Progression to Post-16 Education and Training in Hastings

Communities and Widening Participation Research

With support and funding

from HEFCE

Andrew Church

Yvonne Hillier

Suzanne Hyde

Carol Robinson

Judith Watson

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University of Brighton

Acknowledgements

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Section One

Executive summary

1.1   Introduction

This research is one of a series of Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded projects examining local factors affecting participation in higher education (HE) in five areas of England: Barking and Dagenham, North East Cambridgeshire, Hastings, Leeds and Salford. These projects follow on from previous research conducted in four urban cities in 2007, namely Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham and Sheffield. All projects will contribute to HEFCE's aim to facilitate the longer term HE engagement in low participation neighbourhoods and to develop transferable models of practice.

The research is part of an ongoing commitment by the University of Brighton to widening participation (WP) in Hastings. It employed a multi method approach using survey, interview and focus group tools, alongside documentary analysis and desk survey. The research team has been involved in additional projects commissioned by the Ore Valley Forum and contributes to the Coastal Regeneration Research Centre (CRRC) based at University Centre Hastings. The research was designed to take account of the very significant educational regeneration context which underpins major systemic change in education occurring in the region. This involves the development of a new HE institution, University Centre Hastings (UCH), a range of Aimhigher initiatives, a new further education (FE) college building and the proposed creation of two school academies that are linked to a wider programme of urban regeneration.

The research team was keen not only to meet the outcomes set out by HEFCE but also for the project to be the start of a programme of research that would provide longer term findings on attitudes held by young people. It is hoped that evidence will inform sustainable development and engagement in education across all communities and ages on an on-going basis. The project was also designed to be co-ordinated with other projects being undertaken in Hastings, including an examination of low pupil achievement in Ore Valley, Hastings, and an evaluation of WP initiatives that involved students at Brighton, Chichester and Sussex Universities, including students from UCH.

1.2   Context

This research examines the progression of young people to post-16 provision in Hastings. We asked two questions:

> What is the impact – if any – of educational interventions on individual decisions at 16?

Can widening participation (WP) interventions in education contribute to 'education led' regeneration?

The focus of the research was to examine the experiences of one cohort of young people as they undertook their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations and progressed to further learning and training over an eight month period from April to November 2009.

Hastings is a historic town and a Victorian seaside resort with a population of just over 80,000. The unemployment rate is 23.1 per cent. In 2008, East Sussex was at the bottom of the national league tables for secondary education and three of Hastings' secondary schools were below the government's threshold of 30 per cent of students gaining five or more A*-C grades including English and mathematics. All five secondary schools in Hastings now have attainment levels above this threshold. The county council appointed Ninestiles Plus (2008-2011) to lead radical changes in three secondary schools – Filsham Valley, Hillcrest and The Grove. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is proposing to close these schools in 2011 and, subject to government approval, to replace them with two academies which will be built on the Hillcrest site in the east of the town and the Filsham Valley site in the west. The academies will be sponsored by University of Brighton, British Telecom (BT) and East Sussex County Council. The eastern academy will have 900 places and specialise in English and information communications technology (ICT). The western academy will have 1500 places and specialise in Mathematics and ICT.

Data from Super Output Areas (SOAs) provides a clear picture of multiple deprivation in Hastings. 23.1 per cent of the working population was in receipt of key benefits in May 2009. In May 2007 there were 1585 young people aged 16-24 in receipt of welfare benefits. In December 2007 there were 349 NEETs (not in employment, education or training) – 12.3 per cent of the 16-18 year old population, compared with an East Sussex average of 8 per cent. In 2005 only 44 per cent of the 1083 eligible students in Hastings achieved five or more GCSEs at A*-C including English and Mathematics. 22 per cent of students have no post-16 education. Data from a local social housing provider shows that of the 280 properties let during 2007only 9.3 per cent of heads of household worked full-time and 77.5 per cent of tenants and their partners derived all their income from welfare benefits. Ore Valley has one of the highest claimant counts with 810 in two SOAs. However central Hastings has an SOA with 395 claimants and which is in the worst 5 per cent in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2007) for employment in the country. The gap between Hastings and county/national attainment levels has widened since 2003. Nationally the trend is for more people to gain qualifications but in Hastings this level is decreasing. People with no qualifications are almost five times more likely to be economically inactive than people with Level 4 or above. For example, work done in Hollington showed that 35 per cent of residents have low literacy levels and 40 per cent have difficulties with basic numeracy. East Sussex is the most deprived county in the South East. When gross domestic product (GDP) per head is calculated, East Sussex is the fourth lowest in the country, beneath Liverpool, Newcastle and Glasgow.

1.3   Educational interventions

UCH was the first university centre to be created in the UK. It opened in September 2003, with just 40 students, five staff and three courses. Since then, it has grown in both size and reputation. Courses are offered by University of Brighton, University of Sussex and University of Christchurch, Canterbury. Today, it has more than 500 students and over 50 staff and offers 26 courses in nine areas: Sociology / Applied Social Science, English and Writing, Business and Management, Environmental Biology, Community History, Media, Computing, Sport and Education.

Aimhigher has played a key role in educational regeneration activities in Hastings. Since it began in 2005 it has provided a wide range of activities, including taster sessions for a range of subject specialisms at UCH. In 2009, Aimhigher activities based in schools focused on GCSE revision for English and Mathematics across all the Hastings schools.

Post-16 education is provided by Sussex Coast College Hastings (SCCH), formerly Hastings College of Arts and Technology, a general FE college. In nearby Bexhill there is Bexhill College, a sixth-form college. The BEST programme (Building Engagement, Support and Trust), an Area Based Grant project, is delivered by a group of 30 providers offering first step learning through to Level 2 programmes. Referrals are from Job Centre Plus, individuals and word of mouth. The group is led and co-ordinated by SCCH, which holds the contract from Hastings Borough Council. The programme benefits from the Skills Escalator, which, with SeaSpace funding, was developed by SCCH to offer learners and counsellors an overview of programmes and levels against vocational, occupational and academic pathways. UCH is a supporter of the programme and discusses progress with students.

Adults have been encouraged to participate in further learning through the Horizons Community Learning Project, based in St. Leonards, which has a successful track record in enabling learners to gain qualifications including GCSE in English and Mathematics. The Horizons Project provides family learning, encouraging parents to engage in learning through focusing on their children.

There are ten Children's Centres in Hastings which provide educational courses for parents with children under five years old. There are employment training providers funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and learndirect, along with a number of trusts and charities which work with specific groups such as disabled adults and children whose use of computers and the internet requires adaptation, as well as provision for literacy, numeracy and curriculum vitae writing for adults seeking employment.

The University of Brighton's Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) is very active in Hastings, providing a range of knowledge exchange and community research programmes. The Ore Valley Research Programme is one of these activities; another of the CUPP programmes, led by Professor Angie Hart, works with young children and families through its focus on resilience.

At secondary level, the main thrust of educational intervention has arisen from the Excellence Cluster and the Challenge Schools. There are five maintained schools in Hastings, of which three are mixed community comprehensive schools, one a girls' community comprehensive and one a boys' voluntary aided comprehensive. Following long-term concerns about achievement, the county council appointed Ninestiles Plus to lead radical changes in three secondary schools – Filsham Valley, Hillcrest and The Grove between 2008 and 2011. The project commenced in March 2008 and comprised a Preparation and Initiation phase (April - August 2008), a Developmental phase (September 2008 - August 2009), a Progress Towards Excellence phase (September 2009 - December 2010) and a Transition Phase (January - August 2010).

The key action has focused on eight strands: structures, management, student behaviour, curriculum, teaching and learning, ICT, community and parental involvement, and finance. Specific activities have included reducing staff turnover, management support through the creation of Director of Improvement roles, addressing student behaviour and attitudes, the introduction of an 'age not stage' curriculum in Year 8 and Year 9, introducing a common lesson planning template, introducing the specific use of ICT and sending out regular newsletters to parents. There is a Student Adviser (Excellence Cluster post) operating in the two single sex schools with a Federal Sixth Form, to support the most vulnerable sixth form students by advising on application, finance and support applications.

We suggest that all these intervention activities, although primarily educationally focused, are in themselves WP activities, particularly in light of the acknowledgement by Lord Mandelson of the need to strengthen the 'pipeline that helps young people and adults gain skills and qualifications at every level' (Mandelson, 2009:9). The diversity of these interventions provides a complex picture within which individuals navigate their way through a maze of learning opportunities and where providers attempt to encourage participation.

1.4   *Hastings school performance*

Compared with previous years young people in Hastings achieved a much higher level of GCSEs in 2008/2009, although indications of achievement for younger cohorts suggest that much is still to be done to raise the levels of learning across all age groups.

Staff who were interviewed at one of the schools participating in the research (School D) and the local college were aware of the need to devote resources to enabling young people to achieve qualifications. A number of strategies were in place including academic intervention, such as assertive mentoring, individual interviews with senior management staff, including the head teacher, activities designed to provide a positive environment, such as the Year 11 Café, and the appointment of a range of pupils as senior students who could act as role models for their peers. The staff 'constantly nurture, cajole and fix'.

1.5 College provision

College staff have been involved in a dedicated enrolment and induction process with dedicated time set aside to undertake initial diagnostic assessment of all learners' capabilities in English and Mathematics, as well as a four- week 'Right Choice' programme, which not only specifies clearly expectations upon the learners but also provides opportunities for changes in programmes to occur. The goal of the programme is to 'enable as many young people as possible to be on the right pathway at the right level'.

1.6 Parental support

Focus group interviews with parents indicate that parents want what is best for their children and are willing to support them whether they choose to go to college and on to university or straight into work. They understand how important education is but are also aware of the economic climate and do not want their children to make decisions now that will negatively influence their chances of gaining employment later. Parents are aware of the efforts made by their school to keep them informed of their children's progress and are aware of their children's predicted grades. They are also aware of some of the strategies that have been employed by their school including the assertive mentoring which they believe has been an important factor in the anticipated success of their children. They expect to be able to follow a similar level of connection to the local college but are also aware of the influence of peers on their children's decision making.

1.7 Learner experiences

Half of the Year 11 students in Hastings who responded to our survey said that no-one at all in their family had been to university and 86 per cent said that neither of their parents had been to university. There were some differences between the five schools in the family experience of HE. The proportion reporting that no family member went to university varied from 38.1 per cent in School E to 64.3 per cent in School B. School D has an average (for Hastings) proportion of young people whose parents went to university, combined with a particularly high number who had people in the extended family going to university. No family experience of HE was more common in two-parent families than one-parent families. Children of one-parent families were more likely to have a part-time job (31.6 per cent compared with 12.5 per cent of those with two parents).

The proportion across all the schools predicting for themselves grades at the benchmark of five A*-C or better was two-thirds (67.8 per cent). Students at School A, School C and School D underestimated their achievements while those at School E slightly overestimated them. Girls predicted fewer good GCSE results than boys, which is of course counter to actual national results.

The improvements in attainment rates in 2008/9 were large, but all schools apart from School C scored worse than either the East Sussex or England averages on the measure of five grade A*-C including English and Mathematics.

88 per cent of those responding to the question planned to stay on in full-time education, either in the sixth form or at college. Cross-tabulations of these destinations with the qualifications young people intended to take showed that the majority of young people intended to follow Level 3 qualifications either at SCCH or in the school sixth form (if their school had one). There were interesting differences between males and females and also across the pattern of anticipated GCSE results and intended qualifications. 45 per cent of females and 45.3 per cent of males intended to study A levels only. 23.1 per cent of females anticipated studying Level 2 qualifications, compared with 15.1 per cent of males. On average, young women were aiming for lower level vocational qualifications than young men.

We have derived three main groups of expectation:

- Gold expectation: A levels or International Baccalaureate only. Girls and boys. 175 respondents of which 75 per cent expect to study in school sixth form or 'other college' (probably sixth form college)
- Silver expectation: Advanced Diploma, BTEC National Diploma or National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3, alone or combined with A levels. More boys than girls. 101 respondents, of which 51 per cent expect to be in school or 'other' college
- Bronze expectation: All other, including Level 2, Level 1 and 'other' level qualifications. More girls than boys. 98 respondents of which 17 per cent expect to be in school or 'other' college

More than half the sample had a positive intention to go to university and there is a correlation, although not an exact match, with the Gold, Silver and Bronze expectations identified for 16-19 intentions.

We have a picture of young people who, to a large extent, reflect the national trend of being more likely to say they are going to HE if they have good GCSE results and have parents who have experienced university. We captured a raised school achievement rate in the area, which is already being translated into greater 16-19 participation. Young people see qualifications as an investment and are not likely to be put off aspiring to university by parents or teachers, although they usually come from families with little or no experience of HE and most had not visited a university. They have space at home to study, but they are afraid of debt – this is reflected in statements made by college students – and are probably not yet saving for their future.

Focus groups with young learners in Year 10 who were poor attenders provided evidence that they were heavily influenced by their peers, did not enjoy school unless subjects gave them a level of autonomy, were unlikely to identify any benefit from information, advice and guidance (IAG) and were unsure about where to progress. They remain one of the most challenging groups of learners that schools and colleges work with.

College learners had mixed experiences of school but the majority were less positive about their experiences. Bullying was a strong factor in negative school experiences. Learners from the 2009 cohort were very pleased with their results either because they were 'OK' for the amount of work they had done at school or they had achieved beyond their expectations. Learners were aware of differences between the general FE college, the sixth form college and sixth forms in school. One learner had visited the sixth form college but felt it was 'too posh' and another 'couldn't get in'. Learners noted how the FE college was prepared to give them a chance even though they had no qualifications.

Overall, learners were very positive about the college ethos and their views align with those of the college staff. Their comments all note the way in which they feel treated like adults. Not all learners were aware of the 'Right Choice' programme once at the college, particularly those studying for A levels, but they were aware of the opportunities to discuss their progress and obtain information from college staff.

There was interest in university across the range of programmes being studied but also a wariness of being in debt and whether it was the appropriate thing to do. Few learners had experienced Aimhigher and those who did remembered this in relation to using laptops or being given a free pen, although the actual influence of Aimhigher is difficult to assess from their comments.

Learners were aware of the economic situation in Hastings and suggested the need for more investment in business as well as acknowledging how hard it is to gain employment.

1.8 NEET young people

Despite the evolving success of the current cohort, there are still too many young people who have not benefitted from their school careers and experiences. The high number of NEET young people (10.4 per cent in 2008/2009) provides a stark warning to any complacency amongst policy makers. Our research has shown that young people who are NEET have chaotic experiences of learning with a high proportion noting the bullying they have suffered. Financial barriers are still paramount for participation in education and training for young people, not just for those who are in the NEET category, but for those who are contemplating study at HE level.

1.9 A developing community

Providers in Hastings have become a community which shares goals with the 'agenda shapers' in the town. There is a strong sense that providers are now more purposeful and working more coherently, although there is awareness that far more needs to be done to prevent activities being undertaken in isolation. The work of the Excellence Cluster is key to the future success of educational regeneration along with the Ore Valley Forum and other community groups. Their work is represented by a number of individuals who participate in decision making activities within ESCC.

1.10   Educational interventions for educational regeneration

The research has not been able to specifically attribute the growing levels of attainment in Hastings to any one educational intervention or activity. However, it has shown that after a series of related interventions, attainment has in fact risen. It is important to take the opportunity to follow individual cohorts and their families using a longitudinal research programme to help tease out the sustainable outcomes being achieved. The Coastal Regeneration Research Centre (CRRC) based at UCH has developed a research strategy to incorporate a number of research strands amongst which educational regeneration is paramount.

1.11   Recommendations

The current level of intervention at school and college is an important factor in recent success and resources need to be identified to continue this level of educational regeneration. One-to-one contact appears to be particularly necessary for young people who are more vulnerable to dropping out of education and training.

The work of the Learning & Skills Partnership and the Ore Valley Forum shows that it is possible for practitioners from a range of provision to come together to work for coherent and consistent achievement. This partnership also needs fostering and requires political will both to support it and to engage with it.

The experiences of the current cohort studied and subsequent cohorts need to be examined so that the effect of success can be traced as it reaches into extended families and peer groups. A qualitative methodology can aid in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the residents of Hastings. It *has* been possible to change the aspirations and achievements of a group of young people and the lessons learnt from such a change in their fortunes must be captured to help future generations benefit.

