This report is the second part of the study. The first part ‘The Impact of Careers Education and Guidance on Young People in Years 9 and 10: A follow-up study’. DfEE (RD20) is available, free of charge, from DfEE publications (tel: 0845 60 222 60)

This report will be of particular interest to careers service managers and their staff, careers co-ordinators in schools and anyone else interested in careers education and guidance.
## Contents

Acknowledgements
Executive Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 1</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Research Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 2</th>
<th>The cohort of young people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Characteristics of the Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Careers Education and Guidance Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Young People’s Careers-related Skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 3</th>
<th>The impact of careers-related skills on transition at 16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Post-16 Transitions: monthly trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Post-16 Transitions: the first four months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Post-16 Transitions: the next five months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>The Relationship between Careers-Related Skills and Transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Careers-Related Skills and Progression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 4</th>
<th>Satisfaction with choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Young People’s Satisfaction with their Post-16 Transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Careers-related Skills and Post-16 Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>‘Subjective’ Satisfaction – What Contributed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 5</th>
<th>Careers-related skills and attitudes to further guidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Attitudes to Further Guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Attitudes to Progression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 6</th>
<th>Implications for policy and practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>The Importance of Careers-related Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>The Development of Careers-related Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>The Importance of Appropriate Careers Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>In Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

The NFER team would like to thank most warmly all those people – staff and students in case-study schools and careers service personnel who contributed to both the original baseline study and this follow-up research. Without their forbearance and kind co-operation, this study would not have been possible. We would also like to express our appreciation to colleagues at the DfEE for their helpful guidance and advice throughout the duration of this project.

Our particular thanks go to Sheila Stoney, project director at NFER, to John Dobby and Ian Schagen, project statisticians and to the other members of the project team: Peter Rudd, David Sims and Clare Hill, who undertook some of the fieldwork and data collection.

Finally, thanks go to Janine Gray, project secretary, and Jill Ware, project administrator, for their excellent assistance in producing this report.
As a key element of its strategy to secure informed subject choice for students in Year 9, and to facilitate effective preparation for careers guidance interviews and action planning for those in Year 10, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) implemented enhanced comprehensive guidance for 13 and 14 year olds in 1995. During that year it also commissioned a baseline study from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to:

- establish the extent of careers education and guidance provision for young people in Years 9 and 10;
- draw up a profile of young people’s careers related skills at the end of the academic year 1994/95 and identify the activities that appeared to have contributed most effectively to those skills.

The findings from that research, which was completed in June 1996, are summarised in *Careers Education and Guidance for 13 and 14 Year Olds*. DfEE (1996)(RD10).

1. The Research Project

The follow-up study, which was commissioned from the NFER by the DfEE in 1997, had two distinct but linked strands. The first strand provided an evaluation of the impact of the enhanced careers education and guidance provision that has been made available since 1994 to young people aged 13 and 14. The outcomes of that research are reported in *The Impact of Guidance Provision on Young People in Years 9 and 10*.

The second strand of the research examined the impact that careers education and guidance provision has had on young people’s transitions at 16. In particular the research sought to identify:

- changes in young people’s careers-related experiences and skills between Year 9 and Year 11;
- relationships between careers-related skills and satisfactory transitions;
- young people’s attitudes towards the choices they had made;
- relationships between careers-related skills and positive attitudes to lifelong learning and guidance.

Each of these aims will be reported on in this summary.

The research targeted the young people who had completed Year 9 in 1995 and who had taken part in the original baseline study in that year. In all, it drew on longitudinal data from 1,624 young people, each of whom also filled in a postal questionnaire in January 1998. A sub-set of these (938) also responded to a second survey in May 1998, and data from this group provided some longer-term insights into transition and change. Where individual GCSE results were available, they were used as a proxy measure of ability. In this way it proved possible to explore any potential links between young people’s ability and their level of careers-related skills. In addition to the survey data, contextual material obtained during interviews with school and careers service staff in both 1995/96 and 1997/98 was also included.

2. Changes in Young People’s Careers-Related Experiences Between Year 9 and Year 11

The range of careers education and guidance activities to which young people had access, and in which they remembered taking part, increased between Year 9 and Year 11. Most notably, this included a far higher proportion recording:

- **discussions with a careers adviser:** Two-thirds of the young people (66%) remembered discussing potential post-16 options on at least one occasion before the end of Year 11, compared with only 13% by the end of Year 9. One-quarter however, claimed never to have had such one-to-one discussions. On the whole, this latter group tended to be those following academic courses post-16;

- **access to careers-related information:** In particular, young people appeared to have had more access to information technology during Year 10 and 11 than they had reported in Year 9, whether in the form of computer databases (52% compared with 41%) or computer aided guidance packages (62% compared with 29%);

- **a wide range of work-related activities:** In addition to work experience, for example, participation in industry days/weeks was more evident than had been the case when the young people were in Year 9: 43% of the cohort had taken part in such activities by 1997, compared with 25% in 1995.

3. Changes in Young People’s Careers-Related Skills Between Year 9 and Year 11

It was also evident that young people who engaged in such activities tended to have higher levels of careers-related skills. Matched data, from the Year 9 survey in 1995 and the follow-up survey in 1997, indicated some consistent links between activities and specific careers-related skills.

- **Individual discussions** appeared to be key in the development of overall opportunity awareness, careers exploration skills and decision-making skills.

- **Computer-aided guidance** activities seemed to be instrumental in the development of overall opportunity awareness.

- **Professional careers-related input** (including input from employers as well as from careers advisers) seemed to contribute significantly to the development of opportunity awareness and careers-exploration skills.
Even when individual student ability (as measured by level of attainment at GCSE) was taken into account, these three activity domains remained highly significant. However, there were also clear indications that careers-related skills are more likely to be evident when young people are given the opportunity to develop them at an early stage in their school career. Furthermore, such skills were crucially affected by the way in which careers education and guidance provision was organised. Young people from schools in which careers education and guidance was closely integrated with careers service provision (that is, in guidance community schools) had significantly higher self-awareness and decision-making skills. Those from schools in which provision was parallel had significantly lower careers exploration skills.

4. The Relationship Between Careers-Related Skills and Satisfactory Transitions

The key factor that seemed to underpin successful transition at 16 was the level of young people’s careers exploration skills. Those who demonstrated such skills by the end of Year 11 were the least likely to have made significant changes to their courses, post-16. They were also more likely than other young people to have made a transition that indicated progression; that is, to be working towards a qualification at a higher level than that which they attained at GCSE.

Other skills that appeared to be positively associated with successful transition included:

- **the ability to consider strengths and weaknesses when making career choices.** Young people with this ability were more likely to be working towards higher level courses and were less likely to have made changes to their courses;

- **high levels of factual knowledge.** Young people who had developed an accurate awareness of post-16 opportunities were more likely to have made post-16 choices that indicated progression.

5. Differences in Attitudes Towards Choices Made

While careers exploration skills seem to have been the key factor influencing successful transition, young people’s satisfaction with their transitions also appears to relate strongly to their self-awareness and their ability to use this understanding of themselves when making their career choices. For instance:

- Young people who were most positive about the potential of their current course, training or job to **contribute to their future career** tended to be those who had the highest careers exploration skills and those who were the most able to **apply their self-awareness**.

- Young people who felt they had made the **right choice** of course, training or job felt that they were able to **apply their self-awareness skills** and also tended to demonstrate a wide range of **decision-making strategies**.

- Young people who were **enjoying** their current course, training or job tended to display a wide range of careers-related skills, including **application of self-awareness**, careers exploration skills, opportunity awareness and self-awareness.
By May 1998, most of the young people were relatively satisfied with the choice they had made, although it was apparent that those following vocationally orientated courses appeared more content than those working towards A levels. Even where young people were pleased with their choices, however, it was clear that there was still some concern about the range and type of information available to them. They particularly wanted to know more about what the course, training programme or job would entail and the work that would be involved. This concern was widespread and not limited to any particular post-16 route. While information and guidance about A Levels emerged as a particular area of concern, students following courses at GNVQ and NVQ levels also expressed a desire for more detailed information about the ‘reality’ of the course.

6. The Relationship Between Careers-Related Skills and Positive Attitudes to Lifelong Learning and Guidance

Nearly two-thirds of the young people said that they would like to have further help and guidance in choosing what to do next, even though most (81%) had a relatively clear idea of the occupational area in which they hoped to work. The young people seeking such help were not necessarily the least able, nor did they lack careers-related skills. Indeed, those with the most positive attitudes towards obtaining further guidance were precisely those who had already demonstrated a high level of such skills. However, it was significant that the one skill they most commonly lacked was the ability to seek out and take advantage of opportunities to find out about further education, training and employment options (that is, the careers-exploration skill).

