Widening participation in Further Education and Training: A Survey of the Issues

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A Report to the Further Education Funding Council
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# Widening Participation in Further Education and Training: A Survey of the Issues

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1. PARTICIPATION OF 16–19 YEAR OLDS IN FULL-TIME EDUCATION

1.1 Growth in participation

Participation of 16–19 year olds in full-time education has been rising fast since 1986 after relatively slow growth in the previous decade, but there are signs that the rate of growth is now beginning to slow down. Last year (1994/5) participation rates in full-time education were 71.5 per cent for 16 year olds; 58.6 per cent for 17 year olds and 38.4 per cent for 18 year olds. The average rate for the age group was 56.1 per cent, slightly up on the 55.7 per cent for the previous year (DFE, 10/94: 168/95). However, whilst participation amongst 17 and 18 year olds was up on the previous year, the trend for 16 year olds was down by 1.3 percentage points. This, and the fact that the rate of growth in participation for each of the age groups has been slowing since 1991, has caused some commentators to suggest that the participation rate has now peaked (Spours, 1995).

**FIGURE 1**
Full-time participation in education at 16, 17 and 18, 1985–1994

![Graph showing full-time participation in education at 16, 17, and 18 years old from 1985 to 1994][1]

Source: DfEE News 168/95

Whilst full-time participation has been rising since 1986, part-time participation of 16 year olds in education declined each year between 1988/9 and 1993/4. Between 1993/4 and 1994/5 it showed a slight increase, but this was not sufficient to offset the decline in full-time participation amongst this group (DFE, 168/95). The combined figure for full and part-time participation at 16 stood at 79.9 per cent in 1993/4 and 79.2 per cent in 1994/5. With an estimated 12 per cent of 16 year olds on Youth Training in 1994/5, and another 9 per cent in employment, there remains a residual 8 per cent who are not accounted for and presumed unemployed. This proportion of 'non-participants' has remained stubbornly constant over the last ten years.
1.2 International comparisons

Despite recent improvements, participation rates at 16 are still low by comparison with countries like Japan, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, France and the USA where over 90 per cent are enrolled in what is classified as full-time education (Green and Steedman, 1993; OECD, 1995); the gap is even greater as regards 17 and 18 year olds in schools and colleges (Figure 2). However, the improvements during the last five years have been substantial and suggest a shift from what was a low participation post-compulsory education and training system, by European standards, into what might now be termed a ‘medium participation’ post-compulsory education and training system (Spours, 1995).

![FIGURE 2](image)

Full-time participation in education and training at 16 and 17 in 1992

Source: Education at a Glance 1995, OECD

1.3 Regional differences in participation

Participation has increased in all regions in England and Wales, but there are still marked variations in levels of participation between the regions and these appear to be increasing. In 1988–89 there was a nine percentage point difference between the regions with the highest and lowest participation rates (i.e. the south-east and the north of England). By 1992 this had grown to 16 points (DFE, 11/94). These differences are obviously related to differences in the participation rate on Youth Training (YT) which is high in the north and low in the south-east. However, little analytical work has as yet been done to understand these regional differences and this is an obvious area for further research.

1.4 Institutional patterns of 16+ participation

Schools and colleges have both played an important part in stimulating increased participation amongst 16–19 year olds. However, the balance of institutional participation has changed...
somewhat over the past ten years. In 1986 schools had a small advantage over the combined participation at 16 in further education colleges and sixth-form colleges. By 1994, participation at 16 was distributed almost equally between school sixth forms (including independent schools) and further education colleges (including tertiary colleges and sixth form colleges) (Figure 3). Colleges have a clear majority of 17 year old participants.

**FIGURE 3**
Participation of 16 year olds in full-time education 1983–1994 by type of institution attended

[Graph showing participation of 16 year olds in full-time education 1983–1994 by type of institution attended.]

Source: DFE Statistical Bulletin July 1994, DfEE News 168/95 Table 3, England

These institutional shares differ by geographical area. In urban areas colleges have a greater proportion of 16+ students but in suburban and rural areas school sixth forms are still dominant (Spours, 1995). Since the 1992 Higher and Further Education Act, with the incorporation of colleges and the opening of school sixth forms to a wider range of part-time and vocational students, schools and colleges have been competing fiercely for student enrolments. The opening up of more sixth forms, which has been apparent in the last two years, may again alter the institutional balance between college and school enrolments.

1.5 Changes in enrolments by course

With the exception of GCSE re-sits where there has been a decline, enrolments have increased since 1990 in all the major categories of course provision, including A level, intermediate vocational, and advanced vocational courses. However, it is the A level enrolments, particularly amongst young women, which have spearheaded the increase in participation and which have made the greatest contribution to participation growth. Figure 4 sets out the percentage of all 16 year olds opting for different types of course in full-time education.
Enrolments of 16 year olds on A and A/S level courses started to increase sharply for both young men and young women from 1987 onwards and this change therefore precedes the introduction of the GCSE. Over the period 1987–1993, the increase for young women was greater than the increase for young men so that a substantial proportion of the increase in A level enrolments is accounted for by increased female participation. Overall, increases in A level enrolment amongst 16 and 17 year olds reached a high point in 1991/2 and has since begun to flatten out (Spours, 1995). In 1994/5 36.2 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds were enrolled on A and A/S level courses, half a percentage point less than in the previous year (DFE, 168/95). The statistical trend suggests that A levels, in their current form at least, have now reached their recruitment plateau. It seems likely, therefore, that any further increases in full-time participation will have been achieved through increased recruitment to non A level courses.

Enrolment on foundation and intermediate vocational courses (including BTEC First certificates and diplomas; Foundation and Intermediate GNVQs and Levels 1 and 2 NVQs) has been growing since 1991, particularly amongst young men, and this trend has been amplified by the introduction of GNVQ Intermediate courses. Growth rates for the combined enrolment totals on Level 1 and Level 2 vocational courses for 16 and 17 year olds for the three academic years between 1991 and 1994 averaged 2.4 per cent (DFE, 10/94). This growth was attained partly at the expense of enrolments on GCSE re-sit courses which have been in decline since 1992. However, the growth rate for Level 2 vocational courses dropped from 2.2 per cent in 1993/4 to 1 per cent in 1994/5 (Spours, 1995).

Enrolments on advanced vocational courses have been improving steadily since 1983 for
young women and since 1988 for young men. Figure 4 also illustrates that these courses showed an improved rate of growth post 1991, although it was not as dramatic as the increase in intermediate vocational enrolments. This upturn coincides with the introduction of the first General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses. In 1994/5 4.6 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds were enrolled full-time on GNVQ Advanced courses and another 4 per cent on other Level 3 vocational courses.

While the rate of growth of A level enrolments tails off very slightly for young men and women from 1991 onwards, it appears that the introduction of GNVQ Advanced courses has not been cancelled out by a corresponding fall in A level enrolments and that there has been net growth at this level. GCSE courses post-16 have been the main casualty of the introduction of GNVQ Foundation and Intermediate (GNVQ 1 and 2) vocational courses. However, this apparent fall masks the fact that many of those enrolled in GNVQ Intermediate courses also take some GCSEs so that the fall in GCSE enrolment is not as great as it appears.

1.6 Slow-down in enrolment growth

The trend in participation growth over the last ten years has been impressive; but now appears to be slowing down. DFE data for 1992/3, 1993/4 and 1994/5 show a decline in the rate of growth in participation in full-time education for each age group. Participation growth rates for 16 and 17 year olds peaked in 1991/2 at 7.3 per cent and 6 per cent respectively, but by 1994/5 were down to -0.9 per cent and 1.3 per cent (DFE, 168/95). For 18 year olds the participation growth rates peaked a year later in 1992/3 at 4.7 per cent but dropped to 1.6 per cent in 1994/5 (DFE, 168/95). The slow-down in enrolment growth is evident in data on all the broad categories of course, except that of the GNVQ Advanced courses where the rate of growth in enrolments at 16 and 17 has continued to rise (from 0.8 per cent in 1993/4 to 2.7 per cent in 1994/5).

Recent research for the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets (NACETT) (Green and Ainley, 1995) suggests that school and college managers also perceive that enrolment growth is beginning to slow down and that this is considered to be a particularly serious problem for colleges whose funding is dependent on reaching the growth targets. Section 2 discusses the reasons for this apparent decline in enrolment growth rates.
SECTION TWO

2. FACTORS INFLUENCING PARTICIPATION OF 16–19 YEAR OLDS IN FULL-TIME EDUCATION

Young people’s decisions to stay on in full-time education are influenced by a variety of social, cultural and economic factors, as successive studies have shown. Some of these factors are ‘internal’ to the education system, relating to the organisation and content of the post-compulsory education and training system and the ‘pull’ that this exercises on young people at the end of compulsory schooling. Others are ‘external’ to the education system, relating to characteristics of the labour market, such as the level of demand for skills, the structures of pay differentials, and the availability of jobs for unqualified youth. A third set of factors concerns the attitudes and aspirations of the young people themselves and the effects on these of parental, peer and general social expectations, social and ethnic group influences; prior educational experiences; and financial circumstances (Green, 1995; Raffe, 1992).

2.1 Individual attitudes and aspirations

Post-compulsory education exercises a positive pull on young people through the opportunities it offers them to increase their educational levels and qualifications and thus opportunities on the labour market. Until quite recently many young people have appeared relatively resistant to this opportunity having, for a variety of reasons, low aspirations as regards the gaining of higher qualifications. This situation appears to be changing as more and more young people are coming to believe that ‘learning pays’ (Ball, 1991).

A number of factors may have caused this change in attitudes. At a general level society appears to have become increasingly aware of the importance of qualifications for gaining any kind of work, and particularly for allowing access to the more satisfying and well paid jobs. Government and the media have consistently reinforced this message over the past ten years and the likelihood is that this has influenced the aspirations of young people. More specifically, young people are influenced by their teachers and parents who are increasingly likely to have higher expectations of them. Teachers are keen for young people to continue in education both for the benefits it will bring to the young people themselves, and because it will increase the enrolments and funds of the institutions in which they work. Parents in general may have higher expectations of their children because they are increasingly aware of the importance of qualifications for their children’s futures and because they themselves are better educated. More children have well educated parents as a result of changes in the class structure and the decreasing number of children in working-class families, and the effects of increased access to post-compulsory and higher education on the parents themselves (Raffe, 1992). Last, but not least, young people are influenced by their peers, and it would seem likely that as ‘staying on’ becomes the norm, peer groups will increasingly operate as positive influences on their members to continue in education (Ball, 1991).

