Young People in Transition: Moving in and out of Jobs Without Training in Sheffield at Age 16 and 17

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April 2018

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Abstract

This thesis is about transitions made between education and employment by young people in Sheffield at age 16 and 17. School to work transitions are complex, non-linear and at times chaotic, and the way young people experience them can have a lasting effect on the rest of their adult life. Through a combination of interviews with young workers and a set of statistical analytical techniques collectively known as sequence analysis, this thesis explores the ways in which young people negotiate the post-16 options available to them. It focuses on the learning journeys taken by individuals in the two years after compulsory schooling and considers the value to current and future career trajectories added by the presence and position within them of Jobs Without Training (JWTs). Through collaboration with Sheffield City Council, the research makes use of longitudinal administrative data on full school-leaving cohorts. It is deeply grounded in the local context and service structures and in the interaction between national policy, local practices, and academic understandings. The findings have implications for how young peoples post-16 destinations are understood. The reclassification of young people in JWT (under legislation to raise the participation age) from a policy-good to a policy-bad status does not naturally align with young workers own perceptions. The thesis analyses the value of JWTs for their potential as bridges between destinations as well as for their own merit. The pressures facing young people from family, peers and institutions as well as from financial strain, caring duties and health problems lead conclusions to be drawn about the implementation of career plans and the time delays sometimes needed in order to achieve them. The thesis concludes by making a case for conceptualising post-16 pathways differently and for dismissing approaches which classify young people in Jobs Without Training as an homogeneous group.

For Gran.

Who cheered me to the end.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction: young people in Jobs Without Training

This thesis is about transitions made between education and employment by young people in Sheffield at age 16 and 17. Since secondary education became compulsory for all young people in England in 1944, there has also been a dictated age at which young people can leave school. Defined initially at 14 by the 1944 Education Act, this has risen incrementally over the last 70 years. The latest change, made in 2012, brought it to 18 but expanded the remit to include all forms of education and training and not purely on school-based education provision. Regardless of the specified age, upon reaching the end of compulsory participation young people are faced with a series of options including the continuation in further or higher learning on a voluntary basis, entering employment, and taking up other social pursuits (including home-making for example). Each of the options bring with them short and longer-term opportunities and consequences for individuals and society. This thesis explores the ways in which young people negotiate the presentation of these options, including why they take up or drop out from post-16 learning opportunities. It focuses on one group of young people in particular: young people who enter employment at age 16 or 17 without undertaking any formal learning in tandem. In the 2012 paper, *Raising the Participation Age*, such employment routes are named 'Jobs Without Training' or 'JWT' and the young people in them are classified as 'not participating'.

Bridging the Gap, a policy paper that came out of the New Labour Social Exclusion Unit in 1999, raised for the first time the problems associated with 'non

participation' amongst 16 and 17 year olds, (as opposed to simply 'unemployment') and introduced the term 'NEET' (Not in Education, Employment or Training). The paper outlined the many reasons that young people had for becoming NEET and described the immediate and delayed negative impact that this had on individuals and wider society. *Bridging the Gap* did not include Jobs Without Training as a non-participation destination, but the shift of focus from youth unemployment to youth non-participation, created a policy environment in which young people became increasingly categorised by their learning status.

Less than ten years later, a report by Lord Leitch in 2006 concluded that keeping young people in education or training to the age of 18 would help to establish a long-term strong UK labour market where over 90% of adults would be qualified to level 2 (equivalent to five good GCSEs). The Leitch Report led to a policy paper in 2011 entitled *Building Engagement, Building Futures* and the 2012 *Raising the Participation Age (RPA)* Green Paper, in which a recommendation was made to increase the age of compulsory participation in learning to 18. In enacting this recommendation, Jobs Without Training were re-classified, and young people in them now find themselves caught between two larger classifications of young people: those in full time academic or vocational education or nationally accredited Work-Based Learning (all considered as 'participating'), and those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

This thesis focuses on young people making post-16 transitions in Sheffield and more specifically those young people whose transition pathways include Jobs Without Training. The research is a result of a collaborative partnership with Sheffield City Council and the framing of the project is deeply grounded in the local context and service structures and in the interaction between national policy and local practices within the city. In Sheffield, around a third of the change in participation levels between school years 12 and 13, can be demonstrated by entry into JWTs and the research project was initiated by the local authority to explore the reasons and impact of this for the young people involved and the city as a whole. Administrative quantitative data collected by the local authority has been combined with empirical qualitative data collection to build a picture of the movements made by school-leaving cohorts in the city, and the journeys taken by individuals young people within those cohorts in the two years after completion of school year 11.

The concepts of participation and transition making are explored throughout the thesis within a context of national policy development, local service delivery, and theoretical understandings of post-16 progression. By taking an interest in education policy and theories of transition- and decision-making, the research seeks to contribute to current understandings of sustained post-16 participation in education and training. The thesis is based around the words of young workers alongside the outputs from regression analysis of young people's post-16 participation pathways. The findings of the research have implications for understanding how young people's post-16 destinations are classified and understood, and the impact this has on the types of services they can access.

Drawing on literature about place, structure and agency, and critical moments, the thesis identifies three particular areas of interest in understanding the experiences of young people who move in and out of Jobs Without Training before they turn eighteen. They are: the managing of aspiration, motivation and risk in realising ambitions; the impact of 'difference' on the opportunities and choices made by individuals; and the impact of post-16 paths on personal identity building and 'fitting in' to social environments. These three areas form the three empirical chapters.

The remainder of Chapter One discusses the importance of understanding the transitions made by young people and the contributions made by this research to existing knowledge of the transitions made by young people people who pursue routes incorporating Jobs Without Training. Section 1.1 explores the societal and political expectations on young people to follow certain post-16 pathways and the consequences of defying these routes. Section 1.2 introduces Sheffield as the setting of the research, providing demographic information and the transitioning behaviour of young people in the city as well as their engagement with the services available to them. The chapter concludes by setting out the three central research questions and providing a structural overview of the remainder of the thesis.

1.1 Jobs Without Training within post-16 transition making

1.1.1 Why post-16 transitions matter

High quality, well paid employment is said to be one of the most important indicators of a person's quality of adult life (Atherton et al, 2009; Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Foskett and Helmsley-Brown, 2001; Ball et al, 1999). The successful transition between education and employment (usually between the ages of 18 and 21) is therefore an area of great interest and concern for policy makers (Higham and Yeomans, 2011; Spohrer, 2011; Lawy et al, 2010). In youth and education policy post-16 learning transitions are described and classified by the learning statuses young people hold after leaving Year 11, or in some cases by strings of learning statuses. By focusing on the transitions made between learning statuses, more can be understood about the causes of drop out from education and the motivations for later re-engagement.

The way in which young people leave education and move into employment is seen as vital in setting up the rest of their lives. Consequently, the things that happen during a young person's transition out of pre-16 compulsory schooling can have a huge impact on the rest of their adult life. The experience of being NEET, for example, can severely increase a young person's chances of unemployment in later life, even if the young person re-engages in learning later on (Istance et al, 1994; SEU, 1999; Maguire and Thompson, 2007; Yates and Payne, 2006; Bynner and Parsons, 2002).

A young person's main daily activity (school, work, post-16 education, unemployment etc.) forms only a part of the picture of their everyday life. The *context* of transition making is also worthy of exploration and while the current destinations of a group of young people might be the same (e.g. in a Job Without Training), their pathways into (and intended pathways out of) that destination are likely different and the nature of these pathways dictates whether their ultimate destination is likely to be a positive or a negative one. The investigation into what causes young people to leave education, re-enter it, start and leave jobs, and stay in prolonged unemployment is extensive and this research chooses to focus specifically on the

experiences of the young people who enter and leave Jobs Without Training prior to the end of Year 13. Its approach of looking longitudinally at post-16 pathways to analyse differences within (as well as between) destination groups provides a novel approach to researching JWT and distinguishes the scope of this research from the usual scope of policy and theory.

This research seeks to contribute to academic and policy knowledge by shedding light on the reasons behind Sheffield's level of non-participation amongst 17 year olds and the changes in participation in learning between school years 12 and 13 which presents a concern to the local authority and city outcomes overall. The value of transitions are examined through considering how further study supports the transition into employment, and by evaluating how individualistic decision-making fits into the education policy that dictates post-16 participation.

1.1.2 Making socially acceptable post-16 transitions

Unlike a few decades ago when leaving school at 16 to go to work was relatively common, the majority of young people now go on to access further education opportunities after compulsory school leaving age. In Sheffield, for the past five years, around 95% of young people go straight into learning opportunities after Year 11 and of those who do not, 25% go back into learning in Year 13. In total, only around 3% of any given school-leaving cohort do not access any kind of learning in the three years after Year 11.

Post-16 learning: the only socially acceptable transition?

Since the first Education Act in 1870, the education of children in England has been one of the government's central social priorities. The importance placed on post-16 education is rooted in four main arguments: improved job prospects; increased key skills in the labour market; reduced welfare expenditure; and reduced inequalities.

Better job prospects

It is widely acknowledged that the attainment of 5 A* to C grades at GCSE including English Language and Mathematics increases the likelihood of acquiring

good quality long term employment (Wolf, 2011; Leitch, 2006). Comparatively, a young person who leaves school at 16 with a below average number of qualifications is likely to face disadvantage in the labour market throughout their whole adult life (Istance et al, 1994; SEU, 1999; Maguire and Thompson, 2007). Poor employment has a knock-on impact on many facets of society including increased poverty and dependency on welfare support, poor health, and increased involvement in criminal activity (Yates and Payne, 2006; Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Foskett and Helmsley-Brown, 2001; Ball et al, 1999). New Labour's goal of a university education for 50% of the population, and financial support for lower-income families to attend further education were both rationalized by an evidence-based understanding that further and higher education considerably increases the employment-potential of young people and increases an individual's lifetime earnings (Maguire and Thompson, 2007; Smithers, 2001).

Key skills in the labour market

Aside from the potential benefits to individuals, the post-16 education agenda is closely linked to the government's lifelong learning agenda, which argues that a widespread 'up-skilling' of the workforce would make for a more productive and innovative national economy. While adult education (including online courses) attracts a steady flow of learners, keeping young people in education longer is the most commonly cited way of increasing the population's skill level (Leitch, 2006; Blair, 2001; SEU, 1999). Post-16 education, particularly for 16 and 17 year olds, is therefore a good way of promoting a higher-skilled workforce, and enabling a more innovative economy able to compete in an increasingly global market (Leitch, 2006). Recent policy implications include increased investment in apprenticeships and traineeships, and an overhaul of the vocational curriculum (DfE, 2016; Wolf, 2011; DfE, 2012a).

Reducing inequality

The influential work of Willis (1977) on the perpetuation of inequality through the labour market is just one of a whole host of research reports and articles (for

example MacDonald et al, 2005; Nayak, 2006; Raffo and Reeves, 2000; Rudd and Evans, 1998; Lehman, 2007) relating to how disadvantage (generally financial deprivation and employment disadvantage) is passed down through generations via class divides and level of access to opportunities. Education has long been heralded as an equaliser and education policy made a central way of improving the life chances of its citizens (SEU, 1999; Blair, 2001; DfES, 2003; DfE, 2016). Education does not simply increase employment opportunities, it also gives young people the same opportunities in life as one another regardless of their socio-economic status, where they live, or what their families have done in the past. Education lifts people out of poverty simply by giving them access to new opportunities and in doing so helps to reduce inequalities between communities and groups in society. Several studies have shown that more equal societies benefit everyone, making education a key player in supporting societal wellbeing (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Rowlingson, 2011).

Saving welfare expenditure:

Post-16 education also keeps young people in education for longer, out of unemployment and under the eye of the state. Evidence has repeatedly shown that people with higher qualifications are more likely to be healthy, less likely to get involved in criminal activity, less likely to live in poverty, and more likely to bring up children who go on to do well in life (Bynner and Parsons, 2002; SEU, 1999; Maguire and Thompson, 2007). Young people who do not remain in education post-16 are more likely to get in trouble with the police, face homelessness, experiment with illegal substances and alcohol, and become young parents (Istance et al, 1994; SEU, 1999; Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Ball et al, 1999). Keeping young people in structured learning for an additional two years, so policy rhetoric suggests, may help to divert them from such activities while providing them with a supportive institution or structure within which to seek help and advice.

Evaluating post-16 learning: the two reports

Two reviews conducted between 2004 and 2011 have been central in exploring the skill requirements of England in today's world's economy, and the capacity of learning provision in delivering workers with those skills. Lord Leitch's inquiry and

report, conducted and written between 2004 and 2006, was essentially a skills audit of England offering an assessment of: the country's current skills base, the skills requirement of the current and future economy, and the provision in place to make the two match. The report brought to the government's attention how England was somewhat behind its European neighbours in regards to school attainment (Leitch, 2006) and made recommendations for how to improve its ranking within the world economy. Among his other conclusions, Lord Leitch stated his belief that the low level of skills in England was due partly to the relatively low numbers of people remaining in education after turning 16. He stated that in order to compete in a global market, 90% of the adult population should be educated to level 2 (the equivalent of 5 A*-Cs at GCSE). He also made recommendations for increasing the number of people accessing higher level courses including degree-level study. This perceived link between education and employment was hardly new but Leitch's focus was also on the time spent in education, rather than merely on the acquisition of qualifications. The Leitch report led to two key government priorities that changed the face of post-16 education in the twenty-first century. New Labour had already made a commitment to increase attendance at university (Blair, 2001) and the Leitch Report reiterated and expanded this policy push to include an emphasis on level four (foundation degree) qualifications. The second and more substantial contribution of the Leitch Review on English education was an increase to the age at which a young person could leave learning from 16 to 18.

Professor Wolf's inquiry, conducted in 2011, looked specifically at vocational education in England for young people aged between 14 and 19. It took as its start point the principle that education was valuable for all young people but that a gulf existed between how academic and vocational courses were delivered and understood. During her inquiry, Wolf examined the types of courses available, the subjects covered, the institutions that provided them, and the potential links that they had with labour market demands. Her final report could be described as damning (Harrison, 2011; Shepherd, 2011). She described how too many young people were forced through courses which gained them few or no valuable skills for working life, and that learning providers (including schools) were putting their finances and league table rankings above the needs of their students.

Like Leitch, Wolf made numerous recommendations and, also like Leitch, her re-

port led to significant policy changes nationally. An array of vocational qualifications were removed from the approved curriculum, schools were given new guidelines for delivering core subjects, and the funding criteria for delivering qualifications were altered (DfE, 2015). Attainment of level two English and Mathematics was once again held up as the main benchmark for academic success, and post-16 courses were altered to include delivery of these subjects for anyone who had not already achieved them.

The findings and recommendations of the Leitch and Wolf reviews had a direct impact on the educational experiences of all young people in England, but for young people who would traditionally have left school at 16 to pursue employment opportunities, they had the additional impact of redefining their status in policy as Part 1.1.3 will explore.

1.1.3 The origin of the JWT classification

The policy emphasis placed explicitly on young people in Jobs Without Training was initially a by-product of the extensive research into young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Istance et al, 1994; SEU, 1999). Young people in NEET face a whole host of personal and social problems, as later chapters will explain, and when examining risk factors researchers found that young people in Jobs Without Training were far more at risk than their peers in education of moving into NEET in the future (Maguire and Thompson, 2004). This is because the kind of work a sixteen or seventeen year-old is able to do without training is likely (though not certain) to be part-time, temporary, or unstable, putting them at a higher risk of unemployment, poor conditions and low pay than their older and more highly-trained colleagues (DfEE, 1998).

During the 1990s and early 2000s, research into young people in Jobs Without Training increased as a by-product of a government commitment to reduce NEET. Despite this, the JWT group itself has been given far less priority within policy as NEET, they neither register for benefits, enrol in education, nor seek support services and are thus "relatively invisible 'others'" within policy (Ball et al, 1999, p.203). The recommendations of the Leitch Report and the resulting government policy changes changed this. While engagement in post-16 learning had previously been actively encouraged, prior to 2012 young people were free to follow a post-

16 path of their choosing. Under the new RPA policy however, young people in Jobs Without Training are considered to be 'not-participating' due to their lack of engagement in education. This change in policy emphasis created a new policy 'problem' group out of England's young workers.

Similarly, while NEET had been identified as a problem long before her review, Wolf's Report identified 'churn' between destinations as a policy concern. By this she referred to young people who moved between NEET, unstable employment, and short personal-development courses. She surmised that merely lifting young people out of their NEET status was not valuable if the alternatives were not sustainable or valuable in the longer term. Jobs Without Training consequently came under greater scrutiny as employment was no longer assumed to be positive unless it provided young workers with qualifications and skills that enabled them to progress their career prospects.

Who are the young people in JWT? Introducing the subgroups

National policy and local authorities have specific ways of defining Jobs Without Training (JWT) but this thesis uses the broad definition of any part or full time employment which has no nationally accredited training attached to it, and which is a 16 or 17 year-old's main destination (i.e. not a part-time job alongside post-16 education). In Sheffield, young people in this group make up around 1.5% of the Year 12 population (16-year-olds) and around 3% of Year 13s (17-year-olds). Previous research suggests that young people who enter JWTs are mostly from working class backgrounds, tend to have had negative experiences of compulsory schooling and often do not have 5 GCSEs at A*-C (Spielhofer, 2009; DfEE, 1998; Lawy et al, 2010). They tend to be in un- or low-skilled employment soon after leaving school (DfEE, 1998; Anderson et al, 2006).

Such findings add weight to the priority given in education policy to reduce the number of young people entering employment at 16 and classifying JWTs as a negative destination. However, previous research into JWT has also revealed three sub-groups who have differing characteristics and experiences: those who are starting their career (career-starters); those who are taking a year out before doing something else (thinkers); and those in insecure positions at risk of entering NEET (churners) (Spielhofer et al, 2009; Maguire, 2010; Ball et al, 1999). These three

groups are described below, and the difference in the motivations and experiences of young people who belong to each group provides context for why this thesis places its focus on considering difference within (as well as between) young people in the same destinations. These differences add weight to the rationale for considering destinations longitudinally which will be presented in Chapter Four.

Career-starters:

Career-starters include those who are on local training programmes, young entrepreneurs setting up new businesses, and young people hoping to take over or join family businesses. They are generally motivated to work towards their own goals, have a good sense of what they need to do to achieve them, and often (though not always) will have had a positive experience of school and achieved a selection of qualifications. 17 year-old career-starters may have transferred from the thinkers group.

Thinkers:

Thinkers are those who have generally had a negative or interrupted experience of school. They might have been badly bullied, or be recovering from a long-term illness, or have suffered a bereavement, or have had a late (or un-)diagnosed learning difficulty. They could also just have been unsuited to an academic environment. Thinkers are keen to leave formal education in the short-term, but do not know what they want to do in the longer-term and are unwilling to rush into anything in particular. Employment offers them a breathing space, greater financial independence, and a chance to consider their options. Of the three JWT subgroups, Thinkers are the most willing to engage with support services (careers advice sessions in particular). This is generally a transient group, with the one or two years spent in employment after which they either realise they have started a job they enjoy enough to pursue in the long-term (perhaps with the aid of some further training), or they overcome whatever barrier it was that prevented them from enjoying school and return to formal learning.

<u>Churners:</u>

Churners are the group of most concern to policy makers, and are mostly the kind of young people that researchers, the media, and service providers refer to when describing Jobs Without Training. The term 'churners' was introduced by Professor Wolf who, in her 2011 report, referred to them as 'churning' because they occupy temporary unstable positions and consequently they are sometimes in employment and sometimes NEET. Although they are classified as being in a JWT at the time of a census, the group share many similarities with NEET. They often have few or no qualifications, and are motivated to work but face difficulties in holding down full-time employment either because of personal deficiencies (like not having the appropriate qualifications or experience) practical issues (like not having access to good transport or having caring duties), or labour-market characteristics (if the nature of their work is shift-based or temporary). While sharing some of the same experiences, young people in the three subgroups are different in terms of characteristics, attitudes, and aspirations and policy makers who want to increase participation in learning and support young people cannot simply target the whole JWT group in the same way.

The importance of understanding JWT

Policy emphasis put on Jobs Without Training previously has been largely focused on the reduction of NEET, but research has identified that the vulnerabilities experienced by young people in JWT extend further than simply the immediate risks of unemployment (DfEE, 1998; Anderson et al, 2006; Spielhofer et al, 2009). Young workers are often vulnerable because of the conditions they are subjected to and their lack of access to support networks (DfEE, 1998; Anderson et al, 2006; Spielhofer et al, 2009; Lawy et al, 2010; Maguire, 2010). This thesis promotes a change of focus from understanding how to avoid NEET, to promoting and supporting learning to the JWT group specifically. It also advocates the need to understand the subgroups within the wider heading of JWT, and the motivations of young people in them. Young people in JWTs break the norms of modern youth transition-making because their choices go against current youth policy, and yet they are probably the least resource-intensive group of youth, and almost certainly the most hidden.

The focus on the subgroups of young people in JWTs provides a platform for exploring the concept of active and informed decision-making at 16. Given the limited job opportunities available to young people, understanding the journeys taken by 16- and 17-year-olds who have found and remained in employment can provide an insights into how bridges can be built between NEET and youth engagement. Unlike the majority of young people who progress into further education or who leave school and become NEET, the vast majority of young people who enter JWT have made a conscious decision to be there. The act of this decision making (though in no way simplistic) is a phenomena worthy of further exploration.

1.2 Sheffield as a research site: demographics and diversity

Sheffield, located in the north of England, is the 5th largest city in the UK, with a population of 570,000 (SCC, 2017). It has some unique features that set it apart from other UK cities, not least the large rural areas of the northern Peak District which sit within the city boundary, and some stark inequalities in social outcomes such as financial deprivation, health, and education (SCC, 2017). This section provides some information about the 16- and 17-year-old population under consideration in this research.

1.2.1 A diverse city

Geographic diversity

Historically, Sheffield is perhaps best known for its role in the steel industry, due largely to its location on a mass of river crossings and its proximity to numerous mining communities (Lee, 2009). The long-term impact of that industry is evident in Sheffield's layout, shape, and demographics (Lee, 2009). When the city first entered the industrial revolution, the prevailing wind from the Peak District led those who could afford it to relocate to the South West of city, away from the polluting smog of the steelworks and factories, where bigger houses were consequently built. Poorer factory workers, conversely, lived where they worked in the North and East of the city. The resulting differences in size and style of housing, still clear today in the

leafy suburbs of the south and tightly packed terraces in the north, are not the only evidence of the historic divide. The location of the city's highest performing schools, large public parks, and universities in the south west, and the industrial estates and new retail parks in the north and east, echo the differences of land use and population inequalities that originate back in Victorian England (Lee, 2009).

