How Young People Formulate their Views about the Future - Exploratory Research (October 2009)

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Background

The aim of this research is to enhance the understanding of how those in year 7 think about educational and career issues and what factors shape this thinking. It is hoped that this information will inform further research and help construct appropriate Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) strategies to assist young people in making decisions in the context of changes in the 14-19 curriculum and the raising of the participation age by 2013. There is not a large amount of existing work done with young people at this age, looking specifically at how they view their future education and careers, and what they know about the opportunities available to them. This project is an exploratory one, seeking to map in more detail the attitudes of young people at this stage in their educational careers. It is one of the first pieces of work with the initial cohort who will be affected by the RPA (the raising of the educational participation age) to 17 in 2013.

The key objectives of the research were:

• To understand the role of structural and contextual factors, prior attainment, parents, lead professionals, peers, individual attributes, what career related activities motivate them and how all these factors interact.

• To explore how developed their views are on the future and what is most likely to affect their thinking.

• To consider the most effective ways we can equip young people with the skills to make the optimal decisions.

• To provide a base for further research.

Methodology

The study consisted of focus group workshops with young people in 27 different schools in 3 different areas of the country. Participating schools reflect a range of attainment performance and school ‘type’ i.e. mixed/single sex, faith / non-faith, 11-16/18, academy / community or voluntary aided. A total of 610 young people participated in the study from a range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds and with differing ability levels. The workshops consisted of group discussions with pupils and a series of written tasks for the young people to complete. The findings combine statistical analysis of data
from the written tasks, with the feedback from class discussions with the pupils.

**Headline Findings**

- Over 85% of the Year 7 pupils feel they know the job they want to do in the future and 65% of these pupils have held these views for over 2 years. These views influence what post 18 educational pathway they want to take at this point and what IAG support they would like.

- These jobs are drawn from narrow parts of the occupational structure and over 80% are ‘higher status positions’ from NS-SEC 1-3.

- A high percentage of Year 7 want to go to university: 75%. The majority believe it will help them reach their preferred employment destination or give them a better chance of employment.

- Aspirations for higher education differ by geography with considerably less pupils wishing to go from the rural area in this study.

- Pupils from lower socio-economic groups are as likely to want to go to HE and pursue high status jobs, as their counterparts from higher socio-economic groups.

- The pupils’ level of knowledge regarding post 14 educational routes and how to achieve their employment / educational aspirations is low.

- Knowledge of the RPA (ie raising the educational participation age to 17 in 2013) is low, but there is considerable support for staying in education after 16 as long as there is ‘choice’.

- The pupils have well developed ideas of what constitutes ‘success’ which rank ‘the academic’ over ‘the vocational’.

- Parents have a big influence on the pupils’ views but how this influence works varies and is subtle and complex.

- Other significant adults play a role as influencers - including teachers, siblings and older relatives.

- Year 7 would prefer a pupil-centred multi-faceted approach to IAG with an emphasis on experiential learning supported by information and personal contact with careers advisors/teachers.

- Year 7 pupils are beginning to develop principles regarding the relationship between education and employment and ‘success’.

Source: Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009)