leaving at 16

a study of factors affecting young people's
decision to leave full-time education

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

In November 1996, the NFER embarked on a one-year study of the factors that affect young people's decisions about post-16 education. The research was carried out as part of the NFER's 1996/7 Membership Programme of research, which is funded by the Council of Local Education Authorities (CLEA). The project focused on two key aspects: the decision to stay on or leave full-time education at the age of 16; and, if staying on, the choice of course and institution. Concerning the second of these, the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) worked collaboratively with the NFER and contributed towards the funding of this part of the research. Two reports have arisen from the research; these have been written to provide complementary information. Those with an interest in young people's decisions about post-16 education and the factors that affect young people's choices will find much of value in both reports.

This report is about young people who intended to leave full-time education at the age of 16. It begins by focusing on who these people were in terms of gender, social class and expected educational achievement. The report then moves on to examine the reasons for their decision to leave full-time education and the factors that may have influenced them, including their attitudes towards school and their views on careers education and guidance. The report's main emphasis is on exploring the factors that can be influenced by changes in policy and practice. As such it will be of particular interest to all those who are keen to further young people's post-16 educational opportunities, in particular those working in schools, LEAs, and careers services as well as parents.

The second report is about young people who had decided to stay on in full-time education after the age of 16. It is based on findings from students already in different types of post-16 education: school sixth forms; sixth-form colleges; and FE colleges. It focuses on their reasons for deciding to stay on in full-time education, the factors that affected their choice of course and institution, the careers education and guidance that they received and their early impressions of whether the course was matching their expectations. It provides hard evidence of the factors that influence students' choices about post-16 provision and will therefore be of particular interest to everyone involved with young people around this crucial transition point in their lives. *Staying On: A Study of Young People's Decisions About School Sixth Forms, Sixth-Form Colleges and Colleges of Further Education* (Keys *et al.*, 1998) is available from the NFER Communications Unit, price £8.

A third publication in this series is entitled *Staying or Leaving? A Literature Review of Factors Affecting the Take-up of Post-16 Options*. It focuses on qualitative and quantitative research carried out in this country about decisions concerning post-16 destination and covers the period between 1988 and 1997. It is available from the NFER Communications Unit, price £5.

1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Studies of the factors affecting the choices young people make at the end of their compulsory schooling have largely focused on one of three main aspects. Firstly, a considerable body of research has examined the home background of young people, exploring the impact of their social class, gender and ethnicity on their post-16 destinations. Secondly, in the last decade, studies have focused on the contribution of individual schools to the qualifications obtained by young people at 16, and their subsequent destinations. These have indicated that, although the family background and ability of students are major determinants of achievement levels and post-16 choice, schools in similar circumstances can have very different impacts on their students. Thirdly, some studies have examined the effect of wider influences such as the local and national economic climate and specific educational reforms on the choices young people make.

♦ Academic attainment

There has been widespread agreement amongst researchers that the level of academic qualifications a young person achieves at the end of compulsory education is closely linked with the subsequent destination. For example, Gray *et al.* (1993) argued that:

> *the formal qualifications young people obtain in the examinations they sit at the end of their period of compulsory schooling are overwhelmingly the most powerful predictors of further educational participation. In general, we have found the relationships to be linear ones. The better their qualifications the more likely a person is to stay on* (p.4).

In addition to predicting the likelihood of leaving full-time education or staying, it is clear that attainment is strongly correlated with destinations within each of these two routes. Payne (1995) concluded that:

> *GCSE results are the biggest single influence on staying on rates... In the labour market, they affect the chances of getting an apprenticeship, a full-time job or a non-apprenticeship place on YT* [Youth Training], *and there is a clear hierarchy between these three routes in terms of the average GCSE results of young people on each* (p. v).

♦ Social class

Numerous studies have demonstrated that attainment at the age of 16 is positively correlated with social class. Drew's (1995) analysis of the Youth Cohort Study data revealed that a student's socio-economic group was more important than gender or ethnicity in predicting attainment at 16, while Lynn (1996) found similar results amongst young people completing their compulsory education in Scotland. Given the strong relationships found between attainment and post-16 destination, discussed above, it is likely that social class will also be strongly associated with post-16 choice.

Furthermore, when researchers have controlled for academic attainment, social class has been shown to have had an influence on post-16 destination. Cheng's (1995) analysis of data from the Youth Cohort Study, for young people who completed their compulsory schooling in 1989–90, revealed that amongst pupils with similar GCSE results, those with parents who had high-status jobs and good qualifications were more likely to stay on in full-time education than their peers.

Similarly, there is some evidence that the *aspirations* of young people are influenced by social class. Penn and Scattergood (1992) found that the young people in their study from middle-class families were much more likely to seek professional jobs and higher education than their peers from working-class backgrounds, regardless of which schools they attended, and pupils with fathers in manual jobs had a greater likelihood of aiming for similar jobs themselves. However, the authors did not link the relative levels of achievement of the pupils in their sample with their expectations. It is possible, therefore, that the differences

could be explained, or certainly strongly influenced, by realistic expectations of different levels of attainment at the end of compulsory schooling.

◆ Gender

Differences in attainment

Numerous studies have documented the differential performance of boys and girls during primary and secondary school (for example: Stobart *et al.*, 1992; Elwood, 1995; Warrington and Younger, 1996; Murphy and Elwood, 1997) and, given the correlation between academic attainment and post-16 destination, it is unsurprising that there are strong gender differences in the proportions of young people who choose to remain in full-time education and who leave. For example, data from the Youth Cohort Study indicated that in 1996, 75 per cent of 16-year-old women were pursuing full-time education, but only 68 per cent of 16-year-old men were doing the same (GB. DFEE, 1997). Many researchers and policy makers have sought to explain these differences, suggesting, for example, that boys and girls experience different processes of socialisation in schools (Mac an Ghaill, 1994) and that teacher expectations of boys and girls may be different (Elwood, 1995).

Differences in staying-on rates, independent of attainment

However, Cheng's (1995) analysis of the Youth Cohort Study revealed that, even when attainment in GCSE had been taken into consideration, girls had higher staying-on rates than boys. Similar patterns of gender participation in post-16 education and training were found in Northern Ireland (McWhirter *et al.*, 1988) and in Scotland (Raffe *et al.*, 1994). Amongst those who chose to leave school at 16, McWhirter *et al.* revealed that men were more likely than women to gain full-time jobs on completing their compulsory education, but were also more likely to be unemployed.

A number of studies have suggested that these differences may be determined at an early age: Keys *et al.* (1995) asked pupils in the final year of primary school and first year of secondary school whether or not they thought they would remain at school or college after the age of 16. Girls, in both phases of schooling, were more likely than boys to intend to remain in education and were less likely to intend to leave school as soon as possible.

♦ Ethnicity

Entry to the labour market

Studies have indicated that while young people from ethnic minorities were more likely than their white peers to remain in full-time education after the age of 16 (Drew, 1995; GB. DFEE, 1997), white youths were more likely than young people from other ethnic groups to move directly into employment. Drew *et al.* (1992) revealed that 19 per cent of white school leavers gained a full-time job at the end of their compulsory schooling, compared with five per cent of their Asian peers and eight per cent of African Caribbeans.

Participation in the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) also differed considerably between ethnic groups. Asian young people were generally under-represented and, when other factors were taken into account including attainment at 16, African Caribbeans were the most likely to take up YTS places (Drew, 1995). Similar ethnic differences were revealed by Saunders *et al.* (1997) in their study of young people on Modern Apprenticeships, 92 per cent of whom were white.

Ethnicity has also been shown to affect the likelihood of a young person being unemployed at the end of compulsory schooling (Roberts *et al.* 1992; The Runnymede Trust, 1996; Whitmarsh and Harris/ Office for National Statistics, 1996). Drew (1995) stated that:

> *whatever the level of educational attainment, there were barriers to progress for ethnic minority young people; African Caribbeans and Asians were more likely to become unemployed and less likely to find full-time jobs* (p. 187).

Possible explanations for these differences

In seeking to explain these differences in post-16 destinations, researchers have pointed to cultural differences between ethnic groups and differences in their perceptions of the value of education (Basit, 1996; Lightbody *et al.*, 1997). Others have concentrated on the way the education system, generally, impacts upon different ethnic groups (Gillborn, 1997), on the influence of teachers' expectations (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Sewell, 1997; Wrench *et al.*, 1996) and on discrimination in advice provided by the careers service (Cross *et al.*, 1990; Wrench, 1990).

◆ Influence of the school

Although the family background and ability of students continue to be recognised as major determinants of achievement levels, and thus post-16 destinations, research has demonstrated that schools in similar social circumstances can achieve very different levels of educational progress (for example: Cheng, 1995; Creemers, 1994; Fergusson and Unwin, 1996; Mortimore *et al.*, 1988; Nuttall *et al.*, 1989; Smith and Tomlinson, 1989). However, a relatively small number of studies have focused specifically on the choices made by young people at 16. One such study, conducted by Gray *et al.* (1993), which examined post-16 participation in full-time education, did reveal substantial differences between schools. Amongst pupils with similar qualification levels, some schools were found to 'boost' participation and others to 'depress' it, amounting to a variance of ten per cent.

Similarly, Paterson and Raffe's (1995) study of those who stayed on in full-time education in Scotland found that the propensity to stay on, of both high and low achievers, depended on which school they had attended. In other words, the influence of the school seemed to have been a major factor. Interestingly, this propensity was found to a greater extent among middle-class males than females or working-class males.

Studies have not been able to firmly identify the reasons for these differences between schools. However, researchers have suggested that in some schools, a distinct culture of staying on operates, affecting the decisions young people make at the end of their compulsory schooling (Fergusson and Unwin, 1996). Positive associations have also been found between the staying-on rate and school characteristics such as the rate of teacher turnover in a school (Cheng, 1995).

◆ Careers advice

A number of studies have outlined the sources of advice used by young people as they decide what to do at the end of their compulsory schooling (for example: Foskett and Hesketh, 1997; Witherspoon, 1995) but, once background characteristics were controlled for, these have not provided evidence that careers guidance had any direct effect on young

people's destinations. Howieson and Croxford (1996) revealed that although careers education and guidance had only a very limited effect on post-16 destination, for some young people who chose to leave full-time education at 16, it did have a positive impact, increasing the likelihood that they would be satisfied with their job or training scheme, for example.

Furthermore, while studies have not demonstrated that careers education and guidance has had a direct impact on the actual destinations of young people at the end of their compulsory schooling, recent research has indicated that good careers education and guidance has given students increased confidence in their decision-making abilities (Courtenay and McAleese, 1993), a high level of careers-related skills (Morris *et al.*, 1995) and an increased sense of satisfaction with their post-16 choices (Saunders *et al.*, 1996).

♦ Effect of unemployment/types of employment

Research indicates that the impact of national levels of unemployment on participation in post-16 education and training has varied over the past ten years. In England during the late 1980s, staying-on rates increased despite a decrease in national unemployment levels (Gray *et al.*, 1993; Cheng; 1995; Jesson *et al.*, 1991). However, it is likely that the subsequent levelling off of participation rates in post-compulsory education between 1994 and 1996 was due to improvements in economic conditions and the greater availability of jobs for young people, especially as the fall was largely among those with lower-grade GCSEs and no qualifications, a group which has traditionally been more likely to enter the labour market at 16 than those with higher-level qualifications (GB. DFEE, 1997).

Furthermore, some studies have indicated that local unemployment rates were positively correlated with the take-up of YTS places in England (Jesson *et al.*, 1991; Roberts and Chadwick, 1991). Mizen (1995) found that those who entered YTS did so only reluctantly after it became clear that 'finding a real job was nearly impossible' (p. 90) given high levels of national unemployment and repeated unsuccessful applications for jobs.

The type of work available in the local labour market has also been shown to have had some impact on young people's decisions whether or not to stay on in full-time education. Cheng (1995) revealed higher staying-on rates in areas with larger proportions of people working in the service industries and speculated that this may have been because young people perceived a link between good qualifications and good jobs in these industries. Alternatively, Cheng suggested, young people may have been encouraged to stay on because the type of vocational qualifications required in local service industries could be obtained through full-time education rather than through work-based training.

