

# **Raising Young People's Higher Education Aspirations: Teachers' Attitudes**

Fiona Johnson, Ella Fryer-Smith, Chris Phillips, Louise Skowron,  
Oliver Sweet and Rachel Sweetman  
Ipsos MORI

DIUS Research Report 09 01

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**DIUS Research Report 09-01**

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## **Executive summary**

This report presents the findings from research undertaken by the Ipsos MORI Social Research Unit on behalf of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS).

### **Study aims**

The aim of the study has been to examine the role and impact of education practitioners on the higher education aspirations of young people and, specifically, the range of attitudes, knowledge and practices currently exercised in a cross-section of English schools and sixth form colleges that have low progression rates into post-16 education and training, with a view to identifying the key factors of influence, and potential approaches for addressing these.

The objectives of the project were:

- To identify, compare and contrast the approaches to raising aspirations being undertaken by these schools and colleges, and perceptions of their effectiveness;
- To explore the range of attitudes towards progression held by a variety of school staff (from headteachers / principals to 'regular' teachers / lecturers), and what influences these attitudes;
- To 'triangulate' the attitudes, knowledge and practices of staff per institution;
- To examine the role of headteachers / principals in motivating staff to raise the aspirations of young people, and the nature and impact of their leadership in encouraging young people's progression; and
- To determine how education practitioners can be supported to enhance their approaches and practice in raising young people's progression aspirations.

### **Methodology**

The findings in this report are based on views gathered from a total of 108 teachers in interviews across 17 case-study schools and sixth form colleges in England, and two practitioner workshops. It is important to note that the case-study institutions were selected according to specific criteria, not to be a typical or representative cross-section of educational establishments.

Case-study fieldwork took place between January and March 2008. The workshops were held in April 2008.

### **Key findings**

A common understanding amongst the teachers interviewed is that encouraging progression and aspiration is a key aspect of their role, in the sense of preparing pupils for the 'next step'. Often, though, encouraging a longer-term perspective on progression amongst pupils is (as they see it) necessarily low on their list of priorities, particularly in light of the need to focus on floor targets (i.e. the percentage of pupils achieving five A\*-C grades at GCSE) on which their school's performance is judged.



Moreover, they are also very clear in seeing themselves as just one influence among many on pupils' decisions and attitudes, and they tend to believe that the level of influence they have is strongly shaped and constrained by other wider factors. As such, they are just one part in a complex system.

In the schools and sixth form colleges visited, teachers' sense of place and role in this complex system was reflected in markedly different attitudes towards raising aspirations and supporting progression. These were:

- **Campaigning**, in which teachers are focused on the intrinsic value of education to all pupils and hence value more traditional academic progression routes, such as degree courses, in particular;
- **Vocationalist**, in which teachers value a range of different learning pathways, but perceive vocational education as an important way of attaining qualifications and moving into employment, via an approach which is more engaging to some pupils than traditional academic learning;
- **Entrepreneurial**, in which teachers are focused on getting pupils into employment as the key outcome and value formal qualifications in the context of attaining appropriate work;
- **Laissez-faire**, in which teachers believe that it is largely up to pupils to take the initiative in choosing relevant progression routes, although they themselves tend to favour academic routes;
- **Resigned**, in which teachers feel disempowered to overcome the prevailing barriers to progression that they encounter.

Although some of these mindsets may appear to be more preferable than others in encouraging aspiration, there is no clear evidence that *specific attitudes are necessarily leading to better progression rates*. Teachers' attitudes are important, but even the more preferable mindsets need to be supported by good professional development, structures and strategies, if they are to be effective. Key to this are the following factors:

- Senior school leaders who set the tone by pushing a consistent and clear focus on longer-term progression as a whole-school priority.
- Related to this, the embedding of longer-term progression goals in the ethos of schools, signalled - for example - by the formal inclusion of progression in school development plans, so that progression is not seen as 'another task' but integral to everything the school does.
- A named person with over-arching responsibility for shaping each institution's progression-related activities, and with the drive, authority, time and resources to carry out this job effectively (a "progression champion"). However, responsibility for raising aspirations and promoting longer-term progression goals is not the sole responsibility of this member of staff, but one shared by all colleagues.
- An expansion in teachers' understanding of the current HE landscape, and the full range of potential pathways to and outcomes from Level 4 qualifications for young people, as well as the financing of HE.

- Strong relationships with the wider community including parents and carers, other schools, FEIs / HEIs, local (and national) businesses and employers, and other agencies / third-sector organisations.

All of the case-study schools and colleges already have some approaches in place to address issues around raising aspirations and encouraging progression, often reflecting established good or best practice in these regards. However, practitioners interviewed highlighted a number of other things that they felt should be done, and the interventions and support they felt would be useful or necessary in facilitating this. It is worth noting that not all of the measures identified are new, but it is significant that those interviewed are apparently unaware these approaches are established practice elsewhere or, if aware of them, feel unable to implement them.

The approaches identified fall into four key areas:

- **Broadening horizons / raising aspirations:** finding enough and appropriate work experience placements, especially in economically disadvantaged areas; exposing pupils to new experiences to build their confidence; involving role models in aspiration-raising activities; Aimhigher- and Gifted & Talented-related activities; starting to raise pupils' sights from an earlier age (for example, in KS3 or earlier).
- **Providing advice and guidance:** being more proactive / less 'laissez faire' in providing advice and guidance around progression; ensuring that all staff are engaged in providing advice and guidance around progression; expanding / bringing up-to-date teachers' knowledge about the full range of pathways (and parity of esteem), the types of careers open to young people with Level 4 qualifications, ways of funding higher education, student life, the long-term benefits of higher level qualifications (pay differentials etc), and so on.
- **Encouraging progression through the curriculum:** increasing the relevance of the curriculum to pupils, and their enjoyment of learning.
- **Working with external partners and the community:** developing schools' capacity and confidence in establishing links with FEIs / HEIs, businesses and employers; working with other local providers to ensure a varied and relevant range of progression options for young people; engaging parents and carers in supporting the promotion of longer-term progression.

## Recommendations

There are several key recommendations suggested by this research.

- Schools which are currently focused on short-term progression objectives, at the expense of a longer-term, more holistic view, do need a clear reminder of the importance of keeping sight of both. **Targets** for progression into higher education are probably not the answer. However, **guidance** to schools - especially those in the 11-16 sector - would be likely to go a long way. This should focus on encouraging the inclusion of broader progression issues into school development plans, the promotion of senior leaders with a responsibility for co-ordinating whole-school initiatives relating to encouraging progression, and advice on strategies for working with parents and carers, wider communities and other partners (further education institutions (FEIs), higher education institutions (HEIs), employers and third sector organisations etc.).

- There would seem to be a particular **role for HEIs to be more proactive in making links with, and providing support for, schools** (again, especially those in the 11-16 sector). There is a strong sense of dismay amongst those interviewed that HEIs are not as prepared to 'come to them' as they might be, not least when this would be logistically and financially more manageable for schools, and would hugely increase the number of pupils who could be exposed to this potential option.
- Related to this, **some clarification around Aimhigher** is required. To an extent, there is perception amongst those interviewed that eligible activities lack sufficient flexibility and that Aimhigher funding cannot always be used in ways best tailored to the particular circumstances of individual schools. These perceptions may be well-founded, in which case there is an argument for revisiting the funding arrangements and structure currently in place for the Aimhigher programme, to ensure their full fitness for purpose. Alternatively, these perceptions may be wrong, suggesting a need for better communications with, and guidance for, practitioners about this important initiative and how they can use it to support progression-related work in their schools.
- **Training / Continual Professional Development (CPD)** for teachers relating to the new higher education landscape is a clear requirement, particularly in shifting mindsets that are less effective in promoting higher aspirations amongst young people and encouraging their progression to Level 3 and 4 qualifications.
- Similarly, clearer and more accessible **information** on different progression routes, and ways of financing higher education, for teachers, young people and parents and carers, is essential. Amongst those interviewed, there is an awareness that these details are already 'out there', but they are widely regarded as overwhelming in their volume and complexity. The provision of information in a way that is simpler to understand, easier to navigate, and brought to life more effectively for all stakeholders - practitioners, pupils and parents / carers - is likely to be a role for government in the first instance, given the need to establish an up-to-date and fully accurate, 'current state-of-play' baseline. Once established, however, the responsibility for keeping abreast of developments, and for cascading this information to young people and parents, can be devolved to school-based "progression champions" and their colleagues.

## Introduction

This report presents the findings from research undertaken by the Ipsos MORI Social Research Unit on behalf of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). Research background and objectives

A key strand of Government educational policy has been to increase the participation of 18-30 year olds in higher education (HE). Setting out the economic and social imperatives for, and benefits of, widening participation, *The Future of Higher Education White Paper (2003)*<sup>1</sup> first stated the Government's target of a 50% HE participation rate amongst young people by 2010, as well as its commitment to broadening the socio-economic profile of the higher education student population.

Recent figures indicate, though, that HE participation rates amongst English-domiciled 18-30 year olds stood at seven percentage points shy of this target at c.43% in 2005/2006<sup>2</sup>, with the rate 10 percentage points higher for women compared to men (48% versus 38%). Moreover, despite the efforts of educational charities like the Sutton Trust, the implementation of national programmes such as Aimhigher and the Student Associate Scheme, the creation of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), and the outreach activities undertaken by individual higher education institutions (HEIs), all with the aim of increasing the proportion of young people from non-traditional backgrounds who enter higher education, the young people concerned continue to be under-represented in progression to higher education.

As one of the key spaces for intervention with young people who otherwise might not aspire to progress into higher education, the role of schools and colleges in encouraging and supporting young people to pursue Level 4 qualifications (whether traditionally academic or vocational) is crucial. Key to this will be the attitudes and knowledge of the staff providing that encouragement and support.

The aim of the study reported here has been to examine the role and impact of education practitioners on the higher education aspirations of young people and, specifically, the range of attitudes, knowledge and practices currently exercised in a cross-section of English schools and sixth form colleges that have low progression rates into post-16 education and training, with a view to identifying the key factors of influence, and potential approaches for addressing these.

In particular, the objectives of the project have been:

- To identify, compare and contrast the approaches to raising aspirations being undertaken by these schools and colleges, and perceptions of their effectiveness;
- To explore the range of attitudes towards progression held by a variety of school staff (from headteachers / principals to 'regular' teachers/lecturers), and what influences these attitudes;
- To 'triangulate' the attitudes, knowledge and practices of staff within each institution visited;
- To examine the role of headteachers / principals in motivating staff to raise the aspirations of young people, and the nature and impact of their leadership in encouraging young people's progression; and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/uploads/White%20Pape.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/trends/upload/xls/4\\_6t.xls](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/trends/upload/xls/4_6t.xls)

- To determine how education practitioners can be supported to enhance their approaches and practice in raising young people's progression aspirations.

## **Methodology**

This study presented the need to elicit rich data in an exploratory, open-ended manner - as a result, we adopted a wholly qualitative approach. The findings in this report are based on views gathered from a total of 108 teachers in interviews across 17 case-study schools and sixth form colleges in England, and two evening workshops from schools in London and Gateshead. Full details of how the case-study institutions were selected may be found in the appendices (see Appendix 1, *Sampling strategy*). It is important to note, however, that the case-study institutions were selected according to specific criteria, not to be a typical or representative cross-section of educational establishments.

Case-study fieldwork took place between 22 January and 31 March, 2008. The workshops were held on 1 and 2 April 2008.

## **The interpretation of qualitative data**

Qualitative research provides a depth of understanding which cannot be achieved from a structured questionnaire. The free-flowing format of the discussions provides an insight into participants' views and concerns, while seeking to identify not only *what* they know, think and do, but also *why*. It is a flexible and interactive process and, therefore, it is possible to respond to the individual circumstances of each participant and to bring their experiences to light.

It should be noted that qualitative research focuses more on *perceptions* than *facts*.

However, perceptions often *are* facts to those that hold them and, as such, are important to bear in mind even if the perceptions are, technically speaking, incorrect. All quotes used within this report are based on the perceptions of only those practitioners who took part in the research.

Furthermore, qualitative research is not intended (and does not allow) for the generation of statistics that extrapolate accurately to a larger general population from the data it produces. As such, when referring to the qualitative aspects of the project in this report we have used terms such as 'most' to imply a commonly held viewpoint amongst the practitioners we spoke to and 'few' to mean an opinion that was expressed by only a small number.

Verbatim comments provide evidence for the qualitative findings. To protect participants' anonymity, their comments have been attributed according to their school type, location and position held.

## **Glossary of terms**

A glossary of the various terms and acronyms used in this report may be found immediately after this introduction (on Page 10).

## Glossary of terms

BME - Black and Minority Ethnic

DCSF - Department for Children, Schools and Families

DIUS - Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

EAL - English as an additional language

EBP - Education Business Partnership

EMA - Education Maintenance Allowance

FE - Further Education

FEI - Further Education Institution

HE - Higher Education

HEI - Higher Education Institution

NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training

NVQ - National Vocational Qualification

PS(H)E - Pastoral, Social (and Health) Education

SATs - Standard Attainment Tests

SEG -Socio-economic group

SEN - Special Educational Needs

SLT / SMT - Senior Leadership Team / Senior Management Team

UCAS - Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

# 1. Factors influencing aspirations and progression outcomes: an overview

This chapter introduces and ‘frames’ the main report findings. It sets out the broader factors and influences that teachers interviewed feel are at play in determining aspiration and progression, even when these go beyond the scope of this research or (in some cases) the influence of the schools or sixth form colleges concerned. These areas are then unpacked in more detail, in terms of their impact on and implications for best practice in progression, in the following chapters.

## 1.1 Perceptions of ‘raising aspirations’ and ‘progression’

Practitioners interviewed have a clear and shared sense of what ‘raising aspiration’ means: increasing pupils’ desire to achieve and their self-belief that they can. This might be a goal in itself, but where the object of heightened aspiration is tied to a tangible outcome - that is, some kind of measurable ‘progression’ - for the young people involved, it is often the case that teachers’ focus is highly defined and fairly short-term, relating to piecemeal and step-by-step movement, for example, from one grade boundary up to the next, or from not achieving any GCSEs to achieving some; in short, ‘getting young people a little bit further up the ladder’ and not necessarily ‘getting young people into higher education’.

*In ‘teacherspeak’ progression means improving students’ curriculum levels and grades. That’s what we talk about.*

Citizenship co-ordinator, London workshop

*I think what we want to do is to ensure that our students don’t fall into the NEET [not in education, employment or training] category at one level.*

Head of KS4, 11-16, Rural, East of England

*Our aspirations as a school is always one of a positive outcome, and that positive outcome is, first of all, academically, in order that if a college says that you need five A\*-C [GCSEs], for us to work with those pupils for them to achieve those five A\*-C. But also to help them in that transition period when they’re moving on to FE [further education] or work. So it’s for us to work with them to get the best possible outcome ... I think planting that seed is part of our remit.*

Head of year, 11-16, Inner London

In this sense, the progression achieved by a young person is ‘good’ relatively speaking, i.e. better than they might have achieved otherwise.

This is not to say that practitioners involved in the research are unable to perceive progression in a longer-term, more absolute sense, i.e. **all** the steps that a young person needs to take to get them from Point A to Point B, assuming that Point B represents a young person achieving their fullest possible potential. But as is discussed in more detail below, teachers often feel that the circumstances in which they work necessitate a more pragmatic, and perhaps less idealised, focus than helping as many young people as possible to achieve a Level 4 qualification. As such, these teachers see progression as much broader than

progression to Level 4, or even Level 3<sup>3</sup>. Instead, their interpretation of progression covers a wide range of academic and vocational outcomes, for example:

- Getting pupils up one or more grades in their GCSE subjects;
- Preventing all or most under-achieving pupils from becoming NEETs by ensuring they go on to *any* further education, training or employment option rather than none;
- Getting pupils who have not done well at GCSE into entry-level courses at the local college;
- Getting pupils prepared and skilled to take up the kinds of work available in the local area, or the kind of job roles most suited to their interests;
- Ensuring pupils choose qualifications or courses that will be accepted by employers or other educational establishments in their fields of interest;
- Ensuring pupils with good A-level results go on to courses at the 'right' HEI - those that are well respected in their field, or have a strong reputation.
- Encouraging young people from families with no tradition of entry into higher education to consider this as an option

*For certain students, them meeting their potential is getting through five years in school, having only been in the country for two years, and coming out with at least a basic competency in the use of English and functioning in the local communities. The potential itself varies and what you define as potential follows from that.*

Subject teacher, London workshop

*I'm open-minded about progression routes - higher education isn't ideal for everyone - but I want pupils with the ability to go to university or to become apprentices, to get qualifications at a higher level than they're at now.*

Aimhigher co-ordinator, 11-16, Rural, East of England

## 1.2 Overall attitudes towards raising aspirations and supporting progression

Teachers interviewed overwhelmingly accept that an important part of their role is to raise aspirations and to support progression. There is little evidence that teachers feel disinterested in, or no responsibility for, progression - indeed the vast majority see such attitudes as definitely undesirable and the preserve of a small cohort of poor 'performers' within the profession.

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<sup>3</sup> However, recently published research has shown that young people from 'non-traditional' backgrounds, including the most disadvantaged, are as likely as any other young person to progress to HE if they get to Level 3. The authors comment that "*the main problem in terms of widening access to higher education is getting non-traditional students to A-levels in the first place*". See THE SUTTON TRUST (2008). *Wasted talent? Attrition rates of high-achieving pupils between school and university*. London: The Sutton Trust.



*Our staff are committed to the ethos of the institution, which is the children come first and which is about raising aspiration, expectation and achievement ... it is probably true to say that there are still people in the school, with a staff of 238, that think about the odd student 'Johnny's going to go nowhere', but the overwhelming majority of staff no longer think like that.*

Headteacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

Teachers' underlying assumptions tend to be that progression should be considered in terms of the range of approaches and options that are realistic and suit the needs of individual pupils; that the pupils' own desires and choices<sup>4</sup>, and individual abilities are the prime determinant regarding their aspirations and progression routes; and that the teacher's role is to encourage pupils onto a trajectory that is appropriate for them, will help them to 'better themselves' and moves them towards their individual goal.

*I think we're in a job where we could always do more to change things. I think it's about meeting the aspirations of individual students and giving them a sense of what they want to do.*

Head of KS4, 11-16, Rural, East of England

*In this area there are a number of students for whom the right thing, and the thing they want, is to go off into the world and work. We need to look at all of the students in that respect - to make sure that the pathway that they are taking is actually the correct one for them.*

Head of careers, 11-18, Urban, South East

All teachers feel that their pupils have potential and that they have a role helping to maximise this potential as far as possible. However, teachers vary considerably in the extent to which they believe they have real influence in this respect, and in the types of route they favour for pupils, which can lead to a range of significantly different attitudes towards raising aspirations and supporting progression. These are described in more detail in Chapter 2 (*Teachers' roles: key mindsets*, page 32) but in summary, they are:

- **Campaigning**, in which teachers are focused on the intrinsic value of education to all pupils and hence value more traditional academic progression routes, such as degree courses, in particular;
- **Vocationalist**, in which teachers value a range of different learning pathways, but perceive vocational education as an important way of attaining qualifications and moving into employment, via an approach which is more engaging to some pupils than traditional academic learning;
- **Entrepreneurial**, in which teachers are focused on getting pupils into employment as the key outcome and value formal qualifications in the context of attaining appropriate work;
- **Laissez-faire**, in which teachers believe that it is largely up to pupils to take the initiative in choosing relevant progression routes, although they themselves tend to favour academic routes;

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting here, though, that students' desires and choices may not be a true reflection of their potential and, arguably, there is a risk that this approach does not nurture that potential to a proper extent.

- **Resigned**, in which teachers feel disempowered to overcome the prevailing barriers to progression that they encounter.

These attitudes may be encouraged and influenced by a range of factors, including (but not limited to) teachers' own experiences and views, their understanding of the possible options, local narratives or local employment opportunities, and may present situations in which teachers do not or cannot provide any (or a strong-enough) challenge to what they feel are more pervasive, if unfortunate, attitudes and behaviour around aspiration and progression. Indeed, where teachers do not feel their pupils' potential is being fully capitalised, they often express disappointment and frustration.

*We've got talented youngsters who, because they're poor, are not aspiring and will never reach their potential. And that's a massive waste to society, everybody knows that.*

Headteacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

*I would say that the potential of a lot of the students at our school isn't fully realised and much of the frustration ... is that I think that a lot teachers are aware that there is great potential there.*

Subject teacher, London workshop

### 1.3 The teacher's role in a complex system

However, practitioners interviewed repeatedly emphasised that they are only one part of a complex system and, in their view, they do not have the power to leverage social change, at least not as a lone professional or as a member of one group of professionals. This is especially the case where schools are subject to a range of local, structural issues and not linked with other potential sources of support, or where they feel that local providers and the local authority are not working together to address progression. In such cases, teachers often feel overwhelmed and unable to overcome the challenges they perceive as facing them. Specifically, they may feel unable to counter some more emotional or cultural challenges - such as a prevailing culture of low aspiration particular to a locality or cohort of pupils - or it may be that they feel unable to help pupils channel their aspirations due to a perceived lack of appropriate progression routes or local educational structures.

*Each school has its own bag of problems, bag of concerns, and at the end of the day you've declared that you are open to educate pupils, you recognise the catchment area and you have set up shop to say you are able to deliver a reasonable service.*

Design teacher, 11-16, Inner London

Some teachers interviewed expressed concern that educational establishments in their local area often work in 'competitive' not collaborative ways, striving to get the same students onto the same courses in their institution, instead of taking a broader view and planning jointly with the local authority to offer an appropriate range for the needs and aspirations of young people.

*Funding [on a local level] is a mess ... mechanisms should be run in broad terms by those who are responsible for education in a given area which, by and large, are local authorities. If they want a 14 to 19 philosophy they need to sort out that you've got local authorities responsible for 14-16 and the LSC [Learning*

and Skills Council] responsible for 16-20+. That funding set-up is a mess and if they've got to get that right and get local schools working in consortia. I don't feel that schools are supporting their students by giving them a menu which is exactly the same as the menu down the road ...

Headteacher, 11-18, North West

Wider educational policy may also play its part.

*Progression is so heavily narrowed down and evaluated by the statistics element that sometimes, my biggest worry is sometimes, I feel like the secondary school system's there just to warehouse kids.*

Subject teacher, London workshop

*Oh, I do think government thinking about post-16 issues is still very confused. I don't really think it's got a handle on what it's expecting schools to be able to do in this area. There's no genuinely holistic 14-19 strategy or philosophy, no matter what they say*

Headteacher, 11-18, North West

The next section focuses on exploring these factors in more detail.

