

A comparative analysis of post-16 learner outcomes and perspectives, based on studying further education (FE) in either an FE college or sixth form setting

Evaluation conducted for Go Higher West Yorkshire:
Final Project Report 2022



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1.0 Introduction

This project was commissioned by *Go Higher West Yorkshire* (GHWY), which is a consortium of higher education (HE) providers in West Yorkshire, who work together to reduce inequalities in higher education access, success and progression. This is delivered by collaborating to create demand, and collaborating to respond to need. GHWY is operational across several FE Colleges and Sixth Form settings, delivering outreach to post-16 learners and working strategically with leaders in these settings. Learners may choose such settings for different reasons and may have varying educational experiences depending on the setting they are in. This project sought to analyse post-16 learner outcomes in settings associated with GHWY and help GHWY deepen its understanding of the differences experienced by learners across these settings in relation to their intentions towards and preparation for higher education. The goal is to provide evidence-based research which will enable GHWY to tailor their approach to different settings and to ensure learner needs are met effectively.

The project is shaped around two research questions:

1. In what ways (if any) do post-16 learner experiences and outcomes differ across FE College settings and Sixth Form settings?
2. How might any differences be explained and understood in context?

2.0 Theoretical Perspectives informing the Research

We take as our key theoretical perspective that learner trajectories through the education system and their ultimate outcomes are more strongly shaped by socio-cultural factors, including the context of the educational setting, than by cognitive factors alone. Whilst learners do vary in terms of their 'intellectual' capacity, notions of fixed intelligence have been shown to be limiting for educational outcomes (Dweck, 2006), and particularly for socially and ethnically diverse students (Gillborn and Youdell, 2001; Sisk et al, 2018). Instead, educational outcomes are powerfully affected by a range of social factors, including home background, economic poverty, and the nature of the school experience. Crenna-Jennings (2019), for example, identified four key factors which influence educational outcomes: inequalities in child development; inequalities in access to high-quality education; stressors experienced in school; and different school practices. Crucially, educational outcomes are not simply linked to out-of-school factors, as Crenna-Jennings' four factors highlight: they are also linked to within school factors. Successive studies in the UK have shown that within-school variation in student outcomes is greater than between-school variation (Reynolds, 2007; Husbands and Pearce, 2012), and Macleod et al. (2015) found that up to two-

thirds of the variance between schools in terms of attainment of socially disadvantaged students is attributable to school level characteristics, not home background.

The consequences of these educational inequalities are far-reaching for those they affect in terms of social mobility and life chances. The Social Mobility Commission (2020a, p.35-36) draw attention to the fact that at the end of Key Stage 2, 51% of disadvantaged students achieve the expected standard in writing, reading and mathematics, compared with 71% of all other students; 25% of disadvantaged students achieve a good pass in English and Maths GCSE, compared with 50% of all other students. These differences in educational outcomes play out into differing life opportunities: students from disadvantaged backgrounds are *'less likely to attend university than those from wealthier backgrounds growing up in the same area. Across local authorities, education gaps between sons from poor and wealthy families explain, on average, around 80% of the gap in adult earnings between them'* (SMC 2020b, p.6). With reference to post-16 education specifically, these socio-cultural factors are further affected by the range of qualifications available to students, including vocational qualifications. Different perceptions of post-16 qualifications (Shields and Masardo, 2015) appear to lead to differential access to university (Mian et al, 2016; Rouncefield-Swales, 2014). Our own research (Banerjee and Myhill, 2019), drawing on both statistical analysis of attainment and progression data, and on interviews which elicited students' perspectives on their learning experience suggested that it is important to consider how, for example, students' sense of belonging and student experiences of ways of learning, assessment and feedback, student support systems, and relationships with teachers affect their capacity to learn and to succeed.

3.0 Methodology

The two key research questions we answer are:

- In what ways (if any) do post-16 learner experiences and outcomes differ across FE College settings and Sixth Form settings?
- How might any differences be explained and understood in context?

To answer these research questions, we have made use of multiple research methods. The first strand of the research is a literature review which sought to establish what is already known about post-16 learner experiences and differences. The second strand of the project maps learner outcomes, by making use of a quantifiable measure – progression to higher education. To provide robust analyses both from cross-sectional and longitudinal perspectives and interpret these statistics to give a clear narrative about what

they mean for learner outcomes we have worked with institutional level as well as individual level secondary data. The data available to us included individual level data pertaining to demographics, attainment, progression, and destination. We make use of descriptive statistics and assess student progression to higher education through a range of explanatory variables including demographics, qualification routes and type of institution attended.

A third strand of the project focussed on learner perspectives, involving direct engagement with students in FE colleges and sixth form centres. The perceptions, experiences and intentions of 26 learners who were all 16-18 year olds, studying at West Yorkshire FECs and sixth forms, were collated via in-person semi-structured focus groups. Although the focus groups began with some introductory discussion points, the learners themselves guided the discussion focus and content. Each learner told a personal narrative, shaped by themselves with them deciding what they felt was important to tell and any historical context. Some of the more recent experiences in the responses may be underpinned by events of earlier life. What is important is that the past and the possible *'is the context for self-making, and the most suitable genre for this is personal narrative'* (Goodley et al., 2004, p.73), as we cannot credibly reflect on ourselves in the moment (Ochs and Capps, 2001). An emancipatory approach allowed the knowledge construction to be collaborative between research and the learners, allowing the learners to shape their responses in a way that was meaningful to them and not framed by dominant discourse. It was important that learners had a voice in the research process, considering the learners to be social researchers themselves in the construction of new knowledge.

The data collected from the focus groups was analysed using thematic analysis and with the adoption of Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus and capital as a useful lens through which to view the data.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Exeter and the research was conducted according to the guidelines issued by [BERA \(2018\)](#). We make use of new data as well as existing secondary data for the project. Secondary data from was made available to us in an anonymised form via data sharing agreements between the researchers, GHWY, schools and colleges. All data analysed for the project has been presented in aggregated anonymised form, and none of the participating individuals are identifiable in our research reports.

4.0 Results

4.1 Literature Review – Exploring Student Experiences and Outcomes

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, educational performance varied significantly based on socioeconomic backgrounds and paths into good jobs were less clear for those not going to university (Blundell et al., 2021). Blundell and colleagues (2021) confirm that these variances are likely to widen further following the lack of face-to-face teaching in 2020 and 2021, as a result of lockdown restrictions, that has massively disrupted the education of all children, particularly those from poorer families, with long-term effects on their educational progression and career earnings.

