

# **Participation Rates in Further and Higher Education**

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The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Departments.



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# **Executive Summary**

## **Introduction**

- I. The aim of this study is to investigate cross community participation and geodemographic disparities in the take up of further and higher education within the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) area. Prior to this study, there has been a dearth of empirical knowledge in relation to participation rates across communities and between geodemographic localities. However, there now exists a record of the current state of disparities in participation in further education colleges and universities, across the BELB area.

## **Aims of current study**

- II. The aims of the current study are to assess pupils' attitudes towards, and perceptions of, further education and university and also to identify and assess factors and entities which influence the formation of these attitudes, with a view to determining the effects on participation rates in further and higher education. The specific objectives are:
  - III. To establish the extent of geodemographic disparity in access to further and higher education across schools in the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) area.
  - IV. To identify zones of geodemographic disparity in relation to non-progression.
  - V. To discover reasons for pupils' intentions and aspirations in respect of progression to further and higher education.
  - VI. To highlight cultural, social and economic factors affecting male and female pupils in relation to participation in further and higher education.
  - VII. To provide empirical evidence to enhance the delivery of educational services through informing policy-makers, college managers, careers teachers/advisors and practitioners.

- VIII. To provide recommendations aimed at alleviating geodemographic disparity and enhancing the life chances of pupils.
- IX. To assess and develop relevant indicators with the potential for measuring/ mapping change in attitudes to and perceptions of participation in FHE on a longitudinal basis.

## **Methodology**

- X. The approach taken has been one of assessing the attitudes of a large sample of Year 12 pupils from a representative cross section of schools in relation to further education (FE) and university, from the points of view of the pupils themselves, their parents and their careers teachers. A variety of quantitative and qualitative methods have been utilised, specifically; a questionnaire survey of pupils, interviews with careers teachers, focus group discussions with pupils and interviews with parents. The analysis involves both bivariate and multivariate statistics, carried out on the data, following from the identification of pupils' aspirational choice, i.e. 'None', 'FE only', 'University only' and 'Both'. Aspirational choice was explored in terms of the following key variables: Biographical variables, school variables, extent of influence of important others, pupils' attitudes to education, pupil activity and geographical location. In addition, pertinent variables highlighted in the above categories are considered in a multinomial logistic regression model - which aims to identify profiling variables (predictors) underlying pupils aspirational choice.

## **Results**

- XI. There are four identifying groups in terms of aspirational choice: 'None', 'FE only', 'University only' and 'Both'. Exploration of the data in terms of a number of key variables, as mentioned in the paragraph above, revealed key characteristics associated with each group. The findings for the 'None' group in particular, may contribute to increased knowledge about who non-progressors are, what attitudes they have formed about education and their own ability, who influences their future choices, and the types of schools they are likely to attend. For example: a non-progressor is likely to be a Protestant male who: lives close to his school; attends a secondary school with low rates of

progression and performance and is less likely to have parental or teacher discussions about progression; feels alienated in terms of ability and getting on with others; is less likely to view education as the most important thing in his life right now (but does not view education as being unimportant); wants to go out to work as soon as possible and states his parents want him to go out to work in the near future; does less than one hour homework per night; believe teachers expect less than one hour homework per night; is less involved in school activities; is less likely to have a career in mind; has no access to the internet; does not want to progress even though family have been to further or higher education; does not want to progress even though he has friends at further education or university; but does not want to progress even though he has friends intending to go to further or higher education.

- XII. A number of significant religious and gender differences in participation rates have emerged. A greater number of Protestants than expected choose 'None' 'FE only' or 'Both', while Catholics are more likely to select 'University only'. Male pupils are more likely than female pupils to express an intention not to progress, while females tend to select 'Both', 'FE only' or 'University only'. Furthermore, Protestant males in secondary schools are more likely to select 'None' as compared with Catholic males, and Protestant females in secondary schools tend to select 'None' or 'FE only', while Catholic females indicate a preference for either 'Both' or 'University only'.
- XIII. A more positive attitude to education and educational ability is expressed by pupils who either select to go to 'Both' further education college or university or 'University only' than pupils in the 'FE only' or 'None' groups. In addition, pupils who want to progress are more likely to report having parental or teacher discussions about post-16 opportunities and access a greater variety of sources of information when making a career choice.
- XIV. Two significant trends regarding geodemographic disparities in relation to non-progression to FE college and university were identified. Firstly, the closer one lives to their school, the more likely they were to select 'None' or 'FE only' as their post-16 intention. Secondly, the further a

pupil lives from their school, the greater the likelihood they will choose 'University only' or 'Both'.

- XV. This study also reveals that, in a number of cases, there is room for improvement in school/FE college relationships, particularly on issues such as school visits. It was found that amongst those who had been visited by a representative of an FE college, there was a 50/50 chance of an interest in progression being expressed by Year 12 pupils.
- XVI. In many schools, the administrative burden placed upon careers teachers appeared to be excessive and constituted a barrier to effective careers teaching. Areas such as work experience placement and maintaining effective working relationships with further and higher education institutions were, hence, found by careers teachers to be difficult to manage.
- XVII. One unexpected outcome of this research has been to highlight the need for improvements in relationships between grammar schools and further education colleges; in grammar schools, it would seem that there is little or no consideration given to the possibility of pupils progressing to FE college.
- XVIII. There is also a need for parental education concerning the merits of further education college. While parents' opinions of their local FE college were overwhelmingly positive, when asked whether or not they would like their children to attend these colleges, most parents demurred, stereotyping FE college as a site solely for the learning of 'trades'.
- XIX. Cultural factors influence progression in numerous ways. Most significantly, there seems to be a 'fear' factor surrounding a number of locations within which further educational institutions are currently sited.

## **Conclusions**

- XX. The characteristics of non-progressing pupils, that is those pupils who do not aspire to progressing to either further or higher education are described in the following section. This is a summary view of the pupils who would require targeting if progression is to be enhanced across the

educational sector, offering equality of opportunity to all pupils. While the focus is on male pupils, it is important not to lose sight of the possibility that the higher progression rate of girls to further education may mask the preparation of girls for low skill and low paid employment in service sectors, nor the finding that Protestant females living with both parents are more likely not to aspire to progression than Catholic females living with both parents.

- XXI. One clear characteristic of these young people is their physical location which marks them so distinctly that indices of closeness to their school facilitates prediction of their aspirations. Given the apparent paradox that closeness to the point of delivery of the educational service is predictive of educational non progression it is important to consider the possibilities offered in this context. Since these pupils are locked within communities where educational aspirations may be limited and where the spatial closeness of peers leads to reinforcement of community values, it is important that the strengths of this community ethos are probed.
- XXII. Within the communities, mothers appear to be the main source of career advice; this may be indicative of the decline of the traditional male 'breadwinner' occupations. Furthermore, membership of a lone parent family may not be disadvantageous if the pupil has contact with the other parent and if the mother is informing the pupil. The values and peer relationships that bind the pupils to their community may be accessible in terms of offering progression on the terms of the community, that is through recognition of learning on New Deal, provision of vocational courses (perhaps collaboratively with colleges) and informing pupils of the newer forms of progression, that is through different NVQ levels, foundation degrees, flexible study and accreditation of work based learning.
- XXIII. Through recognising 'male' attitudes in relation to the credibility of the workplace as an acceptable destination for early leavers while challenging the view that work should be separate from learning, there are opportunities for addressing male non progressors to consider these options. This view is predicated on the assumption that educational institutions are capable of responding to these challenges

also by providing the environments that enable different forms of progression to be valued.

- XXIV. Clearly there is a social and economic context within which these pupils exist and this is bounded by circumstances that are not amenable to change through the educational service. There is, however, emerging evidence that some pupils in the most difficult circumstances now have aspirations that are not consonant with the expectations of their teachers, given the community patterns of underachievement. These pupils have begun a process that may lead to the raising of community expectations.
- XXV. The information presented below is a summary of the key findings identified from the analysis of data, which might help characterize pupils not progressing to either further or higher education. In addition to a number of biographical, school and geodemographic variables, attitudinal items and influencing factors were utilized, to aid the identification of progressing and non-progressing pupils in the current sample. The results are presented below against the variables selected for analysis and refer to the general findings for pupils who did not state they wanted to progress in the pupil questionnaire.

**Gender:** male

**Religion:** Protestant

**Location:** live close to their school

**Postcode:** BT13, BT14 or BT15

**School type:** secondary level

**Progression rate of school:** low

**Performance rate of school:** low

**FSM level of school:** high

**Information discussed:** less likely to report having parental or teacher discussions about progression

**Sources of information:** accessed fewer sources of information when making a decision about progression

**Attitudes to education:** feel alienated in terms of their ability and getting on with others (more for males than females), are less likely to view education as the most important thing in their life right now, want to go out to work as soon as possible and state their parents want them to go out to work in the near future

**Homework:** less than one hour per night

**Expectations of homework by teachers:** less than one hour per night

**School activities:** less involved in school activities (males more than females)

**Career choice:** less likely to have a career in mind

**Internet access:** no access

**Influence of family:** family have been to further or higher education but do not want to progress (more males than females)

**Influence of friends:** have friends at further education or university but do not want to progress (more males than females)

**Aspirational choice of friends:** have friends intending to go to further or higher education, but do not want to progress (males more than females)

XXVI. While the restriction of this study to the Greater Belfast area and to Year 12 pupils alone precludes making definitive conclusions, it can be demonstrated how community affiliation and geodemographic factors can impact on the educational environment, resulting in disparities in pupils' intentions to progress to further education and university. The recommendations, which follow, are directed at targeting the non progressing group in their communities and suggesting the provision of support designed to encourage progression.

## Recommendations

### Re-imaging FE college

- I. Further education colleges need to begin to embark upon a substantial re-imaging process. In light of the fact that many pupils tend to view the FE sector as a destination of last resort, colleges need to be presented to pupils as broad-based progression-orientated institutions. Awareness of the full range of courses and qualifications available at further education colleges, particularly the new foundation degrees, needs to be greatly widened for pupils and their parents alike; likewise, the value of these courses, and the higher educational pathways proceeding from qualifications obtained at FE college and through vocational courses at school level should be emphasized.

### FE and Proximity

#### Low Proximity Pupils and Progression to FE college

- II. It is unlikely that the majority of pupils in the low proximity group, typically grammar school attendees, are oriented towards FE college as a realistic educational option given the popularity of A levels at school as a progression pathway. It would seem, however, judging from a number of careers teachers' accounts, that there is still a small but substantial number of pupils, perhaps those not predisposed towards A levels, who would benefit from progression to FE. Equally, progression of these students may assist in addressing the persistent deficits in graduates with technical and scientific skills. FE colleges and grammar schools should, therefore collaborate in assisting pupils to make informed choices regarding progression.

#### High (close) Proximity Pupils and Progression to FE College

- III. In regard to engaging non-progressing pupils, who live in close proximity to their school, in further education, the cultural constitution of these areas needs to be considered, specifically, the established pathway of movement into 'local and immediate employment' (section 4.7). Pupils and parents should be given opportunities to become more aware of the long-term consequences of such short-term thinking, in

terms of future economic and social marginalisation. The relative acceptance of the importance of education by the members of this group strongly suggests that intervention strategies may have positive results. Specifically, these schools should be targeted for development of appropriate curricula (e.g. Vocational A levels and preparatory courses) that offer progression.

- IV. Those who choose immediate progression to the employment market are likely to do so via New Deal, Modern Apprenticeship or JOBSKILLS. As these pupils will be required to undertake National Vocational Qualifications, there should be provision for bridging programmes so that there can be recognition of achievement of vocational and work-based learning for progression to higher education. This may be achieved through a variety of routes and the new foundation degree programmes should offer opportunities for flexible access through full time, part time and flexible learning modalities. These pathways have the potential to offer progression through working with the preferences of the pupils in relation to remaining in communities and entering the world of work.

#### *FE and Religion*

- V. Although the religious picture is somewhat obscured by the influence of gender and proximity, it can be seen that in a number of specific communities, Protestant males are less inclined towards progressing (section 4.3). It is clear, therefore, in terms of marketing further education, this group obviously requires particular targeting and the provision of pathways to progression should be configured to ensure that unnecessary barriers are removed. This may be achieved through the development of compacts between schools and universities or colleges, that is, the formulation of an agreement whereby the higher education institutions contract to accept pupils who meet certain conditions. Such a policy may be in accordance with equality policies if the courses targeted are those in the science and technology domains where there are currently deficits in student applications and pupils from both communities are included. In addition this policy would help to address the skills and knowledge deficits experienced by 'high tech' businesses.

### FE and Gender

- VI. More attention needs to be focused upon why female pupils are more predisposed towards FE (pull factors) and what repels male pupils from attending (push factors). While the progression aspirations of girls may be perceived as positive, it is important, in the context of equality of opportunity that these choices are monitored, as the outcome may be the ghettoisation of girls into traditional feminine service areas, offering limited progression to higher education or high tech skills areas.

### School and FE college

- VII. Schools, including grammar schools - should be encouraged to maintain a close working relationship with further education colleges in order to maximise participation. FE college policies on informing schools should be reconsidered. Apart from visiting schools and providing careers teachers with adequate supplies of information, e.g. prospectuses, thought should be given to the presentation of appropriate role models to school pupils, for example, persons from similar cultures who have progressed.

## **Careers Teachers**

### Administrative support

- VIII. Careers teachers should receive adequate administrative support to enable them to be free to concentrate on their work with pupils.

### Links with T&EA

- IX. Where required, careers teachers should be provided with adequate support from the T&EA as the rapid changes in administration structures in recent years may have weakened linkages.

### Advice provision

- X. Teachers need to be thoroughly briefed regarding both the full range of courses available at FE colleges, and the pathways from school to further and higher education via vocational and access courses.

Equally teachers need to be aware of the personal and social issues surrounding progression and this should include knowledge of the financial implications of attending further education college.

## **FE and Parents**

### *School and community involvement*

- XI. Schools – particularly those in close proximity areas - need to penetrate their local communities with the progression to FE college and university message.

### *Parental influence*

- XII. Parents should be made aware of what is on offer – not only in their immediate localities but throughout the entire greater Belfast area – and the long term benefits – particularly in terms of employment - of continuing education after GCSEs or the equivalent vocational awards. The complexity of the findings in relation to family structure suggests that the quality of the family advice provided to pupils is likely to be as important as the type of family. It is, therefore, the case that information on progression should be specifically targeted at pupils who wish to go directly to employment rather than at pupils from particular family types.
- XIII. Parents who collaborate in their children’s educational disenfranchisement through facilitating truancy and enabling participation in ‘black economy’ employment also need to be made aware of the potential damage they are doing to their children’s future life chances.