Demographic and social diversity

Sheffield has an ethnically diverse population. In 2016 around 25% of the city's 16 and 17 year-old population were from black or minority ethnic backgrounds, most notably from Black Caribbean and Pakistani descent but with other groups significant in specific areas of the city. Figure 1 demonstrates the geographical differences in ethnic make-up of the city's neighbourhoods, with up to 90% of some coming from BME backgrounds, compared with less than 1% in other neighbourhoods. The data comes from Sheffield City Council's Performance and Analysis Services and the CYPD Service Districts relate to the way youth support teams and services are managed.
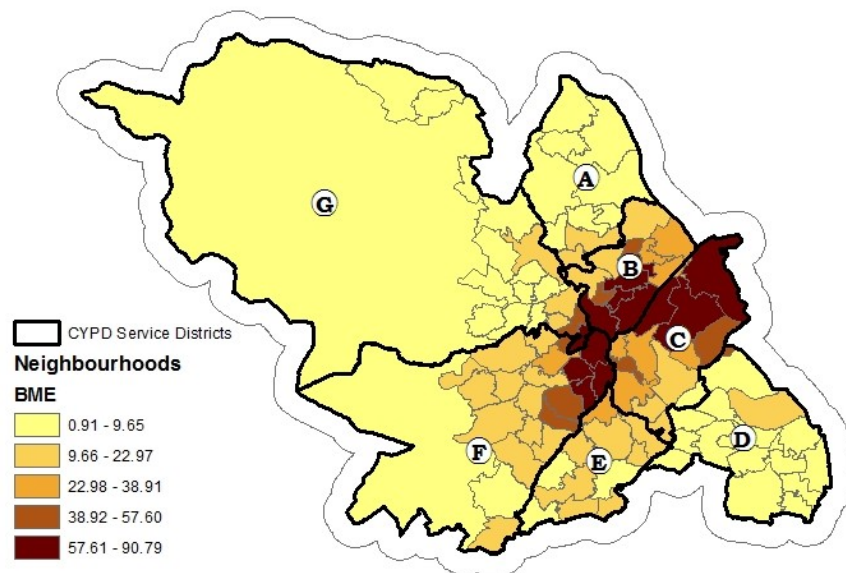
Figure 1: Percentage of 16-17 population classified as BME in 2016 by neighbourhood and service district

In spatially mapping social outcomes there is a "wide and well-documented variation between different parts of Sheffield" (SCC, 2017, p.61). For example 2014 figures show that 24.7% of children in the city were living in poverty, but this ranged

from 3.3% in one ward to 42.9% in another (SCC, 2017, p.61). Outcomes in health, education and employment also show wide variation between wards with "a ten-year difference in life expectancy for men between the most and least deprived wards" (SCC, 2017, p.64). Figures 2 and 3 below show the deprivation of neighbourhoods in Sheffield measured by IMD score, and the attainment of young people leaving Year 11 between 2010 and 2014
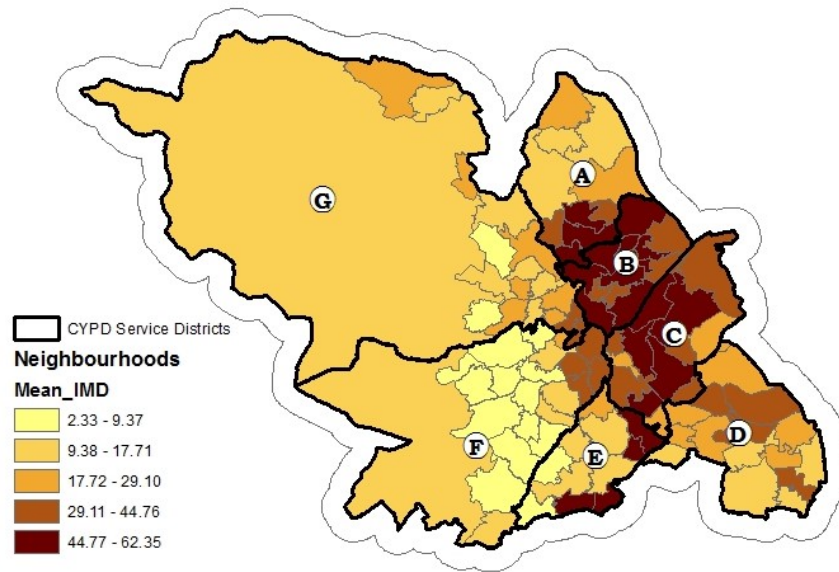
Figure 2: Mean IMD score in 2016 by neighbourhood and service area
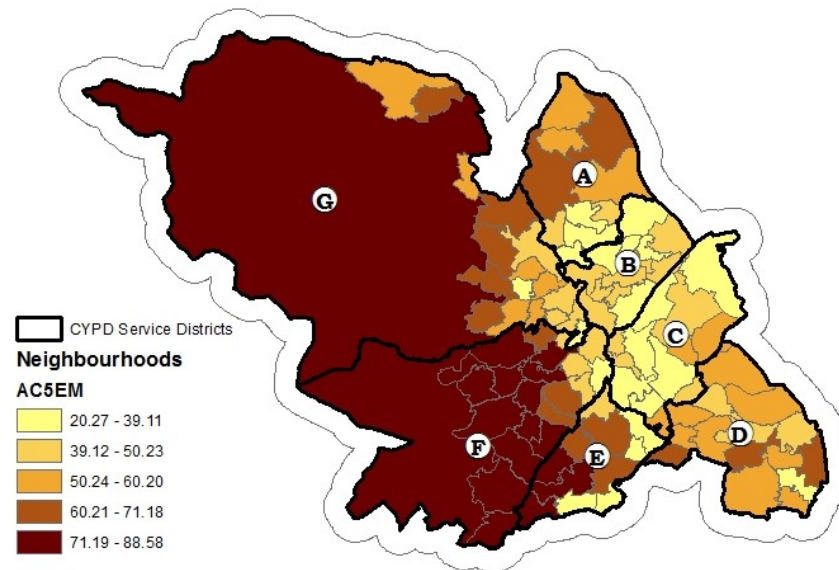
Figure 3: Percentage of school leavers with 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English Language and Mathematics in 2016 by neighbourhood and service area

Also present in Sheffield are places colloquially referred to as 'new arrival' areas. Smaller than wards and predominantly in the north of the city, these are the places recent migrants to Sheffield initially base themselves before establishing the local knowledge and support networks to settle more permanently. Such areas are highly transient, and the impact of this is evident in their poor social outcomes.

1.2.2 Local Labour Market

Sheffield is a city with a long history of industry. The areas of mining around the city (in both coal and iron) helped to fuel a centre of steel-manufacture and cutlery production that helped to put Sheffield on the map nationally and internationally. The rapid decline of manual industry in the city since the 1980s has had a lasting impact on the city and its environs. However "there are a number of growth sectors, including advanced manufacturing and creative and digital industries" (SCC, 2017, p.8) and "Sheffield has an economic inactivity rate lower than most Core Cities, although the city's unemployment rate remains higher than the national average." (SCC, 2017, p.19)

The presence of two universities and a number of hospitals means that the health and education sectors are dominant in Sheffield's economy (SCC, 2017, p.12) and public administration also contributes a considerable number of jobs to the city (SCC, 2017) Compared to over Core Cities "Sheffield has a larger than average manufacturing sector, accounting for 9% of jobs" (SCC, 2017, p.11) and in terms of number of businesses, "[c]onstruction represents the city's third largest sector" (SCC, 2017, p.9). 93% of the Sheffield's construction businesses are micro-businesses and compared to the other Core Cities, it is "more reliant on small and medium-sized enterprises" (SCC, 2017, p.9) with the vast majority of businesses in the wholesale, retail and construction sectors employing fewer than ten people (SCC, 2017).

In Sheffield, as in the rest of the UK, "[t]here is evidence of an increase in part-time, poorly paid and zero hours contracts" (SCC, 2017, p.66). "The majority of people in the city work in level 2 jobs with lower skills requirements and correspondingly lower pay."(SCC, 2017, p.15) and there are "more people educated to NVQ level 4 and above than there are jobs requiring this level of education" (SCC, 2017, p.14). "Sheffield has the highest percentage of economically active people qualified only to NVQ level 1 among the Core Cities (12.5% compared to 10.5% nationally)"

(SCC, 2017, p.15). "The percentage of people in the city who hold no qualifications is also higher than the national average, at 6.8% compared to 5.5%" (SCC, 2017, p.15). "The lack of level 4 jobs and high proportion of low skilled workers have been factors impacting on Sheffield's average salary, which is the third lowest of all Core Cities at 26,834 and below the national average of 28,213" (SCC, 2017, p.15). Self-employment continues to rise, with an additional 12,800 people becoming self-employed between 2015 and 2016 (SCC, 2017, p.18).

1.2.3   Choosing Sheffield as the research site

Along with most of the UK's largest cities, Sheffield falls below the national average for educational attainment at 16 and for participation in learning at 16 and 17. During their first year of post-16, 22% of young people have been out of learning on at least one occasion and around 7% of the population leave their learning place by December of Year 13.

While doing well nationally on take-up of learning in Year 12, the city does less well in maintaining those numbers for the full two years of post-16. The issues Sheffield experiences in maintaining participation levels between Year 12 and 13 provides an interesting setting for the study of transition making, and positions the research within a context where in-depth study has a potential to make a difference to young people's outcomes.

Sheffield is also unique for the high percentage of its young people who go into apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning at 16 (almost double the national average). While in many areas higher Work-Based Learning opportunities leads to a lower number of young people in unskilled employment, in Sheffield both figures are continually high with entry into JWT responsible for around 30% of the net movement from learning in Year 13, a phenomenon worthy of further investigation.

1.3   Research questions and thesis structure

1.3.1   Research questions

This research has two key aims: to understand the experiences of young people who move into and out of Jobs Without Training before they are eighteen, and

to take what is learned from examining these transitions to better understand the support needs of young people to make successful transitions into good quality employment. In order to do this, the following three central research questions are asked and broadly form the basis for Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

QUESTION ONE:

How are the transitions made between education and JWT by young people under the age of 18 influenced by their personal characteristics and circumstances, the relationships they have with their families and peers, and their experience of compulsory schooling?

QUESTION TWO:

How do formal and informal sources of information, advice and guidance (IAG) influence young people's transitions into and out of Jobs Without Training?

QUESTION THREE:

How does post-16 education policy and practice influence the participation choices made by 16 and 17 year-olds?

1.3.2   Thesis structure: a summary of chapters

The three central questions are explored through the remaining seven chapters of this thesis. Chapter Two describes the national policy that contextualises post-16 educational transition making, and the local services and structures in place which support young people to make transitions in Sheffield, in particular Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services. It explores the emergence of JWT as a policy construct and the impact on the post-16 policy arena of focusing on participation. The chapter also introduces the JWT group in more detail, describing the sub-groups within it and the findings of previous research into 16 and 17 year-olds who work rather than study.

Chapter Three provides a theoretical frame for exploring post-16 transition making, in particular how young people make decisions, and the way in which external factors impact on the choices available to them. Movement in and out of Jobs With-

out Training is contextualised through this theoretical framework which includes: culture and place, conceptualising adulthood, critical moments and turning points, and the conflicts of structure and agency in the construction of personal projects. The chapter concludes by bringing together these theoretical strands to suggest how choices are made at 16 and 17 with regards to career building and the risk-taking intrinsically involved in this.

Chapter Four describes the research methodology, covering the nature of the data used in the research, the mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis, and the use of interviews and regression modelling to investigate the JWT group in the context of whole-school cohorts. The chapter provides detail on how and why these methods were employed, the type of data included in the analyses, and the implications of the methods on the data available and conclusions drawn. It introduces the young people who were interviewed and concludes by addressing some wider methodological considerations for researchers working in local authority settings and with live data.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven explore the three research questions from three different perspectives. Chapter Five models the post-16 journeys taken by young people, exploring the impact of internal and external factors on the destinations young people enter and leave. The chapter draws on a combination of optimal matching and cluster analysis to identify ten pathway groups amongst school-leaving cohorts and regression analysis used alongside interview data is used to consider the extent to which factors such as gender, ethnicity, academic attainment, and geography, can predict membership of the different groups. The chapter also draws on the experiences of the young people who were interviewed to help explain the outcomes of the regression analysis.

Chapter Six moves beyond the examination of the structure of transitions and the reasons for those structures, and instead draws on the data collected during interviews to consider the relationship between young people's ambitions, the support services and institutions they encounter, and the overall outcomes they achieve. JWTs are conceptualised as bridges between current destinations and longer term aspirations. The bridges are evaluated against a framework of five factors: personal satisfaction, optimism, risk-taking, self-sufficiency, and opportunism. Comparative vignettes are used to consider the way these factors are realised in the stories of the

young people interviewed.

Chapter Seven draws on data collected during participant interviews, to look at how young people 'fit in' to their families, communities and workplaces, and also within post-16 education policy. It explores the first-hand experiences of young people, how they perceive themselves within their communities and the impact of early entry into employment on their social circles, family relations, and living circumstances. Consideration is given to the formation of young people's sense of adult identity, and the role of adult relationships and public services in supporting young workers. The chapter also considers the potential impact of raising the participation age on the lives of young workers, and the difference between the value placed on employment by young people and policy makers.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by providing a link between the theoretical and policy areas outlined in Chapters Two and Three and the analysis of empirical data in the later chapters. It provides recommendations for policy and practice with the JWT group going forward, as well as suggesting the contribution of the research to academia. The chapter suggests the benefits for both academia and policy development of a combined quantitative and qualitative methodology to better understand and support young people who do not follow traditional routes post-16.

Chapter 2

Jobs Without Training in the UK and Sheffield: national policy and local service delivery

This chapter seeks to describe the way in which JWT has become a focus of current policy and professional practice, and to provide a historical and political overview of how this environment has developed in Sheffield. By providing information about the environment in which young people's transitions take place, the chapter aims to provide context for two of the central research questions laid out in Chapter One and re-printed below (Chapter Three provides context for the remaining question):

> *How do formal and informal sources of information, advice and guidance (IAG) influence young people's transitions into and out of Jobs Without Training?*

> *How does post-16 education policy and practice influence the participation choices made by 16 and 17 year-olds?*

The chapter is divided into four sections. Section 2.1 explains how 'participation' has emerged as a new policy concept. Section 2.2 explores the practical implications of this concept on the development and local implementation of national policy and the influence this has on the JWT group. It also provides a critique of how participation data is collected and monitored and the difficulty in defining and measuring

participation. Section 2.3 discusses the post-16 education agenda and recent changes to the way post-16 provision is arranged. Finally, Section 2.4 lays out the local structures and practices in place in Sheffield, including those that prepare young people, through IAG, to undertake transitions at the end of Year 11. Each of these sections link references from wider policy to the specific impacts on the JWT group.

2.1 'Participation': the emergence of a new policy concept

In order to understand the policy context from which the focus on Jobs Without Training emerged, it is important to understand how 'participation' became a political priority in England and the impact this had on how young people's learning statuses are classified, and judged as policy-good or policy-bad. Part 2.1.1 explains how non-participation first came to the attention of policy makers as problematic. Part 2.1.2 explores the impact that having a non-participating label had on young people, and how services were consequently targeted at young people. Part 2.1.3 concludes the section and explains how the new focus on participation led to a change in policy which ultimately created the JWT classification which forms the focus on the thesis.

2.1.1 New Labour and the fight against post-16 disengagement

Until 1988, young people aged 16 and above (past school leaving age) were subjected to the same unemployment categorisation as all other adults, anyone economically active but unable to find suitable employment was entitled to some kind of income support (subject to various conditions being met). However, "by 1988 all benefits for unemployed young people between the ages of 16 and 18 were removed to 'encourage' them to engage in youth training or stay on in education" (Bynner and Parsons, 2002, p.292). The operative word here was 'encourage' and the change to benefit entitlement was made without a change to the age at which a young person could legally leave school. This left a group 'in limbo' between finishing education at 16 and not having any means of income until 18. While young people

could still of course work, until they had found secure employment they had no access to the financial support their predecessors had been able to draw upon.

Research conducted in Wales in 1994 described this 'in limbo' group as a group with 'status zero' within education and employment policy (Istance et al, 1994; Maguire and Thompson, 2007; Coles et al, 2004; Roberts, 2013). The research report set out for the first time the significant problems the young people faced and the knock-on impact of these problems on their later life chances. The New Labour government, led by Tony Blair's new Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), made the status zero group one of their first key priorities upon their election in 1997, renaming them 'NEET' to stand for '**N**ot in **E**ducation **E**mployment or **T**raining.

Since the work of Istance et al (1994), significant volumes of research has been done about the NEET group (for example, Maguire and Thompson, 2007; Coles et al, 2004; Yates and Payne, 2006; Bynner and Parsons, 2002) highlighting problems like poverty, poor physical and mental health, poor housing, teenage pregnancy, criminal activity and substance misuse, and longer term unemployment and low wages in adulthood (Istance et al, 1994; SEU, 1999; Maguire and Thompson, 2007; Yates and Payne, 2006; Bynner and Parsons, 2002). As well as being problematic on a personal level, such outcomes also have societal impacts and the National Audit Office estimated in 2002 that reducing the number of young people in NEET by 1% "would result in ... economic savings of £165million" (Coles et al, 2004, p.2).

The Social Exclusion Unit report on NEET (SEU, 1999) identified that one of the reasons that young people fell into this 'in-limbo' situation was the challenge school leavers faced in navigating the complex web of learning providers, courses, and support agencies available to them. The report also identified that due to their lack of engagement with services, it was difficult to keep track of the NEET group and thus target services to them (SEU, 1999).

2.1.2 Impact of the NEET label on support for young people

In 2000, the Prime Minister sold the Connexions Strategy as the government's "front line policy for young people" (DfEE, 2000, cited in Coles et al, 2004, p.1). It focused on pooling the expertise and knowledge of different organisations to provide joined-up services for young people at the point of delivery (Coles et al, 2004). Products of the Connexions strategy included a "National Client Caseload Infor-

mation System" (NCCIS) and the establishment of a national Connexions Service in 2001, both of which were co-ordinated nationally, but run locally (Maguire and Thompson, 2007).

The NCCIS database contained details of all young people in England, obtained partially from school data and partially from data inputted by personal advisors. The Connexions Service delivered "mainstream careers education and guidance; targeted support for vulnerable groups; and activities programmes" (Coles et al, 2004, p.44) and was co-ordinated by regional partnership boards made up of various agencies (including local authorities) responsible for education and employment (Coles et al, 2004). Through the Connexions service, young people deemed most at risk of becoming NEET (or who were already NEET) were allocated a key worker to help them re-engage with Education, Employment, Training or a combination of the three. Although the Connexions Service was relatively short-lived, many of its functions have been retained by local authorities (albeit on a significantly reduced scale and budget) and the NCCIS database remains central to local data management and national reporting.

The term 'NEET' was coined as a simple way of describing young people disengaged with the normal occupations of other people in their age group but right from the beginning its use to categorise young people was criticised, largely because it is "a concept that defines young people by what they are not" (Yates and Payne, 2006, p.329) and thus does not shed light on (or address) the specific needs of young people (Yates and Payne, 2006, p.333). Another side effect of the widespread focus on reducing NEET was the significant influence on the way in which services are funded and directed. Local authorities for example are assessed by their ability to reduce the number of NEET young people in their jurisdiction, but for many young people "it is not necessarily the fact they are not in employment, education or training that is the most salient or useful fact for professional services to know about them" (Yates and Payne, 2006, p.338), merely entering EET does not signify an end to their support needs.

2.1.3 Raising the Participation Age: a shift away from NEET

Following the decision to move the Connexions service and CCIS database into the remit of local authorities came a proposal in the form of a Green Paper *Raising*

Expectations (DfES, 2007) to raise the age of participation in education from 16 to 18 for all young people living in England. The resulting legislation, implemented in 2012 under a new government administration meant young people would have to remain in education or training until their 18th birthday, although there would be no sanctions against those who did not and employers would not be penalised for employing them.

The RPA legislation signified one substantial movement from all previous 'NEET' policy. While NEET was still seen as problematic, and Education and Training remained desirable destinations, the second 'E', Employment, had moved without warning from being an acceptable positive destination to being a negative, targeted one (Lawy et al, 2010). The research in this thesis aims to contribute to what is already known about young people in this 'E' group: their characteristics, motivations and social outcomes. It also seeks to support Sheffield City Council to understand more about the needs and experiences of a group of young people who may previously not have engaged in post-16 services or been identified as in need of re-engagement support.

2.2 The focus on participation and its impact on the status of JWT

2.2.1 Justifying RPA

With their recent push to the front of participation policy, the notion of a 'Job Without Training' has now become classified as a negative post-16 destination (Lawy et al, 2010). By changing JWT's status from 'EET' to 'not participating' the RPA legislation turned them from a destination of limited interest to policy makers and service deliverers, into one of relative concern. The RPA paper laid out many justifications for the change, including "better outcomes for virtually all aspects of later life associated with educational participation, the importance for the economy of a skilled workforce and the decline in the availability of low skilled jobs" (Croll, 2008, p.401). The launch of the Connexions service was a direct response to the problem of youth disengagement at 16, and the latest RPA policy is just the latest of a whole array of policy designed to support, cajole, and at times force, young

people to remain in education or training until they reach the age of 18 (Bynner and Parsons, 2002). Because the kind of jobs that young people are able to get at 16 and 17 are liable to be insecure and prone to imminent termination (Vickerstaff, 2003), the RPA legislation is built on the justification that preventing the long term risks associated with NEET is worth the cost of reducing the freedom of 16 and 17 year-olds to make their own post-16 decisions. Paternalistic policy is only really justifiable if "there are cases in which what is at stake is too important, and mistakes are irreversible or too severe, not to force agents to take the course of action that is known to be right" (Floridi, 2015, p.16). Taking away an individual's choice about attending school puts a huge amount of responsibility on the state to ensure that the extra time spent in education will be more beneficial to students than students' own choices would be (Davies, 1987).

> In western society, "[t]o have a job means adult status, self-respect, money, independence and the opportunity to broaden one's social contacts." (European Commission, 2002, cited in Yates and Payne, 2006, p.330)

If young people are compelled to stay in education or training until they are 18, then the return on that extra time must add value to the life they are able to lead afterwards. Young people who choose instead to work, disregarding RPA requirements, suggests a display of their lack of faith in that being the case.

The 'Without Training' part of the JWT status is also an area of contention. The Department for Education defines training as working towards a nationally recognised and accredited qualification for a minimum of 16 hours per week (DfE, 2012). This covers apprenticeships for example where through a combination of work experience and portfolio work young people work towards an NVQ and (where appropriate) an academic certificate, but does not cover a young person working in construction who takes a series of courses in forklift driving, welding, or health and safety for example. In Sheffield there are some major employers who provide their own training programmes popular with young people but which, dependent on the qualifications they offer, may not be included within the 'with training' classification of employment.

2.2.2 The role of data in shaping services

One of the problems identified right at the start of the launch of the agenda to tackle NEET was that too many young people were falling through the gaps in provision simply because no one knew who they were (Istance et al, 1994; SEU, 1999). The development and maintenance of the national NCCIS database seeks to prevent this by allowing approved users to look up past information about young people, add new information, and keep records like contact details up to date (Coles et al, 2004; Maguire and Thompson, 2007). Knowing what young people are doing helps to ensure they get the support they need, and helps local authorities to plan what services to provide or commission. One consequence of this 'tracking' is that post-16 service delivery is now a data-intensive activity, not least because of the funding implications attached to young people's current and future activities.

In Sheffield, learning providers work with the local authority through a forum called the Network Provider Group. Data sharing with this group and others, including the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), greatly aids the process of identifying young people who are seeking learning opportunities. Young people whose learning destinations are not captured by these means are referred to targeted support workers for contact to be made. This can take the form of letters, phone calls, visits to the young person's home, or contacting key workers from other services (housing officers for example). Once contact is made, support is offered to individuals. Those young people who cannot be contacted or traced are allocated an 'unknown' status. There are two months each year when destination data becomes particularly important: September and November.

September guarantee

Introduced nationally in 2007, the September Guarantee is a duty on local authorities to ensure all young people have an offer of suitable education or training for the start of their Year 12 and 13 (offered by the end of September in each of the years). In Sheffield, the ability of the council to meet this duty is greatly aided by the existence of a city-wide applications system called UcasProgress through which nearly all young people apply for their post-16 courses. As described above, any young person without an offer is followed up by targeted youth support workers

tasked with supporting them to choose and apply for a post-16 destination.

November Activity Survey

As well as supporting local service delivery, destination data is also used nationally to assess the performance of local authorities. An annual 'activity survey' taken on the 1st November each year enables year-on-year trend data to be produced. Like in the rest of the UK, Sheffield Local Authority is measured at a national level by the number of young people who progress into learning in Year 12 and 13, and by the total of young people in NEET or unknown learning destinations. League tables are produced using on monthly data returns made to the Department for Education (HoC, 2016).

There are problems in categorising young people simply by their learning status. For young people who are NEET it means grouping together young people with very few shared characteristics. For young people in learning it means disregarding the quality or significance of that learning in their wider career or life ambitions. And for young people in Jobs Without Training it means disregarding informal training and displaying a lack of faith in individual ability to progress their careers outside of traditional routes.

In Sheffield, the 1% of 16 year-olds and the 3.5% of 17 year-olds who go into Jobs Without Training now find themselves caught between the measures used to assess entry into education and entry into NEET. Focusing on destinations, rather than on young people, means that responses to the challenges of young people in Jobs Without Training are focused almost solely on re-entry into learning or the provision of training, while issues such as worker rights, wages and transport are largely ignored. As Yates and Payne explain, "[i]t's a sad fact that what gets measured gets done" (2006, p.340) but creating services that seek solely to meet specific destination targets runs the risk of losing sight of the young people they seek to support.