Educational inequalities exist and the implications for educational outcomes and the differences in educational outcomes have an impact on an individuals' life opportunities, with students from disadvantaged backgrounds:

'less likely to attend university than those from wealthier backgrounds growing up in the same area. Across local authorities, education gaps between sons from poor and wealthy families explain, on average, around 80% of the gap in adult earnings between them'

(Social Mobility Commission, 2020a, p.6).

4.1.1 GCSE attainment

The Social Mobility Commission (2020a) note that disadvantaged students' performance at the end of Key Stage 2 and at GCSE is significantly lower than that of all other students. Analysis by Teach First (2020) found the attainment gap had only marginally improved overall for poorer pupils in England since 2017, when it stood at 44.5%, while in some parts of the country the attainment gap had increased. For example, in Yorkshire and the Humber, the attainment gap has widened in the past few years (Teach First, 2020).

However, research has shown that the situation is more nuanced than the statistics indicate. Lupton et al., (2021) found that, when analysing data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Individualised Learner Record (ILR), there are large differences in the achievement profiles of 16-18 year olds. Lupton and colleagues (2021) found that:

- over two-fifths (43%) of 'lower attainers' achieved a C or above in one of either English or maths,
- 21% had five A*-C grades or equivalents,

- even those who gained neither English nor maths at A*-C, and had fewer than five higher grade passes, tended to have at least five GCSE passes (at any grade),
- on average, 'lower attainers' were also entered for two vocational qualifications.

The emphasis on GCSE English and maths attainment then has implications for the options available at post-16 and the choices made by young people.

4.1.2 Post-16 choices and decision making

Research by the Department for Education (DfE) (2017) found that, although a small proportion of young people start thinking about their post-16 choices as early as primary school, it is most common for them to begin this process in earnest during Year 11. Those progressing into a technical pathway tend to make a final decision later than those progressing onto academic routes such as A Levels (DfE, 2017). This may be, in part, as a result of the confirmation of predicted and attained grades in Year 11.

Regarding attainment, Lupton et al., (2021) describe that 'lower attainers' (those without both GCSE English and maths at grade 4 or above) can often feel like failures, partly because of the strong emphasis on English and maths throughout their school years. Due to the focus on English and maths, these students tend to dismiss their other achievements and feel less confident about their futures, making complex decisions in the 'pressure cooker' atmosphere of Year 11 (Lupton et al., 2021). Lupton and colleagues (2021) found that these students are far more likely to have to move institution rather than carrying on in their school sixth form, when compared to higher attainers.

The findings (Lupton et al., 2021) also indicate that 'lower attainers' are:

- most likely to be in an FE college rather than other settings,
- less likely to be in a school sixth form or sixth form college than the rest of the cohort,
- more likely to be in an apprenticeship route than the rest of the cohort,
- more likely to be in a work-based training route,
- less likely to have a sustained destination (for 6 months in the year after Key Stage 4).

To add further complexities to the decision-making process, regardless of attainment, post-16 structures, course offers, and entry requirements vary substantially across the country and even within local authority

areas (Lupton et al., 2021). As such, young people with similar attainment can access and achieve different things depending on where they live (Lupton et al., 2021).

The post-16 decision-making process is multi-faceted, and a complex set of factors influence the decisions young people make (Lupton et al., 2021), prior attainment being only one such factor. A range of social factors such as home life, socio-economic background, and school experiences may also be of influence.

These may include:

- parental background,
- household composition,
- aspirations to attend university,
- prior and peer group attainment,
- the gender and ethnicity of the young person,
- local labour market conditions,
- access to resources,
- awareness of the options,
- proximity to providers.

(Barrett, 1999; Ashworth and Evans, 2001; Furlong, 2005; Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014; Battiston et al., 2020, Dickerson et al., 2020).

The influence of parental background and the support parents/carers can offer was also found to impact choices in earlier DfE (2017) research:

“young people from lower socio-economic groups often lack the social capital and networks that help to facilitate access to these opportunities, and it is notable that use is more prominent amongst more advantaged survey respondents, such as those who attended independent schools, those whose parents are university educated and those who do not qualify for Free School Meals (FSM)”

(DfE, 2017, p. 9).

The DfE (2017) found that those influencing decisions went beyond the household. However, their findings indicated that most young people consult at least one individual, and on average three, in the decision-making process, most commonly parents/carers, teachers and friends. Those choosing academic pathways

typically viewed this support as more useful in their decision making than those progressing to technical pathways, except for parents/carers and staff at open days (DfE, 2017). Those on academic pathways were also found to be more likely to access other resources than those on technical routes, highly rating providers' websites, work experience/internships and extra-curricular activities, and comparison sites (DfE, 2017).

Further, the report (DfE, 2017) concluded that the ways in which an institution (e.g. schools, colleges, employers and training providers) exhibits expectations of who and what its students are expected to be, referred to as the concept of institutional habitus, is also an important influence on post-16 choices and decision-making. Findings (DfE, 2017) indicated that:

- some schools withhold FE and apprenticeship information, particularly to academically-able students,
- young people who aspired to HE being channelled down technical routes,
- some young people indicated their peers, who had limited social or cultural capital, did not have adequate careers IAG [Information, Advice and Guidance] to help them make the most of their talents and abilities.

These are just a few examples. Decision-making is nuanced, contextualised, and often individualised. The factors identified have only a limited ability to explain the decisions made by an individual young person. Post-16 decisions are shaped to an important extent by unmeasurable determinants and local areas have very limited capacity and powers to monitor, coordinate or intervene (Lupton et al 2021).

Given the multitude of post-16 structures, course and routes, implications and (mis)perceptions relating to attainment, school experiences, parental/influencer knowledge and capital, and quality of IAG, it is understandable that the post-16 choices young people make can have varying implications for their post-16 experiences, post-18 choices, and career outcomes. There is a high proportion of "lost talent" and "academic mismatch" in the education system (Social Mobility Commission, 2021) as a result.

4.1.3 Post-16 attainment

As with GCSE attainment and the post-16 choices young people make, there are several factors influencing experiences and outcomes in post-16 attainment. Research suggests that this is more so for those

progressing to college, whether sixth form and further education, than for those progressing to their school sixth form.

For example, Lupton et al., (2021) found that progression to a sixth form college or FEC is more complex and difficult for students, particularly as they are often also 'lower achievers' and too many are not able to build on their achievements between 16 and 19. Although many students do build on their achievements in the post-16 phase, 25% of those who did not attain grade 4 in both GCSE English and maths in Year 11, did not achieve a Level 2 qualification and around two fifths did not achieve a Level 3 qualification between age 16 and 19 (Lupton et al., 2021). Beyond the impact of GCSE attainment, Banerjee and Myhill (2019) found that students' sense of belonging and student experiences of ways of learning, assessment and feedback, student support systems, and relationships with teachers also affect their capacity to learn and to succeed. These factors ultimately have an impact on progression to HE.