#### **1.4 Factors perceived to contribute to progression outcomes**

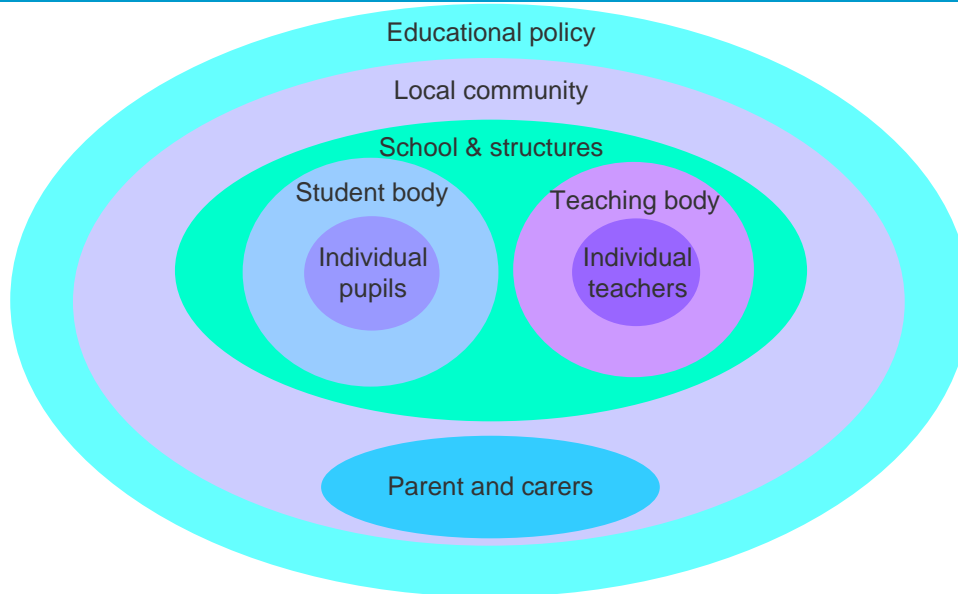
Each student's aspirations and choices, and the extent to which teachers can influence them, are shaped by a complex set of factors, many of which those we interviewed feel are beyond the control of schools. We can map the system of influences and factors that teachers feel surround each individual student and contribute to shaping their aspirations and sense of 'realistic' and desirable outcomes, as in Figure 1 below<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that the views expressed by teachers were not triangulated with those of other key players in this model, for example, parents or young people. The factors detailed relate, therefore, only to teachers' perceptions of the factors at play.

**Figure 1: The teacher's role in a complex system**

Teachers feel they are only one of a range of factors that influence progression



### 1.4.1 Individual pupils

Across schools and sixth form colleges involved in the study, interviewees reiterate that individual pupils are in widely varied situations and this needs to be taken into account when inspiring, advising and assisting them with their progression-related choices.

- **Their interests.** Different pupils have particular subjects, topics and learning styles that they prefer. Teachers feel that pupils' interest in certain subjects and their attraction to more traditional or applied learning approaches shapes their engagement with different options substantially.
- **Their attainment levels and talents.** Not surprisingly, attainment levels are thought to have a direct influence on the options that young people will actively consider. Literacy and numeracy levels in particular are highlighted as having an impact on options (even at quite high levels of attainment, i.e. A-level and beyond). Teachers feel that pupils' sense of being 'good' at a particular subject, and their predicted grades, are central to choices at every level. For example, they point to A-level subjects being chosen in subjects where predicted grades are highest, regardless of what pupils intend to do after A-level.
- **Their confidence levels.** Practitioners interviewed say that some pupils are capable of higher level qualifications but fail to pursue them because they lack confidence in their abilities, whether in relation to learning or in terms of adapting to a new life situation, for example, attending institutions away from home or making progression choices that are unlike those of their peers.

*Amongst the girls particularly, everybody wants to be a hairdresser ... So we get a lot of young girls going off to the college to do Health and Beauty. And their aspiration then is very low, it's not to have your own salon or anything.*

Head of post-16, 11-18, Inner city, South West

*A girl came in to see me for some reason and I said, 'well, are you applying for university?' And she said, 'no, no, I don't want to go to university' and I suspected that this was a bit of an issue of confidence, so I said, 'you're just the sort of person to go - you shout university to me! Why aren't you going to apply for university?' And we had this long chat about things, and when I next saw her in the corridor she said she is now going to university.*

Head of quality, sixth form centre, South East

*We take a group of students, maybe four or five, of similar ability to meet them every week or two weeks. We look at the things that they want to do, how they want to do it and mentor them along. And so they will talk to you: 'what should I do to get this?' or 'how do I go about this?' We liaise with the parents and they come and meet us. It's not a teaching session, it's a progression path.*

Assistant Head, 11-16, Inner London

- **Their learning style.** Teachers can believe that some pupils are put off learning *per se*, as well as certain progression routes, by the more traditional teaching styles employed by many practitioners. In particular, pupils with more kinaesthetic learning preferences are likely to be motivated by learning that takes them outside the classroom, e.g. on fieldwork or in workplace placements.
- **Their motivation levels.** Teachers talk about pupils' willingness to make an effort and their overall motivation as a key factor, along with aptitude, for deciding progression options. Pupils who do not demonstrate high levels of motivation are expected to struggle with more advanced level courses and in environments where independent learning is key. In some schools (typically where progression outcomes are more limited), low levels of motivation can be ascribed to the whole student body, rather than individual pupils, and relate to their whole lives, not just their approach to learning.

*I think realistically there is a degree of apathy ... some of our pupils live from day-to-day, some are quite driven ... but that's not true of many.*

Head of KS4, 11-16, Rural, East of England

*A lot of kids are under-achieving. There's a classic working class male under-achiever, girls less so: it's a working class, masculine sub-culture. Girls, having been liberated from their conventional role, housewife, they're more ambitious.*

Humanities teacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

- **Experiences of school.** Linked to motivation levels, there is a concern that some pupils simply tire of formal education, or have a bad time in certain schools or at particular stages during their compulsory education which puts them off any further education. In these cases, pupils' expectations of progression options that are relevant or appealing to them are highly constrained and relatively low level. A common concern for teachers is that some pupils 'burn out', and see a break from

school as more desirable because of this, even if it is a less good option for them in the longer-term.

- **Effectiveness of transition.** Changes between educational stage and / or establishment carry both risks and opportunities for individual pupils. If they are not sufficiently supported, this can affect progression choices in different ways: information about a young person's particular needs or circumstances can be lost, as can detail on their skills or interests beyond specific subjects<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, there is also a perception amongst teachers that some pupils 'flourish' and their educational performance is improved by a 'fresh start' in a new school or college.
- **Assumptions about the options.** Pupils are thought to have quite strong, and often poorly informed, expectations of different further and higher education providers, but which exert a strong influence on the choices they make. For example, sixth forms attached to schools are often seen as being 'just like school', whereas FE colleges are more 'adult' environments allowing students greater independence and a different relationship with the staff who teach them.
- **Family finances.** Teachers maintain that some pupils are discouraged from more academic progression options, and continued periods of study, due to fears about the costs involved in relation to the likely benefits, with - they say - a particular impact on young people from families that are either less well off or otherwise debt-averse<sup>7</sup>.

*The finance thing's a big thing here because the children don't want to leave university with debts even of £10,000, because for them, that's a lot of money. £10,000 to pay back for them would be a mountain to climb.*

Headteacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

- **Individual relationships with teachers.** Teachers feel that strong relationships between individual teachers and pupils can heavily influence young people's progression choices. The key issues here are how well the teacher knows a pupil (how to raise their aspirations and advise on appropriate routes) and the extent to which the pupil trusts that advice. Teachers feel that where a particularly strong relationship is developed, whether pastorally or around a subject or shared interest, they often have a more substantial influence. Conversely, some teachers, often in larger schools and sixth form colleges, feel that developing these kinds of individual student relationships is difficult, and reduces the likelihood that they will persist in trying to do so.

#### 1.4.2 Student body

Teachers view the overall mix and characteristics of their pupils as an important determinant of aspiration and progression in a number of ways. In many respects, teachers perceive the student body as having an overall 'culture', which can amplify issues identified in relation to individual pupils or prevalent attitudes within the local community:

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<sup>6</sup> Young people may also struggle with transition. See RAPHAEL REED, L., GATES, P. and LAST, K. (2007). *Young Participation in Higher Education in the Parliamentary Constituencies of Birmingham Hodge Hill, Bristol South, Nottingham North and Sheffield Brightside*. Bristol: HEFCE, where the "transition in terms of learning and teaching styles [is] particularly challenging given the fragility of many young people's confidence and attainment as learners by the age of sixteen".

<sup>7</sup> CALLENDER, C. (2003). *Attitudes to debt: School leavers and further education students' attitudes to debt and their impact on participation in higher education*. London: Universities UK (cited in Raphael Reed et al. (2007), *op.cit.*) found evidence of "debt aversion amongst lower earning families" deterring entry into HE.

- **The level of homogeneity.** Teachers feel that socio-economic group (SEG), ethnicity and the level of attainment amongst parents and carers all impact on the overall mix and culture of a school. While this can have a positive or negative effect on aspiration, teachers tend to believe that the more homogeneous a student body is (and the stronger the sense that 'people like us go on to do x') the harder it is for them to influence decisions. Where the intake is much more mixed, teachers tend to feel that pupils from backgrounds with higher aspirations have a positive effect on the student body as a whole: progression choices tend to be more wide-ranging and teachers have more opportunity to influence pupils because of the wider range of 'niches' that they can inhabit amongst their peers.
- **Pupil attitudes to, and peer pressure around, learning.** Linked to the previous point, teachers report that different student bodies have different social norms and expectations, which can feed through into progression choices. For example, some talk about learning being 'not cool' in their schools, which can discourage young people from applying to FE/HE; others talk about a critical mass of pupils expecting and wanting to carry on to FE / HE.

*To be honest with you, with this age group they are very influenced by their peers and we know that when the kinds of kids who are NEET are mixing with those other kids, you know what's probably going to happen ...*

Head of KS4, 11-16, Rural, East of England

- **Overall attainment levels.** Pupils and their families are thought to be keenly aware of a school's reputation and what pupil outcomes are likely to be if they were to attend it. This means a sense of 'good' or 'bad' progression is considered in relative not absolute terms. An individual's expectations of what count as 'high' levels of aspiration or success will vary considerably depending on the expected performance of their peers.

*The culture within a school reaches a sort of tipping-point ... so if you have more kids from a certain background it seems to drag and there's a point where that becomes the dominant culture within the school and it isn't really conducive to consistent hard work and attendance. They don't really have role models for students who really are working hard and are really going for it, and because they don't see it, a lot of the students don't actually realise they're not working very hard.*

Head of mathematics, 11-16, Inner London

- **Proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs or English as an Additional Language (SEN / EAL).** The higher the proportion of pupils with additional needs or requiring high levels of support, the less time teachers tend to feel they have to focus on broader issues of progression. Teachers sometimes talk about this in terms of the trade-off between 'maximising' outcomes overall and 'catching' pupils who are at risk of failing altogether or having only very poor outcomes.

*There are a lot of looked-after children here, a lot of special needs, and because it's the only school in this [isolated] area, everybody comes, so you haven't got much of a selection or a mixture.*

Post-16 teacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

### 1.4.3 School and structures

The type and structure of school is seen as being influential in terms of pupils' overall experience of formal education, the opportunity for them to form relationships with individual teachers and the kinds of support they receive through pastoral systems:

- **School size.** Teachers talk about pros and cons on both sides in relation to school size. In smaller schools, stronger relationships with pupils can be formed and teachers are more likely to spot and address problems relating to inappropriate (or at least low-sighted) progression choices. At the same time, smaller schools have less flexibility in offering a wide range of more specialist / vocational / applied courses or services to support progression e.g. designated careers advisors. Conversely, larger schools may have the means to offer a wider range of courses in response to pupils' needs and interests, but provide a challenging environment for teachers to get to really know individual pupils and give relevant, tailored advice.

*Being a small school has its advantages in that, in terms of communicating aspirations and outlook that could be moved on quickly, both internally and externally. In terms of drawback, for any small school the major drawback is always the resource base because you've not got the bargaining power or the mass that would benefit pupils, as in a larger school.*

Design teacher, 11-16, Inner London

- **Type of institution (11-16, 11-18, sixth form college).** Teachers tend to agree that their foremost aim is to 'get pupils onto the next stage', be that sixth form / FE college, university, training or work. This does mean that the breadth of progression routes being presented and promoted to pupils can be strongly shaped by the institution's own limits. While some 11-16 schools are focusing on longer-term progression, they tend to do so less than schools with their own sixth form or aligned to a sixth form college, institutions which are generally more focused on progression routes into Level 4 education and training, or into work. And yet, research published by TLRP makes clear that "*widening participation in higher education requires intervention well before the point of entry into higher education to increase the attainment of children from poorer backgrounds at earlier ages ... secondary school interventions designed to improve the performance of disadvantaged children are more likely to increase their participation than interventions during post-compulsory education*"<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, Foskett *et al.* (2004)<sup>9</sup> note the significance of schools in low socio-economic status areas, especially those without a sixth form, as an important source of advice for pupils about post-16 pathways.
- **School trajectory and stability.** In some cases, the sense amongst teachers of their school's improvement or decline is more important than overall attainment levels in shaping ideas on progression. For example, some of the schools visited are in, or are just emerging from, special measures; some are in rapid decline with dropping rolls and high staff turnover. Levels of organisational optimism and stability are thought to impact greatly on both pupils and teachers. In particular, schools currently or recently in special measures often express the view that Ofsted constraints require them to focus on more basic or pressing issues such as attendance or behaviour, rather than

<sup>8</sup> TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH PROGRAMME (2008). *Widening Participation in Higher Education: A Quantitative Analysis*. Teaching and Learning Research Briefing Number 39. London: TLRP.

<sup>9</sup> FOSKETT, N., DYKE, M. and MARINGE, F. (2004). *The Influence of the School in the Decision to Participate in Learning Post-16* (DCSF Research Report RR538). London: DCSF.



longer-term or 'more ambitious' progression options. Similarly, schools experiencing falling enrolment report that both funding and staffing levels are being squeezed to an extent that severely constrains many steps that might be used to support more aspirational progression choices.

*The school has been on quite a roller-coaster ride over the last few years. It's been in special measures, now we're into notice to improve, and we're about to be turned into an Academy ...*  
Head of humanities, 11-18, Urban, South East

*[In] the last four years we lost nearly 80% of the staff because of the way the school's managed and kids' behaviour has deteriorated, that's mainly because of the way the school's been managed.*

Subject teacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

- **Pastoral care system.** Schools' approaches to pastoral care vary significantly: some systems dissociate pastoral care from teaching staff (e.g. via a designated 'student services' system); others involve subject teachers as both tutor and pastoral contact. Teachers' views on the optimal system vary, but there is a sense that dissociated systems may mean that teachers fail to establish strong relationships with pupils, or that the pastoral system is seen as a resource to tackle the 'naughty kids' rather than as a means of nurturing all pupils<sup>10</sup>.
- **Tutorial system.** Similarly, schools use a range of approaches to structure tutorial duties, typically involving Pastoral and Social Education (PSE) / Pastoral, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and registration, along with a wide range of additional non-academic teaching and support for progression steps such as choosing subject options and completing UCAS applications. Most of those visited as part of the research use an approach involving a tutor who stays with the same group of pupils during their time in the school. Others, though, mix up forms and tutors from year to year and a few use vertical rather than horizontal groupings similar to 'houses'. The level of time and focus put on tutorial groups, and the relative importance of the 'tutor' role influences teachers' perceptions on how far they have an opportunity to meaningfully support and advise pupils.

#### 1.4.4 Teaching body

Individual teachers feel that their own ability to influence and encourage pupils is affected by the overall messages coming from the staff as a whole, and from senior leaders in particular. Similarly, the level of organisation and co-operation between staff on the issue of progression and aspiration is felt to be a powerful influence on the overall effectiveness of the school in raising aspiration.

- **School ethos.** Teachers think that where a strong ethos exists, this can have a positive effect on progression outcomes (whether directly or indirectly). Some schools, for example, are very 'active' in terms of developing and promoting their school ethos, often with a very particular focus on encouraging pupils individually, which can encourage positive behaviour around progression from pupils and teachers. However, this is not always the case - some schools are more 'passive',

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<sup>10</sup> In this context, research by the Institute of Education for the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) notes that schools can lever raised standards by restructuring to link pastoral and academic support. See HARRIS, A. (2008). *Beyond Workforce Reform. Raising Achievement*. London: Institute of Education/SSAT.

being either a little vague and inconsistent about what their ethos is or effectively not promoting one at all.

- **Leadership.** The extent to which there is leadership around progression is thought to be critical. Teachers are clear that this does not necessarily have to be done by the headteacher, as long as there is a focus and progression issues are seen to be being taken forward. However, the teaching body needs to acknowledge and respect leadership: where staff are disillusioned with the leadership style of the headteacher, this can be destructive and cause issues around staff retention.
- **Quality of staff.** Some teachers suggest that poor teachers are often found in schools where there are poor pupils, as the 'better' local schools attract the 'better' teachers. Hence they perceive systemic issues, such as negative feedback cycles of 'poor' intake and 'poor' teachers shaping the overall staff body. This can sometimes exacerbate poor staff retention too.

*There are issues in terms of getting good teachers. I think that you can have every initiative under the sun, but if you don't have good people in the classroom, if you don't have good people to deliver it, and give those staff the time to deliver it, then obviously lots of these things [around progression] are going to falter.*

Head of sixth form, 11-18, Urban, South East

*I think one of the major problems this school has got is staff retention. So they have an issue with staff recruitment. Obviously because we were in special measures we weren't able to draw from the NQT [newly qualified teacher] bank - traditionally we had huge numbers of staff come here during NQT week. Without that they've done a lot of recruitment abroad and through agencies, so they've brought in a lot of new teachers, many of them have no experience of the English education system and there are massive issues there for integration and training and very few of them stay. So staffing is like a revolving door.*

Head of humanities, 11-18, Urban, South East

*It's one of the few schools just outside of London so it's perhaps difficult to attract staff. I think the school's done well to keep some talented staff when they could move just into London and get £5 grand more ...*

Head of KS4, 11-16, Rural, East of England

#### 1.4.5 Individual teachers

- **Teachers' attitudes towards the community and student body.** Teachers who are more attuned to the local area or feel more fully 'part of' the local community (those who live there or whose background and experience is generally similar to that of their pupils) tend to be more focused on encouraging progression and raising aspirations, and to feel more empowered or clear on how this can be done effectively. There are some cases where teachers are dissociated from the local community, which can feed pessimism about the overall student body e.g. seeing the whole area as 'depressed' or 'de-motivated'.

*I don't want to racialise the issue, but you know that statistics put many Afro-Caribbean people in a particular social category in terms of how fulfilled and how successful they are. We constantly have to debunk that. The students are very conscious of that, especially the boys, of this negative expectation of them [from wider society]. And in terms of their aspiration that's a very subtle, strategic factor and we have a responsibility to address that.*

Maths teacher, 11-16, Inner London

*The bottom line is your home background determines 90% of what you go on to achieve in higher education. It's about your parent's education, [research shows] that middle class parents, even if they choose the local comprehensive school, even if they sent them here, which very few do, those kids would still do the best, would do just as well actually than they do in any other school. It's not the school, it's the background of the kids that determines it.*

Subject teacher, 11-16, Inner London

- **Teachers' personal experience of FE / HE.** This is important in terms of forming teachers' own views on progression options and in shaping how they communicate the options to pupils.
- **Teachers' attitudes to the range of progression options.** Teachers' aspirations/expectations for pupils can influence progression outcomes as teachers may or may not raise certain options depending on what they believe appropriate for the individual student (and beyond this in the context of what is appropriate for/socially acceptable to the student body).
- **Teachers' understanding of the options (further and higher education, work).** It is not always the case that teachers are aware of the whole range of options in relation to work / HE - and regarding the finer detail of potential pathways. This can clearly influence the advice given - ideally, teachers need to know as much as possible on these issues.

#### 1.4.6 Parents and carers

Once again, it should be emphasised that these factors relate to teachers' perceptions of parents' and carers' attitudes, expectations and personal circumstances.

Previous research has shown that although teachers often perceive parents and carers to be hard to reach, parents and carers often feel the same way about teachers<sup>11</sup>. During this study, teachers consistently talked about how important it is to engage parents and carers effectively, but there was little evidence of this being done on a wide scale within the case-study schools visited. Indeed, teachers feel they face a range of barriers in doing so.

- **Parents / carers' expectations / beliefs / backgrounds.** Often, teachers view parents and carers as a barrier to appropriate progression options as their expectations/aspirations for their children may not be in line with the school's expectations and aspirations. This might be to do with class-based or community expectations, or more specifically parents / carers' own experiences of school (and

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<sup>11</sup> HARRIS, A. and GOODALL, J. (2007). *Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement: Do Parents Know They Matter* (DCSF Research Report RW004). London: DCSF / SSAT.

afterwards). Teachers feel that this can lead to parents and carers either disengaging from supporting the school's efforts to raise progression outcomes through to actively discouraging pupils from taking them certain options (especially in relation to university courses when thinking about student debt etc.).

*Family has the biggest influence out of anything - if they see Mum and Dad and think they're doing well then that's what they want to be like. They may never know that they're up to their eyes in debt ... a lot of parents don't really value education perhaps as much as they ought to.*

Head of year, 11-16, Rural, East of England

*The culture in this area amongst the children is one of not particularly prizing academic education, and being much more interested in vocational education. The community is not particularly supportive of the school because it hasn't, in their view, served it very well over many, many years. So the resistance to education is ingrained from previous generations who had a bad experience and that's gone on and on.*

Headteacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

- **Parents/carers' ability to offer guidance on options.** Even where families support high aspirations in general, teachers feel that they may be unable to provide support to their children in the decision-making process, due to a basic lack of knowledge, understanding or experience of the range of possibilities<sup>12</sup>.
- **Parents/carers' ability to offer financial and practical support.** There is a persistent concern (whether well-founded or not) amongst teachers that families who are less well off tend to be debt-averse and intimidated by perceptions of the financial outlay required to support higher education, in particular university-based options and any option where pupils would need to move out of the family home. In particular, pupils with caring roles or who need to find work to help support their family financially are thought by teachers to have severely constrained options because families may struggle to manage without them. Additionally, teachers perceive that emotional instability in a family can affect parents' and carers' engagement with their children's progression (at key moments) and this can be significant across the breadth of the student body, however affluent the family of the pupils concerned.