The research literature generally supports the contention that more young people are developing positive attitudes towards education and higher aspirations, although it cannot tell us
much about the relative influences on this from different sources (Pardy, 1993). However, there
is good evidence on at least one of the determinants of increased aspiration – prior experience
of schooling.

2.2 The importance of prior school attainment levels and the GCSE effect

The most consistent research finding in relation to the decision by 16 year olds to enrol in post-16
full-time education is the extent to which enrolment can be predicted by the level of an
individual’s success at O level or, in more recent years, in GCSE examinations. The most useful
evidence to support this finding is available from two sources for the 1980s and early 1990s. The
first of these sources is the survey carried out as part of the Economic and Social Research
Council (ESRC) 16–19 Initiative; the second is the Youth Cohort Survey funded by the
Employment Department (now Department for Education and Employment: DfEE).

Roberts, Parsell and Connolly (1990), reporting on the ESRC Initiative, claim that
qualifications earned by 16 proved excellent predictors of the samples’ likelihood of remaining
in full-time education. A similar finding has emerged from successive sweeps of the Youth
Cohort Survey. The study by Gray, Jesson and Tranmer (1993) of Cohorts III and IV – i.e. those
in a position to leave school in the summers of 1986 and 1988 – found that for young people with
‘good’ 16+ qualifications (defined as 4 or more O levels or GCSE grades A–C), other key factors
affecting staying on, usually identified as gender, social class or background, ethnic background
and school sector (maintained/independent), affect the staying on decision only marginally. For
example, of 16 year olds with good qualifications from a background where a working parent is
in a manual occupation, some 80 per cent continue with full-time education compared to 90 per
cent from a non-manual background. Well-qualified 16 year olds from a non-white ethnic
backgrounds were marginally more likely than their white counterparts to stay on in full-time
education other things being equal (85 per cent compared to 82 per cent).

Of particular interest is the apparent association between the introduction of GCSE and
staying on in full-time education. The Youth Cohort Survey data is of considerable help here as
it is possible to compare Cohort III (which took O level/CSE) and Cohort IV which took GCSE.
Except at the extremes of the spectrum of GCSE/O level attainment (those gaining 9 or more
passes and those gaining no passes), Cohort IV achieved better than Cohort III at every level of
GCSE. This ‘GCSE effect’ increased the pool of 16 year olds with ‘good’ qualifications – in the
third (pre-GCSE) Youth Cohort Survey cohort, fewer than 30 per cent of the sample obtained four
or more ‘high’ grade passes while in the fourth Youth Cohort Survey cohort (the first one to take
GCSE) nearly 40 per cent obtained four or more GCSE A–C passes.

The GCSE effect did not merely increase staying on by increasing the pool of individuals
with various levels and combinations of qualification. The Youth Cohort Survey also indicates
that, holding GCSE/ O level attainment constant for the two cohorts, the GCSE cohort was more
likely to stay on than the O level cohort. The survey offers us an explanation for this
phenomenon drawn from a comparison of the attitudes to their school experience of the two
cohorts. Among the GCSE cohort, significantly larger proportions of young people rated their
schooling experiences more positively than did the O level cohort. Ashford, Gray and Tranmer
(1993) confirm this finding.
A further study using data from *Youth Cohort Survey* Cohorts V and VI (Payne, 1995b) has shown a continuation of the trends and effects noted above. Thus, not only has the participation rate grown as a result of further increases in the proportions of young people obtaining GCSE passes, but the tendency for higher proportions at each level of GCSE success to stay on has also continued. The gap between the participation of young people from non-manual and manual backgrounds with similar attainments has remained roughly constant, except in the case of those with the highest grades where it has narrowed between 1989 and 1992.

2.3 The effect of other policy initiatives in the 1980s

The introduction of GCSE in 1986 was not the only major policy change which appears to have had an impact on the decision to participate in full-time education post-16 during the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1988, changes were made to the benefit regulations relating to 16 and 17 year olds which made it considerably more difficult for a 16 or 17 year old to claim benefit. Sime (1991) studied the behaviour of two low-attaining groups of 16 year olds classified as 'most at risk' and 'next most at risk' (of unemployment) drawn from Cohort III (pre 1988) and Cohort IV (post 1988). He found that for both groups, and after controlling for the 'GCSE effect', the propensity of Cohort IV to participate in full-time education had increased relative to Cohort III. While for the 'most at risk' group, the change was slight, for the 'next most at risk' group, 15 per cent were in full-time education from Cohort IV (post benefit changes) compared to 11 per cent from Cohort III.

2.4 The influence of the labour market on participation

Much debate has centred on the effects of labour market conditions on rates of participation in education and government training. However, the research to date has provided little conclusive evidence of the precise relationships between the two (Raffe, 1992).

In general terms one would expect young people to respond more or less rationally to the opportunities which are presented to them when they reach the end of compulsory schooling and thus to be strongly influenced by prevailing labour market conditions (Raffe, 1992). Where, for instance, the job market provides good opportunities for young people at 16 this would logically encourage early entry into work, at least amongst those without ambitions towards careers accessible only through higher academic or professional qualifications; conversely, where there is little opportunity for work at 16, and where opportunities in the labour market appear to depend on the acquisition of higher qualifications, then one would expect a general tendency towards higher participation in post-16 education and training programmes amongst all groups. Even those believing themselves incapable of gaining further qualifications would have an interest in joining youth training programmes to qualify for the training allowance, particularly since 1988 when benefits for young people became more limited.

To a certain extent this logic is borne out by analyses of correlations between over time changes in participation and labour market opportunities, at least since the 1970s. In periods of recession, when there have been decreased job opportunities for minimally-qualified youth, rates of participation in full-time education and government training programmes have usually...
increased. This was the case between 1973 and 1976 (for education); between 1979 and 1983 (for education and youth training); and after 1990 (for education) (Raffe, 1992). Conversely, in the only recent period when the youth labour market was relatively buoyant, between 1984 and 1990, participation in full-time education first dropped and then remained flat for four consecutive years until it began to rise again in 1987–8.

There are some anomalies here but they can be explained without undermining the labour market influence thesis. The rise in participation during the last two years of the ‘boom’ period, that is during 1988–90, no doubt had more to do with changes in the benefit laws than any anticipation of labour market changes to come. The decline in youth training after 1990 (Raffe, 1992), can be accounted for by the changing rules accompanying the replacement of the Youth Training Scheme by YT. From 1990, employers taking on young people under YT were no longer bound to offer trainees a set period of off-the-job training – as a consequence, fewer young people on YT attended part-time courses in further education (Steedman and Hawkins, 1994). This change in the status of YT was accompanied by (and may have caused) a steep fall in the proportion of young people joining YT schemes. With both employment and unemployment of 16–19 year olds also in decline in the early 1990s, it seems likely that many of those who would have joined the Youth Training Scheme in the 1980s chose full-time further education in the 1990s.

Roberts, Parsell and Connolly (1990), reporting on the ESRC 16–19 Initiative data, found that of those who left school at 16 in 1985 and found work, only 3 per cent were unemployed two years later; the unemployment rates for those who did not find a job within three months of leaving, or who entered the Youth Training Scheme and full-time education were 62 per cent, 32 per cent and 23 per cent respectively. In other words, in 1985, the best guarantee of being in a job at 18 in 1985 was to leave school at 16 and find work immediately – and in 1985, just over half the cohort did leave to enter the labour market at 16.

Other studies have found similarly strong labour market effects on participation. A study by Whitfield and Wilson (1991) using econometric analysis of time series data (with enrolments as the dependent variable and adult unemployment, social class composition of the population, Youth Training Scheme participation and returns to education as the independent variables) concluded that the unemployment rate did positively influence decisions to participate in full-time education. Raffe and Willms (1989) reached a similar conclusion for Scotland. Payne (1995a) claims that between 1989 and 1992 leaving full-time education at 16 became more risky and that the ‘push’ from the labour market to enter full-time education strengthened as the country moved into recession.

Some studies, however, have been more qualified in their analysis of the relations between labour market conditions and participation. Gray, Jesson and Tranmer (1993) analyse how different factors influence variations in participation (by group and over time) through multi-level modelling of Youth Cohort Survey data. They find some evidence of a labour market effect resulting from structural change and high youth unemployment but correlations with rates of participation at the local labour market level are found to be very imperfect and to have less explanatory power than the effect from educational achievements.

Whilst studies of the relationship between labour market conditions and participation
appear to explain much of the change over time in participation rates, they have more difficulty in dealing with regional variations in participation in full-time education. Participation rates are highest in the south east of England where, until recently, the youth labour market was relatively buoyant; they have tended to be lower in the north even in areas of high unemployment. In Northern Ireland high youth unemployment has co-existed with very high rates of participation in education. Clearly there are other factors involving regional cultures and traditional patterns of school-work transition which are mediating the relationship between labour market conditions and education participation at the regional level. To understand these relationships fully we would need a study which considered not only the relationships between labour market conditions and full-time education but which also included other alternatives to full-time employment such as participation in training schemes, part-time work combined with part-time study, self-supported independent study, and informal and part-time employment. This would also need to analyse the different kinds of work available in the local labour markets for young people from different social and ethnic backgrounds and with different levels of qualification, and the traditional means of transition into them. The variations along all these dimensions preclude any simple equations between participation and youth labour demand at the local level.

2.5 Changes in the opportunity cost of staying on

Another question relates to the opportunity costs of staying on and how these change over time. Motivation leading young people to participate is not just 'intrinsic', but also extrinsic or instrumental, that is, young people make a rational choice to invest in their full-time education in the expectation that over a longer period they will derive a return on that investment in the form of higher income. In this area also, current research does not yield as much information as is needed to determine how these calculations are likely to affect young people's decisions to participate in full-time education in the future.

First, there are indications that the opportunity cost of participation in full-time education is changing. Two important factors appear to be working against each other. On the one hand, the number and level of discretionary awards for student support while in full-time education 16–18 is declining, thus increasing the opportunity cost to young people. On the other hand, an article in the Employment Gazette, using recent evidence from the Labour Force Survey, shows a third of all 16 year olds and over 40 per cent of all 17 year olds in full-time education as being in employment and thus as having an independent source of income while studying (Sly, 1993). This article also reveals a very low unemployment rate among 16 and 17 year olds in full-time education indicating that most of those who wanted or needed some employment while studying had found it.