2.3 Delivering the post-16 education offer and the impact of the national austerity agenda

Politicians have long been known to place education centrally in their manifestos for decreasing inequality and improving society (DfES, 2004; DfES, 2007; DfE, 2010; DfE, 2012; Blair, 2001; Davies, 1987). The majority of education policy relating to this thesis' focus was created between 1997 and 2016, starting with the launch of two agendas by the New Labour government that had significant impact on post-16 progression trends. The first of these was a target for 50% of the population to receive a university education, and the second was the provision of means-tested financial support for 16 and 17 year-old learners in the form of an Educational Maintenance Allowance (since cut) in order to encourage continuation in education. Following these policy pushes, attendance at university in the UK rose considerably, from 30% in 2000 (Corver, 2005) to 48% in 2014 (DfE, 2016a). New Labour's focus on evidence-based policy development is arguably also responsible for the data-driven nature of current service delivery.

This section provides a commentary on how post-16 policy has developed alongside more general social policy over the last ten years, with particular emphasis on the changes to support for young people in JWT pre- and post-2010. It also discusses the impact of the austerity agenda on holistic youth support (including careers support) and how this has changed what is known about young people in employment nationally and locally.

2.3.1 Implementing RPA

The change of political administration in 2010 marked an important milestone in the implementation of the JWT policy agenda. The emphasis placed on education and tackling social exclusion by the Labour government between 1997 and 2010 included the expansion of post-16 learning as a means to up-skilling the population and increasing England's economic potential (SEU, 1999; Leitch, 2006). The early stages of the policy proposal outlined in a 2007 green paper (to raise the age of participation in learning to 18) were focused in part on addressing the challenges and skills deficit faced by young people moving from education to employment at 16 and 17, However, the 2008 recession towards the end of the Labour administration and

the change of political administration to a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010 led to a national agenda of austerity and a change of approach to further and higher education.

The Coalition's 2010 paper "The Importance of Teaching" represented a radical change in the delivery of the RPA legislation. It removed the associated incentives and deterrents and young people would no longer be able to leave learning until their 18th birthday but there would be no sanctions against those who did and employers would not be penalised for employing them. This was a significant movement from the Labour Green Paper's proposal that had suggested "[f]ailure to comply with the proposed requirements to undertake any form of post-16 education or training [would] result in young people facing civil or criminal prosecution" (Maguire and Thompson, 2007, p.14).

The result could perhaps best be described as a watered-down alternative to the original proposal and as a consequence of this change young people in jobs without training who, under the original proposals for raising the age of participation, had been highlighted as a new policy headache for local authorities were instead pushed once again to the background of education policy to make way for new initiatives to improve vocational education and employer-engagement with school-to-work transition making.

2.3.2 The impact of the austerity agenda

The ethos and ability of the youth service to bring young people together in an informal environment in which they can try new things with their peers in a safe environment has made it an ideal vehicle for delivering various government agendas from promotion of health and reduction of crime to provision of careers advice and skill-based learning. Labour's approach to understanding and supporting young people's school-to-work transitions included piloting schemes to support young people to remain in education (e.g. Educational Maintenance Allowance, Activity Agreements and Learning Agreements) and putting significant resources into tracking young people's post-16 destination pathways in order to offer support before relatively minor issues become more significant ones for their wellbeing and educational and employment outcomes. In addition to the change in focus of wider post-16 education policy, ongoing national reductions made in resourcing youth support (and

a wide range of other social) services have significantly reduced the ability of local authorities to track young people and provide the same level of ongoing support as they have done previously.

The bare-bones structures left by the reduction of funding now largely consist of support services tasked with tackling the immediate moments of crisis experienced by young people, and school-based careers advice provision designed to reduce youth employment rather than to increase positive engagement. The partial replacement of the Connexions Service with the Careers and Enterprise Company (which has a much smaller remit) has largely failed to become relevant to young people entering Jobs Without Training before the age of 18.

2.3.3   A move to market-driven education policy

Many attempts have been made in the last few decades to smooth out the transition from education into work, starting with the Youth Training Schemes of the 1980s, moving through to the more recent 14-19 education agenda. The purpose of this smoothing-out process is the avoidance of putting significant pressure on 16 year-olds to make potentially life-changing decisions in a very short space of time. The 14-19 education agenda aims to encourage 14 year-olds, while still in compulsory education, to make a four or five year plan for their transition into employment. Opportunities were increased for starting on vocational courses earlier than 16, and in Sheffield, this is perhaps best characterised by the two University Technical Colleges (UTCs) which take students at 14 for a four-year vocational training programme. As with most recent education policy, the emphasis of the 14-19 education agenda was on the 'upskilling' of young people as a solution to NEET and unemployment. While not actively preventing young people from leaving school at 16, it was designed to encourage them to stay by forcing them to actively 'opt out' rather than 'opt in' to education. The policy instead relies on a combination of advising young people not to leave, explaining to them the negative consequences of doing so, and positively and extensively marketing post-16 courses and programmes. This technique can be classified as 'nudging' (a term coined by Thaler and Sunstein in 2008) which involves either changing the options available to a person or the relative attractiveness of certain options (structural nudging), or changing what a person knows about the decision they are making in order to encourage them to

make better choices (informational nudging).

Since the 1980s, there has been large-scale privatization and 'commissioning out' of public services (Seymour, 2012), and the open market place nature of the post-16 education sector is perhaps the most recent example of this. There are two parts to this: an inward and an outward facing agenda.

First, the learning on offer to young people is independently run and competes for learners in order to secure the limited funding available to them from national government. In the case of academies, this state funding is sometimes supplemented by private funding. The second, outward facing, part of market-driven education policy is based on the premise that the learning and training opportunities on offer to young people should be aligned with local and national job markets and that government policy should act as a broker for this process. Regardless of other potential benefits of attaining any qualifications, the ultimate success of a young person's education should be assessed by their ability to find and sustain good quality long-term employment. Planning learning opportunities around the needs of the labour market helps to control the supply end of the economy, and aims to reduce the potential for high unemployment. In Sheffield the work is co-ordinated through a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) made up of locally elected councillors, local business leaders, and learning providers. Work around this was also incorporated into the 2015 Devolution Deal for South Yorkshire. There are ongoing arguments regarding the potential benefits and pitfalls of the post-16 open marketplace. Three of these areas of contention are explored below.

Some courses are more expensive than others. To provide a high-level vocational engineering programme requires specialist equipment and workshops, and access to high-quality work opportunities. Comparatively, academic or classroom-based vocational courses require fewer resources. Through a market-place environment, given that providers receive a flat-fee per student, there is a real risk that the availability of courses will become financially motivated rather than needs driven.

Services that are commissioned out by local authorities or learning partnerships are under scrutiny for achieving targets such as percentage of students who achieve a certain level or who do not drop out mid-year. Yates and Payne wrote in 2006 of the risk that "attention may become focused more on those young people who can relatively easily or assuredly be moved into employment, education, a training

scheme or work placement ... at the expense of other young people who would benefit from intervention, and who, arguably in some cases, are in more urgent or greater need of it" (p.339). As provision is moved even further from state control, this risk becomes greater, with a real motivation for providers not to take a chance on 'risky' young people instead of more reliable learners. Equally, the increased funding on offer as an incentive to take on 16 and 17 year-old learners under RPA participation criteria makes it less attractive for providers to take on older learners. The risk is therefore that having taken a year or more out of learning, young people will find it much more difficult to re-engage in learning opportunities at 18 despite this still being free for them.

2.3.4 Delivering vocational education and training

Since the surge of young people opting to stay in education after Year 11, there have been ongoing discrepancies between the way in which academic and vocational subjects are taught and certificated. In addition to raising the participation age, the RPA green paper proposed a reform of the 14-19 curriculum and the introduction of Diplomas (Croll, 2008), and more recently, V-Levels have been launched as a vocational alternative to A-Levels. It has been routinely suggested in academic literature that the vocational education options in Britain are inferior to those of other European countries, in terms of their quality and the access they provide to skilled employment (Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Atkins, 2017; Evans, 2016). The three elements of this highlighted below are particularly relevant to those considering entry into JWT against other job-focused vocational options.

Stigma of vocational routes

The social class split between learners who follow academic and vocational learning routes is widely acknowledged. Atkins describes how this has led to (or perhaps stemmed from) "a perception that certain young people, implicitly working-class young people, are 'suited' to different forms of curriculum" (2017, p.648). This perception of the value and prestige of each route, is self-perpetuating and so the vocational education system becomes more and more stigmatised amongst young people from middle class and high-achieving families and continues to be an example of a system that "confin[es] young people to an allotted place in life, constraining

their individual agency and replicating social class" (Atkins, 2017, p.647).

The use of vocational training to target NEET

Movement out of NEET requires entry into either learning or employment and from a local authority perspective by far the easier of the two options is learning (Yates and Payne, 2016). Because of their smaller pre-requisites for academic qualifications and the way they are deemed more work-relevant to young people, the kind of courses offered to young people in NEET are more likely to be vocational. Although for some (even many) young people vocational learning might be a good option, such a strategy runs a risk that the attitudes of the young people from NEET who enroll on these courses are not the same as those of the young people who specifically chose the course as part of their career plan. This conflict of attitudes can lead to low level vocational programmes taking on the feel of 'holding pens' and young people who want to work opting to take a JWT route instead.

Value in finding work

"UK research [...] has consistently found that much vocational education is more likely [than academic education] to lead to transient, lowpay, low-skill, 'bad' quality jobs" (Atkins, 2017, p.646). For young people considering their post-16 options, Evans (2016) explains how the political emphasis on higher education has led to greater competition for graduate jobs and more pressure on young people to "embark on HE in order to compete successfully in the labour market" (Evans, 2016, p.2). Because of this, young people with lower academic ability or inclination who wish to pursue more direct entry into the labour market through vocational FE courses continue to be "disproportionately constrained in both the education and labour markets as they seek to navigate productive transitions from school to work" (Atkins, 2017, p.647).

2.4 Supporting young people to participate in Sheffield

Sections 2.1 - 2.3 covered the policy context surrounding the emergence of the JWT group, and the implications this has had on the way in which the post-16 education agenda developed. This final section explores what that context means for the young people and services in Sheffield, with specific focus on young people who want to work. It is divided into two parts. Part 2.4.1 looks at Sheffield service structures and Part 2.4.2 looks at information, advice and guidance (IAG) provision.

2.4.1 Local structures of support

In Sheffield, around 5500 young people leave Year eleven each summer. Of these, the vast majority leave a mainstream secondary school and go into further education, either at their school sixth form or one of the city's post-16 learning providers (92%) (SCC, 2017). All of Sheffield's schools and training providers make use of the UcasProgress online application system for helping their students make the first step into post-16 education. Similar to the national UCAS website for university applications, the site provides a directory and search function for the opportunities on offer, and young people can upload their qualifications, personal details, and course choices into one central system. Learning providers can provide information about the courses they offer, and accept or decline student applications.

For the small minority (around 5-10%) of each cohort who do not go straight into further education, support is offered via a third sector organisation commissioned by Sheffield City Council to provide a host of young people's services. Support specifically targeted at engagement in learning includes a drop-in or appointment based careers advice and placing service for 16 to 19 year-olds. Young people can get help with career planning, applying for training opportunities, or finding personal development opportunities designed to get them back into learning in the longer term. In 2015/16, 3030 young people were supported back into education, employment, or training through this service (Sheffield Futures, 2016). The same organisation provides in-school careers advice, where schools have commissioned it, and in cases where young people are identified as needing more intensive intervention, targeted youth support (TYS) workers are allocated to them, responsible for providing them

with advice and support to re-engage them in learning where required.

2.4.2 Sheffield transitions in a national context

Because of differences in key characteristics like demographics and rurality Sheffield is compared with other local authorities in two ways for its success in young people's educational and social outcomes, in addition to an overall comparison with the national average. The first is as part of the 8 largest cities in England (known as Core Cities), and the second includes the 11 local authority areas that are most similar in characteristics to Sheffield (known as its statistical neighbours). In 2017 Sheffield had, at 5.2%, "the lowest proportion of young people who [were] NEET compared to the other Core Cities" (SCC, 2017, p.33). Along with most of the UK's largest cities, Sheffield falls below the national average for educational attainment at 16 and for participation in learning at 16 and 17. However, unlike other cities, it does rather better than average for Year 12 participation and worse than other core cities for retention in learning into Year 13. The percentage of young people in post-16 learning in Sheffield is significantly enhanced by the number of 16- and 17-year-olds who enter apprenticeships. In 2017 this was 8.9%, nearly twice the national average and ranking Sheffield second against the other Core Cities (SCC, 2017, p.35). Possible reasons for this phenomenon are discussed in later chapters.

Despite above-average movement out of learning, most young people in Sheffield continue to participate in learning until they are 18. Of those who do not, most become NEET for a time. While most young people not participating in learning are NEET, entry into JWT was responsible for around 30% of the net movement from learning in Year 13 between 2010 and 2014.

2.4.3 Information, Advice and Guidance

Careers education, information, advice and guidance, more commonly shortened to CEIAG or just IAG, is the collective term for the way in which young people are taught about the options available to them after leaving Year 11 and the way in which they are advised and guided to make the best choices to suit their circumstances and aspirations. Demand for such IAG has continued to grow as "young people's education-to-work transitions [have] lengthened and [become] more com-

plex" (Roberts, 2013, p.240). Careers information, advice and guidance "represents a public good as well as a private good" (Watts, 2012, p.443) and has "a critical role to play in ensuring both that [ ] young people are well-prepared for their future lives and that [the] economy has a workforce with the skills it needs" (HoC, 2016, p.28).

Especially for young people with complex needs, "[c]hoosing the right course, at the right level, with the right content, in the right place [is] something of an art form" (Coles et al, 2004, p.27). There is a general consensus that "effective Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is key to successful learner progression" (Higham and Yeomans, 2011, p.223). There are three key elements to reducing the complexity of this process: simplifying the market place, ensuring the right kind of courses and training programmes are available, and giving young people the knowledge and support they require to make good decisions. IAG seeks to meet this latter requirement.

Options for transition making at 16 and 17

Thanks largely to the open-market nature of the post-16 learning environment, there are hundreds of options for young people to choose from upon leaving Year 11 in Sheffield. These options can be broken into branches of opportunities with shared characteristics, getting increasing smaller until a final choice is made. The broad options can be expressed as questions a young person might consider when ruling out certain options and choosing others, as the flow diagram below shows (Fig. 4).
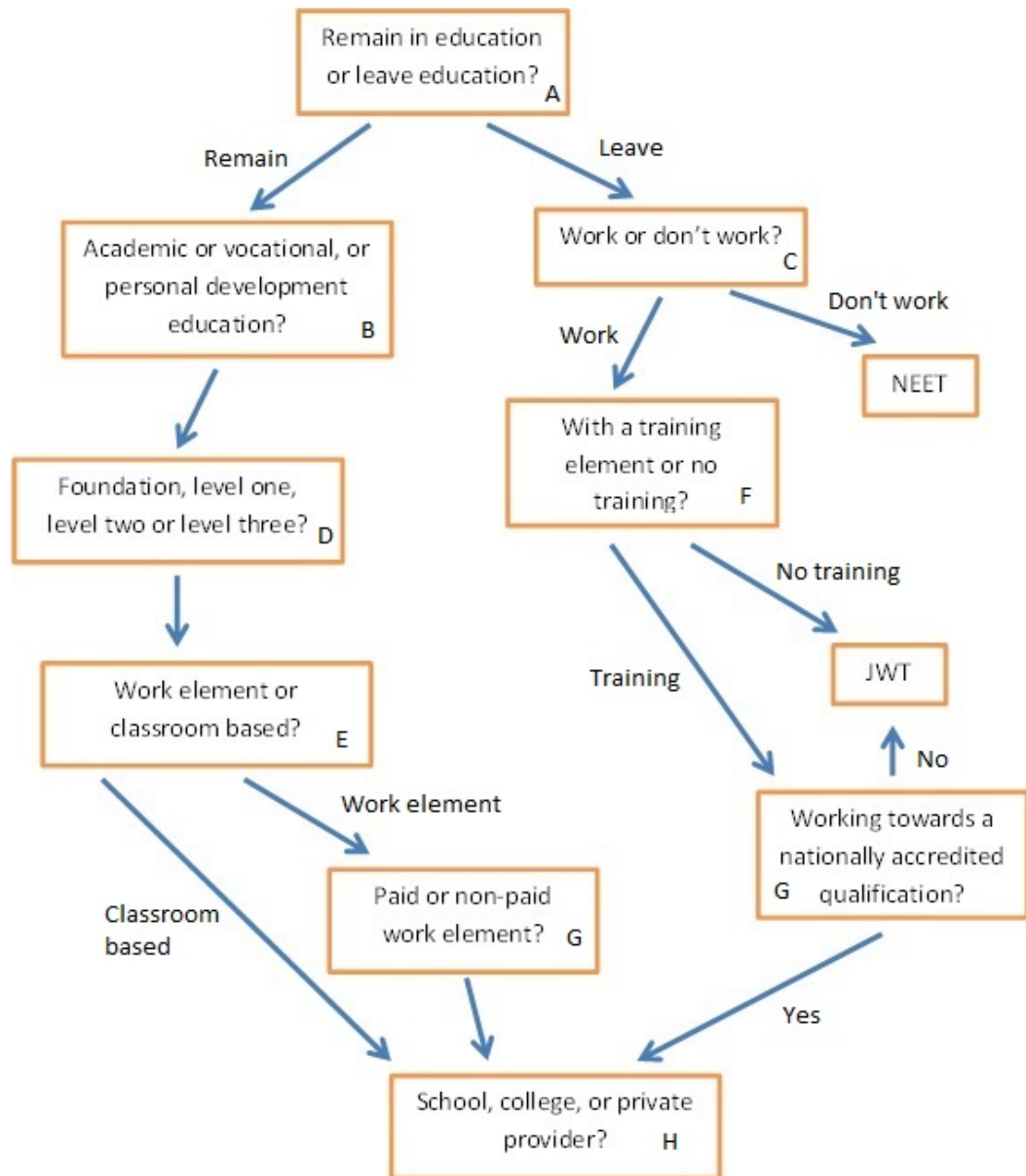
Figure 4: Options for choosing post-16 destinations

The first branch off is whether to remain in learning or to seek an alternative occupation. While RPA legislation now dictates that young people must remain in learning until they are 18 years-old, there is little to prevent them from doing so and some still choose to leave learning each year. For those choosing to leave, the next branch off is a decision about whether to seek employment. For some, this does not constitute a genuine choice, with illness, pregnancy, caring duties or disability preventing them from accessing employment.

For young people seeking employment, another branch breaks off, distinguishing jobs with training from those without. Jobs with training are those which offer at least 20 hours a week of learning that leads to the attainment of nationally recog-

nised accreditation Many of the large employers in Sheffield offer in-house training programmes for school leavers and also for those who have completed some form of post-16 education. Unless these incorporate working towards a nationally recognised level 2 qualification, young people on these programmes would still be classified as in Jobs Without Training however. Similarly, jobs which require young people to undertake short job-specific training such as forklift driving or welding courses also do not meet the required criteria.

Young people following the learning branch have to make a similar number of choices, including the type of learning they would like to pursue, the level at which they would like to study, the learning environment they would prefer, and the institution they would like to study at. The order of options presented in Figure. 4 assumes a young person has a career or subject area in mind. In reality, many young people make choices in the other direction, choosing the learning provider first and then making choices based on the options provided by that institution (A-level courses offered at a school sixth form for example).

The flowchart is, in reality, an overly simplistic version of the decision making process. The distinctions between options such as vocational and academic, for example, are largely subjective, and the branches fail to take account of young people who put together their own programmes by combining part time employment with post-16 education courses, or who undertake online courses while caring for their children for example. There is also an underlying assumption that these choices are all available to every young person, whereas in reality, the attainment of qualifications in Year 11 or the conditions of the local labour market shut off some branches to some young people. Despite these caveats however, the diagram seeks to demonstrate the complexity of the journeys young people make out of compulsory schooling. They way in which these journeys are navigated forms the main focus of Chapter Three, while the remainder of Chapter Two describes the support services available to young people making those journeys.

The origins and development of the Careers Service

Since its origins in the early 1900s, the various forms of a government funded careers service has changed in both its key objects and its vehicle for delivery (Roberts, 2013). "[P]olicies relating to career guidance tend to be intertwined with, and often

subordinated to, wider political agendas" (Watts, 2012, p.443). Having identified that school-leavers entering employment for the first time had different needs to other workers, the first careers service in England was set up through the Education Act of 1910 to find suitable jobs for young people, as a form of youth job-exchange (a forerunner of the modern Job Centre) (Roberts, 2013). As well as helping young people to enter employment, the service's purpose was to "steer them clear of physically and morally hazardous employment and dead-end jobs from which there was no prospect of progress to adult earnings" (Roberts, 2013, p.241). It was for this reason that the service was delivered by local education authorities rather than through the government's department for employment, in order to ensure that jobs found matched the advice that school leavers were given. The original model for delivering careers education has stayed largely the same since 1945, comprising a general talk to whole school year groups about post-school options, followed by individual careers interviews to match young people with suitable career paths (Roberts, 2013).

Over time, as it became more normal for young people to stay in education past the compulsory leaving age, it became necessary to provide careers advice earlier in their school career and to provide information that extended beyond finding them suitable post-16 employment (Roberts, 2013). This change in focus meant it stopped being "associated with finding jobs for early school-leavers" (Roberts, 2013, p.245) and the careers service's "revised aim was to facilitate the development of young people's own vocational thinking. Guidance became non-directive. Clients were assisted to make up their own minds. What had started as a way of getting young people into employment, had become purely advisory and "progressively more distant from employment proper" (Roberts, 2013, p.249). Roberts argues that the IAG services provided to young people today, "will not create the kind of comprehensive education-to-work bridging service that was once intended and which is still needed" (Roberts, 2013, p.240).

Funding for careers advice services has steadily reduced over recent years, and appointments are increasingly targeted at those young people deemed most at need, although this does vary from school to school. Watts predicted in 2012 that only around 40% of young people nationally received a careers interview before leaving school (Watts, 2012, p.443). Despite changes to its funding, careers guidance is hailed by all governments as essential in reducing post-16 disengagement, and often

forms a central part of government education policy agendas (Roberts, 2013), most recently in the 2011 Education Act, which made the provision of independent and impartial careers advice for all 12 to 18 year-olds a statutory duty of English schools (Watts, 2012; HoC, 2016).

Deliverers of IAG

There are two aspects to the 'who' of IAG delivery. The first is the attributes, training and focus of the people who actually come into contact with young people, and the second is the structure and funding of the organisations and departments who employ them. In 2017, the present government's view is that "preparing young people for the world of work and guiding them towards decisions about their future are critical to what schools [do]" (HoC, 2016, p.12), and the responsibility for funding and providing IAG provision now lies with schools. Because until 2012 this responsibility fell to local authorities, many of the organisations previously set up to deliver IAG are now commissioned by schools to continue delivering the service (Roberts, 2013) This is the case in Sheffield, where the majority of schools commission the same organisation to deliver IAG to their students as were previously delivering the services. The move of IAG from local authorities to schools did not include any ring-fenced funding (Watts, 2012; Roberts, 2013; HoC, 2016) and one criticism has been that schools are now expected to pay for the services they used to receive for free without the threat of much repercussion should they fail to deliver the required standard of service (Watts, 2012, p.7). Ofsted's chief inspector, in 2016, went so far as to say that nationally, careers guidance was "a disaster area in schools" (HoC, 2016, p.7).

There are other challenges presented by giving the responsibility for IAG to schools. Schools and other learning providers are largely assessed and funded on their enrollment figures and academic results, so it is perhaps in their better interests to deliver restrictive careers advice based on the provision they provide, than a wider curriculum inclusive of other post-16 options (Watts, 2012; HoC, 2016; Foskett et al, 2008). The move towards increased school autonomy reduces the influence of local authorities of what is and is not included in careers services (Watts, 2012). Evaluations of NEET policy have found that regardless of the breadth of support on offer, the quality of relationships between young people and career advisors are

perhaps the most important factor in the success of IAG provision (Maguire and Thompson, 2007; Coles et al, 2004). Connexions PAs found that for some of their clients to be most effective they needed to act "as a combination of personal secretary and parent as much as a careers advisor, broker and advocate" (Coles et al, 2004, p.37). Current guidance however only "states that schools 'should take into consideration' the quality of career professionals" (HoC, 2016, p.19).

