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The Directions Taken by Young People on Leaving Compulsory Education:

A study in two Birmingham schools

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Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Aston in Birmingham

April 2003

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Summary

The thesis addresses the relative importance of factors affecting working-class school-leavers' post-compulsory education transitions into post-sixteen education, training, employment and unemployment. It focuses on school-leavers choosing to enter the labour market, whether successfully or not and the influences affecting this choice. Methodologically, the longitudinal approach followed young people from before they left school to a period of months after. Discrepancies between young people's intended and actual destinations emphasised the diverse influences on post-sixteen transitions. These influences were investigated through a dynamic multi-method approach, drawing from quantitative and qualitative methodologies providing depth and insight while locating the research within a structural framework, allowing a comparison with local and national trends.

Two crucial factors of school and gender affected young people's intended and actual post-sixteen directions. School policy, including treatment of disaffected pupils and recruitment to a large, on-site sixth form, influenced the number of pupils opting to continue their education. Girls were more likely to continue education after the end of compulsory schooling and gave different reasons to boys for doing so. Family and peer groups were influential, helping young people develop a 'horizon for action' incorporating habitus and subjective preferences that specified acceptable post-sixteen directions. These influences operated within the context of the local labour market. Perception of the latter rather than actual conditions informed post-sixteen decisions; however, labour market reality influenced the success of the school-leavers' endeavours.

The research found that the economics-based rational choice model of decision-making did not apply to many working-class school-leavers. The cohort made pragmatically rational decisions dependent on their 'horizon for action', based on partial, occasionally inaccurate information. Policy recommendations consider the careers service and structure of school sixth forms as aiding successful transitions from compulsory education into education, employment or training. The maintenance allowance may be ineffectual in tackling its objective of social inclusion.

Keywords: post-sixteen transitions, work, education, training, choice

For Rogério

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank both of my schools without whose help and cooperation this research would not have been possible. This gratitude extends to the young people and families who took part in the study. I would like to acknowledge Elizabeth Allen and Jeremy Dawson for their assistance with my statistics, also Pat and Pam for the support and kindness they have offered throughout the last few years, it has been much appreciated. Just to acknowledge my supervisor, Henry Miller, would be to understate his guidance throughout the research. Finally, Rogério provided valuable graphical assistance and he and the 'girls' deserve credit for whatever sanity I have remaining.

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Part I

BACKGROUND, LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY

1 Introduction

At school I was a little horror. Nevertheless, I was academic and knew I could get away with a certain amount of things without the fear of being excluded or even put in detention. This may have been because I was a white female of middle-class parents, living in the good part of town. Things might have been different if my father had had a different job and if I had not been a 'bright girl'. My behaviour may not then have been seen as a phase but indicative of a disaffected pupil destined for an early education exit and a life of deprivation.

During the time I was studying sociology A-level, Paul Willis's book *Learning to Labour* (1977), researching working-class lads, captured my attention. I could not understand why anyone of my age would want to work in a manual job. However, through the study of Willis's work and progression to university to read psychology and sociology, I came to understand that the cultural production and reproduction that takes place meant that I would never willingly work in a factory or stay at home and turn up trousers (Willis, 1977: 45).

Since Willis's research, traditional forms of working-class employment have declined as have the number of school-leavers directly entering employment. Entrance to further education has become the norm with 72% of English and Welsh sixteen-year-old school-leavers entering post-compulsory education in the year 2000 (DfEE, 2001a). However, the number of sixteen-year-olds continuing their education in the rest of Western Europe averages 85–90% (Brooks, 1998). Within England and Wales there is class inequality in post-compulsory education participation; 81% of children from families with non-manual professions entered further education in 2000 compared with 66% of children from manual backgrounds (DfEE, 2001a). In the current employment climate with the decrease in entry-level positions, this poses a problem for the working-class school-leavers. The likely outcome of their leaving education is that they will probably occupy

low-paid, low-status jobs, enter a training scheme that may or may not match their aspirations, or become unemployed.

The school-leavers' actions have a wide impact. A theme in Britain's economic performance debate is the low skill level compared with other OECD countries (Rice, 1999) and how the skills crisis is damaging the country's ability to compete in the international arena (Andrews and Bradley, 1997). There may also be consequences for social cohesion in the rise of a generation that have never experienced continuous full-time, well-paid work. Unsuccessful school-leavers may instead experience deprivation and boredom leading to weak labour market attachment and possible isolation from mainstream society with its dominant norms and values (Wilson, 1991). The situation is aggravated as the majority of young people leaving education to try to enter the labour market are already in the most disadvantaged groups. They can have poor educational qualifications and can lack an instrumental social network that could facilitate a successful transition into employment or training.

With the desire to raise qualification levels, widen participation in post-sixteen education and training and tackle social problems, the Government has implemented a number of policies. Pilots have been running for three years between September 1999 and 2002 for the education maintenance allowance, a government means-tested incentive scheme paying sixteen-year-olds to return to education. When the PhD research began, there was no available research on the maintenance allowance and the first evaluation reports did not appear until 2001 (Ashworth *et al.*, 2001; Legard *et al.*, 2001; Maguire *et al.*, 2001). The study therefore contributes substantive material to the yet limited research in this area.

The research considered the relative importance of factors affecting working-class male and female post-sixteen transitions from compulsory education into post-sixteen education, training, employment or unemployment. There was a focus upon young people leaving education to enter the labour market, whether successfully or not. Some working-class school-leavers are at risk of social exclusion, long-term deprivation and may contribute to the skills crisis. The differential effect of entering post-sixteen education, training, employment or

unemployment on life experiences must be recognised. This is why understanding the decision process behind the post-sixteen-destination 'choice' is important. The choice process could be seen as a conscious decision to undertake a course of action based on a reasoned preference – thus a rational action. This description complies with the traditional economics-based theory of rational choice predominant in much policy. However, bounded rationality (Simon, 1957) and modern theories of pragmatic rationality (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996) argue that choices are constrained by social influences and a limited knowledge of options. This view may be more in line with the experience of a young working-class school-leaver in the transition from compulsory education.

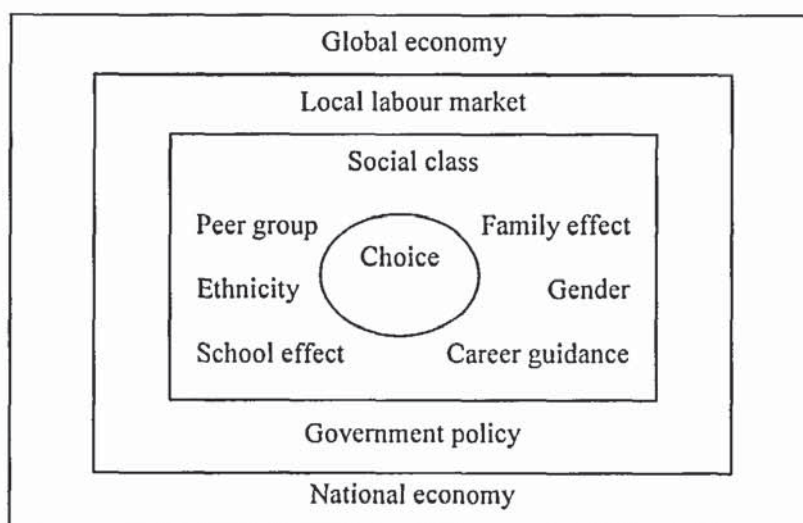
By addressing the way choices are made in the post-compulsory education transition the research makes a theoretical and substantive contribution to knowledge. The choice process appears from the scarce research conducted not to conform to the economics-based rational choice model often assumed by policy design and implementation. This may impair the effectiveness of government schemes, which seems to be largely based on the rational choice model.

The terminology of post-sixteen or post-compulsory education is used to indicate intention to participate or actual participation in education after the end of compulsory schooling. This includes college or sixth form to pursue an academic area in the form of A/AS levels or vocational courses such as childcare or bricklaying, leading to GNVQ certification or similar. Further education is also used interchangeably with post-compulsory education; this is how the majority of the young people viewed it as continuing or 'furthering' their education, even when they stayed on at the same school. Within the research, I have frequently referred to the cohort studied as 'young people'. This was largely due to the absence of an adjective that I felt best described the cohort. When speaking to the young people themselves, they expressed the desire to be treated 'more like adults and less like kids' by adults in authority such as teachers. However, I felt the term 'young adults' did not describe the cohort particularly well, especially those entering post-sixteen education, although it could be more applicable to young people entering employment. Something the cohort did have in common was their involvement in popular youth/teenage culture. However, the term teenager covers the spectrum of

thirteen- to nineteen-year-olds, who would have a very different range of life experiences. I therefore felt that the term youth/young people as opposed to children, teenagers and young adults, best described the individuals concerned.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the structure of the literature review spanning Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The initial chapter of the literature review concerns the role of choice in post-sixteen destinations into continued education, training, employment and unemployment. The way that young people make choices is crucial to the thesis, and thus occupies a central position in the diagram. The chapter discusses the validity of traditional rational choice theories in relation to post-sixteen transitions and considers the alternatives proposed. The traditional notion of rational choice is challenged as a valid concept for working-class sixteen-year-olds who intend to leave education and it is discussed whether other contextual and social factors are involved in their eventual destination. There is a debate surrounding bounded rationality (Simon, 1957) and other conceptions of the choice process (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). The chapter concludes with an outline of the conception of choice to be utilised within the thesis.

Figure 1.1 Nesting influences on compulsory school-leavers' post-sixteen choices



The next chapter in the literature review starts with a discussion of the labour market restructuring that has occurred over the last two and a half decades providing the context for post-sixteen transitions in the twenty-first century. This chapter also highlights the debates on the importance of various forms of capital, including human, social and cultural capital, mediated by the social structure. The notion of the 'underclass' is also attended to. As essentially structural factors, they are located on the perimeter of the diagram.

Chapter 4 considers influences on post-sixteen destinations operating at a more immediate level. The processes within the family that can affect young people's post-sixteen transitions are reviewed first, such as social class and attitude transmission and the possible influence of the family composition on family members' attitudes. The relationship between social class, school and gender is then explored followed by a discussion of peer group influence as contributing to the production and reproduction of class and gender inequalities and differences in post-sixteen transitions. The new market system within education may have unequally affected working and middle-class pupils; therefore the 'school effect' is discussed in relation to post-sixteen transitions before a discussion of the negative impact that truancy can have upon young people's post-sixteen life chances. Finally, the adaptation of the careers service to meet young people's guidance needs in the new labour market and further education context is considered. The research makes a broad distinction between structural and cultural/individual influencing factors. There is a conceptual distinction between these factors, but this distinction is not watertight. For example, social class can affect post-sixteen transitions on a structural and cultural level. Chapter 4 concludes with an identification of gaps in the literature and the formulation of research questions. These are as posed below.

1. What is the relative importance of various factors affecting young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market before leaving compulsory education?
2. Do young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market influence their subsequent post-sixteen directions?

3. Is there a difference between expectations of intended direction before leaving school and actual destinations?
4. Is it possible to identify intervention practices that could aid the transition to post-compulsory education, training or employment?

The philosophy and methodology chapter (Chapter 5) introduces the design of the research as explicitly formulated to address the research questions. The data collection techniques draw from both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. They add strength to the research methodology and to the credibility of substantive contributions to knowledge. The philosophical positioning of quantitative and qualitative approaches allows the rationale behind the philosophical stance taken to be justified. It also locates the range of techniques applied in the research, exposing their relative strengths and weaknesses. Following a consideration of these aspects, there is a discussion of the techniques selected.

Chapter 6 discusses the methodological application in the data collection and contains a description of the two selected schools, their surrounding areas and local labour market. There is also a discussion of researcher characteristics in the endeavour to increase reflexivity. The research adopted a longitudinal approach following a cohort from two Birmingham comprehensive schools from before they left school to three to four months after. The longitudinal design provided substantive and methodological contributions to knowledge and highlights areas that may be addressed within policy.

Chapters 7–12 provide an analysis of the research findings. The effect of the school and gender are positioned first in Chapters 7 and 8 as the two main influences on post-sixteen transitions. School policy towards disaffected pupils, leadership and promotion of an amply sized on-site sixth form had a marked effect on the number of pupils opting to continue their education, particularly at their secondary school as opposed to college. Girls were more likely to intend to and actually enter post-sixteen education than boys and gave different reasons for doing

so. Following the analysis of the school and gender, the influence of the family (Chapter 9), peer network (Chapter 10) and local labour market (Chapter 11) is examined. The family and friendship network aided in the construction of the young person's 'horizon for action', designating what routes were perceived acceptable and desirable. Perceptions of local labour market opportunity structures informed this. However, the actual labour market situation could determine whether the school leaver entered their first choice of destination.

The analysis of the relevant factors has been achieved by drawing on data produced by the questionnaires combined with extracts from individual interviews with selected young people and their families. Data from the 1991 census and other official reports was also utilised. The longitudinal analysis revealed a discrepancy between some pupil's intended post-sixteen directions before they left school and actual destinations a period of months after exiting compulsory education. There were a series of false-starts and compromises as young people made the transition from compulsory education to employment and training, possibly due to inaccurate perceptions of the labour market and the available opportunity structures. Perceptions of training and employment also affected whether the young people compromised and entered a second choice of destination or became unemployed on leaving school.

Chapter 12 provides a discussion on culture and structure in post-sixteen directions and ends by considering the implications of the research findings for government policy considering the education maintenance allowance, careers guidance, the structure of further education and the way that policy research is conducted.

Concluding the thesis, Chapter 13 summarises the research's contribution to knowledge in substantive, methodological, theoretical areas and for policy. Matters for further research are then highlighted.

2 'Choice' at sixteen

2.1 Introduction

'Choice' can be defined as the 'act or power of choosing' and in turn 'choose' means 'pick out, select, take by preference, decide, think fit' (Collins English Dictionary, 1985). This suggests a conscious, purposive action that complies with traditional economics-based, rational choice theory. However, bounded rationality (Simon, 1957) and modern theories of choice (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996) emphasise culture, context and unconscious influences on the choice process. This chapter discusses the validity of traditional rational choice theories in relation to post-sixteen transitions and considers the alternatives proposed. It challenges whether the traditional notion of economic rationality is a valid concept for working-class sixteen-year-olds who intend to leave education and considers whether contextual and social factors are involved in their eventual destination. These questions lead to a dialogue surrounding bounded rationality (Simon, 1957) and other conceptions of the choice process (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). The chapter concludes with an outline of the conception of choice to be utilised throughout the thesis and central to the research conclusions.

2.2 Economic rationality as a model of choice

Traditional economics-based rational choice theory gained precedence as an explanation for human behaviour because of the changing structure of the economy and social institutions, which meant that socialisation alone could no longer explain behaviour (Lindenberg, 1996). The simplicity of rational choice theory has proved appealing. Coleman (1986) argued 'the very concept of rational action is a conception of action that is understandable, action that we need ask no more questions about' (Coleman, 1986: 1).

The model of 'economic man' in traditional rational choice theory carries with it a number of assumptions about the decision-maker.

This man [*sic*] is assumed to have knowledge of the relevant aspects of his environment which, if not absolutely complete, is at least impressively clear and voluminous. He is assumed also to have a well-organized and stable system of preferences, and a skill in computation that enables him to calculate, for the alternative courses of action that are available to him, which of these will permit him to reach the highest attainable point on his preference scale. (Simon, 1955: 241)

The decision-maker is therefore calculating, motivated by self-interest, orientated towards choosing the option with the highest expected utility and well informed in his or her choices and the likely consequences of these choices. Goldthorpe (1998) argues that this raises the issue of realism: do actors really make choices in this fashion? To apply this model to the research context of post-sixteen transitions, do working-class sixteen year-old school-leavers make decisions in this way? A number of theorists and researchers disagree (Ball, Maguire and McCrae, 2000; Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Simon, 1955, 1957). However, it is on this theoretical basis that much policy is formulated.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) argue that because education and training policy in Britain focuses upon customer-driven markets, the career decisions of these 'customers' have become central to policy planning and implementation. Nevertheless, policy and research are failing to consider the way career decisions are actually made (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997: 29). Instead, much policy analysis relies on the largely inaccurate characterisation of the choice process presented by economic rationality, ignoring inequalities in the distribution of wealth and potentially aggravating inequality (Lowe-Boyd, Crowson and Van Geel, 1994). According to Hodkinson *et al.* (1996):

the new individualist, market paradigm for education and training is a seductive, dangerous illusion. Successful policy, that is genuinely aimed at raising educational and training standards for all and/or empowering disadvantaged young people, must be built on a better understanding of real social processes and contexts, in all their confusing complexity. (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996: 138)

An example of the inappropriate application of economic rational choice theory to educational policy can be found in careers guidance in its use of trait and developmental theory. Both theories treat the individual as a discrete entity and minimise contextual and social factors influencing decision-making (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997: 32). Trait theory views occupational choice as the individual matching their personality, skills and interests to a particular occupation for entrance on leaving education. Ginsberg *et al.*'s (1951) developmental theory identified the stages through which young people pass. According to the choice arrived at, the individual seeks knowledge and experience leading to a modification or acceptance of the initial occupational destination demonstrating the application of an economic rational choice. These theories' linear conceptions of the choice process are arguably not applicable to many working-class school-leavers whose first choice of occupation may not be available due to changes in the labour market. Ginsberg *et al.* (1951) have also been extensively criticised, notably by Roberts (1975) for whom the validity of the developmental theory of occupational choice is questionable (Roberts, 1975: 134). Ginsberg *et al.*'s (1951) research was carried out on American, educationally successful college students from white, middle-class backgrounds in the 1940s with wider career options than some of their less qualified working-class and ethnic minority counterparts.

Recent research considering the post-sixteen-transition process challenges the oversimplified characterisation of young people as human capitalists (Ball *et al.*, 2000). The economics-based human capital theory has many connections to the assumption of the process of rational choice.

Human capital refers to the resources, qualifications, skills, and knowledge that are available to and acquired by individuals to maximize their own employability. (Caspi *et al.*, 1998: 427)

The school-leaver is perceived to make an economically sound, individualistic decision involving an evaluation of the advantages of further education and the buoyancy and needs of the labour market (Williams, 1999).

An individual of a given age has a stock of human capital which may be employed either to generate current income for consumption purposes, or to acquire

additional human capital through education and training. The individual chooses between alternative activities which offer different combinations of income and investment, and it is assumed that this choice is made so as to maximise the present discounted value of expected future net benefits. (Rice, 1999: 289)

This conception of decision-making fails to recognise the 'complex interactional, intellectual and situated process that constitute learning' (Ball *et al.*, 2000: 9). Whilst some young people maybe 'planners' others cannot or do not contemplate their future. However, even planners do not always make their choices with reference to expected economic returns, their actions may be better understood as 'investments in self' as they try to form an identity (*ibid.*, p. 18).

The choices made by the young people in our study, with the exception perhaps of those going on to A levels and higher education, bear only a passing resemblance to the uni-dimensional, calculative, individualistic, consumer rationalism which predominates in official texts. (*ibid.*, p. 21)

Katzner (2000) agreeing with Ball *et al.* (2000) argue there is a need for a rational choice model taking into account values, rules and norms of behaviour. This is because preference optimisation, a key factor in economic rationality, is not always the motivating force behind individual action. In particular circumstances and cultures, courtesy, modesty, conformity or loyalty could be the driving force for a particular action, not self-interest. Extracting self-interest as the dominant motive reduces the understanding of motivation and diminishes the power to explain the choice.

That the hypothesis of preference optimization has emerged as the external referent in Western culture is *not* because it has withstood a barrage of empirical tests hurled against it through the study of observable choice behavior ... Rather, the hypothesis has reached its lofty heights because preference optimization is a reflection of self-interest, a motivating force that has come to lie at the heart of Western culture. (Katzner, 2000: 242; original emphasis)

Goldthorpe (1996) further challenges the validity of economic rationality based on its assumption of preference optimisation. Goldthorpe argues that individuals may not have clear goals behind a course of action and can be confused, ambivalent or inconsistent. Beliefs and information held could be wrong and the individual could act in habitual or impulsive ways (Goldthorpe, 1996: 115).

2.3 Bounded rationality as a model of choice

Simon's (1957) dissatisfaction with the economic model of rational choice led him to propose the alternative of 'bounded rationality' (Simon, 1957: 198). Simon argued that a fundamental change in rational choice theories was needed to take into account the complexities of the world in which we live, recognising context, culture and history.

The capacity of the human mind for formulating and solving complex problems is very small compared with the size of the problems whose solution is required for objectively rational behavior in the real world – or even for a reasonable approximation to such objective rationality. (ibid., p. 198; original emphasis)

Simon (1957) argued that the classic goal of economic rational choice was unattainable; behaviour cannot be predicted without making some investigation into the psychological properties of the individual. Some mainstream economists are now willing to acknowledge bounded rationality as a way of accessing how actors reason (Viskovatoff, 2001). However, bounded rationality retains three similarities to traditional rational choice theory. First, both distinguish the individual as the basic actor in society; secondly, bounded rationality views self-interest as the main motivating force behind choices; and thirdly, a bounded rational action involves a conscious choice (Monroe, 2001).

Bounded rationality does depart from rational choice theory concerning five key tenets. Simon's (1957) choice theory views actors as possessing limited computational abilities; having uncertain and limited information; and searching for alternatives, consequences and other information selectively and incompletely; it stresses the cognitive component of the actor in predicting behaviour, goals and conceptual orientation to the world; unlike economics based rational choice theory, process not outcome is emphasised; and finally Simon uses the concept of satisficing as opposed to optimisation. To explain the latter two points; a process-orientated analysis argues that behaviour is procedurally rational when it is the

outcome of appropriate deliberation (Simon, 1976) and good solutions are sought rather than the best. Satisficing occurs when the actor reaches an acceptable alternative rather than an optimal one. This approach can be used when the actor faces complexity or uncertainty and recognises the limited information processing capabilities of the individual. In this way, bounded rationality acknowledges the uncertainty of the environments in which the individual operates, leading individuals to depend on habits, routines and institutions to provide regularity to their environment (Correa, 1999). This is an aspect not recognised by economic rationality.

For the first consequence of the principle of bounded rationality is that the intended rationality of an actor requires him [*sic*] to construct a simplified model of the real situation in order to deal with it. He behaves rationally with respect to this model, and such behavior is not even approximately optimal with respect to the real world. To predict his behavior, we must understand the way in which this simplified model is constructed, and its construction will certainly be related to his psychological properties as a perceiving, thinking, and learning animal. (Simon, 1957: 199)

Downing and Dowd (1988) agree with Simon (1957) and argue that there are effective barriers to occupational and post-sixteen choices. The capacity for effective decision-making may be blocked by psychological conditions, particularly depression, anxiety and low self-confidence.

Simon (1957) argues decision-making is also guided by the 'role' an individual occupies, providing a subset of premises used to guide behaviour and subsequent decisions. Sen (1994) agrees and argues further that there is a need to consider the role of 'others' in the formulation of rational choice. This can lead to a consideration of norms of behaviour and the restraints applied in social contexts. Most occupational decisions are made in a 'dependent' style and the influence of friends and family can take precedence with the school-leaver effectively allowing others to make their decision (Boreham and Arthur, 1993; Harren, 1980). Monroe (2001), in proposing a 'theory of perspective' (Monroe, 2001: 151), argues that self-perception in relation to others delineates options available.

Perspective conceptualizes the individual as the basic actor, but conceptualizes this actor as an individual existing in a social world populated by others whose

behavior has direct and profound consequences on the actor's behavior, including the actor's sense of self. (Monroe, 2001: 161)

Therefore, many theorists arguing against notions of economic rationality state it is necessary to understand how actors view social reality and to look at their narratives to reveal assumptions underlying their behaviour. This moves away from traditional rational choice theory's association with quantitative methodology to recognition of qualitative techniques.

2.4 Further developments in choice theory

Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) criticise traditional theories of 'choice' in that they characterise the decision-making process as being highly individualistic, rational and with control over external influences.

Such technical rationalism assumes that people can be managed as if they behaved like machines. Education and training are seen as production, using the metaphor of the assembly line, with inputs, processes and outputs. Quality and efficiency dominate the discourse. (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996: 120)

Hodkinson *et al.*'s (1996) research studied young people's career decisions in the context of the pilot Training Credits scheme whereby school-leavers are given a credit to purchase the training of their choice, thus involving a career decision. Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) theory of decision-making blends social and cultural factors with personal choice. It allows for serendipity and opportunistic decisions and does not view young people as a pawn of a dominant ideology, preventing the theory from being deterministic. This mix of decision-making, field interaction and life-course choices Hodkinson *et al.* term 'careership' with 'pragmatically rational' decisions (*ibid.*, p. 3). Decisions are seen as pragmatic rather than systematic often based on partial information, heavily context related, affected by family background and culture.

Like bounded rationality, Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) recognise the importance of 'others'. Social interaction is an important dimension in decision-making.

Hodkinson *et al.*'s (1996) research demonstrates that young people are involved in negotiation, bargaining and struggle with potential employers, parents and careers officers. Pragmatic decision-making involves recognition of these stakeholders as well as of the person making the choice.

Culture is important in informing the choice process. Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) use the term 'culture' to describe 'the socially constructed and historically derived common base of knowledge, values and norms for action that people grow into and come to take as a natural way of life' (*ibid.*, p. 148). Clarke *et al.* (1976) in an earlier definition would support this, arguing that culture provides the way life experiences are perceived and incorporated into the individual mindset. An example of this in action can be found in the work of Willis (1977). According to Willis the 'lads' produced and reproduced norms and values that were legitimate according to the culture and 'counter school culture' (Willis, 1977: 11) to which they belonged. This prepared the lads for entering manual work more effectively than any legitimate state institution could. Destination becomes the result not of a dominant ideology forcing the school-leaver into unskilled, low-paid manual work but of the young person's own culture, produced and reproduced by their actions.

In the sense, therefore, that I argue that it is their own culture which most effectively prepares some working class lads for the manual giving of their labour power we may say that there is an element of self-damnation in the taking on of subordinate roles in Western capitalism. However, this damnation is experienced paradoxically, as true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of resistance. (*ibid.*, p. 3)

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) use the term 'habitus' to explain this process of class production and reproduction. Habitus crystallises taste, thought and action and can advantage children socialised into society's dominant mindset allowing access to another arena of structure and meaning. All decisions are made within the context of the habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

As a matter of fact, social agents, ... are not particles subject to mechanical forces and acting under the constraint of *causes*; nor are they conscious and knowing subjects acting with full knowledge of the facts, as the champions of *rational action theory* believe. In fact, 'subjects' are active and knowing agents endowed with a *practical sense*, that is, an acquired system of preferences, of principles of vision and division (what is usually called taste), and also a system of durable

cognitive structures (which are essentially the product of the internalization of objective structures) and the schemes of action which orient the perception of the situation and the appropriate response. The habitus is this kind of practical sense for what is to be done in a given situation ... (Bourdieu, 1998: 24–5; original emphasis)

Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) argue in a similar way to this that career decisions are made within ‘horizons for action’ (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996: 3). This incorporates the habitus and labour market opportunity structures while recognising the individual’s subjective perceptions for work, for example gendered employment expectations (Hollands, 1990; Willis, 1977). As new experiences are gained, horizons for action are modified and new information is constantly integrated into the existing framework, causing modification and refinement to the habitus (Hodkinson, 1998). This schema can both limit and aid understanding by the relation of new information to previously stored knowledge. Careers advice may be rejected as not conducive to existing schematic views or perceptions of appropriate careers (Hodkinson, 1998).

Gottfredson (1981) agrees that career decision-making is made with reference to self-identity and feelings about whether a particular occupation complements this. There is a circumscription of occupations felt suitable, others eliminated and compromises made when preferences are translated into reality. Certain conceptions of self-identity could lead young people to question the utility of continuing education (Ashton, 1975). Gaskell (1992) argues that if school-leavers come to identify themselves as non-academic or view post-sixteen education as being something only certain ‘other’ types of people do, there may be a reluctance to enter post-compulsory education. According to Clarke (1980), the choice of working-class school-leavers is therefore not informed, purposeful or deliberate, but is often due to a series of negative decisions and an elimination of alternatives. In summary Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) argue:

what can be ‘seen’ and therefore chosen, depends on the horizon for action. This, in turn, depends simultaneously upon the standpoint of the person concerned, including habitus, and on the external education and labour market. These are not discrete, for each is a part of the other. Within their horizons, people make pragmatically rational decisions.’ (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997: 36)

Like bounded rationality theory, Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) recognise that the full range of opportunities are not often considered, limiting the decision-maker to a certain segment of the education and labour market. Subjective choice within a social sub-culture interacts with the objectivity of the local labour market which is segmented and stratified to explain the choices made (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996: 150).

Through the development of habitus, individual perceptions and career choices and even the way in which decisions are made are inseparable from their culture, which in turn is related to social structure ... Structural/cultural factors permeate the networks young people can access, which may help find a job or training place. Finally, structural/cultural factors influence the perceptions of other stakeholders, such as employers and training providers, whose views of what might be an appropriate opening for X and what sort of person is suitable for position Y derive from their own habituses [sic]. The whole of the transition to work is permeated by structural and cultural factors. Consequently, the belief in largely free choice, upon which much current policy is based, is, therefore, a myth that is either breathtakingly naïve or sinister. (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996: 155)

As stated earlier, economic rationality relies on the assumption of preference optimisation and conscious decisions. Modern conceptions of the choice process criticise this. Williams's (1999) research shows that participation in post-sixteen education is not so much an active decision but more a case of the students 'drifting' into it (Williams, 1999: 10). Interviewees referred to entering further education as 'a natural progression' suggesting a career trajectory. However, the majority of students possessed a lack of direction leading them to 'buy some time' by staying in education. The idea of 'natural progression' is further contested; the working-class student may have been the first in their family to enter post-compulsory education (*ibid.*, pp. 16–17). Williams (1999) comments that this shows the social nature of decision-making; many students were content to 'go with the flow'. Socialised norms and values allow a 'natural' assumption to take place. Sobel (1994) argues that this behaviour is neither rational nor irrational as these terms can only apply to agents who have determinate and settled beliefs and preferences: 'A vacillating agent is not ready to act rationally' (Sobel, 1994: 234).

2.5 Conception of choice within the research

The thesis examines the role of choice in post-sixteen transitions for a group of working-class school-leavers. The research standpoint on choice is that the destination taken upon leaving compulsory education possesses an element of choice but operates with the proviso that the school-leavers' beliefs and preferences are subjective, operating within the context of their habitus and an objective social structure (Brooks, 1998). The final destination is the product of young people having exercised choices made against a background of structural constraints including education, socio-economic status and the state of the labour market. Marx (1954) in the 'Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' argued:

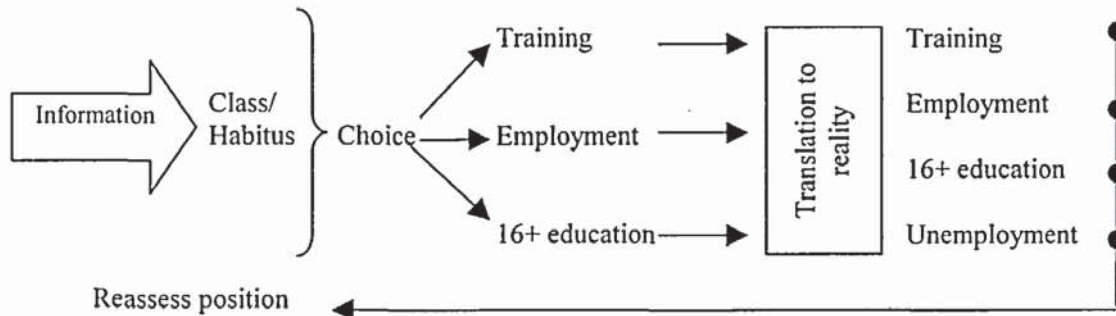
Men [*sic*] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted in the past. (Marx, 1954: 10)

However, young people perceive that there is a choice to be made when deciding their post-sixteen directions and it is necessary to examine the subjective factors in its conception. The thesis, by recognising the individual's role in the choice process as influenced by culture, context and psychological abilities, allows an investigation of how post-sixteen choices are actually made. This is in contrast to utilising the model of choice presented by economic rationality that assumes the decision-maker has perfect knowledge, excellent computational ability and is motivated by preference optimisation, probably not descriptive of a sixteen-year-old school leaver's choice process.

This chapter has argued that many post-sixteen choices are not made in the way much policy assumes. Working-class sixteen year-olds at the end of compulsory education may make pragmatically rational decisions influenced by culture, family and context and based on partial information (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). Entering post-compulsory education may be for economically sound reasons but this may not be the case for all post-compulsory education students. Continuing education or entering training may be not so much an investment in human capital but MORE due to elimination of alternatives (Clarke, 1980); the research will investigate this standpoint.

Figure 2.1 demonstrates a simple version of the factors affecting post-sixteen destination choices. The thesis argues that the choice process operates within the habitus, filtering and shaping information provided by family, friends, the labour market and school. The resultant choice is based upon whether the individual feels that it is a suitable direction given their self-identity, including considerations of masculinity or femininity and their social milieu. The decision then has to be translated into reality. Entrance to employment, training or certain types of education is dependent upon a number of factors; for example, local labour market opportunity structures (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Roberts, 1975), positions aimed for usually dictated by aspiration linked to class, and qualifications held. The social network provided by family and friends can also prove instrumental (Wilson, 1991). If the school-leaver then becomes unemployed or is unhappy in their eventual destination they return to the beginning of the cycle, gathering information from various sources or reassessing previous information before acting.

Figure 2.1 Model of influences on post-sixteen choices



It will be seen in the research analyses and conclusions, that school-leavers make their post-sixteen 'choice' of direction based upon information collected, whether accurate or not and not necessarily complete, in the context of their social network and individual mindset and habitus (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). The following literature chapters explore the influence of structural aspects such as labour market conditions and influences operating at closer quarters to the individual including family and peer relationships before applying these conceptions to the research.

3 Structural influences on post-sixteen transitions

3.1 Introduction

Since Willis (1977) carried out his research on the working-class transition from school to work, the labour market has undergone a radical transformation. The impact of this on the youth labour market has been vast, with the decline of entry-level positions and the prolonging of the school to work transition. It is necessary to explain the labour market restructuring that has occurred over the last two and a half decades to understand the context of post-sixteen transitions in the twenty-first century – a very different landscape to that presented twenty-five years earlier (Willis 1977). With the changing labour market, debates have emerged on the importance of various forms of capital, mediated by the social structure. The term ‘underclass’ has also become more frequent in political and media based discussions. These areas will be discussed with reference to structural effects on working-class school-leavers’ post-sixteen transitions. This chapter therefore outlines the current economic and political climate within which school leavers make their post-sixteen decisions. This is particularly pertinent to the analysis presented later in the thesis addressing the effect of the school and local labour market on working-class school-leavers’ transitions.

3.2 The labour market post-Willis

On leaving school in the early 1970s, young working-class adults could expect to find full-time employment in entry-level positions within a short period. They were also able to move around vacancies with relative ease, due to the surplus of manufacturing employment. The disdain of ‘lads’ for school knowledge and their questioning of its relevance to the real world of work would have seemed justified as they made the relatively smooth transition to the adult working world (Willis, 1977). Compared to

the proportion of fifteen- to sixteen-year-old school-leavers finding work in 1975, the year of Willis's research, the number entering it in the 1990s dropped dramatically from 62% to 9% (McDowell, 2000). Over the last twenty-five years there has been a decline in heavy manufacturing industry with a move to a high-tech and service industry. The high growth and full employment era of the 1950s to mid 1970s was replaced by slow growth and mass unemployment until the mid 1990s (Green, 1997). Willis (1987) himself argued in the 1980s, that the transition from school to work for minimum-age school-leavers 'has changed unrecognisably' (Willis, 1987: xiv). In the late 1990s, manufacturing jobs have been replaced by low-paid, unskilled service-sector employment offering little security and preferring to recruit young women rather than young men (McDowell, 2000). These changes have led to the claims and assumptions of reproduction theories to be branded 'naïve' and unable to explain current complex social processes (Weis, 1990: 3).

It has been suggested that this transformation of the labour market has radically restructured notions of lifetime work, young men's and women's opportunities, and, consequently, disrupted traditional notions of a gender division of labour in which men were the main providers, the so-called 'breadwinners'. (McDowell, 2000: 392)

Gray (1998) argues that Thatcherite policies, including the deep restructuring of the free market, eroded class culture and spelt cultural change; societies have become more linked and dependent on world markets. The implementation of free market principles has also weakened social institutions such as the family and increased social exclusion. Globalisation has allowed the relocation of employment to cheaper labour markets and the concentration of organisations on short-term goals (Hutton, 1995). The impact of this has been huge, not least on the European labour market that has experienced a structural transformation creating new landscapes of employment and unemployment (Green, 1997: 506). Hutton (1995) contends that a contemporary characteristic of OECD countries is the existence of a 30-30-40 society; 30% of the population is disadvantaged, 30% is underemployed and marginalized and 40% is advantaged. Sennett (1998) contends that the need for workers to be flexible and the changing nature of work have affected the personal characteristics of the workforce. It may be difficult to form values within a constantly changing economy where long-term

goals might be unimaginable. However, Doogan (2001) disputes some of Sennett's (1998) claims and contends that the labour market has an entrenched structure.

It could be argued that New Labour has adopted a different stance towards unemployment to their predecessors characterised in policies like the New Deal initiative. This may be due to the recognition that long-term unemployment has arguably become a social fact. Nevertheless, there is some continuity between New Labour and Conservative policy, for example placing emphasis on the supply side, 'skilling' the unemployed for existing job positions in an attempt to attack the skill shortage.

The majority of post-sixteen transitions are now into further education. According to the Youth Cohort Study (DfEE, 2001a), 72% of post-school sixteen-year-olds are in full-time education, with 10% in government-supported training and 10% employed. In Britain there exists a 'Credential Society' (Collins, 1979), qualifications and skills are demanded for many entry-level jobs. This affects the non-academic school-leaver who may find a scarcity of employment they are eligible to enter. In an inner-city survey of the nine most deprived areas of Birmingham, lack of qualifications was the biggest barrier to attaining employment (Ayisa, 1999).

The political-economic legacy of the 1980s for large sectors of working class students, is that of a post-school anticipation of a condition of dependency, on low skilled central government training schemes, as surplus youth labour in late industrial capitalism ... Young people are now part of a generation whose transition into adulthood as workers, citizens and consumers is in the process of being reconstituted as a result of high rates of unemployment, the de-regulation of youth labour markets and punitive legislative changes that have led to the withdrawal of financial state support for young people. (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996: 23)

However, debate surrounding further education and training schemes has been long running, particularly concerning the adequacy of various programmes and their relationship to work (Andrews and Bradley, 1997; Finn, 1987; Willis, 1987). Hollands (1990) in an in-depth study of young people's experiences on the Youth Training Scheme found education's relevance to the 'real world' was questioned, in particular its applicability to work. School-leavers viewed training as a better option than

continuing education, but still a substitute for employment. The middle-class model of career choice did not apply; the reality of the labour market prevented their aspirations being fulfilled.

In the structural transformation of the labour market, it would appear that young working-class males have emerged as the losers. There has been a growth in female employment such as service-sector work and traditional skilled and semi-skilled manual positions occupied by men have declined (Arnot, David, and Weiner, 1999: 87).

Many young men entering the labour market in the 1980s and 1990s could expect to have worse jobs than their fathers, but young women entering in the same period could expect better jobs than their mothers. (McDowell, 2000: 392)

Young working-class males and school-leavers may have to adapt their notions of 'acceptable' employment in order to find work. In Willis's (1977) study, the 'lads' were determined to get a job reflecting their masculinity and reaffirming their male status in social relationships. However, in the current economic climate, stereotyped aspirations could lead to unemployment if the occupation is not available and the young person is unwilling or unable to change their mindset about what work is acceptable (Wallace, 1986). Supporting this, later research by Mac an Ghaill (1994) found that 'macho lads' within a West Midlands comprehensive school had an 'outdated mode of masculinity' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994: 71) focusing on traditional waged labour, even though it was declining. These lads no longer fitted labour market requirements and their skills and attitudes did not appeal to potential employers. Personal characteristics now favoured by employers encompass a different set of attributes to those possessed by young working-class men such as the 'lads' and 'macho lads'. Service-sector employment requires deference to superiors and clients and a more subdued presentation of self (McDowell, 2000). Mac an Ghaill (1994) found that some of the young men he spoke to were in the process of redefining traditionally female areas of work such as the retail industry. Redefinition occurred along the lines of their superior gender expertise in relation to technological

developments and the need for physical strength away from the eyes of customers. McDowell (2000), however, recently found little evidence that low-achieving young working-class men were considering work in the retail or hospitality sector.

They expressed no fears about finding a job and had relatively little sense of the extent to which economic restructuring had transformed opportunities for men and women. It was perhaps surprising how little they were aware of the changed economic circumstances that awaited them and they had no sense at all that they might not be able to achieve and maintain the traditional pattern of working-class family life in which they were the main breadwinner. (McDowell, 2000: 411)

One of the most commonly cited reasons for the change in patterns of employment between men and women is the changing pattern of achievement in schools. This will be discussed later but suffice to say that young working-class men are entering the labour market less equipped than their female counterparts in an age where it is necessary to possess credentials to gain employment offering career progression (McDowell, 2000). However, the position of women in the transformed economy is not 'comfortable' (Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody, 2001). The jobs that young working-class women may occupy often do not offer prospects, pay rises or opportunities.

Women's position in the new economy is not comfortable. Young women watch their mothers struggle and do not want to combine work and family, but know very well that that is precisely the future they face. Indeed more than that, they may also have to cope with men who are feeling intensely the loss of previous modes of masculinity. In these circumstances it would be difficult to say that the female future is rosy. (Walkerdine *et al.*, 2001: 216)

For many young working-class women their working lives will involve 'low-paid, non-unionised part-time work combined with a continuing major responsibility for domestic labour' (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996: 28).

Having reviewed some of the global and political changes affecting the employment situation in Britain, relevant for the school-leavers in the research cohort, it is necessary to focus upon the importance of the local labour market and its effect on post-compulsory education destinations.

3.3 Local labour market influence on post-sixteen directions

Local labour market characteristics are paramount in young people's life chances (Ashton *et al.*, 1988; Roberts, 1975) and this is an aspect examined later within the research analyses.

Traditionally, treatises on the entry of young people to the labour market and the factors which affect this tradition have emphasized the significance of family background, social class and the possession of educational qualifications. More recently, however, research has pointed to the importance of local labour market characteristics in determining the life chances of young people. (Ashton *et al.*, 1988: 53)

Pockets of disadvantage exist around the country with geographical variations in unemployment (Fieldhouse, 1996). Social problems can transpire in these areas when the inhabitants become isolated from work. Due to policy, new employment can become located on the outskirts of towns, inaccessible to those too poor to afford public transport or a car. This has been termed the spatial mismatch hypothesis (Green, 1997). Areas of high unemployment are the sites of a high loss of manual jobs and an exodus begins of those residents able to afford to move. Spicker (2001) agrees, arguing that living in areas of high unemployment affects the residents' job prospects; there occurs increased competition for jobs on a similar level. Young people raised in areas of high unemployment, and thus increased deprivation, have little chance of gaining employment.

In areas characterised by high youth unemployment one answer would be for the school-leaver to move to an area with better opportunities. Nevertheless, this solution may not seem acceptable, involving leaving friends and family and having to support oneself. Residents can build up an 'intense sense of belonging' (Coffield, Borrill, and Marshall, 1986: 117) to a neighbourhood and be reluctant to migrate, further impeding job opportunities. Coffield *et al.* (1986) found that young working-class men and women possessed a strong sense of loyalty to their locality and few would consider

moving away; perceptions of distance to other areas were also distorted. This can lead to a concentration of unemployment in one area.

Human capital theory proposes that the decision to enter post-sixteen education or training is made by assessing the relative benefits of gaining more qualifications in favour of deferred gratification. The likelihood of school-leavers investing in further education is possibly higher if the local labour market is characterised by low levels of employment and few opportunities. Raffe and Willms (1989) termed this the 'discouraged worker effect' whereby the labour market signals the appropriate course of post-sixteen actions. Even pupils with poorer qualifications, deemed the most likely group to leave education at sixteen, remained in education the higher local unemployment. However, within this Rice (1999) found gender differences in post-sixteen transitions: young males with poor academic attainment were more likely to leave education than young women. Gray, Jesson, and Sime (1992) disagree that local labour markets increase the rates for staying on in all cases. Although the overall trend is the same, Gray *et al.* found that those pupils with middling qualifications were less likely to enter education despite high local unemployment. Nevertheless, it can be questioned whether the decision the lower attainment pupils made to enter post-compulsory education was a choice to invest in their human capital. Their decision to return may have been more to do with the stigma of being unemployed than the desire to gain qualifications.

Continuing with the effect of the labour market at a local level, Roberts (1975) contended that future occupation could be predicted not based on aspirations but on qualifications and local job opportunity structure. School-leavers do not choose their occupation but take what is available and careers develop in relation to this. This affects sixteen-year-old school-leavers whose aspirations are not likely to be fulfilled unless they are 'in tune' with local labour market demands. Heaven (1995) agrees that, due to changes in employment opportunities, it is not certain whether school-leavers will procure the kind of employment that meets their aspirations. For this to happen by anything other than chance, school-leavers would need extensive labour market

knowledge, appropriate qualifications and instrumental labour market contacts. This may not be characteristic of the decision process of a sixteen-year-old school-leaver.

Roberts's (1975) concept of a labour market 'opportunity structure' can be criticised as not allowing for individual action. Furlong, Biggart, and Cartmel (1996) also contend that school-leavers are aware to a certain extent of the opportunity structure in the area; if opportunities are above average, the young people have higher aspirations. Furlong *et al.* (1996), however, argue contrary to Roberts that neighbourhoods shape aspirations more than local labour market structures. Neighbourhood deprivation decreases school attainment, thereby lowering the occupational aspirations of its residents. Increased provision of training and education by the government may not be enough to tackle low aspirations. The young person's horizons may be sufficiently restricted by their neighbourhood to rule out either of these as a post-sixteen direction.

Figueira-McDonough (1998) examined the effect of deprived neighbourhoods on young people in an American study involving a large sample of African-American students. She found that although students were aware of and endorsed ideal social norms, they behaved in ways deviant to these. The majority of young people were reluctant to leave the area due to an attachment to friends and family and a fear of discrimination in white neighbourhoods. Although their neighbourhood was seen to be dangerous, it was not perceived to be all bad and the media was blamed for making it appear worse. The students were ambivalent about the importance of school and recognised that education did not guarantee a good job and other forms of success could be achieved without education. However, the students supported staying in school: dropping out meant no opportunities or options. This holds similarities to Willis's (1977) argument over the penetration by the 'lads' of the education system – recognising that school can not always deliver on its promises (Willis, 1977: 136).

3.4 Youth unemployment: 'status zero'

Young labour market entrants are at a disadvantage in finding employment; they often possess few qualifications and may be deficient in basic numeracy and literacy standards. They are also more likely to come from homes with unemployment, meaning they have few instrumental contacts to help them find employment. Early school-leavers are arguably more likely to enter the 'status zero' category, a term used by Williamson (1997) referring to young people of sixteen and seventeen-years-old not in education, training or employment. The longer young people remain unemployed – in effect out of the system – the harder it can be for them to enter work or training. This has been recognised by the government and has led to measures targeting what Gordon Brown, the Labour Chancellor, terms the 'wasted generation' (Ward, 1999) estimated at over 150,000 sixteen to eighteen year-olds. Official statistics contend that 7–8% of sixteen to seventeen year-olds are not in education, training or employment (DfEE, 2000, 2001a).

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) funded by the Department for Education and Employment, aims to increase the number of disadvantaged school-leavers from low-income families entering post-sixteen education. Disadvantaged pupils are 20% less likely to stay in education than their better off peers (DfEE, 1999). The pilot targets areas where staying on rates for post-compulsory education are low and deprivation is high. For future reference, both schools in the thesis sample were members of the pilot scheme. The government aims to see if financial support increases post-sixteen education participation, retention and achievement among young people from low-income homes. The pilot, running for three years between September 1999 and September 2002, makes provision for a means-tested incentive to be paid to pupils dependent on a minimum attendance of 12 hours a week studying recognised qualifications. The government is piloting two levels of incentive in a number of localities, either £30 a week or £40 a week. To qualify for the maximum allowance available in their locality, parental gross taxable income must not exceed £13,000. For those pupils with parents earning between £13,000 and £30,000, a tapered allowance is

available down to a minimum of £5 a week. In addition to the means-tested allowance, a termly attendance bonus and end-of-course achievement payment is available. Initial evaluations by the Centre for Research in Social Policy have suggested that the scheme is successful in increasing staying-on rates (Ashworth *et al.*, 2001; Legard *et al.*, 2001; Maguire *et al.*, 2001). In the pilot areas there was a 5% increase in year 12 participation compared with control areas and increases were highest within rural schools compared to urban. The intervention had a greater impact on young men than young women, which may help to address the gender gap in further education (Ashworth *et al.*, 2001). The increase in continuing education rates was highest for those young people eligible for the full allowance, indicating that the intervention may well be reaching some of its target group. However, young people not engaged in education, training or employment were less likely to say that a financial incentive would make them consider going back to school and over half of young people in training and employment were unwilling to return to education, even if paid to do so. The government will introduce the EMA on a national basis from September 2004 (DfES, 2002a).

On the strength of the money invested in education, David Blunkett, the former Labour Education Minister, set the target of getting 700,000 extra students into the post-sixteen-education sector by 2001/02 compared with when Labour came to power in 1996. Early figures were not promising. Reported in the *Guardian* (Tester, 2000) DfEE final data for 1998/99 year showed that, instead of participation in post-compulsory education increasing by the projected 2%, it had fallen by 1%. Economic factors were blamed with the improving labour market luring school-leavers away from acquiring more qualifications possibly seen as unnecessary (Brooks, 1998). Following a further decrease in post-sixteen education participation in 1999/00, numbers increased in 2000/01 and again in 2001/02, but not by the targeted amount (DfES, 2002b).

Williamson (1997) in a study of the 'status zero' group asked why they decided not to participate in their guaranteed places on youth training schemes. The answers were the

money was too low, placements were equated to slave labour and the training did not meet aspirations. Membership of this disadvantaged group meant that there was no stability in their lives, money became a constant preoccupation and some fell into crime. However, Williamson (1997) also encountered young people with a previous clear direction of what they wanted to do but a change in home circumstances, lack of guidance by career professionals and negative-training experiences had led them to 'live for the moment'. This attitude prevented any action to be taken to alleviate their situation. The school-leavers arguably 'drifted' into their lifestyle after no better option was perceived (Williamson, 1997). This supports Hodgkinson *et al.*'s (1996) argument, and the position taken in the thesis, that young people do not make choices in the way that much policy assumes.

Youth unemployment may have less severe consequences than adult unemployment. The young person has none of the additional strains that an adult faces, including the need to support a family and other financial burdens (Winefield and Tiggemann, 1989). In addition, the school-leaver may not have developed entrenched work routines and lifestyles that are difficult to modify. It may also be 'normal' for school-leavers to experience an initial degree of unemployment in their first year in the labour market. However, youth unemployment is not a trivial matter and could produce 'not only psychological damage, but also negative attitudes to work or even negative attitudes to society' (Winefield *et al.*, 1993: 1). School-leavers face pressures from which an adult has made the transition. Young people are trying to make the passage from the education system to the employment system, youth to adulthood at the same time (Alheit, 1994: 2).

3.5 The underclass debate

When considering post-sixteen destinations and the potential transmission of disadvantage it is necessary to consider the underclass debate. The reason for this discussion is the connection between 'status zero' young people and

unemployment/deprivation in the home. It is significantly more likely that a young person will leave school at sixteen if originating from a deprived background and the motivation for this action needs to be understood. The term 'underclass' has become common in political and media-led discussion and is a powerful rhetorical tool which therefore cannot be ignored.

The underclass debate has fundamental issues concerning whether such a thing exists (Smith, 1992), how it should be defined, who constitutes it and if anyone is to blame for its alleged presence. The original term used in 1962 by Gunnar Myrdal was utilised to describe the treatment and view of America's poor. Smith (1992) contends that the term should be used as a 'counterpart' to the idea of social classes. This is because many agree on the existence and order of class structure (Smith, 1992: 3–4).

The underclass are those that fall outside of this class schema, because they belong to family units having no stable relationship at all with the 'mode of production' – with legitimate gainful employment. (Smith, 1992: 4)

Buck (1992) argues that the individuals who are most 'at risk' of entering the underclass are the long-term unemployed, single parents, those with few or no qualifications and residents in areas of extreme unemployment and deprivation.

The first of two dominant positions considering the underclass is the moral turpitude argument (Westergaard, 1992: 576) favoured by the right wing (Murray, 1990). This theory blames the personal characteristics of individuals, particularly the failure of the family to instil the work ethic during primary socialisation (Gallie, 1994), which means that the individual has a weak labour market attachment, having none of the habits or behaviour associated with regular employment (Wilson, 1991: 10). Murray (1990) blames the next generation as carriers of this culture, who spurn employment, the nuclear family life and prefer to be single parents, delinquents and criminals. Policy measures are believed to worsen the dependency culture, and the underclass learns that it is not necessary to work to get money.

A central tenet of the underclass thesis ... is that the young people of underclass locales are being socialised into the deviant cultures of their economically side-lined parents; that a distaste for work and traditional patterns of family life and a taste for crime and welfare dependence are being inculcated into the young so that the underclass reproduces itself down the generations. (MacDonald, 1997a: 19)

The conservative right-wing stance has unsurprisingly been extensively criticised. It has been branded as false or 'empirically deficient and politically malevolent' (Craine, 1997: 130).

The second dominant version of the underclass debate opposing the culture of dependency approach (Murray, 1990) maintains that changes in the economic structure and institutions, including education, prevent certain sectors of the population accessing opportunities and resources (Smith, 1992). Class division is 'a product of economic forces, not of cultural choices' (Westergaard, 1992: 577). The underclass consists of those outside the means of production or on its fringes, for example part-time workers, poorly paid full-time workers, retired without occupational pension. Women and ethnic minority groups are over-represented in this category. These groups may find themselves concentrated in a geographical area of high unemployment representing an industry that has been removed. The location then becomes a determinant of the resident's employment chances (Green, 1997).

In the U.K context, micro level ecological (i.e. area based) effects have been implicated in the growth of an 'underclass' in various parts of the urban and regional system – notably in inner cities. (Green, 1997: 509)

Wilson (1987) argues that it is necessary to have employment in the neighbourhood to provide mainstream role models and emphasise the importance of education. The concentration of unemployment within social groupings can disadvantage the individuals concerned, affecting the potential for mutual aid (Morris, 1993). Residents in areas of poverty need the most help and support to escape their situation but are not helped by the ties that bind them to their social background (Wacquant and Wilson, 1989).

The issue is not simply that the underclass or ghetto poor have a marginal position in the labor market similar to that of other disadvantaged groups, it is also that their economic position is uniquely reinforced by their social milieu. (Wilson, 1991: 12)

It has been argued the underclass does not exist at all and Westergaard (1992) maintains that 'the "underclass" notion is a nice example of fashion' (Westergaard, 1992: 575). The explanations put forward have gained credit as fitting facts and mirroring current opinions. Westergaard (1992) further argues, 'as a fashion, underclass talk has been media-commentary-led rather than social science led' (ibid., p. 580).

The underclass, although arguably not existing in Britain at present could become a possibility for disadvantaged young people due to the socio-economic climate and changing employment and family structures (Roberts, 1997; Williamson, 1997).

Status Zero young people, if renewed effort is not made to integrate them into training and labour market structures, may be the first generation for who, the underclass is a social reality rather than a political and ideological device. (Williamson, 1997: 81)

Exploring the underclass debate can highlight possible areas for research and methodological difficulties. Roberts (1997) argues that if an underclass does exist, they are under-represented in samples for traditional survey research. This is because people with poor education are least likely to return questionnaires, are liable to be under-represented on electoral roles and may be missing from the 1991 census. According to MacDonald (1997b):

Only ethnographic, longitudinal studies of particular localities (down to neighbourhood level) and key social groups resident in them are likely to provide the evidence necessary to support or reject underclass theories (or develop alternative theories of social exclusion). (MacDonald, 1997b: 179)

Roberts (1997) states:

Youth researchers are in a privileged position to assess whether Britain does in fact have an underclass. Young people are a critical group for judging whether an underclass has formed or is emerging. From their backgrounds, experiences, attitudes and ways of life it should be possible to establish whether cultures that separate an

underclass from the employed population are being transmitted down the generations and discouraging some young people from joining the regular employed workforce. (Roberts, 1997: 43)

The position taken within the thesis, supported by the analysis, is a modified agreement that the underclass may become a reality due to structural and economic change preventing or limiting access to resources by certain sectors of the community. However, the underclass may need to be defined as a fluid category. Families and individuals can move in and out of states of advantage and disadvantage, depending on their circumstances at any given time. Allowing for movement in and out of the underclass means that it is possible to examine different choices within particular families and communities accounting for variations in personal situation.

3.6 Structural advantage: human, social and cultural capital

It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory. (Bourdieu, 1997: 46)

The original formulation of capital concentrated on the advantage that possessing economic capital could bring. Economic capital takes the form of wealth and this can translate into class position and power. However, theorists such as Bourdieu (1977, 1997) and Coleman (1988) developed the notion of capital to include human, social and cultural capital. An explanation of capital accumulation in its various forms can go some way to explaining the effect structural influences have on post-sixteen destinations.

Resources within the family can heighten human capital. Rice (1999) argues that class and the level of parental education have a significant effect on the levels of human capital investment from an early age and thus the human capital stock available to the individual at sixteen (Rice, 1999: 292). Entwisle, Alexander and Olson (2000), however, argue that work experience while at school can help disadvantaged groups accumulate human capital.

Job experience in adolescence can add to human capital and may improve opportunities for employment for minority and economically disadvantaged urban youth later on. (Entwisle *et al.*, 2000: 293–4)

Another form of capital, recently appearing in political rhetoric, is social capital (Blunkett, 2002; Roberts and Roche, 2001). This form of capital refers to ‘social obligations’ (Bourdieu, 1997: 47) and instrumental contacts available to the individual including employment information networks. Cotterell (1996) argues that by examining individuals’ networks it is possible to link them to the wider social landscape and determine their access to various human resources. Following its use by Tony Blair in 1995, there has been growing pressure to measure its distribution to aid policy formation and fight social exclusion. It is seen as ‘a resource to be harnessed and promoted’ (Roberts and Roche, 2001: 15). The reason for this interest may be because, as Putnam (2001a, 2001b) argues, communities with increased social capital have lower crime rates and more effective schools. Children living in these communities are less at risk of teen pregnancy, drug use and juvenile delinquency.

Coleman (1988) argues that, just as human and other forms of capital allow certain aims to be met, so does social capital; thus it is a productive asset. With social capital, the relationship could be between the parents and children or exist within other social structures (Caspi *et al.*, 1998). Coleman (1988) believes that there needs to be the physical presence and devotion of time to the child by the parents to allow social capital to accumulate, which in turn can lead to access to the parents’ human capital. According to Coleman (1988), a deficiency can occur if adults are absent, for example in single-parent families or if both parents work. This can prevent the young person identifying with their parents’ goals and values. Caspi *et al.* (1998) also argue that the relationship with the parents is vital and is the most valuable source of social capital. Caspi *et al.*’s (1998) research addressing social capital and unemployment found that familial conflict, single-parent families, weak parental attachment and low school involvement were all significant predictors of future unemployment.

Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus has already been mentioned in relation to the concept of choice and the possession of a culturally specific mindset. Another key concept in Bourdieu's theory is cultural reproduction occurring through the accumulation and deployment of cultural capital. This exists in three forms: in cultural goods, disposition of the mind and body and in an institutionalised state, for example qualifications (Nash, 1990). Access to cultural capital is primarily through the family. It advantages the middle-class child because the school utilises the dominant culture based on a system of shared symbols and language in teaching and assessments that correlates to middle- and upper-class usage (Bourdieu, 1977; Bernstein, 1973). This allows pupils high in cultural capital to excel while converting cultural capital into legitimatised human capital in the form of qualifications; working-class pupils, however, are alienated and underachieve.

The educational system reproduces all the more perfectly the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among classes ... in that the culture which it transmits is closer to the dominant culture and that the mode of inculcation to which it has recourse is less removed from the mode of inculcation practised by the family. (Bourdieu, 1977: 493)

Cultural capital largely explains the difference in achievement of children from different social classes. Bourdieu (1977) claims that the dominance of the middle classes is not due to natural ability and intelligence. The school fails to transmit the instruments required to make the acquisition of the dominant culture possible to those who do not already possess it, therefore preventing working-class pupils from succeeding academically and subsequently in the labour market. Worse still, the process appears legitimate. Children are told that educational success requires hard work and dedication, but no matter how hard working-class pupils try, they cannot reach the same standard as their middle-class peers. They are excluded by their lack of cultural capital and the implicit insight this provides into the educational process. Working-class pupils are more likely to opt out of education, viewing themselves as academically inferior – but they have no chance of success as they are not incorporated into the system by virtue of their class (Bourdieu, 1977). Lacking the prerequisites to succeed in schooling, some working-class school-leavers are destined to enter the labour market at a disadvantage.

Bourdieu has been criticised by sociologists including Willis (1977) who argues that his theory of cultural reproduction and social reproduction is overtly mechanistic and does not allow for creative human responses. Halsey, Heath, and Ridge (1980) tried to disprove the 'exaggerated claim' that cultural capital is the exclusive means of cultural reproduction of the classes (Halsey *et al.*, 1980: 88). They maintain that class is the most important determinant of inequality in education not culture. Cultural capital is seen to be useful only as an 'umbrella term' (*ibid.*) to describe the mechanisms through which the family influence their children's educational experience.

This thesis contends that access to and deployment of all forms of capital, including human, social and cultural, is a useful way to examine inequalities, particularly within the education system. Although 'class' would explain these inequalities to a certain extent, it does not explain the micro-differences occurring within classes. For example why do some working-class school-leavers transfer with relative ease from education to the labour market while others fail to make a successful connection with the adult world of work? Access to and subsequent deployment of different forms of capital available within the family or social network may account for this and the thesis takes this proposition into account when examining variations in post-sixteen transitions.

4 Close-quarter influences on post-sixteen transitions

4.1 Introduction

Preceding chapters have considered the role of choice and structural influences upon post-sixteen destinations into continued education or the labour market. However, it is necessary to examine more immediate influences on the individual to understand fully the influences on post-sixteen decisions. The home is the key area for socialisation and contains many factors affecting the likelihood of the young person entering further education, training, employment or unemployment. It is therefore necessary to consider the processes within the family that can affect post-sixteen transitions such as social class and attitude transmission and if there is any influence from family composition. The school is another site where socialisation can occur, whether through the interaction of social class, school and gender or via the young person's interaction with their peers. These relationships are therefore explored. The new market system within education may have unequally affected working- and middle-class pupils and their subsequent post-sixteen options; therefore the 'school effect' is discussed in relation to post-sixteen transitions before examining the negative impact truancy can have upon a young person's post-sixteen life chances. Finally, the evolving role of careers service is considered in the way it has had to adapt to meet young people's guidance needs in the new labour market and further education context.

Many of these themes will be referenced later within the thesis analyses chapters as direct influences on post-sixteen transitions for working-class school-leavers. Particularly pertinent is the effect of the family, peer group and school. The role of gender in post-sixteen transitions can be seen as a concept that is applicable over and above many of these individual factors as an all-pervasive influence.

4.2 Class transmission within the home

Class position is an important factor in post-sixteen transitions; working-class students are more likely to leave school at the minimum age (Brooks, 1998). With the decline of entry-level employment, they are also more likely to experience unemployment. Goldthorpe (1987) researched the amount of social mobility in Britain and concluded that a child born of working-class parents becomes and is likely to remain working class due to the durability of 'class-linked inequalities in mobility chances' (Goldthorpe, 1987: 351). It can therefore be argued that class position is relatively fixed and that it is necessary to examine its impact on post-sixteen choices. As Giddens (1973) structuration theory argues, the class position occupied influences the individual's behaviour. The subsequent choices made regarding employment type reinforce the ongoing structure of society, i.e. there is a process of structuration. This theory allows for an element of choice thus avoiding determinism but recognises that it is within restricted class boundaries and that the choices and their enactment consolidate class formations.

Class has a direct effect on occupational aspirations and an indirect effect by its influence on academic achievement (Furlong *et al.*, 1996: 554). Alwin and Thornton (1984) maintain that aspiration is influenced by family educational and intellectual characteristics. The low levels of participation in further education that can be characteristic of working-class families could therefore impede younger family member's aspirations. Social class can also affect attitudes to post-compulsory education which can be seen as less worthwhile by the working class (Brooks, 1998) or as an alien influence separating them from friends, family and the local community (Blackman, 1991). Materially the family may not have sufficient resources to support children through post-compulsory education (Furlong *et al.*, 1996). Class location may also provide a cultural and psychological barrier to entering further education. Walkerdine *et al.* (2001) argue that the challenge working-class students face on entering further education is different to that of middle-class students as almost rejecting their cultural heritage. The quote below refers to the 'psychic separation' experienced by some working-class young people with different aspirations to their family.

Wanting something different, something more than your own parents implies not only that there is something wrong with your parents' life, but also that there is something wrong with them. This kind of disidentification with one's parents and family can engender a deep sense of shame, which is itself so shameful that it must be psychically regulated through repressive mechanisms. (Walkerdine *et al.*, 2001: 158)

Another aspect of class transmission is the 'language code' learned within the family that can affect educational attainment, post-sixteen transitions and even the routes perceived achievable by the school-leaver. Throughout Bernstein's research (1973, 1982), he argues that there are distinct forms of language use due to the organisation of the social strata. He refers to these as 'codes' that are 'culturally determined positioning devices' (Bernstein 1982: 305). Bernstein attempts to show how an individual's social position shapes language use and how this affects the way individuals perceive themselves, leading to a certain orientation in the world:

class relations generate, distribute, reproduce and legitimate distinctive forms of communication, which transmit dominating and dominated codes; and ... subjects are differentially positioned by these codes in the process of their acquisition. (ibid., pp. 304–5)

Bernstein (1973, 1982) argues that there exists an elaborated and restricted code/orientation to meaning that gives an advantage to already privileged sectors of society. The restricted code refers to context-bound speech where the speaker assumes that the listener has the same meanings and experience as themselves. Therefore, the speaker assumes that the listener will understand meanings without elaborate explanation, leading to short, grammatically simple communication. The elaborated code is context-free, language is more complex, with longer sentences, higher use of vocabulary and grammatically advanced. This is the language used in middle-class spheres including the home and school. Middle-class children can also switch principle of classification to that used by the working class. This means that middle-class children are more likely to be adept in handling a number of situations on multiple communication levels.

Middle-class families pass on their knowledge of the elaborated code/orientation to meaning. This allows the child to communicate with their peers and teachers,

giving them a material advantage over working-class pupils who possess a restricted code/orientation to meaning (Bernstein 1973, 1982). This is because 'the codes of education consist of elaborated orientations to meaning' (Bernstein, 1982: 321). Education can therefore have a selective function. It can select, prepare and allocate individuals for particular roles and the division of labour. Nevertheless, it can also have a reproduction function; manual workers' children go on to occupy manual jobs.

Where codes are elaborated, the socialized has more access to the grounds of his [sic] socialization, and so can enter into a reflexive relationship to the social order he has taken over. Where codes are restricted, the socialized has less access to the grounds of his socialization, and thus reflexivity may be limited in range. *One of the effects of the class system is to limit access to elaborated codes.* (Bernstein, 1973: 200 – original emphasis)

The class the child grows up in further prepares for reproduction of this status due to the different relationships of control within working- and middle-class families (Bernstein, 1973). Working-class families are position-orientated whereby decisions and control are located within the highest status member, usually the father, who expects his authority to be obeyed in a similar way to his work situation where he is subordinate to the boss.

In such families, children will tend to grow up with little sense that they can control or shape their own destiny or environment, but with a strong sense of position, identity and 'belonging' – as is to be expected where positions are fixed. (Webb and Westergaard, 1991: 27)

The middle-class family is more person-orientated, with control by negotiation rather than closed commands. The parent often has to give reasons and justification, requesting the child to undertake a certain action. The children also have to learn how to negotiate and therefore develop an elaborated code. They learn that they can construct and control their environment, thus giving a sense of personal autonomy. Therefore, the home effectively prepares young people to be located in a certain sector of the economy; for example, many working-class jobs can be performed using restricted speech and do not encourage free thinking. Middle-class jobs are more likely to revolve around negotiation, planning and personal responsibility. By giving children a fixed or open self-identity, the family

influences the post-sixteen destination instilling in their children whether they can engage in a wider social sphere or whether they 'belong' where they are.

4.3 Attitude transmission within the family

Gender and class influence the forms of work entered by male and female school-leavers. The process through which this can occur is the intergenerational transmission of certain cultural and family specific attitudes. The research examines this with reference to post-sixteen transitions.

Although research has clearly demonstrated the correlation between social class and post-sixteen destination, further work is needed to clarify the mechanisms by which parents' views and experiences of education and work are transmitted to their children. (Brooks, 1998: 85)

Wilson (1991) argues that socialisation practices from a home containing a steady breadwinner are different from those with unemployed members. Young people from stable employed homes experience employment habits and behaviour giving them a goal and expectation framework for the future. Young people from unemployed families often associate with other unemployed homes and the neighbourhood may collectively underpin this position through an inability to reinforce traits of independence and self-reliance (Murray, 1990). These young people may also have lower expectations and goals affecting their job-seeking behaviour (Leonard, 1998; Furnham and Rawles, 1996). Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory contends that the motivation to seek work is interdependent with the individual's expectations of success and the attractiveness of the employment. If young people do not believe they can produce the desired outcome, there is little incentive for them to try.

Research demonstrating the potential effect of unemployment in the home on post-compulsory education transitions was conducted by Rich (1999). Rich in an American study, tested whether family dependence on welfare could affect schooling and employment decisions of male adolescents. Rich (1999) found no evidence that welfare receipt was associated with school and the employment

decisions of white males. However, there was some evidence that adolescent black males would choose the no-work and no-school option rather than the option of combining work and school. There was also evidence that both black and white males would choose to work rather than enter post-compulsory education.

Leonard (1998) arguing against the dependency culture hypothesis (Murray, 1990) believes there is little evidence to suggest that negative work attitudes are transmitted intergenerationally. There could be a combination of factors within the home increasing unemployment chances. The concentration of unemployment within families could be due to their living in the same geographical location where demand for certain forms of labour which the family is offering is low (Payne, 1987). Households often share characteristics of class and educational attainment; this would mean that the probability of unemployment is similar. Academic success is also lower for students from lower income homes than for economically advantaged students. This could start a cycle of deprivation where life chances are transmitted (Roberts, 1997).

4.4 Family composition and post-sixteen decisions

As already argued, the class location of the family and its employment characteristics can have a significant effect on post-sixteen transitions. The thesis also examines individual differences such as the effect of family composition. Structural features of the family influence post-sixteen destinations. Schulenberg, Vondracek, and Crouter (1984) argue that size, birth order and years between siblings can affect educational expectation and attainment, which in turn may directly affect occupation choice and success. Children from larger families have to share resources and thus older children may suffer educationally, receiving lower material resources, less support and capital investment from parents. Overcrowding in a household can also lead to lower exam performance (Gordon, 1996).

Parental composition in the family home can also be an influential variable on post-sixteen transitions, affecting the young person's gender-role attitudes and attitudes towards employment via the provision of role models. This may be more relevant for daughters living with single-parent mothers as opposed to sons (Barber and Eccles, 1992).

Differences in single mothers' roles should interact with the sex of her children in influencing the ontogeny of the children's family and work values. Daughters who are living with the same-sex parent should be more influenced than sons by exposure to the combination of roles modelled by single mothers. (ibid., p. 115)

Kaufman (1987) reported that some girls of divorced mothers were opting for different roles from their mothers. A premium was placed on economic independency influencing the girls to choose highly paid, less gender-stereotyped occupations. After observing the financial difficulties experienced by her mother, the daughter may shy away from traditional labour force participation which may be perceived to be responsible for her family's financial situation (Barber and Eccles, 1992). She may then consider entrance into post-compulsory education to ensure a well-paying job, securing financial independence. Research supporting this found that fourteen-year-old girls in a female-headed household had a decreased chance of choosing a traditional female occupation and an increased chance of entering a traditionally male job (Shapiro and Crowley, 1982; Waite and Berryman, 1985). Similarly, boys in female-headed houses were less likely to select a traditional male occupation than boys from an intact family.

Closely related to gender role values, the perceived potential cost of investing in one activity rather than another also is likely to be related to family constellation. Daughters of single mothers may be more reluctant to make sacrifices in the occupational domain for participation in marital and family domains because the observed costs following divorce can be tremendous. (Barber and Eccles, 1992, p. 115)

As the above quote suggests, the role model provided by a single mother can be positive or negative, depending upon her job and success in integrating home and paid work (Barber and Eccles, 1992). If the mother is satisfied with her job and can manage the home, this is a good role model and can present the daughter with the possibility of following non-traditional options. If the mother is in low-status, low-paid employment and cannot manage the dual employment and domestic role, this

presents her daughter with a model to be avoided. There is however little research on the effect of working mothers on their sons (Schulenberg *et al.*, 1984).

Parental aspirations for their children can be influential on post-sixteen destinations. Returning to the effect of family composition, single parents may have lower expectations for their children, recognising they may not be able to invest as much time in them as a dual-parent family. Conversely, they may have higher aspirations for their children not wanting them to face financial difficulties, thus pushing them to enter post-compulsory education (Barber and Eccles, 1992). Mann (1998) researched the contribution of working-class mothers to their daughters' educational success in families where traditional gender relations existed or 'transitional families' where traditional gender relations were being challenged. Mothers in transitional families often spoke of past hopes and disappointments with their daughters (Mann, 1998: 216). This provided their daughters with a 'frame of reference' in which to make their own life choices and allowed them to see the potential benefits that further education could bring. Qualifications were discussed in terms of allowing independence from men. The high levels of communication increased the impact of maternal values and aspirations on the daughters' educational choices. Rice (1999) contends that single-parent children are more likely to enter post-compulsory education.

... single mothers may place increased value on academic performance and aspire to more education for their children, particularly if they themselves have faced difficulties in the labor market because of limited education or training. (Barber and Eccles, 1992: 121)

However, despite possibly holding higher aspirations for their children within the academic arena, there may be more material restraints on children from single-parent families preventing them entering further education. Single-parent families are more likely to experience economic deprivation (Bradshaw and Millar, 1991) and become dependent on state benefits due to a lack of alternative income (McKay and Marsh, 1994). This may prevent children being supported for the prolonged period that entrance to further education would necessitate. Gordon (1996) argues that employed lone parents do not appear to affect their child's educational success

but if unemployed, this has a significant correlation. Deprivation is associated with low academic attainment and an early education exit.

Therefore, it could be argued that family structure and employment records not only have consequences for occupational choice via its influence on gender-role perceptions but also for academic attainment. O'Brien and Jones (1999), researching within a majority white, working-class area with a tradition of educational underachievement found that children's performance was greatest in homes with maternal employment, especially if the mother worked part-time. Maternal employment appeared important for protecting against low grades; children from dual working households were 70% less likely to obtain low grades than in male single-earner households. Heynes (1982) consistently found that in poor families maternal employment meant higher academic achievement for the children.

Paternal employment can also affect post-sixteen destinations. Parcel and Menaghan (1994) contend that the fathers' working conditions influence child-rearing behaviour:

Paternal values and behavior patterns are surely involved in the child's socialization process, not only through mechanisms such as child's observation and imitation, but also through the norms and expectations that father-child interaction will convey. (Parcel and Menaghan, 1994: 977)

Kohn's (1977) research on paternal occupations and the value placed on conformity recognised the transfer of employment-related values and orientation towards family values and child-rearing practices (Schulenberg *et al.*, 1984: 136). This is similar to Bernstein's (1973) theory regarding discipline in the home. Mortimer, Lorence and Kumka (1986) also found that the closer sons reported their relationship to be with their fathers, the stronger their extrinsic work values and the higher their levels of work involvement.

There is a continuing debate centring on the decline of the family (Smart and Neale, 1999: 25). In 1998, there were over one and a half million single-parent families in the United Kingdom, having risen from 600,000 in the 1970s

(Rowlingson and McKay, 1998). However, official statistics might be inaccurate as marital status is used to define lone mothers; a woman may be cohabiting but officially defined as a single parent; indeed parents can be separated and still categorised as married (ibid.). Many reasons have been given why the structure of the family has changed so dramatically: behavioural changes, women's new employment status and increased independence, changes in divorce legislation and attitudinal change. Craine (1997), examining social exclusion, found that many young disadvantaged women did not plan to have children. Parenthood was drifted into as an alternative and more acceptable option than unemployment (Craine, 1997: 143); disadvantaged young women retreated into feminine roles of motherhood as a means to escape long-term unemployment and this provided them with an identity.

Although most young women did not 'plan' to have children, lone parenthood was less the product of irresponsibility than of the result of a fatalistic ethos generated within a context of institutionalised economic and social insecurity. (ibid., p. 143)

Within the young woman's immediate locality early motherhood may be commonplace and not subjected to moral censure (Ball *et al.*, 2000: 128). Walkerdine *et al.* (2001) argue:

for many young women and their families, pregnancy is a safer and more familiar state than career achievement and the two positions form an opposition: the superwoman, who cannot have a baby for fear of interrupting her career; and the scrounger, whose fecundity ensures her 'career' as a welfare mother. (ibid., p. 215)

Little research has been conducted considering the effect of a reconstituted family upon young people and their post-sixteen destinations. A reconstituted family could be composed of two parents who have divorced and remarried bringing children from other relationships into the new marriage. Spruijt and de Goede (1997) examined the effect of structural change within the family and its effect on adolescent well-being influencing future employment prospects. Their research shows that young people from single-parent families are the least healthy, have the lowest psychological well-being and are more likely to experience their own personal relationships breaking down. Young people from intact families scored more positively in all these categories followed by the children from stepfamilies.

However, when considering the effect of family structure on employment, Spruijt and de Goede (1997) found:

Youngsters from single-parent families are unemployed or incapacitated more often than youngsters from other types of families. The differences between those from stable, conflict, and stepfamilies are very small and not significant. (Spruijt and de Goede, 1997: 908)

Spruijt and de Goede's (1997) research demonstrates that although young people from stepfamilies experienced the highest number of transitions in family structure they did not have the lowest scores in the measures. They finally conclude that family structure does affect young people's well-being but the significance may be due to the absence of a father figure or a decline in finance.

4.5 Class and gender interaction within the school

My central argument is that the family and the education system are used in concert to sustain and reproduce the social and economic *status quo*. Specifically, they maintain existing relations within the family and social relations within the economy – what has sometimes been called the sexual and social division of labour. (David, 1980: 1; original emphasis)

Social class and education have been linked in numerous theories to explain the reproduction of the division of labour, both social and sexual (Bernstein, 1973; Bourdieu, 1977; Willis, 1977). The home and classroom are the prime areas for socialisation so it is unsurprising that these are the sites for the transmission of future inequalities. This section reviews the role of the school in enforcing gendered and class aspirations – two aspects that appear inextricably linked both within previous research (Measor and Sikes, 1992) and the current research analysis and conclusions.

Before discussing the potential ways that schools reproduce class and gender inequalities, it is necessary to give an overview of current patterns of academic achievement and further education entrance to place the arguments in context. Girls are outperforming boys in GCSEs (General Certificate of Education) with 55.5% of girls compared with 45.4% of boys gaining at least five A*–C grades in

1999/2000 (DfEE, 2001b). More girls enter further education than boys with 68% of boys and 76% of girls entering post-compulsory education in the year 2000 (DfEE, 2001a). However, female underachievement is still relevant: girls are more likely to occupy marginalized jobs on leaving education (Weiner, Arnot and David, 1997).

Ethnic minority pupils are more likely to enter post-sixteen education than white working-class pupils placing a higher value on education. A lower educationally qualified Asian male is more likely to enter post-compulsory education than his white counterpart (Rice, 1999). Over 85% of students from ethnic minority groups enter post-compulsory education compared with 67% from white groups. However, more white young people are in full-time employment or training than their ethnic minority peers (DfEE, 2000; DfEE, 2001a).

To begin the discussion of the school's role in reproducing gender and class inequalities, it can be argued that curriculum option choices reinforce gender divisions in society; entrance to certain occupations, post-compulsory education and training is controlled on the strength of results. Riddell (1992) argues that gender identity and curriculum option choices are linked. Attempts to establish an 'appropriate' gender identity lead boys and girls to select particular curriculum subjects. Girls view male subjects as unattractive and boring while boys and male teachers' behaviour encourages girls into their own 'territory'. Measor and Sikes (1992) supporting this viewpoint maintain that teachers develop lessons in order to keep boys' attention and allow boys to challenge them whereas girls' interaction is discouraged by way of verbal and non-verbal means. The hidden curriculum reinforces gender roles and fails to encourage girls to the best of their potential (Measor and Sikes, 1992).

National curriculum changes in the 1990s have meant that there are fewer opportunities for gender division in school (Weiner *et al.*, 1997). Certain subjects traditionally favoured by boys, such as science, are now compulsory and girls are excelling. Nevertheless, Mac an Ghaill (1994) still found in the restructuring of the vocational curriculum that working-class girls were being directed into low-prestige courses with the focus upon caring roles. These courses asserted a family

ideology of two-parent families and the sexual division of labour in the home and labour market. School senior management justified these courses in terms of future domestic and occupational value (Mac an Ghaill, 1994: 119). Male teacher discourse at this school also involved the perception of girls as more interested in finding a future 'breadwinner' than their own education. Some teachers argued that the girls saw this as 'a better investment for the future than a job' (ibid., p. 140) and were unwilling to invest their teaching time on them as believing it to be wasted.

Further research considering the negative effect teachers can have in reinforcing gender divisions was conducted by Stanworth (1987). Stanworth found that the predictions of teachers regarding male and female pupils altered their interaction with them possibly affecting the quality of the education the pupils' received and their subsequent post-sixteen transitions. Teachers predicted that non-academic boys would occupy jobs with responsibility whereas girls were theoretically placed in stereotyped professions and seen to marry quickly.

In contrast to the opinions of some teachers within Mac an Ghaill (1994) and Stanworth's (1987) research, Stevens *et al.* (1992) observed that boys and girls had similar educational aspirations to finish secondary school and enter college. However, labour market participation orientation was different with girls planning to work part-time and intermittently. Riddell (1992) supports this finding, arguing that working-class girls saw their future as a struggle to balance home and work with the major burden of domestic responsibilities placed on them not their husbands. Possibly in light of the perceived gender-role conflict, Stevens *et al.* (1992) found that girls with high aspirations planned to delay marriage; however, they also planned to return to work after having children, placing importance on having a career. Wallace (1986) and Mac an Ghaill (1994) also contended that girls saw employment as more desirable than domestic status. Nevertheless, Wallace (1986) argued that girls still saw men as breadwinners and recognised the pressure placed on them by society to fulfil the wife and mother role. Poole (1983) found this to be true in that expectations of success were altered by the family and community's attitude to male and female roles, resulting in girls having lower aspirations despite their higher academic achievement and a desire to enter gender-

stereotyped roles. Male and female fourteen-year-olds were drawn to different jobs according to their perceived rewards.

Males were more likely to exhibit extrinsic reasons for job choice (rewards, status) than were girls who showed marked preference for people-orientated aspects of job choice (helpful to others, meet interesting people). (ibid., p. 204)

Stanworth (1987) argued that due to boys' prominence in classroom interaction the sexual hierarchy is regenerated in which boys are dominant. This can lead to girls doubting their capabilities and boys estimating girls to be educationally inferior (ibid., p. 209). Stanworth (1983) contended that school produces women who are not equipped to enter the labour market and believe fulfilment is possible in domestic responsibilities in the home. However, it must be remembered that many studies mentioned occurred in a period of fewer labour market opportunities for women. Nevertheless, recent research has found that boys were cavalier in their assumptions of female inferiority, describing girls as 'stupid' and 'sillier than boys' (McDowell, 2000: 406).

Weiner *et al.* (1997) in asking 'is the future female?' examined the fact that boys are falling behind girls in qualifications and jobs. Weiner *et al.* (1997) contend, although it does not appear that boys' lower exam results are a consequence of girls' successes, that the prominent debate is on male underachievement (Weiner, 1997: 620). The discussion does have class and race dimensions. Middle-class boys are seen to be failing due to attitude and culture while working-class and black boys are perceived as a threat to law and order (Weiner *et al.*, 1997). However, Arnot, David and Weiner (1999) argue that local level differences need to be considered to help explain variations in achievement between classes and between the sexes.

The extent to which one ethnic group, one social class or either sex is represented in the highest or lowest achieving educational group depends, to a large extent, on local context and conditions. Thus, national patterns and trends need also to be reinterpreted to accommodate local social and labour-market conditions. (Arnot *et al.*, 1999: 25)

The reason for girls overtaking boys in their GCSE grades could be attributed to the change in school culture where girls can now prosper. Arnot *et al.* (1999) argue

that schools have failed to challenge and transform traditional notions of masculinity while offering girls the opportunity to adapt to new social and economic circumstances. This, coupled with the change in the labour market offering more opportunities to young women, allows work to be combined with domestic responsibilities while young male employment opportunities have relatively decreased.

There is little evidence to suggest that men and women will ever be equal and this is apparent as female equality is seen as 'enormously threatening' and damaging to male youth (Weiner *et al.*, 1997: 629). McDowell (2000) comments that instead of girls' achievements being applauded, they are seen as being symptomatic of a crisis in masculinity.

4.6 Peer group membership and post-sixteen transitions

The current research argues that there are many influences on the post-sixteen decision, including the school, family, gender and as will now be considered, the friendship group. A great deal of time is devoted to friendships during adolescence (Cotterell, 1996). Peers can influence choices and parental influence diminishes as young people mature (Bosma *et al.*, 1996). Cotterell (1996) argues that peer groups are as essential in shaping the young person's personality and for social development, as the family was during childhood.

The media and politicians often take a negative view when discussing youth culture, which is seen as something dangerous (Giroux, 1996). When discussing adolescence, Cotterell argues that it is often implied:

that the individual is not entirely a free agent, but is a product of social relationships which exert influences on beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour, and take for granted that the person is only partly aware of the extent to which his/her behaviour, attitudes and beliefs are shaped by social forces. (Cotterell, 1996: 101–2)

Youth cultures exist within secondary schools due to large numbers of young people coming together apart from wider society allowing a social world to

develop. Cotterell (1996) describes three types of adolescent peer group; cliques, crowds and gangs. Cliques are small groups of the same age and usually same sex; a lot of time is spent together and they may dress similarly. A crowd forms when a number of cliques come together; activities are carried out providing the opportunity to develop social skills. A gang is more expressive than a task-orientated crowd and it is this particular peer group format that has attracted media attention. The gang can provide an important reference point for how to act and dress for its members and may denote certain activities as the norm or undesirable.

Willis (1977) emphasised the importance of 'school' subcultures in determining post-sixteen destinations and producing/reproducing class inequalities. The entrenched opposition by groups of working-class boys to authority Willis (1977) termed the 'counter-school culture' where an alternative value system is forged in opposition to the dominant. However, Willis argued that the working-class lads culture was more than just a resistance to school.

It is, of course, the larger class dimension which gives the working class counter school culture its special edge and resonance in terms of style, its particular force and opposition and its importance as an experiential preparation for entry into working class jobs. (ibid., p. 57)

In Willis's (1977) research, a definite pro- and anti-school culture was recognised, termed the 'ear'oles' and the 'lads' respectively. The ear'oles, defined by the lads because of the former's preference for listening and never doing, were more work-orientated during lessons, attentive, and respectful to the teachers. The lads, on the other hand, openly exhibited boredom and Willis describes a 'caged resentment which always stops just short of outright confrontation' (ibid., pp. 12–13). The lads rejected school as their culture denied that school knowledge was useful. There was scepticism over the value of qualifications and what they would have to sacrifice to get them. Ball (1981) found a similar group of anti-school adolescents who rejected education as a means of achieving their goals and whose value systems of self-determinacy, collective behaviour and physical prowess clashed with school values of individual effort, competition with others and academic prowess (Ball, 1981: 117):

the anti-school pupils at Beachside who were normally viewed as failures by their teachers, can alternatively be seen as rationally weighing up the value of school in terms of returns to their immediate goals and life plans, accepting those parts of the experience of schooling that they saw as valuable and rejecting the rest. (ibid., p. 118)

The lads group, as identified by Willis (1977), allowed an interaction with the wider community meaning information could be passed around and this made school seem unrelated to working-class reality.

One should not underestimate the degree to which the 'lads' want to escape from school – the 'transition' *to* work would be better termed the 'tumble' *out* of school – and the lure of the prospect of money and cultural membership amongst 'real men' beckons very seductively as refracted through their own culture. (ibid., p. 100; original emphasis)

The 'lads' did not expect intrinsic satisfaction and through school they built up a resistance to mental labour. Gaskell (1992) in a Canadian study of seventeen- and eighteen-year-old school-leavers, nevertheless found school-leavers wanted work that was interesting and involving, and where money was not the main priority. However, the unrewarding employment the school-leavers often found themselves in was justified in terms of the money. Like Willis's lads (1977), money equalled consumption, independence and adult status.

Because it was paid, it could demand more, and the demands themselves were taken as a sign that the youths were held in higher esteem than they were at school. The calculations were thus complex. The job provided money, something schools could only promise. The demands of the job were legitimate because they were paid for, even though the youths were disappointed in the quality of their jobs. (Gaskell, 1992: 63)

McDowell (2000), following Willis's study, researched low-achieving white boys in the final year of compulsory education to see if the changing structure of employment had transformed the way they thought about themselves and their employment opportunities. The 23 boys interviewed were confident about their employment prospects and were eager to leave school and enter some form of training, only two intended to go straight into waged work. Like Willis's (1977) lads they expected to be able to enter traditional male industries but unlike Willis's findings, they did not expect to be able to enter this form of work automatically on leaving education. Weis's (1990) research, carried out in the context of a de-industrialising area of America, also found differences to Willis. Weis did not find

the whole-scale rejection of education exhibited by the 'lads' or even a comparable group. Instead male students possessed a more positive attitude to education, possibly linked to the factory closures and the belief that education could help them gain 'good jobs' (Weis, 1990: 24). However, the male students were not necessarily involved in the process of learning and merely desired to 'pass'.

McRobbie and Garber (1976) argued there was little research on girl groups, marginalised within male research. The most visible girl gang phenomenon has been the teenybopper with the girl/pop idol relationship (McRobbie and Garber, 1976). This is a marketed culture aimed at ten- to fifteen year-old girls and based in the bedroom. McRobbie and Garber (1976) contended that this obsession with an idol could be a reaction against the control exercised over girls at school, creating a defensive solidarity and alienating teachers. However, the girl/idol relationship is still subordinate and in effect directs the girl towards 'real' relationships and marriage.

The small, structured and highly manufactured space that is available for ten to fifteen year old girls to create a personal and autonomous area seems to be offered only on the understanding that these strategies also symbolise a future general subordination – as well as a present one. (ibid., p. 221)

Girls' relationships at school are an important determining factor in post-sixteen transitions that can further enhance gender inequalities. This is demonstrated in the work of Meyenn (1979, 1980), which focused on inter-pupil relationships, researching a twelve/thirteen-year-old cohort in a comprehensive school. Similar to Griffin (1985), Meyenn found it hard to locate girl groups based on available models supplied by research on boys (Willis, 1977). Meyenn (1980) argued that for girls the degree of involvement in teenage culture is important for distinguishing their attitude to school. In this way, groups can be distinguished by uniform, jewellery and make-up use. The girls also distinguished themselves from each other and viewed other groups as immature or 'teachers' pets'. Ball (1981) argued that pupils' management of self contributes to status and popularity. Ball maintained that higher-band pupils dressed more uniformly while less academic pupils favoured a fashionable appearance.

Meyenn (1980) argued that girl groups are smaller than male groups with a range of three to six members. Unlike male groups, there is an equality of status among the members and a high supportive role. However, like research within male groups, Meyenn found that peer norms affected school performance. The 'quiet girls' accepted their lower academic status and 'thickness' (Meyenn, 1980: 128) and created an alternative value system where it was more fun to be the way they were than academically successful, thus dictating an early education exit. However, teachers also formed different expectations by group so that a lower standard of work was acceptable from particular peer groups. Pupils with similar scores could be placed in different academic streams according to peer group membership and the future directions associated with peer group norms.

Meyenn (1980) found that female peer networks mediated the effect of class and family pressures on the girls. There were three responses to this; first, the girls accepted their future domestic roles and this was found in the 'nice girls' group who accepted early marriage and domesticity. Secondly, the 'science girls', a higher academic level group, rejected some of the pressures and had more ambition and higher aspirations intending to have a career. Thirdly, the 'P.E. girls' ignored the pressures; they looked to their group to provide fun and rejected the school values and achievements. In Willis's (1977) case, this would have been the 'lads' group or girl gang 'The Posse' within Mac an Ghail's (1994) research. However, unlike either of these groups, the P.E. girls were largely academically successful.

The continual interaction and reinforcement of attitudes within the group plus the explanation of academic success or failure of other groups results in a locking-in process which is continually reinforcing the performance hierarchy and the processes of stratification within the school and this, of course, may relate to later placing within the occupational structure. (Meyenn, 1980: 141)

Measor and Sikes (1992) argue that the inter-pupil relationship is integral to the school experience. Friends fill the emotional and social role as attachment to the home weakens. Within both male and female groups, gender socialisation takes place. 'Appropriate' male or female behaviour is enforced by social and normative rules and the application of sanctions. Measor and Sikes (1992) argue that working-class girls are more likely to 'turn off' from school and enter deviant

youth culture groups. Their deviancy is passive with an unobtrusive, non-academic role taken. Measor and Sikes (1992) question why this happens.

It may be that girls never lose sight of the fact that there is always another job for women apart from paid work. They do not see their futures as one in which they are permanent members of the paid labour force. They accept the message they get from home, school and the mass media that suggest a home-based role for women. Education therefore has very little value for them. (ibid., p.100)

Measor and Sikes (1992) further argue:

They may use the fact of being a girl as a means to escape from the pressure to be academically successful. They retreat into the safer domain of marriage and domesticity, which they assert provides greater fulfilment. (ibid., p. 102)

Measor and Sikes (1992) argue that some adolescent girls are interested in developing their femininity and school may offer goals not allowing this, seen in the suppression of femininity by school uniform, prompting them to leave school. Academic success may also be thought to be unfeminine, lowering the chances of finding a boyfriend. Griffin (1985) found this to be a preoccupation among her 'typical girls'. Measor and Woods (1984) suggested that academically successful working-class girls had less friends and experienced more criticism from their peers.

One way that working-class girls resist the oppressive and class-based characteristics of education is to assert their 'femaleness' (McRobbie, 1978: 104). McRobbie contended that girls bring their sexuality and physical maturity into the classroom to force teachers to take notice of them but in doing so effectively comply with the role society has created for them.

Marriage, family life, fashion and beauty all contribute massively to this feminine anti-school culture and, in doing so, nicely illustrate the contradictions inherent in so-called oppositional activities. Are the girls in the end not simply doing exactly what is required of them – and if this *is* the case, then could it not be convincingly argued that it is their own culture which itself is the most effective agent of social control for girls, pushing them into compliance with that role which a whole range of institutions in capitalist society also, but less effectively, directs them towards? (ibid., p. 104; original emphasis)

However, McRobbie (1978) found that working-class girls did not always look forward to married life. There were concerns about violence and jealousy but

marriage was still seen as conferring status and girls were expected to marry and have children. But the girls relied on their solidarity with friends, particularly 'best friends' as a 'saving' force (ibid., p. 98) and immersed themselves in the idea of romance, as pedalled by teenage magazines.

Weis (1990) in a later study in America contends that the 'Freeway girls' placed obtaining a wage as a primary goal above the ideology of romance, contradicting McRobbie's (1978) much earlier findings. The construction of a home and family identity was secondary to a career and wage labour identity. The girls stressed the need for independence and did not see marriage as an escape. Weis (1990) argues that the Freeway girls were beginning to critique the expectation of having to fulfil the wife and mother role with a subordinate place in the labour market.

They understand, to the point of being able to articulate, the fact that too many negative consequences result if you depend on men to the exclusion of depending on yourself, and that this means you must engage in long-term wage labor. They do not suggest the 'part-time' work solution and/or flights into fantasy futures offered by girls in previous studies (ibid., p. 78).

4.7 School effect on post-sixteen transitions

The following discussion considers changes in the compulsory education sector, including the move to market principles and the subsequent impact on pupils' achievement affecting post-sixteen transitions. This recognises that the school operates within a policy environment which, much like the local labour market, is affected by global change. The school effect is considered extensively within the analyses as a key influence on post-sixteen transitions.

At a structural level, the education system has undergone vast change. This has included the introduction of comprehensives in the 1960s to try to provide an equality of education. More recently, the 1988 Education Reform Act introduced market principles into the education sector with school league tables first appearing in 1992. Parents are now allowed an element of choice in what school their children attend, in theory increasing equality. However, this move has further disadvantaged the most 'at risk' families and deepened the class divide. Inequality

can occur due to parents applying to send their children to what they perceive to be the best school (Davies, 1999). These schools become inundated with more application forms than they have places and they can begin to select pupils. If they can afford to, families move house to get into the better school catchment areas, investing in their children by way of investing economic capital. Crace (1999), through interviews with estate agents in London and the North-West of England, found that house prices were rising in 'good' catchment areas by 10–20%. Ball (1994) argues:

I want to suggest that in an education market (a) the strategic processes of choice systematically disadvantage working class families and (b) the link between choices and resources (via per capita funding) disadvantages working class schools and communities (ramifying and interacting with our collective consumption inequalities). In other words, the operation and effects of an education market benefit certain class groups and fractions to the detriment and disadvantage of others. (Ball, 1994: 117–18)

Schools that do not achieve high academically are forced to take pupils with lower academic ability, starting a vicious circle where the schools' prospects decrease. Schools with lower educational output have a higher proportion of working-class pupils, pupils with special needs and more students from homes with serious deprivation. Differentiation of schools in class intake, local labour market and educational performance are important in the direction taken upon leaving compulsory education by their pupils. In support of this, Andrews and Bradley (1997) found that schools with high academic achievement had pupils who were more likely to enter further non-vocational education. The converse was also true:

The chance of becoming unemployed on leaving school is greatest for the least able, especially those with no formal qualifications, and for those who have been educated in larger schools with lower academic achievements. (ibid., p. 407)

Unfortunately, when the families that can afford to move area to enable their children to attend 'better' schools, the area from which they have left can become more deprived. Intelligent children of disadvantaged families are 'creamed off' by neighbouring 'better' schools. This further hinders the remaining schools. Davies (1999) argues:

The evidence is overwhelming that the single most important factor in a school's performance is its intake: bright children who perform well can lift the performance of others around them. (Davies, 1999: 4)

This argument could be seen to mirror aspects of the underclass argument. Instead of an employment focus, education prospects cause increasing deprivation in the neighbourhood.

It is performance in the (16+) GCSE examinations which has the most direct bearing on the future economic success or failure of an area's population. (Gordon 1996: 409)

Poorer families are restrained by geographical location and are unable to afford to send their children to schools too far away. Schools in deprived areas have lower academic attainment; this is seen particularly in inner-city schools with a decreased percentage of pupils leaving with GCSEs (Gordon, 1996). School performance is an indicator of future economic success with the class divides entrenched throughout the education system. Class, school choice, school effect and future occupational choice are therefore interrelated.

Working-class families' secondary school choice is not only restrained by geographical location but also a lack of knowledge about the educational system. The middle class in possession of cultural capital are far more inclined to engage in the education market and possess the knowledge to exploit it to the full (Pugsley, 1998; Reay, 1998a, 1998b; Ball, 1994). The government rhetoric of increasing educational choice for all does not translate into reality. Pugsley (1998), speaking about middle-class parents and the transition to higher education, argues:

The heritage of the cultural capital of their own post-compulsory educational experiences allowed them to be much more informed not only in terms of the higher education system itself but also they could more clearly appreciate the relationship between educational qualifications life chances. (Pugsley, 1998: 82-3)

Reay's (1997, 1998a, 1998b) research with parents from both working- and middle-class backgrounds, and those ambivalent about their class status, also demonstrated a class difference in interaction with their children's schooling. Reay (1998b)

concludes that class is not just an economic condition but can be seen as a mindset influencing attitudes and actions.

While I am not asserting that parental involvement was a straightforward, easy process for middle-class mothers, it was only the still and once working-class women who talked in terms of high levels of frustration, anxiety, and an inability to institute a dialogue with teachers in which they felt their concerns were being heard. (Reay, 1997: 230)

Lareau (1989, 1997) argues that the degree of comfort with the school is due to the amount of information middle-class culture provides about schooling, stressing the interdependence of the home and education. Middle-class parents give their children an advantage by providing extra help in key areas in the home. They also understand the school system in such a way that they can acquire extra resources for their children if necessary. Working-class culture places emphasis on the family and the independence of education and the home. The difference in involvement between working- and middle-class parents in their children's education was interpreted by teachers as symptomatic of the amount of importance that the parents placed on education. However, parents from working- and middle-class schools saw education as important and the only difference was the level of aspiration for their children.

The system of choice presupposes a set of values which gives primacy to comparison, mobility and long-term planning; it ignores those cultures which give primacy to the values of community and locality. (Ball, 1994: 119)

New targets for all schools include at least 20% of all pupils in secondary schools gaining at least five A*–C GCSEs by 2004; 25% must reach this standard by 2006. David Blunkett, the former Labour education minister introducing these targets, highlighted schools with similar socio-economic profiles achieving differing amounts of success. In doing this he argued at the National Union of Teachers Conference 2000:

There are cynics who say that school performance is all about socio-economics and in the areas these schools are located in. No child is pre-ordained by class or by gender or by ethnic group or by their home life, to fail. (reported by Cassidy, 2000)

This speech created a backlash from the National Union of Teachers who claim that blaming the school and its teachers for pupil failure makes conditions worse for the school. In the light of research displayed within this literature review, it would seem perverse to ignore the effect of class and other family factors on educational achievement.

4.8 The negative influence of truancy on post-sixteen life chances

Truancy operates at the individual level of influences on post-sixteen destinations. Its occurrence relates to the pupil's attitude to education, family structure, peer group membership and school effect, all aspects that are discussed later in the analyses. Truancy depletes the amount of human capital collected and this impairs the chances of a successful labour market transition. The outcomes of truancy are under-researched, particularly in relation to youth unemployment (Hibbett, Fogelman and Manor, 1990).

Truancy may show the presence of an anti-education attitude indicative of an early education exit and increased risk of unemployment. In the year 2000, only 25% of persistent truants and excluded pupils entered full-time further education and a similar proportion of each group became unemployed (DfEE, 2001a). Hibbett *et al.* (1990) found former truants at the age of 23 had lower status occupations, less stable career patterns and were more likely to experience unemployment for a longer period than non-truanting former pupils with similar academic attainment. Truants had not 'outgrown' school; their path into employment was not a smooth transition and they experienced more job changes and less job satisfaction.

Truancy has always attracted attention in the media and through the political drives to combat it (Pritchard and Cox, 1998). The government allocated a total of £527m up to 2002 for tackling truancy and exclusions. Gleeson (1994) comments:

According to successive Secretaries of State for Education, truancy is now so widespread as to confirm a crisis of schooling, reflecting a breakdown in family, education and work discipline. (Gleeson, 1994: 15)

Attempts to decrease truancy have included the provision of the Education Welfare Service which has the conflicting role of care and control, i.e. whether to remove the truant child from the family home or to try and control them within it – including the possibility of prosecuting parents for the child's non-attendance (Pritchard *et al.*, 1998). Gleeson (1992) highlights the paradoxical nature of reforms within the last few decades to combat truancy. These have included measures to aid young people into work and get them under the control of employers and parents. This represents a paradox. Initially compulsory education was founded to get the nations' young out of factories and away from the influence of employers and family and under state control.

Truancy is persistently explained in behavioural terms, for example due to boredom and academic underachievement. Nevertheless, there is little understanding about who truants are and why they take this action. Whilst this research does not comprehensively investigate this question, it does consider school attendance as important in the likely success of post-sixteen transitions. Gleeson (1994) maintains that behavioural explanations have been favoured to the extent of ignoring social, political and economic factors.

Thus, another way of conceptualising truancy is as a form of social exclusion, not solely or functionally linked with school but with the ecology of an area, catchment or neighbourhood, involving an intricate balance between family, housing, welfare agency, health, recreational, leisure and labour market factors, particularly in inner city areas and on fringe estates, where the majority of truancy occurs. (Gleeson, 1994: 16)

Schostak (1983) blamed the maladjusted school for truancy arguing pupils have no individual control and cannot develop initiative. Therefore, truancy could be due to the pupils demonstrating resistance to a dominant authority. However, truancy is not always a rejection of school but can show 'informal student mobility': the pupil is able to get out of class to pursue their unofficial curriculum such as smoking or 'having a laff' (Willis, 1977: 29).

Explanatory variables of truancy include low parental valuation of educational performance, type of house tenure, number of siblings and family structure (Bosworth, 1992). Truancy can also occur due to the pressure placed on parents to

show they care for their children. It may appear more feasible for parents to keep their children off school rather than send them there with poor quality uniform and no money for school dinners/trips (Gleeson, 1994). The young person may also need to be at home to help care for younger siblings.

For families experiencing the combined effects of poverty and unemployment, self-exclusion has become the principal strategy for dealing with the day-to-day problems which they face. (ibid., p. 17)

The new market policy on education adversely affects the working class and already at risk groups. Truancy damages the standard of the school as removing its ability to compete and achieve an even balance of pupil ability. The 'better' schools enrol more advantaged children who are less likely to be truant and expel or transfer 'problem' children. Disadvantaged schools come to have a disproportionate number of pupils who are likely to be truant, worsening the school placement in the league tables and reinforcing the circle of disadvantage (Gleeson, 1994). Pupils attending these schools are more likely to leave school at sixteen under-qualified and 'at risk' of unemployment. Gleeson (1994) therefore argues that government policies are the real problem along with poverty and unemployment. It is not possible to place the blame on families and schools for truancy. Different tactics are needed to get truants back into the routine of education, and fines, benefit cuts and parental imprisonment are not the answer.

4.9 The changing nature of careers guidance

The careers service within Britain's comprehensive secondary schools has evolved within the last few years. It has had to adapt to the changing labour market with the relative decrease in the manufacturing industry supplying some working-class school-leavers with employment (Jarvis, 1994; Green, 1997) and the rise of a credential society (Collins, 1979), requiring qualifications for many basic employment and training opportunities. In addition, the careers service has had to keep abreast of changes in the further education sector and the provision of training schemes, whether government run or privately funded. This has created a different

context for careers advice to the young working class and this will now be outlined as pertinent to the later analyses.

In taking on board structural changes in the labour market, the careers service have adopted an inclusion role and the perceived relevance by the users of the service may have evolved. During the era of Willis's research (1977) there existed high youth employment and the applicability of a careers interview to the working class may have been low. Willis (1977) argued that working-class lads made little differentiation between types of manual labour and focused more upon entering work than the actual occupation chosen. The lads rejected careers advice just as they had rejected the utility of school knowledge. They believed qualifications were unimportant and thought that experience, knowing about the world and being able to demonstrate you could do the job were more important.

In terms of actual job choice it is the 'lads' culture and not the official careers material which provides the most influential guides for the future. (ibid., p. 95)

Willis argued that career choice was a middle-class construct and other factors were more important in determining occupation (ibid., p. 99). Griffin's (1985) study in the 1980s, when mass youth unemployment had become part of the labour market context, stressed the importance of family and friends in providing a job information network. This could lead to the dismissal of careers advice as irrelevant.

At the end of the 1990s and into the new millennium, the labour market can now support some school-leavers and training schemes exist for many occupations. However, the transition to employment or training can be problematic for working-class school-leavers, especially if they are minimally qualified and possess little labour market information. Careers guidance can be vital to match aspirations with a correct route and to facilitate a successful post-sixteen transition whether into training, employment or continued education.

The changes in the employment structure and further education and training opportunities have prompted the school careers service to alter their goals for

guidance. Killeen (1996) believes the careers interview can help the individual develop a long-term view. This applies particularly to the minimum age school-leaver helping the young person to process information quicker, have a realistic reservation wage and direct them towards the forms of employment they are likely to attain. The careers service can also focus on coping strategies for those school-leavers who may become unemployed, for example, which benefits to apply for or which training scheme may be applicable (Hollands, 1990). However, careers interviews in areas of high unemployment may do little more than ready the school-leaver for a training scheme. Careers guidance therefore may be viewed as a waste of time, increasing pupils' feelings of inadequacy (Watts, 1996). Donohue and Patton (1998), Griffin (1985) and Roberts (1975), writing within different eras of youth employment, argue that careers guidance could help aspirations to be more 'realistic', adjusting school-leavers' aspirations to ensure that they are in line with local labour market requirements. If followed, these guidelines may reduce the amount of time spent unemployed.

Careers guidance policy in schools now involves targeting at fourteen-years-old those pupils considered to be at risk of leaving education early or at sixteen. This would include persistent truants who can disappear from official records. In some cases, if the pupils are deemed not to be suited to school, other provision can be made. This includes transferring 'at risk' pupils to college, enabling them to enter training or to participate in a mixture of part-time school and work. This action is government sanctioned from fourteen-years-old. The careers service has in this way tried to help disadvantaged young people identify goals and include them into mainstream society. This early inclusion focus takes into account the fact that careers services are often unable to contact unemployed school-leavers after they exit education (McCreedy, 2000). Early intervention is necessary to preclude a possible life of disadvantage. The New Deal targets young adults aged 18–24 but McCrystal, Higgins and Percy (2001) argue that it may be necessary to start targeting earlier to prevent 'at risk' young people becoming excluded.

Careers guidance process can have huge implications:

Careers education and guidance is a profoundly political process. It operates at the interface between the individual and society, between self and opportunity, between aspiration and realism. It facilitates the allocation of life chances. Within a society in which life chances are unequally distributed, it faces the issue of whether it serves to reinforce such inequalities or to reduce them. (Watts, 1996a: 351)

Within this quote, Watts (1996a) addresses many issues. The 'ideology' of guidance is that it can advise those with a high number of opportunities, for example white middle-class males. It can also maximise opportunities for young people whose options are limited, including ethnic minority groups and working-class, minimum-age school-leavers (Watts, 1996a). However, careers guidance could reproduce inequality, allocating the working-class school-leaver low-grade employment or urging them into training instead of pushing them into academic pursuits. The classic study by Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) argued that careers interviews separated future college students and those destined for the labour market. Nevertheless, even though careers guidance may have a channelling function (Griffin, 1985) perhaps this is what is required for an unqualified school-leaver with few social contacts to help them find a job. By leaving the young person to aim for employment they have no hope of getting, they are more likely to become and remain unemployed.

Watts (1996b) argues that there are many beneficiaries to careers guidance. First, there are the immediate advantages to the individual equipping them with the knowledge to make decisions and maximise their potential. Secondly, there are intermediate advantages to education and training providers. Guidance increases the effectiveness of these programmes, linking the individual to the appropriate program. Future employers can then benefit from properly qualified, motivated workers. The final and ultimate beneficiary is society as a whole. Guidance allows optimum use of resources and the young person becomes instilled with social values. The Government can therefore raise economic efficiency and lower labour market failures and this arguably improves social functioning (Watts, 1996). This view appears ideological in that there is a gap between rhetoric and reality and that overall, improving post-sixteen career choices for some does not change the labour market.

4.10 Literature review summary

The literature review within Chapters 2, 3 and 4 has sought to outline the structural and more individual level factors affecting post-compulsory education directions into education, training, employment or unemployment. Initially the role of choice was discussed and this will remain a central concept throughout the thesis. It was contested whether the economics-based rational choice model used in much policy formation was valid in explaining the post-compulsory education transition for young working-class people. Alternative examples to traditional rational choice were provided, recognising the cultural and individual level constraints placed upon school-leavers (Simon, 1957; Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). A review of the labour market transformation demonstrated the changing context that post-sixteen decisions are now enacted within, on a global and local level. The debates sparked by the changing labour market were also reviewed considering youth unemployment, the 'underclass' and the importance of various forms of capital.

By adopting a more individual focus, processes occurring within the family were considered for their effect on post-sixteen transitions; particularly, class and attitude transmission and the differing influence of family composition on young people's attitudes. The interaction between class, gender and education was then reviewed, outlining how it can cause the reproduction of gender and class inequalities. A young person's interaction with their peers can have far-reaching consequences for their post-sixteen futures and this was discussed. The transformation of the education system to embrace market principles was deliberated with regard to its repercussions followed by a discussion on the negative impact of truancy upon post-sixteen life chances. The changing labour market and training/further education sector have prompted an evolution in careers guidance for it to meet young people's guidance needs. The utility of this service over the last 25 years was therefore considered.

The literature review provides a basis from which research questions can be identified through revealing deficits in substantive and theoretical knowledge. It

also introduces the research context of the questions. Working-class school-leavers are more prone than their middle-class and ethnic minority peers to leave school at sixteen to enter the labour market. They do this despite possessing few if any qualifications in an era of declining entry-level employment. Some working-class school-leavers are therefore at risk of unemployment, social exclusion and long-term deprivation. They are also a contributing factor to the skills crisis affecting Britain's ability to compete in the international arena.

There exists a problem of understanding the young persons' intention in choosing their post-compulsory education destinations. From a review of 'choice' literature and theory the decision process either for entrance to post-sixteen education or into the labour market would appear not to conform to the economics-based rational choice model often assumed by policy design and implementation. Indeed, there is little research considering conceptions of choice in post-compulsory education transitions. Adoption of economic rationality within policy-making has led to schemes such as the education maintenance allowance designed to financially aid disadvantaged young people through post-sixteen education without a recognition of non-utility maximisation principles that the young person may be operating within. The school-leaver may be making a pragmatic choice to enter the labour market after considering the known and acceptable alternatives. This may have an impact upon the effectiveness of the education maintenance allowance.

There is little research concerning the difference between aspirations before leaving school and the reality of destinations after exiting compulsory education. A longitudinal analysis of this could reveal unsuccessful transitions to be a result of young people possessing a deficit of accurate information on the available and acceptable post-sixteen routes or an inaccurate perception of labour market opportunities. However, this explanation would seemingly ascribe to the rational choice perspective that young people make economically rational decisions based on a full array of information. It could be that social and cultural factors are involved in the transition from compulsory education, enabling some young people to achieve their aspirations while other school leavers face a series of compromises and false-starts.

The literature review considers social exclusion in relation to youth unemployment and the 'underclass' and indicates appropriate methods for researching and analysing disadvantaged groups. Previous research has found these groups are under-represented in surveys and official statistics. Therefore, any methodology used needs to be sensitive to the possible bias that can occur and be designed in such a way as to increase the chances of gaining access to excluded groups. There is a need for qualitative research on the decision process of school-leavers to characterise accurately how choices are made and in doing so how inequalities in post-sixteen transitions can come to exist.

Addressing the deficits in knowledge revealed by the literature review concerning white, working-class, post-sixteen transitions from compulsory education may have policy implications and will contribute to substantive knowledge concerning the relative importance of various factors in this decision and also substantive and theoretical knowledge on the role of choice. The literature review points to the following questions to be asked:

1. What is the relative importance of various factors affecting young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market before leaving compulsory education?
2. Do young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market influence their subsequent post-sixteen directions?
3. Is there a difference between expectations of intended direction before leaving school and actual destinations?
4. Is it possible to identify intervention practices that could aid the transition to post-compulsory education, training or employment?

5 Philosophy and methodology

5.1 Introduction

The research questions ask what the relative importance is of factors affecting young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market before they leave school and if these influence their subsequent post-sixteen destinations. There is a particular focus upon young people choosing to enter the labour market and the role of choice. In addition, there is awareness of any discrepancy between the intended directions before the pupils left school and the actual destinations achieved shortly after the end of compulsory education. To gain an understanding of the cohorts' post-sixteen motivation and to produce valid and reliable results it was necessary to ensure that an appropriate methodology was adopted. The needs of the question were considered, in this case the necessity of understanding while retaining the ability to locate the research within a wider framework. This led to the adoption of a multi-method approach, drawing from quantitative and qualitative techniques.

This chapter outlines as part of the contextual influences, some of the philosophical tenets informing quantitative and qualitative methodologies before a discussion of the philosophical position taken by the research. This reflects the early stages of the research process. When the methodology was being formulated, there was a discussion of the relative merits and epistemological positions of a variety of techniques. The consideration of these allowed the utility of various approaches to be assessed in relation to the research and recognition of the fruitfulness of using quantitative and qualitative techniques in the same research design. The research does not view quantitative and qualitative methodologies as fitting within mutually exclusive paradigms and argues that methodological eclecticism adds strength to the overall methodology and to the credibility of substantive contributions to knowledge and conclusions. The philosophical positioning of quantitative and qualitative approaches allows the rationale behind the philosophical stance taken to be justified. It also locates the range of techniques applied in the research,

exposing their relative strengths and weaknesses. Following a consideration of these aspects, there is a justification of the techniques selected.

5.2 How philosophy informed the research methodology

5.2.1 Philosophy and quantitative methods

Quantitative methodology largely originates from within positivism. Through the examination of the philosophy's basic tenets, it is possible to understand the basis of the quantitative approach. Positivism, as posited by Comte (1970), argues that empirical science is the only foundation for valid knowledge – thus denoting its epistemological approach. Positivism argues that both the social and natural world have an objective social reality, possible to capture free of bias or influence from social context. Due to this stance, quantitative research can become preoccupied with ill-construed concepts rather than theory (Bryman, 1988). This leads to the social world being broken into manageable packages to allow measurement and the concept's origin ignored.

Practitioners of quantitative methodology argue that its research exhibits a logical structure with theory, objectives and methods determined before the research commences. However, Bryman (1988) argues that research is not always so theory driven and the linearity of quantitative methodology can be immobile, ignoring serendipity.