## **FE and Culture**

### *FE College and Sectarian Location*

- XIV. FE colleges need to be aware that pupils are acutely sensitive to the location of college sites - and the areas through which they have to travel to reach them - in terms of their position within particular communities in the Greater Belfast area. A possible remedy would be

to ensure that there is transportation available which avoids potentially contentious areas.

### Future Provision

- XV. The perceived community identity of a site needs to be taken into account in positioning future provision, so as not to create single community institutions or courses.

### Support

- XVI. Since there were indications that that the home and community environments were not always conducive to study, several options including a study room at school and provision of a mentor to assist with revision were considered by informants to be positive forms of support. These options should be explored, with the caveat that pupils sometimes thought that study rooms in schools could become distracting if the learning process was not appropriately managed.
- XVII. There is evidence that strong aspirations towards university progression are appearing in girls' schools where there is currently relatively low achievement and, hence, limited opportunity to progress. This suggests that a programme of support, incorporating role models, demonstrating how girls can progress to technical and scientific areas through alternatives to traditional A levels could be productive.
- XVIII. Since the typical non-progressing male will have expressed difficulties in relation to interpersonal relationships in school, it is proposed that identification of pupils with such difficulties and the provision of social skills support would enhance the probability of reducing alienation with the process of schooling and enhance the possibility for progression.
- XIX. Initiatives to make internet access available to non -progressing pupils, either at home or at school or in the community, should be considered.

### Regulation

- XX. Since there are clear indications that pupils are developing awareness of the possibilities for progression but have not always achieved at the

appropriate level, serious consideration should be given to a revision of the age-related regulations governing entry to access courses and the possibility of offering these courses in schools in the communities.



## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 One of the most important decisions facing pupils in Northern Ireland is whether or not to continue with education after finishing their GCSEs. While many pupils choose to stay on at school for A levels, before proceeding to university, there are many others who find this option unattractive or unavailable at their current schools. The further education system is, therefore, an important service in terms of creating opportunities for students with different interests and abilities.
- 1.2 Progression to FE college also opens up possibilities for the pursuit of careers that may not have been available through the schooling system and may not have been traditional to particular communities or gender roles. Moreover, with the advent of incorporation, the FE sector is entering a new era where colleges have greater autonomy and responsibilities. The introduction of governmental policies such as New TSN, aimed at identifying and targeting the most disadvantaged people and areas in our society, makes this an opportune time to investigate how such a substantial community resource can offer the best service to all sections in society.
- 1.3 Although colleges in Northern Ireland attract students from all sections of the community, it would be naïve to assume that these institutions are free of religious or political connotations. Consequently, there may be a knock-on effect for colleges upon the size and boundaries of their travel-to-college catchment areas. Armstrong notes considerable variation in participation rates between wards, particularly between urban and rural areas, and while it remains only an inference, it seems that participation rates in Belfast are lower in working class areas such as the Shankill (1997: 14).
- 1.4 With regard to the problem of addressing some of the barriers to educational progression, and indeed to the nature of progression itself<sup>1</sup>, varying views are expressed by different researchers. Some authors, typically those working from within the system, favour an expansion of

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<sup>1</sup> McGivney notes that “progression” can mean a number of things: personal progression, social progression, economic progression and educational progression, all as a result of participation in learning (1999: 7).

provision (Gallagher et al, 1996). Others advocate measures to ensure economic and social inclusion (Armstrong, 1997) or a complete change in the structures, and ways of thinking about, education (Morris & McMahon, 1998). These researchers also make reference to the setting up of special access arrangements, with a view to overcoming barriers, citing the Higher Education Liaison Project (HELP) in Londonderry, set up by the University of Ulster and the North West Institute of Further Education, as a model of good practice.

- 1.5 It has been noted that, in Northern Ireland the universities have the highest proportion of students from the manual social classes in the UK (Osborne, 2001); this may be due, however, to the larger proportion of the population categorised within this category, and also to the extent to which students from middle class backgrounds attend universities in GB or ROI. There are gender differences in terms of progression and achievement and females predominantly remain within the education cycle for longer (Field and Spence, 1999). It has also been noted that, in comparison with England, a relatively high proportion of Vocational Qualifications (VQs) are gained at further education colleges rather than in the workplace (T&EA, 1996); this finding tends to emphasise the importance of access to colleges for career progression. Participation rates in further education, for 16 and 17 year olds however, have only increased slightly in the last decade (from 27.0% to 27.8% between 1991/2 and 1999/2000 (Compendium of Northern Ireland Education Statistics – 1987/88 To 1999/2000) suggesting that the role of the colleges in offering opportunities for career and educational progression may not be fully recognised. The relative dearth of information in the public domain regarding participation of the two communities in further and higher education suggests that there is a case for making this information more fully available. Osborne (2001) has, however, pointed to the different profiles of Catholic and Protestant entrants to the N.I. universities in terms of the higher proportion of Catholic entrants (43%) from manual backgrounds compared with Protestant entrants (27%), citing (ibid:55) "Survey evidence collected during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s".
- 1.6 To date, however, there have been relatively few studies of third level education in Northern Ireland. An overview by Armstrong (1997) provides some contextualisation of participation (or non-participation) in

FE in Northern Ireland, taking into account the gender, religious and socio-economic background of young people on the verge of entering post-compulsory full-time education. Determining influences include the depressive impact of high levels of unemployment and the performance in and of schools themselves.

- 1.7 The study highlights that progression is related to a combination of factors which include: where one lives and the school one attends - in addition to religion, gender and socio-economic status - amounting to a "cultural" explanation of differential participation rates. Geographical location would also seem to interact with religion. Educational participation tends to be slightly higher amongst young Catholics, although only in some areas of Northern Ireland, while in general urban areas, such as Belfast and Londonderry, consistently have the lowest rates of educational participation (Armstrong, 1997: 13). Armstrong also notes that having parents employed in non-manual occupations has a positive "attitudinal" effect upon participation (Armstrong, 1997: iv).
- 1.8 Armstrong's study also considers the influence of gender and religion on educational participation. His basic findings were that female students were more likely to progress, as were Catholics, although the differences in participation by gender are significantly greater than the differences by religion. In attempting to explain why, in particular, Catholic females educationally progress, Armstrong utilises a "discouraged worker" explanation. In the face of difficulties in securing employment, it is argued that these students feel that they need "extra" qualifications in order to compete effectively in the labour market (1997: 21-23). The impact of parental economic activity on progression is also felt to be significant, although indirectly, in terms of influence on GCSE performance.
- 1.9 Furthermore, because there also seems to be a transfer of relatively poor educational standards between successive generations, suggesting a cyclical conception of non-participation, Morris and McMahon argue that socio-economic status is "strongly determinant of educational opportunity and success". Citing a study by the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, they identify unemployment

and poverty as "the greatest barriers to learning and the major causes of educational disadvantage, north and south" (1998: 69).

## **Rationale for current study**

- 1.10 The need to address these issues is recognised in the current research, and particularly within the context of New Targeting Social Need (NTSN) and its focus on social inclusion. At all stages of the current project, the "cultural" dimension of cross-community disparity in further and higher education participation in both communities is explored (cf. Cairns et al, 2000).

## **Description of current study**

- 1.11 The current study involves assessing the attitudes of a large sample of Year 12 pupils from a representative cross section of schools in relation to further education (FE) and university, from the points of view of the pupils themselves, their parents and their careers teachers. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used, which combined pupil questionnaires, teacher interviews, parent interviews and pupil focus groups.

## **Pilot study**

- 1.12 The current research is based on a pilot study which was carried out by Cairns et al (2000) to facilitate the construction and testing of research instruments and to provide further information relating to the context of pupil choice in respect of progression to further and higher education. The subject groups of the pilot study consisted of pupils currently involved in deciding upon their educational future, i.e. 15 and 16 year olds, and significant others who were influential in determining their futures, i.e. parents and careers teachers. Respondents were located in four secondary schools representing the Controlled and Maintained sectors.

## **The Belfast Education and Library Board**

- 1.13 The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) area was chosen as the sampling base in the current study primarily because of its high

density of population thus enabling the participation of a wide cross section of schools of different management types and drawing from different communities. There are a total of thirty-nine schools in the Board spread across North, South, East and West Belfast, with one located in the Newtownabbey area, comprising of one comprehensive, seventeen grammar and twenty-one secondary schools. A breakdown of the schools' FSM levels, progression and performance rates is available in Appendix 1. The pupils in the BELB area are served by two further and higher education institutes and a further education college. The Queen's University is situated in Belfast as is the Belfast campus of the University of Ulster. The Jordanstown campus of the University of Ulster is located in Newtownabbey. While colleges of further and higher education make returns to the Department of Employment and Further and Higher Education in relation to community affiliation, information in relation to individual colleges is not made available; information on the distribution of the communities across the colleges in the sector is currently not available to the public therefore. Of the thirty-nine schools under BELB control, twenty-one were selected to participate in the current study, eight from the grammar and thirteen from the secondary sector.

## **NTSN**

- 1.14 New TSN policy aims to ensure that Government programmes are effective in both identifying and targeting those people and areas in the greatest need within our society. Policy-makers now have an evidential basis for monitoring and reviewing attitudes towards participation in the further education system and a means of ensuring that resources are being targeted at communities and individuals who may have been previously excluded from participation. Moreover, school and college managers also have information to assist marketing and distribution of services and address excluded populations.

## **Aims and objectives**

- 1.15 The recommendations of this project aim to contribute to New TSN policies in terms of investigating why different communities react to policy and provision in different ways, in relation to the distribution of further and higher educational opportunities and possibilities for

progression. It is believed that the study will serve as a basis for mapping the demography of inter-communal division and contribute to the development of strategies to ensure the effective targeting of educational resources.

1.16 The aims of the current study are therefore, to assess pupils' attitudes towards, and perceptions of, further education and university and also to identify and assess factors and entities which influence the formation of these attitudes, with a view to determining the effects on participation rates in further and higher education. The specific objectives are:

- To establish the extent of geodemographic disparity in access to further and higher education across schools in the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) area;
- To identify zones of geodemographic disparity in relation to non-progression;
- To discover reasons for pupils' intentions and aspirations in respect of progression to further and higher education;
- To highlight the cultural, social and economic factors affecting male and female pupils in relation to participation in further and higher education;
- To provide empirical evidence to enhance the delivery of educational services through informing policy-makers, college managers, careers teachers/advisors and practitioners;
- To provide recommendations aimed at alleviating geodemographic disparity and enhancing the life chances of pupils;
- To assess and develop relevant indicators with the potential for measuring/ mapping change in attitudes to and perceptions of participation in FHE on a longitudinal basis.

## **2.0 Methodology**

2.1 Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were utilised in order to meet the aims and objectives of the current study. In this instance a three-phase approach was followed and each phase is detailed below.

### **Phase One**

#### Sampling

2.2 The Department of Education supplied a database which contained information on the uptake of Free School Meals (FSM), performance and progression rates of schools within the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB). Thirty-nine schools in the BELB were identified from the database, classified on the basis of their ranking with regard to the three broad bands of each of the sampling variables, i.e., high, medium and low FSM; high, medium and low Progression Rates and high, medium and low School Performance rates. Stratified sampling was applied, with schools selected first in terms of FSM, followed by school progression rates and finally in terms of school performance. The target number of schools was achieved for the quantitative phase, with 21 schools participating in the current study. The breakdown of schools in the sample in terms of the stratifying variables is detailed in tables 1-3. The absence of schools in categories presented in tables 1-3 can be accounted for through the non-participation of schools in the study. These represented the various school management types (Controlled, RC Maintained, Voluntary, Grant Maintained Integrated), school type (secondary/grammar), FSM level, performance and progression rates.

**Tables 1-3: Breakdown of sample by FSM, progression and performance**

<b>FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM)</b>								
High (8)								
<b>Progression to FE</b>								
Low (3)			Medium (2)			High (3)		
<b>School Performance</b>			<b>School Performance</b>			<b>School Performance</b>		
Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
2	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	0

**Table 2**

<b>FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM)</b>					
Medium (8)					
<b>Progression to FE</b>					
Low (3)		Medium (4)		High (1)	
<b>School Performance</b>		<b>School Performance</b>		<b>School Performance</b>	
Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
3	0	2	2	0	1

**Table 3**

<b>FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM)</b>					
Low (5)					
<b>Progression to FE</b>					
Low (1)		Medium (1)		High (3)	
<b>School Performance</b>		<b>School Performance</b>		<b>School Performance</b>	
Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
0	1	1	0	1	2

2.3 The broad categories of low, medium and high FSM, performance and progression were used to classify all schools prior to sampling. These broad categories were derived from the continuous variables provided by the Department of Education. Categories were based on the 33.33 and 66.66 percentiles of each distribution, and then each continuous variable was recoded (i.e. collapsed) in terms of the derived cut-off points.

## Phase Two

### Pupil questionnaire

- 2.4 The pupil questionnaire in the current study (see Appendix 2) was used to measure pupils' attitudes to Further and Higher Education, as well as the influence of significant others on their decision making processes. Based on the findings of the pilot study (Cairns et al, 2000), the questionnaire was subsequently modified to better suit the needs of the current research. For example, where the relevance or comprehension of particular items was in question, these were either removed altogether or reworded for clarity. The questionnaire was divided into four parts: about yourself; future career intentions; attitudes towards learning; attitudes to further education college and university.
- 2.5 In each school, two year 12 classes were selected, representing where possible, "intermediate" and "lower" streams within the year group. The questionnaire was administered within each school by the researchers. A total of 753 pupil questionnaires were completed and used in the final analyses. Responses were collated and analysed using SPSS.

### Analysis of pupil questionnaire

- 2.6 The data are explored in relation to pupils' intentions (aspirations) which are classified into four groups: "University only"; "FE only"; "None" or "Both". Where possible, variables are considered at more than bivariate level.
- 2.7 The first phase of the analysis uses the biographical data to explore associations between one's educational aspirations and factors such as socio-economic status (socioeconomic status was designated according to the categories used in the General Household Survey (1998-1999)), religion, gender, parental set-up (lone or otherwise), and employment status of parent(s).
- 2.8 Diversity across the aspirational groups is then explored in terms of school variables such as FSM, progression and performance rates, using multivariate analysis of variance. Group differences are then

explored in terms of school management type and school type (i.e., grammar or secondary) using Chi-square tests.

