

**Higher Education in Northern Ireland:
A Report on Factors Associated with Participation and
Migration**

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Disclaimer: Any views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders of the research

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¹ We would like to extend out thanks to the principals and teachers who helped facilitate our visits to the schools, and to the pupils who kindly gave up their time to participate in the research. Any views put forward are the responsibility of the authors alone.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project is designed to examine the views of school pupils towards progressing towards further and higher education. The study is divided into four main sections.

Section A

The first section sets out some of the main characteristics of participation in higher education in Northern Ireland. In particular it is noted that Northern Ireland has a relatively high Age Participation Index (API) in the UK context. The representation of those from less well-off backgrounds in higher education in Northern Ireland is also relatively high compared with the rest of the UK. However, the high representation of those from less well-off backgrounds in local institutions is at least in part a function of the migration of Northern Ireland domiciled entrants to institutions of higher education in Britain. The migration of those from comparatively well-off backgrounds creates the ‘space’ in Northern Ireland institutions for those from less-well-off backgrounds. The number of funded full-time higher education places in Northern Ireland is capped by the government – the Maximum Aggregate Student Number (MASN) and as a result the demand for places exceeds the supply of places. In these circumstances the asking grades in some instances are higher in Northern Ireland and especially at the University of Ulster than in comparable courses in some universities in Britain. Migrants however have been found to be classifiable into two groups – those who wish to leave, the ‘*determined leaver*’ and those who would rather stay but whose behaviour is determined by the belief that their grades will be inadequate for local entry - the ‘*reluctant leaver*’.

Analysis of data from the School Leavers Survey (SLS) suggests that those from less well-off backgrounds are more likely to achieve the qualifications necessary to enter higher education in Catholic grammar and secondary schools. The data also suggest that the progression into higher education of those with A levels or equivalent from less well off backgrounds is higher in Catholic grammar and secondary schools. Those with qualification enabling higher education entry from less-well-off backgrounds in non-Catholic schools are more likely to enter further education institutions. These observations, however, must be viewed in the light of the apparent evidence that a

smaller proportion of controlled secondary schools have post-16 provision than maintained secondary schools.

Finally in the introductory section the literature is reviewed in relation to student finance and attitudes to debt and the equality policy framework in Northern Ireland.

Section B

The second section is divided up into a consideration of methodological issues in general and the general benefits of using qualitative techniques to explore the processes young people go through as they make decisions about continuing in education or taking an alternative path. Additionally, the specific methodological issues for the study of attitudes and perceptions of pupils in year 12 in secondary schools are outlined. The choice of a focus group methodology for the interview of year 12 pupils and the choice of in-depth interviews for teachers and community leaders is outlined. The main part of section B relates to the extensive reporting of the focus group interviews with year 12 pupils in secondary schools. This is followed by the reporting of the in-depth interviews with teachers and community leaders.

Section C reports on a linked study of Year 14 pupils about their attitudes and perceptions about participating in higher education. Once again this part of the study relies upon a qualitative approach to data collection with a focus group methodology used to assess the attitudes and perceptions of students mainly from grammar schools.

Section D draws the findings together and considers what the main findings of the two studies are. In summary:

- There are substantial differences between girls and boys in their attitudes to continuing in education and also in their intention to seek entry to further or higher education especially in secondary schools. Girls are significantly more likely to want and to plan to go on to further and higher education.

- These gender differences are reflected across the religion divide as reflected in the contrasting attitudes in controlled and maintained schools. In general, girls in both the maintained and controlled sector were more focused on further and higher education than boys in either sector. However, girls in maintained schools were more likely to have the aim of going to university than girls in controlled schools. Similarly, boys in maintained schools regarded progressing to higher education as a goal to a greater extent than boys in controlled schools.
- In part, there are two structural components to this difference in aspirations. The first relates to the fact that Catholic maintained secondary schools do better for educational outcomes for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds than controlled secondary schools. The second factor relates to the apparent higher provision of post 16 provision in maintained schools than controlled schools. Having significant post 16 provision may well lead to raising expectations of progressing into further and especially higher education.
- There was also evidence expressed strongly in interviews with teachers and community leaders that working class Protestant communities had still to adjust to the fact that access to manufacturing jobs through informal networks such as through family and friends was no longer available. The restructuring of the economy has changed the nature of jobs and fair employment policy had increased the importance of having the right qualifications and training to secure access to employment. As the interviews with pupils also demonstrated, there seemed to be more emphasis from Catholic parents than Protestant parents on the need to go on and enter higher education if at all possible. Catholics, probably because of past experiences in the labour market, were far more likely to see securing educational qualifications as the route to securing a job and a job with good prospects. Both focus group and survey evidence tended to suggest that parents were more likely to be very supportive towards continuing in further and higher education for girls and boys in maintained schools, whereas this was less the case especially for boys in controlled schools.
- Community representatives, especially in Protestant working class areas, also talked of the negative influence of paramilitary organisations, the 'drugs' culture and the lack of 'anyone caring' about young people if they drifted out of school with

mediocre qualifications. Some lamented the absence of any effective outreach activities by either the further or higher education sectors in their areas.

- Some of the consequences of selection at 11 were also apparent. Teachers talked of the need to build self-esteem amongst pupils who had not even been entered for the transfer procedure and of the negative experience of many parents who had been labeled as educational failures when they too were not entered into the transfer procedure or failed to get into grammar schools. Moreover, grammar schools adjacent to Protestant working class areas were highlighted as sometimes being ‘unhelpful’ in responding to pupils from poorer backgrounds even if they had secured a good transfer grade.
- The pupils themselves all highlighted their wariness of how much debt that participation in higher education would entail. Little was known about the funding arrangements especially those coming in from 2006. Many boys from controlled schools just could not see any advantage in investing in education if it meant getting into substantial debt. Getting a trade and ‘big’ money in a couple of years after getting a trade, especially in the construction industry, seemed to be, for them, a far more rational choice. Many examples of friends or relatives either dropping out or completing higher education with large debts and then failing to secure a good job were cited. To some extent these views were also expressed by boys in maintained schools but at noticeably lower levels than for boys in controlled schools.
- All respondents agreed that the job opportunities for girls were fewer at 16 and that this in part underpinned the girls’ desire to stay on in education. Many also commented that girls were ‘just more serious at studying’ at school. A small number of boys in controlled schools claimed they were labelled as ‘thick’ by teachers who told them they had no chance of progressing to further or higher education.
- The government’s introduction of the educational maintenance allowance was well known about. Most welcomed its existence but there was a common view that the amount was too small to make a difference in the decision to stay on after 16. Many saw the money as helping to offset travel costs or to help out their families while others claimed to earn more than was available from the allowance over one or two nights of their part-time jobs.

- There was little evidence of the universities' widening access activities, funded by DEL, having any impact on the perceptions or aspirations towards higher education in the focus groups which made up this study. The scale of these focus groups are such that that they include relatively small numbers of pupils from the relevant backgrounds. It was also noted that widening access schemes which work with post-16 provision in schools would experience difficulties in engaging proportionately with controlled and maintained schools because of the apparent lower levels of post-16 provision in the controlled sector.
- Geographical mobility emerged as a major issue in two senses in this research. The first related to the observation by some teachers and community leaders of the narrow, confined areas from which disadvantaged pupils would be prepared to travel. Leaving the immediate area of home and school was regarded as very problematic thereby compounding the inaccessibility of educational resources. More specifically two very striking examples of the importance of sectarian geographical issues were found. The first related to a maintained school to the north of Belfast where both the teachers and pupils regarded the local further education college as effectively 'out of bounds' to the boys of the school as it was perceived to be a Protestant stronghold where the boys would be unsafe if attending the college. Pupils preferred to opt for a college in Belfast instead with the attendant extra travelling time and costs. The second example came from the city of Derry/Londonderry. Here the problem for controlled school pupils is that the post school resources in the city are mostly on the city-side. Pupils uniformly indicated that they would be very wary of travelling to these facilities under any circumstances – preferring to travel to another FEC some 20 miles away. All of these geographical issues thrown up by the sectarian nature of Northern Ireland's society (and there must be many other example in terms of access to further education colleges) really pose major questions to the providers of further and higher education. While it is not feasible to expect further and higher education colleges alone to overcome the more general difficulties of operating in a divided and sectarian society, whether it is through the *Shared Future* community relations initiative or through the responsibility all public authorities have to promote 'good relations' under Section 75, all those concerned with the development of policy in the

further and higher education sectors need to respond to sectarian issues especially as they influence access

The second study reported here deliberately focused on the grammar sector with only a small number of secondary and integrated schools. While a number of general issues concerning higher education participation were discussed, a number of specific matters are of interest. The first relates to finance. There is no doubt that for a significant number of potential students from the grammar sector, the question of how changes in student finance would impact on them was of major importance. It was quite striking however, that students from this sector, compared with those from the secondary sector, indicated that while they were confused about what the new system was going to be, and recognised that it would probably lead to much higher levels of debt they, by and large, continued to see participation in higher education as an investment with a guaranteed financial return. No real sense of the extent to which the graduate premium may be declining was evident amongst our cohort of interviewees. However, in the event that such evidence does become generally understood, there could be a significant impact on decisions to participate in higher education. Where the perception of greater personal debt arising from the new arrangements was starting to potentially have an impact was on the decision of whether to stay in Northern Ireland or to leave to study elsewhere. A minority of students did not see the finance issue of particular relevance to this decision but quite a significant proportion did so. Once again the particularities of the characteristics of higher education in Northern Ireland, as spelled out in Section A are important here. It may well be the case that some of those who are currently quite content to leave Northern Ireland for study will feel obliged to try and stay for cost reasons. In other words while some of the *determined leavers* may well not see cost as an issue others, perhaps drawn from the slightly less well-off groups compared to those from the highest income brackets, may well seek to stay as, in effect, *reluctant stayers*. In this instance, the likely increase in demand for places in Northern Ireland, unless the number of places is increased, will increase the asking grades sought by the universities which are already dealing with the upward drift of A level grades. In these circumstances, in the absence of special measures, it is quite possible that the intake into the two Northern Ireland institutions (and other higher education providers) could become more middle class

and the proportion of better-off Protestants could increase. Several groups could become losers in this scenario. First those Catholics from working class backgrounds, currently quite well represented in higher education in Northern Ireland, could increasingly find it more difficult for local study. Second, working class Protestants, especially males, already not very well represented in higher education could find themselves even less able to access universities on the basis of their qualifications held. It is already the case that those with the lowest qualifications tend to be from the lowest socio-economic groups and it these groups who could be forced to leave Northern Ireland to study usually at the post-1992 universities. Ironically, therefore, not only is it the least well-off who could become the direct major financial casualties of the policy of shifting the costs of higher education onto individual students and their families but they could also lose out additionally as a result of the changes in migration flows.

Thereafter, issues of importance included early information on the significance of AS and A level choices for future higher education courses of study, the importance of Open Days for choices concerning especially local institutions and the major need for information on student funding systems – especially the new system coming into effect in 2006. It was also notable that for some entry to higher education was seen as part of the process of growing up, leaving home and becoming more independent. Living away from home was often seen as an important part of this process.

Finally, the study did not identify the extent to which ‘political’ issues help determine the much larger flow of Protestants to study outside Northern Ireland and especially in Britain. In earlier research conducted in the mid-1990s the issue of the perceived sectarian nature of some aspects of local higher education provision and related matters was seen by those interviewed, including parents, to be a factor in young Protestants choosing institutions outside Northern Ireland. A distaste for the ‘sectarianism of Northern Ireland’ was expressed by a small number of interviewees in this study and this factor underpinned a desire to leave for study. Whether these ‘political’ factors do only play a limited role in how 18 year olds make their choices (in association with their parents) or whether they are deep rooted matters that do not get openly expressed to ‘strangers’ in a short interview period is not clear.

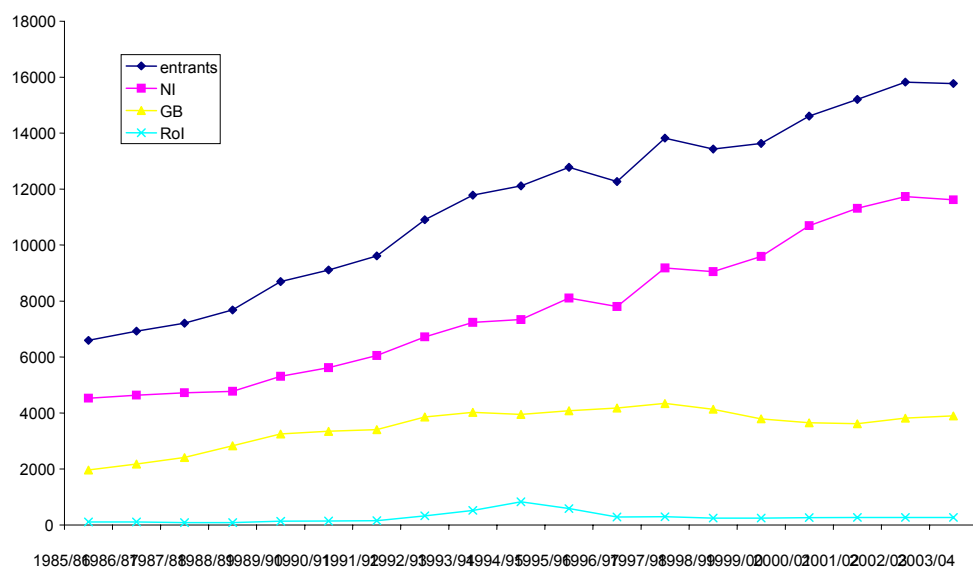
Section A: Higher Education in Northern Ireland: the General Context

In order to provide a context for the two linked research projects contained in this report it is important to set out some of the main characteristics of higher education participation in Northern Ireland (NI) and Great Britain (GB) during the last few years. The last major UK-wide investigation of higher education participation was completed for the Dearing Committee that reported in 1997 (Dearing, 1997). At that time participation (defined as young entrants as a proportion of the age specific population) in Northern Ireland was second only to Scotland at 33% and significantly ahead of England at 28%. In the past few years, participation in higher education has begun to be measured in different ways within the countries of the UK. The most recent date for data on a common basis relates to 2001/02 when the API for Britain as a whole was 35% with Scotland recording a figure of 52% and Northern Ireland recorded a figure of 46%. In 2004/05 the Northern Ireland figure was 45% (DEL, 2006)

Two major characteristics of participation in higher education in Northern Ireland lie at the core of the research reported here. The first relates to destination for study. It has been a characteristic of higher education participation since the 1960s that a proportion of students from Northern Ireland entered institutions elsewhere for undergraduate study. The Lockwood Report of 1965, for example, noted the flow of people from Northern Ireland to Trinity College Dublin (TCD) where they made up a significant proportion of the undergraduate population. During the latter part of 1960s a common entry system to all UK universities was established together with the introduction of the maintenance grant. These measures, which facilitated the geographical mobility of undergraduate entrants, coincided with the outbreak of civil disturbances in Northern Ireland. Not surprisingly, data for the 1970s record a substantial increase in the migration of Northern Ireland students with between 40-45% of entrants being recorded as migrants during this decade (Osborne et al, 1983). In more recent times, the flow of those leaving Northern Ireland for their studies has dropped back to the current position of around 30%. The absolute figures are shown in Figure A1. The data reveal that most of the increase in participation in absolute terms has been accommodated within Northern Ireland with those leaving to study elsewhere in the UK or the Republic of Ireland remaining fairly static. Hence with increasing numbers participating in higher education and with absolute numbers of migrants remaining broadly the same, the migration rate has declined. In part,

this decline reflects the creation of additional places in Northern Ireland but earlier research has suggested that the leavers are made up of two different groups of migrants.

Figure A1: Full time Northern Ireland domiciled undergraduate entrants by destination for study.



Source: DENI and DEL statistical series

The first group of migrants has been referred to as the *determined leavers*. These students indicate an active desire to leave to go primarily to Britain. They tend to be from better-off backgrounds, to be well qualified in terms of ‘A’ levels, to attend Protestant grammar schools and to want to go to the older universities in Scotland and the north of England. Moreover, a number of universities in Scotland and the North of England specifically target these well-qualified students in recruitment exercises. On the other hand, in response to the pressure for places exceeding the supply of places due to the controlling of the full-time undergraduate numbers by the government², the ‘asking grades’ for particular courses in institutions in Northern Ireland, and especially at the University of Ulster, tend to be somewhat higher than for the same courses in comparable institutions in Britain (see Osborne and Shuttleworth, 2003). Hence, a second group of migrants identified in research undertaken in the mid-1990s could be described as *reluctant leavers*. These students would largely have preferred to stay but, in the light of their anticipated grades, did not believe they could secure entry to an institution in Northern

² This is known as the MASN cap. This issue is the subject of a discussion paper (DEL, 2005b).

Ireland. These students tended to be drawn more evenly from the two religious communities, not to be as well off, to be more modestly qualified and to attend a range of mainly post-1992 universities in Scotland and the North of England. From the data in Figure A1 it is likely that the expansion of provision in Northern Ireland has enabled more of these *reluctant leavers* to stay than was the case some years ago.

If the migration of students to study represents one important feature of higher education participation in Northern Ireland a linked second issue relates to the participation of those from less well-off backgrounds. In the 1990s, expansion of higher education in the UK incorporated a widening participation agenda focussed on the expansion of part-time provision and encouraging the participation of more mature students – a focus which eventually became known as ‘lifelong learning’ as it incorporated the idea that individuals would need to spend recurring periods in higher education in order to learn new skills and up-date knowledge. With the advent of a Labour government in 1997 a more explicit focus developed on the socio-economic characteristics of young students entering higher education together with a concern with ensuring that those with disabilities and those from particular ethnic backgrounds were participating proportionately in higher education relative to their representation in the general population. The new policy focus on those from lower socio-economic backgrounds represented a return to the issues identified in the Robbins Report of 1963 and the Labour governments of the 1970s. The question of gender participation, also a policy issue for the Robbins report, had become less an issue due to the considerable expansion of the numbers of women in higher education both in absolute and proportionate terms. The access of women to particular disciplines remains an issue (notably engineering and informatics/computing) but the lower participation of boys especially from less-well-off backgrounds began to become identified as a policy issue. The new policy focus on lower socio-economic groups resulted in the development of particular funding initiatives to encourage universities to provide innovative ways of attracting students from socially deprived backgrounds. With the volume of public money increasing to support widening participation initiatives the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) acting for all funding bodies developed a range of performance measures to capture evidence of progress which are now produced by HESA. We now turn to consider some of the relevant indicators.

Table A1: Participation of underrepresented groups in higher education: Young full-time undergraduate entrants 2003/04

Region and Institution	Total Entrants	‘Working Class’ %*
UK	206525	29.2
England	168085	28.8
Wales	11845	30.0
Scotland	20475	27.5
Northern Ireland	6120	42.8
Queen’s University Belfast	2425	36.0
University of Ulster	3250	48.4
St Mary’s University College	220	46.6
Stranmillis University College	220	31.2

*defined as including socio-economic groups, 4-7.

Totals may not match as HESA rounds data to the nearest 5

Source: HESA (2005)

Table A1 shows the statistics for full-time young entrants to undergraduate programmes in 2003/04. It must be noted that these figures relate to institutions and not to the total number of students from each country. Hence, the Northern Ireland figures do not record Northern Ireland students enrolled elsewhere and similarly, Scottish figures both record the many non-Scots studying in Scottish institutions but do not record those studying higher education courses in the further education sector. A further point that must be taken into account is that the social structures of the countries of the UK vary – hence Northern Ireland and Wales record higher proportions of their populations in the lower socio-economic groups than in England and Scotland. An initial assessment of the data would suggest that Northern Ireland does exceptionally well in terms of the students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. However, such a view has to be tempered by the migration of the *determined leavers* who we have suggested are more likely to be from the better-off social groups.

Table A 2: Location of Northern Ireland domiciled accepted students (degree and HND), by socio-economic status, 2004.

Socio-economic Status	Studying in NI	Studying outside NI	% Migration
Higher Managerial and Professional	807	661	45.0
Lower Managerial and Professional	2056	1095	34.8
Intermediate	1327	605	31.3
Small Employers and Own Account Workers	1079	269	20.0
Lower Supervisory and Technical Occupations	516	215	29.4
Semi-routine Occupations	918	344	27.3
Routine Occupations	602	208	25.7

Source: UCAS special tabulation.

As table A2 reveals there is a significant outflow of migrants from all socio-economic groups but it is especially high for the Higher Professional and Managerial group where almost half leave Northern Ireland to study. Many of these leavers will be *determined leavers* as discussed above. On the other hand, the migration of a quarter of those from the lowest two socio-economic groups will include many of the less well qualified studying at the former polytechnics in Britain who are probably *reluctant leavers* (see also DEL, 2005) Perhaps the most interesting category, however, are those from backgrounds in the most numerous group, the Lower Managerial and Professional occupations. Many of the students from this background will include those with parents who are middle ranking public sector workers who may be particularly vulnerable to increasing costs not only arising from the new funding mechanism for undergraduates but also the increasing costs associated with the reform of rates, the introduction of water charges, shrinkage of employment in the school sector as a result of demographic decline and the implementation of the recommendations of the review of public administration where public sector employment as a whole is set to reduce. Many of the students from these backgrounds may well consider remaining in Northern Ireland rather than leaving on cost grounds and as such becoming *reluctant stayers*.

We also have to recognise that the formal widening access activities of the universities in Northern Ireland do not of themselves operate at a scale that would make significant differences to the entry data (NIHEC, 2004). As the widening participation issue has become better understood, a number of additional matters have become of greater concern. The first of these relates to widening participation being not just about securing the entry of more students from disadvantaged backgrounds to higher education but also

about retaining these students and progressing them to successful completion. As a result, the performance indicators now record some basic non-retention data. Unfortunately, as yet, these figures do not record the retention rates for students in terms of social socio-economic group. However, as table A3 suggests, the University of Ulster records a higher non-retention rate than other institutions and it would not be surprising if this was linked to the social class profile of that university. While making this point it should be emphasised that non-completion is a problem encountered throughout the UK especially in institutions with a high proportion of students from less well-off backgrounds. For example, Quinn et al (2004) have pointed out that in Scotland even though 50% of school leavers participate in higher education, drop-out is perceived as a serious problem. Some new universities, they state, with high working-class participation, experience drop-out rates of 23% or more.

