from both SEGs.

**Figure 18: Influences on which University**



*Base: All English applicants (n=1,427)*

*Question text: B2. Thinking about your main choice of university/the university you chose to attend, apart from the entry requirements, how influential were the following in your final choice of WHERE to study?*

Source: S. Fagence and J. Hansom (March 2018)

A number of reports highlight the importance of provider open days in encouraging students to attend their institution. CFE Research (2017) found that talking to staff at an open day was the fourth most important source of information, but it was the most helpful especially for HE (Academic) students (see Figure 11). Higgins et al. found (2010) that the visit to the HEI provider was the second most important factor in choice for both Foundation and other degree students (see Figure 17).

Diamond et al. (2012) also reached this conclusion:

“One of the most striking statistics to emerge from the 2010 HEFCE report is the large percentage of respondents who rated formal university visits as “very useful” – a greater percentage than any other source of information covered by the research. This suggests that physically visiting a university plays a particularly valuable and distinctive role. Part of the reason for this undoubtedly lies in the fact that formal open days allow prospective students and their parents to gather more detailed and tailored information. Yet existing qualitative studies of student choice as well as the research conducted for this study show that this is not the sole reason; it is also because personal contact with an institution often leads to the forming of emotional ties between the prospective student and the institution.<sup>63</sup>”

Potential students want to know whether a prospective university ‘feels right’.

Universities are well aware of this and they: “...recognised that the open day was the place where, as one staff member put it, prospective candidates stop being simply “candidates on paper” and start to “place themselves” at the institution. As a consequence, concerted efforts had been made to distil the feel good factors into the open day experience”<sup>64</sup>.

A number of studies have focused on the factors underlying choices between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ status HEIs. Status is often operationalised as the Russell Group/Other Universities, and pre- and post-1992 HEIs. Figure 18 above shows that university reputation (which is defined by the individual) is a greater influence on students from higher SEGs than lower. Figure 17 shows that reputation was ranked similarly high for Foundation degree and other HE students, but for a much higher proportion for the latter.

Dickinson et al. (April 2009) found that, for those entering FE, provider proximity was a major factor influencing the choice of where to study<sup>65</sup>, but that this tended to be by default. The limited range of choice in the FE sector for individuals (due to mergers and/or agreements between providers around delivering particular programmes so as not to compete for limited student numbers) meant that there was usually only one provider available in reasonable travelling distance.

Proximity is not just a measure of distance but of access. A provider may be closer in mileage, but not on public transport routes. Learners are often reluctant to change buses. In rural areas, having sufficient car parking spaces is also important<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Diamond et al (2012)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Dickinson et al (April 2009)

<sup>66</sup> Dickinson et al (2009), Evaluation of the impact of Longley Park Sixth Form College

In their analysis of HE decisions, Fagence and Hansom (2018) found that location was the least important of a range of factors presented to students. Of a list of 11 factors, when asked how influential they were; 'located where I can continue to live at home' was the tenth most important, having some influence on 26% of students and being the major influence on 16%. 'Being close to friends' was identified as having some influence on 18% and a major influence on 3% of students. However, being closer to home was much more important to students from lower SEGs. Over one third (36%) of those in SEGs C1-E rated being able to live at home as having some influence and 25% rated it as the major influence. This compares with 19% and 10% of students in SEGs AB respectively<sup>67</sup>.

Higgins et al. (2010) found that 'because I could continue living at home' was an influence for 34% of Foundation degree students and was the third highest reason for choosing the HE provider. This compared with 23% among other HE students where it was the 11<sup>th</sup> highest ranked influence.

For other HE students 'because it is an attractive or interesting place' was of much more importance, rated as important by 43% of HE students and ranked as the fourth most influential factor. This compares with 29% of Foundation degree students who ranked it in sixth place.

#### 4.1.1. Summary

**In terms of provider choice, most young people entering HE choose providers because they offer the particular course they want to study.** This is the primary reason given by both Foundation degree students and other HE students for choosing a given provider.

**It is also important to potential HE students that a prospective provider 'feels right'.** In this context, provider open days are important for students in making their choice of provider, and numerous studies have shown that talking to staff at an open day is among the most important sources of information for young people entering HE.

**The reputation of the institution was also deemed important by young people making their choice of provider.** However, university reputation is a greater influence on students from higher SEGs than lower.

**Among those entering FE, provider proximity was a major factor influencing where to study, but this tended to be by default.** If someone wants to pursue a particular

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<sup>67</sup> Fagence and Hansom (March 2018) op cit.

course, programme or qualification, there is often only one General FE college in an area, so the choice of provider is limited.

**Location is also an important factor for mature HE students in choosing their provider, but not for young HE students.** Mature students are more likely to have other commitments (such as jobs and family), and are less likely to be able and willing to relocate to study. However, being closer to home was more important to students from lower SEGs. Over one third (36%) of those in SEGs C1-E rated being able to live at home as having some influence and 25% rated it as the major influence. This compares with 19% and 10% of students in SEGs AB respectively.

## 4.2. Choice of Course

In deciding which course to undertake at which institution, young people tend to use a variety of information sources and individuals. As far as HE is concerned, Lyonette et al. (2016) found that:

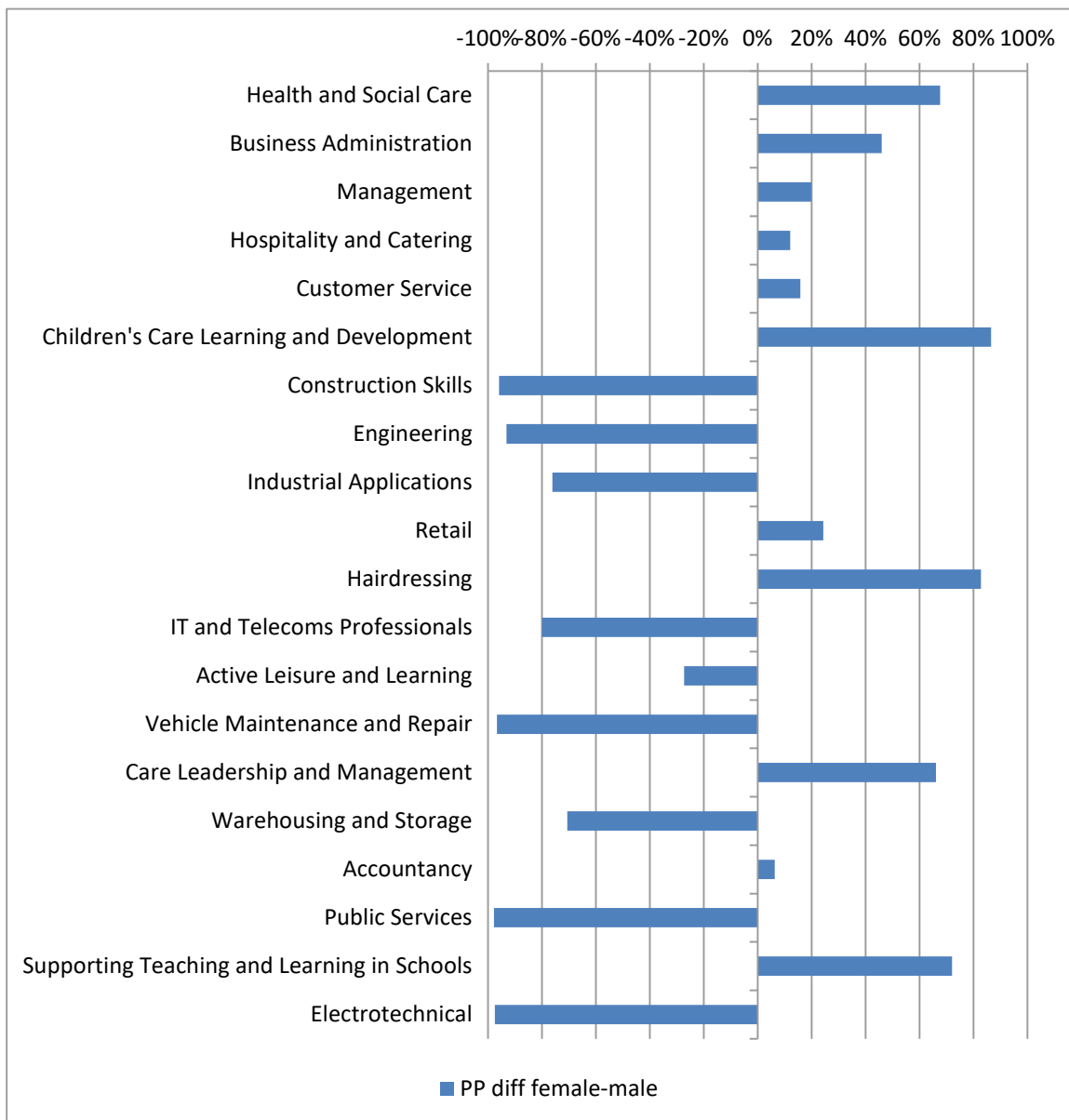
- Prospective HE students use a variety of sources of information when making decisions about whether to go to university and if so, what and where to study.
- However, there are limits to the amount of information-processing prospective students can undertake and that more information does not necessarily lead to a more informed decision.
- Students and graduates appeared predominantly to use sources of information that are well-established and form a 'core' of information used by prospective students.
- Increasingly students are using social media and blogs, i.e. sources that provided personal experiential information, and a decline in the use of physical prospectuses.
- Most common sources of information include family and friends, prospectuses and institutional websites, visits to particular HEIs, and information from teachers.
- Information gained from official sources of raw data tends to be less frequently mentioned, although league tables and other rankings produced from official data by newspapers and university guides feature somewhat more commonly, especially by international students and students with higher entry qualifications".

