VETrack:

Longitudinal Study of Learners in Vocational Education

Wave 1 Report

Prepared for:

Edge Foundation and City & Guilds

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Executive Summary

Background

The aim of VETrack is to understand the factors that are associated with successful returns/outcomes from studying a vocational course at Level 3 in the further dcuation (FE) system in England. It tracks young people as they leave FE and enter and progress in employment.

The study focuses on two types of learners: college-based students in full or part-time study and apprentices with work-based learning; hereinafter respectively referred to as 'students' and 'apprentices'. As the study develops it will be possible to identify how VET policy might be developed to improve outcomes for young people studying at Level.

Over the tracking of these young people, there are a number of points of analysis – 'Waves', with respondents participating a series of surveys over time. This report explains the function, focus and research design of VETrack, which is a longitudinal study of Level 3 learners/FE/students and apprenticeships. It also summarizes the findings of the first survey wave – Wave 1.

Wave 1 surveys young people on VET in their final year of study. The data from Wave 1 is intended to provide a benchmark for subsequent analyses. Wave 1 comprises of 623 young people, mainly aged 16-19 years at start of their Level 3 programme. These learners were enrolled in FE colleges as students on vocational courses or employed as apprentices with work-based learning and also attending college as part of their apprenticeship. In order to control for the impact that the type of provider may have on outcomes, a mix of providers are included in the study: Further Education (FE) Colleges, Private training providers, and University Technical Colleges (UTCs). The study also covers three main English local labour market areas: The Midlands, North and South.

The project will continue to track students and apprentices from the final year of their studies into employment and/or further study and then beyond for up to two years after their initial study. A survey will be administered every six months during this period, creating Waves 2-5. This tracking will cover employment status, earnings, job satisfaction and any further study or training. The employment and wage returns can be compared across the different subjects, type of provider etc. They can also be compared with studies that have looked at the returns to different types of qualification.

Headline Findings from Wave 1

For both students and apprentices, the most important reason for wanting to stay on in FE was to help them get a good job. These respondents were clear that they were choosing a path that they linked to employment and, for many, associated with leading to a good job. A sizable minority however drift into FE either because it is better than being unemployed or because they were unsure about what to do next.

However as they entered FE, careers advice was limited for respondents; parents had most influence, with little substantive input from careers advisers. A clear majority of all respondents were positive about what they could study post-GCSE. Most respondents were also positive about the information available from colleges and schools and the relationship between courses and employment as well as the alternatives to not continuing in education. Apprentices received more advice from employers during their school years than students, though most respondents wanted more information from employers and about universities.

Within the sample, most apprentices are in engineering related subjects. Most students are studying health and social care, creative media and business. In terms of subject area being studied or trained, there were differences between students and apprentices. For students: it was the subject matter that most interested them, while for apprentices, it was getting a particular job.

In terms of the choice of study/training provider, most apprentices were driven by their employer's choice of provider, though interestingly, for non-engineering subjects, the college played the leading role in accessing employers. Students were discerning in their choice of provider, though that choice was also influenced by availability of local provision.

At the time of study/training, the largest proportion of respondents stated that their study/training workload was as they expected, though a sizable proportion stated it to be harder than expected. Nevertheless, almost all students and apprentices were confident of completing their study/training.

Going forward, apprentices were much clearer on what they wanted to do post training than students post study. Nevertheless, three quarters of all respondents had some knowledge of what they wanted to do and how they might achieve it. In terms of subject areas, those studying business were the least certain; those studying/training less generic subjects such as engineering and health and social care were the most certain.

As they were about to transition into the labour market, most respondents stated that their main source of job information still comes from parents. Students have also received information from their college lecturers and teachers, while apprentices stated their main source as their current employer. An interesting finding is that some respondents state that the internet was their main source of information.

In terms of what they want to do, for students, there was a clear preference to wanting to go to university; for apprentices, most wanted to continue working for their current employer. Apprentices were more confident that they will achieve their aim. Students stated that they were more willing to move locality to achieve their aim, as were male respondents generally.

1 Introduction

The aim of VETrack is to understand the factors that are associated with successful outcomes from studying a vocational course at Level 3 in the further education (FE) system in England. It is a longitudinal study that tracks a cohort of learners as they leave their study and then progress towards employment. There are two types of learners – college-based students in full-time study and apprentices with work-based learning, and hereinafter respectively referred to as 'students' and 'apprentices'. As the study develops it will be possible to identify how VET policy might be developed to improve outcomes for young people studying at Level 3.

This report presents findings from Wave 1 of VETrack. This first wave surveys students and apprentices at the point of completion of their studies/training. It is intended to provide benchmark data for subsequent analyses. The report's next section first provides the background to and the focus of VETrack. It then outlines the research design of VETrack before providing an overview of the responses to the Wave 1 survey. The descriptive findings are then presented. The penultimate section indicates data collection to measure return and outcomes of VET at Level 3 beyond Wave 1. The final section of the report indicates the project's next steps.

2 Background to and focus of the study

The policy ground has shifted recently towards FE and apprenticeships in particular. The return to and outcomes of this shift will, in due course, come under greater scrutiny. Currently there is a general consensus that the returns to studying vocational courses in FE are lower than those which derive from studying general/academic courses (e.g. A levels). Nevertheless, there are many vocational courses that provide relatively good labour market returns, particularly at Level 3.

The aim of this study – VETrack – is to understand the factors that are associated with successful outcomes from studying a vocational course at Level 3 in the FE system in England. Successful outcomes can be measured with respect to former students and apprentices being in employment, being in receipt of relatively high earnings, working in a job that delivers non-pecuniary returns or continuing in full- or part-time study. There are likely to be a number of factors associated with achieving successful outcomes. These factors are likely to relate to:

- subject of study;
- the type of provider;
- work-based learning versus wholly college/school-based study;
- the socio-demographic and educational characteristics of students;
- the level of employment demand in the local labour market where students are located.

As far as is possible, VETrack controls for these factors in order to obtain a robust understanding of what contributes to successful outcomes for students. It is a tracking survey of students, starting with Wave 1 and students and apprentices in FE working towards completion of a Level 3 vocational qualification in selected subject areas. The young people being tracked are mostly those aged between 16 and 19 years of age at the commencement of their studies. Participants will be then tracked following completion of their Level 3 studies to observe their initial transition into the labour market and subsequent progression beyond into employment and/or further study. Participants will be tracked using a mix of self-completion, online, and telephone questionnaire surveys in order minimise sample attrition as the study progresses.

There are a number of existing studies that make important contributions to understanding the outcomes of FE study. However these studies also have limitations, creating a need for VETrack. These existing studies tend to fall into two types:

1. Those that use administrative databases to examine progression through FE and into the labour market, based on linking administrative databases held by government (e.g. the Individual Learner Record or 'ILR', and HMRC/DWP databases). These studies:

    - Contain a relatively narrow set of information about employment post-study
    - Have no information on occupation or industry of employment
    - Do no chart the young person's experience of FE and their experiences along the pathway into the labour market and/or further study.

    In other words, administrative databases offer 'the what' but not the 'why' or 'how'.

2. Surveys of young people that follow them through FE and the first few years of their labour market experiences, exemplified by the Youth Cohort Study and the Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England. These studies:

    - Contain a substantial amount of information but sample sizes for particular groups of learners tend to be small and do not allow for much disaggregation of data.

    In other words, offer good breadth but little scope for targeted analysis.

With its focused approach, VETrack has the potential to rectify some of these limitations by tracking young people through FE and into the labour market. More specifically it aims to:

- Provide an indication of the returns (e.g. earnings, employment, continued education and training, job satisfaction, career progression, etc.) to young people, 16-19 years of age, studying Level 3 VET qualifications.
- Measure the returns/outcomes of study at various points after completion of the Level 3 qualification. The study will track former students and apprentices for three years after their initial VET or longer if possible.
- Consider any differences in pathways and outcomes by:
    - Subject of study;
    - Type of education institution/provider;
    - Type of learning, subject type;
    - Socio-demographics of the students.
- Identify factors associated with relative success in the labour market.
- Indicate how VET policy might be changed in order to improve the outcomes of students undertaking vocational studies in FE at Level 3.

In short VETrack will provide better understanding of the factors associated with relatively successful outcomes at Level 3 by tracking what works for learners as well as the different pathways through VET and into the labour market and beyond.

3 Research Design

3.1 Summary of approach

This study is targeted, with resources concentrated on particular subject areas, learning providers and local geographical areas. With the aim to understand the returns obtained at Level 3 for those aged 16-19 years at the start of their studies, there is a need to control for a range of factors that are likely to affect outcomes. These factors include:

1. the different study pathways students may have taken – work-based learning (apprenticeships) versus full-time or part-time study wholly undertaken in college;
2. the type of institution, such as FE colleges, University Technical Colleges (UTC) and private providers;
3. conditions in the local labour market where students are located, with supply and demand skills mis/match likely to impact outcomes other things being equal;
4. the socio-demographic and educational characteristics of students as studies show a form of 'path dependency' in the transmission of outcomes.

By tracking students and apprentices from the latter part of their studies/training and into the labour market it will be possible to identify the various factors that are associated with relatively successful outcomes. Through use of appropriate multivariate statistical techniques it will be possible to identify the extent to which, for example, the type of learning provider or type of course contributed to overall employment outcomes students experienced (other things being equal). This approach is one that has been adopted successfully by IER with its *Futuretrack* study of the outcomes of higher education.

3.2 Scope of the study

The sample comprises of young people who were aged 16-19 years at start of their Level 3 programme. These learners were enrolled in FE colleges as students on vocational courses or employed as apprentices with workbased learning and also attending college as part of their apprenticeship. They study one of the following subjects:

Figure 1: Subjects covered by the studies

Initially selected in conjunction with The Edge Foundation and City & Guilds, these subjects are sensitive to three factors:

- Being broadly representative of Level 3 vocational provision;
- Reflecting different gender balances – male-dominated (ratio = > 60:40), balance of male and female (ratio = 40:60 to 60:40), female-dominated (ration = > 60:40);
- Reflecting the main characteristics of employment in the geographical areas of the learners.

In order to control for the impact that the type of provider may have on outcomes a mix of providers are included in the study. As a result, three types of learning/training providers are included:

- Further Education (FE) Colleges,
- Private training providers.
- University Technical Colleges (UTCs)

The study includes three English local labour market areas (LLMAs) (defined with reference to local education authority area or based on functional economic geography). The providers are thus located in three main geographical areas, with an additional non-geographically specific group:

1. The Midlands (around Birmingham)
2. The North (around Manchester)
3. The South (around Reading and Bristol)
4. Other (e.g. for national providers)

To control for the socio-economic and educational characteristics of the students participating in the tracking study, the survey captures information about the background of the students.

3.3 The survey and questionnaires

The aim is to track students and apprentices from the final year of their studies into employment and/or further study and then beyond for up to two years after their initial study. A survey will be administered every six months during this period, creating Waves 2-5. If possible, further tracking will be undertaken, taking the study to three years with Waves 6 and 7. The current report is based on Wave 1 data with respondents in the final year of their studies.

Table 2: Timing of successive waves of a longitudinal tracking survey

Stage	Wave / contact no.	Timing	Type of contact
During studies / end of studies	Wave 1 + Group discussion	t_1 = mid-point in Level 3 study final year	Paper questionnaire with member of research team in-person + group discussion(s)/online
	Wave 2	$t_2 = t_1 + 6$ months (initial entry to labour market)	Mix of on-line and telephone interview
Post-studies	Wave 3	$t_3 = t_1 + 12$ months	Mix of on-line and telephone interview
	Wave 4	$t_4 = t_1 + 18$ months	Mix of on-line and telephone interview
	Wave 5	$t_5 = t_1 + 24$ months	Mix of on-line and telephone interview
Break point in a three-year study. If further funding becomes available, two additional waves would be possible.			
Post-studies	Wave 6	$t_6 = t_1 + 30$ months	Mix of on-line and telephone interview
	Wave 7	$t_7 = t_1 + 36$ months	Mix of on-line and telephone interview

Over the course of the study, data will be collected through a mixture of self-completion, online and telephone questionnaires. These questionaries' are tailored to the type of learner (student or apprentice) and, later in the study, stage of cohort (employment/further study). Made up of different sections, each questionnaire takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

In Wave 1 paper-based and online versions were available of the questionnaire. In subsequent waves, enabled by respondents providing contact details, questionnaires will be administered by telephone, email and other modes. To try to maximise participation each wave of the survey includes a prize draw. To try to minimise attrition across the study, there will be contact with respondents between waves.

In Wave 1, each type of questionnaire had standard sections covering respondents':

A. Current studies/training
B. Place of study/employer
C. Initial career plans and choices
D. Current situation
E. Personal demographics
F. Prize draw and contact details

The sampling unit for respondents is the learning provider. Students were recruited to join VETrack through the institution that is providing their study/training. Again this approach is analogous to the one used in IER's *Futuretrack* study that tracked higher education students through university and into the labour market.

4 Overview of Wave 1 survey responses

The survey consisted of 655 responses. However, since the focus is only Level 3 students, 32 responses were omitted as they came from Level 1, 2, 4 and 5 students. There were therefore 623 usable responses of which 119 responses were completed on-line with the remainder manually collected by survey team.

The survey targeted the two main groups:

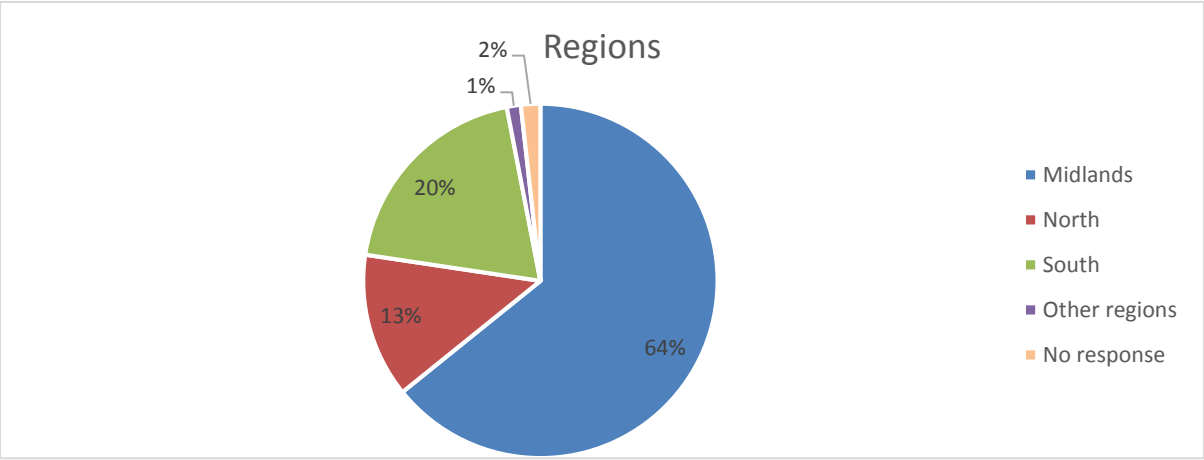
1. *Students*: there were 462 respondents studying either full-time (93%) or part-time (7%). Of these respondents 213 are male, 236 females, with the rest (13) unspecified.

2. *Apprentices*: there were 161 participants of whom 99 are male, 59 female, with three unspecified.

As a group, student respondents are balanced in terms of gender, while apprentices are more male biased. Excluding those respondents who did not answer this question, the sample included three types of learning provider of which, 77% respondents are from colleges, 22% from private providers and 2% from UTCs.

The largest proportion of respondents (64%) was from the Midlands, 20% from the South and 13% from the North. Others, 3%, comprised respondents from other regions (1%) or did not specify (2%).

Figure 2: Regions in the survey



In terms of the age of the respondents, the majority (88%) were 16-20 years of age, 10% 21-30 years and 2% are older than 31 years (see Figure 3).[1]

[1] We exclude those who did not respond to this question – 3.6% of the sample.

Figure 3: 88% of the students are below age <=20 (age distribution, %)

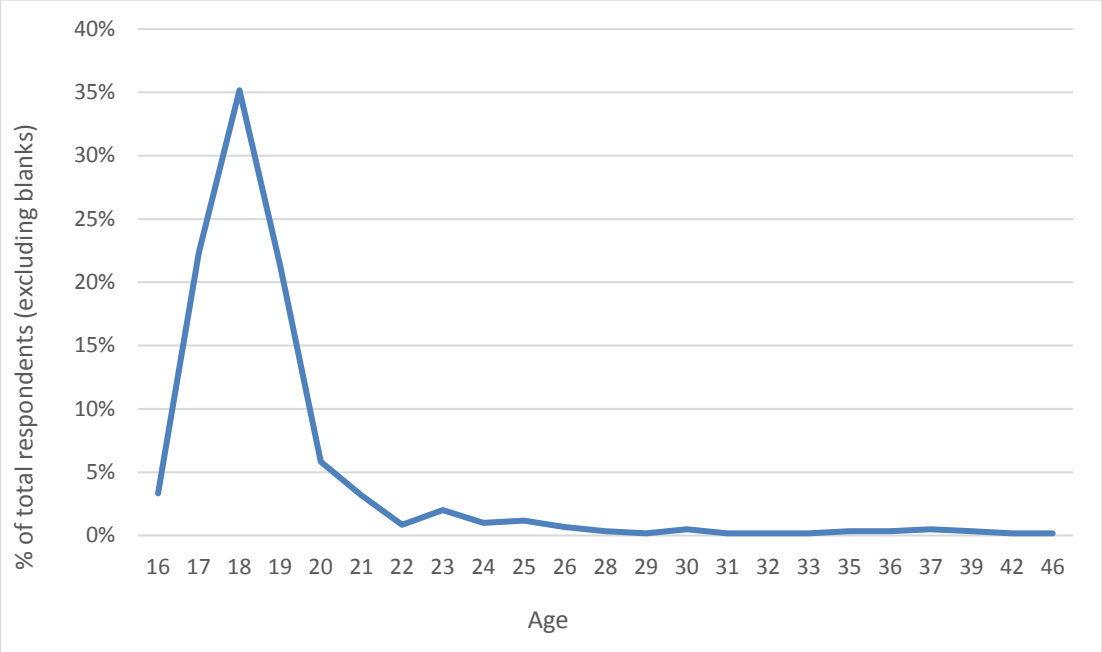


Table 1 provides a breakdown of respondents by gender and ethnicity. Overall the sample is balanced in terms of gender: 49% of the sample are female, 51% male. The majority, and for both males and females, are White (77%) with Asian/Asian British the next largest group (10%).

Table 1: Ethnic group and gender split

Ethnic Group		Female	Male	Total	% of total (excluding blanks)
No response	13	2	1	16	
Asian/Asian British		30	30	60	10%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British		21	14	35	6%
Chinese			1	1	0%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	1	15	19	35	6%
Other		3	3	6	1%
Other ethnic group			1	1	0%
White	2	224	243	469	77%
Total	16	295	312	623	
Total excluding no response	**3**	**293**	**311**	**607**	**100%**

Table 2 below) eports that most of the courses are two years.

Table 2: The length of the course/apprentices

Years	Group All	Students	Apprentices	Group All	Students	Apprentices
1	123	54	69	20%	12%	43%
2	441	390	51	71%	84%	32%
3	43	11	32	7%	2%	20%
4	11	2	9	2%	0%	6%
No response	**5**	**5**	**0**	1%	1%	0%
Total	**623**	**462**	**161**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Table 3 reports that most students in the survey are in year 2, while apprentices are evenly split between year 1 and year 2, and 9% are in year 3.

Table 3: The year the student/apprenticeship is at now

Years	Group All	Students	Apprentices	Group All	Students	Apprentices
Year 1	196	148	48	31%	32%	30%
Year 2	291	250	41	47%	54%	25%
Year 3	37	22	15	6%	5%	9%
Year 4	2	2	0	0%	0%	0%
No response	97	40	57	16%	9%	35%
Total	**623**	**462**	**161**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

The study is intended to capture and track students and apprentices from their final year of study/training. However Wave 1 respondents are more varied: 65% were in that final year, 27% due to complete the following year and 3% were due to complete within 2 years.

4.1 Factors that might pose constraints to the success of a student

Various factors might constrain students from successfully completing the course. These factors were also cross-referenced by gender but there was no significant difference between males and female responses. Below, we present the main results excluding the 'no responses'.

Health problems and care responsibilities can all constrain study. Few respondents reported these constraints however:

> *Health*: Only 5% of respondents have impeding health problems or disability. 91% of respondents have no long-term health problems or a disability that would restrict the type of work they would like to do. 4% do not know.
>
> *Caring for someone else at home*: only 6% of respondents have responsibility for caring for someone else at home; 94% do not.
>
> *Children*: only 4% of respondents have children; 96% do not.

For students, having a job, part-time or full-time, might pose a constraint on their study. It might also lever employment opportunities if directly related to the study. As reported in Table 4, 55% of students have a job, of which 13% report having a full-time job and 42% a part-time job. 42% do not have a job. Females are more likely to have a job compared with males.

Apprentices, by definition, should all have jobs. However, as Table 4 also shows, a number of respondents indicated that they also have jobs additional to their apprenticeship; however we would suggest caution accepting these responses; additional part-time work might be possible but additional full-time work seems less likely.

Table 4: Employment during studies/apprenticeships

Row Labels	Unspecified gender	Female	Male	Total	% of total
Students	**13**	**236**	**213**	**462**	**100%**
No response	11	1	1	13	3%
No	2	94	97	193	42%
Yes, a full-time job		38	22	60	13%
Yes, a part-time job		103	93	196	42%
Apprenticeship	**3**	**59**	**99**	**161**	**100%**
No response	2			2	1%
No	1	34	67	102	63%
Yes, a full-time job		16	21	37	23%
Yes, a part-time job		9	11	20	12%
Total	16	295	312	623	

4.2 Subject area

In terms of subject areas, as intended in the research design, some are gender specific while others have gender balance in terms of learner cohorts. Table 5 (below) shows that the subject area is highly correlated with gender.

Male dominated: Students studying Engineering (which includes Engineering, Gas, Motor Vehicle/Cycle & Mechanics, and Fork Lift) are male-dominated subjects (94%). Information Communication Technology (ICT), which includes game developers, is similarly male dominated (94%). Sport/Fitness is also male dominated.

Female dominated: Child play learning and development/ Early Years is almost entirely female dominated (97%). Subjects that relate to Health and Social Care are more female oriented (84%). Business subjects also lean towards female being female oriented (61%).

Balanced: A number of subjects have more gender-balanced cohorts (within a 40-60% range). Creative and Media (58% female, 42% male), which includes Art & Design, Drama, Music and Photography; another is Hospitality and Catering (56% female, 44% male).

Table 5: Subject area and gender split

Row Labels	Count				% of total	Gender ratio	
	Unspecified gender	Female	Male	Total	(excluding no response)	Female	Male
No response		2	3	5			
Business	4	68	44	116	19%	61%	39%
Child Play Learning and Development/Early Years	2	33	1	36	6%	97%	3%
Creative and Media	1	49	35	85	14%	58%	42%
Engineering	3	6	96	105	17%	6%	94%
Forensic Science		5	2	7	1%	71%	29%
Health and Social Care	3	81	16	100	16%	84%	16%
Hospitality and Catering		9	7	16	3%	56%	44%
ICT	1	2	33	36	6%	6%	94%
Sport/Fitness	1	17	50	68	11%	25%	75%
Other	1	23	25	49	8%	48%	52%
Total	16	295	312	623		49%	51%
Total (excluding no response)	**16**	**293**	**309**	**618**	100%	**49%**	**51%**

4.3 Regional dimension

The study covers three main regions:

1. The Midlands (around Birmingham)
2. The North (around Manchester)
3. The South (around Reading and Bristol)

Table 6 below reports the link between subject area and geographical area. Health and Social Care is the dominant subject in the Midlands and South East, while Engineering subjects are dominant in the North (57%).

Table 6: Subject area and geographical area

Subject/Region	Midlands	North	South	Other	Total (excluding no region response)
Business	17%	11%	28%	63%	19%
Child Play Learning and Development/Early Years	4%	0%	15%	0%	6%
Creative and Media	21%	1%	0%	0%	14%
Engineering	10%	57%	14%	0%	17%
Forensic Science	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Health and Social Care	18%	5%	15%	13%	16%
Hospitality and Catering	0%	4%	9%	13%	3%
ICT	6%	10%	3%	0%	6%
Sport/Fitness	12%	6%	13%	0%	11%
Other	10%	6%	3%	13%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total count(excluding no subject response)	397	81	122	8	618

5 Wave 1 survey findings

The findings from Wave 1 of the study are presented in this section and are divided into four subsections. The first focuses on why the respondent decided to undertake study or an apprenticeship. The second focuses on the current placement where the study or apprenticeship is taking place. The third focuses on the respondent's initial career plans and their initial thoughts on its anticipated employment outcomes. The final subsection focuses on what respondents are thinking of doing and their future goals once their study/training is completed.

5.1 What made you want to stay on in further education or an apprenticeship?

Respondents were asked to explain the main reasons why they wanted to stay on in FE. As Figure 4 shows, regardless of whether the respondent was a student or apprentice, the largest response was wanting to 'get a good job' (29%). A sizable minority however drift into FE either because it is better than being unemployed (11%) or because they were unsure about what to do next (11%).

It seems that advice about taking this path is limited. Parents have the largest influence but this influence is still relatively low (10%) in the decision-making process. Advice from teachers, career advisors or from outside of school seems to be even less influential. The influence of career advisors in particular is very marginal; no more influential than that of friends' behaviour (both 3%).

When asked about the most important reason for wanting to stay on in FE, the clear majority across students and apprentices was that it is to help them 'get a good job' (see Figure 5). As such, in both cases, respondents were clear that they were choosing a path that they linked to employment and that, for many, is associated with leading to a good job.

Figure 4: What made you want to say on in further education?

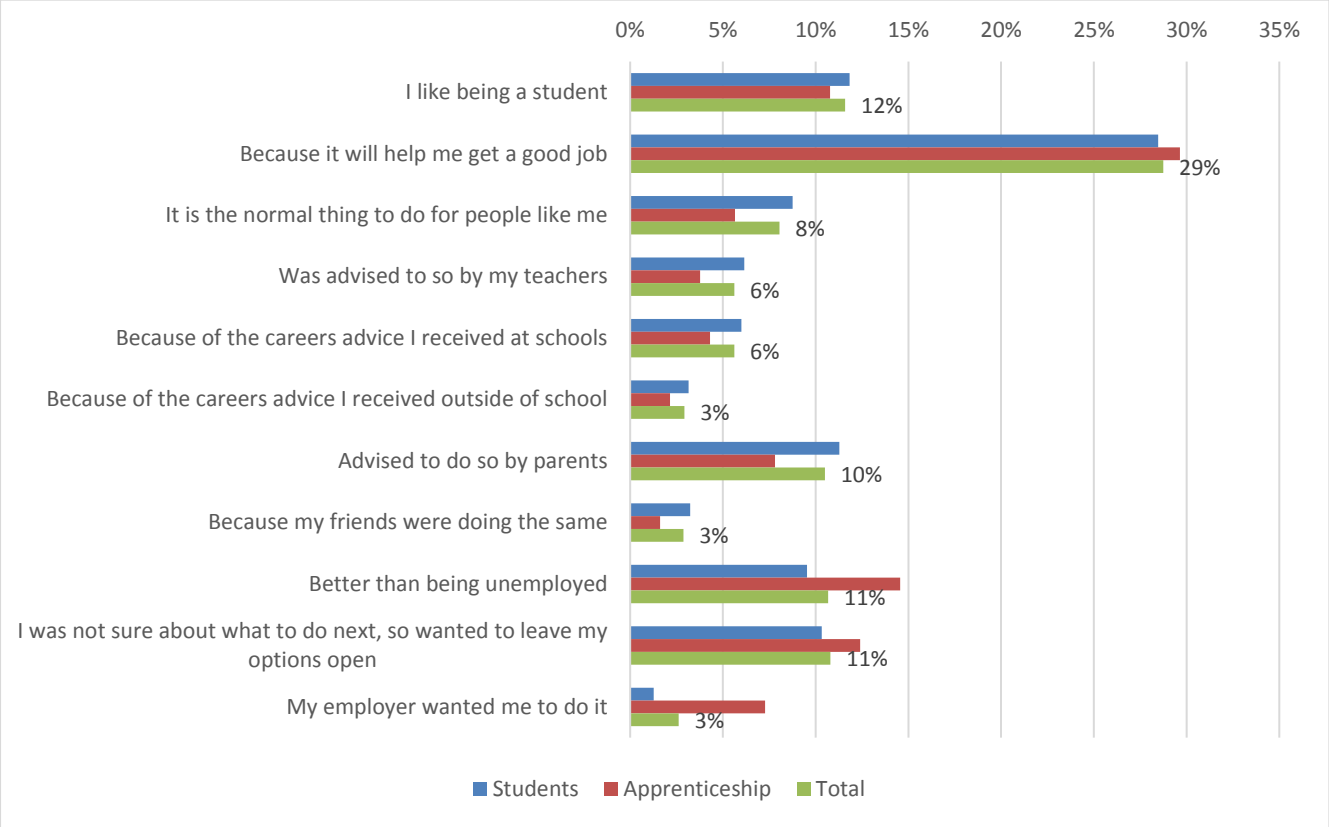


*Figure 5: What was the **most important** reason to stay on in further education?*

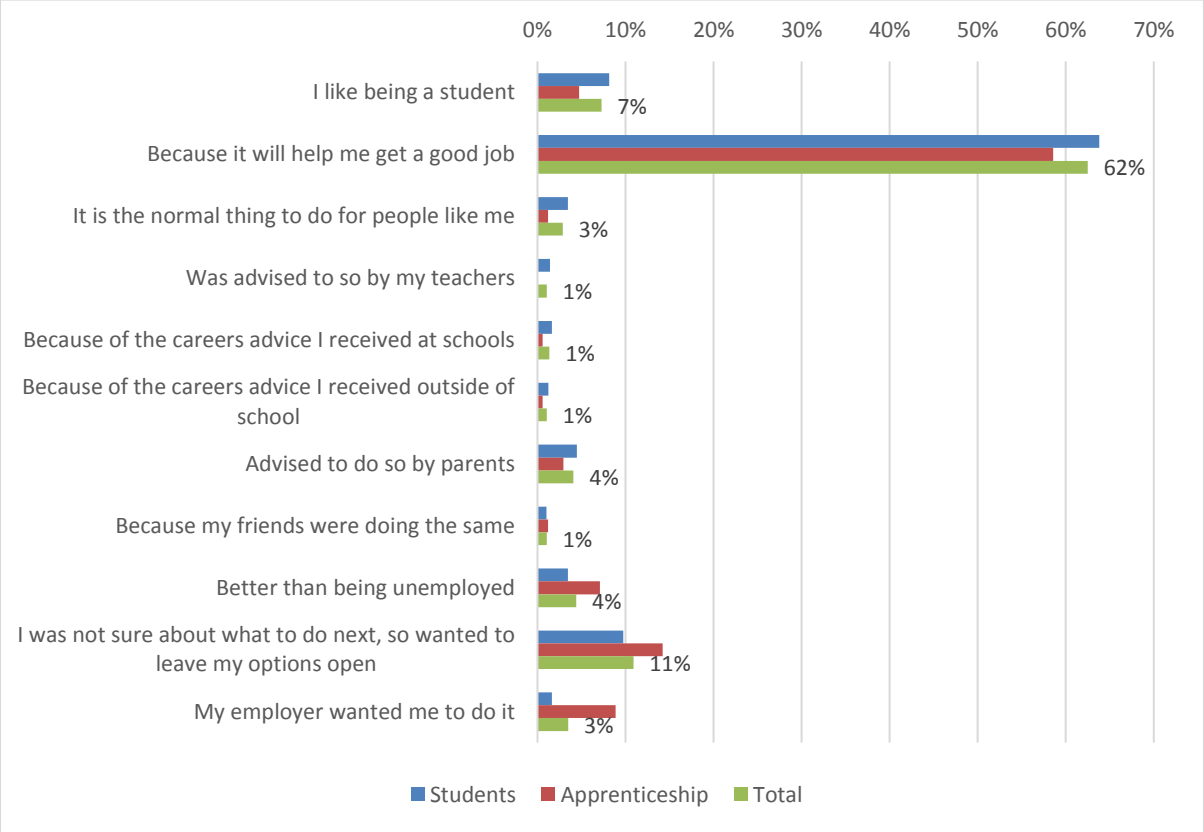


Figure 6 shows that there were three main reasons for wanting to study that particular course or take that particular apprenticeship: first, an interest in the subject matter (28%), second because it led to a job they eventually want to do (21%), and third because of future job opportunities (20%).

There are some small differences though between the students and apprentices. The former are more likely to state an interest in the subject; the latter because they believe that what they are doing will lead to good job opportunities. In this respect, apprenticeships are again associated with leading to good jobs.

Figure 6: What made you want to study the course/apprenticeship you are currently on?

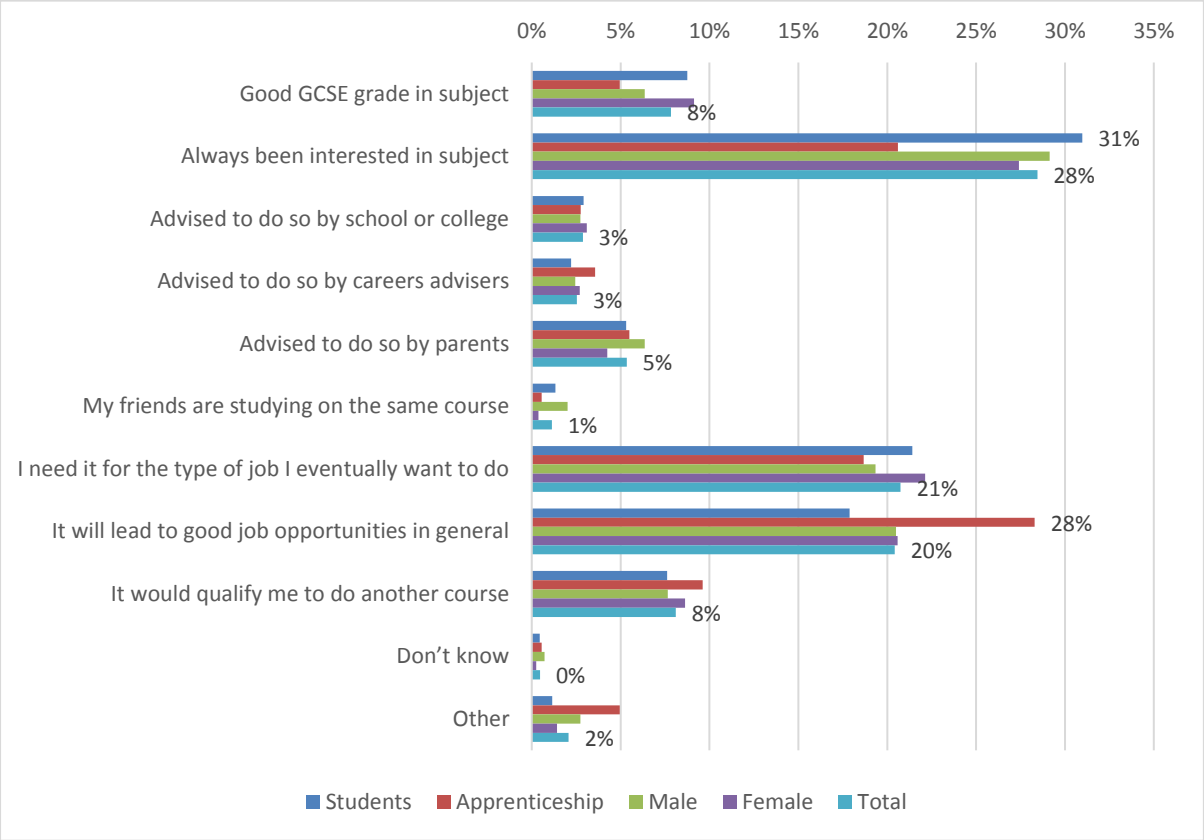
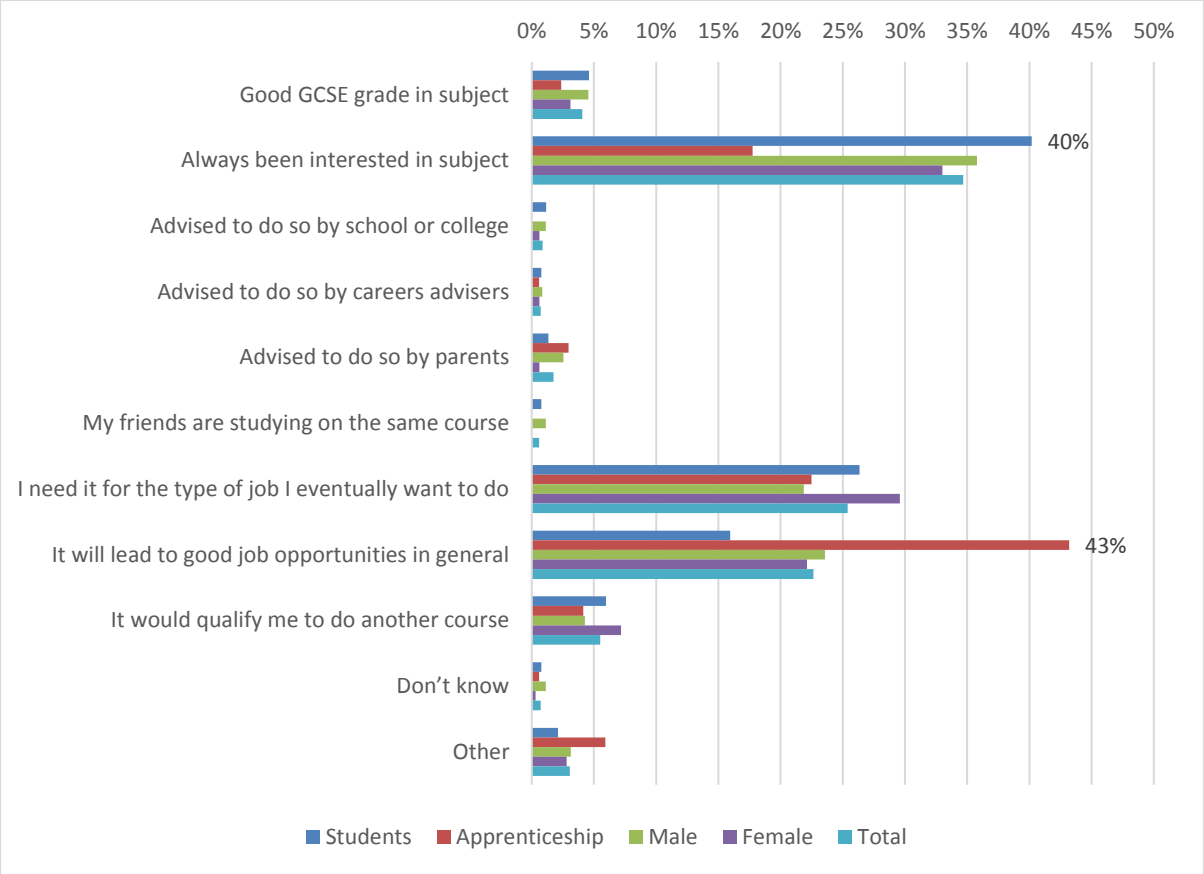


Figure 7 corroborates these findings. It shows that for students it is interest in the subject that droves their choice of the study, while for the apprentices it was job prospects.
There are no significant differences by gender in this respect.

*Figure 7: What was the **main reason** for doing this course?*



Respondents were asked whether this course or apprenticeship was their first choice. From those who responded, 86% stated that it was their first choice. For 13%, it was not their first choice.

Table 7: Was this their first choice of study/apprenticeship

	Students	Apprenticeship	Total
Don't know	0%	1%	1%
No	13%	21%	15%
YES	86%	78%	84%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Respondents were asked the reasons for not studying at their first choice of study/apprenticeship. Of those who stated that the current study/apprenticeship was not their first choice, they explained the following: S*tudents* explained that they did not have Maths GCSE which prevented their first choice. Others students explained that they started the first choice but they got bored with the course and left or simply failed course demands. A*pprentices* who started their first choice training but left said that they dropped out because they 'didn't enjoy it' or they changed their minds.

5.2 The place where you are currently studying

Study and training occurs through three types of learning provider: (i) colleges (ii) private providers and (iii) university technical colleges (UTCs). Table 8 summarises the type of learning providers with the type of subject area covered. The majority of respondents are studying in colleges.

Table 8: Subject of study and type of learning provider (count)

Row Labels	No response	College	Private	UTC	Total
No response	1	3	1		5
Business	10	70	36		116
Child Play Learning and Development/Early Years	2	27	7		36
Creative and Media	1	84			85
Engineering	4	45	50	6	105
Forensic Science		7			7
Health and Social Care	7	79	14		100
Hospitality and Catering	6		10		16
ICT		33		3	36
Sport/Fitness	5	54	9		68
Other	1	47		1	49
Total	**37**	**449**	**127**	**10**	**623**

Table 9 reports subject areas being studied by students and apprentices. The majority of apprentices are training in an Engineering-related topic, i.e. engineering, gas, motor repair or fork lift training, or Business. Students are mainly studying Health and Social Care, Creative and Media, and Business.

Table 9: Subject area by Students or Apprentenceship

				% of total (excluding no response)		
	Students	Apprentices	Total	Students	Apprentices	Total
No response	5		5			
Business	79	37	116	17%	23%	19%
Child Play Learning and Development/Early Years	27	9	36	6%	6%	6%
Creative and Media	84	1	85	18%	1%	14%
Engineering	35	70	105	8%	43%	17%
Forensic Science	7		7	2%	0%	1%
Health and Social Care	85	15	100	19%	9%	16%
Hospitality and Catering	3	13	16	1%	8%	3%
ICT	36		36	8%	0%	6%
Other	46	3	49	10%	2%	8%
Sport/Fitness	55	13	68	12%	8%	11%
Total	462	161	623			
Total (excluding no response)	457	161	618	100%	100%	100%

Respondents were asked for the main reasons for studying or training with the chosen learning provider. The analysis distinguishes between students and apprentices.

As Figure 8 shows, students tend to focus on providers having a 'good course on offer'. This finding resonates with the previous finding that these students are more likely to choose the type of subject area by interest. The second main reason for taking the course is because it is offered near to their home and the provider is the only one locally offering the course that they wanted to study. These findings hold by gender. These reasons are further corroborated when asking for the main reason for studying with the chosen provider (see Figure 9). Students therefore appear to discerning in their choice

of provider, but that these choices are made within constraints – that is within the bounds of localised provision.

Figure 8: What made you want to study here? (Students only)

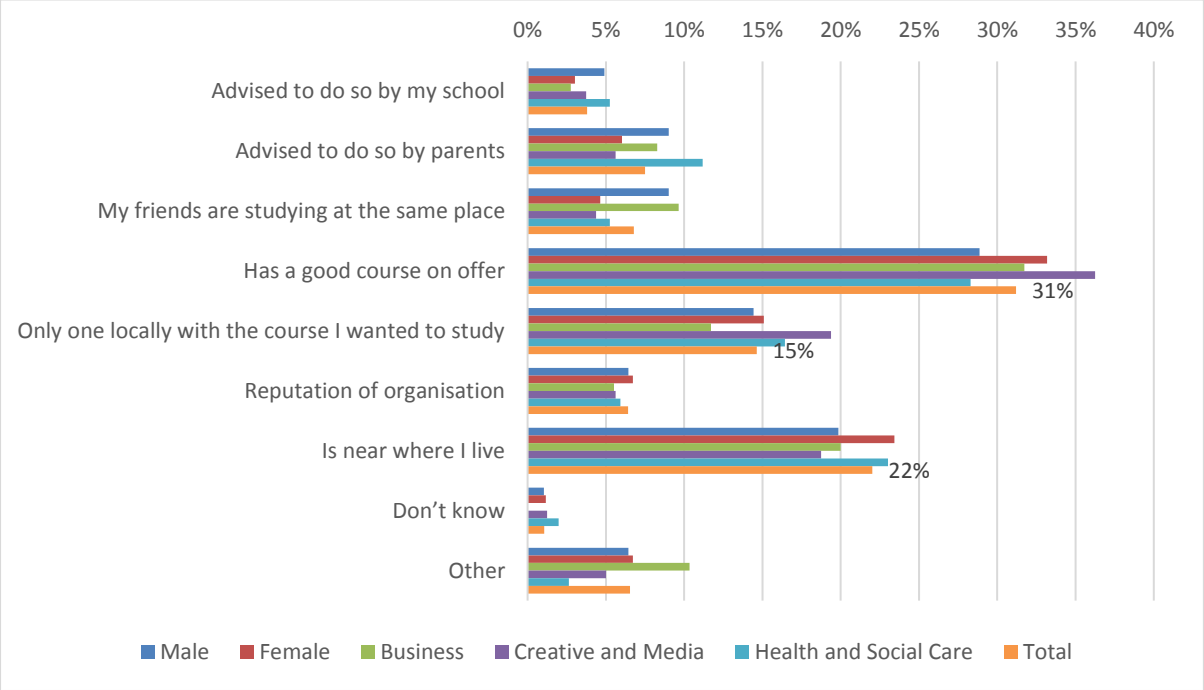
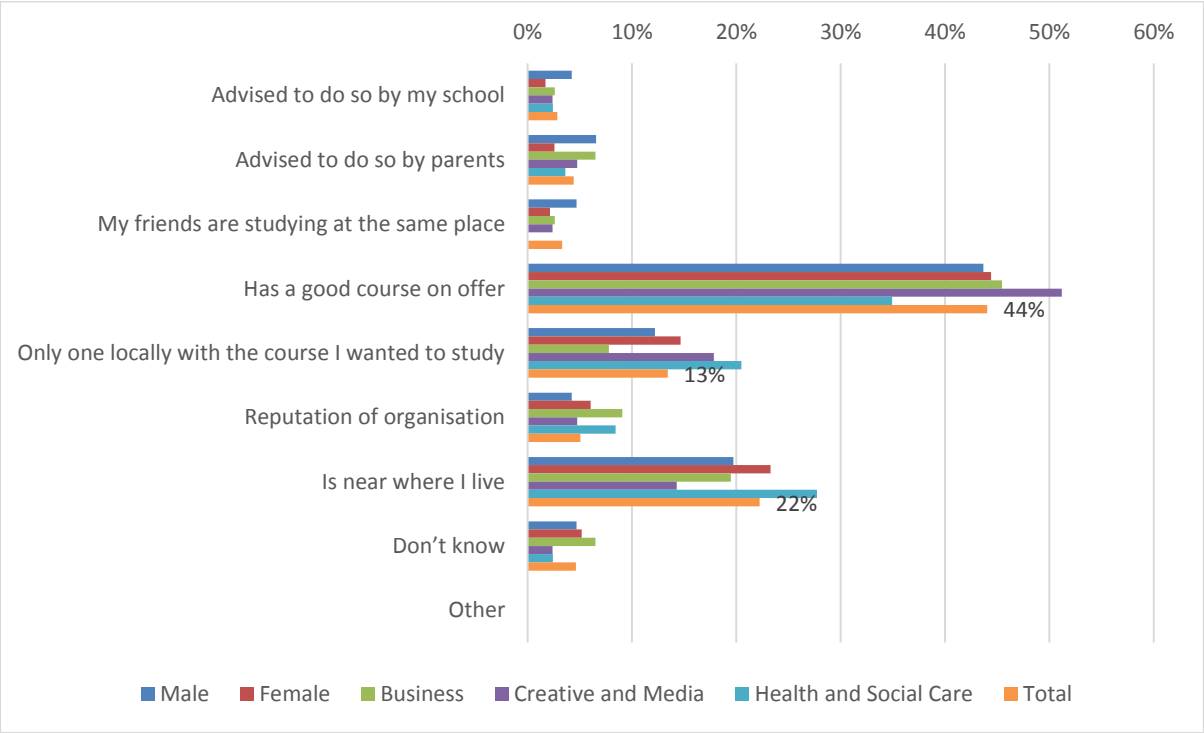


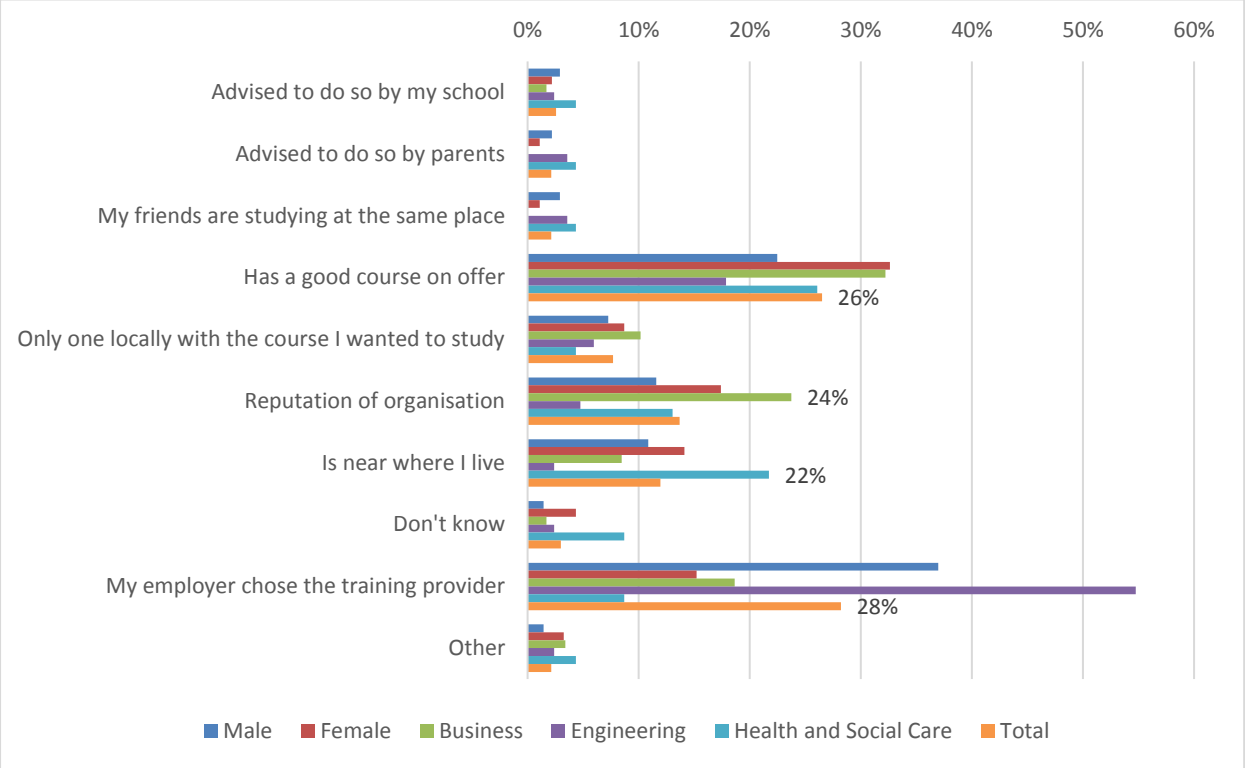
*Figure 9: What is the **main reason** for studying here? (Students only)*



Amongst the apprentices, respondents provide four main reasons for training with that provider (see Figure 10). The first and the most important reason is that the employer chose the training provider. However there are marked differences by subject. Second, regardless of gender or subject, the provider offered a good course. Third, for Health and Social Care apprentices, having the training provider near

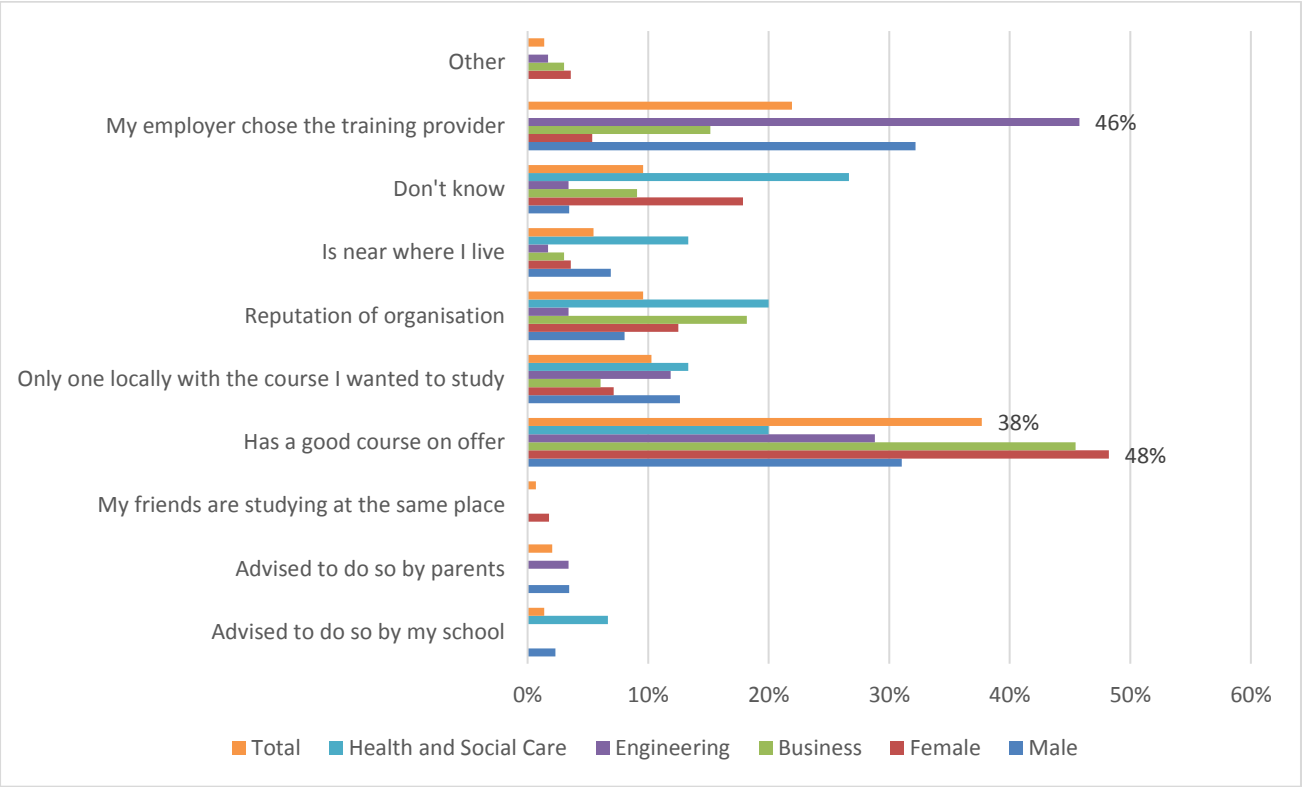
to where they live is important. Fourth, for Business apprentices, the reputation of the provider is important.

Figure 10: What made you want to train with this provider? (Apprentices only)



The main reason for training with this provider is that it has a 'good course on offer'. Again there are marked differences by subject in relation to whether the employer's choice drives provider selection. In Engineering, (potential) apprentices overwhelmingly applied to the employer, who chose the provider as would be expected for most apprenticeships both now and in the future under current government reforms. For other subjects such as Business, (potential) apprentices were much more likely to apply to a provider that they liked and presumably then be placed with an employer through the college.

*Figure 11: What is the **main reason** for training with this provider? (Apprentices only)*



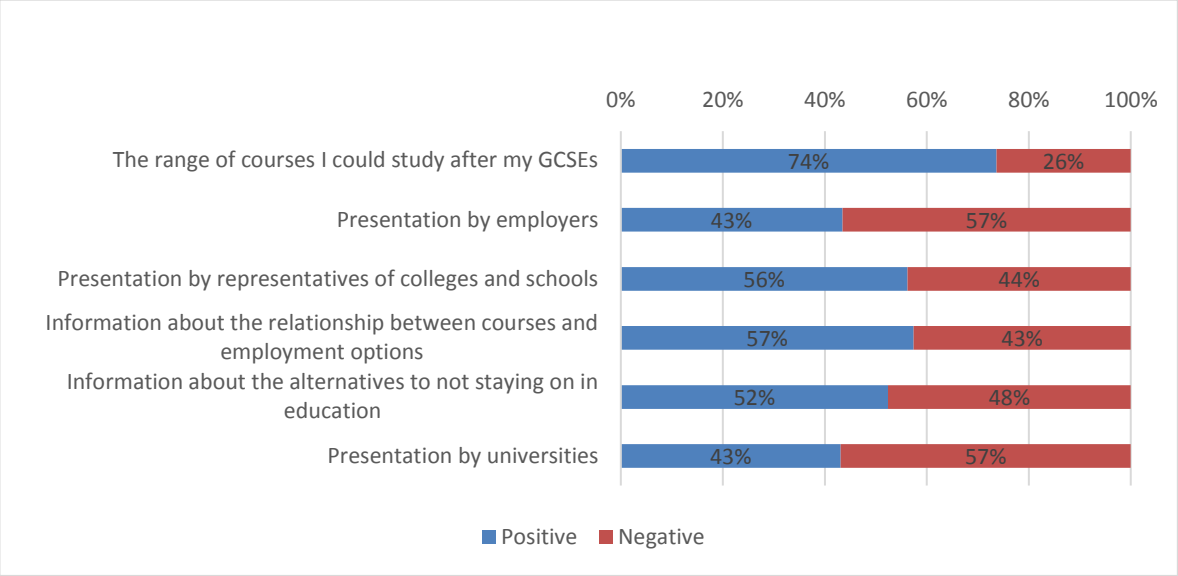
5.3 Your initial career plans and choices

Respondents were asked about the level of career information, guidance and advice that they received when first considering studying or undertaking an apprenticeship. Stripping out of the analysis those respondents who answered 'Don't Know or 'Not Applicable', the level of career information received was ranked as follows:

Response	
Too much Just what I need	Positive
Not enough None at all	Negative
Don't know Not applicable	Unspecified

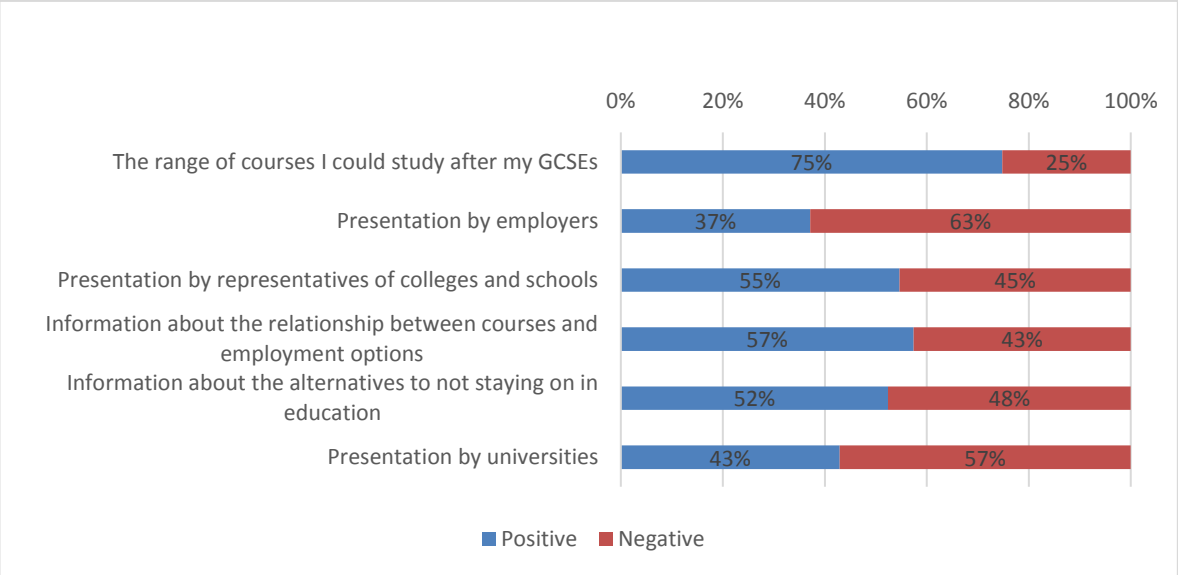
The results for all respondents – students, apprentices, male and female – are presented below in Figures 12-15. Responses, overall, were mixed depending on the type of information as well as the type of learner.

Figure 12: Response for all respondents



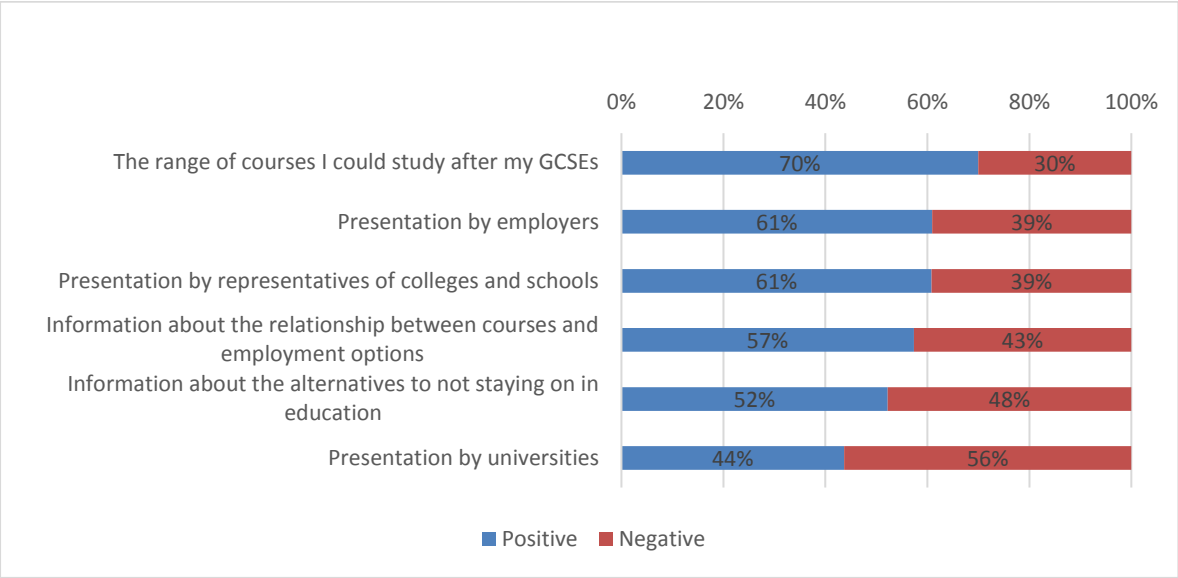
A clear majority of all respondents (74%) were positive about what they could study post-GCSE. Most respondents were also positive about the information available from colleges and schools and the relationship between courses and employment as well as the alternatives to not continuing in education (Above 50% positive in each case). However most respondents wanted more information from employers and about universities (43% positive).

Figure 13: Responses from students



Responses from students generally confirm the overall findings. It should be noted however that this is the group that most wanted more information from employers and about universities. Wanting more information from employers is particularly marked (37% positive).

Figure14: Responses from apprentices



Responses from apprentices also generally confirm the overall findings, though, interestingly, they too wanted more information about universities. It is this group that is most positive about the existing level of information from employers.

Of the differences between students and apprentices, the latter group are generally more positive overall about the information that they received.

Figure 14: Responses by males

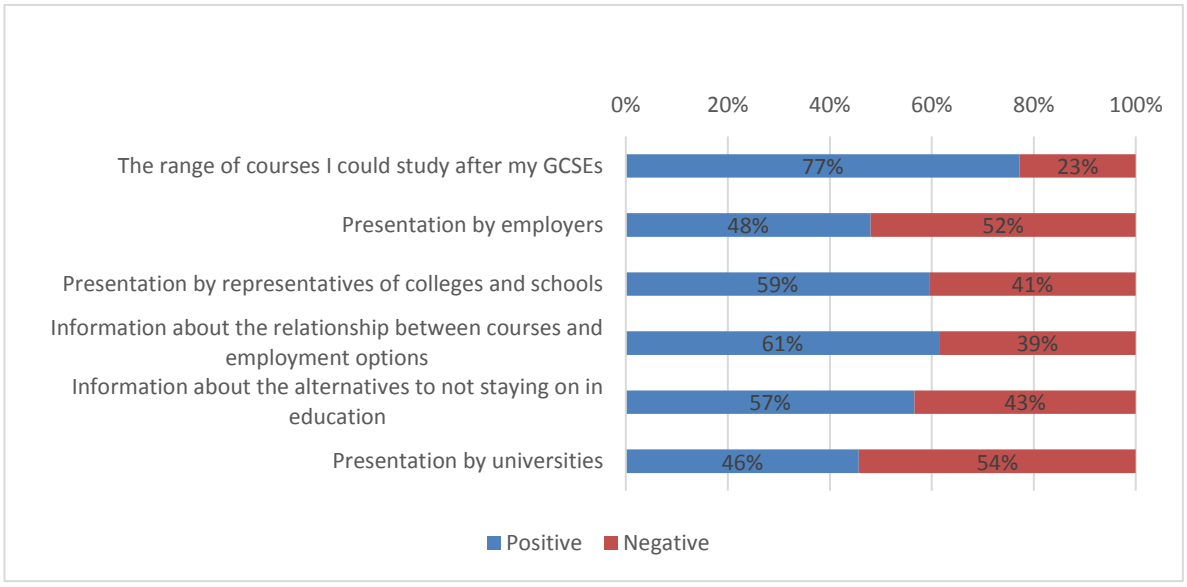
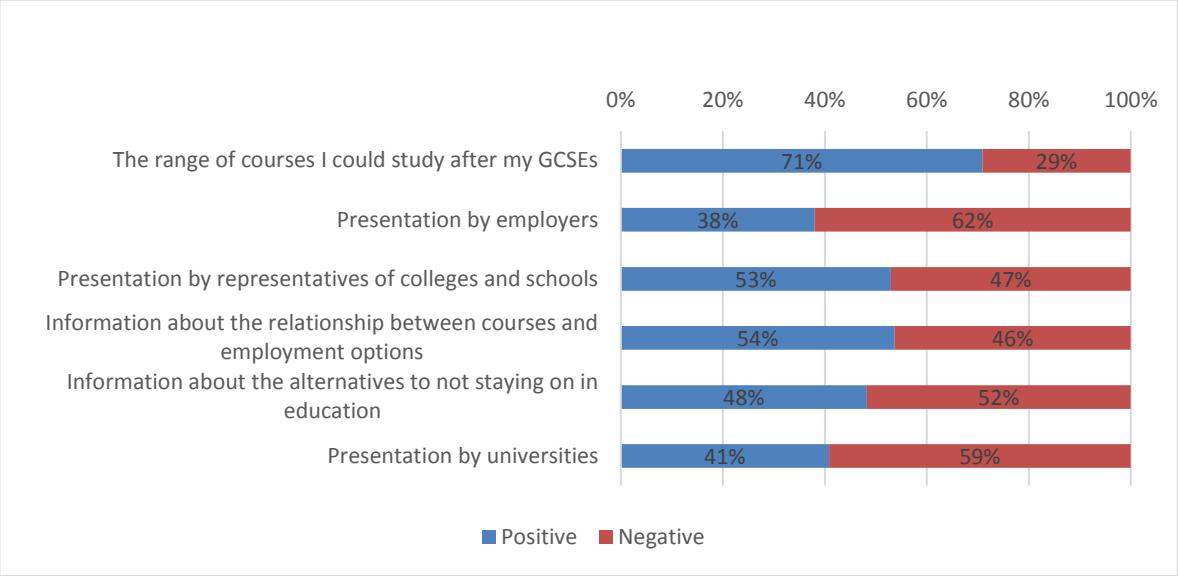


Figure 15: Responses by females



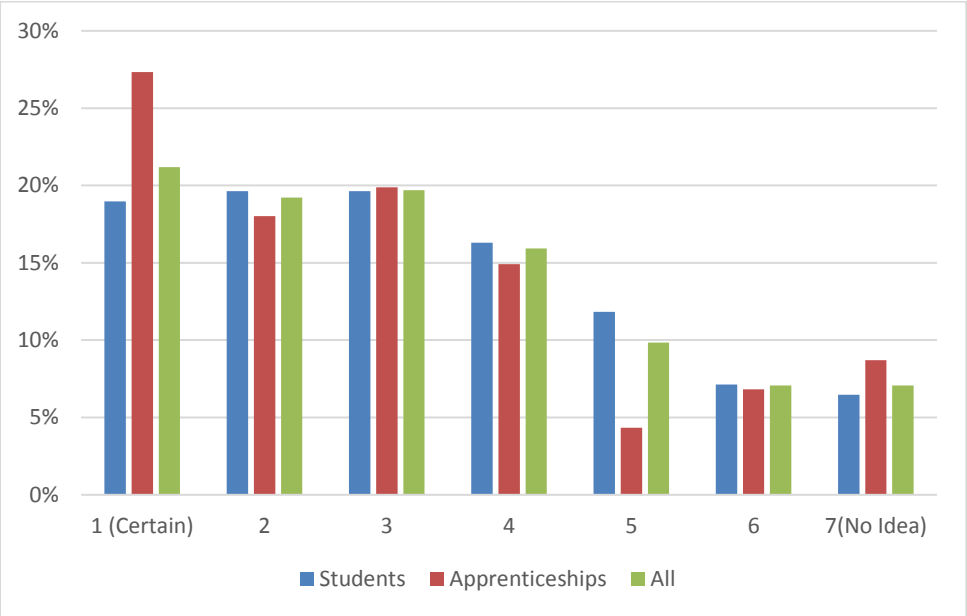
In terms of gender, there are no marked differences between male and female respondents, though males are slightly more positive about the overall information received. Both wanted more information from employers and about universities. The only marked difference is that males reported receiving a higher level of information about alternatives to not staying on in education than females.

Respondents were also asked if they knew what job they eventually wanted to do and what qualification was needed for it when they first considered which course to undertake. Respondents ranked their level of certainly from 1 meaning they *knew exactly* what they wanted to do and the qualification they would need to do it, and 7 meaning that they had *no idea* what they wanted to do or what qualification was needed.

Figure 16 presents the results for all respondents and for those in full-time study and apprenticeships. Across the data, 75% of young people left school with some knowledge of what they wanted to do and how they might achieve it. However, at the point of completing their study/training, a quarter of young people had little or no idea.

Considering the above findings about students compared to apprentices in Figure 16, it might be that students represent 'delayed decision-makers' who are initially less sure of what to do, have less employer contact, are presented with further study as the default option but without definitive plans about what to do at the end of it. This finding holds for all respondents as a whole, and for both students, apprentices, and by gender.

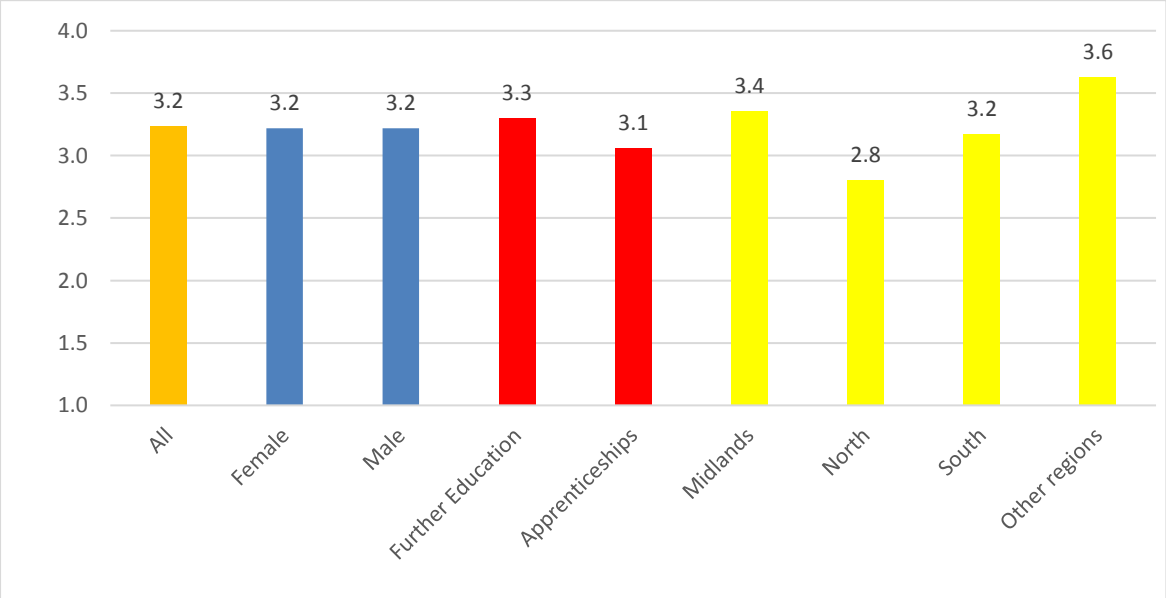
Figure 16: Did you know what you wanted to do and the qualification you needed to have for it? (all respondents, 1 = certain, 7 = no idea)



To simplify the analysis across many dimensions (e.g., gender, type of study/training and geography and subject area), we calculate the weighted average score of the distribution for the different possible answers. The weighted average if the score would have been evenly distributed between 1 (certain) and 7 (no idea) is 4.

Figure 17 and Figure 18 summarize the results. The responses from males and females are similar. Those in apprenticeships are slightly more certain than those studying full-time. Those studying/training in the North are more certain than those from the Other region.[2]

*Figure 17: How certain about what job and qualification they require (Weighted average response rate, various dimensions)**

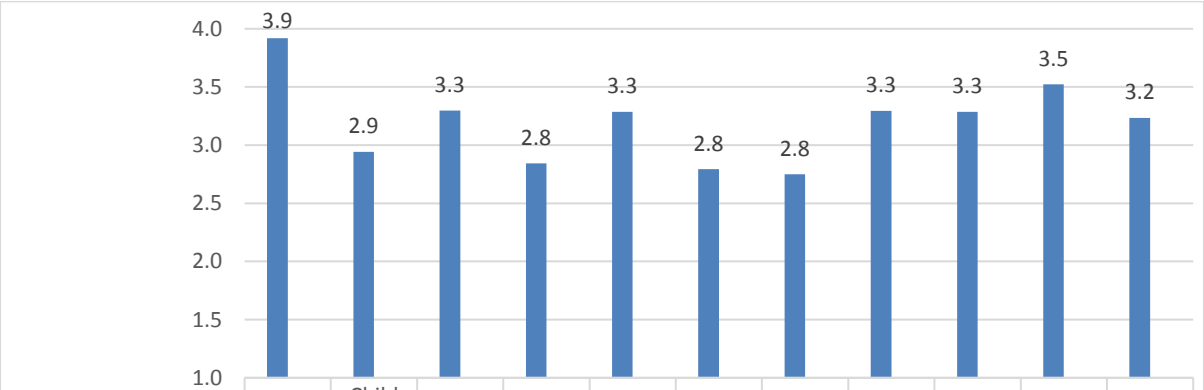


* The 'no responses' are omitted.

[2] Note that there are only 8 respondents in other regions. This low response rate lowers the confidence of the result.

In terms of subject area, as Figure 18 shows, those studying Business are the least certain about what job they want and the qualification they need. Those undertaking Engineering, Health and Social Care, and Hospitality and Catering are the most certain.

*Figure 18: How certain about what job and qualification they require (Weighted average by subject)**



	Business	Child Play Learning and Development/Early Years	Creative and Media	Engineering	Forensic Science	Health and Social Care	Hospitality and Catering	ICT	Other subjects	Sport/Fitness	All
Weighted average	3.9	2.9	3.3	2.8	3.3	2.8	2.8	3.3	3.3	3.5	3.2
Count	113	35	84	102	7	97	16	34	49	67	609

* The 'no responses' are omitted.

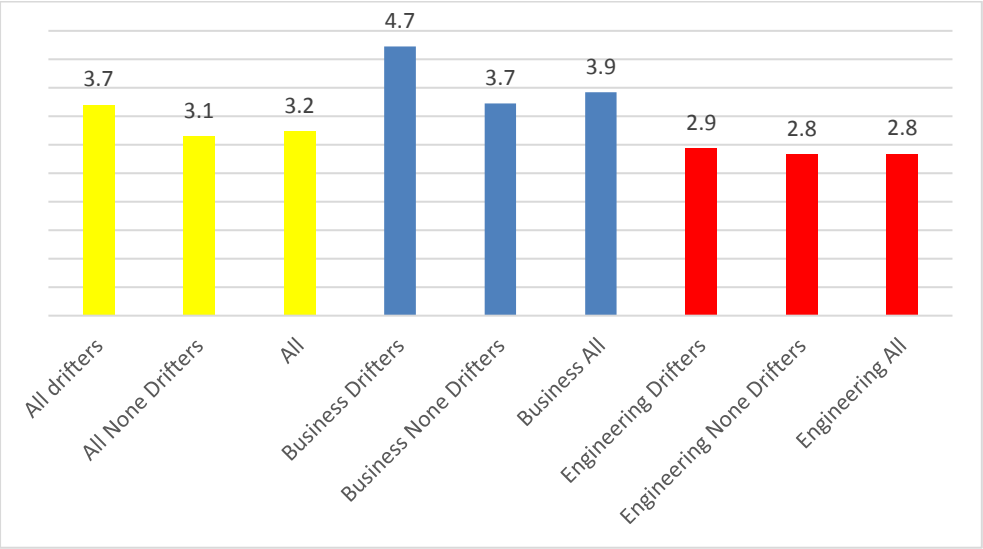
One possible explanation for this finding is that some subject areas have a tighter education-employment pathway than others. Child Play Learning and Development, and Engineering, would be examples of tighter pathways, Business an example of a looser pathway. Having a tighter pathway enables and offers more clarity and certainty. Another possibility is that courses with a looser pathway attract a higher proportion of students and apprentices who are uncertain about what they want to do – characterised above as 'drifters'.

There is some support for this possibility. From the same data as in Figure 5, we define two types of respondents: *drifters* are those who responded that the MOST important reasons for doing their chosen course/apprenticeship is either because "It was better than being unemployed" or "I was not sure about what to do next, so wanted to leave my options open". *None drifters* are all others.

Linking this marker with subject areas, we find that 20% of those studying Business are drifters; by contrast 14% of engineers are drifters and only 6% of those studying Child Play Learning and Development are drifters.

This possibility is further emphasized analysing the level of how certain respondents are about the job and qualification they require. As might be expected, compared to non-drifters, drifters are less certain, see Figure 19. As the figure also shows, drifters in business are the least certain (with a high value of 4.7).

Figure 19: How certain are you about what job and qualification you require (Weighted average response rate, by drifter and subject)

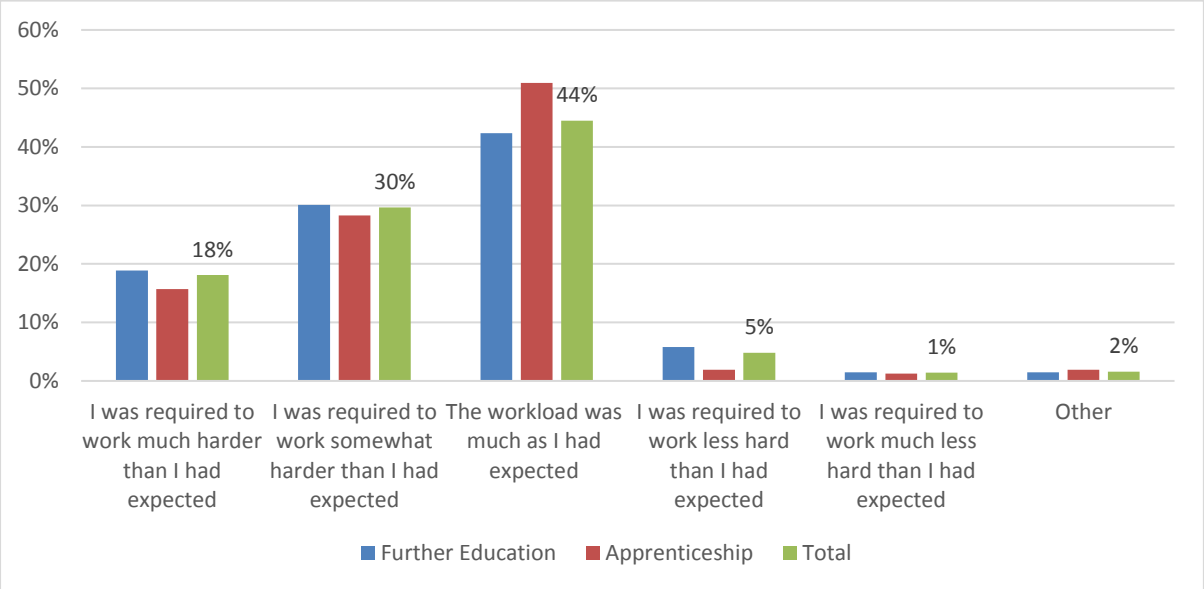


Future trajectory

We now analyse students and apprentices' current situation and how they think it could affect their future plans. A successful completion of the course or apprenticeship means a higher likelihood of success in their future.

The majority of respondents felt that the workload associate with their course or apprenticeship was as expected or harder (see Figure 20: Level of workload versus initial expectation).

Figure 20: Level of workload versus initial expectation



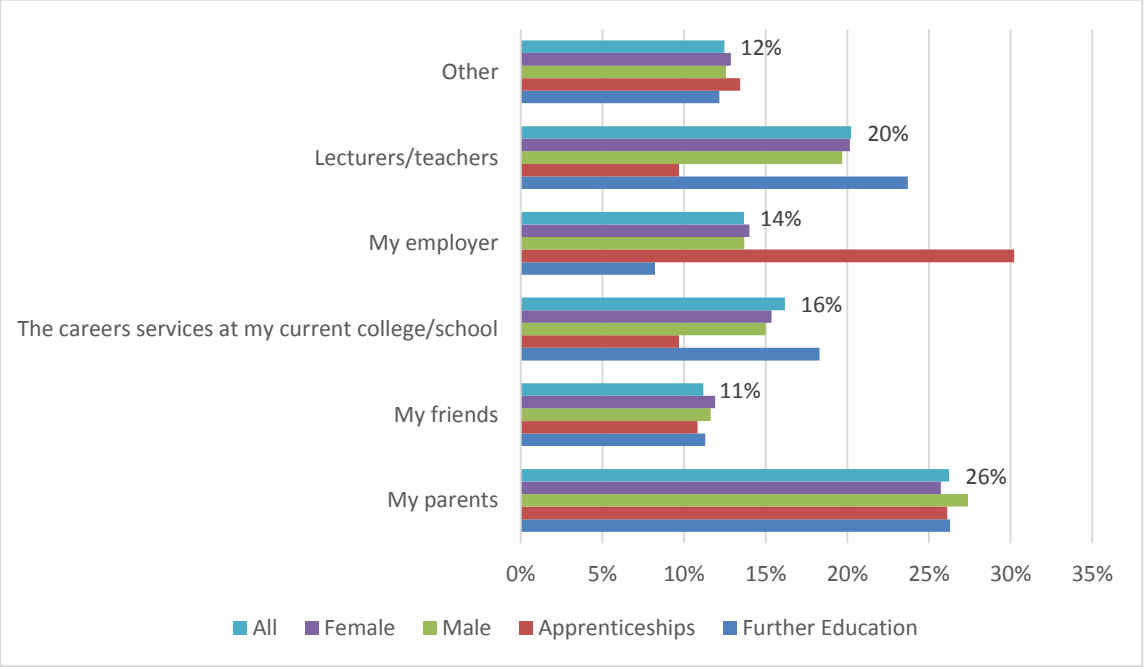
As Table 10 shows, the vast majority of the respondents were confident that they will complete the course or apprenticeship.

Table 10: Do you think you will complete the course or apprenticeship?

	Further Education	Apprenticeship	Total
Don't know	5%	3%	4%
No	1%	1%	1%
Yes	94%	96%	95%
Total (excluding no response)	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**
Total (#, excluding no response)	452	155	607

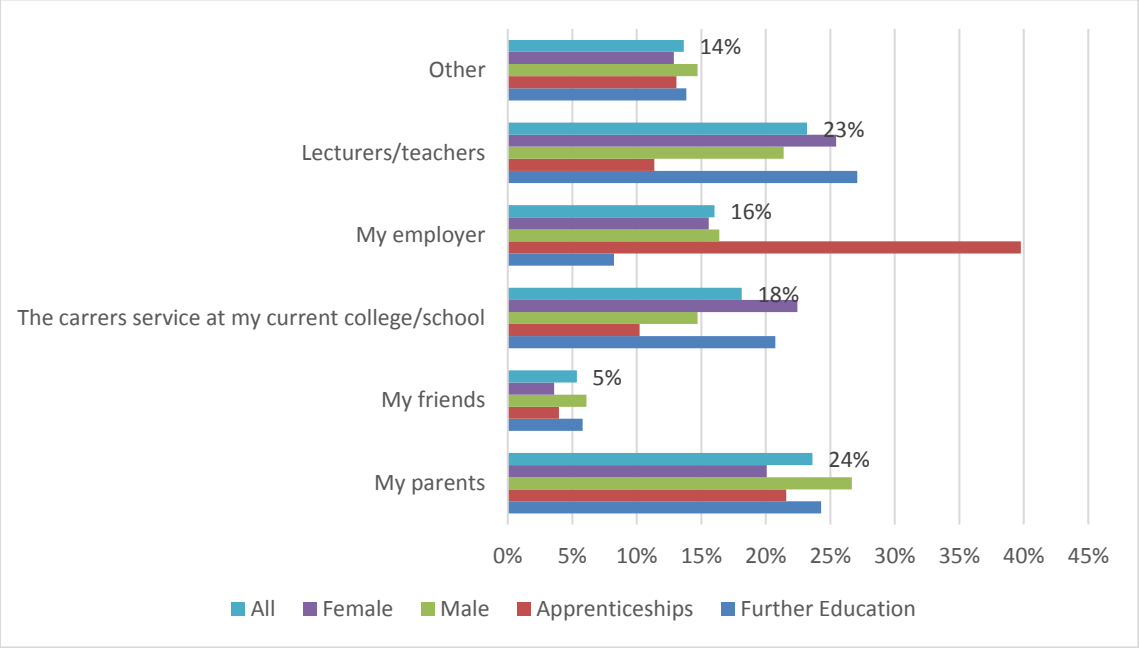
Overall, most of the respondents stated that their *main* source of information about the job market comes from their parents. Students also receive information about the job market from their lecturers and teachers, while apprentices clearly indicated their employer as the main source of information (see Figure 21: What are your main sources of information about the job market? (% of the most likely response). The results are the same when asked about the m*ost* important source of information (see Figure 22). In addition, from an open question, some respondents added that the internet is their main source of information. This finding suggests that apprentices might be usefully gaining external labour market information from the internet as well as internal labour market information from employers.

Figure 21: What are your main sources of information about the job market? (% of the most likely response)



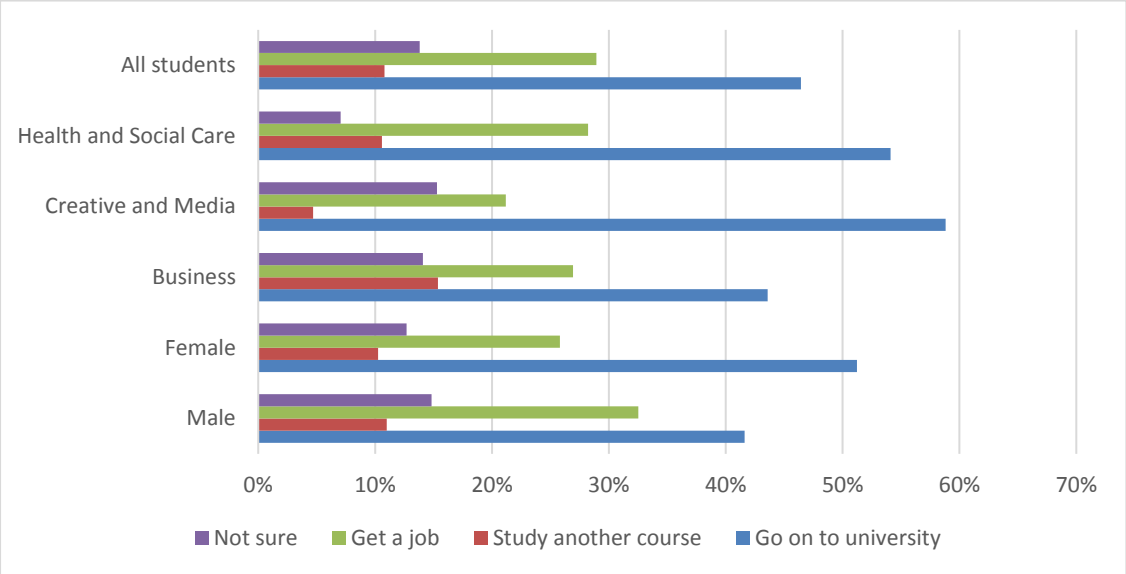
Again, parents are a more important source of information than career services. More broadly these findings affirm the important need for lecturers/teachers, career advisers and parents to have up-to-date labour market information that is easily accessible and comprehendible.

Figure 22: What is the most important source of information about the job market? (% of the most likely response)



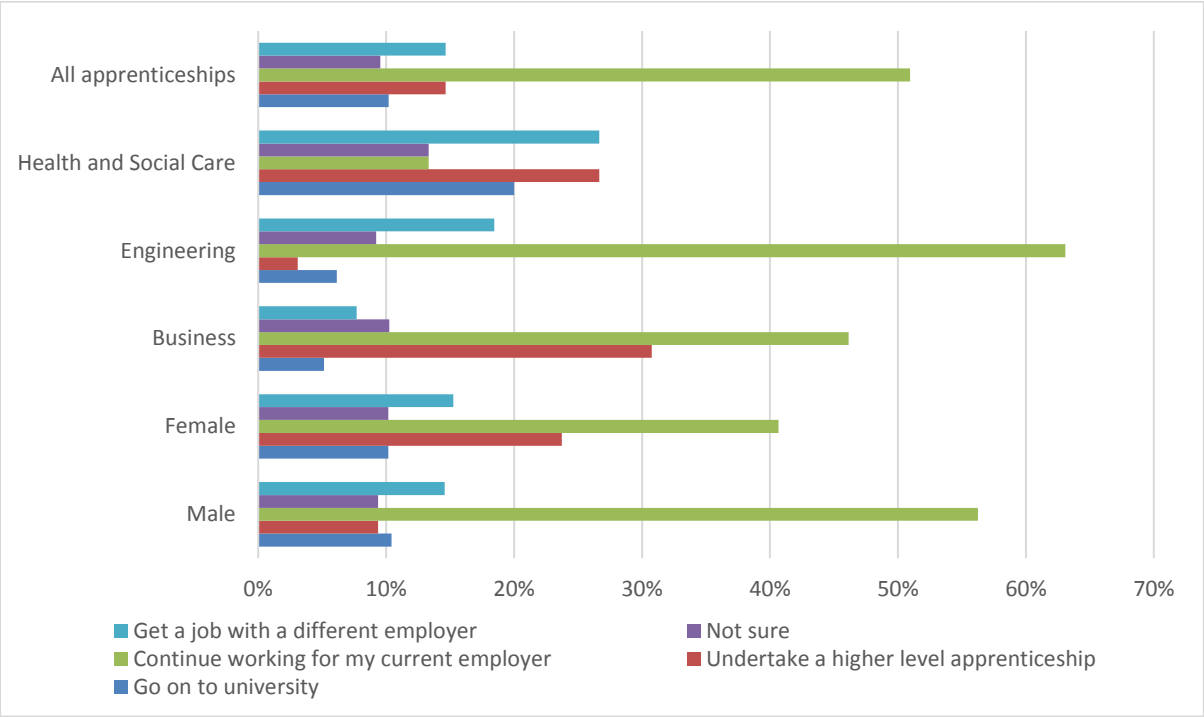
Considering students only, Figure 23 reports their plans once having completed their course. Results show a clear preference for wanting to continue *on to university*. This finding holds true by subject studied and gender, and affirms their greater desire (than apprentices, see Figure 24) for more information about universities. The second most likely plan is *getting a job*. The third are *not sure* what their future plans are. The least likely plan is to study another FE course.

Figure 23: What are your plans when you complete your course? (Students only)



Those in apprenticeships have different plans after completing their apprenticeship. As Figure 24 shows, overwhelmingly, they want to continue working for the current employer. In addition, those studying Business and females responded that they would like to undertake a higher level apprenticeship. The least likely response amongst apprentices was that they were not sure of their plans; again indicating their certainty about their current pathway.

Figure 24: What are your plans when you complete your apprenticeship? (Apprenticeships only)



In terms of finding a job, Table 11 shows different confidence levels between students and apprentices about finding a job locally. Apprentices are very confident that they will find such a job; students, whilst still confident, are less so of finding a job near their current location.

Table 11: Do you think you will be able to get the job you want around here, or would you have to move somewhere else to get it?

	Students	Apprenticeships	Female	Male	Total (excluding blanks)
Yes, likely to get that job around here	59%	77%	61%	63%	63%
No, likely need to move somewhere else to get that job	41%	7%	36%	33%	34%
Don't know	0%	16%	3%	3%	3%
Total (excluding no response)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (excluding no response, count)	339	82	212	204	421

Relatedly, Table 12 shows that students are more willing to move somewhere else. Apprentices are also willing to move but to a lesser extent compared to students. Furthermore, males are more willing to move (65%) compared to females (58%). Almost a quarter of females are not willing to move.

Table 12: Would you prepared to move somewhere else?

	Students	Apprenticeship	Female	Male	Total (excluding blanks)
Don't know	18%	22%	18%	20%	19%
No	18%	31%	24%	15%	20%
Yes	64%	47%	58%	65%	61%
Total (excluding blanks)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (excluding blanks, count)	450	85	266	260	535

5.4 Summary of findings

For both students and apprentices, the most important reason for wanting to stay on in FE was to help them get a good job. These respondents were clear that they were choosing a path that they linked to employment and, for many, associated with leading to a good job. A sizable minority however drift into FE either because it is better than being unemployed or because they were unsure about what to do next.

However as they entered FE, careers advice was limited for respondents; parents had most influence, with little substantive input from careers advisers. A clear majority of all respondents were positive about what they could study post-GCSE. Most respondents were also positive about the information available from colleges and schools and the relationship between courses and employment as well as the alternatives to not continuing in education. Apprentices received more advice from employers during their school years than students, though most respondents wanted more information from employers and about universities.

Within the sample, most apprentices are in engineering related subjects. Most students are studying health and social care, creative media and business. In terms of subject area being studied or trained, there were differences between students and apprentices. For students: it was the subject matter that most interested them, while for apprentices, it was getting a particular job.

In terms of the choice of study/training provider, most apprentices were driven by their employer's choice of provider, though interestingly, for non-engineering subjects, the college played the leading role in accessing employers. Students were discerning in their choice of provider, though that choice was also influenced by availability of local provision.

At the time of study/training, the largest proportion of respondents stated that their study/training workload was as they expected, though a sizable proportion stated it to be harder than expected. Nevertheless, almost all students and apprentices were confident of completing their study/training.

Going forward, apprentices were much clearer on what they wanted to do post training than students post study. Nevertheless, three quarters of all respondents had some knowledge of what they wanted to do and how they might achieve it. In terms of subject areas, those studying business were the least certain; those studying/training less generic subjects such as engineering and health and social care were the most certain.

As they were about to transition into the labour market, most respondents stated that their main source of job information still comes from parents. Students have also received information from their college lecturers and teachers, while apprentices stated their main source as their current employer. An interesting finding is that some respondents state that the internet was their main source of information.

In terms of what they want to do, for students, there was a clear preference to wanting to go to university; for apprentices, most wanted to continue working for their current employer. Apprentices were more confident that they will achieve their aim. Students stated that they were more willing to move locality to achieve their aim, as were male respondents generally.

6 Going forward: measuring returns and outcomes

The purpose of the study is to identify the returns/outcomes that young people derive from their VET. Beyond Wave 1, there are several outcomes that are of interest:

- whether the student is in employment (full/part-time) or self-employment;
- wage rates;
- satisfaction with job;
- continuing study.

The employment and wage returns can be compared across the different subjects, type of provider etc. They can also be compared with studies that have looked at the returns to different types of qualification.

6.1 Employment status

The first outcome measure of interest is that of employment status. In the tracking survey, at each contact point, respondents will be asked to provide their employment history since they were last surveyed. They will be asked about the job title, their hours of work (whether it was full- or part-time) and whether they are employed or self-employed.

Respondents will also be asked about whether the job is one that is commensurate with their qualifications/training or whether it is regarded as a stop-gap until they obtain the job they want. A key issue to explore is whether a qualification at a particular level was a pre-requisite for getting the job, whether the subject studied was important in getting the job, and whether the skills obtained in their studies are used in the job. This information will indicate the extent to which the course studied is matched to the job taken. Over time, the tracking study will be able to gauge the extent to which there is a better fit between course and subject studied and job undertaken.

6.2 Earnings

Once in the labour market, respondents will be asked to provide information about their wages over a defined reference period. Information will be collected on gross wages measured hourly, weekly, four-weekly, monthly or annually – depending upon the preference of the respondent when answering questions about their wages. These data will then be processed to provide a comparable measure of wages (e.g. hourly wage). To do so will also require data to be collected on hours of work for a given reference period and overtime pay. Ideally there is a need to report both (a) usual pay and (b) pay including overtime. There will also be a need to factor in any bonus payments and monetisation of any fringe benefits. The intention is to use the conventions used in the Office of National Statistics' Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings to measure wages.

The benefit of using hourly wage rates as the earnings indicator is that it effectively deals with the issue of whether people are working full- or part-time.

If there is multiple job-holding there will be a need to be collect wage information about each job – and hours worked – so that there are data available to calculate total income as well as that in each job.

With surveys administered every six months, a means will be developed to estimate the average wage over that period, bearing in mind that the respondent may not have been employed for the whole of the six-month period.

In looking at wages, the aim is to find out if students experience wage gains over their initial period in the labour market, and whether any gains are obtained with the same employer or due to changing jobs. Given the frequency of data collection, it should be possible to monitor changes in wage levels quite closely.

6.3 Job satisfaction

There is also an interest in taking a broader view of what constitutes a return to include, amongst other things, the extent to which young people:

- are satisfied with their current jobs;
- are able to use the skills they obtained in VET (skills match);
- feel they are on a career track that provides opportunity for progression;
- are in receipt of further training;
- have progressed or are about to progress to high levels of learning.

These issues represent a broader definition of the return to VET beyond wages and employment status. Their inclusion will provide a fuller picture of the extent to which vocational education in FE is able to satisfy students' aspirations and expectations.

6.4 Continuing education and learning

A further outcome to consider is whether the student has decided to continue with their studies. If so, the tracking survey will collect information about:

- the course/study being undertaken and its level;
- whether study is part-time of full-time;
- whether the student decided to continue studying because of a desire to gain higher level qualifications, gain access to a particular job or did so because there were no preferred alternatives available.

These data can be readily collected in the tracking survey.