**Table A3: Non-Continuation Following year of entry:
Full-time first degree entrants 2002/2003**

Region and Institution	Total Entrants	No longer in HE%
UK	239120	7.8
England	193535	7.3
Wales	13920	8.0
Scotland	24455	10.7
Northern Ireland	7205	9.7
Queen's University Belfast	2930	6.6
St Mary's University College	255	4.7
Stranmillis University College	240	1.7
University of Ulster	3780	12.9

Source: HESA (2005)

Social Class and Religion/Community Background

A particular focus of the research reported here lies in the exploration of the differences between the two ethno-religious communities in Northern Ireland in participation in higher education in relation to social class. Earlier research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s had recorded a significant difference in the class profile of Protestant and Catholic higher education entrants (Osborne, 2001). The profile of Catholic entrants showed more than four out of 10 entrants from manual backgrounds compared with one in four Protestants from the same backgrounds. While some of this difference came from the

social class differences between Protestants and Catholics in the general population (Cormack and Osborne, 1983; 1991), it also demonstrated a much larger engagement by the Catholic manual or working classes with higher education than Protestants from the same backgrounds. The data on which this evidence was based, relied on major social surveys conducted in the late 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, with the support of the ESRC and DENI. The absence of major statistical series incorporating the key social variables of religion and class remains a major obstacle to the routine understanding of participation of higher education in Northern Ireland. However, DEL (2005) has recently produced an estimate of the recent (2001/02) migration rates for Protestant and Catholic based on the School Leavers Survey (SLS). These estimates suggest that 34% of Protestants study in Britain, while 17.5% of Catholics leave home. While these migration rates are a little lower than earlier measures, they are in line with the higher proportion of students overall remaining in Northern Ireland to study. Moreover, the Protestant: Catholic ratio is still 2:1 in favour of higher rates of Protestants migrating. In the absence of routine statistical series, however, some other data enables us to assess whether the greater engagement of Catholics than Protestants from less-well-off backgrounds with higher education is still a contemporary phenomenon. One source of data we can engage with is the School Leavers Survey (SLS) conducted regularly by the DE. The survey relies on returns from schools to measure both the qualifications of leavers and their immediate destinations. As such, as the recent external review of education statistics noted, releases of the data from the SLS should point out ‘that the quality of the data cannot be routinely confirmed’ (Allnutt, 2005). With this caveat in mind the results of the most recent SLS are utilised.

Table A4: School leavers achieving A-levels by type of school, 2003/04

	Catholic Grammar schools%	Other Grammar Schools%	Catholic Secondary Schools%	Other Secondary Schools%	Integrated Schools%
Male	76.6	76.4	14.7	8.4	22.9
Female	91.4	86.5	33.4	19.6	34.1
All	83.6	81.7	23.8	13.5	28.2

Source: DENI, SLS, 2005

In table A4 it can be seen that the overall output in terms of the proportion of pupils obtaining ‘A’ levels is broadly similar for those leaving grammar schools. However, the leavers from maintained secondary schools are significantly more likely to leave school

with 'A' levels compared with those from controlled or integrated schools. Further investigation with data from the Department of Education (DE) suggests that maintained secondary schools are more likely to have post-16 provision than controlled schools. Hence, at least to some extent, some of these differences may be attributable to this structural difference. This possibility should be borne in mind when the data in the following tables are considered further. It should also be noted that widening access schemes which work in schools in relationship with post-16 provision in schools (as does the Step Up programme at the University of Ulster) will find it difficult to engage with both controlled and maintained secondary schools proportionately.

We can continue this analysis further by taking entitlement to Free School Meals into account. Entitlement to FSM is recognised as a major indicator of deprivation and is routinely used in the analysis of educational outcomes as well as in school funding, (Shuttleworth, 1995). We can, therefore, examine the relative attainment levels of those entitled to FSM between the different school types. The relevant data are shown in table A5. Perhaps the most striking conclusion that can be drawn from this table relates to the clear evidence of 'added value' which takes place in the Catholic school system. Taking the grammar sector first, it is clear that the proportion of those entitled to FSM is significantly higher (12.2%) than in the 'Other' sector (4.9%) but it is also clear that Catholic grammar schools deliver significantly higher 'added value' for those students relative to 'Other' grammar with those entitled significantly more likely to leave schools with 'A' levels (72.9%) compared with (60.7%). This 'added value' characteristic also extends to the secondary schools where the proportions of those entitled to FSM in Catholic secondary schools is well over one in three compared with one in five in the 'Other Secondary' Schools. However, notwithstanding this difference, 14.8% of leavers from Catholic schools have 'A' levels compared with 5.1% of leavers from 'Other Secondary schools'.

Table A5: Qualifications of leavers by school sector and FSM entitlement, 2003/04

	Catholic Grammar schools%	Other Grammar Schools%	Catholic Secondary Schools%	Other Secondary Schools%	Integrated Schools%
% A Levels with FSM	72.9	60.7	14.8	5.1	13.4
% A levels without FSM	85.0	82.3	29.5	19.6	32.5
All	83.6	81.7	23.8	13.5	28.2
% FSM in school sector	12.2	4.9	37.7	21.3	22.4

Source: DE, SLS

We can continue this analysis by considering the data in terms of destinations. In table A6 we can see that the progression of school leavers into Institutions of higher education from grammar schools is very similar but that the progression from ‘Other secondary’ schools is significantly lower than from Catholic secondary schools. Indeed, taking gender into account less than 5% of boys enter Institutions of higher education from ‘Other secondary’ schools. Putting it another way, while boys from ‘Other secondary’ schools represent 13.2% of all leavers, they represent only 1.7% of those whose destinations are Institutions of Higher Education.

Table A6: School Leavers progressing to institutions of higher education by type of school, 2003/2004

	Catholic grammar schools%	Other Grammar Schools%	Catholic Secondary Schools%	Other Secondary Schools%	Integrated schools %
Male	66.7	65.9	10.5	4.7	12.0
Female	80.4	75.9	24.2	10.9	23.7
All	73.6	71.1	17.1	7.6	17.6

Source: DE, SLS, 2005

We can take this analysis one stage further by taking those who are entitled to FSM in terms of the qualifications they have attained and their destinations. Thus, reflecting the concerns of this research, we can examine those entitled to FSM and with ‘A’ levels to explore whether those from modest backgrounds with similar qualifications go on to higher education in similar proportions. The data are shown in table A7. Here it can be seen that Catholic school leavers whether from grammar or secondary schools who are entitled to FSM and have ‘A’ levels are more likely to go into higher education than leavers from ‘Other’ grammar or secondary schools. There are smaller differences amongst those going to further education.

Table A7: Destinations of those with ‘A’ Levels and Entitled to FSM, 2003/04

Destination	Catholic grammar schools%	Other Grammar Schools%	Catholic Secondary Schools%	Other Secondary Schools%	Integrated schools %
Institutions of HE	84.9	76.2	61.8	48.6	62.7
Institutions of FE*	7.9	10.0	17.9	18.6	13.7
Other Destinations	7.1	13.8	20.3	32.9	23.5

* Includes higher education courses in FE

Source, DE, SLS

When examining the trends in terms of the social backgrounds of those entering university it is important to remember that this is the culmination of a process that begins in the earlier years of education. As Clancy and Osborne indicate:

Of course class differences in access to higher education represent merely the end-stage of a cumulative process which begins at pre-school level and is manifest through primary and post-primary education. (Clancy and Osborne, 2003, p3)

The transfer test perhaps marks another point at which these issues can be examined in the education system. The grade achieved in the transfer procedure, to a large extent decides whether a pupil will attend either a secondary school or a grammar school. Therefore it can have a great impact on educational achievement. Table A8 shows that as the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals increases, the proportion of pupils achieving grade A decreases. There is a lower proportion of pupils under Catholic management than schools under other management achieving grade A, reflecting the higher proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals in Catholic schools. However, further analysis reveals that the higher the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, the greater the difference between the Catholic managed and other managed sectors. Within each free school meal band there are a greater proportion of pupils at schools under Catholic management achieving grade As than in schools under Other management. It would appear from both these data relating to the transfer procedure and the data on qualifications of leavers already discussed that there is consistent evidence that Catholic schools deliver greater added value for those from less well-off backgrounds

Table A8: Proportions and numbers of those attaining A grades by FSM entitlement by school type, 2001/02

%FSM	Schools Under Catholic Management	Schools Under Other Management	Schools Under Catholic Management	Schools Under Other Management
<11%	52.7	47.4	858	2336
11-20%	40.6	35.6	699	715
21-30%	38.6	32.2	791	315
31- 40%	31.2	21.1	365	77
41 – 50%	28.8	17.8	142	36
51%	20.2	9.8	218	31

Source: DE 2002

Further Education

In terms of further education, there are currently 16 colleges located throughout Northern Ireland. These have a dominant role in vocational education and training for 16-19 year olds, providing the skills necessary for entry into the labour market and ‘A’ levels. They also provide an alternative route to higher education other than school for those aged 16-19 and to adults through access and other courses (McAleavy et al., 2004). The full-time students, who enter at age 16, are drawn predominantly from those with average to poor GCSE performance, including a proportion with no qualifications at all (DEL, 2004).

In contrast to the figures in table A8 on school leavers progressing to higher education, table A9 shows that there is a higher progression for those from controlled secondary schools than Catholic secondary schools to further education.

Table A9: School leavers entering Institutes of Further Education by School type

Entering Further Education Colleges	Catholic Grammar Schools%	Other Grammar Schools%	Catholic Secondary Schools%	Other Secondary Schools%	Integrated schools %
Male	18.7	21.0	20.9	29.5	39.8
Female	13.7	17.0	33.5	44.3	39.5
All	16.2	18.9	27.0	36.4	39.7

Source: SLS, 2005

Research conducted by Collins et al. (2001) have shown that in Belfast the characteristic non-progressor to further education is likely to be the Protestant male who attends a secondary school which itself has low rates of progression.

Student Finance, widening participation and equality

Two major policy areas are of direct concern to this report and both have undergone major changes since the return of Labour to power in 1997. The two policy areas are student finance and widening participation.

Student finance

The Labour government when it returned to office did so in the immediate aftermath of the publication of the Dearing Report (1997). Set up by the outgoing Conservative administration it recommended that the financial advantage accruing to a graduate over a lifetime of earnings compared with a non-graduate, was sufficient to warrant a graduate making a contribution to the cost of higher education through the payment of tuition fees. However, Dearing also recommended that the means-tested maintenance grant be retained in order to ensure that students from less well-off backgrounds were not deterred from entering higher education for financial reasons. However, the Labour government while it decided to accept the recommendation on fees and introduced means-tested tuition fees but replaced the student maintenance grant in favour of a loan. The introduction of asymmetrical devolved government to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, however, removed political responsibility for higher education matters from London to Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. In Scotland the negotiations between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, which preceded the formation of the first coalition administration, involved student finance as a result of the proposed introduction of fees. The two parties agreed to an independent review for Scotland which reported that there was no support for tuition fees in Scotland but that there was support for graduates making a contribution through a flat rate endowment. Cubie also recommended a means-tested maintenance grant. These recommendations were implemented by the Scottish executive. In Northern Ireland, despite the recommendations of an Assembly Committee that the Scottish model be followed, the then Minister in the devolved administration decided to follow the lead of England in this issue. Means-tested fees were introduced alongside means-tested bursaries.

In 2003 the UK government brought higher education to the top of the agenda once again with the publication of the white paper *The Future of Higher Education*. The paper proposed further changes to student finance. Recognising that there was a strong case for

additional finance for the universities but being unwilling to channel the sums needed from public finances, the government proposed allowing universities to introduce tuition fees of up to £3000 for higher education courses to be repaid after graduation. Universities could vary fee levels but all students would incur these fees which unlike the existing system would be repayable after graduation. Universities that charged these fees would, however, be required to prepare a widening access agreement which would have to be endorsed by a new regulatory body - the Office of Fair Access. Moreover, the Access Agreements were required to incorporate a system of bursaries payable to students from less well-off backgrounds. The bursaries to be paid by a university under its Access Agreement would complement the new grants/bursaries again on a means-tested basis to students domiciled in England. These proposals were subsequently enacted. Notwithstanding the fact that devolution meant that this policy only applied to England, it immediately caused difficulties for the devolved administrations, as universities in these regions would not receive the additional fee income going to universities in England. In Scotland, after a Parliamentary review of the implications for higher education in Scotland of the new policy, additional resources for higher education were found from the Scottish budget. In Wales a major investigation of the issue resulted in recommendations to the Welsh assembly which incorporated a fee element but at the time of writing policy in Wales has not been decided. However, in Northern Ireland with the absence of the Assembly and under Direct Rule arrangements, the English policy has been followed with the new arrangements applying to undergraduate entrants in 2006.

The major debate that has taken place over the various ways in which student funding can be designed has, not surprisingly, also focussed on the issue of the potential impact of debt on participation in higher education. According to the 2002/2003 *Student Income and Expenditure Survey* all final year students expected to leave with an average of £8666 debt, and half believed it would be over £10,097. As might be expected the burden of debt fell more heavily on those from the lowest social classes. On average all those from these classes had an average debt of £6424. They had high debts because they were the most reliant on student loans and they had the highest student loans because they were means-tested. They also borrowed more than average commercial credit to augment their income. They were less likely to have family aid and savings. Thus, students who were the poorest before entering university were also those with the highest debts.

That debt was an important factor in the decision to go to university was revealed in the *Attitudes to Debt* (Callender, 2003) survey. Key findings suggested (1) 70% of the non-entrants mentioned the pull of the labour market, getting a job and earning a wage as the most common reasons for not going to university. This was especially so for the two lowest social classes; (2) Non-entrants were unconvinced of the benefits of higher education. (3) Non-entrants were far less likely to view student financial support as a long-term investment for the future. (4) Prospective students underestimated both HE students' income and expenditure and over-estimated final debt. (5) Only a minority of all respondents found it easy to access information on financial support for HE students and the costs. Potential widening participation students found it the most difficult. (6) Non-entrants received far less encouragement from their wider network of friends and family to apply to university compared with entrants. (7) Costs were a perceived barrier to entry, especially for those from a low income background. The costs outweighed the perceived benefits of participation in higher education. (8) Debt aversion was strongest amongst the socio-economic groups targeted by widening participation policy (Callender, 2003). Callender and Jackson (2005) have also found that in England, those from low social classes were more debt averse than those from other social classes. These respondents were far more likely to be deterred from going to university because of their fear of debt irrespective of their academic ability and a range of other attitudes towards higher education. In England and Northern Ireland, however, the official position is that the creation of the national bursaries together with those available from individual universities will mean that students from less well-off backgrounds will be at least partially protected from large-scale debt.

Widening Participation

As noted above, there has been a policy concern with widening access to higher education since the return of Labour. The main focus of widening access policies have been in relation to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and students with disabilities. In response to the policy aspiration of increasing the participation in higher education of these two groups, the funding authorities have developed a series of initiatives including funding innovations designed to assist universities secure an increase in the participation of these under-represented groups. While the policies have varied in detail between the four home countries, there are a range of broadly common approaches.

These include funding programmes for introducing potential students to the idea of entering higher education such as ‘Aim Higher’, the funding of schemes to coordinate activities between universities on a regional basis, the funding of institutionally specific schemes run by individual universities and the payment of a premium to universities either on the basis of students coming from ‘disadvantaged neighbourhoods’ or on the basis of those entitled after means testing to the full student loan (Northern Ireland) (see Osborne and Shuttleworth, 2004a)

In Northern Ireland the Department for Employment and Learning funds projects by the two universities to increase participation by young people especially from disadvantaged backgrounds. The *Step Up* programme initiated by the University of Ulster is designed to enhance attainment thereby enabling students to progress into higher education. The *Discovering Queen’s* programme established by QUB has been designed to raise the aspirations of young people through a range of activities. DEL also funded a student mentoring programme run by NUS/USI aimed at getting 12 year old children to consider third level education (NIHEC, 2004).

Another specific financial policy initiative designed to enable school pupils from less well-off backgrounds to stay in education beyond 16 introduced by the UK government in 2004 is the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). This is a fortnightly payment of up to £60 paid to students from households with an income of £30,000 or less. They are designed to help meet costs incurred through staying on at school such as travel costs, books and equipment. There are also bonus payments for remaining on the course and making satisfactory progress. It is designed to help reduce the financial burdens to participation in education beyond the school leaving age by those from low-income backgrounds.

Equality

The introduction of the ‘mainstreaming equality’ in policy making through Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland act marks a major change in the way designated institutions are supposed to conduct their policy related activities. Section 75 involves two statutory duties: the duty to have due regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity with respect to religion and political opinion, race and ethnicity, gender, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation and those with or without dependents. A second duty

demands that organisations pay regard to the desirability of the promotion of good relations on the grounds of religion and political opinion and race. All designated bodies are required to draft an Equality Scheme and under its terms develop a programme of screening existing policies and all new policies for equality considerations. Osborne (2005) provides a commentary on the implementation of Section 75 in the higher education sector in Northern Ireland. However, two issues are worth highlighting. First, is that the way in which students are recruited, including the marketing policies undertaken to attract students, can exert a strong influence on the potential intake of students to an institution. Hence, from an equality and good relations viewpoint, these policies and activities require careful scrutiny to identify any potential adverse impacts and in the event of their identification, a strategy to seek their amelioration. Second, how students behave in word and deed can also have a strong influence on how an institution is perceived. The extent to which an institution develops strong codes of acceptable behaviour and enforces them can determine whether an institution is perceived to be providing a safe environment for all traditions to feel welcome and secure. In the employment field these issues have long been of major concern and during the 1990s major strides were taken to secure neutral working environments and this has resulted in the growth of integrated workforces (Osborne and Shuttleworth, 2004b). Failure to deal with these issues can result in an institution being perceived as being unappealing as a study destination for one community or the other as noted by Collins et al (2001) for the further education sector in Belfast³. The recent review of further education and the proposed merger of colleges refers to the issue as noted in the quote below. We refer to this matter further in the analysis of data and the discussion and conclusion section at the end of this report.

...rationalisation will require, in some instances, further community integration. Community division may hinder the implementation of the project with the onus on the College staff and Board of Governors to ensure this change is seen to be embraced by all. (DEL, 2005, p.113)

³ The research indicated that a number of sectarian incidents at one further education site in Belfast increased the likelihood of that particular location being perceived as problematic for one side of the community.

Discussion

This section has sought to provide the context to the two research projects discussed in the rest of this report. The two general issues relating to participation that were considered in some detail and which relate to the concerns of the research have been the migration of students to study outside Northern Ireland and widening participation in higher education in relation to those from less well-off backgrounds. It has been noted that the migration of students is comprised of two groups, those who are determined to leave and those who would probably prefer to stay in Northern Ireland but feel they are forced to leave because their anticipated grades are unlikely to secure a local place. This is in the context of asking grades for courses being higher than for similar courses in similar institutions in Britain. The existing data on the extent to which existing patterns of higher education participation, especially in relation to the interrelationships between social class and religion/community background, are related to patterns of attainment at second level. Here, we have noted that while those leaving Catholic and 'Other' grammar schools have similar qualifications, there is a significant pattern of lower attainment in controlled (*de facto Protestant*) secondary schools. Further analysis suggested a substantial 'added value' to the patterns of attainment from those from less well-off backgrounds delivered in Catholic grammar schools compared to 'Other' grammar schools and a similar pattern comparing Catholic secondary schools to other secondary schools. Thereafter, we have provided a commentary on the changing context of student finance across the UK and an assessment of studies of debt hindering participation especially from lower socio-economic groups. We have also briefly outlined the crucial new mainstreaming equality policy area known as section 75 and its importance to the issues we discuss in the rest of this report.

Section B: Access to Further and Higher Education in Northern Ireland: Understanding Attitudes and Perceptions of Working Class Communities

Section B1: Methodology – General Considerations

In the social sciences there has been a long-standing debate over the use of quantitative or qualitative methods to either uncover the reality of social circumstances or to generate theoretical statements or generalisations about the causes of social behaviour. Sometimes this debate is conducted as though it is merely a technical issue of choosing the technique which is best for the problem or issue being investigated. However, at the root of the quantitative/qualitative debate there are fundamental epistemological concerns about how the social world can be understood and examined. Typically, this debate contrasts the positivist argument which claims that social action can be measured and understood using the scientific model which enables directly observable measures to be made through the use of questionnaires and experimental methods. Alternatively, the qualitative or phenomenological argument suggests that as people are capable of thought, self-reflection and language requires techniques which prioritises the actor's perspective – hence participant observation and intensive interviewing.

The early development of the social sciences in the UK was around the analysis of poverty levels. These studies progressed from the impressionistic studies of journalists through the systematic attempts by Booth and Rowntree to establish definitions of poverty and to estimate the incidence of poverty through surveys in places like London and York at the end of the 19th century and early in the 20th century (Bulmer, 1982). A major extension of this type of work developed around the 'political arithmetic' tradition in sociology/social policy research which sought to examine how social 'goods' were distributed by social class, gender, ethnic group and, in Northern Ireland, to religious groups (Cormack and Osborne, 1983). In the 1960s and 1970s, however, sociology and related disciplines reacted against positivist approaches and adopted a strong commitment to phenomenological techniques and quantitative techniques were depicted as 'number crunching'. Latterly, as Becker and Bryman (2004) point out, the nature of debate between the two positions has softened considerably and the strengths of combining both approaches has become appreciated especially in policy related research. In many ways tackling the investigation of a particular issue or problem is greatly enhanced by utilising

the insights to be gained from both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative techniques generally can provide population wide estimates of particular phenomenon especially if based on probability sampling whereas qualitative techniques are widely recognised as being particularly useful in teasing out how issues are understood by individuals and small groups. A less dogmatic approach to researching a phenomenon enables different combinations of the range of available techniques to be deployed to understand the phenomenon more clearly. Becker and Bryman provide a number of examples of both how quantitative and qualitative techniques can be combined to help improve understanding and also specific examples of how they have been combined to illuminate research for policy makers.

The research in this report relies primarily on qualitative techniques – focus groups and extended individual interviews with the additional supplement of some limited survey evidence. However, this project has been undertaken in the context of extensive research over the past 20 years into higher education participation in Northern Ireland which has utilised both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Moreover, it is envisaged that many of the findings reported here will be further examined to assess the likely statistical importance through major surveys conducted with cohorts of year 12 and year 14 pupils during 2006.

Section B2: Methodology for this study

In order to obtain insight into the attitudes and understandings of year 12 pupils on their options at 16 years old, focus groups were organised in secondary schools at a number of locations across Northern Ireland (Appendix A). The advantage of this approach was that it allowed us to obtain the views of pupils in as natural a setting as possible, providing an interactive peer group forum that would allow issues to emerge under the general guidance of the focus group facilitator (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Since the purpose of the research was to establish the perceptions of students from less well off backgrounds about their future options, the schools were selected on the basis of the Free School Meals Index which is taken as an indicator of deprivation. Secondary schools were chosen as opposed to grammar schools because pupils from a less well off background are more likely to be found in secondary schools than in grammar schools. As DENI (2002) indicates, there is a marked relationship between social disadvantage

and achievement in the transfer test which determines whether a child will go to a grammar or secondary school. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are, of course, children from less well off backgrounds who do attend grammar schools, and children from better-off backgrounds in secondary schools, identifying those from a disadvantaged background within the schools for the purposes of only including them in the study would have posed unreasonable ethical and logistical problems.

In order to obtain a cross-section of opinions of pupils, a number of maintained and controlled secondary schools were chosen in both urban and rural locations including North Belfast, East Belfast, Newtownabbey, Londonderry/Derry, Cookstown and Strabane. An added difficulty in selecting the schools was that 'School League Tables', that is the publication of examination results by individual schools is no longer undertaken in Northern Ireland. If available it would have allowed the selection of schools with different patterns of attainment and progression to further and higher education. Therefore, as an alternative approach, data from the population census were used to provide an accurate indication of areas of low educational attainment which helped guide the selection of areas and school. The sample of schools draws on those located in urban and rural settings and those situated in the east and west of Northern Ireland. However, with all studies that seek to be broadly representative at the Northern Ireland level it is not possible to say that the study is representative for specific locations within Northern Ireland.