We suggest some practical actions which could be implemented locally through partnerships:

- college staff should visit schools regularly and meet young people early on in their schooling

- university staff should visit schools and colleges and engage young people in activities that provide a taster of university-level learning. This should be done across the attainment range and will be of benefit to those who do not immediately envisage progression to university but who may progress through a vocational HE route at a later stage. All school pupils should visit at least one college and one university site

- a 'drip feed' approach to reluctant learners with careful follow up and one-to-one support would facilitate the movement of young people vulnerable to non-participation into provision

- schools and colleges should keep further progression in view when giving advice and guidance, particularly for learners who choose a vocational path that may eventually lead to HE learning

- young people should be encouraged to act as advocates for further study, particularly as the members of this successful cohort move through their post-compulsory learning careers

- support to this cohort should be extended into their first stages of university study to improve the experience of progression to HE and minimise drop-out

- even after graduation, support will be needed to enable learners to develop their careers to the benefit of the local economy

- an envisioning project should be undertaken, involving learners in schools, colleges and HE in order to involve all these learners in debate about the future of Hastings as a town and to ensure that they can contribute to its prosperity.

Section Two

2.1 Introduction

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) provided funding to undertake research that worked towards two outcomes:

- to provide all parties with a better understanding of the social, economic and cultural factors that might lie behind the low participation rates in each community in order to establish what might be done to improve them

- a commitment to future action by the institutions informed by the research to embed strategic Widening Participation (WP) developments across the areas

The research conducted by the University of Brighton was one of five projects undertaken in low-participation neighbourhoods. We chose to look at Hastings and its immediate area, since this is a deprived coastal community with long-term low levels of participation in higher education (HE). Our findings from Hastings may be transferable to other coastal communities in Britain. We also chose to focus on transition at 16 from school to post-compulsory education and training. In Hastings there are three mixed community 11-16 comprehensive schools and two single sex community comprehensive schools with sixth forms. Although most young people decide to stay on in education and training beyond 16, many children have to change institution to do so. We wondered whether the experience of the transition to post-16 education affected their attitudes towards participating in HE later on. Qualification rates in this part of Sussex have been low over the past years and a significant proportion of young people are not in employment, education or training (NEET). In 2007, 349 young people were in this category. This was 12.3 per cent of the population, much higher than the 8 per cent average for East Sussex, although it has improved to a figure of 10.4 per cent in 2009. The transition to post-16 is, therefore, a key moment for many pupils who must leave school and move on to further learning at a different institution.

The research was designed to take account of the very significant educational regeneration context which underpins the major systemic change in education occurring in the region. This involves the development of a new HE institution, University College Hastings (UCH), a range of Aimhigher initiatives, a new further education (FE) college building and the proposed creation of two school academies that are linked to a wider programme of urban regeneration. The research team was keen not only to meet the outcomes set out by HEFCE but also for the project to be the start of a programme of research that will provide longer term findings on attitudes held by young people about: learning, Hastings, their behaviour and their local networks. It is hoped that evidence will inform sustainable development and engagement in education across all communities and ages on an on-going basis. The project was also designed to be co-ordinated with other projects being

undertaken in Hastings including an examination of low pupil achievement in the Ore Valley, Hastings and an evaluation of WP initiatives that will involve students at Brighton, Chichester and Sussex Universities, including students at UCH.

2.1.1 Economic and social indicators

Hastings grew up as a historic town, site of the Battle of Hastings, a Cinque Port, a fishing port and a seaside resort. The population grew very rapidly between the 1840s and 1860s to 60,000, and grew again from the 1960s to the present population of over 80,000 (Vision of Britain, 2010).

Even in the 1840s, the service industries accounted for half of employment in Hastings. Only 10 per cent of the population worked in agriculture, and that has fallen today to 1 per cent. Manufacturing employment has gradually declined from 30 per cent to 12 per cent. Today, the proportions of the workforce employed in each industrial group give a picture of the industries present. They are shown in Table 1, where the final column shows the location quotient (LQ), an index that shows whether an industry is over-represented or under-represented in comparison with the national pattern.

Table 1: Industries of the working population

Industry	Proportion of workforce (Hastings) A	Proportion of workforce (England) B	A/B (LQ)
All People	100.00%	100.00%	1.00
Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry	1.00%	1.45%	0.69
Fishing	0.11%	0.02%	4.57
Mining & Quarrying	0.07%	0.25%	0.28
Manufacture	11.88%	14.83%	0.80
Electricity, Gas and Water Supply	0.58%	0.71%	0.82
Construction	8.98%	6.76%	1.33
Wholesale and Retail trade, Repair of Motor Vehicle	17.42%	16.85%	1.03
Hotels and Restaurants	4.86%	4.73%	1.03
Transport, Storage and Communication	6.09%	7.09%	0.86
Financial Intermediation	3.68%	4.80%	0.77
Real Estate, Renting and Business Activities	9.56%	13.21%	0.72
Public Administration & Defence, Social Security	7.07%	5.66%	1.25
Education	7.53%	7.74%	0.97
Health and Social Work	16.24%	10.70%	1.52
Other	4.92%	5.20%	0.95

Source: 2001 Census of Population. ONS Crown Copyright Reserved (from Nomisweb).

By the turn of the millennium, only 0.1 per cent of the Hastings workforce was employed in fishing, although that was a much higher proportion than in England as a whole. Above-average proportions worked in health and social work, in public administration, defence and social security, and construction. Only an average proportion worked in hotels and restaurants. The proportion working in manufacturing was lower than the England average but typical of the South East. The industry pattern is similar to that of an inner city, with little presence either of traditional manufacturing industry or of the newer white-collar finance and business sectors, and with a correspondingly greater importance of public sector employment.

South East England is one of the most prosperous regions in Europe, but East Sussex is the most deprived county in the region. With its coastal economy, Hastings is an island of deprivation in a region of wealth. In 2000, Hastings was ranked the 27th most deprived local authority area in England. It had improved to 31st by 2007. The particular components of the deprivation index that Hastings scores badly on are income and employment.

Indices of Deprivation 2007
Super Output Areas by National Rank of Index of Multiple Deprivation
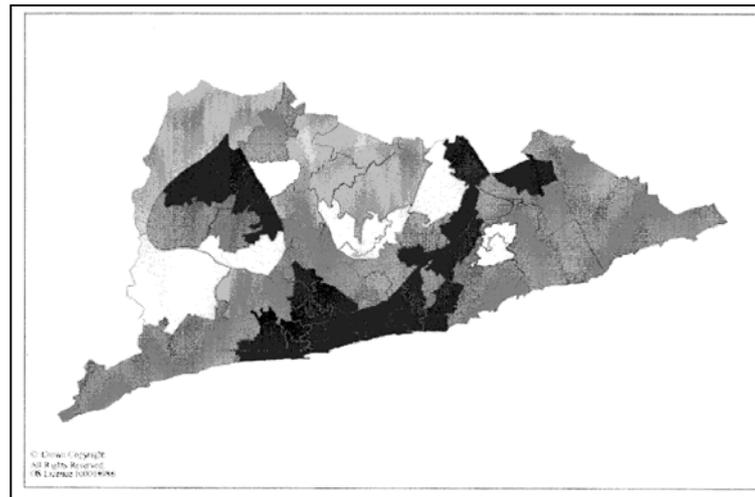
Rank of Average of SOA Scores (of 354, 1 = most deprived)	31
No of SOAs in worst 20% nationally	21

Key National Rank

■	1 - 6496
	6497 - 12992
	12993 - 19488
	19487 - 25984
	25985 - 32482

The age structure in Hastings is weighted towards young children and also to people of retirement age. The proportion in age groups up to 14 is higher than average. From 18 to 65 it is lower than average and then higher again for groups from 65 onwards (Office for National Statistics, ONS, Neighbourhood Statistics). The mortality ratio is high. As far as can be seen within broad confidence intervals, infant mortality is above the South East and England averages. For males, disability-free life expectancy at birth is three years less than in England and six years less than in the South East. For females, disability-free life expectancy at birth is two years less than in England and five years less than in the South East.

There is no local authority housing at all in Hastings but a higher than average proportion of dwellings owned by a registered social landlord. However, social

housing as a whole is lower than average and owner occupation correspondingly high. A high proportion of those requiring social housing need three or more bedrooms (they are families). Social housing tends to be concentrated in large estates and this has the effect of concentrating needy people in areas with few amenities and limited local employment opportunities. Much of the housing is in the lower council tax bands, especially when compared to the South East. The proportion of vacant dwellings (which may be seaside holiday homes) is twice the national average. It is *more* than twice the national average for owner occupied dwellings. The MOSAIC (a geodemographic database) profile of households in Hastings and Bexhill show that a high proportion of them (28.7 per cent) have strong ties to their community, as defined by having lives 'mostly played out within the confines of their local community' (Hastings and Bexhill, Towards a Creative Economy, 2009:44). Ore Valley was designated a Millennium Community in 2002: the original plan was to build 650 homes with mixed tenure (30 per cent affordable homes) the first to be available in 2005 but none has been built as yet. Data from a social housing provider in Ore Valley shows that of the 280 properties let in 2007 only 9.3 per cent of heads of household worked full-time and 77.5 per cent of tenants and their partners derived all their income from welfare benefits.

Proportionately more people in Hastings claim benefits than in England as a whole, and when compared to South East England the proportion is even higher. 23.1 per cent of the working population was in receipt of key benefits in May 2009. Twice the national proportion claim job seeker's allowance (JSA). There are more than average claiming incapacity benefit, and the same is true of lone parent benefit. Among 16-24s nearly twice the national average claim benefits. Also among people of working age and among older people the claimant rate is above average (ONS Neighbourhood Statistics). Ore Valley has one of the highest claimant counts with 810 claimants in two super output areas (SOAs).

Data at the level of SOAs can be used to pinpoint areas of particular deprivation in Hastings. These are to be found in the social housing estates on the outskirts, particularly in Ore Valley, in central Hastings where there is much private-rented accommodation, and in St, Leonards, again with private-rented accommodation. Fourteen SOAs are in the 10 per cent most deprived in England, and seven in the most deprived 5 per cent. One SOA in Baird Ward (Ore Valley) is the 207th most deprived in England, in the 1 per cent most deprived in England, and the third most deprived in the South East region, after two SOAs in Thanet.

2.1.2   Education and childhood welfare indicators

The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) for Hastings is 29.7, compared with 30.4 for Hartlepool, the most deprived authority. It has a teenage conception rate of 58.7 compared with 69.5 for Hartlepool and the much lower rate of 15.1 in Rutland, which is one of the least deprived authorities. 30 per cent of young children aged between 0 and 15 are in poverty compared with 18 per cent in East Sussex. Other factors affecting potential for success in relation to health and wellbeing underline that Hastings is an area of multiple deprivation. For example, 1.9

per cent of children in reception year are underweight, while 11.7 per cent are overweight and 8.6 per cent are obese.

The school population of East Sussex has fewer ethnic minority groups than the average for England, as can be seen from Table 2, and this is also true of Hastings.

Table 2: Proportion of ethnic minority pupils
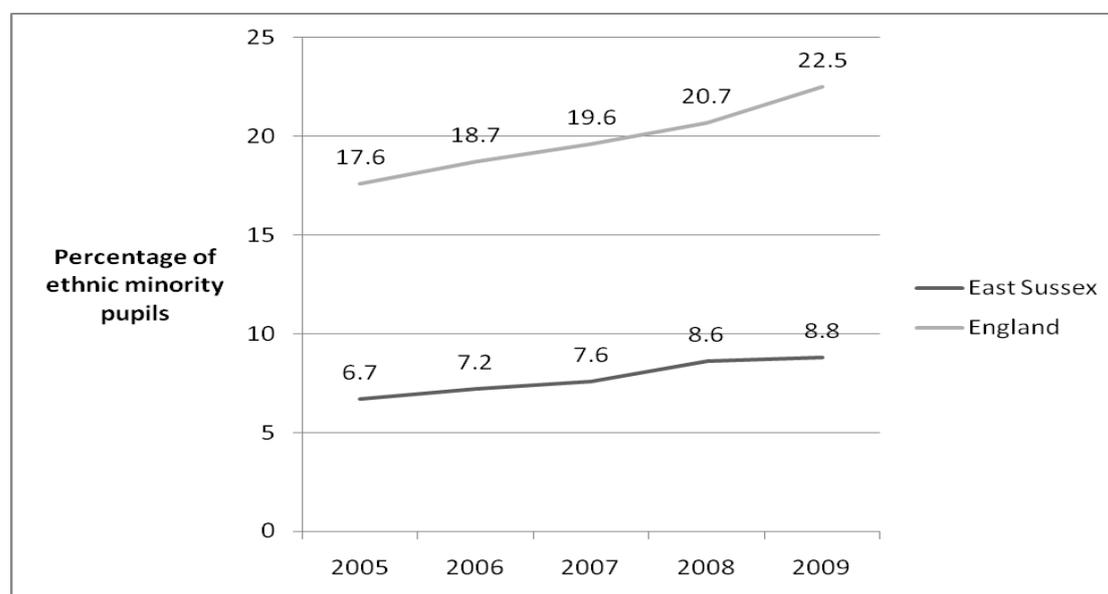
In May 2007 there were 1585 young people aged 16-24 in receipt of welfare benefits. In December 2007 there were 349 young people who were NEET, 12.3 per cent of the 16-18 year old population compared with an East Sussex average of eight per cent.

The gap between Hastings and county/national attainment levels has widened since 2003. Nationally the trend is for more people to gain qualifications but in Hastings this level is decreasing. People with no qualifications are almost five times more likely to be economically inactive than people with Level 4 or above. For example, work done in Hollington showed that 35 per cent of residents have low literacy levels and 40 per cent have difficulties with basic numeracy. Participation in HE is historically very low. The adult qualification rate was in the lowest quintile nationally in five wards of the Hastings & Rye constituency (Baird, Hollington, Ore, Tressell and Wishing Tree).

Table 3: Key figures for education & training (%)

	Hastings	South East	England
All pupils at end of KS4 achieving 5+ A*- C 2007/2008	49.1	66.1	65.6
All pupils at end of KS4 with no passes 2007/2008	3.2	1.4	1.0
Unauthorised absence in all schools 2007/2008	1.67	0.95	1.01
People aged 16-74 with no qualifications (2001)	31.7	23.9	28.8

Source: Department for Children, Schools and Families/ONS

Table 4: Young people (16-18) not in education, employment or training (NEET) East Sussex

Rank in South East	Ward	NEET as share of 16-18 population (%)
3	Sidley (Bexhill)	21.2
4	Newhaven Valley	20.5
10	Ore (Hastings)	15.8
12	Central St. Leonards	15.5
17	Hollington (Hastings)	14.8

Source: LSC

In East Sussex, all the top five wards for projected NEETs are in Hastings. Central St. Leonards is ranked seventh out of all 1499 wards in the South East. (Projections made by East Sussex County Council ESCC using Experian MOSAIC data.)

There are indications of improvement in a number of areas including school attendance. For example, in both primary and secondary schools, attendance has increased and persistent absences declined over the past five years but overall attendance is worse than in the deprived authorities that ESSC use as comparators.

There is evidence that younger children were beginning to make improvements in their learning in 2008 but recent figures now show a decline for 2009. For example, at foundation stage, the percentage scoring at least 78 points overall and 6+ in Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSE) and Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) dropped four points from 53 to 49 in the past year.

Young people in Hastings achieved a much higher level of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) achievement in 2008/2009 compared with previous years. In Table 5 below bold font indicates schools below the government threshold of 30 per cent five or more A*-C GCSEs.

Table 5: Percentage of students achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE and equivalent

% of students achieving 5+A*-C	East Sussex %	England %	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Hastings	Points difference between Hastings and LA	Points difference between Hastings & England
1999	49.6	47.9	45	39	52	42	38	43.2	-6.4	-4.7
2000	51.0	49.2	45	**25**	56	39	34	39.8	-11.2	-9.4
2001	50.3	50.0	36	30	50	31	35	36.4	-13.9	-13.6
2002	51.2	51.6	39	38	54	38	33	40.4	-10.8	-11.2
2003	52.8	52.9	39	34	57	31	54	43.0	-9.8	-9.9
2004	54.3	53.7	40	34	52	**27**	50	40.6	-13.7	-13.1
2005	54.5	56.3	34	39	54	**26**	50	40.6	-13.9	-15.7
2006	55.3	58.5	34	31	58	**25**	50	39.6	-15.7	-18.9
2007	57.8	60.9	30	37	54	**29**	47	39.4	-18.4	-21.4
2008	63.0	64.8	49	41	58	**23**	59	46	-17.0	-18.8
2009	71.8	70.0	64	80	75	76	70	73	+1.2	+3.0

Source: School and College Achievement and Attainment Tables

After many years of much lower achievement than the East Sussex or England average figures, the 2008/2009 results were above both those averages. That improvement is on the measure, traditionally the 'headline' indicator, of five or more high grade GCSEs. Deriving from the five O level measure that was used from the 1960s onwards, this indicator can be used for comparison across long periods.

