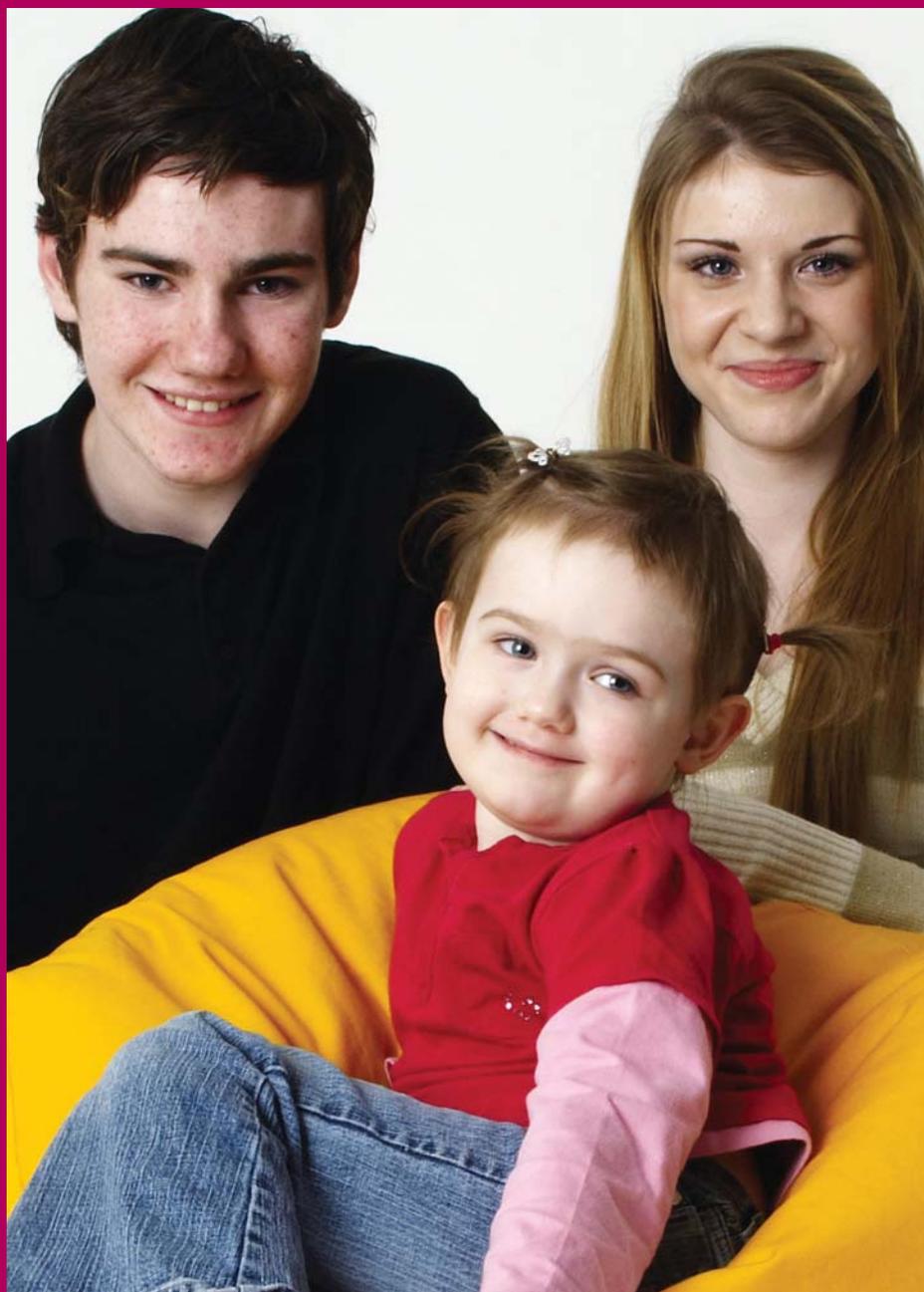


# Impact of Care to Learn: Tracking the destinations of young parents funded in 2003/04

Sally Dench

PART OF THE NATIONAL EVALUATION OF CARE TO LEARN



Leading learning and skills



REPORT 442

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## Executive Summary

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As part of the national evaluation of Care to Learn, a self-completion postal survey was conducted of young parents who had received Care to Learn funding during the 2003/04 academic year. The survey was conducted during the winter of 2006, some 18 months after their support from Care to Learn.

This report shows that:

- The main reasons for continuing in, or returning to, education were utilitarian, both in the medium term (to get a better/good job) and more broadly (to get a better future for my child).
- Consistent with this, almost all (95 per cent) of the courses led to qualifications, although these were varied in their nature and in their level (reflecting the subject of courses being studied).
- Just over half (52 per cent) reported that they had completed the course they were on during the 2003/04 academic year, seven per cent were still studying on the same course and 40 per cent said that they had dropped out.
- Care to Learn funding and related support was very important to young parents remaining in, or returning to, learning; 82 per cent reported that they would not have gone on a course without the programme paying for childcare.
- Their continuing participation in education had been productive; a before and after comparison shows that, overall, there was movement up the qualification scale, and in particular that the proportion with no qualifications had fallen considerably, from 36 to 20 per cent.
- Similarly, there had been a considerable shift in the activities in which the cohort were engaged. Most significantly, the proportion who were (economically or educationally) inactive has fallen from two-thirds (63 per cent) to less than half (43 per cent). The proportion in work has risen considerably (from four to 19 per cent), with a further 11 per cent now looking for work.

- The majority of Care to Learn beneficiaries reported that it was either very easy (54 per cent) or fairly easy (37 per cent) to find childcare. Only nine per cent said that it was not easy. Overall, given the level of difficulties generally reported for young parents accessing childcare, this group appear to have been experiencing very few problems, and furthermore were generally satisfied with their childcare (with 80 per cent reporting being either very or fairly satisfied).

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# 1 Introduction

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As part of the national evaluation of Care to Learn, a survey was conducted of young parents who received Care to Learn funding during the 2003/04 academic year. The survey was conducted during the winter of 2006, some 18 months after they had taken part in the programme. This report documents the findings from that follow-up survey, which explores patterns of learning and the impact of Care to Learn on qualifications and future outcomes.

