

Girls' career aspirations

This report evaluates the extent to which careers education, guidance and other provision raise aspirations and inform the choices of courses and careers by girls and young women to support their long-term achievement. It identifies weaknesses and examples of good practice in these areas.

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Executive summary

Young women achieve better educationally than boys at the age of 16. A higher proportion of girls than boys continue in education to degree level. Their early success, however, does not translate into similar advantages in terms of careers and pay in later life. Women are also less likely than men to work in certain sectors such as science, engineering and technology.

This small scale survey looked at the choices of courses and careers made by girls and young women at various stages in their education and training. Between June 2009 and December 2010 inspectors visited 16 primary schools, 25 secondary schools, (including 13 single-sex girls' schools) and 10 further education colleges. Inspectors also contacted 36 businesses linked to 12 schools. Inspectors found that from Year 3 onwards, the girls spoken to were thinking about what they would like to do after they left school. For girls of all ages, this thinking was strongly influenced by family and friends. These girls were aware of the conventions surrounding 'girls' jobs' and 'boys' jobs'. By secondary school they could also articulate reasons why they could, should they wish, choose any kind of job irrespective of tradition. Almost all the girls and young women who took part in the survey were open to the possibility of pursuing a career that challenged gender stereotypes, if the career interested them sufficiently. Their awareness of this potential, however, did not always translate into practice. Course and career choices made by the girls and young women, in the schools and colleges visited, were predominantly stereotypical and mirrored the national picture of take-up of courses.

Careers education was generally weak in Key Stage 3. This made informed choices of courses and careers difficult. In particular, the girls spoken to had only limited knowledge and understanding of how their choices influenced their future pay and progression. Eleven of the 12 mixed schools visited were not doing enough to promote the confidence, drive and ambition of girls and young women to take risks in challenging vocational stereotypes. While the 13 all-girl schools said that confidence and competitive attitudes were easier to promote in the absence of boys, it was still the case that the proportion of girls' entries for individual GCSE and A-level subjects in these schools broadly matched the national profile of examination entries by girls.

In the few examples where girls had changed their minds and set out on a new and unfamiliar route, that change had often been catalysed by a personal experience of either meeting a professional in school, or directly encountering the new kind of work for themselves. That could happen accidentally, for example as part of a school trip that captured an individual's imagination, or deliberately through school-directed work placements designed to challenge preconceptions.

Inspectors also found good examples of ways in which the specialist status schools visited engaged with employers. In these cases, the schools used their specialist status to present broader career pathways to young women and to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Key findings

- From an early age, the girls surveyed had held conventionally stereotypical views about jobs for men and women. They retained those views throughout their schooling despite being taught about equality of opportunity and knowing their rights to access any kind of future career.
- The programmes of careers education and work-related learning, and the provision of information, advice and guidance in the schools visited, were not focused sufficiently on the knowledge, understanding and skills that girls and young women needed in order to deal with factors such as career breaks and the roles they might wish to play as future parents.
- A narrow range of gender-stereotypical work placements dominated choices in almost all the settings seen.
- The girls and young women spoken to had limited knowledge and understanding of how choices about courses and careers influenced pay and progression routes.
- Even in the all-girls' schools visited for this survey, and despite the rich range of awareness-raising activities across all the schools, most girls chose careers along stereotypical lines.
- For a few girls, career ambitions were changed through direct observation of a professional at work, through mentoring activities, and through personal encounters and extended discussion with a professional about what their job was actually like.

Recommendations

Schools and colleges should:

- ensure that young people have a better understanding about career choice, subsequent progression and its impact on their long-term earnings
- assist young people in developing an understanding of the responsibilities and choices associated with parenthood
- develop better, and more carefully planned opportunities for young women to meet professionals working in non-stereotypical roles, and to learn more about what such work entails
- strengthen the knowledge and understanding of staff about the wide range of progression routes available so that girls and young women can make informed choices
- consider how to link the content of lessons and the skills to be developed more frequently to career opportunities
- consider ways in which mentoring could be used to help support young women in overcoming barriers to achievement.

The national context

1. Young women have better educational outcomes than boys at the age of 16 and a higher proportion of young women continue their education to degree level. More women have higher educational qualifications than men up to the age of 44.¹ This success in educational terms, however, does not translate into similar advantages in terms of long-term career status and pay.
2. Despite the Equal Pay Act (1970) and Sex Discrimination Act (1975), women have continued to earn less on average than men, although recent evidence suggests that women are now earning more than men between the ages of 22 and 29. The gender gap in favour of men is greatest among older workers, at around 17% for the 50–59 age bracket. There are differences in these figures between public and private sectors, between full-time and part-time workers, and between different occupational groups.²
3. In 2006 the Women and Work Commission concluded that women are crowded into a narrow range of lower-paying occupations that do not make the best use of their skills.³ Women are also less likely than men to work in certain sectors such as science, engineering and technology, although that may not have a direct bearing on initial earnings. In 2009, the National Skills Forum reported that increasing the range and level of women's skills would help to combat the UK's skills deficit, improve UK productivity and reduce the gap in pay and opportunities between men and women.⁴
4. In post-16 courses, there has been a slow shift in some subjects towards gender balance. For example, in 2000, 38% of A-level mathematics candidates were girls, rising to 40% in 2010. In 2000, 28% of entries in technology were girls, rising to 44% in 2010. But the proportion of girls taking physics fell slightly from 23% to 21% in the same period. In contrast, 56% of entries for biological sciences were girls, and 48% of entries for Chemistry were girls, so these subjects were essentially free of stereotypical choice bias.⁵ This survey checked A-level uptake in sixth forms where possible and looked for relationships between school specialism and A-level uptake.