In Sheffield, the third sector organisation that delivers IAG to around half of the city's schools is structured in a similar way to the Connexions service. As well as provision of in-school careers appointments, advisors within the organisation provide post-16 careers support through a drop-in and appointment service in a centre that also offers a host of other support services, for example housing, drug and alcohol and mental health services. The focus is to combine careers advice with a more holistic package of support to enable young people to overcome the other barriers they may have to accessing learning opportunities. Around half of the city's schools buy their support from this organisation, while the others either employ someone in-house, or use other independent providers. A national careers service and local CEIAG (Careers education, information, advice and guidance) network also promote the sharing of good practice and support providers to stay up to date with new developments.

Types of IAG and intended service users

IAG support covers a range of activities including "information, group work, advice, guidance, in-depth support and access to personal and social development" (Coles et al, 2004, p.2). Research suggests that the most effective IAG is integrated with wider school curriculums, with pupils approaching their plans for future careers from a variety of academic and non-academic perspectives (Watts, 2012). Whether they enter their first job at 16 or 25, the purpose of IAG is ultimately to prepare young people for entering employment whether through choosing the right training for their chosen career, or through supporting them with knowledge of the labour market or job interview skills. The kind of information provided to young people needs to include general knowledge of the different progression options and more specific details of particular institutions and courses that are available and the specific nature of the local labour market (Roberts, 2013). There is also a time element

which sees a necessity for a combination of longer term career planning with the 'just-in-time' information young people need to make choices (Foskett et al, 2008).

There has always been a conflict within IAG policy. On the one hand, it promotes 'raising the aspirations' of young people, while on the other hand, its focus is on helping young people to make ambitious but realistic decisions about their futures (Davies, 1987). As well as a desire from young people to know more about their personal options, the motivation for providing good quality IAG comes from schools who want their students to aim high and work hard towards future goals, and employers who want suitable candidates with the right relevant qualifications (Roberts, 2013). Recent governments have packaged careers advice as a means of ensuring the learning and labour markets are well served by the best young people to fill the opportunities they offer (Watts, 2012). The mismatch between aspiration and opportunities continues to be a problem across all levels, from university graduates to early school leavers (HoC, 2016).

The decisions that young people make about their careers are based not only on economic considerations, their skill-set and the kind of jobs that there are available for them, but are also to do with the kind of lifestyle they would like to lead, and the necessity to fit round other factors like their families or location. It is perhaps for this reason that research has shown that nationally young people are largely dissatisfied with the careers advice they receive due to feeling pressured to take certain pathways (Foskett et al, 2008; Rudd and Evans, 1998; Atherton et al, 2009; Anderson et al, 2006) along with issues in the timing of advice (Croll, 2008; Coles et al, 2004). For young people, what has been shown to be pivotal to good careers advice is being made aware not only of the steps they can take but also of the longer-term implications of those steps (Roberts, 2013, p.250). Difficulties in providing IAG include timetable constraints faced by schools who are largely judged by academic outcomes and who are subsequently forced to prioritise other elements of the school curriculum over the provision of careers advice.

The disengagement of young workers with IAG

One of the main changes to the direction and purpose of the careers service was what Roberts refers to as "the vanishing youth labour market" which led to a change from around 70% of young people going straight from school into employment at 16

in 1970, to less than 10% doing the same in 1990 (Roberts, 2013, p.245). Government training schemes in the 1970s and '80s brought with them a new way of thinking which included that there was "a forthcoming 'knowledge economy' which would require better-educated and trained, and better qualified young people than before" (Roberts, 2013, p.246). Careers advisors were tasked with matching young people to training rather than to jobs and one long-term knock-on effect of this was a feeling amongst young people who wanted to work, that the careers service was unable to provide jobs and just tried to push training on them (Roberts, 2013). Previous research with early-entrants into employment has found that despite a greater emphasis on structured training programmes embedded within employment placements, the motivation for not taking these up was being able to earn a higher wage more quickly (Ferguson and Unwin, 1996; Roberts, 2013).

The increasing pressure on young people to enter prescribed pathways to un-known locations over the paths they would more intuitively choose to take, suggests the lack of faith governments have in the ability of young people to make good decisions. Decision making at 16 is complex and making the wrong choices increasingly leads to blame being placed on individuals rather than on the system within which they find themselves lost. Perhaps the biggest area of contention in the post-16 education environment is the combination of a policy approach which keeps young people in learning for longer while simultaneously opening up a market place of providers offering a multitude of courses and qualifications and then blaming young people who make the 'wrong' choices. It is this combination of complex dynamics that the research questions seek to investigate, by examining their impact on the way young people formulate and follow through with their plans.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has sought to provide contextual information on the national policy related to post-16 progression out of compulsory learning, and the local structures and practices in Sheffield that relate to the young people and data involved in this research. Understanding the information and support services available to school leavers enables the results of the data analysis presented in the later chapters to be read in context. The information provided in this chapter also provides a more

comprehensive rationale for the research questions that are central to the thesis.

Changes to eligibility criteria for social support in 1988 led to the emergence of a disengaged group of young people who fell between school and employment support. Policy attempts to better support this group created, as a by-product, the classification of a new destination status: Jobs Without Training. The culmination of over a decade of new youth and education policy has been in legislation to keep young people in learning until the age of 18, bringing age benchmarks in line with unemployment support eligibility criteria. One implication this has had on young people in JWT is that they are now more closely monitored than ever before. In practice this means more effort is put in by support services to discourage them from pursuing employment until later in their post-16 trajectory. The justification for this is that early entry into employment is associated with risks of poor social outcomes in the short and longer term and additional time spent in learning acquiring additional qualifications and skills can increase individual skills, reduce the risk of unemployment and give young people more options in their future working lives.

Post-16 education policy

One of the main impacts of the NEET label has been on classifying young people by what they are not rather than who they are. This has a knock-on impact on how support is targetted at young people, not only for those classified as NEET but now (following the RPA legislation) for young people in Jobs Without Training which are now considered in policy terms to be a problematic destination. Due to their lack of engagement with services, keeping track of young people in NEET can be challenging and in order to ensure they were being appropriately supported to re-engage, the NCCIS database was designed to store up-to-date information on young people's destinations and support needs. Databases now maintained locally help to target the support local authorities provide to 16 and 17 year olds. One example of this, as the chapter explained, is the September guarantee, a national initiative introduced in 2007 to ensure all 16 and 17 year olds have an offer of suitable learning at the start of each academic year. Similarly, the November activity survey which captures a snapshot of everyone's destinations at the same time every year gives local authorities and national government an indication of how well they are doing to support their young people.

Raising the Participation Age was justified as a means of improving outcomes for both individual young people and for wider society. This is in part because the kind of jobs that young people are able to get at 16 and 17 are more likely to be insecure, and prone to involve poor pay and conditions. However, the way in which JWTs are defined in policy do not always align with young people's perceptions of them. Increasing the time a young person must spend in learning comes with it a responsibility to ensure that extra time benefits them more than entering employment would have done. This can not automatically be assumed, especially given short or work-specific courses which hold currency in some employment areas but are not recognised as formal learning under RPA criteria.

Delivering post-16 education

Having established the policies in place relating to JWT and post-16 learning progression, the chapter went on to consider the way in which post-16 learning provision was delivered. This included the target to dramatically increase the number of young people accessing higher education and the various schemes associated with this to offer financial incentives to less advantaged learners. The new RPA legislation makes clear the national agenda to promote post-16 learning over work experience. Implementation of this policy however leads to difficulties including the problem of grouping together young people with little in common besides their learning status. Additionally, by its very nature, RPA disregards the informal learning that takes place in workplaces and displays a lack of faith in young people's ability to progress their careers through non-traditional routes. The way in which vocational subjects are taught and certificated is not always seen as of equal value to their academic counterparts and in some cases there is a stigma attached to taking vocational post-16 pathways. Recent policy initiatives have sought to tackle this with varying success and this has a particular impact on young people in JWT who it could be argued are more likely to be suited to work-based learning opportunities.

Supporting post-16 transition making

Although sustained participation in learning is seen as good for individuals, the labour market and wider society, in reality policy can only advise young people not to leave and positively market the learning options available. The last section of

the chapter explained that Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is viewed as a vital part of the local authority package of support for young people's post-16 progression. In supporting young people's decision-making, IAG seeks to simplify the market place and give young people the knowledge and support they need to choose the right kind of courses and training programmes to suit their needs.

This chapter has focused on the design and delivery of services for young people and the impact that this has on the outcomes of young people post-16. In order to understand more fully however the way in which young people respond and engage with the options open to them, it's also important to look at the factors that individuals bring with them to their decision-making. The next chapter introduces concepts of place, social class, and the development of self identifies, in order to explore this interaction.

Chapter 3

Becoming young workers: the formation and realisation of aspiration

This chapter provides a theoretical frame through which to explore young people's transition-making behaviour. A focus is put on decision making with respect of elements including how aspirations are balanced with uncertainty, how job opportunities are balanced against personal circumstances, and how entry into Jobs Without Training contribute to young people's understandings of movement into adulthood. The chapter particularly seeks to provide context for the first research question:

> *How are the transitions made between education and JWT by young people under the age of 18 influenced by their personal characteristics and circumstances, the relationships they have with their families and peers, and their experience of compulsory schooling?*

Chapter Two provided information about the policy and service structures in place to support young people leaving Year 11 in Sheffield and nationally. Post-16 participation continues to be an area of concern in the United Kingdom (Croll, 2008). The problem, argue Higham and Yeomans, is that "the human capital emphasis with policy has shown a tendency to construct 14-19-year-olds as rationalistic, economic actors thus underplaying the realities of their lives, aspirations and motivations" (2011, p.221). Taking the issues raised in Chapter Two as its base, Chapter

Three takes a wider and more theoretical view of transition making and entry into JWT using the following four theoretical frames: culture and place, conceptualising adulthood, critical moments and turning points, and the construction of personal projects through a combination of structure and agency. The purpose of using these frames is to explore the more general underpinning themes of transition-making and entry into JWT which include how young people establish their understandings of 'normal' post-16 progression, how and why they choose to break away from these norms, and the way in which they conceptualise and understand success in their current and future employment and careers.

The chapter starts with a discussion of culture and place. This looks at how a young person's geographical and social environments contribute to the way they understand social norms and societal expectations. It draws on literature about social class and place effects and seeks to explore how these are embedded in young people's way of perceiving themselves within the world and their contribution towards creating their learning identities. It then looks at the conceptualisation of adulthood. In the UK, entry into employment is often seen as a benchmark for the achievement of the transition from childhood to adulthood. The section draws on literature about how life stages are conceptualised in order to explore the place that JWTs hold within them and how jobs contribute to young people's progress between them. It also considers the impact of inequalities on how stages are progressed and how identities are developed as a result. This provides context for one of the underpinning themes described above: the kind of destinations that young people consider to be successful.

The chapter then moves to consideration of the role that structure and agency play in the construction of personal projects. Literature on social structures and pressures is draw upon, along with literature on how choices are presented and the application of personal priorities and resilience in negotiating these. This builds on the underpinning theme of breaking away from established norms of post-16 progression. The final part of Chapter Three describes critical moments and turning points and the part they play in the journeys made by young people. The purpose of this is to consider the unplanned elements of career trajectories and to bring together the other elements of decision making discussed earlier in the chapter to consider how a variety of factors contribute to the way in which young people respond to

unexpected events or experiences and the consequences this has on their future pathways.

3.1 The importance of who you are and where you live

> "I wonder if it really matters whether people living in a deprived place are marginally more likely to be ill than if they had been living somewhere nicer, the point is that they were always very unlikely to live anywhere nicer. There are no examples of neighbourhoods in Britain in which massively deprived residents enjoy fantastically high levels of good health" (Mitchell, 2001, p.1359).

As part of a 2001 collection of papers on place, Mitchell suggests that the effect of place is arguably less important than the concentration of particular outcomes within places. This becomes one of the central threads of this section, which considers not only place but also explores the concept of culture and class embedded within localities. There are sound arguments for separating class, culture, and locality, but equally compelling ones for combining them. The reason for doing the latter in this section, is that the differences in education and transition-making in Sheffield present themselves geographically but are caused by a far wider range of variables.

3.1.1 The impact of culture and class on constructing learning identities

In his account of working class employment and poverty in 1930s Yorkshire, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, Orwell makes a very astute observation about the motivations behind social behaviour:

> "The ordinary human being would rather starve than live on brown bread and raw carrots ... a millionaire may enjoy breakfasting off orange juice and Ryvita biscuits: an unemployed man doesn't ... when you are unemployed, which is to say when you are underfed, harassed, bored, and miserable, you don't want to eat dull wholesome food. You want to eat something a bit 'tasty' " (Orwell, 1937, p.86).

The above extract is taken from a longer discussion about how mining families manage their income (or lack thereof). He argues that the political ideal that a government minister can calculate a suitable weekly payment for an unemployed worker based on a carefully budgeted weekly grocery and utility bill and expect to raise him out of poverty is false. Just as people spend money based not on a rational balancing of resources with needs but instead on factors like financial security, experience of poverty and general enjoyment of ordinary life, so young people make their post-16 decisions based on more than simply aiming for the highest level job they are capable of. Thus, more than 75 years after Orwell was writing, the motivations he described that rationalise class differences can still be applied to post-16 decision making.

The relationship between social class and young people's behaviour and decision-making is not straightforward, not least because social class groups are far from homogenous, but a well-developed link has been established between place, culture, and the formation of social identity (Evans, 2016; Cuzzocrea and Manich, 2016; Foskett et al, 2003; Evans, 2007). Living in poverty, in a run-down area, surrounded by others in a similar situation, can make people (including teenagers) want to do whatever will improve their situation the fastest whether through Orwell's example of blowing a week's food budget on fish and chips, or in the more substantial example of wanting to get a job as soon as possible. The way in which young people form and choose solutions to improving their situation depends on a range of personal and social factors and social class plays a central role in this.

The shift since the 1990s towards 'widening participation' in higher education has increased the number of young people going to university from a range of back-grounds, and the general belief that additional qualifications will lead to better and more secure employment seems to have filtered down to almost every section of society (Evans, 2007). However, for young people from working class backgrounds or social disadvantaged groups, the link between having a post-16 education and the work they can go on to do is not always apparent or understood. "[T]he deficit model of youth holds them personally responsible for their failure to participate in a neoliberal knowledge economy and applies particular characterisations to them, such as disengaged and disaffected" (Atkins, 2017, p.647). Among working class communities, further and higher education is often seen in a context of accessing

better employment through gaining professional qualifications, rather than for self-improvement more generally which is traditionally a more middle class perspective. The impact that individual perspective and social identity can have on education and employment is is explored below through three key elements: choice, resources and values.

Element one: Choice

The body of literature around privilege describes how cultural capital enables people to make active choices about their lifestyle. This is not just about financial security (which does play a significant role), but also about support with educational achievement, access to useful contacts and networks, and emotional and practical support to overcome potential challenges (Croll, 2008). Combined, these things enable someone to make genuine choices about their lives without being constrained by physical or psychological barriers. High privilege is not restricted to young people with middle class upbringings, but is more common amongst them.

Element two: Resources

The difference between the experiences of different social classes is often simplified to being about access to material resources. Measurable social outcomes do often manifest as variables like income and house or car ownership, but in reality social class is less about money than about financial security and the ability to buy (in the short or long term) the things necessary to achieve a desired lifestyle. "Young people from low-income households are typically more eager to realize their earning power at the earliest possible moment if openings exist, and in some cases may be required to do so by necessity or parental pressures" (Ferguson and Unwin, 1996, p.60). However, although social class and income are intrinsically intertwined, the existence of middle class families living in poverty and affluent working class families suggests there is more to the relationship between money and class. It would also be incorrect to assume that a desire for financial comfort is a desire to attain a middle class lifestyle.

Element three: Values

The reason that the other two strands are so closely associated with class difference, can perhaps be attributed to differences in the values held by people from different backgrounds. The central structures of western society are largely aligned with middle class values in regards to education, types of employment and family life. The association between high academic achievement and high income employment is central to understanding why deprivation and social exclusion is far more widespread amongst working class communities.

As well as the role of social identity and cultural norms in shaping aspiration (which is explored further in Section 3.3), what young people go on to do post-16 also depends on the practicality of accessing available opportunities. This applies across all social classes and groups, but arguably has more impact on working class communities. Working class people tend to have more ties to their local area and are less able and/or willing to travel far to access work, education, or other services and amenities (Green, 2001, see Section 3.2.2). Local labour markets (the type of work and the volume of job opportunities) are therefore likely to have a greater influence on the perceived opportunities available to young people from working class backgrounds. This has an impact on what they choose to do in terms of education, training and employment. Stahl and Baars (2016) describe how traditional ideas of masculine identity-building through employment have been changed by the decline in local labour markets and the replacement of 'respectable working-class employment' with service-sector roles they refer to as 'McJobs'. Nayak (2006) suggests that the change in the nature of low-skilled jobs in the labour market has supported an increase in the percentage of female workers due to "[t]heir perceived willingness to service customers and work flexible hours, combined with the absence of a staunch trade union history" (Nayak, 2006, p.817).

Sources of aspiration

The way in which aspiration is linked with educational and economic success in political discourse implies that poverty and social exclusion are a result of the 'handing down' of low aspiration through families, communities, and schools (Stahl and Baars, 2016). This rhetoric is problematic for a number of reasons, not least

because it fails to account for structural differences in access to opportunities. The classification of working-class aspirations as 'low' aspirations fails to consider the value individuals put on "security, masculine validation, alignment with localized, [and] classed identities" (Stahl and Baars, 2016, p.314). Whereas high aspirations are associated with skilled professional employment, the pursuit of unskilled or manual work by working class young people is often viewed by policy makers as an act of rebellion against the education system (Stahl and Baars, 2016).

McDowell argues that getting employment is about more than the attainment of qualifications, and that "their class, their accents, their performative masculinity" can make working-class young people undesirable to certain kinds of employers (cited in Stahl and Baars, 2016, p.317). Working class values, which place a high regard on the maintenance of masculinity, are not always a good fit with high level service jobs which require a degree of subordination to superiors and customers (Stahl and Baars, 2016). The direct link between good qualifications and "good" employment is therefore bounded by social class, perhaps providing some explanation of class differences in the purpose of education and differences in aspirations (Evans, 2016). Croll found that "while high achieving children are very likely to continue in education whatever their background, low attaining children are much more likely to participate if they come from well-educated and high income families" (2008, p.414). Foskett et al (2003) argue that choices are also created and legitimised by social groups. "It is well established that the social and economic context of youth transitions is critically important in determining their shape and their outcomes for different groups" (Bynner and Parsons, 2002, p.289) "Those from the least socially advantaged homes are far less likely to pursue the most prestigious routes through post-16 education" (Evans, 2016, p.1). Because "[l]ifestyle is intimately involved with ... the establishment and maintenance of social status" (Foskett et al, 2003, p.6), the kind of lifestyle a young person has while growing up makes all the difference in what they do when they have the chance to make their own decisions. It is this notion that imagined futures related to lifestyle rather than specific activity (Cuzzocrea and Manich, 2016) which presents a clear picture of class and social differences.

3.1.2 Place and Space

Sheffield is well known for the diversity in both geographic landscape and social outcomes within its boundaries. Its rural North West, Industrial East, and affluent South West lead to a display of distinct patterns in outcomes along clear and spatially organised class lines. Academic and political acknowledgment of place effect is not new (Stahl and Baars, 2016; Pattie, 2001; Sampson et al, 2002). "Social science's engagement with the role that neighbourhoods play in shaping young people's aspirations and outcomes can be traced back to the 1940s" (Stahl and Baars, 2016, p.315) and the general move towards incorporating place within social policy began back in the 1960s (Pattie, 2001; Sampson et al, 2002). In fact Jones (2009) argues that place has firmly become the 'backdrop' to the phenomenon under examination, and the renewed momentum for area based initiatives at the end of the 1990s (Sampson et al, 2002) was "underpinned by the explicit premise that people's life chances are affected by where they live" (Stahl and Baars, 2016, p.315). Nationally, there are significant differences in the spatial concentration of poverty, unemployment, and other measures of deprivation and affluence (Sampson et al, 2002) and it has "long [been] established that young people's post-school choices, transitions and employment prospects depend not only on their qualifications, age, gender, social class and personal attributes, but on where they live and the availability of employment and education opportunities in local settings" (Evans, 2016, p.1). Regardless of the reasons behind these differences, the fact that inequalities exist between areas, and continue to do so decade after decade, generation after generation (Smith et al, 2001; Mitchell, 2001), suggests that place is an important factor to consider when attempting to understand how social issues emerge and are solved. When Dorling argues that the outcomes an individual achieves or experiences are little more than "a signpost to [their] street, school and socialisation" (2001, p.1339) he does not refer to the administrative ward in which they live, but rather to what can best be defined as their local environment or neighbourhood and it is this looser understanding of place that frames the remainder of this section.

Places as aggregations of inhabitants' characteristics

Farnsworth (2013) argues that the impact of place is not a one-way process and that by living or spending time in a particular area individuals influence the characteristics of a place beyond simply the demographical statistics that their presence adds. While there is a certain logic to defining an area by the people who live there ("you cannot have a deprived place without deprived people" (Mitchell, 2001, p.1358)), there is extensive evidence that area effects "shape individual outcomes relating to social exclusion, feelings of stigma, employment, and health, above and beyond the effect of individual-level characteristics" (Stahl and Baars, 2016, p.315). The persistence over time of social inequalities between areas, adds weight to the argument that the characteristics of an area are more than simply an aggregation of the characteristics of its inhabitants (Dorling, 2001; Smith et al, 2001). The structural features of places influence how actors behave and interact with one another (Jones, 2009) and in turn the interactions of social actors shape the culture of an area as a whole: creating hot-spots and concentrations of particular social outcomes and changing the way in which people experience life more generally (Sampson et al, 2002).

False groupings, missing minorities, and meaningfully defining places

There are problems with examining social problems at an area-level rather than at an individual one (McCulloch, 2001; Smith et al, 2001; Joshi, 2001; Pattie, 2001). While more often than not, areas contain groups of similarly minded people, populations are rarely homogenous. Young people living in deprived households in relatively affluent areas of Sheffield are far less likely to show up in when deprivation is measured at area level (Smith et al, 2001; Joshi, 2001; Pattie, 2001).

Place, traditionally, has always been viewed as a static geographical concept based on defined areas of land, with examples including the administrative boundaries of counties, and religious parishes. Such boundaries are defined for the purposes of grouping and governing people within physical land masses. However, in the vast majority of cases it would be wrong to assume that people "live out their lives within a fixed spatial hierarchy" (Mitchell, 2001, p.1358). Modern society is becoming increasingly dispersed with children more likely to move away, and on-

line communities having an increasing influence in connecting people from different social and national groups.

The physical distance between where a person works, socialises and where their family or friends live, can stretch between cities and countries, not merely between neighbourhoods and wards (McCulloch, 2001; Mitchell, 2001, p.1358) and this makes places "inherently chaotic concepts" (Burrows and Bradshaw, 2001, p.1347). An alternative conceptualisation of the spaces people inhabit focuses on "spheres of influence", based on where they spend their time (Joshi, 2001, p.1349). This conceptualisation, suggests that two people living next door to each other may have entirely separate ideas of the communities in which they belong, depending more on who they are than where they are.

Experiencing place: area cultures that outlive individuals

The social outcomes of a place, like its level of deprivation and educational attainment rates, very often extend decade after decade, outlasting the individuals and families who live within them. "Young people's educational decisions are not simply informed by their social and economic circumstances ... Historically specific landscapes of educational and economic opportunities also frame their decisions" (Evans, 2016, p.9). The way a person experiences a place will depend on where their support networks are located, where they have lived before, and what they aspire to be and do. Green describes the increasingly widespread belief in a 'culture of unemployment' experienced by many communities: a theory that suggests local unemployment becomes endemic because being unemployed in a place full of other unemployed people reduces a person's motivation to re-enter employment (Green, 2001). There are some powerful arguments against this theory, most notably in recent years the work of The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and MacDonald et al (2005), but the impact of place on personal motivation and aspiration remains worthy of consideration, not least because the kinds of jobs that young people have heard of and would consider doing are partially based on the area in which they live as much as on the careers advice they receive and the people who they know. People who grow up in area with a history of a particular industry also retain a sense of identity associated with that industry even long after it has declined (Nayak, 2006; Evans, 2016). Common examples include people growing up in ex-mining villages,

coastal cities with decommissioned shipyards, and communities where a central factory/main employer has closed down (Nayak, 2006). The presence of these cultural memories influence the ways that young people make decisions about their futures (Stahl and Baars, 2016; Farnsworth, 2013; McCulloch, 2001; Burrows and Bradshaw, 2001). These "strong, locally embedded, class-cultural frames of reference ... continue to structure young people's expectations, even when the structural conditions for these expectations are either endangered or no longer exist" (Stahl and Baars, 2016, p.322). It would be wrong to assume that all cultural norms associated with place are a direct result of historical employment, however. Practices associated with criminal activity, political persuasion, and racial tensions, are all examples of other norms which are passed down through generations until they become ingrained in places, although established family networks also have a role to play in this (Nayak, 2006).