## 1.1 Survey sampling and methodology

Management information was used to identify the sample. Self-completion postal questionnaires were sent to 2,865 young parents who made up the 2003/04 cohort, and non-respondents were additionally sent subsequent follow-up letters. Of these, 978 had continued their studies with Care to Learn funding through 2004/05, and 363 of these had continued through 2005/06. In addition, it seemed that 85 from the 2003/04 cohort had not done any learning in 2004/05, but returned to learning with Care to Learn in 2005/06.

## 1.2 Response

The gross response rate was around ten per cent, and this level of response is not uncommon for such follow-up research with relatively young cohorts. However, it is important also to keep in mind that:

- Some of those included in the contacts list had not in fact taken up Care to Learn funding during the 2003/04 academic year, although they had been eligible to do so. As they had not received funding they should not be included in the base for any future review of those who had.
- There was a high level of postal returns from the survey. This is not that surprising, given that more than half the addresses were three years old. We might expect that a proportion of young parents, especially those who continue living with their parents and who are on a career or qualification track would probably remain at

the same address. Additionally, those maintaining contact with their parents will probably have post forwarded to them. However, many young parents are highly mobile – they are living in rented accommodation, sometimes temporary accommodation (although these are probably least likely to be in education) which might necessitate them moving on at times. It is unlikely that post will be forwarded, or even a forwarding address left. A number of these also do not maintain family contacts.<sup>1</sup>

Taking these two factors into account, the net response rate is considerably higher than the gross ten per cent recorded. However, with less than 300 actual responses, there is a real limit to the detail of any analysis of the results that can safely be undertaken, and we should be aware of the potential for bias within the sample. That said, there is not much obvious variance between the personal characteristics of those in the base and achieved sample. Bearing all this in mind, it seems sensible to regard the results flowing from the survey as indicative, rather than representative, and to restrict the treatment of the data in the next chapters to straightforward descriptive analysis, rather than anything more complex.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, during the survey the aunt of one young woman phoned up saying that her niece no longer lived with her and she had lost her niece's phone number so couldn't let her know that there was post waiting for her.

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## 2 Courses Followed During 2003/04

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### 2.1 Introduction

We begin by looking back at the direct uses made by the young parents of the funding provided for them 18 months previously. This chapter looks at the courses which they had taken during the 2003/04 academic year, their reasons for studying on these courses, their place of study, the length of courses, the qualifications aimed for and the extent of course completion.

### 2.2 Reasons for deciding to study on the course

Table 2.1 lists the main reasons given for deciding to study on the course they were on in 2003/04. The overwhelming motivations were that they wanted to be able to improve their ability to compete in the labour market – to find a good or better job and to provide a future for their child. They saw studying to gain skills and qualifications as the way of doing this, as is shown later in the section on qualifications. Many had no qualifications and this was not because they had not yet reached the age to take GCSEs – many young mothers who were aged between 17 and 19 had no qualifications at the beginning of the 2003/04 academic year. They may have felt that they had some catching up to do if they were to secure a better job and a more promising future for their families.

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**Table 2.1: Reasons for deciding to study on that course (column per cent)**

	%
To get a better/good job	57
Wanted a better future for my child	32
Something I have always wanted to do	26
To gain qualifications	7
Heard about the course and thought it sounded interesting	6

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*Source: IES Survey*

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As well as these generic reasons for studying a course (ie around improving their position), a quarter reported that it was something they had always wanted to do. This is perhaps rather high. Qualitative work with young parents suggests that many are not really sure what they want to do. However, a number had started doing one course and then moved on to another, for a variety of reasons that are discussed later.

A range of other motivations for studying on their course were mentioned, but each by only between one and three respondents (these are not listed in the table) – for example: hearing that there was support for childcare or other financial support, their child being old enough to leave and their feeling happier about leaving the child, being encouraged by friends/family, being encouraged by a support worker.

## 2.3 Courses being followed

This sample of young parents was studying on a wide range of courses during the 2003/04 academic year. Table 2.2 lists the main types of course. In addition, a range of others was mentioned by one or two respondents – for example: animal care, performing arts/theatre, first aid, cookery, interior design, painting and decorating.

**Table 2.2: Course being studied 2003/04 (column per cent)**

	%
Childcare	16
GCSEs	12
Hairdressing/beauty	13
Essential skills/E2E/Life Skills/courses for young mothers	13
'A' Levels	11
Business skills/administration	10
Health and social care	6
IT/computing	6

*Source: IES Survey*

The courses studied show a varied mix of vocational, academic and 'return to learn' type courses. Some of those studying GCSEs would have been still at school, others would be repeating or adding to those they already had, for example, because their studies were interrupted by pregnancy. Indeed, qualitative interviews with young mothers and those who work with them have shown that becoming a mother can change attitudes to learning – a few will have decided it is worth improving their GCSEs to get a better job. In the qualitative interviews, some commented how having no qualifications, or no GCSEs at grade C or above meant that they had little or nothing to put on their CV to impress an employer.

A stereotypical view is that young parents are lacking in motivation and qualifications, and many are, as this and other studies suggest.<sup>2</sup> However, not all fit these characteristics – some young women who become pregnant are already highly motivated and on a ‘career track’ of some sort. Around one-tenth were studying ‘A’ Levels. Some of these were studying for these qualifications at the ‘traditional’ ages of 17/18; however, others were 19 and 20. The sample therefore does include a mix of those who were already on an academic qualification track and had maintained this. For these, becoming a mother may impact little on their progress and progression.

Just over one-tenth were on some form of specific learning either aimed at young mothers specifically or young people generally, that aims to address gaps in their early education and their motivations. These include Entry to Employment, basic skills courses and a very small number who were on a course specifically for young mothers. A range of young mothers were therefore benefiting from Care to Learn funding.

