



Young people, schools and participation in education

**A two-part report for Fife and Tayside Wider Access
Forum**

by Critical Thinking



1. Disengagement in Fife and Tayside and what to do about it

a 'think piece'

2. Disengagement and what to do about it

A review of selected literature

December 2004

Young people, schools and participation in education

Disengagement in Fife and Tayside and what to do about it

a 'think piece'

for

Fife and Tayside Wider Access Forum Executive Committee



**by
Critical Thinking**

December 2004

Disengagement and what to do about it

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Introduction

Introduction and background

1. The Fife and Tayside Wider Access Forum exists to address under-representation in higher education, in Fife and Tayside by promoting fair access and enhancing subsequent achievement for school pupils, students following further education routes to higher education and adults returning to education from the social and business communities.

2. In October 2004, the Fife and Tayside Wider Access Forum Executive Committee commissioned Critical Thinking to prepare a review of selected literature exploring the general concept of disengagement and the relationships between young people, schools and participation in education. The Executive Committee also commissioned this separate, focussed report which brings the key conclusions from the literature review together with local participation data to identify target areas where a programme of intervention might have most impact in overcoming barriers to participation for young people in the Fife and Tayside region.

3. The main body of this report at Part 1, considers the main areas where practical interventions could be made to motivate learners and minimise disengagement. It is based on key messages from the literature review and the current picture of participation in the Fife and Tayside region (a short analysis of selected data is in Part 2). As an external agency, Critical Thinking acknowledges that those who know and work in the region will possess a far clearer insight into it. This report is therefore presented as a 'think piece' for further discussion.

Part 1: What to do about disengagement in Fife and Tayside?

4. As the literature review showed, some of the more informative data on disengagement among school pupils is derived from qualitative studies. The Fife and Tayside data considered as part of this report is quantitative and clearly concerned with attainment, participation and destinations of learners in the Fife and Tayside region. These themes are all associated with, and are often symptoms of, disengagement and they have been able to provide a broad picture of the issues which in turn has been used to suggest action to combat them. This report could be supplemented by a more detailed analysis (for example of truancy and absence rates, numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals and qualitative studies).

Disengagement in Fife and Tayside

The Fife and Tayside region

5. The overall picture of the Fife and Tayside region is close to average, albeit with pockets where there is cause for concern. Staying on rates for the region as a whole are around the Scottish average but, although the average has remained constant, trends in

three of the four Fife and Tayside areas are downwards. The Fife and Tayside region is slightly below Scottish averages for attainment of qualifications at SCQF levels 3,4 and 5. The percentage going on to further education provision is higher than the Scottish average although the region as a whole sends slightly below the Scottish average on to higher education. The national average is just over 10 per cent more leaving for higher education provision than further education provision. The Fife and Tayside region mirrors this pattern although the gap between the percentages entering further and higher education is tighter. The Fife and Tayside region as a whole mirrors the Scottish average for leavers entering training. Fewer go into employment than the Scottish average but a higher proportion are in the 'other known' category.

In terms of the region's three universities, the University of Abertay and the University of Dundee attract relatively high percentages of deprived students whilst the University of St Andrews performs less well in this area.

6. Newly-released data shows that between 2003 and 2004 there has been a national decline of 2 per cent of Scottish young people going to higher education and the percentage going to further education and into training has remained constant. Nationally there has been a 2 per cent increase in leavers choosing the employment option. In higher education in Fife and Tayside the participation from Perth and Kinross fell 4 per cent, Angus and Fife by the national average and no significant change in Dundee. All Fife and Tayside areas show increases in participation in further education except Dundee which shows a 1 per cent decline, but the largest increase in leavers going into employment. There may be a trade-off between further education and higher education for Angus because of the 6 per cent increase in pupils going to further education. A combination of school leavers in P&K choosing employment and further education options appears to be the trade-off for young people choosing not to go to higher education. There is an increase in school leavers going into employment over all Fife and Tayside areas except Angus.

Dundee City

7. The high social deprivation experienced by Dundee is well-documented. It is perhaps unsurprising that of the four Fife and Tayside areas Dundee City is notably different and tends to perform below average. Staying on rates in Dundee City show an upward trend (as opposed to slight downwards trends in the other three areas). Dundee City started from a much lower base than the others, which still outperform it, but it has closed the 12 per cent gap on the Scottish average in 2001 to 6 per cent. Dundee is a notably poor performer in all attainment levels in Fife and Tayside (and compared to Glasgow). This poorer attainment possibly explains why more learners in Dundee are likely to choose further education options.

8. The percentage going on to further education provision in Dundee is higher than the Scottish average and Dundee City is the only Fife and Tayside region authority where more leavers go into further education provision than higher education provision. Glasgow shares this pattern but a higher percentage of leavers go to both further and higher education provision from Dundee schools than from Glasgow schools. Given that a higher percentage of Glasgow pupils attain qualifications at levels 3,4 and 5 than in Dundee, this is interesting. A higher percentages of school leavers go into training or employment (or not known) in Glasgow than in Dundee, so this perhaps explains the difference.

9. The percentage of school leavers going into training is higher in Dundee than any other Fife and Tayside area and higher than the Scottish average. Dundee College is the highest recruiter of learners from deprived areas to both further and higher education provision in the Fife and Tayside region.

Fife

10. Staying-on rates in Fife are slightly above the Scottish average although (like Angus and Perth and Kinross) the trend is slightly downwards. Fife performs just slightly below the Scottish average on all attainment levels. It performs very slightly below the Scottish average in sending pupils to higher education and above average in sending pupils to further education. Slightly fewer leavers go on to training than the Scottish average and Fife is below average for the region and Scotland for leavers going into employment.

Angus

11. Staying-on rates in Angus are slightly above the Scottish average although (like Fife and Perth and Kinross) the trend is slightly downwards. Angus performs well over all attainment levels and has a higher percentage average attainment of awards at level 5, than the Scottish average. It also performs above the Scottish average in sending pupils to both higher education and further education. The area mirrors the Scottish average for percentages of leavers going into training and is below average for the region and Scotland for leavers going into employment. Angus College has a relatively less deprived intake compared to the Scottish average and other Fife and Tayside-based colleges (with the exception of Elmwood).

Perth and Kinross

12. Perth and Kinross have the highest staying on rates in the region and these are above the Scottish average although the trend has been downwards over the past three years. The area also has the highest attainment rates in the region, performing above the Scottish average at all three levels. Perth and Kinross sends below average proportions to further education but higher than the Scottish national average to higher education. Perth and Kinross school leavers are more likely to be in employment rather than further education when they leave school and, unlike the other three areas, Perth and Kinross sends above average numbers of school leavers into employment.

Summary of key issues for the Fife and Tayside region

- staying-on rates are close to the Scottish average but trends are slightly downward in three of the four Fife and Tayside areas;
- attainment levels are slightly lower than the Scottish average for the Fife and Tayside region as a whole;
- the Fife and Tayside region as a whole mirrors the Scottish average for leavers entering training;
- fewer go into employment than the Scottish average, but Perth and Kinross sends above-average numbers into employment and the regional percentage increased between 2003 and 2004;

- a higher proportion than the Scottish average are in the 'other known' category;
- All four Fife and Tayside areas have distinguishing characteristics with Dundee City at one extreme and Perth and Kinross at the other;
- Dundee City suffers from high levels of social deprivation and is significantly different from the other three areas in terms of tending to perform below the national average in both staying-on and attainment rates. Alone of the three areas, Dundee City sends a higher proportion of school leavers to further education than to higher education;
- Perth and Kinross is alone in the region in performing above the national average in both staying on rates and at all three levels of attainment;
- Dundee City, Fife and Angus all send above the Scottish average to further education (Perth and Kinross is below average) and the trend is upwards for all except Dundee between 2003 and 2004; and
- Perth and Kinross and Angus send above average numbers to higher education (Dundee City and Fife send below average numbers to higher education) but the trend is downwards for all except Dundee between 2003 and 2004.

Conclusions

13. Critical Thinking has drawn a number of conclusions from the data and the literature review. These are suggested tentatively and for discussion – those who know the region will have a far better insight into the causes and consequences of the trends outlined above.

The Fife and Tayside region

14. The data reveals significant differences within the Fife and Tayside region, which in turn suggests that the Forum might wish both to address some issues overall and also to take specific and separate actions in the different areas.

Key questions: how coherent is the region? What is the vision for the region? Would it be useful for a strategy for the Forum to articulate both an overall strategy for the region and separate strategies for the different areas with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the further and higher education sectors as well as the individual institutions?

Proposed action: consider applying area-specific initiatives as well as general ones

Employment

15. A downward trend in staying-on rates in three of the four regions could be worrying although, as the literature showed, there can be many local reasons for this including 'pull' factors from a buoyant employment market. New national data indicates an increase in employment as a destination for leavers in the Fife and Tayside region. As the literature review concluded, the UK has a stronger culture than many other countries

of attracting unqualified young people into work, so strategies to ensure they keep learning whilst in work might be as important and appropriate as strategies to keep them in full-time education

Key questions: what explains the high percentage of leavers already going on to employment in Perth and Kinross? What might be causing the increase in 2003-2004? Is this a trend?

Proposed action: consider strategies to enable young workers to continue in learning

Attainment

16. Attainment is key to progression and, as the literature review showed, lack of attainment is both a symptom and a cause of disengagement. Attainment levels in the Fife and Tayside region generally are lower than the Scottish average and this should be a cause for concern. Dundee City and Fife are clearly bringing the regional average down. Dundee City has lower attainment levels than Glasgow.

Key question: why are attainment levels lower in Fife and, especially in Dundee?

Proposed action: research to 'type' the learners who are not attaining in Dundee and Fife, the nature of their disengagement if applicable, and solutions to address it

17. Attainment is less of an issue for Angus and not a particular issue for Perth and Kinross but, as the literature suggested, good attainment is not necessarily an indicator of engagement and disengagement can affect pupils who are achieving.

Key question: are attainment levels in Angus and Perth and Kinross as high as they might be?

18. The literature suggests a number of strategies to address low attainment, under achievement and general disengagement. Forming and raising aspirations is crucial to this. The former might be more appropriate to Fife and Dundee and the latter to Perth and Kinross and Angus.

19. One of the key messages from the literature is that both preventative and mainstream interventions could and should start early, earlier than many possibly do now. Foskett et al concluded that 'many pupils did not consider the timing of school interventions as suited to their needs, and therefore it is likely that pupils needed career guidance earlier on to help them with their thinking'.¹ They concluded that 'year nine is crucial'.² This is corroborated by Payne who noted that 'young people's ideas about the type of work they would like to do start to take shape in their early teens' although she also observes that these often remain fluid.³ Nonetheless, commentators agree that

¹ Foskett et al 2004 page 2

² Foskett et al 2004

³ Payne 2003 page 1

views have often 'hardened' by S4 and that initiatives designed to discourage disengagement and encourage staying on have to start at a much earlier age.

20. Specifically thinking of higher education, Tinklin and Raffe concluded that initiatives to broaden access must start 'a long time before the end of secondary education'.⁴

21. The pattern of study in the Fife and Tayside region – with a strong emphasis on further education and significant leaving for employment - suggests that, rather than concentrating on higher education, awareness-raising should encompass the wide range of post 16 opportunities. Demonstrating how these can be made to link up (assuming they do) as well as progression routes and pathways would also be valuable and could be the most appropriate route to higher education for some learners.

Proposed action: awareness raising interventions with P6 and 7 pupils and aspiration raising with S1 and S2 pupils could yield benefits. These should cover the widest range of post-16 options

Higher education provision

22. A slightly below average percentage of leavers go on to higher education in the region and this closeness to the average is accounted for by leavers from Angus and Perth and Kinross. In addition, there has been an above average decline in the percentage going on to higher education between 2003 and 2004 in the region. Whilst a more detailed analysis of the national downward change might be helpful, the local area and regional data might also be worth considering in more depth.

23. It would also be useful to know more about the nature of the higher education being undertaken by Fife and Tayside learners – whether it is in colleges or higher education institutions. The nature of the learners is also of interest. The data suggests that the two local higher education institutions based in Dundee attract around one third of their intake from the lower socio-economic groups and that Dundee College has by far the highest proportionate intake of higher education learners from deprived areas of all the further education colleges, also at close to one third.

Key question: who are Fife and Tayside higher education learners and where are they studying?

24. The literature showed that family is the main and most trusted source of advice on education choices and that family expectations probably set the parameters within which young people take decisions.

25. Several of the studies in the literature review showed that both pupils and their parents have misinformed ideas about higher education – particularly in terms of what it entails and what it costs. There is evidence that many school pupils reject the idea of higher education, particularly at university, because they believe they are not clever enough. Higher education, particularly university, is viewed by many pupils and their parents as 'expensive'. Those who think of it as a worthwhile investment are more likely to be from higher socio-economic groups and those who are more sceptical are more likely to be from lower socio-economic groups. Bartley concluded that higher education institutions have a key role in de-mystifying higher education for under-represented

⁴ Tinklin and Raffe 2001? page 8

young people and cautioned that they should evaluate their outreach work which might be inadvertently reinforcing negative views of university: 'pupils did not rate talks from university staff highly and gave mixed views about trips to HEIs'.⁵ The evaluation of GOALS, however, reported 'very positive responses' from primary school pupils and teachers to their 'primary links' programme which included a day visit to a higher education campus along with other ancillary activities.⁶ It was also considered to be good value for money.

26. Bartley prescribed greater use of former pupils or students from similar socio-economic backgrounds, trips to HEIs to reinforce differences with school, more use by universities of the Internet since pupils make good use of this as a source of information, case studies from target communities, high street information shops etc.⁷

Key question: why is the decline in the percentage of leavers entering higher education larger for the Fife and Tayside region than the national average?