Quantitative research conveys a view of social reality which is static in that it tends to neglect the impact and role of change in social life. (Bryman, 1988: 101)

Quantitative data collection traditionally occurs by survey, structured interviews, experimental methods or the review of official statistics and documents. Contact with participants is kept to a minimum and the researcher maintains an outsider perspective, observing the social world using a preordained framework (Bryman, 1988). After statistical analysis, a previously formed hypothesis is confirmed or rejected according to a statistical significance level. This may be taken to indicate

a causal relationship depending on the nature of the research that could be exploratory or descriptive. Quantitative data is potentially comparable, verifiable and possible to replicate. It produces research findings that are arguably value free and representative of the research population due to stringent sampling methods. Lincoln and Guba (2000) have criticised classic generalisation assumptions as deterministic and political, suggesting that what works for one case works for all. They also argue that generalisations are dependent on the assumption of freedom from time and context. Lincoln and Guba contend that it is difficult to imagine a context-free case and the dynamic nature of society means that any analysis will quickly become dated and useful only as history.

Realism arguably originates from within the positivist/empiricist stance (Gergen, 1998). However, realism departs from positivism over some key tenets. Realism does not claim that there is an absolute truth. Knowledge is viewed as fallible due to the 'theory-laden' nature of observation – whereby the particular theory adopted in research can influence the way the phenomena are seen. It is therefore difficult to argue that outcomes represent an absolute. This argument runs the risk of sliding into the truth and relativism debate – where all knowledge is relative and dependent upon context and the individual. However, by recognising knowledge is fallible and theory laden it strengthens the realist position. Sayer (1992) argues:

For it is precisely because the world does not yield to just any kind of expectation that we believe it exists *independently of us and is not simply a figment of our imagination*. If there were no cases of our statements being confounded, if wishful thinking worked, there would be no reason for being a realist, and we could say that truth was purely relative to our conceptual scheme. (Sayer, 1992: 67)

Realists contend that the social world is made up of tangible structures capable of generating events. Nevertheless, realism rejects mechanistic theories of social reproduction: the idea that a dominant order imposes a structure and the rest of society passively complies. This position is carried through into the thesis arguing young people have a degree of choice even if it is within cultural and structural confines.

Any conception of society – whether lay or scientific – which treats people as passive carriers of knowledge, rather than as agents or producers, is doomed to misrepresent both its object and itself. (ibid., p. 19)

In a departure from positivism, realism contends that the model of causation in natural science applied to social science is not necessarily accurate. Realists such as Sayer (1992) maintain that certain social structures exist that although having causal power do not regularly generate patterns. This has led to a move away from the positivist reliance on quantitative methodology to recognition of qualitative methods. These focus more on social relations, how they develop and what they are dependent upon and not just the outcomes. Weber (1962) addresses this aspect through his notion of ‘understanding’. Weber argues that all meaningful behaviour has an underlying intention. Through gaining an actual (intellectual) and explanatory (empathetic) understanding of this intention, insight can be provided that is impossible to gain through statistical measures. The environment of the research needs to be recognised to gain a full understanding of motivation behind a course of action (Weber, 1962).

Sayer (1992) recognises the strength of realism in suiting the method of study to the object of research. While qualitative methods can be used, knowledge must be open to empirical checking and through this, it can inform practice. Smith (1984) argues that according to realism, the account of a phenomenon obtained through ‘correct’ methods corresponds to the actual phenomena. Examining procedures behind data collection can assess any competing accounts. While the dynamics of researcher interaction are recognised, realism still contends that an objective reality exists and data corresponding to it can be collected. Through this, realist philosophy acknowledges the importance of context and interaction, and also the production of knowledge as a social activity.

5.2.2 Philosophy and qualitative methods

It could be maintained that qualitative research stems from a different philosophy to quantitative positivism. However, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that the

qualitative approach originally defined itself within positivism with its one-truth ideal and validation criteria.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative research as:

multimethod in focus, involving and interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative research studies things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2)

The importance of research occurring within the participant's natural context is a recurrent theme throughout qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that a holistic view must be taken to understand the participant rather than isolating them from their context. The qualitative researcher is also able to change direction within the research and incorporate unexpected events. This is an undoubted strength of the research paradigm. It views reality as 'processual' (Bryman, 1988: 103); identifying processes that link variables, and as socially constructed rather than in static quantitative terms.

The phenomenological perspective used within qualitative research also views social reality as relative, created by human interaction. Emphasis is placed on interpretation and the importance of subjective actions. This has led qualitative research largely to reject scientific methodology. Qualitative research disputes the idea that relationships are quantifiable and holds that objectivity is difficult. It is the tradition of qualitative research providing participants with a representative voice that has attracted the favour of marginalised groups. The current research considered a marginalised group of working-class young people whose opinions have been mainly ignored despite the wealth of political rhetoric surrounding them. In addition, unlike previous research such as Willis (1977), both boys and girls were studied.

The qualitative approach favours data collection methods including ethnographies, participant observation and unstructured interviews. These techniques reflect a certain epistemology, viewing the world as complex and not consisting of uniform processes. Berger and Luckmann (1967) argue that face-to-face interaction is the

most important form of interaction. Through social interaction in the 'vivid present' the actors' subjectivity becomes visible and the other person may become more real than your own self (ibid., p. 43). To examine your own subjectivity would require stopping the conversation and reflecting upon it. In an interview, the participant and researcher constantly react to each other, modifying language patterns in response to facial expressions, body language and other personal characteristics. Social reality is created and recreated within these situations. This is the social constructionist argument.

... the research process itself must be seen as socially constructing a world or worlds, with the researchers included in, rather than outside, the body of their own research. (Steier, 1991: 1-2)

Social constructionism reacts against the assumed superiority of scientific positivism. It takes a critical stance towards 'taken-for-granted' knowledge and rejects the notion of absolute truth and an objective social reality. Instead, social constructionist theory points to relativity and the importance of historical and cultural specificity (Burr, 1995). Knowledge is a social process and, through social interaction, versions of knowledge are sustained.

It is essential that the researcher practise reflexivity to examine what part he or she played in eliciting information. Social constructionists argue that personal characteristics are integral in communication and therefore information about researcher characteristics is vital in assessing the validity of information. One influencing researcher variable is gender.

The issue of gender arises because we (ethnographers) [sic] do fieldwork by establishing relationships, and by learning to see, think and be in another culture, and we do this as persons of a particular age, sexual orientation, belief, educational background, ethnic identity and class ... we also do it as women and men. (Bell, 1993: 1-2)

Presentation of all contextual information relevant to the study, including environment and researcher characteristics, allows the validity of the account to be assessed (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). By making the information accessible to the reader, naturalistic generalisation can be achieved (Stake, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (2000) in discussing Stake argue:

To put it another way, if you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they might usually experience it. They will be able, both tacitly and propositionally, to derive naturalistic generalizations that will prove to be useful extensions of their understanding. (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 36)

Qualitative research has usually focused upon internal validity, ignoring external validity. Generalisation is thus difficult or of low priority (Donmoyer, 2000). The methodological techniques used in qualitative research also mean that replicability is not the answer to increasing external reliability and validity, as it may be both time-consuming and expensive. Nevertheless, generalisation does not have to be the purpose of research; indeed qualitative purists may argue that detailed description of a situation is a goal in itself. However, Donmoyer (2000) argues that the increased use of qualitative methods for policy recommendations has amplified interest in the area of generalisability. Donmoyer contends that a consensus is arising between qualitative researchers addressing the issue of generalisability as the 'fit' between the situation studied and any other sites of interest. Thick description then becomes essential to make an informed decision about the goodness of the 'fit' (Donmoyer, 2000: 92–3).

5.3 The technique debate in methodological choice

This chapter has given an overview of quantitative and qualitative methodology and indicated their underlying philosophies. From this it is possible to see the strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches depending on the philosophical viewpoint. However, to distinguish quantitative and qualitative research as originating from different paradigms, or originating from different epistemological positions, exaggerates the differences (Hammersley, 1996). It also presents qualitative and quantitative methodology as 'mutually antagonistic ideal types in the research process' (Bryman, 1988: 92). For more than thirty years, this has formed a key debate in psychology and social science. New debates have emerged regarding quantitative and qualitative methods as potentially complementary that can be utilised when the research focus requires it. This has been termed the 'technique debate' as opposed to the epistemological debate (Bryman, 1988).

The view that quantitative and qualitative research constitute different epistemological positions would seem to imply that researchers formulate their views about the proper foundation for the study of social reality and choose their methods of investigation in light of that decision. (ibid., p. 105)

This ignores social context, participant requirements and the researchers' own limitations. It can also be questioned whether the research process is like this.

When both qualitative and quantitative methods are used within research, uneven weighting is often given to their importance. Quantitative surveys may use qualitative methods for preparatory work and dismiss their significance in informing the later research. By giving equal precedence to each, a richer picture can be provided by research. This is possible due to the relative strengths of the different techniques contained within each paradigm. Quantitative data gives a structural/causal view of a research situation whereas qualitative data provides information about interaction and perspective (Hammersley, 1996). The ability of qualitative and quantitative to take the insider and outsider view can therefore be advantageous in providing a macro and micro level to the research and possibly allowing generalisations (Bryman, 1988). Through methodological eclecticism, it is also possible to overcome or dilute some of the weaknesses associated with particular methods (Hammersley, 1996: 167). Denzin (1970) is an advocate of using multiple technique research designs arguing that the most valid studies are produced in this way reducing threats to error.

5.4 The philosophical approach adopted

While it is recognised that quantitative and qualitative methodologies draw from positivism and social constructionist theory respectively, this is not a barrier to combining the methodologies. In the research, the needs of the question were central when a research methodology was selected but the philosophical basis of the methodological techniques was understood to ensure that strengths and weaknesses were considered.

The research used both quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure depth and understanding while placing the findings in a wider framework. In doing so, a multi-disciplinary, multi-method approach was adopted using a 'soft' realist viewpoint of reality. The research draws upon tenets of realism and social constructionist theory recognising an objective structure within society but also the importance of context and agency. Within social interaction, reality is constantly being constructed and reconstructed. Objective data can be captured but only by methods sensitive to the participants and their context.

5.5 Site selection

Before finalisation of the methodological stance, the research context requirements were viewed with the needs of the participants recognised and limitations that came with the context understood and accommodated. Therefore, before embarking on a discussion of the full methodology, it is necessary to discuss the procedure of site selection.

Walford (1999) contends that within educational research little consideration is given to site selection with convenience for the researcher often taking precedence. The implications of this are that site selection does not always closely relate to the research objectives. This can limit generalisations and could question the research's validity. In the light of the severity of criticism from Walford (1999), care was taken to select the most appropriate research sites. The research examined the directions taken by school-leavers on leaving compulsory education, particularly the motivation behind attempts to enter the labour market. Therefore, research sites were needed where a significant proportion of the pupils did not enter post-compulsory education. As the research was particularly concerned with young people entering unemployment rather than returning to education, the research sites needed to be in areas where there was relatively high unemployment.

The research focused upon white working-class boys and girls. This group is more likely to leave education at sixteen than their middle-class and most ethnic minority

counterparts (DfEE, 2001a; DfEE, 2000; Rice, 1999). Working-class school-leavers are also more prone to leave school without qualifications and 7% of girls and 9% of boys are doing this every year (Arnot *et al.*, 1999). This group is then more likely to become unemployed compared with middle-class young people, forming a marginalised group. Training, education and employment policy has arguably been made with little reference to the reasons young people give for their choice of destination and therefore this group needs to be researched.

The decision to focus on white pupils was taken as, although ethnic minority school-leavers are also at risk of unemployment, as a white researcher, similarly to Griffin's (1985) justification for a focus on white working-class girls, any account of the possible influences on ethnic minority decisions would have been affected by my own 'ill-informed assumptions' (Griffin, 1985: 4). To consider the relative importance of factors affecting, for example, a black male school-leaver, would have possibly required a different set of culturally related variables. My own white middle-class upbringing may have impaired an understanding of these and led to inaccurate preconceived notions being given undue significance. A pragmatic reason for the focus upon white young people was that a consideration of the factors affecting post-sixteen transitions contains many variables and if this was to encompass the effect of ethnic minority, the research project would have been too large for one PhD.

To research young people at high risk of unemployment, two schools were selected that had a significant portion of their students leaving education for the labour market with few or no qualifications. This approach was in opposition to choosing two schools where one does well academically, one does badly, and carrying out a comparative analysis of the different factors involved in this. However, the study was not solely concerned with school effect, but rather the relative importance involved in differential post-sixteen directions with a particular focus upon successful and unsuccessful labour market entrants. Choosing to study two schools with similar characteristics increased the possibility of contact with a larger number of pupils who would be trying to enter the labour market and thus increased the possibility of drawing generalisations from the research.

From approximately 100 Birmingham comprehensive schools six schools were selected as potential research sites. The elimination process included determining local and national GCSE averages and highlighting any schools that fell below these. Department for Education and Employment statistics were used for this purpose in the form of performance tables for GCSE and GNVQ results for 1994 through to 1998 for the Birmingham region. Single-sex schools were excluded as were those schools known to have more than 20% ethnic minority students. Further information was then gained on the remaining schools such as the number of pupils with special educational needs, truancy and whether the school had a sixth form on site. The location of the schools was recognised, for example whether in a predominantly working- or middle-class area.

With reference to the needs of the question requiring a white majority, working-class school with 'failing' pupils in an area of relatively high unemployment, a final list was constructed of six potential sites. These sites all bore similarities in their general characteristics such as possession of an on-site sixth form and demographic variables to ensure generalisation was possible. Contact was then made with the local government education department to secure official authorisation for the research and I subsequently approached two schools. A meeting held with the head teachers gained permission for the research to take place onsite and ensured that they knew the full extent of what was involved. This meeting also gave the opportunity to confirm further the suitability of the school and its area and discover any limitations that could be imposed on the research. The main constraint was time. The cohort was entering their final year and had mock and final exams approaching. The research therefore had to be fitted around their timetable to create minimum disruption in their school and home lives.

The identity of the schools is not revealed out of respect to the teachers, pupils and their families. Personal information was gathered and the participants were promised anonymity. I would never wish to violate their trust. All participants' names have been changed to approximations. The school names have also been altered but capture something of the local characteristics of the area.

5.6 The research methodology overview

An awareness of the research context and the constraints this imposed upon data collection enabled an appropriate methodology to be formulated. The research took place over two periods. The first data collection period occurred between October 1999 and April 2000, allowing data to be collected before GCSE exams were taken. The second stage occurred between October 2000 and March 2001, by which time the cohort would have had to enrol in an educational institution, had a chance to begin training, find a job or experience unemployment. The longitudinal aspect allowed a discussion of any discrepancies revealed between the cohorts' intended post-sixteen directions before leaving school and actual destinations achieved a number of months after. The moderate longitudinal design also enabled an identification of aspects that if altered could possibly increase the number of young people entering training, work or post-compulsory education rather than becoming unemployed.

A questionnaire was administered in both research periods while observations, individual interviews and family interviews allowed more in-depth information to be gathered. The remainder of the chapter outlines the methodological choices and the following chapter discusses how these techniques were implemented.

5.7 Observation within the research context

Observation and interaction are beneficial in providing access to a multi-level view of the problem state and greater understanding of the participants' actions in context. Taking the lead from Willis (1977), the young people were seen to be operating within their own internalised ideology, actively creating and recreating a system of cultural production and reproduction. Observations enhanced the validity of the questionnaire construction and triangulated conclusions gained through other techniques. Importantly, observations of the schools heightened my visibility to the respondents, possibly leading to more accurate data collection, higher response rates, and interviews within the family homes.

The methodology of participant observation is exceptional for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns, as well as the immediate sociocultural contexts in which human existence unfolds. (Jorgensen, 1989: 12)

To collect rich data it was necessary to become involved with the participants at various points on a continuum between complete observer and complete participant (Adler and Adler, 1994; Denzin, 1970). The quotes below dismiss the possibility of gaining insight from quantitative methodology that assumes researcher distance from participants.

The potential for misunderstanding and inaccurate observations increases when the researcher remains aloof and distanced physically and socially from the subject of study. Participation reduces the possibility of inaccurate observation, because the researcher gains through subjective involvement direct access to what people think, do, and feel from multiple perspectives. (Jorgensen, 1989: 56)

Deyhle, Hess and LeCompte (1992) seemingly agree with Jorgensen (1989):

For the researcher, gaining a clear and deep understanding of these behaviors means moving on stage with the actors. To remain a 'stranger' or an observer of the actors only results in gaining a picture of their 'costumes and makeup' rather than an understanding of the meaning behind their actions. (Deyhle *et al.*, 1992: 622)

Qualitative research recognises that researcher characteristics affect data collection. When entering a research site it necessarily involves 'impression management' (Deyhle *et al.*, 1992: 623). This encompasses dress, attitude and speech. Fielding (1993) argues that the researcher must learn the participants' language, including jargon, slang and any special meanings to understand their world. Liebow (1967), researching low-income males, altered his vocabulary and diction. These slight alterations dulled his background characteristics and made him more acceptable to his respondents who may have been deterred by a sharp contrast between researcher and participant status. Jorgensen (1989) agrees, arguing that perception of social barriers can prevent relationships forming. Delamont (1984) in a study of an elite girls' school, projected different images through appearance management to preserve relationships with multiple audiences. A mini dress was worn when interacting with pupils acknowledging fashion and allowing the pupils to identify

with her. When interacting with the head teacher or senior pupils a conservative coat was worn over the dress, portraying a respectable image.

One aspect that cannot be much changed concerning researcher characteristics is gender. Research considering the effect of gender has traditionally examined the female fieldworker and how her gender bars her from certain sites while opening up others. Warren (1988) demonstrated how a female researcher could gain access to personal areas, such as to patients' private areas in a drug rehabilitation centre; a female researcher was not perceived to be a threat.

Appearance plays a crucial role but so does merely being in the field. Walford (1991) recognises the importance of observation for this purpose. Having spent time in the classrooms of a City Technology College he argues researcher presence can allow barriers to be broken down and data collected concerning not just factual information but emotional aspects.

I believe that my time spent in classrooms observing contributed vitally to the willingness of the CTC children to talk openly to me – without it I would have been just another 'visitor' for whom 'special rules' of conversation operated. (Walford, 1991: 96)

Deyhle (1986), researching young Indian break-dancers, attributes gained acceptance into the group by her perseverance in hanging around classrooms. After a period of time the group cautiously approached her on the grounds that they had seen her in class. Through informal conversation about film and music, a bond was formed leading to in-depth research.

Observation as a research technique can be criticised. Sayer (1992) argues that it is not a valid basis for research conclusions because it is not open to empirical checking. Replication is also an issue but Schostak (1983) argues that there are patterns which are repeated and structures which are always present in social situations. Reflexivity addresses the issue of researcher effect allowing the reader to surmise if the study has a valid basis for generalisation and the reliability of conclusions.

The participant observer has to protect against the possibility of 'going native'. Objectivity can be lost and the insider's perspective adopted, leading to a lack of insight and analysis.

Learning and sharing the meanings inherent in another person's symbolic world poses problems for the participant observer, for he [*sic*] may cease to think entirely as a sociologist ... and, instead, begin to adopt the perspective of those he is studying. (Denzin, 1970: 188)

Covert research either as a pupil or teacher/lesson assistant would not have been appropriate within the methodology. I would not have been able to pass as a pupil and I do not have the teaching or classroom assistance experience to be able to integrate myself as a teacher. It also would have been unethical and violated any trust that had been developed. May (1997) proposes that 'covenantal' ethics should be used whereby there is an obligation to the hosts, public, colleagues and discipline but the paramount obligation is to the participants. The decision was taken to be overt and always explain to participants the purpose of the study.

5.8 The applicability of questionnaires

A questionnaire administered to the selected cohort before and after they left school was the most appropriate methodology for collecting data concerning family structure, parental employment and views of education and employment. This provided a structural overview of factors affecting differential post-sixteen destinations and reasons for the participants' choices. It allowed information to be gathered on the cohorts' intended and actual destination and a discussion of any discrepancies. To collect this information via interview would have been labour-intensive, time-consuming and would have diminished the number of young people contacted. May (1997) argues that questionnaires are a quick and cheap way of discovering the characteristics and beliefs of a sample population.

Questionnaires allowed data to be collected in a form most appropriate for the research. It would have been possible to use school data on aspects including parental employment type and possibly the pupils' intended destinations on leaving

compulsory education. However, this data may have been inaccurate in that it involved dynamic variables and, for example, parents may not have wished the school or any authority to know they were working.

Official statistics can be valuable for understanding dynamics in society possibly along gender, class, age and race lines and for charting trends (May, 1997: 67). It was due to this that census figures were used in the research for examining area demographics and employment trends. Government data was applied to select the schools and the final destination survey data produced by the careers service was also utilised. Two examples of the use of large-scale data are Halsey *et al.* (1980) and Goldthorpe (1987). They both employed a survey of over 10,000 men in 1972 examining occupational mobility. However, the 1972 survey did not include women and therefore women were excluded from their research. The current research addressed many aspects not recorded in official statistics.

Statistics concerning employment or social exclusion have always caused controversy as they have arguably been manipulated to gain political advantage. May (1997) argues that official statistics can be biased.

Official statistics, like social research, may employ unexamined assumptions about social life which, if one is not cautious, may be inherited and reproduced in studies. Given this, we should view them not simply as 'social facts', but also as social and political constructions which may be based upon the interests of those who commissioned the research in the first instance. (May, 1997: 65)

Questionnaires provide a certain type of exploration, description and explanation of a phenomenon and can show the strength of associations between variables although arguably not allowing prediction (May, 1997). However, questionnaires presuppose a certain level of literacy and understanding. In educational research, this can be problematic. Within an average school, there exist pupils with special educational needs and problems at basic literacy levels. A comprehensive pilot survey can add reliability and validity to a final questionnaire to address these problems, ensuring that the finished format is comprehensible to the majority of the participants.

5.8 Individual interviews for enhancing understanding

To understand the motivation behind destination choice at sixteen, in-depth individual interviews and family interviews were carried out with selected pupils. This approach saw the research moving from the broad structural focus elicited by the questionnaires to a 'processual' insight (Bryman, 1988) begun by the observations.

Male and female participants were selected for more in-depth enquiry based on their responses to the questionnaire and in line with the research questions. The interviews allowed a deeper exploration of certain questions and provided a form of clarification not possible through a questionnaire. This meant that previous answers were investigated, giving validity and reliability to the questionnaire data. More complex and personal areas were also discussed, allowing subtle cultural responses to be elicited, abstract ideas considered and sensitive information to be gained.

Positivism addresses the possibility of researcher bias within interviews by aiming to generate data which is valid independent of its setting. Standardised interview formats are used with minimal interviewer/interviewee interaction (Fielding, 1993). There is a structured interview with controlled pace and order of questions and the researcher adopts a neutral role (Fontana and Frey, 1994). This style can lead to socially desirable responses and prevents further explanation of questions. It can also prevent the respondent 'opening up' and giving emotional responses. The positivist approach is in contrast to the qualitative process. Interviews within qualitative research are perceived to be a highly interactive process (May, 1997). Social constructionists view interviews as constructing a social world, creating data while collecting it. Therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to possess a high level of sensitivity and an awareness of the tension between subjectivity and objectivity.

Moser and Kalton (1983) argue that there are three necessary conditions for a successful interview. First accessibility – this is whether the interviewee has access

to the information required, whether they can find it out and if not, why not. Secondly, cognition – meaning the understanding of the interviewee of what is required of them. Thirdly, motivation – the respondent needs to feel valued and that their cooperation is vital.

The establishment of rapport in focussed interviews is of paramount importance given that the method itself is designed to elicit understanding of the interviewee's perspectives. (May, 1997: 118)

Fielding (1993) argues a successful interview can be obstructed by a number of factors; rationalisation by the participant, whereby logical responses to their actions are offered, impeding collection of evaluative and emotional reasons; an inability of the participants to express themselves can also prevent accurate data collection, blocking insight that could have been achieved. Respondents can also fear being 'shown up' in front of the interviewer and therefore only offer responses that fit their self-image. Finally, the interviewee can be over-polite, merely telling the interviewer what they think they want to hear. To prevent these obstructions occurring, the interviewer needs to ensure that the respondent is relaxed and make sure the respondent feels needed without being obtrusive. Discrepancies in status between the researcher and participants can prevent successful interviews and this harks back to the importance of appearance management.

5.9 Family interviews as a tool in youth research

Within the research, family interviews enhanced the portrait of the young people's decision context and influencing factors gained by observations within the school and its surrounding area and further through questionnaires and interviews with the young people. The family interview is a tool not often used in youth research. It is, however, a valuable method in providing access to information on numerous levels including group dynamics, cultural indicators and gaining some sense of the participants' everyday reality. Further information was also gleaned from parents concerning aspects of which the young person was not fully aware, including family job networks and parental employment history.

The collection of information from another source close to the participant means that it is possible to validate or triangulate earlier responses, increasing reliability and depth in research. However, May (1997) argues that the group interview can yield different results from those attained in individual interviews. This does not mean that previous or later data is false but that it represents different perspectives. The interaction involved can affect the opinions of the group. It is therefore necessary to be cautious when generalising from group interviews to overall situations.

Group interviews have weaknesses. Group culture may prevent individual expression and personal areas may not be freely discussed. Focus groups run the risk of being dominated by one member and the less articulate remaining silent. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) contend that the success of a focus group is dependent on the respondents being comfortable with communicating ideas. The researcher therefore needs to be adept in handling group dynamics (Janis, 1972; Fontana and Frey, 1994). In the particular sample used, there were several individuals with low self-assurance and lacking the confidence to speak publicly.

Interviews conducted with family members provided data that could not have been accessed through other means, particularly concerning family dynamics. It was for this reason that questionnaires were not distributed to families because they could not provide the contextual data or the wealth of non-verbal information given by interviews. Low response rates would also have been problematic. The families were characterised by poor educational attainment, symptomatic of low return rates. Focus groups with several sets of parents or young people were also deemed inappropriate. Sensitive information was needed and the respondents had to feel confident to vocalise this.

6 The research methodology

6.1 Introduction

Consideration of previous literature and theory allows an understanding of the philosophical underpinning of different methodologies. It also demonstrates how methodological eclecticism can lend strength to research conclusions. With reference to this, it was possible to select and apply an appropriate methodology to the research. This chapter demonstrates how the methods were applied to gain reliability and validity but also to add depth and understanding to the research. First, there is a discussion of researcher characteristics in the endeavour to increase reflexivity. The application of the methodology is then reviewed in the order it was conducted, beginning with observation in the research context, followed by questionnaires and interviews. The chapter concludes with school and area profiles for both research sites.

Table 6.1 is a summary of the techniques used over the longitudinal research period spanning October 1999 to March 2001 in two stages from before the cohort left school to 3–4 months after.

Table 6.1 Research schedule and techniques

Stages	Techniques
Stage I: Oct. 1999–Apr. 2000	Observation and interaction in school environment Questionnaire administration in classrooms Individual interviews Family interviews Formal/informal staff interviews incl. careers service
Stage II: Oct. 2000–Mar. 2001	Observation and interaction in sixth forms Questionnaire administration in sixth forms Individual interviews in sixth forms Postal questionnaire Telephone interviews Careers service follow-up

6.2 Researcher characteristics

Discussed throughout the methodological chapter is how researcher appearance, encompassing language, appearance, gender and ethnicity, can influence data collection (Deyhle *et al.*, 1992; Liebow, 1967). Therefore, to be reflexive and enhance the validity of the study it is necessary briefly to describe myself. I am female, white, tall at 5 feet 9 inches, have long blonde hair and a southern English accent. I am averagely attractive and most people find me affable. During the fieldwork, I was aged 23–24, however in casual clothes I do look younger and at one point the head teacher of Tower Cross Comprehensive mistook me for a sixth former. This may have acted to my advantage in muting the age distinction between myself and the pupils, thus making me more approachable and able to blend into classrooms during observation periods. I had a middle-class upbringing in Suffolk and attended a comprehensive school. Before entering university to study sociology and psychology, I took a year out to experience the ‘real world’. After spending this time working in entry-level office positions I have remained in the ‘academic world’ ever since.

Impression management was an integral part of the research. For interviews with senior staff a formal suit or equivalent was worn. For the classroom observation and interviews, I wore fashion combat trousers, in style at the time, high street casual tops with name-brand trainers. My hairstyle reflected the trend, worn up, pulled back from the face with a loose 'back combed' bun. A slightly smarter version of this overall style was adopted for the family interviews. For entrance to sixth form, knee-length boots with a fashionable knee-length skirt and a close-fitting top were worn. The alteration to the previous style was necessary as the students were no longer obliged to wear school uniform and many had matured into young adults. By adopting a similar look to them and dressing appropriately for my age, I was distinguishable as older than their age group but possible to identify with. The clothes also emphasised my femininity enabling the female sixth formers to identify with me while enhancing the chance of the boys approaching me. The form of dress on all occasions was necessary to distinguish me from authority figures within the school or other agencies that may have visited the home such as social services or the police.

Through impression management, adapting my clothes to blend into a young environment, modifying my language to use informal terms and a heavy use of slang, my background characteristics of being a southern, middle-class, well-educated researcher were dulled. However, the effect of my height and gender were unavoidable. To address the first aspect of my height: in both schools and surrounding areas, I was the tallest person in the majority of situations. This was used to my advantage. It was hard not to notice me standing at the front of a classroom when I wanted attention to introduce myself. On frequent occasions throughout the research I was left alone with the pupils. The class never became loud or out of control as they did in other situations with a teacher present. This shows that the pupils recognised me as a source of authority but also as someone and something new and possibly to be respected. As a young female researcher, I was also able to gain access to information and personal arenas that may not have been so forthcoming to an older male. I doubt that I was perceived to be a threat and therefore I was able to visit the selected participants' homes to interview families, including single mothers and fathers. In many cases the mothers were

approximately 10–15 years older than me, not presenting too much of a generation gap. Possibly, they felt they could relate their experiences and often looked for validation and implicit recognition of their comments indicated in responses ending in ‘you know’. The two single-parent fathers also allowed access to the home; again possibly as I did not pose a threat but also they were interested to meet me after favourable reports from their sons.

6.3 Stage I methodology

6.3.1 Observation and interaction

Previous research has emphasised the importance of observation and interaction within the research site (Walford, 1991; Deyhle, 1986), therefore both Birmingham Comprehensive schools and surrounding areas were entered from the early stages of the fieldwork through to its completion. A school and site description is given at the end of this section for naturalistic generalisation to be achieved (Stake, 2000). Statistical tables in Appendix 5 represent the demographics of the schools and their areas.

Both schools were visited before their selection as research sites was confirmed. During the first visit that lasted 1–2 hours, observations were made in the school and immediate surrounding area and the type and condition of local housing were noted. In addition, the nearest parade of local shops was visited to gain a limited feel of the residents’ everyday reality. For Tower Cross Comprehensive, I had previously lived in its catchment area as an undergraduate for two years due to the cheap availability of housing attributable to the ‘undesirability’ of the area.

Over a two-week period, an intensive period of observations was carried out in each school. At least four entire days were spent in each school, from 8.30 a.m. before registration period to after-school hours, approximately 3.30 p.m. During these times, efforts were made to increase my visibility. Lessons were attended for the selected cohort, an aspect to be discussed shortly. During break times, corridors

and playgrounds were also observed, as were the cafeterias during lunchtimes. Another way to increase my profile was to take the local bus to and from the areas during school transport times. I was eventually recognised by participants in this situation. Travelling through the schools catchments area afforded a further familiarity with the area. Public transport was used throughout the study.

In agreement with the teachers, classes were entered that involved a degree of interaction between teacher and pupils and among the pupils themselves (Randall, 1987). This allowed the culture of the classroom to become apparent. Observing classroom interaction revealed friendship groups and allowed any counter-school culture to emerge, as the pupils were not merely 'copying from the board'. It was possible to distinguish groups within the cohort, including conformists and nonconformists explicated by their attitude in lessons, uniform and interaction with other students and the teachers. These aspects are discussed within the analysis. To ensure that the majority of the year cohort was observed, each tutor group was viewed at least once. At the beginning of every observation in both schools, I would wait outside the classroom before entering with the pupils. This prompted interest from the pupils and they often asked if I was a new teacher or what I was doing. This was an easy way to start conversations about who I was and my purpose there and this information spread quickly through the group. By maintaining a continued presence within the school and its surrounding areas during the first data collection period of six months, the cohort became familiar with me, ensuring that I was perceived as less of a stranger but someone who could be approached and possibly trusted. Collecting information in this way also allowed the questionnaire to be informed in the language it used and topics that it addressed.

The initial four days' observation at each school was followed approximately two to three months later by successive visits over approximately one and a half months to pilot and administer the first questionnaire. Interviews then took place in Tower Cross Comprehensive over an intensive two-day period while it lasted one week in Longfield Comprehensive. I made approximately 25 trips to each school to carry out various activities and maintain my presence in the school over six months. The schools were also entered whenever I was in the locale to conduct family

interviews. At these times, general observations were made around the school and its locality and pupils and staff informally spoken to. This maintained a steady if somewhat sporadic presence around the school and surrounding area. This all occurred over six months from the first entrance to the school in October 1999 to before the cohorts GCSE examinations in April 2000.

Observation notes were recorded by hand on topics drawn from the literature review such as patterns of interaction and the presence of pro- or anti-school attitudes. Remarks were also made on arising or novel situations. Table and room plans were taken in every lesson and two of these are presented in the analysis section.

Within Longfield School, the year 11 was observed over a course of three personal and social education classes. I spent a subsequent day carrying out general observations of the school and area. Observations were also made on subsequent occasions such as break-time and the questionnaire administration. The classes contained between 15 and 20 male and female pupils, depending on attendance, who were taught by the female head teacher. Each lesson lasted 50 minutes. The presence of the head teacher could be seen as problematic to the general observation of the 'normal' behaviour of a class. The class may have felt more restrained than if taught by a junior teacher. However, the head teacher had always taken a 'hands on' approach to the school and the pupils were used to her presence. The school population was also small so she would have been a well-known figure.

Longfield Comprehensive was accustomed to classroom visitors as under government 'special measures' at the beginning of the research. This may have made my presence less of an issue. The Head introduced me at the start of every lesson as a student researcher from Aston University. She said I would be talking to them and they should talk to me. I always took a seat towards the end of the horseshoe table arrangements. In this way, the pupils could sit next to me if they wanted and usually they sat around me. The head teacher frequently offered my assistance to the class although I remained largely as an observer, usually only helping when asked by the pupils. This is an example of how, in Longfield Comprehensive and later in the sixth-form observations in Tower Cross

Comprehensive, my role moved away from that of a complete observer to a participant observer. I was often viewed by the cohort as a source of information about sociology and psychology professions and university and was often approached and engaged in conversations in these areas after lessons.

In Tower Cross Comprehensive, observations were conducted of design and technology, textiles and home economics classes. Again each tutor group was observed at least once. There were eight classes in total and each lesson lasted 50 minutes. The gender composition of the classes proved somewhat problematic in gaining a general overview of classroom interaction. The textiles and home economics class were female in majority and the design and technology lesson was male in majority, consisting of approximately 6–20 pupils depending upon attendance. This could lead to problems in observation, in that it prevented observation of how boys and girls interacted within their groups. However, I observed the groups on numerous other occasions over six months, for example within their registration tutor groups and at break-times, and later within the sixth form.

Break-time observations were made in both schools. To an inexperienced researcher, the school environment seems chaotic when any bell sounds! The school corridors fill as pupils dash from their classrooms just to congregate in the hallways or to run in and out on to the playgrounds. However, there was a pattern to their interaction and I observed this by seeing where groups formed, and of whom they consisted with regard to gender, ethnicity and conformist or nonconformist appearance.

6.3.2 First questionnaire methodology

The questionnaire was formulated after carrying out an extensive literature review and, from this, formulating research questions. A period of classroom observations was completed in both schools and arising issues incorporated into the questionnaire. Questions were also included addressing the education maintenance allowance. A combination of answering styles was used for ease of completion –

ranking, open-ended and circling answers. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was presented on purple paper to be eye-catching and different to the usual handouts received during class. The second questionnaire (Appendix 2), to be discussed later, was printed on similar paper to afford recognition and re-establish any earlier familiarity formed.

To verify that the full scope of pre-prepared answers was included and that the format was comprehensible to the cohort, a pilot test of the questionnaire was carried out. The pilot ensured that the questionnaire was appropriate for mixed-ability classes including students with lower literacy levels. The head of year at Tower Cross Comprehensive selected 11 mixed-ability male and female pupils to answer the questionnaire and take part in a discussion with me about it. Issues such as format, appropriateness of language and ease of comprehension were addressed and points raised were incorporated into the eventual design.

It is argued that the familiarity of my presence, combined with effective piloting, increased the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. I had been frequently approached by some of the cohort and engaged in informal conversation regarding what it was like to be at university, where I socialised and what football team I supported. The mutual self-disclosure of leisure interests promoted a certain rapport and acceptance, implying that I became more than a stranger. When handing out the questionnaire in the classes I was recognised from earlier encounters and this may have promoted more honest answers in the questionnaire that had been designed for their ease and to reflect their style of language. It was also made clear from the outset that I was not carrying out research for an official body such as the social services and that information revealed to me was confidential. This may have made the pupils more willing to elaborate who was resident in their home and working rather than to an official body, who could impose benefit sanctions if working 'off the record' was taking place or the number of people in the home did not tally with official records. Family interviews confirmed the accuracy of the data and this information may differ from official records.

For the administration of the questionnaire in both schools, I stood at the front of the class and explained who I was, what I was doing and the confidentiality of the questionnaire. A registration was taken so that absentees could be followed up on later occasions. Three attempts were made to contact the absent pupils during class time. Senior staff members informed me that the majority of the pupils whom I had not been able to contact were persistent non-attendees, absent on mental health or medical grounds. While recognising that these pupils were more likely to become unemployed because they were at risk of gaining few if any qualifications, it would have been time- and labour-intensive to contact them. The research focuses on post-sixteen destinations after leaving compulsory education. To examine the absentees would have involved a different set of variables and changed the focus to young people that prematurely exit the education system. It was however possible to discover where the absentees went on leaving compulsory education via both schools' final destination survey.

In agreement with the head teacher at Longfield School, I administered the questionnaire within the lessons previously observed. The room was quiet although some pupils asked me questions regarding its completion and generally helped each other. Completion took approximately twenty minutes. After the questionnaire was completed, the lesson resumed and I remained in the class, helping with the lesson tasks and answering questions about university. Questionnaire administration and the follow-up of absentees occurred over nine separate visits to the school.

For administering the questionnaire in Tower Cross Comprehensive a tutor group period was selected by the head of year as the most appropriate. This was because the period was 'spare time' when the pupils were not completing work valuable to their GCSEs. There were eight tutor groups in total and to minimise the amount of time the questionnaire would take, two groups were combined in one form room. The pupils liked this because it enabled them to see their friends from other tutor groups and the teachers liked it as they could have the session off!

Like Longfield pupils, Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils completed the questionnaire at their own pace and any queries were addressed to me, each other

or the teachers in the room. The least able pupils were identified by the teachers and aided to ensure the accurate completion of the questionnaire. Throughout the session, I either stood at the front of the class talking to the teachers or mingled among the students answering their questions or chatting informally. When they were completing the questionnaire, they appeared engrossed and were quieter than in some of their lessons. The teachers noticed this and remarked that I had a good effect on them. This meant that I had seen them behaving in the usual way within their classrooms but it also meant that I had successfully engaged their attention. The questionnaire took slightly longer to administer than at Longfield Comprehensive. This was due to the number of pupils in the room, numbering approximately 20–30, which increased the time taken to answer questions. The questionnaire sessions lasted approximately 30 minutes. The questionnaire administration and follow-up of absent pupils occurred over five separate visits to the school. For those pupils who had been absent on previous weeks, their form tutor sent them along to a class where I was administering the questionnaire. There was one final follow-up session in a separate classroom a week after the majority of the cohort had completed the questionnaire.

An issue worth mentioning was the ambiguity over the number of pupils actually registered at the schools constituting the sample population in the research. In Longfield Comprehensive School I was informed that there were 63 pupils in year 11 and administered 51 questionnaires (81%). In Tower Cross Comprehensive, there were 137 pupils on the daily register and 113 questionnaires were completed (82%). However, these may just have been the numbers on the daily register. The final destination survey provided by the careers service at the end of the research listed more pupils than this. For Longfield Comprehensive the careers service followed up 69 pupils, meaning that the research collected data on 73% of the final-year pupils' intended destinations. Similarly, with Tower Cross Comprehensive the careers service suggested that 160 students were enrolled, showing the research to have collected 71% of the final-year pupils' intended destinations. The difference between the schools and the research numbers meant that there was a discrepancy between statistics concerning final destinations. It is recognised that from the schools' total leaving population there was increased membership of categories such as unemployment while post-sixteen education participation decreased. This

is because the research did not reach all of the 'at risk' pupils, who were more likely to become unemployed and less likely to participate in further education.

When examining the careers service final destination data, it was possible to match the questionnaire data for the 51 Longfield pupils and the 113 Tower Cross pupils to the careers service information for the final destinations of the total population. Occasionally results were different between the careers service and research data. This was largely due to the differential data collection period. The transition from school can comprise a number of 'false-starts' and setbacks (Ball *et al.*, 2000: 15). Young people may enter courses, training and employment only to find they do not match their expectations (or indeed the young person does not match their employers' or training/education providers' expectations) and the school-leavers can restart on another path. To resolve the discrepancies between figures, questionnaire results were used as their more recent production meant that they provided more accurate information on the individual's status.

6.3.3 Case selection

To explore further the relative importance of factors pre-empting some sixteen-year-olds to leave school to try to enter the labour market, I selected a sample of participants to take part in individual interviews and family interviews.

To select the participants the questionnaires were separated by respondents who indicated that they intended to leave school at sixteen or had not yet decided their destination. Fifteen pupils were selected from each school. The participants came from diverse family backgrounds with a range of size, structure and employment records. Only white pupils were selected for reasons previously explained. Appendix 5 includes a table summarising some key characteristics of the young people selected for interviews, including their intended post-sixteen directions, their actual destinations and information concerning their family size, structure and parental employment types.

6.3.4 Interview methodology

The interview schedule took into account the selected participants' individual responses to the questionnaire but was designed with reference to time constraints as it was approaching exam time. Other considerations included the need for sensitivity in addressing personal areas. Therefore, a standardised interview schedule was devised. It comprised open and closed questions to allow leeway for the individual's own questionnaire responses that needed further development and to allow the respondent to talk openly on subjects which they felt to be important. A period of thirty minutes was allotted for each interview.

Both schools provided an interview area and pupils were sent there at pre-agreed times. The teacher had informed the participants that they had been selected for an interview concerning the previously completed questionnaire. I started the interview with assurances of confidentiality and, although the prospect of being tape-recorded drew a few concerned looks, nobody objected. After a brief introduction concerning the research, the interview opened with a vague question concerning what they wanted to do when they left school. An easy rapport was formed with most of the respondents. All the participants recognised me from previous visits to the school and the questionnaire administration. Good body language included high eye contact and leaning in towards me. Negative body language was more likely to originate from pupils who regularly played truant and involved low eye contact and an aggressive style of speech. Two boys were uncommunicative and this was attributed to their being unwilling to participate in the research. It was later found that they were shy and had actually been quite impressed with me, leading to family interviews in the home.

The individual interviews in Longfield Comprehensive were located in a restricted area separate to the main body of the school in a pleasant glass room, not unlike a small conservatory. The room had a small low circular table in the middle and five low comfortable chairs around it, providing an intimate atmosphere. In total, 14 out of the 15 selected participants were interviewed, 8 girls and 7 boys. The last individual had become a persistent truant and had been on report for violence; it was therefore decided not to pursue an interview outside of school.

In Tower Cross Comprehensive, the interviews were located in three rooms. On the first session they were situated in a teacher's office. The room was quiet with a separate space for comfortable chairs around a low table. The second session was located within a disused classroom, then in a room off a busy home economics classroom providing little privacy. Unfortunately in this school only ten out of the selected fifteen interviews took place, four girls and six boys. Circumstances had changed for the rest of the selected pupils since they completed the questionnaire. Four had become persistent truants or school refusers and one had started part-time schooling. Access to the school was becoming limited due to the approaching exams and no other participants were selected. However, attempts were made to contact the original participants by sending a letter to their home address but no replies were received.

When the participant attended their individual interview a letter was given to them to take home, informing the parent that their child had taken part in some research and that I would like to talk to them. Enclosed was a reply slip and a prepaid envelope to post back to indicate their willingness to the interview. The issue was presented in a relaxed manner to the selected pupils, explaining that I would like an informal chat with their parents. It was again emphasised that the personal interview was confidential and that their parents would not be informed of their answers.

6.3.5 Family interview methodology

Family interviews added a further dimension to the cohorts' post-sixteen-decision context. Data was collected on family work ethics, attitudes and norms permitting some examination of attitude transmission within the home; and also the family dynamics and power relationships that existed. The home visits provided the opportunity to gather data on contextual aspects of the young person's home circumstances such as the area they lived in, the condition of nearby houses, the state and type of house and household capital. Household capital was taken to include access to computers, local facilities and even time and space within the

home. Public transport was used to travel to all of the family interviews. This sometimes proved problematic, the homes could be difficult to find, often located away from main roads. The family homes visited were often terraced council houses located in a warren of streets with a seemingly sporadic system of house numbering. Interviews took place at any time of day convenient to the participants. Attempts were made to ensure that interviews took place during daylight hours, although on one occasion this was not possible and the interview commenced in the early evening.

After the initial replies to the letter sent home with the pupils, a second letter was posted two to three weeks later to those who had not responded. The letter was carefully addressed, ensuring that it included the parents' correct title and surname, as the young person's surname was not always the family name. By checking whether the child had any stepbrothers and sisters, or if they had stated they saw their natural parents separately, the school could be consulted to gain the appropriate name.

After a low response rate, I took a more personal approach by telephoning the families directly. The numbers were obtained using Directory Enquires and the school was used for the high number of ex-directory homes. When the families were telephoned, an informal and relaxed approach was taken, outlining what the research involved, the kind of questions to be asked and assurances of confidentiality. Eleven out of 24 families agreed to be interviewed. Of those that could not be interviewed, reasons given included long or unsociable work hours or ill health.

Some of the Longfield families were resistant to home visits; therefore I made arrangements to conduct three interviews in the school café. The café was provided for visitors to the school's facilities such as the library and adult learning centre. This proved to be a good interview setting as informal yet connected to an area where the participants felt safe. Interviews in the café were conducted immediately after school hours at approximately 3.15 p.m. The room was quiet, providing an air of comfort and familiarity. An interview schedule was devised of topics to address drawn from literature, theory and to a certain extent from their child's responses.

The interviews were longer than the individual pupil interview. They lasted anything from 30 to 50 minutes and ended with an informal chat. This could last as long as the actual interview and often proved to be just as revealing. The interviews were again tape-recorded and assurances were given that nobody else would be party to these. The research was introduced before beginning with an open question concerning what they thought their child would be doing on leaving school. The introduction was left deliberately vague to see if the parents knew their child's intentions taken to indicate the amount of communication in the home.

6.3.6 Staff interviews

Throughout the research, I spoke to school staff on an informal and formal basis. There was often the opportunity to chat in the staff room before school began and in classrooms before and during lessons. The head teachers were never formally interviewed and the insights they provided into the school and the possible basis for the cohorts' post-sixteen decisions came from informal conversations maybe as they felt they could speak openly in a relaxed context. Two formal interviews were, however, carried out with a careers teacher from Longfield Comprehensive and the head of sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive. These two people were chosen as they were ideally located to make assumptions concerning the relative importance for factors affecting post-sixteen decisions and they dealt closely with the final year pupils. These interviews followed a loose interview schedule drawn from the literature, hypotheses and results of the questionnaires and were tape-recorded with assurances of confidentiality. The formal interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. They were often followed by an informal conversation, which again proved just as revealing as the interview itself.

6.3.7 Transcribing

For all the interviews, I carried out transcribing soon after the event. In this way, it was possible to remember contextual data such as the size and condition of the family home or the form of school uniform worn. Nuances in the conversations

could also be noted including shared looks between family members when answering certain questions and tone of voice. The interviews were transcribed as heard, with slang and long pauses noted. After each interview was transcribed, a brief summary was made of the interview in a single paragraph with key points noted and a brief description of the participant. This was placed at the top of the first page to aid my recall of the interview.

A complete transcript of an individual pupil interview and an interview in the family home is given in Appendix 3 with the excerpts used highlighted in bold type. When an excerpt is used within the analysis from the interviews, the original pronunciation and grammar is retained. A similar approach is used when presenting extracts from the questionnaires, with the original spelling and grammar retained. After each quote, it is stated which school the young person attended and from the name given it is also possible to tell whether they were male or female. In many instances, post-sixteen destinations are also given. This allows the reader to view the differences in perceptions and attitudes that existed between young people entering further education as opposed to young people entering the labour market and also between boys and girls. In the text before the quotes, it is indicated if the response was given before or after the pupil left compulsory education.

6.4 Stage II methodology

6.4.1 Second questionnaire methodology

For the second questionnaire (Appendix 2), questions were drawn from the literature and theory as before and from issues raised by the first data set. The questionnaire followed the same format used previously and was piloted within the sixth form. The questionnaire made provision for telephone numbers to be supplied to indicate willingness to have a brief telephone interview.

The Longfield Comprehensive sixth form was small, consisting of 17 pupils in total, 11 students in year 12. The common room was located within one small area,

brightly decorated in blue and yellow with a couple of tables and chairs. I was the first one in the room and introduced myself to the pupils that entered and asked them to complete a questionnaire. On completion, they were asked individually or in pairs about their answers. Seven questionnaires were completed and all participants were consulted about their responses. Due to the confined nature of the room, it was not appropriate to conduct tape-recorded interviews. Handwritten notes were therefore taken as I asked them to explain particular responses and their motivation to be in further education. The questionnaire administration occurred over one morning period that lasted approximately one hour. Additional time was spent before and after this period renewing my acquaintance with staff members and revisiting local areas.

The sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive was considerably larger, with 64 pupils in year 12. The common room was multi-levelled with soft chairs and tables scattered over the levels. The room had a nice community atmosphere and the young people were friendly and willing to help. The majority of the pupils spent their time in the room talking, finishing off work or playing a noisy game of cards.

On the first day I introduced myself and asked them to fill in a questionnaire for which in return I would answer questions about university and help with homework. A few students were recognised from the first stage but many remembered me and said hello. Once the questionnaires were returned numbering approximately 51, I cross-referenced the sixth formers' names with the data set from the first questionnaire to see their intended destinations compared with their current location. Interviews were then conducted with pupils who had changed direction, for example those who originally wanted to enter employment or training. Nevertheless, those that had always intended to enter sixth form were consulted on their motivation to do so to obtain the richest picture possible of affecting factors on post-sixteen destinations in a variety of circumstances. Sixth formers who had consistently wanted to enter further education stated this choice as a desire to gain qualifications to get a better job. This was a response commonly found on the first questionnaire and it is argued that the initial questionnaire had captured the original intentions of the school returnees and reasons behind this

accurately. This supports the decision only to interview intended school-leavers for the insight that this could provide into their motivation to leave education.

Although sixth-form participants were selected for interviews, a number of pupils volunteered by either approaching me or sitting close to me until I asked them! Fourteen short individual and group interviews were carried out and interviews were also conducted with four of the case studies that had returned to sixth form despite originally intending to work. On occasion I was consulted for advice on careers in sociological and psychological areas viewed as 'expert' in this field. I advised where possible or directed them to their careers teacher. More common were questions about entrance to university and what the lifestyle was like. On the second of three entire days spent in sixth form, I had a group of approximately ten girls sitting round me. We talked about travel, university, their lifestyles and my lifestyle. The degree of intimacy and trust achieved was made apparent with the ease of the discussion of personal areas and the eagerness to show me tattoos and body piercings. Although this group comprised girls, the male sixth formers exhibited no inhibitions in approaching me or joining in conversations.

The second questionnaire was posted to the remainder of the cohort who were not in sixth form, from addresses obtained in the first questionnaire. A letter was sent with the questionnaire using familiar language and handwritten names. An incentive of twenty pounds for the first questionnaire returned was also offered. An incentive was chosen to promote a higher and quicker response rate. In the cover letter it was linked to the time that it would take to earn this amount of money as it was likely that the school-leavers had already experienced low paid work. The response rate was quite high for a postal survey in a deprived, low-education neighbourhood with approximately a 35% return rate. This was achieved in the first postal wave with only a handful gained on a second attempt. Including those administered in the sixth forms and postal questionnaires, 93 questionnaires were completed out of an original sample size of 164 (57%). Young people in further education, including sixth form and college, returned 80 questionnaires; this represents 80 out of 111 of the cohort in post-sixteen education (72%). 8 (8/34) questionnaires were returned by young people in employment or training representing 23.5% of the trainees and workers. 5 (5/18) were unemployed

representing 28% of the unemployed. Therefore, 86% (80/93) of the second questionnaire responses came from students within post-sixteen education, 9% (8/93) were from trainees and workers and 5% (5/93) were from unemployed young people. The higher response rate among further education entrants was probably due to the data collection methodology used. The response bias was taken into account when analysing the data from the second questionnaire.

The final destination for all but one of the pupils was known from the final destination survey produced by the careers service. This meant that further follow-ups were not necessary to gain a complete destination picture of entrance to post-compulsory education, training, employment or unemployment.

6.4.2 Telephone interviews

As pupils in sixth form were interviewed to find out why they choose sixth form over college, training or employment, for triangulation purposes I also interviewed six college entrants. This was achieved via telephone interviews of a selection of respondents from the second questionnaire who had supplied their numbers. Telephone calls allowed an instant picture to be gained of the influences upon their choice to enter college as opposed to sixth form, training or employment. The call also clarified the reason for any discrepancies between intended directions before leaving school and actual destinations achieved after leaving compulsory education.

Twelve of the 24 original case studies were telephoned. Not all the case studies were called for reasons including change of telephone number or they had entered their original destination choice and therefore the reasons for this were known from prior interviews. Five of the case studies were also spoken to in the school sixth forms. Importance was however placed on calling respondents from the second questionnaire that were unemployed to attain an insight into how they came to occupy 'status zero'. Information collected also included how they felt concerning education, employment and the form of help they believed would benefit them.

When the respondent was not available, occasionally the parent was spoken to confirming the young person's status. It was decided for safety that house calls would not be made following the second questionnaire. The first family interviews had occurred in March–April 2000, usually during daylight hours. The second data collection period began in October of the same year at a time when daylight hours were decreasing. This contributed to my declining confidence in visiting the family homes. Colleagues had also expressed numerous concerns over this practice and it was decided not to recontinue this form of data collection.

6.5 Questionnaire analysis

The questionnaires were designed for ease of completion by the cohort. They took into account their style of language, likely attention span and the needs of lower literacy pupils. The two questionnaires supplied data on attitudes, demographics and structural features affecting post-sixteen choices. It was possible to subject a number of the responses from both questionnaires to statistical testing by Chi-squared using two-by-two contingency tables. For a discussion of the choice of this statistical technique and the full explanation of chi-squared results please refer to Appendix 4.

Descriptive statistics allowed apparent differences between young people that eventually undertook post-compulsory education, training/employment or became unemployed to be considered. Coding was required for some questionnaire responses, for example answers relating to school likes and dislikes and how school could prepare the young people better for the future. This was fairly simple; there was an identifiable pattern to responses among most open-ended answers. Throughout the questionnaire the cohort had apparently responded freely whenever they had the opportunity to express an opinion or reason for their action. There were no questionnaires incorrectly completed and few questions were left blank throughout the sample. Quotes are taken from the questionnaires and used in the analysis section and contain the respondents' original spelling and grammar.

A 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' analysis was conducted with the research data collected via participant observations, interviews and the questionnaires. Topics were identified from existing literature but themes were also detected from the research material itself and explored. This allowed the analysis to explore previously developed research questions but also allowed the data to speak for itself and investigate the areas that the young people found important.

6.6 Methodology conclusion

This section has sought to demonstrate how the methodology was applied to attain valid and reliable data. The methodology also achieved a certain amount of depth and understanding of the influencing factors in the cohort's post-sixteen choices and eventual destinations after leaving compulsory education into post-sixteen education, training, employment or unemployment. The longitudinal analysis allowed the overall trends to be revealed while exposing any discrepancies between intended directions and actual destinations. The qualitative methodology afforded a focus upon those young people trying successfully or otherwise to enter the labour market. It also collected in-depth data from the future unemployed school leavers before and after they come to occupy this position. This allowed an understanding of the relative importance of factors affecting post-sixteen transitions and an insight into measures that could prevent some young people becoming unemployed.

While it is never claimed that I became one of the young people or part of their groups, it is claimed that through careful impression management and observation/interaction within the research site, more accurate data collection was possible. I do not think I was seen as a stranger or viewed as a threat; my age, gender and appearance were beneficial in this. This view was supported by the number of times the teachers remarked how well the pupils responded to me and the success of individual and family interviews often leading to lengthy informal discussions.

The methodology has a degree of reliability and validity but also depth and understanding essential when trying to understand motivation for undertaking certain post-sixteen directions. The analysis and reporting of results show a multi-level picture achieved by using multiple techniques to improve the strength of the data's conclusions. The research makes a methodological contribution to knowledge. It demonstrates the fruitfulness and feasibility of incorporating observation and interaction at the research sites combined with the appropriate qualitative/quantitative techniques for the research questions.

6.7 School and area profiles

The methodology chapters emphasised the importance of locating actions in context to gain an understanding of the motivation behind them. Therefore it is necessary to provide school and area profiles to enhance the understanding of the pupils' post-sixteen decisions. This is followed by a local labour market profile of the two main catchment wards serving Longfield and Tower Cross Comprehensive. Descriptive statistics are presented in Appendix 5 for both schools and their respective wards with a brief description of the individual pupil case studies.

The school and labour market profiles are a necessary context for the analysis of the results. Therefore, the description is placed here, after the methodology and before the analysis section as vital to an understanding of later chapters but connected to the methodology utilised.

6.7.1 Longfield Comprehensive School

The school and its small sixth form were set on the periphery of the city bordering on open fields. There was one bus route from the estate to Birmingham's city centre taking approximately 45 minutes. When the city centre underwent redevelopment, it was difficult to find the new location of the bus stop. The estate and school were built at the end of the 1970s in an inner-city re-housing project. The school now had second-generation pupils attending it. In the last few years, the area administration had changed authority from a council located a remarkable distance away. This led to a feeling of isolation under the previous council, it also meant when the former inner-city residents were originally moved to Longfield they were being re-housed under a different council. The recent change of area administration, the peripheral location, and lack of public transport to the area had led the residents to feel isolated and alienated from inner-city Birmingham. Many residents also possessed parochial views concerning their locality and the perceived safety of the area, preventing migration to other areas with more job opportunities.

Accommodation on the estate was mainly comprised of council housing located in a warren of streets and cul-de-sacs. There was a majority white, working-class population. Some houses were becoming run down or had been boarded up. The area also had a number of run-down high rises. Graffiti and broken down cars were a common sight. The school was next to a primary school and health centre; immediately adjacent was a vandalised, derelict pub. A small parade of shops was located behind the school, again with heavy vandalism. It was possible for the residents to do a 'weekly shop' without leaving the estate. A new retail park had been built a short walking distance away with retail outlets and sports facilities. The head teacher remarked that these facilities were seen as alien to the young people and they did not have the money to spend there anyway. The pupils were also made to feel unwelcome by the owners/management by preventing them using certain facilities such as the bowling alley unless accompanied by an adult.

