



Vocational education:  
The Wolf review

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## About NFER

NFER is the UK's largest independent provider of research, assessment and information services for education, training and children's services. We make a difference to learners of all ages, especially to the lives of children and young people, by ensuring our work improves the practice and understanding of those who work with and for learners.

NFER's purpose is to provide independent evidence which improves education and training. As a charity we are always thinking about ways in which we can achieve this purpose. In particular, we are focusing attention on the use of evidence for improvement, taking a proactive approach to setting the research agenda for education and children's services in order to make a real impact on policy and practice.

## About this document: Vocational education (the Wolf Review)

In 2010 Professor Alison Wolf was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education to hold a consultation to inform her *Review of Vocational Education* which was published in 2011. The NFER submitted a response to this consultation. This is set out in this paper. We welcomed the opportunity to make a submission to this major review of vocational education for 14-19 year old young people by:

- drawing on our detailed understanding of work-related and work-based learning to comment on the review's enquiries into target audiences for the vocational offer, the principles underpinning content, structure and teaching methods, and progression from vocational education to positive destinations
- sharing relevant learning points from our extensive evidence based on evaluations of high-profile, national programmes such as the Increased Flexibility Programme, Diplomas and Young Apprenticeships.

## Related documents

A broader picture of the issues affecting young people at key stage 4 can be seen from responses that NFER has submitted to other consultations:

- Reforming key stage 4 qualifications
- Careers guidance
- Work related learning

These are available on the NFER website.

In addition, an NFER paper, *Policy Developments and the Risk to NEET Young People*, draws attention to the impact of policy proposal on some groups of vulnerable young people: this is also available on the NFER website.

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The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Wolf Review of 14-19 Vocational Education and contribute to policy thinking for this priority area of the Coalition Government. For this submission we draw on an extensive track record of research relating to vocational education undertaken by the NFER over 25 years ranging from the national evaluations of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative in the 1980s to the more recent implementation and impact of Diplomas and the Young Apprenticeship Programme.

The key points from our submission relating to the most important problems and changes, as outlined in the Call for Evidence, and our recommendations, are summarised below.

## Key problems

One key problem concerns the need for co-located delivery of vocational education as a result of the lack of specialist facilities and staff expertise in individual institutions. This can result in concerns over assuring quality of provision for students who travel to learn in a different institution. This is of particular concern to the institution where the student is on roll. This is in addition to the logistical issues of transport, aligned timetabling and effective sharing of information between institutions.

The delivery of vocational education works best when students learn in small groups. This, together with the expense of specialist faculties and resources, has significant cost implications for supporting this type of provision. Another key resource implication is the cost of engaging and involving employers to provide 'real world' learning. The dilemma facing policy makers and practitioners is to identify and create mechanisms and methods for providing these key elements of vocational provision more cost-effectively.

## Key changes

All types of education would benefit from the use of effective teaching and learning methods used in vocational education. This would help to engage more young people in learning and therefore minimise the risk of young people disengaging from learning and becoming NEET. It would also help to reduce the perceived distinction between 'academic' and 'vocational' education as all subject matter could include some applied learning as appropriate.

A cultural change is still needed where all types of learning, knowledge and skill are respected and this is reflected in the value assigned to qualifications. This does not necessarily result from a separation of vocational learning from academic learning but rather a more sophisticated understanding of the skills, knowledge and attributes required to contribute to the UK economy today and in the future which is an integral part of the general education system.

## Key recommendations

The vocational education design features which engage and motivate young people are a learning environment with an adult learning ethos which is different to the more formal style associated with school and which offers an applied, hands-on and independent approach to learning with links to the world of work. An important aspect of developing an education system which values practical education will involve replicating these principles of engagement and features in the design of future vocational education courses and programmes.

IAG is critical in helping young people with their parents/carers make decisions about taking a learning pathway which includes vocational education. They require accurate up-to-date information and impartial advice and guidance relating to not only the content and learning style of the course they are considering but also the practical and logistical implications such as timetabling, travel, costs and impact on their wider education. Well-informed choices will support students finishing their courses and achieving qualifications and will ultimately mean that the resources invested in vocational education are spent to good effect.

With the variety of pathways that are now available at 14, those responsible for recruiting young people to vocational education programmes must consider which students they will promote the programme to and how they will retain them once they have started the course. This will require clear criteria being shared in a collaborative approach between schools and colleges/training providers, an assessment of students' motivation and interest in the subject area, and rigorous entry procedures including application forms and interviews in order to ensure that the most suitable young people will embark on the right course.