Proposed action: for all Fife and Tayside areas combat general misinformation about higher education in terms of its costs and the workload it entails through work with school pupils and their parents

27. Furthermore, the literature showed that parents from all social classes regard education as important but those from higher socio-economic groups are able to provide more support. Given the importance of family advice, strategies to help parents from the lower socio-economic groups support their children in taking decisions about participation might be useful

Proposed action: for Dundee City and Fife in particular there may be merit in extra and tailored work with parents regarding higher education

Further education colleges

28. Dundee City, Fife and Angus all send above the Scottish average to further education (Perth and Kinross is below average) and the trend is upwards for all except Dundee between 2003 and 2004.

29. From the literature review it is clear that there is a key and unique role for colleges in facilitating re-engagement with school provision and in providing options and choices for those who wish to leave school after year 11, (as well as those wishing to study higher education in a non-university setting). Miller found that for many school pupils, college was a more attractive environment because they were treated differently, seen more as adults, it was a more relaxed environment, there was greater mutual respect between lecturer and student and work was undertaken through choice.⁸ In addition, Payne recorded that 'students who are not wholly committed to staying in full time education are more likely to choose further education college than students who have no doubts about staying on'.⁹

⁵ Bartley 2004 page 5

⁶ Sanderson 2003 page 15

⁷ Bartley 2004 page 5

⁸ Millar page 1

⁹ Payne 2003 page 6

Proposed action: build on existing national and local initiatives to ensure that it is possible for school pupils who would thrive better in a college environment to have that opportunity

30. There is also clear evidence that some learners from lower social class backgrounds (for a wide range of reasons) prefer the college route for higher education. Tinklin and Raffe noticed that entrants to sub-degree courses 'were recruited from a wider range of backgrounds [than degree entrants] and this was not entirely explained by the lower qualifications required for entrance: leavers from less advantaged backgrounds were slightly more likely than others with equivalent qualifications' to enter sub degree courses rather than degree courses.¹⁰

Proposed action: continue to keep the higher education in further education college options open

31. College non-completion rates are complex and outwith the scope of this work but it is important to point out that the research suggests that there should be caution in applying a college panacea. The University of Stirling Institute of Education found that 'there is a recurring theme in the data that suggests that college is chosen as a temporary destination, a mid-way place between the worlds of training/work and school'¹¹. Hall noted that 'early leavers [from further education] tended to show less commitment to their programme of study and had sometimes chosen college for negative reasons, such as having had poor experience of school'.¹²

32. Davies (2001 in Hall) noted that the college experience was a more important factor than the student's background in terms of those who withdraw 'student background is less significant than their attitudes to the experience at college' and that 'a distinguishing characteristic of withdrawn students is their relatively lower satisfaction with the suitability of their course, quality of teaching and support for progression'.¹³ Hall also found that 'drop out [from college] is frequently connected...with a failure of guidance or provision'.¹⁴ He noted that the literature he considered appeared to conclude (from Davies 1999) that 'levels of student satisfaction in a number of course-related areas were the variables that linked most strongly with rates of non-and unsuccessful completion' pointing particularly to induction and choice of course; interest in course content; and perceived quality of teaching. Davies points to the interaction between variables – personal and financial problems can add up to dropout if college quality is not seen as good, leading Davies to conclude that 'colleges...can make a substantial improvement in their retention rates by acting on aspects of the student experience which are well within their control'.¹⁵

Proposed action: attention should be paid to ensuring that colleges in the Fife and Tayside region offer the highest quality possible learning opportunities and support services

¹⁰ Tinklin and Raffe 2001? page 7

¹¹ University of Stirling Institute of Education 2001 page 24

¹² Hall 2001 page 16

¹³ in Hall 2001 page 21

¹⁴ Hall 2001 page 23

¹⁵ Hall 2001 page 20

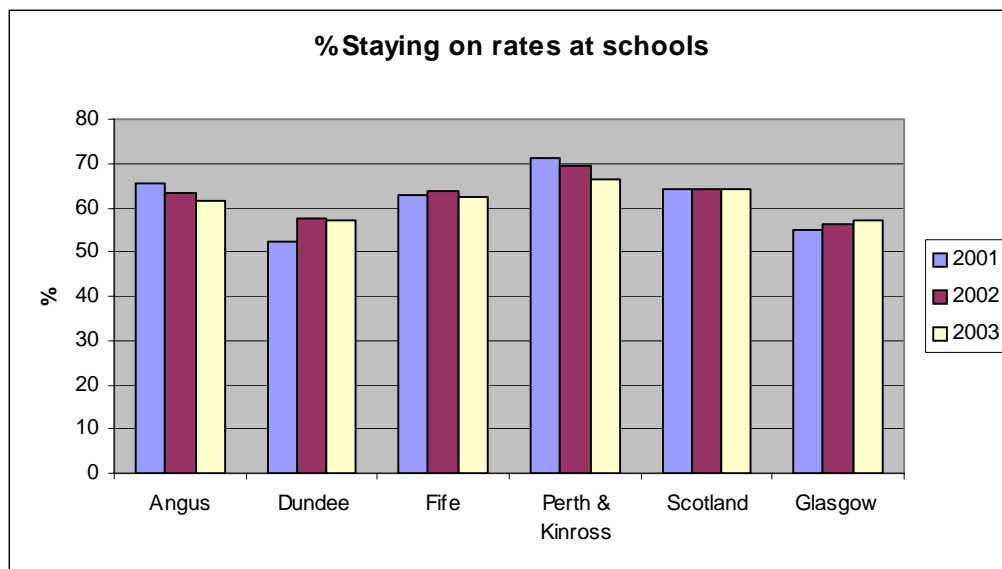
Part 2: Participation in education in Fife and Tayside

33. The data used to inform the picture of the Fife and Tayside region, presented in Part 1, was drawn from a number of sources including the Scottish Executive (and the Scottish Executive via Parentzone), Scottish Further Education Funding Council and Higher Education Statistical Agency. They cover staying on rates, attainment, destinations of leavers and deprivation. The scope of the analysis was limited to the time available to conduct the study, but provides a reasonable basis for an outline of the region which can be supplemented with further data in future.

34. Notes on the tables

- all tables (except Table 8) consist of data relating to 2002-3. Table 8 compares changes between 2002/03 and 2003/04
- 'school leavers' comprise all leavers from S4, S5 and S6.
- definitions of further education and higher education are programme-based and not institution-based.

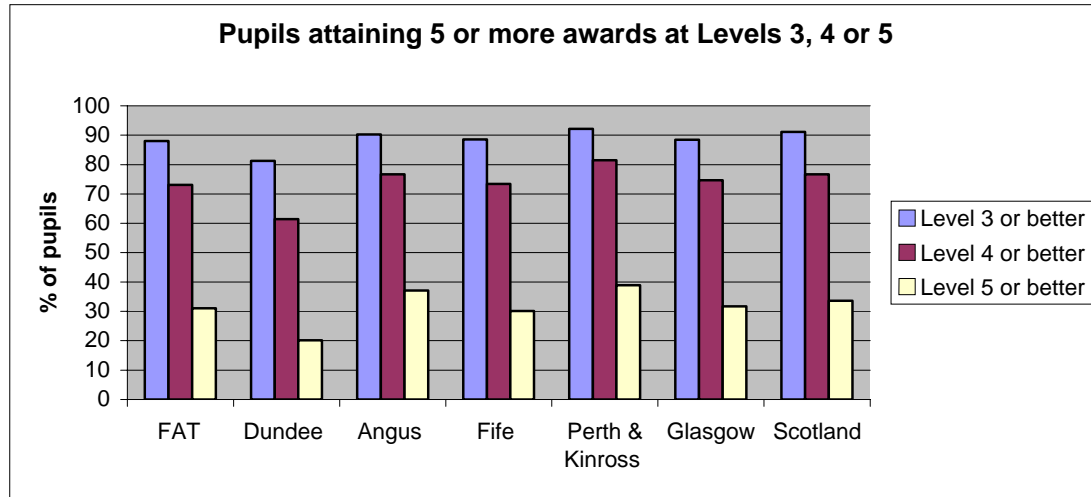
Table 1: Staying on rates



Source – Parentzone <http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk/>

35. The figures in Table 1 relate to pupils who remained at school to S5. The Scottish average has remained fairly constant at around 64 per cent over the past three years. Staying on rates in the Fife and Tayside region show an upward trend in Dundee but slight downwards trends in the other three areas. Dundee City started from a much lower base than the others, which still outperform it, but it has closed the 12 per cent gap on the Scottish average in 2001 to 6 per cent. Glasgow has been included for comparison and, like Dundee City, shows an upward trend in staying on.

Table 2: School pupil attainment



Source – Parentzone <http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk/>

36. This Table shows the percentage of school pupils gaining five or more awards at SCQF levels 3, 4, 5 respectively.

37. Note:

Level 3 (SCQF) is equal to Access 3 (Standard grade at 5-6)

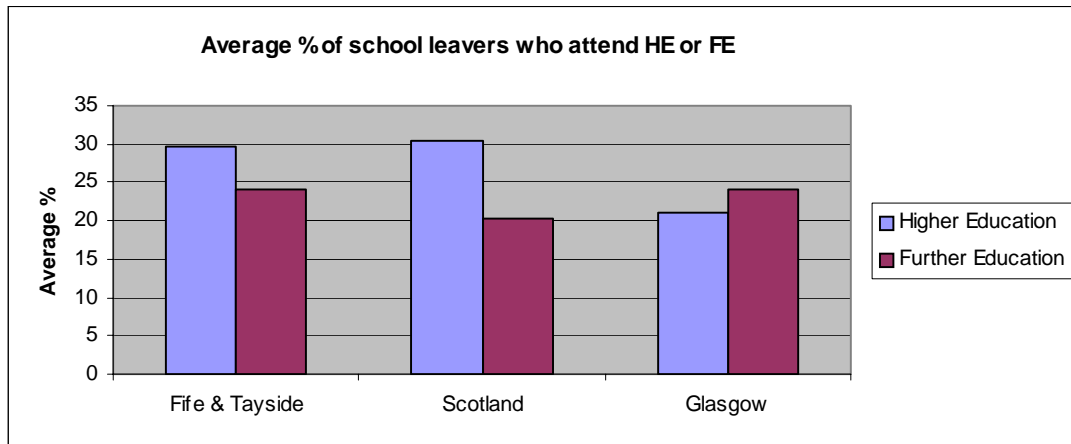
Level 4 (SCQF) is equal to Intermediate 1 at A-C (Standard Grade at 3-4)

Level 5 (SCQF) is equal to Intermediate 2 at A-C (Standard Grade at 1-2)

38. Overall, the Fife and Tayside region is slightly below Scottish averages for attainment at all levels. The Table shows Dundee as a notably poor performer in all attainment levels in Fife and Tayside, and compared to Glasgow. This relates to Table 4 and this poorer attainment possibly explains why more learners in Dundee are likely to choose further education options.

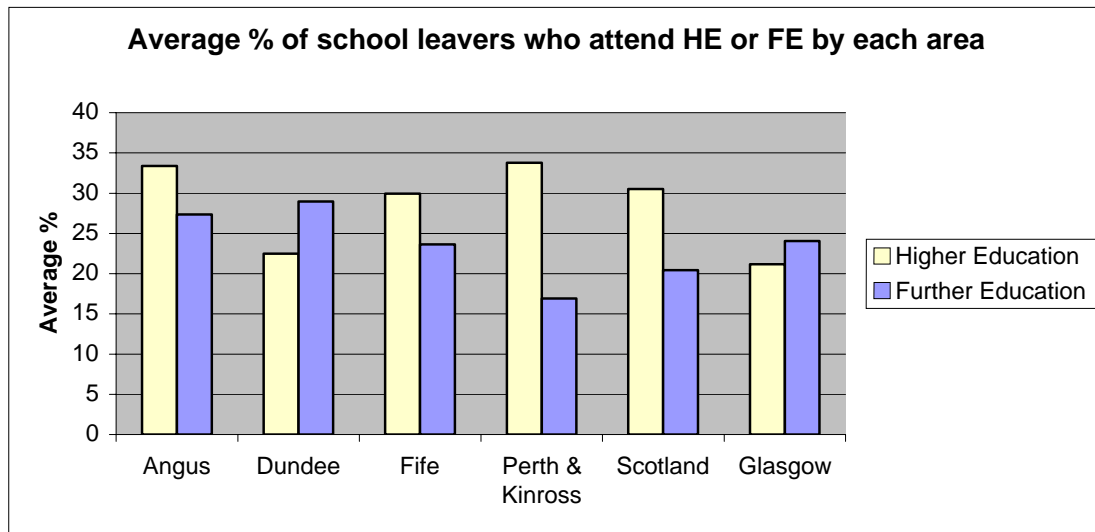
39. Angus and Perth and Kinross perform very well at all attainment levels and have higher percentage average attainment awards at level 5 than the Scottish average. As Table 4 shows, both also perform well in sending pupils to higher education. Perth and Kinross in particular has the highest staying on rates and the highest attainment rates, so learners appear to be better-qualified to attend higher education.