However, there is another measure that is now regarded as the most important indicator of achievement in Year 11. That is the proportion achieving five A*-C grades including English and Mathematics. East Sussex's attainment level on this indicator was at the England average level in 2009, having risen from being slightly below this level in previous years. However, on this measure in 2009 Hastings schools had a lower average achievement rate (40 per cent) than all local authorities with high levels of deprivation (Hartlepool achieved 48.5 per cent).

Table 6: GCSE attainment including English and Mathematics

Percentages	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	East Sussex	England
5 A*-C including E & M 2009	34	37	63	34	37	50.7	50.7
Points increase over 2008	0	25	14	18	12	4.6	2.5

Source: School and College Achievement and Attainment Tables

As can be seen from Table 6, School C was the only one of the Hastings maintained schools that had a proportion above the East Sussex and England average. The other four schools all had levels well below the average.

Table 7: Special educational needs in Year 11

	Statements and School Action Plus	School Action	Total SEN
School A	26.9	8.6	35.5
School B	11.9	12.6	24.5
School C	1.4	9.7	11.1
School D	17.9	36.8	54.7
School E	19.8	3.6	23.4
East Sussex	13.0	10.9	23.9
England (maintained schools)	10.8	13.4	24.2

Source: School and College Achievement and Attainment Tables

In School D more than half of pupils have special educational needs, more than twice the England average. School A also has a very high proportion, while School C has less than half the England average.

As can be seen from Table 8, the GCSE points gap for children entitled to free school meals is generally high in East Sussex. Table 8 additionally shows low levels of achievement in Hastings.

Table 8: GCSE points gap, pupils entitled to free school meals 2008/2009

LPC	Pupil Count			Gap 5+ A* -C inc. English and Mathematics		
	All pupils	Non-FSM	FSM	% Non-FSM	% FSM	%FSM Gap
Hastings East	117	90	27	38.9	18.5	20.4
Hastings West	439	400	39	52.5	20.5	32.0
N St. Leonards	159	131	28	42.7	10.7	32.0
S St. Leonards	186	148	38	36.5	23.7	12.8
East Sussex	5091	4674	417	55.1	24.0	31.1

Source: Children's Services Data Compendium ESCC

The proportion of NEET young people in Hastings is high, although beginning to decline. In 2006/2007, 349 young people were in this category. This was 12.3 per cent of the 16-18 population, much higher than the 8 per cent average for East Sussex, although it has improved to a figure of 10.4 per cent in 2009. The transition to post-16 is a key moment for many pupils who must leave school and move on to further learning at a different institution.

Table 9: Young people NEET
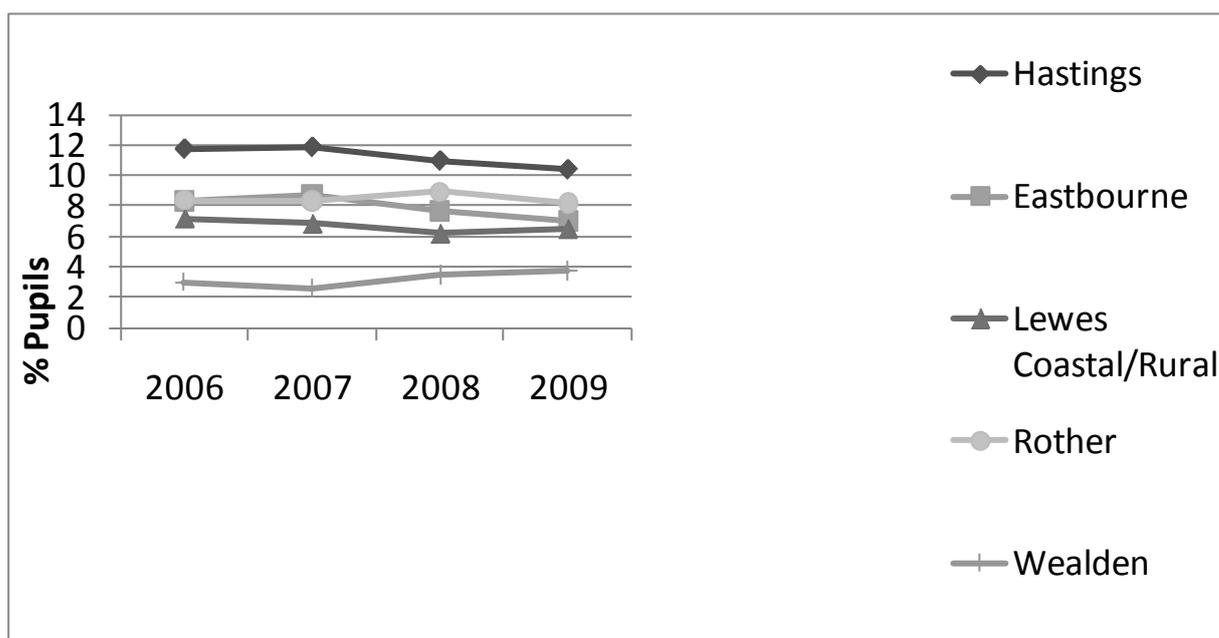
Table 10: Young people aged 16-18 NEET by East Sussex district and age

District	16	17	18	19
Eastbourne	-	106	105	At least 211
Hastings	14	160	156	330
Lewes	7	63	67	137
Rother	-	71	50	At least 121
Wealden	-	54	41	At least 95
Total	31	454	419	904

Source: Connexions Sussex July 2009. Numbers 5 or fewer have been suppressed in individual cells but appear in totals.

The young participation rate in HE (POLAR 2, calculated between 2000 and 2004) was in the lowest quintile in eight wards: Baird, Castle, Gensing, Hollington, Ore, Tressell, Wishing Tree and Rye (HEFCE figures). In Hollington the rates were only nine per cent for both females and males. In Hastings & Rye as a whole, the young participation rates were 24 per cent for females and 18 per cent for males, showing that there is a long way to go before the aspiration of 50 per cent of a cohort entering HE will be met.

In summary then, the picture in Hastings is of young people who are growing up in the context of socio-economic deprivation. On the whole they have not achieved well in their early stages of schooling, yet there is the beginning of improvement in levels of achievement at the time of transition to post-16 education and training. This is the context for our examination of their aspirations for their futures.

2.1.3 Education development

Educational interventions in Hastings comprise a number of activities across the full age range.

UCH was the first university centre to be created in the UK. It opened in September 2003, with just 40 students, five staff and three courses. Since then, it has grown in both size and reputation. Courses are offered by University of Brighton, University of Sussex and University of Christchurch, Canterbury. Today, it has more than 500 students and over 50 staff and offers 26 courses in nine areas: Sociology / Applied Social Science, English and Writing, Business and Management, Environmental Biology, Community History, Media, Computing, Sport and Education. UCH is housed in a modern campus that has undergone over £7m of investment since opening. Facilities include a 100-seat lecture theatre, a spacious and well-stocked library, and high-quality computer pool rooms. Plans are in hand to extend the campus by 2012, which will double the learning space and increase the student community to 1200.

Aimhigher has played a key role in educational regeneration activities in Hastings. It has provided a range of activities since it began in 2005, including taster sessions for a range of subject specialisms at UCH. For example, it held a 'Create the Future' event at UCH for learners across all schools in East Sussex which focused on creative industries careers. It also held an event for pupils from one of the Hastings schools to visit UCH and meet past learners from their school who were now students at UCH. Other events include activities with parents and carers aimed at Years 10 and 12. Aimhigher Sussex also participates in the National Aimhigher Week. In 2009, Aimhigher activities based in schools focused on GCSE revision for English and Mathematics across all the Hastings schools.

Post-16 education is provided by Sussex Coast College Hastings (SCCH), formerly Hastings College of Arts and Technology, a general FE college. In nearby Bexhill there is Bexhill College, a sixth-form college. The BEST programme (Building Engagement, Support and Trust), an Area Based Grant project, is delivered by a group of 30 providers offering first step learning through to Level 2 programmes. Referrals are from Job Centre Plus, individuals and word of mouth. The group is led and co-ordinated by SCCH, which holds the contract from Hastings Borough Council. The programme benefits from the Skills Escalator, which, with SeaSpace funding, was developed by SCCH to offer learners and counsellors an overview of programmes and levels against vocational, occupational and academic pathways. UCH is a supporter of the programme and discusses progress with students.

Bexhill College moved into new buildings in September 2004 and in January 2010 SCCH also moved into a new purpose-built campus, which is adjacent to the railway station and close to UCH.

Adults have been encouraged to participate in further learning through the Horizons Community Learning Project which is based in St. Leonards and has a successful track record in enabling learners to gain qualifications, including GCSE in English and Mathematics. Information, advice and guidance (IAG) is provided, and pathways

from a variety of starting points are offered. Learner progress is tracked, including progression to further learning at SCCH and UCH or to employment.

The University of Brighton's Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) is very active in Hastings, providing a range of knowledge exchange and community research programmes. The Ore Valley Research Programme is one of these activities; another of the CUPP programmes, led by Professor Angie Hart, works with young children and families through its focus on resilience.

The Horizons Project provides family learning, encouraging parents to engage in learning through focusing on their children. Progression is possible through the Area Based Grant to support learners at SCCH as well as HE provision at UCH. In June 2009, 16 learners took English GCSE with 81 per cent gaining A-C passes, and 31 learners took the Foundation tier Mathematics GCSE of which 45 per cent gained a C grade and an additional four learners took the Higher tier Mathematics GCSE and gained As and Bs.

There are ten Children's Centres in Hastings which provide educational courses for parents with children under five years old. There are employment training providers funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and learndirect, along with a number of trusts and charities which work with specific groups such as disabled adults and children who require adaptations to use computers and the internet, and provision of literacy, numeracy and CV writing for adults seeking employment.

At secondary level, the main thrust of educational intervention has arisen from the Excellence Cluster and the Challenge Schools. There are five maintained schools in Hastings, of which three are mixed community comprehensive schools, one a girls' community comprehensive and one a boys' voluntary aided comprehensive. Some children living in Hastings travel to schools in neighbouring parts of East Sussex.

Following long-term concerns about under achievement, the county council appointed Ninestiles Plus to lead radical changes in three secondary schools – Filsham Valley, Hillcrest and The Grove – between 2008 and 2011. The Executive Director of Ninestiles Plus is Sir Dexter Hutt, head teacher of Ninestiles School in Birmingham. The project commenced in March 2008 and comprised a Preparation and Initiation phase (April - August 2008), a Developmental phase (September 2008 - August 2009), a Progress Towards Excellence phase (September 2009 - December 2010) and a Transition Phase (January - August 2010).

The key action has focused on eight strands including structures, management, student behaviour, curriculum, teaching and learning, information communications technology (ICT), community and parental involvement and finance. Specific activities included reducing staff turnover, management support through the creation of Director of Improvement roles, addressing student behaviour and attitudes, the introduction of an 'age not stage' curriculum in Year 8 and Year 9, introducing a common lesson planning template, introducing the specific use of ICT and sending out regular newsletters to parents. There is a Student Adviser (Excellence Cluster post) operating in the two single sex schools with a Federal Sixth Form to support the

most vulnerable sixth form students by advising on application, finance and support applications.

East Sussex County Council is proposing to close Filsham Valley, Hillcrest and The Grove schools in 2011 and, subject to government approval, replace them with two academies to be built on the Hillcrest site in the east of the town and the Filsham Valley site in the west. The academies will be sponsored by University of Brighton, British Telecom (BT) and ESCC. The eastern academy will have 900 places and specialise in English and ICT. The western academy will have 1500 places and specialise in Mathematics and ICT.

We suggest that all these intervention activities, although primarily educationally focused, are in themselves WP activities, particularly in light of the recent acknowledgement by Lord Mandelson of the need to strengthen the 'pipeline that helps young people and adults gain skills and qualifications at every level' (Mandelson, 2009:9). The diversity of these interventions provides a complex picture within which individuals navigate their way through a maze of learning opportunities and where providers attempt to encourage participation. This has led the research team to conclude that an examination of the effect of these activities on individual progress is required.

2.2 Research questions

The aims of the research outlined by HEFCE were to:

- understand how young people experience the end of their compulsory education, and the first few months of their transfer to post-16 education, training or employment (if any)

- assess the role and impact of activities developed through WP initiatives in this transfer process

The Brighton research team asked the following research questions in response to these aims:

- What – if any – is the impact of educational interventions on individual decisions at 16?

- Can WP interventions in education contribute to 'education-led' regeneration?

Our premise was that interventions may well impact on individuals and this should be testable/demonstrable, i.e. we should see the effects of this in the stories young people tell, including how members of their families and communities are being engaged by the activities, including focused IAG, assertive mentoring, as well as Aimhigher and the Gifted and Talented programme. An understanding of the role of WP must be informed by research concerning the effects of the wider programme of education-led regeneration in Hastings and Bexhill.

We started from the idea that there would be four groups of young people in relation to transition from school to post-compulsory education and training:

1 - definitely staying on

2 - probably staying on

3 - unlikely to stay on

4 - definitely not staying on and already in the NEET group

We wanted to know how young people in the second and third groups could be encouraged to join those in the first group. The research examined groups of young people in all categories, including those who were already in the NEET group. To achieve this, we followed a cohort as they took their GCSEs, gaining an overview of their expectations and aspirations through a survey of Year 11 pupils and then following the provision at one school, SCCH and a project working with NEET young people. This enabled us to obtain perceptions of learners, their parents and educational providers and to begin to understand what effect the educational interventions were having. It is important to note that we were not in a position to attribute any one change in behaviour to a specific educational initiative and that we were capturing an evolving process where each of the interventions have been developing throughout the past few years. This is particularly the case for our interviews with college learners and NEET young people which comprised different year groups and therefore brought forward their experiences across a variety of interventions, or indeed lack of them.

The educational interventions that our research should have been able to capture included the Ninestiles Plus activities, the Aimhigher and the Gifted and Talented programmes and Connexions activities at the secondary schools. The college would also have been involved in Aimhigher and Connexions, along with Community Learning Projects, such as Horizons. We were also in a position to hear about any experience our young people had gained with the numerous charities and LSC-funded providers in Hastings.

2.3   Methods

A mixed methods approach was adopted. A local steering group was established, which ensured that the research contributed to ongoing partnership-based work on WP. Membership was drawn from the steering group of the current research on low pupil achievement in Ore Valley, and in particular representation from the Ore Valley Forum, Excellence Cluster, Hastings Borough Council and Children's Trust. The steering group included representation from Turning Point, a community-led research project which was running concurrently, community education through the local Horizons Community Learning Project, UCH, a head teacher and the deputy principal of SCCH, thereby ensuring that the group represented practitioner involvement across the transition phase being examined.

There were four main actions in the research: a survey questionnaire of Year 11 pupils prior to the examination period, a series of focus groups with staff, parents and learners at one school, a series of interviews with staff and learners at one college

and a series of interviews with staff and young people at a centre specialising in working with NEET young people.

2.3.1   Year 11 survey

A questionnaire survey with closed and open questions for Hastings schools was piloted with a school in West Sussex in April 2009 and the refined survey was distributed in the five Hastings schools in May 2009 (see Appendix 2). The survey was issued to all the young people who were in school and completed in school time. It obtained quantitative and qualitative data on pupils' education experiences, aspirations, knowledge of FE/HE and views on the quality of life in Hastings. The survey was essential for understanding the role of WP in Hastings since it provided contextual information on the nature of the transition to post-16 and knowledge of WP initiatives, including the establishment of UCH. We were particularly keen to examine the ways in which current practical activities affected decisions to remain in education and training and we focused on evaluating interventions undertaken during this period.

2.3.2   Young people not in employment, education or training

Our examination of effective transitions and services for young people at 16 had to include those who were not going to progress to any form of employment, education or training. This NEET element of the research was designed to look at student and staff perspectives, including eliciting the experiences of young people who may be older than 16, in order to understand the transition journey. Our data reflects the experiences of staff and young people involved with one project of NEET provision and may not reflect the experiences of those involved in other provision

The organisation we worked with, XTRAX, offers personalised provision for young people NEET in addition to group work and courses. Research suggests that the level of personalisation of services is key to engaging groups such as young people NEET (Hyde and Cecil, 2007; McDonnell and Beauclair, 2007). Members of the steering committee, i.e. education stakeholders, helped the research team identify marginalised groups not covered in the Year 11 pupil survey (e.g. non-attendees and excluded pupils) and offered access to an organisation working with members of these marginalised groups. 14 qualitative interviews were conducted with eight male and six female participants aged between 16 and 24 in order to understand and analyse their experiences after formal education.