At the outset, we note that the terms of reference for the Wolf Review do not define what 14-19 vocational education is though it does note the Education Secretary of State's concern that 'in the past our education system has failed to value practical education'. Yet, the design of any system of 14-19 vocational education will be influenced and shaped partly by understanding of and commitment to the purpose of vocational education. This presents a challenge to policy makers and practitioners as there is no universally-agreed definition. Rather, the term is contested and depending on the definer's values, experience and aims can embrace work-related learning and/or work-based learning including the following: job-specific education which helps to prepare for entry to a particular occupation; education which provides an awareness of what one or more jobs or employment areas involve; education which provides experience of and exposure to the world of work; and education which uses applied and practical learning as a significant contribution to young people's academic and skills development (in practice, this is what is usually meant by pre-16 'vocational education'). The review will be strengthened by taking into consideration and reflecting the requirements of these different dimensions of 14-19 vocational education.

In light of recently announced government policy priorities such as the development of university technical colleges, the expansion of apprenticeships and the focus on Foundation Learning, it is important and timely that a systemic review is undertaken of vocational education. We now address three of the specific questions included in the Call for Evidence document. The evidence we present is based primarily on the findings and implications of empirical studies conducted by the NFER (see references for key research reports).

## What is the appropriate target audience for a vocational offer and in particular from what age is it appropriate for young people to be engaging in vocational education?

It can be argued that all young people need to participate in some form of vocational education, as part of a broad and balanced education and learning experience, to understand what it encompasses and judge whether it is right for them. This exposure will help them to make an informed decision about whether this type of education motivates and enables them to learn and achieve. If we are considering the provision of a more targeted vocational offer, then the question to be asked is which type of young people would benefit most from taking up this offer.

To answer the question we draw on evidence from an evaluation the NFER conducted of the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) for 14-16 year olds which was introduced in 2002 to 'create enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities for 14 to 16 year olds of all abilities who can benefit most'. The evaluation found that students who had benefited from participation in IFP in terms of their key stage 4 attainment were young people who had lower attainment (level 5 or below) at key stage 3, and who studied GCSEs in vocational subjects, NVQs and other vocational qualifications. In addition, male students who undertook NVQs through IFP gained more points than similar students taking these qualifications who were female suggesting that the provision had been particularly beneficial for males.

The evaluation of the IFP also found that the majority of students who participated in the first cohort achieved the qualifications they had undertaken. Nearly all (91 per cent) of those who had taken GCSEs in vocational subjects had attained passes at grades A\* to G and 36 per cent achieved grades A\* to C. The comparable figures for cohort 2 were 93 per cent and 39 per cent. Among the students who had taken GNVQs, 80 per cent had achieved the qualification. Around two-thirds of those in the sample who had taken NVQs and other vocational qualifications achieved their qualification. The qualifications achieved by these students contributed to the total points that they achieved at the end of key stage 4. Students who participated in IFP attained slightly higher total points overall at key stage 4 than students who were similar in terms of their prior attainment and other background characteristics who had not participated in the programme. In other words, they achieved better in terms of points outcomes at key stage 4 than they might have done had they not participated in IFP provision. We conclude that the IFP worked well for students who

did not get on with just classroom-based study and wanted practical experience in an area of interest.

The evidence from a number of evaluations of the characteristics of young people who participate in vocational learning opportunities provides an indication of the nature of young people who may be best targeted with such opportunities. For example, the evaluation of the Diplomas found that young people who took the Diploma tended to be male (although this may be related to the nature of the subject areas available), have lower prior attainment and planned to progress to a work-based route post-16. Their reasons for choosing a Diploma included an interest in the subject area, a perception that it would help them to get a job or get into university in the future and an interest in experiencing a different style of teaching.

Similarly, young people who participated in the Young Apprenticeship programme tended to be male, of 'middle ability' (for example a greater proportion had achieved level 5 on average at key stage 3 and a smaller proportion achieved level 4 or level 6 compared with their peers) and known to be eligible for free school meals. Those who participated in the IFP tended to be male, known to be eligible for free school meals and had lower attainment at key stage 3 than their peers. In addition, the main selection criteria used by staff to identify young people to participate in the IFP were underachievement in the academic curriculum, a strength or interest in vocational study, an interest in a specific vocational area and poor motivation at school.