The Employment Gazette article does not allow us to see whether this is a new or an established trend but it is certainly an area that deserves further study, both from the point of view of understanding changes in the structure of opportunity costs and to assess possible benefits to students from first-hand experience of the labour market while studying.
2.6 Lifetime returns to education and training

More work has been carried out on lifetime returns to education in the form of a wage premium for qualifications gained. Returns to vocational qualifications are of particular interest here since most of the future growth in enrolments must come from expansion of those areas. Bennett, Glennerster and Nevison (1992) used General Household Survey data to calculate private rates of return to vocational education. For men with no qualifications other than vocational qualifications, rates of return were positive for all vocational qualifications. However, these figures are based on cross sections, holding constant family background but not ability. Another study (Blanchflower and Lynch, 1994) used longitudinal National Child Development Study (NCDS) data which allows ability to be held constant. This also shows holders of vocational qualifications receiving a wage premium in their early years in the job market over those with no qualifications. The problem with such studies is that they only tell a story about the past: we cannot assume that future returns will follow a similar pattern.

2.7 Qualifications and the probability of unemployment

A number of studies, notably White (1988), have demonstrated that a vocational qualification at any level offers the individual a better probability of finding employment compared to an individual with no qualifications. Unpublished tabulations taken from the Labour Force Survey for 1993 show an unemployment rate of nearly 30 per cent for young people under the age of 26 having no qualifications. Surveys of young people's stated motivation for entering full-time education show that they enrol to improve their chances of finding a job – a secondary motive concerns progression possibilities, i.e. keeping open the option of proceeding to higher education where returns are higher and more certain (Courtenay and McAleese, 1993a and 1993b).

2.8 Internal factors affecting participation in full-time education

It would be surprising if the character of post-compulsory education provision did not exercise some influence on the decisions young people make at the end of compulsory schooling, and it may well be that the institutional structures and types of course provision available in a given area have a significant impact on levels of participation. Many of the studies on young peoples’ participation in full-time education have concentrated on the effects of these factors and have laid some of the blame for Britain's traditionally low levels of participation on the structure of provision.

At the system level, a number of factors have been identified which may have had a negative impact on participation. In various studies, Ball (1991), Gordon and Parkes (1992) and Green and Steedman (1993) have argued that the organisational and institutional structures of the post-compulsory education and training system in England and Wales are so complex and fragmented that the system has lacked the necessary transparency to encourage high levels of participation. The same has been said of the qualification system and, indeed, it was the identification of the damaging effects of the so-called 'jungle of qualifications' in De Ville's (1986) Review of Vocational Qualifications which led the Government to set up the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) to rationalise the whole structure of vocational
awards. Also focusing on system effects, but with less emphasis on the institutional structures, Finegold et al (1990) have argued that it is the divisions between courses and qualifications which denies the system flexibility and therefore accessibility: so long as the academic and vocational remain divided, the traditional prestige of the academic would devalue the status of the vocational thus reducing the incentive to stay on for young people who do not see themselves as 'academic' but might otherwise have benefited from vocational courses. Richardson, Spours, Woolhouse and Young (1995) have recently reiterated this argument.

The nature of course provision in post-compulsory education has frequently been criticised for discouraging access and progression. A levels have been criticised for being overly narrow and specialised and for carrying a high risk of failure (Higginson Report, DES, 1988; Finegold et al, 1990; Ball, 1991; Royal Society, 1991; Raffe, 1992; National Commission on Education, 1993; Association for Colleges, 1994). Students, it is said, may be discouraged from taking them because they appear too academically specialised and lacking in vocational relevance, and because they offer no intermediate qualification for those who find written terminal examinations difficult.

At the same time the alternative vocational qualifications have been criticised for lacking prestige, having little value in the labour market, and offering too little in the way of progression possibilities (Finegold et al, 1990; Raffe, 1992; Green and Steedman, 1993; Spours, 1995). Many students who lack the academic abilities to succeed at A level may have been dissuaded from pursuing other vocational courses at which they might have succeeded because they fear that they will give them only marginal advantages in the job market (Green, 1995). The National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) have been critically evaluated by some commentators who argue variously that they are too vocationally specific for young people, lack a sufficient foundation in general education to promote progression, or involve unreliable assessment methods that undermine their value on the labour market (Wolf, 1992; Smithers, 1994; Steedman and Hawkins, 1994).

In sum, it is argued that the structure of course provision in full-time education has discouraged participation because of the unsuitability of many of the individual courses for substantial groups of potential students and because the whole is too fragmented and inflexible to be capable of providing the kinds of flexible course combinations which would appeal to many potential students who do not fit into the traditional moulds. At the same time, structure of institutions and qualifications is seen to be over complex and lacking in coherence and transparency which likewise is said to reduce accessibility and therefore participation.

Empirical studies lend some support to these arguments although they are far from being conclusive on all points. During their consultations on raising the target levels NACETT found a high degree of support amongst education organisations for the proposition that curricular divisions and inflexibilities provided a substantial barrier to student participation and progression (NACETT, Report on Progress, 1995). The Unified Curriculum Project research, supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, has also provided initial evidence that more flexible and integrated curriculum frameworks can have beneficial effects on student participation and progression (Young et al, 1994). Research on experimental modular A level programmes, such as the Wessex Project, also suggests beneficial effects from the introduction of more flexible modes of curriculum delivery (Rainbow, 1993). The popularity of the new GNVQ courses, which allow
at least some possibilities for flexible curriculum combination, as well as innovative forms of delivery and assessment, also lend some support for the argument that flexibility in the course offer is a positive stimulus towards participation.

The argument about the effects of different institutional arrangements for post-16 education has been more difficult to ground in empirical research. Gray, Jesson and Tranmer (1993) in their study of different factors affecting participation could find no statistical support for the argument that different institutional arrangements affect participation rates. However, this may well be because by taking LEAs as the units of comparison they are masking these effects since many LEAs contain a number of different local sub-systems – e.g. tertiary colleges in one area and sixth-forms in another. The effects of these different institutional arrangements on participation in different catchment areas could only be established through more geographically localized comparisons, and these are becoming increasingly difficult to make due to the way institutions recruit from outside their traditional catchment areas and the fact that colleges are now independent of local authority control. The fact that tertiary colleges are often very popular and recruit well in certain areas does not prove that a more integrated institutional model would help to raise participation in all contexts. Some recent research (Green and Ainley, 1995) suggests that competition for recruits between different types of institution in the same area in the period since college incorporation has helped to increase participation. Spours (1995), however, argues that such intense institutional competition may soon become dysfunctional.

2.9 Effects of internal changes on recent rises in participation

Whatever the precise effects of supply-side factors on past levels of participation it seems reasonably clear from recent research that changes in provision during the past few years have had a significant positive effect. GNVQ courses have proved to be very popular and have recruited students without displacing recruits from existing A level courses (FEFC Inspectorate, 1994; FEU, 1994; Green and Ainley, 1995). Colleges, under pressure to meet their funding targets, are paying much more attention to student recruitment, and this has led to greater innovation in the development of courses to meet market need, improved marketing and more student-friendly admissions procedures (FEFC Inspectors’ reports, 1994; Green and Ainley, 1995). Research conducted by the Edinburgh Centre for Educational Studies (Raffe, 1992) has also suggested a significant ‘pull-through effect’ on participation at 16 from recent increases in admissions to university courses.

2.10 The slow-down in enrolments growth in post-16 full-time education

A slowing or possible halting of growth in full-time education enrolments at 16 has been identified by Green and Ainley (1995) and by Richardson, Spours, Woolhouse and Young (1995). It is too early to determine whether this is a problem of retention of the loyalty of groups which have enrolled in greater numbers in recent years or whether the difficulty is one of finding ways of attracting the ‘hard core’ 30 per cent of young people whose experience of formal schooling has been predominantly one of failure. It seems likely, however, that it is a combination of both.
Raising participation above current levels is bound to become more difficult because it involves finding new recruits from amongst those groups which have been, by definition, most resistant to continuing in full-time education. These groups are also most likely to suffer financial constraints which inhibit participation. Green and Ainley (1995) suggest that financial hardship may be discouraging enrolment to a greater degree than previously as LEAs reduce discretionary maintenance awards. While we have pointed out above that large numbers of those in full-time education also have some part-time employment, we cannot rule out the possibility that this may be concentrated in areas with low unemployment rates and that part-time jobs may be difficult to find in areas where deprivation is also high.

There may also be factors which are reducing the propensity to participate amongst some of the groups who have been recently been attracted into full-time education but do not have a long history of such participation. These may be considered ‘provisional’ or ‘floating’ participant groups whose loyalties are conditional. Two factors may be beginning to undermine the fragile loyalty amongst these groups. Firstly, there is the possibility of a disillusionment effect spreading where new participants in full-time education have failed to complete their courses successfully or have completed but failed to gain their desired outcomes in terms of employment or higher education places (Green and Ainley, 1995). Secondly, there is the possibility that some of these groups have been drawn back into the former pattern of looking for early employment by improvements in the labour market (Spours, 1995). This hypothesis is supported by data on students’ destinations from the UK Heads of Careers Services Association which shows that for 1994/95 the proportion of those entering the labour market had risen slightly from 6.9 to 7.6 per cent (Spours, 1995). Whether this latter effect becomes more marked in the future will depend to some extent on whether the youth labour market does revive substantially as we come out of recession. This, in turn, raises the question of whether the attrition of young people’s jobs in recent years has been structural, as Soskice (1994) maintains, or primarily recession-led.

It is impossible to say yet whether the stalling in growth in participation is a temporary or more long-term phenomenon. If the demise of the youth labour market in Britain turns out to be structural and permanent, as seems to be the case in many countries on the Continent, then there will continue to be a strong ‘push’ from the labour market towards education. If this is accompanied by a strong ‘pull effect’ from schools and colleges, where courses are seen as attractive and able to deliver the goods in terms of improved job and higher education prospects, then we can expect continuing growth in participation. However, if these conditions are not met, then it would seem likely that participation will tend to remain static at around the current level. The most decisive factor may be whether the economy generates the increasing demand for skills and qualifications by employers, as is routinely predicted by many economists. If it does not, and there are some who remain sceptical (Keep and Mayhew, 1993), and if those gaining qualifications fail to reap the expected rewards, there will be little positive stimulus for increasing participation.
SECTION THREE

3. 16–19 YEAR OLDS NOT IN FULL-TIME EDUCATION

Until now we have discussed exclusively those young people who enrol in full-time education at age 16. From Figure 5, we can see that there has been considerable change in the relative importance of different types of educational and economic activity of the whole 16–18 age group over the period 1983–1993.4

![Figure 5](image)

**Educational and economic activity of 16–17 year olds in England**

Source: DES Statistical Bulletin 9/90 Tables 6, 7; Robinson 1994

3.1 Change since 1983

In 1983, just under half of all 16 year olds and around one third of 17 year olds were in full-time education. A fifth of all 16 year olds and over 40 per cent of 17 year olds were in full-time employment. Ten years later, in 1993, the proportions of 16 and 17 year olds in full-time employment had more than halved. Far fewer 16 year olds were in YT but YT attracted more 17 year olds, reflecting changes in eligibility. These changes—occurring as they do over such a short time period, and recording historically low levels of youth participation in the labour market—lend weight to the conjecture that a ‘once for all’ structural change may have taken place in the demand for youth labour and in the attitudes of young people towards the value of education and training (Figure 5).5
3.2 Education and training of young people outside full-time education

Figure 6 shows that while full-time participation of young people in further education has increased since 1988, the proportion of young people in part-time education has fallen as a proportion of total enrolments. This relative decline in part-time enrolments can be attributed in part to the decline in employment of young people, so that fewer are sent by employers to study part-time at college; to the decline in 16 year olds in full-time YT; and to the switch from a Youth Training Scheme to YT in 1990 which allowed YT to be provided on the job with no off-the-job provision required.