♦ Local differences in post-16 destinations

Disparities have also been found between LEAs (Gray *et al.*, 1993; Smith and Noble, 1995), with participation rates in post-compulsory education ten per cent higher in some than in others. This can be explained partially by the difference in the socio-economic backgrounds and academic achievements of the young people but, even when these variables had been controlled for, some variation between LEAs persisted.

A number of studies have compared the destinations of young people in rural and urban areas (Gray *et al.*, 1989; Sime *et al.*, 1990; Wallace *et al.*, 1993). Although a large proportion of the differences that emerged were explained by the different socio-economic status of the two groups, young people from inner cities who left school at 16 were less likely than their counterparts in other areas to gain a full-time job immediately (Gray *et al.*, 1989). Furthermore, Wallace *et al.* (1993) claimed that young people in rural areas were more likely than their peers in urban areas to enter a full-time job or YTS and much less likely than other young people to stay on at school and study for academic qualifications, suggesting that this may have been as a result of employers' low evaluation of qualifications and the predominance of manual work in the region. The authors also cited transport as a key problem for many in sparsely populated rural areas which, in some cases, limited access to education, employment and training.

◆ Influence of educational reforms

Qualification levels of young people increased considerably in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ashford *et al.*, 1993), and many have attributed this to new forms of assessment introduced with the GCSE in 1988. As discussed above, the higher a young person's level of academic attainment, the more likely they are to continue in full-time education after the age of 16. Thus, the increasing levels of qualification from the late 1980s onwards enabled more young people to stay on in post-compulsory education. It has also been suggested, from analysis of Youth Cohort data, that the GCSE engendered more positive attitudes towards school among young people, which consequently encouraged them to continue their education beyond the age of 16 (Gray *et al.*, 1993).

The introduction of GNVQs in 1992 also affected the choices of young people at the end of their compulsory schooling, offering a vocational alternative to those who wished to remain in full-time education but did not want to study for A-levels. However, one study claimed that they 'were essentially a reactive response to increasing participation rates rather than an incentive to increased participation or achievement' (Hodgson and Spours, 1997, p. 6).

It is likely that increased participation rates in post-16 education have also been influenced by reforms to the higher education system. In the early 1990s, the Government encouraged expansion through a number of different strategies such as providing increased funds to higher education institutions and developing more vocationally relevant higher education in the hope that these would allow more people from different sectors of society the opportunity to enter higher education and thus provide greater numbers of highly educated people to meet the demands of the economy (Connor *et al.*, 1996). Between 1988 and 1992, during the peak years for expansion in the United Kingdom, the number of students enrolled on higher education courses increased by 42 per cent, thus giving those who chose to remain in full-time education at the age of 16 an increased chance of moving into higher education. These opportunities were increased by a certain amount of 'spare capacity' in higher education over the same period, as the size of the relevant cohort had fallen (Hillman, 1994).

♦ Summary

Numerous studies have highlighted the correlations between a young person's characteristics, such as social class, ethnicity and gender, and their likelihood of participating in full-time education, training or employment at the end of their compulsory schooling. Research has also been conducted to try to uncover the reasons for these correlations by, for example, exploring socialisation processes at home and at school. However, there has been less emphasis on establishing the reasons for the differences in participation rates *between schools*. Although the literature on school effectiveness and school improvement has engaged with many of the factors which help determine attainment at 16, few quantitative or qualitative studies have been able to establish what underpins the 'staying-on' culture in some schools.

1.2 Research details

♦ Aims

This report presents the findings from a one-year study of the factors that affect young people's decisions about post-16 education. The project had three main aims:

1. to identify the factors that influence young people's decisions about staying on or leaving full-time education beyond the statutory minimum leaving age;

2. to focus, in particular, on the reasons why certain groups within the youth population decide to leave full-time education at the age of 16;

3. to identify aspects of good practice in the provision of advice to young people on careers and post-16 education and training.

♦ Funding

The study was carried out by the NFER as part of its 1996/97 Membership Programme of research, which is funded mainly through local authority contributions. The Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) worked collaboratively with the NFER and part-funded that part of the research that focused specifically on students already in post-16 provision. Two reports have arisen from the study (see Preface).

♦ Developmental phase

Phase 1 was a brief period at the start of the research which involved group and individual interviews with secondary school pupils in Years 8, 11 and 12 from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Findings from these interviews helped to inform decisions about the focus of the research, key questions and survey design.

♦ The surveys

Phase 2 involved questionnaire surveys in January 1997 of over 2,000 Year 8 and Year 11 pupils in 42 maintained secondary schools (with and without sixth forms) in England. In addition, each participating school was asked to complete a questionnaire providing background information on pupils, catchment area, school features and the local employment situation. A total of 821 Year 11 questionnaires and 863 Year 8 pupil questionnaires were returned — a 75 per cent response from each year group.[1] However, four schools did not return *any* questionnaires, which means that the response from those schools that did participate was actually much higher than this (approximately 90 per cent).

Pupils' questionnaire responses revealed that many more were intending to *continue* in full-time education after the age of 16 (600 Year 11 pupils and 513 Year 8 pupils) than were intending to *leave* full-time education (207 Year 11 pupils and 321 Year 8 pupils), particularly so among Year 11 pupils — a ratio of approximately 3:1. Also it was found that pupils who were intending to leave had different characteristics in terms of gender, social class and expected examination results than those intending to continue their full-time education These aspects are described in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 describes differences between pupils intending to leave and pupils intending to continue in full-time education in terms of careers information and guidance, while in Chapter 4 the attention switches to pupils' attitudes: towards school in general; and staying on in particular, again examining the

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[1] *However, some questionnaires were excluded from the analysis because pupils did not provide enough information about themselves, e.g. gender, parental occupation, expected achievement, to render their responses useful. Therefore the tables are based on 807 Year 11 questionnaires and 834 Year 8 questionnaires.*

differences that emerged between the 'leavers' and 'stayers'. In order to make useful comparisons between these two groups of pupils, the responses of those intending to continue in full-time education were *weighted* for gender, parental occupation and academic expectations, which allows the report to focus on differences *other* than these three characteristics. This process is explained more fully at the start of Chapter 3.

♦ Interview programme

Phase 3 of the research took place between May and July 1997. It involved follow-up interviews with 33 Year 11 pupils who completed a questionnaire: 16 who were intending to stay on in full-time education and 17 who were intending to leave at the end of Year 11. These interviews were designed to extend and illuminate the questionnaire data, allowing exploration of some of the key issues associated with the decision to stay on or leave full-time education at 16.

2: THE DECISION TO LEAVE FULL-TIME EDUCATION

I've been doing schoolwork for too long now. I don't want to sit behind a desk all day any more.

(Year 11 pupil)

I knew I'd rather work in an office than do anything else... [it's] *quite easy work, there's room for promotion and it's good money.*

(Year 11 pupil)

This chapter focuses on the decision to leave full-time education. Which pupils decide to follow this route and what reasons do they have for doing so? Pupils intending to leave represented a substantial proportion of the questionnaire respondents: approximately one-quarter of Year 11 pupils and almost 40 per cent of Year 8 pupils indicated on the questionnaire that they were intending to leave. The chapter begins by comparing the gender, parental occupation and expected academic achievement of these pupils with those who were planning to continue. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the pupils who were intending to leave — their reasons for deciding to leave school and their career plans for the end of Year 11. The chapter is based mainly on questionnaire data. Gender differences and differences between Year 11 and Year 8 pupils are only reported in the text if these were found to be statistically significant (all data are presented in the tables). The chapter also draws on information from follow-up interviews with Year 11 pupils to illustrate some of the key issues emerging.

2.1 Who leaves full-time education at 16?

♦ How many pupils intend to leave?

Questionnaire responses revealed that approximately one-quarter of Year 11 pupils were intending to leave full-time education at 16. Interestingly a much higher proportion of Year 8 pupils (38 per cent) said they planned to leave full-time education at 16 (Table 2.1). This difference between the year groups was statistically significant.

♦ Gender differences

Among Year 11 boys, 31 per cent were planning to leave full-time education at 16, while only 20 per cent of Year 11 girls were intending to leave (Table 2.1). A similar picture emerged among pupils in Year 8, with a higher proportion of boys (44 per cent) than girls (32 per cent) intending to leave. These gender differences between 'leavers' and 'stayers' were statistically significant.[1]

Table 2.1   Gender differences between pupils intending to leave and pupils intending to continue in full-time education

	YEAR 11 *			YEAR 8 *		
	Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pupils intending to leave full-time education at 16	31	20	26	44	32	38
Pupils intending to continue full-time education	69	80	74	56	68	62
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of pupils:
Year 11 pupils planning to leave = 207 and planning to continue = 600;
Year 8 pupils planning to leave =321 and planning to continue = 513.

* *Indicates that the difference between Year 11 boys and girls intending to leave full-time education is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

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[1]   Throughout this report, gender differences and differences between Year 11 and Year 8 are only reported in the text if they are statistically significant. In tables, an * indicates where this is the case.

♦ Parental occupation

Pupils were asked to write the occupation of their parents or guardians. Their responses, taking the higher status parent, were categorised into six categories using the Standard Occupational Classification system (GB. OPCS, 1990). These categories were combined to give three broad categories: professional, managerial and technical; skilled manual; and partly-skilled/unskilled manual (Tables 2.2 and 2.3).

Year 11 pupils

Between pupils intending to leave full-time education and pupils intending to continue, there were statistically significant differences in terms of parental occupation status (Table 2.2). Taking boys and girls together, almost twice as many pupils intending to continue were from *professional, managerial or technical* backgrounds (34 per cent compared with 18 per cent). Reinforcing this image of those staying on coming from higher social class backgrounds, it was found that far more pupils intending to leave were from *partly-skilled or unskilled manual* backgrounds (29 per cent of those leaving compared with only 19 per cent of those intending to continue in full-time education).

No gender differences emerged, in relation to parental occupation, between Year 11 boys and girls intending to leave. However, among Year 11 pupils intending to continue full-time education it was found that boys tended to come from higher social backgrounds than girls. Significantly more boys (38 per cent) than girls (29 per cent) were from *professional, managerial or technical* backgrounds while fewer boys (16 per cent) than girls (22 per cent) were from *partly-skilled/unskilled manual* backgrounds (Table 2.2).

Year 8 pupils

Not surprisingly, Year 8 pupils' parental occupation analyses revealed a similar pattern to that found among Year 11 pupils (Table 2.3). Again there was a clear leaning towards higher parental employment status among pupils in the 'staying on' category, mirrored by a clear leaning towards lower parental employment status among pupils in the 'leaving' category. Taking boys and girls together, twice as many Year 8 pupils

Table 2.2   Occupations of parents of Year 11 pupils

	YEAR 11 *					
	Planning to LEAVE			Planning to CONTINUE		
	Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls	Boys#	Girls#	Boys and Girls
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Professional, managerial and technical	17	19	18	38	29	34
Skilled manual	28	34	30	30	38	34
Partly-skilled/unskilled manual	28	31	29	16	22	19
Other or occupation unknown	27	16	23	16	11	14
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	101

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
planning to leave full-time education =207; and planning to continue = 600.

* *Indicates that the difference between Year 11 pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

\# *Indicates that the difference between boys and girls intending to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

Due to rounding, some column totals may not add up to 100.

Table 2.3   Occupations of parents of Year 8 pupils

	YEAR 8 *					
	Planning to LEAVE			Planning to CONTINUE		
	Boys#	Girls#	Boys and Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Professional, managerial and technical	20	12	17	35	33	34
Skilled manual	32	35	34	32	38	35
Partly-skilled/unskilled manual	33	27	31	24	20	22
Other or occupation unknown	15	26	19	9	10	9
TOTAL	100	100	101	100	101	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 8 pupils:
planning to leave full-time education = 321; and planning to continue = 513.