- 2.9 Salient questionnaire items are then utilised to explore the extent of influence of 'important others' (e.g., peers, parents and teachers), as well as investigating pupils' attitudes to education. Chi-square tests are again used for this analysis. For example, the association between friends having attended/intending to attend some form of post-16 education and pupil aspiration is expected to give some measure of peer influence. Familial influences such as family participation in post-16 education as well as the predominance of parental discussions (and teacher discussions) about further and higher education are also examined.
- 2.10 Attitudes to education are explored using those items from the pupil questionnaire which are considered to bear the most relevance to the outcome of this study. These are considered in terms of pupil aspirations and are also explored with reference to other factors such as gender, religion, parental set-up and parental employment status. Items included are: 'Education is the most important thing in my life right now'; 'Further education is not for me'; 'I like to go out to work as soon as possible'; 'My parent(s)/guardian(s) would like me to go out to work as soon as possible'; 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of my academic ability'; 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of getting on with others'; and 'I do better at school than my friends'.
- 2.11 The geodemographic aspect of progression was assessed, in part, through exploring pupils' aspirational choice by their postcode (postcodes were truncated to the first four characters). In addition, an index was developed to take account of the impact of a school in an area and the relationship between an individual's postcode, the school they attend and aspirational choice. The high density of postcode areas within the city and its suburban fringe enabled the construction of a postcode index designed to indicate the proximity of fifth form pupils' households with their chosen school (see Appendix 6 for the postcode distribution of each school). This index, based on postcode areas, indicates the strength of community association with a given school. It

ranges from 0 (low community association) to 100 (where all the sampled households are in the same postcode area as the school).

- 2.12 The household proximity index is based on a simple points scheme. If the household is in the same postal area as the school it is awarded 3 points, if it is in an adjacent postal area it is awarded 2 points, if it is beyond the adjacent postal area but within the city limits it is awarded 1 point and, finally, if the household is outside the city limits it gets 0 (zero) points. The points are calculated for each household and summed to give a total number of points for a given school. This total is averaged per household and normalised by a factor of 1/3. The latter normalisation is based on the assumption that if all the households are in the same postcode area as the school then the average number of points per household will be 3 which must be normalised to 1 as the optimal proximity.

For example, consider

School name	Postcode	Adjacent codes	(Associated Household Codes)
1230262	BT12	1, 2, 7, 9, 11, 13, 17	1 in (BT5), 2 in (BT11), 16 in (BT12), 2 in (BT17)
Calculation of points	Points	Number of households	Postcode Index
$1(1)+2(2)+16(3)+2(2)=57$	57	$1+2+16+2=21$	Index = $(57 \div (3 \times 21))100 = 90$

- 2.13 Finally, a multinomial logistic regression was used to identify profiling variables (predictors), such as FSM, HPI, gender, pupils attitudes, influences etc., underlying pupils' aspirational choice.

#### Careers teachers interviews

- 2.14 A further element of phase two involved surveying careers teachers in each of the sampled schools. An interview schedule was devised (see Appendix 3) and administered via telephone by the researchers. These interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 20 and 50 minutes. A total of 20 out of 21 careers teachers participated in this phase of the project. The interviews covered the following areas: personal details; pupils' perceptions/intentions; influence of school location.

### Analysis of careers teachers interviews

2.15 The responses to all interviews were collated and analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to explore a number of pertinent themes arising from the questions asked during the careers teachers' interviews. These included: careers advice offered, the school's relationship with further education colleges and universities, progression rates to further or higher education, barriers to progression, gender differences in progression, the role of parents and addressing barriers.

## **Phase Three**

### Focus groups

2.16 Focus groups were conducted in 9 of the 21 sampled schools and were chosen in an attempt to provide a relevant cross section of the different rates of progression (i.e. low (4); medium (4); high (1)), however participation was on a purely voluntary basis which accounted for the discrepancy in numbers. Each focus group consisted of an average of 8 pupils and it was requested that these people were among those who had previously completed the questionnaire. Group discussions took place in the relevant schools and lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. Discussion was structured around the following topics: future career intentions, post GCSE plans, study culture, further education college and university. The discussion was conducted by one of the researchers, while a colleague recorded pupils' responses (see Appendix 4 for focus group schedule).

### Parent interviews

2.17 The final stage in the research was the interviewing of 50 parents. Parents were selected via pupils' nominations in the initial questionnaire. An interview schedule (see Appendix 5) was devised and administered by the researchers, covering the following areas: about yourself; future career plans; attitudes towards learning; attitudes to further education and university.

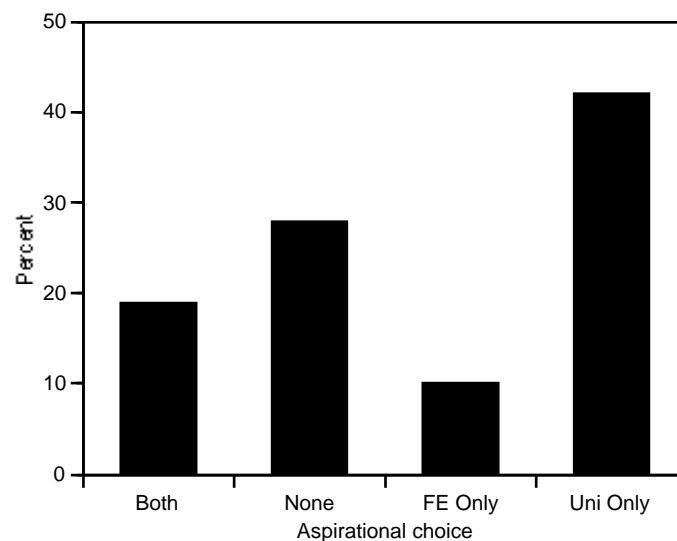
## 3.0 Results

### Pupils' Aspirational Choices

3.1 Based on information collated from the pupil questionnaire, the sample was subsequently divided into the following 4 groups:

- Both – those who express an interest in progressing to FE college and university (19%; N=144);
- None – those who express no interest in progressing to post-16 education (27%; N=203);
- FE only – those who wish to go to FE college only (11%; N=81); and
- University only – those who want to go to university only (43%; N=325).

**Figure 1: Pupils aspirational choices**



### Biographical variables

3.2 Pupils' biographical data was utilised in the current study in order to ascertain whether or not there are any associations between certain data and pupils' aspirations to progress (or not) to post-16 education. The variables explored are SES, Gender, Religion, Parental setup and Parental working status.







- 3.9 There is also a significant association for male Catholics and Protestants who live with one parent as opposed to both ( $X^2=9.381$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<.05$ ;  $V=.3$ ). Protestants in this group are more likely to express an interest in going to 'Both' or 'None', while Catholics are more likely to choose 'FE only' or 'University only'.

### **Parental setup and Parental employment status**

- 3.10 The association between parental setup, parental employment status and post-16 educational aspirations is also explored here. For those living with both parents, where both parents work, there is a higher than expected number of pupils who choose 'University only' compared with parental setups where one or none work or occupation is not stated. However, where pupils have not stated their parent(s) occupation(s) there is a greater likelihood that they will belong to the non-progressing group. The association between these variables is again significant ( $X^2=55.145$ ;  $df=9$ ;  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.186$ ).
- 3.11 Significant associations between aspirations and working status of parents are also found for those living with one parent ( $X^2=21.618$ ;  $df=9$ ;  $p<.05$ ;  $V=.206$ ). In this setup, those who have not stated parental occupation have a greater than expected chance of choosing 'FE only' or 'None' as their post-16 educational choice. However, some of the respondents volunteered both parents' occupations even though it is not known from the data which particular parent they live with. Notably, there are a greater than expected number of pupils in this parental category who choose 'University only'.

### **School variables**

- 3.12 The school variables chosen for analysis in the current study are FSM, School Performance rates and Progression rates. Management type and school type are also explored. Figure 6 shows the mean values for FSM, performance and progression as they relate to the pupils' aspirational choices. The variables of FSM, school performance and progression are treated as continuous for the analysis.







- 3.20 Protestant females at secondary school are more likely to choose 'None' or 'FE only', while Catholic females are more inclined to choose 'Both' or 'University only' ( $X^2=25.536$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.393$ ).
- 3.21 At grammar school level, there are no significant differences between Catholic and Protestant males, however, Catholic females are more likely to choose 'University only' and Protestant females tend to choose 'Both'.

### **School type and Parental setup**

- 3.22 Those at grammar school who live with both parents are more likely to choose 'Both' or 'University only'. Those at secondary school living with both parents who are more likely to choose 'None' or 'FE only' ( $X^2=151.641$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.524$ ).
- 3.23 Grammar school pupils currently living with one parent tend to choose 'University only' while those in secondary school from one parent backgrounds are more likely to choose 'FE only', 'None' or 'Both' ( $X^2=44.844$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.502$ ).

### **Key findings**

#### **Biographical data**

- 3.24 Nineteen percent of the sample choose 'Both' as their option for future education, while 27% choose 'None', and 11% choose 'FE only'. The largest proportion of respondents (43%) choose 'University only'.
- 3.25 More Catholics than Protestants choose 'University only' while more Protestants than Catholics choose 'None', 'Both' or 'FE only'.
- 3.26 Females are more likely than males to choose 'Both', 'FE only' and 'University only'. Males are more likely to choose 'None'.
- 3.27 Protestant females are more likely to choose 'Both', 'None' or 'FE only' while Catholic females are more likely to choose 'University only'.

- 3.28 Female Protestants who live with both parents are more likely to choose 'FE only', 'Both' or 'None' whereas female Catholics living with both parents are more likely to choose 'University only'.
- 3.29 Male Protestants from one parent families are more inclined to choose 'None' or 'Both' while Catholic males from one parent backgrounds are more likely to choose 'FE only' or 'University only'.
- 3.30 Those who live with both parents, where both parents work choose 'University only' more often than those where none or one parent works or where parental occupation is not stated.
- 3.31 Those who do not state parent(s) occupation(s) are more likely to choose 'None'.
- 3.32 There is a greater than expected number choosing 'University only' who live with one parent, but have stated both parents' occupations.

### **School variables**

- 3.33 In RC Maintained and Controlled schools there are higher numbers who choose 'None' compared to voluntary and Grant Maintained Integrated.
- 3.34 Voluntary schools are represented by larger than expected numbers choosing 'University only' compared to RC Maintained and Controlled.
- 3.35 Males in all school management types are more likely than females to choose 'None', however, the differential is greater in Controlled and RC Maintained schools.
- 3.36 Grammar school pupils are more likely to choose 'Both' or 'University only' compared to secondary school pupils who are more likely to choose 'FE only' or 'None'.
- 3.37 Males in secondary schools are more likely than females to choose 'None', while females in secondary schools are more likely than males to choose 'FE only'.



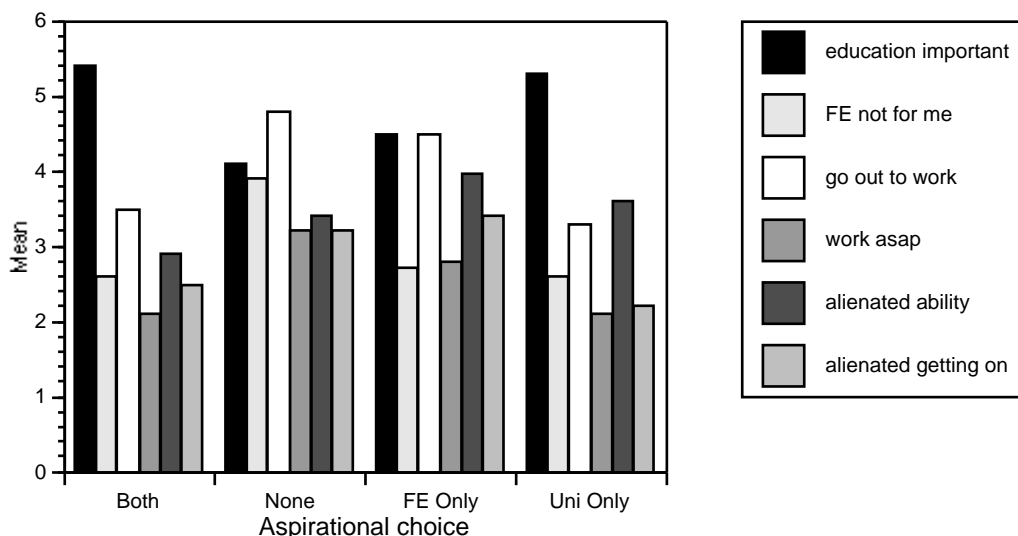


## Attitudes to education

3.42 A number of items were selected from the questionnaire which explored pupils' attitudes to education. The attitudinal items were rated by pupils on a 7-point Likert scale in terms of how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statements detailed below:

- 'Education is the most important thing in my life right now'
- 'Further education is not for me'
- 'I would like to go out to work as soon as possible'
- 'My parent(s)/guardian(s) would like me to go out to work as soon as possible'
- 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of my academic ability'
- 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of getting on with others'

**Figure 9: Mean score for attitudinal items for each group in terms of pupil aspirations**



3.43 A multivariate analysis of variance found that there are significant differences between the four aspiring groups across all of the attitudinal items selected for analysis ( $F=10.788$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Significant differences emerge between the four aspiring groups for each individual item.

- 3.44 Responses to the item 'education is the most important thing in my life right now' show that pupils who aspire to go to both further education and university agree more strongly with this statement than pupils who do not want to progress anywhere ( $p < .05$ ) and those who intend to progress to further education only ( $p < .05$ ). Similarly, pupils who want to go to university only agree that 'education is the most important thing in their life right now', more than pupils in the 'FE only' ( $p < .05$ ) and 'None' group ( $p < .05$ ).
- 3.45 Significant differences are found between pupils not wanting to progress to further or higher education and respondents in the other three groups: 'FE only' ( $p < .05$ ), 'University only' ( $p < .05$ ) and those wanting to go to 'Both' ( $p < .05$ ). The greatest mean difference is observed between the 'None' and the 'Both' groups for this item.
- 3.46 Pupils were asked for their opinion on going out to work. It emerges that pupils who do not want to progress in education differ significantly in their opinion than those who want to go to 'University only' or both further education and university ( $p < .05$ ). Pupils in the 'None' category agree more strongly that they want to go out to work as soon as possible than respondents in either the 'University only' or 'Both' groups. No significant difference is noted in the opinions of pupils in the 'FE only' and 'None' group, in terms of wanting to go out to work as soon as possible.
- 3.47 Further explorations reveal a significant association between parental set-up (living with one parent or two) and wanting to go out to work as soon as possible ( $X^2 = 50.962$ ;  $df=6$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $V = .218$ ). A larger number than expected in both the 'None' and 'FE only' groups who live with both parents want to go out to work in the near future. Similarly, pupils from one parent households, in these two groups, are also more likely to say they want to go out to work than pupils in the 'Both' and 'University only' groups ( $X^2 = 13.519$ ;  $df=6$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $V = .198$ ).
- 3.48 Similar findings emerge for the item 'my parents want me to go out to work as soon as possible', with the attitudes of pupils in the 'None' category being significantly different to the other three aspiring groups ( $p < .05$ ). Pupils who do not want to progress to either further or higher education, agree more strongly that their parents want them to go out

to work as soon as possible, than pupils in the 'FE only', 'University only' and 'Both' groups.

- 3.49 A significant association is observed between parental employment status and pupils reporting that their parents want them to go out to work as soon as possible ( $X^2 = 24.205$ ;  $df=6$ ,  $p<.001$ ; Cramer's  $V=.129$ ). Pupils whose parents don't work or occupation is not stated, are more likely to agree with the statement that 'their parents want them to go out to work as soon as possible', whereas in households where both parents work, pupils are least likely to agree with this statement. In addition, a significant association emerges between parental set-up (living with one parent or two) and this item ( $X^2 = 7.263$ ;  $df=2$ ,  $p<.05$ ;  $V=.101$ ). The findings indicate that pupils in two parent households, whose parents want them to go to work as soon as possible, are more likely to choose 'None', while pupils from one parent families, where the parent wants them to go out to work are most likely to select 'None' or 'FE only'.
- 3.50 Further explorations in terms of pupils' aspirational choice indicate a significant association between parental employment status and intention to progress ( $X^2 = 41.285$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.197$ ). Despite the fact that both parents work, pupils in the 'None' category are more likely to agree that their parents want them to go out to work in the near future.
- 3.51 Responses to the item 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of my ability' reveal a significant difference between pupils in the 'None', 'University only' and 'Both' groups ( $p<.05$ ). Pupils who do not want to progress are more likely to agree with this statement than pupils who express an intention to progress to 'University only' or both further education or university. In comparison, no significant difference is found between pupils in the 'None' and 'FE only' groups, although a higher mean score is observed for pupils wanting to go to 'FE only' than those not wanting to progress at all in education.
- 3.52 A significant association emerges between gender, intention to progress and the item 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of my ability' ( $X^2 = 40.892$ ;  $df=6$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.250$ ). Males in the

'None' and 'FE only' categories are more likely to report feeling alienated because of their ability.

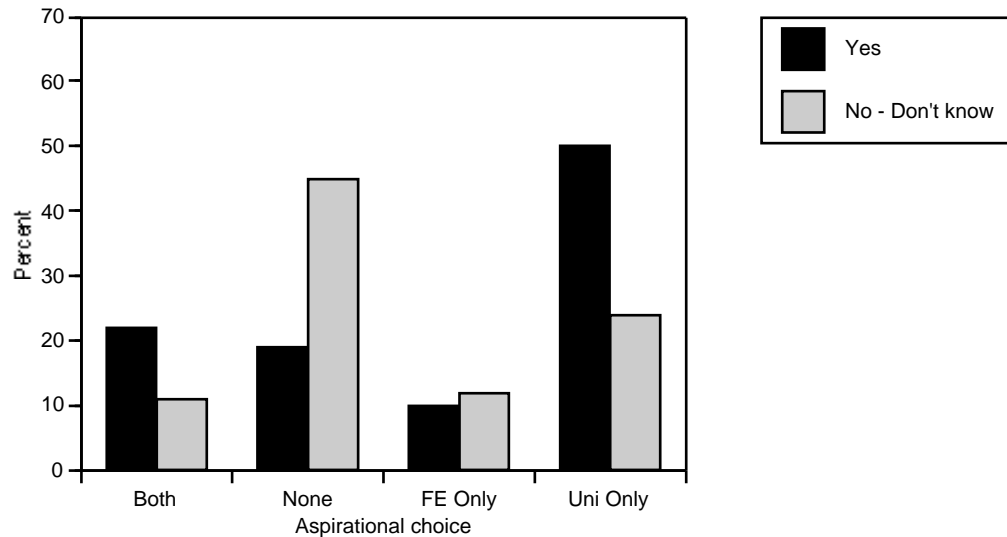
- 3.53 A similar pattern of results emerges for the item 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of getting on with others'. Significant differences emerge between pupils in the 'None', 'University only' and 'Both' groups ( $p < .05$ ) as respondents in the 'None' group agree more strongly with this statement than pupils in the 'University only' and 'Both' groups. Similar to the previous item, a higher mean score is observed for pupils wanting to go to 'FE only' compared to pupils not wanting to progress anywhere, although the difference between the groups is not significant.
- 3.54 Gender differences are also observed for the item 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of getting on with others' with regard to intention to progress ( $X^2 = 24.735$ ;  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $V = .195$ ), with males in the 'None' and 'FE only' categories more likely to report feelings of alienation. There is though less of an association for this item, than the previous item, 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of my ability'.

### **Influences in progression**

- 3.55 Possible influences in pupils' intentions to progress are examined through their responses to a number of questions on the questionnaire. Analysis for this section focused on the following:
- The number of pupils who have friends attending further or higher education;
  - The number of pupils who have friends intending to go to further or higher education;
  - The number of pupils who have had family members who attended further or higher education;
  - The number of pupils who have a career choice in mind;
  - Sources of information pupils availed of in terms of making a career choice.

## Family at further or higher education

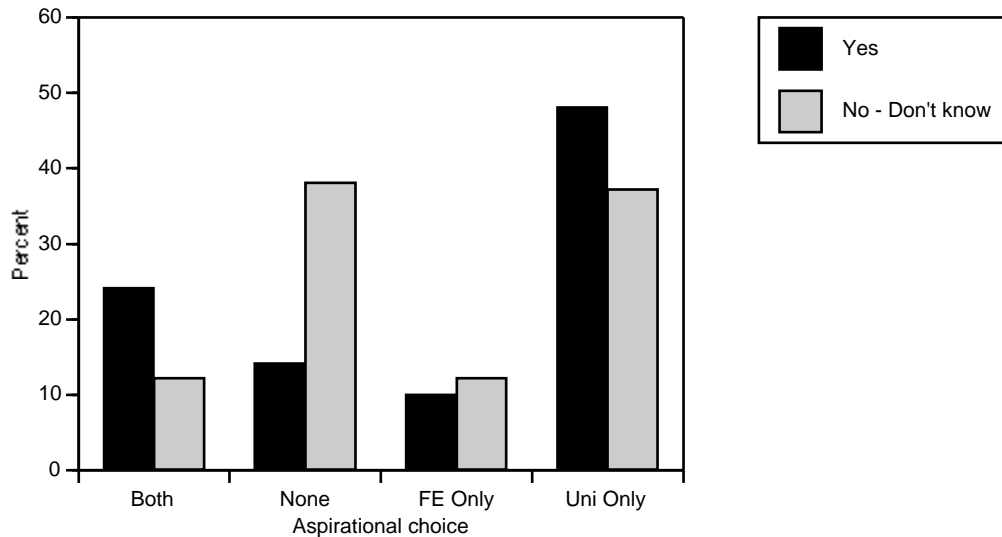
**Figure 10: Pupils with family members who have attended further or higher education in terms of aspirational choice**



3.56 Pupils were asked if family had attended further or higher education. A significant association between family members who progressed to further or higher education and aspirational choice is observed ( $X^2 = 75.153$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.316$ ). Those individuals who would like to progress to 'University only' or 'Both', are about 60% more likely to have family who attended some form of further or higher education. Additional analysis indicates that males who have family that progressed, are still more likely to select 'None' as their aspirational choice ( $X^2 = 22.719$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.206$ ). Furthermore, females who do not have family who attended further or higher education, are more likely than males to choose 'Both', 'FE only' or 'University only' ( $X^2 = 12.615$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p<.01$ ;  $V=.234$ ).

## Friends at further or higher education

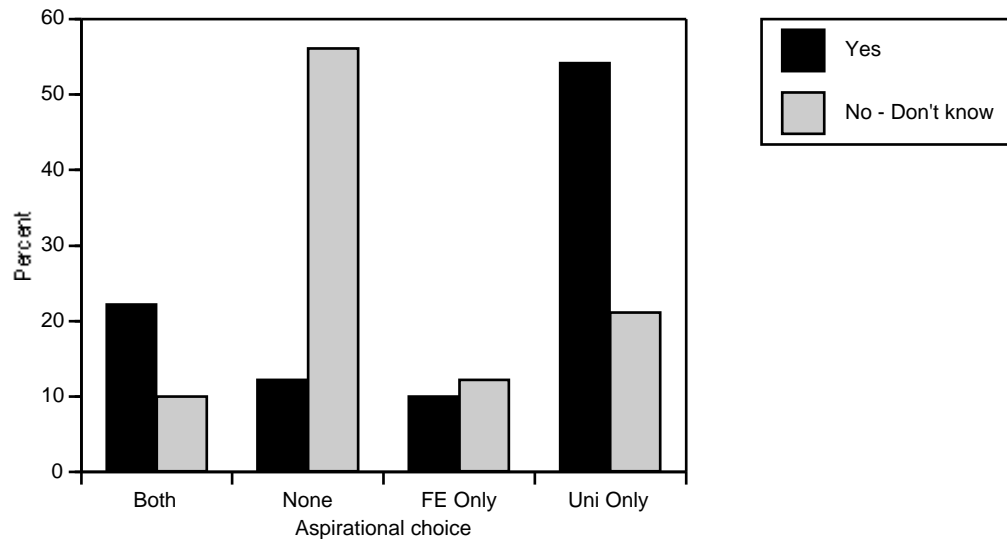
**Figure 11: Pupils with friends at further or higher education and aspirational choice**



3.57 A significant association is observed between the four aspiring groups and whether pupils in these groups have friends who have attended either further education college or university ( $X^2 = 55.329$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.274$ ). Pupils in the 'Both' or 'University only' groups have more friends that attended further education or university. Additional analysis shows a significant association between gender, aspirational choice and friends who have attended further education or university ( $X^2 = 10.851$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p<.05$ ;  $V=.166$ ). Males who have friends in further or higher education are more likely to select 'None' than females. There is also a greater likelihood of females who have friends that progressed, to choose 'Both' or 'FE only'. Furthermore, females are still more likely to select 'Both', 'FE only' and 'University only' than males, even though they report not having friends who progressed to further or higher education ( $X^2 = 24.397$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.260$ ).

## Friends intending to go to further or higher education

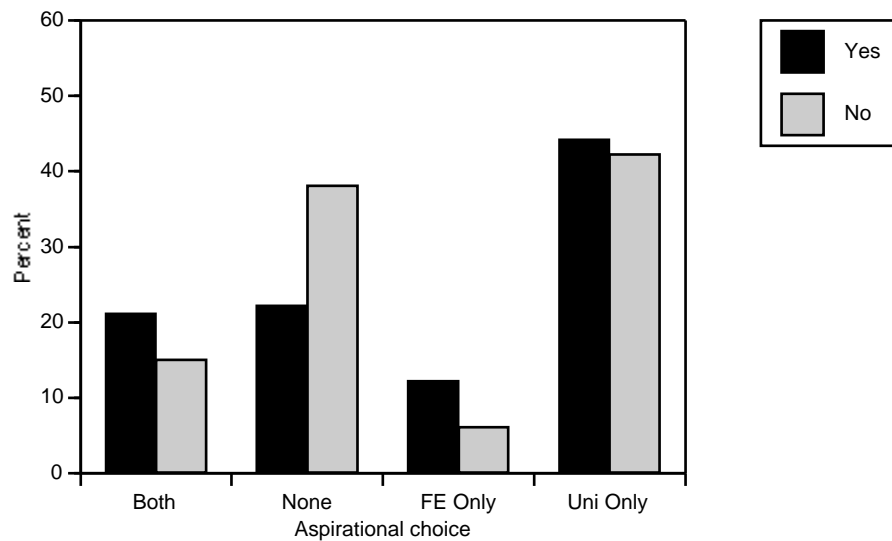
**Figure 12: Pupils with friends intending to go to further education and aspirational choice**



- 3.58 A significant association emerges between friends' intentions to progress to further education college or university and the pupils' own aspirations to progress ( $X^2 = 164.317$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $V = .477$ ). The results reveal that a greater number of pupils in the 'Both' and 'University only' groups, have friends who want to progress to further education or university, than respondents in either the 'None' or 'FE only' groups.
- 3.59 Further explorations reveal a significant association between gender, aspirational choice and friends intending to progress to further education or university ( $X^2 = 9.613$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $V = .122$ ). Males who have friends intending to go to further education or university are more likely to choose 'None' than females. In comparison, females who have friends intending to progress, are more likely than males to select 'Both' or 'FE only'. Males whose friends hope to go to further education or university are more likely to choose 'University only' than females. In addition, a significant association was found between friends not intending to go, gender and aspirational choice ( $X^2 = 17.007$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $V = .267$ ). Females who do not have friends intending to progress, are still more likely to choose either 'Both' or 'FE only', than males.

## Career in mind

Figure 13: Career choice in mind and pupils' aspirational choice



3.60 Pupils were asked if they had a possible career in mind after leaving school. The results highlight a significant association between the four aspiring groups and whether the pupils in the groups have a possible career in mind ( $X^2 = 17.469$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $V = .157$ ). A greater number of pupils in the 'Both', 'FE only' and 'University only' have a career in mind than pupils in the 'None' group, with females more likely to be thinking of a possible career than males ( $X^2 = 4.373$ ;  $df=1$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $V = .071$ ). Further examination of the data shows a significant association between gender, aspirational choice and having a career in mind ( $X^2 = 29.568$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $V = .245$ ). Males in the 'None' group are more likely than females in this group to have a career or job in mind, while females, more than males in the 'Both', 'FE only' and 'University only' have considered what career to follow after leaving school.

## Discussions about further or higher education

3.61 Information about post-16 education is explored as pupils were asked if their parents and teachers provided information about opportunities available to them after Year 12. A significant association emerges between discussion with parents regarding post-16 opportunities and pupils' aspirations to progress

## **Parents discussed further education**

- 3.62 Those whose parents have discussed FE college with them are more likely to choose 'Both' or 'FE only', while those whose parents have not discussed FE college with them are more likely to choose 'None' or 'University only' ( $X^2=18.781$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.0.180$ ).

## **Parents discussed University**

- 3.63 Where parents have discussed university with their children, there is a greater likelihood that these children will subsequently choose 'Both' or 'University only', whereas when pupils have not discussed university with their parents they are more likely to opt for 'None' or 'FE only' ( $X^2=70.308$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<.05$ ;  $V=.343$ ).

## **Teachers discussed FE college**

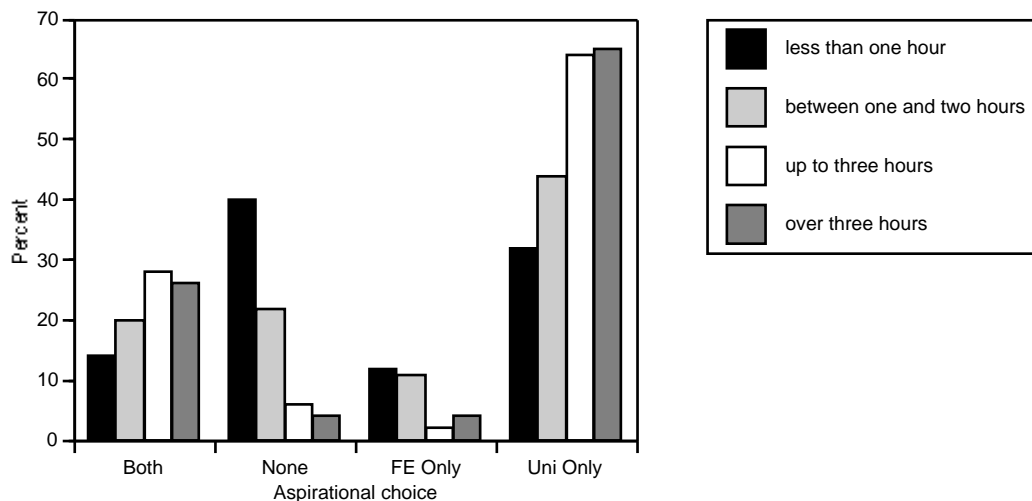
- 3.64 Similarly, when asked if teachers discussed post-16 education or opportunities, there is a significant association between teacher discussions and pupils' aspirations. Where teachers have discussed FE college with their pupils the findings are very similar to those for parents in that, those pupils whose teachers have discussed it with them are more likely than not to choose 'Both' or 'FE only', while those with whom it has not been discussed are more likely than not to choose 'None' or 'University only' ( $X^2=20.215$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<.005$ ;  $V=.125$ ).
- 3.65 Furthermore, there is a greater likelihood that those whose teachers have discussed university with them emanate from the 'Both' and 'University only' groups, while those with whom it has not been discussed are more likely to come from the 'None' and 'FE only' groups ( $X^2=36.852$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.239$ ).





- 3.70 A significant association is observed between gender and amount of time reportedly spent on homework ( $X^2 = 49.911$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $V = .288$ ). Females are more likely to report spending longer periods of time on homework, while a larger number of males spend less amounts of time on homework.
- 3.71 In terms of aspirations, pupils in the 'None' and 'FE only' groups are found to spend less than one hour compared to the 'Both' and 'University only' groups ( $X^2 = 78.986$ ;  $df=9$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $V = .189$ ). Males in the 'None' group are more likely to spend less than one hour on homework than females in the same group ( $X^2 = 11.741$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $V = .213$ ).

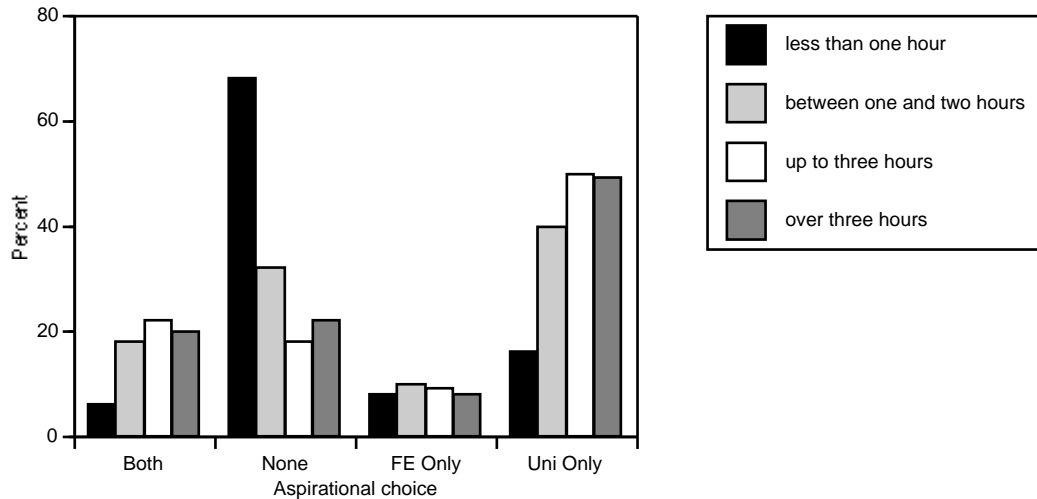
**Figure 16: Time spent on homework in terms of pupil aspirations.**



- 3.72 Pupils were asked how much homework they believe teachers expect them to do. A significant association emerges between pupil aspirations and the amount of time they believe teachers expect them to spend on homework ( $X^2 = 33.141$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $V = .211$ ). Pupils who believe teachers expect between one and two hours homework a night or less than one hour, are more likely to select 'None' or 'FE only'. In comparison, pupils who report teachers expecting more time to be spent on homework, are more likely to be in the 'University only' or 'Both' groups.
- 3.73 Females are more likely to believe that a greater amount of homework is expected by teachers, while males tend to believe that teachers

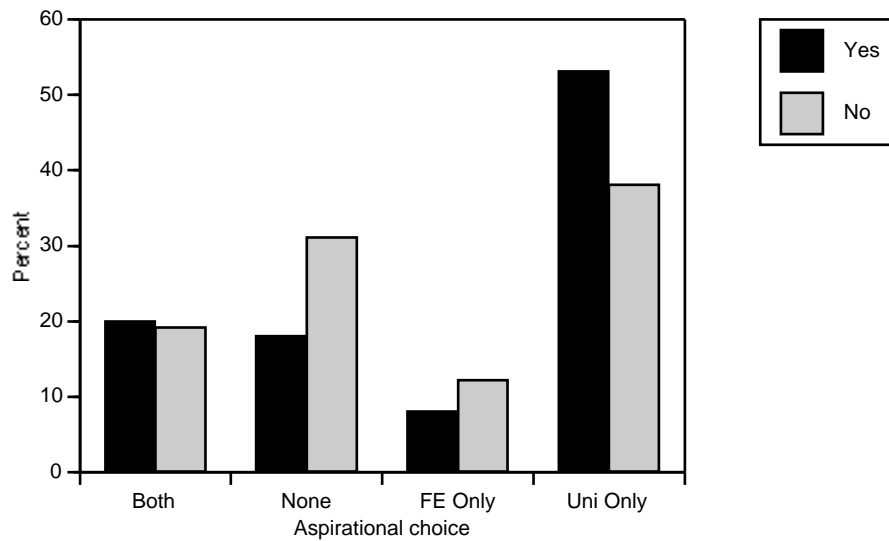
expected less time to be spent on homework ( $X^2 = 83.415$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.335$ ).

**Figure 17: Pupils' perception of homework expected by teachers in terms of aspirational choice.**



- 3.74 Further explorations reveal a significant association between gender, aspirational choice and teachers expectations of homework ( $X^2 = 13.279$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p<.01$ ;  $V=.187$ ). There is a greater likelihood that males who report that teachers want pupils to spend small periods of time on homework, will be from the 'None ' and ' FE only' groups. Similarly, females who believe teachers expect less time to be spent doing homework are more likely to be from the 'None' and 'FE only' groups. Additional analysis highlights a non significant trend between pupils who report they feel alienated because of their ability and amount of homework done. Pupils who feel more alienated because of their ability spend less time on homework, while those who do not have concerns about ability spend longer periods doing homework.
- 3.75 Involvement in groups at school is explored in terms of pupils' aspirational choices. A significant association is found between pupils' intention to progress and reported involvement in school activities ( $X^2 = 22.486$ ;  $df=3$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $V=.176$ ). Pupils involved in groups at school are more likely to want to progress to both university or further education or university only. A significant effect of gender is observed ( $X^2 = 6.268$ ;  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$ ;  $V=.093$ ), with females more likely to be involved in group activities than males.

**Figure 18: Pupil involvement in school groups and aspirational choice**



3.76 Furthermore, males taking part in school activities are more likely to be in the 'Both', 'FE only' and 'University only' groups than the 'None' group, while females involved in school groups want to progress to 'University only'. Additional explorations reveal a significant association between amount of homework done by pupils and involvement in school activities ( $X^2 = 4.418$ ;  $df=1$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $V = .081$ ).

## Geographical location

3.77 A significant association emerges between where an individual lives, in terms of postcode, and their aspirations with regard to further education ( $X^2 = 106.486$ ;  $df=30$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $V = .240$ ) (Table 4). The postcodes represented in the sample include: 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 15, 17 and 36. In terms of distribution of aspirational choice within the postcodes, pupils from BT13 are more likely to choose 'None', while pupils from BT4, 6, 11 and 36, have a greater likelihood of selecting 'University only'. Pupils from BT5, on the other hand, tend to choose 'Both', while pupils from BT8 are more likely to choose 'FE only' or 'University only'. Those pupils who are equally likely to be in the 'Both' and 'University only' groups, in this case emanate from BT17. The findings also reveal that pupils living in BT14 are more likely to select 'None' or 'University only', while pupils travelling from BT15 are mainly in the 'None' or 'FE only' groups.

**Table 4: Pupil location and aspirational choice**

<b>Postcode(s)</b>	<b>Aspirational choice(s) most likely to be represented by this postcode</b>
BT13	'None'
BT5	'Both'
BT4, 6, 11, 36	'University only'
BT8	'Both' or 'FE only'
BT17	'Both' or 'University only'
BT14	'None' or 'University only'
BT15	'None' or 'FE only'

## **Household Proximity Index**

3.78 The results from the previous section refer to the distribution of pupil choice about progression by postcode, i.e., pupils' aspirational choice in terms of where pupils come from. This may be useful in identifying possible pockets of non-progression however it does not take into account the impact of a school in an area and the relationship between an individual's postcode, the school they attend and aspirational choice. HPI, as explained in the Methodology, addresses this relationship and analyses involving pupil aspirational choice is detailed below. An association between HPI and one's future aspirations also emerges from the analysis ( $F=52.175$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p<.001$ ). For example, those who want to go to 'Both' are more likely to live further away from school than those who choose 'None' ( $p<.001$ ), or 'FE only' ( $p<.001$ ), while there is no significant difference between the 'Both' group and those wanting to go to 'University only'. However, those in the 'None' and 'FE only' groups are significantly more likely to live closer to school than those in the 'University only' group ( $p<.001$ ).

## **Key findings**

### *Attitudes to education*

3.79 Pupils in the 'FE only' and 'None' groups are less likely to agree that 'education is the most important thing in my life right now', in comparison to pupils in the 'Both' and 'University only' groups who agreed more strongly with this statement.

- 3.80 Pupils in the 'None' group agree more strongly that they want to go out to work as soon as possible, than respondents in either the 'University only' or 'Both' groups, regardless of parental setup.
- 3.81 Pupils in the 'None' and 'FE only' groups who live with either both parents or one parent are more likely want to go out to work in the near future than the 'University only' or 'Both' groups.
- 3.82 Pupils who do not want to progress to either further or higher education, agree more strongly that their parents want them to go out to work as soon as possible.
- 3.83 Pupils in two parent households, whose parents want them to go to work as soon as possible, are more likely to choose 'None'.
- 3.84 Pupils from one parent families, where the parent want them to go out to work are most likely to select 'None' or 'FE only', compared to 'University only' or 'Both' groups.
- 3.85 Pupils in the 'None' group are more likely to state they feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of their ability.
- 3.86 Males in the 'None' and 'FE only' categories are more likely to report feeling alienated because of their ability, compared to males in the 'Both' or 'University only' groups.
- 3.87 Pupils in the 'None' group, agree more strongly with the statement 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of getting on with others' than pupils in the 'University only' and 'Both' groups.
- 3.88 Males in the 'None' group, agree more strongly with the statement; 'I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of getting on with others' than males in the 'University only' and 'Both' groups.

#### *Influences on progression*

- 3.89 Pupils wanting to progress to 'University only' or 'Both', are about 60% more likely to have family who have attended further or higher education.

- 3.90 For pupils with family who progressed in education, males are more likely than females to choose 'None'.
- 3.91 Pupils in the 'Both' or 'University only' groups have more friends that attended further education or university, than the 'FE only' or 'None' groups.
- 3.92 Females are more likely to select 'Both', 'FE only' and 'University only' than males, even though they report not having friends who progressed to further or higher education.
- 3.93 A greater percentage of pupils in the 'Both' and 'University only' groups have friends who want to progress to further education college or university, than respondents in either the 'None' or 'FE only' groups.
- 3.94 A greater percentage of pupils in the 'Both', 'FE only' and 'University only' have a career in mind, compared to pupils in the 'None' group.
- 3.95 Pupils whose parents have discussed FE college, are more likely to choose 'Both' or 'FE only'. Similar results are found for teacher discussions about further education.
- 3.96 Those with whom FE college has not been discussed, are more likely to choose 'None' or 'University only'. The same pattern of results emerges for pupils who report teachers not discussing FE college with them.
- 3.97 Pupils are more likely to choose 'Both' or 'University only' if university has been discussed with them by their parents. If not, they are more likely to choose 'None' or 'FE only'.
- 3.98 Pupils in the 'None' group access fewer sources of information than pupils in the 'FE only', 'Both' and 'University only' groups.
- 3.99 In terms of internet access, pupils in secondary schools who have unrestricted access are more likely to choose 'Both' or 'University only' than those with restricted or no access.

- 3.100 Pupils with restricted access to the internet are more likely to choose 'FE only', while respondents with no access to the internet are more likely to choose 'None'.
- 3.101 Pupils in the 'Both' and 'University only' groups are more likely than not to have internet access at home, while those in the 'FE only' and 'None' groups are more likely not to have the internet at home.
- 3.102 Females are more likely to report spending longer periods of time on homework, while a larger percentage of males spend less amounts of time on homework.
- 3.103 Pupils in the 'None' and 'FE only' groups are more likely to spend less than one hour on homework in comparison to the 'Both' and 'University only' groups, who on average spend more than three hours per night.
- 3.104 Males in the 'None' group are more likely to spend less time on homework than females in the same group.
- 3.105 Pupils who believe teachers expect between one and two hours or less than one hour spent on homework per night, are more likely to select 'None' or 'FE only'. In comparison, greater teacher expectations in terms of time spent on homework, were more likely to stem from the 'University only' or 'Both' groups.
- 3.106 A non significant trend indicated that less time is spent on homework by pupils who report feeling alienated because of their ability, while those who do not express concerns about their ability, spend longer periods doing homework.
- 3.107 Pupils involved in school activities at are more likely to want to progress to 'Both' or 'University only'.
- 3.108 Males taking part in school activities are more likely to be represented in the 'Both', 'FE only' and 'University only' groups than the 'None' group, while females involved in school groups want to progress to 'University only'.

- 3.109 There is a significant association between where individuals live in terms of their postcodes, and pupil aspirational choice.
- 3.110 Pupils in the 'None' and 'FE only' groups are significantly more likely to live closer to school than pupils in the 'Both' and 'University only' group, in terms of their Household Proximity Score.

## The Multinomial Logistic Regression Model

- 3.111 In this section a number of geo-demographic characteristics and school related indices are considered, together with the influences on, and the attitudes held by pupils. The aim is to explore and describe the relative influence of these variables, and how they may collectively impact on pupils' decision to progress (or otherwise) to further and higher education. To determine the collective impact of these characteristics a multinomial logistic regression analysis was performed.
- 3.112 Multinomial logistic regression can be used to assess the effectiveness of a range of variables in terms of how well they perform in predicting a set of outcomes. The model seeks to identify those predictor variables that are effective in terms of classifying participants into the outcome categories/groups. It is similar to the linear regression model but is suited to models where the dependent/outcome variable is categorical, as in the current study where the outcome variable is pupil choice – i.e. whether pupils wish to proceed to '*University only*', '*FE only*', '*Both*' or '*None*'.
- 3.113 Following exploratory data analysis, and with reference to the analyses detailed earlier and previous research, a number of predictor variables were considered in the multinomial logistic regression model. The predictor variables are best considered under the following headings (these categories played no role in the statistical model, but are solely an aid to explanation/interpretation):
- **School Indices** – which included *Free School Meals Index*; *School Performance Index* and the *School Management type* (RC Maintained, Controlled, Voluntary or Integrated)

- **Geo-demographic Indices** – which included Pupil's Gender (male, female), Religion (Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Other); *Socio-economic status* (collapsed into Upper, Intermediate and Lower) and the *Household Proximity Index* (see Methodology section)
  
- **Pupils' Attitude/Opinions/Perceptions** – which consisted of the following statements (and to which pupils responded using a seven-point Likert scale from 'disagree strongly' through to 'agree strongly') '*Education is the most important thing in my life right now*'; '*Further education is not for me*'; '*I would rather be in employment than continue with my education*'; '*I feel alienated from the entire education system in terms of my academic ability*'; and '*I do better at school than my friends*'
  
- **Influences** – which comprised the statement '*I feel pressure from my friends to go out after school*'; and a variable, which contained information on the number of sources the respondent had used to gather information about the range of courses/qualifications available '*sources*'; and finally, whether the respondent's *friends are intending to go to further and higher education*.

3.114 The above predictor variables were entered into the multinomial logistic regression model. The resulting goodness-of-fit statistic ( $X^2 = 1594.14$ ,  $p = 0.978$ ) indicated that the model provided a sufficient description of the data. The variance accounted for in pupil choice (i.e. the four outcome categories) was moderate, with a Nagelkerke pseudo R-square of approximately 55%. In relation to how well the predictor variables performed in terms of classifying the participants into the four outcome measures (i.e. correct prediction rates), the results varied, with classification into the 'University only' category having a success rate of 91%; the 'FE only' classification was 34% correct; the 'Both' category was approximately only 17% correctly classified and the 'None' category had a 65% success rate. The overall successful prediction rate across all four categories was approximately 64% correct.

3.115 It would appear therefore that the model is unimpressive in relation to its performance in classifying the participants into the 'Both' group, but perhaps one reason for this is that characteristics associated with the

'Both' group can also be found in the 'University only' and the 'FE only' groups. From these results it would seem however, that the model performs well in terms of correctly classifying participants into the 'University only' grouping and the 'None' group.

Table 5 gives the 'Likelihood Ratio tests', which indicate the extent to which each of the predictor variables contributes to the model.

**Table 5: Likelihood Ratio Tests**

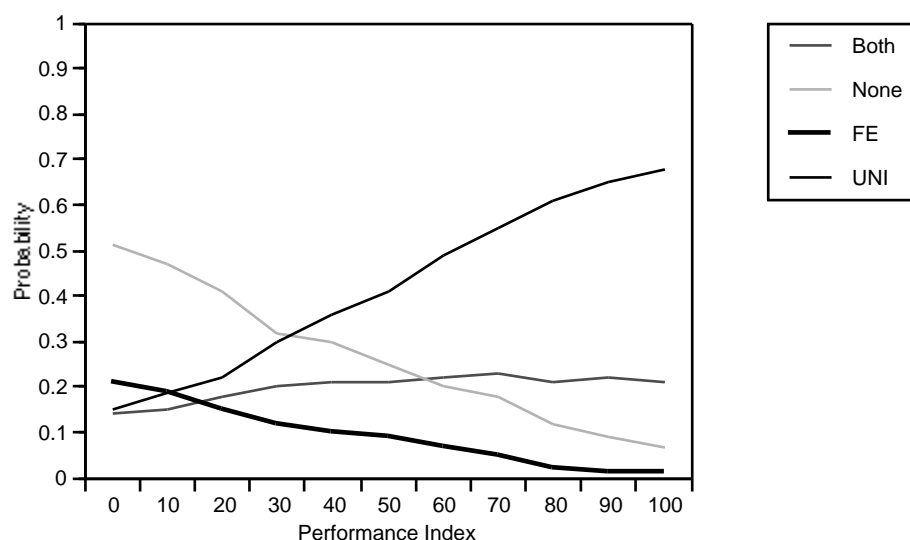
Effect	-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	1055.531	.000	0	.
<b>School Indices:</b>				
Free Schools Meals Index	1056.140	.609	3	.894
School Performance Index	1071.876	16.346	3	.001
School management	1075.783	20.252	9	.016
Geo-demographic:				
Household Proximity Index	1069.290	13.759	3	.003
Gender	1071.256	15.725	3	.001
Religion	1060.412	4.881	3	.181
SES (broad)	1062.730	7.199	6	.303
<b>Attitudes/Opinions:</b>				
'Education most important...'	1067.346	11.815	3	.008
'Further education not for me'	1065.817	10.286	3	.016
'Would rather be in employment'	1066.557	11.027	3	.012
'...alienated from the education system...'	1070.091	14.560	3	.002
'I do better at school than my friends'	1063.369	7.838	3	.049
<b>Influences:</b>				
Career decision	1066.704	11.173	3	.011
'...feel pressure from my friends...'	1064.935	9.405	3	.024
'Sources of information'	1063.430	7.900	3	.048
Friends intend to go to FHE	1065.488	9.957	3	.019

3.116 It is evident from the information in Table 5 that most of the variables included in the model contribute significantly in terms of their predictive power. The exceptions are the Free School Meals Index, Religion and parents' Socio-economic status, all of which are non-significant. While it might be expected that such predictors would be significant in regard

to educational progression, it should be noted that other variables in the model may capture the variance attributable to such variables. For example, it is well established that school performance is correlated highly with free school meals (approximately  $r = -0.91$  for the current sample). Consequently, variance across the outcome measures in terms of free school meals may be accounted for primarily in terms of the School Performance Index. Likewise, the Religion and the SES variance may be captured parsimoniously by the School Management predictor. It should also be noted that the model does not include any interaction terms, but only main effects. While a number of interactions were explored, the explanatory power of the model did not benefit substantially from their inclusion and they were subsequently discarded for the sake of simplicity of approach.

3.117 For brevity and ease of presentation the parameter estimates (betas, Wald statistics and significance values etc.) associated with the significant predictors are relegated to the appendices and substituted here by a number of derived graphical representations which depict the predicted probabilities obtained from the model. It should be noted however, that while the graphs facilitate explanation and interpretation, calculations are based on their corresponding subpopulation.

**Figure 19: The School Performance Index**



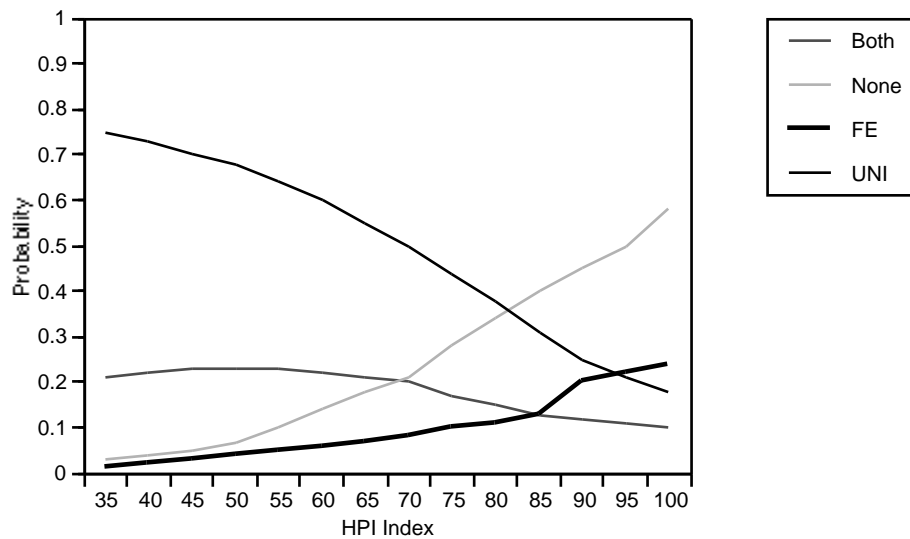
3.118 Figure 19 shows the distribution of responses for the School Performance Index across the four aspirational groups. It is evident from this graph that pupil choice is in part a function of their schools



categories. The probabilities for Controlled and Maintained schools appear fairly stable across the four categories. Some caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the information in Figure 20 since one set of the predicted probabilities are based on a small number of respondents, namely the Integrated School management type, which had thirty only.

3.120 The predicted probabilities for the Household Proximity index (HPI) are given in Figure 21. The HPI indicates that for those participants from schools with a low index score, the greater the relative probability that these participants will attend university; this estimate gradually decreases as the index increases. Conversely, the probability of choosing 'None', increases as HPI increases. This index appears to perform well in terms of profiling and distinguishing the groupings.

**Figure 21: The Household Proximity Index (HPI)**

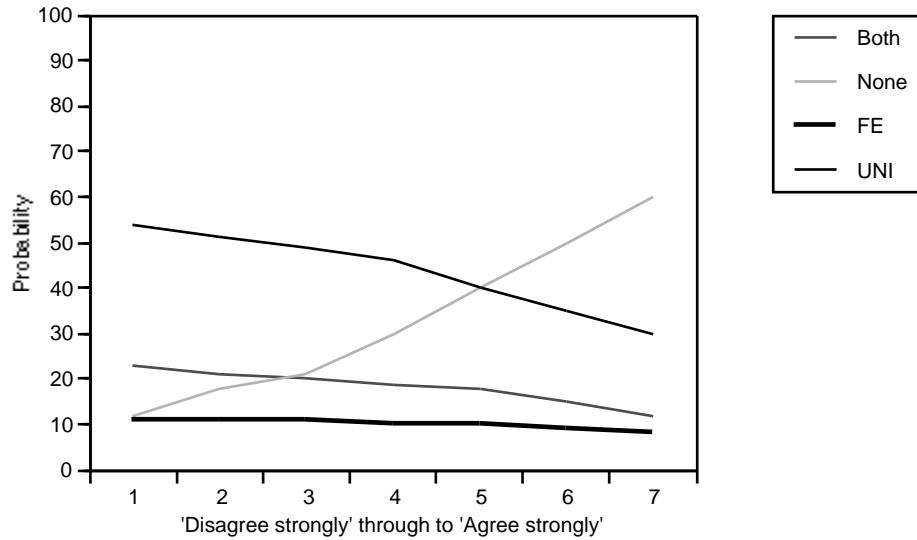


3.121 Figure 22 provides information in relation to Gender. It is evident from this figure that across the categories of 'Both', 'FE only' and 'University only', females appear to be more likely to progress to further and higher education than males. It is only within the 'None' option that males are likely to appear more frequently.



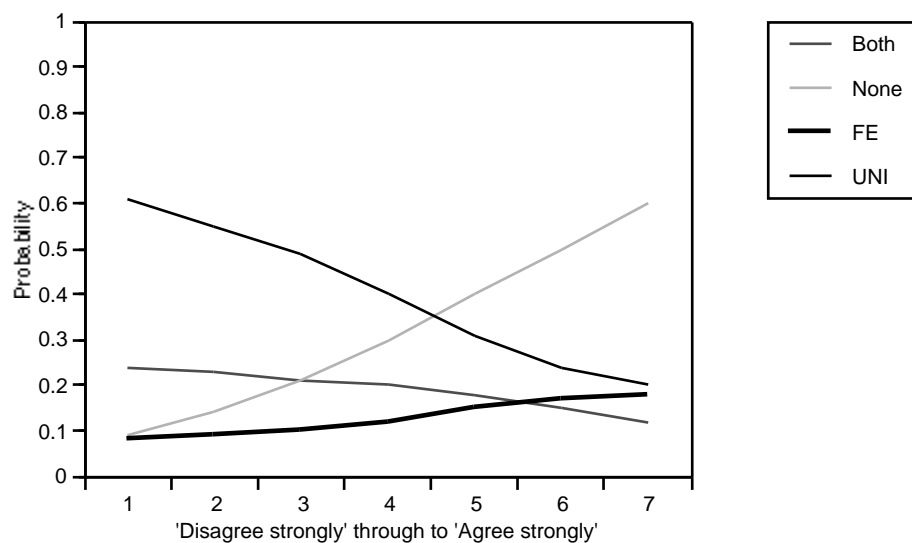
for the 'None' group, with the majority favouring the 'Agree' response and this tails off steeply towards the disagree pole.

**Figure 24: Attitude: 'Further education is not for me'**



3.124 Figure 25 gives the distributions for participants relating to the statement 'I would rather be in employment than continue my education'. Interestingly, the predicted probabilities in Figure 25 are rather similar to those displayed in Figure 24. These results suggest that the 'None' group within this sample would rather discontinue their educational progression and seek employment.

**Figure 25: Attitude: 'I would rather be in employment than continue my education'**

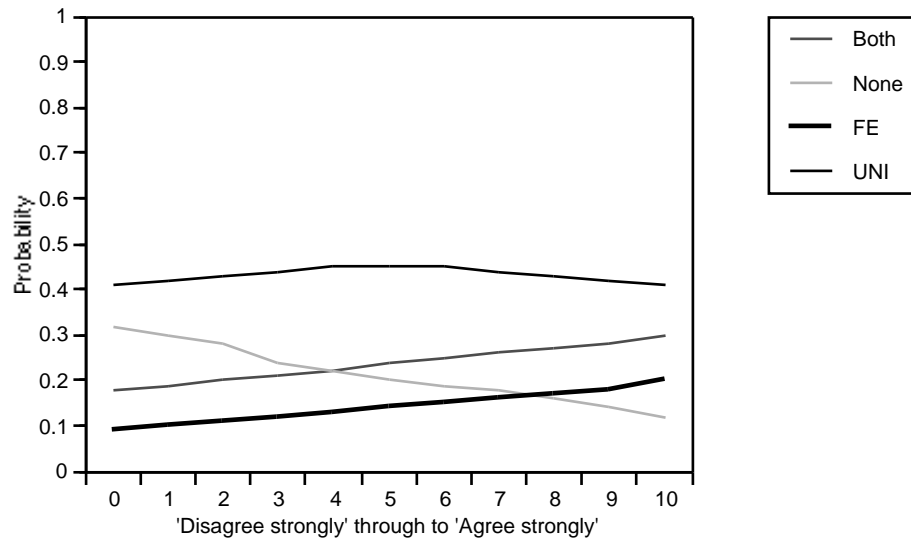






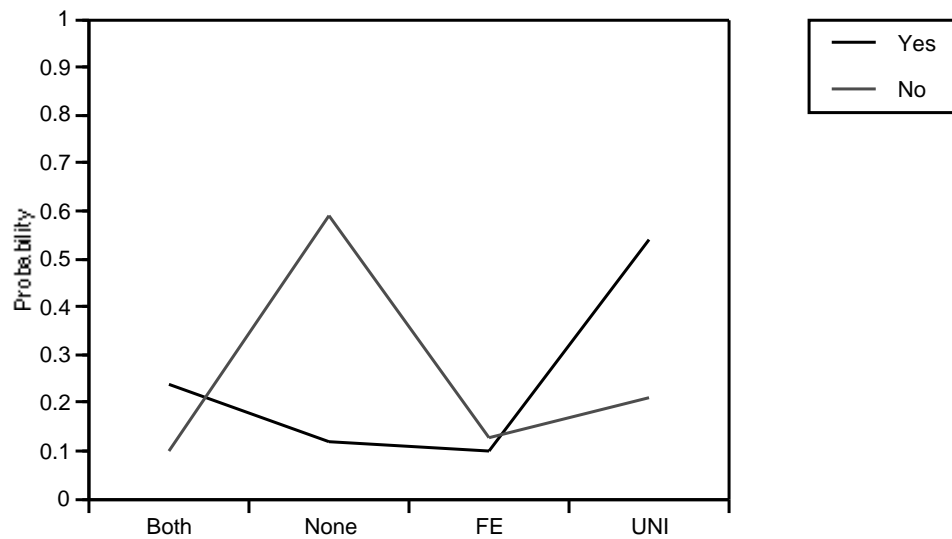
3.129 Figure 30 provides information on the number of sources of information about qualifications, which participants received. The proportion for those participants who wish to proceed to university remains relatively constant, while both the 'FE only' and 'Both' groups rise slightly. In contrast the 'None' group appear to assess the least number of sources of information regarding qualifications.

**Figure 30: Number of Sources of Information about Qualifications**



3.130 Figure 31 displays the predicted probabilities for participants whose friends intend to go to further education across the four groups. From the graph it is evident that for those participants who wish to proceed to university, a substantial number of their friends also intend to progress to university. Similarly, the predicted probabilities associated with the 'None' group also suggests that individuals who do not wish to progress have friends of the same inclination. For the 'FE only' group there is little difference between those participants whose friends intend to go to further education, i.e. this outcome is almost equally probable. Similar to the 'University only' group, the 'Both' group are more likely to have friends who intend to proceed.

**Figure 31: Friends intend to go to further education**



## Conclusion

3.131 It is evident from the multinomial logistic regression model that variables such as FSM, religion and parent's socioeconomic status, do not contribute significantly in predicting pupils' aspirational choice. Variables which contributed significantly to the model included: school performance rates, school management type, Household Proximity Index score (HPI), gender, pupil attitudes, having made a career decision and friends intending to go to further education.

3.132 The information detailed in this section identifies a number of differences and similarities across the four groups in relation to the predictor variables identified in the multinomial logistic regression model. This information, and indeed the modelling process, highlights the collective impact of a number of hard and soft indices, which contribute to pupils' decisions to progress (or not) to further and/or higher education. This analytic process is of substantive utility since it describes pupils' experiences, influences and perceptions both within and outside the school environment.

## Careers Teachers Interviews

3.133 The careers teachers' interviews were designed to obtain opinions from professionals with direct experience of working with pupils who are

currently thinking about progressing to further education college and/or university. A total of 20 out of a possible 21 teachers responded.

3.134 Regarding the personal characteristics of these individuals, a 50/50 gender balance was achieved. Most of these professionals were also departmental heads – of careers – although in 7 cases, teachers were also involved in the delivery of other subjects, e.g. maths, history or science. A breakdown of school management type is shown in Table 6 below.

**Table 6: Management type of schools by gender and school type**

Management Type	Gender	School Type
CONTROLLED 1	BOYS'	SECONDARY
CONTROLLED 2	BOYS'	SECONDARY
CONTROLLED 3	CO-ED	SECONDARY
CONTROLLED 4	GIRLS'	SECONDARY
CONTROLLED 5	CO-ED	SECONDARY
CONTROLLED 6	CO-ED	SECONDARY
CONTROLLED 7	CO-ED	GRAMMAR
GRANT MAINTAINED INTEGRATED (GMI)	CO-ED	SECONDARY
RC MAINTAINED 1 (RCM 1)	BOYS'	SECONDARY
RC MAINTAINED 2 (RCM 2)	BOYS'	SECONDARY
RC MAINTAINED 3 (RCM 3)	BOYS'	SECONDARY
RC MAINTAINED 4 (RCM 4)	GIRLS'	SECONDARY
RC MAINTAINED 5 (RCM 5)	BOYS'	SECONDARY
RC MAINTAINED 6 (RCM 6)	GIRLS'	SECONDARY
VOLUNTARY 1	CO-ED	GRAMMAR
VOLUNTARY 2	GIRLS'	GRAMMAR
VOLUNTARY 3	GIRLS'	GRAMMAR
VOLUNTARY 4	GIRLS'	GRAMMAR
VOLUNTARY 5	BOYS'	GRAMMAR
VOLUNTARY 6	BOYS'	GRAMMAR

### Careers advice at school

3.135 When asked how pupils access careers advice, it is found that in 8 schools, teachers "send for the pupil", while in 9 schools, pupils

generally seek advice. There are "regular time-tabled sessions" in 15 schools, while only 4 schools have "a single session supported by an appointments scheme".

3.136 With regard to the actual advice giving procedure, a number of schools comment that a T&EA careers officer interviews each individual year 12 pupil during the course of the year (RCM 1, RCM 2, Voluntary 3, Controlled 4, GMI, Controlled 5, Voluntary 6 and RCM 5). At RCM 1 there are also proposals for a purpose-designed facility, with "open available resources to all". Voluntary 3 pupils access careers advice via Odyssey computer software, along with a class interview with a year tutor. Voluntary 4 runs a 10-week careers module; pupils in this school are also able to ask for an interview, with imminent leavers selected for individual interviews.

3.137 A number of possible procedural improvements are suggested. While one teacher indicated that pupils would benefit from an increase in the number of time-tabled sessions, another would like to encourage as many pupils as possible to progress to sixth form, but recognises that this path is "not always the best option". He would also like to have time in school solely for interviewing one-to-one. RCM 3 believes that careers advice should begin earlier. It is also felt that they "should get the culture sorted out" and that the "problem", regarding non-progression, is with the "black economy/welfare society" of people "always getting [things] without effort". Another teacher also highlights the fact that help from the T&EA has stopped.

3.138 Issues discussed most often with Year 12 pupils include: A levels, GNVQ's, career opportunities from further education college, personal and social issues and the college environment, while issues such as transportation are discussed less frequently.

### **Awareness of Further Education college and university**

3.139 When asked how they think their Year 12 pupils view FE college, 11 of the 20 careers teachers believe that pupils view further education 'Very positively'. Other responses range from 'Fairly negatively' to 'Don't know'. Some of the more specific comments include:

"Some think it is somewhere they can go and doss, not as much pressure as school" (Controlled 1).

"More focused pupils see it more positively" (Controlled 1).

- 3.140 Teachers were also asked whether Year 12 pupils are aware of the location of their local FE college: 19 out of 20 responded affirmatively. Other issues probed include: awareness about qualifications needed to access local FE college (17 teachers), awareness about the range of courses at FE college (15 teachers), awareness about qualifications available at FE college (15 teachers) and transport to and from these colleges (8 teachers).
- 3.141 Teachers were also questioned as to their Year 12 pupils' awareness of university. A total of 15 teachers believe that their Year 12 pupils are aware of the location of the local universities, and of the qualifications required in order to access them. Twelve teachers indicate that these particular pupils know about the range of courses/qualifications available at most universities, although only 3 teachers think they would be aware of transport to and from these universities.

### **School relationships with further education college and university**

- 3.142 Three quarters of schools surveyed are "frequently involved" with further education colleges in terms of information provision (12 secondary schools, 3 grammar schools), and 11 schools "frequently involved" in terms of careers advice (9 secondary and 2 grammar schools). In comparison, 10 secondary schools state that they rarely visit local colleges, although 9 attend college open days. Overall, it appears that grammar schools are less involved with further education colleges than secondary schools.
- 3.143 A number of colleges visit schools to give talks once a year and many students from the schools attend further education college open days. Eight out of the 20 schools are "frequently" involved with universities as regards information provision, while 2 are "never" involved. Contact or involvement with local universities includes visits once a year from university personnel or visits to open days at Queen's and 7 the

University of Ulster. Voluntary 4 believes that although university information is too "glossy" - magazines and posters upon which there is "too much money spent" - "contacts have improved greatly over the years". RCM 5 thinks not overloading pupils with information is important, while Voluntary 6 believes that more "frequent" access to universities throughout the year, rather than one open day, would improve contacts between schools and universities. RCM 4 believes that people tend to think solely of the link between universities and grammar schools, rather than secondaries, and that universities could raise the profile of GNVQ: "University of Ulster already do this but Queen's aren't interested".

### **Progression rates to Further Education College**

- 3.144 When giving an indication of the percentage of Year 12 pupils intending to progress to further education college, generally lower numbers of grammar school pupils, compared to secondary school pupils, are thought to be interested in progressing to further education college.
- 3.145 At RCM 2, it is thought that 50% of pupils are intent on progressing to further education college. Controlled 4 believe it "very difficult to assess [numbers progressing], as pupils change their minds when GCSE results become available. It also depends on individual years". Of the Year 12 pupils not intending to progress to further education college, careers teachers suggest that they are most likely to go back to school to do A levels, get a job, undertake Jobskills training or apprenticeships.
- 3.146 The most often named further education colleges for possible progression are BIFHE, Castlereagh and East Antrim Institute.
- 3.147 The majority of careers teachers indicate that in the main, pupils considered Queen's University and the University of Ulster to be their Year 12 pupils' most likely choice of university. Controlled 3 indicates that pupils in this school would generally not progress to university. At RCM 2, pupils are normally informed regarding university opportunities in "England", as "requirements are less demanding", although according to Controlled 6, "a lot of pupils don't want to go to a UK university for financial reasons". Results also suggest that pupils not























































less likely to have friends who have attended further or higher education, or to have friends intending to pursue further or higher education progression. Gender differences emerge with regard to family who have attended a further education college or university, males still being more likely than females to select 'None' despite this being the case. It would appear that the prior experiences of family members acts to discourage pupils in the non-progressing group from selecting further education, higher education or both as a post-16 option. Additionally, pupils in the 'None' group were less likely to access different sources of information with regards making a career choice, than the other aspirational groups. However, it was also found that those in the 'None' group were more likely to not have internet access compared to the other groups who are likely to have some form of access. Furthermore, it is pupils in the 'None' and 'FE only' groups who are less likely than the 'Both' and 'University only' groups to have the internet at home. It may be that less information is available to them, thereby reducing the availability of resources that might help inform their decision.





## Appendix 1

Breakdown of schools by their FSM level, progression and performance rates, management type, gender type and school type.