The school was approximately 25 years old and smaller than an average comprehensive; in 1998 the school had 468 pupils enrolled compared to a national average of 915. The teaching staff varied in age from trainees to seasoned professionals. Throughout the school, the décor was modern and in good condition, having undergone building renovation and pupil artwork lined the walls. The school was also the site for an adult learning centre and the library was used by many sections of the community. Possibly due to this, a café was located within the immediate reception area of the school. Overall, there was a friendly feeling throughout the one building and an omnipresent smell of bacon sandwiches!

The school was unusual in the sense that it was an inner-city school with the related problems but in an almost rural location. The school and neighbouring estates bordered on open fields contributing to the school's truancy problem. One parent commented this location was lovely during the summer but bleak and cold in winter.

A recurrent theme among the teachers was the perception of the area's women as downtrodden by the men and lacking ambition and motivation. Girls within the school achieved lower than their male counterparts in GCSE examinations in contrast to the national trend. There was also seen to be a lack of male and female

role models. Around school finishing time, a large number of male youths aged sixteen plus were always waiting around outside the school. Their presence there at lunchtimes and after school indicated they were most likely unemployed. Youth social workers were present on the estate at night in an attempt to tackle the locality's social problems.

When the research started, the school had been under 'Special Measures' for two years after failing its OFSTED inspection. The parents perceived the school to be improving, especially within the last few years under the new female leadership. Figures from the school in 1998, which formed the basis for the school's selection, showed that approximately 50% of the pupils entered post-compulsory education and 14% of year 11 pupils scored five plus A*-C GCSE grades; 19% left without any qualifications. Nearby there was another school that was seen to cream off the most able pupils from the primary schools.

6.7.2 Tower Cross Comprehensive School

The school was located on the outskirts of the inner city, set behind another comprehensive, near a primary school. Tower Cross Comprehensive was a middle size co-educational school with a sixth form on site; in 1998 there was a total of 882 pupils enrolled compared with the national average of 915. Formerly a grammar school with separate building for boys and girls, this was still reflected in the location of certain curriculum options. Male gender-typed choices such as design and technology were located in the old boys' part and home economics and textiles in the old girls' section. The school design and layout was old-fashioned and contained many dark corners and solitary buildings added on as the school had grown.

Some parents attended the school as children. This may have affected their perception of the school and created a natural transition for their children to attend the same secondary school as they did. Mention was made of teaching staff who were teaching the sons and daughters of previous pupils.

The immediate neighbourhood was quite pleasant, with fairly well-kept terraced houses and bungalows. However, in the other school catchment areas the vicinity was more rundown with high-rise towers and prolific graffiti. The surrounding neighbourhoods were characterised by low levels of education, high unemployment and deprivation and were predominantly white working class. In these areas, the few shops were heavily vandalised and young men sat outside the pubs and wandered the streets throughout the day. Police were a common sight and an area close to the school had a night-time youth curfew. Within the family interviews comments were made concerning how the area had 'gone downhill' in the last few years. My personal experience of the area, as a former resident, supported this perception. I had moved away after an escalation of vandalism and violence.

The area was well connected by public transport to the city centre and areas further a field yet there existed a strong parochial view among the residents. The school was perceived as a 'safe territory' and a large proportion of the students continuing their education opted to enter the school sixth form for this reason rather than travel to college in another area. The head teacher was a physically large man who in the 1970s worked at a progressive school that tried to move away from the 'normal' school model. He perceived student culture as important and felt this area had been neglected with a focus on league tables. The head teacher left the school after Christmas 1999, and the new leader was considered a poor replacement by interviewed pupils and parents alike. The school throughout the change of leadership was undergoing an internal transformation to try to boost its achievements. It was part of an Education Action Zone and had two school mentors helping final year pupils.

In 1998, 25% of the year 11 pupils achieved five plus A*–C GCSE grades, 16% left without any qualifications and approximately 48% continued education, whether at sixth form or college. There had been a steady increase in post-compulsory education entrants over the last two years.

6.7.3 The local labour market profile

To gain a sense of the local labour market situation of the area, ward profiles of two of the main catchment areas serving the schools are presented below. These represent the areas that most of the cohort lived in. However, the research postulates that it was the young people's perception of the labour market that affected their intended post-compulsory education destinations and not necessarily the actual labour market situation. The actual situation had a determining role in the school-leavers' eventual destinations. Further ward statistics are displayed in Appendix 5, including four pie charts representing the percentage of jobs by sector in the closest wards. Statistics were taken from the 1991 census of population, except the jobs by sector statistics which were from the annual employment survey of 1997 as displayed in the Birmingham Economic and Information Centre ward profiles.

Employment statistics from the winter after the cohort had left school in 2000/01 (BEIC, 2001a, 2001b) indicated that wards nearest Longfield Comprehensive had an overall unemployment rate of one and a half to two times the national average of 3.5%. The Tower Cross Comprehensive School ward was experiencing an overall unemployment rate of two to three times the national average. The other closest ward had an unemployment rate of one and half to two times the national average.

Employment within the first Longfield Comprehensive ward was concentrated within one dominant job sector of construction and manufacturing providing 15,100 jobs. This sector was the main form of full-time employment for men and women. Rover was the main employer with 14,917 employees. Related to this was the number of jobs providing services to the car plant such as motor parts. The two next largest employers in the area were represented by a mental health trust and a psychiatric clinic. The public administration sector provided 1900 jobs overall and was the largest supplier of female part-time employment in the ward. The other main employment sector was located in distribution, hotels, restaurants, transport and communications with 1000 jobs. The majority of male part-time employment was spread between this last sector and public administration and distribution. The large service sector reflected the amount of leisure activities available in the area

with a sports club, bowling alley and cinema present. Closure of the Rover plant at Longbridge would have materially affected many businesses in the locality and the spending power of the residents for leisure pursuits.

The distribution, hotel and restaurant sector was the main employment sector for the second relevant ward to Longfield Comprehensive School with 4400 jobs. This sector provided the dominant form of full- and part-time work for both men and women of the locality. The second largest employment sector for the ward was public administration, education and health with 1500 workers. Jobs were located within care homes for the elderly, schools and local government offices. The main employer in this ward with 729 jobs was a computer firm dealing with sales and maintenance.

The main job sector within the first catchment area of Tower Cross Comprehensive was manufacturing with 1100 jobs. This sector provided the dominant form of full-time employment for men. The main employer was an aluminium producer providing 480 jobs. The second largest sector was public administration, education and health employing 1000 workers. There were three secondary schools in the area supplying 185 jobs. This job sector provided the dominant form of full-time employment for women. The two sectors providing the most part-time employment for women was again public administration, education and health but also distribution, hotels and restaurants with 800 jobs. This last sector was the main form of part-time employment for men.

The second main catchment ward for Tower Cross Comprehensive had a job sector again dominated by public administration, education and health with 1300 employees in this area. It provided one of the main forms of full-time employment for men and it was the dominant sector for female full- and part-time employment. The other main form of male employment was the construction industry with 300 male workers. The second largest employer in the ward, the first being a transport provider, was a college, followed by care homes and two schools. Out of the 15 largest employers, four were care homes and five were educational institutions. The second largest sector was distribution, hotels, restaurants, transport and communications with 900 jobs in these areas.

Part II

ANALYSIS

Introduction to Part II

- 7 The school as key in transitions from compulsory education
- 8 Gender as a pervasive influence on post-sixteen transitions
- 9 Families and futures
- 10 Friendship and post-sixteen possibilities
- 11 Hopes, fears and failed expectations

Introduction to Part II: Influences on post-sixteen directions

The literature review discussed structural and cultural factors and the role of choice in post-sixteen destinations whether into education, training, employment or unemployment. From this it was possible to formulate research questions. The research questions ask what the relative importance is of factors affecting young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market before they leave school and whether these factors influence their subsequent post-sixteen destinations. Also, is there a discrepancy between intended directions before leaving school and actual destinations achieved shortly after exiting compulsory education? A final question is whether it is possible to identify intervention practices that could aid post-compulsory education transitions. This section provides an overview of the research findings and the structure of the analysis chapter.

When determining the relative importance of factors affecting intended and actual destinations in the transition from compulsory education, data analysis and personal experience revealed that the transition from Longfield Comprehensive compared with Tower Cross Comprehensive was markedly different for its former pupils. This was surprising as care was taken to select schools with similar demographic characteristics for reasons given in the methodology section. Less surprising was the gender differentiation in post-sixteen transitions and directions; for example, girls were significantly more likely to intend to enter further education and according to descriptive statistics, more likely to actually enter further education than their male counterparts.

The analysis therefore has to occur on multiple levels recognising within and between school differences. The apparent 'school effect' needs careful exploration. Were the schools causing the differential transitions of their pupils via school culture and implementation of school policy or was it the geographical and social context of the school? The analysis also explores why male and female school-leavers had significantly different post-sixteen transitions. This involves a consideration of the school effect, local labour market, the role of the family and

peers embodying the cultural characteristics of the estates and the norms and expectation framework of the two areas. The analysis argues that school influence and gender are the most important influences on young people's aspirations, perception of the labour market and post-sixteen intentions and actual destinations into further education, training, employment or unemployment.

Addressing the third research question of possible discrepancies between intended and actual destinations, differences were found in the choice process and influencing factors between young people choosing to remain in education, those entering training or employment and the young people that became unemployed. In this instance, no differences emerged between Longfield Comprehensive and Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils. Throughout the analysis chapters, these differences are highlighted to build a picture of school-leavers who are at risk of entering the labour market with few qualifications and little hope of gaining employment that matches their aspirations, or indeed of finding work at all.

The largely qualitative focus of the research, nature of the data and the way it was collected meant that multivariate analysis was not appropriate. However, the research questions and arising data did allow relationships between particular factors to be extrapolated via chi-squared testing and further elaborated through descriptive statistics. To maintain the 'flow' of the analysis section, statistical material has been placed in Appendix 4 and a factor has been referred to as 'significant' indicating a statistically significant chi-squared test at the 1% or 5% level. The term 'significant' is not used in any other context.

To give an overview of the statistical relationships found; already mentioned is the major school effect seen in the statistically significant difference in post-sixteen transitions for Tower Cross and Longfield Comprehensive pupils. Longfield pupils were significantly more likely to view their careers interview as a positive experience. An offer of a weekly incentive to continue education also proved significant for the intention to return to education but not in practice; this was particularly pertinent for boys. There was a significant gender effect of more girls intending to enter post-sixteen education than boys, which held in both schools.

However, there was no significant difference between boys and girls in GCSE grade attainment.

Family characteristics also had a relationship to post-sixteen transitions with parental educational career, amount of employment in the home, maternal employment and household size all significantly affecting the young people's intentions and/or destinations after leaving compulsory education. Young people with the majority of their friends entering post-sixteen education were significantly more likely to take this route than pupils with the majority of their friendship group leaving school. Boys were significantly more likely to belong to a large friendship group compared with girls who preferred smaller groups. Membership to a particular peer group may have also affected attitudes to further education and this was demonstrated in a significant relationship between attitudes to further education and intention to return to education.

The pupils' employment aspirations affected their intended and actual post-sixteen destinations with young people with high aspirations significantly more likely to continue their education. Aspirations also held a relationship with grade attainment; higher academic achievers had higher employment aspirations and vice versa although it is difficult to establish the causal direction of this. Pupils from Longfield Comprehensive were significantly more likely to say that access to transport would impede their search for employment, although this result was borderline. Girls were more likely than boys to say they would not move to find employment, as they would not wish to leave their family.

Statistical data does not allow the process and motivation behind the young people's actions to be explained. To gain insight into these actions, structural data needs to be complemented by cultural data. Observation and interviews allowed the analysis to acquire an understanding of the young people's motivation to take a particular post-compulsory education route. This facilitated an analysis of the role of choice by the young people in their post-sixteen directions while recognising the structural constraints, such as class and the availability of employment, within which this action was taken.

The analysis combines material from the literature, statistics from the questionnaire, edited excerpts from the transcripts of interviews with young people and their families and observations made while in the research sites. Information is also drawn from official statistics such as the 1991 census and the schools' final destination reports produced by the careers service. The sequence of the analysis chapters reflects the importance of the factors affecting post-sixteen transitions, decided through careful analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data. The school effect is discussed first as a major influence on post-sixteen destinations and this theme continues throughout the rest of the analysis chapters. The effect of gender is treated in a similar way with a separate chapter discussing some main effects; however, gender is a pervasive influence within the school, home, labour market and peer relationships. Following the effect of school and gender on post-sixteen transitions, the role of the family and peer group is analysed, providing an immediate context for the young people's choice. The influence of the local labour market is presented last. This is not because the labour market was less important than friends and family but because it appeared to be a separate force affecting post-sixteen routes through the availability of entry-level employment or signalling to some pupils the need for further qualifications.

7 The school as key in transitions from compulsory education

7.1 Introduction

The school the young people attended had a significant effect on their post-sixteen destination. Coupled with gender, the school was the most important influence on post-sixteen transitions. Pupils attending Tower Cross Comprehensive were significantly more likely to enter post-sixteen education than their counterparts at Longfield Comprehensive. Conversely, Longfield Comprehensive pupils were more likely to enter employment and training than their Tower Cross counterparts. To investigate this apparent 'school effect' it is necessary to examine the characteristics of the two schools to see what role they had in determining the difference in their pupils destinations.

7.2 School within the community

'And you know we think our top girls are really good but ...'
(Longfield Careers advisor)

School differentiation in class intake, position in the community and educational performance are influencing factors for pupil transitions at the end of compulsory education (Andrews and Bradley, 1997). The majority (95%) of Longfield Comprehensive pupils were drawn from the immediate, white, working-class council estate that experienced high levels of unemployment and deprivation which the head teacher argued were worse than those of the inner city, although this may have been a slight exaggeration. Wandering around the area, I never felt entirely comfortable. Substantial vandalism and several very squalid corners provided an air of neglect and little sense of a cohesive, friendly community. The head teacher characterised the estate as being like a 'porridge bowl', never sure if it would spill over or drain out. Further exploration of this comment suggested that the

deprivation was such that poverty and its effects reached serious lows and this led to migration of the marginally more affluent families to other areas. The spilling over of the porridge bowl represented the way that social problems on the estate seemed to peak before subsiding. Two evening youth workers spent time on the estate in the evenings in an attempt to combat the rise in teen pregnancy, vandalism and problems caused by high levels of unemployment.

The academic quality of the pupils accepted into Longfield Comprehensive was lower than neighbouring schools, two of which 'creamed off' the brightest, most able pupils from the estate. This reinforced a vicious circle for the school that struggled to attract high-calibre students from diverse class backgrounds affecting their league table placing. The head teacher recognised that the pupil intake limited the school's performance and believed that it was necessary to have a mix of ability and class to raise pupil aspirations and performance (Davies, 1999).

The careers officer at Longfield Comprehensive recognised the disadvantage of the school and its pupils compared with the middle-class school located nearby.

Careers officer: The kids [at the other school] are confident. They have huge self-esteem. They are polite and they are frighteningly clever! And they are so poised. I did some group work there last summer and the sixth form pupils, well students, showed us where we were going to sit and getting our drinks and the girls were wearing these wonderful suits. They could choose their own as long as they were suits and erm they erm got such poise and they were just so confident and it was as though they had been to Swiss finishing school and you can't imagine those competing against our girls. And you know we think our top girls are really good but you just put them against someone from [...]. Not much of a chance ... It's dead strange as we're only just across the river from [...] across the reservoir. Yet the grounds are so wonderful and the reservoir looks like a private lake there and here it looks like a reservoir!

I frequently recognised the difference in local demographics and pupil intake when travelling to and from Longfield during school 'rush hour'. Longfield is located on the outskirts of the city and only one bus serves the area. This bus frequented a number of schools and colleges, including the school the careers teacher mentioned. I often boarded the bus at school-leaving time in Longfield along with a noisy, boisterous group of pupils all pushing and shoving and talking about the day's scandals. The pupils always wore school uniform but often personalised it with trainers, jewellery extracted from pockets, and knotted their ties so only the

first couple of inches of the wide tip showed or, alternatively, the tie was stuffed into their top buttonholes. This was my cohort behaving in ways that I had seen them behave in classes and playtimes, grasping the chance to speak to friends and enemies about anything but education. As we travelled through neighbouring estates the bus emptied to be replaced by a quieter and more smartly dressed group of young people, some carrying musical instrument cases or sports equipment. The contrast in their behaviour could not be more distinct as they took their seats without any horseplay and spoke to their neighbour rather than the whole bus. Bourdieu (1977) and Bernstein (1973) would have felt reaffirmed in their theories of habitus and codes of language-watching as I did the difference in behaviour and interaction by the working- and middle-class students.

Tower Cross Comprehensive's intake was similar to Longfield Comprehensive with a majority of white, working-class pupils. When interacting within Tower Cross Comprehensive I never forgot that the school was located in a major city whereas Longfield emitted a small-town vibe, giving the feeling of being a separate entity from surrounding locales. Tower Cross pupils came from a wider catchment area that appeared less deprived with slightly lower unemployment in the home of the participants compared with the Longfield sample. Nevertheless, unemployment was higher for one of the Tower Cross school wards compared to the Longfield wards. Tower Cross Comprehensive also faced competition for the most able pupils but was seen as one of the 'better' schools in the local area, possibly due to the number of parents that had attended the school, creating a 'natural transition' for their own children.

According to government policy, parents can try to enter their children for any secondary school. Three of the Tower Cross and Longfield Comprehensive families interviewed had tried to secure a place for their children at other schools in the area and failed. A few had chosen the school because it had a special educational needs programme or because they did not like the alternative schools. However, the rest of the families had allowed their children to choose the school or had selected it because of its close proximity to home. This was possibly due to the need for the children to be able to take themselves to school because of parental work schedules (Gewirtz *et al.*, 1991).

7.3 School-based initiatives

'She's put the discipline back into education ...'
(Longfield father)

Policy initiatives towards raising school standards can affect the amount of pupils entering post-compulsory education as increasing academic performance. Tower Cross Comprehensive was part of an education action zone, working to improve literacy levels, numeracy, attendance and employability. The last two aspects were aimed to be increased by tackling pupil underachievement due to a lack of parental support, developing a more motivating curriculum and a better teaching style.

During the first visit to Tower Cross Comprehensive I was invited to attend a parents' evening. The timing of the meeting had been chosen with careful reference to the wider community. Poor turnout was often blamed on the weather or some other event taking precedence. This particular parents' evening was scheduled between two football matches allowing parents and children to watch a match, attend the meeting and return home in time for the next match. The school had also taken the costly step of posting a letter home with information about the parents' evening rather than giving it to pupils to hand deliver. This led to a higher turnout than usual with over one hundred parents and children. The meeting was motivating, outlining how the school and parents by working together could support the child to achieve their best. Lists were handed to parents of important dates including coursework and extra curriculum activities to give them as much information as possible so they could motivate their child. This demonstrated how the school viewed the home and school as a partnership (Lareau, 1989, 1997). Estimated grade forms were also sent home regularly through the pupils to allow the parent to keep track of their child's progress. However, in some family interviews, parents from both schools were unaware of their child's predicted grades and there were a few jokes about how the teenager had managed to keep it quiet or 'under wraps'. It was almost as if the parents expected this secrecy and in some cases were proud of it, relating their child's actions to their own educational experience.

Tower Cross Comprehensive had taken the step of implementing a pupil GCSE incentive scheme. Certificates were given out for the completion of each piece of coursework. These were put into a prize draw at the end of the year to win a compact disc player. Other new measures included allowing pupils to drop one GCSE to concentrate on the other eight. There was also extra help for pupils who were borderline for achieving five A*-C GCSEs to boost them over. Support groups had been set up for the less academic.

Longfield Comprehensive had also changed in the last few years under its head teacher's leadership who was appointed in 1995. The head teacher was a small woman but a mighty presence. She was fond of wearing suits as she told me to maintain the distinction between teacher/authority and pupils. There was a drive and enthusiasm surrounding the head teacher and it was not hard to believe that the changes instigated in the school were due to her mission to turn the school and its pupil's fortunes around. She did, however, admit that she suffered from stress and her forthcoming move to a more privileged school would provide welcome relief. Part of her stress may have been because the school had been under 'special measures' for two years since 1997 after failing their OFSTED inspection. The school had just been released from these after passing their October 1999 inspection when the research began.

The parents recognised that Longfield Comprehensive had changed for the better and attributed it to the head teacher.

HM: What do you think she's [head teacher] done to change it?

Stuart's father: She's put discipline in. There was no discipline from what I could make out. She's made the pupils more aware of how much responsibility that they've got for themselves. The previous regime kept on sending me and my wife letters about the responsibility that I've got to teach our children which we already knew, our responsibility was encouragement and to make sure they did hard work but the previous regime was trying to hold me responsible for the period they were in school ... She's put the discipline back into education, to show the children, much the same as the army, that discipline is for a good reason.

The quote by Stuart's father contains an interesting use of terminology; he speaks of the 'previous regime' and the beneficial discipline of the army. It is possible that

these traits would be advantageous in the working environment the pupils may later inhabit. It may enable the pupils to follow the management's or supervisor's directions and could instil a clear 'them and us' distinction between authority and the workers, seen in the new pupil-teacher relationship that had previously been absent. The authority of the school could be seen as similar to the operation of authority in the working-class home, located within a central figure (Bernstein, 1973). With a look of horror on his face, Stuart's father retold a story of a past parents' evening. The male teacher he spoke to had long hair, beaded necklaces and moccasins and swore in class. To Stuart's father, the new authoritative head teacher was a relief.

7.4 School structure: the availability of a sixth form

Government league table and questionnaire figures show Longfield and Tower Cross Comprehensive performing at a similar academic level in the year 2000 GCSE exams, relating to the research cohort. According to government figures, 20% of pupils from both schools achieved five plus A*-C GCSE grades, the research showed 22% and 26% from Longfield and Tower Cross Comprehensive respectively achieving this level. However, there was a significant difference between the numbers of pupils from both schools entering post-sixteen education. From the cohort studied, 75% of Tower Cross pupils entered post-sixteen education compared with 51% of Longfield Comprehensive pupils. A more established 'academic' culture existed in Tower Cross compared with that of Longfield. Although A*-C GCSE grade performance had been similar for both schools for the last two years this had not always been the case. In 1997, Longfield had been placed under special measures after only 5% of their pupils had passed more than five A*-C GCSE grades. Although the school had greatly improved over the last three years, an established academic culture may not yet have been fostered and this could have impaired the perception of post-sixteen education as an acceptable and achievable route.

Table 7.1 Percentage of pupils on school roll achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs

	1997 (% of roll achieving 5+ A-C GCSEs)	1998 (% of roll achieving 5+ A-C GCSEs)	1999 (% of roll achieving 5+ A-C GCSEs)	2000 (% of roll achieving 5+ A-C GCSEs)
Longfield Comprehensive	5	14	21	20
Tower Cross Comprehensive	20	25	19	20
Birmingham LEA	35	36	38	41
England	45	46	48	49

The difference in entrance to post-sixteen education could be attributable to the structure of the school, and parental and pupil acceptance of the idea of staying on to sixth form as inevitable. Having a large sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive meant that it was easier for the pupils to continue their education. As the figures below indicate, entrance to sixth form rather than college was the normal route for Tower Cross students.

Table 7.2 Type of further education institution entered by post-sixteen education entrants (figures from careers service final destination reports)

Post-16 Direction	Longfield Comprehensive		Tower Cross Comprehensive	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
School sixth form	11	38%	64	72%
College sixth form	3	10%	7	8%
College vocational	15	52%	18	20%
Total	29	100%	89	100%

Tower Cross Comprehensive promoted their sixth form at every opportunity as the more logical choice than college. The promotion included a number of presentations to pupils concerning the ease of entering school sixth form and its utility. At one of the promotional meetings, a senior staff member highlighted the fact that there was a fee to register at college – a cost that joining sixth form would avoid. This may have been quite a persuasive argument for young people who were aware of financial constraints in the home. The explicit drive by Tower Cross Comprehensive to recruit sixth formers was part of the school's development plan and was occasioned by the fall in sixth-form numbers in 1998. In 1997, 60% of former Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils entered post-sixteen education and this fell to 47% in 1998 with a corresponding drop in sixth-form students. As outlined in the development plan, this was due to the students' increased confidence in applying to college and to better local labour market conditions. The lower sixth form enrolments decreased the school's budget and delayed plans for a joint sixth form with a neighbouring school. Within the Tower Cross area there were numerous further education colleges offering a wide range of courses, and it is a testament to the promotional drive of Tower Cross Comprehensive that so few pupils choose to follow this alternative route. Like Bracebridge College, a further education institution in Ball *et al.*'s (2000) research, Tower Cross sixth-form leaders may have recognised that it was a case of 'grow or die' because of the cut-throat nature of the further education market, especially where multiple providers existed (*ibid.*, p. 13).

The size of Longfield Comprehensives' sixth form decreased from 18 pupils in 1998 and 1999 to 11 pupils in the year 2000. Longfield Comprehensive was trying to change the character of its small, on-site sixth form to become more academic and actively deterring the less academic pupils. The head of sixth form told me that sixth form was previously seen 'as a bit of a doss'. Its small size limited the number of courses it could offer, and the possibility of interaction with a diverse group of peers thus decreased its attractiveness to former pupils. Longfield pupils were more liable to continue a vocational form of education at a nearby college. The students could also opt to continue their education in a local college sixth form.

Longfield Comprehensive pupils had a different post-sixteen education choice to make compared with their Tower Cross counterparts. The small sixth form meant that if they wanted to continue their academic education it would be necessary for them to consider alternative further education provision in a new environment and face the added costs this would bring, including a registration fee and transport to and from college. Tower Cross pupils by this measure had a relatively easy choice with known factors. Ball *et al.* (2000) describe a 'friction of distance' (p. 149) limiting access to post-sixteen education, referring to among other things material factors and a perception of security.

7.5 Contrasting post-sixteen destinations: a three-year retrospective

To place the number of Longfield and Tower Cross pupils continuing their education in perspective, other post-sixteen transitions must be examined. The figures in the following tables were taken from the careers service official destination survey from both schools for the last three years. These figures differ from the results produced by the research as the careers service survey encompassed the whole year group unlike the research that was unable to contact all of the pupils, particularly absentees, truants and school refusers. However, despite the careers service's more extensive coverage, they still did not reach every pupil. Those pupils not responding could be more prone to unemployment, therefore this category could rise by 10%. For reference, the figures produced by the research are displayed in red.

Longfield Comprehensives careers service percentages displayed below show that there had been a continued drop in pupils entering post-compulsory education amounting to a 10% decline between 1998 and 2000. There had been a 4% decrease in young people entering employment since 1999 but still almost double the amount compared with 1998. There had been a continued decline in the number of school-leavers becoming unemployed and the number entering training had fluctuated over the last few years.

Table 7.3 Final destination percentages for Longfield Comprehensive

Final destination	1998* Pupils on roll %	1999 Pupils on roll % (Number)	2000 Pupils on roll % (Number)	Questionnaire 2000 Pupils on roll % (Number)
Post-sixteen education	51.17	48.34 (29/60)	42 (29/69)	51 (26/51)
Employment	9.3	21.67 (13/60)	17.39 (11/69)	21.6 (11/51)
Training	11.63	8.8 (5/60)	15.9 (11/69)	13.7 (7/51)
Unemployment	18.6	16.67 (10/60)	14.49 (10/69)	13.7 (7/51)
Total	90.7	95.48 (57/60)	89.78 (61/69)	100 (51/51)

* Numbers not available

Unlike Longfield Comprehensive, the number of Tower Cross pupils' continuing education had increased for the second year running. However, there were similarities to Longfield Comprehensive with percentages in categories correspondingly increasing or decreasing. Employment decreased and the number of school-leavers undertaking training increased between 1999 and 2000. The rise in training participation in 2000 at Tower Cross was however marginal compared with Longfield figures.

Table 7.4 Final destination percentages for Tower Cross Comprehensive

Final destination	1998* Pupils on roll %	1999* Pupils on roll %	2000 Pupils on roll % (Number)	Questionnaire 2000 Pupils on roll % (Number)
Post-sixteen education	47.86	51.06	58.75 (94/160)	75.2 (85/112)
Employment	17.09	21.99	11.87 (19/160)	9.7 (11/112)
Training	13.68	7.09	7.5 (12/160)	4.4 (5/112)
Unemployment	9.40	12.06	14.37 (23/160)	9.7 (11/112)
Total	88.03	92.23	92.5 (148/160)	99.1 (112/113)

* Numbers not available

Both schools had experienced a shift in post-sixteen destinations between 1998 and 2000. This may have been due to the change of leadership in both schools occurring around 1995. With the new leadership came staff changes and new approaches to boost pupil performance and league table placing. For Tower Cross this translated into a steady increase in further education participation since 1998 but for Longfield this declined. Unemployment for school-leavers had become equal between the two schools, but whereas for Longfield this represented a reduction, for Tower Cross it was the result of a consistent increase. Other factors than school effect are likely to be partly responsible for these figures, including the local labour market and training opportunities for school-leavers. This will be discussed in a separate chapter.

7.6 Further education information provision and support

'They throw all these leaflets at us but then they tell us it's all changed.'
(Rachel, Tower Cross pupil)

Some pupils were confused about post-sixteen education options and this led a few Tower Cross pupils to enter sixth form. This destination was not an example of an informed rational choice or preference optimisation but due to limited knowledge of alternatives and a willingness to go with the influence of others (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Harren, 1980; Simon, 1957). For some pupils, entrance to sixth form may have just seemed to happen to them (Ball *et al.*, 2000: 99). Nevertheless, for the less academic the confusion may have deterred them from post-compulsory education due to mystification.

Rachel: Everyone in my classes are stuck on it (further education) cos they throw all these leaflets at us but then they tell us its all changed so everyone is confused about it really. (*Tower Cross pupil*)

HM: But you think sixth form will be okay?

Rachel: I think I'll like it but I dunno if I'm just scared to try anything new. I do like the idea of sixth form but I don't know enough about it to make a decision.

The head of sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive recognised the bewilderment of some year 11 pupils and perceived that the less confident pupils stayed with the school as unsure of their options. The pupils may then not have thrived, entering an option that did not match their aspirations or abilities.

HM: Do you think there could be anything else done to help them into further education or employment?

Head of sixth form: Not such a complex system. From the youngsters' point of view it's massively complex. Some schools have got sixth forms some haven't. Some colleges have more appropriate courses than others, some are linked to higher education and have got franchised courses, some have almost a guarantee of leading into a higher education course but the guarantee's a bit vague. If an authority was revolutionised and had a genuine tertiary section I can see that being easier for youngsters to grapple with because at the moment they are being thrust ... They get stuff through from all the colleges and all the promises that sometimes don't materialise and some do and they get bombarded and sometimes they stick to where they are because they feel comfortable. Our youngsters, the confident ones will do well where they are and will probably move on and those who aren't so confident will stay where they are and might do well, might not.

The need for the sixth form to grow in size (and thus prosperity) may have led to the acceptance of As/A-level pupils who would have been better resitting GCSEs in a different learning environment. The way many young people decided between college and sixth form was similar to how their secondary schools had been selected, with proximity, friendship network and ease paramount in the decision process. However, Tower Cross Comprehensive former pupils were more likely to say that the school had influenced them in their post-sixteen directions than Longfield Comprehensive former pupils, 35.7% (25/70) and 29.2% (7/24) respectively. Some of these students were more concerned with coping with and understanding what they already knew rather than exploring other options and new identities (Ball *et al.*, 2000: 96). The differential school effect could be due to the increased amounts of information Tower Cross Comprehensive offered its students concerning the ease of the transition to sixth form, or that the school has persuaded them against college as expensive, too far away and generally problematic. A number of young people commented that it was easier to enter sixth form as it was 'just around the corner' and they did not want to travel to college every day. This was an angle that Tower Cross Comprehensive was quick to promote.

However, when speaking to sixth formers at both schools later in the research, a fear of the unknown was displayed. One Tower Cross student spoke in hushed tones of the stabbings and gangs at a nearby college. The fear of leaving a 'safe' environment may have deterred many from leaving the school. When questioned about why they had returned to the sixth form and not entered college, the Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils displayed a familiarity with the environment and wariness of entering a new situation. The sixth formers felt like they 'fitted in' and 'knew the rules'.

Adrian: Well it's a nice routine [here]. You've got friends around, you know the teachers and it's a lot easier to just come back and get straight into it than go to a new place and learn the routines and not be able to just get into your work. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

Melanie: Too scared! I don't like change. I just don't like change. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

Amber: I did think I had a lot of options. But I was scared in a way to choose the one away from here cos it's a new environment; it's a new world. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

The words of these students mirror those of Luke and Jordan, Ball *et al.*'s (2000) 'ordinary young men'. These pupils may have been seeking continuity in a time of economic and cultural uncertainty (ibid., p. 102). If young people had gained acquaintance with a college through open days there was less hesitancy in leaving the school environment. The careers officer at Longfield Comprehensive recognised the perceived security of the home area and parochial views limiting post-sixteen choice.

Longfield Careers Officer: A lot of them tend to have very parochial views as well on where they can go at the end of year 11 and they see working or going to another college as being foreign ... they're quite timid. They're very challenging pupils a lot of them but it's not because they are particularly hard or streetwise, it's because they're defensive.

More confident students were liable to enter college if they felt it offered the appropriate course or if they had 'outgrown' school. Appropriate courses usually indicated a particular vocational route such as childcare or bricklaying. Some young people also selected college as wishing to meet new people, break away from the school or as Claire, a Tower Cross pupil, stated, felt the need to 'move on'. This feeling of maturity was, however, also the reason that Rebecca, a Longfield pupil, gave for not going back to education despite being unemployed.

The belief the schools possessed in some of their students' ability to succeed in their GCSE exams and post-sixteen education affected some pupils' self-confidence and efficacy. This is similar to the correlation between parental belief in their child's ability to succeed and positive results (Bandura *et al.*, 2001). It also shows that the choice to enter further education was socially embedded in both the home and school. In answer to the question, *How did the school influence you to take your particular route?*, replies included:

Helen: [The school] convinced me I was capable of doing further education. (Tower Cross pupil)

Debbie: They [the school] believed I could do really well. (Tower Cross pupil)

Alison: I think it was like my sister and my mum and the teachers saying I should go to college cos I'm capable of getting all these grades. So I thought I might as well, I've got nothing to lose. (Longfield pupil)

The school could also provide an incentive to do well when the pupil perceived they had been treated badly.

James: They used to tell me I will never get the course I want cause of what grades I am going to get but I achieved what I was aiming for. (Electrical course at college, former Tower Cross pupil)

School targets imposed by the government such as at least 20% of pupils achieving five A*–C grades at GCSE and a certain number progressing to post-compulsory education can place pupils under pressure. In asking what the cohort disliked about school, particularly the non-academic and future college pupils complained about school pressure.

Rachel: I just don't understand all that [A-levels]. I've got all the stuff and I'm just not getting anywhere. I keep being asked what I want to do and I just don't know. (Tower Cross sixth former)

Jolie: Pressure, amount of bullying around school. (college, former Tower Cross pupil)

Natasha: Teachers pushing you to do work. (unemployed, former Tower Cross pupil)

Zoe: Too much pressure. (art college, former Longfield pupil)

Penny: Too much pressure from people who expect you to do well. (office junior, former Longfield pupil)

Pamela, now unemployed, felt that the school was uninterested in her due to her lack of academic ability. This apathy did not spur her on to achieve but seemed to lower her self-esteem and limit her choices.

Pamela: I've been told because I'm getting lower grades than others like D's, C's and E's I will not be able to stay on 6th form. I don't get on with most teachers they always put me down and tell me I won't get anywhere with my grades (unemployed, former Tower Cross pupil)

Pamela is similar to Debra, a participant in Ball *et al.*'s (2000) research. Debra had learning difficulties and was unable to find a source of positive identity at school. Debra and Pamela's experience of school led to a damaged school or 'learner identity' (Ball *et al.*, 2000). The school's need to achieve a high certification rate led some pupils to withdraw themselves possibly as feeling excluded.

7.7 School policy on disaffected pupils

'I favour the majority over the minority'
(Longfield Head teacher)

The school's explicit and hidden curriculum can affect its pupils' post-sixteen options and subsequent destinations. Different policy between the two schools included the spoken and covert means for dealing with disaffected pupils, whether they were actively integrated into the school or other educational provision sought.

In a relaxed conversation with the head teacher at Longfield Comprehensive, she outlined the school's informal policy for dealing with 'trouble' pupils. She argued that she found ways to 'push out' problem pupils either by exclusion or transferring them to part-time vocational courses. By placing the education of the majority over the minority the head teacher argued that this allowed the class to continue with their work uninterrupted by disaffected pupils. She recognised how 'incorrect' this approach was but preferred to do what was necessary to let the majority pass their exams. This could improve the school's overall GCSE performance and provides an example of how the government policy of publishing league tables afflicts already disadvantaged pupils. Schools are under pressure to meet targets and this may lead them to 'hide' their failing pupils by transferring them to other institutions or prompting parents to withdraw them from school before they are excluded. Unfortunately, these young people can remain hidden as they are not old enough to register for benefits or join the New Deal scheme.

Unemployed school-leavers can become difficult to contact (McCready, 2000). The careers advisors in both schools encountered this problem when carrying out the final destination survey every year.

Longfield careers officer: You're not allowed to have any no responses but that is ever so difficult sometimes particularly with some of the community round here, lots of people just move on, move away, families split up, kids move out of the area, telephones are cut off, they don't answer the letters. It is really hard and there are kids that have been on non-attenders for perhaps one or two years who I am not able to get in contact with. Or there are kids that have been excluded and

don't want anything to do with anybody who might be from school. So that's hard as well and you get a lot of resistance from parents in that respect and I don't want to say 'well excuse me but you should be you know' but that's what the government seems to want us to do so that we have got contact with these kids and to keep the contact. That's great when I can get them and they come to school occasionally or I can get them hooked into something like those boys who are interested in the army.

Longfield Comprehensive operated a strict uniform code. This could have been problematic for students from deprived homes, unable to afford the uniform and arguably the most likely to disaffected. This school policy arguably excluded some pupils before they even entered the classroom. Measures were undoubtedly in place to assist poorer families financially with this cost but would have required the parents to make their financial situation known.

Longfield Comprehensive policy on disaffected pupils, candidly revealed by the head teacher, was considerably different to the spoken philosophy of Tower Cross Comprehensive. The Tower Cross school policy encouraged disaffected pupils to become fully integrated into the rest of school. This was achieved by allowing the pupils to enter part-time schooling rather than excluding them. Tower Cross Comprehensive was also a participant in the school-mentoring scheme whereby two university students worked with disaffected or failing pupils to help them raise their grades and prevent them dropping out. The Longfield Comprehensive head teacher commented they did not have the staff resources to initiate such a programme. In 1997/98, the academic year before the research started, Longfield Comprehensive had a markedly higher exclusion rate than Tower Cross Comprehensive. Longfield excluded 7 boys and 2 girls out of approximately 468 pupils. Tower Cross excluded 3 boys out of approximately 882 pupils.

7.8 The influential role of careers guidance

'I gently nudge them into touch.'
(Longfield Careers advisor)

The careers service has undergone many changes in the last few years, also adopting a social inclusion role. Both the careers advisor at Longfield Comprehensive and the head of sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive defined

pupils 'at risk' as those who were non-attenders, sporadic attenders and likely to underachieve their potential. The Longfield careers officer saw these young people entering a life of 'drugs, dropping out, a period of a succession of jobs without training or satisfaction, poverty'.

Longfield careers officer: Well normally those in year 11 have had career interviews, erm and those in the post-16 here. Also I target those in year 10 who might be at risk and try and give them all an interview towards the end of the summer term so that I have seen them and that we might have to, if there's a possibility that alternative provision might have to be provided, something like that, we all need to know what vocational area they are looking at. Erm, also I need to start targeting quite early on so I need to know which students might be most likely to be at risk.

HM: With the careers guidance in the school do you think it's changed over the last few years?

Tower Cross Head sixth form: Yes it's changed significantly with the demands that priority is given to disadvantaged, disaffected youngsters, underachievers, it does mean that youngsters that are trying hard who are doing their best that could be missed out on the advice or may only get a short time. Prior to last year we would have interviewed everyone from year 11 [who] would have an individual interview, minimum of twenty minutes unless they didn't turn up. Now we have to prioritise, the careers guy prioritises and now he will see some youngsters that fit into the categories of disaffected, underachieving etc., three or four times before he will see someone just doing their best and they are no less deserving than any of the others, they need the quality advice just as much.

Only 15.2% (24/158) of the cohort had not had a careers interview and four of these young people became unemployed, showing the importance of helping pupils explore their post-sixteen options. It also demonstrated that if the pupils who became unemployed were likely to be absent from school, the careers service would have made repeated attempts to contact them.

Earlier research found official sources of careers guidance were negated in favour of the peer and family network (Griffin, 1985; Willis, 1977). However, due to changes in the labour market and an increase in training scheme provision, importance may be placed by young people on gaining information from career professionals. School-leavers entering employment or training were more likely to rate the careers interview positively 93.8% (30/32) compared to 84.1% post-compulsory education entrants (74/88). This could be attributed to the fact they gained practical information they could immediately apply and instrumental job information and contacts. Nevertheless, 10 out of 12 school-leavers who became unemployed also rated careers guidance positively (83.3%). Possibly the

information provided was seen as relevant even though it did not lead to later labour market success.

The significantly better perception in Longfield Comprehensive of the careers interview could have been due to the careers teacher, who was often mentioned by name as the person who helped the young person choose a training scheme or job for when they left school. 95.6% (43/45) of Longfield pupils rated the interview positively compared with 81.8% of Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils (72/88). The Longfield careers teacher had an amazing rapport with the pupils and knew them all by name, their personal situations and aspirations. The amount of pupils gaining training scheme placements could have been due to her efficiency. During our interview, fifteen-year-old Kieran came to see her with his newborn baby. His girlfriend was still at the school and the careers officer was working closely with them to help Kieran into training. There was a clear positive relationship between the careers officer and Kieran that could help him achieve a successful transition to the labour market.

The Longfield careers officer saw her role as making sure the pupils were aware of their options and 'raising aspirations' (Donohue and Patton, 1998) although not necessarily encouraging the young person into post-compulsory education. She wanted to make the pupils realistic about their opportunities (Griffin, 1985) but challenge them to look outside the immediate area and gender stereotyped boundaries. The careers officer said that if a student had unrealistic career aspirations, such as becoming a professional footballer, she would 'gently nudge them into touch'. She did this by asking what they were doing towards gaining this career, such as playing for a local team and sensitively challenging if their goal was achievable.

Longfield careers officer: I had one girl last year that wanted to be a dolphin trainer ... and erm my first question was do you swim? 'No'! ... and where are you going to work? There might be sort of limited opportunities for dolphin trainers ... It's getting them to come round to acknowledge the fact (unrealistic aspiration) ... and also talk about a backup plan, that's the good thing.

Information gained by pupils during their careers interviews could modify their intended post-sixteen directions. Some students said the interview made them

change their mind about the options available, reconsider the type of job or training they wanted or had led to a decision to enter post-sixteen education. The careers interview had provided relevant information concerning money, opportunity availability and the qualifications needed for particular jobs in an acceptable format. Low literacy could have prevented some pupils from finding this information themselves.

My experience within the schools, both during the initial observations through to the time I spent in sixth form emphasised how eager the pupils were to hear modern information concerning careers and possible educational routes. I was frequently approached in classrooms and common rooms and asked numerous questions about entrance to university, careers in psychology and sociology (I had told the pupils the subject of my degree) and which university to apply to for a range of things, including sports – something I know very little about. This raised the interesting question of how the young people viewed me. I was apparently seen as an expert in various areas of further and higher education, an image I had done nothing to earn other than by being from a university. I was also apparently seen as someone who could be approached and possibly a credible source of information. I believe that my carefully planned entrance to the schools, my age, gender and status as an approachable outsider led to this.

I was aware before the pupils left school that I could possibly influence their post-sixteen directions. However, I thought this unlikely due to the limited time I spent with them compared with teachers, friends and family. Any comments made by me were not intended as advice but were offered in a friendly style. For specific queries relating to things I could not comment on I suggested that the individual spoke to the careers advisor, went to the careers resource room or computer room to use the Internet.

7.9 The Education Maintenance Allowance: reaching the reachable?

'Rip off – there's always a catch.'
(Kelly, Tower Cross pupil)

Both of the schools were participating in the Education Maintenance Allowance pilot (EMA) so it was necessary to assess its impact on the pupils' choice to continue education or enter the labour market, whether into training or employment. The EMA is a means-tested grant paid to pupils in compliance with certain conditions. The government pilot targets areas where staying on rates are low and deprivation high to see if financial support increases post-sixteen participation, retention and achievement. The first questionnaire was distributed from October to November 1999, before information would have reached the pupils about the possibility of receiving the grant. At the time the research started, there was little information available to the public concerning the scheme and the first reports were produced in 2001 via the National Centre for Social Research (Ashworth *et al.*, 2001; Legard *et al.*, 2001; Maguire *et al.*, 2001). The amount available to the cohort via the EMA was £30 a week to return to education, however the first questionnaire asked if £40 a week would encourage them to continue post-sixteen education.

A significant relationship was found in the first questionnaire between willingness to return to education for £40 a week and the pupils' intention to enter further education. Descriptive statistics showed 66.5% of pupils (109/164) said they would return to further education for £40 a week. Young people stating this were already more likely to intend to enter sixth form or college. The future workers and trainees were 20% less likely to state they would stay in education for £40 a week than students entering post-sixteen education. However, the future unemployed young people were marginally more likely than post-compulsory education entrants to say they would enter further education in return for payment.

Pupils often stated that continuing education was dependent on a number of things. Some pupils replied that it depended on whether they had a job or not and that post-

sixteen education entrance was not about money. Structural, financial and cultural factors affected post-sixteen choices. An initial EMA evaluation report (Legard *et al.*, 2001) supports this finding, arguing that decision-making was influenced by 'personal considerations and external influences' including personal motivation, experience of schooling and GCSE results, feelings about further education and influence from important others such as friends, family, teachers and careers advisors. Typical responses to the question, *If you were offered £40 a week to go into further education, would you?*, included:

Lisa: Yes, because it'll support us while still in education. (Tower Cross sixth former)

Sophie: Yes and no ... depends if I had any other offers. (training, former Longfield pupil)

Sarah: Though I want to go into further education I wouldn't do it just for the money unless I really wanted to do it. (college, former Longfield pupil)

Craig: No ... should want to go to school because of wanting to learn. (army, former Longfield pupil)

Damian: Depends on whether I had a job lined up. (Longfield sixth former)

Post-sixteen education students were asked in the second questionnaire distributed in October 2000 whether the money influenced their decision to return. There was no statistically significant effect of the incentive on education re-entrance; 56 out of 75 students (74.7%) said no while only 19 (25.3%) said that it did affect their decision. Similar to the first questionnaire, a number of students commented that they were returning to education anyway and the money did not influence their decision. In addition, many of the sixth formers only found out about the grant after rejoining education. Lack of information due to the late announcement of the scheme could have led to a lower uptake and remedying this could lead to increased participation in the future. This was a problem identified by the EMA evaluation team (Maguire *et al.*, 2001). The careers advisor at Longfield Comprehensive commented:

Careers officer: It's been a rather reactive thing we feel and we haven't had much, as career advisors, we haven't had any training on it at all. It's only come in, in the last month (April) and we haven't been able to tell our year 11s and they've been out since we've known that this is on. So they need, really need contacting so that they, it might make such a difference to them.

Many of the students were positive about being paid to continue their education. This may contribute to higher completion rates but from the data, it was impossible to tell. The head of sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive commented that the grant may have led to a 'handful' of pupils returning to education but would not overstate its impact, believing that labour market shifts affected intake as much if not more than incentives to return to education.

HM: Has the EMA boosted your sixth form numbers?

Head of sixth form: Slightly, but there are other influences this year. There isn't one influence because if I could say that the employment recruitment was identical from one year to another and you didn't take out particular exam successes ... if you only had one variable it would be easier. I think it's had an effect, but whether it's had a dramatic effect I don't know ... I mean our sixth form intake is up about ten bodies from about 56 to 66 so whether that's just the £30 maintenance. It will affect it; it certainly has affected some ... they have to be staying on for a minimum of 15 hours full-time education. They still have to meet family finance checks and the £30 is a maximum figure. I'm still waiting to see how it pans out; I mean the paperwork is quite horrendous.

HM: I get the feeling you are quite sceptical about it?

Head of sixth form: I think it's unnecessarily complicated. I understand that they are dealing with public money and they don't want it wasted but equally they don't understand, the people who raise the initiatives, the extra work it creates in a school where there are no extra staff taken on to do that.

The EMA had created an additional workload within both schools; among other things it required them to monitor attendance stringently and draw up learning agreements that the pupils had to sign to be eligible for the allowance. The complicated form also meant that a lot were incorrectly completed by the pupils and their parents and rectified by the school. Maguire *et al.* (2001) found 50–75% of forms were incorrectly completed and subsequently dealt with by the school. Personal questions about income as a means-tested allowance had also led to some resistance. The evaluation team found that this led to a lower take-up among families who were towards the upper end of the means tested eligibility criteria; possibly the amount of money available was not attractive enough to warrant filling in the form (Maguire *et al.*, 2001).

HM: Are you getting the money from the government?

Nathan: I was until my dad got all the things and thought they were being a bit nosey so he tore it up. Well he's paying me now. (*former Tower Cross pupil*)

School-leavers intending to enter training or employment were more likely to state that they would not return to education, even if they became unemployed (Ashworth *et al.*, 2001; Legard *et al.*, 2001). This group were more likely to possess few qualifications and undertake low-status, low-paid employment. Yet, the measures designed to encourage them back to education apparently had little effect. Young people leaving education may have seen the prospect of receiving an incentive for continuing something they disliked, as not much of an inducement. The school-leavers believed they could earn at least £30–£40 a week on a training scheme or more if working and preferred this route to continued schooling; it even may have been that the incentive was not enough. As two future school-leavers stated about continuing education for money:

Kelly: Rip off – there's always a catch. (vocational course at college, former Tower Cross pupil)

Tony: Tell them to stick it. (production line, former Longfield pupil)

Based on the results from this one study it could be suggested the government was paying money to pupils who already intended to stay on at school and the money was having little effect on those wanting to leave. However, this result could be because the scheme was in the early stages and not widely publicised. The effect may be more pronounced in other areas including lowering the post-sixteen-education dropout rate. Early evaluations suggest that the incentive improves post-sixteen retention, attendance and achievement (Ashworth *et al.*, 2001; Legard *et al.*, 2001).

Longfield male pupils were more likely than Tower Cross male pupils to say they would enter post-sixteen education for £40 a week; 20% more of Longfield male pupils than the Tower Cross Comprehensive male pupils (Ashworth *et al.*, 2001). Longfield Comprehensive had a higher percentage of its school-leavers exiting education; therefore this result is encouraging. The deprivation of the home and area could be affecting the male pupils' perception of the directions available to them and an adequate incentive scheme may adjust this. The Longfield Comprehensive girls were 15% less likely than the Longfield boys and 11% less likely than the Tower Cross Comprehensive girls to state they would be encouraged

back to education by the money. This may be related to a negative school attitude and lower self-confidence displayed in the school observations by some of the female pupils and the desire to pursue vocational education.

7.10 Conclusion: school effect as key in post-sixteen life chances?

Factors in the school such as careers guidance, availability of a sizeable sixth form, school culture and head teacher leadership had a direct impact on the pupils' post-sixteen directions as affecting the pupils' aspirations, perception of the routes available and the possibility of entrance to the school sixth form. The school could effectively block or make accessible certain routes by allowing an easy transition to further education or by acting in the interests of the majority limiting the choices of the minority. However, the community the school was located within affected pupil intake and parents and pupils attending the two schools seemed to harbour differing opinions about the acceptability of returning to education, possibly created by the sixth-form culture within Tower Cross Comprehensive. As will be seen in later chapters, financial capital and role models available in the home and membership of certain peer groups contributed to this culture, affecting the post-sixteen routes that the young people perceived to be available.

8 Gender as a pervasive influence on post-sixteen transitions

8.1 Introduction

As the title of this chapter suggests, gender had a significant effect throughout the research and was related to many other variables. The intention to enter further education was significantly related to gender in both schools. Gender was also important in the relationships boys and girls had with their friends, family and the school. The choices the school-leavers made were influenced by their gender and the findings represent a picture where post-sixteen transitions were constrained by socialised gender stereotypes reinforced by the young people's actions within their culture and by the broader cultural and economic context affecting gender identity, aspirations and outcomes.

8.2 Gender and choice in post-sixteen destinations

Girls were significantly more likely to intend to enter post-sixteen education than boys were. The differences in post-sixteen intentions translated to gender differences in destinations with 10% more girls entering post-sixteen education compared with boys. However there was an apparent difference between the schools, reflecting the overall lower participation of former Longfield pupils in post-sixteen education. Within the Longfield Comprehensive sample, female pupils were 7% less likely to intend to enter further education compared with their female counterparts at Tower Cross. Of Longfield pupils, 60% (12/20) of girls and 45.2% (14/31) of boys continued their education. The Tower Cross Comprehensive sample figures showed 79.2% (42/53) of girls and 72.9% (43/59) of boys taking this route.

Nationally, 68% of boys and 76% of girls enter college and sixth form every year, perhaps delineating this route as female (DfEE, 2001a). The head of sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive recognised this gender bias.

HM: Are you finding a lot more boys are leaving school at sixteen?

Head of sixth form: No, not more than it was. Our sixth form is significantly female but it varies a lot depending on how the employment is outside and how much the ... whatever initiatives are going on. A couple of years ago when the training agency was revamped and their advertising was really significant an awful lot of money and time went into it, there was quite a large take up, certainly more boys than girls.

The higher number of boys than girls trying to enter the labour market in both schools, coupled with the changing nature of entry-level work, meant that more male school-leavers became unemployed than female. In total 18 out of 53 (34%) school-leavers became unemployed, consisting of 13 boys (13/90 14.4%) and 5 girls (5/73 6.8%). The increased amount of male unemployment may have been because girls were 12% more likely than boys to consider entering a range of occupations. The boys' lower labour knowledge and lack of recognition for the need for further qualifications could have contributed to the higher number leaving school – a pragmatically rational choice.

The cohorts' reasons for selecting their destination differed by gender. On the surface, those remaining in college or sixth form appeared to make a choice to invest in their human capital (Ball *et al.*, 2000). Girls placed more importance on continuing education to achieve qualifications to help gain employment with 54.8% (40/73) stating this as their reason to continue their education compared with 39.6% (36/91) of boys. However, 18.7% (17/91) of boys intended to enter post-compulsory education due to the scarcity of local employment and as unready to work, compared with 5.5% (4/73) girls. The boys were also more likely to view education as a substitution for employment. Matthew, after failing to gain a placement at British Telecom, returned to Tower Cross sixth form, as 'I couldn't think of anything else that I wanted to do!'

HM: If you were offered a decent job tomorrow would you take it?

Matthew: Yeah

HM: So you think qualifications are important but ...

Matthew: If I had a job I would take it. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

8.3 Academic achievements

'Boys are happier kicking a football around than reading a book.'
(*Tower Cross Head of Sixth form*)

At a national and local level, the trend is for girls to perform better at GCSE level than boys. In the sample, girls were more likely to be semi-academic or academic with 27.1% (19/70) of the girls scoring five or more A*–C grades compared with 20% of boys (18/90), although this difference was not statistically significant. Overall, boys were more likely than girls to be non-academic, scoring below five D–G GCSE grades: 42.2% of boys (38/90) compared to 28.6% of girls (20/70). Rice (1999) found boys with lower academic attainment were twice less likely to enter further education than girls with the same GCSE scores. This result was clear in the research with 60% of non-academic girls entering post-compulsory education compared with 40% of non-academic boys.

During an interview with the head of sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive, he hypothesised why boys were underachieving. He perceived that the boys' underachievement was due to the culture of masculinity, placing kudos on physical ability and being part of a gang. This would seem to suggest that masculinity is not in crisis but working-class girls are achieving nearer their potential: their male counterparts are continuing to place emphasis on non-academic pursuits.

HM: You mentioned that pupils are underachieving, why do you think that is?

Head of sixth form: Peer pressure. Doing well at school doesn't have a lot of street cred. Why it should be affecting more boys than girls is probably historical I'm guessing. Boys are quite happy to kick a football around ... I've got nothing objective, it's just a gut feeling ... but you see boys are happier kicking a football around than reading a book. The knock on effects of that and historically within families I guess were that the male member of the family has been involved with manual jobs.

The higher male leaving rate was also true in Longfield Comprehensive. The Longfield careers officer recognised the extrinsic nature of the boys' decision-

making (Willis, 1977) and the financial difficulty of working-class pupils entering post-compulsory education.

HM: Are most of them trying to go into work at sixteen?

Careers officer: No, I wouldn't have said most of them. If you look at last year's destination report a lot of them did stay on in further education but they tended to be girls, boys tend to be failing which is the national thing anyway. Boys were the ones going into the quick jobs; you know the ones that paid the money. I have got some into training but not many. But it tends to be boys rather than girls that are going into training as well.

HM: The girls are going into college?

Careers officer: Yeah, the girls seem to be going more for further education. Although of course there is a lot of pressure put on I think by the families who want ... who don't see the necessity for any further qualification and need the money. Let's face it, there are a lot of families who really do need the money and so the kids are just doomed to go out and it might be a job without any training or whatever but sometimes they have to grit their teeth and go out to it. But another of the things I try and do is promote equal opportunities, and get rid of gender stereotyping to make sure that they are all aware of the opportunities that are equal to everyone.

Longfield Comprehensive did not conform to the national average of girls achieving higher academically than boys. Within the sample, only 3 out of 20 Longfield girls (15%) gained five plus A*–C GCSE grades compared with 8 out of 30 (26.7%) Longfield boys. The reverse was true for Tower Cross Comprehensive girls who were twice as likely to be academic compared with their male counterparts, 16 out of 50 Tower Cross girls (32%) and 10 out of 60 Tower Cross boys (16.7%) gained five plus A*–C GCSE grades. Longfield girls were, however, more likely to be semi-academic than the boys and less likely to be non-academic. This follows the national average with boys gaining fewer qualifications than girls, possibly leading to an early education exit.

Table 8.1 demonstrates the trend locally and nationally for the number on the school roll scoring one or more A*–G GCSE passes. Detailed figures were not readily available for the standard measure employed by policy of the number passing five or more A*–C GCSE. However, in this instance looking at the overall certification allows it to be seen how many pupils left school with no qualifications at all, a fact that is important for young school-leavers and the subsequent opportunities the labour market and training schemes can afford them.

Table 8.1 Local and national A*-G GCSE comparison (numbers rounded)

% of roll achieving 1+ GCSE A*-G grade	1995			1996			1997			1998		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Longfield Comprehensive	83	70	76	67	69	68	76	73	74	82	81	81
Tower Cross Comprehensive	-	-	90	-	-	88	87	91	89	77	88	84
Birmingham Comprehensives	-	-	87	88	90	89	88	92	90	90	93	92
England	-	-	92	91	94	92	91	93	92	92	95	93

A possible reason for Longfield Comprehensive girls achieving poorer academically than their male counterparts could have been the role of women in the area. Three senior staff members perceived that Longfield women suffered low self-esteem and were 'downtrodden' by the men. During observations of the area there appeared to be a high number of young women with children and young men hung around the school and surrounding areas during the day waiting for the girls to finish school. The girls of the area seemed dependent on the men for identity. This, combined with their low self-esteem, may have led them to underachieve. However, the school GCSE results were steadily improving and the increase in female academic achievement both nationally and within the school can be attributed to a change in school culture allowing girls to develop and prosper (McDowell, 2000). Longfield Comprehensive had gained a female head teacher, offering an alternative female role model of a woman in a relatively powerful position in charge of male and female teachers and pupils.

8.4 Gender-typed employment aspirations

'I love working with children.'
(Penny, Longfield pupil)

Types of employment sought by successful school-leavers and to a certain extent by post-compulsory education entrants, were gendered, manual and typically working-class, mirroring their parents' occupations and to an extent what was available in the local labour market. This reinforced sexual divisions in the labour market and the young persons' class position. This is an example of young people producing and reproducing their own culture by the choices they make within structural constraints (Giddens, 1973). The three predominant female employment types in the home were carer, cleaner and clerical. For men manual work was predominant with factory, mechanics and construction as the main employment types, and few white-collar jobs. 111 out of 161 (68.9%) of maternal figures in the home worked compared with 101 out of 160 (63.1%) of paternal figures. The higher percentage of female workers was probably due to the fact that almost a fifth of the sample came from female-headed families while only 2% came from single-father families.

Although the service sector was a dominant employer in the wards surrounding both schools, many male pupils did not see this form of employment as desirable (McDowell, 2000). Girls were more likely than their male counterparts to consider entrance to a service-sector occupation such as shopwork. The boys' 'ideal' employment was mechanic, accountant, electrician, painter and decorator, carpenter, builder, fireman and footballer. The most preferred occupation was computer programmer with twelve of the boys compared with only two girls interested in this occupation. Boys gave the dominant reasons for these occupations as being that the money was good; they had experience or were good at this; or someone in the family/social network was involved in the occupation. The girls' 'ideal' employment included flight attendant, teacher, nurse, fashion designer, special needs worker, hair and beauty professional and florist. The predominant employment aspiration was childcare assistant with sixteen girls intending to enter this. In contrast to the boys, money was hardly mentioned with emphasis placed on the social nature of the job and the rewards of working with

people. Below is a sample of gender representative responses to: *What job would you really like?*

Robert: Bank manager ... good pay, I like accounts, good pension scheme, good percs – mortgage loans etc. (*Tower Cross pupil*)

Mike: To become a sniper ... The army has good pay and many other career prospects than other jobs I can think of and I can have the chance to travel the world and keep fit and I'll be getting paid for it. (*Longfield pupil*)

Helen: Something with animals ... because I like animals and these jobs would also involve working with people and I feel I am good with people also (*Tower Cross pupil*)

Penny: Nursery nurse ... I love working with children (*Longfield pupil*)

Ellie: To be a teacher ... because I want to work with young people to help them achieve (*Tower Cross pupil*)

Some of the girls intended to enter office work and reasons for this were similar to those given in Griffin's (1985) research. Office work was seen to be 'clean' and of higher status by most of the female respondents. Nevertheless, some girls thought office work would be boring. Gemma, after professing this, said she wanted to work in a high-street clothing shop, continuing the idea of wanting employment perceived to be clean and non-manual.

Natasha: I would really like to work in a council when I'm older because I like jobs with sophisticated looks. (*Unemployed, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Sharon: I just like working in my own space, a set number of hours. (*Wanted to be a legal secretary, now unemployed, former Longfield pupil*)

The impression given by the young people was they considered occupations on an individual level; how the perceived traits required in the job related to their personality. There was an automatic discounting of 'opposite' gender-typed jobs. This was tested by when the young person said they would do any job it was put to them if they would undertake a traditionally male or female occupation; for example, a boy would be asked if he would be a nurse and a girl if she would be a builder. The question was always met with laughter or a 'huff' and a 'no' and the interview proceeded more freely. The young people were choosing to enter gendered occupations without reference to the constraints pushing them in this

direction. They relied on their perception of themselves, including identity as feminine or masculine and job desirability.

Preference for certain types of work, the pay, status and conditions these subsequently offered could explain why boys liked the idea of working more than girls, 81.3% (65/80) of boys compared with 72.7% (48/66) of girls. Knowledge about the unfavourable labour market position of women may have contributed to the higher number of girls entering post-sixteen education, critical of employment opportunities offered by the local labour market (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Parents were located in stereotypical gendered employment and this provided boys and girls with a certain picture of the jobs they may later undertake. The female pupil observing her mother in employment such as cleaning, caring or clerical work may have recognised that entry-level positions did not offer money, status or ideal working conditions and therefore intended to gain further qualifications to enhance prospects.

HM: What do you think of your mum's jobs? (Three cleaning jobs)

Tracy: It's not for me ... it just don't interest me. It's slavery cleaning. (Longfield pupil)

The young males viewed their fathers in occupations respected and rewarded with money and status in working-class culture such as builder and mechanic. This did not act as a labour market deterrent in the way 'women's work' did for the girls. There was more adult male employment within the Longfield cohort compared with the Tower Cross cohort, 68.6% against 60.6%. This could provide a reason for the higher percentage of Longfield boys leaving school to enter the labour market following the dominant male role model. This was reinforced by the decreased amount of maternal full and part-time employment in the Longfield participants' homes, 64.7% compared with 70.9% in the Tower Cross Comprehensive sample, decreasing material support and providing less positive or negative working role models to their daughters. These findings may represent Longfield conforming to a traditional working-class model with a male breadwinner. This would have been the prevailing family model at the time of

Willis's (1977) research where it was the norm for working-class pupils to leave school to enter the labour market.

The schoolteachers and careers service recognised socialisation in the home and peer group led school-leavers to enter gender-typed occupations. The careers officers at Longfield Comprehensive and Tower Cross Comprehensive were actively fighting this, introducing different forms of work in non-gender-typed ways, encouraging the pupils to raise their aspirations and cross gender-typed boundaries. Although this was reported to be moderately successful, with the pupils aware of equal opportunity policy and sexism, school-leavers were still opting to enter certain occupations (Griffin, 1985). Below are quotes from the head of sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive and the careers officer at Longfield Comprehensive.

HM: Do you think the school-leavers are going into particularly gendered jobs?

Tower Cross head of sixth form: Yeah the stereotyping is still very strong. Very strong from home. We do our up most with equal opportunities. I've had a heated argument with a father whose daughter wanted to go to a garage [on work experience as a mechanic]. That is still reflected very strongly. It is peer group stereotyping, there still seems to be there are some jobs that are more appropriate to male or female and I don't have the answer to that.

Longfield careers officer: ... I'm really committed to raising aspirations but getting them to look realistically at what they can do and broadening out their opportunities at the same time. There is only so much we can do and I realise that at home parents matter much more to the kids than we do at the end of the day and however long they see me for, whether its an hour a week, it's not going to make much impression.

Some parents did not want their children entering their occupations. The parents wanted their child to do better or felt that their occupation was gender specific and unsuitable for their son/daughter. Family interviews with parents from both schools displayed the gender socialisation occurring in the home. Guy's mum whose son attended Tower Cross said she wanted her son to enter a masculine profession, not be a cleaner like her as this was 'women's work'. Guy repeated his mum exactly. A similar opinion was held by Lee's mother.

HM: Is there any kind of job or activity you wouldn't want him to do?

Lee's mother: I wouldn't want him to clean toilets out for a start. I wouldn't want him to do the really crappy jobs. For a living I wipe people's backsides, I'm a home carer and I wouldn't want him doing that.

HM: You don't want him doing home care?

Lee's mother: Home care can be very nice, it can be very rewarding but ... I don't think it's a man's job it really isn't. (Mind you) I wouldn't want my girls doing it. (Son attended Longfield)

During interviews parents apologised after stating sexist viewpoints and this was an example of my gender interacting with the participants. The adults knew they were expressing a politically incorrect opinion and felt the need to apologise although standing firm by it. Despite attempts to limit the distinction between the cohort and myself by dulling my middle-class accent and dressing informally, the parents still implicitly saw me as possessing different values. This may have acted to my advantage. The parents felt they had to state explicitly why they thought an occupation was inappropriate rather than leaving it unsaid and implicitly understood, possibly the case for a similar conversation with someone in their social milieu.

8.5 Future expectations: career girls versus future mums?

Linked to aspirations was what the pupils saw themselves doing when they were twenty-one. This was the first time some of the young people had considered their future, seen in Kevin's answer 'Dunno, haven't thought that far ahead.' These young people were concerned with the 'here and now' and were possibly unable or unwilling to contemplate the future (Ball *et al.*, 2000). Responses by other students were often related to gender differences in aspiration and socialised gender roles. Girls intending to enter further education had high aspirations and stated that by twenty-one they did not intend to have children (Stevens *et al.*, 1992). They saw having a family as preventing them achieving their occupational aspirations and perceived that they would have to carry the burden of domestic responsibility thwarting any further career plans. The unfavourable opinion of combining domestic and working life may have been gained through observing their family situation (Wallace, 1986). Below are some of the typical answers by the female

future post-sixteen education entrants to what they thought they would be doing when they were twenty-one.

Sarah: Enjoying myself, probably at uni or travelling the world – definitely not housebound with children and a hubbie. (*College, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Zara: When I am twenty-one I would like to think I would have a good job, house, car. That I am happy but no kids until later on in life. (*College, former Longfield pupil*)

Debbie: Hopefully I will have a good job, own house/flat, and car. I hope I'll be happy. But no kids until I'm older, probably engaged or something. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

Mothers with career-minded daughters also perceived that by twenty-one they would not have started a family.

Joanna's mother: I think she will still be at home probably. I don't think she'll have a family. I keep on drumming it into them, don't do what I did. (*Joanna, now at college, had attended Longfield*)

Many parents were keen to stress that they had warned their children against teen pregnancy but added that they would cope if this were to happen. Mothers and their daughters, particularly post-compulsory education entrants, spoke of how they had discussed the negative impact this course of action could have on their lives. The two single fathers were particularly vocal on teen pregnancy, emphasising they did not want their sons 'to be trapped'. The parents appeared to be drawing from their own life experience of how children could prevent them achieving certain aspirations. This was similar to the belief of how post-compulsory education could allow their children to attain a higher status and better lifestyle than they could. Discussing the possibility of their sons having a family at twenty-one:

Stuart's father: No, I don't think so. I think the only way he'll trap himself like that is through sheer accident or stupidity. Stuart and his brothers and sisters have had the benefit of seeing the difficulty of having a large family and he's seen the problems of having his parents break up. (*Son attended Longfield*)

Daniel's father: ... At the moment their chasing girls, and I say make sure you don't do nothing wrong, don't get into trouble, watch what you're doing, cos you got your whole life ... (*Son attended Tower Cross*)

Longfield Comprehensive had a number of teen mothers and the head teacher remarked that she had seen a rise in pregnancies and terminations reported to the

school, although she believed the actual number was higher as the families often dealt with the situation in private. The United Kingdom has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Western Europe with girls from disadvantaged backgrounds ten times more likely to become young mothers than girls from better off families (Dean, 2000). The head teacher of Longfield Comprehensive linked the high pregnancy rate on the estate to the self-esteem of the young women who, she argued, were using sex to gain status and attention. The young men believed it was not masculine to use a condom, resulting in a higher rate of pregnancy. This was not a view held by the female careers officer; however, she did acknowledge the alternative views present on the estate towards young motherhood.

Longfield careers officer: I do think some of them, particularly in year 10, we're going to have more problems with. I've had a few girls in here once and they started discussing it and we were talking about sex and I said it was illegal they were under age and all this sort of thing and wanted to make that noted then said ... well we talked about contraception. And there was one particular girl who said she'd had sex lots of times and she'd never had any protection and she wasn't pregnant. And this is the sort of attitude we're coping with. And I said what if you do get pregnant? And she said 'What? So what?' so in a way it might be another option to them to ... to a small section anyway.

HM: ... Yeah if they see it as an option then it's ...

Careers officer: Well certainly this girl did and I was really quite surprised by it ... well, I shouldn't be surprised really I shouldn't ... understand that as an option. 'So what if I do get pregnant, so what? ... have a baby then ... well?'

HM: What do you think the families' attitude is to something like that then? Because a lot of the mothers and fathers I spoke to married young and had kids very young, by the age of twenty the family was complete.

Careers officer: I don't know, I can only speculate really as I've never discussed this with the parents but erm the parents I know of who've been landed with their children having babies have been quite supportive. I'm sure it's not what they want for their kids. But perhaps it's also something for those kids to care for. It's something of their own and that has to be taken into account.

Girls intending to enter employment at sixteen expected to be settled with their own house and usually a family by the time they were twenty-one. They wanted to follow the same route as their mothers who had devoted their lives to raising their family. The parents usually corresponded with this view (Arnot *et al.*, 1999).

Pamela: I hope I have a good paid job, live in a flat with my boyfriend, and he will have a good paid job. (*Unemployed, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Helen: In a decent job with a fella that's fit and a kid. (*Employed, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Sharon's mother: I think she will probably be married [by 21] ... I think she will be married with kids (Sharon now unemployed, attended Longfield)

Catherine's mother: She'll probably be married [by 21] with half a dozen kids knowing Cath! (Catherine now employed, attended Longfield)

Future family and life plans could be a reason why these female school-leavers aspired to entry-level positions. They did not expect to be full-time labour market participants and saw pursuing further qualifications and high-status jobs to be pointless; they envisaged that they would have to leave full-time paid employment to look after their family and did not intend to pursue a career. Future work would likely be in entry-level positions and possibly undertaken out of necessity rather than ambition.

8.6 Role models within the family

Role models were a source of employment aspiration and acted to socialise and reproduce the gendered employment divisions and roles in some young people, particularly early school-leavers. Mothers and fathers were often cited as the people their children admired. Girls were more likely to state a female family member as a source of admiration and vice versa for boys. Girls also selected certain traits from their family's occupations deemed 'suitable' to follow. The quotes below are examples of typical responses to the question: *Who do you admire and why?*

Sarah: I admire my mother. She's a really strong woman and I kind of hope to be like her when I grow up. (Tower Cross pupil)

Rachel: I admire my mom because she works hard and has many qualifications. She cares and looks after my Nan. (Longfield pupil)

Robert: Dad because he makes a lot of money and he is my dad. (Tower Cross pupil)

Richard: Father for taking a bankrupt small company and making it a success. (Tower Cross pupil)

Lisa: Cos I went to take your daughters to work day with my mum. So I saw her working for other people and communicating and stuff and I thought that's good that is, the way she's doing that. (Longfield pupil, Mother Head Domestic)

Claire: I would really like to work with children from an early age ... because when I was little I helped my mum look after my cousins from an early age and I decided I wanted to work with them. (Tower Cross pupil)

The careers officer at Longfield Comprehensive emphasised the importance of diverse role models to provide information on different types of occupations and the opportunities afforded nationally and internationally. The female head teacher recognised that the school and surrounding area had a deficit of varied, high-aspiration male role models and this was seen as detrimental to the male pupils. The high percentage of single parents combined with little or no contact with natural fathers and transient father figures the head teacher viewed to be damaging. Boys could not expand their labour market and occupational knowledge and relied upon stereotypical notions of employment.

Both schools' pupils displayed parochial attitudes and the surrounding areas were characterised by unskilled labour and unemployment providing few professional male and female role models. Teachers in both schools mentioned that the pupils became happy to 'settle' for low-status employment and residence in the tower blocks, trapping them in the area. The schools sought to raise the pupils' aspirations to prevent this but could only do so much; their family, friends and community as a whole influenced the young people. Expectations of success were linked to aspirations and could be altered by the family and community's attitude towards male and female roles (Poole, 1983).

8.7 Gender and the classroom

During classroom observations it was possible to see the interaction of gender and the school possibly affecting perceived options and eventual post-sixteen directions. As probably within any classroom there was a place reserved for the noisier and disruptive groups, often located at the back of the classroom. In Longfield Comprehensive, girls who displayed a negative attitude towards official school activities, preferring to pursue their own interests, occupied this spot. These groups often attracted more negative teacher attention than the male groups whose conversations would gradually get louder before being reprimanded and being quiet

for a while before beginning the cycle again. The girls seemed to resent being 'told off' and continued immediately in whispers. The anti-school attitude of this group could have led them to dismiss education as unfulfilling.

In Longfield Comprehensive personal and social education lessons, there was the opportunity for pupils to participate in mock interviews with the teacher. Boys volunteered for this activity while girls seemed reticent to engage. A similar pattern emerged when the teacher asked questions, with boys more likely to raise their hands to reply (Randall, 1987). The Longfield Comprehensive girls' low self-confidence meant that participation in class, especially in an activity where they would be the focus of attention, was unlikely. In the informal workshop lessons in Tower Cross Comprehensive, the female pupils frequently interacted with the teacher and the most commonly heard phrase was 'What shall I do?' Similar to Randall's (1987) work, many girls needed encouragement and guidance in class and this could affect curriculum options and post-sixteen destinations.

Tower Cross Comprehensive was an ex-grammar school that originally had separate buildings for male and female pupils. The machinery necessary for design and technology was located in the male building and kitchen and sewing equipment in the female part so physical gender divisions still existed. I also saw one example of a teacher consciously or unconsciously reinforcing gender divisions. When Tower Cross Comprehensive was initially entered to determine its suitability as a research site, a technology teacher remarked to me that his design and technology lessons, and textiles and home economics, were the most useful to the pupils, equipping them with skills needed in life. These lessons were gender segregated and the teacher by suggesting future applicability was advocating gender specific behaviour and reinforcing the gender divisions in the domestic and labour market. However, it may also have been that the teacher recognised an inequality of employment opportunities for the school-leavers and was attempting to equip them with relevant skills aiding them in the school to work transition. This represents a cycle of production and reproduction; the school provides the labour market with workers who possess gender-differentiated skills and the pupils are socialised to accept this as correct. The school-leavers are therefore only able to enter gender-

typed occupations and subsequent labour market entrants have to fight against a socialised course if deviating from the accepted route.

8.8 Conclusion: gender, jobs and babies

Gender had an important influence upon post-sixteen decisions. Within the cohort, many young people had gender-stereotyped perceptions of what employment was appropriate and families and friends often reinforced this viewpoint. School policies were having some effect in raising educational standards for male and female pupils and the underachievement of girls was being challenged in both schools. Low aspirations were however an issue in both schools, but perhaps more so in Longfield Comprehensive. If employment and life aspirations could be raised through the provision of role models, this could benefit boys and girls but this would be a slow process as career inspiration was drawn from the home and community and not often from 'officially sanctioned' sources such as the school or other agency campaigns.

9 Families and futures

9.1 Introduction

The family is the formative site for socialisation influencing post-sixteen directions directly by the guidance, information and social networks they supply (Cotterell, 1996) and indirectly through the effect of class location on aspirations, perception of available routes and academic outcome (Furlong *et al.*, 1996). Families can also provide young people with models for employment, directing them towards particular occupations and instilling a work ethic.

Norms and values operating in the family home and wider community influenced the decisions of pupils while they were at school and their subsequent post-sixteen routes. Some of the variables influencing post-sixteen transitions in the home varied between the two schools. In particular, unemployment was higher in the homes of the Longfield pupils compared to Tower Cross homes; there was also less maternal employment in Longfield affecting the provision of financial and other forms of capital.

9.2 Parental attitudes to post-compulsory education

'I've tried every blackmail trick but it doesn't work.'
(Longfield mother)

Leaving school at sixteen with few or no qualifications places young people at risk of unemployment. To understand the motivation to leave school, despite an apparent weakened labour market position, the research examined parental attitudes to education and post-compulsory education. It was possible that the perceived utility of various post-sixteen routes was discussed within the family altering the young person's perception of the routes available. The family's attitudes were based on partial information gained through their own experience of education (Mac an Ghaill, 1994), supplemented with limited knowledge about the education

system and what was required by the labour market possibly leading to pragmatically rational decisions about what was best for their child (Ball *et al.*, 2000).

Post-compulsory education was generally seen in the family interviews as necessary to ensure a good job. Lee, a Longfield pupil, came from a two-parent family with four children. All of the family members were either employed or in education.

Lee's mother: I wanted all my children to stop on at school ... You can't get anywhere in this world without qualifications. Lee is going to leave school with very few qualifications.

HM: When he said he was going to leave school at sixteen did you try and persuade him not to?

Lee's mother: Oh yeah, I've tried every blackmail trick but it doesn't work. If it's not there you can't force him to do it.

On questioning about the blackmail tactics used, the mother cited her son's previous work experience at a fast food restaurant. Lee's comment on the experience was 'I was just a little slave.'

Lee's mother: They just had him mopping floors because he was under age to do anything else, you see. I mean I tried to use that as a ploy but you know, you know what I mean, 'do you want to end up mopping floors for the rest of your life?' But it doesn't work. 'I'm not stopping on school and that's it.' 'Well why don't you go to night school?' 'No I'm not going to school, I've had enough school blah, blah, blah!'

An interview in the Longfield school café with another mother and her daughter revealed similar feelings about the advantages of a good education. This family of six had all four adult members unemployed, all of whom had left education as soon as possible and two children still at school.

HM: Do you want her to go into further education?

Sharon's mother: Oh yeah, oh yeah, it's a good idea definitely to have a good education.

HM: Why do you see education as so important?

Sharon's mother: It's the only way to get a good job.

The belief that it would be advantageous for their children to enter post-compulsory education was fuelled by experiences drawn from within the family. Lee's mother participated in part-time college and was proud of the fact she was going to get her first 'proper' qualification, an NVQ in healthcare. Lee's sister, after dropping out of college and working in unsatisfying entry-level jobs, had returned to education to increase her opportunities. In a family interview Lee's sister commented:

Lee's sister: Well I've been working for three years and I'm thinking, 'I can't do this, I'm just not satisfied, I can't do this, I'm just not happy.' So I went back to do what I want to do and I'm happy doing it.

Both women had tried to pass on to Lee the importance of qualifications for labour market success but he remained resistant to entering post-sixteen education. However, in his follow-up interview, Lee had begun a roofing apprenticeship and was finding that outdoor manual work did not meet his expectations. He hated being outside in 'all weather' and found the work unrewarding and exhausting but his parents told him he could not leave his job until another opportunity became available. He was intending to enter college as soon as possible. Lee's labour force experience had strengthened the message transmitted in the home that education was a means of entering fulfilling work. The 'careership' of this family emphasised that life pathways were not fixed, based on post-sixteen decisions – although it may take years to reverse the initial choice (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996).

A popular question in the family interviews was related to the parents' own school experiences. This prompted laughter and grimaces and revealed the difference between previous and current attitudes to education. Parents urging their children towards further education and training thought of their own education as lacking and having affected their career and life paths. The parents were stressing to their children not to repeat the same mistakes they had made.

Sharon's mother: I used to hate school but I wish I was back there! I do wish I was back there. If I had my time back I wouldn't have left. I wouldn't have done half the things I've done now. (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

Daniel's father: ... If I had my time now I'd sooner be back at school. Yeah, to get an education cos I left with nothing. I know I come out where I work now, er, but I had to build myself up to that, but if I was at school [now] I know I could have done better and walked out and got a better job straight away. As it is I've had to work meself up. (*Son attended Tower Cross*)

HM: When you think back about school, do you wish you'd stayed on?

Stuart's father: Yeah I think I definitely would have done. I think there is always that time, in my case it was fifteen, with the children sixteen, you're looking to the other side and thinking 'Oh, I want that money, Oh, I want that to go out and I want new clothes,' especially with the girls. (*Son attended Longfield*)

The three quotes above were taken from families whose children left school at sixteen and became unemployed in the short term with two eventually working. These parents were pro-education but they had not experienced post-sixteen education and could not advise their children concerning entrance to college/sixth form or course selection. The parents' information on the utility of continuing education was not drawn from experience and might have been devalued by their children.

The failure of the parent academically was not often used as an excuse for their children's lower academic achievement. For Guy's mother, it was a spur to try to get the best education she could for her child. Guy was not academic but his mother pushed him and Tower Cross Comprehensive at every opportunity despite limited knowledge of the education system. The notion that decreased possession of cultural capital by working-class parents prevents interaction with the school to advantage their children is contested (Lareau, 1989, 1997). Guy had gained one to one tuition and had greatly improved, although still possessing low literacy levels and gaining few GCSE's. Post-sixteen he joined a bricklaying course at college and was progressing well. The difference between this case and the three mentioned previously may have been the availability of information in the home and interaction with the school. Although Guy's mother had little educational experience, she used all available resources to benefit her son, including visiting the school and careers service to collect information on college and other possible routes. Guy's mother was a determined woman and proud of her only child. Her determination for her son in the educational arena is expressed in the quote below.

The full transcript of this interview and of her son's individual interview is in Appendix 3.

HM: What do you think of the school?

Guy's mother: [Tower Cross?] I went there myself. Er, I hated it. I never went to school.

HM: Why didn't you like it?

Guy's mother: I had problems with me reading. Well, I just had problems with school. I was absolutely crap at school. I was no good. Well the only thing I was good at school was sports ... Maybe that's where Guy's got it from. But, I knew the difficulty I had with school and I wasn't prepared for Guy to have the same problems as well. I was like, you know, soon as I knew he was accepted to go into [Tower Cross] I was straight down the school and said 'Listen, I came to this school, I never got no help.' I've had to struggle, you know the way I need to live now, I mean if I have to spell anything I have to get the dictionary out. I'm not thick but I get by.

Later in interview

Guy's mother: The education system really let me down and that's why when you choose your schools and I picked whatever for Guy, and then they came back to me and said [Tower Cross] will go with – what do they call it now? ... erm, special needs programme. [Tower Cross] have got a good special needs programme and I was still if'ing and but'ing about it, and as it happens when we had an open day down the school, there was a teacher there, well he's still there now, but he was there when I was in school, and he looked at me and must of thought 'O my God.' I said 'Mr [...] meet my son' and he went, and I went 'I want you to look after him, I want you to make him feel school is a good thing' as I just felt really let down by school.

Parents not promoting post-compulsory education to their children viewed their own school transition differently from the parents quoted previously. Education was still perceived to be beneficial and this was the explicit message transmitted in the family interview. However, implicitly its relevance could have been questioned to the 'real world'. These parents' own attendance at school was seen as something to be borne while necessary and continuing education was not an option either because of financial constraints, a desire to leave school or the cultural obstacles that they would have had to overcome. The mothers spoke of leaving school and immediately starting work to bring in a wage to the family home before marrying and having children – the accepted (and expected) route. The fathers spoke of starting work the day after leaving school and having to contribute first to their parents' home and then to support their own family.

All of the parents interviewed identified themselves as non-academic and some saw their children in a similar light. The children of the following parents left school,

Lisa successfully into employment while Kevin started college and left, as 'it was too much like school' and subsequently became unemployed. Kirsty, also unemployed, worked for two days in a factory before leaving, as she did not like the people. She was having a baby in July 2001.

HM: When you think back about school were you glad to leave or ...?

Kevin's mother: Yeah! I was quite ... I just couldn't wait to see what life brought me. (*Son attended Tower Cross*)

HM: When you talk about school you don't seem too happy?

Lisa's mother: I think I'm a bit like ... well Lisa's a bit like me with school. She goes because she has to, and I think I used to go because I had to. But I never use to really like it. (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

Kirsty's mother: I was glad to get out at the time. I never liked it much. (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

Young people having at least one parent with experience of post-sixteen education were significantly more likely to intend to continue their education. This result did not hold for the influence on actual destinations with the result slightly over the 5% significance level. Descriptive statistics however showed 60.3% of post-sixteen education entrants had parents with post-sixteen education experiences, 47 out of 78 responses. Although only 13 school-leavers responded to the question, only 4 (30.8%) had a family member enter post-sixteen education. Census statistics taken from 1991 show the areas surrounding both schools had a minimal higher education participation rate. The English average was 13.5% whereas the ward average for Longfield was 5.4% and Tower Cross 2.3%. The importance of having a family member enter post-compulsory and higher education relates to the amount of information available concerning how to opt for this route, the mechanics behind enrolment, evidence of its utility and setting a precedent in the home.

Experience of post-sixteen education in the family did not always mean that parents and children perceived its utility. Lisa came from a two-parent home on the Longfield estate, with both parents employed and an older sister at college.

HM: What do you think of further education generally like A-levels? Do you think they're a good idea or do you think a training course is better?

Lisa's mother: I think the training is better. I don't personally like college because I never liked school so I had no intention of going to college so my thoughts are 'Oh another two years, you must be mad', but Kaz [other daughter] is going and she's still got none the wiser about what she wants to do. She's wasted two years as far as I'm concerned. I mean they haven't really helped her in the college. They haven't really sort of said you're doing this. Or have you got any idea about what you want to do when you leave college? Have you thought about taking this on or this on? Nobody's actually talked to her.

Lisa echoed this view in her individual interview, again using her sister as an example. Lisa went straight into employment in administration. Pursuing further education was not perceived to be a worthwhile option therefore her choices were 'bounded' to entering employment or training (Simon, 1957).

A duplicate view was held in Tracy's family and explicitly stated by both mother and daughter during separate interviews. Both parents and three older sisters were in full-time employment. Tracy intended to enter a specialist business administration training college where another sister had trained. One sister had experienced further education and deemed it a 'waste of time'. The mother saw sixth form as inadequate preparation for work and failing to instil the respect necessary for a working environment.

Tracy's mother: When I was at school and they had sixth form and they stayed on until they were eighteen and what have you and they were still having classes, well, like when they had certain free time ... you never saw them like, they always had to be in uniform and they had to show that they were more adult, and the young ones had to show respect to them. You don't get these days; you don't get none of it now.

HM: So you see going to [training college] perhaps as a better experience than going to...

Tracy's mother: Well, it is because they've got a dress code. If you wear your trousers they've got to be smart. You can't have these tight-looking things or have jeans on. They have to look smart with a nice jacket, blouse and what have you. Not slovenly and scruffy and don't care.

HM: Do you think that's better preparation for work?

Tracy's mother: Yeah I do, it gives them pride in themselves and gives them the right attitude for work and how to dress for interviews.

9.3 Parental attitudes towards training schemes

'I was a dogsbody, a skivvy.'
(Tower Cross mother)

Some parents viewed the training system as abused by unscrupulous employers. It was often felt that trainees were used as cheap labour to be dismissed when the training subsidy ran out. Many parents believed that training did provide experience but the quality and treatment of trainees varied.

HM: What do you think of the training schemes that are around at the moment?

Stuart's father: I think that they get abused a lot, they are just canon fodder. I'm not saying that the actual experience is bad. Some are treated different. My son went to one in [...] and he got nothing for it, he didn't even get a free cup of tea and he worked for a fortnight on work experience. And when we found out he wasn't having breaks ... I think it is abused by a lot of employers. (*Son attended Longfield*)

Guy's mother was pleased when her son opted to enter a vocational course at college. Education was viewed positively despite her negative experiences but a bad training scheme experience was not so easily overcome.

Guy's mother: Well I think about them. I think about the ones I had when I left school you know these £25 things, you know that sort of thing. And even then I did, I did go out and do a couple of them and I felt like I was a dogsbody, a skivvy.

HM: You felt like you were being ripped off?

Guy's mother: Yeah for £25 I felt I've got to go out and pay my mum out of that, pay my bus fare and whatever, so no I don't think they're erm any good. (*Son attended Tower Cross*)

Kirsty's mother, labour-market inactive because she was raising her boyfriend's children, also viewed education as positive and training schemes in a negative light. For the majority of parents interviewed the educational system was not understood and all qualifications were seen to have some worth. However, many parents had or still occupied entry-level positions and experienced the kind of employment their children maybe trained into. Parental resistance was therefore high to the 'slave labour'; they knew the minimal amount of training and money the young person would receive without a guarantee of a job at the end. The parents could then have negated the value of training to their children.

Kirsty's mother: To be honest with yer I don't really agree with them [training schemes] because they are more or less they get you to do the same work as everyone else but for £25 per week. I think it's terrible. But she might get a bit of confidence, it might help her. (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

However, Sharon's mother, from a household of six with four adults unemployed and two children at school viewed training as beneficial.

HM: What do you think of training schemes, YTS, New Deal?

Sharon's mother: I know there are a lot about because they were trying to persuade my son to go on one. I think they are quite good. I would go on one myself if I didn't have the kids! I think they are brilliant! (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

Sharon became unemployed, stating the reason as caring for her sick uncle. Her unemployment would not seem to be the result of a lack of encouragement, even if just by her mother, to enter post-compulsory education or training. Nevertheless, the family had little information on these routes and no social network to advantage them. In a discussion with her careers advisor, Sharon was seen to possess low self-esteem and social problems to the extent that her exam performance was affected after her reluctance to be in a room with other people. Her intention to enter training or college was viewed sceptically by the careers professional. My individual interview with Sharon had been slightly problematic. Initially she had appeared wary of me and in the family interview she was excessively close to her mother who did not want her to leave home or the area to look for work. Sharon stated she did not have any friends. Her low self-esteem, possibly caused by total unemployment in the home and isolation from peers, led her to become unemployed following the same route as her two brothers who had been unemployed since leaving school.

9.4 Employment patterns in the home and post-sixteen destinations

School-leavers were significantly more likely to enter post-sixteen education if there was at least one person working resident in the home.

Table 9.1 Employment in the family home by post-sixteen status

Post-16 Status	Employment in home	Number	Percentage
Post-16 education entrant	None	11	10.3
	1 person works	40	37.4
	2 people plus work	56	52.3
	Total	107	100
Job/training entrant	None	7	20.6
	1 person works	3	8.8
	2 people plus work	24	70.6
	Total	34	100
Unemployed school-leaver	None	5	27.8
	1 person works	4	22.2
	2 people plus work	9	50.0
	Total	18	100

School-leavers entering training or employment were more likely to have two or more people working in the home. Employment in the home might be thought to increase the financial viability of entering post-sixteen education but it had the opposite effect. The young person saw the majority of their family working and perceived the labour market to be buoyant. Employment information within the home and contacts available were maximised, enabling the school-leaver to join the labour force compared with a sixteen-year-old from a high unemployment background with few instrumental social contacts. Multiple workers in the home also highlighted the extrinsic rewards to employment. These points are demonstrated in the quotes below taken from the first questionnaire in reply to: *Who do you admire and why?*

Lee: My mum and dad because they both work hard to provide good things and we can go on holidays. (Employed, former Longfield pupil)

Ben: My uncle because he is successful in his business. (Employed, former Tower Cross pupil)

Lisa: ... cos like my parents have got a good life, no like debts, they've got a job, a family... (Employed, former Longfield pupil)

Guy: [I admire my dad] because I think he's excellent at what he does. He does it. He lost his finger from building and he still gets on with his work. He's got loads of money. He's got a big house and he's told me it's took him years to do it but if you can do it, do it. (College bricklaying course, former Tower Cross pupil)

Maternal employment significantly increased the likelihood of young people entering post-compulsory education. There was no effect for paternal employment. Descriptive statistics indicated 75% (81/108) of post-compulsory education entrants had maternal employment in the home compared with 64.7% (22/34) of young people entering training or employment and 44.4% (12/18) of unemployed young people. In a dual income family, the mother's wage may have represented the financial viability of supporting a dependent for the period necessary to gain more qualifications. There was 6% less maternal employment within Longfield Comprehensive homes compared to Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils but 8% more paternal employment. Longfield pupils may have had less financial capital to rely on and fewer non-traditional role models. The amount of one adult working resident in the home was higher for post-sixteen education entrants than young people entering other destinations. The elevated number of post-compulsory education entrants from single parent homes might account for this. 23% of post-sixteen education entrants were from single-parents homes, compared to 12% of trainees and workers and 22% of unemployed school-leavers.

Young people who became unemployed were more likely to come from homes with non-labour market participation, nearly three times more than post-sixteen education entrants. Deprivation is increased in high unemployment homes possibly encouraging the young person to leave school to earn money. Indeed, many school-leavers stated that one of the reasons for entrance to the labour market was the need for money. This seemed to be the case for Sarah now in employment, the second child of five in a single parent household. She stated she was leaving school as she wanted to 'stand on my own feet and support myself'.

Unemployment within the home could also affect the self-confidence of the school-leaver; the young person may believe they will fail to find employment, therefore not investing the time or effort to gain work, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy (Furnham, 1984). A measure of deprivation is the number of pupils receiving free school meals in an area. In 1998, 45% of pupils at Longfield Comprehensive and 41% at Tower Cross Comprehensive received free school meals, over twice the national average of 17.5%. Unemployment was higher overall in Longfield Comprehensive for both male and female adults resident in the home with 17.6% households with total unemployment compared with 12.8% of households from the Tower Cross Comprehensive sample. The employment data taken with the measure of deprivation represents Longfield as more deprived than the Tower Cross sample. This could account for the increased number of Longfield school pupils leaving school compared with Tower Cross Comprehensive.

Having unemployment in the family did not mean that the young person would automatically become unemployed or even try to enter the labour market. Louise was the oldest child of three from an unemployed two-parent family living in Longfield. She explained that her mother was keen for her to enter college and was obtaining information about childcare courses. Louise subsequently followed this route. In answer to how her family suggested further education, she replied:

Louise: It's really my mum. She like sits at home and she really wants me to go to college cos she says she knows I could do it. (Former Longfield pupil)

Louise was keen to start work for the money and pursuing a vocational childcare course meant that she stood a good chance of finding employment as qualified – even if for a low-paid, low-status job. Her mother had increased the information in the home over the utility of post-sixteen education and encouraged her daughter to seek a career. This disputes Murray's (1990) theory of a culture of deprivation existing in homes with total unemployment.

9.5 Information availability in the home

Many parents believed that their child was capable of making their own post-sixteen decisions. The parents added that they would support their children whatever they decided to do, emotionally if not financially (Ball *et al.*, 2000). Only in Lee's case did his mother admit pushing post-sixteen education to the point of 'bullying'. Reluctance to direct their children might have been due to the parents' belief in their child's self-efficacy, but it could have been that the parents felt unable to advise a career path due to a lack of information, trusting in the career professionals and school to offer advice (Lareau, 1989, 1997). Lisa's mother was worried that the college was failing to advise her oldest daughter about what to do on completion of her course. Lisa's mother complained, 'Nobody's talked to her', indicating the role of the college in careers guidance and ignoring the role of the family.

HM: How involved do you think you were in Lisa's decision to leave school at sixteen?

Lisa's Mum: Like I say I left it all for her. I haven't pushed her to do anything. It's her decision; her life at the end of the day isn't it? (Daughter attended Longfield)

Many parents were unaware of what further education courses were available and were concerned of their 'worth'.

HM: I spoke to a few families in the area about what they thought their child would be doing when they were sixteen. I asked about whether they would be able to advise about the further education system and they said we would have no idea we didn't go through the system ourselves.

Head of sixth form, Tower Cross: That is absolutely true erm and they're fearful of it. They might not admit it but they are very nervous, it's an unknown.

HM: What came across is that they didn't know what the qualification was worth, what a GCSE was.

Head of sixth form: It's not just the parents of youngsters that don't know that. The nature of qualifications changes so much and continues to change, people who have been through the system have an understanding of its worth but [...] Birmingham again is statistically the lowest continuing education at whatever level ...

HM: Do you know much about the qualification system at the moment? A-levels, AS levels, NVQs?

Catherine's mother: No. I know A-levels and O-levels, that's about it.

Catherine's father: I was in the AA once! (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

Descriptive statistics taken from the first questionnaire showed that young people did not rely on their family as the solitary source of information on post-sixteen options. Future post-compulsory education entrants were more informed in their post-sixteen decisions with 71.4% (75/105) collecting information from three sources compared to 56.9% (29/51) of leavers. This could have increased their labour-market knowledge, deterring them from leaving education and heightening their information on the utility of qualifications. The post-compulsory education entrants appeared to make an informed decision concerning their direction after gathering information from diverse sources. Labour-market entrants were less informed about their options, particularly the future unemployed. The school-leavers' decision to enter the labour market was pragmatic rather than systematic, based upon partial information (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996).

Parental involvement in their children's education was limited with shift work and large families meaning spare time was sparse. Both careers services within the two schools had given pupils and posted home, glossy, modern information leaflets in the hope of encouraging further interest and inquiries. The parents, however, complained of not being informed about post-sixteen options. This was adversely reacted to by the careers advisors and senior staff who felt that the families did not

take advantage of their services and were quick to blame the school for a lack of information that was readily available.

HM: How involved do you think the parents are in helping their child make that decision post sixteen?

Head of sixth form, Tower Cross: ... I think in my experience of dealing with parents is that they want to be able to advise, they want to support but without being malicious or anyway unkind because they haven't the opportunity to go through it they are limited, they will value it but it's the confidence of seeking it. The confidence to go out and say what can my son or daughter do is not there. There's a small number who appear to take no interest. I have to say appear to be careful!

Careers officer, Longfield: The other thing is that parents are invited to come to any interviews. I haven't had one. And I used to send letters out saying your son or daughter is entitled to a year 11 careers interview, please would you like to come along to the interview, we can make an appointment for you. It's easy to say 'Yeah we don't know, how can we advise we don't know', but the information's there.

9.6 Occupational aspirations and family employment

Parents were asked about their aspirations for their children. None of the eleven families questioned had an ideal job for their child. The quote given below from a father of six children demonstrates that families did not necessarily have the resources to support their children through post-sixteen education to allow them to aspire to non-entry level employment.

HM: Do you have an ideal job in your mind that you would like him to be doing?

Stuart's father: No I don't think I have. I think ... as I say, we've been limited financially and everything we could do for the children we do for them all. It wouldn't be fair to push one through anything particular. (*Son attended Longfield*)

The Longfield Comprehensive careers officer contended that within Longfield families there was not the 'drive' for their children to succeed unlike middle-class or Asian families. The parents were content to let their children choose their own curriculum options and post-sixteen education routes.

There was one explicit example of a parent discouraging their child from holding high aspirations; this was Nathan who had returned to sixth form. He came from a two-parent family of six children. His mother and three older siblings worked and

his father was unemployed. His two older brothers and sister had little education and one had been to prison, yet Nathan admired his brothers as they were in full-time employment and had overcome their earlier difficulties. Everyone in his family was supportive of his goal of becoming an architect or designer, except his unemployed father.

HM: How about your father what does he do? (Meaning help with information)

Nathan: (sigh) he just moans. He goes on like eerrr big ideas you won't get it, stuff like that. (future Tower Cross sixth former)

Luckily, this seemed to have no effect on Nathan's post-sixteen destination but it may have affected his intended direction. Initially, Nathan planned to leave school at sixteen to work on a building site but the majority of his family had managed to persuade him against this action. This demonstrates the difference in parental opinions that can exist in the home concerning the young person's post-sixteen direction (Mac an Ghaill, 1994).

The idea of a career ladder was prevalent in many of the interviewed families. The parents believed their child had to start at the bottom of the occupational scale and could work their way up to a better status position. Cathy's father suggested she work part-time at McDonalds, there was the opportunity for progression to manager level after a length of service. Kirsty's mum was of a similar view that entry-level work could lead to a higher status position.

Kirsty's mother: I don't want her to go into cleaning; the money is rubbish, she ain't going to get nowhere. Mind you, I started off cleaning, then I went to supervisor, then I was cleaning a pub and became barmaid, then I became licensee. (Daughter attended Longfield)

These families had spoken about the value of education but were sending a conflicting message to their children. The young person was effectively told qualifications were not as important as being given the opportunity to show their ability in the workplace. This would explain why so many of the children whose parents overtly stressed the importance of further education opted to enter the labour market.

HM: You like the idea of your daughter going into office work then? Why is that?

Tracy's mother: Office work is something you can work your way up. I worked in office work when I left school and I worked my way up but the manager didn't keep his promise to give me a full wage so I left. But I think it's good cos these days they do seem to stretch them. If they know that you've got the knowledge they will use you and they will pay you for it. (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

During the family interviews, many of the parents expressed an interest in my future career. They seemed to make a distinction between the kind of position you could 'work your way up' into and the type of job they perceived me to be destined for – one of power and influence – which I found quite encouraging! Mothers and fathers often asked what I would be doing after I had finished the research. I answered that I wanted to be involved in informing policy to help young people whether in making the transition from school to work or in other areas. Responses included, 'You'll be one of them, up there?' and 'You're going all the way to the top, aren't you?' The first comment and the way it was delivered I took as signalling some kind of acceptance of me by the parents: I was going to be 'one of them' later as opposed to 'one of us' now. The second comment came from a mother during an interview in the Longfield school café and conveyed the feeling that she was proud of me – but I am unsure why – perhaps as a woman that was expected to do well?

9.7 Work ethic

'I would always want to do an honest day's work.'
(Natalie, Tower Cross pupil)

Within all of the family interviews the parents were keen to underline their expectation that their child would not leave school to become unemployed. This was true in families with total unemployment, contradicting the culture of deprivation hypothesis (Murray, 1990). Parents and children placed value on hard, manual work. None of the pupils in either school stated that they would leave school purposively to become unemployed. The stigma attached to this was confirmed by derogatory remarks about 'dole dossers'. Many of the pupils already had part-time employment and this had further instilled the importance of work and

the value of money, particularly earned money. One girl stated that she would rather earn a million than win a million. The comments below were made before the pupils left school.

Natalie: I already have a job, but I would never not go to work. I couldn't sit on my backside doing nothing. I would always want to do an honest day's work. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

Tracy: I don't want to be sitting at home all day doing nothing. (*Business admin. course at training college, former Longfield pupil*)

Daniel's father: I'm not going to have him sit round the house and waste his life so ... unless he finds a job or an apprenticeship he's not leaving so he's going to have to go on to further education so whether that is at the school where he is now or somewhere else cos he's not leaving.

Lee's mother: He'll get a job because I won't allow him to it at home. He'll go to school or he'll go to work, that's the only choices ... There's no sitting on your backside claiming off the dole because that's not going to happen. (*Son attended Longfield*)

Guy's mother: Personally I would have kept him in school and my attitude is, if he's not at school he's going somewhere because I'm not having him sit around here all day. And that's not because ... I want him to do something. I don't want him to sit around and do nothing. I think that is the time when most of the kids go and get into trouble. I mean they do a lot when they come out of school and whatever but I think if they come out of school and they haven't got anything to do that's when it turn to trouble. (*Son attended Tower Cross*)

9.8 Family structure and its effect on post-sixteen transitions

The research was unable to find a statistically significant relationship between family structure and the school-leavers' post-sixteen destinations into education, training, employment or unemployment. This may be due to the complexity of forms a family can take. However, descriptive statistics highlighted differences between family type and post-sixteen destinations and these can be explained with reference to individual and family interviews.

Young people from single parent households were 11% more likely to opt for post-sixteen education rather than training and employment (Rice, 1999). It may be single parents pushed their children to achieve enough qualifications to gain well paid jobs avoiding the financial constraints they could have already experienced (Barber and Eccles, 1992). Individual and family interviews would seem to support this, particularly in the case of mothers influencing daughters. Further education

entrant girls and their mothers were keen to emphasis that they had sent and received the message concerning the importance of education for improved life chances (Mann, 1998). A lot of mothers stressed they had told their daughters not to make the same mistakes that they had – marrying young and never having a career, although without fail, all mothers spontaneously said they never regretted having their children. Longfield Comprehensive sample were 10% less likely to live in single-parent families compared to Tower Cross Comprehensive participants.

The number of residents within the home was significantly related to the pupils' actual destinations into education or the labour market. School-leavers were more likely to originate from homes with a higher number of residents; 64.7% (22/34) of school-leavers entering training and employment and 50% (9/18) of unemployed young people lived in a home with five or more residents. Their entrance to the labour market may have been due to financial necessity, for example Hannah, who left school at sixteen to enter unspecified employment. She came from an unemployed single parent household with eight siblings and her mother wanted her to work as soon as possible. The 'choice' to enter the labour market was out of necessity so other options such as continuing education were not truly available. Options were restricted and some school-leavers perceived the necessity of earning money to contribute to the family income – they made a rational choice but one which was restricted by cultural and structural factors. Post-compulsory education entrants originated from homes with fewer residents with only 40% (43/107) living in a home with five or more residents. Financially, the parents could have been aware that they only had three or less children to support for an added number of years and this made it possible to encourage their children.

The school-leaver may have desired a wage to increase their independence from a large family who often lived in a small house. This situation became apparent during interviews in the family home. Often the families were council tenants in homes that seemed crammed with people. Catherine's family interview took place in a Longfield council estate house, in a small lounge with her mother, father, Catherine, her brother's girlfriend and her toddler and Catherine's sister's baby, and not forgetting the dog and me. This was a very small room, with a very large

television and a lot of people. Catherine wished to leave school to get a job with a view to marrying early and leaving home, a motivation of which the parents were completely unaware. At times there was an interesting dynamic in the room. Catherine had told me she was definitely going to be married by twenty-one and had someone in mind – of whom she swore me to secrecy. Her father during the interview suddenly turned to Catherine and said, ‘Who are you wearing make-up for?’ Before launching into what appeared to be a longstanding joke of teasing Catherine about boys and whether she had a boyfriend. At this point Catherine, her brother’s girlfriend and me shared a knowing look – I felt included in a secret and honoured to be in this girl’s confidence.

The crowded house situation was also applicable for Kirsty. A home visit revealed an even smaller house occupied by her mother and boyfriend, Kirsty and three young children and again, a huge television.

HM: Do you think having a large family helps Kirsty at all?

Kirsty’s mother: No she’s never here. She doesn’t like young kids. Having said that she was the youngest and having three younger kids arrive, invading her space basically, she didn’t like it. (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

Both Catherine and Kirsty went to Longfield Comprehensive whose sample were 6% more likely than Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils to originate from homes with a large number of residents. This suggests a reason for the higher number of Longfield pupils leaving school at sixteen. Demonstrated in Kirsty and Catherine’s case, a large family does not mean a large house. The 1991 census showed that England had 10.5% of children living in overcrowded houses. The area average for children living in overcrowded houses was 16.1% for the Tower Cross area and 17.4% for the Longfield area. Overcrowding can decrease the resources available to the student such as time and space affecting their academic performance (Gordon, 1996).

Stuart’s father believed that large families were beneficial to children, giving them the drive to achieve things for themselves and equipping them with social skills necessary to succeed.

HM: Do you think in some cases having a large family has helped him?

Stuart's father: Yes, I feel sorry for a child that is brought up on its own. They learn so much from each other even in the fighting. I come from a large family, there were six of us, you find a brother or a sister you really get on with and there's always one that you hate! Until you mature and all come together and have a laugh. You learn to fight and you learn to win! You learn so much in a short periods of time and you learn what's it like with a large family financially. It gives them more fight to say 'I'm not going to do it, when I leave school I'm going to do this and I'm going to get those things' themselves. (Son attended Longfield)

A large family could be instrumental in providing a wide network of contacts. Training and employed young people were more likely to come from two-parent families and had a higher number of people resident in the home with more workers. Unemployed school-leavers were equally likely to come from large families as small. However, unemployed school-leavers were more likely to originate from single-parent families than young people undertaking training or employment (Spruijt and de Goede, 1997). This meant that there could be over four children with one parent increasing the chances of the young person trying to enter the labour market for money and independence. Employment in single mother households may have represented entry-level, female employment. The contacts provided by this job might be 'unsuitable' for male school-leavers seeking gender specific employment.

9.9 Conclusion: post-sixteen transitions – it's a family affair?

The family had a direct and indirect influence on the perception of the labour market and post-sixteen directions. Employment in the home and the size of the family all affected post-sixteen intentions and subsequent actions, possibly related to the amount of human, social and financial capital the family could provide, enabling certain routes to be taken. Socialisation was also important for the types of employment the young people perceived acceptable and desirable, emphasising the importance of gender in post-sixteen transitions. The difference between Longfield and Tower Cross pupils in some family variables suggests that the differing post-sixteen destinations between the two schools was not solely attributable to the major influence of the school and that other, more immediate factors were also involved.

10 Friendship and post-sixteen possibilities

10.1 Introduction

As young people mature, they spend an increasing amount of time outside the family home and this could negate the family influence. Friendship groups are a socialising force (Bosma *et al.*, 1996) and the desire to remain with friends, peer pressure and information within a friendship network can influence post-compulsory education aspirations and destinations. This can have a positive or negative outcome dependent upon the peer group's attitude towards and perception of education, training, employment and the local labour market situation. Pupils exhibiting anti-education traits were likely to belong to a like-minded peer group who reinforced unfavourable attitudes to school, leading to an early entrance to the labour market. If school was critically perceived, it affected willingness to enter post-compulsory education even if they became unemployed, negatively affecting their life chances. Peer group influence operated differently for boys and girls; for example, girls were less likely to acknowledge that they were influenced by their friends and belonged to smaller peer groups than boys.

10.2 Distinguishing peer groups

Before discussing peer influence on post-sixteen destinations into education, training, employment or unemployment, it is helpful to discuss how peer groups were distinguishable in the schools. It is recognised that peer groups can also exist outside the schools and may involve older groups of young people and adults. The existence of these was seen in the gangs of young men hanging around local estates and the school waiting to be joined by friends still in education. However, the research was concentrated in the school so only the immediately visible peer groups can be described in any depth.

Both schools operated a uniform policy with dark trousers/skirt, white shirt, dark pullover, school tie and shoes. In Longfield Comprehensive, this rule was strictly enforced but Tower Cross Comprehensive had a more relaxed attitude. The reason for this was that they preferred to have the pupils present in class, even if they were not in correct uniform, rather than their being absent. In Tower Cross Comprehensive, this led to more diversity in appearance and an easier identification of groups. The pupils with the most problems in school, such as increased negative teacher attention, anti-education attitude and absenteeism, were informally dressed. The girls in this group would wear the most make-up, jewellery and often have bleached/dyed hair and appeared physically mature compared with their uniformed peers. The girls were expressing their self-identity through a particular style of appearance. Other all-girl cliques were also distinguishable by their appearance; for example, semi-academic girls usually dressed in short skirts and had their hair pulled back, with modest makeup and jewellery. The boys were more difficult to differentiate into groups as their uniform contained fewer variations. However, boys within the anti-school and non-academic group were likely to wear trainers and combat trousers, asserting their individuality and using brand-names as status symbols.

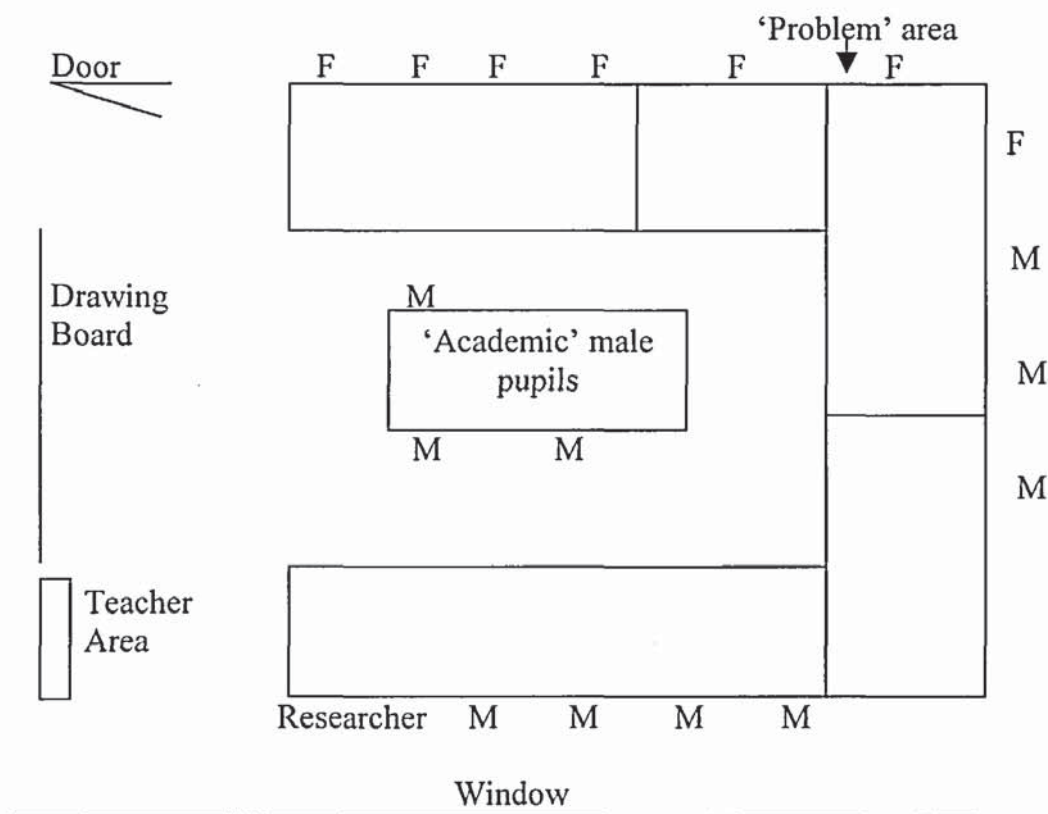
During classroom observations, I eavesdropped where possible on conversations. From the non-academic and anti-school girl cliques, topics included the threatening of physical confrontation with girls in opposing groups, boyfriends and drinking. Other girl groups could not be clearly overheard and they worked more and socialised less than the non-academic cliques. Conversations in male groups involved music, socialising and football. As with the anti-school girl cliques, in anti-school male gangs the frequent rattle of smoker's coughs could be heard!

Although male and female anti-school groups were present in both schools, there also existed non-academic groups. Non-academic pupils participated in lessons but were easily distracted by their friends. They professed that they enjoyed school for the social aspects and saw its utility for gaining employment but were keen to enter the labour market whether into training or employment. Non-academic pupils were not as disruptive within lessons as the anti-school group and some entered vocational courses at college. Anti-school groups ruled out the possibility of

continuing education of any kind, to the extent that training was sometimes considered in a negative light. Within lessons, they were disruptive and often did not participate, preferring to amuse themselves with other activities. The non-academic pupils and anti-school pupils often looked similar, preferring an informal version of the school uniform; indeed these groups associated in class. However, attitudes towards the utility of education distinguished the two groups both in their classroom actions and in research responses.

In both schools, the pupils were allowed to sit in friendship groups and these were often gender-exclusive. There were certain areas in the classrooms that appeared to denote academic status. Figure 10.1 (below) is a diagram of the classroom observed in Longfield Comprehensive. Despite observing three different tutor groups over a number of weeks there emerged a seating pattern. The more academic male pupils, those working during lessons and attracting the least negative teacher attention, sat in the middle of the room closest to the drawing board. Willis's (1977) 'lads' may have termed these pupils the 'ear'oles'. Pupils attracting the most negative teacher attention, talking continuously about non-school matters and gazing into space, sat in the corner furthest away from the teacher's desk. In Longfield Comprehensive, these pupils tended to be girls. Even when classrooms were empty, it was possible to distinguish where disruptive pupils may sit, i.e. at the back of the room, with graffiti etched on the tables and distorted chair legs where pupils had rocked back on them.

Figure 10.1 Typical observed room plan in Longfield Comprehensive

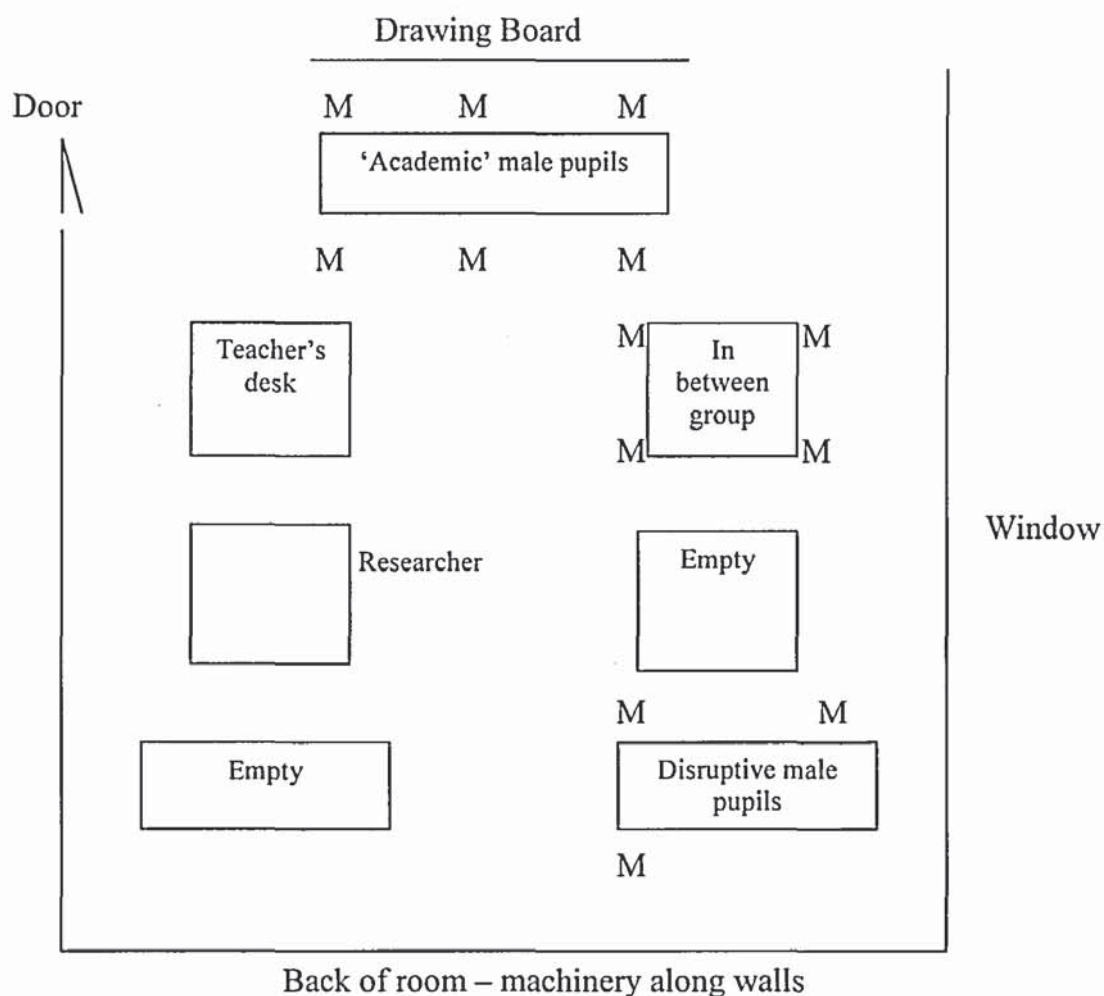


The lessons observed in Tower Cross Comprehensive comprised options traditionally favoured by boys or girls. Similar to Longfield Comprehensive, there were areas within the rooms indicating attitude to lesson. In most groups, classes went through alternate phases of, on the one hand giving their full attention and, on the other, staring into space. However, the extreme pro- or anti-school pupils remained constant in behaviour. Behaviour in other groups was dependent on (a) the task the class was carrying out; (b) the time of day – for example, before lunch, last lesson; (c) the time in class cycle – for example, start, middle, end; and (d) the teacher, whether they were the expected member of staff or a cover teacher.

One Tower Cross Comprehensive design and technology class appeared to be out of control for most of the time. This was a male class with 13 pupils and a cover teacher. The classroom was located in a separate block from the main school and

the room layout replicated that of a workshop with machinery lining the walls. When I entered the lesson halfway through, the head teacher had just been in to complain about the disturbance and the atmosphere seemed tense with an eerie 'over quiet'. At this point 'caged resentment' (Willis, 1977: 12) was clearly visible, especially towards the male cover teacher who appeared overwhelmed and complained that the class had been 'shouting and even screaming' at him. The male students giving the appearance of working hard were seated at the front of the room while a group fluctuating between working and socialising were seated in the middle. Anti-school students were located at the back of the room and they quickly approached to ask who I was. The enquiries were more personal than usual and I was asked my age. On replying, one boy told the teacher he was too old for me and that he, the pupil, 'stood more chance'. Soon after my entrance to the room, there was 'outright confrontation' (Willis, 1977: 13) between the teacher and the anti-school pupils, with name-calling and general disorder. Then the class appeared to settle, having apparently forgotten about me. However, when two girls walked past the class windows the disruptive section of the room immediately engaged in getting the girls' attention by banging on windows and throwing things out of them. The reaction to any stimulus other than the official pursuit of the classroom could show how the anti-school boys set an alternative curriculum, involving socialising and avoidance of work. It also shows the interaction of gender within the school; some boys were keen to demonstrate their masculinity by 'showing off' in class. The room layout is presented in Figure 10.2.

Figure 10.2 Design and technology room plan for Tower Cross Comprehensive



M = boys

10.3 Peer direction effect: going with the flow

'You prat about in front of your mates don't yer?'
(Guy, Tower Cross pupil)

Pupils with a high percentage of friends intending to continue their education were significantly more likely to intend to and actually take this route; 84% (87/104) of post-sixteen education entrants had friends intending to enter further education. School-leavers, particularly those becoming unemployed, had the lowest percentage of friends intending to continue their further education. Compared with post-sixteen education entrants, 68% of young people entering employment and

training and only 44% of the school-leavers who became unemployed had friends intending to enter post-sixteen education.

Girls were more likely to belong to a friendship group who all had the sole intention of entering post-sixteen education, making it an 'acceptable' option, 42.9% (27/63) of girls compared to 31.6% (24/76) of boys. Information on the procedural requirements for entry and the utility of further education within female groups could therefore have been higher but it could also have been seen as the 'norm'. However, girls returning to education were less likely to report that their friends had influenced their post-sixteen decision, 27.3% (12/44) of boys acknowledged the role of friends compared to 14% (7/50) of girls. Boys were significantly more likely to belong to a wide circle of friends than girls with 89.7% (35/39) of boys belonging to a large peer group compared to 58% (29/50) of girls who favoured close friendships. This may highlight a culture of masculinity where it is important for boys to be part of a gang and follow the crowd whereas girls associate in intimate cliques and are more influenced by the family (Willis, 1977; Cotterell, 1996).

Friendships with young people in full-time employment or training could have enhanced the possibility of entrance to the labour market. These friends offered another perspective on post-education life with jobs, money and independence. A number of pupils had older friends not in school who were trying to persuade them to take a particular direction. Lee's mother recognised this influence and contended that her son's attitude was 'they can do it, so can I' in many aspects, including employment and social activities. She felt his friends were leading him astray, offering a future of 'easy jobs' and 'fast money'. The quote below gives an insight into what is possibly a regular argument in many family households and shows the tension between a parent and a child trying to assert their independence.

Lee's mother: Some of them are a couple of years older than him and he tends to think 'Oh I can do this.' He says, 'I'm going to my friends', 'Yeah okay what time are you going to be in?' 'Two'... (*stern look*) 'Mum, I'm at his', 'I don't care!' (*Son attended Longfield*)

Some pupils, particularly school-leavers, said friends played no part in their post-sixteen decisions. This could be due to an independent style of decision-making (Harren, 1980) or a lack of recognition of the influence of 'others'. Lee, in opposition to his mother, contended his friends did not influence him. Lee was a 'lad' in the sense that he hung around with other lads, was non-academic and had an interest in girls, cars and football. Like Willis's (1977) lads, he had an urgency for money and independence and had high estimations for what the labour market would bring him and his potential earning power; he mentioned earning £300 a week. Lee was a friendly young man, engaged with the interview and cooperative. He possessed no belligerent school attitudes but believed post-sixteen education was not for him. The information school offered was heavily filtered to make it applicable to his non-academic world of masculine work (Willis, 1977).

The negative effect of belonging to a male 'gang' had been recognised by some male pupils. In one observation, a boy had voluntarily excluded himself from a lesson to sit outside and work after being removed the previous week for disruption caused with his friends. Guy commented that one of the reasons work would be different to school would be the way he conducted himself. He recognised the peer pressure within the non-academic group to which he belonged to follow an alternative curriculum at school of socialising and 'messaging around'. James felt the need to enter college away from his friends due to the distraction they caused.

Guy: School is, all your mates are here, you prat about in front of your mates don't yer? But at work you don't. (Tower Cross pupil)

James: No influence [of friends] – I am happy I have gone to a college where I don't know that many people for concentration wise (former Tower Cross pupil)

In the follow-up questionnaire, a popular answer to what would you have done differently at school involved the recognition of the disruptive influence of school friends. Standard replies included 'paid more attention' and 'revised harder', activities whose amount was dependent upon less distraction from friends.

Natalie: I think I would have worked a lot harder and get my head down and not take notice of other people distracting me. (Tower Cross sixth former)

Timmy: Done my coursework better, behave better in lessons. (Tower Cross sixth former)

Robert: Concentrated more, not get distracted by others. (Tower Cross sixth former)

Sonia: Concentrated more, less chatting, more working. Be there everyday. (Training, former Longfield pupil)

Nicki: I would have concentrated more in lessons and listened to teachers more and changed my group of friends. (College, former Longfield pupil)

Kirsty: I would sit and listen more to the teachers. I would do more of the work that was set, and not let friends influence me into do things I shouldn't of been doing. (Unemployed, former Longfield pupil)

The friendship group may have influenced the school-leavers' post-sixteen destinations by the processes enforcing its structure. Certain penalties and threats may have been applied to young people diverting from the norm such as the possibility of losing contact. The power of these sanctions could have been enough for the members of a clique or gang to conform to the same option (Measor and Sikes, 1992).

10.4 Attitude to school

'Good place to socialize, gets me out of the house.'
(Craig, Longfield pupil)

Attitude to compulsory education was linked with entrance to post-sixteen education. Pro-school pupils usually progressed into post-compulsory education whereas the non-academic and anti-school pupils often left school to enter the labour market, whether into training, employment or unemployment. Self-identity as part of a group could be influential, if the young person had defined themselves within a non-academic group and created alternative goals to educational success, it could have been hard for them to divert from an early education exit.

A revealing question about attitude to education was the pupils' views of school taken before the end of compulsory education. When asked what they liked about school the common response was the social aspect. In total 35.3% of eventual post-sixteen education entrants (36/102) liked school solely for socialising compared with 44.1% of future job/training entrants (15/29) and 38.9% of future unemployed

school-leavers (7/16). In answer to the question, *What do you like about school?*, replies included:

Sarah: You get to see friends, learn interesting subjects (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

Jim: Enjoy having a laught with friends and like to learn different things. (*Unemployed, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Shane: Learning, interacting with others. (*Employed, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Adele: Spending time with friends, learning new skills, meeting new people. (*Tower Cross sixth form*)

Craig: Good place to socialize, gets me out of the house. Can be fun at times. (*Army, former Longfield pupil*)

Nicki: I like seeing my friends to catch up on all the gossip. (*Hair & Beauty NVQ college, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Helen: Friends, knowing that it is good for my future. (*Tower Cross sixth form*)

Linda: Nothink. (*Cleaner, former Longfield pupil*)

Hannah: Nothink it's a waste of time. (*Employed, former Tower Cross pupil*)

The value placed by eventual school-leavers on socialising at school may be evidence of an alternative curriculum invented to give meaning to an education system they did not particularly enjoy and wished to leave (Meyenn, 1980; Willis, 1977). The last two quotes demonstrate the anti-education attitude shown by some intended school-leavers compared with post-compulsory education entrants. The girls in this case rejected the utility of education, were persistent truants and left school to enter entry-level employment after achieving few qualifications. However, future unemployed young people were twice as likely as post-sixteen education entrants to say they enjoyed specific lessons and learning. The particular lessons may have been those seen as relevant to work.

In answering what they disliked about school, 50.9% (54/106) of the future post-compulsory education entrants complained about authority, 53% (9/17) of the future unemployed compared to 64.7% (22/34) of those entering training and employment. Other grievances included the way they were treated and criticisms against particular teachers. Rules united all groups within the school over their utility (Meyenn, 1980) including smoking and uniform. Alison, who had

transferred from another school after problems with authority and other pupils, felt wearing uniform was a way to suppress individuality and treat them like children. Freedom of movement was also a contentious issue. Many of the non-academic and anti-school pupils felt that by restricting their movement and making them adhere to certain times the teachers were treating them like inferiors. These pupils were prone to believe that the working environment would afford them the freedom that school denied.

Mark was part of an anti-school group present in both schools and notorious among teachers. His close friends were all leaving school at sixteen and possessed similar attitudes, appearances and employment aspirations. Mark was in part-time schooling at Tower Cross Comprehensive and had been suspended approximately 23 times. He complained that he was punished for 'the little things' like uniform infringements. However, Mark was involved in major incidents including fighting. He admitted his mother could not get a job because she had to stay at home and wait for telephone calls from the school about him and his sister. In a rehearsed answer, possibly paraphrasing the words of the school, he explained the purpose of his two and a half day a week education:

*Mark: To give me a break from school and to give the teachers a break from me.
(Tower Cross pupil)*

On enquiring after one Longfield pupil I wished to speak to, I asked a teacher if John was in. 'I hope not,' was the teacher's reply. In this vein, teachers volunteered John for interviews in the hope that he would be taken out of their lessons; he was a disruptive force and could be violent. Unfortunately, due to John's sporadic school attendance and penchant for appearing at registration time then disappearing, I never managed to meet him, despite numerous attempts. Pupils like John were regarded by many teachers as disruptive to the education of the majority – indeed other pupils took a dim view of their anti-education disruption tactics, believing that it was not fair that they took all the teachers' attention and stopped others from working. Fellow pupils and teachers regarded the time spent controlling disruptive pupils as a waste of time. Examples of pupil

negative attitudes to school are demonstrated in the quotes below taken from the first questionnaire.

Pamela: Teachers have atudude problems they don't lison to all puples views.
(*Unemployed, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Phillip: Teachers that think their better than the pupils just because their more powerful on school premises. (*Unemployed*)

Neil: Most teachers are sarcastic and think they own the school but if it wasn't for students like me they wouldn't have a job. (*Labourer, former Longfield pupil*)

Sarah: Some rules are stupid, don't treat year 11's like adults treat us like kids.
(*Floristry training, former Longfield pupil*)

Donna: I don't like school because teachers stress u 24/7 and they have attitudes towards other peoples and they don't treat us with respect. (*Temp, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Emma: I don't like being bossed around. I don't mind if I'm getting paid for it if it was a job. But I don't like to be bossed around. (*Trainee hairdresser, former Tower Cross pupil*)

The future workers had the most negative view of authority within the school but they willingly exchanged this authority for another with a boss who had the power to leave them unemployed rather than just in detention. John reacted against the 'illegitimate authority' of the school (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Willis, 1977) only to opt for even more authority with heavier penalties in the workplace; he entered the army. The importance of money could have been a reason for believing the teachers' authority was illegitimate, demonstrated in the last quote from Emma. School-leavers believed that work would be better than school and they could cope with a lot more difficulties as being paid (Gaskell, 1992). This could relate to the type of job the school-leavers were opting for – manual labour or entry-level work for extrinsic rather than intrinsic rewards. Many parents emphasised the extrinsic nature of their employment and it was possible that this view of the importance of money, possibly over-intrinsic satisfaction, was transmitted to their children. Guy and Lisa's mothers commented:

Guy's mother: ... I go out to work for the things I want to do. Me and Guy go abroad every year so I think Guy looks at it (like), mum goes and works and we go on holiday. I think if I was sat at home all day, we wouldn't have the things we have. (*Son attended Tower Cross*)

Lisa's mother: I'm just happy with what I'm doing you know? [referring to her job] At the end of the day I mean everybody goes out to work for the money at the

end of the week don't they? I'd like to do something different but I'm happy as I am. (*Domestic; daughter attended Longfield*)

This is a similar attitude to the non-academic pupils perception of education; they attended because they had to and to gain qualifications to get a job. In reply to the question, *Do you think work is going to be different to school?*, answers included:

Damien: It'll probably be harder, more strenuous but ... the hours will be longer as well. But at the end of the week you're getting paid. (*Former Longfield pupil*)

Emma: Well I've never been very ... not clever just into errm ... I don't mind getting told what to do as long as I'm getting paid for it. (*Former Tower Cross pupil*)

The young persons' choice to leave school to enter the labour market was aided by their favourable perception of working life, its extrinsic rewards and eagerness to leave school. 87% (40/46) of school-leavers compared with 73% (73/100) of post-compulsory education entrants liked the idea of work. The reason work was so favourably perceived may have been due to the somewhat idealistic notions about the working environment, perhaps showing some of the pupils had not recognised the reality of the employment they would enter at sixteen. Although the school-leavers were entering employment mostly for extrinsic reasons, they saw work as allowing increased freedom, autonomy and being well paid – not descriptive of the average school-leavers job. Answers to the first questionnaire query of, *Do you like the idea of working this year?*, included:

Stephen: Yes because I hate school. (*Production line, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Elizabeth: [Yes] For the money and to get out of school ... I lost interest in school about a year ago. (*Trainee hairdresser, former Tower Cross pupil*)

Rachel: I just can't wait to get out and start a new life. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

Peter: Yes, cos you're doing something different practically every single day so its not all the same all the time. (*Construction worker, former Longfield pupil*)

Amber: It's a different environment to school for one. I mean I do like being at school and I don't cos I'm here all day and it feels like I'm in prison so ... errm, I like it [the idea of training and employment] because there's more freedom and there's more opportunities out there for me. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

One aspect pupils voluntarily addressed was the respect they would receive at work compared with school. Peter contended that respect would be given 'by the bosses'

once you had shown them what you could do. This was an opinion shared by Lee and Guy, showing the confidence in their ability to make the transition to adult work. Conversely, Louise believed that work was going to be hard and she received more respect at school than she would at work.

HM: How do you think work is going to be different to school?

Louise: I think you'll probably get a lot more respect at school than you do at work ... cos the teachers are like 'you give respect to us and we'll give respect back', and I think times going to be hard because I'm not very like on time all the time. (*Childcare at college, former Longfield pupil*)

School-leavers did not always perceive work favourably. Catherine did not consider sixth form or college to be an option; she wanted to start earning her own money to save for a holiday in the short term and to get married in the long term. However, she saw penalties in making the transition to the labour market such as the separation from her friends. She arrived at her decision to leave school by an elimination of alternatives (Clarke, 1980). Ian was also hesitant about entrance to the labour market and believed his work experience at a local supermarket had not prepared him for the transition. He believed the real working environment would be hostile. This negative perception of employment combined with his poor academic performance and low self-confidence could have led to his eventual unemployment.

HM: Do you like the idea of working?

Ian: No I think it's a bit early but you know, nothing can quite prepare you for it.

HM: What do you mean?

Ian: Well you go to work experience and that, fair enough, but you know it's too easy there and like all helpful. (*Unemployed, former Longfield pupil*)

In some cases, the school-leavers' parents had predicted the school to labour market transition would be problematic. Lee's mother had foreseen that employment would come as 'a shock' to her son and similarly Kirsty's mother was 'expecting problems'. However, some parents thought their children would thrive away from the school due to their 'easy-going' personality and ability to 'fit in'. Tracy's sister had experienced problems in the transition to work but her mother contended Tracy would be all right and placed value on her ability to conform.

Tracy's mother: Cos she's a bit more half soaked than Lorraine.

HM: Half soaked?

Tracy's mother: She takes no notice whereas Lorraine will get very het up. She's a bit more controllable. (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

10.5 Truancy and its effect on post-sixteen options

Truancy was one reaction to authority with the anti-school pupils taking control over their movements to express their disillusionment with the education system, its perceived utility and treatment of them. This anti-school attitude may have led to the inversion of school aims with status being attributed to successful truanting. Both girls below were frequent truants.

Alison: Being kept in the same space all day I can't handle that, and cos I'm sixteen and I smoke I'm not allowed to smoke even outside, standing outside the front entrance, I have to stand around by the health centre. (*Longfield pupil*)

Kirsty: I try and get as many days as possible [off]. I haven't done a full week since we got back [after half-term 3 weeks ago] ... I just can't be bothered. (*Longfield pupil*)

Longfield Comprehensive experienced a high level of truancy and this was attributed by senior staff members to the fact that the school bordered on open fields, allowing pupils to 'wander off' after registration periods. To curtail this, a high metal fence had been erected around the school perimeter with some success. Table 10.1 gives the attendance figures for the two schools, the Local Education Authority and England drawn from official school reports such as the Birmingham County Council school statistical profiles.

Table 10.1 Attendance percentages for case study schools, the LEA and England

	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99
Longfield Comprehensive	74.4	75.6	78.7	82.6
Tower Cross Comprehensive	80.2	83	84.7	84.2
LEA	87.5	88.5	88.5	89.5
England	90.3	90.9	91	91.3

Longfield Comprehensive had consistently below local and national average attendance. The Longfield sample had larger families, more unemployment and lower post-sixteen education participation rates, factors linked to truancy (Gleeson, 1994). In 1997/98, Tower Cross Comprehensive had 10.8% authorised absenteeism and 4.5% unauthorised absenteeism compared with Longfield Comprehensive 13.7% authorised and 7.6% unauthorised. Authorised absenteeism refers to the pupils' ability to produce a letter from parents or a relevant authority substantiating a reason for their absence but low literacy in the home can prevent communication with the school.

Willis (1977) argued truancy was not necessarily a rejection of school but showed 'informal student mobility'. This could be the case with some of the non-academic 'lads' who were keen to leave school but were not disregarding their school experience, it gave them a chance to see their friends and gain qualifications. Their attitude to truancy was that occasionally they deserved a day off or a lie in. Truancy was, however, recognised by some young people as the reason for their poor grades and, in their battle with the system, they found they were the ultimate losers.

10.6 Attitude to further education

'If you don't learn it at school you're not ever going to learn it.'
(Mark, Tower Cross pupil)

The cohorts' intention to and actual return to education was significantly related to their attitude towards further education. Unsurprisingly, pupils with a favourable opinion of post-sixteen education pupils were more likely to enter further education compared to pupils with a low opinion of further education. A few of the young people who became unemployed were adamant that they would not return to education, preferring to look for work. Overall, 88% (93/106) of students continuing their education post-sixteen saw further education as positive, compared with 67% (22/33) of job and training entrants and half of the young people (9/18) who became unemployed.

Young people with high aspirations were significantly more likely to intend to and actually enter post-sixteen education. These young people were also significantly more likely to achieve more GCSE passes than their counterparts who possessed low aspirations. There could have been a two-way effect with grade attainment affecting aspirations and vice versa. School-leavers often questioned the utility of post-compulsory education as not relevant to the forms of work sought in the labour market. These young people had lower employment aspirations than post-compulsory education entrants and many of the jobs or training they wanted required minimal qualifications. The occupational choice might have been due to the knowledge that high-status positions required further qualifications. 82% (77/94) of further education entrants wanted to enter professional or skilled employment compared to 53% (17/32) entering training and employment and 57% (8/16) of the young people who became unemployed. The school-leavers who became unemployed had higher aspirations than young people entering training and employment and often they would not consider entry-level positions. The unemployed school-leavers, however, found that desirable employment was unavailable due to their lack of qualifications.

For those entering training and employment the unskilled occupations were chosen because of the young persons' own culture, not the result of allocation by a dominant ideology but a pragmatic rational choice (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Willis, 1977). These young people knew what they did not want, namely more education, and certain options were not considered or effectively closed off to them. The school-leavers were responsible for their own choices but these choices occurred within restricted horizons for action (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). However, the choice to work may not have overcome a lack of desirable entry-level jobs but their generalised notion of work and lack of specific ambition may have helped them enter unskilled employment. In response to the question, *What job would you really like?*, replies before leaving school included:

Tom: Anythink with good wages and easy to do. (Former Tower Cross pupil)

Lee: A job that involves getting my hands dirty, manual work. (Roofing apprentice, former Longfield pupil)

Daniel and his peer group who were concerned with independence, money and girls, argued education was a waste of time (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). On the Tower Cross estate where Daniel lived, there was high unemployment and few opportunities. It was a known 'bad area' in Birmingham and a youth evening curfew was in effect due to frequent trouble caused by gangs of local teenagers. The houses were becoming run-down and groups of male adolescents roamed around during the daytime. Daniel's entire peer group left education for training or employment and some became unemployed. Daniel was making his post-sixteen decisions in this context.

The majority of school-leavers still viewed post-sixteen education as positive but it was often seen as for certain types of people. This was particularly true for the future unemployed. Responses taken from the first questionnaire showed that 6 out of 18 (33.3%) future unemployed young people compared with 6 out of 33 (18.2%) future employed young people and only 11 out of 106 (10.4%) future post-sixteen education entrants saw further education as for particular types of people. The school-leavers made a choice not to enter post-compulsory education; it was not seen as a 'suitable' direction with reference to their self-identity.

*Emma: I'm getting a full time job because I feel education dosent sute me.
(Employed, former Tower Cross pupil)*

Emma was part of an all-girl, non-academic clique possessing comparable attitudes towards leaving school at sixteen. Her clique was similar in appearance, favouring a fashionable version of school uniform encompassing makeup, jewellery, high heels and clothes emphasising their femininity. This group were often observed in practical lessons talking quietly with their work folders shut or some working while others gazed into space (Measor and Sikes, 1992). At school they enjoyed certain lessons and socialising. Girls like these were present within both schools and saw further education as 'good for some but not good for me':

Lisa: I don't really know my mind intelligence. Things go into one ear and just go out the other end so I don't really take much in. (Employed, former Longfield pupil)

Emma felt herself to be non-academic and ready to enter the adult world of work. This was the most suitable course of action given her self-identity and desire to participate in life as an adult. Like the young people mentioned previously, choices were part of an expression of identity (Ball *et al.*, 2000: 24). The choices were made within a social context with various instabilities to be resolved, managed and avoided, leading to a pragmatically rational decisions (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). Emma recognised that to an extent qualifications were important, but had a pragmatic approach that showed insight into the credential society. The post-compulsory education entrants made no comment concerning the credential society, implicitly believing that further qualifications gained them an advantage in the labour market.

HM: Do you think qualifications are important for job hunting?

Emma: Yes and no.

HM: What would the yes and no be?

Emma: The yes would be because people do actually want people with qualifications. Well some jobs their just, people looking for qualifications where they're not needed cos some people you know they're good at maths, history and geography, well that's not going to help them with common sense. (Tower Cross pupil)

Future unemployed and anti-school pupils were more likely to negate the worth of qualifications. Kirsty argued that GCSE results were not important for employment in the area where she lived. This may explain why some pupils scored poorly in their GCSEs because they did not attribute any real value to them. Pupils with anti-education attitudes viewed post-compulsory education as a waste of time; therefore their exit from school was pragmatically rational. Validation for these opinions was gained from their peer group who were often pursuing the same post-sixteen routes for similar reasons. Ball *et al.* (2000) argue that for many school-leavers this rejection of further education could be the moment of class reproduction.

Kirsty: It's a waste of time. If you weres going to learn it you would have learnt while you were at school. It's a waste of time going back. (Unemployed, former Longfield pupil)

Mark: If you don't learn it at school you're not ever going to learn it. (Bodywork course at college, former Tower Cross pupil)

Further education entrants were often regarded with derision by anti-education students and labelled as such. On answering what type of person entered further education replies included:

Kirsty: Boffins. (Unemployed, former Longfield pupil)

Mark: All the boffs. (Bodywork course at college, former Tower Cross pupil)

'Boffs' was a derisory comment, indicating those pupils viewed as academic. These pupils were unlikely to take part in 'messaging around' in class, always had work completed on time and participated in lessons (Willis, 1977). They were seen by the anti-school group as pro-school and committed the offence of 'sucking up' to teachers.

Total rejection of the school and education system can lead to an early exit before the pupil reached sixteen. This was found within both schools. In a number of observations, pupils possessing an anti-school attitude were noted for further observation, never to be seen in class or around the school again. One example was Shaun, who arrived late to class in Longfield Comprehensive and sat down next to me. The teacher spontaneously offered him my help with the class task of completing an application form. After noticing an inch-deep frown as he hunched

over the desk, I asked if I could help to which he responded, 'not fussed' in a slightly too nonchalant tone. I took this as a sign to work through the form with him and we quickly established a lighthearted rapport. This young man was from a home with complete unemployment and did not expect to achieve many GCSEs – indeed the school had only entered him for five. He wanted to be a mechanic as he was 'mad about cars'. He was not particularly articulate and appeared quite tough but we enjoyed a good conversation with eye contact and a few laughs as we completed the form. The teacher remarked on the relationship we had established, commenting that he was an 'at risk' pupil. I never met Shaun again after his truancy increased. He became unemployed after rejecting the school system and leaving unqualified. On hearing this fate I felt disappointed that the young man who went from being 'not fussed' to involved in a lesson had slipped through the system.

10.7 Parents view of peer effect

It was interesting to see how the parent perceived their role of guidance. Many parents in the family interviews recognised that their child was spending increasing amounts of time away from the home and placing greater emphasis on friends. Some parents were content to let their child decide their own direction with the assistance of friends and the school; others felt that intervention was necessary. This was related to the perception of the desirability of the friendship group, belief in the young person's self-efficacy and how the parent viewed their advisory role in relation to the school. However, it was universally felt in the family homes that boyfriends and girlfriends were an unwelcome distraction (Ball *et al.*, 2000).

A common feeling among the parents interviewed was that their child was mature for their age and could act independently of their friends.

Kirsty's mother: She's got a mind of her own. (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

Lisa's mother: She's a grown up sixteen year old. I mean you can get sixteen year olds that are still thirteen, fourteen, can't you? But she's got her head screwed on. (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

Within family interviews, the parents were keen to stress they had a certain 'hold' over their children concerning post-sixteen destinations. Lee's mother argued that the family brought him 'back to reality' when his ideas were too far off what was deemed acceptable by them. A common statement was that while teenagers were living under the parents' roof they would do what they were told. Daniel's single-parent father held a similar attitude.

HM: Do you think anyone else influences him, like his friends?

Daniel's father: No. It's just me. I don't think it's his friends at school. If it was up to his friends at school and he was listening to his friends at school, I don't think he'd be going to work.

HM: What do you think he would be doing?

Daniel's father: That's why I'm saying, he's listening to me at home saying I don't want him walking the streets and wasting his life, I want him to get an education so he can get a job. I've told everyone of them the same. Friends he mixes with at school, I don't know what they are going to do when they leave school but I'm just working on what I'm saying at what he's got to do. He's not going to roam the streets and do what he likes. (*Son attended Tower Cross*)

Joanna, a Longfield pupil, intended to pursue a childcare course at college, had filled in applications, and attended open days with her friends. Her mother had let her continue the process unaided, possibly due to her own lack of education and the feeling that her daughter and friends were better equipped to find information. Joanna's mother did admit that she was worried about the amount of influence friends had on her daughter and felt that Joanna could be swayed in a certain direction. A sense of lack of control came across but there was a belief in her daughter's self-efficacy and ability to 'do the right thing'. The oldest of eight children, Joanna had become independent away from the home. As her mum stated about Joanna's attendance at college open days, 'It was something she wanted to do herself.' Joanna's early experience of further education was very different to that portrayed by Ball *et al.* (2000) through Kirsty and Rachel. Their mothers took them to various further education institutions and the young women welcomed the parental presence as a source of advice and emotional support. The difference between these experiences of parental support could be attributable to parental educational career and class.

10.8 Conclusion: peer influence in context

Friendships were undoubtedly important to the pupils. The security and sense of belonging to a group may have influenced post-sixteen aspirations and choices and allowed the exchange of information and opinions on the 'suitability' of certain post-sixteen routes. Indications of this were seen in the clustering of friends undertaking particular routes, lending moral and instrumental support. Girls were apparently more attached to their family than boys, who admitted that their friends influenced them – a force which parents often fought.

11 Hopes, fears and failed expectations

11.1 Introduction

The perceived condition of the local labour market affected post-sixteen decisions to participate in further education or leave school at sixteen (Raffe and Willms, 1989). However, many school-leavers found the type of employment or training they desired was not available when they entered the labour market. These young people faced compromise, unemployment or a return to education. Their post-sixteen aspirations held before leaving education could not be translated into reality. By placing the major 'school effect' in the context of the local labour market it allows structural factors such as job availability to be seen as influential in transitions from compulsory education. There were differences between the two schools' local labour markets and their students' perception of them.

11.2 Longfield pupils' perception of labour-market conditions and the effect on post-sixteen destinations

The catchment areas serving both schools were affected by the threatened closure of the Rover plant in Longbridge, the crisis reaching its peak in spring 2000. This crisis was not foreseen when the two schools were selected. Birmingham City Council estimated that over 20,000 jobs in Birmingham were dependent on the plant and that the 'skilled workers had contributed £465 million to the local economy' (Birmingham Voice, 2000: 1). Longfield Comprehensive was in close proximity to the plant. Rover was an employer on the estate, both in terms of those working at the Longbridge plant, nearby suppliers to the plant and the retail park that relied on the spending power of the Rover employees and their families. During the height of the crisis, many houses on the Longfield estate displayed posters with slogans such as 'Don't let Rover die'. A national newspaper report on the effect of the crisis on the school was published in which senior staff spoke of the unsettling influence the threatened closure was having on year 11 students before they took their final exams. One support teacher stated that there had been

an increase in final year pupils dropping out. The support teacher argued that the students no longer saw any point in attending school because they couldn't see the possibility of any jobs at the end (Brown, 2000).

However, the head teacher hypothesised that the positive effect of the threatened closure could be an increase in pupils entering post-compulsory education due to a perception for the need for more qualifications to gain employment. The school-leavers could also have recognised the lack of immediately available employment and therefore delayed their transition to the labour market until the crisis passed (Raffe and Willms, 1989). If post-sixteen choices were conducted in this way, with the young person making an economically sound, individualistic decision to enter further education after considering the labour market, it could be argued they were making an economically rational choice.

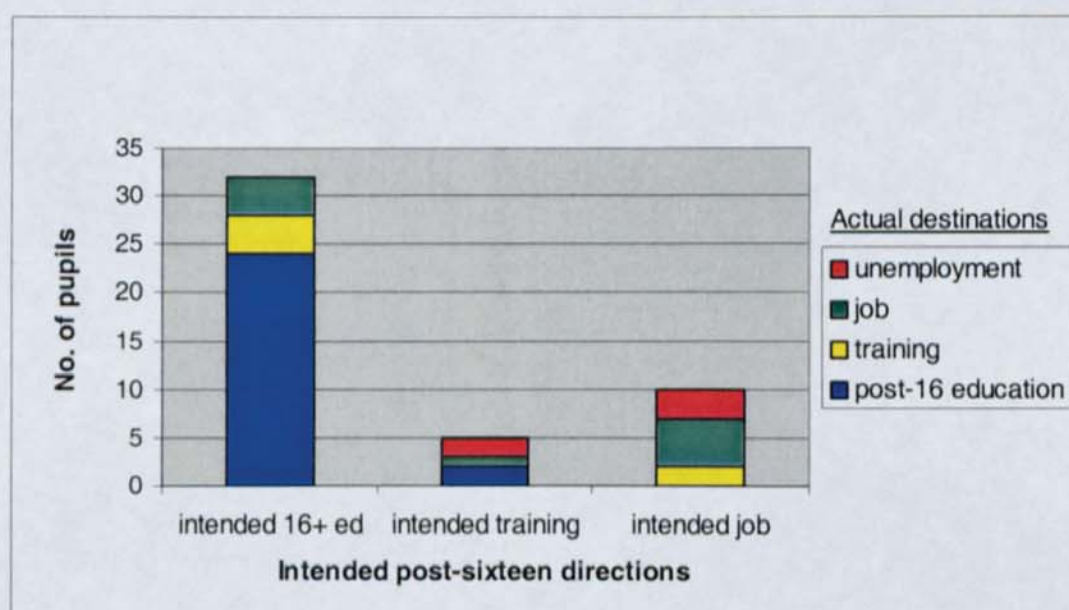
During a newspaper interview the deputy head teacher of Longfield Comprehensive contended that the school usually sent 10% of their year 10 pupils on work experience to the Longbridge Rover plant (Brown, 2000). In the year 2000, no pupils had applied for work experience at Rover, possibly not believing Rover to be a viable employer. The pupils were looking for experience elsewhere that could lead to future employment. However, the Longfield Comprehensive careers advisor had a more tentative approach and perceived no direct effect upon the pupils.

Careers officer: Not with the students I've seen, although I never really had a great deal of students that came and said they wanted to work at Rover. So I don't think ... I'm sure it affected them as it's affecting home lives and affecting relatives and they all know people who work for Rover if they're not related to them there's some connection there. Perhaps they're being realistic and saying I don't want an apprenticeship at Rover.

Revealing figures come from comparing the pupils' intended directions stated in the first questionnaire before they left school, to actual destinations three to four months after leaving compulsory education. Young people's intentions to enter post-sixteen education or the labour market were significantly related to their actual destinations. However, 18 school-leavers became unemployed, indicating that not all school-leavers entered their preferred destinations. Figure 11.1 (below) shows

the intended post-sixteen directions of 47 Longfield Comprehensive pupils. The diagram segments the bars representing the intended directions of the pupils to show where they actually went. For example, 32 pupils intended to enter post-compulsory education but the bar segmentation indicates that only 24 followed this intention with four school-leavers entering training and four school-leavers employed.

Figure 11.1 Intended directions and actual destinations for Longfield Comprehensive pupils



No pupils intending to enter post-compulsory education became unemployed, demonstrating the range of options they had available to them. These school-leavers had no qualms about returning to education if they failed to gain employment or a training placement. Nevertheless, these young people were more likely to possess qualifications that could help them in the transition from school. Overall, 51% (26/51) of Longfield Comprehensive pupils entered post-compulsory education.

None of the five Longfield pupils who intended to enter training undertook this option; two entered post-sixteen education while another two became unemployed and one gained employment. Ten Longfield pupils originally intended to work

after leaving compulsory education. Five of the school-leavers successfully made this transition, three became unemployed and two entered training. None of the young people who wanted to work returned to education; they may have possessed certain attitudes towards post-sixteen education, indicating that it had a low utility for gaining employment and believing that it did not fit their self-identity. Ball *et al.* (2000) describe a 'damaged learner identity' that can make continuing education an impossible and unpalatable option even if it is recognised that few 'good' jobs are available.

The young people's movement between categories could indicate a discrepancy between perceptions of and information held concerning the labour market and the reality of the labour market. As the school-leavers found that they were unable to fulfil their initial choice of destination, they entered another option or compromised. It could be argued that some school-leavers were making a decision based on the reality of the labour market they had experienced. This highlights the complex and transient nature of post-sixteen decisions. Choice and subsequent destination are often not linear and a number of alternatives may be attempted before a final destination is entered. This relates to Simon's (1957) concept of 'satisficing' where an acceptable alternative is reached rather than an optimal one. Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) would refer to the number of stakeholders key to a successful post-sixteen transition into any route including the school-leaver, employers and training providers but also structural and cultural factors.

The perception of the local labour market conditions may have caused the change between intended and actual destinations. When the pupils were asked to state their intended post-sixteen destinations in January to February 2000, they could have perceived the local employment situation as unfavourable, possibly due to the impending Longbridge crisis. However, when they exited compulsory education, the resolution of the Rover situation and the overall buoyancy of the labour market promoted a favourable perception of the chances of gaining employment (Raffe and Willms, 1989). Evidence for this hypothesis is demonstrated in the number of Longfield Comprehensive pupils intending to enter post-compulsory education who undertook training and employment. Post-sixteen education was never the fully accepted direction but seen as something to do before the labour market became

more favourable. The 'norm' of the area was to enter employment or training and when this became feasible, the school-leavers followed the trend. The pupils' initial perception of the labour market informed their post-sixteen intentions; however, the actual conditions affected their eventual destinations.

11.3 Tower Cross pupils' perception of labour market conditions and the effect on post-sixteen destinations

Tower Cross Comprehensive was located near the Landrover plant. Landrover had ceased to offer apprenticeships, showing the effect throughout the company of the Rover crisis. The head of sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive commented how tense the previous year had been for Rover and Landrover and said that it had affected the number of work experience placements available. This was similar to the opinion of the deputy head at Longfield Comprehensive. The head of sixth form at Tower Cross Comprehensive commented how the sixth-form intake was affected every year by the state of the labour market and policy initiatives.

Head of sixth form: This year [2000 post-sixteen education entrance] it's quite high. It goes up and down from year to year. There's so many variables and the employment situation out there is the biggest factor. If there are jobs a lot will not stay on, particularly boys ... What percentage go into employment with real training I don't know because one of the characteristics of [...] Birmingham, irrespective of which school you're in, the continuation to further education whether it be at school and higher education tends to be lower than some other parts of the city by nature that many of our youngsters, particularly if they are looking at higher education will be the first in the families that have made that jump and that culturally is quite a jump to do.

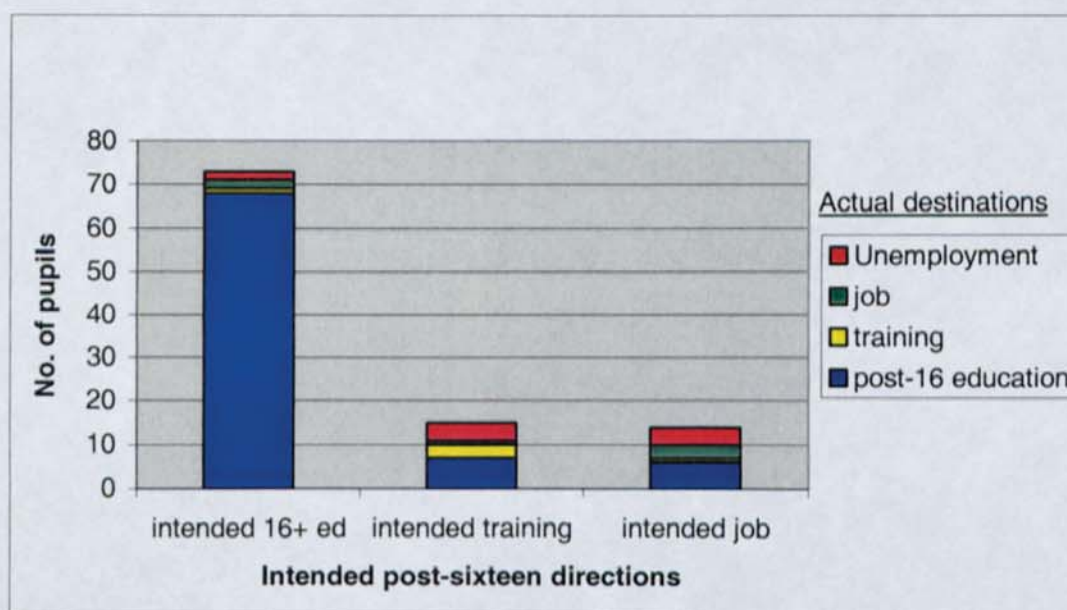
HM: Do you think the kids feel they have a lot of choice about what they're going to do? When they leave school are they optimistic?

Head of sixth form: Varies enormously. It's gone through phases. When the employment situation was really grim in the Eighties there were youngsters who were very pessimistic, you know, why should I bother, I've got three brothers out of work and my father hasn't worked and that was the culture they were steeped in. It's not as bad now as it was and it has picked up quite well.

This quote is interesting as it touches on the preference optimisation of the male school-leavers wanting to work but also the cultural aspects of the choice process. Working-class heritage may erect barriers to entering further and certainly higher education (Walkerdine *et al.*, 2001; Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996).

Again, it is important to look at the difference between intended and actual destinations for Tower Cross pupils to observe and describe the shifts that occurred. Figure 11.2 (below) demonstrates the intended and actual destinations of 102 Tower Cross pupils.

Figure 11.2 Intended directions and actual destinations for Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils



Like Longfield Comprehensive, the majority of pupils intended to enter post-sixteen education, 73/102 (71%). Figure 11.2 shows that the majority of students who intended to enter post-compulsory education (68/73) followed their initial intention. One school-leaver, however, undertook training and another two entered employment. Two of the school-leavers who intended to enter post-sixteen education became unemployed. This could be due to a change of circumstances within the home, or the school-leaver not achieving the grades required to enter a particular post-sixteen-education course (Williamson, 1997).

Fifteen Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils intended to enter training. Only three of these pupils were successful in this intention with the majority of the group (7/15) returning to education. Four of the remaining school-leavers became

unemployed while one found employment. Of the Tower Cross sample, 14 pupils intended to work on leaving compulsory education. Many of these school-leavers (6/14) re-entered education in some form while only three gained employment. Four of the school-leavers who wanted to work became unemployed while one undertook training.

Tower Cross Comprehensive experienced an increase in the number of pupils entering post-compulsory education for the second year running; 75.2% (85/112) of the sample entered post-compulsory education of some form showing a 3.7% increase on those that intended to continue their education. Male participation in post-sixteen education increased from 34 out of 55 male pupils (61.8%) who intended to continue their education to 43 out of 59 (72.9%) undertaking this route. It was the 'norm' of the school and area to re-enter education, particularly if returning to the amply sized and constantly promoted school sixth form.

11.4 Opportunities, compromises and 'good jobs'

The increase in Tower Cross Comprehensive's post-sixteen education entrants and other shifts in both schools' pupil directions may relate to Roberts's (1975) opportunity structure theory. Roberts argued that the eventual destination of the school-leaver was determined not by aspiration but by the conditions of the local labour market. Some school-leavers had tried to find employment and made a conscious choice to return to education to increase their 'chances' in the future, an economically rational decision. It was 'normal' for the Tower Cross Comprehensive sample to return to education if they failed to enter their preferred option. This may have affected the amount of effort expended in trying to find employment. The Longfield sample were more liable to enter work and training and the absence of an easily accessible sixth form may have deterred them from post-sixteen education.

Considering the jobs occupied upon leaving school it was possible to see that the desire for money and immediate gratification led to entry into work that was

immediately available. This is demonstrated by comparing the type of employment wanted and actual employment gained. In many cases, it did not fit the school-leavers' aspirations, although their initial choice was achievable for a sixteen year old within the conditions of the local labour market. An example would be the intended trainee mechanic who became an apprentice roofer or the intended childcare assistant who became an administration assistant; an example of satisficing (Simon, 1957). It was the norm to take entry-level, gender-stereotyped positions and these were all that was available to school-leavers. Seemingly, the successful school-leavers' employment parameters were in line with employment opportunities available to them in the local labour market characterised by manual, care-related and service occupations. This was unlikely to be due to an economically rational choice as the decision to enter the labour market was influenced by cultural norms, little if any labour market knowledge and not after a consideration of all available options. This choice could instead be related to the young person's 'horizon for action' (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996) incorporating the 'habitus' and opportunity structures within the labour market while recognising subjective preferences. Table 11.1 lists the types of employment entered by the school-leavers.

Table 11.1 Type of employment entered by school-leavers

Gender	Type of post-sixteen employment entered
Male	Agency work Labourer (2) Fast food retail Shelf stocker Production line (2) Trainee welder Fitting boxing rings Apprentice sheet fitter Trainee plasterer Trainee carpenter Roofing apprentice Infantry (2) Window cleaner
Female	Shop assistant Office junior Fast food retail Trainee hairdresser Cleaner Temp. Admin (2) Assembly worker Laundry assistant Dental nurse

Many young people perceived the need for qualifications to enable them to find a 'good job'. There was an implicit belief that further qualifications led to wider opportunities, more choice, money and status. The further education entrants deferred gratification and invested in their future. Replies to the question, *Do you like the idea of working this year?*, asked in the first questionnaire included:

Adrian: No ... because leaving with just my GCSE's would ensure me a low paid, low skilled job. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

Natasha: I want to be a solicitor, I want a profession. I know if I do a job at this age it will just be a job. I want a profession. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

Paula from Longfield Comprehensive argued that qualifications gave you 'more choices about what you could do and more chance of getting it'. Nevertheless, this choice may have been due to recognition that if she left school she could become unemployed. The stigma attached to this could have been enough of a deterrent to

ensure some pupils remained education. Other pupils wanted employment which, as Nathan contended, offered 'promotion and prospects'; employing the concept of preference optimisation and the attainment of the highest expected utility. This could be an effect of the perceived instability of the labour market.

Anne: I have chosen to stay in education so I have a chance to learn more so if I don't get the job I want I will be able to go for another job (*Longfield sixth former*)

Chris: No [I don't like the idea of working this year] because I probably wouldn't be able to find a job with a decent pay, and the money I would get would be very little. I would rather get a job that needs qualifications (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

Joshua: I just wanted the qualifications cos, if I got fired from a job I wouldn't have nothing to back it up. (*Tower Cross sixth former*)

Pupils planning to enter the labour market expected to find employment within three months, and the majority expected to gain a job in days or weeks. Longfield Comprehensive pupils were less likely to think this than their Tower Cross counterparts. The nearby Longbridge crisis may have promoted a pessimistic labour market view although this did not affect their eventual destinations with 49% entering the labour market whether successfully or not.

11.5 Parents' perception of the local labour market

'If you have got a job I think you are lucky today.'
(*Longfield mother*)

Parents were concerned about the buoyancy of the local labour market, especially if their child intended to leave school at sixteen. Many of the families were negative about the employment opportunities their area offered. Parents saw their children as struggling to find work locally due to increased competition for any 'good' training placements and employment (Spicker, 2001). Many of the families were experiencing uncertainty in their own employment or were unemployed. Guy's mother told me the cleaning firm she worked for had been taken over and she had had to explain to Guy that she might lose her job and could not afford something he wanted. The insecurity of the situation with Rover was a concern in many

households, not just in Longfield, promoting a pessimistic view of the labour market.

Catherine's mother: Most of the people we know are unemployed. There's quite high unemployment on this estate. If you have got a job I think you are lucky today. (*Daughter attended Longfield*)

Daniel's father worked at the Land Rover plant and discussed the possibility of his son entering the army.

Daniel's father: I wouldn't push him. I'd mention it cos you can have a career in the army. Cos there's not a lot of jobs out there now. If you've been listening to the telly you would have heard about how our companies being split up. There's a possibility of 6,000 at Longbridge leaving, possibly affect 50,000 so a lot will be looking for jobs so young lads ain't going to have much of a chance. (*Son attended Tower Cross*)

Sharon's parents and two older brothers were unemployed and her mother was pessimistic about employment opportunities not just in the local area in Longfield but all over the country. She was reluctant to talk in terms of ideal employment for her daughter not believing it was possible to think like this and was dismissive about making plans for the future (Furnham, 1990). Sharon seemed appalled to hear her mother talk like this, then quickly accepted the dire situation her mum portrayed as fact. However, some parents in both areas thought that employment was readily available; Kirsty's mum argued that there was work out there; all you needed was the 'confidence and qualifications to go and get it'. Lee's mother held a similar opinion, stating 'there's work there if you look for it'.

11.6 Area loyalties and post-sixteen transitions

School-leavers were reluctant to leave the neighbourhood that they perceived as 'safe' to find work. Young people were often willing to consider taking any kind of work (within gender constraints) but not anywhere. Employment had to be within immediate reach of the locality, demonstrating the restricted horizons for action the school-leavers often possessed and limited frame of reference (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Coffield *et al.*, 1986). Pupils entering post-sixteen

education were more willing to migrate in the future to find employment. This difference was noticeable among young people entering various post-sixteen options; 63.5% (66/104) of future post-sixteen education entrants compared to 57.6% (19/33) of future trainees and workers and 50% (8/16) of the future unemployed said they would move to find work. More ambitious young people saw themselves as limited by the locale.

Amber: [I would move] out of Birmingham. It seems like I've been here like ... I know its only fifteen years but it feels like I've been here a long time and I'd like to see more elsewhere. (Tower Cross sixth former)

This fits previous evidence of the migration of skilled workers to areas of employment while the unskilled are left behind (Fieldhouse, 1996). Many school-leavers' entering employment, training or becoming unemployed had a distorted perception of distance to other areas; any area beyond an immediate reach was viewed as alien and held the possibility of isolation from family and friends. The future further education entrants perceived wider opportunities further afield and their horizons for action were not constrained by geography. Ball *et al.* (2000) hypothesised that this confidence may in part be due to the material and emotional support received via families.

Girls were less likely to state that they would move to find work, 55.9% (38/68) of girls compared to 64% (55/86) of boys. Girls were also significantly more likely than boys to give the desire to stay close to their family as a reason for not re-locating. Many of the non-academic female pupils who later left school could not envisage leaving the area and their support network. In answer to the question, *Would you move to get a job?*, typical responses included:

Zoe: No ... I'd have to move away from my family and friends. (Art college, former Longfield pupil)

Claire: No ... because I would be away from my family and if I did I would have to get them to move as well. (Childcare at college, former Tower Cross pupil)

Jenny: I would feel lost without my family. (Employed, former Longfield pupil)

Pupils from Longfield Comprehensive were significantly more likely to say that access to transport had or would affect their employment search than Tower Cross

pupils, although this was borderline significant. The Longfield school estate was further from the city than the Tower Cross area. In previous years, there had been plans for a light rail but some residents had opposed these to the chagrin of the young parents to whom I spoke. The sparse links to the city centre limited the young people socially as there were few attractions on the estate but it also affected travel to college and employment.

11.7 Attitudes towards training schemes in the local labour market context

'You get paid very little but you do get useful experience.'
(James, Tower Cross pupil)

There was little difference between school-leavers entering post-compulsory education and those in employment and training concerning their opinion of training schemes before they left school. 84.8% (89/105) future post-sixteen education entrants and 81.8% (27/33) future employed/training entrants saw training schemes in a positive light, a good experience and a way to get training while working. There was no difference between either school for the perception of training schemes although an increased number of Longfield Comprehensive pupils later entered this option. This could be due to the availability of training placements in the area, and the school-leavers' help in gaining them. In answer to the question, *What do you think of training schemes?*, replies included:

James: You get paid very little but you do get useful experience. (Tower Cross sixth former)

Natalie: Very good experience. I think it would make you feel more comfortable and get ready for that job. (Tower Cross sixth former)

Paula: Helps people build up their confidence, especially if they feel they're not ready for a job. (Longfield sixth former)

The positive perception of training by future students, workers and trainees could be compared with the 72.2% (13/18) of future unemployed young people that perceived them positively – still a substantial number but almost 10% less than employed school-leavers. 22.2% (4/18) of future unemployed school-leavers were

unsure about the advantages of training schemes or what was involved and saw them as something to do before they got a 'proper' job. Less than 10% of future workers, trainees and post-sixteen education entrants thought this.

Unemployment in the family could accentuate the importance of gaining skills through training. David stated that it was important to learn a trade as providing security for the future. The uncertainty of his father and brother's work as odd job men may have prompted this view, especially since his brother was about to be made redundant. Other boys were keen to learn trades and ideal placements were chosen in relation to favoured school and leisure pursuits such as mechanics or electronics (Ashton, 1975). The boys interviewed often spoke about training schemes with enthusiasm and varying degrees of knowledge. These boys were often non-academic but not anti-school and were willing to continue their education – but based in work. Many assumed they would get a scheme matching their work preferences in the immediate locality – an eventuality that the careers advisor informed me was not usually the case. Instead, the school-leavers often entered any scheme that was available and 'didn't look too bad' – a pragmatically rational choice. In the follow-up interviews, many of the trainees were happy with their choice of direction, although the standard and type of training did not always meet expectations (Hollands, 1990).

In some cases, a future school-leaver's negative attitude to education extended to training schemes. Hannah, a Tower Cross pupil, believed that training schemes 'rip you off'. She hated school enjoying 'nothink' and disliking 'everythink' and described further education as a 'waste of time'. Similar to her was Simon, whose first questionnaire responses included the fact that he was leaving school because he hated it and could get a job in one week. He also had a negative opinion of training schemes.

Simon: They are rubbish and a wast of time. (Longfield pupil)

If the school-leaver entered the labour market and failed to gain employment a negative attitude towards training schemes and post-sixteen education could have prolonged their unemployed status. Kirsty had extensive problems at school,

possessing an anti-education attitude extending to encompass training programmes. She was keen to take part in the research as it meant she would have a valid reason for missing lessons.

HM: So you wouldn't go back to school?

Kirsty: No

HM: How about training?

Kirsty: Nope

HM: Can you tell me why not? Tell me why you wouldn't do training.

*Kirsty: Cos I've been learning all my life and I don't want to carry on with it.
(Longfield pupil)*

Apprenticeships were viewed favourably by parents and young people and were highly sought after.

David: Cos like with training schemes, cos you have a training scheme and an apprenticeship don't you, and like you don't get much money and at the end of the training scheme you don't definitely get the job do you. But the apprenticeship would like be better. (Trainee bricklayer, former Longfield pupil)

There was competition for a limited number of apprenticeships and social networks were utilised in an attempt to gain an advantage over other school-leavers. Some mothers and fathers spoke of 'friends of friends' at a particular company, checking the local papers everyday, 'putting the word out'. Advantage in gaining an apprenticeship seemed to be on the 'who you know' basis, some degree of luck and intensive family involvement.

11.8 Relevance of education to the labour market

'It doesn't teach you about real life.'
(Lisa, Longfield pupil)

The pupils were asked in the first questionnaire if they thought school prepared them for work. At face value, both future school-leavers and returnees had similar opinions with approximately 51% of both groups believing it did.

Kevin: Well its like getting up everyday like having to be there on time.
(Unemployed, former Longfield pupil)

Peter: You've got to wear uniforms like some jobs. (Construction worker, former Longfield pupil)

When the descriptive statistics were examined for the directions of post-sixteen education, employment/training and unemployment, a discrepancy was revealed. Half of future post-sixteen education entrants (51/101) believed school failed to prepare them for employment. An extra 10.5% of Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils compared with Longfield pupils were more likely to believe this, possibly explaining their increased numbers in post-sixteen education as perceiving the need for extra qualifications. 57.6% (19/33) of young people in training and employment thought the school did prepare them for work – in fact, it may have, these young people made a successful transition to the labour market. Nevertheless, 56.3% (9/16) of the future unemployed felt let down by the school, arguing that it had inadequately prepared them to make the transition to the labour market but they may have felt unable to return to education.

The pupils in proposing how school could prepare them for employment advocated more practical experience. In year 10, pupils were sent (unpaid) to local businesses for two weeks to experience the working environment. In answer to the query taken from the first questionnaire, *How could school prepare you better for work?*, replies included:

Louise: More than two weeks work experience and you should get paid so you know how to deal with money. (Childcare college, former Longfield pupil)

Kate: Give you more chance at work experience and let you try more places. (College, former Longfield pupil)

Pamela: Have people from work places to come and talk to use and puples going to other work places, like more work expeiince. (Unemployed, former Tower Cross pupil)

Damian for work experience had been placed at McDonalds. Although he said he would not work there again, he contended that it had been a good experience.

Damian: That's why its good cos you can go to a job and see if you would like to do that but you don't. You can only go to one job, it would be better if you could go to more jobs cos then you could see what area you would really like to work in. (Longfield sixth former)

This was similar to Kate's experience who after leaving compulsory education entered college study to childcare.

Kate: When I done my work experience at a nursery I then decided I want to work with children. (College, former Longfield pupil)

Part-time employment and work experience provided current labour market information. These two activities also imparted human and social capital, allowing young people to gain extra skills and labour market contacts (Entwisle *et al.*, 2000). Many post-compulsory education entrants had part-time jobs in shops and helping family but did not want to pursue this full-time as wanting something better, providing a reason for gaining more qualifications. However, Stuart's work experience had instilled confidence in his own abilities and he left school at sixteen. The following quote from his retired father draws on points made earlier concerning the influence of older peer groups.

Stuart's father: He's already done a little spell over the summer [employment] and he did his work experience. He got on really well with the workforce there. They are slightly older and he made a lot of friends up there and that's when the girl thing started! And the money, if he did go up there when he left school he could be walking away with £130 which coming from zilch at school seems a lot. (Son attended Longfield)

Some of the pupils felt let down by the school in providing relevant labour market information. Pupils complained that the teachers spoke about their own school transition experiences and this was irrelevant as outdated.

Jolie: More work experience and publicity of jobs because you can't look in a career library for a job which may appeal if you have never heard of it. (College, former Tower Cross pupil)

Tracy: Teach us about real life ... cos like the teachers like tell you what happened in their days and they don't really prepare you for up-to-date stuff. (Business Admin College, former Longfield pupil)

Following this, some pupils and their parents questioned the applicability of school to 'real life'. Lisa left school at sixteen to enter employment and had a family with negative experiences of post-sixteen education. Although not anti-education, she was keen to leave school and perceived the utility of post-compulsory education as low. I asked her if she thought school had prepared her for work.

Lisa: Mmm, no. It teaches you like ... cos like work is about confronting people and going out into the world and this [school] doesn't really do that. It just confines you into school and maths. (Longfield pupil)

Some of the students, especially the non-academic pupils, thought school should make lessons more relevant to work.

Tracy: You don't need all the subjects. It would be better if you could just choose the lessons you need for the job. (Business administration training, former Longfield pupil)

Susan: I think it could teach us about real life work. (Tower Cross sixth former)

Lisa: It doesn't teach you about real life. (Admin, former Longfield pupil)

Damian: Put us in more real life situations. (Tower Cross sixth former)

Paula: A wider range of lesson options – 2 periods a week pupils should be placed in the office etc for work experience (Longfield sixth former)

Some families on the Longfield estate questioned the relevance of their children's education to the labour market. This was possibly due to the belief that their children needed to be fully prepared to make a successful transition to work given the current economic conditions.

HM: You don't think there is anything else the school could do to prepare them for work?

Lee's mother: No. I mean the subjects they teach at school don't prepare you for real life does it?

HM: Do you think the school should teach more practical subjects?

Lee's mother: Yes, I don't think...I know you need to know about maths, science, English and all that but unless you're up there (taps head) you don't want to know, because I didn't. (*Son attended Longfield*)

Interesting throughout these quotes from parents and pupils is the use of 'real life' in connection with their school learning experience. Many of the pupils, particularly those desiring to leave school, felt that their education was unrelated to work and the 'outside world'. Perhaps they saw school as having some regulatory function stopping them joining society in full – or as one female pupil put it; 'school is like prison'. Whatever the case, many were eager to leave and get on with the business of 'real life'. This finding is apparent in other research. Wayne within Ball *et al.*'s (2000) research, comments that school-leavers 'want a fresh start, a job, a new life, not more writing and learning things that nobody cares about' (*ibid.*, p. 135).

11.9 Conclusion: 'real life' post-sixteen

The difference between intended directions and actual destinations could have been due to a change in the perception of the buoyancy of the labour market and inaccurate information corrected by experience. However, the Tower Cross sample were also more prone to return to education if they failed to find employment than the Longfield sample. Many pupils from both schools did not perceive school to be related to reality seen in the recurrent use of the phrase 'real life' in connection to the world outside school. This could have created difficulty for some pupils in relating to and engaging in the school's official pursuits. Parents echoed their children's concern of the applicability of some school knowledge to work. Based on this perception of compulsory schooling held by some young people, it becomes evident why a sizable portion of the cohort left school to enter the labour market.

Part III

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

12 Discussion: culture and structure in post-sixteen directions

12.1 Introduction

The research questions ask what the relative importance is of factors affecting young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market before they leave school and if these perceptions influence their subsequent post-sixteen destinations. In addition, it is asked if there is a difference between intended directions before leaving school and actual destinations achieved a number of months after. The final research question asks if it is possible to identify ways to aid young people in their transition from compulsory education into continued education, training or employment. These questions allowed an examination of the relative importance of the school, gender, family, peer group and the perceived and actual local labour market in post-sixteen transitions. It also enabled the research to examine the 'choice' process for working-class pupils in their transition from compulsory education. Through a discussion of the literature, data collection and analysis, the research confirmed that post-sixteen directions possess an element of choice, but that young people operated within structural constraints including school policy, socio-economic status and labour market opportunity structures (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Brooks 1998; Marx, 1954). Cultural constraints were also influential, and these could be seen in the way the family and peer group aided the young person's development of a 'horizon for action' which designated the choices that could be perceived as available (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). The horizon for action comprised the young person's habitus, perceived labour market opportunity structures and subjective preferences for work. The habitus is a crystallisation of taste, thought and action, which is class and gender specific, advantaging children socialised into the dominant middle-class mindset and/or culture, disadvantaging the majority of the participants within the research. By examining the factors that school-leavers acknowledge as influential in their transition and structural factors beyond their control, a rich picture of post-sixteen transitions can be developed.

From the qualitative analysis supported by the quantitative data, the two most important factors affecting young people's intended and actual destinations on leaving compulsory education emerged as the school attended and the pupils' gender. The school culture, leadership, policy towards disaffected pupils and promotion of a feasible, on-site sixth form were a major influence on the pupils' post-sixteen directions. The pupils' gender was tied to all factors affecting post-sixteen decisions and transitions, altering expectations and aspirations. Much of the school-leavers' identity as male/female, academic/non-academic was derived from interaction with family and friends. These sources of support provided a sense of security that could expand or constrict the possibilities for young people, preventing certain options from being perceived as desirable or acceptable. When examining the directions that pupils intended to take on leaving school and actual destinations upon leaving compulsory education, cultural influences ultimately had to be sited within the local labour market, to determine the likely and actual success of these endeavours. Therefore, by examining the intended and actual destinations, it was possible to see the choice process through to its attempted enactment and discover the cause of any discrepancies.

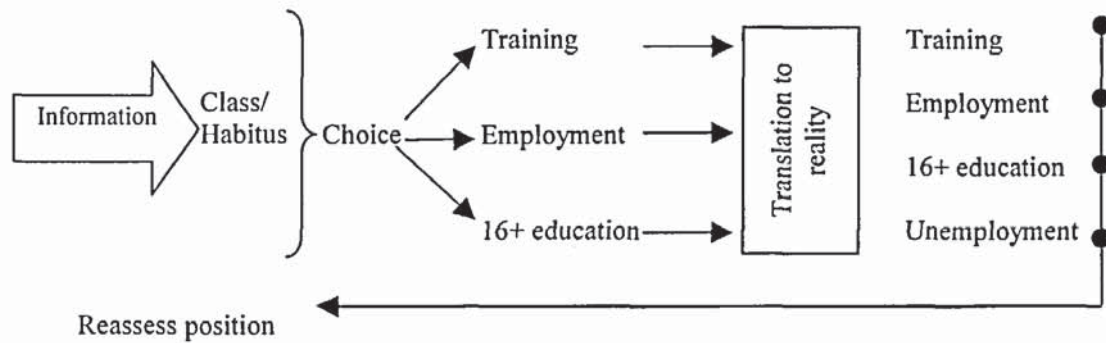
The research has shown that post-sixteen choices are not made in the way much policy assumes, rarely conforming to an economically rational model of decision-making. It is true that young people entering sixth form and college were more likely to collect information from multiple sources to inform their post-sixteen decisions than school-leavers entering training, employment or unemployment, possibly indicating an investment in human capital, aware of future opportunities and current restraints. However, structural, cultural and social forces heavily influenced the way that further education entrants chose which courses to take and where to take them. Young people continued their education for numerous reasons other than a desire to gain qualifications to help get a 'good job'. The process of continuing education was far less economically calculating than rational choice theory would suggest and could depend on the security network the young people had built in a time of economic, culture and individual uncertainty. Some students had returned to sixth form as they were unable to think of an acceptable alternative, had a desire to be with friends, were unable to gain employment or were afraid of leaving the 'safety' of the school environment. In this light, continuing education

becomes less of an investment in human capital but – due to peer pressure, fear of the unknown and structural constraints – an example of pragmatic rationality.

Young people entering employment, training or becoming unemployed after leaving school were also influenced by structural and cultural forces with choices based on partial and occasionally inaccurate information. School-leavers often conducted an elimination of alternatives whereby their direction was more the result of not wanting to enter other routes perceived as undesirable (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). The belief in the low utility of further education, with reference to conceptions of self-identity and the perception of the labour market as buoyant confirmed their choice to exit education.

Figure 12.1 (below) was presented within the literature review to represent the thesis position on choice. It is used again here to restate that position based on the research evidence and to summarise the research findings. To explain the direction of the diagram; information on available post-sixteen routes was filtered through the young person's class positioned habitus informed by their family and friendship group and constituting part of their horizon for action. This led to a decision to enter training, employment or post-sixteen education; there was no evidence to suggest that any school-leavers opted to enter unemployment. Some young people entered their first choice of destination, but for others there was a series of false starts and compromises as they attempted to translate their initial choice into reality. If school-leavers found themselves in an undesirable occupation, educational course or unemployment they had to reassess their position and 'choose' to enter another route.

Figure 12.1 Model of influences on post-sixteen choices



This chapter draws together the argument throughout the analysis that there were two main influences on post-sixteen transitions, school and gender. However, it is important not to forget the family and friendship network that many young people viewed as crucial in their lives. The local labour markets, whether accurately perceived or not, had an influential role in the success of the young person's transition if they choose to leave education. By discussing the relative importance of these factors, the research questions can be addressed.

1. What is the relative importance of various factors affecting young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market before leaving compulsory education?
2. Do young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market influence their subsequent post-sixteen directions?
3. Is there a difference between expectations of intended direction before leaving school and actual destinations?
4. Is it possible to identify intervention practices that could aid the transition to post-compulsory education, training or employment?

After discussing the relative importance of factors affecting post-sixteen destinations, it will be possible to see the policy implications of the research,

including the relevance of the education maintenance allowance and careers guidance service.

12.2 The school effect: comprehensive constraints?

Considering the relative importance of factors affecting post-sixteen transitions from compulsory education, the role of the school and gender emerged as the most important. Outwardly, the two schools possessed analogous characteristics such as similar pupil demographics, matching patterns of post-sixteen transitions and comparable levels of academic achievement and underachievement. However, on entering the schools, a different ethos emerged distinguishing each institution and probably accounting for the significant difference in their former pupils' post-sixteen transitions.

Tower Cross Comprehensive was attempting to foster an academic culture leading to post-sixteen education participation and achievement; indeed the number of pupils opting for further education had steadily increased over the last two years. The provision of an on site sixth form that was actively publicised and continually promoted made the destination acceptable to some pupils and their parents as an easily accessible option in a known and 'safe' environment. From the sample of young people studied, Tower Cross pupils were significantly more likely to enter post-compulsory education than their Longfield counterparts, 75% of the Tower Cross sample compared with 51% of the Longfield sample. The number opting to enter school sixth form was dramatically different, with 72% of former Tower Cross pupils entering this option compared with 38% of former Longfield pupils.

Longfield Comprehensive had actively been trying to create a more 'academic' sixth form, deterring less academically capable pupils from entrance. This led to considerably fewer pupils from Longfield Comprehensive than Tower Cross continuing education at their secondary school. Longfield sixth form was then unable to offer a diverse spectrum of courses or the opportunity for students to interact with a range of peers. The repercussions of this were immense for the sixth

form's future; in 2000, it was decided that the sixth form was no longer financially viable and it was closed in 2002.

The transition for many Tower Cross pupils into further education was, however, by no means stress free. The plethora of qualifications available and diversity of further education institutions in the local area led to confusion while further distancing parents from a system they did not understand and had little, if any, experience of. A number of Tower Cross sixth-form entrants chose this route because they were unaware or unsure of other educational options. In some cases, students may have thrived in a new environment but were prevented from entering college by fear and confusion. Tower Cross sixth form was also eager to expand and this may have led to the acceptance of pupils whose optimal route may have been training. The option for Tower Cross pupils to stay with the 'known' must be compared with the transition that faced Longfield pupils at the end of compulsory education. The absence of a welcoming/academically forgiving sixth form into which they could be drawn meant that if they wished to continue their education, they had to explore new environments and possibly develop new identities (Ball *et al.*, 2000).

School measures for dealing with disaffected pupils and fostering academic achievement were dissimilar between the two schools. Tower Cross Comprehensive preferred to integrate disaffected pupils back into the school system by personal mentoring and part-time schooling. They had also implemented measures designed to create a school/home learning partnership (Lareau, 1989, 1997). Longfield Comprehensive did not have the resources to institute these measures and were inclined to seek other educational provision for 'trouble' pupils. Disaffected students were transferred to college or parents were advised to withdraw them before they were excluded. It could be argued that there was an active marginalisation of disaffected pupils by the head teacher. Personal experience in both schools showed how pupils could vanish from the school system. The government's policy of publishing league tables could be leading schools to hide their failing pupils, who then become difficult to contact via official and unofficial means. Through promoting parental 'choice' and aiming to raise

school standards, the government could be further excluding some 'at risk' young people.

An explicit source of information and advice on post-sixteen options within the school was the careers guidance advisor. Under the previous careers guidance policy of 'blanket coverage', 85% of pupils within both schools had received at least one careers interview. The interview had enabled some school-leavers' aspirations to be adjusted in sequence with labour market reality and made provision for entrance to training schemes (Donohue and Patton, 1998, Roberts, 1975). The majority of pupils viewed the experience as positive and pupil comments included it had provided instrumental information on post-sixteen options, broadened their arena of choice and made them more aware of requirements for entrance to certain occupations.

Young people who later became unemployed after leaving compulsory education were less likely than their post-compulsory education entrant, training or employed peers to have had a careers interview. The unemployed school-leavers were less informed about their options and had unrealistic aspirations for the labour market. This demonstrates how important the careers interview can be in providing an accurate source of information. Due to the changing structure of the labour market and expanding further education and skills sector, families might have been unable to advise their children on the most beneficial post-sixteen routes. The familiarity that pupils achieved with their careers guidance advisor helped transcend any barriers erected to information provided by unfamiliar sources. Careers guidance interviews were essentially 'driven' by the pupil, allowing information to be assimilated into culturally constructed horizons for action and not dismissed as irrelevant to the young person's goals and aspirations. The constant dialogue within Tower Cross surrounding further education meant that this might have been mentioned more within careers guidance sessions by both the advisor and pupil creating further acceptance of this direction. The Longfield advisor was often cited as the person that helped the school-leaver enter a training scheme.

12.3 Male and female post-sixteen transitions: different agendas?

The pupils' gender was crucial when considering the relative importance of factors affecting post-sixteen aspirations and perceptions of the labour market and the transition from compulsory education. The effect of gender was only equalled by the role of the school in its influence on post-sixteen intentions and destinations. Boys and girls made contrasting post-sixteen decisions. They were choosing different destinations or the same routes for different reasons. Girls were significantly more likely to intend to enter post-sixteen education than their male counterparts. This intention translated into an overall difference in rates of post-sixteen-education participation between boys and girls, mirroring national trends. Girls placed greater stock in continuing their education to gain qualifications seen to be beneficial in the long-term. It could be argued that girls were more likely to make an economically rational choice to enter further education. Boys were more likely to see education as a substitute for their preferred option of employment, suggesting that they were compromising or satisficing (Simon, 1957). However, boys entering further education were also more likely to recognise that there was a scarcity of desirable entry-level employment, indicating an element of labour market awareness.

The male preference for entering the labour market can be seen as having historical significance in the two areas the schools were located within. There existed a culture of masculinity and academic performance was not rated highly. In addition to this, girls were more likely to belong to a friendship group intending to enter and actually entering post-compulsory education possibly delineating the route as female. Overall, girls were more likely to attain the grades necessary for entrance to further education and non-academic girls were more likely than non-academic boys to continue their education (Rice, 1999). The higher male leaving rate translated into more unemployment among male school-leavers than female.

Despite attaining similar levels of academic achievement and underachievement, a difference existed between the two schools regarding attainment levels for boys and girls. For a number of years the girls within Longfield Comprehensive achieved

less A*-G GCSE passes than their male counterparts, in contrast to Tower Cross and national figures. The low status of women on the Longfield estate, compounded by less maternal employment, may have contributed to the low academic achievement of the Longfield Comprehensive girls. This could be attributed to the culture of the area concerning family and peer attitudes towards gender roles. The entrenched gender roles that existed cast females in the position of wife, mother and menial worker while males assumed the dominant provider role (Poole, 1983). This could constrict the working-class girls' aspirations, limiting their choice of post-sixteen destinations through socialisation. Any information received on alternative routes was filtered through this gendered habitus and mindset of what was appropriate and perceived to be achievable. Although a similar culture existed within Tower Cross preventing academic attainment levels from dramatically increasing, the role of women may have been perceived slightly differently with higher levels of maternal employment and more single-parent families providing different role models for Tower Cross girls. However, in Longfield Comprehensive, academic levels were rising and the girls were closing the gender gap. This may have been facilitated through the provision of a female head teacher providing a powerful female role model and a steady change in school culture designed to raise academic achievement and address female underachievement.

Value transmission through socialisation could rationalise the school-leavers' post-sixteen choice to enter entry-level, gender-stereotyped occupations. Manual trades typified ideal and actual employment entered by male school-leavers and female school-leavers occupied care/service sector positions. This selection can be attributed to the models of employment supplied within the home and what was available in the local labour market to the young, minimally qualified school-leaver. It could also be due to the rewards the young people were looking to gain from employment. The male pupils focused upon extrinsic rewards while girls valued the intrinsic opportunities a job could offer (Poole, 1983). The pupils' valuation system could have been gained from observations made in the home. The dominant paternal figure occupations were ascribed status within working-class culture and paid relatively well. Maternal employment was concentrated in caring,

clerical and cleaning occupations. These were low paid and low status but were seen to have intrinsic value.

There could be a differential gender effect of maternal employment. Working mothers may have been of little benefit to their school-leaving sons, not providing instrumental social contacts for the type of employment the male school-leavers wanted. Gender socialisation and cultural production and reproduction meant that boys were unlikely to want to enter the form of employment occupied by their mothers. Also, maternal employment in low status, poorly paid positions did not act as a labour market deterrent for boys in the same way that it did for some girls, particularly those intending to enter further education.

Few school-leavers consciously recognised the influence of the family and this was especially true for boys. Girls entering post-compulsory education were more likely to acknowledge that the home and the school had influenced their post-sixteen choices. Some mothers recognised their subordinate position in relation to men and in the class structure. These women urged their daughters against entering the same type of employment as them or taking the same life path. The influence of this and the recognition by the female pupils of gender inequality were discovered through asking the pupils what they intended to be doing at twenty-one. Girls entering post-compulsory education frequently mentioned that they did not intend to have children by this age as it could prevent the realisation of their dreams and career choice. They saw themselves as bearing the brunt of domestic responsibility. This 'unromantic realism' was seen in Wallace's (1986) work. Non-academic girls forming groups within both schools, saw future roles as closely related to the home and domestic status. Full-time employment in low status occupations may be viewed by these girls as a short-term location before becoming wives and mothers, an alternative career and one followed by successive generations of women in their family (Measor and Sikes, 1992; Meyenn, 1980). Employment in low-status occupations would then become a secondary role only undertaken out of necessity.

Gender was an important factor throughout the research not only in the effect it had on pupil post-sixteen transitions but also in conducting the research. As a young

woman, I was able to enter certain personal contexts such as the family home and undoubtedly my gender affected the way that the young people, families and teachers interacted with me. I often felt that both male and female pupils were confiding in me and that their parents seemed at ease relating personal information, in many cases on issues that were not broached by me. Interacting in the research site as an early twenty-something female researcher helped me establish a rapport with many of the research participants leading to rich data collection. This influence needs to be recognised as it could have created different data through social interaction to data collected by anyone else. This bias is, however, inherent within social research and as long as it is acknowledged to be part of the data collection process, assessments can be made by the researcher and other audiences as to the effect on the 'validity' of the data and research conclusions.

12.4 Families and feasibilities in post-sixteen transitions

The role of the school and pupils' gender were the main factors affecting post-sixteen transitions, however other factors were also relatively influential in informing the young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market in readiness for their post-sixteen transitions. The home provided school-leavers with a cultural context for their post-sixteen decisions. The socialisation occurring within the family in conjunction with the influence exerted by friendship groups and wider social networks delineated certain routes as desirable while closing other options; what they knew and thought acceptable informed the young person's 'horizon for action'. The family also conveyed in varying amounts financial, human, social and cultural capital advantaging some pupils over others.

Certain characteristics of the family, such as educational experience, amount of employment and size, had a significant effect upon the young person's post-sixteen intentions and actual destinations. Parental participation in further education increased the pupils' likelihood of entrance to post-compulsory education (Alwin and Thornton, 1984). The parents' educational careers provided an arena of information for the young person to access concerning the utility of continuing

education and procedural requirements for entrance. For these young people, the home could help navigate the route from compulsory education into further and possibly higher education through the deployment of cultural capital. This path had been chartered by other family members and was therefore acceptable and possibly expected.

For parents, merely holding a positive perception of post-compulsory education without the requisite experience did not necessarily lead to its entrance by their children. Employed, poorly educated parents provided the model that it was unnecessary to have qualifications to find work. This argument was enhanced by the popular notion of career ladders. Parents and young people placed importance on being able to show what you were capable of while 'on the job'. This view was prevalent even among pro-further education parents, negating the impact of their message and holding the contradictory position that post-compulsory education was not necessary in the real world.

A large number of adult workers resident in the family home indicated a network of instrumental contacts that could facilitate a successful transition to the labour market. Of school-leavers with two or more employed residents in the home, 70% entered employment or training. In this instance, not only did the young people have daily evidence of the material advantages of working and the low utility of further education in attaining employment, they were also high in social capital as possessing the employment information and contacts with which to seek work. Young people originating from homes containing no adult employment were significantly more likely to become unemployed than the rest of the cohort. Their choice to leave education was pragmatically rational; little was known about labour market reality and there were often misconceptions regarding the validity of post-compulsory education and training. Employment or a 'good' training placement was seen to increase status and provide extrinsic rewards. Their intended directions into employment or training were not always translated into reality due to a lack of human, social and cultural capital in the form of qualifications, social contacts and implicit knowledge.

A significant relationship was found between the number of residents within the home and post-sixteen destinations into the labour market or continued education. Young people from families with less than five people living in the home were significantly more likely to enter post-sixteen education than their counterparts from homes with five or more residents. This relationship could be attributed to the amount of employment contacts in the home or a lack of money to support dependents for a prolonged period. As was found in family interviews, large families did not equate to large houses. This may have increased the young person's desire for independence.

Maternal employment significantly increased the likelihood of young people entering post-compulsory education. In a dual-income family, a maternal wage may have made it feasible to support dependants for a prolonged period. Much of the employment was in low-status positions and many of the women spoken to were keen to stress that they had encouraged their daughters to follow a career, believing that this would afford them a better life (Mann, 1998). Working mothers in menial employment may have provided a labour market deterrent to their daughters and emphasised the importance of education in order to occupy intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding work. Maternal employment may also have indicated that it was possible to have both a career and a family, encouraging girls to pursue qualifications and raising their employment aspirations. Within the homes of the Longfield sample, there was less maternal employment and more paternal employment than within the Tower Cross sample. Therefore, the Longfield girls would have had fewer non-traditional role models and possibly less encouragement either implicit or explicit to enter further education.

Young people originating from single-parent families were more likely to enter post-compulsory education or unemployment (Rice, 1999; Spuijt and de Goede, 1997). Again, the provision of financial capital, role models and social contacts could be an explanatory factor. The young person observing their family struggling to cope on a single income derived from a low-status, low-waged job could have resolved, with the encouragement of the single parent, to enter post-compulsory education to achieve a measure of social mobility. Conversely, a young person perceiving that the parent could not fund a prolonged period of dependence may

have decided to enter employment or training to enhance the financial status of the home. However, the unemployed single-parent family may have had a deficit of instrumental contacts and employment information translating into an unsuccessful labour market transition for the school-leaver.

The families generally believed post-sixteen education to be worthwhile, whether continued in an academic or skill-related field. However, among the parents interviewed there was little instrumental support or cultural capital to help their children enter further education (Pugsley, 1998). The further education system was not understood, and many parents trusted teachers and careers professionals at the school to supply information. Tower Cross sixth form offered an easily accessible route into further education. It was promoted to parents and pupils as a logical step avoiding the cost and inconvenience that entrance to college could cause. Within Longfield Comprehensive, no such route was available and entrance to post-sixteen education involved a concerted effort by the school-leaver. This may have represented a huge transition for the pupil as not only involving leaving the school and immediate area to go to college but also being the first person in the family to make this leap (Walkerdine *et al.*, 2001). The school had not paved the way for this continuation and the families in many cases could do little to advise. The natural or easiest transitions for the Longfield sample may have seemed like joining friends and family in the labour market.

12.5 Friendship and futures

Membership of a particular peer group at school could expand or constrict the horizons of school pupils. It affected the perceived utility of various options such as education or training, helped dictate employment choice and post-sixteen destinations and could suppress academic achievement. It did this through helping create an identity and mindset that information was attained and filtered through, affecting aspirations, perceptions and actions. It allowed cultural production and reproduction to take place, independent of a dominant social structure-imposing disadvantage (Willis, 1977).

Eavesdropping on any pupils' conversation or observing the 'huddles' of male and female groups, it would be reasonable to assume that friendships were an all-consuming part of adolescent life and could therefore exercise a considerable influence on post-sixteen transitions. A certain degree of influence was visible, yet friendship groups did not appear to be as important as the school or gender in post-sixteen transitions.

Despite observing similar traits and preferences existing within male and female friendship groups, the strength these bonds exerted was perceived differently by boys and girls. Boys were significantly more likely to belong to a large group than girls (Cotterell, 1996) and place importance upon this, possibly investing more of their identity within their peer group. This could be truer in an era of uncertain transitions from school to work. Masculinity may be defined through the membership of a gang rather than through particular forms of employment. Girls saw friends as having less influence on their post-sixteen decisions, instead placing importance on the home and school.

The processes and influence operating within friendship groups meant that many young people followed the norm of their peer group in their intended and actual post-sixteen directions. This could be advantageous for the young person's future, in the case of a friendship group entering further education or disadvantageous if a group decided to enter the labour market. School-leavers entering training, employment or subsequently becoming unemployed were less likely to have friends enter post-compulsory education. Personal values shared by these groups included a focus on immediate gratification and a perception of education as not suiting their self-identity. Post-compulsory education entrants were conversely more likely to have friends entering the same college or sixth form. Groups often possessed a high degree of information on one chosen destination. The discussion of a particular option within a friendship group, seen to have particular relevance to its members' common goals and values, could make this option seem more acceptable than other options that may be disregarded without ever being considered, leading to pragmatically rational decisions.

Membership of a non-academic or anti-education group reinforced low grades as the norm prompting an early education exit. Among these groups, post-compulsory education was often perceived as a waste of time and compulsory education was seen to have low relevance to employment (Willis, 1977). This can be related to the forms of work or training these school-leavers desired. They were choosing to enter manual or entry-level positions that did not require many, if any, qualifications for entrance, blocking social mobility through choice. These working-class school-leavers had low aspiration jobs and low academic achievement. However, the relationship between aspirations and grades could be two-way, with poor academic achievers lowering their employment aspirations.

The pragmatic choice to enter the labour market operated within the young person's own cultural parameters, emphasising the gender specificity of employment and an extrinsic system of rewards. Entering the labour market offered the respect and status that many of the non-academic pupils craved while enabling an exit from an education system that many saw as irrelevant to work. However, an anti-education attitude could prevent the male or female school-leaver entering training if seen as aligned to school. If they subsequently became unemployed upon exiting education, this attitude could maintain their disadvantaged position. These school-leavers were already at increased risk of unemployment as lacking qualifications, possibly resulting from truancy (Bosworth, 1992).

12.6 Opportunity structures in the local labour market

The local labour market formed the structural context of post-sixteen transitions and affected the likelihood of success if a decision was taken to try to enter employment or training. Its influence operated differently from that of the home or peer group as an objective structure whose influence the young person could not modify; for example if the desired job was not available, it simply could not be entered.

Previous research (Raffe and Willms, 1989) argued that the local labour market signalled to sixteen-year-olds the most appropriate course of post-sixteen action. Both of the schools would have been affected by the closure of the Rover plant at Longbridge in terms of apprenticeships at the car plant and training and employment opportunities in related companies. The publicity surrounding the threatened closure may have influenced the pupils' intended post-sixteen directions, with the majority of pupils' intending to enter post-compulsory education, 68.1% of pupils at Longfield Comprehensive and 70.9% at Tower Cross Comprehensive. It was the pupils' perception and attitude towards the labour market, rather than the actual economic conditions that influenced their intended transition. Those boys that wanted to enter traditional working-class masculine occupations, despite the declining presence of these in the labour market, provided an example of this (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Wallace, 1986). However, post-sixteen aspirations were not always translated into reality and many school-leavers were forced to make a series of compromises.

The longitudinal design of the methodology, contacting the pupils before they left school and three to four months after they made the transition to education, employment, training or unemployment, showed a discrepancy between some intended directions prior to leaving school and actual destinations three to four months after the transition. This points to the diverse factors involved in the transition and reinforces the research position that subjective preferences operate within structural constraints. It also enables the third research question to be answered, considering whether there was a difference between intended destinations prior to leaving school and actual destinations. A sizeable percentage (31%) of young people were unsuccessful in reaching their intended destinations of further education, employment or training. Within the number that did enter their preferred destination, it was not always into the desired occupation, training scheme or course. This implies that notions of economic rationality in relation to participation in post-compulsory education, training or employment may be inaccurate. Preferences were not stable or fixed, compromises were made and some routes were blocked by factors external to the 'choosers' (Ball *et al.*, 2000; Sobel, 1994).

Failure to gain the form of employment or training school-leavers wanted, or for which they were willing to compromise, led to a return to education or unemployment. The basis for occupational selection was less a case of 'self-actualisation' as Ginsberg *et al.* (1951) would argue for middle-class school-leavers, but was more due to immediate availability, the need for money and perception of work or training as better than returning to school. Most unemployed school-leavers were reluctant to return to education, questioning its utility and preferring to seek employment or training. Similar to Williamson's (1997) status zero young people, some of the future unemployed school leavers prior to leaving compulsory education had clear ideas about what they wanted to do. Circumstances prevented their aspirations becoming reality. This included the attainment of poor GSCE grades and labour market opportunities that did not match aspirations.

The number of young people entering training increased within both schools' official post-sixteen-destination figures. The majority of pupils perceived training as a positive experience, although this was slightly less so by pupils who became unemployed. Anti-education attitudes in these cases were often translated to anti-training scheme perceptions. Nationally there has been a substantial decrease in the number of school-leavers directly entering employment on leaving compulsory schooling. Approximately 10% (DfEE, 2001a) of school-leavers in the year 2000 directly entered employment compared with 65% of school-leavers at the time of Willis's (1977) research in the 1970s (McDowell, 2000). This demonstrates a certain amount of labour market awareness concerning the credential society that exists and the economic climate. There has been a reduction in the availability of entry-level, unskilled manual work and it could be that labour market aspirations had been adjusted to ensure a successful transition from school to training and employment. However, entry to the immediately available jobs in gender-stereotyped employment was less about labour market awareness but more due to culturally specific horizons for action specifying that this type of work was acceptable and more desirable than continuing education.

The compromises that former pupils were willing to make varied between the two schools. The sixth form at Tower Cross had made itself available to those pupils

who were unable to find employment or training by the start of the new academic year. In this way the sixth form increased in size, enhancing its image as the normal post-sixteen route. Many Longfield pupils were barred from returning to their sixth form and this may have increased the amount of effort they expended in seeking employment or training while increasing the possibility of compromising to a job that was not explicitly sought – a ‘satisficing’ move (Simon, 1957).

Pupils within both schools possessed strong parochial attitudes towards their areas (Figueira-McDonough, 1998; Coffield *et al.*, 1986). This view was strongest among school-leavers. There was a perception of the neighbourhood as a safe environment and a wariness of entering situations away from the immediate proximity. This constricted the employment and training opportunities of school-leavers. There was resistance to moving to find employment or training and a resistance to travelling to other locales, particularly by the non-academic female pupils who were unwilling to leave their families. Further education entrants were less likely to have this reticence and considered moving for the ‘right job’. This inequality in ‘horizons for action’ may mean that in future years workers with higher academic attainment are willing to migrate to areas with skilled employment, leaving unskilled workers behind, draining the area of a diversity of professional role models.

12.7 Policy implications arising from the research

The fourth research question asks whether it is possible to identify intervention practices to aid young people at the end of their compulsory schooling to continue education or enter the labour market, whether into training or employment. Drawing from the analysis, a number of areas can be addressed.

12.7.1 Effectiveness of the Education Maintenance Allowance

The research found that multiple factors were involved in post-sixteen destinations, including structural, cultural, social and individual, and that choice did not always occur in the way much policy assumes. This may affect the utility of the Education Maintenance Allowance, which is arguably based on principles of economic rationality and the premise that money is a barrier to many entering further education and by removing this obstacle, post-sixteen education participation will be widened.

The students in the first pilot year (1999/2000) were largely unaware of the incentive. Many students entering sixth form only found out about the scheme after re-enrolment. This was an issue discovered not just by this research but also by the EMA evaluation team (Ashworth *et al.*, 2001; Legard *et al.*, 2001). Rectifying this could lead to an increase in post-compulsory education participation in subsequent years. However, of those students that knew of the scheme, many stated that they intended to return to education anyway and the money made no difference to their decision. Factors that the school-leavers saw as influential in their choice included labour market conditions, availability of training and apprenticeships, direction of peers, family influence and school sixth-form promotion. School careers advice also led to a number of students entering post-sixteen education.

The research suggests that the incentive is likely to make little difference in increasing post-compulsory education participation among anti-education and non-academic pupils. Those intending to enter training and employment were least likely to state that the incentive would encourage them back to education. This was also found in the official evaluation of the pilot (Ashworth *et al.*, 2001; Legard *et al.*, 2001). These school leavers saw the incentive as poor compensation for continuing an activity perceived to have low relevance to employment and it may have partly been that the incentive was not large enough. Post-compulsory education was also incongruent with these pupils self-identity and not considered a desirable post-sixteen direction. The government, certainly in the pilot year, was paying money to many students who might have returned to further education anyway.

Dismissing the Education Maintenance Allowance as largely ineffective for encouraging disaffected pupils back into education does not provide a solution for widening participation in post-sixteen education. It was some pupils' perception of this activity that needed to be challenged and not solely financial constraints that prevented them from taking part. The constraints imposed by the EMA including participation in approved courses for a minimum number of hours a week, regular attendance checks and conforming to a learning agreement, often embodied the form of education that the young people fought against throughout their compulsory schooling.

When interviewing the pupils before and after they left school, it emerged that pupils who later became unemployed felt that they did not understand the array of options available on leaving school. These pupils had been given a range of information informing them of various options provided by a variety of institutions but it may not have been presented in a way that they felt was accessible or applicable to them. The challenge is to provide relevant information to school-leavers that can be assimilated into their culturally specific habitus within their horizons for action. More research needs to be carried out to discover the most effective way of addressing 'at risk' pupils' information deficits and perception of training and education before they leave school and before policy is formulated.

12.7.2 Careers guidance: blanket versus targeted provision

The careers service has undergone a change of policy in an attempt to promote social inclusion. It aims to integrate 'at risk' young people into society rather than letting them face a future of unemployment and exclusion. This involves targeting disaffected pupils from the age of fourteen to explore their education, training and employment options. Other education provision can be arranged if these pupils are deemed not to be suited to full-time compulsory schooling. While this inclusion focus may be beneficial for 'at risk' pupils, increasing their number entering training, employment and education, it may be detrimental to the majority of other pupils.

The careers guidance system provided the majority of pupils with information relative to their requirements, for example if they desired to enter training, employment or further education. Removing this information source may lead pupils to rely on limited and possibly inaccurate information to decide their route and they could enter a destination that does not fulfil their requirements. This would prove inefficient for the school-leaver and for the destination; for example, the employer or trainee provider receives an unmotivated worker or the further education institution gains students that underachieve or drop out as entering the wrong course (Watts, 1996b). Colleges and sixth forms could also experience a decline in enrolments. A number of post-compulsory education entrants had indicated that the careers service advice had led them to choose this course of action after emphasising its utility for entering their preferred occupation. Therefore, if careers advice is focused only upon those pupils thought 'at risk' of unemployment, young people that would have previously entered post-sixteen education after receiving careers advice may enter employment believing that they are adequately qualified for the positions they want. The career mechanism – that would have adjusted their aspirations to be in line with labour market requirements and ensured that when they eventually made the labour market transition they were equipped with appropriate qualifications for the jobs they wanted – would have been removed. This could lead to an increase of dissatisfaction in school-leavers, not tackling the skills crisis and possibly increasing unemployment in young people capable of further academic achievements.

While targeting could be beneficial to 'at risk' pupils it needs to be recognised that careers guidance provides a valuable service to all pupils, matching employment aspirations with correct routes and in some cases 'altering' aspirations to be in line with labour market reality. There needs to be more careers guidance for all pupils, not less provision. Presentations by people employed in forms of work the pupils could be interested in could further broaden their career knowledge. It could also help challenge gender role stereotypes. If former students carried out these seminars or presentations it may be possible for pupils to relate more to them, providing positive role models. This could possibly elevate aspirations and academic grades. Pupils were hungry for information from what they perceived to

be accurate, modern sources. However, these sources need to be tailored to transcend any cultural barriers that can be erected to information from unknown informants.

12.7.3 Further education provision: size counts

Many pupils were confused concerning post-sixteen education provisions. There was little understanding of the different forms of course available and who offered them. The market system introduced into further education also meant that course providers were competing for clients, a fact recognised by teachers at Tower Cross Comprehensive and by colleges in other research (Ball *et al.*, 2000). This had led the pupils to be bombarded with a bewildering array of information from post-sixteen institutions, leading some pupils to settle for the known and 'safe' option. There needs to be some form of coordination of further education provision between schools and colleges to ensure that young people choose the right course for their goals and aspirations, rather than entrance to any number of options due to confusion, fear and lack of confidence. The fear of entering new and unknown contexts could be partially overcome by promoting greater familiarity between colleges and schools. However, this relationship could be detrimental to the schools' sixth form recruitment that benefited from a glut of students entering it as they were afraid of choosing another option. It may be that the funding of further education institutions needs to be reconsidered with less emphasis on funding per student for school sixth forms.

The different characteristics of the Longfield and Tower Cross sixth form led to more pupils studying at Tower Cross sixth form. Longfield Comprehensive, in attempting to make their sixth form more academic, reduced their further education intake for the second year running. This decreased the attractiveness of the sixth form and lowered course availability. Tower Cross sixth form, through its constant promotion, had swelled their numbers. By strengthening their further education provision they made the transition to sixth form the 'normal' route in the school, increasing its desirability and the funding it received. This facility may be expected to increase again in subsequent years. The feasibility of retaining a sixth form at

Longfield Comprehensive was threatened due to its decreasing size and it closed in 2002. Longfield Comprehensive pupils were attending vocational courses at college or entering the labour market. This has policy implications for the type of further education institutions in one area. It may be that school sixth forms need to be 'strengthened', offering more courses and facilities, increasing their attractiveness to pupils. This may promote post-compulsory education as the 'norm' or an acceptable route. This could be especially important in schools where the pupils are particularly parochial.

12.7.4 Methodology and policy formation: hearing the neglected

The research collected data on the intended and actual post-sixteen destinations of 164 young people, highlighting discrepancies between the two. It provided information on structural factors affecting this transition and subjective motivations for the choice. Through comparison with official sources, trends in both schools history could also be surveyed. By collecting data from diverse sources and subsequent triangulation, the research also demonstrated how disadvantaged groups could be excluded from statistics. Although contact was sought with every final year pupil in both schools on numerous occasions, it proved impossible. The final statistics on intended and actual destinations therefore listed fewer unemployed school-leavers than the official careers service report.

The careers service may have been successful in contacting more of the final year pupils for a number of reasons. The careers service had increased resources including recent addresses and telephone numbers supplied by the school on the pupils' last known location. The careers service also held a prize draw in which all pupils returning careers guidance final destination questionnaires were entered. Throughout the pupils' compulsory educational career, they would have been in some contact with a careers guidance teacher. This may have established a bond enabling information to be more easily collected than by an 'outsider'. Nevertheless, the careers service still did not manage to contact everyone, with the destinations of between 5% and 10% of pupils unknown every year. This may lead

to an underestimate of sixteen and seventeen year olds not in education, employment or training.

The discrepancy between the research and government required careers guidance final destination survey statistics has policy implications. It is necessary for research to be designed to increase contact with disaffected and disadvantaged young people and to take precautions to avoid excluding them from data. In this way the voices and opinions of at risk young people can be added to the cacophony of dialogue surrounding them and perhaps policy can be designed to benefit this group. The research endeavoured to achieve this through personal contact during data collection and perseverance up to a point in contacting absent pupils. In this way, the research could present some of the voices of the young people that can remain unheard in large-scale research (MacDonald, 1997b).

Although admittedly small-scale, the research found no evidence of an underclass. Diverse sets of families were interviewed, comprising single mother and father households, reconstituted families, two-parent households and households ranging from complete employment to total unemployment. Family members throughout the generations all displayed an unstinting work ethic, and further education and training were often viewed as positive and worthwhile. To apply the term 'underclass' to any of these families would have been stigmatising and degrading. It is true that some of these families fitted the definition of the underclass as given by Murray (1990) and were in a materially disadvantaged position but they did not possess a separate cultural outlook to that of 'mainstream' society and they saw themselves as advantaged compared with other families. It is time to stop segmenting society by the application of demeaning labels to particular sectors. The government and its opponents should instead try to hear what disaffected and disadvantaged groups are saying and design policy to widen access to the educational and skills sector on the basis of these contributions.

13 Conclusions

The first and second research questions ask: what is the relative importance of factors affecting young people's aspirations for and perceptions of the labour market before they leave school and do these perceptions influence their subsequent post-sixteen destinations? The research in addressing these questions makes a contribution to substantive knowledge concerning the relative importance of the school, gender, home, peer group and perceived and actual labour market in post-sixteen transitions. A contribution is also made to substantive and theoretical knowledge surrounding the role of choice. The research found that the school attended and the young person's gender were the most important factors influencing whether young people entered further education, training, employment or unemployment. The home and peer group were relatively less influential but they worked in consort to enable young people to develop a habitus and mindset that were incorporated into a horizon for action specifying an 'appropriate' post-sixteen destination. The state of the local labour market was the deciding factor in the success of the final transition if leaving education for employment or training. For those students entering further education it occasionally informed their transition, indicating that more qualifications were necessarily to secure a 'good' job or that desirable work was currently unavailable.

The choice process in post-sixteen transitions for working-class pupils was shown not to be an economically rational decision in the majority of cases. The pupils made pragmatically rational decisions within their horizons for action based on partial, occasionally inaccurate information that was filtered and shaped by their habitus. In response to the third research question, the research found that there was a difference between the pupils' intended directions before leaving school and actual destinations following the end of compulsory education for at least 31% of the study participants. The discrepancy between the intended directions of some pupils before leaving education and their actual destinations after a period of months emphasised the fact that many students did not make a simple post-sixteen transition and the process could be characterised by a series of false-starts and

compromises. These findings enabled the formation of a tentative model of choice and the fourth research question to be addressed, considering whether it was possible to identify ways to aid post-school transitions.

To conclude the thesis, the research's contribution to knowledge in substantive, methodological, theoretical areas and for policy is summarised. Potential directions for future research, based on findings from the analysis, are then highlighted.

13.1 Substantive contribution

13.1.1 The school effect

The school that the young people attended had the most important influence on post-sixteen transitions, only equalled by the effect of pupils' gender. The two research sites were located in majority white, working-class, deprived areas of the city, with pupils having lower aspirations and academic attainment. The possession of an adequately sized, viable, on site sixth form and the recurrent publicising of this within Tower Cross Comprehensive increased the retention of pupils into the school's sixth form. The small sixth form at Longfield Comprehensive decreased its desirability for the students and limited the variety of courses it could offer. The school was also actively limiting its sixth-form intake in an attempt to foster a more academic culture, leading to few pupils being eligible to continue their education at the school and few wanting to.

The political rhetoric of parental choice in secondary education provision for their children appeared not to be translated into reality. The parents and their children often selected a secondary school by considering its proximity to the home and the direction of the child's peers. The choice to enter a particular further education institution operated in a similar way for students, with proximity, fear and school/peer pressure delineating likely routes.

School policy aiming to raise academic standards and dealing with disaffected pupils influenced the pupils' educational career. Within Tower Cross, disaffected students were integrated back into education through part-time schooling and personal mentoring; pupils of lower academic ability were also accepted back into sixth form. Lack of funds and marginalisation in Longfield Comprehensive pushed disaffected pupils out of the school system and prevented any special measures from being introduced to assist less able or disaffected pupils possibly deterring or barring these pupils from continued education.

The majority of the cohort within both schools perceived their careers interview to be beneficial in helping them make their post-sixteen decisions. It was often cited by the sample as a source of information on available post-sixteen routes. Pupils stated it broadened their career horizons to encompass other forms of employment and training not previously considered and various post-sixteen directions including further education. At the same time, the careers interview made the pupils more realistic about their job prospects. The information supplied by the familiar careers guidance officer penetrated or transcended cultural barriers that may have been erected to information provided by an unfamiliar source. School-leavers who became unemployed were less likely to have had a careers interview and were more likely to rate the experience as negative.

13.1.2 The effect of gender

The importance of gender was only rivalled by the significance of the school in its effect on post-sixteen aspirations and transitions. Girls were significantly more likely to intend to enter post-sixteen education than their male counterparts. This difference translated into an overall differentiation in rates of post-sixteen-education participation for boys and girls, although the difference in actual participation did not prove to be significant. Boys were more likely to intend to and actually try to enter the labour market and were more likely to become unemployed than girls. The rationale behind post-sixteen intentions differed by gender. Girls were more likely to see further education as a means to an end, gaining qualifications that would help them in the labour market. Boys were more

likely to view further education as a substitute for their preferred option of employment or training or as necessary due to the state of the local labour market.

The gender difference in transitions could have been partly due to the culture of masculinity that existed within both schools focusing away from academic achievement and placing primacy on male peer relationships. Girls, on the other hand, did not consider their friends to be a prime influence on their post-sixteen transitions but also acknowledged the role of the school and family. Girls overall gained more GCSE passes than boys, although within Longfield Comprehensive, boys were more likely than girls to attain five or more A*–C grade GCSEs. This could have been attributable to the male-dominated culture of the area, suppressing female achievement and lowering self-confidence.

Within many family interviews, mothers were keen to stress that they had urged their daughters to enter post-compulsory education to ensure that they would enter an intrinsically and extrinsically satisfying career. Possibly due to this, girls who intended to enter further education spontaneously said that they did not intend to have children by the age of twenty-one and this would prevent their career dreams becoming reality. Girls who intended to enter the labour market were more likely to envision themselves with their own family by this age.

13.1.3 The role of the family

The family exerted a relatively weaker influence on post-sixteen transitions than that of the school and the effect of the young person's gender. However, the socialisation occurring within the home in conjunction with the influence exercised by the peer group closed some post-sixteen options while specifying others were desirable and acceptable.

Having parents who had experienced post-sixteen education significantly increased the chance of the student intending to enter college or sixth form and actual entrance to this option was increased, indicated by the descriptive statistics. This possibly occurred through the provision of cultural capital helping navigate

entrance to further education and evidence of the utility of this route. Parental employment also significantly affected their children's post-sixteen destinations. Pupils from homes with two or more residents in paid work were more likely to enter the labour market. Originating from a home with high unemployment increased the chances of the young person entering unemployment. Maternal employment increased the probability of the pupils entering post-compulsory education. This could be because of the provision of financial capital or role models.

Family structure did not have a statistically significant effect other than that children originating from large families were more likely to enter the labour market. The size of the family may have been influential on post-sixteen destinations again due to employment contacts available in the home or the realisation by young people originating from large families that there was not the financial capital to support them through continued education. Descriptive statistics indicated that children from single-parent families were more likely to enter post-sixteen education or unemployment than successfully enter employment or training. Many of the young people in the cohort were the first in their families to enter post-sixteen education and therefore this transition had added significance. Tower Cross through the constant promotion of its on-site sixth form to parents and students had possibly made this route seem acceptable and a logical direction.

13.1.4 Peer power

Friendship groups operated in consort with the family to exert a degree of influence over young people and their post-sixteen aspirations and transitions. Although this influence was not seen to be particularly dominant, young people did view these relationships as important.

It was possible to distinguish peer groups within the schools through appearance, classroom seating arrangements and explicit attitude to education. Membership of a non-academic or anti-school peer group reinforced low grades as the norm, prompting an entrance to the labour market at sixteen. The creation of a 'normal'

route within peer groups was seen in the number of young people taking the same post-sixteen directions as their friends. Young people entering college or sixth form were more likely to have friends following this route compared with school-leavers, particularly pupils who became unemployed, possibly showing the positive support and encouragement friendship groups can provide to enter further education. Boys were more likely to attribute influence to their peer network than girls for their post-sixteen choices. A certain amount of socialisation and cultural production and reproduction occurred within peer groups as they came to share the same values and aspirations. The friendship group therefore might be as important as the home in influencing post-sixteen routes, if not more so.

Anti-education attitudes were related to a negative view of post-compulsory education and a negation of the importance of qualifications. In some cases, the anti-education pupils saw training as an extension of education and this route was rejected. Truancy was also related to lower academic achievement and non-academic peer group membership.

13.1.5 Labour market opportunity structures

The state of the labour market was the deciding factor in the success of any transition into employment or training. Young people's perception of the labour market and local opportunity structures was important in terms of whether they intended to leave education, but the actual conditions could prevent aspirations being translated into reality leading to a series of false-starts, compromises or in some cases, unemployment.

Many young people perceived that there was a need for training and skills to gain employment. This could have been as a result of the local labour market uncertainty created by the crisis at the Rover plant in nearby Longbridge. The majority of school-leavers were aiming for work present within the immediate locale that was typified by manual employment and care work. There was also considerable service industry employment but few male school-leavers saw this work as desirable. School-leavers successfully entering training or employment

had more realistic labour market expectations and wider labour market knowledge than the future unemployed young people. School-leavers believed labour market conditions would be favourable compared with their school experience, believing it afforded status, money and freedom.

Before leaving compulsory education, young people later entering further education, training or employment were more likely to perceive training schemes in a favourable light than young people who later became unemployed. Pupils who later became unemployed on leaving school knew less about training schemes and possessed a more negative view concerning them. Pupils from both schools possessed parochial views about their area and were reluctant to leave their neighbourhood and this was particularly true for some girls. This could have prevented school-leavers from finding employment or training, as they were unwilling to travel outside their immediate locality. Pupils entering post-compulsory education were more susceptible to the idea of migrating to other areas to find 'good' employment.

13.2 Methodological contribution

The research questions delineated that a particular methodology was needed to fully explore the relative importance of factors affecting post-sixteen transitions. Care was taken when selecting two research sites to ensure that the research questions could be properly addressed. A multi-method approach was adopted, drawing from both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Observation and individual/family interviews allowed depth and insight while questionnaires provided structural information and location of data within local and national trends. A rich picture could therefore be formed of the pupil's decision process and the influencing factors behind particular post-sixteen destinations. The research makes a methodological contribution to knowledge. It demonstrates the fruitfulness and feasibility of incorporating observation and interaction into the research sites. It also shows the benefits of using qualitative and quantitative techniques in the same research design.

The longitudinal multi-method approach, following young people from before they left school until a period of months after, provided substantive, theoretical and policy insight. This methodological approach was valuable for charting the factors affecting choice leading to an entrance to post-compulsory education, training, employment or unemployment. Many of the influencing factors were dynamic, including the perception of the local labour market, employment situation in the home and the qualification attainment of the young people. The research methodology also increased contact with the young people that large-scale research can fail to reach.

13.3 Theoretical contribution

The research has challenged the economics based model of rational choice. Only in some cases was entrance to further education based on an individualistic, calculative investment in human capital, possibly more characteristic of middle class transitions (Ball *et al.*, 2000). The research instead argues that working-class school-leavers make pragmatically rational decisions to enter post-sixteen education, training or employment. This was a process identified by Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) in relation to entrance to training schemes. Pragmatically rational decisions are made within 'horizons for action', which incorporate the habitus, labour market opportunity structures and the individual's subjective preferences. Decisions are heavily influenced by culture particularly seen in the socialisation and influence exerted by the family and peer group. The young person's horizon for action then delineates what options can be 'seen' and therefore chosen.

This research extends Hodkinson *et al.*'s (1996) notion of pragmatic rationality beyond its original application to the choice process surrounding entrance to training schemes to encompass the decision to enter post-sixteen education or employment. By arguing that young people operate within a class and gender positioned 'habitus' and mindset, influenced by family, friends and perceptions of the labour market the research also demonstrates an application of Bourdieu's

(1977) notion of 'habitus'. The research also shows how the notion of 'habitus' is useful in exploring the characteristics of actors and in capturing the dynamics of class and choice.

13.4 Policy contribution

The fourth research question asks whether it is possible to identify processes that could aid the transition from compulsory schooling to further education, training or employment. Drawing from the analysis, a number of suggestions can be made that could be addressed within policy research.

The research suggested that the government-run education maintenance allowance scheme at this early stage in its implementation might not be effective in encouraging disaffected pupils back into education. Many factors were involved in working-class students' decisions to return to education. The choice to pursue training or employment was often made with reference to the type of employment wanted, the perception of the utility of education and self-conceptions of identity influenced by peer group and family culture. More was involved in the decision to enter employment, training or indeed education, other than the desire for money and this was confirmed by the EMA evaluation team (Legard *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, the government aim of trying to increase further education participation through the payment of an allowance may be tackling the wrong issue. Inaccurate characterisations and perceptions of post-sixteen education as for certain 'other' types of people held by some non-academic and anti-school pupils need to be challenged and evidence provided of the practical utility of further qualifications/skills. The money may then encourage disaffected pupils back into some form of education. Currently these young people may perceive receiving an incentive in compliance with strict guidelines as poor compensation for doing something they believe has low utility and is in contradiction to their self-identity.

The effect of the school attended was found within the research to be a crucial influence on post-sixteen destinations particularly in terms of continuing education

in an attached school sixth form. The demographic characteristics of the school's locality, its policy towards disaffected pupils and raising academic achievement all affected their pupils' post-sixteen outcomes. Factors such as size and promotion of an on-site sixth form influenced the post-sixteen transitions and retention of pupils. This has implications for the provision of further education within schools and other institutions.

Careers guidance has gained more significance since the research of Willis (1977) and Griffin (1985). Most pupils recognised that the careers service provided them with accurate, up-to-date information on post-sixteen destinations. In this way, the careers service could supplement the role of the family in the provision of information on post-sixteen destinations. This may be especially important given the changing context of the labour market and the expanding education and training sector. Information held by young people at the end of compulsory education needs to be augmented in a way perceived by them as 'acceptable' to increase the chances of information assimilation and crossing the cultural divide between information providers and recipients. Information was filtered through the class and gender positioned habitus and mindset constructed around and informed by family, peers, school culture and locality.

One aspect that the research highlighted was the discrepancy existing between research statistics and the corresponding phenomena. This was particularly seen in the data collected on the post-sixteen destinations compared to the careers service final destination survey. Although the research had endeavoured to reach the entire cohort, it proved difficult and labour intensive. This resulted in fewer disaffected pupils being contacted and a smaller percentage of the research cohort entering unemployment compared to school figures. Large-scale policy research has to take into account the discrepancy that can exist between research figures and the actual phenomena. Methodology must be designed to reach 'at risk' young people. The majority that became unemployed wanted to work or train but entered the labour market unequipped with the necessary information, skills and contacts to make it possible and in some cases possessing negative perceptions of training and further education preventing them entering these options. These school leavers need to be assisted to gain employment or perceive the utility of post-compulsory education or

training. Unemployed school-leavers often already come from excluded sectors of society. These young people must not be blamed for their disadvantaged position or ignored by the methodology informing policy that is meant to help them.

13.5 Future research: where to now?

The research argues that 'choice' does not occur in the way much policy assumes for working-class school-leavers. The research showed that working-class pupils make pragmatically rational decisions often based on partial and not necessarily accurate information. This information is filtered through the class and gender positioned mindset and habitus developed in the home, peer group, school and locality. Post-sixteen destinations were arrived at by elimination of alternatives, failure to enter their first choice, indecision, fear and confusion, peer pressure or a desire to gain qualifications to name but a few motivations. Intervention via the provision of careers guidance material in the form of leaflets and brochures may not be enough to penetrate a culturally constructed resistance to further education created by some at risk young people. Future research could therefore be carried out on intervention practices to aid the post-sixteen-decision process to maximise young people's potential and preclude a possible life of deprivation, disadvantage and isolation.

The research was unable to determine if there existed a statistical relationship between family structure and post-sixteen destinations, except that those pupils from large families were significantly more likely to enter the labour market. The failure to discern further significant influences of the family structure on post-sixteen destinations could be due to the complex analysis it requires, difficult to explore via the current research data. Descriptive statistics did, however, indicate a possible influence of various family compositions on post-sixteen transitions. Young people from single-parent families were more likely to continue their education post-sixteen or enter the labour market and experience unemployment than make a successful transition into employment or training. Further research with a larger sample could use quantitative techniques to investigate in more detail

the direction of the relationship and qualitative techniques could study the processes behind this difference in destination. Drawn from the research, possible reasons could include the employment situation of the home affecting the level of deprivation and material support for post-compulsory education. Role models and the provision of information could also explain the difference in transitions between different structured families.

Maternal employment increased the chance of sixteen-year-olds continuing education. For girls this could occur through the provision of positive or negative role models (Barber and Eccles, 1992). Maternal employment may encourage girls to believe that a career and family can co-exist. The girls could then perceive that a prolonged career break would be unnecessary, increasing the likelihood of their aspiring to skilled, non-gendered occupations with increased training. Maternal employment in low status positions could also encourage young women to pursue education as a means of entering fulfilling and extrinsically rewarding employment. Nevertheless, the effect of working-class, maternal employment on pupils' attitudes to post-compulsory education and the labour market needs to be considered in more depth. This is particularly true for the influence of maternal employment on boys where little research exists. It could be that maternal employment within working-class occupations, especially in single-parent families, has little effect on boys' post-sixteen destinations. The boys see their mothers' occupational experience as inapplicable to their own goals.