There was an opportunity to attend an open day on 11th September organised by East Sussex County Council for young people who had not yet found a suitable education placement. This resulted in an additional four interviews with potentially NEET young people.

2.3.3   School focus groups

In June 2009 a focus group with parents of Year 11 pupils was conducted to analyse experiences and expectations of their children's transition to post-16. The parents were recruited through one of the participating schools. The Ore Valley Research

Programme also conducted a focus group with Year 10 pupils in June 2009 to analyse their expectations of the transition to post-16 and their data provided information for this project, too.

In September 2009, following the publication of GCSE results, a focus group was conducted with staff at the school to discuss the educational interventions that had resulted in a large improvement in GCSE results compared with previous years.

2.3.4 College focus groups and interviews

A series of interviews was conducted with staff at SCCH in early November 2009 to examine the processes introduced by the college for induction and to help the initial transition to study at FE for incoming students. In November 2009 six group interviews were conducted with young students, most of whom had left local schools in 2009 and 2008, to analyse experiences of the transition to post-16. The students in the group interviews were studying on courses ranging from Levels 1 to 3.

2.3.5 Incentives

Incentives were approved as part of the ethical approval process. Young people and parents were offered incentives to take part in the project with those taking part in the in-depth qualitative research being given £10 in bonus bond vouchers to cover expenses.

2.3.6 Timescale

The project was conducted between April and November 2009 as we wished to understand the experiences of young people as they went through a series of transitions (and hurdles) within a short space of time as part of the transfer from formal education. We had to make a number of adjustments to our original proposal due to the changing fortunes of the particular cohort and so that we could participate in additional activities that were introduced by the local authority in September 2009. The college was undergoing a move to new premises which affected the research team's access to the students but all the fieldwork was completed by the end of November 2009. This meant we were able to capture the experiences of students who had undergone a new induction process introduced by the college, as well as the views of staff after this new process had been tested.

A conference, organised by the Coastal Regeneration Research Centre (CRRC) is scheduled in March 2010 to disseminate the findings of this and other projects related to research in Hastings. The event will include young people who participated in the research and local residents who are currently students at UCH.

Section Three

Findings

In our work with our education and community partners in Hastings, we are aiming at a 'cradle to grave' analysis of education and its effect on progression in Hastings. This HEFCE funded Communities and Widening Participation Research project provides key information about a particular cohort as it makes the transition from compulsory education to FE and training.

The findings are reported in the following sections: survey, school interventions, college interventions and NEET young people. A thematic analysis, which we relate to our original research questions, is also provided with recommendations and commitments for our ongoing partnership research and regeneration through education and training.

3.1   Year 11 Survey

3.1.1   Introduction

The questionnaire (Appendix 2) took a snapshot of the cohort just before GCSEs, but we were able to capture some of the influences of the past, as well as a sense of the young people's projections into the future. We obtained information about background factors:

- Gender
- Ethnic group
- Age in months
- Parental experience of HE
- Parents' occupations
- Full postcode

And we also obtained some information about the young people's experiences, expectations and attitudes:

- Part-time working and earnings during Key Stage 4
- GCSE expected grades
- Post-16 intention: college and course
- University intention
- Attitudes to work and learning

We undertook a number of cross tabulations of this data and the main findings are reported below.

3.1.2 The sample

We were able to sample pupils at all five schools in Hastings prior to their taking GCSEs in May 2009. We had responses from 212 girls and 208 boys. The distribution of numbers participating and their sex is shown below.

Table 11: The questionnaire sample

Schools	Number of respondents	Sample rate %	Female	Male
School A	94	51	48	33
School B	58	36	24	10
School C	99	46	92	0
School D	100	85	44	49
School E	132	59	0	120
Total	483	54	212	208

The sample rate varies from 36 per cent to 85 per cent, with the total sample 54 per cent. Not all questions were answered by all respondents, and the questions asking for personal information, which came last in the questionnaire were the ones most frequently omitted. There is a sampling bias towards those in school on the days on which the survey was handed out. It should also be remembered that some Hastings children travel to schools outside the area and some attend private schools. Movement during secondary schooling is not a particularly important factor: 89 per cent of respondents have lived in the Hastings area for at least 6 years, all the way through secondary school.

3.1.3 Family background

We asked respondents to tell us about their parental occupation and whether anyone in their family had been to university. The question said 'university' for clarity, but there may be some who had family members attending polytechnics or other higher education institutions (HEIs).

The question was 'If anyone in your family has been to university, who was that? Tick all that apply.' We turned it into a single variable with mutually exclusive conditions as follows:

- 'both parents went' – respondent reported both 'mother' and 'father', perhaps also siblings or other relatives
- 'one parent went' – respondent reported either 'mother' or 'father' but not both. Again, siblings and other relatives may also have been reported
- 'siblings went' – neither parent was reported, but one or more siblings and perhaps also other family members were
- 'extended went' – neither parent, nor any siblings reported, but one or more aunts, uncles or cousin(s)
- 'carer went' – neither parent, nor any siblings or other relatives reported, but a carer or carers
- 'no-one went' – no category at all ticked.

We found that 469 respondents (50.7 per cent of valid responses to this question) reported that no-one at all in their family had gone to university. The next largest group was 'extended went' (111 respondents, 23.0 per cent), followed by 'sibling went' (49 respondents, 10.1 per cent), 'one parent went' (41 respondents, 8.5 per cent), 'both parents went' (26 respondents, 5.4 per cent) and lastly 'carer went' (four respondents, 0.8 per cent).

Therefore half of these Year 11 students in Hastings had no family experience of university at all and 86 per cent had no parental experience of university. As we said, there are young people who attend schools outside the area as well as a few in independent schools. A higher proportion of these 'missing' young people would be expected to have family experience of HE.

There were some differences between the five schools in the family experience of HE. The proportion reporting that no family member went to university varied from 38.1 per cent in School E to 64.3 per cent in School B. School D has an average (for Hastings) proportion of young people whose parents went to university, combined with a particularly high number who had people in the extended family going to university.

We asked about parental occupation for the one or two parents with whom the respondent lived, whether they were working full-time, part-time, or were self-employed, looking for work or not looking for work. Respondents chose which parent to report as 'Parent 1' and 'Parent 2' and we did not ask about the sex of each parent. From these responses we were able to generate two further variables on parental occupation. We are aware that these were only the young people's reports of their parents' occupations and that they could be unsure about what their parents did. Sometimes they gave very general answers that did not allow us to code their occupational status accurately. This is a problem also experienced, for example, with the university (UCAS) applications and subsequent identification of WP numbers (Hatt and Harrison, 2009). Nevertheless, the parents' occupations painted a vivid picture of the Hastings labour market, with parents employed in public services, tourism, retail, and occasionally in fishing.

From these responses we generated two further variables: whether the respondent appeared to come from a one-parent family and whether neither parent was in work or self-employment. The proportion of young people coming from one-parent families was 6.2 per cent varying in the schools from 2.5 per cent in School A to 11.4 per cent in School D. The proportion from families where neither parent was working was 10.9 per cent in total, varying 7.0 per cent to 17.0 per cent, with the highest proportions in Schools B and D.

These variables for family type and work situation were cross-tabulated with family experience of HE (Tables 12 and 13). When we examined the relationship between parental occupation and their experience of going into HE, we found it was when parents were self-employed that there was most likely to be no family experience of HE (54.7 per cent). It was when parents were looking for work that is was most likely that someone in the family had attended HE (64 per cent). No family experience of

HE was more common in two-parent families than one-parent families. The differences were not large and the wording of the questions has to be taken into account, in particular how respondents were asked to report about non-resident biological parents and about resident step-parents.

**Table 12: Family type and family experience of HE**
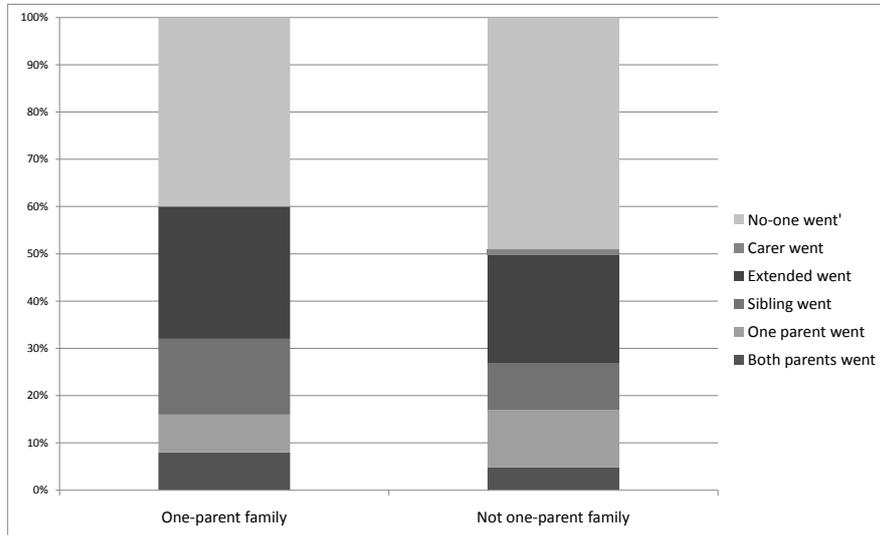
Table 13: Family work situation and family experience of HE
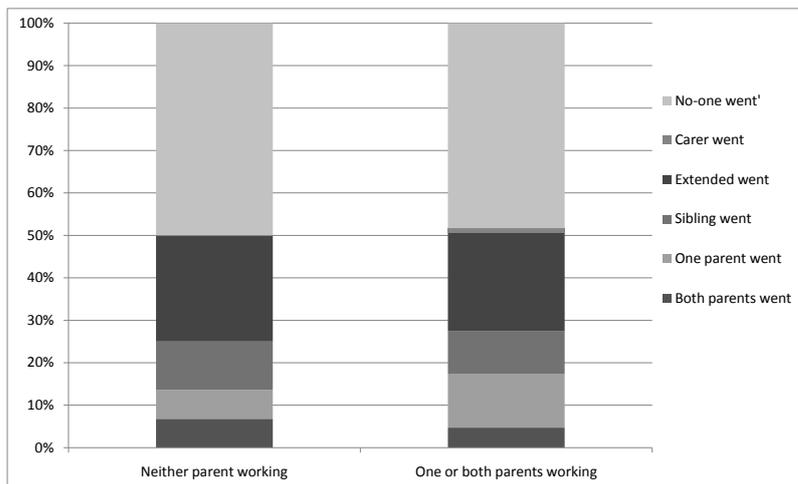
Our results in relation to family situation are counter-intuitive in that those families that seem to be facing disadvantage, such as one-parent families and/or with no adult working are also more likely, rather than less likely, to have had some family experience of HE. The differences are small and we suggest they show that stereotyping on the basis of family background can be misleading. In terms of WP it indicates that there are young people who know that their parents have had some experience of HE but whose families are currently in a difficult situation. Their perception of the benefits of HE may be affected as a consequence.

Other variables we had for family background were ethnic origin and month of birth. The number of ethnic minority students is too small for meaningful comparisons to be made. While educational disadvantage attaching to being summer-born is known in the literature it did not emerge as significant in this sample.

3.1.4   School experience

The survey did not set out to capture young people's school experience, as this was the subject of a different study, but we asked about their part-time work, and we could then see how it was layered on their family background. The youth labour market is very depressed in Hastings, and only 25.9 per cent of pupils worked during term time. Boys were marginally more likely to work in term time than girls and we found no significant differences across the schools. We did find that children of one-parent families were more likely to have a part-time job (31.6 per cent compared with 12.5 per cent of those with two parents).

We cross-tabulated part-time working with family experience of HE and the other family background variables. Part-time working was lower among those who reported that both parents went to university and also among those with no family experience of HE at all. It was higher among those having one parent or a sibling attending university. We hypothesise that families with two graduate parents prioritise school homework over part-time working for their children. Children from families where no adult was in work were less likely to have a part-time job, perhaps because their parents lacked the contacts to help them find jobs for their children (Dustman and van Soest, 2006). However, the small numbers suggests care must be taken with these differences.

We asked students to predict their GCSE results. Very many thought they were going to get five A*-C grades and indeed the results were greatly improved. The proportion across all the schools predicting for themselves grades at the benchmark of five A*-C or better was two thirds (67.8 per cent).

Table 14: Predicted GCSE results by school
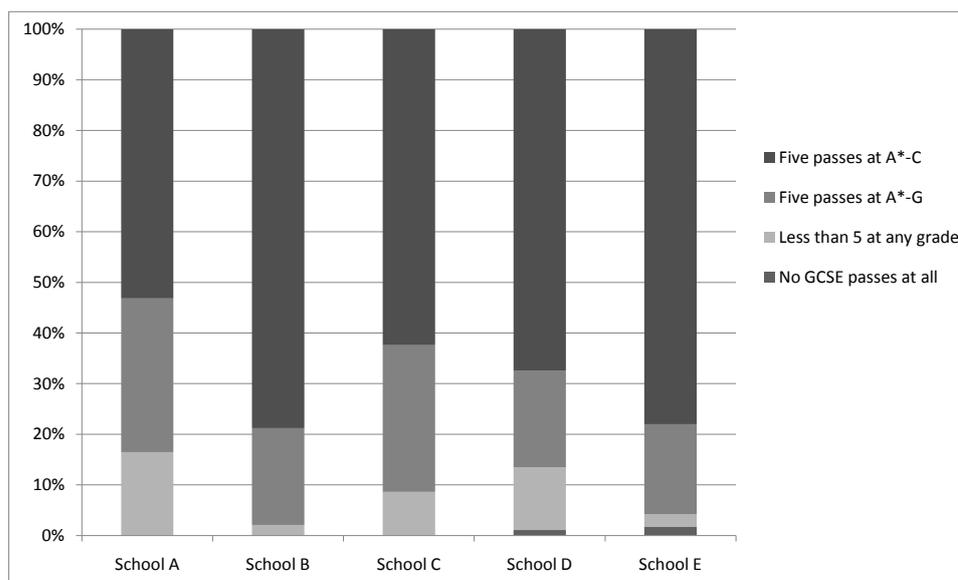
As Table 14 shows, the predictions were in line with the actual results achieved, shown in our comparison of each school with actual results.

Table 15: Pupils' predicted GCSE attainment and actual attainment

	Percentages obtaining 5 A*-C grades				
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
Predicted 2009	53	79	62	67	78
Actual 2009	64	80	75	76	70
Actual 2008	49	41	58	23	59

Students at School A, School C and School D underestimated their achievements while those at School E slightly overestimated them. There may also be a sampling bias in that we only surveyed students who were in school. Some of the underestimates may have been due to the fact that the schools increased the number of vocational courses taken, and pupils may not have realised that these counted towards their GCSE scores. Girls predicted fewer good GCSE results than boys, which is of course counter to actual national results.

The improvements in attainment rates between 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 are large but as we saw earlier the goalposts are movable. Our question used the category "five A*-C grades", and this is a measure still published in the league tables. However, the five A*-C including English and Mathematics measure is now preferred, and all schools apart from School C score worse than either the East Sussex or England averages on that measure.

There is also the question of 'value-added' which measures attainment by comparison with pupils with similar prior attainment. This measure is very important in Hastings where achievement in primary schools is also low. Schools A and D have value-added scores above average (the lower confidence interval is higher than 1000). The other schools have average value-added. As was seen earlier, Schools A and D also have extremely high proportions of students with special educational needs. Their high value-added scores can be expected from the national pattern, since higher value-added scores result on average for children with special educational needs than for those without. A newer measure, Contextual Value Added (CVA), which takes account of other factors such as special educational needs or levels of deprivation, was introduced by the DfES in 2005.

3.1.5   Intentions 16-19

This section discusses pupils' intention to stay on at school (in the two schools which retain a sixth form) or go to college and what qualifications they envisaged achieving. The results were as follows:

	No. of pupils
• School sixth form	81
• SCCH	165
• Other college	130
• Apprenticeship	24
• Job with training	11
• Job without training	4
• Other	13
• No response	55

Therefore the vast majority, 88 per cent of those responding to the question, planned to stay on in full-time education, whether in the sixth form or at college. The proportion wanting either to stay on full-time or take an apprenticeship was as high as 94 per cent, and of those who did not want to do this, some hoped to get a job with training. SCCH was the most common intended destination, while 'other college' probably usually means Bexhill College, the nearby sixth form college.

Table 16 shows the intentions in selected groups. Girls were more likely to be aiming for 'other college' (again, we think Bexhill College in most cases), while boys were more likely to expect to stay on at school, to get a job or have an 'other' destination. Those from one-parent families were less likely to intend to stay on at school and more likely to pursue an 'other' destination. Those without a parent in work were also more likely to think that their destination would be 'other'.