An interesting feature of Table 2.2 is the type of vocational subjects most commonly being studied. While some of the other courses mentioned by small numbers of respondents show broader aspirations, the most common are health and social care, hairdressing and beauty, childcare, business skills and administration. These, particularly the first three, are all areas traditionally entered – or at least aspired to – by young women (whether a mother or not) who do not require particularly high levels of qualification. There may be a number of reasons for this. Many young people do not really know much about the employment opportunities potentially open to them, or the routes through which these can be entered. Some of these courses may be more flexible in meeting the needs of young mothers (although this is not the case in all colleges). Many young women generally, not just young mothers, want to do something that involves caring for others in some way and these courses are often seen as routes into such occupations. Young people are also influenced by what their friends are doing – which can reinforce them entering similar courses. They know there will be people they know there, or others had studied such a course before them and recommended it in some way.

## 2.4 Place of study

The majority of respondents had been studying at a further education college (Table 2.3), with small numbers in sixth forms, schools and work-based learning providers.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Ridge M, O’Flaherty D, Deasley S (2007), *Child support and work incentives: A literature review*, DWP Research Report No. 402; Brown R, Joyce L (2007), *New Deal for Lone Parents: Non-participation qualitative research*, DWP Research Report No. 408; Hirst J, Formby E, Owen J (2006), *Pathways into Parenthood: Reflections from three generations of teenage mothers and fathers*, University of Sheffield.

**Table 2.3: Place of study (column per cent)**

	%
FE college	72
Sixth form/Sixth Form College	8
Work-based learning provider	8
School	6
Other	6

*Source: IES Survey*

This reflects the age structure of the sample, in that most were between 17 and 19, and also the types of courses they were studying, as discussed above.

A proportion were studying 'A' Levels, and while some of these were doing so in a sixth form, not all were. Those studying somewhere else were doing so in a church community centre, training centre and one reported having a home tutor.

## 2.5 Length of these courses

The minimum course length was three months and the longest three years. The average course length was one year.

The majority had started on their course in 2003 (77 per cent). A few had been on the same course since 2001 and one-tenth since 2002. Care to Learn does not only provide childcare for those on longer courses, and almost one-tenth reported that they had started their course in 2004. Since most 'mainstream courses' have a September start, it is likely that these were on short courses. This is reflected in the types of courses being studied, outlined above. For example, some were on basic skills courses and those for young mothers, which often last for shorter periods.

## 2.6 Qualifications aimed for

Almost all (95 per cent) of the courses were leading to qualifications. Only four per cent reported that the course they were on in 2003/04 was not leading to qualifications and two per cent could not remember.

The qualifications being aimed for were varied in their nature (reflecting the subject of courses being studied) and in their level. These young parents were studying for GCSEs and 'A' Levels. They were also on a variety of NVQs, GNVQs, BTEC and BEC certificates and diplomas, OND/ONCs. A few were studying for other specific professional qualifications, for example, AAT, Institute of Legal Executives.

A small number were unsure of the level of the qualification they were studying for, and six per cent reported that they could not remember what qualification they had been studying for. These are mostly those who had dropped out before completing their course. Qualitative interviews with young people further show how a

proportion can be vague about what they are studying for. For example, in one such interview, a young mother had just dropped out of her course; she could remember the subject but not the qualification level. During the interview she referred to her mother who could also not remember.

Rather than presenting a long list of different qualifications, the most straightforward way of looking at the qualifications being studied is by level (Table 2.4). Without results for GCSEs and 'A' Levels it is not possible to allocate these to levels, and respondents were not asked how many they were studying so the proposed level is also not available. However, these would have been studying for a mix of Level 1 to Level 3.

**Table 2.4: Level of qualifications being studied 2003/04 (column per cent)**

	%
None	4
< Level 1	2
GCSEs	13
A/S and 'A' Levels	11
Level 1	19
Level 2	27
Level 3	13
Level 4	1
Level not clear	5
Couldn't remember what studying for	6

*Source: IES Survey*

Table 2.4 shows the levels of qualifications being studied for. As reported earlier, only four per cent were on a course that was not leading to any qualifications. This does perhaps seem low as Care to Learn is available to young parents on courses with no accreditation, and it might seem that these would be one way back into learning for young parents. However, the majority of courses specifically for young mothers (and a few respondents were on these) and others providing basic and other general skills necessary for work are accredited. Many of the young people attending these have not achieved qualifications in the past, and providing with them some form of accreditation can give them a sense of achievement, increase motivation and also provide them with some evidence to offer employers or when applying to continue in education or training.

Similarly very few were studying for qualifications below Level 1. It does seem that many courses aimed at motivating and helping low/unqualified young people (whether young mothers or not) do provide a qualification at least to Level 1. For example, 'Young Mums To Be' courses (which cater for both pregnant and teenage mothers) provide accreditation equivalent to NVQ Level 1. This can be followed by the 'Parents with Prospects' programme which can be followed at entry level or Level 1 or 2 equivalent.

Apart from those studying for GCSEs and 'A' Levels, just over a quarter (27 per cent) were studying for Level 2 qualifications, which are regarded as the minimum desirable level of attainment for employment in the UK.<sup>3</sup> Thirteen per cent were studying for Level 3 and a few others for Level 4 qualifications. They were therefore seemingly on a sound track for improving their competitive position in the labour market.

## 2.7 Completing their course

Just over half (52 per cent) reported that they had completed the course they were on during the 2003/04 academic year, seven per cent were still studying on the same course and 40 per cent said that they had dropped out. This drop out rate does seem high. However, while three-quarters of the drop outs were at home looking after their child(ren) at the time of the survey, the rest had either returned to learning, were in work or were looking for it.

Table 2.5 lists all the reasons and the main reasons given for not completing their course. The main reasons do little to change the order of importance shown by all the reasons.

A range of other reasons was mentioned each by only one or a few respondents – these were usually related to specific individuals and their circumstances. For example, not getting on with other students, health reasons, not getting on with tutors/teachers. One or two reasons were beyond the influence of the young parent themselves, for example, a tutor leaving and not being replaced and the college not being able to find one young woman a placement for her course.