Young working-class school-leavers are making their post-sixteen decisions in a time of structural, educational and cultural change. The transition from compulsory education is characterised by a series of false starts and compromises for a proportion of school-leavers as they try to enter a destination fitting their self-identity and within their horizons for action (Ball *et al.*, 2000; Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). It is at this point in the transition that some school-leavers become lost to the system, disappearing from the education and training radar until they are picked up at eighteen by the New Deal scheme.

The way that young people make their transitions from compulsory education is an important and complex area. More research is therefore needed of a type and

quality which would be able to consider the dynamics of post-sixteen choice and opportunity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1.
First Questionnaire

Name: _____ Age: _____ Sex: ~~Male~~/Female

Ethnicity: White Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi Chinese
please circle Black- Caribbean Black- African Mixed Race Other

Address: _____

How many people live in your house? _____

Who are these people? (mother, father, grandparents, brothers/sisters etc.)

If you do not live with your birth father/mother how often do you see him/her?

How many brothers and sisters do you have? Blood related _____ Step/half related _____
What are their ages?

Who in your home is in regular paid work?

What job does your mother do? Or if you don't live with her and there is a woman in the house what does she do?

What job does your father do? Or if you don't live with him and there is a man in the house what does he do?

What do you want to do when you finish school this year?

Below is a list of options in bold print please circle one and answer the questions underneath it.

a) Go into further education

Where would you go? (e.g. 6th form/college)

What would you take? (e.g. A'levels, retake GCSE, NVQs)

b) Go on a training programme

What kind?

c) Get a job

What kind? E.g. full-time/part-time

d) don't know yet

e) other (e.g. army, have summer off etc) please write in gap

~~I have just asked you what you want to do, I would now like to know **why** you want to do it.~~
~~There are some options below, you can circle more than one reason~~

~~I choose this option as:~~

- a) I already have a job set up
- b) I'm going into further education to get more qualifications to help me get a job
- c) There are no jobs about so I'll do training/further education to wait a bit
- d) I'm going to stay in education as I don't feel ready to get a job yet
- e) All my friends are doing my option
- f) My parents want me to
- g) I choose this option as there is nothing else to do
- h) other reason (please write in gap)

What are your best friends doing when they finish school? You can circle more than one

- a) Further education b) Training c) Working d) other

I would like to know what your family wants you to do when you leave school

For this answer you can circle more than one option for example if
your mum wants you to work and your dad wants you to continue your education.

- a) further education b) training scheme c) get a job d) whatever I want
e) they don't care f) other (please write in gap)

What job would you really like?

Why this job?

Would you do any other job, if yes what?

Would you move to get a job? Yes/No

If yes how far? E.g. out of Birmingham, another country etc.

If no why not?

Has access to transport affected/will affect your job hunting?

Yes/No

Do you like the idea of working this year? Yes/No

If yes is it because of the money, image etc

If no why

How long do you think it will take to get a job when you leave school?

E.g. days, months, years _____

If you did not get a job would you go back to education/go on a training scheme? Yes/No

If yes after how long?

If no why not?

What do you think of training schemes? Please circle an option

- a) good experience
- b) rip you off
- c) something to do before getting a job
- d) good idea to get training whilst working
- e) other (please write in gap) e.g. don't know anything about them

What do you think of further education? Please circle an option

- a) good idea to help get better job
- b) waste of time
- c) good for some people but not really good for me
- d) it is only for certain types of people (Who?)
- e) other (please write in gap)

I would now like to know what you like/dislike about school.

What do you like about school? E.g. can see friends, enjoy learning etc.

What do you dislike about school? E.g. rules, teachers, homework etc.

Do you think school prepares you for work? Yes/No

What could it do better to prepare you?

If you were offered £40 a week to go into further education would you? Yes/No

Where did you get information about what to do when you leave school
(please list in order of importance e.g. family 1, school 2, friends 3)

- a) family
- b) mother
- c) father
- b) friends
- c) school
- d) careers interview
- e) other (please write in gap)

Have you had a careers interview? Yes/No

If Yes did you:

- a) find it helpful b) waste of time c) made you consider more options
- d) changed your mind about career e) gave you useful information
- f) other (please write in gap)

Who do you admire and why? It could be someone in your family, a musician,
actor/actress, a profession (e.g. police)

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about why you have chosen
to leave school, stay in education, work etc. for example you are getting married
or you have to look after your family.

What do you think you will be doing when you are 21?

Thank you very much for your help

Appendix 2.
Second Questionnaire

Name: _____

Telephone Number: _____

What are you doing now? E.g. 6th form/college/working/unemployed/training
Please write here _____

Is this what you wanted to do when you left school this summer? Yes/No

If No what was?

If No why are you doing this? For example: (please circle)

- a) you didn't get the grades needed to do your first choice
- b) you got better grades so you had different options
- c) couldn't get a job/apprenticeship
- d) nothing else to do
- e) parents want you to
- f) changed mind. Why? _____

f) other reason (please write here) _____

Have your friends had any influence in what you are doing now? Yes/No
Yes (e.g. you wanted to stay with them) Please write here

No

At school did you have a wide group of friends, a few close friends, or one best friend? Please write here.

Has the school influenced you to do what you are doing now? Yes/No
Yes (e.g. encourage to stay on in education) Please write here

No

Has your family influenced you to do what you are doing now? **Yes/No**

Yes (encourage to get job/stay education) Please write here

No

If you are **NOT** working have you tried or are currently trying to get a full time job? **Yes/No**

If Yes:

Where are you getting the information from about the jobs?

If you **ARE** working how did you choose to do this job? (please circle)

- a) it was what you always wanted to do
- b) it just came along and you liked the look of it
- c) your family set up the job
- d) for the money
- e) other (please write in gap)

If you **ARE** working how did you get this job? E.g. through family, job centre, school. Please write in gap

How many jobs have you applied to? _____

Do you feel your school education is relevant to the type of job you want or have got? **Yes/No**

If you are at **school/college** are you doing this option because; (please circle)

- a) this is what you wanted to do before you left school
- b) you need more qualifications to get a job
- c) you couldn't get a job so returned to education
- d) friends doing this
- e) nothing else to do
- f) parents wanted you to
- g) other (please write in gap)

If you are at school or college did the possibility of receiving money from the government for staying in education influence this decision? Yes/No

Has anyone else in your family gone onto college/6th form? Yes/No

Do you feel that you had enough information about what to do when you left school this summer? Yes/No

**Looking back over your time at school, what would you have done differently?
Please write below**

--

**Can you think of anything that might have helped you choose what to do when you finished school this summer?
Please write below**

--

What grades did you get in your GCSE's?

--

Thank you and good luck with your future!

Example of an individual and family interview transcript

Guy's Individual Interview – Tower Cross Comprehensive

Quite a light hearted interview, easy rapport – a bit of a lad!
Very nice, good personality comes across well - articulate
Sounds like his family is a big influence – particularly father who is a builder
Wants to be a builder after going to vocational college, non-academic but not anti-school
Gender stereotyped ideas

HM: intro research

What do you think you'll be doing in June?

GUY: I want to do an apprentice builder and I want to go to college and learn about it.

HM: have you looked into any apprenticeships or training schemes?

GUY: not really

HM: not really. What is it about building that interests you?

GUY: my dad does it.

HM: yeah?

GUY: and he's got a lot money really from doing it so that's what I think.

HM: so you see your dad doing it, do you live with your dad?

GUY: no I don't.

HM: but does he talk about it and things?

GUY: yeah he does.

HM: it sounds quite...

GUY: all my family do it really, my uncles and everything.

HM: ok. It's quite a masculine job isn't it really?

GUY: yeah I'm prepared to go out and work and that in the rain and that.

HM: it fits your image?

GUY: that's what everyone been saying to me 'you've have to got in all the rain and that. You're feeling strong.'

HM: you're looking to do a training scheme or apprenticeship so you wouldn't just go out and start now?

GUY: no.

HM: what puts you off just going to start now?

GUY: I dunno. I might it all depends on what it's going to learn me. If I felt I was learning something I would probably go but if didn't feel like I was learning I wouldn't go.

HM: when you finish in June/July do you think you'd look for a job before you come back to education or go to training.

GUY: I'd go to training. I'd try anyway.

HM: So do you think there's lots of opportunities to be a builder? Is there a lot of work around?

GUY: yeah I think so.

HM: do you think there's a lot of work in this area?

GUY: yeah.

HM: Do many of your uncles live in this area as well then?

GUY: yeah.

HM: what do you like about the idea of working then?

GUY: errm just get your mum off your case saying get out there and go to a job.

HM: you get that a lot at home?

GUY: yeah!

HM: why does your mum want you to get out and get a job?

GUY: cos I always sit down in the house!

HM: she wants you off her hands!

GUY: yeah!

HM: what else do you like about the idea of working then, apart from the money? (Questionnaire answer)

GUY: that's my main one and I just feel like I really want to go out and work and earn some money.

HM: what do you dislike about the idea of working?

GUY: getting up in the morning!

HM: what do you think of Further Education then, like A' levels?

GUY: I don't think the 6th form of this school is very good because they haven't got very many courses. I mean cos I want to be a builder and they haven't got nothing to do with building.

HM: What do you think of A' levels?

GUY: not for me.

HM: why not?

GUY: I don't know, just don't fancy it. I've been in school long enough.

HM: thinking about where you live, would you move from [TowerCross]?

GUY: if it meant I was getting a good job yeah.

HM: would you move from Birmingham?

GUY: no I don't think so.

HM: How do you plan on finding out about apprenticeships and stuff?

GUY: I keep meaning to go to the careers interviewer at school but I just seem to keep forgetting.

HM: but you've heard that there are apprenticeships out there?

GUY: yeah.

HM: who did you hear about that from?

GUY: from the careers interviewer last time I went.

HM: have you been to any colleges around here?

GUY: no not yet. But I'm going up to East Birmingham College in a couple of weeks. Gotta go and get a letter though.

HM: You've got a lot of uncles and your dad works in building. Do you think they'd be able to help you set up stuff?

GUY: I dunno they might be able to. I've been telling them already that when I'm old enough they can come and work for me!

Both laugh

HM: and what do they say to that!

GUY: 'you're mad I wouldn't work for you!'

HM: alright! Do you think they would be able to say 'my boss has got a space here'?

GUY: yeah.

HM: so your mum's on your case then telling you to get a job?

GUY: and my girlfriend.

HM: is she at this school as well?

GUY: she used to be. She's going to college to do catering.

HM: and she wants you to get a job as well?

GUY: yeah, part-time.

HM: part-time, what to do with the rest of your time?

GUY: dunno. Cos I play football as well.

HM: do you play that at school?

GUY: I play for the school and I play for the Sunday league team.

HM: is that part-time so she gets to see you for the rest of the time?

GUY: yeah!

Both laugh

HM: they've all been saying 'get a job, get a job'. Do you feel that they are supporting you or pushing you?

GUY: ahhh!

HM: or is your girlfriend supporting you and your mum pushing you or vice versa or have they joined forces?

GUY: joined forces to get me!

HM: Are they helping you? They haven't put you off?

GUY: no they haven't put me offcos I really do want to go out to work but it's just finding someone who will take me.

HM: do you know when your family left school? When did your uncles' and your dad leave school?

GUY: half of them probably never went to school!

HM: how about your mum?

GUY: she left school...she didn't hardly ever come to school. She come to this school. She got engaged early on.

HM: but she didn't do college or...?

GUY: no.

HM: how about your girlfriend?

GUY: she came to 6th form for a bit here then she left and went to, she got a job at an office, she didn't like it there so she left. And now she's waiting to go to college.

HM: your mum's a cleaner. What do you think of that kind of job then?

GUY: I don't fancy that.

HM: why not?

GUY: I just wouldn't. I don't think it's a man's job. Sorry but I just don't think it's a man's job.

HM: You've got your heart set on building. Is there anything else you would consider doing?

GUY: footballer.

HM: have you got a shot at doing that do you think?

GUY: I dunno it all depends how fit I am. If I'm fit I play well but if I'm not fit I don't play well.

HM: have you got a chance at doing it at a higher level do you think?

GUY: semi-pro.

HM: sorry not up on the terms!

Both laugh

HM: so have you done a try out or anything like that?

GUY: no not yet, I'm looking for Walsall.

HM: you think you've got a real chance there?

GUY: I dunno it depends

HM: ... on fitness level. Thinking about your friends and what they've been telling you to do. You've said most of them are going off to do training.

GUY: yeah.

HM: has anyone kind of said to you 'Oh come on do this training scheme with me or come to college with me' has anyone tried to persuade you?

GUY: yeah my mate [...] he's trying to persuade me but I'll do what I want to do.

HM: Thinking about school. What do you like about school?

GUY: my friends are here.

HM: what do you dislike about school?

GUY: Mr [...]

HM: ok. What is it about Mr [...]?

GUY: too strict.

HM: you don't like the rules is it?

GUY: the rules are just silly. Like putting us out when it is raining things like that, it's just stupid.

HM: Anything else about school you don't like?

GUY: no.

HM: do you think school prepares you for going to work?

GUY: not really.

HM: why do you think that?

GUY: cos I think we should...you know when you do your work experience, I think you should be able to do it for longer.

HM: How much longer? Did you do it for a week or 2 weeks?

GUY: a week.

HM: where did you go?

GUY: I didn't go anywhere.

HM: how come you didn't go anywhere?

GUY: cos they had one arranged and err I was just about to go and he found out he didn't have no, you know when children can go on site? He didn't have none of that. So at the last moment I couldn't go.

HM: you felt quite let down by that?

GUY: mmm.

HM: yeah. So you think you should have more work experience. Anything else?

GUY: more job opportunities.

HM: ok. How do you think that going on your training scheme or apprenticeship will be different to school? Do you think you'll be treated differently?

GUY: yeah I'll be treated differently. I'll be treated like an adult.

HM: You don't feel like your treated like an adult at school?

GUY: nah.

HM: do you think you'll be treated with more respect?

GUY: yeah, if you show them what you can do they'll probably treat you with more respect.

HM: how else do you think school and work will be different?

GUY: school is, all your mates are here, you prat about in front of your mates don't yer? But at work you don't.

HM: just between you and me out of a 5-day week how many days are you are school?

GUY: everyday.

HM: everyday. So if you're off it's because you're ill?

GUY: yeah.

HM: So you've got your GCSE's coming up in a couple of months how many are you taking?

GUY: all of them.

HM: 9 is it?

GUY: yeah.

HM: what do you expect to get?

GUY: D's. I might, a C for construction

HM: so you expect to pass all of them?

GUY: I'm gonna fail maths, I don't like maths. Nor French. I'm not going to the French exam because I think it's silly that we have to learn French.

HM: something against the French?!

GUY: what? no!

Both laugh

GUY: I just think it's stupid.

HM: are you off languages or is there another language you would have like to have done?

GUY: I'm just off languages.

HM: Do you think the grades you get this year are going to help you in the future?

GUY: yeah.

HM: will they help you get into your construction career?

GUY: yep.

HM: so you've had a careers interview. When was that?

GUY: ages ago. About 3 or 4 months ago.

HM: what did you think of it?

GUY: it was good but all I want someone to do, I just want someone to help me and get like a career. I want someone to say to me 'we've got you this all you've got to do is write this, write that and send it off'.

HM: you want someone to sit down and say this is what you've got to do?

GUY: yeah.

HM: thinking about your uncle and aunts and your older friends as well, do you know many people who are working at the minute?

GUY: no not from school anyway.

HM: do you know many unemployed people?

GUY: no.

HM: adults?

GUY: Oh yeah, one of my uncle's is unemployed

HM: I've asked you a strange question about who you admire and why and you've put David Beckham and your dad.

GUY: yeah.

HM: ok so first of all your dad, why do you admire your dad?

GUY: because I think he's excellent at what he does. He does it. He lost his finger from building and he still gets on with his work. He's got loads of money. He's got a big house and he's told me it's took him years to do it but if you can do it, do it.

HM: you admire that kind of hard work

GUY: yeah.

HM: and David Beckham, obviously the haircut!

Both laugh

GUY: no I just think he's a fantastic footballer.

HM: you admire him for his skill then?

GUY: yeah.

HM: not his wife!

GUY: no, don't like her!

HM: what do you see yourself doing when you are 21?

GUY: I see myself... I want to have my own company. When I'm building I want to be a plumber or a carpenter.

HM: why those particular 2 trades?

GUY: cos my dad told me there's a lot of money in carpentry.

HM: do you see yourself still living at home?

GUY: at 21? Dunno. I might me. I'm a mummy's boy!

HM: she won't let you leave! You'd never go back to school?

GUY: no they've got no courses here for me.

HM: So you quite like learning do you?

GUY: yeah I'd like to learn things that I enjoy.

HM: are you looking forward to learning a trade?

GUY: yeah.

HM: why do you think it's so important to learn a trade?

GUY: what at school?

HM: generally.

GUY: because it gears you for before you leave school.

HM: do you think school could be more geared towards helping you go to work?

GUY: helping you go to work yeah.

End by introducing family interview

Guy's family interview

At home with mother. Very supportive, strong woman. Guy seems to take after her in openness and ability to communicate. Very self assured and confident. We got on really well – stayed 20-30min after the 'formal' interview to chat. Long bleached hair, lots of gold jewellery, smoked during interview.

Lived in a block of flats. Not very nice outside or in hallway. Stone stairs, prone to vandalism. Flat itself very nice, looked like it had just been cleaned.

HM: what do you think Guy will be doing this year when he finishes?

Mum: I'm hoping he's going to go to college.

HM: what to do?

Mum: he wants to do brickwork, he wants to be a bricky.

HM: why do you think he's particularly interested in this?

Mum: I don't really know, it's something that's come up maybe over the last 4 months. He hasn't really had an idea what he wanted to do, but he just turned round one day and said 'I want to be a bricky'. So...

HM: what do you think of that then, do you think it's a good move?

Mum: oh yeah cos Guy's had a few problems at school and erm I think if he can get on and get on and further his education and learn a trade from it rather than go to college and I don't know mess around and do the things that some of the kids do from round here. Yeah I'm quite happy for him to do it.

HM: You see some of the kids go to college rather than work?

Mum: yeah, yeah.

HM: but you think it's quite a good idea for Guy to go and get a few more qualifications?

Mum: well I'd rather him go to college than stay on at school. I think at college if he's going to be doing something that's going to keep him occupied and he's going to be learning from it, I'm not saying that he hasn't learnt anything from school, but he hasn't done very well in school.

HM: do you think it's not perhaps the right environment for him, it's not quite suiting his personality?

Mum: I think Guy struggles with erm, erm, sitting down and writing and doing all that sorts of sort, whereas I think if he's in college and there will be a majority of writing plus doing something he can see and think he'll benefit more from that.

HM: is there quite a few people in your family that have gone into building work?

Mum: yeah his dad got his own business and my brother passed his city and guilds for brickwork as well.

HM: was that recently?

Mum: no it would be a few years back by now.

HM: do you think that might have influenced him because his dad is a bricky?

Mum: I don't really know, it's not something we've ever really discussed. Guy's very very, he's mad about football, absolutely mad about it, and that's it. We haven't had a discussion about what

he's going to do when he leaves school, its more or less me saying, well when you leave school if you haven't got a job you're stay on school and now I know the opportunities are that he can go to college and he can take training up from college.

HM: Would you prefer him to go on to college rather than try and get a job now?

Mum: yeah.

HM: you're quite strong about that. Why?

Mum: err, how can I explain Guy. Guy's ... I'm sorry about the neighbours (loud music coming through the wall)

HM: you should hear mine!

Both laugh

Mum: Guy's had a rough time at school. I've had to go down and get him sorted out getting one to one tuition and you know and help with things that he's needed help witherm and I don't think he's err he's not got the get up and go to go out to work.

HM: you don't think that would suit him?

Mum: no no. I think he needs to go out ... I think if he was put in the situation where someone would take him on in a builders yard i.e. wood yard or anything like that he'd be o.k.but I think I'd rather him go out and get 2 years training and then decide from there what he really wants to do.

HM: you don't want him to rush into anything?

Mum: no no.

HM: do you think you have an ideal job for Guy. Have you built up an ideal job in your mind for him?

Mum: no not really.

HM: you are happy for him to go into building?

Mum: yeah.

HM: is there anything you wouldn't want him to do work wise?

Mum: no not really 'cos I think if he was 10 and he says to me 'I want to be a fireman, I want to be a mortician' I wouldn't say no. Even if he came in today and says 'I've changed my mind I want to be a gardener' or something it really wouldn't bother me.

HM: you support him?

Mum: whatever he wanted to do.

HM: so how important do you think his friends have been in his choice of where he wants to go?

Mum: I don't really know. All Guy's friends are all football friends do you know what I mean?

HM: he does the Sunday League doesn't he?

Mum: yeah he plays football of a Sunday and he's into sports at school so he hasn't really got any...he's got a friend [...] who has always worked on a Saturday down at the Blues ground, you know running around doing whatever, and he's just got himself a job in one of the clubs in town

where he collects the glasses, but that's the only one of Guy's friends that goes out and works sort of thing.

HM: so there's been no persuasion or influence then?

Mum: no no.

HM: how about his girlfriend, has she got much persuasion over him?

Mum: I wouldn't say sore subject but [...] is very over powering. She's erm come out of school. From what I can gather she's very intelligent, she's far from thick. She's had a couple of jobs where she's worked in a shop whatever, and I know ... I'm not sure, I know she's going away in a couple of months to work in the Isle of Man or wherever it is to do a silver service. I know she asked Guy to go with her.

HM: and your not keen on that or?

Mum: if Guy turned round to me and says he'd like to go I'd be happy for him to go, but I know he wouldn't be happy there.

HM: you think it would be the wrong thing for him?

Mum: I know it would be the wrong thing for him but if he came in and said he was determined that he'd like to go for 3 months and try it I would be quite happy for him to go.

HM: yeah, but you'd have some reservations about that?

Mum: yeah I would.

HM: is that because he's 16 and a bit young?

Mum: have you met Guy?

HM: yeah we had about a half hour chat at school about what he wants to do.

Mum: I don't know what to say about him. I know he's my son but he's really strange, he hasn't got...it seems to me that he hasn't got any goals in life.

HM: he comes across very well.

Mum: yeah but like I say he hasn't come in and said 'right this is what I want to do. I'm going to set myself and I'm going to do this'. Its only been a matter of 3 or 4 months ago that's he's decided that he wants to go into building.

HM: and you were quite surprised by that decision.

Mum: well I was quite surprised cos you know when they have you know a week or 2 weeks out from school when they go and do whatever, and I says to him 'go and ask your dad if you can go and do some work with your dad' and his dads very like 'you don't want to be doing this for the rest of your life. I have to work 24/7 7 days a week'. And I thought he was out of order I don't think it would have hurt him to take Guy and ...

HM: because Guy didn't have a careers did he?

Mum: he was left to the last minute and there was nothing for him to do.

HM: but you think it would have been quite a good experience for him?

Mum: well I you know I don't think it would have hurt, you know what I mean? I don't think it would have hurt him to do it.

HM: do you know much about the college system then?

Mum: no I don't know anything. I went down to school couple of weeks ago 'cos there was some... well there wasn't some trouble but there was a bit you know this and that, and I had to come out of work and go down the school and she was saying that Guy had improved, he wasn't brilliant but he had improved blah blah blah. So I says to her where does he go when he leaves school, well she says he can either stop on or go to college. And then I spoke to [...], cos [...] gone to college his friend, and I says to [...] 'can you get me a number so I can phone the college blahblah blah to sort out whatever' and [...] says 'I need to enrol again myself and the day that we enrol I'll take Guy down with me to enrol' so...

HM: do you think the school should keep you more informed...

Mum: yeah.

HM: and involved...

Mum: yeah.

HM: in college and things?

Mum: yeah, cos I asked her about college and she says 'Oh no you can phone up yourself'.

HM: you think she should have been able to give you the information?

Mum: I think she should have been able to say to me ... well Guy sees the careers officer when they come in and I'll put it to Guy to mention to the careers officer. You know to see if they can give me any information about it. So I don't think they're that good really.

HM: you think you should be given more information.

Mum: yeah yeah.

HM: that seems to be a thing that a lot of parents are saying that they've not been kept up to speed. You'll be willing to find out the college stuff for Guy then?

Mum: yeah.

HM: has his dad or any of his uncles helped him find out information?

Mum: no

HM: has Guy been to the college yet?

Mum: no he hasn't been yet.

HM: and he hasn't applied for any jobs yet?

Mum: no.

HM: he's quite set on going to college?

Mum: yeah .

HM: what do you think he'll do for the summer?

Mum: I don't know. You see I've got some cousins that have got their own business. We were out ... we were at a family do a few weeks back and they came over to Guy and says they heard he was interested in being a bricklayer and all this and that and Guy says yeah 'soon as you leave school

you phone us and we're sort you out'. So whether I could get Guy to go out with them in summer and you know see where it goes from there. We'll just wait and see.

HM: so they could probably set something up for him?

Mum: yeah, yeah.

HM: so there is a good chance of Guy getting a job if he does decide to go for a job?

Mum: yeah yeah.

HM: just thinking about the area you live in, do you like the area? How long have you lived here?

Mum: I've lived in my flat for 13 years but I think we've lived around here for about 28 years.

HM: pretty much all the time then?

Mum: yeah, yeah. I don't think much of the area.

HM: why's that?

Mum: it's just gone down, down in the dumps.

HM: I use to live over in [...]

Mum: when we first moved around here [...] was a village. Do you know what I mean? And now it just like erm full of drugs. Er, car thieves, which I'm very, very lucky with Guy...

HM: he hasn't been in trouble like that at all

Mum: no no. Never had the police at my door. Never had no problems with that with regards to any trouble at all with Guy no.

HM: so you think the areas gone down hill a bit then?

Mum: yeah terrible.

HM: would you ever move away from this area?

Mum: not now I wouldn't.

HM: lived here too long?

Mum: I love me flat and I am settled here, but I think if an opportunity came up where in a couple years time an opportunity came for me I would go.

HM: would you go out of Birmingham do you think?

Mum: yeah yeah.

HM: you would. In this country?

Mum: if need be I'd go abroad. We had a chance to move down to Cornwall about 8 years ago. We got some friends that live down there and they own their own cottage and a holiday flat next door to the cottage and unfortunately they had to go back to London 'cos one of their parents were really ill, blah blah blah and I was asked if I wanted the cottage, but because I don't drive well I thought it was just a bit scary, know what I mean? So...

HM: but you would be quite happy to emigrate?

Mum: yeah if I had a chance I would.

HM: how do you think that Guy will cope going to college? Do you think it will be better for him than school?

Mum: well I hope so, I bet it will. I don't have no problems getting him to school, even though he probably don't go to school and be the best pupil, but I don't have no problems, but saying that he never whitewashes me with anything. If he gets up and says he's ill I say 'yeah, get your uniform on, get your breakfast' and I send him off to school, and I don't know but about 5 times out of 10 the school will phone and say 'Guy's really ill you know we have to send him home'. But I don't have no problems sending him to school so I don't think there will be a problem with him going to college.

HM: you think he's prepared for it. Some kids go to college...

Mum: to have a mess around and do what they got to do. No, I think if Guy's set his heart that he wants to, he needs to get something out of college he'll do it.

HM: once he sets his mind on something he's quite determined?

Mum: yeah, yeah.

HM: what do you think of the school?

Mum: [Tower Cross]? I went there myself. Er, I hated it. I never went to school.

HM: why didn't you like it?

Mum: I had problems with me reading. Well I just had problems with school. I was absolutely crap at school. I was no good. Well the only thing I was good at school was sports.

HM: maybe that's where Guy's got it from?

Mum: maybe that's where Guy's got it from. But, I knew the difficulty I had with school and I wasn't prepared for Guy to have the same problems as well. I was like, you know, soon as I knew he was accepted to go into [Tower Cross] I was straight down the school and said 'listen, I came to this school, I never got no help', I've had to struggle, you know the way I need to live now, I mean if I have to spell anything I have to get the dictionary out. I'm not thick but I get by.

HM: you help yourself.

Mum: I help myself. I mean I can read books I mean if you go in my bedroom the books I read is unbelievable but I didn't want Guy to go what I've been through.

HM: you're self taught really?

Mum: yeah everything that I know now is something that I've had to do for myself.

HM: do you think that Guy's picked up on that then? He's quite independent?

Mum: I think so yeah, because I think he knows that the times that I've had at school I think I only went for the first 2 years and after that I just went in got a mark, came out, cheeky enough to go in for my dinner, came out again. I did get myself into a lot of trouble for it, I was put into care for I dunno, 2 months. Mum got into trouble for it, but I just couldn't get to grips with school, I felt like they was humiliating me all the time. You know when you use to have those lessons when you use to have to get up and read?

HM: yeah.

Mum: I use to be 'O god don't pick me today'. I really hated it. There was never anybody there that I could go and talk to and say to them, well I never done any homework, I never brought anything home for me to do because I just couldn't get to grips with it, I couldn't get to grips with school. So maybe Guy has picked up on it.

HM: So you choose [Tower Cross school] as you went there rather than [other close school]?

Mum: Oh god I wouldn't send them to [other school]!

HM: is it not a good school?

Mum: no.

HM: what's the problems with that school?

Mum: it's just the problems with the kids basically. Erm, I would rather have had Guy out of the area. I would rather him go to school that wasn't in the area but I couldn't get him in anywhere.

HM: is that because of the kids round here?

Mum: yeah yeah, and because the majority of the kids he was at junior school with they all went to the 2 schools. I would rather have had Guy taken out and gone to a school that wasn't in the area.

HM: was that not possible because of the catchment area?

Mum: yeah yeah.

HM: do you think that the kids round here are a bit of a bad influence then?

Mum: they're terrible, terrible. And I mean I don't like to stand there and blow my own trumpet about Guy, but at the end of the day I've taught Guy he has to have respect for people. People in the shop say to me I can't believe Guy lives round here, and I'm like what do you mean 'he's so polite, and when he asks for something its please and thank you I can't believe he lives here sort of thing' do you know what I mean?

HM: what's the general standard like then?

Mum: vile absolutely vile.

HM: do you know what Guy's predicted grades are like this year?

Mum: haven't got a clue.

HM: he hasn't brought you home anything to show you then?

Mum: no not yet.

HM: do you know how many GCSE's he's taking?

Mum: no I don't.

HM: you said you left school quite early and that you've got quite bad memories of school? Do you wish you'd done things differently or do you think the education system never really could have interested you?

Mum: the education system really let me down and that's why when you choose your schools and I picked whatever for Guy, and then they came back to me and said [Tower Cross] will go with, what do they call it now?

HM: curriculum?

Mum: no, erm, special needs programme. [Tower Cross] have got a good special needs programme and I was still if'ing and but'ing about it, and as it happens when we had an open day down the school, there was a teacher there, well he's still there now, but he was there when I was in school, and he looked at me and must of thought 'o my god'. I said 'Mr [...] meet my son' and he went and I went 'I want you to look after him, I want you to make him feel school is a good thing' as I just felt really let down by school.

HM: even though you've had bad experiences you do see school as a good thing?

Mum: yeah yeah, as I say Guy's never off school, I never allow him. If he's ill I send him to school!

HM: what do you think of these training schemes about at the moment? Do you know much about them?

Mum: well I think about them. I think about the ones I had when I left school you know these £25 things, you know that sort of thing. And even then I did, I did go out and do a couple of them and I felt like I was a dogsbody, a skivvy,

HM: you felt like you were being ripped off.

Mum: yeah for £25 I felt I've got to go out and pay my mum out of that, pay my bus fare and whatever, so no I don't think there erm any good.

HM: and you're working at the moment?

Mum: yeah.

HM: and you're working as err...

Mum: a cleaning supervisor.

HM: do you like your job?

Mum: yep yeah.

HM: just to see if your impression of work has influenced Guy. Do you come home and talk about it 'I did this' and Guy might pick up on it?

Mum: not ... maybe just recently. I've been there for 7 years and we've just been took over by a new cleaning contract, and err and I was sort of like, I didn't know whether to stay there or not, but my attitude is I go out to work for things that I want to do. Me and Guy go abroad every year so I think Guy looks at it mum goes and works and we do go on holiday. I think if I was sat at home all day we wouldn't have the things we have. Guy doesn't go without anything. There's some days when he goes 'errrr errr' and I say 'I can't do it'. Like the other week he asked me for something and I went 'Guy I need to explain to you I don't know if I'm going to have a job, you know the money that I've got...' I've booked a holiday and I don't know whether I'm at work because I know I've got the holiday coming up. I've paid for the holiday and I'm looking at spending money but I don't know, I'm happy in my job, I love my job, but I don't know whether I'm going to get on with this cleaning contractor that have just took over. So like I'm not going to be foolish enough to pack my job in and not be able to go into anything else.

HM: you'd always have something set up then?

Mum: yeah, I need...at the moment I'm out looking for jobs but I've still got a job do you know what I mean?

HM: do you think that you have the attitude that you work to live rather than live to work, you work so you can get things?

Mum: I work to live, 7 days a week do you know what I mean? Christmas day, boxing day. I've had a day off today but I still work 7 days a weekcos I've got 2 jobs, I work of a morning and I work of an evening.

HM: thinking about the people you know, do you know a lot of people that are working or are there many unemployed?

Mum: I don't really know. We're a fairly close family and I've got a few close friends and all my friends work.

HM: so you've got quite a lot of contacts then if Guy needs to get a job?

Mum: yeah.

HM: would you want him working with you?

Mum: no.

HM: any particular reason?

Mum: I don't think it's a man's job. I think if it was industrial cleaning whereas mine is office cleaning erm no I wouldn't like Guy to do it.

HM: so you're quite happy for Guy to go into a masculine job like building then?

Mum: yeah but i.e. saying that mum's got a pub, my mum runs a pub so you know if in 2 years time he decides he wants to work behind the bar I'd be quite happy for him to do that do you know what I mean?

HM: but you see cleaning as a woman's job?

Mum: a woman's job yeah.

HM: do you know a lot of people in this area?

Mum: yeah.

HM: thinking about what's been done to help Guy do you think there could be more done to help him? You said there could be more done to help you. Do you think that he needs to be sat down with someone and said this is your application fill it in like this?

Mum: definitely yeah. I think there's too many kids to a class.

HM: you think they need more personal...

Mum: Guy is better when he's having one-to-one or say he's say in a classroom where there's 5 kids, do you know what I mean? I'm not saying he should have one-to-one but I think he's suited better when there's a smaller number of kids in the class and I think if that's what they did with regards career work like a careers officers, I don't know... I mean Guy's seen a careers officer but he hasn't come home and said 'gasp seen a careers officer today and she's like lala la'.

HM: you think they should make them more enthusiastic then?

Mum: yeah yeah.

HM: you think the attitude at school might be a bit lax?

Mum: yeah, I think its like, you're at school and when you leave school (dull tone) so you don't think... I don't think they get enough people to come and talk to them.

HM: do you think Guy is ready to make the choice or do you think...I'm not saying he should be kept in school til he's 18, but do you think it would have been helpful if he was a bit older when he had to make this choice about what he wants to do?

Mum: personally I would have kept him in school and my attitude is, if he's not at school he's going somewhere because I'm not having him sit around here all day. And that's not because...I want him to do something. I don't want him to sit around and do nothing. I think that is the time when most of the kids go and get into trouble. I mean they do a lot when they come out of school and whatever but I think if they come out of school and they haven't got anything to do that's when it turn to trouble.

HM: thinking into the future, what do you see Guy doing when he's 21?

Mum: I haven't got a clue.

HM: never thought about it or he could be doing anything?

Mum: anything yeah. I mean if he was lucky enough to be scouted for football then so be it.

HM: but you don't particularly see him with his own family?

Mum: oh no, hopefully not! I really don't want him to do. If it happened it happened you know what I mean. But I hope he's got his head screwed on and I would like him to go out and do things that he wants to do and not be tied down.

HM: just thinking about the job situation not just in Birmingham, do you think that in the future he'll be in full employment?

Mum: well hopefully yeahcos he's got...well his dad's family there's a lot of them that have moved to Australia, all come from the building business, you know you've got a carpenter in the family, you've got an architect in the family and their all, a lot of them live in Australia I'd hope to think that if in a few years time if Guy decided that well I'd like to go over and see what's what and if he phoned me up a month later and told me he's got a job in Australia and he's staying there I'd be all for it. And I still want to for Guy's 18th birthday, I want to buy him a ticket for Australia to go over and see what it's all about.

HM: so you think it's definitely an advantage having such a close family?

Mum: I think so yeah. Plus having a family that all go out and work.

HM: do you think its attitude?

Mum: yeah, we...my mum's always worked, it was me that was left to look after the rest of the kids, 4 of us and err and I don't know whether its growing up knowing that mum always goes out and works that's sort of like you've got to get up and fend for yourself sort of thing.

HM: is Guy an only child?

Mum: yeah...I was brave once!

Both laugh

HM: I think that's it unless you've got anything to ask me?

Mum: he just came home with the letter the other day and went 'ermm ermm erm' and I went 'erm' and said 'I'll phone them shall I' and he said 'really?' and I went 'yeah'.

HM: he is a really nice lad.

Mum: I have no problems with him at all. The only backbone at the minute is his girlfriend.

HM: you don't think she is such a good influence then? Or do you think she is a distraction?

Mum: They ain't got any social life. There with each other 24/7 and I'm like 'go out and football' and its like when they do split up I don't see Guy he's like 'I'm going down (...), I'm going football training, I'm going up the gym' and I'm thinking yeah great and that's what I want him to do. I think she's trying to like...she really influences him and she's got no friends and he's got no friends so they've just got each other sort of thing.

HM: is she a year or 2 older?

Mum: yeah, she's not in school no more. I think it will do him good if she does go away and do this job ... But I certainly wouldn't pay for him to go. If he wanted to go he would have to sort it out himself. I wouldn't be very happy about it because I know, I know Guy and I know he wouldn't like it. I know he wouldn't like to be stuck in a hotel doing things that doesn't interest him.

Ended interview with an informal chat – topics included-

Family holidays in America and comparison of healthcare/family/difference between rich and poor. Mum reiterated how Guy a man's man and how she wants him to do something after school because that's when kids get in trouble.

Mum said her brother had been in prison and Guy might have picked up on this and kept out of trouble.

Said how Tower Cross different to other local school where there are obvious signs of drug abuse, language and behaviour problems

Talked about teenage pregnancy. Mum said talk about it at work how disgusting it is for 12 year olds to have babies. Said it is up to the mothers to teach the daughters. Very gendered ideas. Said to Guy if his girlfriend got pregnant she would 'batter' him, the girlfriend and her mother. Said if she ever had a daughter she would put her on the pill at 14.

Extraction of chi-squared results from analysis chapters

The use of chi-squared statistics

Although the research methodology was largely qualitative in focus, determined by the need to understand the process behind post-sixteen choices, it was decided that quantitative data collected via a questionnaire distributed before the young people left school and a number of months after could be useful for a number of purposes. This data would allow:

- Participants to be selected based on their questionnaire responses for in-depth interviews (Hammersley, 1996)
- Subjective data to be gathered from a large number of respondents on matters such as intended post-sixteen destinations, aspirations and predictions for the future (May, 1997)
- Factual data to be collected considering actual post-sixteen destinations, GCSE grades, family structure and employment for comparison to national data (May, 1997)
- Discrepancies between intended post-sixteen directions and actual destination to be observed
- Quantitative data to 'compliment' qualitative data through the provision of descriptive statistics (Hammersley, 1996)
- Triangulation of questionnaire responses via later interviews enhancing the reliability and validity of some research conclusions (Hammersley, 1996).
- A macro and micro level perspective to be adopted in the research (Bryman, 1988).

The questionnaire data would also allow the analysis to distinguish if relationships existed between pairs of selected factors. It was never intended that the questionnaire data would be used to assume causality and there was no desire to look at more elaborate interrelationships between factors using quantitative analysis. Bearing these judgements in mind, it was appropriate to do a simple univariate analyses. Therefore, the statistical analysis was conducted using chi-squared tests often referred to as the test of independence as measuring the association between variables (Heiman, 1995).

The choice to use chi-squared tests can also be largely supported from an objective standpoint based on the quality of the data rather than just the largely qualitative focus of the research.

- The data produced by the questionnaires was categorical with the numbers in some groups being small. This in itself would lead to problems in undertaking an appropriate multivariate analysis, and the research was not concerned with how groupings of variables interrelate but rather the individual relationships between pairs of particular factors (Robson, 2002; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). The univariate analyses were unconditional and unadjusted, allowing the relationship between pairs of factors to be observed.
- Other multivariate methods such as factor analysis are open to subjective

interpretation whereas the research specifically wanted to determine if a relationship existed between one variable and another (Robson, 2002).

As recognised within the final chapter, further quantitative work could be conducted in the area of post-sixteen transitions especially concerning the potential effect of differing family structures on post-sixteen destinations. However, it was not the remit of this research thesis to carry out complex statistical analysis and the strength of the data gained from the questionnaire was such that it may not have withstood a more thorough analysis. The reliability of any assumptions could also have been questioned, given that a statistical validation of the questionnaire was not undertaken (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

Presentation of Chi-squared results

Given the importance of the 'school effect' on post-sixteen destinations, it may have been beneficial to present the chi-squared test results separately for each school rather than at the aggregate level. However, when the data collected from the 51 pupils at Longfield Comprehensive was categorised for analysis, the expected count in many cells was less than the required five. As stated by Matthews and Farewell (1996) and echoed in other academic sources (e.g. Robson, 2002; Flowerdew and Martin, 1997):

The distribution of the test statistic calculated from 2x2 contingency tables, is only approximately chi squared on one degree of freedom. In general, the accuracy of this approximation depends on the total of observations in the rows and columns of the 2x2 table. A conservative rule of thumb ensuring that the approximation is accurate requires that all the expected numbers exceed 5. (Matthew and Farewell, 1996, p. 44)

For this reason any conclusions based on many of the tables of data from Longfield school alone would not necessarily have been valid. Consequently, if the analyses had been split by school, most of the conclusions derived from the chi-squared tests would have had to have been based solely on Tower Cross. I did not want to lose any information so combined the two schools for the majority of the analyses and the results need to be interpreted in this light. However, to ensure that no important differences did exist between the schools for the reported chi-squared tests, preliminary analyses were conducted and it was verified that there were no differences in the directions of the effects. It was for these reasons, and one other to be considered shortly, that I felt that it would add nothing to the research to consider and present the results from the two schools separately for the majority of the chi-squared analyses.

A final reason for not presenting the majority of the chi-squared results by school was due to demographic similarities of the schools. One of the reasons that the two schools were chosen for the research is that they were so similar on paper, possessing similar class and employment characteristics. Many of these demographic similarities were borne out by the research and any moderate differences were shown via the descriptive statistics reported in the main body of the thesis. The choosing of two comparable schools was purposively done (as stated in Chapter 5), to allow the possibilities of

generalisations and to carry out qualitative analysis with a larger number of pupils that may leave school at sixteen. As it would not be expected that the 'school effect' on post-sixteen destinations would have any bearing on the influence of aspects such as length of parental educational career or household size (or vice versa) there was no real need to report the chi-squared results separately.

Determining the relative importance of factors

The statistical data accompany and compliment the qualitative data but are not supposed to supersede qualitative conclusions. Only in one instance did data arising from the chi-squared analyses appear not to support the conclusions derived from the extensive qualitative data; in this instance a judgment was required to distinguish between the relative importance of gender and the effect of the family in post-sixteen transitions. To support this judgement, the methodological strengths and weaknesses of the techniques used to generate the data in question were examined, as was the strength of the data (Sayer, 1992).

The effect of gender on aspects such as aspirations and future intentions was hard to quantify. Data on the size of the household and employment in the home was easier to capture and their relationship to post-sixteen transitions could be moderately tested. Therefore chi-squared statistics may appear to indicate through the quantity and quality of results that the family was more important. However, gender consistently emerged as an important factor influencing post-sixteen transitions, mediating interactions in the school, home, friendship network and affecting perceptions of the labour market, parental role models, 'desirable' employment and the benefits of further education. Its influence only seemed to be equalled by the role of the school and certainly appeared to reach further than that of the family.

Therefore, although chi-squared analyses would indicate that the family is more influential than gender in post-sixteen transitions, these statistics only provide one limited perspective. Data collection, analysis and conclusions stemming from the more lengthy and in-depth qualitative process suggested that gender, as an all-pervasive influence throughout the young male and female pupils' lives, was more important than the family. By using both qualitative and quantitative techniques, data arising from one technique could be challenged and clarified from that arising from another (Hammersley, 1996; Denzin, 1970).

Chi-squared results

The following chi-squared results are presented in the order they were referenced within the main analysis chapters.

The 'school' effect on post-sixteen transitions

Post-sixteen transitions into either post-sixteen education or the labour market were related to the school the young people attended at the 1% significance level. Tower Cross Comprehensive pupils were more likely to continue their education than Longfield Comprehensive pupils.

School attended by post-sixteen destinations
($X^2(1) = 9.440, p = 0.002$).

A more positive perception of the careers interview was related to the school the pupil attended at the 1% significance level. Longfield Comprehensive pupils were more likely to view the careers interview as beneficial than Tower Cross pupils were.

School attended by the pupils' assessment of careers guidance
($X^2(1) = 7.382, p = 0.007$).

Pupils stated that they would return to education if offered an incentive of £40 a week and this was significant to the 1% level. However, actual post-sixteen directions were not influenced by the possibility of receiving the education maintenance allowance (EMA).

Offer of £40 incentive by intended post-sixteen directions
($X^2(1) = 11.834, p < 0.001$);

EMA by actual post-sixteen destinations
($X^2(1) = 1.828, p = 0.176$).

Chi-squared analysis also found that pupils from Longfield Comprehensive were more likely to say that access to transport had already or would impede their search for a job compared to pupils from Tower Cross Comprehensive. However, within the main body of the thesis, this result is presented within the analysis of the local labour market effect on post-sixteen transitions as more pertinent to discussions in this area compared to those surrounding the school effect.

Gender as an important influence on post-sixteen transitions

Gender was related to intended post-sixteen destinations. Girls were significantly more likely to intend to enter post-compulsory education than boys were. This was significant at the 5% significance level. However, gender was not related to actual post-sixteen destinations, although the descriptive statistics suggested girls may be

marginally more likely to enter further education.

Gender by intended post-sixteen directions
($X^2(1) = 3.882, p = 0.049$);

Gender by actual post-sixteen destinations
($X^2(1) = 2.379, p = 0.123$).

According to chi-squared analysis, gender was not related to academic attainment and this was apparent in both schools. However, the overall direction of the data supplied via the questionnaires and official school records suggested that girls were more likely to be semi-academic or academic compared with their male counterparts.

Gender by academic attainment
($X^2(1) = 3.175, p = 0.075$).

Direct family influence on post-sixteen transitions

Intended destinations into post-compulsory education or the labour market were related to the level of parental education. This was significant at the 5% significance level. Young people with at least one parent with experience of further education were more likely to intend to continue his or her education. However, the effect of the level of parental education on actual post-sixteen destinations was slightly over the 5% probability level proving statistically insignificant.

Parental educational career by post-sixteen intentions
($X^2(1) = 4.625, p = 0.032$);

Parental educational career by post-sixteen destinations
($X^2(1) = 3.763, p = 0.052$).

Entrance to post-sixteen education was related to the presence of employment in the home. This was supported at the 5% significance level. Young people were more likely to continue their education if there was at least one person in employment resident in the home.

Household employment by post-sixteen destinations
($X^2(1) = 4.400, p = 0.036$).

The presence of maternal employment in the home was related to post-sixteen destinations. Maternal employment increased the likelihood of young people entering post-compulsory education. This was significant at the 5% significance level.

Maternal employment by post-sixteen destinations
($X^2(1) = 5.619, p = 0.018$).

The research was unable to find a statistically significant relationship between the structure of the family concerning parental composition and post-sixteen destinations into education, training, employment or unemployment.

Family structure by post-sixteen destinations
($X^2(1) = 1.539, p = 0.215$).

The number of residents within the home was found to be significant at the 5% significance level for the school leavers' actual destinations into continued education or the labour market. School leavers entering employment, training or unemployment were more likely to originate from homes with more than five residents.

Number of residents in family home by post-sixteen destinations
($X^2(1) = 5.802, p = 0.016$).

Friendship and post-sixteen transitions

The pupils' post-sixteen intentions to continue their education or enter the labour market and their subsequent directions were related to their friends' intended directions. This relationship was shown at the 1% significance level. Young people with a high percentage of friends intending to continue their education were more likely to take this route and vice versa.

Peer direction by intended post-sixteen destinations
($X^2(1) = 10.091, p < 0.001$);

Peer direction by actual post-sixteen destinations
($X^2(1) = 11.907, p < 0.001$).

Boys were significantly more likely to belong to a wide circle of friends than girls who favoured smaller friendship groups. This finding was supported at the 1% significance level.

Size of friendship group by gender
($X^2(1) = 12.023, p < 0.001$).

The pupils' intention to and actual return to education was related to their attitude towards further education. This was shown at the 1% significance level. Unsurprisingly, pro-school pupils with a positive perception of further education were more likely to enter post-sixteen education compared with pupils with a low opinion of further education.

Pupils' attitude to further education by intended destinations
($X^2(1) = 21.272, p < 0.001$);

Pupils' attitude to further education by actual destinations

$$(X^2 (1) = 14.490, p < 0.001).$$

The pupils' employment aspirations to enter either manual or non-manual positions were related to their intended post-sixteen directions and their actual destinations on leaving compulsory schooling. This was significant at the 1% significance level. Young people with high employment aspirations were more likely to continue their education and vice versa. Employment aspirations were also related to grade attainment at the 1% significance level; pupils with non-manual aspirations achieved more GCSE passes. However, there may be a two-way effect with grade attainment affecting the pupils' aspirations.

Aspiration by post-sixteen intentions
 $(X^2 (1) = 12.414, p < 0.001);$

Aspiration by post-sixteen destinations
 $(X^2 (1) = 12.920, p < 0.001);$

Aspiration by grade attainment
 $(X^2 (1) = 7.741, p = 0.005).$

Local labour market influence on intended and actual post-sixteen destinations

An intention to enter post-sixteen education or the labour market was related to actual destinations at the 1% significance level. Young people generally followed their initial directions whether into continued education, training or employment.

Intended post-sixteen direction by actual destination
 $(X^2 (1) = 53.705, p < 0.001).$

Girls were significantly more likely than boys to give the desire to stay close to their family as a reason for not relocating to find employment, this was significant at the five percent level.

Willingness to move rationale by gender
 $(X^2 (1) = 5.287, p = 0.021).$

Pupils from Longfield Comprehensive were significantly more likely to say that access to transport had or would impede their employment search than their counterparts at Tower Cross. This result was supported at the 5% significance level to three decimal places so should be considered borderline significant.

Access to transport impede job hunting by school
 $(X^2 (1) = 3.836, p = 0.050).$

Appendix 5

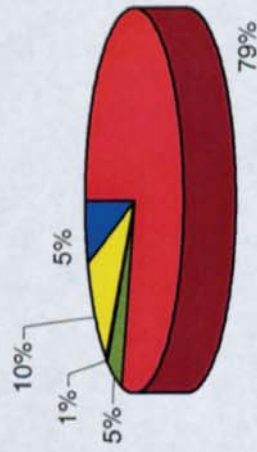
Area Descriptive Statistics
Percentage of jobs in school wards by sector
School Descriptive Statistics
Youth Cohort Descriptive Statistics
Case Profiles

Area Descriptive Statistics – data taken from the 1991 census and 1997 annual employment survey

Census & Annual Employment Statistics	Longfield Wards		Tower Cross Wards	
	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 1	Ward 2
Residents	23353	24201	23639	23181
Household number	9268	10148	10199	9229
Household size	2.48	2.38	2.31	2.48
% Children in overcrowded houses	17.4	7.5	16.1	16.8
Tenure:	Owner occupied	7002	4490	5091
	Local auth. rented	3335	5064	2427
	Housing assoc rented	122	312	378
Car availability:	No car	4031	5582	4002
	1 car	3958	3645	3805
	2+ cars	1281	970	1420
% Adults with higher education	5.4	9.4	2.3	6.7
Ethnic breakdown of population:	White	22462	22792	21284
	Black Caribbean	347	443	626
	Black African	24	12	28
	Black other	145	115	140
	Indian	124	55	406
	Pakistani	24	36	436
	Bangladeshi	6	5	13
	Chinese	24	17	41
	Other Asian	46	16	57
	Other	160	153	148

Percentage of jobs in school wards by sector

Longfield Ward 1.



■ Manufacturing & construction

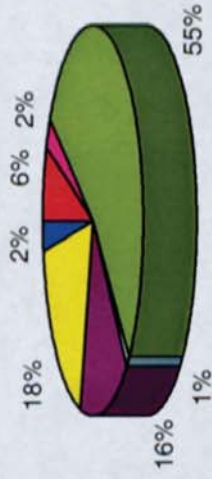
■ Distribution/hotels/restaurants & transport & communications

■ Banking, finance, insurance etc.

■ Public administration

■ Other services

Longfield Ward 2.



■ Manufacturing

■ Construction

■ Distribution, hotels & restaurants

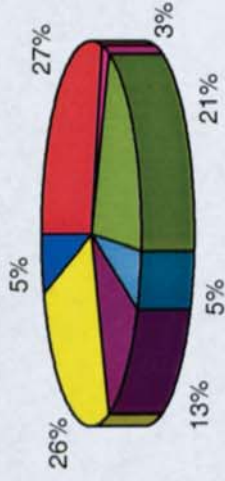
■ Transport & communications

■ Banking, finance, insurance etc.

■ Public administration, education & health

■ Other services

Tower Cross Ward 1.



■ Manufacturing

■ Construction

■ Distribution, hotels & restaurants

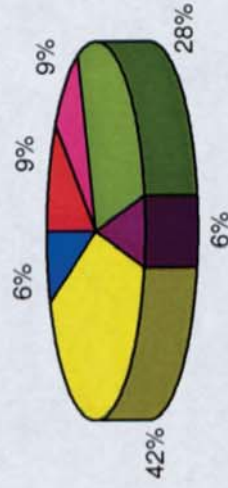
■ Transport & communications

■ Banking, finance, insurance etc.

■ Public administration, education & health

■ Other services

Tower Cross Ward 2.



■ Manufacturing

■ Construction

■ Distribution/hotels/restaurants & transport & communications

■ Banking, finance, insurance etc.

■ Public administration, education & health

■ Other services

School Descriptive Statistics – statistics taken from School reports for 1998/99

Descriptive:	Longfield Comprehensive	Tower Cross Comprehensive	National or LEA average
No. on school roll	468	882	915
% eligible for free school meals	45.1%	41%	17.5%
% speaking English as additional language	1.7%	4.4%	7.8%
% with SEN (including statements)	14.5%	15.8%	15.4%
Attendance 1998/99	82.6%	84.2%	91.3%
Ethnic composition of school:			
White	95.7%	82.4%	LEA 57.8%
African/Caribbean	1.1%	5.5%	LEA 7.5%
Indian	0%	0.7%	LEA 8.2%
Pakistani	0%	3.7%	LEA 16.4%
Bangladeshi	0%	0.1%	LEA 3.7%
Other	3.2%	7.6%	LEA 6.4%

Youth Cohort Descriptive Statistics taken from study

Youth cohort descriptive statistics	Longfield Comprehensive		Tower Cross Comprehensive	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Number in study	51	31	113	69
Male	31	60.8	60	53.1
Female	20	39.2	53	46.9
Ethnic composition of cohort				
- White	46	90.2	88	77.9
- Black				
- African/Caribbean	1	2	8	7.1
- Pakistani	0	0	4	3.5
- Indian	1	2	1	0.9
- Other	3	5.9	12	10.6
Residents in house				
- 4 and under	25	49	60	55
- 5 and over	26	51	49	45
Family structure				
- Two parent	27	52.9	59	53.6
- Single parent	7	13.7	26	23.6
- Parent & partner	12	23.5	19	17.3
- Other	5	9.8	6	5.5
How many in house work				
- Nobody	9	17.6	14	12.8
- One person	11	21.6	37	33.9
- Two people plus	31	60.8	58	53.2
Maternal figure in employment				
- Yes	33	64.7	78	70.9
- No	18	35.3	32	29.1
Paternal figure in employment				
- Yes	35	68.6	66	60.6
- No	16	31.4	43	39.4
Intention to continue into post-16 education				
- Yes	32	64	73	67.6
- No	19	36	35	32.4
Post-16 education as actual destination				
- Yes	26	51	85	75.2
- No	25	49	28	24.8

Case Study Profiles

Name:	School attended	Intended destination	Actual destination	Female work	Male work	No. of siblings	No. in house
Alison	Longfield	Art college	Art college	No	Unskilled	3	5
Amber	Tower Cross	Hairdresser training	Sixth form	Unskilled	White collar	3	4
Catherine	Longfield	Any job	McDonalds	Unskilled	Unskilled	4	6
Damian	Longfield	Further education/job	Sixth form	Unskilled	N/a	1	3
Daniel	Tower Cross	Land Rover	Trainee carpenter	N/A	Semi-skilled	3	4
David	Longfield	Apprenticeship	Bricklayer Training	Unskilled	Unskilled	3	5
Donna	Tower Cross	Beauty therapist	Temp. worker	Unskilled	No	1	4
Emma	Tower Cross	Job – shop work	Trainee hairdresser	No	Skilled	1	4
Guy	Tower Cross	Apprentice builder	Bricklaying course at college	Unskilled	N/A (but contact high)	0	2
Ian	Longfield	Training/further education/job	Unemployed	No	Semi-skilled	4	4
Joanna	Longfield	Not sure	Childcare course NVQ at college	No	Unskilled	7	10

Name:	School attended	Intended destination	Actual destination	Female work	Male work	No. of siblings	No. in house
Kevin	Tower Cross	Apprentice electrician	Unemployed	Unskilled	Semi-skilled	3	5
Kirsty	Longfield	Any job	Unemployed	No	Semi-skilled	5	6
Lee	Longfield	Motor engineering Training	Roofing apprentice	Unskilled	White collar	3	5
Lisa	Longfield	Travel job	Admin Assistant	Unskilled	Skilled	2	4
Louise	Longfield	Any job	Childcare NVQ at college	No	No	2	5
Mark	Tower Cross	Construction training	Body work course college	No	Unskilled	2	4
Matthew	Tower Cross	British Telecom	Sixth form	Unskilled	N/A (but contact high)	0	2
Nathan	Tower Cross	Job – designer	Sixth form	Unskilled	No	5	6
Peter	Longfield	Job/apprenticeship	Construction	Unskilled	Semi-skilled	2	4
Rachel	Tower Cross	Don't know	Sixth form	Unskilled	Unskilled	2	5
Sharon	Longfield	Any job	Unemployed	No	No	3	6
Stuart	Longfield	Fire service/college/army	Part-time Burger King	N/A	Retired	5	4
Tracy	Longfield	P.E teacher training programme	Business Admin college	Unskilled	Skilled	4	6