Table 16: Predicted post-16 destinations, selected groups
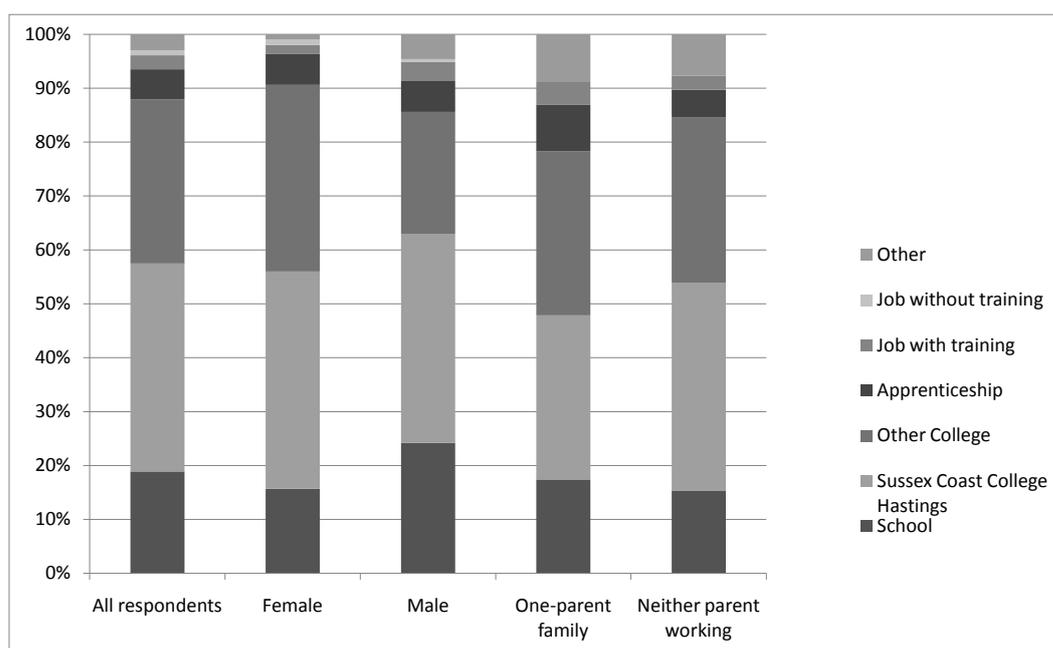
Cross-tabulations of these destinations with the qualifications young people intended to take showed that the majority of young people intended to follow Level 3 qualifications either at SCCH or in the school sixth form (if their school had a sixth form). There were interesting differences between males and females and also across the pattern of anticipated GCSE results and intended qualifications. 45 per cent of females and 45.3 per cent of males intended to study A levels only. 23.1 per cent of females anticipated studying Level 2 qualifications compared with 15.1 per cent of males. On average, young women were aiming for lower level vocational qualifications than young men. There were 67 respondents who were not expecting five A*-C grades at GCSE yet still expected to take Level 3 courses, but perhaps they did not expect to take them immediately. There was also 52 who did expect five A*-C grades yet did not say that they would take Level 3 courses. This shows perhaps that students need more information about entry requirements.

We have derived three main groups of expectation:

- Gold expectation: A levels or International Baccalaureate only. Girls and boys. 175 respondents of whom 75 per cent expected to study in school sixth form or 'other college' (probably sixth form college)
- Silver expectation: Advanced Diploma, BTEC National Diploma or National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3, alone or combined with A levels. More boys than girls. 101 respondents of which 51 per cent expecting to be in school or 'other' college

- Bronze expectation: All other, including Level 2, Level 1 and "other" level qualifications. More girls than boys. 98 respondents of which 17 per cent expecting to be in school or 'other' college

We see the cohort split on a 50:25:25 pattern, with Hastings no longer very different from the national average. It seems that in Hastings, as elsewhere in the UK, the credit crunch and crisis have influenced a decision to remain in the formal education system.

3.1.6   Progression to university

We asked the young people how likely they were to go to university. The results were as follows:

	No. of pupils
Very likely	117
Quite likely	114
Neither likely nor unlikely	105
Quite unlikely	32
Very unlikely	60
No response	55

More than half the sample had a positive intention to go to university, and this is despite Hastings being one of the lowest participation areas in the country. Again we see the 50:25:25 pattern, with 50 per cent likely to go to university, 25 per cent not sure and 25 per cent not at this point expecting to go to university. There is a correlation, although not an exact match, with the Gold, Silver and Bronze expectations identified for 16-19 intentions.

We asked pupils to tell us about their experiences of careers and WP experiences and they reported a number of activities.

Work experience	76%
Visit to a workplace or work shadowing	68%
Visit to Sussex Coast College (Hastings College)	61%
Visit to another college	60%
Gifted and Talented programme	33%
Visit to University Centre Hastings	29%
Visit to another university	21%
A lecturer or professor running an event in school	15%
Mentoring by a university student	11%

The low numbers having visited a college by the time GCSEs were being taken is of interest, given that most intend to go to college. The proportions having visited a university site are also low. The proportion saying they had taken part in the Gifted and Talented programme was high, as the national proportion from the National Pupil Database is around 15 per cent. Our steering group members explained to us that some schools had opened up Gifted and Talented activities to a wider group of interested students. The Gifted and Talented programme seems to be called in to compensate when other motivating experiences are lacking. We guessed from these responses that some young people were going to enrol at a college they had not previously visited. As we shall see, this was borne out by interviews in SCCH.

Boys, who as we have seen predicted higher GCSE grades for themselves than girls, were more likely than girls to want to go to university. 28.2 per cent of boys and 26.7 per cent of girls said they were very likely to go, and 26.7 per cent of boys and 24.6 per cent of girls said they were quite likely to go. School E had the highest proportion very or quite likely to go to university (61.0 per cent) and School D had the lowest (45.6 per cent). Table 17 shows these intentions in the context of family background.

Table 17: Family background and higher education intention
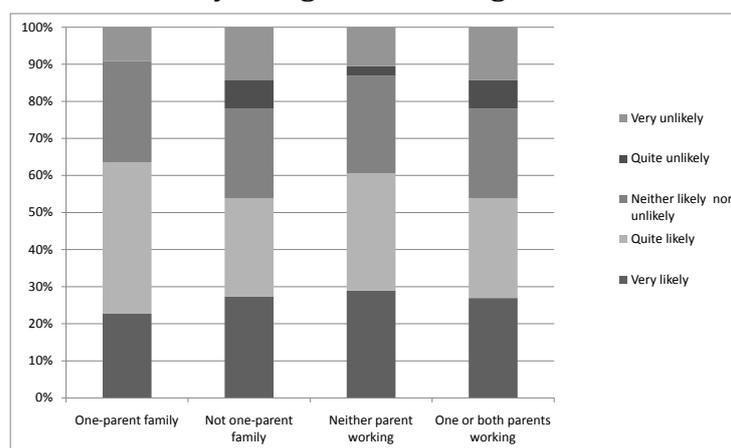
As Table 17 shows, young people from one parent families more often said they were very or quite likely to go to university (63.6 per cent compared with 53.9 per cent of those from two-parent-families). Young people who have no parent in work are also more likely to want to go to university.

Since we had asked students whether they were saving from their part-time earnings, we were able to compare this with the intention to go to university, and thus to see whether intention affected savings behaviour. Respondents who thought they were neither likely nor unlikely to go to university were the most likely to be saving for their future. 43.5 per cent in the neither likely nor unlikely group were saving for their

future compared to 32.1 per cent of those who thought they were very likely to go to university and 32.0 per cent of those who thought they were very unlikely to go to university. This indicates a generally cautious attitude among this group.

3.1.7 Attitudes

Finally, we asked pupils to say whether they agreed with, disagreed with, or were not sure about a number of attitudinal statements which have been derived from numerous studies of perceptions about WP. The following statements were most likely to be agreed with:

- You should avoid getting into debt - 391 agreed
- You can always go to college when you are older to get more qualifications - 362 agreed
- People with qualifications usually earn more money - 336 agreed
- I have a quiet space at home to study - 325 agreed
- There are very few jobs in Hastings - 246 agreed

Least likely to be agreed with were:

- My family wouldn't allow me to go to university if it meant leaving home - 18 agreed
- My family wouldn't see any point in me going to university - 21 agreed
- Working in an apprenticeship would be boring - 31 agreed
- A university course would be boring - 33 agreed
- My teachers don't think I am clever enough to go to university - 38 agreed

Overall, then, we have a picture of young people who to a large extent reflect the national trend of being more likely to say that they are going to HE if they have good GCSE results and have parents who have experienced university. We have also captured a raised school achievement rate in the area, which is already being translated into greater 16-19 participation. They see qualifications as an investment and are not likely to be deterred from aspiring to university by parents or teachers, despite coming from families with little or no experience of HE and not having visited a university. They have space at home to study, but they are very afraid of debt – this is reflected in statements made by college students – and are probably not yet saving for their future.

The findings of the questionnaire survey were used to inform the qualitative elements of the research, which dig deeper into how these changing educational behaviours are perceived by staff and students before and after the transition to post-compulsory education. We then go on to examine the experiences of those who have not shared in the raised achievement and participation, but have found themselves in the NEET category. From this group we gained important insights into the precariousness of their educational experiences and how much more needs to be done to ensure that they, too, can be successful in the future.

3.2   Experiences and interventions

The survey data helped set the scene for a number of avenues of exploration, not least the way in which pupils were anticipating their GCSE results and making plans for future study and training. We explored the experiences of this cohort through analysis of how one school and one college were managing the transition process. School D was chosen as it had provided the highest proportion of questionnaire responses and was one of the schools in the Excellence Cluster and therefore very actively involved in educational regeneration activities. SCCH takes the largest number of learners from the Hasting schools. This provided an opportunity for us to examine its recent changes to recruitment and induction as the cohort moved from school to college.

3.2.1   Interventions in 'School D'

3.2.1.1 An improving school

The improvement of School D has for a long time been considered part of the regeneration process in Hastings. It is a mixed 11-16 comprehensive with 670 on roll. The school was put into special measures in 2008 but was taken out following an Ofsted visit in November 2009. The Ofsted report noted that:

> School [D] is rapidly improving and, in accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that special measures are no longer required because its overall effectiveness is now satisfactory. Strong leadership from the head teacher and the executive leader has dramatically raised the school's expectations of itself by providing a challenging vision of what the students should be achieving. After significant changes in staffing and restructuring of leadership, their vision is now shared by other staff. Working as part of the federation has been of considerable benefit to the school by helping share good practice and expertise. The impact on students is clear and the staff are ambitious for further improvement, providing concrete evidence of the school's good capacity for further improvement (Ofsted, 2009, p.4).

The school has experienced a great deal of disruption over the past four years as there have been seven heads and acting heads. During this period there has been high staff turnover where, for example, for nearly two years, some Year 11 pupils were taught English by a non-English specialist. Of the original 210 pupils who began the school in Year 7, 117 completed Year 11. Some were excluded, some moved away (often because their parents came to Hastings to find work, were unable to do so and thus moved away again) and some moved into different schools. Year 11 pupils have therefore experienced much disruption whilst at School D.

School D is one of three schools in the 'loose federation', all of which were required to improve their low achievement rates. The others were Schools A and B. An organisation called Ninestiles Plus was appointed to lead the improvements, the Executive Director of which is Sir Dexter Hutt, head teacher of Ninestiles School in Birmingham. Aspirations in School D were thus very low but there has been a lot of

work done within the school and by those external to it. The current head teacher took over her role in September 2008 just as the school was put into special measures.

On the measure of the proportion of pupils gaining at least five A*-G GCSEs School D is at 92.4 per cent, above the national average of 88 per cent. Their average point score has gone up by 140 points, the equivalent of three grade C passes. The school has achieved the best Contextual Value Added (CVA) in the bottom quartile. Despite this success, the head teacher noted that 'the world beats us up on a single threshold' (five A*-C GCSEs including English and Mathematics).

3.2.1.2 Raising achievement

A number of initiatives have taken place across the three schools in the federation, including the appointment of Directors of Improvement for Science, English, Mathematics and ICT. In February 2009, the Directors decided to introduce 'assertive mentoring' which had already been tried at School A. Fifty-four students who were judged to be likely to benefit were identified. They included both high achievers and those who were judged to be on the borderline for achieving grade C at GCSE. Each member of School D senior management team (SMT) then took responsibility for a group of these students. The head teacher personally interviewed every child in Year 11 to discuss their expected achievement and plans. The careers officers also undertook significant one-to-one work with the pupils.

A pastoral role was developed using non teaching staff who were free to deal with issues as necessary. From September 2008 there has also been a raising achievement co-ordinator role, filled by a member of staff who has worked at the school for 19 years. In the current academic year 2009/2010, the school is moving from year groups to vertical groups in houses. These groups will be smaller and will not necessarily have teaching staff as form tutors. This is based on the Ninestiles model which Sir Dexter Hutt is promoting.

3.2.2   The experiences of parents

Nine parents of children at School D attended the focus group, which was conducted prior to the announcement of examination results. The parents' comments provide evidence that they were aware of some of the interventions being made at the school and, to a smaller degree, at the college. They also demonstrate a 'moment in time' for the way in which aspirations are being raised for their children and how this is perceived within the wider family and therefore have an intergenerational aspect.

3.3.2.1 Context

School D keeps in touch with parents through a variety of means including written information, parents' evenings and through text messages – particularly if their child does not attend school.

3.2.2.2 Knowledge of predicted grades

All parents in the focus group felt they knew what GCSEs their children were taking and what grades they were likely to achieve. The information came from letters from

school with predicted grades, exam timetables and results from exams taken early. When asked if they thought these predictions were reasonable parents felt young people often do not really pay attention to their parents' expectations and boys in particular were not achieving full potential. Yet parents also acknowledged that some young people were working steadily and some realised they needed to work harder. Parents did express concern that the new school policy of taking GCSE English and Mathematics early meant that some young people felt that with these subjects already in hand they would only work to achieve the minimum further attainment.

3.2.2.3 Strategies identified as helpful

When asked to identify what strategies had helped their children, parents felt the mentor scheme had been really useful as this gave the young people the best information on post-16 options as well as options at 18. Parents perceived the role of school as crucial, particularly for communication with them. Parents also noted that the presentation at SCCH had been very good.

3.2.2.4 Information, advice and guidance

When asked how aware they were of post-16 options parents' replies ranged from 'not very' to 'googled it' and 'had to look in college prospectus'. Not all parents were sure of the role Connexions played, although one young person who attended the focus group with her mother thought it helpful. Parents felt that Connexions and colleges were not aware of the potential of their children. Their own memories of being at school were of poor advice, and parents felt strongly that they wanted their children to have better advice and more options, saying 'don't do what I did'.

Parents felt that the staff in colleges did not mention at interview with their children what was required to progress to the next stage post-college and that misleading advice could be given to young people on options available to them. Some parents felt that colleges were lowering aspirations and should think about progression from Level 2 and others felt that colleges 'shoehorn' students in to certain subjects. This is in contrast to our interviews with college staff who explained that many of the vocational subjects needed to be studied at Level 2 as students would be starting 'ab initio' but there was every opportunity to progress to higher levels at a later stage.

We asked how parents expected to keep in touch with college and the progress of their children in the following year. They expected there would be pastoral care at college and to attend a parents evening at college but also recognised they would have to rely on feedback from their children. They felt they would need to catch enthusiasm in the first few weeks to maintain communication with their children as they moved into college.

The parents acknowledged the role that peers play in heavily influencing choice of college and sometimes choice of course (unless a young person has a strong vocation). As one parent noted, a parent is 'fortunate' if the young person is not influenced by peers. In the group, one parent had other children at university and most had extended family who had been. Older siblings at university can provide

incentive to progress, but older siblings who are unemployed or disengaged from education can have a negative effect.

3.2.2.5 Parental support for career choices

Overall, there was a consistent message from parents that it was important for them to support what their children wanted to do – 'If he's happy then I'm happy'. Most of all, they wanted them to 'Do something rather than nothing'. They didn't want their children to say, 'You were right; I should have worked harder' but some were worried as their children 'don't take any notice of us anyway'. Most of the parents would like their children to go to university but fewer thought their children actually had aspirations to go. Some parents felt it was not worth going to into higher education, citing debt or problems getting work – even with a degree – but they would not discourage their children if they wanted to go. They were not concerned about costs of living away from home but the thought of this stage was too early for them, they had 'not discussed uni – need to get through this stage first'. The parents expected there were 'lots of opportunities for training on the job', and it was not the end of the world if college study did not work out, believing their child could change course or get a job with training.

3.2.3   The experiences of school staff

Staff at School D were interviewed and provided a further detailed perspective on the interventions made within the school and their effectiveness to date.