As regards the age for engagement in vocational education, we think that starting this involvement at 14 years of age is appropriate. The main reason for this is that students at this age generally have the maturity and sufficient experience of school to make decisions (at key stage 3) about the subjects that interest and motivate them and that they wish to pursue at Key Stage 4 and beyond. It is worth noting that students who are interested in taking vocational qualifications often want to keep their options open to give themselves maximum flexibility in making future choices about courses and careers. In our view, there isn't a convincing argument for targeting most vocational learning resources on younger age groups. Moreover, experience across a range of research studies we have conducted has indicated that some young people become disaffected by the curriculum on offer at 14 and are more motivated and satisfied by learning in a more adult environment and learning in a different way that involves more application of knowledge.

What principles should underpin content structure and teaching methods? Specifically how can vocational education best respond to the current and expected future labour market and how can it provide a positive incentive to participation by young people in particular those who are at risk of disengaging from learning?

## Principles

One of the main challenges facing all types of education is how best to engage young people in terms of providing learning opportunities that interest, stimulate and motivate them to participate, finish and achieve. In our experience, the design of vocational education, including content, structure and teaching methods works best if it based on the following principles. First, the design must not be too complicated so that students, their parents/carers and teachers can readily understand what the course comprises, what it involves in terms of the balance of applied and theoretical work, what range of teaching, learning and assessment methods and experiences will be used, and what is required to achieve the qualification. Second, students tend to learn better when they can see the relevance of course content to their current and future needs and when it is suitable for their level. Third, course structure works best when it provides learning activities in digestible packages or units which are attractive enough to maintain students' interest and attention. The structure also needs to provide students with a suitable and sequenced blend of theory and practice which enables them to understand the importance of and apply theoretical knowledge. Finally, evidence informs us that the most appropriate mode of learning is one which is based on an adult learning environment ethos which, compared to some schools, encourages less formal working relationships between students and staff and where students feel respected and noticed as they work in small groups. We illustrate the principles outlined above using findings from some of the research we have undertaken in recent years.

## Recruitment

An NFER review of widening 14-19 choices, which summarises evidence from across a range of NFER research projects, highlighted the importance of careful recruitment to ensure that young people embark on appropriate courses at 14 and that they are supported in sustaining this involvement – these are key features of the new landscape of choice. Collaboration between institutions in terms of the provision of formal and less formal information, advice and guidance and genuine interest from the young person in the course are key to appropriate selection and successful retention. This involves consideration of students' motivation, attendance and interest in the subject area before they embark on the course. The review concluded that rigorous entry procedures are necessary and that young people need to be fully informed about the programme they are choosing in relation to:

- the content of the programme (for instance, the amount of coursework and written work involved, and the extent of practical work)
- the structure of the programme (for instance, if the young person will be required to miss other lessons in order to take part in the programme)
- practical issues such as travel, if the programme is provided at a site away from their home-school environment
- the assessment methods that are used.

Opportunities to visit the location of study and/or to meet with staff and current students help to raise awareness and understanding of exactly what the course entails.

The review spotlighted the learning preferences of young people who pursue applied qualifications at key stage 4. It reported that they are more likely to have a preference for practical learning and to want to learn outside the classroom than their peers. It also noted that young people's applied choices at 14 do not appear to constrain their choices at 16 to the same applied subject area. While some continue within the same subject area, many others do not.

### Teaching and learning styles and preferences

Our evaluation of Diploma delivery revealed that teachers thought the Diploma involved a different teaching and learning experience to other qualifications. They valued the opportunity for using a holistic model of teaching and encouragement of independent learning, reported greater use of interactive teaching techniques and less dependence on textbooks and worksheets, and welcomed the link between theory and work-related learning. Overall, the majority of Diploma students were satisfied with their Diploma course and were enjoying it, as this new qualification was considered to be interesting and different from other learning experiences; students particularly welcomed the applied or 'hands-on approach' to learning and appreciated the links with the world of work, what they described as the 'real world' application of knowledge. There was evidence of an association between positive attitudes towards the Diploma and a preference for teamwork and practical working.

A study undertaken by the NFER exploring the characteristics and experiences of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or in jobs without training (JWT) found that many interviewees had negative experiences of school and faced issues such as bullying, exclusion, behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties and stress. Interviewees who were judged to be 'at risk of becoming NEET' and several of those 'sustained in a JWT' were very likely to report negative experiences of schooling. These experiences had put them off participating in further learning. Consequently, there was a need for strategies to address aversion to education and training by making it more appealing and as unlike school and classroom-based activity as possible. This could include structured informal learning opportunities which could help young people to appreciate the value of learning in a non-threatening way.