¹ *An anatomy of economic inequality in the UK, report of the National Equality Panel* (ISSN 1465-3001), Government Equalities Office, 2010;

www.equalities.gov.uk/national_equality_panel/publications.aspx.

² Office for National Statistics, earnings analysis, 21 December 2010;

www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=167.

³ *Shaping a fairer future*, Women and Work Commission, 2006; www.ukces.org.uk/our-work/qualifications/woman-and-work/women-and-work-shaping-a-fairer-future/1004.

⁴ *Closing the gender skills gap*, National Skills Forum, February 2009;

www.policyconnect.org.uk/nsfapsg/research.

⁵ GCE/Applied GCE A/AS and Equivalent Examination Results in England, 2009/10 (Revised), Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011;

www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000986/index.shtml.

The survey structure

5. The survey set out to evaluate the extent to which careers education, guidance and other facilities provided by schools and further education colleges raised aspirations and informed girls' and young women's choices of courses and careers, to support their long-term achievement.
6. Much of the information gathered during the survey came from discussions with pupils and students themselves, coupled with information from some providers relating to transition between phases, and destination data beyond school. In the primary schools visited, inspectors spoke to mixed groups of Year 3 pupils and separate groups of Year 6 boys and girls. In the secondary schools, discussions were held with girls in different age groups, up to Year 12. Inspectors also visited 10 further education colleges, selected because they had targeted areas of provision specifically for girls and young women.

What girls know about future careers

The views of primary school pupils

7. Primary pupils taking part in the survey already had established views on work 'roles' and quite stereotypical personal opinions even though they knew in principle that any job is possible, irrespective of gender. They held clear views of what might be considered 'boys' or 'girls' jobs although, after some gentle prompts, most admitted that they could do either, in principle. But almost to a pupil, the girls spoken to would not countenance actually taking up a role they associated with males, for example plumbing, 'because it is so messy and boys like mess'. Both boys and girls had considerable difficulty coping with the concept of a boy being a nursery nurse, however theoretically possible they admitted that it could be.
8. In discussion about what they would like to do for a job, the youngest pupils talked about wanting to become teachers or vets (girls), footballers or pilots (boys). The Year 6 girls interviewed had a wider idea of what they might like to do with some already talking of science alongside nursing, teaching, police, armed services, care services, hairdressing and beauty work. Boys continued to prefer sports or applied technology vocations, a games designer being a popular notion. Around half (51 out of 112) of the Year 6 boys spoken to were thinking of these two areas. In contrast, only four of the 113 girls surveyed referred to sport (horse riding and gymnastics) while 43 were aiming at performing or graphic arts, or writing. Only five girls and six boys had no definite thought about a future job. No Year 6 pupil, girl or boy, wanted to be a nursery nurse or childminder although they all thought that these were 'girls jobs'.
9. Most of the primary school pupils surveyed had family or friends connected to the jobs they were considering. They had no clear understanding, however, of the necessary qualifications for their preferred roles, or of how qualifications

are structured through different levels. Most gave inspectors the impression of considering such matters for the first time during the focus groups. They offered essentially stereotypical reasons for why men earn more than women. For example, one pupil captured the general thinking of staff as much as pupils when she suggested, 'Girls can do anything. But most managers are men; boys want power more than girls.' Another said, 'girls have more to think about when going for a job. Men are more single minded on a career'. Another thought that 'people don't want women as leaders'.

10. Most of the girls spoken to said that they considered having an interesting job to be more important than the salary. About half of the 113 Year 6 girls had changed their minds about a future job, compared with when they were younger. They had moved on from teaching and working with animals to consider a wider range of possibilities, usually because of knowing a person doing that job, being involved in a club outside school such as music or drama, or in exceptional cases, seeing for themselves that work in action because of a school or family trip.

The views of secondary school pupils

11. In all but three of the secondary schools visited, the girls interviewed at Key Stage 3 spoke of their general awareness of future careers. Most of them could recall activities and events in which they had taken part, such as a commercial game which involved looking at random jobs and managing money, although they were unable to recall any key messages from the exercise. They made the point that the exercise was not personalised to job choices that were relevant to them.
12. Girls of all ages in the secondary schools visited were able to distinguish broadly between higher-paid and low-paid jobs. They correctly linked additional training and higher skills to higher-paid jobs but frequently over-estimated the salary of those working in the early years and care sectors. Girls enjoyed the opportunity to discuss different jobs and relative pay with inspectors and said they found this valuable and informative. All but two of the schools did not have a specific strategy which encouraged young women to consider longer-term job prospects and pay, although there were exceptions. For example, in one school visited, the young women spoken to referred to a 'Real Money' exercise, provided by their school, which they had found very useful in setting pay against bills and lifestyle choices. They felt, however, that the input would have been more valuable earlier on in school. They recognised that having more financial information would better support them to make informed career choices.
13. Almost all the secondary school girls who spoke to inspectors were open to the possibility of pursuing a career that challenged stereotypes, if the jobs looked interesting. Their schools had successfully ensured that their students understood that some career options were associated with stereotyping and that such views can be challenged. In one setting, however, girls' attitudes

were more entrenched; one Year 8 girl said, 'We are not meant to do men's jobs like building.' A few girls in this school expressed concern about possible unfair treatment in a predominantly male environment. Girls in the mixed schools' focus groups felt that they needed more information to broaden their view of what jobs were possible.