A major impact on choice of course is gender.

Figure 19 shows the percentage point difference between the proportion of women and men on different apprenticeship frameworks/standards in 2014/15. The top twenty apprenticeship frameworks/standards by number of starts are presented. In all but three of these twenty frameworks/standards, the percentage point difference is greater than 20

percentage points – Hospitality and catering; Customer service and Accountancy. In 13 of the top 20 frameworks/standards, the percentage points difference is great than 50pps.

**Figure 19: Apprenticeship Programme Starts by Sector Framework and Gender 2014/15**

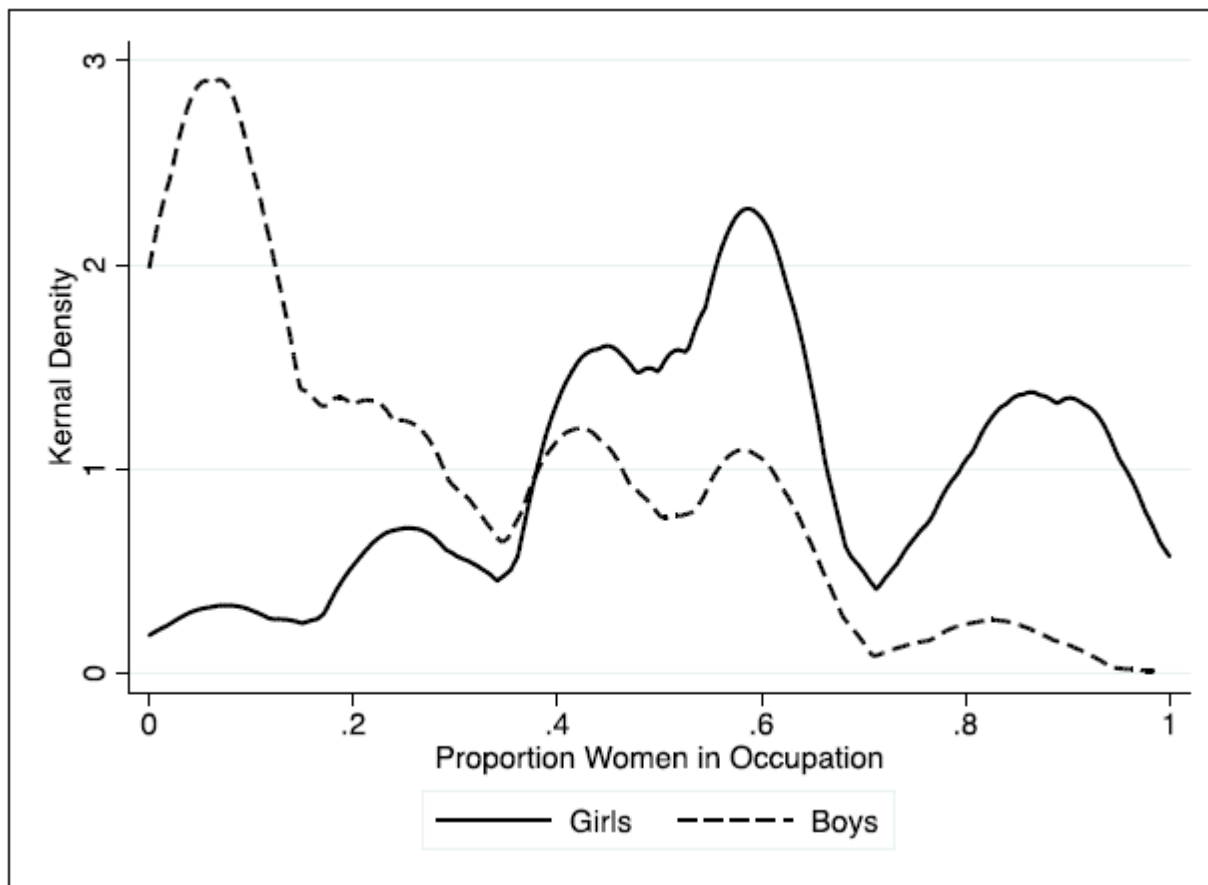


Source: Warwick IER analysis of apprenticeship data (2018)

As far as HE is concerned, Figure 20 shows that very few girls aspired to occupations which employed fewer than 40% women. Similarly boys (even more so) were biased to occupations dominated by their own gender. The choices for both girls and boys were not influenced by individual (apart from gender) or household (including mother's attitudes and behaviour) characteristics.



Figure 20: Distribution of share women in girls' and boys' aspired occupations, MCS age 14



Source: L. Platt and S. Parsons (2017)

Future earnings potential plays a role in young people's course choice. CFE Research (2017) found that 57% of students sought information on what previous learners on a course now earned, but this varied by type of route. 48% of FE (Academic) learners sought this information, compared to 56% of Technical FE/HE and 68% of HE (Academic) students. In Fagence and Hansom's (2018) study of HE students, future earnings potential was the fourth highest ranked influential factor as to where to study. It played some part of the decision for 82% of students and was the major factor (3<sup>rd</sup> ranked) for 41% of students. Future earnings potential was marginally more important for those from a higher SEG (2-3 percentage points).

Few studies have therefore focused on such factors as passion, fulfilment and calling when analysing the factors which people use to decide between courses. Codiroli McMaster (2017) did analyse whether differences in students' choices are driven by differences in their personal attributes, specifically ratings of their own abilities and enjoyment in studying STEM; Social sciences, Law and Business (SLB); and arts and

humanities subjects<sup>68</sup>. Analysing data from Next Steps (formerly the LSYPE), Codioli McMaster used parents' highest qualification, and young people's responses. The author found that: "...students whose parents are more educated are most likely to choose subjects for intrinsic reasons". The author concluded:

"Students whose parents had higher levels of education were both more likely to choose arts and humanities subjects, and less likely to choose social sciences, law or business, compared to students whose parents had lower levels of education. The study also confirmed findings from the psychological literature, showing that students from a range of social backgrounds were most likely to choose subjects they thought they were good at and enjoyed...Recent research into the efficacy of these interventions suggests that for all students attitudes are difficult to manipulate, and it is more effective for practitioners to foster students' knowledge of positive outcomes associated with studying STEM. This study presents support for the argument that for many students, attitudes to science and maths are not the key issue.<sup>69</sup>"

#### 4.2.1. Summary

- **Gender plays a key role in influencing the course choice of young people pursuing both academic and technical pathways.** For example, in all but three of the top 20 apprenticeship frameworks/standards, the percentage point difference between male and female starts is greater than 20. In 13 of the top 20 frameworks/standards, the difference is greater than 50 percentage points.
- **Future earnings potential plays a role in young people's course choice.** 57% of students sought information on what previous learners on a course now earned, but this varied by route. 48% of FE (Academic) learners sought this information, compared to 56% of Technical FE/HE and 68% of HE (Academic) students.
- **In terms of course choice, there is some evidence that students whose parents are more educated are more likely to choose subjects for intrinsic reasons, such as enjoyment.** Students whose parents had higher levels of education were more likely to choose arts and humanities subjects, and less likely to choose social sciences, law or business, compared to students whose parents had lower levels of education.