![Figure 6](Image)

**Source:** DFE Statistical Bulletin July 1994, DfEE News 168/95

Young people outside full-time education but on YT receive some training, although outcomes in terms of certification are disappointing – since 1990, only one third on average have gained a full NVQ or other full qualification while on YT. Of 16–17 year olds in full-time employment in 1992, two thirds received some form of training; at age 17–18 the number rises to four out of five (Payne, 1995a).

3.3 Characteristics of those 16–19 year olds outside full-time education

Participation in full-time education is highly dependent, as we saw in Section 2, on prior educational attainments. Those with higher levels of achievement at GCSE are much more likely to stay on than those with lower level achievements. Given that those with higher level achievements are more likely to come from families belonging to a higher social group, it follows that participation is more likely amongst children from these families. This finding has been borne out by numerous studies during the last 20 years including Halsey, Heath and Ridge’s celebrated study of *Origins and Destinations* (1980). Most recently this finding has been borne
out by Payne (1995a) in her study of the Youth Cohort Survey data which shows that participation at 16 varies substantially according to parental socio-economic group. Participation amongst children with a professional parent was highest at 84 per cent; followed by that of children with a junior non-manual or skilled manual parent (64 per cent) and children with a semi- or unskilled parent (51 per cent). What is most interesting about these figures is, however, less the expected variation in rates of participation by social class, but rather the degree of variance in the patterns of participation at each level. The figures remind us that non-participants in full-time education are not a homogenous group.

The 30 per cent of 16 year olds not participating in full-time education include four main groups: those in full-time employment; those in part-time, irregular or informal employment; those in YT; and those not involved in any of these activities. Each group may include some who are studying part-time in colleges or elsewhere. With the exception of those on YT, we know relatively little about these groups. However, what we do know suggests that they are far from homogenous and may have different characteristics in different regions.

On the whole, non-participants are more likely to have achieved only low level qualifications at school, particularly those who are neither in full-time employment nor youth training. However, the latter groups may well include many with good school qualifications. Studies based on the ESRC data, for instance, have demonstrated the regional specificities of this phenomenon. YT trainees in the north are more likely than those in the south east to have good school qualifications, since those schemes generally have a higher reputation in the north than in the south east and thus attract more of the better qualified school leavers. Similarly, in some contexts, such as Swindon in the boom years of the 1980s, many of those leaving school early for full-time employment came from amongst the better qualified school leavers (Evans, 1990).
4. PARTICIPATION OF ADULTS IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

4.1 Education

4.1.1 Trends in participation in maintained further education

Adult participation in further education has also followed an upward trend since 1980. Part-time enrolments have always been the dominant mode of participation, but more recently full-time enrolments have shown a sharp upward rise (Figure 7). However, we can make fewer assumptions about adult enrolments than we can about those by young people. We may be double counting the same individuals as they enrol for a variety of short courses in the space of a single year. Full-time courses may only last for a number of weeks rather than for the whole year so that the number of full-time equivalents (FTEs) for each academic year would be considerably less than the number of full-time enrolments. Notwithstanding these reservations, it should be recognised that full-time enrolments by those aged over 18 amount to well over two thirds of those by young people aged 16 and 17 and that in terms of total enrolments by all modes of attendance adults outnumber 16 and 17 year olds by a factor of 3 to 1.

FIGURE 7
Change in adult participation in maintained further education 1980–1993 (Age 18 and over)

Source: DES Statistical Bulletin 17/92 Table 2, DFE News 196/94 Table 2

4.1.2 Potential for expansion of adult education and training

When we consider enrolment rates of the adult population, we can see that there is still scope for enormous expansion in the field of work-related education and training alone as far as the adult population is concerned. At any one time, no more than one fifth of the adult population is estimated to be engaged in any form of education or training. In 1992 nearly 40 per cent of the population of Great Britain aged between 16 and 64, that is some 15 million individuals, were
recorded either as having no qualifications or as having a qualification below O level or GCSE grade A–C. If a future government were to set as its policy goal to ensure that all labour force participants had at least an NVQ Level 2 qualification, a huge expansion of current education and training effort would be required which in turn would require massive expansion of publicly-provided further education.

4.1.3 What makes adults committed to vocational learning?

An important source of information for this question is the comprehensive literature review entitled Factors Influencing Individual Commitment to Lifetime Learning (Maguire, Maguire and Felstead, 1993). This section will draw on the findings of that review and, in addition, on more recent survey studies published by the Employment Department covering similar ground. Regional studies, such as De Bell and Davies (1991) and Teg (1992) and studies of specific categories of the labour force, such as McGivney (1994b), have also been consulted. In all these studies, a broad view is taken of learning – the Maguire literature survey encompasses all learning experiences and not just formal education and training. The Employment Department studies focus on all types of vocational learning – that is, learning connected with an individual’s current occupation or profession or connected with an occupation that the individual plans or wishes to enter.

4.1.4 Numbers studying

Maguire et al (1993) estimate that at any one time there are 6 million adult learners in Britain, of whom some 3.4 million are in formal education. Of these, around 2 million are in publicly maintained further education, the remainder distributed between private providers (including employers) and higher education. One of the Employment Department studies (Tremlett, Thomas and Taylor, 1994) found that nearly half its sample reported ‘episodes of learning’ in the three years prior to interview, with 19 per cent currently undertaking some vocational learning. This figure, when related to the total adult population of Britain aged 20–64 of some 33 million, would give us a figure of some 6 million adult learners at any one point in time – very close to the estimate by Maguire. However, all these surveys provide snapshots rather than giving us an idea of duration of learning and of who is participating. Without longitudinal studies, we have no way of knowing whether adult learners are drawn substantially from the same sub-groups of the population year after year, or whether learning opportunities are being taken up by a very broad cross section of the population.

4.1.5 Who studies?

Both the Maguire and the Employment Department surveys give us consistent answers to these questions in terms of the groups most likely to have engaged in some sort of learning recently. Participation is related to age, social class, educational level and occupational level, with younger age groups having some educational qualifications and at least a skilled occupation or higher being most likely to have engaged in learning recently. The more an individual engages in learning, the more that person is likely to continue learning, so that learning is very unevenly...
distributed among the adult population with some groups almost completely excluded. In the Employment Department study, respondents were asked about their future learning intentions. Almost three quarters of those who replied that future learning was likely were actually doing some learning at the time or had done some within the last three years. Of those who said that future learning was unlikely, 70 per cent had not been recent learners and most had left school without qualifications. It is easy to see from these studies, if taken together with the findings for who receives employer training, that adults in unskilled or semi-skilled employment are less likely to receive training at work and (partly because they had not received work-related training) are less likely to be planning to undertake some learning in the future.

4.1.6 What were the obstacles to study?

Adults face a number of obstacles to participation in FTE, stemming both from certain limitations in the opportunities available and from factors which impede the take up of these opportunities. A number of studies in the past have stressed the need for providers to be more responsive to the needs of adult learners. The DES Inspectorate report on Educational Responses to Unemployed Adults (1990) noted that 'in general, a range of course provision which is responsive to the needs of the adult unemployed is beginning to develop in colleges', citing the proliferation of Access, Return to Study and vocational taster courses. However, it found inadequacies in some respects in the provision for those with special educational needs and those needing help with basic skills or language. Many of these students, it said, 'do not receive appropriate assessment and guidance'; there were inflexibilities in the timing of enrolment and assessment; and 'few programmes link(ed) effectively the acquisition of basic or linguistic skills with occupational competencies'. Similarly, Hunt and Jackson in their 1992 article identified six key factors necessary for opening up participation for adults in vocational education:

- educational and vocational advice and guidance
- teaching and learning methods suited to adult needs
- an improved system of financial support
- the accreditation of prior learning
- developing competence-based learning through NVQs
- developing and embedding a core curriculum

A full survey of the most recent developments and evaluations is beyond the scope of the current report but it would seem that many of these issues are now being addressed in colleges. Amongst other salient developments are the growth of NVQ courses, short-course provision, assessment centres, APL, and new admissions and guidance systems. Certainly, more recent studies have focused more on barriers to individual take-up of opportunities than on absence of opportunities.

The main barriers to participation amongst the adult employed identified by the Maguire survey are:

- funding
- fear of loss of job security
- finding time to study
Additionally women claimed to have constraints of:

- domestic responsibilities
- part-time working
- inadequate transport
- lack of child-care provision

Unemployed adults were constrained in their ability to enrol on courses by the way the '21 hour rule' was implemented in some areas.

The Employment Department's survey findings under this heading were substantially the same. In addition they stressed the need for:

- improved access and signposting to information and guidance on learning
- the role of previous success in learning in predisposing individuals to return
- reluctance of individuals to finance their own work-related learning
- developing and embedding a core curriculum

For both men and women, participation may also be inhibited by a lack of basic skills. Ekinsmyth and Bynner (1994) reported on problems with literacy and numeracy based on the NCDS longitudinal study of a sample of individuals born in 1970. The proportion reporting serious difficulties (12 per cent) had hardly changed since a previous survey carried out in 1981. Again, the main conclusion of this report is that more publicising of existing courses and more targeting of information should be carried out to raise awareness of where help is available.