Despite living in the same place, people might experience area characteristics differently. This can be explored in two ways: though the concept of relativity in measuring impact (i.e. whether being poor in a poor area is different to being poor in rich one), and by whether the importance that people put on 'place' is different for different groups in society (Stahl and Baars, 2016). Working class or more disadvantaged groups are more likely to have stronger ties to particular areas, and are less likely to travel out of those areas to find work, education or other services (Green, 2001; MacDonald et al, 2005). Green (2001) suggests this is due to physical logistical problems like dependency on poor public transport, and psychological reasons like an unwillingness to leave the local area or to enter particular neighbourhoods. This has a double effect of making it harder to find suitable employment (due to reduced flexibility) and intensifying the impact of local surroundings (Green, 2001).

The impact of neighbours and communities

In addition to individual characteristics and cultural norms, the characteristics and behaviours of the people near whom a person lives or spends significant time, are also influential. This is partly because the way in which young people form their educational and employment aspirations are based on what they see the people around them do (or fail to do) (Green, 2001; Farnsworth, 2013). In this way, issues

like teenage pregnancy, early drop out from school, and criminal behaviour, can become normalised in some areas, making it more likely to reoccur (Sampson et al, 2002). Wenger's social learning theory, as explained by Farnsworth (2013), suggests that young people decide, consciously or not, which 'communities of practice' they feel most accountable to, based on the relationships they have with the people who live with and around them. Assuming this to be the case, the way in which young people plan for, and measure, their own success depends upon the expectations of the communities they affiliate with, along with the routes and options that role models within those communities make seem possible (Jones, 2009; Stahl and Baars, 2016; Nayak, 2006; Ellen and Turner, 1997). "There is, in effect, an assumption that, if this particular choice is fashionable, there must be a good reason for that, and hence it is a safe and confident choice" (Foskett et al, 2003, p.6). For young people, the 'path of least resistance' involves following the route most normal for their socio-economic group. Young people who belong to communities where educational achievement is rated the most highly will be under the most pressure not to drop out early, and in this way "inequalities are inevitably replicated" and changing behaviour requires an understanding of culture and place (Foskett et al, 2003, p.2; Evans, 2016). Communities in this case can refer to physical location, digital space, social class, or other social groupings like gender and race.

Access to services and opportunities

Similar to the people they come into contact with, the presence or lack of businesses and employers in an area shapes how young people view work and job opportunities (Stahl and Baars, 2016). This approach is central to the 'horizons of action' theory developed by Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, in which young people imagine their futures based on the boundaries set by the circumstances and environment in which they live (Farnsworth, 2013, p.125). Grannis (1998, cited in Sampson et al 2002) found in his research on area affect that geographical distance was far less important to people than accessibility. For young people largely dependent on public or non-vehicular transport, accessibility and convenience both play a role in choosing learning provision or job opportunities (Atkins, 2017; Evans, 2016). Stahl and Baars suggest that it is "harder for working class young people to get high-level jobs because there is an emphasis on the need to move away from home"

(Stahl and Baars, 2016), although Farnsworth (2013) found that this depended on individual prioritisation. She gives the example of a young person who would consider moving to London in order to do the job she wants but has no aspirations to leave her local area otherwise (Farnsworth, 2013, p.129). As well as services, local job markets also have an impact on educational behaviour, with high unemployment sometimes encouraging young people to stay in education for longer (Evans, 2016) and sometimes inspiring them to take the first job opportunity offered rather than think more carefully about their progression routes.

3.2   JWT as an entry point to adulthood

"There is extensive research on the growing uncertainty in young people's lives and the fatigue involved in projecting a life for themselves along with the assumption, rarely challenged, that the route to adulthood implied a lonely journey" (Cuzzocrea and Manich, 2016, p.562). Leaving education and getting their first job is one of several socially accepted ways in which a person's move from childhood to adulthood is conceptualised (Cockburn, 2001; Evans, 2007; Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Vickerstaff, 2003). Other ways include moving out of the family home, co-habiting with a partner or getting married, and starting a family of their own. The changes in the length and linearity of these transitions over time have been well documented by authors such as Du Bois-Reymond (1998), Cockburn (2001), Evans (2007) and Beck (1992) and the move out of post-compulsory education now involves a "bewildering array of labour market transitions" (Nayak, 2006, p.814).

This section considers how adulthood is conceptualised from a young person's perspective, and the stages that they feel it is necessary to go through in order to achieve this 'adult' status. Theorists have produced many models of life stages, ranging from Erikson's eight to Freud's five (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003) but there is an increasing acceptance that modern youth is less a "status between childhood and adulthood .. but rather an autonomous phase" (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998, p.64). One purpose of education has always been to "induct the young and especially those at that literally irresponsible stage of 'adolescence', into such critical roles as citizen, husband or wife and father or mother" (Davies, 1987, p.332) and policy relating to young people still largely prescribes to the assumption that "any variation [to the

norm, is] risky or dangerous" (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003, p.196). For authors such as Cockburn (2001), the achievement of a successful transition to adulthood is a state of mind more than a definitive achievement of set milestones, far more to do with a personal feeling of autonomy than any achievement of economic or social independence. This way of conceptualising a young person as an ongoing project rather than a defined life stage, which emerged in the 1990s, is explored through Du Bois-Reymond's theory of choice biographies, and through transition making as a production of identity and a reproduction of inequality.

3.2.1   Choice biographies and life projects

The journeys that young people make away from childhood have changed structurally since the 1970s and are no longer simple and linear (Martin et al, 2008; Yates and Payne, 2006; MacDonald et al, 2005; Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Thomson et al, 2002; Raffo and Reeves, 2000; Du Bois-Reymond, 1998). As the education system and youth labour markets have become more diverse and deregulated, young people have become more dependent on their families for longer (Raffo and Reeves, 2000) and this can be attributed to "changing gender relations, expansion of the education system, a decoupling of educational qualifications and professions, and the increased risk of youth unemployment" (Martin et al, 2008, p.182). "[T]he movement to adulthood now tends to be marked by unpredictability, backward steps and false starts, and ... the youth phase has become more fragmented and extended" (MacDonald et al, 2005, p.874). The problems associated with difficult transition making are more concentrated amongst young people from deprived backgrounds or living in deprived areas (Raffo and Reeves, 2000).

As they reach the end of Year 11 (aged 15 or 16) young people are forced to make a decision: whether to stay in academic education, pursue more vocational training at a post-16 education provider or training centre, take up a training or apprenticeship position in the workplace, enter a low-skilled job that does not require training, or to do something else like travel, start a family or care for a relative. All these options take the form of life choices in that what they decide will shape the life they lead for the immediate (and probably the longer) term.

Du Bois-Reymond's (1998) theory of choice biographies (a term coined by Beck in 1992) proposes a young person's journey into adulthood as a 'project' which fits

into one of two categories: either a 'normal-biography' or a 'choice-biography'. In order to make sense of their transitions, she explains that young people opt for one of several 'life concepts' as a guide for understanding and planning their journey through changing external conditions (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998). Her 'normal' biography refers to young people who move through "a relatively traditional sequencing of status passages" from education and childhood towards employment and adulthood (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998, p.68). Conversely, her 'choice' biographies refer to non-traditional paths that break away from what is expected of young people and that include elements of 'reversibility and complexity' (1998, p.68) Du Bois-Reymond proposes the following five ways of conceptualising these choice biographies of 'life projects': Gaining time, Self-development, Professional future, Growing up, and Partnership and family (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998). She explains that for some young people, choices are made simply because *a* choice *has* to be made and that young people make them in the knowledge that they can be changed later on (1998, p.69). From this perspective, entering a job does not form a concrete or active decision, but rather a way of passing time productively until a young person decides what they would like to do in the longer-term. For others, starting a job is a way of looking for opportunities that offer self development rather than on career building specifically. Enjoyment of the job and of the company and opportunities it offers are more important than money or career progression (1998, p.70). Yet others, who have a profession or longer-term career in mind, use work as a first rung on the ladder while they wait for their break. This can mean taking any job available even if it is not something they want to do, because it will provide them with a platform for applying for something else (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998). Unlike in previous generations however, jobs are not seen as permanent or 'for life' and taking on a job is less of a commitment to entering the adult world (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998).

3.2.2 Production of personal identity and societal inequalities

Foskett et al (2003) argue that young people use career progression as a way of building, and legitimising, their personal identities. Through the choices they

make, young people start to "define a set of values and ... to find [their] own place in the world" (Cuzzocrea and Manich, 2016, p.552). "Individuals are motivated to find interactional environments which provide them with positive sentiments and symbols of their social being" (Shilling, 1999, p.550). However, "[i]ndividualization is still bounded by class, gender, and ethnicity [and t]he disadvantage identified with location in the social structure" (Bynner and Parsons, 2002, p.290). The eminent work of Willis (1977) and later theoretical work by Nayak (2006) and Lehmann (2007) propose that the movement into employment produces (and re-produces) personal identities and societal inequalities. "Young people bring together their pre-conceptions of careers, pathways, courses and institutions with the pursuit of a choice that will secure social approval in terms of maintaining self-esteem and peer group acceptance" (Foskett et al, 2003, p.6). "Although all trajectories are complex, those that most nearly match the straightforward and 'ladder-like' policy concept are likely to be those of young people with greater access to valorised cultural capitals" (Atkins, 2017, p.648).

3.2.3   Becoming an adult through JWT

The transition from youth to adulthood is very often conceptualised as the transition from school to work. Also of consideration however are the achievement of particular benchmarks including "financial independence, marriage, full-time employment and living outside the parents' home" to signal the completed transition to adult status" (Martin et al, 2008, p.180)

Du Bois-Reymond argues that young people are guided by two "pillars of adulthood: economic independence and starting a family" (1998, p.74). For those wishing to grow up quickly, it is these two things that influence their choices the most. "Well up to the middle of this century large sections of female and male adolescents used to begin work with either no prior training or after just a brief period of training. Their early financial independence was the basis for starting a family after this short adolescent phase" (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998, p.66). Entrants into JWT display "a hyper-conventional attitude to work in which the getting of work, even 'poor work', [is] the driving force" (MacDonald et al, 2005, p.882). Gender is "inextricably linked to the movement from school to work" especially for men (Nayak, 2006, p.813). In Britain, "the importance of work, of a job, and a wage are well-known features of

working-class masculinity" (Arnot, 1985, cited in Stahl and Baars, 2016, p.314) and how transitions are viewed and accepted by society are also closely linked to these social groupings (Nayak, 2006; Willis, 1977). For example, Cockburn found that young people from more deprived backgrounds and their families were likely to see entry into paid employment as a positive step, while this was seen as "problematic by practitioners and policy-makers" (2001, p.5).

Cuzzocrea and Manich point out that unlike in policy, from a young person's perspective "becoming an adult does not include taking an active part in the world; it instead implied discovering a place for oneself in that given world" (2016, p.562). "[Y]o-yo movements in and out of adult roles, emphasise the fuzziness of transitions, and ... young adults frequently feel an ambiguity about whether they have entered adulthood or not" (Martin et al, 2008, p.182)

Long term relationships and starting a family are often seen by young people as a central way of entering adulthood, even if they do not want that for themselves right away (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998). For young women this sometimes means considering their career plans to include time off for motherhood, and for young men there is a sense of needing to earn enough to support a family. It is also the case that a focus on career building would necessitate putting marriage and long-term relationships on hold until later in life, a largely but not exclusively middle-class perspective (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998) For young people considering JWT, work could be seen as: a 'stop-gap' between school and marriage; a way of earning money as quickly as possible in order to live independently with a partner; or a better use of their time than education, knowing that any career would be cut short by having children.

Rejecting the rhetoric of increased length and complexity in transition making, Vickerstaff (2003) argues that the main difference between today's and past generations is the lack of job stability, security and prospects in the modern labour market. Apprenticeships more than fifty years ago were rarely completed until the age of 21, not dissimilar to the age at which a young person now leaves university, but entry into long term career work now occurs later in life, if at all (Vickerstaff, 2003).

3.3 JWT within a model of structure and agency

Vickerstaff's challenge of the "taken for-granted assumptions ... that transitions were unproblematic for most young people in the past" arguing instead, that the social pressure to conform was greater and the labour market was more able to cope with changes in career paths (2003, p.270). Nonetheless, it is generally accepted that transitions into work are now less linear and more reversible than they have been in the past, and that young people "[make] educational decisions within parameters defined by external forces which are both social and spatial" (Evans, 2016, p.10).

Throughout life people have to continually make choices and decisions about all aspects of their lives, some more important or irreversible than others. This section explores how these decisions are made, how genuine they are (i.e. whether there is more than one viable option) and how personal characteristics and environments influence the way in which individuals form their priorities. Given the strong link between personal circumstance and personal outcome, Bynner and Parsons argue that the role of personal agency is "of paramount importance in the 'negotiation' of the transition that has to be undertaken" (Bynner and Parsons, 2002, p.290). It is perhaps for this reason that models and theories of structure and agency remain central in the study of young people's post-16 transition making (Shilling, 1999, p.543).

Resilience and building resilience is now central to social policy. Resilience is the term given to explain how and why some people achieve better outcomes than other people with similar characteristics and experiences. This inevitably leads to "[t]he overriding perspective ... that the future is in one's own hands and, while setbacks will be encountered, it is down to the individual to find ways to cope and to overcome them" (Evans, 2007, p.91). Linked to the concept of resilience, 'agency' refers to the "extent to which people can resist, by exercising their own 'free will', the influences of social structures and cultural institutions" (Ct, 2014, cited in Cuzzocrea and Manich, 2016, p.555). However, "the capabilities of people to act creatively in relation to the status quo will be constrained by the need to sustain successful interactional relationships" (Shilling, 1999, p.548) and agency cannot therefore be viewed without an understanding of the social environments in which they take place. "A 'can do' approach to life may be a necessary condition for

progressive personal change, yet it is unlikely to be sufficient in the face of structural constraints" (Thomson et al, 2002, p.351). Gidden's (1984) model of structure and agency addresses the conflict between personal control and social restriction, and the balance in decision making between the ability of an individual to freely choose an option, and being forced to take the only option open to them.

3.3.1 Masters and victims of choice

> "[O]ne consequence of an environment that fosters a belief that 'opportunities are open to all' is that people blame themselves for their failures in education and the labour market" (Evans, 2007, p.90).

Foskett and Helmsley-Brown wrote in 2002 that young people have become both "masters and victims of choice" (2002, p.2). By this they mean that the policy emphasis on giving individuals choice over their post-school options (the rationale for the marketisation of the post-16 environment) means that 16 and 17 year-olds are far more subject to personal blame for unsuccessful outcomes than previous generations, despite having similar levels of agency and being just as restricted by their personal and social circumstances (Foskett and Helmsley-Brown, 2002; Du Bois-Reymond, 1998). The individualisation of young people and the perception that they are in full control of their lives can also lead to a problematic culture of individual blame for (and consequent ineffective solutions to) unsuccessful transition-making (Beck, 1992; Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Roberts, 2012).

Despite the problems with an individualistic blame culture, it is equally easy to view young people as a set of characteristics and make predictions on their projected future based only on their sex, ethnicity, class, locality etc. Although these factors can influence decision making (as numerous studies have shown, e.g. MacDonald et al, 2005; Maguire, 2010; Evans, 2016; Atherton et al, 2009; Bynner and Parsons, 2002), young people still "feel that they have a considerable degree of choices about their futures" (Cockburn, 2001, p.4). Personal agency is what "enables individuals to "navigate" their way into and through the modern labor [sic] market" (Bynner and Parsons, 2002, p.291), demonstrated by factors like "active job seeking and 'trial and error' in the search for work" (Evans, 2007, p.89). Because human thought processes are not always economically rational (Bruner, 1987) personal choice does influence

the outcomes that one individual experiences over another when both are faced with the same options and a similar level of agency. Although long term financial and career-progression gains may be taken into consideration in such decision-making, they may not be the only things, and the value placed on each will differ from person to person (Evans, 2016). It is therefore wrong to attempt to make sense of the manifestation of agency through a purely rational lens without considering "the context of young people's social, cultural and personal circumstances" (Evans, 2016, p.3).

Evans (2007) found that the young people in her study generally subscribed to the policy rhetoric of career-progression as a meritocracy, supporting the belief that that failure was a result of personal fault. Evans goes on to explain however that there is a distinction between the kinds of thing young people can control and that "[s]ome aspects of environment and personal circumstances are extremely difficult to change. Others can be overcome by the exercise of initiative and learning" (Evans, 2007, p.92). While agreeing with this in principle, Raffo and Reeves add that young people's "resistance, innovation, negotiation and accommodation to a range of socializing forces" (2000, p.149) impact on how they experience the level of agency they have over the decision they make. For example, the need to move or travel to find suitable work or employment both limits agency (by putting up barriers) but also presents a chance for young people to realise their agency but rising to the challenge (Cuzzocrea and Manich, 2016).

The way in which young people perceive their level of agency is also important, regardless of how real this is. Evans (2007) found that young people who had chosen educational pathways rather than being forced into them by a lack of alternative options, had better experiences of those pathways and were less "vulnerable to drop out and non-completion" and followed less "tenuous, fragmented and convoluted" post-16 routes (Evans, 2016, p.11). Overall, making active choices is healthier than being pushed into the only option available, in terms of both short and long term happiness, stability and success (Evans, 2016).

Framing of opportunities and the 'poverty of aspiration' myth

The simple fact that young people from certain economic and social backgrounds are more likely than others to follow certain pathways or achieve particular outcomes lends itself to the argument for the existence of structural factors that restrict or enhance and individual's personal decision making. Social opinion may in some instances judge that young people have the power to overcome structural factors with the right amount of innovation or personal resilence, but "the perception that young people can all effectively manage their transitions assumes that all have similar access to high levels of cultural capital, and maximum potential for agency" (Atkins, 2017, p.647). This assumption is routinely proven wrong in empirical research with young people (Evans, 2007; Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Atkins, 2017; Shilling, 1999). In terms of overcoming setbacks personal choices can be important, but Evans found that they rarely led to "major reallocations of social position" (2007, p.88).

When deciding to take risks, or facing precarious situations, the extent to which young person is 'cushioned' by the resources of their families to "offer stability in uncertain times" becomes key (Nayak, 2016, p.826; Neale and Flowerdew, 2003). Young people without the necessary financial or emotional support to fall back on are less able to take risks in their decision making. As well as longer-term influences on a young person's values and perspectives, the day to day operation of family life can be heavily influential on a young person's choices at 16. Most sixteen year-olds live in their childhood family home, and will remain there until they are eighteen (and often for considerably longer). As well as the financial benefits for doing so, young people also have to go through a transition into independence which family life can help to facilitate at a more relaxed pace than moving out right away. However, this can come with other challenges. Contributing towards household income, providing care for younger siblings, or providing labour for a family business can all limit the choices young people have in deciding what to do after Year 11. For some young people, the full-time or unpaid nature of education or training can prevent it from being an option. Equally, "[i]nstitutions, influenced by policy at macro level, but also local pressures and the ethos arising from their history and management, have a significant impact on determining what is possible for young people in terms of the educational opportunities they can access" (Atkins, 2017, p.650). Structural factors are not purely access to physical resources. Also important is the accumulation

of cultural capital. Atkin's (2016) research found that a young person's access to role models and useful contacts made a big difference to whether they were able to realise their ambitions. "An individualized system of social capital is a dynamic, social, spatially, culturally, temporally and economically embedded group, network, or constellation of social relations, which has the young person at the core of the constellation" (Raffo and Reeves, 2000, p.148).

The "precise relationship between individual agency and social structures remains a matter for debate" (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003, p.191) and Gidden's model has since been built upon in a number of ways, in particular by Cohen's "structuration theory" (1989) and Clark and Wallace's (date) theory of "structured individualism". This latter theory proposes that young people make their own decisions but do so within formal structures over which they have no control (Roberts, 2004; Cockburn, 2001).

The 'structured individualism' approach is based on the premise that young people's transitions take place within social contexts. This means that even if individuals are free to make decisions about their lives and careers, factors outside of their control limit the scope of those decisions (Rudd and Evans, 1998; Cockburn, 2001; France, 2007). Such an approach avoids focusing solely on either the binary structure *or* agency (Atkins, 2017) and supports "Gambetta's (1987) assertion that choices are made between a limited set of alternatives, the boundaries of which have been defined by external forces" (Evans, 2016, p.5). External forces could include personal experiences and interests, family relationships, institutions like schools, and local labour markets and policies (Vickerstaff, 2003, p.272) and it is at the intersections of these factors in which decisions are made and played out (Raffo and Reeves, 2000).

Stahl and Baars (2016) argue that the rhetoric around groups of young people with a 'poverty of aspiration' is built around a middle-class political view of aspiration, and that it actually describes a disconnect between young people's own aspirations, and the aspirations that government has for them. Young people tend to choose jobs that they 'know' are available, will be stable, and allow them to bring in a steady income. With this in mind however, young people "can and do have aspirations that transcend their objective reality recognizing, however, that these aspirations are realistically rooted within the young person's practical situated

knowledge base and that of their social network" (Raffo and Reeves, 2000, p.150). Aspirations are formed from very personal local understandings and far wider conceptual ideas of what can be achieved (Stahl and Baars, 2016). The aspirations of the young people in Stahl and Baars' study to enter work as a soon as possible to escape "the effects of area-level deprivation on individual and household life" were deemed low in policy terms, but were aspirational on a local level (2016, p.321). As the gap between rich and poor widens, the task of bridging the gap with education, employment, or behaviour changes becomes far more onerous, and there is a knock-on effect on aspiration.

3.3.2   Bounded agency

> "[E]ducational transitions are informed both by processes which 'push'
> young people towards particular pathways, as well as their preferences
> and intentions which lead them to 'jump' towards certain destinations;
> both causality and intentionality are at play" (Evans, 2016, p.2).

Bounded agency, proposed by Evans (2007), branches off Gidden's theory of structure and agency but instead proposes that the 'structures' preventing agency are in the beliefs and perspectives of individuals, bounded by what they believe is possible and often restricted by their role models and surroundings. "By examining bounded agency, the focus moves from structured individualization onto individuals as actors, without losing the perspective of structuration" (Evans, 2007, p.93). Future choices are therefore based on a combination of past experiences and current knowledge (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003). This idea sits comfortably within Hodkinson and Sparkes' (2008) theories of Careership and Horizons; that a person's outlook is based on who they are, what they have done, and who they know, in itself a development of Bourdieu's disposition theory (Atkins, 2017) and ideas developed by Foskett et al (2003) and Atherton et al (2009) that attitudes and decisions are influenced by a person's environment. For example, Stahl and Baars (2016) found that young people who described the place they lived in terms of deprivation, poor employment, or benefit dependency, were more likely to be aiming to enter jobs that could give them material security. Similarly, Atkins (2017) found that individual knowledge and access to people who had followed certain paths, shaped how

young people viewed the paths that were open to them. This is a significant move away from policy which aims simply to promote opportunities and provide material access but misunderstand "the realities of the students' own worlds, in which their 'horizons for action' are both constrained and enabled by external opportunities and personal subjective perceptions" (Atkins, 2017, p.650).

Atkins suggests that social or class positioning is influential in the way that "young people perceive and construct their careers" and the way in which they go about carrying out such constructions" (2017, p.641). The way in which young people interpret and relate to the opportunities on offer to them is influenced by how they view their past experiences and the expectations of them by the communities that matter to them (Evans, 2016). Such interpretations are developed through the context within which they have been raised and the values and norms instilled in them earlier in life. A young person's way of viewing the world is formed by their characteristics, experiences and the influence of the people and environment around them, and impacts the likelihood of their making certain decisions. Thus a parent encouraging their daughter to become a doctor is more likely to have success if they have been raised in a household where professional occupations are seen as the norm. Entering employment can often require a young person to learn a new way of perceiving the world, and they will have limited success if the values of their employer are at odds with their school and/or family. Atkins explained the case of a young person who, despite considering an apprenticeship route, eventually returned to a HE trajectory more in line with his social acceptability: the "well understood and familially acceptable [route]" (Ball, Maguire, and Macrae, 2000, cited in Atkins, 2017, p.640).