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<sup>68</sup> N. Codioli McMaster, (2017). What role do enjoyment and students' perception of ability play in social disparities in subject choices at university? Centre for Longitudinal Studies.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

## 5. Finance

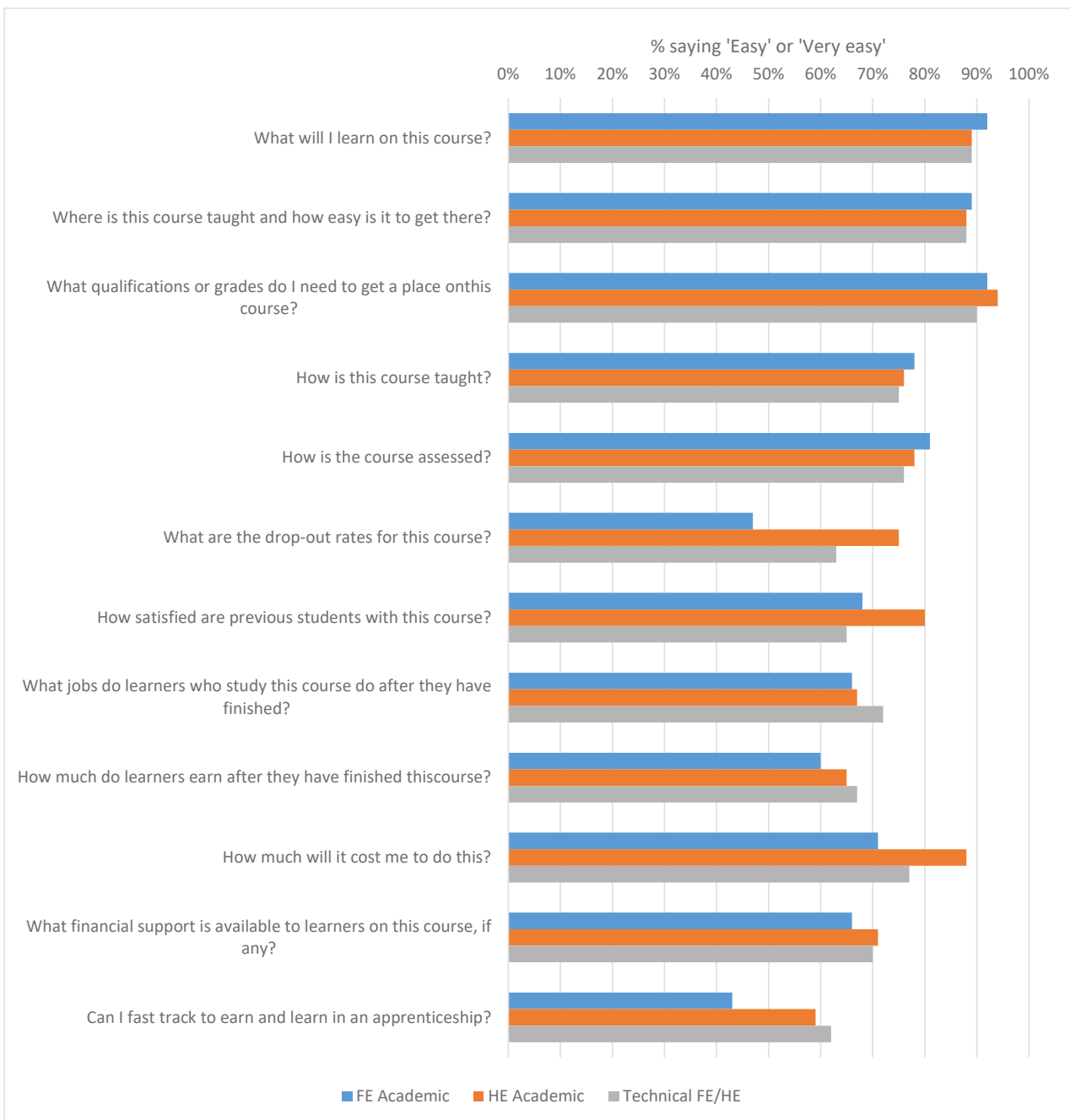
This section focuses on finance, how information about finance influences choices, and the extent to which finance influences decisions depending on different countries' funding systems.

### 5.1. How does the available information about finance (e.g. relating to fees, loans, bursaries, accommodation rates etc.) influence the choices students make

CFE Research found that information about the earnings of previous learners was more important than how much the course cost and whether there was financial support available. This was for all of the routes students chose.

Generally, students ranked information about earnings as the 7th most important followed by cost (9th) and then support (10th) (see Figure 7). Students found information about the cost of and financial support available for the programme easier to locate than information about earnings. For example, 88% of those on the HE Academic route found information about cost easy or very easy to get hold of. 71% of the same group found information about financial support easy/very easy to access and 65% found earnings data easy/very easy to access.

**Figure 21: Ease of obtaining information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route**



Source: CFE Research (December 2017)

Generally, financial information and data about education and training options is easy to access. Dickinson et al. (2010) found that, for FE provision, providers usually take a blanket approach in sending out financial information to all applicants whether they are likely to access financial support or not. Some providers may target particular learners,

for example, students on dance and drama courses because they are more likely to be living away from home<sup>70</sup>.

In their evaluation of advanced learner loans, IFF (May 2016) found that awareness about funding support came after the decision to study<sup>71</sup>. At this point, 36% of loanees and non-loaneees were aware of advanced learner loans. There was a similar conclusion in Dickinson et al's. evaluation of Career Development Loans (CDL), people made the learning decision and then sought ways to finance it<sup>72</sup>. Information about CDLs tended to come from the providers themselves.

Figure 22 shows that awareness and take-up of loans varied depending on a range of factors – prior attainment and work status. This suggested that learners who did not take out loans had more savings and earnings and were able to self-fund themselves. Attitudes to debt and savings did not affect an individual's loan take-up. However, older people were much less likely to take-up a loan.

**Figure 22: Ease of sourcing funding information about advanced learner loans**



Source: IFF (May 2016)

<sup>70</sup> P. Dickinson et al (2010), Research into automated access to information about learner financial support. LSC National Office.

<sup>71</sup> IFF (May 2016), Evaluation of 24+ Advanced Learning Loans: An assessment of the First Year BIS Research Paper Number 263

<sup>72</sup> P. Dickinson et al (2008), Evaluation of the Career Development Loans Scheme. Learning and Skills Council National Office Research.

## 5.2. What is the impact of the funding system on choice in other developed countries

There are very few studies which analyse the HE decision making processes of young people in other countries. Those that do suggest it is very similar to young people in England.

The expansion of HE seen in the UK since the turn of the millennium is being replicated across the World in high-, medium- and low income countries. Between 2000 and 2013, the Gross Tertiary Enrolment Rate increased in every continent<sup>73</sup>. The World participation rate increased from 19% in 2000 to 33% in 2013, and in Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific, Arab states, South and West Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa the rate doubled. In North America and Western Europe there was a 17 percentage point increase to 77%.

This increase is bringing millions of first generation students into the HE system and also raising concerns about how best to fund this expansion.

The UK HE system is very different in how it is funded compared to other European countries<sup>74</sup>. It depends to a much greater extent on student fees and other sources of income (such as, commercial activities, philanthropic funding and European funding) as Figure 23 shows. In the UK, only 40% of HE funding comes from the Government which is 20 percentage points lower than the next two countries Ireland and the Netherlands, and half the median Government contribution (80%).