Table 3: Destinations - Educational Fife and Tayside Region



Source – Parentzone <http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk/>

Table 4: Destinations - Educational Fife and Tayside Areas



Source – Parentzone <http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk/>

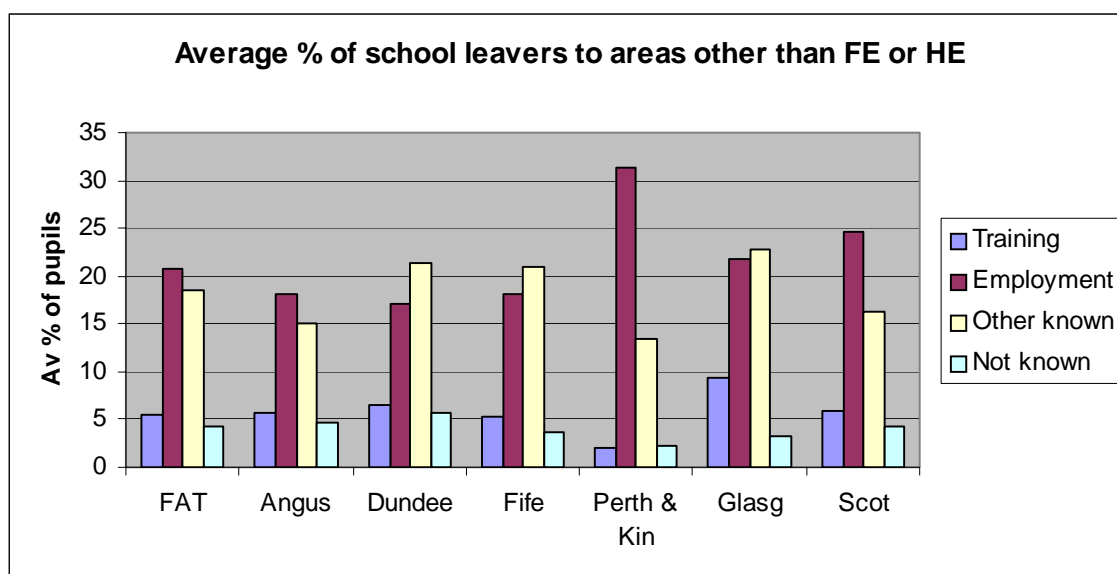
40. Tables 3 and 4 consider the educational destinations of school leavers from the Fife and Tayside region generally and then broken down by area. The percentage going on to further education provision is higher than the Scottish average both for the region overall and in each of the Angus, Dundee and Fife areas. Perth and Kinross sends below average numbers to further education provision but higher than the Scottish average and any of the other Fife and Tayside areas for leavers moving on to both higher education provision and to employment (see Table 5).

41. The region as a whole sends slightly below the Scottish average on to higher education.

42. The national average is just over 10 per cent more leaving for higher education provision than further education provision. The Fife and Tayside region mirrors this although the gap is narrower.

43. Dundee City is the only Fife and Tayside region authority where more leavers go into further education provision than higher education provision. Glasgow shares this pattern but a higher percentage of leavers go to both further and higher education provision from Dundee schools than from Glasgow schools. Given that Table 2 shows that a higher percentage of Glasgow pupils attain qualifications at levels 3,4 and 5 than in Dundee, this is interesting. Table 5, below shows higher percentages of school leavers going into training or employment (or not known) in Glasgow than in Dundee, so this perhaps explains the difference.

Table 5: Destinations - other



Source – Parentzone <http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk/>

44. The Fife and Tayside region as a whole mirrors the Scottish average for leavers entering training or unknown. Fewer go into employment than the Scottish average but a higher proportion are in the 'other known' category. A strikingly high proportion of school-leavers in Perth and Kinross go into employment. Perth and Kinross school leavers are more likely to be in employment rather than further education when they leave school. This could perhaps be a feature of their relatively high attainment rates.

45. This is not the case with any of the other Fife and Tayside areas or Glasgow which, on average, can expect more pupils to attend further education after leaving school than go into employment. The percentage of school leavers going into training is higher in Dundee than any other Fife and Tayside area and higher than the Scottish average.

Table 6: FE Enrolments from Deprived Areas

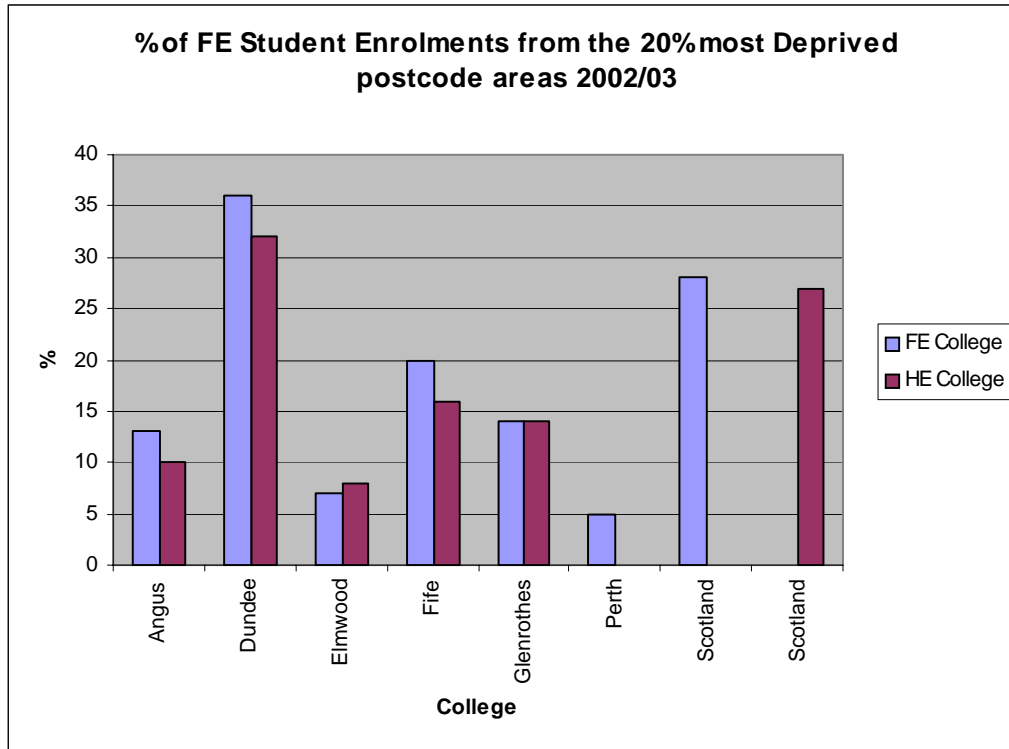


Table 6 – Source SFEFC - http://www.sfehc.ac.uk/publications/pi_2002-03/pdfs/13_college_lpi.pdf

n.b. Perth College offers higher education qualifications under the auspices of the UHI Millennium institute, not represented here

46. Table 6 shows recruitment patterns to colleges in the Fife and Tayside region by level of study from the 20 per cent most deprived postcode areas in Scotland. Dundee College is the highest recruiter of learners from deprived areas to both further and higher education provision. Perth College is shown to attract the lowest percentage of its students from deprived areas, but this could also be related to the fact that Perth and Kinross attracts the lowest percentage of further education school leavers of all Fife and Tayside areas.

Table 7: Number of entrants to HE Institutions from socially deprived areas and state schools/colleges

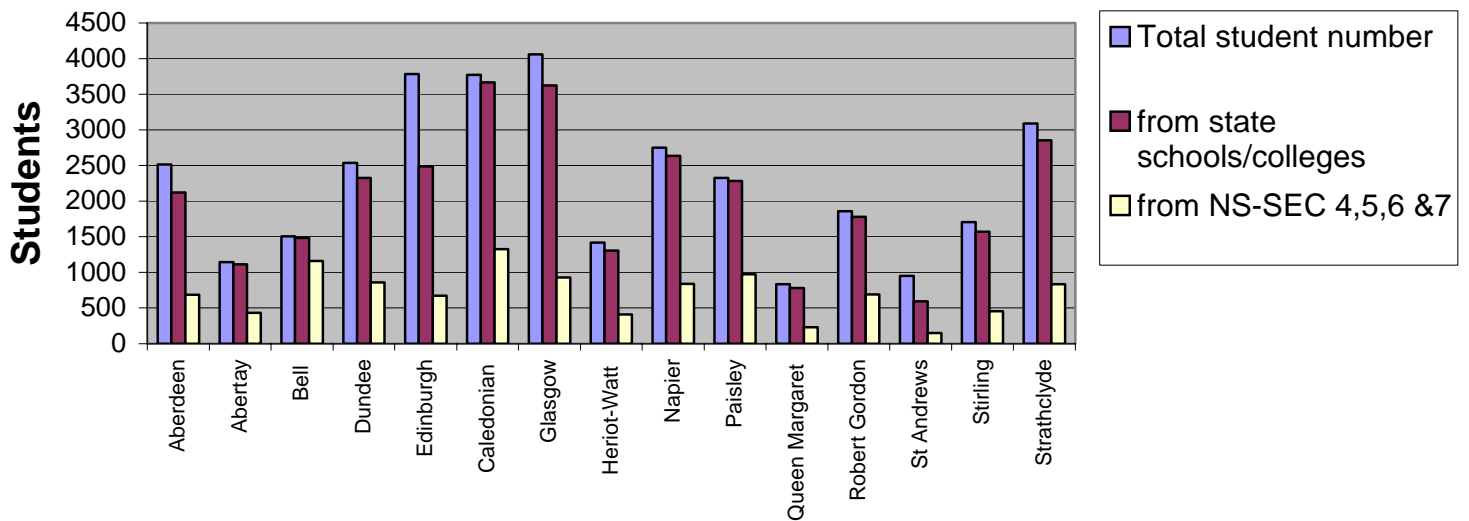


Table 7 Source: HESA 2002/03 - <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/pi/default.htm>

47. Table 7 considers the numbers of entrants recruited by Scotland's higher education institutions from state schools and colleges and from socially deprived areas (these categories are not mutually exclusive). The University of Abertay attracts around 37 per cent of its total from socially derived areas, the University of Dundee around 32 per cent and St Andrews 16 per cent.

48. Note: NS-SEC - National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification

- 4 – Employers (sic) in small organisations
- 5 – Lower supervisory & technical occupations
- 6 – Semi-routine occupations (sales, service, childcare)
- 7 – Routine occupations (sales, service)

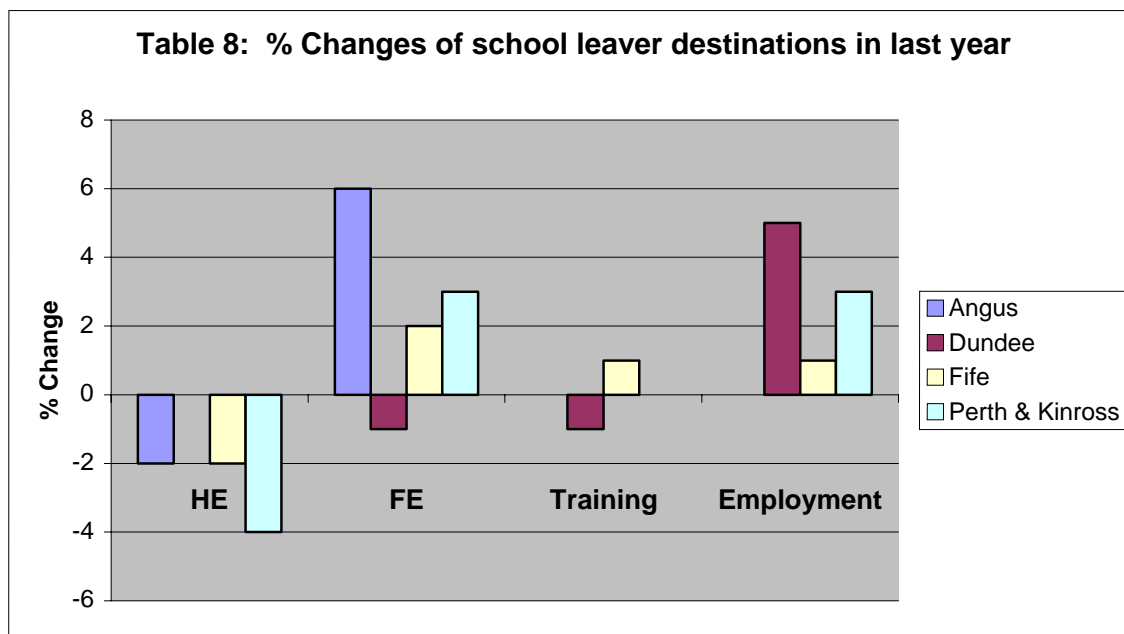


Table 8 Scottish Executive <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/00380-00.asp>

49. Table 8 compares where school leavers are going this year compared to last year. This data has only just been released, which is why the preceding analysis mainly contains data for 2002/2003. This new data is not yet as comprehensive as the extant data and there is probably still more current year data to be released.

50. The Table simply shows increases or decreases (in percentage terms) of where pupils are going. This is against a national backdrop of a decline of 2 per cent of Scottish young people going to higher education and the percentage going to further education and into training remaining constant. Nationally there has been a 2 per cent increase in leavers choosing the employment option. In higher education, the decrease for Perth and Kinross (the Fife and Tayside region 'higher education flagship') is 4 per cent, with no significant change at Dundee and both other Fife and Tayside areas also falling by the average.

51. All Fife and Tayside areas show increases in participation in further education except Dundee which shows a 1 per cent decline but the largest increase in leavers going into employment. There may be a trade-off between further education and higher education for Angus because of the 6 per cent increase in pupils going to further education. A combination of school leavers in P & K choosing employment and further education options appears to be the trade off for people choosing not to go to higher education. There is an increase in school leavers going into employment in all areas except Angus.

52. (note: we cannot use the "other known/unknown" figures from Table 5 as comparison because the new data has been grouped differently)

Disengagement and what to do about it

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A review of selected literature

**for
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**by
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Part 1: Introduction

Introduction and background

1. The Fife and Tayside Wider Access Forum exists to address under-representation in higher education, in Fife and Tayside by promoting fair access and enhancing subsequent achievement, for school pupils, students following further education routes to higher education and adults returning to education from the social and business communities.