14. The most positive attitudes were found in the single-sex schools visited, where most of the girls spoken to asserted that they would definitely consider jobs stereotypically done by men. The girls in the selective secondary schools did not view any career as being unavailable to them, as long as they worked hard and achieved the relevant qualifications. They understood that this was integral to the changing roles of women and they felt that more women should be encouraged into roles traditionally done by men. However, this confident thinking, strongly championed by teachers and school leaders, was not matched by any noticeable shift away from gender-typical course or career choices. Almost all of these girls told inspectors that they were not planning to pursue such a route for themselves.
15. Inspectors asked Year 7, Year 10 and sixth form girls from the schools visited what career path they were considering; in all three age groups about a quarter of the 200 girls questioned were considering a health service route, with education and performing arts the next most popular. Only seven of the girls were considering engineering and 17 a science-related career. None were looking to construction-related trades. The girls' thoughts about future careers remained very similar across all three age ranges, in all types of school. For most of the girls spoken to, including the sixth formers, the major influence on their thoughts about careers remained that of family and friends. Typically, they were thinking of careers very similar to their families, either parents or siblings. The influence of school, or of explicit careers education, was relatively small. The information from families, however, did not usually extend to details about salary, career structure, or promotional prospects. Options programmes in Year 9 and guidance lessons were seen as helpful in making choices about courses, although links with careers were less explicit.
16. The girls in the secondary school sample were asked to reflect on concerns that they or their parents might have if they were to take up a less stereotypical career path. Most were very confident and did not see any barriers. A typical response was: 'You should not be judged by your gender or should not be treated differently.' All the groups spoken to knew of their right to expect equal opportunities and that women should receive equal pay to men for doing the same job. Responses about entering male-dominated occupations, however, were more tentative. For example, comments such as 'there may be discrimination' or 'it could be intimidating' were commonplace from girls who responded to questions about what they thought might happen if they attempted to enter such an occupation. In these cases, the girls suggested they would want to visit the working environment and see a woman doing the job successfully before choosing it for themselves.

17. Inspectors asked the girls for their opinion about why there was a pay gap between men and women. Their responses generally reflected common, and deeply held, views. For example, many of the older girls in the single-sex schools suggested that men were 'more competitive' and 'motivated by power', compared with women. They thought money was not the only consideration, pointing out the view that women were more likely to take time out of work to raise families. As one young woman put it, 'women have to compromise between work and family... it is supposed to be moving on but it is still women that have to make the sacrifice'. Another said, 'having children puts employers off appointing women'. Some young women also said that to 'get on' in leadership and management, girls had to be 'aggressive, forceful, persistent and selfish'. They thought that was why women did not pursue careers in high finance or business.
18. Almost all the young women spoken to from the school sixth forms visited said that they would consider a wide range of careers, although, in practice, they were usually following a narrower range of routes. A few were concerned about the language used in the workplace and the potential attitude of men, expressed in phrases such as, 'Women can't do this work.' Most of the young women, however, were very assertive; they wanted to prove men wrong by challenging stereotypes. They were concerned about the possibility that they might be pre-judged because they were female but felt that this would increase their determination to prove themselves and gain new experience.

The quality of advice and guidance

19. The primary schools taking part in the survey did not deliver explicit careers advice in the sense of informing pupils about the qualifications and skills needed to perform particular jobs. What they all did, however, was aim to maximise basic skills, including in several cases explicit approaches to improving communication skills, teamworking, writing, and problem-solving. The pupils spoken to at Key Stage 2 had increased their awareness of stereotyping and the potential for girls and boys to do any kind of job; this suggests that some notions about stereotyping and employment rights have been transmitted effectively by some means, although not necessarily intentionally. However, for those girls taking part in the survey, their information relating to careers came overwhelmingly from home and family and not the school.
20. In all the examples where primary schools were associated with a local specialist secondary school, either by proximity or through transition arrangements, good partnerships existed which involved drawing on expertise from that school and exchange visits for pupils and staff. In essence, however, these were accidental arrangements, rather than systematic; the exchange of specialist expertise depended on what the secondary school happened to have available rather than being a response to pupil need. In terms of providing role models that challenged stereotypes, these partnerships, where they existed,

appeared to be effective. Inspectors found several examples of female science and mathematics specialists and male performing arts experts meeting and working with pupils.

21. The primary school headteachers spoken to expressed a general concern that the information they possessed about a pupil's talents, ambitions, interests and circumstances was not making much difference to the work of the receiving secondary school. Although they felt that the 'event' of transition was well-managed in terms of the pastoral care and initial settling-in, they were not convinced that the receiving schools took much notice of individual pupils' attainment, let alone interests, across the full range of subjects. There was little evidence, other than anecdotal comments from former pupils, of primary schools seeking feedback from their ex-pupils.
22. Data showed that, in the sample of schools visited, girls chose courses at Key Stage 4 and sixth form in similar proportions to girls in similar schools nationally. Although there were no systematic school-based strategies to challenge those choices, school staff said they 'encouraged' girls to consider non-stereotypical routes and supported them if they made such a choice.
23. Where numbers in a particular curriculum area were high, this situation often but not always, correlated strongly with a specialist school's curriculum specialism and was in line with its course take-up targets. However, this could work for or against stereotypical choices. For example, one girls' school with an arts specialism entered a higher than average proportion (for girls nationally) for GCSE art and design, and drama but had no-one taking GCSE business studies at Key Stage 4. There was also a very low proportion of students studying design technology.
24. Other influences can promote curriculum emphasis alongside specialism. For example, in a school with specialisms in music and applied learning, 94% of girls studied design technology at Key Stage 4, driven by the (female) deputy headteacher's enthusiasm for technology. In that school an unusually high proportion of girls continued studying technology at A level and the school's destination data showed that five went on to study for engineering degrees.
25. In contrast, a specialist science and mathematics girls' school also had high proportions of GCSE entries for art, business studies, drama and sport but low proportions for design and technology. Two of the all-girls' schools visited saw participation in Diploma courses in information technology and engineering as an opportunity to challenge stereotypical roles and careers. However, the choice of Diploma subjects was frequently along traditional gender lines and there was insufficient focus on advice and guidance around this issue.
26. Choices made by the young women seen who attended college as part of the Key Stage 4 curriculum also remained strongly stereotypical. Typically, one young woman in Year 10 told inspectors, 'New subjects are not familiar enough so we go with what we are good at in Key Stage 3.' Another female student