*The reason I'm getting repeatedly for pupils not going on to HE is the risk of university finance. I've had two or three students that have said, 'I don't want to go to university because it costs too much'. Within [this rural area] a sort of reluctance to take on that risk of coming out with £30,000 debt.*

Head of sixth form, 11-18, Rural, West Midlands

*You speak to the kids and it's, 'my Dad doesn't mind because I have to go and work with him after I've done my GCSEs'. These parents are not valuing education for the sake of education.*

Subject teacher, London workshop

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<sup>12</sup> These findings chime closely with those from research conducted recently by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Sutton Trust and HM Treasury, to explore parents' aspirations for their children. We found that parents tend to 'calibrate' aspirations for their children against their own experiences, due to a lack of information/knowledge to the contrary.

*While they're here there are often social or personal issues and challenges: splitting parents, absent fathers, that's been somewhat common. And I think they're distracted. They have the aspiration but are distracted.*

Maths teacher, 11-16, Inner London

#### 1.4.7 Local area and community

- **Competitive context.** Often schools with low progression rates talk about being caught in a particularly competitive school context, with their pupils coming from households or communities where parents and carers are less focused on, or informed about, education and academic options. Schools perceived to be the least good or 'default' option in their area are concerned that many young people come to them already expecting not to continue in education post-16. Similarly, 11-18 schools may be in conflict with other local sixth forms, trying to keep pupils rather than encouraging them to go elsewhere, even where the range and appropriateness of progression options elsewhere might be better for individual pupils.
- **Relationship with other bodies (e.g. church / local community).** Faith schools are seen as being able to count on support for their progression aims from, for example, local religious leaders promoting the value of higher education through services. Bad relationships with the local community - particularly when communicated via the local press - are also thought to upset schools' overall position and to make it harder to maintain an even keel or help pupils in relation to their progression aims.
- **Local employment context/role models.** If within the local context there is a range of employment options, teachers feel that an assumption amongst pupils that that they will go into a job locally after school can discourage pupils from aspiring to higher education.
- **Expectations/norms for the area.** Some teachers report that in some areas, even if the local employment context is negative (i.e. few realistic options), there is a prevalent 'benefits culture' whereby unemployment and/or teenage parenthood is a socially acceptable and (even) relatively appealing option.

*It's an interesting culture - it's an experience - many parents are on benefits, there's a system: we'll be cared for, we won't worry, 'my mum's always been fine' ... If it's a concerted effort, you can influence some of them: if you're visible about the opportunities that are there, then some people are drawn in that otherwise would be disengaged.*

Aimhigher co-ordinator, 11-16, Rural,  
East of England

#### 1.4.8 Educational policy

Teachers cite a number of examples of how they believe educational policy shapes their approaches to raising aspiration and encouraging progression. Views here are quite divergent, with some teachers criticising the proliferation of course types and pathways, and others arguing there is not a sufficient range of courses to suit all pupils.

- **Policy development.** Some teachers, especially those in leadership roles, feel that the level of target-setting for and assessment of schools forces them to focus efforts on hard, measurable outcomes such as exam results, rather than softer outcomes for pupils such as developing transferable work / life skills or building confidence. There is also a concern that a great deal of effort and resource is taken up in responding to new and frequently changing top-down initiatives which reduces time to spend on issues such as promoting longer-term progression goals.
- **Proliferation of courses/options.** Some teachers feel there are too many progressions options and the volume and speed of proliferation contributes to them being unable to inform pupils about relevant pathways with any confidence. Teachers are also concerned that new courses confuse HEIs and employers and they constitute less 'safe' options until they become established.
- **Curriculum constraints.** In contrast, other teachers argue that there are insufficient options available for certain groups of pupils, particularly those in Years 10 and 11. The concern is most acute about less academically able pupils taking GCSE courses, whom teachers perceive to be ready for and more suited to less traditionally 'academic' pathways.
- **Local authority relationships with schools.** Some schools perceive the local authority to not be working effectively with them, which can impact on schools' ability to develop appropriate options to support progression, e.g. wanting to become specialist schools or develop consortia that went unsupported by the local authority.

### 1.5 Illustrating the different contexts for teachers and pupils

These contextual factors highlight the range of issues around progression and aspiration, and demonstrate that in some situations teachers and schools can have (or can feel they have) relatively little control or influence, and also that different schools can be in significantly different positions.

The following case studies below illustrate two schools which face very different challenges. Teachers in the first school feel they need to concentrate on 'the basics', avoiding any further decline in the school's Level 2 (GCSE or equivalent) attainment levels, and making any significant focus on progression beyond this a lower priority.

### **Case Study 1: A school emerging from crisis, focusing on the basics and its local reputation**

The school is just coming out of special measures, with a 'Super Head' recently appointed to move it forwards and upwards, and aiming to do so by focusing on behaviour and attendance before anything else. The school will gain Academy status within the next few years. The student body is seen as being fairly homogeneous but characterised by a culture of under-achievement, amongst pupils themselves and in the wider community.

Teachers perceive a number of challenges: the school feels very large, with around 450 pupils per year group up to Year 11, making it hard for teachers to get to know pupils. They are also concerned about the dwindling sixth form and relatively large proportion of looked-after children and pupils with SEN within the student body. Teachers see this as partly due to local competition from several grammar schools, so pupils (and parents) more focused on academic education go elsewhere. In light of these problems, teachers describe a severe problem with staff turnover, which they see as driven by the overall difficulties faced by the school and challenging behaviour not being dealt with consistently.

Furthermore, teachers believe parents and the wider community have come to see the school as having problems and now view it and treat it negatively - views which pupils pick up on and lead to more problems in terms of behaviour and a lack of respect for staff. The local paper has become highly critical of the school, and it now faces a major push to 'rebuild' its reputation.

The school is facing challenges around behaviour, attendance and attainment levels. The latter issue is being tackled by the development of vocational learning within the school: the headteacher has developed small vocational facilities on site but is aiming to grow this further. There is also a drive to increase attainment levels by identifying the top achievers within the school, encouraging them via praise and target setting, and also notifying their parents of their potential.

In contrast to the previous example, teachers in the following school felt the work they did to support progression was in line with a wider interest in, and support for, HE and academic options amongst their pupils and families.

## Case Study 2: An established sixth form college with an HE-focused intake

This is seen by teachers as a successful sixth form college, based on its good Ofsted report and the fact that they send 60-70% of their intake on to university. Their intake is described as 'varied', but with the majority being middle class and white, reflecting the local area. Intake is not selective beyond quite low minimum grades (depending on the course being applied for). The college runs some vocational courses (one in partnership with the local NHS), but currently doesn't offer Level 1 courses.

Teachers feel that the pupils in the college are affected positively by their peers: it is soon seen as the 'norm' to apply and go to university, even if this is not their expectation when they first join the sixth form. Teachers comment that those pupils who are not sure about university tend to apply anyway because 'all their friends are doing so'. Teachers therefore feel that while they contribute to raising pupils' aspirations and encouraging them to go on to HE, this outcome is significantly supported by the student body's overall culture:

*The college builds up a sense of momentum – even if they're not doing UCAS all their friends are – so they feel they might as well, even if there's not a lot of commitment. So a lot of them do end up applying*

Teachers consistently emphasise that their role is to actively encourage and support pupils to 'reflect' on their skills and aims, and help them to make their decisions in this way. All interviewees emphasised the college does not want to be just an 'exam factory' but to provide learning more widely and personal development. The shared aim is for the college to ensure pupils leave fully prepared for their next step, whatever that may be. This model to describe progression seemed to be an effective motivator and made teachers feel positive and confident about discussing progression with pupils both formally and informally. Teachers feel most of the parents are highly engaged with their children's decisions and encourage HE in most cases. This means that where the school runs events on progression, they can expect a good turnout of parents.

*We hold parents evenings where three speakers come in talking about UCAS forms, how people manage money on loans, and the strain on parents, so they are well-informed long before applications go out*

## 1.6 Framing the report findings

Overall then, a common understanding amongst the teachers interviewed is that encouraging progression and aspiration is a key aspect of their role, in the sense of preparing their pupils for the 'next step'. Often, though, encouraging a longer-term perspective on progression amongst pupils is (as they see it) necessarily low on their list of priorities. Moreover, they are also very clear in seeing themselves as just one influence among many on pupils' decisions and attitudes, and that the level of influence they have is strongly shaped and constrained by wider factors. Two teachers summed up the situations in their school as follows:



For some students, the belief is ingrained that they're not capable and that it's *[FE/HE]* not worthwhile. There's some other reasons: inadequate information, advice and guidance by people *[like me]* and a failure *[by students]* to grasp the concept of deferred gratification. But family background and socialisation are the principle reasons. And the other killer is the working-class aversion to debt: the acquisition of a debt for something which doesn't bring obvious benefit to a working class family that has no tradition of higher education is a risk too far for many

We do have kids that have gone off and done some very highbrow things in fairly highbrow universities, but most, most kids that leave this school to go to university go to *[the local]* university. So there's not that drive to get out of this area, or see another part of the world. I think it's a fairly insular area, and kids tend to stay fairly close to what they know. Well I would like to see them go on elsewhere. I'd also like them to be aware of gap years and the funding available for them. I will sell it to them, I'll do assemblies on it, and I've never had anybody apply for it. And I'd like them to have the courage or the wherewithal to *[say]* that's something I want to do and do that

## 2. Teachers' attitudes: key mindsets

### 2.1 Overview

A range of different attitudes to progression emerge from this research. Teachers see the idea of progression as integral to the overall aim of education, but their interpretation of what progression means in practice, and their perception of how far they can have an influence, varies substantially. This chapter maps out how these varying attitudes and understandings of progression can be broken down into five key mindsets which describe different perceptions of raising aspirations and progression outcomes.

Although some of these mindsets may appear to be preferable in encouraging aspiration, there is no clear evidence from the interviews that *specific attitudes are necessarily leading to better progression rates*: as emphasised in the first chapter, while teachers' attitudes are important, they need to be supported by good professional development, structures and strategies, if they are to be effective.

Teachers' attitudes emerge as varying markedly according to two underlying beliefs:

- 1) Who has overall responsibility for progression decisions, and how far they can have a positive influence on pupils' aspiration; and
- 2) Their perspectives on the overall purpose of education and hence what they regard as the best progression routes.

#### 2.1.1 Who has overall responsibility for progression and decisions?

No teachers express the view that progression is not their responsibility, but the level of influence that teachers believe they can exert varies substantially. Teachers' comments reveal very different assumptions about how significant their role is, and also how appropriate it is for them to significantly influence pupils' progression choices.

At one extreme of the spectrum are teachers who see their role as being to actively mould and push pupils to outcomes that the teacher regards as 'best', going beyond inspiring pupils, providing guidance and information to making recommendations and exhortations to pick options which pupils might not consider if left to their own devices. These teachers are highly motivated to challenge low aspirations and to enable pupils to find a route to help them meet their potential.

At the other extreme are those teachers who feel that pupils' decisions are largely self-determined or determined by factors outside of the school such as family and social expectations. These teachers typically see their role as limited to supporting overall academic outcomes (e.g. the best realistic exam results), providing information on options appropriate to each pupil's academic performance and offering functional assistance such as completing applications. Although some of these teachers may want to raise aspirations and encourage pupils to better meet their potential, they may feel powerless to overcome the strong cultures and ingrained attitudes that they perceive they are encountering.

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs on these issues shape their mood as well as the steps they are likely to take: their beliefs about their potential influence can make them feel important, determined and positive, and so be more active in approaching pupils, or, on the other hand to feel disempowered, unsure how to proceed and pessimistic about eventual outcomes. Influencing teachers' attitudes in these regards is therefore crucial in motivating them to take a more active approach to raising aspirations.

### **2.1.2 What is the overall point of education and what are the 'best' progression routes?**

Essentially these attitudes relate to teachers' understanding of education as an intrinsic good or an instrumental good. Is their role to educate pupils for the sake of knowledge, regardless of the vocational or practical outcomes of this? Or to prepare them for working life with the kinds of skills they will require? Similarly, their views on what progression routes are most suitable and desirable for pupils vary, and in turn determine what steps they feel are necessary to support progression.

A tendency for teachers to be more familiar with, and positive about, more 'traditional', academic routes to Level 4 qualifications, is demonstrated in some cases. At the same time, there is a high degree of awareness amongst teachers that their experiences of and assumptions about the higher education system, particular institutions and the full range of potential pathways may need updating.

## **2.2 Five key mindsets**

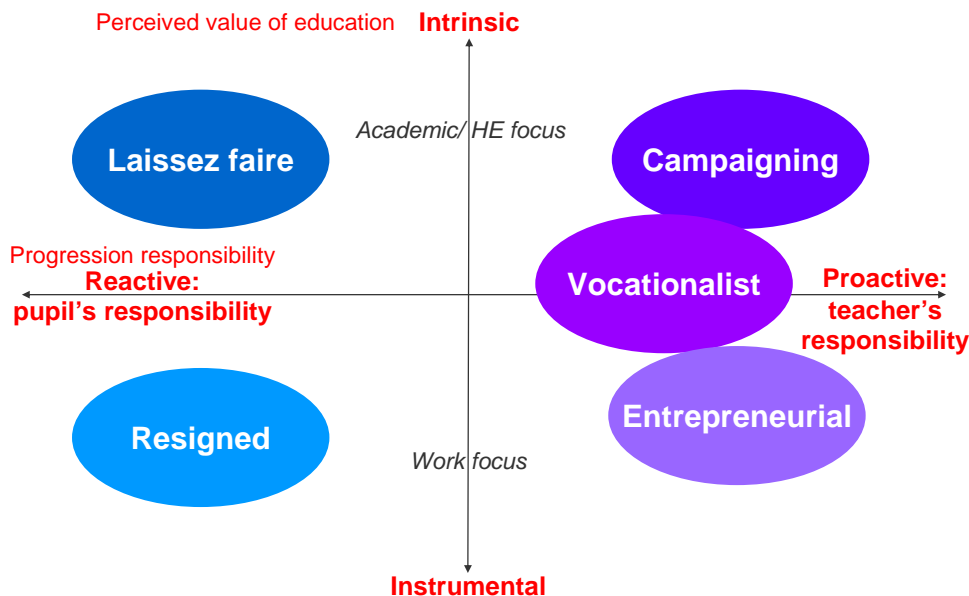
Amongst the teachers interviewed, five key mindsets predominated, differentiating practitioners' perceptions of raising aspirations and progression outcomes. These are summarised in Figure 2, and the key features of each one are explored in more detail in the remainder of this section.

It is worth noting that, as with any typology, those at the very extremes of each mindset are relatively rare, and the more useful information that emerges is in the overall 'clusters' of attitudes, which sum up common positions held by teachers. These mindsets can also be used to characterise the overall attitude of a school: in this regard the role of leadership is important in terms of encouraging a whole-school shift towards a more proactive, and consistent, mindset.

It is also important to note that while teachers tend to occupy a particular area in terms of their overall attitudes, they can and do adopt different mindsets on an 'ad hoc' or situational basis, for example, when considering different pupils and the advice they would give to them. For example, a teacher might sympathise with a campaigning attitude in principle and feel that their overall role is to encourage uptake of HE amongst their pupils, but feel that for pupils who have had enough of a formal / classroom-based education, a more vocationalist or entrepreneurial approach is appropriate.

**Figure 2: Five key mindsets among teachers and schools**

Teachers' attitudes to raising aspiration and encouraging progression are important and do vary



### 2.2.1 Campaigning mindset

- Teachers in this mindset tend to be highly focused on a good education through academic courses, often explicitly stating that this is distinct from good exam results, as the end in itself of their work and the school's role. These teachers are most likely to be advocates of (and practice a commitment to) lifelong learning.
- They argue the intrinsic value of education on the basis of its potential social impact, that is, as an aid to social mobility and a way of 'opening doors' to a wider range of career options. They are particularly concerned where they perceive social and economic barriers to progression for academically able pupils, and often flag up the role they feel they play in the lives of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds who they feel need additional support and encouragement if they are to progress to Level 4 qualifications.
- These teachers are most focused on traditional academic progression routes into higher education, and tend to believe that as many pupils as possible should go to university. They feel more needs to be done to widen participation and that HEIs should do more to welcome and encourage applicants from more socially disadvantaged backgrounds.
- These attitudes are more likely to be expressed by teachers working in 11-18 schools or in sixth form colleges, where there is a general focus on progression to higher education as the next step for many pupils. Additionally they are also found in some schools within which a high proportion of pupils and staff are from ethnic minority groups.
- These teachers are aware that academic progression routes are not necessarily appropriate for all pupils. While they see vocational routes into higher education as a positive development, they tend to be less focused on and/or informed about the range of vocational pathways available.

*I don't want to see any of our Year 11s working before 18, I don't want to see any of them in low-paid jobs doing menial work around the area. I want all of them to definitely go to college, the majority of them to go on to university. I want them to have the experience of university life, like I did. I want them to be able to enter the job market at a higher level so they access salaries that will take them out of poverty. I want them to access careers rather than a job.*

Head of KS4, 11-16, Inner London

*Kids will say to me, why would I do history? Why would I do English at university? Why would I do that? And I try to persuade them that being clever is being clever - it's a matter of demonstrating that you're clever and that you've got an appetite for the knowledge and using that knowledge in any of those ways.*

Vice principal of student services,  
sixth form college, South East

*You've got the big institutions begging for you - I've often said to them, 'why do you want ten GCSEs?' 'Sir, it's hard, can't I do five?' I say 'You guys are smart people. You can get ten, can't you? You get ten and you apply to sixth form centres and that I guarantee you'll get all of them wanting you. Then you're running things - you can pick and choose. You're in the driving seat'. It's just about giving them the power.*

Learning mentor, 11-16, Inner London

### **2.2.2 Vocationalist mindset**

- These teachers perceive the value of vocational education as a way of gaining qualifications as well as providing clear links between education, training and work. They feel that it encourages many pupils to engage with learning to a greater extent than traditional academic pathways. They are concerned that the GCSE / A-level system fails some pupils who would be better motivated and more successful by focusing on more vocational learning. They tend to disagree that progression to Level 4 courses is always the best / most desirable outcome for young people. Amongst teachers interviewed, they tend to be most aware of the higher level vocational options available, but even these teachers may feel they do not have a firm grasp on the full range of Level 4 pathways.
- They are concerned about the creation of a 'two tier' system of academic versus vocational routes, and that employers and HEIs have unhelpful attitudes towards newer courses. This is of particular concern regarding the new Diplomas, which are otherwise seen as promising by 'vocationalists'.
- Ideally these teachers want as much flexibility in the system for young people as possible, but feel there can be tensions, such as pressure for schools to retain pupils within their sixth forms, even when a course at a further education institution (FEI) may suit individuals better.

- They see teachers as being influential, seeing it is important not to 'push' young people into certain routes without considering the full range of options and the final outcomes these will lead to in terms of employment opportunities.
- These teachers see a joint role for the practitioner and pupil to determine the very best progression route (one which aligns the pupil's abilities and interests).

*I don't think it matters what you study, if you're in the system, and still learning, and still developing. I have a view that humans learn because we want to learn; a guy on a desert island will soon find something to occupy himself. There's personal fulfilment for the individual and there's the national economic need. Talking about the tension between vocational and more academic? I don't think it matters too much.*

Assistant headteacher, 11-16, Urban, North West

*Well you could argue that education should be valid for its own purpose and therefore, does it matter what comes next? But then the other argument is: what's the point in coming away with £20,000 worth of debt? It's wrong to encourage people to take that route to then get a job working in telesales for instance.*

Assistant headteacher, 11-18, Rural, East Midlands

*At the end of the day some of our kids are not academic, they're never going to be academic, why force them into something if there's a route they can take that suits their talents? Take them down that [vocational] route and they will get a certificate and achieve something, instead of putting them through years of struggle. Some kids might not want to be academic, they might want to be a tradesman, but if they've been pushed down a corridor they'll do it because they're good kids and they'll try to do it. But if they can be doing some thing that they really want to do and are going to enjoy they're going to get keyed up and do it a lot better.*

Physics teacher, 11-18, Urban, East of England

*We have to stop messing around and merge the qualification's framework to give genuine comparative esteem between qualifications which, while different, nonetheless provide challenge and genuinely successful outcomes for the students who participate in them.*

Head of department, 11-18, Urban, South East

*In 2008 the Diplomas are coming and one of the five targets is engineering - we want to be doing those. We saw engineering as a great way for us to go. We're moving away from the oily mechanic style and moved to problem solvers.*

Headteacher, 11-16, Rural, East of England

### 2.2.3 Entrepreneurial mindset

- These teachers tend to focus on work as the best outcome for many pupils, but see the need for schools to help young people think more strategically about the opportunities likely to be open to them. 'Entrepreneurs' tend to be looking 'further down the road' rather than only focusing on getting pupils to 'the next step' e.g. encouraging pupils in the process of selecting GCSEs to consider what they might eventually do for a career, rather than what A-level options will be open to them. They are more likely to be found in 11-16 schools with specialist status in areas such as the visual arts or engineering. They perceive HE as relevant in the context of employability - and therefore tend to favour professional qualifications rather than 'general' or arts degrees. In light of this, they are sceptical that the 50% HE participation target is useful or relevant.
- These teachers are looking at the issues around progression from a very broad perspective, for example, thinking about local and national employment trends, skills shortages, what is likely to be more in demand in ten years' time and specifically what skills are needed to gain employment in the local area.
- Schools where this mindset predominates tend to be quick to take the initiative to build relationships with employers in the local community e.g. setting up work placement schemes or starting employment programmes at school to encourage pupils to think about work and what work skills are needed, even to encourage pupils into local employment after school. They are often well connected and very familiar with their local areas. They, therefore, tend to see themselves as being much more in touch with business and the world of work (whether nationally or locally) than those in any other mindsets.
- Often these teachers want more help and support in reaching out to employers (EBPs are often used but tend to be criticised as not successfully fulfilling the needs of both schools and businesses) and better careers advice or training for teachers regarding careers options.

