

Other titles from IES:

The IES Annual Graduate Review 2004

Perryman S

IES Report 406, 2004. ISBN 1 85184 331 0

Your Graduates and You: Effective Strategies for Graduate Recruitment and Development

Connor H, Hirsh W, Barber L

IES Report 400, 2003. ISBN 1 85184 327 2

The IES Annual Graduate Review: 2003 update: Business as usual? Trends in student and graduate numbers

Perryman S

IES Report 399, 2003

Exploring e-Learning

Pollard E, Hillage J

IES Report 376, 2001. ISBN 1 85184 305 1

Adult Learning in England: a Review

Hillage J, Uden T, Aldridge F, Eccles J

IES Report 369, 2000. ISBN 1 85184 299 3

A catalogue of these and over 100 other titles is available from IES, or on the IES Website, www.employment-studies.co.uk

Next Choices: Career Choices Beyond University

E Pollard
R Pearson
R Willison

Published by:

INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT STUDIES
Mantell Building
Falmer
Brighton BN1 9RF
UK

Tel. + 44 (0) 1273 686751

Fax + 44 (0) 1273 690430

<http://www.employment-studies.co.uk>

Copyright © 2004 Institute for Employment Studies

No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form by any means—graphic, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording, taping or information storage or retrieval systems—without prior permission in writing from the Institute for Employment Studies.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 1 85184 334 5

Printed in Great Britain

The Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in human resource issues. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. For over 30 years the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has over 60 multidisciplinary staff and international associates. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, publications and the Internet.

IES aims to help bring about sustainable improvements in employment policy and human resource management. IES achieves this by increasing the understanding and improving the practice of key decision makers in policy bodies and employing organisations.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Department for Education and Skills for their financial support for the study. We are also indebted to David Thompson and the research steering group including Margaret Dane, William Locke, Mary Degg, Craig Toulson and Sarbani Banerjee for their helpful comments. Thanks too go to Sarah Perryman, Helen Connor, and Carol Barber at IES for their help with the report; and to Marije Van Gent, Darcy Hill, and Geoff Pike for their assistance with the data collection.

However, our main thanks go to the individuals who, over the years, have completed questionnaires and taken part in interviews and enabled us to track their progress.

Contents

Executive Summary	ix
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Research context	1
1.2 This new 'Wave III' follow-up study – methodology	14
1.3 Report contents	18
2. Completing Initial Higher Education Studies	20
2.1 Introduction	20
2.2 Experiences whilst studying	20
2.3 Completing studies	29
3. Leaving Early	34
3.1 Introduction	34
3.2 Leaving early	35
3.3 Original choices	36
3.4 Making the break	41
3.5 Options and choices on leaving	47
3.6 Early leavers reflections on their higher education experiences	50
4. Employment Experiences After Graduation	52
4.1 Introduction	52
4.2 Activities	52
4.3 Characteristics of current job	58
4.4 Perceived quality of jobs	65
4.5 Impact of early career activities	70
4.6 Geographical mobility	71
5. Building Skills Through Further Study	75
5.1 Introduction	75
5.2 Studying beyond first degree	75
5.3 Significant additional study	78
5.4 Going back	84

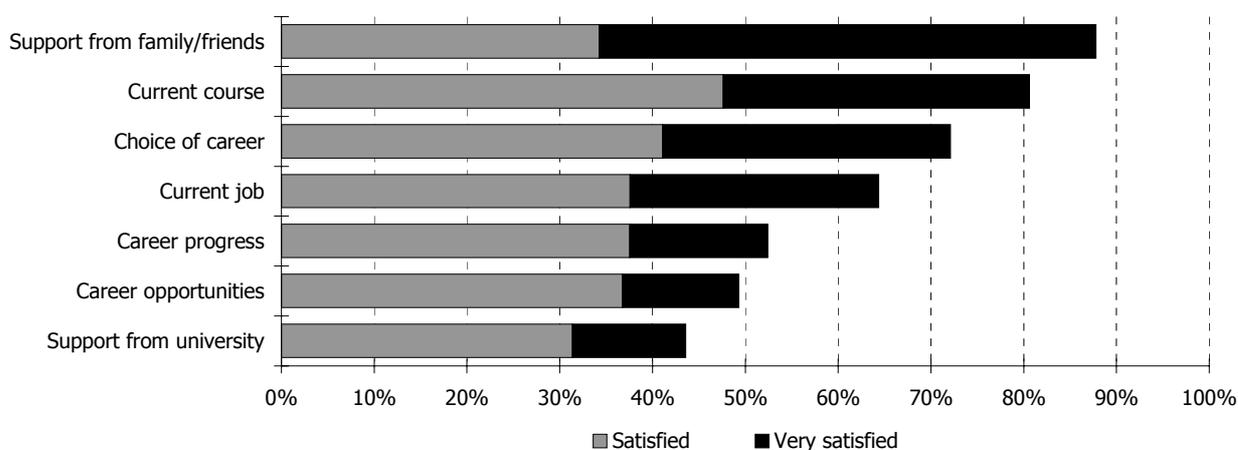
6. Career and Current Choices	86
6.1 Introduction	86
6.2 Careers advice and guidance	86
6.3 Career satisfaction	94
6.4 Changes	99
7. Reflecting Upon Choices and Experiences	102
7.1 Introduction	102
7.2 Value of higher education	102
7.3 Right choices?	107
8. Summary and Conclusion	111
8.1 The research	111
8.2 Making the right choice	111
8.3 Their experiences whilst studying	112
8.4 Moving into employment after graduation	114
8.5 The start of lifelong learning	116
8.6 The value of higher education	116
8.7 Room for improvement	117
Appendix A: Further Details About the Sample and Methodology	119
Weighting the data	119
Sample key characteristics	120
Appendix B: Summaries from <i>Making the Right Choice</i> (Wave I), and <i>Right Choice?</i> (Wave II) reports published by Universities UK Publications Department	124
Appendix C: Bibliography	125

Executive Summary

Was it the right choice?

Do the 40,000 who enter higher education each year value their experience, and do they make the right choice about where and what to study? The applicants of 1998, the first cohort to pay tuition fees, certainly have a positive perspective, but more could be done to support and improve the decisions of future applicants. Six years after their initial application, the majority had successfully graduated and remained confident about their choices. Most were also satisfied with their choice of career, but to a lesser extent with the opportunities open to them and their career progress to date. For the majority, the benefits had outweighed the costs of higher education.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with career aspects and choices (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

The most satisfied tended to be traditional graduates, who had completed their studies with good results, and were mobile in the national labour market; and those now in good jobs. Least satisfied were those who gained a lower class of degree, or who failed to complete, or were in lower-paid, lower-level occupations; and those who returned home after their studies.

Work, study, and debt

Most worked whilst studying, either during vacation or in term time, but the substantial minority (42 per cent) who regularly

worked during term time (controlling for ability by using 'A' level points, and for a range of other personal and educational variables) were less likely to gain a good degree. This is a concern, as those from lower socio-economic groups, from families with lower income, and from minority groups were more likely to work during term time.

Costs were a significant issue for many. The average level of debt on completion was almost £10,000. The highest debt was for those from less privileged backgrounds (*ie* low family income) and those who studied away from home.

Some leave early

A small minority of students left their course early; they came from diverse backgrounds and left for different reasons. The younger leavers felt they had often made hasty or ill-informed choices, and looking back realised they did not really know what they wanted from their higher education; the move to higher education was just the next step on the 'education conveyor belt'. The more mature leavers recognised their circumstances often limited their choices, but felt they had an obstacle course to overcome to get into and through higher education. Few of the leavers sought advice about their decision to leave, or about their subsequent choices. Many, however, returned to higher education, often after a period of employment, or while continuing employment. Three-quarters of the leavers saw some value in their time in higher education, as it helped them to make better future choices and increased their self-confidence. However, this experience came at a financial cost and, for some, it outweighed any potential benefits.

Most work after graduation

Those most active in job search while studying, were the most successful in the labour market. Family and friends were particularly important for careers guidance after graduation. Thus, those from families and communities with little experience of higher education may get less broad-ranging advice.

Many graduates were surprised at how difficult it was to find work. A substantial minority moved into temporary or low-quality jobs. For some this was for a 'breathing space', or to start to pay off debt, but for others it was due to a lack of visible alternatives. The latter tended to be those who at graduation had no clear career plans. Nearly two years after graduating, an increasing proportion of graduates had moved into permanent work. However, the less advantaged individuals (from lower socio-economic groups and with lower family incomes) found it the most difficult to move into permanent work. Annual salaries ranged from £500 to over £40,000 with a median of £16,000.

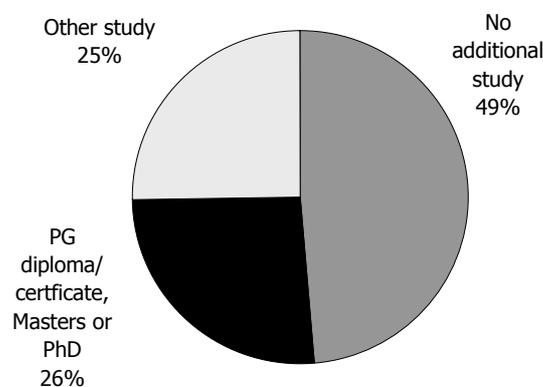
Those earning the higher salaries, and in what they perceived to be good quality jobs, tended to be male, from higher socio-economic groups and from families with higher incomes (*ie* 'traditional' graduates). Those in poor quality jobs tended to be the less advantaged (from lower socio-economic groups and with lower family incomes), and to have been less successful in higher education. They were also less likely to think about jobs and careers and take action whilst in higher education.

Those who moved to study and work were the most likely to find 'good' jobs; those who returned to their home region to look for work had a particularly difficult time.

The start of lifelong learning?

Significantly, half had not engaged in any further study since they graduated or left higher education. Those least likely to engage in further study were men; from families with high incomes; had studied vocational subjects; or were from post-92 institutions. Perhaps most worryingly, many were in poor quality jobs. Of those engaging in further study, half were on full-time MSc, PhD or diploma courses, the others were mostly studying on short courses while working, or working towards professional qualifications.

Figure 2: Additional study activity (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

Most value their higher education

Overall, the graduates painted a very positive picture of their choices of, and experiences in and after higher education. Higher education had helped them with their future prospects. Even though many anticipated, and left with sizeable levels of debt, the vast majority felt that the benefits they gained (and would continue to reap) from higher education outweighed the costs. They would, however, have welcomed more advice as to the nature and financing of these costs. The majority of early leavers were still positive about the value of their time in higher

education; the experience had encouraged them to continue to learn (and many successfully returned to higher education or some other form of study), increased their self-confidence, and increased their (perceived) attractiveness to employers.

However, traditional graduates (younger, white, middle class) tended to have the best outcomes, while those from less traditional backgrounds achieved lower results and were more likely to have weaker labour market outcomes and lower satisfaction.

... but room for improvement

While most were satisfied with their choices, experiences and outcomes, further improvements in careers advice and support would add value for future students. All students need to take well informed decisions, consider the full range of options both within and out of higher education, undertake more visits to higher education institutions, and to talk to more students in higher education. Prior to entry they need better information as to the likely costs, managing their expenditure, sources of funding, and the pros and cons of paid work during term time and vacations.

Once in higher education, students need an early understanding of the value and importance of work experience. They also need to consider their choice of career, the ways to access their chosen career, and the importance of lifelong learning. Advice should be particularly targeted at non-traditional students, and the least mobile, as they are most likely to end up in poor quality jobs.

Good practice in retaining and advising potential early leavers should be disseminated widely. It should focus on the identification of those most at risk of leaving, encouraging them to seek advice early, helping those who wish to remain to do so, or to transfer them to a more suitable course/institution (or to manage their exit from higher education).

Finally, careers support after leaving is especially important for those moving into lower quality jobs. This is a particular challenge for graduates returning home after their studies and who are often unclear as to what support may be available locally, *eg* through their local higher education institutions and careers services.

The research

This report presents the experiences of 1,500 individuals who applied to enter higher education in 1998 and were surveyed for a third time (Wave III) in 2003 about their choices and experiences up to two years post graduation. It follows on from *Making the Right Choice*, which looked at how potential students chose their

place of study (Wave I), and *Right Choice?*, which explored outcomes of their applications and experiences in higher education in 2001 (Wave II). Whilst not representative of all graduates, it presents a continuing picture of life in and beyond HE. This wave of the research was funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES); the conclusions are, however, the sole responsibility of the authors.

1. Introduction

This report is the third in a series (the 'Choices' series) of reports by the Institute for Employment Studies, that tracks the choices and experiences of a cohort of individuals who applied to a higher education institution (through UCAS) in 1998. The first report, *Making the Right Choice* (1999), focused on the choices and decisions about higher education of over 20,000 potential students. It was the first major national study examining the choices of individuals in the 'mass higher education market', and provided a wealth of information to policy makers, individual institutions, higher education students and potential students. The second report, *Right Choice?* (2001), followed the cohort as the majority progressed into higher education, and examined how well their earlier choices worked out. Now, as the majority of the cohort move out of higher education and into the labour market, this report continues to monitor student experiences. It looks at the outcomes of their time in higher education, and their career choices and experiences beyond university or college. It also looks at the experiences of those who tried higher education but withdrew from their course early. This study has been funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

1.1 Research context

It is useful here to set the research in context, in terms of the changes in the higher education sector over the period that the three waves of research have been conducted, and to look back at the choices the cohort have already made. It is particularly useful to explore the literature in relation to employability and the graduate labour market; and leaving higher education early.

1.1.1 Changes in the higher education sector

Compared to more than a decade ago, we now have a higher education sector with:

- increased student numbers

A period of rapid expansion in the 1980s and early 1990s has been followed by relatively stable numbers, but more recently the numbers have once again picked up. The undergraduate

entrant population increased by 25 per cent from 1994/95 to 2000/01 (Ramsden, 2003). In 2001/02, there were 1.5 million UK undergraduate students studying in UK higher education institutions, with the number of home and EC students increasing by approximately 10,000 each year between 2001 and 2003 (HESA Statistics, 2003).

- a more diverse student population

'Women and ethnic minorities now have high levels of representation in higher education' (NAO, 2002b). In the early 1990s, women began to participate in higher education at the same overall rate as men, and now outnumber them; although gender segregation persists in subject areas. The higher education participation rate amongst minority ethnic groups is high. Indeed, 15 per cent of the student population are from minority ethnic groups, compared to six per cent of the total working age population (NAO, 2002b). The number of individuals from lower socio-economic groups participating in higher education has been increasing. However, students from lower socio-economic groups continue to be under-represented, and the participation gap *'remains unacceptably wide'* (DfES, 2003b; Connor and Dewson, 2001).

- a wider range of courses and study methods available

These include: sub-degree qualifications (*eg* foundation degrees); higher education provision in the further education sector; e-learning; and part-time study, where individuals can combine study with work or other responsibilities. Indeed, the part-time undergraduate student population has increased much faster than the full-time population (increasing by 20 per cent from 1999 to 2001, compared to only a one per cent increase in the full-time undergraduate population [HESA, 2003]). Also, the numbers of higher education students receiving qualifications below degree level increased by 39 per cent from 1994/95 to 2000/01 compared to 12 per cent obtaining honours degrees (DfES, 2003b).

- changed student funding arrangements

These include the abolition of maintenance grants, and the introduction of standard tuition fees (in 1998/99, when the IES *Choice* cohort were applying to higher education). There are plans to change funding arrangements further by restoring grants for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and removing up-front tuition fees, but at the same time, allowing institutions to increase these fees through the 'Graduate Contribution Scheme' (DfES, 2003b).

- with students as consumers.

'Few, if any, universities can now afford to ignore the changing role of university students, and the transition of the student population from an elite group of submissive patronised apprentices to a large and diverse collection of demanding clients.' (Coaldrake, 2001, p.78).

The sector has become more diverse, and the choice available to potential students has increased and become more complex as information (and information formats) available to students has multiplied, and as the personal financial costs of higher education have continued to increase. The expansion of the sector has also been accompanied by an increased concern and focus on dropout rates (see DfES, 2003b). All of this has heightened the need for potential students to make well-informed decisions.

As such, it has become critically important for all stakeholders – potential students, providers of higher education, and policy makers – to understand the choice process of, and factors influencing, individuals as they move into, through and out of higher education. There is also a need to fully understand how students make appropriate choices, and what happens to those that don't. The choice process is a chain of interlocking decisions, with the initial choices made by individuals influencing satisfaction with their experience of higher education, which in turn can influence attainment (and indeed completion), which can influence further choices such as career choices and labour market activities.

This research examines the choice process. For every respondent, data gathered from this survey has been merged with data collected at two previous time points to provide a picture of how the choices of these individuals have evolved over time. These data range from decisions about what and where to study, to satisfaction with initial choices and university experiences (and whether to continue with study), to decisions about careers and experiences in the labour market. Choices and experiences were captured as they happen. This is in contrast to other studies that collect retrospective data, requiring individuals to report on decisions and choices made some time in the past.

1.1.2 Students' choices

Application choices

The first wave (Wave I) of research, reported as '*Making the Right Choice: How Students Choose Universities and Colleges*' (1999) highlighted that potential students made a series of choices about higher education. Firstly they chose whether to go into higher education at all, and this decision was made early, with choices largely formulated by Year 11 (S4). The next decision related to the subject of study, and this was followed by (and often closely linked to) choosing a university or college. Indeed, the subject of study was the most important factor to students when choosing a university or college. However, older students also looked towards academic quality and location (closeness to home) whilst younger students were more likely to seek a balance between academic quality and social life. Cost was also a significant factor in the choice process, particularly for non-traditional student groups,

encouraging many to study close to home and/or on a course where there are considered to be good employment prospects.

Many applicants found this early choice process complex and difficult. They used a range of information sources and were influenced by a range of people when making their decisions. Not all applicants used the same information, but the university/college prospectus was considered particularly useful.

The study concluded that, for potential students to become 'informed consumers' and make the 'best' decisions, they need: decision making tools, better core information from institutions and independent bodies, better guidance on finance, information on graduate experiences, a guide to the relevance of information sources, improved careers advice in schools, and better use of the new technologies to personalise information.

Were these the right choices?

The second wave of research (Wave II) published, *Right Choice?* (2001) found that expectations about the chosen higher education institution had been largely met and, in the main, individuals were confident that they had made the right decisions and were satisfied with their institution and subject choices.

Although most students felt well informed about higher education when making their decisions, information gaps were noted such as a lack of objective information regarding course structures, work expected of students on courses, costs, and employment prospects. Schools were seen as a place where major improvements in information provision could be made.

Of those who felt they had made the wrong choice of institution, many were not deterred from continuing with higher education, but instead went to study elsewhere. Most institutional changes took place within the first year, and tended to involve a subject change. Indeed, dislike of course (rather than institution) was the main reason for leaving (particularly amongst those who transferred institutions), followed by cost (particularly amongst true early leavers).

Almost all students experienced some problems while in higher education. The most common were exam anxiety, and difficulties living on a low income.

Future choices

Looking to the future, the majority of students had taken action towards their careers after graduation, such as gathering information, visiting careers offices and using employer websites; and one-third were planning to start a job within three months of graduating, and one-fifth were planning further study.

1.1.3 Graduate employability and labour market experiences

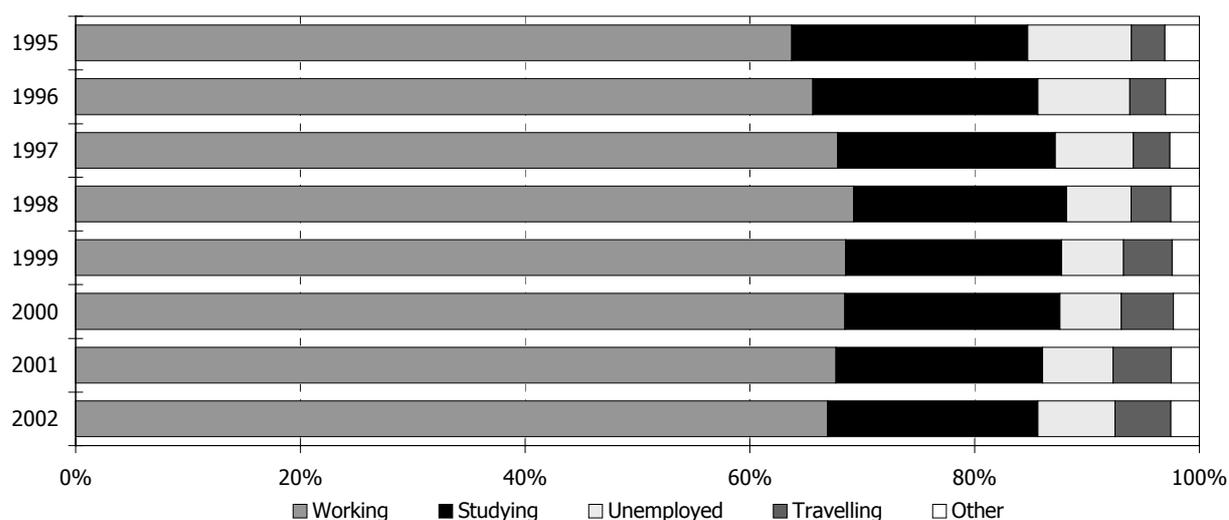
The section above has outlined the changes affecting both higher education institutions and students. However, there have also been changes further down the educational 'pipeline', impacting upon both graduates and their employers. Most significantly, graduate employability and early labour market experiences have been an important issue over the last few years.

Matching student supply with demand

As outlined in the section above, the number of students increased dramatically over the 1990s. As the UK has traditionally had high course completion levels, the number of graduates exiting higher education institutions each year has also increased. In 2002, over half a million people gained a higher education qualification. About half of these (244,000) were awarded first degrees following a full-time course, with a further 30,000 bachelors from part-time study. In addition, there were approximately 155,000 graduating with postgraduate qualifications, and 92,000 graduates completing sub-degrees such as HNDs.

Employment opportunities for new graduates also increased with the increased supply. Despite the rising numbers, employers have continued to absorb a similar proportion of the new graduate output. Each year, typically 65 to 70 per cent of new graduates have found employment within six months (see Figure 1.1). This can vary greatly by subject of study. For example public sector, professionally oriented subjects such as education and nursing, enable the majority of their graduates to enter full-time employment immediately. Their success is nearly matched by

Figure 1.1: Graduates' initial destinations, 1995-2001 (per cent)



Note: UK domiciled, first degree graduates

Source: IES/HESA, 1996 to 2002

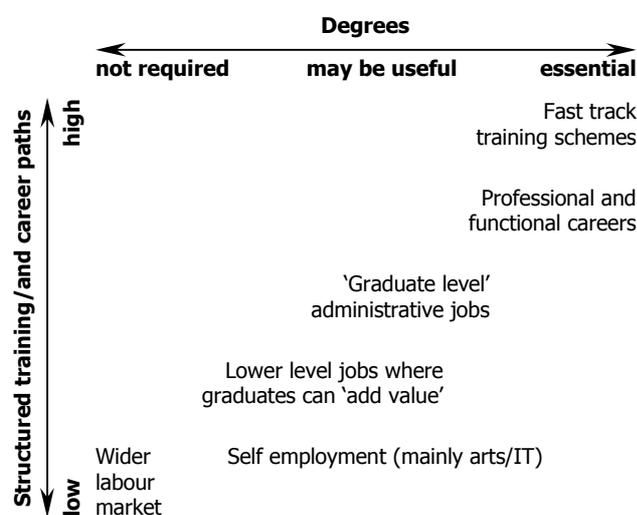
graduates in vocational subjects, eg computing, business and engineering. However, a large proportion of graduates from humanities courses delay their entrance to the labour market by continuing with further professional training.

However, the types of work that graduates find available to them, or on the other side of the coin, the type of work which employers are willing to allocate to new graduates, has broadened (or perhaps fragmented). Figure 1.2 illustrates the range of employment 'niches' in the new graduate labour market. These range from the traditional management training schemes and professional entry positions (top right), through to the general labour market (bottom right).

A similar classification has subsequently been developed by Elias and Purcell (unpublished) when looking at the work graduates actually do. Their classification includes five groups:

- traditional graduate occupations (*ie* the established professions such as law, medicine, science and education)
- modern graduate occupations (*ie* newer professions such as IT, management, and creative industries, which the authors note have absorbed the major part of the increased graduate output)
- new graduate occupations (*ie* admin and technical areas in which graduates are increasingly recruited)
- niche graduate occupations (*ie* areas where the majority of workers are non-graduates but where graduates make up specialist posts such as management roles)
- non-graduate occupations (roles in which their skills will be under-utilised such as sales assistant posts)

Figure 1.2: Graduate jobs



Source: IES, 2001

- moving down through the group, the likelihood of a degree being required for entry, and that individuals will utilise their graduate skills and knowledge, declines.

The location, or the classification, of an individual job within this matrix has implications for both the graduate and the employer. Graduates taking a management training position or traditional graduate occupation for example, are likely to access a prestigious and well-paid career, often with a 'blue-chip' employer. However, those new graduates in the wider labour market or in non-graduate jobs, find themselves in competition with less-qualified people – in this segment of the labour market, a degree confers no discernible benefit in terms of wages (Dolton and Silles, 2001).

From an employer perspective, this widening of graduate career paths (Connor, Hirsh and Barber, 2003) has strategic implications. Firstly, they must question the strategic intention for recruiting graduates – for example, to meet immediate business needs or to ensure a supply of future managers. Secondly, there are issues about the internal organisational arrangements for managing the new graduate resource – for example, the appropriateness of a centralised over a devolved programme. Thirdly, employers must assess the extent to which they need to provide planned, structured development – how, how much and when – and whether they can fulfil the 'promises' made about careers at the recruitment stage. These choices are complicated further as many employers recruit graduates to several, or all of the different employment niches.

In conclusion, it is necessary to be mindful that new graduate career paths are many and varied, with several distinct strata. There is no longer a single, unified 'graduate labour market', rather five or six segments in the wider labour market.

Anecdotally, much has been said about diminishing job prospects for new graduates and the economic downturn. However, a similar proportion of recent graduates (completed in 2002) entered employment compared to previous cohorts (see Figure 1.1), although fewer have obtained managerial, professional or associate professional work (Perryman, 2003).

What is meant by employability?

Charles Clarke, the Secretary of State for Education, recently outlined his belief that the funding of higher education was contingent upon its wider social and economic benefits. In Wave I of the 'Choices' research (*Making the Right Choice*) students were equally focussed on the economic advantages of a degree, and graduate employment prospects was a key factor in their choice of course and institution.

At its broadest, employability is the capacity to not only get work, but to maintain that employment and progress within it (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Graduate employability has, however, been part of the higher education agenda for a number of years now. In part, this is due to calls from employers for work-related skills and behaviours among new graduates (see for example Harvey, 1997; AGR, 1995). Additionally, there has been concern that higher education has not equipped students with the range of skills that will enable them to fulfil their career aspirations and potential, especially those less advantaged groups in society (see for example, CHERI, 2002a).

As it stands, students often enhance their employability without being aware, by building a useful portfolio of skills through part-time working during their courses. Many only realise this on graduation (Perryman *et al.*, 2003). The use and importance of work experience is stressed by the CHERI report (2002b), which indicates that work experience, particularly that related to individuals' study, leads to positive employment outcomes. It can lead to regular employment, is felt to prepare people for work, and helps them to find a satisfying job at the appropriate level. However, the authors note that large amounts of unrelated work experience can have negative effects.

A recent development has been the setting up of Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) to help the sector engage with employability. The team has produced a number of good practice briefings aimed at different audiences, and has hosted a series of regional conferences. It has also charted the actions higher education institutions have made over the last few years to address the employability agenda and help graduates with their transition into the workplace. These activities centre around a combination of: revising/enhancing support for job search; embedding the development of employability attributes into study programmes; provision of work experience opportunities within or outside of study programmes; and promoting reflection or recording of achievement, experience and skill development (Harvey, 2003).

The value of higher education

The labour market advantage conferred by a higher education qualification was recently confirmed. The OECD (2002) calculated that the private rate of return to a degree in the UK is worth in excess of 15 per cent, due in part to the UK's relatively short degree programmes. They also found that the rate of return to higher education in the UK was higher than that in other industrialised countries.

However, the benefits of higher education are not evenly distributed among the graduate population. For example, early successes in 'A' level and/or degree study have consistently been

found to open the doors to higher earnings and career opportunities. Along with gender, it has been found that age, subject and institution are also influential, (Perryman and Pearson, 2001; IER, 1999; CEL, 2001; Conlon and Chevalier, 2002), as is being sponsored through university or taking part in internships or summer placements (CEL, 2001). Although the sums involved in these internships are generally low, averaging £88 a week (Barber and Regan, 2002), the value of these placements lies in the work experience and access to a career position, and allows employers to screen potential applicants. The interplay between social class and ethnicity are also influential in the extent to which graduates can capitalise on their investment in education, as highlighted in a recent report on access to the solicitors profession (Vignaendra, 2001). IES is currently examining Black and minority ethnic graduates' early labour market experiences, and analysis of existing data has shown that they are more likely to suffer initial unemployment and to undertake further study (Connor *et al.*, 2003).

However, for the majority of graduates, a degree can be seen as a passport not only to employment, but also to high-level employment. Graduate unemployment remains low (Brown, 2003). Graduates are far more likely than people without degrees to find their way into managerial, professional or associate professional occupations, even if they start in non-graduate jobs. Not only are graduate salaries higher than those earned by non-graduates with the same number of years in the labour market, but graduates salary progression is also faster throughout their early and mid-careers. Even when graduates in higher-level occupations are compared with non-graduates doing similar work, graduates earn more. Over the first three years of their careers, graduates typically increase their earnings by 54 per cent (CEL, 2001). For those fortunate enough to enter graduate training with a blue-chip employer, salary growth (on their starting salaries) of 60 per cent in five years is typical, with many salaries in sectors such as financial and legal doubling (Barber and Regan, 2002).

Other research has pointed to the non-financial benefits conferred on individuals from higher education. For example, Schuller *et al.* (2001) outlined the health outcomes associated with education. More recently, Bynner *et al.* (2003) reported a range of health and wider benefits. The authors found that graduates (in contrast to non-graduates and those with 'A' levels) are: more geographically mobile, less depressed, have lower levels of obesity, are less likely to smoke, less likely to be unemployed, more likely to move up the social scale, more likely to be tolerant of other races, less politically cynical and more likely to vote.

1.1.4 Leaving early

Not all higher education students become graduates; some leave their courses early. This is variously referred to as withdrawing,

non-completion, dropping out, or leaving early. The fact that students leave early is of major concern to institutions and policy makers; there is a need to understand the size and nature of the problem, if indeed it is a problem.

Magnitude of the problem

In comparison to other OECD countries, the UK traditionally has a relatively low rate of non-completion and the lowest figures show it improving further. However, estimates of the prevalence of non-completion in UK higher education institutions vary greatly and there are certain problems with definition and quality of research.

Many studies focus solely upon one institution or course, and this does not allow us to draw policy implications or the generalising of conclusions. However, a recent comprehensive study by the IER whose sample included 30 UK institutions, estimates that non-completion by students on their original course is running at about 17 per cent in the UK (Davies and Elias, 2003).