said, 'There was no taster session for engineering', suggesting that taster courses might help to give girls the confidence to try something new. The value of taster sessions was also identified in Ofsted's survey on best practice in apprenticeships.⁶

27. None of the schools in the survey had systematic records of the ultimate employment of their former students. Inspectors heard anecdotes of individual successes and examples of former pupils returning to support the careers education programme of the school; however, the lack of long-term intelligence made it difficult for individual schools to adapt their provision better to meet the longer-term needs of their students. Nobody had asked the question of former students, 'what could we have done better to support your career development?'
28. In 11 of the 25 secondary schools visited, girls in Key Stage 3 said they were not sufficiently well informed to make the choices they needed to make. Explicit teaching about career breaks, the impact of raising a family and how careers develop through promotion was rare in all of the schools. Good examples did occur, usually within subject-specific courses such as business studies; however, the actual nature of what a particular job involved, beyond its entry qualifications, was not well understood. Commonly, girls thought of a job (by name or generic trait) and then used a database to suggest a range of relevant jobs that had similar entry requirements. Hardly any information about starting salary, promotion prospects and ultimate earning potential was available and girls had no clear idea what these might be even when they had very detailed notions of what they wanted to do. This was a major shortfall in the information available to young people making choices in these schools, irrespective of gender.
29. There was considerable variation in the numbers of young women spoken to by inspectors who had attended interviews with a Connexions adviser. For schools, meeting the needs of potentially vulnerable students was the priority in terms of the focus of the information, advice and guidance they provided. Much of this work began at the time of Year 9 options; this was evident in the limited awareness of careers education shown in inspectors' discussions with girls in Years 8 and 9. Access to specialist careers advisers in Year 9 for the majority of girls involved a group session linked to the process of choosing their courses for Years 10 and 11. Access to Connexions advisers in Year 10 ranged from 2% to 99% of young women in the schools visited, with one-to-one interviews an uncommon experience. Connexions advisers tended to focus on those in Year 11 and in particular, those most at risk of unemployment on leaving school. One view expressed by a few of the young women interviewed was that Year

⁶ *Learning from the best. Examples of best practice from providers of apprenticeships in underperforming vocational areas* (090225), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090225.

11 was 'too late'. One young woman commented: 'The interview was more of an event than part of a process.'

30. Almost all of the 193 young women interviewed in the colleges visited felt that their previous careers education had had very little impact in terms of informing them about career choices and their future economic prospects. At school, they had not been encouraged to consider jobs usually undertaken by men. This was the case even for most of the young women who went on to non-stereotypical courses, such as engineering or construction. In the colleges visited, around three quarters of the young women interviewed felt that their careers interviews at school had been unhelpful. Many said that the Connexions advisers had asked them what they wanted to do and what they were good at, but did not provide any suggestions about possible career pathways.
31. Despite the ubiquity of accredited information, and advice and guidance provision, course choices were overwhelmingly gender-stereotypical in all the 10 further education colleges visited. Construction, motor vehicle and engineering departments remained predominantly male. However, in these departments, there had been a trend to attract more women to 'softer' programmes such as painting, decorating and interior design. Areas such as health, social care, childcare, hairdressing and beauty therapy remained primarily the choice of female students.
32. Inspectors interviewed young women in the colleges visited who were attending non-stereotypical college courses, such as construction and engineering. These young women felt that any career was open to them. The reasons for enrolling on these courses varied. In some cases it was very much with the blessing of parents: 'My dad owns a garage, I grew up around cars and bikes and so this is natural for me.' Most had found a subject that they were good at or had attended a link course when they were at school. A small minority of this group had chosen their career path against their parents' advice, specifically to be different from their peers and to prove that they could do 'a man's job'. Several of the young women on engineering and motor vehicle programmes, for example, relished the surprised reaction from friends and strangers when they told them about their career plans. Around a quarter of those spoken to on stereotypically female courses, particularly in hairdressing and beauty therapy, felt that it was not appropriate for girls to work in certain jobs such as bricklaying.

External influences

33. The influence of role models, for better or worse, was a factor in shaping the opinions of these young women. Media representations also played a part. For example, the television reality show 'The Apprentice' was quoted by one sixth-form girl, supported by her peers, as 'proving the need to be competitive and aggressive' in order to succeed in business. Staff spoken to in the schools visited, especially the all-girls' schools, referred to strong role models that helped young women and could point to a few examples that had influenced

career pathways: for example, female teachers, senior managers and subject leaders were seen as helping to promote the status of women, particularly in non-stereotypical subjects. The staff drew attention to this as a positive strategy.

An ex-student returning to her school emphasised to inspectors the inspiration of her two physics teachers so that, by the end of Year 12, she had decided to study A-level mathematics in Year 13. She applied to university to study physics. Having successfully gained a first class degree, she was set to return to the school to train to teach science on the Graduate Teacher Programme.