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<sup>73</sup> S. Marginson (2016), The worldwide trend to high participation higher education: dynamics of social stratification in inclusive systems. *High Educ* (2016) 72:413–434

<sup>74</sup> Claeys-Kulik A. and Estermann T. (2015), *Define Thematic Report: Performance Based Funding Of Universities in Europe*. European University Association

**Figure 23: Simplified average income structure of public universities 2014 (rounded up to the nearest multiple of five)**



Source: Claeys-Kulik A. and Estermann T. (2015)

Compared to other OECD countries, the UK spends a higher level of GDP on HE (1.5%) than all but four – Canada, Korea, Chile and the USA. But this tends to be generated from non-public sources (as do the other four countries)<sup>75</sup>.

Many countries are considering Income Contingent Loans (ICLs) as a form of funding HE expansion as this is seen as the most progressive revenue raising option but few have implemented the change<sup>76</sup>.

Given the relatively unique funding system in the UK it is perhaps surprising that young people in the UK are involved in similar decision making processes to young people in most other countries.

<sup>75</sup> Diris R. and Ooghe E. (2018), Financing higher education. Economic Policy April 2018

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. and Chapman B. and Doris A. (2018), Modelling Higher Education Financing Reform for Ireland. Economics of Education Review

In a study comparing decision making between German and English students the author<sup>77</sup> differentiated between those who consciously made decisions and those who were 'embedded choosers'. The latter made non-decisions. They were on the 'royal route' by default mainly thanks to the fact that their parents were also graduates and attended university-oriented schools. The 'embedded choosers' were more prevalent in England than Germany primarily due to the fact that fewer German students attended academic schools. The other key difference was that the status of HE providers was important to English students but virtually irrelevant to German students<sup>78</sup>. But apart from these two areas, it was an interest in a future job/career (though not salaries), enjoyment of learning and intellectual development which were the biggest draws.

Similarly, in research into the reasons why students became involved in the Erasmus programme (which gave students the chance to study in another countries' HE provider) the authors concluded that: "...students in Europe are rather similar when it comes to barriers and drivers...How students make their decisions, what motivates them, and how they reach the conclusion for participation in the Erasmus program does not seem to be highly country-specific. In what stages of the decision-making process a barrier emerges also seems to be rather predictable, with some exceptions"<sup>79</sup>.

In a study of high-poverty urban High School students' plans for HE in the USA, Sebnem and Drotos (2016) found that the rewards of HE outweigh the costs in a similar way to those of young people in London (see Section 3.5.1): "The study's findings suggest that students saw higher education as a reward and therefore wanted to attain it—primarily to improve their future economic security. In addition to the expected economic returns of higher education, however, reasons for aspiring to attend college also included students' perceptions of symbolic meaning and value of college (i.e., higher education as a symbol of life success) and desire for personal and/or societal betterment."<sup>80</sup>

Studies in other countries found that whilst financial costs and benefits do play a role, they are often based on incorrect or incomplete information. In their study of decision making in Italy, Barone et al. (2017): "...found that student beliefs about the profitability of HE are highly inaccurate, systematically biased, and only partially updated over the final year of high school. Moreover, students show limited awareness of the marked

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<sup>77</sup> Budd R. (2017), Undergraduate orientations towards higher education in Germany and England: problematizing the notion of 'student as customer'. *High Educ* (2017) 73:23–37

<sup>78</sup> However, the author does point out that this finding is at odds with other research which shows that 60% of German students consider rankings when choosing their university. But this is unrelated to future earnings and career trajectories as it is in England.

<sup>79</sup> Beerkens M. et al (2016), Similar Students and Different Countries? An Analysis of the Barriers and Drivers for Erasmus Participation in Seven Countries. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 2016, Vol. 20(2) 184–204

<sup>80</sup> Sebnem C. and Drotos S.M. (2016), High-Poverty Urban High School Students' Plans for Higher Education: Weaving Their Own Safety Nets *Urban Education* 2016, Vol. 51(1) 3–31



differences between tertiary fields in terms of career opportunities”<sup>81</sup>. Students were optimistic about the outcomes from HE and overplayed the costs. In this study, students and their parents were given more accurate and up-to-date information about the financial costs and benefits of HE. The intervention did not change students’ intentions to apply for university in general and in those from different social groups. The only difference was that those from lower social groups were more likely to consider subjects where the prospective earnings were higher.

An evaluation of an Australian programme, targeting high achievers from low income families and encouraging them to apply to HE, found similar decision making processes reported in earlier sections (for example see Sections 3.3 and 3.4)<sup>82</sup>. Providing young people and their parents with information improved their decision making processes by making HE an option for them through making them aware of what’s involved with becoming a university student, what career and study options are available, the steps they need to take, and what support is available.

In Canada, Greene and Kirby (2012) found that students were attracted to HE providers with lower tuition fees<sup>83</sup>. Memorial University in Newfoundland charged lower tuition fees and this attracted students from further away due to the lower costs. In many ways these ‘migrant’ students were similar to other students in that they: “...consult a wide variety of sources before arriving at a choice of university and...utilise a wide range of resources including family, friends, educators, co-workers and Memorial University alumni, as well as services and programmes available from online sources and university promotional materials”. However, tuition fee costs are an especially important consideration along with university reputation and programme availability.

Marginson (2016), and Gallacher (2014)<sup>84</sup> voice similar concerns to authors in the UK; that the expansion and widening participation of HE leads to a stratified system, with those from higher social groups attending the highest ranked HE providers and vice versa. Using analysis of attendance at different types of HE providers by deprivation quintile, Gallacher found that those from the most deprived areas were increasingly likely to attend colleges and post-1992 HEIs. Marginson reports on a census-level study of all 2008 applicants to US higher education. The large majority (percentage not specified) of those students in the top 4% by SAT scores and grade point averages and in the bottom

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<sup>81</sup> Barone C. et al (2017), Information Barriers, Social Inequality, and Plans for Higher Education: Evidence from a Field Experiment. *European Sociological Review*, 2017, Vol. 33, No. 1, 84–96

<sup>82</sup> Cuthill M. and Jansen D. (2013), Initial results from a longitudinal impact study focusing on a higher education ‘widening participation’ program in Australia. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* Volume 15, Number 1, April 2013.

<sup>83</sup> Greene M. and Kirby D. (2012), The impact of tuition fees on access and student migration: lessons from Canada’s Atlantic coast. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* Volume 14, Number 1, June 2012

<sup>84</sup> Gallacher J. (2014) Higher education in Scotland: differentiation and diversion? The impact of college-university progression links, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 33:1, 96-106

family income quartile did not apply to a 'selective college'. Even though such colleges charged lower tuition than many non-selective institutions, due to the provision of financial aid in selective institutions. The reason proposed is that: "Low-income high achievers opted for uniformly safe choices"<sup>85</sup>.

### 5.3. Summary

- Information about the earnings of previous learners was more important to young people than how much the course cost and whether there was financial support available. This was true for all routes students chose (HE (Academic), FE (Academic) and HE/FE Technical).
- Young people found information about the cost of and financial support available to them easier to locate than information about earnings. For example, 88% of those on the HE (Academic) route found information about cost easy or very easy to get hold of. 71% of the same group found information about financial support easy/very easy to access and 65% found earnings data easy/very easy to access.
- The decision making processes of young people in England are similar to those in other countries. This is relatively surprising, given the higher tuition fees paid by students in England compared with other countries. Young people develop a predisposition to pursuing a particular route. HE funding is an important component of this decision, but it is not the main one and is offset to a large extent by the deferred repayment of income contingent loans repaid when earnings reach a certain threshold.
- Similar to England, studies from other countries suggest that young people from low income (and other) backgrounds would benefit from more accurate information about HE, which could help them make more informed choices about whether to consider HE in the first place, which subjects to study and which HE providers to attend.

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<sup>85</sup> Marginson (2016) op cit.

## 6. Mature Students

This section focuses on mature students<sup>86</sup> and whether their decisions, and the content of those decisions are in any way different from those of young people.

### 6.1. Which factors shape mature students' choices?

The decision making process for older people is different to that of younger people. They are much less likely to frame or make decisions about engagement in learning and skills on their own; other organisations, primarily employers and Jobcentre+, are much more likely to take the lead in those decisions.