A criticism of figures on non-completion is that they do not always take account of a student leaving an original choice of course or institution and returning to higher education at a later date, which makes the rate of non-completion in the UK appear higher than it actually is. The IES 'Choices' research Wave II (*Right Choice?*) took account of this distinction, and estimated the non-completion rate to be around ten per cent, but half of these had changed course or institution within two and a half years (Connor *et al.*, 2001).

Also, rates can vary hugely between institutions and courses and also within institutions. Variation in the non-completion rate between institutions and courses is estimated to range from one to two per cent in some courses, to 20 per cent in others (National Audit Office, 2002a).

Perhaps the most reliable source of data on non-completion are the HEFCE performance indicators. These tell us that for all entrants to UK institutions in 2000 to 2001, around nine per cent did not continue in higher education after their first year and a further three per cent had continued in a different institution. This of course does not take into account those who returned to higher education at a later date. HEFCE figures suggest that of those not continuing after their first year one-fifth (20 per cent) return in the medium term (ten per cent resuming at their original institution after a year out and another ten per cent transferring to a different institution). The indicators also show that the problem is greater for mature students. In the UK, the proportion not continuing after their first year was much higher for mature students (14 per cent) than for younger students (seven per cent). However, as noted above, there remains a huge variation in non-completion rates between institutions. The rates range from one per cent of

students not continuing after their first year to 22 per cent in the highest case of non-continuation (HEFCE, 2003).

Key factors on leaving behaviour

Leaving behaviour/probability is heavily influenced by prior attainment and this should be stressed when taking into account institutional differences in non-completion as institutions have varied entry requirements (eg Arulampalam *et al.*, 2002; Davies and Elias, 2003; NAO, 2002a). For example, less than 15 per cent of respondents to their survey, who withdrew in 1996/1997 or 1998/1999, had high prior attainment, eg had 24 or more 'A' level points. Whereas across the graduate population (in 1998) 25 per cent had high prior attainment (Davies and Elias, 2003). The NAO study also found that of those with more than ten 'A' level points, 95 per cent continued after their first year compared to 90 per cent of those with ten 'A' level points or less (NAO, 2002).

Reasons for early leaving

The literature identifies a substantial number of factors that cause higher education students to leave early, and the extent to which these are seen as important varies between sources. The following represent the key factors that are commonly identified as reasons for non-completion. They are listed in order of magnitude.

- **Dissatisfaction with choice of course and/or institution** was the most commonly identified reason for non-completion and was identified as such in much of the literature. IES identified that about one-third of non-completion was due to not liking a course and a further ten per cent due to not liking the institution (Connor *et al.*, 2001). Yorke (1999) reports similar findings, although he examined this aspect in greater detail. He found that when asked if factors were a moderate or considerable influence on their decision to withdraw, 39 per cent of respondents cited choosing the wrong field of study, 23 per cent cited quality of teaching and the programme not being relevant to their career, and 19 per cent cited the institution was not what they expected. These aspects, of course have links with provision of information, discussed below.
- **Financial reasons** are often highlighted as a reason for non-completion, and the changing climate of higher education funding means this is a much debated issue. The literature suggests that this factor accounts for non-completion between one in five and one in ten cases (Davies and Elias, 2003; Connor *et al.*, 2001). This is particularly relevant for students who rely on government funding or whose main source of income is student loans who are most often those from lower social class groups. In *Right Choice?* the costs of higher education were given as the main reason for non-completion

by a much larger proportion of those from low income groups than those from the highest group (Connor *et al.*, 2001). However, the effects of finance as a reason for non-completion are often said to occur in conjunction with other issues and may play some role even when other factors are more influential. For example, Yorke found that well over one-third of his respondents cited financial problems as a moderate or considerable influence on the decision to withdraw (Yorke, 1999).

- **Information** was a key factor in non-completion. There is often a mismatch between student expectations based upon information they are given upon application and the experiences they have upon entering higher education. Course information and prospectuses are often said to appear misleading. It also seems that students have little information on the financial implications of higher education. Information seemed to be particularly poor for students entering through clearing where there is little time and fewer options for decision making (Connor *et al.*, 2001).
- **Personal problems or health** seemed to be a key problem, particularly for mature students. *Dropping Out* reports that about one in six students aged over 21 at the time of leaving reported personal problems as their main reason for dropping out compared to a smaller proportion (roughly one in eight) of those aged 21 or under (Davies and Elias, 2003).
- **Support** is increasingly becoming an issue with the higher numbers of students entering higher education placing increasing demands on support staff. Effective support services for students are shown to decrease levels of non-completion, although evidence on this is limited (HUCCS, 2002). A focus on higher education expansion means that services need to expand with the numbers of students. Support is also vital when a student is considering leaving early. Half of early leavers do not consult their personal tutor, despite the fact that students report advice and support services as being helpful (Davies and Elias, 2003). First generation higher education participants may also have specific support needs.
- **Lack of preparation for higher education** is a commonly cited reason for non-completion among younger students. This is characterised by a lack of self-management or study skills, and often parental or peer group pressure to enter higher education despite a lack of commitment from the student (NAO, 2002a; Yorke, 1999).
- **Academic failure** is a commonly mentioned reason for non-completion, but tends to be a product of many of the problems listed above rather than a reason for non-completion in itself, eg having to work during term time leads to poor attendance, and lack of support with anxieties over ICT use leads to academic failure. Students with vocational entry routes were more likely to cite academic failure as their main reason for

leaving than those from academic entry routes. Also males were more likely to report academic failure as their main reason for leaving than were females (Connor *et al.*, 2001).

It is important to consider that non-completion is often multi-faceted and that often several of the factors above may inter-link in order to lead a student to leaving their course or institution.

An important distinction is also made in the literature between voluntary (*eg* didn't like the course, students, teachers, institution) and involuntary (*eg* financial reasons, family responsibilities, academic failure, illness) non-completion. It is suggested that voluntary non-completion is actually quite rare and that involuntary non-completion can account for as much as 80 per cent of non-completion (Bennett, 2003). This is an important consideration when debating policy initiatives and objectives for tackling non-completion.

Implications of early leaving

Labour market outcomes are significantly different for non-completers of higher education (early leavers) than for graduates. Unemployment can be as much a double among non-completers (six per cent) compared to those one year after graduation (three per cent). One in ten graduates are in a non-graduate level job 3½ years after graduation, compared to one-quarter of non-completers 3½ years after leaving (Davies and Elias, 2003).

Non-completion can often lead to a sense of guilt and failure, and sometimes a lack of self-esteem. Therefore, particular care should be taken in making the right choices about higher education prior to application, and ensuring that the right choices are made for the student in question.

Improving retention

Studies provide numerous suggestions for improving retention (*eg* Connor *et al.*, 2001; Davies and Elias, 2003; Yorke, 1999; NAO, 2002a):

- Better/more realistic information on courses, institutions and finance prior to application. It could be argued that this is already being partially addressed by the development of the Connexions service. However, this may be optimistic in view of their strong focus on the socially excluded rather than potential higher education applicants.
- A more comprehensive clearing process with a greater time period between publication of 'A' level results and acceptance of places.
- More systematic record keeping in institutions in order to spot early warning signs and follow-up people who do leave early

to learn more about reasons for leaving early, and improvements that can be made. This should include attendance registers and minimum attendance requirements for passing courses.

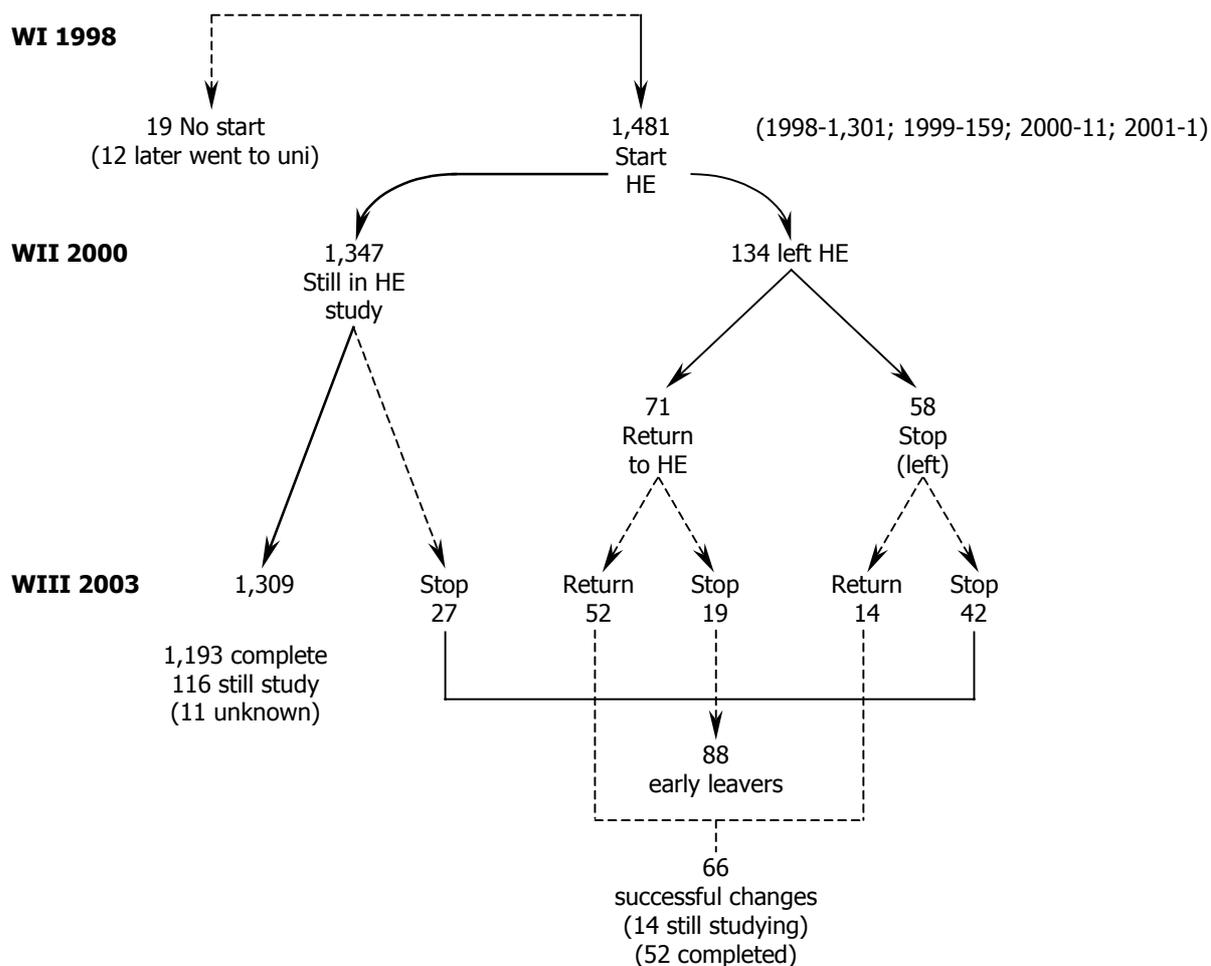
- Students from a wider range of backgrounds are now entering higher education. This diversity leads to a need for more complex and 'joined-up' support services including:
 - study skills and induction particularly for those from non-traditional academic backgrounds
 - a need to be flexible and responsive to responsibilities outside higher education, particularly for mature students.
 - an effective personal tutor system
 - a counselling service
 - teaching of life skills to younger students.
- Creating links with employers to provide work as part of a course, in order to recognise students often need to supplement their income.
- Induction updates throughout the first term as vital information taught at the beginning of term is often forgotten.
- Increase in student access and hardship funds.
- Increase modular degree systems so that there is more flexibility to return after a period of illness or time out to attend to family responsibilities. Increase in ability to change from full-time to part-time or distance courses.

Universities and colleges are actively encouraged and recommended to undertake such activities (see for example, HEFCE *a guide to good practice* 01/36, 2001). Indeed, the Higher Education and Funding Council of England (HEFCE) provides funds via its widening participation allocations (£255 million for 2003/04) to support student success, recognising that retaining students, particularly those at high risk of dropping-out, is expensive (HEFCE newsletter EP 03/3003). However, these retention activities are labour and resource intensive, at a time when institutions have a wide number of competing priorities. Also higher education institutions are encouraged to identify and target 'at risk' students to improve retention. This can be difficult, as students are reluctant to be identified in this way, ensuring that all students have to be provided with access to appropriate help and resources.

1.2 This new 'Wave III' follow-up study — methodology

The research series starts with a cohort of individuals who applied to higher education and follows their decisions and experiences over five years. In this cohort are individuals who entered higher education as they had planned, either in the year they applied or

Figure 1.3: Decisions of our cohort made over the last 5.5 years and captured at Waves I, II and III



Note: figures do not add exactly due to missing values and weighting

Source: IES survey, 2003

some time later, and these individuals followed a range of courses (of different lengths) in a range of institutions. However, the respondent group also includes individuals who decided against higher education, and individuals who went to higher education but left before they completed their courses. The cohort therefore provides us with an opportunity to chart, and indeed compare, the progress of individuals who followed a range of 'paths' (see Figure 1.3) at a number of key points:

- in 1998/99, the first wave of research, *Making the Right Choice*, examined the decision making process of over 20,000 individuals as they applied to universities and colleges of higher education in 1998 (Connor *et al.*, 1999).
- in 2000/01, the second wave of research (essentially the first follow-up study), *Right Choice?*, looked at the outcomes of these choices for almost 4,000 individuals and, where appropriate, their experiences in higher education (Connor *et al.*, 2001).

Now, five years on from their original application to higher education, the main aim of this third wave (second follow-up study) is to investigate the career aspirations, choices and experiences of our cohort over the period when the majority come to the end of their higher education courses and find their way into the graduate labour market. Also, for a small sub-group, to understand the motivations, experiences and outcomes of those who decided to withdraw from their original choice of institution and course, and to 'leave early'. One of the sponsors of the first two waves of research, DfES, agreed to fund this Wave III, follow-up study.

1.2.1 The questionnaire and telephone survey

The research consisted of a two-stage methodology:

Part 1: a quantitative postal survey of the career choices beyond university of the choice cohort. Individuals who provided contact details and gave permission for IES to re-contact them were sent a questionnaire. This allowed us to explore the early labour market experiences of those with higher level skills and who completed their studies up to two years ago (*ie* beyond that typically researched in the national First Destinations Survey), particularly:

- how those who completed higher education fared (*eg* in terms of subject, qualification, classification)
- what the cohort had been doing since they were last surveyed (in Winter 2000)
- where they are now (*eg* whether they are still following their course, or are involved in further study, work or looking for work) and why
- their attitudes towards the labour market and their expectations for the future
- perceptions as to whether the choices they made (about institution, subject, and to stay or leave university) were right for their current activities and future plans
- and their perceptions of the benefits of higher education – was it all worth it?

Part 2: a qualitative telephone survey of a sub-sample of respondents identified as leaving their initial choice of higher education institution early. A sample of 40 individuals participated in in-depth telephone interviews that explored:

- their original choice processes
- when they decided to leave and why (exploring potential mismatch between expectations and experiences)
- how they left, and the support and advice they sought and were given (if at all)

- their perceived options on leaving, and the choices they subsequently made
- their perceptions of the value of higher education and of their time (however short) at university/college
- and whether they did or would return to higher education and if so, what they did or would do differently.

1.2.2 Sample and response

Part 1: We contacted all those who responded to the Wave II survey (in 2000/01) and for whom we had a contact address, excluding all those who noted that they would not like to be contacted again. This provided a sample of 3238. This group were sent a short (eight page) postal questionnaire about their current experiences and choices. Questionnaires were mailed in April 2003, with reminders sent to non-respondents in May and June. The survey was closed in July, when 1503 completed and useable questionnaires had been returned. This represents a response rate of 49 per cent (allowing for post office returns and non-completions *etc.*) (see Table 1.1). This is very similar to the response rate achieved in the previous Wave II survey (50 per cent).

Response to this survey was biased towards women due to differential response rates, and this would have an effect on the representation of subjects of study. It was therefore decided to correct this bias by weighting the data by gender to bring it in line with the UK student population gender profile. A similar procedure was undertaken in the previous wave of research. A comparison between the response profile (both before and after weighting), the original survey (in 1998) and UCAS applicant population in 1998 is shown in the appendix (see Table A1). The appendix also includes details on the key characteristics of respondents (after weighting) (see Tables A2 to A5).

It should be stressed here that the cohort has suffered from attrition over the years, due to the geographic mobility of individuals and their willingness to continue to participate. This cohort therefore can no longer be said to be fully representative. So although the data presented have been weighted, it describes

Table 1.1: Postal survey response rate

Response type	Frequency	%	Valid %
Respondent	1,503	46	49
Non-response	1,558	48	51
Post office return/not available	177	5	Not applicable
Total	3,238	100	100
<i>Valid total</i>	<i>3,061</i>		

Source: IES Survey, 2003

the experiences of this cohort and does not fully represent the behaviour of all students and graduates.

Part 2: When the postal survey was closed, a sample of early leavers was drawn from the respondents. These were individuals who left their original choice of institution early and were willing to participate in a telephone survey. Our achieved sample was slightly biased towards those who returned to higher education at a later date. Forty telephone interviews (lasting up to three-quarters of an hour and using a semi-structured guide) were achieved, and took place in July and August 2003.

1.2.3 Data analysis

Part 1: The data gathered from the questionnaire survey was compiled into an SPSS data set. This was then merged with data from Wave I and Wave II for each individual and weighted (as noted above). This provided a picture of how the choices of individuals had evolved over time – from decisions about what and where to study, to satisfaction with initial choices and university experiences (and whether to continue with study), to decisions about careers and experiences in the labour market. This enabled us to track choices, intentions and actual experiences as individuals moved into, through and out of universities – capturing this (through a number of data collection points) as it actually happens. This is in contrast to other studies which collect retrospective data, and often require respondents to report on decisions and choices made some time in the past, which can have implications on the quality and quantity of data collected. Differences and similarities in the experiences of groups are explored and notable differences are described, including those that are found to be statistically significant. For ease of reading, the words *slight* or *marginal* are used to denote patterns, which though noticeable were not found to be statistically significant; whereas the words *great* or *significant* denote patterns found to be statistically significant. Various tests were used to detect significant relationships including: chi-square tests, t-tests, and bivariate correlations.

Part 2: The information gathered from the interviews was transcribed into a pro-forma, and a content analysis was used to draw out underlying themes.

1.3 Report contents

The following chapters present the findings of the study and highlight key issues that have been investigated.

Chapter 2 looks at the outcomes of higher education, and the impact of activities during study on choices and experiences.

Chapter 3 probes the choices and experiences of early leavers through data collected in the postal survey, particularly through using the rich qualitative data gained from the telephone interviews.

Chapter 4 follows the activities of respondents since the last survey in 2001, pays particular attention to their employment experiences and includes looking at the quality of this experience.

Chapter 5 looks at whether respondents engaged in any additional study since their initial foray into higher education, and examines how graduates attempt to build upon their skills.

Chapter 6 is about career choices. It explores the help and support graduates have received with their careers since leaving higher education, looks at levels of satisfaction with careers to date, and examines the changes graduates expect to make to their careers in the short and medium term.

Chapter 7 explores the value of higher education. Respondents reflect on the choices they made about higher education, and consider whether these choices were appropriate for current activities and future plans, and whether higher education was worth it.

Chapter 8 summarises the main points, draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

The **Appendices** include further details about the sample and methodology; full summaries from the previous 'Choices' studies; and a bibliography of listed references and sources.

2. Completing Initial Higher Education Studies

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, and those that follow, we examine the data from the third study and, in some cases, cross-reference back to the previous two studies conducted in 1998 and in 2000 (Wave I – *Making the Right Choice*, and Wave II – *The Right Choice?*). The main focus of this chapter is to explore how individuals fared in their higher education. The issues covered are:

- their experiences of term-time working and of debt
- whether they completed their course and how well they did.

Throughout this and remaining chapters, the data are examined for patterns at subgroup level in relation to a range of key personal, higher education study, and labour market characteristics. However, for the purposes of brevity and clarity, not all the data are shown. The data presented are all based on the adjusted sample (by gender, see above, Chapter 1). The sample total is 1503 but as some survey respondents did not answer every question, some tables have slightly smaller bases.

2.2 Experiences whilst studying

2.2.1 Working whilst studying

'I have started to work part-time during my final year for money reasons' (still studying).

The literature indicates that students now expect to work whilst studying:

'More students now come to university with strong expectations that the experience not only will assist, in a practical way, their preparation for life and the workforce, but will accommodate their need to engage in paid employment while studying' (Coaldrake, 2001, p.76).

Indeed, the vast majority (91 per cent) of respondents reported that they had undertaken paid work at some time whilst studying at university or college. This mirrors figures found in a survey of

South West students and graduates, where 84 per cent of finalists reported that they had undertaken paid work at some point during their studies (Perryman *et al.*, 2003). The most common form was to take regular paid work during vacation periods (63 per cent), but regular paid work during term time was also popular (42 per cent). The figure for term-time working correspond closely with the proportion found in the MORI report 2003, of 41 per cent; and that found in the Student Income and Expenditure survey of 2000 (which looked at the activities of undergraduates in 1998/99) of 47 per cent. A new Student Income and Expenditure survey has recently been undertaken and reports that the incidence of term-time working has increased to 58 per cent. A few (16 per cent) of our respondents reported that they undertook paid work from time to time.

Who works?

There appears to be no real difference in pattern of work whilst studying between men and women. However there are some differences when looking at other key characteristics. Black respondents were more likely to work during term time than in holiday periods. They were also more likely to work during term time than others (although these findings should be treated with caution as the numbers involved are small). Whereas White respondents were more likely than others to work during vacations, and Asian respondents were the least likely to undertake paid work whilst studying. There are also some age differences, with older students marginally more likely to work during term time. More specifically, young mature students (those between 21 and 24 at application in 1998) were significantly more likely to work in term time than vacation time, and more likely than other ages to undertake paid work during the term. However, older students (those at least 21 when applying to university or college) were less likely than their younger peers to undertake any form of paid work during their studies. There were also differences according to prior attainment. Those who entered higher education with vocational qualifications (compared with those with academic qualifications) were significantly more likely to engage in term-time working. Similarly, those with lower 'A' level points were significantly more likely to work regularly during term times than those with higher points.

'I have always found it hard financially as I have received no financial assistance from my parents – there is a definite advantage for richer students. I was working 20 hours a week at times to support myself whilst others did not work at all.'

Respondents from lower socio-economic groups were more likely to undertake work and were significantly more likely to undertake term-time work than their peers; and a similar and statistically significant pattern was found when looking at family income. Those from families with low incomes (measured in 1998)

were almost twice as likely to regularly work during term time than those from families with high incomes (51 per cent compared with 27 per cent). This fits with findings from the UUK (2003) study into attitudes towards debt whereby poorer entrants were more likely to minimise higher education costs by depending on student loans and, particularly, paid employment. It also corresponds with research conducted by Metcalf (2001) and the recently published Student Income and Expenditure survey (Callender and Wilkinson, 2003). This survey showed that students from lower socio-economic groups and higher socio-economic groups worked a similar number of hours each week, students from lower groups worked for more weeks in the term. They also earned considerably lower hourly earnings than did those from higher socio-economic groups.

Those following health and medicine, and arts and humanities type courses, were marginally less likely than those on other courses to undertake paid work whilst studying. Though, as the quote below illustrates, this may be due to the requirement on some courses to undertake unpaid placements.

'Fieldwork placements in vocational courses such as allied health programmes, are often unpaid and during the holidays. This does add to the financial pressures of being a student.'

Those studying social sciences, business and administration, and education subjects however were significantly more likely to undertake paid work during term time (although for each of these groups vacation work was still more prevalent). Related to this, respondents in post-92 universities and colleges of higher education (where much of these type of courses are concentrated) were much more likely to work during term time than those in pre-92 universities (59 compared with 33 per cent, which was a statistically significant difference).

There were lower incidences of term-time working amongst those studying in the East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside, East Anglia, and Wales (21, 24, 27 and 28 per cent respectively); whereas there was a much higher incidence of term-time working amongst Greater London and Scottish students (Table 2.1). Indeed, those studying in Greater London were more likely to work during term time than work during their holiday periods. Term-time working was also significantly more common amongst those who stayed in their home region to undertake their higher education studies than those who moved away. This could be explained by the potentially greater access to local jobs by local students, perhaps through informal networks and previous work experience. This finding, however, also corresponds with those of the Student Income and Expenditure surveys in 1998/99 and 2003 study, where those most likely to work during studying were those living at home with their parents (Callender and Kemp, 2000; and Callender and Wilkinson, 2003).

Table 2.1: Prevalence of undertaking paid work whilst studying, by region of study (per cent)

	Regularly term time	From time to time	Regularly in holidays	Any paid work	No paid work	Base no.
Same region	56	13	57	91	9	632
Different region	31	20	68	91	9	831
North	43	25	54	91	9	43
Yorkshire & Humberside	24	22	68	92	8	186
North West	37	14	61	92	8	184
East Midlands	21	22	67	89	11	83
West Midlands	36	23	64	93	7	76
East Anglia	27	27	63	92	8	29
Greater London	60	16	51	92	8	143
South East	46	13	62	89	11	259
South West	41	15	67	91	9	135
Wales	28	14	69	86	14	84
Northern Ireland	59	31	22	91	9	8
Scotland	58	14	66	94	6	244
Overall	42	16	63	91	9	1,494

Source: IES Survey, 2003

It is also interesting to look at the interaction between debt accrued during study and undertaking paid work whilst studying, as both are used to fund higher education study. Those that owed most (at least £10,000) were more likely to engage in some form of paid work, particularly holiday work, than those owing nothing or smaller amounts (less than £5,000 on completion). Or to put it another way, those who undertook some form of paid work were significantly more likely to have accrued some form of debt, than those who did not. Thus it would seem that individuals use both methods to fund their study. However, students who worked regularly during term time had lower average levels of debt (though not significantly) than those who did not (£9,000 compared with £9,501); and were marginally more likely to have no debt at all. Conversely, those that worked regularly during holidays had significantly higher debt levels (£10,000) than those who did not (£8,500). It would appear then that working during term time, as opposed to vacation work, is a possible debt management strategy. Whereas vacation work may be more driven by employability concerns.

Effect of working?

'I worked at NEXT as a Saturday girl during my degree and went full-time when I graduated. I was very quickly promoted due more to my experience there than my degree.' (Respondent is currently working as a retail manager).

Working part-time whilst studying is not only a debt management technique it can be a useful way for students to build

employability skills or indeed provide a route into employment (Chapter 1). However it would appear that working whilst studying may affect degree outcomes. Looking at respondents who had completed their initial studies, those who had undertaken any form of paid work whilst studying were less likely to gain a first or upper second class degree (65 per cent compared to 75 per cent, though this is not a statistically significant difference). This was markedly the case (and this time was statistically significant) for those who regularly undertook paid term-time work but interestingly, those who took regular vacation work were conversely marginally more likely to gain a high class degree than those who did not work during the holidays.

However, to check the potential effect of working whilst studying, the ability of individuals, such as 'A' level points, should also be taken into account. Here it can be seen that within each proxy ability band, those who worked during term times were less likely to get a high class degree than those who did not work (see Table 2.2). This was particularly the case for the extreme groups – those with no 'A' level points (*ie* came to higher education with vocational qualifications) and for those with at least 25 'A' level points, here the differences were statistically significant. This finding coupled with the one above (*ie* the greater propensity to term-time working amongst those from lower socio-economic groups) indicates that term-time working compounds the disadvantage experienced by less traditional students (see also Metcalf, 2001; and CHERI, 2002a). Indeed, it can be seen that for respondents from lower socio-economic groups, term-time working lowers the likelihood of gaining a higher class of degree even further from 57 per cent to 51 per cent (see Table 2.3).

Multivariate analysis (using binary logistic regression) which takes into account the effect of a range of variables, indicates that working during term time is one of the most important factors in determining the likelihood of gaining a high class degree outcome. Indeed, taking into account a wide range of personal and educational characteristics¹, regular term working along with age, gender and previous 'A' level points were the strongest (and statistically significant) predictors of a good higher education outcome (see section 2.3.1).

A more complex pattern emerges when looking at vacation work. Those with fewer 'A' level points or alternative qualifications, (excluding Scottish Highers) and who worked during vacations were marginally more likely to gain a high class degree than those who did not work during the holidays. However, the reverse is true for those with a greater number of 'A' level points (*ie* above 20 points at the time of applying to university or college).

¹ Variables included in the model: gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic group, entry route, 'A' level points (banded), subject of HE study, type of HEI, regular term time working, first choice HEI, and use of clearing.

Table 2.2: Working whilst studying and degree outcomes (completers only) – per cent gaining a high degree class*, by 'A' level points (grouped)

	Overall	Term-time work		Vacation work		Any paid work	
		No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
'A' level points banded							
No points/other qual.	50	59 ^s	41 ^s	48	51	66	47
1 to 10 points	56	58	53	53	57	87	52
11 to 20 points	58	60	55	53	60	64	58
21 to 25 points	69	70	66	69	68	69	68
Above 25 points	86	89 ^s	73 ^s	89	84	90	85
Scottish highers	62	65	59	63	61	54	62
All completers	66	71	58	63	67	75	65

* high class degree means first or upper second class honours.

^s denotes statistically significant difference

Source: IES Survey, 2003

It would appear that students need to balance the potential benefit of added employability gained from working whilst studying, with the potential disbenefit of compromised study time. The literature would suggest that there is a termly paid working hours threshold (of 15 to 16 hours per week) that, when breached, causes the dis-benefits to outweigh the benefits (eg Curtis and Shani, 2002; Van Dyke quoted in Sanders, 2003). The most recent figures available (Callender and Wilkinson, 2003) would indicate that term-time working hours are increasing and approaching this threshold, increasing from 11 hours per week in 1998/2000 to 14 hours a week in 2002/2003. However, an Australian study recently reported that students who work part-time perform better in examinations than those without jobs. It found that those who worked up to 12 hours a week gained the best marks, and posited that paid work whilst studying helped grades by encouraging good time management skills (see Maslen, 2003).

Table 2.3: Working whilst studying and degree outcomes (completers only) – per cent gaining a high degree class*, by socio-economic group

	Overall	Term-time work		Vacation work		Any paid work	
		No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Socio-economic group							
ABC1	69	74 ^s	60 ^s	66	70	76	68
C2DE	57	63 ^s	51 ^s	56	57	74	56
All completers	66	71	58	63	67	75	65

* high class degree means first or upper second class honours

^s denotes statistically significant difference

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Early attitudes to working whilst studying

Early attitudes towards undertaking paid work whilst studying were good predictors of actual behaviour. Looking back at attitudes towards working whilst studying, captured during Wave I of the study (in 1998) those who considered prospects for term-time work to be an important factor in their choice of university or college were considerably more likely to engage in regular paid term-time work than their peers. Also willingness to work was a good indicator as to whether individuals would actually undertake work whilst studying. Those who said they were very prepared to work during the holidays to help with the financial costs of being a student were more likely to actually do so, similarly those who said they were very prepared to work during term-time were much more likely to actually do so.