In another example, a young woman in Year 10 who had expressed an interest in becoming an information and communication technology technician had been influenced by female technicians who were former sixth-formers at the school.

In one all-girls' school, typical of the others visited, high-profile women, some of whom were former students, attended speech day and prize-giving as effective role models. They talked about their work, how they got to where they were, and what skills and experience the students needed in their particular field. Ex-students returned to the school to talk about their time at university and in work. The girls were highly motivated by these role models. One girl said, 'I can remember X as a student in the sixth form when I started school. Now she is part of an engineering consultancy and advising men on how to set up projects. How cool is that?'

34. The impact of personal meetings with individual professionals at work, or even at school, sometimes had a more substantial impact in changing girls' pre-conceived ideas. In most of the focus groups, in all of the schools visited, at least one girl could recount an event that had caused her to review her career thinking. For example, one Year 10 girl was determined to become a forensic scientist, not because of current media exposure, but because of watching a crime officer at work in dealing with a burglary at her father's shop. She had followed this by getting a work experience placement with the local crime laboratory. Sharply focused experiences such as this were rated by the girls as much more useful than more generic careers advice and guidance, or whole-group presentations.

Careers and the curriculum

35. Fourteen of the 16 primary schools visited did not devote explicit time to teaching about careers, although all of them, to different degrees, undertook a range of activities that brought pupils into contact with the world of work, usually public services. In addition, two of the schools held career events. For example, one set up a whole day for Year 6 pupils to learn about job

qualifications, curriculum vitae, writing letters of application and interview techniques, using local business partners to help.

36. The primary schools did take advantage of some opportunities to deliver career related education. All of the schools regularly asked parents or governors to come to the school and talk to pupils about their work. All had regular visits by the police, fire service and animal rescue and sometimes by health service professionals. In the schools visited, off-site visits were not directed explicitly to future careers, but several pupils had been very positively influenced by such trips, often to the surprise of the school. For example, one Year 3 girl was determined to become a 'Water Zoo Owner', following a visit to a sea-life centre. Many other pupils told inspectors how these encounters had made them think about future jobs.

A Year 6 girl highlighted an area where opportunities to promote particular careers were being missed. She wondered 'why we had to study shapes', referring to a recent mathematics lesson. She was planning to be a horse riding instructor and could not see the relevance of mathematical shapes. She did concede that elements of dressage followed regular patterns. Further discussion with her and the other girls revealed a general sense of learning 'because we have to', rather than because of a clear link between topics being studied and pupils' personal interests and career objectives.

37. Secondary school girls and young women interviewed who had met representatives from businesses and made visits to business premises had benefited, because they had learned directly from these professionals what their work was really like. But this approach was not developed systematically in most of the schools visited. In particular, the positive influence of role models was not planned sufficiently to improve girls' and young women's knowledge and understanding of the place of women in society, or used specifically to challenge gender stereotypes through careers education.
38. The single-sex girls' schools visited had various approaches to challenging stereotypical choices, including the use of positive female role models and successful former students returning to the school to share experiences of work. Two of these schools had coherent programmes of work-related learning and enterprise education. All these schools used visits and visitors to broaden horizons: for example, women engineers visiting the school and students visiting engineering faculties led by women. One school, through its specialism as a language college, had developed extensive international links to extend its students' experiences of life and work.
39. The engineering specialism in another single-sex school was celebrated through outstanding displays with photographs and models linked to projects with employers. Through numerous leadership and enterprise opportunities, the girls developed the confidence and skills to consider a broader range of courses. All the single-sex girls' schools reiterated a view that the single-sex environment allowed girls to develop personal confidence and participate actively in lessons

without deferring to boys. Despite these initiatives, however, the proportion of girls choosing non-stereotypical courses or careers in the schools visited was broadly similar to other schools nationally.

40. In all the schools visited, girls mainly chose courses such as dance, art, textiles, health and social care and were strongly represented in drama. This continued in the sixth forms, including those in all-girls' schools, with young women following Level 3 courses in dance, art, textiles, sociology, health and social care, biology, English and psychology in large numbers. One school had been effective in challenging stereotypes in additional mathematics with equal numbers of male and female students starting the subject in Year 12. In the past, in this school, additional mathematics had been a predominantly male subject (nationally, 32% of A-level additional mathematics students are female) but the school had worked hard at 'selling' mathematics to young women over the previous three years.
41. All the secondary schools visited gave examples of ways in which they tried to raise the status of work-related learning. Typically, schools gathered feedback from the students about individual events. However, there were weaknesses in evaluating how well girls and young women understood course and career progression routes, the qualifications required for particular jobs and the knowledge and skills they needed for their future working lives. For example, students in Year 10, in one school, recalled a business visit to observe a range of jobs, but felt that it had not helped them with career choices or to see women in less stereotypical jobs. It appeared as a stand-alone input contributing to work-related learning rather than a coherent programme to build knowledge and understanding of career opportunities. This was a feature in other settings, as in this example:

Through an enterprise event, 'guess my job' proved to be a popular exercise in which students could ask 20 questions to identify the occupations of invited guests. This was designed to challenge perceptions and stereotypes, although there was little to indicate that it had an impact on choices of subject and careers. The input was not followed up to reinforce key messages or linked to opportunities for wider work experience. As a result, the girls did not see the link between enterprise events, careers education and their wider education.

Work experience

42. Despite the numerous examples of good ideas and helpful collaborative working that inspectors found in the secondary schools visited, work experience was not used effectively to challenge vocational stereotypes. Not enough of the young women spoken to had first-hand experience of, and insights into, less traditional areas of work, given that almost all the girls in Key Stage 3 told inspectors that they would at least consider a less stereotypical career. Of the 1,725 examples of work placements for young women, collected from records

presented by the survey schools, only 164 represented non-stereotypical experiences.