There were some difficulties in obtaining the participation of maintained schools in North Belfast. This problem had arisen because over recent years the area has been inundated with research and principals were reluctant to allow any more. In all, focus groups were conducted in 18 schools with 8-12 pupils participating in each group. The pupils in the focus groups were selected by the head of year 12 with the stipulation that those selected should include a range of abilities. Whilst this was perhaps not the ideal situation in that the researcher did not have complete control over the selection procedure, it was less disruptive to the school and allowed the focus groups to be arranged in less time. Constraints on time were keenly felt because they were conducted during spring term in the run-up to exam time. Normally the focus groups lasted for between 30-45 minutes as it was often the case only one teaching period was available for data collection.

All focus groups were either 'all girls' or 'all boys'. Some of our schools were single-sex so focus groups were by default of the same gender. However, it was a conscious decision to select 'all girls' or 'all boys' focus groups. We wanted to eliminate the girl/boy interactions which may well have acted to inhibit both girls and boys from expressing themselves freely. When we asked the focus groups if this was 'OK with them' there was a consensus that focus group members were more likely to talk openly in a single-sex environment.

Finally, with respect to the reports of the focus groups in Section B2 there is a significant contrast with the report of those in Section C which relate to focus groups with year 14 pupils. The latter tend to talk in longer sentences and to have more informed views to express. In part this merely reflects the fact that most of them are two years older but also reflects the greater verbal confidence of students at grammar rather than secondary schools.

It was also decided that the opportunity should be taken for a survey of all year 12 pupils in the participating schools to be carried out. This would provide a snapshot of the general feelings and attitudes of 15/16 year olds towards the salient issues and would supplement the more qualitative material. In order to cause the minimum amount of disruption to the schools and to facilitate greater participation in the survey, the questionnaires were passed to the year 12 heads in the schools to be distributed at the most appropriate time (Appendix B). The questionnaires were distributed to 22 schools. A total of 2455 questionnaires were distributed and 1352 were returned, which was a 55% response rate. There was an uneven distribution of responses to the survey. A higher proportion of the questionnaires returned were from controlled schools (63.1%) and responses in the maintained schools were skewed towards the males (76.2%) (Appendix C). This was largely a result of the fact that most of the schools which had declined to participate were maintained girls' schools. These limitations must be borne in mind when assessing the data recorded in the tables in Section B2.

In most of the schools we were also afforded the opportunity of speaking with the principal, the head of year 12, or the careers teacher. These discussions provided us with additional valuable contextual data to complement the focus group material. These discussions were supplemented by interviews with various community representatives and these were undertaken on an informal basis.

Section B3: The Focus Group & Survey Findings – Year 12

What Next? The relative value of further and higher education

Pupils were asked what they wanted to do after their GCSEs. There was a core of male year 12 pupils who preferred to go out and get a trade as opposed to continuing on with their education and eventually going to university. This was largely the case among those attending controlled schools but was present to a lesser extent among males attending maintained schools where there was a greater inclination to go to university.

The perceived benefits of getting a trade were seen to outweigh any future benefits that would accrue from going on to higher education. Most wanted to start earning money as soon as possible:

Q. Why do you prefer to go to tech rather than University?

Because it's a real man's job. I don't want to waste half my life in school. I want to start getting cash. (Controlled, M)

You have to make your own way. (Controlled, M)

Q. Why do you want to get a trade?

That's where the money is. (Controlled, M)

Q. Is part of the reason that you are going to tech because of the cost or is it just that you want to get a trade?

It's too expensive and you have to work hard (Controlled, M)

I prefer to get a trade (Controlled, M)

I prefer to get out and make money. (Controlled, M)

It was believed by those who were opting for the skilled trade route that this would be a more lucrative business than pursuing a career through university:

We'll be loaded more than them. You will all be working hard in your lectures and we'll be out doing a real man's job and be loaded. (Controlled, M)

Sure there are plumbers that are making more money...run your own business. (Controlled, M)

The only profession higher paid than a trade is a doctor. (Controlled, M)

In addition it was felt that it would take less time to start earning substantial salaries than it would if the university route was taken. Several did not want to waste their time continuing with their studies when they felt they could earn decent salaries sooner if they went into skilled trades:

Q. Have you ever thought about going to university?

No, I've no interest in it. Too long. You're wasting a good bit of the good years of your life studying and all. I want to be out clubbing. (Controlled, M)

I was thinking about it but it's a bit too long. (Controlled, M)

There's no point in making about 90,000 a year when you're about 40 and you're dead and all. (Controlled, M)

It's a bit stupid the way you have to pay about £15,000, when in them 3 years you could be making say £90,000 or so...3 years like. (Maintained, M)

These attitudes were mirrored in the responses to the survey question on what pupils thought was most important for getting a good job with good pay. Table B1 shows that although the majority believed that staying in education was the best choice, we can see that there was a substantial difference in the attitudes of male and female respondents in both controlled and maintained schools. Whilst females favoured progressing to higher education more highly than males, males favoured getting a skilled trade a great deal more than females. This tendency was most pronounced within the controlled sector where males had the lowest belief that staying on in education was the best way to a good job and the highest belief that it could be obtained through getting a skilled trade.

Table B1: Which do you think is most important for getting a good job with good pay?

	Controlled		Total	Maintained		Total
	Female	Male		Female	Male	
Staying in Education	351 87.1%	242 60.3%	593 73.8%	85 85.0%	215 68.3%	300 72.3%
Skilled Trade	44 10.9%	152 37.9%	196 24.4%	14 14.0%	96 30.5%	110 26.5%
None of These	8 2.0%	7 1.7%	15 1.9%	1 1.0%	4 1.3%	5 1.2%
Total	403 100.0%	401 100.0%	804 100.0%	100 100.0%	315 100.0%	415 100.0%

Missing N=52 (4.1%)

Beliefs about the best way to get a good job with good pay were mirrored in pupils' ideas about what they intended to do once they were 16 years old. Table B2 shows that there was a much higher proportion of females than males in both the controlled and maintained sector who intended to go on with their education. Inversely there were higher proportions of males in both sectors who planned to find a paid job or join a training scheme. There were no major differences between the controlled and maintained sectors on this issue.

Table B2: What do you want to do when you are 16 years old?

	Controlled		Total	Maintained		Total
	Female	Male		Female	Male	
Stay in Education	303 74.6%	208 52.1%	511 63.5%	79 77.5%	178 54.6%	257 60.0%
Paid Job	26 6.4%	61 15.3%	87 10.8%	6 5.9%	33 10.1%	39 9.1%
Training Scheme	38 9.4%	77 19.3%	115 14.3%	9 8.8%	68 20.9%	77 18.0%
Don't Know	21 5.2%	25 6.3%	46 5.7%	4 3.9%	25 7.7%	29 6.8%
Other	18 4.4%	28 7.0%	46 5.7%	4 3.9%	22 6.7%	26 6.1%
Total	406 100.0%	399 100.0%	805 100.0%	102 100.0%	326 100.0%	428 100.0%

Missing N=38 (3.0%)

It is worth noting that whilst the majority believed that staying in education was the best way to get a good job and good money, this was not accompanied by a similarly high proportion who wanted to go to university. Table B3 shows that less than half of those

who said that staying in education was the way to obtain a good job with good pay said that they wanted to go to university. This was the case for both controlled and maintained schools. However, again there was a difference between the males and females in both sectors with females displaying a greater desire to attend university. The difference between males is particularly striking, with males in the controlled sector displaying lower commitment to this route.

Table B3: Do you want to do a course at university?

	Controlled		Total	Maintained		Total
	Female	Male		Female	Male	
Yes	145 35.7%	93 22.8%	238 29.2%	43 41.7%	96 29.5%	139 32.5%
No	108 26.6%	191 46.8%	299 36.7%	30 29.1%	115 35.4%	145 33.9%
Thinking about it	98 24.1%	73 17.9%	171 21.0%	20 19.4%	78 24.0%	98 22.9%
don't know	55 13.5%	51 12.5%	106 13.0%	10 9.7%	36 11.1%	46 10.7%
Total	406 100.0%	408 100.0%	814 100.0%	103 100.0%	325 100.0%	428 100.0%

Missing N=29 (2.3%)

The debt that would be accrued was also a factor that made the option of a skilled trade more attractive. There was a general sense among the male students that the debt and the effort was not worth the outcomes from University education. Often this was backed with anecdotal evidence of acquaintances who had obtained a university degree, had accrued debts and did not appear to be benefiting in terms of their careers. The benefits of university were not as tangible or immediate as those provided by getting a trade:

I know two people, but they ended up wasters. They all got good qualifications. One of them is now a postman. There's another man who works in Iceland (the supermarket)- he got too many qualifications and he's overqualified to get any good job. That's what they told him. (Controlled, M)

It's a waste of money. (Controlled, M)

If you drop out then it's a waste of money and you're going to have to pay it back no matter what. (Controlled, M)

It's only the start of your life to and you're already in debt. (Controlled, M)

Q. Is it worth borrowing money to go to university?

No, because you would just end up in too much debt. And a whole lot of people don't even use their degrees from university. It's just a waste of time.
(Controlled, M)

I know five people who went to university. Not one of them is doing all that well.
(Controlled, M)

Q. What if you could get a well-paid job in the end?

You can get a well-paid job anyway. (Maintained, M)

But you'd owe so much at the end. You'd be 21 and have all those debts and paying how many years. (Maintained, M)

Q. Would the idea of debt put you off going to university?

Yes (general agreement)(Controlled, M group)

The best years of your life and you're trying to pay that for an education

Q. Would you not think of it like investing in a house?

It's not as good as a house, you can see a house solid there. All you've got to show is a bit of paper. I know it's a diploma but you're spending five thousand pounds...(Controlled, M)

...whenever you could get a job without doing that. (Controlled, M)

You could buy a car for that. (Controlled, M)

Q. Do you know anybody who has been to university?

All they said was that it was too expensive and a waste of time. (Maintained, M)

Some people are still paying it off. (Controlled, M)

I know a guy around my way and he's still paying it off. (Controlled, M)

These findings mirrored to a great extent those of the *Attitudes to Debt* survey outlined in Section A. This found that there was a belief among those not intending to progress to university that the costs outweighed the benefits. Similarly, the report found that non-entrants were less likely to view student financial support as a long-term investment in the future and were drawn by the pull of the labour market. It found that debt aversion deterred those whom the government are seeking to attract to higher education (Callender and Wilkinson, 2003).

It is worth noting that in two of the focus groups with male students some said that teachers had encouraged them in the view that getting a skilled trade would probably pay off better than going to university:

Well, what the teachers have said is don't go to university, because you're going to get there a lot quicker than people in university are because they're studying for two or three years, but while they're studying, you're studying and making a wage at the same time. (Integrated, M)

If you get a good trade now, there's as much money as anything else- the teachers tell you that. (Maintained, M)

The picture was different for girls who were intending to go to a Further Education College (FEC). When asked why they wanted to go to FEC they did not make the same financial comparison between getting a trade and going to university. Rather they spoke about the particular courses that they wanted to do, the flexibility and freedom offered by FEC in contrast with staying on at school. However, there were indications by the girls who were intending to go to FECs that the cost had played a prohibitive part in their decision not to go to university but, unlike the boys, this was not juxtaposed with the perceived advantages of getting a trade instead.

Q. Did anyone else think about going to university?

I thought about it, but moneywise...it's too much (Controlled, F)

Q. Why do you not want to go to university?

It's very dear. (Integrated, F)

Q. Why are you going to college instead of doing A-levels at school?

Because I don't want to go back to school. I don't want to go to university either because it's too much money. It's really expensive...loads of money that I couldn't afford (Controlled, F)

The course I want to do is a two year course and it's equivalent to three A-levels, so it's just going to be much easier for me to go to tech and much cheaper as well. (Controlled, F)

Q. Do your parents want you to go on to university?

Only if you can afford it. (Controlled, F)

However, despite the amount of negative response about going to university among those who said that they were leaving school to get a trade, there was an element surprisingly who said that they would like to go to university if they had the chance. Some said that they would prefer going to university than FEC but there was a sense that they felt that it was an unachievable option:

Q. For the people going to tech did you ever consider going to university?

I just thought I'm never going to get there. I'll be lucky if I get my GCSEs.
(Controlled, M)

I know that I won't get into university. (Controlled, M)

Q. Would you like to go if you thought you could get in?

(great deal of agreement- 4 of those going to FEC)

Q. Why?

You'd get higher qualifications.

You'd get better employment. (Controlled, M)

In addition, there were a number of indications that a lack of belief in ability to get into university and to cope with the level of work was an influence on the decision to go to FEC instead of university.

Q. Do you feel that your options are open to you?

No, because I'm stupid. I'm not going to pass my GCSEs (Maintained, F)

Neither am I, I know, I've been told. (Maintained, F)

Q. Why are only two of you thinking about doing A-levels?

We can't do it. (Controlled, M)

Q. Do any of you who want to go to tech feel that it would be difficult to go to university?

It's really hard to get in. (Controlled, M)

Q. Is there anything that could be done to persuade you to go on to university?

If the grades weren't as demanding. (Maintained, F)

Q. How many of you wouldn't go to tech?

I'd stay on but I don't know if I want to go to university- it's a lot of hard work and I don't know if I could be bothered (Maintained, F)

Q. Do you know anyone who has been to university?

My sister has been- it's a lot of hard work. (Integrated, F)

Q. How many think that they couldn't cope with university?

Because I'm stupid. (Controlled, M)

I wouldn't get in. (Controlled, M)

Q. If you could have the qualifications that you wanted what would you do?

I would like to be a solicitor if I could. (Maintained, F)

Q. Why can't you?

Because I'm stupid. (Controlled, F)

It was also notable that among the boys, unlike the girls, there was a small cohort of pupils who were planning to do their A-levels but were uncertain about what they wanted to do after that or who planned to get a job.

I don't know what I want to do after that, I just want to try and get through A-levels, I haven't really decided what I want to do. (Maintained, M)

They would help you get a job far better than just having to study for another lot of years. (Maintained, M)

I just want to do my A-levels, not even so much A-levels... anything-GNVQs, then get a job. (Maintained, M)

Q. What were the rest of you planning on doing?

Staying on and doing my A-levels, then getting a job. (Controlled, M)

Staying on and then I don't know yet... (Controlled, M)

On the other hand there were those who were convinced of the merits of going to university and were prepared to go despite the uncertainty created by the debts that they might have to face when they finished their degrees. Although many underestimated the

amount that they would have to pay back after finishing their degrees, for the most part they were still prepared to go to university because they thought that it would be worth it in the long-run in terms of eventual job opportunities:

Q. Are you familiar with the finances for university?

Student loans (Maintained, F)

I don't know, it's a lot of debt (Maintained, F)

Q. What do you think about that?

It's a bit scary.(Maintained, F)

It will be...when you're so young it's going to be hard and all the wages that you get the first years you're going to be paying back. (Maintained, F)

Q. Did anyone think, it's not worth it, I won't bother?

(nobody)

Q. Is anyone having second thoughts?

Yes, it only hit me a couple of weeks ago that it was so dear. But I'm going to go anyway...once you get it all paid...(Maintained, F)

Q. Is it worthwhile in the end?

Yes (Controlled, F)

You'll get a good job in the end. (Controlled, F)

Q. How do you feel about the debt?

It'll be worth it in the end (Maintained, M)

Q. What about the people planning to go to Stranmillis? What do you think? (about the debt)

If you get a degree you have it for the rest of your life. As well if you get a good job, you've got money coming in for the rest of your life. You can get out of one job and into another job when you've got more qualifications. I think it's worth it. (Controlled, M)

Q. So those who want to go to university are not sure what you want to do yet?

Not yet(Maintained, M)

Q. So you just know that you want to go to university?

Well nowadays you need university if you want to get a higher paid job, so you may as well, there's no choice, you have to. (Maintained, M)

Q. Has money put you off?

It has a bit, but it's always what I wanted to do and my parents want me to go to university. (Controlled, F)

I've thought about it, but I've had relatives come out of university with debt for a couple of years and they've managed to get through that and get a good job, so there's advantages as well as disadvantages. (Controlled, F)

It's all paid once you get your qualifications. (Controlled, M)

In the long run it would be worth it. (Controlled, M)

Q. What are you going to do after you're A-levels?

University (several) (Integrated, F)

You'll probably have a lot of debt in the first three years. (Integrated, F)

But when you get a good job you'll get good money. (Integrated, F)

It puts you off but not to the point that I wouldn't want to go. (Integrated, F)

In the same vein the survey asked pupils if they thought it was worth borrowing money to get good qualifications. The responses (Table B4) revealed that the majority in both controlled and maintained secondary schools either strongly agreed or agreed that it was worth it. However, there was less agreement from males in both controlled and maintained schools that it was worth borrowing for study.

Table B4: Is it worth borrowing money to get good qualifications?

	Controlled		Total	Maintained		Total
	Female	Male		Female	Male	
Strongly Agree	76 18.9%	59 15.6%	135 17.3%	27 27.6%	58 18.5%	85 20.6%
Agree	210 52.1%	178 47.1%	388 49.7%	41 41.8%	146 46.5%	187 45.4%
Disagree	43 10.7%	37 9.8%	80 10.2%	8 8.2%	44 14.0%	52 12.6%
Strongly Disagree	14 3.5%	23 6.1%	37 4.7%	6 6.1%	19 6.1%	25 6.1%
Don't Know	60 14.9%	81 21.4%	141 18.1%	16 16.3%	47 15.0%	63 15.3%
Total	403 100.0%	378 100.0%	781 100.0%	98 100.0%	314 100.0%	412 100.0%

Missing N=78 (6.1%)

Whilst some of the pupils thought that it would be costly to go to university, for most the likely cost of the new arrangements coming in 2006 was a shock to them. So whilst there were a substantial number who said that it was worth borrowing money to go to university, this was accompanied by an underestimation of the likely cost. This tendency was reflected in the survey results as shown in Table B5. The table also demonstrated that there was a greater tendency among those in controlled schools to underestimate the cost.

Table B5: How much do you think you will owe at the end of a three year course?

	School Type		Total
	Controlled	Maintained	
1-5000	611 75.2%	274 64.0%	885 71.4%
5001-10000	114 14.0%	83 19.4%	197 15.9%
10001-15000	52 6.4%	47 11.0%	99 8.0%
15001 +	35 4.3%	24 5.6%	59 4.8%
Total	812 100.0%	428 100.0%	1240 100.0%

Missing N= 31 (2.4%)

Most of the people who wanted to go to university were also prepared to repeat their A-levels if they didn't get the grades to meet the entry requirements. However, among the

boys who were considering university there were suggestions of less determination to pursue going to university in the face of debt or having to repeat A-levels.

Q. Most of you would not consider getting into debt to go to university then?

(All agree) (Maintained, M group)

Q. And what if you got a well-paid job at the end?

But you'd owe so much at the end. You'd be twenty-one and have all those debts and paying how many years. (Maintained, M)

Q. You were talking about studying law, what do you think?

I probably wouldn't do it (Maintained, M)

Q. You were thinking about going to Stranmillis- do you still think that it is worth it?

I suppose it would be worth it... (Controlled, M)

Q. If you have to pay it back afterwards, not your parents- would that be different?

I suppose yes - I wouldn't go. (Controlled, M)

In addition, in three of the focus groups some male pupils said that if they didn't get the grades to go to university they would get a job rather than going to university 'abroad' that is in Britain.

To summarise, there was a noticeably lower interest in going to university among the boys in the focus groups and this was particularly the case among the boys in controlled schools. This was largely linked to the perception that the best route to a well-paid job was through acquiring a trade, rather than spending years at university and running up debt for a career that was not guaranteed. Although there was an element of this thinking among the boys in the maintained schools it was not present to the same degree. Among the focus groups in controlled schools there were five groups in which there were only one or two boys who wanted to go to university whereas this was the case in only one of the maintained schools.

However, as the discussion above indicates the situation in relation to entering university goes beyond financial considerations alone. Negative attitudes towards going on with

education had been reinforced by the belief that university was an avenue that was closed to many by virtue of their abilities and that therefore it was futile to even consider it. There were indications in some cases that, had it been considered possible, the preferred option would have been to go to university instead of FEC.

For the girls the picture was different. The skilled trade versus university debate was largely absent from their considerations. The cost of going to university was viewed as a deterrent by several of those who had decided to go to FEC but, unlike the boys, this was not mitigated by the rewards of acquiring a skilled trade. Furthermore, the girls were much more orientated towards continuing their education than the boys, particularly among those in the controlled sector.

Gender differences: Options and Attitudes

There was an awareness in many of the focus groups that there were differences between the boys and girls in terms of the options available to them and attitudes towards education. Getting a skilled trade was believed to be an option that the boys alone could avail of:

Q. Are the boys and girls different in what they want to do?

Yes boys prefer to do a trade (Maintained, F).

Q. You're going to be a hairdresser, do you see that as a better option for getting money and doing well?

Hairdressers aren't all that well paid... I don't think there's enough options for the girls. (Maintained, F)

There's more options for the boys. (Maintained, F)

The joiners are more in demand- hairdressers are not in demand. (Maintained, F)

Q. Would you not consider those options?

(General laughter at this idea)

It's a boys' thing. (Maintained, F)

The boys have a got a trade to fall onto, the girls don't. (Maintained, M)

Although in one male focus group someone saw it from a different perspective:

We have it harder, we have to do the heavy-duty work, lift the bricks and all, while they do nails and wash people's hairs. (Maintained, M)

Q. Have you had any advice about what you need to do?

A nurse came in for a career talk before Christmas and she told us what it was like and what the job was like and what you needed to become a nurse. We also had an engineer in. (most laugh as this)

Q. An engineer, what's wrong with that?

The boys want to be engineers. Nobody was really interested in it. The nurse came out and everyone was very interested.

Q. Why do you think that is?

It's a stereotypical guys' job. Girls don't think of it. (Controlled, F)

These attitudes echoed the findings of research conducted for the Equality Commission into the sex-typing of occupations in primary schools. The results showed that whilst the majority of occupations presented to children were perceived as appropriate for both sexes, almost one third of these occupations were viewed as being for one sex only. The children in the study discussed occupations along very stereotyped lines and reflected an acceptance of gendered roles. Their choices of occupation were very gender biased. The majority of girls believed that the occupations of bus driver, firefighter, electrician, builder, car mechanic and road-sweeper were for men only (Knipe et al., 2002).

It was also largely felt by both boys and girls that the girls were more focused academically than the boys.