2.2.2 Debt

Average levels of debt

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of repayable debt they owed on completion of their initial studies. For those who completed their studies, levels of Student Loan debt ranged from zero to £20,000 with the average level at £7,646 (or median of £8,500). Further debt, owed to others including banks, credit card companies, and family also ranged from zero to £20,000 but the average was much lower at £1,383 (or median of £1,000) as over two fifths had no such debt on completion. This gives an overall average debt of over nine thousand pounds (£9,029 or £9,800 median). However, nine per cent reported that they owed nothing when they completed their initial studies (see Table 2.4).

The figures indicate that debt is perhaps on the increase, as those who finished a three year course in 2002 owed almost 25 per cent more than those who finished a three-year course in 2001. The difference is statistically significant but these figures should be treated with some caution due to the small number of those in the later cohort, some of whom were on a four year course). Also, as would be expected, those following a longer four year course owed significantly more than those following a standard three year course (see Table 2.5, over).

Table 2.4: Levels and type of debt accrued by those who completed their initial studies

Debt	Minimum	% no debt	£ maximum	£ median	Base no.
Student Loan	0	15	20,000	8,500	1,253
Other debt	0	41	20,000	1,000	1,253
Total debt	0	9	31,000	9,800	1,253

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Table 2.5: Total debt accrued by those who completed their initial studies, by course start and length

Total debt	£ mean	£ median	Base no.
1998 to 2001 (3 year course)	8,294	9,000	625
1998 to 2002 (4 year course)	10,119	11,100	431
1999 to 2002 (3 year course)	10,333	10,500	81
All completers	9,029	9,800	1,253

Source: IES Survey, 2003

The survey findings closely mirror those from other surveys. For example the NatWest survey (2003) finds that graduates from the class of 2002 face average debt repayments of £10,000. Whereas the Barclays ninth annual graduate survey (CEL, 2003) reports that in 2002 individuals graduated with £10,997 average debt, up from the figure for 2001 of £9,373. The most recent figures are provided by the 2002/03 Student Income and Expenditure Survey (Callender and Wilkinson, 2003) reporting final year undergraduates' anticipated debt of £9,673 (median), which includes £350 owed to commercial credit companies, and £997 from overdrafts.

The amount respondents owed to the Student Loans Company far outweighs that owed to other sources (eg banks, credit card companies, and family). Indeed, for all those who completed their studies, on average 82 per cent of their debt was made up of a Student Loan.

The costs associated with higher education study can be seen as an 'investment' and a small scale study indicated that full-time students whilst at university are not overly concerned with debt '[students] do not treat loans or overdrafts as "real debt" but merely as a long-term investment. None of them showed undue concerns about how debts of several thousand pounds may affect their lifestyle and choices in the future' (Eccles and Bird, 2002). It would appear that timing plays a factor in perceptions about student debt. We did not specifically ask a question about concerns over or impact of debt, however, the weight of comments from respondents would indicate that debt is a concern to them. It was the most common theme of respondents' comments (occurring about once in every five comments which is relatively frequent given the range of comments given). These comments, from individuals who have completed their studies, illustrate that upon leaving higher education, debt can become 'real' and a burden for many. Thus we have chosen to call monies accrued during study 'debt'.

'Students in further education are only advised of the benefits of continuing on to higher education and are not warned of the costs. Since graduating I have found it extremely difficult to find graduate jobs in my field. I could have obtained my current role when leaving secondary education. I am 23 years old, still living with a parent and am £13,000 in debt. Employment concerns

aside, graduates from working class backgrounds are starting out in life with the worries of debt.'

'The cost of attending university has left myself and many friends in deep debt and unable to afford many things which we should be doing/have in our early 20s ... At 23 I have more debt hanging over me than they [parents] have ever had in a lifetime. I feel let down by the government schemes and, in a way, scared for my future.'

'I do not feel I went into higher education with my eyes wide open – this is in a financial sense. I have gained personally and academically but the burden of debt is bigger than my shoulders can carry.'

Who owes most?

'Facing the costs of higher education is a family concern – where students' families are supportive, they are prepared to take the risk, but to take on thousands of pounds of debt without family support is overwhelming for an 18 year old.' (owes over £9,000)

Male, older graduates (over 21 at application); and those with lower family income (measured in 1998) had statistically significant, higher average levels of total debt on completion of their studies. These indicative patterns also hold true when looking at average levels of Student Loans. However a slightly different picture emerges for other loans, with female, black, and mid-age (between 21 and 25 at application) graduates having marginally, though not statistically significant, higher levels of other debt than their peers. This might indicate that these groups have a greater willingness to borrow from banks, credit card companies and particularly their families. However, using data from Wave II of the study (see below) only younger mature students were found to be more willing (and statistically significantly so) than other groups to borrow from banks (rather than from their families).

Overall, levels of debt vary little by subject of study with the exception of courses related to health and medicine (eg pharmacy), where the total level of debt accrued by those who studied subjects allied to medicine were considerably (and statistically significantly) lower (£6,834 compared with an overall average of £9,029), perhaps due to the existence of bursaries in this field of study.

Levels of total debt also varied by geographic location. Those who studied in Yorkshire and Humberside, and the West Midlands had considerably higher levels of debt than those who studied in the North, East Anglia, and Northern Ireland. Interestingly Greater London was not at the top of the list, in terms of level of debt accrued. As would be expected, those who studied in a different region to their home region had statistically significant higher levels of debt on completion; again particularly for those studying in Yorkshire and Humberside, and the West Midlands;

and also for those moving to Greater London to study. For some regions the difference between the levels of debt accrued on completion between those who stayed in their home region to study and those who went elsewhere were quite stark. For example, those studying in Greater London from outside of the region accrued almost twice the level of debt (86 per cent higher) than those originally from within the region.

Early experience of and attitudes to debt

It is interesting to contrast early attitudes towards debt captured during Wave I of the study (in 1998); before respondents had entered higher education, with the levels of debt that actually accrued. Those who considered themselves more willing to take out a student loan indeed had statistically significant higher average levels of debt owed to the Student Loans company, almost three times greater, than those less willing to do so (£9,448 compared with £3,279). Similarly those who were more willing to get an overdraft or a bank loan had higher average levels of 'other' debt (*ie* owed to banks, credit card companies, or family) and this was again statistically significant. This group owed on average more than twice the level of other debt, than those less willing to do so (£2,045 compared with £859). Thus attitudes to debt have proved a good predictor of actual debt. This verifies the findings of a recent report into attitudes to debt where *'prospective students religion and attitudes to debt were the most important factors predicting likely student loan take-up ... those with tolerant attitudes to debt were 2½ times more likely to take one out'* (UUK, 2003, p.4).

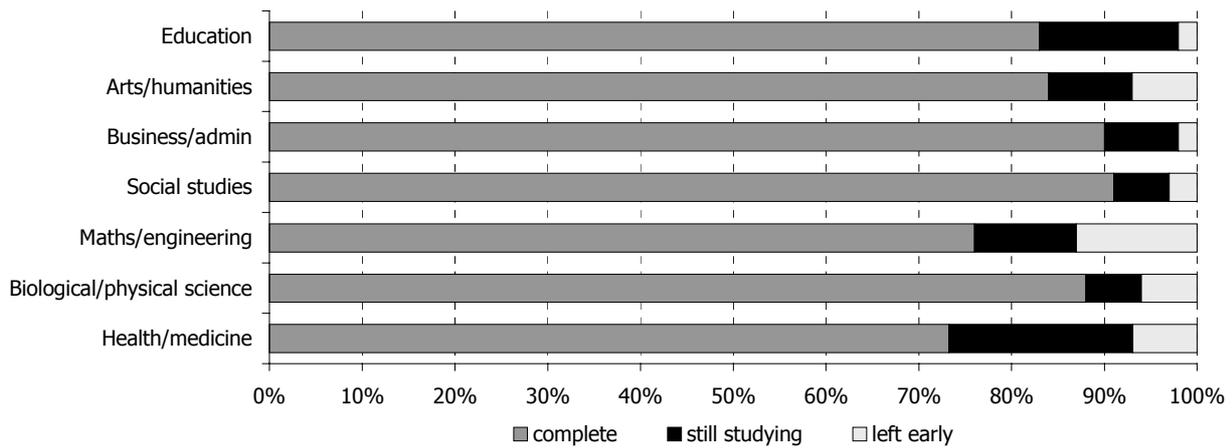
However, of the small group who, when applying to higher education, did not want to take out a student loan, more than half (58 per cent) did so during their time at university or college. Similarly, of those who did not consider borrowing from others, whether family or commercial credit companies and banks, about half did so during their studies.

It is also interesting to look at individuals experiences in higher education and their concerns with finance, captured at Wave II of the study (in 2000). Here, it can be seen that those who reported that they were having problems living on a low income had higher average (median) levels of total debt on completion than those who did not experience a problem with this aspect of student life (£10,400 compared with £8,379). Also, those who felt that they would like to have been better informed about the costs of study had higher average levels of total debt, (£10,000 compared to £9,000). Both of these results are statistically significant.

2.3 Completing studies

The vast majority (85 per cent) of respondents had completed their initial higher education studies at the time of the survey (Spring

Figure 2.1: Whether completed study, by subject of study (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

2003). However, as our cohort entered higher education at different times (although all applied in 1998) and followed different length courses, not all had completed their original studies (see Chapter 1, Figure 1.3). Thus a further nine per cent reported that they were still studying (for their initial qualifications). Also six per cent reported that they had withdrawn from their course before completion.

As would be expected, those who started their courses later (in 1999) and/or took a gap year before entering higher education were much more likely to still be studying. Younger students, minority ethnic (particularly Black and Asian) respondents, and those from higher socio-economic groups, were also statistically significantly more likely to still be studying. Those with higher family incomes were also marginally more likely to still be studying, which is unsurprising as family income is found to be correlated with taking a gap year. However, this also follows findings from the first survey (Wave I) where respondents from lower family income groups were relatively more likely to consider taking a shorter course because of the anticipated costs of higher education. So those with higher family incomes are more likely to either delay entry or to follow longer courses than those with lower family incomes. Also those most likely to still be studying were those following health and medicine courses (including veterinary sciences) which tend to be longer courses, and those studying education (see Figure 2.1).

Of those that had completed their course, most had finished in 2001 or 2002 (51 and 44 per cent respectively) so they potentially had up to two years experience of the labour market.

2.3.1 Outcomes

Of those who had completed their studies, one in eight (13 per cent) gained a first-class honours degree, a further 53 per cent (just

Table 2.6: Qualification outcomes, by year of graduation (excluding early leavers) (per cent)

Degree class	2001	2002	All finished	Still to finish*
First	9	18	13	14
Upper second	53	53	53	65
Lower second	31	24	27	16
Third/pass	6	4	5	2
Distinction	1	1	1	2
Did not graduate	—	1	<1	1
<i>Base no.</i>	<i>640</i>	<i>552</i>	<i>1,245</i>	<i>127</i>

* based on expectations

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Table 2.7: First degree outcomes for those graduating in 2001 (per cent)

Class of degree	Respondents graduating in 2001	All graduating in 2001*
First	9	9
Upper second	54	47
Lower second	31	32
Third/pass	6	6
Did not graduate/unclassified	—	5

* all UK and EU first degree graduates of known destination

Source: IES Survey, 2003 and HESA First Destination statistics 00/01 table 1b

over half) gained an upper second and 27 per cent a lower second class degree (see Table 2.6). Interestingly, those yet to finish were more optimistic with 14 per cent and 65 per cent expecting a first or upper second class degree respectively. Comparing the results of respondents to all graduates (like with like, using HESA statistics) indicates that respondents did marginally better than the graduate population as a whole (though this was not statistically significant) (see Table 2.7).

Higher class degrees, *ie* first or upper second-class honours were particularly found amongst female graduates, those from higher socio-economic groups and with higher family incomes (measured in 1998). Also among those who entered higher education with academic qualifications and studied at pre-92 institutes and amongst White graduates – all were statistically significant differences (see Table 2.8). Although the numbers involved are small, it would appear that Black and Asian graduates were less likely than their White peers to gain a first or upper second class degree. This corresponds with findings presented in a study specifically looking at the experiences of minority ethnic graduates (Connor and Tyers, forthcoming, 2004).

Table 2.8: Degree class of those who completed their studies, by key characteristics (per cent)

Characteristics	First	2:1	First or 2:1	Base no.
Male	14	46	60 ^s	576
Female	11	59	71 ^s	665
Young (under 21 at application)	12	53	65	1,046
Older (over 21 at application)	16	55	71	140
White	13	54	67 ^s	1,114
Black/Asian/Mixed	7	44	51 ^s	73
ABC1	13	55	68 ^s	866
C2DE	12	45	57 ^s	294
Low family income	12	48	60 ^s	435
Medium family income	14	54	68 ^s	371
High family income	13	62	74 ^s	182
Academic entry route	14 ^s	54	68 ^s	1,050
Vocational entry route	7 ^s	47	54 ^s	145
Pre-92 university	14	58	72 ^s	762
Post-92 university/College of HE	12	47	59 ^s	309
Health/medicine	13	57	70 ^s	76
Biological/Physical sciences	17	53	69 ^s	259
Maths/Engineering	22	27	49 ^s	175
Social studies	10	57	67 ^s	272
Business/Admin	10	54	63 ^s	147
Arts/Humanities	8	64	72 ^s	271
Education	8	54	62 ^s	39
All	13	53	66	1,245

^s denotes statistically significant difference

Source: IES Survey, 2003

In particular, first-class honours were relatively more likely amongst male graduates, and amongst maths and engineering, and biological and physical science graduates. This mirrors national figures reported by HESA (2003). It is interesting to note here that those who reported that they managed to get into their preferred (or first choice) university or college were almost twice as likely to graduate with a first-class degree (15 per cent compared to eight per cent, which is a statistically significant difference). This contrasts with the small group of respondents who used clearing. Here only nine per cent gained a first-class honours degree compared to 13 per cent who did not use clearing (though the difference is not statistically significant). This pattern could be linked to ability and fit, *ie* those with higher 'A' level points (and possibly higher ability) are more likely to get into their preferred institution and onto their first choice of course.

As would perhaps be expected, 'A' level results were a good (and statistically significant) indicator of degree classification. For those

who had completed their studies, first-class degree graduates had the highest average 'A' level point score, followed by upper second, lower second, and third class degree graduates (20, 17, 14 and 6 out of a maximum of 30 points, respectively). Indeed, outcomes were strongly related to prior attainment and previous schooling. First-class honours were more common for those with academic entry qualifications, for those with high 'A' level points (particularly 25 points and above), and were marginally more common for those from school sixth form colleges rather than from further education institutions.

Interestingly, those who were happier with their choices and experiences at university or college (measured during Wave II) were significantly more likely to do well, in terms of gaining a higher class degree classification. A much higher proportion of those who were satisfied with their choice of university and choice of course gained a first or upper second degree (69 and 70 per cent compared with only 46 per cent). Statistically significant relationships were also found for quality of teaching, course structure, study facilities, IT support, and tutor support, where those who were satisfied with these aspects of their higher education were much more likely to gain a high degree classification.

3. Leaving Early

3.1 Introduction

This chapter looks more closely at the choices and experiences of those who left university early. First it looks at the data and analysis afforded through the questionnaire surveys, and then moves on to make use of qualitative data collected through in-depth telephone interviews. Also, where appropriate it includes comments from respondents recorded on the questionnaire which add weight to key themes.

As well as the responses from the 1503 questionnaires, which included those from 93 'early leavers'; a sub-sample of 40 of these early leavers participated in telephone interviews. The sample was therefore self-selecting but, despite this, a range of individuals participated, representing different gender, ages and subject profiles. The interviews with researchers lasted up to three quarters of an hour and explored:

- their original choice processes
- when and why they decided to leave
- their perceived options and choices upon leaving
- whether they returned to higher education
- their reflections on their experience of higher education.

As such the interviews involved more in-depth discussions of the complex processes and choices involved in leaving early than was possible in the survey questionnaire. The aim was to provide richness of data (rather than generalising quantitative results as in other sections) and the stories gathered form the basis of this chapter.

It should be noted that findings relating to early leavers are not confined to this chapter. Relevant findings are also discussed throughout the report, particularly when experiences of early leavers are compared with those who successfully completed their initial higher education studies.

3.2 Leaving early

Looking at survey data, it can be seen that at the time of the survey (Spring 2003) a small minority of respondents (six per cent, just under a hundred) reported that they had left their initial course of higher education study before completion, in other words they had left early. This follows findings from the Wave II study (*Right Choice?*) where the level of dropout amongst the sample was small (although it was noted that the early leavers may well be underrepresented as they might be less likely to respond to the survey). In the Wave II survey, early leavers were divided into two roughly equal groups: those who left early but quickly returned to higher education (transferring institution and subject); and true early leavers who stayed away from higher education.

This distinction has not been made in this Wave III of the research as the numbers involved are smaller, and it becomes harder to detect clear and particular patterns of behaviour due to the multitude of paths taken. However, it is interesting to note that since the last survey, of the respondents previously deemed to be institutional transferors (71), nine of these once again left early, withdrawing from their new course. Also that, of the 58 respondents previously deemed to be true early leavers, 14 went back to higher education. This indicates that an individual's perception of their behaviour changes, and some no longer consider themselves to be early leavers.

Who leaves early?

Those most likely to have left their studies before completion were studying mathematical or technology-related subjects; and older students (both statistically significant relationships). Indeed, those age 21 and over when they applied to university in 1998 were twice as likely to leave their courses early than their younger counterparts (12 per cent of older students compared to only five per cent of younger students left early). Interestingly, those who left early and had followed courses in maths and engineering had higher levels of debt when they left than those who had left early from other courses (£7,258 compared with an overall average for early leavers of £6,035). Which again may suggest a particular difficulty for this group of students. There was also a difference according to whether respondents had studied in their home region or had moved away to study. Those who studied in their home region were more likely to leave early, although this pattern could be influenced by age as older students are much more likely than their younger peers to study within their home region.

Surprisingly, there was no difference in non-completion by family experience of higher education, so individuals from families with no experience of higher education were no more likely to leave early than those from families with such experience; nor was there

any difference according to gaining a place in their preferred institution or not; or the use of clearing. There was a difference noted according to the type of institution attended, with those in post-92 universities and colleges of higher education being more likely to leave early, but the difference was marginal and not statistically significant.

However, there seems to be an interesting interaction with family income and social class. Those with low family incomes (measured in 1998) were twice as likely to leave early as those with high family incomes (less than £25,000 compared to above £45,000) which suggests that respondents with lower family incomes may be more susceptible to financial pressures. This was borne out in the Wave II survey, where those from lower family incomes were much more likely than others to have cited 'too expensive' as a reason for no longer studying at their initial higher education establishment. However those in higher socio-economic groups were twice as likely as those in lower groups to leave their courses early (statistically significant). Socio-economic group and family income were found to be significantly correlated, with the socio-economic group rising with family income level. However, the findings relating to leaving early may indicate a counter influence at work. Perhaps those from higher socio-economic groups feel more able to change their choices, potentially extending their time in higher education, than those from lower socio-economic groups who may feel more pressure to 'stay the course'?

Leaving behaviour/probability is heavily influenced by prior attainment (eg Arulampalam *et al.*, 2002; Davies and Elias, 2003; and NAO, 2002a see Chapter 1). These new findings would confirm this position. Respondents who entered higher education with vocational qualifications were significantly more likely to leave early than those starting with academic qualifications (12 per cent compared with five per cent). Also the likelihood of leaving early increases among those with a lower number of 'A' level points. Only two per cent of those with at least 25 'A' level points reported that they left their original choice of course early, compared to six per cent of those with ten or fewer points).

Overall, our findings follow those from the previous study (Wave II), where early leavers and indeed institutional transfers tended to be non-traditional students: older, from minority ethnic groups, with lower family incomes, and to have entered higher education with vocational qualifications (see Table 3.1).

3.3 Original choices

We now move on to look more closely at the choices made by those who left early, and therefore arguably made the wrong choices. However, before doing so it is useful to recap on the choices involved when applying to higher education. As

Table 3.1: Characteristics of early leavers.

	Withdrew early		All respondents*	
	No.	%	No.	%
Gender				
Male	46	49	702	47
Female	48	51	783	53
All	93	100	1,485	100
Age categories				
Traditional	66	76	1,242	88
Young/mature	9	10	60	4
Mature	12	13	111	8
All	87	100	1,412	100
Ethnicity				
White	90	97	1,335	94
Black	–	2	22	2
Asian	–	1	58	4
Other	0	0	–	–
All	93	100	1,427	100
Social class				
ABC1	65	86	1,042	76
C2DE	10	14	333	24
All	75	100	1,375	100
Family income				
Below £25,000	39	51	527	45
£25,001 to £45,000	30	39	438	37
Above £45,000	–	10	212	18
Prior qualification				
Academic	67	76	1247	88
Vocational	21	24	177	12
All	76	100	1,178	100

* of known outcome (*ie* complete, still studying, left early); – indicates less than 10

Source: IES Survey, 2003

discussed in the first study in this series (*Making the Right Choice*) the higher education choices process is complex and involves a number of key stages or decisions. The first decision is whether to attend university or college, to study elsewhere or to enter the labour market. The second decision is which subject to study, and deciding where to study (*ie* which university or college) follows this. The interviews highlighted a number of issues or areas in this process, which can cause problems. The comments from those who completed their courses also echo points raised by early leavers.

3.3.1 Having no alternatives

For many of the young individuals interviewed, particularly those from more affluent backgrounds or who were academically bright, it was assumed that they would go to university or college. This group felt that they were either unaware (*ie* through a complete lack of information) of the other routes or options open to them or were presented with no alternatives (*fait accompli*). Here the transition from education at age 18 was seen as somewhat of a conveyor belt, akin to the transition from primary to secondary education, rather than being presented as a choice at all. This has several consequences. Firstly, the step between secondary or tertiary education and higher education can be underestimated, and individuals then encounter problems with the transition and feel unprepared. Secondly, individuals can feel that they don't really own the decision process; and, when unsure of their future aims, expect someone else to help them or make the choices for them.

Case study — A proceeded straight from 'A' level's to a degree course and remembers little or no discussion of alternatives to higher education. 'The thing with school is that I was one of the clever ones and it was just assumed that I'd go to HE and get a degree — all I had to do was decide what course and where. There was no real advice or discussion as to whether it was a useful thing to do or not'.

Case study — B went straight from school to study Pharmacy 'There was very little advice at the time. If you were doing well at school you were left to choose your own degree — I was just seen as sensible and could make up my own mind. It would have been useful if they'd challenged me and said you can always take a year out. I think schools are so keen to get you to university they don't really consider if you're making the right subject choices or whether it is actually the best thing for you to do anyway'.

Turning briefly to the survey, some of those who successfully completed their higher education studies also reported feeling the pressure to attend university, and with hindsight would have made different choices.

'I attended university basically because of parents and family expectations and because that was the done thing for most of the students at my school. I would definitely want my child to think twice before applying for a university education ... For most students, who will leave and never use their subjects again, I cant help feeling it has for the most part been a complete waste of time' (successfully completed HE course).

'I took two years out of my degree and then returned. I am currently in the last term. This break was very beneficial for me. Maybe there is too much pressure to go straight to university. I appreciate it more now I am a bit older' (still studying but felt they did not make the right choice of when to go to university).

'All the options at 'A' level are not clearly given' (successful completer).

3.3.2 Knowing what you want

The results of the questionnaire survey (both this wave (Wave III) and the previous wave (Wave II)) would indicate that some individuals (generally younger individuals) may not really know what they want from higher education, and so end up making the wrong decisions. The data shows that largely individuals who ended up leaving early, got what they thought they wanted in that they attended the university or college of their first choice. Indeed, those who entered higher education through clearing, or who attended a university or college that was not their first preference, were no more likely to leave early. This was also borne out in the interviews, where at least half of the early leavers interviewed revealed that they had started at the institution and course of their first choice.

Shortfall of information

Exploring further, the interviews indicated that individuals were having particular problems in terms of the information they collected or received in order to work out what they wanted and make their choices. Looking back on the process many reported that:

- they were left to make decisions alone (with little or no support)
- they felt they had little information
- or they felt that the information they had was misleading. Prospectuses in particular came under fire, where the information was often said to be misleading on areas such as course content and social life.

This indicates that this group needs more guidance on how to collect materials, and how to interpret and critically assess materials in order to use them to make decisions.

Case study — C applied to study a degree course in Physical Geography. When she started her course she realised that the information in the prospectus had been quite misleading. 'I was let down by the prospectus which promised Physical Geography but I did none in the first year and could see I'd do little or none in the second year. It was a real disappointment as I had spent a lot of time filtering out the Human Geography courses which is what most of them are. To call it a Physical Geography course is pretty much a plain lie. There were no field trips either. I was quite angry with the university and course for misinforming me. I think they just don't think people are interested in Physical Geography anymore.'

Case study — D was studying a degree course in the sciences and was also disappointed with the information in the prospectus. The prospectus had promised lots of practical work but after two years the work had nearly all been theory based. 'The prospectus had lots of pictures of people in labs'.

Again, comments from the survey questionnaire complement the findings from the interviews:

'Not enough neutral information is available to students when making decisions of institution or course. I feel that although the course subject for me was right, the institution was not. This was as I was told false information about the amount of performance opportunities there would be. Having friends studying music in other institutions meant I was very aware of the fact I was doing far less music making than they were' (successful completer).

'I think that whilst I do not regret going to university, it maybe would have been better for me to defer a year or two to really decide what I truly wanted to do. It may have stopped me from doing a degree I do not want to use. But I felt so pressured from teachers/family/friends to do a degree that I never considered other options. Young people should be told that it is acceptable not to do a degree and vocational courses are not for dropouts and stupid people' (successful completer).

'Encourage prospective students not to enter higher education until they are certain what they want to do (including researched their career path), or have had a gap year. If still not certain, do a course for interest and enjoyment' (successful completer but currently studying part-time for a masters degree to change career direction).

'Before university I attended a week-long course at University of Surrey concerning their engineering courses. This was called Headstart and provided a valuable insight into what I would be letting myself in for, and helped me to make up my mind about course and institution' (successful completer).

3.3.3 Family help and hindrance

It became evident from the interviews that family history of higher education seemed to work in two different ways for younger students. For those whose family had no experience of higher education, there was a lack of information or guidance that those with higher education experience could have provided. This lack of information and guidance may lead to unsuitable choices being made. On the other hand, those with a family history of higher education may feel subject to a similar pressure as described above – higher education may be presented as the only option and it can be difficult to challenge these assumptions made

by parents. Both these factors were evident in a few of our cases of leaving early.

3.3.4 Limited choices

Here, as with many aspects of leaving early there was a key distinction between the experiences of mature students and younger students. These two groups had different difficulties with their choices, and for mature interviewees it was having limited choices.

In contrast to the situation described above, for mature students the higher education choice process was not so much a conveyor belt, but an assault course. For many it was a struggle to enter higher education and there were many obstacles in the way. Although this group felt a much greater degree of ownership of the decision making process and were better at seeking out information, their decisions were often limited due to responsibilities and commitments, such as having dependent children or being geographically settled in one area. This fits with findings from other qualitative research. Davies *et al.*, (2002) looked at the higher education decision making process of mature students and found older potential students encountered many barriers to entry: *'Barriers to entry were linked to the realities of mature students lives: a multiplicity of roles, costs of study, the need for a reliable source of income to meet existing commitments, the importance and value of caring responsibilities, and time problems...family responsibilities limited participation, increased stress'* (Davies *et al.*, 2002, p.3).

Case study — E was a mature student who needed to stay in the local area due to family responsibilities and his mortgage 'X Uni and Y Uni were the only ones within striking distance who offered the course I wanted. X accepted me and then discovered a driving offence I had not declared and refused a place at the last minute. This left me in the lurch, but Y came up trumps and offered me a place'. This shows a choice process dictated not by what is best for the student but by where it was possible for him to go.

A few mature interviews noted that options and choices could also be limited by their non-traditional entry to higher education, *ie* lack of 'A' levels.

3.4 Making the break

3.4.1 Deciding to leave

The survey data (from Wave II, *Right Choice?*) shows that individuals decide to leave for a number of reasons. Key reasons for leaving a course early include: unsuitable course; financial reasons (*eg* prohibitive or underestimated costs of study and independent living); unsuitable institution; ill health; lack of

ability (eg failing exams); missing friends; stress (eg unable to cope with work pressure); domestic commitments; and accommodation issues. Some of these could be classed as voluntary reasons, in that they led to a conscious decision to leave; whereas others could be deemed involuntary reasons, in these circumstances individuals have no real choice but to leave (see Chapter 1). The qualitative interviews allow us to confirm these key reasons and, more importantly, to explore these reasons in greater depth and to understand how these reasons interact, and to investigate the effect that they have on individuals.

Common reasons for leaving

Approximately half of those interviewed were voluntary leavers, making the decision to leave often through dislike of the course or institution. The other half, however, were involuntary leavers, this group were often affected by external factors or factors beyond their control, such as ill health or family responsibilities.

The 40 interviewees described a wide variety of situations or reasons that led to them deciding to leave early. The most common reasons (cited by approximately one third of all interviewees) were one or a combination of:

- struggling academically or academic failure (16 interviewees)
- poor course material or an unsuitable course, and younger students were particularly critical of the course (14 interviewees)
- problems with finance and getting into debt (12 interviewees). There was a slightly greater likelihood of this for males (but this is indicative only as numbers involved were small).

The next most common reasons were:

- unengaging, and unsupportive tutors with little time for them (11 interviewees)
- illness or death within the family or other family responsibilities (nine interviewees), which was particularly an issue for mature interviewees.

Finally, fewer cited:

- difficulty with social integration into the department or wider university community (eight interviewees), particularly for those who lived some distance from the campus or for mature interviewees
- lack of support from the department or availability of wider support services (seven interviewees)

- the location, standard or general quality, and type of people in their accommodation or the institution as a whole (eight interviewees).

Other reasons given included large class size, impersonal feel to university life, homesickness, problems with independent living, bullying, and a general lack of student (social) life.

Differing problems faced by younger and older students

Again there was a clear distinction in the reasons for leaving early between younger and mature students. As these groups tended to have different motivations for attending higher education and faced different difficulties in making their higher education choices, they correspondingly had different reasons for dropping out.

Younger interviewees often left early for voluntary reasons, they reported problems with not liking the course either due to badly informed or unsupported decisions, or to higher education being seen as their only choice whilst at school or college. Some younger interviewees also reported problems with independent living, and were getting into debt due to a lack of personal financial management skills. This group seemed to demand higher levels of support and a more structured environment in order to make a successful transition from school to higher education.