43. Whether these young women had found their own work placement or it had been chosen for them, the placements were almost all stereotypically female. The most common placements for young women in the schools visited were in education, hair and beauty establishments, offices, retail and health care. Most of the schools had not explicitly encouraged them to choose something unusual for young women, but most would support a student's wish, if possible. Exceptionally, in one case a young woman felt deterred by her school. She enjoyed working with motor cycles and cars and had found her own placement in a garage. However, she thought that her school considered that this was not acceptable; she believed this was because school staff held stereotypical views about the kind of placement that was suitable. She reluctantly undertook a placement in a nursery, but later studied motor vehicle maintenance at college.
44. In all but three of the schools visited, the young women were required to identify their own placements. As a result, much of this pattern was a result of the young women's family background and resources. Some of the girls spoken to said, 'It's not what you know, it's who you know.' In one rural location, work experience had been reduced to one week as it was difficult to find placements. Therefore, the young women felt lucky to get a placement, irrespective of whether it matched their interests.
45. Many of the young women interviewed in Year 11 reflected that they should have been more adventurous in their choices. Such reflection had been helpful to those in Year 10 and shows the impact that older students can have when they share their experiences and are challenged to reflect on them. One young woman in Year 10 commented that the experience of older students had made her think again about her choice.
46. Only one of the schools visited had a very clear programme to maximise the benefits of work experience. The timings had been adjusted to facilitate a wider range of placements in January and February. Year 9 students used a commercial programme to identify potential careers that cut across stereotypes. This was supplemented by an 'options fair' with a range of providers to ensure that the students encountered a variety of career possibilities. Work experience placements at the local hospital encouraged young women to consider medicine and an input from the fire service promoted public services. As a result, nine young women from the school, who took part in a well-planned placement with the local fire service, had very positive experiences, as the following example shows.

Young women were able to complete level 1 or 2 qualifications in Understanding Fire Fighting and a BTEC award in Fire and Rescue. Feedback from the young women who took part in 2009 indicated that they were well prepared for the placement.

Parents and carers were invited to a passing out parade where they listened to presentations on achievements and experiences. Highlights for the young women included 'going in the fire house, meeting new people and being treated as a young adult'. The placement, however, was not without its challenges. They included 'learning drills and working as a team' and 'running out the hose and climbing the ladder'.

The experience had a strong impact on the group and they gained a great deal. They recognised the importance of teamwork, two overcame a fear of heights, and they understood what was involved in becoming a fire-fighter. The challenges gave them confidence in their ability to learn new skills. When asked what they would say to other young women considering a non-stereotypical job, they were unanimous: 'Go for it!'

47. In a specialist school with technology status, the number of young women involved in non-stereotypical placements was growing slowly as a result of links with engineering companies. The coordinator for work experience was aware that some families were more able than others to support their daughters in selecting a work placement so she provided help with letters and telephone calls for the placements that the girls could choose. It was important to her that girls in Key Stage 3 were excited by the prospect of work experience. That personal drive by a particular member of staff had a considerable impact upon the opportunities available to girls in this school. The young women were very positive that work experience had been helpful, improving their confidence and broadening their horizons. But although the number of less stereotypical placements was growing, the staff were aware that most of their young women tended to choose placements with which they felt comfortable.
48. Nine of the 10 colleges visited routinely used female role models in their promotional materials, classroom displays and course literature for their engineering and construction courses. These colleges acknowledged, however, that this had not been translated into increased recruitment of young women to the course.
49. Mentoring was also a strong feature in several of the colleges and had a very important impact in helping some young women to overcome barriers to achievement. For example one student gained a college place on the BTEC foundation course in science, against her parents' wishes. She found the course difficult, changed her accommodation and got support from the college's counselling service. She became depressed, lost motivation and was on the point of leaving college when she was referred to the mentoring service. She was allocated a science mentor on a level 3 course who had a similar history in that she had also gone against her parents' wishes. The mentor acted as a role model and provided academic support, particularly for chemistry. The student completed her course successfully which contributed to an improvement in her relationship with her parents.

Extending the curriculum – examples of good practice

50. Across the schools visited inspectors found several good examples of ways in which the extended curriculum benefited from schools' engagement with employers. These presented broader career pathways to young women and challenged occupational stereotypes. One of the schools, for example, used the Young Enterprise initiative effectively.⁷ Volunteers from the local business community, such as female engineers and male nurses, as well as male and female business owners, worked to inspire young people to consider non-stereotypical careers.
51. Four of the schools used the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programme to devise activities involving teachers, students, outside agencies and local companies.⁸ These included projects and presentations, competitions and constructions designed to enrich students' experiences. Enthusiasm, teamwork and problem-solving were high on the list of attributes required. Data collected by the school indicated that a higher percentage of girls than boys were involved in the STEM activities. The girls spoken to said they had been inspired by the female role models in these schools. They had enjoyed their engagement in novel and challenging activities which had left them with a keenness to develop new skills.
52. In two of the schools with an engineering specialism, the specialist status had brought more opportunities and better facilities to support girls' understanding of the importance of engineering locally and nationally. The young women interviewed in these schools were becoming more familiar with the various roles available within companies, ranging from design and manufacture to selling, marketing and research. In one of the schools, the young women met such employers and had several project days, including one on building and launching rockets. In the other, the girls had been encouraged to find out about chemical engineering, catering, hospitality and business. The companies were highly committed to challenging stereotypes through visits and work-experience placements. One engineering company had a strong awareness of the importance of meeting young women's needs during visits:

The company specifically encouraged young women and promoted the creative and artistic side of business, information technology and options within the apprenticeship scheme. It recognised the need to make non-stereotypical roles appealing and visual, stating that: 'It is important that young women have the opportunity to experience an engineering setting to demystify working in an engineering environment.' Work experience enabled young women to see the range of skills needed, particularly computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture (CAD/CAM),

⁷ For further information on Young Enterprise Volunteers, see: www.young-enterprise.org.uk/case_studies/volunteers.