Q. Do you think there's a difference between the boys and the girls in what they want to do?

The girls are more into it, they take it a lot more seriously than we lads do. They're thinking about their careers and all. We're more laid back. The girls would have planned what they're doing. (Controlled, M)

My brother was in his second year of Queens and he dropped out. (Controlled, F)

I agree, my twin brother doesn't want to come back to school at all next year and he wants to go to tech. My older brother left school at the end of fifth year, went to tech and dropped out. Now he's doing an apprenticeship. (Controlled, F)

I agree, because my brother went to school until after his AS-levels and dropped out and went to tech because he couldn't be bothered sitting his exams.(Controlled, F)

Yes, they've got better heads than us. They always know what they have to do and when they're going to do it. (Maintained, M)

Yes, most of them [the boys]aren't coming back. (Maintained, F)

They work harder. (Controlled, M)

There are some boys who are trying to study really hard... but there are people who just...(Controlled, F)

They don't bother. They don't care...they just want to go out and get a job straight away.(Controlled, F)

Q. Would that be most of the boys?

A good lot of them in the lower classes and some in the higher classes too. (Controlled, F)

An interesting feature that emerged from the focus groups was that there were a certain number of girls who preferred to go to FEC then on to university. This seemed to be more prevalent among the girls in controlled schools. This was the case only in one of the focus groups with boys in a maintained school. Generally the reason for choosing this avenue was for the freedom and flexibility offered by this course that was not perceived to be available at school:

Q. Why do so many of you want to go to tech?

Because you can specialise in one course instead of having to do something else that you don't want to do. (Controlled, F)

It's not a 9-3.30 thing either like ordinary school. You can have a class in the morning and then through the afternoon you can study for your first class. (Controlled, F)

Q. What's your main reason for going to tech?

It's not here, you don't have to wear a uniform (Maintained, F)

In tech they don't really care if you show up. I will show up, but it would be nice to not have them going on and on at you. (Maintained, F)

I think I would work better without the pressure. (Maintained, F)

The same feelings were expressed by those who were going to FEC but were not intending to go to university.

Q. Most of you want to go to tech- why?

The course I want to do is a two-year course and it's equivalent to three A-levels, so it's just going to be easier for me to go to tech, much cheaper as well. (Controlled, F)

Tech is easier to get to and you get more one-to-one contact than in school... (Controlled, F)

The whole point of going to tech is to get your freedom (Controlled, F)

Q. How many feel that way?

(general agreement) (Controlled, F)

Q. Why do you want to go to tech?

...Studying what you like too, so that you don't have to take on three subjects that you can't handle. (Maintained, M)

More independence. (Controlled, M)

Support at School

There was a distinct sense in several of the focus groups with the male pupils in controlled schools, that they did not feel that they had been encouraged to go to on to higher education and that they were not expected to follow this path. In one school a pupil said that he would have liked to have studied sports studies at university but that the teacher had dissuaded him. In another school a male pupil said that his teacher had advised him not to go to university.

Q. So why did you come to this decision? (to get a trade)

The school gave out stuff about it, more information about it than universities. Careers talks tell you about tech- go to and be such-and-such. (Controlled, M)

Seriously, it's about reality. We're not expected to go to university. (Controlled, M)

Yes, because more Grammar schools like Sullivan would get more university things. (Controlled, M)

We were all told that we wouldn't pass our GCSEs. (Controlled, M)

That's what we were told at the very start. (Controlled, M)

That's probably played on our minds and we want to go somewhere where we can get something from instead of university... (Controlled, M)

Q. Does anyone feel annoyed about the assumption being made?

Yes (general agreement) (Controlled, M group)

You're just judged (Controlled, M)

Right away without them even knowing your ability...(Controlled, M)

You want to prove those people wrong who said you couldn't do your GCSEs and get a decent job. (Controlled, M)

For the boys in maintained schools there was less of a sense of a lack of support but more that there was a lack of information on higher education.

Q. Do you feel that the teachers support you to go on to higher education?

The teachers support us, but there's just not enough information (Maintained, M)

However, there was one case in which a male pupil at a maintained school who wanted to go to university felt that he had been pushed towards considering FEC instead:

Q. Do you feel that you are encouraged enough in school to go on and do what you want to do?

She said you should go to tech. She was pushing me to go to tech- "there's great courses down at tech in Derry". I don't particularly want to go but it's almost as if she's pushing you to go to tech. (Maintained, M)

Within the female focus groups there were a range of feelings on the issue. On the whole there was more positive feedback on the encouragement they had been given.

Q. What about the school generally, do you think the teachers encourage you to go on?

Yes (general agreement on this)(Maintained, F group)

Q. Do you feel that they push you to go on to university?

No, they don't push us, they just take it as it comes (Maintained, F).

Q. Do the teachers encourage you to go on?

A couple of them. (Controlled, F)

However, at the other end of the spectrum was one particular focus group with females at a controlled school.

(Controlled, F, group)

Nobody goes from this school because we're all stupid...

The teachers don't think we're stupid, they just don't expect people from this school to go on to college...

Teachers don't want to come to this school because of its reputation.

One of the substitute teachers said "don't burn my car out" so that shows what they think of our school.

The survey echoed the views expressed in the focus groups. As Table B6 shows, both higher proportions of females and males in the maintained sector strongly agreed that the teachers had encouraged them to go on with their education. Although overall the same proportions within controlled and maintained sector agreed that their teachers had encouraged them, the proportions of females strongly agreeing were higher in both the controlled and maintained sector. However, the most striking aspect of the results is that whereas females and males in the maintained sector take broadly the same views the same cannot be said for pupils in the controlled sector. The table shows that females agreed more strongly that teachers had encouraged them, whereas males more strongly disagreed that this was the case.

Table B6: Have teachers encouraged you to think of going on to Further Education College or University?

	Controlled		Total	Maintained		Total
	Female	Male		Female	Male	
Strongly Agree	127 31.8%	94 23.4%	221 27.6%	42 41.2%	99 31.5%	141 33.9%
Agree	190 47.6%	179 44.6%	369 46.1%	31 30.4%	133 42.4%	164 39.4%
Disagree	27 6.8%	35 8.7%	62 7.8%	12 11.8%	26 8.3%	38 9.1%
Strongly Disagree	6 1.5%	21 5.2%	27 3.4%	1 1.0%	13 4.1%	14 3.4%
Don't Know	49 12.3%	72 18.0%	121 15.1%	16 15.7%	43 13.7%	59 14.2%
Total	399 100.0%	401 100.0%	800 100.0%	102 100.0%	314 100.0%	416 100.0%

Missing N=55 (4.3%)

On a related issue, a key theme emerging from the focus groups was that the pupils felt that they had been given insufficient information about universities or that they would have preferred to have had it earlier in order to be able to make better decisions. This was the obstacle about which the pupils were most vociferous.

Q. Do you think that there's anything that could be done to encourage you to go to university?

*I think the teachers really encourage us as it is. They're really supportive.
I think you need access to university information like what grades you need for the courses for all the universities...*(Controlled, F)

Q. Do you feel that you get the information you need to make the right choices?

At the end of the year people have been looking to get more information earlier on so that they can start applying for things, but it's only now at the end of the year that we actually got it. (Controlled, F)

It's only now... whenever we were choosing our subjects for third year for what we wanted to do, I didn't choose IT but now I realise that I might need it. (Controlled, F)

Q. Do any of the rest of you feel like that?

*Yes (general agreement) (Controlled, Female, group)
It would have given you more time to think about it in more depth rather than thinking about it in fourth year and fifth year...*(Controlled, F)

If I had the choice now to go back and choose my subjects then I would know what to do because I know what to do now. Then I chose art and art won't get me anywhere with what I want to do. I want to do word-processing ...it was all too quick choosing the subjects and being more informed about what was on offer maybe(Controlled, F)

Q. Have you had much information about the universities?

The only way you get information is if you went and asked for it. Whenever we were with joblink they got the whole year out and sat down to talk about it. Even though there were people who didn't want to go to joblink. I don't know why they didn't do that for university, just bring everyone together and inform them about university...(Controlled, F)

Q. Do you think that if you had had the information about university sooner more people would have been interested in going?

(Resounding yes) (Controlled, F, group)

Q. Do you wish you had had information sooner about courses and the A-levels you need?

They've left it very late and we've got our exams soon. And they're throwing everything at us. So to have to think about where to go as well as exams...(Controlled, F)

Q. Would it have made a difference to you then?

If I had known what I need ages ago rather than now...would have been spending more time earlier on trying to get the maximum (Controlled, F)

Q. Do you think you should have more information on university?

Yes, because it would make it more clear what you want to do. You'd know what grades to get to go there too. (Controlled, F)

Q. Have you had careers advice?

Just 30 minutes(Controlled, F)

Hardly any(Controlled, F)

I just wish there was more information (Controlled, F)

Q. On what?

Just information on the particular job you want to do, what universities and what qualifications you need. (Controlled, F)

I would just like to know what grades you need to get into it and what university offers the course. (Maintained, F)

In two of the focus groups with the female pupils some girls indicated that they had made an effort to obtain information about universities for themselves:

Q. Did you find out about that [a course] yourself or did you get help

I got help at the job office in the town and she gave me more information about universities and websites which I went onto and looked up different courses. (Controlled, F)

Q. What about the school itself, have you had any advice here?

Mr ____ has been pointing me at university routes. He said he would give me a lot more help about university... (Controlled, F)

Q. So the people who want to go, you've had to find out about that for yourselves?

Prospectuses and the internet. (Controlled, F)

You have to apply yourself. There's no open days so you have to arrange an open day yourself. With Derry tech I had to go and ask Mr..... for a book because we weren't given books. (Controlled, F)

Q. Have you been given much information about the universities and campuses?

No, found out about it ourselves. (Maintained, F)

In the majority of cases it was felt that more information had been given about going to FEC. Whilst it was understandable that this information had been provided at this stage in the pupils' academic careers there was a sense that, to some extent, the provision of information about FEC alone gave pupils the impression that it was the only option available to them and limited their consideration of the possibility of going to university. This was an issue particularly prevalent among males in controlled schools.

Q. Those who are going to tech, why do you not want to go to university then?

Is it hard to get into university? What do you need to get in? (Controlled, M)

Q. What about the universities?

They never really mention the universities (Controlled, F)

Q. What about the careers advice?

That's more about the tech (Controlled, M)

Jobskills (Controlled, F)

It's all about next year. (Controlled, M)

Q. Why do you want to get a trade?

The school gave out stuff about it, more information about it than universities. Careers talks tell you about tech- go to tech and be such-and-such. (Controlled, M)

Q. Have the teachers talked to you about university?

Not that much, it's more just the techs and they talk about the options now at this age. They don't really talk about what we're going to do in two or three years' time. (Controlled, M)

Q. Would it help?

People are scared. They'd like to go on but they don't know what to do. If they knew now then they could say I'll do my A-levels and go on to university. But now I don't know about university. I'll see what it's like in two years' time. (Controlled, M)

Q. Why do you want to go to tech?

More independence (Controlled, F)

Q. Is university completely out then?

Yes, I just want a job. (Controlled, F)

Q. So you just don't want to go to university?

It's not that, it's just that I don't know what to do. (Controlled, M)

Q. Have you thought about what university you might like to go to?

I haven't thought about it yet(Controlled, F)

We don't really get stuff about university, it's more about techs and schools (Controlled, F)

Q. Do you feel you should be told now?

(Resounding yes)(Controlled, F group)

If we were told then it might interest us more, but we just don't know much about it...That survey that we had – that was the first time we had heard of any university. (Controlled, F)

In general the pupils felt that plenty of information had been given about going to FECs. Nearly all the schools had visited open days at FECs or the local institutions had visited their schools. There were no real differences between the controlled and maintained schools or the boys and girls on the view that there was a lack of information although it was mostly among the boys in the controlled sector that the lack of information on university was felt to have been a deterrent to their consideration of it as a possible option.

It was notable that several wanted more contact with universities either in the form of open days or people coming from the universities to give talks. In the focus groups this was the case even with the pupils who were not at the time considering going to university but seemed to be more interested in getting a trade. Tellingly, in one school,

one of the pupils in the focus group actually asked the researcher if she could arrange for somebody to come from the university to talk to them about what university is like.

Q. What else could be done to encourage you to go to university?

Showing us people from university that would be in a similar position to us- like if they came from Strabane and the same kind of family and you could ask them how they did it. (Controlled, F)

Trips to universities (Controlled, M)

More people coming out and showing us. (Controlled, M)

Q. Would you like more information on the choices available to you?

Yes, posters...advertising, giving people advice on going on to further and higher education. (Maintained, M)

Q. Would you like more information on what's available at Queens and Jordanstown?

It would help. There's no point in me getting A-levels and going to tech if you want to be a lawyer. (Maintained, M)

The sense that meeting with people and visiting universities would act as an encouraging factor for going to university was something that was echoed in the findings of the survey. When asked in the survey what could be done to encourage them to go to university the most frequently occurring response was that they needed more information (22%). There was a higher proportion of pupils who gave this response than answered that if it was less expensive they would be encouraged to go. The kind of information desired took numerous forms and frequently referred to were presentations by people who attended the universities and visits to the higher education institutions.

In some schools difficulties were experienced in relation to the opportunities provided to pupils for continuing with their education. This was particularly the case in those schools where there was no sixth-form provision for pupils who might have thought about continuing on to their A-levels and possibly university. It was something that was indicated only in focus groups in controlled schools. The added disruption provided an extra disincentive to those who were initially unsure about going onto university in the first place. In some cases it was the lack of subject options that caused difficulties:

Q. You don't feel encouraged by the teachers?

No, the teachers do give you help, but it's the choice...you don't have the choice of going on...(Controlled, F)

Not many people from this school have gone to university. This school doesn't even have a sixth year.....(Controlled, F)

If this school had a sixth year it would encourage more people to stay on and doing something with themselves. ...(Controlled, F)

If you had a sixth year you'd have more of a choice, it would be easier. ...(Controlled, F)

Instead of new people and new teachers...(Controlled, F)

It's scary enough having to go on to tech. Whereas if you were able to stay on you would know what to expect...(Controlled, F)

I think it would make a big difference. A lot more people would go on to further education. (Controlled, F)

Q. Have you had information about transferring to grammar school?

Nobody's come from the schools for talks. ...(Controlled, F)

Q. Would that be a difficulty?

Yes because I don't know anything about the schools in Strabane or what they offer. (Controlled, F)

Some were concerned that if they were unable to return to school and were forced to go to FEC to continue their education that they would not work to their optimum level:

Q. Did anyone think about going to tech?

I just think that tech is too easy going and you don't get pressured to do your work and I'm the sort of person that if I'm not told to do something, I won't really do it. ...(Controlled, F)

(most agreed with this).(Controlled, F group)

My brother started going to tech and because he wasn't pushed he ended up not going at all and ended up dropping out. Now he's 21 and he's still doing an apprenticeship. (Controlled, F)

Q. How many wouldn't go to tech?

Tech's scary. (Integrated, F)

I'm sending in the application form in case I don't get back to school but I don't want to go. (Integrated, F)

I'd rather study at school. At school it's much easier. The teachers help you a lot more than in tech. (Integrated, F)

The issue raised in some focus groups about the lack of sixth-form provision at their schools raised an important question about the level of provision. On analysis of the statistics available on the numbers of pupils in sixth year in secondary schools in Northern Ireland it can be seen that there are a lower proportion of pupils in sixth year in the controlled sector than in the maintained sector (Table B7).

Table B7: Pupils Attending years 13 and 14 2004/2005

	Number in Sixth Year	Total school population	Sixth Year as percentage of school population
Controlled Secondary	2985	36314	8.2
Maintained Secondary	5451	42946	12.7

Source: DENI, School Census 2004

The Costello Report (2003) has already noted that “many pupils are disadvantaged by having their options closed down at a very early stage in their post-primary education”. It pointed out the lack of GCE A-level subjects available in many schools and that the limited range of subject options denied post-16 pupils many opportunities (Costello, 2005, p.7)

Overall, the lack of information about university was clearly a major issue in the focus groups and this was reinforced by responses to the survey. When viewed in the light of the perceptions discussed in the previous section this issue took on more importance. Whilst the previous section had revealed a lower propensity among males to go on to higher education related to the financial attraction of gaining a skilled trade, this section has indicated that there are questions raised about the extent to which this tendency may have been exacerbated by other factors. In particular, the amount of information or lack of it and the time at which it is provided may have influenced the feeling that higher education was an avenue closed to some pupils. A related issue was that of the influence of schools on the level of aspiration of the pupils. As discussed above, there was a feeling particularly among the male pupils that they had not been encouraged by teachers to go on with their education.

Education Maintenance Allowance

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is part of a government strategy to encourage more pupils to stay on in education when they reach the age of 16. Pupils can receive up to £30 per week to stay on at school or continue their education at a FEC. It was therefore important to get an idea from the focus groups of how they perceived this incentive and whether it made any difference to their decision to leave school or continue with their education.

The majority of people in the focus groups said that the EMA made very little difference to their decision on whether to stay on in education. For the most part pupils said that they would be going on with their education whether they received the money or not:

I would still go even if I wasn't getting paid. (Controlled, F)

I was still going before anyway. (Controlled, F)

I decided to go to tech before the money came in. (Integrated, M)

However, although the money did not affect these pupils' decisions to stay on there was sense that the money would be useful to them and that it was 'a bonus'. It would take some financial pressure off and it meant that they didn't have to ask their parents for money. In particular some students thought that the money would help them with their travelling expenses:

Q. Would the EMA be important in your decision to stay on or go to tech?

No, I think it gives you more independence having your own money and not having to rely on your parents. (Integrated, F)

Say we choose to go to Limavady we would have to pay a bit more for buses but with the money it's not that bad. (Controlled, F)

If you've got a car it helps to keep it on the road. (Maintained, M)

The EMA would just get your bus-fares for the week. (Maintained, F)

Q. Would that (EMA) be important in your decision to stay on and go to tech?

It's a good incentive and it makes you feel happier about staying on at school. (Maintained, M)

Q. But it wouldn't change your mind?

No (Maintained, M)

In one of the groups a girl was planning on saving the money to go to university. In a small number of cases it was suggested that receiving EMA would mean that some pupils would not have to work or not have to leave school to get work:

It would be useful if you didn't have a job and you were in school
(Maintained, M)

We still have jobs, it means that we don't have to work (Integrated, F)

People leave school to get jobs to get money. Whenever they get that money they can stay on and get further qualifications. (Controlled, M)

People would come back more because people want to go out and make money.
(Controlled, M)

However, one pupil suggested that the EMA could have potentially deleterious effects:

Q. What do you think about the EMA, do you think it's a good idea?

No, because you'll have boys in the class who just do nothing and take the money.
(Controlled, M)

For some the comparison with what could be earned in a job meant that it was not much of an incentive. This view was more prevalent amongst the boys in the focus groups:

Q. What do you think of the EMA?

Get a job and you get more. (Controlled, M)

Q. Would it make any difference to you?

I wouldn't stay for any amount of money (Maintained, M)

Q. Would that (EMA) make you stay on?

Sure £30 week is not going to support you. (Maintained, M)

Q. Have you heard of the EMA?

Yes, it's alright. (Controlled, M)

I think it's a scheme to get you back.(Controlled, M)

I wouldn't come back for £30 a week.(Controlled, M)

Why when you could go out and get a job. .(Controlled, M)

I would for about £150 a week.(Controlled, M)

Q. Do you not think it would be helpful?

Not really.(Controlled, M)

If you're going to stay on in sixth year and you're going to get £30 then it will obviously be better for you. But you can go out and get double that.
(Controlled, M)

Q. Does the EMA make any difference to you?

It's not enough, maybe £200-300... (Controlled, M)

I don't see why they give you £30 a week when you could go and get a job and get 3 times more. (Controlled, M)

Included in the questionnaire was a question asking pupils if they would stay on in school if given an allowance. Table B8 shows that there was a high proportion who said that they would stay on in school or stay on in FE and this echoed the high proportion who said they wanted to stay on in education when they were 16. However, pupils in controlled and maintained schools differed on their preferred options for continuing with their education. Whilst overall the highest proportion of pupils indicated that they wanted to stay on at school, a higher proportion within the controlled sector favoured going to FE. It is worth noting that whereas 62% had said that they wanted to stay in education, 75% altogether said that they would stay in education if given an allowance. This suggests that the EMA may have some effect for a small proportion of pupils.

Table B8: If given an allowance would you stay on in education?

	School type		Total
	Controlled	Maintained	
Yes, School	389 47.5%	221 51.9%	610 49.0%
Yes, FEC	247 30.2%	88 20.7%	335 26.9%
No, Neither	53 6.5%	42 9.9%	95 7.6%
I would have to think about it	92 11.2%	49 11.5%	141 11.3%
Don't Know	38 4.6%	26 6.1%	64 5.1%
Total	819 100.0%	426 100.0%	1245 100.0%

Missing N=26 (2.0%)

Pupils were asked: The government has just started giving money to pupils who stay in education after 16, depending on their family circumstances. Have you heard about this Education Maintenance Allowance? There was a difference between the controlled and maintained schools. There was a higher proportion within the maintained schools, who had heard about it and understood than there was within the controlled schools (Table B9).

Table B9: Have you heard of the Education Maintenance Allowance?

Heard of EMA	School type		Total
	Controlled	Maintained	
Yes and understand	592 72.1%	351 82.6%	943 75.7%
Yes and don't understand	204 24.8%	71 16.7%	275 22.1%
No	25 3.0%	3 .7%	28 2.2%
Total	821 100.0%	425 100.0%	1246 100.0%

Missing N=25 (2.0%)

It is worth pointing out that a substantial number of pupils in the focus groups thought that it was unfair that the EMA was not available to all on the basis that it was means-tested.

Q. Have you heard of the EMA?

Just because your mummy and your daddy have money doesn't mean that you're getting money. (Integrated, F)

Q. Do you think the EMA is a good thing?

I don't think that it's a good thing that if your parents are working you're not able to get it. (Controlled, F)

Q. Would the EMA make a difference?

It's not fair on the ones who can't get it because of their income...(Maintained, F)

Q. Do you think that they should get it regardless?

Yes. (Maintained, F)

On the whole the focus groups suggested that the EMA had made no difference to their decisions on whether to continue with their education or not. Those who were planning to stay on at school and go to university had resolved to do so regardless of the money. To those who wanted to go to FEC, they had decided to do this regardless. In any case, the sum available under the EMA was regarded as too paltry when compared with what could be earned in a job to make a difference. There was nobody in the focus groups who had decided to stay on as a result of the EMA. However there was evidence that although not crucial in the decision about what to do when 16, the money would be helpful in different ways such as travelling to and from college.

Influence of Parents

When pupils were asked about what they felt their parents wanted them to do, there was a mixture of responses. The overall sense among the boys in controlled schools was that their parents "didn't mind" and that it was "their own choice" although in many cases they indicated that they felt that their parents would like them to go on with their education. Several also mentioned that their parents wanted them to get a skilled trade:

Q. What do your parents say?

They leave it up to us. (Controlled, M)

Q. No-one tells you to stay on?

My mum told me to stay on... I did think of coming back but then I thought I'd rather stay in the house and do nothing. (Controlled, M)

My parents prefer me to come back but at the end of the day it's up to myself.
(Controlled, M)

They want me to get a skilled trade. (Controlled, M)

It's my own choice. (Controlled, M)

My mum or dad doesn't mind if I go to tech because they think it's good.
(Controlled, M)

Q. What about the rest of you?

They aren't worried. (Controlled, M)

My mum would rather have me stay on at school. (Controlled, M)

Q. How many of you have parents who would prefer you to stay on at school?

(Nearly Everybody)

Q. Why is that?

They just want us to get a further education

Because they missed out on it.