Different perceptions of post-16 qualifications (Shields and Masardo, 2015) also appear to lead to differential access to university (Mian et al., 2016; Rouncefield-Swales, 2014). Further, evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (Schoon and Lyons-Amos, 2017) suggests that there is little movement between different broad types of post-18 pathway (e.g. higher education, technical education or employment), especially after Year 13, suggesting that the 16-18 year old transition point is critical for longer term outcomes in a young person's life (Dickinson, 2019).

4.1.4 Progression to higher education

Most recent DfE progression to HE or training statistics (2021) show 66.2% of level 3 pupils (e.g. those that studied A levels, tech levels and applied general qualifications) continued to a sustained education or training destination at level 4 or higher in the year after completing 16 to 18 study:

- 61.9% were studying for a degree (a level 6 qualification),
- 2.5% were studying qualifications at level 4 or level 5,
- 1.7% were participating in an apprenticeship at level 4 or higher.

However, variations in progression remain across school and college types:

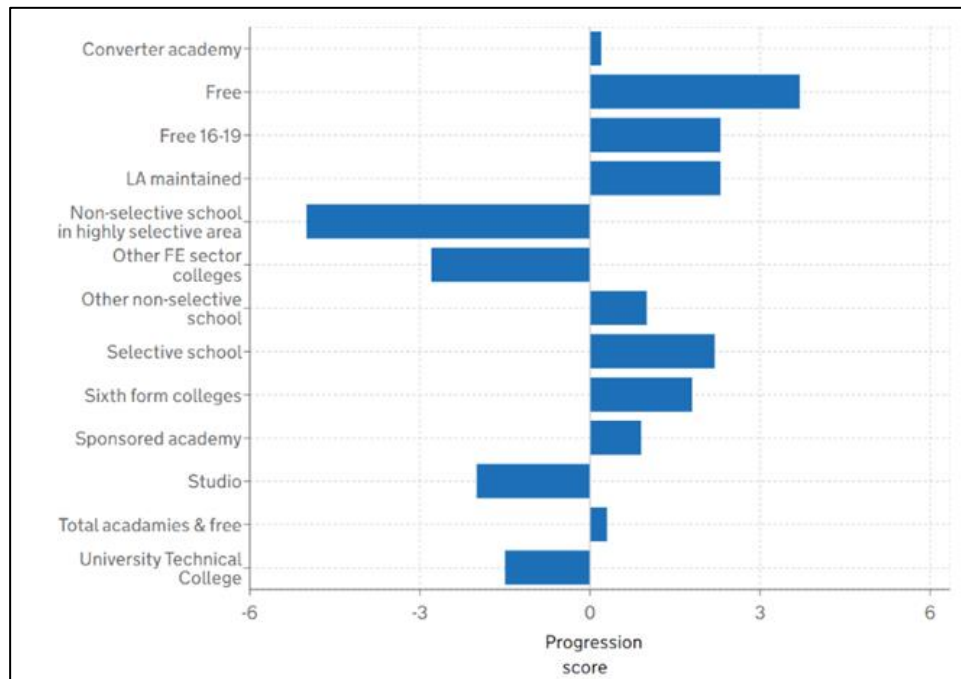


Figure 1: Progression to HE and training by provider type (DfE, 2021).

The data indicates that those progressing to HE or training from FE sector colleges do so at a lower rate (48.8%) than those progressing from sixth form colleges (70.7%) and state-funded mainstream schools (SFM) (72.8%), although the difference between SFM schools and all SFM colleges is only 1.9 percentage points (+0.8 for schools vs -1.1 for colleges). This demonstrates that progression between SFM schools and colleges was much closer once prior attainment and qualification type were considered (DfE, 2021). DfE (2021) believe part of the explanation for dissimilar progression rates between schools and colleges might be the different intentions of the students.

Dickinson (2019) found that most young people consciously make their post-18 choices in Year 9 (when choosing their GCSE options), in Year 11 (the transition point into post-16 education and training), and in Year 12 (for those in HE). However, this can differ depending on the intended pathway. Like Lupton and colleague's (2021) findings relating to post-16 choices, Dickinson (2019) found that young people on academic pathways start to think about their post-18 choices earlier than those on technical routes, possibly as early as Year 7 or 8. One third (33%) of those who progress into academic HE routes made their final decision about their post-18 route during Year 12, compared to 19% of those who progressed into technical HE routes such as higher level apprenticeships (Dickinson, 2019). Just under half (47%) of

those progressing to academic HE routes made their decision during Year 13, compared to 63% of those progressing to higher level apprenticeships (Dickinson, 2019).

The decision-making process can be complex, with several influential factors impacting choice. Dickinson (2019) goes on to explain that the post-18 choices young people make are heavily influenced by their demographic characteristics:

- young people from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to progress to HE,
- those in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) or a 16-19 Bursary are more likely to follow FE or technical routes,
- those whose parents did not go to university are less likely to progress to HE for academic routes and more likely to follow FE or technical routes,
- attainment at age 16 is a key determinant of young people's post-18 pathways, with higher attainment at this age associated with higher rates of post-18 participation in education and training and, specifically, higher rates of participation in HE.

Dickinson (2019) also found that young people make their post-18 choices with their future earnings in mind and their future career prospects are of paramount importance. Higher levels of qualification lead to higher financial returns and HE is still considered a relatively good financial investment. The main reason given by young people for applying to university is to improve their job opportunities and salary prospects. Although those in lower social classes are more concerned about student debt, and feel more reluctant about entering HE, participation rates among this group have actually increased, and young people on HE Technical pathways tend to have more of a clear idea about what job they want to go into after completing their course (75%), compared to 62% of those on the Academic route (Dickinson, 2019).

However, 'lifestyle factors' have also been found to play a key role in underpinning the decision of many young people to enter higher education as opposed to other routes, such as apprenticeships (Dickinson, 2019). When asked why they did not choose alternatives to HE, the most popular response, given by four out of five HE applicants, was simply that they 'wanted to go to university'. Qualitative research has found that young people consistently speak about non-academic aspects when considering university. For some, university represents a 'rite of passage', in contrast to apprenticeships which were not seen to provide a narrative about lifestyle.

Young people tend to decide on a chosen route first (based on an array of factors) and then seek out information about it rather than amassing a large amount of information before they make a broad decision (Dickinson, 2019). When they do start researching courses, young people are most interested in finding out about course entry requirements and what they will learn on a course (Dickinson, 2019). Large proportions also want to know about location and accessibility.

Those considering academic HE routes are more likely than those on other routes to want to know about: the satisfaction of previous learners; costs; the availability of financial support; and job, and earnings outcomes (Dickinson, 2019). Young people aiming for technical FE/HE routes are more interested in how the course is assessed (Dickinson, 2019).

Perceptions about the helpfulness of other individuals, including careers advisers, family, friends and staff during open days, were broadly similar among young people following different pathways (Dickinson, 2019). However, those on different pathways has varied preferences as to who they consulted and valued. Parents/carers and other relatives were the individuals consulted most by young people, followed by subject teacher, and friends (Dickinson, 2019). Those following technical routes were much less likely to have consulted their subject teachers (48%) compared with those following academic routes (69%), and were less likely to find their subject teachers helpful (74%) compared to those on Academic routes (91%).

Although most young people are broadly satisfied with the IAG available, significant minorities have faced issues (Dickinson, 2019). Dickinson (2019) highlights that these issues include:

- not finding the information to help them make a decision (<20%),
- not finding all the information they wanted to make a fully informed decision (<15%),
- not being aware of available IAG (<15%),
- being confused about which sources of information they can trust (30%).

Recommendations based on findings suggest that young people would like careers information in one place and want personalised IAG that is relevant to them, preferring to speak to someone face-to-face, by phone or text, (Dickinson, 2019). There is some qualitative evidence that IAG is perceived to be biased towards academic routes and away from more technical or vocational options (Dickinson, 2019).

4.2 Analysis of administrative datasets – student background and HE progression

We made use of Individual level administrative data for the academic year 2021-22 available from two sources - the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Higher Education access tracker (HEAT). The dataset had a record of 16,130 students. Students with sufficient tracking data recorded on HEAT (name, date of birth, postcode) and aged 18 or over at the start of the latest academic year for whom tracking data was available and were therefore ready to progress to HE in that academic year were included in the analysis. All students in this dataset participated in an activity and were based in one of the West Yorkshire institutions with Uni Connect engagement. Where a student had been registered to an activity on the database, the Activity ID was provided in the record, and it was possible to use this Activity ID to link the record to activity details for local analysis. Some cases were duplicates where students had participated in more than one activity. Making use of the "HEAT Student ID" or HESA's ID it was possible to see duplicate records for the same student. As table 1 below shows in the West Yorkshire region there were 19 partner institutions of which six were FE colleges, two were sixth form colleges and eleven were school sixth form settings.

Table 1. Institution Group Name

Institution	Type of institution	Local authority	Frequency		Percent
Bradford College	FE College	Bradford	823	8465	52.5
Calderdale College	FE College	Calderdale	112		
Leeds City College	FE College	Leeds	1964		
Leeds College of Building	FE College	Leeds	1960		
Wakefield College	FE College	Wakefield	3606		
Kirklees College*	FE College	Kirklees	0		
Elliott Hudson College	Sixth Form College	Leeds	297	3660	22.7
New College Pontefract	Sixth Form College	Wakefield	3363		
Allerton Grange School	School Sixth Form	Bradford	67	4005	24.8
Beckfoot Oakbank	School Sixth Form	Bradford	102		
Bradford Academy	School Sixth Form	Bradford	643		
Castleford Academy	School Sixth Form	Wakefield	158		
Co-op Academy Leeds	School Sixth Form	Leeds	44		
Hanson School	School Sixth Form	Bradford	577		

Immanuel College	School Sixth Form	Bradford	474		
Outwood Academy Hemsworth	School Sixth Form	Wakefield	684		
Roundhay School	School Sixth Form	Leeds	13		
Titus Salt School	School Sixth Form	Bradford	136		
Minsthorpe Community College	School Sixth Form	Wakefield	1107		
Total			16130	16130	100

* HESA progression data was not provided for Kirklees college. Uni Connect have limited engagement with FE learners in this college as none of the Uni Connect target wards are in Kirklees. Uni Connect mainly engage with their HE provision.

4.2.1 Neighbourhood deprivation

Table 2 below summarises the percentage of students living in quintiles one (most deprived) to five (affluent) by various measures currently used in the sector and advocated by the Office for Students (OfS) – TUNDRA, Polar 3 and 4, index of multiple deprivation, EST and IDACI. These are all area-based measures looking at participation rates in higher education. The distinction being POLAR is a historical measure looking at the HE participation rates of the local area whereas TUNDRA is the newer measure tracking underrepresentation by area. Mapping by geographical area of residence of learners and neighbourhood deprivation we found most students were living in neighbourhoods which do not have many young people studying/known to study in higher education.

Table 2 Percentage of students living in Quintiles one to five

Quintile	TUNDRA	POLAR 3	POLAR 4	IMD	EST	IDACI
1	32.3	49.2	40.5	47.3	51.5	34.7
2	22.2	20.3	30	19.9	21.0	27.6
3	23.8	19.4	16.8	14.4	11.8	17.4
4	14.7	6.1	8.7	12.2	10.3	11.4
5	5.5	4	3.1	5.3	4.4	7.9
Missing	1.5	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	99.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

All students in the database were expected to be in HE by the year 2020 (N=16130). However not all of them went on to pursue a course in higher education. Research reports show some educational and social factors (demographics) are known to be strongly associated with HE participation and progression. The analysis presented here has compared students in FE colleges and sixth form settings first by their family background (parental education, parental occupation) and then by educational aspects (post-16 qualification type). We have then mapped HE progression rates for students by type of institution (FE college, sixth form, secondary school) attended.

4.2.2 Parental education

Parental education is an important index of socioeconomic status and has been noted to predict children’s education outcome (Erola et al 2016). Currently this information about students is collected from UCAS application form and the data for UCAS entrants is shared with providers by UCAS. HE providers collect this information directly from relevant non-UCAS entrants. This data is required at entry to mark a student's engagement and is not required to be updated throughout the course. Students are asked about their parents' level of education. This includes natural parents, adoptive parents, stepparents or guardians who have brought them up. The form asks, *“Do any of your parents (as defined above) have any higher education qualifications, such as a degree, diploma, or certificate of higher education?”* As table 3 shows only 11.2% of all students had a parent who had a completed an HE degree while 21% said none of their parents had an HE qualification. We did not have information on parental education for the remaining students. Comparing parental education by institution types more students from sixth form colleges and school sixth forms said none of their parents had an HE degree.