## Flexible provision

NFER's study of young people who are NEET and in JWT identified a need for more flexible and appropriate post-16 provision suitable for all young people aged 16 and 17 in terms of content, delivery and timing and more flexible provision in terms of start dates in order to accommodate young people who want to change direction. More work-based provision below, or at, Level 2 to reflect their preferred learning styles and lower levels of achievement was also required. Staff who work in colleges and training providers may need to adapt their teaching styles in order to cater to the needs of younger students (aged 14-16) who may be studying on their programmes. These findings were also reflected in the evaluation of Diplomas and research we conducted on the impact of 14-16 year olds on FE colleges.

The study also noted that there was a need for schools to provide more opportunities for applied teaching and learning, engender a more respectful relationship between teachers and learners and implement more effective anti-bullying strategies to minimise the impact of disruptive pupils on their peers' learning opportunities. There was a need for more information about the opportunity to 'bank' any elements of a qualification that they achieve to ensure that any achievements by those who change options can be built up over time. This was also the case with Diplomas.

## Targeted support

Research shows that targeted support is required for many students taking vocational courses. For example, our review of young people's choices revealed that young people studying for non-traditional courses tend to drop out more frequently at particular points, such as the beginning and end of terms, so schools may wish to think about designing programmes of study with this in mind, for instance, by targeting support for young people at these specific times of year. Students who drop out from courses tend to have particular characteristics (such as being eligible for free school meals or being on the Special Educational Needs register) which may suggest that those involved in the delivery of programmes could target additional support at students with these characteristics to minimise the risk of them dropping out. In addition, our research has found that retention may be an issue for programmes which involve study outside the regular school setting as young people may miss lessons in core subjects in order to participate in these programmes. It may be helpful for schools to provide catch-up lessons and for teachers to provide work for individual students who have missed core lessons to complete, in order that they do not fall behind with their other work or drop out of the programme they have chosen for this reason.

Here it should be noted that widening the vocational offer will involve collaboration between institutions as specialist teachers and specialist facilities will not be available in each institution. An important organisational aspect of collaboration involves devising and operating aligned timetables between institutions to enable students to access learning opportunities.

NFER's evaluation of the first year of delivery of Diplomas found that Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is important for a positive Diploma learning experience. The more satisfied Year 10 Diploma students were with IAG prior to starting their course, the more satisfied they were overall with their Diploma. They also had more positive attitudes towards the Diploma and were more likely to think that their course would have a positive impact on their future. The provision of effective Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in relation to these aspects, delivered before young people make decisions about courses, qualifications and locations of study can help to ensure that young people make an effective and informed decision and may prevent drop out. The importance of IAG in progression is discussed in the next section.

## How can we improve progression from vocational education to positive destinations (work Apprenticeships FE HE)?

### Information, Advice and Guidance and Pre-16 Choices

The research evidence is clear that IAG is critical to help young people progress successfully from vocational education to appropriate further education, training or employment. This means that the providers of the IAG need the knowledge and skills to offer a well-informed and up-to-date service. Our review of young people's choices noted that it is important that all young people are able to access diverse, effective and impartial IAG in relation to the decisions they are making and that the people to whom they turn are supported in order that they are able to provide effective careers education and guidance.

The NFER review of widening 14-19 choices found that when making their decisions about vocational courses and locations of study, young people would like:

- advice about available options from those 'in the know' (that is, working in a particular profession or who have already studied on a particular course)
- the opportunity to visit sites such as colleges where the courses they are considering will be delivered
- advice from teachers in their school who know them well, provided that their knowledge is up to date.

The review noted that in a wider curriculum, young people can be further supported to make informed decisions about their vocational learning choices by ensuring that college and training provider staff are actively involved. In particular, they can give support by providing information about the content, mode of learning and location of the course that learners are considering. Additionally, the review emphasised that support needs to come from informed adults – not only guidance professionals but also those with particular insights into the content and nature of the qualification that they will be studying, such as college and training provider staff. There was also

evidence that the influence of parents and carers on young people's choices is significant. Consequently, parents and carers need to have access to up-to-date information that is easy to digest so that they can help their children in making these choices. This is particularly true within this new and wider landscape of choice including vocational choices at 14. We have found that in some cases, parents' and carers' knowledge in relation to newer and non-traditional courses (such as the Diploma) is lacking and this may lead them to put pressure on their offspring to study more familiar courses such as GCSEs and A levels which may not always be appropriate or what the young person wants.