The concepts of structured individualism (France, 2007; Giddens, 1981) and bounded agency (Evans, 2007) suggest that while young people theoretically have freedom over their decision making, in reality those decisions have to be made within a context of physical barriers (money, location, qualifications) and individual mind-set. The widely accepted correlation between effective IAG and successful outcomes (Higham and Yeomans, 2011) does suggest that individual choice is important, and outcomes are not pre-determined by position or characteristics. Raffo and Reeves describe how young people have to make multiple and pro-active choices about their lives but that these choices were "not completely open and free." Choices are made

through "individual practical knowledge ... and understanding of circumstances that are situated and created within individualized systems of social capital" (Raffo and Reeves, 2000, p.150).

Social Capital

A young person's way of viewing the world (formed by their characteristics, experiences and the influence of the people and environment around them) impacts the likelihood of them making certain decisions (Ball et al, 1999; Coles, 1995; Cockburn, 2001). The environment in which a young person spends their time can therefore be key in shaping their attitudes and decisions regarding education and employment (Foskett et al, 2008; Atherton et al, 2009). Social capital is "a resource that is realised through social relationships" (Sampson et al, 2002, p.457). Resources in this context are the complex web of economic, social, and academic factors that a young person is able to draw upon in their process of decision making (Raffo and Reeves, 2000). "[S]uch systems of social relations both support and constrain individual actions and outcomes" (Raffo and Reeves, 2000, p.147).

The other element of social capital, is that of professional opportunities. In much the same way that networking events are set up by companies to enable new business connections to be made, the people that individuals live and spend time with can provide opportunities for employment (Ellen and Turner, 1997). In close knit communities where people know one another, and collective efficacy is high, finding employment is more likely regardless of more normal predictive factors like qualifications and local labour markets (Ellen and Turner, 1997; Granovetter, 1974).

The manifestation of social capital can be seen in the disconnect between aspiration and employment outcomes, as in an example given by MacDonald et al (2005) that despite their normal understanding of progressing into employment, young people from deprived communities rarely secured good quality employment as some of their peers did. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to have the greatest difficulty in making good transitions into long term good quality employment (Anders and Dorsett, 2015).

3.4 JWT through the lens of critical moments and turning points

Critical moments, as defined by Thomas et al (2002), are moments when a person's identity, circumstances, and opportunities all come together in such a way that makes one path more favourable or easier than all others. These moments change the direction of a person's life trajectory (for better or worse), either by presenting a physical barrier or opportunity, or through a change in perspective. Such moments can be described as either 'fateful' or 'fatalistic' (Thomas et al, 2002). It's particularly relevant to acknowledge critical moments in the field of career building, because it discards the notion of well-planned career paths that can be chosen and followed, and instead suggests that the movement from education into work is an ongoing evolving process, constantly influenced by events and experiences. Thomas et al's theory stemmed in part from the work of Strauss (1962), Mandelbaum's (1973) theory of turning points, Denzin's (1989) 'epiphanies', and Gidden's (1991) fateful moments theory. Such theories seek to understand pathways through a series of key events or experiences rather than as full journeys.

The key premise of critical moments theory is that rather than plotting the life course in a linear fashion in terms of fixed stages, it is more sensible to see it not as "a progress through a predetermined structure but the negotiation of a passage through an unpredictably changing environment" (Harris 1987, cited in Neale and Flowerdew, 2003, p.193). Instead of choosing a career path and working their way along it, young people's ideas about the future are a constant work in progress which can be influenced by anything from a chance conversation to a life-changing event (for example bereavement, childbirth, or moving house).

Social responses and sequences

The way in critical moments are characterised is a social construct, based on a "combination of structural conditions, individual response, timing and chance" (Thomson et al, 2002, p.336) and the subsequent "interaction of choice, chance and opportunity" (Thomson et al, 2002, p.335). This means that social and economic circumstances at home and elsewhere have an impact on the way in which disorientation is experienced. For example, a response to "family breakdown or ill health

... will be shaped by the social and cultural resources that they have to hand" (Thomson et al, 2002, p.338). Moments do not relate directly and solely to career decisions. For example, domestic abuse leading to leaving the family home might be a critical moment, a chance encounter with a school admissions worker while accessing a drop-in centre for financial help might be another, and moving cities and thus having to give up an offer of learning place might be a third. Life stories inevitably include such sequences of moments but "it is the singularity of the 'moment' that makes it so crucial a feature of young people's narratives and constructions of self" (Thomson et al, 2002, p.351-2).

As explored in Section 3.2 which considered entry into adulthood, certain benchmarks are often used as stages of a lifecourse such as leaving the family home or entering full time employment. However, such models underestimate personal moments and changes (like a house move, family break up, or illness) which can be far more significant to how a life course is shaped and experienced (Thomson et al, 2002). Such moments are far more indicative of social experience and the context in which decisions are made, than the meeting of the so called life stages (finishing school, starting work etc.)

The consideration of critical moments allows greater understanding of the "subtle interplay of individual agency, circumstance and social structure" (Thomson et al, 2002, p.336). Decisions cannot be made in isolation and their knock-on effect on other parts of life are not always predictable or planned. "In choosing particular courses of action, structural constraints such as economic needs interact with value orientations, moral obligations, self determined goals, and the individual's own perception of the situation and choices ahead" (Thomson et al, 2002, p.336). While moments might be out of a young person's control (for example a death in the family), an individual's response to such a moment is what makes them critical in the shaping of their life trajectory going forward (Thomson et al, 2002). Responses to moments demonstrate the "capacity of the individual to access and to take advantage of resources" (Thomson et al, 2002, p.343). Thomson et al give the example of young person being offered education and employment support at a pupil referral unit (PRU) but that "his commitment to cultivating a criminal identity" reduced his receptiveness to this support (Thomson et al, 2002, p.348). Similarly, expulsion from school might be considered a significant moment but it only becomes critical

if it changes the actions or perspectives of a young person. Such an event might only "serve to confirm and legitimize" the pathway already being pursued (Thomson et al, 2002, p.348). "Such objective circumstances can only be made sense of in relation to individual biographies and the extent to which different young people have access to the requisite resources to enable them to respond constructively to events and changing circumstances" (Thomson et al, 2002, p.350). "Young people may respond to and seek solutions to these experiences at an individual level, but their life chances remain highly structured and highly predictable" (Thomson et al, 2002, p.338)

3.5   Chapter Summary

This chapter has covered a wide range of theoretical literature related to decision making and entry into JWT and in doing so has brought together a framework through which young people's transitions can be understood. As the introduction to the chapter explained, the purpose of the theoretical frames presented is to provide context for three underpinning themes: how young people establish their understandings of 'normal' post-16 progression; how and why they choose to break away from these norms; and the way in which they conceptualise and understand success in their current and future employment.

Establishing 'normal' in post-16 progression

At the start of the chapter consideration was given to the impact of social class and places on the way in which young people form their world views and opinions about careers. A well-developed link has been established between the two, and a range of local social factors therefore influence the way in which national trends and norms are experienced by young people. For example the increase in university attendance of young people from a range of backgrounds has led to widespread acceptance that higher qualifications lead to more secure employment, but local labour markets still influence the level of faith a young person has in this being the case for them personally.

The differences in how place is experienced by next door neighbours suggests that place is not the only influential factor. The interaction of place and social class

also informs how young people develop their understanding of what 'normal' post-16 progression looks like. Working class and more disadvantaged groups are likely to have stronger ties to particular geographical areas. A combination of the kind of jobs available locally, traditional ideas of masculinity and working class employment and national pushes to promote the acquisition of more qualifications, creates a conflicting picture of 'normal' in some spheres.

The theoretical frames presented explain how young people are free to make their own decisions but do so within structures over which they have little or no control. Life courses are not plotted linearly but are instead ever-changing and responsive to unpredictable events and environments encountered along the way. The kind of home-life and lifestyle a young person has growing up has an influenced on how they interpret and respond to these events because the way in which they interpret the value of certain options is shaped by the values and norms of the people and places closest to them. The 'path of least resistance' usually involves following the route most normal for a young person's socio-economic group. This is based on an assumption that popular choices are more likely to be safe and well-tested. Access to alternative role models and networks external to their immediate surroundings made a big difference to whether (and why) young people chose to break from those norms, as summarised below.

Breaking away from 'normal'

Policy (and society more generally) largely prescribes to the assumption that deviation from the norm is risky or dangerous. This said, the problems associated with difficult transition making are more concentrated amongst young people from deprived backgrounds. In policy terms, 'high aspiration' is often associated with skilled professional employment and the alternative employment routes taken by working class or other young people are often viewed as an act of rebellion rather than as rational choices. The concepts of normal and choice biographies discussed in the chapter suggest young people have different ways of prioritising with respect to career building.

The way in which young people negotiate their transitions is influenced by personal circumstances, and the theoretical (and political) stance that a positive attitude and strong personal resilience will enable an individual to achieve any of their

aspirations is problematic. The assumption leads to policy built on choice and the premise that 16 and 17 year-olds are therefore wholly responsible for their transitions, despite the structural factors and personal challenges they may face and the expectations of them from parties with conflicting priorities. Such policy, the rhetoric of career-progression as a meritocracy, can lead to a culture of unfounded blame, whereas in reality there is an ongoing balance in evaluating decision-making between freedom of choice and being forced to choose from a (sometimes very) limited range of options. A lack of aspiration is often cited as at fault for poor outcomes, but there is little evidence that young people from deprived backgrounds and communities have fewer aspirations, but that instead it is social capital (which they often lack) which enables aspirations to be realised. Also important in understanding and evaluating 'norm breaking' is the way in which young people perceive their own level of agency. The chapter explained how active, rather than passive, choices generally led to better outcomes and reduced the likelihood of young people failing to follow them through.

Although social approval is important to young people, this is not always gained through the pursuit of traditional (middle class) routes into employment through further and higher education. Paid employment can be seen as positive, and not at all problematic, within families and communities with experience of deprivation. 'Breaking the norm' can thus be viewed positively or negatively depending on the position of the judge.

Conceptualising career success

A final underpinning theme of the theoretical frames presented in Chapter Three is that of how young people form their perceptions of success. There has already been discussion of what 'normal' looks like and what leads young people to develop their understanding of this, but also important is consideration of the longer-term goals for which they are striving. What transpired was that young people base their post-16 plans on more than simply the attainment of the most qualified, high-level job they are capable of. The 'horizons of action' theory suggests young people imagine their futures within the boundaries of what they see as possible. Desired areas of employment are therefore based partially on what's most readily available and accessible as well as on careers advice received and the presence of role models.

Young people use employment as a means of creating or confirming their personal identity, as well as for achieving benchmarks of adulthood like financial and residential independence. These things transcend social class but the *nature* of these benchmarks *can* be dictated by class or economic background. The speed at which such benchmarks are attained is also important, with one of the drivers for entry into JWT being a desire to secure paid employment and gain financial independence as soon as possible. The relationship between social class and career-planning behaviour is not straightforward and a desire for the success enjoyed by the middle classes cannot be translated as a desire for the attainment of a middle class lifestyle.

Success can take the form of bettering personal circumstances, achieving a sense of security, and meeting (or surpassing) the standards set by the examples of family members or role models. The environment in which a young person spends their time can therefore be key in shaping their understanding of success and consequently their attitudes and decisions regarding education and employment.

Chapter 4

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on how the research project was conducted and why such an approach was taken. The chapter is split into three parts. Section 4.1, methodological approach, describes the three approaches taken in the design and implementation of the research, namely: longitudinal, mixed methods, and collaborative. Section 4.2, data and methods, describes the different aspects of the research and covers: what data was used; how the final database was constructed; qualitative and quantitative sampling strategies; semi-structured interviewing; and sequence and logistic regression analysis. The final part of the chapter highlights two particular methodological considerations: working with live data, and researcher positionality. The chapter concludes by offering some lessons learned for conducting similar research in the future.

The initial project brief outlined by Sheffield City Council was to aid their understanding of progression and retention in learning of the 16 and 17 year-olds within their jurisdiction, particularly in reference to drop-out at 17. The strategy taken in this project has been to undertake an in-depth study of young people who enter Jobs Without Training (JWT) at 16 or 17, in order to illuminate wider patterns of transition making and the relationship that young people see between education and work.

4.1 Methodological approach

4.1.1 Longitudinal approach

A longitudinal approach underpins all aspects of this research. This means that its focus is on understanding the position of events within time, and social actors' reactions to those events. Its purpose is to conjure up social life (Henderson et al, 2012) through "captur[ing] a 'movie' rather than simply a 'snapshot' " of a life or phenomenon (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003, p.190).

While different in how they are implemented, qualitative and quantitative traditions of longitudinal research are complementary (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003), both taking individual social actors as their unit of analysis (Thomas and McLeod, 2015). Quantitative longitudinal approaches have a longer history in the social sciences, often based on survey or adminstrative data and aiming to demonstrate social trends (Thomas and McLeod, 2015; Henderson et al, 2012; Neale and Flowerdew, 2003). Qualitative studies, in contrast, are dominated by repeat-interview studies either by design or by opportunity (tracking down a previous sample to reinterview), although retrospective interviewing at a single point of time is also not uncommon (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003; Thomas and McLeod, 2015). The aim of this research was to catch young people about half way through their post-16 transition in order to look both backwards and forwards along their transition pathways. It was also possible to reinterview around a third of the sample, which helped to capture how perspectives change over time.

Why longitudinal?

Longitudinal research considers the way in which people react to the 'flux and flow' of life and the occurrences of key moments and events (Henderson et al, 2012). The rationale for a longitudinal approach to study transitions is that "what individuals have done determines what they do and become next, and this, in turn, determines what they will subsequently do and become" (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003, p.191). People's interpretations and understandings of an event depend on its place within the wider sequence of events they have experienced (Abbott, 1995). Simply put, the order of events is just as important as the events themselves. A young person's feelings towards their second job will inevitably be shaped by their

experience of their first, in the same way that employment after a period of unemployment may be seen differently to employment after time spent in education.

Social behaviour is shaped around what has been learned or challenged through previous social experiences (Abbot, 1995). Because of this, successful social research needs to capture these time-limited perspectives in order to understand "the mechanisms and strategies used by individuals to generate and manage change in their personal lives" (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003, p.190). The way in which young people make decisions and prioritise is also under examination in this research and those processes can also be conceptualised as sequences. For example the order in which young people choose their options influences the overall result. Prioritising staying at sixth form limits a student's course choices to those offered by the school, while choosing to pursue a specific qualification reduces the range of options for learning providers.

Benefits and pitfalls for research with the JWT group

A job without training (JWT) is a destination, and destinations only tell a very small part of the story. Longitudinal methods enable insight into how such destinations are reached (Thomas et al, 2002), whether they are a positive or negative part of a young person's wider trajectory, and whether they are likely to be the end point. One key difference between longitudinal and other methods is its capacity to make the "distinction between net and gross change" (Gershuny, 2002, p.3). It is concerned with looking not only at the difference between start and end points, but also about the size and shape of the movements between those points. For the JWT group, this means an ability to consider the churn in and out of employment (Wolf, 2011) rather than merely entry and exit on a case by case basis (Gershuny, 2002). The optimal matching process described later enabled this to happen within the quantitative analysis for instance, through chains of destinations being analysed as sequences rather than as their component parts (Gershuny, 2002).

The approach of the qualitative interviews in this research was to ask young people to reflect on their past actions and to share some hopes and plans for the future. This allowed for some understanding about how young people viewed their current position within their wider life trajectory and how they saw the social expectations attached to these positions (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003). In the ten instances

where young people could be interviewed for a second time it was, as Henderson et al (2012) found, that the second interview shed new light on the information collected previously. The focus was not simply on the events and transitions that took place but also on "the agency of individuals in crafting these processes" (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003, p.192).

Capturing data in real-time enables personal feelings and perceptions of events to be understood without the privilege of hindsight (Thomas and McLeod, 2015; Thomas et al, 2002). This shows the impact of policies and practices on current lives rather than on future life courses and can give better insight into why some policies succeed or fail (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003; Thomas and McLeod, 2015; Anders and Dorsett, 2015).

The role of undertaking, analysing, and writing up longitudinal research is to capture events and their positions in a meaningful way (Bruner, 1987). The problem with asking people to tell the story of their life is in the "narrator's irresistible error in accounting for his *[sic]* acts in terms of intentions when, in fact, they might have been quite otherwise determined" (Bruner, 1987, p.13). By telling and re-telling the story of how an event or decision came about the storyteller learns to make sense of it, drawing on the influence of hindsight and framing it within their current understanding of the world. This is not necessarily a negative thing. The things a storyteller chooses to omit can be just as interesting as those they choose to include and their interpretation of events provides a window into their understanding of what happened (Bruner, 1987). However, it can also be the case that during interviews, young people do not mention a specific event or decision because the impact that it will have on them has not yet manifested (or may never do so), and it has been consequently forgotten or deemed irrelevant. In story-telling, "things are mentioned [only] because they account for things" (Bruner, 1987, p.29). The way people view and respond to external events changes over time, and the importance of some events only comes to light much later on, while others that seemed important initially had no lasting impact. Bruner's assertion that the timing at which a story is captured can therefore sometimes be as significant as the story that is being told, is the main rationale for the use of longitudinal data collection in this thesis.

4.1.2 A mixed methods, sociological forensic, approach

This research employs a sociological forensic approach, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and drawing on the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Three to undertake a study of young people in Jobs Without Training. The purpose of a sociological forensic approach is to collect and analyse data about a specific phenomenon from a whole range of sources in order to illuminate a much wider picture or position (Inglis, 2010). First proposed by Durkheim in his study of religion, the approach rejects the traditional wisdom "that understanding the structure will enable understanding of the part", and instead advocates that "studying the part will enable understanding of the structure" (Inglis, 2010, p.512). By examining the JWT cohort through a variety of methodological techniques and analysing everyday events within the theoretical frames presented in Chapter Three, new insights can be made into how young people make post-16 transitions.

Mixing methods

In many respects, young people who enter Jobs Without Training at 16 or 17 in Sheffield are not unique. They have, for example, been enrolled in Sheffield schools and lived in Sheffield neighbourhoods. They are subjected to the same youth policies as their peers, required to attend school until they are 16, given access to the same support and leisure services, and are entered (at least in most cases) for the same GCSE exams. What makes them unique is the move they make between destinations, by either choice or necessity, and it is this separation from the ordinary to the extraordinary which the thesis seeks to examine. Understanding this separation requires understanding the bigger picture (the ordinary) and the specific picture (the extraordinary) and herein lies the rationale for a mixed methods approach. The quantitative data helps describe the ordinary and identify the extraordinary, and the qualitative data enables an exploration about why the separation occurs.

The council's quantitative data is longitudinal, allowing for snapshot and trend data analysis to be done, and making it possible to statistically model the likelihood of entry into one destination over another and the variables that influence that likelihood. Such modelling can describe what sets young workers apart from the wider cohort of the aggregate. It cannot explain why these differences occur or

whether they are important, but it can demonstrate which factors have a significant impact, and the size of that impact. That explanation of difference and judgement of importance comes from the qualitative strand of the research (the interviews with young people and the anecdotal evidence of professionals). It provides detail-rich data that enables in-depth analysis of the way in which social processes are experienced by individuals and groups.

Designing the project

The research project is designed to look for clues at a scenario level which can then be analysed and reinterpreted in the context of a wider social phenomenon (Inglis, 2010). Detailed research into the JWT cohort is used to understand post-16 progression and drop out through a combination of theory and mixed empirical data collection and analysis working together to create a comprehensive picture. Instead of taking a broad view of post-16 progression as a life stage the research focuses very specifically on a select group of young people making one such progression in order to shed light on the wider social process. This enables analysis of the way in which individuals live and understand their lives, within the context of social controls that provide "opportunities and constraints on individual behaviour and interactions" (Mnch and Smelser, 1987, cited in Inglis, 2010, p.513). The study is based on interviews conducted with 28 young people, focused discussions with the professionals who work with them, and quantitatively modelling the movement in and out of Jobs Without Training by whole school-leaving cohorts.

The sociological forensic approach "tries to avoid, at one extreme, abstract general theorization ... and, at the other, concentration on empirical statements" (Inglis, 2010, p.509). The balance has been attained in this research through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, through value being placed jointly on local knowledge and practice and on academic theory and research. A central conflict in qualitative longitudinal research is whether examining the stories and experiences of individuals in such depth and detail can be generalised any wider than the smaller number of cases under examination. While interviews can only tell one story from one perspective, they do help to construct a lens through which wider social practices can be examined (Henderson et al, 2012). The experiences of the young people in this study cannot be generalised to all young people, nor even all young workers

in Sheffield, but mapping their course through the social and cultural structures enforced on them illuminates those structures in a way that *could* arguably be applied to the wider youth population.

Drawing on theory

The way in which the qualitative interview topics and questions were developed, and the choice of variables in the quantitative regression analysis, were based on exploring JWT from the theoretical viewing points described in Chapter Three. The 'middle ground' nature of the chosen theories gives a steer for looking at the empirical data collected, while not preventing new analysis to emerge which does not fit well with broader ideas of social life (Inglis, 2010). Theory has been used more as a guide for where to look for data (including through the creation of research questions), than as a frame in which to fit results (Ragin, 1991). This is reflected in the way the later chapters are structured around themes that emerged rather than the original theoretical areas.

4.1.3 Collaborative and iterative approach

This research has been a collaboration between a local authority team and two academic departments. The collaboration has been an invaluable context in which to conduct social research and this is explored later in Section 4.3. This section seeks only to lay out the functionality of the collaborative approach. The research, including literature reviews and research design, was completed almost entirely within the local authority offices, with time spent at the University more sporadic and on a needs-only basis. Good working relationships with local authority staff provided a valuable source of local knowledge and sign-posting to relevant policy as well as support with accessing and interpreting local authority administrative datasets. The access to such networks and knowledge enabled the focus of the research to develop and become shaped by policy-need as well as academic-interest. Of equal importance has been how, by involving local authority officers in the design of the research project, and continually seeking their input and feedback along the way, it has been possible to address the topics of importance to them and their partners. The research design focused in part on aiding local understanding of the young people in the local authority's jurisdiction and on how services contribute, either positively or

negatively, to the lives of those young people. The qualitative aspect of the work provides a new kind of data to a team that deals, almost exclusively, with quantitative datasets. Equally, the optimal matching of sequence data takes the analysis of the council's existing administrative data to a greater level than would usually be undertaken by the team.

The quantitative data used in the study is held by Sheffield City Council's *Children, Young People and Families* Performance and Analysis Service (PAS), and the project was jointly supervised by a service manager from within that team as well as academics from the Departments of Geography and Education at Sheffield and Leeds Universities, respectively. This combination of disciplines and the mixed environments of the public and education sectors added great depth to the data collection and analysis that could be done in both an academic and policy sense. Access to raw individual-level data and contact details for five full cohorts of young people, along with access to staff networks and policy expertise is a much sought after resource in the academic community. The level of detail explored in this research would have been extremely difficult without it and the potential for the thesis' findings and conclusions to contribute to academic knowledge on transition making have been greatly increased as a result.

The need to produce research outputs that are useful in both academia and a policy environment has meant it is necessary to pay great attention to the presentation and dissemination of those outputs. It was important to allow space for new ideas and theory to emerge while also coming up with practical recommendations of points of interest for delivery of front-line services.

4.2   Data and Methods

Section 4.1 described the principles and approaches of the research. This section describes the specific methods used to deliver these principles and the way in which the required data was collected and sorted. The methods used for the thesis included sequence analysis, semi-structured qualitative interviews and quantitative sequence and regression analysis.

4.2.1 Quantitative analysis of destination sequences: optimal matching and cluster analysis

The methods used to analyse the quantitative data in this thesis have been chosen to place value on its longitudinal nature. As discussed extensively in Chapter Three, transitions from school to work are complex, non-linear, and at times chaotic and "even at the simplest level employment and unemployment-job histories are astonishingly erratic" (Abbott, 1995, p.103). Illuminating as they are, regression analysis to predict entry into different destination groups at the start of each academic year can only go so far in measuring post-16 experiences. The aim of sequence analysis is to statistically model career trajectories as sequences of events rather than only the outcomes of those sequences (Anders and Dorsett, 2015). The central purpose of sequence analysis is to look for patterns among or within sequences which is a key attraction of longitudinal research. This section explains the methodological technique of conducting sequence analysis.