* *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

\# *Indicates that the difference between boys and girls planning to leave is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

Due to rounding, some column totals may not add up to 100.

intending to continue were from *professional, managerial or technical* backgrounds (34 per cent compared with 17 per cent). Reinforcing this image of those staying on coming from higher social class backgrounds, it was found that far more pupils intending to leave were from *partly-skilled or unskilled manual* backgrounds (31 per cent of those leaving compared with only 22 per cent of those intending to continue in full-time education). The differences between Year 8 boys and Year 8 girls intending to leave were statistically significant, though this finding is complicated by the higher percentage of girls leaving whose parental occupation was not known.

♦ Expected academic achievement

The formal qualifications that pupils obtain at the end of compulsory schooling have been found to be the most powerful predictor of further educational participation whereby the better the qualifications, the more likely is a young person to continue (see for example, Gray *et al.*, 1993). In this research, pupils had not yet taken formal qualifications so pupils in Year 11 were asked to indicate what GCSE grades they expected to achieve and pupils in Year 8 were asked to indicate how good they felt they were at school work. Whether or not their self-assessments were accurate, it is interesting to see the relationship between pupils' own perceptions of their academic ability and their decisions about post-16 full-time education.

Year 11 pupils

The vast majority (85 per cent) of Year 11 pupils who were planning to leave fell into the broadly defined category of expected academic achievement level 2 (i.e. they were expecting *mostly grades D–G, a mixture of grades,* or *mostly ungraded* results). The remainder (just 15 per cent) were in category 1 (i.e. expecting *mostly A–C grades*).[2] In contrast, as might have been expected, among pupils intending to continue in full-time education the majority (62 per cent) fell into category 1, while only 38 per cent were in category 2 (Table 2.4). These differences were statistically significant.

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[2] Pupils were asked to estimate how well they would do in their GCSEs by ticking one of the following: *mostly grades A–C; mostly grades D–G; a mixture of grades A–G; mostly ungraded.* In order to make useful comparisons between high and low achievers, pupils were then categorised into two groups: **expected academic achievement level 1**, which included pupils who had estimated *mostly grades A–C*, and **expected academic achievement level 2**, which included pupils who had estimated *mostly grades D–G, a mixture of grades* or *mostly ungraded* results.

Table 2.4   Year 11 pupils' predictions about their external examination results

	YEAR 11 *					
	Planning to LEAVE			Planning to CONTINUE		
	Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Expected academic achievement level 1	17	12	15	67	57	62
Expected academic achievement level 2	83	88	85	33	43	38
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
planning to leave full-time education =207; and planning to continue = 600.

Pupils who did not indicate expected academic achievement were excluded from the analysis (see footnote in Chapter 1, p.10).

*   *Indicates that the difference between Year 11 pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

\#   *Indicates that the difference between boys and girls planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

Furthermore, among Year 11 pupils planning to continue in full-time education, there were significantly more boys with an expected academic achievement level 1 (67 per cent) than girls (57 per cent). No such gender differences emerged between Year 11 boys and girls intending to leave full-time education at 16 (Table 2.4).

Year 8 pupils

Year 8 pupils, who were still some years away from external examinations, were asked to grade how good they thought they were at school work by ticking: *very good, above average, average, below average* or *not at all good*. Their responses were then categorised into two groups: **perceived academic ability 1,** which included those judging themselves to be in the top two categories; or **perceived academic ability 2,** which included those pupils who judged themselves to be *average, below average* or *not at all good*.

As with Year 11 pupils, those planning to leave full-time

education had commonly graded themselves as average or below average (**perceived academic ability level 2**) (Table 2.5). Around three-quarters of 'leavers' fell into this category. In contrast, those Year 8 pupils planning to continue were more evenly divided, with just under half (47 per cent) falling into the above average category (**perceived academic ability level 1**), and just over half (53 per cent) claiming to be average or below average (**perceived academic ability level 2**). These differences were statistically significant. However, no gender differences emerged among Year 8 pupils planning to leave with respect to perceived academic ability. Similarly, among those planning to continue, no differences were found between boys and girls.

Table 2.5   Year 8 pupils' perceptions of their academic ability

	YEAR 8 *					
	Planning to LEAVE			Planning to CONTINUE		
	Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Perceived academic ability level 1	28	24	26	48	45	47
Perceived academic ability level 2	72	76	74	52	55	53
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 8 pupils:
   planning to leave full-time education = 321; and planning to continue = 513.

Pupils who did not indicate academic ability were excluded from the analysis (see footnote in Chapter 1, p.10).

*   *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

An overview of the pupils intending to leave full-time education in terms of their gender, parental occupation and expected academic achievement can be seen in Appendix 2, Table A2.1 (Year 11) and Table A2.2 (Year 8).

2.2 Career plans

♦ What pupils will be doing when they leave school

Year 11 pupils

Year 11 pupils who were intending to leave school at the end of the year were asked to indicate, from a list of possible options, what they were most likely to be doing the following year (Table 2.6). The majority (64 per cent) of those not intending to continue said that *a full-time job which includes training* was the most likely option. Most of the remaining pupils who were intending to leave indicated that they would like to be *in a job* (i.e. without training). None of those intending to leave envisaged being *unemployed*. Year 11 pupils were not given the option of saying *I don't know* but were asked to give the *most likely* option of those listed.

The difference between the way girls and boys answered this question was statistically significant (Table 2.6). A higher proportion of Year 11 girls anticipated having *a full-time job that includes training* (69 per cent of girls compared with 60 per cent of boys) while a higher proportion of boys did not anticipate being in a job with training (33 per cent of boys compared with 20 per cent of girls).

Year 8 pupils

The responses of Year 8 pupils differed somewhat from those of Year 11 (Table 2.6). Less than 40 per cent envisaged having *a full-time job that includes training*. Moreover, there were no significant gender differences. However, Year 8 pupils, unlike Year 11 pupils, had the opportunity to tick *don't know* in response to this question. One-fifth of them had not made up their minds what they would be doing when they left full-time education.

Table 2.6   What Year 8 and Year 11 pupils said they would be doing when they left school at 16

	YEAR 11			YEAR 8		
	Boys*	Girls*	Boys and Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Full-time job with training	60	69	64	35	43	39
In a job	33	20	28	29	33	31
Staying at home	2	3	2	0	2	1
Self-employed	2	0	1	6	2	4
Unemployed	0	0	0	0	1	1
Other	2	5	3	4	0	2
Don't know (Year 8 only)	N/A	N/A	N/A	22	17	20
No response	*1*	*3*	*2*	*4*	*2*	*2*
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of pupils who were planning to leave full-time education:
Year 11 = 207; Year 8 = 321.

* *Indicates that the difference between Year 11 boys and Year 11 girls is statistically significant at a level <0.05 (i.e. Year 11 only).*

◆ Chosen job or careers

Year 11 pupils were asked if they knew what job or career they would like to have. As Table 2.7 shows, the majority had made up their minds, though interestingly fewer of those intending to leave at 16 (63 per cent) than those intending to continue (73 per cent).

Year 11 pupils were asked to indicate what type of job their preference would be. These were classified using the same criteria that were used for parental occupations (see Section 2.1) and compared with parental jobs.

Table 2.7   Proportion of Year 11 pupils who knew what job or career they would like

Decided on chosen career?	YEAR 11*	
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Yes	63	73
No	36	27
No response	*1*	*0*
TOTAL	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
  planning to leave full-time education = 207; and planning to continue = weighted sample of 600.
Percentages may sum to more than 100 since pupils were allowed to make more than one response.
* ***** *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

As can be seen in Table 2.8, just over 40 per cent of pupils intending to leave full-time education at 16 had aspirations for a higher status job than their parents' job. Just under a third aspired to a job of a similar level, while around a quarter indicated a preferred job which was classified as lower than that of their parents. An almost identical pattern of response was noted among pupils intending to continue in full-time education.

Table 2.8   Comparison between Year 11 pupils' preferred jobs and their parents' jobs

Level of pupils' job aspirations:	YEAR 11 (ns)	
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Greater than parents' job	43	42
Same as parents' job	31	31
Lower than parents' job	26	27
TOTAL	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
  planning to leave full-time education = 207; and planning to continue = weighted sample of 600.
Where both parents had jobs the higher occupation classification was used.
ns *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant.*

2.3 Reasons for leaving full-time education

When given a list of possible factors that may have affected their decision to leave full-time education, pupils in Year 11 ticked, on average, three reasons for wanting to leave; and pupils in Year 8 ticked, on average, two reasons. The reasons listed in the questionnaire covered three main aspects: desire to have a job; attitude to school/college/further studying; and influence of friends and family. Both Year 11 and Year 8 pupils made similar patterns of responses, although twice as many Year 8 pupils as Year 11 pupils did not give *any* reasons (40 per cent and 20 per cent respectively) (Table 2.9). As a result of this high non-response among Year 8 pupils, their responses are shown in Table 2.10, but not reported below.

◆ Desire to have a job

Among Year 11 pupils, the desire to have a job was by far the most common reason for wanting to leave full-time education at 16. *I want to get a job to start earning money* and *I would prefer to work and do some part-time training* were each ticked by just over 40 per cent of Year 11 pupils (Table 2.9). It seems clear that the *desire* to have a job was uppermost, rather than the *need* to get a job: only 16 per cent of pupils said *I need to get a job because of the money*. Also, the desire to have a job was particularly important to boys; the difference between boys and girls (49 per cent and 30 per cent respectively) was statistically significant.

◆ Attitude to school, college or further studying

Though far less prominent than the desire to get a job, just over a quarter of Year 11 pupils ticked *I don't like school* (Table 2.9). A similar proportion indicated *I don't want to go to college*. Fifteen per cent of pupils said *I don't expect to get good GCSE results*. However, more specific negative comments about school *per se* were not much in evidence — only ten per cent said *I've done enough studying* and even fewer indicated *the teachers are too strict*. Also, it seemed that more practical considerations, such as *my school has no sixth form* or *college is too far away*, were seldom reasons for not continuing in full-time education. In contrast to factors related to the desire to have a job, *no* differences between boys and girls emerged in their attitudes to school, college or further studying.

♦ Influence of friends and family

Very few Year 11 pupils felt that the views or actions of friends or family had influenced their decision to leave school at 16 (Table 2.9). For example, *my friends are leaving* was ticked by only eight per cent of pupils in Year 11. Even fewer pupils felt *parents* or *siblings* were influential factors (four per cent and two per cent respectively). Again boys and girls were broadly similar in the extent to which the views of friends and family were taken on board.

Table 2.9 Year 11 pupils' reasons for deciding to leave full-time education

	P[3]	YEAR 11		
		Boys %	Girls %	Boys and Girls %
Reasons linked to wanting a job:				
I *want* to get a job to start earning money	*	49	30	42
I would prefer to work and do some part-time training	ns	38	45	41
I want to look for a job	ns	28	23	26
I have got a job arranged	ns	23	18	21
I *need* to get a job because of the money	ns	18	12	16
Reasons linked to school, college or further studying:				
I don't like school	ns	30	24	28
I don't want to go to college	ns	24	27	25
I don't expect to get good GCSE results	ns	17	11	15
I've done enough studying	ns	10	10	10
The teachers are too strict	ns	12	4	9
My school has no sixth form	ns	8	4	6
I don't need any more qualifications for what I want to do	ns	7	1	5
College is too far away	ns	4	1	3
Influence of friends and family:				
My friends are leaving	ns	10	5	8
My parents want me to leave	ns	4	3	4
My brother(s)/sister(s) left at 16	ns	2	3	2
No response	*	*16*	*28*	*20*

Percentages are based on the 207 Year 11 pupils who were planning to leave full-time education at 16.
Percentages may sum to more than 100 since pupils were allowed to make more than one response.
* *Indicates that the difference between boys and girls is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*
ns *Indicates that the difference between boys and girls is not statistically significant.*

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[3] *P = probability. Throughout the report, the P column indicates where differences are statistically significant.*

Table 2.10   Year 8 pupils' reasons for deciding to leave full-time education

		YEAR 8		
		Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls
	P	%	%	%
Reasons linked to wanting a job:				
I *want* to get a job to start earning money	ns	35	30	33
I would prefer to work and do some part-time training	ns	18	27	22
I *need* to get a job because of the money	ns	16	12	15
Reasons linked to school, college or further studying:				
I don't like school	ns	16	13	14
I don't want to go to college	ns	15	14	15
I don't expect to get good GCSE results	ns	9	6	8
I've done enough studying	ns	5	6	5
The teachers are too strict	ns	6	2	4
My school has no sixth form	ns	4	5	4
I won't need any more qualifications for what I want to do	ns	5	5	5
College is too far away	ns	2	2	2
Influence of friends and family:				
My friends are leaving	ns	7	4	6
My parents want me to leave	ns	2	0	1
My brother(s)/sister(s) left at 16	ns	5	6	6
No response	*	*38*	*46*	*41*

Percentages are based on the 321 Year 8 pupils who were planning to leave full-time education at 16.
Percentages may sum to more than 100 since pupils were allowed to make more than one response.
* Indicates that the difference between boys and girls is not statistically significant at level <0.05.
ns *Indicates that the difference between boys and girls is not statistically significant.*

Follow-up interviews took place with a small subsample of Year 11 questionnaire respondents. These allowed a closer examination of what thoughts lay behind the simple statements in the questionnaire. These discussions revealed that, often, there were several factors contributing to the decision to leave. The following illustration of one pupil's position was typical of the complexity and interwoven nature of the reasoning behind not wishing to continue in education.

