This electronic thesis or dissertation has been downloaded from Explore Bristol Research, http://research-information.bristol.ac.uk

Author: Dooner, Kerry
Title: Socio-cultural/material factors and working-class students' ideas about higher education and future lives

General rights
Access to the thesis is subject to the Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International Public License. A copy of this may be found at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode This license sets out your rights and the restrictions that apply to your access to the thesis so it is important you read this before proceeding.

Take down policy
Some pages of this thesis may have been removed for copyright restrictions prior to having it been deposited in Explore Bristol Research. However, if you have discovered material within the thesis that you consider to be unlawful e.g. breaches of copyright (either yours or that of a third party) or any other law, including but not limited to those relating to patent, trademark, confidentiality, data protection, obscenity, defamation, libel, then please contact collections-metadata@bristol.ac.uk and include the following information in your message:

• Your contact details
• Bibliographic details for the item, including a URL
• An outline nature of the complaint

Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item in question will be removed from public view as soon as possible.
Socio-Cultural/Material Factors and Working-Class Students’ Ideas About Higher Education and Future Lives

Kerry Dooner
BA, MA

Submitted for the degree of PhD
November 2004

University of Bristol
Abstract

This thesis is concerned with a sample of working-class secondary school students in England and their ideas about higher education and future lives. Working-class groups have traditionally been under-represented in higher education, and successive governments have professed varying levels of commitment to, not only increasing the numbers of students in higher education, but also creating a more socially inclusive higher education system.

The qualitative research carried out for this thesis involved conducting semi-structured individual and paired interviews with 70 male and female students. Students interviewed were in year 10 at secondary school and aged 14 and 15. The research was carried out at 3 very different schools, in terms of location, and student population, in terms of gender and ethnic background. These schools were chosen to try and reflect differences in working-class experiences. The thesis details what it is to be a feminist and to conduct `feminist research'. Issues to do with power and positioning in the research process, and the role of personal experience and values in research are an important methodological concern.

The thesis, in examining a relatively small sample of young working-class students' ideas about possible future educational and career opportunities, argues there is something of a mismatch between what the current New Labour government sees as the underlying reason for the under-representation of working-class groups in higher education, and what many of the young people in the research considered to be the 'problem'. Whilst New Labour's widening participation agenda in schools (DfEE, 2000; DfES, 2003), seems to be overwhelmingly a cultural agenda, based on the perceived need to 'raise the aspirations' of working-class young people, a range of financial, cultural and social issues were regarded by the young people as likely to encourage/discourage their future participation in higher education. When they
did show an interest in higher education, it was usually because they thought it would offer them better job opportunities.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu is utilised in the thesis, especially the concepts of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997). Bourdieu has recognised the importance of the family as a site of social and cultural reproduction and the concept of cultural capital is integral to his writings on `the family’. Throughout this thesis the influence of families on the decisions the young people are beginning to make about their futures is examined. The concept of social capital is also utilised in the thesis, to examine the importance of social networks and relationships in the reproduction of (dis)advantage.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.
I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Rosemary Deem, who has had the unenviable task of supervising me over the last 4 years. Her patience, humour and enthusiasm have helped carry me through many a crisis during this time.

Thanks to the headteacher at Springfield School, the head of careers at Chantry School, and the head of year 10 at Kingsbridge School, for allowing me access to the schools involved and for allowing me time, and space to interview the young people. But mostly to the young people themselves, for allowing me a small insight into their lives.

To Lolis and Claire in the department, for providing opportunities to get together and moan about this thing they call a PhD- largely over food and copious amounts of red wine!

To my mum, David, Claire, Nikki, Jo, Yollie, Cath and ‘The Wildcats’ who have been my normality outside the department and the PhD, providing a mixture of support, love, fun, and exercise.

To Paul, for everything and for sharing this journey with me.
# Contents

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ii

DECLARATION ....................................................................................................................................iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....................................................................................................................5

CONTENTS .........................................................................................................................................6

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................1

1.0 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................2

1.1 RESEARCHING HIGHER EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CLASS: BRINGING IN THE PERSONAL ....3

1.2 DEFINING SOCIAL CLASS: MORE THAN A QUESTION OF OCCUPATION? ..........................4

1.3 PIERRE BOURDIEU: SOCIAL CLASS AND THE FORMS OF CAPITAL .....................................6

1.4 THOSE INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH ....................................................................................8

1.5 WIDENING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE WIDER PUBLIC DEBATE ............9

1.6 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS ......................................................................................................11

CHAPTER TWO RESEARCHING YOUNG PEOPLE’S LIVES AND EXPERIENCES: METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................................................13

2.0 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................13

2.1 RESEARCHING YOUNG PEOPLE: ISSUES SURROUNDING ACCESS, PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY ................................................................................................................13

2.1A GAINING ACCESS AND CONSENT .........................................................................................14

2.1B PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY .........................................................................................15

2.2 SPRINGFIELD SCHOOL AND THE INITIAL PILOT STUDY .....................................................17

2.3 THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE MAIN STUDY ..............................................................................18

2.4 INTERVIEWING ..........................................................................................................................19

2.5 DILEMMAS OF FEMINIST RESEARCH: IS BEING A FEMINIST ENOUGH? .........................20

2.6 THE ROLE OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND VALUES IN RESEARCH ...............................22

2.7 POWER AND RAPPORT IN RESEARCH INTERVIEWS .............................................................27

2.8 INTERVIEWING AND ‘TELLING IT LIKE IT IS?’ .....................................................................30

2.9 ANALYSING MY DATA ..............................................................................................................33

2.10 SUMMARY ...............................................................................................................................36

CHAPTER THREE NEW LABOUR AND HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY ...............38

3.0 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................38

3.1 EDUCATION POLICY UNDER THE CONSERVATIVES AND NEW LABOUR: SPLITTING THE
DIFFERENCE? .................................................................................................................................39

3.2 WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: IS IT ON THE AGENDA? ...............41

3.3 WIDENING AND INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPATIBLE
AGENDA? ......................................................................................................................................46
TABLE 4.2B QUALIFICATIONS OF THOSE IN THE WARD CONTAINING KINGSBRIDGE SCHOOL COMPARED WITH THE CITY AS A WHOLE AND ENGLAND AND WALES.................................................206

TABLE 4.3A NUMBERS OF STUDENTS IN THE WARD CONTAINING CHANTRY SCHOOL COMPARED WITH THE CITY AS A WHOLE AND ENGLAND AND WALES..............................206

TABLE 4.3B QUALIFICATIONS OF THOSE IN THE WARD CONTAINING CHANTRY SCHOOL COMPARED WITH THE CITY AS A WHOLE AND ENGLAND AND WALES..............................206

APPENDIX 5 .........................................................................................................................207

TABLE 5.1 CHANTRY SCHOOL: DESTINATION OF 2001 LEAVERS: A COMPARISON WITH 2000 - PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN OF DESTINATIONS .........................................................207

TABLE 5.2 KINGSBRIDGE SCHOOL: DESTINATION OF 2001 LEAVERS: A COMPARISON WITH 2000 - PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN OF DESTINATIONS .........................................................207

TABLE 5.3 SPRINGFIELD SCHOOL DESTINATION DATA, PUPIL NUMBERS.........................................................208

APPENDIX 6 HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS FROM 1997- 2004.................................................................................................................................209

APPENDIX 7 .........................................................................................................................210

A7.0 PART OF A TRANSCRIPT AND EMERGING THEMES.........................................................210

A7.1 EMERGING THEMES ....................................................................................................213
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“ My first real recognition that I could be categorized by others as working-class happened when I went to university (an upper/middle-class university that often felt like a finishing school) and I was identified in a seminar group as ‘oh, you must be one of those working-class people we hear so much about’. I was absolutely mortified. I knew what this meant – I had been recognized as common, authentic and without much cultural value. For the first time in my life I began to feel insecure” (Skeggs, 1997a: 130)

“My headteacher told me “girls like you do not go to university”. She was right. I stubbornly persisted only to arrive at my well-established provincial university to find that there were no “girls like me”. If they did exist they were far more adept at assimilation. My working-class habitus was evident in a range of both crude and subtle embodied differences. It soon became clear that I had mastered no arts of assimilation. At the freshers’ ball a young man egged on by his friends came and said “Haven’t I seen you in Woolworths?” I smiled until he went on to ask how I had managed to gatecrash the dance. He had thought I worked in Woolworths” (Reay, 1998a: 13)
1.0 Introduction

Internationally there is a growing concern to increase, as well as widen the social basis of students in higher education (OECD, 2001). Economic and social justice concerns have been behind these drives to widen participation. In England, the government has stated one of its aims as being to widen participation in higher education to 50 per cent of 18-30 year olds by the year 2010 (DfEE, 2000). To achieve this target of widened participation, currently under-represented groups will need to be recruited. Young working-class groups, who have traditionally been under-represented, have been the main target of government attempts to widen participation.

This thesis is concerned to explore, using qualitative methods, the ideas young working-class people, who are still at school, and who have increasingly become the ‘subjects’ of government widening participation initiatives, have about higher education. Although education is often portrayed in terms of its positive and liberatory potential, there is a history of sociological analysis on education about how, far from being liberating, actually reproduces and reinforces class inequalities. (See for example Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). Often missing from the debate surrounding widening participation, have been the voices of those whom the debate is supposed to be about. While official discourses extol the social and economic benefits of higher education, considerably less is known about whether young people share these assumptions about the benefits of higher education. Do young working-class young people, share with Reay (1998a) and Skeggs (1997a), worries about being ‘educated out of their class’ in terms of accessing higher education in the future? Or do they consider class, as well as, gender and ethnicity to be irrelevant to their future lives and opportunities?

This thesis considers the following questions:

What has been New Labour’s approach to widening participation in higher education and the policies that have been put in place to achieve this?
What are the working-class young peoples' experiences, at the three schools, of secondary school, and how, and in what ways, do they perceive these experiences to inform their ideas about future educational and career opportunities?

What aspirations for the future do the young people involved in the research have, and what educational and career opportunities do they believe are available to them (including higher education)?

To what extent do the working-class young people in the research feel parents/teachers/careers advisors and others have an influence on the decisions they are making about their futures?

1.1 Researching Higher Education and Social Class: Bringing in the Personal

In common with other feminist researchers, I have chosen to research that which is closest to my own experience (Armstead, 1995). My interest in education and social class, stems from my own experiences of higher education as a working-class woman. Lynch and O’Neill (1994) have written about how education for working-class people is often fraught with dilemmas and contradictions:

"Working class people who succeed in the education system have to abandon certain features of their background class habitus in a way that is not really true for other socially mobile groups. Once educated they will cease to be working class in a way that a woman, no matter what her social position, will never cease to be a woman; a person who is black will never cease to be black, and those with a major physical disability will never be without it" (1994: 318)

However, far from ceasing to be working-class, I live, like Andy Medhurst (2000: 20), ‘in a space between’ and ‘on a cultural cusp’. I do not feel middle class, despite doing what I consider to be ‘middle class things’: like drinking
Earl Grey tea, reading ‘The Guardian’ newspaper and enjoying foreign language films! I did not do any of these things while growing up in my working class family. My continuing feeling of working-classness is played out in my regional accent, although I continually adapt this, depending on the situation I find myself in (Hey, 1997). I find that, like Diane Reay (1998a:14), I am ‘constantly evaluating and calculating to what extent, and with whom, I can reveal different aspects of self’.

While ‘class is an emotional business’ for those that live on the cusp between classes (Medhurst, 2000), social class seems to have all but disappeared from the political, as well as. the sociological agenda. The current dispassionate political debate surrounding ‘widening participation in higher education’ rarely explicitly talks in class terms, except when the working classes are demonised and problematised. The political language of widening participation, of ‘meritocracy’, ‘opportunity for all’, and ‘fairness’ reveal nothing of the educational and emotional struggles involved for many working-class people in accessing and experiencing higher education. To make class invisible, to talk in terms of a ‘classless society’ as politicians frequently do, to think that class does not matter, represents a historical stage in which the identity of the middle classes is assured (Skeggs, 1997b).

1.2 Defining Social Class: More Than a Question of Occupation?

Skeggs (1997b) has argued that the disappearance of class from feminist and other analyses, could be to do with the difficulty in defining it. For instance, do we mean class structure, identity, consciousness, action, and so on, when we speak of class? There are, and have been, a variety of ways in which class has been defined. Rosemary Crompton (1998: 11) has identified three different meanings of the class concept:

‘Class’ as prestige, status, culture or ‘lifestyles’,
‘Class’ as structured inequality (related to the possession of economic and power resources,
‘Classes’ as actual or potential social and political actors.
Sociologists have often paid considerable attention to class-differentiated lifestyles, and issues to do with consumption (see Warde, 1994). A second common use of the ‘class’ concept Crompton (1998) argues, is as a general description of structures of material inequality, reflected in differential access to economic and power resources. A common basis for classification is occupation. The best known British social class scheme is probably the Registrar General’s that was first used in the 1911 Census, and remained the UK’s official class scheme up to 1998 (Roberts, 2001). The old Registrar General’s scheme grouped the population into six classes on the basis of occupation, grouped in terms of skill levels (I, Professional, II Managerial and Technical, IIIN Skilled non-manual, IIIIm Skilled manual, IV Partly skilled, V Unskilled). The Dearing Report into higher education (NCIHE, 1997) uses the Registrar General’s classification, highlighting the low proportion of social class IV and V students who participate in higher education.

There have been a number of problems in defining social class in terms of occupation. Nicola Charles asks:

“Is an unemployed actor to be considered in the same class as an unemployed bricklayer? Does unemployment, or housewifery, transform a person’s class identity? Does a university student with middle-class parents become working-class if s/he takes a holiday job packing cakes in a local bakery” (1990:49).

Not only are there difficulties in classifying jobs and those who are (un)employed, the position of women has often been problematic. Many theories of class have been based on stratification theory, which sees the family as the unit of stratification. The position of the unit in the system of stratification is taken as that of the (usually male) head of the household; with the class position of married women assumed to be the same as that of their husband. There are many problems with this theory, not least the idea that women and men if they are married or cohabiting necessarily share the same class position. Within households, research has shown that women and children do not necessarily have the same access to resources, such as food and money, as men (Charles, 1990).
‘Classes’ have also been identified as actual or potential social forces, or social actors, which have the capacity to transform society. From the French Revolution and before, ‘classes’—particularly the lower classes—have been regarded as a possible threat to the established order (Crompton, 1998).

Class analyses based on employment, income and wealth, also reveal little of the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs people have about social class. Valerie Walkerdine and her colleagues (2001) argue that, ‘class is not something that is simply produced economically. It is performed, marked, written on minds and bodies’. Many conventional accounts of class fail to consider how class is lived, how people feel and experience class. Annette Kuhn argues:

“Class is not just about the way you talk, or dress, or furnish your home, it is not just about the job you do or how much money you make doing it; nor is it merely about whether or not you have A levels or went to university, nor which university you went to. Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being” (1995: 98).

The research, is therefore concerned to explore what social class means to young working-class people, and the educational and career opportunities they believe are available to them, at a time when class is increasingly seen to be irrelevant (for debates about class and inequality see for example, Lee and Turner, 1996).

1.3 Pierre Bourdieu: Social Class and the Forms of Capital

It seems to me that class analyses need to be based on economic, as well as, social and cultural aspects of how class is lived and experienced. The French theorist Pierre Bourdieu, allows us to move beyond the either/or of seeing class as purely economic or purely socio-cultural.

Throughout the thesis, I have drawn on the work of Bourdieu, especially his concept of ‘Capital’. The forms of ‘Capital’ Bourdieu talks about are
economic, cultural, social and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1997). Bourdieu suggests a model of class which is based on ‘capital’ movements through social space. The structure of this space is given by the distribution of the various forms of ‘capital’, by the distribution of their properties, properties which are capable of conferring strength, power and consequently profit on their holder (Skeggs, 1997b). The four forms of capital are:

1. Economic Capital: this includes income, wealth, financial inheritances and monetary assets.

2. Cultural Capital: this can exist in three forms-in an embodied state, that is in the form of long-lasting dispositions (or habitus) of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods; and in the institutionalized state, resulting in such things as educational qualifications.

3. Social Capital: resources based on connections, networks and group membership. This is capital generated through relationships.

4. Symbolic Capital: this is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate. Legitimation is the key mechanism in the conversion to power.

Alongside economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital, Diane Reay (2004) has also drawn attention to and further developed the concept of emotional capital in her own work on mothers’ involvement in their children’s education. Unlike the other four forms of capital Bourdieu talks about, emotional capital has been theorized in a gendered way and is seen as a resource women have in greater abundance than men. This can be seen in the ways in which women take responsibility for maintaining both the practical and emotional aspects of family relationships. For many of the working-class women in Reay’s (2004) research, who had negative personal experiences of schooling, it was difficult
to generate resources of emotional capital for their child to draw on if they were experiencing difficulties in school:

"the ability to distance oneself from one’s immediate emotional experience is the prerogative of those who have readily available a range of emotional options, who are not overwhelmed by emotional necessity and intensity, and can therefore approach their own self and emotions with the same detached mode that comes from accumulated emotional competence" (Illouz, 1997:56 in Reay, 2004).

The ability to ‘distance oneself from one’s immediate emotional experience’ is a skill more readily available to those from the middle classes. However, as Reay (2004) argues from her own research, negative emotions do not always result in negative educational repercussions for children. This certainly seems to reflect some of the experiences of the young people I interviewed, and is discussed at greater length in chapter four. Embodied cultural capital also denotes particular styles or modes of presentation, including speech, forms of social etiquette and competence, as well as degree of confidence and self-assurance (Allatt, 1993) and is further discussed in chapters six and seven.

1.4 Those Involved in the Research

The research focuses on 14 and 15 year olds in three secondary schools in England. Altogether I talked to 70 young people in year 10 at the three schools; Kingsbridge School, a single sex girls’ school and Springfield School and Chantry School, which are both co-educational schools. All three schools are located in urban areas of large cities. How the research was carried out is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two and Appendix 1 gives details about the 3 schools involved in the research. There is a growing literature on the experiences of working-class people who have ‘made it’ to university (Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003), as well as, constructions of higher education by working-class people who are not currently participating in higher education (Archer and Hutchings, 2000). The experiences of working-class people on access to higher education courses have also been examined (Warmington, 2003; Brine and Waller, 2004). Although there is some research on
constructions of higher education by post-16 working-class and middle-class students in further education (Reay, 1998; Pugsley, 1998), there seems to be a dearth of research on school students’ ideas about higher education.

The research was carried out at three very different schools, in terms of location, and student population, in terms of gender and ethnic background. These schools were chosen to try and reflect differences in working-class experiences, as feminists and others have stressed the importance of considering multiple social identities and inequalities, and the inter-relatedness of class, gender and ethnicity (Archer, 2003). However, the overwhelming concern in the sociology of education, current social policy, and the popular and broadsheet press, has been with the educational ‘failure’ of (mainly White) working-class boys (see Delamont, 2000). There have been exceptions to this, with feminist researchers examining the educational experiences of working-class White (Skeggs, 1997b), Asian (Shain, 2003) and African-Caribbean (Mirza, 1992) young women.

1.5 Widening Access to Higher Education and the Wider Public Debate

The desirability or otherwise, of widening access to higher education, and arguments over the funding and expansion of universities, have not only been the concern of politicians and policy makers. In the national press, stories and articles surrounding widening access to higher education are rarely out of the news. Far from being positive about access issues however, they have largely reflected wider concerns about ‘standards’ and fears surrounding the ‘dumbing down’ of degrees.

It is interesting that attacks on the widening participation agenda have overwhelmingly come from those privileged ‘middle Englanders’, who have personally benefited from a university education themselves. Recent comments reported in the national press by, amongst others, the president of Trinity College, Oxford University, Michael Beloff QC, (The Guardian, October 5 2004), also seem to reflect a wider snobbery about exactly what is a ‘good’
university and what constitutes a ‘good’ academic degree course. In *The Guardian* article it is reported;

“Mr Beloff claimed that the rebranding of polytechnics into universities, the abundance of ‘Mickey Mouse’ courses and the focus on improving access through targets all pointed towards a potential devaluation of university degrees” (*The Guardian*, October 5 2004).

Following comments made by Margaret Hodge, the former Minister for lifelong learning and higher education, about ‘Mickey Mouse’ courses (see *The Guardian*, January 13 2003), the term has rarely been out of the news. Although Margaret Hodge refused to ‘name and shame’ specific courses, or institutions, she did make clear that she was referring to degrees that might not have relevance to the labour market. As someone who has not only studied Women’s Studies, but studied it at a ‘new’ post-1992 university, I cannot help but feel that comments made about ‘Mickey Mouse’ courses by Margaret Hodge et al., refer to people ‘like me’. While Reay (1998a) and Skeggs (1997a) have talked about the painful and difficult experiences of being working-class and educated at established pre-1992 universities, (for example, Skeggs (1997a: 130) talks about going to “an upper/middle-class university that often felt more like a finishing school”), I wonder if many working-class people at ‘new’ post-1992 universities share my continuing feelings of not being ‘good enough’, of having ‘failed’ because we did not get the grades to go to ‘old’ established universities?

Although postgraduate study took me to a red brick university, and then to an elite, very traditional university, I am constantly reminded of my educational past, as well as, my working-classness. I have lost count of the amount of times I have been asked ‘what did you study at undergraduate level’, and more ominously ‘where did you do your degree?’ The worst, and certainly most memorable response to this was, during a student and lecturers social night out, when a senior male academic abruptly ended our conversation and walked away when I informed him which university I had been to. I felt, and continue to feel, like Skeggs (1997a: 130), “afraid to speak in case I gave (give) ‘myself’ (that is my classed self) away”: 
“Being the object of the judgements of others, whose values are legitimated, is a very uncomfortable position to occupy. This, however, was a very contradictory experience for I did not really value the people who were making the judgements. They were full of pretensions, a form of behaviour I had learnt to ridicule. So there I was intimidated by people who I didn’t rate. But this felt even worse because they still made me feel insecure” (Skeggs, 1997a: 130).

1.6 Overview of Chapters

Chapter Two details how the research was carried out at the three schools involved in the research. Issues of access, privacy and confidentiality are discussed, as well as, data collection methods and how data was analysed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ‘feminist research’, and what it means to bring personal values and experiences to the research process.

Chapter Three addresses the policy context of widening participation, and looks at New Labour’s policies in particular. Policy documents The Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000) and The Future of Higher Education (DfES, 2003), form the major focus of the chapter. The chapter also considers the main focus of higher education policy under New Labour, that of education for the economy and the need for those from working-class backgrounds to ‘raise their aspirations’.

Chapters four, five, six and seven reveal the findings about the research, based on the experiences of the research participants.

Chapter Four, considers the importance of families, especially mothers and older siblings in the decisions young people are beginning to make about their post-16 careers. The chapter examines the importance of locality and the local area for the young people in the research, in terms of information and guidance about possible educational futures.

Chapter Five explores the role of schools in providing information and guidance to young people about their possible future educational and career opportunities. The role of setting and streaming is considered, in terms of the
structuring of opportunities, as well as, young people’s own experiences of school and how this affects ideas about post-compulsory education.

Chapter Six looks at the information and knowledge that the working-class young people in the research have about higher education, including ideas and perceptions about student finance, as well as, cultural understandings about universities and university students. The ‘value’ of higher education, in terms of qualifications and ‘good’ jobs, is considered alongside young people’s perceptions about student debt and being ‘poor’.

Chapter Seven, “I’ll Take it One Step at a Time”, explores the importance of the ‘here and now’ for many of the young people in the research. Concerns about GCSE examinations and results, and more immediate worries and anxieties, mean that ideas about further/higher education are quite vague and largely rooted in the distant future.

Chapter Eight is a discussion of the findings of the research, focusing on young people’s use of social resources and networks, and future educational and career possibilities.

Implications and recommendations for policy are discussed in chapter nine. This final chapter raises a number of questions for policy and practice, including concerns about university ‘taster’ days and the cultural agenda of the current government. The role of further education in widening participation to higher education, as well as, careers advice in schools is also considered.
Chapter Two

Researching Young People’s Lives and Experiences: Methodology

2.0 Introduction

This chapter explores how I both experienced, and conducted my research on young people and their ideas about higher education and future lives. As research is an ‘intensely practical exercise’ (Edwards and Ribbens, 1998: 1), the chapter is overwhelmingly concerned with the practical aspects of ‘doing’ my research. As Walford (1991) has argued, it is only through ‘doing’ research, and experiencing the ‘messiness’ and everyday routines of conducting research, that the careful, step-by-step model of the research process that is presented in many textbooks, can be seen to be unrealistic. Below, I explore how my research with young people was carried out and experienced, revealing the very real problems, frustrations, as well as, joys of conducting the research.

2.1 Researching Young People: Issues Surrounding Access, Privacy and Confidentiality

There is a growing literature on the ethical and methodological dilemmas facing researchers conducting research with children and young people (Morrow and Richards, 1996; Mauthner, 1997; Thomas and O’Kane, 1998). Although much of this research is concerned with much younger children than those I have chosen to research, many of the issues raised were also relevant to the dilemmas I faced when researching 14 and 15 year old young people.
2.1a Gaining Access and Consent

Unlike Reay (1998c; 1998d), who talks about conducting part of her research at Milner school, a school where her children had previously attended and where she has also taught, I am not a teacher and have not had contact with a school since leaving my school 6th form ten years ago. I therefore initially anticipated that I would have a great deal of difficulty in gaining physical access to three schools for my research. However, I was granted a meeting with the head of year ten at Kingsbridge Girls' School, because I had a friend who was also a teacher at the school. After initially writing to numerous suitable schools in the two research areas, outlining my study, I received positive responses from Springfield School and Chantry School. I was invited to each school to further discuss my ideas and proposals. Through talking to the headteacher at Springfield School and the head of careers at Chantry School, I was granted permission to interview young people in year ten.

While the processes and difficulties in gaining access to research participants are not restricted to those conducting research with children, the issue of 'informed consent' is a specific concern when researching children and young people. When research is conducted with children, especially young children, 'informed consent' often comes from parents, who decide whether or not to allow their child to participate. When older children and teenagers participate in research, consent is perhaps not such a clear, straightforward issue. At Chantry school and Kingsbridge Girls' School, I met the students that were to be interviewed, in pairs, and explained to each pair what the research was about and made sure each pair was entirely happy with being interviewed before proceeding. At Springfield School, I talked to all thirty students that were to be involved in the research together in one room, explaining about the interviews and the research. Letters were also sent home to the parents of these students. Most students appeared to be quite happy to take part, especially as it often meant missing one of their least favourite lessons!

Access is also often an issue for those indirectly, or more distantly involved in research. Lee (1993), writing about the access process in research on sensitive
topics, importantly distinguishes between physical and social access. While he argues that physical access is a precondition of social access, the latter can remain problematic, even when physical access has been granted. The issue of social access was an issue for my research and was a concern throughout. I was concerned that despite being given physical access to the school and year ten students by the initial three teachers, or ‘gatekeepers’, other members of teaching staff might not be quite so willing to agree to students in their class leaving their lessons to be interviewed. However, apart from a couple of incidents at Springfield School, where GCSE coursework had to be completed in a certain lesson, meaning a small number of interviews had to be delayed, or re-arranged, I did not experience any difficulty in interviewing students during lesson time.

2.1b Privacy and Confidentiality

I would also concur with Mauthner (1997), that negotiating privacy in order to talk to research participants can also be problematic, especially in schools, where there might be a shortage of space. During my time at the three schools, I experienced varying degrees and levels of disruption and interruptions. Conducting interviews in the counselling room at Springfield School, sometimes proved to be problematic. Although I was of course grateful that I had been granted access to the schools, space was to a certain extent, a problem. Although the headteacher at Springfield school had kindly allocated me the counselling room to conduct the interviews, the room was frequently used and I was restricted in the days and times I was able to conduct the interviews. Elwood and Martin (2000) have discussed the significance of the social and political dynamics of different spaces for interviews, and the implications for participants involved in research. Although Elwood and Martin (2000) importantly consider issues such as choosing places for interviews that participants can find and are conducive to conversation, they ignore their own more powerful positioning in the research process. In terms of their own research, they talk about being able to choose locations in which their own interviews could take place, as well as being able to negotiate with those they were interviewing. The authors recognise the potential power
imbalances involved in the research process between the researcher and the researched, but fail to recognise power relations between the researcher and 'gatekeepers' and others who have granted access to a research site. I did not have any choice in where I could conduct my interviews, and the small counselling room was not always particularly conducive to conversation. The room was next to the main hall, which was used for drama lessons, and also doubled as a music room on a number of occasions! It was often difficult to hear the young people speak and I often had to turn the volume level up on my Dictaphone and ask the students to speak more loudly. Many of the students were also unaware where the counselling room was and after being excused from their lesson had to ask teachers or secretarial staff exactly where it was. I was also acutely aware that some of the young people were not comfortable with being interviewed in the counselling room. Because the counselling room was quite small, I did find some of the young people found eye contact difficult. The room was small and the young people had to sit near me. Although I could not do anything about where I conducted the interviews, I did consider that some of the difficulties experienced by the young people in talking to me and finding it difficult to make eye contact might have something to do with talking to me as a stranger, and initially conducting individual interviews. I changed to using paired interviews after conducting fourteen individual interviews at Springfield School.

On many occasions I also felt I was invading the space and privacy of teachers, especially at Chantry and Kingsbridge Schools, where I was interviewing in teachers' own rooms. I was more than a little embarrassed that the head of year ten at Kingsbridge School and another teacher at Chantry School would knock before entering their own room!

Aside from the problem of physical privacy for me and the difficulties in sometimes being able to find a quiet space in order to interview the students, was the issue of privacy and confidentiality for the young people being interviewed. I informed all students that I would tape all interviews, and that I would be the only one to have access to these tapes. I also encouraged students
to choose alternative names for themselves, to ensure anonymity. The names of
the three schools are, of course, also pseudonyms.

2.2 Springfield School and the Initial Pilot Study

Springfield School was the first school I gained access to, and was where I
conducted my pilot study. Springfield School is a mixed sex comprehensive
with around 1000 pupils, and is situated in a city in South West England (see
Appendix 1 for information on the three schools involved in the research).

I conducted a small pilot study with nine mixed sex year ten pupils in July
2001. I had chosen these nine particular students to interview, after meeting
them in an earlier exercise I had observed in the school where an LEA official
involved in The Excellence Challenge (See chapter three for New Labour’s
higher education policies) had come in to question some year ten pupils about
their ideas on higher education. My reasons for focusing on year ten pupils
were twofold. On a practical level, I thought there would be less disruption to
the young people if they were interviewed in year ten, and not in their final
GCSE year. Secondly, I had anticipated that because the school no longer had a
sixth form, young people would be considering their options and what they
were intending to do by the time they had reached year ten.

During the pilot stage of the research, students were interviewed in three
groups of three, using semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted
approximately one hour. All interviews were taped and transcribed by me.
While the pilot interviews went well in the sense that the themes and issues I
wanted to ‘test out’ worked well in practice, I was unsure whether the mixed
sex small group interviews were effective. I had anticipated using small group
interviews for the main body of the research, as I imagined these would ensure
a more informal atmosphere for the students. While the pilot interviews were
informal and most students seemed to enjoy talking to me and the other
students in the group, I was concerned that a small number of students were
very quiet and seemed unwilling to say anything at all. This inability or
unwillingness to talk might have been for a number of reasons, but I was left
feeling that small group interviews might not be the most appropriate way to talk to the students. It was at this time that I decided to change from small group interviews to individual interviews for the main study.

2.3 The participants in the main study

I interviewed twenty young women at Kingsbridge School and twenty male and female students at Chantry School for the main study. These students were chosen randomly to be involved in the research. At Kingsbridge School, it was left to the head of year ten to choose twenty mixed ability students from the whole year group to be interviewed. Students are rigidly streamed and set by ‘ability’ at Kingsbridge School, and are placed in either the ‘red’ or ‘green’ group on entry to the school, depending on perceived ability. At Chantry School I was given a printed list of all students in year ten and I picked twenty male and female students from this list to be interviewed. These students were also of mixed ‘ability’. I ended up interviewing thirty young people at Springfield School. I was originally given a list of twenty male and female students who the headteacher perceived as having the ‘potential’ to enter higher education in the future. This ‘potential’ had been based on teacher recommendations and early predictions that these students were likely to achieve at least 5 good GCSEs at grade A*-C the following year. Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) data were also used as criteria for selection. I did have reservations about only involving these specific students, for a number of reasons. Firstly, I did think the targeting of students based on teacher recommendations and expectations could be problematic. Literature surrounding setting and the grouping of students based on their perceived ‘ability’ as well as teacher-student relations (Abraham, 1995; Boaler, 1997; Wright, 1986) illustrates the ways in which streaming and setting based on teacher expectations and perceptions of a student’s ability, creates and maintains inequalities, dictating the opportunities and options available to young people both at school and after they leave school. As the young people I was to interview were mainly in the top sets for Maths, English and Science, I was aware that those that were not perceived to have the ‘ability’ to enter higher education, were not thought to be capable of gaining five good GCSE
grades, and were not in the top sets, were effectively having opportunities closed to them.

I was also concerned that because Springfield School was actively involved in The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000) (see Chapter three for a more in-depth look at current higher educational policy) and in trying to get more young people from the school to consider higher education as an option for them in the future, this was the reason why the headteacher wanted me to only interview those students in top sets. Lee (1993) argues that although there is a wealth of literature surrounding the issue of access, there has been little concern with why a request to grant access was granted or refused. Although I did gain access to Springfield School, I was also aware access was granted because the school was involved in initiatives to address a particular characteristic of the school – that its students’ rate of progression to higher education is the lowest in the city. Students at Springfield were well aware of the fact that few young people from their school progress to higher education, and on more than one occasion while interviewing, a student informed me of this fact. This was largely articulated to me by students who had positive orientations towards higher education, and who saw themselves as possibly being able to ‘break the mould’ in the future by accessing university. On more than occasion during my interviews at Springfield, a student I interviewed a further ten students at Springfield School, who were not on the original list of twenty given to me by the headteacher and who were not in top sets for English, maths and science.

2.4 Interviewing

I talked to seventy young people in all, with all interviews recorded on a dictaphone. I used semi-structured interviews, based around a number of themes. A number of questions surrounded each theme. General themes included, school, further education, higher education, family, jobs/careers, identities. I interviewed all of the young people at school and was permitted to interview them during lesson time. Although for my pilot study I had conducted small group interviews, I had decided to use individual interviews
for my main study. I had found the small group interviews to be quite effective and fun and the young people seemed to find it quite easy to talk about their future educational and job aspirations in front of their peers. However, I decided that for my main study individual interviews might be more appropriate. As students were being interviewed during lesson time I did think it would be more acceptable if only one student was missing from a lesson, rather than a small group. I had also found that although the small group interviews had been quite effective, a couple of students had been a lot quieter than the others and had not contributed to the conversations. In individual interviews I did not think it would be quite so easy to remain quiet and not say anything. On a practical level, as already mentioned, lack of space in some of the rooms where I conducted the interviews, would have made it impossible to carry out group interviews.

After conducting fourteen of the individual interviews at Springfield School, I decided that perhaps paired interviews would be a more effective way of getting the young people to talk to me. During the interviews I also felt that my gender had an impact both on how the young people viewed me, and the responses they gave me. As a young woman myself, I did find it easier to talk to the girls and generally, they were far more enthusiastic and willing to talk to me than the boys. I certainly felt as Measor (1985) did in her own school based research that the data I received from the girls was different to that of the boys, especially in the sense that generally the young women I interviewed were more open and talkative than the young men. I hoped that by conducting same sex paired interviews that the boys would be more comfortable and communicative. I continued with the paired interviews after I finished my research at Springfield School, and went into Kingsbridge Girls’ School and Chantry School.