The mechanics of sequence analysis

Sequence analysis is the name given to a quantitative methodological approach that involves comparing strings of data rather than specific data points. In this thesis, as is most common, sequence analysis involves combining Optimal Matching Analysis (OMA) with cluster analysis. Optimal matching generates a matrix of distances between every sequence and cluster analysis uses these generated distances to group together similar sequences, which allows the resulting clusters to be modelled through the more traditional logistic regression analysis (Martin et al, 2008; Abbott, 1995).

The sequences used in this research are formed from the learning destinations of young people on the first day of each month for the 24 months following the end of compulsory schooling (i.e. 1 September of Year 12 to 1 August of Year 13). Having allocated every young person a 24-month chain of destinations the analysis then took three key steps, following the approach taken by Anders and Dorsett (2005).

Step one: comparing sequences

Optimal matching is used to compare individuals' sequences of destinations "to produce a measure of dissimilarity for each pair of individuals

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in the dataset" (Anders and Dorsett, 2015, p.6).

Step two: creating clusters

Cluster analysis is used to group together the most similar sequences using the dissimilarity measures "in order to group together individuals sharing broadly similar experiences" (Anders and Dorsett, 2015, p.6).

Step three: predicting membership of clusters

Logistic regression analysis is used to explore the impact that a range of independent variables have on a young person being a member of one cluster over another.

Optimal Matching

Optimal matching involves calculating the minimum numbers of insertions and deletions that need to be made in order to transform one sequence into another (Martin et al, 2008). Take for example the following two young people:

- Young Person One remains in education for 6 months

- Young Person Two is NEET for the first month and then in education for the remaining five

Young Person One	Young Person Two
Learning	NEET
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning

By adding a month of NEET to the start of Young Person One's sequence, or by deleting NEET from the start of Young Person Two's sequence, the two sequences can be made to match. Insertions and deletions both carry a cost and the resulting score gives the dissimilarity score used for cluster analysis.

Young Person One	Young Person Two
Learning	**...**
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning

OR

Young Person One	Young Person Two
NEET	NEET
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning
Learning	Learning
Learning	

Although the destinations and movements within the sequences become the same, the consequence of inserting or deleting destinations is a change in length of the final sequences ("stretched by insertions" or "compressed by deletions" (Anders and Dorsett, 2015, p.7). This can be problematic where points of sequences are time-sensitive, for example the length of an academic year. To avoid this an additional 'substitution' option is included, through which a destination can be swapped (Anderson and Dorsett, 2015, p.7). In the above example, the NEET in Young Person Two's sequence could be substituted for Learning, thus making the two sequences match while keeping their length the same. Substitution carries twice the cost of deletion or insertion because it involves the equivalent of two changes (changing NEET to learning involves *deleting* NEET and then *inserting* Learning). While a tidier solution in some ways, the problem with depending solely on substitution is that it "might in some circumstances exaggerate differences between sequences that are actually quite similar but slightly offset" (Anders and Dorsett, 2015, p.7). In the above example deleting NEET would carry a score of 1 and make the sequences match, whereas substituting NEET for Learning would carry a cost of 2 even though

Young Person Two's sequence is arguably the same as that of Young Person One's starting a month later. Optimal Matching uses an algorithm to calculate "the minimum cost of transforming one sequence into another" (Martin et al, 2008, p.181) and this becomes the dissimilarity score.

Cluster Analysis

Through the optimal matching analysis, every sequence is compared to every other and a dissimilarity score is generated for each comparison. Cluster Analysis is then used to group together the sequences which are most similar to one another. For this research, Ward's method of cluster analysis was chosen (common in social research: Martin et al, 2008).

The dissimilarity scores between all pairs of sequences are used to group similar sequences into a defined number of clusters. Because the majority of young people (around 70% of the cohort) remained in Classroom-Based Learning for the full 24 months, initial experimentation involved removing this group before the analysis to try to enable more nuanced differences to emerge between the other groups. They were then re-inserted for the regression analysis stage as their own group. However, the effect of this was to cause small changes to only two of the clusters and to split apart some sequences which were only a few months different to the full-24-months-in-learning cluster. This caused concerns conceptually. Therefore, the final cluster analysis chosen included the whole cohort from the start. In the final analysis, ten clusters was found to allow a sufficient level of difference to emerge between clusters while keeping the clusters large enough to model and draw statistically significant conclusions from the regression analysis.

Multinomial logistic regression analysis

Logistic regression analysis enables the use of discrete variables (such as ethnicity or sex) to predict the likelihood of defined outcome variables which are discrete, categorical and unordered (post-16 learning destinations in this instance). A central concern of this research has been to determine which kinds of young people are the most likely to enter different destination groups, and what factors in their personal

and social life make this likelihood larger or smaller. Logistic regression provides a means by which to do this, by producing predicted likelihoods of entry into the different destination groups, rather than predicting any one outcome outright.

There are two kinds of logistic regression: binary and multinomial. Binary logistic regression would generate the likelihood of entering a Job Without Training rather than any other destination, based on a combination of independent variables. This is problematic, especially for policy development, because the alternatives of JWT are not a homogeneous group. For example, the attainment of 5 GCSEs might be shown to decrease the likelihood of entry into JWT but it would not be clear whether this was in comparison to being unemployed or being in full time post-16 education or both.

Multinomial logistic regression addresses this problem by generating a likelihood of entering each of the distinct learning destinations in comparison to one destination group identified as a base. The multinomial logistic regression model used in this thesis takes Classroom-Based Learning as the base, and predicts separate likelihoods of a young person entering the four other destination groups (NEET, JWT, Work-Based Learning and a personal development opportunity). Although all outcomes are modelled against Classroom-Based Learning, the results allow for comparisons to be made between all groups. For example, it might be the case that being Pakistani decreases the odds of being unemployed generally but that it increases the chance of entering learning more than it increases the chance of entering a Job Without Training.

Predicting sequences: interpreting model outputs

The output of the logistic regression is used throughout the remainder of the thesis to explore (and try to explain) the reasons that different young people follow different learning trajectories. This section describes how the outputs of logistic regression modelling can be interpreted.

In a population generally it might be that for every 17 year-old who is unemployed, three 17 year-olds are in a job. Taking unemployment as the base category the odds of being in a job could therefore be written as 1:3. People are three times more likely to be in a job than be unemployed. However, there might also be differences between sub-groups of the population, for example between males and females

or between White British people and ethnic minorities. This is where odds ratios are useful.

Example:

For every female who is unemployed, two females are in a job

→ Odds of 1:2

For every male who is unemployed, four males are in a job

→ Odds of 1:4

The odds of entering a job rather than being unemployed are therefore different for males and females

→ (Female = 2, Male = 4)

The odds ratio compares these odds in the form of a ratio 2:4 (or 1:2)

In the example above, the odds ratio shows that the odds of a male entering a job rather than unemployment are double the odds of a female entering a job rather than unemployment. If being female is taken as the base category then the odds ratio for a male is shown as 1:2 (or double), whereas if being male is taken as the base category then the odds ratio for a female would be 1:0.5 (or half). The final regression model includes multiple independent variables which can be presented in table form, as the example table extract shows below:

Model 1 – predicting likelihood of jobs and traineeships (rather than NEET)		
Variable	**Job**	**Traineeship**
Male	2.00***	4.00***
BME	0.30***	0.30***
_cons	0.19***	0.43***

*p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

Figure 5: Example output from regression analysis

The table shows predictions of entry into a job or traineeship (rather than NEET) based on a 17-year-old's sex and ethnicity. The numbers shown in each column are the odds ratios. The table just shows the second part of the ratio (for example 0.5, rather than 1:0.5), and the base category for each variable is the one that is

not shown (i.e. for the *Male* variable female is the base and for the *BME* variable White British is the base category).

Looking just at the 'Job' column it is apparent that the odds of entering a job rather than unemployment as a male are 1:2 (twice as likely as females) and the odds of entering a job rather than unemployment for BME young people are 1:0.3 (about a third as likely as White British young people). The difference between entry into a job and entry into a traineeship can be seen by comparing the two columns. For example, being male increases the odds of both being in a job and being in a traineeship, but the size of the increase is bigger for traineeships.

In order to predict the odds of any specific person entering a job, the relevant odds ratios are multiplied. So a White British Male would have odds of 1:0.4 (Male (2) multiplied by Not-BME (1) multiplied by the constant (0.19)) whereas a BME Male would have odds of 1:0.1 (Male (2) multiplied by BME (0.3) multiplied by the constant (0.19)).

The asterisks next to the numbers denote their level of statistical significance. Put very simply the more asterisks the odds ratio has the more it can be trusted to be true of the wider population and not just of the data sample used in the model. Values without any asterisks show that, while a trend appears to exist, there can not be sufficient confidence that this is true of the wider population. Low statistical significance is generally caused by samples that are too small (for example, if there was only one Pakistani female in the sample, her destination could not be trusted to reflect the destinations of all other Pakistani females).

4.2.2 Creating the quantitative database

The principal source of quantitative data for this research was an administrative database managed by Sheffield City Council (the IYSS database described in Chapter Two). Data is held on all young people who were enrolled at a mainstream school in Sheffield at the end of May, when they are in Year 11. Young people who lived in the city but did not attend any formal school (home schooled, hospitalised, resident at a young offenders unit et cetera) were also included. The database stores data on young people for the two years after they leave Year 11. The data stored includes personal details (ethnicity, school attainment, postcode, eligibility for free school meals et cetera), past and current educational statuses, and a record of worker

interventions. Additional data was added to young peoples' records from two other council-run databases, including a measure of area deprivation (IMD score) at neighbourhood level and eligibility for free school meals, GCSE results, and other school related data.

IYSS uses eighty or so codes for categorising learning destinations, which allows for a detailed understanding of the routes young people take out of compulsory schooling. The example sequence below shows what might be recorded for one young person:

- **Destination one:** School Year 11

- **Destination two:** Further Education College

- **Destination three:** NEET Seeking work and/or training provision

- **Destination four:** NEET Actively applying/wanting EET

- **Destination five:** Foundation Modern Apprenticeship Employment Status

- **Destination six:** Employment Local Training client at NVQ2

The record shows that the young person left school at the end of Year 11 (Destination one), and attended post-16 education for a while (Destination two) before becoming NEET (Destination three). They did want to re-enter education however, and started applying for suitable courses (Destination four). They then completed a one year apprenticeship (Destination five) where they gained a level 2 qualification and then started working full time (Destination six).

A total of 33,833 unique records were included in the final dataset which covered school-leaving cohorts between 2010 and 2015. This database was used to provide descriptive statistics and to run the first logistic regression analysis. Due to need for a complete three-year period of accessible records, only a sub-set of the database was used for the sequence analysis. For this analysis only school leavers from 2012 and 2013 were included (a total of 10,458 records). The subset included an additional 22 variables to cover young people's learning destinations at the start of each month starting from September of Year 12 to August of Year 13. The full dataset, in comparison, contained only learning destinations for the start of September of Year 12 and September of Year 13.

Data cleaning and coding variables

In order to model sequences most effectively, young people's destinations were re-coded into five conceptual categories. They were as follows:

- **CBL**: Classroom-based learning

- **WBL**: Work-based learning

- **JWT**: Job without training

- **NEET**: Not in Education, employment or training

- **PDO:** Personal Development Opportunity

The criteria for these groups were based on definitions of participation within policy and service delivery as implemented under the RPA legislation. The destinations in the original dataset provided exact start and end points but to make them comparable to one another, the sequences were formed from snapshots taken on the first day of each month for 24 months. Some of the young people had an 'unknown' status for one or more of the 24 months but Optimal Matching Analysis cannot handing missing data. Two strategies were therefore employed to remove missing data from the dataset. Young people with missing destinations for September and/or October of Year 12 but who were in a known destination in November, had their November destination extended back to the previous two months. Missing data in this period may arise due to the higher intensity of data collection associated with tracking new intakes at the start of each academic year. Young people with missing data for the June, July and/or August of Year 13 were given the same destination as May of Year 13 where it was known. Young people with missing data between the November of Year 12 and the May of Year 13 were excluded from the research. These were young people who had moved away from the city or, in a very small number of instances, who had passed away.

Selecting independent variables

There will always be a challenge in combining the evaluation of social outcomes with measurement and analysis of observable variables (Ragin, 1991). The problem occurs in considering whole units (in this case people) as a combination of different

elements (Ragin, 1991) when in reality it is the combination which makes the difference as much as the component parts. There is therefore a risk that individuals become conceptualised and analysed as no more than groups of characteristics and people cannot simply be understood as a sum of their parts (Ragin, 1991). The outcomes of a young person with a particular sex and ethnicity living in a particular part of the city with a specific set of GCSE results cannot, for example, be measured or understood merely by analysis of those variables. It is the bringing together of all of those things that make a person distinct, combined with less-measurable individual factors like self-identity, social values, and family relationships. The mixed methods nature of this research helps to address this conflict in some ways, with the qualitative strand capturing the essence of young people's stories that cannot be captured statistically, but it was also important to consider carefully the variables used in the statistical modelling.

Variables were initially chosen based on the descriptive statistics of the destination groups under consideration. For example, the majority of young people in Jobs Without Training are male, and therefore sex was included as one of the variables in the model. Similarly there was an uneven geographical distribution of young people in the destination groups, so the three geographical city 'regions' used by the local authority to deliver services were used as a variable. Other variables were added based on the findings of other studies and on the themes that emerged from the first phase of interviews. It became apparent, for example, that family circumstances, school ethos and academic attainment played an important role in the decisions made by young people and variables to reflect these were added. The final model included eight independent variables loosely grouped into: personal characteristics, personal experiences, place, and experience of school. These groups of variables are explained below.

Characteristics

This group included a binary measure of sex (male or female), and a binary measure of ethnicity (White British or Black and Minority Ethnic).

This group included, as a measure of household income, eligibility for free school meals (which identifies the 20% of Sheffield households with the lowest incomes). Unlike IMD score (described below) this measure relates to young people's personal circumstances but its binary measure means it does not take into account the variation in deprivation between the two groups. The other variable included in this group was a flag used in the council database to identify young people who were deemed to be most at risk of becoming involved in criminal activity. These young people had taken part, or being invited to take part, in programmes run by the Youth Offending Team (YOT) but had not necessarily already being involved in any criminal behaviour.

Place

As well as the geographic service district (Seven in total) in which a young person lived, the place variables included an area deprivation measure (IMD score) split into deciles. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) allocates a score between 1 and 100 to geographic areas at neighbourhood level (DETR, 2000). This does not guarantee an accurate reflection of an individual's economic circumstances but it does reflect the general experiences of their neighbours and of those using local services including catchment schools.

Experience of school

This group included a binary measure of academic achievement at Year 11 defined by attainment of at least 5 GCSEs at A*-C including English Language and Mathematics, and a binary measure of whether a young person had a special educational need..

4.2.3 Qualitative analysis of interview transcripts

The empirical qualitative data used in this research was collected through semi-structured interviews with young people. The interviews employed Tomlinson's hierarchical focusing which takes a "spontaneity exhaustion" approach in an attempt to reduce research bias in data collection (Tomlinson, 1989). The approach was designed to "provide maximum opportunity for young people to be given a voice and at the same time provide a structure for useful comparative purposes" (Raffo and Reeves, 2000, p.154; Tomlinson, 1989). To capture real-time longitudinal data, young people were invited to a second interview between six and nine months after their first.

Bruner describes two elements of storytelling: fabula and sjuzet (1987, p.17). Fabula is the underlying theme of the story, for example "human jealously, authority and obedience, thwarted ambition" et cetera, whereas sjuzet is the more concrete plot or series of events that includes the "particularity of time, place, person, and event" (Bruner, 1987, p.17). Bruner (1987) argues that the way interview questions are posed, and the time allocated for answering them, can influence whether its fabula or sjuzet that comes through most strongly.

To start each interview participants were asked to describe what they had done since leaving school and then, depending on where they placed the emphasis of their storytelling, questions were asked to prompt them to expand on their experiences of certain aspects such as home life, education, and of where they lived. To supplement these participant-led stories, young people were also asked more specifically about their experiences of compulsory schooling, support networks, careers advice, and hopes for the future. The participant-led approach employed meant that participants were not all asked exactly the same questions, but the core list of topics were explored at least at a minimum level. Young people who were interviewed for a second time were asked about what they had done since their first interview, if any of their views had changed (for example their hopes for the future) and were also asked for their thoughts on some of the themes that had emerged from interviews and statistical modelling more generally.

The depth and breadth of participants' responses was very varied. Some interviews ran for over an hour with minimal interjection from the interviewer, while others lasted less than twenty minutes with a great deal of prompting required to

encourage detailed responses. The depth to which specific issues were explored was largely down to the level of interest or importance the young person attached to them and how relevant they were to the individual. A copy of the topic guide is available in Appendix Two.

Use of phone interviews

Young people were given the option of a face-to-face or phone interview. As a result, three of the first round of interviews took place face to face with the remaining 25 conducted by phone. In contrast, eight of the nine second interviews were conducted in person with only one young person opting for a phone interview on both occasions. The rationale for using phone interviews was based on their capacity for accessing certain groups, thereby allowing for a larger and more diverse sample. The use of telephone interviews is fairly uncommon in academic qualitative research but there is a growing body of evidence to suggest it has a specific valuable place amongst other research methods (Novick, 2008; Holt, 2010; Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). The decision to use phone interviews as the principal method of qualitative data collection was made for a number of practical reasons as explored below but predominantly: increased sample size and greater flexibility around young people's chaotic lives.

Increased sample size

The decision to conduct interviews over the phone was heavily influenced by a desire to recruit as many participants as possible. The evaluation of the potential benefits of using phone interviews was based around the experiences of previous researchers in the field, and in particular the reflections of Sue Maguire (2010) in her research with young workers. Maguire's research involved 36 (mostly face to face) interviews with young people amounting to 17% of the full cohort. Her discussion around participant recruitment identifies a range of challenges with making contact with young people and in ensuring their attendance at arranged interviews. In total 950 phone calls were made in order to achieve 36 interviews (Maguire, 2010, p.322). The considerable time and staff resource taken to secure the sample described by Maguire (2010) as well as more general writing on participant recruitment by other

authors, adds weight to the argument for using phone interviews.

However, the importance of maintaining an appropriate quality of data was also important. Several comparative studies into the use of face-to-face and telephone interviews in qualitative research have revealed that the option to be interviewed over the phone rather than in person encourages a greater range and number of participants without having a significant impact on the depth and breadth of data collected (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004; Holt, 2010; Novick, 2008). Indeed, in some instances phone interviews improved the research environment (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004).

Maintained normal environment

Given the age of participants, interviewing in private homes was deemed inappropriate. With this as a condition, interviewing by phone rather than asking young people to meet in a neutral location enabled them to be interviewed in their normal (home) environment. This allowed them to manage their own space and privacy (e.g. by moving to another room to avoid family members) (Holt, 2010) while minimising risk to both the researcher and participant (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). This was certainly the case in a few instances when young people broke off their interview momentarily to tell a family member to leave the room or to stop bothering them.

Increased flexibility

Previous research into the lives of young workers suggests that they often lead busy and chaotic lives due to irregular working hours and other commitments. This certainly appeared to be the case in many instances of young people interviewed for this research. Phone interviews give participants a "far greater degree of control" than face-to-face interviews, in that they involved no extra time for travel and were easier to rearrange if needed (Holt, 2010). The ability for a young person to take part in an interview straight away was also far more attractive for many participants than the necessity to commit to a later date.

Reduction in participant-researcher bias

There is much to be said for face-to-face engagement as a way to build quick rapport (Stephens, 2007), but Holt argues that young people (especially those with more troubled histories) can be very used to being interviewed by figures in authority, namely "social workers, education officers, and other 'psy' professionals" (2010, p.115) and not intruding into private spaces can be an advantageous way for the researcher to build trust, giving the participant a greater feeling of control (Holt, 2010, p.115). While a lack of visual clues may make it hard to find commonalities that help with rapport-building, verbal cues like accent and use of vocabulary can go a long way towards identifying individual characteristics. Holt (2010) also argues that the absence of visual signals may have actually increased the rapport built between the researcher and participant, as issues such as gender, social status and ethnicity became less of a barrier to meaningful dialogue.

Empowered voice

Not meeting a participant in person reduces the contextual information that can be gleaned from visual cues like personal attire, but Holt (2010) argues that this also means a researcher can not "contaminate" a participant's responses with their own contextual analysis, which gives more power to a participant's voice through giving more weight to their actual words. Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) also argue that for exploring sensitive topics the telephone can provide a greater sense of anonymity and for topics that might be deemed embarrassing may provide better quality data. While hard to assess whether this was the case, talking about topics such as suicide and depression does suggest that at the very least, speaking via phone did not prohibit such a level of sensitive discussion.

Transcript analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full. Transcript analysis aimed to explore the journeys taken by young people and the way in which those journeys were experienced. Analysis was designed to avoid the trap of " 'chunking' their biographical story into broad themes" (Henderson et al, 2012, p.28) by taking a

two-pronged approach. First transcripts were analysed longitudinally one at a time, and then thematically side by side. Where two interviews had been conducted the longitudinal analysis was undertaken on both transcripts together. The approach was designed to examine both the order and interaction of events in individual pathways, and the cross-cutting themes experienced by young people with similar and different journeys. One type of analysis cannot replace the other, but combined they create a much stronger image of the phenomenon under investigation (Gershuny, 2002).

Longitudinal analysis

The overriding aim of the longitudinal transcript analysis was to understand and then retell the story of each young person from a range of perspectives, drawing where appropriate on critical moment and bounded agency theory. The notes and annotations that formed the analysis followed a semi-structured proforma which allowed a comparative process of analysis to be done later across all of the interviews. Four 'read-throughs' were completed in total. At the first read-through, notes were made on the events that happened, their order, and the different aspects of a young person's life that they belonged to (school, home, work etc.). The second read-through focused on the way in which the story was told: where young people focused the most detail on and the importance they placed on various events and experiences. Henderson et al's (2012) strategy of listening to the interview recording alongside this analysis was also used as a reminder of where verbal emphasis had been placed. The third read-through focused on how people and places played into the sequence of events and the impact they had on how the young person experienced and conceptualised them. Finally, the fourth read-through considered the way in which the telling of the story and the events within it, provided an insight into the way that young people considered their position in the journey towards adult life. The second and fourth read-throughs were particularly helpful in considering changes between first and second interviews in regards to perspectives and the importance placed on specific experiences (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003).

Following the longitudinal analysis, transcripts were thematically analysed alongside one another, using a matrix to code participant responses to each area of enquiry. These areas were based on both the original interview topic guide and on new areas that emerged from the longitudinal analysis and quantitative models. The elements of each interview which were relevant to each theme were then compared to find similarities and differences in experiences, and to look for shared characteristics that might provide explanation for them. It was these themes that were explored in the repeat interviews, and they were also used to inform the building of regression models.

In writing up the stories of participants, Henderson et al describe the balance that is needed between "analytical rigour and imaginative effervescence" (2012, p.17), and also outline the real challenge in prioritising what is included and what can be left out. Chapters Five, Six and Seven draw heavily on extracts from interview transcripts in order to capture not only what young people have said, but also the manner in which they said it. Like Henderson et al (2012), they also seek to "capture something of the voice of the participant by using their phrases whenever possible" (2012, p.21).

4.2.4   Qualitative sampling strategy and recruitment

The aim of the qualitative work was to interview young people who were around half way through the 16 to 18 transition phase and to ask them to look both back and forwards in order to understand where they saw themselves within the trajectory. Around a third of the young people could be re-contacted for a second interview and this allowed a real-time longitudinal change of perspective to be captured. Two criteria were used to select young people for interview. First they had to be in school Year 12 or 13 (as at January 2015). Second they had to have been in a Job Without Training for at least one month since leaving Year 11. A total of 218 young people met this criteria and were invited by letter to take part in an interview. A follow-up phone call was then made with interviews set up on a voluntary basis. The final sample of 28 were self-selecting and the first wave of interviews took place between January and June 2015. Nine follow-up interviews were conducted between

six and nine months later, with recruitment by the same 'letter then phone' method. Participants received a £10 gift voucher for their first interview and a twenty pound voucher for their second interview.