Evidence suggests that attendance at college pre-16 can help to prepare young people better for the transition at 16 and assist in improving awareness and informing their choices at the end of compulsory schooling. For some young people, undertaking an applied course pre-16 helps to confirm a post-16 decision, for others it helps to refine their decision or to reject an initial plan. As an example, the majority of young people participating in the first cohort of the Young Apprenticeship Programme felt that their participation had influenced their choice of post-16 destination, in particular by increasing their awareness of opportunities that were available to them after Year 11 and helping them to decide which route to take post-16.

### Information, Advice and Guidance and Post-16 Choices

NFER's study of barriers to participation in education and training noted that in addition to raising awareness, there is a need to enhance young people's ability to interrogate and assess the information that have in order to make an informed choice about vocational learning opportunities. Young people need someone to help mediate the information that they have, while providing guidance, to ensure that they have both awareness and a real understanding of the options available to them. This could be enhanced through access to taster sessions and direct contact with individuals from a variety of learning environments. Young people who are NEET would benefit from improved IAG to raise their awareness and broaden their horizons and to be offered provision, including work-based learning options at Entry Level and Level 1, which better meets their needs.

This study found that nearly two-thirds of young people experience some constraints on their post-16 choices and these are often related to the availability of appropriate courses and Apprenticeships and lack of awareness of the full range of options available. This is more likely to be the case among those who are NEET or in JWT. The study showed that young people who were more confident and felt prepared for their future had decreased odds of experiencing financial constraints. This suggests that ensuring young people are confident and well-prepared for post-16 progression through high-quality IAG including information on the financial support available to them could help to minimise the likelihood that they will experience financial constraints to participation.

Research studies have revealed that the IAG received at 16 was variable. The research suggested that in order to increase participation, young people need better information, advice and guidance before leaving learning or while in jobs without training to increase their awareness of the learning options available to them and enable them to make more informed choices. Several interviewees in the study of non-participation in education and training thought that they had received incomplete or biased advice and guidance, and in particular, awareness, advice and understanding of apprenticeships was lacking. Those young people sustained in a JWT were most likely to cite financial reasons for not engaging in learning. Some of them had considered training options, particularly apprenticeships, but were put off by lack of placement opportunities or lower financial rewards.

Around half of the students surveyed in the first cohort of IFP indicated that they would have liked more information and guidance about their post-16 choices. Young people who had wished or chose to pursue a work-based route post-16 had a particular need for guidance. The majority of young people, particularly those who had continued into further education or training, were positive about what they were doing post-16. However, nearly half of young people would have liked more help and guidance about what to do after Year 11, especially in relation to exploring which careers might suit their skills, abilities and interests. Young people who were in further education or training, particularly those in an Apprenticeship post-16, were more positive about their post-16 destination than those who were in alternative destinations. Young people who were not satisfied with their post-16 destinations were more likely to be in a job without training.

### Employer involvement, practical learning and financial provision

Other factors in supporting successful progression are employer involvement, more practical learning and financial provision. The study of non-participation at 16 or 17 found that young people and professionals thought that raising participation depended on various factors including employers being encouraged to provide sufficient placement opportunities to allow more young people to engage in work-based learning; schools, colleges and providers providing more practical and non-classroom based learning provision; and the offer of better financial support for those staying on in education or training, including universal provision regardless of parental income and raising levels of financial support. The issue of financial provision has been thrown into sharper relief by the abolition of the Educational Maintenance Allowance announced (20/10/10) as part of the government's Comprehensive Spending Review.

### Barriers to participation in education and training

The NFER barriers study found that the majority of young people surveyed completing Year 11 do not experience any barriers that stop them from participating in their choice of learning post-16. The main barriers and constraints experienced by young people relate to finance, transport, availability of provision and their knowledge and awareness of the post-16 options available to them. Lack of finance was the

most commonly identified constraint on young people's choices when deciding what to do after completing Year 11. However, while it was not a barrier or a constraint for the majority in considering their choices at 16, it was for a minority of vulnerable groups. Young people would benefit from enhanced awareness of existing funding, including other forms of financial supports such as hardship funds, together with guidance on how to access these, to minimise the impact of financial constraints on young people's participation. The second most common constraint were the linked issues of lack of availability of appropriate courses and lack of knowledge of all the options potentially available to them. The third most commonly reported constraint, the cost of transport, also related to financial concerns, although this constraint rarely stopped young people from making the choice they wanted. Five per cent experienced multiple barriers. Young people with lower levels of achievement (less than five GCSEs at grades A\*-C) and those with LDD were more likely to experience a barrier at all and to have multiple barriers than young people overall.