Table 3 Parental education

Student response	% Students by type of institution			Total (N=16130)
	FE College (N=8465)	Sixth Form College (N=3660)	School Sixth Form (N=4005)	
Yes	6.2	21.6	12.3	1801(11.2%)
No	9.9	36.8	29.8	3381(21%)
Don't know	1.3	1.7	1.8	247(1.5%)
Missing data	82.6	39.9	56.1	10701(66.3%)

4.2.3 Parental occupation and socioeconomic background

Table 4 below shows the socioeconomic background of students. We have used the socioeconomic measure based on parental occupation as this measure is routinely used in national statistics to map employment relations and conditions of occupations. Conceptually these show the structure of socioeconomic positions in modern society and helps in explaining variations in social behaviour. Socioeconomic background is also strongly associated with educational attainment and progression in higher education. The categories include executives, high level managerial, mid-level managerial, skilled labourers, semi-skilled workers, irregular workers, and those who do not work or have been in long term unemployment. Students from lower socioeconomic background have been shown to have compromised learning trajectories in previous reports. Students in FE colleges had an equal distribution and came from various socioeconomic backgrounds, however sixth form centres had slightly more students from affluent families.

Table 4 Socio-economic classification

Socio-economic classification	Type of institution %			Total (N=16130)
	FE College (N=8465)	Sixth Form College (N=3660)	School Sixth Form (N=4005)	
Higher managerial & professional occupations	1.3	8.7	6.2	679(4.2%)
Lower managerial & professional occupations	2.6	15.6	8.5	1133(7%)
Intermediate occupations	2.4	7.6	4.8	675(4.2%)
Small employers & own account workers	1.8	3.5	3.7	432(2.7%)
Lower supervisory & technical occupations	2	4.7	3.3	475(2.9%)
Semi-routine occupations	2.1	8.4	7.7	795(4.9%)
Routine occupations	3	7.1	5.2	722(4.5%)
Never worked & long-term unemployed	0.03	0	0.1	8(0%)
Unknown	0.3	0.7	0.4	70(0.4%)
Not classified	2.4	6.7	5.8	680(4.2%)

Not found	81.9	36.9	54.3	10461(64.9%)
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4.2.4 Post-16 Qualifications by institution type

Students pursued different post-16 qualifications. A levels, Highers and BTec/vocational qualifications were some of the popular choices. None of the students had an international baccalaureate diploma. Table 5 below provides a summary of qualifications taken by students from FE colleges and sixth forms. Most students from FE colleges held vocational qualifications whereas most students from a school sixth form had A levels/Highers and some held a combination of A levels/Highers with vocational qualifications. Those from sixth form colleges generally followed the more traditional route to HE and held A level qualifications/Highers.

Table 5 Post-16 qualifications

	% students by educational setting			Count
	FE College (N=8465)	Sixth Form College (N=3660)	School Sixth Form (N=4005)	Total (N= 16130)
Student holds				
a combination of A levels / Highers and BTEC / VQs	0.2	11.1	14.4	6.2
A levels / Highers but not known to hold BTEC / VQs	5.6	43.3	17.9	17.2
BTEC / VQs but not known to hold A levels / Highers	7.7	7.5	11.9	8.7
not known to hold any A levels, Highers, BTECs nor VQs	4.5	1.3	1.5	3
Post-16 qualifications details not available	81.9	36.9	54.3	64.9

4.2.5 Progression in HE

5,669 students out of the eligible 16,130 students were identified in the HESA records as being enrolled in higher education which is nearly 35.1% of all students. These students were in the first year of their HE course in the reporting period. The expected length of their courses varied from one year to six years. As table 6 shows these students were in different levels of study. These were undergraduate degree, foundation degree or a Higher National Diploma (HND). First degree in table 6 below includes all first degrees at level H (including those with eligibility to register to practice with a health or social care or veterinary statutory regulatory body), ordinary (non-honours) first degrees, first degrees with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)/registration with a General Teaching Council (GTC), postgraduate Bachelor's degree at level H, integrated and enhanced first degrees (including those leading towards obtaining eligibility to

register to practice with a health or social care or veterinary statutory regulatory body), first degrees obtained concurrently with a diploma and intercalated first degrees. Foundation degrees include vocational higher education qualifications at level I. HND includes Diplomas of Higher Education including those leading towards obtaining eligibility to register to practice with a health or social care or veterinary statutory regulatory body and Higher National Diplomas (HND). A majority of students who had progressed to HE were pursuing an undergraduate course (34.7%) and a very small number of students were pursuing a foundation degree or HND.

Table 6 Level of study

	% students by type of post-16 institution added			Total (N=16130)
	FE College (N=8465)	Sixth Form College (N=3660)	School Sixth Form (N=4005)	
First degree	18	62.9	45.4	35
Foundation degree	0	0.1	0.2	0.1
Higher national diploma	0 (n=2)	0 (n=0)	0 (n=0)	0 (n=2)
Not found	81.9%	36.9%	54.3%	64.9%

Most students in HE were in the first (20%) or second year (11.6%) of their course and a small proportion of them had progressed to the third year (1.6%) or were in foundation year (1%). Following the UNISTATS methodology we were further able to investigate the progress these students made in higher education via longitudinal tracking.

Continuation status summarised in table 9 below refers to whether students have progressed from one year of study into the next or whether this has ceased. Continuation is tracked by comparing linked records for students in two successive year's data. We have used five different categories of continuation status. A student was marked as *continuing at HE provider* when they progressed into their following year of study. The second category *gained intended award or higher* was for those students who achieved a qualification in either of the two comparison years and that qualification was deemed to be equivalent to or higher than the qualification aimed for in the first of the two comparison years. A student was marked as *gained other award* when they did not progress into their following year of study, because they achieved a qualification in either of the two comparison years and that qualification was deemed to be lower than the qualification aimed for in the first of the two comparison years. There were also some students who

were recorded as *dormant* or writing-up status in the second of the comparison years and who had not obtained a qualification. A small proportion of students *left with no award* and were not continuing into their following year of study, had not been awarded a qualification in either of the two comparison years and were not recorded as having a dormant status.

There was a lot of missing data for this variable but amongst those for whom records were available we found a majority of those who were in HE were continuing their studies. From previous years some students had already completed a course and had a degree awarded. A very small proportion of those who had joined had left the course without completing a degree and with no award (see table 7).

Table 9 Continuation in HE

Progress in HE	% Students by type of post-16 institution			Total (N=16130)
	FE College (N=8465)	Sixth Form College (N=3660)	School Sixth Form (N=4005)	
Continuing at HE provider	9.4%	25.6%	15.5%	14.6%
Dormant or writing-up	0.2%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%
Gained intended award or higher	0.1%	0.4%	0.1%	0.2%
Gained other award	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%	0.4%
Left with no award	0.8%	1.3%	1.8%	1.1%
Not applicable	7.2%	34.9%	27.8%	18.6%
Not found	81.9%	36.9%	54.3%	64.9%

4.3 Analysis and Discussion of the Focus Group Interviews

This section reports on the findings of the focus group interviews, and sought to elicit the perspectives and experiences of the young people themselves, and to voice the nuances and complexities of diverse individuals.