2. This literature review forms part of a wider piece of work exploring the relationships between young people, schools and participation in education in the Fife and Tayside region. It has been prepared for the Fife and Tayside Wider Access Forum Executive Committee to help inform the Forum's strategy for widening participation to higher education (in further education colleges and in higher education institutions) in the region. The key lessons from this literature review will also feed into a separate, focussed report which will bring it together with participation data to identify target areas where a programme of intervention would have most impact in overcoming barriers to participation in the Fife and Tayside region.

3. Consideration of these issues by the Forum Executive Committee is very timely. The landscape of secondary education is set to change significantly in the UK with the publication of the English *14-19 Reform Final Report* (the 'Tomlinson Report') in mid-October and the Scottish Executive's *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* package including *A Curriculum for Excellence* in early November. The content of these publications has been clearly influenced by research evidence and the proposals for action go with the grain of the findings of this literature review.

Methodology and scope

4. The Forum wished to examine in detail the causes of, and solutions to, disengagement from education among young people. It commissioned this small scale and focussed piece of research to help it determine strategy and future work. This report considers the evidence from a range of literature about the nature of disengagement, the role of schooling, other external factors that contribute to disengagement and practical actions for tackling it.

5. A total of 64 hours were allocated to the whole project. Within the time available this literature review has considered a range of reports of empirical research, literature reviews and policy documents concerned with Scottish, English and UK education. Many of the UK and English documents contain general arguments and prescriptions for action which could equally apply in a Scottish context although examples given, even in

publications purporting to have UK-wide relevance, are often expressed in terms of English qualifications.

6. There is a considerable body of research evidence concerned directly and indirectly with the subject of disengagement. Over 40 documents were consulted for this review and a selected list of the most useful is at the Annex. The review is not a systematic review of all literature and, for example, does not include a review of articles in academic journals but has considered documents from the major policy and practical research sources including the Scottish Executive, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE), National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

7. A particularly rich source of information was the 2001 NFER Report *The Delivery of the Curriculum to Disengaged Young People in Scotland*. This study explored the issues and included a national survey questionnaire of all secondary schools and colleges as well as an in-depth examination of 16 different interventions. This report for the Forum also leans heavily on the work of Hilary Steedman and Sheila Stoney in summarising a series of ESRC-sponsored seminars on the subject of *How to Motivate (Demotivated) 14-16 year olds*. Joan Payne's literature review of *Choice at the End of Compulsory Schooling*, published in 2003, was also helpful as was the work of the Learning and Skills Development Agency Review Team in 2004 on *Participation by 17 year olds* a systematic review of the factors that influence participation in the second year of post-compulsory education or training. Una Bartley's study *More School?* which considered factors affecting decisions to apply to higher education institutions amongst under-represented young people, published in 2004, was also very useful.

8. At the very end of the time period for the project, the Scottish Executive published the *Findings from the Scottish School Leavers Survey: 17 in 2003*. The SSLS recruits a sample of young people in a year group Cohort at S4 on a three-yearly cycle and surveys them at ages 16-17, 18-19 21-22 and 23-24. Self-completion postal survey questionnaires are issued to the selected sample. The digest of this major report was considered as part of this project.

The report

9. The Executive Committee was particularly interested in practical interventions which can be made to motivate learners and minimise disengagement and this has led the review to focus on learners and non learners, considering the concept of disengagement in terms of what it is; what are the key transition points; how disengagement manifests itself differently in different groups of learners (and non-learners) including a typology of different types of disengaged learners (Part 2); what causes it (Part 3); and ways to address it at policy level and at a practical level (Part 4). A series of overarching conclusions and points for further consideration are at Part 5.

Part 2: What is disengagement?

Defining disengagement

10. The term disengagement is commonly used in the research literature concerned with participation and motivation of young learners. The literature hints at an ideological tension between those who prefer to characterise the issues in positive terms (talking of 'engagement' and 'motivation', rather than 'disengagement', 'disaffection' and 'demotivation') and those who freely use negative terms. However the authors choose to phrase it, the terminology is often used without explanation to cover a range of behaviours, attitudes and states of being. Steedman and Stoney¹⁶ consider that 'disengagement is principally concerned with identification with the goals and values of the school and willingness to engage with its programme of learning' whilst behaviour such as 'missing school, arriving late, skipping classes' is concerned with 'participation', which is more objectively measured.¹⁷ 'Truancy, exclusion and bad behaviour' were used in Tomlinson as manifestations of disengagement.¹⁸ The EPPI Review Team defined disengagement as a state of having 'lost connection with the learning process' for a variety of reasons (of which, interestingly, they considered motivation not to be relevant) whereas 'disaffection' with learning is exhibited by demotivated pupils.¹⁹

11. More simply, Kendal et al considered there to be 'degrees of disengagement' ranging from 'at risk' to 'excluded/self-excluded'.²⁰ Building on this, this review adapts Rossi and Montgomery's definition, using the term disengagement holistically, to cover all such issues. Disengagement is a process whereby 'students who do not identify, participate, and succeed in school activities become increasingly at risk of academic failure and dropout.'²¹ According to this definition, participation is, therefore, an important feature contributing to a level of engagement, and non-participation is a feature of disengagement. Participation, however, takes on a more formal meaning at the post-compulsory stage.

Accumulation and transition points

12. There is evidence from the literature that disengagement appears to be cumulative. Payne concluded that 'a significant minority of pupils have very negative attitudes towards school which tend to strengthen as they get older'²² and, more specifically, 'pupil attitudes are predominantly positive at the start of secondary education, but take a downward slide over the next two years'.²³ She adds that 'negative attitudes towards

¹⁶ Steedman and Stoney summarised the papers given and discussions held at a series of ESRC-funded seminars on the theme of 'How to motivate (demotivated) 14-16 year olds'.

¹⁷ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 6

¹⁸ Tomlinson 2004 page 92

¹⁹ EPPI Review Team 2004 page 4

²⁰ Kendal et al 2001 page 8

²¹ Rossi and Montgomery 1994 Chapter 5 page 1

²² Payne 2003 page 2

²³ Payne 2003 page 26

school can become self-reinforcing' creating a 'downward spiral'.²⁴ There is strong evidence that once disengagement has set in, it can take hold and intensify.

13. During compulsory education there are several key transition points which can impact on engagement with learning and which may require attention in practical terms. Kendall et al acknowledged that schools and colleges tend to address disengagement according to key age bands and identified these as: 12-14, 14-16, 16-18 and 18-21. Almost 90 per cent of schools which responded to their questionnaire had strategies in place for addressing disengagement for 14-16 year olds and 78 per cent for 12-14 year olds. Just over half had strategies for 16-18 year olds. Two thirds of the colleges had strategies for school leavers (16-18) and just over half for both school age pupils and young adults up to age 21. Disengagement is clearly a process which occurs to a greater or lesser extent throughout schooling and which influences the decisions taken at the key transition points.

14. From the literature the key transition points appear to be:

- **Age 11 transfer from primary to secondary school;**

In Scotland most children at age 11 transfer from a smaller primary school to a larger secondary school with a different type of class organisation and curriculum. Graham and Hill note that the research shows that 'most children have considerable anxiety about the changes, but also often positive anticipations about the new opportunities'²⁵ They comment intriguingly that 'the move is also commonly accompanied by a dip in attainment'²⁶ but do not go on to talk further about this. Graham and Hill found that most of the reasons for concern identified by primary pupils going on to secondary school in Scotland 'were social or non-academic'.²⁷ In general, once in S1 'children reported coping better with the changes than they had expected'.²⁸ Several of the research studies consulted showed evidence that some pupils had already begun to form ideas about what they would do post-16 at primary school.

- **Age 14 selection of choices**

Payne asserts that an increasing negativity towards education on the part of young people manifests itself in the first two years of secondary education.²⁹ This coincides with a time when decisions about important choices are being formed, if not taken. Foskett et al found that year nine (English equivalent of S2) 'is the time when the majority of pupils start to think about post-16 options'.³⁰ Bartley's study of school pupils' attitudes to higher education identified S2 as a crucial point at which pupils select their subjects for standard grade, which in turn could affect future choices. Kendal et al noted that about half of the 'other'³¹ organisations in their sample had strategies which covered S1-S2 'perhaps signalling recognition of the importance of early intervention and additional support'.³²

²⁴ Payne 2003 page 26

²⁵ Graham and Hill 2003 page 1

²⁶ Graham and Hill 2003 page 1

²⁷ Graham and Hill 2003 page 2

²⁸ Graham and Hill 2003 page 3

²⁹ Payne 2003 page 26

³⁰ Foskett et al 2004 page 2

³¹ Kendal et al also surveyed careers services, education business partnerships, health board trusts, LECs, local education authorities, police, social work departments, training agencies voluntary sector organisations and jointly run initiatives page 4

³² Kendall et al 2001 page 6

- **Age 16 decision to participate once education is no longer compulsory;**

Steedman and Stoney identified age 16 as an important age which carries an increased risk of suffering the effects of disengagement, being the point when important decisions about future careers are made.³³ Tomlinson asserted that disengagement peaks during Key Stage 4³⁴ which is the year of study in which learners usually turn 16.

- **Age 17 decision to participate for a further year of study once education is no longer compulsory;**

The LSDA Review Team noted that a relatively large proportion of young people in the United Kingdom are choosing not to participate at all in post-compulsory education, or leaving full-time education and training at 17+ (year 13). Although there have been some increases in the number of 16+ young people participating, there is a significant drop-off in the following year, by those aged 17+.³⁵ The LSDA study quoted Spours 'the 17+ participation rate can be regarded as an increasingly "bell-weather figure" for the system as a whole'³⁶ and Tomlinson added that 'we share the Government's aspiration that all young people should remain in some kind of education or training until they are 19, recognising that for some this will be combined with employment. To do this, we must tackle the high drop-out rate at age 16/17 and provide young people with relevant and motivating choices, leading to qualifications which are valued by employers and higher education institutions.'³⁷ Age 17/end S5 is also a crucial point for higher education entry in Scotland as this is an age at which pupils can have attained the qualifications necessary to enter higher education. Tinklin and Raffe, however, found that between 1978 and 1993 the proportion of higher education entrants who had left school from S5 had declined from almost one third to one in ten.³⁸

- **From school or further education to higher education**

There is a great deal of literature on the transition from school to university and how and why young people choose to take this route. This is not the focus of this study, however, although the route to higher education is considered as part of the wider discussion in this report.

Who are 'the disengaged'?

15. The first four years of secondary schooling are particularly crucial and this study considers these in some depth. Payne points out that 'although young people do not need to take the final decision [to participate in post-compulsory education] until Year 11, many start to think about their options much earlier'.³⁹ There is a great deal of focus in the literature on the 14-16 age group but the literature also indicates that pre-secondary and years S1 and S2 are important. **Group A** learners for the purposes of this study are, therefore, primary school, S1 and S2 pupils.

³³ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 11

³⁴ Tomlinson 2004 page 92

³⁵ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 8

³⁶ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 6

³⁷ Tomlinson 2004 paragraph 242

³⁸ Tinklin and Raffe 2001? page 6

³⁹ Payne 2003 page 16

16. In addition, there is a sense that the negative terminology, in relating to *poor* educational performance, stresses the *poorest* performance when, as studies show, disengagement can be 'found across the spectrum of school achievement'⁴⁰ and even among those who participate and achieve. A study of 'an eclectic group of gifted, regular and remedial students' by Baines and Stanley showed that they 'uniformly viewed school as irrelevant, sterile, dull or worse'.⁴¹ According to this research 'even students who received mostly good marks said that they endured their classes to attain marks that would qualify them for particular colleges'.⁴² Bartley found that 'strategic planners and higher education aspirants tended to be most positive about school, though within these groups were pupils who did not like school'.⁴³ Payne adds that 'the consistent message that emerges from a number of large quantitative studies is that young people stay in full time education after age 16 primarily for career reasons rather than from a love of learning as an end in itself'.⁴⁴

17. Steedman and Stoney concur with Baines and Stanley, finding that that young people who may be described as 'disengaged from learning' can be:

- disengaged and achieving at or above potential (which this study will call **Group B**); and
- disengaged and achieving below potential and/or failing to master basic skills⁴⁵ (which this project breaks down further, below).

18. This appears to contradict conventional wisdom, albeit rooted in research, that the 'problem' of disengagement is confined to a minority. In a review of research into choice at the end of compulsory schooling, Payne notes that 'several large cross-sectional surveys indicate that most secondary school pupils are reasonably happy'.⁴⁶ She adds, however, that on detailed consideration studies show that 'there are often other things that they would rather be doing'.⁴⁷ The SLSS report of Cohort 4 (17 year olds reflecting on their previous year of schooling) similarly concluded that 'most young people were broadly positive about their experiences of schoolwork and teaching' but added that they were 'slightly more ambivalent about their experiences of the school as a community' and they also cautioned that 'response to all these measures...was strongly patterned by social class, attainment and stage of leaving'.⁴⁸

19. Certainly for the years of compulsory schooling, much of the literature concentrates on the second of Steedman and Stoney's two categories, outlined above, and it may be simply that less is known about the 'reasonably happy' and that this may not be the same thing as 'happy'. In the light of the Forum Executive Committee's interest in entry to higher education provision, both categories are likely to be of interest, so this category needs to be included and attempts have been made to find studies which also consider

⁴⁰ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 1

⁴¹ Baines and Stanley 2003 page 4 Baines and Stanley set out to find out 'what adolescents really think about life in high school'. They invited 75 school students to keep journals about their day-to-day experiences, at least one page a day for five days. A total of 52 useable responses were received. Although Baines and Stanley themselves admit that 'legitimate research cannot base generalised conclusions about student angst on fifty-two journal entries' they felt their study was robust enough to offer some general observations.

⁴² Baines and Stanley 2003 page 1

⁴³ Bartley 2004 page 29

⁴⁴ Payne 2003 page 17

⁴⁵ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 1

⁴⁶ Payne 2003 page 2

⁴⁷ Payne 2003 page 22

⁴⁸ SLSS 2004 page 2

these learners, where possible.