In contrast, mature interviewees' decisions were often involuntary. Indeed, family responsibilities and finance were commonly cited reasons for leaving early among more mature interviewees. It would seem that mature students made more informed decisions about higher education, but that these decisions tended to be limited by other responsibilities. A common problem was a lack of geographical flexibility, which limited the institutions they could consider. This group, however, have a better idea than younger interviewees of their future plans and how higher education will fit in with these, and as such unsuitability of the course (in terms of not liking the course) was rare. Although, in some ways, mature students are better prepared for the transition to higher education, this group faced difficulties adjusting to studying (often after some time out of formal education). They reported needing help with the use of ICT and with study skills and writing skills. They know that higher education will be difficult but have problems 'fitting in' with university life and 'fitting it in' with external responsibilities.

3.4.2 Multi-faceted process

The reasons above, in themselves, do not come close to explaining the complexities and the individual nature of the decision making process when a student decides to leave their course. The decision in the case of every one of the 40 interviewees was multi-faceted and no two situations were the same. Individuals encountered problems that made things difficult and often led to further

problems. So for many, a kind of vicious circle develops and the final decision to leave has therefore been brought about by a number a compounding factors.

The following case studies illustrate some of the complexities and interlinking of different issues that lead to leaving early.

Case study — F was studying a degree course in English and Sociology. He started to get into debt and then in his second year he developed ME. He knew he was heading for difficulties in his exams but tried to avoid the issue and nobody at the university really noticed. Eventually he failed his second year exams and had to either re-sit the year or leave and due to the state of his finances he was unable to re-sit a whole year of the course and had to leave. *'When I fell ill, a kind of ME, I started not going to lectures and spending more money and I just slipped through the net really. What I found was that I could not go to lectures and nobody would notice or care — I sort of buried my head in the sand and let too much time and money slip by.'*

Case study — G was a mature student with children and was studying Language and Communications. Her father died shortly before her course started and her mother, who originally was going to look after the children while G was at university, then needed support rather than being able to give it. She also found it difficult to access the library due to her childcare responsibilities and the fact that she lived fifteen miles from the university. A friend, who had been giving her a lift to university, subsequently left which meant she then had to rely on public transport which was time consuming and costly. She felt that the university was not geared up for people in her situation and could do little to help her. *'In the end it felt that I was not getting anywhere — just moving from one problem to the next.'*

Case study — H was studying Ecology and found the course itself enjoyable and interesting. He moved into halls of residence, but as a mature student was not happy living with 'a bunch of eighteen year olds' and so he moved out. Higher rents outside halls of residence meant that he began to accumulate debt. Then his father died towards the end of his first year, which hit him very hard. He seemed to be drinking too much and couldn't cope with his problems. He saw tutors and counsellors but they didn't seem to help much.

3.4.3 Deciding when to go

Half of the interviewees left in the first year of their course. This is lower than would be expected, as findings from the previous survey (*'The Right Choice?'*) indicate that the vast majority of those who leave early do so within the first year. However, this pattern is largely due to the difference in timing of the current and previous studies. The current study allows us to capture the experiences of those who leave later in their higher education course. Around one-quarter of interviewees left in the first term (up until or including the Christmas holidays) and a further quarter left later on in the first year, although problems had often already emerged in the first term. For many of those who left during the first year it seemed that the Christmas holiday period

was often a time of reflection and decision making. Interviewees returned home and took stock of their situation. Many used this time to make the decision to withdraw, or often said that after returning to university after Christmas they realised they were not happy. This was more common amongst younger students, particularly when the magnitude of the transition to higher education became evident.

Case study — J was already having a few doubts about her course before the Christmas holidays. She had found her tutors unsupportive, had not received much feedback on her coursework and her grandparent had died. She felt that other students had been given much more support than she had. Over Christmas she *'reflected on the situation with my grandparents, not having got work back, on unequal treatment, the fact that there was a big assignment due in after the holidays and a general lack of support'* and decided she would leave her course straight after the holidays were over.

The other half of the interviewees left their courses after a year or more, although initial problems had already started to manifest themselves at a much earlier point, often in the first few months of the course. For many of those who left further into their course, it seems that academic failure, although not the principle cause of the decision to leave early often acted as a catalyst to making the decision. Having many doubts and being aware that a deadline for a large piece of work is looming often spurs the student into making the decision that they have delayed, rather than wasting time on a piece of work if they think they might leave anyway. Exam failure was also often mentioned, with interviewees not feeling as though it is worthwhile re-sitting an exam or re-taking a year that they have failed.

So it is possible to distinguish between underlying factors and precipitating factors which act as the final straw in the decision to leave.

3.4.4 The leaving process

The amount of consultation and support offered to interviewees when they informed the institution of their decision to withdraw varied. A few interviewees simply wrote a letter to the institution and received little or no contact as a result of this letter. A greater number, about one-quarter, felt that there was little contact or debate about them leaving and that the institution didn't seem to care if they left. This was particularly evident for those who were studying in large departments and felt somewhat isolated. However, around half did have some form of consultation during the process of deciding to leave, although in most cases this only involved some discussion with a tutor or head of department. A few did see a counsellor or student advisor. A small minority were offered the option to discuss the decision but refused to have any consultation with members of staff at their institution.

The literature also suggests that support was not often utilised to its full potential. For example, just under half (46 per cent) of the early leavers in one study did have some consultation with a personal tutor and around 17 per cent accessed counselling services. The authors highlighted that although general awareness of the existence of these services was high (79 per cent were aware of personal tutors and 71 per cent of counselling services), these resources were not being fully utilised. They also found that a substantial minority (around one-quarter) did not find the support offered at all useful (Davies and Elias, 2003).

It seems that at each stage, when a problem developed there was little support either given to or asked for by our interviewees. It is evident that more could have been done to identify the problems faced by the interviewees, particularly early on in the process when problems first begin to emerge. Perhaps if one problem was effectively tackled when it occurred it would have minimised the impact of subsequent problems (making them easier to resolve) and eliminate the crescendo effect that is evident in all of the cases of the interviewees. However, more universities and colleges are now working on retention strategies, and policies including conducting some form of exit interview, to better understand where the problems lie, especially in a higher education market where the consumer (the student) has increasing purchasing power. In the early stages, while this may not enable them to help the individuals concerned as the intervention is invariably too late, it will enable them to put measures in place that could prevent it happening to others. For example, the NAO identified that one institution ran a memo system whereby staff referred a student (for whom there was concern) to the Director of Student Support. Another institution had created a post whereby anyone considering leaving had a formal interview with someone trained to direct them to the relevant support services (NAO, 2002a).

The lack of support received, evident in the interviews, was said to be due to a number of reasons:

- a general lack of availability of support. However, other research indicates that support is available, *eg* the NAO survey, of over one hundred institutions, reports that all of these offered professional counsellors, the vast majority (95 per cent) offered financial advisers, and just over half (55 per cent) offered psychiatric services (NAO, 2002a)
- a lack of awareness of the help available (often through a lack of advertising of the support). However as noted above, awareness of services tended to be high (Davies and Elias, 2003)
- a lack of provision to link students to the support they need. However, as indicated above, institutions are putting in place systems of referrals.
- a hesitancy or unwillingness on the part of the student to access support, which is perhaps the most likely as students

will have begun their withdrawal process, mentally and emotionally, long before they physically leave.

It would be interesting at this point to consider the support provided and accessed by individuals who considered leaving but decided to stay. How and when are these individuals reached, and how are they helped? However, this is perhaps a subject for further research.

3.5 Options and choices on leaving

Interviewees were asked about their plans upon leaving their course, about the options they felt were open to them at that time, and about what actions they took.

- Around half of the interviewees planned to move straight into employment when leaving the course (see Chapter 4 for details of the employment experiences of early leavers, gained from the survey):
 - as an alternative career path other than higher education (long-term view), or
 - to earn some money to pay off debt accumulated during higher education, (possibly with a view to returning to higher education at a later date – short to medium term view).
- Approximately one-quarter of the interviewees aimed to transfer to an alternative course or institution immediately or at the start of the next academic year.
- However, a further quarter had no solid plans at all upon leaving higher education early.

It is therefore possible to make a distinction between ‘getting out’ and ‘getting on’. A student who decides to leave as they feel their current situation will not offer them the future or prospects they desire may still progress well upon leaving higher education early. This group leaves to progress further and with a clear plan (getting on). Of more concern are those who leave higher education early simply because they feel they have no option, or cannot stand to remain in their current situation and whose future plans are uncertain (getting out).

Findings from the questionnaire survey, discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, indicates that early leavers are in less attractive jobs than those who completed their course, *ie* lower level occupations, lower salaries, and less likely to be perceived to be of good quality. This would suggest that many of the early leavers who are in work are therefore just ‘getting out’ of higher education, and are taking a more short-term perspective on their careers. This group are faring relatively poorly in the labour market and

generally report a lower level of satisfaction with their careers (see also Section 6.3 Career satisfaction).

3.5.1 Going back

As noted above, many (over half of those interviewed) returned to higher education after leaving their initial course but the time frame for this happening varied between an immediate transfer to going back several years after the initial withdrawal. However, the return was not always successful second time around and, of those who returned, a small proportion (about one fifth) have since left the course again. Perhaps indicating that higher education is not suitable for everyone (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of the survey results in relation to early leavers' return to study). It was found that over three-fifths of early leavers returned to education of some kind, and that undergraduate study was particularly popular.

What was different?

Knowing what you really want: Interviewees who returned to higher education were asked what was different about their new higher education experience. The majority of those who returned to higher education reported that they studied a different subject second time around. This was the key difference, and was also reported in the previous study (*Right Choice?* – where the vast majority, 84 per cent, of those who returned to higher education changed their subject of study). The actual nature of the subject changes varied, with some students making complete changes, eg from Chemistry to Fine Art, to more subtle changes, eg Computing and Cybernetics to Computer Studies without Cybernetics. It seemed to be a matter of personal preference and of not enjoying a subject they initially thought they were interested in. Changes from science subjects to arts and social science subjects were slightly more common than were changes from arts and social science to science subjects (which were rare).

Interviewees felt that the decision to return and the choice of a different subject of study was much more considered and better informed than initial choices. These new decisions tended to be informed by a greater life experience gained after a period of employment between higher education experiences. This was particularly the case for younger interviewees who, it could be argued, now know what they really want. More links with employment was also commonly mentioned and this is discussed further below.

Other differences mentioned in their higher education experience second time around, also tended to relate to the course: smaller classes, better paced, and more structured. However, issues relating to location were also commonly mentioned such as being

able to live at home or preferring the town or location of the new institution.

Case study — K originally enrolled on a Media Studies course, which she left early as it wasn't for her. After leaving the course she worked in a shop and eventually did some basic courses in counselling and play therapy and started doing some voluntary play therapy work in schools. This eventually led to a small amount of paid work that made her think that she could actually make a career out of it. *'It was like suddenly I saw a line of work opening out for me which I felt passionate about, was quite good at and there was a need for.'* She then decided to do a Psychology degree with the Open University *'mainly as it is flexible, I can take it at my own pace, the costs is less and I can work at the same time. I'll have more credibility to my counselling work and get on the register of UK Psychologists and ultimately have plans to get into Educational Psychology.'*

Placing study in context of employment: Another key difference was to place higher education in context with employment. Around one-fifth of those who left early but returned to higher education were studying (second time around) whilst working (eg as part of day release from an employer). They reported that they had the support, often financial support, of their employer which helped to eliminate financial problems related to higher education. Putting higher education into context was also valuable as it helped focus interviewees on the employment benefits of remaining on their course. A few interviewees were working part-time and studying part-time without employer support but this still helped to make higher education financially viable. Some also reported studying via the Open University and were enjoying the greater flexibility that this offered. Thus putting study in the context of employment effectively provided:

- a clearly defined goal and purpose
- external encouragement
- financial support (from wages or from employer subsidy)
- altered the mode of study (sometimes part-time, or distance learning).

Case study — L originally studied Bio-technology and left after the Christmas holidays. She then worked in an accountancy office and tried to do some further study and again left. In May 2000, she began working in the Haematology department of a hospital and found she enjoyed the subject of the work. Her employer is now supporting her to study a four year Biomedical Science course one day per week. She has just completed the first year and she is enjoying it and the course is going well. Her work place is very supportive both pastorally and financially and she also has a guaranteed job when she completes the course. *'I wish I knew about this option when I was at school. Everyone said I would have to do a degree.'*

3.5.2 Non-returners

Again, as noted above, a small group, of early leavers had no plans to return to higher education. The main reasons given for this decision were:

- **Finance** – after their initial experiences proved so costly many said that they could not afford to return to higher education and some commented that the benefits of returning would not outweigh the costs.
- **Employment** – half of those who did not return found that once they had adapted to working life they preferred the structure, status or remuneration associated with working (effectively ‘getting on’)
- **Family responsibilities** – a very few (only two) did not return due to external commitments.

However, one or two of those who had not yet returned to higher education said they may consider returning in the future.

3.6 Early leavers reflections on their higher education experiences

Lastly, interviewees were probed about their perceptions of the value of their higher education experience and of higher education more generally. They were asked whether they felt that their time at their original university or college had been useful or whether they regretted their time there.

3.6.1 Value of higher education

The vast majority, three quarters of all interviewees, identified at least some value in their **initial higher education experience** (see also Section 7.2.1). This usually related to gaining life experience, learning about themselves; or leading them to their current course or job. Interviewees tended to feel that they could make better decisions in the future as their experience had helped them to understand what they didn’t want. However, some pointed out that these benefits did come at a cost – usually financial. A few identified no value at all to their time at university or college, and claimed the cost was not at all worth the benefits (see also Chapter 7).

Case study — M left her original choice of a Maths degree and eventually chose to return to a teaching course. She didn’t have any regrets about her initial experience as she learned a lot about her likes and dislikes and what she was like as a person. *‘It was a high learning curve — all the practical things about going to uni and also the responsibility of having complete control over your life. I became much more confident and learned how to make new friends.’*

Almost all of the interviewed early leavers identified at least some value in higher education more generally. Even those who had decided that higher education was not right for them could still see the benefits of higher education for others. The benefits of higher education were seen as relating to career satisfaction, income, confidence, making new friends and experiencing 'university life' (see also Chapter 7).

However, a very small minority of early leavers could see no benefits at all to higher education. This usually related to the view that higher education does not necessarily lead you into a good job; and that the costs in terms of finance and time are too risky and thus investment is not worthwhile. In some cases, this was related directly to a personal experience; interviewees had left higher education and entered employment while their peers had continued in higher education, only to find themselves in similar jobs but with higher amounts of debt.

4. Employment Experiences After Graduation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter follows the activities of the 1503 respondents since the Wave II survey, *Right Choice?* in 2000/01, and pays particular attention to their employment experiences. The issues covered are:

- patterns of activity over the past two and a half years
- current employment experiences of those with up to two years in the labour market
- graduate geographical mobility
- the perceived quality of their jobs.

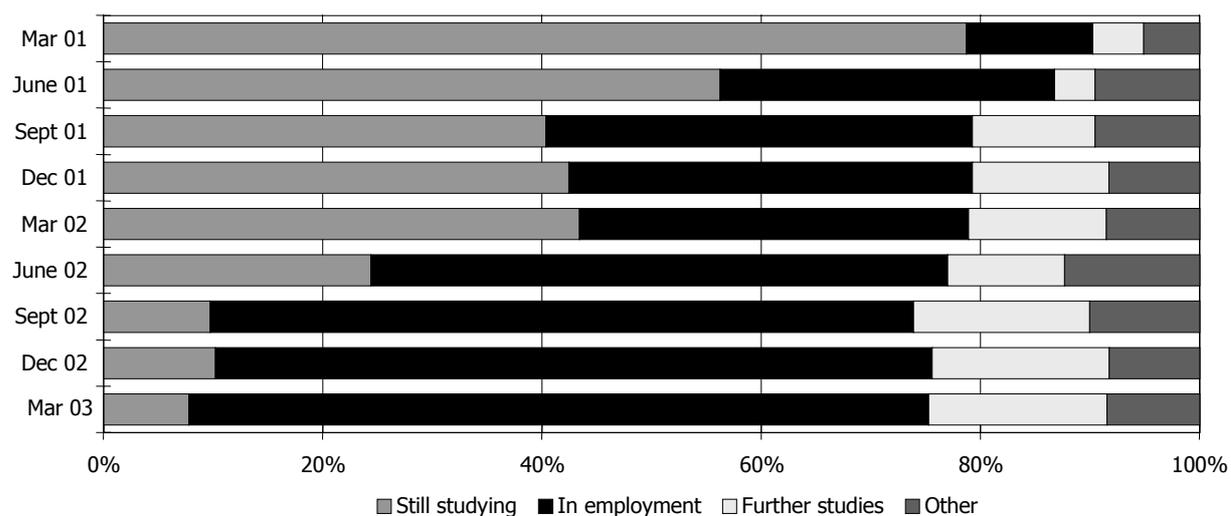
Once again it should be noted here that the experiences and actions of this sample over time is indicative and may not be fully representative of the experiences of all graduates. Any statistically significant relationships and patterns are indicated, and where possible comparisons between the respondent findings and national level data are given.

4.2 Activities

Respondents indicated their main activities at set time points (at intervals of three months) over a period of 2½ years (since the last survey), and from this a pattern of activity emerges with an increasing proportion moving into employment, particularly permanent employment. A fluctuating pattern exists for temporary employment, which is largely caused by the different graduating cohorts (see below). However, overall an increasing proportion of respondents were undertaking further studies over time (see Figure 4.1).

Looking at the activities of those who completed their studies, it is possible to compare the experiences over time of the two main graduating cohorts – those who graduated in 2001 and those who graduated in 2002. The activities of both cohorts are remarkably similar with perhaps the exception that those who graduated more recently were marginally more likely to be in permanent employment six and nine months after graduating than their peers who graduated a year earlier (see Table 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Main activities between Spring 2001 and Spring 2003 (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

Interestingly, there seems to be no indications that the prevailing labour market conditions were any better in 2002 than 2001. Indeed national figures show that the outcomes for those entering employment in 2002 were not very different to previous cohorts (Perryman, 2003). Instead this pattern is likely to be due to the different types of courses followed by the two cohorts. Whilst nearly all of those who completed their courses in 2001 had followed a three year course, the vast majority of those who completed in 2002 (85 per cent) had followed a four year course. These longer courses are often in professional or vocational subjects and may incorporate a work experience/placement element – factors linked to greater employability (Chapter 1).

It makes sense here to look separately at the activities, since graduation, of each graduating cohort, *eg* the class of 2002 and the class of 2001.

Table 4.1: Proportion of graduating cohort undertaking each activity (per cent)

Time since graduation	Cohort	Permanent employment	Temporary work	Self-employment	Further studies	Base no.
On completion	class of 2001	10	21	1	2	634
	class of 2002	10	24	0	2	551
Three months	class of 2001	37	27	1	18	640
	class of 2002	38	26	1	18	551
Six months	class of 2001	44	20	2	20	641
	class of 2002	48	19	1	20	553
Nine months	class of 2001	49	14	2	20	632
	class of 2002	56	14	0	21	548

NB: initial studies, and other activities not reported here, hence row percentages do not add up to 100

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Early expectations

Before looking at each cohort in more detail, it is possible to look at respondents expected activities after leaving university or college, with their actual activities captured during Wave II when they were still in higher education. The majority (three out of five) of those who expected to start a job within three months of graduating, did indeed do so (*ie* gained permanent work). Similarly the majority (again three out of five) of those who expected to start a postgraduate course within three months, were (three months after finishing) in further study. This indicates that short term expectations were largely met. This was true of both graduating cohorts. However, there were large proportions of those who had intended to travel after graduating and particularly of those who had no plans at all, that three months after graduating were in temporary work – around one in three.

4.2.1 Activities of class of 2002

Respondents who graduated in 2002 reported their main activities in June 2002 (around the time they completed their studies), September 2002 (three months after graduating); December 2002 (six-months after graduating); and at the time of the survey (approximately nine months after graduating). Over the period of nine months the proportion of individuals in permanent employment increased to a maximum of 56 per cent (at the time of the survey), whilst the proportion in temporary work decreased steadily to a current low of 14 per cent. This indicates that graduates move to more secure work over time. Also over this period the proportion undertaking further studies gradually rose to a current peak of 21 per cent.

Exploring the patterns

Within these general patterns, it is possible to look at the experiences of different groups of respondents. Female respondents, at each time period, were more likely to be in permanent work but the proportions in temporary work were similar; a marginally greater proportion of male respondents reported to be undertaking further studies towards the end of the monitoring period. Those from higher socio-economic groups were relatively more likely to be in permanent employment at each time period than those from lower groups; whilst conversely, those from lower groups were relatively more likely at each time period to be in temporary work. However, by the time of the survey, the levels of temporary work were the same for both groups. This indicates that it took those from lower socio-economic groups longer to find permanent work. The proportions who had undertaken further study varied little by socio-economic group. Unfortunately the numbers involved were too small to allow for comparisons by ethnicity and age.

Looking at subject of study, health and medicine, and maths and engineering graduates were the most likely to enter permanent employment over the period (both reached a peak of 66 per cent, at the time of the survey); whilst the proportions of biological and physical science graduates working permanently was particularly low (only reaching a peak of 44 per cent). Arts and humanities graduates tended to be over-represented in temporary employment, with the proportion in this group in temporary employment falling more slowly than other graduate groups over the period. Social studies graduates and particularly biological and physical science graduates were more likely than other graduates to undertake further study at any of the time periods (reaching peaks of 25 and 36 per cent respectively), as were those who had studied in pre-92 universities.

Although there was little difference in patterns of permanent employment, those who graduated with lower class degrees (*ie* neither first nor upper second) were more likely at each time period to be in temporary work than those who had graduated with higher class degrees. However, those with higher class degrees were twice as likely to undertake further study than their peers. A similar pattern was noticed when looking at prior attainment. Those who entered higher education with academic qualifications, particularly those with higher 'A' level points, were more likely at each time period to be in further study. Those with vocational entry qualifications were more likely to be in employment, especially towards the end of the measured time period.

It is perhaps worth reiterating here that the majority (85 per cent) of those who graduated in 2002 had started in 1998 and therefore had taken a four year course. Those who had followed longer courses were marginally more likely to be in permanent work than those from shorter (three year) courses, whilst this latter group were relatively more likely to have undertaken further study at any of the time periods.

4.2.2 Activities of class of 2001

Looking at this cohort, all but a handful, started their courses in 1998 and so had followed a three year course.

The activities of this graduating cohort were tracked over a greater period of time, approximately 21 months. Over this time the proportion in permanent employment rose steadily to a peak (at the time of the survey) of 69 per cent; and the proportion in temporary work fell gradually to a current low of seven per cent. The pattern of further study is a little different, in that the proportion rose to a high of 20 per cent (one in five) six to nine months after graduating, and then fell slightly to a current proportion of 14 per cent. A similar pattern was recorded in the *Moving On* study which also tracked graduates' early careers (IER, 1999).

Table 4.2: Activities at six months and 21 months of class of 2001, compared with First Destination statistics

	2001 cohort (6m)		All graduates 2001 population (6m)	2001 cohort (21m)	
	No.	%	%	No.	%
Work (perm/temp)	410	66	66	483	77
Self employment	10	2	1	11	2
Further study	128	20	18	89	14
Other	76	12	14	45	7
<i>Base*</i>	<i>624</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>628</i>	<i>100</i>

* figures adjusted to exclude those still on initial courses to allow comparison

Source: IES Survey, 2003 and HESA First Destination statistics, Table 1b

It is possible to compare the activity of this cohort of respondents soon after graduation with national level data on first destinations of graduates collected by HESA. Six months after graduating the activity profile of respondents closely matches that found for all UK first degree graduates (see Table 4.2). However, further into their careers the situation has changed, and arguably improved, for our respondents, with: a much greater proportion in employment and earning a salary; a drop in the proportion in further study; and a fall in the numbers in other activities which include unemployment and taking time out.

Exploring the patterns

Interestingly for this cohort the activity patterns of different groups of graduates were very similar. Although a slight difference in the pattern of temporary work and further study was noticed by socio-economic group after 15 months (post graduation). At this time the groups diverge, with those from lower socio-economic groups being more likely to be in temporary work than their peers, and those from higher socio-economic groups being more likely to be in further study than their peers. This suggests that some individuals from lower socio-economic groups may be stuck in temporary jobs as the proportion does not tail off for this group as sharply as it does for those from higher socio-economic groups.

Those with higher education qualifications in maths and engineering, as with the 2002 cohort, and also in business and administration, were more likely to be in permanent employment at any measured time point than those who had followed other courses (reaching peaks of 78 and 82 per cent respectively at the time of the survey). Again, the proportions in permanent employment who studied biological or physical sciences, or who studied arts and humanities subjects were relatively lower over the period (currently reaching peaks of 67 and 63 per cent respectively). The activity pattern with regard to temporary

employment for some subject groups was not a steady decline but rather a more a jagged decline with some periods of increase. However, arts and humanities graduates and biological and physical science graduates (corresponding with their lesser propensity to be in permanent work) were generally over-represented in temporary employment over the period.

Again, as with the 2002 cohort, social studies and biological and physical science graduates were more likely to undertake further study than other graduates (reaching peaks of 25 and 26 per cent respectively). However, the longer tracking period offered by the 2001 cohort shows a change in the participation in further study with the proportions of social studies graduates tailing off after one year, whilst the proportions of biological and physical science graduates remains steady. This suggests that natural science graduates undertake longer courses post graduation than their social studies counterparts (see also Chapter 5).

Those in post-92 universities and colleges of higher education were more likely to be in permanent work over the period, than those in pre-92 universities. However, this is largely due to the relatively higher rates of further study amongst those from pre-92 universities.

The proportions undertaking temporary work varied little over time by degree class obtained, however those with lower class degrees (*ie* neither first nor upper second) were more likely at each time period to be in permanent work than those who had graduated with higher class degrees. However, this pattern is heavily influenced by the likelihood of engaging in further study. The latter group, those with higher class degrees, were much more likely to engage in further study (following the activity pattern for the 2002 cohort) (see also Chapter 5) at the expense of permanent employment.

Similarly, looking at prior attainment, those who entered university or college with academic qualifications and particularly with high 'A' level points were more likely to be in further study across the measured period, once again at the expense of permanent work. Interestingly, towards the end of the measured period (over a year after graduation) the proportion of those with lower 'A' level points (less than 11) undertaking further study was greater than those with higher 'A' level points (over 25). Thus whilst other groups propensity to further study tails off over time, those with fewer 'A' level points increases one year after graduation and remains at this level.

4.2.3 Current main activity

At the time of the survey (Spring/early Summer 2003) eight per cent of respondents said they were still studying for their initial higher education qualifications as their main activity, 16 per cent

were engaged in further study, eight per cent were doing 'something else' (largely looking for work, travelling or taking time out, undertaking a mixture of work and study, or looking after a home or family), and well over two-thirds (68 per cent) were in employment. Interestingly, of those who reported that they had left their initial course of study early, nearly one-quarter were undertaking further study at the time of the survey (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 for a further exploration of this issue).

Again some differences in current activity by respondent groups (that were statistically significant) can be identified. Relatively **higher rates of:**

- **permanent employment** were found for White students; business and administration, maths and engineering, and education graduates; those with lower class degree outcomes; those who attended a post-92 university or college of higher education; and those who graduated in 2001 (*ie* more time in the labour market)
- **temporary working** were found for arts and humanities and social studies graduates; and those who graduated in 2002 (*ie* less time in the labour market). Also there were higher rates, but not significantly so, amongst mature respondents and those from lower socio-economic groups)
- **further studies** were found for younger respondents; biological and physical, and social studies graduates; those with higher class degree qualifications (especially first-class honours); students who entered higher education with academic qualifications and particularly those with high 'A' level points (21 and above); those who studied at pre-92 universities; and those who graduated in 2002 (particularly those who had followed three year courses). There were also higher rates amongst minority ethnic groups but the difference was not statistically significant. This finding fits with other research that specifically examined the labour market transitions of minority ethnic students and noted that minority ethnic graduates are more likely to want to get further qualifications (Connor and Tyers, forthcoming).

4.3 Characteristics of current job

Activity rates give an indication of the proportion of those in temporary and permanent work but tell us little about the quality of that work. Therefore, respondents were asked a series of questions about their current job.

Over one thousand respondents (73 per cent), at the time of the survey, were in a job. This is a little higher than the proportion who stated that their **main** activity at the time of the survey was employment (see above). This 73 per cent includes those who are undertaking any form of work, including those who are working

whilst studying or undertaking voluntary work. Of these, 80 per cent are in a permanent position, 12 per cent classify their job as temporary, and eight per cent were working as a secondary activity to studying or travelling.

For most of those in work (56 per cent), this is their first job since graduating or leaving early, however, just over one-quarter (28 per cent) were in their second job, and for one in six (16 per cent) it was at least their third job. As might be expected, those who left their university or college early were relatively more likely to be on their second or third job; as were those who graduated in 2001 rather than 2002 (statistically significant).

Hours worked is perhaps one indicator of quality of work, as part-time work can attract lower rates of pay and fewer fringe benefits (including training and career advancement), and take place within lower graded jobs (see for example Rubery, 1998; Hakim, 1997). The majority of respondents considered their job to be full-time (87 per cent) rather than part-time (13 per cent). Those working temporarily or as a secondary activity were much more likely to be working part-time than those working on permanent contracts (statistically significant). Part-time work was also statistically more prevalent amongst female, and older respondents; and amongst biological and physical science, social studies and arts and humanities graduates. There were also higher rates of part-time work amongst ethnic minority respondents but this was not found to be statistically significant.

4.3.1 Occupation

Another indicator of quality is the level of occupation, measured on the Standard Occupational Classification. A wide range of occupations were reported by respondents, but the most common were: administrative and secretarial occupations (15 per cent); teaching and research professionals (11 per cent); science, engineering and IT technicians (ten per cent); and other business and public service associates (ten per cent). Overall, the majority of respondents (72 per cent) were in relatively high level occupations (measured against Standard Occupational Classification [SOC] groups one to three), *ie* managerial, professional, and associate professional and technical occupations (see Table 4.3).

Exploring the patterns

As would be expected the occupational profile of respondents was heavily influenced by gender and subject. Female respondents were dominant in health, teaching and research, and public service professions; in health and social welfare, and sales related associate professions; and in administrative and secretarial and personal service roles. Conversely male respondents were over-represented in legal, finance, and other business professions; and

Table 4.3: Occupational profile of those currently in work

Occupation	No.	%
Any managerial or professional	262	24
Science professionals	—	—
Engineering and technology/ICT professionals	44	4
Health professionals	10	1
Teaching and research professionals	119	11
Legal professionals	10	1
Finance, accountancy, auditing professionals	41	4
Public service professionals	10	1
Other business professionals	22	2
Any associate professional/technical	521	48
Science/engineering/IT technicians	109	10
Health and social welfare associates	84	8
Protective service officers	19	2
Culture media and sports occupations	53	5
Legal and financial associate	78	7
Sales and related associate	71	7
Other business and public service associate	107	10
Any other	301	28
Administrative and secretarial occupations	162	15
Skilled trades	20	2
Personal service occupations	29	3
Sales and customer service occupations	64	6
Process, plant and machine operatives	—	—
Elementary occupations	21	2
Total	1,084	100

NB: cell sizes of less than 10 are not reported.