4.1.7 What were the qualification aims of adults who were working towards a qualification?

Training Statistics (Employment Department, 1994) provides a table taken from the Labour Force Survey which gives information on the level of qualification aimed at by those of working age who are working towards a qualification. From this table we do not know how this study is financed i.e. whether it is financed by an employer or by an individual, whether it is full- or part-time, or where it is carried out. What this table does show us is that over half of all those persons of working age who are working towards a qualification (around 4.3 million in total) are aged 24 or under. Of the remainder, aged between 25 and 64, around one third were studying for a degree or equivalent qualification. Only a very small percentage were studying for a qualification at NVQ Level 2. The DFE also publishes statistics of qualifications aimed for by adults studying in maintained further education establishments. This group should be a sub-group of the group identified by the Labour Force Survey. Figure 8 shows three main types of courses studied by young people aged 16-24 and adults aged 25 and over studying full- or part-time in maintained further education establishments. Figure 8 shows that, for young people aged 16-24, recognised higher level qualifications, principally BTEC and City & Guilds, predominate, while for adults aged 25 and over non-examinable courses – presumably short and at a low level – are by far the most common qualification aim. According to McGivney (1994b), women tend to be over-represented on part-time, uncertificated general education courses, while men are more often involved in full-time, work-related and qualification-bearing courses.
FIGURE 8
Changes by age in enrolments on three types of courses in maintained FE: England 1990/91

Source: DFE Statistical Bulletin July 1994, Table 9, England

4.2 Employer-funded training

4.2.1 Trends in the volume of training provided by employers

The volume of training provided to employees by British employers since the mid-80s expanded rapidly until 1990; thereafter the volume declined slightly as the economy went into recession but has now risen again. In 1984 around 9 per cent of all employees received some employer-provided training during the four weeks prior to the survey, while in 1990 the figure had risen to 15 per cent. After a dip during the 1990–1992 trough of recession it is now (1994) at 14.4 per cent, nearly back to its 1990 level. For most of those receiving employer-provided training, training lasts for no more than one day. Since 1990 the total number of training days provided by employers appears to have risen sharply while numbers reporting training remain at roughly the same level leading to the conclusion that employer-provided training is being spread more thinly. This is confirmed in McGivney (1994b).

4.2.2 The influence of age and prior qualifications on probability of employer-provided training

Younger age groups are more likely to have received employer-provided training than any other age group and the incidence of training activity declines sharply with age (Training Agency, 1988). In 1994, 20 per cent of all employees aged between 20–24 reported receiving some training compared with 14 per cent in the 40–49 age group – those aged between 60 and 64 received almost none. It is not easy to know how to interpret these figures. Much of the additional training provided for the younger age groups may simply be induction training as opposed to skill-enhancing training, while employees over 50 years old may be considered by employers to offer poorer prospects of a return on any human capital investment, both because their working life is reaching an end and because their capacity to benefit from training may be thought to be more limited. The prior qualification level of employees appears to exercise a
strong influence on their chances of receiving training. A survey in 1991 (Employment Department, 1992) found that nearly two-thirds of those undertaking job-related training already had qualifications at a level equivalent to A level or higher. The group holding no qualifications – some 30 per cent of the working population – has a less than one in twenty chance of receiving training compared to a one in four chance for those with a higher education qualification.

4.2.3 The influence of skill level on probability of employer-provided training

A similar pattern is observable when employer-provided training is analysed by skill level. Those with no or low qualifications will normally be concentrated in semi-skilled or unskilled job categories and it is these categories which receive the least employer-provided training – 7.7 per cent of semi-skilled employees and 5.4 per cent of unskilled employees received training compared to the average of 14.5 per cent for all employees in 1992. Further analysis would be needed to determine which of these two factors – qualification level or skill level – was the dominant one in determining chances of receiving training. Ethnic minority employees are more likely to receive employer-provided training but some of this difference may be explained by the different age profiles of the white and ethnic minority groups.

4.2.4 Women’s access to employer-provided training

The 1992 Labour Force Survey indicated that for the third successive year more women had received job-related training in the four weeks prior to the survey than men (McGivney, 1994b). However, this may comprise disproportionate amounts of short-term induction training. Women are heavily over-represented in part-time and temporary jobs which generally provide fewer training opportunities and this type of employment has been growing rapidly in recent years. Between 1983 and 1990 1.65 million of the 1.8 million new jobs created in the UK went to women and 871,000 of these were part-time. In 1992 82 per cent of part-time workers were women and 46 per cent of women worked part-time (McGivney, 1994b). Much of the training undertaken by women is low-level training even when it is certificated. In 1993 women accounted for three quarters of all NVQ awards at Level 1, but significantly less than half at levels above this (Labour Market Quarterly Review, Feb. 1993).

De Bell and Davies (1991) and McGivney (1994b) have argued that access to training for women employees is limited by their over-representation in part-time and low-level jobs which generally involve fewer training opportunities and by other constraints which impede their take-up of training opportunities. It is suggested that these include financial and time constraints; domestic responsibilities; lack of confidence and employer support; inadequate information and guidance; lack of career prospects and perceived benefits from training; and lack of child-care provision. Interviews conducted for Chwarae Teg (1992) in South Wales with nearly 800 women aged between 25 and 49 indicated that 80 per cent of those not in training would enrol on training courses if child-care were available. McGivney’s (1994b) survey of the literature concludes that ‘virtually all surveys of women and training indicate that lack of organised child care facilities creates an acute barrier to participation in training for many women part-time workers and potential returners to the workforce’.
No serious challenge has been made to the explanation formulated by Becker (1964) of employers' behaviour in respect of the training of their employees. Becker concluded that *ceteris paribus* employers would only be prepared to meet the cost of providing specific non-transferable training to their employees and that employees should bear the cost of acquiring general education and training. It is therefore entirely consistent with Becker's analysis to find from the *Training Statistics* that British employers overwhelmingly provide short courses of training not leading to recognised qualifications for their employees. A recent report (Metcalf, Walling and Fogarty, 1994) also bears out this view. Whereas the report found that 95 per cent of employers reported that they provided training for at least some of their employees, much of this training activity was aimed solely at providing skills required for the current job. Those employees in semi-skilled or unskilled positions who did receive training (a small minority) were most likely to receive job-specific training. Whilst it seems likely that employers will continue to fund increasing quantities of training for their employees, it seems unrealistic to expect employers to take the initiative or be prepared to fund general education and training for those employees with low or no qualifications.
5. LEARNING OUTCOMES: QUALIFICATION AND PROGRESSION

5.1 International comparisons

Qualification levels amongst young people and adults in the UK have not compared well with those in many countries in Europe and Asia during recent years. Whilst the highest attainers gain standards comparable with any country in the world, qualification rates at the post-compulsory level of education are well below those in countries such as France, Germany, Sweden and Japan, and indeed, in many other European and Asian countries as well. The UK lags behind the majority of leading industrialised countries in the rates of qualification among young people at the NACETT Foundation Target 1 (5 GCSE Grades A–C or (G)NVQ 2) and at Foundation Target 3 (2 or more A levels or (G)NVQ Level 3). For example, the numbers of those passing the Baccalauréat (Foundation Target 3) in France in 1994 expressed as a percentage of the relevant cohorts was approaching 60 per cent. In the UK some 40 per cent of 19–21 year olds had gained any qualification at Foundation Target 3 (NACETT, 1994).

The National Targets for Education and Training were, until recently, for 50 per cent of 21 year olds to attain a Level 3 qualification by the end of the century and for half the workforce to be similarly qualified. According to the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets, we are well on course to reach this target (NACETT, 1994). The proportion of 21 year olds attaining Level 3 qualifications has been increasing by 3.4 per cent per year since 1981. NACETT have now raised the Foundation Target to 60 per cent (NACETT, 1995).

This new target is not high by international standards but it represents a considerable challenge and advance on our present levels. Recent research by Green and Ainley (1995) suggested that the target could be met if full-time participation at 16 continued to rise over the next three years. However, if, as seems likely, this does not happen, then the new target can only be reached through very significant improvements in the rates of successful course completion and progression to higher level courses. Recent data on GNVQ completions for 1995 (Joint Council of National Awarding Bodies, 1995; FEFC, 1995) do not augur well for this, either. We consider the implications of this further below. The following section of this report analyses trends in qualification and progression rates, first amongst adults, and then amongst young people.

5.2 Problems of measuring outcomes of learning for adults

The ‘snapshots’ of the qualification levels of the labour force provided by the LFS allow us to assess year by year improvements in the average educational level of the population of working age. It is clear that the qualification levels of the population are steadily improving and that less than a third of the population is now without any qualifications compared to nearly one half in 1979. However, we cannot assess from the Labour Force Survey data how this improvement came about, that is we cannot attempt to estimate the relative weights of the education system, employer training and government sponsored training in bringing about this improvement. In
order to understand outcomes in terms of inputs (student characteristics, prior attainment, type of learning provided etc.) it is necessary to follow a population or a representative sample through the educational process, taking note of socio-economic characteristics and indicators of prior attainment at the beginning of the process. For young people aged 16–19, the Youth Cohort Survey provides useful data available usually within two or three years of the first observations. For adults, we have only one major longitudinal study available, the National Child Development Study. This study has the disadvantage that we can only see how adults in the survey have achieved in terms of past education and training provision, since the cohort being followed was born in 1958. No detailed analysis of educational and vocational qualifications achieved by this group in adult life has been carried out in recent years and such an analysis could no doubt yield useful information.

5.3 Learning outcomes for 16–19 year olds

5.3.1 Trends in qualification rates

The achievements of 16–19 year olds in education and training have improved consistently during recent years, with rates of qualification in full-time education growing only slightly more slowly than rates of participation (Spours, 1995). NACETT estimate that in 1994 39.4 per cent of 21 year olds had gained a Level 3 qualification and that this was increasing at the rate of 3.4 per cent per annum (NACETT, 1994). According to NACETT calculations (based on the Labour Force Survey with a proxy sample of 21–23 year olds), about a third of these qualifications were gained by 20 and 21 year olds whilst at work, most of whom were taking vocational qualifications. However, the majority of those attaining Level 3 qualification did so through gaining 2 or more A levels, and this would normally have been done through study at school or college at the ages of 17 and 18.