3.2.3.1 Assertive mentoring

Assertive mentoring is an approach where staff act as 'advocates' on behalf of students. The students are given support so that, for example, if they were late handing in coursework, the mentor would approach the teacher concerned and negotiate on behalf of the student so that the coursework could be completed beyond the original timescale. This meant that coursework was marked and the student benefitted from the feedback.

The approach developed trust between the students and their mentors and had a 'knock-on effect' because as pupils began to talk to mentors, and could see action was taken, they were able to voice their concerns about their school work. These concerns could relate to anything. One member of staff noted that the psychological aspect of this approach was an important factor, not only in gaining trust but in overcoming apathy.

3.2.3.2 Early entry GCSE

School D has made a decisive intervention to maximise achievement in both English and Mathematics.

All pupils at School D are entered early for GCSE English and Mathematics. If they obtain a C or better, they do not necessarily continue with that subject. However, if this first attempt results in C in only one of these two subjects, the pupil is removed from that subject and given additional sessions in the other. For example, if a pupil obtained a grade C in English, he or she worked on extra Mathematics during the

timetabled English session and vice versa. The current Year 11 (2009/2010) took early entry Mathematics and English in June 2009 (at the end of Year 10) and some are re-taking in the autumn.

If pupils achieved a GCSE Mathematics at C grade, they were then able to take statistics, thereby improving the status of their results. The investment in this strategy is evident from the fact that teaching in modern foreign languages (MFL) now takes second place, although School D is a specialist school in MFL. Pupils may drop MFL in Year 11 in order to concentrate on English or Mathematics, and the proportion studying MFL to GCSE declined from 90 per cent in 2007/2008 to 50 per cent in 2008/2009.

3.2.3.3 Additional curriculum changes

The school is using advanced skills teachers to give 'masterclasses' to pupils. There is a fast track IT programme and in the academic year 2008/2009, 30 students were interviewed by staff and are now studying for a Level 3 qualification. The staff described this qualification as 'equivalent to AS level'.

Another opportunity that has gained interest among pupils is the introduction of a BTEC course in PE. Offered in partnership with a successful Beacon school, this has an online theory component. Another BTEC course offered is Childcare. These programmes are being used as they offer immediate feedback from achievement through a different mode of learning and 'the kids need instant gratification'.

ICT provision was introduced across the schools' federation. All Pupils now take ICT. Following much one-to-one discussion with students and parents, there is now a more positive perception of the benefit. Staff pointed out that 89 per cent had obtained the equivalent of two Grade C GCSEs through taking this subject.

3.2.3.4 Staff interviews with students

The head teacher personally interviewed all students last year and intended to do the same this year. This appears to have had a positive effect on a number of levels: with the students, with the staff and with the parents (as we report above from the parent focus group on the success of the mentoring and the personal interviews).

3.2.3.5 Partnership with Connexions and college

One of the senior managers line-manages a Connexions advisor who has also conducted one-to-one meetings with students. Staff at the school and also the college staff (see below) saw the involvement of Connexions as key to the current raising of aspiration and achievement, although parents were less aware of its impact.

SCCH has had to change the level of some of its provision to adjust to the improved entry qualifications of the autumn 2009 entry cohort, as has the neighbouring Bexhill College. The staff noted the close relationship with SCCH that had resulted from parents and pupils meeting college staff to discuss progression after GCSEs. There is also provision for pupils to attend college as part of the Increased Flexibility

Programme (IFP). As we discuss in a later section, some learners at the college found this provision to be a very positive experience.

3.2.3.6 Wider strategies

> *'We are relentless…'*

The school has introduced general expectations about behaviour, insisting on correct uniform, punctuality and attendance, as part of the strategy to improve the experience of pupils whilst at school.

The school has appointed senior students (head boy and girl and heads of house). This was done through application and interviews and some of the more 'unconventional' students who applied were appointed, even though some of their behaviour subsequently lived up to their reputations. The group noted the importance of this message throughout the school and also about overcoming apathy.

The previous cohort had benefitted from the 'Year 11 Café' which was described as psychologically 'brilliant'. Funds were gained from having had a speaker on healthy eating who was persuaded to donate £500. The school opened a café which provided Year 11 pupils with free breakfast. The idea to do this came at a point in April 2009 when:

> *'We had to constantly nurture, cajole and fix. They [students] began losing it in April and were scared – but not as scared as we were!'*

> (Head teacher)

3.2.3.7 Inclusion

The head teacher noted that 'we're fully inclusive'. Staff suggested that when pupils are removed from a subject they are not thriving in, the rest of the students have a new dynamic. It is also helping the teachers to focus. In September 2008, there were 28 Year 11 persistent absentees in the first term but this had dwindled to five, including school refusers, at the end of the year. This was a result of the altered culture not to exclude. There is a managed transfer where any pupil who is seen to need moving to a different school does so only after a careful process involving a range of staff responsible for young people, including those with pastoral responsibility at the school. Although it is a very carefully managed process, it may not always take account of the student's voice and can lead to low self-esteem as we discuss below under the section on NEET young people.

In the current year, the school is focusing on vulnerable groups, such as those entitled to free school meals, as well as on those who are deemed Gifted and Talented. In this cohort, 16 pupils who underperformed last year have been targeted as vulnerable. Alternative provision is made and monitored and students can be put into a 'cause for concern' process. Since the current head teacher arrived there have been no managed transfers or permanent exclusions but the school does have some 'very tricky youngsters' who have temporary exclusions. The records of the past two

years show that of those leaving in 2007/2008 14 per cent became 'NEET', but by 2008/2009 the proportion had fallen to 2.9 per cent.

3.2.3.8 Plans for the future

The management group suggested that 'we can do a better job this year' as staff have more training and experience. In the coming year, School D will focus more on target setting as an academic mentoring process. They will not have a leavers' assembly so early (in 2009 it was in May), as they want to keep the pupils psychologically and practically engaged in school.

3.2.3.9 Consequences of the strategy for progression

The current Year 11 has the success of the previous cohort to live up to, but their own early entry for GCSEs is helping them maintain self-esteem. However, they are currently feeling 'stressed and frightened' as they have had 'three years of brutalisation', as expressed by one of the staff members interviewed, and now have the spotlight on them. They have never had expectations placed on them in this way before and the head teacher is aware that 'we need to challenge the students' stated aspirations' when interviewing them. The current Years 7 and 8 have only experienced an aspirational environment but Year 9 will have experienced the initial culture of low aspirations. The research team is keen to follow subsequent cohorts through in order to gain a more systematic understanding of the effects that educational regeneration is having.

3.2.3.10 Implications of the school's strategies

The school has introduced a variety of initiatives to improve the achievement levels of their pupils. As noted by the head teacher:

> 'We are taking the battle to the kids. We say to the kids "you're responsible but I can help". We are winning the hearts and minds of the children. Because we are being judged on their outcomes, we do as much as possible here for them.'

It is interesting to consider how the school's activity is changing as a result of the government target setting. This does mean that there is success – as shown by the summer 2009 results – but there is a concern that students do not reach their maximum potential if the early entry for GCSE policy affects motivation in Year 11. College provision may change dramatically over the years if the school strategy results in better qualifications achieved in Key Stage 4. It is important to identify whether the colleges can maintain a similar focus on achievement. There may be some casualties, for example, what happens to young people who have been 'cajoled' at school but who may not have the same level of attention whilst at college?

The influence of a charismatic head, strong SMT and clear direction from the federation is evident. The investment of staff time is probably one of the most influential factors here, but the research team has asked if this is sustainable. The following sections now follow the learners' journeys into college.

3.2.4 The experiences of learners in Hastings schools

The learners who participated in interviews were in Year 10 at the time of the research. We had negotiated access to focus groups of learners through the linked Ore Valley research project. Although this project included interviews with learners in more than one school, it focused on those who were poor attenders and provided insights into the challenges facing schools from the perspective of the young people who were the target of education intervention activities. All schools were undertaking these activities and we therefore include the experiences of all the learners from the focus groups, even though they were not representative of School D.

3.2.4.1 Learners' experiences of school

Learners studying for GCSEs viewed school as providing a satisfactory education which would lead to them being able to get jobs in the future. Learners following vocational courses considered they would have a better chance of getting a job when they left school. However, those with poor attendance considered that school did not prepare them for the future, they came to school for the prime purpose of seeing their peers:

> *'It doesn't prepare you for the future but I don't know what you could do to change it. I'm only here to see my mates.'*

> *'I come mainly to be social and see my friends and we'd go to court if we didn't come here but it doesn't help us get ready for the future cos no one bothers about us. We're the naughty ones and we're just all shoved in together.'*

The most enjoyable aspect of being at school was having fun with friends:

> *'Being with all the misbehaved people, it's really fun. It's like we're all friends together.'*

> *'Hanging around with my sort of people.'*

> *'Messing about and having a laugh.'*

Some of the 'high achieving' learners felt a sense of belonging to the school; however, some also thought that they were not listened to. For those following vocational courses and those with poor attendance, there was a definite feeling that they did not belong to the school. They considered school did not offer much that was of interest to them:

> *'I normally wander around for lessons and get there late. If you get there 10 minutes late you get a detention, but you still get one if you're half an hour late so you may as well be really late.'*

> *'No way do we belong, we're all naughty and so no one wants to listen to us. Teachers have their opinions and they stick to them. They don't care what we think about anything. They'll be glad when we're not here. We get picked on by some teachers if we do anything wrong, but if other kids do something wrong, they don't get told off like we do. School isn't fair to us.'*

Learners studying for GCSEs were motivated in lessons when teachers communicated the lesson's learning objective to them and when they were set personal improvement targets. They felt motivated to learn when lessons were 'hands on' and active and preferred lessons which didn't involve the teacher spending a lot of time talking:

> *'I enjoy Drama and Art. We're given more freedom to do what we want. We learn our own thing.'*

Learners were demotivated when lessons involved copying from books or the board and when teachers wasted time trying to control the class:

> *'Everything, lessons are just so boring and the teachers don't care. They can't control the class.'*

> *'Teachers don't have control of lessons so we just do what we want. We normally just talk to our mates.'*

Learners with poor attendance tended to lack motivation in lessons when they perceived the work not to be of interest or relevance to them, or when they considered the teachers had little concern for them. These learners often became easily distracted by activities which were more relevant/fun to them, such as putting on make-up:

> *'Teachers try and do stuff but no one's really interested in what they're doing and you just end up talking. We don't do much in lessons.'*

> *'Most days I can't be bothered to work. There's no point in it.'*

> *'Teacher is grumpy and not bothered about us. I've never been asked to do homework. I wouldn't do it.'*

> *'Some days I come to school and I know my make-up isn't right so all I want to do is put it right so I get my make-up out and then other people want to use it so I pass it round and all the girls start doing their make-up and then we don't do no work and the teachers can't stop us.'*

Most learners studying for GCSEs considered that teachers had reasonably high expectations of them; learners with poor attendance, however, considered that teachers did not place high academic expectations on them:

> *'Most teachers don't expect much from us.'*

> *'A few teachers help us but most think we're no good. We're just seen as the ones who misbehave.'*

Learners considered that their parents did not place high academic expectations on them:

> *'My family don't care; I'm the only one who expects anything from me.'*

Learners with poor attendance who were required to attend school on a part-time basis were positive about this arrangement as it reduced the pressure they had previously felt at school:

> *'We don't come into school all the time and that's better. Sometimes we go to work experience which is quite good and sometimes we go to this group in town where we sit round and talk to people on these big sofas. It's quite good. You can be with your mates and that but it's not like school. They're supposed to teach you things there but we never do anything so they just let us talk.'*

When choosing GCSE options, learners considered that neither teachers nor parents were interested in, or influenced, their choice of subjects. They based their choice on their own perceptions of the subjects they thought they could manage, subjects they didn't 'hate', or they chose the same subjects as their peers in the hope that they would spend more time with them:

> *'I did what my mates did. No-one really bothers.'*

> *'The teachers just told us what to do. We just had what was left over. They didn't care.'*

Several learners wanted to go to college to learn skills to enable them to get a job; they considered that most teachers would encourage them to do that. Many learners were unsure about what they would like to study at college; those who mentioned courses they would like to pursue talked about the following: beauty, hairdressing and catering:

> *'I want to go to college. I don't know what to do though but my teachers and parents would be telling me to go.'*

> *'I don't know. My family would try and encourage me but I wouldn't go if I didn't want to. My sister went but didn't like it at all.'*

The level of careers guidance received by all learners interviewed was perceived to be minimal. Learners with poor attendance were of the opinion that they did not want the guidance:

> *'I wouldn't want any anyway.'*

Learners considered that their future aspirations had been influenced mainly by themselves:

> *'I've influenced me. That's why I've written the books.'*

> *'My sister [has influenced me] in a way cos I know I don't want to be like her. She's just a waster.'*

When asked: What do you reckon you will think when you leave school and look back on your time here? The following responses were given:

> *'What a waste!'*

> *'It was a laugh.'*

> *'I should've been good and not wasted it.'*

> *'I should have done something better at school.'*

> *'I'll miss messing around and being with my friends.'*

> *'It sounds good leaving school but when it really comes to it, it won't be as much fun cos you won't see you friends every day and you won't have the laughs we have here, like we're all really close and we all have fun together.'*

We see here that young people are aware of some of the interventions such as careers advice, part-time attendance and requirements to do homework, but generally they are not positive about these activities. The influence of peer pressure, as noted by parents earlier, is strongly expressed by the learners. It is important to remember that the young people attended a variety of the schools and therefore did not necessarily experience the focus of some of the activities undertaken by School D, yet the picture is worrying as it shows how uninterested this particular group is in relation to further learning. However, the educational interventions provided by the schools and the college continue to be directed at this group of young people. The next section now examines how the college addresses these challenges.

3.2.5 The experiences of college staff

> *'We want to enable as many young people as possible to be on the right pathway at the right level'*

(Assistant Principal).

3.2.5.1 Context

SCCH is a medium-sized general FE college with 1914 full-time and 464 part-time learners aged 16-18 with an additional 9514 adult learners, mainly studying part-time (2006/2007 figures). Learners attend a range of provision from foundation to advanced level, with some apprenticeships and Train to Gain provision. The majority of learners are aged 16-18 and study full-time on foundation and intermediate levels. Its last inspection by Ofsted was judged to be overall satisfactory, with leadership and management and the capacity to improve being judged good. The current principal joined in 2008 and since then a number of senior management appointments have been made. The most recent Ofsted report identified significant improvements in learner achievement, particularly in relation to GCSE levels on entry.

The attention to recruitment, induction and retention by the college has evolved over the years but has been particularly reinforced by the change of staff at senior management level. The previous focus on 'bums on seats' is now disappearing. There is now a sense of being connected to the community, sharing goals with the Local Authority, the LSC and Children's Trust: all 'agenda shapers'. The principal is clear about shifts and responsiveness to the national agenda but is aware that the college is also focusing on the individual needs of learners. The local 14-19 Partnership Board influences and facilitates communication between schools and colleges. Government policy is steering the college and has 'forced' relationships to take shape but as a result there is a more coherent approach to the curriculum and individual aspirations. One assistant principal suggested they are now more purposeful and do not work within isolated strands of activity.

The infrastructure at the college is now in place to monitor what is being achieved. For example, the SAR (self assessment report, validated by peer review) showed 7 per cent improved retention of the 16-18 year olds, which was 4 per cent above benchmark, with improved success, achievement and attendance.

3.2.5.2 Recruitment

The college staff visit schools by Year 10 and attend all open days and some parents' evenings. The head of central admissions noted that the Year 10 students are enthusiastic. They are full of questions yet 'something happens – not sure what it is' by Year 11. At this stage there is less enthusiasm and the students appear to be following their peers rather than using information to help guide their choices.

SCCH also works closely with Connexions – referring, sending reports, helping young people whose parents may not be pro-active, acting as 'advocates', etc. They also identify potential NEETs and 'head them off'. The head of central admissions

stated that 'if we didn't push, they wouldn't apply in time and then it is too late.' A lot of them wait until September to apply (the normal application procedure takes place over some months, much earlier in the year). They send two to three invitations to these more 'vulnerable' young people and they always monitor attendance. Connexions chase those who do not attend.

Parents as well as schools are seen to be influencing the aspirations of the learners, but staff are aware that the context in Hastings is also influenced not only by the cost of HE but the lack of jobs and apprenticeships available for young people.

Taster days for applicants are being used across programme areas providing the potential students with experiences such a being in an industrial kitchen. These welcome days in June were meant to 'keep them warm' but also help in 'getting the right people on the right course at the right level'. There are a 'plethora of opportunities' for young people and SSCH has a number of work experience modules to help young people experience the sectors they are thinking of entering. One programme manager suggested more should be done for transition from primary to secondary (Year 6 and 7), for example having taster sessions in cookery or playing sport. He argued there should be a college-related 11-19 curriculum.