Source: IES Survey, 2003

amongst science, engineering and IT professionals and technicians, and protective service roles. Health and medicine graduates tended to be clustered in health and social welfare associate, and health professional roles; respondents who had studied maths and engineering tended to be clustered in science, engineering and IT technician posts and engineering, technology and ICT professions; and education students were clustered in teaching and research professions. Those who had studied other subjects had a greater spread of occupations.

Other occupational patterns emerging were that:

- Older respondents were over-represented in teaching and research professions, and in health and social welfare associate professional roles.

- Those with high degree outcomes (actual or expected) were over-represented in health, science, business, and teaching and research professions.
- Some groups were statistically significant to be more likely than other groups to be working outside of managerial, professional, and associate professional and technical occupations (*ie* SOC top three):
 - those who class their job as temporary work or who were working as a secondary activity (*ie* alongside travelling or undertaking further study)
 - those with lower family incomes (measured in 1998). Also female respondents (as found in *Moving On*, 1999, although looking further into individuals careers), or those from minority ethnic groups, or from lower socio-economic groups were more likely to be in lower occupations but these findings were not statistically significant
 - those who studied business and administration, or arts and humanities subjects (also found in *Moving On*, 1999); or who obtained (or expected to obtain) a lower degree class (*ie* below first or upper second); or those who withdrew early
 - those who entered higher education with vocational qualifications or entered with academic qualifications but less than 21 'A' level points
 - those with less labour market experience (*ie* fewer years since graduation, particularly those leaving in 2002 after following a three year course); or with high job turnover (*ie* more than one job since graduating); or who were working part time.

Early expectations

It is interesting here to contrast the occupations respondents are currently working in with their previous goals and expectations. In Wave II, whilst still in higher education, respondents were asked to describe the kind of job or career they would want in the next two to three years. The most popular choice was teaching at 15 per cent, followed by engineering/ICT at 11 per cent, finance and media both with ten per cent, scientific research nine per cent, and health related work eight per cent. Looking at these groups it would appear that for many (at least half) respondents their earlier career expectations have been met and they are working within occupations that they had hoped for. However, those who had wanted to work in media or scientific research seem to have encountered difficulties or to have changed their minds, as the data would indicate that only about one in four actually achieved this goal.

Table 4.4: Sector profile of those currently in work

Sector	No.	%
Primary industries	—	—
Utilities	34	3
Manufacturing	70	6
Construction	35	3
Selling, distribution, retailing	117	11
Financial services	108	10
Arts and cultural services	19	2
Leisure and entertainment services	64	6
Communications	78	7
Other business services	125	12
Education	160	15
Public administration/defence	87	8
Health and social services	116	11
Other public services	52	5
Other	14	1
Total	1,083	100

NB: cell sizes of less than 10 are not reported

Source: IES Survey, 2003

4.3.2 Sector

Respondents described the work that their employer undertook and this enabled the employment sector to be identified. The most common sectors were all in the service sector: education (15 per cent); business services (12 per cent); selling, distribution and retail (11 per cent); health and social services (11 per cent); and financial services (ten per cent) (see Table 4.4).

Occupation and sector are closely related with some occupations clustered in particular industrial sectors (see Table 4.5).

The patterns found by sector closely mirror those found for occupation, as occupation and sector are related. Thus female respondents dominated the public sector including education, and health and social services; whereas males dominated in utilities, manufacturing, construction and communications sectors. The majority of respondents who studied health and medicine were working in the health and social services sector, and the majority of education graduates were employed in the education sector.

Also older respondents were over-represented in public service including arts and cultural services, education, public administration and health and social services. Those with higher degree outcomes (actual or expected) were more likely to be working in the arts and cultural services, communications,

Table 4.5: Occupations and their key sectors for those currently in work

Occupations	No.	Clustered sectors (per cent occurrence in sector clusters)
Engineering & technology/ICT professionals	45	Manufacturing, Construction (64%)
Teaching & research professionals	118	Education (86%)
Legal professionals	11	Business services (46%)
Finance, accountancy, auditing professionals	41	Financial services (68%)
Public service professionals	10	Public administration/defence (80%)
Other business professionals	22	<i>Spread</i>
Science/engineering/IT technicians	109	Manufacturing, Business services, Public admin./defence (48%)
Health & social welfare associates	84	Health & social services (83%)
Protective service officers	19	Public administration/defence, Other public services (90%)
Culture media & sports occupations	51	Communications (55%)
Legal & financial associate	78	Financial services, Business services (76%)
Sales & related associate	71	Selling, distribution, retailing (55%)
<i>Other business & public service associate</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>Spread</i>
<i>Administrative & secretarial occupations</i>	<i>162</i>	<i>Spread</i>
<i>Skilled trades</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Spread</i>
Personal service occupations	28	Education, Health & social services (71%)
Sales & customer service occupations	63	Selling, distribution, retailing (56%)
Elementary occupations	22	Leisure & entertainment services; Selling, distribution & retailing (77%)

NB: cell sizes of less than 10 are not reported.

Source: IES Survey, 2003

education, health and social services, and other public services sectors. Lastly, temporary jobs were more likely to be in manufacturing, selling, distribution and retailing, and in leisure and entertainment services; secondary activity jobs were most common in health and social services; and part-time jobs in selling distribution and retailing, leisure and entertainment and also in the education sector.

4.3.3 Salary

A further indicator of job quality could be the amount employers are prepared to pay for individuals working in particular roles, *ie* salary. The levels of annual gross salary before tax and excluding bonuses and benefits ranged from under £500 to over £40,000, with the mean of £15,559 (or median of £16,000). This compares well with a median salary of £16,016 for all new graduates¹ in employment (calculated from LFS Spring 2003). The median rises to £18,307 for those in self perceived good quality 'graduate' jobs with strict entry criteria, development opportunities, and are externally well regarded (see 4.4 below). This compares with

¹ A new graduate is identified, using ONS methodology, as someone who one year ago was a full-time student, who is not a full-time student now, and has a higher education first degree qualification.

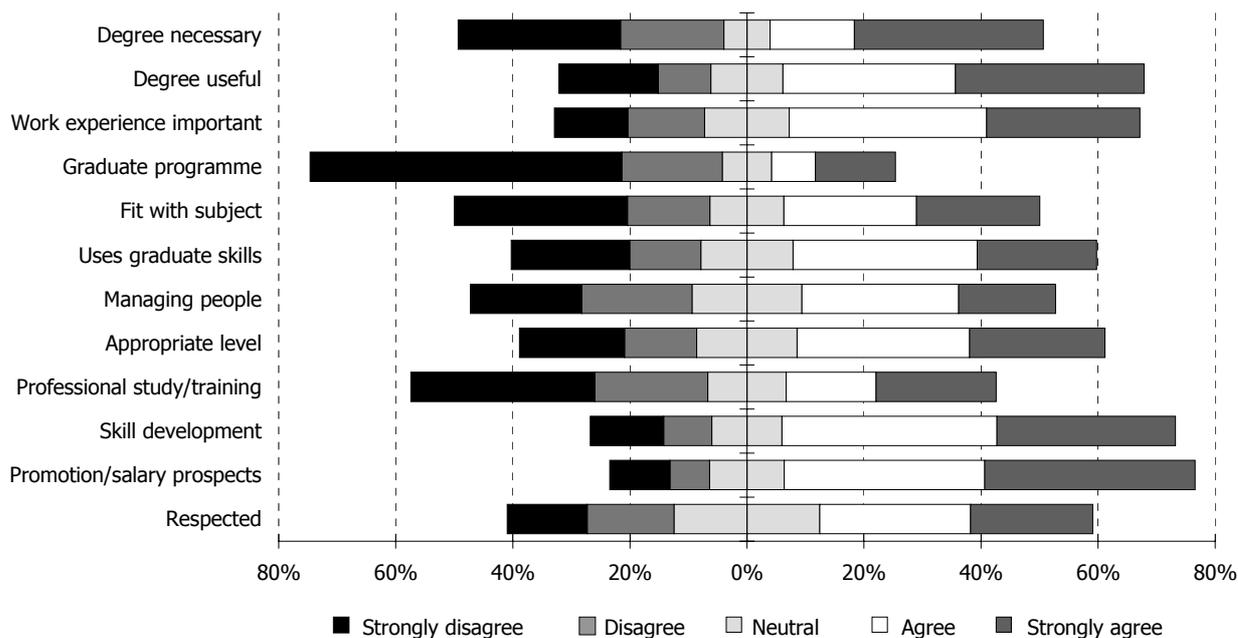
surveys of blue chip employers, where the median salary paid to new graduates ranged between £19,000 and £19,600 (IDS, 2002).

Men earned higher salaries on average (statistically significant). This follows patterns identified in 1999 where female graduates three and half years into their careers earn 11 per cent less (IER, 1999). However, looking at the survey data within occupations (those working full-time only) the pattern is more complex – with female average salaries outweighing males in many categories. Those with a higher family income (measured in 1998), and from a higher socio-economic group (ABC1) tended to earn more. Again this follows patterns identified previously (IER, 1999, CHERI 2002a). Also those who were younger (under 21 at application in 1998), and those from a minority ethnic group had marginally higher average salaries (but this difference was not statistically significant). Socio-economic group and family income are related to prior attainment. So it is possible to look at the how those with different levels of prior attainment fared in the labour market. Those with academic qualifications had statistically significant higher average salary level, as did those with higher 'A' level points.

Turning to subject, graduates from maths and engineering, education, and health and medicine courses, (all often regarded as professional subjects) achieved higher salaries. This again follows patterns identified earlier (IER, 1999). Relatively low average salaries were found amongst arts and humanities, and biological and physical science respondents. Those who studied in a pre-92 university had significantly higher average salaries than those who had followed courses in post-92 universities or colleges of higher education. Those who completed their courses earned 25 per cent more than those who left early, while those who completed their courses with a higher class degree outcome (first or upper second) had even higher salaries.

Those working full-time earned considerably more than those working part-time (on average more than twice the level), as did those in permanent work as opposed to those in temporary or secondary activity jobs, and those in higher level occupations (all were statistically significant). In particular, those working as financial professionals, in protective service roles, and as engineering, technology and ICT professionals, earned most (indicative findings only due to the small numbers involved). This corresponds with figures from the Association of Graduate Recruiters (2003). It also contrasts with national figures which find that new graduates in non-graduate work (using Standard Occupational Classification) are earning considerably less, a median of just over £12,000; (LFS, Spring 2002 quoted in Perryman, 2003). Higher salaries were found in Greater London, East Midlands, the East and the South East.

Figure 4.2: Agreement with statements about current job (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

4.4 Perceived quality of jobs

The 'quality' of their jobs can also be assessed in the way the respondents rated their jobs against a range of criteria (see Figure 4.2).

The highest degrees of association were with the statements:

- *my job offers the possibility of promotion and salary increases* (70 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement)
- *my job offers continual skill development* (67 per cent)
- *a degree was useful for entry to my job* (62 per cent)
- *my previous work experience was important in getting this job* (60 per cent).

The respondents were less likely to associate the following statements, often associated with 'graduate jobs' as discussed in Chapter 1, with their jobs:

- *my job involves study that will lead to a professional or recognised qualification* (44 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement)
- *my job fits closely with my degree subject* (36 per cent)
- *my job is part of a graduate entry/development programme* (only 21 per cent).

4.4.1 What is a good quality job?

A statistical technique (factor analysis) was used to group the statements. Three groups of factors were formed. A high incidence of agreement with these statements/factors was taken to mean that the individual was in a quality job. They related to:

- **High entry requirements for the job**, *ie* the necessity (or usefulness) for a degree; work experience; and whether the job fits closely with degree subject (see Table 4.6). Work experience was particularly important for women, those who had studied at post-92 institutions, and those working in newer professions such as culture, media and sports occupations. For example:

'Although university was a great learning opportunity it is essential to get work experience during holidays to get a foot in the door for when you try and get a job after graduating.'

Table 4.6: Entry aspects of current job, by occupation (per cent who agree)

Current job sector	Degree necessary	Degree useful	Work experience important	Fit with subject	Base no.
Professional	82	80	64	67	262
Engineering/technology/ICT professional	84	76	67	68	44
Health professional	90	89	89	89	10
Teaching/research professional	91	83	62	75	119
Legal professional	40	60	46	40	10
Finance professional	88	85	63	59	41
Public service professional	40	60	70	10	10
Business professional	59	82	64	67	22
Associate professional/technical	47	67	65	47	521
Science/engineering/ICT technicians	49	72	59	51	109
Health/welfare associate	55	69	80	72	84
Protective service officers	16	63	53	10	19
Culture/media/sports occupations	36	77	78	51	53
Legal/finance associate	54	68	61	56	78
Sales associate	35	59	66	28	71
Other business/public associate	52	63	57	35	107
Other	15	36	48	18	301
Admin/secretarial occupation	18	45	51	19	162
Skilled trades	16	35	37	20	20
Personal service occupation	25	52	59	36	29
Sales/customer service occupation	6	18	44	10	64
Elementary occupation	5	5	42	11	21
All in work	47	62	60	44	1,084

NB: cells of less than 10 not reported; % agree or strongly agree; only those currently in work included.

Source: IES Survey, 2003

'I am very happy with the course I chose, but I am upset that at the time of the course we were not warned about the importance of experience, because in the design industry nobody wants to employ somebody with no experience.' (respondent had a long period of unemployment and is now working in a shop).

- **Skills development**, ie the job utilises the skills and knowledge gained during the degree; and builds upon this with formal (less common) or informal development opportunities (see Table 4.7).
- **Recognition**, ie was considered to be of an appropriate level (for a graduate); offered possibilities of promotion and salary increases; was well respected or regarded; and or involved people management responsibilities (which was relatively rare) (see Table 4.8, over).

Table 4.7: Development Aspects of current job, by occupation (per cent who agree)

Current job sector	Graduate programme	Uses graduate skills	Prof. study/training	Continual skill development	Base no.
Professional	37	75	48	86	262
Engineering/technology/ICT professional	55	72	68	91	44
Health professional	50	78	78	90	10
Teaching/research professional	21	81	36	85	119
Legal professional	0	46	20	70	10
Finance professional	78	73	66	88	41
Public service professional	10	56	50	82	10
Business professional	46	73	38	81	22
Associate professional/technical	21	55	41	74	521
Science/engineering/ICT technicians	26	52	38	71	109
Health/welfare associate	21	76	55	86	84
Protective service officers	10	47	58	90	19
Culture/media/sports occupations	4	53	13	64	53
Legal/finance associate	32	56	67	84	78
Sales associate	25	44	23	59	71
Other business/public associate	18	50	38	74	107
Other	6	26	17	39	301
Admin/secretarial occupation	8	31	21	41	162
Skilled trades	10	30	21	70	20
Personal service occupation	4	39	19	58	29
Sales/customer service occupation	5	14	8	27	64
Elementary occupation	0	3	11	16	21
All in work	21	52	36	67	1,084

NB: cells of less than 10 not reported; % agree or strongly agree; only those currently in work included.

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Table 4.8: Prestige aspects of current job, by occupation (mean score)

Current job sector	Managing people	Appropriate level	Promo/salary prospects	Respected	Base no.
Professional	57	83	81	71	262
Engineering/technology/ICT professional	57	80	89	72	44
Health professional	22	90	78	89	10
Teaching/research professional	68	89	75	66	119
Legal professional	30	64	91	70	10
Finance professional	44	81	93	90	41
Public service professional	30	56	70	60	10
Business professional	68	81	73	64	22
Associate professional/technical	45	55	79	49	521
Science/engineering/ICT technicians	32	52	76	38	109
Health/welfare associate	449	73	76	49	84
Protective service officers	67	47	100	90	19
Culture/media/sports occupations	30	50	79	53	53
Legal/finance associate	34	62	82	65	78
Sales associate	61	41	75	37	71
Other business/public associate	55	52	80	50	107
Other	30	21	46	20	301
Admin/secretarial occupation	24	23	49	23	162
Skilled trades	50	30	60	16	20
Personal service occupation	47	36	46	32	29
Sales/customer service occupation	37	16	44	13	64
Elementary occupation	21	5	21	5	21
All in work	43	53	70	47	1,084

NB: cells of less than 10 not reported; % agree or strongly agree; only those currently in work included.

Source: IES Survey, 2003

4.4.2 Who went into 'quality' jobs

The quality of a job was defined by the number of above statements associated with an individual's job.

Those who were positive about the most statements, *ie* in 'quality' jobs were generally:

- younger, White respondents, from higher socio-economic groups and or higher family incomes;
- had entered higher education with academic qualifications (particularly with high 'A' level points, had studied in pre-92 universities, had followed courses in professional subjects such as health and medicine, or education, and gained higher degree class outcomes (*ie* first or upper second)
- more likely to be mobile in a national labour market.

Those in these 'quality' jobs also tended to be on full-time, permanent contracts at professional, or associate professional and technical level. They were also satisfied with their jobs.

4.4.3 Poorer quality jobs

Whilst many were in jobs that could be perceived as good quality, about one in eight were in 'poor quality' jobs, *ie* were not associated with strict entry requirements, offered little or no development in the role and beyond and were not well regarded by the incumbent or the wider public. Almost all of this group were dissatisfied with their job.

The majority of these were working below managerial, professional, or associate professional and technical level; earned low salaries (median of £10,000); were more likely to be in at least their second job since graduating; and more likely to be in temporary positions.

Those relatively (and statistically significantly) more likely to be in poor quality jobs were:

- from lower socio-economic groups; and or with lower family incomes
- were more likely to have entered with vocational entry qualifications and were more likely to have studied subjects with no direct career paths or that would not be described as vocational such as biological or physical science, arts and humanities, or social science subjects
- more likely to have either withdrawn early from their course or completed with a lower degree classification
- more likely to have returned home after their studies to look for work.

Individuals who had found the transition from higher education to work very difficult, felt they had underestimated the challenge and were very unprepared, particularly for the competition for jobs. These individuals were more likely to be in poor quality jobs.

'Competition for places on graduate schemes is intense. This isn't something you appreciate until entering the job market.'

'The experience of going to university was great, but looking back I feel as though the job prospects were 'hyped' as the reality has not been the same. Many employers won't look at your application simply due to UCAS and degree classification.'

'With so many graduates around now, a degree is undervalued by most employers. Graduate jobs are going to PhD candidates. Those jobs requiring 'A' levels give a more realistic hope of employment.'

'I'm doing a job I'm not interested in, being paid £4.24 an hour. I think universities MUST provide a much more realistic view of what's going to happen once you graduate. ... I'm not the only graduate in this situation.'

4.5 Impact of early career activities

Data from Wave II indicates that almost one-quarter (23 per cent) of the respondents had taken no action towards finding a job or career while studying. However, over one-third (38 per cent) took one or two types of actions, and 39 per cent took at least three types of actions. The most common activities were gathering information about possible careers, looking at employer websites, and visiting university/college careers offices.

The group who had undertaken the most job/career related activity while studying were those who were also the most successful in the labour market. This group rated their jobs more highly in terms of perceived quality, were more likely to be in high level occupations, eg working in a professional role, were

Table 4.9: Extent of career/job related activity whilst in higher education and measures of current job quality (per cent)

	None	Some	More than average
Type of job			
Permanent	56	54	63
Temporary	9	13	6
Work as secondary activity	35	33	31
Occupational level			
Professional	19	17	34
Associate professional and technical	43	50	50
Other	37	33	17
Satisfaction with current job			
Dissatisfied	26	28	18
Neutral	13	13	11
Satisfied	61	59	71
Perceived job quality			
Poor	16	19	7
Mid	69	62	56
Good	15	19	36
Salary (median)	14,000	14,436	17,595
Per cent in a job	70	74	73
Base no.	348	566	590

Source: IES Survey, 2003

more likely to be working full-time and in a permanent role, and earned higher salaries (median of £17,595 compared to approximately £14,000) (see Table 4.9). All of these findings are statistically significant differences, even when controlled for key personal characteristics. However, the direction of the relationship can only be speculated. It is likely that greater and earlier action on careers is an indication of greater commitment and motivation, which in turn is likely to be rewarded in the job market.

4.6 Geographical mobility

The respondents were working in all regions of the UK, but regions with the largest concentrations of jobs were: South East (20 per cent); Greater London (19 per cent); Scotland (13 per cent, reflecting the initial sample skew); and the South West (11 per cent). This closely mirrors the distribution of their home regions. However, it is different to the pattern for region of study where the largest concentrations of students were found in the South East, Scotland, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the North West (no-doubt reflecting the greater levels of higher education provision available in these areas) (see Table 4.10). This suggests that respondents move to study but return home to work. This has an implication for regional agencies, who need to understand their graduate labour pool (see Choices and Transitions, Perryman *et al.*, 2003).

Indeed, almost three-fifths (59 per cent) of those working, were working in the same region as they came from originally (at the

Table 4.10: Region of home, study and current work (per cent)

Region	Home	Study	Work*
North	2	3	3
Yorkshire and Humberside	6	13	6
North West	11	13	9
East Midlands	5	6	3
West Midlands	7	5	5
East Anglia	9	2	2
Greater London	12	10	19
South East	18	18	20
South West	11	9	11
Wales	4	6	3
Northern Ireland	2	1	1
Scotland	14	17	13
<i>Base no.</i>	<i>1,497</i>	<i>1,475</i>	<i>1,077</i>

* does not add to 100% as includes 3% working overseas, filtered for those in work only.

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Table 4.11: Student and graduate mobility

Name	Description	No.	%
Rooted	Study and work in home region	323	33
Returners	Moved away to study but returned home to work	244	25
Hyper mobile	Moved to study, and moved again to work	194	20
Graduate movers	Stayed to study but moved away to work	89	9
Student movers	Moved away to study, but stayed in study region to work	135	14
<i>Base no.</i>	<i>All known</i>	<i>986</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: IES Survey, 2003

time of applying to university or college). Fewer, just under half (45 per cent) were, however, working in the same region as they studied in.

4.6.1 Stayers and movers

Looking at the links between initial home region, region of study, and region of current work, a variable can be derived which indicates respondent mobility (see Table 4.11). One-third (33 per cent) of all respondents (whose movements are known) have stayed within their home region to study and work; one-quarter (25 per cent) moved away to study but returned home to work – indicating that over half of the respondents were still in their home region at the time of the study.

A significant minority of respondents, one in five (20 per cent) were hyper mobile, in that they moved away to study and then moved on again to work. However, a note of caution should be introduced here. The true size of the hyper mobile group is probably larger, but due to the very nature of their mobility it is particularly difficult to maintain contact with this group. They are therefore likely to be over-represented in the survey non-response.

A small group, less than one in ten (nine per cent) studied in their home region but then moved away to work, and the last group are those who moved away to study and then stayed in their study region to work (one in seven, or 14 per cent).

Exploring the data further allows the characteristics of each mobility group to be determined:

- The **rooted** were relatively (and statistically significantly) more likely to: be older (twice as likely to be a mature respondent, *ie* over 21 in 1998, over 26 now); be from a lower socio-economic group, and have a lower family income; have vocational higher education entry qualifications; have studied education and business and administrative subjects and studied at a post-92 university or college of higher education; and have had less time in the labour market than other graduate mobility groups. Also this group were marginally

more likely to have come from Scotland (and thus come to higher education with Scottish Higher qualifications), Wales or the North East (although the numbers involved are small); have come to higher education from a comprehensive school or FE college; have (or expect to gain) a lower class of degree or to have withdrawn from study before completion. This group are largely non-traditional graduates.

- **The returners** were relatively more likely to: be from an ethnic minority; be younger; and have had longer in the labour market. Also the group were marginally more likely to have come from the North West, Greater London, and Northern Ireland, and to have studied arts and humanities, the least vocationally oriented subjects
- **The hyper mobile** were relatively more likely to be: White; young; from a higher socio-economic group, and higher family income; to have entered higher education with academic qualifications, with high 'A' level points; to have studied health and medicine; and studied at a pre-92 university. They were also marginally more likely to have previously studied at an independent school; have come from the East region and East Midlands; and successfully completed their initial higher education studies. This group are largely traditional graduates.
- **Graduate movers** were a very broad group (in that no particular characteristic dominated); although they were relatively more likely to have studied at a post-92 university or college of higher education, and have studied health and medicine and business and administration (highly vocational courses) than other groups of graduates. Also they were marginally more likely to have come from the South East, Yorkshire and Humberside and Greater London; and to have withdrawn from study before completion.
- **Student movers** were relatively more likely to: be from an ethnic minority; have entered university with high 'A' level points, and have studied at a pre-92 university; and have had longer in the labour market. Also this group were marginally more likely than others to have come from the East region and have successfully completed their initial higher education studies.

It is also possible to look at and compare the characteristics of the jobs held by each mobility group:

- **The rooted** obtained jobs locally and were relatively (and statistically significantly) more likely to have lower salaries (mean £15,026); and work part time. They were also marginally more likely to be in engineering, technology and ICT, personal service, and teaching and research occupations; be in the leisure and entertainment, other public services and education sectors; and be in the first job since graduating.

- The **returners** were relatively more likely: to have a lower than average salary, indeed this group have the lowest salaries for those who completed (£14,782); to work temporarily or as a secondary activity (*ie* secondary to travelling or studying); and consider their job to be of poor quality. Indeed, this group were the most likely to disagree or agree less strongly with statements about their jobs that could be associated with quality such as aspects relating to prestige or recognition, and particularly to entry requirements (see below). Returners were also marginally more likely to be in an occupation outside of the top three occupation groups (*ie* managers, professionals, and associates), and not be in their first job since graduating. This indicates the dangers for this group of returning home to poor quality jobs, and is illustrated with the comment from a respondent below:

'Immediate unemployment after university depends on the area you return to once you have finished. If you return to the Welsh Valleys with a degree like I did, it makes no difference to your job chances there. There are no jobs there anyway. An HGV or transit van driver's licence is worth more than a degree in that area.'

- The **hyper mobile** were more likely to job search across the national labour market, and as a consequence were more likely to have higher salaries (£17,752), and be in full-time permanent posts. Also, the group were marginally more likely than others to be in finance, protective service, and health professions, and in their first job. Over one-third of this group were working in London. These jobs tended to be considered good quality (statistically significant), with high entry requirements, good development prospects, and were generally well regarded.
- The **graduate movers** were also more likely to job search across the national labour market and as a consequence were more likely to have higher salaries (£18,779) but worked across a range of occupations and sectors, and permanently. Again, these jobs tended to be considered good quality (statistically significant), with high entry requirements, good development prospects, and were generally well regarded. Indeed, this group of graduates were the most likely to strongly agree with statements about perceived job quality (see above).
- The **student movers** had no clear distinguishing features in the jobs they found. They attracted middle-level salaries but reported relatively low job quality scores, particularly on developmental aspects.

5. Building Skills Through Further Study

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we look at whether respondents engaged in additional study, of any kind, since completing or withdrawing from their initial studies at university or college. We then look at the nature and significance of this further study. The issues covered are:

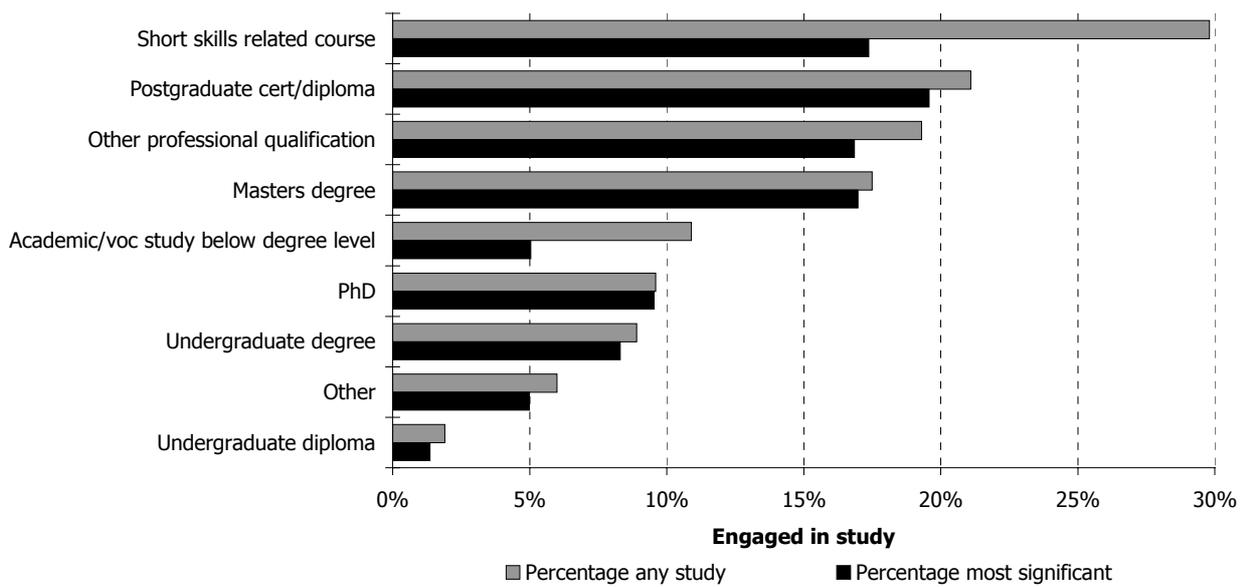
- the prevalence of additional study
- the type and level of this further study, and the influences upon it
- the nature of the most significant period of further study, including the mode of study, educational sector, and subject area
- motivations for undertaking further study, and
- additional study decisions of those who did not complete their initial higher education studies.

5.2 Studying beyond first degree

Just over one-half of the sample had not engaged in any further study since they graduated, or initially left higher education. Those least likely to engage in further study were: men, those from families with high incomes, those who had initially studied (at HE) vocational subjects or had studied in post-92 universities or colleges of higher education. Also, and perhaps more worryingly, those in self-perceived poor quality jobs, low level occupations and with low salaries were less likely to undertake further study.

Just under half (48 per cent) of the sample had undertaken further or additional study at some time since their initial higher education studies. Whilst the majority of these individuals (78 per cent) reported only one period of further study, one in five (19 per cent) noted two types of further study, and a small minority (three per cent) noted at least three types. Whilst there was little difference in the overall propensity to engage in additional study amongst many groups of respondents, some statistically significant

Figure 5.1: All types of study engaged in since initial higher education studies; and most significant period of additional study (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

differences were noticed for age, initial study outcome, subject of study, and time in the labour market. Thus additional study was more prevalent amongst:

- mature respondents (particularly those 25 or older in 1998, and now at least 30 years old).
- those with higher class degrees (*ie* first or upper second)
- those who left their initial courses early (see below)
- those who followed courses in health and medicine, biological and physical sciences, and social studies (interestingly, comparatively low levels of additional study were found for education and maths and engineering respondents, see above).
- those with two or more years in the labour market.

5.2.1 Type of study

The most common type of additional or further study was a short skills related course (30 per cent of all those engaging in further study); followed by a postgraduate certificate/diploma (21 per cent), other professional qualification (19 per cent) or masters degree (18 per cent). Further undergraduate study was much less common (see Figure 5.1).

Of those undertaking additional study:

- Female respondents were marginally more likely than their male peers to undertake short skills related courses, and sub-degree courses; whereas male respondents were more likely to undertake masters degrees and significantly more likely (statistically speaking) to undertake PhDs.

- Mature respondents were much more likely to follow short skills related courses, and were marginally more likely to undertake postgraduate certificate or diploma courses than were younger respondents; while this latter group had a much greater propensity to study for other professional qualifications.
- Respondents from ethnic minority groups were significantly more likely than White respondents to undertake postgraduate certificate or diploma courses; and marginally more likely to study for masters degrees and other professional qualifications. White respondents were more likely to study for a PhD (caution though as numbers here are small, and the relationship is not statistically significant).
- Those with higher 'A' level points were significantly more likely to undertake professional qualifications or PhDs, whilst those with no or few 'A' level points were much more likely to undertake short skills courses.
- PhD study was statistically more prevalent amongst those with higher class degrees (particularly those with first-class honours). Reflecting the fact that a first-class degree qualification is often an entry requirement for this type of study. Those with lower degree classifications were, however, statistically more likely to undertake short skills courses (twice as likely as those with higher degree outcomes), and marginally more likely to follow undergraduate courses, and other professional qualifications.
- PhD study was also significantly more likely amongst those who had studied in a pre-92 university, whilst those who had studied at post-92 universities or colleges of higher education were relatively (and statistically) more likely to undertake short skills courses or further undergraduate degrees.

The subject chosen for initial study appeared to be a key (and statistically significant) influence on the nature of any additional study undertaken. Arts graduates were much more likely than science graduates to undertake study towards postgraduate certificates or diplomas or other professional qualifications, conversely the latter had a greater propensity to study at undergraduate level and to study for a PhD. Exploring further:

- Health and medicine graduates were relatively more likely than others to undertake short skills related courses and marginally more likely to follow undergraduate degrees.
- Biological and physical sciences – sub-degree study, masters degrees, and (statistically significant) PhDs. This fits in with activity patterns described in the previous chapter, where biological and physical science graduates had greater levels of further study, and tended to stay in further study for longer periods.

- Maths and engineering – masters degrees and (statistically significant) short skills courses and PhDs.
- Social studies – postgraduate certificates or diplomas, and other professional qualifications (both statistically significant).
- Business and administration – short skills related courses, postgraduate certificates or diplomas, and other professional qualifications (all statistically significant).
- Arts and humanities – sub-degree study, masters degrees, and (statistically significant) postgraduate certificates or diplomas.

5.3 Significant additional study

As individuals could list more than one type of additional or further study, respondents were asked to indicate which was their most significant period of further or additional study. Postgraduate certificate or diploma, short skills related course, masters degree, and other professional qualification were the most commonly cited significant types of study. The patterns, in terms of the personal and initial study characteristics of respondents, for this most significant additional study were the same as those noted above (when looking at all forms of additional study undertaken) (see Table 5.1). Respondents then supplied further details about this period of significant additional study including the mode of study, type of institution attended, subject area, and the motivating factors (*ie* the reasons why they decided to take the course). From this information it is possible to detect patterns in the nature of additional study, and distinguish between study intended to trade-up on qualifications, to accredit specific skills, and to top up employability skills.

Table 5.1: Nature of most significant period of additional study, by initial subject of study (all those who engaged in additional study of some kind) (per cent)

	Health/ medicine	Bio/phys sciences	Maths/ engineering	Social studies	Business/ admin	Arts/ humanities	Overall
Short skills related course	32	11	17	16	18	15	15
Sub-degree study	7	5	3	2	5	8	6
Undergraduate dip	0	0	4	0	2	1	1
Undergraduate degree	14	11	10	6	8	5	9
Post grad cert./dip	8	12	9	22	22	35	18
Masters degree	11	21	17	18	7	19	18
PhD	10	25	14	4	–	2	11
Other prof. qual.	13	11	18	24	35	10	18
Other	5	3	8	6	3	4	4
<i>Base no.</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>157</i>	<i>547</i>

Source: IES Survey, 2003

5.3.1 Overall patterns of study

Mode of study: the majority of additional study was full-time (57 per cent) but a substantial minority (31 per cent) studied part-time, usually whilst working, either financed by their employer (18 per cent) or by themselves (13 per cent). Few (12 per cent) studied via distance learning or other methods (*eg* on a more *ad-hoc* basis or through government funded training).

Institution: three-fifths (62 per cent) undertook their further study in a higher education institution, nine per cent in the FE sector (*ie* FE college, sixth form college or adult education college), 16 per cent with a private training provider, nine per cent with their employer, and four per cent studied through distance learning or correspondence course.

Mode and institution: most full-time additional study took place in universities or colleges of higher education (86 per cent). Universities and higher education colleges were also popular places to study amongst those following part-time self-financed courses (44 per cent) as were further education institutions (40 per cent), whereas part-time employer financed training tended to take place with the employer or with a private training provider (25 and 34 per cent respectively) (see Table 5.2).

Subject area: the main focus of additional study was in the area of arts and social sciences rather than sciences (68 per cent compared with 32 per cent), and the imbalance is greater and statistically significantly different than that found for the initial period of study (57 and 43 per cent). Also a slightly greater proportion of respondents were found to be studying outside of their broad area of initial study than those who continued to study within their broad area of specialism (53 compared to 47 per cent). This was particularly the case for those who had initially studied arts and humanities subjects. However, those who had originally studied health and medicine and business and administrative subjects were more likely to stay within their field in order to undertake further study.

Table 5.2: Sector in which (most significant) additional study undertaken, by mode of study (per cent)

	Full-time study	Part-time study (employer financed)	Part-time study (self financed)
HE sector	86	26	44
FE sector	2	11	40
Private	12	59	14
Other	0	4	2
<i>Base no.</i>	<i>406</i>	<i>122</i>	<i>91</i>

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Table 5.3: Subject area of most significant additional study

Subject	No.	%
Any science	<i>221</i>	<i>32</i>
Health/medicine	66	10
Bio/phys. sciences	74	11
Maths/engineering	80	12
Any arts	<i>474</i>	<i>68</i>
Social sciences	142	20
Business/admin	164	24
Arts/humanities	76	11
Education	83	12
Other	9	1
<i>Base</i>	<i>694</i>	<i>100</i>
Study within subject area	320	47
Study outside of subject area	367	53
<i>Base</i>	<i>687</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: IES Survey, 2003

The most common areas for additional study were business studies and skills, and social sciences (particularly law and social studies). Next were education, maths, and biological sciences (see Table 5.3).

5.3.2 The nature of additional study

Looking more closely at the type of course undertaken it is possible to detect patterns in the following areas:

- **Short skills related courses** (which were fairly common), tended to be part time (50 per cent) particularly employer financed; take place in the private sector (66 per cent). They tended to be taken in a different subject area to initial study; and were focused in the fields of business and admin, maths and engineering, and health and medicine. This type of additional study was largely about topping up employability skills.

'I found that my computer skills were not good enough, that's why I'm doing ECDL [European Computer Driving Licence].'

- **Sub-degree programmes** (relatively rare) tended to be part-time (73 per cent), take place outside of the higher education sector in either the private sector or particularly the further education sector; and to be arts subjects particularly arts and humanities, and business and admin areas.
- **Degree programmes** tended to be full-time (84 per cent) and in the higher education sector though a minority took place via distance learning with the Open University. They were

most likely to be in the areas of health and medicine, biological and physical sciences, and in arts and humanities. They were particularly common amongst those who returned to some form of education after leaving their initial higher education course early (see below). Thus for some, this type of study is about trying again, and trying something different.

- **Postgraduate certificate or diploma courses** (the most common type of study) were more likely to be full-time (84 per cent) and take place in a university or college of higher education (86 per cent); to be outside of respondents initial broad subject area; and concentrated in arts subjects (94 per cent), particularly in the areas of education (PGCE) and social sciences. This type of study is largely about gaining a licence to practice in a particular field, *ie* converting academic study into vocational skills.

'After completing my degree I chose to do an additional course so that I could gain a position as a teacher as this was my original goal. I have the degree to fall back on for a different type of job in the field of education.'

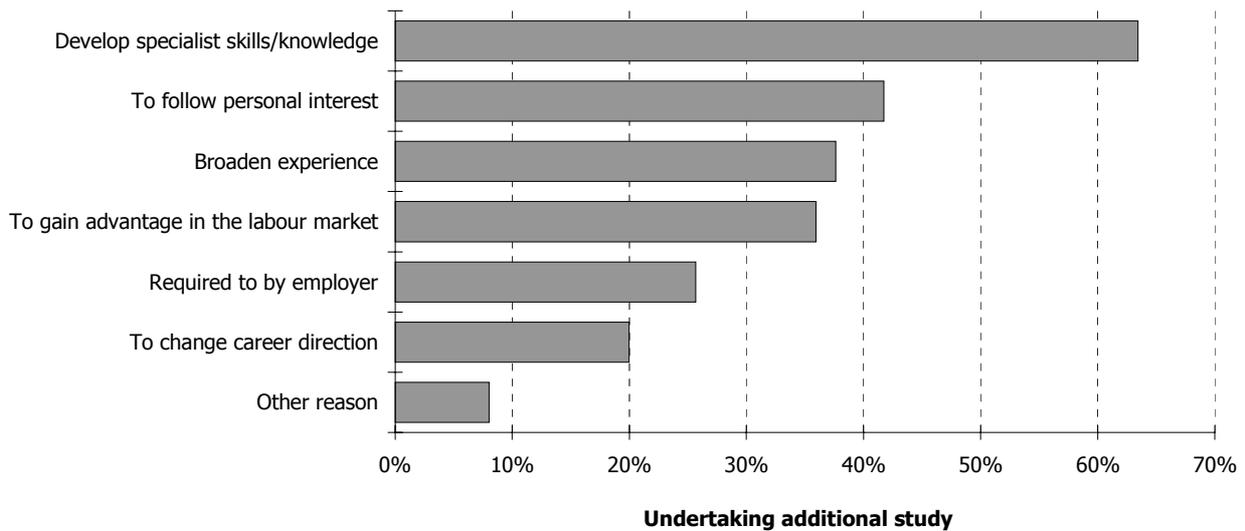
However, it can also be about capitalising upon and refocusing the transferable skills gained during undergraduate study (see reasons below).

- **Masters courses** (also common) were all undertaken in the higher education sector. The majority were studied full-time (74 per cent) but a sizeable minority were studying part-time (22 per cent). Arts subjects outweighed science subjects by two to one and common areas of study were social sciences and business and admin subjects. This type of study (along with PhD programmes) is about trading up ones initial qualification, and to some extent delaying entry into the labour market.

'My degree has not provided me with the necessary skills to pursue an interesting career so I am going to do an MA and then a PhD.' (initially gained first degree in English Literature).

- **PhD programmes** (less common) were all followed in the higher education sector and, with few exceptions, were studied full-time. They were dominated by science subjects particularly biological and physical sciences, and tended to stay within the respondents broad area of specialism. This form of study is about building upon ones chosen specialism and trading up the qualification.
- **Other professional qualifications** (also common) tended to be studied part-time and financed by employers (41 per cent), and undertaken in the private sector (56 per cent) – suggesting this type of additional study is part of the employment contract. However, it was also commonly studied full-time (37 per cent) and in the higher education sector (32 per cent). This form of study tended to be concentrated in arts subjects, particularly business and admin and social sciences

Figure 5.2: Reasons for undertaking additional study (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

areas. This type of study combines a licence to practice with increasing one's employability and formalising work experience.

5.3.3 Reasons for further study

The most common reasons respondents noted for undertaking further or additional study (beyond their initial higher education course) was to develop specialist skills and knowledge (63 per cent) or to follow a personal interest (42 per cent) (see Figure 5.2).

'My degree in music was not really vocational and has not specifically enhanced my career prospects (other than the fact that it's a degree). Its value has been purely that I've been able to study something I'm interested in at a sustained level, develop new interests, and also learn about living and working independently. My decision to continue with postgraduate study is, again, based on personal interest not career motivation.'

Other reasons included: to broaden experience (38 per cent); and to gain advantage in the labour market (36 per cent).

Motivations differed markedly according to the type of course undertaken (see Table 5.4). Depth of knowledge was particularly important to those studying for masters and PhD qualifications, whilst breadth of experience was relatively more important to those undertaking short skills courses and sub-degree programmes. Personal interest was a relatively greater driver to study amongst those working towards a PhD (reflecting the personal commitment required for such programmes) and those studying at sub-degree level.

Employability was particularly important to those studying a masters degree, who were more likely to engage in such a

Table 5.4: Motivation for undertaking additional study, by type of course (per cent)

	Short skills	Sub degree	Degree	Post grad cert./dip.	Masters	PhD	Other prof. qual.	All
Develop specialist skills/knowledge	67	67	46	61	72	84	57	64
Follow personal interest	36	61	55	32	53	66	15	42
Broaden experience	50	49	18	28	51	41	27	38
Gain labour market advantage	28	34	33	33	57	37	37	37
Required to by employer	34	20	5	29	8	4	61	26
Change career direction	13	16	39	30	24	3	10	19
Other reason	4	5	12	12	3	5	13	8
<i>Base no.</i>	<i>119</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>644</i>

Source: IES Survey, 2003

programme to gain an advantage in the labour market. As noted above, this group appeared to be trading up their degree level qualifications. The main motivating factor for those studying for other professional qualifications was employer requirement. For some, however, further study was a way for them to change their career path. This was particularly important to those taking undergraduate degrees, and, to some extent, to those taking postgraduate certificate or diploma courses.

Other differences noted were that those undertaking self-financed part-time study were more likely to be doing so in order to follow a personal interest than those studying through other routes (reflecting the personal financial investment required). Also, as would be expected, those funded by their employer were most likely to undertake their study at the request of their employer. Generally though, part-time study rather than full-time was more likely to be about broadening experience and skills. Those studying outside of their initial subject area were more likely to do so in order to change career direction than those continuing to study within their field.

Male respondents were significantly more likely to look to gain labour market advantage through their additional study than were female respondents. Other differences noticed (though not statistically significant) were that a greater proportion of younger graduates and White respondents engaged in study as a condition of their job (*ie* required to by their employer). Whereas older respondents were more likely than their younger counterparts to undertake additional study to change career direction, and minority respondents and those from lower socio-economic groups were relatively more likely than White respondents and those from higher socio-economic groups to look to broaden their experience via additional study.

5.4 Going back

Engaging in additional study was relatively more prevalent amongst those who left their initial courses early. Indeed, of the small group of respondents who reported that they withdrew before completion, many returned to education of some kind. More than three in five (61 per cent) engaged in some form of additional study beyond their initial experience of higher education (see Table 5.5).

Undergraduate degrees were particularly common amongst this group, and one-third of all early leavers went back into higher education to follow an undergraduate degree course (essentially to try again). Short skills related courses and sub-degree study were also popular amongst early leavers. A key driver or motivator for returning to education for early leavers, was to follow a personal interest. Also, of relatively more importance to this group was to undertake study to change their career direction. However, the likelihood of citing employability (*ie* to

Table 5.5: Engagement in additional study of those who left early compared to those who completed their initial studies (per cent)

	Completed	Withdrew early
Additional study		
Yes	50	61
No	50	39
Most significant further study		
Short skills related course	17	16
Academic/vocational study sub-degree	5	7
Undergraduate dip	1	3
Undergraduate degree	4	58
Post grad cert./dip.	22	1
Masters degree	19	1
PhD	10	1
Other prof. qual.	18	6
Other	5	6
Reasons for additional study		
Required to by employer	27	15
Broaden experience	37	39
Develop specialist skills/knowledge	65	49
To change career direction	19	33
To gain advantage in the labour market	36	35
To follow personal interest	40	53
Other reason	8	6
<i>Base no.</i>	<i>1,261</i>	<i>94</i>

Source: IES Survey, 2003

gain labour market advantage) as a motivating factor was very similar for those who completed their studies as for early leavers (see Table 5.5).

There was little difference in mode of study between those who completed their initial studies and those who left early. The only marked difference was in the use of distance learning (including the Open University) which was higher amongst early leavers. This suggests that for some early leavers (a small minority) the university lifestyle experience was not one they would like to repeat, preferring a more distanced relationship in which to restart their studies.

6. Career and Current Choices

6.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the choices individuals made about their careers and the help and support they have received with their careers since leaving university or college. It pays particular attention to respondents' attitudes towards the labour market and their expectations for the future. The issues covered are:

- the sources of information, advice and guidance open to and utilised by graduates
- satisfaction with aspects of careers
- plans for the short and medium term.

6.2 Careers advice and guidance

When respondents were last surveyed (Wave II, in 2000) they were still in higher education and they were asked to indicate which, if any, actions they had taken towards getting a job or career upon graduation. As noted earlier (Chapter 4), 23 per cent had taken no actions, 38 per cent had taken one or two, but 39 per cent had undertaken at least three of the given activities. The most common activities were to gather information about possible careers, employers and jobs; to visit employer websites and to visit the university or college careers office.

During this current 2003, Wave III of the research, as the vast majority have completed their initial higher education studies, respondents were asked about their career and job research activities since they *left* higher education. They were given a list of potential sources of advice and guidance and were asked to indicate which of the sources they had used since they left their university or college (of their initial studies) and to indicate for which purpose they had been used. They were then asked to note which of these sources was the most useful for each activity: gaining information on careers; providing careers advice and guidance; and for job search.

Looking at the patterns of use, it can be seen that some resources available to individuals are used more heavily than others and

provide help with all aspects of planning careers, whereas others provide support in particular areas only. This is illustrated in Table 6.1 (over). Overall then, the Internet and friends and family are the most consulted sources but, whereas the Internet is most useful for job search, friends and family are particularly important for careers advice and guidance. There are implications here of the ability of these informal networks to provide up-to-date and appropriate advice and guidance (see *Pollard et al.*, 2003).

Impact of earlier career/job activities

Interestingly, the use of services whilst at university was linked to use after graduation, indicating that if individuals can be encouraged to explore careers services and resources early, whilst still studying, they will continue to use them. For example, those who used the Internet to look for employers, jobs and careers whilst still in higher education were also significantly more likely to do so after they graduated. Also, those who used university and college careers services whilst still studying, were significantly more likely to use them after they graduated. About one-quarter (24 per cent) used university careers services both before and after they graduated. However, one-third (32 per cent) only used the careers services after they graduated, and 30 per cent did not use these services at all.

However, those who used careers services only after they graduated were no more likely to have fared better in the labour market than those who did not use these services at all. Indeed, those who used the services only after graduating were significantly less likely to be in a job or in a permanent job, and were marginally more likely to consider their job to be of poor quality, to be dissatisfied with their job, and earn lower than average salaries (see Table 6.2). It would seem likely that this group of graduates are using the careers services offered at universities and colleges somewhat reactively to help with their situation, *ie* to try to improve their labour market situation. This group also expects to make more changes in the short term than those who did not use the service.

Early use of careers services is linked with greater satisfaction with career opportunities. Those who visited their institutions career service (whilst studying) were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the career opportunities open to them after graduating.

It is possible to group the sources available to individuals into four types: press and publications, formal networks, informal networks, and new technologies. The use of these groups and each of the sources is explored below.

Table 6.1: Relative use and main purpose of each potential careers resource (per cent)

	Base no.	Used	Info	Advice	Job search	Main purpose
Local press	869	58	22	6	94	Job search
National press	825	55	37	20	85	Job search
Specialist press	803	53	51	35	79	Job search
Careers publications	701	46	71	50	51	Info
University careers	851	56	76	70	41	Info/advice
Recruitment agencies	651	43	26	21	90	Job search
Private consultants	88	6	43	51	46	Little used
Friends/relatives	1,023	68	47	82	38	Advice
Work colleagues	626	42	48	75	33	Advice
University contacts	679	45	54	76	35	Advice
Internet	1,173	78	67	51	87	Job search

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Table 6.2: Use of careers services and measures of current job quality (per cent)

	Used	Used after only	Not used
<i>Percentage in a job</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>77</i>
Type of job			
Permanent	55	54	62
Temporary	9	9	10
Work as secondary activity	36	37	29
Occupational level			
Professional	23	18	25
Associate professional and technical	48	49	48
Other	28	33	27
Satisfaction with current job			
Dissatisfied	25	27	22
Neutral	11	10	13
Satisfied	64	63	65
Perceived job quality			
Poor	15	17	13
Mid	60	64	63
Good	25	19	25
Salary (median)	15,000	15,000	16,000
Short term changes expect (mean)	2.35	2.38	2.05
<i>Base no.</i>	<i>851</i>	<i>483</i>	<i>657</i>

Source: IES Survey, 2003

6.2.1 Careers information

The most commonly used sources for careers information were the Internet (63 per cent), university careers services (52 per cent), careers publications (40 per cent), friends and relatives (38 per cent), and specialist press (33 per cent). Few respondents used the local press, recruitment agencies or private career consultants for this purpose. Overall, the press and publications group of resources were the most consulted (but there was only marginal difference between all groups) (see Table 6.3).

Similarly, the most useful source for careers information tended to be the Internet followed by university careers services (way out in front of the other sources).

On average respondents used three sources to collect careers information.

Patterns of use:

- **Gender.** Male respondents made significantly greater use of most sources than were female respondents, and overall tended to consult a greater number of sources. Particularly

Table 6.3: Sources used for careers advice and guidance after university or college (per cent)

	Careers info		Advice/guidance		Job search	
	Used*	Most imp	Used*	Most imp	Used*	Most imp
Local press	16	2	4	0	63	19
National press	24	3	13	1	54	7
Specialist press	33	10	23	4	49	11
Careers publications	40	9	28	5	28	4
<i>Press and publications</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>74</i>	<i>41</i>
University careers	52	23	48	21	27	4
Recruitment agencies	14	2	11	3	45	9
Private consultants	3	1	4	1	3	0
<i>Formal networks</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>13</i>
Friends/relatives	38	8	67	30	31	6
Work colleagues	24	6	38	10	16	2
University contacts	30	7	41	11	19	3
<i>Informal networks</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>11</i>
Internet	63	27	48	14	79	34
<i>New technologies</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>34</i>
Other	4	1	3	1	5	1
<i>Base no.</i>	<i>1,240</i>	<i>1,076</i>	<i>1,249</i>	<i>1,082</i>	<i>1,292</i>	<i>1,139</i>

* % used is base on a multiple response question, therefore column % does not add up to 100%

Source: IES Survey, 2003

stark (and statistically significant) differences in usage rates were noticed for the Internet, specialist and national press, and recruitment agencies where men were much more likely to use these sources than were women.

- **Age.** There was a great deal of difference noticed by age. Young respondents were significantly more likely than their older peers to use the Internet and careers publications, and marginally more likely to use university careers services and friends and relatives. Whereas older respondents had a greater propensity in particular to use local press and recruitment agencies, and a marginally greater relative use of national press and to consult work colleagues (reflecting the greater likelihood that this group will have these kinds of contacts).
- **Ethnicity.** Minority ethnic individuals were more likely than White respondents to use the press and publications group of resources (particularly careers publications) and to use formal networks (particularly university careers services, indeed these were seen as the most useful source of information by this group). This group of individuals also had a relatively greater use of university contacts. White respondents, however, had a greater propensity to use the Internet (which was seen as the most useful source of information) and the national press. However, none of these differences were found to be statistically significant.
- **Social class.** There was a relatively (and statistically significant) greater use of local press and recruitment agencies among those from lower socio-economic groups. These groups also made marginally greater use of careers publications and the Internet. A slightly greater use of informal networks was found among those from higher groups, particularly the use of friends and relatives and work colleagues to provide careers information (though not statistically significant).
- **Experience of higher education.** Those with no family experience of higher education had a greater propensity to use the press and publications group of resources for careers information (particularly the local press and to some extent the national press). They also had a marginally greater use of recruitment agencies than those with family experience of higher education. However, a marginally greater use of new technologies and a much greater (and statistically significant) use of informal networks, especially friends and relatives but also to some extent work colleagues and university contacts, was found for those with family experience of higher education. This follows the pattern for those from higher socio-economic groups (see above).
- **Institution of study.** Those who had studied in pre-92 universities were significantly more likely to use careers publications, careers services and the Internet, than those in post-92 universities or colleges of higher education.

6.2.2 Advice and guidance

The most common sources were friends and relatives (67 per cent), the Internet (48 per cent), university careers services (48 per cent), and university contacts (41 per cent). Few used recruitment agencies, local press or private agencies for careers advice and guidance. Overall, informal networks were used most heavily for careers advice (see Table 6.3, above).

Interestingly, although the Internet was one of the most cited sources of career advice and careers guidance, friends and relatives, followed by university careers services, were much more likely to be considered the most important sources.

On average, respondents reported using three sources to obtain career advice and guidance.

Patterns of use:

- **Gender.** Men again make significantly greater use of new technologies and specialist press for advice and guidance than do women. They also make marginally greater use of formal networks (particularly university careers services which they also rate highly) and university contacts. Female respondents, however, make marginally greater use of friends and relatives and have a slightly greater propensity to consult work colleagues about careers information.
- **Age.** Younger respondents were significantly more likely to use most of the given sources for advice and guidance and, on average, used more sources than their older peers. Younger individuals had a much greater tendency to consult friends and relatives and the Internet than did older graduates and were marginally more likely to consult university contacts and careers publications. This perhaps indicates that this group may feel they need more assistance with this aspect of their lives, whereas older respondents may have already formed ideas about their careers. However, older respondents found the Internet and particularly university careers services (as reported by CHERI, 2002) more useful for advice and guidance than other sources.
- **Ethnicity.** Across the groups, use of sources for advice and guidance was very similar. However, minority ethnic respondents were more likely again to use formal networks (particularly university careers services and recruitment agencies) and also university contacts than were White respondents. This group also found careers services and university contacts more useful than did White respondents. Overall, minority ethnic respondents consulted more sources for advice and guidance than their peers. Once again the patterns were not statistically significant, with the exception of

the greater reliance on recruitment agencies amongst minority ethnic graduates.

- **Social class.** The pattern for socio-economic groups were similar with the only statistically significant difference being in the greater propensity among those in lower (rather than higher) socio-economic groups to use the Internet for advice and guidance. Other more marginal differences included a greater likelihood among those in lower groups of consulting work colleagues and recruitment agencies. Once again, there was also a slightly greater propensity to use informal networks among those in higher socio-economic groups. This latter group found friends and family the most useful source whereas those from lower groups found university careers services the most useful.
- **Experience of higher education.** Again, those with family experience of higher education were more likely to use formal and especially informal networks for careers advice and guidance. This group, as would be expected, had a greater propensity to use friends and relatives for advice than those with no family experience of university. All these patterns were found to be statistically significant.
- **Institution of study.** Again, those who studied in pre-92 universities were significantly more likely than those who studied in post-92 universities or colleges of higher education to use formal networks, particularly careers services, for advice and guidance. Whereas those in post-92 universities and colleges had a greater propensity to turn to work colleagues.

It is interesting here to compare those who are satisfied with their current job and career choices with those who are not, in terms of their use of sources for careers advice and guidance. Those who were satisfied with their choice of career were much more likely to have consulted university contacts and used specialist press which tended to provide specialist knowledge and tailored advice; they were also marginally more likely to use university careers services, than those who felt dissatisfied with their careers. The 'dissatisfied' group, however, relied more heavily on new technologies and also to some extent on friends and relatives, national press, careers publications, and recruitment agencies for their advice and guidance. These resources, in contrast to those listed above, tend to be less flexible and provide more general information.

6.2.3 Job search

The most used sources when looking for jobs proved to be the Internet (79 per cent), local press (63 per cent) and national press (54 per cent), specialist publications (49 per cent) and recruitment agencies (45 per cent). Overall, press and publications were the most consulted group of resources (see Table 6.3, above).

Again the most useful sources coincided with those most consulted: the Internet, followed by local and then national press.

Respondents used more sources for job search than they did for collecting information about careers or for obtaining careers advice and guidance. On average, respondents used four sources.

Patterns of use:

- **Gender.** Men were more likely than women to use formal networks for job search, and significantly more likely to use university careers services and careers publications. However, female respondents were significantly more likely to use the press and publications group of resources, particularly the local press.
- **Age.** Overall, younger respondents were significantly more likely to use formal networks and new technologies for job search than were older respondents. They were also marginally more likely to consult careers publications and use recruitment agencies. However, older individuals were relatively much more likely to use (and find useful) the local press and, to some extent, the national press, than their younger peers.
- **Ethnicity.** White respondents were relatively more likely to use press and publications for their job search, particularly the local and national press. However, minority ethnic individuals were more likely to use specialist press and careers publications. Again, minority ethnic respondents also had a greater propensity to use university careers services and university contacts, and also the Internet to look for jobs. None of these differences were found to be statistically significant
- **Social class.** Those from lower socio-economic groups had a greater tendency than those from higher groups to use press and publications (particularly local press), formal networks (particularly recruitment agencies), and once again new technologies to find work. The only statistical significant difference, however, was in the use of local press.
- **Experience of higher education.** There seemed to be little difference in the use of resources for job search between those with and those without family experience of higher education. However, those who had family experience of higher education had a greater propensity (than those with none) to use the services offered by universities such as careers services, and to some extent, informal contacts.
- **Institution of study.** Those who studied in post-92 universities or colleges of higher education were significantly more likely to use the press for job search, particularly the local papers. However, those from post-92 universities relied more heavily on the Internet for job search.

It is interesting here to compare those who are satisfied with their current job with those who are not, in terms of their use of sources for job search. A very similar pattern emerges, as described above, for career satisfaction and sources of advice and guidance. Those who were satisfied with their jobs had a greater (and significant) propensity, than those who were dissatisfied, to use university careers services, university contacts and, to some extent, specialist press to find these jobs. As noted above, all these sources offer tailored information. Whereas those who were unhappy with their present jobs tended to rely more heavily on the Internet, local and national press, recruitment agencies, and, to some extent, friends and relatives. This group also used more sources in their job search, indicating that their search was still ongoing and that they perhaps 'widen the net' consulting more sources as they become increasingly dissatisfied with their experiences in the labour market.

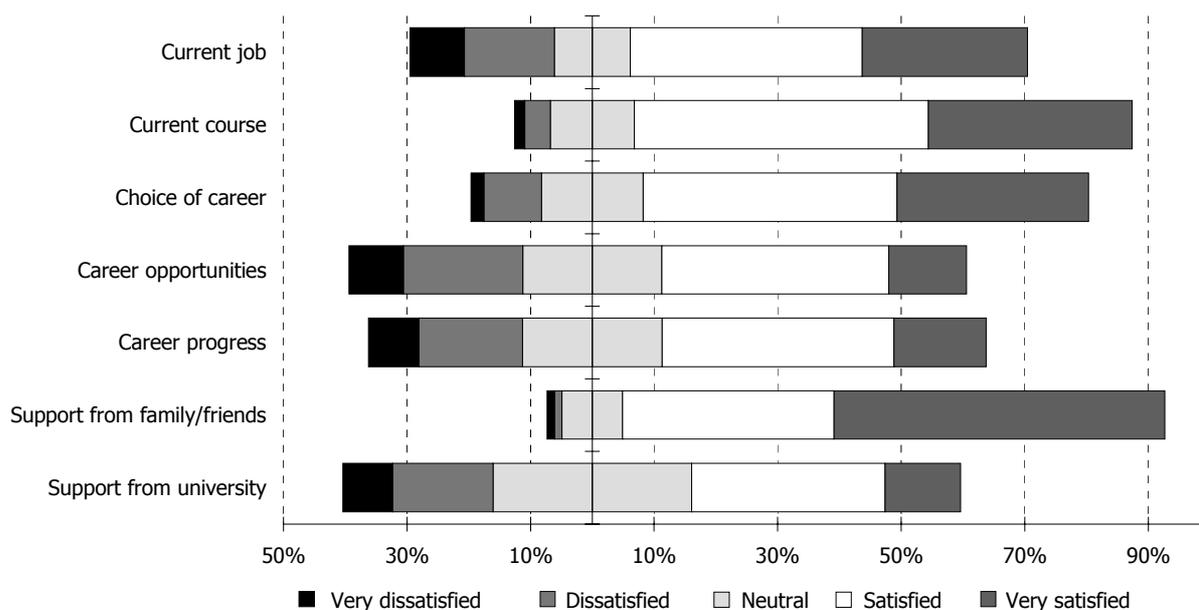
6.3 Career satisfaction

On the whole, respondents were satisfied (achieving positive average satisfaction scores) with all of the measured aspects of their careers and current activities including help and support received. Indeed, the highest satisfaction scores were achieved for help and support from family and friends (88 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied); followed by satisfaction with current course (84 per cent of those who had engaged in any further study), choice of career (72 per cent), and current job (65 per cent of those currently in work). Slightly lower ratings were gained for career progress (52 per cent), career opportunities (49 per cent), and help and support from university or college careers services (44 per cent). Although the majority were happy with the support provided by institutions, one-quarter were not satisfied, and comments illustrate some of the criticisms levelled at careers services: not enough support with choosing a career, some students want more direction from careers officers; a lack of information on occupations outside of the mainstream, here university tutors were considered more helpful; and a heavy reliance on self directed Internet based research.

'I found that, for people like me who have no clear idea about what they want to do when they leave university, the careers service can be frustratingly vague. I really needed somebody to suggest possible careers which would suit someone with my qualifications and abilities, but the advisors I spoke to were loathe to make suggestions themselves, preferring to wait until I brought a possible career option up, then giving me relevant leaflets.'

'The university careers service, although willing to help and offer advice, could offer me virtually no guidance on music careers. I found tutors in the university music department very happy to offer career guidance, and this was my most useful source of information at university and after I had left.'

Figure 6.1: Satisfaction with aspects of career to date (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

'I have found it difficult to gather information on graduate jobs that are not in finance or research. It seems the main bulk of information available is about the finance market – not helpful if you have no interest whatsoever in this area. This tends to leave the Internet as the place for information, but one can not always rely on the integrity or accuracy of the information available.'

6.3.1 Exploring the patterns ...

... for personal characteristics

On the whole, traditional respondents were more satisfied with the measured aspects of their careers than were other groups, *ie* those who were younger (under 21 when they applied to university or college in 1998), and White; and particularly those from higher socio-economic groups, with higher levels of family income, and with academic entry qualifications (all statistically significant relationships) were most satisfied. This indicates that advantage persists beyond university, and that higher education does not necessarily level the playing field. However, graduates, from whatever background, still enjoy greater health and labour market benefits relative to those with lower level qualifications (Chapter 1).

... for study characteristics

Those who completed their initial studies were more satisfied with the measured aspects of their careers than those who left their original courses early. Particularly stark (and statistically significant) differences were in satisfaction with choice of career, support from family and friends, and support from university

tutors and careers services. It is interesting to note that early leavers tended to be dissatisfied with the help and support from their university or college, whereas as those who completed their courses tended to be satisfied. Indeed, this would correspond with findings from the interviews with early leavers (Chapter 3) which indicated that few early leavers either sought and/or received support from their university. The only exception to the pattern is satisfaction with current course. Here, early leavers (who had returned to some form of study, often another undergraduate course [see Chapter 5]) scored this aspect more highly than those who had completed their original studies (though the numbers involved are small).

Those who had spent less time in the labour market (*ie* completed their studies in 2002, up to one year ago) were slightly more positive about their careers than those with more time in the labour market. Those who graduated in 2002 were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the choice of their career, and the help and support they received from their institution (careers services and/or tutors) than earlier graduates. Of this more recent cohort, those who had followed a four year course were the most satisfied, particularly with their career progress and with help from their institution. These patterns may indicate that those with greater labour market experience become more jaded (*ie* less optimistic and/or more frustrated). Further evidence for this supposition is gained when looking at the number of jobs individuals have had since graduating or leaving higher education. Those still in their first job were much more positive than those in their second, third or even fourth job (all statistically significant findings with the exception of satisfaction with support from family and friends, which was only marginally higher).

Higher education outcomes were strongly (and statistically significantly) related to levels of career satisfaction. Those who qualified (or expected to qualify) with a higher class of degree (*eg* first or upper second class honours) were more satisfied with their choice of career, career opportunities and career progress though were no more satisfied than those with lower degree class outcomes with their current job or course of study. Those with a first or upper second class honours were also more satisfied with the help and support they received from their university than those with lower degree class outcomes.

Those who had studied health and medicine, and education subjects were the most satisfied with their careers, tending to be very satisfied with all measured aspects but particularly with their current job, their career opportunities and their career progress. These are highly vocational subjects offering specific routes into graduate entry level occupations, so one would perhaps expect to find relatively greater career satisfaction amongst graduates in these fields.

Table 6.4: Satisfaction with aspects of career to date, by subject of initial study (per cent)

	Health/ medicine	Bio/phy. sciences	Maths/ engineering	Social sciences	Business/ admin	Arts/ humanities	Overall
Current job*	(66)	(194)	(167)	(225)	(132)	(236)	(1,073)
dissatisfied	8	28	17	24	19	35	24
neutral	8	9	10	14	17	12	12
satisfied	85	63	73	62	64	53	65
Current course**	(28)	(103)	(50)	(78)	(40)	(76)	(381)
dissatisfied	0	5	6	13	5	1	6
neutral	7	8	8	8	18	13	10
satisfied	93	87	86	80	78	86	84
Choice of career	(103)	(256)	(214)	(270)	(148)	(256)	(1,305)
dissatisfied	4	11	12	13	11	15	11
neutral	14	17	18	16	19	17	17
satisfied	83	72	70	71	70	68	72
Career opportunities	(93)	(259)	(208)	(278)	(156)	(297)	(1,343)
dissatisfied	8	30	20	30	31	39	28
neutral	24	21	25	23	19	25	23
satisfied	69	49	55	48	51	36	49
Career progress	(94)	(245)	(196)	(269)	(145)	(274)	(1,282)
dissatisfied	7	31	22	23	23	33	25
neutral	25	20	21	25	26	23	23
satisfied	68	49	57	52	51	44	52
Support family/ friends	(108)	(291)	(230)	(297)	(165)	(320)	(1,293)
dissatisfied	0	1	4	4	2	2	2
neutral	4	11	8	10	12	11	10
satisfied	96	88	88	85	86	87	88
Support university	(106)	(287)	(223)	(292)	(156)	(314)	(1,432)
dissatisfied	19	22	22	27	29	26	24
neutral	34	28	30	31	34	37	32
satisfied	47	50	48	43	37	37	44

* filtered for those in work only

** filtered for those who undertook additional study only

Source: IES Survey, 2003

'As I went into a profession after studying a vocational degree, I found it easier to find a job. However, friends who did a more general degree have found it extremely hard.' (BA in teaching and now working as a teacher).

Those who studied arts and humanities subjects tended to be the least satisfied group (with the exception of satisfaction with additional study, which was high). This group scored satisfaction with career opportunities particularly poorly (see Table 6.4).

Slight differences were also noted according to the type of institution attended. Those who had attended pre-92 universities were marginally more likely to be satisfied with all the aspects of their careers than those in post-92 institutions. Interestingly, those from pre-92 universities were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the help and support they received from their

university careers services or tutors. This group (as noted above) were more likely to rely on careers services for information, advice and guidance; and were more likely to use their careers services whilst they were still studying (Connor *et al.*, 2001).

... and job characteristics

Those in full-time jobs and in permanent jobs were much more satisfied with their careers, across all the measured aspects. In contrast, those working part-time or in temporary positions were not just less satisfied they were, in the main, dissatisfied with their careers, particularly with their current job, their career opportunities and their career progress.

Those who reported to be satisfied with aspects of their careers had considerably (and statistically significant) higher average salary levels than those who considered themselves dissatisfied, particularly in terms of career opportunities and career progress. The difference in average annual salary levels between the two groups was about £6,000.

Generally, those working in professional level occupations were the most satisfied with their careers (all aspects found to be significantly significant), much more so than those working in other occupations, especially those working in administrative and secretarial, sales and customer service, skilled trades and machine operative roles (*ie* outside of the professional or associate professional and technical group of occupations). This group of respondents tended to be dissatisfied with their current jobs, career opportunities, and career progress. Interestingly, the small group of individuals (20) working in protective service roles were the most satisfied with their careers, more so than any other group of respondents. Those working in teaching and research professions and in health and social welfare associate professions, also scored their current job and choice of career highly; and those in financial professions tended to be positive about most aspects of their careers. However, the large group of respondents working as science, engineering and IT technicians was not so positive (though remaining largely satisfied) about their career aspects.

'Returners' those who moved away from their home region to study but returned home to work (see Chapter 4) appear to be less satisfied (significantly less than any other group) with all aspects of their careers, and tended to be dissatisfied with the support they received from their university or college. In contrast, the group of respondents termed 'graduate movers' (those who stayed in their home region to study but then moved away to work) were the most satisfied with their careers, followed closely by the 'hyper mobile' group (those who moved to study, and moved again to work). These two groups appear to be operating in a national labour market and, as such, are gaining greater satisfaction from their careers.

Lastly, as noted in Chapter 4, ten per cent of respondents perceived themselves to be in poor 'quality' jobs (scoring low on all aspects relating to entry requirements, development opportunities and external recognition and respect). As would be expected, the majority of these were also unhappy with their careers. However, the difference (though still significant) is not so stark when looking at (dis)satisfaction with support provided by university and college careers services and tutors.

6.4 Changes

Respondents were asked to consider if they would expect to make any changes in their lives and careers in the short and medium term (*ie* within the next year, and within three years). Few individuals (13 per cent) felt that they would make no changes in the short term; and even fewer expected no changes in the medium term (only three per cent) (see Table 6.5). Change therefore seemed to be a part of respondents' lives.

In the next year

The key changes expected in the short term all appeared to take place in the context of their current workplace (63 per cent): *eg* to change their job role or responsibilities (43 per cent), to be promoted (achieve a higher position, 37 per cent), and to study for additional qualifications whilst working (29 per cent). However, a substantial proportion of employed respondents expected to change employers (36 per cent) in the short term, or for those not in work 57 per cent expected to get a job. Overall, very few expected to move abroad, take a career break or become self-employed (six, four and two per cent respectively) (see Figure 6.2, over).

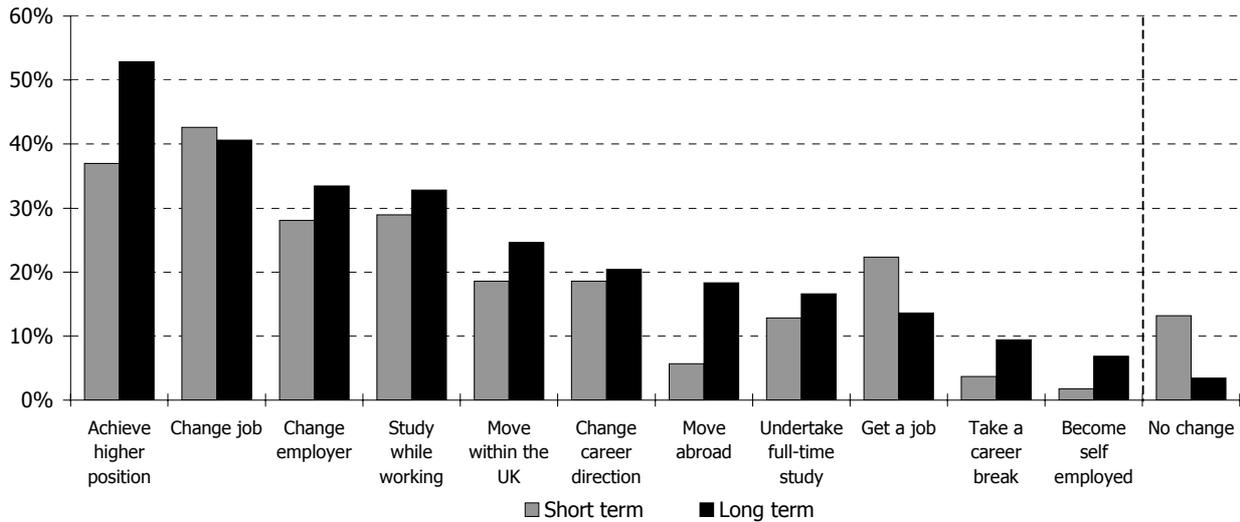
Table 6.5: Number of changes (including none) respondents expect to make in their lives and careers in the next year (short term) and the next three years (medium term)

No. of changes expected	Short term		Medium term	
	No.	%	No.	%
No change	187	13	46	3
1	397	28	351	26
2	317	22	306	23
3	217	15	238	18
4	149	11	191	14
5 or more	51	11	216	16
<i>Base*</i>	<i>1,419</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>1,348</i>	<i>100</i>

* all those that answered the question

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Figure 6.2: Changes expected in the short and medium term (including no change) (per cent)



NB: per cent from all those who answered the question short term N=1,419 and medium term N=1,348

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Looking at specific interactions, it can be seen that:

- Those most likely to change career direction had originally studied arts and humanities courses; whereas those who originally studied biological and physical sciences were most likely to expect to undertake further full-time study (reflecting patterns described in previous chapters). Those who studied health and medicine and business and administrative subjects were more likely to expect to study for additional qualifications while working (*ie* part-time study or short skills courses, see Chapter 5). These differences were all statistically significant.
- Those most likely to expect to move within the UK are currently working in the East Midlands, Merseyside, and the North West; whereas those working in the South (*eg* Greater London, South East and South West) and in Wales are less likely to expect to move (differences notable but not significant). This reflects the anticipated north/south divide in terms of job opportunities (see Choices and Transitions, Perryman *et al.*, 2003).
- Those working part-time have a significantly greater tendency to expect to change employer and/or career direction, whereas those working full-time are marginally more likely to expect a promotion.

A key influence on the degree of change individuals expect appears to be their current feelings about their careers. Those who are dissatisfied with their careers are considerably more likely to expect change, particularly in the short term, *ie* dissatisfied individuals expect to take action to improve their careers. Correspondingly, those in lower level occupations (*ie* outside of

the top three standard occupational groups), and with lower than average salary levels also anticipate more changes in the short term, particularly relating to their employment situation.

In the next three years

A greater degree of change was expected in the medium term (see Table 6.5), however, the pattern of changes was similar to those expected in the short term. This is despite that a greater proportion of respondents felt they would be affected by change (*ie* relative strength of the pattern of change is the same but absolute strength has increased). In the medium term, respondents were particularly more likely to expect promotion (53 per cent) and geographical movement (within (25 per cent), and also out of (18 per cent) the UK) than they were in the short term. Again, few expected to take a career break or become self-employed (nine and seven per cent respectively) (see Figure 6.2).

7 ■ Reflecting Upon Choices and Experiences

7.1 Introduction

Respondents were asked to look back over the options they had and the choices and decisions they had made about higher education. In this chapter, we look at individual's perceptions as to whether the choices they made were right for their current activities and future plans; and what their perceptions are of the benefits of higher education – was it worth it? The issues covered are:

- the added value of the university or college experience
- confidence in choices made, given individuals present circumstances.

7.2 Value of higher education

Respondents were generally very positive about their experiences at university or college, and felt that the experience had benefited them. Indeed, for each of the statements given in the questionnaire about the potential benefits of higher education, those who agreed far outweighed those who disagreed (see Figure 7.1).

Respondents were particularly positive about higher education helping their future prospects. More than three-quarters of all respondents felt their time at university or college had provided them with the following benefits:

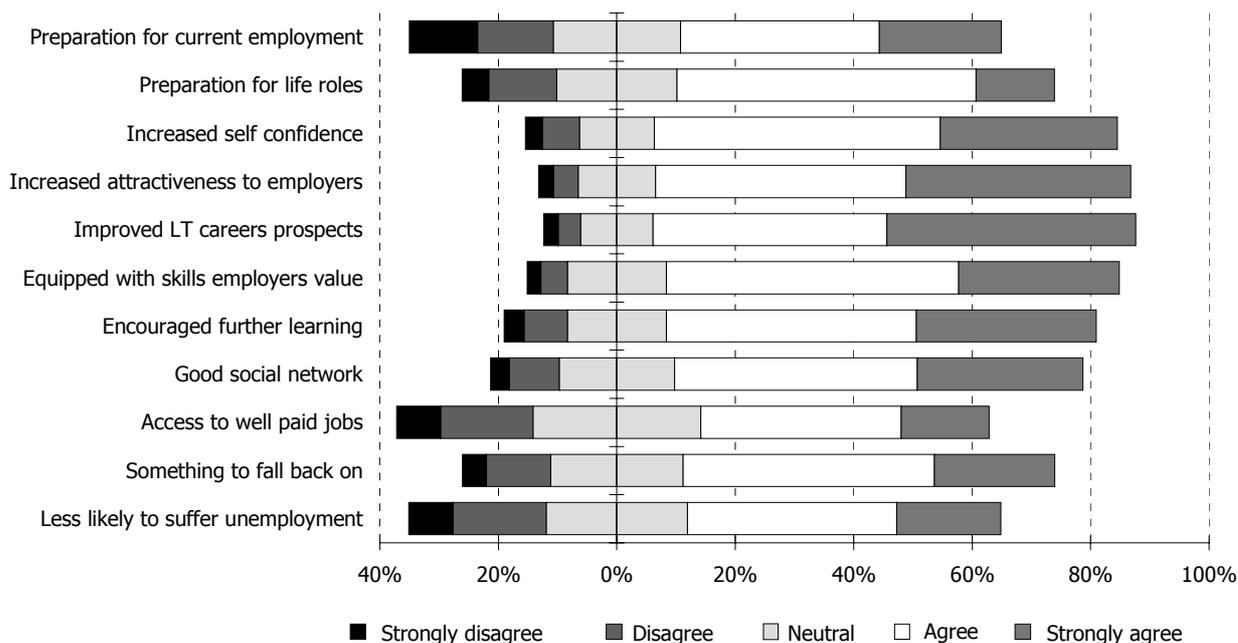
- improved their long-term career prospects, 82 per cent agreed or agreed strongly with the statement:

'I think that in the long-term going to university sets you up for getting a good career.'

- increased their attractiveness to employers (80 per cent)
- increased their self-confidence (78 per cent)
- equipped them with skills and qualities that employers value (77 per cent).

'Higher education provided me with great transferable skills. I believe it is these, rather than my academic qualifications that will benefit me. Despite the costs/debts, I believe everyone should sample university life for confidence, experiences of life etc.'

Figure 7.1: Usefulness of experience at university or college (all respondents*) (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003 (*includes early leavers)

However, several comments, particularly those about having some difficulties in the labour market, indicated that some individuals were less convinced of the currency of a degree. They also recognised that there is an opportunity cost (to be added to the more obvious financial cost) to taking time out of the labour market:

‘Despite enjoying many aspects of my time at university – ie friends, lifestyle etc. I do feel that the worth of a good degree is lost in the current labour market. Employers are unable to differentiate between good degrees and poorer ones. It does not offer you a good job at the end of the day. Unlike what we were told at school, it is hard to get a good job – only guaranteed to get one in a call centre!’

‘I don’t think that an initial degree is as valuable as it once was. I found that while looking for a job after leaving university, that every other person seems to have a degree and employers just assume that you will have one rather than valuing it for any reason ...’

‘I think that overall my time at university was productive – growth in a mental capacity – forced to challenge assumptions etc. However, I may have been better off being employed straight after ‘A’ levels/GCSEs and ‘working my way up’ in a company.’

‘I really don’t know if my degree has been worthwhile. I strongly believe that if I’d left school with my standard grades (all credit grades) I’d have a good job with prospects and money. As it stands I’m doing a job I’m not interested in, being paid £4.24 an hour.’

7.2.1 Exploring the patterns ...

... for personal characteristics

There appeared to be little real difference in attitude towards the value of their higher education experience between male and female respondents (see Table 7.1). However, male respondents were significantly more likely to feel that the experience had provided them with a good social network.

'... any degree you do at any university can be worthwhile for the networking aspect; you never know who you are going to meet that could play a vital role in your future.'

Differences between older and younger respondents' attitudes were much more extreme (see Table 7.1). Generally, younger individuals (those under 21 at application in 1998) were much more positive about the value of higher education than were their older peers, particularly in terms of making them more attractive to employers, increasing their career prospects, and providing them with valuable skills, a good social network and access to well-paid jobs. This pattern is mirrored when looking at the attitudes of those with academic, as opposed to vocational, entry qualifications. It could be speculated that younger people (generally those with academic entry qualifications) start from a lower base than mature individuals in terms of labour market power and therefore have more to gain from the experience of higher education and thus will tend to see the experience more positively. Interestingly, for mature respondents, their time at university or college was significantly more likely to act as an incentive to further learning than it was for younger individuals.

Table 7.1: Value of higher education, by personal characteristics (per cent who agree)

	Gender		Age		Ethnicity		All
	Male	Female	Young	Mature	White	Ethnic minority	
Preparation for current employment	52	56	56	48	55	47	54
Preparation for life roles	65	63	66	46	64	56	63
Increased self-confidence	78	79	79	81	78	73	78
Increased attractiveness to employers	80	80	82	72	81	74	80
Improved long-term careers prospects	81	82	83	74	82	78	81
Equipped with skills employers value	76	77	78	68	77	76	77
Encouraged further learning	70	75	72	80	72	75	73
Good social network	74	65	72	47	71	55	70
Access to well-paid jobs	51	47	52	29	49	47	49
Something to fall back on	61	65	64	56	62	66	63
Less likely to suffer unemployment	56	50	54	49	53	53	53

Source: IES Survey, 2003

White respondents also tended to be marginally more positive than those from minority ethnic groups about the usefulness of their higher education experience, especially in terms of long-term career prospects, attractiveness to employers and (statistically significant) social networks (see Table 7.1). However, minority ethnic respondents were marginally more likely to feel that higher education had provided them with something to fall back on.

In terms of socio-economic group and family affluence, those from higher groups tended to be altogether more positive about their higher education experience. Particular (and statistically significant) differences noted were that those from higher socio-economic groups and with higher family incomes were more likely than other groups to feel that higher education had helped prepare them for life roles and responsibilities and provided them with a good social network. Those from lower groups were marginally more likely to feel that higher education study would encourage them to continue to learn, and significantly more likely to feel that university or college study had provided them with something to fall back on.

Overall 'traditional' graduates considered their time in higher education more useful than did other groups of individuals.

... study characteristics

Attitudes towards the value of higher education can also be explored in terms of the characteristics and outcomes of that period of study. As would be expected, those that did better in higher education felt considerably more positive about that experience. Those who achieved (or expected to achieve) a first or upper second class degree were more positive about their higher education experience (for each of the given potential benefits) than those graduating below this level. Also those who completed their studies were much more positive about the benefits of higher education than those who had left early. However, for many of the measured aspects, even those who had left early still considered their time to have been beneficial. This group felt the greatest benefits were encouragement to continue to learn (*ie* they were not discouraged), increased self-confidence and increased attractiveness to employers (see Table 7.2). So for this group, their time at university or college was not considered a waste. However, they did tend to feel that the experience did not provide them with something to fall back on, help them avoid periods of unemployment, provide access to well-paid jobs, and most especially that they were not helped to prepare them for their current job.

Stark differences were also noted when looking at institution studied in. Those who had studied in pre-92 universities were much more positive about all the aspects of their time in higher education than those who had studied in post-92 universities or

Table 7.2: Value of higher education, by key study characteristics (per cent who agree)

	Complete				Institution type		All
	High class degree	Lower class degree	All complete	Did not complete	Pre-92	Post-92/coll. HE	
Preparation for current employment	61	49	57	17	56	52	54
Preparation for life roles	68	59	64	52	68	60	63
Increased self-confidence	84	73	80	59	81	74	78
Increased attractiveness to employers	87	75	83	52	82	77	80
Improved LT careers prospects	89	77	85	43	86	79	81
Equipped with skills employers value	81	73	78	50	80	72	77
Encouraged further learning	79	63	73	62	74	73	73
Good social network	71	70	70	48	75	63	70
Access to well-paid jobs	53	44	50	20	55	43	49
Something to fall back on	65	64	65	33	65	61	63

Source: IES Survey, 2003

colleges of higher education (see Table 7.2). Most of these differences were found to be statistically significant. Again, it is within the traditional model of higher education that higher level study is more likely to be considered beneficial.

Those who studied health and medicine, and education subjects were the most positive about their university experience (with the exception of encouraging further learning and providing a social network for education students) whereas those who followed courses in arts and humanities subjects tended to be the least positive group. This pattern is not surprising, as we have seen that the former group are faring better in the labour market whereas the latter are experiencing more difficulties (Chapter 4 and Chapter 6).

... and job characteristics

It is also useful to look at the relationship between labour market experience and the perceived value of higher education.

Those who graduated earlier, and therefore had spent longer in the labour market tended to be marginally less positive about their time at university or college than those fresh from this experience. This could be due a number of things: poor experiences in the labour market affecting their attitudes and reducing the perceived value of higher education; greater realism as to the added value of a degree in a mass higher education system; or that over time individuals recollection of their activities and experiences in higher education deteriorates (see quotes above). Looking at job changeability, those who were still in their first job tended to be more positive about the value and benefits of

their higher education to them, than those who had moved on to their second or third (or beyond) job.

Those in full-time permanent jobs, with higher than average salaries and professional level occupations were much more positive about the value of higher education than were those in temporary or part-time positions, with average or below salary levels, and with jobs below professional or associate professional and technical levels. However, there was little difference in terms of perceptions about the increased self-confidence gained through this period of study – which seems to be a pretty universal benefit of higher education. Indeed, even three-quarters of those who felt they had suffered from a lack of confidence during their time at university or college (captured in Wave II) felt that overall higher education had increased their self-confidence. Those in lower level and lower paid occupations, in temporary and part-time posts, and in self-perceived poor quality jobs (using a range of measures, Chapter 4) tended to feel that their university experience had not prepared them for their current employment. These groups also felt the experience had not provided them with access to well-paid jobs or increased their attractiveness to employers.

Those who felt that their time at university or college had encouraged them to learn were significantly more likely to have engaged in additional study (particularly study at postgraduate level, eg postgraduate certificate or diploma, masters, PhD, or other professional qualifications). They were also more likely to expect to undertake full-time or part-time study within the next year or next three years

7.3 Right choices?

Respondents appeared to be particularly confident in their choices about higher education, even with the benefit of hindsight. They were most confident about their choice of when to go to higher education, followed by their choice of institution and then their choice of subject. Also, as indicated above, the vast majority of individuals felt that the benefits of higher education had outweighed the costs (see Table 7.3).

'Going to university at 38 was a brilliant experience (even though it has cost a fortune).'

'I felt my choice of course (Social Policy) really limits what careers I can enter into BUT a degree (even if it is in something deemed pointless) is so important I have no regrets about going to university. I'm sure most of your sample will agree that the benefits (especially financial ones) will ALWAYS outweigh the costs even if it means tolerating 3-4 years of hardship, boredom and loneliness.'

Table 7.3: Confidence in choices about higher education (per cent)

	Definitely not	No (some reservations)	Uncertain	Yes (some reservations)	Definitely yes	Base no.
Right choice of institution	5	5	6	33	51	1,497
Right choice of subject	5	6	11	33	45	1,499
Right choice in timing	4	5	8	20	64	1,499
Benefits outweigh costs	3	6	13	32	46	1,499

Source: IES Survey, 2003

'Although I sometimes question whether the amount of money it cost me to go to university was worth it, looking at the salary I am currently on. The amount I learned both inside and outside my course, eg independence, living with others etc., made it all worthwhile.'

Very few individuals (less than one in ten or nine per cent) felt that they had made any wrong choices with regard to higher education.

'The content of my course was different from what I'd initially been led to believe, and career prospects were much lower. It was a very specific course leading to a qualification in a very poorly paid sector. In hindsight I would have chosen a course that would have led to more highly paid and abundant job opportunities. Despite this, I did enjoy my time at university.'

'As a mature student ... I wish I had done my degree ten years before I did, but never mind.'

As would perhaps be expected, whilst the vast majority of individuals were confident and indeed strongly confident in their choices, those who left early were not. This group tended to feel they had made the wrong choices about higher education – particularly in terms of subject (48 per cent felt they had made the wrong choice) and institution (47 per cent); but also to a certain extent, in terms of timing (39 per cent). However, this group still tended to feel that the benefits of higher education outweigh the costs – either because they believe they benefited even from the short time they were in higher education, or because they have returned and are now studying afresh (see Table 7.4).

Table 7.4: Confidence in choices about higher education of early leavers (per cent)

	Definitely not	No (some reservations)	Uncertain	Yes (some reservations)	Definitely yes	Base no.
Right choice of institution	39	8	11	25	17	93
Right choice of subject	33	15	16	22	14	93
Right choice in timing	18	21	14	29	18	93
Benefits outweigh costs	12	16	26	23	24	93

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Looking at the main group of respondents, given that most are confident about their choices, it is interesting to look at the extent to which different groups are **strongly confident** in their higher education choices.

- Female respondents were more confident about their choice of subject and timing of entry than were males (statistically significant).
- Mature respondents are marginally more strongly confident than younger individuals about their choice of institution and subject, but were significantly less so about their timing of entry.
- White respondents were more confident about their choice of institution and that the benefits of higher education outweigh the costs, more so than those from minority ethnic groups (but these differences were not statistically significant, although they follow patterns found in Wave II).
- Those from higher socio-economic groups and with higher levels of family income were relatively more strongly confident about their choice of institution (again follows Wave II results) and about the benefits of attending university outweighing the costs (statistically significant).
- Those who entered higher education with academic qualifications were more confident about the timing of their entry and that the benefits outweighed the costs (statistically significant).
- Those who qualified (or expected to qualify) with a good degree (first or upper second) were much more confident about all of their choices than were those with a lower class of degree (statistically significant).
- Those who applied in 1998 but delayed their entry until 1999 were more confident about their timing of entry than those who applied and entered in 1998 (statistically significant).
- Those who did not use clearing were strongly confident about all of their choices. Also, those who had got into their first choice of institution were much more confident about their choice of institution (statistically significant).
- Those who studied in a pre-92 university were more confident about all their choices (statistically significant and again follows patterns found in Wave II), with the exception of subject of study. Here the strength of confidence in choice was virtually identical between those from traditional and those from post-92 universities or colleges of higher education.
- Those who studied health and medicine, and education subjects were more strongly confident about their choice of subject than those following other courses, and were also the most confident about their choice of institution and about the benefits of higher education. However, those who studied

business and administrative subjects tended to be not so strongly confident about their subject or institution choice.