It appears that the attainment of Level 3 qualifications amongst 16–18 year olds has been growing steadily in recent years, although we cannot be precise about the acquisition of vocational qualifications since we lack age-specific data on passes for a number of qualifications. The proportion of 18 year olds with 2 or more A levels has been increasing annually by over 2 per cent since 1989, and in 1993, according to DFE data, 24 per cent of 18 year olds had acquired two or more A levels (DFE, Statistical Bulletin 10/94). The attainment of Level 3 vocational qualifications grew more slowly prior to the introduction of GNVQs. BTEC registrations for the National Diploma and National Certificate courses increased by about 1 per cent annually between 1986–87 and 1991–92 with a successful completion rate fairly static at around 70 per cent. It is estimated that around 7–8 per cent of the cohort gained a BTEC National Diploma in 1992 (Spours, 1995). However, since the introduction of GNVQs in 1992–93 participation on advanced vocational courses has grown at an accelerated rate, with an increase of over 2 per cent in 1993–94 registrations over the previous year. If completion rates are maintained this would add several percentage points to attainments at Level 3 each year, but the early indicators for the last two years suggest that they are falling (see below). Participation on intermediate vocational courses has also increased since the introduction of GNVQs, by a growth rate of 3.6 per cent in 1992–93 and an estimated 2.2 per cent in 1993–94, but again it appears that completion rates may be falling. The absence of DFE data consolidating all the results from different awarding bodies makes it impossible to be more precise about trends in vocational attainments of the age group.
5.3.2 **Qualifications gained by different routes**

Participation in full-time education is more likely to yield qualifications than other qualification routes. Payne (1995b) reports on qualifications gained after year 11 by young people who spent years 12 and 13 in full-time education, training or employment. Full-time education 16–19 was by far the most effective route to a qualification of some sort and full-time employment yielded the smallest percentage of qualified individuals. Apprenticeship provided two thirds of apprentices with a vocational qualification, but left one third unqualified. YT had just over half emerging with some vocational qualification. However, these findings give an over-optimistic impression of the success of further education in providing those who enter with qualifications. Those who dropped out before reaching year 13 are not included in the further education figures. Some reappear in YT or apprenticeship where they may or may not have achieved some qualification. Some who dropped out from further education are in unemployment or inactive and not recorded here.

5.3.3 **Qualifications on the Youth Training route**

Youth Training and Training Credits remains an important route for young people in the 1990s, particularly in the north of England. Although participation has declined since the high point of YT enrolments in 1986, there were still some 303,700 participating in YT in 1994/5, representing a substantial part of the 16 and 17 year cohorts. However, historically, rates of completion and qualification amongst YT trainees have been relatively low, although they have been rising for the last three years.

In 1990/1 only 36 per cent of those leaving YT had completed their training and of these only 51 per cent had gained a qualification or a credit towards a qualification. By April–August 1994, this had increased to 49 per cent completing and 54 per cent gaining a qualification or part qualification (LFS data, quoted in Spours, 1995). Data for 1995/6 shows that 52 per cent completed, 49 per cent gained a whole or part qualification, with 29 per cent of these at Level 3 or above and 53 per cent at Level 2 (Labour Market Quarterly Review, February 1997). While it may be confidently hoped that the new Modern Apprenticeship will achieve a higher proportion of successful completions with Level 3 qualifications, it remains a concern that significant numbers of young people may still be leaving without full qualifications at either intermediate or advanced levels. Great improvements would have to be made here for YT to contribute significantly towards the achievement of the Foundation Three target.

5.3.4 **Drop-out, exam failure and non-progression in further education**

The data on rising qualification rates in 16–19 full-time education presents a relatively optimistic picture. However, against this we have to set the more negative picture that emerges from considering the data on those who are not achieving as much as they should from participation in full-time education. The two major problems in school sixth-forms and further education colleges are currently the high rates of non-completion of courses and the relatively low rates of progression from lower to advanced courses. Non-completion takes two forms: drop-out from courses and exam failure. Non-progression refers to the failure of students entering courses at
Level 2 and below to progress to higher levels. Currently, both these phenomena are too high. On average 30 per cent of students embarking on full-time education courses fail to complete successfully and less than 50 per cent of those who enter full-time education progress to successful completion of Level 3 courses.

5.3.5 The extent of non-completion

The OFSTED/Audit Commission report (1993) has drawn attention to high non-completion rates for full-time 16–19 courses. The Commission found that 40 per cent of those aged 16–19 enrolled on Royal Society of Arts (RSA) vocational courses failed to complete or completed unsuccessfully; the corresponding figure for City and Guilds was 45 per cent and for BTEC and A level around 30 per cent. Drop-out alone accounted for 15 per cent of the students lost from A level, 19 per cent lost from BTEC National, First and City and Guilds courses and 13 per cent lost from RSA courses. The Further Education Unit (FEU et al, 1994) examined drop-out from GNVQ courses for 1993–94. Their finding was very much in line with the overall figure of 18 per cent for drop-out from vocational courses produced by the Audit Commission. In the FEU survey, the average drop-out rate for GNVQ Level 2 students was around 20 per cent and the rate for the first year of GNVQ Level 3 was a little below that at around 16 per cent.

Not all studies have confirmed this picture. Payne (1995a and 1995b) does not give a detailed breakdown of drop-out/failure on vocational courses; however, her analysis (Payne 1995b) of drop-out rates from A and A/S level courses shows a much lower rate for 1993 (4 per cent) than the 15 per cent drop-out rate that resulted from the field work carried out for the Audit Commission, presumably in 1991–92. The Audit Commission figures for A level drop-out should, perhaps, therefore be treated with some caution until firmer information is available from the FEFC databank using the Individualised Student Record. However, there can be little doubt that this is a major issue.

The GNVQ is a recent qualification and it may still be too early to judge how courses preparing students for it are likely to fare in terms of completion and progression. However, such data as we have on the 1992 and 1993 entry cohorts on GNVQ courses suggests that successful completion rates are disappointing and probably lower than for the courses being replaced. In their recent report the FEFC Inspectorate cite evidence collected by BTEC on successful completion on GNVQ courses to-date: ‘overall, of those who had enrolled, 48 per cent of intermediate students and 55 per cent of advanced students had completed their GNVQs by the end of the normal programme duration’ (FEFC, 1995).

5.3.6 Reasons for non-completion and non-progression

The full reasons for drop-out and exam failure are still not well understood. Studies show that there are certain common characteristics amongst students who drop out from different courses. The Audit Commission found a significant relationship between prior GCSE scores and non-completion — roughly speaking, students with GCSE grades at F/G and below were most likely not to complete. Both Payne (1995) and the OFSTED/Audit Commission report (1993) found a marked relationship between low GCSE scores and non-completion on A level courses. In
addition, Payne consistently found that, holding GCSE score constant, students from less-favoured socio-economic groups were more likely not to complete A level courses than those from higher groups. Studies have also highlighted certain factors which may be common causes for non-completion on various courses, such as student financial hardship, inappropriate course choice and student deficits in core skills areas (OFSTED/Audit Commission, 1993; Green and Ainley, 1995). Such evidence as there is on the first of these has been cited above. The latter possible causes are best considered in a course-specific analysis since the precise nature of the problems vary somewhat according to course. The following analysis will consider the problems of non-completion and non-progression in the two main pathways in full-time education: the ‘academic’ (GCSE re-sits and A levels); the broad vocational (GNVQ type courses).

5.3.7 The GCSE re-sit/A level pathway

The majority pathway followed by students in post-16 education is the two-year A level course. This recruits the majority of full time students (36 per cent of the 16 year old cohort in 1992-93, of which cohort less than 70 per cent were participating full-time) and far more than any other course type. It currently contributes more than any other type of course to qualification at Level 3. However, it also, as we have seen, contributes a large proportion of those not completing courses in full-time education. The non-completion rate on A levels may be deemed particularly serious since for many of the students concerned it represents two years of study with nothing gained.

GCSE re-sits recruit a significant proportion of students at 16 (about 7 per cent of the cohort in 1993-94: DFE, 10/94). However, the numbers are dropping and the course does not, in any case, represent a very significant progression route to Level 3 qualification. We do not know the exact proportion of re-sitters who progress to and successfully complete A levels but on the evidence we have it would seem to be not very high. Ashford et al (1993) calculate from the Youth Cohort Survey data that around 20 per cent of re-sit students in 1990 progressed onto A levels. The exact proportion of re-sit students who drop out is not known but it has been estimated (Audit Commission, 1993) that less than 60 per cent of re-sitters gained an extra two GCSE A–C grades, the very minimum level of achievement which might be considered to justify full-time study on such a course.

5.3.8 Reasons for poor GCSE re-sit results

The relative ineffectiveness of the GCSE re-sit courses in facilitating achievement and progression is not well understood, but it is certainly well known. In their study of colleges and school sixth forms, Green and Ainley (1995) reported that the majority of managers, particularly in colleges, took the view that full-time re-sit programmes were generally undesirable since their outcomes were so poor and since there were better alternatives available. Few reasons were given for the lack of effectiveness of re-sit courses, apart from the view that many of the students taking them were not suited to GCSE study. Most managers expressed the view that students should be encouraged to do GNVQ courses instead of re-sits, except in cases where they had not attained good grades in Maths or English where they should be encouraged to pursue GNVQ programmes and re-sits in these subjects simultaneously. According to the managers, the reasons
why this course was not more consistently followed was that students insisted, against the advice of admissions tutors, in doing full-time re-sit programmes because they believed that the acquisition of GCSEs was essential for enhancing their employment prospects or for gaining admission to A level courses. It seems likely that this perception will remain until the GNVQ Intermediate courses achieve a higher status and prove themselves as a viable progression route to Level 3 A levels and advanced vocational qualifications.

5.3.9 Reasons for non-completion of A levels

Completion rates at A level vary considerably by institution and region, but concern about dropout and examination failure seems to be common to most provider institutions. The reasons for this have been discussed in a number of studies and reports, including those from Finegold et al. (1990); Ball (1991); OFSTED/Audit Commission (1993); the FEFC Inspectorate (1994); Green and Ainley (1995) and Richardson, Spours, Woolhouse and Young (1995). The most frequently cited reasons are as follows:

- Students experience difficulties because they lack the core skills in English, Maths or study skills (Ball, 1991; Green and Ainley, 1995)

- Some students are not suited to the A level style of assessment with its emphasis on terminal written exams (Finegold et al., 1990; Ball, 1991; Richardson, Spours, Woolhouse and Young, 1995). The new limits on course work assessment may have made A levels more difficult for some students (Spours, 1995)

- Some students do not relate well to the specialised and academic content of A level courses. This could lead them to lose interest and motivation (Higgins Report, DES, 1988; Ball, 1991; Royal Society, 1991; and Richardson, Spours, Woolhouse and Young, 1995)

- Some of the students enrolling on A level courses might be more suited to other types of course (OFSTED/Audit Commission, 1993; Richardson, Spours, Woolhouse and Young, 1995). Some school and college managers reported to Green and Ainley (1995) that there was a significant number of students enrolling on A level courses who should not have been, given the relatively modest levels of their prior attainments at GCSE. These students would have been better off on a different type of course or doing a mixture of courses. This was thought to be a difficult issue to tackle since many students who were advised to do different courses were adamant about doing an A level course because they believed it was the best way of getting into higher education or getting better jobs.

The interview evidence reported in Green and Ainley (1995) suggested a high level of consensus amongst lecturers and teachers about the 'best practice' in A level teaching for improving rates of achievement. This accords with the FEFC Inspectorate's advice in their recent report (1994a) which recommends, inter alia, the tightening of entry criteria and improved pre-entry guidance, greater emphasis on coherence and core skills across the curriculum and more systematic monitoring of student performance.
The evidence of these reports implies that under current assessment arrangements the rates at which A level students successfully complete will only improve significantly if the standards are lowered or if tougher entry criteria are applied. The first option would be inconsistent with the current policy of maintaining the A level as a 'gold standard'. The second option would have no net effect on the numbers qualifying at Level 3 by A level but it might increase those doing so by the GNVQ route. It would also prevent many students from coming out of A level courses with nothing but a sense of demoralization and failure.

5.3.10 The General Vocational pathway

GNVQs were designed to provide a broad vocational education for 16-19 year olds in schools and colleges and, as such, to act as the major alternative route to A levels. They have so far proved to be popular with both students and teachers and have the potential to make a major contribution towards the National Targets (NACETT, 1995). However, this will only be achieved if high rates of completion and progression can be established. There are some worrying signs at present that these are currently not high enough.

Data released by the Joint Council of National Vocational Awarding Bodies in August 1995 show that less than 40 per cent of the first two cohorts on GNVQ Advanced courses (starting in 1992 and 1993) successfully completed the whole qualification within the expected two year period (i.e. by end July 1994 and 1995). For the pilot (1992/3) cohort only 33 per cent had successfully completed by the end of August 1994. BTEC (Report, 1994) maintains that nearly three quarters of students who had completed the Advanced but not achieved a full award by July 1994 went on to complete by the end of December 1994. Assuming a similar rate of 'late' awards for the other awarding bodies, Patrick Wilkes for the NCVQ (1995) estimates that 53 per cent of the pilot cohort would have achieved the full award over the extended period. Joint Council figures for the 1993 entry cohort on Advanced GNVQ suggest a similar low rate of full completion within the strict two year period. Wilkes estimates from these figures that 46 per cent of these students will get the full award within the extended period. This rate of successful completion on GNVQ Advanced courses is well below what has generally been achieved on BTEC National Diploma courses in the past (70 per cent) and very much below the level needed to reach Foundation Target 3 of the National Targets.

The FEFC Inspectorate (1994b) reported from their survey of colleges that standards on advanced GNVQ courses were good, and comparable with two A level courses, but standards on Intermediate GNVQ courses were not so adequate. There was considerable variability in the standards expected and demonstrated and only about one third of students were doing work judged to be of merit quality or better (FEFC, 1994b). OFSTED found that amongst equivalent groups in schools the proportion producing work at merit level was only about 25 per cent (OFSTED, 1994). The comparison again with BTEC is not very encouraging since the rate of higher grades gained on BTEC First courses is generally at twice this level. However, the standard for GNVQ Intermediate is generally deemed to be higher.

The broad vocational pathway has yet to establish itself as a reliable progression route to Level 3 qualifications for those entering at Levels 2 and below (Intermediate and Foundation). In 1991–92 the proportion of students who started BTEC First, successfully completed, and then
went on to National Diploma course, was about 39 per cent (Spours, 1995). It is too early to say how GNVQ Intermediate will fare as a progression route to GNVQ Advanced courses. However, the early indications provided by the data on merit awards presented above, suggest that it may have a long way to go.

Recent studies have suggested various reasons for the relatively low rates of completion and progression on GNVQ type courses. Probably the most important single reason is the more rigorous standard-setting procedure entailed by the detailed specification of learning outcomes against which student achievement must be assessed. Other reasons cited are the difficulty under the current funding arrangements of a) providing students with a course composed of units taken from a range of qualifications and b) the difficulty of extending the period of study for a given level of qualification for those students who require a longer study period than that recognised by FEFC regulations.

5.3.11 GNVQ course entry criteria

The Audit Commission (1993) expressed concern that too many students on both academic and vocational courses had received inadequate guidance on course choice and that many had ended up on unsuitable courses. More recent studies and reports (FEFC, 1994a; OFSTED, 1994; Green and Ainley, 1995) have concluded that this is also happening currently with students on GNVQ courses. The recent FEU survey (1994) found that 49 per cent of GNVQ Advanced students had on entry less than the 4 GCSE A–C grades recognised as the normal entry criteria in most institutions. The problem is occurring for two main reasons. Firstly, the criteria for entrance to courses at Intermediate and Advanced levels are not always clear. Secondly, students often resist guidance and insist on being admitted to courses for which they are not adequately prepared.

The advice from the awarding bodies is that students admitted to advanced courses should generally have at least four GCSEs at A–C grades, preferably with Maths and English. FEFC and OFSTED concur with this advice and it also follows logically from the experience on BTEC National Diploma, where, according to the OFSTED research, students with fewer than 32 GCSE points (i.e. CCCCDDD) had a high rate of non-completion (13 per cent) (OFSTED/Audit Commission, 1993). According to Green and Ainley (1995), admissions tutors generally agree with this policy in principle, but find it difficult to implement because students are often adamant about going on Advanced courses, even when advised otherwise by admissions tutors, and the latter are reluctant to press the point for fear of losing the students to other colleges or schools.

At the intermediate level the situation is even more confused. According to FEU (1994) colleges often have no clear guidelines on entry requirements for these courses and practices appear to vary considerably. Intermediate GNVQ is generally judged to be more demanding than BTEC First, and yet it would seem likely that many schools and colleges are allowing students on to these courses who have only achieved E and F grades at GCSE. FEU (1994) found that most of their sample institutions accepted 'lower grade' GCSEs whilst a quarter operated an open door policy.
5.3.12 **Course balance**

According to a number of recent studies (Finegold *et al.*, 1990; Young *et al.*, 1994; Spours, 1995), the difficulties and tensions that surround selection of students onto courses can be reduced by flexible curriculum policies which seek to customize the courses to suit the individual students. The Government in its White Paper, *Education and Training for the 21st Century* (1991), recommended that the unit structure of NVQs and GNVQs could be used in this way, allowing flexible combinations with GCSE and A level courses. However, this does not seem to be happening to the degree intended. The FEFC Inspectorate (FEFC, 1994a) have reported that the number of students taking flexible combinations of units is still relatively low. The FEU survey (1994) found that only 15 per cent of Advanced students were taking an additional A level and only 5 per cent of course team leaders reported cases of students combining GNVQs and NVQs.

A number of factors make flexible combinations difficult to achieve in practice, according to Green and Ainley (1995):

- the different qualifications pathways each involve their own styles of learning and assessment and this can make combination difficult for students

- students often find the workload very high when GNVQs are combined with additional A levels or GCSEs, despite the fact that GNVQs are designed not to fill an entire week's programme

- time-tabling rigidities can also limit the degree to which students can avail themselves of flexible combinations

- the funding mechanism may not encourage such flexible combinations

5.3.13 **Core skills**

Core skills have been identified in a number of studies (CBI, 1989; Ball, 1991; Wolf, 1992; Steedman and Hawkins, 1994; Green, 1995) as a major problem area in post-16 education generally, but it is particularly in the GNVQ pathway that the issue emerges as critical. Green and Ainley (1995) found that their respondents in most schools and colleges noted that a substantial number of students had problems with core skills, and particularly with the basic skills of communication and number. Lack of basic skills was seen by respondents as a major reason for drop-out and failure on both Level 2 and Level 3 courses, and this despite the fact that many did not see the NCVQ core skills specifications (including basic skills) as sufficiently demanding. This widespread nature of core skills deficits amongst college students is confirmed by the ALBSU research (1993) which found that 42 per cent of students in colleges surveyed need help with communication skills to reach the Level 2 standards and that 60 per cent needed help with numeracy.

Colleges vary in their approaches to core skills teaching (FEU, 1994). FEFC Inspectors have reported that: 'in the best practice, core skills were developed and assessed through the vocational units...' and that ‘...where colleges had open-access workshops and literacy and
numeracy support to extend student capabilities beyond the immediate programme...work of good quality ensued' (FEFC, 1994).

However, these best practices are not always easy to achieve. A number of teachers in Green and Ainley's study noted that the coordination of core skills support across institutions was often difficult and that workshop support could not always be synchronized with core skills learning in vocational units, particularly when part-time staff were involved. Open learning workshops could provide invaluable support to some students when there was adequate supervision but other students lacked the basic skills to make full use of it. One college principal with a particularly extensive support service complained that the funding mechanism was not helping because the threshold was pitched at a *per capita* level which was not triggered where you had very large scale core skills support provision.

The FEFC Inspectorate noted in their report (1994a) that 'overall, the organisation and support for core skills are lagging behind those given to mandatory and optional units and their development is proving difficult to cover fully within these units' (p.21). The FEU survey (1994) showed that whilst 55 per cent of the sample GNVQ courses included additional sessions in IT, only 40 per cent did so in Maths and English. Few courses offered core skills above the minimum mandatory level for that type of course.

Despite the effort being made in schools and colleges to provide additional support in basic skills, this is often still falling short of what is needed by many students. The problem here may range beyond the institutional constraints of time and resources. Several studies (Wolf, 1992; Smithers, 1994; Steedman and Hawkins, 1994) have argued that NCVQ core skills specifications lack precision or are insufficiently demanding to lay the foundations for student progression.

5.3.14 Funding for extended pathways

Recent studies of student flows through full-time education (Green and Ainley, 1995; Green, 1995; Spours, 1995) confirm what might be predicted from the ALBSU research on core skills deficits amongst college students – that a large proportion of college students will require lengthy periods of study to reach Level 3 standards, in some cases extending to four years. Providing these extended pathways may require modifications to the standard progression routes and the methods by which they are funded.

Several of the sample institutions in the Green and Ainley study (1995) had found that some of their students did not fit well into the standard pattern of two year advanced courses or one year intermediate courses followed by two year advanced courses. They were consequently varying these patterns by offering three year advanced courses and two year intermediate courses to students who were not able to achieve the qualifications in the normal periods. In the view of those interviewed, students should be allowed to progress at their own pace and should not be limited by courses being organised into standard lengths. The current funding mechanism, however, was seen to be prejudicial to this kind of flexibility since it only allowed for one year on Intermediate and two years on Advanced.
Flexible course duration is a familiar principal in post-16 systems based on credit accumulation. It also occurs de facto in systems which use grade repeating. It can be used to greatest advantage in unit-based systems like GNVQ where students can repeat units where necessary without having to repeat whole courses. More consideration needs to be given to the best way of facilitating this kind of course flexibility.
6. FURTHER RESEARCH

In order to meet the revised targets for education and training new policies will have to be devised to increase rates of participation and attainment in further education and training amongst both young people and adults. This will require further research in a number of areas where our knowledge is still very incomplete. This final section highlights some of the areas where further research is most needed.