Each August the college undertakes a complex recruitment and enrolment exercise with a large team of staff. There was a 38 per cent increase in applications this year (to 3006 applicants) and 1500 learners enrolled. The busiest period begins on the day on which GCSE results are published. Young people then contact the college, which checks these. The first day is reserved for enrolments for 'Academy 6' (the college's sixth-form college-style unit offering GCE A levels) which has about 250 learners in the cohort. Then over the next three and half days, the vocational learners come in for enrolment. This is followed by a two-week 'mop up session'. Applicants who have not yet come to the college go through the same process as the rest but in a 'condensed' form because of time constraints. Construction students apparently always apply late.

Interestingly, one college manager predicted that the college would begin to reduce its lower level provision and return to what it was 10 years ago (a mainly Level 3 provider), reflecting the changing profile of the past few cohorts and possibly following the rise in fortunes of the current cohort and beyond. This view does imply that learners who need to begin at lower levels will need to be catered for differently.

3.2.5.3 Study support

Study support is given a great deal of attention. Learning mentors are a key element and each has a case load of learners to work with. In the 2009/2010 academic year, a management information system is being used for the first time to identify which learners the learning mentors will work with. The college is being proactive in using the data to identify groups of students (and their personal tutors) who need some additional support or intervention. This includes routine monitoring of attendance. Learning mentors also pick out individual students, some of whom gravitate towards the 'hub', (a place where mentors are located which has computers available for

students to use in their free time). It is hoped that the new process will help manage students' expectations, including how to learn at college.

Study skills are covered at induction and by the tutorial system and some disciplines, such as Art and Design, have a track record in covering independent skills. Business Studies has a handbook that sets out criteria for what students need to do to get pass, merit or distinction grades.

Approximately 40 students a year leave before their programmes of study are complete. They are given exit interviews.

3.2.5.4 The new induction process

A new process this year included initial screening at application, a general interview where results of this assessment were discussed, specific literacy and numeracy assessments, followed by a subject-specific interview with course tutors. Many of the students have 'spiky profiles' (they have much better attainment in some skill areas than in others). In some cases their GCSE grades bear no resemblance to their literacy and numeracy assessments; this can go in either direction.

The new process forms a 'gentler progression' because students are given information about other options at the point of assessment. Following the process, a conditional offer is made and a welcome day is held in July where students meet their peer group. Of course, the college peer group will be different from the school peer group. The head of admissions thinks about 60 per cent of predictions were about right for 2009/2010.

3.2.5.5 The 'Right Choice' programme

A second part to the induction process includes the 'Right Choice' period where the students start their induction and settling in period. They are given specific information about the college's expectations on behaviour and attendance, as well as specific course information. This is different from what college managers felt happened in schools where 'no one has imposed boundaries on them before'. This process is 'all about positive expectations'. College life is seen to be very different from school and the students need to have ownership of this. The head of admissions was aware that schools needed to be part of this preparation for transition.

3.2.5.6 Progression

There is an 'opt in' programme which is run at Enterprise One, an initiative run by SSCH. This provision covers outreach work, such as working with teenage mothers. It is flexible, has rolling enrolment, builds up credit and can roll into the Foundation Pathways programme. Foundation Pathways, too, is a flexible programme and learners can progress to Entry to Employment (E2E) and vocational options, such as childcare, hospitality, travel and construction. One of the challenges noted by staff at the college are the families with generations being on benefit – 'you need to start giving reasons why it could be different – young people see their parents can get up when they like, go to bed when they like, they have money for cigarettes – so why

should they do anything else?' Breaking this cycle is a component of the advice and guidance work of Connexions and school and college staff.

For vocational learners, the college is aware that students who have been successful in going to HE from similar backgrounds to the young people at college need to come back and talk to the current learners. This would be helped by employers who could explain how a higher qualification will help people get work. It is not just the qualifications but the 'change in confidence, life changing experiences that need to be told'.

As one college manager told us:

> *'Never give up on them – keep bashing at them. If you talk to them long enough you can get them hooked – they see they're not thick and that there's possibilities.'*

The college also has an enrichment programme with sports and other activities that students are encouraged to participate in.

3.2.5.7 Ongoing challenges

There are still areas to improve. One assistant principal noted that there was work to do with subject tutors who might not see the potential of young people to progress. It is 'crucial' that tutorial support includes targets and to make sure that tutors set these – the learners have experienced this approach in the schools now and would expect it at the college, although there was a perception by some tutors that the tutorial system is all about 'being fluffy' and this perception needs to change.

3.2.6   The experiences of young people in college

In our interviews with college learners, we met with six groups of learners across a range of courses including Level 1 Social Care, Level 2 Beauty Therapy, BTEC National Diploma in Public Services, BTEC First Diploma in Sports, BTEC National Diploma in Sports and A levels. Not all respondents were from the 2009 Year 11 cohort, which provided an opportunity to explore differences in school experiences before the current educational interventions had occurred. One group of learners comprised teenage mothers whose experiences align with many of those from the NEET group which we interviewed and report on in the next section.

3.2.6.1 Views of school

The learners had attended a range of schools in Hastings. Learners had mixed experiences of school but the majority were less positive. Their responses ranged from 'boring' to acknowledging that with supportive teachers they enjoyed it. Those undertaking Level 1 and Level 2 vocational qualifications were most likely to report poor experiences of school, but they had not been turned away from learning. Their fortunes at school had already begun to affect their progress and a couple of learners were aware that they had not gained any GCSEs despite the potential to do so:

> *'I only went to school an hour a week and they wouldn't let me do it even though I could have passed a couple [of GCSEs]'*

We have evidence that bullying was a strong factor in negative school experiences as the following two comments indicate. The first respondent also provides supporting evidence for parental fears about peer pressure and influence on their children's career choices:

> *'I didn't enjoy school but I put that down to my confidence and to the friend I had at the time, who I thought was a friend, and not till you look back you realise no, she was just constantly putting me down all the time.'*

> *'Yeah, I was bullied when I was in Year 7 but then I just sort of got on with my form after that. Sort of what's the point? So when I did join the sixth form – cos I still went – I didn't know no-one. When I first went to [School C] I ate my lunch in the toilets.'*

We asked how learners viewed their GCSE results and those from the 2008/2009 cohort were very pleased with their results either because they were 'OK' for the amount of work they had done at school, or beyond their expectations – particularly those who had expected no GCSEs. Some reported feeling 'chuffed' because they were so good. Those who had done well also recognised the help they had received from school. Again, not all learners had taken advantage of the provision at school as one learner noted:

> *'When we had mentoring sessions, I just never used to go.'*

Our evidence, then, is of the newer cohort having experienced the opportunities to engage in learning at school but not necessarily taking full advantage of these.

3.2.6.2 Information, advice and guidance

Hardly anyone cited IAG as part of their school experience but one learner noted that the timing of this was not necessarily most effective, even when she had left school:

> *'When I left school I was contacted by Connexions. It was good advice but not for me at that time.'*

We also found evidence that they were aware of differences between the general FE college, the sixth form college and sixth forms in school. One learner had visited the sixth form college but felt it was 'too posh' and another 'couldn't get in'. Indeed, other learners noted how the FE college was prepared to give them a chance even though they had no qualifications.

Some learners had explored the opportunity of undertaking an apprenticeship but, again, they were aware that there were few places. There was a discussion in one focus group as to whether they needed entry qualifications to embark on an apprenticeship.

Once at the college not all learners were aware of the 'Right Choice' programme, particularly those studying for A levels, but they were aware of the opportunities to discuss their progress and obtain information from college staff.

Learners were only partly aware of the information about HE but those with a sibling drew their knowledge of HE from this source:

> 'I would ask my brother – he tells me everything.'

3.2.6.3 Views of college

Overall, learners were very positive about the college ethos and their views align with those of the college staff. Their comments all note the way in which they feel treated like adults:

> 'The teachers here explain it more than school would have. They would have said just "Here you go, get on with it."'

> 'I didn't really enjoy school a lot and I left quite early so I missed out on college applications and how to get into college. But now I'm a bit older I know there's more advice, so I'm a lot clearer now about how to get to college and what path you can take.'

The IFP, where Key Stage 4 school students attend college one or two days a week alongside doing GCSEs in school, although undertaken by some of our respondents, was also seen by others as only suitable for certain kinds of learners:

> 'That's for the naughty kids.'

There was interest in the programme by those now attending college who identified it as appropriate for them if the right courses were offered. The same group of learners recognised that this programme should be offered to everyone.

3.2.6.4 Progression within college

Some learners have already begun to make progress from a fairly low level of achievement on entry. They are also making use of the additional resources within the college, such as the enrichment programme, which, in the previous section of this report, was also identified as an important incentive by college staff:

> 'Since I've been at college I've got my Level 1 literacy and numeracy and now I'm going for Level 2 numeracy and literacy and I've got my Level 1 Beauty Therapy and there's other courses available, like enrichment.'

 Although this learner had improved her literacy and numeracy, there was a general view that key skills were necessary even if not something they were keen to do:

> '…obviously a bit boring but it does help.'

3.2.6.5 Views of progression to university

We asked the learners to tell us about their aspirations, including whether they had considered university. Again, as with our survey results, there was interest in university across the range of programmes being studied but also a wariness of being in debt and whether it was the appropriate thing to do:

> *'I'd hate being in debt.'*

> *'Well scary.'*

> *'We're too old.'*

> *'I don't think I'd want to go to university. It sounds like too much hard work.'*

We also found that learners who had siblings were aware of the level of work and need for independence that HE study demands.

Yet other learners were positive about thinking of university:

> *'I'd love to go to university.'*

Following the interest in university expressed in one focus group of learners undertaking BTEC, their tutor has made a note to organise a series of university visits in their second year.

We have begun to capture the espoused interest in HE by learners who may previously have been seen to be less engaged and it is clear that vocational learners are a key focus for the recent Higher Ambitions White Paper (BIS, 2009).

We asked if learners had experienced Aimhigher and, although few had, there were some from the BTEC programme and A levels who recalled their experiences:

> *'We went into this van and they gave us a laptop.'*

> *'We sat on a bus.'*

> *'We got a free pen.'*

Such comments suggest that Aimhigher has much to develop in relation to the perceptions of the young people who have participated. Aimhigher Sussex is conducting a series of focus groups with young people in Years 10 and 11. It is also highly likely that although young people remember the practicalities, they may not attribute any changes in their achievement to these activities. However, other learners did mention the opportunity to visit the University of Brighton or attending an open evening at UCH.

3.2.6.6 Employment opportunities in Hastings

Learners were aware of the economic situation in Hastings and offered views on what could be done to improve it for young people like themselves:

> *'They just need to build more shops, build more companies, build more buildings, build more offices, build more…'*

> *'Lower the retirement age.'*

> *'Open more businesses.'*

'I think there are jobs out there – people are just too lazy to get them.'

Yet other learners had tried to gain employment:

'I got rejected by Pizza Hut.'

'I got rejected too.'

3.2.7 The experiences of young people not in employment, education or training

3.2.7.1 Context

'If I didn't come here I'd be on drugs, dossing round.'

'I can get peace and quiet.'

As we pointed out before, our research aimed to examine effective transitions and services for young people at 16. This had to include those who were not going to progress to any form of employment, education or training (NEET).

The NEET element of the research was designed to look at student and staff perspectives, including eliciting the experiences of young people who may be older than 16, in order to understand the transition journey.

The organisation we worked with, XTRAX, offers personalised provision for young people NEET, in addition to group work and courses. Research suggests that the level of personalisation of services is key to engaging groups such as young people NEET (Hyde and Cecil, 2007; McDonnell and Beauclair, 2007).

3.2.7.2 Young people's awareness of their difficulties

According to XTRAX, young people who leave school at 16 without any plans don't perceive this as a 'problem' initially. It is often only when the summer of the final year of school is over, peer groups become busy and financial realities hit home that being NEET becomes 'a problem' and at this point young people may gravitate towards provision such as XTRAX. Of those interviewed, most had not attended school in the final years although half had taken GCSEs even if they were unsure of their results.

3.2.7.3 Financial barriers to participation

The biggest barrier for young people over 18-19 is financial. Under 18s are entitled to some type of public housing support and over 19's lose entitlement to a range of financial support and the support of significant services. There was universal frustration with opportunities in Hastings and fear expressed about lack of economic security. One third of those interviewed said they had thought about going to university but dismissed it as financially impossible. Fear of debt was the main barrier discussed. Both young people and staff commented on how, without financial support, the thought of taking on a student loan was too off-putting. In addition, some spoke about the transition from benefits to a loan and no regular income, and said that having no means of paying housing costs was too much of a barrier, especially when there was no financial support from family to fall back on.

3.2.7.3 Bullying as a contributor to disengagement

In the majority of interviews bullying appeared as a key reason for young people disengaging from school. This was compounded by a perception that there was inadequate support and systems in place to deal with it. Many young people had attended multiple schools in the area. A few were home schooled as a result of cited bullying:

> 'Every school in Hastings but not School D.'

> 'Done the rounds.'

3.2.7.3 Wider lack of opportunities

There was a sense of frustration with Hastings and lack of opportunities for young people in terms of jobs. The lack of free or affordable sports and leisure facilities were also mentioned, including transport costs incurred in travelling for jobs and courses. There was a sense that Hastings was a 'no go' area and provided a climate of temptation for drugs, drink and even criminal activity. Yet once again, our interviews showed that young people were aware of their own potential, both academically and economically and felt thwarted by factors outside their control. Ultimately a lack of secure jobs with prospects seemed to provide the ultimate barrier for young people as most were taking courses and making efforts to improve their fortunes.

3.2.7.4 Positive aspirations and goals

Projects such as XTRAX provide a safe space: a type of alternative family network for young people, as well as a supportive peer group. The fact that the project is open on Sundays and at Christmas (key times when other provision is closed) was reported by young people to be a particularly welcome feature. The alternative family and safe peer group atmosphere created in the project is especially important as at least half of those young people interviewed talked about estrangement from families.

Few young people in the sample reported positive feelings or experiences of school. The majority of those interviewed were in and out of courses and part-time jobs. Substance misuse, housing problems and offending histories also formed significant features of many lives. All young people interviewed talked about turning things around for themselves in terms of negative experiences and how XTRAX formed a significant part of that process. There was no poverty of aspiration in evidence in the interviews, but rather a poverty of opportunity. All of the young people interviewed had hopes, dreams, aspirations and, in most cases, plans for the future.

One young person who was in her first term at UCH articulated a range of barriers that had been in the way including: difficult school and peer group experiences, with bullying and fear of debt related to the points raised above. In addition, they articulated quite how big a transition it was to go back into a formal classroom again, particularly after a history of bullying at school.

There were numerous success stories within this group of young people. One young person noted that support was received from Connexions but only after becoming homeless, not during school. Another individual noted that a head of year at school:

> *'...sat me down and told me I was academic and it was up to me to get my act together. She really did help me – if not for her I'd have been kicked out.'*

3.2.7.5 *The limitations of interventions based on an age-defined target group*

Restrictive definitions of 'NEET' appear to be preventing young people in the 'NEET churn', and who may currently be engaged in some kind of work or training that doesn't appear to offer concrete long-term prospects, from accessing provision in the new partnership at XTRAX. Although leaving school between 14 and 16 was a key transition point for young people in this sample, moving on from projects such as XTRAX at age 25 is another key transition point as they lose provision that provides alternative family networks, IAG and general support for 'older' young people.

3.2.7.6 *Section conclusion*

This research only scratches the surface of issues facing young people not in (or in insecure) employment, education or training in Hastings. Our data reflects the experiences of staff and young people involved with one project of NEET provision and may not reflect the experiences of those involved in other provision. What we can show, however, is that some of the concerns and experiences expressed by young people at XTRAX are currently the focus of a number of initiatives at both schools and college in Hastings. It is only by gathering these experiences that we can we see how important all parts of education and training provision are to young people as they make the transition from schooling to future work and study.

Section Four

Themes and recommendations

4.1 Themes

The research has shown that in this particular year, as a result of educational interventions at school and college level, young people have been able to make the transition from school to further learning with higher levels of qualifications than previous cohorts had managed. Across the school and college partnerships there is a sense that young people are 'up for it' and the numbers who have stayed on at school or progressed to college testify to this important change.

Bexhill College has moved into new premises, SCCH is about to move into new accommodation near the centre and railway station and UCH is continuing to grow and will also move into expanded buildings. However, the Hastings labour market is not only one of the most depressed in South East England, but also in England as a whole, and this especially hits young people.