Q. Do they want you to go to university?

No.

They do, I think, but later on in life.

Q. How many have parents who say they want you to go to university?

(two out of ten put their hands up) (Controlled, M, group)

Q. And the rest?

Do what you think's best, get a job, get a trade. (Controlled, M)

My uncles are in the trade. (Controlled, M)

Q. How many have relatives that are going to help you out?

(5 say ye out of 10) (Controlled, M)

Q. What do your parents want you to do?

It's up to yourself...My mum wants me to go on to school but... (Controlled, M)

They usually suggest that you go on. (Controlled, M)

Q. What do they want you to do?

Grammar School (Controlled, M)

Take it as far as you can take it I suppose. (Controlled, M)

Q. Do your parents ever say anything to you about what they want you to do next?

My mum says I don't care, as long as you leave school and get a job and pay me my keep money. (Controlled, M)

However, even in the focus groups with boys in controlled schools where it was said that their parents wanted them to stay on at school, this did not necessarily coincide with a plan to go on to university on the part of the students. Nevertheless, in those focus groups where there were only one or two who were planning to go to university these were students whose parents had expressed an interest in them taking this route.

The focus groups with boys in maintained schools revealed a higher interest among their parents about going to university.

Q. What do your parents want you to do?

Stay on at school. (Maintained, M)

Q. Would they all want you to go to university?

Yes

Q. How many of your parents want you to stay on for university?

(8 say yes out of 9) (Maintained, M)

In only one of the focus groups with males in maintained schools, although in the minority, there were those who said their parents were suggesting that they get a trade:

Q. What about your parents, what do they want you to do?

(7 out of 11 say their parents want them to stay on) (Maintained M)

Q. What about the parents who aren't saying that?

Get a job (Maintained, M)

Q. They want you to start earning your keep?

Yes

Q. Anyone else?

Yes

Q. They say get out and get a job?

No, get a trade. (Maintained, M)

At the other end of the spectrum were some of the responses from the focus groups with female pupils. There was a sense here that there was a definite expectation and, in some cases, a certain amount of pressure that they would continue with their education and go on to university later. This view was more common in the focus groups with maintained schools.

Q. What do your parents want you to do?

(all of 12 say they want them to go to university) (Maintained, F)

What parent doesn't want their child to go to university? (Maintained, F)

That's my mum's worst fear. My mum doesn't want me to go out now because she wants me to have a good job. (Maintained, F)

I said I was considering not coming back. My mummy and daddy said 'no way, you're going to university'. (Maintained, F)

Q. What do your parents say to you?

Go to university (Maintained, F)

They say it's your own choice but they would like me to go to university. (Maintained, F)

Q. Generally would they want you to stay on and do your A-levels?

Yes (general agreement) (Maintained, F)

In one of the focus groups with females at a controlled school all the pupils said that they wanted to go to university but pointed out that they were not typical of the pupils at the school.

Q. Would all the girls be the same?

Not necessarily, our parents want us to go on to university. (Controlled, F)

My mum has high hopes for me, she would be disappointed if I didn't go on. But other families are expecting you to drop out. (Controlled, F)

Some classes have halved in size because people dropped out last year. (Controlled, F)

Some people have dropped out to get a job already. (Controlled, F)

On the whole the female pupils indicated that their parents wanted them to go on with their education either in FEC or school although there was less of an emphasis in the controlled schools on university:

Q. What do your parents want you to do?

University (Integrated, F)

They don't want me to leave school (Integrated, F)

My mummy doesn't mind if I leave school as long as I have a plan to go to tech and do a course (Integrated, F)

Same here. (Integrated, F)

My mummy says that's alright. As long as I'm leaving to do something. She thinks I would like tech better because it's more lenient... (Integrated, F)

Q. What do your parents want you to do?

They just want us to do the best we can. (Controlled, F)

My mum wants me to go on to grammar school. (Controlled, F)

My mum's happy if I go to tech. . (Controlled, F)

I think she prefers if I have more choice. . (Controlled, F)

My mum said that I was able to go on...but then I changed my mind (because of the grades) . (Controlled, F)

To try and get the best education. Stay on at school and go on to sixth year. . (Controlled, F)

Q. Do you feel encouraged at home?

(Resounding yes)

My mum tells me to do what I want to do, just not to sit in the house. (Controlled, F)

However, in two of the controlled schools there was a different view.

Q. What do your parents say about what you should do?

Do what you want (general agreement)... . (Controlled, F)

Q. Do you feel encouraged at home to go on with your education?

No, not in my house. . (Controlled, F)

Q. Does anybody else feel that way?

(a few agree) (Controlled, F)

Q. What did your parents say to you about going on with your education, did they say go out and get a job...?

Yes. (Controlled, F)

As in the case of teachers, the questionnaire asked if pupils felt that they had been encouraged by their parents to go on with their education. Table B10 shows that a higher proportion of pupils agreed that their parents had encouraged them than those who said their teachers had encouraged them. Overall, the survey indicated that pupils in maintained and secondary schools shared the same opinions on this issue. However, once again the females in both sectors more strongly agreed that this was the case. Furthermore, there was again less agreement from males in the controlled sector that they had been encouraged by their parents. However, it can also be seen that a higher proportion of females in maintained schools disagreed that their parents had encouraged them than any other group. This was not something that had come to the fore in the focus groups.

Table B10: Have parents encouraged you to go to think of going to further or higher education

Parents encouraged	Controlled		Total	Maintained		Total
	Female	Male		Female	Male	
Strongly Agree	215 53.3%	138 34.2%	353 43.7%	56 56.0%	157 49.5%	213 51.1%
Agree	150 37.2%	182 45.0%	332 41.1%	28 28.0%	117 36.9%	145 34.8%
Disagree	16 4.0%	36 8.9%	52 6.4%	11 11.0%	17 5.4%	28 6.7%
Strongly Disagree	5 1.2%	14 3.5%	19 2.4%	1 1.0%	8 2.5%	9 2.2%
Don't Know	17 4.2%	34 8.4%	51 6.3%	4 4.0%	18 5.7%	22 5.3%
Total	403 100.0%	404 100.0%	807 100.0%	100 100.0%	317 100.0%	417 100.0%

Missing N=47 (3.7%)

For the most part the pupils in both controlled and maintained schools were of the view that their parents wanted them to go on with their education. However, there was a greater tendency for pupils in focus groups in maintained schools to indicate that their parents wanted them to go to university and this was most articulated in the focus groups with females. Although most pupils in the controlled sector indicated that their parents wanted them to continue with their education, there was less of an emphasis on going to university, particularly among the boys. It was notable that the boys in controlled schools planning on studying at university were pupils who said that their parents or family had an interest in them doing so.

Perceptions of Locations

In assessing the extent to which pupils found institutions of further and higher education accessible we asked the focus groups if there were any campuses that they would not feel comfortable going to.

Some of the focus groups mentioned worries about sectarianism in going to further education colleges in certain areas. Only one group of focus interviews mentioned a university campus as being a cause for concern. Of particular note was the case in Derry/Londonderry where the segregation of Catholics and Protestants is an important aspect of the geography of the city. The city is divided by the river Foyle, with a Catholic

majority on the Cityside and a Protestant majority on the Waterside. There has been a move of the Protestant population from the Cityside to the Waterside combined with an overall decrease in the Protestant population. In the Cityside there is a minority Protestant population concentrated in the Fountain area. This has been declining due to various factors, one of them being intimidation, as outlined in a study conducted by the Templegrove Action Research:

...in the Fountain ongoing stoning and attacks on the area were mentioned. Fountain residents also mentioned lying, if asked where they were from, and being secretive about contact with "the other side" in case of being perceived as a traitor.(<http://cain.ulster.ac.uk> Smyth, 1996, 14/10/05)

The most recent research on the position in Derry/Londonderry has been reported by Shirlow et al (2005) Their comprehensive study of the Protestant population in Derry/Londonderry captures many of the social, economic and political dynamics of the city and should be read as providing the context in which these observations are made. This study did not include access to educational resources by the two communities which is of importance to this report but did draw attention to some of the fears of young Protestants from the main school in the Waterside had in being seen on the City side especially when in school uniform.

This context is important for understanding the responses of pupils because the main FEC and university campuses are located in the Cityside area of Derry.

Q. Would people feel wary of going across the river?

Yes(general agreement) (Controlled, F)

Limavady has better facilities. (Controlled, F)

If my course was in Derry tech I would be wary of going over. (Controlled, F)

We're mixed with girls from St Mary's and St Brigid's and we're just divided. We're all on one side and they're on the other. We don't mix at all...
(Controlled, F)

I would be worried about going to Derry tech and having to drop out.
(Controlled, F)

I know two people who dropped out who were doing care in it and they just couldn't stand it anymore. (Controlled, F)

I know the facilities are better in Derry tech for the course I want to do but it's harder to get into. Going to Derry tech would be my best option but there's more risk of me dropping out. (Controlled, F)

The boys expressed the same strong reservations about going to the North West Institute. None of those who were planning to go to FEC intended to go there. Most wanted to go to Limavady college with one opting for Omagh:

Q. So you wouldn't go across the river?

No (general agreement) (Controlled, M)

Q. Do you want to tell us why?

Religion (general agreement) (Controlled, M)

Q. You just wouldn't feel comfortable?

No (general agreement) (Controlled, M)

Q. Would you socialise over there?

No (general agreement) (Controlled, M)

Q. So you wouldn't feel comfortable at the North West Institute?

No, not if they knew where you came from and what religion you were... (Controlled, M)

For some of the boys from the same school there was worry of physical violence. When asked about why they would not attend Derry tech one muttered "you'd get your head kicked in". However, unlike with the girls it was said that:

Limavady offers the same if not better. (Controlled, M)

Other focus groups in different locations mentioned the same concern about facing potential sectarianism in certain institutions:

There's one I wouldn't go to in a loyalist area. (Maintained, M)

My brother went to one of those techs near a Loyalist area and he got beat up. He just didn't go back again. (Maintained, M)

The one over at Feldon, because it's mostly Protestant. A couple of friends I know went over to it and got hurt... (Integrated, M)

Millfield there's a lot of Catholics at it. Whenever we were down for the open day - the way it's at the bottom of the Falls - you just have to watch yourself. (Controlled, M)

In three of the focus groups outside Belfast there was concern expressed about going to university campuses in Belfast. In one maintained girls' school there was a worry about sectarian violence mentioned with some of the girls referring to examples of criminality which had received considerable publicity. Another group said that Belfast was 'too dodgy'.

Q. Anywhere you wouldn't feel comfortable going?

Belfast (Controlled, F)

Or Dublin (Controlled, F)

They're too big I'd be scared. (Controlled, F)

It's rough. (Controlled, F)

I've heard that you can get beaten up at Jordanstown. (Integrated, M)

In only two of the focus groups did the pupils say that they would not feel welcome for reasons other than sectarian ones. In these two cases, there was a perception that they would be unable to fit in because of their working-class backgrounds.

If you went to university and they knew where you're from you wouldn't be accepted. My mum went to Methodist College and anyone that goes there that isn't rich-they're victimised... (Controlled, F)

*Everyone who goes to university owns a horse and plays rugby.
It's not even about money, it's about the school you went to.* (Controlled, F)

If any of us went to university we wouldn't be like the people in it. They would all be stuck up...I couldn't stick the fact of being a snob... being all smart and knowing everything. (Controlled, M)

It has to be recognised that the focus groups were probably limited in what they could unearth about the extent of pupils' possible perceptions or fears of sectarianism, or the chill factor in relation to particular institutions. Despite reassurances of confidentiality there may have been a reluctance to disclose such information to outsiders whom pupils were meeting for the first time. However, as shown above there were indications from a number of students that this was an issue.

In order to further gauge feelings about different campuses and FECs, a question was included in the survey asking if there were any colleges or campuses that pupils didn't feel were welcoming to all sections of the community. However, like the focus groups, and probably for the same reasons, a low number of pupils indicated institutions to which they wouldn't feel comfortable going. Overall, 68 pupils indicated university campuses and 46 indicated Further Education Colleges that they felt were not welcoming to all. In both cases there were a higher number of pupils in controlled schools who felt this was the case.

Therefore, fears of sectarianism were an issue these did not emerge for the majority of those interviewed in either focus groups or through the survey. Concerns about sectarian issues determining access to specific colleges and courses is probably a localised phenomenon. It was an issue of importance in Derry/Londonderry where the river was seen as a psychological barrier for those in the focus groups in the controlled sector who would not consider going to the North West Institute largely for reasons to do with sectarianism.

Going away to university

A good number of those who wanted to go to university indicated that they wanted to go 'abroad'. A major factor in this willingness to go away to university was knowing family members who lived in Scotland or England and therefore, by implication, having a safety net. In other cases pupils knew people who had gone to university in the particular area that they were planning to go to:

Q. You've mentioned places like Leeds and Liverpool but you haven't mentioned anywhere in the South of England-why would that be?

We're happier going over there because I've got an uncle in Leicester.
(Controlled, F)

I want to go to Edinburgh.(Controlled, F)

Q. Is there a reason why people go to the north of England and Scotland?

They're just places people know more about. .(Controlled, F)

People talk about them more than other places. .(Controlled, F)

I know a lot of people who go to Scotland and the north of England. I don't know people who have gone anywhere else..(Controlled, F)

I have family in the north of England and Scotland. (Controlled, F)

I've always wanted to go across the water. They specialise in what I want to do and I've got relatives in both areas too...(Controlled, F)

I've got relatives in Kent. I've been in London before so I know my way about. (Controlled, F)

I'm thinking about going away because some of my family lives in Leicester (Controlled, M)

Q. What about the universities here?

I don't know about them. (wants to go to UCD) (Maintained, M)

Q. And how did you know about UCD?

My cousin went to it.

Q. And what about the universities here?

I don't know anything about them. (Maintained, M)

Q. You're going to Jordanstown, is that because you want to stay here and not move away?

...I've heard it's quite good, I've got cousins who have been there. (Maintained, F)

There was also a certain awareness among those who wanted to go away that because of the difference in grade requirements between Northern Ireland and Great Britain it would be easier also to get into a university across the water. In particular Queens was perceived to be difficult to gain entry to.

Q. Are there any universities that you wouldn't go to?

Probably Queens because you would not get in. (Maintained, M)

In Northern Ireland the grades are so much higher to get in than England now. (Maintained, M)

I would be going away anyway but that's just another reason to not stay in Northern Ireland. (Maintained, M)

Q. None of you have mentioned the local universities. Is there a reason for that?

Queens is a good place. It's harder to get in. (Controlled, F)

I'd go there if I got in. (Controlled, F)

We have a really good education system, they don't. So it's easier to get in over there. (Maintained, F)

Some universities have more grade boundaries. If you go abroad you don't have high grade boundaries. (Controlled, M)

For the most part though, pupils in the focus groups wanted to stay in Northern Ireland. For many it was too difficult to leave home and leave family and friends behind:

Q. Is there anywhere that you wouldn't go?

I wouldn't go abroad (Controlled, M)

You'd be away from your friends and family. (Controlled, M)

You'd have to make food. (Controlled, M)

You'd be on your own and you wouldn't really know anyone... (Controlled, M)

It's easier to be at home. If you have to move it's a big hassle. Getting a house, studying as well. (Controlled, M)

Q. why do you not want to go away like some of the rest?

We have friends here (Maintained, F)

You know where you are (Maintained, F)

If you go away you don't know anyone. (Maintained, F)

Q. Are there any places you wouldn't feel happy going to?

Abroad (Maintained, F)

Q. Why?

Would miss home. (Maintained, F)

However, surprisingly there was one case in which concerns, normally expressed about attending university abroad, were expressed about going to a university that was quite local to the school in which this focus group was conducted:

Q. Are there any universities you wouldn't feel happy going to?

I wouldn't go to Queens. (Controlled, F)

Q. Why not?

It's too big. (Controlled, F)

If you were going by yourself and you didn't know anybody. (Controlled, F)

Some mentioned the financial issue of leaving home:

If you stay here you don't need a student loan because you can just stay with your mummy and daddy. (Maintained, F)

If we had to go to university, you'd have to go somewhere else and you couldn't live at home. You wouldn't have money to be able to afford rent and food and clothes and everything you need. (Controlled, F)

She(my cousin) went away to Manchester. She said even go away to Coleraine because that means I can go home when I'm really skint. (Integrated, F)

Some were so determined not to go away that they said that they would prefer to stay in Northern Ireland and repeat their A-levels than go away to university whilst in some other focus groups pupils said reluctantly that they would leave if they had to.

Interestingly, there was a greater interest in going to university abroad displayed by the girls. Often the reason given for wanting to go to university abroad was that they wanted to leave Northern Ireland rather than an interest in any particular course or institution. Liverpool was most cited as a target destination along with Manchester. Universities in the north of England were those also popular even when pupils weren't clear on why they wanted to attend these particular institutions.

Q. Why do you want to go away?

Because, I can't stick it here. (Integrated, F)

Anywhere out of here. (Integrated, F)

Q. What about the local universities?

I want to get out of Northern Ireland- Dundee or Glasgow (Controlled, F)

(Another says the same)

Q. Why?

No reasons really. (Controlled, F)

For some, the idea of going away was part of the whole university experience that they wanted to take part in:

Q. What about the different universities?

I want to go somewhere in London or Durham because they have a very good drama department. (Maintained, F)

Q. Any other reasons?

I want to do something different. I don't want to stay in Ireland... (Maintained, F)

Q. Is that what everyone else thinks?

No, It's more for the experience. You only get one chance to go to university and have that experience. (Maintained, F)

Q. Is there anywhere else you're thinking of?

I'd like to go across the water (Controlled, F)

I'd just like to get out of this country. (Controlled, F)

I want to go to Dublin. (Controlled, F)

Q. Why do you want to go across the water?

Meet new people (Controlled, F)

Independence (Controlled, F)

In only one of the male focus groups in a maintained school was the same attitude found.

I don't want to go to college in Northern Ireland and stay in the same old place...Getting to go away and live away from home, it's part of the college experience. (Maintained, M)

Males in controlled schools, on the other hand, were more reluctant to contemplate attending university in England or Scotland. Concomitantly, there was a tendency for the male pupils at controlled schools to favour Queens to the exclusion of other institutions.

Q. Is there anywhere that you wouldn't go?

I wouldn't go abroad (Controlled, M).

Q. Would that be the same for anybody else?

(most agree) (Controlled, M)

Q. Say that you didn't get the grades, would you go away or would you stay and repeat to get into one of the universities here?

Stay and repeat. (Maintained, M)

Q. Is that what everybody says?

Yes (10 out of 10) (Maintained, M)

Q. So you really don't want to go away at all?

We don't really know much about it. (Maintained, M)

Interestingly, in a small number of cases of male students, some regarded local universities as being too far away. For example in three different focus groups with male students in the Belfast area it was surprising that Queens and Jordanstown were regarded as being too far away even though they were relatively close. These were also controlled schools in which very few of the pupils intended to go to university. It seems that the perception of physical distance of these institutions was correlated with the psychological distance apparent at these schools.

In the survey pupils were asked if there were any other reasons that might make it difficult for them to go to university or FEC. The factor most mentioned as posing a difficulty was the aspect of travel with 122 (9.1%) responses to this effect. Surprisingly this had only arisen once in the focus groups with schools in rural areas:

If you went to Magee in Derry, you need a car and all to get you down there, or a bus even. (Maintained, M)

In only a few cases did pupils state that they wanted to go to a university because they were interested in a particular course that was on offer at a particular institution. Many weren't aware of all the university options available within Northern Ireland. Although the majority knew about Queens University Belfast knowledge about the University of Ulster was more patchy. In one focus group in the Belfast area, when asked about the Jordanstown campus of the University of Ulster, a pupil responded that she had thought it was 'located in England'. There was a sense that pupils' knowledge was limited at this

stage and not much thought had been given to this issue. Therefore, choices of university were governed to some extent by the fact that they were not yet acquainted with all the options available or vague notions about particular locations. As the following focus group demonstrated:

Q. Any particular universities in mind?

Lincoln or Liverpool (Controlled, F)

Liverpool (Controlled, F)

Q. Have you been to Liverpool, do you like it?

Yes, I love the accent (Controlled, F)

Q. Who else?

Maybe Leeds (Controlled, F)

Q. Why Leeds?

I don't know. I saw it once on tv and it looks like a really nice place.
(Controlled, F)

When, in one focus group male students in a controlled school, it was asked if there were any universities to which the pupils wouldn't go the response was that they didn't know enough about them yet to be able to answer the question:

Q. Would anyone who's going to university want to go away?

Well I don't know anywhere else that would do zoology. (Controlled, M)

Q. Do you know the other ones?

Not really. (Controlled, M)

Q. What about the University of Ulster, would you think of going there?

Don't know much about it (Controlled, F)

Q. What about Coleraine?

Don't know much about it. (Controlled, F)

Q. What about Magee?

Never heard of it. (Controlled, F)

Q. Where would you be thinking about doing that? (studying law)

Down in Dublin (Maintained, M)

Q. What about the universities here?

I don't know about them. (Maintained, M)

Q. What other universities were you thinking of going to, is it just Queens and Jordanstown?

We don't really know other ones. (Controlled, M)

Overall, while most pupils in the focus groups wanted to attend university locally there were a significant number who were intending to go to England or Scotland. Those who had relatives living there were highly influenced by this in their intentions to go abroad. However, the perception of higher grade requirements to gain entry to university in Northern Ireland, and particularly Queens, was also a factor. The most striking features of the focus groups on this issue was that females in controlled schools were the most inclined to consider going to university outside Northern Ireland and males in controlled schools were the least interested in going abroad. They were also the least inclined to consider going to the University of Ulster and those who were planning to go to university were more focused instead on going to Queens. In fact, in a small number of cases there was an unwillingness to travel across the city to university campuses among males as they considered them to be too far away. However, there was an overall sense that pupils had not given a great deal of thought to the issue as yet and were not fully acquainted with the options available.

Class differences

The key aspect of the study was to understand the perceptions of working-class pupils on continuing with their education. Whilst the focus groups afforded us the opportunity to explore the attitudes and perceptions of pupils from this background, it did not provide an overview of the class backgrounds of pupils in year 12. Therefore, the survey sought to ascertain the social class of pupils and therefore to be able to analyse any links between attitudes and this profile. Obviously, there were limitations to this approach as many pupils have only a vague idea of what their parents' occupations are, or don't provide

enough detail to enable a precise allocation. However, there was enough information to provide some idea of any associations between perceptions and social class.

The following three tables (Tables B11, B12, B13) demonstrate the lower value attached to continuing on with education among those in the lower social classes. A much higher proportion of pupils from the higher classes said that they wanted to stay in education after they were 16 years old. On the other hand a higher proportion in the lower classes favoured getting a job or joining a training scheme.

The majority in both socio-economic groupings believed that staying in education was the way to get a good job with good pay. However, it is striking that while a lower proportion of those in the lower socio-economic grouping took this view, a higher proportion of them believed that a skilled trade was more important.