Young people with the clearest ideas about progression were most likely to be:

- young people with the higher levels of attainment (and from schools in which the student profile was skewed towards a higher ability level);
- those with higher levels of self-awareness and opportunity awareness.

7. In Conclusion

This longitudinal study suggests that pre-16 careers education and guidance provision can have significant medium-term (and possibly longer-term) outcomes for young people. Where young people have been enabled to develop a range of careers-related skills, particularly those related to careers exploration and considering and applying an awareness of self, they appear more likely to make satisfactory transitions at 16. They are also less likely to drop out of learning, whether it be from further education courses or training.

These findings have some important implications for the way in which careers education and guidance is both timed and organised. They suggest that schools and careers services need to focus specifically on the early development of careers-exploration skills and the promotion of self-awareness skills. In addition schools may need to make greater use of careers advisers in helping young people apply their knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses when considering their career choice. Finally, greater consideration may need to be given to filling in the gaps in the information that young people are given about post-16 courses, with a clearer emphasis on strategies such as taster courses, input from students and trainees already on the courses and extended (or more frequent) work experience placements.
This report is one outcome of a detailed research study that was commissioned from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in 1997. The study was conducted between October 1997 and September 1998 and had two distinct, but linked, strands. The first strand, which followed on from a baseline study completed in June 1996, provided an evaluation of the impact of the enhanced careers education and guidance provision that has been made available since 1994 to young people aged 13 and 14. The outcomes of this research are reported in 'The Impact of Guidance on Young People in Years 9 and 10'.

The second strand of the research, which is discussed in this report, sought to identify the impact that careers education and guidance provision has had on young people's transitions at 16. Young people who completed Year 9 in the summer of 1995, and who were involved in the original baseline study, were sent postal questionnaires on two separate occasions in 1998. These responses were explored in order to examine the extent to which careers education and guidance may have played a role in promoting satisfactory transitions at 16.

1.1 Background

The DfEE, in 1997, identified the need to encourage more young people to take part in education and training towards qualifications at Level 2 or higher as a significant element of its long-term strategy to 'lead and support the nation's investment in learning and its drive towards greater employability'. While this aim has been high on successive government agendas for many years, it is apparent that post-16 participation is still lower than in many other European countries. Although participation rates in further education and training by 16 and 17 year olds have shown significant increases since the early 1990s, the pace of that increase has slowed perceptibly since 1993/94. Moreover, progress towards the qualification levels and skills now identified by the Government as the 'foundation level for employability for the 21st century' has been relatively slow. A significant minority of young people fail to achieve any qualifications at 16, with many becoming disaffected or disengaged from education at an early stage.

In order to address these issues, the Government has sought to explore ways of tackling disaffection and has placed a firm emphasis on providing the help that young people need in selecting both their post-16 route and the qualifications they need to obtain.

1 This was also commissioned by DfEE and carried out by NFER. The findings from the research are summarised in MORRIS, M. (1996). Careers Education and Guidance Provision for 13 and 14 Year Olds. Sheffield: DfEE (RD10).
The various policy initiatives aimed at promoting post-16 participation and reducing drop-out\footnote{For example, the promotion of training schemes such as Modern Apprenticeships, the development of GNVQs and NVQs as alternative post-16 routes and the introduction of Learning Cards.} have highlighted the need to ensure that careers education and guidance programmes are well-founded and effective in promoting both the development of short-term outcomes (with evidence of careers-related learning) and of intermediate outcomes, especially the appropriate choice of post-16 destinations. Indeed, one of the key aims of Learning Cards, implemented in 1997, is to assist young people to make the right choice at 16, ‘through a process of integrated and coherent careers education, guidance and information’\footnote{ibid.}

Careers education and guidance has thus been the subject of a number of legislative, structural, and operational changes in recent years. Careers services are now contracted directly with the DfEE, instead of being a service operated by local education authorities. Since the implementation of the 1997 Education Act\footnote{GREAT BRITAIN. STATUTES (1997). \textit{Education Act} 1997. Chapter 44 Sections 43-5. London: The Stationery Office.}, schools have been statutorily required to allow careers service access to all young people in the target age groups and to provide access to a comprehensive and impartial range of careers guidance and reference materials. Furthermore, and building on the implementation of enhanced guidance for 13 and 14 year olds in 1995, careers education and guidance has now become a statutory element of the school curriculum for Years 9 to 11 in September 1998 (after the fieldwork period for this study) and is also subject to inspection by OFSTED.

More recently, the agenda for social inclusion has come more to the fore. As outlined in Requirements and Guidance for Careers Services 1998, careers services are now required to ‘focus their help on those who are disadvantaged and for whom it can make the most difference’. This specifically includes ‘those in education who have low aspirations, are at risk of dropping out, failing to achieve, or not making a successful transition to further education, training or employment’. In addition, and in response to the Kennedy report\footnote{KENNEDY, H. (1997). \textit{Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education}. Coventry: FEFC.}, strategies are now being put in place to help schools widen the scope for work-related learning activities for 14 to 16 year olds considered to be at risk of disaffection and disengagement\footnote{GREAT BRITAIN. DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT (1998). \textit{Further Education for the New Millennium: Response to the Kennedy Report}. (The Learning Age). London: DfEE.}

1.2 The Research Project

The findings from the follow-up evaluation reported in ‘The Impact of Guidance Provision on Young People in Years 9 and 10’ indicated that enhanced careers education and guidance provision since 1995 had indeed led to some significant improvements in short-term outcomes – that is, in young people’s careers related skills\footnote{A full description of what is meant by these skills is included in Appendix 1.}. In particular, this was evident in the extent to which there had been improvement in:

- overall levels of opportunity awareness, including factual knowledge;
- levels of career exploration (careers-related research) skills;
- levels of confidence in transition skills.

5 ibid
6 ibid
11 A full description of what is meant by these skills is included in Appendix 1.
In each case, young people from the 1997/98 Year 9 and 10 cohorts scored **consistently more highly** than their peers in the 1995/96 cohorts. But is there any evidence that careers education and guidance provision can have significant longer-term outcomes? Does it help young people to make their education, training and career choices wisely, whatever the socio-economic conditions and changes in their personal circumstances? Does it indeed promote satisfactory transition at 16 and reduce dropout from post-compulsory education and training courses?

The current research was commissioned in order to address some of these issues. This longitudinal study built on data originally collected in the autumn term of 1995/96. Of the 3,750 young people who had completed a questionnaire at that time (when they had just started in Year 10), 3,184 had agreed to take part in future research. These were sent an initial follow-up postal survey in January 1998, some four to six months into their post-compulsory education, training or other destinations. The baseline questionnaire asked about their careers-related experiences, attitudes and understanding to date. The first follow-up survey replicated a number of the baseline questions in order to assess the extent to which young people’s careers-related experiences and skills had changed between 1995/96 and 1997/98. It also sought detailed information on the transitions that young people had made and their plans for the future. Questionnaires were sent to home addresses (where these had been given by students) or, in 600 cases, to schools (where schools had indicated that young people had stayed on into their sixth form). Responses were received from 1,624 young people (a 51% response rate). Full details about the characteristics of the respondents and non-respondents are given in Section 2.

Five months later, in May 1998, a second questionnaire was sent to these 1,624 young people. This questionnaire requested further information about transitions and also explored young people’s feelings and attitudes towards the guidance they had received (or would have liked to have received), the education or training courses they were following (or the jobs they were doing) and their medium and long-term plans for the future. Responses were received from 938 young people (a 58% response rate).

### 1.3 The Report

The main focus of this 1997/98 longitudinal study was to assess the **impact of careers education and guidance on transition**. In order to do this, the information obtained from the two sweeps of the follow-up student surveys was matched and compared, as far as possible, with data acquired during the baseline study. Contextual data, obtained during interviews with school and careers service staff in both 1995/96 and 1997/98 was also included. In addition, attainment data, in the form of individual GCSE results, where available, was built into the analysis of the student data.

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12. The outcomes of this study were summarised in *Careers Education and Guidance Provision for 13 and 14 Year Olds*. DfEE (1996)(RD10).
The report seeks to identify the extent to which careers education and guidance has contributed to the success of young people's transitions at 16. In particular, it addresses the following questions:

- Do young people with the highest levels of careers-related skills at 16 make the most satisfactory transitions (see Section 3)?

- To what extent are there any significant differences between those who switch courses and those who do not switch in terms of their feelings about their current course? (see Chapter 4).

- Is there any evidence to suggest that young people with high careers-related skills at 16 will have more positive attitudes to lifelong learning and guidance? (see Chapter 5).

Throughout each of these sections a number of other issues, including the impact of the type of careers education and guidance provision that was in operation in each young person’s school, are also explored.

13 The working definition adopted for 'satisfactory transition' is given in Chapter 3.
Chapter 2
The cohort of young people

As indicated in Chapter 1, the study is based primarily on data obtained from a cohort of students who completed an initial questionnaire in the autumn term of 1995/96\textsuperscript{14}, when they had just completed their Year 9 courses\textsuperscript{15}. The discussion in this and following chapters is founded on the responses from 1,624 young people who completed a first follow-up survey in January 1998 and a subset of 938 who also completed a second follow-up survey in May 1998\textsuperscript{16}.

This chapter will present a brief outline of the characteristics of the young people, including their levels of ability. It will then summarise the extent of their careers-related experiences by the end of Year 11 and the extent to which these appear to have been effective in raising young people’s careers-related skills since the end of Year 9.

2.1 Characteristics of the Cohort

The 1,624 young people who completed the first follow-up survey in January 1998 represented the complete attainment range and included those who had not achieved any GCSEs, as well as those who had attained at least eight GCSEs at grade A*. Respondents were from a variety of different post-16 destinations, with young people in a range of employment, further education or training organisations as well as some who were unemployed or who were engaged in other activities such as staying at home to look after family members. A similar range of attainment and occupations was also evident amongst the respondents to the second follow-up survey in May.

However, by comparison with the entire cohort of Year 9 respondents (of whom there were 3,750), there were some notable differences:

- **More responses were obtained from females than males.** Over half of the respondents e.g. 55% in January 1998 and 60% in May, were female. In 1995/96, the proportions had been more or less equal, with 47% male and 45% female respondents (eight per cent did not give their sex).

- **Respondents showed a tendency towards those with a higher level of attainment.** An analysis of the GCSE data received from schools indicates that the young people who replied to the January questionnaire had, on average attained the equivalent of eight GCSEs at grade C\textsuperscript{17}. Those who did not respond had achieved rather lower qualifications, attaining, on average, the equivalent of six GCSEs at grade C. The May respondents were further skewed towards higher attainment levels, with an average of nine GCSEs at grade C.

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\textsuperscript{14} The administration of that questionnaire coincided with the main phase of implementation of enhanced guidance for students in Years 9 and 10. At that stage, few of the students had yet been given the opportunity to take part in the activities that were introduced at that time.

\textsuperscript{15} These students were based in 40 schools across 15 careers service areas. A number of these services subsequently merged with other services under the new contracting arrangements.

\textsuperscript{16} Respondents represented each of the original 40 schools that were included in the 1995/96 baseline study, but the proportion responding from each school varied.

\textsuperscript{17} The mean total GCSE score for the January respondents was 42, compared with a mean of 31 for non-respondents. The mean total score for May respondents was 45.
The statistical techniques employed to analyse the data (in particular, multilevel modelling) were able to take these response biases into account and statistically significant differences between the sexes, or students of different levels of attainment, are indicated in the report. However, it is important to remember that, where basic frequencies alone are used, response bias has not been controlled for.

### 2.2 Careers Education and Guidance Experiences

The range of careers education and guidance activities to which young people had access, and in which they remembered taking part, had clearly increased between Year 9 and Year 11, as Table 2.1 demonstrates.18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>By end of Year 9</th>
<th>By end of Year 11</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guidance activities (including individual discussions)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information gathering</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition and self-awareness activities</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World of work activities (in school)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on matched data (1995 and 1997) from 1,624 young people

Two-thirds of the young people (66%) remembered talking to a careers adviser about potential post-16 options on at least one occasion before the end of Year 11; only 13% of the cohort had spoken to a careers adviser by the end of Year 9.

However, one-quarter claimed never to have had such one-to-one discussions. On the whole, this latter group tended to be those following academic courses, post-16. Such students, while often appearing to be confident career planners (in that they felt well informed about their options and believed they were able to plan for their future) were more likely to have reported taking part in discussions with school staff than with careers advisers. Young people who were following vocational routes were far more likely to have reported making use of professional careers-related input.

Between Year 9 and Year 11, there had clearly been a far greater emphasis on obtaining careers-related information. Young people appeared to have had more access to information technology during Years 10 and 11 than they had reported in Year 9, whether in the form of computer databases (52% compared with 41%) or computer-aided guidance packages (62% compared with 29%). Many more had used a careers library (71% compared with 54%) or had written away for information on jobs, education or training courses or careers (48% compared with 22%).

18 The activities included in each of these broad categories are summarised in Appendix 2.
19 The remainder (9%) were uncertain whether such discussions had ever taken place. These figures suggest a lower level of penetration than was noted in the 1995 Youth Cohort Study report, where 85% of the young people who left school in that year said they had a careers guidance interview. The reasons for this difference may relate partly to the move away from "blanket interviewing" noted in some of the case-study schools and partly to the relatively high proportion of A level students, who appeared to be the group least likely to take up the offer of an interview.
Allied to this increase in data gathering, was an increase in the range of work-related activities that young people had undertaken. In addition to work experience, for example, participation in industry days/weeks was more evident than had been the case when the young people were in Year 9: 43% of the cohort had taken part in such activities by 1997, compared with 25% in 1995. Company visits had increased (45% compared to 35%) as had employer input to the careers-related curriculum. By the end of Year 11, half the cohort (50%) had been given the opportunity to hear employers talking about careers or work compared with just over one third (36%) by the end of Year 9. Participation in mini-enterprise activities was the one area in which no significant change was noticed.

2.3 Young People’s Careers-related Skills

It was also evident that engaging in such activities was associated with the further development of young people’s careers related skills. Matched data, from the Year 9 survey in 1995 and the follow-up survey in 1997, indicated that some consistent links between activities and specific careers-related skills were apparent over time.

- **Individual discussions** appeared to be a key element in the development of overall opportunity awareness, careers exploration skills and decision-making skills.

- **Computer-aided guidance** activities seemed to be instrumental in the development of overall opportunity awareness.

- **Professional careers-related input** (including input from employers as well as from careers advisers) seemed to be essential for the development of opportunity awareness and careers-exploration skills.

Even when individual student ability (as measured by levels of attainment at GCSE) was taken into account, these three domains remained highly significant. Such positive associations are encouraging, insofar as they suggest that, amongst both the most able and the least able students, aspects of careers education and guidance can contribute to the development of higher careers-related skills.

However, there are also clear indications that such skills are more likely to be evident when young people are given the opportunity to develop them at an early stage in their school career. While young people with higher levels of attainment also seemed to be more self-aware, those who, at the end of Year 9, demonstrated a high level of self-awareness, were significantly more likely to demonstrate such an awareness by the end of Year 11, irrespective of the extent of their academic ability. This was also the case for opportunity awareness, factual knowledge and careers-exploration skills. In only one area, that of decision-making skills, were Year 9 skills a poor ‘predictor’ of skills by the end of Year 11.

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20 Appendix 3 provides a comparative breakdown of young people’s careers-related skills at the end of Year 9 and again at the end of Year 11. In common with the analysis undertaken in the Year 9 and 10 linked study (The Impact of Guidance Provision on Young People in Years 9 and 10), it should be noted that no link emerged between careers education and guidance activities and self-awareness skills for this cohort.

21 This may suggest that careers education and guidance programmes focused more clearly on decision-making activities prior to the end of Year 11. However, it may also suggest that, until young people were faced with the need to make a significant decision (that is, what to do after age 16) they were not sufficiently motivated to develop their skills in this area at an earlier stage.
Furthermore, careers-related skills were crucially affected by the way in which careers education and guidance provision was organised. Young people from schools in which careers education and guidance was closely integrated with careers service provision (that is, in guidance community schools) had significantly higher self-awareness and decision-making skills. Those from schools in which provision was parallel had significantly lower careers exploration skills.

These findings may have some important implications for the ways in which careers education and guidance provision are both timed and organised if young people's careers related skills are to be developed effectively. However, before exploring these implications in detail it is worth asking whether the acquisition of such skills makes any real difference to the transitions young people make at 16 (or subsequently). Section 3 explores this question and examines the extent to which it could be argued that 'satisfactory' transitions at 16 are associated with a high level of careers-related skills.

22 A concise description of what is meant by guidance community and parallel provision is provided in Appendix 4.
Chapter 3
The impact of careers-related skills on transition at 16

Previous research has indicated that, for a number of young people, the decisions they make at 16 subsequently appear to be inappropriate. Within the first year of post-compulsory education, for example, estimates of non-completion of A and A/S level courses are around eight per cent, with four per cent dropping out completely (Payne, 1995\textsuperscript{23}). Between two and four per cent are said to switch to non-A level courses before their second year. Non-completion of intermediate GNVQ courses is believed to be nearer to 20\% (FEU et al. 1994\textsuperscript{24}; NCVQ, 1995\textsuperscript{25}), with withdrawal rates from other vocational routes at a similar level (Audit Commission and Ofsted, 1993\textsuperscript{26}). Both institutional and subject area differences in the level of non-completion have been noted, although these are apparently more evident on vocational rather than on A level courses.

However, a recent exploratory study undertaken by MORI, and conducted on behalf of the DfEE, suggested that such switches were not evidence of a complete ‘system failure’ in terms of careers education and guidance provision\textsuperscript{27}. Rather, it suggested that careers education and guidance has not yet been able to meet the needs of those who are completely uncertain of what to do or to address the needs of those young people who have ‘closed minds’. The data from the current study highlights some similar issues, but also indicates that some school and careers service partnerships have been more effective than others in promoting effective transition at 16.

3.1 Post-16 transitions: monthly trends

In September 1997, the majority of the young people in the study (81\%) were engaged in full time further education or training, with an additional six per cent taking part in training in the workplace that led to a qualification. Yet, over the next four months, some 352 students (22\% of the cohort) had made some change to their post-16 occupation (see Table 3.1). Of these, 16\% of the cohort had made an alteration to their original course, (four per cent dropping out of education or training altogether) and an additional six per cent changed the location in which their course was taking place.

\textsuperscript{26} AUDIT COMMISSION and OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION (1993). Unfinished Business: Full-time Educational Courses for 16-19 Year Olds. London: HMSO.
Table 3.1 Changes made to post-16 education and training destinations and courses: whole cohort data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of change</th>
<th>September to December 1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changed post-16 destination only</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed post-16 course only</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed both destination and course</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data obtained from more than one question
Source: NFER Year 12 follow-up survey: Sweep 1

Furthermore, of the 938 young people who responded to questionnaires in both January and May, a total of 385 (41% of the sub-cohort) made at least one change to their original programme in that nine month period from September 1997. Nearly one quarter of these made more than one change, with some six per cent of the sub-cohort changing both location and course on more than one occasion during the nine month period (see Table 3.2). This suggests that, for a minority of young people, the identification of an appropriate post-16 pathway proved to be difficult, with a significant amount of modification needed to find the right course of study or training.

Table 3.2 Changes made to post-16 education and training destinations and courses: sub-cohort data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of change</th>
<th>Number of students making changes in:</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September to December only</td>
<td>January to May only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed post-16 destination only</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change post-16 course only</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed both destination and course</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data obtained from more than one question
*Of these 59, some may have changed destination (or course) in the first period and course (or destination) in the second
Source: NFER Year 12 follow-up surveys: Sweeps 1 and 2

28 A further two per cent completed courses during that time. Such changes are not included here.
As shown in Table 3.2, the majority of changes took place some months into the various courses (that is, when young people had at least a reasonable idea of what the course or training entailed). This seems at odds with some earlier studies of drop-outs within institutions, which suggest that the majority of changes tend to take place within the first few weeks of a post-16 course\(^2\). Data from this sub-cohort indicated that, of the 227 young people who made some change to their education or training course over the nine month period, over two-thirds (68\%) made those changes between January and May. However, it should be acknowledged that proportionally, there was a higher proportion of changes to courses or locations amongst the non-respondents to sweep 2 (January to May). Over one-third of the non-respondents, compared with one-tenth of the respondents had made early changes. Since no further data is available for these young people it is difficult to ascertain what the longer-term impact of this may be.

This tendency (towards later rather than earlier moves) becomes even more evident when one examines diary data from the 251 young people in the sub-cohort who made at least one change of post-16 location (see Table 3.3). While 16\% of the moves made by this group occurred between September and October, the greatest proportion (67\%) took place between December 1997 and January 1998, when young people were often some four to five months into their course\(^3\). Subsequently, (that is, in the four month period after January 1998) the number of young people making changes decreased substantially.

Table 3.3 Changes to post-16 locations: sub-cohort data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moves between:</th>
<th>Changed location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of those moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September to October</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October to November</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November to December</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December to January</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January to February</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February to March</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March to April</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April to May</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>251</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data obtained from more than one question
Young people could make more than one move, so percentages do not sum to 100.
Source: NFER Year 12 follow-up surveys: Sweeps 1 and 2


\(^3\) The highest proportion of the moves that took place was out of full-time education in school and into FE colleges, training schemes or employment.
Just how significant are these changes? As Evans and Heinz (1994) suggested, the transition decisions made by young people can encompass 'taking chances', 'wait and see' and 'step-by-step' behaviour, as well as the 'strategic' responses that may be the hoped-for outcomes of effective careers education and guidance. Do the patterns of change identified above suggest that young people made incorrect choices at the end of Year 11, or that some are still exploring their post-16 options? The following subsections examine the characteristics of the changes that young people made over the nine months of the cohort study.

### 3.2 Post-16 Transitions: the first four months

Table 3.4 illustrates the kind of changes young people made to their courses in the four months between September and December 1997. It indicates a fairly high degree of movement, particularly amongst students who were following academic courses, although, as the discussion which follows illustrates, the proportion who made radical changes to their courses was small.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses changed</th>
<th>Changed location and course</th>
<th>Changed course alone</th>
<th>Total changes made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A level</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/S</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNVQ</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other vocational</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information on course</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>47</strong></td>
<td><strong>215</strong></td>
<td><strong>262</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from more than one question
Young people could change more than one of their courses, so numbers do not add up to totals given
Source: NFER Year 12 follow-up surveys: Sweep 1

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3.2.1 Modifications to courses

To begin with, the majority of changes that took place between September and December were to do with modifications to courses (the 'step-by-step' approach noted by Evans and Heinz). For example, of the 262 young people who changed courses during that period, the majority (197) were still working towards some qualification, generally at the same level as the course from which they had withdrawn. Most of these 197 had made some change to academic rather than vocational courses, with 124 (16% of the 785 A level students) either dropping or changing at least one of their A level options (mainly sciences or humanities32). A small proportion of these A level students had additionally withdrawn from GNVQs (six students), A/S courses (seven students), or GCSEs (two students).

3.2.2 Radical changes to courses

These young people (six per cent of the whole cohort) who could be said to have made a more radical change to their post-16 options, seemed to have adopted one of three different courses of action:

- **From an academic to a vocational course:** 11 young people had discontinued A levels and transferred to a GNVQ course; three had abandoned their A levels (and four a GCSE course) and were now following training leading to an NVQ33.

- **Changing direction within vocational training:** three students had changed from their initial GNVQ area to an alternative, eight had transferred from a GNVQ course to NVQ training and six switched from one NVQ area to another.

- **Dropping out of education or training altogether:** 59 young people had dropped out of education or training, with the majority abandoning either GNVQs (17) or A levels (10).

It is clear that the highest proportion of radical changes were amongst those following the academic (24 young people) or GNVQ (28 young people) routes. Few of the changes that young people made within the first four months of their post-compulsory education or training programme implied that there was any fundamental failure of the guidance system as a whole. However, there were clearly a small number of young people whose needs had not been met by pre-16 careers education and guidance provision. Of most concern are those young people who, having initially selected the 'wrong' route or qualification type, were then unable (or unwilling) to transfer into a more appropriate education or training course34.

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32 Drop-outs from GNVQ were primarily related to Advanced or Intermediate Business and Administration courses, a picture also reflected at NVQ where nearly half of those dropping such a qualification discontinued business-related training.
33 Eighteen of these young people had dropped more than one subject at either A or GCSE level.
34 Many of these young people epitomised the 'learned helplessness' that Evans and Heinz noted amongst young people whose approach to transition was 'wait and see'. The discussion in Chapter 4 explores this more fully.
### 3.3 Post-16 Transitions: the next five months

The highest proportion of the changes made in the later months was again amongst students following academic courses. Table 3.5 below illustrates the type of changes made by the sub-cohort between January and May 1998.

**Table 3.5 Changes made to post-16 education and training courses January to May 1998: sub-cohort data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses changed</th>
<th>Changed location and course</th>
<th>Changed course alone</th>
<th>Total changes made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A level</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNVQ</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other vocational</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information on course</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>47</strong></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data from more than one question
Young people could change more than one of their courses, so numbers do not add up to totals given
Source: NFER Year 12 follow-up surveys: Sweep 2*

Of the 122 young people who dropped at least one course between January and May (13% of the sub-cohort), the largest number (56) dropped or changed at least one of their A level options, with the biggest drop-out (as before) being from science and humanities subjects. The reasons given for changes were primarily to do with a lack of enjoyment, the failure of the course or training programme to live up to earlier expectations or the level of academic or technical difficulty the young people encountered when doing the course — reasons that were also given by young people who made changes at a much earlier stage.35

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35 Young people’s responses to their education or training courses are examined in more detail in Chapter 4.
At one level, this argues for a certain amount of commitment amongst young people and a willingness to at least ‘have a go’ at their courses, even when there was a lack of contentment at an early stage. Yet, given that they finally did change course (and six per cent of the cohort made more than one change) to what extent were young people making initial choices that appropriate and timely guidance might have helped them to avoid? Were young people simply unaware of the options open to them or did they lack the skills to help them make the pertinent decisions about the course that would best suit them? Is there any evidence to suggest that the careers-related skills that young people had developed by the end of Year 11 contributed effectively to transitions they made at 16?

The discussion which follows in Section 3.4 looks first at the skill levels demonstrated by young people following higher level qualifications (that is above NVQ Level II), those following courses that led to qualifications at NVQ Level II or below, and those whose post-16 destination included no specific qualification. In each case, any significant differences between those who made changes to their courses and those who did not, are identified. The final sub-section (3.5) explores any differences in the careers-related skills demonstrated by young people whose transitions clearly demonstrated progression.

3.4 The Relationship Between Careers-related Skills and Transition

The key factor that seemed to underpin successful transition at 16 was the level of young people’s careers-exploration skills. Those who demonstrated such skills by the end of Year 11 were the least likely to have made significant changes to their courses, post-16, and were more likely than other young people to have made a transition that indicated progression.

The discussion in Chapter 2 highlighted the role played by schools in developing young people’s careers related skills and suggested that integrated provision which enabled the early acquisition of such skills was more effective in promoting a high level of skills by the end of Year 11. An analysis of the whole cohort (the 1,624 who responded to the January survey) indicates that, while not straightforward, there were also some significant relationships between the careers-related skills that young people demonstrated and the types of transition that they had made.

3.4.1 Those seeking qualifications above NVQ Level II (or equivalent)

To begin with, young people who were engaged in further education, training or employment, which led to qualifications above NVQ Level II (51% of the cohort), tended to have good research skills, demonstrated a high level of factual knowledge about specific post-16 opportunities and were able to consider their strengths and weaknesses when thinking about their future career. It became evident however, that few felt that they knew much about the wider opportunities that might be available to them. Furthermore, even though they were consistent in thinking about their strengths and weaknesses when considering potential working environments, they tended to express a greater degree of uncertainty than other students about the extent of their key skills. Most had used only a limited range of decision-making strategies prior to making the transition at 16.

Progression is used here to denote any transition which included a course that led to a qualification at a higher level than young people had previously achieved at GCSE. It is accepted that some vocational courses expect trainees to achieve NVQ Level II (equivalent to five A to Cs at GCSE) before allowing them to progress to Level III.
This picture, of able but relatively ‘blinkerated’ young people, reflects many of the previous research findings in this field. It is still the case that students intending to follow higher level courses (particularly to A level) are often seen by schools as a low priority for guidance. Indeed, the current emphasis on provision for young people ‘who are disadvantaged and for whom it can make the greatest difference’ means that guidance is becoming more targeted at potentially poor achievers, with low aspirations. However, it is clear that there is still a need for guidance amongst many of the most able students. Young people with high GCSE scores who began a course of study at a high level, but subsequently modified (or switched) their courses (one fifth of those studying above NVQ Level II) were found to have a significantly lower ability to apply their self-awareness skills to their choice of future career than the non-switchers.

### 3.4.2 Those seeking qualifications at NVQ Level II (or equivalent)

On the whole, young people working towards a qualification at NVQ Level II or equivalent (28% of the cohort) felt they knew a great deal about the range and types of opportunities open to them but, in fact, revealed a low level of factual awareness. Similarly, while they claimed to be clear about their strengths and weaknesses, they were inconsistent in considering those strengths and weaknesses when thinking about their future careers. Young people working at this level, whether they had made changes to their courses or not, generally revealed fairly low levels of careers-exploration skills, although they had employed a wide range of decision-making strategies.

The contrast between these young people and those following the higher level courses is interesting, suggesting that school careers education and guidance programmes may have been more successful in raising decision-making skills amongst less academic students than amongst those who, by virtue of their ability, may have decided to defer their career decision to a later date. However, it would appear that this latter group may well be equipped with the skills to explore potential careers (even if they had not yet done so) as a result of the research strategies they have developed: the lack of good careers-exploration skills amongst the less academic students may mean that future progression could be more problematic for them.

### 3.4.3 ‘Drop-outs’

There was a high proportion of drop-outs among those who made a change to their course at NVQ Level II or equivalent. Of those who made a switch at this level (four per cent of the whole cohort), over half dropped out altogether. Such young people also demonstrated poor factual awareness and, in common with others working towards qualifications at, or lower than, NVQ Level II equivalent, appeared to be less certain about what would be expected of them post-16 than those on the higher level courses. Furthermore, they were less clear than other young people about the number and/or type of other courses or training that they were expected to do in addition to the basic course they had originally intended to follow. Nor did they believe that they knew enough about the ways in which they would have to work, or the amount of free time they would have, before they began their courses.

38 A number of the case-study schools reported that young people intending to remain in the sixth form, or to go on to do A levels, were seen as less in need of a guidance interview than those who were undecided or who were intending to leave school.
40 Three per cent of the cohort had dropped out of education or training altogether. It should be noted that, for a further three per cent of the cohort, insufficient data existed to identify the full pattern of their transition.
41 However, those on higher level courses were also highly articulate about what they perceived to be a lack of ‘real’ information about the difference between pre-16 courses (GCSEs) and those they began post-16, such as A levels, GNVQs and NVQs at Level III (see Section 4.)
3.4.4 **In employment without training, or unemployed**

Young people who had never taken up an education or training option (whether government or employer sponsored), but were in employment (five per cent of the cohort), tended also to demonstrate poor research skills and it is telling that few of these young people had originally intended to take up a job without training. However, there is evidence that they were fairly consistent in their recognition of their work preferences when considering their career choice (even though they were using a relatively limited range of decision-making strategies). By contrast, young people who were unemployed (or doing something else – five per cent of the cohort) tended to be unable to apply their self-awareness to their choice of job or career (and indeed, most had poor self-awareness skills). This group had significantly lower careers-related skills than their peers.

The main concerns that arise in relation to these groups, however, are the lack of potential for progression in their current occupations and the possibility that the negative view that many had of themselves would become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Given the poor careers-exploration skills they displayed and their lack of factual knowledge about potential education and training options, there is a risk that many would not be able to take advantage of future learning opportunities.

3.5 **Careers-related Skills and Progression**

Data from the 726 students who responded to both the January and May surveys, and for whom detailed individual GCSE data was available, provided some more detailed insights into the relationship between careers-related skills and progression, and these are summarised in Figure A.

- Young people who were working towards a qualification that was higher than that which they had already attained at GCSE (and who had not made any changes to their course) tended to be those who demonstrated good careers exploration skills and displayed a high level of factual knowledge. Their self-reported levels of opportunity awareness tended to be low, however, with many feeling that they knew little about opportunities outside the area in which they were being educated or trained.

- Young people who were working towards a qualification that was at the same level as that which they had attained at GCSE (and who had not made any changes to their course) displayed no statistically significant differences in their careers-related skills.

- Young people who had made changes to their courses (irrespective of whether they were working towards a qualification that was higher than, or at the same level as, that which they had attained at GCSE) tended to be inconsistent in considering their strengths and weaknesses when thinking about their future careers. That is, they did not appear to make clear connections between their key skills and abilities and the requirements of the workplace.

42 This issue is explored further in Chapter 5.
Young people who were not working towards any qualification, regardless of whether they were employed or not, seemed to be consistent in considering what they perceived to be their strengths and weaknesses, but generally had a fairly negative view of their abilities. This suggests that many of these young people tended to lack confidence and have low self-esteem.

Figure A  Statistically significant associations between careers-related skills and progression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Careers-related skills</th>
<th>Clear progression*</th>
<th>Limited progression†</th>
<th>No progression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-switchers</td>
<td>Switchers</td>
<td>Non-switchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied self-awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers exploration skills</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Often low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 'Clear progression' is used to mean transition to a course/qualification at a higher level than that achieved at GCSE.
† 'Limited progression' is used to mean transition to a course/qualification at the same level as that achieved at GCSE.

Schools in areas of high socio-economic deprivation (as measured by the proportion of young people eligible for free school meals) appeared to be more successful than others in promoting progression and students from such schools were least likely to have taken up further education or training to the same level as that which they had attained at GCSE. Guidance community schools, by contrast, do not appear to have significantly promoted progression at 16, even though they appear to have been the most successful at developing the careers-related skills that underpin such transition*.

However, progression, by itself, may not be a sufficiently robust or comprehensive indicator of satisfactory transition at 16. Young people who were working towards a qualification at a level that was equivalent to that which they had already attained at GCSE were more likely than other students to believe that what they were doing was interesting and led somewhere. The following chapter explores the extent to which young people are content with and feel positive about, the different types of transition they had made.

Thus far, this report has examined the extent to which young people have made what could be described as 'objectively' satisfactory transitions. In other words, as indicated in Chapter 3, those transitions into training, education or employment in which young people were working towards a qualification, and in which there was a measure of progression. There is some evidence however, that individuals may not always view such 'objectively' satisfactory transitions as the most appropriate or suitable ones for them as individuals.

In order to explore this notion, a series of measures of young people’s ‘subjective satisfaction’ was compiled, using indicators from the May 1998 questionnaire. These measures reflect young people’s perceptions, over the first nine months of their post-16 transition, of the following issues:

- The extent to which they felt their current post-16 occupations would lead somewhere in the future. In other words, whether they felt that the work they were doing was interesting, enabled them to learn new skills and was providing appropriate foundations for their future career.

- The extent to which they felt they had made the right choice of post-16 destination at the end of Year 11.

- The extent to which they were enjoying the course, training or job they were doing.

The subjective measures outlined above reflect the young people’s own understanding and assessment of whether their transition has been ‘satisfactory’, as opposed to the objective measure which reflected what most careers and teaching professionals would perhaps regard as a ‘satisfactory’ transition. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the data analyses suggest that there is a strong statistical association between the extent of young people’s enjoyment of their course and the likelihood of their switching courses or destinations post-16.

This section seeks to investigate the extent to which the 938 young people in the sub-cohort believed they had made the right choices at 16. It explores the extent to which they expressed satisfaction with their choices and seeks to identify the key underlying influences on those levels of satisfaction.
4.1 Young People’s Satisfaction with their Post-16 Transitions

It was clear that most of the respondents were relatively satisfied with their post-16 choices by May 1998. A clear majority (79%) enjoyed what they were doing and nearly as many (73%) had found it easy to settle into their course, training or job. Half of the sub-cohort in May 1998 agreed that they were doing something that they had always wanted to do, reflecting a high level of career decisiveness (even if, in some cases, this may have been a post hoc rationalisation). Moreover, a high proportion also felt that their post-16 choice would help them with their long-term career aim. In all, over 40% of the sub-cohort of young people were content with their preparation for post-16 options, their subsequent experience of transition and their current occupation. Those following vocationally-related courses appeared more satisfied than those working towards A levels. Over half of the NVQ trainees (54%) and 43% of the GNVQ students said they were completely satisfied, compared with 36% of the A level students.

However, there were a number of young people who were evidently unhappy with their situation. While such feelings were evident amongst those working towards both vocational and academic courses, it was clear that those not studying for any qualification were the most likely group to express their dissatisfaction. Overall, 11% of the sub-cohort expressed a high degree of discontent with their chosen course, training or job, and were critical of the lack of information about the range of opportunities open to them that had been available pre-16. This cry for further information, support and advice was also evident even amongst those young people who enjoyed what they were doing, and who were more or less content with their current course or destination. For example, a significant group of young people (40%), expressed some reservations about aspects of their transition. Two-thirds of these (252 young people) commented on the lack of information, advice or support they received prior to embarking upon their further education or training. Just over one-fifth (83 young people) were more generally dissatisfied, while a further 10% (37 young people) identified particular problems with their course or training which had subsequently been resolved.

Irrespective of their level of satisfaction, however, there was some recognition amongst young people that they had to take responsibility for their current status. Some acknowledged that, if they had wanted to avoid ending up in their current occupation, they should have worked harder for their GCSEs. Furthermore, while there was a widespread call for more advice and guidance, in particular from careers advisers and teachers, some 10% of all respondents, in an open-ended question, indicated that they should have taken the opportunity to research their career choice more thoroughly.

It is clear, therefore, that one of the key concerns amongst young people was the need for more information, particularly about what the course, training programme or job would entail and the work that would be involved. Furthermore, the responses revealed that this concern was widespread and not limited to any particular post-16 route. While information and guidance about A Levels emerged as a particular area of concern, students following courses at GNVQ and NVQ levels also raised the notion of providing more detailed information about the ‘reality’ of the course. The common cry for ‘more information’ was not just a vague one. Young people often had very clear ideas about the type and source of information they would have liked.

44 It is worth noting here the slight over-representation of higher than average achievers amongst the respondents.
Young people particularly wanted more information about the content of the course or job they subsequently followed, including the amount and type of work involved. (288 – 31% of the sub-cohort – made comments of this type). They suggested that this might have been accomplished through the experience of classes, for instance through ‘taster A level classes put on over the summer so that we could get a better idea of what courses were going to be like before we committed ourselves’ or from having ‘information on what past A level students thought about the subject they chose’.

The potentially complementary roles of teachers and careers advisers as sources of information and guidance was illustrated by the comment of one student who said ‘I think that teachers should be trained to give careers advice because they know [the students] better and the way in which they study’ while another remarked that the ‘careers adviser should have taken more part in the school lives of high school children’. Early contact with careers advisers, and a greater level of school input into the development of critical self-awareness might begin to address these needs. Eighty one students wanted more input from careers advisers and 67 identified the need for more help from teachers.

Students also identified the importance of the timing of careers input while they were at school. In an open-ended question, 20 indicated that they would have liked their careers input earlier, as one student explained: ‘I feel I should have had more advice from the careers adviser, i.e. some in Year 10. As in my case he/she had to rush through all of Year 11, a few months before we were due to leave, so it was a case of, oh you did well in your mocks in maths, take it for A Levels’.

Fifty-two students said they would have liked to have been ‘encouraged to look further ahead’ when making GCSE or A Level choices. This was neatly summarised by one who wrote: ‘I wish I had taken my careers interviews in Year 9 and 10 more seriously and could have had an idea of what I wanted to do rather than thinking it was something that wouldn’t affect me for years. I would have chosen different GCSEs which would lead on to different A Levels’.

The issue of information, support and advice was clearly important to young people. However, is there any indication that other aspects of pre-16 careers education and guidance experiences played a part in promoting transitions with which young people were content? More specifically, was there any relationship between the level of young people’s skills at 16 and their subsequent satisfaction with their post-16 occupation?

4.2 Careers-related Skills and Post-16 Satisfaction

The relationship between the type of transitions young people had made, their careers-related skills and their ‘subjective’ satisfaction, were explored using a series of multilevel models. These models revealed that there was a significant relationship between the skills young people had developed and the extent to which they expressed satisfaction with their choices:

- Young people who were most positive about the potential of their current course, training or job to contribute to their future career tended to be those who had the highest careers exploration skills and those who were the most able to apply their self-awareness.

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45 See Chapter 3 for a full description of these. It should be noted that, in this sub-section, all of the comments are based on an analysis of the 726 young people for whom full questionnaire data and GCSE data were available.
• Young people who felt they had made the right choice of course, training or job gave evidence that they were able to apply their self-awareness skills and tended to demonstrate a wide range of decision-making strategies.

• Young people who were enjoying their current course, training or job tended to display a wide range of careers-related skills, including application of self-awareness, careers exploration skills, opportunity awareness and self-awareness.

While careers exploration skills appear to have been the key factor influencing objective transition (see Chapter 3), young people’s satisfaction with their transitions appears to relate as strongly to their understanding of themselves and their strengths and weaknesses and their ability to apply this to their choice of career. As indicated in the companion report (Morris et.al.), this is one area in which timely input from careers professionals may be critical.

4.2.1 Individual and institutional factors

However, there are some fundamental issues underlying these findings that need to be explored. To begin with, it was evident that those following academic courses tended to be less content with their post-16 options than those following either NVQ or GNVQ courses. For many A level students, this was partly a function of the challenging nature of a higher level course. The adjustment from GCSE to A level presented many respondents with problems (‘it’s a big jump’), while others found that they now disliked one or more of the subjects they had chosen. As a result, some of the young people who had originally begun to follow an A level course had subsequently abandoned at least one or more of their chosen subjects, while others had changed direction entirely (see Chapter 3).

Yet it was also clear that, for other students, the lack of satisfaction alone was insufficient reason to modify or withdraw from their chosen course. For some, this may have been because they took a longer-term view, accepting their present discontent because they were able to see potential benefits at some future date. As one such student commented ‘I don’t enjoy doing A Levels, but I am glad I have done them for future preference (sic)’. Others, having started their course, relied more on dogged determination: ‘It is a two year course however, and I think I am stupid if I pack it in now’. Such groups, while not necessarily content with their post-16 options, might well have acquired the motivation and positive attitudes that would enable them to make a success of a transition that may not have been quite what they had hoped for.

However, in other cases, young people appeared to have been prevented from making changes to their courses by institutional or structural factors. Some (29) felt constrained by the confines of school or college timetables: ‘the only thing I could have done differently would have been to start out doing four A Levels...so that I could have made a more informed decision. However, my school would not allow me to do this’.

As a result, a number felt they were committed to completing a course they did not particularly enjoy: ‘I have had a lot of difficulties in trying to change course and now don’t have much of an option but to keep trying at maths’. It is arguable that, where difficulties are not recognised or resolved at an appropriate stage, there may be a very real possibility that young people will fail to reach their true potential.

The early recognition that a course or training programme is inappropriate (for whatever reason) may be crucial to helping young people make positive transitions. These reasons may not always be to do with academic problems: for a small number of the young people (23) who responded to the survey, social and personal difficulties were as imperative. One such student, who left further education for a job during the first term of his course, recognised that '[the] college course was not for me. There were a lot of more mature students, I don't think I fitted in, also I found the tutor unapproachable. I made the right choice in leaving college'. Rather than dropping out of education or training entirely, however, this individual had investigated the various options and made the decision to take up a new vocationally related course at a different institution during the next academic year. Financial difficulties were also cited by 13 students. For example, one had found the cost of travelling to college prohibitive and this had led to a poor attendance record. As a result, she had fallen behind with her coursework. Again, her positive response had been to seek an alternative route and she 'changed courses to my old school where some of my friends are. It doesn't cost any money to get there'. In both cases, the young people had made switches that, while appearing to be radical, were appropriate.

The preferred outcome of a careers education and guidance programme might be that young people made choices at 16 which provided them with opportunities for future progression. However, the examples above highlight the need to equip young people with appropriate careers-related knowledge and skills so that, should they make less than optimum choices, they would be able to exercise their skills (albeit belatedly) to make changes to their circumstances. For some young people at least, modifications or changes to post-16 options could prove to be a positive move and would help avoid the situation reported by one such student: 'I wish that I had stayed on at school as I'm working in factories (sic) now which is very boring, but I don't think there's much else I can do with just GCSEs'.

4.3 'Subjective' Satisfaction – What Contributed?

'Satisfaction' is clearly a complex concept and it was evident that a number of factors played a part in promoting such attitudes amongst the young people. While there were some clear links with the actual location (those who switched courses and those who were unemployed tended to be the least content), three other aspects played a strong contributory role, and these are summarised below.

- The development of appropriate careers-related skills, especially careers exploration skills and the ability to apply self-awareness to the career decision-making process meant that young people were more likely to make a transition into a course or training programme that was most suited to them and for which they felt adequately prepared.

- In addition to being adequately prepared, young people were more likely to express satisfaction when they were following courses or training in which they felt their transition had been properly supported. While there was a tendency for those working towards NVQ level II or equivalent to seem most content (a number of those following A level or GNVQ courses appeared worried about the challenges they faced), it was clear that the provision of appropriate pre-16 information and support through the process of transition went some way towards allaying young people’s fears and concerns.
The opportunity for a **period of adjustment**, particularly amongst those following academic courses, was welcomed. The comments that young people made about the difference between GCSE courses and higher level study was often not so much about the demands made by post-16 courses, but about their very different nature. Students’ expectations of subjects were sometimes at odds with their reality, and the chance to try subjects out for a time was welcomed. As one student commented ‘*I am glad I took four A levels as I was able to [drop the one I didn’t like]*.’

Finally, where young people were **given assistance to transfer at an early stage** (whether in terms of modification or radical change) there appeared to be a greater likelihood that they would subsequently express contentment with their course, training or job.
Chapter 5
Careers-related skills and attitudes to further guidance

As the discussion in Chapter 4 has identified, many young people, looking back over the previous year, wished that they had been given more information about aspects of their post-16 occupations. More significantly, perhaps, a number regretted that they had not made a greater effort to seek out and obtain information for themselves. However, to what extent have young people’s reflections on their pre-16 experiences prompted a greater willingness to continue to seek guidance about their future? Is this willingness confined to young people who were less content with their post-16 options, or were young people who had made satisfactory transitions equally positive about seeking out and acting on informed advice?

5.1 Attitudes to Further Guidance

By May 1998, 26% of the sub-cohort (those who responded to both follow-up surveys) said they had made a definite career decision. A further 61% were reasonably decided or were exploring career options. Only 12% said categorically that they had no idea as yet about what they wanted to do in the future. The majority of the sub-cohort (81%) had a relatively clear idea of the occupational area in which they hoped to work.

Yet despite this apparent level of decidedness, 62% said that they would still like to have further help and guidance in choosing what to do next. While the largest number of calls were for specific information on the courses, training or jobs that they could apply for (76%), it is telling that over two-thirds of those seeking more help wanted assistance in finding out which job or career would best suit their abilities (68%) or hoped for help in making final decisions about courses (68%). Over half (58%) wanted some help in order to plan what to do next. Fewer young people were seeking assistance in such practical skill areas as writing application forms (42%) or job interviews (35%). In other words, young people appeared more concerned about obtaining guidance in the process of decision-making than about getting help in the more mechanistic aspects of preparing for future transition.

Yet it is clear that the young people seeking such help were not necessarily the least able (those with relatively high scores at GCSE were also open to further guidance), nor did they lack careers-related skills. Indeed, those with the most positive attitudes towards obtaining further guidance were precisely those who had already demonstrated a high level of such skills. It was significant however, that the one skill they most commonly lacked was the ability to seek out and take advantage of opportunities to find out about further education, training and employment options (that is, the careers-exploration skill).
While schools' approaches to careers education and guidance had clearly been an important factor in promoting positive attitudes to guidance when the cohort were younger, there was no indication that this had necessarily had any long-term impact. When the baseline study was conducted in 1995/96, young people from guidance community schools were significantly more likely than students from other schools to demonstrate an openness to guidance. Three years on, it appeared that subsequent experiences and a growing awareness of life outside compulsory education may have become more important factors. For example, the desire for a range of guidance inputs was most clearly seen amongst those who were working towards a qualification at NVQ Level II in May 1998, but who, at some stage over the previous nine months, had made at least one change to their course. It seems possible that these young people, having reflected on the process of their first transition, were subsequently more aware of the value of guidance to them as individuals and the need for a better understanding of the course or work they were about to embark upon.

5.2 Attitudes to Progression

The majority of the sub-cohort (who, it may be remembered, had scored an average of nine GCSEs at grade C) intended to continue in further education or training once they had completed their current course or training programme. Forty per cent hoped to go to university, 16% wanted to follow some form of formal vocational training (whether in paid employment or on a training scheme) and nine per cent intended to carry on with further education (mainly to A level). Just over one-tenth of the group felt their current course would be as far as they wanted to go and had no plans for any further education or training.

However, while this suggests that most of the sub-cohort were committed to further learning, the extent of their understanding of career paths and progression was a little less robust. On the positive side, 78% of those who intended to continue into further education or training beyond their current occupation hoped to build on the qualifications they had already gained or were working towards. Nonetheless, this still means that nearly one-quarter of the group were either unsure whether there was any link between their current and planned occupation or had no particular intention of building on what they had already learnt.

Interest and enjoyment (as well as particular aptitudes) were the prime motivating factors behind young people’s choice of future career, with the possibility of good prospects also encouraging career choice. There was clearly an element of wish fulfilment emerging from some of the young people, with 48% saying that they had ‘always wanted to do’ their hoped-for career and 44% believing that the job would be exciting. However, only a limited number appeared to be basing their choices upon any aspect of labour market information: 10% knew of jobs locally and 30% referred to wider prospects around the country. For some, career choice was about staying within a ‘comfort zone’ (15% had selected the career because friends and family were engaged in it), or even about fantasy (seven per cent admitted that their job choice was based on something they had seen in the cinema or on the television). Less than one-third mentioned the prospects of high earnings.

The young people with the clearest ideas about progression (in that they intended to move into advanced education or training that built upon their current qualifications, were able to identify a career area in which their qualifications would be appropriate and were able to give realistic reasons for their choice of career) were most likely to be:

- young people with higher levels of attainment (and from schools in which there was a tendency towards a high level of ability);
- those with higher levels of self-awareness and opportunity awareness.

Young people from guidance community schools (of which, admittedly, there were few in this sub-cohort) appeared to be no more likely to have clear ideas about progression than their peers. However, it was evident from the analysis of the data from the full cohort that those who had been in such schools were far more likely to have developed a high level of self-awareness, one of the careers-related skills that seemed to be associated with clearer ideas about progression.

The young people with the least idea of progression (not surprisingly) were those who, having begun a course of study or training, had subsequently dropped-out. It is worth remembering that these young people were not simply the least able: a number were high achievers at GCSE, but subsequently began courses for which they either had little aptitude or which did not match up to their expectations. Within this group of ‘drop-outs’ however, the least able also lacked careers-exploration skills (the skills most strongly associated with successful transitions at 16) and it is these young people who are perhaps most ‘at risk’ of becoming permanently disengaged from the learning process in future.
A number of key points were highlighted during the course of this research, raising issues about the types of skills that appear to be most effective in helping young people make successful transitions at 16; the ways in which those skills need to be developed (and were best developed) and the type, range and extent of information young people felt had been most helpful to them. These findings may have some important implications for the ways in which careers education and guidance provision are both timed and organised if young people’s careers-related skills are to be developed effectively.

6.1 The Importance of Careers-Related Skills

To begin with, careers-exploration skills emerged as the most significant factor in promoting successful transition at 16. Where young people possessed these skills they were not only more likely to have made transitions that showed progression (or the possibility of progression), they were also less likely to have made any modifications or switches to their courses post-16. However, where they lacked such skills, they were far more likely to be among the groups of young people who made changes to their courses or who dropped out of education or training altogether. The effective promotion of careers-exploration skills would appear, therefore, to be an important priority for careers education and guidance programmes in schools.

Secondly, young people with high levels of self-awareness and the ability to apply that awareness were significantly more likely to have made career decisions with which they were content.

6.2 The Development of Careers-Related Skills

Schools had varying degrees of success in raising young people’s skills and promoting progression. The integration of careers education and guidance programmes with careers service provision (as in guidance community or ‘partnership’ schools) and with the wider curriculum in schools appeared to be a key factor in developing appropriate careers-related skills amongst young people. The early development of such skills was also a significant indicator of their later skill levels.

This has implications for school and careers service provision, since it emphasises:

- the need to focus on research and self-awareness skills at an early stage within careers education and guidance programmes;
- the need to make greater use of careers advisers in helping young people apply their knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses to a consideration of their career choice.
6.3 **The Importance of Appropriate Careers Information**

Young people identified some clear **gaps in the kinds of information** that they were given about post-16 courses. For many, accurate information about the reality of study, training or work placements was lacking. It was also clear that some young people were using the first term of their post-16 courses as an element of the decision-making process, with a number making modifications or complete switches during that time. This is obviously costly for schools, colleges, training organisations and employers, but given the very different nature of GCSEs and post-16 courses may be understandable from the young people’s point of view.

However, young people also suggested some novel ways of obtaining such material that might well reduce the long-term problem. These included more taster courses, input from students and trainees already on the courses and extended (or more frequent) work experience placements – strategies that were also identified in a recent qualitative study.

6.4 **In Conclusion**

This longitudinal study suggests that pre-16 careers education and guidance provision can have significant medium-term (and possibly longer-term) outcomes for young people. Where young people have been enabled to develop a range of careers-related skills – and particularly those related to research and the individual consideration of abilities and strengths – they appear more likely to make satisfactory transitions at 16 and less likely to drop out of learning, whether further education or training courses. However, it needs to be acknowledged that there are still a number of structural, institutional and economic barriers to post-16 progression that cannot be addressed through the provision of effective careers education and guidance programmes alone.

Self-awareness skills

Self-awareness is usually defined as the individual’s ability to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. In both the baseline and follow-up research study, we chose to focus on young people’s awareness of their core skills, in order to identify the extent to which students’ experiences to date had enabled them to become aware of their learning and working preferences and their ability to cope in a variety of work situations.

Opportunity awareness

Opportunity awareness is generally defined as the extent to which young people are aware of the local and/or national post-16 education, training and employment opportunities open to them once they have completed their compulsory education.

Transition skills

Transition skills could best be defined as those skills which people need to use when moving from one phase in their education or working life to another. For young people nearing the end of their compulsory education, the development of such skills would specifically involve the need to develop the ability to write application letters, complete application forms, compile a CV and be able to ‘sell themselves’ in an interview.

Decision-making skills

In exploring young people’s decision-making skills, the research sought to identify the extent to which students had already made career decisions and the extent to which they had used appropriate strategies (such as seeking out relevant information, or discussing their plans with informed adults) in arriving at those decisions.
The different careers education and guidance activities included in both the 1995 and 1997 questionnaires were grouped into categories and the percentage of young people that had experienced at least one of the activities in that category was calculated. The categories and their component activities, are set out below:

- **Guidance activities** included individual discussions with teachers or careers advisers about subject choices or post-16 plans, using JIIG-CAL or similar, completing interest and ability questionnaires and writing a careers action plan. 95% of the 1,624, young people in the survey reported taking part in guidance activities.

- **Transition and self-awareness activities** included preparing a CV, preparing job or course applications or having a mock interview. 73% of the 1,624 young people in the longitudinal study identified at least one transition skill activity.

- **Information gathering activities** included using careers libraries, using computers or writing away for information. Of the young people in this study 69% reported taking part in at least one information gathering activity.

- **World of work activities in school** included doing a mini-enterprise project, occupational talks from employers and involvement in industry days or weeks. Of the young people in this longitudinal study 60% identified at least one such activity.
The following table provides a comparative breakdown of young people’s careers-related skills at the end of Year 9 (in 1994/95) and again at the end of Year 11 (1996/97). The table is based on data gathered from the re-administration of questions used in the baseline survey. However, it should be noted that, in the case of research skills, some items on Year 9 subject choice that were used in the Year 9 survey, were necessarily omitted from the later survey. Care should therefore be exercised when reading this table. The statistical analysis used in the main report was able to take account of such differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill levels</th>
<th>High %</th>
<th>Medium %</th>
<th>Low %</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Year 9</td>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>Year 9</td>
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<td>Self-awareness</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decision-making skills</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on data from the Year 9 baseline survey (1995) and the longitudinal follow-up NFER survey. Data from 1,624 young people who responded to a survey at the end of Year 9 and one at the end of Year 11.
During research carried out in 1994/1995 by the NFER and commissioned by the then Employment Department, the research team were able to identify a number of particular patterns of interaction. These patterns reflected five key elements:

- the perceived relationships between the ‘educational’ and ‘guidance’ aspects of careers practice;
- the division of tasks between careers service and school staff;
- the pattern of information flow between the careers service and the school;
- the extent of feedback between the careers service and the school;
- the status of the guidance interview in the CEG programme.

These variables were used to construct three broad models of interactive practice, based on observation in the 66 schools in the study. These models provide a means by which the most effective roles for careers service staff, within the main careers education and guidance context existing within schools, can be identified. The three models which emerged, ‘parallel provision’, ‘pyramidal provision’ and ‘the guidance community’ are outlined below.

**Parallel Provision**

In the first model, careers education was seen as the province of teachers in the school (although it might not be given that much attention) while guidance primarily took the form of a careers service interview. In rare instances, some school staff additionally took on that role. In the most basic cases, there was little interaction or flow of information between the three key players in the guidance triangle: the careers adviser, the co-ordinator and the young person or client. Little or no information about the young person was passed on to the careers officer, while the young people in turn received little or no prior information about the reason or purpose for the interview. The written outcome of the interview, even if passed to the school as well as to the interviewee, played no part in the continuing further education of the student within the school.
Pyramidal provision

In the second model the interview was seen as the culmination of the guidance process, with the school and the careers service, sometimes working fairly separately, towards this event, but with a better interchange of information. In this more widespread model, the careers service was often involved in providing some factual input to the curriculum, support for the careers library and occasional INSET for tutors. Young people were better prepared for the guidance interview than in the parallel provision model. Information about the young people, obtained from vocational questionnaires and/or staff reports was passed to the careers adviser in sufficient time to have been of use in planning the interview. A written outcome of the interview was passed back to both the young person and the school, although it rarely played any part in continuing careers education. Further careers service interventions, such as referral or placement, were conducted on an individual basis, with the young person, in effect, becoming a personal client of the service after the interview had taken place.

Guidance community

The third model saw careers advisers more actively involved in curriculum planning and review, sometimes as consultants, sometimes as part of a guidance team in the school. Young people were involved in skills development and action planning at an early stage in their school career and came well prepared to the guidance interview. Careers advisers, in turn, were provided with detailed information about the interests, abilities and career aspirations (when known) of the young people who were coming to interview.

The interview itself was seen as part of the educative process, and young people returned from interviews (often more than one) with ideas to research and follow up, before completing an action plan that led to transition. Feedback from the interviews was also passed on to school staff and informed future curriculum development (for example, highlighting concepts or skills that might need to be enhanced for the individual or in the careers education programme in the school). In addition, a network of adults other than teachers (AOTs) from the local employer and training community and other bodies were actively involved in a wide variety of activities within the broader careers education curriculum within the school.
Notes