#### 6.1.1. People as individuals

Previous sections have shown that, when the individual is the prime decision maker, older people tend to prioritise location much more than younger people. This is because of their other commitments to family and work. But in most respects, older people go through a similar process to younger people. For whatever reason, whether it is to improve their labour market prospects, return to work, support their children's education or for pleasure, the decision to engage in education will evolve over time. Practical choices (which provider, can I afford it?) will then manifest themselves, and barriers and incentives can be evaluated.

A key difference in the decision making and choices of older compared to young people, is that older people's moments of choice are much less predictable, and can be prompted by uncertain events: being made redundant, health issues, bereavement, promotion, changes in caring responsibilities etc.

R. Gloster et al. (2013) consider behavioural approaches to older people's decision making processes<sup>87</sup>. People accessed and utilised a range of sources of support, of which family and friends were the most important. However, these sources could be discouraging as well as encouraging. Older people tended to use the internet to access information, although in the main it was used to find and apply for jobs. The internet was not just a source of information but also support; older people were happy to communicate with on-line advisers and use internet based tools (e.g. CV builders)<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> The definition of mature student will vary depending on the focus of the research. For example, UCAS define a 'mature' student as: '...over the age of 21 who didn't go to university after school or college'. But in FE it tends to mean those aged 24+. In this section mature students are also referred to as older people as some are not students.

<sup>87</sup> R. Gloster et al. (September 2013), Adult career decision-making: qualitative research. BIS

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

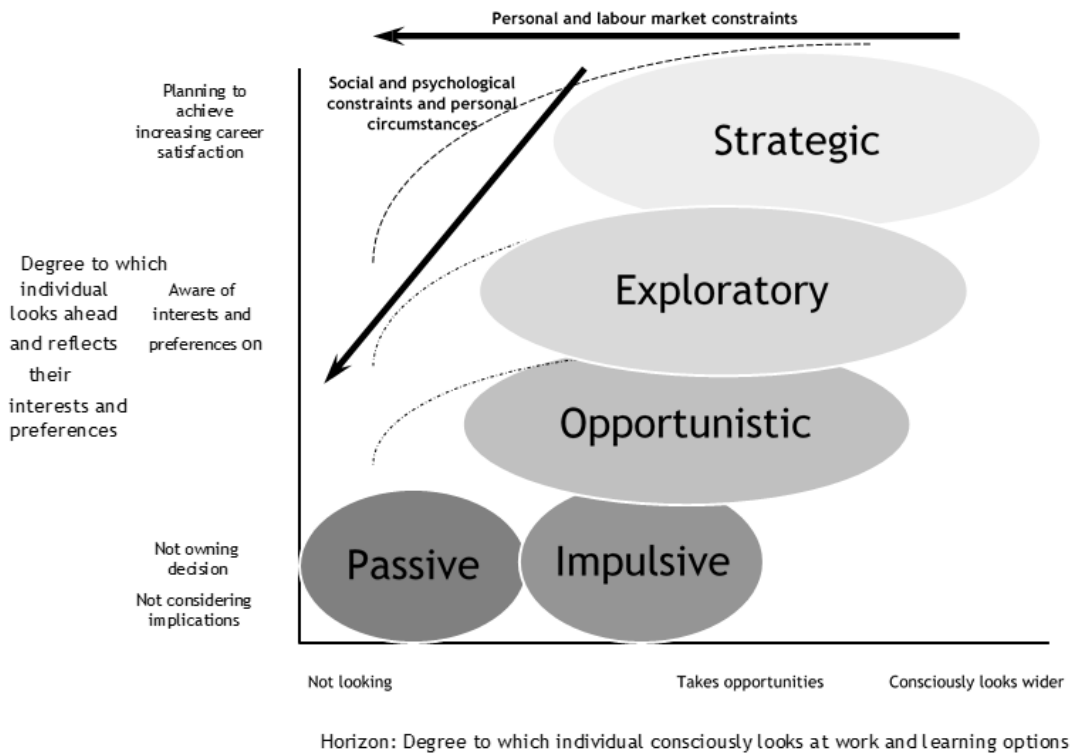
Only a small number of interviewees in the study used formal careers services. Some of these people had used the National Careers Service (NCS) although many were unaware that it was the NCS they were using, or what the full range of NCS support was that they could access. Respondents tended to receive employability type support (i.e. help to get people into work), when what they really wanted was: "...support in helping them to make sense of their opportunities and constraints, and to develop an understanding of their interests and preferences".

The authors developed a typology of decision making styles:

- **Strategic:** Reflective about self; systematic; seeking out information and consulting others; deliberate weighing up of factors influencing the decision.
- **Exploratory:** Reflective after periods of experience; testing ideas through experience; evaluating how they feel about experiences; can be pro-active in looking for opportunities.
- **Opportunistic:** Reactive; responding to opportunities; often taking opportunities pointed out by others.
- **Impulsive:** Emotional; instinctive; often taking very quick decisions with little or no thought about real options or the consequences of decision.
- **Passive:** Laid back; drifting; reacting to choices presented; strongly influenced by others in their choices.

Figure 24 puts these decision making typologies in a wider context.

**Figure 24: Overview of older people's career decision-making styles**



Source: R. Gloster et al. (September 2013)

The two axes represent the extent to which people look outwards towards the world of work and learning, and the extent to which they follow their own interests and preferences. The two are not mutually exclusive. The diagram also includes personal, labour market, sociological and psychological constraints (though these are not treated as drivers and/or motivators).

### 6.1.2. Older people in HE

Table 3 showed the decline in some categories of HE learners, particularly part-time students. The Independent Commission on Fees (ICOF) found that the decline in older people's (those aged 20-24 and 25+) applications in 2012-13 in the UK was driven by a large fall in England. The figures for both age groups in Northern Ireland grew, remained static in Wales, and grew overall in Scotland<sup>89</sup>. ICOF concluded that this was because of the increase in tuition fees in England.

Mature HE students differ from younger students in that they have different qualifications on entry. Almost nine out of ten (86%) young students have A levels as their highest qualification, compared to 29% of mature students. Two out of five mature students

<sup>89</sup> Independent Commission on Fees (September 2013), Analysis of university applications for 2013/2014 admissions

(40%) already hold an HE or professional qualification, whilst a further 9% have completed an Access course<sup>90</sup>. 57% are from the highest NS-SEC groups, but over one third are from semi-routine and routine occupations.

The findings across all mature students is similar to that found by Higgins et al. (August 2010). Figure 17 shows that mature students' main reasons for choosing their HE provider was because it offered the course they want to study, and location. The availability of flexible study options was third most important (this study was undertaken before the fall in part-time students). Whilst almost half of mature students sourced their information from UCAS, 40% did not consult any information sources. 'Interest in my subject' was the primary motivating factor (57%), followed by 'to get a more fulfilling job (44%), improve my earning potential (41%), and to change my career (35%).

### **6.1.3. People in employment**

Analysis of the Labour Force Survey shows that older people are much less likely to participate in job related training than younger people. Figure 25 shows that in 2017 there was a consistent (if slight) decline in the level of training in each age group, the rate of decrease becomes more pronounced after 54 years of age<sup>91</sup>. However, levels of involvement in training are around the 25% mark for most age groups. Between 2010 and 2017, the level of training declined in every age group, apart from those aged 55+.

For older people, there is much less financial incentive to engage in training. The wage returns to qualifications decline significantly after the age of 25. Also, additional qualifications add little to an individual's chances of gaining employment, compared to their work experience<sup>92</sup>. However, for people with less work experience qualifications are likely to be more valuable.