4.3.1 Further Education Colleges: Post-16 Choices

Six male learners (66.6% White British, 16.6% Pakistani and 16.6% Other Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups) at a West Yorkshire FEC participated in focus groups. Three (50%) were on Level 3 Year 1 of programme (equivalent to Year 12) and three were on Level 3 Year 2 of programme (equivalent of Year 13). All learners

in this category were studying BTEC vocational diplomas. The learners discussed the reasons for choosing to study in a college setting. Thematic analysis has enabled grouping of the reasons provided into two broad themes:

Subject options

One of the most common themes of reasons given related to the subject choices available to them compared to at a sixth form. Responses indicated that learners studying at an FEC chose to do so because:

- the subject choices were better at college than offered at sixth form (50%),
- they wanted to do one subject more specifically, rather than three individual A Level subjects (33.3%),
- they sought more practical-based lessons rather than 'traditional' lessons (33.3%),
- one learner wanted to study a qualification at college to get into a specified subject at university (16.7%), and
- one learner they had not yet decided their future aims so chose based on having options after post-16 study (16.7%).

Perceived experiences

Another common theme among the reasons given related to perceived comparisons learners made between college settings and sixth form settings and a desire to seek new experiences. Specific considerations identified were:

- it is somewhere different – new start, meet new people, and the course is in much more detail than at school sixth form (83.3%),
- more opportunities, for example trips and speakers, with more variation at a college than at school sixth form (50%),
- college looked more interesting than sixth form.

No learners mentioned prior attainment or any limitations on access to sixth form or study options as a result of GCSE results. Equally, no learners disclosed that their secondary school had provided specific guidance as to studying at a sixth form or FEC. There appeared no variations between ethnicities as to the reasons these learners chose post-16 study in a college setting.

4.3.2 Further Education Colleges: Post-16 education experiences

The learners discussed their experiences of studying in a college setting, and all spoke positively about their experiences. Thematic analysis has enabled grouping of the reasons provided into two broad themes:

Learning and teaching

All the FEC learners were passionate about the learning and teaching strategies adopted on their courses. There was consistent agreement about how their learning and teaching experiences had been positive, with responses including:

- *“Great, really interactive and they [teachers] really know what they’re talking about”*
- *“It’s much better that there are some practicals and that you can make improvements on coursework or resit on exams straight away”*
- *“Some people are better at learning using different methods so at college there are more opportunities to learn in a way that suits you”*
- *“Teachers make it more simple to understand what you need to do to achieve and succeed”*
- *“Teachers provide more 1-2-1 support and have more subject knowledge which is really great”.*

Environment and structure

In addition to the learning and teaching perceived by learners, FEC learners also identified positive experiences relating to the theme of structure, for example timetables. Responses included:

- *“I’ve really enjoyed the year and the fact that it’s not 5 days a week like school, leaving me more time to do things I need to do”*
- *“You get more time to do the assessed work”*
- *“It’s great that everything you need is also online so if you miss anything you can easily get it”*
- *“I enjoy it more as you have more freedom, more independence”.*

However, two learners in their first year of FEC study explained that their experiences had not been quite what they expected, with fewer educational and practical excursions than they had anticipated.

4.3.3 Further Education Colleges: Progression to HE

There seemed some uncertainty about HE and, with the Year 1 learners particularly, decisions had not yet been reached. Their narratives were all similar in respect to not really giving thought to HE previously.

Knowledge of options

The learners in FECs discussed a range of progression options following post-16 study and demonstrated an awareness of the range of options available. Of the six FEC learners:

- Two thirds learners were unsure about their progression,
- One third considering apprenticeships,
- One third were thinking HE might be for them,
- One third very seriously considering progression to HE.

Only one learner discussed prior attainment as part of their perceptions and intentions towards HE, stating: *"I'm not sure a degree would be for me as haven't got [GCSE] Maths and an apprenticeship is more linked to job so that might be better for someone like me"*.

Agency

From the focus groups, the Year 2 learners appeared to have developed agency whilst at college, empowering themselves and allowing them to draw on appropriate resources to now consider HE as a viable progression option where they had not done previously.

"At high school I was thinking no chance am I getting to uni. But coming to college has made me think about it more and I want to do it more now than I did before. The course has given me more confidence to think about going to uni and that I could do it."

Four learners (40%) had parents who studied HE although they did not discuss that this had any influence over their own decisions. From the discussions, it was suggested that the support of the college, and the teachers, were influential in providing the confidence and resources needed to perceive HE as a viable progression option. There are some links here to HE discourse concerning non-traditional learners, including Finnegan and colleagues (2014) who reported finding that non-traditional students are often agentic and resilient in finding ways to struggle against inequality and filling subject positions within HE (p. 154). Merrill (2012, p. 35) also notes that support for non-traditional students, pivotal in their continuing of their studies can come from, for example, family, peers, lecturers/tutors, personal tutors and/or wider institutional support.

4.3.4 Sixth Forms: Post-16 choices

20 learners at West Yorkshire sixth forms (one sixth form college and three school sixth forms) participated in focus groups. Learners included 10 females (30% White British, 30% Pakistani, 20% Bangladeshi, 10% White and Asian, and 10% White or Black African) and 10 males (50% White British, 20% Any other White background, 10% Bangladeshi, 10% Pakistani, and 10% White and Asian). 18 (90%) were in Year 12 of sixth form with 2 (10%) in Year 13. All the learners studying at the school sixth form (10) were studying three A Levels. Of the 10 learners studying at a sixth form college, four were studying three A Levels and six were studying a combination of A Levels and vocational BTEC certificates or diplomas. This means, of the learners studying at a sixth form 70% (14/20) were studying A Levels only and 30% (6/20) were studying a combination of A Levels and vocational qualifications.

The learners discussed the reasons for choosing to study in a sixth form setting. Thematic analysis has enabled grouping of the reasons provided into the same two broad themes as those identified with FEC learners. Interestingly, there were some variations in reasons observed between those learners studying at a sixth form college compared to those studying at a school sixth form.

Subject options

Subject choices available to learners were identified as important in the decision-making to study post-16 education at a sixth form. Responses indicated that learners studying at a sixth form college chose to do so because they:

- preferred the subjects on offer,
- wanted to study particular A Level combinations for progression to a particular HE course,
- were unsure of their future aims so chose based on leaving options.

For those studying at a school sixth form, learners identified that the subjects they wanted were on offer, with one learner stating that colleges did not necessarily offer the combinations they were looking for.

Perceived experiences

Like FEC learners, the perceived new experiences to be had were drawn from the focus group discussions. However, again, there were similarities between FEC learners and sixth form college learners and variations between sixth form college learners and school sixth form learners.

Sixth form college learners stated that they were looking for somewhere different to school to study in post-16 education, with one learner specifically identifying that she did not like the school art department as it did not allow creative experimentation whereas that was possible at a sixth form college. One learner also identified that the college was close to where they lived and that had influenced their decision. Another learner discussed that their secondary school did not have a sixth form but that the school partnered with his sixth form college and so progression to there seemed to be a given progression.

School sixth form learners were much clearer about their reasons for studying at school sixth form being about the known environment and familiarity. Responses included:

- *“I was already at the school, and it’s local, so I didn’t need change. Plus it has a good reputation and the best music department. It already had everything I needed so I had no reason to look elsewhere.”*
- *“You know what you’re going to get [experience].”*
- *“It was convenient and I already know the teachers.”*
- *“It was just easier as we were already there.”*
- *“I live close to school and it’s familiar, like, I’ve been going for years so why change.”*
- *“There is a tendency at our school to just carry on and get the grades to stay so it’s the expected.”*

All the school sixth form learners were studying A Level subjects, with the decision making process to study at sixth form presumably made quite early in the schooling and reflecting the existing literature that those progressing onto academic routes such as A Levels tend to make a final decision earlier than those progressing into technical pathways (DfE, 2017).

4.3.5 Sixth Forms: Post-16 education experiences

The learners discussed their experiences of studying in a sixth form setting, and all spoke positively about their experiences. Thematic analysis has enabled grouping of the reasons provided into the same two broad themes as the FEC learners:

Learning and teaching

All the sixth form learners were passionate about the learning and teaching strategies adopted on their courses. There was consistent agreement across both sixth form college and school sixth form learners about how their learning and teaching experiences had been positive, with responses including:

- *“It’s been really good and I really enjoy it. I like being creative and that I’m allowed to do own style”*
- *“The subjects we cover are hard but I’ve been doing ok. The teachers are really nice and supportive and help if you don’t understand”*
- *“My experience has been positive, the teachers are friendly, but I knew what to expect. I feel it’s good quality”*
- *“I’ve found it to be very good. It’s friendly, high quality, and everyone knows everyone”*
- *“I like the teacher interaction as known I’ve known them for years”*

Environment and structure

The responses indicated some similarities between FEC learners and those studying at a sixth form college, both expressing several positive perceptions of their experiences in relation to structural elements of their setting. However, one learner also described how they had found it difficult to adjust to the independence and autonomy needed for self-directed learning if the teacher was off sick and no cover was available, although they found the overall experience at college to be good.

However, school sixth form learners only discussed things they perceived as negative in this regarding, stating:

- *“Now, I wish I’d gone elsewhere to be treated less like at school, like a child, and more like an adult”*
- *“My experience has not been good. I’ve experienced homophobia, really bad, and been yelled at in corridors, but the teachers are like school teachers and just do nothing about it.”*

4.3.6 Sixth Forms: Progression to HE

Unlike the students in FEC settings, learners in sixth form settings were generally much more certain about their post-18 options and progression to HE, particularly those from school sixth forms.

Knowledge of options

The learners in sixth form colleges appeared to have little knowledge about various options, although not as much as the learners from FEC settings. Of the 10 learners from sixth form college settings, six (60%) discussed that they had always intended to progress to HE. Three (30%) said they were not always thinking about progressing to HE but that their sixth form college were encouraging them to. One learner stated he was not yet sure about progressing to HE and that he was considering an apprenticeship route.

Of the 10 school sixth form learners, 90% were clear that progression to HE was always the intention, with only one student stating they have thought about HE more recently as it has been made attractive to them by their teachers and peers. This reflects the findings of Dickinson (2019), that young people on academic pathways start to think about their post-18 choices earlier than those on technical routes, possibly as early as Year 7 or 8.

The findings support those of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (Schoon and Lyons-Amos, 2017) which suggested that there is little movement between different broad types of post-18 pathway (e.g. higher education, technical education or employment). Here, we observed that those studying at FECs on vocational programmes, as well as learners at sixth form colleges studying a combination of A Levels and vocational subjects, were considering an apprenticeship route, over HE, after their post-16 study. Whereas, those studying only A Levels, both in sixth form colleges and school sixth forms, only appeared to consider HE as a progression option with no mention of alternative routes.

Agency

From the focus groups, all sixth form learners appeared to have well-established agency whilst at college. 55% (11/20) of the sixth form learners have parents who completed HE study, with a further two students stating they had parents who started HE but did not complete. Again, variations were observed between sixth form college learners and school sixth form learners, two school sixth form learners specifically mentioning that their whole family have studied HE, including a parent studying a Masters. 60% (6/10) sixth form college learners and only 30% (3/10) of school sixth form learners were first in family to progress to HE.

4.3.7 Key Differences between the two settings

The experiences and intentions of post-16 learners do appear to differ across FE College settings and sixth form settings, but more so between FECs and school sixth forms as well as between sixth form colleges and school sixth forms.

Post-16 choices

The findings suggest that learners who chose to study post-16 education at FECs considered more elements of their options such as subject choices and perceived experience compared to those studying at a sixth form which appeared more of the only natural, in some cases expected, option. This is only based

on the information learners themselves chose to disclose, no participating learner referring to any options being made more, or less, available to them due to their GCSE attainment.

In terms of decision-making based on the subject options available to them, this appeared much more important to FEC learners than sixth form learners. However, there were variations among sixth form learners whereby those studying at a sixth form college highlighted subject options in some of the discussions were little was mentioned about this in the focus groups with those studying at school sixth forms.

FEC learners also discussed the experience(s) they perceived they would access compared to sixth form, much more than sixth form learners. In particular, FEC learners highlighted that they would benefit from a different and new environment and more opportunities. Sixth form college learners also mentioned looking forward to potential benefits of a different environment to school, although to a much lesser extent that FEC learners, with school sixth form learners discussing being influenced by location, convenience, and progression to school sixth form being the natural choice, familiar, and expected decision.

No learners identified GCSE attainment as a factor in their choices; however, other influential factors included in existing literature and discourse were disclosed, including:

- aspirations to attend university,
- access to resources,
- awareness of the options,
- proximity to providers.

(Barrett, 1999; Ashworth and Evans, 2001; Furlong, 2005; Archer, DeWitt and Wong, 2014; Battiston et al., 2020, Dickerson et al., 2020).

For FEC learners, their influences were more notably linked to access to resources and awareness of options whereas for sixth form learners it was more about aspirations to attend university and the proximity of providers.

When discussing actual experience whilst studying post-16 education, on the whole, those of FEC learners appeared to be more positive than those of the sixth form learners. All learners, regardless of settings,

were positive about their learning and teaching but there were some significant differences between learners in different settings when considering their overall perceptions.

FEC learners praised their learning experiences as being more practical and interactive, with knowledgeable and supportive teachers, and an appreciation for varied learning styles. Sixth form college learners also identified specific elements of knowledgeable and supportive teachers as important to their experiences. However, where FEC learners described not having a 5-day timetable as a very positive thing, which allowed for other commitments they had in their lives, sixth form colleges found this a negative having found it difficult to adjust to independent and autonomous study.

School sixth form learners discussed their learning experiences and environment to a much lesser extent, some unable to make any comparisons as they were studying in the same school they had been at since the age of 11. The only comments were regarding wishing they had studied post-16 education elsewhere as they felt they were still treated like school children, and specific examples of homophobia experienced. Finnegan *et al.*, (2014) say that students seek an environment that will respect and recognise them as people and that will treat them in all relations as such (p. 162). This is particularly pertinent here. Real interpersonal forms of engagement that encourage a relationship that respects student voices and concerns (Finnegan *et al.*, 2014, p. 162) allow for cooperative behaviour and creative exploration of self and world (West, 1996).

Whilst the sixth form learners were more certain about their post-18 progression decisions, it is worth noting the differences in shift in attitudes and awareness of the options available, particularly for FEC learners. FEC learners attribute this largely to the encouragement of their teachers and a developed sense of confidence towards HE. West (1996) describes that personal attention and recognition enables students to believe in themselves and to survive, and as making all the difference (p. 201). The value students place on institutional support, more specifically the relationship with teaching staff, appeared influential. Thomas (2002) states that this relationship is fundamental to attitudes towards learning and overcoming academic difficulties (p. 432). She highlighted that if students felt staff believed in them, and cared about their outcomes, they gained self-confidence and motivation resulting in improved work (Thomas, 2002, p. 432).

The biggest difference between learners at FECs and sixth forms was in relation to intentions towards HE, again with variations also observed between sixth form college and school sixth form learners. Among FEC learners, there was a high level of uncertainty regarding progression to HE, and 60% would be first in family, but learners were aware of a good range of other options aside from HE (such as apprenticeships). Sixth form college learners were more certain about HE, with 60% stating they always intended to progress to HE and 60% being first in family. However, school sixth form learners were extremely certain about their intentions to progress to HE, with 90% stating they always intended to progress to HE, no mention of other options, and 30% being first in family.

The learners at FECs appeared to find the decision-making process more complex, with several influential factors impacting choice, including awareness of the range of options available and having not necessarily considered HE previously. Some of the demographic characteristics influencing post-18 options, as identified by Dickinson (2019), may also have played a part, particularly where learners are considering apprenticeships and technical routes over academic routes, a large number were from lower socio-economic groups, and larger proportions of learners' parents did not go to university, compared to sixth form learners.

It is potentially the influence of family and peers that has developed ingrained and embodied dispositions within sixth form learners to both stay at sixth form and their intentions to progress to HE. Having family members who have followed the same progression pathways would help generate a social and cultural capital for such a pathway for themselves. Finnegan and Merrill (2017, p. 314) argue that the interplay between personal and collective dimensions of identity is sociologically very important and students reconstruct class identities through education.

Where a learner comes from a family with large numbers of family members holding degree qualifications, these material circumstances create an embodiment of thoughts and beliefs, a system or predispositions (*habitus*) that shape the learner's own perspectives and understanding of their experiences (Bourdieu 1984; 1977). Parents, and teachers within schools encouraging progression to their own sixth form with the view to attaining entry grades for university, provide embodied cultural capital by transmitting the expected behaviours, attitudes and knowledge needed to achieve in school and progress into HE, which acts as a powerful principle of symbolic efficacy (see for example Bourdieu, 1996; 1986). Some FEC learners have education journeys that are more complex and require the accrual of cultural capital during their

post-16 education, largely from teachers and peers, to develop confidence and empowerment to progress to HE. However, these students are more informed in their decision-making.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

One pragmatic problem which has arisen from the research is that the statistical data available to conduct the research is very variable in both availability and consistency. It was impossible to conduct any meaningful analysis of attainment data as so little was available. Nonetheless, the points outlined below from the analysis of progression data seem particularly salient for the work of GHWY:

- ❑ FE students were most likely to have parents/carers without any HE qualifications whereas students in sixth forms were more likely to have parents/carers with HE qualifications.
- ❑ FE students were least likely to be from higher socioeconomic background classified by parental occupation such as those having managerial and professional occupations. More sixth form students were from higher SECs.
- ❑ FE students were more likely to pursue BTEC and vocational qualifications. Sixth form students were more likely to take up A levels.
- ❑ Most students who progressed on to pursue a course in higher education were from sixth form centres. These were clearly also the students from relatively affluent backgrounds and who took the traditional A levels route rather than VQs.

These points do flag up a clear difference between FE and sixth form students in terms of socio-economic background, with FE colleges being more likely to attract students from less advantaged families than sixth forms. This appears to play out in the choice of qualifications selected, and in progression to HE.

It is, of course, important to be aware of what statistical can and cannot tell you. Statistical data has real strengths in being able to highlight patterns, trends over time, and generalisations, but it is less helpful in generating evidence about individual students' perceptions and experience. It is important always to remember the importance of recognising that individuals may present different characteristics or choices from those identified by the statistics. The focus group interviews complement the statistical data by presenting a more complex and nuanced interpretation of students' experience, for example, in showing that for some students the familiarity and 'safety' of sixth forms prompts their choice of study there, whereas for others, the freedom and new experience of FE colleges attracts them to study there.

In the light of these findings we suggest the following recommendations for consideration:

1. Decide what statistical data is most important to inform GHWY's work and strive to create an agreement with local colleges and sixth forms about what key data will be routinely collected. This will permit better comparisons of trends and patterns across settings and over time.
2. Consider manageable ways to routinely gather student voice and elicit individual perspectives, perhaps using digital survey tools on an annual basis, or creating focus groups that meet on a reasonably regular basis.
3. It is important to integrate evaluation right from the planning stage when developing an intervention or outreach programme. This will help the provider to see what data needs to be collected to understand which schemes delivered by the provider are working and what could work better. It will also help to ensure the whole process is cost effective and robust.
4. Given that there is a tendency for choice of setting and qualification to be strongly linked to socio-economic background, it might be productive to open cross-setting discussion about this. Do these choices predispose students to particular outcomes, or are they effective because they meet diverse needs? Is the Information, Advice and Guidance appropriate or steering students towards making particular decisions? It may also be productive to discuss whether there are opportunities for stronger collaboration across settings to share teaching, courses offered, and other student experiences.

7.0 Dissemination and impact

We have had a paper accepted for the conference organised by the Society of Research in Higher education (SRHE). We also expect to submit the research as a journal article in due course.

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