We have identified in our research some of the main themes which have run through our findings in section three:

- hopes and fears of progression

- raised expectations

- the capacity of IAG services to support young people through transitions in a context of raised expectations

- ability to envisage a future in the local labour market rather than having to move away, but also having the option to move away

4.1.1 Progression

Our research has confirmed the view of the educational partnerships operating in Hastings that age16 is an important turning point worth attention if participation in HE is to be widened. Our interviews with college students showed that young people identified the move into post-16 education as a chance for a new start. For those who had had poor GCSE results and were enrolled on lower-level courses at 16, school experience had usually been disappointing, while college was already proving to be better. Even those with good GCSEs, who were taking courses that could lead directly to university, frequently had mixed experiences at school.

Young people were frequently critical of school while expressing praise for college and contrasted the 'adult' atmosphere of college with that of school. We suggest that practitioners should not take this 'school-bad-college-good' discourse at face value.

On one level it simply shows that the young people were ready and able to make the transition to a new stage of learning, whether in school or college or both (as in the Diploma), that they were ready to take on more responsibility for learning and to move on from the 'them-and-us' attitude of school that is so characteristic of teenage disaffection. But it does show that to a certain extent schools have had their time taken up with discipline and control issues.

Also in the responses both from the questionnaire and from college students there are indications of a less than ideal transition at 16 and concrete pointers to where IAG can be improved. These are discussed in the next section.

4.1.2 Raised expectations

Our evidence also shows that there has been a clear intention for staff across a range of provision, including school, Connexions, college and learning partnerships, to work together to provide a more seamless transfer. As a result of a number of activities, the schools are improving and one has now moved out of special measures.

What we have also been able to capture is the need to pursue the experiences of this cohort and those who work with them to identify how best to maintain the level of interest in further learning and training. We also need to ensure that the initiatives being developed by schools and the college are monitored and evaluated. With so many activities taking place concurrently, it will be hard to identify and attribute success and distinguish between those initiatives that have made a difference and those which may not be worth maintaining.

4.1.3 Information, Advice and Guidance

Our interviews with young people NEET and those working with them showed the need for long-term support and guidance. The educational regeneration efforts being made in Hastings need to address those who were not fortunate enough to experience the levels of attention currently being given to school pupils and students at the college. Without such initiatives, there will continue to be people living in the town who are 'not in', rather than participating in employment, education and training.

We have shown that there are good links between providers, both through individual staff relationships with Connexions and a dedicated 'push' to keep in contact with young people who may not follow through offers to visit the college, yet not all young people are aware of this provision, nor, indeed, are their parents.

It is also clear that the level of focus on young people and the investment of time and resources place a heavy burden on institutional resources. In the current economic climate it is hard to see how such levels can be maintained.

4.1.4 Preparing for local employment

We have also seen throughout our research that people are very aware of the economic climate in Hastings. Pupils, students and NEET young people all used their individual agency to deal with the economic and social challenges within Hastings.

Staff in school and college were only too aware of the need for young people to gain as many qualifications as possible to enable them to compete locally.

There is evidence from this research to claim success across the local partnerships and in particular for the strength of partnership working.

Below we identify a number of principles which we suggest may provide a basis for further research and collaborative working:

1. young people benefit from clear boundaries and goals

2. teachers need to agree academic goals which should be constantly monitored

3. parents need to be informed constantly of their children's progress and be invited to information sharing activities regularly

4. the systematic monitoring of learner progress is a vital component of early intervention and prevents drop out

5. providers benefit from working across sectors

6. the influence of successful achievement on subsequent family and intergenerational engagement with education and training is potent

4.2   Recommendations

Here we suggest some practical actions that we hope can be implemented locally through our partnerships:

*   college staff should visit schools regularly and meet young people early on in their schooling

*   university staff should visit schools and colleges and engage young people in activities that provide a taster of university-level learning. This should be done across the attainment range and will be of benefit to those who do not immediately envisage progression to university but who may progress through a vocational HE route at a later stage. All school pupils should visit at least one college and one university site

*   a 'drip feed' approach to reluctant learners with careful follow up and one-to-one support would facilitate the movement of young people vulnerable to non-participation into provision

*   schools and colleges should keep further progression in view when giving advice and guidance, particularly for learners who choose a vocational path that may eventually lead to HE learning

*   young people should be encouraged to act as advocates for further study, particularly as the members of this successful cohort move through their post-compulsory learning careers

- support to this cohort should be extended into their first stages of university study to improve the experience of progression to HE and minimise drop-out

- even after graduation, support is needed to enable learners to develop their careers to the benefit of the local economy

- an envisioning project should be undertaken, involving learners in schools, colleges and HE in order to involve all these learners in debate about the future of Hastings as a town and to ensure that they can contribute to its prosperity

4.3   Research questions

We set out to ask:

- What – if any – is the impact of educational interventions on individual decisions at 16?

- Can WP interventions in education contribute to 'education led' regeneration?

We stated at the outset that we knew we could not directly attribute any particular change in behaviour to a specific WP intervention or educational intervention. We also stated that we did not find the idea of different types of intervention (WP or educational) a helpful distinction. In Hastings, we argue that all interventions have the potential to widen participation, not just in HE but in learning provision generally.

Our research has not merely repeated the 'familiar list of NEET pointers: peer pressure, parental aspiration or lack of; poor relationship with school; lack of appropriate advice and guidance and an inappropriate curriculum' (Besley, 2010/1, DWP 2010, Ross, 2009) but identified some positive indications that steps are being taken within the Hastings community to make a difference to the aspirations of young people. Indeed, the attempt to avoid young people becoming a 'lost generation' (DCSF, 2010) is high on the agenda and, again, our evidence suggests people do not feel lost at all but rather are aware of the challenges and pitfalls that confront them. Our research has found, as did the Leeds study (Sharp, 2009), that parental encouragement and support for learning is one of many factors influencing young people's decision-making at 16. We can also challenge the notion that young people are 'lazy, inarticulate, selfish and aggressive' (*Staying On*, June 2009, Sharp, 2009:25) and agree with the Leeds study that young people want to engage and are hopeful and optimistic.

We support the claim that attainment at age 16 is key to children's life chances (Milburn Report, *Unleashing Aspiration: Fair Access to the Professions* 2009:30) and argue that in Hastings, there is an opportunity for more young people to achieve following their recent success at GCSE. However, there is much more to be done. The level of GCSEs compared with those in more affluent areas is still low. There is evidence that this can be built on, as shown by improvements in achievement in Hastings and as seen from recent Ofsted reports. We suggest that it is vital that the current level of resource and focus on keeping young people engaged continues.

This priority has been accepted by the South East LSC, whose strategy is to 'provide an increasingly flexible, personalised and engaging curriculum which will motivate young people, increase their aspirations, improve their success and help them to progress to a productive and fulfilling adult life' (LSC, 2008:2). These local and regional strategies will also need to develop to meet the changing policy landscape for 14-19 and 16-24 year old age groups. The effects of the raising of the school leaving age, for example, will provide a different context within which young people are encouraged or required to participate in education and training. The number of bills still to proceed through parliament, including the Children, Schools and Families Bill, the Child Poverty Bill and the Equality Bill, will all underpin action to increase numbers of children and their families who can benefit from education and other action to improve their position in society. Although we do not support the term 'lost generation' we are aware that there are still many young people who have not benefitted from the education system as fully as they could. Young people who have not achieved well initially are not yet finding their way through the education and training system effectively. Those who have begun this journey are aware of both the barriers and challenges, but have also begun to improve their life chances. There are many others who have not yet made a start on changing their situation. We cannot afford to ignore this group.

Our findings suggest that educational interventions are beginning to have an impact on individual decisions at 16, but that these interventions are resource intensive. We have also shown that education-led regeneration is underway in Hastings through improved educational attainment, but that we need to track this carefully as cohorts move through school to college and beyond. The Coastal Regeneration Research Centre at the University College Hastings has recently developed its three-year strategy to build research activity focusing on Hastings, St. Leonards and Area (HSLA) with particular emphasis on social and economic regeneration. We hope that our research can begin to support such regeneration.

Yvonne Hillier
January 2010

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Appendix 2 Questionnaire

Future Plans Project

Thank you for agreeing to fill in this questionnaire. We're really interested in knowing about your plans and your views about your future. For most questions you only need to put a cross in a box. When there is something to write in, please don't worry about spelling.

For each question please place a cross clearly IN THE CENTRE of the answer box.

First up, here's some questions about your life at school and work

Q1.   How many GCSEs do you think you're most likely to get?

None at all	
Less than five at ANY grade	
Five or more but not five with C grades or better	
At least five with C grades or better	

Q2.   Do you have a part-time job that you do IN SCHOOL TERM-TIME after school, before school or at weekends?

Yes	
No	

Q3.   If you have a part-time job in term-time, how much do you earn?

I work and I earn less than £10 a week	
I work and I earn between £10 and £20 a week	
I work and I earn between £21 and £30 a week	
I work and I earn between £31 and £40 a week	
I work and I earn between £41 and £50 a week	
I work and I earn more than £50 a week	
Not applicable (I don't have a job in term-time)	

Q4.   Are you expecting to work in the summer holidays this year?

Yes, most of the holidays or all the holidays	
Yes, some of the holidays	
No	

Q5.   Do you save any of the money you earn from working before or after school, at the weekend, or in the holidays?

I don't work before or after school, at the weekend, or in the holidays	
When I earn money at work I don't save any of it	
I save some of my earnings for things I want to buy	
I save some of my earnings for things I want to buy and for my life in the future	

Next up, here's some questions about future studies and careers

Q6.   What are you most likely to do in September after finishing Year 11?

I'll stay on at school	
I'll go to Sussex Coast College, Hastings (Hastings College), full-time	
I'll go to a different college, full-time	
I'll get an apprenticeship (might include part-time college)	
I'll get a job that isn't an apprenticeship but has training	
I'll get a job that isn't an apprenticeship and doesn't have training	
I'll do something else	

Q7.   If you stay on in the sixth form, go to college or do an apprenticeship or a job with training, what qualifications do you think you will get?

You can select more than one box.

A Levels	
14-19 Diploma, Advanced	
14-19 Diploma, Higher	
14-19 Diploma, Foundation	
International Baccalaureate	
BTEC National Diploma/Certificate	
BTEC First	
NVQ Level 1	
NVQ Level 2	
NVQ Level 3	
City & Guilds	
Other qualification(s)	

Q8.   If you think you will get other qualification(s) then what will it/they be?

Q9.   How likely are you to go to university before you are 30?

I'm very likely to go	
I'm quite likely to go	
I'm neither likely nor unlikely to go	
I'm quite unlikely to go	
I'm very unlikely to go	

Q10.　　Please list one or two careers that you are considering and that you think would be realistic for you.

1	
2	

Q11.　　Here are some statements about studying, working and money. What do you think?

	Yes, I agree	No, I don't agree	Not sure
It is hard to get an apprenticeship			
Young people need to have a full-time job to borrow money from a bank.			
There are very few job opportunities in Hastings			
A university course would probably be boring			
People with qualifications usually earn more money			
My family wouldn't see the point of me going to university			
I have a quiet space at home to study			
Unless their parents have a high income, university students get a grant for their living expenses that they don't have to repay.			
My teachers don't think I am clever enough to go to university			
You can always go to college when you are older to get more qualifications			
A levels might be too difficult for me			
Employers can charge a fee for someone to start an apprenticeship			
You should avoid getting into debt			
It is hard to get into university			

Working in an apprenticeship would probably be boring			
I missed out on a lot of school trips because they were too expensive			
A levels are more useful than vocational qualifications like BTEC and NVQ			
My family won't let me go to university if it means leaving home			

Q12. If someone in your family has been to university, who was that?

You can select more than one box

Mother	
Father	
Carer(s)	
Brother(s) or sister(s)	
Aunt(s), uncle(s), cousin(s) or other	

Q13. Which of these people have given you good advice about careers and studying?

You can select more than one box.

Personal tutor, head of year, PSHE teacher at school	
Subject teacher(s) at school	
Connexions/Careers adviser	
Parent(s)	
Carer(s)	
Brother(s) or sister(s)	
Friend(s)	
Someone else	

Q14. If someone else gave you good advice about careers and studying, who was that?

Q15. Have you had experience of any of these things, and how useful was it?

	Yes I had experience of this and it was useful	Yes I had experience of this but it wasn't useful	No I didn't have experience of this
Visit to a workplace, or work shadowing			
Work experience			
Visit to Sussex Coast College, Hastings (Hastings College)			
Visit to a different college			
Visit to University Centre Hastings			
Visit to a different university site			
A university lecturer or professor running an event in your school			
Mentoring by a university student			
Gifted and talented programme			

Q16. Have you heard of Aimhigher?

Yes, and I took part in it	
Yes, but I didn't take part in it	
No	

And finally, some questions about you.

Q17.   Please say if you are a boy or a girl.

I'm a boy	
I'm a girl	

Q18.   When were you born? Please circle the appropriate month AND year.

Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

1991 1992 1993 1994

Q19.   What is your cultural background?

White British		Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	
White Irish		Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	
Any other White background		Any other Asian background	
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean		Black or Black British - Caribbean	
Mixed - White and Black African		Black or Black British - African	
Mixed - White and Asian		Any other Black background	
Any other Mixed background		Chinese	
Asian or Asian British - Indian		Any other background	

Q20.   How long have you lived in the Hastings area, either at the place you live now or somewhere else in the area?

Less than 2 years	
2-5 years	
5-10 years	
Longer than 10 years	
All my life	

Q21.   If you haven't lived in Hastings all your life, where did you live before that?

Please write in up to three towns, cities or countries where you lived.

1	
2	
3	

Q22. What is your FULL postcode?

Q23.   Please give some information about what your parents or carers do. Fill in the columns below for ONE OR TWO adults who live with you and look after you. If you live with ONE parent or carer please leave the second column blank. If you don't live in a family please leave both columns blank.

Parent or carer 1

Has a full-time job	
Has a part-time job	
Self-employed	
Doesn't go out to work at the moment but is looking for a job	
Doesn't go out to work and isn't looking for a job	

If he or she has a job or is self-employed, or USED to have a job, what does he or she do?

Parent or carer 2

Has a full-time job	
Has a part-time job	
Self-employed	
Doesn't go out to work at the moment but is looking for a job	
Doesn't go out to work and isn't looking for a job	

If he or she has a job or is self-employed, or USED to have a job, what does he or she do?

Q24.   Can we contact you in September for a follow-up interview? We will make a payment for your time and expenses. If that is OK, please give us your name with AT LEAST ONE way we can contact you. We guarantee that we won't use your contact details in any other way.

Name	
Postal address	
Home phone number	
Mobile number	
Email address	

Phew, that's everything we wanted to ask!

Thanks very much for your help.

Appendix 3 Abbreviations

BT   British Telecom

CRRC   Coastal Regeneration Research Centre

CUPP   Community University Partnership Programme

DCSF   Department of Children, Schools and Families

ESCC   East Sussex County Council

E2E   Entry to Employment

FE   Further Education

GCSE   General Certificate of Secondary Education

GDP   Gross Domestic Product

HEFCE   Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEI   Higher Education Institution

HSLA   Hastings and St. Leonards Area

IAG   Information, Advice and Guidance

ICT   Information Communication Technology

IFP   Increased Flexibility Programme

IDACI   Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index

IMD   Index of Multiple Deprivation

LQ   Location Quotient

LSC   Learning and Skills Council

MFL   Modern Foreign Languages

NEET   Not in Education, Employment or Training

NVQ   National Vocational Qualification

Ofsted   Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

ONS   Office for National Statistics

POLAR   Participation of Local Areas

SCCH   South Coast College Hastings

SMT   Senior management team

SOA   Super Output Area

UCH   University College Hastings

WP   Widening participation

Appendix 4 Steering Group Members

Professor Peter Ambrose   Director, Coastal Regeneration Research Centre, UCH

Ron Bennett   Ore Valley Forum

Professor Andrew Church   University of Brighton

Sarah Cullen   Director of Widening Participation, University of Brighton

Philip Halsted   Hastings and St. Leonards Excellence Challenge

Professor Yvonne Hillier   University of Brighton

Alison Jeffrey   Children's Services Authority, East Sussex County Council

Professor Stuart Laing (Chair)   University of Brighton

Theresa Phillips   Head, Hillcrest School

Sonia Plato   Director, Horizons Project

Graham Razey   Vice Principal, Sussex Coast College Hastings

Jessica Stubbings   Children's Services Authority, East Sussex County Council

Becky Surman   Turning Point

Margaret Wallis   Director, University College Hastings

Dr. Judith Watson   University of Brighton