Table B11: What do you want to do when you are 16 years old?

	Professional, Managerial and Intermediate occupations	Small Employers and Routine Occupations	Total
Stay in education	225 74.5%	340 60.1%	565 65.1%
Paid job	21 7.0%	58 10.2%	79 9.1%
Training scheme	33 10.9%	91 16.1%	124 14.3%
Don't know	10 3.3%	45 8.0%	55 6.3%
Other	13 4.3%	32 5.7%	45 5.2%
Total	302 100.0%	566 100.0%	868 100.0%□

Missing N=12 (1.4%)

This table does not include figures for those cases where occupation was not stated or was inadequately described or figures for the unemployed.

Table B12: What do you think is important for getting a good job with good pay?

	Professional, Managerial and Intermediate occupations	Small Employers and Routine Occupations	Total
Staying in education	245 81.1%	409 72.8%	654 75.7%
Skilled trade	51 16.9%	145 25.8%	196 22.7%
None of these	6 2.0%	8 1.4%	14 1.6%
Total	302 100.0%	562 100.0%	864 100.0%□

Missing N=16 (1.8%)

This table does not include figures for those cases where occupation was not stated or was inadequately described or figures for the unemployed.

Table B13: Do you want to do a course at university?

	Professional, Managerial and Intermediate Occupations	Small Employers and Routine Occupations	Total
Yes	139 45.3%	150 26.4%	289 33.0%
No	76 24.8%	213 37.5%	289 33.0%
Thinking about it	68 22.1%	130 22.9%	198 22.6%
Don't know	24 7.8%	75 13.2%	99 11.3%
Total	307 100.0%	568 100.0%	875 100.0%□

Missing N=5 (0.6%)

This table does not include figures for those cases where occupation was not stated or was inadequately described or figures for the unemployed.

Perhaps the area with the most obvious class differences displayed in the survey, was on the issue of going to university. As Table 13 shows there was a much lower proportion of pupils from the lower socio-economic classes who said that they wanted to study at university.

Section B4: The interviews with principals, teachers and community representatives

Location

Backing the observations of students were those of several of the interviewees with respect to the impact of geographical factors. Of particular importance was the situation in Derry/Londonderry where there were perceived barriers to access arising from the location of the North West Institute and the university:

There's no getting around the river in terms of the issue of access to resources. Young people won't go to the city centre. It's as simple as that...there is a psychological block and it is based around personal security. (Community Representative, Londonderry)

There was a similar feeling indicated in relation to access the East Antrim Institute of Further Education by the head of a maintained school. Even though it was the local college pupils would not go to it but preferred to attend BIFHE instead.

A similar problem was pointed out by interviewees in Belfast. One high profile community worker pointed out the difficulties faced in accessing education in the Shankill by saying that people in the area “wouldn't cross Peter's Hill for the Crown Jewels”:

“Go to Tomb Street, you must be joking, how would you get to Tomb Street”. We did some work with the Hilton. They were doing hospitality and it was “you want me to go away down to that hotel!” These were grown people who you think are quite confident but they're not confident once they leave the area. (Community Representative, Belfast)

DSD did a survey of Sandy Row and they said that they had no school there. As I pointed out to them- they've got Methody and Inst. But the perception was that they were not... (CCMS Interviewee)

In relation to the Shankill and the Waterside in Derry these interviewees felt that the only way to foster participation in further and higher education and address the lack of access arising from geographical or psychological barriers was to make some provision within the areas and to foster a link with the relevant institutions in this way. Then there would be the possibility of progressing to institutions perceived to be distant.

Q. Is there anything that the institutions themselves can do to counter that?

The only obvious one is to have branches on both sides of the river, which is very difficult in terms of resources. (Community representative, Londonderry)

Whatever has to be put in has to be put in here locally and hand - held for a while. (Community Representative, Belfast)

The fact is that we don't have anybody on the road who takes a passionate interest. BIFHE used to put a representative on the road, not anymore... Outreach to me means sending somebody out. There might be 100 community groups on this road. It mightn't be beyond somebody's imagination to say "could I come along to your meeting and talk about classes - what we do, how you get there, what's your fees." To my knowledge that hasn't happened in years. (Community Representative, Belfast)

These perceptions fit well with the findings of research conducted into area perceptions of young disadvantaged people in Belfast (Green et al., 2003). This showed that young people had a highly localised outlook and tended to focus on their home area. They restricted their options for employment by discounting training and employment areas that were accessible and unfamiliar. There were found to be numerous factors affecting this attitude - not wishing to venture outside established social networks; unfamiliarity with public transport and lack of access to private transport; fear of sectarianism. In the case of the latter evidence emerged from the research that this fear could be linked with a general lack of mobility and geographical knowledge. There was evidence that this could be overcome by the experience of travelling to and working in other areas as part of social activities or employment reasons. This suggested that there was a role for policy to enhance the mobility of disadvantaged people by improving public transport and programmes for increasing their confidence and experience (Green and Shuttleworth, 2004). These findings bring into focus the question of how should places like the University of Ulster deal with the issue of the chill factor in relation to making university more accessible to both sections of the community. For instance, is it the case that only duplicate provision on the Waterside of the city will provide adequate accessibility or would it be possible to encourage pupils from controlled schools to go across the bridge to Magee campus through a range of confidence building measures?

The Transfer Test

Another issue that emerged frequently in the interviews was that of the effect of the 11-plus on pupils. One of the teachers interviewed said that they had to spend a lot of time building up the confidence of those pupils who had "failed" the transfer test. Another principal spoke of the stigma that was attached to those pupils who had "failed" the 11-plus. He recalled how students at a local grammar school had been instructed "don't be

like the girls in the brown uniforms”, meaning that pupils should not behave in the same way as those who attended the local secondary school.

In the Shankill, if you do the 11-plus and you're successful then that's okay. If you fail the 11-plus the future would not be in further and higher education. Because you leave school with very limited qualifications-further and higher education is not really pushed in our schools. (Community Representative, Belfast)

The alienation comes from a sense of failure repeated - you're a failure at 11, you're a failure at 16 and you can't get a job so you're a failure. It just keeps perpetuating itself. (School Principal, Belfast)

We need to look at our failings at post-16. We actually need to look at our failings at 5. It may be that there is a lost generation that we have to give up. We need to look at the early years and it needs to be a joint-up agenda. (CCMS Interviewee)

These views of the impact of the 11-plus reflected the findings of Gallagher and Smith (2000) that teachers in non-grammar schools spend a great deal of time seeking to address the feelings of failure and that pupils can become disengaged and disaffected with the education system.

The fact that the issue of the 11-plus emerged in interviews where the research was primarily concerned with access to higher education was significant. It reinforced the sense that it is difficult to separate this issue from the earlier educational experiences of children and that the aspiration to continue on to further and higher education should be dealt with from a younger age.

Area and Esteem

In some of the focus group discussions outlined above it was notable that in several schools the pupils did not believe in their ability to achieve entry to higher education and therefore had ruled it out as a legitimate option. In some cases this was linked to their view of the perception of the school or the area which they came from and the impact that it had on their opportunities. Again this was something that was echoed by the interviewees.

Some of the kids would see the fact that they are going to this school as reinforcing failure. For some children to go to school outside this area is indeed success... In other words you have lifted yourself above the immediacy of your area - there can't be anything good in this area because it's got all this deprivation. (CCMS Interviewee)

Occasionally, you'll hear it reflected back in terms of the perceptions of young people-they come from the Shankill, what good are they going to do...maybe someone from the Shankill has gone to a school outside the Shankill because of ability and has had to overcome a certain stigma of low expectation...(Church Minister, Belfast)

I remember being at Corpus Christi one day and we had put in a new IT suite. Two kids came down the corridor and one said to the other "I wonder who that's for?" and the other said "it's not for us". And there is this mentality that anything good can't be for them. When you look at some of the secondary schools, some of them aren't very well maintained. That reinforces to the kids that they are second class citizens. (CCMS Interviewee)

One year 12 head reinforced the views of his pupils that they were looked down on because of the area in which they attended school by other grammar and secondary schools. One interviewee spoke of the difficulties faced by pupils from one deprived area in Belfast who wanted to attend local grammar schools:

We tried to negotiate with Inst., Methodist College, Victoria, and BRA to look at reduced fees. As I understand, the most a school can ask for is £85. But if you take Inst., their fees are almost £500. They said that finance was the last thing-just £85. So we had parents who signed up to it. Then six months later they got a letter from the school saying "we will send a solicitor's letter to you to pay the rest" or it became known that the child was on a reduced fee and they were bullied. So parents took their kids away then. (Community Representative, Belfast)

Drugs and Paramilitaries

Several of the interviewees pointed out that for some communities in Belfast, educational aspiration had been damaged by the influence of paramilitaries and of drug-dealing. These avenues were seen as a quick way to financial success that could not be attained so easily through educational attainment.

Then he told me about the kid down the road who makes £3000 a weekend selling drugs. He said there were a whole lot of people around here who don't work and live perfectly good lives. (CCMS Interviewee)

We've just recruited for this new training session in Lanark Way and we've got 113 in. Of that 113 by a month's time we will be lucky if we have 70. They just disappear into the system. They go and get jobs on the new building sites or they sell drugs.

Q. Is that a big issue?

A big issue with the paramilitaries. The paramilitaries here show children it's okay, you don't need to work, do what we're doing- flash jewellery, holidays - don't need education. That very unfortunately has got the hold of this community. (Community Representative, Belfast)

There's kids that have no education and they think that running around joining these organisations that they're big boys. (Community Representative, Belfast)

Whilst these issues were not mentioned in the focus groups, the observations did tie in well with the general attitudes of the boys towards education. More specifically, it correlated with the short-term goal of earning money as soon as possible and that it was not necessary to gain higher qualifications to achieve this.

Parents

The focus groups had shown that those most interested in continuing on to university had parents who they felt were encouraging them to do so. In some of the schools where the pupils were less academically orientated, some of the teachers indicated that there was a lack of interest on the part of parents. One year 12 head in a controlled school in Belfast said that not one parent had turned up to year 12 parent-teacher night. Another in a controlled school in Belfast said it was a struggle to get parents interested in children's education.

What I think is the biggest problem with kids on this road is when they fall out of the system nobody cares. And many of their parents are young people themselves and they've had a bad experience...I have a nephew going to Queens next month. But if his parents had put him into our local secondary school...That's because somebody had an interest in him. But the kids you're talking about in this area...(Community Representative, Belfast)

However, these difficulties were not completely limited to the controlled schools as this interviewee indicated:

There was one class who was a very good class. The teacher of one of them came to me and said "he says he won't do his GCSEs". So I spoke to the kid and he said "my parents don't want me to do GCSEs. They said it won't get me a job and they're right". (CCMS Interviewee)

Culture of Education

It was felt by several of the interviewees that there was a difference in attitudes towards education between the Catholic and Protestant communities. There had been less emphasis on education in Protestant communities because in the past access to the skilled industries had not necessitated educational achievement. However, for the Catholic community who had not had access to such employment, education had been the avenue to success and therefore more emphasis had been placed on it.

Because Catholics have seen education as the route to improvement that is in the psyche. It is something that has to be brought into the psyche of many people in the controlled sector...In the Catholic community there were many people who came from the community or similar communities and had a rapport with the school. Therefore people were more welcome. They had the church thing to back it up as well. (CCMS Interviewee)

I think what has happened historically you will find in Northern Ireland, particularly in Protestant areas, education was never valued. Because you left school and you went to work - your mum or your dad got you the job and you learned on the job...

Q. But that was a long time ago...?

It is but that has just got bigger and bigger and bigger. The gap has got bigger. I think the Roman Catholic community came to where we are now at the beginning of the troubles. They realised that the way out for their kids was education. If they were smart enough to go in and pass the 11-plus there was great emphasis put onto education. Whereas on the Protestant side that all went bye-the-bye. We really have no-one here driving it. (Community Representative, Belfast)

A lot of my friends didn't finish exams - they didn't get the support. The emphasis was not on education, it was 'get out and get a job' regardless of what the job was. (Community Representative, Belfast)

The idea of skills and jobs being passed on in the community is gone. But the mentality is that you don't need a lot of education. (CCMS Interviewee)

For whatever reason there would have appeared to have been more motivation in the Catholic area and education is seen as your ticket to a new and better world... but there are Catholic schools that have difficulties. (School Principal, Belfast)

One year 12 head spoke of how there was not a culture of academic achievement because to be interested in achieving was seen by boys at the school as not being "cool". In

addition he perceived that the area had not recovered from the decline of the skilled industries and this had contributed to the lack of a culture of education.

These views resonated with the tenor of the focus group discussions with boys in the controlled schools where there was a lack of interest in pursuing educational qualifications.

One of the interviewees felt that the attitude towards education was linked to a deeper problem within the Protestant community. This had arisen from the historical background of the Protestant community which had been characterized by a strict hierarchy and respect for authority that had been fostered by the unionist state. This was not conducive to a positive attitude towards social mobility through education:

I don't know about the Catholic community but we have a saying in the working class "don't get above yourself, know your place." (Community Representative, Belfast)

This also helped to explain the negativity from the Protestant community towards the proposal for a new University of Ulster campus in West Belfast and the lack of reaction when it was dropped:

When we worked together with the University of Ulster on the Springvale campus the interesting thing was – there were Protestants and Catholics represented on the board - Protestants immediately said that there is nothing in it for us. We had leaders who said "well sure our kids will never get there". On the Catholic side they wanted to know how you got there, how many jobs would be local, would this improve the prices of housing. On the Protestant side, our leaders were saying "this isn't really for us". (Community Representative, Belfast)

In Londonderry the same view was raised about Protestant politicians not helping to provide the same opportunities for the community:

Protestant politicians haven't done enough to represent their community. On the nationalist/republican side their councillors are working like crazy on the political level to develop community projects. (Community Representative, Londonderry)

One of the interviewees took the view that a key in the difference between controlled and maintained schools had been in the area of ethos. This, he said had been important in raising standards and this difference was partly a result of a different system of management in the controlled sector:

Ethos is important in raising standards. It doesn't have to be the Catholic ethos, as long as you've got one... The controlled sector don't actually have ethos. There is no collectivity. The education and library boards have more authority as they are the managers of the schools. We're not, we only manage through the boards of governors. But actually, that influencing role is a much more useful tool because we have a kind of informal accountability whereas the board is only accountable to itself. There's no focus on the management of controlled schools. (CCMS Interviewee)

Gender difference

Echoing the views expressed in the focus groups two of the interviewees indicated that the girls were more focused on academic achievement than the boys. One mentioned the fact that the boys had the option of a trade whereas the girls “needed to be academic”. One thought that not passing the 11-plus was something that had a bigger impact on the girls:

It's hard to actually give credit to boys without them either rejecting it or others getting in the way to reject it. One of the things that we did was to operate a system whereby the teachers were able to convey messages about their success privately. (CCMS Interviewee)

Demography

In some of the focus groups in controlled schools it had been felt that the lack of sixth form provision had impacted on the pupils' options for continuing their education. This issue was reflected in some of the concerns expressed by interviewees about how the demographic trends in Northern Ireland were affecting education provision. Often mentioned was a concern that the declining pupil numbers were affecting school provision. Several interviewees pointed out that as a result of the demographic trend the numbers in secondary schools were falling whilst Grammar Schools were taking in lower grades.

There are 24 schools in Northern Ireland who this year have an intake of fewer than 40 pupils and another three who have an intake between 40 and 45. When it comes to the potential of those kids in year 10, what level of choice are they going to have and how is it going to effect their motivation. Because of the constraints of the curriculum they're not going to have that breadth of vocational activity that many people need... where you have limited choice you have greater disengagement because you can't meet their needs. (CCMS Interviewee)

Another year 12 head teacher pointed out that a cap had been put on the number of children who could go to his school because of the declining figures in two of the other local controlled schools. These two schools were included in the study and both had no sixth form. For the pupils in a focus group at one of these schools, it was strongly felt that this had affected their options.

For two of the interviewees it was felt that perhaps there was too much emphasis on higher education with an emphasis on more “academic” subjects at the expense of “vocational” subjects.

It's the bit in the middle of the education system that many of these kids are failing, because there aren't jobs for some of them and the things that there are jobs for, they aren't trained for. Those who are hitting the grammar schools with C-grades instead of coming out of the system and doing an HND they are still focusing on higher education. (CCMS Interviewee)

It depends on what you're talking about when you say further education. I think in one sense we've got too sophisticated... (Community Representative, Belfast)

There are many kids going into the grammar school now that have what is largely an academic diet who are not suited to that and there are many children who would prosper with a vocational element to their education. We need to see education in a broader sense... There's a grammar effect. There's also a secondary school effect when kids get qualifications in secondary school who in grammar school wouldn't have gotten them. (CCMS Interviewee)

These observations were resonant with the findings of the Costello Report (2003). This had noted the declining number of pupils in post-primary schools and the knock-on effects that this is having on the school system. Firstly, it indicated that there has been a widening ability range being admitted to grammar schools, raising questions about the appropriateness of the curriculum offered at these schools. Secondly, there were an increasing number of schools with low enrolments which would lead to a greater concentration of socially and educationally disadvantaged pupils in non-grammar schools.

The report proposed that a broader curriculum that includes vocational qualifications be available to all pupils rather than one that offered an “essentially academic diet”. It also includes the abolition of the transfer test and the introduction of transfer on the basis of choice by the parents and pupils supported by information including a pupil profile.

Another core component of the proposals was that they advocated the development of collegial groups of schools that would cooperate to meet the demands of a broader curriculum.

Some of the interviewees made reference to the potential implications of the Costello Report. The following two interviewees took different perspectives on the potential outcomes of the proposals.

Where I see the benefits of the grammar school education, in my years working here with education I always believed in some ways the 11-plus was the way out of the ghetto for many of these kids. I worry about Costello coming in because if they start to cluster schools it's not going to do the kids we're talking about any favours. Inst and BRA don't want us. But having said that, I think Mount Gilbert has only taken 15 children this year. (Community Representative, Belfast)

One of the things I would say in defence of the Costello arrangements is that until we get a generation through our school system who say that they've had a good experience we're not going to get the generation that follows respecting education. There are many people who are dissatisfied with the education that they have. Their experience by-and-large was negative and it was negative because the curriculum was so content-focused. (CCMS Interviewee)

Higher Education and Further Education

Some of the principals and head teachers spoke of growing interest in going on to university. The principal and teacher of two maintained schools said there was a growing expectancy among parents that children would go on to university and that a high proportion tended to go to university. One spoke of how the teachers tried to push students on with their education and tried to build their confidence. These views were backed by the level of interest for going into higher education expressed in the focus groups in those schools.

A principal of a controlled school in Londonderry indicated that there was more of a focus on going to Further Education that was in line with the views expressed by the pupils. However, again the principal felt that while the school had been initially more geared towards more vocational careers, it had now become more academic.

A head teacher of a controlled boys' school in Belfast said that there had been a rise in university applications. However, two of the teachers also hinted at a problem of students

who had gained entry to university dropping out. One said that some pupils had a problem when they went to university after completing AVCES as they struggled to cope with the level of work involved.

Two of the interviewees linked rising academic expectations with the advent of the Education Reform Order 1989, saying that this had lead to a more academic orientation with one interviewee saying that it had “forced everyone down an academic route”.

Section C: To Go or to Stay: Attitudes to Studying Higher Education in Northern Ireland or Leaving to Study Elsewhere

Amanda Hayes & Bob Osborne

Section C1: Methodology

The study reported in this section paralleled that reported in Section B. It explores the attitudes and perceptions of a sample of Year 14 pupils from a cross-section of schools in relation to higher education progression in particular and the influences and factors that inform their preferences on where to study. The methodology used once again is broadly similar to that used in Section B in that data were collected through a series of semi-structured focus groups held in the sampled schools. The major advantage of this method was that students were engaged on their own ground and within their familiar peer group and thereby a clear opportunity existed for the free-flowing discussion of the issues.

The Sample of Schools

The sampling base used was information produced by Department of Education on the numbers of year 14s in each grammar school. Selection was then made on the basis of ranking those schools with a higher proportion of school leavers in descending order while at the same time taking into account issues such as geographical location and school management type. The identified schools were then invited to be involved in the research through sending letters to school principals. As six schools declined to take part in the research, with many reporting that they had been inundated with research requests or were suffering from ‘research fatigue’, we had to revisit our original list several times and forward more letters of invitation until the desired number was reached. Each ‘replacement’ school replicated some of the basic characteristics of the school that had withdrawn from the study. Using this approach a total of 15 schools agreed to participate in the study, 11 were from grammar and 4 from the secondary sector (including integrated schools). In each school, two groups averaging of between 8 – 10 pupils from year 14 took part in the focus group discussions. In total, approximately 245 pupils from 15 schools contributed to this research. The schools were drawn from across Northern Ireland and reflected the religion balance and the integrated sector.

The focus groups were based on a semi-structured format to ensure that a range of topics were covered in each interview, though the order in which issues were raised varied depending on the ways the interviewees responded. All pupils who took part in the focus group discussions gave their consent for these to be tape recorded and the research aims, confidentiality and anonymity procedures were explained at the beginning of each session. Group discussions lasted between 45 minutes to one hour and were constructed around key themes which are used to structure the report. All fieldwork was conducted November 2004 and March 2005.

Section C2: Focus Group Findings

Information Sources

Prospective students were also asked about who or what they consulted as regards information to help inform them in the decision making process. In the main students accessed a variety of sources of information however, a starting point for most pupils in helping them in making a informed choice of what to study and where, was by looking through prospectuses, which were available in all schools and widely used mainly in careers classes and by visiting university websites.

However, it would also appear that in addition to these sources informal discussions between friends and family, including current students, played an equally influential role in the choice process for many.

The internet was pretty good for the UCAS.com but I didn't really decide what I was going to do until I spoke to a family member and they told me it would be a good thing to do ... (Protestant Grammar, M)

Try and talk to other people that have went to the university and on the course you want to do because I talked to people that had done primary education at Northumbria and they said they really enjoyed it – that helps a lot to – to get their views instead of just what you are reading about. (Catholic Grammar, F)

In addition to these sources the majority of schools in the sample had experienced visits from university representatives, in particular the two local universities and a consortium of universities from Scotland. Pupils regarded these visits as informative but tended to view them as something akin to political broadcasts from competing parties and as such would not consider this source very influential on their final decision. In one group the use of expensive television advertisements by one Scottish university was raised. Pupils in this group were of the opinion that to resort to this form of advertising implied the university was 'desperate' and if anything would deter prospective students from applying "I reckon it couldn't be a very good university if it has to rely on that "(Catholic Grammar, M)

In terms of other information sources accessed by pupils it would appear that university league tables were not widely used as pupils found the different range of indicators taken into account confusing.

Several schools had organised specific career talks for pupils and one school had organised a four day visit for some sixth-formers to Scottish and English universities. Travelling outside Northern Ireland to visit prospective institutions was a task undertaken by only a minority of pupils with their family.