2.5 Dilemmas of Feminist Research: Is Being a Feminist Enough?

Since about the age of seventeen, I have proudly identified myself as a feminist. However, it has largely proved unwise to reveal this fact in conversation to anyone outside your immediate group of friends. Further
admitting you have studied Women's Studies at university has proven to be
another conversation stopper. Either that, or you wait for the tirade of
supposedly 'funny' retorts from men about how they also like studying
women, and questioning whether Women’s Studies involves anything more
than cooking and flower arranging. This experience of sexism was what first
attracted me to Radical Feminism and American writers like Andrea Dworkin
and Catharine Mackinnon, who have written with such rage and passion about
patriarchy (see for example, Dworkin, 1997). However, my ambivalence about
my own class positioning and subjective feelings about class, has drawn me
away from Radical Feminism. While Mahony and Zmroczek (1997) as radical
feminists interested in social class, have argued against seeing radical feminism
as essentially middle-class and uninterested in differences between women,
this is exactly how I have come to see radical feminism. As I have become
more 'class aware', through a mixture of personal experience and reading and
studying certain books and university modules, (for example, Mahoney and
Zmroczek (1997)), some of the earlier debates of 'second wave feminism',
especially surrounding the sexual objectification of women by men and male
violence have become personally less important. A persistent theme of radical
feminism is the socially constructed or innate aggression of male psyches and
men's propensity to be driven by hatred of women. While radical feminists like
Andrea Dworkin, Susan Griffin, and Susan Brownmiller importantly spoke out
about issues to do with rape, pornography and other 'taboo' subjects (See
Humm, (1992) Feminisms: A Reader, for an early introduction to radical
feminism and other feminisms), it often feels that differences between women
(and men for that matter) are disregarded and ignored within radical feminism,
with all women seen as the potential 'victims' of male violence and aggression.
Issues to do with class and 'race', I do not feel are adequately addressed within
radical feminism and by radical feminists.

I have come to the research process with these experiences, and what it means
for me, to be a 'feminist'. From the start of the research process I have often
declared, rather grandly, like Raisborough (2000), that I was 'doing feminist
research'. However, debates amongst feminists and others have continued as to
exactly what constitutes 'feminist research' and how, and in what ways, it
differs from non-feminist research. As there is no singular feminist theory, it has been argued that there is no one answer to the question ‘what is feminist research?’, and many contested issues of method, methodology and epistemology remain (Ramazanoglu, 1989; Maynard, 1994). In contrast, Harding (1987) has argued that it is possible to differentiate between feminist and non-feminist research, and she argues that it is methodology and epistemology that helps distinguish between the two. Gilbert (1994) has similarly argued that it is possible to differentiate between feminist and non-feminist research and to identify broad methodological concerns within feminist debates. These include critiques of objectivity and the need to examine and make visible the relationship between researcher and researched.

2.6 The Role of Personal Experience and Values in Research

Experience has been, and continues to be, problematic for feminists. The focus of early feminism was to encourage women to speak about their experiences, in order to challenge the silencing of women’s lives and experiences by men (Maynard, 1994). Feminists argued that traditional social science was based only on men’s experiences, that the questions asked about social life only reflected the social experiences that were characteristic for men (Harding, 1987). Feminists were challenging the idea that knowledge comes from nowhere. It matters what questions are asked, as well as, what questions are not asked. ‘The feminist standpoint’ is a position that has been adopted by some feminists to prioritize ‘women’s experiences’. Standpoint theory centres on the claim that all knowledge springs from experience and that women’s experience carries with it special knowledge and that this knowledge is necessary oppression (Skeggs, 1997b). Feminist standpoint theorists argue that ‘women’s experiences, informed by feminist theory, provide a potential grounding for more complete and less distorted knowledge claims than do men’s’ (Harding 1987: 184/85), this is because Jaggar argues:

"Women's subordinate status means that, unlike men, women do not have an interest in mystifying reality and so are likely to develop a clearer and more trustworthy understanding of the world. A representation of reality from the standpoint of women is more
objective and unbiased than the prevailing representations that reflect the standpoint of men” (Jaggar 1983: 384).

Although standpoint theory has been attacked on many levels, Skeggs (1997b) argues that standpoint theory has to be seen as a product of its time, a time when women were claiming universal oppression to establish their place on an academic agenda. While feminist standpoint may be a product of its time, the importance of listening to, and hearing ‘women’s experiences’ is still evident in much feminist research. The experiences of both the researcher and the researched have also been a consideration in much feminist work. The experiences a researcher might have had might affect the research they are conducting, the questions they ask, the relationships with those they are researching. For some feminists, research involves the ‘weaving’ of biographies of all those involved in the research process (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993).

While feminists have argued that it would be impossible to abandon the concept of experience altogether (Skeggs 1997a), it remains problematic. One of the problems with experience has been with the idea that it somehow equates with ‘truth’. Some feminists have argued that it is only by listening to women’s experiences that the ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ of their lives can be revealed. However, we do not have direct access to the truth, the experiences we have are not pure, they have already been interpreted by us. Maynard argues:

“To begin with there is no such thing as ‘raw’ experience. People’s accounts of their lives are culturally embedded. Their descriptions are, at the same time, a construction of the events that occurred, together with an interpretation of them” (Maynard 1994:23).

Riessman (1993) argues that feminists can not ‘give voice’ to women and their experiences. ‘Giving voice’ implies that it is possible for researchers to represent women’s experiences without interpreting them. We do not have direct access to another’s experience, we can only deal with ambiguous representations of that experience, in talk, text, interaction.
‘Giving voice’ to women’s experiences as advocated by many feminists also assumes that women have a complete understanding of the many ways in which they might be oppressed. However, is this the case? The research Glucksmann (1994) conducted with women assemblers is an example of this. ‘Divisions in knowledge’ meant that Glucksmann could not rely on the women’s own understanding of their situation as assembly workers. A central part of the women’s subordination was that they only had a partial knowledge of the assembly line process:

“Assemblers usually operated only one or two machines and were only given enough information to these. They had little knowledge of the process as a whole or of the functions of other grades of workers, especially of those higher than themselves in the hierarchy. Thus one clear instance of gender inequality on the shop floor was that of knowledge: men controlled the machinery, which included knowing more about the production process, while women operated it. This lack of formal knowledge was further compounded by the fact of being tied to a particular place in the line all day and not moving around the different parts of the factory: the factory line also subdivided women’s experiences” (Glucksmann 1994:157).

Because the women were not in a position to give an overall picture of their experiences in the assembly line process, because it was largely ‘hidden’, Glucksmann (1994) could not rely on the women to ‘tell it like it was’. Thus, some feminists have argued that representing women’s experiences is limited because it may not be apparent to women themselves how, and in what ways they are oppressed (Riessman 1993), for, if it were apparent would people not try to change their circumstances?

Experience and the role of personal values were an issue throughout my research. I brought values to the research, I would have found it impossible not to do so. I started the research because of my own feelings and experiences of higher education as a working-class woman. However, it was more than this, as, “in feminist research the “problem” is frequently a blend of an intellectual question and a personal trouble” (Reinharz, 1992: 260). Although the starting point for my research was my own experience and this was what had first motivated me to consider doing research in this area, the “problem” I identified outside my experience was to ask why there are so few working-class people in
higher education, what happens to young working-class people before they reach this stage in their education? I was also intent on letting those who are usually silenced to speak, to incorporate a working-class perspective on education and educational inequalities (Lynch and O’Neill, 1994). I wanted to ‘give voice’ to those I was researching. Bringing values and experiences to the research was not only inevitable, it was positive in the sense that my experiences have helped me see and recognise things that others would prefer to ignore or overlook (Skeggs, 1997b). The virtual disappearance of social class in academia, and academic debates does not necessarily signal its actual disappearance or irrelevance in being able to explain the complexities and inequalities of people’s lives. However, it has only been through my own experiences that I have been able to ‘see’ this.

Bringing certain experiences to the research did mean that there were many similarities between the experiences of the young people I was interviewing and myself. The secondary school I had attended whilst growing up was especially similar in size, and pupil intake to Springfield School. Comparisons could also be drawn in that only a minority of pupils from both the school I went to and the schools involved in the research, go on to university. The gendered (cleaner, shop assistant, factory worker, clerical worker, plumber, electrician) and classed occupations of parents of those I was interviewing reflected the occupations of my own parents and those of the friends and other people I knew at school. I also felt that I identified with the seriousness with which many of the young women I was interviewing contemplated their futures, in terms of the need to work hard, get good grades and get ‘good’ jobs. I also identified with the seeming lack of confidence some of the young men and women had in their own abilities, believing themselves to be incapable of getting good grades, and not being ‘good’ enough to go to university.

Barbara Du Bois has talked about the possibility of bias in bringing value and experiences to the research process:

“The closer our subject matter to our own life and experience, the more we can probably expect our own beliefs about the world to enter into
Diane Reay (1996a) has explored the dangers of proximity in her own research on women’s involvement in their children’s primary schooling, arguing there is a thin dividing line between identification and exploitation. By identifying with those we are researching there is the danger that we can end up mixing up our own personal history with respondents whose experiences are in fact very different. Reay (1996b) has argued elsewhere that reflexivity is about giving as full and honest an account of the research process as possible, and it is more than articulating who we are. Reay (1996b: 443) sees reflexive practice as constituting “a process of uncovering/recognizing the difference your differences make”. During the research I did find dealing with the differences between those I was researching and myself more difficult than understanding and dealing with the similarities. Although I understood the problems and dangers of proximity, I could not ignore many of the similarities between the experiences of the young people I was interviewing and myself. Skeggs (1997a) talks about moving between an awareness of similarities and differences while conducting her ethnographic study of young, working-class women on a further education course. Although Skeggs (1997b: 34) began her research recognizing a strong similarity between the women she was researching and the positions she had herself previously occupied, she was also aware of being unable to put herself in the young women’s place as, “it was a place I had left”. As an academic, with more economic and cultural capital than those she was researching, it would have been impossible for Skeggs to deny the difference her differences made.

My age, experience of further and higher education, my social and financial independence similarly made it impossible to deny many of the differences between myself and those I interviewed. I did not always identify with those I was researching. I became aware during the interviews that I had brought certain assumptions with me about what it was to be a woman and my feelings about class. For example, I was surprised during some of the interviews that many of the young people not only considered themselves to be middle-class
or entirely classless, but also many of the girls (as well as many boys) considered themselves to be living in an equal society, where it was believed working hard was all that was required to succeed. Although some young people did consider themselves to be working-class, I had not expected this response. I had assumed before starting the research that I would identify with the young people, and this identification would be around issues of gender and class. I imagined in some way that they would affirm my own experiences of what it was to be ‘working-class’.

Reay (1996b) has also importantly noted the significant role emotions play in the research process. Whether we identify or dis-identify with those we research, our responses to what respondents tell us are not just intellectual, they are emotional. The certain sense of identification I felt with many of the accounts given to me by those I was interviewing, had much to do with the strong sense of connection I continue to have with my working-class background.

2.7 Power and Rapport in Research Interviews

Much feminist writing on the ethics of research has focused on the nature of power relations within the research process, and the potential which exists for exploitation and abuse (Riddell, 1989). Because of women’s general experience of gender subordination, it has been suggested that women interviewing women is the ideal way to conduct interviews in a non-hierarchical way. Ann Oakley writing about interviewing women, argued that ‘a feminist interviewing women is by definition “inside” the culture and participating in that which she is observing’ and that given shared gender ‘social distance can be minimal’ (Oakley, 1981: 57). Along similar lines, Devault (1990: 102) has argued that she can listen to other women ‘as a woman, filling in from experience to help me understand the things that are incompletely said’.
However, some feminists have argued that despite women’s shared understandings of oppression, other social attributes also contribute to different power relationships in women interviewing women. Riessman (1987) has argued that gender is not always enough, and her own experiences as a White, middle-class woman interviewing a working-class, Puerto Rican woman demonstrate this. Riessman recognises that:

“Although the interviewer is sensitive to the issue of gender roles, she does not appreciate the particular conflicts that gender roles create for a Puerto Rican woman, their significance to Marta, or the relationship between gender roles and culture conflict” (Riessman, 1987: 183)

The lack of shared experience between the middle-class, White researcher and the working-class Puerto Rican interviewee has, Riessman (1987:183) argues, “created barriers to understanding”. In this case, gender congruity is not enough to create shared meanings’. Further, others have questioned how desirable it is to be so close to those we are interviewing (Ribbens, 1989).

Stacey (1988) argues that the reciprocal and egalitarian approach to research relationships that is advocated by feminists like Oakley is problematic. Stacey comments:

“I find myself wondering whether the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation..... Precisely because ethnographic research depends upon human relationship, engagement, and attachment, it places research subjects at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer” (Stacey 1988: 22/23).

Stacey (1988) argues that the fact that the researcher is also far freer to leave the research situation than the researched, this can compound feelings of exploitation and betrayal by research participants. Skeggs (1994) takes issue with Judith Stacey’s portrayal of research participants as passive victims and argues that Stacey overstates the power of the researcher. The young women in her research, Skeggs (1994: 88) argues “were not prepared to be exploited; just as they were able to resist most things which did not promise economic or cultural reward, they were able to resist me”. The women in Skeggs’ study were not exploited, they had made the decision to become involved in the
study, just as they were able to decide to a great extent what aspects of themselves and their lives they were willing to reveal to Skeggs. Most importantly, I think Stacey’s argument that research participants are at risk of manipulation and betrayal is based on the assumption that the research being undertaken will necessarily mean as much to the research participants as it does to the researcher. The young people I interviewed seemed to make the most of it, and many saw my interviewing them as an opportunity to escape lessons they were not particularly fond of. For those I was interviewing, the research probably meant very little, it interfered with only a small part of their day, and it certainly did not affect their lives in any significant way.

I think another problem with Oakley’s account of interviewing women is her assumption that it is gender, and not another factor which might be creating the shared understandings between herself and the women. Shared understandings and ‘cosiness’ in interviews depend on the social relations between researcher and researched and is “often partly the result of shared social class and/or shared colour” (Phoenix 1994: 50). Ann Phoenix argues:

“The simultaneity of ‘race’, social class, gender, (assumed) sexuality and age make it extremely difficult to tease apart the aspects of the interviewer which are having an impact on the interviewee or on the power dynamics between interviewer and interviewee” (Phoenix, 1994: 56).

In my own interviews I was not able to determine why some interviews seemed to be better than others. Although I did enjoy many of the interviews with the young women more than the young men, and this was because they were generally more talkative and open with me, I could not conclude that this was due to our shared gender, especially as some of the young men were just as talkative and open with me and I thoroughly enjoyed some of these interviews.

In much feminist writing on interviewing there seems to be a great concern that a sense of rapport should be created between the interviewer and the interviewee. In Oakley’s (1981) account of interviewing, there is the assumption that once you have established rapport in the research interview,
this will remain a constant. I like the idea that there are “moments of rapport” in the interview (Luff, 1999). Luff explains:

“In the interview situation moments of rapport, as I term them, can develop, as aspects of each woman’s identity or experience are found to be shared, understood or mirrored. In the same interaction there may also be moments of dissonance or discomfort, a discovery of opposition or even hostility” (Luff 1999: 697).

I found ‘moments of rapport’ more adequately reflected my own research experience. As I did not know those I was researching before I actually interviewed them, and because I only interviewed each young person once, rapport was not always immediate (occasionally it was not established at all). I did not experience the levels of involvement experienced by Oakley (1981) in her research, although I did experience ‘moments of rapport’. As Phoenix (1994:57) argues, even if we disagree or dislike what an interviewee is telling us the accounts they give us are “not unitary and there are generally parts of their accounts with which researchers can feel in sympathy”.

2.8 Interviewing and ‘Telling It Like It Is?’

During the research, I decided to move from conducting individual interviews to paired interviews. I became increasingly dissatisfied with the balance of power within the interviews, and felt that I was leading and controlling the interviews too much. The shyness and/or unwillingness of some of the young people to talk during the individual interviews had led me to believe that by changing to paired interviews, they might be more willing to talk. I was aware that while long pauses or non-responses in individual interviews could mean the end of the interview, interviewing two young people together might make the interview less stilted, with the young people interacting more with me, as well as with each other (Lewis, 1992). Naively, I had imagined that my move to conducting paired interviews would solve all of my interviewing problems. However, this proved not to be the case. School trips, illness of a student, and the refusal by a teacher on a couple of occasions to allow a student to be interviewed, meant that interviews had to be delayed or re-arranged. I also continued to experience in some of the paired interviews an unwillingness for
students to talk openly, which I considered could be for a number of reasons. The relationship between the two participants and how well they knew each other might have affected what they were willing to reveal to me, as well as to each other in the interview. Although I tried to interview two people who were in the same form class together, and therefore would have spent much time together and would probably know each other quite well, this was not always possible. Shyness and feelings of awkwardness again, might have influenced what students told me. I also came to the conclusion that for some students, they might just not want to talk to me, and their unwillingness to talk would have been a factor whatever method I was using to try to find out about their lives. Ribbens (1989) argues that the balance of power in interviews will vary according to how participants came to be included in the research. Because the consent for the students to be involved in the research had come initially from parents and teachers, perhaps some of the unwillingness of students to talk had come from their unwillingness to participate in the research. However, the majority of students were willing to talk and seemed to enjoy it.

I had also naively assumed that by changing from individual to paired interviews, that interviewees would ‘tell it like it is’. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue that we should not treat people’s own accounts of their lives as unproblematic:

"In everyday dealings with each other, we do not take each other’s accounts at face value, unless we are totally naive; we question, disagree, bring in counter-examples, interpret, notice hidden agendas" (Holloway and Jefferson 2000:3)

Oakley (1981:41) has argued that in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. I found this argument too simplistic for a number of reasons. Although I wanted to conduct interviews in a similar non-hierarchical way to Oakley, I do not think this is always possible, even if it might be desirable. All research relationships are different. and Oakley was able to achieve a level of intimacy with the
repeat interviews she conducted with women experiencing motherhood, than I was able to achieve with my interviewees. Ribbens (1989) sees the accounts given by those being researched as being dependent on the different styles and levels of intimacy in research relationships. Although the interviewer may perceive they are acting and behaving in similar ways in all of their interviews, does this mean that all interviewees will experience the interview and react to the interview in similar ways? I would also argue the ‘goal about finding out about people’ in interviews, may remain exactly that: a goal. Adopting and achieving the levels of intimacy and egalitarianism Oakley prescribes, does not necessarily translate into finding out about the ‘realities’ of people’s lives.

Oakley’s (1981:48) claim that her decision to depart from conventional interviewing ethics was an “essential way of giving the subjective situation of women greater visibility” and a “strategy for documenting women’s own accounts of their lives”, also needs to be examined. Can we accept that in interviews people are necessarily ‘telling it like it is?’ Or do interviewees tell us what they think we as interviewers want to hear? While Oakley presumably views interviews as ‘natural’ and an unproblematic means of gaining access to the lives of the women she was interviewing, Measor (1985) sees interviewing as ‘unnatural’. While I would have liked to believe interviewing would have given me a complete insight into the lives of the young people I was interviewing, I would agree with Ribbens (1989), that interviews have to be seen as a particular type of social encounter.

Cornwell’s (1984) discussion of public and private accounts in interviews and the ‘best face’ phenomenon is interesting. Cornwell argues that when people find themselves in a new social situation where they are unsure of their ground, they become acutely concerned to manage their own conduct. For most people, talking to a stranger in an interview is precisely this type of new, ‘unnatural’ setting in which they need to develop coping strategies in order to deal with it. One of these coping strategies is the ‘best face’ phenomenon where interviewees seek to make the ‘right’ responses, while concealing privately held views which they deem may be unacceptable to others.
Interviewees while using the ‘right’ words and saying the ‘right’ things are not deliberately trying to mislead the interviewer, (although some may), they are reproducing culturally defined norms and rules for appropriate behaviour between strangers. Like Cornwell, I felt some of my interviews were examples of public accounts. Perhaps if I had conducted repeat interviews with the young people, there would have been a shift from public to private accounts as the young people began to trust me more. However, I am not convinced that even when more private accounts have been given, that interviewees always necessarily ‘tell it like it is’. Brannen (1988) argues in her study of ‘sensitive subjects’ that the ‘one-off’ nature of the interviews she conducted with husbands and wives experiencing marital difficulties, influenced disclosure patterns. Knowing they would never meet the interviewers again, and their desire for anonymity, provided the respondents with an opportunity to discharge their feelings. Along similar lines, Cotterill (1992) suggests some respondents find it easier to talk to the researcher precisely because of their status as a ‘friendly stranger’. My experiences of interviewing could be seen to reflect Cotterill’s idea of the ‘friendly stranger’. I had limited access to the lives of those I was interviewing and I recognized that there could not be the ‘transition to friendship’ that Oakley (1981) believes should develop between the interviewer and interviewee. The relationship I had with those I was interviewing was for the purpose of the research and would be terminated once the interviews were complete. The ‘one-off’ nature of the interviews I carried out with the young people might have allowed them to disclose certain things that they would not otherwise have done, however, I can not say for sure.

2.9 Analysing My Data

In order to analyse my data, I have largely drawn on Framework Analysis, an approach that has largely been used by those involved in health related research (Barbour, 2000; Pope, Ziebland and Mays, 2000). Framework Analysis has five key stages. Lacey and Luff (2001) detail the five stages:
Familiarisation: whole or partial transcription and reading of the data

Identifying a thematic framework: this is the initial coding framework which is developed both from a priori issues and from emerging issues from the familiarisation stage. This thematic framework should be developed and refined during subsequent stages.

Indexing: the process of applying the thematic framework to the data. using numerical or textual codes to identify specific pieces of data which correspond to differing themes (this is more commonly called coding in other qualitative analysis approaches)

Charting: using headings from the thematic framework to create charts of your data so that you can easily read across the whole dataset. Charts can be either thematic for each theme across all respondents or by case for each respondent across all themes

Mapping and Interpretation: this means searching for patterns, associations, concepts, and explanations in your data, aided by visual displays and plots.

Lacey and Luff (2001) argue almost all qualitative research studies involve some degree of transcription- the data may be tape recorded interviews, focus groups, video recordings, or handwritten field notes. I transcribed all of the tape recorded interviews myself, as well as, repeatedly listening to the tapes. Although it has been argued that transcription can work to distance the researcher from those she is researching, because ‘disembodied transcripts’ reveal little of the laughter, irony, silences and other important responses in interviews (Raisborough, 2000), I did not find this. I found it not only extremely helpful and reassuring to have a complete transcript of each interview and to actually have something concrete to be able to hold, repeatedly listening to the taped interviews also meant I did not miss any of silences, pauses, laughter that Raisborough (2000) talks about. My only concern about transcribing interviews, and working from transcripts, is the
amount of potential data you have to hand, and this can initially be very daunting. That's why Miles and Huberman (1994) talk about data reduction to get through all the volume. Through the transcripts, and listening again and revisiting the tapes, I made notes of the emerging themes and topics. This is the ‘Familiarisation’ stage that Lacey and Luff (2001) talk about.

After familiarisation with the data, I carried out some preliminary coding of my data. (See Appendix 7 for an example of part of a transcript and emerging themes and concepts). Certain broad themes cropped up in the transcripts at this point, (for example, the importance of local community and networks for young people, the largely instrumental reasons given for going to college/university, the influence of older siblings on the young people) and using highlighter pens of different colours, I developed codes from the data. For example, although I was investigating young people’s ideas about higher education, it became apparent from my transcribed interviews that further education was a more immediate concern for many of the young people. I highlighted in blue, those lines in my interviews which referred to ‘further education’. I then looked through my data again to see whether there were differences in the way the young people talked about further education. For example, I began to consider whether the young people expressed different reasons for wanting or not wanting, to participate in further education.

As I was taking a framework approach, it became apparent that some of the themes emerging from my data were some of the already identified issues with which I began my research. This is in direct contrast to a grounded theory approach, where a researcher would try to ensure that all the emergent themes are generated from the data itself (see Glaser and Strauss (1967) for more about grounded theory). For example, the work of Pierre Bourdieu is drawn on in the thesis, because of its relevance to the study of education, especially secondary and higher education. Bourdieu devoted much of his research to mapping relations and objective structures within the French school system. Texts such as Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture (1977) which he co-wrote with Jean-Claude Passeron, have been particularly influential. Alongside secondary education, Bourdieu also considers higher education. For Bourdieu,
the higher education system resembles the school system in its work to ‘consecrate’ social distinctions by cultivating certain ways of acting that have the effect of reproducing social inequality (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002). For example, although more people in Western societies now have the opportunity to attend university, the system as a whole continues to work to reinforce privilege. This is done in a variety of ways, including through distinctions made between elite universities (like Oxford and Cambridge) and less prestigious higher education institutions (for example, ex-polytechnics or ‘new’ post-1992 universities). Thus, it is noticeable that the majority of young, working-class I interviewed were not only unaware of these distinctions, but those who had older siblings or other close relatives currently in higher education were largely concentrated in post-1992 universities.

Bourdieu’s (1997) use of Capitals is also drawn on in the thesis, to provide a useful conceptual framework for understanding young, working-class students’ ideas about higher education and their educational and career aspirations. Cultural capital is particularly helpful, as it refers to the knowledge, language and culture, differentially accessed and possessed. Middle-class and working-class families have differential access to various forms of economic, cultural and social capital and resources, which differentially frames the educational choices that different families can or will make (Archer, 2003). For example, middle-class parents can pass on cultural and material advantages that privilege or enable their children to succeed within the education system (Allatt, 1993). Within the thesis, I especially consider cultural capital (including the lack of knowledge about further and higher education) and social capital (community and local networks) to explore possible reasons for the continuing under-representation of working-class people in higher education.

2.10 Summary

This chapter has discussed the main features of my research approach. I have outlined the practical aspects of the research, including issues of access, privacy and the interviewing of students, as well as, how I analysed my data. Despite being a feminist and coming to the research with an idea of what it was
to 'do feminist research', conducting single interviews with students did take me some way away from what I had anticipated and expected interviewing to be like. Instead of the instant rapport I had naively anticipated, I experienced 'moments of rapport' with those I interviewed, and was more like the 'friendly stranger' that Cotterill (1992) talks about. I think there is an expectation in interviews that interviewees will talk freely and easily about their experiences. Interviews however, have to be seen as very specific social encounters (Ribbens, 1989), where certain 'truths' are told, and the 'truth' being told will depend on who the teller is, as well as who the listener is.
Chapter Three

New Labour and Higher Education Policy

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is mainly concerned with New Labour’s higher education policy in England, since first coming to office in 1997. Although there is some reference to higher education policy under the previous Conservative administrations, the main focus of the chapter is with the widening participation agenda of New Labour. It will be argued however, that while the current New Labour government has professed a commitment to widening participation in higher education for those from working-class backgrounds, changes in student funding and continuing cultural assumptions about those from working-class backgrounds will undermine these attempts. As long as widening participation is overwhelmingly couched in terms of ‘raising aspirations’, wider structural and financial constraints will continue to be ignored. There is also a concern with the government’s joint aim of increasing and widening participation in higher education. Higher education qualifications have been promoted by current, as well as, past governments as benefiting individuals, Business and the economy more generally (DfEE, 1998b; DfEE, 2000; DfES, 2003). Increasing participation in higher education has therefore been a major economic concern for the government. Increasing participation in higher education is often assumed to go hand in hand with widening participation, with the widening of access automatically resulting from increases in student numbers. The history of higher education in England would seem to suggest that by simply increasing participation rates does little to widen access to disadvantaged groups (NAO, 2002; Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003).
3.1 Education Policy under the Conservatives and New Labour: Splitting the Difference?

Although this chapter is overwhelmingly concerned with the higher educational policies and widening participation aims of New Labour since first coming to office in 1997, the previous Conservative administration did demonstrate some interest in higher education. However, since 1997, a debate has continued concerning the extent to which New Labour has continued with/distanced itself from the education related policy initiatives and legislation that characterised eighteen years of Conservative rule. While New Labour has, in the main, sought to emphasise the differences between itself and the Conservatives in terms of policies and agendas, educationists and others, have largely emphasised the similarities between the two.

Before New Labour even came to power in 1997, the Labour Party manifesto was promoting the idea of a ‘Third Way’. The idea of a ‘Third Way’ was an attempt by New Labour to distance itself from Conservative ideas and policies and what had come before, seeking to promote itself and its agenda as new and distinctive. The ‘Third Way’ has been outlined by Tony Blair (1998: 1) as “not an attempt to split the difference between Right and Left” but an attempt to reconcile themes “which in the past have wrongly been regarded as antagonistic- patriotism and internationalism, rights and responsibilities; the promotion of enterprise and the attack on poverty and discrimination”. The ‘newness’ of New Labour was revealed in the Labour Party 1997 manifesto, “in each area of policy a new and distinctive approach has been mapped out, one that differs from the Old Left and the Conservative right” (Labour Party, 1997: 1). In the manifesto, New Labour is especially seeking to distance itself from the ‘failed’ Conservative government:

"The purpose of new Labour is to give Britain a different political choice: the choice between a failed Conservative government, exhausted and divided in everything other than its desire to cling on to power, and a new and revitalised Labour Party that has been resolute in transforming itself into a party of the future" (Labour Party, 1997: 2).
While it is unsurprising that New Labour, in an attempt to win the 1997 general election, would want potential voters to focus on the differences between the Conservatives and what it had to offer, following the 1997 election, New Labour has continued to attempt to distance itself from Conservative ideas and policies.

Many others have argued that not only did New Labour adopt and continue with Conservative education policy initiatives and ideas following its arrival in office in 1997, but that there continues to be little noticeable difference between New Labour and the Conservative party in terms of policy and ideals. Following the change of government in 1997, there was certainly little noticeable difference in policies between the new New Labour government and the previous Conservative government, as New Labour continued with Conservative spending plans for the first two years of office (Toynbee and Walker, 2001). Sally Tomlinson (2001) documents the continuity in education policies pursued by New Labour post-1997:

"There was an acceptance of the Conservative faith in choice and competition, with education developing as a market commodity driven by consumer demands, demonstrated by the retention of market competition between schools, and fuelled by league table publication, school choice, specialist schools and failing schools" (Tomlinson, 2001: 85).

The moves towards parental ‘choice’ in education began during the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting and reinforcing Conservative ideals of freedom and individualism. The 1988 Education Reform Act of England and Wales, introduced and reinforced notions of ‘choice’ by encouraging a range of different school types to emerge (Grant Maintained, Specialist, City Technology colleges) (Coffey, 2001). This diversification has accompanied other transformations – performance indicators, in the form of league tables, as well as, school inspection reports carried out by the Office for Standards in education (Ofsted). This concern with ‘raising standards’ in education has continued under New Labour, with the public ‘naming and shaming’ of ‘failing’ schools, as well as, the continued testing of children at ages seven, eleven and fourteen, in the form of Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs). The
annual August furore that follows the publication of GCSE and A Level results, as well as, the continuing concern over boys' underachievement (see for example Epstein et al, 1998), demonstrates the extent to which concerns over educational standards have become part of the public psyche.

The notion of ‘choice’ is now a central tenet of contemporary educational policy in England and Wales, especially, but not exclusively, in compulsory education. At the transfer from primary to secondary school, parents have a right to express a preference for the school they wish their child to attend. However, as Coffey (2001) argues, choice making is a two-way process. Parents can ‘shop’ in the school market place to choose a school suitable for their child and schools can select pupils according to whichever criteria they choose. The illusion of equality, that all families have similar and wide ranging ‘choices’ available to them, masks the persistence of old inequalities. Inequalities that ensure those with the most financial and cultural resources available to them have a greater range of ‘choices’ available to them. By giving families greater responsibility for the type of education received by their children, negative outcomes can be attributed to poor choices on the part of parents as customers. Thus, a child’s ‘success’ or ‘failure’ at school becomes individualized, and can be attributed largely to the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ choices made by parents.

It is, however clear, that different families approach the decision making process in different ways. Some families have greater financial and cultural resources available to them, and in understanding and ‘working’ the education system are deemed to be ‘better’ at ‘choosing’ than others (Ball and Vincent, 1998).

3.2 Widening Participation in Higher Education: Is it on the Agenda?

Alongside an increased interest in pre-school education, under New Labour, there has also been a professed commitment to post-compulsory education.
There has not only been a concern about those who leave school at 16, with few or no qualifications (DfES, 2001; Atkinson and Elliott, 2000), attention has also been drawn to post-18 education and higher education. There have been a number of government consultation documents considering the issues of how to widen access to further and higher education for a number of currently under-represented groups (NCIHE, 1997; The Learning Age: DfEE, 1998; The Kennedy Report: FEFC, 1997). The focus on this area of the education system has reflected government concerns about social exclusion, as well as, the government’s wider concern with the role of education for the economy. To a great extent, New Labour sees social justice and economic efficiency as two sides of the same coin. For Margaret Hodge (2002: 2), former Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, widening access to higher education is "a serious objective founded on strong economic and social justice principles".

"Put simply, we know that 80% of the new jobs, that are likely to be created in this decade- that’s 1.7 million jobs- will require the sort of skills and qualifications that can only be gained through higher education. So success in the knowledge economy depends on raising participation in higher education..... Ensuring fair access is vital for our social inclusion agenda, especially when the graduate premium- an average of an extra £400,000 earned during your working life- still holds good. And of course ensuring fair access makes economic sense, in that we can’t afford to waste the talents and abilities of such a wide section of our society by limiting their opportunity.”

Two years before Margaret Hodge made this speech to the Social Market Foundation, David Blunkett, former Secretary of State for Education, was using similar arguments about the role of education in promoting social inclusion and economic efficiency. He set out the reasons for why New Labour had prioritised education since coming to office in 1997:

"The first argument is an economic one and it is unanswerable. Thirty or forty years ago, developed countries could tolerate substantial under-performance in their education systems mostly because there was a plentiful supply of unskilled or semi-skilled jobs in the economy. This is no longer the case......The second argument is a social one. Healthy, cohesive societies depend, especially in this rapidly changing world, on education, because only through education can people gain the knowledge, learn the skills and develop the confidence to participate in shaping their communities” (Blunkett, 2000: 1).
In ‘ensuring fair access’ to higher education, certain groups have specifically been targeted. The under-representation of those from working-class backgrounds, those with disabilities and certain minority ethnic groups have been of particular concern. In the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), the under-representation of certain groups in higher education, is addressed in both the main report and in reports five and six which were published alongside the main report. The under-representation of ethnic minorities, women and alternative students is addressed in report five (Coffield and Vignoles, 1997) and attention is drawn to students from lower socio-economic groups and those with disabilities in report six (Robertson and Hillman, 1997). In the main report it is argued:

“Unless we address the under-representation of those from lower socio-economic groups we may face increasingly socially divisive consequences. As a matter of equity, we need to reduce the under-representation of certain ethnic groups and of those with disabilities” (NCIHE, 1997:10).

Similarly, in the government’s response to the Dearing report, there is a professed commitment to “reach out and include those who have been under-represented in higher education, including young people from semi-skilled or unskilled family backgrounds and from disadvantaged localities, and people with disabilities” (DfEE, 1998a: 11). However, the concern with the under-representation in higher education of those with disabilities, women and those from certain ethnic groups seem to have all but disappeared following Dearing.

With the publication of The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000), outlining the government’s aim of increasing participation in higher education to 50% by the year 2010, the main focus of the government appears to be on widening participation for those from working-class backgrounds.