Family experience, desire to earn an income and poor educational history

Following his work experience with the Post Office, Adam, a Year 11 pupil, had decided to embark on this as a career and was planning to be a postman when he left school later that year. Both Adam's father and grandfather had worked for the Post Office and he felt that this would be a job which he would both enjoy and which had long-term career prospects.

Adam's primary reason for wishing to enter employment instead of continuing his education was for the immediate financial reward, although, living at home with his parents, he did not have any major financial or material responsibilities.

Adam had decided to leave full-time education despite acknowledging that he was likely to acquire a better-paid job if he continued his studies and obtained further qualifications. For him, continuing his education at this point was not a realistic option — first, due to his overriding wish to have an income and secondly, because he did not believe he would obtain the GCSE grades he would need to continue his education, despite presently working hard at school.

In addition, Adam expressed a general dissatisfaction and boredom with school.

In his view, college was likely to be similar to school. A local college in partnership with his school taught one of his current courses and he had found the college environment to be very .similar to that of school and did not relish the idea of studying there after Year 11. He preferred to leave full-time education and start earning an income in a job he thought would be relatively easy to acquire and one that he would enjoy. He was particularly looking forward to finishing work early in the afternoon and having free time for himself, although he realised he would be starting work earlier than others. This did not dissuade him as he was used to an early start from working in the local market.

> *I find it a bit boring. I don't like some of the lessons because they are a waste of time. Like PSE, you don't do an exam in it so it is a waste of time. French, well, I am not all that good at it, so they should give you an extra lesson of maths and English instead — things you could really do with.*

Despite his plans to leave, Adam could envisage circumstances in which he might change his mind and continue in full-time education. The first of these would be if he were to obtain higher GCSE grades than he was expecting. However, such was his conviction that this would not happen, he had not made any enquiries into possible courses nor had he discussed this option with his school. Secondly, should he be unable to secure employment, Adam felt that he would prefer to go to college rather than stay at home all day. Also, for the future, he found the idea of working and earning a wage while studying part-time in a subject such as IT very appealing. Adam felt this would provide him with additional skills to further his career or enable him to move into a different job.

2.4 What might persuade pupils to stay in full-time education?

Year 11 pupils only

Year 11 pupils were given a list of factors and asked to indicate which ones would *definitely*, *maybe* or *definitely not* persuade them to stay on at school or go to college full time (Table 2.11). Two things suggest that pupils found this question difficult: i) many pupils did not answer (about one-third for each factor); and ii) many of those that did answer (again, about one-third for each factor) indicated uncertainty by ticking *maybe* in preference to *definitely* or *definitely not*.

Table 2.11 Factors that might persuade Year 11 pupils to stay at school or go to college full-time

Would any of these factors persuade you to continue?	P	Year 11 pupils planning to LEAVE				
		Definitely	Maybe	Definitely not	No response	TOTAL
		%	%	%	%	%
No jobs available	*	25 (Boys: 29 Girls: 18)	27 (Boys: 21 Girls: 36)	16 (Boys: 19 Girls: 12)	*32 (Boys: 31 Girls: 34)*	100
Different teachers	ns	11	19	36	*34*	100
Friends staying	ns	9	30	29	*32*	100
School offering new courses	ns	7	39	23	*31*	100
College offering new courses	ns	11	38	18	*33*	100
Availability of a grant or allowance	ns	20	33	13	*34*	100
Better GCSE results than expected	ns	24	34	11	*31*	100
Other	ns	2	1	5	*92*	100

Percentages are based on the 207 Year 11 pupils who were planning to leave full-time education at 16.
Percentages may sum to more than 100 since pupils were allowed to make more than one response.
* *Indicates that the difference between boys and girls is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*
ns *Indicates that the difference between boys and girls is not statistically significant.*

The factors in Table 2.11 have been ranked according to what would definitely not persuade young people to continue in full-time education. More than a third said that **different teachers** would *definitely not* make any difference. Also, just under a third of pupils indicated that **friends staying** would *definitely not* make a difference. These findings are

consistent with pupils' reasons for leaving full-time education (Table 2.9), where only nine per cent indicated that teachers being too strict was a factor in their decision to leave and only six per cent said that their friends leaving was a factor in their decision.

However, between one in four and one in five pupils said they *definitely* would be persuaded to stay on at school or go to college if there were **no jobs available** (25 per cent), or if they got better **GCSE results than expected** (24 per cent) or if there was a **grant or allowance available** (20 per cent). Moreover the difference in the proportion of boys and girls saying that they would definitely stay on if there were no jobs available was statistically significant, with 29 per cent of boys saying this, compared with only 18 per cent of girls.

2.5 Would pupils consider returning to full-time education in the future?

Later in the questionnaire, Year 11 pupils were asked if they would consider going back into some form of education at some time in the future. Half of them indicated they were *not sure* (and a further 20 per cent did not respond to the question) (Table 2.12). Only one in five pupils said they *would consider* returning to education in the future. However, the difference between boys' and girls' responses was statistically significant: boys were more likely to say they were *not sure* (51 per cent compared with 43 per cent of girls) and more likely to say they *would not consider* returning in the future (15 per cent compared with only seven per cent of girls). However, a much higher proportion of girls did not answer the question (31 per cent compared with 14 per cent of boys).

Table 2.12   Proportion of Year 11 pupils who would consider returning to education in the future

Would you consider going back into education in the future?	YEAR 11 pupils planning to LEAVE *		
	Boys	Girls	Boys and Girls
	%	%	%
Not sure	51	43	48
Would consider	20	19	20
Would not consider	15	7	12
No response	*14*	*31*	*20*
TOTAL	100	100	100

Percentages are based on the 207 Year 11 pupils who were planning to leave full-time education at 16.

* *Indicates that the difference boys and girls who were intending to leave is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

Follow-up interviews with Year 11 pupils who were planning to leave explored their feelings about resuming an educational course at some point in the future. Pupils' comments gave a rich insight into the strength of feeling behind many of the questionnaire responses. In several cases, they attributed their reluctance or uncertainty about returning to education to their very negative experiences of school and education. Sometimes, where pupils felt it would be worthwhile, from a career point of view, to engage in some training, they placed conditions on this — often that it would have to take place in a non-school environment. In this respect, the views of the pupil described below were fairly characteristic of the pupils interviewed.

Wanting a fresh start

Ben, a pupil in Year 11, had decided to leave school at the end of the year and train as a car mechanic. This entailed practical experience in a local garage as well as attending a course at college to obtain an NVQ.

Car mechanics had always interested him and he felt this would be a career with long-term prospects as well as immediate financial rewards. Whilst at one stage he was adamant that he would not pursue an educational route, he realised that the additional qualification would provide him with the technical skills he needed and might aid promotion later in his career. Therefore, he was prepared to combine working in a garage with the formal training at college.

For Ben, his negative experience of school meant that under no circumstances did he wish to continue his education there. He felt he had a poor reputation for behaviour and studying at school and wanted a clean break.

At school, I have not done as good as I should have... I want a fresh start with new teachers and that. The teachers here know what I'm like – they say that in the sixth form they'll treat you as if you've started again but they can't, can they? They already know what you're like.

3: CAREERS ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

I didn't have a clue what to do before the careers interview.

(Year 11 pupil)

She helped me get through it. She gave me the forms and helped me find the places. I'd be stranded if the adviser hadn't been there.

(Year 11 pupil)

This chapter explores the link between careers advice and guidance and pupils' decisions about staying on or leaving full-time education at 16. It reports on the careers information received, pupils' views on how helpful this was and their suggestions for additional information that would be useful. The chapter is mainly based on the questionnaire responses of Year 11 pupils. Year 8 pupils inevitably had less experience of careers advice and guidance, though where comparable questions were put to these pupils, their responses are also included. Also, where relevant, information from follow-up interviews with some pupils is reported.

3.1 Making comparisons between 'stayers' and 'leavers'

To appreciate fully the responses of pupils intending to leave full-time education, it is useful to compare them with those intending to continue. However, as Chapter 2 showed, there were significant differences between these pupils, with those intending to stay on tending to come from higher socio-economic backgrounds and have higher academic expectations as well as being more predominantly female. Therefore, in order to make useful comparisons between their responses, pupils who were intending to continue in full-time education were *matched* for three key background characteristics — gender, parental occupation status and expected academic achievement — with those intending to leave. This was achieved by using a statistical process known as *weighting* (Appendix 3 explains how this works).

Weighting the data in this way effectively 'levels the playing field', thus allowing underlying factors to emerge. *For example*, it was found that careers evenings were reported by significantly more pupils who were intending to continue than by those intending to leave (Table 3.6). When the data were weighted (i.e. gender, parental occupation status and academic expectations were effectively 'neutralised') the difference was still statistically significant, more pupils intending to stay on reporting that such events had been available to them. This finding could be an important one, which it would be all too easy to gloss over if the data had not been weighted to take into account background characteristics which are known to correlate with staying-on rates.

3.2 How early are decisions made?

Year 11 pupils

The majority of pupils indicated that they had already decided on the type of job or career that they would like by the time this survey took place in the autumn term of Year 11 at school (Table 3.1). Not surprisingly, however, pupils who had decided to leave were more likely to have decided on the type of job or career they wanted (76 per cent) than those who had decided to continue at school or go to college full-time (65 per cent). This difference was statistically significant.

Year 8 pupils

Interestingly, as Table 3.1 shows, the situation between Year 11 and Year 8 'stayers' and 'leavers' was reversed. It was the Year 8 pupils who planned to continue in full-time education who were *more* likely to have decided on the type of job or career they wanted (73 per cent) than those who planned to leave at 16 (63 per cent). Again, this difference was statistically significant.

Table 3.1   Decisions taken about chosen job/career

Job or career decided	YEAR 11 *		YEAR 8 *	
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Decided	76	65	63	73
Not decided	23	34	36	27
No response	1	1	1	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of pupils planning to leave full-time education (Year 11 = 207; Year 8 = 321) and weighted samples of those planning to continue (Year 11 = 600; Year 8 = 513).

* *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

3.3   Timing of careers advice and guidance

Year 11 pupils

Year 11 pupils were asked to recall the year in which they first received careers advice or guidance. The differences between 'stayers' and 'leavers' were statistically significant (Table 3.2). Although almost 70 per cent of both groups indicated that this took place in Years 9 or 10 (i.e. one or two years before they had to make a choice), and very few pupils reported having received any careers information before Year 9, more pupils planning to continue in full-time education said that their first careers advice was not until Year 11 (26 per cent) compared with those intending to leave (18 per cent).

Table 3.2   The year in which Year 11 pupils first received careers guidance at school

| Careers guidance first received: | YEAR 11 * | |
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Year 7	1	1
Year 8	4	1
Year 9	34	38
Year 10	34	31
Year 11	18	26
No response	9	*3*
TOTAL	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
planning to leave full-time education = 207; planning to continue = weighted sample of 600.

*   *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

When asked about the timing of careers advice, about half of all Year 11 pupils — i.e. both those intending to leave and those intending to continue — felt that it would have been helpful to know earlier what post-16 choices there were (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3   Year 11 pupils' views on timing of careers guidance

| Would it have been helpful to know about the choices earlier? | YEAR 11 (ns) | |
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Yes	55	47
No	22	26
Not sure	20	26
No response	*3*	*1*
TOTAL	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
planning to leave full-time education = 207; planning to continue = weighted sample of 600.

ns Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant.

Year 8 pupils

Pupils in Year 8 were asked to indicate what, if any, careers guidance they had received since being at secondary school. Seventy per cent of Year 8 pupils indicated that they had not received *any* careers guidance so far (Table 3.4). This finding is consistent with the recollections of Year 11 pupils, few of whom recalled receiving information in Years 7 or 8 at school (see above).[1]

Table 3.4   Proportion of Year 8 pupils that had received careers information

Year 8 pupils had received:	YEAR 8 (ns)	
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
No careers information so far	69	72
Some careers information	21	15
No response	*10*	*13*
TOTAL	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 8 pupils:
   planning to leave full-time education = 321; planning to continue = weighted sample of 513.

ns *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant.*

This situation was not satisfactory as far as Year 8 pupils were concerned — the vast majority indicated that they would like to know more about post-16 choices (Table 3.5). Moreover, this feeling was significantly more common among Year 8 pupils who were planning to continue (93 per cent) than among those planning to leave (83 per cent).

Table 3.5   Proportion of Year 8 pupils that wanted more career information

Would you like to know more about the choices you will have when you finish Year 11?	YEAR 8 *	
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Yes	83	93
No	15	5
No response	2	2
TOTAL	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 8 pupils:
   planning to leave full-time education = 321; planning to continue = weighted sample of 513.

*   *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

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[1]   It should be borne in mind that pupils were only part-way through Year 8 when they responded, so some careers guidance may have been provided after the questionnaire was returned.

3.4 Extent and nature of careers advice

Careers advice and guidance took the form of different types of events (e.g. talks or individual interviews) and was delivered by different types of people (e.g. school teachers or professional careers officers). Interestingly, there were some significant differences between pupils who were planning to continue and those who were planning to leave in relation to the careers *events* available to them, though no differences emerged in relation to careers guidance *people*.

♦ Careers guidance events

Year 11 pupils only

Table 3.6 shows the careers guidance opportunities reported by Year 11 pupils. The most common was an *individual careers interview*. No difference emerged between those intending to leave full-time education and those intending to continue, approximately 70 per cent of pupils in each group reporting having this type of session.

However, for other types of careers information, significant differences did emerge between these two groups (Table 3.6). Not surprisingly, those intending to continue in full-time education were much more active in seeking, or more likely to recall, careers information and guidance that related to other colleges or schools: 53 per cent had seen *brochures from colleges/other schools* (compared with 43 per cent of those intending to leave); and 45 per cent had seen *other information about college/other schools* (compared with 34 per cent of those intending to leave). Also, a significantly higher proportion had attended a *careers evening* — 23 per cent of those intending to continue compared with only 13 per cent of those intending to leave. The only reversal of this trend, i.e. where those intending to leave were significantly more active, or had stronger recollections, related to *talks from outside speakers about their jobs*: 43 per cent of those intending to leave indicated attendance at such an occasion, compared with only 34 per cent of those intending to continue. (It should be borne in mind, of course, that some schools only provide such activities for pupils who they know are definitely intending to leave at 16.)

Table 3.6   Careers advice and guidance reported by Year 11 pupils

	P	YEAR 11 Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Individual careers interview	ns	69	75
Talks from outside speakers about their jobs	*	43	34
Access to brochures from colleges/other schools	*	43	53
Other information about college/other schools	*	34	45
Careers lessons	ns	32	33
Presentations from staff from colleges/other schools	ns	28	36
Group discussions	ns	27	20
Attendance at open days/evenings at the place chosen	ns	24	31
Careers evening	*	13	23
Other	ns	6	4
No response	*ns*	*4*	*3*

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
  planning to leave full-time education = 207; planning to continue = weighted sample of 600.
Percentages may sum to more than 100 since pupils were allowed to make more than one response.
* Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils*
   planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.
ns Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is
   not statistically significant

♦ People giving careers guidance

Year 11 pupils

Table 3.7 shows the range of people from whom Year 11 pupils had received careers advice or guidance. Pupils were most likely to have received advice from their *parent(s)/ guardian(s)* (about 65 per cent of Year 11 pupils) and from their *careers teacher* (about 60 per cent of Year 11 pupils). About half of all Year 11 pupils had received advice from the *careers adviser* from outside school. No significant differences emerged between those intending to stay on and those intending to leave full-time education at 16.

Although the *careers teacher* was the most common teacher mentioned, other members of staff were also cited, for example *subject teachers* (indicated by about one-third of

pupils) and *other teachers* (indicated by about one-fifth of pupils). *Friends* and *relatives* (other than parents/guardians) were also said to have given advice (each indicated by about one-third of Year 11 pupils).

Table 3.7   People giving advice about post-16 choices

Which of the following people gave advice about what to do next year?	P	YEAR 11	
		Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Parents or guardians	ns	65	65
Careers teacher	ns	61	62
Careers adviser (from outside school)	ns	50	53
Other relative	ns	31	30
Friend	ns	29	26
Subject teacher	ns	27	29
Other teacher	ns	18	16
Other	ns	5	7
No response	*ns*	*3*	*1*

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
   planning to leave full-time education = 207; planning to continue = weighted sample of 600.

Percentages may sum to more than 100 since pupils were allowed to make more than one response.

ns *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant.*

Year 8 pupils

Despite the very limited formal careers information reported earlier by Year 8 pupils, virtually all of them had spoken to someone about their career plans (Table 3.8). As with Year 11 pupils, the most common source proved to be their parents, though significantly more pupils planning to continue reported this (78 per cent) than those planning to leave (67 per cent). Also, possibly reflecting the absence of more formal information, a far higher proportion of Year 8 pupils overall indicated that they had spoken to their friends (55 per cent of those intending to leave and 49 per cent of those intending to continue). Interestingly, a higher percentage of pupils intending to leave full-time education at 16 had not spoken to anyone about their career plans (11 per cent compared with four per cent).

Table 3.8   Who Year 8 pupils talked to about career plans

| Which of the following people do you talk to about your career plans? | P | YEAR 8 | |
		Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Parent(s)/ guardian(s)	*	67	78
Friends	ns	49	55
Careers teacher	ns	14	15
Careers adviser	ns	11	12
No one	*	11	4
Subject teachers	ns	10	14
Any other person	ns	4	7
Other teachers	ns	3	6
No response	ns	2	1

Percentages are based on the number of Year 8 pupils:
    planning to leave full-time education = 321; planning to continue = weighted sample of 513.

Percentages may sum to more than 100 since pupils were allowed to make more than one response.

ns *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant.*

*   *Indicates that the differences between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

3.5 How helpful was the careers advice?

♦ Which advice was the most helpful?

Year 11 pupils only

Pupils were asked to list up to three types of information and guidance they had found particularly helpful. Most commonly mentioned was the advice of the *careers adviser* from outside school, followed by the advice of the *careers teacher*. (Table 3.9). Given that the majority of pupils had received advice from the *careers teacher* (see Table 3.7), it is interesting to find that relatively few pupils rated this most highly. Similarly, despite the fact that the majority of Year 11 pupils had received advice and guidance from *parent(s)/guardian(s)*, only a small number of them listed this advice as being among the most helpful.

Table 3.9   Most helpful source of careers information and guidance

Most helpful careers information	P	YEAR 11	
		Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Careers adviser (outside school)	ns	26	31
Careers teacher/lessons	ns	16	18
Parent(s)/guardian(s)	ns	16	9
Work people	*	5	0
Friends	ns	4	5
Other teacher	*	3	7
Other relatives	ns	18	14
Specific career information	ns	3	3
College presentations/visits	*	2	6
Nothing/no one	ns	2	1
Not specific enough	ns	2	5
Written information	*	0	3
No response	*ns*	*29*	*21*

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
   planning to leave full-time education = 207; planning to continue = weighted sample of 600.

Percentages may sum to more than 100 since pupils were allowed to make more than one response.

*   *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

ns *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant.*

Interviews with Year 11 pupils revealed the kind of advice and information that was most helpful to pupils intending to leave full-time education. The following illustration highlights the desire to tap into advisers' networks.

Valuable Introductions

Carol knew that she wanted to get a job at the end of the year but wasn't sure whether she wanted to go to college as well. However, she then moved out of her family home and it was clear that she would have to get a job to support herself.

Carol felt that her interview with the careers adviser had been very helpful. She had been advised that office work would be the easiest area for her to enter at the age of 16 and the careers adviser had explained to her what this work was likely to involve. She also told her about the Modern Apprenticeship scheme and other apprenticeships and the kind of salary expectations that were attached to these.

Taking into consideration her projected GCSE grades, the careers adviser had suggested that Carol apply for a Modern Apprenticeship and had given her an application form for a local employment agency that had experience in this area. The agency arranged interviews and Carol obtained an office job with a local company.

Carol said she was pleased that the careers adviser had introduced her to the agency. In addition to getting a job she wanted, she would also receive training that would help to further her career.

I'm going for a week's training before I start at the company. That's run by the agency. They'll show me things like typing, shorthand and a bit about computers. I'm doing a Modern Apprenticeship so I'll also have one day's training per week, out of the office, at the agency. At the end, I get a certificate that's equivalent to an A-level.

The second example focuses on the important role of the careers adviser in encouraging the pupil to enrol on a part-time training course in addition to a job to enable better job prospects in the future.

Choosing to combine training with a job

Denise said that for as long as she could remember, she had always wanted to do secretarial work. However, her decision to combine this with studying for an NVQ was made as a result of her interview with the careers adviser at the beginning of Year 11. Denise spoke very positively about the help and encouragement she had received from this person, who had provided Denise with information on the range of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) that were available in her chosen field and helped with the application forms for the course, which would enable her to work four days a week and attend college once a week.

However, while she undoubtedly felt that the advice had been invaluable, she said that it would have helped her if the interview had taken place while she was in Year 10.

> *It would have been easier to do it last year because we've got our exams and everything this year. We're meant to be revising all the time.*

♦ Knowledge of alternative options

Pupils in Year 11 were asked if they were aware of the alternative choices open to them should they do better, or worse, than expected in their GCSEs (Table 3.10). Those pupils that planned to leave full-time education appeared less well informed in this respect — only half of them said they knew of alternative options, while 64 per cent of those intending to continue were aware of other options open to them should things turn out differently. This difference was statistically significant.

Table 3.10 Pupils' knowledge of alternative options if GCSE results were better or worse than expected

	YEAR 11 *	
Knowledge of other options?	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Yes	52	64
No	41	34
No response	7	2
TOTAL	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
   planning to leave full-time education = 207; planning to continue = weighted sample of 600.
* *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

♦ Is more help needed?

Year 11 pupils

Sixty per cent of Year 11 pupils would have liked more help with making their decision about what to do or where to go after the end of Year 11 at school (Table 3.11). Interestingly, this was the same for those who were intending to leave as for those intending to continue in education. However, there were significant differences between the groups when it came to the type of help they felt they needed, as the following section shows.

Table 3.11   Year 11 pupils wanting more help on post-16 choices

Would you like more help about what to do/where to go next year?	YEAR 11 (ns)	
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Yes	60	60
No	38	39
No response	2	1
TOTAL	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
   planning to leave full-time education = 207; planning to continue = weighted sample of 600.

ns   *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant.*

Type of help needed

Pupils who had indicated that they would like more careers advice and guidance were asked what form this should take. Those intending to leave full-time education were far more likely to want job-related information (Table 3.12). More than half of them (58 per cent) said they would have liked *more information on different kinds of jobs*, compared with only 39 per cent of pupils planning to continue. Similar proportions wanted to know more about *combining work with training* (56 per cent and 39 per cent respectively). Those planning to continue, on the other hand, were more likely to want *more information on different courses* (71 per cent of pupils planning to continue compared with 52 per cent of pupils planning to leave) and on *other schools and colleges* (52 per cent of pupils planning to continue compared with 26 per cent of pupils planning to leave).

Table 3.12 Pupils' suggestions for additional guidance about post-16 options

| | | YEAR 11 | |
Suggestions for additional guidance	P	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
More information on different kinds of jobs	*	58	39
More information on combining work with training	*	56	39
More information on different courses	*	52	71
Individual careers interview	ns	49	50
More information on other schools and colleges	*	26	52
Other	ns	1	3
No response	*ns*	2	0

Percentages are based on the number of pupils indicating that they would like more help with the decision about where to go/what to do next year:
    planning to leave = 123; and a weighted sample of those planning to continue = 125.

Percentages may sum to more than 100 since pupils were allowed to make more than one response.

* *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

ns Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant.

Interviews with Year 11 pupils allowed this issue to be examined in more depth. What emerged particularly strongly was pupils' desire to broaden their experience of different college and workplace locations prior to making decisions. The factual information provided in written format was felt by many pupils to be inadequate on its own. The following illustrates this point.

Taking a more personal approach to providing information

Having spoken to her parents and having received information from her careers adviser on the options available to her, Emma had decided that she would rather leave school at the end of the year than continue in full-time education.

She felt that there was perhaps more that her school could have done to show her the range of courses on offer to her and give her a flavour of what college would be like.

At school they should take you on trips, taster days. Here, they take you to one college but they should take you to other colleges and jobs. I've only had the chance to go to one college. I also think they should give more talks in school. They should get in people from college, past students. They should come in and talk to us about it. [That would help because] people in school don't really know what to expect.

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Careers advisers were widely held in high regard by those interviewed. Several pupils said that it would have been helpful to have had more access to this valuable source of information and advice. Rather than just for general information, some pupils wanted to speak to the careers adviser with specific concerns in mind at key points in the decision-making process. The case of the following pupil reveals where one pupil felt the shortcomings of the system were.

Greater access to the careers adviser

Fred, currently in Year 11, planned to leave school at the end of the year and had applied to several construction firms for employment which would enable him to work towards an NVQ. Whilst he had used his own initiative to find out about the type of jobs available to him in the construction industry, he had been to see his careers adviser for information on particular companies in the area. Taking into consideration his educational achievements to date and his predicted grades, the careers adviser suggested possible options available to him in the field.

Fred was pleased with the advice that he had received from the careers adviser, but said it wasn't always possible to see her when he felt he most needed to. Although she visited the school once a week, if he had an interview arranged at short notice he found it particularly frustrating to be unable to contact her to get advice when he felt he most needed it.

4: PUPILS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION

> *Teachers tell you what to do all the time. The boss at work will make you work but you can do it at your own pace.*
>
> (Year 11 pupil)

This chapter focuses on the relationship between pupils' attitudes towards education and work and their decision to leave at 16. The main emphasis is on trying to identify differences in patterns of responses between those pupils who are intending to leave and pupils who are intending to continue in education. The chapter begins by comparing their *opinions* about school and the usefulness of education after 16, before going on to explore *actions* that may reveal more about their attitudes to education and work, e.g. involvement in extra-curricular activities, truancy and part-time employment whilst at school. The data presented are derived from the questionnaire responses of Year 11 and Year 8 pupils and, where relevant, information from follow-up interviews with some Year 11 pupils.

4.1 Overview of pupils' opinions of school and post-16 education

The Year 11 questionnaire provided pupils with a list of statements and asked them to tick *'agree'*, *'disagree'* or *'not sure'* by each one. A similar question was put to Year 8 pupils, though with fewer statements. Tables 4.1 (Year 11) and 4.2 (Year 8) give pupils' responses. As these tables show, the statements fall into four categories:

- perceived usefulness of school;
- enjoyment of school;
- relevance of staying in full-time education after 16; and
- views on other options available at 16.

In the next four sections pupils' responses to each of these aspects are explored in turn. The following paragraph gives just a brief overview of the pattern of responses to the whole question.

Among both year groups, important differences emerged between those intending to continue and those intending to leave. Despite being matched for gender, social class and expected academic achievement, pupils planning to leave were much more negative about school and education than pupils planning to continue their education. The difference in their response to *every* statement was statistically significant.

Not only were there found to be differences *within* year groups, but also *between* year groups. Year 8 pupils were significantly more positive about school than Year 11 pupils. There appeared to be a downward slope, with younger pupils who were intending to continue feeling the *most* positive, and older pupils intending to leave feeling the *least* positive. However, there was some evidence that pupils in certain schools generally did not follow this pattern, suggesting that school-related factors were influencing pupils' comments.

4.2 Do pupils think school is useful?

Year 11 pupils

Virtually all Year 11 pupils felt that school was useful, though more for some aspects than others (Table 4.1). For example, most agreed with the statement that school was *useful for preparing for a job*. This view was more common among those planning to continue in full-time education (82 per cent), than among those planning to leave (69 per cent). The majority of Year 11 pupils also agreed with the statement that school was *useful for preparing for university/higher education*. Again, this view was slightly more common among those planning

to continue in full-time education (71 per cent) than among those planning to leave at 16 years (62 per cent). However, fewer than half the Year 11 pupils agreed with the statement *school prepares you for coping with life* (45 per cent of those continuing and 37 per cent of those planning to leave). Indeed, among the group of pupils planning to leave, 40 per cent felt that school did *not* prepare them for life. Overall, however, school was seldom seen as *a waste of time* — 14 per cent of those planning to leave and only three per cent of those planning to continue agreed with the statement.

The follow-up interviews with Year 11 pupils intending to leave were useful in exploring their views about school and its relevance to their lives. The following example is taken from an in-depth interview with a Year 11 pupil intending to leave full-time education at 16. It is typical of a group of pupils who felt that, for them, school was too theoretical and irrelevant to the skills they needed in life.

School isn't seen as relevant

Greg, a Year 11 pupil, had been offered a Modern Apprenticeship in plumbing with a local firm for whom he had worked during his holidays. This meant that he would be leaving full-time education after Year 11.

In the main, he attributed his decision to leave full-time education to his experience of school. He felt that often school was boring, subjects were too theoretical and didn't hold pupils' attention.

> *I don't like school! I like some lessons — if we did more practical instead of just dictation and copying from the board. That doesn't interest kids and that's why they bunk off lessons.*

In Greg's view, his education had been too formal and he would have preferred to study subjects that would have more relevance for him in later life.

> *Education is good depending on what job you want at the end of it. Not everyone needs loads of academic qualifications for what they want to do.*

Table 4.1   Year 11 pupils' views on school and post-16 education

		YEAR 11					
		Planning to LEAVE			Planning to CONTINUE		
		Agree	Disagree	Not sure or no response	Agree	Disagree	Not sure or no response
	P	%	%	%	%	%	%
Views about usefulness of school:							
1. School is useful for preparing for a job	*	69	13	18	82	5	13
2. School is useful for preparing for university/higher education	*	62	16	22	71	8	21
3. School prepares you for coping with life	*	37	40	23	45	25	30
4. School work isn't relevant for getting a job	*	22	54	24	13	69	18
5. School is a waste of time	*	14	71	15	3	83	14
Views about enjoyment of school:							
6. I mostly enjoy being at school	*	36	37	27	52	20	28
7. Life outside school is much more enjoyable	*	59	14	27	46	13	41
Views about continuing full-time education:							
8. It's worth staying on at school/college to get a better job	*	47	26	27	78	5	17
9. You can develop new interests in sixth form/at college	*	37	18	45	74	5	21
Views about other options after Year 11:							
10. I'd rather be at school/college than unemployed	*	69	16	15	88	5	7
11. It's better to be out working than at school	*	41	30	29	13	54	33

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils:
  planning to leave full-time education = 207; planning to continue full-time education = weighted sample of 600. One per cent of pupils did not answer any part of the question.

Percentages sum to more than 100 as pupils were invited to respond to all statements.

* *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

Each statement has been numbered in order to facilitate comparisons with Year 8 responses (Table 4.2).
(The Year 8 question contained fewer statements than the Year 11 question.)

Table 4.2   Year 8 pupils' views on school and post-16 education

		YEAR 8					
		Planning to LEAVE			Planning to CONTINUE		
		Agree	Disagree	Not sure or no response	Agree	Disagree	Not sure or no response
	P	%	%	%	%	%	%
Views about usefulness of school:							
1. School is useful for preparing for a job	*	77	3	20	89	1	10
3. School prepares you for coping with life	*	52	14	34	66	8	26
4. School work isn't relevant for getting a job	*	10	60	30	7	73	20
5. School is a waste of time	*	13	71	16	4	84	12
Views about enjoyment of school:							
6. I mostly enjoy being at school	*	39	22	39	64	11	25
Views about continuing full-time education:							
8. It's worth staying on at school/college to get a better job	*	56	12	32	86	3	11
Views about other options after Year 11:							
10. I'd rather be at school/college than unemployed	*	66	11	23	85	5	10

Percentages are based on the number of Year 8 pupils:
   planning to leave full-time education = 321; planning to continue full-time education = weighted sample of 513.

Percentages sum to more than 100 as pupils were invited to respond to all statements. One per cent of pupils did not answer any part of the question.

* *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

Each statement has been numbered in order to facilitate comparisons with Year 11 responses (Table 4.1). (The Year 8 question contained fewer statements than the Year 11 question.)

Year 8 pupils

As with Year 11 pupils, most Year 8 pupils felt that school was useful in *preparing for a job*, though again this view was stronger among those planning to continue in full-time education than among those planning to leave (Table 4.2). Again, few pupils agreed with the statement that *school is a waste of time*, though as with Year 11 pupils, there were significantly more pupils planning to leave who thought this (13 per cent) than pupils planning to continue (four per cent).

♦ Comparisons between Years 8 and 11

Agreement that school *prepares you for coping with life* was more common among Year 8 pupils than it had been among Year 11 pupils. Also, responses to the statement *school work isn't relevant for getting a job* suggest a major shift between Years 8 and 11: while the 'agree' categories show slight increases, the 'disagree' and 'not sure' categories show a complete reversal, suggesting that younger pupils have not yet made up their mind about this aspect, but older pupils have.

4.3 Do pupils find school enjoyable?

Year 11 pupils

Only about half the pupils who were intending to continue in full-time education indicated that they enjoyed being at school most of the time (Table 4.1). More than a quarter were not sure and the remainder indicated they did not enjoy school. Not surprisingly, enjoyment of school was even less common among those intending to leave: just over a third did not enjoy school and about a quarter were not sure. However, just over a third of them *did* enjoy school. Notably, too, almost 60 per cent of pupils who were planning to leave at the end of Year 11 agreed with the statement *life outside school is much more enjoyable*. Fewer than 50 per cent of those continuing felt this way, although around 40 per cent were not sure about this aspect. (Only 27 per cent of those planning to leave were not sure.)

Year 8 pupils

Year 8 pupils responded in a similar pattern to Year 11 pupils. Almost two-thirds of those intending to continue agreed with the statement *I mostly enjoy being at school*. Those intending to leave full-time education were more divided: almost 40 per cent agreed with the statement, i.e. they mostly enjoyed being at school; a similar proportion were unsure or did not respond; and 22 per cent indicated that they did not enjoy being at school (Table 4.2)

4.4   Do pupils think post-16 education is worthwhile?

Year 11 pupils

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of Year 11 pupils who were planning to continue in full-time education agreed with the statement *It's worth staying on at school/going to college to get a better job* (78 per cent); 17 per cent were uncertain and only five per cent disagreed with this statement (Table 4.1). Interestingly, however, among the pupils who were planning to leave full-time education, just under half thought that continuing *would* lead to a better job; the others were evenly divided between those who thought it would not lead to a better job (26 per cent) and those who were unsure whether it would or not (27 per cent).

In response to the statement *You can develop new interests in sixth form/at college*, three-quarters of those planning to pursue this route agreed. However, only 18 per cent of those intending to leave *disagreed* with this statement. Almost half of them were uncertain and more than a third of those planning to leave agreed that continuing could lead to new interests.

Year 8 pupils

Among Year 8 pupils, the pattern of responses was very similar to that of Year 11 pupils. Most of those planning to continue felt it was *worth staying on at school or college to get a better job* (86 per cent), while only just over half of those intending to leave felt this way (Table 4.2).

Attitudes towards post-16 education and its relevance to career plans were explored in the follow-up interviews with Year 11 pupils intending to leave full-time education. Interestingly, agreement that staying on in full-time education would lead to a better job, or would help in achieving career goals, was commonly offset by the perceived delay in financial gratification and independence. Often, whilst believing that the more sensible option would be to continue with full-time education, pupils rejected this for the more immediate rewards of getting a job, the view being that at least they would have an income this way. The following example illustrates this important point.

Opting for immediate earning power

After much thought and discussion with his family, Harry had decided to pursue a career as a musician in a band. Both he and his family believed that it would be beneficial for him to go to college and study a one-year course in music. This would give him some formal training and provide him with the opportunity to extend his experience in song writing and would also improve his musical skills.

However, whilst agreeing that the course would provide him with a good grounding for his chosen career, Harry had decided that he would rather get a job on leaving school and practise music in his spare time. Although he really wanted a job in the music industry, he would consider any job so that he could start earning an income. From his point of view, he had just spent five years at school and didn't want to prolong his education by going to college.

Well, some people say it is like being at school again. I feel like I should just get a job really, get a bit of money in. See if I can do something myself with music, form a band or get some money in and do that. I would prefer to go straight into employment. You get money for it don't you? I think if I went to work, it would be a lot better — I could save for rainy days and stuff like that. I think it would be a lot better if I just went into a job straightaway.

For Harry, the immediacy of being able to get a job and earn a wage was paramount in his decision to leave full-time education. To him, this was a much more direct route to getting on with his life and fulfilling his ambitions.

Certainly, one of the reasons that Harry felt he could pursue his more practical approach was because he felt that should he wish to, at a later date, perhaps next year, he could enrol on the one-year course at college. Knowing that this option was open to him gave him the additional confidence to leave school at the end of Year 11.

I suppose I would have a regret in not going to college and not learning a lot more about music. It's just [that] going to college seems a lot of messing about. You have to get all prepared, whilst for work it is just straight: job on, job off. You come home and you know your money is there like. But [at] college, you are stuck in between places.

4.5 Pupils' views about other options

Year 11 pupils

Is it better to be at school or college than have nothing to do? The responses from those planning to leave full-time education are interesting. Almost 70 per cent of them agreed that they would *rather be at school or college than unemployed* (Table 4.1). The remainder were divided evenly between those who were not sure and those who disagreed with the statement. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of those intending to continue in full-time education (88 per cent) agreed with the statement.

Responses to the statement *It's better to be out working than at school* also seem particularly important. Although 40 per cent of those planning to leave agreed with this statement, 30 per cent disagreed with it. Also, despite planning to continue at school, a third of pupils in this group indicated that they were unsure if this was better than getting a job or not.

Year 8 pupils

Year 8 pupils again showed a similar pattern of responses to Year 11 pupils (Table 4.2). The vast majority would rather be at school or college than unemployed, though the proportion was greater among those intending to follow this route than among those leaving (85 per cent compared with 66 per cent). However, almost a quarter of Year 8 pupils who were intending to leave full-time education at 16 said they were not sure whether they would *rather be unemployed* than at school or college (Table 4.2).

4.6 Other factors related to pupils' attitudes

Up to now this chapter has focused on pupils' *opinions* about various aspects of education and continuing after Year 11. A clear link has emerged between their attitudes to school and their decisions about what to do; negative feelings about school, college or education were clearly associated with the decision to leave. In this section, the emphasis shifts away from pupils' opinions, and concentrates on their *behaviour* — e.g. in relation to extra-curricular activities, truancy and part-time employment — in order to illuminate further the link between attitudes and the decision about post-16 education.

♦ Involvement in extra-curricular activities

School-focused activities

Pupils were asked about their involvement in out-of-lesson-time activities provided by the school, such as clubs and after-school sports. Analysis of Year 11 pupils' responses showed that in only one school activity, music, was the difference between those intending to stay on in full-time education and those intending to leave statistically significant (Table 4.3). In all the other activities listed — sports, drama, community work, religion, chess and bridge — there were no differences between the two groups.

Year 8 pupils' responses revealed greater differences between those intending to continue and those intending to leave, with the former being generally much more involved in their schools' extra-curricular activities. Differences in involvement in sports teams/clubs, music, drama and religious activities/clubs were all statistically significant (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3   Involvement in school extra-curricular activities

	YEAR 11			YEAR 8		
	P	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %	P	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Sports team or club	ns	40	37	*	40	54
Music	*	1	6	*	8	15
Drama group	ns	6	6	*	4	10
Community work	ns	6	4	*	4	1
Religious group	ns	1	2	*	0	2
Chess/bridge/ other games	ns	1	2	ns	0	0
Other	ns	4	4	ns	7	9
No response	ns	49	50	ns	46	27

Percentages are based on the number of pupils planning to leave full-time education (Year 11 = 207; Year 8 = 321) and weighted samples of those planning to continue (Year 11 = 600; Year 8 = 513).

Percentages may sum to more than 100 because pupils could tick all responses that applied.

*   *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

ns *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant.*

Clubs and activities outside school

Analysis of pupils' participation in activities outside of school revealed that, for Year 11 pupils, only in music was the percentage of pupils participating significantly higher among the pupils intending to continue than those intending to leave (Table 4.4). Among Year 8 pupils, both music and sports activities showed significant differences in participation levels between the two groups — again those intending to leave being significantly less likely to participate in such out-of-school activities. Again, it should be borne in mind that these two groups of pupils had been weighted, so that they were effectively equal in terms of gender, social class and expected academic achievement, making these differences all the more profound.

Table 4.4   Involvement in clubs/activities *outside* school

| | | YEAR 11 | | | YEAR 8 | |
	P	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %	P	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Sports team or club	ns	36	34	*	31	37
Social activities	ns	16	22	ns	8	12
Youth club	ns	24	19	ns	32	32
Music/drama group	*	1	6	*	4	8
Community work	ns	4	4	ns	2	4
Religious group	ns	1	4	ns	2	5
Political group	ns	1	0	ns	N/A	N/A
Other	ns	5	4	ns	9	9
No response	*ns*	*34*	*37*	*ns*	*35*	*31*

Percentages are based on the number of pupils planning to leave full-time education (Year 11 = 207; Year 8 = 321) and weighted samples of those planning to continue (Year 11 = 600; Year 8 = 513).

Percentages may sum to more than 100 because pupils could tick all responses that applied.

*   *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

ns *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant.*

♦ Truancy

Pupils were asked if they had ever played truant. Among Year 11 pupils, significant differences emerged between those intending to stay on and those intending to leave full-time education at 16. Those intending to stay on were less likely to have ever played truant (25 per cent of this group compared with 33 per cent of those intending to leave). Moreover, of those that had, there is a slight but clear drift towards more persistent truancy among pupils who are not intending to continue in full-time education after 16: five per cent reported they had missed several weeks, while none of those intending to continue fell into this category.

Among Year 8 pupils, however, no significant differences emerged between those intending to continue and those intending to leave. Moreover, there were significant differences in the incidence and degrees of truancy between Year 11 and Year 8. As might have been expected, far fewer Year 8 pupils had ever played truant.

Table 4.5   Levels of truancy

Levels of truancy	YEAR 11*		YEAR 8 (ns)	
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Never played truant	67	75	83	92
A lesson here and there	10	12	7	2
A day here and there	11	7	8	4
Several days at a time	5	3	0	0
Several weeks here and there	5	0	0	0
No response	2	*3*	2	2
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of pupils planning to leave full-time education (Year 11 = 207; Year 8 = 321) and weighted samples of those planning to continue (Year 11 = 600; Year 8 = 513).

* *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05 (i.e. Year 11 only).*

ns *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant (i.e. Year 8 only).*

◆ Parental help with homework

The extent to which parental attitudes influence young people's decisions about post-16 education is obviously an important consideration. Although it was beyond the scope of this study to focus specifically on this aspect, data about parental help with homework provide some useful background information.

Pupils were asked if their parents ever helped with homework and, if so, how often. In Year 8, parental help was extremely common. Just under 90 per cent of Year 8 pupils received parental help with their homework. Of these, the majority (54 per cent of those intending to continue and 59 per cent of those intending to leave) said that their parents helped *sometimes* (Table 4.6). The remainder were almost evenly divided between those whose parents helped *every day* (11 per cent of both groups) and those whose parents helped only *very occasionally* (11 per cent of those intending to leave and 18 per cent of those intending to continue). The differences between Year 8 pupils who were intending to leave and those intending to continue were statistically significant.

The percentage of pupils in Year 11 that received parental help with homework was much lower than it had been for Year 8 pupils: more than a third said they *never* had any help. No significant differences emerged, however, between those intending to continue full-time education and those intending to leave (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6   Parental help with homework

Parental help with homework	YEAR 11 (ns)		YEAR 8 (ns)	
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Never	34	37	13	11
Very occasionally	8	4	11	18
Sometimes	42	37	59	54
Every day	14	17	11	11
No response	*0*	*4*	*5*	*5*
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of pupils planning to leave full-time education (Year 11 = 207; Year 8 = 321) and weighted samples of those planning to continue (Year 11 = 600, Year 8 = 513).

ns Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave and pupils planning to continue is not statistically significant (i.e Year 11 only).

♦ Possession of a part-time job

Among Year 11 pupils, almost 50 per cent of those planning to leave full-time education and almost 40 per cent of those planning to continue full-time education had a part-time job (Table 4.7). This difference was statistically significant, although the difference between the two groups in terms of the percentage of pupils who had a part-time job *that they would like to do full-time* was statistically significant: twice as many pupils who were leaving full-time education as those staying on said they would like to do their part-time job on a full-time basis (33 per cent compared with 17 per cent) (Table 4.8). The majority of both groups did not want to do their part-time job on a full-time basis.

Table 4.7   Year 11 pupils with a part-time job

Pupils with a part-time job	YEAR 11 *	
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Pupils *with* a part-time job	49	39
Pupils *without* a part-time job	50	60
No response	*1*	*1*
TOTAL	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils planning to leave full-time education = 207; and weighted samples of those planning to continue = 600.

* *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

Table 4.8   Desirability of doing part-time job on a full-time basis

Desirability of doing part-time job on a full-time basis	YEAR 11 *	
	Planning to LEAVE %	Planning to CONTINUE %
Would like to do the job full time	33	17
Would *not* like to do the job full time	65	82
No response	*2*	*1*
TOTAL	100	100

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils who had a part-time job: 102 planning to leave; and 238 planning to continue.

* *Indicates that the difference between pupils planning to leave full-time education and pupils planning to continue is statistically significant at a level <0.05.*

5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that affect young people's decisions about post-16 education. This report has focused on the destinations of Year 11 and Year 8 pupils who were asked to indicate whether they thought they would continue with their full-time education after the age of 16 or whether they were likely to leave full-time education at that age. This report has examined factors that influenced this decision such as their home background, their attitudes to school and education, and careers advice and information they received, examining the differences that emerged between the 'leavers' and 'stayers'. An important aspect of the findings is the reasons why certain groups in particular wanted to leave full-time education. A complementary report, *Staying On: A Study of Young People's Decisions About School Sixth-Forms, Sixth-Form Colleges and Colleges of Further Education*, focuses on young people who had decided to continue with full-time education, and explores the factors contributing to that decision and their choice of course and academic institution.

The following sections discuss some of the main findings of the research, paying particular attention to factors contributing to the decision to leave full-time education, as this will be of most concern to schools and policy makers concerned with young people's post-16 education choices.

Who are the leavers?

This research found that young people intending to leave at 16 were in the minority — most young people intended to continue in full-time education after this age. Nevertheless, it is notable that boys accounted for a higher proportion of pupils planning to leave. Also, echoing other studies, it would appear that social class is strongly related to post-16 choice: two-thirds of Year 11 and Year 8 pupils who planned to leave full-time education were from skilled manual or partly-skilled backgrounds. In contrast, only one-fifth of Year 11 pupils and one-sixth of Year 8 pupils who had made this decision had parents with professional or managerial jobs.

In addition, the research found that expected academic attainment is also a strong indicator of whether pupils will continue with education after the age of 16. The majority of Year 11 pupils in this study planning to leave expected poor GCSE results, and Year 8 pupils who had made this decision similarly graded their school work as average or below average. One explanation for this correlation could be that such young people were unhappy with school and, because of this, did not perform well. On the other hand, their reason for wanting to leave may have been due to their poor expected academic achievement in the first place — they did not want to stay on because they did not think their academic achievements would be good enough to allow them to continue. This latter explanation would appear to be borne out by the fact that a common factor among pupils who said they might consider continuing their education was the attainment of higher GCSE grades than expected.

Why leave?

This research has shown that the most common reason for wanting to leave school and not continue with full-time education was the desire to start earning money. This is despite the fact that as many as half of those planning to leave agreed that it was worth continuing with their full-time education to get a better job in the long term. However, pupils' employment expectations were not low. While many already had part-time unskilled jobs, very few had any intention of pursuing them on a full-time basis. Most leavers were looking for a full-time job with training opportunities. Moreover, hardly any pupils thought they would be unemployed, although, if there were difficulties in getting a job, the survey showed that this was likely to be an influential factor in returning to full-time education. There was however, a noticeable difference between boys' and girls' attitudes. Whilst the desire to earn money was important for both, as a reason in itself for leaving school, this was definitely more often the case among boys. In contrast, more girls stated that they would prefer to work and do some part-time training than continue their full-time education.

In addition to perceived monetary gains, school factors are also very important contributors to the desire to leave at 16. The previous section has already highlighted the correlation

between perceived attainment and the decision to leave full-time education. In addition, the research showed that *attitudes* towards school and education in general contributed towards the decision to continue or leave full-time education. However, it is worth considering that even pupils intending to continue sometimes expressed negative or ambiguous feelings towards school, such as being unsure as to whether it was better to be out working than at school. In addition, only half of this group of pupils actually indicated that they enjoyed school. Clearly, reasons other than immediate social and financial gratification were keeping them in education.

Nevertheless, in general, the groups of pupils intending to stay on were much more positive about school and education than the groups intending to leave. Pupils intending to leave full-time education were more likely to say that they did not like school and a substantial minority indicated that they did not enjoy school. Six out of ten Year 11 pupils planning to leave school thought that life outside school was better. Crucially, significantly more boys than girls held these negative feelings towards school.

Pupils intending to leave also seemed to think that school did not relate to real life, that it was too removed from reality and too academic. While many of these pupils agreed that school was useful for preparing for a job or preparing for higher education, many did not feel that it was good preparation for coping with life or that school work itself was relevant to getting a job. Furthermore, nearly three-quarters of this group thought school was a waste of time.

If such groups of young people are to be persuaded to stay on in education, then a key consideration is whether a wider variety of more relevant courses and activities ought to be provided, in response to their needs and interests. Whilst it is clearly essential for young people to have a broad-based academic education, some groups within the pupil population may benefit from the inclusion of more specialised vocational training. Truancy, which was higher among pupils intending to leave, might be reduced through such a course of action, and pupils' early experiences of work-related training might help to make the decision to stay on or leave education at 16 a more informed one.

Timing of careers advice

The research found that careers advice and guidance usually played an important part in young people's decisions about their future, with the vast majority of young people consulting some adult about what they wanted to do. However, a substantial proportion — half of Year 11 pupils — felt that it would have been more useful to receive the careers advice and guidance earlier. It seems that provision of careers advice for the *first time* in Years 9 or 10, which was most common, and sometimes in Year 11, is perhaps too late for young people making such important decisions about their lives. It would seem to be more relevant for schools and other providers to increase awareness of career choices at an earlier age, not necessarily in careers sessions as such, but possibly as part of other subject lessons — for example, as part of each subject, informally discussing possible occupations in that field.

Quality of careers advice and guidance

Several people were consulted as a source of careers advice and discussion. Most pupils had spoken to their parents/ guardians about their career plans, and parental advice and guidance were felt to be more important by pupils planning to leave education than those intending to carry on. The next most common point of careers information was the school careers teacher. Interestingly, however, the person perceived by pupils to be the most *useful* was the visiting professional careers adviser, even though pupils had limited access to this person, who would not usually have been based in the school, and would not necessarily have an insight into their academic background or aspirations prior to their discussion. However, possibly these very factors contributed to pupils' perception that this advice was more helpful; in addition to the content, the fact that pupils had a specific individual interview with an external 'expert' who was prepared to spend time exclusively with them, listening to *their* view of what they felt they could achieve and what they wanted to do in the future, possibly increased the value of the advice. It may also be the case that pupils felt the careers adviser was more impartial than other adults who had been consulted, as the adviser did not know of their academic history or background.

The type of careers advice and guidance on offer

This research suggests that more careers advice and guidance is needed to help Year 11 pupils make decisions about their post-16 choices. Six out of ten Year 11 pupils would have liked more help in making their decision and, even at such a young age, seven out of ten Year 8 pupils would have liked to know more about their future choices.

It would appear that there are two key areas in which additional information would be useful: first, in helping to make that crucial decision to continue or leave full-time education; and secondly, once the decision to stay on or leave education has been made, in informing pupils of the more specific options available to them on each of these routes. For example, over half the 15–16-year-olds planning to leave full-time education said they would have liked more information on courses available, and a quarter of those leaving would have liked more information on schools and colleges. Also, a substantial minority of pupils planning to continue their education expressed an interest in more information on combining work with training. Obviously this information gap is a critical area for improvement. It may be that, armed with more information, some pupils might have made a different decision about their future after the end of compulsory education. That said, it is important to note that most pupils were interested in having more specific information about options available to them *within the confines of the decision* they had already made about continuing in or leaving full-time education. Those who had chosen to continue were more interested in the range of courses available and establishments offering them, while those planning to leave education would have liked to know more about the different kinds of jobs available and the option of combining work with training. Such information is vital for young people to make informed choices about their futures and to learn about the immense diversity and choice available to them at that age.

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APPENDIX 1

Table A1.1   Sample of pupils responding to the questionnaire compared with pupil population in England

	% of pupils who completed a questionnaire	% of pupils in England
School type		
Comprehensive	89	91
Grammar/Modern	8	7
Other secondary schools	2	1
Total	100	100
Type of LEA		
Metropolitan	31	38
Non-metropolitan	69	62
Total	100	100
Region		
North	34	32
Midlands	18	23
South	48	45
Total	100	100
Size of Year 11 year group		
Up to 150	46	30
151–200	38	34
201–250	11	24
251+	5	11
Total	100	100
% of pupils with five or more A–C grade GCSE passes (1993)		
Less than 25%	41	25
26–35 %	15	21
36–45 %	31	21
46–55 %	5	18
Greater than 55 %	8	15
Total	100	100

As can be seen in Table A1.1, the sample of pupils that completed a questionnaire were representative of schools in England in relation to: type of school (comprehensive, grammar, etc); type of LEA (metropolitan/non-metropolitan); and region. In terms of size of year group (i.e. number of pupils in Year 11), the sample was generally representative, although it slightly under-represented pupils in year groups of 200+ pupils. Also, the responding sample of schools contained higher than the national proportion of schools with less than 25 per cent achieving A–C grades, and slightly less than the national proportion of schools with more than 45 per cent of pupils achieving A–C grades.

APPENDIX 2

Table A2.1   Background information on Year 11 pupils planning to leave full-time education

	PARENTAL OCCUPATION									
	Professional, managerial & technical		Skilled manual		Partly-skilled/ unskilled		Unknown and others		TOTAL	
	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %
Academic level 1	2	1	4	1	3	2	2	1	11	5
Academic level 2	9	6	14	11	15	9	15	5	53	31
BOYS AND GIRLS	18		30		29		23		100	

Percentages are based on the number of Year 11 pupils planning to leave full-time education: N = 207.

Table A2.2   Characteristics of Year 8 pupils planning to leave full-time education

	PARENTAL OCCUPATION									
	Professional, managerial & technical		Skilled manual		Partly-skilled/ unskilled		Unknown and others		TOTAL	
	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %
Academic level 1	4	1	5	4	5	2	3	2	17	9
Academic level 2	8	3	15	10	15	9	6	8	44	30
BOYS AND GIRLS	16		34		31		19		100	

Percentages are based on the number of Year 8 pupils planning to leave full-time education: N = 321.

APPENDIX 3

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WEIGHTING DATA

Previous studies (see, for example, Foskett and Hesketh, 1997) have shown that young people's attitudes to, and perceptions of, education are related to their gender, their social class, and their own academic attainments. Hence, differences between pupils intending to stay on and those intending to leave education at 16 are due, at least in part, to the differences between pupils with respect to these characteristics.

For this reason, comparisons reported in this study were based on weighted results. Pupils intending to leave school at 16, the focus of this study, were taken as the reference group. For the pupils intending to continue in full-time education after the age of 16, weighting factors were calculated so that the results presented for this group are estimates of the results which would be obtained if the pupils staying on were equivalent to those leaving in terms of gender, social class (parental occupation) and expected GCSE achievement (Year 11 pupils) or performance in school work (Year 8 pupils). Throughout the report, footnotes to tables indicate where weighted data have been used.

APPENDIX 4

Table A4.1   Average scores for Year 11 pupils' responses to statements about school and education

	YEAR 11	
	Planning to LEAVE	Planning to CONTINUE
Views about usefulness of school:	Average score	Average score
School is useful for preparing for a job	1.4	1.2
School is useful for preparing for university/ higher education	1.5	1.3
School prepares you for coping with life	2.0	1.8
School work isn't relevant for getting a job	2.3	2.6
School is a waste of time	2.6	2.8
Views about enjoyment of school:		
I mostly enjoy being at school	2.0	1.7
Life outside school is much more enjoyable	1.5	1.7
Views about continuing full-time education:		
It's worth staying on at school/ going to college to get a better job	1.8	1.2
You can develop new interests in sixth form/at college	1.8	1.3
Views about other options after Year 11:		
I'd rather be at school/college than unemployed	1.4	1.1
It's better to be out working than at school	1.9	2.4

Average scores were based on a scale of 1 to 3: 1 = 'agree', 2 = 'not sure', 3 = 'disagree'.
Based on responses from 207 pupils planning to leave full-time education; and a weighted sample of 600 pupils planning to stay on.

Table A4.2 Average scores for Year 8 pupils' responses to statements about school and education

| | YEAR 11 | |
| | Planning to LEAVE | Planning to CONTINUE |
	Average score	Average score
I mostly enjoy being at school	1.8	1.5
School is a waste of time	2.6	2.8
School is useful for preparing for a job	1.3	1.1
It's worth staying on at school/ college to get a better job	1.6	1.2
School work isn't relevant for getting a job	2.5	2.7
School prepares you for coping with life	1.6	1.4
I'd rather be at school/college than unemployed	1.5	1.2

Average scores are based on the number of Year 8 pupils:
planning to leave full-time education = 321; and a weighted sample of 513 planning to stay on.
Average scores were based on a scale of 1 to 3: 1 = 'agree', 2 = 'not sure', 3 = 'disagree'.

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leaving at 16

This report is about young people who decided to leave full-time education at the age of 16. It is based on the findings of a survey of pupils in Years 8 and 11 (ages 12/13 and 15/16) in secondary schools in England. It compares the views and attitudes of young people who plan to leave full-time education at the end of compulsory schooling with those of young people who intended to remain in education.

The report focuses on:

- pupils' reasons for deciding whether or not to leave full-time education;
- the factors which have influenced their opinions;
- their perceptions of the careers advice and guidance they had received; and
- their attitudes towards school and education.

It provides hard evidence on the factors that influence students' choices about leaving school or remaining in full-time education beyond the end of compulsory education. It will therefore be of particular interest to everyone involved with young people at this crucial transition point in their lives including teachers in schools and colleges, careers advisers, parents and policy makers.