*If they're leaving the school with bricklaying skills, for instance, they're going to be straight into a job. It's not a particularly wealthy community, it's quite deprived, so that's a utilitarian decision, but it's going to lead them to work. That's going to allow them to support themselves and their families. For the community, those sorts of skills are excellent ... We've done everything on a shoestring, we've built a garage, we've got a stables off site, we've got converted classrooms for them to do bricklaying in, and it's fantastic.*

Headteacher, 14-19, 11-18, Urban, South East

*My hope and aspirations for the students is that they get into employment they enjoy and they find inspiring. I want them to have a good skill bases and be happy in their work. I don't want people to be forced in a path they don't really want to go down because of lack of education. You have to be able to offer something in life, you get nothing for nothing and that's what I always say, you have to have skills to offer that people want to pay you to perform to do.*

Head of year, 11-16, Inner London

*For working class boys in particular, I think there is still this work ethic: they are proud to be working, they want to contribute and get a sense of dignity through working.*

Head of KS4, 11-16, Rural, East of England

#### **2.2.4 Laissez-faire mindset**

- These teachers are noticeably less proactive than others. While they have a range of views about what progression outcomes are best, they tend to favour traditional academic routes as these are often the most familiar to them.
- The key characteristic of this mindset is that teachers believe it to be largely up to pupils to take the initiative on looking into and deciding what they wish to do, and they take little responsibility for shaping choices beyond provision of basic information or 'signposting' to other sources of advice. Where these teachers have a tutorial or pastoral role, they are sometimes unclear about where this fits with wider steps regarding progression, and may feel they do not have enough information or know-how to advise beyond the 'administrative' parts of the process such as distributing application forms and flagging up deadlines etc.
- These teachers may believe that HE is a good option for their pupils but again may not perceive that a 50% target is achievable or useful as they are unclear on how the increased number of graduates will be accommodated in employment and tend to be concerned about the value of degrees being diluted or diminished.
- These attitudes are more prevalent in 11-16 schools.

*It's particularly difficult at an 11-16 school to influence it, because we don't really have control over what they do next.*

Head of maths, 11-16, Inner London

*I'm not a careers guidance officer, I'm a teacher. I don't want to be a careers advisor, I've got too much other stuff to think about and I'd be spreading myself too thin.<sup>13</sup>*

Head of year, 11-16, Inner London

*[My colleague] would be the better person to ask about progression, because that is his remit and he has all that info, a load of that information ... He's always happy for pupils to come in, have a look at the information, and if they need to contact a specific college, often he will have a bank of resources. What we say to pupils is don't take the information away, we encourage them to phone up and get their own and then if they want to apply, they do.*

Head of year, 11-16, Inner London

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<sup>13</sup> This teacher had no formal responsibility for careers but was worried that more of a push in the school on progression to HE would mean that he would be expected to provide guidance without the training and preparation necessary to do so effectively.



*I'm not 100% for the 50% to HE target - I'm concerned that there are people with skills in other areas that may not be put to such good use. A lot of what this country has achieved is based on trades and skills and if you don't have them then industry may be weakened. It must be nice for people to say they've got a degree but what is the value of that?*

Head of year, 11-16, Rural, East of England

### 2.2.5 Resigned mindset

- These teachers feel resigned about problems they see as generated by the school's circumstances. They believe they cannot make a significant impact on pupils' aspirations and decisions other than in exceptional circumstances, even though many of them feel they should and would like to do so. These teachers do not necessarily think their pupils are incapable of progression to Level 4, and often see great value in HE, but they perceive a huge range of cultural and practical issues around engaging their pupils with this aspiration. As a result, they feel highly disempowered in terms of facilitating progression.
- While they are concerned about their pupils' longer-term progression, the 'resigned' tend to focus more on trying to get them through their current educational stage. They believe that encouraging pupils to pursue things they are good at is the best way to engage them, retain them in education for as long as possible and minimise disruptive behaviour. These teachers are most likely to criticise the current curriculum for being difficult to access - and being too challenging - for many pupils. They often feel it is hard for them to offer an appropriate range of options to their pupils, and are interested in providing a wider range of course options.
- As with those in 'laissez-faire' mindsets, these teachers may also doubt the relevance of many of the newer Level 4 qualifications. They also tend to be highly sceptical about the 50% target.
- These teachers are typically working in schools which do appear to be facing a number of challenges, for example, persistent low attainment, and where staff morale is generally at low ebb.
- More generally, this mindset is more prevalent in 11-16 schools.

*A lot of our kids are bussed in and there's not that connection with community and it doesn't matter what you put in place, it's still the same. Ofsted have actually recognised that. It's not the school, it's the people we have coming into us. They're just not motivated.*

Assistant headteacher, 11-18, Rural,  
East of England

*They have a lot of information but they don't understand, they still find it very hard to understand the information they're given and also the level of organisation of students and I don't, I've got no idea what happens, sounds like an old teacher moaning but, they're just so badly organised and it seems just a trend generally because I've got kids at school, secondary school myself, and they seem to be in the same situation.*

Humanities teacher, 11-16, Inner London

*Well, the problem is, they're not going to listen to a teacher are they? They just look at you and think, 'how can you tell me what to do? You've ended up here.'*

Assistant headteacher, 11-18, Urban, East of England

*I think some people, I don't know, may have been here too long or may have lost focus and lost that enthusiasm to move the school forward and it resonates throughout the whole school and then the grades fall and that's where it stands today.*

Assistant headteacher, 11-16, Inner London

### 3. Leadership and structures

#### 3.1 Context for the research

Other studies have pointed to the significant impact that the leadership of headteachers and other senior managers has on shaping pupil outcomes<sup>14</sup>. Teachers interviewed as part of this study feel that school leaders (headteachers or others) who push the raising of pupils' aspirations and a focus on longer-term progression as a priority, and who are clearly expressing what this means in practice for the school, influence other staff significantly.

*I think it works because I've got the senior leadership that reminds and encourages teachers to see if they can raise the aspiration.*

Maths teacher, 11-16, Inner London

*He [the principal] sets the tone of the college and came in with a clear vision. He's utterly committed to that vision. Utterly genuine about it. He's trying to guide the institution.*

Head of department, sixth form college,  
South East

It is important to note that, as part of this study, we only sought teachers' *perceptions* of the impact of leadership, and indeed headteachers/senior managers' own views on their influence; as such, the 'evidence' presented here has not been triangulated through observation or otherwise independently verified. Furthermore, different schools involved in the study were at different points in their trajectory and in some cases heads or other senior leaders had only been in post for a limited amount of time and were still establishing themselves. Hence, the conclusions we draw here about the impact of leadership should be regarded as tentative rather than definitive.

#### 3.2 Relative prioritisation of progression

While teachers and headteachers interviewed agree that raising aspirations and encouraging progression in the longer-term are important, some readily admit it is not currently a top priority for them and their schools. Many suggest a key reason for this is that 'final' pupil destinations, such as progression onto a course at university or into work-based training and employment, are not measured or monitored systematically, unlike other outcome targets that are used to monitor and compare school performance. As a result, not all schools are collecting data about longer-term progression outcomes: generally the focus is more piecemeal, i.e. on the outcomes for pupils at the next 'step'. This means, for example, that 11-16 schools tend to focus on immediate post-16 outcomes / destinations (FE, training or employment) at the expense of considering longer-term progression objectives, even though earlier research<sup>15,16</sup> has clearly indicated a need amongst young people for support and guidance in this regard much earlier in their school careers.

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<sup>14</sup> LEITHWOOD, K., DAY, C., SIMMONS, P., HARRIS, A. AND HOPKINS, D. (2006). *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership*. Nottingham: NCSL.

<sup>15</sup> FOSKETT, N., DYKE, M. and MARINGE, F. (2004). *The Influence of the School in the Decision to Participate in Learning Post-16* (DCSF Research Report RR538). London: DCSF.

<sup>16</sup> BLENKINSOP, S., McCRONE, T., WADE, P. and MORRIS, M. (2005). *How do Young People Make Choices at Age 14 and Age 16?* (DfES Research Report 773). London: DfES

*Our [sixth form] feeder schools have a vast range of attitudes. We get kids who have been damaged at home and then damaged by five years in poor secondary education. We get them in NHS uniforms, and in no time their self-respect flourishes and they make successes of themselves.*

Principal, sixth form college, South East

In light of this, some teachers suggest that schools should be judged on these longer-term progression outcomes to a greater extent, in order to ensure its prioritisation in *all* secondary schools: a 'Level 4 progression indicator' as it were. Even so, this provokes debate in relation to whether focusing on another target will indeed have the intended effect. In particular, teachers feel it is important that approaches to raising aspiration and encouraging progression are tailored to and owned by individual schools and communities. As such, teachers fear that a formal measurement of outcomes will demand standardization and a 'one size fits all' model, precisely the opposite of what they feel will help. Meanwhile, teachers note that a commitment to progression is not always explicitly embedded in school thinking, for example, something which is highlighted in school development plans. Many teachers believe that greater encouragement to put longer-term progression on the agenda in this way would be a fruitful means of focusing attention on the issue and give it a higher profile, without recourse to formal target-setting and monitoring. Indeed, those who feel their school has done this argue that promoting high aspirations and goals cannot be separated from raising overall attainment.

*[We have] raising achievement and attainment top of our, our priority Number 1. We've been able to get that message through - it's the way you lead the school, rather than a specific strategy. We've shifted emphasis that we are optimistic. We're focussing on the positive and on what matters, which is raising achievement, rather than, for example, trying to cover ourselves, preparing ourselves for Ofsted, chasing our tail. We don't get distracted if we have a few teachers that we know that we have to carry with us. Instead, we're going to be happy and focussed on those that can deliver and there are quite a few of those - that's seeing the big picture.*

Assistant principal, 11-16, Inner London

Teachers interviewed also suggest other reasons for not focusing on longer-term progression outcomes. For example, in schools facing a raft of challenges such as low attendance, poor behaviour, poor GCSE pass rates and falling school rolls, the leadership tends to focus on these as the priority. Only once these fundamental problems have been addressed do leaders feel able to focus on longer-term progression issues. This attitude was in greater evidence in 11-16 schools visited, where progression options are not felt to reflect as directly on overall reputation. Indeed, in some schools without post-16 provision, teachers may be up-front in admitting that for them, the priority in terms of progression is to 'catch' and channel those at risk of becoming NEET on leaving school, rather than ensuring that other pupils make the best possible decisions to go into further or higher education, training or employment.

*You'd probably argue that there should be [a focus on progression] but I don't think there is at the minute. What I'm really focussing on is the exam results, preparing students for that, looking at their learning styles, looking at how they can learn better, with an end view in sight of being their GCSEs. It's prioritising isn't it? So at the minute progression and aspiration is not top of my priorities.*

Assistant headteacher, 11-18, Rural, East Midlands

*The overall attendance is quite low, which doesn't help because it has a knock-on effect, because they haven't been here to be able to achieve they think they can't achieve, so they don't bother coming to school - it ends up in a vicious circle for them.*

Head of careers, 11-18, Urban, South East

*Behaviour management is very, very taxing. Every day there's a challenge, a big challenge sometimes, from some needy kids who are violent or don't want to be here. When staff are hard pressed, when they're in their own little wheel and running very hard to keep, to keep the wheel going, then [progression] for them it's not necessarily a priority. So it's about pointing out to people that it's important to get that right, and I think they expect other people to get that right to a certain extent.*

Headteacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

Finally, given that schools may feel their over-riding focus is on GCSE grades, some teachers mention that this can present an active disincentive to encouraging very high aspirations. Pupils are largely given computer-generated grade predictions, and while teachers can add challenge to improve the grades predicted, if pupils fail to meet the target set, the teacher will be held accountable.

### **3.3 Distribution of leadership**

It became clear during the study that in many cases headteachers are not necessarily the key leaders on strategies that raise aspirations and encourage longer-term progression. Many headteachers have delegated this responsibility to another member of their leadership team, and while they are typically still involved in 'setting the tone' for the whole school on progression issues, they are not shaping their school's approach directly.

*Leadership's a key issue isn't it? Leadership - it's not just about me - headteachers have a crucial role to set a vision, to set the ethos, to guide decisions and we're allowed a certain amount of selection from what's on offer nationally. I think the leadership issue then is bringing on board the rest of your team. Now I believe that every single member of staff in this school is a leader.*

Headteacher, 11-18, Rural, West Midlands

The most important consideration for teachers that emerges from this research is that while schools do need to have a designated and identifiable leader for progression in place, this does not need to be the headteacher. Teachers say the role can be fulfilled by any colleague with the time, drive and authority to direct efforts on progression across the staff as a whole and in relation to wider partnerships, such as links with the local community, businesses and

universities. However, teachers do feel that even if the headteacher has delegated this responsibility, it is critical for the designated leader to feel supported by the headteacher, and for the headteacher's support for the designated leader's work to be clearly communicated to and reinforced amongst the staff as a whole.

Where leadership has been delegated or is dispersed, those with a responsibility for encouraging progression also feel it is important to have the autonomy and resources to fulfil their leadership role: they want to have designated time set aside for it, their own budget to spend and want to be able to adapt and update approaches in response to changes in courses or the range of progression routes open locally.

*It was part of the reason I left my last job. I felt that the school was paying it [my careers role] lip service, they wouldn't give me the responsibility or the authority I required to actually do the job properly, so I left. I was trying to get it [careers] into schemes of class work, but I didn't have any authority to tell heads of department to do that, they didn't necessarily get backing from senior members of staff to do it. I was trying to get activities done during tutor time, but I didn't have the authority to tell heads of year to tell their form tutors to do it.*

Head of careers, 11-18, Urban, South East

There are several examples of schools facing difficulties in encouraging or supporting longer-term progression where responsibility for all related activities, including careers advice, has been 'tacked on' the existing responsibilities of staff members. However, these teachers either have little time to attend to progression (over-burdened heads of year or those already juggling several different roles in the school), or have little authority to push the issue (e.g. librarians or pastoral care advisors).

*I do think [the careers advisor and school PE teacher] does a good job of providing the information and producing teaching resources for us, but the PSHE and careers tutors in Key Stage 4, who deliver it, are quite a fluid team. There are a core of us who happen to fall into that role, but we don't have specialist careers teachers in Key Stage 4. And the trouble is that people such as myself who have become part of the core teaching PHSE and careers team, well I'm assistant headteacher, two or three others are assistant headteachers or they're heads of year, they have a lot of other roles. Planning for that lesson is certainly not the top of my priority list, it's not the top of everyone's priorities, because of the nature of our roles in school, and it's not.*

Assistant headteacher, 11-18, Rural, East Midlands

In contrast, in schools where progression activity is led by a senior leader with the resources and time to attend to the issue regularly, the process is perceived by the teaching staff as working much more smoothly.

*You just need to have somebody there that drives it ...*

Teacher and form tutor, London workshop

### 3.4 Congruence in schools

In the schools visited, there is a high level of congruence between what senior leaders say is happening in relation to progression and what their colleagues *think* is happening: there were no cases of leaders claiming one thing and other teachers disagreeing. However, within individual schools, *mindsets* regarding progression can be more incongruent.

For example, in some schools, the whole staff, including senior leaders, appears to be operating in similar mindsets and, crucially, at the proactive end of the spectrum. Teachers' interviewed tend to have a clear and shared sense of the ethos, values and vision of their school in relation to progression and of their particular role within this<sup>17</sup>.

*The headteacher has had to make a number of changes internally by changing staff culture. The day has now become more structured and teachers are now encouraged to show more discipline with the pupils. The new head that's come in is aiming for achievement, respect and community, that's the new driving force ... Staff have been very responsive to it, by and large.*

Head of year, Urban, North West

*Our head has made it very clear to all staff that the values and ethos is far more important to her than us literally forcing kids to achieve higher results. I know that sounds all lovey dovey, but you'd be very surprised by what you can achieve as a school by constantly banging on about values.*

Subject teacher, London workshop

In other schools, though, staff exhibit highly incongruous attitudes, and there is evidence of poor, if not rancorous, intra-staff relations which appear to be undermining approaches to encouraging progression.

*Here not everyone's singing from the same hymn book and that has a big impact on how the school feels ... it's sinking in terms of morale.*

Head of Year, 11-16, Rural, East of England

In these schools, teachers exhibit a range of mindsets - often jarring with those of senior leaders - and commonly also have variable views of the vision and values of the school. They seem to be considerably less focused on progression than colleagues working in schools with greater congruence in thought and action. Additionally, having divergent views about appropriate progression options means that the efforts of individuals can be dispersed and unfocused, and lacking in power or impact.

Schools in this situation tend to be those that have recently been through or are undergoing a great deal of change e.g. entering or emerging from special measures or having a new headteacher appointed.

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<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that these findings should be treated with a degree of caution since only a small number of staff per institution were interviewed, and we cannot ignore the possibility that those put forward by the school for interview were chosen (whether consciously or unconsciously) because of the congruence of their views with the key school contact. However, during the recruitment process, the research team sought as far as possible to counteract this effect by making the selection of staff, other than those in targeted positions, as random as possible.

### 3.5 Elements of leadership in relation to progression

Leithwood et al. (2006)<sup>18</sup> set out the four key areas of focus for school leaders as being:

- Vision and direction;
- Understanding and developing people;
- The organisation and its structures;
- The teaching and learning programme.

Below, we use this model to examine leadership in relation to progression.

### 3.6 Vision and direction

Teachers' descriptions of their school's ethos and overall vision reveal a great deal about the way the schools concerned are led and how progression is viewed within them<sup>19</sup>. This also relates closely to the extent to which teachers see their role in raising aspirations and encouraging progression as active and important, or as passive and minimal.

*Our ethos is to give the youngsters, who are from an inner city area, often from a working class, ethnic minority background, to actually really be aspirational, and to get them to feel, 'I can be whatever I want to be'. Even so, a lot of them still, after the school's done their bit, there's a tendency to settle for, 'oh I can't do that', or, 'I'll do two A-levels rather than three', and we have to say to them, 'no, no, no, you're going to do bloody three'. So our ethos was to actually challenge students, rather than accepting the stereotype and their behaviour pattern, it is to actively promote academic excellence to get the most out and to develop them as people, so that they don't just settle for something - so they have that kind of confidence. Even if they don't have that from home.*

Deputy headteacher, sixth form centre, South East

*There's a culture of understanding and also a culture of values - in that pupils are able to recognise their own self-worth, and recognise they have abilities that can be put to positive use. Regardless of what the prevailing concerns within this society they are in, be they negative or positive, as individuals they can make positive choices. So it's about an environment which challenges any perceptions that, because we're black, we're meant not to achieve: they've been able to see that is not a rule of life.*

Head of department, 11-16, Inner London

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<sup>18</sup> LEITHWOOD, K., DAY, C., SIMMONS, P., HARRIS, A. AND HOPKINS, D. (2006). *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership*. Nottingham: NCSL.

<sup>19</sup> See also FOSKETT, N., DYKE, M. and MARINGE, F. (2004). *The Influence of the School in the Decision to Participate in Learning Post-16* (DCSF Research Report RR538). London: DCSF.



Teachers interviewed who have a clear, consistent sense of the distinctive ethos and values defining their school, a vision for the school and a sense of where it is going, and can clearly express what their school is trying to achieve, typically have a senior management team in place which is perceived as providing good, established and trusted leadership in relation to progression. These schools are more likely to have a marked number of teachers in 'proactive'-type mindsets (those to the right of vertical axis in Figure 2, see page 32). This also increases the likelihood of teachers demonstrating congruent attitudes in relation to progression as it helps focus and direct attention in terms of the ways in which progression will be approached.

In schools without this clarity of vision, teachers tend to be unsure as to how to describe their institution's ethos or aims in relation to progression beyond standard educational outcomes such as 'improving exam pass rates' or 'making sure that the school does the best for each pupil'. This is not necessarily interpreted as a particularly motivating vision, whether for pupils or teachers.

*Do we have an ethos? If we do, it wouldn't be any different from every other school ... individuals matter, that sort of thing*  
Director of vocational education, 11-16, Rural,  
South East

*I suppose the school would say 'well, we are tackling [progression] because by focusing on results we're ensuring that these kids get into decent colleges', that's the rationale.*  
Teacher, London workshop

Others describe their ethos in very passive terms, feeling it is determined entirely by the character of the student intake.

*So you've got unemployment, you've got poverty, there's quite a lot of crime, drug abuse - it's basically the traditional working class culture. It's particularly like that amongst the boys, it's macho, there's no interest in deferred gratification, no long-term planning and a lack of ambition.*  
Humanities teacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

Teachers in schools without a strong sense of direction or purpose are more likely to be in passive mindsets. However, it should be emphasized that these teachers are also more likely to work in schools with genuine challenges.

### **3.7 Understanding and developing people**

In schools exhibiting the highest level of congruence - and hence perhaps strong leadership - a key tenet of their practice seems to involve developing good relationships within the staff team as a whole, in terms of leaders being felt to understand their staff and showing a commitment to their professional development. These emerge as important in keeping teachers feeling motivated and empowered, particularly in schools where external factors are felt to be militating against a culture of high aspiration.

Relationships between staff, such as within year groups, are also thought to be important in ensuring that efforts around progression are consistent and cascaded down to all staff involved: from heads of year to form and subject tutors. In schools where staff relationships are strong, and the senior leadership team is robust and effective, teachers also feel it is easier to get initiatives regarding progression started and maintained.

*You want them [school management] to be supportive and approachable and to encourage things, to encourage change or new ideas. As a new teacher, or if you've got new ideas you need to know you can go to your senior leadership team and ask for something to happen.*

Teacher, London workshop

Teachers want to feel supported and to believe that leaders are committed to structures that support individual efforts to raise aspiration. Additionally, where teachers feel that leaders are supportive and approachable, this makes the school environment more open and welcoming to innovation.

Where teachers do not feel their efforts are supported by the wider staff team, it can damage motivation, potentially 'growing' teachers who are attitudinally 'laissez-faire' or 'resigned'.

*I know that sometimes the senior leadership team are almost detached from the day-to-day classroom and the corridor.*

Teacher, London workshop

*[The headteacher] doesn't teach. He doesn't do duties. He doesn't do covers. His perspective is somewhat limited, well, it's just limited. He's not around the school very much, the kids hardly know him.*

Humanities teacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

Specifically, many teachers also talk about wanting more training and development relating to the potential FE / HE / training / employment pathways that pupils might take up. Not all members of staff necessarily need to gain this knowledge, but at least one key member of staff needs to be fully abreast of what is on offer, who can cascade the knowledge within the staff body or deal with pupil referrals.

Communication is felt to be a critical responsibility of the leadership team and a core part of putting any progression strategies into action: if staff do not share information about individual pupils or initiatives and options available, then they cannot effectively implement approaches.

*We did have one member of the leadership team who was all guns blazing. She wanted to change everything and then she left. And we're still really trying to get over that.*

Head of Post-16 education, 11-18, Urban, South East

Across the board, teachers want consistency and clarity regarding communication around what they should be doing to support progression. Teachers in schools where leadership on this issue appears weak often complain that constant changes in approach make it hard for them to be clear on their individual role in helping pupils.