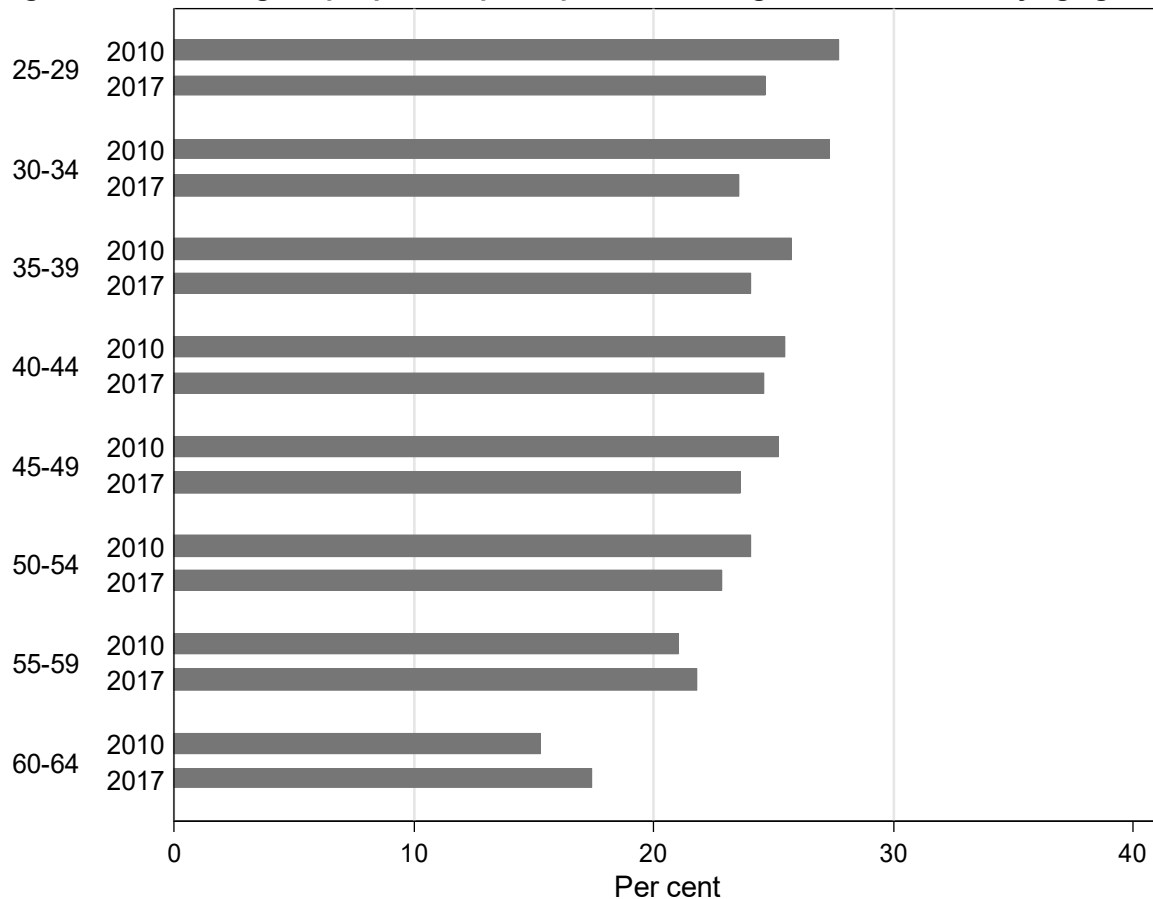
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<sup>90</sup> D. McVitty and K. Morris (May 2012), Never Too Late To Learn: Mature students in higher education. million+ and National Union of Students (NUS)

<sup>91</sup> D. Luchinskaya and P. Dickinson (Forthcoming), Adult Skills: Who gets invested in and how has this changed over time? Social Mobility Commission.

<sup>92</sup> A. Bhutoria (September 2016), Economic Returns to Education in the United Kingdom.

**Figure 25: Percentage of people who participated in training in 2017 and 2010, by age group**



Source: Luchinskaya and Dickinson (2018). Labour Force Survey 2010 and 2017, June-September quarter, people aged 25 to 64 in employment, weighted.

A key feature of apprenticeships over the past decade has been the increase in adult starts . However, over the past five years (2011/12 to 2015/16) the age profile of apprentices has remained fairly stable. In 2015/16, 26% of apprentice starts were made by 16-18 year olds, 30.2% by 19-24 year olds, and 44% of those aged 25+<sup>93</sup>.

However, the prime mover and funder of job related training in general, and apprenticeships in particular, will be the employer. People working in large organisations, the public sector, in managerial, professional, associate professional and technical, and personal service occupations are the most likely to be involved in training. Occupational training is also highly related to gender<sup>94</sup>.

In their study of advanced apprentices, Smith et al. (2015) found that the progression rate to HE of older people was half that of younger apprentices<sup>95</sup>. The progression rate for

<sup>93</sup> Department for Education (2018), Apprenticeships demographics data tool: starts 2011/12 to 2016/17. FE data library: apprenticeships

<sup>94</sup> D. Luchinskaya and P. Dickinson (Forthcoming) op cit

<sup>95</sup> S. Smith et al (September 2015), Progression of Apprentices to Higher Education – 2nd Cohort Update

25+ apprentices peaked at 7% for the 2006-07 cohort dropping to 5.7% for 2010-11 apprentices. The progression rate for 17-19 year old apprentices in 2008-09 peaked at 15.8% dropping to 12% for 2010-11 young apprentices.

If advanced apprentices did progress to HE this happened several years after completing the advanced apprenticeship. They were also likely to study HE at an FE College.

#### **6.1.4. People not in employment**

DWP's Six Month Offer mandated claimants to choose one of four options: an employment voucher to give to a potential employer, advice on self-employment, a volunteering placement or work-focused training. The options were offered to different numbers of unemployed people depending on their profiles. For example, more qualified people were less likely to receive the training offer. Take-up of the training option was second behind the employment voucher.

Take-up of the training offer was marginally higher among those aged 18-24 (32%) than those aged 25-49 (29%), which was higher than those aged 50+ (25%). Older learners were much more likely than younger ones to undertake the training in order to gain new skills or update existing ones. It was the highest ranked reason for those aged 25-49 (45% gave this reason) and 50+ (46%) compared to 18-24 year olds (32%)<sup>96</sup>. This supports findings from a number of studies that the primary motivating factor for unemployed people in undertaking training is to get a job.

In their study of approaches used by UK online centres, Dickson and Frearson (2007) found that engagement with hard to help learners on the individual's terms was very important<sup>97</sup>. Engagement was primarily through organisations working with the target hard to reach groups (e.g. a women's refuge). This was the first step in developing a trusted relationship. Getting the atmosphere, communication and contact was also important in order to make learners feel comfortable, many of whom would not have undertaken education and training since leaving school. Basic skills and ICT courses were the most popular.

Gloster et al. (2017) applied behavioural insights to claimants' decision to train<sup>98</sup>. The authors identified critical moments when claimants are receptive to training: the initial assessment when they first sign-on; through ongoing adviser support when the person is

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<sup>96</sup> L. Adams et al (2010). Six Month Offer Evaluation: A report on quantitative research findings. DWP.  
L. Adams et al (2011). Six Month Offer Evaluation: Findings from the longitudinal claimant survey. DWP.  
<sup>97</sup> A. Dickson and M. Frearson (2007), Engaging the hardest to reach what works at UK online centres. LSDA

<sup>98</sup> R. Gloster (July 2017), Using behavioural insights to examine benefit claimants' approaches to training opportunities



unable to find work; and if they have positive experiences from undertaking training that is job oriented and relevant to them.

The last point is important. Claimants were open and willing to train: "...particularly if they perceived that the training opportunity was a good fit with their skills and experience and would add value by helping them to work towards their employment goals". The study also found that Jobcentre Plus advisers were frequently used as a source of information about training provision<sup>99</sup>. The study found that mandated learners tended to be directed to employability courses (e.g. CV writing) whereas self-referred claimants tended to undertake vocational courses.

As far as motivation is concerned, conditionality and mandation are key elements. A claimant's capability (their individual skills, experiences and work goals) need to be taken into account and this is where adviser support and understanding is required as they perform a gatekeeper role to training opportunities:

"The motivations for training are complex and personal. Claimants react to mandation to training differently. For some it does not affect their planned behaviour and they continue to train. For others it can create a sense of anxiety that overshadows their learning experience. Mandation changes the nature of the interaction, and it made some claimants more defensive or dismissive of the training opportunity"<sup>100</sup>.

It is a fine balancing act because positive experiences of training encourage people to undertake more training. And this is critical in getting disadvantaged learners, many of whom will have negative attitudes to education and training, on to a positive and progressive path.

### 6.1.5. Summary

- **Older people's aspirations, choices and intentions evolve over time.** While this is similar to the decision making process of younger people, older people's moments of choice are much less predictable and can be prompted by uncertain events e.g.: being made redundant, health issues, bereavement, promotion, changes in caring responsibilities etc.
- **Like younger people, older people access a wide range of information and support.** Friends and family tend to be heavily involved.
- **Older people's participation in HE appears has been significantly affected by the increase in tuition fees.** Part-time student numbers especially have declined.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

- **When deciding on HE options, location is a much more important decision-making factor for older students, compared with younger students.** Interest in the subject, earnings and careers and flexibility of learning are also important motivating factors.
- **Unlike younger people, older people are more likely to have organisations heavily involved in their education and training decisions.** Employers can be the major decision maker for people in employment, while Jobcentre+ advisers play an important role in supporting unemployed people into work related training.

## 7. Summary

This section brings together the main summary points from the review under the research question headings.

### 7.1. Choices between Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships

#### 7.1.1. Overview of decision making pathway

**Most young people consciously make their post-18 choices in Year 9 (when choosing their GCSE options), in Year 11 (the transition point into post-16 education and training), and in Year 12 (for those in HE).**

**Young people tend not to amass a large amount of information before they make a broad decision.** They tend to decide on a chosen route first (based on an array of factors) and then seek out information about it.

**Young people on academic pathways start to think about their post-18 choices earlier than those on technical routes, and make their final decisions sooner.** While 8 per cent of those on a HE (Academic) pathway first considered their future education choices in Years 7 or 8, only 2% of HE (Technical) learners did so. One third (33%) of those on HE (Academic) routes made their final decision about their post-18 route during Year 12 and just under half (47%) made it during Year 13. This compares to 19% and 63% respectively for HE (Technical) learners on higher level apprenticeships.

**Evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England suggests that there is little movement between different broad types of post-18 pathway (e.g. higher education, technical education or employment), especially after Year 13.** This suggests that the 16-18 year old transition point is critical for longer term outcomes in a young person's life.

#### 7.1.2. Demographic factors impacting on choices between Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Apprenticeships

**The choice that young people make between HE, FE and Apprenticeships is heavily influenced by their demographic characteristics. In particular:**

- **Socio-economic group (SEG):** Young people from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to progress to HE. Those in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) or a

16-19 Bursary are more likely to follow FE or Technical routes, as are those whose parents did not go to university. However, the role of SEG in learning and skills decision making is complex, given that it is closely related to prior attainment, which is the best predictor of future outcomes.

- **Prior attainment:** Attainment at age 16 is a key determinant of young people's post-18 pathways, with higher attainment at this age associated with higher rates of post-18 participation in education and training and, specifically, higher rates of participation in HE.
- **Gender:** Take-up of the broad post-18 options is relatively balanced between women and men, although women are more likely than men to enter education and training. (Women account for 57% of HE starts and 54% of apprenticeship starts.) There are significant differences in the subjects chosen by men and women on both technical and academic post-18 routes. In terms of apprenticeships, women are more likely to choose subjects like Hairdressing, Children's Care, Learning and Development and Supporting Teaching in Learning and School. Men are more likely to choose subjects such as Construction, Electrotechnical and Vehicle Maintenance and Repair.

### **7.1.3. The impact of access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) on young people's choices between HE, FE and Apprenticeships**

**Young people pursuing different post-18 pathways have different information needs.** Young people are most interested in finding out about course entry requirements and what they will learn on a course, regardless of their post-18 route (Technical HE/FE, HE (Academic) and FE (Academic)). However, young people looking to HE (Academic) routes are more likely than those on other routes to want to know about: the satisfaction of previous learners; costs; the availability of financial support; and job, and earnings outcomes. Young people aiming for Technical FE/HE routes are more interested in how the course is assessed. Large proportions of those on the HE (Academic), and Technical FE/HE routes also want to know about location and accessibility.

**Most young people would like careers information in one place, and want personalised IAG that is relevant to them.** Their preference would be to speak to someone face-to-face, by phone or text, and this preference is strongest amongst those on Technical FE/HE routes.

**Most young people are broadly satisfied with the IAG available, however, significant minorities have faced issues.** These issues include not finding the information to help them make a decision (<20%), not finding all the information they

wanted to make a fully informed decision (<15%) and not being aware of available IAG (<15%).

**A significant minority of young people are also confused about which sources of information they can trust.** 30% of all young people agreed or strongly agreed that 'I did not know what source of information I could trust to give me accurate information'. Young people on HE (Academic) pathways were most likely to agree with this (40%).

**Parents/carers and other relatives were the individuals consulted most by young people following each of the three routes – Technical FE/HE, HE (Academic) and FE (Academic) – followed by subject teacher, and friends.**

**Those following technical routes were much less likely to have consulted their subject teachers compared with those following academic routes.** 48 percent of those following technical pathways had consulted subject teachers compared to 69% of those following HE (Academic) and 68% following FE (Academic) routes.

**Young people following technical routes were also less likely than those following other pathways to find subject teachers helpful or very helpful.** Three quarters (74%) of those on FE/HE Technical routes found their subject teachers helpful or very helpful, compared to 91% on the HE (Academic) route and 90% on the FE (Academic) route. Perceptions about the helpfulness of other individuals, including careers advisers, family, friends and staff during open days, were broadly similar among young people following different pathways.

**There is some qualitative evidence that IAG is perceived to be biased towards academic routes and away from more technical or vocational options.** In particular, studies highlight the often perceived poor quality of information about apprenticeships given to young people by teachers and careers advisers in schools.

**There are also potential issues with the timing of IAG in relation to technical routes. *When* pupils are told about apprenticeships is potentially important and could influence the effectiveness of information received.** In those schools where more than 6% of pupils graduated into apprenticeships, around 70 per cent told pupils in Year 10 or younger compared to just over 50% of other schools.

**Despite these issues, most young people are satisfied with their chosen route.** 87% of those taking the Technical FE/HE route are satisfied or very satisfied, compared with 89% taking the HE (Academic) route and 90% on the FE (Academic) route.

### **7.1.4. The impact of future financial returns, job prospects and 'lifestyle' factors on young people's choices between HE, FE and Apprenticeships**

**Future career prospects are of paramount importance to young people following academic and technical routes.** This is true despite the fact many young people on HE (Academic) pathways do not have a clear idea about what job they want to go into after completing their course. 38% of those on the HE (Academic) route agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I know what I want to do when I finish my current course', compared to 75% of those on the Technical HE/FE route and 73% of those on the FE (Academic) route.

**Young people also make their post-18 choices with their future earnings in mind.** Higher levels of qualification lead to higher financial returns. Despite the 2012 rise in tuition fees, HE is still considered a relatively good financial investment, and understanding of this among young people has grown over time. The main reason given by young people for applying to university is to improve their job opportunities and salary prospects.

**This holds true for young people of all social classes.** Although those in lower social classes are more concerned about student debt, and feel more reluctant about entering HE, participation rates among this group have actually increased.

**'Lifestyle factors' play a key role in underpinning the decision of many young people to enter higher education as opposed to other routes, such as apprenticeships.** When asked why they did not choose alternatives to HE, the most popular response, given by four out of five HE applicants, was simply that they 'wanted to go to university'. Qualitative research has found that young people consistently speak about non-academic aspects when considering university. For some, university represents a 'rite of passage', in contrast to apprenticeships which were not seen to provide a narrative about lifestyle.

## **7.2. Choices within HE and FE**

### **7.2.1. Choice of provider**

**In terms of provider choice, most young people entering HE choose providers because they offer the particular course they want to study.** This is the primary reason given by both Foundation degree students and other HE students for choosing a given provider.

**It is also important to potential HE students that a prospective provider ‘feels right’.** In this context, provider open days are important for students in making their choice of provider, and numerous studies have shown that talking to staff at an open day is among the most important sources of information for young people entering HE.