In terms of advice and information provided by career teachers within the schools it would appear that this varied very much from school to school. We can see examples of the range of opinions in the following quotes:

She gave us time to look through the prospectuses to see what we wanted to do and before filling in our prospectuses we all got individual interviews – to see if our course were realistic - and if there was chances that you would actually get the grades ‘very helpful to those who wanted to go to Oxford, Cambridge’
(Catholic Secondary/Comprehensive, F)

Why go to University

Pupils were first asked to tell us why they wanted to progress to university. Overwhelmingly the most common reason expressed was the need to compete effectively in the labour market; as more and more professions are becoming graduate only, a degree would help get a job or a better job, in a chosen career path which, in due course would secure a decent wage.

I think it is important to go to university because the amount of people going these days you are not really going to get a decent job if you don’t go to university so the higher the degree you get the more chances of getting the job you want
(Protestant Grammar, M)

...you need to go if you want to get into a good career and you want to do well, it’s what they expect, employers’ are looking for university graduates – so I think it is quite important to go (Integrated Secondary, F)

Independence, doing something you actually like, getting a good job, earning more money than you would if you didn’t have a degree (Integrated Secondary, F)

So that you that you can learn new skills that will help for your future job and help the ambitions that you have and through going to university you will do the course that will help you get a better job. (Catholic Secondary/Comprehensive, F)

Interestingly, only a minority of prospective students placed more emphasis on the fact that progression would afford them the opportunity for further study in their chosen subject area.

'I just really like physics so I want to go on to study at university'
(Protestant Grammar, M)

The second most common factor raised was the potential opportunities they believed the 'university experience' would offer them. These included opportunities for personal development; such as the opportunity to take their first step towards independence and maturity and the chance to meet new people from different places.

Going for the experience as well, it's not just getting a degree but going to really grow up and have fun and experience life in a different area and different place.
(Protestant Grammar, M)

..to learn independence and take on responsibilities because it is completely different from being supported by mum and dad (Protestant Grammar, M)

A minority of respondents highlighted the attractions of university social life as their main reason for going "You get to party all the time ...in your own flat, no rules...it's all good "(Catholic Grammar, M) and in three of the focus groups it was suggested that expectations from school and home had influenced their decisions about progressing onto higher education.

Your parents sort of want you to as well - so forced into it
(Protestant Grammar, M)

Don't think that was an option left open to us by the school...
(Protestant Grammar, M)

I'm only going to Trinity because my ma and da made me, if I had a choice I wouldn't go to university - can't stand rules and teachers, I'd just prefer to get out there and get a job (Catholic Grammar, M)

One individual stated that going to university was their only option as they were as yet unsure as what to do with their life in the immediate future " ...not quite sure clear what I want to do yet, so it is something to do for three or four years" (Integrated Secondary, M) We were also interested in finding out if any of the students had at any point explored other options as opposed to not progressing onto higher education and in twelve of the focus groups a number of students admitted that they had at some stage given this idea some consideration. However, thoughts of this nature usually stemmed from anxiety over their expected grades at GCSE or AS level and once they had obtained the necessary grades their levels of confidence were restored and the idea of not progressing to higher education was dismissed. One of the respondents in this group explains:

Well it was fifth year, GCSE year, I just felt like there was so much pressure on you, was thinking of taking the easy way out was just to go and get an apprenticeship or take up a trade or something like that, it's still a job at the end of the day you are still making your own money, but university seems more lucrative now, the whole experience, the whole culture shock.
(Protestant Grammar, M)

In addition, a number of students also indicated that they were acutely aware of the financial implications surrounding progression to higher education and had at some point questioned whether the perceived benefits and value of a university education was worthwhile.

I don't know if the whole money aspect of it is going to be worth it in the end up – I was thinking about that too - instead of coming out with a big debt you could learn a trade and get a good job and actually make money instead of losing money (Catholic Grammar, M)

....sometimes the cost of a degree and staying abroad or whatever you are doing for university and then weighing that up against what job you are getting when you come out – a lot of people are left working in McDonalds after going to university for three years, the pressure of study and paying all that money - so you might as well leave after school and get a trade as there is loads of money in trades...(Protestant Grammar, M)

However, despite these initial doubts or reservations, all claimed at the time of interview, they were intent on progressing to university. When all groups were questioned further as to what their contingency plans were if they didn't receive the appropriate grades for university only two pupils indicated that they would consider entering full time employment. The majority of pupils however, claimed that if unsuccessful first time around they would repeat A levels the following year. One comment from a pupil illustrates the typical response to this question.

Think about taking a year out and repeat them and then go to university because it is something I really want to do – I wouldn't want to stop after school and get a job, it's not what I want to do I want to keep on living the student life and live it before I settle down and get a job and start earning and stuff like that?
(Protestant Grammar, F)

It also emerged during discussions that one individual viewed the option of obtaining qualifications from the FE sector as an equally valid and less expensive alternative.

I don't think I'm going to go because what I can do I can do it just as well at the Tech - I'm doing accountancy and I go into an office as well and they put you through your exams – there's no fees or anything (Catholic Grammar, F)

Leaving Northern Ireland

One third of our sample indicated that they wanted to leave Northern Ireland for their university experience. However during discussions it transpired that for the majority of students within this particular group one of the influences on their decision to leave Northern Ireland was their expected attainment grades at 'A' level. Those with low exam expectations indicated that they were left with no alternative but to apply to universities outside Northern Ireland due to the high entry grades required not only at Queens but also the University of Ulster. The following two quotes highlight the predicament these particular pupils felt they faced:

When I looked at Queen's, it was anything I wanted to do as was all A and 2B's and I am not expected to get something that high so I thought I would do better to apply for something that was more realistic which was outside NI mainly
(Protestant Grammar, M)

Yes, well I wanted to go to Jordanstown but it depends on my grades so that's why I applied for Leeds and London City as they have the lowest grades in the country (Integrated Secondary, M)

In a minority of cases the option of remaining at home to study was unavailable as some young people wanted to do courses that were only available outside Northern Ireland.

However, the other main reason cited for studying further a field was to gain a sense of independence, as the following two pupils illustrate:

Because I think it's a really great opportunity to go off and meet new people I want to see what it is like to be away from your family and get a new experience.
(Protestant Grammar, F)

I'd like to go away to Glasgow hopefully just to see what it is like just to get away from the family and see what it's like living on my own with friends and people interested in following the same sort of career path. (Protestant Grammar, M)

On one occasion was the desire to get away from the current political climate in Northern Ireland cited as the main reason for wanting to leave Northern Ireland.

All six of my applications were in England...I don't want to stay in Northern Ireland – I don't really like it here, I hate the sectarianism and stuff like that.
(Protestant Grammar, M)

It is perhaps striking that these issues which might be described as 'politically related' were only highlighted as key factors, in a minority of cases. It is however, likely to be the

case that some of these factors related to the wider political situation do underpin some decisions but that a short focus group, conducted by strangers, may not provide an environment where sensitive issues can be expressed.

In addition to finding out the main reasons for leaving Northern Ireland the interviews then went on to explore the preferred destinations of those pupils wanting to study in other parts of the United Kingdom. Scotland was identified as the preferred destination in nine of the focus groups and the following quotes encapsulate the main reasons why those pupils perceive Scotland as a popular choice.

Scotland for a lot of people from NI seems more like home, than perhaps England would be, people traditionally feel they are more similar to us or more friendly, a bit more lively. A friendlier atmosphere perhaps than some places in England and with the boats and stuff there is very cheap transport, flights to anywhere in Scotland is very cheap, it just seems you are still getting away but it seems a wee bit closer to home than perhaps the South of England.

(Protestant Grammar, M)

It seems like all the people are really friendly and it's a really nice place, a nice place to live and the nightlife. (Catholic Grammar, F)

I chose Scotland because England has all the fees coming in, so my parents were a bit worried about that because they are still supporting my sister.

(Protestant Grammar, M)

Other popular destinations included Newcastle, Manchester, Loughborough and Liverpool. The historical migration pattern of the school as a whole would also appear to bear some influence on pupil's choice of destination

A lot of people from the school seem to go to Edinburgh or Glasgow, those seem to be the most popular places from this school – the past few years it just seems to be like that most of them want to seem to go to Edinburgh or Glasgow. (Protestant Grammar, Male)

This point was born out when pupils' were asked to identify universities they wouldn't consider going to. The responses revealed that there was no one university in particular but rather a region of the United Kingdom and the most frequently mentioned region was Wales. This would appear to be down to the fact that that pupil's didn't know anybody who had studied in Wales and had very little knowledge of universities in that area. The Republic of Ireland was also mentioned on several occasions mainly because the cost of

living was considered too expensive and the entry grades too high. Two individuals also suggested that pupils from the North might face discrimination in the Republic of Ireland.

I think Trinity don't like people from the North because Dubliners don't like people from the North. (Catholic Grammar, M)

I wouldn't go to England people just aren't as welcoming to people from Northern Ireland. (Protestant Grammar, F)

Staying in Northern Ireland

The previous section focused on the main reasons for entrants to higher education leaving Northern Ireland. This section of the analysis explores the reasons put forward by sixth-formers for staying in Northern Ireland. As three quarters of our sample were intent on staying in Northern Ireland we were interested in the influences and factors that affected this particular decision.

The evidence of this study would suggest that cost is a significant factor in the choice process encouraging many to study close to home. The perceived additional expense of studying outside Northern Ireland was considered by many too much of a financial burden for both parents and students alike (particularly if there were other siblings in the family intending to go university in the near future) and one that could be avoided by remaining within Northern Ireland and studying at local institutions. The quotations below are typical of some of the comments made.

I don't want to go to far away because if I have money problems I can always revert back to mum and dad...I know I have to pay for some of it, but my sisters want to go off to England or somewhere and my mum couldn't afford to pay for all of us. (Integrated Secondary, F)

My mummy always said that she wouldn't be able to afford to send me away. (Catholic Secondary/Comprehensive, F)

I want to do law and it is very, very expensive, even in Belfast. If you were to go away you would have to pay for your own home and pay for your food and stuff like that whereas if you were at home you get it really for free'. (Catholic Secondary/Comprehensive, F)

I don't see the point of spending extra money if you are going to get the same qualification doing the same course here. (Catholic Grammar, F)

You have got your life here, why would you want to leave that and just going to university over there when you have universities over here?
(Catholic Secondary/Comprehensive, F)

The cost of attending interviews ‘across the water’ was also raised as a prohibiting factor which, for some, may restrict options. Motivation to engage in work is to ‘finance’ a lifestyle rather than because of financial difficulties or needs. Furthermore, the majority of students in this group have part-time jobs and throughout the interviews pupils highlighted the main reasons for wanting to keep their current jobs, not least for the social aspects of work but also for the independence and autonomy that came with the money. Maintaining their own independent source of income was clearly important to them as the majority of students intended combining part-time work with future study in order to help support themselves financially throughout their time at university.

If I go to Belfast I have cousins who live there so I will be able to stay with them so obviously rent is going to be cheaper and I will still be able to keep my job here so I will be on decent pay, whereas I’ll just be working in a bar somewhere if I went away for pretty poor money. That’s another reason for staying, when coming home at the weekend, you can have a job before you go and just keep it on at the weekend. (Protestant Grammar, M)

I don’t really want to got too far at the end of the day there are so many things still here that you have and that you are used to and if I go to Scotland I’ll only be home at Christmas or I’ll only be home at summer and I’ll have to give up my job as well. (Protestant Grammar, M)

In some of the groups several students admitted that they felt they were just not mature enough for the experience of physical separation from home. Some of the more specific comments include:

No, I want to stay at home I just don’t feel that while I am still in fulltime education I want to be separated from my family for such a long time - so I am going to stay at home there will be more support around me.
(Integrated Secondary, F)

I’ve applied for Jordanstown and Queen’s – I wouldn’t want to go away because I am such a home bird, I’d miss my family if I went away to England.
(Catholic Grammar, F)

Interestingly, out of the total of 15 schools that took part in this research there was one school where all the pupils wanted to remain in Northern Ireland – a Catholic grammar school.

Other factors that affected the decision making process included the influence of positive role models such as friends and other family members, who had made similar educational choices.

My mum and dad both went to Stranmillis and they thought I should go there because they knew how much better it was to have help from the family around and they want me to have that as well. (Catholic Grammar, F)

I've just applied to the University of Ulster because my brother and sister went there and they said they liked it. (Protestant Grammar, M).

Maintaining existing social ties/networks established through involvement in clubs and sporting activities were also highlighted, as well as the convenience of the safety net of support, both emotional and practical available at home. It would appear that pupils regard all these factors as highly important as they can/will provide social protection at a time of transition as well as a valuable source of social capital.

...I can't really wash or cook, I mean I can't eat pot noodles every day like, I need a decent meal at weekends. (Protestant Grammar, M)

I have friends up in Belfast at Queen's and they have a great time there and that is one of my main reasons for going to Belfast as I already know people there. (Protestant Grammar, M)

When pupils were asked about the importance of parental influence on their choice of university, the responses given would suggest that parents were prepared to stand by and support any decision the young people made 'My mum doesn't care as long as I get the course I want to do.' However, analysis of responses to the question 'How important does the role of finance played in the decision making process?' suggests that parents may have had some influence.

My mum says she doesn't want me to go away as she thinks I won't be able to cope with like money, she thinks I'll just spend it, all my loan at one time (Catholic Grammar, F)

She just wants me to stay here, close to home so if anything happens then I'm nearby and if I need her she is not far away (Protestant Grammar, F)

My parents are encouraging me to go away, they just say there's more opportunities and you'll mature a lot quicker and it'll build your independence (Integrated Secondary, M)

...but my Dad said it would probably be better to stay here as you would end up having to support yourself, getting a job and stuff over there, and you have got financial support when you are at home...(Integrated Secondary, M)

Perceptions of local universities

Year fourteen students were also asked for their perceptions of the local universities, in terms of whether they view the institutions positively or negatively. Essentially this discussion was largely about Queen's and the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, as the majority of pupils had a prior knowledge of these institutions' either by virtue of the fact they were sited near their schools or homes or they were their preferred choice of university within Northern Ireland

'I don't really know anything about them – I only know about Queens and Jordanstown'. (Protestant Grammar, F)

I didn't know about Magee until this year' I only heard about it five minutes ago. (Protestant Grammar, F)

Overall pupils expressed broadly positive views about both universities.

'I think they are something to be proud of as Northern Ireland is usually known for all the bad things that happen'. (Protestant Grammar, M)

'They have definitely gone up I've heard a lot of reports of how they have improved and a lot of people from Northern Ireland who used to go over to England and Scotland are staying here because they know they have got a better Standard'. (Protestant Grammar, M)

'I've been to Coleraine and Jordanstown and Queens and they all seem to be a fairly high standard as well, there big and there well developed and there seems to be a lot of money invested in them. (Catholic Grammar, M).

However one individual made reference to a car-parking scheme recently introduced by the University of Ulster and commented on the controversy and negative press attention the university had attracted as a result of this:

Even though the universities are improving themselves they are limiting themselves in other ways as they have brought in stuff like you have to pay to use the car park, so all the streets around Foyle, even all the way down the Strand Road, people have to park their cars down at McDonalds car park, because coming in in the morning it's a nightmare...(Protestant Grammar, M)

In three of the focus groups it emerged that a number of individual sixth-formers perceived Queens as culturally incompatible for those from a working class background:

'Queens is upper class, Jordanstown is the working man's university'.
(Integrated Secondary, M)

'It's prestigious as well and you have to have really high grades to get in ...and there's no chance with me'. (Integrated Secondary, F)

'It's almost too posh, whenever you think of people going to Queens...it's higher class'. (Protestant Grammar, M)

'There quite, I don't know, up themselves or something, they think they are better than anybody else, the university itself like, not the people that go'.
(Catholic Secondary/ Comprehensive, F)

By contrast Jordanstown was viewed as being more for:

'Just normal people like us...not anybody overly rich'.
(Catholic secondary/comprehensive, F)

Historically, some universities are perceived as being of higher quality than others so it was of interest to note that in two focus groups these perceptions were being challenged and pupils were making choices based on the quality of the courses available rather than the reputation of the institution. The following quotations illustrate the way in which this point arose:

Q. What are your perceptions of the local universities?

'I think there is the impression that Queen's is far more prestigious than Jordanstown...' (Catholic Grammar, F)

'I think that has kind of changed'. (Catholic Grammar, F)

Q. What makes you think that?

'Jordanstown has sort of come out on its own a bit more in the past couple of years now and the grade requirements for most of my courses were higher in Jordanstown than Queens - don't know I even think the course availability Queens is sort of sectioned into groups – like law and medicine and then English, History whereas Jordanstown sort of has varying courses. (Catholic Grammar, F)

'I think every one builds Queen's up to be like the absolute best university you can go to but I think it's not. I mean it's very good for medicine and stuff like that but for other things it's just not as good so I didn't want to

go to it because for my course it wasn't very good at all – but I think a lot of people in Northern Ireland just think that Queen's is absolutely the best thing, but it is more just because they don't want to leave home that they build Queen's up to be the best place to go'. (Protestant Grammar, F)

If you hadn't done your research you would say Queens, by reputation...it's just something about it, more tradition, older university, but I have been up to Jordanstown a lot and its just as good as Queens for a lot of subjects. (Protestant Grammar, M)

In terms of negative comments in only one of the focus group sessions was it suggested that pupils from Catholic schools might face discrimination because of the perceived religious 'chill factor' or area perceptions of one campus location:

'Coleraine seem a bit dodgy for Catholics not the actual university but, like I know four or five people down there who say it's wile hostile down there for Catholics - they say they keep themselves to themselves – there is a large population of Protestants down in there in Coleraine and Portrush and stuff as well, be highly Protestant and it's kinda rough sometimes to go to out for people who are Catholics - scary. (Catholic Grammar, M)

Other comments which made reference to the location of the universities included the following:

'Queens is more central – like Jordanstown is a good bus ride out of the city'. (Catholic grammar F)

...the ones like Magee and Coleraine they completely put me off because of their position, where they are situated, Jordanstown was just accessible and located in a nice position and stuff. (Catholic grammar, F)

We took the opportunity to explore this question further and ask pupils if they thought all universities were equally welcoming and inviting to students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. From the following quotes we can see that the replies suggest that where pupils see discrimination existing is in terms of class differences as opposed to different religious backgrounds:

I think it's all to do with money places like Oxford and Cambridge – they say they are not money orientated and they totally are – even when you went over you sort of felt like everybody here is a public school person but me ...(Protestant Grammar, F).

Like religion and - university seems the place that religion doesn't matter and even up towards like Queens which is the university area even like Jordandstown students would go out in Queens there's not a lot of like

Catholic bars, Protestant bars in that area – like I don't think there is a thing any more I think it just comes down to money - the rest of Belfast you would have Catholic areas, Protestant areas but the university area is just totally different you can go to any bar, any club and you're not worried by somebody hearing that your name is Una ...
(Catholic Grammar, F)

I think they just reflect the secular society, especially over in England, might be a little more equal than here...simply because of the numbers involved over there, there would be more people of different backgrounds than over here.
(Protestant Grammar, M)

'It seems to me they are more interested in why a person wants to do the course and whether or not they have good grades or whether or not they would be able to survive a course rather than religious or ethnic backgrounds its just are they going to be able to cope and is the course suited to them, more interested in their grades, at least that's my interpretation of it anyway'. (Integrated Secondary, M)

Financial issues

The main source of income for most students is money from the Students Loan Company. Therefore, in each of the focus group discussions we took the opportunity to ask the sixth-formers if they intended on taking out student loans, what they knew about the loans system and their attitude towards debt. They were also asked to identify other possible sources of income they could draw on. Discussions revealed that the majority of prospective students anticipated adopting a range of strategies to pay for their higher education; student loans, paid employment and financial support from the family.

The vast majority of sixth-formers claimed that they anticipate taking out student loans and as the following statements highlight, there was clearly an acceptance that student debt was a feature of university life. However, despite the prospect of accumulating high levels of debt there was also the perception that the benefits of higher education and its perceived long-term returns outweighed the direct costs and availing of student financial support was viewed as a long-term investment in their future.

I think everybody is in debt anyway by the time you get out of university so I suppose it's just to be accepted unless you work out a situation where your parents are going to pay for your rent or something – but most likely not, so I suppose just everyone just faces the same situation-it's just the way university is.
(Catholic Grammar, F)

I'll probably be broke but all students are broke, they all come out with debt.
(Catholic Grammar, F)

If you were the only person to come of uni with debt you would probably decide against it, but nearly everybody who graduates from uni is in debt.
(Protestant Grammar, M)

By contrast, it was interesting to note that a minority of pupils, a total of seven, indicated that their parents were adverse to the idea of student loan take-up and consequently did not anticipate applying for a loan.

I'm in a single parent family but mum has a job which means she does have to pay some fees, but she's quite determined that if I stay here not to take out a student loan as she doesn't want me to fall into debt or anything, so I think we probably will struggle but she works really hard to try and save some money so that I don't get into debt. (Protestant Grammar, F)

My brother took out a student loan and he is still paying it back and he has left university four years and I'm not sure even if he has paid much of it back...my parents wouldn't let my sister take one out so they are funding her so I suppose I will be doing just the same as my sister, not my brother. (Protestant Grammar, F)

My dad's against student loans so they will probably be financing me, probably get a part-time job as well to help with income. (Protestant Grammar, M)

My ma and da are going to give me money and then I will pay them back.
(Catholic Grammar, M)

My parents will be financing me because they just don't want me to get a student loan after hearing about everybody else and stuff. (Protestant Grammar, M)

However when asked if they thought university would be value for money an element of doubt could be detected:

I don't know-it's sort of just the university experience like and I'm getting away – I don't know it sort of makes you think-because so many people come out with degrees and maybe don't get the type of jobs they want ... (Catholic Grammar, F)

...I don't know if it is going to be worth it, whenever you could just start a job and work your way up and not even be in all that debt.
(Catholic Secondary/Comprehensive, F)

Whereas others had a more pragmatic view:

If you messed through the whole year – just party and drink, like fail your exams, of course it's going to be like crap-of course it's not going to be value for money but if you do it right and have the right attitude and a good degree at the end of it

–it's going to be well worth it –if you have a decent job, pick a career you are going to get a job in then eventually it is going to pay off. (Catholic Grammar, F)

The majority of pupils anticipated relying on a parental contribution as well as student loans to help pay for their time at university and it was evident throughout discussions that many pupils were very mindful of the financial situation in their families and expressed concern about the extra financial burden they were placing on the family. To try and alleviate this situation the majority of pupils claimed they intended to balance a job as well as their degree to try and ease the financial pressure on parents.

Yes, mainly student loans as well as part-time jobs – won't put too much pressure on my parents as I don't think it is really fair as my other sister is at university and then if there's me going to university as well that will be two sets of fees to pay and then my little sister as well, she'd love to go ...I don't think its fair to put all the pressure on parents so I'll definitely have to get student loans and jobs to try and make head way of it mostly myself. (Protestant Grammar, M)

If mum and dad talk me into a gap year then I suppose I think I will have to find myself a job and work-full time hours so to build up some money to keep myself going at university so it's not so much a financial strain on the parents, because they are putting two people through university at the one time, which would help them. (Protestant Grammar, M)

By contrast to the concerns of those pupils outlined above one pupil was quite vocal about who should pay.