*I think they just need to raise profiles of certain things. And get out of that wretched management room. Nothing gets disseminated down and I think, somehow they have to raise that profile, it's about a rolling programme of awareness really.*

Teacher, London workshop

*Communication goes one way, not two ways, it's vertical, most of it comes down, no, most of the instructions come down, but there's no communication back up. So most people haven't got a clue what's going on elsewhere. And this Aimhigher is a classic example - it's a new one on me.*

Humanities teacher, 11-18, Urban, South East  
(this school was involved in the Aimhigher programme)

*They should start listening to staff and being there more often.*

Head of Year, 11-16, Rural, East of England

Key issues that teachers feel their leaders need to communicate include:

- The overall importance of progression and its relevance as a priority;
- The individual actions or policies that make up the school's approach to progression;
- How these work in detail;
- Their support for innovation/the accommodation of 'bottom-up' ideas for encouraging progression.

*I talk to my staff and feed everything back. In the bulletin at meetings, I make sure I write to, speak to and motivate staff saying we are responsible for delivering this and motivating our children. I am accountable for ensuring those messages get through. I just went into Year 11 assembly and was bigging them up about the grades they will get and motivating inspiring them ... Heads need to empower pupils and staff.*

Headteacher, 11-16, Rural, East of England

*I think you need to put on a day, or even just an assembly, specifically geared towards the Year 11s, where, do a little, maybe a little slide presentation and just highlight various different options of what's available. So that it's coming as a whole-school initiative and not just a year group initiative. I think that would have a huge impact, because it would be seen as coming not only just from their head of year, but also it's coming from the senior management team as well and it would show that they are also interested in the outcome would be for individuals.*

Head of year, 11-16, Inner London

Teachers tend to agree that stability and consistency of leadership is also important as part of this, as changes in leadership can cause a loss of momentum.

*Things can crumble really quickly because you've got a certain key person going and you haven't built in a hierarchy for somebody else to take over. So all sorts of other things often get set up but never get sustained because it doesn't work out with the staffing really.*

Teacher, London workshop

### 3.8 The organisation and its structures

A number of areas of school management and structure seem to relate closely to the level of priority being given to raising aspirations and encouraging progression. In particular, the way schools arrange tutorial or pastoral care, the provision made for careers guidance and the support for post-16 and post-18 education and training applications can have a strong influence. Schools with a clear approach to these issues at senior leadership level tend to deal more effectively with progression overall.

#### 3.8.1 Tutorial and pastoral systems

Teachers interviewed believe it is important for pupils to have an established and trusting relationship with the member(s) of staff giving them progression advice, if that advice is to be appropriate. The staff concerned need to be appropriately trained and supported to provide the fullest possible range of guidance on available options.

*We've got rid of our old pastoral system, which was very effective, all the Ofsted reports said one of the best things about the school. It was run by teachers, and traditional heads of the year and division tutors. I was one of those, so I was in the class with an assistant and it was supportive but also we knew when time to say goodbye or time to tell them to get on with it, whereas we don't have that system anymore. What we have now is the student services and these people are staffed by non-teachers and it's like a big shoulder for the kids to cry on.*

Humanities teacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

#### 3.8.2 Careers guidance

Research has found that many pupils believe the careers education and guidance offered to them through their schools was insufficient to support their post-16 and post-18 transitions<sup>20</sup>. In the case-study schools visited, a number of different approaches to careers guidance had been adopted, with - it was felt - varying degrees of effectiveness.

**Self-referrals and information libraries:** Some schools focus on pupils taking the initiative to seek guidance and information. However, teachers on the ground are sceptical that these are much used - especially by those most in need of guidance. There is also concern that the level and breadth of information on offer is too much for most pupils to effectively navigate and make sure of, without initial guidance.

*If you just give them a prospectus it's not the best way. We've actually got to bring it alive for them, take them to the website, take them to the college ... they do get lost in that plethora of information.*

Head of KS4, 11-16, Inner London

**External provision through Connexions:** Views of this service vary considerably. In some cases, the service is highly trusted and praised as having a positive impact. Often this is where the relationship with Connexions is long-standing and thought has been given to the role of Connexions in school concerned.

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<sup>20</sup> IRELAND, E. and O'DONNELL, L. (2004). *Post-16 and Post-18 Transitions: Initial Findings*. Slough: NFER.

*I ask [our Connexions advisor] that she's open for drop-in for children - to be there in a room that's well furnished, a lovely place for the kids to go and look at information with her. If there's any child in danger of dropping out, I ask her to personally work out an education plan for them.*

Head of KS4, 11-16, Inner London

*We've always had really good [Connexions advisors]. I said that all students should have a careers interview regardless and we always managed to get every single one of our kids a careers interview and they've always been quite good.*

Teacher, London workshop

*In this particular school, we have a self-referral system for Connexions - but that's not necessarily the best practice because my target group are not going to ask to see me.*

Connexions worker, 11-16, Inner London

However, others see Connexions as less effective. A key concern for many is that Connexions advisors often have limited time allocated to their school, and so appointments may only be available to pupils facing particular challenges or who are at risk of becoming NEET. Additionally, others query the accuracy of the advice or the effectiveness of the approach taken by individual advisors.

*To be perfectly honest, I have been in an interview with [our Connexions advisor] and a student and it was quite, dare I say, wishy-washy. In as much as her saying 'well I'll find out for you about that' for next time. No, tell them what they need to do and say 'right, by the next time I see you, you can have researched that'. Just saying, 'I'll do it', isn't giving them any incentive.*

Head of Post-16, 11-18, Urban, South East

We also found that some members of staff are unclear about the service provided by Connexions, who it is for or even its availability in their school. Here, teachers interviewed feel there is scope for considerably better communication.

*I don't know how well they do. I say hello to the Connexions adviser. I do know his name, but he's just not very integrated into the school*

Teacher, London workshop

**Designated head of careers with ring-fenced time:** Teachers accept that this particular approach requires an individual being given a significant amount of time to deal with their responsibilities (in larger schools and sixth form colleges, this could be a full-time role). It is felt that where this role is more strategic and free to innovate, e.g. forging new links with external partners, undertaking a careers audit of the school or developing new curriculum materials, it is more successful than when left in the hands of a member of staff with little authority or specialist training, for example, a school librarian 'doubling up' as a careers advisor.

*Some will never listen to you, but ... you've just got to keep going until you get a few more motivated. Every time you talk you get a few more. It's up to me then to try and motivate other staff and most of them do realise that there's more to just teaching the subject. If they want the children to be motivated in that subject they have to understand what that subject is going to do for them when they leave school.*

Head of careers, 11-16, Urban, North West

*I need to set up a senior management team, get a careers policy into the school, get a more fervent learning policy into the school, and try and work into the other departments more off- timetable events for the careers programme.*

Head of careers, 11-18, Urban, South East

*Our librarian is our careers lady, it's not a high powered position - we should have someone who could sell different types of careers to open people's eyes. They'd need to have the time to do this but also they need to be strong and dynamic*

Aimhigher co-ordinator, 11-16, Rural,  
East of England

### **3.8.3 Role of the post-16 offer**

There is a sense in a number of the 11-18 schools visited that the post-16 offer is sidelined, or at least is not fully integrated into the rest of the school. It is commonly believed that this is driven by schools feeling they need to focus on maximising GCSEs results.

*They give very little support to the head of sixth form, you know, very little, and they quite often completely miss out sixth form for the whole school activities, for the QA [quality assurance] programme ... the sixth form is virtually ignored. And I think we're out of special measures now and so that should no longer be the case.*

Head of humanities, 11-18, Urban, South East

*At the moment the results band and our projected grades and things like that, it's all based on GCSE. And A-levels are an after-thought. And it shouldn't be, I don't think it should be. Because to me they're equally important. For school status, it's the GCSE results. But why should that be? ... I think more emphasis could be put on 16+. SLT [the Senior Leadership Team] do not come up here unless I ask them to. I don't get the support that I would like from my line manager.*

Head of Post-16 education, 11-18, Urban,  
South East

Heads of sixth forms are quick to see the potential value of incorporating the 16+ offer into their schools' other efforts to raise aspirations, attainment and potential progression, as well as enhancing the reputation of the school. They look to school leaders to recognise this and ensure that they are considered in the wider picture.

### 3.8.4 School links

Interviews with headteachers in particular reveal that many of the steps that schools would like to take, or have taken, to support progression, rely on building relationships and empowering leaders to work with the wider community, including parents, carers, local businesses and employers. There is also a sense from some teachers that issues around aspiration and progression need to be tackled across wider education 'communities'.

### 3.8.5 Parents, carers and the community

To be taken seriously when promoting higher aspirations and longer-term progression, teachers argue that schools need to be viewed positively by parents and carers, and the community overall. In schools where this is not the case, teachers express concern about the challenge involved in engaging parents and carers with any events relating to progression options.

*We had a Year 11 parents' evening, now that's a critical year group, because they're doing their GCSEs: the parental turnout was only 34%. If you look at our data for the children who are likely to achieve five A\*-Cs, it's about 33%. I think that tells us something about the situation. Where parents are supportive and coming along to things like parents evenings, careers advice evenings or options evenings in Year 9, those children do well.*

Head of Post-16 education, 11-18, Inner city,  
South West

*In terms of progression, the local community is your school. That's where the school is judged and it's impact is decided.*

Teacher, London workshop

*[Parents need to be] coming into the school actually to see that teachers are very approachable and that there's a very friendly environment, because I think a lot of them don't come to parents evenings because they don't want to go anywhere near the school. Unless you try and break that down a bit there's always going to be that problem.*

Teacher, London workshop

Additionally, teachers feel that parents and carers need to be informed about the range - and value - of different options if they are not to undermine schools' attempts to raise aspirations and support longer-term progression.

### 3.8.6 Local business and employers

The school's relationship with local businesses is consistently highlighted by teachers as a resource that could offer pupils a range of benefits including:

- New input / ideas to help consider future progression options;
- Opportunities and experiences to help understand the relevance of different options;

- Proof that employers value education and qualifications to help engage pupils with the possibilities early on.

Schools vary substantially in the extent to which they have managed to set up these links. In the few schools where such relationships are well-established, these have been set up by leaders with a great deal of local knowledge, and who are likely to be operating in an 'entrepreneurial' mindset.

*We do quite a lot of work with industry through the Education Business Alliance, and we have people doing engineering going to work with a couple of construction companies, and they're going to do some mentoring too. So businesses coming to work with students in school is really important because, again ... it shows that there are lots of possibilities.*

Citizenship curriculum manager, 11-16,  
Inner London

*We want people to come in, to be inspiring, to say 'if you join our industry do you realise that by the time you're 35 you could be earning £50,000 a year and do you realise that, you could be in one of 18 different jobs on offer?'*

Headteacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

*I think with the way the British society runs, it's business-oriented, so it will help them and help them achieve their goals (which are not always highly academic), if they have a good head for business.*

Assistant headteacher, 11-16, Inner London

*Jaguar have a competition where you can design a car and work out that kind of thing, but I can't do every single thing that I would like to do so we need to spread the workload, so that everybody's in charge of one link with one outside company, or one outside agency, or one higher education provider that can offer all these things. Because there are amazing resources out there, and most of them are free. It's just one person can't be, can't possibly get them all when you're a teacher as well.*

Head of sixth form, 11-18, Urban, South East

In general, schools do not feel they have well-enough developed links to offer the range of benefits outlined above to their pupils.

*One other thing that I would like to see is that we as a school take on the initiative to get some partners in university and business - get some high-powered networks and individuals, our Sir Alan Sugars.*

Maths teacher, 11-16, Inner London



### 3.8.7 Universities and colleges

Generally, teachers feel that links with FEIs and HEIs are worthwhile for the insight and detail they provide for pupils on:

- Possible course options and where these can lead;
- Issues around funding;
- The student lifestyle and its relevance to individual pupils.

*We need colleges and universities to come to us ... because every afternoon or full day I take them out of maths or science or English to go and visit, I make them more behind.*

Head of KS4, 11-16, Inner London

*At the moment we have a big event coming up, an open day when the whole sixth form college is open for Year 11 students from local schools. My job is to make sure that as a college we are going out to all the local schools and telling the youngsters about what we do here, what the college is about, so in a sense it's a kind of aspirational thing for them, to say, 'come on, this is what you need to do after school, this is what you could do if you're successful'.*

Deputy headteacher, sixth form college,  
South East

*[One of our local] universities have been a really good resource in terms of coming in and delivering information about what it's like going to university. But, really it means about going to their specific place, so that's a bit of a downside, because they're selling themselves, and I think sometimes they come across as quite stuffy. I think what they need is to come across as young and vibrant - it would be better if it was students who came down. And actually if they were to go up there and see it, that actually it's full of young people, and there's some subjects that are fantastic, which our kids would love, they just don't know that they exist.*

Head of sixth form, 11-18, Urban, South East

*I think getting old students who are at university in really raises the profile of those destinations.*

Teacher, London workshop

*We've made a strong link with a local university ... we've got one of our teachers who works there part-time. There are actually sessions for them at 16 at that university which they're welcome to go to and they all can get signed-off timetable to go and do that during the winter term.*

Teacher, London workshop

In many cases, heads of sixth forms (or equivalent) are likely to be operating in campaigning or vocationalist mindsets, and most likely to have made contacts. The level and depth of these relationships are highly variable though.

Teachers express some dismay that FEIs and HEIs are not keener to 'come to them' to offer information sessions, promote their educational offer to pupils and help them to raise aspirations. In a handful of cases these relationships are more established, often with links and agreements between local HEIs and schools such as 'compacts' to offer guaranteed interviews, preferential points offers and to provide regular open day or taster events.

*There will be two distinct, established routes for our students. There will be the diploma or vocational route and there will be the academic route. We are networking with King's College London, and South Bank University. South Bank University are helping us with the diploma course and King's College will be taking the top ability pupils.*

Assistant principal, Inner London

### 3.8.8 The wider educational community

Teachers describe the relationship between local schools in many areas as one of competition, not co-operation. This is thought to have several serious implications for progression. Particularly important are links between feeder schools and institutions who receive their pupils when they leave. For those with post-16 provision, relationships with other local institutions such as FEIs and HEIs are seen as even more important. In a handful of schools where more co-operative and close relationships with other providers have been formed, a number of important benefits in supporting progression have emerged:

- **Smooth transitions.** Many teachers perceive the need to work with both feeder schools and the onward destinations that receive their pupils, to make sure pupils are supported and that any particular issues or needs are 'passed on' between providers. This includes mutual understanding of how the curriculum operates in different settings, so that schools are fully aware of pupils' attainment levels when they join, in order to be able to challenge them appropriately.
- **Widening options and progression routes.** In areas with several intuitions competing for the same pupils post-16, there is concern from some headteachers that they are forced to compete to introduce a wider range of courses, and bring in newer courses first, to maintain pupil numbers, rather than collaborating to offer the best possible range of courses to pupils. For example, there is felt to be considerable pressure on sixth forms to offer more vocational Level 2 and 3 courses, even where these are already on offer at local FE colleges.
- **Offering experience of other educational environments.** Some schools have forged links with a range of local sixth forms and FE colleges, to set up taster days and events to allow pupils to try out different types of course. Teachers feel this to be an important 'hook' to encourage pupils to stay on in some kind of further education or training, particularly where it helps those who feel 'burnt out' or ready to leave school to realise that post-16 study is not the same experience.

*The Government needs to fund co-operation and collaboration positively and it needs to fund isolationism punitively. Schools that don't want to co-operate, for whatever reason, should be fined because you believe that co-operation enables better provision. For example, it is fundamentally stupid that a student at our school who wants to do electronics cannot, because we do not offer it and therefore ends up doing sociology because we do, when the school down the road does do electronics. It*

*is madness for the school down the road to offer A-level music to three students and for us to have three students who would like to do it but can't as we don't offer it.*

Headteacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

### **3.8.9 Funding**

Some teachers currently leading on progression commonly mention issues around budgets. They tend to feel they are at their most powerful when they are allowed to hold their own budget and to spend it as they choose, as this gives them a high degree of flexibility and control over what they do. Additionally, teachers are clear that monies received regarding progression need to be ring-fenced and protected where possible. For example, some teachers complain that Aimhigher budgets can be swallowed up into a central school budget and so may not be channelled into appropriate activities. Further, teachers are opposed to the pump-priming funding of current initiatives subsequently being reduced or withdrawn over time, as they argue that schools cannot often afford to divert their own funds into these kinds of activities.

More generally, teachers talk about how the senior leaders can often usefully focus on garnering extra funding (e.g. as experienced when moving to Academy status) as this supports innovative ways of working, more staffing and more flexible facilities and resources. The case study below describes a school that has been focusing on using links with the community, to build its reputation and raise aspiration and achievement.

### Case Study 3: A school focused on building wider relationships / partnerships

A rural school has around 700 pupils and serves the local town and surrounding villages. The area used to have varied industry such as a large steel works and numerous farms. However, much of this industry has disappeared in recent years and the town has become a 'dormitory' town for two larger cities nearby. The largest local employers are two supermarkets and the school.

It is a comprehensive school with a long history, but few staff or pupils seem to be aware of this and some of the tradition has been lost in recent years. Around three years ago the school was put into special measures and has since had three headteachers.

The school is largely an 11-16 school but does also have a small sixth form of about 60 pupils across the two years. The sixth form has been of particular concern as pupils are tending to go to the other larger colleges in the area, and teachers feel they are losing most of their university-level pupils:

*So let's take your top set for science, who are all university material, they've been choosing to go to [college in neighbouring town]. So out of that class we may only retain two students - we're losing our university material, but I think that's changing now though*

Last year, the sixth form was re-branded to make it 'separate' from the rest of the school and attempts made to distinguish it from its competitors by offering a smaller, more personal approach. They are expecting next year's sixth form intake to rise by around 75% and are aiming to offer a fuller range of courses once numbers start to increase.

The approach of the headteacher has also been to build the school's profile in the local community. Every morning he buys the local paper and looks for articles that are promoting the school, and then follows it up with the journalist involved to try to get a follow-up story. This way, he believes he can encourage staff and pupils to feel proud of the school and to take it more seriously:

*So the plan over five years from now we would hope that we've sold that to the community so we're full, I've got an excess next year, so already we're beginning to sell that. I'd like to see the sixth form full and then we'll expand the partnership as we are with other schools and colleges.*

As part of this effort to increase engagement with the local community, there are several projects in place to forge links with local employers and local universities. The headteacher has been setting up 'Compacts' with local HEIs, so that his pupils will receive favourable offers.

### 3.9 The teaching and learning programme

Teachers look to senior leaders to develop new strategies for managing and developing the learning programme. Specifically, a key area for debate is that of the relevance of the curriculum options available to all pupils, as some feel that the curriculum is not fully accessible or wholly appropriate for all pupils.

*I think for a lot of our students it's completely the wrong diet - that's where a lot of the problems come from - it's dull, it switches them off.*

Teacher, London workshop

Many suggest that more vocational learning options - and specifically the resources and facilities to offer them - will help in this regard. Having said this, teachers do recognise that there is a tension between providing relevant options for all and diluting the curriculum to a level that is impractical.

Some teachers also feel that when pupils come to choose their options for GCSE there can be inflexibility within the system, creating practical barriers around engaging pupils. For example, cramped timetables and limited resources in one institution make it hard to expand the range of courses on offer, particularly when there are only small groups of pupils interested in a particular subject. However, collaborative arrangements with other local providers may be prevented by logistical problems involved in making sure that two different timetables don't clash with each other and allow pupils to attend classes in both.

## 4. Approaches to raising aspirations and encouraging progression to higher education

### 4.1 Context for the research

All the case-study schools have some approaches in place to address issues around raising aspirations and encouraging progression, often reflecting established good or best practice in these regards. This chapter does not rehearse what the schools visited are already doing; rather, it focuses on *what else* the practitioners interviewed thought should be done, and the interventions and support they felt would be useful or necessary in facilitating this. It is worth noting that not all of the measures identified are new, but it is significant that those interviewed are apparently unaware these approaches are established practice elsewhere or, if aware of them, feel unable to implement them.

The approaches identified fall into four key areas:

- Broadening horizons / raising aspirations;
- Providing advice and guidance;
- Encouraging progression through the curriculum; and
- Working with external partners and the community.

### 4.2 Broadening horizons/raising aspirations

Work experience opens up their eyes that they could travel a bit further, about what it's like to be at work and what skills you need at work, and it's always assessed when they come back into school. It's those things that enable students to think beyond the straightforward academic curriculum, it's how you encourage them

We've got to show them life, basically. And I really think that part of education is just as important as sitting in a classroom and gaining the qualifications

Work experience is highly valued in the schools visited, but felt to be frequently constrained by practical considerations, that is, finding *enough* and *appropriate* placements, especially in economically disadvantaged areas. It can also involve a considerable investment of time by the staff with responsibility for its organisation.

The extent to which schools are skilled in making links with businesses is highly variable: some have worked hard to develop this area, but others struggle. Some depend on Education Business Partnerships (EBPs) for help in developing relationships with employers, but describe difficulties in dealing with them. For example, teachers refer to a lack of mutual understanding around each other's ways of working, or to finding communication with EBPs difficult.

Also, teachers talk about needing to find new and better ways of recording what pupils have learned and gained from work experience, so that they can build on this and - where appropriate - reward pupils who have done well during their placement.

On the outward bounds thing they can actually achieve something, they can do it. Some of them might be used to being told all the time 'you're never going to achieve', but they go and do something different and say, 'yeah well I did it, and I've got a certificate to prove it'

We run a Year 10 trip for a week and they're doing [*geography*] coursework, but every time we go, there are some kids that just shine in that setting

One of the things that we should be able to do more of in terms of learning is to take the children on more activities and so that they can get their hands on things – it's a very enclosed school life and they don't get to see much

Activities that expose pupils to new experiences and help to build their confidence, like work experience and curriculum-based fieldwork, participation in schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh's Award or careers fairs and FE / HE / workplace "taster" days, are perceived by schools as invaluable. This allows pupils' strengths such as leadership, initiative and communication skills to shine through when these are not necessarily on show in the classroom. However, the teachers we interviewed point to a number of barriers to maximising these opportunities for pupils, including the drain on staff time in terms of administration, organisation, risk assessment and supervision, a reluctance on the part of colleagues to allow pupils time out of lessons and - for pupils - whether they can afford to pay for travel, accommodation and so on when the activities are not subsidised.

I think a lot of it is the fact that we, as a school we haven't engaged them enough in terms of raising their aspirations. I think we could do an awful lot more to raise their aspirations rather than just when they get to sixth form, because by that stage they've already had five years of schooling ... I could bring someone who's an airline pilot in, but they won't relate that to themselves, whereas if I could bring someone in who came to this school who's now an airline pilot, and who's a parent of someone at this school who does that

We get our ex-Year 11s to come in on Saturday school and to summer school and throughout the year as volunteers to talk to seniors. I think that's really important in terms of peer learning

With our speakers, they're able to see different people, some are famous, some have been on TV, some they've never heard of. Having a range of people from different walks of life, different backgrounds, different professions, different careers, gives them a bigger outlook. Whether it leads to fame and fortune or not, it gets them thinking about having an outlook and recognising where their slot in life is, and being fulfilled individuals. So I think it's about the sharing of experience

Widening pupils' aspirations and encouraging them to think about less familiar or more challenging options is thought to be difficult in a classroom environment. Several schools emphasise the effectiveness of involving a range of role models e.g. successful people from the local area, ex-pupils or other individuals with whom pupils can empathise and who may have overcome similar barriers to progression. This is often felt to have a greater impact on pupils than anything teachers might tell them. Teachers are also keen on talks/events in school involving visitors from FEIs, HEIs, business and industry (especially since this obviates many of the logistical problems described above). However, many refer to the difficulties they experience in persuading these speakers 'to come to us'.

#### **Case Study 4: Using role models to raise aspirations and illustrate progression routes**

In one inner-London school, most of the students are from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, with a high proportion of students from families that have very recently moved to the UK. The school has long encouraged ex-pupils to stay in touch and come back in to talk about their experiences in further education or work, as they feel many of their pupils will need extra help to 'see themselves' in successful studies or careers. Pupils who are first in their family to apply for university and uncertain about whether and how they will fit in to environments they perceive to be predominantly white and/or middle class are felt by teachers to particularly benefit from this kind of encouragement.

One example was mentioned by several teachers: a young man who progressed to studying science at a leading London university, even though he had only recently moved to the UK and was still getting to grips with written English. This was achieved through his own talent, but also through work by the school to contact the university in advance and explain the situation to them.

I think [Aimhigher] is a really a good way for them to start thinking about it. Because you notice they'll come back and think 'wow, I could actually do it, I'm quite good at English, and I could actually do that'. You find if they've been on a trip the next time we have a group session they do tend to say they would like to go to HE and if they didn't go on those trips, if they didn't have the support, they probably wouldn't. Especially if they've not got anyone in the family who's been ...

With Aimhigher, pupils are exposed to other options. Once they start seeing the possibilities, many start going onto that route. It's lack of knowledge which stops them

As an initiative it's good because not all students operate at the same level and students can lose their focus if their energies are not challenged in the right direction

Teachers interviewed welcome the Aimhigher initiative, as it provides concrete resources in support of activities to tackle low aspirations and encourage progression. However, they express the view that the initiative is not always as flexible as it might be: for example, they would like to be able to involve pupils from lower down the school in activities, or pupils who come from families with a tradition of entry into higher education but where parents are discouraging their children from applying ('it didn't do us any good'). More generally, there is a sense that Aimhigher is an initiative that has been developed by HEIs for HEIs, rather than for schools: teachers want Aimhigher to be more bespoke and to offer modules or elements that they believe are most appropriate to their situation. There is also some suggestion that

Aimhigher could provide a useful starting point for area-wide initiatives to raise aspiration and broaden horizons. Where there are local Aimhigher co-ordinators in place, working with a range of schools, this provides a potential starting point for more concerted and joined-up efforts and a pooling of resources.

If we get them at a younger age, and try and raise their aspirations from Year 7, by tasters at a university, by having more varied lessons, having outside speakers coming in, and more external visits, and anything to really raise their idea of the fact that there's something else out there, apart from doing this from then on. I think they think that the school is just academic, and it doesn't really have any relevance to their lives

Teachers generally feel that schools should be raising aspirations and focusing on progression issues from a much earlier age (pre-Year 10 and even pre-secondary school, and certainly not just at 'crunch points' like the selection of GCSE options) to demonstrate the high expectations that schools have of young people. The longer build-up is also thought to be important in giving pupils more time to engage with and properly consider the very substantial and personal questions about what they aspire to do and aim for in the future.

What we do in this school is we colour code them, what's called RAG. Red, amber, green. And we colour code all the youngsters according to ability. So we've got a very clear view about our top cohort, middle and bottom cohorts. And we track them and we constantly adjust the register on the Gifted and Talented

We now have the information on students that gives us a very, very good picture of their abilities and therefore we should be setting aspirational targets. I think the targets and the background data that we've got on every individual really does allow us to set challenging targets and therefore once we're setting challenging targets we're raising aspirations in that way. It's a very, very important issue

Many schools have quite sophisticated processes in place to monitor and track pupils, and this is thought to be an important foundation for individually tailored efforts to raise aspirations and encourage progression. Those schools where tracking and information seems most organised feel well placed to set targets for individual pupils that are appropriate, but also encourage students to stretch themselves, instead of just focusing on the lower achievers in an attempt to get all pupils to a 'pass' grade. In this context, teachers interviewed see the Gifted and Talented initiative as helpful, especially in relation to the identification of 'talented' pupils (many feel they are able to spot academically 'gifted' pupils themselves). Although the scheme is organised and run in slightly different ways across different schools, teachers largely find it sufficiently flexible in meeting their school's particular needs. Where there is some criticism is of the ways in which data are used by some schools to identify the Gifted and Talented, if there is a reliance on data which has been averaged out across subjects and pupils with very specific abilities are overlooked.

### 4.3 Providing information and guidance

Some progression-related information and guidance is available in all the case-study schools. However, how it is supplied, to whom, by whom and when varies considerably. For example, making information available to pupils to access 'under their own steam' is often the sign of a more 'resigned' or 'laissez-faire' mindset and approach. In some of the schools



visited, subject teachers who are not also fulfilling some kind of pastoral role (for example, form tutor) might feel very disengaged from the process of providing information and guidance about progression 'because it is handled by other colleagues'. Schools and colleges with post-16 pupils tend to have a more varied information offer than those with no post-16 provision. Meanwhile, not all of the schools visited were targeting information at parents and carers.

We need to be more realistic and it's something that I've tried to address here about the fact that I'm a qualified teacher, I've got an economic history degree, I'm not a qualified careers guidance adviser and I certainly haven't ever worked closely with universities in terms of their recruitment processes. Gone are the days where you encouraged everybody to go to university or get a job. We've got to be far more knowledgeable about it and we're working to do that because it's all very well having great intentions and wanting the best for them as individuals, but bad advice can be really damaging and teachers aren't the most appropriate people to give careers advice and advice about all courses

When I was at school our careers advisers were non-existent and I think even these days it's really low priority and the kids are just not made aware of what people do in various jobs. I still don't know what a City analyst does all day

Teachers tend to agree that the development in recent years (and certainly since 'their day') of a range of different pathways into, and different types of, Level 4 courses and qualifications means that there is a great deal within the current higher education landscape about which they (like many of us) are uncertain or even completely unaware. It is one of the areas where most teachers feel they would like to offer more, but believe they are least able to do so due to a lack of up-to-date (or indeed *any*) knowledge about the full range of pathways, the types of careers open to young people with Level 4 qualifications, ways of funding higher education, student life, the long-term benefits of higher level qualifications (pay differentials etc.), and so on.

This is a multi-faceted issue and one which warrants a more detailed examination.

#### **4.3.1 An academic / vocational divide**

At an overall level, teachers discern three, broad-brush learning pathways into employment for young people: the traditional academic route, a newer vocational route and the work-based training route. Regarding the first two of these routes, teachers tend to make distinctions in relation to subject matter rather than the institutions in which the subjects will be studied. At an overall level, the academic route tends to be associated with HEIs primarily and FEIs sometimes, whereas the top of mind association amongst teachers for vocational routes tends to be with FEIs. With probing, though, these practitioners are usually aware to some degree of a range of vocational routes offered via HEIs.

Within this though, teachers' understanding of the detail of the different routes and the employment they might lead to is highly variable, depending on their mindset, the focus of their interests and their role. In particular, many teachers feel less informed about newer vocational routes and potential outcomes, compared to the more traditional academic options.

*It is regrettably still an issue of the difference between what are regarded as 'academic, better, good qualifications' and 'occupational, vocational qualifications', 'those things that people do who can't pass real exams'. Everybody looks down their nose at a plumber, sorry everybody looks down their nose at vocational qualifications until you need a plumber.*

Headteacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

*There's a host of careers relating to geography that students aren't really aware of any more - teachers don't know about this - the teachers are committed and want students to study further but they haven't been out in the market and they aren't up to speed in how things have changed in their field.*

Aimhigher co-ordinator, 11-16, Rural,  
East of England

Therefore, teachers whose roles entail a specific focus on progression, such as heads of careers or heads of sixth forms, tend to be more up-to-date with the options and to have a broad-ranging understanding of what they involve and can lead onto. Others, especially subject teachers, may have a much narrower view.

*I think what we'll probably need to do is to hold staff training on more careers and what's expected out of careers, what work-related learning is, what enterprise education is, and then we'll be able to find ways of dealing with all of that. So telling you where your department can cover, what it can cover, what it does cover, what it can cover and how you're going to do it.*

Head of careers, 11-18, Urban, South East

In particular, teachers may be unclear as to how pathways join up and which alternative paths (relevant for different individuals) could lead to similar outcomes.

*There is a common pre-supposition which is that every student should go to higher education. I would challenge that assumption. There are some students who would clearly benefit from higher education who don't go, and for those, exercises in self-esteem, aspiration, and supporting the family at an earlier stage would make the difference. For students who don't wish or can't go to higher education, and they're quite right not to, then they should be going and getting the Level 4 or 5 qualifications through other routes, such as work-based learning, apprenticeships and training.*

Head of department, 11-18, Inner City, North West

### 4.3.2 FE versus HE

Amongst teachers interviewed, FE options tend to be relatively well understood - often because teachers are working within a geographically finite context and are very familiar with what is on offer locally.

HE-related knowledge, though, is more variable. For example, teachers working in 11-16 schools tend to be less knowledgeable overall than colleagues working with post-16 pupils, but there are exceptions to this. There are a few practitioners overall who are aware of the full range of options under the HE umbrella, from Foundation Degrees, through to diplomas of higher education, higher national diplomas and the traditional bachelors degree. Most, though, tend to associate HE with the latter and may exhibit little knowledge of courses outside their own experience.

*When I went to university, I got there and there were these subjects that you've never heard of before, like anthropology, because you don't have it at A level. And there's loads of things, you're just not aware of them at school, because we don't teach them, we don't prepare them for things like that, so I just think we need to make them aware of all the different possibilities - there are 50,000 courses - there must be one for most people I would have thought, that would fire someone's interest, but they don't know you fancy it until you know that it exists.*

Head of sixth form, 11-18, Urban, South East

It is worth noting that some teachers spontaneously mention their view that the introduction of Diplomas will help to smooth out progression pathways and encourage students to study non-traditional subjects academically, ultimately leading to more students taking the step into HE.

*I think the whole curriculum needs to have real life context and real life application, and for that reason I think the Diplomas will be fantastic, because I think there will be scope to get them out of the classroom and do more.*

Teacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

*I think there'll need to be much more clarity from 14 to 19, much more continuity. That would hopefully make it more likely that people stay on to conclude their education up to 19. And so I think [the introduction of Diplomas will] have quite a positive impact because as we're a big school, there will be quite a lot of choice.*

Headteacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

When thinking about different kinds of HE provider, teachers admit that their general sense of the 'better' HEIs is often shaped by their own experiences and quite out-dated information on individual institutions. Within their own or familiar subject areas, though, teachers tend to express more confidence about which HEIs have a strong reputation based on ex-pupils' applications and subsequent experiences.

### 4.3.3 Financing HE

Teachers display a great deal of variation in relation to their knowledge and understanding about ways of financing participation in higher education. Most tend to know that grants are available, but detailed understanding beyond this is fairly limited. This means that teachers are often not well-placed to challenge assumptions about the amount of debt that young people might incur as students, and ways of off-setting this. However, there is evidence of some teachers being unaware of even the most basic levels of support for students from low income families.

*I'm not sure that the students are particularly frightened by finance but I think the whole thing is frightening, it's down to me to get them through it and I think it's all a bit of a nightmare. I don't know a simple way of doing it.*

Teacher, London workshop

Specifically, teachers' concerns lie in the complexity around the finance of HE - all feel that it needs to be simplified so that pupils, parents and carers and especially teachers themselves understand it. Hence, teachers consistently talk about the need for more guidance in navigating this issue.

*There's a lot of fear about student loans and about debt. And there's a lot of misunderstanding, if no one in your family has ever been to university, who are you going to speak to for advice? You're not going to have anybody there are you?*

Head of humanities, 11-18, Urban, South East

*I don't think there's enough information for parents. Because especially our kids that we're putting through to [university] are normally the first [university] entrants in the family. We have parents coming up and they really don't understand the procedures. I do have students come in to say, 'I'd love to go to uni, Miss, but my Mum and Dad said they can't afford it'.*

Head of post-16 education, 11-18, Urban,  
South East

However, teachers also often talk about the difficulties and awkwardness involved in discussing the detail of pupils' personal and family finances, which in itself can make it difficult to identify the eligible sources of support for individuals.

*If you get anybody in to talk about it, it's just a whole set of figures on the board and most kids don't actually understand what their parents earn, so they don't know if they're eligible for this or that.*

Teacher, London workshop

### 4.3.4 Guiding students

Teachers interviewed agonise about the balance they are striking around guiding pupils and raising their aspirations versus challenging them to make decisions that may not be consonant with the attitudes prevailing in their home communities or their own progression ideas and expectations. Teachers want to offer their pupils relevant options and may worry that encouraging them to make choices that are potentially alien and perhaps intimidating is not always appropriate.

*I don't think there is a path they 'should' take, I think it's whatever they want to do. I wouldn't want to direct anybody too much, but there is a sense that they need to have the full picture available, then make the decision for themselves, rather than being held back by tradition or by peer pressure or by family expectations. So I wouldn't force children down certain pathways, but I do think sometimes, for some students, one pathway is easier to go down than another, and I'd like to work against that.*

Assistant headteacher, 11-18, Rural, East Midlands

*With all this information, advice and guidance it's the easiest thing in the world to just to let them choose what they want to do. But we also have a responsibility to try and push them, and extend them, and challenge them.*

Head of sixth form, 11-18, Urban, South East

Even if pupils have high aspirations, teachers also worry about how to respond if these are not particularly realistic for the individual. It is possible that teachers' lack of knowledge about the full range of different pathways to higher level qualifications may make it harder for them to harness these aspirations appropriately, and guide pupils onto pathways that constitute progression, but are more realistic and achievable.

*I would question in some cases whether advising them to go to university, necessarily, will bring them that happiness and feeling of success, but that's quite difficult to challenge.*

Teacher, London workshop

*A lot of students have unrealistic expectations compared with their levels of achievement ... we have students who are struggling to get their five GCSE A\*-C's who are convinced they are going to be doctors and barristers.*

Head of mathematics, 11-16, Inner London

*Stupidity is choosing a course which is at the wrong level for you, stupidity is going to a college which is too far away. One child was going to apply to a college to do a course that wasn't on offer other than as an A-level, and I said, 'but you're not at that standard yet', because I know the child and I can talk to them properly, I'm not belittling, I'm talking to him as a person and he recognised it and said, 'that's OK, I'll do something else'. But it's about having that kind of confidence.*

Citizenship curriculum manager, 11-16,  
Inner London

More specifically, teachers believe that the guidance they provide to young people is most effective when there is an established relationship between practitioner and pupil, meaning that what is offered is relevant and bespoke, chimes with the pupil's personality and wider interests, challenges their assumptions, raises their aspirations (for example, beyond just what the pupil feels safe doing) and tries to overcome perceived barriers, whilst not raising expectations unrealistically. Sufficient time (preferably for one-to-one support) also needs to be built into the guidance process.

*There are a lot of very needy kids here, a lot of impoverished kids here. And they're all familiar with the idea that you can move on and progress through education, but they don't have awareness about differentiating between good universities and pretty poor second division or third division places - it's something which doesn't come easily to them or they don't have a great deal of awareness of. Because of that, other things might be more important to them, for instance, staying locally, until that awareness is raised.*

Vice principal of student services, sixth form college,  
South East

*It's a sad reflection that I think a lot of us do feel there's times when they ask for information and you just think I'm sorry, I've not got time to have that conversation.*

Teacher, London workshop

*I don't have enough time to do the job properly; I don't do it in enough detail. I get given lots of other jobs - I'm a Gifted & Talented mentor, I see my job as working with the students as individuals - but I haven't got time to do it ... I just snatch a few minutes here and there.*

Head of year, 11-16, Rural, East of England

#### 4.4 Encouraging progression through the curriculum

One of the problems we had, one of the reasons the school went into special measures, is because students were on courses which weren't suitable for them. So they'd be sat in the back of history class, very practically minded kids, not very academic, and they would be causing mayhem when they should have been doing the practical courses. Now we've introduced health and beauty, we've got plumbing, we've got carpentry, we've got brickwork, we've got horse management

As an English teacher, I just can't see how GCSE English is relevant to quite a few children. Why are they studying Shakespeare when they can't read, when their literacy skills aren't very good?

We are pushed by Ofsted to continually challenge kids, the whole agenda is to challenge kids, challenge kids. Most of these kids don't want to be challenged, they want to come in and have an easy life, just get on with it. Now I'm no way suggesting they should do that, but I think we've gone to the other extreme with kids in this school who are not capable of it. So they're being pushed to do something they can't and they get angry, then they get frustrated, then they kick out. And that's why a course like health and social care is so good because you can work it at different levels. The brighter kids can work at a certain level, the less bright kids you can set them tasks which actually will get them through the course and they will pass. But that's what great about the course because you never push a kid beyond their breaking point.

Some teachers - especially those with vocationalist and entrepreneurial mindsets - believe that many of their pupils find it difficult to engage with the traditional academic curriculum, seeing it as irrelevant to them and their lives. This is compounded in schools where literacy and numeracy levels are low, preventing pupils from accessing the curriculum to a great extent.

These teachers are likely to feel that more vocational learning options are appropriate and successful, because they offer pupils the chance to engage at a number of levels (practical/hands-on as well as abstract / intellectual), offer a clear route into employment and can offer specific opportunities for pupils who benefit from non-traditional learning methods, e.g. kinaesthetic, to shine.

*In maths, I teach them how to work out the volume of a cylinder and I can get it so they can understand it, but it's got absolutely no relevance to them, and so two weeks later they'll forget it. Whereas I know for a fact that in college they teach them to work out the cubic capacity, the cc, of a car, and all the kids remember, because it's got a practical application.*

Head of sixth form, 11-18, Urban, South East

*We've got the BTEC courses as well and we've got very high take up of them. And they've got core literacy and numeracy in them. And sometimes I think it's fair to say the kids don't even notice that they're learning numeracy or literacy on those courses, but they are.*

Teacher, London workshop

*A lot of kids are kinaesthetic learners and I don't think there's enough to enhance that. I think we need to have something in place for those who struggle academically because they're sharper in other ways - so on the ball. At one of the schools I used to work in another teacher said, 'there's this child here, we can't get this child to focus. And you know why I'm so concerned? Whichever path he takes he's going to be very successful. If it's criminal or 9 to 5 he's going to be so successful'. We have to give them something they can succeed in here.*

Learning mentor, 11-16, Inner London

*By 2013 the Government are saying 11 to 18 year olds should stay in education but we've got kids at 14 that are already disaffected. We are moving in a direction that is better for more of our students, especially the less academic ones. We have a responsibility that they can learn in a way that suits them so that when they reach 14 they're not disaffected ... we need a wider range of facilities to suit the diverse nature of students at that age.*

Head of year, 11-16, Rural, East of England

However, it is worth noting that the Raphael Reed *et al.* (2007) suggest that pupils do not necessarily perceive a difference between 'traditional academic' and 'vocational' options but rather between options that are 'interesting' and 'boring'. What is important to them is having control over the choices they make, and for subjects to be delivered in a way that is

enjoyable, engaging, creative and linked to their interests<sup>21</sup>. Many teachers agree, too, that the key determinant is their ability to make the curriculum fun - but they vary considerably in terms of the extent to which they believe they have room to do this.

At an overall level, teachers feel that schools can lack flexibility in the way they deliver the curriculum, with a detrimental impact on the time they feel they can spend in focusing on progression issues. Within this, they include:

- The lack of flexibility in an already-crowded timetable;
- A lack of concentrated classroom time;
- The pressure of targets forcing them to teach to improve grades in the short-term above all else, rather than getting pupils to think about progression in the longer-term.

*I think we're so over-burdened with the core curriculum. The lack of flexibility in the curriculum means that things like careers is phased into a half-day timetable on a Tuesday morning once a term.*

Teacher, London workshop

*We need to build links without disrupting the timetable ... inflexibility is difficult. If you look at the school where my daughter is, if you miss work, you catch up on it, rather than miss out on it fully. But, changing that type of culture is very difficult.*

Aimhigher co-ordinator, 11-16, Rural,  
East of England

*A friend of mine's got a job at a new Academy ... they're in until 6pm I think the kids are and then the teachers on a shift system. There's timetable time for extra-curricular activities or for what we'd think of as booster classes or revision classes. I think totally rethinking the way that teachers are working is probably the only way of making the timetable more flexible.*

Teacher, London workshop

*If I taught geography lessons that were two, three hours long I would be able to do activities, whether they were practical activities or decision-making activities or preparing certain things in different ways, I'd be able to do things with them that I think would allow them to take on different roles within the group.*

Teacher, London workshop

*Everybody's aiming for is five A\*-Cs, and then once they've done their GCSEs, then it's all about getting three A-levels, and it's never really about the big picture of what's the point of it. We've got to try and get them earlier, and make them want the good job for themselves, because they want to enjoy it, and*

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<sup>21</sup> RAPHAEL REED, L., GATES, P. and LAST, K. (2007). *Young Participation in Higher Education in the Parliamentary Constituencies of Birmingham Hodge Hill, Bristol South, Nottingham North and Sheffield Brightside*. Bristol: HEFCE



*they want to do something that fires them. We've got to say the point of school is not to get these five A\*-Cs, it's for this.*  
Head of sixth form, 11-18, Urban, South East

*Because the Government keeps making targets, what happens is schools then have to focus on meeting that target. And then those that can't meet it get left behind. It's like with the GCSEs target, isn't it? Because at the end of the day, what's happened is, schools are being run like a business, and the head, if the head doesn't meet his targets then he's answerable.*  
Post-16 teacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

*Our key years are Year 9 and Year 11, and at the moment the big focus is on SATs and GCSEs, so at the moment it's the results they're more worried about and how well they're going to do - not what do they do next. So it may need to be incorporated into younger years as well, so maybe 7 and 8 and 10, where the pressures of a lot exams isn't there so much.*  
KS3 teacher, 11-18, Inner city, South West

#### **4.5 Working with external partners and the community**

The extent to which this happens is highly variable and appears to be dependent on whether schools have identified this as a need and have the resources to put into it. Schools in campaigning or vocationalist mindsets are most likely to have made links with FEIs / HEIs; schools in entrepreneurial mindsets are most likely to have addressed links with business; and schools operating in areas in which there is a high level of ethnic diversity are most likely to have addressed relations with parents, carers and the local community.