**The reputation of the institution was also deemed important by young people making their choice of provider.** However, university reputation is a greater influence on students from higher SEGs than lower.

**Among those entering FE, provider proximity was a major factor influencing where to study, but this tended to be by default.** If someone wants to pursue a particular course, programme or qualification, there is often only one General FE college in an area, so the choice of provider is limited.

**Location is also an important factor for mature HE students in choosing their provider, but not for young HE students.** Mature students are more likely to have other commitments (such as jobs and family), and are less likely to be able and willing to relocate to study. However, being closer to home was more important to students from lower SEGs. Over one third (36%) of those in SEGs C1-E rated being able to live at home as having some influence and 25% rated it as the major influence. This compares with 19% and 10% of students in SEGs AB respectively.

## **7.2.2. Choice of course**

**Gender plays a key role in influencing the course choice of young people pursuing both academic and technical pathways.** For example, in all but three of the top 20 apprenticeship frameworks/standards, the percentage point difference between male and female starts is greater than 20. In 13 of the top 20 frameworks/standards, the difference is greater than 50 percentage points.

**Future earnings potential plays a role in young people’s course choice.** 57% of students sought information on what previous learners on a course now earned, but this varied by route. 48% of FE (Academic) learners sought this information, compared to 56% of Technical FE/HE and 68% of HE (Academic) students.

**In terms of course choice, there is some evidence that students whose parents are more educated are more likely to choose subjects for intrinsic reasons, such as enjoyment.** Students whose parents had higher levels of education were more likely to choose arts and humanities subjects, and less likely to choose social sciences, law or business, compared to students whose parents had lower levels of education.

### 7.3. How financial factors influence choice

**Information about the earnings of previous learners was more important to young people than how much the course cost and whether there was financial support available.** This was true for all routes students chose (HE (Academic), FE (Academic) and HE/FE Technical).

**Young people found information about the cost of and financial support available to them easier to locate than information about earnings.** For example, 88% of those on the HE (Academic) route found information about cost easy or very easy to get hold of. 71% of the same group found information about financial support easy/very easy to access and 65% found earnings data easy/very easy to access.

**The decision making processes of young people in England are similar to those in other countries.** This is relatively surprising, given the higher tuition fees paid by students in the England compared with other countries. Young people develop a predisposition to pursuing a particular route. HE funding is an important component of this decision, but it is not the main one and is offset to a large extent by the deferred repayment of income contingent loans repaid when earnings reach a certain threshold.

**Similar to England, studies from other countries suggest that young people from low income (and other) backgrounds would benefit from more accurate information about HE, which could help them make more informed choices about whether to consider HE in the first place, which subjects to study and which HE providers to attend.**

### 7.4. Choice factors for mature students

**Older people's aspirations, choices and intentions evolve over time.** While this is similar to the decision making process of younger people, older people's moments of choice are much less predictable and can be prompted by uncertain events e.g. being made redundant, health issues, bereavement, promotion, changes in caring responsibilities etc.

**Like younger people, older people access a wide range of information and support.** Friends and family tend to be heavily involved.

**Older people's participation in HE appears has been significantly affected by the increase in tuition fees.** Part-time student numbers especially have declined.

**When deciding on HE options, location is a much more important decision-making factor for older students, compared with younger students.** Interest in the subject, earnings and careers and flexibility of learning are also important motivating factors.



**Unlike younger people, older people are more likely to have organisations heavily involved in their education and training decisions.** Employers can be the major decision maker for people in employment, while Jobcentre+ advisers play an important role in supporting unemployed people into work related training.

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## 9. Websites consulted

**Table 16: Websites with relevant literature**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Web address</b>
AELP	<a href="https://www.aelp.org.uk/resource-and-information-centre/">https://www.aelp.org.uk/resource-and-information-centre/</a>
Association of Colleges	<a href="https://www.aoc.co.uk/">https://www.aoc.co.uk/</a>
Behavioural Insights	<a href="http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/">http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/</a>
Campbell Collaboration	<a href="https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/">https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/</a>
Career and Enterprise Company	<a href="https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/research">https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/research</a>
CBI	<a href="http://www.cbi.org.uk/">http://www.cbi.org.uk/</a>
Cedefop	<a href="http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en">http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en</a>
Centre for Longitudinal Studies	<a href="http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/default.aspx">http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/default.aspx</a>
Centre for Research on Learning and Life Chances	<a href="http://www.llakes.ac.uk/">http://www.llakes.ac.uk/</a>
Centre for the Economics of Education	<a href="http://cee.lse.ac.uk/">http://cee.lse.ac.uk/</a>
Children and Young People Now	<a href="https://www.cypnow.co.uk/">https://www.cypnow.co.uk/</a>
Cochrane Collaboration	<a href="http://www.cochrane.org/">http://www.cochrane.org/</a>
Centre for Vocational Education and Research	<a href="http://cver.lse.ac.uk/publications/default.asp">http://cver.lse.ac.uk/publications/default.asp</a>
DfE, DWP, BIS etc.	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications</a>
DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion	<a href="http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&amp;catId=22">http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&amp;catId=22</a>
Economics of Education in Europe	<a href="http://www.eenee.de/eeneeHome.html">http://www.eenee.de/eeneeHome.html</a>
Edge Foundation	<a href="http://www.edge.co.uk/">http://www.edge.co.uk/</a>
Education and Employers	<a href="https://www.educationandemployers.org/research-main/">https://www.educationandemployers.org/research-main/</a>
Education and Training Foundation	<a href="http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/">http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/</a>

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Web address</b>
Education Endowment Foundation	<a href="https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/">https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/</a>
EPPI Centre	<a href="http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=53">http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=53</a>
European Expert Network on Economics of Education	<a href="http://www.eenee.de/eeneeHome/EENEE.html">http://www.eenee.de/eeneeHome/EENEE.html</a>
Gatsby	<a href="http://www.gatsby.org.uk/">http://www.gatsby.org.uk/</a>
ILO	<a href="http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/lang--en/index.htm">http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/lang--en/index.htm</a>
Institute for Apprenticeships	<a href="https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/">https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/</a>
IPPR	<a href="https://www.ippr.org/">https://www.ippr.org/</a>
Joseph Rowntree Foundation	<a href="https://www.jrf.org.uk/">https://www.jrf.org.uk/</a>
Learning and Work Institute	<a href="http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/">http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/</a>
Living Map of Jobs Innovators	<a href="https://jobsinnovators.org/">https://jobsinnovators.org/</a>
National Foundation for Educational Research (Nfer)	<a href="https://www.nfer.ac.uk/">https://www.nfer.ac.uk/</a>
National Institute of Economic and Social Research	<a href="https://www.niesr.ac.uk/publications/search">https://www.niesr.ac.uk/publications/search</a>
OECD - education	<a href="http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education;jsessionid=1m44398oar1y8.x-oecd-live-02">http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education;jsessionid=1m44398oar1y8.x-oecd-live-02</a>
OECD - employment	<a href="http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment;jsessionid=1m44398oar1y8.x-oecd-live-02">http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment;jsessionid=1m44398oar1y8.x-oecd-live-02</a>
OECD library	<a href="http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/">http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/</a>
Ofsted	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted</a>
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	<a href="https://www.phf.org.uk/publications/">https://www.phf.org.uk/publications/</a>
Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation (ImPRovE)	<a href="http://improve-research.eu/">http://improve-research.eu/</a>
Sutton Trust	<a href="https://www.suttontrust.com/research/">https://www.suttontrust.com/research/</a>

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Web address</b>
UK Commission for Employment and Skills	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-commission-for-employment-and-skills">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-commission-for-employment-and-skills</a>
UNESCO	<a href="http://www.unesco.org/ulis/en/advanced_search.html#6401922">http://www.unesco.org/ulis/en/advanced_search.html#6401922</a>
University College London	<a href="http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/">http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/</a>
VOCEDplus	<a href="http://www.voced.edu.au/">http://www.voced.edu.au/</a>
Work Foundation	<a href="http://www.theworkfoundation.com/wf-reports/">http://www.theworkfoundation.com/wf-reports/</a>

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