Although widening participation does seem to be on the New Labour agenda, it is a very specific agenda, which is all about targets and quotas. An example of this can be seen with The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000), which came into effect in September 2001 and was the first attempt by the New Labour government to set a target for the percentage of young people going to
The setting of a target in *The Excellence Challenge* has been problematic for a number of reasons. The widening participation agenda in *The Excellence Challenge* does not appear to be very wide. In the Dearing report (NCIHE, 1997) and in the Lifelong Learning pre-election policy statement by the Labour Party (1996), there did at least appear to be some mention of, and some interest in part-time and mature students. In the Labour Party document (1996: 18) we are told, "a simple participation target for young people ignores mature students and does little to encourage wider participation". Four years later, with the arrival of *The Excellence Challenge*, there is a participation target for young people, which effectively ignores mature students. The targeting of eighteen to thirty year olds in government policy has led to Alan Coleman, the president of the Mature Students’ Union, commenting, “you might as well be dead at 31” (Coleman, quoted in Baty, 2003: 56).

Another concern with setting a target of 50% of young people benefiting from higher education by the time they are thirty, is what happens to the 50% of young people not mentioned in the equation? This concern is expressed in the response to *The Excellence Challenge* by The National Organisation for Adult
Learning (NIACE) who are concerned that “potentially, this will constitute yet another mechanism of exclusion for the remaining 50% who are not deemed to be HE potential” (NIACE, 2000: 1).

In policy documents there has been a noticeable absence of any consideration of gender, and issues surrounding the gendered nature of subject and occupational choice. Although it is recognised that the number of women in higher education has improved and they now represent 57% of all students (NAO, 2002), there has been less concern about the different routes and qualifications taken by young women and men before, during and after, university entry. The under-representation of girls in school science and technology subjects, as well as, gender differences evident in General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ), modern apprenticeships and other vocational courses, has largely been of concern to feminists, or those sympathetic to gender issues (Whitehead, 1996; Hayton, 1999; Roger and Duffield, 2000;). The under-representation of women in technology, engineering, computer sciences and maths subjects at university has also been acknowledged (NAO, 2002). Gender differentiation at school, college and university, in terms of routes, courses, qualifications taken, has serious implications for women and men later in life. The participation of young women and men in some subjects and not others has a significant effect on their future career opportunities and job prospects. The different types of work that women and men do also has an impact on their earning power, with women still typically earning less than men (EOC, 2002 and 2003). With the current government’s intention to introduce a more vocational curriculum into secondary schools (DfES, 2002), there is a concern that existing gender inequalities will become even further entrenched.

The continuing under-representation of certain minority ethnic groups in higher education has also all but disappeared from the political agenda. The optimism expressed at the high level of representation in higher education by those from ethnic minority groups (NAO, 2002), is somewhat overshadowed by research which reveals ‘racial bias at UK’s elite universities’. This research reveals that although many people from ethnic minority communities are
participating in higher education, they are not distributed evenly across universities, and are under-represented in ‘old’, pre-1992, more elite universities. Certain subjects also appear to attract students of a minority ethnic background – pharmacy, for example – while others appear not to attract such students, or not to recruit such students (Gilchrist, Phillips and Ross, 2003). Modood and Connor (2004) also reveal the enormous variations between different minority groups. Although every minority ethnic group shows higher HE participation rates than whites, the figures range from 39% for Bangladeshi to over 70% for Black African, Indian and some other Asian groups. Gender also appears to have a significant impact, with Bangladeshi women and black Caribbean men both having lower than average participation rates.

3.3 Widening and Increasing Participation in Higher Education: A Compatible Agenda?

While under New Labour there has been a professed commitment to widening participation in higher education for under-represented groups, and most specifically working-class groups, the widening participation agenda often comes a poor second to the increasing participation agenda. While widening participation is concerned more with issues to do with access and social justice, increasing participation in higher education has more to do with the economy, business, competitiveness, and the role education has to play in these. However, the seeming prioritization of the needs of business and the economy in higher educational policy, has not been unique to New Labour. It was especially during the 1980s, during successive Conservative governments, that education was overwhelmingly viewed in economic terms. Unlike New Labour however, there was little mention, either in general, or in policy documents more specifically, of concerns about social justice or the role of education in promoting equal opportunities.

As Sally Tomlinson (2001:27) has remarked, “in the regressive Conservative vision of the 1980s, fairness and justice were not visible attributes”. In education, and especially post-compulsory education, the vision translated into an overriding concern with the economy and the role education had to play in the labour market. The White Paper, Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge
DES, 1987) reflected this economic vision of education. Although it is remarked that “meeting the needs of the economy is not the sole purpose of higher education”, this is somewhat undermined by the tone and content of the document as a whole. In the introduction to the document, under aims and purposes, we are informed that higher education should “serve the economy more effectively” and “have closer links with industry and commerce, and promote enterprise”. Access to higher education is seen in terms of the need “to take greater account of the country’s needs for highly qualified manpower”. The issue of access to higher education in the document is largely skewed in favour of increasing participation in higher education, largely ignoring widening participation issues and the under-representation of certain groups. In order to take “greater account of the country’s needs for highly qualified manpower”, the Government promised to:

“Plan for student numbers to increase in the next few years, to return to present levels in the mid-1990s and then to grow again

Study the needs of the economy so as to achieve the right number and balance of graduates in the 1990s

Plan to increase participation rates among young people, particularly young women, and mature entrants – by building on improvements in schools and colleges, and in admission arrangements for those with non-traditional qualifications” (DES, 1987: iv).

Although there is some commitment to increasing participation rates for young women and mature students, there is little sense of this desired increase being due to any real concern with equalising opportunities for under-represented groups. Justice and fairness seemed to be ideals low down on the Conservative agenda. There is recognition in the document of three routes into higher education; traditional sixth form qualifications, ie A levels, vocational qualifications and access courses. There is a stated need to “accommodate students with a wider range of academic and practical experience than before, many of whom will not have the traditional qualifications for entry”. However, this seeming concern with increasing participation for those with non-traditional qualifications has less to do with issues of social justice, than concern to adjust the balance of provision to match the needs of the economy.
The issue of standards is also raised in the document, and more importantly, it is raised alongside widening access to those with non-traditional qualifications. We are informed that the Government "attaches no less importance than previously to its policy of maintaining and raising standards. It believes that increased participation in higher education need not be at the expense of academic excellence" (DES, 1987:9).

Under New Labour and since the publication of the Dearing report (NCIHE, 1997), there has been a similar economic agenda evident in higher education policy. The Dearing report on higher education was published in July 1997, with the stated aims being to:

"make recommendations on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education, including support for students, should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom over the next 20 years, recognising that higher education embraces teaching, learning, scholarship and research" (NCIHE, 1997: 1).

The timing of the report, both in terms of the setting up of the inquiry, and the final publication of the report in 1997, reflected political concerns. The setting up of the Dearing inquiry in 1996 under a Conservative government was a product of a deepening crisis in the funding of universities, which came to a head when a number of universities threatened to introduce top-up fees for students if no additional public funds were able to be found for higher education (Parry and Fry, 1999). The announcement of the Inquiry’s findings and recommendations in July 1997 came a short time after both a general election and a change of administration. Since neither the Conservative government nor the main opposition party seemed willing to debate higher education funding issues before the 1997 general election, it was left to the new New Labour government to respond to Dearing’s recommendations. The Dearing committee had fourteen months to complete their work and there was a recognition by Sir Ron Dearing and his team that their work was constrained by time and the enormity of the task before them, "from our first meeting we recognised the scale of the task facing us. Our terms of reference were extensive and the problems we had to address were complex" (NCIHE, 1997: 13). Perhaps a clearer, and more pronounced commitment to widening
participation in higher education was out of the question, when the terms of reference for those involved in compiling the report were so vast and wide ranging. However, it does seem evident in the report, that while there was obviously a vast amount to include in the report if its aims were to consider the 'purposes, shape, structure, size and funding' of higher education for the next twenty years, the overwhelming concern of the report does seem to be with the economic role higher education has to play. In the report, attention is paid to both widening and increasing participation in higher education, and both objectives are assumed to be entirely compatible with each other:

"Increasing participation in higher education is a necessary and desirable objective of national policy over the next 20 years. This must be accompanied by the objective of reducing the disparities in participation in higher education between groups and ensuring that higher education is responsive to the aspirations and distinctive abilities of individuals" (NCIHE, 1997: 101).

Increasing participation in higher education is deemed to be necessary as the UK "must now compete in increasingly competitive international markets where the proliferation of knowledge, technological advances and the information revolution mean that the labour market demand for those with higher level education and training is growing" (NCIHE, 1997: 4).

One of the problems evident in the Dearing report is the assumption made that widening participation can come about by increasing participation alone:

"Recent history does suggest that, as overall numbers in higher education expand, so participation widens" (NCIHE, 1997: 106).

This does not seem to be the case however, where the last few decades have shown that social class distribution within higher education has remained relatively stable. Despite a major expansion in student numbers, students from lower social class backgrounds continue to be under-represented. Fewer than one in five young people from the lower social class groups (111M, IV, V) participate in higher education, which is well below the 45 per cent who participate from the higher social classes (IIIN, II, I) (Connor et al, 2001). Widening and increasing participation are inseparable terms also used in the
government’s response to the Dearing report – Higher Education for the 21st Century (DfEE, 1998a: 11) where we are told “increasing opportunities for people to learn and widening access are at the heart of this Government’s policies for creating a learning society”.

The Dearing report is not only problematic in that it assumes widening participation will come about with a further increase in student numbers. The prioritization of the needs of business and the economy in the report seriously questions any real commitment to addressing any inequalities in access to university education and ignores many of the wider reasons people might have for wanting to study at university level. At the beginning of the main report under ‘terms of reference’, before we even get to chapter one, we are informed, “learning should be increasingly responsive to employment needs and include the development of general skills, widely valued in employment”(NCIHE, 1997: 3). The onus also seems to be on the individual to continually (re)educate and (re) train themselves to remain employable:

“The pace of change in the workplace will require people to re-equip themselves, as new knowledge and new skills are needed for economies to compete, survive and prosper. A lifelong career in one organisation will become increasingly the exception. People will need the knowledge and skills to control and manage their own working lives”(NCIHE, 1997: 9).

With education and learning linked to employment in this way, the onus is on the individual to update their own education and skills in order to survive the ‘pace of change in the workplace’. The construction of work as unstable, fragmented and changeable also allows some abdication of responsibility by both the government and employers, who are able to hide behind the rhetoric of rapid change and global competition to avoid dealing with inequalities and discrimination in the workplace. It would also seem that self worth, personal satisfaction, identity and personal development have no place in the agenda of the competitive state (Macrae et al, 1997).

Tony Blair’s comment that “education is the best economic policy we have” (DfEE, 1998) accurately sums up New Labour’s approach to education.
Current government rhetoric on ‘lifelong learning’ and ‘social exclusion’ also reveals the pervasiveness of the economic agenda within education. Whilst there have been a number of criticisms of the term ‘social exclusion’, for a variety of reasons, (see for example, Burden, 2000; Fairclough, 2000; Levitas, 1998), the term remains a favourite with the current government. With the setting up of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in 1997, the Prime Minister Tony Blair, defined social exclusion as:

"About income but it’s about much more. It’s about prospects and networks and life chances. It’s a very modern problem, and one that is more harmful to the individual, more damaging to self esteem, more corrosive for society as a whole, more likely to be passed down from generation to generation than material poverty" (Tony Blair speech at Stockwell Park School, Lambeth, quoted in Blunkett, 1999: 2).

Although there is some recognition of the damaging effects of poverty and material disadvantage, according to Tony Blair, social exclusion ‘is about much more’. Social exclusion is seen more in cultural and moral terms. Although social exclusion is about ‘income’, it is also about ‘prospects and networks and life chances’, which although not specifically outlined by Tony Blair, could include educational qualifications, (un)employment, family resources, as well as, aspirations and expectations. The language used by Tony Blair to detail the ‘harmful’, ‘damaging’ and ‘corrosive’ effects of social exclusion on the socially excluded themselves and society as a whole also leaves us with no illusion of how destructive social exclusion can be. For Blair, social exclusion, ‘is more likely to be passed down from generation to generation than material poverty’, implying that there is something inherent in the culture of those that are socially excluded that is passed from generation to generation. The SEU’s initial leaflet also draws upon a combination of material and cultural factors to define social exclusion. Social exclusion is:

"A shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdowns" (SEU leaflet quoted in Fairclough, 2000: 53).
Aside from the cultural and moral tone of the above comment on social exclusion, New Labour’s ‘solution’ for dealing with social exclusion could also be seen to be problematic. Education has been seen as having an important role to play in the fight against social exclusion:

"The best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience" (Tony Blair, Foreword to Bridging the Gap, SEU, 1999: 6).

Because the causes of social exclusion are seen as multiple and complex, one major critique of the government’s attempts to tackle social exclusion, is the idea that education can, or should be left to, solve such a wide range of social problems (Edwards, Armstrong and Miller, 2001). To a large extent, the emphasis New Labour places on learning and education successfully diverts attention away from issues to do with class and poverty and material disadvantage. For many people deemed to be ‘socially excluded’, the fundamental problem is far more likely to be poverty, than just a lack of education. But because poverty requires a far greater commitment and monetary investment by the government, the ‘easy’ option is to individualise responsibility for ‘social exclusion’ and to make individuals and families responsible for becoming ‘socially included’ through (l)earning and managing their own education and training.

3.4 Loans and Fees Policy in Higher Education: Disadvantaging the Already Disadvantaged

The commitment to reach out and include those who have been under-represented in higher education was somewhat undermined with changes in funding arrangements for students announced by the government. The Dearing report acknowledged that ‘the costs of higher education should be shared between those that benefit’ (NCIHE, 1997), although also making clear ‘that the state must remain a major source of funding for higher education in the future’ (NCIHE, 1997:288). In the government’s formal response to the
Dearing Report – Higher Education in the 21st Century (DfEE, 1998a: 52), they argued that the new funding arrangements are:

"based on the principle underlying the Dearing Committee’s recommendations that those who benefit from higher education should share the cost, while recognising the need to widen access particularly for students from lower income families”.

From 1998/1999, the new funding arrangements meant that students and their families became primarily responsible for the costs of their higher education. The Dearing Report had proposed charging tuition fees on a flat rate basis but maintaining support for living expenses for those most in need. The government accepted the principle of fees, but decided to means-test fee contributions. It also replaced grants for living expenses with loans. From 1998/1999, new students had to contribute towards the costs of their tuition, which were set initially at a maximum of £1,000 and were means-tested. Students entering higher education in 1999/2000, together with those who started the previous year, were to receive support for their living costs solely through loans.

Although there was much anger and disappointment expressed at the time by students and their families, student leaders and others that a government could introduce such measures, let alone a Labour government, the new funding arrangements had not been completely unexpected. A pre-election policy statement on Lifelong Learning (Labour Party, 1996:20) gave some indication that maintenance grants were under threat:

"As we move to a mass system of higher education maintenance grants will not themselves act to promote equality of opportunity. The central determinant of participation in higher education today is the availability of places at university or college”.

In an attempt to sell the new funding reforms, the government’s attention was very much focused on the purported benefits to be gained from receiving a higher education. We are told “compared with those without degrees, graduates on average see their earnings rise by as much as £4,000 for every £20,000 of earnings”(DfEE, 1998a: 54). The benefits of receiving a higher education are
not shared equally between graduates. As more people participate in higher education, it matters for your future earnings what A-levels and what sort of degree you did, what class of degree you got, and what university you went to (Wolf. 2002). With the government’s focus on graduate earnings and the economic benefits of going to university, there is a danger that the wider benefits of education for many people will be lost. As Chris Holden (1999:534) argues, the emphasis on education for the market reduces education to another form of productive investment, squeezing out “the less narrowly economic, less measurable, intellectual and social benefits of education”.

While the focus seemed to be on the benefits of higher education for students, there seemed to be little concern for the added costs students from disadvantaged backgrounds were likely to incur under the new funding arrangements introduced following the Dearing report. For lower income students, although it would be unlikely that they would have to pay tuition fees as these were means-tested, they were more than likely going to have to take out loans to pay for their living costs. Many better off students in comparison would have less need to take out loans, as they would be more likely to have family able to financially support them. The likely effects of debt on students from poor families both during university and following graduation, when loans would have to be repaid, was somewhat lost on Kim Howells, Education and Employment Minister, who argued:

“I find it very odd that some people assume that because poorer students will get access to larger subsidised loans than those from better off families, we’re somehow penalising the poor” (Howells, 1997, quoted in Knowles, 2000:15).

A study by John Knowles (2000), of year 12 (aged 16 and 17) students and the impact of the new funding arrangements after Dearing on their aspirations to enter higher education, would seem to suggest that the poor were indeed being penalised, even before they entered higher education. Many of the students at the state comprehensive school and the further education college had decided not to enter higher education by the end of year twelve, due to financial reasons. For those who still wanted to go to university at the end of year
twelve, many were planning to study at local institutions, enabling them to live at home and save money. For the Independent school students in the study by Knowles, there was no such concern to study at a local institution and save money.

As the costs of higher education in the UK have moved increasingly from the state, to students and their families, there has also been an increase in the numbers of students having to work during term time, to make ends meet. Research conducted by Hilary Metcalf (2003), shows not only that term time working is more prevalent amongst the most disadvantaged students, but that term-time working varies across universities, with the more prestigious universities having fewer students who work during term-time.

3.5 Targeting Funding at Disadvantaged Students

Part of the problem with current government higher education funding policy is that it is highly individualistic and individualised. Means testing for students and their families, to see what, if any, funding they are entitled to, has largely meant that, in reality, only the most disadvantaged have been entitled to extra help. Not only has the income threshold often been too low for many more students to claim extra financial support, but also when additional financial support has been awarded, it has been a relatively small amount. An example of this is in ‘The Excellence Challenge’ (DfEE, 2000), where two new forms of financial support for disadvantaged students were announced, although they were to be piloted first. Opportunity bursaries of £2,000 each over three years were to be made available, with the aim being that by 2003/04, 10,000 new students each year would be able to apply for them. In addition, an extra £100 was announced in the policy document, depending on family income, to young people who gain an offer of a full-time place in higher education. Alongside these two new forms of financial support, the document also mentions a range of other sources of funding already available or soon to be available including: financial help for students who have been in care, bursaries of up to £1,000 for mature students over twenty-five with dependent children, a school meals grant, and a new childcare grant for students with children. For students at
university experiencing financial difficulty there are also hardship funds. Although in the document we are informed the "system of financial support for HE students is designed to target help at those most in need" (DfEE, 2000:13), presumably this is only the case if students understand what they are entitled to? In the case of Opportunity Bursaries, which, we are told have to be applied for, there is the assumption that students will already know that they are entitled to these. A report by the National Audit Office (NAO, 2002) revealed a number of problems with the wide range of funds available. Although the report recognised they are helpful sources of support, they are also relatively low in value, mainly discretionary, which creates uncertainty for students' financial planning, available to few students, and complex, with over twenty potential sources of funds.

3.6 The Future of Higher Education: The Announcement of New Funding Arrangements

Wednesday 22 January, 2003 heralded the long awaited arrival of the New Labour government’s White Paper on higher education, The Future of Higher Education (DfES, 2003). There had been much speculation in the media in the preceding months about what would be contained in the White Paper. Headlines ranged from ‘Learn Now, Pay Later...’ (The Guardian, 19 November 2002) and ‘Minister Admits Universities are in Crisis’ (The Guardian, 15 November 2002) to personal opinions from many on what they thought should be included in the review, including the former Trade and Industry Secretary, Stephen Byers, ‘Students Need Grants’ (The Guardian, 15 November 2002).

The new funding arrangements that were announced signalled a move to seeing students as more autonomous and independent. Previously, for those students who were required to pay tuition fees, they had to pay these fees up-front, with the assumption that the student’s family would be willing (and able) to pay them. As student loans for maintenance were also means tested, any shortfall between the amount of loan received and the amount a student needed to survive, was deemed to be the responsibility of the student and their family.
Although the funding arrangements announced in the paper still involved the means testing of family resources, the removal of up-front tuition fees, to be repaid after graduation, saw students as being less financially dependent on their families. In the White Paper, the costs and benefits of higher education were seen to lie with the student:

"As we are asking new students to pay for the benefits they get from higher education, to build sustainable funding freedoms for the future, we believe that it is also right that those who have already benefited from higher education should be able to contribute" (DfES, 2003: 76).

From 2006, the White Paper announced that universities would have the freedom to set their own tuition fee. The maximum fee that could be charged by universities was set at £3,000, with the minimum being £0. For those from low-income backgrounds, although the government pledged to pay the first £1,100 of any fee contribution, they would have to make up for any shortfall themselves if the university they attend charges a higher tuition fee. Following the publication of the White Paper there was a concern that elite universities would charge the maximum fee of £3,000, affecting access to those from working-class backgrounds. Before the White Paper was published, the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University spoke out in support of top-up fees, (THES, 29 November 2002: 2). However, more recently it has been suggested that nine out of ten universities and colleges plan to charge the full £3,000 a year fee for courses (THES, 21 February 2003: 2/3). There has been a fear that differential top-up fees will encourage poorer students to attend less prestigious universities that charge the lowest tuition fees.

In the White Paper, there were also plans to introduce a new Office for Fair Access (OFFA) with plans to oversee the issue of tuition fees and widening participation initiatives in all universities. The OFFA was to be an independent body, separated from, but supported by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE). Universities wishing to increase their fees above the current £1,100 level would be required by the OFFA to draw up an access agreement, that would be considered and approved by the head of OFFA. The agreement,
lasting for five years, would be required to include the fee levels the institution wished to charge, the courses to which the higher fees would apply, as well as, the outreach work the institution planned to undertake with schools and colleges to widen participation. Universities would also be obliged to set out the bursaries and other financial support they were planning to make available to students, along with advice on financial issues.

The White Paper also announced that from Autumn 2004, students with parents on low incomes would be entitled to a new Higher Education Grant worth up to £1,000 a year. Students from households with incomes of £10,000 or less would receive the full award and some grants would be available to those whose families earn up to £20,000 a year. Opportunity Bursaries, which were announced in *The Excellence Challenge* (DfEE, 2000) and were worth £2,000 each over three years, but only available in certain areas, would disappear. The ‘benefits’ of the new funding arrangements to students from poorer backgrounds were outlined in the document:

“A student coming from a family earning less than £10,000 a year will therefore be entitled to £1,100 in fee support, and £1,000 in grant, as well as the full student loan for living costs – currently £3,905 for students studying away from home, and more in London – meaning that they have almost £5,000 a year to live on, as well as help with their graduate contribution” (DfES, 2003: 86).

The grant arrangements announced in the White Paper were problematic in many ways, not least the low income threshold at which students would be entitled to receive the £1,000 a year full grant. Although the White Paper envisaged the new grant as benefitting around a third of students, there was concern, also expressed by Charles Clarke, the Education Secretary, at the time, that the £10,000 a year family earnings limit was set too low (*THES*, 2003). There was also no mention in the document of exactly how much grant students in households with residual incomes of between £10,000 and £20,000 would receive. The £1,000 a year grant was also viewed as being a relatively small amount, when accommodation costs, utility bills, food, books and various other things are considered. The intention in the White Paper was that Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs), which are currently available
for young people aged 16-19 if they stay on at school or college, would be extended across England from 2004 and would be worth up to £1,500 a year. For the majority of young people of this age they will still be living at home, yet if these proposals were to become a reality, they would receive a larger grant than poor higher education students, who may be living away from home, with greater financial responsibilities.

3.7 The Higher Education Act 2004 and Student Funding

Many of the higher education funding changes first proposed in the White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003), finally reached the statute book on July 1, 2004, in the form of The Higher Education Act 2004. Despite the Bill’s rocky ride through parliament, with the government’s majority being cut to five at its second reading in the House of Commons (*The Guardian*, July 2 2004; *THES*, July 9 2004), university top-up fees of up to £3,000 from 2006, have become enshrined in law. Alongside university top-up fees, which are repayable after graduation once earnings exceed £15,000, the Higher Education Act will reintroduce an upfront maintenance grant for the poorest students of up to £2,700.

Following the passing of the Higher Education Act 2004 in July, on 15 October 2004, the appointment was announced of Sir Martin Harris, formerly the vice-chancellor at the University of Manchester, as the new Director of Fair Access to Higher Education (OFFA). The Director’s role is considered by the government to be central to the drive to widen participation in higher education. Any institution that intends to charge tuition fees above the standard level (above £1,200 and up to £3,000) will need an Access Agreement approved by the Director. Access agreements will set out:

- Institutions’ fees for courses up to the maximum allowed of £3,000;
- Institutions’ plans for bursaries and other financial support for students;
- Any plans for outreach work to encourage more potential students from under-represented groups to consider higher education;
- Plans to provide information to prospective students on available funding; and
Institutions’ own milestones, set by themselves, which will help them and OFFA monitor whether their efforts to improve access are succeeding; OFFA will have no remit over the admissions arrangements of universities. Admissions are and will remain a matter for the universities themselves as set out in the HE Act 2004 (Press Notice 2004/0173, 2004).

3.8 Raising Aspirations and Targeting ‘Bright’ Young People

A major theme running through New Labour’s higher education policy has been the need to raise the aspirations of working-class students and their families. The Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), as well as, The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000) and The Future of Higher Education (DFES, 2003) all ‘blame’ to some extent non-participation on certain individuals and their families. Archer and Hutchings (2000) have levelled criticism at current widening participation policy for the emphasis placed on the need to raise the aspirations of working-class people and their ‘desire to participate’, rather than addressing fundamental questions concerning their ‘ability to participate’ in higher education. From the current government’s focus on students’ ‘desire to participate’, non-participation is seen to be the problem of working-class young people and their families who are believed to be lacking in aspiration and motivation. In report six of the Dearing Report we are informed:

“Students from lower socio-economic groups appear to be guided from an earlier age, by reason of habit, culture and professional or peer expectation, to anticipate initial entry to the labour market rather than higher education” (Robertson and Hillman, 1997).

Throughout the White paper on The Future of Higher Education (DFES, 2003) widening access to higher education is seen as a matter of raising aspirations; “Young people and their families need to be encouraged to raise their aspirations and achieve more of their potential in examinations prior to entry to higher education”, “more young people must be motivated to stay on in learning”, and “it is especially important that those who come from families without a tradition of going to higher education, and whose aspirations are low, are supported both in achieving their full potential before university, and in aspiring to go on to further study”. Liz Thomas (2001) importantly notes
that the ‘blaming’ of individuals for their low aspirations shifts responsibility onto potential entrants and away from institutions. Although there is some mention in the White paper of the need to ‘raise standards’ in schools, any discussion or understanding of barriers to participation in higher education which might be created by the education system itself, and schools and colleges in particular, is absent from the document.

Although there is some recognition in the White paper of the need to form greater links between schools, colleges and universities in order to widen participation in higher education, in order to enable young people to have a better knowledge of the routes into higher education, this is only seen in the context of needing to ‘raise aspirations’. The “AimHigher” programme which brings together The Excellence Challenge and Partnerships for Progression initiatives is all about ‘aiming higher’ and raising aspirations. “AimHigher” roadshows, for example, have been touring the country with the aim of raising young people’s aspirations to enter higher education.

Alongside ‘raising aspirations’, current government higher education policy seems to be largely focused on targeting ‘bright’ young working-class people, who are identified by others as having the ‘potential’ to enter higher education in the future. This is especially evident in The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000), where the concern is with ensuring ‘bright’ young people who do not have a history of higher education in their families, are encouraged to ‘raise their aspirations’ and think about entering high status universities at some point in the future. Liz Thomas (2001: 371) has argued The Excellence Challenge initiative is all about seeking to “raise the participation rates of those who already have qualifications sufficient to enter higher education – and ignores the needs of the majority who do not possess them”. This is evident at the beginning of the Excellence Challenge document where the aim is the improve access to higher education “for bright young students from poorer backgrounds whilst maintaining entry standards” (DfEE, 2000: 1). It focuses on the “gifted and talented” (p. 14) and “those young people with the talent to access universities with the most demanding entry requirements” (p. 16). The onus seems to be on “bright” young people to ‘raise their aspirations’ to enter
high status universities. There is no discussion of reforming the HE entry system or addressing the reasons why those from better off backgrounds have higher rates of attainment at A level (DfEE, 2000: 3). Maggie Woodrow (2000: 4) has argued that the initiative is merely about “talent spotting”:

"The clear evidence from this document is that, in government circles, widening participation is about ‘talent spotting’ those unfortunate few who were (to quote one minister) ‘born on the wrong side of the tracks’. In this speak – and the language is a give away – widening participation is about rescuing the few and preserving the system”.

Identifying those “bright” young people deemed to have the “potential” to enter higher education in the future is also problematic. There is no indication in the document as to how young people will be identified and targeted. The initiative also assumes all young people from the age of thirteen will demonstrate their “potential” to enter higher education in the future, and more importantly, that those around them will be able to identify this “potential”. In the response to the initiative by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (now Universities UK), there is a caution that the identifying of 13-19 year olds “should not be rigid – students may show evidence of being able to benefit from HE later on in their pre-HE study” (CVCP, 2000: 2).

3.9 The Role of Further Education and Schools in Widening Access

The executive summary at the beginning of The Future of Higher Education (DfES, 2003) outlines the case for expanding higher education:

“We want the bulk of the expansion to come through new types of qualification, better tailored to the needs of students and the economy” (DfES, 2003: 7).

The new types of qualification the document is referring to are foundation degrees. Increasing participation in higher education from the current 43% to the target set by the government of 50% by 2010, is to come “mainly through two-year work-focused foundation degrees”. The document also informs us, “we do not believe that expansion should mean ‘more of the same’...”we do not favour expansion on the single template of the traditional three year
honours degree". Although foundation degrees are presented as a work-focused higher education course, the White Paper tells us, "foundation degrees will often be delivered in further education colleges". According to the White Paper, further education colleges already play an important role in delivering higher education, delivering 11 per cent of higher education. The reason for expanding higher education provision in the further education sector seems to lie with the perceived strengths of further education;

"Further education has strengths in providing ladders of progression for students, particularly for those pursuing vocational routes, and serves the needs of part-time students and those who want to study locally. Further education colleges make an important contribution to meeting local and regional skill needs, including through the higher education they provide" (DfES, 2003: 62).

The implicit assumption in the document is that there is a wealth of difference between further and higher education institutions. Further education provides what higher education is unable/unwilling to offer; vocational routes, greater flexibility for students, and a local, more community based education. The clear distinction between what further and higher education institutions are able to offer is problematic for a number of reasons. While it is not problematic in itself to see further and higher education as offering different routes, curricula and so on, it becomes problematic when one sector is valued significantly less than the other. The vocational/academic divide which essentially reflects the division between further and higher education, is not an equal one. The most fundamental question of the increased FE-HE collaboration announced in the White Paper is, who are the students most likely to undertake foundation degrees? Will those from the privileged middle classes, who have traditionally anticipated entry to high status universities, be queuing up to do two year foundation degrees in their local further education college? The announcement that Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs), which have largely been taken up by those from lower social class groups (Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003), are to be brought into the foundation degree framework, perhaps gives some indication of those most likely to study for foundation degrees.
Although the document confidently states, "new foundation degrees are making a good start as a reputable and truly employer focused higher education qualification", there is no evidence that employers are specifically seeking to employ those with foundation degrees. Will holders of two year foundation degrees, with FDA or FDSc after their name, depending on whether their foundation degree is arts or science based, be more employable than those who have completed a three year honours degree?

Near the beginning of the White Paper, there appears to be some concern that "the social class gap among those entering university remains too wide". However, it is difficult to see how the overwhelming concentration on foundation degrees in the document, the majority of which will be provided in further education colleges, can radically change the social composition of students in higher education. From 2004, additional funded places will be offered for foundation degrees, "in preference to traditional honours degree courses; so that the numbers studying traditional three-year courses will remain steady". This certainly implies that the social composition of students in universities studying three year courses will remain as it is now, dominated by those from middle class backgrounds. Apart from those few very bright working-class young people who get "talent spotted" at school/college and deemed to have the "potential" to enter higher education in the future, the White Paper does not offer any great hope for the majority of those from working-class backgrounds. It is interesting that while we hear about the need to select more "bright" working-class students for higher education, we do not hear much about selecting the "bright" young people from public schools. Presumably they are all "bright" and gifted there anyway (Woodrow, 2000). It would also seem that postgraduate study, which is not mentioned in the White Paper, is also going to remain dominated by those from more privileged backgrounds. The option of studying at postgraduate level, especially for those studying foundation degrees in further education colleges is not likely to be available.

3.10 Summary
In this chapter, the recent history of higher education policy under New Labour has been summarised. It was argued that New Labour’s concern with post-compulsory education, especially higher education, has reflected government concerns about social exclusion, as well as, the government’s wider concern with the role of education for the economy. To a great extent, New Labour sees social justice and economic efficiency as two sides of the same coin. This has been problematic, largely because the assumption behind this has been that increasing participation in higher education, in terms of increasing numbers, will automatically bring about the widening of access to currently underrepresented groups. The widening access agenda of New Labour has also been seriously undermined by changes in student funding since 1997, as students (and their families) have become increasingly responsible for supporting themselves financially.

The chapter has also briefly considered the role of cultural assumptions in the government’s widening participation agenda. A large part of this agenda seems to be about ‘raising the aspirations’ of working-class young people, the assumption being that those from working-class families do not aspire to enter higher education. As long as working-class families are blamed for their low aspirations, and their own educational ‘failure’, wider structural and financial constraints will continue to be ignored.
Chapter Four

The Involvement of Families in Young People’s Educational Lives and Futures

4.0 Introduction

This chapter considers the role of families in the decisions the young people in the research are making about their futures. The influence and importance of mothers, as well as, older siblings, on young people’s ideas about education and future careers is discussed. Gender and ethnic background are highly significant in several respects, from parental involvement in young people’s decision making, to the gendered nature of educational and career options being chosen by the young people. I also argue that New Labour widening participation policy rhetoric on the need to raise working-class families aspirations to enter higher education, not only ignores differences within and between working-class families, but also ignores structures outside the family, which help to impede more working-class people from entering higher education.

4.1 The Heterogeneity of the working-classes.

Evident in much government policy, especially documents concerned with widening participation, is the assumption of a unitary and homogenous working-class. Beginning with the publication of the Dearing report in 1997, under New Labour, the focus for widening participation initiatives, has been on raising working-class people’s aspirations. Implicit in much of this, is the idea that working-class families and communities are somewhat ‘lacking’ (for a greater in-depth look at New Labour’s educational policies see Chapter Three). In The Future of Higher Education (DfES, 2003: 68), we are told that “young people and their families need to be encouraged to raise their aspirations and achieve more of their potential in examinations prior to entry to higher
education”. Similarly, in Widening Participation in Higher Education (DfES. 2003b: 2), improving levels of attainment “need to be matched by raising young people’s aspirations”. While these documents, and New Labour more generally, do not explicitly use the language of class, class is never far from the surface. The strategy to widen participation in higher education is very obviously aimed at those from working-class backgrounds, who, unlike many from middle-class groups, remain under-represented in higher education. The concern with culture, specifically working-class culture, was considered by Robertson and Hillman (1997) in report 6 of the Dearing report;

“Students from lower socio-economic groups appear to be guided from an earlier age, by reason of habit, culture and professional or peer expectation, to anticipate initial entry to the labour market rather than higher education” (1997: paragraph 3,13).