A key issue though is that schools visited often express nervousness about making contact with employers, because they often do not understand how the organisations work. They feel a need for much more support in how to go about doing this. Additionally, if nothing else, making these links and maintaining the relationships that develop requires a large investment of time and resources on the part of those leading on this work in schools.

*I think most organisations are unrealistic about how fast they think schools can turn things round, especially one of this size. It's going to take a bit of time to start phoning through to organisations for information and to introduce ourselves.*  
Head of careers, 11-18, Urban, South East

It is worth noting too that where schools visited are making links with businesses, they tend to be doing so with local small or medium employers, rather than larger employers. Teachers talk about how it would be useful and interesting to encourage larger employers to be involved in the process, for example, in talking to pupils about graduate recruitment schemes. Specifically they feel that pupils would take much more notice of these kinds of employers because of their relative power in the labour market. However, teachers tend to believe that they do not have sufficient weight to encourage these kinds of employers to come into schools.

*I think you do need to go to the banks and to the, even big companies, like Tesco's. Tesco's are a massive employer here and a lot of our students do end up working there. But wouldn't it be great if you could get the manager of Tesco's in and say, like, 'these are our management trainee schemes'. Like 'if you come to us with GCSEs this is what you'll do for a living and this is how much you'll earn. If you come to us with A-levels, if you come to us with a business degree this is what happens to you'. I think that's where a business could make a real impact.*

Head of humanities, 11-18, Urban, South East

Some schools talk about having used local EBPs to make links with business, but references are made to how relationships can be strained, whether due to teachers perceiving EBPs to be of limited value or EBPs being unaware of or unresponsive to the needs of schools in terms of how they work.

*Education Business Partnerships are technically meant to be our link with business, they are meant to communicate between schools and the business world, to help set up various different links, find work experience placements, do the health and safety checks, all of that side of things. So they do offer that help, but they're only as good as the number of employers willing to take on students from the different schools, because some employers will turn round and say, 'I will take students from this one, this one, this one, don't even think about giving me one from there, there or there'. We can get frustrated with each other, because sometimes our agendas are a little bit different.*

Head of careers, 11-18, Urban, South East

*We did mock interviews, and we got employers in from the local area through the help of the EBP, to do mock interviews. And the employers were all left with a very positive view of the students in the school.*

Head of careers, 11-18, Urban, South East

While schools tend to have relatively strong links with local FEIs, it is clear from this research that not all have close links with HEIs, and those that do often depend on the efforts of a particularly dedicated teacher who has made it their role to develop these links. In this context, a number of staff in the schools involved in the research are interested in the idea of Excellence Fellowship Awards (which provide opportunities for secondments to an HEI and to undertake a project related to their own subject area). More generally, though, teachers point to needing support in knowing how approach and communicate with HEIs.

*I think you may need better links with the local universities, and I would like to see our students go in there not just for the day or for like the university fairs. I suppose I just want much more openness within that system and perhaps you could just go over for a day, do a lecture, go to see what it's like.*

Head of Humanities, 11-18, Urban, South East

*If it was a much more structured government driven initiative to link teachers with HEIs, perhaps as part of your retraining process. Some of us teach for however many years without actually stopping and having a bit of catching up, just having one contact with a lecturer which can then be disseminated all through school in terms of the systems that are changing or the types of curriculum that are on offer.*

Teacher, London workshop

There are signs that 11-16 schools may not be getting sufficient attention from HEIs, compounding problems within schools around knowledge about and understanding of HE.

Although few schools are currently working with feeder schools on progression issues (beyond managing the primary to secondary transition), teachers feel that working with future pupils to help raise aspirations is a positive move. Within this, it is felt important to help ensure consistency in approach between primary and secondary schools in order to increase the power of any initiatives.

*I think one of the issues we've got is actually the work that's being done in those primary schools. The literacy hour, for example, is based very much on chunking so they don't actually look at full text. And the way secondary school is set up you're presenting them with a book they don't know how to use it because they've not got the skills.*

Head of Humanities, 11-18, Urban, South East

Teachers tend to agree that making contact with and involving parents and carers is important for supporting the promotion of longer-term progression, but many teachers feel they lack inspiration in how to go about engaging parents and carers, particularly when they sense that the attitudes of parents and carers towards higher education are at odds with what the school is trying to achieve, and they are operating largely in isolation from the communities they serve. As such, practitioners say they would appreciate an opportunity to tap into the experience of schools in situations similar to their own and share ideas about how to do this. However, teachers also believe there is greater scope for helping parents and carers to understand the relative benefits of higher education, from a social or economic perspective and - in particular - in providing information about funding HE, in order to alleviate their concerns about debt.

*I can't think of any downsides of education. I just think it has the potential to make better people. I think HE gets people to grow, to like themselves and others better and have more fun. It's not a message we consciously put forward but it probably does seep through as students are getting guidance from people who have had good experiences in HE.*

Principal, sixth form college, South East

*We've written to all the parents and said, your child is clever enough to get 5 A\*-Cs. And the number of parents who've rung us back and said, 'well no one's ever told me my child was clever before'. It's quite astonishing. So it's about raising aspirations and saying, 'there's no reason why you shouldn't be very, very successful'.*

Headteacher, 11-18, Urban, South East

## 5. Key findings and recommendations

A common understanding amongst the teachers interviewed is that encouraging progression and aspiration is a key aspect of their role, in the sense of preparing pupils for the 'next step'. Often, though, encouraging a longer-term perspective on progression amongst pupils is (as they see it) necessarily low on their list of priorities, particularly in light of the need to focus on floor targets (i.e. the percentage of pupils achieving five A\*-C grades at GCSE) on which their school's performance is judged.

Moreover, they are also very clear in seeing themselves as just one influence among many on pupils' decisions and attitudes, and they tend to believe that the level of influence they have is strongly shaped and constrained by other wider factors. As such, they are just one part in a complex system.

In the schools and sixth form colleges visited, teachers' sense of place and role in this complex system was reflected in markedly different attitudes towards raising aspirations and supporting progression. These were:

- **Campaigning**, in which teachers are focused on the intrinsic value of education to all pupils and hence value more traditional academic progression routes, such as degree courses, in particular;
- **Vocationalist**, in which teachers value a range of different learning pathways, but perceive vocational education as an important way of attaining qualifications and moving into employment, via an approach which is more engaging to some pupils than traditional academic learning;
- **Entrepreneurial**, in which teachers are focused on getting pupils into employment as the key outcome and value formal qualifications in the context of attaining appropriate work;
- **Laissez-faire**, in which teachers believe that it is largely up to pupils to take the initiative in choosing relevant progression routes, although they themselves tend to favour academic routes;
- **Resigned**, in which teachers feel disempowered to overcome the prevailing barriers to progression that they encounter.

Although some of these mindsets may appear to be more preferable than others in encouraging aspiration, there is no clear evidence that *specific attitudes are necessarily leading to better progression rates*. Teachers' attitudes are important, but even the more preferable mindsets need to be supported by good professional development, structures and strategies, if they are to be effective. Key to this are the following factors:

- Senior school leaders who set the tone by pushing a consistent and clear focus on longer-term progression as a whole-school priority.
- Related to this, the embedding of longer-term progression goals in the ethos of schools, signalled - for example - by the formal inclusion of progression in school development plans, so that progression is not seen as 'another task' but integral to everything the school does.

- A named person with over-arching responsibility for shaping each institution's progression-related activities, and with the drive, authority, time and resources to carry out this job effectively (a "progression champion". However, responsibility for raising aspirations and promoting longer-term progression goals is not the sole responsibility of this member of staff, but one shared by all colleagues.
- An expansion in teachers' understanding of the current HE landscape, and the full range of potential pathways to and outcomes from Level 4 qualifications for young people, as well as the financing of HE.
- Strong relationships with the wider community including parents and carers, other schools, FEIs / HEIs, local (and national) businesses and employers, and other agencies/third-sector organisations.

All of the case-study schools and colleges already have some approaches in place to address issues around raising aspirations and encouraging progression, often reflecting established good or best practice in these regards. However, practitioners interviewed a number of other things that they felt should be done, and the interventions and support they felt would be useful or necessary in facilitating this. It is worth noting that not all of the measures identified are new, but it is significant that those interviewed are apparently unaware these approaches are established practice elsewhere or, if aware of them, feel unable to implement them.

The approaches identified fall into four key areas:

- Broadening horizons / raising aspirations
- Providing advice and guidance
- Encouraging progression through the curriculum
- Working with external partners and the community

## **Broadening horizons / raising aspirations**

The following steps are thought to be particularly important in the following contexts:

- Schools where the student body is felt to have low and/or narrow aspirations due to the prevailing local 'culture'.
- Schools where provision for work experience is limited or poor and / or where pupils struggle to arrange work experience independently or through family or personal connections.

*Suggested interventions and support required:*

Starting early to 'map out' progression options. Pupils lacking an HE 'tradition' (for example, progression into higher education by family members or members of their wider social network) need time to internalise and map out the options available to them.

Motivational speakers/mentors/peer role models. To help pupils think about their longer-term progression, to consider options they have not heard about previously, and, crucially, to be convinced that progression to Level 4 qualifications (whether academic or vocational) is a achievable for and relevant to young people *like them*.

Helping schools to develop relationships with businesses. Schools need to work individually, or in local partnerships, to develop networks amongst local businesses, with established arrangements for work experience, practice interviews, advertising job vacancies and training opportunities.

Trips/taster days to FEIs and HEIs to 'bring to life' what is on offer and make these options less intimidating. Teachers feel that pupils need to 'see for themselves' to seriously consider a wider range of progression options.

Promoting and building on Aimhigher and Gifted & Talented-related activities

## Providing advice and guidance

These kinds of step are thought to be particularly important in the following contexts:

- Schools where large numbers of pupils may be concerned that higher education (especially university-based provision) will not be welcoming to them e.g. BME students, those first in their family to progress into HE, young people from low-income households etc.
- Where the socio-economic situation of pupil's families make them debt-averse, or where the deferred benefits of progression to Level 4 qualifications are not fully appreciated.
- Schools with an 11-16 intake.

### *Suggested interventions and support required:*

Facilitating strong individual relationships between pupils and teachers through careful planning of tutorial/pastoral structures. These relationships benefit from consistency, so that at least one teacher is *comprehensively* aware of pupils' individual circumstances (for example, where home circumstances may be a barrier to progression into higher education) as well as how pupils' particular strengths and interests may be levered.

A focus on longer-term progression (to Levels 3 and 4) *in parallel with* any focus on shorter-term 'progression' goals, for example, by building longer-term progression as an underpinning/over-arching objective for any activity included in school development plans, and monitoring progression outcomes for pupils after they have moved on.

Establishing clear leadership and responsibility for progression, with an identified member of staff taking progression forward as a whole-school, priority issue, clearly supported by the Senior Leadership Team; the "progression champion's" work facilitated by a devolved budget, personal autonomy, clout and the time to in which to undertake the role effectively.

Moving away from *ad hoc* and intensive support directed by individual members of staff at individual pupils towards a joined-up, holistic approach, ensuring all pupils are encouraged and supported appropriately.

Through training, raising teachers' own aspirations and confidence around their ability to support progression by developing their capacity to offer up-to-date and comprehensive information and guidance on the full range of pathways (and their parity of esteem), the types of careers open to young people with Level 4 qualifications, ways of funding higher education, student life, the long-term benefits of higher level qualifications (pay differentials etc.), and so on.

Providing the same information and guidance for parents.

## **Encouraging progression through the curriculum**

These kinds of step are thought to be particularly important in the following contexts:

- Schools where a large number of students are thought to be ill-suited to, or expected to struggle on, traditional academic progression routes
- Schools with low overall attainment and pupils with more limited progression options post-16

*Suggested interventions and support required:*

Strategies to allow pupils with the lowest levels of literacy / numeracy to access the curriculum, by providing additional support alongside main lessons, and making the identification of these problems a key priority when pupils arrive in a new educational setting (whether post-11 or post-16).

Focusing on rewarding academically average or low performers, and/or those with other skills through attainment and achievement in extra-curricula activities, work experience etc.

A focus on progression routes that are relevant to the schools' own intake, specifically routes into careers relevant to local employment opportunities

Apprenticeships or other opportunities from Year 10 onwards to combine work-based learning with classroom learning



## Working with external partners and community

These kinds of step are thought to be particularly important in the following contexts:

- Schools with poorer capacity and confidence in establishing links with FEIs/HEIs, businesses and employers

*Suggested interventions and support required:*

Helping schools/business understand how each other work (for example, via EBPs). Schools and heads in particular need to communicate candidly but positively with the local community, and in a targeted way with businesses, to explain their priorities, approach and the support they need. They also need to consider what they can offer to local communities and businesses in return e.g. facilities for training or events in the evening and school-leavers with skills and experience suited to those local employers.

Building links with local schools - those with good rates of progression into higher education (for inspiration and ideas); feeder schools, to start the work of raising aspirations as early as possible in pupils' educational careers; and receiver schools / colleges so that approaches to progression are aligned.

Encouraging and supporting schools to move towards partnership working, specifically in relation to course provision, so that the local 'offer' is complementary and provides varied and relevant options for young people.

Encouraging and facilitating more contact with HEIs, and support for schools in developing relationships.

Engaging parents in planning and considering progression much earlier, for example, through parents evenings from Year 7 onwards.

Involving parents in supporting the school, for example, through providing work experience options through their own employers, or helping to find local speakers and role models to come into the school.

There are several key recommendations suggested by this research.

- Schools which are currently focused on short-term progression objectives, at the expense of a longer-term, more holistic view, do need a clear reminder of the importance of keeping sight of both. **Targets** for progression into higher education are probably not the answer. However, **guidance** to schools - especially those in the 11-16 sector - would be likely to go a long way. This should focus on encouraging the inclusion of broader progression issues into school development plans, the promotion of senior leaders with a responsibility for co-ordinating whole-school initiatives relating to encouraging progression, and advice on strategies for working with parents and carers, wider communities and other partners (further education institutions (FEIs), higher education institutions (HEIs), employers and third sector organisations etc.).
- There would seem to be a particular **role for HEIs to be more proactive in making links with, and providing support for, schools** (again, especially those in the 11-16 sector). There is a strong sense of dismay amongst those interviewed that HEIs are not as prepared to 'come to them' as they might be, not least when this would be logistically and financially more manageable for schools, and would hugely increase the number of pupils who could be exposed to this potential option.

- Related to this, **some clarification around Aimhigher** is required. To an extent, there is perception amongst those interviewed that eligible activities lack sufficient flexibility and that Aimhigher funding cannot always be used in ways best tailored to the particular circumstances of individual schools. These perceptions may be well-founded, in which case there is an argument for revisiting the funding arrangements and structure currently in place for the Aimhigher programme, to ensure their full fitness for purpose. Alternatively, these perceptions may be wrong, suggesting a need for better communications with, and guidance for, practitioners about this important initiative and how they can use it to support progression-related work in their schools.
- **Training / Continual Professional Development (CPD)** for teachers relating to the new higher education landscape is a clear requirement, particularly in shifting mindsets that are less effective in promoting higher aspirations amongst young people and encouraging their progression to Level 3 and 4 qualifications.
- Similarly, clearer and more accessible **information** on different progression routes, and ways of financing higher education, for teachers, young people and parents and carers, is essential. Amongst those interviewed, there is an awareness that these details are already 'out there', but they are widely regarded as overwhelming in their volume and complexity. The provision of information in a way that is simpler to understand, easier to navigate, and brought to life more effectively for all stakeholders - practitioners, pupils and parents / carers - is likely to be a role for government in the first instance, given the need to establish an up-to-date and fully accurate, 'current state-of-play' baseline. Once established, however, the responsibility for keeping abreast of developments, and for cascading this information to young people and parents, can be devolved to school-based "progression champions" and their colleagues.

## Appendices

## **Appendix 1: Sampling strategy**

The findings in this report are based on views gathered from a total of 108 teachers in interviews across 17 case-study schools and sixth form colleges in England, and two evening workshops from schools in London and Gateshead. Case-study fieldwork took place between 22 January and 31 March, 2008. The workshops were held on 1 and 2 April 2008. The details of how these schools and colleges were selected, the kinds of institution included and the interviews conducted within them are described below.

It is important to note that, as with all qualitative research, the findings described here are reflective, not representative, of the views of all teachers. Furthermore, the case-study institutions were selected according to specific criteria, not to be a typical or representative cross-section of educational establishments.

### **Selecting schools**

When examining progression to higher education, the ideal method for sampling schools to participate would be to look at their individual progression rates at the end of Key Stage 5. Unfortunately the lack of published data at school level means this is not possible. In the absence of other information, achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 was taken as a reasonable basis for an estimate of likely progression rates.

As a result, the DCSF's 2006 Level 2 attainment rates for 15 year old pupils were used to make judgements of which schools were likely to have lower HE progression rates.

Reaching Level 2 attainment involves pupils achieving 5 or more A\* to C grades at GCSE (or their equivalent).

The sampling process also needed to allow for variations in local circumstances and performance. This was done by using the DCSF's Contextual Value Added (CVA) scores, a more sophisticated version of Simple Value Added (SVA) scores.

SVA scores are based on the progress made between the beginning and end of secondary education. More specifically, this involves comparing the end result of qualifications achieved in Year 11 to the starting point of results obtained in Key Stage 2 tests in Year 6. Some factors which affect pupil performance are outside schools' control. These can include (but are not limited to) gender, Special Education Needs, movement between schools and family circumstances. The DCSF CVA scores adjust the SVA scores in the light of a number of these factors. The CVA aims to measure each school's overall effectiveness and make comparisons between schools more meaningful.

Table 1.1 below shows how Level 2 Attainment and CVA scores were used to select schools and classify them into two categories. Only mainstream secondary schools were included in the sample.

**Table 1.1**

<b>Sample classification relating to progression</b>		
<b>Likely HE progression</b>	<b>Pupils achieving five or more A*-C GCSEs (Level 2 attainment)</b>	<b>CVA</b>
	<b>England Average 59%</b>	<b>England Average 1000</b>
Lower	49% or lower	Less than 1000
Average	50% to 64%	Greater than 1005.1
<p><i>Source: Ipsos MORI and DCSF achievement and attainment tables (<a href="http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/performance/tables/index.shtml">http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/performance/tables/index.shtml</a>)</i></p>		

### **Lower progression**

As the table shows, these schools have Level 2 attainment at least ten percentage points below the England average of 59%. Their CVA scores are the England average of 1000 or below.

This means that this group should contain only schools with lower levels of progression and should not include any schools who are performing exceptionally well in difficult circumstances.

### **Average progression**

This group contains schools that have Level 2 attainment in a broad range around the England average. Their scores range from up to ten percentage points below or five percentage points above the England average. Their CVA scores lie in the top 40% of schools in England.

This produces a group of schools who we would expect to have average rates of progression to HE, but are above average in terms of their performance as measured by CVA. The “lower” and “average” classifications were designed to give two groups of schools whose performance differed enough to capture a range of practices, but also similar enough to make any comparisons meaningful.

### **Region and settlement types**

In any qualitative piece of research, the small number of participants means that the sample selected cannot be representative of the population in the same way as (for example) a quantitative survey of 200 headteachers. Nevertheless, the research still needs to capture a range of different types of establishment.

To meet this requirement, schools were selected according to whether they were located in rural, urban or inner city (IC) areas. In our achieved sample, the schools and colleges which participated in the research were spread across seven of the nine English government office regions.

### **Sixth form colleges**

A limited number of local authorities contain sixth form colleges. Again, data on their progression rates to HE were not available. Average Point Scores per pupil were used to estimate how their HE progression rates compared with other post-16 providers. Two “lower” colleges were selected on the basis that their Average Point Scores were below average for their local authority and below the national average. One “better” college was selected on the basis that its scores were slightly above the national and LA average. Likely feeder schools were identified for the “lower” colleges on the basis of their geographical proximity.

### **Participating institutions**

Table 1.2 shows the full list of schools participating in the research.

**Table 1.2**

<b>Participating schools and sixth form colleges</b>						
<b>No.</b>	<b>Name (attributions)</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Estimated progression</b>	<b>Settlement type</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Government Office Region</b>
1	IC Average 1	School	Average	Inner City	11 to 16	London
2	IC Lower 1	School	Lower	Inner City	11 to 18	South West
3	IC Lower 2	School	Lower	Inner City	11 to 18	North West
4	IC Lower 3	School	Lower	Inner City	11 to 16	London
5	IC Lower 4	School	Lower	Inner City	11 to 16	London
6	Urban Average	School	Average	Urban	11 to 18	South East
7	Urban Lower 1	School	Lower	Urban	11 to 16	North West
8	Urban Lower 2	School	Lower	Urban	11 to 18	South East
9	Urban Lower 3	School	Lower	Urban	11 to 18	East of England
10	Rural Average 1	School	Average	Rural	11 to 18	South East
11	Rural Lower 1	School	Lower	Rural	11 to 18	West Midlands
12	Rural Lower 2	School	Lower	Rural	11 to 16	East of England
13	Rural Lower 3	School	Lower	Rural	11 to 18	East Midlands
14	Feeder for SFC Lower 1	Feeder School	Feeder	Feeder	11 to 16	London
15	SFC Lower 1	SFC	Lower	N/A	16 plus	-
16	SFC Lower 2	SFC	Lower	N/A	16 plus	-
17	SFC Average	SFC	Average	N/A	16 plus	-

*Source: Ipsos MORI*

**Participants within each institution**

The following table (Table 1.3) shows the range of staff interviewed in each type of institution. Numbers and types of interviews varied slightly between institutions, but the table provides a broad guide to the typical range of participants. As far as possible, Ipsos MORI sought to ensure that members of staff involved in the research, and not one of the named post-holders below (for example ‘Head of Key Stage 4’), were randomly selected, so as to ensure a good cross-section of views and experiences.

