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## Barriers to participation in education and training

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### Background

This study explores the barriers and constraints young people currently face when deciding what to do at the end of their compulsory schooling in Year 11. The study conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), working in partnership with Triangle and QA Research, included a survey of **2029 young people** who completed Year 11 in either 2008 or 2009 conducted between August and October 2009. This survey was supplemented by interviews with booster samples of **519 young people** across specific sub-groups and **102 parent interviews**.

### Key findings

- The study shows that the majority of young people completing Year 11 (86 per cent) do not experience any barriers that stop them from participating in their choice of learning post-16
- However, a notable minority of young people (14 per cent) are prevented from doing what they want to do, while 63 per cent report experiencing at least one barrier or constraint
- The main barriers and constraints experienced by young people relate to finance, transport, availability of provision and their knowledge and awareness of the post-16 options available to them
- Young people who live in rural areas have significantly increased odds of experiencing transport as a barrier or constraint than similar young people who do not live in rural areas
- Finance is significantly more likely to be experienced as a barrier or constraint by young people who are NEET, those in JWT and teenage parents
- The study suggests that there is an issue around the amount and nature of IAG available to some young people. A substantial minority of young people, particularly those with LDD, teenage parents, and young people in JWT or who are NEET feel that they have not received enough support and information, and do not feel prepared for their future when completing Year 11.

## **Aims and objectives**

The main aim of this study was to explore the relative impacts of the barriers and constraints young people currently face when deciding what to do at the end of their compulsory schooling in Year 11. There were several objectives underlying this main aim of the study. The main ones included exploring:

- the extent to which young people face multiple barriers and constraints and how these interact and influence their post-16 choices – barriers include problems which stop young people pursuing a particular option or route, while constraints do not stop them from doing what they want to do but are problems that they have to overcome
- the extent to which it is possible to distinguish barriers and constraints reported by young people depending on geographical location, in particular in relation to urban and rural areas
- the particular impacts of transport- and finance-related barriers on young people's choices
- the experiences of young people aged 16-25 with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) in relation to choosing and accessing different learning options in their area
- the adequacy of Care To Learn payments to enable teenage parents to participate in learning, especially in high childcare cost areas
- what support and other strategies are needed to help overcome barriers and constraints faced by different groups of young people to help them all engage in education or training until they reach the age of 18.

## **Summary of research methods**

In order to address the main aims and objective outlined above, a survey was conducted including a representative sample of 2029 young people, who were chosen to be representative of young people aged 16 and 17 in terms of their gender and attainment, of incidence of LDD and destination in the September after leaving Year 11. This was supplemented by a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews with 303 young people with LDD aged 16-25, 102 parents of young people with LDD, 65 young people in a job without training (JWT) aged 16 or 17, 75 young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) aged 16 or 17 and 76 teenage parents aged 16-18. This was supplemented by an analysis of the adequacy of the Care to Learn allowance for young parents to access a range of post-16 options.

## **How well are young people prepared to make the transition at 16?**

Although most young people find the decision about what to do after Year 11 easy and most are satisfied with what they have done post-16, almost a fifth of young people find the decision-making process difficult and seven per cent end up dissatisfied with the choice they make. In addition, almost a quarter of young people participating in education or training post-16 say that they would have done something different if they had been aware of all of the courses they could have done.

The study suggests that there is an issue around the amount and nature of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) available to some young people. A substantial minority of young people, particularly those with LDD, teenage parents, and young people in JWT or who were NEET feel that they have not received enough support and information, and do not feel prepared for their future. There also appears to be a core group of young people who, when leaving school, feel undecided about what to do, and it is important that they are provided with IAG which is presented in engaging and accessible forms to aid a real understanding of the opportunities available to them.

## What are the main barriers or constraints experienced by young people?

Even though the majority of young people (86 per cent) do not face any **barriers that stop them** from doing what they want to do at the end of Year 11, there are a notable proportion of young people (14 per cent) who do face such barriers. Furthermore, some of these barriers are particularly acute in relation to particular sub-groups of young people, including teenage parents, young people with LDD, and those who are NEET or in JWT. Many young people in these groups report that lack of availability and awareness of courses they want to do when completing Year 11 stops them from doing what they want to do. Young people in JWT in particular and others also frequently cite financial barriers as reasons for not participating or not doing what they want to do post-16.

Otherwise, a large proportion of young people (63 per cent) face one or more **constraints** at the end of Year 11, but for most these constraints do not become barriers that stop them from doing what they want to do.

## To what extent is transport a barrier or constraint for young people?

Overall, very few people report that **the availability** of transport is a barrier that stops them from doing what they want to do after Year 11. This includes most young people who are NEET or in JWT who rarely identify this as a barrier. Instead, young people are more likely to identify **the cost** of transport as a barrier or constraint on their choices. Indeed, around a third of young people who are NEET or in JWT after completing Year 11 think that they would have chosen to participate in education or training if they had received more money to cover the cost of transport.

Young people living in rural areas and those who rate the public transport facilities in their areas as 'bad' or 'very bad' are significantly more likely to report transport as a barrier or constraint than other young people. This suggests that transport initiatives need to identify areas with limited existing transport facilities, including rural areas, to enable all young people to access the post-16 learning of their choice.