Here, it is suggested that there is something inherent in working-class ‘culture’, a poverty of aspiration, which sees those from lower socio-economic groups ‘choosing’ to enter the labour market, rather than higher education. The ‘problem’ has been located in working-class communities, where education, especially higher education, is deemed not to be valued or aspired to. Nothing short of a ‘culture change’ is what Margaret Hodge (The Guardian, 2000), former Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, believes is needed if more working-class people are to access higher education. Estelle Morris, the former Education Secretary, has similarly argued that the ‘problem’ of working-class under-representation in higher education can be contributed to by a collapse of a culture of education in some working-class communities (see The Guardian, 2002). Levitas (1998) argues that there are three different discourses associated with social exclusion and inclusion. The three different discourses are a redistributionist discourse, which focuses on poverty and attempts to reduce poverty by redistributing wealth; a social integrationist discourse, which sees exclusion in terms of unemployment and inclusion as getting people into paid work; and a moral underclass discourse, which attributes exclusion to deficiencies in the culture of the excluded and inclusion as entailing cultural change. Levitas argues that under New Labour, the discourse of social exclusion is a combination of the social integrationist
discourse and the moral underclass discourse. Levitas (1998) lists the main characteristics of the moral underclass discourse (MUD):

- It presents the underclass or socially excluded as culturally distinct from the ‘mainstream’.
- It focuses on the behaviour of the poor rather than the structure of the whole society.
- It implies that benefits are bad, rather than good, for their recipients, and encourage ‘dependency’.
- Inequalities among the rest of society are ignored.
- It is a gendered discourse, about idle, criminal young men and single mothers.
- Unpaid work is not acknowledged.
- Although dependency on the state is regarded as a problem, personal economic dependency—especially of women and children on men—is not. Indeed, it is seen as a civilizing influence on men. (Levitas, 1998: 21).

Although the young people I interviewed were not ‘socially excluded’, some of the main characteristics of the moral underclass discourse (MUD), as defined by Levitas, could be seen to apply to the representation of working-class families in many of the current debates on widening participation.

By utilising Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural and social capital (1997), I hope to demonstrate, that far from suffering from a ‘poverty of aspiration’, many of the working-class young people I interviewed had positive orientations to education, and higher education. As Morrow (1999: 760) argues, Boudieu’s concept of capital is useful “because it is essentially a theory of privilege rather than a theory of inadequacy”.

4.2 The Involvement of Mothers In Children’s Education

Bourdieu has recognised the importance of the family as a site of social and cultural reproduction. The concept of cultural capital is integral to Bourdieu’s writings on ‘the family’:

“Each family transmits to its children, indirectly rather than directly, a certain cultural capital and a certain ethos” (Bourdieu, 1976:110).
For Bourdieu, unequal educational achievement and inequality are attributed to this 'ethos' which:

"is a system of implicit and deeply interiorized values which, among other things, helps to define attitudes towards the cultural capital and educational institutions" (Bourdieu, 1976:110).

In *The Forms of Capital* Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of mothers and the pivotal role they play in the generation of cultural capital:

"It is because the cultural capital that is effectively transmitted within the family itself depends not only on the quantity of cultural capital, itself accumulated by spending time, that the domestic group possess, but also on the usable time (particularly in the form of the mother’s free time) available to it ..... “ (Bourdieu 1997: 54).

The generation of cultural capital within families, not only depends on an investment of time, ‘in the form of mother’s free time’, but also on material resources. As Bourdieu (1997: 53) argues, ‘the different types of capital can be derived from economic capital’. Plentiful amounts of economic capital means ‘being able to purchase the time of others’ (Bourdieu, 1997: 54). The buying of time, for example buying into child-care, is increasingly used by middle-class women to pursue their own professional careers (Reay, 1998a). However, although many middle-class mothers might not be as time poor as working-class mothers because of their ability to ‘purchase the time of others, women still remain primarily responsible and involved in the rearing of their children. The greater involvement of mothers in their children’s education has however been an issue largely raised by feminist academics ((Lareau, 1989: David, 1993: Reay, 1995, 1998c). For Reay (1998c), the work that women do in support of their children’s education is not only often hidden behind assumptions of mothering as a natural, easy process, far removed from what counts as ‘real’ work. Mothers’ involvement in their children’s education is also often hidden, she believes, as a result of who gets to decide, in academia specifically, what topics are worthy of study. She argues that neither mothers’ involvement in their children’s education nor mothering more generally have been considered worthy topics to study. When parental involvement in children’s education has been considered a topic worthy of consideration,
much of the writing has assumed that all parents share an identical experience of involvement in their children’s schooling (Reay, 1995,1998c). Similarly, government policy emphasizes parents as ungendered, unclassed and ‘unraced’, ignoring materiality and differences between families. The current rhetoric of ‘choice’ in education, which positions parents as active consumers in education, also ignores differences between families and the differing cultural and economic resources families are able to draw on. Diane Reay (1998c:10) argues that gender, class, ‘race’ and marital status are missing from the texts on parental involvement except when they emerge as ‘problems to be dealt with’. Different family types, especially lone mother families have been seen as ‘problems to be dealt with’, and in current social policy the emphasis has been on encouraging lone mothers into paid employment (Standing, 1997). Similarly, working-class families have been problematized in the widening participation debate, where their under-representation in higher education has been blamed on their own low aspirations.

In both Reay’s study of mothers’ involvement in their children’s primary schooling (1995,1998c) and Lareau’s study of parental intervention in elementary education (1989), fathers are not generally involved in the daily routines of their children’s lives. The issue of time was especially crucial to parents’ involvement in their children’s education. While many fathers felt they ‘didn’t have time’ to spend more time on their children’s schooling, mothers ‘had’ to make time. One father was further questioned in Lareau’s study about helping out at school;

“I never thought of it, but if it was something I wanted to do, like skiing, I would find the time. It never crossed my mind. I guess I thought that it was women’s work” (Lareau, 1989:89).

For the father above, it was not only a question of not wanting to find the time to help his child out at school, it was also that parental involvement was necessarily ‘women’s work’. It is not only the ‘educational work’ of helping out at school, reading with children and helping with homework, amongst other things that mothers are generally more involved with. They are also more involved in the essential, but often stressful and difficult ‘practical maintenance
work' (Reay, 1995, 1998c). This work often involves waking children in the morning, “dragging children out of bed”, making sure children are dressed appropriately, preparing and/or supervising breakfast, “dragging” them out the door, and making sure they arrive at school on time.

At all three schools, mothers and fathers seemed to have very different roles and were involved in their children’s lives in very different ways. From talking to the young people it became clear that mothers were more involved in the every day routines of their children’s lives and were the ones who were more ‘hands on’, helping with homework and things like work experience, which all students in year ten at all three schools had to organize for themselves. However, it was at Kingsbridge Girls’ School that the involvement of mothers was most marked.

**4.3 Lost Opportunities: The Impact of mothers’ Own Educational Experiences on Their Daughters**

Most of the girls at Kingsbridge School attached a great deal of importance to their education, supporting the literature on the value of education for many ethnic minority families, especially those from South Asian backgrounds (Afshar, 1989; Basit, 1997). Why education should be valued so highly by ethnic minority young people and their families has been debated. Racism and discrimination in the workplace has been seen as a major factor in explaining the higher rates of participation in post-compulsory education for ethnic minority young people. Post-compulsory education not only offers the chance of improving certification, it also postpones entry into the labour market (Gillborn, 1997). In her study of working-class Muslim girls, Basit (1997) found that education offered the girls the possibility of upward mobility. In contrast, Plummer (2000) and Afshar (1989) question the faith placed in education to equalise conditions and opportunities and deliver families from poverty and disadvantage. Afshar (1989) in her study of Muslim women in West Yorkshire found that despite the commitment of Muslim parents to schooling, the curriculum did not meet their needs or expectations.
The importance of getting a good education was articulated to the girls mainly through their parents, many of whom had been born in Pakistan and had received little or no education themselves:

"my mum and dad were born in Pakistan and that's why they never got to really get a proper education, so they really want us to do well and get a good education", (Sophie, Kingsbridge School)

"my parents, my mum came from Pakistan but she just, always says to us that oh you're so lucky to have education, you know take the opportunity", (Tehmina, Kingsbridge School).

Although many of the girls' mothers and fathers had experienced a lack of educational opportunities growing up in Pakistan, it was women who appeared to be more disadvantaged educationally and it was mainly the lack of opportunities available to their own mothers, that the girls at Kingsbridge School recognized the importance of education for their own future lives. The girls talked about the unequal educational opportunities available to women and to their own mothers in particular:

"In those times Asian families didn't really used to let their girls go to school, probably something but not a lot, so my nan and grandad never used to let them go to school", (Jennifer, Kingsbridge School).

"My mum never went to school cos she was in Pakistan and she had a lot of brothers and sisters and you know, she was one of the oldest so it was kind of like her duty to look after them and help out with her mum", (Fauzia, Kingsbridge School).

Although there was some recognition by the girls at Kingsbridge School that things had changed and there were now more educational opportunities for girls, many still saw the difficulties their mothers still faced.

"My mum really regrets not, you know, learning English, like my mum's sister now she goes to a college where adults go and she's learning how to speak English and now my mum thinks that you know it'll be useful for her to know English, just to answer the phone, if someone knocks on the door, you know that sort of thing, but then now I've told her to like go to lesson and she's like 'no I'm shy cos I don't speak English and I feel embarrassed". (Sophie, Kingsbridge School).
"well my mum she's gonna work with ICT and that, she's gotta know English, she's gotta know how to use the computer and she doesn't know", (Jennifer, Kingsbridge School).

For most of the girls the lack of educational opportunities available to their mothers positively influenced their own attitudes towards education. Besides knowing what they did want: a good education, many of the girls also knew what they did not want: to be housewives. This finding is supported by Basit (1996), who found in her study of fifteen and sixteen year old British Muslim girls, that no girl wanted to do the same job as her mother or father. As most mothers were housewives, the young women in Basit's study did not aspire to this in the future. Being educated and going to college was not only seen as a means of escaping becoming a housewife for many of the girls at Kingsbridge School, it was also seen as a better option than 'staying at home' which was positioned as the alternative. Like the majority of young British Asian women in Basit's (1996) study, the majority of mothers at Kingsbridge School were full-time housewives. Of the twenty girls interviewed at Kingsbridge School, thirteen had mothers who were housewives and a further two described their mothers as not working. The number of mothers who were housewives at Kingsbridge School was far higher than at either Springfield School, or Chantry School. Tehmina and Anoop talked about their reasons for wanting to go to college:

"to further, to get my education, I don't want to be a housewife or anything like that", (Tehmina, Kingsbridge School).

"cleaning up houses and everything I don't wanna become something like that. I wanna, do my education more further and like, you know what I mean, get a job or something", (Anoop, Kingsbridge School).

Zakia also gave her reason for wanting to go to college as being "cos I don't wanna sit at home". Anoop also knew a lot of people who were 'at home' and who were not in education or employment:

"Yeah I know a lot of people, I know a lot of people. One of my friends won't be able to go college because her dad, her dad's a bit strict, so she'll be staying home, quite sad", (Anoop, Kingsbridge School).
While Anoop talked about the ongoing lack of opportunities for many girls to receive any education post-16, there was also recognition from both Anoop and Tehmina that things had changed for the better. Education was seen as especially important for girls because ‘in the past we’ve always been stayin’ at home’. Although both girls were aware of the continuing restrictions placed on young women they knew in terms of post-16 educational participation, they themselves were not subject to it and could look forward to moving into further education. However, for Anoop, the battle was not won. Despite greater opportunities for women, men’s attitudes towards women and their ‘place’ in society were still an issue:

“I mean like, we have to prove ourselves, we’ve got to change the rules of...men thinking that girls are just for housewife and everything which kind of hurts because we are the same, we can do the same” (Anoop, Kingsbridge School).

However, there was also evidence at Kingsbridge School that relationships between men and women were seen to be more egalitarian, with marriage seen as an equal partnership. For Mavdip and Priya who both want to go into further and higher education, marriage was viewed as an equal partnership where partners supported each other. Both girls also talked about working after marriage, something that the majority of mothers at Kingsbridge School had not done themselves. Mavdip and Priya discuss the importance of education:

Priya: I really think it’s useful (education) for when you get married as well

Mavdip: Exactly, then you know, if, in your further life and everything if you’re married, if you are married and stuff then obviously, you can get a job with the qualifications you’ve already got

Priya: Yeah, and it’s good cos you can support each other as well, if you’re working and stuff like that, or even if you’re still studying, support each other, cos you know you’re gonna be going out there and getting a good job at the end of the day

(Kingsbridge School)
Nadira similarly talks about the importance of education for girls, and more specifically the growing importance for men of having an educated partner. She talks about her reasons for wanting to go to college:

"um, better education cos you realize the rest of your life marriage everything cos I don’t know ‘bout you, like you know for us lot it’s more about education for a lady like you know you can either go for an educational wife, look for an educational girlfriend or whatever so..." (Nadira, Kingsbridge School).

At Kingsbridge School it was also noticeable that many of the girls who were interviewed had older siblings who had already finished college and/or university, or who were currently studying at college and/or university. For girls like Tehmina, who has four older sisters, two currently studying medicine and law at university and two currently studying at college and anticipating entry to higher education, it might be somewhat easier to negotiate with parents or other family members entry into further and higher education. While Tehmina’s oldest sister might have experienced some difficulty in accessing further and higher education, Tehmina as the youngest in her family is able to follow the well trodden path of her sisters into post-compulsory education. While Tehmina articulates that she ‘does not want to be a housewife or anything like that’ and can clearly see the range of options available to her through seeing the opportunities available to her older sisters, perhaps those who do not have older siblings or siblings that have been to college or university do not have the same negotiating powers over parents.

Many of the mothers of the young women interviewed at Kingsbridge School articulated to their daughters the gender aspects of lost opportunities. Mothers stressed the opportunities lost to them through being excluded from education because they were female. Some of the girls also described how their mothers missed out on working because of marriage and family. Amrita talks about her mother:

"She went to secondary school, went to ....... School, and after that she wanted to have a job, but she was taken out of that because of the ways
of the society, and um, after she got married and had 4 kids” (Amrita, Kingsbridge School).

‘The ways of the society’ made it impossible for Amrita’s mother to work, and marriage and family were the only options available to her. It was almost exclusively girls at Kingsbridge School who described the gender aspects of lost opportunities relating to their mothers.

4.4 “It’s Your Life at the End of the Day”: Parents’ Involvement in the Decision-Making Process

While many of the mothers at Kingsbridge School had articulated to their daughters the importance of education, especially in terms of their own ‘lost opportunities’, the majority of parents at all three schools seemed to play more of a supportive role in their children’s education. Through talking to the young people, it seemed evident that generally, parents would leave any decision-making to their child, but would express concerns or give their backing to the choices explored by their sons and daughters. The young people seemed to operate within a ‘framed field of reference’ (Foskett and Heskett, 1996) established by their parents. Lack of cultural capital, in terms of educational qualifications and knowledge of the educational system, makes it difficult for parents to advise and guide their children in the decisions they are making about future educational and career opportunities. Reay (1998e, 2004) has argued that families differ in their access to emotional capital, in their ability to mobilize and deploy emotional involvement and support. Reay (1998e) argues in particular that class and economic factors affect mothers’ ability to ‘divert their emotional involvement into generating academic profits for their children’ (p.4). Reay and Ball (1997:89) have argued elsewhere that ‘working-class decision-making in education is infused by ambivalence, fear and a reluctance to invest too much in an area where failure is still a common working-class experience’. As the majority of the parents of those I interviewed, had low levels of dominant cultural capital, in the form of educational knowledge and negative personal experiences of schooling, it is hardly surprising that decision making should be largely left to the young people themselves.
Diane Reay (1998b) has also argued elsewhere that lack of familial resources often means that working-class students are more autonomous in the decisions they make about university. In Reay’s study of higher education choice, the working-class college students she interviewed, although supported by parents, were often left to make decisions about higher education alone due to a lack of familial higher education experience. This was in contrast to the middle-class students who were engaging with higher education choice in a context of certainty. There were ‘taken for granted assumptions’ in the middle-class families that their children would go to university. ‘Bourdieu observes that families possessing high-status cultural capital have clear strategies of how much and what kind of schooling each generation should have’ (McDonough et al. 1996: 6 in Ball et al. 1999). Few of the parents of the young people I interviewed had made it into further education, let alone higher education. Although many of the young people talked about their parents wanting them to go to college and university and taking up opportunities they themselves had never had, much of the advice offered to the young people seemed to be vague. Although some young people talked about feeling pressured to study certain subjects, or go to certain colleges by their parents, especially at Kingsbridge School, many young people felt their parents’ only desire was for them to be ‘happy’:

“My dad’s said that, it’s up to you really what you wanna be because it’s your life at the end of the day, he goes um, if your heart’s set on something then you need to do it, it’s not up to me what you wanna be”(Josie, Chantry School).

“You know, my parents have said to me you can do whatever course you want, we won’t tell you to do, you have to do this course, just what you’re good at, what you wanna do, what you think you’ll enjoy”(Mavdip, Kingsbridge School).

“My ma said as long as like you try your best and you do your best you can she said I’ll back you up whatever you wanna do, if you wanna go college and she said yeah do what you want, it’s your life and make the most of it ”(Lea, Springfield School).
Fathers did not seem to be as involved in the lives of their children, and their intervention seemed to be at the level of advice giving and they were more generally the figure of authority in their families:

"I did actually wanna be an air hostess for an airline and I was kind of put off by it cause I really love aeroplanes and then I just asked my dad about it and my dad was like you’re gonna be coming in and out flying, it’s gonna be stressful and you’re just gonna have to put on a happy face and it’s not the best thing you could do” (Sara, Chantry School).

"My dad says it’d be best for me to go (to college) and then I’ll get a better job, more money and then life’ll be easier for me” (Jerome, Chantry School).

"My dad’s advised me not to go into building because you’re not always certain of a job, once the work runs out there’s no point in keeping you” (Carl, Springfield School).

Since talking to her father about being an air hostess, Sara had decided against it and was now interested in becoming a teacher, just like her mother. The content of the advice given to the young people by their fathers also seemed to be largely dependent on the sex of the child. The advice given to girls by their fathers was often concerned with what they imagined to be ‘appropriate’ jobs for their daughters. In comparison, boys were often advised by their fathers not to ‘mess around’ at school, to do well at school, and warned against ending up ‘like me’:

"Like he (dad) got kicked out of school but he didn’t do nothing, his friend got him kicked out of school and my grandad weren’t exactly happy, so he had to go and get, he had to go and get a job straightaway and go and get an apprenticeship and everything and he wants us to do well so that doesn’t happen to us cause he says he’s been through it and he doesn’t want it happening to us again” (Billy, Chantry School).

"My dad he, I think he was taking this test to get into university, but instead of going to the test he was out playing with his friends, so my dad keeps telling me about that, just do what you need to do, get your education and just don’t mess about” (Jerome, Chantry School).

Both Billy and Jerome want to go to college and university and seem to have taken on board their father’s warning about not ‘messing about’ and not ending up ‘like me’. David et al. (2003) in their study of parental involvement in
student choices of higher education found important class differences in familial habitus, in that the middle-classes attempted to reproduce their own educational patterns whilst the working-class parents wanted to transform their children's educational fates. Similarly, the warnings from the fathers of Billy and Jerome not to end up 'like me', seems to suggest that some working-class parents did want to transform their children's educational fates. Despite their own negative experiences of schooling, the educational success of their sons Billy and Jerome is vitally important. However, whilst some parents knew what they did not want, their children to end up 'like me', their familial resources do not provide a clear sense of 'what might be' and what things could be like or the links between the here and now and the possible then. Cultural capital is stretched beyond its limits (Ball et al. 1999). Thus, although parents seemed to be encouraging, they are not necessarily able to offer tangible support or facilitation. Fathers also seemed to exert more authority over their children and were often the decision makers in their families:

"My dad usually has like a lecture about getting a good job which I don't mind cause I know I've got to get good results" (Daisy, Chantry School)

"Every day I ask my dad if I can go college. Well my dad knows that if you get good grades my dad's definitely sending me to college" (Louise-Ann, Chantry School).

4.5 'My Parents' Dream is to Have a Child Who's a Solicitor...'

There was some expectation from some parents, and especially at Kingsbridge School that their children would enter certain professions. This expectation especially affected girls who were in top sets and who were already contemplating further and higher education. It was also both mothers and fathers that articulated to their daughters their desires for their future careers:

"My parents’ dream is to have a child who’s a solicitor or lawyer" (Nadira, Kingsbridge School).

"My dad wants me to come, become a pharmacist. and I’m like 'no'" (Aaliyah, Kingsbridge School)
Aaliyah’s father wants her to become a pharmacist because “it’s good money”.

Mavdip talks about her mother:

“My mum, my mum does kind of sometimes you know, hint that oh I want you to be a teacher something like that or teaching is good you know you should try it” (Mavdip, Kingsbridge School).

Devine (2004) talks about the ‘occupational inheritance’ of many of the middle-class interviewees in her comparative study of social mobility in America and Britain. Many of the middle-class people in her study talked about the pressures placed on them to follow their parents into similar professions. Although there is some hope from both mothers and fathers that their daughters will enter certain professions, this does seem open to negotiation and the girls seem able to challenge their parents if it is not something they want to do in the future. While many of the parents of the young women I interviewed did value cultural capital in that they placed a high premium on educational and occupational success for their daughters, they lacked cultural capital in the form of knowledge and information about the routes available to achieve this success. Although Mavdip’s mother would like her to become a teacher, Mavdip responds by saying “I’m just gonna do what I feel, I feel more comfortable in doing”. Similarly, Aaliyah is able to say “no” to her father’s hope that she will become a pharmacist. Lightbody et al., (1997) suggest it is perhaps the experiences of discrimination within the labour market and the community at large of first-generation immigrants that prompts them to strive for ‘something better’ for their children in the form of cultural capital that is valuable in the labour market (and hence can be turned into economic capital). The desire of some parents at Kingsbridge School that their daughters will enter certain professions perhaps stems from wanting ‘something better’ for their children. Teaching, law and pharmacy were considered by parents to be ‘good’ professions for their daughters to go into, and would all require entry to higher education, something that none of the parents at Kingsbridge School had themselves experienced. For Mavdip, Aayliah and Nadira who were all in the Green group at Kingsbridge School and had already been predicted good GCSE grades for the following year, it was not unrealistic that they would
enter higher education in the future. Although the three girls were not intending to enter the professions desired by their parents, they were intending to go into further education and Mavdip and Aayliah wanted to also go to university. It would therefore seem that the parents of the three girls do not have unrealistic expectations of their daughters. Aayliyah’s comment that her father hoped that she would take up pharmacy because “it’s good money” perhaps reflected parents concern that their daughters would also be financially secure in the future and have more opportunities than they themselves had had. The parents of Mavdip, Aayliah and Nadira, like the majority of other parents at Kingsbridge School, were in low paid jobs or did not work (housewife, retired or unemployed).

Devine (2004) also talks about the mobilisation of social resources and networks in the reproduction of advantage. A ‘helping hand’, ‘string pulling’ and the ‘old boy network’ work to advantage the already advantaged and can work to correct the effect of academic sanctions. For example, one of Fiona Devine’s interviewees talks about the importance of strong ties on his career:

“Again, fate and fortune, one of the ladies who is on the board of directors is from (M) and knew my family and she came up and introduced herself to my mother. My grandparents and hers had been acquaintances. And it came about that (my mother said) ‘oh, my son is a doctor’ and she said ‘Oh, would he like to work here?’ and she obviously couldn’t get me a job but she could introduce me to people. As it turned out, she introduced me to the Chairman of the Department here and as it came about he asked me if I would like to be a fellow here” (Devine, 2004:129).

For the young women I interviewed at Kingsbridge School, as well as, the young people at Chantry and Springfield School, they did not have access to similar kinds of influential social networks. If the young women at Kingsbridge School were to succeed in the profession of their parent’s choice, (or in any other profession for that matter), it would be due to their own hard work and academic success.

4.6 Young People’s Use of Social Resources and Networks
The notion of ‘social capital’ is used by Bourdieu (1997) in examining the importance of social networks and relationships in the reproduction of advantage. Social Capital “is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1997: 51). These relationships and memberships, “through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources” (Shilling, 1993 in Morrow, 1999: 755). ‘The old boy network’ is perhaps one example of how men in positions of power have traditionally used their social resources and contacts to advance their education and careers. According to Bourdieu (1997: 52) these relationships take time, and the reproduction of social capital presupposes an “unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed”. Like cultural capital, ‘expenditure of time and energy’ is essential to this work, and as already mentioned, economic capital is at the root of cultural and social capital.

Patricia Allatt (1993) in her study of middle-class family processes, found that social capital was crucial in the reproduction of advantage. The children in these middle-class families were integrated into the networks and processes of using parental contacts, and as Allatt argues (1993: 155) “to be effective, social networks have to be coupled with a knowledge of how to use them”. Parents offered their own social networks as a resource for their children’s use. For example, parental contacts were often used to further school projects or for career or university information.

While the parents in Allatt’s (1993) study were able to offer their social networks as a resource for their children, most of students that I talked to, relied more on older siblings, and other older family members. For information about careers, university, and so on, the lack of higher education experience amongst the majority of parents at all three schools, meant that they did not have the social networks available to them that would have aided their own children in the decisions they were beginning to make about their futures.
The social networks the young people had access to, were also highly localised. So, information about college, university and careers, came from older siblings who were all largely studying/working in the local area. The impact of this on the young people in the research, seemed to be that they in turn wanted to ‘stay close to home’ when studying/working in the future. (This is discussed in more detail below in section 4.7). In section 4.7, I also consider the role of ‘grapevine’ knowledge in the educational and career decisions being made by the young people. ‘Grapevine’ knowledge refers to the social networks and informal information gathering that takes place in communities and which people have differential access to. “Where you live, who you know and what community you belong to are vital determinants of the particular grapevine that is open to you” (Ball and Vincent, 1998: 381).

4.7 ‘It’s Easier Just to Follow your Brothers and Sisters’: The Use of ‘Hot’ Knowledge

Bourdieu writes of cultural capital:

“One of the most valuable sorts of information constituting inherited cultural capital is practical or theoretical knowledge of the fluctuations of the market in academic qualifications, the sense of investment which enables one to get the best return on inherited cultural capital in the scholastic market or on scholastic capital in the labour market, for example, by knowing the right moment to pull out of devalued disciplines and careers and to switch into those with a future, rather than clinging to the scholastic values which secured the highest profits in an earlier state of the market” (1984:142).

For the working-class students at Kingsbridge, Springfield and Chantry Schools, there was little knowledge or awareness of differences between colleges and universities, and there was certainly little awareness and knowledge about the most marketable subjects to study. Decisions about where to study post-16 and what to study, were largely determined by locality (See 4.8 below), and older siblings. It was not only parents, and especially mothers, who influenced the educational and career aspirations of the young people. In all three schools, older siblings, older cousins and other older family members
influenced, both positively and negatively, the young people’s ideas about further and higher education and possible future careers. This conforms with the views of young people studied by Archer, Hutchings and Ross (2003) and Connor and Dewson (2001), who placed great reliance on people, rather than brochures and other formal information, when making decisions about higher education. As most of the parents of the young people interviewed had little knowledge themselves about higher education, because they had not experienced it themselves, it was unsurprising many of the young men and women turned to older siblings and other older family members who had experienced, or were currently experiencing further and/or higher education. Ball and Vincent (1998), although specifically considering parental choice of secondary school, distinguish between ‘hot’ knowledge (acquired through the ‘grapevine’) and ‘cold’ knowledge (official or formal knowledge). They found that while most parents made some use of ‘grapevine’ knowledge, some were suspicious or doubtful about it and sought out official or ‘cold’ knowledge with which to replace, or at least supplement it. This group were mainly middle-class parents. Other parents used ‘grapevine’ knowledge unquestioningly, seeing it as a way of making choices ‘grounded in the opinions of other parents like oneself’ (1998:392). Working-class parents tended to fall into this category. Ball and Vincent argue:

“Significantly, the grapevine is seen as more reliable than other ‘official’ sources of information...The comparisons between grapevine knowledge and official information...counterpose formal, public, abstract knowledge with personal, social knowledge. There is a degree of scepticism about the former and a general preference for and sense of greater usefulness about the latter” (1998:380).

In exactly the same way, information available to young people about their post-16 educational choices can be identified as ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ knowledge. The majority of young people in all three schools relied heavily on ‘hot’ knowledge. Despite there being careers rooms at all three schools, there was little reliance on ‘cold’ knowledge, with few young people saying they had looked at college brochures, leaflets or university prospectus, The influence on the young people of older siblings, cousins and friends on the choice of college, as well as, the choice of college course was especially noticeable:
"my sister's at (college name) 6th form college, so I might go there if I can get the things that I need to get in there, I need to get high levels to get into that 6th form college, but that's where I might go" (Maisy, Chantry School)

"(name) 6th form, most of my cousins have been there, and my brother" (Louise-Ann, Chantry School)

"(name) College because my cousin went there, she said it's quite a good college" (Amrita, Kingsbridge School)

"I've just had, my sister just likes the college, like she's been to 6th form, now she's gone to (name of college) and she said that (name) College is a much better college compared to 6th form and I just like the sound of it there" (Billy, Chantry School)

"My sister goes to (name of college), so probably go to the same as her I expect" (Paula, Springfield School)

"I'll probably go to (name of college) cause that's where my brother's been already, yeah I'll probably go there" (William, Springfield School).

"I've been thinking about going to (name) university because I've heard that it does media and textiles, and I've been there before and it's got like a friendly atmosphere so...and my sister goes to that uni as well" (Josie, Chantry School)

Despite many of the young people saying they wanted to go to the same college and/or university as their older siblings and friends, few had actually visited the college of their choice, or were aware of the courses the college offered and whether they were able to study the courses they were interested in. However, 'hot' knowledge did not necessarily come from family and/or friends. Many of the young people also seem to be influenced by rumour and hearsay, many weighing up which college to go to, based on reputation and what they had 'heard' from other people:

"I've heard that (name of college) a very good college" (Amrita, Kingsbridge School)

"I don't want to go to a local college because as far as I know they're not very good" (Rozina, Kingsbridge School)
"I've heard like recommendations of them (2 local colleges) and apparently they're quite good" (John, Chantry School)

"(name of college), lots of girls I know go there and they say it's really good so I wanna go there" (Anoop, Kingsbridge School)

'Hot' knowledge was not only used by the majority of young people who were interested in going to college/university, it was also used by some of the young men at Springfield School, who did not want to go to college, but wanted to enter jobs where they would be following in the footsteps of older siblings or people they knew:

"I want to do something about sports or an electrician...I just, I'm quite good at electrics and science and my uncle does it" (Paul, Springfield School)

"I want to be an electrician... 'cause it's fun and I know a couple of people and I was going to like go into partnership with my brother" (Phil, Springfield School)

4.8 ‘Staying Close to Home’: The Influence of Family and Community on Young People’s Educational Futures

Many of the young people I interviewed talked about being reluctant to move away from the area in which they lived, if they were to go to university. The need to ‘keep close’ (Pugsley, 1998) was mostly framed in terms of family relations and the safety of familiarity- knowing people and being known. At all three schools there appeared to be constraints of family, community and locality on young people’s possible future educational careers. As mentioned above, ‘hot’ knowledge was often perceived by the young people to be more trustworthy, as it was based on the direct experience of family and/or friends. However, ‘staying close to home’, was a strategy that had been adopted by many of the young people’s older siblings, and other family members when applying to college/university. Many of the older siblings who had experienced, or were currently experiencing college, had chosen colleges one bus ride or less away from their homes. Similarly, many older siblings, and other family members who had successfully negotiated access to higher education, were studying or had been studying in their home towns or had only
moved a short distance away. The knowledge and information many of the young people had about post-16 educational opportunities was therefore located in who they knew and the community in which they lived, which potentially closed off opportunities, colleges and courses located outside their immediate locality. However, while many of the young people were considering college/university in terms of ‘staying close to home’, because of recommendations made by older siblings and other people they knew, some were also ‘staying close to home’ for other reasons.

Some of the girls at Kingsbridge School talked about the restrictions placed on them as girls, something that they did not think applied equally to boys. For Fatema, boys are treated differently to girls and are allowed more freedom:

Fatema: Boys can do whatever they want girls can’t, girls have gotta tell their parents, girls gotta come in early, they let the boys stay out late, it’s really sexist

Kerry: Is it quite strict being a girl?

Fatema: Yeah, towards the girls they are and most parents are so overprotective with their daughters than the boys, it’s unfair

For Fatema, it is not only parents who treat their children differently, depending on whether they are boys or girls. Fatema does not feel she has the same opportunities available to her as a girl, or that she has the same amount of freedom as boys generally have. When Fatema comments that “there are very strict people round our end” (in the neighbourhood where she lives), there is the implication that the local community is also involved in policing the behaviour and activities of girls.

Within the field of geography, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of space and place in the construction of people’s identities. Within education, the importance of locality has also been explored, specifically in relation to working-class children (Reay, 2000; Connolly and Neill, 2001). For some of the girls at Kingsbridge School, their future educational aspirations are
mediated by their own, and their parents’ experiences of the area in which they live. Although none of the girls talked about experiencing any difficulty in gaining permission from parents to go to college, choice of college and university did appear to be more problematic. Through talking to some of the girls at Kingsbridge School, there did appear to be restrictions placed on some girls by their parents on where they would be able to go to college and university. It appeared that although permission was granted by parents for girls to go to college, this was very much dependent on their daughters ‘staying close to home’ and not travelling too far. Rozina who wants to go to college comments:

Rozina: I don’t mind if it’s far (distance to college) but I don’t think I’d be allowed to go that far anyway. so:”

And later:

Kerry: Can you see any hurdles in getting to college, is there anything you’re worried about?

Rozina: probably my parents cos I don’t think they want me to go somewhere too far

Similarly, Amrita who wants to go to college and university talks about the pressure on her to remain at home if she goes to university:

Amrita: I’d stay at home because er, mainly because it’s religious rules and that and because my parents would not like it and because I’m more settled when I’m at home

Kerry: Why do you think they wouldn’t like you...?

Amrita: er no, it’s not that, my parents have always said to me, my family’s always said to me that you know, do whatever you can, achieve the best and we’re always behind you, we’re always supporting you, but I think going away I think it’d be, I don’t know, it’s kind of hard really, mainly cos of religious rules and um, not many Muslim girls……. maybe I think because my parents are just scared about what this society’s like, that’s it.
While parental guidance and control appeared to influence both the leisure activities and educational opportunities of some of the girls at Kingsbridge School, there was little sign of rebellion on the part of the young women in trying to negotiate more freedom for themselves. In Basit’s (1997) study of fifteen and sixteen year old British Muslim girls at three schools in the East of England, she found that while teachers often perceived Muslim girls to have less freedom than English girls, some Muslim girls themselves maintained they had the freedom to do what they liked at home. While many of the girls at Kingsbridge School did not seem to have the freedom they would like at home, there did seem to be a similar echoing of ‘I want more freedom, but not too much’, that Basit found in her study. The respect that many of the young women had for their families, meant that they were likely to agree with their parents’ wishes. Although Amrita talked about the expectation on her from her family that she would stay at home while studying at a local university, she is more than happy to go along with her parents’ wishes saying, “I’d rather stay at home, I wouldn’t want to go out on campus, I’d rather stay at home and do my studying there”.

For some of the girls at Kingsbridge School ‘staying close to home’ is a reflection of how close their relationships with their families are. Mavdip and Priya who both want to go to university, are worried that they will be homesick if they move away from home:

Mavdip: I don’t think I’d like to move away from home, I get really homesick
Priya: Yeah, I mean we were away for a week...
Mavdip: when we were away for a week, last week we were like. Oh we wanna go home
Priya: and we were complaining the first day
Mavdip: Yeah, oh I want my mum!
Priya: no, if I, if I’ve got the support from people, if like my brother and sister were there in the same place where I want to go and they, and I’ve got accommodation then that’s fine but if....
Mavdip: if I was on my own then I don’t think...
Priya: even if I’m with a friend I don’t think I’d be able to....
Mavdip: Like, I’ve got like, I’ve got cousins in London and I can apply there, I mean my parents have given me full
permission that I you know, if I get good grades, I can stay there but I wanna stay at home, I’d get homesick, I’d prefer it in.....

For some of the young people at the three schools, going to a college/university ‘close to home’, was also based on distance and transport practicalities. Being able to catch a bus, walk, or get a lift from friends or family members, seemed to play a part in making some colleges/universities more ‘get-at-able’ than others (Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz, 1997):

“(name of college) is more convenient for me, ‘cause you catch the bus straight to the centre and you’re there really so, yeah so I think it’ll be easier” (Claire, Springfield School).

“I prefer to go somewhere local where I don’t have to catch loads of buses” (Imaan, Kingsbridge School).

“I wouldn’t mind going far (to college) but I’d rather my dad dropped me off ‘cause I hate buses” (Farzana, Kingsbridge School)

‘Staying close to home’, could also be seen to be a response to the difficulties experienced by those from working-class backgrounds having to negotiate middle-class spaces (Reay, 1998a). ‘Middle-class places, the suburbs, no less than the traditional university, may be reassuring and inviting for the middle classes, but they are simultaneously relatively hostile places for working-class children and young people’ (Reay, 2000: 160). The disjuncture between working-class habitus and middle-class education is discussed further in chapter six, where students discuss their experiences of ‘taster days’ at elite universities.

4.9 Educational and Career Aspirations: Reproducing Gender and Class Inequalities

All young people were asked about their career intentions on leaving school. The career aspirations of some of the girls at Kingsbridge School reflected not only what their own mothers were doing, but also the work they were, as girls, already carrying out in the home. As already argued, many of the parents of those I interviewed did not lack cultural capital, in the sense that many placed a
high premium on academic success for their children. However, apart from a small number of parents who had very specific ideas about what occupations they would like their children to go into (this seemed to only be the case at Kingsbridge School), the majority of parents did not seem to hold high occupational aspirations for their children. Aside from wanting their children to be ‘happy’, they are not necessarily able to offer tangible support or facilitation. It is also interesting that, especially at Kingsbridge School, many of the young women themselves shared similar modest occupational aspirations for the future. This was despite many anticipating that they would go to university in the future. Although friends seemed to be an important social support system for many of the young people I interviewed (this is discussed in chapter five), and Devine (2004) has argued that peer pressures from similarly academically able school friends can set those from working-class backgrounds on the path to higher education. It also seemed that peer pressures (alongside family pressures and responsibilities) from school friends could perhaps set many of the young women I interviewed at Kingsbridge School on the path to very gendered, low status caring occupations in the future. Thus, while friendships among many of the educationally oriented young working-class women at Kingsbridge School was an important social capital resource that many seemed to draw on, as they began (or had already started), to contemplate further and even higher education, these friendships also seemed to be reinforcing gendered and classed inequalities and occupational aspirations. Amrita, whose mother is a nursery nurse is thinking of going to college and university to become a family social worker or paediatrician. She explains why:

“I have brothers, younger brothers and sisters and I look after them. I also look after other people’s children, um, you could say um, it’s like, our friends they call me the mum of the group, so I’m also looking after them as well” (Amrita, Kingsbridge School).

Amrita likes children, and it is through caring for her younger siblings at home, as well as, being the ‘mum’ to her group of friends that she is interested in working with children when she is older. The domestic responsibility of looking after others in her home, is being transferred into the world of work.
and what Amrita aspires to do in the future. Both Kirsty and Sonja also want to work with children in the future:

"I wanna become a nursery nurse because I like, I like teaching kids and I like um, talking to 'em, keep them calm, that's it" (Sonja, Kingsbridge School).

"When I leave school I'd like to go to college and um, study health and social care and basically stuff about kids and teaching things....I like working with kids and um, I've, I wanted to become a, health and social care um, worker since I was little so, don't know, it runs in the family" (Kirsty, Kingsbridge School).

Both Kirsty and Sonja also have younger siblings, and they, along with many of the girls at Kingsbridge School seem to spend a lot of time looking after younger brothers and sisters, and babysitting other younger extended family members. Many of the girls, especially at Kingsbridge School have also witnessed the gendered nature of their mothers’ lives, caring for others, both inside and outside the home. It is perhaps somewhat surprising that unlike the working-class women in Skeggs’ (1997b) study who were enrolled on a caring course in further education, largely due to a lack of cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications, many of the young women in the top stream at Kingsbridge School, who had access to transferable cultural capital, were similarly interested in care work.

4.10 Summary

This chapter has argued that the young working-class people I interviewed, and their families, did not have access to influential social networks and they were not able to mobilize social resources to the extent that those from middle-class backgrounds with 'insider knowledge' (Brine and Waller, 2004) of the further and higher education system are able to do.

This chapter has examined the influence of families on the decisions the young people in the research are beginning to make about their futures. I claimed that it was at Kingsbridge School that the importance of education was most clearly
articulated to young women by their families, and especially their mothers. For many of the young women at Kingsbridge School, their mothers had been born in Pakistan and had received little or no education of their own. Through talking about their own 'lost opportunities', many mothers seemed to have articulated to their daughters the importance of education. The gendered nature of many mother's lives, being full-time housewives and caring for others, also seems to have influenced many of the young women in the research, with education positioned as the alternative to being a housewife. Education was seen as offering the opportunity of escaping, at least for a while, the constraints of home and being a housewife.

The chapter has also argued that despite the articulation by many parents about the importance of education to their children, lack of cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications and a knowledge of the educational system, did mean that they seemed unable to advise and guide their children. There did not seem to be too much pressure placed on young people in their decision making, many of the young people in the research talked about their parents just wanting them to be 'happy'. If pressure was exerted, it was generally fathers who were the more authoritarian. The gender of a child also seemed to effect how fathers exerted their influence. For some girls in the research, there was some expectation from some fathers that they would go to a certain college, or go into a certain career or profession. In contrast, for a small number of boys in the research, there was a concern articulated by fathers that they should not end up 'like them' and should work hard and not 'mess around' at school.

The importance of older siblings and other family members to the young people in the research is also explored. Information about college, university and careers was often gleaned from these older family members who had experienced, or were currently experiencing further/higher education. This information seemed to be implicitly trusted by the young people, and there did not seem to be much effort made by the young people to find additional or alternative 'cold' more formal knowledge. Much of this information, as well as, many of these social networks and contacts was specific to the local area in
which the young people lived. Thus, ‘staying close to home’, neatly summed up the possible future educational and career intentions of many of the young people at all three schools. Choices reflect attachments to locality for many working-class people, and this reflects ‘the opposition between the tastes or luxury (or freedom) and the tastes of necessity’ (Bourdieu, 1986:177-178 in Ball et al. 2002).
Chapter Five

The Structuring of Educational and Career Opportunities: The Role of the School

5.0 Introduction

Schools have become an increasingly important part of the government’s widening participation strategy. Government policy has focused on encouraging greater collaborations between schools, local colleges and universities, in an attempt to encourage young working-class people to ‘raise their aspirations’ and see higher education as a possible option for them in the future. However, there has been a long tradition of sociological writing on the schooling of working-class youth, especially boys. Much of this has been concerned with the underachievement of working-class young people within the education system, focusing on the role of teachers, as well as, on the gendered identities of young people themselves. While much of this writing is overly deterministic, this chapter argues that current government education policy, as well as, schools themselves, continue to structure to an extent, the educational and career opportunities available to pupils.

5.1 Institutional Characteristics of Springfield, Kingsbridge and Chantry School

Springfield School is the largest of the three schools I went into, with around 1000 pupils. It is a mixed sex comprehensive school situated in a large city in South West England. Although the school used to have a sixth form, it now only caters for pupils aged eleven to sixteen. The school serves a wide area, with pupils coming from more than twenty local primary schools. There are very few pupils of minority ethnic heritage, which reflects the predominantly White working-class Ward in which Springfield School is situated (see Appendix 3.1) and also reflects those participating in the research. Only one
student I interviewed defined herself as mixed race. The other twenty-nine students I interviewed were White. According to the Ofsted report of 1998, a high number of pupils enter the school with low attainment levels, and GCSE results for year eleven pupils are well below national averages. In the last four years, from 2000 to 2003, the percentage of students gaining at least five 'good' GCSEs (A*-C) has remained under 30% (22%, 27%, 24%, 27% for the four consecutive years from 2000). These percentages are below the average for the city, and well below the average for England as a whole. However, it is important to point out that there are a large number of Independent schools in the city, and the percentage of students gaining at least five 'good' GCSEs at these selective schools is far greater than for those attending the remaining non-selective schools in the city.

In the 2001 Ofsted report on Springfield School, the level of attendance is deemed unsatisfactory, with pupils in years ten and eleven having an above average amount of unauthorised absence. In the year before the latest Ofsted inspection, authorised absence at the school is put at 10.9%, compared to 7.7% nationally. Unauthorised absence at the school is put at 3.1%, compared to 1.1% nationally. The number of fixed period exclusions at Springfield School in the 2001 Ofsted report is also far greater than at the other two schools I went into. Although the last Ofsted inspection held at Kingsbridge School was in 1999, in the previous year there were no fixed period or permanent exclusions. At Chantry School, it is mentioned in the 1999 Ofsted report, that there were four permanent exclusions and thirteen fixed period exclusions in the previous year.

A large number of young people at Springfield School, following their GCSEs at the end of year eleven, do not go into full-time post-16 education (See Appendix 5.3 for destination data of pupils at Springfield School). A large number of students at Springfield School are involved in employment and training after leaving year eleven, which is at variance with the destination data available from Kingsbridge and Chantry Schools. At these two schools, more young people participate in post-16 education, with fewer undertaking employment and training.
Kingsbridge Girls’ School is the smallest of the three schools I went into, with around 600 pupils on roll. The school is situated in a City in the Midlands, and almost all the girls are of Pakistani heritage and live locally. The Ward in which Kingsbridge School is located contains a high percentage of those from Asian or British Asian ethnic backgrounds, compared with the city as a whole (See Appendix 2.2). Like Springfield and Chantry Schools, Kingsbridge does not have a sixth form, and only caters for students aged 11-16. In the 1999 Ofsted report, 92% of students have English as an additional language, and Kingsbridge School has the highest percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals out of the three schools (61% in the 1999 Ofsted report). GCSE results at Kingsbridge Girls’ School are better than at Springfield School, with 49% of students gaining at least five GCSEs grades A*-C in 2003, compared with 39% in 2002, 42% in 2001 and 44% in 2000. Like Chantry School, a large percentage of students at Kingsbridge School go on to post-compulsory education (See Appendix 5.2). In 2001, almost 75% of students went on to participate in some form of further education. Unlike the City where Springfield School is located, Kingsbridge School is one of a large number of non-selective single sex in the City.

Chantry School was the most ethnically diverse of the schools I went into, where according to the 1999 Ofsted report (see Ofsted.gov.uk/reports), 52% of the school’s population is from an ethnic minority background, and students are mainly of Pakistani and Indian heritage. Chantry School is a mixed-sex comprehensive school, situated in the same City as Kingsbridge Girls’ School, with around 760 pupils on roll. Unlike the other two schools, Chantry School provides for a number of students with physical disabilities, and these students come from all across the city. According to the 1999 Ofsted report, standards of attainment for students on entry to the school are above average, and GCSE results are not only above national averages, but better than at the other two schools. In 1995, 50% of students gained at least five ‘good’ GCSE results (A*-C). This had risen to 58% in 1999. By 2003, 68% of students had achieved at least 5 GCSE results at grades A*-C. The majority of students at Chantry School also go on to participate in further education (See Appendix 5.1). In
2001, over 87% of students went on to post-compulsory education, this is a greater percentage than at Kingsbridge Girls’ School or Springfield School and perhaps reflects the greater number of students gaining ‘good’ GCSE results.

5.2 The Structuring of Educational and Career Opportunities: Social Capital in Schools

I introduced this thesis with a quote from Diane Reay (see page one), as she recalls a school memory, ‘my headteacher told me, “girls like you do not go to university”’. With the expectation that girls ‘like her’ do not go to university, Reay importantly draws attention to the pivotal role of schools and teachers in supporting (or not supporting) young people’s hopes and aspirations. While the three schools I researched were all different in terms of location, and student population, (in terms of gender and ethnic background), they were similar in terms of their largely working-class student intake, their age range (11-16), and Kingsbridge and Chantry Schools were also of a similar size. How is it then possible to explain not only differences in the exam results and percentage of students continuing into post-compulsory education at the three schools, but also the differences in expectations and aspirations of students at Kingsbridge, Chantry and Springfield Schools? Bourdieu’s concept of social capital is particularly relevant here. Social capital for Bourdieu consists of social networks and connections: ‘contacts and group memberships which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources’ (1993: 143) and sociability, in other words, how networks are sustained, which requires the appropriate skills and disposition (or habitus). The importance of social networks, in terms of the interviewees acquiring advice and information about colleges and universities from older siblings and other family members has already been discussed in chapter four. Through talking to the young people, it also became apparent that the school environment, namely people such as teachers and friends had an impact on their aspirations, expectations and the paths they talked about wanting to follow post-16. Peer pressures from other, academically able school friends seemed to be a very important social support system that the young people relied on. This was especially true for many of
the young women, who talked about the importance of friends, and their enjoyment of school as a result of these friendships:

"I like school, no I enjoy coming to school, not because I like the teachers, but because I like my friends" (Sophie, Kingsbridge School).

For Sara and Leigh-Ann at Chantry School, school was a place to socialize and meet friends:

"you meet new people and make friends" (Leigh-Ann, Chantry School)

"It's a different atmosphere from the outside world cause you come to learn and you've got your friends and you meet different people here so..." (Sara, Chantry School).

Although many of the young people talked about the influence of their friends in terms of making decisions about the future and wanting to go to the same colleges, it was also apparent that through their friendships, other opportunities and possibilities were potentially being lost to them. The majority of young women at Kingsbridge School for example, talked about wanting to go to college to study childcare or wanting to work with children in the future. It seemed to be through their friendship groups, combined with their familial experiences of caring for other younger family members and watching and helping their mother's in the home, that the young women shared very gendered aspirations for the future. Whilst it was true that many of the young people at all three schools talked about the influence of friends, it was especially noticeable at Springfield School, that because many of the young people did not have any family history of higher education and did not have the social networks outside school to provide advice and information on possible post-16 opportunities, they had to rely on the support of friends, peers and teachers at school.

5.3 Working-Class Responses to School: The ‘Problem’ with Boys

In the popular, broad sheet and educational press, as well as, in scholarly articles and in the media, stories about ‘boys who fail’ have become increasingly common. Although it is also at home and in the labour market that
boys have been seen to be increasingly disadvantaged, it is at school and within
the education system that the ‘problem’ is deemed to originate. The issue of
boys’ underachievement becomes especially visible in the media, following the
yearly publication of GCSE and A Level results in August, when boys and
girls are pitted against each other in the battle over academic achievement. As
the gap between girls’ and boys’ achievement has slightly widened, in favour
of girls, so analyses on the ‘crisis in masculinity’ have gathered pace. While in
the press it is not always clear which boys are underachieving, the clear
implication being that all boys are ‘failing’, in other areas it is made
abundantly clear which boys are underachieving. Chris Woodhead, former
Chief Inspector of Schools, has argued that “the failure of boys, and in
particular white working class boys, is one of the most disturbing problems we
face within the whole education system” (Woodhead, 1996 quoted in Heath,
1999: 249).

Problems relating to the education of boys, particularly working-class boys,
have however, been around for a long time. Michele Cohen (1998) traces the
evidence of boys ‘underachievement’, at least, in terms of the learning of
language, back to John Locke’s 1693 treatise, Some Thoughts Concerning
Education. During the 1970s the plight of ‘failing’ working-class boys was
addressed in the sociological writing of Paul Willis (1977). Willis’ study of 12
non-academic White, working-class boys at ‘Hammertown Boys’ School’, is
perhaps a classic example of the seeming fascination with working-class, anti-
school boys. ‘The lads’, as they are referred to in Willis’ study, are seen as
somewhat aggressive and confrontational in their opposition to school and
teachers. This is in direct opposition to the school conformists, who are called
the ‘ear’oles’ by ‘the lads’,

Feminist and other critiques of the boys’ ‘underachievement’ debate have been
numerous and wide ranging. In much of the sociological writing on young
people and schooling, the overriding concern has not only been on the plight of
working-class boys, but there has also been a certain amount of glamorising,
by largely male sociologists, of the lives of these working-class boys. As Sara
Delamont (2000:99) argues, in many of these studies, ‘the anti-school,
delinquent, rebellious young working-class urban males have been lovingly chronicled and even celebrated as heroes, although they epitomise everything no sociologist would actually want to live next door to in real life’. Brown (1987) has also argued that missing from debates on the relationship between social class and education have been accounts of the educational experiences of ‘ordinary’ working-class young people. Existing accounts have largely focused on working-class educational failure, and the ways in which working-class pupils, especially boys, resist school and education more generally. Epstein et al., (1998) have identified three separate discourses used in the popular and academic press to explain boys’ ‘educational failure’: ‘poor boys’, ‘failing schools’, and ‘boys will be boys’. The ‘poor boys’ discourse presents boys as ‘victims’, and this discourse blames females (feminists, mothers, female teachers) for boys’ supposed educational failure. An example of the ‘poor boys’ discourse could perhaps be found in government plans for single sex teaching in some subjects, to counter a ‘laddish culture’ (see The Guardian, 2000). In this discourse, girls are seen as being responsible for boys’ ‘underachievement’. As Cohen (1998) has argued, unlike girls, boys’ failure has often been attributed to something external- a pedagogy, methods, texts, teachers. Attributing boys’ failure to a method makes it possible to explain away their poor results without implicating boys themselves. Low educational achievement among girls is, in contrast, perceived as the result of internal inadequacies.

5.4 Middle Class Differences that Matter

In contrast to cultural difference explanations, which have tended to focus, whether intentionally or unintentionally, on the ‘pathology’ of the working classes with regard to education, others have instead focused on the educational advantages and privileges enjoyed by the middle classes. In these accounts, working class educational underachievement is largely attributed to an education system which is vested in middle class interests. This is due in part.
“If the ‘Other’ of Western civilisation is the colonised subject; so the colonised subject in education must surely be the working class. It is the one about whom most has been said but who never speaks back” (Lynch and O’Neill (1994: 310).

One of the major barriers to participation in higher education for some students has been the education system itself (Thomas, 2001). For Bourdieu and Passeron (1979), the school system is responsible for the ‘elimination’ of working-class groups from the highest levels of the educational system:

“The chances of entering higher education can be seen as the product of a selection process which, throughout the school system, is applied with very unequal severity, depending on the student’s social origin. In fact, for the most disadvantaged classes, it is purely and simply a matter of elimination” (1979:2).

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1979), the chances of entering higher education for different social classes, even if they are not consciously assessed by those concerned, give rise to an image of higher education as an “impossible,” “possible,” or “natural” future. For people with little or no family history of higher education, it is likely that they are going to view higher education as, at best, a ‘possibility’, and at worst, an ‘impossibility’. The structuring of educational opportunities at school therefore not only affects the future participation of pupils in further and higher education, it is also contributes to the ways students think of themselves and their experiences as learners:

“The experience and process of education contribute to the image pupils have of themselves, how they relate to education, and whether or not they perceive themselves as learners” (Thomas, 2001, p.364).

5.5 Positive Orientations to Education and ideas about School

Far from rebelling and opposing school, the majority of young people, both boys and girls, at all three schools enjoyed it, or at worst, showed indifference to it. Those that showed the greatest indifference to school, were also the students most likely to have more negative ideas about further/higher education. Bob and Barry, two students at Chantry School, are likely to be ‘reluctant conscripts’ (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) to further education, they
have little idea of why they want to go to college, and only want to go to college because they do not know what other options might be available to them. This indifference to post-compulsory education is reflected in their ideas about school:

Kerry: What do you think about school?
Bob: Not brilliant, could be better
Barry: Gets really boring, after a bit, lessons seem to drag on

Those who talked about school in more positive ways, had a more positive orientation to education and generally wanted to continue with their education post-16:

“I quite like it, I think it’s okay, sometimes it can be hard and some days it can be very boring and you just feel like going home but it is actually quite interesting cause you learn new things every day, that’s what I enjoy about school” (Jerome, Chantry School).

Jerome was interested in going into further and higher education, and his generally positive feelings about school, seemed to have influenced his attitudes towards further education. The research certainly seemed to show that the more ambivalent a student’s ideas about school, the more ambivalent they were about participating in post-compulsory education.

5.6 The Rationing of Higher Education Opportunities: Setting by ‘ability’

Lack of information is one of the major explanations put forward by the government to explain the low participation in higher education by working-class groups. Policy recommendations have focused on the need to provide low participation groups with more information about the benefits of higher education. In the Dearing report (NCIHE, 1997: 109), information is seen as pivotal to the decision making process:

“For students to make well-informed decisions about the higher education programme that they wish to follow, they need clear information and guidance”
Similarly, in ‘The Excellence Challenge’ (DfEE, 2000) (which is now known as the AimHigher programme), proposals were set out to provide ‘clearer information and better marketing of the route to HE for young people’ because:

“there is evidence that information is reaching young people at too late an age to affect their attitudes to HE. There is also evidence that some young people, and their parents, do not have the full facts about HE including the facts on who pays tuition fees and who does not” (DfEE, 2000: 21).

Armed with the ‘full’ facts about higher education, lies the assumption in policy documents, that those from working-class backgrounds will automatically decide higher education is definitely for them.

However, the implicit assumption in this, is that information and knowledge is not only impartial, but that all young people will have the same access to that information. However, the setting of students at all three schools, meant that students did not have the same access to information about possible future educational and career opportunities. Whilst students in top academic sets had access to information about higher education and opportunities to go on university visits, those in lower academic sets did not. Differentiation within schools, in the form of streaming and setting by ‘ability’ has impacted on some groups more than others, namely those from working-class backgrounds and ethnic minorities (Gillborn, 1997; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Gillborn and Youdell, 2001). The increasing influence of published school performance tables has been seen as one reason why schools continue setting students by academic ‘ability’. The dominant feature in school performance tables is the proportion of final year pupils gaining five or more higher passes (A*-C) in their GCSE examinations and is what Gillborn and Youdell refer to as the ‘A-to-C economy’ (2001:73). The concentration in league tables on GCSE results, has also forced schools to pay more attention to potential high achievers than other students (Boaler, 1997).

Setting pupils by academic ‘ability’ and placing them in sets has been seen to be problematic for a number of reasons. For many subjects at GCSE, pupils are entered for one of two different ‘tiers’ of exam, where the highest grades are
only available to pupils in the top tier. For example, in mathematics, where there are currently three tiers, a pupil taking the foundation paper is unable to attain a C grade, a prerequisite for many post-16 educational opportunities. One criticism of the notion of ‘ability’ has been that the term has been seen to be relatively fixed (Gillborn and Youdell, 2001), with the assumption being that those with more or less ‘ability’ will be similarly distinguished throughout their education. This clearly has implications for the movement of pupils once placed in a particular set.

It is also evident, as already mentioned in chapter three, that in much government policy that ‘ability’ is constructed as both measurable and relatively fixed. In both *The Excellence Challenge* (DfEE, 2000) and *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003), although ‘ability’ is not mentioned, ‘potential’ appears as its replacement. In both documents the assumption is that young people will both demonstrate, and be identified, as having the ‘potential’ to enter higher education at some point in the future. Identifying ‘potential’ in young people is also problematic as it requires, as with streaming and setting, teachers’ assessments of a student’s ‘ability’. Studies, especially concerned with the achievement of ethnic minority students, have concluded that teachers’ assessments of pupils’ ‘abilities’ are often influenced by behavioural rather than cognitive criteria (Wright, 1986).

As already mentioned, all three schools involved in the research have a policy of setting pupils by academic ‘ability’. At Kingsbridge School, students are placed in either the red group or green group, on entry to the school in year seven. Those in the red group are deemed to be less academically able than those placed in the green group. There is further differentiation within these two groups, with students in both the red and green group placed in sets one, two or three. At both Springfield School and Chantry School, students are placed in sets mainly for the three core subjects of maths, English and Science.

Although all three schools set their students by academic ‘ability’, it was particularly noticeable at Springfield School and Kingsbridge School that for many students, educational opportunities were not available to them because of
teachers’ notions of their ‘ability’. While I was interviewing students at Springfield School, a university ‘taster’ day to a relatively local ‘old’, pre-1992 University was organised for some pupils in year ten. This visit was not open to all year ten students, only those who were in top sets for the three core subjects and who were predicted five or more higher grade passes (A*-C) in their GCSE examinations the following year. Similarly, at Kingsbridge School, trips to Oxford and Cambridge Universities had already taken place, involving only a small number of year ten girls in the top sets. At both schools, those students not in top sets, who were not predicted ‘good’ GCSE results the following year and who might have wanted to go on the university visits were not able to.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has briefly considered the role of streaming and setting in schools, and the effects it had on the higher educational opportunities available to the young people involved in the research.
Chapter Six

Accessing Higher Education in the Future: Economic and Cultural Barriers

6.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the ideas the young people in my research have about higher education. So far, my data has shown that families, and especially older siblings, may have a significant impact on the ideas the young people have about possible future educational and career opportunities. The social capital of the young people studied did not always include access to people with experience of higher education. However, where there was family experience of higher education, most of the young people at the three schools lacked cultural capital in terms of their knowledge and information about the university system, especially to do with student finance and entry qualifications.

6.1 Financial Barriers to Accessing Higher Education

The financial cost of going to university is seen as one of the most significant barriers to widening access to higher education for those from working-class backgrounds (Woodrow, 2000; Hutchings and Archer, 2001). Since New Labour first came to power in 1997, there have been a number of changes to the higher education funding system. (See Chapter three for more information on New Labour’s higher education policies). Although there were a number of changes to student financial support under the Conservatives, including the freezing of maintenance grants from 1990 and the creation of the Student Loan Company in the same year, the thesis is largely concerned with New Labour and current government policy. Central to New Labour’s higher education policy is the aim of both increasing and widening participation. The commitment of New Labour to widen access to higher education for working-
class groups has been somewhat undermined by the shifting of the financial burden of higher education from the State, to individual students and their families. This shift has not only come about through concerns about increases in student numbers and the escalating costs of student support, but also through the government’s calculations that those who personally benefit from higher education should contribute towards the cost. In the Government’s response to the Dearing report- *Higher Education in the 21st Century* (DfEE, 1998a:54), they argued that:

“In its initial response to the Committee’s report on 23 July 1997, the Government accepted the Committee’s guiding principle that the costs of higher education should be shared between those who benefit. Compared with those without degrees, graduates on average see their earnings rise by as much as £4,000 for every £20,000 of earnings. As graduates benefit, so the Government believes that it is right that they should share the cost” (DfEE, 1998a:54).

That students should contribute towards the costs of their university education was a theme continued by the government and was evident in the White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003: 83):

“Graduates derive substantial benefits from having gained a degree, including wider career opportunities and the financial benefits that generally follow. On average those with a higher education qualification earn around 50% more than non-graduates. Given these benefits to an individual from the investment in a university education, the government has decided that it is fair to allow universities, if they so determine, to ask students to make an increased contribution” (DfES, 2003: 83).

While the Dearing Report (1997) does agree that graduates have higher employment rates and enjoy greater salaries than those without higher education qualifications, the report also talks of ‘stakeholders’ and the partnership between Government, students and families, employers, in terms of who should pay for higher education. In the future, the report also states that the “*State must remain a major source of funding*”(p.288). The student financial support arrangements announced, and introduced, by New Labour since 1997, seem to have moved away from the Dearing idea of ‘stakeholders’ and partnerships, with the financial burden of higher education falling
increasingly to students and their families. This has particular consequences for potential students from backgrounds with limited economic capital.

6.2 Student Financial Support: Tuition Fees Vs Student Loans

While the financial burden of higher education has fallen increasingly to students and their families, it has not fallen equally across all families and social class groups. As the government has announced and introduced a number of new financial measures for higher education students, media attention has largely focused on the issues and concerns of certain groups. Since the introduction of tuition fees in 1998/99, which were initially set at a maximum of £1,000, the media focus has been on tuition fees, which have largely reflected the concerns of middle-class families, who have had to pay them. There has been less media concern with student loans, which became the sole source of financial support for many students in the year 1999/00, when maintenance grants were abolished. Following the publication of the White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003), and the passing of the Higher Education Act 2004, and the announcement of the intention to introduce variable tuition fees of up to £3,000 from 2006, media attention has again largely focused on the issue of tuition fees. Press and media headlines have included ‘Rebels could sink fees bill by Christmas’ (THES, 28 November, 2003), ‘Top-up fees vote put off as protests grow’ (The Guardian, 2 December, 2003), ‘Fees: Fact and Fiction’ (THES, 16 December, 2003), ‘59% of voters oppose top-up fees’ (The Guardian, 23 December, 2003). Tuition fees have also been an issue raised on current affairs television programmes (*Question Time*, 8 January 2004, BBC1 and *This Week*, 8 January 2003, BBC1). Absent from most of this media focus on tuition fees is any mention of student loans, or the proposals in *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003) for a means-tested Higher Education Grant of up to £1,000 for students from households with residual incomes below £20,000.

The focus on tuition fees, diverts attention away from student loans and other issues surrounding student debt, which have been more of an issue for working-class people. Perceptions of student hardship and debt by those from
working-class backgrounds who are not currently participating in higher education have been examined (Knowles, 2000; Connor and Dewson, 2001), as well as, the actual experience of hardship and debt by working-class students participating in higher education (Callender, 2001; Hutchings, 2003). Although the perceptions of student hardship and debt have been examined in a number of studies, the knowledge young people who are still at school have about the funding of higher education and the financial support that might be available to them if they are contemplating higher education in the future, has been under-examined.

6.3 Financial In/Considerations: Secondary School Students’ Knowledge of the HE System

Information and guidance on careers and study options post-16 has been highlighted as an influence on decisions about higher education (NCIHE, 1997; Robertson and Hillman, 1997). Explanations for the under-representation of those from working-class backgrounds in higher education have included the lack of knowledge and information working-class groups have about higher education. The assumption often held is that armed with the ‘correct’ information about higher education or cultural capital, those who are currently under-represented in higher education can make ‘better’, well-informed decisions about higher education. One of the major planks of government higher education policy is to provide young people with more information about higher education. One of the major aims of The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000:1) which set out the government’s proposals to widen participation in HE, was to:

"Provide clearer information and better marketing of the route to HE for young people, with a particular focus on reaching families and communities who do not have a tradition of entering HE" (DfEE, 2000:1).

With the setting up of the Connexions service, which offers advice and guidance to young people aged 13-19, as well as, college and university taster days, and the AimHigher advertising campaign which is aimed at encouraging more disadvantaged young people into considering higher education in the
future, the government’s message seems to be ‘more’ information and guidance about higher education is definitely ‘better’. The concept of ‘institutional habitus’ (see Reay et al. 2001; Thomas, 2002) is particularly relevant here, especially in terms of the provision of careers advice and information for young people in schools. ‘Habitus’ is used by Bourdieu to refer to the norms and practices of particular social classes or groups (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Institutional habitus can be understood as the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual’s behaviour as it is mediated through an organisation (Thomas, 2002). For example, Bourdieu looked at the education system as the primary institution through which class order is maintained:

“In other words, educational institutions favour knowledge and experiences of dominant social groups (e.g. white, middle-class men) to the detriment of other groups. Hence, the education system is socially and culturally biased, and this is played out in the relations between staff and students, and amongst students” (Thomas, 2002:431).

One key aspect of institutional habitus is the quality and quantity of careers advice provided by schools for its students. As found by Reay et al. (2001) in their study on choice of higher education, there are often enormous differences in the resourcing of careers advice between the state and private education sectors. In their study, while the state school students largely talked about careers advice as being ‘uninfluential’, the careers advice experienced by students in the two private schools was extensive and intensive. Marcus for example, claims of his private school that ‘by the fourth year, they are really making you think along the line of university, not letting you just get by and make decisions on your own’. Similarly, Emma says that it is expected that pupils would apply for ‘a good university’ at her private girls’ school and that you are ‘encouraged every step of the way to go for the best’ (Reay, 1998b: 524). Reay (1998b) also argues that within the same school institutional habituses are mobilized differentially for different pupils. This also seemed to be the case at Kingsbridge Girls’ school and Springfield School, where the provision of certain advice and information was determined by the academic ‘ability’ of students. Thus, at both schools, only those deemed to have the
academic ‘ability’ to enter university in the future were offered the opportunity to go on university visits.

Providing ‘clearer information and better marketing of the route to HE for young people’, as the government is suggesting, especially for those without a family history of higher education, could therefore prove to be problematic. Who will be providing this advice, as well as, which students will be included/excluded from these sources of guidance and advice are crucial considerations. The type of educational institution attended by young people can also affect the educational and career opportunities available or open to students. Providing plenty of information for potential higher education students, also does not mean that this information is necessarily ‘good’ information. Information and guidance which is too general or too complex and not tailored to young people’s own varied personal circumstances is unlikely to be effective in helping young people make decisions about going on to higher education. As previously discussed in chapter four, many of the young people at Springfield, Chantry and Kingsbridge Schools, relied more on ‘hot’ knowledge from people they knew and trusted, and who had experienced, or were currently experiencing further education/higher education, than on more formal ‘cold’ knowledge. To some extent, the young people distrusted official sources of knowledge and advice, and chose to trust the ‘hot’ knowledge of those they knew and they were being pragmatic and using the advice and information that was both available and most relevant to them at the time.

Few of the young people at all three schools were well informed about student finance. Despite many of the young people having older siblings in further and/or higher education, and many having recently experienced university taster days, most of the young people are vague about current student funding. Reay et al. (2001, para. 1.6) argue that higher education applicants are ‘located within a matrix of influences which are best represented by overlapping circles of individuals, family, friends and institution’. Thus, the young people I interviewed not only had varying amounts of cultural capital, institutional habitus interacted with familial habitus to generate different processes. Some
students in top academic sets who had access to university visits and who had some family history of higher education, had familial and institutional habituses that were in symmetry. For many young people however, (especially at Springfield School), without family knowledge or experience of higher education, ‘there is less of a fit between educational institution and family and friends’ (Reay et al. 2001). Although many students have heard of tuition fees and student loans, none are able to give specific details of how much money students are currently able to borrow, or how much tuition fees are. Nazia, a student at Kingsbridge School, has heard of tuition fees and student loans, explaining:

“That when you go in college you have to pay before you go in or I think they give you some money, something like that, and, that’s it, that’s all I’ve heard” (Nazia, Kingsbridge School).

Asjid and Imran, students at Chantry School, are asked what the difference is between student loans and student fees:

Asjid: “fees you gotta pay what they tell you to, student loans you take out a certain amount and pay it back within a certain amount of time, like an overdraft isn’t it?”

Kerry: “Have you got any idea how much you have to pay for fees?”

Asjid: “er, 30 grand”

Imran: “a few grand, it’s in the thousand mark”

Although, Asjid had some idea about the difference between student fees and loans, and the fact student loans have to be paid back, both Asjid and Imran guessed wildly at the amount they thought student fees were.

Ian, a student at Springfield School, has not heard of tuition fees, but has been vaguely aware of student loans, since his visit to a local university:

“I don’t know, you can get a certain amount of money out to pay for bills and that” (Ian, Springfield School).

Ian however, has no idea what the ‘certain amount of money’ is he would need, or is able to borrow, to be able to support himself as a student. William, also a
student at Springfield School, heard about student loans also on his recent visit to a local university:

"Student loans you just, buy loads of things and then get in debts and then when you get a good job you just pay 'em off" (William, Springfield School).

Barry, a student at Chantry School, has also heard about student loans, although he has not been on a university visit:

"Like, they loan you money to get books and stuff like that or to rent places, something like that, I dunno" (Barry, Chantry School).

Tehmina, a student at Kingsbridge School, has been on a university visit and has older siblings currently studying at university. She talks about student loans:

"Yeah, you go and then you pay it off slowly or something, yeah, I remember my sister saying something about it but I couldn't be bothered to listen" (Tehmina, Kingsbridge School).

It is clear from the responses from the young people above, and the majority of young people interviewed at all three schools, that if the government’s intention is that university taster days are to provide, amongst other things, young people with information about current student finance by talking to current university students, it has not been entirely successful. Had the students at Kingsbridge School and Springfield School not been to visit two ‘old’, elite universities, they might also have had a different set of perspectives on student finance and student hardship from talking to a perhaps wider, more socially mixed group of students. For the largely middle-class students that access ‘elite’ universities (especially Oxbridge), I am not sure what words of wisdom concerning student finance they could offer disadvantaged working-class students. Thus, framing the institutional habituses of the schools are the institutional habituses of universities. The coupling between Kingsbridge and Springfield schools and ‘elite’ universities certainly seemed to culminate in a sense for many young people that higher education (especially of the ‘elite’
kind) was ‘not for the like of us’ (Bourdieu, 1990 in Reay et al. 2001). (This is further discussed in 6.8 below).

6.4 The Complexity of the HE Funding System

One of the major concerns about the current higher education funding system is its complexity. Thus cultural capital becomes crucial in determining whether someone understands the system. This is not only due to ongoing changes in government higher education funding policy, but also the availability of a range of different financial sources of support. This especially has implications for working-class students who are more likely to have to access these various sources of financial support. For working-class people, decisions about entering higher education could depend heavily on the funding available to them once they have accessed university. The report, Widening Participation in Higher Education in England (NAO, 2002) points out that although the education department provides a wide range of funds to help students facing specific difficulties or hardship these are:

- Relatively low in value (Opportunity Bursaries are £2,000 spread over three years and hardship payments have average values of just over £500;
- Mainly discretionary, creating uncertainty for students’ financial planning;
- Available to few students (under 7,000 Opportunity Bursaries in 2001-02); and
- Complex (over 20 potential sources of funds) (NAO, 2002:3).

The report also points out that sources other than the main student loan are “intended largely to provide a safety net for existing students in severe financial difficulties” (p.22). This makes it difficult for those who are not already in higher education and not in ‘severe financial difficulties’, to plan their futures. If students have to apply for support on the basis of hardship during their courses, rather than before they start their courses and perhaps before they are in ‘severe financial difficulties’, any delays in receiving funds are likely to increase the difficulties of many students. As the funds are also largely discretionary and not given automatically, it will also be left to
individual students to find out for themselves what they are entitled to, and this is likely to differ between institutions and between students.

For a small number of young people at Chantry School there was some confusion between further and higher education and what funding they would be entitled to. These findings are consistent with Hutchings and Archer’s (2001) study of young working-class non-participants, who also demonstrated some confusion between funding arrangements in FE and HE. This confusion surrounded the Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs), which had been piloted in certain areas in England, becoming extended across the whole of England in September 2004. The aim of EMAs is to encourage disadvantaged young people aged 16-19 to stay on at school or college. Eligible young people can receive an allowance of up to £30 a week, after signing a learning agreement setting out details of their course, attendance and homework requirements. While talking specifically about higher education funding, and student loans and tuition fees, some students mentioned the EMAs:

Kerry:  “Have you heard of student loans and tuition fees?”
Kassie: “Yeah I think so”
Louise-Ann: “Is that the EMA, is that the EMA you get from college?”
(Kassie and Louise-Ann, Chantry School).

Maisy, also a student at Chantry School admits:

“It’s kind of confusing ‘cause my sister gets this thing, I don’t know what it is, in college well, 6th form college and I don’t really understand any of it” (Maisy, Chantry School).

When asking Sara and Leigh-Ann whether they have heard about tuition fees or student loans they reply:

Sara: “My cousin’s doing a nursing course and she gets a grant or something that’s all I know”
Leigh-Ann: “Some people get paid to go to college don’t they? Like I think it’s £30 I think” (Sara and Leigh-Ann, Chantry School).

The knowledge the young people above had about EMAs had all come from older siblings and other family members who were studying in further education and had received the maintenance allowances. However, just as most young people at all three schools were not well informed about higher education student finance, knowledge about further education student funding was also quite vague. The responses by some of the young people above would seem to suggest that while they need to know about higher education student funding, advice and guidance on possible sources of funding in further education is more immediately required. As Chantry, Kingsbridge and Springfield Schools only cater for 11-16 year olds, it is important that young people at these schools are given information on possible sources of funding in further education before they reach year eleven and have to make decisions about their future educational careers and transferring to local further education institutions.

6.5 Young People’s Perceptions of Student Hardship and Debt

Although most young people are vague and lack specifics about student finance, most perceive higher education students to be poor and in debt. Similar to the findings of Archer and Hutchings (2000), university was constructed as a ‘risky’ and ‘costly’ option for many of the working-class young people I studied. This perception has largely come from people they know who have been, or are currently, studying in higher education:

“What puts me off from uni they’re all poor, they get really poor, it’s what the girl said to me who lives next door. She’s never got any money like...but you’re just stuck with no money so, that’s what puts me off a bit” (Matt, Springfield School).

The issue of money and student debt also came up while talking to Alisha:

Alisha: “It’s really expensive these days ain’t it to go to uni?”
Kerry: "What, what have you heard about that?"

Alisha: "cause a student, she comes round sometimes and she goes it's really, really expensive these days to go to uni, have to buy your books yourself, you have to pay for the teaching and all that" (Nazreen, Kingsbridge School).

Michelle, a student at Springfield School, is worried about money and student debt:

"Because we're not exactly rich, but we're not exactly poor, we're just in the middle and it would be a lot of money. My auntie still, I know people that are still paying off their debts now, 'cause my old music teacher is still paying off his debts" (Michelle, Springfield School).

The influence of local, social networks on the young people is evident here, as they listen to, and implicitly trust the knowledge they have about the expense involved in going to university. For many of the young people with older siblings, friends or significant others in higher education, they see that lack of economic capital in the form of financial support from parents means financial hardship and 'being poor'. For many of the young people, students are not only poor and in debt while at university, they are also in debt after university as they pay back their student loans. As none of the students interviewed know the specific details of how much tuition fees are or how much they are entitled to borrow in student loans, details about how poor and how much in debt the university students they know are, are also quite vague. They just know university is 'expensive' and university students, both during and after university, are 'poor'. Asjid, a student at Chantry School, was the only person interviewed who thought students used their student loans for drinking and clubbing.

For most young people, although being in debt in higher education was seen as a worrying prospect, this was often offset by the belief that it would be worth it 'in the end'. Getting the desired higher education qualification, and a 'good' job at the end, were seen as the main reasons to go into higher education and possibly be in debt:
"But if you know you can get the qualification then, or whatever you’re going to get, it’s worth it" (Barry, Chantry School)

“As long as you get a good job afterwards to pay it off!” (William, Springfield School)

“So many people get in debt don’t they, ’cause they go there for several years and then they’re in debt at the end of it. You’ve sort of got pressure on you to get a good job so you can pay it off, but if you go to university then you probably will get a good job anyway” (Kathryn, Springfield School).

Going to university and possibly being in debt was seen as being ‘worth it in the end’ largely by those who were either already seriously thinking about higher education as being a possible option for them in the future, or by those who were currently ambivalent about whether they wanted to go to university or not, in the future, Worries about being in debt at university were more of a concern for the small number of students who had negative ideas about university and had already decided that they did not want to go to university:

“I don’t think I wanna go to university...I think it’d be a waste of my time, I’d rather get out and work than go on and get into debt ’cause that’d be the worry, getting into debt...tutoring and all the lectures, actually going to university does cost a lot of money and I don’t think I would like that, I would really worry about getting into debt” (Claire, Springfield School).

For Claire, who had already made a decision that she did not want to go into higher education in the future, the fear of debt was the main reason for her reluctance to see university as a viable option for her in the future. Claire’s fears about debt, although very real and understandable, are not based on personal experiences. Although she has an older sister currently at college, she does not know anyone, either in her family or outside her immediate family, who has experienced higher education. As mentioned above, most students at all three schools, lacked accurate information about student funding and were often quite vague about issues to do with student loans and tuition fees. The fear students have about being in debt, therefore seems to be fuelled by inaccurate information and rumour and hearsay.
6.6 Affording Further and Higher Education: The Role of Term Time Working

The impact of term time working on students has been addressed in a number of studies (Metcalf, 2003; Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003). The research conducted by Leathwood and O’Connell (2003) was concerned with the experiences of mostly ‘non-traditional’ working-class students at a post-1992 university. Many students in the study expressed concerns about the level of debt they had accumulated and the impact of term-time work. Many of these students had less time to spend on studying, with students feeling they would be achieving higher grades if they did not have to work. Many of the students at Chantry, Kingsbridge and Springfield Schools, anticipated that they would have to take on some form of paid employment while they were studying, in order to support themselves, and in some cases, to help and support their families:

“I’ll leave college and then go university, hopefully I’ll get a job like so I can help my parents as well, so they’re not just paying for me and stuff” (Billy, Chantry School).

Louise-Ann and Kassie, students at Chantry school, both anticipate that they will get jobs while at college and university:

“If I go college, if I decide to go to college I’m definitely gonna get a part-time job ‘cause there’s no point in sitting around, ‘cause that’d help me in the future with the money” (Louise-Ann).

“If I go university I’d want a job as well, like a part-time job” (Kassie).

However, unlike many of the students in the Leathwood and O’Connell (2003) study, who were already in higher education, there did not seem to be any concern expressed in the interviews I conducted with young people about possible conflicts between studying commitments and term-time working, it was just seen as something that had to done. There were only two students in the research who voiced any major concerns about the possible difficulties of combining paid employment with studying:
"I don’t want to have a job at university because I’d want to concentrate on the work" (Maisy, Chantry School).

"I’d get a part-time job and I’d just save money, but I won’t over prioritize my work, my work of earning money because if I do too much working for money I’m gonna miss out on doing the work that I’m paying for to do at university, so I’ll probably only take a few nights off a week to do some work, not long hours, um reasonable, I’ll try and get reasonable pay for it and I’ll probably just live on food that my mum and dad give me” (Michelle, Springfield School).

Some of the students I interviewed had already got Saturday jobs, or were thinking about getting one as soon as they could, so working while at college/university in the future did not seem to be too daunting a prospect for them.

A small number of students at Chantry and Kingsbridge School did anticipate that their families would be able to financially support them were they to go to university in the future. These were all ethnic minority students. These students were largely opposed to student loans, and talked about preferring to rely on their families for financial support than on loans, which would have to be paid back at some point in the future and would accrue interest. This concurs with research conducted by Callender and Kempson (see Callender, 2001), which found ethnic origin had a strong effect on student behaviour in terms of student loan take-up. They found that Asian students were the least likely of all ethnic groups to have taken out a student loan. Nazreen, a student at Kingsbridge School comments:

"I think it’s better, it’s better to get money off someone else if you haven’t got the money, than having a student loan ‘cause they charge you interest and, as the years go past right, they add interest, so much right...I think ‘cause then if you borrow it off a friend or family they won’t charge interest” (Nazreen, Kingsbridge School).

“’My parents would be able to help me out but then if they haven’t got the money then I’d be scared, but then I’ll make sure they’ve got the money first, before I go to university”’(Asjid, Chantry School).

Billy, a mixed race student at Chantry School, does not want to take out a student loan if he goes to university, and thinks a family member will be helping to fund him through higher education:
Although Billy thought his nan had set some money aside for his university education in the future, I am not entirely sure exactly how feasible it is that the few ethnic minority students who did not anticipate having to take out student loans in the future would in reality be able to rely on financial support from their families. Just based on parental occupation, it is difficult to see how some parents would have enough financial resources to pour into their child’s university education.

6.7 Dispelling the Myths? : University Taster Days for Secondary School Students

As part of the government’s widening participation strategy, greater collaboration between schools, colleges and universities is encouraged. One of the main strands of The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000) is to increase funding to higher education institutions in order to:

“Reach out to more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This will enable them (HEIs) to recruit more admissions staff, send ambassadors to schools and colleges and to run more open days and summer schools for young people and their teachers” (DfEE, 2000:1).

Similarly, in the White Paper, The Future of Higher Education (DfES, 2003:67), the national AimHigher programme “will build better links between schools, colleges and universities, including through summer schools and a pilot programme offering students the chance to support teachers in schools and colleges”. Through greater collaboration between schools, colleges and universities, in the form of taster days and summer schools, it is envisaged disadvantaged young people will not only receive the ‘right’ information about what university is ‘really’ about, but there is also an assumption that all young people will have a similar and positive experience. As the focus of the government’s widening participation strategy appears to be on ‘raising
aspirations’, the desired outcome of giving young people an early ‘taste’ of university life appears to be that aspirations will be raised sufficiently to ensure disadvantaged youngsters will want to go to university in the future.

Dominant government discourses have framed working-class participation in higher education as not only being about ‘raising aspirations’ but as a way of achieving ‘change’:

“That is, for working-class participants to change themselves and the national and/or local population by becoming more educated, skilled, affluent, socially mobile, ‘civilized’ and (implicitly) middle class. These changes are assumed to be ‘good’ and worthwhile, and carry a further assumption that it is the working-class individual who must adapt and change, in order to fit into, and participate in, the (unchanged) HE institutional culture and wider system” (Archer and Leathwood, 2003:176).

There is a certain sense that university taster days and other outreach projects have been about trying to ‘fit’ and adapt non-traditional working-class students without significant cultural and social capital into already established university life. As already mentioned, there has been some criticism levelled at the emphasis in much current government education policy on the need to raise working-class students’ ‘desire’ to participate in higher education, rather than seriously considering ways of ensuring these same students are given opportunities to actually participate in higher education. Taster days and other initiatives certainly seem to fit more into the government’s agenda of trying to raise working-class students’ ‘desire’ to participate in higher education.

A number of students at both Springfield and Kingsbridge School had already been, or were about to go, on university visits when I interviewed them. Students at Springfield School visited a local, ‘old’, pre-1992 university, while some students at Kingsbridge School visited two very elite, ‘old’ university, which were not in the local area. These universities are also members of the Russell group of large, research-led universities. This fits in with current government policy, which is especially concerned to see more of those from disadvantaged backgrounds applying to ‘top’ leading universities (DfEE, 2000). At both schools, only a small number of those young people who were in top subject sets and were expected to get at least five good GCSEs (A* – C) at the end of year eleven, were invited to go on the university visits. The young
people appeared to have little input into this process. They were chosen by teachers to go on the visits, and even if students were unsure what the visits were for, or did not particularly want to go, the visits appeared to be compulsory.

A number of points came out from talking to the young people at Kingsbridge School and Springfield School about their university taster day experiences. Despite government rhetoric, not all young people from disadvantaged backgrounds need to have their aspirations raised where university is concerned. A number of young people had considered university before the taster day experience, and the visit to a university had just re-affirmed their desire to go to university. For those that did not really want to go to university in the future, the taster day did not seem to affect or change their opinion on going to university in the future. For a number of young people who had had little or no contact with universities before the taster day, the taster day was talked about in terms of meeting ‘posh’ students who did not speak or dress in the same way as they did.

6.8 “I didn’t Think They Were Like Me”: Secondary School Students’ Encounters With University Students.

Brown and Scase (1994) in their study of middle-class and working-class students at ‘Oxbridge’, ‘Home Counties’ and ‘Inner City’ universities, have pointed to the differences in cultural capital, in terms of social confidence between those from middle-class and working-class backgrounds:

“Many students from working-class backgrounds have had to come to terms with the fact that going to university has involved a psychological and social distancing from families and friends, but that it has also left them ill-at ease within the new world they have entered” (1994:61).

The lack of appropriate cultural capital exhibited by working-class students when they entered university made it extremely difficult for them to exhibit ‘effortless achievement’. Because it was largely what had been expected of them from an early age, middle-class students were ‘at home’ at university and they took their experiences of higher education for granted. Although the
young people I interviewed were still at school, their experiences of university
taster days did perhaps reflect the feelings of being ill-at ease that the working-
class students in Brown and Scase’s study exhibited. As part of the university
taster day, the young people were put into groups and shown around the
university by a student ‘mentor’. For some young people, this was not only
their first visit to a university, it was also their first encounter with a university
student. A number of young people drew clear boundaries between themselves
and the students they met. Kathryn, a student at Springfield School, talked
about the students she had met on the taster day:

Kathryn: “When I went there (university) most of the people I saw
I didn’t think they were like me”

Kerry: “Why did you think that?

Kathryn: “They were, I can’t explain it, they looked more, like
more educated, d’you, higher up, d’you know what I
mean? I can’t really explain it. They were different, they
seemed different some of them. Some of them seemed
like me honestly, but some of them they like different,
different types of people”

Kerry: “Were they quite ‘posh’?

Kathryn” “Yeah, different types of people that went there, if you
know what I mean. A few strange people as well, a few
strange people, but, I suppose you get that
everywhere”(Kathryn, Springfield School)

Ian, also a student at Springfield School, talked about his university taster day
experience:

“It was quite posh actually, I don’t know, not the sort of people I hang
around with now, and that, so...”(Ian, Springfield School).

However, it was not just the students at university that many of the young
people considered to be ‘posh’, it was also other secondary school students
they met while on the university visit:

“We met these boys there, they were so posh, they were like oh we go to
like a private school, proper stuck up”(Sam, Springfield School).
For many of those I interviewed, there is a disjuncture between working-class habitus and the elitist field of the ‘old’ pre-1992 universities. They position themselves as ‘different’ to the middle-class students that reside at these elite universities, they lack the ‘self certainty of middle-class habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1984:66 in Reay, 1997:229). For many of the young people, they lacked embodied cultural capital, in the form of self-confidence and self-assurance whilst on their university taster days. They positioned themselves as ‘different’ to the students they met at university, believing them to be ‘more intelligent’, ‘posh’ and not the sort of people they are used to ‘hanging around with now’. Thus, while the government’s attempts to try and ensure more young working-class people ‘make it’ to university are laudable, this is not where the struggle ends. The disjuncture between working-class habitus and middle-class education will continue to mean that those who do ‘make it’ to university from working-class backgrounds will continue to feel torn between two worlds. While ‘no one talks about the price exacted for working-class admittance into middle-class status’ (Reay, 1998a: 14), many of the young people I studied articulated to me the difficulties and dilemmas of ‘becoming educated’ at university, especially elite ‘old’ pre-1992 universities. While taster days at university for young people with little or no family experience of higher education have been promoted by the government, the comments from Kathryn, Ian and Sam demonstrate this is not unproblematic, and can reinforce ideas that university is not for ‘someone like me’. Although Sam, Ian, and Kathryn had not been put off going to university, because as Kathryn put it, some university students ‘are just like me’, the role of feelings and emotions in higher education choice processes are brought to the fore. However, these feelings are often difficult to articulate, as Diane Reay and her colleagues found when researching higher education choice processes:

"While material constraints were readily articulated by respondents, there were often only hints and barely articulated suggestions of emotional constraints on choice" (Reay et al., 2001: 863).

Both Ian and Kathryn had found it difficult to articulate why the students they met at university ‘seemed different’ and ‘not the sort of people I hangs around
with now'. As Harriet Bradley argues, “class is everywhere and it is nowhere” (1996:45). She suggests that it has no definite physical signs or markers, which makes it hard to observe. However, class is everywhere, and it is both material and abstract, it encompasses education, taste, style, lifestyle and accent (see Skeggs, 1997a). The conflation of class with accent (Hey, 1997) was used by Sam, a student at Springfield School:

“Cause we chatted to some of them (other school students) and they were so posh and like all us lot like proper (term for the town), with our accents” (Sam, Springfield School).

While some of the students at Springfield School talked about being divided into groups whilst on the university visit, and shown around the university by a student, I am not entirely sure how much contact the young people actually had with university students. On one of the visits to a university by girls at Kingsbridge School, it was mentioned that they did not really get to meet university students, as they were taking exams. While this might have been unfortunate timing, if the aim of these visits is to meet students, and to see what university might be like from a student’s perspective and experience, then this is clearly not happening and is an opportunity missed. If many young people already have negative ideas about what university students are ‘like’, then not meeting students on these visits or not having enough of an opportunity to talk to them, is not going to do anything to dispel some of the negative images of university students already held by the young people.

Matt and Claire, students at Springfield School, had not been on the university taster day when I interviewed them, but they both had negative ideas about university students:

“Scarves and long hair! Um, really clever people, rich people, I don’t know, people that are on drugs all the time, that’s about it really” (Claire Springfield School)

“Students, like it’s gonna be like, in university there’s gonna be a lot of like, I don’t know, I don’t think there’ll be, there’s gonna be a lot of people not like me that likes my taste in clothes, fashion and stuff like that” (Matt, Springfield School).
For Matt and Claire, university students are not ‘like us’, they dress differently, they look different, with ‘their scarves and long hair’, and have a completely different sense of ‘taste’. However, while Claire had already decided that she did not want to go to university, and did not view university positively, especially in terms of worries about student debt (see above), Matt had not decided yet whether he wanted to go, despite having some negative ideas about what university students were like. For some of the young people, university was seen as being not only for ‘posh’ people, but also only for those from different, higher social class backgrounds:

Kerry: “So could you imagine the sort of people that might go to university, the sort of people you might meet if you went?”

Barry: “snobbish kind of people”

Bob: “Yeah, who think they’re like ‘it’ and everything like that. They don’t associate with like lower people like common class or anything like that”

Kerry: “Do you think that would put you off going to university, if you think that’s the sort of people you might meet?”

Bob: “You wouldn’t be able to be able to socialize with ‘em because they’re like....

Barry: “just completely different”

(Bob and Barry, Chantry School).

Connor, a student at Springfield School, similarly thought at university, “you don’t find working men so, not lower class. It’s all middle-class and upper”.

6.9 “More Able People go to University”: Young People’s Perceptions of ‘Ability’

Many of the young people lacked embodied cultural capital, in the form of self confidence about their own intellectual abilities, and unlike most of the middle-class students in Brown and Scase’s (1994) study, it was perhaps not expected, because of their family histories, that they would go on to higher education. Many of the young people not only had images of what university students looked like, but also constructed university students as being ‘brainy’ and ‘intellectual’, something that many of the young people did not necessarily
consider themselves to be. It was overwhelmingly students at Springfield School who mentioned how ‘brainy’ students had to be to go to university:

“More able people go, I think go to university” (Sam, Springfield School)
“Obviously clever people go there don’t they?” (Paula, Springfield School)
“Quite intelligent, have good GCSEs and things like that” (Madeleine, Springfield School)
“probably smart people” (Chris, Springfield School)

Unlike in Leathwood and O’Connell’s (2003) study of non-traditional students in higher education, it was largely women who lacked confidence in their academic abilities, it seemed to be both young men and women in my research who displayed worries about not ‘being good enough’:

“I think I need to be a more confident person..and have a bit more of a positive attitude because I think ‘cause I like drama so much don’t, it’s really hard to get a job in acting so I have to have a bit more of a positive attitude so I can push myself” (Lisa, Springfield School)

“I don’t really think I’ll get in, (to university), that’s why I haven’t really thought about it.... Don’t think I’m, don’t think I’m good enough to get in” (Bob, Chantry School).

It was not only meeting ‘posh’ students at the taster day that had put some of the students off university, it was also the general ‘feel’ of the university. Nazreen, a student at Kingsbridge School, had been completely put off going to university after visiting Oxford University:

“I hate universities...we went to Oxford University and I did not like the place like that...it’s too strict and I would never live there. I just cannot live there..I didn’t like the place, it’s too quiet, it’s too....” (Nazreen, Kingsbridge School).

In contrast, there were two students at Kingsbridge School who had older siblings who had been to ‘old’ pre-1992 universities, and their visit to the universities had reinforced positive ideas already held about possibly going to an ‘elite’ university in the future. The influence of social capital and local networks perhaps works here to advantage a small number of young women at
Kingsbridge School. Through seeing older siblings attend elite universities, it becomes possible to see a similar future at a similar university. One of these students, Priya, was also one of the few students at all three schools who distinguished between ‘old’ and ‘new’ universities, and saw a distinct difference between ‘old’ established universities like Oxford which she considered to be ‘one of the best universities’, and ‘new’ universities which she did not rate as highly.

6.10 Constructions of University and University Life as ‘Hard Work’

Brown and Scase (1994), in their study of higher education students at three very different universities, ‘Oxbridge’, ‘Home Counties’ and ‘Inner City’, talk about the tradition of ‘effortless achievement’ in many middle and upper class families, where financial resources mean families are able to afford to have their children educated privately and intensively from an early age. This in turn meant:

“*The familiarity of middle-class students with the general milieu of higher education accounts for the fact that students from professional and managerial backgrounds found university life, and their academic studies, much as they had anticipated*” (Brown and Scase, 1994: 58).

The accumulation over years of academic and intellectual achievements, not only means going to university is expected in these families, but that academic study and university life requires little effort or adjustment, because it is what is already ‘known’. Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) have also talked of ‘intellectual exoticism’ and the ways in which more privileged students read and study more widely. They are involved in the ‘pleasure principle’ where they learn things for ‘fun’, and where *“they are free from economic and social conditions to make free and gratuitous choices”* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979: 15). For many of the young people I interviewed, going to university was not seen as involving little effort, it was seen as involving lots of hard work. (This is discussed further in Chapter Seven). University life and academic study were rarely seen in terms of being ‘fun’ or ‘enjoyable’, but more as something that had to constantly worked on and worked at. Some of the ideas that the young
people had about university being ‘hard work’ came from older sibling’s personal experiences of university. Louise-Ann, a student at Chantry School has a brother currently at university:

“It is (university) hard work he says, ‘cause when he comes home, he comes home with these big sheets of paper...hard work!” (Louise-Ann, Chantry School).

For students who did not have any familial history of higher education, university was often also construed as being ‘hard work’:

“probably gonna be a lot different and a lot harder as well, have to put more effort into your work, have to study a lot harder…” (Lisa, Springfield School).

This confirms with Ozga and Sukhnandan’s (1997) finding that while conventional (middle-class A level) applicants anticipate minimal academic demands and an exciting social life, non-conventional applicants emphasize the workload. While studying for a degree at university was generally regarded as ‘hard work’, this alone did not seem to adversely affect young people’s ideas about whether they wanted to go to university in the future. It was almost seen as something that had to be ‘put up with’, if they wanted to go and succeed in higher education. This seemed to be true of both young men and women. This finding contrasts with the research findings of Archer, Pratt and Phillips (2001), who discovered that many working-class men they interviewed, who were not currently in higher education, argued against participation in higher education precisely because it was perceived as being ‘hard work’. They regarded other men who did participate in higher education as ‘geekish’ and ‘boffins’ and as undesirable middle-class ‘Others’. Ball et al. (2000) have written about identity:

“Identity is socially and culturally ‘located’ in time and space and inflected by rejection, displacement and desire. Post-16 ‘choices’ are bound up with the expression and suppression of identities” (2000:24).

Bound in with the young people’s ideas that they will have to ‘work hard’ if they are to go to college/university, as already discussed above, is the idea many of them have that they are not ‘good enough’ or ‘bright’ enough to go to
university in the first place. There is perhaps some assumption that in order to become ‘good enough’, they will have to ‘change’ aspects of themselves (including having less fun and working harder) before university can become a realistic option. Dominant government discourses have framed working-class participation in higher education as a way of achieving ‘change’; that is, for working-class participants to change themselves and the national and/or local population by becoming more educated, skilled, affluent, socially mobile, ‘civilized’ and (implicitly) middle class (Archer and Leathwood, 2003). Thus, as perhaps outlined by some of the young people who commented above, working-class individuals’ negotiations around participation in higher (and further) education might involve engagement with this ideal of identity and social class change.

It was not only while at university that many young people anticipated they would have to ‘work hard’. The route to university was often seen as being ‘hard work’, with college and further education seen as requiring them to also work hard:

“You get more work at college, have to stay behind more, the lessons are a bit longer” (Kam, Chantry School).

While many young people anticipated that they would also have to work hard at college, this was perceived as being bearable, because they would have chosen specific subjects at college to study and thus, studying, whilst ‘hard work’, would be partly enjoyable because young people would be studying subjects they were actually interested in:

“At college you’re more focusing on what you wanna do instead of like, you’ve still got the compulsory subjects to do in school like science, maths and English, you don’t have to do those you can do whatever you want in college so you’d probably be more enjoyable like to do the courses and things” (John, Chantry School)

“It’ll (college) probably be harder but I don’t know, ‘cause it’s less subjects it’ll be better ’cause you can concentrate on those subjects and not have to worry about other ones as well, and you get to choose the ones that you like the best and that you need” (Maisy, Chantry School).
There were only a small number of students who anticipated college and university to be ‘fun’. Some of these ideas about university being fun had come following visits to university. Ian talked about what he liked about his visit to a local university:

"the facilities, like sport, and um, clubs and bars and all that, good nightlife and that up there" (Ian, Springfield School)

‘Drinking’ and ‘partying’ were largely the things that a small number of young people at Springfield and Chantry School anticipated would be fun about going to university. However, they were never given as the sole reasons for going to university:

"Drinking, partying, more learning and by the end of it you’re normally like guaranteed to get a job really aren’t you, in what you wanna do, more or less" (Madeleine, Springfield School).

6.11 Summary

This chapter has detailed the financial and cultural barriers to higher education young people in the research anticipated, if they were to enter higher education in the future. However, fears about student hardship and debt were often based on either a complete lack of information, or just misinformation, about student finance. Ideas about what university students were ‘like’, in terms of being ‘posh’, were shared by young people that had been on university visits, as well as, those that had not.

The chapter has also examined the concept of ‘institutional habitus’ and the ways in which schools set parameters around ‘the possible’ for its students. One key aspect of institutional habitus is careers advice and information and the ways in which students have access to differential routes and possibilities post-16. Thus at Kingsbridge and Springfield Schools, setting and streaming impacted on the opportunities available to young people, giving rise to an image of higher education as an ‘impossible’, ‘possible’ or ‘natural’ future (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). For those in top sets at Kingsbridge and Springfield Schools with access to university ‘taster’ days. university was
constructed as being an entirely ‘possible’ option for the future. For those not in top sets, and who did not have access to university visits, university was constructed by many as neither ‘possible’ nor ‘natural’.

I have also argued in this chapter that it is not enough for the government, alongside schools and colleges to try and ensure more working-class people ‘make it’ to university. Whilst this is a good starting point, Diane Reay (1998a) has argued that it is often at university that the real struggle begins for those from working-class backgrounds. For many of those I interviewed, there seemed to be a disjuncture between their working-class habitus and the middle-class world they came to briefly inhabit on their visits to elite pre-1992 universities. While working-class young people may seek to exclude themselves from elite universities, because of their fears of not being ‘good enough’, or ‘bright enough’ or ‘posh enough’, universities, especially elite universities, need to look at themselves to see how and in what ways they might be perpetuating the exclusion of those from working-class backgrounds.
Chapter Seven

“I’m Just Taking One Step at a Time”: Young People’s Ideas about the Future

7.0 Introduction

The last 3 chapters have examined young people’s ideas about higher education, and the important influence of schools, families and other people they know, on the ideas they have about future educational and career options. While education was considered important for the majority of young people interviewed, with possible options post-16 being, in the main, tentatively thought about, this chapter considers the role of qualifications in the lives of young people. The mantra of education, education, education, that reflects New Labour’s social policy agenda (see chapter three), and the deemed importance of credentials and qualifications, is reflected and shared in this chapter, by most young people. However, whilst qualifications were perceived to be essential to gain ‘good’ jobs in the future, ideas and knowledge about future jobs and qualifications were, in the main, quite vague. “I’m just taking one step at a time” seemed to accurately reflect most young people’s ideas about the future.

7.1 ‘You Can’t Really Get a Good Job These Days Without Having Good Qualifications’: Young People’s Intentions to Remain in Education Post-16

In England, rates of participation in post-compulsory education have increased substantially. This increase has been attributed to many different factors, including general improvements in GCSE results, which has meant more young people having the qualifications required to study continue into post-compulsory education. The introduction of new forms of educational credentials and vocational courses has also impacted on the number of young people continuing with their education post-16. Not only do young people have the opportunity to study a wider range of subjects and courses at school, from
traditional GCSEs, to vocational GCSEs, or General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). Young people also have a greater range of options available to them post-16. Alongside the more traditional A levels, young people are able to choose from a wide range of vocational courses, as well as, being able to combine study with training. Although the increase in young people’s participation in post-compulsory education has been largely welcomed, there has been some concern with some young people’s reasons for remaining in education post-16. Furlong and Cartmel (1997:17) worry about the numbers of young people who are ‘reluctant conscripts’ to post-compulsory education, only there through changes in the labour force which have impacted negatively on the opportunities for minimum-aged school-leavers. While it might have been previously possible to leave school at sixteen and find immediate employment, changes in the labour market, as well as, the increasing numbers of young people experiencing further and higher education, have affected the likelihood of young people with few or no qualifications being able to find employment.

Current government policy stresses the instrumental and wholly economic value of education, and assumes learning necessarily entails qualification achievement. For young people contemplating post-16 education, the concern with current government policy is that it gives young people an unrepresentative view of education as a direct route of access to desired jobs (Francis, 1999). At a time when greater numbers of young people are participating in post-compulsory education and staying on at sixteen is increasingly normalised, there has also been a concern to examine the causes behind some young people’s decisions to ‘drop out’ of further education (Hodgkinson and Bloomer, 2001).

Virtually all the students at all three schools said that they intended to continue with their education after their GCSEs, despite some being vague about what qualifications they intended to study for, and what subjects/courses they were interested in studying. All students were asked whether they thought education was important and to explain their reasons for wanting/not wanting to go into further and higher education. The majority of students at all three schools
believed education to be important, although it was overwhelmingly seen as a means to an end: the means to gain further qualifications, which would in the end provide them with access to ‘good’ or ‘better’ jobs. The young people characterised qualifications as ‘cultural capital passports into education and work’ (Riseborough, 1993: 57). The importance of education was articulated by the students:

“That’s what gonna back us up when you go into the real world after school, to get a job and everything” (Nazia, Kingsbridge School).

“If you mess up like your education then you can’t get good results to, and the knowledge to, get a decent job and earn a living” (John, Chantry School)

“You get really good jobs, good money for the jobs and that, you can live a good life and that” (Ian, Springfield School).

Participating in post-compulsory education was overwhelmingly seen as a ‘good’ thing by the young people and was seen as the route to eventually securing a ‘decent’ job, which would be gained through achieving relevant qualifications. Reasons for participating in education post-16 were talked about by the young people:

“So I can get a better job, more qualifications” (Paula, Springfield School)

“You can’t really get a good job these days without good qualifications” (Rozina, Kingsbridge School)

“To get the qualifications like what you need for the jobs and that, to do the jobs you wanna do in the future, like if I wanna, If I’m gonna like go into a sports related job or something, need to study it in college and then get the qualifications what I need to get, have that job” (John, Chantry School).

Gaining qualifications was also seen by many students as being essential if future employers were going to employ them. Qualifications were viewed by students as a means by which potential employers could distinguish between potential employees based on the qualifications they had. Students describe their reasons for participating in further education:
"Just to further your education and get more grades or whatever so if you go for interview you've got more grades than someone else, they're gonna choose you and not someone else" (Kathryn, Springfield School).

"To get more qualifications really. To get a more secure job because if you've got more qualifications they'll, the employer's more likely to take you on" (Michelle, Springfield School).

Many students, even those who were not currently contemplating higher education, viewed going to university as the ultimate achievement, in terms of getting a 'good' job and earning lots of money. Asjid, a student at Chantry School who was unsure whether he wanted to go to university commented:

"It is (university) for the work at the end of the day, university is what's going to start your career off, you're gonna be in a really good job, earning loads of money.....if you've got a degree you're sorted aren't you? I mean you've got top notch grades, you've got A stars in everything, you've got a really good degree, and you approach a high company, how can they turn you down?" (Asjid, Chantry School).

Kathryn, a student at Springfield School, who was currently contemplating going to university in the future, gave her reasons for wanting to go to university and the benefits she believed it would bring:

"Qualifications and become more successful if you know what I mean, like get a well paid job and not having to worry about money if you know what I mean, like scraping by probably" (Kathryn, Springfield School).

The majority of young people at all three schools seem to want to invest in education for the perceived economic benefits it will bring at some point in their futures, echoing official discourses on the economic role of education. Self worth, personal satisfaction, personal development, and education for 'its own sake' seem to play little part in the current government's education policy. A range of education documents published under the New Labour government on further and higher education, from the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE, 1997), and The Learning Age (DfEE, 1998) to The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000) focus almost exclusively on the economic benefits of education. The value of education, which is currently assessed in terms of its contribution to the development of occupational skills, is also
creeping into other educational phases. The importance of vocational education has been recently outlined in proposals for a new 14-19 education phase (DfES, 2002, 2003).

Although girls appeared to be equally concerned with the apparent ability of further and higher education to secure them the qualifications needed for a ‘good’ or ‘better’ job, girls at Kingsbridge School also provided a greater number of reasons for participating in post-compulsory education:

“I think it’s good to be knowledgeable about things” (Farzana, Kingsbridge School)

“I think it’s, it’s about yeah, it’s about getting a job and everything but then you’ve got like a high initiative of yourself, you know you can, you can, I think it’s, what you can do, what you can achieve when you do your A levels, or university or whatever” (Mavdip, Kingsbridge School).

“I’m personally going to learn more and to experience different things and to get more qualifications cause that’s what you do in college” (Aaliyah, Kingsbridge School).

For Priya, a student at Kingsbridge School, going to university is all about learning to be independent:

“I think it’s, it’s the whole thing of you being there on your own, it’s er you know, you can experience life on your own, you’re at that level where you don’t have to listen to people you know, obviously you take, you take on the advice and stuff but you can make decisions for yourself, it gives you the chance to be independent” (Priya, Kingsbridge School).

Although post-compulsory education is constructed as being about ‘getting a job’, many of the young women at Kingsbridge School thought it to be more than this. Only one boy and two girls at Chantry School, and one boy and one girl at Springfield School gave alternative reasons for wanting to go into further education. Learning different subjects, being ‘something in life’, as well as, getting a better social life and meeting new people were among the alternative reasons given for wanting to participate in post-compulsory education. The voices of young people and their reasons for choosing to
participate/not participate in post-16 education are currently lost beneath the overwhelming focus and attention given to the economic benefits of education.

Of concern during interviews with a small number of young men was their inability to explain why they wanted to go to college. These young men appeared to be ‘reluctant conscripts’ to post-compulsory education (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997), unable to talk about what qualifications or subjects they were interested in studying at college. Although they knew that they wanted to go to college, this was about as far as it went. There also seemed to be a lack of any enthusiasm for what college had to offer them and what lay ahead of them. There seemed to be almost a passive inevitability about their future move into post-compulsory education. The passive inevitability of going to college as demonstrated by some of the young men is perhaps unsurprising at a time when greater numbers of young people are progressing into post-16 education and fewer are leaving school at sixteen. Also of concern within current policy is the idea that education on its own is able to solve all social problems, an idea which has been criticised by some (Coffield, 1999). With the setting up of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in 1997, policy documents on ‘lifelong learning’ and widening participation, education is presented as the solution to a range of societal problems including poverty, family and community breakdown, delinquency, unemployment. Not only is it debatable that education alone can solve many of these problems, young people are perhaps also given an unrealistic and unrepresentative view of what education is able to offer them. Of most concern is exactly what post-compulsory education has to offer the small number of young men who are seemingly already unenthusiastic about education and what college has to offer them.

The push towards developing an agenda for lifelong learning and the current desire to create a ‘learning society’ also seems to stem more from a concern with the economy and the perceived need to constantly upskill, (re)educate, (re)train the workforce in order to compete internationally. In many policy documents there is also an assumed compatibility between issues of social justice, equality and issues related to business, the economy and economic
competitiveness. The reconciling of themes which have in the past been regarded as antagonistic could be seen to reflect the ‘Third Way’ agenda of New Labour (Blair, 1998). The consensus also seems to be that we are living in a rapidly changing, unpredictable world, where the only means of survival is to continuously (re)train and (re)educate ourselves. In The Learning Age (1998b:7) we are told that “to cope with rapid change and the challenge of the information and communication age, we must ensure that people can return to learning throughout their lives”. Similarly in the main report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE):

“The pace of change in the work-place will require people to re-equip themselves, as new knowledge and new skills are needed for economies to compete, survive and prosper. A lifelong career in one organisation will become increasingly the exception. People will need the knowledge and skills to control and manage their own working lives” (NCIHE, 1997:9).

The linking of education and learning to work also places the onus on the individual to update their own education and skills in order to survive in this ‘rapidly’ changing world. The construction of work as unstable, fragmented, and changeable also allows some abdication of responsibility by the government, who can hide behind the rhetoric of rapid change and global competition to avoid dealing with inequalities in the workplace.

It is interesting that none of the young people talked about education, and their own participation in education as being on-going, long term or lifelong. The progression from school to college and perhaps on to university is seen by the young people as a continuous journey, where at the end they will become ‘qualified’ and settle into the job of their choice:

“I think it’s better just when you come out of school then go to college, from my point of view that is. Speaking from my....you know. But um some people they actually feel that when they’ve, cos they’ve had a bad experience in school they think that they’re gonna get the same experience in college, that’s why they don’t go to college”(Rojina, Kingsbridge School).
Josie, a student at Chantry School similarly feels that although stressful, going
to college straight from school is the best option:

"It'd be a lot of stress, but I think it would be worth it at the end of the
day" (Josie, Chantry School).

For many of the students, failing exams and retaking them at a later date was
the only reason for prolonging a certain stage in their education, before moving
onto the next stage. For Michelle, a student at Springfield School, continuing
with education later in life is constructed as difficult, because of family
circumstances:

"If I didn't get the grades I need then, there and then, I know it'd be
stressful like but, it's better to get it all done while you're young
because when you're older you're gonna have other things, children,
family, so I'd go back to wherever I needed to go again and get the
qualifications and then know what I needed to work on, because if I got,
say I needed an A and I only got a C then I'd know I had to jump up 2
grades, find out what I need to do to get those, stay in college for
another year get the grades and go" (Michelle, Springfield School).

The idea that there is no longer any such thing as 'a job for life' and the
representation in current policy, especially lifelong learning policy, of the
world of work as unstable, changeable, is not something any of the young
people seem to be aware of. None of the young people talk about the need in
the future to (re)educate and (re)train themselves in order to be able to equip
themselves with the necessary skills needed to remain employable. It would
seem that 'a job for life' is exactly what all of the young people believe will
come with going to college and university and acquiring qualifications. There
is no mention by any of the young people of the possibility of changing jobs in
the future, of the possibility of perhaps becoming bored with what they are
doing and going into a different area of work. For almost all of the young
people, their choice of job or career is at the end of a very straight path or route
of education, from school to college and maybe university. The idea for many
of the young people that school will be immediately followed by college and
then possibly university and/or a job perhaps reflects current government
attempts at a more joined up approach to education. This can especially be seen
in The Excellence Challenge (now AimHigher) (DfEE, 2000), where greater
collaboration between schools, colleges and universities is encouraged and supported. It is also possible that many of the young people, were contemplating education and career options that were loosely based on predicted GCSE grades and teacher expectations. Actual GCSE results and the traumas and highs and lows of receiving these results, might mean that the young people have to revise their post-16 plans, thus disrupting plans already made.

7.2 “I’m Just Taking One Step at a Time”: Young People’s Ideas about the Future

Although most of the young people at all three schools saw the gaining of qualifications as crucial in their bid for ‘good’ and ‘better’ jobs, there were many who did not have a clear idea of exactly what qualifications they wanted to do, or what subjects and courses they were interested in studying post-16. Unlike the middle-class young people in Reay’s (1998b) study of choice of higher education, the young people I interviewed were not engaging with further education, let alone higher education, in a context of certainty. There were no ‘taken for granted assumptions’ that they would definitely be participating in higher education in the future. Part of this uncertainty seemed to stem from the fact that they had yet to take their GCSE exams, with many young people feeling unable to make firm decisions about their future lives until these exams had been taken. This point is taken up by Ball et al, (1999) who importantly note the absence in policy texts of the importance of past experiences and histories for young people in making their post-16 choices:

“The possibilities of ‘choice’ at 16 are in this sense as much constructed and constrained by the young people’s educational pasts as they are by promises or anticipations of the future” (Ball et al, 1999:203).

Matt, a student at Springfield, talks about the worries he has about his GCSE exams:

“I’m worried about mucking it all up and having nothing to fall back on to be honest, cos I really wanna do like acting when I’m older but
I'm just really worried about like, messing it all up and not having nothing to fall back on and ending up in a rubbishy job" (Matt, Springfield School).

For many of the young people it is impossible to think about what they would like to do post-16 because so much rests on the results they get for their GCSE exams at the end of year eleven. For many of the young people, university has not been contemplated because GCSEs and college are the more immediate concern. Many of the young people appear to be concerned with “taking one step at a time” in terms of their plans for the future, not thinking too far ahead, mainly concentrating on the here and now. This is especially the case for boys, who seem to be generally more unsure about what they plan to do post-16. For many boys at Chantry School and Springfield School, university is something they have not given much thought to:

“I wouldn’t mind going to university, I hadn’t really thought about going university yet, just get my grades and then look for the future” (Chris, Springfield School).

“I have thought about it (university), like going there and stuff like that but, it hasn’t really been a big thing yet, I’m not really thinking about it so....” (Matt, Springfield School).

“I just haven’t thought about it (university), not that I don’t wanna go” (John, Chantry School).

While university has not been ruled out by some boys, year ten is considered “too early” by many to be thinking about university. For many boys, going to university depends on grades and what happens at the end of year eleven and college. Although some girls at all three schools also considered university to be “too far ahead” to be thinking about, girls were generally far more sure of what qualifications and courses they wanted to study at college. At Springfield School, ten young people specifically talked about wanting to study for their A levels at college. eight of these were girls and two were boys. Six of these ten were quite clear about what subjects they intended to study (five girls and one boy), with four having some sort of idea what they would like to study (three girls and one boy). At Chantry School, seven students talked specifically about wanting to study for their A levels at college (four girls and three boys), with five being sure about what subjects they wanted to study (three girls and two
boys) and two students were unsure about which subjects to study (one girl and one boy). Eight girls at Kingsbridge School want to study A levels at college with only one girl unclear about what subjects she would be interested in studying. The most noticeable gender difference at both Chantry School and Springfield School was the greater number of boys who had absolutely no idea what qualifications, whether academic or vocational, or subjects they wanted to study at college. Four students at Chantry School had no idea what they planned to do at college (three boys and one girl). A further four students at Chantry had career related ideas about what they wanted to do in the future (two boys and two girls), but were unsure what courses and qualifications they needed to study for to get into their desired career. There were similarly three boys (0 girls) at Springfield School who want to go to college, but have absolutely no idea what qualifications they need, or courses or subjects they would like to study.

At Kingsbridge School, a third of girls (seven) talked about wanting to study more vocational courses at college. This was more than at either Chantry School or Springfield School. Three girls want to study hair and beauty at college, one girl wants to do some kind of apprenticeship, a further two girls are interested in health and social care and childcare. Nazia, although unsure what subject she wants to study, knows she wants to do a GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification). All but one of the seven girls who want to do vocational courses are also in the green group (top stream) at Kingsbridge School and are in top sets for the main subjects. Some of these girls, although unsure at the moment, have not ruled out going to university in the future:

“\textit{I haven’t really thought, I have actually thought about it (university) but I think if I wanna go further to get a degree or something like that then I’ll probably go}”(Jennifer, Kingsbridge School)

“\textit{I ain’t really thought about it but um, yeah I wanna get high and if I know I’m able to complete the course then yeah}”(Kirsty, Kingsbridge School).

“\textit{Yeah, only if I get good grades and I pass all my subjects in college and all that}”(Nadia, Kingsbridge School).
Although predicted good grades at GCSE, the six girls in top sets at Kingsbridge School who want to study vocational courses at college may be inadvertently narrowing the possibilities and opportunities for higher education study in the future. With the current government’s attempts to create greater curriculum ‘choice’ for young people at secondary school from the age of fourteen, there is the distinct possibility that inequalities will become further entrenched. The White Paper, ‘Schools Achieving Success’(DfES, 2001) sets out the government’s intentions to widen the current secondary school curriculum, to include opportunities to study more vocational programmes:

“And for the first time there will also be the opportunity of a predominantly vocational programme for those with the aptitude, beginning at 14 and going right through to degree level. Such a programme might include a significant element of work related learning from 14, followed by a modern apprenticeship or full-time vocational study at college and then a Foundation Degree for those who have the potential” (DfES, 2001:31).

Held within the document is the assumption that all fourteen year olds know what they want to do, and that these ideas will remain static throughout young people’s school careers. A number of young people at the three schools had no current clear idea about what they want to do, either post-16 or post-18. While the stated aim of the document, as well as, government policy more generally, is to ‘raise the status of vocational education’(p.30), there is no clear indication of how this will be achieved, especially when greater divisions are likely to be created between academic and vocational modes of study. Although we are told that ‘the education system must respond to the needs, talents and aspirations of each student’(p.30), there is a complete absence of any recognition of inequalities created by the education system, and how greater and earlier specialisation at secondary school might lead to further inequalities. Are equal numbers of young people likely to study vocational and academic programmes? Are young people at certain schools more likely to be encouraged to study more academic subjects? Are more vocational programmes likely to be studied and followed by middle-class young people at grammar or other selective schools?
There is also an assumption that young people, armed with the correct information, will be able to make informed decisions about what they intend to do, both during their time at secondary school and post-16. However, a number of young people at all three schools were not armed with the ‘correct’ information to enable them to make informed decisions about their futures. Ball et al. (2001) argue that the capacity for choice is unevenly distributed across the social classes:

“Different kinds of practical knowledge are at work in choice-making. Knowledge about and use of status hierarchies and reputations is uneven and varies systematically between schools and families’ (2001: 69).

Thus, ‘choice’ of institution, in terms of where to study post-16 and post-18, as well as, what to study and what qualifications to study for, reflect the fact that social class is an important aspect of ‘choice’. Hutchings (2003) argues those from working-class backgrounds are disadvantaged because they do not possess the same cultural capital as their middle-class peers. As a result, those from working-class backgrounds, who do not have access to the same symbolic capital as their middle-class counterparts, may know less about what higher education entails and how to get there. However, while I concur with Hutchings that working-class young people in many cases do ‘lack’ cultural capital in terms of their knowledge about the opportunities available to them post-16, I also think schools play an important part in constructing the opportunities available to young people. While there did seem to be an expectation that some of the young people I interviewed and who were in top sets, would potentially ‘make it’ to university, this expectation only applied to a small number of young people. While the most academically able students at the schools seemed to receive support and a ‘helping hand’ from teachers in the form of being invited on visits to university taster days and so on, this was certainly not available to most students. For many of these young people then, a ‘lack’ of cultural capital is further exacerbated by their schools’ own institutional habits and the low expectations some teachers have of working-class students. Many young people, even those who had quite a clear idea of what they wanted to do post-16, were unsure what GCSEs they needed to get
to be able to progress to college and study their chosen subjects and courses. I asked all young people what qualifications they thought were needed to progress to college:

"Good GCSEs I heard" (Farzana, Kingsbridge School)

"Pretty good GCSEs, I suppose" (Barry, Chantry School)

"I don't really know, is it 6 GCSEs?" (Daisy, Chantry School)

Claire, a student at Springfield School, also worried about the hurdles she faced in getting to college:

"Not getting good GCSEs, I don't know that cos I don't actually know what grades I gotta get to get into these courses" (Claire, Springfield School).

Despite many young people being unsure about what GCSEs they needed to progress to college after year eleven, those few who did seek out further information about college courses and were more proactive about their futures post-16, were mainly girls. Amrita, a student at Kingsbridge School, talks about making an appointment to see the careers advisor at her school:

Kerry: So do you know what qualifications you need to get into college?

Amrita: I have been looking round but I'm not sure, that's why I had er, an appointment with my careers advisor and she's gonna tell me everything like that after the summer holidays, so looking forward to that" (Kingsbridge School).

Michelle, a student at Springfield School, has been similarly proactive about her options post-16, having already visited a local college with her friends:

"I visited a college with my friends in year 11 and they said something about AS levels. gotta take about 3 courses, 2 or 3 courses, fashion, media and journalism. thought I could take 3 different courses, so I've
got some sort of idea and I think I’d go to (name of college)” (Michelle, Springfield School).

Although Michelle appears slightly unsure about AS levels and how many exactly she is able to take, she has taken time out to visit a local college with her friends, something that none of the boys had done at either of the two schools. Many of the boys talked about year ten being ‘too early’ to contemplate their options post-16, with some believing decisions could not be made until the end of year eleven, after receiving their GCSE results. A few girls did agree with many of the boys, arguing year ten was too early to be contemplating their futures post-16:

“I still feel too young, if you know what I mean? I still feel too young to be thinking about college and everything. But next year it’ll probably kick in that I’m leaving at the end of the year, and better get your arse in gear!” (Kathryn, Springfield School).

There was a notable difference between the way in which boys and girls talked about their belief that year ten was too early to be thinking about their options post-16. For many of the boys who believe year ten is too early to be thinking about possible future educational and career options, they are locked in the here and now, their futures appear to be a matter of ‘wait and see’. Their vague and tentative ideas about college courses, qualifications, training options seem to not only stem from uncertainty through lack of information and guidance and what their GCSE results will bring, but also through a seemingly more carefree and less serious attitude towards their future lives. In contrast, even those girls who think year ten is too early to be thinking about future education and career options, have actually given their futures quite a lot of consideration. Kathryn, a student at Springfield School, was interested in studying law and going to college and university, even though she still thought year ten to be too early to be thinking ‘about college and everything’. Not only did many of the girls have “imagined futures”(Ball et al., 1999) that were relatively clear and possible, (even if they were unsure how to go about realising their ambitions), they were also more serious and seemed to openly fret more about their futures. Concerns about ‘failing’ GCSE exams, placing
too much pressure on themselves to ‘do well’, as well as, feeling under pressure from family members were just some of the worries many of the young women had about their futures. Priya, a student at Kingsbridge School, worries about her GCSE results:

“I worry about getting good grades in GCSE, although I’ve been predicted good grades, As and Bs, but sometimes I think can I live up to these expectations that you know, people think I can, if they, you know, if they can think I can do it then I’m sure I can but sometimes when you just, you just worry like you know, can I do it or not?” (Priya, Kingsbridge School).

Amrita, a student at Kingsbridge School, talks about wanting to do a GNVQ, as well as, an A level at college. She sees the A level as offering some form of protection, of having something to ‘fall back on’ if she decides she does not want to work with children in the future:

“I think it will (studying for an A level) help me in the future maybe if I don’t wanna go to um, doing jobs with children, it’ll help me to do something else” (Amrita, Kingsbridge School).

There was little evidence amongst the boys that they were thinking as clearly, or were as worried, about their futures as the girls seemed to be. Important gender differences in the way young men and women think about their future educational and career options were noted by Francis (1999a) in her study of 14-16 year old students’ constructions of gender, learning and future educational and occupational pathways. Young men in her study considered young women to be more ‘serious’ than them at school and thought they were more worried about their future job prospects. This seemed to be due to some of the young men taking their ability to find work in the future for granted. Lucey and Reay (2002) in their study of families with children transferring from primary to secondary school, also found gender differences in the amount of exam anxiety experienced by boys and girls. They noted that middle-class girls generally expressed more anxieties about their performance than boys, and appeared to be less confident about their achievements. However, while few boys articulated to me directly any concerns or worries they had about
their futures, this does not mean they do not have any fears concerning GCSEs, college, courses, family pressures and so on.

### 7.3 Working Hard and Taking Responsibility: Individualizing Responsibility for Future ‘Success’

A number of studies of non-participants in higher education have found that images of university are often negative, and focus on the studying aspect of university, with many working-class people emphasising the imagined workload and stress of university life (Hutchings and Archer, 2001; Archer, Pratt and Phillips, 2001; Archer and Hutchings, 2000). Ball et al. (2000) point to the link between discourses of individualisation and individual pathology, whereby, for example, working-class groups may blame themselves (as opposed to, say, structural inequalities) for their educational failure. Before even contemplating going into higher education, many of the young people at all three schools similarly emphasised and imagined college and further education to be ‘hard work’:

*Kerry:* "Have you got any idea what college might be like, do you think it’s going to be like school?"

*Billy:* "I think it’ll be harder, don’t wanna go!"

*Kerry:* "Why do you think it’s going to be harder?"

*Billy:* "I think that, with school it’s more, you’ve got the teachers there to help you and then when you’re at college you’ve actually gotta work for yourself and you’ve gotta do your own work really" (Billy, Chantry School).

Lisa, a student at Springfield School similarly thinks college is going to be a lot different to school, and will involve hard work and more effort:

"It’s (college) probably gonna be a lot different and a lot harder as well, have to put more effort into your work, have to study a lot harder, but if it, if you get the grades you need and you study hard enough......." (Lisa, Springfield School).

Fatema, a student at Kingsbridge School, was one of the few young people who did not want to go to college, believing it would be hard work and similar to school:
"Loads of homework and coursework, I just can’t handle coursework, so, I don’t know, I don’t really wanna go college, 8 o’clock every day, same routine as school" (Fatema, Kingsbridge School).

Although Fatema was exceptional in that she was one of the few young people who did not want to go to college and had largely negative views about what she imagined college life to be like, many of those who hoped to go to college and were more enthusiastic about further education, held similar views about the ‘hard work’ and study involved in going to college. As already discussed in chapter six, the construction of further/higher education as ‘hard work’ seemed to be bound up with ideas that many of the young people had that they were not clever enough or ‘brainy’ enough to go to college/university. The need to ‘work hard’ was positioned as a necessity if the young people were to access college/university. A major area of struggle for many of the young working-class students, was their struggle with feelings of a lack of confidence in their abilities or performance. However, rather than conceptualizing lack of confidence or low self-esteem as individual personality traits, Bartky, in discussing the apparent lack of self-esteem amongst some of her women students who felt that they/their work were not good enough, argues that ‘this shame is manifest in a pervasive sense of personal inadequacy that….is profoundly disempowering’ and reveals “generalized condition of dishonour” which is women’s lot in a sexist society’ (Bartky, 1990:85 in Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003). Bartky therefore locates such a lack of self-esteem within systems of oppression. While Bartky is referring specifically to women and their ‘lack’ of embodied capital in the form of self confidence and self-esteem, this could easily apply to many of the young men and women that I interviewed. However, while Fatema seems to be put off college because she imagines it is going to be like school with “loads of homework and coursework”, those who hold similar views to Fatema about the ‘hard work’ involved in going to college seem to see this as ‘one of those things’ and as something they will have to put up with, and accept, if they are to achieve their future educational and career ambitions.
These notions of stress and ‘hard work’ were supported from experience by many of those whose relatives were currently studying, or had studied, at college, and sometimes university:

“My sister finds it quite hard but she’s just stressed anyway cos she’s always like that” (Maisy, Chantry School)

“My sister goes to college, she says she’s still got to do quite a lot of work but she gets some free time sometimes, so that’s alright” (Chris, Springfield School).

Amrita, a student at Chantry School talks to her brother about university:

“It is hard work he says, cos when he comes home he comes home with these big sheets of paper... it’s hard work” (Amrita, Chantry School).

“From what my auntie said it’s a lot of work and she was always consumed in work, and she couldn’t come and visit us that often because she had so much work to do” (Michelle, Springfield School).

Although all of the young people above, have heard from relatives how much work and study is involved in further, and in some cases, higher education, it does not seem to have completely put them off the idea of going to college. While many of the young people did cite ‘hard work’ and study first in their ideas about college, this was often followed by more positive images of what they imagined college to be like. Thus, while Maisy’s sister finds college quite hard, Maisy puts this down to how her sister is more generally, being “just stressed anyway cos she’s always like that”. Similarly, although Chris’ sister has to ‘do quite a lot of work” at college, he seems more encouraged that she gets “some free time sometimes”.

7.4 Summary

“I’m just taking one step at a time”, seemed to accurately reflect the stance many of the young people I interviewed were taking towards their futures. Decision-making seemed to be largely rooted in the ‘here and now’. Vague ideas and decisions about possible post-16 options were entirely pragmatic and based on partial information located in the familiar and the known. It was also
context related and could not be separated from the family background, culture and life histories of the young people (Hodgkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Feelings and emotions were also bound up with many of the young people’s ideas about the future, as they constructed further and higher education as being ‘hard work’ and ‘stressful’. Many of the young people lacked self-confidence in their own abilities, positioning themselves as not ‘brainy enough’ or ‘intelligent’ enough to ‘make it’ to university. As I have argued in chapters five and six, students’ sense of their own abilities are reinforced by their schools’ own institutional habitus, and differentiation in the form of setting and streaming, as well as, differential access to careers advice and information.
Chapter Eight

Discussion of Findings

8.0 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis has been to understand the ideas, a sample of young, working-class young people at three schools, have about higher education and future lives. Although widening participation to higher education, is not in itself a novel topic or area of research, the research is set in the context of current government policy agendas about widening higher education participation, the role of schools and further education in widening access to higher education, as well as, wider concerns about social exclusion and lifelong learning (Chapter Three). The objective of the research was also to listen to the views and experiences of young people, something that is not often done, as well as, attempt to incorporate working-class perspectives on educational inequalities. Lynch and O’Neill 1994: 310) have argued that the colonised ‘Other’ in education must be the working-class, because “it is the one about whom most has been said but who never speaks back”. The thesis is therefore an attempt to allow young, working-class people to ‘speak’. The aim of this thesis has also been to attempt to understand the importance of families (Chapter Four) and school (Chapter Five) to the decisions young people are beginning to make about their futures, in terms of education and careers. In trying to gain an understanding of these issues, the thesis has considered the following questions:

- What has been New Labour’s approach to widening participation in higher education and the policies that have been put in place to achieve this?
- What are the working-class young people’s experiences, at the three schools, of secondary school, and in what ways, do they perceive these
experiences to inform their ideas about future educational and career opportunities?

- What aspirations for the future do the young people involved in the research have, and what educational and career opportunities do they believe are available to them (including higher education)?

- To what extent do the working-class young people in the research, feel parents/teachers/careers advisors and others have an influence on the decisions they are making about their futures?

8.1 Widening Participation in Higher Education: Is it on the Agenda?

It has already been established in chapter three, that whilst widening participation in higher education is on New Labour’s agenda, it is a very specific agenda, that is largely based on cultural assumptions about the working-classes. Despite a number of reports detailing the under-representation of a number of groups in higher education, including some minority ethnic groups, those with disabilities, mature students (Coffield and Vignoles, 1997; Robertson and Hillman, 1997; NAO, 2002), the overwhelming focus of government concern has been with those from working-class backgrounds. This focus has led to the creation and implementation of widening participation policies in schools, especially disadvantaged schools, where there has not often been a history of young people going on to post-16 education, let alone post-18 education and higher education. The government’s targeting of schools is an attempt to introduce to young people, at an earlier age, the idea that university might be an option for them in the future. Two of the schools in the research had applied for, and received, government funding for widening participation initiatives in their schools. Kingsbridge Girls’ School and Springfield School had used this extra money to organize university visits for the ‘gifted and talented’ (see the ‘Excellence in Cities’ programme. www.standards.dfee.gov.uk/excellence), all of whom, were in ‘top’ academic sets. It has been argued in this thesis, that the overwhelming concern of the current government has been with ‘raising aspirations’ and focusing on very
‘bright’ working-class young people. As Woodrow (2000) has noted, the current government agenda not only seems to be largely based on ‘talent spotting’ ‘bright’ young people whilst they are at school, the agenda also seems to be about getting these ‘bright’ disadvantaged young people into ‘top’ elite universities (DfEE, 2000).

Alongside New Labour’s cultural higher education agenda, and also discussed in Chapter Three, is the role of education in, and for, the economy. Currently, education is seen in largely economic terms, and the ‘returns’, in terms of a skilled workforce and access to qualifications and desired jobs, that it is assumed to give both individuals and to society as a whole. As the findings reported in Chapter Seven demonstrated, the majority of young people in this research shared government policy ideas concerning the importance of education, for credentials and qualifications, and access to desired jobs. However, the current rhetoric of ‘lifelong learning’ and the emphasis placed on the need to constantly (re)educate, and (re)train ourselves throughout our lives, was not something that any of the young people articulated to me. Education was seen as a means to an end: to gain access to a ‘good’ job. Education was not seen as something that would be ongoing throughout the young people’s lives, the ultimate achievement and pinnacle of their educational lives, was seen to be higher education, which would take them into their early 20s and not beyond.

8.2 Young People’s Use of Social Resources and Networks

It has been established in Chapter Four, that families, and especially older siblings are highly significant in young people’s lives, and the ideas they have about education and future lives and possibilities. Bourdieu’s (1997) notion of social capital, as well as, Ball and Vincent’s (1998) use of ‘hot’ knowledge, were used to examine the role of families in young people’s ideas about further/higher education. Young people in this research largely relied on ‘hot’ knowledge (acquired through the grapevine), in the form of advice and information from older siblings, cousins, other older family members and friends who had already been, or who were currently experiencing
further/higher education. Hearsay and rumour also formed a seemingly important part of many of the young people’s ideas about colleges, courses, universities, as they formed opinions about certain colleges and universities based on reputation and what they had ‘heard’ from people they knew and largely seemed to trust. Despite there being careers rooms at all three schools involved in the research, there was little reliance on ‘cold’ knowledge, with few young people saying they had looked at college brochures, leaflets or prospectus, that were available in these rooms. Of course, for young people who do not have family histories of participation in further/higher education (this was overwhelmingly the case at Springfield School), they are receiving little information about possible future educational/career opportunities, because they are not receiving it outside school (in the form of ‘hot’ knowledge), and they are generally not receiving it in school, in the form of careers advice (see Chapter Five).

As mentioned in Chapter Four, most older siblings and other older family members of the young people in the research, who had experiences of further/higher education, were studying locally. Thus the ‘hot’ knowledge that the young people in the research had about colleges, universities and so on, was mainly related to the local area and community in which they lived. ‘Staying Close to Home’ seemed to sum up most young people’s future intentions, in terms of going into further/higher education or working. Few young people talked about wanting to move away from home, and their families and friends. Going to college was talked about in terms of it being ‘easy to get to’, in terms of transport, and also in terms of it being in an area that the young people knew well. Moving ‘away’ to university was often negatively viewed by the young people, especially by many of the young women, who did not want to move away from their family or the area in which they currently lived:

“I wanna stay in (name of City)...’cause I don’t like going away from home. it’s just like I get homesick, I’m just weird!” (Maisy, Chantry School).
"I prefer to stay in (name of City), I'm quite proud of where I come from" (Daisy, Chantry School).

This is in keeping with the findings of Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1997), and the importance of locality and community for the working-class 'Locals' in their research. "In making choices, reputation and desirability are played off against other factors, like distance, and like matching" (Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz, 1997: 419). For most of the working-class young people in my research, the reputation and desirability of courses, colleges and so on, was based on the local 'hot' knowledge they had received from those they trusted, alongside relationships with their families and feelings about the area and community in which they lived.

This finding, about the importance of locality and 'staying close to home' for many working-class young people, goes some way to challenging and perhaps hampering one important aspect of the widening participation agenda of New Labour. The importance of getting more working-class young people into 'top' elite universities, is outlined in The Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000). However, for most of the young working-class people in my research, 'choosing' a university is all about feeling comfortable and 'at home', and part of this is studying 'close to home' and being near friends and family. Whilst Knowles (2000) has talked about the impact of student finance on student decisions to stay at home and study at local universities, this research has also demonstrated the importance and impact of local networks on working-class secondary school students’ decisions about wanting to study 'close to home'.

8.3 Ideas about University and Future Lives: 'I'm Just Taking One Step at a Time'

It was notable in the research, that similar to the findings of Ball, Macrae and Maguire (1999), in their research on the educational and career interests of a group of year eleven students at 'Northwick Park' comprehensive school and a pupil referral unit, "initial post-16 choices are based upon weak commitments, fuzziness about the future and limited information" (1999: 38). Although the
majority of the young people in my research anticipated going to college after leaving school the following year, ideas about courses, qualifications and so on were very vague (see Chapter Seven). Although university had not been ruled out entirely by the majority of young people, it was seen as a long way in the future, and ‘I’m just taking one step at a time’, did seem to accurately reflect most of the young people’s ideas surrounding their futures. It is of course worth mentioning that for many of the young people in the research, the following year’s GCSE examinations and results were more of an immediate concern, and of course these would determine to a large extent the options that would be available to them post-16. Concentrating on the ‘here and now’ seemed to be the response of most of the young people in the research to their futures.

8.4 The Contribution of this Thesis

As already mentioned, although widening participation to higher education, is not in itself a novel topic, the research is set specifically in the context of New Labour’s widening participation agenda in schools. The research challenges, to some extent, both assumptions about the ‘problem’ underlying the under-representation of working-class young people in higher education and the need to ‘raise aspirations’, as well as, the idea that greater collaboration between schools, colleges and universities is going on as part of this widening participation agenda. Although I only conducted research at three schools, in two different cities, there was little evidence of any significant amount of collaboration between the schools, and other local colleges and universities, as proposed in current government policy (DfEE, 2000; DfES, 2003).

Although some of the findings in the research are not novel, and are somewhat predictable (for instance, fears about student debt and hardship), the focus on year ten students offers a slightly different perspective on working-class young people’s ideas about higher education and future lives, moving away from the traditional focus on those already participating in post-16 education (Pugsley,
1998; Reay, 1998b), or already participating in higher education (Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003).

8.5 Building on this Research

The research carried out for this thesis, has provided a small insight into the ideas and aspirations a sample of seventy young working-class people have about possible future education and career opportunities. However, as Leonard (1999) points out, asking young people whilst they are still at school about their career intentions, does not necessarily mean that these ideas will become reality, and career intentions may in fact remain aspirations. There is therefore perhaps a need to follow young people into their destinations post-16, to see what does in reality happen to them, and whether the ideas and thoughts they had whilst at school about careers and so on, do become a reality. Recent research conducted by researchers at the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce), would however seem to suggest that the opportunities available to young school leavers are very much dependent on where they live in the country. The Guardian reports:

"The likelihood of a school leaver going to university relates directly to where they live, their household income, whether they go on regular holidays and even whether they have a dishwasher at home" (2005:6).