20. Steedman and Stoney were particularly concerned with 14-16 year olds and further differentiated the category of those who were disengaged with and achieving below potential and/or failing to master basic skills into three groups:

- disengaged learners with 1-4 GCSEs at A*-C account for up to 20 per cent of the cohort - these students are generally of good but underused potential whose interests are increasingly focused on the world outside school (which this study will call **Group C**);
- the larger 'disaffected but in touch' group which comprises approximately 20 per cent of 14-16 year-olds – this group attends school fairly regularly but makes little effort to achieve and views the curriculum and school culture negatively (which this study will call **Group D**); and
- the hardest to reach are the very small group (1-2 per cent) who lose touch with school between 14 and 16 – these students attend school infrequently if at all and their basic skills are inadequate for the practical tasks of day to day living and employment (which this study will call **Group E**).^{49 50}

21. For post-compulsory years. A further two categories will be those who participate post-16 (**Group F**) and those who do not participate in post-compulsory education at all (**Group G**). These might be further differentiated in a wider study.

22. As well as consulting the literature, the project sought advice from prominent and active Scottish educational researchers and was unable to find any other practical alternative typology which was comprehensive and also learner-centred (as opposed to provision-led). The one used here defining **Groups A-G** is, therefore, adapted from Steedman and Stoney and is necessarily pragmatic and experimental.

Scale

23. There is little doubt that disengagement is considered to be a real and substantial problem in the UK and in Scotland. All policy statements start by stating the case. The Tomlinson Report stated that 'while many young people are challenged and motivated to achieve highly by the current system, too many are not'⁵¹ whilst the Scottish Executive announced in *A Curriculum for Excellence* that 'a significant proportion of young people in Scotland are not achieving all that they are capable of'.⁵² Scotland has a significantly lower proportion of 15-19 year olds in education (71 per cent) than for the OECD as a whole (80 per cent).⁵³

24. Disengagement *per se* is difficult to measure in the literature, because, as outlined above, different authors use different definitions from disliking school to complete detachment. Of 14-16 year olds, Steedman and Stoney, for example, estimated the

⁴⁹ Tomlinson 2004 paragraph 244

⁵⁰ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 13

⁵¹ Tomlinson 2004 paragraph 236

⁵² A Curriculum for Excellence 2004 page 11

⁵³ Life through Learning through Life 2003 page 31

whole disengaged group to be 'at a maximum around one third of a cohort, at a minimum one fifth'⁵⁴ but Baines and Stanley's definition yielded almost 100 per cent disengagement despite the apparent lack of impact on some learners' actual participation or achievement. As previously stated, this study takes a broad view of disengagement, partly because it can intensify with time and strategic interventions might be able to combat it if identified early enough.

Disliking school

25. Disliking school, therefore, although not as extreme as some forms, can be a manifestation of disengagement. The SLSS study of Cohort 4 recorded that 'the most commonly mentioned reason for leaving before S5 was "having had enough of school"' but added that it was 'rare for this to be the only reason, and leavers had usually also been offered a job, place at college or a training placement'.⁵⁵ Bartley found that 'the majority of S4 floaters and focussed leavers strongly disliked school and were looking forward to leaving'⁵⁶ whilst a number of S2 pupils already also strongly disliked school.⁵⁷

Tuancy

26. Tuancy levels are one key indicator of disengagement. The SLSS study of Cohort 4 found that whilst 57 per cent of respondents claimed never to have truanted in 2003, 20 per cent had missed a lesson 'here and there' and 16 per cent 'a day here and there' – thus over a third had truanted a bit. The remaining 7 per cent had truanted for either several days or several weeks at a time.⁵⁸ According to the SLSS study 'there is no evidence of change in levels of truancy' between 1999 and 2004.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, that 43 per cent of a representative sample of Scottish 16 year olds have experience of truancy must give some cause for concern given that 'even fairly low levels of truancy have been shown to be significantly associated with leaving full-time education at age 16'.⁶⁰

Participation

27. Participation is another way of trying to capture certain, perhaps even more serious, forms of disengagement, but, as those aged under 16 do not have the choice of whether to participate or not, it only fully applies post-16 and therefore to Group F and G learners. Corroborating the findings of the LSDA Review team, reported above, Tomlinson pointed out that, at 76 per cent, UK participation at age 17 is fifth lowest among 28 OECD countries.⁶¹ Tomlinson also regarded 'the real scandals of our low participation' to be the 9 per cent of young people who are not in education, employment or training (the NEET group) and the 15 per cent in employment without training.⁶²

28. Steedman and Stoney's Summary asks if there is more or less of a problem with disengagement in the UK than in other countries and finds that the UK ranks quite low in terms of proportions of those with a Level 3⁶³ qualification and in addition that there has been less progress in the UK than other countries towards remedying the position of those without a Level 3 qualification.⁶⁴ The LSDA Review pointed to a study by Iacovou

⁵⁴ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 13 (adding up above gives over 40%)

⁵⁵ SLSS 2004 page 4

⁵⁶ Bartley 2004 page 29

⁵⁷ Bartley 2004 page 30

⁵⁸ SLSS 2004 page 3

⁵⁹ SLSS 2004 page 3

⁶⁰ Payne 2003 page 23

⁶¹ Tomlinson 2004 page 92

⁶² Tomlinson 2004 paragraph 242

⁶³ Level 3 in England equates to A level, BTEC National, GNVQ Level 3 etc

⁶⁴ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 5

and Berthoud in 2001 which found that, of 14 countries considered, the UK had the lowest participation rate in full-time education and training by young people aged 16-18 (65 percent, compared with a European average of 84 percent). The LSDA Report adds that 'in 1999 the UK 17+ participation rate was below the average for OECD countries by 8 percentage points'.⁶⁵ Payne added that there is evidence that wages paid to unqualified school leavers in the UK are comparatively high 'and that young people with a basic level of educational qualification receive no wage premium over those who are wholly unqualified'.⁶⁶

Attainment

29. As discussed above, good attainment is not necessarily an indicator of engagement but the research does show that attainment is important to the choices that young people make. As Payne points out 'when GCSEs replaced the previous stratified examination system, the increase in the proportion of 16 year olds getting good examination results was one of the factors that led to a substantial increase in post-16 participation rates in England and Wales'.⁶⁷ There is also evidence that *expectations* of attainment play a role in guiding choices and that there is a correlation between 'academic self-concept and positive attitudes towards school'.⁶⁸ The LSDA Review Team points out that that in English further education colleges 44 per cent of 16-18 year olds were 'unsuccessful' in 2000, in that they failed to gain the qualification for which they studying.⁶⁹

Trends

30. The literature appears to show that the trends are in many ways, moving in a positive direction but that there is much still to achieve and they are key problem areas. The LSDA Review Team point to the fact that between 1995 and 1999 there was a reduction in the percentage of young people who did not participate in education or training at 16+.⁷⁰ And for Scotland the Executive has pointed out that 'in 2004 47 per cent of pupils gained 5 or more awards at Level 5 in the SCQF (SG at 1-2 or Intermediate 2 at A-C) by the end of S6 (compared to 37 per cent in 1999). Tinklin and Raffe recorded that the proportion of Scottish school leavers entering higher education doubled between 1984 and 1993.⁷¹ Nonetheless, most studies conclude that this is not good enough. Even where the trend is towards improvement, proportions remaining in full-time education and training in the UK at 16+ are still smaller than in several other OECD countries, some of which succeed in retaining virtually all young people in full-time education beyond the age at which it is compulsory.

31. In addition, in Scotland the performance of the lowest attaining 20 per cent of pupils in S4 has remained flat in recent years and around 15 per cent of 16-19 year olds are NEETs
In particular boys are underachieving'.⁷²

⁶⁵ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 10

⁶⁶ Payne 2003 page 50

⁶⁷ Payne 2003 page 27

⁶⁸ Payne 2003 page 28

⁶⁹ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

⁷⁰ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 10

⁷¹ Tinklin and Raffe 2001? page 1

⁷² Ambitious, Excellent Schools 2004 page 10

32. Steedman and Stoney's summary compares the aspirations of students and their parents in evidence from two cohorts. This shows that 'educational and occupational aspirations have generally increased among the later born cohort – among the young people themselves as well as among their parents'. 'While...only 10 per cent of young men from the most disadvantaged backgrounds wanted further education beyond minimum school leaving age...this has increased to 39 per cent of young men wanting further education. This compares to 80 per cent of young men from professional families ...and 88 per cent with high educational aspirations'. Steedman and Stoney conclude that 'the aspirations of young people in social classes IV and V have increased far more than the aspirations of social classes I and II'.⁷³

33. Steedman and Stoney's Summary asks if disengagement now constitutes a more serious and qualitatively different challenge to schools than in the past. They conclude that the issue might have been there but that it may simply not have been so much of a priority for politicians in the past: 'disengagement is not new, but changes in the demand for skills, and the importance of lifelong learning together with a more inclusive employment and social agenda have made it a high priority policy area'.⁷⁴ The LSDA Review Team on the other hand considered that 'this is not a recent phenomenon. Since the 1960s, policy makers have expressed concern about the low rate of participation in full-time education or training in the UK by young people'.⁷⁵

⁷³ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 12

⁷⁴ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 22

⁷⁵ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 9

Part 3: What causes disengagement?

34. The literature, with varying degrees of clarity, discusses a range of factors which contribute to disengagement from learning. Tomlinson points out that 'some of the causes of disengagement are cultural, social and economic and not easily addressed through changes to curriculum and qualifications' and his proposals address largely the educational causes of disengagement.⁷⁶ The work of the LSDA Review Team concurs with this adding that 'it is possible to have some understanding of the characteristics of those who are more or less likely to participate'. They caution that 'for a large minority they form significant barriers, which educational institutions and policies often cannot overcome'.⁷⁷

35. Powney further points out that research shows that 'rather than a single factor being important, it is the cumulative disadvantage accrued from several factors which affects pupils' school attainments'.⁷⁸ She concludes that 'educational attainment is the outcome of parents, pupils and school staff working in partnership'.⁷⁹ Powney quotes Sammons (1995) who argued that differences on entry to school can be ascribed to home influences and improvements in attainment are due to school influences.⁸⁰

36. The literature gives a number of different causes of disengagement which fall under Tomlinson's four categories of

- cultural factors;
- social factors;
- economic factors; and
- educational factors

It is crucial to note that many of these are linked and occur under more than one category and all impact upon each individual learner in combined ways. They are considered separately here for simplicity.

Cultural factors

37. Cultural factors feature regularly in the literature, often connected to other factors. They are often less tangible than the other factors but appear to have a key effect upon predispositions and attitudes which in turn influence behaviour, all of which are crucial to engagement with education and learning. Policy directives have an influence by setting the tone about what is of interest and what is valued and the LSDA Review team found that students pick up on these messages, which infiltrate all aspects of the education system.⁸¹

38. Cultural factors occur within schools and colleges as well as within families and communities. Payne concluded that schools influence attitudes which in turn influence choices at 16⁸² and this seems to be corroborated by the LSDA Review Team and Steedman and Stoney's comment that 'within school' variables, in particular teacher

⁷⁶ Tomlinson 2004 page 91

⁷⁷ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

⁷⁸ Powney 1996 page 3

⁷⁹ Powney 1996 page 4

⁸⁰ Powney 1996 page 3

⁸¹ LSDA Review Team 2004 page

⁸² Payne 2003 page 46

expectations, have a positive effect on student achievement', although they add that other factors such as parental encouragement and support for further education are also important.⁸³ Powney considers that 'where the educational community makes the most contribution is in school and classrooms ensuring that school ethos and approaches to teaching and learning support the development of all pupils and do not ignore, but take into account, differences in social class, ethnicity and gender'.⁸⁴ Stirling University Institute of Education found that College Model Skillseekers referred repeatedly to negative experiences of schooling in structured discussions 'these students didn't feel like they "graduated" from school but rather were dispatched from schooling'.⁸⁵ Millar found that young people who experienced college placements tended to enjoy the college experience 'the best thing about college was often just that it wasn't school'.⁸⁶ Interestingly, in studying attitudes to higher education, Bartley found that 'pupils who disliked school expressed concerns that university would be "more school"'.⁸⁷

39. Payne noted that although 'ethos' is a concept sometimes used to describe school influence, it is a difficult concept to pin down. More concretely, she pointed to the existence of a school sixth form as a positive factor in influencing staying on rates, although this might be less about ethos than about ease 'in schools with a sixth form, staying on entails no upheaval and a degree of inertia keeps some in education'.⁸⁸ Foskett et al added that schools with sixth forms 'often actively promoted post-16 academic routes, compared to other forms of post-16 participation which were less clearly promoted'.⁸⁹

40. The LSDA Review Team pointed to the availability of work opportunities for unqualified young people in the UK (unlike in France and Germany, for example) which has led to a culture where there is not such a strong link between studying and working. In addition, the LSDA Review Team recorded that 'from a young person's point of view it can be construed as a positive choice to go to work rather than a negative decision to leave education'.⁹⁰ They found that the attraction of employment and training opportunities is enhanced when combined with other factors associated with the student's course or place of study which were pushing them away from education.

41. Cultural factors include:

Influencing Pre-16 engagement

- perceptions derived by low achievers, from signals from policymakers and institutions, that low achievers are less important than others;⁹¹

⁸³ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 12

⁸⁴ Powney 1996 page 4

⁸⁵ University of Stirling Institute of Education 2001 page 20

⁸⁶ Millar 2004 page 1

⁸⁷ Bartley 2004 page 5

⁸⁸ Payne 2003 page 47

⁸⁹ Foskett et al 2004 page 1

⁹⁰ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 24

⁹¹ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 11

- expectations by institutions of certain groups of learners, particularly the academically able that they will progress;⁹²

Influencing Post-16 engagement and participation

- perceptions derived by low achievers, from signals from policymakers and institutions, that low achievers are less important than others;⁹³
- expectations by institutions of certain groups of learners, particularly the academically able that they will progress;⁹⁴
- where there is a school sixth form – transition to further study is more easily facilitated;⁹⁵
- the school environment does not suit everyone;
- a range of work is available without the need for qualifications so the ‘need to study to work’ ethos of other countries is not felt in the UK.⁹⁶
- going to work is seen by many young people as a positive not a negative choice,⁹⁷ and also seen as attractive when combined with negative attitudes to education – they are often happier with their current activity than when they had been in education;⁹⁸

Social factors

42. Social factors are particularly closely connected to economic factors and socio-economic status is one of the most widely-cited of all, and of particular significance in the UK when compared to other countries. Levels of attainment of core skills and qualifications are class-related. The LSDA Review Team described social class as ‘consistently...a key determinant of educational achievement and life chances’.⁹⁹ The SLSS survey of Cohort 4 found that ‘there was a strong link between family circumstances and educational experiences, with 35 per cent of young people who came from less advantaged backgrounds being disadvantaged educationally (i.e. having no standard grades, at 1-2, being a regular truant, or having been suspended or expelled)’.¹⁰⁰ Tinklin and Raffe found that in 1993, ‘48 per cent of [school] leavers with fathers in non-manual occupations had attained three or more Highers, compared with 21 per cent of those whose fathers were in manual occupations’.¹⁰¹ In addition, according to Payne, both parental occupation and parental education ‘play an independent role, net of GCSE results and other confounding factors’.¹⁰²

43. In a further education context, in terms of retaining students, however, Davies (2001 in Hall) noted that the college experience was a more important factor than the student’s

⁹² LSDA Review Team 2004 page 12

⁹³ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 11

⁹⁴ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 12

⁹⁵ Payne 2003 page 47

⁹⁶ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 11

⁹⁷ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 24

⁹⁸ Knight and White 2003 page 59

⁹⁹ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

¹⁰⁰ SLSS 2004 page 5

¹⁰¹ Tinklin and Raffe 2001? page 7

¹⁰² Payne 2003 page 34

background in terms of those who withdraw.¹⁰³ In higher education, Bartley's study found that 'pupils from higher socio-economic groups were more likely to be considering university'¹⁰⁴ and reinforced the findings of other studies that 'for many families with little or no history of higher education participation the issue of whether or not to go to university is simply outside their frames of reference'.¹⁰⁵ Bartley found that information about higher education institutions and degree courses 'varied considerably amongst school pupils though those hoping to go to university, including S2 pupils, tended to be better informed'.¹⁰⁶ She further found that 'not only had a number of S2 pupils started to consider university but some stated they had taken that decision in primary school'.¹⁰⁷ This phenomenon was also noted by Foskett et al who commented that 'a significant number of pupils...claim to have begun the process of thinking about post-16 options before they started secondary schooling'.¹⁰⁸

44. Family advice is also clearly key, and more so than advice from more formal sources,¹⁰⁹ or from friends¹¹⁰ at least for learners from higher social classes.¹¹¹ Although the LSDA Review Team concluded that 'peers can also influence views and behaviour, by, for example, encouraging or discouraging attendance and influencing career decisions',¹¹² Payne concluded that 'most young people are not unduly swayed in the short term by what their friends choose to do, but that over a longer period of time friends may help to form their general attitudes towards education'.¹¹³ This is borne out in the SLSS survey which also found that 17 year olds reported that they had been 'most likely to receive advice about what to do after S4 from their parents, and were most likely to consider advice from parents as the best that they received from any source' – 48 per cent cited parents as the best source, compared to 18 per cent for school guidance, 16 per cent the careers service and 6 per cent friends.¹¹⁴ It is further corroborated by Payne who concluded that, over and above the general influence of family background, 'parents have a pervasive influence in shaping young people's attitudes to education over a long period of time, so that the broad direction of what they will do at 16 is simply taken for granted'.¹¹⁵ Payne found that it was 'unusual' for parents to impose their views but that, more subtly, they 'set the boundaries within which young people make their choices'.¹¹⁶

45. Foskett et al concluded that school was a 'very important source of advice' for pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds in schools without a sixth form¹¹⁷ but teachers told Bartley that although they felt that 'school could compensate to a degree for a lack of ambition from home...they were unlikely to persuade an able pupil who lacked parental support to consider higher education'.¹¹⁸

¹⁰³ in Hall 2001 page 21

¹⁰⁴ Bartley 2004 page 4

¹⁰⁵ Bartley 2004 page 21

¹⁰⁶ Bartley 2004 page 4

¹⁰⁷ Bartley 2004 page 21

¹⁰⁸ Foskett et al 2004 page 2

¹⁰⁹ Payne 2003 page 42

¹¹⁰ Payne 2003 page 47

¹¹¹ Foskett et al 2004 page 2

¹¹² LSDA Review Team 2004 page 14

¹¹³ Payne 2003 page 47

¹¹⁴ SLSS 2004 page 2

¹¹⁵ Payne 2003 page 30

¹¹⁶ Payne 2003 page 32

¹¹⁷ Foskett et al 2004 page 2

¹¹⁸ Bartley 2004 page 32

46. Parents from all social classes appear to regard education as important but the differences appear to lie in the amount of support which parents are able to give their children, with parents from higher socio-economic groups being more interventionist.¹¹⁹ The LSDA Review Team noted that young people from lower socio-economic groups were themselves often sceptical about the value and use of further education, post-16, and argued that this might explain class differences in participation more than economic issues (see also economic factors, below) be a greater influencing factor than economic.¹²⁰

47. Bartley noted that a 'large proportion of pupils had a role model either in their family or community on whom they were basing their career decisions'.¹²¹ She also found that some pupils hinted at the idea that 'pupils from the school did not go to university'¹²² but also that many pupils across all groups 'thought that "anyone" or "people like us" could go to university'.¹²³ One of the key factors in deterring a large proportion of pupils was that they did not consider themselves ' "brainy" enough to go to university'.¹²⁴

48. Social factors include:

Influencing Pre-16 engagement

- strong relationship between socio-economic status and literacy;¹²⁵
- strong relationship between socio-economic status and participation¹²⁶ and the fact that this effect is considerably stronger in the UK than in other European countries.¹²⁷

Influencing Post-16 engagement and participation

- strong relationship between socio-economic status and participation¹²⁸ and the fact that this effect is considerably stronger in the UK than in other European countries;¹²⁹
- family attitudes and expectations are thought to have the biggest influence on the participation decision and parental and siblings' prior educational attainment impact on that;¹³⁰
- school is an important source of advice for pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds in schools without a sixth form¹³¹
- peers also have an influence and are an important factor in encouraging work and earning over education;¹³²

¹¹⁹ Payne 2003 page 35

¹²⁰ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

¹²¹ Bartley 2004 page 5

¹²² Bartley 2004 page 16

¹²³ Bartley 2004 page 17

¹²⁴ Bartley 2004 page 18

¹²⁵ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 6

¹²⁶ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 7

¹²⁷ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 12

¹²⁸ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

¹²⁹ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 12

¹³⁰ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

¹³¹ Foskett et al 2004 page 2

- some young people from the lower socio-economic groups are disillusioned with education and sceptical about its value;¹³³
- perceptions of ability may be more important than social class in inhibiting some pupils from considering going to university.

Economic factors

49. In general terms (as outlined at 'social factors' above), the research shows that 'persistent socio-economic disadvantage results in an accumulation of risk factors which predispose towards poor school performance'.¹³⁴ Steedman and Stoney suggest that this can be overcome or ameliorated to some extent by the positive aspects of other factors, including the attributes of the young people themselves, the characteristics of their families and aspects of the wider social context.¹³⁵

50. Payne noted that 'social class is correlated with family income' and this is an influence in staying-on and general disengagement in some cases.¹³⁶ Pressure can be applied by families and by the young people themselves. Payne notes that 'even if their families could afford to let them stay in education, the prospect of earning is likely to be a particular lure to young people from low-income families'.¹³⁷ The LSDA corroborates this stating that some young people 'desire, or require the income from a full-time job right away and are not prepared to postpone this'.¹³⁸

51. However, Payne points out that 'although young people's choices at age 16 involve some calculation of costs and benefits, they usually fall short of the pure rationality of the economic model'.¹³⁹ Certainly, Knight and White found that in general, young people in their 'early leavers' sample reported that Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) 'had not been something they had given great consideration to when they were deciding to leave education. The factors motivating the young person to leave education relating to their experience of their course or place of study, appeared to outweigh any financial concerns they may have had about the loss of EMA' (although they might have a higher income in work than the EMA could provide).¹⁴⁰ Ashworth, reported in the LSDA study, similarly found that EMAs had a relatively small effect of increasing participation by eligible 16+ students. With reference to 17-year-old staying-on rates, the LSDA Review Team stated (perhaps rather baldly) that although those from low income families might be under pressure to be earning rather than studying, 'it is only for a small minority of learners that financial circumstances influence participation in education'.¹⁴¹ Given the

¹³² LSDA Review Team 2004 page 14

¹³³ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

¹³⁴ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 13

¹³⁵ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 13

¹³⁶ Payne 2003 page 35

¹³⁷ Payne 2003 page 36

¹³⁸ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 11

¹³⁹ Payne 2003 page 13

¹⁴⁰ Knight and White page 49

¹⁴¹ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

emphasis on economic-related interventions by government, more consideration than there has been time for in this study needs to be given to their effect before accepting this statement from the LSDA.

52. Payne does add that local labour market opportunities are responsible for at least partially shaping young people's choices at age 16 but that these are probably ameliorated by other socio-economic influences. Payne and the LSDA Review Team conclude that lack, or perceived lack, of work opportunities can act as an incentive both to stay on or to leave.¹⁴²

53. Perhaps surprisingly, it appears that financial concerns are not overtly influential in staying-on decisions but it should be cautioned that, with reference to higher education, Payne further commented that 'in addition to any direct impact, family income may also play a role in choices at 16 through its effect on plans for higher education...if young people are deterred from this by the cost, they may see no point in staying on'.¹⁴³ Given the LSDA and Payne's general point that higher education opportunities are, of themselves, an incentive to young people to stay on, general and increasing perceptions that higher education is too costly, might have a negative effect. Bartley noted that most pupils and parents thought that higher education 'would be "expensive" and that universities charged tuition fees'.¹⁴⁴

54. In addition, whereas the majority of pupils in Bartley's groups of S4 'strategic planners' and 'higher education aspirants' appeared convinced of the economic benefits of a degree (the fact that it would lead to 'a good job' being the main motivator) the S4 'floaters' and 'focussed leavers' 'were much more likely to be sceptical about whether a university degree would lead to a better paid job and the most popular reason stated for not going to university by S4 pupils was getting a job'.¹⁴⁵

55. Economic factors include:

Influencing Pre-16 engagement

- poverty is the most obvious key feature which has an impact on reading and maths attainment (which in turn facilitate other attainments)

Influencing Post-16 engagement and participation

- potential pressure on young people from low income families to be earning¹⁴⁶
- EMAs have increased participation but not by much and their loss is not generally a factor in the decision to stay or leave¹⁴⁷
- UK labour market offers work opportunities without requirements for qualifications

¹⁴² Payne 2003 page 49

¹⁴³ Payne 2003 page 36

¹⁴⁴ Bartley 2004 page 4

¹⁴⁵ Bartley 2004 page 14

¹⁴⁶ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

¹⁴⁷ LSDA Review Team, 2004 page 13 and Knight and White 2003 page 49

- potential that high general unemployment encourages participation;^{148, 149}
- potential that high general unemployment also encourages feelings that further study is pointless;¹⁵⁰
- some pupils see higher education as an investment whilst others are more sceptical – most see it as ‘expensive’.

Educational factors

56. Whilst being aware of the context set by other factors which cause disengagement, it is likely that ‘educational factors’ will be the sphere in which educational institutions and agencies such as the Forum can have most impact. As outlined under ‘cultural factors’ above, individual schools also influence choice at 16 and ‘there remain substantial differences between schools in the proportion of students who continue in full-time education after 16’ according to Payne.¹⁵¹ The causes of these differences ‘remain largely obscure’ although factors such as high teacher turnover and a high proportion of pupils receiving free school meals are associated with poorer staying on rates. On the other hand, pupil-teacher ratios and length of experience of teaching staff do not seem to have an effect.¹⁵²

57. It is axiomatic that the more a learner achieves, the wider their range of choices will be. There is, however, a more subtle and overwhelming message from the literature about achievement being a virtuous cycle if it can be started and maintained. The greater the achievement at school, the more likely it is that a individual will continue to participate in education beyond post-compulsory schooling.¹⁵³ The LSDA Review Team adds that ‘the early years of schooling being particularly significant’ in this context.¹⁵⁴ Bartley found evidence that pupils thought that higher education would involve ‘a lot of studying, with limited academic support in bigger classes’.¹⁵⁵ In particular most of the S2 pupils interviewed ‘expressed concerns about the perceived workload’ and S4 pupils referred to the workload as likely to be ‘stressful’.¹⁵⁶ Bartley also found that ‘low self-esteem expressed itself among S4 pupils as doubts about doing well at school with the ‘strategic planner and higher education aspirants tending ‘to be more confident of passing exams and achieving university entry requirements’.¹⁵⁷ ‘Inability to cope with course demands, low levels of ability and poor language and key skills’ were identified by Hall as contributing to non-completion of further education.¹⁵⁸

58. The curriculum and style of teaching and learning is clearly important. Academic study is often considered to be irrelevant, not sufficiently practical, too academic and boring by some pupils.^{159, 160} Bartley found that such pupils were sometimes engaged by ‘extra curricular activities, such as sport and drama [which] provided a positive aspect’

¹⁴⁸ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 24

¹⁴⁹ Powney 1996 page 2

¹⁵⁰ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 24

¹⁵¹ Payne 2003 page 45

¹⁵² Payne 2003 page 45

¹⁵³ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 6

¹⁵⁴ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 11

¹⁵⁵ Bartley 2004 page 20

¹⁵⁶ Bartley 2004 page 20

¹⁵⁷ Bartley 2004 page 32

¹⁵⁸ Hall 2001 page 19

¹⁵⁹ Bartley 2004 page 30

¹⁶⁰ Payne 2003 page 24

for them'.¹⁶¹ The LSDA Review Team also recorded that 'there is also evidence that pupils learn in different ways and that the present school curriculum favours verbal and mathematical learning, so that those with a propensity towards kinaesthetic learning become disaffected', adding that 'it is significant that those who would benefit most from learning in this way belong to precisely those groups of students who are least likely to participate at 17+'.¹⁶²

59. Relationships with teachers 'can also be very influential'¹⁶³ and the LSDA Review Team notes that 'there is considerable anecdotal evidence about how even one teacher can have a strong positive or negative effect on a student's views and subsequent actions'.¹⁶⁴ Bartley noted that some teachers may be discouraging particular pupils from considering university' adding that 'a culture of aspiration to higher education must involve teachers and cannot solely be the responsibility of families and communities'.¹⁶⁵ Payne added that generally poor pupil-teacher relationships 'are associated with disruptive behaviour in class, truancy and drop-out from school'.¹⁶⁶ The LSDA Review Team added that 'this not only applies to those who teach, but to all staff within an institution with whom students might come into contact'.¹⁶⁷

60. Advice and guidance are also important to ensure that young people make the right choices and are not discouraged. There is also some evidence that they find the proliferation of choices at 16 bewildering which might of itself have a negative impact on participation 'an abundance and complexity of choice may have contributed to non-participation by 17 year olds who lack guidance and are unsure of the relative advantages and disadvantages of each option'.¹⁶⁸ In addition, advice and guidance might help ease transitions, particularly at the crucial 17-year-old participation decision interface. As outlined above, Foskett et al concluded that school was a particularly important source of advice and influence on choices for pupils in low socio economic localities.¹⁶⁹

61. Several of the studies – especially those which had surveyed young people directly - referred to 'respect' as an issue for young learners 'whether or not students feel that they are respected is an important factor in student retention' according to the LSDA Review team.¹⁷⁰ In this, college was often cited as preferable to school and the University of Stirling Institute of Education found that 'the desire to find an education setting that gave the learner "more respect" was a factor in leaving school for some young people'.¹⁷¹ Millar found that 'mutual respect between college lecturer and student' was something which school pupils valued about college placements.¹⁷² Payne also noted that college was welcomed by young people as having 'a more adult environment' than school.¹⁷³

¹⁶¹ Bartley 2004 page 30

¹⁶² LSDA Review Team 2004 page 11

¹⁶³ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 12

¹⁶⁴ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 11

¹⁶⁵ Bartley 2004 page 32

¹⁶⁶ Payne 2003 page 24

¹⁶⁷ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 12

¹⁶⁸ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 12

¹⁶⁹ Foskett 2004 page 2

¹⁷⁰ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 12

¹⁷¹ University of Stirling Institute of Education 2001 page 20

¹⁷² Millar 2004 page 1

¹⁷³ Payne 2003 page 53

62. Notwithstanding the bewilderment of some learners, expansion of choice of opportunities in both vocational education and higher education in England have clearly drawn more young people into post-16 education, according to the LSDA Review Team, which comments specifically that 'increasing opportunities to enter higher education at 18 is likely to have encouraged more 16+ students to remain in education'.¹⁷⁴ Bartley's study found that 'the distinction between available courses at higher education institutions and further education colleges was not apparent to most S4 pupils, with many unclear about the status of local institutions. There was a general view that further education colleges were "easier" and catered for people who wanted to return to learning, while universities were seen as "higher", "better" or "harder"'.¹⁷⁵ In addition, Bartley found that parents 'were also vague about the distinction between higher education institutions and further education colleges'.¹⁷⁶

63. There is evidence that the quality of educational opportunities is also important. In further education, Hall reported that, although lecturers and tutors tended to ascribe withdrawal and non-completion to financial, domestic and personal difficulties of students, students themselves 'tended to rate these as relatively unimportant and place more importance on factors relating to the course or college'.¹⁷⁷

64. Educational factors include:

Influencing Pre-16 engagement

- early achievement brings continuing achievement;¹⁷⁸
- ability to succeed once enrolled keeps young people in learning and ensures that they do not become discouraged and demotivated';¹⁷⁹
- teachers – even a single teacher – can have a strong positive or negative effect;¹⁸⁰
- curriculum content needs to be seen to be relevant and engaging¹⁸¹
- current curriculum features a specific style of learning that favours some but does not suit all;¹⁸²
- feeling respected is important to a lot of pupils and lacking in many school situations;¹⁸³
- appropriate advice and guidance can contribute to making the right choices of courses to pursue in terms of level and subject¹⁸⁴
- engaging learners through extra curricular routes and, at the same time, building support for the school¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁴ LSDA Review Team 2004 page10

¹⁷⁵ Bartley 2004 page 21

¹⁷⁶ Bartley 2004 page 22

¹⁷⁷ Hall 2001 page 17

¹⁷⁸ Powney 1996 page 2

¹⁷⁹ Tomlinson 2004 paragraph 248

¹⁸⁰ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 11

¹⁸¹ Payne 2003 page 24

¹⁸² LSDA Review Team 2004 page 6

¹⁸³ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

¹⁸⁴ knight and White page 41

¹⁸⁵ Bartley 2004 page 30

Influencing Post-16 engagement and participation

- low achievers are less likely to participate¹⁸⁶ and more likely to complain of boredom¹⁸⁷
- those who have had previous problems (truancy, exclusion) are even less likely to participate,¹⁸⁸
- ability to succeed once enrolled keeps young people in learning and ensures that they do not become discouraged and demotivated¹⁸⁹
- dissatisfaction with the school or college environment particularly treatment by teaching staff is a factor in disengagement;¹⁹⁰
- feeling respected is important to a lot of pupils and lacking in many school situations;¹⁹¹
- Some young people prefer the more adult environment associated with colleges and workplaces;¹⁹²
- appropriate advice and guidance can contribute to making the right choices of courses to pursue in terms of level and subject and progression¹⁹³
- an 'abundance and complexity of choice' confuse young people who do not then participate;¹⁹⁴
- an expansion of vocational course options has drawn more young people into this stream of post-16 education;¹⁹⁵
- curriculum content needs to be seen to be relevant and engaging¹⁹⁶
- increasing opportunities to enter higher education at 18 is likely to have encouraged more 16+ students to remain in education;¹⁹⁷
- learners can be engaged through extra curricular routes, if not through the mainstream curriculum at the same time, building support for the school¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁶ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 11

¹⁸⁷ Payne 2003 page 24

¹⁸⁸ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 6

¹⁸⁹ Tomlinson 2004 paragraph 248

¹⁹⁰ Knight and White 2004 page 43

¹⁹¹ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

¹⁹² Tomlinson 2004 paragraph 251

¹⁹³ knight and White page 41

¹⁹⁴ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 13

¹⁹⁵ LSDA Research Team 2004 page 10

¹⁹⁶ Payne 2003 24

¹⁹⁷ LSDA Research Team 2004 page 10

¹⁹⁸ Bartley 2004 page 30

Part 4: What can be done about disengagement?

65. There is a great deal of advice in the literature about what can be done to combat disengagement in its various forms. This section considers the policy and practical responses which are being, and can be, made.

Policy responses

66. An important and recurring message from the literature is that 'changing or adapting those parts of the curriculum which influence dislocation' is key to any re-engagement strategy.¹⁹⁹ The content of the curriculum is primarily the domain of government and two major documents have been published, almost simultaneously, for Scotland and England, both of which are highly concerned with curriculum change to minimise disengagement and promote participation in learning. Many of the key themes and proposals in both are strikingly similar. As these two documents will set the overall context in which any new initiatives and interventions will take place, it is useful to summarise their key aspects.

Tomlinson

67. The response of the UK government for England has been the green paper '14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards' which indicated that the UK government would encourage an expectation that education should continue until the age of 18. A further stated policy objective of the government has been to significantly raise the participation rate in higher education so that 50 per cent of 18-30 year olds will have experienced higher education by 2010. To make this possible, a greater proportion of 17 year olds will need to reach level 3.²⁰⁰ Tomlinson highlights choice and relevance as key motivators of learners between 14 and 19. Tomlinson proposes:

- 'offering a choice of relevant programmes and activities, which allow young people to pursue their interests and aspirations, while working towards high status qualifications linked to progression in learning and employment;
- sign-posting progression routes within the diploma framework and making it easier for learners to follow them because diplomas would interlock;
- ensuring that all young people develop the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to access the curriculum; and
- enabling young people to build confidence by gaining credit for small steps of achievement, which is recognised on a transcript. They should be underpinned by high quality teaching and learning, collaboration between institutions and improved information, advice and guidance.'²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Kendall et al 2001 page iii

²⁰⁰ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 10

²⁰¹ Tomlinson 2004 page 91

Ambitious, Excellent Schools

68. In Scotland, *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* considers itself to be an 'agenda for the most comprehensive programme of modernisation for a generation or more'²⁰² aiming to heighten expectations, free up teachers and schools and offer more choice, opportunity and support to learners.

69. Under the auspices of *Ambitious, Excellent Schools*, Scottish Ministers have accepted in full *A Curriculum for Excellence* which overhauls the S1-S3 curriculum to provide more choice and more time for literacy and numeracy 'and to inject greater pace, relevance and challenge to improve motivation and attainment'.²⁰³ *A Curriculum for Excellence* embraced the following 'Principles for Curriculum design':

- challenge and enjoyment
- breadth
- progression
- depth
- personalisation and choice
- coherence
- relevance.²⁰⁴

70. All of which will involve:

- partnerships with colleges
- new skills for work qualifications as part of the NQ framework
- better access to colleges
- formal partnership arrangements with colleges
- personalised learning – planning own learning
- basic rights to information for parents
- guidance to parents about how best to support learning
- more time for music, drama, PE and sport and work related learning
- new ways of recognising achievement (e.g. in sport, community activity and leadership)²⁰⁵

71. The thinking behind these two policy documents is clearly rooted in the research literature and their prescriptions for action go with the grain of the conclusions to part 3, above. As *Ambitious Excellent Schools* moves into its implementation phase, organisations such as the Forum should find a favourable policy climate to implement their schemes and programmes.

²⁰² *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* 2004 page 3

²⁰³ *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* 2004 page 14

²⁰⁴ *A Curriculum for Excellence* 2004 page 15

²⁰⁵ *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* 2004

Practical responses – what works?

72. Steedman and Stoney surmised that different groups of disengaged learners, 'although difficult to distinguish at the margin, do require different approaches in order to achieve in basic skills and/or achieve their potential'.²⁰⁶ Augmenting Steedman and Stoney's categories, this report has attempted to take a learner-centred approach to disengagement by identifying different groups of disengaged learners with a view to considering how their different needs can be met by different initiatives. To recap, the groups are:

Group A: primary school, S1 and S2 pupils

Group B: age 14-16 disengaged and achieving at or above potential

Group C: age 14-16 disengaged learners with 1-4 GCSEs at A*-C - they account for up to 20 per cent of the cohort - these students are generally of good but underused potential whose interests are increasingly focused on the world outside school

Group D: age 14-16 the larger 'disaffected but in touch' group which comprises approximately 20 per cent of 14-16 year-olds – this group attends school fairly regularly but makes little effort to achieve and views the curriculum and school culture negatively

Group E: age 14-16 the hardest to reach are the very small group (1-2 per cent) who lose touch with school between 14 and 16 – these students attend school infrequently if at all and their basic skills are inadequate for the practical tasks of day to day living and employment²⁰⁷

Group F: those who participate post-16 learning

Group G: those who do not participate in post-compulsory education at all

73. Steedman and Stoney's summary was based on an extensive series of seminars which considered UK and international practice in addressing disengagement. The practical solutions to disengagement detailed below and summarised in the table at paragraph 87 below, are drawn primarily from this work but also, as appropriate, from other studies and evaluations of schemes and initiatives. This typology of disengaged learners, as well as the Kendall typology of interventions, could be built upon and added to with information from other research studies in future.

Group A primary school, S1 and S2 pupils

74. The literature says little about disengagement among Group A learners although it records that this does begin to set in during S1 and S2. Since there is evidence that at least some pupils begin thinking about their post-16 options in primary school, then preventative measures could usefully be employed to minimise the onset of disengagement among these learners. Kendall et al suggested several activities

²⁰⁶ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 22

²⁰⁷ Groups B,C,D and E have been adapted from Steedman and Stoney 2003 as modified by Tomlinson 2004

including mentoring, awareness raising, after school clubs to address specific needs and buddy systems. When undertaking projects which relate to raising aspirations and awareness specifically of higher education some of the literature points to splitting primary pupils from secondary pupils. The West of Scotland GOALS project clearly developed two separate higher education links programmes – one for P6 and P7 pupils and one for S1-S6 pupils. The Saturday University work undertaken by GOALS was aimed at S1 and S2 specifically.

Group B learners disengaged and achieving at or above potential

75. As Baines and Stanley noted, even high achieving learners can be considered to be disengaged. Baines and Stanley concluded that 'what students despised most were unenthusiastic teachers teaching uninteresting lessons straight from text books'.²⁰⁸ They prescribed resurrecting the idea that a student must first be engaged before he or she can learn' but predicted that, in America, 'the prospect is dim for refocusing public schools on learning rather than testing'.²⁰⁹ Steedman and Stoney identified this group but did not consider their needs as pressing as some of the others so did not address them. Kendall et al suggested some preventative and mainstream activities which could help engagement of pupils who fit this category, including mentoring and work to increase aspirations.

Group C learners disengaged learners with 1-4 GCSEs at A*-C

76. This group of learners are generally of good but underused potential, and their interests are increasingly focused on the world outside school. Steedman and Stoney acknowledged that this group has been targeted by a range of initiatives which 'focused on changing the mix of subjects studied 14-16 to include vocational subjects' with the idea that this would 're-engage students' interests at a period in their development when they were focusing on future roles in the adult world of work' and 'allow students to demonstrate aptitudes and capabilities that were not called upon in the more 'academic' subjects'.²¹⁰ Steedman and Stoney recorded that, although OFSTED queried the capacity of schools to offer such courses to the standard required, 'the overall judgement has been that such courses can have a highly motivating effect on students performance'. Steedman and Stoney described it as 'something of a magic bullet'.²¹¹

77. Similarly, Kendall et al found that providers sought to address the needs of young people 'whose learning needs were not severe but which may impede their achievement and/or lead to disengagement in the future' through a focus on raising awareness of 'academic and work/employment orientated opportunities'.²¹²

²⁰⁸ Baines and Stanley 2003 page 4

²⁰⁹ Baines and Stanley 2003 page 4

²¹⁰ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 23

²¹¹ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 24

²¹² Kendall et al 2001 page 10

Group D learners ‘disaffected but in touch’ group

78. This relatively large group attends school fairly regularly but makes little effort to achieve and views the curriculum and school culture negatively. Steedman and Stoney commented that learners in this group have been shown to respond to a range of initiatives which often share the characteristics of taking them out of school, whether into work-related settings (e.g. further education college, workplace) or a setting associated with leisure and cultural activities (e.g. football club, music). This response chimes with Baines and Stanley’s finding that ‘signs of joy in journals appeared most often in descriptions of extracurricular activities, lunch or encounters in the hallway between bells’.²¹³ However, ‘benefits tend to take the form of general animation rather than the securing of material benefits’ such as increases in attainment and progression to further education and training. Steedman and Stoney further commented that ‘If anything, contact with the world outside school appeared to increase the probability that students would choose to leave rather than stay’.²¹⁴ They concluded that ‘nothing...offers a cast iron way forward’ for Group D.

79. Steedman and Stoney further cautioned against treating learners from Groups C and D the same because the ‘better vocational options’ solution which works for Group C does not work for Group D ‘because no simple recipe will’ and that it will become ‘discredited’ for Group C if it is associated with Group D.²¹⁵

Group E ‘out of touch’

80. Steedman and Stoney characterised Group E as ‘the hardest to reach’. They comprise a very small group (1-2 per cent) who lose touch with school between 14 and 16, attend school infrequently if at all and their basic skills are inadequate for the practical tasks of day to day living and employment. Steedman and Stoney considered that the evidence suggests that this group makes some progress ‘in alternative provision, which provides one-to-one contact, an adult approach and atmosphere, and the opportunity to mark progress through certification’.²¹⁶ However, they cautioned that success on even the best of these programmes is limited.²¹⁷

81. Kendall et al pointed out that ‘in many cases, disengagement was so severe that providers’ primary aim centred on just re-engaging young people in learning’. They noted that ‘all providers working with the most disaffected youngsters identified improving the confidence and self-esteem of young people as stated aims...[these] were seen as essential prerequisites for engaging them in any form of learning’.²¹⁸

Group F participate post-16 and Group F do not participate in post-compulsory education

82. The literature suggests that the decision to participate in education post-16 is often taken long before (sometimes years before) the end of Year 11 and is very likely to have been influenced heavily by social, economic and cultural considerations. Payne

²¹³ Baines and Stanley 2003 page 1

²¹⁴ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 23

²¹⁵ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 24

²¹⁶ paraphrased in Tomlinson 2004 page 93

²¹⁷ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 22

²¹⁸ Kendall et al 2001 page 11

recorded that for some young people 'the very concept of a decision or a choice' to participate at age 16 'may sometimes be inappropriate' as they may be acting upon 'longstanding assumptions about what they will do'.²¹⁹

83. She added that 'young people generally see education in instrumental terms' and that those who were unsure about what to do at the start of year 11 'often make up their mind on the basis of practicalities, particularly their actual examination results and whether they can find a job'.²²⁰ The SLSS study of Cohort 4 also reported that 'job prospects' and 'qualifying for higher education as well as a positive interest in particular courses and subjects, were the main reasons given for staying on at school'.²²¹ Payne found that 'for many young people, the major motive for staying in education after age 16 is the wish to go to university'.²²² She added 'if higher education is not viewed as an option, then they have less incentive to stay on'.²²³ In addition, Payne noted that 'young people are more likely to stay in education after 16 if they spend Year 11 in a school that has a sixth form', largely because it is 'easier' than transferring to another school or college.²²⁴ Foskett et al added that schools with sixth forms 'often actively promoted post-16 academic routes, compared to other forms of post-16 participation which were less clearly promoted'.²²⁵ They noted that 'pupils in schools with sixth forms tended to judge the advice and guidance functions of their schools as being less impartial than those in schools with no sixth form'.²²⁶

84. The overwhelming message from the literature is that interventions to encourage staying-on need to be undertaken much earlier than age 16 and involve the social, economic and cultural spheres. The importance of the family in providing advice is emphasised in the literature, although the school might also be important in the case of learners drawn from the lower socio-economic groups. There is generally a positive orientation towards the benefits of education among most parents but there is also a great deal of misinformation about post-school options and confusion about qualifications and what different parts of the further and higher education system provide. Thus, interventions which inform and support the parents of young learners might yield benefits.

85. In addition, age 17 is also increasingly becoming a crucial 'break point' in terms of participation. The LSDA Review Team found that those who study on a one-year course when they leave school at 16+ are less likely to participate in full-time education or training in the following year than those who embark on a two-year course.²²⁷

Typology of learners and interventions

86. From the case studies of practical interventions they considered, Kendall et al developed a typology of 'different degrees of provision, from preventative, through intervention while still in the mainstream, to alternative forms of educational provision

²¹⁹ Payne 2003 page 9

²²⁰ Payne 2003 page 2

²²¹ SLSS 2004 page 2

²²² Payne 2003 page 2

²²³ Payne 2003 page 28

²²⁴ Payne 2003 page 5

²²⁵ Foskett et al 2004 page 1

²²⁶ Foskett et al 2004 page 1

²²⁷ LSDA Review Team 2004 page 6

designed to “reclaim” those who have become completely disengaged’. They summarised these in three categories as:

- preventative
- mainstream and
- reclaimed disengaged²²⁸

87. This study has found these categories a useful way to attempt to categorise the various different types of interventions in use in education and has adopted it in this section, which summarises some of the main ways in which disengagement can be addressed. If this table is useful, it could be built upon by including more detailed information from other studies, so that a complete picture of both features of successful schemes and the schemes themselves could be included.

²²⁸ Kendall et al 2001 page 8

Typology of learners and interventions

Features of provision to address the needs of disengaged learners			
	Features of schemes Preventative	Features of schemes Mainstream	Features of schemes Reclaimed disengaged
	<p>Preventative measures tend to apply across the school/institution and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> inclusive ethos develop appropriate curricula high teacher expectations monitor attendance and behaviour advice and support available encourage aspirations 	<p>Mainstream provision to support those who are disengaging. General activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent exclusion raise pupil self esteem encourage identification with school raise teacher expectations challenge bad behaviour and assist learners to modify behaviour develop strengths, tackle weaknesses overcome specific learning problems raise awareness of progression routes 	<p>Support to prevent extreme consequences of disengagement</p> <p>Provide means to focus on positive aspects of learners' lives 'hook them in' so they can make effective transition equip with social and life skills, job and employment skills raise self-esteem and confidence</p>
Group A: primary school, S1 and S2 pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mentoring schemes taster, links and awareness schemes to inform S1-S6 buddy systems after school clubs to address specific learning needs e.g. reading deployment of role models from work and education 		

<p>Group B: age 14-16 disengaged and achieving at or above potential</p>	<p>mentoring schemes</p> <p>taster and awareness schemes to increase aspirations</p> <p>deployment of role models from work and education</p>	<p>curriculum relevance</p>	
<p>Group C: age 14-16 disengaged learners with 1-4 GCSEs at A*-C</p> <p>'there is something of a magic bullet for this group'²²⁹</p>		<p>assistance with accessing the curriculum</p> <p>curriculum changes – more and better vocational subjects</p> <p>set demanding levels</p> <p>address specific learning needs</p> <p>promote idea of lifelong learning</p> <p>encourage strengths</p> <p>in-depth progression advice embedded in curriculum</p>	
<p>Group D: age 14-16 'disaffected but in touch' group</p> <p>'no obvious solution for this group'²³⁰</p>	<p>support underachievers</p>	<p>mainstream curriculum remains important</p> <p>traditional styles of learning may not suit – respond better to supportive style with safety nets</p> <p>relate academic subjects to real life</p>	<p>element of alternative provision</p> <p>placements in external setting e.g. workplace, college or leisure setting (e.g. football club, theatre)</p> <p>enable positive experiences of learning</p>

²²⁹ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 24

²³⁰ Steedman and Stoney 2003 page 24

<p>Group E: age 14-16 the very small group who lose touch with school</p> <p>Raising of self esteem and confidence are 'essential prerequisites' for this group²³¹</p>			<p>alternative provision</p> <p>'fresh start' often in a vocational setting</p> <p>external (to school) input</p> <p>post-16 learning styles</p> <p>tailored and flexible schemes which can adapt to changing needs of individuals</p> <p>one to one contact</p> <p>'respect'</p> <p>'achievement' facilitated and accredited</p> <p>regular feedback and encouragement</p> <p>develop and inspire realistic aspirations and progression routes</p> <p>develop self-awareness, self esteem and confidence</p> <p>address basic skills needs</p>
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²³¹ Kendall et al page 11

<p>Group F: those who participate post-16</p>	<p>early advice and guidance and induction where appropriate</p> <p>raise awareness of the world of work</p> <p>advice and support to parents in helping them help their children make choices</p> <p>combat misinformation and provide information on the spectrum of opportunities available</p> <p>raise aspirations and awareness of educational opportunities</p> <p>outreach activities by colleges and higher education institutions</p> <p>mechanisms for identifying and dealing with 'at risk' students</p> <p>prompt attention to non-attenders</p>	<p>transparent routes and bridges to further learning</p> <p>relevant (often vocational) curricula</p> <p>two-year courses post-16</p>	
<p>Group G: those who do not participate in post-compulsory education at all</p>			<p>better information linking learning to vocational success</p> <p>guidance on how to go about it</p> <p>transparent routes back to education</p>

Part 5: Conclusions

Conclusions

88. Flowing from the discussion of the literature on disengagement, a number of overarching conclusions can be drawn which can be used to guide and underpin any practical action or interventions.

The literature suggests that:

- Disengagement takes many forms from mild dislike of school to non-attendance/participation, suggesting that a range of strategies need to be devised to combat it;
- There is evidence that if disengagement is defined broadly then far more than a particularly problematic minority are affected by it;
- Disengagement can affect pupils who are achieving as well as those who are not, suggesting identification of disengaged pupils and those at risk of becoming disengaged should be broadly conceived;
- Disengagement is cumulative, suggesting that strategies to identify it and prevent it taking hold might be useful;
- There are a number of key transition points where disengagement might take place but although some of these can be conceived as 'break points', disengagement is also a process which occurs throughout schooling and which often influences the decisions taken at the key transition points;
- Post-16 transition break points are particularly important and those who study a one-year course post 16 are less likely to participate in the following year than those on a two-year course. This suggests that clearer links, bridges and progression points between courses at this stage might improve participation rates;
- Many pupils start to form dispositions about post-16 choices from primary school, so intervention to prevent disengagement and keep options open needs to start in primary schools;
- Disengagement is often the product of a combination of factors, which suggests that multi-faceted approaches need to be taken to combat it;
- The traditional school environment is clearly not conducive to participation and engagement by many pupils. For some, college regimes are a better solution;
- College curricula are also often seen as more appropriate than school curricula;

- Involving disengaged young people with extra-curricular activities that are of interest to them can keep them in school and improve the esteem in which they hold the school;
- There is a slight indication from the evidence that whereas college is seen by disengaged school pupils as a more attractive option, university would be 'more school'. This suggests that the college route to higher education is a particularly important one for certain groups of learners;
- The UK has a stronger culture than many other countries of attracting unqualified young people into work, so strategies to ensure they keep learning whilst in work might be as important and appropriate as strategies to keep them in full-time education;
- Social class is still, in 2004, a key determinant of likely attainment, dispositions and choices;
- Family is the main and most trusted source of advice on education choices. Family expectations probably set the parameters within which young people take decisions but peers may have an influence over the longer term on general attitudes. This suggests that influencing families could be crucial to assisting with participation and engagement;
- School is an important source of advice for pupils from lower socio-economic groups;
- Parents from all social classes regard education as important but those from higher socio-economic groups are able to provide more support. Given the importance of family advice, strategies to help parents from the lower socio-economic groups support their children in taking decisions about participation might be useful;
- There is evidence that many school pupils reject the idea of higher education, particularly at university, because they believe they are not clever enough;
- Higher education, particularly university, is viewed by many pupils and their parents as 'expensive', those who think of it as a worthwhile investment are more likely to be from higher socio-economic groups and those who are more sceptical are more likely to be from lower socio-economic groups;
- A sense of achievement is important to securing engagement with the learning process. It is a virtuous cycle, if it can be started and maintained and can be a vicious cycle if not.

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