Interviews with young people also revealed that a sizeable proportion find it difficult to work out the times of buses and trains. This is particularly the case for young people with LDD, who are less likely to say than young people overall that they feel confident and safe using public transport and working out the times of buses and trains. Furthermore, only 17 per cent of those aged 16-17 with LDD and 38 per cent of those aged 18-25 are aware of Independent Travel Training schemes in their areas which aim to overcome such issues.

## To what extent is finance a barrier or constraint for young people?

Around a quarter of young people view finance as a constraint when deciding what to do after Year 11, although it only stops a minority (four per cent) from doing what they want to do after leaving school. However, young people who are NEET, those in JWT and teenage parents have increased odds of experiencing finance as a barrier or constraint. In particular, one quarter of young people in JWT say that having to pay their parents rent is a barrier or constraint when deciding what to do post-16. Furthermore, around a third of young people who do not participate in learning after leaving school think that they would have done some education or training if they had received more financial support. Otherwise, finance is more likely to be experienced as a barrier or constraint when deciding what to do by those who feel it is important to earn money straight away and those who subsequently receive or apply for an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) or hardship funding.

However, only 12 per cent of young people overall receiving an EMA believe that they would not have participated in the courses they are doing if they had not received an EMA. This contrasts with much higher proportions of young people with LDD who say that they would not have participated in learning without this support. Together these findings suggest the need for financial support to be increasingly targeted at those most at need.

## **What are the relative factors that encourage or discourage young people from participating in learning?**

While the majority of young people are motivated by future progression and, therefore, choose to stay in education or training, there is a minority of young people who do not. These young people are less motivated by qualifications and more by immediate financial gain. This appears to be the case particularly among young people who are NEET or in JWT. Young people with a good knowledge of Apprenticeships were also significantly more likely not to participate than young people with lower awareness. This seems to confirm the findings of other research that some young people who cannot access an Apprenticeship choose JWT or become NEET instead.

Teenage parents are more likely to experience finance as a barrier or constraint than other young people and many of them believe that they would participate in education or training if they received more financial support. However, many of them are not well informed about the financial support available to them, including Care to Learn and EMA. Even though other research (Vaid *et al.*, 2009) found that 92 per cent of learners in receipt of Care to Learn said that it was easy to find out about this funding, two-fifths of the 86 teenage parents interviewed as part of this study were not aware of Care to Learn. This is particularly an issue given the fact that the analysis of the funding provided by Care to Learn conducted as part of this study revealed that it is sufficient to cover additional childcare or transport costs incurred by teenage parents to access most types of post-16 courses. However, some teenage parents do not consider re-engaging in education or training at all as they prefer to stay at home and care for their children instead, although those aged 16 will be required to participate once the participation age is raised to 17 in 2013.

Otherwise, many young people who do not participate in learning after Year 11 believe that increased awareness of the options available to them would have encouraged them to engage in education or training when leaving school. However, it is important to ensure that young people are not given too much information, because, as the study suggests, young people who consider many different options are actually less likely to participate in education or training.

## **What are the policy implications of the research?**

Specific policy recommendations relating to the support and other strategies needed to help overcome barriers and constraints faced by different groups of young people in order to help them all engage in education or training until they reach the age of 18 are provided below.

### **Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)**

The study shows that there is scope to further improve IAG for all young people, but in particular for young people with LDD, teenage parents and those who are NEET or in JWT. Furthermore, the IAG needs to be presented in engaging and accessible forms to aid young people's real understanding of the opportunities available to them. This needs to be accompanied by personal support to ensure young people receive the advice and support suitable to their particular needs, interests and circumstances.

### **Financial support**

It is important to ensure that all young people are aware of the financial support available to them in order to minimise any constraints on their choices of what to do post-16. In particular, it is important to ensure that information and financial support is targeted at vulnerable groups of young people, including teenage parents and those who are NEET or in JWT, who are more likely to identify financial issues as a reason for not engaging in learning.

The study showed that there was limited awareness of Care to Learn among teenage parents, which analysis revealed covers the additional transport and childcare costs needed to enable participating in most courses and for young people in most areas of the country. This suggests a need for additional or more targeted marketing strategies aimed at raising teenage parents' awareness of Care to Learn funding and increasing the maximum amount paid in specific areas to enable and encourage more teenage parents to access learning.

## **Transport**

It appears that strategies to ensure the availability of a transport infrastructure that enables young people to participate in learning should examine closely the availability of transport in rural areas in particular as there appears to be a greater level of need in such areas.

The study also suggested that strategies should be targeted at young people who feel less at ease with using public transport, in particular young people with LDD. This should include encouraging all local authorities to provide, and raise the awareness among young people of the availability of, Independent Travel Training schemes in their areas.

Financial support to cover the cost of transport needs to be targeted at those young people most in need, including those in rural areas and young people who choose a job without training due to financial considerations.

### **Additional Information**

The full report can be accessed at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/)  
Further information about this research can be obtained from  
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