This study also found that transport was a barrier for some young people, in particular those who live in rural areas have significantly increased odds of experiencing transport as a barrier or constraint. This was also a finding from the Diplomas evaluation. The survey revealed that only 17 per cent of those aged 16-17 with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) and 38 per cent of those aged 18-25 are aware of Independent Travel Training schemes in their areas which aim to overcome such issues for those with LDD. It appears that strategies to ensure the availability of a transport infrastructure that enables young people to participate in learning should examine closely the availability of transport in rural areas in particular as there appears to be a greater level of need in such areas. The study suggested that strategies should be targeted at young people who feel less at ease using public transport, in particular young people with LDD. This should include encouraging local authorities to provide and raise the awareness among young people and their parents or carers of the availability of Independent Travel Training schemes in their areas. Financial support to cover the cost of transport needs to be targeted at those young people most in need, including those in rural areas and young people who choose a job without training due to financial reasons.

## Progression

The main message from the research is that the majority of young people are keen to and decide to stay in education or training after compulsory schooling. For example, the majority (90 per cent) of the sample of young people in the first cohort of IFP surveyed by the NFER were reported by their schools to have continued into further education or training after finishing Year 11. Analysis of the cohort as a whole indicated a post-16 participation rate of 80 per cent. Most of those in the sample had embarked on a course-based route (in a school sixth form or at an FE College or training provider), while a notable minority were following a work-based route, in an Apprenticeship, or job with training. In addition, the majority (87 per cent) of young people who participated in the second cohort of IFP progressed into further education or training.

The study of barriers to participation found that the majority of young people are motivated by future progression and choose to stay in education and training. There is a minority of young people who do not. These young people are less motivated by qualifications and more by immediate financial gain. This appears to be the case particularly among young people who are NEET or in JWT. Young people with a good knowledge of Apprenticeships were also significantly more likely not to participate than young people with lower awareness. This confirms the findings from other research that some young people who cannot access an Apprenticeship choose a JWT or become NEET. Within the JWT group, almost half are very content with their work and likely to remain in a JWT in the long term. A third of young people in this group were found to be at risk of becoming NEET in the future.

Our evaluation of Diplomas found a strongly positive expectation among students taking a Diploma that it would support their progression into employment or higher education, or would keep open their options for both, if they had not decided on their future route. Progression to higher education was confirmed by figures recently released by UCAS which showed that 89 per cent of level 3 Diploma students who had applied to higher education had received at least one offer, which was higher than the national average of 83.8 per cent. However, there is still a perception, particularly amongst staff teaching post-16 students, that taking a level Diploma will restrict progression to higher education.

There is some evidence that participation in vocational learning pre-16 can contribute to progression to an Apprenticeship post-16. The evaluation of the Young Apprenticeship Programme found that, in 2006, 21 per cent of young people who participated progressed onto an Apprenticeship. The proportions progressing were similar in 2007 and 2008 (22 per cent and 19 per cent respectively). Although this declined in 2009 to 14 per cent, which is likely to be related to more challenging economic conditions, the percentage remained higher than the average in 2009 nationally of six per cent of 16 year olds participating in Apprenticeships.

What are the relative factors that encourage or discourage young people from participating in learning? The barriers study reported that most young people's decisions about what to do after Year 11 are influenced by wanting to do something that will help them achieve the qualifications they need either to get into university or into a job or career of their choice. The availability of transport, although not as significant as future aspirations, is also important. Young people are more likely not to participate in learning if they want to earn money straight away or if they face specific barriers that stop them from doing what they want to do. Young people are significantly more likely to participate in learning if they have high post-16 aspirations including wanting to achieve qualifications and go on to higher education. They are also likely to participate if they find the decision of what to do after Year 11 easy to make and progress post-16 feeling well prepared for the future.

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**National Foundation for  
Educational Research**  
The Mere, Upton Park,  
Slough, Berks SL1 2DQ

T: 01753 574123  
F: 01753 691632  
E: [enquiries@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@nfer.ac.uk)

[www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk)