

**SCHOOL CONTROL OF INFORMATION, ADVICE AND  
GUIDANCE DURING TRANSITION: A TWO YEAR STUDY  
INTO POST-16 STUDENT DECISION-MAKING**

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# Abstract

The majority of research into choice, transition and decision-making took place in the 1990s-2000s. Since this time the context in which post-16 transition takes place has been changing due to increased competition between institutions and the extended length of time students are required to remain in education or training through raising the participation age. Additionally, in 2012 the government made schools responsible for Information, Advice and Guidance.

This thesis explores choice and decision-making during the transition to post-16 education and training. It provides new research evidence to contribute to the existing literature in light of the changes in context since the body of literature was formed. In particular, it explores the impact of the changes to Information, Advice and Guidance provision and the role of schools in influencing students' transition.

The study uses evidence from three schools with sixth forms, drawn from two contrasting counties of England during the first year of research. The second year of research draws evidence from a range of post-16 institutions which the students progressed onto. Overall, the data from staff, students and documentary evidence explores student transition from the final year of secondary schooling to post-16 education or training.

The study finds that competition between post-16 institutions has implications for the way that post-16 Information, Advice and Guidance is provided by schools. The practical strategies schools use to influence transition include practical prevention of access to alternative IAG, control of the application process and active student selection. The most powerful strategies involve the social construction of

unique selling points and the management of culture and trust. The implications of these strategies for students' transition is assessed taking into account how students make their post-16 transition decisions in a loosely coupled manner and the common belief that their position is of their own making. Overall, a continuum of schools' influence on transition is presented.

The study concludes that the competitive post-16 environment coupled with school control of guidance may lead to imperfect transition for students and reproduction of the structural status quo rather than social change. For school leaders implications exist in being able to mitigate competition through collaboration and specialisation. However, the complexity of achieving this in the competitive post-16 marketplace produces implications for guidance providers in equipping students with decision-making skills and empowering them with an understanding of their position which is more likely to lead to students being able to challenge influencing structures and make effective post-16 transitions.

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# Abbreviations

A levels - Advanced Levels (previously A2's)

AS levels - Advanced Subsidiary Levels

BTEC - Business and Technology Education Council

CIAEG - Careers Information Advice and Educational Guidance

DOTS - Decision Learning, Opportunity Awareness, Transition Learning and Self Awareness

DfE - Department for Education

EBacc - English Baccalaureate

EU - European Union

FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions

FE - Further Education

GCE - General Certificate of Education

GCSE - General Certificate of Secondary Education

HE - Higher Education

HEFCE - Higher Education Funding Council for England

IAG - Information, Advice and Guidance

KS4 - Key Stage 4

NCS - National Careers Service

NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training

NVQ - National Vocational Qualification

OCR - Oxford, Cambridge and the Royal Society for the Arts

Ofsted - Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

ONS - Office for National Statistics  
RPA - Raising the Participation Age  
SFC - Sixth Form College  
UCAS - Universities and Colleges Admissions Service  
UK - United Kingdom  
USPs - Unique Selling Points  
UTCs - University Technical Colleges  
VCE - Vocational Certificate of Education  
VET - Vocational Education and Training

### **Abbreviations used to note institutional names:**

Midlands:

AH - Adley House School and Sixth Form  
BLA - Burlywood Academy and Sixth Form  
CCN - Combined College Newfield  
CS - Crown School and Sixth Form  
EW - Eastward Independent Sixth Form  
TS - Torhall Catholic School and Sixth Form

North West:

AG - Abbey Gate School and Sixth Form  
ATG - Apprentice Training Group  
AUS - Auston College  
BAU - Bauley Grammar School and Sixth Form  
BOT - Boothly College  
BRO - Brookford College  
HAY - Hayston School and Sixth Form  
NEA - Neathside College

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This introductory chapter begins by outlining my interest in the topic of post-16 transition. It continues with an introduction to the current context of post-16 education which covers raising the participation age, choices at age 16, the aims of education and the vocational/academic divide. The chapter argues that this study of post-16 transition is important due to changes in Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) since the previous body of literature on choice and transition took place in the 1990s-2000s. It concludes outlining the structure of the thesis.

This thesis originated from an interest in post-16 transition which developed through my occupational experience as a teacher. At the time I was not convinced that the school where I taught<sup>1</sup> was providing students with the IAG necessary for the students to be able to make the best transition decisions for their future lives. At times it felt like the school was able to exert bias in IAG to support the institution's needs, rather than the needs of the students. This presented a professional dilemma for myself as a teacher who wanted the best for the students. I could also appreciate that this was occurring in the context of a school that (quite rationally) wanted to protect its position in a competitive marketplace. However, this may not have been in the best interest of the students' futures, if the course that the students progressed onto was not suited to their needs. It was this initial interest that sparked

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<sup>1</sup>This school was not used in the sampling frame for this study.

a research interest which has illuminative implications for my practice, and that of other educators, and for policy actors (Ozga, 2000). Given the 2012 IAG policy changes, which will be outlined below, the aim is also to help to contribute towards bringing about positive change in education through an increased understanding of choice and transition in more recent times. Thus, this thesis explores students' post-16 transition and the impact of schools' influences during this phase.

This thesis will argue that the role of the school can be a powerful force in post-16 decision-making (albeit along a continuum of varying strengths) and thus schools do play an important role in the transition process which can potentially, positively or negatively, impact on students' futures. Although the role of the school is important it is necessary to remember that other factors, such as socio-economic and political factors, also play important roles in the transition process.

The literature review will locate this study in the work of Bloomer, Hodkinson, Foskett, Maguire, Hemsley-Brown, Macrae, Gewirtz and Ball using their work from the 1990s and 2000s. Their work will provide a firm body of literature covering choice, transition, progression, career trajectories, marketing and competition in which to locate this study. Some of their work has been reapplied in this thesis given the political and contextual changes which have occurred in the post-16 transition landscape since their work was completed, there is a particular focus on the changes to IAG. Therefore, this new application is an important addition to the existing literature on transition due to the changes in the provision of post-16 education since the 2000s.

We know that schools impact on the transition of students (Foskett and Hesketh, 1997; Foskett et al., 2004), and we know that IAG varies in levels of impartiality and effectiveness between institutions due to the competitive post-16 marketplace (Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Pring et al., 2009; Fuller and Macfadyen, 2012). However, currently there is a paucity of research which addresses specifically *how* schools influence student transition through their role in providing IAG *operationally* (Foskett et al., 2004). This thesis contributes knowledge to this research gap using evidence from schools drawn from two contrasting counties in England, United Kingdom



(UK). It therefore contributes a more up-to-date application of some of the aforementioned literature from the 1990s and 2000s given the changes in the educational landscape. The issues will be explored through the eyes of students and staff plus documentary evidence so that the impact that schools have on students' transition can be illuminated in-depth and contribute to the literature on transition to post-16 education.

So far this introduction has explained my interest in post-16 transition, focused the thesis on the influence of schools on post-16 transition, highlighted the importance of the study as a re-application of some of the body of work covering transition from the 1990s and 2000s, given changes in post-16 education since this work was completed. Next the introduction scopes the context of the thesis so that the arguments and data can be understood. It first deals with definitions before exploring changes in the context of 14-18 education which have occurred since the 2000s.

## **Definitions**

### **Post-16 transition**

In English schools transition refers to the sequential movement within education through distinct stages (Moon et al., 2004), primary school (5 to 11 years old) to secondary school (students are aged 11-16 with distinct choices in Year 9 for level one or two qualifications taken aged 16) and then to post-16 further Education (FE) or training (aged 16-18 or 19, choices in Year 11, during secondary school, include decisions on subjects, qualifications and institution types for post-16 study) and Higher Education (HE) (aged 18+). Further transition then takes place into employment, in the labour market.

In England educational outcomes are measured at the individual level through educational achievement, occupational status and associated earnings (Raffe, 2008)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>Transitions to employment are socially and structurally grounded in the background of specific countries (Raffe, 2008).

Dismore (2014, p. 588) argues that transition is the "...capability to navigate change" which involves using capabilities, aspirations, voice and resources in the specific condition. Thus, it is more than moving and transferring onto the next stage of education (Ecclestone, 2007b). Ecclestone et al. (2010) argue that there is no agreed definition of transition, but that a definition needs to include changes in agency and identity through the influence of social norms and values, particularly from institutions and life histories. These influences may not be specific events but tacit changes in feelings over time; thus transition is not simply movement between education phases but a lifelong event. Much of which is unconscious, repetitive and contradictory. For the purpose of this research, transition focuses on the transition from pre-16 education to post-16 education and training.

### **Career guidance**

'Career guidance' is a disputed and confused term, the exact definition and activities which surround career guidance are debated and the same term is often used by different people to mean different things (Watts and Kidd, 2000; Hooley et al., 2014)<sup>3</sup>. However, a broad, generally accepted definition includes activities surrounding the provision of answers to specific career queries, guidance to explore a range of career options suitable for individuals in order for decisions to be made (often one to one), and information provision (Sampson et al., 1999). This would include, an assessment of ability, aptitude, interests and personality, with reference to future aspirations, in the world of work, the nature and requirements of occupations and job opportunities (Moor, 1976)<sup>4</sup>. The OECD (2004) define careers guidance and education as broad related services and activities relating to assisting individuals to make education, training and occupational choices, at any stage throughout their lives (for career management and resilience (Watts and Kidd, 2000)). Activities may be individual or group and take place in person or via distance and web based

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<sup>3</sup>For a detailed discussion of the history and debates surrounding the use of the term 'career guidance' see Watts and Kidd (2000).

<sup>4</sup>The dominant model of career guidance is the Decision Learning, Opportunity Awareness, Transition Learning and Self Awareness (DOTS) model, for an in-depth discussion of the range of career delivery models see Hooley et al. (2012).

means. This definition includes career information provision, self-assessment, self awareness (of one's skills and abilities), counselling interviews, careers education, taster sessions, work searches, and transition activities (Ofsted, 2013). Careers education forms a component of careers guidance involving activities relating to general career related curricula (Hooley, 2014). It is argued that guidance should now be seen as pro-actively preparing individuals for their futures rather than *placing* individuals in existing specific jobs (Watts and Kidd, 2000).

The OECD's inclusive definition is the one adopted by this study and the text refers to guidance activities as IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) to represent all of these activities. The broader term, Careers Information Advice and Educational Guidance (CIAEG) is not used because the guidance may not always refer to a career, but for example, a specific course of learning for post-16 choices. It is important to note that the above definitions of IAG are overly simplistic in nature and too linear in scope as they assume that IAG would lead to desired career progression, this ignores wider influences on progression and the nature of non-linear transition (Watt and Paterson, 2000).

## **Progression**

IAG is said to take place with the aim of achieving progression. Progression definitions depend on what metrics are used to report progression thus there is no one accepted measure of progression (Spours et al., 2009). However, progression can be considered to be continued participation in education or training following the previous completion of a course of learning (Spours et al., 2009). Following the completion of education or training, progression would be to employment.

## **Students**

Throughout this thesis the terms 'student' and 'young person' represent an individual social actor. The terms represent a learner, whether male or female who was a participant in the study and the terms are used throughout. Where this thesis refers to a 'student' or 'young person' in another author's study the term used by

the other author will normally have been the same but the terms used in this thesis are used to give consistency for the reader.

## **Changes in 14-18 education since the 2000s**

This chapter now turns to exploring changes in the context of 14-18 education since the period which the previous transition literature covers. The discussion that follows deals with increasing competition for students, changes in the provision of IAG, raising of the participation age and changes to the choice arena. The chapter then outlines specific changes which have occurred since the study began, as these have implications for how the thesis is read.

### **Increased competition**

Competition in the post-16 student marketplace is fierce (Schagen et al., 1996; Hodgson and Spours, 2011a). Therefore, this makes it more likely for institutions to require a competitive advantage and maximise their student numbers. Given institutions are now responsible for IAG it seems powerful competitive drivers may conflict with the legal requirement to provide impartial<sup>5</sup> IAG. For some students this may mean that they do not receive impartial IAG which may lead to a more suitable, alternative, route being followed and thus competitive success may be at the expense of individual learner success.

Bridges and McLaughlin (1994); Schagen et al. (1996) and Hodgson and Spours (2011a) detail how over time successive education policies have increased competitive market forces in education through reducing Local Education Authority control over institutions, by publishing reliable performance indicators (for example, examination results and performance tables) to enable more informed consumer decision-making, and creating choice for consumers by inventing new types of educational institutions, for example academies, studio schools, Free Schools and University Technical Colleges (UTCs provide vocational training in Science, Engineering, Tech-

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<sup>5</sup>Impartial means external to a school's provision (DfE, 2014a).

nology and Maths) which all compete for the same finite students (see also page 10). Education markets have increased competition for students; to ensure institution survival managers are having to focus on maximising student numbers to secure funding. Increasing competition has been felt since the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. Ainley and Green (1996) note how the Act changed the emphasis from 80% of students progressing into employment and 20% into HE to the reverse, significantly emphasising FE and HE as a result of rising youth unemployment, the expansion of FE meant that more students had the required qualifications to enter HE.

### **Reduced information, advice and guidance**

From 2001 to 2012 the Connexions service provided a broad IAG service to young people aged 13-19 (or 25 for those at risk or disabled). It offered both universal and targeted support financed by regional government and local authorities (Bowes et al., 2005). Its aim was to ensure that guidance was provided to large numbers of students, through the use of specialist personal advisors, who met with students face to face (Joyce and White, 2004; Evans and Rallings, 2013). The rationale of organising provision in this way was to enable Connexions to provide up-to-date, professional and impartial advice (Bowes et al., 2005).

The Education Act (2011) gave schools responsibility for careers guidance for young people. This Act transferred the responsibility to provide IAG from local authorities to schools. Since September 2012 schools, sixth form colleges and FE colleges have had the legal responsibility to provide independent, impartial IAG to students in academic years 8 to 13 (ages 12-18)<sup>6</sup> (DfE, 2013). This was the first time schools were responsible for IAG in forty years (NFER et al., 2014). At the same time (in 2012) the National Careers Service (NCS) was launched to provide careers advice to adults but it also began a web-based and telephone service for young people aged 13 to 18, with a face to face service for those aged 19 and over (BIS, 2012a).

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<sup>6</sup>Year 9 since September 2012, Year 8 since September 2013 (Ofsted, 2013).

Prior to the creation of Connexions in 2001, local authorities were given responsibility for IAG in The Employment and Training Act (1973) (later becoming the Careers Service (Watts, 1991)) and this continued in various models, which included relationships with external providers, until The Education Act (1997) made (impartial) careers education mandatory in the school curriculum for all young people aged 13 and above, and aged 11 and above since 2004 (Watts and Young, 1999; Bowes et al., 2005; Hooley et al., 2012). During the 1960s - 1970s approaches to guidance moved from directive matching to non-directive liberal career skill and decision-making development programmes which were aimed at supporting lifelong social equity and economic welfare (Watts, 1991, 1996b). Before the 1960s Watts (1991) identified the start of directive matching of careers to students within schools (for school leavers) to be between 1926-1932, in 1948 the Juvenile Employment Service became the Youth Employment Service which worked with schools to provide career matching. Prior to this period of formal careers advice, industrialisation and division of labour through specialisation, careers advice was traditionally determined by family networks allocating employment (Watts and Kidd, 2000).

Hooley and Watts (2011); Careers England (2012); House of Commons Education Committee (2013a,b,c); Ofsted (2013) and National Careers Council (2013) provide strong and compelling evidence criticising the 2012 IAG change. They argue that locating the responsibility for IAG with schools has had a negative impact on IAG provision and thus this could risk effective educational and employment transitions for students. The literature review will review IAG in-depth and explore its role in the context of other factors that influence transition.

### **Extended compulsory education**

In England compulsory education begins when a child is 5 years old, and since September 2015, The Education and Skills Act (2008) means that young people have to remain in education or training until their 18th birthday. Education and training means full-time education, an apprenticeship or full-time work with part-time education or training. The Education and Skills Act (2008) raised the partic-

icipation age from 16 to 18. Since 2013 students have had to remain in education until their 17th Birthday and since the summer of 2015 until their 18th Birthday. The previous change to raise the leaving age from 15 to 16 was in 1972.

The aim of raising the leaving age was to reduce Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) statistics, raise skill levels for employment productivity (and the UK's international competitive position) along with its international ranking for participation in education under 19 which lags behind European Union (EU) and international benchmark countries and in order to reduce social benefit spending through fuller employment (Hodgson and Spours, 2011b; Foley, 2014). Approximately 150,000 students who would have previously been expected to leave school will have been required to stay in full time education or work-based training (Cook, 2013; Edge Foundation, 2013). According to UK government figures (see page 321) raising the participation age (RPA) has already led to an increase in demand for education and training beyond age 16.

Between the ages of 14 to 16 students take compulsory examinations, usually General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) and BTECs (formerly known as Business and Technology Education Council qualifications)<sup>7</sup>. From age 16 to 18 students who remain in full-time education normally take General Certificates of Education at Advanced Subsidiary and/or Advanced levels (GCE AS or A levels) or BTEC Nationals<sup>8</sup>; these qualifications can lead to employment or HE from age 18.

### **Increased risk**

Choices can be high risk for students and schools. Routes taken can impact on an institution's results and league table position, and for students choices taken can have possible implications for the routes that they may be able to follow in future years. Some decisions may have lifelong consequences if pre-requisites are not taken which then cause progression routes to be closed off for students. The changes to IAG provision and the requirement for a student to stay on in education or training

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<sup>7</sup>Both as level 2 qualifications.

<sup>8</sup>As level 3 qualifications.

until they are aged 18 could create an increased transition risk for some students when compared to the situation in the 1990s and 2000s. In addition, the number of choices a student has available to choose from has been increasing, making their choices potentially more complex and difficult.

The array of choices available to students is vast (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013a,b,c); they have to choose between subjects offered, the types of course and which type of institution to study in. Courses can range from apprenticeships and BTECs to applied and academic A levels, taken at a range of institutions, school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, FE colleges, faith and voluntary aided schools, grammar and independent (private, fee paying) schools and the recent additions of UTCs, studio schools, free schools, academies (see page 7). In addition, FE colleges have been able to offer programmes to students from age 14, if found to be more appropriate for the student and Technical Baccalaureates were introduced for vocational students wishing to follow employment in recognised occupations (by professional bodies). This list demonstrates that it is not surprising that students need IAG to help provide some clarity when choosing their post-16 route. Overall, increased choice exists for students when compared with the choices that were available when the previous literature on transition was completed in the 1990s-2000s.

Educational transition can reflect and lead to the re-creation of wider societal structures. For some students early specialisation in vocational qualifications occurs in Year 9 when aged 14 (McCrone, 2014), and these vocational routes can represent a focus on skills and knowledge which can lead students on to progress to existing employment realities (Knight et al., 1998; Atkins, 2008). As the nature of employment changes over time training in specific occupational roles may not equip vocational students with the skills and knowledge to be able to adapt to the new employment realities and this could result in their access to the employment marketplace being limited (ibid). Qualification structures are therefore represented in a divided economy where academically able students learn the general principles behind a subject for wide application (beyond specific current employment practices)



and it gives these students the opportunity to adapt as labour markets do. Students who are channelled into Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses where specific skills and competencies are learnt for existing employment realities are less susceptible to allow for changes in employment (Edwards, 1997). Therefore, this could reward the middle class who have the ability to use their capitals to navigate the educational marketplace, achieve HE and general education which is adaptable to access the marketplace as it changes (ibid).

The English education system has strong historic cultural expectations, which combined with the structure of English education, exert pressure over young people to choose to keep their options open in the pursuit of economic independence (Bloomer, 1997). In the 1960s and 1970s progression to employment from education was more direct. Colley et al. (2003) note how for young people in England the youth labour market has collapsed and as such the transition from school to work has become extended<sup>9</sup>, since the 1990s accepted routes to economic success have become less overt and more unstable (Roberts and Parsell, 1992); this has led to individual risk at the point of post-16 transition. The situation is not helped with the aforementioned increasing range of options available to students which adds to confusion, complexity and risk. Clear routes to social reproduction are now less common. Thus, the transition decision is made even more difficult (Ball, 2003b).

The use of the words 'choices' and 'options' carry connotations of students being able to freely navigate between these different progression routes within the marketplace, choosing different subjects, courses and institutions. In reality students may have very limited options and few real 'choices' given that not all students have access to the resources to be able to choose and the marketplace favours some students over others (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Ball et al., 1996; Macrae et al., 1997a). Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) debate the term 'choice', they state that the term indicates a misleading notion of rational decision-making to follow a path of increasing commitment. They report that choices were unstable and included change. They emphasise that change is common as choices develop (in a non-linear

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<sup>9</sup>See Carter (1966) and Ashton and Field (1976).

fashion) and this should not be seen as a sign of failure. Throughout this thesis the terms 'choices' and 'options' are used to refer to a situation where a student could adopt one option over another. However, in using these terms it is not assumed that free choice is possible. The literature review fully explores these concepts.

Thus, the ability for IAG to be able to assist students' transition, depending on the school they attend, given increased competition, changes to IAG, raising of the participation age and increased risk, is significantly different to that experienced when the literature of choice and transition was established in the 1990s-2000s. This is the rationale behind re-applying some of the work of Bloomer, Hodgkinson, Foskett, Maguire, Hemsley-Brown, Macrae, Gewirtz and Ball to the recent post-16 context.

## **Changes in 14-18 education since 2010**

Since the start of this research a number of changes have occurred in 14-18 education. These changes are outlined here so that the thesis can be read in the context of when the research took place, recognising that the educational landscape has changed. Future changes are outlined to give context to the concluding chapter of this thesis.

From 2010 to 2015 the UK had a coalition government, formed between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat Party. In 2010 the Department for Education (DfE) was formed, this succeeded the Labour government's Department for Children, Schools and Families. In 2015 a Conservative government was formed and it remains the present government. There have been two Conservative Secretaries of State for Education since 2010, Michael Gove (2010-2014) and Nicky Morgan (2014 - present).

The Labour government introduced Diploma qualifications in 2008 following a rejection of the whole scale reform suggested by the on 14-19 Reform (2004) working party (McCrone et al., 2011). Diplomas were introduced to run alongside GCSEs, A levels and apprenticeships covering fourteen subjects at level one, two

and three. They were designed to offer sector specific learning, generic skills and work experience. The coalition government removed support for Diplomas in 2010 (McCrone et al., 2011).

A number of changes to GCE and GCSE qualifications have taken place or have been announced and are being rolled out over time. The rationale behind the changes was to improve qualification rigour and quality assurance (Ofqual, 2015a,b). In 2014 the coalition government re-introduced linear GCE examinations, whereby formal examinations are taken at the end of a course of study, rather than with the previous qualification setup where examinations were taken throughout a course. Since September 2015 some AS and A levels have followed a new format, assessment is by examination in the main and the courses are linear with assessments at the end of one year for AS, and two years for A levels. AS and A levels are now decoupled stand alone qualifications, previously a student's AS grade counted for their A level grade, but this is no longer the case (Ofqual, 2015b). Grading A\*-E remains unchanged, the A\* GCE grade was introduced in 2010 in order to differentiate between the highest achieving candidates following rises in A level pass rates.

In September 2015 some GCSE subjects started<sup>10</sup> to follow content produced by the DfE and assessments are now to be by examination in the main. GCSE results issued from 2017-2019 will be graded as 9-1 instead of the current A\*-G. The DfE discouraged schools from entering students for GCSE examinations early, for example in Year 10, a year before GCSEs were designed to be taken, by announcing that a student's first attempt is the one that will be used for institutions' performance tables so any allowed resits are for students' performance improvements only (Ofqual, 2015a).

Performance tables (from January 2017) will measure progress from Key Stage two to four<sup>11</sup> (DfE, 2016). An overall attainment measure for schools will be constructed based on an average across eight subjects (ibid). This change will

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<sup>10</sup>English language and literature and mathematics were the first subjects to be rolled out, others are going to be phased in until September 2017.

<sup>11</sup>Progress is the difference between expected results and actual achievement (DfE, 2016).

create choice management implications for schools and students, as found when the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was introduced.

The coalition government introduced the EBacc as a performance measure in 2010 (Greevy et al., 2013). The introduction of the EBacc impacted on the range of subject choices offered to students by schools. In order to achieve the EBacc a student must have achieved a grade A\*-C in English, mathematics, science, a language and and a humanities subject (history or geography). This clearly sent a message to schools that a traditional curriculum was preferred over a general and vocational mixed curriculum for students (Hodgson and Spours, 2011a). Introducing the EBacc meant that 52% of schools changed their curriculum offering and option blocks to meet the measure. This emphasises the impact of performance measures on the management of schools and the resultant impact on students (Greevy et al., 2013).

Educational Maintenance Allowance was a payment of up to £30 paid directly to students who were in education on a means tested basis. It was designed to support students in order to enable economically disadvantaged students to be able to continue with education. In 2010 the coalition government ended this scheme and replaced it with a payment directly to schools as a pupil premium in order to provide schools with the resources to be able to combat educational disadvantage (DfE, 2015).

So far this introduction has considered the changes in the context of 14-18 education since the 1990s and 2000s. These changes enable this research to contribute new knowledge to the existing literature on transition. It then outlined changes in 14-18 education since 2010 which have implications for the conclusions of this thesis. Specifically recent education policy changes have a Conservative dominance and this may support academic and middle class students above others during post-16 decision-making and transition. The introduction now outlines the aims of education. This is important because economic aims appear to form the underlying rationale behind most policy and transition decisions. The link between education and economic success is then questioned. The academic and vocational divide and

then problems with the purpose of vocational education are then discussed.

## **The aims of education**

Although a full review of the aims of education is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to understand the overarching aims of education as these themes enable the findings to be understood in context. Three aims of education can be identified, liberal aims, citizenship aims and economic or employment aims. A brief overview of each is now provided in this introductory chapter rather than the literature review because the aims discussed here are general and include individual, societal and employment outcomes whereas the literature review focuses specifically on issues affecting decision-making for transition within education.

In liberal education, learning is carried out for the sake of learning without the need for external justification (Morrison, 2007), certification or specific occupational learning (Dore, 1976). Liberal education is used to develop character, to explore one's self and broaden the mind, not to achieve explicit employment (Chitty, 1991; Allen and Ainley, 2007).

A second aim of education goes beyond self and economic development and concerns preparing students with the skills to be able to contribute to society, to be active and moral citizens (Hayward, 2006; Pring and Pollard, 2011).

The dominant aim, which forms the basis of assumptions behind policy and student decision-making, follows from Human Capital Theory. Human capital concerns intangible skills and abilities which are developed through investment in education and training which enable increased productivity following investments made in developing human capital (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1975; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Aspin, 2004). Human Capital Theory assumes that a utilitarian approach to educational choices is taken, whereby qualifications are chosen by individuals to enable effective competition in the labour market which assumes that higher pay for employees will be the resultant outcome (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1975). If benefits are not thought to outweigh the costs education will not be sought (Fevre

et al., 1999; Machin and Vignoles, 2009). Thus, the choice process is described as a rational one where students invest in their futures (Maringe et al., 2011). Links between education, human capital and economic success have formed government policy over recent decades (Wolf, 1997, 2002; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Keep et al., 2006; Wolf et al., 2006; Keep and Mayhew, 2010). Thus, education is seen as a panacea for national economic problems (Keep and Mayhew, 1999; Brown, 2001; Wolf, 2002; Lloyd and Payne, 2003) and as a tool for personal employment success. Therefore, education is charged with having the role of preparing young people for their working lives, ensuring students will have the right skills and attitudes for personal employment success (Gleeson and Keep, 2004; Foley, 2014), allowing an individual with the skills and knowledge to be able to compete in the competitive labour market (Avis, 1996; Hodkinson, 1996; Bathmaker, 2005; Foley, 2014).

In viewing students as supplies into a wider economic system this theory also only measures returns to education in economic terms and it ignores the wider benefits of education such as intrinsic learning (Scrimshaw, 1983; Atkins, 2005; Paton, 2007; Bryson, 2015). The argument that education leads to economic success is now assessed.

### **Assessing the link between education and economic success**

The preceding section introduced the argument that education's aim is to contribute to economic success. The link between education and economic success is now assessed by arguing that employment is becoming less secure than in the past, that mismatches between the supply and demand for skills exist and that qualification inflation reduces the value of education over time. Overall the argument that education leads directly to secure employment is challenged (Allen and Ainley, 2013).

### **The changing nature of employment**

Globalisation has led to changes in employment. Ball (2003a) and Avis (1996) argue how in recent times the traditional labour markets have restructured as a re-

sult of globalisation pressurising business strategies (improved technology increased information flows, reduced trade barriers and intensified competition), structural unemployment (deskilling through declines in manufacturing and capital intensive production), high unemployment and international careers (Bloomer, 1997; Collin and Watts, 1996; Law, 1996; Killeen, 1996; Bowes et al., 2005)). This has led to decreased labour market security through delayering to form flat hierarchies and increasingly, flexible employment short term contracts (Grubb and Lazerson, 2007; Law, 2010; Foley, 2014). There has been a rise in the peripheral workforce and a reduction in the bureaucratic, traditional career leading to more regular job changes. Career is defined as an individual's sequence of jobs held across their socio-economic life cycle (Pallas, 2006). The traditional concept of the career is of a bureaucracy in which a person rises up the ordered hierarchy over time. It is meritocratic, rewarding individuals for investment over time (Watts, 1999). The traditional permanent professional hierarchical career is outdated as bureaucracies change to be flexible to cope with competition (Avis, 1996; Arthur et al., 1999) and an oversupply of graduates for the service industry. Arthur et al. (1999) term this the "boundary-less career" (p. 3) and it emphasises how career paths are no longer traditional and jobs do not necessarily fit traditional skills and functions (Watts and Kidd, 2000). Bloomer comments on the unsuitable use of the term 'career', suggesting that moving towards a career commitment is only the case for a small number of young people (2001). Taking the changing nature of employment into account and the argued economic aim of education, schools are therefore tasked with equipping students with lifelong learning skills so that the students can be in a position to adapt flexibly to employment needs and learn new jobs as employment conditions and professions change (Winch and Clarke, 2003; Ainley, 1994; Smith, 1998). This requires students to learn how to be autonomous and creative (Lauder et al., 2012). However, even if these lifelong learning needs are met it is argued that there are issues with employer demand for skills which also makes the link between education and employment less secure.

### **Skills supply and demand mismatch**

There are problems with the demand for skills by employers (Keep et al., 2006), this means that education may not directly lead to secure employment. It is suggested that nearly half of UK jobs do not require post-compulsory education (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Lanning and Lawton, 2012) and so this evidence raises questions as to whether high skills are really demanded by employers. The expansion of tertiary education<sup>12</sup> has led to a wastage of talent (Brown and Lauder, 1996). UKCES (2014) estimates that 16% of the workforce have underutilised skills whereas other sectors have skills shortages, such as manufacturing. Industry specific competitive strategies reflect the markets in which firms operate and these markets may not require high skills or be subject to global competition (Green and Sakamoto, 2001; Lloyd and Payne, 2002; Lanning and Lawton, 2012). Although the service economy is growing there is evidence to suggest that low skilled service jobs (rather than high skilled jobs) will form the increase in job numbers. Over the last forty years the increase in service jobs has been in supportive routine service roles, such as hospitality and health care, rather than professional jobs (Brown, 2001; Thompson et al., 2001). Brown et al. (2011) argue that highly qualified employees often carry out routine and standardised work, they argue that only 15% of a workforce have the chance to think whilst carrying out their job roles, the remainder follow existing rules and procedures. Supplied skills need to be matched by demand from employers (Grubb and Lazerson, 2007; Clifton et al., 2015). However, Ryan and Sinning (1991) argue that there is currently a skills mismatch.

### **Credential inflation and diminishing returns to higher education**

It is assumed that gaining a degree is critical to employment and social mobility as it can provide access to better career and employment opportunities that will bring lifelong benefits (Million+, 2011; University Alliance, 2014). The University Alliance (2014) cite evidence from post-1992 universities achieving a graduate employment rate at six months post graduating at levels above the local employment rate.

<sup>12</sup>Tertiary education includes post-compulsory further and HE in the UK (OECD, 2014).



Graduates achieve higher employment outcomes than non-graduates, on average earning £10,000 more per year than non-graduates (BIS, 2015). Therefore, this evidence suggests that degree education reduces the likelihood of unemployment and can lead to higher earnings (Machin and Vignoles, 2005; OECD, 2004; BIS, 2015). Almost 88% of graduates are in employment compared to 70% of non-graduates, for those who completed their degree in 2011 (BIS, 2015; HESA, 2015).

The meritocratic rhetoric suggests graduates achieve high paid, high skills jobs in a linear model progressing from education to employment, however this input-output supply side policy is questioned as demand cannot absorb graduate supply (Morley, 2001). Brown and Hesketh (2004) and CIPD (2015) argue that the supply of graduates is greater than the demand for highly skilled graduate workers. This has led to the relabelling of some jobs as professional or management where previously degrees were not required for those positions. “Over education” exists where a graduate position could be carried out by a non-graduate and “over-skilling” where a graduate’s skills are not being utilised in their job role (Davies et al., 2013, p. 3). Overall, many recent graduates are finding that securing employment is difficult. Lawton (2013) found that one in five new graduates were not in education or work and Lawton also presents anecdotal evidence from graduates which argues that the jobs secured were part time, students had to wait a year to find a graduate job, and graduates had to remain reliant on parents, living at home. Thus, they still have no defined career path but large amounts of debt<sup>13</sup> (Slane, 2013). This situation has wider social class implications.

For the middle classes the increasing number of graduates reduces differentiation between job applicants and increases competition for them when securing professional jobs. There appears to be continued growth in HE, figures from UCAS (2014a) show that students were 6% more likely to attend HE in 2014 than in 2011 and 23% more likely than in 2006. Overall in 2014 40.5% of young people entered

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<sup>13</sup>In HE the coalition government increased the fee cap to £9,000 and introduced increased widening participation measures (Lupton et al., 2015). UCAS (The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) notes that higher fees did not materially affect the annual demand patterns overall and any small decreases have now been reversed and applications for HE are at record levels (UCAS, 2014b; ICOF, 2015).

HE in England by age 19, it was 26% in 2000 (UCAS, 2014a)<sup>14</sup>. The UK has the highest number of graduates in the workforce in the EU (41%) (OECD, 2014). Middle class students may now feel that they need postgraduate qualifications to reproduce their class advantages due to labour market risks (Ball et al., 2000b; Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014b). This means that middle class success cannot be guaranteed as easily, whereas previously predictable advances through employment hierarchies used credentials to continue employability (Brown, 1995). Hatcher (1998) and Macrae et al. (1997a) argue that middle classes have increased risk because they need to maintain HE attendance to be able to maintain their middle class position, whereas for lower socio-economic groups, their position can be maintained without HE attendance. Thus, it is more important for middle classes to maintain dominance in HE attendance.

However, despite improvements in education and a narrowing of the gap between the most and least advantaged students, an employment gap is still maintained, less advantaged students were not found to be competing in top levels of the employment market by Blanden and Macmillan (2014). In contrast to the above, gaining a degree and educational expansion is not a panacea for lower socio-economically resourced graduates who are more likely to attend post-1992 universities and study less prestigious subjects (Wolf, 2002; Nunn et al., 2007). Brown and Hesketh (2004) and Crawford and Vignoles (2014) note how it is misleading to generalise the economic returns to higher education, returns are higher at institutions and courses with stronger reputations<sup>15</sup> (Dearden et al., 2002; Keep and Mayhew, 2004; OECD, 2004; Machin and Vignoles, 2009; De Vries, 2014). Although the expansion of HE has led to widening participation in terms of students from lower socio-economic groups attending HE there is still underrepresentation in deprived areas and underrepresentation at the most selective universities where the proportion of lower socio-economic students attending these institutions has remained unchanged (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2013).

Despite links between education and economic success it is argued that edu-

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<sup>14</sup>In the early 1900s around 1% of 18 year olds attended HE, 3% in the 1950s (Knowles, 1997).

<sup>15</sup>Such as medicine, dentistry and engineering (De Vries, 2014).

cation is increasingly becoming a process of commodification, whereby educational certificates gained are being exchanged for employment opportunities. Dore (2006) argues that education systems are used rationally by bureaucratic systems in recruitment process, whereby educational credentials are used to select suitable employees. He traces the start of this process back to the 1860s. Over time this makes the educational credential a market positional good, its value is dependent on the number of students who hold it. Eventually, he argues, qualification inflation or escalation would occur when the value of the exchange of education credentials for securing employment is reduced (Dore, 1976, 2006; Allen and Ainley, 2007). The process is rational because it allows for the efficient short-listing of candidates. Those who do not hold the minimum expected credential are thought not to have the ability or persistence in order to be a successful employee. Thus, Dore argues that the human capital rhetoric behind education (see page 15) needs to place more emphasis on the screening effect. This increases demand for higher qualifications to be gained for selection into roles where this new level of education was previously not required, as they signal success to employers. Through this process education is commodified for exchange in employment markets (Dore, 1976, 2006; Allen and Ainley, 2007). Hence, Dore describes the situation as a disease for society, as students are rationally remaining in education for their own good, to maximise their chances of employment and their earning potential. This does however, mean that students need to remain in HE to secure employment where HE was previously not necessary to secure employment (Dore, 2006). As qualification inflation devalues existing education students require higher qualifications and more prestigious institutional attendance to differentiate themselves from other applicants (Ainley, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Allen and Ainley, 2007). As increasing numbers graduates enter the pool of applicants available to supply employers the more selection will have to use qualifications as a proxy of employment ability and thus the demand for HE will increase, fuelling pressure to enter HE, and the situation will continue as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Dore, 1976, 2006). Therefore, academic inflation is considered as a threat to middle class dominance due to increased access to the

education system.

### **Qualifications as a proxy signal of ability**

Following on from the above argument there is a debate as to whether improved post-degree outcomes are due to education providing a signalling role for employers which differentiates young people from those without the same level of education, or if higher earnings and employment levels are due to actually possessing higher skills, or presumed higher ability compared to those without the qualifications, making degree holders attractive to employers (Wolf et al., 2006). There is strong evidence of the signalling argument because the longer a student remains in education, the stronger the signal of their work ethic is to employers who can use education as a proxy signal of ability, qualities and self-determination during recruitment (Spence, 1973; Blaug, 1985; Jackson, 2001; Wolf, 2002, 2004; Jackson et al., 2005; Wolf et al., 2006; Wolf, 2009). Qualifications may not however, help in carrying out a job (Dale and Pires, 1984). In addition, the more traditional the route (academic, GCSEs, A levels and university) the more recognised the route is to employers and the clearer the signal (and easier the selection decision) for the employer as they are more likely to understand the qualification and have experience of those with it in employment already. The Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004) claims that the rise in the number of vocational qualifications (of varying sizes and types) has led to employer confusion about the value and quality of courses and as a result the recognition of many VET qualifications is low, as such their currency and progression routes are unclear (ibid). Employers are cited as not understanding the qualification systems (Maguire, 2002). This is important as the number of options and thus, choice increases transition risks, especially when choosing vocational education (see pages 7 and 10 and the Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004)).

This section has outlined how risk is created in students' transition decisions through changes in employment and education, the nature of employment has changed and the demand for skills coupled with education inflationary supply make economic returns to education less direct. In individualised markets there is no

correct action and increased risk is created by the need to secure ever increasing educational credential levels (Ball, 2003a). Ball (2003a) states that education has become the location for class struggles, an arena for competition in order to fulfil self-interests. Overall, the future is looking less like the past, and thus uncertainty, individualism and risk exists in the future of a student's life (Beck, 1992). Giddens' use of late modernity is useful in presenting the argument that there are changing times, in a breakdown of previously assumed ontological security, but that differentiation through structure still does retain influences on reproduction, for example class and gender (Giddens, 1991). Individualism is inherent in educational market rhetoric and policy (Macrae et al., 1997b; Bloomer and Hodgkinson, 2000b; Apple, 2013; Atkins, 2016), this has been outlined above through the focus on the rhetoric which emphasises the pursuit of qualifications through hard work and assumed individual responsibility for a lack of success and thus, that a meritocratic hierarchy exists in education and employment.

The penultimate section of the introduction provides a broad introduction to the context of vocational education in order to locate later arguments contained in the thesis.

## **Vocational Education**

Defining VET (vocational education and training) in England is challenging (Hayward, 2006, 2008; Hoelscher et al., 2008). One of the widest definitions taken by Hayward (2006, p. 1) is "any form of activity and experience leading to understandings relevant to work . . . this conceptual definition covers . . . courses taught in classrooms and workshops." The definition used by Edge Foundation (2010) is broadly similar and specifically states that it includes apprenticeships, BTECs and Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society for Arts (OCR) National qualifications (but not Diplomas or Applied A levels). Some authors use a narrower definition of VET's aims, for example Field et al. (2009) in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's report on learning for employment, state that VET includes ed-

education which is designed for and leads to a certain type of job. They state that it would normally include practical learning and relevant theory. They define how it is different from academic learning, because academic learning can be applied to a wide array of jobs. Vocational education is more specific to a particular career (which could include law and medicine). This section will explore the historic divide between academic and vocational education before exploring the use of vocational education. It then finally considers the use of vocational education for progression to HE.

### **A divided system**

There is a long-standing divide between academic and vocational education in England. Status and hierarchies are key components of British education (Finegold et al., 1990; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999a). In 1868 The Taunton Commission highlighted a divide between vocational and liberal education that was rooted in social society (Atkins, 2009). Successive reviews, Dearing (1997), on 14-19 Reform (2004) and Wolf (2011) have all made reference to a divided system. The lack of parity of esteem between academic and vocational courses (Smithers, 2002; Wolf, 2002) reflects the wider class structure (Foskett and Hesketh, 1996; Lumby and Wilson, 2003; Brockmann, 2007; Shaw, 2007; Atherton et al., 2009). This situation has implications for institutions, students and society.

Schools are more likely to select academic studies for higher attaining, middle class students (Hemsley-Brown and Foskett, 1999). Over time this has reinforced the perception of vocational education being for non-academic (Hemsley-Brown and Foskett, 1999; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Lumby et al., 2002; Foskett et al., 2004; Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Hayward, 2006; Hoelscher et al., 2008; Atkins, 2010), low-achieving students and resit students and thus routes providing second chances (Bathmaker, 2001, 2005; Edge Foundation, 2014). The result has been that when compared to academic qualifications, vocational qualifications are held in lower esteem regardless of the value of the vocational course (Raffe et al., 2001; Little and Connor, 2005; Hayward et al., 2005; Daly and Thomas, 2008; Atkins,

2016). Students who take GCSEs, international GCSEs, the Cambridge Pre-U, the International Baccalaureate and GCE A levels are labelled as 'academic' students and those who take Applied GCSE, Applied A levels or BTECs are labelled as 'vocational' students (Wilkins and Walker, 2011).

The academic and vocational divide is carried through to institutional type, with some institutions differentiating themselves by their exclusive academic or vocational offerings. This has important implications for the findings section. Traditionally academic students would stay on in sixth form colleges, schools and grammar schools to study A levels before progressing to universities. Vocational students would progress from school to FE colleges and study vocational qualifications before entering employment (see appendix A on page 241). Wolf (2011) estimated that two thirds of students in the UK took a vocational course of some form whereas one third of students took wholly academic courses.

This rhetoric is also reflected in the aim of academic study which is represented in societal culture as being a rite of passage to HE and then employment with the associated social and personal development benefits (Macrae et al., 1997b; Ainley, 2003; Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Hayward, 2006; Pring, 2007; Atkins, 2016). Educational policy emphasises linear progression up through levels of education (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Hayward, 2006). The dominant academic approach is seen as students gaining enough good GCSEs (5+ A\*-C grades) to gain good A levels to progress to HE (ibid). Historically vocational courses were aligned to progression into the workplace not university (Little and Connor, 2005; Daly and Thomas, 2008) although a later section of this chapter updates this view.

Therefore, rational students would opt for a more secure progression route to HE via A levels over a less certain vocational alternative (Hayward, 2006), providing they were able to make this choice. Thus, it is more likely that middle class students would be keen to distance themselves from vocational courses which have been stigmatised as being for second best students (Hemsley-Brown, 1999). It is common for students, teachers, parents, employers and HE admission tutors to believe that students would only choose vocational study if they lacked the ability to pursue an

academic course (Wahlberg and Gleeson, 2003; Wilkins and Walker, 2011; Allen and Ainley, 2014a; Allen, 2016). There is also a lack of clarity over the purpose of VET (Smithers, 2002), due to the complex maze of options (see page 10) that students have to navigate. Therefore, it is not surprising that academic routes are often favoured given their more established purpose as the route to HE and their recognition by employers (Foskett and Hesketh, 1997; Allen and Ainley, 2014b; Atkins, 2016). Thus, it could be argued that academic qualifications are considered as a lower risk option for students to choose.

Overall choices at 14 and 16, between academic and vocational education, portray cultural desirability and an employment exchange value or currency and as such the post-16 education marketplace is hierarchical and stratified (Macrae et al., 1997a; Atkins, 2016). British cultural inequalities lead to career trajectories based on educational level and routes taken at 16. This is strongly influenced by social class (Bates, 1993; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008; Atkins, 2016). The way that vocational education is undervalued in British society and the lack of clarity over its purpose has meant that some students do not follow academic routes at the expense of developing their talents and interests (Smithers, 2002). The next section will argue that it is the use of vocational qualifications, rather than the qualifications themselves which represent the problem.

### **Vocational education in schools**

The number of vocational courses provided in schools has risen substantially over the last five to ten years. Over 2007-2009 the number of BTECs and other vocational qualifications offered in schools more than doubled to 20% of level two qualifications and 25% of level three qualifications (Edge Foundation, 2009). The rise in the number of vocational courses is in part down to schools offering vocational courses to students who would perform better on vocational courses than academic ones (Wolf, 2011). This approach has been criticised due to the variable quality and narrow scope for progression of some vocational qualifications (ibid). This perverse incentive boosts a school's position in the performance tables (BIS, 2013) and it



entrenches the stereotype that vocational courses are for lower attaining students. Furthermore, Wolf's review of vocational education argued that only one quarter of the vocational qualifications students were taking were providing adequate opportunities for progression, and that 350,000 students were on courses that did not provide adequate progression opportunities. However, these courses would boost a school's performance position. The government accepted Wolf's review in full and made significant changes to performance measures to coerce schools into offering vocational qualifications which were deemed to offer quality and further study or employment progression opportunities. Limits were also placed on the equivalence of vocational qualifications to academic qualifications when used for performance table measures. Both measures were designed to re-balance the mix of vocational and academic subjects a student studies and to stop schools offering vocational qualifications that were considered low quality and weakly vocational (DfE, 2012).

Part of the concern over the rise in schools offering vocational education regarded the ability for schools to make the courses vocational. Large amounts of evidence suggests that vocational courses offered in schools lack the staff with up-to-date industrial knowledge and experience, lack the flexibility to be able to engage with businesses and lack the industrial resources required to deliver technical courses (Brockmann, 2007; Ofsted, 2007; Winch and Hyland, 2007; Wolf, 2011). Thus, some students who progress from school vocational courses to those in FE institutions are often said to lack the vocational knowledge, skills and experience compared to that of students who studied in FE colleges with the suitable resources to be able to deliver the courses (Wolf, 2011). Approaches to vocational education such as these weakly vocational approaches have damaged the value of vocational education (Young et al., 1997; Wolf, 2002). Therefore, it is argued that the use of inappropriate weakly vocational courses is what has fuelled the academic and vocational divide, not vocational education itself.

## **Vocational education and HE**

Despite the aforementioned divided system and the ways that schools have used vocational education, it is interesting to note that increasingly VET courses are being used for the purpose of progression to HE. Often students and institutions use vocational qualifications with progression to HE in mind. This may be due to the culture of securing a degree as being essential for securing employment (Payne, 2003; Hoelscher et al., 2008; Allen and Ainley, 2014a,b; Avis, 2014). This situation is not surprising given the the number of graduates in the workforce overall. Therefore, vocational students are more likely to feel increasingly that HE participation is necessary to reduce the risk of being unable to access the job market and to avoid unemployment (see page 21). Over time more and more universities have opened up to accepting vocational qualifications through widening participation (Ertl et al., 2010). The number of students who progress to HE via vocational qualifications are still in the minority in comparison with the A level route and vocational students are more likely to attend less selective courses at post-1992 (newer) universities (Daly and Thomas, 2008). Evidence suggests that the growth in the number of disadvantaged applicants to newer universities has partly been through the use of BTEC qualifications (UCAS, 2014a). The latest available analysis, provided by UCAS, stated that 19.6% of HE applicants held three or more A levels and 3.5% of applicants held BTECs only (UCAS, 2016, p. 134). The number of students applying to HE with at least one BTEC qualification has almost doubled since 2008 (UCAS, 2016).

The rising cost of HE (maximum £9,000 cost per year for tuition) (Garner, 2013) alongside political support (Dismore, 2014) has increased the focus on vocational apprenticeships in the last few years. Increasingly apprenticeships are being seen as routes to HE (Dismore, 2013; Smith et al., 2015). The announcement of apprenticeship degrees (GOV.UK, 2014) emphasised this as an aim of apprenticeships.

Previously the chapter argued that the aim of academic qualifications are universally accepted as the route to HE, but the above highlights how the aim of VET is unclear, and can be seen to play a dual role in allowing progression to employment

and HE for some students. Paradoxically the government continued to defend A levels and support the selection of A level candidates by universities, whilst appearing to continue to support widening participation (Shaw and Bloomer, 1993). This situation does not provide any clarity on the role of vocational qualifications, other than emphasising that a degree is key to competing in the labour market.

In order to set the context for the findings of this thesis, this section of the introduction explored the definition of VET and the aims of vocational education. It then provided an introduction to the academic and vocational divide, explaining that divisions exist between qualifications, institutions and wider society. The section then assessed the increasing use of VET in schools, it argued how the use of vocational qualifications may maximise performance table success but that courses offered in schools may not be of sufficient quality for effective vocational progression post-16. Finally the section emphasised how increasingly VET is being more widely used for progression to HE. The structure of the thesis will conclude this chapter.

## **Thesis structure**

This chapter located the study within the context of post-16 education. It has introduced my interest in post-16 transition and located the study in the context of the changes which have occurred in 14-18 education since the 2000s. Competition has increased, IAG has reduced, compulsory education has extended and transition risks have increased. It provided an introduction to the aims of education, highlighting the dominance of economic aims and finally it outlined a brief history of vocational education.

Chapter two locates the study in literature. It continues on from this introductory chapter to detail changes in IAG following the 2012 changes before critiquing the role of IAG in supporting transition. The literature review then locates the study in the literature of choice, transition and decision-making. It builds on the economic aim of education which was first introduced in this chapter. Finally, the chapter underpins the study by rejecting a structure-agency dichotomy using concepts from

the work of Bourdieu and Giddens.

Chapter three outlines the philosophical and methodological traditions which the study follows. It then details the methods of inquiry and analysis used in the study. Validity and ethics are also considered.

Chapter four explores the context of the sample before the findings are presented in chapter five. The chapter outlines the regional, local and school educational, economic and geographical contexts of the sampled locations. This chapter is important because the contexts create implications for this study's findings.

Chapter five presents the findings and discussion of the study. The chapter outlines the competitive post-16 environment in order to explain why the transition control methods used by schools are utilised. It then explores the impact of school control on post-16 transition in detail. The chapter ends by highlighting the implications that this control has on student decision-making. Pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis to ensure the anonymity of participants, schools and locations.

Chapter six concludes the thesis by emphasising the findings and the contribution to the existing body of literature on transition, choice and decision-making taking into account the contextual changes, particularly to IAG. It draws on these findings to present implications for institutional competition and supporting IAG. Finally it outlines the study's limitations and suggests further research.

## Chapter 2

# Literature Review

### Introduction

In order to fully understand the transition decisions of post-16 students the literature review does three things, the first is to present the current and contemporary literature on IAG, the second is to consider what is understood regarding choice, decision-making and transition and the third is to ground this study of choice and transition in the structure-agency debate. These sections are now introduced.

The first section assesses the impact of the 2012 changes to IAG on institutions and students, this highlights the importance of re-assessing IAG usage following the changes. The final part of the IAG section assesses the role played by IAG in supporting transition. Overall the first section of the literature chapter frames the study by emphasising that, taking into account the changes in IAG policy, we understand a great deal about why IAG is provided by schools in the sometimes competitively biased way that it is. However, what is less clear is the operational and strategic manner in which IAG is carried out on a day-to-day basis, at a micro level, by schools. Hence, this study aims to contribute knowledge to this area of transition literature reflecting the post-2000 educational context.

The second section presents what is known about choice and decision-making. It focuses on economic, structuralist and pragmatic rational decision-making theories

using some of the work of Bloomer, Hodgkinson, Foskett, Maguire, Hemsley-Brown, Macrae, Gewirtz and Ball from the 1990s-2000s when choice became a body of literature in its own right. Prior to the 1990s there was a lack of literature focusing on student choice and decision-making (Hemsley-Brown, 1996b; Blenkinsop et al., 2006). The work of these authors provides the knowledge base to underpin the current study in order to build on it when exploring the current nature of the field of choice, transition and decision-making. This section also links IAG to choice and decision-making by suggesting that some students require more support than others, depending on their ability to access resources to assist with their transition. It also emphasises how some students utilise formal and informal knowledge differently in the decision-making process. Finally this section addresses the theme of decision-making risk, this theme has important implications for the findings and discussion.

The third section leads on from the literature on choice, decision-making and transition and it locates this in the structure-agency debate, at a macro level, using concepts from the work of Bourdieu and Giddens, this section presents the theoretical grounding for the study, reflecting the research traditions established by previous decision-making studies. This grounding is especially useful as it is used to inform understanding and analysis which avoids structural determinism. It presents a basis for the methodological approach and methods to be used in the current study in order to understand choice from the social actors' points of view. The chapter now continues with the first section which discusses the impact of the 2012 IAG policy changes on institutions and students.

## **Information, advice and guidance**

This first section of the literature review builds on the introductory chapter to explain, in more detail, the impact of the changes that occurred to IAG in 2012. This explains why IAG has reduced for some students since the changes were implemented. It considers the practical, knowledge and financial resource limitations faced by schools when enacting the 2012 changes to IAG. The chapter then ad-

dresses the role of teachers in providing IAG before highlighting post-2012 concerns over IAG. The final part of the section addresses the positive contribution and limitations of IAG in supporting transition.

### **The impact of the 2012 changes to information and guidance provision**

The rationale behind transferring the control of IAG to schools, as outlined in the introduction (see page 7), was to combat inconsistencies identified in Connexions' careers IAG provision. The coalition government argued that schools were best placed to be able to identify and respond to the specific needs of students and therefore that this would allow IAG provision to be in the best interests of those students (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b). The Skills Minister, John Hayes, outlined the rationale in 2010:

Individual schools and colleges know their own learners and are better placed to assess their needs than anyone else. So it follows that on them must fall the responsibility for ensuring that all learners get the best advice and guidance possible [...] But we ask too much of our teachers when we expect them to be excellent pedagogues and professional careers advisors. So too many schools are not equipped to provide young people with a full understanding of the options open to them. As a result, the ambitions of some are prematurely limited. That's a waste that we just can't afford. And that's why I am clear that close partnerships - whereby schools work together with expert, independent advisers - must be at the heart of our new arrangements. (Hooley et al., 2012, p. 17)

This rationale followed on from a common criticism of the Connexions service, that it over focused on supporting vulnerable groups of students at the expense of IAG for all students (Hughes and Gration, 2009; Hooley et al., 2014). Unfortunately other factors have meant that this aim has been left unachieved, namely competitive,

practical and financial resource factors (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b; Watts, 2014). These factors are now addressed in turn. Overall, this section's purpose is to emphasise the interplay between competition, selection and IAG.

### **Competitive pressures and accountability measures**

Research questions the extent to which schools are best placed to provide impartial advice. The statutory duty required schools to provide guidance from Year 8 to Year 13 students which is impartial, covers a range of academic and vocational education and training options, and is delivered by someone who has the best interests of the student in mind. Thus, in-house guidance can be provided but external, independent sources must also be commissioned to meet the duty (Careers England, 2012; DfE, 2014a). As a result of these changes there is a large body of evidence suggesting that students are not receiving impartial IAG (Evans and Rallings, 2013; House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b; Ofsted, 2013; Watts, 2013; Hooley et al., 2014; Ofsted, 2014).

It is difficult for schools to give unbiased advice partly because they know their students so well. This is a paradox in contention with the law (Evans and Rallings, 2013) and the minister's comments above (see page 33). The post-16 market is competitive and this affects students' choices (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Lumby et al., 2002). This was especially found to be the case in schools with their own sixth forms, given their lack of independence. Schools with their own sixth forms potentially have interests in tension with the progression interests of some students (Foskett et al., 2004, 2008). A number of studies have emphasised that staff in schools are not impartial and encourage students to stay on into their own sixth forms (Taylor, 1992; Payne, 2003; Blenkinsop et al., 2006). Given the competition for pupil funding in the post-16 marketplace, it is not always within schools' interests to provide students with advice on alternative institutions (Keys and Maychell, 1998; Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012; Fuller and Macfadyen, 2012; McCrone et al., 2012; Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Hughes and Gration, 2009; Hutchings, 2015). The



changes to IAG came at a time where institutions were facing competitive pressures through increased post-16 options as detailed in the introductory chapter (see page 6). Competitive pressures provide an incentive for schools to follow strategies (for example, in terms of IAG) which could stem impartiality (Hemsley-Brown, 1996a; Morris et al., 2001; Foley, 2014; Hutchings, 2015). Foskett et al. (2004) summarised this:

Schools with sixth forms have a ready made post-16 route and pupils in these schools are more channelled in their choices and decisions, with the school exerting influence through processes aimed at maintaining a position, image and status consistent with excellence and the highest standards. In schools without a sixth form, there is a greater democratisation of choice and so IAG is more generally aimed at providing students with opportunities that more adequately address their needs. (p. 6)

Schools with sixth forms have an easily accessible market, in their current students, which is natural (consisting of their students by defacto), captive because the schools control the activities that occur within the school and closed because access to students (within school time) can be blocked by school gatekeepers. This situation presents an enormous competitive advantage for the institutions and so they are able to focus on internal recruitment and transition before external recruitment (Gray and Sime, 1990; Maguire et al., 2001).

This situation is more likely to occur in schools where their sixth form is under subscribed. Access to alternative IAG may be blocked as funding requires enough students to maximise Year 11 transition to make courses financially viable in sixth forms (Schagen et al., 1996; Dolphin, 2014). This was recognised by school students who admitted that they did not receive much information on alternative provision (Foskett et al., 2004, 2008). Maguire et al. (2001) and Maguire (2005) and more recently the House of Commons Education Select Committee evidenced that 74% of colleges said that schools would not even distribute their prospectuses (2013b). Further confirmation of this argument exists following the 2012 changes, a report

published by the Association of Colleges in November 2012 found that 57% of the 500 teachers polled felt obliged to encourage pupils to stay on at their school post-16 with 26% blaming this on overt pressure from school leaders (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b, p. 28).

Furthermore, schools also act to achieve accountability measures and have prioritised league table performance (for example) over other aims such as IAG (Hutchings, 2015). Currently there is no robust accountability measure of IAG; there is no separate measure identified by the schools inspectorate<sup>1</sup> to check that the statutory duty is being complied with (Cegnet, 2015). Hence, there is a belief that impartial IAG is weakly incentivised through Ofsted inspections, and it is not incentivised enough to be prioritised (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b; Fresh-Minds, 2014). The competitive and accountability contexts surrounding post-16 education are in direct competition with the partnership approach identified above by Minister John Hayes (see page 33).

Evidence from earlier studies can help to explain the post-2012 situation, Morris et al. (2001) argued that some schools interpreted the removal of local authority support as a signal that IAG was not important, and given the pressure to achieve academic results for league table positions, and to maximise sixth form enrolment IAG represents an opportunity cost in achieving success in these areas. Curriculum time is precious in order to help in achieving results which supports performance table position which in turn helps to attract the students from competitors in order to boost the number of students on roll (Hutchings, 2015). This could mean that IAG sessions that were no longer offered by local authorities and Connexions were not replaced by alternative provision leading to an overall reduction in IAG, especially impartial IAG.

Oversubscribed schools cannot be complacent but it may be easier for them to defend their positions and provide IAG on alternative choices (Gewirtz et al., 1993, 1994; Ball, 2003c). Under-subscribed schools on the other hand may be more likely to need to maximise student enrolment. Oversubscribed schools are more

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<sup>1</sup>The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

likely to be more able to provide the best resources and achievement becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Ball, 1993; Gewirtz et al., 1994). For schools with poor student numbers, this situation could lead to schools having to make staff redundant and stop offering less economically viable courses, this again can become a negative self-fulfilling prophecy as a lack of courses may lead to lower attractiveness to students and lower student numbers. Therefore, a downward spiral would likely continue (Maguire et al., 2001). Hence, increased competition can create inefficiencies in the education market<sup>2</sup> which schools have to overcome using anti-competitive strategies, not partnerships as argued by the Skills Minister (see page 33). The extent to which there is local competition depends on specific local factors (Foskett and Hesketh, 1997; Maguire et al., 1999; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Hodgson and Spours, 2008) hence the context chapter (chapter 4 on page 109) explores the geography, labour market, history, socio-economic landscape and travel factors impacting on competition across the sampled schools.

Competitive post-16 markets can lead to students becoming commodified through the self-interest and long term survival of institutions. The free market competition policy (competition between institutions) could encourage the support of the middle classes as schools aim to act in order to protect their (middle class) interests by working to maintain their advantages. Oversubscribed schools are more likely to be able to be selective and this selection aims to maximise the enrolment of good students which tends to favour middle class students (Smithers and Robinson, 2010). There is a long established relationship between educational attainment and parental background. Students from poorer backgrounds tend to have lower academic attainment and there is an effect after accounting for background and ability in the UK (Blanden and Gregg, 2004). Thus, these students are also more likely to boost or maintain an institution's performance, league table position and reputation through high academic attainment with minimal investment and thus, they are more likely to be valued and are actively recruited by institutions (Gewirtz et al., 1993,

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<sup>2</sup>Education is a quasi-market, it is not a perfect market due to political interference and the government paying for state education on behalf of parents (Ball, 1993; Ranson, 1993; Davies and Adnett, 1999).

1994; Ball, 1995; Higham et al., 1996; Lumby et al., 2003; Webb, 2006). Hence, competition between post-16 providers occurs through the ability of institutions to be able to attract and successfully recruit students in order to maximise enrolments which can lead to maximising funding, examination and league table success. This in turn can help to protect the institution's survival and employment provision (Ball, 1993, 1995; Gewirtz et al., 1995). Therefore, institutions may actively select more able students to make it easier to achieve these outcomes, at the expense of lower ability or those students with special needs (ibid). Hence, schools may actively provide alternative provision via IAG for students who are less valuable to them (Ball, 1995; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Blenkinsop et al., 2006).

Therefore, it is not surprising that students were found to be more likely to have been knowledgeable about academic study when they attended a school with a sixth form and be more knowledgeable about a range of course types when their school did not have a sixth form (Keys and Maychell, 1998; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Foskett and Hesketh, 1997; Hemsley-Brown, 1997). School management channels students into their post-16 provision with the aim of maintaining the image and success of the institution, which may not reflect the needs of the students. There is no pressure to do this in schools without sixth forms (Foskett et al., 2004, 2008). Therefore, it appears that the presence or absence of a sixth form does alter a school's culture, encouraging students to remain in their sixth form, or not (Payne, 2003).

Watts and Young (1999) explored levels of impartiality in IAG. They found that IAG has "reactive impartiality" (p. 156) if students sought alternative advice and "proactive impartiality" (p. 156) in advice is represented by channelling students into certain routes via proactive provision of IAG, for the institution's benefit. They suggested that teachers cannot be expected to be fully impartial, instead "intra-institutional impartiality" (p. 156) can be expected which presents a narrow range of choices in line with institutional biases. Here there is a professional ethical dilemma, a conflict of interest between a teacher's desire to help a student when they are also institutionally tied (Gewirtz et al., 1995). This term effectively draws together the aforementioned tensions between IAG, competition, recruitment, retention and

survival (Maguire et al., 2001; Maguire, 2005). Hence, the full range of options which schools must outline for students, by law, may be difficult for school staff to implement due to competitive pressures. This conflict of interest is not addressed by the Skills Minister's comments on page 33.

### **Teachers' effectiveness in IAG provision**

Schools were also found to lack the practical skills, knowledge and experience to be able to provide impartial IAG of effective quality (Fuller et al., 2014). This is the second concern given that schools are now responsible for IAG. Teachers are experts in pedagogy, not occupations and as such, unless effective professional development exists to train and keep teachers up-to-date, advice may be of poor quality and unrepresentative of industry (Munro and Elsom, 2000; Bamfield, 2013; House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b; Ofsted, 2013).

Teachers themselves claimed a lack of confidence in being able to explain available options to students (Holman, 2014), particularly vocational options (Morris et al., 2001; Haynes, 2004; Webb, 2006). School staff are more likely to have followed an academic route and thus they are understood by teachers (Taylor, 1992; Hemsley-Brown and Foskett, 1999; Payne, 2003; Foskett et al., 2004, 2008; Hodgson and Spours, 2015). Thus, IAG provided by school staff is more likely to focus on academic routes, restricting advice on the range of alternative, vocational options (Hemsley-Brown, 1996b; Foskett et al., 2004; Hayward, 2006; Foskett et al., 2008; Hughes and Gratton, 2009; McCrone et al., 2012; Ofsted, 2013; Watts, 2013; Edge Foundation, 2014; Hutchings, 2015), this was found to be the case at two thirds of schools sampled by Foskett et al. (2004, 2008) and by Ofsted's inspections post the 2012 changes to IAG (Ofsted, 2013). Students were unaware of the wide range of course and career opportunities available (ibid).

In addition many teachers do not have work experience outside of teaching and so they reported knowing little about the local occupational area (Fuller et al., 2014). Their understanding of careers was gained from personal contact with friends and family members and so this reflected their cultures, backgrounds and biases (Foskett

and Hemsley-Brown, 1999). Taken together these reasons mean that teachers may not be effective at providing effective, impartial IAG for students.

### **Reduced IAG resources and support for schools**

Finally, the responsibility to provide IAG has been transferred to schools without further support being provided to schools; this has limited the effective provision of IAG post-2012. Following the 2012 changes, the Connexions service, which supported schools in the delivery of IAG, was disbanded for the majority of students (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011; Hooley and Watts, 2011). Schools and colleges were not provided with additional funding in order to carry out their new IAG responsibilities (Evans and Rallings, 2013; House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b). By 2013 annual spending by local authorities on career guidance had fallen by £228 million (Foley, 2014) and Connexions services were either being closed, offered as a service that schools could buy into (as part of a market approach, whereby schools operated in a contractor relationship with IAG providers (Hooley et al., 2012)) or they focused on vulnerable and NEET students only (Hooley and Watts, 2011). Thus, the capacity for local authorities and Connexions to be able to support schools was vastly reduced. It is difficult to see how the Skills Minister could make schools responsible for IAG without providing adequate support, given his recognition that school staff and resources are not adequate enough to provide effective IAG (see the Minister's comments on page 33).

In response, at the same time as making schools responsible for IAG, the NCS (National Careers Service) was launched to provide a one stop shop for career information and guidance. For young people (aged 13 to under 19) this formed a website, a telephone, text, email, online forum and web-chat service. For adults aged 19 and over face to face provision was created (BIS, 2012a). NCS does not work directly with schools, nor are advisors allowed to market directly to schools and as such it is not recognised (or promoted by schools) or used by students (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b).

Hooley and Watts (2011) and Careers England (2012) claimed that the 2012

policy move has left schools in a difficult position being both practically and financially unsupported in the provision of IAG whilst also being under financial pressure to provide a range of other services for students. Taking account of the above competitive and accountability situation this has led to reductions in IAG provision given the opportunity cost of using resources for IAG provision (ibid). Therefore, Hooley and Watts predicted that these pressures would lead to a reduction in support for students (2011). Evidence from studies which followed the IAG changes are presented below, in the final part of the first section of the literature review. Overall the purpose of the section is to support Hooley's prediction, arguing that reductions in IAG have occurred since the changes were made to IAG in 2012.

### **Reductions in IAG as a result of the 2012 changes**

As a result of the changes it is argued that students are receiving lower levels of IAG and IAG which is less independent. Overall the provision of IAG is ineffective (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b). 80% of schools have reported to have reduced their levels of guidance since 2012 (University Alliance, 2014). Careers England (2012) provided an example of one school which reduced its careers advisor provision by 75% and others who reduced guidance interviews to just ten minutes, not long enough for substantive discussions they argued. Indeed Watts confirmed that, for the reasons outlined in the preceding sections, the changes have led to an overall drop in provision of IAG (Evans and Rallings, 2013; Watts, 2013; Hooley et al., 2014). The House of Commons Education Select Committee (2011) raised serious questions over the consistency, quality, independence and impartiality of advice provided by schools. The level of careers advice has only been maintained in 16.5% of schools surveyed by Careers England (2013). Out of sixty schools visited by Ofsted only twelve were providing adequate advice (one in five) (Ofsted, 2013) and in 2014 the annual report by Ofsted's Chief Inspector found that IAG was not acceptable in three quarters of schools visited (Ofsted, 2014). Before the changes were implemented Future First (2011) identified that students at state schools and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds tended to get poorer

IAG. Thus, the current situation is likely to have exaggerated their need and have had a disproportionately negative effect on those students. These are the students who may need school support due to a lack of resource access available outside of school (ibid).

In this section I have presented literature to argue that instead of ameliorating issues identified with the Connexions service the 2012 changes to IAG have allowed for biased instead of impartial IAG to be provided by schools and that accountability measures do not exist to challenge this practice. Antecedents to ineffective IAG were identified as competitive pressures, a lack of teacher effectiveness and limited resource availability for schools. The section's purpose was to highlight how there could be a conflict of interest between the needs of a school with a sixth form and the needs of their students, this could be inimical towards the IAG provided to students and it could negatively impact on their transition and future life chances (Watts, 2013).

This argument is important because effective IAG is one element in assisting transition into post-16 education, especially for students who lack the resources to be able to access alternative sources of transition decision-making support. Therefore, it is important for this study to investigate what IAG is used by students and the differences that may exist between schools in the provision of IAG. So far this chapter has explored the post-2012 context of IAG and assessed the impact of the changes on IAG provision. The next section of the literature review will explore the influence of actual sources of IAG used by students in order to understand the findings and discussion.

### **The influence of people, teachers, family and friends on transition**

It is important to consider the role of specific social actors in guidance during transition decision-making choices before the literature review considers the overall influence of IAG on transition. The purpose of this section is not to consider the



importance of each source of IAG<sup>3</sup>, instead it focuses on themes relevant to IAG in schools given the focus of this thesis. People are specifically important sources of IAG which need to be considered in order to understand the findings and discussion. When making decisions about post-16 transition, studies found that students often reported that their decisions were taken by themselves individually, whereas their decisions were heavily influenced through unrecognised social interaction (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Smith et al., 2005).

However, students do recognise and value the advice from people, stating that people (family members, teachers and friends) are more important than formal sources of advice (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993; Macrae et al., 1996; Keys and Maychell, 1998; Wardman and Stevens, 1998; Munro and Elsom, 2000; Payne, 2003; Foskett et al., 2004; McNicol, 2005; Smith et al., 2005; Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008; Hughes and Gration, 2009). This was found to be the case in almost all studies reviewed by Hughes and Gration (2009). Abraham (1995a) found that lower socio-economically resourced students were more likely to opt to follow their own career decisions, however, middle class students were more likely to be directed away from choices parents considered inappropriate.

Lumby and Foskett (2005a); Foskett et al. (2008) and Higham and Yeomans (2011) found that schools had a broad influence over students. Teachers were key providers of career advice (Taylor, 1992; Munro and Elsom, 2000; Smith et al., 2005; Blenkinsop et al., 2006; FreshMinds, 2014). In particular, Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) found that teachers had disproportionately high effects on students at key periods in decision-making. However, the extent of their influence depended on students' trust of teachers and the availability of resources outside of the school (Moon et al., 2004). Subject teachers were trusted to provide specialist subject specific advice (Maguire, 2005; Hughes and Gration, 2009). This is important given that students are unlikely to have their own experiences of their proposed future routes in which to call upon when making transition decisions. Thus, making choices about the future is difficult and so trusted people help in making decisions

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<sup>3</sup>See Hughes and Gration (2009) and Hooley (2014) for a consideration of the usefulness and importance of a wide variety of IAG sources.

easier (Hayward, 2006). Atherton et al. (2009) reported that support from teachers and older relatives within students' families were important sources of advice and influence. They stated that teachers provided shaping to the horizons of young people and that this should not be underestimated, as it can substitute advice that is not available through family networks. In one survey of 1,700 10-19 year olds students had access to careers advisors (by arrangement) but students preferred to use teachers as their advisors, few students commented on using careers advisors (B-live Foundation, 2007). Foskett and Hesketh (1997) presented a reason for such trust of teachers' IAG, students believed that their teachers had experience of the choice processes that parents, older siblings and family members may not have held and students believed that the teachers had personal knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses so they could check the suitability of choices for students as individuals (Hughes and Gration, 2009; McCrone et al., 2012). Munro and Elsom (2000) studied science teachers and found that they were an important source of motivation to continue with specific subjects. It was seldom recognised that teachers may lack the ability or up-to-date knowledge to be able to advise on careers (Blenkinsop et al., 2006; House of Commons Education Committee, 2013c) as discussed in the previous section (see page 39).

### **Trusted grapevine information**

Ball and Vincent (1998) distinguished between formal sources of IAG which they termed "cold knowledge" (p. 380) and "hot knowledge" which is informal, first and second hand information, based on personal emotions, anecdotes and experiences (p. 380). Informal knowledge is gained through privileged access to "noise traders" in social networks (Hayward, 2006, p. 22). Ball (2003a) argued that information presented by formal knowledge was often distrusted over knowledge which was provided by people within a trusted, first hand, reliable communications network. The work of Ball and Vincent (1998) dealt with transition from primary to secondary school, when students were aged 11; however their work remains applicable for this study as it highlights the role of social networks in IAG.

IAG received from people builds up socially constructed impressions of qualifications, institutions and opportunities and these are based on anecdotes provided by trusted people formed through the use of an information grapevine (Foreman-Peck and Thompson, 1998). A grapevine describes a network of people, friends and family members through which gossip and hearsay is relayed. It allows social actors to make sense of everyday understandings and aids decision-making (Ball and Vincent, 1998).

Assessing the influence of people (including teachers) on transition decision-making will form a key component of the study. The final part of the first section of the literature review considers the extent to which IAG can assist transition.

## **The impact of IAG on transition**

### **Positive impacts of IAG on transition**

Rhetoric suggests that IAG plays an important role in developing students for transition to their future lives. It is argued that effective IAG can lead to positive educational, economic, employment and social outcomes (Hughes and Gratton, 2009; Hooley, 2014). Two extensive reviews by Hughes and Gratton (2009) and Hooley (2014) assessed the impact of IAG and found that IAG encouraged retention in education and training, motivated students and reduced educational drop out, reduced those NEET, encouraged personal achievement, facilitated transition and improved life chances, contributed towards broadening horizons and raised aspirations. All of these elements can contribute towards social equity, social mobility, social inclusion and career success. The final part of the IAG literature review section explores these positive claims before critiquing the ability for IAG to positively impact on students' transition.

Bowes et al. (2005) and Bimrose (2010) suggested that the aim of careers education is for all individuals to have the necessary skills and understanding to be able to make appropriate, considered career transitions whilst at school and in

life. Evidence suggests that IAG increases students' awareness of options. IAG is especially important given that the post-16 transition point is complex for a student to be able to navigate alone according to the Education Select Committee (2013b). Reasons for this complexity include the increased participation age and the risks created from an expanding, bewildering, number of options available in education (see page 10). Bowes et al. (2005) cited studies that reported a positive impact of IAG on students' development. Hooley (2014) reported evidence to suggest that where schools provided a high level of IAG, students had improved attendance, better attainment and more thought through university choices. Payne (2003) evidenced that students who had careers advice were more self-aware and more aware of the options available to themselves. This means that the students were more likely to have the mental motivation and planning skills in order to be able to make well informed and thought through decisions. This was possible because they were more likely to know a variety of options and have self-awareness and a thorough understanding of how current educational investments may lead to desired employment (Moon et al., 2004; McCrone et al., 2012). Following IAG, decisions taken were found to be more likely to be linked to capacities and aspirations and decisions could be taken to overcome setbacks. Thus, IAG can provide confidence in decision-making (Bimrose et al., 2006; Hughes and Gration, 2009). IAG can manage expectations and motivate educational engagement and retention (Hughes and Gration, 2009; Hooley et al., 2012; Holman, 2014), this can reduce educational wastage through dropping out (Hodkinson, 1995, 1998a; Fuller and Macfadyen, 2012).

IAG can also lead to financial well-being by supporting entry to the labour market initially as a result of successful applications, and then through supporting promotion and increased salary attainment (Holman, 2014). Wider benefits can include social inclusion and economic prosperity. This can be created through full employment by matching labour supply and demand which can reduce skill gaps and improve labour market outcomes (Watts, 1996b; Hooley et al., 2012). This matching can also reduce labour turnover training and recruitment costs for employers (Killeen,

1992; Howieson and Croxford, 1996; OECD, 2004). IAG can positively influence human capital and job search decisions (NICEC, 1993) which are more likely to lead to good use of public spending on education (Watts, 1996a). Furthermore, productivity, increased gross domestic product, flexibility, lower unemployment and decreased welfare spending for governments are all reported benefits of effective IAG (Hughes and Gration, 2009). The National Careers Council estimated a potential loss of £28 billion to the economy if students are not guided in the right direction, £200 million per annum for Year 11 students alone (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b).

In turn these benefits can reportedly reduce social exclusion and reduce divisions surrounding gender, class, ethnicity and poverty through full employment (Holman, 2014). IAG can tackle stereotypes, such as gender, by explaining what a job entails so that students can imagine themselves carrying out the job regardless of their background (ibid). IAG can increase social mobility by raising awareness of possible careers and routes for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who may not have suitable support structures available to guide their educational decisions which would lead to achievement of their aspirations, especially for professional roles. Fundamentally, if students learn how structural and contextual factors influence their decision-making they are more likely to be able to act on or counter these factors for their own benefit (Bright, 2005).

In addition to the wider individual and societal benefits explored here educational institutions can benefit from matching their courses to students. Thus, IAG is said to lead to efficient allocation of resources by reducing the likelihood of decisions which are inappropriate for a student (Wardman and Stevens, 1998) and equity in opportunities for individuals, education providers, employers, society and governments (Watts, 1991; NICEC, 1993). Thus, IAG is both a public and private good (OECD, 2004).

This section has argued that IAG has the potential to contribute towards a student's effective choice, decision and transition. Its purpose is important as it explains reasons why the 2012 changes in IAG may negatively impact on students'

transitions. The literature review will explore the extent to which transition and decision-making are planned and linear as these are assumptions inherent in this section. The next section questions to what extent IAG is positive and can be said to lead to effective choice, transition and decision-making.

### **Limitations of IAG's contribution to transition**

Despite the aforementioned advantages of IAG, IAG is not a panacea (Ball et al., 2000a; OECD, 2004; Fuller et al., 2009). Limitations exist, not just in terms of the actual IAG provided, but also concerning the assessment of its possible success.

The positive rhetoric assumes that IAG will have the same impact on different types of students, however, its impact is not heterogeneous across types of students. For example, high achievers, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and those in care may be affected by the same IAG in different ways (Bowes et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2005). Nor is the type and quality of IAG across types of provision homogeneous (Hughes and Gratton, 2009). Ofsted (2013) found that the quality of external IAG was mixed in sessions it evaluated. Guidance ranged from detailed explorations of options, to simply signposting students to additional sources of information. The quality of IAG also ranged between schools and staff within schools (Smith et al., 2005).

Even with impartial IAG, criticisms exist. Munro and Elsom (2000) argued that some of the same problems with school teacher IAG are also demonstrated by trained advisors. Their concerns regarded advisors lacking experience of routes outside their discipline, especially science career knowledge and a lack of up-to-date knowledge of careers in general. Harris (1992) also found advisors to lack occupational exposure and work experience. She argued that the advisors ended up being career advisors by chance and that they led a marginalised role of limited impact within schools (Harris, 1992).

In addition to the ineffective in and out of school IAG, the impact of IAG is limited by additional factors, including students' attitudes, ability, attainment and self-perception of their ability. IAG is further mediated by structural factors, such

as socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicity, unemployment and gender (Moon et al., 2004; Bowes et al., 2005; Beck et al., 2006; Hughes and Gration, 2009). Therefore, IAG is only one impact on transition at 16 (Moon et al., 2004). Choices do not occur in a vacuum (Beck et al., 2006), they start by age 14, by which time cultural and social biases may be internalised and these influences will be difficult to overcome with IAG (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001). Thus, IAG cannot be seen to operate in isolation and we must recognise that these wider factors affect students' lives (Collin and Watts, 1996; Smith et al., 2005). Therefore, it cannot follow that the advantages outlined in the previous section, apply so simplistically. Hence, it is important that this study investigates how students see their own transition (set against wider contextual factors).

A further criticism of IAG is that it can maintain the status quo and therefore structural disadvantages. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1996) argued that students may reject IAG if it does not fit in with their current viewpoints which are influenced by the social and cultural traditions that the student lives within. Utilised in this way IAG can be seen to assist students in operating within their current constraints of a decision already taken (Penn, 1986; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993; Hodkinson, 1998c), dealing with short term transition issues, rather than affecting outcomes, for example by widening horizons (Roberts, 1997). Students were also more likely to consider IAG as useful if they had already made a decision and had used IAG to reinforce the existing choice (Smith et al., 2005; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Hughes and Gration, 2009; Kintrea et al., 2011). Thus, Smith et al. (2005) suggested that a student's perception of the usefulness of IAG is contingent on how much progress they have made in securing a decision. Thus, it is difficult to widen horizons once students have chosen a decision and 'stopped listening' to advice (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999).

In addition, students may not be ready to utilise guidance. Future study and employment transitions can be considered to be so distant by students that they find it difficult to recognise the value of IAG (Killeen and White, 1992). Students may also not be cognitively ready to made such important decisions at the time

IAG is received (Stables, 1996).

Finally, IAG's success is open to debate due to a lack of adequate, quality published research including a lack of research which is comparable through the use of shared definitions of IAG (Moon et al., 2004; Bimrose et al., 2006; Hughes and Gratton, 2009; Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012). Student decision-making is complex and therefore, it is difficult to evaluate the impact of formal or informal IAG (Bimrose, 2010). Such difficulty does not mean that IAG has no impact, rather it is difficult to evidence and measure the causal relationship between the IAG input and eventual outcomes, it is difficult to measure cause and effect taking into account other contravening variables (Howieson and Croxford, 1996; Hughes and Gratton, 2009; Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012; Hooley, 2014). Killeen (1992) clearly stated that the potential advantages of IAG are easier to justify than the actual outcomes. Large scale, longitudinal studies would be required to do this, tracking students from school into employment (Payne, 2003). Effectiveness is difficult to define, study and measure, not least because IAG has a delayed impact on transition so IAG received in Year 11 may only have its usefulness assessed at entry to employment (potentially) many years later (Hodkinson, 1995; Stables, 1996; Bimrose et al., 2006; Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012).

Overall this section has argued that IAG is not a panacea for effective transition to employment. IAG does not directly lead to the achievement of the economic, social and societal aims as argued in the previous section. This section explored the implications of the 2012 changes to IAG and assessed the influence of IAG on post-16 transition, including the contribution of people in IAG to support transition decision-making. Overall, it emphasised that IAG has a role to play in supporting decision-making, and it was important to introduce this given the impact that the 2012 changes to IAG may have on students' transition. Thus, it forms the background to the contribution of the thesis which brings the choice literature more up-to-date. The purpose of the next section is to establish the links between IAG, choice, transition and decision-making.



## **Post-16 choice, decision-making and transition**

### **Introduction: linking IAG to choice, decision-making and transition**

The purpose of this section of the literature review is to explore the link between IAG, choice, decision-making and transition. The process of IAG described in policy and in the previous section of the literature review follows an economic, technically rational view of decision-making. This view assumes that effective IAG provides information and support so that students understand themselves and employment demands. This will lead them to making 'correct' decisions in education which will result in career fulfilment through matching their interests and capabilities to employment opportunities. It assumes that rational judgements are made for a best fit to be achieved in a context free and meritocratic manner (Collin and Watts, 1996; Law, 1996; Blenkinsop et al., 2006). However, in reality decisions are much more complex than this (Hodkinson, 1995; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999), and it is not common for students to enter jobs which they previously aspired to achieve. Linear career transition routes assume clear and staged progression, these assumptions are overly simplistic when compared to reality (Carter, 1966; Roberts, 1977; Atkins, 2016). Brown (1995) argued that this view of progression ignores external, structural, socio-economic dis/advantages. Thus, in reality choice is complex and decision-making is not as easy as indicated in IAG policy (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Paton, 2007). Hodkinson and Sparkes (1993) accepted that planning should exist but argued that it should include an appreciation of socio-economic and cultural factors which influence opportunities.

In order to fully understand choice, decision-making and transition at age 16 there are three main approaches in the literature that need to be understood; the economically rational model, the structural model and the pragmatically rational decision-making model. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to address each of these in turn before the pragmatically rational model is accepted as the underpinning theory for the thesis as it overcomes structural determinism

without neglecting the influence of structural influences on transition.

### **Economically rational decision-making**

The economically rational decision-making model is guided by the principles of human capital investment that were first introduced in the introductory chapter (see page 15). It suggests that education is seen as an a current investment in human capital in order to improve future gains through the ability to exchange the developed human capital for income (Becker, 1975). Thus, students choose freely between all options, using full information, maximising utility depending on the assessment of returns (benefits) relative to each option's costs in order to make the 'correct' investment decision for the individual (Hodkinson, 1995; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Payne, 2003; Tan, 2014).

This view emphasises the role of individual agency in linear and economically instrumental decision-making. This rhetoric is translated by students into a meritocratic belief whereby students consider individual hard work in education as the route to future employment, financial, and social success (Bloomer, 1997; Brown, 2001; Maguire, 2005; Hoskins and Barker, 2014). For students, acceptance of the economically rational model follows internalising propaganda from schools, the media and parents which represents itself as students citing continuation in education, as a requirement to achieve a 'good job' and economic security through employment.

There may be problems with a student's ability to make rational decisions which are ignored by the model. Cognitive limitations on student decision-making include students exerting more emphasis on the present compared to the future, for example, choosing a short term easier course over a more difficult one that may lead to higher future rewards (Gigerenzer, 1997; Jin et al., 2011). Students may consider their decisions to be good enough for their current position and therefore, 'rational' but they may not be economically optimally rational (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001). The rational model assumes choices are taken based upon assessment of perfect information, whereas in reality inferences must be made by the students as they have limited knowledge and time for rational decision-making (Gigerenzer,

1997; Jin et al., 2011). Hodkinson and Sparkes (1993); Bridges (1994); Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) and Lumby and Foskett (2005b) argued that educational routes are too far removed (in terms of time) for effective evaluation to be taken by students. Students were also found to be over-optimistic about their ability, and it has also been found that students ignored projection bias by neglecting the possibility that preferences may change in the future when they take courses that restrict rather than support change at a later date (Gigerenzer, 1997; Jin et al., 2011). Further limitations relate to students' information processing abilities. Hemsley-Brown (1999) described how students employed psychological protection mechanisms. These are used to raise motivation and image during announcements of decisions and hence deal with dissonance to persuade themselves that, given the circumstances, they have chosen the best option available. Students can do this by focusing on and exaggerating positive information, minimising the negative aspects of the route and failing to recognise negative countervailing evidence (Hemsley-Brown, 1996b; Gigerenzer, 1997; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Jin et al., 2011). Students do this themselves by exaggerating and distorting information such as pass rates. Gigerenzer (1997); Hemsley-Brown (1999) and Jin et al. (2011) also described how post hoc justification occurs in order to explain decisions; this occurs through the collection or recognition of evidence which supports the decisions taken after the event. Students were also affected by framing effects where decisions were taken based on the way that decisions were presented, such as following the most recently received information rather than questioning desirability of the option before following it, and students were found to suffer from inertia when the visibility of one choice stops another being considered. For example, choice of attending one institution early prevents other possible institutions being considered (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001). In practice choice overload may also take place, when this occurs the situation is overcomplicated and may lead to dissatisfaction and sub-optimal decision-making (Jin et al., 2011). Students also respond to decisions with different mind-sets to influences as students develop and factors change over time (Bloomer, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, 2000b; Foskett and Hemsley-

Brown, 2001; Payne, 2003; Foskett et al., 2004; Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Foskett et al., 2008; McCrone, 2014). Such cognition can filter out information and cause information blindness caused by conceptual blocks. These blocks are based on perceptions established from culture, social, emotional and intellectual labelling and stereotyping (Hemsley-Brown, 1996a). These can lead students towards selecting a choice that is acceptable for existing social reality and reproducing the reality for the future (Ball and Vincent, 1998).

In reality the context described here means that decisions change over time, as more information comes to light, and as the deadline approaches; hence Hemsley-Brown describes decision-making as dynamic and not linear (1996a). Transitions are linked to previous decisions and thus future choices are linked to the legacy of past decisions.

The most important assumption to note with this model is that the theory assumes students will make choices in order to maximise their utility, their personal future gains (Bridges, 1994; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Mankiw, 2004). In doing so the model neglects the structural inequalities that constrain agency (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993; Hatcher, 1998; Brown and Hesketh, 2004). Hence, on its own the economic model does not fully explain student choice and transition. The following structuralist model deals with the assumptions unaccounted for by this model in order to give a more complete picture of choice and decision-making.

### **The structural impact of the school on transition**

In order to take account of the way that structural and external influences impact on transition and decision-making the structuralist model is now considered. This extends the understanding of decision-making beyond the limitations of the economically rational view presented above. Structuralist theorists argue that external causes and structures (social and institutional) impact on social behaviour. Structural constraints on decision-making occur when class, gender, ethnicity, culture and socio-economic positions impact on transition (Gambetta, 1987). Institutional factors also impact on transition and can include the availability of school provision,

teacher bias in IAG and institutional ethos. These factors are especially important given that students view teachers and schools as a key source IAG and decision-making support (see page 43).

This model argues that these structural factors are internalised through socialisation so that current realities are reproduced in students' decisions, maintaining the status quo. Expectations are managed using social interaction and students accept their position in the social hierarchy (Roberts, 1977; Gambetta, 1987; Atherton et al., 2009). Resource constraints may make it difficult for a decision to be taken (for example financial resource restrictions may mean travel to a specialist provider is beyond the means of a student). Hence, this model suggests that the structures, and not a student's economically rational decision has the largest influence on progression (Foskett et al., 2004; Paton, 2007; Foskett et al., 2008). This view contrasts with the economically rational decision-making model where it is argued that a student's assessment of options leads to optimal decision-making. Therefore, this model argues that assessment cannot be optimal due to the structural and external environmental constraints placed upon students (Paton, 2007).

Earlier in the section it was argued that the economically rational decision-making view is used in policy rhetoric. It is useful for policy, despite the view being an over simplification of the complex reality involved in decision-making, because it forms middle class ideology through its emphasis on individual choice, competition, and market forces. This supports the Conservative ideology of ruling political dominance through the illusion of free choice and a meritocracy (Hodkinson, 1996). This is achieved through aligning educational achievement with middle class values of success (Bourdieu, 1973; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Schools reflect the dominant values of the middle class (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), students who conform to these are rewarded through positive reinforcement (Ashton and Field, 1976). Schools can also support middle class dominance through differentiating access to privileged knowledge (Young, 1971). Thus, rather than education enabling a meritocracy based on achievement, the education system is argued to be a function of class acting as an agent of social

control, maintaining the position of the dominant class through a social divide. Any distraction and illusion would support middle class reproduction as they would be able to exploit the market and continue their dominance without appearing to be doing so (Ball et al., 2000a; Ball, 2003c; Avis, 2014, 2015).

Accepting this argument means that students are also likely to blame their own individual performance for a lack of success, ignoring structural and resource constraints on their options in an assumed meritocracy (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Maguire, 2005). Therefore, students may be overly optimistic and naive in their acceptance of the existence of a meritocracy (Paton, 2007). Ball et al. (2000a) found that students stated that they had choices, that hard work and luck would lead to success.

A culture of individualism in market driven policies supports this position (Maguire, 2005)<sup>4</sup>. Using the quasi-market, the super structure socialises students to assume that their choices are rational and of their own making, rather than questioning the wider structural factors which may also be influencing transition; this legitimises middle class dominance. In reality markets are more likely to favour those with resources (the students of middle class families) as they are more likely to be able to complete in the market through capital advantages, have access to resources in order to be able to obtain complete information, decode cultural messages and take action in order to make informed choices, rather than their transition being down to pre-existing structures (Ball, 1993; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Ball, 2003c,a). Therefore, the ability to receive and interpret information for decision-making is said to be unevenly distributed between classes (Ball, 2003b), official information is distrusted and must be checked, and multiple conflicting sources of information make decision-making complex and inherently risky (ibid). Here it can be seen how schools may help students who lack resources by supporting decision-making. However, this process will be influenced by structures.

Education is considered, by those who accept this theory, as an ideological state

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<sup>4</sup>Gewirtz et al. (1994); Ball et al. (1995) and Ball et al. (1996) presented information on parental choice and class, themes from their research are applicable to choice in this study but their research focused on parental decision-making which is not the focus of this study.

apparatus, an agent of secondary socialisation, as a social institution capable of mass social control (Higham et al., 1996; Allen and Ainley, 2007). There are specific risks for students who are from lower socio-economic groups as education to work transitions are longer and the nature of employment is changing. Employers are demanding more flexible work, which includes more insecure, temporary contracts with shorter tenure resulting in frequent job changes (Allen and Ainley, 2012, 2013, 2014a; Allen, 2016) (the introductory chapter outlined the argument concerning the changing nature of work, see page 16). This situation can create uncertainty in planning for transition (Furlong and Cartmel, 1999). Furlong and Cartmel (2007) argued that young people are more vulnerable to risk as they lack traditional support and the number of opportunities makes transition to employment protracted and uncertain. The work of Bowles and Gintis (1976); Willis (1977) and Gambetta (1987) further explores these arguments.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) argued that through the hidden curriculum in the United States schools played a functional role in transmitting and socialising students to accept norms and values of a dominant class that enabled a workforce to be reproduced to support capitalism. Workers were subservient, motivated through external rewards and accepted inequality and hierarchies through the illusion of a meritocracy. The illusion of opportunity was stabilising as the meritocracy was not questioned. Hence the students accepted a place in a differentiated class based society. Those with middle class knowledge and skills could navigate the system to their advantage (Ashton and Field, 1976). Adopting a Marxist position, Bowles and Gintis argued that the meritocracy is false, an illusion, and they evidenced that credentials do not lead to social mobility even when intelligence is controlled for. This view is in contrast to the context free, meritocratic economically rational decision-making view outlined previously (see page 52).

Structural studies such as that of Bowles and Gintis have been criticised as considering the school to be a black box, the internal workings were not considered (Blaug, 1985) and others argued that their work ignored students who did not conform to the expected norms (Brown, 1987; Abraham, 1995b). Therefore,

in response, Willis (1977) moved the structurally deterministic argument presented above by Bowles and Gintis (1976) on from the given criticisms as he emphasised the agency of students alongside structural factors. Agency is having the capacity for empowered, autonomous action (Ecclestone et al., 2010), where actions are taken towards future opportunities but within opportunities and constraints of the social and historical circumstances (Ecclestone, 2007a). Hence, understanding agency requires an understanding of different past and future orientations and agency cannot be isolated from structures such as class (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Structures alone do not re-create social reality but students socially construct this reality. Willis' ethnographic study was of twelve male students in the final two years of schooling in a UK industrial town when students could leave aged 16. Willis found that the working class students he studied rebelled against the achievement of educational values and authority because they did not accept that schooling was important to achieve manual employment to which they aspired. This resulted in the students forming a counter-school culture which resisted learning and authority through being truant, playing practical jokes and behaving inappropriately at school. The rejection of educational values caused cultural, social and educational performance differentiation. Paradoxically this led the students to securing low-skilled and low paid jobs due to their low levels of educational attainment<sup>5</sup>. Willis' key addition to previous theories was *agency*, the students' rebellious counter-culture was a choice and it acted against the dominant middle class school values. It was the students' actions which reproduced structure.

Three studies are used here to outline how structural differences can be reflected within schools, they demonstrate that education distributes cultural and social capital unevenly through their selection and management techniques (Ball, 2003a). Gambetta's research in Italy evaluated the impact of schools' structural influences covering, organisation, rules, admission and selection, certification and streaming by ability. He found that all of these factors could lead to differentiated outcomes

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<sup>5</sup>It is important to remember that more traditional masculine working class jobs, such as manufacturing, existed in England during the 1970s when the study took place. Now remaining in education or training has reduced this employment route following changes to the economy and the raising of the participation age.



which students had little agency over (Gambetta, 1987). Although the research was conducted in Italy Gambetta's findings were also reflected in English studies. Streaming and selection by the schools could lead to differentiated results for the students. Students in deviant (non-middle class) subcultures within schools were labelled and located in lower streams. This negative labelling became a self-fulfilling prophecy for Ashton and Field (1976), Hargreaves (1967), Ball (1981) and Mirza (1992). Ball's study of Beachside Comprehensive is a study in which Ball outlined how streaming by ability produced labels which reflected class backgrounds and these stereotypes became self-fulfilling prophecies where students were either warmed up (for academic education) or cooled out (for alternative courses, for example more vocational ones) as teachers acted on the stereotypes, which created a perception of what constituted the 'correct' option for certain 'types' of students (1981). Roberts (1977) argued that choice is reduced to selecting what is available and hence IAG has limited effectiveness. Therefore, there is an element of predictability in being able to determine occupational paths based on pre-existing structures. The structuralist view argues that students will transition through existing paths, for example reflecting their family histories and school situation (Ball et al., 2002). Thus, structures can frame decision-making and restrict choices and social mobility; agency does not act in isolation (Ecclestone, 2007a).

Criticisms of structuralism theorists relate to oversimplification, it is argued that they reflect a bipolar model, where only dual options are considered (Gordon, 1984; Bloomer, 1997). Bourdieu also criticised structural theorists for over focusing on capitalism (1985). Hence, neither the economically rational, nor the structuralist model allow for social change. Therefore, the final model of pragmatically rational decision-making is required to fully understand student decision-making and the findings and discussion of this thesis.

## **Pragmatically rational decision-making**

### **Contribution of the model**

The economically rational model of decision-making neglects structural influences on choices, and the structuralist theorists do not explain how social mobility and social change can occur, nor do they take into account the social and cultural impacts on transition. Hence, a third model of pragmatically rational decision-making is presented. It is key to understanding transition for this study, as it takes account of economically rational and structural models whilst accounting for their weaknesses. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) and Hodkinson (1998b) blended together social and cultural choices with personal choices, merged individual preferences with opportunity structures and recognised the role of the individual and chance. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1996) recognised that there were limitations on decisions that were taken, but they argued that students were also not total victims of capitalism and that some unpredictability in re-producing social reality existed. Theories suggesting rational choices and linear progression routes are thus too simplistic to explain the decision-making of many students (Bloomer, 1999), instead choice is determined by cultural, short term, contingent and unexpected events (Lumby and Wilson, 2003). This model is used to explain how students make partially rational decisions, evaluating costs and benefits based on their socially constructed perception of reality, but the model also considers the extent to which decisions are bounded by structural influences which impact upon their social perception of reality.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1996) highlighted three components of pragmatically rational career decision-making. Interactions occur with other social actors within specific contexts, lifestyle choices are made within a socially and culturally derived habitus and transformations of identity occur at turning points within the evolving life course. The components of this theory are now discussed.

### **Social interaction in specific contexts**

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) and Hodkinson (1998b) found that the students who they studied were making rational decisions, their decisions were based on partial information, which was located in familiar settings and that decision-making was context specific. Decisions were inseparable from a student's perceived situation, their family background, education, culture and life history at the time of decision-making (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1995; Ball et al., 2000a). Decision-making was related to the local context and could not be isolated from socio-cultural background and history (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Students' decisions were opportunistic, based on chance and personal experiences (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Their decisions were made in the young person's own time and in reaction to perceived encounters (ibid). Hence the students' decisions did not occur in a social vacuum. Choices are therefore informed by social, situational and institutional factors (Paton, 2007).

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (1999) emphasised that career decision-making is complex and based on individual perspectives and judgements formed from experiences and derived images. Perceptions are built in relation to advantages and disadvantages of routes that can be chosen, these are unique and can be built from a student's own experience (contracted), from other people's perceptions (delegated) or derived images (from the media) (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1997, 2001). Decisions were found to be partially rational, influenced by these feelings and emotions (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Perceptions exist, change over time (they are non-linear) and they are socially constructed through life experiences. They are impacted upon by gender, race, family background and culture (Evans, 2002; Hughes and Gratton, 2009; Marson-Smith et al., 2009). It is not surprising that decisions change over time as perceptions, values and interests alter through teenage developments (Bloomer, 2001). Giddens (1991) referred to this period as the time of discovery and age of uncertainty and change where new epistemological and ontological standpoints lead to a re-evaluation of opportunities and thus decisions may change. As Ball et al. (2002) found decisions were made on partial and re-evaluated

information and linked to their situated local context, their location (Banks et al., 1991), employment opportunities, family and cultural backgrounds. This part of the model fits with the cognitive difficulties in decision-making previously outlined on page 52.

Pragmatically rational decision-making was said to occur when decisions were pragmatic instead of systematic. They were pragmatic because they were located on partial information drawn from the familiar context and were influenced by feelings but decisions were not drawn from a choice between options, rather acceptance of one (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Foreman-Peck and Thompson (1998) suggested that students made decisions in a pragmatically rational way when they made decisions based on a restricted amount of information which was perceived relevant based on the opportunities available at the time. Overall “decisions were neither technically rational nor irrational” (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p. 33). This part of the model is useful because it recognises that students will have subjective frames of reference when using IAG to guide their actions. These frames of reference create boundaries of knowledge through partial information, biasing decisions in favour of the familiar and the known (Hodkinson, 1996), and by using hot sources of knowledge from the grapevine (Ball et al., 2000a) because students feel that these sources are trustworthy (see page 44).

### **Career trajectories from habitus**

Career trajectories are patterns of similar progression routes which share characteristics for example, gender, socio-economic status and location. Subtle determinism (and thus predictability) is implied (Banks et al., 1991; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Bourdieu argued that trajectories are determined by social class, and choices were as a result of their socio-economic position in a particular field or social space (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Furthermore, these structures influence the socially created reality which leads students to believe which options are possible, in other words which options are suitable ‘for someone like me’ (Fuller and Macfadyen, 2012). Trajectories can be “contradictory” (choice of an alternative as

there is current dissatisfaction), “confirmatory” (of the intended route), “socializing” (a stop gap which remains for some time), “dislocating” (a student is after an identity which they can no longer have) or “evolutionary” (gradual change there may be no specific turning points) (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p. 40).

Decisions are made within “horizons for action” (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p. 34), which are schemas developed from childhood as decision-making tools (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993). The horizon is affected by inter-related perceptions of decisions and opportunities which are subjective. Thus, they are socially constructed frames of reference which link with habitus, external structures and an individual social actor’s perception of themselves (ibid). ‘Horizon’ is used as a metaphor for ‘vision’. Hence, horizons are visible from certain positions, some things are visible and some things are beyond the horizon (Hodkinson, 2008). Therefore, when a position changes so does the field and horizon for action (ibid).

Bourdieu’s use of the concept habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1992) is also useful to the current study as it represents subjective beliefs which are historically located but also change over time (Lumby and Wilson, 2003). Bourdieu (1992, p. 53) defined habitus as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.” Hence, habitus is the unconscious dispositions internalised as a result of separate structures (from individuals), experiences (especially from familial primary socialisation) and social and cultural histories and experiences, it gives meaning to experiences within a specific social space (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). It leads to holding a sense of place (Bourdieu, 1989) and this tends to re-produce structures through actions, not through rational action but following internalised rules unconsciously (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The structures within a field condition the habitus and the habitus gives meaning to the world (Wacquant, 1989). It is durable but also changes over time (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron,

1990). Hodkinson (1995) found Bourdieu's notion of habitus useful in explaining pragmatic rationality by suggesting that an individual's view of their world is derived from their particular social group such and that these subconsciously constrain or support their decisions, as such feasibility will differ between individual students (Hodkinson, 1999). The socially constructed habitus forms a schematic tool for understanding social situations by filtering and filling in the gaps in knowledge. Thus, it helps to form aspirations which aid decision-making (ibid). Hodkinson (1996) argued that Bourdieu's tool of habitus could be used to challenge the deterministic pattern of social reproduction as it could lead to agency and a future which is not historically routine.

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (1999) outlined four images, the value of their route, the image of themselves, aspirations and capabilities, the image of the career and the view of the role of the economy and society. These images enabled students to make sense of current situations following the past. They built and developed over time and thus the student was inextricably linked to the complex combination of learning, actions, social, cultural and historical life histories. This past could not be objectively escaped from to make context free decisions, perceptions in turn altered future paths, they shaped and were shaped (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993). Like Bourdieu's habitus they provided the scope for action, following pragmatically rational decision-making at a given time. Being located in a historical context the horizons provided filtering effects which could be limiting, re-producing existing social reality by leading students to follow accepted norms for their social group and family background or they could be enabling producing social change. This situation is what Giddens (1984, p. 16) called the "dialectic of constraint" and what Ball et al. (1999, p. 210) called "imagined futures", which were broad or narrow and fixed or fluid (Hodkinson, 1995, 1996).

### **Turning points**

A decision during a turning point amends a person's habitus and identity (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Identity was defined by Banks et al. (1991) as how an individual

views the social and political world and how they perceive themselves. This is subjective and is based on beliefs, opinions, feelings, and judgements which lead to an evaluation of who the student believes they are and what they are capable of based on history and experiences in given social and cultural contexts. This psychological view is based on interactions with capitals, with people and cognitive strategies (Ecclestone, 2007a). A turning point is a situation where a social actor re-evaluates a situation and they may see their situation from a different point of view which leads to a revision of their decision (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Turning points can be structural, for example raising the participation age, self-initiated or forced (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1995). Routines can be contradictory, reinforcing and socialising (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1995). Transition is argued to be a series of turning points which can be short or developed over time (years) and sometimes the turning points are only recognised with hindsight (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1995).

### **A decision-making theory**

So far the discussion of the pragmatically rational model has been related to its elements and contribution to the field of choice and decision-making. This section explains how the model deals with actual decision-making through a combination of the aforementioned elements. It therefore forms the understanding for the findings and discussion to be understood. Hodkinson (2008) explained why decisions were made in a practically rational manner. Firstly, students embodied their decisions. Hodkinson linked this to Giddens' description of subconscious and practical consciousness (1991). This is a tacit understanding, an embodiment of the social and cultural situation that cannot be fully explained, representing taken for granted assumptions and structural constraints which have been internalised over time to be accepted as the norm and right for them, it thus does not represent a decision as such. Secondly, and to a lesser extent via discursive consciousness, arguments articulated and discussed with other trusted social actors. This meant that students assessed opportunity availability, decided on what was possible, not possible

and what was perceived as desirable in their imagined futures, out of the possible options (Hodkinson, 1996; Ball et al., 2000a). This socially constructed perception was subjectively based on interactions between students' self-perception and ambitions, their context based on their family, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and their life histories. It was constructed through social interactions in their social landscapes with influences from family, peers and other social actors in the field (Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998b; Foskett et al., 2004). Decisions were found to be complex, non-linear, they adapted over time, and thus they were unpredictable (Hodkinson, 2003; Paton, 2007).

The power of this theory centres around the belief that it allows for choices that are neither random, voluntary nor systematic or entirely predictable (Bloomer, 1997). Hence, the overriding argument presented by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) was that decisions were made through social interaction, decisions were not irrational nor objectively rational as personal analysis and agency interprets the decision which was also influenced by the structural and contextual situation that the student was placed within. Choice was dynamic where the processes were occurring concurrently and continuously. The chooser was being influenced by and influencing choice factors and cognition all at the same time. This in turn impacted upon other social actors and shaped and constrained future choices by changing social reality (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001). Hodkinson (1995) found that few students made informed, rationally considered choices through assessing all available options with the students' own needs. This helps to explain why students present choices as their own, as the students rationalised and perceived their situation as rational, whereas the decision was pragmatically rational (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001). Choice as a term therefore only represents the preference at a single moment in time, in a given context. A choice is subject to change (Paton, 2007). Hence, for this study it is vital to consider how the students construct their transition paths and negotiate their choices as they become reality.

Overall this decision-making theory helps to avoid structural determinism and free agency as it recognises the complexity of choices through turning points and



changes over time (Hodkinson, 1996, 1998c, 2008). The theory describes transition “as an uneven pattern of routine experience interspersed with such turning-points, pragmatically rational decisions embedded in the relevant field” (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p. 39). It combined pragmatically rational choices within a locality where the social interactions occurred between parents, peers and teachers. Thus, choice is pragmatic, because decisions are not irrational but based on personal, social re-construction of reality (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999). Therefore, the policy and IAG rhetoric may be over ambitious in its pursuit of economically rational and linear decision-making. Rather transition is a pragmatically rational process which does not support the technically rational linear choice model of transition.

## **Conclusion**

What has been implicit so far is that the economically rational, structural and pragmatically rational decision-making models represent different positions on the structure-agency continuum (Paton, 2007). The final model is adopted by this thesis as it enables researchers to overcome the dual errors of social determinism and free agency (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). This model is key to the current study because its use can help to explain how structural changes in IAG (school structures and control) impact upon student decision-making on the one hand, and on the other hand it can be used to explain how transition decision-making needs to be understood in the context of the socially constructed reality of staff and students. Finally, it can show how students have the ability to overcome social determinism through making positive social changes, to maximise agency within their particular circumstances, through empowerment provided by education. The structure-agency debate is now considered in the final part of the literature review.

## **Structure and agency in transition**

The purpose of this section of the literature review is to ground the previous sections of this chapter which covered micro social interaction in the macro structure and

agency debate. Researchers in the space of choice, decision-making and transition, such as Brown (1987); Bloomer et al. (2004); Daoud and Puaca (2011); Hodkinson (1998a) and Hodkinson (1999), have utilised concepts from the work of Bourdieu in order to explore structure and agency. At one level some researchers have argued that Bourdieu's concepts can only be used when his extensive wider theory of practice is used in the research (Grenfell, 2006) and on another level elements of Bourdieu's work have been used by some researchers to offer a set of tools in order to explain a social issue at a macro level (Grenfell, 2006). This section continues on from this tradition and presents the relevant concepts from Bourdieu's work for this research in order to explore structural determinism in transition without claiming to be a true Bourdieusian study. The section then highlights useful concepts from the work of Giddens which are also useful in exploring the structure and agency debate.

### **Power in education**

Bourdieu's work was extensive and it covered multiple disciplines. Part of his work presented a position whereby he argued that inequality in education occurs through legitimisation and reproduction of dominant positions of those who already hold power through economic, cultural and social capitals (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). This is his cultural theory of reproduction. It involves the formation of habitus through social interactions, within the context of an unequal power position (Thompson and Simmons, 2013). Bourdieu (1989) described his work as being "of structuralist constructivism" (p. 14). He rejected both determinism and conscious intentions using habitus as a tool. Therefore, he rejected the dichotomy of the structure and agency debate (Swartz, 1997). Concepts from his work can be used in the current study alongside parts of Giddens' work by providing thinking tools to assess the influence of resources on transition.

Rather than a theory Bourdieu presented thinking tools consisting of habitus, capitals and field (Wacquant, 1989; Webb et al., 2002). He rejected grand theories and positions such as symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and ethnomethodology because he argued that they over focused on micro-understandings at the

expense of structural explanations (Susen and Turner, 2011). He argued that no theory can present a universal solution to fully explain the social world. Bourdieu's thinking was influenced by Durkheim's functionalism and Marx's economic and political dominance, although Bourdieu argued that Marxists place too much emphasis on unquestioned economic production at the expense of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1985).

Bourdieu stated that social reality needs to be understood as the socially constructed perception of social reality that agents hold, the habitus, the background and a social actor's trajectory (Bourdieu, 1989). However, this is not conscious deliberation, Bourdieu emphasised the lack of consciousness because he argued that habitus is likely to reproduce structure, but that there is *some* room for social change (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998).

Bourdieu used 'field' as a notion to describe a social space which could be analysed to understand social interactions (Thomson, 2008). A field is a network of objective relations between different positions of power within a social space (Bourdieu, 1992). Struggles take place within a field for access to resources, and hence dominant and subordinate positions exist (ibid). Bourdieu saw the education marketplace as a field containing a school system which promotes the legitimacy of the interests of the dominant class, in turn this re-produces a hierarchy of positions (Webb, 2006; Thomson, 2008). Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000a) and Bloomer (2001) used Bourdieu's work when they highlighted cases where social and cultural capital influenced the career trajectory of young people negatively.

Bourdieu advocated studying the capitals in order to study power within a social space (Webb et al., 2002), for example, a lack of cultural capital and a position at a specific time and place may disadvantage the lower socio-economically resourced through not having access to the capitals in order for them to be able to exploit them to their advantage (Bourdieu, 1979). Within a marketplace forces are not equal (Hodkinson, 2008), for example access to resources is not equal.

According to Bourdieu, social class represents the location where social actors occupy similar positions in the social space. These actors have shared understand-

ings, norms and values (Bourdieu, 1985, 1998) along with the relevant distribution of social, economic and cultural capitals which give certain power (Bourdieu, 1985, 1998; Savage, 2015). Ball (2003a) stated that social groups have similar social expectations and boundaries which provide a sense of membership and belonging. Class based societies, such as England are therefore socially stratified by a hierarchy of different social classes (Savage, 2015). Traditionally in England, upper, middle and working class; attributed by occupation, wealth and education (Savage, 2015). However, Savage argued that this tripartite class system is now outdated and seven classes now exist. The terms 'middle class' and 'working class' do not represent homogeneous groups. Differences exist in the vertical hierarchy of power and money, geography, political persuasion and horizontal cultural assets. Hence, the term used in this thesis is 'lower socio-economically resourced students'<sup>6</sup>. However, there are similarities that exist in commitment to education, moral superiority and relative power (Reay et al., 2011).

Social capital is the sense of belonging or having membership to a particular social group (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is represented by affiliations, connections, networks, family, heritage, religious and cultural beliefs (Grenfell, 2008). These networks can create resources to be used through gaining information, contacts and informed advice to produce advantages over those who do not have access to such resources (Hodkinson, 2003; Heath et al., 2010). Social capital includes information and norms internalised through social ties and resources that help students at an individual and group level (Dufur et al., 2013). In a longitudinal study covering a nationally representative sample of 10,585 students it was reported that social capital from home has more influence on educational outcomes than from schools (Dufur et al., 2013). Therefore, a wider range of IAG is especially important to support students who may lack the support, understanding and experience to fully understand their transition decisions.

Economic capital was described by Bourdieu (1986) as the root of all other capitals. Economic capital provides money and wealth in order to provide material

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<sup>6</sup>Except when referring to previous studies where the term 'working class' was used.

resources and assets such as property close to successful schools. Economic capital can also provide access to educational advantages such as private schooling, private tuition, music and drama lessons. Other resources such as books, transport and extracurricular fees can help to provide security through reproducing the powerful position of the middle classes (Webb et al., 2002).

Culture is defined as the socially constructed shared norms and values that are internalised and accepted as normal for a given situation, they are located in history (Hodkinson, 1995). Cultural capital is embedded in social class and it represents the cultural knowledge and communication skills which enable or constrain social actors' interpretations and actions in social contexts. This includes attitude, interest, preferences, cultural knowledge and language fluency (Davies et al., 2014). Moore (2004) argued that it is more than economic capital because it can be exchanged for profit because investment in social and cultural capital over time can lead to a return on investment. Middle class dominance is related to power in education through education aligning with middle class values (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Cultural capital includes knowledge, tastes, aesthetics, language, voice and narrative all of which give competence and confidence within a cultural situation, for example interpretation of academic credentials, so that their meaning can be decoded (Bourdieu, 1986; Grenfell, 2008). Cultural capital is learnt first from the family during primary socialisation as the culture in which the social actor is immersed in is internalised and embodied. Cultural capital is represented in objects, for example, books and musical instruments and then reinforced by schools during secondary socialisation as students become institutionalised, for example, when schools promote educational success this is considered as the norm to be desired by the attending students. According to Jaeger cultural capital has a statistically significant effect on attainment (2011).

Symbolic capital is capital that represents other forms of capital and it can be exchanged, for example, educational credentials can be exchanged for employment and thus economic capital (Robbins, 2004; Grenfell, 2008).

The above tools will be useful in studying decision-making and transition, in

particular through the use of capitals when exploring power in the post-16 marketplace. This is especially important due to the increasing competitive nature of post-16 education and the changes to IAG which put schools in control of IAG.

Despite its wide use Bourdieu's work has received a large amount of criticism. Bourdieu's translated work (from French to English) is often very complex and his work has evolved over time with some ideas changing significantly in his later work (Bourdieu, 1992). Reading criticisms of his work it is evident his work is seen very differently by different people, Robbins (2004) also made this claim. One of the major criticisms of Bourdieu's work is that he is overly deterministic, by ignoring the possibility for social change his work is said to lead to determinism (Jenkins, 1982, 2002; Reed-Danahay, 2005; Elder-Vass, 2007). However, I do not accept that Bourdieu is deterministic, I think this view leads from a misinterpretation of his work as habitus can allow for a degree of change during social re-production as Bourdieu himself states in Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and in Bourdieu (1992). Bohman (1999) and Joas and Knobl (2011) drew on the similarities between Giddens and Bourdieu (Giddens did himself in Giddens (1979)), arguing that Bourdieu's work, like Giddens', aimed to avoid structural determinism through "action and structure determining one another through their interrelationship" (Susen and Turner, 2011, p. 10). To emphasise, for both structures are products of previous structures which are reproduced and *can be* transformed by social practices which are themselves products of the structures which they go on to produce (Giddens, 1979, p. 217). Hence, they are both avoiding structural determinism but recognising that structures do play a part in social reproduction (The Friday Morning Group, 1990). Elements of Giddens' work are now presented in order to help fully explore determinism in the structure and agency debate.

### **Avoiding structural determinism in transition**

In *Central Problems in Social Theory* Giddens described his work as a non-functionalism manifesto and he provided a criticism of structuralism (1979, p. 7). Giddens however, dealt with the complexity in social reality by explaining that agency (action) oc-

curs over time and is situated in local contexts where a different decision could have been taken to change a course of events (1984, p. 14) and that rules and resource availability (or lack thereof) provides structure to the social systems. Structures are organised sets of rules and resources within social systems reproduced through repetitive actions of social actors (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). It is this system which also reproduces social reality (ibid). Schools are examples of institutions described by Giddens which provide standardised behaviour in time and space, authority is legitimised by rules and as such a choice could be considered to be the norm (for example, to stay on in the sixth form). Social rules enable actors to make decisions in different social situations and these are sometimes explicit and generalizable to specific social situations, although often not consciously but applied from prior socialisation and experience where norms for the given situation are internalised, but they also provide opportunities for limiting action (Giddens, 1976, 1984).

Like pragmatic rationality Giddens' work dealt with the belief that, for social actors, structure is pre-existing but that they also have the ability to act, hence being "both the medium and the outcome of social interaction" (Giddens, 1979, p. 69). He avoided the deterministic and mechanistic arguments of structural theories by emphasising that social actors may behave in unpredictable ways, and thus change previously existing structures to alter their position in society having consciously followed an active process (Giddens, 1976). He rejected positivism for interpretative sociology in order to focus on understanding agency and motivation. Giddens (1976, p. 162) called this "double hermeneutic". By this he meant double interpretation, relating to the belief that ontologically social reality exists through pre-existing social frames of meanings but that these are re-interpreted to produce new action. Hence, social action and structures are affected by pre-existing structures but that they also act to create new structures through the application of social actions re-producing rules and resources in specific contexts (Giddens, 1976). Therefore, actions can have unintended consequences (Giddens, 1984). Giddens (1979) defined social structure as patterns of interaction between social groups that lead to continuity over time. This continuity exists through the acceptance of social rules,

accepted generalised procedures (Giddens, 1984), systems, order and reproduction. All of which actors cannot fall outside of. He also argued that structures only exist demonstrating structural properties of rules, resources and organised social systems. Thus, structure is inextricably linked to action (Giddens, 1984).

Giddens (1976, p. 75) defined agency as the “stream of actual or contemplated casual interventions of social actions in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world”. In other words, the ability to exert some control and direction (Miles, 2001). Hence, he argued that social actors act intentionally biased on their social positions and reflexive construction of their own identity (Giddens, 1991). Therefore, action and interactions are purposive following reflexive monitoring of their situation and intentions. Thus, social action takes account of past structures, resources and contexts but act towards the future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Hence, for this study it is important to visit social understandings of students over time as their beliefs (and habitus) may change as the contexts do and as reflexivity occurs. Reflexivity is the process of self-definition through monitoring and reflecting upon social and psychological information regarding possible life trajectories (Elliott, 2008).

Giddens' based his theory on a social system where “independence of action is conceived” (Giddens, 1976, p. 78). Giddens argued that relations are circular as a change in one initiates changes in other relations. Monitoring and regulation of the system through feedback involves filtering and reacting to contingent responses of other social actors (Giddens, 1976, 1984). Using a system view is useful as Giddens' can be seen to be bringing together societal aspects of the labour market, economy, political systems, cultures, the education system: institutions, courses, funding, policies, social aspects, and structural inequalities (Giddens, 1979). All of these influence transition in an inter-related and connected way. Agency and social structures are thus linked and neither micro nor macro explanations are individually sufficient to explain social reality (ibid), Giddens calls this process of structure and social action reproducing social reality “structuration” (Giddens, 1979, p. 66). Structuration is explained by Giddens (1984) as social actors being knowledgeable, understanding their day-to-day lives and give reasons for action. This understanding



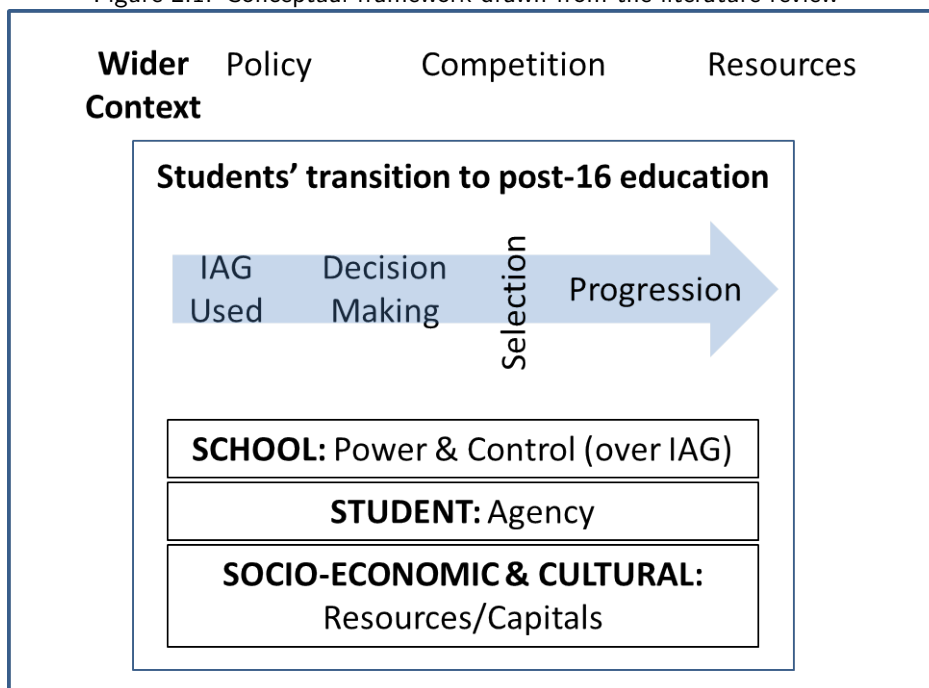
is bounded by unconscious conditions which enable and constrain actions.

Giddens' thinking presented here is useful for this study on transition because he emphasised how structure can be enabling or limiting, pre-existing structural properties may limit or enable action, "the dialectic of constraint" (1984, p. 16). He argued that behaviour is reasoned, that the structures do not compel specific behaviour but give order to social reality. Thus, his argument is that structures are not deterministic but action is not fully voluntary. Structures, rules, and resources are used in social interaction which also re-produces the structures but they also may be changed in the process. This concept is important when dealing with choice as it provides a theoretical explanation for why pragmatic rationality and horizons for action occur because individual action produces life changes, and although these are strongly influenced by social class and other structural factors (Bourdieu, 1977; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997), there is some opportunity for subjective decisions to alter pre-existing structures during re-production at the level of the individual. Hence, these concepts deal with the deterministic structural re-production criticism, whereby it is argued that structural reproduction ignores the ability for social change, and allows for this social change accounting for the interplay between structure and action in reproducing and changing social reality (Giddens, 1984). For example, students make their choices within existing structures, which are impacted upon by socially constructed perceptions of what is available in their horizons for action (see page 63).

## **Conclusion**

The first section of the literature review highlighted how competition, institutional type, the 2012 changes to IAG and people influence progression. The section emphasised how literature exists which explains why schools with sixth forms operate IAG control in a competitive post-16 market place. However, the literature to date has not investigated, in practical terms, how schools operate methods of IAG control in this context. Therefore, this study will explore and illuminate these relationships

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework drawn from the literature review



surrounding post-16 progression given changes to the context of IAG and competition since the main body of choice literature took place in the 1990s-2000s. This study will therefore contribute more up-to-date knowledge to the literature on choice and decision-making which was outlined in the second part of the literature review. Overall the contribution of the pragmatically rational decision-making model was emphasised. The final part of the literature review grounded the study in the structure and agency debate using concepts from the work of Bourdieu and Giddens; in doing so it rejected structural determinism and the dichotomy of the structure and agency debate. These foci have been drawn from the literature and are represented in the conceptual framework that will guide the research. It is based on the understanding gained from this literature review and it highlights the key constructs to be studied (Figure 2.1).

## Conceptual framework and research questions

The conceptual framework is an organised, visual representation of selected factors which can influence post-16 transition. The conceptual framework is useful because it draws on the literature's key themes which inform the current study. Three key themes are represented as foundation constructs in the framework in order to emphasise their influence on transition. These foundations highlight the role of the school (power and control), the role of the student (agency) and the role of the socio-economic and cultural background (resources/capitals) in the context of post-16 transition. Above these foundations an arrow represents the transition process to post-16 education. For simplicity a one-way arrow is used as progression is the outcome of the process, in reality this process may occur a number of times and be non-linear given the complexity of decision-making which the literature review has outlined. The process represents IAG used to support decision-making and selection of an option which then leads to progression to post-16 education. The framework also highlights the roles that policy, competition and resource availability hold in influencing transition the wider setting. Students may not be aware of them whilst progressing but the literature review has highlighted how they may impact on transition to post-16 education.

As a result of this framework the following research questions have emerged from the literature and will guide the study:

- Research Question 1: How does the sampled group of students see and understand their transition paths from Year 11 to post-16 study?
- Research Question 2: How are these paths negotiated into choices?
- Research Question 3: What information and guidance does this group of students use? Does this differ between schools?

- Research Question 4: What is the influence of schools on the transition of the sampled students? Does this influence differ between schools?

### **Formation and evolution of the research questions**

Due to my professional interest in the area of vocational education my original research interests related to school-employer involvement in vocational assessments and assessments relating to vocational progression preparation. This eventually developed into a more specific focus on transition at age 16 as the stage was less well covered in the literature than GCSEs and HE progression and progression rather than vocational qualifications as I reflected that it was the use of vocational qualifications rather than the design of vocational qualifications per se which impacted on their quality and students' progression.

When carrying out the literature review, it was clear that the previous research into transition took place in a context different to the one students faced at the time when this research commenced (see page 6) and hence it was important to investigate how the sampled students understood transition and how choices were taken in the contemporary context. I also realised that my interest went beyond specific types of courses as issues that I was interested in investigating were present across course types.

Over time as I became more familiar with the literature my interest in transition evolved into an understanding from previous research that the pre-16 institutional type attended by students could have an effect on transition decisions due to the IAG that they receive. Furthermore, I had a professional interest in post-16 transition (see page 1) and at the same time the government made schools responsible for IAG in 2012 so changes to IAG used by students could be usefully investigated.

Thus it was clear that the research questions should investigate the themes of transition, choice decisions, IAG used in order to explore the influence of schools on sample students transition as outlined above. The first two broad concepts (transition and choices) support the investigation into the final two (IAG and school

influence on transition).

Therefore the research questions aim to contribute a more up-to-date application of some of the aforementioned literature on transition from the 1990s and 2000s given the contextual changes to the post-16 transition environment. They cover the broad context of post-16 transition and the second recognises the external influences on a student's choice as identified in the contextual framework. The third and fourth research question provide the study with a focus on IAG. The third explores what IAG is used in practice and will lead the study towards contributing to the research gap of how the three case study schools manage IAG operationally using themes of competition, control and power. The final research question builds on from the third and enables the study to investigate the influence of schools' power and control on students' transition.

The next chapter will detail the methodology and methods leading on from this literature review.

## Chapter 3

# Methodology and Methods

This chapter details the study's methodology and methods. First it explores the philosophical position which underpins this research, then it considers the underlying methodological rationale and methods used in this study in order to explore the research questions. Then approaches to data collection and analysis are outlined. Finally the chapter considers the study's validity and ethical implications.

### **The philosophical and methodological traditions used in choice, transition and decision-making research traditions**

This section of the chapter considers the philosophical and methodological principles behind the research. Ontological paradigms are philosophical assumptions shared by researchers within a discipline and concern the nature of reality (Maykut, 1994; Maxwell, 2009; Atkins and Wallace, 2012) and these underpin what researchers in a specific field believe is possible to research and how data collection and analysis should occur (Patton, 1990; Bassey, 1999). Epistemology concerns what researchers within a certain discipline believe can be acceptable knowledge (Bryman, 2004) and the reality that can be claimed (Briggs and Coleman, 2007).

As explored in the literature review, this thesis aims to add further understanding to the literature concerning how institutions practically influence students' decision-making processes in order to better understand and assist student transition, because practical school influencing strategies represent a gap in the existing literature on student choice and transition (Payne, 2003; Hughes and Gratton, 2009). Therefore, the interpretive approach can be used to contribute to extending our understanding of the schools' role in choice and transition in the context of new IAG policies.

The interpretative methodological approach supports the view that social reality is created through social interaction which leads to the construction of reality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Social norms and values are internalised through socialisation from the given situation and available reference groups (Mead, 1934; Howe, 1998; Bloomer, 2001; Cohen et al., 2007). For this reason it is believed that this research involving students, staff and the researcher does not occur in a social vacuum as the social interactions operate within the local history, culture and geographical contexts (Berlak and Berlak, 2002). As such, ontologically social reality cannot be objectively studied because the subjectivity created by this contextual social interaction means that no generalisable positivist laws can be uncovered as no one 'truth' exists which is external to social actors (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Peshkin, 1993; Hammersley, 2001; Silverman, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007). Reality only exists as far as reality is created by social actors (Giddens, 1976). Epistemologically this social reality is inter-subjective and pluralist as it exists in shared consciousness through interactions between social actors (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Sikes, 2004, p.121). This can lead to the existence of multiple meanings, depending on a social actor's frame of reference (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Cohen et al., 2007; Thomas, 2009; Wolcott, 2009). Hodkinson (1992) drew on the work of Kuhn (1962) to explain that research leads to the replacement of previous realities as new knowledge is discovered and displaces the previous, and as such no claim to researching absolute reality can be made. This tradition is especially important given the influence of people on students' decision-making (see page 42).

The literature review recognised that structural factors also impact on post-16

transition. For example, educational institutions are external and tangible to social actors, these institutions provide rules which constrain how social actors create social order. Social class, gender, ethnicity, and local socio-economic contexts also provide structural constraints on careers and choice making (Hodkinson, 1996; Ball et al., 2000a). Thus, the study of choice and transition has both a functionalist, macro lens and a micro lens that concerns social interaction which covers students' construction of their choice decision-making. Due to the complexity of choice and transition there is unlikely to be one grand theory which adequately deals with this complexity. What is required is a theory that combines the micro social interaction approach which assumes that social reality is shaped by individual social action and the macro approach which recognises that social reality and structures provide shape to transition decision-making.

Elements from the work of Bourdieu and Giddens were introduced in the literature review (see page 67). This study follows the research tradition surrounding choice, decision-making and transition created by the work of Macrae et al. (1996); Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997); Macrae et al. (1997a); Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000a); Bloomer (2001); Lumby and Wilson (2003) and Hodkinson (2008) to locate this study in concepts from the work of Bourdieu and Giddens. They both provide frameworks to link macro structure and micro interaction (agency) together to explain how choice can occur within restrictions placed by pre-existing structures. Concepts from Bourdieu and Giddens help to explain how the social world is formed. Bourdieu's work is important in the study of power relations using his concept of capitals, as advantages and disadvantages are created through social reproduction during post-16 transition. Structure and capitals will allow the study to investigate resource competition during progression and, habitus and social action will form a basis for investigating the role of student in transition decision-making where the outcome of social action is decision-making and actual progression. Part of Giddens' work provides a general social theory which can support the interpretative position in an attempt to explain that ontologically social reality is constructed by social actors but also exists external to them (Cohen et al., 2007). Together their



work forms a theoretical base which will provide an understanding of how existing structural factors and individual social actors interplay in post-16 transition.

Bourdieu (1989) categorised himself as accepting constructivist structuralism where objective structures are external to social actors and constrain actions on the one hand and habitus in constructivism enables action on the other.

To apply these theories to transition, Giddens (1984) provided a clear example of how social actors are knowledgeable about their day to day lives and how functional structure does not fully constrain actions using Willis' *Learning to Labour* study (1977) (see page 58). Ecclestone (2007a) explained how transition decision-making varied depending on students' life histories, social, cultural, socio-economic, institutional and subject discipline factors. This means that students (the social actors) will construct their decision context and their construction will be unique depending on their interpretation of their futures, motivation and available routes and resources. Hodkinson drew on Bourdieu's use of habitus to explain how someone's beliefs, ideas and preferences are individual and derived from the culture and network of a person's life experience and history. Decision-making can never ignore this context, but habitus does develop over time (Harker, 1990) and as such Bourdieu also argues that structure is not deterministic, but that habitus can result in transformation of reality (Hodkinson, 1996). In this way horizons for action can be both enabling and limiting (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1995), like Giddens' "dialectic of constraint" (1984, p. 16) and Bourdieu's habitus (1989). Hodkinson (1996) and Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) explained how students constrained their own careers by limiting their future aspirations to socially acceptable career opportunities within their horizons, as experienced in their local context, which re-created structural reality. Thus, habitus and horizons for action are conducive to interpretivist theory (Bloomer et al., 2004) and like Giddens, Bourdieu (1989) argued that social actors' social interaction influences social reality which in turn influences structures in specific contexts (Grenfell, 2008); thus it is double structuring. Giddens' and Bourdieu's theories are therefore key to understanding the findings and discussion of this study.

Therefore, the methodology and methods must recognise that individual choices are unique and subject to certain levels of unpredictability at the individual level. However, it must also recognise that broad patterns emerge from individual choice reflecting larger structures which impact on transition. Hence, qualitative, in-depth methods are required when researching choice at the level of the individual (Paton, 2007). The next part of this section explores this methodological approach.

Qualitative data are important because they are able to provide the depth of understanding required to understand how the students form their perceptions, how they feel about their transition positions, the choices that they make, and how these ideas evolve over time. Qualitative research allows for a rich understanding of social interactions within specific contexts to be established and it is suitable to study process and outcomes (Silverman, 2006). Studying meanings and causes, how and why (Hammersley, 1992) can therefore, provide the micro detail, to meet the study's aim of exploring practical school choice operations and the impact that these have on students' transition. This study's focus concerns the interaction side of the duality of constraint.

A interpretive paradigm uses qualitative methods as a way of establishing micro in-depth understanding, as detail is required for an in-depth interpretation of the lived experience of social agents (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003), in this case covering choice and transition. This methodological rationale will reflect the micro interaction processes at the level of students and teachers and this will also highlight the macro structural forces that also shape actions as indicated in the literature review. As Bloomer (2001) identified in his study, this may lead to multiple versions of reality being constructed by the social actors, which will lead to difficult interpretation (Cohen et al., 2007). This could be caused by students' own realisation changing over time, or through data collection revealing previously uncovered influences on progression, or other factors becoming more dominant and changing the co-constructed reality as the study unfolds. As such, I need to be aware that multiple realities may occur and not make simplistic assumptions that ignore this phenomena.

Thus, the study will be idiographic<sup>1</sup> and constructivist in nature (Cohen et al., 2007), focusing on the individual perceptions of students and staff, and their interpretations which will provide valid explanations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) to explore student transition and their constructed social reality (Cohen et al., 2007). This enables thick descriptions to be used which can fully explore the complex construction of reality (Geertz, 1973). It can cope with meanings and issues developing over an extended period of time which can take account of the historical and contextual situation overcoming snapshot bias (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Peshkin, 1988). This is important because students' choices develop over time (Hemsley-Brown, 1996a; Blenkinsop et al., 2006). In doing so the study will follow in the choice and transition research traditions established in the 1990s-2000s. Studies by Ainley, Ball, Ecclestone, Foreman-Peck, Furlong, Hodkinson, Macrae, Maguire and Sparkes have all used qualitative methods to research choice, transition and decision-making. Their studies were small scale, with small samples and focused on the students, they were rich and explained the detail behind the complex factors that impacted on student transition.

Now that the philosophical and methodological principles of the research have been established the next section details the methods used in the study which follow these principles.

## **Methods used in the study**

The study involved gaining data through two rounds of qualitative interviews with students and staff. Documentary evidence, published secondary statistics and informal observations whilst visiting the sample school sites were also used as data. The following section describes the pilot study, accessing and creating a sampling frame, and the process of conducting the research.

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<sup>1</sup>Nomothetic research methods involving quantitative experiments cannot be used as social phenomena are too complex to test and discover laws that govern these relationships.

## **The pilot study**

A pilot study enables a researcher to test, refine and improve their collection procedures in a trial setting prior to live data collection (Gillham, 2000). Given the design involved carrying out research over two academic years it was important to ensure that the initial sampling process and instruments enabled a sample that understood this commitment and that the data collected would contribute towards understanding the research aim. There would be no opportunity to re-start the research, nor could further sample students be added to the sample once the research had begun because the research design relied upon gaining an insight into students lives at specific times in the decision-making process. Recruiting a student later than others may have resulted in the student giving a biased post hoc reflection of their decisions, in comparison to the other students in the sample. Furthermore, for the same reasons, it was important to ensure that the interview questions elicited responses that were in line with my expectations based on the literature and that they contributed towards understanding for the research aim. Thus, it was very important that a full pilot study took place. This tested the effectiveness of the initial sampling instrument and the staff and student interview questions.

The study was designed to recruit students from school classes directly. One of the challenges of researching in schools is convincing the teachers that the research will not have an adverse opportunity cost on formal learning, measured by time. The way this research achieved this was to gain all the information I required to contact a sample of students in ten minutes. The teacher decided which lesson, and where in the lesson this activity would take place. In the classes students were given a brief summary of the purpose of the research by the researcher and students were asked to complete a small piece of paper. This initial instrument (see appendix B, page 244) was designed to be easy to understand and quick to complete. It asked students to state what they planned to do post-16 and if they would be willing to talk about it with a researcher. Students who met the sample criteria and agreed, in principle, to opt in were followed up. In total nine interviews were completed, these ranged in length from thirty to forty minutes for students and one hour for

staff. All interviews were conducted in the school, face to face and were recorded for transcription purposes.

The interview questions were broadly effective and transcript themes aligned with the literature on choice and transition. They elicited responses in line with the research aim and did not lead to students repeating themselves (so that participants would not get bored (Gillham, 2000)), and the questions and responses followed a logical flow and order detailing their decision-making. At times I could have probed for more depth, including using silence more effectively thus prompt reminders were added to my interview aide memoir.

One challenge identified in the pilot study was how to deal with the validity of participant's responses. It was sometimes difficult to tell if a response was realistic or aspirational. For example, it is not realistic for every student to become a doctor because they aspire to this profession. For this reason additional prompts and questions were added to the interview questions to try to gain more detail and ratify responses when students were talking about their perceived future. One of the questions added to check the validity of future career responses was, "What might go wrong and why?" and, "Do you have a backup plan?" It turned out that these questions were very effective and enhanced validity because they encouraged deep discussion and previously undisclosed factors and thought patterns to be revealed.

The initial sample instrument and interview questions were tested on Year 10 (age 14-15), Year 11 (age 15-16), Year 12 (age 16-17) and Year 13 (age 17-18) students to test the usefulness of the questions on a range of student ages and the corresponding transition points in the school system. The pilot study confirmed that in terms of timing Year 10 was too early for most students to be able to give the depth of detail to post-16 discussions and Year 13 was too late to provide detail on the transition to post-16 study (as their focus was on post-18 preparation). Thus, the pilot study confirmed the phases of the interviews to be in Year 11<sup>2</sup> and Year 12 (or equivalent) as these students were at the correct time to be able to give detailed and valid responses surrounding post-16 transition.

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<sup>2</sup>The final year of compulsory schooling (at the time when the research began).

The next stage of the research was to start the live study, the following subsections detail the methods used in the study.

### **Accessing the sample**

The study used business students as its purposive, non-probability sample, this provided a boundary to work within but still met the aims of the research, in order to keep the sample manageable given available resources (Patton, 1990; Salkind, 2006). This lens was chosen because it is of interest due to my professional experience, but more importantly, because of this professional experience, I am able to understand the syllabi and other documentation of business courses, and progression routes where subtle differences may be important in the social construction of reality for the students. Furthermore, business courses have a clear progression route available for both academic and vocational routes (for example, A level Business, Applied A level Business or BTEC Nationals and apprenticeship business courses). This range of post-16 options is likely to increase the variety of sample student destinations (to HE and employment) and improve the study's data. Using a single subject also had practical advantages when arranging access to schools.

Due to time and financial resource constraints (of part time study) the schools were initially contacted from a list consisting of North West English educational institutions compiled from lists provided by a North West County Council, The Independent Schools Council and The National Grammar Schools Association. This minimised the expense and time of contacting potential sample schools and ensured that students were located within a sensible travel proximity, at least for the first round of interviews, so that face-to-face interviews could be held to enable rapport to be established with relative efficient practical arrangements.

Access to institutions proved much more difficult than anticipated. Contact with institutions began in October 2012, numerous letters (see appendix C, page 245), emails and telephone calls were made to institutions without access arrangements being agreed. Difficulty in access was partly due to the research topic which was considered to be sensitive for institutions given the political focus on transition,

local competition and league table performance pressure (Maguire et al., 2011). It is understood that schools and their gate keepers may have felt that they would have been under increased scrutiny or they may have perceived that information would be divulged which would tarnish their school's reputation and provide competitive threats to their institutions; this was despite guarantees of anonymity (Cohen et al., 2007; Morrison, 2007). Linked to this is how key Year 11 is for schools, as it is the year when students take their GCSEs which directly impact on school performance tables. For this reason it is common for Year 11 students to be 'protected' from all distractions so that students can focus on their GCSE courses in order to maximise individual and institutional success. Additionally Heads and teachers are very busy and may not have wanted to add to their workload (Cohen et al., 2007; Morrison, 2007).

After four months of negotiations a previous colleague arranged with their Head to allow access to their school. Shortly after this the University of Nottingham School of Education's School Liaison Officer put me in contact with two other schools which consented to take part in the study. After six months I had three consenting schools in two regions of England. The next stage was to arrange the interviews.

I recognise that implications for the findings and conclusions of this study exist due to the way that access to the sample was gained. Firstly, it is possible that gate keepers blocked access to their schools due to the nature of IAG practices existing within their institutions. For example, gate keepers may have blocked access if they considered their practices to be in conflict with the post-2012 rules so as not to draw external attention to their institution and so the sample may have been more likely to include institutions with more inclusive IAG practices. However, despite the impact of gate keepers in accessing the sample this study found and concludes that a variety of IAG practices existed in the sampled schools. Secondly, it is possible that students who formed part of the sample were more positive about their IAG and transition experiences and so wanted to share their stories. In contrast those who did not consent to taking part in the study or who left after the first round

could have represented students who were less positive about their experiences or position. However, the sample does include examples of students who changed routes, were positive and less so about their positions.

### **Interviewing students**

The periods of data collection occurred in the academic years 2012-2014. The initial in school sampling activities started in March 2013. For clarity where this fits within the English schooling cycle is presented below:

2010-2011: Year 9 (GCSEs or equivalent options are taken)

2011-2012: Year 10 (Start of GCSEs or equivalent)

**2012-2013: Year 11 (GCSEs or equivalent completed) – Round one**

**2013-2014: Year 12 or equivalent (Start of Post-16 study) – Round two**

2014-2015: Year 13 or equivalent (HE applications during this year)

2015-2016: First year of HE (if progressed to at age 18)

As explained in the pilot study, it was important to get the time of the interviews to coincide with students' conscious thinking about transition. The delay in accessing the sample proved to be serendipitous to the study as the interviews occurred later than originally intended. This meant that students were actively thinking about progression, applying for courses, attending interviews and receiving offers for post-16 courses. Interviewing at a time which was closer to their actual transition point enabled students to verbalise their feelings and decisions more than was the case in the pilot study (which occurred in September, too early in the academic year). Thus, it enhanced the quality of the empirical data collected.

### **Organising the interviews**

I arranged to visit each of the three schools and carry out the initial in-class sampling activity (as described on page 86). I introduced myself to students using my first name and dressed less formally than school staff. This was important so that I



did not appear to be 'a teacher', instead I wanted to appear as someone who was interested in what the students had to say rather than someone with potential perceived authority. In this way students were more likely to have an open discussion with me about their aims and decisions. For students who indicated they would take part in the study on the initial form the study was explained to the students again (Gillham, 2000), the information and consent forms were completed (see appendix D, page 248 and E, page 250) and interview times were arranged with students. This was all done face to face in order to build rapport with the students.

Class teacher bias was removed because the teachers had no input in the selection of students invited to interview, nor did they screen or have access to the initial sampling slips at any stage. Thus, the initial sampling frame resulted from an initial sampling activity that was undertaken on multiple classes in three schools. The teachers gave me access to all of their Year 11 business classes and the initial activity was completed on all available classes, over multiple visits to each school.

Thirty four students agreed to speak to me and interviews were arranged with all of these students. However, eleven students could not be contacted and so twenty three initial round one student interviews were conducted in the academic year 2012-2013. This sample led to data from students from each school intending to progress onto a range of institutions (including the original sample schools), to follow a range of courses (subjects and institution types) and also included a mix of gender, academic and vocational students with a range of abilities represented (see appendix F on page 251).

Interviews took place inside school in a quiet location so that students could talk freely and confidentially. As in the pilot study interview audio was recorded for transcription purposes. Recording allowed me to focus on the conversation, and take relevant notes, as I did not need to remember or record student responses (Basse, 1999). Due to restrictions in the school timetables not all interviews could be completed in school time. For the remaining interviews consent was received to telephone students at a convenient time. Using telephone interviews led to an increase in the attrition rate, as some students were less willing to give up their own

time to take part in the study, and inevitably some contact details provided were inaccurate.

Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) found that no significant differences were found between face to face and telephone interviews in terms of quality, length or depth so validity should not have been compromised. I also found this and attributed it to the face to face rapport which I established with the students before the interviews commenced. Interviews ranged in length from thirty to sixty minutes<sup>3</sup> for both face to face interviews and interviews conducted over the telephone.

### **Conducting the interviews**

Interviews are an exchange of views in a conversational form where participants and researchers also use verbal and non-verbal communication and listening skills to create meaning (Miller, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Cohen et al., 2007). Interviews are not neutral as meanings are socially constructed from the interaction (and personal characteristics) within the interview (Kvale, 1996; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007). Interviews elicit understanding from the point of view of participants lives using their words, language and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973; Miles et al., 2014), they do not use generalisations (Kvale, 1996; Miles et al., 2014; Gillham, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007). Thus, they enable an understanding of the unique context shaped by local circumstances (Maxwell, 2009).

A deliberate non-confrontational opening was used to put students at ease where I introduced the study and asked students about their hobbies and the subjects that they were studying because this required no effort to recall, questions were easy to answer and encouraged descriptive responses (Patton, 1990) to 'warm up' students (Gillham, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

This led into a time based discussion of what students chose to study for GCSEs in Year 9 (post hoc), current post-16 transition discussions, and then future thoughts on post-18 and career related aspirations. The interview questions were created from a synthesis of the literature in order to achieve the aim of re-applying

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<sup>3</sup>These interview lengths are similar to transition research carried out by Bloomer (1997).

the research from the 1990s and 2000s. Hemsley-Brown (1996a) highlighted important implications for this study, they raised questions over the amount of guidance provided to students in schools with sixth forms, this provided a basis for the IAG questions concerning how decisions were made and what IAG was received and what influences decisions (Hemsley-Brown, 1996a; Foskett et al., 2004; Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Foskett et al., 2008; Hughes and Gration, 2009; Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012; McCrone et al., 2012; Ofsted, 2013; House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b). A similar approach was used to Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997) and Bloomer and Hodkinson (1999a), where students were asked about past experiences (GCSE options) and their plans for the future. Questions relating to career plans and future aspirations, lifestyle, hobbies and interests, past experiences, aspirations, current and future location, grades, an overview of what friends and siblings are doing, and how to receive help were similar to those used by Kintrea et al. (2011) who advised on gaining a culturally contextual understanding of participants. A view of social capital was gained through a discussion of family background, Reay (2004) and Cochrane (2007) explained the importance of doing this through the interview questions to enable a level of cultural capital to be estimated and the extent to which students appreciated their social position.

The questions were open ended and provided students with the opportunity to answer from their own frame of reference (Silverman, 2006), without constraint in a semi-structured manner, but in line with the research aims (Cohen et al., 2007). These questions allowed for a flexible conversation which, although led by initial question control, flowed depending on the students' answers surrounding my major research exploratory themes (Patton, 1990; Kvale, 1996; Gillham, 2000; Silverman, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007). Although a list of questions is provided in the appendix G (page 277) the actual questions and discussion depended on the responses given by the students. The aim was not to impose my perspective onto the students but to enable new insights to be gained (Patton, 1990; Flick, 2007). However, all interviews used the questions as a guide to ensure all relevant topics were covered (Patton, 1990), so that analysis between participants could be achieved. Thus, the

interview approach falls between the interview guide and standardised open-ended interview approach as described by Cohen et al. (2007, p. 352-3). This approach enabled depth to be elicited during conversations and for any misunderstandings to be queried, clarification to be sought, topics to be followed up by probing, and prompting for depth and extension to occur.

The interview questions and probes ranged from questions covering experience, opinions, feelings and knowledge. Knowledge questions were asked to enhance validity and confirm how realistic a choice may be, for example if a student said they knew about a college course, they were asked to explain it in more detail. I made a validity note where students could not do so. I asked background and demographic questions last once rapport had been established (Patton, 1990; Gillham, 2000; Burke and Miller, 2001).

### **Round two interviews**

In the academic year 2013-2014 the second round of student interviews took place. Students were re-contacted and interviews arranged. The timing of the second round interviews was as important as the first. The second round of interviews started after the students had experienced a term in their new institutional environment, this meant that they were familiar with their new positions and that they were able to reflect on the decisions that they had discussed in round one.

Four students were not contactable during the second round and one decided that they no longer wanted to continue from round one to round two, leaving a total of eighteen students who were contacted in both rounds (a 22% attrition rate).

The second round of student interviews covered discussions on how plans had played out from the first round of interviews, what had changed and why. Importantly the second round also asked students to consider how useful the IAG they received in Year 11 was and how influential the different sources of IAG had been on their actual transitions made, bearing in mind the students had, by the time of the second interview, experienced the post-16 result of IAG and decision-making<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>Howieson and Croxford (1996); Wardman and Stevens (1998); Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001); Croll (2009) and Fuller and Macfadyen (2012) highlight the problem of post hoc rational-

Following advice from Bimrose et al. (2006) rapport was re-established with participants by using the previous transcripts, transcript summaries were reviewed and personal hobbies and interests were used to help put the students at ease at the start of the second interviews.

Interviews over two years were sufficient to gain an understanding of how transition from Year 11 into post-16 education or training occurred in practice and how understandings may have changed over time, as a result of the lived experience in the Year 12 setting. The interviews occurred across the key decision-making period and as with Hemsley-Brown (1996a) this allowed for comparison and reflection between round one and round two by the students.

In round two part of the interview was used to check 'facts' established in the first round of interviews to check for descriptive validity (Maxwell, 1992; Cohen et al., 2007), for example, the parental occupation and in some instances errors were corrected. Other changes in plans between round one and two were discussed, where changes occurred this created an opportunity for rich data collection and analysis. Given the longitudinal nature of the research, analysis from the first round of interviews highlighted areas for further probing in round two, this gave an opportunity to check and extend understanding and fill any gaps identified by transcription and analysis of first round data to strengthen validity (Maxwell, 1992; Cohen et al., 2007). For example, the use of the internet was explored in more detail because students had very varying levels of internet use, much lower than anticipated for such a connected generation. Appendix K (page 287) details the questions which guided the second round student interviews.

isation (retrospective rewriting of history) and query the objectivity of this evaluative technique because it relies on the students' recollection after the event, through self-reporting, without using direct evidence which opens up the possibility of retrospective consistency being imposed instead of lived reality. For post-16 transition the discussion related to current lived experiences and the contextual understanding from very recent transition. In addition IAG sources provided by the school were corroborated with staff interview data and documentary evidence. Therefore this issue was likely to be reduced in the current study.

## **Interviewing staff**

In addition to the student interviews an interview with a member of institutional staff was also conducted. The staff interviewed were self-reported, or volunteered by each institution's contact as someone who knew the context of the school or institution and its place in the local educational market (as in Foskett and Hesketh's (1997) study), this was at times a Subject Leader, Head of Sixth Form, Deputy Head or Data Analyst who consented to taking part in the study<sup>5</sup>. Some of these interviews were conducted face to face inside the institution, others via the telephone after an initial face to face, rapport building meeting. Interviews were carried out in the same manner as the student interviews (see page 90). Ten staff interviews were carried out, three in round one and seven in round two.

Staff were asked questions (see appendix K, page 287) which were very open ended to allow them to give pertinent responses, these responses were critical to an understanding of the context of IAG and transition in these institutions. Staff were asked about the background of the institution, the programme's aims, their target market, marketing activities, recruitment and selection. Staff were also asked about the context of the institution's local area.

## **Documentary evidence**

Throughout both rounds of interviews documentary evidence was collected following Maguire (2005). Documentary evidence was collected for all institutions attended by or applied to by students in the sample, this covered fifteen institutions in total. Documents were collected from publicly available sources such as websites and marketing materials. Others were internal documents provided by interviewees. Documents collected included school policies, prospectuses, Year 9 GCSE options booklets, and sixth form options booklets, Year 9 and Year 11 and sixth form marketing brochures, application forms, and website content. During visits some photographs were taken of careers and choice display boards and these were included as

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<sup>5</sup>The staff were informed of the nature of the study and written consent was gained in the same manner as it was for students, see appendix I and J on pages 282 and 284.

documentary evidence. In total 283 documents were collected, the number collected is high because this includes individual web pages that were downloaded separately. Appendix L (page 289) details the documents collected for each institution.

### **Observational evidence**

Whilst visiting institutions during the first and second rounds informal observational data were collected. This produced what Ecclestone (2001) called “informal data” (p.138), these were interpretations and impressions of institutions. Nine day visits to six different institutions were carried out in total (see appendix L, page 289). These informal observations produced naturally occurring data which was not reliant on a research task existing and the event would have occurred without my presence so these observations had the opportunity to raise novel concepts which were not covered by the original research questions (Silverman, 2007). Notes included topics such as the institution’s environment, displays and resources. These notes were included in the data for analysis.

### **Statistical evidence**

Institutional and official statistics were also collected. National, regional, local authority and institutional level statistical data were collected for all institutions attended by or applied to by students in the sample, this covered fifteen institutions in total<sup>6</sup>. These statistics gave background contextual information and enabled a comparison to be made between institutions and local areas in a way that was cost effective and easy to analyse, given that the official sources (DfE school performance tables [www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance), The Office for National Statistics (ONS) and <http://dashboard.ofsted.gov.uk/>) used the same methodology

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<sup>6</sup>Data collected for each institution included, GCSE results, A level results, the proportion of students studying facilitating subjects, the average GCSE and A level point scores, the value added measure, vocational pass rates, post-16 participation rates in total and by academic and vocational courses were, HE participation rates, NEET rates, Free School Meal/Pupil Premium student proportions, Special Educational Needs proportions, the student gender split, English as an Additional Language proportions, the institution’s size (including any sixth form), the school type, student ethnicity breakdown, absence percentages, their Ofsted grade, spend per pupil, and drop out rates

Source	Number
Round 1 Student Interviews	23
Round 2 Student Interviews	18
Total Student Interviews	41
Round 1 Staff Interviews	3
Round 2 Staff Interviews	7
Total Staff Interviews	10
Total Interviews	51
Observations during visits	9
Documents collected	283
Sets of institutional statistics	15
Sets of national, regional and local statistics	5

Table 3.1: Evidence Summary

for collection. The data also enabled students' positions and transition choices to be interpreted within the school's local area context. Statistics will be outlined in the next chapter when the contexts of the sample institutions are explored.

In total Table 3.1 details the evidence that was collected for analysis over the two year study.

## Analysing the evidence

The previous section outlined the evidence collection methods, this section deals with data analysis. Data analysis concerns organising, explaining and interpreting themes and relationships in the data, given the interpretive philosophical position adopted by this study there are multiple ways in which the data could be analysed (Patton, 1990; Cohen et al., 2007). Researchers infer meanings from the data as researchers are part of the social construction of reality. All judgements follow interpretations of the data by myself as a researcher (Merriam, 2002; Sikes, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007; Saldana, 2013; Miles et al., 2014) and cannot be value free, but value determined (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Thus, the data will be presented from the views of participants, to give their voice by using extended quotations (Cohen et al., 2007) and this will allow readers to judge the validity of my decisions (Merriam, 2002; Silverman, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007).



## **Transcribing the evidence**

Following data organisation, transcribing the data involved producing a written account of the recorded oral interviews for analysis. Major pauses, hesitations and laughter were included to maximise meaning in the transcripts using notation following Bazeley (2007), for example (laughs). Notation did not need to follow the in-depth requirements of some approaches to analysis because the qualitative, inductive interpretive approach used assumes subjective social construction of reality without following in-depth linguistic analysis. The questions asked and any clarification from myself were also included. Other significant events were also recorded, for example, where one student relocated themselves so that their parents could not hear them, so that they could talk more freely and when some students asked relatives and siblings for clarification over courses and job roles. The two rounds of student interviews created transcriptions totalling 160,000 words and staff interviews created transcriptions totalling 51,000 words.

Before any analysis techniques, which break up the data, were applied all interview transcripts were read and summarised, this gave an overall understanding of the data (for each student and school) and provided an aid so as not to lose sight of the overall bigger picture, of sequences and of the individual student's stories (Maykut, 1994; Cohen et al., 2007). These summaries were used following analysis to provide a validity check of the findings based on these pre-analysis summary transcripts.

## **Coding the evidence**

Qualitative data analysis involves coding the qualitative information to reflect themes (patterns) found in the data. This process followed Boyatzis (1998). I used Nvivo qualitative analysis software (version 10) as a tool to assist in the qualitative analysis, for the storage of all data and recording of codes. Codes were applied openly, manually (without the use of search, range coding and auto coding Nvivo tools), inductively from the data. The codes provided a summary of the large amount of

data so that meaning, categories, patterns, and relationships could be highlighted and applied across individual students and institutions (Maykut, 1994; Miles et al., 2014). After round one coding a second round of coding was applied to clarify the meaning of some codes and to break larger categories into more specific categories to differentiate ideas and variables for a more detailed understanding of the data. This resulted in a set of systematic recurring categories and themes. Repeating concepts were checked to ensure that data collected in each category was homogeneous, categories were combined and split to ensure that the codes had a good fit with the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Coding individual interviews and documents allowed for the complexity of qualitative data to be dealt with (Stake, 1995), especially given the flexibility in the qualitative interviews, this included the sequence of questions changing which limited direct comparison between students' data (Patton, 1990).

### **Charting the data**

Some of the approaches to data analysis suggested by Kvale (1996); Silverman (2006) and Miles et al. (2014) were followed to find patterns in the data beyond initial impressions, this included charting the data. A matrix display table which charted student contextual information and changes from round one to round two plus observations and statistics was created. This data reduction was also a way to display summary data and enable comparison between schools, institutions and areas (for example a comparison of GCSE results across areas and schools, see Table 4.4 on page 117). Categories created from this analysis were used to demonstrate similarities and relationships; such as identifying students who had and had not changed subjects studied and institutions from their original plans. This categorising and grouping reduced a large amount of data to allow for comparisons to be made (Kvale, 1996) and for detailed querying of data. It also provided a sense of the data as a whole. Next individual cases were compared to the themes, deviant cases and rival explanations were categorised where the data did not fit with majority themes and categories (Silverman, 2006; Miles et al., 2014). This was one of the

key steps in developing possible relationships between the data which were then explored further.

### **Quasi-statistical analysis**

Qualitative analysis was the primary analysis method. However, Wolcott (1994); Silverman (2006); Maxwell (2009) and Miles et al. (2014) argued that quasi-statistics can be used to assess the evidence weighting for a particular theme and they can give further meaning to qualitative data and enable data to be displayed. For each node Nvivo's visualisation tool was used to create a map displaying the relative weighted importance of each coded item (by coded frequency). This quasi-quantitative analysis was then combined with the qualitative interpretations (for example, the significance of a coded item) to give an overall view on the big picture of the data. This comparison between visualisations and prior themes provided a validity check and opportunities to explore areas which were previously undiscovered. Furthermore, the matrix display table's categories were transferred into a statistical summary which highlighted key differences within the sample and sample schools, for example, the percentages of students who wanted to study academic verses vocational courses by institution.

### **Querying the data**

Another phase in the analysis followed Saldana (2013), the data were queried by their associated attributes. Attributes such as gender, age, school and ethnicity were loaded into Nvivo (into Nvivo's Source and Node Classification Sheets) this enabled Nvivo's query tools to further analyse the data and potentially highlight patterns that I had missed due to the sheer volume of data. This interrogation allowed for conclusions to be checked for internal homogeneity (Miles et al., 2014).

## **Documentary evidence analysis**

Collecting and analysing documents from the institutions provided an opportunity to analyse the context, the culture and history beyond the interviews and allowed for triangulation to occur; as an additional representation of reality (Silverman, 2006; Briggs and Coleman, 2007). I had to be aware of bias in analysis (ibid) but given many of the documents related to marketing this bias provided a valuable insight into the local choice market because they occurred naturally in the day-to-day institutional operation, unlike the interviews which occurred as a result of the research taking place (Silverman, 2006). The majority of document types, for example, policies were available for all institutions (appendix L, page 289 details what evidence was available for each institution).

Analysis of the documents included reflection on whether the documents were internal or external, their intended audience (Salkind, 2006; Silverman, 2006), representativeness and accuracy, if authentic, if they held claims to power and legitimacy (Saldana, 2013), the author and reason the document was created, what they did not say, their content and language, and key messages. This analysis followed Silverman (2006), and Briggs and Coleman (2007). In addition, following Maguire et al. (1999) the marketing documents were analysed for their design and overall look which included the use of fonts, the paper quality used, the use of colour, logos and photographs included in the documents (see appendix M, page 293).

## **Concluding analysis**

Once codes, themes, categories and explanations were identified the elements which could be applied to existing theory, for example, student subject and institution choice were linked. New thinking was highlighted as important and this understanding forms the findings and discussion chapter.

A true grounded study, utilising data saturation (Glasser and Strauss, 1967) was not carried out for this study, however, data analysis did result in a tipping point where the sample data revealed enough so that new ideas were not being

presented by looking at more data and literature. Although in qualitative studies sample size is relatively immaterial (Cohen et al., 2007) and the quality of data analysis is the important issue (Hodkinson, 2007). Thomson (2011) suggested that saturation is likely to occur at around twenty five participants (from their review of 100 journal articles), and Mason (2010) argued that saturation occurs between twenty to thirty participants (reviewing PhD studies). Thus, although grounded study techniques were not strictly followed I required enough data for patterns and concepts to emerge. This was achieved with the amount of data summarised in Table 3.1 (page 98).

Originally the research was designed to use students as the unit of analysis. As analysis progressed it became apparent that the data were more reflective of Yin's multiple case design whereby the students were embedded cases (Yin, 2003), which provided context to the wider bounded cases representing schools as the unit of analysis. Thus, this thesis ended up evolving into and reflecting multiple (three) school sites using staff and students as units of analysis as their individual stories have collectively revealed school cases (these will be outlined in the findings and discussion chapter). This was decided because the analysis provided a great deal of detail about the schools and their contexts, in addition to the lives of the individual students thus broadly reflecting the case study design (Salkind, 2006; Yin, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007). As such the case exploratory design characteristic (see Bassey (1999) and Yin (2003)) was arrived at rather than aimed for by design. The context of the schools and their localities are important and therefore it is important to include a context chapter which explores and compares the two regional and local circumstances.

So far the first three sections of this chapter have outlined the philosophical and methodological transitions which underpinned the research methods which were then outlined. The final two sections consider the validity, and ethical considerations in the study.

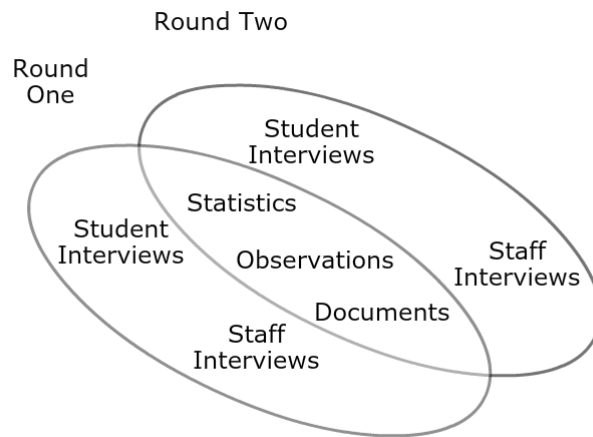
## Validity in the study

This section explores validity in the study. One advantage of this study is that the research took place over an extended time period. This enabled students to be tracked over time, leading to a study which was longitudinal in nature. This allowed for changes in students' plans to be explored. Had only one round of interviews taken place the data would have been less valid as any changed plans would not have been identified and the study could have assumed that a student would have progressed onto a post-16 institution which they may not have ended up at (see appendix N on page 304 for an identification of the changes to transition between round one and two).

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) argued that researchers can unwittingly create the social reality that they are analysing by trying to spot patterns during research. Denzin (1970); Silverman (2006) and Silverman (2007) argued how participant self-presentation can result in socially desirable manufactured data. They argued that this is more likely to occur in the early part of interviews and reduce once commitment to the interview process is increased. Given the study was longitudinal in nature students knew I would be contacting them again and so socially desirable manufactured data were likely to be lower as they gave this commitment from the outset. Approaches to maximise validity have been explained in the preceding interview section and these included the pilot study, interview recordings and transcription along with depth of understanding achieved through the qualitative interviews, by querying responses during interviews to check understanding and fill gaps and following any misunderstanding up during the final round of interviews. The analysis section detailed steps taken to compare data at different points during analysis with the aim of spotting differences caused by social desirability and manufactured data, this was identified in certain interviews.

Thus, it was an important aspect of analysis to consider the construction of 'truth' during interviews. For example, in the interview with the Head of Burlywood Academy Sixth Form he inflated their pass rate success when comparing their

Figure 3.1: Diagram showing the combination of sources across the two rounds.



position with a competitor's, this and other aspects of 'truth' will be returned to in the findings and discussion chapter where they had an impact on analysis.

Lincoln and Guba (1985); Patton (1990); Bryman (2004); Kvale (2007) and Hammersley (2008) explained how triangulation aims to reduce threats to conclusion validity using two plus methods to study the same aspect of understanding. I carried this out using data triangulation (Denzin, 1970) by comparing interview data between staff and students, interviews and documentation, observations and statistical data. Figure 3.1 (page 105) visualises this approach. This study also used triangulation of time (two rounds of data collection) (Denzin, 1970) as prolonged exposure to participants helped to ensure credibility. Where the same institution was included in the sample in both rounds, where possible a different member of staff was interviewed in the second round to gain an additional opportunity to seek alternative data<sup>7</sup>. Differences identified between the two rounds suggests that different aspects of social reality have been captured rather than invalid data, and exploring these differences is more likely to reveal the 'truth' (Denzin, 1970; Miles et al., 2014). However, general patterns and divergent, negative or deviant cases, exceptions or rival explanations (Patton, 1990; Boyatzis, 1998; Silverman, 2006;

<sup>7</sup>However, this was not possible at Abbey Gate.

Hammersley, 2008; Maxwell, 2009; Miles et al., 2014) suggest credibility of findings and improving theoretical validity, and that the reported data explains the theoretical phenomena in question (Maxwell, 1992).

Second round interview data were available for eighteen out of the original twenty three participants, I was unable to verify the destinations of the students who were not interviewed in the second round. Likewise not all institutions provided a member of staff for interview (see appendix L, page 289).

## **Ethical considerations**

The final section of the methods chapter considers the ethical implications of the study. The study was carried out in accordance with the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, updated for 2011 by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) and The University of Nottingham School of Education's ethical guidance. The research was given ethical clearance by the School of Education (see appendix O, page 318). I held an Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check specifically for conducting this research in schools. The research was conducted as I would allow a study to be conducted onto myself, and aimed to do no harm (Sikes, 2004; Busher and James, 2007). All students who consented to the study gave written and oral consent (see appendix E, page 250). The study's aims and purpose were made clear to participants via face to face oral conversations and through the written study information sheet (see appendix D, page 248), the students could have removed themselves and their data from the study at any time. A copy of the consent and information form was provided to all participants so that they could contact me or the University's ethics co-ordinator at any time during the research.

The participants were volunteers and were not held captive by the study. It could be argued that the in-class sampling activity was forced upon the students by the very nature of them being a business student in the sample school and as such could have been coerced into taking part. However, the in-class sampling activity



asked the student if they were willing to speak to a researcher and thus if a student felt that they were required to complete the activity they could opt out through not ticking the box, 36% of all students who completed the initial sampling instrument opted out at this stage. In addition, students could not consent by giving false contact details or missing arranged interview times, and by leaving the study part way through. Eleven of the students who indicated they would speak to me opted out or could not be contacted at this stage.

To comply with the Data Protection Act (1998) all data were kept on a secure computer and on password protected backups. Paper data were kept locked in a cabinet to which only the researcher had access. All data are anonymous and pseudonyms are used (for participants, schools, towns, and cities) and thus, data are untraceable back to the participants and institutions in order to maintain their anonymity. After the research all electronic data were deleted and paper data shredded. In this thesis enough details of the environment and references (including contextual information) have been changed so readers should not be able to work out the schools and participants involved through deductive disclosure (Cohen et al., 2007).

Special consideration was given to seeking the contextual information from institution staff. It was made clear to the students that staff would not be informed of their interview content so that confidentiality would be maintained. This was important in building rapport and to enhance validity. Students would have been less likely to disclose their true future intentions if they thought teachers would find out about the content of their interviews (Lee, 1993; Cohen et al., 2007). For example, students intending to progress to a rival institution for sixth form may not have disclosed this if they felt their teachers would find out and intervene. Like in Siann and Knox (1992) confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by not disclosing to staff exactly who had agreed to be interviewed.

Reciprocity (Liamputtong, 2012) was aimed for through the second round of interviews, to thank the students for their time and contribution to the research. I consciously did not offer any advice or assistance to students, or use leading

questions during the first round of interviews so as to set clear boundaries between myself and the research to avoid any influence this may have had on the study. However, I did offer some information to some students in round two as this was the last time I was going to speak to students so no bias would occur in future rounds, and it was a way of giving something back to the students, as a partial thank you for taking part in the research. Information given related to the role of the NCS, how the website [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) lists career information, what apprenticeship levels could be used for entrance to HE, and [www.peopleperhour.com](http://www.peopleperhour.com) which is a website where one student could receive paid work and gain work experience for his design skills. In this way the research could also have been of benefit to the students directly (Bimrose et al., 2006). Additionally Ely et al. (1991) suggested that interviews provide opportunities for reflection and this can help the students learn something about themselves.

The next chapter will describe the context of the sample so that the study's findings can be understood in context.

## Chapter 4

# Context of the Sample

This chapter is important because it outlines the context of the sample. The following comparison between the two regions highlights differences and similarities which contain important implications for the findings and argument of this thesis. Although a comparative study was not designed the available data has meant that comparisons between the specific localities of the sample schools is, in part, possible. Hence, this chapter outlines the context of the two regions and each school used in this study's sample. Specifically this chapter explores the contextual factors concerning, geographic location, local post-16 institutional competition, local higher education and employment opportunities, and other demographics including deprivation, employment by sector and by profession, and unemployment statistics. Finally the context of each school, their provision, recent history, performance and progression statistics are outlined.

The North West and Midlands provide both similar and contrasting contexts for students' post-16 decision-making. Firstly Redmarsh<sup>1</sup> in the North West where Abbey Gate is located has a population of 25,000. It is located at one end of a valley which provides a physical separation between two small towns. Its rural location means that residents have to commute out to larger surrounding towns and cities for most employment opportunities and travel for retail and leisure activities. For

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<sup>1</sup>As outlined in the methods chapter all the names of participants, schools, towns, and cities are pseudonyms.

students this presents a barrier as access to personal car transport is required for efficient travel around the area while around 80% of residents of this area have access to at least one car (Census 2011). This is in contrast to Newfield which is a city with a population of 300,000<sup>2</sup> in the Midlands which provides excellent transport links along with high street shopping and leisure activities which are numerous and easily accessible. In Newfield around 55% of residents have access to a car while 75% is the national average. The excellent transport network and high proliferation of retail, leisure and education institutions means that car ownership is not as significant in Newfield as in Redmarsh.

The geography has implications for post-16 student decision-making. In Redmarsh students considered six post-16 institutions, in addition to their pre-16 school. However, their school's location in a rural valley means that no directly easily accessible post-16 alternative institution is readily available for students to attend. The nearest institution offers a similar post-16 experience in that it is a secondary school with an attached sixth form. Within a travelling distance of fifteen miles students considered alternative post-16 institutions which included other schools with attached sixth forms, a grammar school and large established general FE and post-16 colleges also offering academic and vocational courses. Unless students decided to stay at their post-16 institution they all had to travel outside of the valley to experience post-16 education. In this way the map (Figure 4.2, page 113) demonstrates the pre-16 school as the centre of a hub with spokes (bus routes) representing travel options which lead out to post-16 institutions in neighbouring larger towns, the majority of which are between seven and ten miles away. Students also considered a college which is fifteen miles away. Three quarters of institutions outside of the valley offer free travel to students which can be seen as a way of competing for students who have to travel in the surrounding rural valleys.

In contrast a much greater choice of post-16 institutions is available and are more accessible in Newfield. Students in Newfield listed an additional eight institutions, that were considered by students, in addition to their pre-16 school. In contrast to

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<sup>2</sup>The exact population is not given to aid anonymity.

Redmarsh these were spread over a smaller geographic area of ten miles and are located within and to the north of Newfield. The city centre offers a transport hub for students to be able to access institutions from anywhere within the city (see the map, Figure 4.1 on page 112). As with Redmarsh the large established colleges offer students free transport, and the school sixth forms do not. The institutions include schools with sixth forms, religious voluntary aided schools, sixth form colleges and large general FE colleges both offering academic and vocational courses. Newfield also offers a 16-19 sixth form college as an independent corporation (there are only around 90 of these in the UK). Eastward College sits at the centre of a 'catchment' area circling 60 miles in diameter which covers the city and surrounding counties. It is the only college of its type in the region, and it provides an extensive network of buses including to the city centre and towns to the east and north of Newfield, as staff were aware of competition from other non-school colleges with similar offerings.

In both areas students had to choose to move institutions and attend a large vocational college if specialist vocational courses were desired for post-16 study, no pre-16 school offers specialist vocational facilities for students at post-16, although Adley House and Abbey Gate offer general vocational courses at post-16. Abbey Gate is located in an area where the local grammar school diverts higher attaining students from attending Abbey Gate, as it exists within a selective education system. The grammar school serves a wide geographical area and draws students from the local large towns. Its 'catchment' area's diameter is around 30 miles and covers all local schools and colleges shown on the map (see Figure 4.2 on page 113).

Although differences exist at the post-16 level the major differences between the sample locations exist at post-18. Newfield is a large city offering university education at multiple institutions. In Redmarsh students have no option of such higher education without travelling to a nearby larger city or town. Students and staff in Newfield commented on how it was difficult to get into one institution for HE, but it was at least an option; colleges also offer higher education courses leading to degree certification. One in eight of the population are full time university students (Census 2011). When taking into account GCSE attainment and the ethnic profile of

Figure 4.1: Outline map showing the geographic spread of institutions in the Midlands sample region.

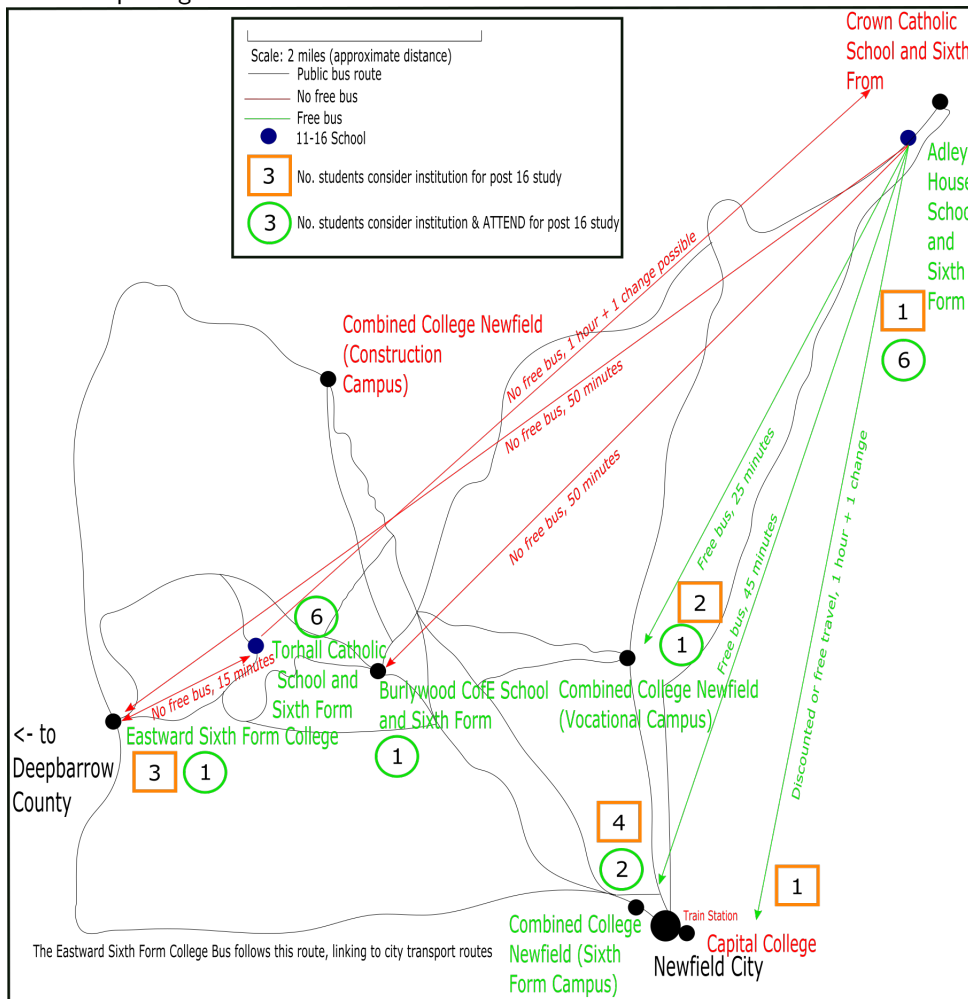
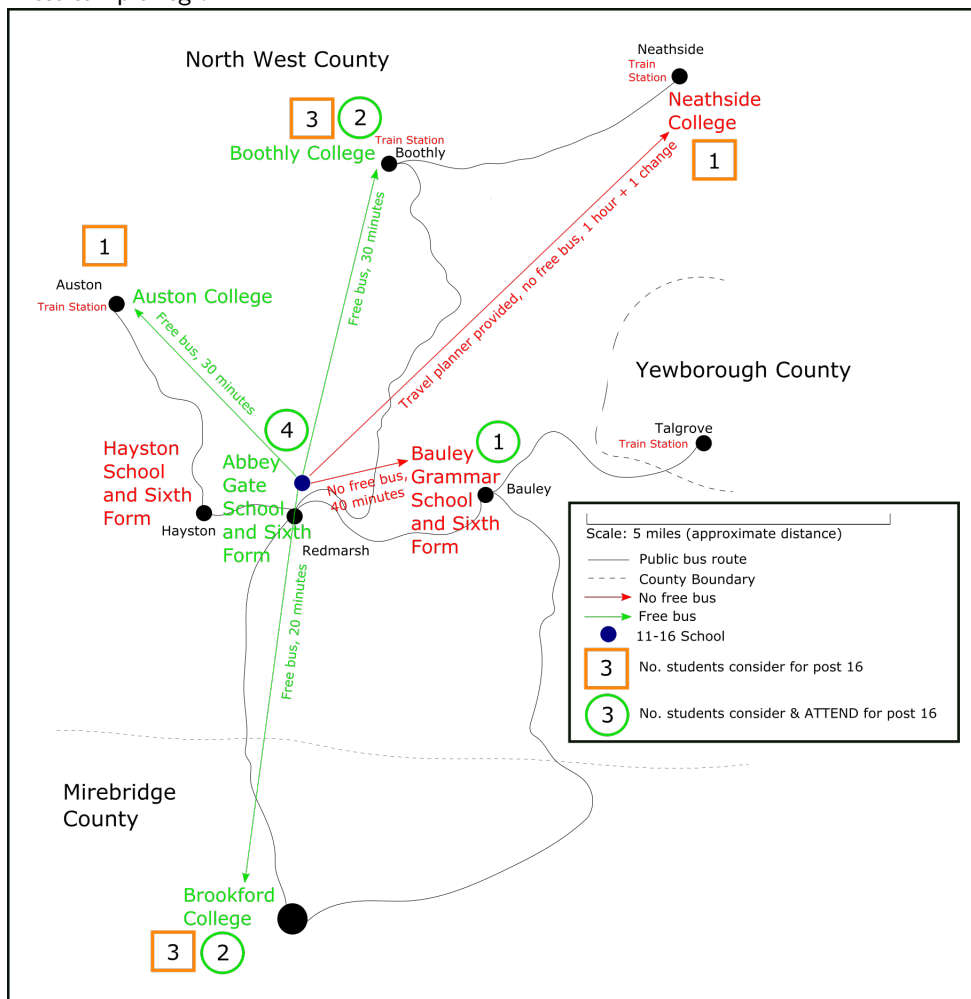


Figure 4.2: Outline map showing the geographic spread of institutions in the North West sample region.



the population of youth residents the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) report that Abbey Gate has a positive higher education participation rate of 30-42%, and Adley House a positive participation rate of 36-54%, up to 9% above the expected rate and Torhall School, 32.8% participation, 2% lower than the rate expected by HEFCE. However, this is for the school's location and it does not take into account students travelling to the schools from other areas (for details see [www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/deciles/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/deciles/)).

There are also more opportunities for employment in Newfield compared to in Redmarsh. Redmarsh has a history of primary sector business, for example, quarrying and agriculture and Newfield city has a history of secondary manufacturing; both have declined as the service sector becomes more dominant. However, Redmarsh town council emphasises that manufacturing remains dominant in the local economy. This is in contrast to Newfield city where the service sector is dominant. Table 4.1 (page 115) from ONS provides an overview of regional employment sectors.

Even though the regional statistics are similar, practicalities mean that Redmarsh students are likely to have to travel to find employment, especially with larger employers who are not only located over a wider geographic area, but an area that is more difficult to access due to the rural transport network. 30% of the work journeys are to the locations which also offer colleges (see Figure 4.2, page 113) (Local council statistics). This is in contrast to Newfield's employers who draw young adults in from the surrounding area for education and employment where recently there has been a net increase in the population of around 12% (Local council statistics). Half of the population churn is down to the movements of students (ibid).

However, both regions have similar major employers in the local council, National Health Service, educational institutions and retail service providers. Both have large employers who are significant providers of apprenticeships, however, they are not named here as they are synonymous with the locations which they exist in. Both regions have similar employment contexts in relation to the size of businesses, 88% (micro – 9 or fewer employees), 10% are small (10–49 employees), 1.5% are medium



Sector	Midlands (%)	North West (%)	UK (%)
A : Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1.1	1	1.3
B : Mining and quarrying	0.3	0.1	0.2
C : Manufacturing	12.6	9.1	7.9
D : Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning	0.6	0.4	0.4
E : Water supply; sewerage, waste management	0.6	0.6	0.6
F : Construction	6.4	6.6	6.5
G : Wholesale and retail trade; repair of vehicles	16.2	15.9	14.9
H : Transportation and storage	5.3	5.3	4.6
I : Accommodation and food service activities	4.9	5.8	6.1
J : Information and communication	2.1	2.9	3.9
K : Financial and insurance activities	1.5	2.7	3.4
L : Real estate activities	1	1.5	1.8
M : Professional, scientific and technical activities	7.3	7.7	8.2
N : Administrative and support service activities	8.1	9	8.3
O : Public administration and defence	4.2	4.5	4.7
P : Education	9.4	8.6	8.8
Q : Human health and social work activities	13	13.3	12.7
R : Arts, entertainment and recreation	2.2	2.4	2.8
S : Other service activities	3.1	2.4	2.5
T : Activities of households as employers	0.1	0.2	0.2

Table 4.1: Employment by Sector and Region

(5–249 employees) and 5% are large (250+ employees)<sup>3</sup>. Both regions also share similarities in the breakdown of employment classification as Table 4.2 (page 116) indicates.

The North West has a lower number of economically active residents and residents in employment, see Table 4.3 (page 116). Redmarsh had a falling proportion of economically active residents in employment, and levels were the lowest out of all North West local authorities (Local council statistics; ONS). Earnings were also below the national average (ibid).

Both Ofsted and demographic statistics portray both areas in the North West and the Midlands as being two of the poorest and most disadvantaged areas in Eng-

<sup>3</sup>Figures are rounded for anonymity.

Category	Midlands (%)	North West (%)	UK (%)
Professional	40.5	40.4	44
1 Managers, directors and senior officials	9.4	9.6	10.1
2 Professional occupations	17.9	18.2	19.7
3 Associate professional and technical	13	12.2	13.9
Skilled	21.4	22.5	21.6
4 Administrative and secretarial	10.3	11.7	10.8
5 Skilled trades occupations	11	10.6	10.7
Leisure service	16.7	18.7	17.1
6 Caring, leisure and other service occupations	8.6	9.6	9.1
7 Sales and customer service	8	9	7.9
Routine	21.4	18.4	17.2
8 Plant and machine operatives	8.8	6.8	6.3
9 Elementary occupations	12.5	11.4	10.7

Table 4.2: Employment by Profession Type

Type	Midlands (%)	North West (%)	UK (%)
Economically active	78.4	75.7	78.1
In employment	73	69.8	72.7
Unemployed	6.6	7.7	6.8
Economically inactive	21.6	24.3	21.9

Table 4.3: Employment by Region

land, both suffer from high levels of deprivation (Source: ONS). Ofsted also noted that levels of careers advice detailing the range of available options is inconsistent in both areas (2014a).

Both regions have large minority ethnic groups of Pakistani and an increasing number of Polish nationals alongside the largest ethnic group, White British. In Newfield 44% of those in education are from Black and minority ethnic groups, 24% speak English as an additional language which is higher than the national average.

Redmarsh town council stated that there are pockets of high unemployment claimant rates and 15% of households were low income workers, this was twice the national average and placed the town in the top 100 most deprived areas in England (Local council statistics). Similarly, students attending Torhall School and Adley House schools in Newfield were drawn from areas of deprivation. The proportion of students receiving the pupil premium funding was around the national average and

Statistic	Torhall School	Adley House	Abbey Gate
A level pass rate A*-E (%)	92	75	41
GCSE pass rate (%) inc. Eng and Maths	73	52	56
Sch progress to own SF (%)	67	46	24
Sch SF size (no. pupils)	170	290	130
Academic post-16 proportion (%)	100	85	43

Table 4.4: Sample School Statistics

the regional A\*-C GCSE achievement rate was one of the lowest in the region. 15% of households were also low income workers and Newfield was in the top twenty areas of England for levels of deprivation and one quarter of its areas were in the top 10% most deprived in England; 50% of areas were in the top 20% most deprived. One third of areas were in the top 10% most deprived for education, skills and training in England. This is where Torhall School is located. Torhall is described by Ofsted as an outstanding school, this success in such a deprived area partly demonstrates the polarisation of the demographic factors in the city. Torhall School's Catholic status means that its roll is made up of both students from deprived areas, but also students from young and well educated families who live outside of the school's immediate geographic area, which has the above demographic characteristics. This was in contrast to Adley House. This school's catchment area draws a mixed intake from the best ranked areas in terms of employment, housing, income and crime to the worst.

Torhall School is over subscribed and its Catholic ethos and academic results support its positive reputation for teaching and staff-student relationships. It has a reputation for being in the top 20% of all schools, and this means that students travel from outside of its immediate locality to attend the school. Over 90% of students are baptised Catholics. 4% of students have additional learning needs and 30% of students receive the pupil premium. Over forty languages are spoken at the school. Torhall School holds the Careers Mark for schools which is awarded for recognition of employer engagement and a commitment to supporting students' futures. It is the only school to hold the award in the sample.

In contrast Adley House is a large comprehensive school, also with its own sixth form. Its performance places it in the middle 20% of all schools and it is described by Ofsted as requiring improvement. However, Ofsted states that its sixth form is judged to be outstanding because students enter with below average performance and make progress which is better than average. Ofsted report that teaching is good and staff-student relationships are good. Adley House has an above average number of students with additional educational needs but a below average number of students who receive the pupil premium and speak English as an additional language, this reflects the area of Newfield where the school is located, reflecting both a deprived area and a more middle class area. Both Newfield schools send 70% of their students to HE by the age of 18 and 20% of these attend a Russell Group university, this is in contrast to 26% of the students who enter HE from Abbey Gate in Redmarsh.

Abbey Gate is described by Ofsted as a smaller than average, good comprehensive school. The number of students with English as an additional language is at the national average, students with additional learning needs is below the national average and students receiving the pupil premium is at the national average. The school's results place it in the top 40% of all schools. Their sixth form is described as making progress, but requiring improvement. Although their sixth form offers both academic and vocational courses the staff, students and Ofsted, note how performance is low (see Table 4.4 on page 117). The map (Figure 4.2, page 113) displays a range of local competitor institutions all of whom have higher pass rates. Ofsted report that the sixth form is developing well but requires improvement because it is not yet established enough to ensure that progress is consistent, in some courses academic progress is not good due to poor teaching.

This chapter has outlined the institutional, local and regional contexts of the sample so that the study's findings and discussion can be understood. The next chapter details the study's findings and discussion. Appendix P (page 320) provides a picture of the national context of post-16 education and training in order for regional variation to be given context.

## **Chapter 5**

# **Findings and Discussion:**

# **Competition, Control and**

# **Transition in Post-16**

# **Education**

### **Introduction**

The findings and discussion chapter of this thesis presents knowledge to complement the research work carried out by Bloomer, Hodgkinson, Foskett, Maguire, Hemsley-Brown, Macrae, Gewirtz and Ball, on choice, transition and competition during the 1990s-2000s. The major contribution of this thesis to the transition literature is an exploration of how schools use strategies and operational tactics to control IAG with the aim of benefiting their own institutional position. This may not be in the students' best interests. Understanding this may help to improve IAG practice and the outcomes for students. The contribution helps to fill the research gap created by larger studies which covered the resultant impact of schools' influences on students

but they did not contain adequate detail to evidence *how* this influence was created in practice.

This more up-to-date contribution is important because firstly, it takes into account the coalition's 2012 policy changes to IAG, that made schools responsible for IAG provision. This change led to a documented reduction of impartial careers advice. Secondly, competition between providers has increased in the post-16 marketplace as a result of the growing number of options available for students to choose from and finally more students are affected by these factors because the compulsory leaving age has increased to 18 (see the introductory chapter, page 6).

This findings and discussion chapter uses separate sections in order to organise the content; relationships between sections are highlighted because in reality the factors are interlinked and cannot be divided into sections. The chapter is split into three sections. The first outlines the competitive post-16 marketplace which interplays with IAG, choice and transition. The second leads on from the competition section by exploring the strategies employed by schools in post-16 transition activities in order to cope with the competitive context. The final section completes the argument by explaining how student decision-making supports and challenges the influence of schools on transition.

## **Heterogeneous competition between post-16 providers**

The introductory and literature review chapters outlined how competition between post-16 providers is one of the antecedents of biased or less effective IAG. Policy assumes that standards are improved through competition, hence types of institutions have been increasing since the 2000s and now include numerous types such as sixth forms, FE colleges, free schools, studio schools and UTCs (see page 10). It was suggested that, all things being equal, schools with sixth forms would rationally want to recruit the most qualified (highest achieving) students in order to maximise both the number of students on roll for both financial security, and to maximise examination performance and league table positioning. However, findings from this

study suggest that the competition between institution types is much more complex than this (economically) rational viewpoint. Competition is not homogeneous amongst institution types.

This section will explore the nature of competition between types of institutions in order to give background context to the schools' IAG and transition practices explored later in the chapter. Outlining the competitive post-16 marketplace is the first part in explaining the impact of schools on students' transition post the 2012 IAG changes. The section has four elements which constructs the post-16 competitive environment. Firstly it notes how students are divided between remaining or leaving their pre-16 school. Secondly it explores the extent to which all students are available for selection by competitors. Thirdly it outlines how students are divided between academic and vocational study. Finally the section explores how some schools aimed to become more competitive through the provision of vocational education. The first section concludes that competition between institutions is organised by heterogeneous competition between institutional types.

### **Differentiated institutional offerings: academic quality or independence**

Reasons for heterogeneous competition within the sample are explored below, these reasons represent contrasting unique selling points (USPs) between types of institutions. Competition for students did not exist across all institution types; it was not homogeneous. Across both regions competition between institutions played out through one key factor surrounding students' transitions, whether students considered leaving their pre-16 school, or remaining at it for post-16 education. All pre-16 schools in the sample offered post-16 education.

Table 5.1 (page 122) demonstrates that the students who moved to a college environment were more likely to be following vocational courses and those who remained at their own school sixth form were more likely to be academic students.

Attended a post-16 college	Attended their pre-16 school's sixth form	Attended an alternative school sixth form	Post-16 Apprenticeship
Vocational course followed by: Zane, AG to Boothly (BTEC) Amy, AG to Boothly (BTEC) Max, AH to CCN (BTEC) Eleanor, TS to Unknown	Vocational course followed by: Henry, AG (BTEC)	Vocational course followed by:	Vocational course followed by: Terry, AG to Appr
A level course followed by: Alfie, AH to East Nissa, AH to CCN Lloyd, AH to CCN	A level course followed by: Jay, AG Damian, AG John, AH Kath, AH Tim, AH Magda, AH Jamal, TS Heather, TS Carla, TS Karen, TS George, TS	A level course followed by: Leena, AG to Bauley Grammar Sofia, AH to Burlywood	

Table 5.1: Post-16 Institutions Attended Compared to Pre-16 Institutions



Students who stayed at their pre-16 school for post-16 study based decisions on being familiar with the environment, having had a positive pre-16 school experience (between both staff and students), to remain with peers, to study in an institution with a positive academic reputation, to benefit from staff who know the students personally (so that they could receive accurate and personalised advice), and to attend a school environment which is more supportive than that of a college. Students presented the situation as lower risk because the experience that they were buying into is known given they have experience of the school's service as a pre-16 student at the same institution, often with the same staff. These findings reflect previous research findings by Schagen et al. (1996); Maguire et al. (2001) and Blenkinsop et al. (2006).

In contrast students who left their pre-16 school to follow post-16 education at a college did so for reasons which included following their peers for social reasons, to access specialist facilities, for the range of courses available (including GCSE resits, vocational courses and courses not offered elsewhere) and fundamentally because students felt that they required a change from their pre-16 school environment, and wanted to gain more independence.

Thus, there was a dichotomy between academic and vocational institutions, courses and students. These two positions differentiated competition between institution types (schools or colleges). These mutually exclusive and contrasting positions were clearly presented by institutions as the choice differentiator through their IAG messages and through subliminal marketing messages. These messages were that academic support was provided by schools verses the independent experience available at colleges. Reasons to attend post-16 institutions converged evidence given by both staff and students. Both students and staff accepted and used these reasons to construct or present a meaningful internalised argument to support the route taken. These reasons reflected the USPs of institutions which reflected, created and reinforced these realities through social construction of reality which gave meaning to and enabled transition decision-making.

## **Indirect competition between school sixth forms**

Overall both staff and students felt that school sixth forms were competing with colleges and training providers, and not with other school sixth forms, even within a local area. This is highlighted by the types of institutions considered for post-16 study by students (see Table 5.1 on page 122). There appears to have been an unwritten, professional understanding that school sixth forms do not normally accept students from other schools with sixth forms, representing a certain level of protection from competition from schools by the schools themselves. This in some ways provided support to minimise the impact of competition within localities, limiting the levels of competition that schools experienced when compared to other types of providers, for example, sixth form colleges. This situation was summed up by the Head of Sixth Form at Torhall School:

If somebody comes to me and says right, I'm at [name of a local school with a sixth form] I'd say well you've no need to talk to us, you've got a sixth form [...] You should stay at your own school unless, one, they don't do the course, or two, some cataclysmic breakdown with mates or teachers [...] I'm not out to recruit from other schools. (Head of Sixth Form, Torhall School, Newfield)

If competition did exist it was indirect, the Head of Sixth Form at Burlywood Academy stated:

As our results go up and we retain more of our own students the success of the sixth form spreads across the city, so we're also recruiting more students from other schools now [...] we're a bit wary of going in and trying to promote our sixth form to a site that already has a sixth form, it's not something that's really done. (Head of Sixth Form, Burlywood Academy, Newfield)

Although he was not displeased that this was occurring, he was clear it was not the school's main aim to compete with other schools with sixth forms.

## **Vocational or academic post-16 study differentiation**

In both counties students were able to access a range of A levels, vocational, BTEC and apprenticeship courses across a range of competing institutions. Table 5.2 (page 126) displays how, in terms of subject choice, the majority of institutions offered between 23 and 37 A level subject choices across both schools and colleges<sup>1</sup>. Boothly College had 37, the widest range of A levels on offer and emphasised this in its advertising and prospectus.

Table 5.2 (page 126) clearly demonstrates how some sixth forms were more academic in their focus. Fuller and Unwin (2011) defined this differentiation as segmentation by institutional choice, where specific products (courses) were offered in certain institutions. Thus, they were able to attract distinctive customers, for example Bauley Grammar and Torhall School, exclusively offered post-16 academic subjects. This research depicts a divide between vocational and academic routes which occurred between institution types. In this study all students who followed a post-16 vocational route attended a college, moving from their school sixth form (see Table 5.1, page 122). Post-16 provision is segmented by provision whereby sixth forms cater for higher attainers (Hodgson and Spours, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup>Table 5.2 (page 126) represents the availability of courses during the study, changes to funding and qualification reforms have since led to a decline in the diversity of courses offered (offerings are currently more likely to focus on core subjects which facilitate entry to HE).

Institution	Burlywood	Abbey Gate	Bailey Grammar / (Torhall)	Adley House	CCN	Boothly	East
Type	Sch SFC	Sch SFC	Sch SFC	Sch SFC	FE College	FE College	SF College
Apprenticeships					34 L2 Apprenticeships & 26 L3 Apprenticeships	52 apprenticeship areas	
L2 BTECs [Other voc L2]	L2 BTEC Business, Media, Health & Social Care [Cache Childcare L2, OCR IT, C&G Hairdressing]				L2 BTECs: Media, Music (6), Business (3), Art (2), Public & Childcare (4), Travel & Tourism (3), Health & Beauty (4), Construction (8)		
L3 BTECs [Other voc L3]	L3 BTEC Business, Applied Science, Media, Health & Social Care [Cache Childcare L3, OCR IT]	L3 BTEC Applied Science, Media, Health & Social Care, Horticulture, Hospitality, Music, Performing Arts, Sport [OCR L3 IT]		BTEC Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, IT, Music, Science, Travel & Tourism	L3 BTECs: Music (7), Media (5), Fashion (5), Business, Computing (5), Travel & Tourism (8), Hair & Beauty (6), Construction (4), Sciences (9)	BTEC Applied Science L3, Business, Construction, Plumbing, Electrical Installation, Care, IT, Environmental studies, Public Services, Sport, Travel & Tourism	L3 BTECs in Sport, Business, Public Services, Performing Arts (2), Applied Science, Law
A levels	27 AS & A2 Various subjects	23 AS & A2 Various subjects	23 (26) AS & A2 Various subjects	31 AS & A2 Various subjects	28 AS & A2 levels	37 A levels	30 AS & A2 levels
International Baccalaureate							6

Table 5.2: Courses Offered by Institution

## **Vocational and applied education in schools**

So far I have argued that competition for students was influenced by a dichotomous offering that existed between providers. However, academic and vocational provision was not mutually exclusive between institution types. For some schools, vocational options were on offer (Burlywood, Abbey Gate, Adley House) but these were of a very limited range of applied subjects which enabled them to widen their offerings to cater for a larger range of student abilities and increase the number of students on roll, they only offered courses that were relatively easy to deliver. For example, business, media, health and social care, IT, sport, and science, were all offered as applied subjects utilising existing school resources. All of these required fewer specialist resources when compared to the vast range of options available at the two colleges. The colleges provided over fifty lines of apprenticeships, and a large and diverse range of BTECs requiring specialist staff and equipment. The variety of choices not only allowed for students to study BTECs over a wider range of subject areas but within the subject areas a specialist choice was possible. For example, a media BTEC was available in some schools, however, in the colleges six specialist BTECs within media studies were available.

Abbey Gate School Sixth Form had begun to offer more vocational provision using applied courses to expand its offering in order to increase the number of students attending its sixth form. Out of all the institutions in the sample Abbey Gate School Sixth Form had the lowest number of post-16 students on roll (130 students) and evidence from the interviews with both staff and students highlighted small class sizes, which are synonymous with a sixth form which is new, and needing to become more established (Abbey Gate School Sixth Form opened in 2010 moving to its new accommodation in 2011). One of their Ofsted reports advised that they needed to “increase the overall effectiveness of the sixth form to securely establish its provision by achieving greater consistency of numbers on roll through increased integration with the school” (Ofsted, 2013). Abbey Gate’s management recognised that the number on roll in the sixth form required improvement, and due to the nature of their students grade profile at C-, as a result of competition from the local

grammar school, their strategy to increase the number of students on roll was to move towards a more applied learning curriculum. A Business Teacher explained how the school leaders were looking to expand their offering to include BTEC Business, which would be more suitable for their students and thus enhance achievement and reputation over time:

The sixth form is moving towards BTEC Business because they are not getting the student numbers with needed calibre of students as the grades are low, Ds + Es, only have a few A + B students as Bailey Grammar competition creams them off. (Business Teacher, Abbey Gate, Redmarsh)

This situation reflects that presented by Macrae et al. (1997a) who found that institutions that were under-subscribed had to attract less able students by expanding their course offerings. Hence, demonstrating that the work on choice and competition is still applicable to this study, taking into account the changing context outlined in the introduction.

Abbey Gate was the only institution to imply that raising the participation age to 18 would impact their provision, by expanding the range of courses they argued that they could cater for students affected by raising the participation age who would normally go to local colleges, and thus increase their student numbers. They hoped that provision of an offering that would meet the needs of the students in their local area may be more attractive to the students because they would not have to travel outside of the valley to a college. Attending a college involved travelling outside of the valley to an alternative provider, a local offer at Abbey Gate School Sixth Form would remove this requirement and may be more attractive to students than having to travel (see the local area map, Figure 4.2 on page 113). However, there were a number of established, well-resourced and high performing colleges close to Abbey Gate who would continue to compete for these students, the advantage Abbey Gate would hold is that these offerings would then be available in their geographic location. For a number of Abbey Gate students having easy travel was a reason for

remaining at Abbey Gate. Thus, if students did not want to travel outside of their valley then this strategy may prove to be effective.

It is well documented that some schools find vocational courses difficult to run due to the resources and staff required to operate them effectively (Foskett et al., 2004, 2008). Overall, schools were found not to have the resources required to provide vocational provision (Higham et al., 1996; Haynes, 2004; Ofsted, 2004; on 14-19 Reform, 2004; Hayward, 2006) and evidence suggested that they end up offering weak vocational courses, more aligned to academic studies (Stanton and Bailey, 2005; Brockmann, 2007). The Wolf Report claimed that, "schools offering vocational options do not always meet the vocational standards required by colleges." (Wolf, 2011, p. 82). This raises questions over the schools' ability to provide opportunities for students to develop vocational skills in a school environment which in turn may harm students' chances of progression onto higher level vocational courses. Although a sub theme this is of concern, because Abbey Gate was using vocational options to increase the number of students on roll, in the competitive post-16 marketplace, but this may have led to less effective vocational options for the students if the provision did not match the quality available at competitor colleges. Nevertheless this is an example of marketing management previously documented by Gewirtz et al. (1995). They argued that Heads have gained dual roles managing learning and the enterprise, having to become involved in marketing and the creation of competitive offerings in order to match students' needs through segmentation (Gewirtz et al., 1995). This has particularly been the case at Abbey Gate, at other institutions maintaining segmentation on the lines of academic/support and vocational/change represented existing marketing segmentation.

This first findings section explored how, in practice, competition was differentiated by institutional type and course types for the majority of students. It emphasised that not all students were available to be recruited by institutions and it then examined the rise in the provision of applied subjects by schools, specifically Abbey Gate as they tried to compete in the post-16 marketplace.

Understanding the competitive environment is the first stage in the argument as it sets the competitive context which underpins reasons for transition and IAG strategies utilised by schools which in turn influenced students' post-16 transition. The second section in this findings and discussion chapter leads on from this competitive post-16 background and explores the practical strategies utilised by schools in managing post-16 transition, in order to cope with the competitive situation which the literature review and this section outlined, in doing so it forms the major contribution of this thesis to the literature on post-16 choice and transition.

## **School control during post-16 transition**

This section of the findings and discussion chapter will explore the strategies used by schools with sixth forms in their influence over IAG and transition. Crucially it is these findings, concerning strategies and operational methods, which enabled schools to compete in the post-16 marketplace and the evidence is key to the argument in this thesis as it explains *how* schools can influence students' post-16 transition; they form the important second stage of the argument. This findings section is in line with the 2012 IAG changes which made schools responsible for IAG provision. It is argued that this enhanced their ability to be able to control IAG and transition. They did so in order to cope with the competitive environment which was established in the previous section. Therefore, this section provides the link between IAG provision and a school's influence on transition which contributes to the existing literature on post-16 choice and transition. It is important to remember that existing literature emphasised that control and influence occurred but the literature does not contain the detail to explore *how* this influence operated in practice. It is vital to understand the ways schools aimed to control post-16 transition before the final section of the findings and discussion chapter considers student decision-making as the way schools aimed to control transition influenced students' decision-making.

This section contains three sub-sections. The first sets out the practical management strategies that schools utilised with the aim of retaining Year 11 students



for post-16 study, the second outlines the more subtle, and arguably more important social influence strategies. Together these sections form the evidence to support the argument of how schools aimed to control post-16 transition. The final component of this chapter uses the case of apprenticeships in order to highlight how school influence on transition may have affected students in practice.

### **Practical transition management strategies used to retain students for post-16 study**

This section explores how schools employed practical strategies to maximise the transition of their Year 11 students into their sixth forms for post-16 education. These strategies represent strategies used by schools to cope with competition from other providers and may have been at the expense of effective IAG and resulted in students progressing onto a course which was less suited to their needs than an alternative course offered by a competitor.

It is vital to the argument in this thesis to emphasise that staff and students did not, and would have found it difficult to differentiate between discrete IAG, marketing, promotion and selection activities<sup>2</sup>. IAG, marketing, promotion and selection were not seen as discrete events by schools and students but rather merged component parts of a strategy to maximise Year 11 progression to post-16 education at the same institution. Their power is inherent in the view (although varying by institution) that the transition, IAG, marketing and selection activities were 'helpful' to students as they progressed from Year 11 to post-16 education. Following Watts and Young (1999) it is argued that marketing activities were carried out under the guise of IAG in order to influence students' transition.

Before breaking down the specific strategies utilised by schools in controlling transition an overall picture of the transition process is briefly provided here. School students were all exposed to in school transition assemblies where they were given

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<sup>2</sup>Marketing refers to identifying the range of customer needs and satisfying them (Armstrong and Kotler, 2007) and promotion refers to the activities undertaken to communicate the benefits of products and services in order to persuade customers to 'buy' them (ibid). Promotional activities include advertising, public relations and personal selling (Armstrong and Kotler, 2007).

information regarding progression. Schools and colleges held open days/evenings for students to experience their post-16 offerings, then there was some kind of selection process once applications had been made. Offers were made and students were then invited to attend induction/orientation days. Colleges did not have direct access to students in Year 11 and so used attendance at career fairs and external adverts (on buses, billboards, car parks, cinemas, jobs centre, newspapers, and radio) to market to potential students.

This first section will cover operational and strategic methods used by schools to manage and control transition, including restricting access to students and information about competitors, making applications automatic, tracking applications, and selecting out students through information provision. This section is an important contribution to the existing literature, given the IAG changes, as it outlines a series of strategies and activities involved in schools maintaining their power over existing students through the control of transition activities, the existing literature does not contain this level of in-depth detail.

### **Preventing access to, and information on, competitor institutions**

Evidence from schools, colleges and apprenticeship providers suggested that schools blocked access to alternative, competitor institutions. Any such blocking may have been at the detriment of student success in order to support the institution's needs in the competitive marketplace. One tactic found to be used by schools was to prevent collaboration events with the aim of trying to minimise awareness of other options which cuts down on marketing noise as this noise can cause potential distractions for students. It follows that lower understanding of competitor institutions is more likely to make it easier for students to end up at a school's sixth form for post-16 study.

The following evidence presents this strategy as a response to the competitive situation from an independent<sup>3</sup> sixth form college's point of view when staff were asked about their information provision and connections with schools regarding

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<sup>3</sup>Independent means the sixth form provides post-16 education only, there is no attached pre-16 school.

post-16 study:

So we've found the competition really great at the moment, it's becoming harder and harder because part of my role, I offer to go into schools and do talks and PSHE [Personal, Social, Health and Economic education] lessons, but I'm not even invited through the door because it's seen as competition [...] [the students] apply and everything is online now, so again we do find it or we found it difficult because we put application forms into schools and schools won't necessarily give them out so everything is online now [...]. We have some walk up from Newfield University Academy but then schools will say well we can't let them out at the moment because they're working on their mock exams or they're doing this, that and the other, it's very difficult getting that [pause]. We used to do in the summer a Year 10 day where we'd have Year 10s and they'd have tasters, they'd go into some of the classes and everything and now, the last two years it's not been worth it, I've only had one school, no, two schools, say that they want to come along to that, the rest of them say no, we can't do it. (Assistant Head, Eastward College, Newfield)

When schools (with sixth forms) were asked if they provided information on competitors to their Year 11 students the following response was typical:

They don't give it, as far as I know they don't give them any experiences of any other sixth form provider because they want them here. Prior to us opening the sixth form they did. I only feel that because I wanted to make contact with some local high schools to get some of their Year 10s involved in our enterprise week and bring them for a week to our school, as a marketing exercise at Abbey Gate School Sixth Form, and one thing and another and there is only two schools that I can approach because the others have their own sixth form so they won't let their kids come over. (Business Teacher and Form Tutor, Abbey Gate, Redmarsh)

The impact of these strategic decisions to minimise students exposure to competition was recognised by CCN, a large FE college:

We also go and do talks in schools and so on, on vocational options where it's acceptable to the school and each school has rather different politics. So there's a wide range of different channels, but it's always a bit of a battle being able to put a good case for the vocational alternatives to schools who have different priorities really [...] So some of it's about advertising, some of it's just about offering advice, and I wouldn't necessarily claim that it's independent advice but it's alternative advice and we have a school's liaison team, his job is to go round schools supporting them doing guidance sessions with probably mainly Year 10 pupils but I think some earlier. But that is a bit of a constant toing and froing about how welcome they are or not in one particular year in one school depending on the state of play really [pause] but certainly it's been a bit of a challenge over the past few years with the increasing number of schools in the city offering open sixth forms particularly with academy conversion. (Strategic Analyst, CCN, Newfield)

These quotations emphasise the competitive pressures that the schools faced and the resultant impact which was that schools were not allowing students access to other schools and colleges with post-16 options as this represented potential competition. Both Burlywood Academy and Abbey Gate staff could only work with other schools that did not have sixth forms, therefore this represented marketing, not competition. It is interesting to note that the college analyst recognised that it is sometimes acceptable for vocational options to be presented to school students, this situation will be explored later in the findings section as it further represents how schools can control students' transition for their institutional interests. In addition to blocking access schools aimed to control the internal application process to influence transition.

### **Controlling the internal application process**

Schools with sixth forms were maximising transition to post-16 from Year 11 through managing the internal application process effectively in order to mitigate the competitive effects of the post-16 marketplace. Torhall School made the application process as easy as possible to follow and it took place in school time so that students who met the entry criteria gained a place so there was no separate ‘interview’ and no separate application form (Torhall School website/Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)), the process was seamless and supportive and cut down the number of stressful choices students had to make at a time when they faced with an enormous number of potential post-16 options.

For students at Torhall School, following this process appeared to lead to automatic selection as George (TS)<sup>4</sup> summarised well:

GG: Why Torhall School?

George: I’m not sure, I think it’s just for the same reasons as I have, it’s there, like it’s easy, there’s nothing you really need to do to get into it, you’re already in there.

GG: So did you have to have an interview to get in?

George: No, they just said if you come to the school you’ve already got a place as long as you get five Cs or above.

George: I didn’t really think about it, I just thought I might as well stay on because you already get a place if you go to the Torhall School, as long as you get the grades.

Abbey Gate was trying to adopt some of these application management practices to improve their Year 11 retention rate. For Damian “easier” meant that he didn’t have to “fully apply” for a place at Abbey Gate School Sixth Form, he also commented that he didn’t have “to ring up and ask to apply” and as such

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<sup>4</sup>The quotation identifier details the student’s name followed by the institution they attended. Where students did not move from their school for post-16 education only one institution needs to be included in the identifier, for example George (TS). Where a student moved to a different post-16 education provider both the pre-16 and post-16 institutions are identified for contextual detail, for example Harvey (AG to Brookford).

the quasi-automatic application process made it more likely for the school's easier application process and external application inertia to lead Damian to attend his existing school sixth form, because he already attended the school, and to attend another institution would have required Damian to exert extra effort as he explained:

They gave out letters to who wanted to apply, what courses you wanted to do, what was your first choice and then you handed that in, and then they asked you to come in for an interview, and then after the interview they told you if you'd got a place or not. So I just did that, yeah.  
(Damian, AG)

Damian had no experience of contacting other institutions and making applications to providers other than his pre-16 school's sixth form. Damian hinted that he lacked confidence in his ability to apply to or knowledge of other institutions by mentioning the need to telephone providers when making applications. This need was removed if he remained at Abbey Gate School Sixth Form because he was guided through the application process automatically. This lack of confidence may represent a lack of cultural capital which may be required to approach other institutions. Thus, by Abbey Gate making the process automatic, by the students not needing to "fully apply" to attend Abbey Gate School Sixth Form it gave students like Damian, who lacked confidence, no reason to look at competitor institutions. The process of inviting students to select their courses (via letters) and then interviewing the students in school time at Abbey Gate put the control in the hands of the school not the students. Damian provided an enlightening description of the feeling of 'ease' when remaining at an institution he attended for pre-16 education:

Well, I think a lot of people from my school were saying they were going to go to different places, and then as it came closer to having to apply for other courses they just thought sort of come here, it's easier to just not have to ring up and apply for loads of different places when you can just [pause] well you already in here, you know the teachers and people, it was just easier, and that's why I didn't really apply for anywhere else,

or look for anywhere else. (Damian, AG)

Abbey Gate also used enterprise week, an off timetable cross-curricular learning week focusing on progression, as a marketing and recruitment activity, under the guise of IAG, to promote their own sixth form. This had the potential to be powerful as students were captive and had no choice to attend, as it occurred in school time, it was thus 100% controllable by the school in terms of message delivery. A Year 11 Form Tutor explained how the week worked:

In Year 10 we have an enterprise week, where the Year 10 students, so when they get to Year 11, they have all done this, this is the last activity in the Year 10. They are taken off timetable for a whole week and since the sixth form was built they have started to hold it in the sixth form. I suspect because we are low on numbers in the sixth form it is a bit of a marketing exercise. But nevertheless they hold the enterprise week in the sixth form and the students are given life skills, to put themselves through, they have got to make an application to sixth form, go through an interview for sixth form, get a curriculum vitae and at the back of it they will also go at other activities that will carry them through the week. (Business Teacher and Form Tutor, Abbey Gate, Redmarsh)

For some students this process was understood as a way for the school to interview their current students but for others the situation was not fully understood as Amy explained when asked if she had attended an interview for Abbey Gate School Sixth Form she replied:

I didn't but other people might of, I don't know actually. I didn't have an interview, [pause], oh I did, in enterprise week it was just like a mock one but I didn't know that it was supposed to be proper about it, so I just answered 'dunno' and then I got a letter saying that I didn't get in, all of my friends got in because they were normal [in the interview]. (Amy, Abbey Gate to Boothly College)

Amy's situation would appear to have assisted the school in gaining applicants, but a lack of understanding had an impact on the usefulness of the process for students.

Terry emphasised how some students recognised this as a deliberate strategy to maximise transition from Year 11 to Abbey Gate's sixth form, he explained how he was told by a teacher who 'whistleblew' on the practice of blocking access to competitors and managing the automatic transition process:

Honestly, I even got told by some of the teachers that they built the sixth form and they were low on numbers so they cut back on all the guidance talks, they stopped the colleges from coming in, they didn't mention anything and then I just think it got to that point where everyone in our year who didn't sign up for a college had to sign on with sixth form sort of thing. That's what I thought anyway. It made me feel quite angry at the time because I thought you can't be doing that, loads of people were unhappy there, but one of my teachers even said, I mentioned something and she got like brushed it aside and said not to get involved. (Terry, AG)

Although Table 5.1 (page 122) highlights that students did attend post-16 institutions other than sixth forms at Abbey Gate and Torhall School the management of the internal application process could enable a school to influence post-16 transition and maximise retention of their Year 11 students to some extent, especially for students who lacked the confidence or knowledge to be able to make alternative applications. Additionally schools used application tracking to influence the transition process.

### **Tracking students' sixth form applications**

An additional practical strategy schools used with the aim of maximising the retention of Year 11 students over competitors was that the schools tracked students through the post-16 application process. This enabled the ability for schools to be able to highlight potential missed progression opportunities from their current Year



11 cohort and this enabled staff to work out who had not applied to the sixth form and identified reasons to qualify this or to action activities to attempt to convert the 'missing' students into progressing students. This tracking and intervention was more likely to result in increased progression to post-16 study by internal Year 11 students who were more easily accessed and controlled than students who attended other institutions and must have been attracted in by marketing before applications were made. This latter external process is a much more difficult process to control.

Torhall School and Burlywood Academy took this management further and used the staff's knowledge of students to maximise transition through actively identifying any missed transition opportunities (students), Torhall School did this over the three interview periods. The Heads of Sixth Form explained:

So, once as a starter, once as a sort of follow up, and in between those two we will get a list to all the staff of who's thinking of staying on, so we can go, oh, well I'm not sure about that, or gosh, I'm surprised this person isn't, so we ask the staff in that period to do some presentations about, you know, if you're a geography teacher, tell them about geography A level and what it could do. (Head of Sixth Form, Torhall School, Newfield)

I mean our own students who apply here, we're just doing this at the moment actually, we're running the applications so I speak to each tutor group and I say right, who's applied and who hasn't, and then as a pastoral team we will go in and meet with them either in groups on a one to one basis to discuss basically what they want to do and where they see themselves and if we're not the right route what the alternatives are. And it partly is a marketing exercise and partly it's making sure they're doing the right thing. (Head of Sixth Form, Burlywood Academy, Newfield)

The provision of three 'guidance' interviews was a significant time investment by senior leaders for Torhall School, this emphasises the importance which the school

placed on transition IAG, through supporting students, and through being able to control options to maximise the effectiveness of their sixth form. This management process is one element which explains why Torhall School and Burlywood Academy had so many students progressing to their sixth forms (see Table 5.1, page 122). Two further strategies involving interview control and student selection enabled schools, especially Torhall School, to influence students' transition. These form the final two components of the practical transition control strategies. They were made possible due to the previously outlined internal control and tracking practical strategies and they are important due to their possible influence on transition.

#### **Choice management: 'control' as 'guidance' during transition interviews**

As part of the transition process students were provided with IAG 'interviews'. Student focused printed literature, media and staff messages communicated the transition process to students and the content of these messages positioned post-16 institutions as being omniscient and organisations that could be trusted. Prospectuses and websites communicated these messages to students:

Once we've received your application form, we will arrange for you to be interviewed with your parents or guardians. Don't panic! This is a friendly chat, where we get to know you and make sure that the course is right for you. (Auston prospectus)

A lot of guidance is offered to help you to choose the most appropriate subjects during your interview in the Spring Term, on the June Preview Days and again in your Individual Enrolment Interview in late August. (Bailey Grammar prospectus)

After applying, the College will send you a letter offering you the chance to come in for an induction event. Don't worry; it just gives the staff here a chance to meet you and to talk through your A level choices, to

see if what you've chosen is right for you. (CCN website)

You and your parents will be invited for an interview, which will take place between November and May. It is an informal process and is your chance to ask questions about your chosen subject as well as helping staff to match you with the right programme. (Neathside College website)

Depending on your predicted grades, we may invite you in for a brief interview, just to check that your chosen course is absolutely right for you, but in most cases, we are able to offer a place based on the information we have in your application and the school reference and so a provisional offer of a place is made. (Eastward College prospectus)

Many students were found to enjoy the helpfulness of institutions given the risk and complex number of options involved in post-16 transition decision-making. For a student reading these prospectuses the interview process will appear to be helpful, ensuring a fit between their choices and the organisation; so that their choices are right for them. However, there is evidence to suggest that the aim of these processes is that the institution will be able to manage the options of the students to ensure the needs of their institution are also met. 'Choice' management was based on quantitative data (predicted grades and mock results) which were combined with qualitative knowledge of the students so that transition was evidence based. This level of data, although partially available through application forms, was not available in the depth available to schools for other institutions not attended by students prior to post-16 education. School staff knew the students personally and this assisted schools in their ability to manage transition to specific courses as the following Head of Sixth Form highlighted:

We have a lot of discussions in the September because kids change their minds, and we try hard then not to just let them loose on something

for something's sake, but that is hard work that, and a lot of effort. And again, the great thing about a sixth form in a school is, you know, somebody's looking me in the eye and going, oh, I teach A level biology, I've taught this person GCSE biology, I can tell you they're very fortunate to have got their B, they're going to find it really difficult, and we'd have to present that to the student and their family. They might still choose to do it, and I wouldn't stop them doing it, but you just make sure they get that information. And you have the other here as well, quite a lot of kids just don't think they're good enough, so you would have some that are going, I know I got an A in maths but I don't really think I'm any good, and you need a maths teacher to say no, you're good, you'll be all right. (Head of Sixth Form, Torhall School, Newfield)

Further evidence explains how choice management helped to support a school's position. Abbey Gate appeared to be implementing processes to carefully manage progression onto courses in order to improve their post-16 intake, pass rate and reputation as the teacher interviewed explained:

They're interviewed [the students], and what we're doing this year, they're just finishing their mock exams this week and the results of the mock exams will be given to them during their interview as part of the process of trying to guide them onto which courses they'd be best suited to. So we're going to do that for the first time this year. (Business Teacher and Form Tutor, Abbey Gate, Redmarsh)

In contrast to Abbey Gate, Torhall School had a very well developed system for managing choices as their Head of Sixth Form provided additional evidence, to explain how their process worked:

And then the start of January, they've [the students have] done mocks, so we'll tie it into their progress as well, so they've done mocks, they get reports, there's a parents' evening, in between one of the senior staff

that does the timetable will interview every Year 11 to ask them what they're doing. And added to that it might be, I'm clear sir, I want to do maths, physics, chemistry, I want to do it here, it might be I want to stay but I don't know what to do, in which case Richard [Assistant Head, Timetable] will say, well then go and talk to X or Y or Z, or it might be well, I want to go to college and do something, all right, that's fine. Or it might be I want to stay here and do A levels and we're going, with where you're heading from your mocks that's not a good idea, it's a possibility, and you always want to keep that aspiration there, but you need a plan B, so you should look at this, that or the other. And Richard will interview them three times before they finish. (Head of Sixth Form, Torhall School, Newfield)

This process was corroborated by other staff, emphasising the influence Torhall School had over the subjects students 'chose':

At the end of Year 11, well sort of throughout Year 11, again the senior leadership team will have an interview with every single one of the Year 11s to work out what they're going to do and they're told that if they want to come into the sixth form they've got to meet the entry requirement, which is to get a B or above in the subject that they want to study at A level [. . .] they basically get told before they leave at the end of the school year whether they're likely to get a place or not. And then in September they can all come and they can apply, but obviously if they haven't done very well in their GCSE they won't get a place, or they might be told, yes you can come, but you'll only be able to do applied science and one other. (Business Teacher, Torhall School, Newfield)

The evidence from staff at both Torhall School and Burlywood Academy evidences choice management which involved students transferring onto courses which they considered to be more appropriate for the student, or as the final practical

strategy will outline, schools transition influences also involved selecting out students so that they were encouraged to attend alternative post-16 provision through choice management.

### **Choice management: enabling alternative provision**

Continuing on from the previous section which introduced schools management of choices during 'guidance' interviews, this section explores this practice in more detail emphasising that it was common for students who did not fall into the desired school sixth form student profile to be signposted towards alternative provision. This occurred at all three schools with sixth forms that formed part of the initial sample during round one and additional schools added during round two.

Burlywood Academy's Head of Sixth Form explained how students were selected for alternative provision:

I mean our own students who apply here, we're just doing this at the moment actually, we're running the applications so I speak to each tutor group and I say right, who's applied and who hasn't, and then as a pastoral team we will go in and meet with them either in groups or on a one to one basis to discuss basically what they want to do and where they see themselves and if we're not the right route what the alternatives are. And it partly is a marketing exercise and partly it's making sure they're doing the right thing, because I will happily suggest CCN to a student who wants, as I said before, that vocational route or an alternative. (Head of Sixth Form, Burlywood Academy, Newfield)

Here the Head of Sixth Form made it very clear that some students were more valuable, and desired by the institution than others. Students with less value were selected out by institutions and pro-actively provided with alternative progression information, as Torhall School's Head of Sixth Form explained that they identified the weakest sixty students in terms of ability and took them to a careers fair. This careers fair was attended by a large number of post-16 providers and is an example of

a school providing impartial IAG, however, it is also an example of selecting students who did not meet Torhall School's sixth form criteria and actively managing their expectations during post-16 transition, as these students attended the careers fair instead of receiving information on their sixth form.

Adley House also actively discouraged some students from applying to their sixth form as their Head of Business explained:

I mean obviously the more academic ones, we really try and keep hold of them, but some students, the weaker ones that are under-performing, they'll be told, look, this course at CCN or whatever will be suitable for you, go and find out about it. (Head of Business, Adley House, Newfield)

The Strategic Analyst from CCN explained that one of the opportunities which they were given to access school students was to provide information of vocational options to selected school students (see page 134).

Interestingly, despite being under subscribed, Abbey Gate was starting to follow this approach of being more selective according to a Business Teacher, this may be reactive as a result of their negative post-16 reputation which was reported by students. It was a strategy to try and improve their sixth form's results which in turn should improve their reputation and enrolment over time, a Business Teacher explained:

Well from what I can gather, and it's not from colleagues, it's from the students themselves, that one or two of the pupils have been told that they've not got a place, they're not going to be allowed into Abbey Gate School Sixth Form. So I think they're being picky, you know, behaviour, I don't think they're being picky on capability, if you want to learn regardless of the level of your ability, well you can come in, and you can go on a BTEC, they'll guide you towards a BTEC. But if your behaviour has been really bad then go elsewhere. (Business Teacher, Abbey Gate, Redmarsh)

In support of this Terry (AG) mentioned that he was given a mentor who offered career advice. Therefore, under the guise of giving career advice this mentor also supported the school's position.

Eleanor was the only student in the sample to leave Torhall School, all other students remained at Torhall School for post-16 study (Carla returned after a short time at Eastward College), Eleanor identified in round one as a student who was unlikely to achieve her science and mathematics GCSEs. During her round one interview she expressed a wish to continue with level three construction, but this was not offered at Torhall School. The Deputy Head identified Eleanor (without prompting) as a student who they did not offer post-16 provision for in the sixth form, he suggested college provision was more appropriate for this type of student, because Eleanor was identified as someone who would not meet Torhall School's entry criteria for post-16 study. This emphasises that school sixth forms were not directly and automatically competing with colleges for students as outlined in the first findings section (see page 120). This was especially the case for Torhall School with their focus on academic provision.

Carla was also consciously aware of the likelihood of not meeting the higher entry requirements for Torhall School Sixth Form and as such had gained a place to study A levels at an alternative provider with lower entry requirements (Eastward College). In Year 11 she stated how Torhall School managed her expectations, she recalled how in her Year 11 guidance interview with senior Torhall School staff she was advised to seek a backup plan:

We had a talk with a teacher from senior management at school and we told them what we were going to do and they tell us what's best and they told me that having a backup such as Eastward is best, in case I don't get the grades for Torhall School Sixth Form. (Carla, TS to East to TS)

These cases highlight Torhall School's success at choice management, by selecting out students who they did not wish to remain in their school post-16, through



establishing academic only course offerings which excluded certain students and signposting of alternative courses and information. Eleanor was considering CCN's construction college in Newfield and she was provided with proactive support in applying from Torhall School through the use of a careers advisor and supported research. Evidence from Torhall School's comprehensive post-16 choices booklet supports this, their booklet provided students with details of what students could study beyond their current year and this included vocational and employment routes alongside the traditional academic routes. Eleanor received this information because she was identified as someone who would not meet their entry criteria for their sixth form (and subsequently did not progress to it). In this extended excerpt Eleanor's evidence corroborated that of the Head of Sixth Form when describing managing students out of sixth form applications using choice management:

GG: So how did you find out about your courses then?

Eleanor: With school really, because obviously we're getting to the end of Year 11 now and our exams are coming up. At the start of the year we had talks about what we wanted to do and that we needed to get applications for colleges and everything. So they showed us how to go through all that and then we've got a woman who comes in [a careers advisor], I've forgotten her name, I don't know what her name is now, but she used to come in and she'd talk to every student for about an hour on colleges and what's best for them, like she'll talk to them about what course they wanted to do and everything and they'll tell her what they want and she'll point them in the right direction kind of thing. And then one of our teachers has talks with us about what we're going to do and how we're going to do it kind of thing.

GG: So your school gave you information did they, about the other colleges?

Eleanor: Well, we had this event thing [the aforementioned careers fair, see page 144] where there was about every different college and sixth form and all that. They gave us the opportunity to look round and go

and talk to people who work at those colleges, students and all that, to see what you had to do and everything. So we talked to loads of different people on that from different colleges and sixth forms and everything. So that's how I found out most of the information because we spent a morning there.

GG: So did everybody go to this event?

Eleanor: I'd say the majority of them. Like the people who struggle, and the people who are really determined and some other people, they got to go, and then it was after school as well until, I don't know what time, it was quite late, I think it was about six or seven o'clock. So, as far as I know a lot of people went because they would talk about it the next day at school.

The evidence presented here supports findings from the literature, that schools manage and could therefore influence students' transition for institutional interests. School staff actively managed their intakes and selected out some students in order to stop them progressing to their own sixth forms because schools do not want all students. Thus, competition is differentiated by institutional offerings and course types, as the first findings section argued (see page 120). The final part of this section will begin to link this choice management to wider social class issues.

Students who did not meet the profile of a sixth form student and were selected out were also the ones who 'chose' to attend a college over a school sixth form. The reasons for this 'choice' matched those provided by the school as 'guidance' in IAG. These IAG messages became or reflected students' post-16 decision-making reasons which related to colleges providing a much more suitable environment for post-16 study for these students, they wanted a change from an academic environment. This situation demonstrates schools' power and influence over transition decisions at post-16, whereby students were counselled to seek alternative provision because it would better meet their needs as the Head of Sixth Form at Burlywood Academy explained:

Yeah, I mean look, for some kids moving out of the school environment is a positive, and we're never going to retain everybody, and there is a ceiling to how many we're going to recruit [pause]. But there are students as I say for whom a college environment is the right choice and we wave them on happily and say good luck to you. I recognise that it wouldn't be good for us to retain everybody, there is a calibre of student, a particular cohort who I'm interested in [...]. But yes I too will turn people down and I will do that for some of our internal as well as external students on the back of a reference, on the back of an interview. I mean here I will talk to the Heads of Year 11 with those internal students and say for some they would be better off elsewhere and they would for us and for them, that they need a new start somewhere else and a fresh environment. (Head of Sixth Form, Burlywood Academy, Newfield)

Therefore, it is argued that students internalised messages provided by their schools to accept a 'need' to move to a college environment as their own, positive 'choice' in a co-construction of social reality.

Active choice management in this way reflects the streaming approach highlighted by structuralist authors such as Hargreaves (1967) and Ball (1981) in the literature review (see page 59). Although not 'deviant' in the same ways as the students represented in the work of Hargreaves and Ball a non-academic subculture existed in the schools and these students were identified and labelled by staff as deviating from their academic norm. This labelling became a self-fulfilling prophecy in managing out the students to vocational/applied post-16 courses or to alternative provision. This represents the work of Hargreaves and Ball, as in their studies students were also either warmed up for academic education or cooled out for alternative courses, for example, vocational ones as teachers acted on the stereotypes producing a self-fulfilling prophecy which represented existing social reality and the associated class divisions. Following Ball's work would also suggest that streaming by ability produced labels which reflected class backgrounds and stereotypes became self-fulfilling prophecies for both academic ability and social class.

Gewirtz et al. (1995) and Ball et al. (2000a) considered this situation as an example of a hidden class agenda whereby middle class schools used their legitimate power as a school, in order to manage enrolment to continue middle class academic dominance. Examination results were used as a proxy for selection of ability. This follows the socially constructed, dominant middle class belief that ability is measured through success in academic, written examinations. Reflecting previous research the schools then used their legitimated ability to control transition in order to select out students who were less likely to achieve results which would have supported a favourable league table position. The Edge Foundation (2013) suggested that choice management was driven by the accountability system which provides incentives to maximise results, by strategically limiting access to academic qualifications for some students in order to help and support league table positions. The Edge Foundation (2013) also found that competitive incentives were likely to lead to schools reducing their support for vocational students so that they did not use their finite resources on the lowest ability students who were not going to maximise their league table position. CCN corroborated this argument as they reported in this study that dealing with these types of students, diverted from school sixth forms, provided their core specialism. This situation presents the use of vocational qualifications as a tool to manage non-academic students therefore it represents and reinforces academic/vocational divide stereotypes which represent the wider educational system rather than vocational qualifications themselves (this argument is developed further on page 202).

The introductory chapter outlined that students who are not from middle class backgrounds are most likely to be vocational students (see page 24). Hence, this situation also reflects lower socio-economically resourced students attending less prestigious, vocational institutions and middle class more prestigious, A level offering institutions (Daly and Thomas, 2008). The choice management process is likely to continue this as school sixth forms select higher attainers to progress onto A levels and select out lower attainers for progression onto vocational courses, often at post-16 colleges where vocational study is more common (Abraham, 1995b; Barry, 1997;

Haynes, 2004, 2008) (see also appendix A on page 241).

Bourdieu described schools as a symbolic force. Tools from his work, especially cultural capital, are useful in exploring the sampled students' experiences of choice management which represents power in education. Capital inequalities are transformed into educational inequalities through cultural capital (Robbins, 2004). Pedagogic action is symbolic violence, by imposing control through legitimate power. Academic qualification credentials act as a mechanism for legitimate advancement, being a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998). Hence, institutions reproduce the power of the middle classes in a hidden manner as schooling represents the middle class values and ideologies which are permitted as being socially acceptable and legitimate. Failing to achieve educational outcomes is considered to be as a result of personal failings in a meritocracy and are therefore less likely to be challenged (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu highlighted the use of streaming, for example into academic and vocational courses, and certification as ways of reinforcing the dominant class (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The way education does this is for dominant students to achieve higher academic attainment and others to self-select out (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Students self-select out by emphasising that courses are 'not for me' as the options do not match their habitus', in this study this situation is represented by students self selecting college courses as the students reported needing a change from the school institutional environment. Bourdieu would have recognised this as a way of schooling replicating middle class dominance through transition to alternative institutions following a tracked qualification route. Only one form of cultural capital currency is rewarded within schools, academic success as defined by the middle class schools, and this is never fully mastered by the non-dominant classes (Harker, 1984; Mahar et al., 1990).

Overall this section has established strategies that schools designed and used to practically manage transition in order to maximise progression into the sixth form for students which the schools considered would benefit from continuing from post-16 education by capitalising on the opportunity of having 'captive' Year 11 students by blocking access to competitor institutions, by controlling the internal application

process and by making the process automatic, through tracking applications to their sixth forms which enabled potential missed opportunities to be rectified and through choice management during 'guidance' interviews.

However, for students who were not as useful in maintaining or creating good results and league table positions the choice management process was designed to pro-actively manage progression for these students to other institutions or alternative courses. Therefore, it is argued that, given the competitive environment outlined in the first findings section (see page 120), these strategies allowed schools to influence students' transition for their own interests and that these may not have been in the best interests of the students. School control of IAG has enabled this process to be more effective as the literature review emphasised how alternative IAG to counter such school control reduced as a result of the 2012 changes to IAG.

This section was the first step in explaining how schools influenced transition to post-16 education and in explaining how such control reflected wider class structures in society. The next section outlines how the more powerful transition influences came from activities designed to construct positive social realities concerning trust, cultures and academic 'unique selling points'. Schools aimed to produce powerful transition messages to control post-16 transition.

### **Strategies used to construct social realities in order to retain students for post-16 study**

The previous section argued that practical management strategies helped schools to influence post-16 transition, this was the first stage in evidencing the argument concerning how schools influenced post-16 transition given their responsibility for IAG, in the context of a competitive marketplace. This section explores the much more important strategies which involve constructing social reality to reflect differentiating messages through transition, marketing and IAG activities. This section is critical to understanding how some schools were such powerful influences on transition and it is an important contribution to the existing literature as this level of detail is not contained in the previous transition research. Once the section has

established the strategies used to construct social reality it will explore why these activities were so effective, through the way that schools were perceived as being supportive in the difficult and risk filled post-16 transition period.

The following evidence builds on the concepts introduced in the first findings section (see page 120), by arguing that institutions built differentiated USPs through social construction of reality concerning the key decision for students, 'should I stay at my school or move for post-16 study?'. Staff and students evidence reflected a heterogeneous marketplace, schools offered a quality academic experience and colleges an experience that offered a change from school. These messages were powerful as they were co-created by staff and students during transition activities. They have the potential to be very powerful, due to the varying information processing abilities of students, the strength of a normalised culture, and the trust placed with school staff. These reasons are explored once the evidence of the strategies which were used to construct social realities has first been presented.

### **Academic quality is a school's USP**

Institutions must differentiate, in locations of high competition (see figures 4.1 and 4.2 on pages 112 and 113), in order to attract students from a competitors offering (Hemsley-Brown, 1997; Maguire et al., 1999). Maguire et al. (2011) stressed how it is important to be seen to be successful and better than a competitor, not just to be successful. This section explores how schools aimed to compete and retain their Year 11 students for post-16 study at their own institution. Schools emphasised their academic quality when competing for students and these USPs were used to differentiate from colleges in order to maximise students attendance at their own sixth forms.

### **Teaching quality**

All schools mentioned that teaching was their USP in order to differentiate themselves from the number of courses available at colleges and their facilities. Evidence from this study suggests that competition over facilities may not be as important

as course choice, academic and support reasons as these Heads of Sixth Form explained:

So we haven't got nice buildings like a lot of other places, so my main ambition is to make sure the students are going to get well taught, so [they achieve] good qualifications. (Head of Sixth Form, Torhall School, Newfield)

Our marketing is based on our academic results, not on our building. (Head of Sixth Form, Bauley Grammar, Redmarsh)

Thus, school staff may have been aware that facilities may have needed to improve, but education still ranked above this for academic students who were satisfied with their pre-16 school experiences and schools seemed to be able to compete and win students, even taking into account facilities which were viewed as more modern, using better education as a USP. There were a number of ways in which teaching quality was emphasised, the first being contact hours as a proxy for teaching quality.

Schools were using direct marketing messages to use against FE competitors in order to try and stop competitors poaching their pre-16 students. The Head of Sixth Form at Burlywood Academy described how a direct competitor (Eastward College) had been identified and the school has consciously improved their offering to beat the competition. Burlywood Academy increased its contact hours from four to five to match its main competitor, removing this as a factor in students' comparisons of institutions. Burlywood Academy's Head of Sixth Form explained:

We used to lose a lot of students to Eastward College, I think these days we retain 60% to 70% of our own students and Eastward College used to take 50% to 60% of our students, and that's because we've made ourselves a more attractive proposition, we've gone from four to five hours per subject. (Head of Sixth Form, Burlywood Academy, Newfield)



It is easy to see how contact hours was an item which was easily comparable by students and how a lower number of contact hours per week could have been used to make negative marketing claims against Burlywood Academy.

Beyond formal contact hours schools emphasised extra curricular support. On the first page of Torhall School Sixth Form's website the teaching section mentioned that students receive five hours per week of class time but a large paragraph, around 10% of the information on the page was dedicated to explaining how teachers will go above and beyond to support students with extracurricular support. The following is an excerpt from the web page:

It [Torhall School Sixth Form] is a centre of opportunity and achievement, which is distinguished by the care given to students and the extraordinary commitment of its teachers [...] In many subjects revision workshops and additional tutorial hours are given by teachers as examinations approach [...] Countless hours before and after school, during breaks and at lunchtime are provided by teachers to assist sixth form students. The building is often opened in the evening and during holidays for revision during the critical period before exams. Feedback from students leaving the sixth form testifies to their satisfaction with the time spent here and focuses on their appreciation of the commitment of their teachers, primarily in teaching but also in the help and support they get and all the activities which are going on. (Torhall School Website/About Us, Newfield)

This ethos was emphasised by staff and repeated by students during interviews, the students expected to and believed that they did receive more help than they would have received elsewhere. They qualified that students would need the extra support because of the difficulty of A levels, a risk emphasised in their post-16 literature, in order to emphasise how remaining at Torhall School would be the 'correct' transition decision, their website emphasised that:

The transition from GCSE to AS level is quite a challenge and we have

very experienced subject staff and tutorial staff to help you. (Torhall School Website/FAQs, Newfield)

Here schools had socially constructed an understanding which was accepted by students that schools offered more teaching than colleges. It is important to highlight that risk is starting to become an important theme and one that will be returned to.

An additional way of ensuring students believed that they would receive teaching quality in sixth forms was through their pre-16 experiences. Ainley and Green (1996) and Maguire et al. (1999) described how the most effective way of differentiating was through offering a good experience pre-16 to build strong brand loyalty through reputation so that students were more likely to want to stay on. This is one way of overcoming the challenge of education being an intangible service, students cannot experience the education service before consumption (Maguire et al., 1999). These findings suggest that this approach was effective given the high proportion of students who remained at their school sixth forms when alternatives were readily available in Newfield (see Table 5.3 on page 157). Burlywood Academy and Torhall School strategically positioned their best teachers in the Year 11 timetable to maximise results in Year 11 and so that students knew how good the teachers who they would be getting in the sixth form were.

School	Number of students	Any education destination	Further Education College	Other Provider	FE	School Form	Sixth College	Form	Apprenticeships	Education destination not sustained (or captured)
Torhall	170	89	15	3		67	4		4	6 (5)
Burlywood	310	88	23	2		48	16		3	9 (2)
Adley House	290	90	34	4		46	4		6	4 (5)
Crown	120	89	41	x		38	8		7	6 (6)
Bailey Grammar	150	97	5	0		91	x		x	2 (x)
Hayston	250	87	32	3		53	0		4	8 (4)
Abbey Gate	130	89	58	6		24	x		8	8 (2)

Table 5.3: Percentage of Key Stage 4 (KS4) Cohort Going to, or Remaining in, an Education Destination (Source: ONS)

This provided students with tangible experiences of what the teaching in their sixth form was going to be like, this is something that cannot be experienced at other colleges, again this reduced the *risk* of students making the 'wrong' decision and risk being taught less well at other institutions where the quality of teaching was intangible as it was an unknown quantity prior to transition. This situation was emphasised by school teachers, again risk is emphasised here. Burlywood Academy's Head of Sixth Form explained:

A level is something I'm very keen on, a priority on timetable, we get our best teachers teaching these subjects and we target classes in Year 11 to make sure they get the best teaching, and therefore there's no moving somewhere else and learning new things, they know they're getting the high quality. (Head of Sixth Form, Burlywood Academy, Newfield)

In their current pre-16 schools students had experienced the teaching and learning that they would go on to receive in the sixth form as pre-16 students. Students moving had no experience of alternative post-16 institutions' teaching and learning methods, other than what they received through IAG and 'artificial' open events and taster days, and so the students were more inclined to accept the trusted messages through their schools. These realities were constructed on tangible experience and messages from family and peers so they produced very powerful reasons to remain at the school sixth form. They enabled students to process the risks contained in post-16 transition and enabled decision-making, trust is a crucial theme in the thesis' argument as it enabled students to form transition decisions and accept schools' messages and help the schools to influence their transition whilst appearing to be helpful. Thus, any bias was not questioned as the advice was trusted, trust will be explored in the next section.

A third approach employed by schools to emphasise that they had superior teaching quality was to claim that their schools had smaller class sizes than colleges so that learning would be more personal, so that students could spend more time with teaching staff which would lead to better examination results. Torhall School's

prospectus claimed that classes were a maximum of fifteen students per class, and the Deputy Head suggested that the average class size was ten, the Head of Business suggested that this number was more like eighteen per class (and the Head of Sixth Form agreed, where staff restrictions existed). Torhall School limited class sizes for academic reasons, “small is beautiful” (Head of Sixth Form, Torhall School, Newfield) to meet individual needs whereas, in contrast Abbey Gate provided small class sizes through very low numbers on roll (four in AS Business and seven in A level, up to fifteen in the most popular subjects like psychology), again they used this as a USP so that personalised teaching and learning could be achieved which would lead to improved results.

The small number of students at Abbey Gate gave some students the advantage of personal attention. Leena and Jay considered this an advantage as Jay explained:

I don't know, well I suppose I wanted to go to Abbey Gate School Sixth Form anyway because there were less people going that I knew, it was like smaller class size, so I thought if there's less people they [teachers] could focus more on you. It's like when Zane says he's gone to Boothly College he's in massive classes, whereas my history's like five and stuff like that ... The teacher can focus more on you, so instead of stood in front of everyone dictating, they can spend more time with one person if you don't get it. (Jay, AG)

It is interesting that Jay interpreted this situation as advantageous for his learning, whereas other students such as Zane (AG to Boothly College) interpreted the low class size as a signal of poor quality learning and results at Abbey Gate which was not a long term strategy:

Zane: I think that there is a maximum of, I think the biggest class has a maximum of 15 students in and that's it. So erm, yeah I just don't think it is that good.

GG: Why is the number of students important?

Zane: I don't think it really is a deciding factor in whether it is good or

bad, but I think if the students decrease, like it is quite a small number and then no-one will pick certain lessons and then it will get much narrower [choice of subjects] and it will just end up going.

In round two, when Jay had experienced a term of sixth form study he still believed this was positive as he only had five people in his history and law class but 15 in sociology.

The claims made by schools concerning small class sizes and better teaching in comparison with colleges, is an example of when schools were using explicit anti-competitive messages, by teachers, to attack their college competitors. They also spread anti-competitive rumours surrounding ethos, results and teaching in addition to class sizes. An Assistant Head at Eastward College argued that as a college schools suggested that they had much larger class sizes than they actually had, and it was an image they had to pro-actively dispute. Eastward College's average class size was reportedly seventeen. Therefore, rather than having larger class sizes this college can be seen to have, on average, similar sized classes to schools. Another college, CCN had an average of eighteen.

Eastward College had to actively challenge messages concerning large class sizes, as the Assistant Head explained:

There are lots of rumours out there, we're constantly countering rumours, such as we've got classes of 50, we don't look after students, and things like that because it's becoming so much more competitive, schools are trying to hold tight to these students and I think we're hit more than the FE colleges because if I'm honest with you the students that we have are the ones that the schools want to keep, those that they want to get away from are those who are looking maybe more for an FE college anyway. It's schools with sixth forms, so there's a school not very far from here who I know because we do tours and talks and we've got it on the website, on a Wednesday open to anybody after school to come and have a tour and a talk, and the last one I did before

half term they said oh the Head Teacher told us that you have classes of 50. I said well you can see a classroom won't even hold 50 so where that's come from [pause] Oh, and you don't look after your students and this, that and the other, there's a lot of rumour out there that we're combating more and more at the moment and it tends to be the schools with the sixth forms. Not all schools with sixth forms, but it tended to be the schools with sixth forms. (Assistant Head, Eastward College, Newfield)

The messages surrounding teaching quality were powerful. Torhall School went further than Burlywood Academy and actively presented anti-competitive messages through comparing its strengths and weaknesses in a compulsory assembly for students. The success of this strategy is highlighted by a Torhall School student:

I think it's just because at Torhall School, they don't really force you, but they make it look like [pause] I'm not too sure really, they like sell it to you really well. (George, TS)

Karen and Jamal, Torhall School students explained what occurred:

GG: So how do you know that they're like compared to other colleges?

So you said class sizes are smaller, how do you know that?

Karen: Oh, we had a sixth form talk as well and they compared Torhall School with other sixth form colleges.

GG: And who did that?

Karen: Mr Duncan, he's like Head of Sixth Form I think.

Jamal: I think Torhall School did a little presentation of different schools and different grade boundaries in order to get to the colleges and different schools and that.

GG: And was that in Year 11?

Jamal: Yeah, I think so, yeah.

GG: And was that a whole school assembly kind of thing or was it after

school?

Jamal: Yeah, it was during school, as a year group they kind of give you talks and stuff.

GG: And did they say anything else about staying at Torhall School then?

Jamal: No, they gave us an assembly about why you should stay in Torhall School and what are the good things and the bad things and the drawbacks of it and the positives that attract you to go to Torhall School.

These messages may have negatively impacted on college competition by misleading students, but the students may not have heard from the colleges when making their decisions thus, they may not have made a decision based on all available information. Most students trusted their teachers and messages were received when students were 'captive' during school time. Because of this a teacher's claims over class sizes and teaching support were more likely to bias students, supporting reasons to stay on at school. Whereas students may have found that the actual reality of class sizes and support was different to the expectations created by these messages.

### **Academic support**

Overall the proxies of academic and teaching quality outlined above led to a second key differentiating USP that schools used to support progression to their sixth forms at the expense of colleges, that colleges have an ethos which is too independent and unsupportive towards students and thus schools were more supportive than colleges. This finding was also reported by Higham et al. (1996) and Schagen et al. (1996). It is repeated here as it is important in order to understand the later argument concerning trust and risk. Burlywood Academy's Head of Sixth Form explained, when asked why a student would choose to stay at a school sixth form:

The fact that they're known as a student here because it's still relatively small so the pastoral experience is better [ . . . ] [at] Eastward College and



they're seen as having greater freedoms in a quality environment and I would argue that yes they probably do but I don't necessarily see that as a strength and because it's smaller, Eastward College is 2,000 we're 400 and therefore, there is an expectation with those numbers that the pastoral side, the monitoring of the students, is closer, which it is [. . .] For a lot of the students who go there they would be better off with us and actually the students who could cope with a college environment because they have the independent study skills are actually are more likely to stay here, so it's really interesting and it's something I look at very closely. (Head of Sixth Form, Burlywood Academy, Newfield)

In Burlywood Academy's marketing this message is emphasised:

At Burlywood Academy, students are given the one-to-one, personalised support they need to turn aspirations into reality. Our range of more than 30 A level courses, in addition to a variety of BTEC and OCR Nationals, matches what is offered by many larger institutions in Newfield. Yet we are small enough to ensure that students don't 'fall through the net'. Indeed, our size is one of our key strengths - big enough to offer a wide range of courses, small enough to give the individualised attention to allow students to fulfil their aspirations. (Burlywood Academy Prospectus)

The message was also repeated by Torhall School:

But where colleges might just say, well, that's how you are you're on your own, a lot of our kids would fall at the first fence, they'll be partying and missing work and all that and we're not going to allow that to happen. (Head of Sixth Form, Torhall School, Newfield)

However, Torhall School went further and made specific links to the additional support received at a school and achieving entry to higher education; on their website the FAQs noted:

What are the exam results? Torhall School has had excellent exam results post-16, often over 98% pass rates, showing top performances in 'league and performance' tables. It has been in the top 250 state schools published by national newspapers in the summer. Each summer around 90% of students achieve their first choice of university course. Part of the reason for success is the way staff interact with you and get to know you very well and tailor work with plenty of challenge and support. Staff analyse your skills and develop your strengths and work on your weaknesses to create successful independent learners. They set challenging targets for you and do their best to ensure you persevere. (Torhall School Website/FAQs, Newfield)

Crown School provided a summary of all of the above in their prospectus, and it was clear to point out that these reasons meant that they were better than colleges:

By staying with us, you are ensured continuity between Year 11 and sixth form work. We know your strengths and we know how best to meet your needs. You will receive more individual help, guidance, and advice as you progress through your course. Our classes are much smaller than in a college and this makes for strong relationships with your teachers. (Crown School Prospectus, Newfield)

These realities were re-constructed by students. Students at school sixth forms were more likely to report that staying in their sixth form was a safe option as the teachers and environment were familiar, students knew what to expect, and that they believed they would continue to receive quality education because they had experience of doing so before sixth form as Heather (TS) explained:

GG: What is it in particular about staying at Torhall School that's kind of important?

Heather: Well because obviously I see the sixth formers and I see what Torhall School offers them, like the lunchtime extra sessions as well, so I knew it would just offer me support and I wasn't sure if I'd get that

anywhere else, whereas I knew I'd be supported at Torhall School.

Knowing existing students and staff provided social security in the transition to post-16 (Schagen et al., 1996; Maguire et al., 2001; Blenkinsop et al., 2006). This evidence supports how safety was a reason for remaining at school. Messages of risks involved with moving and having to settle in to a new institution has an opportunity cost to academic learning at a crucial time in students' education. Students accepted and relayed this message, when asked why they wanted to remain at Torhall School and Adley House:

Well I've been here since Year 7, so it just seems normal to that school and I don't think I'm a big fan of changes really. (George, TS)

Oh, because I know the teachers and the students and I don't like meeting new people. I'm kind of [pause] I don't want to meet new people, it's quite daunting to meet new people I think. If you know the teachers and you know the people it's much more comforting, if you know what I mean. (Jamal, TS)

I think just because it would be hard to settle in somewhere new when A levels are so hard already, so I think like trying to make new friends and do all that as well as study would be really hard. And I think other colleges are just too big and I don't know [pause] yeah. (Heather, TS)

I kind of already know all the teachers and staff there and my friends so I wouldn't waste time settling in. (Tim, AH)

By schools emphasising the quality of their school experience they were highlighting the risk of attending an alternative provider, the above quotations evidenced how these messages influenced transition. Table 5.4 (page 166) compares institutional size, it is clear that school sixth forms are much smaller than FE colleges and this formed part of schools' arguments.

Institution	Number of students	Type
Abbey Gate	130	SFC
Bauley Grammar	150	SFC
Hayston	250	SFC
Auston	1192	FE
Neathside	1638	FE
Boothly	2547	FE
ATG	3592	Appr
Brookford	4866	FE
Crown	120	SFC
Torhall	170	SFC
Adley House	290	SFC
Burlywood	310	SFC
Eastward	1724	Ind SFC
Capital College	4000	FE
CCN	4596	FE

Table 5.4: Number of Post-16 Students by Institution

Scarlet explained:

I changed, in the summer I was going to go to CCN Sixth Form but when I went to Burlywood Academy's sixth form taster day and I realised that it was a smaller place and it would have been so much better if I stayed at somewhere smaller and with teachers who actually related and cared about what I was doing, rather than just letting me be independent. (Scarlet, AH)

Adley House also used the same differentiating message, Alfie explained:

Because obviously if you go to a college there'll be more people than if you went to a sixth form. So I suppose if you went to a college maybe people wouldn't be bothered about your grades because there's more people to focus on if you want to get some help. (Alfie, AH)

As institutions Adley House, Burlywood Academy and Torhall School were clearly maintaining these messages at open evenings and during school activities, Kath explained why she chose Adley House:

Because when I went to the open evening thing it just seemed a lot better and you got more support for your work and stuff [pause] you get more help that when you're at college I think. (Kath, AH)

They are going to be a lot smaller [the classes], like 10, compared to 25 or 30, so you are going to get a lot more 1-2-1 and I have heard that the college classes sizes are a lot bigger, like 15-20. Erm you are going to get a lot more help if you need it because like less people are going to be asking you have got more time with the teacher if you don't understand something so you are going to learn better and hopefully do even better in the exams than you would if there was a bigger class.

(John, AH)

Here the internalised message was that colleges have larger classes so teaching cannot be as good as that provided by schools, because there is less individual student attention so students may perform more poorly in exams because of this. These comments exemplify the importance that students placed on expecting good teaching and how they emphasised messages which aligned with this and created a shared understanding for students who remained at a school sixth form for academic success. Internalising these messages enabled schools to retain their pre-16 students as sixth form students in the competitive post-16 marketplace.

### **Providing a structured environment**

A final social reality which schools tried to create was that colleges are less supportive than schools because of the difference between their environment and that of schools. Again Eastward College, representing an independent sixth form college, provided a strong rebuttal to this:

Again I think that that's again where some of these myths grow up because everybody is talked to and addressed by their first names, so I'm Sarah, Craig the principal is Craig, teachers are all by their first name so there's a perception that that means that we're all very lackadaisical, we're not really on the ball in terms of discipline, we don't

have any detentions and things like that that you get in schools. So the perception is that we're very laid back and it's dead easy, not to be chased and looked after, but we have study zones, we put people into classes, we have supervised private study for those who need it. So we have things built in but we try and be more adult because for a lot of students coming here is a fresh start and they want to be treated as adults and they do, you see the difference from a 16-year-old to an 18-year-old when they leave and it's huge and they've grown and they've taken on a lot more responsibility for their own learning, which whether they go to employment or they go on to university is what is needed. So they're not spoon fed as much. So I think the ethos is one of Ofsted said happy and purposeful so students are here, they want to be here, but they're purposeful in what they do when they are here. (Assistant Head, Eastward College, Newfield)

It is not surprising that schools would want to present students with information that highlights their strengths and competitors' weaknesses in a competitive marketplace, however, due to the power balance involved it is a concern that a lack of impartial IAG is not likely to re-balance biased messages, as students may use these messages as a reason for a decision which may mean their progression is not one in line with their perceived best interests. This section introduces the ways in which schools started to construct social reality reflecting messages which support remaining at a school sixth form. In particular it continues to introduce the themes of risk and trust which will be explored in detail later in this findings section. It is important to note that a school's ability to socially construct the above differentiating messages was borne out of the practical strategies detailed in the preceding section, it is the combination of these strategies which helped schools to influence post-16 transition.

For students who progressed to colleges for post-16 education (see Table 5.1 on page 122) the most important reason for their choice of institution related to ethos (needing an adult environment, a change from school). Thus, reflecting previous

findings by Prout (1993); Macrae et al. (1996); Keys and Maychell (1998); Unwin and Wellington (2000); Lumby and Wilson (2003); Payne (2003); Blenkinsop et al. (2006); Zepke et al. (2009) and Fuller and Macfadyen (2012). 'Needing a change from school' was a comment discussed frequently during interviews with students who wanted to attend an institution which offered them more independence, adult treatment and a new mix of people than offered in the sixth form at the students' pre-16 schools. This was often presented as a single, definitive reason for not attending a school sixth form. Amy (Abbey Gate to Boothly College) explained powerfully and decisively:

Amy: I was just sick of everything, because I'd been there five years  
[pause]

GG: Anything in particular?

Amy: Just like how it was run, like it was the same every single day  
[pause] I wanted a different change of scenery.

GG: What if you don't get your course?

Amy: Get a job, I don't want to come here, I don't like the school, I don't want to come to sixth form. Nothing is really good about here though. There are a couple of people who have left this school the sixth form because they say that they treat you like children still, which I think they do because you have the same teachers, like you have the same teachers all the way through high school and you have got them in sixth form; they are going to still treat you like children because they have taught you. It is more different that is why I want to go to another one.

A common reason cited for attending a college was gaining more freedom in the timetable including late starts, early finishes and free time. This was linked with independence through the responsibility of managing study time independently, which was also associated with feelings of being treated like an adult (as opposed to sixth form school children), and this was alongside colleges having more relaxed

rules than school sixth forms. These were the messages colleges actively played on in their marketing and were the messages schools supported for students who they did not want in their sixth form, encouraging a move was 'in the best interests of the student', as outlined in the previous section on page 144. Harvey also from Abbey Gate, along with Amy, was clearly ready for a change:

I just don't like school, I don't like being told what to do, I will do the work but they nag at you for pointless things and it does my head in.

They are just stressing me out. (Harvey, AG)

Therefore, students who progressed to a college were co-constructing a social reality that represented a different USP for students who were remaining in school sixth forms. The extent to which this reality was constructed by the student or by schools pushing students out of their sixth form depends on the power dynamic between social actors. The power of transition influences will be discussed later in the findings section. Regardless of causality it was clear that both staff and students differentiated the decision to remain at a school sixth form or attend a college based on the construction that a college environment was either suitable or not for their needs and as such acted as a USP for college attendees or supported the teaching quality USP highlighted by schools.

This section of the findings and discussion chapter built on the previous practical management section in order to explain that socially constructed situations created powerful transition influences for students. Specifically this section added evidence to the argument to demonstrate how schools differentiated their provision using USPs of academic quality and support. These were direct anti-competitive messages which were used against colleges. Together these strategies created a socially constructed situation which represents the heterogeneous competitive situation outlined in the first findings section (see page 120).

In exploring these strategies it has been established that schools used positive framing effects, Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) presented how these effects may lead choice decisions to be cognitively biased through presenting information



positively in order to choose to avoid risk, in this case to remain in post-16 education at school sixth forms. Now that the messages schools utilised in order to compete in the post-16 marketplace have been outlined the next stage of the argument is to establish how effective students were at processing these messages.

### **Marketing validity and students' information processing skills**

The purpose of this section is to provide reasons as to why messages of teaching quality were so important and influential for students transitioning to school sixth forms.

Reputation was especially important for Torhall School and Adley House students. Staff, students and documents suggested that Torhall School had a good reputation for behaviour and learning which students, such as George, emphasised:

I think to get a good grade at A level you've got to be getting a good grade at GCSE so there's no point in letting somebody who got a D at GCSE to do an A level course and then just fail. It's more likely they'd fail. So I think they do it to help people, to make sure that people pass.

(George, TS)

When asked what types of students attend Torhall School Sixth Form Heather was representative of other students' comments in stating that students were:

Hard working [pause] very. Oh [pause] it's hard actually. Yeah, like know what they want, they've got their own aspirations and they're dedicated as well. (Heather, TS)

In assessing academic reputation, students used grades as a proxy for reputation. Students across all schools did discuss looking at results as part of their decision-making process but only Leena, who went to an academically selective grammar school, actually used it as a reason not to attend Abbey Gate, her pre-16 school. For Torhall School students it was accepted that they were attending because of the academic reputation of the institution and they did not have to move to attend a reputable institution. For other students they viewed results as 90% plus pass rates

to be 'good' although it was clear they did not analyse the results beyond repeating the interpretation presented as 'good' or 'better' in marketing materials. Findings here support the previous literature. Students had difficulties in comparing offerings between institutions, they did not have the required information processing skills (Hemsley-Brown, 1999). The students were unable to deal with the high volume of messages and so informal grapevine knowledge dominated choices (Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Foskett and Lumby, 2003).

Grapevine knowledge was used where students had picked up that results were generally considered to be 'good' by family and peers, results were not as important as other factors on their own. For most students teaching and learning was much more likely to be considered important to lead to good results. This may have been down to the problems identified by Alfie. Results reported in marketing literature were the most positive and broadly defined results as possible, and often only included headline results, for example, overall pass rates, and so trusted advice was sought from family and peers, as these students explained:

Other people [friends] have spoken about it and said that they're meant to be quite good and that people have got good grades from going [. . .] and because it's meant to be quite good and to have good results.  
(Kath, AH)

It must be good because a lot of people go there and I know loads of people that went there, family went there and they seemed to do okay.  
(Nissa, AH to CCN).

Grapevine IAG as support for decision-making was clearly included in transition stories but ambiguous in its specific message beyond supporting decisions for a route by positively endorsing institutions.

Payne (2003) and Blenkinsop et al. (2006) recognised the role of people, peers, family members, parents and especially siblings as being widely used sources of IAG in the literature. This was principally found to be because they had recent

or current insider experience (for example, experience of day to day workload and subject content information) and information of the education routes about which decisions were being made. Thus, their advice was relevant and trusted. Jin et al. (2011) found that peers were important because they had experienced the route which the deciding student currently had no experience of, they were “in the know” (Marson-Smith et al., 2009, p. 10), especially when in school or alternative IAG was weak. As such, peers and siblings had credibility above parents, staff and careers advisors for some students (Blenkinsop et al., 2006).

Gewirtz et al. (1995) found that marketing materials were more promotional than informative, they focused on communicating an attractive visual identity rather than information. The Trade Description Act (1968) covers post-16 education so prospectuses and marketing materials are skilfully written to emphasise positives and ignore negatives according to Bridges (1994). Similarly in this study only Bauley Grammar, Torhall School, Eastward College and Boothly College published a detailed breakdown of pass rate by subject (see Table 5.5 on page 174). The table clearly demonstrates that institutions with the highest pass rates published more information surrounding their pass rates; institutions with lower pass rates ignored results in their literature. Interpreting reported results would involve students being able to cut through marketing noise, as results were reported in ways that were non-comparable, or were combined with marketing tag lines such as reporting results to be, “top”, “sustained”, “high”, “record”, “exceptional”, “best”, “outstanding”, “record breaking”, “amongst the top X% of”. It appeared that students were not equipped to challenge or interpret these results beyond broad acceptance of ‘good results’ as Alfie (AH) and Carla (TS) explained:

GG: So what was it about Eastward College that attracted you to it?

Alfie: Well I’d heard that it’s a good college, it’s one of the best in Newfield behind the private sixth forms.

GG: And why is that something that you thought about?

Institution	Results published	Level of Detail in Results	Pass Rate (%)
Bauley Grammar	Yes	Full subject breakdown	97
Neathside	Yes	Headline	96
Eastward	Yes	Full subject breakdown	96
Torhall	Yes	Full subject breakdown	92
Boothly	Yes	Full subject breakdown	90
CCN	Yes	Headline	82
Brookford	Yes	Headline, emphasises success	77
Burlywood	Yes	Headline	71
Hayston	No		61
Auston	No		70
Adley House	Yes	One sentence	75
Capital Coll	No		74
Crown	No		72
Abbey Gate	No		41

Table 5.5: Comparison of the Depth of Information in Published Results

Alfie: I don't know really, I just think it's important because if I'm thinking about going to university I need some good grades, so going to a college with a good reputation for good grades is a good idea really.

GG: So what attracted you to Torhall School?

Carla: It's definitely a good one from what the school has told us anyway, they say that because you need good grades it has a high expectation of you and they've always had past good grades and Ofsted reports and stuff like that.

One difficulty students had when interpreting the pass rates published by colleges was interpreting the potentially misleading way that institutions published and made claims surrounding their results. Along with Burlywood Academy, Boothly College made misleading claims about its results. Their prospectus stated that, "our advanced level students achieve better grades in their exams than all other schools and colleges in the North West", yet, with an advanced level pass rate of 90% both Neathside College (96% A\*-E) and Bauley Grammar (97%) had higher pass rates for A levels. However, unless students and stakeholders created a comparison chart (like Table 5.5 which was compiled using DfE data<sup>5</sup>) spotting these misleading or

<sup>5</sup>The published DfE data were reliable and consistent because common statistical methods were

false claims is unlikely to have occurred and may have made a difference to a student's decision. For example, Jay chose to remain at Abbey Gate to benefit from the small class sizes, however, using pass rate statistics it would appear that he would have been much more likely to be able to pass at a college (even despite larger class sizes) because Abbey Gate had much lower pass rates than any other institution in the sample (see Table 5.5 on page 174).

Secondly, Burlywood Academy's Head of Sixth Form stated that:

You know, we can't compete with facilities, but we can compete on the quality of teaching, exam results are now better than Eastward College's. (Head of Sixth Form, Burlywood Academy, Newfield)

However, this is not supported by DfE data where Eastward College's A\*-E pass rate was 96% and Burlywood Academy's was 71% (see Table 5.5 on page 174). This message was repeated by students and it is possible that the Head of Sixth Form was using this message to try and recruit students from competitors using biased and misleading data as his reality is not supported by the official statistics above. The concern here is that students were susceptible to the messages delivered by teachers, here the theme of trust is once again important, many students trusted their teachers and they may not have had the ability or resources to be able to make such detailed comparisons between institutional data in order to assess the validity of the claims presented in marketing and received in IAG.

The majority of students did not know specifically what the published data represented. Only Alfie (AH) queried the use of results in marketing, he complained about the lack of subject specific results to enable an in-depth comparison of institutions:

It [Ofsted's Data Dashboard] was useful because most of the results are on there, because they tell you the pass rate and it's always something like 98% or 99%, but they don't really tell you what grades you can expect or what the average grades you can get are when you get there.

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used by the DfE in order to enable comparisons between institutions.

But on these government websites they actually tell you what percentage of students got four As in facilitating subjects and stuff. So it was quite good and that helped me a lot. (Alfie, AH)

The work of Ball et al. (1996) focused on parental decision-making. De Giovanni (2011) applied their work to student choice and stated that attributes of skilled choosers included the capacity to decode information and glean meaning, this is what the majority of students in this study lacked and thus they fall into their "newcomer" (p. 92) category where they had strong drive but limited capacity due to a lack of required cultural capital. Borrowing from the field of economics the principle of adverse selection can be used here where the providing party (the school) knew more about the service provided (schooling) than the buyer (student). The market was not in balance as asymmetric information may have led to undesirable options for the students (who were less powerful). Schools used signalling (as the informed party), this involved highlighting the USPs outlined in this section. The uninformed party may have screened the informed to maximise information in order to support decision-making, for example, attending open days and accessing statistics revealed information to the uninformed (the student). However, these findings argue that messages contained in advertising were biased which supported the cause of the school. Furthermore, the students did not always possess effective information processing skills in order to be able to assess the information that they received for bias. This is important for this thesis' argument as it explains that some students did not have the resources, capital, and ability to counter and assess biased messages provided in schools' marketing and IAG. Overall, students had limited knowledge of their progression routes and mentioned few alternative sources of IAG. Thus, some students trusted the (biased) advice of school staff and this may have had negative effects on these students' transition as some of the IAG was biased for the institution's needs. The government suggested that the NCS website provided an opportunity for students to receive impartial IAG if schools did not fully provide this. However, this claim is challenged in the following section which builds on the evidence presented here covering students' information processing skills.

### **Use of the world wide web**

This section emphasises the role of people in supporting students' transition to post-16 education in order to demonstrate how influential school IAG and choice management strategies were for some students. In order to do this the case of the internet is explored. Appendix Q (page 323) summarises sources of IAG used by sampled students.

When compared to face-to-face guidance methods students used the internet as a source of IAG less than was anticipated. This was a surprising finding given that we live in such a connected world. The case of the internet represented how useful people and schools were to students during transition decision-making. Students regularly accessed social media, but did not search the internet for IAG. Only one student, Terry (AG), said that he used the internet. Where websites were used as a source of IAG this was to find out information regarding facilities, higher education and career entry requirements, to check subject provision, to access digital prospectuses (for course details and entry requirements), and to check when open events were occurring. Students reported beginning their use of the internet using a search engine (Google) in order to search for subjects, courses and institutions rather than navigating directly to a specific website. However, students (such as Tim, AH) who was considering an apprenticeship navigated directly to [www.apprenticeship.org](http://www.apprenticeship.org). Students noted that they found out about specific websites through guidance interviews and advertising (television, radio and print).

One of the reasons provided by students as to why it was useful for them to receive IAG from school was because of the number of options available (types of courses and institutions), coupled with the need to make decisions to prepare for their abstract future transition to higher education and employment. The NCS website provides online support for transition, as do other websites such as [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk), and many others. These websites contain a wealth of information for students to assist with guidance, but the sheer volume of information was difficult to process in a way that was meaningful to assist transition. When asked if students used these websites it appeared that the students were unable to

use them because they were overwhelmed by the volume of information available and number of options presented as the students explained:

Scarlet (AH): There's not a lot of information, but it's helpful information, so it's like if I was to go on a normal website there were a load of things that weren't really relevant to what I was looking for, whereas Yahoo Answers there were people actually talking from experience, they would just put it in a little paragraph of what you had to do and what grades you needed to get.

Carla (TS) Yeah, sometimes there is far too much. When you type in something in Google there is too much there for you to click on and look at one thing, so that kind of puts you off searching sometimes.

Schools supported students through the volume of information available and thus made the transition decision easier to comprehend, understand and ultimately more manageable. Foskett et al. (2004) and Foskett et al. (2008) also found that students were unable to process large amounts of information which is created by the number of possible future options available, described elsewhere as “drinking water from a fire-hose” (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013b, p. 35). Conducting generic searches without any search parameters, as described above, may explain why students were overwhelmed by the amount of information they had to navigate through due to the sheer volume of information available on the internet. This can lead to choice overload where choices are overcomplicated and lead to less optimal decisions (Jin et al., 2011). Schools made the transition process more manageable through providing alternative, simpler (bounded) IAG which was easier to comprehend by students. Schools filled the gap which existed because students lacked the information processing skills in order to utilise the information available to the students via the internet rather than equipping the students with the information processing skills to be able to cope.

Evidence from Hooley et al. (2010); Nicholas et al. (2010) and Evans and



Rallings (2013) reported that familiarity with technology disguises problems with technological confidence and digital literacy skills. This is despite policy makers and the general perception of young people being digitally literate. Nicholas' study also reported that students spent very little time evaluating sources and they did not consider the accuracy and authority of the information that they were exposed too. The young people in the study were unaware of the information requirements, they had poor search strategies, and the participants relied on branded search engines. Young (2008) and Hooley et al. (2010) agreed, arguing that Google cannot help students formulate questions, just answers. This reflects what was reported by students in the current study above. Hence, students were happy to be supported by their teachers and peers. This supports the use of school centred 'quick fixes' to transition questions and this therefore partly explains why students accepted the potentially biased help schools were happy to provide as it also supported their institutional needs.

Throughout this chapter trust has emerged as a theme of importance to students. Websites represent 'unknown' sources and for some students they were treated with limited confidence in their ability to provide trustworthy information. As such students preferred to use knowledge from teachers, parents and peers via internet forums and therefore, speak to people that they knew and trusted. This type of trusted information (hot knowledge) was provided via a grapevine of social networks (Ball and Vincent, 1998). These students preferred to utilise knowledge from people in similar circumstances, from people 'just like me' rather than relaying information from a third party source as these students explained:

Max (AH): I think it's better to talk to people in person because then you get what they think on it, rather than what the internet tells you, because what's on the internet could be something that anyone wrote, so it couldn't always be 100% true.

Jamal (TS): I think the internet's not that reliable to be honest so I think getting information from school or other places is much more re-

liable.

George (TS) provided an example of one of only a few students who combined multiple sources of information to qualify IAG findings:

George: Well, say with your example teachers had already told me on previous open evenings that you had to get an A or an A\* in maths to study it. Or you didn't need to but it's best to then you're more likely to pass, so if I saw there was something on the internet that said you needed a D I'd know it was rubbish.

GG: Okay, so what you're saying is that if you know from somebody who you know already then you can kind of check the information?

George: Yes.

Internet forums were mentioned by students as being more reliable as they were considered to be written by peers and did not include marketing messages (see Scarlet's (AH) excerpt on page 178). This included Yahoo Answers where weighting the importance of responses is based on user votes received to answers provided by other users, as Damian (AG) explained this enabled for IAG information to be verified:

GG: So which kind of websites would you be looking at? How would you find out that information?

Damian: Well you can go on the actual college website and have a look what courses they do and what facilities they have or you can visit forums and stuff like that where people tell you which one's better and why, so like saying that's better because. It's more realistic, you get other people's point of view, instead of going on a website and them saying oh, this is the best college because we have this, this and this, like they'll never tell you the disadvantages of it, whereas if you go on a forum they'll tell you why it's good and things that aren't good about it. You get loads of different people's opinions instead of just

the company. Things like you can go on a forum and they'll tell you what facilities you can use there and what materials and stuff you can use, and then another person could say about the same thing and say it's not as actually as good as say that guy's making out, it's more like that. You get more of a broader view of it and get to understand which one's better and why.

Despite the varying utilisation of the internet there is the possibility that online information, such as the NCS website, could in the future compensate for bias provided by schools. Therefore, it could help to overcome shortfalls in current IAG policy through the provision of alternative information. However, this would require students to have a greater awareness of the sources of information available online and it would involve developing their digital literacy skills. The understanding and skills required to combine multiple sources of information in order to lead to a wider understanding of transition were only demonstrated by three students in the sample (Jamal and George (TS) and Alfie (AH)). Therefore, the position maintained by the government that the NCS website (BIS, 2012b) represents impartial IAG is questioned due to the low of utilisation of the internet, and shortfalls in digital literacy skills.

Given that IAG activities are now the responsibility of the school and there is evidence that the transition, marketing, and IAG activities are not mutually exclusive and most recently the evidence suggests that at times the messages are deliberately biased. Given the competitive marketplace, this situation may not be acting in the interests of effective transition for all students. So far this section has shown how schools influence transition in practice using social construction of reality, the final and next stage of the argument in this section is to explain why this control was at times so effective. This was due to a normalised culture of remaining at a school for post-16 study and trust placed with teachers.

### **Peer normalisation of a sixth form culture**

The preceding section highlighted how students used grapevine knowledge in order to assist them in dealing with information processing when deciding on a transition decision. They used this information because they trusted those on the grapevine who provided it. This section continues the theme of co-constructing social reality and explains how peers helped to normalise reasons for staying on in a school sixth form which is the first part in explaining how these strategies were effective ways of schools influencing transition because the reality of 'staying on' was internalised as the 'norm' over time.

Peers influenced attendance at an institution because they provided a sense of place, it supported the view that the choice fitted with people 'like me' and therefore, provided a sense of safety and security in transition through matching a socially accepted self-image to an institution's social and cultural ethos which was represented by its student base. This situation is more complex than reasons reported in previous literature such as 'I'm attending because my friend is going too' (Macrae et al., 1996; Hemsley-Brown, 1997; Maguire et al., 1999; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Foskett and Lumby, 2003; Lumby and Foskett, 2005b; Blenkinsop et al., 2006). For example, Carla did not find that she fitted into Eastward College after leaving Torhall and she wanted to (and did) return to Torhall School, which represented an environment which matched her she social norms (see page 186).

Foskett et al. (2004); Blenkinsop et al. (2006) and Foskett et al. (2008) noted that students in schools with sixth forms saw progression as natural. Hemsley-Brown (1999); Payne (2003) and Jin et al. (2011) found that peer pressure normalised a route, for example that staying on is expected. Thus, if peers stay on for post-16 education it is much more likely that other students will also stay on as general attitudes to education and post-16 education in specific sixth forms has been supported, this is more effective over the long term than short term. Torhall School in the current study can be seen as an institution which created a strong and positive culture for both post-16 study and study at their own sixth form, whereas Abbey Gate had

a much weaker culture for staying on at their own sixth form. Students constructed their social reality reflecting expectations of what post-16 education would be like from generalisations based on peers (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997). Reputation and cultures are created over time, they are historically determined through the next generations of students who internalise pre-conceived ideas of academic culture and quality, for example examination results (Foskett and Hesketh, 1996, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999b).

Students accepted or rejected the norm to remain in the sixth form over time through messages, created by Torhall School's activities, which were in turn internalised to represent students' own beliefs through co-construction of social reality, which provided powerful reasons to support transition. It is argued that schools aimed to create these social norms, the power of which is demonstrated by no backup plan existing for students who internalised these norms. Torhall School students reported that one of the factors behind their decision was because their friends were remaining at the school. At face value this could be seen to represent friendship as a social reason to remain. However, although this is a cited benefit, at Torhall School these typical social reasons were more likely to represent the belief that students had normalised staying at Torhall School and the decision is mutually supported by their friends. Typically students commented that it was normal for the majority of students to stay at Torhall School, this reflected official DfE statistics, 67% of Torhall School students remained for post-16 education in their sixth form (see Table 5.3, page 157). Only one student in the sample (Eleanor) left Torhall School, and she left because she did not achieve the grades to achieve entry<sup>6</sup>. The retention rate of 67% can be seen as the highest of all sampled schools in Table 5.3 (page 157), except for the grammar school in Redmarsh.

Torhall School used strategies to help establish a culture of remaining in Torhall School Sixth Form, they provided timetabled events to celebrate post-16 achievement and they used teaching and learning activities to build a culture of post-16 success, right from day one in Year 7 they established the cultural expectation of

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<sup>6</sup>Level 2 achievement equivalent to at least five GCSEs at A\* - C with B grade minimum in subjects studied at level 3 (Torhall School admissions policy).

staying on into post-16 and this became internalised until in Year 11 students accepted it fully, all students who met the entrance criteria progressed from Torhall School to Torhall School Sixth Form in my sample. Their Head of Sixth Form explained their approach:

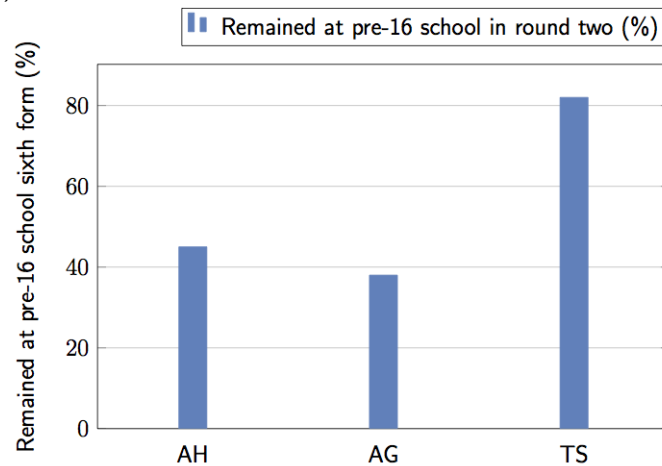
I think one of the great assets here of course is that being an 11 to 18 school people like me, who teach sixth form, also teach little ones, and people that are teaching Year 7 are teaching A level, so we can excite them about the possibilities of continuing their education from the day they walk through the door [pause]. But just going back to the kind of where they all end up, we celebrate that a lot, so we have a massive prize giving in the hall, I'm just planning it now, and they'll all be invited back, we've got medals for all the sixth form that come back, and then we've got special prizes for the best results, the best contributor, all that sort of stuff. And the whole school are invited to that, they won't all be there because they can't all fit in, but there'll be four or five hundred students involved in our music who will see that. So you do get I want to be the next Joe Bloggs going off to Cambridge and do maths. Okay, you may not be able to pull it off, but you know, we're with you on that. (Head of Sixth Form, Torhall School, Newfield)

This normalised culture had clearly been accepted by academic students at Torhall School, comments such as George's were common:

We'll I've been there since Year 7 so it just seems normal to go to that school and I don't think I'm a big fan of changes really. (George, TS)

The students who remained at their school sixth forms were valuable for the schools because they fed positive messages into the grapevine via hot knowledge. This could have caused more students to decide to stay on into a school's sixth form because a culture of 'staying on' existed. It could be argued that this was happening, especially in the case of Carla who left and returned to Torhall School (see page 186), given the knowledge was hot as it was provided by a peer, and

Figure 5.1: Percentage of students remaining at pre-16 school sixth forms (by institution).



trusted the messages could have been more persuasive than formal advice as the messages were internalised over time.

The last component of the normalised culture argument links this argument to social class before the importance of trust in the argument is outlined. The literature review introduced the concept of choice based on class rather than rational choice. Foskett and Hesketh (1996) and Hemsley-Brown (1996a) found that students made choices having identified with a specific social identity, which is classed. Students developed a self-image with which they made choices in order to identify with the past students who were from similar contexts and made similar choices, for 'people like me'. Schools are not neutral, they embody the dominant cultural class in order to remain dominant (Hatcher, 1998; Young and Muller, 2010). Hence, at Torhall School students who were academically able and fitted the social identity 'chose' to remain whilst others such as Eleanor left having constructed the belief that her social identity would be better matched in a college environment.

It is argued that the practices outlined in the previous practical management and social construction of reality sections have enabled students to internalise the messages that the schools constructed through co-construction of reality with peers and teachers in order for Torhall School, especially, to be able to influence transition.

The literature review used the work of Hodkinson (2008) to explain why transition decisions were made in a practically rational manner. The cultural acceptance highlighted here is an example of students embodying their decisions. Hodkinson linked this concept to the subconscious and practical consciousness (Giddens, 1991). There is a tacit understanding, an embodiment of the social and cultural situation that cannot be fully explained. Therefore it represents taken for granted assumptions which have been internalised over time to become accepted as the norm, and it does not represent a decision as such. The strength of this cultural acceptance is demonstrated in the unanimous acceptance and use of the school support message given by the students when asked what was the most important reason for their decision and the number of students who remained at Torhall School for post-16 education (see Figure 5.1, page 185).

The strength of the normalised position created by peers is evident in Carla's experience. She offered a unique view in the sample. Carla left Torhall School to attend Eastward College and then returned to Torhall School citing that she did not feel supported at Eastward College. Carla explained this lack of support:

At Eastward College it was ridiculously busy and you didn't get that one to one relationship with your teacher and get the help and support that you needed because there were so many students. (Carla, TS to East to TS)

In Carla's case when she moved back to Torhall School (Sixth Form) she commented that:

It was really good, they give you so much support and help, and I'm only taking three AS levels which is a lot more suitable for me academically. (Carla, TS to East to TS)

This further supports Torhall School's position and provides a powerful example (from a peer) who endorsed the messages used by staff at Torhall School. Heather (TS) provided an example of how internalised this message had become:



Like Eastward College, I think it's just too big and it's sort of a bit more impersonal, whereas Torhall School Sixth Form, it's smaller and so the teachers know you more rather than loads of other people as well. I think other colleges are just too big. (Heather, TS)

Thus, students considered remaining at Torhall School to be not only the safest option but the most educationally sound decision. Karen summarised this:

The teachers [at Torhall School] are supportive and they can give you help whenever you want, and because the teachers know you as well and you know the teachers it's like not as [pause] I don't know, like scary really I think to one you don't really know. (Karen, TS)

This comment summarises the USP for Torhall School and other school sixth forms and demonstrates why Carla returned, the school is a safe option, it has been experienced and so students know the quality of the experience good, these views were supported, socially constructed and internalised by trusted peers.

The penultimate part of this section outlined how peers were able to normalise a culture of transitioning to a school sixth form, this was a powerful situation which is important in explaining why the strategies which involve social construction of reality were so influential. The final part of the argument which explains why these strategies were so powerful draws on the previously introduced theme of trust.

### **Trust reduced transition risks: two contrasting institutional positions**

The previous section argued that peer social construction of reality helped schools to influence transition. This section argues that the students trusted their teachers and this reduced their transition risks. This is the final component of the argument which explains how schools were sometimes so successful in influencing transition to their pre-16 school for post-16 study using social construction of reality.

Some students had built a relationship with staff over five years. The above practices enabled schools to build trust between staff and students and this was a significant factor in schools being able to influence their Year 11 students to stay on

into the sixth form. Students remaining in a school's sixth form were reminded that they were known by staff who could ensure that their personal educational needs were met. This message appeared to be very strong and omnipotent at Torhall School and it formed an effective tool to maximise transition from Year 11 to their sixth form. For the remaining students it reduced the risk of transitioning into the unknown (post-16 education market) by deciding to remain at their school post-16. Heads of Sixth Forms strongly believed in this message:

I think it is about the whole package and I think that's one of the big selling points for the sixth form, we know these students, we worked with them through lower school and therefore there is a transition of information and everything else that goes with that that student follows up and through. Therefore, we can support them, but making sure that we've got them on the right pathway for what they want to do. (Head of Sixth Form, Burlywood Academy, Newfield)

Students, especially at Torhall School where trust was high, clearly considered this to be one of the most important reasons behind the decision to stay, when asked specifically why they wanted to remain at their own school for post-16 study students responded:

Well, I wanted the ones I had at GCSE because I had a close relationship with them and they knew what my weaknesses and strengths were in my subjects so like they knew what was best for me and everything and they'd give me the best support, whereas if I had a teacher I'd never had before then they don't really know much about me and what I'm good at and what I'm not. (Carla, TS)

Mainly because it's smaller than going to a sixth form college, so the classes will be smaller and like I know the teachers and the teachers know me so they'll know what I struggle with and what I need more help with kind of thing. (Karen, TS)

It's because I know the teachers and they know my abilities so they can like push me more to reach my target if I'm failing to achieve what I'm capable of. I think they're more pushing than going to a new college where they don't know you more personally and they don't push you because they don't know your abilities that much. I think as I said they know you personally so they're more likely to support you and push you because they know your capabilities and they set you a target, a more personal target because they already know you from GCSEs. So it's much better than going to somewhere new because they don't know you. (Jamal, TS)

It was clear that Jamal trusted the information received from Torhall School given his description of the staff who provided it:

Oh it's probably one of the teachers, or I think the Deputy Heads that give you the talk and gives you the information. Because they kind of give you the information and they explain it more because they've got experience, they've taught and been in the teaching industry for some time so they've got the experience to give you the information, to give you the right information so that you can succeed as well. So you can choose the right sixth form or college. (Jamal, TS)

Thus, a key theme for post-16 transition decision-making by students from all three schools was one of confidence in transition and the risk of attending unknown institutions, attending their current schools offered students reduced risk and confidence in transition as staff, the experience and the environment were known. These findings support those of previous reviews of IAG in stating that teachers knowing the students as individuals can ensure that the risk is reduced by having a trusted, knowledgeable teacher checking the appropriate choices for them (McCrone et al., 2012), as such the impact of teachers on transition has been found to be of the most influential sources of IAG (Hughes and Gratton, 2009). For example, Mizra's

(1992) study of black students' lives found that teachers were considered as having superior knowledge and could persuade parents that they were acting in the best interests of students even when restricting options. The following quotations represent the risks in transition and a lack of confidence in coping with change which staff helped to mitigate:

There aren't any problems in knowing where to go and stuff . . . if you know the teachers and you know the people it's much more comforting, if you know what I mean. Knowing the people and teachers is easier to settle in. (Jamal, TS)

When I start sixth form I just want to get on with the subject straight away, I don't want to worry about fitting in and making new friends, and also obviously I've been to the school for a number of years so I sort of know how to get help, there's teachers that I can talk to about things. (Alfie, AH)

Therefore, two distinct mutually exclusive categories of student decision-making existed, students who were more academic and who were worried about academic success accepted messages of school support, reputation and superior teaching by choosing to attend a familiar institution, and these messages were in contrast to students who wanted more social experience and independence and those who reportedly did not like school, and thus needed a change from school and who were seeking independence by attending a college. Again this position represents the heterogeneous competition outlined in the first findings section (see page 120).

Overall, students built a cultural understanding of post-16 institutions, whether positive or negative, with underlying socially constructed ideas representing confidence, risk and trust. Schools aimed to use these social constructions in order to try and cope with competition in the post-16 education market, by aiming to build a culture of remaining at the same institution for post-16 study. Two contrasting positions focus this issue, Abbey Gate verses Torhall School. Abbey Gate School

Sixth Form was attempting to start this as a culture to combat their low numbers (also encouraged by Ofsted):

At school we've been told to not talk about them [Year 11 students] leaving Abbey Gate School Sixth Form but we'll do this when we're in Abbey Gate School Sixth Form, we'll do this when you are in Year 12, as if it's a given thing that they will be joining Abbey Gate School Sixth Form. (Business Teacher, Abbey Gate, Redmarsh)

Torhall School demonstrated the other end of the spectrum in how effective they were at creating a positive transition culture, unlike at Abbey Gate. 67% of Torhall School's Year 11 students progressed to their sixth form compared to 24% at Abbey Gate. The contrasting position of Torhall School and Abbey Gate will now be examined to highlight how the key themes operated in practice.

Abbey Gate had a low number of students on roll and low rates of success in comparison with other institutions (see Table 5.6 and 5.3 on pages 192 and 157) and this impacted on its ability to compete with nearby competitor institutions both in terms of perceived reputation and economic viability of the number of courses on offer. The low numbers of students meant that a wide range of course options could not be offered because there were not enough students to support a wide curriculum offering. Abbey Gate School Sixth Form staff and students reported that a negative culture existed regarding their sixth form, it was reported that the recent establishment of Abbey Gate School Sixth Form (2010-2011), which included lessons being taught by the same staff as pre-16 school lessons, led students to believe that staff were not properly qualified to teach post-16 students, a view which was summarised by Zane:

The teachers, I would say the teachers, the teachers because the teachers are from here [the school], they go over there [to Abbey Gate's sixth form building] and they swap over so I don't so how you can be a college and high school teacher at the same time, I think that if someone

Institution	GCSE A*-C inc English & Maths %	A level Pass rate A*-E %	Vocational pass rate %
Bauley Grammar	99	97	NA
Neathside	NA	96	89
Boothly	NA	90	79
Brookford	NA	77	74
Hayston	76	61	38
CCN	NA	82	61
Auston	NA	NA	70
Abbey Gate	56	41	35
Torhall	73	92	NA
Burlywood	66	71	2
Adley House	52	75	41
Eastward	NA	96	NA
Capital College	NA	NA	74
Crown	53	72	NA

Table 5.6: Percentage Pass Rates by Sample Institution

needs to be specialised in teaching college students, not high school also. (Zane, AG to Boothly)

Other students shared his view and held a belief that staff at colleges were more qualified to teach because they sometimes held Masters degrees which meant that they had better subject knowledge than school teachers. These comments highlighted a culture of low trust between students and their school staff. Abbey Gate students were the only students to comment that staff outside of a school sixth form would be more qualified to teach post-16. Harvey's (AG to Brookford College) and Zane's (AG to Boothly College) excerpts emphasise their confidence in attending Abbey Gate School Sixth Form:

GG: What is not well thought-out about it?

Harvey: Like in each class they have like 5 people in it and it's just, it just, the pass rates just aren't that good, like two out of 5 in a class passing, like 2 out of 5 or 3 out of 5 in a class passing and the other two get like Es, I just don't think it is good.

GG: So have you looked at the pass rate at other colleges?

Harvey: Erm, I don't know at Boothly College but I know at Brookford

College, on the sociology course that I did, last year they got a 93% pass rate and the pass rates at Brookford College overall are like 96% or something, they are like really good.

GG: So what does that mean for your choices?

Harvey: Well obviously when you are looking, you think they must be doing something right, they must be good to learn from so.

The pass rate at Abbey Gate School Sixth Form was a concern for some students, Harvey had clearly considered the pass rates of other colleges and presented an unfavourable comparative position for Abbey Gate. He also used class sizes (as outlined above on page 159) and this was used as a proxy as a lack of success. For some students they were unwilling to potentially jeopardise their future results and subject options by attending Abbey Gate School Sixth Form, and choose a more established college with better results. Zane (AG to Boothly) explained:

GG: Why there?

Zane: Well, my friends are going there and it has got a good pass rate, 99.8%, really good. I don't really want to go to the new Abbey Gate School Sixth Form.

GG: Why did you look at the pass rate?

Zane: I wanted to do well, cos college is different to our school, you get to choose what you want to do and I think that makes you want to do better in it, and so I don't want to go to a place where not everyone wants to do well, and the pass rate here, because it is new, the pass rates are not that good.

GG: How do you know that?

Zane: Because it has just been established, after a few years people will start getting used to it and pass rates will start going up, because it is only a few years old I don't think the pass rates will be as good as what they will be in a couple of year's time.

GG: You have mentioned reputation, what about here at Abbey Gate

School Sixth Form?

Zane: Erm, they say that it is not doing as well as it could do, I wouldn't go so far as to say that it is failing but the pass rates aren't that good. I think that there is a maximum of, I think the biggest class has a maximum of 15 students in and that's it. So erm, yeah I just don't think it is that good.

GG: What is important choosing the other colleges?

Zane: Obviously if the pass rates are high then the teachers and good and the students are willing to learn, it just looks really good and positive. I don't think it really is a deciding factor in whether it is good or bad, but I think if the students decrease, like it is quite a small number and then no-one will pick certain lessons and then it will get much narrower [choice of subjects] and it will just end up going.

It is likely that trust will develop as Abbey Gate School Sixth Form becomes more established because over time students who enter school at Year 7 will be less aware that the school once did not have a sixth form. The lack of a positive history to support transition marketing messages is something that Torhall School, with a more established sixth form could offer, their academic pass rates and history commanded greater student trust and this was a key difference in messages which differentiated offerings between schools and colleges. Schools emphasised a low risk academically supportive environment whereas colleges offered a higher risk, alternative more independent experience. It is argued that students recalled these messages, having internalised them, to enter into a high trust situation at Torhall School. However, although Abbey Gate repeated the same messages their culture and trust was not as effective as at Torhall School and so their influence on transition was not as strong. Harvey and Zane's evidence suggested that on the contrary attending Abbey Gate School Sixth Form would have represented an educational risk which gave them confidence to move onto other providers, including colleges with higher proxies of academic quality, such as pass rates, which reduced their transition risk.



This section has emphasised the role of trust in managing the risks associated with transition. Trust provides students with ontological security which Giddens argued is required in order to be able to cope with the risks inherent in modern society. He argued that social actors aim for ontological security, they follow routines and taken for granted assumptions which govern action leading to confirming actions which represent the culturally accepted norms and values (Giddens, 1984). In this way action gives stability in order to avoid anxiety (ibid). Therefore, parts of Giddens' work can help to explain why schools were able to influence transition through their management of trust.

The previous sections have outlined how and why students trusted their familiar schools. This familiarity and trust reduced risks through the provision of ontological security and so students were more likely to remain in their pre-16 school for post-16 education where their values matched. This was found to be the case where academic students accepted that post-16 academic support was required. Furthermore, this route was also more likely to reduce career risks as academic courses are more likely to lead to a higher education and secure employment, or at least if the meritocratic argument is internalised (see the literature review, page 52). In this respect stability is also achieved for students who rejected the need for academic support, instead anxiety for them existed over remaining at their pre-16 school, in which case security was provided for them by moving to a college which enabled their alternative norms and values to be met.

### **The case of apprenticeships**

The findings section has presented the argument that schools used a variety of practical strategies and ways of constructing social realities in order to influence the transition of students, with varying rates of success. Throughout the duration of the study apprenticeships were given increasing amounts of coverage in the media and political messages supported increases in apprenticeship provision (GOV.UK, 2014). The final part of this section of the findings and discussion chapter combines many of the strategies schools employed in order to influence transition and applies them

to the findings on apprenticeships. It does this in order to demonstrate, through the context of apprenticeships, how schools influenced transition in ways that may not have been in the best interests of students. In particular, it emphasises the gate keeping role that schools were able to maintain, given the 2012 IAG policy which has reduced access to alternative sources of IAG. Thus, schools' influences may have important implications for continuing their middle class dominance at the expense of students' interests and vocational education.

Despite a number of students reporting positive messages about the benefits of apprenticeships, only one student in the sample actually progressed from school onto an apprenticeship aged 16, Terry (Abbey Gate to apprenticeship (Appr)). At the time of the first round of interviews, Terry was well under way with applications to colleges and an apprenticeship, having already taken an aptitude test. Terry had carefully considered his options having attended six college interviews. He had hoped to start an apprenticeship at ABC Networks which also would have allowed for study at a local college and eventual progression to university. His father was an ex-chef who had been an apprentice. However, by round two Terry's route had not turned out as planned. Terry did not gain a place on an apprenticeship with ABC Networks and so attended his backup option of a level 2 Business and Finance National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) course. However, Terry planned an exit strategy and left after only a few months on the college course to become an apprentice. His experience is used to highlight the case of apprenticeships. The first part of this section explores how schools competed in the marketplace using RPA messages, the second part outlines how schools blocked access to apprenticeship providers and finally the section presents how schools enacted choice management based on academic and vocational grounds.

### **Competing with RPA messages from schools**

Although, as outlined in the first findings section, vocational college students were not the main source of school sixth form students (see page 120), the apprenticeship training provider considered schools to be competition, as they provided some alter-

natives to apprenticeships in the form of vocational and applied options (see Table 5.2 on page 126). Apprentice staff felt strongly that they had to present a clear USP to cut through the noise of RPA (raising the participation age), a misconception that was used by schools to mislead students, informing them that they had to remain in school education until age 18 (to support their sixth form enrolment), as such all the apprenticeship literature by this provider featured a noise cutting logo stating that “Apprenticeships are Further Education” (see Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3 on page 198) thus meeting the RPA requirements.

The apprenticeship provider stated that with their company (a regional training provider) there were 326 apprenticeship vacancies and 209 without any applicants. The provider argued that this was, in part, because schools provided misleading information and blocked access to information about apprenticeships as a way of maximising their student retention into their sixth forms and this is coupled with some parents’ misconceptions, believing that students must remain in full time education (as the only option) until aged 18 as they explained:

We have noticed a bit of a drop since they said people have got to stay in education until they’re 17, and that’s from like last September, and we have had a drop in applications because of that, because they don’t know that it is further education, do you know what I mean, so we have had a drop, that’s what we’re worrying about, not worrying about but concerned about and getting it out there for next, well this year actually, September this year. (Apprenticeship Manager, North West training provider)

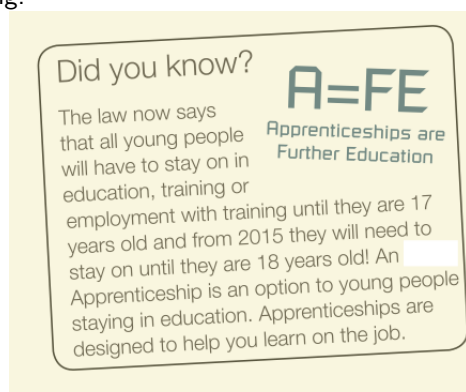
In contrast, the findings section outlined how Torhall School was in a secure, oversubscribed position. Their Head of Sixth Form explained how some schools utilised the RPA message to the advantage of sixth forms:

I’ve made it clear to them [students] that while they’re part of that project it’s not staying at school. I mean some schools have been a bit naughty on that I think because they’ve gone, oh, you’ve got to stay at

Figure 5.2: Apprenticeships are FE branding by the apprenticeship provider.



Figure 5.3: Apprenticeships are FE information included in the apprenticeship provider's marketing.



school. (Head of Sixth Form, Torhall School, Newfield)

This is a clear example of where impartial IAG can have an impact, to correct misconceptions about the RPA requirements. Here evidence indicates that biased IAG is occurring and issues identified in the literature review were occurring in practice (see page 41), school control of IAG was not leading to impartial advice for students. Terry (AG to Coll to Appr) recognised this situation occurring in his under subscribed school:

GG: Did the school give you information about the courses you wanted to do?

Terry: No, they didn't actually, I don't think they did, I think they wanted to like direct people into sixth form, they used to have an event where other colleges come but since they have opened the sixth form they have stopped it.

GG: How could your school have acted differently?

Terry: I don't know, probably just have given a wider range of where I could have gone and like maybe even have just a list of local businesses that might have taken an apprentice on or something. Just like a career adviser or something would have been all right.

A Business Teacher at Abbey Gate stated that:

On our frequently asked questions we've been prepared and primed to say that because education is compulsory now 'till you're 18 all our teachers are trained to teach up to the age of 18. (Business Teacher, Abbey Gate, Redmarsh)

Abbey Gate was the only school to report that RPA would have a positive impact on their sixth form's student numbers. Therefore, it appears that they were consciously using the extension of compulsory schooling/training to support their growth in numbers.

### **Competing with blocked access and restricted information**

There was a feeling amongst the students who applied to apprenticeships that their pre-16 schools did not help them prepare for successfully securing an apprenticeship place, instead they supported transition to their own sixth forms. Tim (AH) and Henry (AG) both wished to secure apprenticeships but instead both ended up remaining at their pre-16 schools for post-16 study. Students considered that gaining an apprenticeship involved a very competitive process, and it was difficult to secure an apprenticeship placement and as such they all agreed that they had probably applied too late and suggested that schools could have raised awareness of the apprenticeship option earlier so that they could have had a higher chance of successfully securing a place through earlier applications.

Henry (AG) and Terry (AG to Appr) argued that Abbey Gate had a responsibility to provide alternative information sooner, so that they could have applied to an apprenticeship earlier, giving them more chance of success:

GG: So could school have done anything differently? When you were in Year 10, in Year 11?

Henry: I don't know, they probably could have had an assembly for the year when it's the right time saying, I don't know, giving everyone ideas of what they could do, options and stuff, instead of leaving it until the last minute. (Henry, AG)

Without like badmouthing my school they were a bit bad really because they'd just built the sixth form and they had no careers advice really. Usually colleges come in and try and speak to you but they cancelled all of them and just kind of were leaving it so late that it was too late to apply for colleges so I had to kind of do it off my own back. But there were two teachers that helped me with it. (Terry, AG to Appr)

The evidence from the above students and the training provider suggested that apprenticeships were not actively promoted to students, in order to maximise Year

11 retention. Abbey Gate staff confirmed that post-16 options assemblies did occur. Thus, it is argued that some students (Henry, AG and Terry, AG) were not informed of alternative options because the school wanted them to remain in their school for post-16 study. However, specific students were actively assisted in their applications to alternative providers of post-16 education, including apprenticeships, where the school did not consider the student to be suitable for their post-16 provision. Thus, schools actively managed and controlled the IAG and post-16 transition as highlighted previously in the findings section (see page 140). Tim's (AH) experience provided an example of this type of active choice management:

I think the school was mainly just focused on getting your exam results but there was always [pause]. No there was always the work experience, you could always go in there and she would ask if she could help, and she would tell you where apprenticeships were, and she did tell me sites [apprenticeship.org], and she gave a book that I could read up on all the different jobs and stuff, and the average salaries, and just gave me a general information on just a lot of jobs. Because leaving school I didn't really have too much of an idea of what leads to what, I don't now to be fair, but ... but there's always emails from school about apprenticeships, in a lot of different areas [pause] and in school heard about a couple of apprenticeships because I talked to one of the careers counsellors there. ... So no, I think they're quite focused on making you go to Adley House Sixth Form if that's what you want to do, but if you do tell an adviser you want to do an apprenticeship they will help you out as much as they can. (Tim, AH)

When the manager at the apprenticeship provider was asked about accessing schools their underlying message was of a school's power as a gatekeeper and their ability to actively manage information flows, this is in contrast with their legal requirement to provide impartial advice covering all available options for students:

It just depends which school it is really, some schools we have had

problems going into, the high schools people like that who've got a sixth form they seem fine with us, they've always been good with us, but it's some more of the schools that think their students are too academically bright to do an apprenticeship, which you have to be bright to do an apprenticeship, do you know what I mean. It depends which one you're doing, and the ones that are lesser academic, we're there to help them and support them, so it's for everybody. (Apprenticeship Manager, North West training provider)

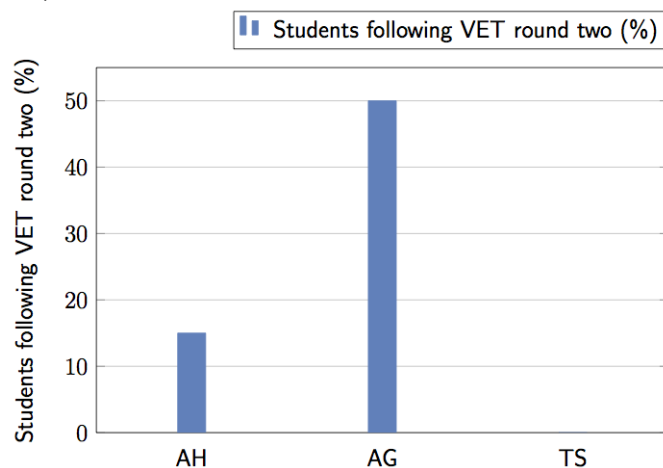
Both of the preceding parts of this apprenticeship section have emphasised how Abbey Gate utilised RPA in order to try and maximise transition to Abbey Gate School Sixth Form and through schools blocking access to and restricting information about apprenticeships, again in order to maximise transition to their own sixth forms. These examples emphasise the practical strategies, including choice management outlined in the previous findings sections, which schools used in order to cope with the competitive post-16 marketplace. The final section of the apprenticeship argument argues that choice management strategies represented an academic and vocational divide which represents wider structural divides and may not be in students' best interests.

### **Academic/vocational divides in choice management**

Schools identified high achieving students and restricted access to vocational options through choice management. Therefore, they re-created social reality of the existing academic/vocational divide which is recognised in the literature (Bazalgette, 1978; Edge Foundation, 2014). The Edge Foundation (2014) went as far as to suggest that up to one quarter of students were prevented from accessing vocational subjects due to their academic label. Evidence from this study also suggests that the transition and guidance system, now exclusively led by schools, aims to actively manage choices for students. However, this may be in the best interests of the institutions, rather than the students. Given IAG has been reported as becoming more ineffective the likelihood for students to receive impartial IAG in order to be able to recognise and



Figure 5.4: Percentage of students following a vocational route during round two (by institution).



challenge recreation of the status quo is arguably reduced.

Wolf (2011) identified perverse incentives whereby schools were using vocational courses to inflate league table positions. They did this by enrolling borderline (C/D) students onto applied and vocational league table equivalent qualifications which students were more likely to pass (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014a), with C+ being the required grade. Too many of these courses did not offer effective learning to progress to employment or FE (Wolf, 2011). The government responded to this by reducing the number of vocational qualifications that could be used in performance tables to include only rigorous ones which provide a broad education and are recognised by employers (BIS, 2013). However, institutions such as Abbey Gate, in this study, were still using applied and vocational qualifications alongside choice management to boost post-16 enrolment due to their under subscribed sixth form position (see Table 5.2 on page 126, Figure 5.4 and the first findings section, page 127).

Therefore, it is argued that some schools were maintaining a socially divided system using choice management techniques, IAG and transition guidance which influenced students' transition into divided routes representing schools' social realities, not those of a student's construction. It has been established that school

sixth forms and colleges can represent a divide between vocational and academic courses (see appendix A on page 241, Hemsley-Brown (1996a, 1999) and Lumby and Foskett (2005b)) and that England operates an academic/vocational divide through a tracked system<sup>7</sup>. It is argued that choices were not 'choices' but students followed different curriculum provision and this carried differences in terms of prestige, student types and life chances (Stables, 1996; Young et al., 1997; Raffae et al., 1998; Shaw, 2007; Atkins, 2016). There is a correlation between schools streaming students into subjects and qualification levels and types reflecting and re-creating social class divisions. Working class students are less likely to take academic subjects and more likely to take practical, vocational ones (Ball, 1981; Abraham, 1995b). Schools are more likely to select academic studies for higher attaining, middle class students (Hemsley-Brown and Foskett, 1999). Middle class students are more likely to distance themselves from vocational courses which have been stigmatised as for 'second best' students (Hemsley-Brown, 1999), vocational education is consistently referred to as 'non-academic' (Hemsley-Brown and Foskett, 1999; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Lumby et al., 2002; Foskett et al., 2004; Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Hayward, 2006; Hoelscher et al., 2008; Atkins, 2010), for low-achieving students and for resit students and thus, vocational routes provide second chances (Bathmaker, 2001, 2005).

In the current study the students did not frame their decision in these terms but in constructing social reality to represent requiring a change of environment for progression to colleges (see page 167), making vocational courses more likely than remaining at a school sixth form which in turn made transition onto academic study more likely (see page 153). These tracks represent wider social, cultural and economic divisions in society where education is representative of societal divisions (Lumby and Foskett, 2005a).

Previous studies have suggested that students who are directed into vocational routes are more likely than academic routes to lead to low paid, less skilled work

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<sup>7</sup>A tracked system has separate tracks, a linked system has similarities across tracks with equivalence, a unified system allows for diversity and does not organise learning by following certain tracks.

(Ball et al., 2000a; Atkins, 2010). Some vocational qualifications, especially lower level ones, have limited returns to the labour market and provide limited progression opportunities to higher educational levels (Keep and Mayhew, 1988, 1999; on 14-19 Reform, 2004; Little and Connor, 2005; Hayward, 2006; Daly and Thomas, 2008; Connor et al., 2006; Jones, 2008; UKCES, 2010; Wolf, 2011; Dolphin, 2014) whereas an established route to HE by higher attainers with middle class backgrounds seeking professional careers, is more likely to exist with academic qualifications (Bamfield, 2013) due to the way that the labour market operates. The competitive situation that existed between post-16 providers created reasons for anti-competitive strategies to be used and this helped to continue these social divisions. Schools are responsible for IAG and this has led to a reduction in impartial IAG which could support students in understanding their position and provide alternative transition information. The evidence section has detailed how schools used strategies to influence students to remain at their own sixth forms. The case of apprenticeships was used to underline the role of choice management in continuing social divisions through institutional types and the vocational/academic divide; this may have life long consequences for students given England's tracked education system.

Torrance et al. (2005) found that although vocational qualifications could lead to progression to higher levels of education and eventually to HE but that this was unlikely to be outside of the broad initial vocational tracks entered into at an early stage. Wolf (1997) noted how it would be irrational for a student to opt for a vocational qualification as general skills need to be demonstrated to employers to prove students would be able to cope with the changes in the nature of employment (see the introductory chapter, page 16). Thus, the importance of early IAG is key, but crucially evidence suggested that the reduction in impartial IAG has led students to be less likely to be provided with impartial information to support their decision and thus their 'choices' may not be in their best interests. It has been argued that decisions at age can 16 have a profound effect on future careers and life chances, that early specialisation may restrict future option availability and are sometimes difficult to reverse because it is difficult to navigate between tracks (Dunford, 1993;

Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1993; Macfarlane, 1993; Young et al., 1997; Foskett et al., 2004; on 14-19 Reform, 2004; Lumby and Foskett, 2005b; Foskett et al., 2008; Young, 2008; Wolf, 2011). This questions the rationale behind schools managing students into vocational education as evidenced above, as it may reproduce and recreate societal divisions as staff place students into courses which they consider will be suitable for them (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001). As such schools may have reproduced the inequalities of the socio-economic environment which may have influenced transition and life chances (Bourdieu, 1986; Foskett et al., 2004, 2008). This also reflects the findings of earlier studies by Ball and Hargreaves (on page 59 and the earlier findings section on page 150). The addition this study makes to the literature is the role that IAG played in this process, as a result of the 2012 changes. The importance of students receiving impartial IAG is highlighted by the final findings section, it argues that schools' influences were sometimes so strong because of the way that students made transition decisions. This is the final part of the argument to be addressed.

## **Student decision-making**

So far the findings and discussion chapter has explored the strategies utilised by schools in order to influence transition and the reasons as to why these strategies were so important for schools when dealing with the competitive post-16 market-place. The final section of the findings and discussion chapter now turns to the ways in which students made their decisions in order to provide further evidence as to why a school's influence on transition was sometimes so strong. The section is divided into six main components. The first four add evidence to argue that schools' control of IAG and transition is of concern due to the students' lack of recognition that information may have been biased and not in their best interests, students presented their choices as being their own decisions, rather than decisions borne out of biased and or controlled IAG, transition strategies and wider structural factors. This section will then emphasise the subliminal bias and control in schools'

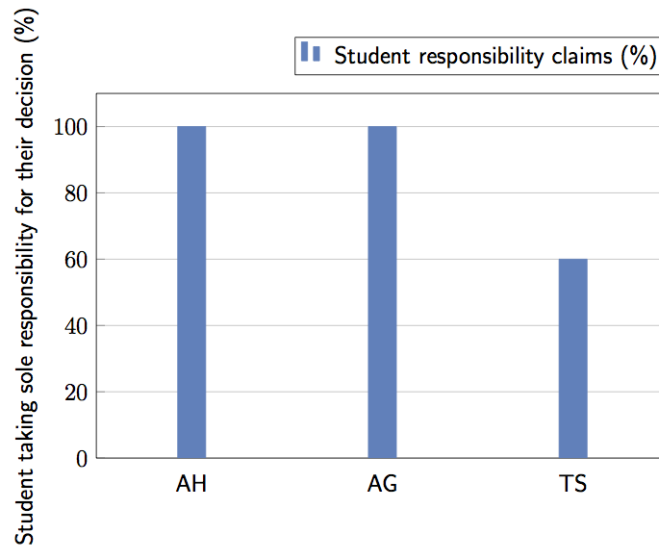
provision of IAG, for some students in this study school control was omnipresent and omnipotent due to the lack of planning carried out by students and the ways in which students made decisions over time. The section then emphasises the similarities between this study's findings and that of the research carried out in the 1990s and 2000s before assessing the possible impact of this type of decision-making on students' futures and finally it returns to the work of Bourdieu and Giddens.

### **A student's decision**

Almost exclusively students presented their transition decision as one that they made themselves. This suggests that the power of schools over decision-making was not recognised by students. Such lack of recognition, or misrecognition, may have meant that students accepted or were influenced by schools as outlined in the second findings section, but they did not question the impact of the strategies on their transition route. All students were asked who was responsible for their transition decision and where they transitioned to, overwhelmingly, students presented the responsibility for their transition decisions as their own. This does not mean that students did not accept or utilise guidance, but they represented the decision as their interpretation of advice which led to the decision being made. Only students at Torhall School accepted that a range of people influenced their decisions, George and Jamal (both TS) reported that it was teachers and parents who helped form transition decisions, and the decision was not only down to themselves. Only one student, Heather (TS), stated that school (teachers) were responsible for her transition decision. Overall, all of the students at Adley House and Abbey Gate considered the decision to be their own, in contrast to only 60% of the students at Torhall (see Figure 5.5 on page 208).

The most important and significant source of IAG was provided by people. Students used and valued face-to-face guidance provided by the people who they knew and trusted, this was more important than all other forms of guidance. Previous research ranks people, parents, siblings and friends as the most important providers of IAG (Fuller et al., 2009), this research supports these findings. However, when

Figure 5.5: Percentage of students taking responsibility for their route (by institution).



asked what the most important form of IAG was, the students themselves often did not recognise the importance of people as sources of IAG. It is suggested that this is because at the time of decision-making it is often difficult to recall and consider the importance of guidance until later reflection, and that these sources of advice were considered obvious and occurred over such a long period of time the advice from parents, peers and students was so internalised that it was not actually considered to be guidance. Furthermore, students sometimes consider the definition of guidance to be specific events aimed at transition and 'people' do not neatly fit into this category<sup>8</sup>.

Hemsley-Brown (1996a); Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (1999, 2001) and Blenkinsop et al. (2006) found that students presented post hoc rationalised decisions that were down to themselves. In reality they suggested that decisions were pragmatically rational, as can be seen in this study. Students were not always acknowledging or recognising influences on their decisions. To some extent this can be considered a psychological protection mechanism to raise self-esteem and self-image as justi-

<sup>8</sup>In retrospect asking the students to define guidance in their interviews would have been prudent to further understand their transition decisions.

fication of their choice to others<sup>9</sup>, masking underlying reasons, such as requiring resits, which limited the transition options available (for Amy, AG for example).

The above discussion suggested that school IAG was powerful as it operated influences which were not fully recognised, or misrecognised, by the students and thus they were not consciously assessed at the time of their influence. Students presentation of the transition decision as one being down to themselves, and transition occurring as a meritocracy, are concerning due to the problem that it ignores other transition influences, such as structural ones, that students could potentially work to negotiate if they had awareness of them. Bourdieu argued that misrecognition occurs when social order is maintained by the actual social process being attributed to other factors (Bourdieu, 1989). Here this could be argued to have occurred when the students accepted a meritocracy rather than them having the resources to be able to recognise structural influences on transition. Society is individualising, choice is represented in policy and rhetoric as an individual act, not one down to structural factors (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992), and hence individuals are being held to account for their own decisions (Beck, 1992). Choice has become the political panacea, and over time the rhetoric and quasi-market policies emphasise that individuals have 'free' choice and self-control over their futures (Hemsley-Brown, 1996a, 1999) (see the literature review, page 52). Students' data supported this rhetoric, however, the positioning of capital is unequal so some students had more resources than others. This means that some students are more likely to be able to make choices that they desire, hence transition is not meritocratic (Ball et al., 2000a). However, the meritocratic argument can be seen to be accepted by students who highlighted themselves as the person responsible for their choices. Therefore, they were the one to blame for unwanted progression effects, rather than wider structural factors which may have influenced their transition. Such lack of recognition of other influences on transition meant that students were less likely to recognise that schools with sixth forms could have had competitive agenda in their transition advice.

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<sup>9</sup>Including for myself as a researcher during interview.

## Loosely coupled decision-making

A second reason why some schools were able to influence transition so strongly was that students reported making decisions about their future without realising the implications of their current decisions on their future options. Future plans were not made at the start of transition. Therefore, it is also possible that this situation reinforced wider structural divisions in society. For the majority of students in the sample decisions regarding subject choices were postponed until students received their grades, for others decisions regarding course types and institution types were taken without researching the full implications of these transition decisions. Students had not researched subject and course choice implications for future entry to HE and employment.

Only one student, Heather (TS), reported how she knew the future education and employment requirements before making decisions at 16, when asked if she knew about any route requirements she replied:

Heather: I looked at the UCAS one to see the course, but for the other career fairs I didn't really bother.

GG: So how did you find the UCAS website?

Heather: Really helpful, like it helped me to know the courses that are out there and which universities would provide them.

GG: Did you use that information before you chose your options in sixth form or afterwards?

Heather: Before.

GG: So let me just check then, so you looked on the UCAS website to look at the kind of course you wanted to do at university and it then told you what you needed to get and if there was any subject specific things you needed, and then you made your options based on that?

Heather: Yeah, I knew that I wanted to do that, but I just looked up courses with subjects that I wanted to take really, just to know what was out there.



All other students in the sample were unable to confirm that their future options were realistic due to a lack of information. For many this was because future employment opportunities were too far in the future to be considered meaningfully. Broad HE expectations however, were more concrete. Therefore, it is possible that students ended up on routes that did not fully prepare them for the future routes which students expected to be able to progress to, due to progression prerequisites not being fulfilled as a result of earlier decisions. This could have occurred without students realising, and this may have been due to controlled options or biased IAG received by students as evidenced in the previous findings section. Although many additional factors impacted on transition, in addition to schools' IAG, a lack of planning is one factor which may have, as a result of IAG changes, exaggerated the effects of the IAG changes themselves, especially for students without capitals.

It is widely reported in the literature that choices in school are rarely linked to achieving career aspirations and so students follow routes that may not lead to their aspirations. Students need IAG and maturity (Cockett, 1996; Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Atherton et al., 2009) in order to be able to make better decisions earlier in schools. It is recognised that even with improved IAG some students may need to become more mature in order to recognise the value of the information in order for it to be meaningfully used for decision-making. It is also recognised that futures were pragmatically rational, the concern here is that students may have had routes closed to them based on their previous choices, and if the students knew additional information earlier, through impartial IAG for example, their choices may have been altered to keep more future routes available.

A key finding which underlines the concern over the lack of recognition of influences on transition and their effects combined with a lack of planning is that students made decisions in a loosely coupled manner. As with the previous point this had the potential for students to be influenced without recognising the future implications on their transition and therefore the effects of transition influences, including structural ones being compounded and re-created. Students did not adequately plan for their futures, they made decisions at transition points defined by

schools and collected evidence to confirm the suitability of their route post hoc. Students made decisions based on their next life stage and rarely considered how these decisions may have impacted on their future routes. Therefore, they did not see the options process at ages 14, 16, 18 as a continuous move towards achieving desired future employment but instead as a series of isolated decision-making processes at ages 14 then 16 and then 18 which would lead to a 'good job' and economic security from such employment which would be achieved in the meritocracy.

Decisions were loosely coupled, at age 14 (for GCSEs or equivalent), at 16 (for post-16 A levels or equivalent) and at 18 for employment and HE. It was common for students to consider their future to be so abstract and removed from their current decision to think about, for example, employment at age 14. Therefore, loosely coupled decision-making is defined as when a student makes transition decisions concerning education and training over an extended period of time in such a way that the dependence between the decisions is not assessed with full knowledge when a prior decision is taken. Students choices were therefore incremental in nature, appearing as a series of smaller decisions committing to a particular course over time, students were not aware of all outcomes at the start of their decision-making. It is recognised that it is difficult for students to have a long term view to enable optimal, economically rational decision-making (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Lumby and Foskett, 2005b). However, Ball et al. (2000a) and Davies and Tedder (2003) found that futures were vague and students postponed decision-making. Students were waiting for things to happen, rather than making joined up decisions. They based decisions on short term to medium term and immediately available opportunities due to the constraints of their horizons for action which were based on their social and financially resourced position and their nave narrative of future opportunities. From this position the above decision-making strategies would not have enabled social change to occur. Although it is recognised that economically rational decision-making is not achievable or representative of student decision-making; instead decisions were pragmatically rational (see the literature review pages 52 and 60). However, an increased awareness of future options could

have helped to mitigate the influence of schools and other structural transition factors on students' transition. Carla (TS to East to TS) reflected on this situation in her second round interview:

GG: So have you got an opinion on how important or not the options are in Year 9 and then Year 11?

Carla: Yeah, I bet if you took some GCSEs in Years 10 and 11 and wanted to take different ones at Year 12 and 13 as A levels it's very hard so I think you should think carefully about what you're going to take at Year 9.

GG: And did you know that in Year 9?

Carla: We did know it but we didn't take it into much consideration because we didn't think it was that important.

GG: And why do you think that was?

Carla: I don't think I was aware of how important GCSEs were to be honest.

### **Ending the transition decision**

A third reason why the aforementioned school control activities could be so successful due to the way that students made decisions was because once students had made a decision to stay at an institution they were less likely to seek further IAG or consider alternative institutions. This is once again a demonstration of students' trust placed in schools (if they aligned to the profile of a school sixth form student) and process control as students did not see the need to seek alternative IAG. For students at Torhall School, who received a lot of support, they were very clear on the reasons for not requiring further information, they received the information that they required from their school. Thus, it is in an institution's interests to provide early IAG in order to increase the chances of them progressing the maximum number of students from Year 11 into their sixth form, this demonstrated choice inertia where one choice stops another being considered (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001).

Students from all sample schools made reference to this situation:

GG: And what other options would you have had?

Damian (AG): Like other colleges?

GG: Yes.

Damian: I don't really know, I didn't apply to anywhere else, I just applied here and then as soon as I got the place that was it.

Max (AH to CCN): I know they had an evening of things going on like what you could actually do in the future, and they had the sixth form evening as well to see what you could do at sixth form. But like I'd already decided before that what I wanted to do, I'd probably decided in like Year 10 what I decided I wanted to do.

GG: And so you didn't go to either?

Max: Not really, I was definitely set on CCN.

Heather (TS): They just gave us like a letter about a careers fair that we would attend outside of school, so that was it really.

GG: And did you go?

Heather: No. (laughs)

GG: Why was that?

Heather: I think by then I'd already made up my mind so I didn't really see the point in it.

Thus, for an institution that is able to control the timing of options, through early transition activities outline in the previous findings section (page 135), they were likely to have had the advantage of stopping students seeking alternative post-16 plans, this potentially meant that the pre-16 school benefited from the students' attendance, through locking the students into an early decision to remain. Whereas students may have been able to find alternative provision which more suited their needs elsewhere if they had continued to explore alternative options. Furthermore,

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (1999) suggested that students seek information based on decisions demanded (existing choices) not to expand the complexity or number of choices and as such ignore alternative information restricting the impact of IAG's effectiveness. The above evidence from this study supports this view.

Holman (2014) outlined how IAG includes both push factors (from school) and pull factors (from employers), and argue that pull factors are as important as push factors. Their report set out career guidance benchmarks to enable both pull and push factors to be catered for. However, they found that no school met more than two thirds of the benchmarks in their research. Evidence from this study would support their findings that students saw decisions as being led by schools (pushing students into making their decisions in a directive manner), rather than schools supporting students being pulled by long term career factors fuelled by links to employers. Ofsted (2013) emphasised that in three quarters of inspected schools IAG was focused on pushing students into current short term study options, rather than linking current decisions to future careers and the pull of employment. Blenkinsop et al. (2006) found that young people did not have the necessary skills for decision-making because IAG focused on outcomes rather than processes, this is evidenced by the short term, push decision-making processes focused on currently available options.

Thus, decisions were unlikely to be fully informed ones that supported social mobility by opening students' eyes to a range of possible careers, as Holman's report called for in 2014. Instead the decisions were more likely to maintain the status quo and structural disadvantages by matching students to existing and previous realities, continuing these realities unchallenged for the future because of the way that student decision-making was carried out. Influences on decisions were not recognised by students, futures were planned without knowledge of how to achieve future employment goals and as such decisions were loosely coupled over time. Therefore, decisions may not have been in the best interests of students as the decisions were influenced by schools' own interests and wider structural factors which the 2012 IAG have helped to support, rather than challenge.

## **Backup plans**

One final indicator of the possible strength of the strategies used by schools in order to maximise Year 11 transition to their own sixth form was demonstrated by the number of students who did not have a backup plan when they planned to remain at their own school's sixth form.

For students who decided that they were going to attend their school sixth form, and had gained a place, students did not consider that they required a backup plan and were only considering this if they did not eventually achieve the grades for entry to their intended institution, or were worried about not doing so. Thus, if students had already achieved a place they were less likely to actively consider alternative post-16 institutions. Therefore, schools actively encouraged early application (see page 135) and had the aforementioned strategies to maximise making students offers (see page 138) in order to reinforce a school's position in the market through maximising their Year 11 student retention. This position demonstrated the effectiveness of school transition control strategies, at maximising transition from schools to sixth forms. All students who considered staying at their own sixth form did not report considering backups, specifically demonstrating the trust and control of schools.

## **Pragmatically rational decision-making remains in the current context**

This section uses research from the 1990s and 2000s, to draw similarities between the findings of the previous literature outlined in the literature review and the current study. Overall, there is corroboratory research spanning twenty years describing similar types of decision makers, what has changed in this time is the context in which the decisions are made.

Macrae et al. (1996) and Macrae et al. (1997b) provided an illuminative study which tracked students over two years. They followed Year 11 students at a pupil referral unit and comprehensive school. They concluded that students often fell

into four categories, “outsiders”, “hangers-in”, “notional and pragmatic acceptors” and “embedded” students (Macrae et al., 1997b, p. 501). The “outsiders” opted out of formal education at the earliest opportunity and the school experience was a bad experience for these students, which they wanted to escape. The “hangers-in” were low achievers who would rather have been in employment. They were easily influenced by teachers, peers and advisors. The “acceptors” contained the largest proportion of their sample, these students recognised the need to gain qualifications. They further stratified this group into “notional acceptors” who believed turning up would enable education to happen by osmosis, and “pragmatic acceptors” who were prepared to take on a further two years of post-16 education and would then seek employment, further study was taken to improve their employment prospects, something to get through as a means to an end. Embedded students actively chose to stay on in education (Macrae et al., 1996), and they were more likely to be from middle class homes with professional parents. They had considered a wide range of options and researched their choices through visits and their career aspirations were well developed and the majority progressed to HE (Macrae et al., 1997a).

The majority of students in the current study would fall into the category described by Macrae et al. (1997b, p. 506) as “pragmatic acceptors”. The students accepted that education was required to increase their chances of employment success and they collected credentials. Blenkinsop et al. (2006, p. 75) described these students as “short term conformist” where students were pushed or had accepted the educational rhetoric without aspiring to certain long term goals and their next steps were taken without clarity on where their steps would take them.

A small number of sampled students would fall into the “embedded” (Macrae et al., 1997b, p. 506) learner category whereby education was considered to be an integral part of their career and life plans, for example Leena (AG), Alfie (AH) and academic students at Torhall School.

Macrae et al. (1996, p. 38) identified “active choosers” (or “decided planners” (Blenkinsop et al., 2006, p. 77)) as students who were rational decision makers. These students made ‘ideal’, careful choices through being well informed and they

visited a number of different institutions and collected a wide variety of information before they made their choice. This decision-making approach was not found in the current study. Instead students did hold ambitions for future career plans but these plans changed over time as understanding developed and become clearer over time (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Blenkinsop et al., 2006) (see the evidence log of changes over time for the students in this study in appendix L on page 289).

Vocational students in the current study were more likely to fall between the “embedded” and “choice-avoider” (Macrae et al., 1997b, p. 504) categories, they accepted the need for education but also delayed choices through indecisiveness. Remaining in education was a way of postponing decision-making which students may not have felt ready to make, it bought time, this represents previous findings by Payne (2003); Lumby and Foskett (2005b); Beck et al. (2006); Slane (2013). This situation could represent a lack of confidence and this finding is similar to that reported in Macrae et al. (1996) and Blenkinsop et al. (2006) who found some students to be narrow minded and some held a bounded assessment of options based on insufficient information available at the time.

Thus, there is a role for IAG in keeping students properly informed about all available options. Overall, choice was based on information from a limited range of powerful sources, schools and external sources, which bounded a student's habitus from which pragmatically rational decisions were then taken (see the literature review page 62).

### **Possible impact on future transition and careers**

This section highlights the importance of the findings, in doing so it returns to the arguments outlined in the literature review. Students' loosely coupled decision-making demonstrated that they rarely planned to achieve specific employment goals. Students also gave reasons for their choices based on future study requirements rather than for specific career entry and for this reason it was common for students to cite 'to keep options open' as a reason for a course choice. Blenkinsop et al. (2006) and Hughes and Gratton (2009) emphasised how younger students (especially) may



not link IAG and current decisions to their futures. Therefore, the links need to be made more explicit by schools. Future First (2011) evidenced that it was common for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to be exposed to a limited number of occupational roles. Where specific jobs were mentioned these were careers such as the armed services, law enforcement, teaching, accounting and construction work. These roles are visible and are tangible jobs that most students would be aware of. This represents a very limited awareness of the full range of possible occupations, and one that is limited to those seen in students' daily lives (Ofsted, 2013; FreshMinds, 2014), specific job requirements were also likely to be unknown (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1997, 1999, 2001; Kintrea et al., 2011).

Hence, greater IAG is required to expose students to a wider range of careers (Kintrea et al., 2011). The number of possible careers is vast and career guidance to support these is not sufficient (Slane, 2013). As such it is important for careers advice to improve the early linking of employer's pull factors to decision-making, and this has not been supported by positioning schools to be in control IAG, as school's push factors have been shown to be dominant. This study's evidence has established that the decisions for the sample students were short term and focusing on immediate transition, the future was too abstract and far removed from current reality, it may be that pull factor IAG was considered to be too abstract to be of current use for students for this reason (FreshMinds, 2014). Nevertheless employer pull involvement is still an important part of IAG and it can lead to social mobility through challenging the status quo (ibid).

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to have access to the same career information that those from higher socio-economic backgrounds have access to due to a lack of capital access and so they may be disadvantaged in preparing for employment competition (Penn, 1986; Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008). Kintrea et al. (2011) emphasised that lower socio-economic students were more likely not to know what they were required to do in order to achieve their aspirations, students with access to resources (such as professional parents) were more likely to have the knowledge of educational pathways which would lead them to

achieving their employment ambitions. Lower socio-economically resourced students were also more likely to think that deferred gratification of a future career after years of education is too uncertain and there is also an opportunity cost between education and income generation (Gambetta, 1987). As a result of a lack of capitals these students may rely on a school's 'push' information and this may misrepresent reality through supporting their institutional needs. Thus, students may draw a cognitive map of employers and educational institutions which they consider are acceptable to attend in order to make transition decisions but these maps are based on existing, structured social realities (Ball, 2003a).

This situation occurs with post-16 decisions as the future is abstract and represents a risk and as such the students are more likely to rely on deferring decisions to later stages, by focusing on known careers or by utilising grapevine knowledge to follow the options outlined as available by the school at the time of transition. This process increases the likelihood of following an existing structured social reality. Horizons for action act as mental short-cuts to process the transition information and this is formed over time in a specific environment. Thus, students' decisions were pragmatically rational and may have been in the interests of the school, and middle classes rather than the students' futures through the creation of social reality which was more likely to reflect the status quo through the use of the aforementioned school strategies. This findings chapter has argued that schools provided trusted help and support in order to make to make abstract and complex transition choices easier and this may have increased the power of the school as they operated choice management which was shown, at times to reflect existing socially constructed tracks between institutions and academic and vocational education.

Therefore, the 2012 changes to IAG have made it more likely for the schools to be able to act in their own interests using their legitimate IAG power, the legal responsibility to provide IAG, which is not scrutinised by an outside agency (other than partially by Ofsted). This situation has led to the practical management and social construction of reality strategies which may have acted in the interests of schools to be maintained or increased and at the same time these could have rein-

forced middle class dominance through the social construction of students' reality being influenced by schools and wider societal structures. This situation is unlikely to have been questioned by students due to the legitimate (misrecognised) role schools played in helpfully providing IAG to mitigate the transition risks for students, the trust students place with school staff and the acceptance of a meritocracy when making practically rational decisions. The result of the 2012 policy therefore, rather than supporting social change via agency in students' decision-making, could have reinforced the continuation of existing social reality and structural divisions in society. Therefore, there is little evidence of the possibility of structures being transformed by social practices (Giddens, 1979) given the schools' influences on transition which reflected schools' roles in education as a symbolic force through pedagogic action (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). There is a concern that, for some students, this may have resulted in future transition options and social mobility being blocked, or made harder to achieve due to transitions meeting the needs of institutions rather than students.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has identified and explored the ways in which schools utilised control over their pre-existing Year 11 students during transition to post-16 institutions, specifically through practical controls over access, restricting information, processing and tracking of applications, providing guidance, timetabling compulsory transition events and social construction of reality strategies which created a culture of teaching quality through marketing messages surrounding teaching support, the number of contact hours and competitor colleges ethos. Some students were aware of these strategies, others were not. Overall, it was suggested that students lacked the ability to be able to assess the impartiality of these messages and the NCS website provided limited opportunities to mitigate schools' biases despite the government's claims. The chapter then argued how successful schools' transition management could be due to the way that students made decisions. Finally it drew on concepts

from the work of Bourdieu and Giddens to suggest possible future implications of this situation for students.

The literature review presented evidence to claim that changes in IAG brought in by the previous coalition government reduced impartial IAG given to students. The findings of this study have reinforced the notion that impartial IAG is not always provided by schools who have been made solely responsible for providing it. The aforementioned strategies managed students transition within schools, these events aimed to increase control and transition to Year 11. Many of the practices were scheduled each year to ensure student transition is maximised annually, a deliberate, designed and replicable strategy. There was limited involvement by external career advisors and provision of IAG beyond the control of school despite the legal requirement for schools to provide this to students.

Schools were given the flexibility to design careers guidance in order to support the individual needs of their students (Ofsted, 2013). Ofsted (2013) emphasised that this should be focused on long term skill development so that students can manage their careers over their lifetime. However, evidence from this study suggests that schools were micromanaging change, such as during guidance interviews, and providing information, giving closed choices or managing out students (this represents no choice). It was suggested that this was not developing life long career management skills which is the ethos behind career guidance as emphasised by Ofsted (2013). In this sense IAG could be seen as being "directive" (Watts and Kidd, 2000, p. 490) as it focused on an assessment of a student's potential and gave specific advice which matched students to existing opportunities. These school practices, were made more likely following the 2012 IAG changes and the competitive post-16 environment. Thus, they are enabling students' transition and choice to replicate existing labour market opportunities, social and structural stratification by social class, gender, race, ethnicity (Bates, 1985). As such newer guidance models advocate developing "career capital" in students which would enable students to understand and cope with changes in their careers throughout their lives (Watts and Kidd, 2000, p. 497). However, it is argued that school controlled IAG has

not enabled such a long term view to be developed. Instead transition IAG focused on short term choice management; this may have been in the best interests of the schools given their competitive situation, and not the students. This situation is compounded by the way that students made their decisions, evidence demonstrated how students lacked the skills, confidence and knowledge to plan their transition route. Instead choices were made in a loosely coupled and pragmatically rational manner which meant that choices were more likely to support schools' short term choice management control than the needs of students.

The 2015 general election returned a Conservative majority. IAG policy has not changed since the coalition government placed schools in control of IAG in 2012. In 1991 Watts explored the impact of the previous Conservative guidance policies from the Thatcher era (1979-1990). He argued that the Conservative political influence led to guidance being used as a form of social control. It is argued here that the more recent 2012 IAG policy has also led to the same outcome. Fundamentally, school staff and students did not differentiate between marketing, promotion and IAG. This represented a conflict of interest and lack of impartiality. Placing IAG control with schools, although with varying levels of success, has enabled the schools to act in their own interests. There is little evidence of independent IAG occurring, contravening statutory guidance which dictates that:

Independent [guidance] is defined as external to the school. Schools can retain any in-house arrangements but should supplement them with external sources of careers guidance - which could include an external careers provider, employer visits, mentoring, websites and telephone helpline access. Taken together, these external sources should include information on the full range of education and training options, including apprenticeships. (DfE, 2013, p. 6)

However, given the market forces, competition between institution types and the need to maximise funding individualistic, short term competitive reasons biased the guidance provided by schools for their own interests and not that of students.

These competitive reasons therefore form the basis of the background environment in the conceptual framework which visually demonstrates the findings concerning students' transition to post-16 education (see Figure 5.6 on page 226).

Access to IAG was not universal, which is implied in a free market and decentralised approach (Watts, 1991), as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to lack the resources to be able to navigate the post-16 transition marketplace successfully. This forms part of the base in which decisions are made from in the framework. Thus, Watts and Kidd (2000) emphasised how IAG is not always positive as dysfunctional guidance can be provided from ineffective power relationships, in the case of this study, through schools holding power over the students hence school power forms the second base underpinning transition in the framework. Hughes and Gration (2009) explored how the impact of IAG depended on school type, organisation, available careers programme, socio-economic school status, school leadership, ethos/culture, teacher influence, and curriculum. This research has presented more recent evidence presenting a continuum of control from Torhall School (strong control) to Abbey Gate (weaker control), this continuum is represented in the framework.

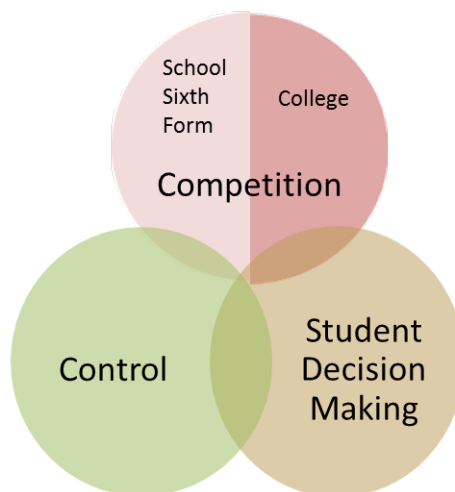
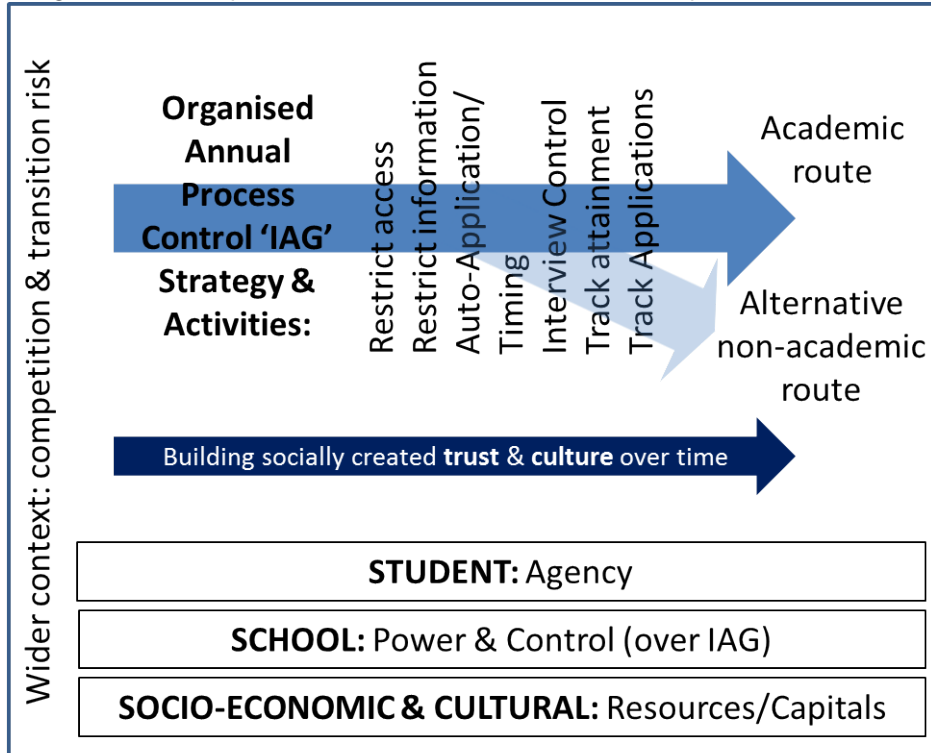
This chapter has therefore contributed evidence to the literature regarding the ways that schools influence transition in practice using strategically organised IAG activities. These are represented in the framework as an arrow representing influence over time. The framework represents school control over transition that was found to occur through practical and social construction of reality strategies and these were supported by socially created and cultural messages and trust; together these factors made school IAG and transition processes effective at maximising transition to post-16 institutions in many cases. The findings emphasised how the socially constructed notions of trust were developed in order to cope with transition risks. Hence, risk is a component of the wider context surrounding transition. The resultant impact of transition influences led to students being differentiated in their approaches to transition, this is represented in the framework by the arrow providing

alternative information to students who did not meet dominant academic profiles<sup>10</sup>. The final part of the argument explored the ways in which students made decisions, this forms the third base which supports decision-making in the framework. Overall, this findings section has explored three key themes of students' post-16 transition, competition, control and student decision-making, these are emphasised in the conceptual framework. The literature review explained how IAG is not a panacea for overcoming these issues but it has the potential to help ameliorate some of the issues through increasing understanding which is more likely to lead to action for positive social change. However, the findings of this study emphasised that IAG does not currently help to support students' transitions due to the 2012 policy change which located the responsibility for IAG with schools.

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<sup>10</sup>It is recognised that the process is simplified in the visual representation provided in Figure 5.6 (page 226). In reality the transition process is found to be more complex at the level of a student, the literature review explored this notion in detail.

Figure 5.6: Conceptual Framework: students' transition to post-16 education.





## Chapter 6

# Conclusion

This concluding chapter contains four sections. It emphasises the findings of this thesis and explains the contribution which it makes to the literature on IAG, post-16 transition and decision-making. Following this it highlights implications from the findings for institutional competition and IAG. Limitations of the study and finally suggestions for further research are then outlined.

### **The contribution: schools' control in post-16 transition**

The purpose of this section of the conclusion is to emphasise the overall argument of this thesis. This thesis aimed to explore the themes of choice and control in transition to post-16 education in three schools using evidence from staff, students, statistics and documentation. It has re-applied some of the work of Bloomer, Hodgkinson, Foskett, Maguire, Hemsley-Brown, Macrae, Gewirtz and Ball which took place during the 1990s and 2000s. This period was when the body of literature on choice, transition and decision-making was formed. Since this formation the context of post-16 education has changed, hence why it was important to re-apply some of the work in order to contribute a more current understanding of choice, transition and decision-making to the literature. In doing so this thesis has joined together

aspects from the literature concerning transition, choice and decision-making with IAG.

The post-16 marketplace is now more competitive, the number of choices available to young people has increased the risk associated with transition. Some students are required to remain in education or training longer than was previously required due to RPA which means that more students will be affected by this situation. However, young people are not as well supported in their transition due to changes in the provision of IAG. Schools are now responsible for IAG and have limited, or no support in its provision due to the policy changes. The competitive marketplace means institutions want to protect their own interests in the provision of IAG. In the 1990s and 2000s local education authorities had a much greater role in supporting schools provision of effective and impartial IAG.

The following research questions led on from the literature review. These questions are now returned to and the major findings for each are presented.

**Research Question 1: How does the sampled group of students see and understand their transition paths from Year 11 to post-16 study?**

The findings of the study revealed that the sampled students considered transition to post-16 education or training<sup>1</sup> and then HE as necessary steps to maximise their chances of securing a successful career. Students accepted the meritocratic rhetoric of educational success protecting themselves against individual risks of the current educational and employment contexts.

Beyond this the majority of students were not found to have effectively planned for their futures. Decisions regarding their future choices were postponed and taken without the full implications of their route being understood. The concern here is that students may have acted differently in the way that they made their decisions if the future implications of their chosen route were understood earlier. Crucially decisions were loosely coupled, taken incrementally at each phase in education rather than as joined up decisions which led towards an employment goal. Students' un-

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<sup>1</sup>At the time remaining in post-16 education or training was not compulsory.

derstandings of the transition processes and paths were led by schools' management of the choice processes. Confirmation of the suitability of plans occurred post hoc, critically this was too late for changes to be implemented if the suitability of a plan was not confirmed. Backup plans were not created by the majority of students.

When aged 15 and 16 it is recognised that it is difficult for this planning to occur and that students may not have the levels of maturity or skills in order to plan in such a way but I argue that such low levels of awareness and realisation of the other factors that affect decision-making could impact on students' transition and future life chances.

### **Research Question 2: How are these paths negotiated into choices?**

The findings highlighted how fundamentally students saw their choices as their own decisions. For some students misrecognition occurred when they apportioned personal responsibility for decisions that were influenced by other structural factors which the students did not recognise. This occurred because students reported that they were responsible for their own transition decision, only a few students recognised the parts that other social actors and structures played on their transition. Importantly bias in marketing and IAG was rarely recognised as occurring by students. This is concerning given that schools did not differentiate between marketing, recruitment, selection and IAG; the former were explicitly designed for biasing recruitment in a competitive marketplace. This misrecognition supported the sometimes powerful level of influence schools achieved over transition and made such power less likely to be challenged.

Once a decision was taken the students were less likely to seek alternative information or options and the way that schools provided transition support mechanisms was helpful to the students in the way that this enabled navigation of the risky post-16 transition decisions. Overwhelmingly students trusted school staff and wanted their help to explore the complex and risk filled post-16 transition decision which was abstract, confusing at times and contained a huge number of possibilities that needed to be explored before a decision was taken.

Students negotiated their 'choice' to match their social position, the students' construction of social reality was created by, led to or reflected differentiated positions created by the schools marketing and IAG. For example, whether it was best to stay at a school sixth form or move to a college in order to 'fit in' and these cultural understandings also represented vocational and academic divisions. Overall decisions were found to be pragmatically rational and constrained by students' horizons for action which helped to re-create existing social realities and divisions.

**Research Question 3: What information and guidance does this group of students use? Does this differ between schools?**

Fundamentally people were the sources of IAG required by students in order to make their post-16 transition decisions. The majority of students lacked the skills required to be able to access and interpret IAG so they relied on information from informal grapevines.

Students were unable to interpret the biased information provided by schools in marketing communications, such as information concerning pass rates. This impacted on the social reality which students created surrounding the success of institutions which they progressed to, their realities were not always reflective of the official reality when assessing academic pass rates for example.

Students also lacked the information search and processing skills to be able to effectively use the internet to support IAG, which presented an overwhelming and mainly impenetrable source of information which was therefore of limited use to students. Crucially schools provided the short term answers to decisions rather than the support required to navigate IAG provided outside of the school. As students trusted teachers they were happy to accept this help in the risky transition period and this situation supported schools' control of IAG.

**Research Question 4: What is the influence of schools on the transition of the sampled students? Does this influence differ between schools?**

The coalition government's IAG policy shifted IAG control to become the sole re-

sponsibility of schools. This move enabled biased IAG to be used more effectively by schools to support the needs of their institutions using transition influencing strategies under the guise of IAG in order to compete in the post-16 marketplace. This move has been unabated due to weak IAG accountability measures. However, the influence of a school on the transition of students was shown to depend on the specific institutional context. Torhall School was able to influence transition much more powerfully than Abbey Gate. Critically the way that students made decisions balanced the power of transitions towards the interests of schools instead of the students' futures.

Using IAG strategies schools were able to use their role in providing IAG as a device which enabled them to act as agents of social control. Control was often hidden by the social influence created through the establishment of trusting relationships built between students and teachers which aided students when they were navigating the 'risky' post-16 transition phase. This was especially the case for students who lacked the capitals required to support decision-making. However, instead of assisting students in transition, this paradoxically made students more likely to represent existing social realities but this was not questioned by students. 'Choices' were differentiated via academic and vocational courses but these divisions also represented institutional specialisation. Students' decision-making was heavily influenced by cultural normalisation of remaining at a school sixth form for academic support or requiring an adult environment and thus choosing to leave a school. However, this 'choice' was pro-actively supported by schools in order to maximise the success of their sixth form by managing out less academic students who did not meet their student profiles or by maximising the likelihood of students who did meet their sixth form student profile by emphasising the academic success of the sixth form and practically managing the transition process to restrict information and manage student sixth form applications.

This situation is more likely to have promoted middle class educational advantages as schools acted to promote and protect academic success and thus lead to re-creating the structural status quo in society.

The observed academic and vocational labelling and streaming process represented class divisions in society and they have the potential to have lifelong consequences for the students because it is hard to move between vocational and academic routes. Furthermore, vocational students are less likely to attend HE, but HE is becoming the norm and a requirement for securing a wide range of employment opportunities. Therefore, early specialisation on vocational courses may polarise students from education and employment opportunities in comparison to students on academic courses which are more directly linked to HE progression and opening up access to future employment opportunities. This is being supported by the Conservative policy which continued to allow schools to control IAG for their own (academic/middle class) interests and through the support of academic subjects in policy. Whereas the impact of school controlled IAG and transition activities may be limited for the middle classes as they are more likely to be able to access the social, financial and cultural resources to be able to maintain effective transition decisions, for their interests and aspirations. Those with limited access to resources are more reliant on school provided and biased IAG which would impact on their transition, reflect existing social realities and structural divisions in society. Such influence may have led to choices which were imperfectly positioned for lower socio-economic students.

Overall, the specific and important contributions of this thesis firstly concern the way that the findings linked the more recent changes in IAG to previous research on decision-making which led to the two research areas being combined and updated, and secondly concern the additional knowledge which this study adds to the previous literature on IAG surrounding the practical ways that schools influence post-16 transition, the effects of which have increased as a result of schools' control of IAG and due to the schools thus being able to act to support their competitive needs rather than the needs of students. It is argued that this situation will increasingly lead to imperfect transition for students which continues the structural status quo rather than IAG leading to support social change for students. Operationally this influence occurred in practice when schools provided ineffective, limited, controlled

or biased IAG transition, and marketing practices in order to support their own interests. These practices were compounded by the limited accountability structure available to counter them. It is this understanding of how schools carried out IAG strategies and activities in practice which contributes towards extending the previous literature on IAG, choice, decision-making and transition at age 16 because this understanding is not covered in previous larger studies of transition and IAG as they focused on providing a more representative picture of *what* occurred, not *how* it occurred.

These findings these hold important implications for students transition, especially when students rely on school IAG due to a lack of capitals.

## **Current implications**

This section locates this thesis in time and argues that themes from the study's findings remain relevant. It draws implications from the findings for competition between institutions and supporting student transition for the future. At the time of writing the IAG policy has remained following its introduction in 2012 and other changes in education since the 2000s remain current (see page 6). Competition between institutions for post-16 students is a particular issue (see page 6) and this is set against the wider context of the current government's focus on protecting academic qualifications and the divide that this represents (Fuller and Unwin, 2011; Hodgson and Spours, 2011a) (see page 12).

## **Institutional competition**

The focus of the current study related to the changes in IAG and the role of schools in post-16 transition, the first part of the literature review presented how schools play a key role in the provision of IAG. The literature review emphasised that schools with sixth forms were more likely to bias IAG in order to maximise their competitive position through IAG control. In this study institutional pressure existed for teachers to encourage students to remain at their own sixth forms. School management

channelled students into sixth forms through strategies aimed at maintaining the image and position of the institution, which may not have reflected the needs of the students, there is no pressure to do this with schools without a sixth form. The competitive marketplace is entrenched in the political environment and is unlikely to change in the near future. Thus, there are implications for school leaders in balancing competition and collaboration.

An assumed implication for school leaders would be to mitigate competition through post-16 institutional differentiation and specialisation, and thus enable effective IAG provision via collaboration with other institutions who offer alternative provision as they would no longer directly compete for the same students. Students would then be able to receive full guidance on all the available options and the impact of certain routes chosen would be able to be provided to all students so that they would be able to follow quality, specialist courses once they have progressed to post-16 education and training. This implication, however, is not easily compatible with the competitive situation which currently exists in education and the financial pressure for institutions to maximise enrolment as specialisation may not lead to this being achieved; this has implications for supporting students' IAG.

### **Supporting students' IAG**

Following the 2012 changes the government argued that the NCS' online resources would help to mitigate any reduction in IAG provided by schools. However, findings suggested that students were often ill-equipped with the skills required to make effective use of the information contained on the internet and that they were more likely to be focused on gaining support from people who they trusted using informal, rather than formal advice (see page 177). This situation is compounded by the loosely coupled way that students made decisions and the lack of recognition of any bias in IAG that they received. Thus, evidence from this study would suggest that the government's policy is of limited benefit to students as IAG provision is reduced. Therefore, for professionals supporting IAG a focus should exist on building students' information search and interpretation skills which will build their decision-making



capacity, supporting students' effective use of a wide range of information sources to mitigate reductions in formally provided IAG. This will support transition at 16 and beyond taking into account the changing nature of employment and the likelihood of students experiencing multiple transitions during employment (see page 16).

A second implication relates to empowering students with the capacity to be able to understand the context of the transition situation which they are in. This includes an understanding of structural influences. The study argued that powerful school controls impacted on students' transitions and this helped to re-create structural divisions in society which remained unrecognised by students due to the understanding by many that their position was of their own making. Thus, students require more IAG in order to understand their situation which may result in students becoming empowered. IAG is especially important for students who lack the cultural capital, knowledge or experience to support decision-making. Empowering students with knowledge is one way which will help to counter a lack of resources or middle class advantages such as cultural or financial capital. Raising students' awareness of structural constraints will therefore make it more likely that students will be able to challenge the status quo. Findings from this study emphasised how England's tracked system still reproduces existing social realities which represent wider social positions and resources. However, there is the possibility that empowering agency will enable social change to occur during reproduction.

Thus, implications exist for IAG professionals in raising awareness of decision-making and structural factors which impact on transition in order to mitigate any lack of capitals. Helping students to create strategies which will help to challenge structural constraints include providing a range of effective and impartial IAG to raise awareness of social actors' positions, the structural influences on transition and of the variety of options available along with the potential impact of following certain routes on future options. This will also help to support increasing self-confidence and self-esteem which some students lacked in this study. Although not a panacea, impartial and effective IAG will play a role in raising awareness and promoting effective decision-making in transition, helping to support positive social

change.

### **Implications from contemporary literature**

The area of young peoples transitions is still under researched; however some contemporary literature has emerged more recently which is helpful to assist in interpreting the findings. This literature is the focus of this section of the conclusion. Although the broad arguments remain, subtle changes exist in the context of policy rhetoric, employer demands, globalisation, apprenticeships, austerity, higher education and the labour market. These areas are outlined alongside their implications on the findings of this study.

Ainley (2014) and Avis (2014) argue that policy rhetoric still follows the notion of employers demanding high skills for competitiveness in the knowledge economy through assumptions contained in the human capital argument. This is despite strong evidence of insecure, low wage and low skills employment existing in the labour market following the effects of the 2008 economic crisis (Atkins, 2016). The security of traditional Fordism through secure employment is not present in the contemporary labour market (Roberts, 2013; Avis, 2015). The implications for students is that they accept the need to remain in education for increasing amounts of time in order to secure credentials to enter employment (Allen and Ainley, 2013) and this belief is reflected in the findings of this study.

Specific employment issues exist for young people. The service industry has now replaced the manufacturing sector which traditionally provided employment opportunities for young people (especially males) (Allen and Ainley, 2012, 2013, 2014a; Allen, 2016) and increasingly companies use technology which has increased productivity through replacing people especially in manufacturing businesses (Allen and Ainley, 2013; Ford, 2015). Post-recession employers were more likely to recruit older and more experienced applicants who did not require training to carry out job roles (Allen, 2015). Globalisation has also affected youth employment as increasingly employers are using low skill employment practices through outsourcing roles to overseas workforces (Allen and Ainley, 2012) or large employers only investing in

certain localities which may be geographically inaccessible to young people (Allen and Ainley, 2014a; Allen, 2016; Atkins, 2016).

In addition, the context of apprenticeships has also changed subtly. The re-introduction of apprenticeships in recent years has provided an alternative entry route to HE in response to large amounts of debt built up by students following a more traditional route to securing a degree and due to many graduates being overqualified and having underutilised skills in the workplace (Allen and Ainley, 2014a; Allen, 2016). This evidence helps to explain why this study found that students were broadly positive about apprenticeships. They provide a route to earning a degree which fits in with social expectations of gaining a degree whilst gaining work experience and not accruing large amounts of debt. However, Allen and Ainley (2014a); Allen (2016) also explain that the number of young people starting apprenticeships has not increased, in part, because schools promote traditional academic routes to HE rather than apprenticeships for students who they deem capable of going to university and due to the limited number of apprenticeships available compared to the large number applicants for each place (Allen and Ainley, 2014a; Allen, 2016). This situation is especially likely given the pressures on institutions to maximise enrolment following austerity funding cuts (Atkins, 2016). This is reflected in this research as students felt they were disadvantaged in applying to competitive apprenticeships due to the information provided by their schools and through the institutional culture created representing progression to HE being the norm. Furthermore Ainley (2014) and Allen (2016) argue that apprenticeships offer specialisation in vocations that may not exist in the future and thus they may restrict learning which would prepare students for coping with changes in the employment market (Avis, 2014). This is an example of divided educational routes leading to differentiated labour opportunities and thus life chances (Atkins, 2016).

The increase in the number of graduates has not been matched by increases in demand for graduates and so underutilisation of graduate skills exists (Allen and Ainley, 2014a; Allen, 2015, 2016) and increasingly higher credentials are required in order for job applicants to differentiate themselves from other applicants and

so students end up overqualified and with underutilised skills during employment (Ainley, 2014; Allen and Ainley, 2014b; Avis, 2014). This contemporary evidence affirms the previous literature (Dore, 1976, 2006) however it is argued that the implications for the young people of today are more pronounced.

At a societal level these labour market changes and impacts on young people are likely to re-produce inequalities of wealth through a polarised labour market where qualifications segregate through the employment market (Allen and Ainley, 2014b; Avis, 2015). There is evidence that employment markets are polarised which lead to income, wealth and social polarisation (Avis, 2014) as there is a hollowed out gap between the insecure, low paid and flexible workforce and more traditional professional middle class roles (Roberts, 2013; Allen and Ainley, 2014a; Allen, 2016). Thus the ability for students to participate in the globalised competitive employment market may be constrained by this socially constrained position which is both socially (Atkins, 2016) and geographically created as some people are unwilling to move for economic reasons (Webb, 2014). In the context of young people living in an a society marked by austerity post-recession the issues surrounding class and employment competition are exaggerated (Roberts, 2013; Allen and Ainley, 2014b).

Specifically for IAG the contemporary context impacts on transition decisions made before the young people are able to make informed decisions about their progression and careers (Allen and Ainley, 2014b). Atkins (2016) argues that social class positioning plays a significant role in transition decision-making. Ultimately Allen and Ainley (2013) argue that current educational policies reinforce state social control and reinforce social divisions by class. Especially with regard to selection for transition using academic assessments which conservative policy has reinforced (Ainley, 2015). This reflects the findings of this study which suggest that IAG policies play a role in creating social divisions around social class through re-construction and reinforcement.

## Limitations

This section considers three limitations of the study relating to the research time frame and the sample. These have implications for the claims made in this thesis.

Firstly, the research is a snapshot of the lives of the students. Although the study was longitudinal in nature there may have been other factors which also impacted on students' transition in addition to those discussed in this thesis but these have been omitted because they occurred before the study commenced and remained undiscovered. Therefore, the basis for the claims surrounding the implications on class are indicated but cannot be fully grounded in the data due to this reason.

Secondly, following on from the above limitation the same issue exists post-16. Although this study took place over two years it is recognised that it would have been advantageous to make the study more longitudinal in nature, if time and resources were available, to study the final year of post-16 education and the first year of HE/or equivalent. Making the study more longitudinal would have ensured that the impact of pre-16 transition influences on post-18 life would have been able to be assessed.

Finally, the literature review outlined how Hemsley-Brown (1996a); Foskett et al. (2004); Blenkinsop et al. (2006); Foskett et al. (2008); Hughes and Gration (2009); Filmer-Sankey and McCrone (2012); McCrone et al. (2012); Ofsted (2013) and House of Commons Education Committee (2013b) suggested that schools without sixth forms provide more effective, more impartial IAG than schools with sixth forms. It was not the original intention for this study's sample to only include institutions with their own sixth forms. However, given the issues in obtaining access to a sample the resulting sampling frame only included institutions of this type (see page 88). The sample was obtained from schools and lessons accessible within the constraints of limited time and resource availability. However, a sampling frame which included schools without sixth forms would have provided a richer picture of pre-16 influences on transition to post-16 education and training. Thus, it was up to me as the researcher to decide the extent to which this study's context<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>See chapter 4 from page 109.

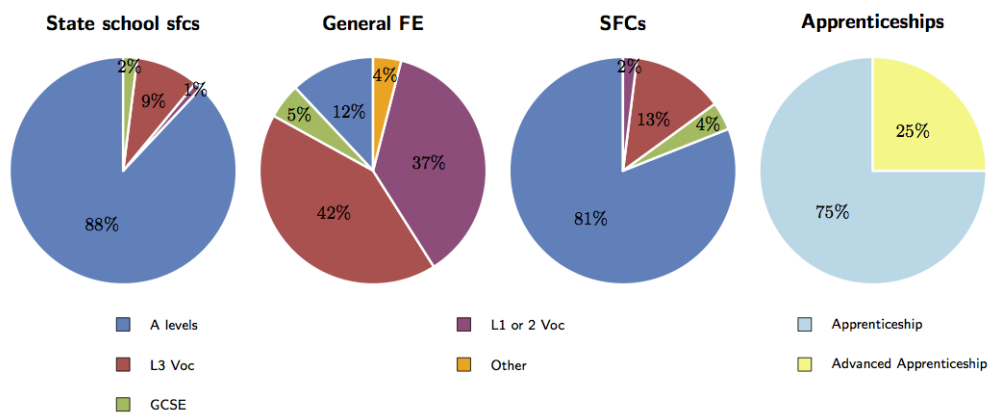
represented other schools and students in the wider population (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

## **Further research**

Suggestions for further research are outlined in this section. Payne (2003) and Maguire (2005) argued that funding for longitudinal studies of choice would help to capture improved findings as choice decisions are becoming increasingly extended and increasing the number of larger longitudinal studies would produce a data set which would enable early influences to be assessed in greater detail. This is important given the number of changes which have occurred since the body of choice literature was formed in the 1990s-2000s, as outlined in the introduction (see page 6), and therefore I argue that the context of decision-making is sufficiently different from when the body of literature on choice was formed to advocate a renewed focus on the area. In particular I argue that longitudinal studies which enable the influences of the new IAG policies to be explored would be important additions to the literature given the 2012 policy change had such a large effect on IAG provision for students attending schools with their own sixth forms in this study.

## **Appendix A**

# **Comparison of highest course type studied by students across institution types**



Highest course followed by 16 and 17 year-olds in full-time education and apprenticeships in 2013, Source: DfE (2014b).



## **Appendix B**

# **In-class Sampling Instrument**

Your name:

Which optional subjects did you take (for Years 10 to 11)?

What do you want to do next (e.g. A levels, BTECs, Get a job)?

If study, what subject(s)?

Where would you like to do this (name of place e.g. Sunnyside College)?

Would you be willing to speak to someone about your choices? YES or NO

If yes, would you be willing to do this via telephone (at no cost to you)? YES or NO

Email address:

Telephone number:

These questions were completed by every student in each class visited. Students noted down their responses on the small slip of paper and returned them to the researcher.

## **Appendix C**

# **Heads' Study Invite Letter**



The University of  
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Faculty of Social Sciences  
School of Education  
The University of Nottingham  
Jubilee Campus  
Wollaton Road  
Nottingham  
NG8 1BB  
t: +44 (0)7981 855 596  
e: ggarforth@alumni.nottingham.ac.uk

### Longitudinal research into young people's experiences of progression

Dear [Head's Name],

I am currently carrying out research to better understand what influences educational transition, from the perspectives of young people. I am currently seeking initial contact with **Year 11 business** students from [Area Name] who may benefit from taking part in this study.

Students who agree to take part in the research, with parental consent, will be agreeing to a potential, voluntary commitment to two meetings of approximately one hour only, over two years.

The study requires minimal involvement from school staff, other than allowing for the students to be invited to take part in the research during an initial in class activity which will only take 10 minutes, it involves no prior or post preparation by teachers. A teacher who knows the context of the institution and students will be asked to take part in a short one off discussion with the researcher. Initial help setting up interviews may be required depending on interview logistics.

In return for the students giving up their time and providing valuable information to the research, some students remark that they personally benefit from talking through their 'life histories' with a researcher. Other arrangements to help the school community may also be possible, for example, informing students about university life and research.

The research is carried out in accordance with The University of Nottingham's strict guidelines on ethics and safeguarding. All researchers hold a valid Enhanced CRB Disclosure specific to the research study. All students and institution details are kept confidential and anonymous in line with the Data Protection Act.

Your support would be valuable and appreciated and I hope that I will be able to discuss this exciting research with you, or a member of your staff, over the telephone, by email, or in person in order to give further information. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours Sincerely,  
Graham Garforth

## **Appendix D**

# **Students' Study Information Form**

## Your Participant Information Sheet



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**Nottingham**

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### **What is the aim of the research?**

The aim of this study is to explore your experiences of transition to your post-16 course over two years. It will explore the choices that you make as you move through your education and beyond. It will discuss the factors and influences that you believe impact on your progression to work, higher education and other activities. It will look into your experiences of post-16 education in your situation by understanding your lived experiences.

### **What will I be required to do?**

The research will take place over 2 years during which time we will meet to discuss your experiences at least twice, at a convenient time, for about one hour each time. It is likely that we will only need to meet twice, once in year 11 and then once a year later.

### **How will you protect me?**

Only the researchers will have access to the data collected for the purposes of analysis. The data will be stored electronically on a firewall and password protected computer and backup hard-disk to which only the researchers have access. Hard copies of data will be locked away. The data will be deleted, erased and shredded once the study has been published. You will be kept anonymous and your data will be treated in the strictest confidence. Your name will never be associated with your data in publication. Your privacy is important to us and the discussions will be held in a mutually agreed safe and private location.

### **Is participation voluntary?**

Yes, your participation is valuable and completely voluntary. You may withdraw yourself (and the data collected which is linked to you) at any time without prejudice or repercussions.

### **How will I benefit from participation in the research?**

In return for your participation you will benefit from receiving a summary of the results at the end of the study.

### **Who can I contact about the study?**

Graham Garforth: [txgg7@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:txgg7@nottingham.ac.uk) / 07981 855596

Professor Roger Murphy: [roger.murphy@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:roger.murphy@nottingham.ac.uk) / 01159 8467201

Professor Simon McGrath: [simon.mcgrath@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:simon.mcgrath@nottingham.ac.uk) / 01159 514508

Research Ethics Coordinator: [educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk) / 01159 514543

## **Appendix E**

# **Students' Consent Form**

**Participant Consent Form**  
**Longitudinal research into young people's**  
**experiences of post-16 education**



I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and know that I can contact the researcher, supervisors or Research Ethics Coordinator if I have any further questions or wish to make a complaint.

I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage without prejudice.

I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my data will remain confidential. Any information which might potentially identify me will not be used in published material. I understand that I will be audio-taped during the interviews.

I understand that data will be stored electronically on a firewall and password protected computer and backup disk to which only the research has access. Hard copies and audiotapes will be locked away. The data will be deleted, erased and shredded once the study has been published. I can request to access data held about me at any time.

I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it and agree to participate in the study as outlined to me.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Participant)

**Print Name:**

**Date:**

I would be interested in receiving a summary of the study's findings  (Tick if yes)

**If the participant is under 16 the below must be completed:**

I understand and agree to \_\_\_\_\_ (participant's name) to participate in the study as outlined to me.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent/Carer/Guardian)

**Print Name:**

**Date:**

**Contact Details**

Graham Garforth: ttxgg7@nottingham.ac.uk / 07981 855596

Professor Roger Murphy: roger.murphy@nottingham.ac.uk / 01159 8467201

Professor Simon McGrath: simon.mcgrath@nottingham.ac.uk / 01159 514508

Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk / 01159 514543



## **Appendix F**

# **Sample Contextual Factors**

Table F.1: Sample Contextual Factors: Education and Career Capitals  
Compared to Routes Taken

Name, Gender, Eth Grp	Family Oc- cupations	Family Edu History	Actual Inst R2	Actual Course in R2	Actual GC- SEs	GCSE: target	Career Ambi- tions	Edu simi- lar?	Career simi- lar?	Parental Occup Group	Parent Ex- pect	Sibling qual- & route
<b>AG stu- dents:</b> Jay (M) White British	Dad self employed, mum secre- tary family business.		AG SFC	Law, History Sociol- ogy	Maths B, A RE, Cs, Ds	Slightly lower	Lawyer	HE (Par- ents not)	Prof (fam not), not follow fam	Self employed	HE	Not get grades - married, pregnant - left home

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Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name,</b>	<b>Family Oc-</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>GCSE:</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>Edu</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>Parental</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Sibling</b>
<b>Gender,</b>	<b>cupations</b>	<b>Edu</b>	<b>Inst R2</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>GC-</b>	<b>target</b>	<b>Ambi-</b>	<b>simi-</b>	<b>simi-</b>	<b>Occup</b>	<b>Ex-</b>	<b>quals</b>	<b>&amp;</b>
<b>Eth Grp</b>	<b>History</b>	<b>Dad HE</b>	<b>Boothly</b>	<b>in R2</b>	<b>SEs</b>	<b>Journa-</b>	<b>tions</b>	<b>lar?</b>	<b>lar?</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>pect</b>	<b>route</b>	<b>Younger</b>
Zane (M)	Dad - En-	Dad HE	Boothly	Sports		Journa-		No HE	No HE	White col-	HE	Younger	
White	gineering	for teach-	Col-	Sci L3		list		(Par-	(Par-	lar		sister	
British	Teacher,	ing, Mum	lege+	BTEC				ents	ents				
	Mum - Nurs-	- Auston						not)	not)				
	ery nurse.	Coll and											
		Edge Hill.											

Continued on Next Page...

Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name, Gender, Eth Grp</b>	<b>Family Occupations</b>	<b>Family Edu History</b>	<b>Actual Inst R2</b>	<b>Actual Course in R2</b>	<b>Actual GCSEs</b>	<b>GCSE: target</b>	<b>Career Ambitions</b>	<b>Edu similar?</b>	<b>Career similar?</b>	<b>Parental Occup Group</b>	<b>Parent Expect</b>	<b>Siblings &amp; route</b>
Amy (F) White British	Mum accountant (left HE), Dad - council worker	Mum - Prof accountancy, college, Dad - college. No HE.	Boothly College	BTEC	5 A-Cs, D maths	Higher than predicted	Physio	No HE (Parents not)	Not follow fam route	Prof		Brother, in year below

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Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name, Gender, Eth Grp</b>	<b>Family Occupations</b>	<b>Family Edu History</b>	<b>Actual Inst R2</b>	<b>Actual Course in R2</b>	<b>Actual GCSEs</b>	<b>GCSE: target</b>	<b>Career Ambitions</b>	<b>Edu simi-lar?</b>	<b>Career simi-lar?</b>	<b>Parental Occup Group</b>	<b>Parent Ex-pect</b>	<b>Sibling quals &amp; route</b>
Leena (F) Banglad-eshi	Mum - home maker, Dad - restau-rant owner. Aunt own salon (ac-countant?) and uncle - engineering owner	Mum not uni, dad Bauley Gram-mar Bauley Gram-mar and uncles and dad Manches-ter uni	Bauley Gram-mar	Business, Psychology, English Liter-ature, Maths, Critical Think-ing	4As, all rest Bs.	As pre-dicted	Account-ant	HE (par-ents HE)	Poss follow fam route	Self employed	Good HE	Younger brother

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Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name,</b>	<b>Family Oc-</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>GCSE:</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>Edu</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>Parental</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Sibling</b>
<b>Gender,</b>	<b>cupations</b>	<b>Edu</b>	<b>Inst R2</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>GC-SEs</b>	<b>target</b>	<b>Ambi-</b>	<b>simi-</b>	<b>simi-</b>	<b>Occup</b>	<b>Ex-</b>	<b>quals &amp;</b>
<b>Eth Grp</b>		<b>History</b>		<b>in R2</b>			<b>tions</b>	<b>lar?</b>	<b>lar?</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>pect</b>	<b>route</b>
Terry (M)	Uncle man-	Mum	ATG	Appre-	A*	Slightly	Chef ap-	No HE	Follow	White col-		Younger
White	ager. Dad	Auston	after	nticeship	hospi-	lower	prentice	(Par-	family	lar		brother
British	ex-chef,	coll, dad	Brook-	(em-	tality,			ents	route			and sister
	Mum- social	chef	ford	ploy-	failed			not)				
	worker.	training	College	ment	his-							
				route)	tory,							
					maths							
					and							
					Eng							

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Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name, Gender, Eth Grp</b>	<b>Family Occupations</b>	<b>Family Edu History</b>	<b>Actual Inst R2</b>	<b>Actual Course in R2</b>	<b>Actual GCSEs</b>	<b>GCSE: target</b>	<b>Career Ambitions</b>	<b>Edu similar?</b>	<b>Career similar?</b>	<b>Parental Occup Group</b>	<b>Parent Expect</b>	<b>Siblings &amp; route</b>
Harvey (M)	Mum - oil sales manager. Dad - own business plumber	Mum - Manchester college. Mum - Manchester Met. (dropped out pregnant)	Brookford College+	A levels			Physio or Construction apprentice	No HE (Parents not)	Poss follow fam route	Self employed		Sister, 2 years younger

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Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name, Gender, Eth Grp</b>	<b>Family Occupations</b>	<b>Family Edu History</b>	<b>Actual Inst R2</b>	<b>Actual Course in R2</b>	<b>Actual GCSEs</b>	<b>GCSE: target</b>	<b>Career Ambitions</b>	<b>Edu simi-lar?</b>	<b>Career simi-lar?</b>	<b>Parental Occup Group</b>	<b>Parent Ex-pect</b>	<b>Sibling quals &amp; route</b>
Henry (M) White British	Dad builder. Mum nurse	Brother & sister at HE. Northumbria, Brother graduated with Job, sister Architecture	AG SFC	BTEC sport & Maths resit (his backup plan no place-ment found)	Cs and Ds at GCSE (D in maths).	As pre-dicted	PE teacher or electrical engineer	Poss HE (sib-ling HE)	Poss follow fam route	White col-lar		Sister, year above

Continued on Next Page...



Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name, Gender, Eth Grp</b>	<b>Family Occupations</b>	<b>Family Edu History</b>	<b>Actual Inst R2</b>	<b>Actual Course in R2</b>	<b>Actual GC-SEs</b>	<b>GCSE: target</b>	<b>Career Ambitions</b>	<b>Edu simi-lar?</b>	<b>Career simi-lar?</b>	<b>Parental Occup Group</b>	<b>Parent Ex-pect</b>	<b>Sibling quals &amp; route</b>
Damian (M)	Dad - trucker driver like granddad.	Brother - Bauley	AG SFC	Product Design, Art,	A Art, D RE, Rest	As pre-dicted	Own design business	No HE (sib-lings ad-vised against)	Poss follow fam route	Self employed	HE - resist-ing for job.	Brother - runs own business.
White British	Mum and step-dad have own business.	Gram-mar, not HE own business advised no to HE. Sister HE -advised don't go		Graph-ics	Cs, Bs.						Tried to get into Bauley Gram-mar in Y7.	Older sister - uni

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Table F.1 – Continued

Name, Gender, Eth Grp	Family Oc- cupations	Family Edu History	Actual Inst R2	Actual Course in R2	Actual GC- SEs	GCSE: target	Career Ambi- tions	Edu simi- lar?	Career simi- lar?	Parental Occup Group	Parent Ex- pect	Sibling quals & route
<b>AH stu- dents:</b>												
John (M)	Dad - Chief salesperson	Dad diploma	AH SFC	Maths, Com- puting, Eco- nomics	3As, 4Bs, 7 Cs	As pre- dicted	Apprent- iceship	No HE (Par- ents not)	Not follow fam route	White col- lar	College	Younger sister
White	engineering co, Mum at shop, just had baby.	in buss.										
British												

Continued on Next Page...

Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name, Gender, Eth Grp</b>	<b>Family Occupations</b>	<b>Family Edu History</b>	<b>Actual Inst R2</b>	<b>Actual Course in R2</b>	<b>Actual GC-SEs</b>	<b>GCSE: target</b>	<b>Career Ambitions</b>	<b>Edu similar?</b>	<b>Career similar?</b>	<b>Parental Occup Group</b>	<b>Parent Expect</b>	<b>Siblings &amp; route</b>
Kath (F)	Mum - support worker carer. Dad business worker.	Mum - college.	AH SFC	Eng Lang, Psychology, Economics, Geography	Cs, Bs (Maths, Hospitality), D physics	Higher than predicted (ap-prentice or BTEC backup plan was in place)	Law or Med changes	HE (Parents not)	Not follow fam route	White collar		Sister (2 yrs older - nursery apprenticeship at CCN Construction, same sch.)

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Table F.1 – Continued

Name, Gender, Eth Grp	Family Occupations	Family Edu History	Actual Inst R2	Actual Course in R2	Actual GC-SEs	GCSE: target	Career Ambitions	Edu similar?	Career similar?	Parental Occup Group	Parent Expect	Siblings & route
Alfie (M) White British	Mum hospital admin- tration assis- tant. Uncle and Granddad Sgt or Insp.	Mum Mum college. Sister Coven- try uni politics	Eastward SFC	Maths, Spanish, Soci- ology, Business	Cs, Bs, Maths & Span- ish B, Buss C	As pre- dicted (some disap- point- ment)	Police or buss manage- ment	HE (sib- lings HE)	Follow fam route	White col- lar		Older sister (2 yrs older - Coven- try uni politics)

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Table F.1 – Continued

Name, Gender, Eth Grp	Family Occupations	Family Edu History	Actual Inst R2	Actual Course in R2	Actual GCSEs	GCSE: target	Career Ambitions	Edu similar?	Career similar?	Parental Occup Group	Parent Expect	Siblings & route
Nissa (F) Black African	Mum - works for Housing Association. Dad cleaner. Granddad - construction owner.	Mum - CCN Sixth Form also, not HE.	Not at AH+							Manual	HE - from mum	Only Child

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Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name, Gender, Eth Grp</b>	<b>Family Occupations</b>	<b>Family Edu History</b>	<b>Actual Inst R2</b>	<b>Actual Course in R2</b>	<b>Actual GCSEs</b>	<b>GCSE: target</b>	<b>Career Ambitions</b>	<b>Edu simi-lar?</b>	<b>Career simi-lar?</b>	<b>Parental Occup Group</b>	<b>Parent Ex-pect</b>	<b>Sibling quals &amp; route</b>
Scarlet (F) Black African	Dad - mechanical engineer.	Dad - uni and college. Poss MEng.	Black-rigg	Psy, Law, English Lang	Cs, Bs, D Physics and Chem	As pre-dicted	Law	HE (Parents uni)	Follow fam route	White collar	HE - explicit	Younger bro and sister

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Table F.1 – Continued

Name, Gender, Eth Grp	Family Oc- cupations	Family Edu History	Actual Inst R2	Actual Course in R2	Actual GC- SEs	GCSE: target	Career Ambi- tions	Edu simi- lar?	Career simi- lar?	Parental Occup Group	Parent Ex- pect	Sibling quals & route
Lloyd (M) British African	Mum - bank manager, now ther- apist, Dad - Boots, unknown job.	Parents both coll, poss CCN.	CCN, Fol- lowed similar route to others e.g. CCN+				Law or Buss or Sports journal- ist	HE (par- ents not)	Not follow fam route	White col- lar		Younger sister

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Table F.1 – Continued

Name, Gender, Eth Grp	Family Occupations	Family Edu History	Actual Inst R2	Actual Course in R2	Actual GC-SEs	GCSE: target	Career Ambitions	Edu simi-lar?	Career simi-lar?	Parental Occup Group	Parent Ex-pect	Sibling quals & route
Tim (M) White British	Dad - electrician, manager, Mum - nurse	Brother - college in Deepbarrow, also apprentice. Mum - Newfield school of nursing.	AH SFC	Business, PE, English Lang, Use of Maths	C Eng, Maths C, History C, Buss C, PE B, Psy E, Constr Merit, D* sci BTEC.	As predicted	Sch teacher or engineering	HE (Parents uni)	Poss follow fam route	White collar		Brother (3 yrs older)

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Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name, Gender, Eth Grp</b>	<b>Family Occupations</b>	<b>Family Edu History</b>	<b>Actual Inst R2</b>	<b>Actual Course in R2</b>	<b>Actual GC-SEs</b>	<b>GCSE: target</b>	<b>Career Ambitions</b>	<b>Edu similar?</b>	<b>Career similar?</b>	<b>Parental Occup Group</b>	<b>Parent Expect</b>	<b>Sibling quals &amp; route</b>
Max (M) White British	Construction Tutor NEETs, Mum - administrator	Dad college, mum school leaver no HE history	CCN VET	L2 Public Services (and Eng Resit)	Maths C, Sci B, D Eng, C IT, D Geog	Hist	Higher than pre- dicted	Army	No HE (Par- ents not)	Follow fam route	White collar	

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Table F.1 – Continued

Name, Gender, Eth Grp	Family Occupations	Family Edu History	Actual Inst R2	Actual Course in R2	Actual GC-SEs	GCSE: target	Career Ambitions	Edu simi-lar?	Career simi-lar?	Parental Occup Group	Parent Ex-pect	Sibling quals & route
Magda (F)	Dad - Manager baker, Mum Crown	Mum - A levels, Dad left	AH SFC	Biology, Chemistry, Maths, Physics	9 As, 3 Cs, Dis-tinction.	As pre-dicted	Bio chemistry	HE (sib-lings HE)	Not follow fam route	White collar		Younger brother
British Chinese	Prosecution Worker	sch at 16. Sister New-field Uni Nursing.										
<b>TS students:</b>												

Continued on Next Page...

Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name, Gender, Eth Grp</b>	<b>Family Occupations</b>	<b>Family Edu History</b>	<b>Actual Inst R2</b>	<b>Actual Course in R2</b>	<b>Actual GC-SEs</b>	<b>GCSE: target</b>	<b>Career Ambitions</b>	<b>Edu similar?</b>	<b>Career similar?</b>	<b>Parental Occup Group</b>	<b>Parent Ex-pect</b>	<b>Sibling quals &amp; route</b>
Jamal (M) Indian	Mum - nurse	Mum nurse training India. Bro Kent Uni 4th yr Pharmacy	TS SFC	Maths, Chem-istry, Biology, Business	6 As, 1 A*, 3 Bs	As pre-dicted	Health sector med, pharm or physio	HE (family route)	Follow family route	White collar	HE	Older brother at uni (5yrs older) - went to same college

Continued on Next Page...

Table F.1 – Continued

Name, Gender, Eth Grp	Family Occupations	Family Edu History	Actual Inst R2	Actual Course in R2	Actual GCSEs	GCSE: target	Career Ambitions	Edu similar?	Career similar?	Parental Occup Group	Parent Expect	Sibling quals & route
Heather (F) White British	Mum - community fundraiser Notts hospice & Dad - Civil Engineer.	- Grandma - Radio-grapher and BSc. Parents to Crown Sch, Dad - CCN SFC and uni humanities. Parents Newfield Tech HE.	TS SFC	Maths, Chemistry, Biology, Business A*	As Bs in Sciences, Maths A*	As predicted	Sciences	HE (family HE)	Not follow fam	White collar		Older brother - took buss

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Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name,</b>	<b>Family Oc-</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>GCSE:</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>Edu</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>Parental</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Sibling</b>
<b>Gender,</b>	<b>cupations</b>	<b>Edu</b>	<b>Inst R2</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>GC-</b>	<b>target</b>	<b>Ambi-</b>	<b>simi-</b>	<b>simi-</b>	<b>Occup</b>	<b>Ex-</b>	<b>Expect</b>	<b>quals &amp;</b>
<b>Eth Grp</b>		<b>History</b>		<b>in R2</b>	<b>SEs</b>		<b>tions</b>	<b>lar?</b>	<b>lar?</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>pect</b>	<b>route</b>	
Carla (F)	Mum - hotel	Mum and	TS SFC	RS, En-	1 B,	As	Teacher	HE	Not	Blue col-		Older	
White	worker (man-	siblings -	(was at	glish Lit,	7 Cs,	pre-		(par-	follow	lar		sister at-	
British	ager?), dad -	Torhall,	East-	Business	1 Dis-	dicted		ents	fam			tended	
	construction	and on	ward)		tinc-			not)				same sch	
	unsure.	Eastward.			tion*								

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Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name,</b>	<b>Family Oc-</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>GCSE:</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>Edu</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>Parental</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Sibling</b>
<b>Gender,</b>	<b>cupations</b>	<b>Edu</b>	<b>Inst R2</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>GC-SEs</b>	<b>target</b>	<b>Ambitions</b>	<b>simi-lar?</b>	<b>simi-lar?</b>	<b>simi-lar?</b>	<b>Occup Group</b>	<b>Ex-pect</b>	<b>quals &amp; route</b>
<b>Eth Grp</b>	<b>History</b>	<b>Parents -</b>	<b>TS SFC</b>	<b>in R2</b>	<b>SEs</b>	<b>As</b>	<b>Unsure,</b>	<b>Not</b>	<b>poss</b>	<b>Not</b>	<b>Prof</b>	<b>Prof</b>	<b>No</b>
Karen (F)	Dad - ac-	Parents -	TS SFC	Business	4 A*s,	As	Unsure,	Not	poss	Not	Prof	Prof	No
White	countant,	Sheffield		Studies,	6As, 1	pre-	HE	follow	HE	follow			
British	own buss,	uni. Mum		Spanish,	B.	dicted	route?	fam	(Par-				
	mum - solici-	- Law,		English,					ents				
	tor.	cousins		Chem-					HE)				
		Graphic		istry									
		Design,											
		Aunties											
		and Un-											
		cles -											
		Engineer-											
		ing											

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Table F.1 – Continued

<b>Name, Gender, Eth Grp</b>	<b>Family Oc- cupations</b>	<b>Family Edu History</b>	<b>Actual Inst R2</b>	<b>Actual Course in R2</b>	<b>Actual GC- SEs</b>	<b>GCSE: target</b>	<b>Career Ambi- tions</b>	<b>Edu simi- lar? no HE (no HE his- tory)</b>	<b>Career simi- lar? Poss follow fam route</b>	<b>Parental Occup Group Manager</b>	<b>Parent Ex- pect</b>	<b>Sibling quals &amp; route 2 older brothers (one hotel worker, other coll public services for police), 2 younger sisters</b>
Eleanor (F) White British	Dad - restau- rant man- ager, Mum - home maker.	Not coll or uni?	Not at TS (only one)				Const- ruction industry					

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Table F.1 – Continued

Name, Gender, Eth Grp	Family Occupations	Family Edu History	Actual Inst R2	Actual Course in R2	Actual GC-SEs	GCSE: target	Career Ambitions	Edu similar?	Career similar?	Parental Occupation	Parent Expect	Siblings & route
George (M) White British	Mum - civil servant, Dad for car company auditor.	Neither parents uni.	TS SFC	Maths, Business, RE, Geography	3 A*s, 1 A, 7 Bs, 2 Cs.	As predicted	HE, career unsure	poss (no history HE)		White colonial		Older brother at same coll. Now Nat Grid apprenticeship

Key:

+ = Unconfirmed

Eth Grp = Ethnic Group



Fam = Family  
(F) = Female  
(M) = Male  
BSc = Bachelor of Science  
IT = Information Technology  
MEng = MEng Masters of Engineering  
Met = Metropolitan  
Occup = Occupational  
PE = Physical Education  
Poss = Possible  
Psy = Psychology  
RE = Religious Education  
Uni = University  
Yrs = Years.

## **Appendix G**

# **First Round Student Interview Questions**

Tell me about yourself . . .

**Options at 14:**

Why did you choose each subject?

Was your route/options your first choice?

For GCSES . . . why choose, how find out about them, get 1st choice?

**Options at 16:**

What do you want to do in the future after Year 11- next few years & say 10-15yrs?

Backup plan?

What do you have to do to get there? How confident are you about achieving your plan? What might go wrong? Why?

After Year 11 & how know about options?

How did you make your decision? What is the most important factor/rank? How are you finding the route?

How did you know about the options available? University cost?

Did anyone help you? What help has school give e.g. events over the year? How helpful were they?

How did you decide between options?

How did you hear about your course? Did you get any information about places other than your school from your school?

What are your friends doing?

**Options at 18:**

Have they said anything to you about your future?

Jobs in future? Which area? Why?

Expectations of where you are going to go/want to do . . .

**Background Context:**

Gender

How would you describe your ethnicity?

school attended since . . . previous schools . . .

Who do you live with? What is it like at home?

Which area do you live in? What is it like?

Did you get Education Maintenance Allowance?/Free School Meals/16-19 bursary

What do your parents do? Do you know anything about their education?

What do your parents/family/community want you to do?

Any siblings? What are they doing? Qualifications?

What do you think of going to this institution? What do your family/friends think?

Do you think it will be easy to get a job (in your area?)

What qualifications have you got so far? Predicted grades? Standard Assessment Tests?

Which teacher knows you best?

Is there anything else you'd like me to know? Think I should know?

## **Appendix H**

# **Second Round Student Interview Questions**

### **Current Course**

Extra curricular hobbies...or/and job...

Reflect back to what your choice was based on and your expectations when making choices, how does it compare to your current reality?

Where are you now? Any change?

Are you happy with what you chose/ended up on - institution? Why/why not

If different - why did you change your mind? What influenced it, a particular thing or point?

What type of people come here? What did your school friends do?

What courses are you doing? Any change?

Are you happy with what you chose/ended up on - course? Why/why not?

If different - why did you change your mind? What influenced it, a particular thing or point?

If schools didn't offer VET course switched to college provider, would liked to have stay at school in some cases. Indicate course or environment more important in decision

What did you mean by know institution/environment? Did you choose your subjects based on liking/having a good subject teacher? (But couldn't if moved institution, or rely on older friends advice?)

Any changes in your life had an impact from last meeting that have impact on your route?

### **IAG:**

Looking back do you think that IAG you were given was adequate? What else would you have liked to know or get?

Do you have a view on their pre-16 IAG events in institutions e.g. bias power (filling spaces) etc.

Who was the most important/influential help/decision maker/advisor for your decisions?

If students described options as 'easy' or 'just tick the boxes', ask if the student

still thinks this or do they now realise the wider implication of their choices?

Who is responsible for you being in this situation? Who's fault is it (e.g. if negative blame self or wider system?)

Internet use or why not use? What would help use? e.g not knowing where to look, too much info? Don't trust info? (policy) & (social) formal/informal technological savvy but lack specific skills for accessing IAG information & trust

National careers service or unaware of? Used? (policy) Social role in over riding careers advisors?

### **Post-18:**

Do you know what you want to do in the future now? Do you know anyone doing that occupation? Uni or job or other? If not uni why this route? (hierarchy of options socially desirable/expectations?)

What specific uni course do you want to go onto. Why?

Which institution? Why?

Are you clear about the requirements you need to follow your chosen route and future ambitions? Uni or other. Anything you couldn't do because of your options?

### **Context:**

GCSE grades

Check parents occupation

Housing

Anything else I should know?

## **Appendix I**

# **Staff Study Information Form**



## Staff Participant Information Sheet



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### **What is the aim of the research?**

The aim of this study is to explore young people's experiences of transition into post-16 courses, over two years. It will explore the choices that they make as they move through education and beyond. It will discuss the factors and influences that they believe impact on progression to work, higher education and other activities. It will look into their experiences of pre and post-16 education by understanding their lived experiences.

### **What will I be required to do?**

For you the research will involve meeting a researcher to discuss your school context, at a convenient time, for about one hour. It is likely that we will only need to meet once.

### **How will you protect me?**

Only the researchers will have access to the data collected for the purposes of analysis. The data will be stored electronically on a firewall and password protected computer and backup hard-disk to which only the researchers have access. Hard copies of data will be locked away. The data will be deleted, erased and shredded once the study has been published. You will be kept anonymous and your data will be treated in the strictest confidence. Your name will never be associated with your data in publication. Your privacy is important to us and the discussions will be held in a mutually agreed safe and private location.

### **Is participation voluntary?**

Yes, your participation is valuable and completely voluntary. You may withdraw yourself (and the data collected which is linked to you) at any time without prejudice or repercussions.

### **How will I benefit from participation in the research?**

In return for your participation you will benefit from receiving a summary of the results at the end of the study.

### **Who can I contact about the study?**

Graham Garforth: [ttxgg7@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:ttxgg7@nottingham.ac.uk) / 07981 855596

Professor Roger Murphy: [roger.murphy@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:roger.murphy@nottingham.ac.uk) / 01159 8467201

Professor Simon McGrath: [simon.mcgrath@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:simon.mcgrath@nottingham.ac.uk) / 01159 514508

Research Ethics Coordinator: [educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk) / 01159 514543

## **Appendix J**

# **Staff Consent Form**

**Staff Participant Consent Form**  
**Longitudinal research into young people's**  
**experiences of post-16 education**



**The University of**  
**Nottingham**

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and know that I can contact the researcher, supervisors or Research Ethics Coordinator if I have any further questions or wish to make a complaint.

I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage without prejudice.

I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my data will remain confidential. Any information which might potentially identify me will not be used in published material. I understand that I will be audio-taped during the interviews.

I understand that data will be stored electronically on a firewall and password protected computer and backup disk to which only the research has access. Hard copies and audiotapes will be locked away. The data will be deleted, erased and shredded once the study has been published. I can request to access data held about me at any time.

I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it and agree to participate in the study as outlined to me.

**Signed:** (Staff Participant)

**Print Name:**

**Date:**

I would be interested in receiving a summary of the study's findings  (Tick if yes)

**Contact Details**

Graham Garforth: ttxgg7@nottingham.ac.uk / 07981 855596

Professor Roger Murphy: roger.murphy@nottingham.ac.uk / 01159 8467201

Professor Simon McGrath: simon.mcgrath@nottingham.ac.uk / 01159 514508

Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk / 01159 514543

## **Appendix K**

# **Staff Interview Questions**

What can you tell be about the institution background?  
What kinds of students come to this institution? Target Market?  
What kinds of students are on this programme?  
What is the aim of the course?  
How are the students recruited and selected for the course? How does the option system work?  
What is the institution's aim? Is the programme the right fit for the students?  
How are students assisted in their transition from here for when their course is completed? School timeline of IAG help? Documentation?  
Where do students end up from this institution/programme?  
Increase in vocational students due to change in leaving age?  
Has there been an impact on the courses that you teach from introducing the English Baccalaureate?

**Background Context:**

Gender  
How would you classify your ethnicity?  
Years of teaching:  
Years in your current school:  
Position:  
Have you taught in more than one institution type? (if so, can ask to compare IAG)  
Subjects taught & exam boards  
Course and college pass rates?  
Course and college drop out rates  
Local employment rate, business size & areas  
Are there any course marketing materials that I can look at? What is the local impression of this institution? Is it over subscribed?  
How are students selected & recruited for the institution & course?  
Is there anything you'd like me to know? Think I should know?  
Local area demographics

What course is this author talking about? Learning ethos

Continuation rate- numbers to HE and employment

Building, facilities & resources

Exam pass rates

Class sizes

Organisation of teaching

Setting?

What is the local environment for advice

Which universities do students go to can I have a historical list?

## **Appendix L**

# **Evidence Summary**

Table L.1: Sources of Evidence by Institution

Evidence type and availability:	AH	BAU	TS	BLA	AG	CCN	BOT	EW	ATG	BRO	HAY	CS	NEA	AUS
6th form application form	20	16	24	22	17	36	18	30	14	17	16	10	17	19
IAG policy	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
School prospectus 2013-14	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	NA	NA	NA	NA	Y	Y	NA	NA
6th form prospectus 2013-14	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
KS4 options booklet 2010-11	Y	N	Y	NA	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Y	N	NA	Y
KS4 parents booklet 2011-2013	N	N	N	N	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	N	N	NA	Y
Post-6th form options booklet	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Parents post-16 handbook	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Ofsted report (most recent)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Ofsted data dashboard 2012-13	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
DfE performance tables 2012-13	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Continued on Next Page...



Table L.1 – Continued

Evidence type and availability:	AH	BAU	TS	BLA	AG	CCN	BOT	EW	ATG	BRO	HAY	CS	NEA	AUS
DfE destination data (summary)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Website (contents)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Admissions policy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
Parents Y7/9 options invite letter	Y	N	N	Y	NA	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
HE newsletter/information	Y	NA	Y	Y	NA	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Local authority RPA advice	Y	NA	Y	Y	NA	Y	NA	Y	NA	NA	NA	Y	NA	NA
Local authority choices booklet	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Number of informal observational visits:	1	0	2	1	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	NA	NA	NA
Visits in round 1	1	0	1	NA	2	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Visits in round 2	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	NA	NA	NA

Continued on Next Page...

Table L.1 – Continued

Evidence type and availability:	AH	BAU	TS	BLA	AG	CCN	BOT	EW	ATG	BRO	HAY	CS	NEA	AUS
Student interviews:														
Round 1	13	1	11	1	11	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Round 2	9	0	6	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	4	1	5	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Staff interviews:														
Staff Round 1	1	1	2	1	2	1	0	1	1	0	NA	NA	NA	NA
Staff Round 2	1	NA	1	NA	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	NA	NA	NA	NA

Key:

Y = Collected

N = Not Collected

NA = Not Applicable (for example, institution was not included in round one or pre-16 data were unavailable as the institution is post-16 only).

## **Appendix M**

# **Institutional Marketing Comparison**

Table M.1: Comparison of Marketing Materials, Prospectuses and Websites

Variable	BRO	AG	BAU	BOT	AUS	NEA	TS	AH	BLA	CCN	CAP	EW
Paper quality used	Quality	Quality	Quality	Quality	Quality	Quality	Non-glossy	Non-glossy	Quality	Quality	Quality	Online only
Prof photos	Y	Y not specific	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Photo contents	Students lessons, activities	Some students, dents, not specific	Students lessons, activities	Students lessons, activities	Students lessons, activities	Students lessons, activities	Student real activities not posed	Student real activities not posed	Posed students	Posed students	Posed students using facilities	Few, of activities and case students

Continued on Next Page...

Table M.1 – Continued

Variable	BRO	AG	BAU	BOT	AUS	NEA	TS	AH	BLA	CCN	CAP	EW
Affiliat-ions	Ofsted, liP	N	Ofsted	N	Ofsted	Ofsted, NCS	N	N	N	N	Queen's FE award	N
refer-enced												
Use of mottoes	N	Y Eng	Age	N	N	N	Catholic	N	Y Eng	N	N	Y Eng
e.g. Latin												

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Table M.1 – Continued

Variable	BRO	AG	BAU	BOT	AUS	NEA	TS	AH	BLA	CCN	CAP	EW
Design type e.g. traditional or modern	Vibrant	Simple	Modern Traditional	Modern	Vibrant	Modern	Basic	Basic	Modern	Modern	Vibrant	Modern
Prof printing or copied	Prof	Prof	Prof	Prof	Prof	Prof	Copied	Copied	Prof	Prof	Prof	Online only

Continued on Next Page...

Table M.1 – Continued

Variable	BRO	AG	BAU	BOT	AUS	NEA	TS	AH	BLA	CCN	CAP	EW
Prof de- sign	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Prof	N - Website basic text with news photos, Prospectus basic design	N web- site basic page text only for info	N- web- site basic text, collec- tion of pages and links. Prospectus prof	Y	Y	Y

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Table M.1 – Continued

Variable	BRO	AG	BAU	BOT	AUS	NEA	TS	AH	BLA	CCN	CAP	EW
Divided brochures	Y listed separately	Y listed separately	Academic only	Y	Y	Y different brochures	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
No. of pages	63	47	28	72	72	51	56	54	37	34	171	Personal
Amount of detail	Detailed entry, content and progression	Some content and progression	Subject super-ficial about only	Detailed entry, content and progression	Course content and career salary info	Detailed content and progression	Detailed subject info. and progression	Some course detail, entry requirements and progression	Detailed content, assessment and progression	Some course detail, entry requirements and progression	Some course detail, entry requirements and progression	Some subject, HE and course detail, profiles

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Table M.1 – Continued

Variable	BRO	AG	BAU	BOT	AUS	NEA	TS	AH	BLA	CCN	CAP	EW
Curricula described as	Voc and acad	A level and Applied	Academic only	Voc and acad	Voc	Acad, Voc, Appr	Academic with some applied	A level, BTEC L3	Voc and acad	Voc and acad	Voc	Voc and acad
Exam results included	Headline, emphasises success	N	N	Yes	N	Yes	Yes full subject breakdown	Y one sentence	Y	Y	N	Yes full subject breakdown
Destinations included?	Headline	No (case studies)	Oxbridge roll of honour	Yes	N	Yes	N	N	N case studies	Y a list	N	N case studies

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Table M.1 – Continued

Variable	BRO	AG	BAU	BOT	AUS	NEA	TS	AH	BLA	CCN	CAP	EW
Quotations used	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Feeder schools included?	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N case studies	N	N	N case studies
Extra-curricular activities	Y	Y	Basic	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Facilities	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y basic	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

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Table M.1 – Continued

Variable	BRO	AG	BAU	BOT	AUS	NEA	TS	AH	BLA	CCN	CAP	EW
Student profile types	Both academic and vocational	Both academic and vocational	No	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
IAG	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Support												
Religion mentioned	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y explicit	N	Y	N	N	N case studies

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Table M.1 – Continued

Variable	BRO	AG	BAU	BOT	AUS	NEA	TS	AH	BLA	CCN	CAP	EW
Meaning	Emph	Lists	Advertise	Emph	Emph	Emph	School	For	Prof de-	Advertise	Sells vo-	Using
deeper	success	content,	aca-	pass	route to	results	pro-	current	signed	success	ational	text
docu-	as an	not	dem-	rate on	employ-	as one	duced,	stu-	mar-	and	facilities	to sell
ment	advert	'adver-	success	home	ment	of the	(cheaper)	dents.	keting	ability	and ac-	reputa-
mean-		tising'	e.g. Avg	page	best	best	but ad-	Not	prospec-	to offer	cess at	tion and
ing			Point	inc.	colleges	colleges	equate	mar-	tus,	wide va-	number	using
			Score	Oxbridge	in the	in the	design,	keting,	website	riety of	of sites	quota-
			37th in	success	country,	country,	focuses	inc app	mixed	courses		tions
			UK		1st for	1st for	on aca-	form.	market-	and		and case
					Value	Value	dem-	Prospec-	ing and	range of		studies
					Added	Added	content	tus	current	facilities		to give
					not	not	not	detail	student			sense of
					design,	design,	design,	sub-	use			a com-
					photos	photos	photos	jects, no				munity
					un-	un-	un-	alumni				as mar-
					staged	staged	staged	data				keting

Marketing collateral comparison, by institution: Schools, overall, have engaged fewer resources, professionals in creating their prospectuses, they catered mainly for their internal market who already knew the institution and thus were not required. Abbey Gate did not stage photographs of students engaged in activities, using the facilities. Comparison based on Maguire et al. (1999) and Fitzgerald (2007). Variables with no comparable differences have been omitted.

Key:

Acad = Academic

Y = Yes

N = No

Voc = Vocational.

## **Appendix N**

# **Destination Tracking**

Table N.1: Destination Tracking Round 1 to Round 2

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institution for post-16?	Actual Institution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in institution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institutions in R1?	Change in subject?
Abbey Gate	Jay	A levels	AG SF	N	AG SF	A levels	N	N	Minor (fewer)
Abbey Gate	Zane	A levels	Boothly College	Y	Unconfirmed Boothly College	BTEC			

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Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institution for post-16?	Actual Institution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in institution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institutions in R1?	Change in subject?
Abbey Gate	Amy	BTEC	Brookford College or Boothly College	Y	Boothly College	BTEC	N	Y (Brookford)	No (but resit maths)
Abbey Gate	Leena	A levels	Bauley Grammar or AG SF	Y	Bauley Grammar	A levels	N	Y (AG SF)	Minor (more)

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Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institution for post-16?	Actual Institution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in institution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institutions in R1?	Change in subject?
Abbey Gate	Terry	NVQ Apprenticeship	Brookford College	Y	ATG after Brookford College	Apprenticeship (employment route)	Y	Y (Brookford, Neath-side)	N
Abbey Gate	Harvey	A levels	Brookford College	Y	Unconfirmed Brookford College	A levels			

Continued on Next Page...

Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institution for post-16?	Actual Institution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in institution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institutions in R1?	Change in subject?
Abbey Gate	Henry	Get a job, Apprenticeship, NVQ	Boothly College	N	AG SF	BTEC	Y (considering drop out)	Y (Aus-ton)	Y
Abbey Gate	Damian	Don't know, A levels	AG SF	N	AG SF	A levels	N	N	N

Continued on Next Page...

Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institution for post-16?	Actual Institution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in institution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institutions in R1?	Change in subject?
Adley House	John	A levels	Adley House SF	N	Adley House SF	A levels	N	Y (Eastward)	Minor (swap) not high enough GCSE in physics

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Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institution for post-16?	Actual Institution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in institution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institutions in R1?	Change in subject?
Adley House	Kath	A levels	CCN CCN Sixth Form or Adley House SF	Y	Adley House SF	A levels	N	Y (CCN)	Minor (swap) not high enough GCSE in sciences
Adley House	Alfie	A levels	Adley House SF	Y	Eastward	A levels	Y	Y (AH)	N

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Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institution for post-16?	Actual Institution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in institution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institutions in R1?	Change in subject?
Adley House	Nissa	A levels	CCN CCN Sixth Form	Y	Unconfirmed not at AH	Unknown			
Adley House	Scarlet	A levels	CCN CCN Sixth Form	Y	Burlywood	A levels	Y	Y (CCN, Eastward, AH)	Y
Adley House	Lloyd	A levels	CCN CCN Sixth Form	Y	Unconfirmed CCN				

Continued on Next Page...

Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institution for post-16?	Actual Institution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in institution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institutions in R1?	Change in subject?
Adley House	Tim	Apprenticeship	CCN VET/with a well respected firm	N	Adley House SF	A levels	Y	Y (Capital, CCN)	Yes (Voc to Aca)
Adley House	Max	BTECs	CCN VET	Y	CCN VET	BTEC	N	N	No (and resit)

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Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institu- tion for post-16?	Actual Insti- tution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in insti- tution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institu- tions in R1?	Change in sub- ject?
Adley House	Magda	A levels	Adley House SF	N	Adley House SF	A levels	N	N	Y

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Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institu- tion for post-16?	Actual Insti- tution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in insti- tution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institu- tions in R1?	Change in sub- ject?
Torhall Catholic	Jamal	A levels	Torhall SF	N	Torhall SF	A levels	N	N (only if missed B entry grades, Burly- wood, Crown School)	N



Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institution for post-16?	Actual Institution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in institution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institutions in R1?	Change in subject?
Torhall Catholic	Heather	A levels	Torhall SF	N	Torhall SF	A levels	N	N	N
Torhall Catholic	Carla	A levels	Torhall SF or Eastward	N*	*Torhall SF (was at Eastward)	A levels	N	Y (was at Eastward)	Y
Torhall Catholic	Karen	A levels	Torhall SF	N	Torhall SF	A levels	N	N	N

Continued on Next Page...

Table N.1 – Continued

Sch R1	Name	Post-16 Course Plans in R1	Post-16 Inst Plans in R1	Moved institution for post-16?	Actual Institution in R2	Actual Course in R2	Change in institution from planned?	Consider other post-16 institutions in R1?	Change in subject?
Torhall Catholic	Eleanor	A levels and BTEC	Torhall SF or other	Y	Unknown, Not at Torhall	Unknown		Y	
Torhall Catholic	George	A levels	Torhall SF	N	Torhall School Sixth Form	A levels	N	N	Minor (swap) sciences

Key:

Aca = Academic

Y = Yes

N = No

Voc = Vocational.

## **Appendix O**

# **Ethics Approval Form**



The University of  
**Nottingham**

**School of Education – Research Ethics Approval Form**

Name: Graham Garforth  
 Main Supervisor: Roger Murphy and Simon McGrath  
 Course of Study: PhD  
 Title of Research Project: Longitudinal research to explore the effect that post-16 institutional type attended has on information and guidance received and the transitional effect of using Bourdieu's field theory  
 Is this a resubmission? No

Date statement of research ethics received by PGR Office: 16.05.12

Research Ethics Coordinator Comments:

I have read through all the documents associated with this ethics submission and they look fine. You have addressed all the relevant ethical issues in the Information Sheet and Consent Form.

Good luck with your research!

I consider this research to be above minimum risk

Outcome:  Approved

Revise and Resubmit

Signed:

Name: Dr Alison Kington  
(Research Ethics Coordinator)

Date: May 28<sup>th</sup> 2012

## **Appendix P**

# **National Contextual Statistics**

The below statistics provide a general overview to progression and associated contextual factors in England.

## **Participation rates**

The 2013 figures<sup>1</sup> show that 85.6% of 16 to 18-year-old students in England were in some form of education and training, this is the highest figure since comparable records began (83.6% in 2012 DfE (2014b)). Of this 70% were on full time courses and 5.9% on Work Based Learning courses (including apprenticeships). Participation in part time and work-based learning also increased. In the academic year 2012-13 HE participation rate was 43%, this was down by 6% compared with 2011-12 (49%). This was the first year tuition fees rose to £9,000 and the decrease is mainly due to students who deferred from the previous year not taking up their places.

## **Types of institutions**

In 2013 full time students aged 16 to 18 years old were enrolled in the following types of institutions, 35.6% in maintained schools, 11.5% in SFCs, 6.3% in independent schools, 30.6% in general FE colleges and 0.1% in HE institutions (DfE, 2014b).

## **NEET and unemployment**

The proportion of those not in education, employment or training (NEET) fell from 9.2% in 2012 to 7.6% in 2013. This was the lowest level since consistent records began (in 1994). Thus, according to government statistics, raising the participation age had an impact on demand as these figures reflect the first cohort of young people to be affected by the raising of the participation age. In October 2013 the unemployment rate for 16-24 years olds was 20.5% (when students had to stay

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<sup>1</sup>These figures relate to the year in which the sample students started post-compulsory education (2013-14). The statistical release is a snapshot from the end of 2013 which categorises students by their age at the start of the academic year.

in education or employment until they were aged 17) and 16.6% in October 2014 (when students would normally apply to enter HE in the following academic year).

## **Course types**

The majority of full time 16-year-old students in FE were studying for level 3 GCE/VCE A/AS level and applied qualifications or NVQ level 3 equivalents, 64.1%. 13.2% of 16 to 18 years olds were studying on level 2 courses and 6% on level 1 courses. 3.2% were enrolled on Work Based learning (apprenticeships and entry to employment courses) of a population of 647,800 students aged between 16 to 18 years old.

## **Regional variations**

The percentage of students in education and training varies by region. In North West England participation is 78%, in contrast to London (82%), the North East (75%), the Midlands (75%), Yorkshire 76% and the South East (80%) (DfE, 2014b).



## **Appendix Q**

# **IAG Used by Students**

Table Q.1: IAG Used Across Rounds by Institution (Number of Mentions by Students during Interviews)

Item / Institution	Whole sample	AH	AG	TS
<b>Round 1:</b>				
School systems total: options, assemblies, taster	13	2	8	3
School events total: open events, interviews, visits	16	7	3	6
Sch literature or adverts total	14	6	5	3
School staff total	14	5	4	5
<b>Total of school controlled IAG</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>
Adverts total: Television, Billboards, Newspapers	5	2	0	3
Family total: parents, siblings, wider family, grandparents	34	13	9	12
Non-school events: career fair, HE open events	2	1	0	1
Website totals: UCAS, other, institution sites, exam boards, specific career sites, apprenticeship.org	18	8	5	5
Non-sch advisor: peers, apprentice agency, specific job advisor	15	7	4	4
<b>Total non-school IAG</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Round 2:</b>				
School systems total: options, assemblies, taster	3	1	1	1

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Table Q.1 – Continued

Item / Institution	Whole sample	AH	AG	TS
School events total: open events, interviews, visits	8	3	4	1
Sch literature or adverts total	6	2	2	2
School staff total	15	3	5	7
<b>Total of institution controlled IAG</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>
Adverts total: Television, Billboards, Newspapers	0	0	0	0
Family total: parents, siblings, wider family, grandparents	16	9	3	4
Non-school events: career fair, HE open events	4	1	1	2
Website totals: UCAS, other, institution sites, exam boards, specific career sites, apprenticeship.org	15	7	5	3
Non-sch advisor: peers, apprentice agency, specific job advisor	9	5	3	1
Total non-school IAG	41	21	10	10
School total	14	6	3	5
Family total	32	13	8	11
<b>Total non-school</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>

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