6.1 Increasing participation amongst 16–19 year olds

It would appear from the research surveyed in this report that participation in education and training amongst 16 year olds has now reached a threshold which will be difficult to pass. The vast majority of 16 year olds are already in some form of full- or part-time further education or training or are in work. The remaining segment of non-participants is small and has proved to be very hard to reach by providers of education and training. Inevitably, then, increasing participation amongst the 16–19 age group will have to rely on increasing rates of participation amongst 17 and 18 year olds, primarily through ensuring higher rates of retention amongst those already recruited at 16. The next section will consider what kinds of research may be needed on this question. However, there may still be some scope for marginal improvements in participation at 16 and this needs to be further researched. In particular we need to know more about:

- **The characteristics of the non-participating 16 year old segment**
  What are their qualifications? What are their attitudes towards education and training? What are their work aspirations? What are their patterns of existence? Why do they not participate in education or training?

- **The financial circumstances which are affecting participation at 16**
  i.e. the effects of reductions in discretionary awards; different patterns of part-time employment in different areas; poverty in the home etc.

- **What patterns of education/training would be more attractive to current non-participants**
  Are they attracted by open learning provision in colleges? Does new educational technology present new opportunities for attracting such students? Would they be more ready to participate in schemes based on *alternance* models of college/work-based learning? What balance of general education, occupational learning and general vocational education is most suited to these students?

- **Regional variations in participation patterns**
  We need to know more about the different regional patterns of participation and their causes. This would mean going beyond the traditional simplistic categories of student, trainee and employee which are often – wrongly – taken to be mutually exclusive. Future research needs to look at the more complex patterns which are emerging where
young people are constructing 'portfolio' existences comprising various combinations of part-time and full-time work and study. To understand better the causes of regional differences in participation patterns we need further research which discriminates between these complex patterns and which examines their rationality in terms of the nature and structure of local labour markets. The impact of the latter on participation patterns should be assessed not only in terms of aggregate demand for youth labour, but also in terms of the effects of the different types of jobs available, their entry requirements, and their pay differentials

6.2 Increasing progression and attainment amongst 16-19 year olds

As the foregoing survey shows, the major challenge facing further education at the present time is to improve the quality of participation and to raise rates of attainment. Without this the targets cannot be achieved. This involves reducing drop-out, increasing rates of successful course completion and improving rates of progression between levels. In a number of areas further research will be needed before we can devise effective policies for achieving this.

- **Data on Vocational Qualifications**
  National data sources currently lack complete data on vocational qualifications awarded and the rates of course completion and progression amongst vocational students. We need a complete record of qualifications awarded annually to both young people and adults by age, gender, and route, as well as sufficient data on destinations to give an accurate picture of progression rates

- **Reasons for drop-out**
  Further research is needed on the reasons why young people drop out from courses. A number of factors have been suggested by previous research, including financial hardship, inappropriate choice of course, problems with core skills etc. More systematic research on student attitudes and performance on different types of course will be needed before we can understand this phenomenon adequately

- **The causes and effects of inappropriate course choice**
  What measures should be taken to alleviate the problem? There are important questions to be answered here about: i) admissions procedures and how these are affected by the FE funding mechanism; ii) how to determine and implement realistic entry requirements for courses; iii) what diagnostic tests would assist admissions tutors in directing students to the most appropriate courses; and iv) what changes are needed in guidance systems (both pre- and post-16) to ensure that realistic choices are made about courses

- **Ways of improving successful course completion and progression**
  The available research suggests that in addition to ensuring that young people are accepted onto the most appropriate courses, other factors are critical to achieving high success rates. These include ensuring adequate support in core skills areas; utilizing effective means of performance monitoring and on-course guidance; and providing flexible and, where necessary, extended progression routes. More research is needed in all of these areas. Most urgent is knowing more about the most effective ways of
enhancing core skills. We still lack comprehensive studies on the relative effectiveness of integrated or 'embedded' core skills learning, single subject approaches, and combined approaches.

- **Work destinations of students**
  We currently know little about the occupational destinations of young people gaining vocational qualifications. Until more is known about the value and take-up of different types of vocational qualification on the labour market it will be difficult to assess the effectiveness of recent qualification reforms and the advisability of further reforms.

- **Qualifications gained through work-based learning**
  NACETT estimate that some 13 per cent of 21 year olds have achieved Level 3 qualifications by taking NVQ-type qualifications between the ages of 20 and 21 whilst in employment. Undoubtedly there are significant numbers qualifying in this way, but currently we know too little about how this occurs or what the precise level is of the qualifications gained. In order to have an accurate picture of our progress towards achieving the targets, research and data analysis is needed which draws on LFS and other data to establish the extent and level of awards made to people whilst at work at different ages.

6.3 Increasing adult participation and achievement

The report has identified a number of barriers to adult participation and training. Many of these are well understood and in many cases there are policies in place for dealing with them. However, there are a number of areas where not enough is known to inform effective policy-making and where there is a need for further research.

- **Suitability of courses and qualifications offered**
  The Employment Department survey (op. cit.) presents strong evidence to indicate that adult learners find the existing qualifications system complex and confusing. This problem could be alleviated to a certain extent by better guidance for adult learners. However, we have also drawn attention in Section 4 to the extent to which adult learners in further education predominantly enrol on non-examinable courses. Employers also tend to provide training which does not lead to qualifications. We need to ask whether the existing range of qualifications caters adequately for adult needs, particularly the needs of those with no or low qualifications. Are there opportunities for progression? Are there courses designed to provide the 'platform for further learning' that so many adult learners need? NVQs merely test competencies acquired and do not make provision for learners to brush up and consolidate basic literacy and numeracy. Could GNVQs be adapted for use with adult learners? These are all questions that are highly relevant to attempts to enrol more adults in learning opportunities.

- **Financial obstacles to adult participation**
  Finance is obviously the major obstacle to further participation. Colleges currently receive no public funding to offset the cost of providing courses for adult students in
employment and the most educationally disadvantaged are the least likely to be able to afford such fees, even if kept to a modest level. Since employers and individuals are unlikely to be able to fund such learning and since the important social benefits in terms of greater employability etc. could be expected from such expenditure, *there is a strong case for arguing that fees for such courses should be met from public funds*. Research is needed on the feasibility and likely effects of such funding.

- **Outcomes of adult further education**
  Too little is known about the outcomes for adults in further education and the effectiveness of the courses in which they participate. More research is needed on the patterns of adult participation in further education and the outcomes of this participation.
ENDNOTES

1. The opportunity cost of full-time education is usually defined as the sum of post-tax wages foregone during full-time education and the direct tuition cost if any adjusted for tax saved due to tax relief on fees paid.

2. There are some exceptions—notably, young people from families in receipt of benefits and young people not supported by their parents and in receipt of benefits receive a maintenance allowance equal to the YTS allowance.

3. The unemployment rate is calculated by expressing those who declare themselves to be unable to find work as a percentage of all those who are economically active, i.e. seeking work or in employment. Around 36 per cent of 16 year olds in full-time education and 46 per cent of 17 year olds declare themselves to be economically active. By definition, their work is part-time, around half work for between 5 and 10 hours. However, it may be too optimistic to assume that the total numbers of those in full-time education who would like some employment equates to those who declare themselves economically active—in economically depressed areas many young people may think it not worthwhile to look for part-time work.

4. Up to 1989, DFE, Statistical Bulletin 9/90 pulls together data for the activities of the entire cohort. Since that date, this data has had to be assembled by researchers using a variety of sources. Because responsibility for the education and training of 16-19 year olds has previously been shared between two government departments, the DFE and the Employment Department with another department, the DSS having considerable involvement with the most deprived sub-group, no one government body provides a comprehensive and detailed picture of the activities of this group on a regular basis. The sources used here are estimates by Robinson (1994) using Labour Force Survey, Youth Cohort Survey and DFE data. In addition, we have cross-checked this with data from Courtenay and McAleese (op.cit.), and Shaw (1994). Reports from training and enterprise councils (TECs) have claimed that the 'excluded group' (not in training, education and employment, not registered as unemployed and not drawing benefit) is considerably larger than current estimates.

5. Taking 1985 as 100, in 1987, the index of manufacturing output stood at 107 and in 1993 it was 112, so that it is not possible to explain the change in the youth share of employment by a downturn in economic activity. Between 1987 and 1994, youth earnings in real terms did not increase, so we can exclude the possibility that young people were preferring education to employment thus leading employers to raise wages to attract them. Finally, the presentation of the data in percentage terms actually hides the true extent of the collapse of the youth labour market. Between 1987 and 1983 the 16 year old cohort declined by 25 per cent. In 1987, 74,000 16 year olds were in full-time employment, in 1993 the number was only 22,000.

6. A similar point was made by a report from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) (McGivney 1993). This pilot survey of 50 organisations also produced the useful view that progression routes for adults are unclear—both to users and
providers. Many colleges had little idea of the previous educational experiences of their adult students and it was therefore difficult to build up a coherent picture of typical access routes.

7. This section is based on the volume of training statistics assembled by the Employment Department for 1994 (Employment Department 1994).

8. The measure used is the level of response to a question in the Labour Force Survey as to whether the employee has received any job-related training in the four weeks preceding the date of this survey.


10. Becker argued that, in a competitive labour market, the only training that employers would be prepared to finance would be firm-specific training. Employers would not be prepared to finance general training or general education of their employees. This argument was premised on the assumption that training made the employee more valuable in terms of productivity; if the employer trained the employee only in the firm-specific skill and the employee stayed, the employer would gain a return on his investment in employee training in the form of higher output. The additional training would not make the employee more valuable to any other firm because no other firm could benefit from highly specific training. This would mean that the employee was not likely to be bid away by higher wage offers from other firms as a result of training and the original employer would not have to pay a higher wage to retain the trained employee. In the case of the employer giving general training or education to an employee, all these assumptions are reversed. General training is of use to a large number of other employers who will not have borne the cost of financing it. It is likely therefore that an employee who has been given general training by his employer will be offered a higher wage by another employer (poaching). The original employer thus stands to lose his investment unless he too offers a higher wage. The cost to the original employer is therefore the cost of the training plus the higher wage. These costs are likely to more than cancel out the benefits to be gained from offering general training. Becker concluded that *ceteris paribus* employers would only be prepared to meet the cost of providing specific non-transferable training to their employees and that employees should bear the cost of acquiring general education and training.

11. Another cohort born in 1970 is also being followed through but it will be some time before this study can yield useful information on adult learning outcomes.
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