⁸ For further information on the STEM programme, see: www.dcsf.gov.uk/stem/.

where the creative side could be harnessed. This was supported by strong female role models. Placements were arranged to broaden experience and to ensure a strong match with each young woman's skills and interests. Mentoring was seen as a helpful approach in developing talent.

53. Practice interviews with employers, with a full debriefing afterwards, were helpful in providing life-like experiences, especially when students were carefully matched to the employer. Such work contributed strongly to young women's skills and confidence. One company provided an on-site training room each week for the engineering group in Key Stage 4 that included a few young women. The company was committed to developing local talent and progression through the apprenticeship scheme. One employer interviewed during the survey was particularly active and increasingly successful in employing young women in non-stereotypical jobs. Working with the local college, the company was providing employment and opportunities for apprenticeships specifically for female plumbers and carpenters.
54. Another school chose the business and enterprise specialism as a vehicle to improve students' attainment and aspirations. The 'At Work' initiative provided opportunities for young women and young men to develop relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes within a range of employment sectors. In partnership with the local Education Business Partnership, the programme underpinned the provision of industry-specific information for BTEC, GCSE and AS/A2 courses in business, sport, health and social care, and childcare. Students spent a week visiting a range of businesses in the public and private sectors related to their field of study. 'At Work' was provided at the beginning of Years 10 and 12. Students involved in discussions with inspectors valued the programme as it linked practical aspects with theory and gave them a chance to experience a variety of companies.
55. There were some examples (seven in colleges, three in schools) of coherent and coordinated provision for careers education, work-related learning and work experience. Some effective collaboration also existed with other education, training and employment providers and higher education providers that offered clear progression routes for girls and young women. Settings where this was more effective shared some common features, as illustrated in this school example:

A school serving an area of deprivation communicated high expectations and aspirations extremely well before students were admitted. A 'can do – no excuses' culture permeated the school. The staff promoted the sixth-form curriculum as early as Year 7 and assumed that education would continue beyond 16. Presentations included information on progression to the Level 3 curriculum. Work-related learning activities, supported by strong links with employers, challenged gender stereotypes. Sports leadership was promoted successfully among young women. Employers helped with enrichment afternoons for Years 7 and 8, and ran lunchtime

activities. Strong role models, many of whom were former students, returned as coaches. All the students were interviewed at key points and taster sessions were provided after GCSE examinations. Rigorous guidance and support helped to ensure that the students chose appropriate courses with a strong focus on the future. Access to university became a realistic ambition for many young women from families that had had no previous experience of higher education.

Partnerships with employers

56. During the survey, inspectors contacted 36 businesses linked to 12 of the schools visited, to evaluate their involvement with work-related learning programmes. There was a specific focus on the challenge to gender stereotypes. The evidence from this part of the survey indicated that the primary focus of these partnerships was on supporting work experience, facilitating visits to businesses and providing enterprise and business events in schools.
57. The effectiveness of links between schools, colleges and employers, and Education Business Partnerships in promoting awareness of a broader range of career opportunities and raising the aspirations of girls and young women, varied widely. In most cases, there was no overall strategy by the schools and colleges visited to tackle vocational gender stereotypes or to extend opportunities to provide girls and young women with first-hand experience of non-stereotypical work. In addition, the monitoring of participation in, and the evaluation of the impact of, activities carried out through the partnership, were not developed sufficiently by the schools and colleges to allow them to tackle occupational stereotypes or to ensure that all the young women had access to a broad enough range of experiences. This is in line with the findings of Ofsted's recent report on personal, social, health and economic education.⁹
58. Employers who took part in the survey felt that confidence was the key to progression to non-stereotypical routes for young women. They emphasised the need to extend practice in preparing for job interviews and in developing young women's presentational skills. Employers saw the potential for expanding links to tackle occupational stereotypes by:
- providing earlier experience of work to enable students to make more meaningful course choices
 - increasing visits to businesses and from business to schools
 - supporting interaction between different ages and levels within a company
 - providing work experience in a wider range of roles to extend choice

⁹ *Personal, social, health and economic education in schools* (090222), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090222.

- increasing the number of role models and mentors visiting schools
- promoting case studies from the local area where young women had moved beyond stereotypical routes.

59. All the colleges visited had extensive links with employers, particularly through apprenticeship programmes and Train to Gain, and were able to give examples of how employers had recruited young women as employees or apprentices.¹⁰ In most cases, however, these still tended to reinforce stereotypes. In four of the colleges, initiatives to challenge stereotypes had resulted in many more young men enrolling on hairdressing courses, but there was no similar increase in young women enrolling on stereotypically male programmes.

Notes

This report is based on visits to schools and colleges between June 2009 and December 2010, in two distinct phases. The first phase, to the end of March 2010, reflected the range of school settings attended by girls and young women. It included 12 mixed comprehensive schools and two girls' secondary schools. Inspectors also visited 10 further education colleges, selected because they had targeted areas of provision specifically for girls and young women. The colleges had recruited them to both stereotypical courses such as hair, beauty and childcare and non-stereotypical courses such as computing, engineering and construction. During the visits to colleges inspectors spoke to 96 girls on stereotypical courses and 97 on non-stereotypical courses.

Before inspectors visited the schools, school leaders were asked to select focus groups of approximately eight girls and young women from each key stage, including some who had been identified as underachieving or who had become more engaged as a result of the school's provision. During the visits inspectors held discussions with 276 girls. Discussions focused on experiences of learning; the quality of sex and relationships education; careers guidance, support and influences on course and career choices; challenges to gender stereotypes; and knowledge and understanding of how choices influenced progression routes, pay and long-term economic well-being. In the 14 secondary schools visited during this phase, three business links were identified for telephone discussions on their involvement in the schools' impact and focus on challenging stereotypes. Inspectors also contacted 36 businesses linked to 12 schools, in order to sample how the business partners contributed to the school's work-related learning programmes.

The second phase, in December 2010, was designed to complement the emerging findings, by following up further evidence in 11 all-girls' secondary schools and by also including 16 primary schools graded outstanding in recent Ofsted inspections for

¹⁰ Train to Gain was a National Employer Training Programme introduced in 2005. It offered training and assessment designed for employers, including an advice service on training provision. The Programme ended in October 2010.

the extent to which pupils were prepared for their future work. Inspectors spoke to 112 boys and 113 girls in the primary schools, and 64 Year 7, 65 Year 10 and 71 sixth form girls. Destination data for university courses, where available, were collected from seven of the girls' schools. These visits were much shorter and conducted at short notice, involving brief meetings with staff, discussions with groups of pupils of all ages, and analysis of any option and destination data available at the time of the visits. Two further secondary schools contributed data in place of visits that were cancelled by bad weather.

Further information

Publications by Ofsted

Developing financially capable young people (070029), Ofsted, 2008;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070029a.

Good practice in involving employers in work-related education and training (090227), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090227.

Good practice in re-engaging disaffected and reluctant students in secondary schools (070255), Ofsted, 2008; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070255.

Guidance for students studying science (100045), Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100045.

Implementation of 14–19 reforms, including the introduction of Diplomas (080267), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080267.

Learning from the best. Examples of best practice from providers of apprenticeships in underperforming vocational areas (090225), Ofsted 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090225.

Moving through the system: information, advice and guidance (080273), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080273.

Personal, social, health and economic education in schools (090222), Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090222.

Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why (090236), Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090236.

Support for care leavers (080259), Ofsted, 2009;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080259.

Other publications

Closing the gender gap: a National Forum report on women, skills and productivity, National Skills Forum, 2009; www.policyconnect.org.uk/nsfapsg/research.

Shaping a fairer future. Women and Work Commission, 2006; www.ukces.org.uk/our-work/qualifications/woman-and-work/women-and-work-shaping-a-fairer-future/1004.

Towards a fairer future: implementing the Women and Work Commission recommendations, Women and Work Commission, 2007; www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/towardsfairer.

Financial services inquiry: sex discrimination and gender pay gap report of the Equality and Human rights Commission, Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009; www.equalityhumanrights.com/legislative-framework/formal-inquiries/inquiry-into-sex-discrimination-in-the-finance-sector/.

Annex: Providers visited for this survey

Local authorities

Buckinghamshire

Ealing

Rutland

Primary schools

Archbishop Cranmer CofE Primary School

Barnfields Primary School

Bourne Abbey CofE Primary School

Burford CofE Primary School

Enstone Primary School

Eskdale Junior School

Greenfield Primary School

Harborne Primary School

Horsendale Primary School

Ketton CofE Primary School

Kings Stanley CofE Primary School

Lakefield CofE Primary School

Langham CofE Primary School

Longcot and Fernham CofE Primary School

Lutley Primary School

St Augustine's Catholic Primary School

Local authority

Nottinghamshire

Staffordshire

Lincolnshire

Shropshire

Oxfordshire

Nottinghamshire

Dudley

Birmingham

Nottinghamshire

Rutland

Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire

Rutland

Oxfordshire

Dudley

Solihull

Secondary schools

Alcester High School Technology College

All Saints Catholic High School, Rossendale

All Saints College

Cheadle Hulme High School

Fairfax School

George Stephenson Community High School

Greenbank High School

Hadley Learning Community

Hayes School

High School for Girls

Local authority

Warwickshire

Lancashire

Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Stockport

Birmingham

North Tyneside

Sefton

Telford

Bromley

Gloucestershire

Kesteven and Grantham Girls' Grammar School	Lincolnshire
King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Girls	Birmingham
King Edward VI Handsworth School	Birmingham
Kings Norton Girls' School and Language College	Birmingham
Newent Community School and Sixth Form Centre	Gloucestershire
Northampton School for Girls	Northamptonshire
Ribston Hall High School	Gloucestershire
Rugby High School	Warwickshire
Sale High School	Trafford
Stratford-upon-Avon Grammar School for Girls	Warwickshire
The Trafalgar School at Downton	Wiltshire
The Walton Girls' High School	Lincolnshire
Wallington High School for Girls	Sutton
Wolverhampton Girls' High School	Wolverhampton
Wood Green High School College of Sport, Maths and Computing	Sandwell

Further education colleges

Barnsley College
Bradford College
Highbury College
Kingston College
Lowestoft College
Northbrook College, Sussex
Solihull College
The College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London
The Manchester College
Weymouth College

Pupil referral units

Old Warren House School	Local authority Suffolk
The Schoolgirl Mums' Unit at Girls Boulevard Centre	Kingston upon Hull