They [parents] can't push you to university and then not step up to the plate with no money? (Catholic Grammar, M)

When pupils were asked how much knowledge they had about student financial support they claimed they had little awareness or knowledge of the system or of the typical debts a university degree course would incur.

Q. Are you aware of how much debt you are likely to accumulate by the time you leave university?

No, and I don't want to know either as I would just get into that amount of debt-I'd be safer just getting a minimal loan. (Catholic Grammar, F)

Nobody has really said anything here about things financially, how we are supposed to pay for it, I haven't a clue how it's supposed to work. (Catholic Grammar, M)

Out of our sample only pupils in five schools could clearly state at the time of interview that they had received information on student financial support. Of the five schools, two reported that they had received talks from local banks, one had received a talk from the careers teacher and one from a representative of an Education and Library Board, and in one case, information on financial issues had been disseminated in conjunction with offers from a university. Only two groups of pupils said they had an awareness of the amount of likely debt that could be accumulated and also felt that, overall, they had been well informed:

We have had the scary figures thrown at us, we have indeed It's about 13k, about 13-16 grand that's an average student ...depends on the course, Medicine and dentistry is all way, way higher. (Protestant Grammar, M)

It was after we had applied to university that people came into talk to us about loans though – nobody came in before and said this is how much debt you would be in if you are going away or staying at home. (Catholic Grammar, F)

Open Days

Open Days can provide prospective students with an excellent opportunity to visit and find out more information about potential Universities: the range of courses on offer, the facilities and resources available and what the local area has to offer before making an application. At the time the interviews with pupils were being conducted all but one of the groups within our sample had attended at least one of the Open Days organised by the local universities. For many pupils, but not all, these events were considered worthwhile and insightful as they provided opportunities for pupils to talk with current students and academic staff. Furthermore, by physically being on the campus pupils felt able to conceptualise what it would feel like to be a 'real' student attending that particular university:

It's pretty good, it gives you a sort of idea of the general stuff the university offers, like what sort of things are in round the campus, what facilities they have ... (Catholic Grammar, M)

...like if you are comparing universities you can see one might have a better standard of equipment than the other one, more modern lab, you would be more inclined to go to that one, likewise if the university is in a nice area more things available to you'. (Protestant, Grammar, M)

When asked for their perceptions of the Open Days in terms of how they were organised it would appear that the majority of pupils preferred the more structured approach as perceived to have been adopted by the University of Ulster as opposed to the less structured approach as adopted by Queens. The following four quotes illustrate the pupil's perceptions on this issue:

In Queens you were just left wandering about...it wasn't very structured – in Jordanstown it was 'go to this place at this time, you've got this amount of time for lunch and then go back for another talk' you were told directly what to do and when to do it – but at Queens you were just handed a sheet and allowed to wander'. (Catholic Grammar, Female)

Magee was good – the Queens one you just sort of went in and there was no-one telling you where to go just went about by yourself, whereas in Magee it was all, 'this was here, that was there', and there were guides everywhere telling you exactly where everything was and if we wanted to find something it was far easier to find than Queen's. (Catholic Grammar, Male)

I think there should have been a wee bit of structure to it – if you are left to do it on your own you haven't a clue where you are going and you end up missing out whereas if you were given a timetable or what lecture you were to go to it would be far better. (Catholic Grammar, Female)

I thought the UU at Coleraine was better organised because with Queen's university you were given maps and basically just allowed to walk around which I thought was better anyway as you got to choose where you wanted to go and find your own way round as you would have to do anyway, I thought that although Coleraine was more structured the Queen's Open Day was better'. (Protestant Grammar, Male)

It was clear from the discussion that pupils also preferred Open Days where there were plenty of current students on hand to answer any questions they may have had about student life:

... 'it was really nice to talk to first years and second years who have experience of what it is actually like to be there and the way they were just talking away to you and giving you wee tips' 'don't do this and don't do that, but make sure you have done that first of all' they seemed very welcoming and telling you it's good to have some feedback. (Integrated Secondary, Male)

'there wasn't as many students about, it seemed that Jordanstown had actually encouraged a lot of students to come, whereas when I went to Queens there was hardly any...it was kinda like a student's day off, so I didn't find I was able to talk to as many people, just lecturers and people who worked there...' (Catholic, Secondary, Female)

Opinions differed as to whether a campus based university such as Jordanstown was preferable to the more dispersed nature of the Queens' University campus as we can see in the illustrative quotations below:

Whenever we went to Queen's on the Open Day I thought Queen's was quite spread, it was spread all though out the city centre of Belfast, really, really spread out and I just kinda got bored and went shopping. (Protestant Grammar, M)

I liked Jordanstown the way everything was in one central area – whereas with Queen's to go to the computer course I had to go way up the other street to go to it and then to get the canteen you had all the way back and then to go to the main building you had to go another direction – whereas in Jordanstown it was one main corridor. (Catholic, Grammar, Female)

I would like the Queens campus because the Belfast hospital is quite close which would appeal to my course and I thought the campus was quite well laid out and it was centrally located and the halls wasn't that far away. (Catholic Grammar, Male)

Queens is a bit more in the centre of Belfast, Jordanstown is that wee bit further out from the centre and you have to get in and out...I think it is better to be in the city. (Catholic Grammar, F).

When asked for their final thoughts on Open Days the following point was made on a number of occasions:

'Make the Open Days during lower sixth so that you are a bit more prepared, it seems to me that Jordanstown and Queen's Open Day was this year, yet our UCAS deadline in school was very early so you didn't get much time to make your choices'. (Catholic Secondary, F)

Anything else?

Towards the end of the focus group sessions pupils were asked if there were any issues they would like to raise or was there any information they would liked to have received at an earlier stage:

The A levels you do determines what course you can do, so you could be picking three A levels in fifth year and then deciding in upper sixth what course you want to do and then finding out you haven't got the right A levels'. (Catholic secondary/comprehensive, F)

You see I would love to do speech therapy now but you have to do either like a science, maths or English and I didn't do any of them so I can't do it now, I have to do something else'. (Protestant Grammar, F)

At the start of the AS levels, because after you do your AS levels your kinda limited then to what you can apply for and you don't know what grades you can apply for'. (Catholic Grammar, M)

'You need somebody there to influence you when you are picking A levels because I was really lost when I was picking mine, I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do so I just picked the ones I liked best...now I can't so the course I wanted to do because my A levels are just totally unrelated and I have to have 2 sciences to do most of mine'. (Catholic comprehensive, F).

*The only other thing was that I felt slightly ill-advised because when I was picking my GCSE's I left out Art and I picked Technology whereas all the courses I really wanted to do were art courses and I couldn't apply for themso that is why I have to go down the mechanical side of design now and do product design whereas I would really like to do media design and advertising.
(Protestant grammar, M)*

Q. Is there anything you feel should have been addressed earlier?

*Definitely grade requirements – what subjects you need for specific degrees – you need them at the end of fifth year – and when you are picking you're A levels they don't really tell you, they don't ask you if you have a job in mind.
(Catholic grammar, male)*

Section D: Conclusions and Discussion

This report contextualised the empirical research by noting some key aspects of high education participation in Northern Ireland in general. Thereafter, the report has covered two areas of qualitative research. The first concentrated on the investigation of the attitudes and perceptions of year 12 pupils towards higher and further education drawn from secondary schools. These attitudes and perceptions were measured through the holding of focus groups across schools. Supplementing these sessions were the findings from a survey together with a number of interviews held with teachers and school principals. Additionally, a series of interviews were held with community representatives. What are the key conclusions that emerge? In summary for the Year 12 study they are:

- There are substantial differences between girls and boys in their attitudes to continuing in education and also in their intention to seek entry to further or higher education especially in secondary schools. Girls are significantly more likely to want and to plan to go on to further and higher education.
- These gender differences are reflected across the religion divide as reflected in the contrasting attitudes in controlled and maintained schools. In general, girls in both the maintained and controlled sector were more focussed on further and higher education than boys in either sector. However, girls in maintained schools were more likely to have the aim of going to university than girls in controlled schools. Similarly, boys in maintained schools regarded progressing to higher education as a goal to a greater extent than boys in controlled school.
- In part, there are two structural components to this difference in aspirations. The first relates to the fact that Catholic schools do better for educational outcomes for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds than controlled secondary schools. The second factor relates to the apparent higher provision of post-16, provision in maintained schools than controlled schools. Having significant post-16 provision may well lead to the raising of expectations of progressing into further and especially higher education.
- There was also evidence expressed strongly in interviews with teachers and community leaders that working class Protestant communities had still to adjust to the fact that access to manufacturing jobs through informal networks such as through family and friends was no longer available. The restructuring of the economy has

changed the nature of jobs and fair employment policy had increased the importance of having the right qualifications and training to secure access to employment. As the interviews with pupils also demonstrated, there seemed to be more emphasis from Catholic parents than Protestant parents on the need to go on and enter higher education if at all possible. Catholics, probably because of past experiences in the labour market, were far more likely to see securing educational qualifications as the route to securing a job and a job with good prospects. Both focus group and survey evidence tended to suggest that parents were more likely to be very supportive towards continuing in further and higher education for girls and boys in maintained schools, whereas this was less the case especially for boys in controlled schools.

- Community representatives, especially in Protestant working class areas, also talked of the negative influence of paramilitary organisations, the 'drugs' culture and the lack of 'anyone caring' about young people if they drifted out of school with mediocre qualifications. Some lamented the absence of any effective outreach activities by either the further or higher education sectors in their areas.
- Some of the consequences of selection at 11 were also apparent. Teachers talked of the need to build self-esteem amongst pupils who had not even been entered for the transfer procedure and of the negative experience of many parents who had been labelled as educational failures when they too were not entered into the transfer procedure or failed to get into grammar schools. Moreover, grammar schools adjacent to Protestant working class areas were highlighted as sometimes being 'unhelpful' in responding to pupils from poorer backgrounds even if they had secured a good transfer grade.
- The pupils themselves all highlighted their wariness of how much debt that participation in higher education would entail. Little was known about the funding arrangements especially those coming in from 2006. Many boys from controlled schools just could not see any advantage in investing in education if it meant getting into substantial debt. Getting a trade and 'big' money in a couple of years after getting a trade, especially in the construction industry, seemed to be, for them, a far more rational choice. Many examples of friends or relatives either dropping out or completing higher education with large debts and then failing to secure a good job were cited. To some extent these views were also expressed by boys in maintained schools but at noticeably lower levels than for boys in controlled schools.

- All respondents agreed that the job opportunities for girls were fewer at 16 and that this in part underpinned the girls' desire to stay on in education. Many also commented that girls were 'just more serious at studying' at school. A small number of boys in controlled schools claimed they were labelled as 'thick' by teachers who told them they had no chance of progressing to further or higher education.
- The government's introduction of the educational maintenance allowance was well known about. Most welcomed its existence but there was a common view that the amount was too small to make a difference in the decision to stay on after 16. Many saw the money as helping to offset travel costs or to help out their families while others claimed to earn more than was available from the allowance over one or two nights of their part-time jobs.
- There was little evidence of the universities' widening access activities, funded by DEL, having any impact on the perceptions or aspirations towards higher education in the focus groups which made up this study. The scale of these focus groups are such that they include relatively small numbers of pupils from the relevant backgrounds. It was also noted that widening access schemes which work with post-16 provision in schools would experience difficulties in engaging proportionately with controlled and maintained schools because of the apparent lower levels of post 16 provision in the controlled sector.
- Geographical mobility emerged as a major issue in two senses in this research. The first related to the observation by some teachers and community leaders of the narrow, confined areas from which disadvantaged pupils would be prepared to travel. Leaving the immediate area of home and school was regarded as very problematic thereby compounding the inaccessibility of educational resources. More specifically two very striking examples of the importance of sectarian geographical issues were found. The first related to a maintained school to the north of Belfast where both the teachers and pupils regarded the local further education college as effectively 'out of bounds' to the boys of the school as it was perceived to be a Protestant stronghold where the boys would be unsafe if attending the college. Pupils preferred to opt for a college in Belfast instead with the attendant extra travelling time and costs. The second example came from the city of Derry/Londonderry. Here the problem for controlled school pupils is that the post school resources in the city are mostly on the city-side. Pupils uniformly indicated that they would be very wary of travelling to

these facilities under any circumstances – preferring to travel to another FEC some 20 miles away. All of these geographical issues thrown up by the sectarian nature of Northern Ireland’s society (and there must be other examples in terms of access to further education colleges)⁴ really pose major questions to the providers of further and higher education. While it is not feasible to expect further and higher education colleges alone to overcome the more general difficulties of operating in a divided and sectarian society, whether it is through the *Shared Future* community relations initiative or through the responsibility all public authorities have to promote ‘good relations’ under Section 75, all those concerned with the development of policy in the further and higher education sectors need to respond to sectarian issues especially as they influence access.

The second study reported here deliberately focussed on the grammar sector with only a small number of secondary and integrated schools. While a number of general issues concerning higher education participation were discussed, a number of specific matters are of interest. The first relates to finance. There is no doubt that for a significant number of potential students from the grammar sector, the question of how changes in student finance would impact on them was of major importance. It was quite striking however, that students from this sector, compared with those from the secondary sector, indicated that while they were confused about what the new system was going to be, and recognised that it would probably lead to much higher levels of debt they, by and large, continued to see participation in higher education as an investment with a guaranteed financial return. No real sense of the extent to which the graduate premium may be declining was evident amongst our cohort of interviewees. However, in the event that such evidence does become generally understood, there could be a significant impact on decisions to participate in higher education. Where the perception of greater personal debt arising from the new arrangements was starting to potentially have an impact was on the decision of whether to stay in Northern Ireland or to leave to study elsewhere. A minority of students did not see the finance issue of particular relevance to this decision but quite a significant proportion did so. Once again the particularities of the characteristics of higher education in Northern Ireland, as spelled out at the start of this report are important here. It may

⁴ The DEL has commissioned a study of the ‘chill factor’ in access to further education colleges. Early findings suggest the ‘chill factor’ is an issue for some colleges but the study also suggests colleges are seeking to challenge this problem in a number of ways.

well be the case that some of those who are currently quite content to leave Northern Ireland for study will feel obliged to try and stay for cost reasons. In other words while some of the *determined leavers* may well not see cost as an issue others, perhaps drawn from the slightly less well-off groups compared to those from the highest income brackets, may well seek to stay as, in effect, *reluctant stayers*. In this instance, the likely increase in demand for places in Northern Ireland, unless the number of places is increased, will increase the asking grades sought by the universities which are already dealing with the upward drift of A level grades. In these circumstances, in the absence of special measures, it is quite possible that the intake into the two Northern Ireland institutions (and other higher education providers) could become more middle class and the proportion of better-off Protestants could increase. Several groups could become losers in this scenario. First those Catholics from working class backgrounds, currently quite well represented in higher education in Northern Ireland, could increasingly find it more difficult for local study. Second, working class Protestants, especially males, already not very well represented in higher education could find themselves even less able to access universities on the basis of their qualifications held. It is already the case that those with the lowest qualifications tend to be from the lowest socio-economic groups and it these groups who could be forced to leave Northern Ireland to study usually at the post-1992 universities. Ironically, therefore, not only is it the least well-off who could become the direct major financial casualties of the policy of shifting the costs of higher education onto individual students and their families but they could also lose out additionally as a result of the changes in migration flows.

Thereafter, issues of importance included early information on the significance of AS and A level choices for future higher education courses of study, the importance of Open Days for choices concerning especially local institutions and the major need for information on student funding systems – especially the new system coming into effect in 2006. It was also notable that for some entry to higher education was seen as part of the process of growing up, leaving home and becoming more independent. Living away from home was often seen as an important part of this process.

Finally, the study did not identify the extent to which ‘political’ issues help determine the much larger flow of Protestants to study outside Northern Ireland and especially

in Britain. In earlier research conducted in the mid-1990s the issue of the perceived sectarian nature of some aspects of local higher education provision and related matters was seen by those interviewed, including parents, to be a factor in young Protestants choosing institutions outside Northern Ireland. A distaste for the 'sectarianism of Northern Ireland' was expressed by a small number of interviewees in this study and this factor underpinned a desire to leave for study. Whether these 'political' factors do only play a limited role in how 18 year olds make their choices (in association with their parents) or whether they are deep rooted matters that do not get openly expressed to 'strangers' in a short interview period is not clear.

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APPENDIX A

Focus Group Guide

Instructions to be read to group

The reason we have got you together for this discussion is because we are trying to find out how fifth year pupils feel about going to University or Further Education college after they leave school. Your participation is important because this research will help government to decide the future of Further and Higher Education. Therefore we would like you to feel free to talk. We appreciate your taking part because we know you probably have a lot of work to do at the moment.

We will be using a tape recorder to record what you say so please try to speak clearly and take it in turns to give your opinion.

The things that are discussed will remain confidential. It will only be known to the researchers who provided the information.

Intentions

Tell us your first name and what you are studying at the moment at school

What do you want to do after you've finished your GCSEs- (A-levels, Job, FE?)
What might you study?

What do your parents want you to do?

Have any of you been thinking about whether you might go to University or College?
(What might you do?)

Influences

Do you feel that going to University or FEC is a choice open to you?

Do you feel that they would make a difference to your future?

Do your parents encourage you to go on with your education? What about other people- friends, other members of your family, teachers. (Do you have brothers or sisters that went to university?)

Do you get any information or advice here in school about going on to college or university after school- is it enough?

Obstacles

Is there anything stopping you from going on to college or university? (probe: qualifications, money, locations)

Are there any Colleges or Campuses you would not feel able to go to?

What would encourage you to go to FEC or University?

Finances

Can you afford to keep studying?

Would the EMA make a difference?

Would money be an issue for you if you're thinking about going to university?
(prompt: borrowing?)

How much do you think you would owe at the end of a course?

Would you borrow money so you could study at university?

Anything to add?

APPENDIX B

Instructions

Do not write your name on this questionnaire.

It is designed to find out your views about staying on in education and then going on to local college or one of the universities.

The questionnaire is part of a project which will help government to decide about the future of Further and Higher Education.

We therefore appreciate your help and ask that you answer the questions as fully and accurately as you can.

The research is being conducted by researchers from the University of Ulster.

Please mark your answers clearly. Tick the boxes that best suit your answers and write in the spaces provided when asked to do so.

Thank-you for your help

ID NUMBER:

How many GCSEs are you studying? ☐

(Please tick the boxes for the subjects you are studying)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art and Design | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biology | <input type="checkbox"/> Information Communication and
Technology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Journalism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry | <input type="checkbox"/> Music |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drama | <input type="checkbox"/> Maths |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economics | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English | <input type="checkbox"/> Physics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious Studies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Social and Environmental Studies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geography | <input type="checkbox"/> Technology and Design |
| <input type="checkbox"/> German | <input type="checkbox"/> Science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> History | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home Economics | |

Please write here any other GCSE subjects which you are studying but are not listed above.

Are you studying for any other exams as well as GCSEs?

- 1 ☐ Yes 2 ☐ No

(If yes, please give the names of the subjects and qualifications you hope to get)

What do you want to do when you are 16 years old?

- 1 ☐ Stay in education (school or further education college)
2 ☐ Get a paid job
3 ☐ Join a training scheme
4 ☐ Don't know yet
5 ☐ Other

If you have other plans please say what they are.

If you plan to stay on in education after 16, which of the following do you want to do?

- 1 ☐ NVQs
2 ☐ AS Levels
3 ☐ A-Levels
4 ☐ Other

If other please tell us

The government has just started giving money to pupils who stay in education after 16, depending on their family circumstances. Have you heard about this Education Maintenance Allowance?

- ☐ *1 Yes, I have heard of it and understand what it means.*
- ☐ *2 Yes, I have heard of it but I don't know what it is about.*
- ☐ *3 No, I haven't heard of it.*

If you were given an allowance like this every two weeks and a cash bonus every so often would you stay on at school or go to Further Education College?

- ☐ *1 Yes, I would stay on at school*
- ☐ *2 Yes, I would go to Further Education College*
- ☐ *3 No, I would do neither*
- ☐ *4 I would have to think about it*
- ☐ *5 Don't know*

Do you want to do a course at university?

- ☐ *1 Yes*
- ☐ *2 No*
- ☐ *3 I'm thinking about it*
- ☐ *4 Don't know*

Which do you think is the most important for getting a good job with good pay?

- ☐ *1 Staying on in education and getting as many qualifications as possible*
- ☐ *2 Leaving school and getting a skilled trade*
- ☐ *3 None of these*

If you plan to go to Further Education College or University what University Campus or Further Education College would you like to go to? **(Name your first and second choices)**

Are all Further Education Colleges and University campuses open and friendly to all sections of the community? If not, which colleges or universities would you not feel able to go to?

As you know it has become more expensive to study for some courses. If you are intending to go to University or Further Education College how much do you think you will owe at the end of a three year course?

£ _____

To do a course at Further Education College or University it may be necessary to borrow money that you will have to pay back once you start to work.

It is worth borrowing money that I will have to pay back later so I can get good qualifications?

(Please tick one box to show how much you agree or disagree with this sentence)

- 1 ☐ Strongly Agree
- 2 ☐ Agree
- 3 ☐ Disagree
- 4 ☐ Strongly Disagree
- 5 ☐ Don't know

Have any of the following groups of people encouraged you to think of going to Further Education College or University? (Tick one box on each line)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Your Friends	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Parents	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
The Rest of your Family	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>

What else could be done to encourage you to go to University or Further Education College?

Are there any other reasons which would make it difficult for you to go to University or Further Education College?

**Finally, we just need to ask you some questions about yourself
so we can see how different people feel about the topics about
which you've answered questions**

Are you: ¹☐ Female OR ²☐ Male

Does your mother work outside the home?

¹☐ Yes ²☐ No

If yes, what does she work as?

Does your mother work:

(please tick the box that best describes how much she works)

¹☐ Part-time (part of the day a few days a week)

²☐ Full-time (Monday to Friday, all day)

Does your father work outside the home?

¹☐ Yes ²☐ No

If yes, what does he work as?

Does your father work:

(please tick the box that best describes how much he works)

¹☐ Part-time (part of the day a few days a week)

²☐ Full-time (Monday to Friday, all day)

Have any of your family been to university or are at university now?
(tick all the boxes that best answer the question)

- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Brothers or sisters
- ☐ Other family members
- ☐ None of the above

**Thank-you for completing the questionnaire. Please check that
you have answered all the questions**

APPENDIX C

Number of Focus Groups Conducted

Location	Number
North Belfast	6
Newtownabbey	5
East Belfast	6
Londonderry	4
Strabane	3
Cookstown	4
Total	28

Questionnaire Response Rate

Sex of Respondent		School Type			Total
		Controlled	Maintained	Integrated	
Female	Count	409	103	42	554
	Row %	73.8%	18.6%	7.6%	100.0%
	Col %	49.8%	23.8%	56.8%	41.7%
Male	Count	412	330	32	774
	Row %	53.2%	42.6%	4.1%	100.0%
	Col %	50.2%	76.2%	43.2%	58.3%
Total	Count	821	433	74	1328
	Row %	61.8%	32.6%	5.6%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%□