**Table 2.5: Reasons for leaving their course early (column per cent)**

	All reasons	Main reasons
Too difficult looking after a child and studying	20	16
Too many personal and/or family problems	17	14
It was boring/not interested	14	13
It wasn't what expected or wanted	11	5
Became pregnant again	11	11
Missed too much and got too far behind	9	7
Child became sick	9	4
Too expensive/couldn't cope financially	7	5

*Source: IES Survey*

<sup>3</sup> The Labour Force Survey shows that in Q4 2006, the proportion of economically active adults in England not qualified to at least NVQ Level 2 or equivalent was 26 per cent, or about six million people. The Government's Adult Level 2 PSA Target is to reduce this number by 40 per cent by 2010.

The reasons for leaving a course early generally reflect the reasons for young parents finding it difficult to study. They find it too much balancing the demands of studying with the demands of caring for their child, and they have too many other issues in their lives that need addressing. Nearly one-tenth said that they had missed too much and got too far behind, while another nine per cent said that their child became sick. The main reasons for dropping out of a course were associated with being a young mother.

However, a minority reported reasons related to their choice of course and their own attitudes or aspirations – for example, 14 per cent said that their course was boring and they didn't find it interesting, and 11 per cent that it wasn't what they expected or wanted. Young people, whether or not they are a young parent, are not always sure what they want to do on completing compulsory schooling. They often lack the information or experience to make choices that are sufficiently informed to be long-term and meet their aspirations and aptitudes. It is therefore not surprising that a proportion had given up on one course. Some had gone on to do further courses, while others had perhaps been demoralised by this choice not working out and had given up on learning, at least in the short term.

## 2.8 Summary

This chapter has considered respondents' participation in education as recipients of support from Care to Learn. It shows that the main reasons for continuing in, or returning to, education were utilitarian, both in the medium term (to get a better/good job) and more broadly (to get a better future for my child). Consistent with this, the courses studied show a mix of vocational, academic and 'return to learn' type courses, and almost all (95 per cent) of them led to qualifications, although these were varied in their nature and in their level (reflecting the subject of courses being studied).

The majority of respondents had been studying at a further education college. Across the sample as a whole, the minimum course length was three months and the longest three years. The average course length was one year.

Just over half (52 per cent) reported that they had completed the course they were on during the 2003/04 academic year, seven per cent were still studying on the same course and 40 per cent said that they had dropped out. The main reasons for dropping out of a course were associated with being a young mother, particularly that it was 'too difficult looking after a child and studying'.

The next chapter looks at their progression from Care to Learn, and the impact of the programme on their lives.

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## 3 Impact of Care to Learn

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### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the different effects which Care to Learn was reported to have had on the lives and circumstances of the 2003/04 cohort. It begins by looking at the overall importance of Care to Learn to this group of young mothers and their activities before they started their course in 2003. Then it goes on to consider the impact on qualification levels and concludes with a review of respondents' activities at the time of the survey.

### 3.2 Overall importance of Care to Learn

Care to Learn was very important in supporting young parents in learning (Table 3.1). When asked what difference the help they had received through Care to Learn had made to their ability to study, 82 per cent reported that they would not have gone on a course without the programme paying for childcare. Only one per cent said that the childcare support had made no difference.

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**Table 3.1: The difference Care to Learn made to their ability to study (column per cent)**

	%
I could not have gone on a course without Care to Learn paying for childcare	82
I would probably have gone on a course but the help made it much easier	10
I would have done some study but the help meant I could do more	7
Help with paying for childcare made no difference, I would have done a course anyway	1

*Source: IES Survey*

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It is clear, then, that any immediate deadweight effects of Care to Learn are likely to be extremely modest.

### 3.3 Activity prior to summer 2003

Although a few could not remember what they were doing before they secured support from Care to Learn, it would seem that a third were already studying, with around half of these still being at school in compulsory education. The others had either been on the same course as in 2003/04 or another course (and these were in their late teens). Only four per cent were working (all part time).

However, Care to Learn funding had moved the majority from inactivity, or at least been a major factor in facilitating such a move. Over half (52 per cent) were at home looking after their child before they started their course in September 2003, and 11 per cent were having their baby (or another baby). This was particularly the case for those who were in their late teens.

Qualitative evidence from other parts of the evaluation<sup>4</sup> suggests that a high proportion had decided that they wanted to return to learning, possibly because they felt their child was then old enough to be left, and they had sorted out various personal and other issues that can act as a barrier to learning. It seems likely, from the evidence in Table 3.1 above that their awareness that funding to support their childcare would be available to them was a crucial factor in making this a practical proposition. It seems reasonable to conclude that Care to Learn had therefore helped a significant proportion of the cohort to progress and continue with their studies.

### 3.4 Qualifications gained

Furthermore, the results suggest that such re-engagement with education had been rewarding for many of them, as Table 3.2 shows.

**Table 3.2: Qualifications obtained (column per cent)**

	Qualifications obtained
No additional qualifications	42
< Level 1	4
Level 1	15
Level 2	17
Level 3	9
Level 4	1
Obtained qualifications but level not clear	3
Couldn't remember/not sure	8

*Source: IES Survey*

<sup>4</sup> Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers: A qualitative study of flexible provision*, Institute for Employment Studies, IES Report 441

We can see that 58 per cent had gained some qualifications from the course they were studying on in 2003/04. Level 1 and 2 qualifications were most commonly obtained, by one-third of the sample.<sup>5</sup>

Eight per cent had achieved GCSEs to Level 1 (ie less than five at grade C or above) and one per cent at Level 2 (ie five or more at grade C or above). This suggests that those taking GCSEs were mostly either retaking exams or taking missed exams for the first time. Six per cent had obtained A/S or 'A' Levels to Levels 2 or 3.

Table 3.3 compares the qualification levels of this sample of young parents before they started the course and at the time of the survey.

**Table 3.3: Qualification levels before starting their course and at the time of the survey (column per cent)**

	Before starting course	Time of survey
Level 4	-	1
Level 3	2	10
Level 2	27	29
Level 1	31	30
<Level 1	1	2
None	36	20
Don't know/missing	4	12

*Source: IES Survey*

The table clearly shows that the proportion with no qualifications had fallen considerably, from 36 to 20 per cent. Overall, there was movement up the qualification scale. Thus we can see that ten per cent had achieved Level 3 qualifications and one per cent Level 4. While similar proportions had Level 1 and 2 qualifications, these were not always the same people (ie some had moved up from a lower, less-well-qualified, cell in the table).

A proportion had changed from an academic to vocational track, which meant that the actual level of their qualifications stayed the same or sometimes dipped over time. However, they were still progressing from having achieved some basic academic qualifications onto a vocational track. Others had improved their basic academic qualifications.

<sup>5</sup> This might seem slightly at odds with Table 3.4; however, it should be remembered that some had obtained GCSEs or 'A' Levels and once their results were known, this can be coded to a qualification level.

### 3.5 Activities at the time of the survey

Table 3.4 sets out the activities of the cohort before they started their course, and then at the time of the survey. With a relatively young cohort, we might reasonably expect to see some significant moves of economic status over an 18 month period, as they moved on through the education system or out of it into employment. At the same time, their pregnancy and the subsequent demands of childcare might delay or slow such movement down considerably, and might even alter the direction/character of some moves.

Looking first at their status before they started their course, we observe that the most common activity at the time of the survey was being at home looking after their child and not looking for work. However, over half were either still in learning or had entered the labour market.

**Table 3.4: Activity before starting their course and at the time of the survey (column per cent)**

Before starting course	%	Time of survey	%
At home looking after their child - not looking for work	52	At home looking after their child - not looking for work	43
At school/college/on a training course	33	At school/college/on a training course	27
Working	4	Working	19
Inactive/waiting for or engaged in birth	11	Looking for work	11

*Source: IES Survey*

Looking at the change over time, and remembering that individuals reported some quite complex shifts of activity during these 18 months, we can see that the proportion who were (economically or educationally) inactive has fallen from two-thirds (63 per cent) to less than half (43 per cent). The proportion in work has risen considerably (from four to 19 per cent), with a further 11 per cent now looking for work.

### 3.6 Continuing in learning

Table 3.4 also shows that, while the proportion engaged in education or training had fallen somewhat, there remained a significant proportion of the cohort still engaged in study; just over a quarter of them (27 per cent). Amongst those who were still in learning, two-thirds were on a different course to the one they were on in 2003/04. The majority of these (two-thirds) had completed their course. However, others had decided to change courses without completing the one they were on in 2003/04. The main reasons that they had moved to another course was to improve their qualifications. However, those who had dropped out of their original course due to it not being what they had expected or due to practical or personal difficulties, had also moved on to other courses.

### 3.6.1 Courses pursued

When looking at the courses these young people had progressed on to, it is therefore not surprising that those who had changed courses showed elements of both progressing within the area they had already started in and moving to new areas. For example, there was movement from academic (for example, GCSE) courses to vocational courses, progression within an academic track (for example, from 'A' Levels) and progression within vocational courses (for example, moving to a course with the same subject but at a higher level, or moving from a generic course onto something more specific).

### 3.6.2 Institutions of study

There was also evidence of progression in the types of learning institutions respondents were studying in. The majority (77 per cent) were studying in FE colleges, which is not surprising given the vocational nature of many courses. However, there was movement showing progression within the sample. For example, respondents had moved from school to FE college and work-based learning providers; there had been movement from FE colleges to HE; those previously studying in the more informal locations had progressed to, for example, provision in FE colleges.

### 3.6.3 On-going contribution of Care to Learn

Those still in learning were asked whether Care to Learn was still covering the cost of their childcare. Around half said that it was not (five per cent could not remember). Those no longer in receipt of Care to Learn were mostly older – ie they had passed their 19th birthday (which was the age limit at that time for Care to Learn).

However, a few 18 year olds reported that they were not in receipt of Care to Learn. There are a number of possible reasons for this. They may have been using informal care, they were perhaps in receipt of Care to Learn but didn't realise, they were in learning provision which was able to utilise alternative sources of funding for childcare. Similarly, a few older teenagers reported that they were in receipt of Care to Learn. Some of these had started their course before their 19th birthday, others were possibly confusing Care to Learn and other sources of (college) funding.

Those not receiving Care to Learn funding were drawing on a range of other sources. Most commonly they reported paying for childcare themselves – although they were not asked how they did this. The second two most common sources were their college, and the childcare not costing anything. Some responses were vague, such as 'help from the government' which could mean almost anything. Connexions and Jobcentres had provided funding for a few (or had possibly facilitated access).

## 3.7 Employment and jobseeking

Table 3.4 showed that over time the proportion in work has risen considerably (from four to 19 per cent), with a further 11 per cent looking for work at the time of the survey. We look at these two groups in turn.

### 3.7.1 Jobs held

Those who were in employment were asked a series of questions about their job.

Just under a third of the jobs were part time, most likely to fit in with childcare and their caring responsibilities. Three-quarters were in permanent jobs. The range of jobs held was very broad. A quarter were in retailing, working as a shop assistant and other customer service roles. Others were working in childcare (for example as nursery nurse or early years assistant) and other care jobs; as a receptionist/clerk/office junior and other administrative roles (including jobs in data input, as call centre advisers and in events management); as a travel agent; hairdresser and health and beauty consultant. Cleaning, modelling and factory work were also mentioned.

The over-riding reason for taking the job they were in was for the money – even though a number of these jobs will not be that well paid, the financial pressures on young parents can be immediate and severe.<sup>6</sup> However, around a fifth reported that it was the job they wanted and a tenth that it offered them opportunities to ‘get on’ and follow a career. It was also reported that the job followed on from their studies and would give them experience. So, it would seem that a significant proportion of these young mothers were progressing from their studies and entering the employment market in a position that they hoped would lead to better things. Two-thirds of those in work reported that they were receiving some training in their job – although this would include induction and general instructions on how to do the job, as well as longer-term training.

Other reasons mentioned for taking these jobs were that the working hours were suitable, they were local or in a convenient location, and that they simply wanted a change.

The majority (just over half of those working) reported that they had found it either easy or very easy to find a job. It is not possible to say whether this was because they were just looking for any job and had low expectations or because they had the necessary qualifications, etc. to enter a job they were interested in – it is probably a combination of factors. Only a third reported that their job was related to the course they were doing in 2003/04.

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<sup>6</sup> See for example: Suzanne Speak et al (2005), *Young Single Mothers: Barriers to Independent Living*, Family Policy Studies Centre; Kathleen Kiernan, *Transition to Parenthood: Young Mothers, Young Fathers: associated factors and later life experiences*, Welfare State Discussion Paper No. 113, London School of Economics.

### 3.7.2 Jobseekers

Just under half were looking for full-time and a similar proportion for part-time work. One-tenth didn't know which they favoured. The jobs that those searching for work were looking for were broadly similar to those already held by those in work. Retailing and office related jobs were most commonly being sought, followed by caring occupations. However, a range of other occupations was mentioned; for example: midwife, teaching assistant, finance/accounting, a management position, bar work, etc. About a fifth of them were looking for a job related to the course they had been studying on.

By contrast with the former (ie working) group, but perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of those still looking for work (90 per cent) said that finding a job was very or fairly difficult. They mentioned: lack of experience and/or qualifications, difficult finding a job that suited their childcare, lack of opportunities in the occupation they were looking for and too much competition for jobs, as factors making it difficult to find a job. Others simply reported that it was taking too long, there was a long waiting time for interviews and a lack of feedback from job applications.

## 3.8 Staying at home

The proportion of the cohort who were at home looking after their family and not looking for work had fallen, but at 43 per cent remains by far the largest category. These respondents were asked why they had decided to do this.

Their responses split into three broad groups.

- The majority simply wanted to stay at home to look after their child(ren) and raise a family, including, for example, allowing their child to get used to the school routine, wanting to wait until their child was in full-time education and having to deal with family/personal problems.
- The second group is made up of those who were planning to return to learning but had just not done so yet. For example, they had deferred a course, were waiting to start a new one, the course they wanted to do was full, etc.
- The third group includes a miscellany of reasons – for example, not being able to find a job, not being able to find childcare, paying more for childcare than they were earning, it being too expensive to travel to college, etc.

## 3.9 Future plans

Despite the high proportion still committed to staying at home and looking after their child, these young parents overwhelmingly had different aspirations for the future, as Table 3.5 shows.

**Table 3.5: Plans for the future (column per cent)**

	%
Working	64
At university	18
Studying but not at university	13
Bringing up children full-time	2
Don't know/refused	4

*Source: IES Survey*

Asked what they expected to be doing in three years' time, the majority thought that they would be working. However, almost a fifth planned to be at university and another 13 per cent wanted to be studying but not at a university. It seems clear that for almost all of them full time childcare was a transitional state from which they expected to move on in the medium term.

### 3.10 Summary

This chapter looks at the different effects which Care to Learn was reported to have had on the lives and circumstances of the 2003/04 cohort. It shows that Care to Learn funding and related support was very important to young parents remaining in, or returning to, learning; 82 per cent reported that they would not have gone on a course without the programme paying for childcare.

Their continuing participation in education had been productive; a before and after comparison shows that, overall, there was movement up the qualification scale, and in particular that the proportion with no qualifications had fallen considerably, from 36 to 20 per cent.

Similarly there had been a considerable shift in the activities in which the cohort were engaged. Most significantly, the proportion who were (economically or educationally) inactive has fallen from two-thirds (63 per cent) to less than half (43 per cent). The proportion in work has risen considerably (from four to 19 per cent), with a further 11 per cent now looking for work.

While the proportion engaged in education or training had fallen somewhat, there remained a significant proportion of the cohort still engaged in study; just over a quarter of them (27 per cent). Among them, there is some evidence of progression, both in terms of the kind of institution they were attending and the kind of course taken.

Among those who were in employment, just under a third of the jobs were part time, most likely to fit in with childcare and their caring responsibilities. Three-quarters were in permanent jobs. They reported relatively few difficulties in finding such work. Their motivation was mainly to secure an immediate source of income, but

around a fifth reported that it was the job they wanted and a tenth that it offered them opportunities to 'get on' and follow a career. Two-thirds of those in work reported that they were receiving some training in their job. Those still looking for work cited the difficulty in securing it as their main reason for not working at the time.

The proportion of the cohort who were at home looking after their family and not looking for work had fallen, but at 43 per cent remains by far the largest category. Most of them were there by choice; ie they simply wanted to stay at home to look after their child(ren) and raise a family, although some were planning to return to learning in due course. A minority had encountered various constraints which had made it difficult to move on to a different activity.

For almost all of them full-time childcare was a transitional state from which they expected to move on in the medium term; the majority thought that they would be working in three years' time, and nearly a third in some kind of study.

The next chapter looks in more detail at the cohort's childcare arrangements.

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## 4 Use of Childcare

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### 4.1 Introduction

Care to Learn supports the childcare costs of young parents so that they can continue to participate in education and training. This chapter looks in more detail at exactly how this is achieved. It reviews the kind of childcare used by Care to Learn beneficiaries when they were learning in 2003/04, why they used this type of childcare, the ease of finding childcare, their satisfaction with it and whether they received any advice or support from their childcare provider. To facilitate this investigation, this chapter draws on a different dataset from that used in the other chapters. These new data were collected as part of an earlier survey<sup>7</sup> – which has not yet been reported in full. Crucially though for our interests here, these new data also relate to those receiving Care to Learn during the 2003/04 academic year.

### 4.2 The childcare used

Table 4.1 (overleaf) lists the types of childcare being used by Care to Learn beneficiaries in 2003/04. Four main types of childcare were used, each by between nearly one-fifth and a quarter of young parents. In addition, six per cent were using family or friends.

This question asked about all the childcare used while this group of young parents were studying. Some young parents used additional unregistered childcare (eg the child's grandparents, friends and neighbours) on top of the formal care funded by Care to Learn. The total column per cent above adds up to just over 100 per cent – a few respondents had reported using more than one type of childcare while studying. However, this table probably underestimates the extent to which young parents studying were using additional, informal childcare to support their studies. The

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<sup>7</sup> A telephone follow-up was conducted in 2005 of a sub-sample of those receiving Care to Learn during the 2003/04 academic year. This was able to collect more information than a postal survey and also looked at the use of childcare by these young parents.

survey was about Care to Learn, and hence respondents were perhaps focused on this. It should also be noted that a number of young parents only use family members for childcare – and this was illustrated in an earlier study on the flexibility of learning.<sup>8</sup> They do not trust leaving their child with a stranger and/or have family members who are able and prepared to provide childcare. A survey based on those receiving Care to Learn funding is therefore likely to underestimate the extent to which young parents are studying, and using family members for childcare.

**Table 4.1: Type of childcare used (column per cent, N = 188)**

	%
Registered childminder	26
Nursery school (not at school or college)	24
Childcare provision at college/school	23
Day nursery (not at school or college)	18
Crèche (not at school or college)	5
Family or friends	6

*Source: IES Survey, 2005 Multi-response*

### 4.3 Reasons for choosing this childcare

Table 4.2 lists the reasons that this group of young parents used the childcare they did – one column gives all the reasons given and another the main reason. As can be seen, focusing on the main reason only does little to change their order of importance, but it does emphasise their wanting childcare near home.

**Table 4.2: Reasons for choosing this childcare (column per cent, N = 188)**

	All reasons	Main reason
Close to home	33	27
Close to college	28	17
Know and trust this person/these people	21	14
Like child to be near to me	13	7
Looked at the options and liked this the best	10	5
Word of mouth/recommendation	9	4
Wanted someone properly trained to look after child	8	3
No choice/it was the only one available	6	4
Transport convenient	6	1
Told to use this childcare	6	4

*Source: IES Survey, 2005*

<sup>8</sup> Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers: A qualitative study of flexible provision*, Institute for Employment Studies, IES Report 441

The two most important reasons for choosing the childcare they did (Table 4.2) was that it was either close to home or close to college. Other parts of the evaluation have shown that young parents vary between those who prefer to use childcare close to home and those who prefer to use that close to college. A number of factors are at work, and some of these are reflected by other responses in the table.

Thirteen per cent said that they wanted their child to be near them, and this links with wanting their child in childcare at or near their place of learning. Recent qualitative interviews with young parents have illustrated their uneasiness and reluctance at leaving their child – having their child nearby, where they can either check up on them during the day or where they can reach them quickly if there is a problem, is important to them. Some prefer to use childcare in their local community – it can save having to deal with the complexities of using public transport to reach the childcare, it means they can be a student during the day (away from their responsibilities as a mother) and they can maybe utilise people known to them.

Knowing and trusting the child's carer and relying on word of mouth or recommendation as reasons for using childcare also reflect data from the qualitative interviews and reinforce young parents' concerns about leaving their child with a stranger.

One-tenth reported that they had looked at the options and liked this the best, while six per cent reported that there was no choice. However, it is perhaps of concern that six per cent said they were told to use the childcare. This might be a young person's perception of a situation – those working with young parents might guide them towards certain childcare providers but would not tell them to use a particular one, or at least not without the young person being happy with that care.

#### 4.4 The ease of finding childcare

The majority reported that it was either very easy (54 per cent) or fairly easy (37 per cent) to find childcare. Seven per cent said it was not very easy and two per cent that it was not at all easy. Those who reported that it was not very, or not at all easy were asked what problems they had experienced. The main difficulty was that there was not enough information and help available to them, and that they did not know where to go to find out about childcare. This was followed by there not being enough childcare places available in their locality. It should be remembered that this is based on very small numbers but nevertheless, these data suggest that not all young parents accessing Care to Learn receive the help they need in accessing childcare. A few mentioned transport being difficult – and this can be a key issue for young parents in particular who are nearly always reliant on public transport. Two respondents mentioned problems finding a place that provided care for the hours wanted.

Overall, given the level of difficulties generally reported for young parents accessing childcare, this group was experiencing very few problems.

## 4.5 Satisfaction with their childcare

These young parents were generally satisfied with their childcare with 80 per cent reporting being either very or fairly satisfied (Table 4.3). The main reasons for being very or fairly satisfied with the childcare were that it was a good service and great with the children; the children enjoyed going there; staff were friendly, helpful and caring and that the child was learning and developing. Interestingly, those who reported being very satisfied with their childcare were more likely to comment positively on their child learning and developing.

**Table 4.3: Satisfaction with the childcare used (column per cent)**

	%
Very satisfied	58
Fairly satisfied	22
Satisfied	14
Not very satisfied	5
Not at all satisfied	1

*Source: IES Survey, 2005*

Those who were satisfied with their childcare reported similar reasons for being so – in particular that it was a good service and great with the children; that the children enjoyed going; and that staff were friendly, helpful and caring. However, elements of criticism were also creeping in. For example, a few respondents reported that there was poor quality childcare and the children weren't learning anything. One young mother was unhappy because her child was moved from one nursery to another.

Few were not satisfied in any way with their childcare. The main reason was that they thought the childcare was of poor quality and that their children were neglected. However, a few had particular experiences. For example – their child did not enjoy the childcare and one reported that the childminder could not cope and left her at short notice with no childcare. Young parents are quick to react to their own children's reactions to childcare. Many are already very concerned about leaving their child – it might reflect on their abilities as a parent, the child will miss them too much, is not used to strangers. Most children, especially young children, are unhappy about being left by their mother in a strange environment to begin with. From this survey we cannot tell how long young mothers left their children with a childcare provider before deciding they did not enjoy it. From the qualitative interviews we know that some decide after very little time that their child will not settle, while others are prepared to persevere for longer.

## 4.6 Help and advice from childcare providers

The majority (80 per cent) of young parents reported that they had not asked for help or advice from their childcare provider. Not surprisingly, those who had sought help

or advice had nearly always done so on issues relating to their child. They had asked about their child's health, nutrition and diet, managing child behaviour, child development, appropriate play activities and parenting skills. Between one and three respondents had also sought help on each of the following: budgeting, housing, money problems, their course and Child Tax Credit. Nearly all those who had asked for help or advice had received all they asked for.

## 4.7 Summary

This chapter looks in more detail at exactly how the young beneficiaries of Care to Learn support used the funding to organise their childcare arrangements. Although the data used here are from a different source from those in the rest of the report, they also relate to those receiving Care to Learn during the 2003/04 academic year.

Although the use of informal/family-based childcare may be underestimated through the research focus on Care to Learn support, the 2003/04 beneficiaries appear to have relied most heavily on registered childminders, nursery schools (not at school or college), college/school-based childcare provision, and day nursery provision (again not at school or college).

The two most important reasons for choosing their childcare provider was that it was either close to home or close to college.

The majority reported that it was either very easy (54 per cent) or fairly easy (37 per cent) to find childcare. Only nine per cent said that it was not easy. Overall, given the level of difficulties generally reported for young parents accessing childcare, this group appear to have been experiencing very few problems, and furthermore were generally satisfied with their childcare (with 80 per cent reporting being either very or fairly satisfied).

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## 5 Conclusions

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In Chapter 1, we pointed out that the scale and character of the data on which these results are based are somewhat limited, and that the findings should be regarded as indicative rather than representative. In drawing the findings towards some summary conclusions, it is worth repeating this caveat. Nevertheless, it is important to discuss the policy implications of the results, not least because they form part of a wider series of research exercises which have informed the evaluation of Care to Learn.

### 5.1 Encouraging participation

An earlier qualitative study<sup>9</sup> clearly indicated that beneficiaries' reasons for attending their current learning activity were very mixed, and often a combination of these applied. Most often, positive rationales emerged; some had very clear views about wanting to obtain qualifications and to find good employment. Others had been persuaded, or as reported by some: 'dragged there', often by a support worker but sometimes by family or friends. Personal contacts and being told about the provision was an important motivator. They wanted to mix with others in a similar position to themselves; they were bored at home. A few had been pushed out of mainstream provision on becoming pregnant and wanted to stay engaged in something.

The present research lays somewhat more emphasis on the positive rationales; it clearly shows that the main reasons for continuing in, or returning to, education were utilitarian, both in the medium term (to get a better/good job) and more broadly (to get a better future for my child). This finding is consistent with those flowing from another part of the evaluation<sup>10</sup> which highlighted, among other factors, the

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<sup>9</sup> Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers: A qualitative study of flexible provision*, Institute for Employment Studies, Report 441

<sup>10</sup> Dench S, Bellis A, Tuohy S (2007), *Young Mothers Not in Learning: A qualitative study of barriers and attitudes*, Institute for Employment Studies, IES Report 439

motivation to provide a better life for their child as a key feature influencing likely participation.

It would seem safe to conclude that messages about the positive medium and longer term outcomes for young parents' (and their families') lives which can be accessed through on-going participation in education or training of some kind would have a significantly beneficial effect on their thinking about the future.

## 5.2 Conditioning factors

Again, the earlier work, particularly the first of those cited above, indicates that such decisions are likely to be filtered through a number of considerations about the availability of, perceptions about, and accessibility of opportunities to continue in (or re-engage with) education or training. These are known to include the quality and availability of advice and support, the existence of varied provision to address the needs of a range of young mothers, and a curriculum and learning environment that applies to those disengaged from formal education. The present study shows how varied have been the routes into and through education and training which beneficiaries from the 2003/04 cohort travelled; therefore, the courses taken show a mix of vocational, academic and 'return to learn' type courses, their duration varied widely, their institutional settings differed somewhat. Somewhat at odds with this variety, though, is the importance of formal accreditation and the possibility to gain or improve qualifications through participation as an intermediate step towards those longer-term goals of getting a better/good job and providing a better future for their children.

While the present research says nothing about the ease with which such factors can be negotiated by Care to Learn target groups, it does nevertheless describe some positive routes through them, and highlights the remaining key barrier, which Care to Learn addresses directly: the practical accessibility of affordable and suitable childcare.

## 5.3 Childcare support

The earlier research cited above showed that many of the cohort had no previous experience of using childcare, and nearly all had been reluctant initially to leave their child with strangers. In addition, the commitment to being a full-time mother is important to many young mothers. They often do not want to leave their child, particularly while he/she is very young.

However, a combination of factors seems to offer important keys to unlocking this reluctance; reassurance and advice from support workers, the availability of the 'right kind of childcare provision in the right place', and crucially, its affordability. While the earlier research showed how the first of these could have a positive influence, we can infer from the present findings that there is a positive relationship between the second of them (ie suitable provision) and successful re-engagement with education

and subsequently work. It clearly shows that access to the kinds of childcare provision they thought suitable was either very easy (54 per cent) or fairly easy (37 per cent) to find. Only nine per cent said that it was not easy. Overall, given the level of difficulties generally reported for young parents accessing childcare, this group appears to have been experiencing very few problems, and furthermore were generally satisfied with their childcare (with 80 per cent reporting being either very or fairly satisfied).

It seems reasonable to conclude that the opportunity to make ready use of childcare provision, which they might not otherwise have been able to find or to afford, represents a major step in this cohort's participation in education, and through it, to employment.

## 5.4 Returns to Care to Learn support

Here, the evidence from the current study is more direct. Without the opportunity to contrast outcomes with a control group, such conclusions must remain tentative, but the movement of a significant proportion of the 2003/04 recipient cohort through education and into employment during the course of the subsequent 18 months is quite evident. Thus, their continuing participation in education had produced, or at least contributed to movement up the qualification scale, and in particular that the proportion with no qualifications had fallen considerably, from 36 to 20 per cent. Furthermore, the proportion in work has risen considerably (from four to 19 per cent), with a further 11 per cent now looking for work. These respondents had reported relatively few difficulties in finding such work. Their motivation was mainly to secure an immediate source of income, but around a fifth reported that it was the job they wanted, and a tenth that it offered them opportunities to 'get on' and follow a career. Two-thirds of those in work reported that they were receiving some training in their job.

At the same time, the research has clearly shown that these young parents faced serious cultural, practical, financial and attitudinal barriers both to continuing in education and to progression through the labour market. While it may not provide a fully representative picture, the research does suggest that significant success is possible in re-orienting these young people's aspirations towards both education and employment. Furthermore, substantial proportions of the cohort had already gained significantly as a result.