- As would be expected, (strong) confidence in the benefits of higher education outweighing the costs reduces with the size of debt. Two-thirds of those with no debt and one-half of those with low debt (less than £5,000) were strongly confident about the investment opportunity of higher education, compared to only one-quarter of those with high levels of debt (over £15,000).
- Of those in work, respondents in professional occupations, with higher salary levels and with self perceived good quality jobs (across a range of measures, see Chapter 4), were much more strongly confident about their higher education choices and the benefits of higher education (statistically significant). Similarly those in full-time and in permanent work tended to be marginally more strongly confident than those in part-time or temporary work about their choice of institution, and timing of entry.

8. Summary and Conclusion

8.1 The research

This report presents the experiences of individuals who applied to enter higher education in 1998 and were surveyed for a third time (Wave III) about their experiences in 2003. It follows on from *Making the Right Choice*, (Connor *et al.*, 1999) which looked at how potential students chose their place of study (Wave I), and *Right Choice?* (Connor *et al.* 2001) which explored outcomes of their applications and experiences in higher education in 2001 (Wave II).

This new, Wave III, report provides insights into:

- these students' outcomes from higher education.
- the experiences of those who withdrew from their original courses before completion
- their patterns of activity, employment and further study, and.
- their satisfaction with their time in higher education and their subsequent progression.

The research series (Waves I, II, III) captures the choices and experiences of individuals as they happen, and provides a unique picture of how the choices of individuals have evolved over time.

The 1,503 replies are drawn from the population who originally applied for full-time undergraduate courses in higher education for entry in 1998, and who completed a questionnaire in 1998, and again in 2000/01 about their higher education experiences. While the sample was broadly representative of those in full-time higher education, it was skewed towards those from more traditional student backgrounds due to attrition between the waves. A gender bias was corrected by weighting the balance of replies but care needs to be taken when generalising the findings.

8.2 Making the right choice

Wave I explored individuals choices about higher education and the Wave II survey found that most students felt their choices had been the right ones for them. Now, in Wave III, when the majority have successfully completed higher education, individuals remain

confident about the choices they had made about higher education. They were most confident about their choice of when to go to higher education (particularly those who had deferred entry, *eg* taken a gap year), followed by their choice of institution, then their choice of subject.

The vast majority of graduates felt that the benefits of higher education had outweighed the costs. Individuals were also satisfied with their choice of career, but to a lesser extent with the opportunities open to them and their career progress to date.

Those most confident and satisfied with their choices about higher education and careers tended to be traditional graduates, who had completed their studies with good results, were mobile in the national labour market, and were in better jobs.

The least confident and most dissatisfied with their choices about higher education and careers were those in lower paid, lower level occupations, those working part-time; and those who returned home after their studies. Not surprisingly, those who qualified with a lower class of degree, and particularly those who failed to complete their course, tended to be more concerned about their choices in higher education and their careers.

8.3 Their experiences whilst studying

The Wave II report, *Right Choice?* detailed the students experiences and views while on their courses, however, Wave III adds to the picture.

In total, 91 per cent worked whilst studying. Those regularly working during term time (controlling for ability by using 'A' level points, and for a range of other personal and educational variables) were less likely to gain a first or upper second class degree qualification. This is particularly a concern as those from lower socio-economic groups, from families with lower income, and from minority groups were more likely to work during term times. Early attitudes towards taking paid work whilst studying correctly predicted such activities.

Over 85 per cent completed their initial course in 2001 or 2002. The rest were still studying, or they had left and not re-entered higher education. Two-thirds graduated with a higher class of degree but those from less privileged backgrounds (lower socio-economic group and, or with lower family incomes) and from minority groups, were less likely to do so, indicating that higher education did not 'level the playing field'. Early satisfaction with higher education experiences was linked to success. Those who were satisfied with the quality of teaching, course structure, academic facilities and support whilst studying were the most likely to gain a high class degree.

Despite considering the benefits of higher education to outweigh the costs, costs were a significant issue for many. The average level of debt on completion was just over £9,000, most of which was covered by a Student Loan. Those with the highest level of debt were those from less privileged backgrounds (*ie* low family income) and those who moved away from 'home'. The applicants most willing to take on debt also had the highest debt levels, as did those who had difficulties living on a low income whilst studying. Those studying in Greater London experienced only average levels of debt (due to high levels of local students).

Leaving early

Six per cent of respondents left their original higher education course early. They tended to be older, studying in their home region, and clustered in certain subjects, particularly maths and technology related subjects. However, this group had a mixed pattern in terms of privilege with higher incidences of both those from higher socio-economic groups, and those from lower family income. Dropout rates peaked around the Christmas period, a key stocktaking period for individuals. There was no one, single reason causing an individual to leave, rather it was a compounding of problems. The most notable were struggling with the academic challenge, the 'quality' of the course, and financial problems.

The younger students had often made hasty or ill-informed choices as many did not really know what they wanted from their higher education, if indeed they wanted to go at all. They suffered from an apparent lack of guidance about alternatives in and out of higher education, and a lack of ownership of the decision-making process. In short many felt the move to higher education was just the next step on the 'education conveyor belt'.

Conversely, more mature leavers recognised their personal circumstances often limited their choices, and meant they had an obstacle course to overcome to get into and through higher education. They would, however, have valued more information and advice about the range of options available to them, and what they might expect once they were in higher education, including the financial and academic support available. These mature early leavers also had greater difficulties getting back into education.

There were two groups of early leavers identified. Those who just wanted to 'get out' of higher education and did not really consider the consequences or make any longer term plans; and those who sought an alternative route to 'get on' with their careers. It would seem that those who wanted to 'get out' are in the majority and are not faring very well in the labour market. Few of those leaving their initial courses early sought advice about their decision to leave, nor about their subsequent choices. However, it is not clear whether it was a lack of provision, or a lack of knowledge about the support available, and/or willingness to access it.

Many (34 per cent) of those who left their initial courses early, returned to higher education, usually to study different subjects. Those who returned tended to have a clearer idea of what they wanted from higher education, and made more informed choices due to greater life experiences. They tended to place further study in the context of employment, often working alongside studying. This provided them with a goal or focus to their studies, external encouragement, and greater financial stability and/or support. However, returning to higher education did not always work, and some (approximately one-fifth) again left early.

A shortened time in higher education was not always a bad thing. Three-quarters of the leavers saw some value in their time in higher education. It helped them to make better future choices and increased their self-confidence. However, this experience came at a financial cost, and for some it was too great and outweighed any potential benefits.

8.4 Moving into employment after graduation

Many individuals took some action towards getting a job or career when studying. This tended to involve gathering information on possible careers or employers, visiting employer websites and visiting higher education careers services. Those who were more active during this period were the most successful in the labour market.

After graduating, individuals consulted many sources for careers information and advice and for job search but the Internet, and family and friends were the most consulted. Family and friends were particularly important for careers guidance, thus those from families and communities with little experience of higher education may be disadvantaged in terms of the amount of advice they receive. The Internet was most useful for job search.

Many graduates were surprised how difficult it was to find work. A substantial minority of new graduates moved into temporary or low quality jobs. For some this was as a 'breathing space', or to start to pay off debt, but for others it was a lack of visible alternatives. The latter tended to be individuals who had no clear career plans whilst still in higher education. Nearly two years after graduating, an increasing proportion of graduates had moved into permanent work with correspondingly fewer in temporary and less secure work. However, the less advantaged individuals (from lower socio-economic groups and with lower family incomes) found it the most difficult to move from temporary to permanent work.

Nearly three-quarters were in employment at the time of the survey. It tended to be their first job since graduating, and to be full-time. Most commonly they were in administrative and secretarial occupations; teaching and research professions; science,

engineering and IT technician roles; and other business and public service associates. Few were managers. The majority (72 per cent) of those working, were in relatively high (professional, or associate professional and technical) level occupations, an indicator of job quality. Most worked in the service sector.

Another indicator of job quality is salary. Annual salaries ranged from £500 to over £40,000, with a median of £16,000. Those earning the higher salaries tended to be male, from higher socio-economic groups and from higher income families (*ie* 'traditional' graduates). They tended to have better higher education outcomes, and to have studied professional or vocational subjects such as maths and engineering, education and health and medicine. They also had a greater propensity to work in the South or the South East.

'Traditional' graduates, *ie* younger, White, from higher socio-economic group and families with higher incomes, and the overlapping group of those job seeking in the national labour market, were the most likely to perceive their jobs as being of good quality. This had been defined through a series of self-assessed statements, *eg* having high entry requirements; offering skills development; and being well regarded by the individual or the wider public.

The majority of individuals perceived their jobs to have at least some of these aspects of 'quality'. However, some individuals saw themselves to be in poor quality jobs. They tended to be less advantaged individuals (from lower socio-economic groups and with lower family incomes), and to have been less successful in their higher education studies. The least satisfied with their labour market experiences were less likely to think about careers/jobs and take action whilst in university. They subsequently also relied more heavily on friends and relatives, new technologies, national press, careers publications, and recruitment agencies. This gave them more general information about opportunities, and less guidance about the process of choosing careers.

Nearly one in three individuals moved location after they completed their studies to find work (but did not return home). These '*graduate movers*' or '*hyper mobile graduates*' were more likely to be 'traditional' graduates and to operate in the national graduate labour market, and to achieve better jobs and salaries. Many others had stronger ties to their home region. These either stayed in their home region to study and work ('*rooted*' 33 per cent) or returned ('*returners*' 25 per cent) to their home region to look for and take up work, restricting the range of job opportunities open to them. Of these, the '*returners*' had a particularly difficult time in the labour market.

Change was a key part of the graduates' lives. The majority of graduates expected changes that related to their current workplace while one in three (36 per cent) expected to change

their employer in the next year. Geographical movement and promotion was considered much more likely over the medium term. Most of the dissatisfied individuals expected to take action to improve their current position and future prospects, and these individuals were more likely to use higher education careers services after graduation.

8.5 The start of lifelong learning

Just under half undertook some form of further or additional study after their initial higher education, especially older respondents, those with higher class degree qualifications (a selection criteria for most postgraduate courses), and those who followed courses in health and medicine, social science, and biological and physical sciences. Of these, half went on to full-time diploma, masters, or PhD programmes. Others studied for professional qualifications or were engaged in short skills courses. As noted above, many of the early leavers returned to education of some kind, and undergraduate programmes were particularly common.

Perhaps most significantly, half said that they had not engaged in any further study since they graduated or left higher education. Those least likely to engage in further study were men, from families with high incomes, who had initially studied vocational subjects, or from post-92 institutions; and perhaps more worryingly those in poor quality jobs, low level occupations and with low salaries.

8.6 The value of higher education

Overall, these graduates painted a very positive picture of their choices of, and experiences in and after higher education. They felt that their time in higher education had helped them with their future prospects. Even though many anticipated, and left with sizeable levels of debt, the vast majority felt that the benefits they gained (and would continue to reap) from higher education outweighed the costs. They would, however, have welcomed more advice as to the nature of these costs and how they might have best funded themselves.

The majority of those who left their initial courses early, and by their own admission had made the wrong choices, were positive about the value of their time in higher education. The experience had encouraged them to continue to learn (and many successfully returned to higher education or some other form of study), increased their self-confidence, and increased their (perceived) attractiveness to employers.

However, traditional graduates (younger, White, middle class) tended to have the best outcomes, were most likely to be mobile,

and were the most positive about their experiences. Students from less traditional backgrounds achieved lower results and were more likely to have weaker labour market outcomes and lower satisfaction. They had not 'caught up' with their peers in career terms within the first few years of their graduation.

8.7 Room for improvement

While most were satisfied with their choices, experiences and outcomes in relation to higher education, there are some areas where improvements in careers advice and support would add value for future generations of students. Improvements should build on the earlier *Choice* recommendations and many areas of existing good practice.

8.7.1 Careers support prior to higher education

The information and advice available to, and used by, potential applicants on choices related to higher education and careers could usefully be improved in a number of ways. It should include better information as to the actual costs they might incur, how they might manage their expenditure, possible sources of funding, and the pros and cons of taking on paid work during term time and vacations.

All higher education applicants should be encouraged to take advantage of such advice to ensure that they take well-informed decisions before they enter higher education. Advisers (including school, college and HE careers teachers and the Connexions and IAG services) should also encourage and help applicants to build in more 'thinking' space. This should enable them to think about the full range of options in and out of higher education; to undertake more visits and to talk to students in higher education, and to consider the pros and cons of different subject areas.

8.7.2 Careers support during higher education

Undergraduates need to be encouraged to seek and use good advice and information, and for such information to be available, before they graduate. Careers advisers need to promote a three-dimensional strategy to undergraduates before the end of their courses to focus on the process of choosing a career; to explore opportunities within, and ways to access their chosen career or area (including opportunities outside of the mainstream); and to recognise the importance of lifelong learning. The degree of support required with each of these aspects will differ depending on the profile of the undergraduate and the subject studied. For example, a mature student studying at university in order to change occupations and set up her own business will need very different support from a young graduate considering his first job after studying a non-vocational specific degree. Help should be

particularly targeted at non-traditional students, and the least mobile, as they are most likely to end up in poor quality jobs.

Advisers need to encourage students, particularly those with little experience in the labour market, to understand early in their studies the value and importance of work experience to their subsequent careers. It should be seen as a beneficial part of studies, not simply a means to income. Students do, however, need to strike a balance between building employability and reducing debt, without compromising study time and success.

8.7.3 Careers and wider support after leaving

This is especially important for those moving initially into 'lower quality' jobs. Such individuals need help to spot opportunities and employers who are able to offer development and opportunities to turn their jobs into stepping-stones to higher quality jobs. This is a particular challenge for graduates returning 'home' after their studies and who are often unclear as to what support may be available locally, *eg* through their local universities and colleges or the local careers services.

There is a role here too for regional and local bodies, to help their graduates to contribute quickly and efficiently to the local economy. These agencies need to build graduate support into their long-term economic development plans.

8.7.4 Retention

Information should be collated and disseminated about successful retention strategies adopted by universities and colleges. These should address topics such as:

- helping identify those most at risk of leaving
- encouraging those at risk to seek help and advice early
- helping those who wish to remain and complete successfully to do so; enabling individuals to transfer to a more suitable course/institution; or
- managing their transition from higher education, which may be for the short term only.

Appendix A: Further Details About the Sample and Methodology

Weighting the data

It was decided to weight the second follow-up survey (Wave III) data to address the gender bias, as this was the most significant area of sample bias. Weighting is a method of assessing the representativeness of a sample by comparing key variables (such as the main socio-demographic characteristics) with a larger population which is known to be representative. It takes account of the over and under representation of groups in the sample by applying an individually calculated multiplier to each respondent. In this way it adjusts the 'weight' or value attached to each response in order to match that of the population. A simple weight was applied to the entire data set in order to bring the gender distribution of the second follow-up sample in line with the UCAS applicant population of 1998 (see Table A1). This provides a cohort that is broadly similar to the national applicant population of 1998, although the cohort has marginally fewer older individuals and fewer from ethnic minority groups, and a larger number originating from Scotland.

However, it should be stressed that it was not intended to make the response truly representative of the original population. The cohort has reduced considerably in size over the years, and is affected by the original sample control and selection technique (selecting applicants to 15 institutions in the UK with a further top up sample to reflect population characteristics) and by response bias. Our experience would indicate that there is a greater likelihood that less geographically mobile students and graduates and those with more extreme experiences (positive or negative) will respond due to accessibility and motivation factors. Thus, the findings presented in this report describe the experiences of our cohort and not necessarily what happens to all students and graduates. As such, the report provides indicative results rather than generalising results.

Table A1: Response characteristics before and after weighting, compared to the first survey and the national population (per cent)

		Wave III		Wave I	UCAS apps (1998)
		Weighted#	Response	Response	Population
Gender	Male	47	28	42	47
	Female	53	72	58	53
Age (entry)	Under 21	88	88	89	78
	21-24	4	4	5	10
	25+	8	8	6	13
Ethnicity	White	93	93	88	84
	Black	2	2	3	4
	Asian	4	4	8	10
	Other	1	1	2	2
Region of domicile	NE/NW	19	19	22	22
	London/SE/E	38	39	40	38
	E&W Mids.	12	12	12	15
	SW	11	11	11	8
	Wales	4	4	5	5
	NI	2	2	2	4
	Scotland	14	14	8	9
Preferred subject*	Science/eng.	41	37	37	33
	Soc./business	25	26	26	24
	Arts/hum	19	20	20	21
	Other	9	11	10	9
	No pref.	6	6	6	12
<i>Base no.</i>		<i>1,503</i>	<i>1,503</i>	<i>19,817</i>	<i>389,588</i>

* preferred subject calculated by UCAS at time of application for each applicant
weighted by gender, linked to UCAS population data

Source: IES Survey, 2003 and UCAS annual statistical tables 1998 entry

Sample key characteristics

The following tables present key information on the sample of respondents (after weighting to address gender bias) including personal characteristics, economic and educational background, and early higher education choices. This data was collected across all three waves of the research.

Table A2: Respondents' personal characteristics (after weighting)

	No.	%
Gender		
Male	711	47
Female	793	53
Age		
Under 21	1,253	88
21 to 24	61	4
25 and older	115	8
Ethnicity		
White	1,349	93
Black	22	2
Asian	62	4
Other	13	1
<i>Minority ethnic</i>	97	6
Disability		
None	1,402	94
Some recorded	95	6

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Table A3: Respondents' economic background (after weighting)

	No.	%
Socio-economic group		
ABC1	1,052	76
C2DE	338	24
Family income (in 1998)		
Below £25,000	535	45
£25,001 to £45,000	444	37
Above £45,001	213	18
Family experience of HE		
Yes	1,137	76
No	367	24
Home region		
North East, Yorkshire and Humberside	125	8
North West and Merseyside	160	11
East and West Midlands	176	12
Eastern and South East	394	26
Greater London	178	12
South West	164	11
Wales	62	4
Northern Ireland	24	2
Scotland	215	14

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Table A4: Respondents' education background (prior to HE application, and after weighting)

	No.	%
Highest qualification gained		
Academic	1,261	87
Vocational	181	13
'A' level points achieved		
No points	171	11
1 to 10	161	11
11 to 20	374	25
21 to 25	249	17
Above 25	344	23
Scottish Highers	198	13
Activity prior to HE application		
FT study school/6th form college	1,034	70
FT study FE/HE	286	19
In work	102	7
PT study	36	2
Other	23	2
Education institution last attended		
Comprehensive school	520	35
Grammar school	144	10
Independent school	165	11
Sixth form college	321	22
FE/HE/Adult education college	318	21
Other	12	1

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Table A5: Respondents' HE choices (after weighting)

	No.	%
Year started university		
1998	1,301	88
1999	159	11
2000 or 2001	12	1
Type of HEI attended		
Pre-92 institution	916	71
Post-92 institution/college of HE	375	29
Initial course of study		
Health/medicine	108	7
Biological/physical science	297	20
Maths/engineering	235	16
<i>Science</i>	<i>640</i>	<i>43</i>
Social studies	305	20
Business/admin	169	11
Arts/humanities	330	22
Education	47	3
<i>Arts</i>	<i>850</i>	<i>57</i>
Study region		
North	43	3
Yorkshire & Humberside	186	13
North Wales	184	13
East Midlands	83	6
West Midlands	76	5
East Anglia	29	2
Greater London	143	10
South East	259	18
South West	135	9
Wales	84	6
Northern Ireland	—	4
Scotland	244	17

— cell size is less than 10

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Appendix B: Summaries from *Making the Right Choice* (Wave I), and *Right Choice?* (Wave II) reports published by Universities UK Publications Department

A summary of the first report (Wave I) *Making the Right Choice: How Students Choose Universities and Colleges* may be found at:
www.employment-studies.co.uk/summary/summary.php?id=cvcpchoi

A summary of the second report (Wave II) *Right Choice?* a follow-up to '*Making the Right Choice*' may be found at:
www.employment-studies.co.uk/summary/summary.php?id=1427uuk

Appendix C: Bibliography

- Action on Access (2002), *Achieving Student Success (draft report)*
www.brad.ac.uk/admin/conted/action/contact/ssrep.html
- Arulampalam W, Naylor R, Smith J (2002), 'Effects of In-class Variation and Student Rank on the Probability of Withdrawal: Cross Section and Time-Series Analysis for UK University Students', *Discussion Paper 655*, IZA (Institute for the Study of Labor, Germany) www.iza.org
- Association of Graduate Recruiters (2003), *The AGR Recruitment Survey, Summer Review*, AGR
- Association of Graduate Recruiters (1995), *Skills for Graduates in the 21st Century*, AGR
- AUT (nd), *Student Retention – Problems and Solutions*, AUT
- Aston L (2003), *Higher Education Supply and Demand to 2010*, Higher Education Policy Institute
- Barber L, Regan J (2002), *January 2002 Graduate Salaries and Vacancies Annual Review*, AGR
- Bennett R (2003), 'Determinants of Undergraduate Student Drop-out Rates in a University Business Studies Department', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 27, Part 2
- Brunsdon V *et al.* (2000), 'Why Do HE Students Drop-out? A Test of Tinto's Model', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 24, Part 3
- Brown R (2003), *The Value of Higher Education*, CIHE
- Bynner J, Dolton P, Feinstein L, Makepeace G, Malmberg L, Woods L (2003), *Revisiting the Benefits of Higher Education*, Institute of Education
www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/2003/rd05_03/rd05_03.pdf
- Callender C, Kemp M (2000), *Changing Student Finances: Income, Expenditure and The Take-up of Student Loans among Full-time and Part-time Higher Education Students in 1998/99*, Research Report 213, DfEE

- Callender C, Wilkinson D (2003), *Student Income and Expenditure Survey: Students' Income, Expenditure and Debt in 2002/03 and changes since 1998/99*, Research Report 487, DfES
- CEL (2003), *Barclays Ninth Annual Graduate Survey*, Barclays
www.newsroom.barclays.co.uk/news/data/847.html for
 press release
- CEL (2001), *2001 Graduate Tracking Survey*, and (2002), *Graduate First Destinations Survey*, Council of Excellence in Management and Leadership
- Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) (2002a), *Access to what: analysis of factors determining graduate employability*, HEFCE
- Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) (2002b), *UK Graduates and the impact of work experience*, HEFCE
- Chevalier A (2000), *Graduate Over-education in the UK*, Centre for the Economics of Education
- Coaldrake P (2001), 'Responding to Changing Student Expectations', *Higher Education Management*, Vol. 13:2 pp. 75-92
- Conlon G, Chevalier A (2002), *Rates of Return to Qualifications: A Summary of Recent Evidence*, CIHE
- Connor H, Burton R, Pearson R, Pollard E, Regan J (1999), *Making the Right Choice: How Students Choose Universities and Colleges*, CVCP and IES
- Connor H, Dewson S (2001), *Social Class and Higher Education: Issues Affecting Decisions on Participation by Low Social Class Groups*, DfEE Research Report RR267
- Connor H, Pearson R, Pollard E, Tyers C, Willison R (2001), *Right Choice?* Universities UK and IES
- Connor H, Tyers C, Davis S, Tackey N, Modood T (2003), *Minority Ethnic Students in Higher Education: interim report*, DfES Research Report RR448
- Connor H, Hirsh W, Barber L (2003), *Your Graduates and You: Effective Strategies for Graduate Recruitment and Development*, IES Report 400
- Connor H, Tyers C (forthcoming, 2004), *Minority Ethnic Students in Higher Education: Labour Market Transitions*, IES/DfES
- Curtis S, Shani N (2002), 'The Effect of Taking Paid Employment During Term-time on Students' Academic Studies', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 26, 2, pp. 129-138

- Davies P (1999), *Student Retention in Further Education: A Problem of Quality or of Student Finance?* FEDA
- Davies P, Osborne M, Williams J (2002), *For Me or Not for Me? That is the Question: A Study of Mature Students' Decision-making and Higher Education*, Research Brief 297, DfES
- Davies R, Elias P (2003), *Dropping Out: A Study of Early Leavers From Higher Education*, IER, DfES Research Report RR386
- DfES (2003a), *The Future of Higher Education: What it means to Students and Parents*, DfES
www.dfes.gov.uk/hestudents/hestrategy/pdfs/studentparentguide.pdf
- DfES (2003b), *The Future of Higher Education*, DfES White Paper
- Dolton P, Silles M (2001), *Over-education in the Graduate Labour Market*, Centre for Economics of Education
- Draper S (2003), *Tinto's Model of Student Retention*, University of Glasgow
- Education and Employment Select Committee (2001), *Responses from the Government and from HEFCE to the Sixth Report from the Committee Higher Education and Student Retention*, Select Committee on Education and Employment Seventh Special Report
- Eccles S, Bird D (2002), *Mental Budgeting: How Young People Manage Their Money, Credit and Debt*, Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster
- Elias P, Purcell K (2003), *Researching Graduate Careers Seven Years On – Research Paper 1: Measuring Change in the Graduate Labour Market*, IER
- Gordon G *et al.* (2002), *Undergraduate Student Retention at Strathclyde*, Centre for Academic Practice, University of Strathclyde
- Hakim C (1997), 'A Sociological Perspective on Part-time work' in Blossfeld H, Hakim C (eds.), *Between Equalization and Marginalization: Women Working Part-time in Europe and the United States of America*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Hall J (2001), *Retention and Wastage in FE and HE*, SCRE
- Harvey L (1997), *Graduates Work: Organisational Change and Students' Attributes*, Centre for Research into Quality, UCE
- Harvey L (2003), *Transitions from Higher Education to Work*, Briefing paper, ESECT/LTSN Generic Centre

- HEFCE (2001), *Strategies for Widening Participation in Higher Education: A Guide to Good Practice*, 01/36
- HEFCE (2002), *Performance Indicators in Higher Education 1999-2000 and 2000-2001*, HEFCE 2002/52
- HEFCE (2003), *DfES Funding Announcement 2003-04 to 2005-06*, EP 03/2003
- HESA (2000), *Students in Higher Education 1998/99*, HESA
- HESA (2002), *First Destination Statistics 00/01*, HESA
- HESA (2003), *Students in Higher Education 2001/02*, HESA
- Hillage J, Pollard E (1998), *Employability: Developing a Framework for Policy Analysis*, DfEE Research Report RR85
- HUCS (2002), *The Impact of Counselling Services on Student Retention*, On behalf of the Heads of Universities Counselling Services Group for submission to Universities UK
- Institute for Access Studies (nd), *First Year Student Retention at Staffordshire University: Some Short-term Measures*, www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/graduate_school/access/docs/schools-retention.doc
- IDS (2002), *Pay and Progression for Graduates*, IDS, London
- IER (1999), *Moving On: Graduate Careers Three Years After Graduation*, DfEE/IER/AGCAS/CSU
- Johnston V, Pollack A (nd), *Addressing Undergraduate Retention in the First Year: A Case Study of a Scottish Post-92 University*, Napier University
- Johnston V (1997), *Why Do First Year Students Fail to Progress to Their Second Year? An Academic Staff Perspective*, Napier University, Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference
- Laing C, Robinson A (2003), 'The Withdrawal of Non-traditional Students: Developing an Exploratory Model', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 27, Part 2
- Lloyd P, Willmot L (2002), 'The Attraction, Support and Retention Project', *Learning and Teaching in Action*, Issue 1, *Widening Participation and Access*
- Mackie S (1998), *Jumping the Hurdles*, University of the West of England, Paper presented at the Higher Education Close Up Conference

- MacLeod-Brudenell T, Harvey L (2003), *Are There Too Many Graduates?: A Literature Review and Analysis of Graduate Employability*, Centre for Research and Evaluation, Sheffield Hallam University for Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT)
- Maslen G (2003), 'Having a job lifts results, says report', *Times Higher*, 10 October p13
- Metcalfe H (2001), *Increasing Inequality in Higher Education: The Role of Term-time Working*, NIESR, London (www.niesr.ac.uk)
- MORI (2003), *The Student Living Report 2003*, UNITE
- NATFHE (2001), *Higher Education: Student Retention*, Education and Employment Select Committee Inquiry.
- National Audit Office (2002), *Improving Student Achievement in English Higher Education*, HC 486, Session 2001/02, The Stationary Office
- National Audit Office (2002b), *Widening Participation in Higher Education in England*, HC 485, Session 2001/02, The Stationary Office
- NatWest (2003), *Student Money Matters Report: A Definitive Guide to Sixth Form, Undergraduates, and Graduate Finances*, (accessed via www.prospects.ac.uk)
- OECD (2002), *Education at a Glance*, OECD
- Ozga J, Sukhanandan L (1998), *Undergraduate Non-completion: Developing an Exploratory Model*, *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 52, Part 3
- Perryman S, Pearson R (2001), *The IES Annual Graduate Review 2001 Update*, IES Report 374
- Perryman S, Pearson R (2002), *Graduating for Advantage: The IES Annual Graduate Review 2002 Update Part 2*, IES Report 393
- Perryman S (2003), *Business as Usual? Trends In Student and Graduate Numbers*, *The IES Annual Graduate Review, 2003 Update*, IES Report 399
- Perryman S, Pollard E, Hillage J, Barber L (2003), *Choices and Transitions: A Study of the Graduate Labour Market in the South West*, HERDA-SW (www.herda-sw.ac.uk)
- Pollard E, Jagger N, Perryman S, Van Gent M, Mann K (2003), *Ready, SET Go: A Review of SET Study and Career Choices*, Engineering Technology Board

- Ramsden B (2003), *Patterns of Higher Education Institutions in the UK: Third Report*, UUK
- Rubery J (1998), 'Part-time Work: A Threat to Labour Standards?' in O'Reilly J, Fagan C (Eds.) *Part-time Prospects: An International Comparison of Part-time Work in Europe, North America and the Pacific Rim*, Routledge, London
- Sanders C (2002), 'Debt grows ever bigger and more painful', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 1 February, pp. 6-7
- Sanders C (2003), 'Fact: Term jobs damage grades', *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 7 February
- Schuller T, Bynner J, Green A, Blackwell L, Hammond C, Preston J, Gough M (2001), *Modelling and Measuring the Wider Benefits of Learning: A Synthesis*, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning
- SCOP (2002), *Student Services: Effective Approaches to Retaining Students in Higher Education*, Universities UK
- Smith E, Beggs B (2003), *A New Paradigm for Maximising Student Retention in Higher Education*, Glasgow Caledonian University, Paper presented at IEE Engineering Education Conference
- Thomas L, et al. (2002), *Student Services: Effective Approaches to Retaining Students in Higher Education*, Institute for Access Studies
- UUK (2003), *Attitudes to Debt: School Leavers and Further Education Students' Attitudes to Debt and Their Impact on Participation in Higher Education*, UUK, London
- Ramsden B (2003), *Patterns of Higher Education Institutions in the UK: Third Report*, UUK
www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Bookshop/downloads/patterns3.pdf
- Vignaendra S (2001), *Social Class and Entry to the Solicitors' Profession: Research Study 41*, The Law Society
- Yorke M (1999), *Leaving Early: Undergraduate Non-completion in Higher Education*, Falmer Press