FSM	PROG	PERF	MANAGEMENT TYPE	SCHOOL TYPE	GENDER
HIGH	LOW	LOW	RCMAINTAINED	SECONDARY	BOYS
HIGH	LOW	LOW	CONTROLLED	SECONDARY	CO-ED
HIGH	LOW	MED	RC MAINTAINED	SECONDARY	CO-ED
HIGH	LOW	MED	RC MAINTAINED	SECONDARY	CO-ED
HIGH	LOW	MED	CONTROLLED	SECONDARY	CO-ED
HIGH	LOW	HIGH	RCMAINTAINED	SECONDARY	BOYS
HIGH	HIGH	LOW	CONTROLLED	SECONDARY	CO-ED
HIGH	MED	LOW	RCMAINTAINED	SECONDARY	GIRLS
HIGH	MED	MED	RCMAINTAINED	SECONDARY	GIRLS
HIGH	HIGH	LOW	RCMAINTAINED	SECONDARY	BOYS
HIGH	HIGH	MED	RCMAINTAINED	SECONDARY	BOYS
HIGH	HIGH	MED	RCMAINTAINED	SECONDARY	GIRLS
HIGH	HIGH	MED	RC MAINTAINED	SECONDARY	GIRL
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	OTHER MAINTAINED	SECONDARY	CO-ED
MED	LOW	LOW	CONTROLLED	SECONDARY	BOYS
MED	LOW	LOW	CONTROLLED	SECONDARY	CO-ED
MED	LOW	LOW	CONTROLLED	SECONDARY	BOYS
MED	LOW	HIGH	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	CO-ED
MED	MED	LOW	GRANTMAINTAINED INTEGRATED	SECONDARY	CO-ED
MED	MED	LOW	CONTROLLED	SECONDARY	GIRLS
MED	MED	LOW	RC MAINTAINED	SECONDARY	BOYS
MED	MED	HIGH	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	BOYS
MED	MED	HIGH	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	GIRLS
MED	HIGH	LOW	CONTROLLED	SECONDARY	GIRLS
MED	HIGH	LOW	RC MAINTAINED	SECONDARY	GIRLS
MED	HIGH	LOW	RC MAINTAINED	SECONDARY	GIRLS
MED	HIGH	HIGH	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	BOYS
LOW	LOW	LOW	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	GIRLS
LOW	LOW	LOW	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	CO-ED
LOW	LOW	HIGH	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	GIRLS
LOW	LOW	HIGH	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	CO-ED
LOW	MED	LOW	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	GIRLS
LOW	MED	LOW	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	GIRLS
LOW	MED	HIGH	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	GIRLS
LOW	MED	HIGH	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	GIRLS
LOW	HIGH	LOW	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	BOYS
LOW	HIGH	LOW	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	BOYS
LOW	HIGH	LOW	CONTROLLED	GRAMMAR	COED
LOW	HIGH	HIGH	CONTROLLED	GRAMMAR	CO-ED
LOW	HIGH	HIGH	VOLUNTARY	GRAMMAR	BOYS

**UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER**

*School of Education  
Further and Higher Education Research Unit*

**Attitudes to Further and Higher Education Questionnaire**

The University of Ulster is currently conducting a survey of attitudes to further and higher education with pupils in the Belfast Education and Library Board area.

This questionnaire is designed to provide information on issues such as pupils' future career intentions and educational plans.

We would be grateful if you could provide responses to the following questions. Please read through the questionnaire carefully and if you have any queries, please ask the researcher for help.

**ALL RESPONSES WILL BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL**

Thank you for your co-operation.





2b. **How strong an influence would you say the following things had in your career decision making?** (please circle only one rating per item)

	<b>Strong Influence</b>			<b>Don't Know</b>		<b>Weak Influence</b>	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Television programmes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Newspapers/Magazines	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Information on the internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Visitor from further education college	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Personal issues, e.g. disability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Family circumstances	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The amount of money earned in this job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Other influence – please tell us what this is	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. **Please rate the following statements about work and education on a scale of one to seven** (please circle only one rating per statement)

	<b>Disagree Strongly</b>			<b>Don't Know</b>		<b>Agree Strongly</b>	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The longer I spend in education, the better the job I will get	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My career/job plans require that I go to a training organisation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My career/job plans require that I go to university	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My career/job plans require that I go to further education college	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would like to go out to work as soon as possible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Learning a trade is more important than obtaining qualifications	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Disagree Strongly		Don't Know			Agree Strongly	
Going to further education college would interfere with my social life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People who go to further education college or university are not really doing anything useful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My parent(s)/guardian(s) would like me to go out to work as soon as possible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My family would not like me to go to further education college or university	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not many people from my area go to further education college or university	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I don't think I would fit in at further education college	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>If you don't think you would fit in at further education college, is this because:</i>							
– I think that most people who attend further education colleges are from a different religious background to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
– I have a personal disability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
– I feel that people who attend further education colleges are from a different social class to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
– I feel that I have an inability at sports	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
– It is mostly people of the opposite sex who study the subject(s) I would like to do	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I don't think I would fit in at university	1	2	3	4	5	6	7





9b. **Would you include Queen's University and/or the University of Ulster in your choices?** (please tick only one per item)

Queen's University

Yes

No

University of Ulster

Yes

No

9c. **If yes, you would choose Queen's University, can you tell us why?**

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9d. **If no, you would not choose Queen's University, can you tell us why?**

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9e. **If yes, you would choose the University of Ulster, can you tell us why?**

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9f. **If no, you would not choose the University of Ulster, can you tell us why?**

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### **Part 3: Attitudes towards learning**

Please answer the following questions relating to your home studying habits.

1a. **On an average day, how many hours of homework/revision do you think your teacher expect you to do?** (please tick only one box)

Less than one hour

Between one and two hours

Up to three hours

Over three hours

1b. **On an average day, how many hours of homework or revision do you actually do?** (please tick only one)

Less than one hour

Between one and two hours

Up to three hours

Over three hours



3d. **If you are involved in any of the above, please tell us how many hours per week you spend on this/these activity(ies)?**

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4a. **Do you have access to the internet?** (please tick only one)

- Yes – unrestricted access
- Yes – restricted access
- No

4b. **If yes, where do you have access to the internet?** (please tick as many as you like)

- Home
- School
- Friends
- Internet Café
- Other – please tell us where \_\_\_\_\_

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4c. **Can you tell us about any of the sites you have visited?**

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5a. **Are you a member of any of the following libraries?** (please tick as many as you like)

- School library
- Local library
- Mobile library
- Other library – please specify \_\_\_\_\_

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5b. **How often do you usually visit the library to borrow books?** (please tick only one)

- Daily
- Weekly
- Fortnightly
- Monthly
- Never

5c. **Approximately how many books have you read in the last six months for your own interest, i.e. other than for a course at school?**

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5d. **Can you tell us the names of any of these books?**

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5e. **What was your main reason for reading these particular books?**  
(please tick as many as you like)

- Local/Historical interest
- Friends' recommendation
- No particular reason
- Other – please tell us \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Part 4: Attitudes to further education college and university**

Please answer the following questions about your opinions of further education college and university.

1a. **Have any members of your family attended a further education college or university?** (please tick only one per category)

- |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Further education college           | University                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No         | <input type="checkbox"/> No         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |

1b. **If yes, can you tell us who in your family has attended a further education college or university?** (please tick as many boxes as you like)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Further education college                             | University  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sister/Brother               | <input type="checkbox"/> Sister/Brother               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent(s)                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent(s)                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian(s)                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian(s)                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aunt/Uncle                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Aunt/Uncle                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please tell us _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please tell us _____ |

2a. **Have any of your friends attended a further education college or university?**  
(please tick only one per category)

- |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Further education college           | University                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No         | <input type="checkbox"/> No         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |

2b. **If yes, can you tell us how many?** (please tick only one per category)

- | Further education college             | University                            |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> One          | <input type="checkbox"/> One          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two          | <input type="checkbox"/> Two          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three        | <input type="checkbox"/> Three        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Four         | <input type="checkbox"/> Four         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Five or more | <input type="checkbox"/> Five or more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know   | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know   |

3a. **Do any of your friends intend to go to a further education college or university in the future?** (please tick only one per category)

- | Further education college           | University                          |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No         | <input type="checkbox"/> No         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |

3b. **If yes, can you tell us how many friends?** (please tick only one per category)

- | Further education college             | University                            |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> One          | <input type="checkbox"/> One          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two          | <input type="checkbox"/> Two          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three        | <input type="checkbox"/> Three        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Four         | <input type="checkbox"/> Four         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Five or more | <input type="checkbox"/> Five or more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know   | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know   |

4a. **Do you feel that you know enough about the range of courses/qualifications available to you at further education colleges?** (please tick only one)

- Yes  
 No

4b. **If no, what would you like to know more about?**

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4c. **If you are thinking of going to a further education college, which qualification(s) would you like to come out with?**

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6a. **Have your teachers discussed further education college or university with you?**  
(please tick only one per category)

- | Further education college           | University                          |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No         | <input type="checkbox"/> No         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |

6b. If yes, how useful did you find this discussion? (please tick only one per category)

- | Further education college                  | University                                 |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extremely useful  | <input type="checkbox"/> Extremely useful  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Very useful       | <input type="checkbox"/> Very useful       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quite useful      | <input type="checkbox"/> Quite useful      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not very useful   | <input type="checkbox"/> Not very useful   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not useful at all | <input type="checkbox"/> Not useful at all |

6c. **What aspects of further education have they discussed?**  
(please tick as many as necessary)

- A levels
- GNVQ
- The college environment
- Transportation
- Financial support
- Career prospects
- Course structure and content
- Personal and social issues

7a. **Have your parent(s)/guardian(s) discussed further education college or university with you?** (please tick only one per category)

- | Further education college    | University                   |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No  | <input type="checkbox"/> No  |

7b. **If yes, how much time have they spent explaining further education college or university?** (please tick only one per category)

- | Further education college                      | University                                     |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A lot of time         | <input type="checkbox"/> A lot of time         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A fair amount of time | <input type="checkbox"/> A fair amount of time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hardly any time       | <input type="checkbox"/> Hardly any time       |











10b. Can you tell us which universities these pupils intend to progress to?

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10c. Of those who are intending to progress to university, please tell us the name of the university that is most often mentioned by your Year 12 pupils:

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10d. Of those not intending to progress to university, can you tell us from your past experience where they are most likely to go?

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11a. To what extent is your school involved with local further education colleges in any of the following:

	Frequently Involved	Rarely Involved	Never Involved
Information provision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Careers advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visits to local colleges	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local college open day/ Information evening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other – please tell us	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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11b. Are there any respects in which you think contacts between your school and local further education colleges might be improved?

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12a. To what extent is your school involved with local universities in any of the following:

	Frequently Involved	Rarely Involved	Never Involved
Information provision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Careers advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visits to local colleges	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local college open day/			
Information evening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other – please tell us	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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12b. Are there any respects in which you think contacts between your school and local universities might be improved?

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13a. How important do you think the parental role is in influencing your year 12 pupils in their choices after GCSE?

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Fairly important
- Not very important
- Not important at all
- Don't know

13b. Are there any ways in which parents could play a more active enough role in encouraging their children to progress to a further education college?

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### Part Three: Influence of School Location

1a. Are there any further education colleges near your school to which your pupils would not progress to?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

1b. Can you tell us the name of this/these further education college(s) and why you believe pupils would not want to go there?

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2a. How would you describe the state of transport provision between your school's catchment area and your local further education college(s)?

- Extremely good
- Very good
- Fairly good
- Fairly poor
- Very poor
- Extremely poor
- Don't know

2b. Do you think that pupils would be more likely to progress to further education college if transportation links to and from college in your school's catchment area were improved?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Thank you for your co-operation. If you have any comments to make regarding the issues explored in this questionnaire, please tell us:

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## Focus Group Discussion Topics

### Part 1: Future Career Intentions

- Have you decided upon a possible career?
- What career have you decided upon?
- Who and/or what influenced you in making this decision?
- When did you make this decision?
- How are you going to reach your career goal(s)?

### Part 2: Your Post-GCSE Plans

- What, if any, are your post-GCSE education plans, e.g. A levels, GNVQs, Training organisation?
- Which is more important to you? Continuing your education or going straight into work after leaving school?
- Who and/or what influenced you in making your decision about post-GCSE education?
- When did you make this decision?
- How are you going to reach your educational goal(s)?

### Part 3: Study Culture

- What is your opinion of homework?
- On an average school day, how much homework do you do?
- Do you feel that you are doing as much homework as your teachers expect you to do?
- Is your home a good place to study in?
- If you needed help with your homework, who would you be most likely to ask?
- Does having to do homework ever get in the way of your social life?
- Do your friends often persuade you to go out rather than stay in and do your homework?
- Do you ever use the internet to help you with your homework or coursework?

#### **Part 4: Further Education College**

- Can you tell us what you know about further education provision in your area, e.g. which colleges, courses, qualifications?
- Can you tell us about how you feel about your local college, e.g. quality of teaching, image of college, relevance of courses, value of qualifications?
- What do you see as the attractions, if any, of going to college?
- Do you feel that there are any barriers preventing you attending a further education college, e.g. no transport, financial, parental disapproval, friends disapproval, afraid to go?
- Have any members of your family attended further education college?
- Are any of your friends planning on going to further education college?

#### **Part 5: University**

- Can you tell us what you know about university, e.g. where they are, how do you access them, courses, qualifications?
- What do you see as the attractions of going to university?
- Do you feel that there are any barriers preventing you from progressing to university?
- Have any members of your family attended university?
- Are any of your friends planning on going to university?
- How do you feel about your local universities compared to those elsewhere, i.e. Queens & UU vs GB & ROI?





### Part 3: Attitudes Towards Learning

1a. On an average day, how many hours does your son/daughter spend studying at home?

- Less than one hour
- Between one and two hours
- Three hours
- Over three hours
- Don't know

1b. Do you tend to get involved at all in his/her studying?

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2a. Do you have a computer in the house?

- Yes
- No

2b. If yes, does it have access to the internet?

- Yes
- No

2c. If yes, what websites do you think your son/daughter tends to access?

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3a. Do you ever read any books in your spare time?

- Yes
- No

3b. Apart from school material, would your son/daughter read much in their spare time?

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## Part 4: Attitudes to Further Education and College

1a. How would you say your son/daughter feels about school in general?

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1b. What would you say has influenced their opinion most?

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2a. Do you know where your nearest further education college is? (please tick box)

- Yes – please tell us \_\_\_\_\_
- No

2c. How would you describe your opinion of this college?

- Extremely positive
- Fairly positive
- Fairly negative
- Extremely negative
- Don't know

2d. Would you like your son/daughter to attend this college?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

2e. What factors would you say have influenced your opinion?

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2f. **Do you think that qualifications obtained from a further education college lead to better career opportunities?**

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3a. **Eventually, would you like to see your son/daughter go to university?**

- Yes – please tell us which \_\_\_\_\_
- No
- Don't Know

3b. **If yes, please tell us why you would like them to go to this/these particular university(ies)?**

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3c. **Do you think that obtaining a qualification from university enhances career opportunities?**

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**Just to finish, can I clarify a couple of points?**

How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

If you are currently in employment can you please tell us what your occupation is?

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If you have any comments to make regarding these questions, please tell us:

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