**Table 1.3**

<b>Participating practitioners</b>		
<b>11-16 schools</b>	<b>11-18 schools</b>	<b>Sixth form colleges</b>
Headteacher or principal	Headteacher or principal	Headteacher or principal
Head of Careers [or equivalent]	Head of Careers [or equivalent]	Head of Careers [or equivalent]
Head of Key Stage 4 [or equivalent]	Head of Key Stage 4 [or equivalent]	
	Head of Post-16 [or equivalent]	Head of Upper VIth/ Year 13 [or equivalent]
3 other members of permanent teaching staff [ <b>NOT</b> supply/support staff] <i>for example:</i> - a form tutor - a 'regular' subject teacher - a head or assistant head of year	3 other members of permanent teaching staff [ <b>NOT</b> supply/support staff] <i>for example:</i> - a form tutor - a 'regular' subject teacher - a teacher involved in vocational courses (where applicable)	3 other members of permanent teaching staff [ <b>NOT</b> supply/support staff] <i>for example:</i> - person with responsibility for feeder school liaison - a form tutor - a curriculum or subject co-ordinator
<b>Total = 6</b>	<b>Total = 7</b>	<b>Total = 6</b>

### **Workshops**

Two evening workshops were conducted in London and Gateshead. These lasted for three hours and involved more focused discussions on the issues emerging from interviews across the case-study institutions, and gave teachers a chance to respond to and refine some of the key findings, in particular the key implications.

- London workshop - 9 teachers from a range of local schools, including assistant heads, heads of year and subject teachers.
- Gateshead workshop - 4 teachers from a range of local schools, including department heads, heads of sixth form and subject teachers.

Please note, schools and sixth form colleges involved in the case-study visits did not participate in the workshops and *vice versa*. The identities of schools and sixth form colleges involved in the case-study visits were not identified to those participating in the workshops, nor have they been shared with DIUS.



## **Appendix 2: Research materials**

Discussion guide: Depth interviews

Discussion guide: Workshops

**The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)**  
**Depth interviews discussion guide:**  
**Raising the higher education aspirations of young people**  
**Draft FINAL - 10 January 2008**

**All participants**

	<b>Areas to cover</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Introductions and warm-up</b>	<p>Explanation of the project: we are carrying out research in a number of schools / sixth form colleges to understand how teachers encourage and support students to progress towards further and higher learning after school.</p> <p>Key research objectives are to explore what this means to teachers, how teachers support students into further and higher education and how teachers could be helped and supported to a greater degree to enable young people to progress to FE / HE.</p> <p>There are no right or wrong answers. We would like to record what you say but the interview is totally confidential - any details that could identify you or your institution will not be released to DIUS or any other third party, including other interviewees in this school/college.</p>	<i>Establishing the task, reassuring and putting everyone at ease</i>

## Headteachers / principals

<p><b>Background info/context</b></p>	<p>Can you tell me a bit about the school / college - what are its circumstances, ethos / aims, values etc.?</p> <p>How would you describe the intake here? What kind of community does the school / college serve?</p> <p>What would you say are the particular challenges facing this school / college?</p>	<p><i>Gaining an understanding of the background context of the school</i></p>
<p><b>Progression outcomes</b></p>	<p>What do students tend to do when they leave this school/college (by all means use last year's Year 11 / Year 13 as an example).</p> <p>Probe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>proportion who go on to FE/HE (either vocational or academic)</li> <li>proportion who go into work</li> <li>proportion who do something else (and what is that something else?)</li> </ul> <p>What do young people regard as relevant / desirable 'progression' routes for them and how does this vary from what others - staff here, their parents, the Government - might hope for them?</p> <p>What, if anything, contributes to students not taking up further and higher education options?</p> <p>What are the key barriers?</p> <p>Probe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Perceptions: What do young people think they will do / want to do post-16 and where does FE / HE fit into that? Do they see FE / HE as relevant / realistic / attractive / desirable options? Why / why not? Are they ambitious enough for themselves?</li> <li>- Attainment levels: Do they have the ability? Do they understand what they have to do / achieve earlier on to be able to progress?</li> <li>- Attitudes of peer group?</li> <li>- Attitudes of parents?</li> <li>- Structural / community issues (affordability etc.)?</li> <li>- Anything else?</li> </ul> <p>How can these barriers be overcome? How can young people be better supported to progress into FE / HE or better encouraged to see FE / HE as relevant / realistic / attractive / desirable options?</p>	<p><i>Understanding the progression outcomes of the school in more detail</i></p>

<p><b>Attitudes to progression - you</b></p>	<p>What are your progression aspirations/ expectations for the young people attending this school? Overall, how do you think students should be progressing, what should they be aspiring to do once they leave?</p> <p>Do you think you are ambitious enough about your students' potential progression? Why / why not?</p>	<p><i>Exploring definitions of 'progression' and what this can mean in different contexts</i></p>
<p><b>Attitudes to progression - your staff</b></p>	<p>What are the progression aspirations / expectations for the young people attending this school amongst your staff? How do they think students should be progressing once they leave?</p> <p>Do you think your staff are ambitious enough about their students' potential progression? Why / why not?</p> <p>NOTE TO MODERATOR: If respondent alludes to any inconsistency in attitudes amongst staff, and particularly between staff and headteacher / principal, probe to find out what explains this, why respondent thinks this is the case</p>	<p><i>Exploring definitions of 'progression' and what this can mean in different contexts</i></p>
<p><b>Attitudes to progression to HE</b></p>	<p>What routes do you think of as "HE"?</p> <p>Probe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- traditional, academic courses only</li> <li>- mix of vocational and academic courses</li> </ul> <p>Do you perceive there to be differences between different institutions e.g..Oxbridge / red brick universities / new universities / FEIs providing HE? What are the main differences? How relevant to you perceive these different options as being for students here?</p> <p>Overall, how do you feel about HE as an option for students at this school? What, if anything, would/do your students gain from going on to HE? Would there be any disadvantages to them from going on to HE?</p> <p>Do the students here have a good / detailed understanding of what's available (different courses and providers), what HE involves (e.g. leaving home perhaps), what they need to achieve to progress into HE, how to fund HE etc?</p> <p>What impact, if any, do you think Diplomas will have on the rates of FE / HE progression amongst, or the nature of the FE / HE choices made by, students at this school?</p> <p>What do you think of the national aim of 50% of young people going on to HE? Does it raise any particular issues for this school / college - if so, what are these?</p>	<p><i>Understanding the HE progression context at the school and probing individual attitudes to HE</i></p>

<p><b>Your role in relation to progression</b></p>	<p>Specifically, what do you see as your personal role in terms of leading the school in relation to encouraging progression?</p> <p>Specifically, what do you do to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage / inspire students?</li> <li>• Motivate teachers?</li> <li>• Involve parents in their children’s education, especially decisions about further / higher education?</li> </ul> <p>Personally, is there anything that you would like to do more of to encourage progression, especially into HE?</p> <p>What is stopping you from doing this? How could any barriers/issues be overcome?</p>	<p><i>Understanding headteacher’s role in relation to encouraging progression</i></p>
<p><b>School / college approach to encouraging progression</b></p>	<p>Overall, what approaches are taken in this school/college to encourage young people to take up different progression options?</p> <p>How do teachers go about raising the issue of progression with students and how does this vary by teacher? To what extent do they experience challenges in inspiring young people to take up progression options - if so, what are they and how are they supported?</p> <p>Do you have any particular approaches in place for encouraging progression - if so, what are they? (e.g. events for parents, ex-students coming into school to discuss their experiences etc.)</p> <p>What is your involvement in progression initiatives in this area? (e.g. Aim Higher, links with Lifelong Learning Networks, links with Student Associate Scheme, Gifted &amp; Talented, links with Excellence Hubs, Learning Mentors, ad hoc links with universities / colleges / employers / others)</p> <p>How helpful / effective do you perceive all / any of these as being and why?</p> <p>Are there key gaps in terms of provision that you would identify in this area? What provision is needed and who would be responsible for this?</p>	<p><i>Gathering evidence of what the school does in relation to encouraging progression to HE</i></p> <p><i>Eliciting how headteachers feel they could be supported to encourage progression to a greater degree</i></p>
<p><b>Supporting progression</b></p>	<p>In general, what helps schools / colleges to enable young people to achieve their potential and - within this - consider relevant progression options?</p> <p>What makes it harder / prevents schools / colleges from doing so? How if at all could this / these issues be overcome?</p> <p>Are there any areas in which you feel the school/college could be doing better? If so, what are they and what is stopping you from addressing the issues? What would help you address the issues?</p>	

	<p>Specifically, what would be most useful in supporting you to help young people achieve their potential and consider relevant progression options? Would these be different for the school / for you in particular / for your staff? Whose responsibility would they be? How could they be implemented for best effect? Would implementation raise any issues - if so, how would these be overcome?</p> <p>Is there anything more that Government / local universities / industry / colleges / local authorities could be doing to help support progression?</p>	
<b>Summary</b>	Overall, what are the key ways in which teachers - and specifically headteachers / principals - could be supported to enable students to progress to further and higher learning after school.	<i>Summarising key insight</i>
<b>Thank and close</b>		

## Other interviewees

<p><b>About you</b></p>	<p>Could you tell me about your role in the school/college - what are your day-to-day responsibilities, how much time to you spend teaching versus other tasks etc.? How long have you worked here?</p>	
<p><b>Background info/context</b></p>	<p>Can you tell me a bit about the school / college - what are its circumstances, ethos / aims, values etc.? How would you describe the intake here? What kind of community does the school / college serve? How would you characterise relationships in the school/college between - Staff? - Staff and students? What would you say are the particular challenges facing this school / college?</p>	<p><i>Gaining an understanding of the background context of the school</i></p>
<p><b>Progression outcomes</b></p>	<p>What do students tend to do when they leave this school / college (by all means use last year's Year 11 / Year 13 as an example). What are the factors that contribute to these decisions for the young people concerned - why do they choose these paths? For those students who went on to FE / HE last year, what kind of courses did they go on to do? What types of institutions did they go to? Why do you think students chose those particular courses / institutions? What, if anything, prevented them from achieving better or more ideal choices / more appropriate routes for them? What, if anything, contributes to students not taking up further and higher education options? What are the key barriers? Probe: - Perceptions: What do young people think they will do / want to do post-16 and where does FE / HE fit into that? Do they see FE / HE as relevant / realistic / attractive / desirable options? Why / why not? Are they ambitious enough for themselves?  - Attainment levels: Do they have the ability? Do they understand what they have to do / achieve earlier on to be able to progress?  - Attitudes of peer group?</p>	<p><i>Understanding the progression outcomes of the school in more detail</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attitudes of parents?</li> <li>- Structural / community issues (affordability etc.)?</li> <li>- Anything else?</li> </ul> <p>How can these barriers be overcome? How can young people be better supported to progress into FE / HE or better encouraged to see FE / HE as relevant / realistic / attractive / desirable options?</p>	
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<p><b>Attitudes to progression – you</b></p>	<p>What are your progression aspirations/ expectations for the young people attending this school to progress to FE / HE? Overall, how do you think students should be progressing, what should they be aspiring to do once they leave?</p> <p>Do you think you are ambitious enough about your students' potential progression? Why / why not? Are your colleagues ambitious enough? Why do you say that?</p> <p>NOTE TO MODERATOR: If respondent alludes to any inconsistency in attitudes amongst staff, and particularly between staff and headteacher / principal, probe to find out what explains this, why respondent thinks this is the case</p>	<p><i>Exploring definitions of 'progression' and what this can mean in different contexts</i></p>
<p><b>Attitudes to progression to HE</b></p>	<p>What routes do you think of as "HE"?</p> <p>Probe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- traditional, academic courses only</li> <li>- mix of vocational and academic courses</li> </ul> <p>Do you perceive there to be differences between different institutions e.g. Oxbridge / red brick universities/new universities / FEIs providing HE? What are the main differences? How relevant to you perceive these different options as being for students here?</p> <p>Overall, how do you feel about HE as an option for students at this school? What, if anything, would/do your students gain from going on to HE? Would there be any disadvantages to them from going on to HE?</p> <p>Do the students here have a good / detailed understanding of what's available (different courses and providers), what HE involves (e.g. leaving home perhaps), what they need to achieve to progress into HE, how to fund HE etc.?</p> <p>What impact, if any, do you think Diplomas will have on the rates of FE / HE progression amongst, or the nature of the FE / HE choices made by, students at this school?</p>	<p><i>Understanding the HE progression context at the school and probing individual attitudes to HE</i></p>



	What do you think of the national aim of 50% of young people going on to HE? Does it raise any particular issues for this school / college - if so, what are these?	
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<b>Your role in relation to progression</b>	<p>Specifically, what do you see as your personal role in terms of encouraging progression?</p> <p>Specifically, what do you do to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage / inspire students?</li> <li>• Involve parents in their children's education, especially decisions about further / higher education?</li> </ul> <p>To what extent do you distinguish between different options / FE / HE institutions / courses when talking to students? Why / why not? What makes certain options more suited to some than to others?</p> <p>How do you deal with situations where relevant progression options are very different for different individuals? How do students respond to this?</p> <p>What makes it harder to encourage/stops you from encouraging students to progress to FE / HE? What, if anything, would help to overcome this?</p> <p>To what extent do you feel you know about the different options, including jobs / FE / HE options? How could you be better supported in relation to knowing more about these options?</p> <p>What helps you in your specific role to encourage progression? Is there anything you would like to do more of to encourage progression? What is stopping you from doing this? How could any barriers/issues be overcome?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Probe training, contact with universities, specific information / materials</p> <p>How can you personally be supported / helped? Whose responsibility should it be to deliver this support? Would there be any issues around implementing this kind of support?</p>	<i>Understanding headteacher's role in relation to encouraging progression</i>
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<b>School / college approach to encouraging progression</b>	<p>Overall, what approaches are taken in this school / college to encourage young people to take up different progression options? How do approaches vary according to the particular progression option, if at all?</p> <p>How do teachers go about raising the issue of progression with students and how does this vary by teacher? To what extent do they experience challenges in inspiring young people to take up progression options - if so, what are they and how are they supported?</p>	<p><i>Gathering evidence of what the school does in relation to encouraging progression to HE</i></p> <p><i>Eliciting how teachers feel they could be supported to encourage progression to a greater degree</i></p>
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	<p>What is the headteacher's / principal's role in all of this? What does (s)he do at the moment to encourage / motivate students (and to motivate staff to motivate students) to take up relevant progression opportunities?</p> <p>Do you have any particular approaches in place for encouraging progression - if so, what are they? (e.g. events for parents, ex-students coming into school to discuss their experiences etc.)</p> <p>What is your involvement in progression initiatives in this area? (e.g. Aim Higher, links with Lifelong Learning Networks, links with Student Associate Scheme, Gifted &amp; Talented, links with Excellence Hubs, Learning Mentors, ad hoc links with universities / colleges / employers / others)</p> <p>How helpful / effective do you perceive all / any of these as being and why?</p> <p>Are there key gaps in terms of provision that you would identify in this area? What provision is needed and who would be responsible for this?</p> <p>Are there any areas in which you feel the school / college could be doing better? If so, what are they and what is stopping you from addressing the issues? What would help you address the issues?</p> <p>Can you think of any actions / policies which would be useful to put in place to encourage higher take up of relevant progression opportunities? What would you consider to be best practice for your school?</p> <p>Are there any factors that might prevent these actions / policies being put in place - if so, what are they?</p> <p>Is there anything more that Government / local universities / industry / colleges / local authorities could be doing to help support progression?</p>	
<b>Summary</b>	Overall, what are the key ways in which teachers could be supported to enable students to progress to further and higher learning after school.	<i>Summarising key insight</i>
<b>Thank and close</b>		

**The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)**  
**Workshop discussion guide:**  
**Raising the higher education aspirations of young people**  
**Draft FINAL - 1 April 2008**

17:30 - 18:00	<p><b>Arrival and registration</b></p>	
18:00 - 18:15	<p><b>Introduction by the Chair</b></p> <p>The day ahead, reasons for the research, topline preliminary research findings and overall focus of the workshop session.</p> <p>Confidentiality and “housekeeping” arrangements.</p> <p>Details of break out groups (3 groups in each session, each including a mix of teachers and policy makers).</p>	
18:15 - 18:55	<p><b>BREAK-OUT GROUPS</b></p> <p><b>Discussion - views on progression</b></p> <p>Introductions: each to say a little about their role / organisation / school</p> <p><i>Our research has focused on views of progression across teachers in a range of schools. So first of all, we'd like to discuss your ideas about progression</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the potential of your students?</li> <li>• What are they likely to do post-16?</li> <li>• To what extent does this apply to all or is there higher potential in some?</li> <li>• How confident are you in being able to identify and nurture higher potential where it exists? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why is this?</li> <li>- What can hinder the identification/nurturing of potential in your position?</li> <li>- What helps/supports the identification/nurturing of potential? To what extent does this happen at the moment?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What balance do you feel that you strike between encouraging young people to strive to achieve their best, or on the other hand not wanting to impose undue stress by setting goals that may never be achieved?</li> <li>• To what extent do you think the attitudes of your colleagues are similar? Why/why not?</li> <li>• Overall, in your school, how does progression rank in relation to other issues? Why is this? What relative value does it have, why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prompt in relation to other issues such as exam grades</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Objective:</b></p> <p>Exploring views on progression at an overall level and its relative level of priority</p>

PROMPTS:

- Progression
- Exam pass rates
- Maintaining student numbers
- Dealing with challenging behavior
- Literacy / numeracy / basic skills issues
- Support for those with English as a second language
- Support for those with special / additional needs
- Curriculum changes e.g. introduction of new courses / Diplomas
- Strategic changes in the school e.g. applying for academy status / specialist school status
- Pastoral care for students with personal problems / challenges
- Attendance
- Creating a strong school ethos
- Extra curricular activities - creative or sports-based

THEN: ask teachers to rank these elements

- (If appropriate) What is stopping progression from being prioritised further?
- What would help to raise the prominence of progression as more of an issue?

*Our research has shown that teachers have a range of different attitudes to progression, depending on the situation they find themselves in: some prioritise it to a great extent and have created a number of solutions for doing so, whilst others see it as less important, as they often feel they have more pressing issues to attend to.*

Using case studies / quotes to illustrate the attitudes

*It's particularly difficult at an 11-16 school because we don't really have control over what they do next*

*I'm not a careers guidance officer, I'm a teacher. I don't want to be a careers advisor, I've got too much other stuff to think about and I'd be spreading myself too thin*

*There's not that connection between the school and the community, so it doesn't matter what you put in place, it's still the same. Ofsted have actually recognised that. It's not the school, its people we have coming into us. They're just not motivated*

	<p><i>There was a study last week showing that middle class parents, even if they choose the local comprehensive school...those kids would still do the best, would do just as well actually than they do in any other school. It's not the school, it's the background of the kids that determines.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent do you sympathise with these attitudes and why? To what extent do you see them in your own school / other schools?</li> <li>• Why would teachers hold these opinions - what do you think contributes to teachers holding these opinions? What can prevent teachers from engaging with the full range of different progression options to a greater degree?</li> <li>• What would help to support teachers who are currently more negative about progression options than others?</li> <li>• In summary, what is / are the most important specific action(s) that would help to encourage (all) teachers to engage with the full range of progression options?</li> </ul>	
<p>18:55 - 19:45</p>	<p><b>BREAK-OUT GROUPS</b></p> <p><b>Discussion - approaches to helping raise aspirations</b></p> <p><i>We have found that schools have consistently identified similar core issues that make it harder to raise aspirations and encourage students to progress into a range of options. Some schools have found ways of addressing these issues but that is not the case across the board. Therefore we want to spend some time looking at each of these issues in detail to think about why they present difficulties, how to resolve the issues – within the existing framework – and how any solutions can be optimised.</i></p> <p>Each group to focus on at least two different issues, spending around 25 minutes on each (and rotating these so that all are covered within each session)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low attainment / lack of engagement with the curriculum</li> <li>• Providing information &amp; advice</li> <li>• Available curriculum options</li> <li>• Narrow horizons / limited engagement with different possibilities</li> <li>• Lack of parental engagement</li> <li>• Poor relationships with business / other members of the community</li> </ul>	<p><b>Objective:</b></p> <p>Identifying effective ways of raising aspirations that tackle barriers and issues that schools talked about having experienced in their last round of research</p>

	<p>For each issue, using case study material to flesh out the problems that schools may be facing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent do you recognize this as an issue?</li> <li>• Why is this/can this be a problem for schools, what contributes to it being a problem?</li> <li>• How relevant is this for you / in your school? If so, how is it addressed in your school? Are there any other ways have you been aware of it being addressed - if so, how?</li> <li>• What do you think could work? To what extent is this possible within the current framework? How realistic a solution is this? Why / why not? (calling on experts present as to whether this could be put into practice)</li> <li>• If no extra time / money / resources were made available, how could it be addressed?</li> </ul> <p>Expose suggestions made by schools in the first stage of research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial responses in terms of overall relevance</li> <li>• Compare / contrast with solutions generated - how similar/different are these - why is this?</li> <li>• Overall, which of the solutions talked about so far have been most relevant for addressing the issue? How could this/these be optimised?</li> <li>• Who would be responsible for putting this/these into practice? (Including national / local government, schools, school leaders, individual teachers and students/parents themselves)</li> <li>• Are there any implementation issues around this/these solution(s)? If so, what are they? What would minimize the impact of this?</li> <li>• What would minimize the time / resource implications?</li> </ul> <p>In summary, given all that we have discussed, what are the most important areas of support that schools could be given? What are the most important things that schools could be doing to take control of the issues themselves?</p>	
19:45 - 20:00	<p><b>PLENARY SESSION</b></p> <p><b>Feedback from groups on previous sessions</b></p>	
20:00 - 20:15	<p><b>Break for refreshments</b></p>	

<p>20:15 - 20:50</p>	<p><b>BREAK-OUT GROUPS</b></p> <p><b>Discussion - focusing on the role of senior leaders</b></p> <p><i>Clearly, the role of the senior leadership team is very important when it comes to developing approaches to helping to raise aspirations, so we are interested in your views on what this is and how senior leaders can optimise their behaviour and structures in this regard</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall, what level of priority does progression take in relation to other issues within schools? How do senior leaders tend to prioritise this as an issue? (refer back to initial prioritisation exercise and compare and contrast results) What tends to contribute to this level of prioritisation?</li> <li>• What influence do senior leaders have in relation to progression?</li> <li>• Ideally, what should they be doing in relation to progression? What should they delegate to others?</li> <li>• More specifically, how could / should senior leaders be <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Motivating and engaging staff?</li> <li>- Directing and developing staff?</li> <li>- Managing the teaching and learning programme?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What structures help to allow senior leaders to do this? (prompt in relation to pastoral systems, tutorial systems, different systems of responsibility, different relationships with Connexions, different ways of administering FE / HE application processes)</li> <li>• What can go wrong? How can this be avoided?</li> <li>• Overall, what can senior leaders be doing to encourage a culture of higher aspirations in schools? What is it most important and why?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Objective:</b></p> <p>Exploring views on the role of the senior leadership team</p>
<p>20:50 - 21:00</p>	<p><b>PLENARY SESSION</b></p> <p><b>Feedback from groups on last session</b></p> <p>Summing up and close</p>	

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