Researchers at Hefce spent five years mapping out the proportion of school leavers going to university in every region, parliamentary constitution, and Ward in the UK between 1994 and 2000. They found that young people from the most advantaged areas were up to six times more likely to go to university than those in the most disadvantaged areas. The area in the South West where Springfield School is situated, is placed in the lowest 20% of wards, where on average one in ten school leavers go to university. (See www.hefce.ac.uk for more information).
Chapter Nine

Policy Implications and Recommendations

9.0 Introduction

Widening participation to higher education has been an issue of great policy relevance in England in the last few years. The professed commitment of the New Labour government over the last seven years has been to not only increase the numbers going to university, but to also widen participation and encourage currently under-represented groups to consider higher education as a possible option in the future. A number of groups have been identified as being currently under-represented in higher education, including some ethnic minority groups, those with disabilities, women (especially in some subject areas), mature students, (see for example, NCIHE, 1997; NAO, 2002). However, the main targets of government widening participation initiatives have been those from working-class backgrounds, with little or no familial experience of higher education. These initiatives have also been primarily targeted at young people still in compulsory education, (see The Excellence Challenge, (DfEE, 2000) (now known as Aimhigher), the intention being that targeting young people at an earlier age and encouraging greater collaboration between schools, colleges and universities, will encourage more young people to continue into post-compulsory education. This research has endeavoured to examine the ideas, a relatively small number of working-class young people, who are the targets of such government widening participation initiatives, have about higher education. From the findings of this research, there are a number of policy issues which need to be addressed, both at the local and national level, if more young people from disadvantage backgrounds are to access, as well as, remain in higher education.
9.1 Widening Participation to Higher Education: The need to move Beyond a Cultural Agenda

It is quite clear from the research that there is a mismatch between what the current government sees as the underlying reason for the under-representation of working-class groups in higher education, and what many of the young people in the research considered to be the ‘problem’. As outlined in chapter three, the widening participation agenda of New Labour seems to be overwhelmingly concerned with the need to ‘raise aspirations’, specifically working-class people’s aspirations to enter higher education. The policy ‘solution’ to working-class low representation in higher education, has overwhelmingly been to allow working-class people to ‘see’ what university is ‘really’ like through visits, ‘taster’ days, and university summer schools. The assumption being, that this short experience will be enough to ‘raise aspirations’ and encourage these young people to consider university as a future prospect.

Although university was considered a long way off by many of the young people interviewed, many were already thinking about university, even if their ideas about courses, qualifications, and where to study, were very vague. Their aspirations, in many cases, did not need to be raised.

9.2 Young People’s Experiences of Higher Education: University ‘Taster’ Days

If one of the major aims of government policy is to ‘raise aspirations’ through young people experiencing higher education, and to arm them with the ‘right’ information about what higher education is all about, I am not entirely sure ‘taster’ days are the answer to this. A number of issues seemed to arise out of the university experiences of some of the students who had participated in ‘taster’ days at Kingsbridge and Springfield Schools.
While it is true to say that many of the young people that went on these visits, had found the visits enjoyable, it is difficult to know whether the visits had had any real impact, or any long term effects. If the government’s aim is that these visits are to demonstrate a short ‘taster’ to young people about what university life might be like, and what a university actually looks like, then perhaps this is enough, especially if a number of university visits, in conjunction with other events, are initiated. However, if these visits are singled out as the major weapon in the government’s fight against educational inequalities, and these visits are seen as arming young people with all the information they need to know about higher education, then I am slightly more dubious. Following their university visits, most of the young people still lacked crucial information about student finance and funding, and worries about student debt remained a concern for many students after these visits, and when I interviewed them.

Also of concern, was the fact that the young people that went on these visits seemed to have had little contact, or opportunity to talk with university students. Whilst some of the students at Springfield School talked about being split into groups and shown round university by a student, it was mentioned at Kingsbridge Girls’ School that because of student exams at the university they visited, they had few opportunities to talk to students about university and student life. Whilst this might have been unfortunate timing, if the aim of these visits is to meet students, and to see what university might be like from a student’s perspective and experience, then an opportunity has been missed. Many of the young people interviewed already had quite strong images of what they thought university students were ‘like’, and not being able to meet students, or to have enough of an opportunity to talk to them on these visits, did not do enough to displace some of the negative images of university students, the young people had.

Of concern on both a national and local level, are decisions concerning which universities young people are visiting as part of their ‘taster’ experience. On a national level, the concern has not only been to encourage and widen participation to working-class groups, it has also been to encourage these same
groups to consider entering ‘top’ elite universities, which continue to be dominated by the middle-classes. On a more local level, university ‘taster’ days for young people seem to be highly dependent on the links and relationships between certain universities and schools. In the case of Kingsbridge and Springfield School, links had been established with, in the case of Springfield School, a relatively local, ‘old’ pre-1992 university. In the case of Kingsbridge School, a link had been established with two very elite ‘old’ universities. These two universities were not in the local area. Had the young people at these two schools been to different universities as part of their ‘taster’ experience, they might well have had very different experiences. In the two cities where my research was conducted, there are a number of different higher education institutions, including both ‘top’ elite research led universities and former polytechnics. Making sure young people have the opportunity to experience different types of higher education institutions seems to be crucial if more working-class people are to access higher education. Diane Reay and Stephen Ball (1997) have noted the importance of ‘being at home’ and ‘feeling at home’ in education, and have argued that the working-classes have rarely been ‘at home’ in schooling. University visits have the potential to further alienate working-class students from seeing higher education as being a place for people ‘like them’. It is likely to be problematic if working-class young people’s experiences of university are restricted to visits to very elite universities. Whilst of course I am not saying that young working-class people’s experiences of university should only be restricted to ‘local’ less elite universities, more consideration needs to be given to where these university ‘taster’ experiences take place. It would seem that there is possibly a fine dividing line between secondary school students having positive university experiences and having negative experiences and being ‘put off’ going to university in the future, based on these ‘taster’ experiences.

One of the most significant findings from my data, was the importance of locality and ‘staying close to home’ for many of the young people, in terms of plans for the future. (This is discussed in Chapter Four). Many of the young people had misgivings about their university visits because they were not
'local' enough. Many students spoke of their closeness to their families, and attachments to their friends and communities. Their social networks and contacts were very localised. Moving away to go to university was largely seen by the young people as being undesirable. However, despite the importance of locality for many of the young people and their attachments to the local community, it was surprising how little most knew about the different higher education institutions that were situated in their towns. Few could name all the universities in their town. At the national level, while there seems to be a focus on a more joined-up-approach, with an attempt to bring closer together different phases of the educational system, I am not sure to what extent this is happening at the local level. From the responses of the young people, it would seem that universities in their town have had limited involvement in, or impact on, their worlds. The only way through which the young people had any knowledge of, or involvement in, local universities, was through older siblings or family members who had been, or who were currently studying at university. Of course, for the young people who did not have these contacts, or did not know anyone at university, (this was overwhelmingly true of students at Springfield School), knowledge about universities was even more scarce.

9.3 The Role of Further Education in Widening Participation

While many of the young people lacked information about higher education, it was also true to say that knowledge and information about educational opportunities post-16 was scarce. Despite students at all three schools having potential access to education and careers information, in the form of course guides, brochures and prospectus, this was rarely used by those I interviewed. 'Hot' knowledge in the form of recommendations and advice from people the young people knew, seemed to be trusted more than more formal, 'cold' knowledge.

As already mentioned, the government’s focus seems to be on a more joined-up-approach, to widening participation. Further education is seen as being an important part of this approach. For many of the young people, further
education and going to college was the most immediate concern for them. As none of the three schools involved in the research had sixth forms attached to them, young people have to concretely decide what they intend to do post-16, before they reach the end of year eleven, as they have to transfer elsewhere if they are to continue with their education.

At a local level, and certainly in the schools where I was interviewing, further education institutions seem to be largely invisible, with students seeming to have minimal contact with local colleges. It seems to be crucial that if students are to even continue into post-16 education, they have a clear idea of the paths and routes available into further education. Few students that I interviewed were aware of the qualifications they needed to get into college, especially if they wanted to study for A Levels. Although some students at Springfield School spoke about having an ‘enrichment week’ at school, in which local colleges and representatives from certain professions came in to see and speak to them, many still seemed to be uncertain about the options available to them. At Chantry School, there is also a further education college situated almost on the same site, positioned just behind the school. Despite this, and the ‘bad’ reputation some of the young people at the school thought the college had, little was known by the young people about what courses the college had to offer, or had been to have a look around for themselves.

A lack of information about possible sources of funding in further education was also noticeable in talking to the young people. Although a small number of young people talked about their families being able to financially support them through further and higher education, and I am not entirely sure how realistic an option this was, many of the young people came from families where there was only one income coming in (largely Kingsbridge School), or where one parent (normally the mother) was in part-time, low paid work. Although Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) were discussed, most young people did not know whether they would be entitled to them at college, or were even aware of how much money was involved. This extra money could make a big difference to a family income, and could ultimately affect the likelihood of
a young person continuing into post-compulsory education. Information about possible sources of funding in further education, as well as, higher education, therefore needs to be made available to young people at a far younger age and earlier in their school careers.

9.4 The ‘Excellence’ Agenda of New Labour and the Implications of ‘Talent Spotting’ in Schools

A major criticism in this thesis is New Labour’s current educational agenda, which seems to be largely based on an overwhelming concern with ‘excellence’ (DfEE, 2000, 2001), which has manifested itself in policies only concerned with ‘standards’, ‘targets’, and increased differentiation. ‘Gifted and Talented’ schemes have been set up in primary and secondary schools, as part of this ‘excellence’ agenda, attempting to identify ‘gifted’ disadvantaged young people. In terms of higher education policy, a major concern has been to identify ‘talented’ disadvantaged young people in schools, who demonstrate the ‘potential’ to enter higher education in the future. My criticism of this agenda, is not only that ‘potential’ is seen as fixed and unchanging, with the idea that all young people at 13-14, will necessarily demonstrate the same ‘potential’ to go to university. Identifying ‘potential’ is also presumably based on teacher assessments of a student’s ‘ability’. At Kingsbridge and Springfield schools, in terms of access to university visits, ‘potential’ and assessments of a student’s ‘ability’ were based on their placement in academic sets and the likelihood of their getting at least five ‘good’ GCSEs (grades A*-C), the following year in their examinations. All students who went on university visits at Kingsbridge School and Springfield School, were in top academic sets. I am concerned that New Labour’s focus on ‘excellence’ and its translation in schools to a seeming focus on a relatively small number of very ‘bright’ working-class pupils, not only perhaps places more pressure on those perceived to be ‘bright’ and have ‘potential’ to succeed. There is a concern that for those students not deemed to have the ‘potential’ to enter higher education in the future, at a very young age, are having a number of future opportunities closed to them. There were a small number of young people at Springfield and
Kingsbridge Schools who were not invited on these university visits, but who did actually want to go. There is a concern that these, and other such students, will be left feeling that they are not ‘good enough’ to go to university, purely based on these very early experiences of exclusion. For a government that claims to be concerned with social justice and social inclusion, their policies do not seem to be very socially inclusive.

9.5 Careers Advice Provided by Schools: Is It (Good) Enough?

Most of the young people at all three schools had received little or no careers advice at school. Although some students anticipated that more careers advice would be made available to them in year eleven, this was seen by many, as coming far too late in their school careers. What was provided, was overwhelmingly provided by teachers, who were not specially trained as careers advisers. This seemed to be largely provided by the young people’s form class tutors, and was largely seen as pointless and irrelevant by the young people themselves. As mentioned before, while most young people valued ‘hot’ knowledge more, in the form of recommendations and advice from people they knew, many also talked about wanting more careers advice and information. Many young people also had very specific ideas about what they would like to see, as part of any changes to what was already provided (see Chapter Five). Girls seemed to be particularly vocal about the advice they would like to receive at school:

“I’d like some more information about courses to be honest, ‘cause I haven’t really got a clue about what courses there are available out there and it’d be more helpful if I knew probably” (Kathryn, Springfield School).

“I would like some more (advice) because I’d like to discuss with someone all the interests I have and sort of help me because I’m only 14, I don’t know what it’s like in the big, open world yet because I don’t know, I’ve not been to work, I don’t know what employers are like, what they look for or anything like that, so, if I had someone to give me advice it’d be so much more easier and I’d know where to go and what to do. I know the grades I need to get, so that’s what I’m working towards now; but when I leave school what do I do then? So I need a lot...
of advice and I think a lot of other people in my year would benefit from advice as well” (Michelle, Springfield School).

While ‘hot’ knowledge was used by many of the young people, for those young people without a family history of further/higher education, and who did not have other people they knew who had been through these experiences, careers advice might be the only means of finding out about future educational and career opportunities. For example, for Kathryn and Michelle above, who do not have close family experiences of higher education, and who are, in the case of Kathryn, the eldest child in the family, or in the case of Michelle, the only child in her family, their access to ‘hot’ knowledge is severely restricted. Any information related to careers, course and colleges will need to come from more ‘formal’ information, in the form of school careers advice and information. I think it is also important that careers information is tailored, as far as possible, to the individual needs of students. It also needs to be sympathetic to the differences between students, in terms of gender, ethnicity and so on. For example, in my research, there were differences in student attitudes to debt and fears surrounding the taking out of student loans. These fears ran along ethnic lines, with some Asian students saying they did not want to take out student loans. The provision of careers advice in the form of whole class teaching, as is what seemed to be happening in year ten at Chantry and Springfield Schools in particular, can not hope to provide students with all the advice and information they require on the particular pathways they might want to take after year eleven. While I understand this form of careers advice and information provided in year ten might not be the only advice being offered, with more guidance available to students in year eleven, this appears to not only be too late for many of the young people, it is not individual enough to take into account important differences between students.

9.6 The Mantra of Education, Education, Education

Governments often promote education as being the solution to all of society’s problems. This has particularly been the case under the current New Labour government. From my research, I want to raise one final point about how this
could be problematic. Since 1997, and when New Labour first came to power, education (and increasingly lifelong learning) has been offered as the solution to a range of ‘problems’ in society, including poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, teenage pregnancy, family breakdown. (See for example work carried out by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) at, www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk). Education is positioned as the route out of all of this. Aside from the language used, and tone of many policy documents on these subjects, (see for example Levitas’ (1998) argument concerning the Moral Underclass Discourse (MUD) which she argues New Labour has adopted to talk about the poor and disadvantaged) there are also a number of problems inherent in placing so much faith in education to solve such a wide spectrum of problems. The first major problem is, of course, to question whether it is possible, or even desirable, to see education as offering such seemingly magical solutions to such pervasive problems, as poverty. While education might be part of the ‘solution’, it could never be seen as the only solution. Education is not likely to solve all, or even very many, of the material and financial burdens of those already living in poverty.

Another problem with the current mantra of education, education and more education, evident in New Labour’s agenda, is its individualistic nature. People are deemed to be essentially responsible for their own lives, and responsible for their own (re)education, (re)training and so on, with little financial or other help or support from the government.

The mantra of education had certainly seemed to pervade the lives of most of the young people in the research. Whilst this might not be a problem for those with already positive orientations to education, and who want to continue with their education into further and higher education, for those that are more ambivalent about their educational experiences, and whether they want to continue into post-compulsory education, this might be problematic. For a small number of young people in my research, they could only be described as potential ‘reluctant conscripts’ (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) to further education. These were mostly, but not exclusively, boys. They did not particularly want to go into post-compulsory education, but saw no alternative
option, or did not know what the alternatives were. They saw the path into further education as being slightly clearer and more obvious than any other option that might have been available. If these few young people had information on other options post-16, further education might have not even been a consideration. When ‘success’ is largely seen in terms of academic success and qualifications, and in the end, access to ‘good’ jobs, there seems to be a great deal of pressure on young people to perform educationally and continue with their education for as long as possible. If these, and other issues are not addressed, personal unhappiness and lack of satisfaction at choosing the wrong college, course, qualification, is likely to ultimately lead to young people ‘dropping out’ of college and university.
Bibliography and References


175


Appendices
Appendix 1

Setting the Context: The Schools Involved in the Research

A1.1 Springfield School

Springfield School is a mixed sex comprehensive with around 1000 pupils, situated in a large city in South West England. Although the School used to have a small sixth form, it now only caters for young people aged 11-16. The school serves a wide area, with pupils coming from more than 20 local primary schools. There are very few pupils of minority ethnic heritage, which reflects the Ward in which Springfield School is situated (see Appendix 3.1) and this also reflects those participating in the research. 29 students involved in the research are White, and only 1 student is defined as mixed race. According to the last Ofsted report conducted in 1998, a high number of pupils enter the school with low attainment levels, and GCSE results for year 11 pupils are well below national averages. In the last four years, from 2000 to 2003, the percentage of students gaining at least 5 ‘good’ GCSEs (A*-C) has remained under 30% (22%, 27%, 24%, 27% for the four consecutive years from 2000). These percentages are below the average for the City, and well below the average for England as a whole. Out of the 29 schools in the City which enter students for GCSE examinations, Springfield was ranked 23rd in 2003, based on the 27% of pupils who gained at least 5 ‘good’ GCSE grades. However, the low ranking of the school in terms of GCSE results has to be understood in the context of the provision of secondary schools in the City. There are a large number of Independent schools in the City, and the percentage of students gaining at least 5 ‘good’ GCSEs at these selective schools is far greater than for those attending the remaining non-selective schools in the City.

A large number of young people at Springfield School, following their GCSEs at the end of year 11, do not go in to full time post-16 education. Destination data from 1995 to 2000 demonstrates that a large number of students after year
11 are involved in employment and training (See Appendix 5.3)). This is at variance with the destination data available from the other two schools involved in the research, Kingsbridge and Chantry. At these two schools more young people participate in post-16 education, with fewer undertaking employment and training. The greater number of students undertaking employment and training at Springfield School could be the result of few students gaining the required GCSE grades to enter post-16 education. The 2001 Census also shows that employment levels in the Ward containing Springfield School are higher than for the City as a whole, and for England and Wales. Although young people’s reasons for continuing into post-16 education may be numerous and varied, the local employment situation might be one of the factors encouraging or discouraging young people’s move into further education. The high numbers of young people at Springfield School going straight into employment and training might be due to their optimism concerning the local employment market.

A1.2 Kingsbridge School

Kingsbridge School is a single sex girls’ school situated in a City in the Midlands. There are around 600 pupils on roll, and almost all the girls are of Pakistani heritage and live locally. The Ward in which Kingsbridge School is located contains a high percentage of those from Asian or British Asian ethnic backgrounds, compared with the City as a whole (See Appendix 2.2). The school used to have a sixth form, but now only caters for girls aged 11-16. According to the latest 1999 Ofsted report, 92% of students have English as an additional language and 61% are entitled to free school meals. The percentage gaining at least 5 ‘good’ GCSEs at the end of year 11 is slightly below the average for the City and England as a whole. In 2003, 49% of students gained at least 5 GCSEs grades A*-C, compared with 39% in 2002, 42% in 2001 and 44% in 2000. Based on GCSE results for 2003, out of the 80 schools in the City which enter pupils for GCSE examinations, Kingsbridge School was ranked 41. Kingsbridge School is one of a large number of non-selective single sex schools in the City.
A large percentage of students at Kingsbridge School go on to post-compulsory education (See Appendix 5.2). In 2001, almost 75% of students went on to participate in some form of further education.

A1.3 Chantry School

Chantry School is a mixed sex comprehensive school, situated in the same city as Kingsbridge School. There are around 760 pupils on roll, with the majority of students living near to the school. However, the school provides for a number of students with physical disabilities, and these students come from all across the city. The school only caters for students aged 11-16. According to the latest Ofsted report, conducted in 1999, (see Ofsted.gov.uk/reports) 52% of the school’s population is from an ethnic minority background, and are mainly of Pakistani and Indian heritage. 19% of students at Chantry School are entitled to free school meals, which is in line with the national average. According to the 1999 Ofsted report, standards of attainment for students on entry to the school are above average, and GCSE results are above national averages. In 1995, 50% of students gained at least 5 ‘good’ GCSE results (grades A* - C). This had risen to 58% in 1999. By 2003, 68% of students had achieved at least 5 GCSE results at grades A* - C. Based on GCSE results for 2003, out of the 80 schools in the city which enter pupils for GCSE examinations, Chantry School was ranked 20.

The majority of students at Chantry School go on to participate in further education (See Appendix 5.1). In 2001, over 87% of students went on to post-compulsory education. A higher percentage of students at Chantry School go on to further education, than at Kingsbridge or Springfield Schools.
## Appendix 2

Table 2.1 Student Details, Chantry School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Older Siblings</th>
<th>Siblings’ Career Pathways</th>
<th>Mother’s Job</th>
<th>Father’s Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Has Recently Finished ‘A’ Levels</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leighann</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Catering College</td>
<td>Shop Worker</td>
<td>Royal Mail Union Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Housewife, Used to be a Teacher</td>
<td>Travel Agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roz</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>‘New’ Post-1992 University</td>
<td>Has 2 jobs: Warehouse Worker and School Lunch Supervisor</td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josie</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Does Not Work</td>
<td>Does Not Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerome</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td></td>
<td>Has 2 jobs: Electrician at Weekends and Train Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Govt. Worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>P/T Catering Worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>Mixed Race</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Account Technician</td>
<td>Plumbing and Heating Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rena</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Policeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>School Integration Assistant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Office Worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Does Not Do Anything</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Security Guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Shop Worker</td>
<td>Shop Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Welfare Benefits Worker</td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s Name</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Older Siblings</td>
<td>Siblings’ Career Pathways</td>
<td>Mother’s Job</td>
<td>Father’s Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kam</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>‘New’ Post-1992 University College</td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Playgroup Assistant</td>
<td>‘Digger’ Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maisy</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>‘A’ Levels College</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise-Ann</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Shop Worker</td>
<td>Retired from Royal Mail-III Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>‘New’ Post-1992 University</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kassie</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Warehouse Worker</td>
<td>Warehouse Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asjid</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>‘New’ Post-1992 University</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imran</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘New’ Post-1992 University</td>
<td>P/Time British Gas</td>
<td>British Gas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.2 Student Details, Kingsbridge School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student's Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Older Siblings</th>
<th>Siblings' Career Pathways</th>
<th>Mother's Job</th>
<th>Father's Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amrita</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Nursery Nurse</td>
<td>Butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alisha</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Brother Brother</td>
<td>College Working (Not known)</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Does Not Work (Pensioner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaliyah</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Working (Not known)</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Taxi Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mavdip</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sewing Teacher</td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priya</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Sister Brother</td>
<td>‘Old’ Pre-1992 University</td>
<td>Foster Carer</td>
<td>Foster Carer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brother Brother</td>
<td>Working in IT (Has a Master’s Degree) Works in IT</td>
<td>Foster Carer</td>
<td>Foster Carer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehmina</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Sister Sister</td>
<td>‘Old’ Pre-1992 University</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Taxi Driver (Used to be in the army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sister Sister</td>
<td>‘Old’ Pre-University (Law)</td>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anoop</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Owns 2 Hotels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadira</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Brother Sister</td>
<td>Married College</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zakia</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Sister Brother</td>
<td>College Married College</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s Name</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Older Siblings</td>
<td>Siblings’ Career Pathways</td>
<td>Mother’s Job</td>
<td>Father’s Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rojina</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Does Not Work (Pensioner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonja</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Brother, Sister</td>
<td>Does not do anything, Does not do anything</td>
<td>Does Not Work</td>
<td>Does Not Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatema</td>
<td>Kashmiri</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Shop Worker (Has been to college)</td>
<td>Does Not Work</td>
<td>Does Not Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazia</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Brother, Brother</td>
<td>Accountant, College</td>
<td>Does Not Work</td>
<td>Bus Mechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Sister, Sister</td>
<td>Married, IT Course</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Owns Pizza Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty</td>
<td>Pushtu</td>
<td>Sister, Brother</td>
<td>Classroom Asst, Does Not Work</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Does Not Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farzana</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Sister, Sister</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>At Home</td>
<td>Taxi Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rozina</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>School Lunchtime Supervisor/ Healthcare Assistant</td>
<td>Line Manager- Royal Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaan</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student's Name</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Older Siblings</td>
<td>Siblings' Career Pathways</td>
<td>Mother's Job</td>
<td>Father's Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Mixed Race</td>
<td></td>
<td>College</td>
<td>School Dinner Lady</td>
<td>Hotel Cleaning Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connor</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>College (Leisure &amp; Tourism)</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>Designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>College - Dropped Out Now Working</td>
<td>Shop Worker</td>
<td>Painter and Decorator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>School Dinner Lady</td>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>College - Dropped Out Now Working</td>
<td>Sports Centre Worker</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>University - Dropped Out</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Photocopying Salesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College - Retaking GCSEs and AS Maths</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>IT - City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College - A Levels</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Sells Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College - A Levels</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Sells Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saul</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Working in Insurance</td>
<td>Shop Worker</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>Working in Insurance</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>Construction Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>Creche Worker</td>
<td>Hospital Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College - Dropped Out</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>Owns Steel Erecting Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeleine</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Does Not Work</td>
<td>Own Business – Not Known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimee</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>Printer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Royal Mail</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>College - A Levels</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Water Company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

200
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student's Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Older Siblings</th>
<th>Siblings' Career Pathways</th>
<th>Mother's Job</th>
<th>Father's Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>College - Computer Course</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Programme Editor Football Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Homecare Worker</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>College - Dropped Out Now Working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trainee Paramedic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lea</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pub Worker</td>
<td>Own Business – Not Known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shop Worker</td>
<td>Own Business – Heating and Plumbing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shop Worker</td>
<td>Office Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoë</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary Teacher</td>
<td>Father: Police Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Step Father: Lorry Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Construction Sales</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td></td>
<td>Office Worker</td>
<td>Taxi Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Office Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>Office Worker</td>
<td>Taxi Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Dropped out of college – working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Foster Carer</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>Plumber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

201
Appendix 3

Table 3.1 Shows the Ethnic Group Details of the Ward Containing Springfield School Compared with the City as a Whole and England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which White Irish</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Black</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Group</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census, ONS
Table 3.2 Shows the Ethnic Group Details of the Ward Containing Kingsbridge School Compared with the City as a Whole and England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White of which White Irish</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Black</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or Other</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census, ONS
Table 3.3 Shows the Ethnic Group Details of the Ward Containing Chantry School Compared with the City as a Whole and England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which White Irish</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Black</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or Other</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census, ONS
### Appendix 4

**Table 4.1a Number of Students in the Ward Containing Springfield School Compared with the City as a Whole and England and Wales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>England and Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of full-time students and schoolchildren aged 16 to 74</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>32,140</td>
<td>2,648,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total resident population</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number aged 16 to 17</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>6,567</td>
<td>1,014,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number aged 18 to 74</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>25,573</td>
<td>1,634,708</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

**Table 4.1b Qualifications of Those in the Ward Containing Springfield School Compared with the City as a Whole and England and Wales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>England and Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had no qualifications</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified to degree level or higher</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

**Table 4.2a Number of Students in the Ward Containing Kingsbridge School Compared with the City as a Whole and England and Wales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>England and Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of full-time students and schoolchildren aged 16 to 74</td>
<td>2,609</td>
<td>68,719</td>
<td>2,648,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total resident population</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number aged 16 to 17</td>
<td>1,082</td>
<td>20,492</td>
<td>1,014,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number aged 18 to 74</td>
<td>1,527</td>
<td>48,227</td>
<td>1,634,708</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census, ONS
### Table 4.2b Qualifications of Those in the Ward Containing Kingsbridge School Compared with the City as a Whole and England and Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>England and Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had no qualifications</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified to degree level or higher</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

### Table 4.3a Numbers of Students in the Ward Containing Chantry School Compared with the City as a Whole and England and Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>England and Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of full-time students and schoolchildren aged 16 to 74</td>
<td>1,330</td>
<td>68,719</td>
<td>2,648,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total resident population</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number aged 16 to 17</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>20,492</td>
<td>1,014,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number aged 18 to 74</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>48,227</td>
<td>1,634,708</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

### Table 4.3b Qualifications of Those in the Ward Containing Chantry School Compared with the City as a Whole and England and Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>England and Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had no qualifications</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified to degree level or higher</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 Census, ONS
### Appendix 5

#### Table 5.1 Chantry School: Destination of 2001 Leavers: A Comparison with 2000 - Percentage Breakdown of Destinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>City Wide Area 2001</th>
<th>City 11 to 16 Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School VI Form</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>31.30</td>
<td>5.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI Form College</td>
<td>66.44</td>
<td>60.14</td>
<td>15.52</td>
<td>25.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE College</td>
<td>19.46</td>
<td>32.43</td>
<td>27.07</td>
<td>37.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. Education Total</td>
<td>87.25</td>
<td>95.27</td>
<td>73.89</td>
<td>68.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>9.95</td>
<td>11.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Scheme</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>6.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Area</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 5.2 Kingsbridge School: Destination of 2001 Leavers: A Comparison with 2000 - Percentage Breakdown of Destinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>City 2001</th>
<th>Citywide Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School VI Form</td>
<td>18.80</td>
<td>28.61</td>
<td>34.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI Form College</td>
<td>29.91</td>
<td>14.50</td>
<td>16.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE College</td>
<td>25.63</td>
<td>26.34</td>
<td>27.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. Education Total</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>74.34</td>
<td>69.45</td>
<td>78.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>12.33</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Scheme</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Area</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield School</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Training</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment and Training</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Known/Moved Away</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3 Springfield School Destination Data, Pupil Numbers
Appendix 6

Higher Education Policy Documents and Reports From 1997-2004

1997  Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education, FEFC

1997  Higher Education in the Learning Society, NCIHE

1997  Learning for the Twenty-First Century, NAGCELL


1998  The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain, DfEE

2000  The Excellence Challenge, DfEE

2002  Widening Participation in Higher Education in England, NAO

2003  Fair Enough? Wider Access to University by Identifying Potential to Succeed, Universities UK

2003  The Future of Higher Education, DfES

2003  Widening Participation in Higher Education, DfES
Appendix 7

A7.0 Part of a Transcript and Emerging Themes

Amrita- Student at Kingsbridge Girls’ School

1K: Okay, do you just want to tell me first of all what you’re thinking about doing once you leave next year?

2A: Um, maybe going to college definitely, er, maybe doing an A level in something and having a GNVQ ’cause I’d want to do something with children. I’d like to have a job doing something with children so maybe something leading up to that that will help me more

3K: So have you got any idea, why do you want to do an A level as well?

4A: Yeah I think it will help me in the future maybe if I don’t wanna go to uni, doing jobs with children it’ll help me to do something else

5K: So what subjects are you interested in doing an A level in?

6A: Maybe English, definitely English, maybe science, that’s a very big maybe! I like history- one in that as well

7K: And can you mix A levels and GNVQs do you think? Do you know whether you can do that?

8A: I don’t know, I really don’t know

9K: So what would you do the GNVQ in?

10A: Maybe, because my mother had a GNVQ and she did hers in like children, and she also had a Btec in nursery nurse and maybe that’s why.....

11K: Do you think that’s what, what influenced you?

12A: Yeah, maybe yeah, and I love playing with children

13K: Okay, so do you know what qualifications you need to get into college?

14A: Um, I have been looking round but I’m not that sure, that’s why I had an appointment with my careers advisor and she’s gonna tell me everything like that after the summer holidays, so looking forward to that

15K: So have you got any kind of idea what you might need to get into college?

16A: Maybe, er, good GCSEs definitely, maybe higher than a C..

17K: Have you got any idea what college you might want to go to?
18A: Yeah, maybe Mayfair college, or maybe Denver college

19K: And why have you been thinking about those?

20A: Denver college is because my cousin went there, she said it’s quite a good college and I’ve also heard that Mayfair’s a very good college as well

21K: So have you been to have a look at any of them or.....?

22A: I have seen, I have seen Denver college and what it was like inside because when my cousin was going there I used to just go there and pop in and see her for a short while but I haven’t seen Mayfair, I have been looking at them, the leaflets which are provided by the school and they are looking good

23K: Do you know lots of people that have been to college?

24A: Yes, my cousins, my uncles and my aunties, pretty much all of them have

25K: And what do you think college is going to be like, do you think it’s going to be like school, or completely different?

26A: No, I think it’s gonna be more, think you’re gonna be, think it’s gonna make you more independent definitely, because at school when you come in there you have no friends and maybe you might have some but you’ll need to make more and plus you need to, in college you need to be more, have a broader mind and just be dependent on yourself

27K: Okay, and what do you think are your main reasons for going to college?

28A: Main reasons are I want to good in my life, I want to achieve the best and I think it’s gonna help me in my future jobs, that’s about it really

29K: Do you think the main reason is to get a job or do you think there are other reasons why you want to go to college?

30A: No, I think you get more confidence, you make more friends, you learn more and yeah, about the jobs, you get good jobs with it

31K: So after college, have you been thinking about university or anything like that?

32A: Yeah I have been thinking about university and I do want to go university

33K: Do you know anyone that’s been?

34A: My cousins, my uncles, one or two of my aunties, no I don’t think my aunties have, my uncles have

35K: So why do you want to go to university?

36A: Because again I think it’s gonna, by going to college I think it’ll, it’s gonna be one big major step and to improve what I have, what I have done in college I’m, it’s towards a job, it’s gonna get me a really good job
and it’s gonna broaden my mind, it’s gonna make me more independent, that’s it really

37K: And have you thought about what you’d like to do at university?

38A: No not really, I haven’t thought that far yet, I’m just thinking about college at the moment, maybe history, I really like history so...

39K: And have you got any kind of idea what university might be like or what sort of people might go?

40A: I haven’t really, I have an image about what college is gonna be like but maybe at the end of college I would probably find out what an image of university would be like. At the moment I just have an image of college at the moment.

41K: Okay, so if you were thinking about going to university do you think that you’d stay at home or do you think you’d move away?

42A: I’d stay at home because, mainly because it’s religious rules and that and because my parents would not like it and because I’m more settled when I’m at home

43K: Why do you think they wouldn’t like you....?

44A: No, it’s not that, my parents have always said to me, my family’s always said to me that you know, do whatever you can, achieve the best and we’re always behind you, we’re always supporting you. But I think going away I think it’d be, I don’t know, it’s kind of hard really, mainly cause of religious rules and not many Muslim girls...maybe I think because my parents are just scared about what this society’s like, that’s it

45K: Does that, are you quite willing to go along with that...?

46A: Yeah, I’d rather stay at home, I wouldn’t want to go out on campus, I’d rather stay at home and do my studying there
### A7.1 Emerging Themes

#### Ideas About Further Education/College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: What Would Amrita Like to Study?</th>
<th>Theme: Knowledge About Qualifications</th>
<th>Theme: Reasons for Going to College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Level and GNVQ</td>
<td>Good GCSEs definitely, maybe higher than a C</td>
<td>It’s gonna help me in my future jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Something to do with Children’</td>
<td>(Line 16) (Vague)</td>
<td>(Line 28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe English, definitely English, maybe science</td>
<td></td>
<td>You get more confidence, you make more friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Line 6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Line 30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instrumental reasons for going to college, as well as, influence of social networks (friends)
Vagueness about qualifications required to get into FE
Also some vagueness about what to study (cultural capital)

#### Ideas About Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Positive/Negative Ideas About HE</th>
<th>Theme: Knowledge About Qualifications</th>
<th>Theme: Reasons for Going/Not going</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about Going (Line 32)</td>
<td>I haven’t thought that far ahead</td>
<td>Make more independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Line 38)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Line 36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good for jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Line 36)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vagueness again about what to study and qualifications needed
Mainly instrumental reasons for participating
Not thinking that far ahead
Influence of Family/Parents/Siblings/Other family members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Influence of which family members?</th>
<th>Theme: Influence in what way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cousin</td>
<td>Denver college her cousin went there (Line 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Want her to stay at home whilst studying (Line 42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncles/Cousins</td>
<td>Have been to university (Line 34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Influence of family in making decisions
Choice of college- due to information from Amrita’s cousin and the fact she has also been there
Staying at home whilst studying-influence of local networks

Influence of Schools/Careers Advisors/et al.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Role of careers advisors</th>
<th>Has made appt to see careers advisor (Line 14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of ‘Official Information’ (Brochures, Leaflets, etc.) on FE/HE</td>
<td>Has looked at college leaflets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>