The final sample

The sample of young people interviewed included 13 males and 15 females. 21 were White British, four were Eastern European, and three were Pakistani. At the time of their first interview, four of the young people were aged 16, 21 were aged 17 and three were 18. Most lived in the East and North of the city (15 and nine respectively), and the remaining four lived in the South. Most of the young people lived at home with one or both of their parents, three lived with grandparents and one young person lived with an older sibling. None of the young people reported living in 'workless' households (although two lived in houses where the main earner had retired) but many discussed experiencing financial hardships at home in one way or another. Nine of the young people had five A*-C grades at GCSE and of the 28 young people, 15 had entered some form of education after the end of compulsory schooling although only four had completed their courses.

The sample was self selecting and not designed to be representative of the population. The voluntary self-selecting method of participant recruitment may have led to a skewed sample of young people based on their motivation, confidence, or ability to take part in an interview. However, the types of responses and the level of engagement young people had in the interview process offered some confidence that the sample included a good spread of young people from across the JWT population. The characteristics (ethnicity, academic attainment and household income) of participants were also not unusual of the wider population in their neighbourhoods, when compared with the descriptive statistics of those areas.

The remainder of this section introduces the young people who took part in the interviews, grouped by employment sector. All young people gave their permission to be quoted in the research and for the key components of their stories to be shared, but their names have been changed to preserve their anonymity. Dunya, Emma, Alice, Bianca, Jakub, Aleks, Kyle, Lukas and Ed were all interviewed twice, identified by an asterisk in the list below.

Food and hospitality

Ed*
White British male, 17 at time of first interview. Working in food industry and problems with depression.

Lukas*
Eastern European male, 17 at time of first interview. Working in hospitality after dropping out of A-levels to recover from illness.

Rachael
White British female, 16 at the time of interview. Working 12 hours a week as a waitress.

Naz
Pakistani male, 16 at time of interview. Working full time at a takeaway after dropping out of a one year vocational course.

Jenny
White British female, 17 at time of interview. Working part time as a waitress after dropping out of an apprenticeship.

Jason
White British male, 18 at time of interview. Working part time as a cleaner after dropping out of post-16 education.

Holly
White British female, 17 and NEET at time of interview. Previously employed in food industry, and attended pupil referral unit.

Laura
White British female, 17 at time of interview. Working as a waitress.

Ellie
White British female, 17 at time of interview. Working part time as a waitress.

Syed
Pakistani male, 17 at time of interview. Working part time in a restaurant and actively job hunting.

Administration

Emma*

White British female, aged 17 at the time of interview. Working full time in HR, living away from her parental home.

Tanya

White British female, 17 and NEET at time of interview. Previously working in administration.

Dika

Roma Slovak female, 16 at time of interview. Working as a translator, and living with depression.

Retail

Dunya*

Pakistani female, aged 17 at the time of interview. Working part time in retail after not getting the grades for her school sixth form.

Jade

White British female, 17 at time of interview. Working part time in retail after being asked to leave post-16 education.

Adrian

White British Male, 17 at time of interview. Working 20 hours a week in retail, having dropped out of sixth form.

Warehouse and factory work

Jakub*

Eastern European male, 17 at time of first interview. Working part time in a warehouse after dropping out of A-levels to care for his sister.

Aleks*

Eastern European male, 18 at time of interview. Working in a factory.

Mark

White British male, aged 17 at the time of interview. Working full time in a warehouse.

Liz

White British female, 17 and NEET at time of interview. Previously working in a warehouse after leaving post-16 education early.

Care industry

Bianca*

White British female, 17 at time of first interview. Working in the care industry after dropping out of post-16 education to care for relatives.

Katie

White British female, 17 at time of interview. Working full time in childcare.

Alice*

White British female, 17 at time of interview. Working full time in health care after completing a one year apprenticeship in the same organisation.

<u>Construction</u>

Kyle*

White British male, 17 at time of first interview. Working in construction after being expelled from his post-16 learning provider.

James

White British male, 17 at time of interview. Working full time as a builder.

Ben

White British male, 18 at time of interview. Working full time as a steel fabricator after completing a one year course in catering.

<u>Short term mixed work</u>

Kirsty

White British female, 16 at time of interview. Young carer working part time with her family's horses.

Matt

White British male, 17 at time of interview. Working adhoc doing odd jobs for people. Unable to read and write.

* young person was interviewed twice

4.3 Methodological considerations

Section 4.3 explores two areas of particular relevance to this research: the way in which the empirical data collected was influenced by working with live data; and how the position of the researcher within the research environment affected the kind of data available and the reliability of that data. The third and final part of Section 4.3 brings together a number of smaller but no less significant considerations of conducting collaborative, mixed methods research in the context of a local authority. Its recommendations and lessons for future research also serve to conclude the chapter.

4.3.1 Working with live data

There were numerous advantages to working with a live administrative data set, not least because the data was not subjected to collection bias, and when considering the development and implementation of social policies the ability to see exactly what data is available to people delivering services is a valuable asset. Working with live data presented two particular challenges however.

The first was the changing nature of the data contained within the database. This was not relevant for the quantitative strand of the research, which used records that had expired and were no longer being updated, but was important in the recruitment and interviewing of participants for the qualitative strand. The constraints of local authority resources mean that inevitably some records remain out of date for short periods of time should circumstances change between scheduled follow ups. Equally, some data is naturally restricted by individual willingness to pass on information, like details of workplaces or living arrangements. The information collected through interviews and conversations with family members did not therefore always match with the council-held data.

When conducting and writing up qualitative longitudinal research there is a need to be considerate of both the temporal nature of the data, and the orientation of the various participants and researchers (Thomas and McLeod, 2015). In asking young people about their past experiences I found several differences between their records and what they had remembered doing. While there are challenges in such an approach, with selective memories and the influence of hindsight on storytelling, interviews provided an opportunity for "exploring changing perceptions of past events and changing aspirations for the future" (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003, p.193). Consideration was given to how such discrepancies should be handled, and the final strategy was to take the accounts of young people at face value, given that it was their subjective 'truth' that the research aimed to capture. However, some consideration was given in Chapter Eight to the value of relying on administrative information as a point of policy concern more generally.

4.3.2   Researcher positionality

Within qualitative social research it is widely accepted that the personal and social characteristics of the researcher have a big impact on "all aspects of the research process - from the articulation of a research question to the analysis and presentation of the data" (McCorkel and Myers, 2003, p.199). The information about young people presented in this research came firsthand from the participants themselves and from administrative data collected for service provision, but it is still the case that in analysing and writing up this information, it "is always filtered through the writer's language and social location" (Levine-Rasky, 2015, p.459). There is also a risk therefore that despite wanting to represent the experiences of the young people, "the researcher's perspective is regarded as more accurate than that of the community members themselves" (Levine-Rasky, 2015, p.459). Consideration of culture (Levine-Rasky, 2015; Bolt, 2010), race (McCorkel and Myers, 2003) and gender (Arendell, 1997) were all taken into account when considering the impact of researcher positionality on the research output.

Master narratives

Master narratives refer to the way in which a person makes sense of the world around them based on the way in which "differences in power and privilege are regarded as inevitable, natural and desirable" (Romero and Stewart, 1999, cited in McCorkel and Myers, 2003, p.202). A researcher's influence on their research design and implementation therefore extends beyond measurable characteristics like gender or race, to "situated perspectives, concerns, and experiences" which shape how they understand the world (McCorkel and Myers, 2003, p.202). While gender, race, and social upbringing were all of importance in identifying differences between researcher and participant in this study, so too were previous experiences of being a youth worker, personal experience of a post-16 transition making, and the current pursuit of a higher education. Such experiences inevitably influenced in "subtle and complex" ways the way in which research was carried out, whether at the design stage, or in how questions were asked and answers interpreted (McCorkel and Myers, 2003, p.199; Bott, 2010; Arendell, 1997).

In framing the research around why young people left education early, it was

important to avoid simply reproducing master narratives. For example, by translating action to active-choices and a lack of education to a lack of knowledge. Making such translations risks reproducing accepted norms rather than finding new aspects of the situation (Levine-Rasky, 2015, p.459) and the focus given to entry into Jobs Without Training might suggest existing values placed on the abnormality of this transition. While important, truly reflecting what young people were saying was a challenge in two ways. First, it is easy to fall into the trap outlined by McCorkel and Myers on allowing a "handful of similarities" to overshadow the very real differences between the researcher and researched, thus leading to "flawed, partial, and biased assumptions" about research participants" (McCorkel and Myers, 2003, p.210). The way in which sentiments were made about a wish to push back against the societal pressure to stay in education, were interpreted not only through the words of young people but through the perspective of the researcher towards the social environment of education and employment. Second, setting out to 'defend' these young people from what was portrayed as a problematic or challenging system assumed that their priorities were the same as the researcher's, where in reality it was at the more micro-level that young people felt that changes should be made rather than at national or even local policy level (Levine-Rasky, 2015). The approach, finally, was the one Levine-Rasky writes about, to "maintain methodological humility" (2015, p.466) and to seek to build on existing knowledge to improve on what is already known about the young workforce.

The research setting

The capacity of this research to understand both the policy and young person's perspective of post-16 progression and experience of JWT was in no small part due to the very welcoming local authority environment made accessible for the duration of the project. Access to council databases was part of the research agreement, but the relationships built with staff at the local authority went beyond those of mere practicality. This extended to attending team away days, networking events, and social occasions, through which full advantage could be taken of the wealth of knowledge available in the team. The value of ready access to such knowledge in understanding the issues being researched would be hard to quantify adequately. The other, unanticipated impact of this environment was on the way in which the

foci of the investigation was prioritised. Daily interactions with a data team served to continually highlight the role that data had on the way in which young people were understood and services are planned, delivered and evaluated. Consideration of data quality and its impact on local services were therefore considered at a higher level than would perhaps be expected in such research.

Staying critical and respecting insider knowledge

This research was not ethnographic, in that the subjects of the study were met or spoken to on distinct occasions for fixed periods of time in which they were actively engaged in the data collection process (through taking part in interviews). However, having a local authority rather than purely academic base did present opportunities for gaining 'insider' knowledge into systems and practices that would otherwise have been difficult to access. Being an 'insider' in a research context involves being an integrated part of the community that is the focus of one's study. There are "longstanding debates among ethnographers over the desirability of 'insider' and 'outsider' status" in research (McCorkel and Myers, 2003, p.203) but given the multiple aspects and environments in any research project, this is arguably a shifting status anyway (McCorkel and Myers, 2003).

Experiencing the day to day challenges faced by colleagues processing data, supporting front-line staff with technical and substantive queries, meant witnessing processes pushed to breaking point. The role of 'researcher' got interchanged on occasion with one of 'sounding board' or as the provider of tea and a few minutes of off-loading. It was important to distinguish between these roles and to ensure the information used in the written research findings was in line with the research agreements and did not use privileged 'insider' knowledge unfairly. The compromise was in keeping staff confidences while also presenting an honest picture of the real challenges and issues involved in the post-16 structures.

Staying critical was the other central challenge to this aspect of the research. Levine-Rasky (2015) argues that regardless of the nature of relationships formed while undertaking research, they are likely to lead to "personal transformation" on at least some level. It can be challenging, when working within an organisation under investigation to remain critical (Levine-Rasky, 2015) but every effort was made to continually assess this.

4.3.3 Constraints and lessons for the future

There were many elements of doing collaborative research that proved challenging or worthy of careful consideration. This final section, which serves as the chapter's summary, highlights four in particular.

Choosing the research topic

The investigation into what causes young people to leave education, re-enter it, start and leave jobs, and stay in prolonged unemployment is extensive and far outside the facilities of a doctoral thesis. This research therefore chose to concentrate on the subgroup of young people in Jobs Without Training and use them to shed illumination on local structures and practices and the experience of young people who come into contact with them.

Choosing variables

Choosing which independent and outcome variables to use involved a continual balancing of what data was available, and what the outcomes of modelling would mean in a policy context. A good example of this was the inclusion of GCSE results in statistical modelling of transition pathways. For some year groups, data was available on the total number of GCSEs a young person had achieved, how many were at a level A* - C, and whether they had achieved English Language and Mathematics at this level. However, given what is known about the entry requirements into different levels of education at 16, some of these measures of attainment were more logical from a policy perspective. Equally, while modelling place at neighbourhood or ward level might produce results more reflective of individual circumstance, the delivery of services at a higher, regional, level means that the larger and less specific measures of place were also worthy of consideration.

Choosing a cut off point

The policy landscape of post-16 progression is such a rapidly changing one, that it is nonsensical to discuss young people's unique journeys without reference to the political and societal context in which they happen. New policy was considered throughout the life of the PhD. However, ultimately, the project has been time

limited and fixed within a specified period of youth and education policy and Chapter Two aimed to give an overview of this context.

Writing for an academic and policy audience

As well as the contribution it makes to doctoral study, this research was commissioned in order to advise Sheffield City Council of the reasons behind the city's comparatively high non-participation rate at seventeen. In writing up the research, there was a balance to be struck between writing for an academic audience without the local situated knowledge of Sheffield and its young people, and writing for a policy audience, potentially without the interest in theoretical and more abstract research findings. In terms of writing style, there was also a balance to be struck between "analytic rigour and imaginative effervescence" (Henderson et al, 2012, p.17). The mixed methods nature of the study and the collection of so much new raw material in the form of interview transcripts and model outputs meant there was a high risk of condensing data down so much as to lose sight of the original stories being told (Henderson et al, 2012). It is inevitable that some details have to be left out due to space constraints and relevance to the central research questions, but this process was made more challenging by the need to cater for both academic and policy audiences. The use of young people's own words and an ongoing referencing of the impact of findings on policy has been implemented as a way of meeting these needs.

Chapter 5

Internal and external factors in the manifestation of 'difference'

Chapter Five considers the relationship between a young person's transition pathway and their characteristics and experiences, and offers a high level picture of how Jobs Without Training fit into those transition pathways. The chapter considers the ways in which different transition pathways reflect different social characteristics by analysing the make-up of ten pathway clusters and the interviews given by the young people from within them. The ten longitudinal clusters which provide the focus of the chapter are formed from the combined populations of two school-leaving cohorts of young people and are analysed in relation to factors such as gender, ethnicity, academic attainment and geography.

Exploring 'difference' is about exploring what sets different groups of young people apart, not only who they are but also in terms of the things they do and the experiences they have. The chapter starts in Section 5.1 by considering the way in which transitions are defined and measured, and by introducing high level trend data on participation collected by the local authority. Previous research has emphasised the fluidity of young people's journeys between education and employment (see Macdonald et al 2005; Nayak, 2006; Cockburn, 2001; Maguire, 2010) and so the remainder of the section describes the use of sequence analysis as an alternative method for modelling these journeys to build on what is already known about transition making.

Section 5.2 presents the ten clusters which came from sequence analysis of the Sheffield dataset. It groups these by the nature of the dominant destinations within

each cluster and provides descriptive data of the kinds of young people who belong to each. Section 5.3 presents the words of the young people who were interviewed alongside the output of the logistic regression analysis, which offers a prediction of the level to which various factors in a person's life have an impact on the transition pathway they follow. The section is split into five parts which each cover a different theme: personal characteristics, personal experiences, places and spaces, families and networks and pre-16 education. The chapter concludes by providing a summary of the results from the analysis, and suggesting the benefits and policy implications of using a combination of optimal matching and cluster analysis to understand post-16 pathways.

5.1 Defining and measuring difference in learning trajectories

5.1.1 Understanding participation through snapshots

Overwhelmingly, young people finishing Year 11 in England go on to enter further learning opportunities (SCC, 2017; DfES, 2007; DfE, 2012). Of the 34,136 young people who left school between 2010 and 2015 in Sheffield, 32,435 accessed learning in either Year 12 or 13 (95%). Of these, 2986 (9%) were in paid Work-Based Learning and the remainder were undertaking classroom-based programmes.

As described in Chapter Two, the analysis and monitoring of young people's participation in learning is done by the local authority using snapshots at specific times of the year. Data is continuously collected and updated, but the the snapshots provide an overview of the city's post-16 learning cohorts as a whole and enable trend data to be analysed. The figures below draw from the November snapshot data on young people leaving Year 11 between 2010 and 2014. The data was extracted before the Year 13 destinations of the 2014 cohort were known so this data is not included in the figures.

In both Year 12 and Year 13, the majority of young people who are not in learning are NEET (around two thirds) but it is becoming slightly more common for young people who are not in learning to be in a Job Without Training. These trends are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Breakdown of non-participation, by year in which cohort left Year 11
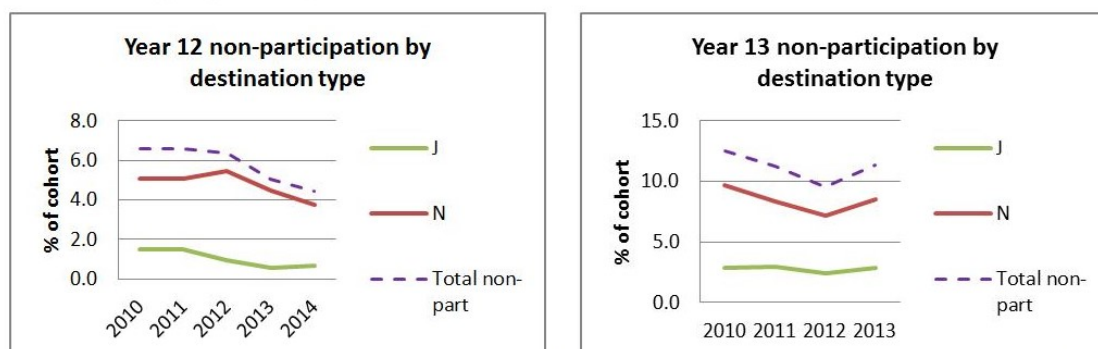
Data source: Sheffield City Council Performance and Analysis Service

Most young people who enter a Job Without Training during Year 12 or Year 13 come from Classroom-Based Learning destinations and have not previously been NEET. Young people with experience of a JWT by the end of Year 13 were most likely to have spent between seven and 12 months in work (not necessarily in the same job or in continuous employment) and had rarely been NEET for more than six of the 24 months.

Although the number of young people entering JWT in Year 12 continues to fall, approximately the same number of young people are reported as remaining in JWT for a second year. This suggests that JWT has become a less popular (or more difficult) option for school leavers but that a greater percentage of those who do enter a JWT are more suited to this destination type than in previous years. This has led to a decrease in the percentage of students re-entering education in Year 13 from JWT. Additionally, the number of entries into JWT in Year 12 has decreased at a similar rate to the increase of young people entering Work-Based Learning. This means that the number of young people who are in any form of 'work' in Year 12 has remained relatively stable. Unlike in previous years, those entering JWT in Year 13 are now more likely to come from education than from time spent NEET.

Shapshots in Year 12 and 13

Based on the November snapshot data, young people are more likely to remain in the same type of destination in Year 12 and 13 than to move into one of the other specific destination-types. For example, young people in NEET in Year 12 are more likely to remain NEET in Year 13 than to enter enter Work-Based Learning (see Table 1). In the cases of NEET, WBL and CBL, this trend actually extends further,

with young people in those destinations more likely to remain in them than to move at all. Young people in Jobs Without Training however are slightly more likely to move than stay (only 43.2% stay in JWT for a second year).

In all cases, young people were more likely to move into learning than out of it but the likelihood of moving out of learning was slightly higher for Work-Based Learning than Classroom-Based Learning. Young people who were in WBL in Year 12 were more likely to enter JWT in Year 13 than those in CBL. Young people in NEET or JWT in Year 12 were equally likely to enter learning in Year 13 (35% and 35.7% respectively) but young people in JWT were more likely to enter WBL whereas those in NEET were much more likely to enter CBL.

Table 1: Movement between Year 12 and 13

Progression into year 13 (based on 21,137 records)		Year 13 destination				
		NEET	JWT	WBL	CBL	Total
Year 12 destination (%)	NEET	58.9	6.1	10.6	24.4	100
	JWT	21.2	43.2	21.2	14.5	100
	WBL	5.2	4.3	81.0	9.5	100
	CBL	5.2	2.0	5.2	87.6	100

Data source: Sheffield City Council Performance and Analysis Service

5.1.2 Modelling difference between and within transition groups

Current learning destinations are an important part of a young person's life, for their current wellbeing, sense of identity, and feeling of belonging or contribution. Examining *sequences* of destinations however, including their relative order and the way people perceive them, enables a more comprehensive understanding of the longer-term impacts of entering certain destinations on a person's life. This is the rationale for the longitudinal focus of the thesis, which considers monthly destinations for the 24 months following Year 11 starting in the September of Year 12. Each destination type has been allocated a colour and each young person is represented by a horizontal line of 24 colour blocks to show their destination in each of the 24 months (Figure 7).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
PERSON ONE																								
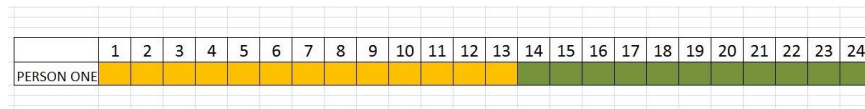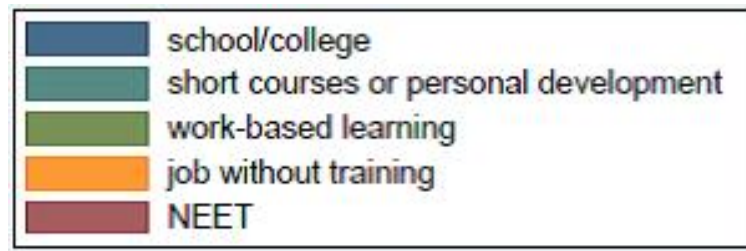
Figure 7: Example of a single post-16 sequence using colours

As described in Chapter four, these lines are placed side by side and compared with one another through an analytic process known as optimal matching. By then using cluster analysis (also described in Chapter Four) young people have been grouped into ten longitudinal clusters based on their similarities. The clusters do not, therefore, contain young people with exactly the same transition paths but instead bring together young people who made similar movements or who spent similar amounts of time in particular destinations. For example, as Figure 8 shows below, young people in one cluster might spend around a year in Classroom-Based Learning and then move into Work or Work-Based Learning. The young people in this example cluster made the transition between Month 9 and Month 18 (and some spent short periods NEET in between) but the general shape of the transitions made by members of the cluster were more similar to each other than to those within other clusters.

The numbers up the left-hand side show the number of young people in the group, and the numbers along the bottom show the 24 months. The order of the lines is dictated by the optimal matching output, with those calculated to be most similar put together.
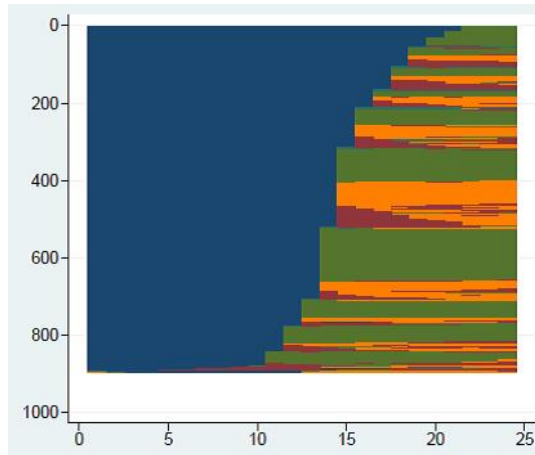
Figure 8: Example cluster diagram

Analysis revealed ten distinct clusters and Section 5.2 provides information about these, including how the journeys of the young people interviewed might align with them. The cluster analysis grouped together transitions with the smallest dissimilarity scores calculated through the optimal matching and these were used to form the clusters. This exercise involved a balance between grouping together young people with suitably similar trajectories while minimising the number of clusters. As a result they do not form a perfect picture but instead seek to show a type of 'best-fit'.

5.2 Longitudinal clusters

The ten clusters of young people's transitions can be loosely arranged into three groups: Classroom-Based pathways, Work-Based pathways, and pathways involving extended periods in NEET. Each of these groups is shown and described in this section. Section 5.3 then presents how memberships of the groups and clusters can be predicted and better understood. The following figures show these transitions pictorially and are accompanied with a short description of the kind of young people who follow them and (where relevant) the interview participants who most closely align with the group.
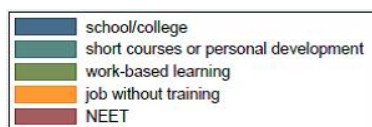
5.2.1 Classroom-based transitions

These four longitudinal clusters all included significant time spent in classroom-based destinations: either traditional learning or in personal-development style programmes. The four clusters are shown pictorially below.
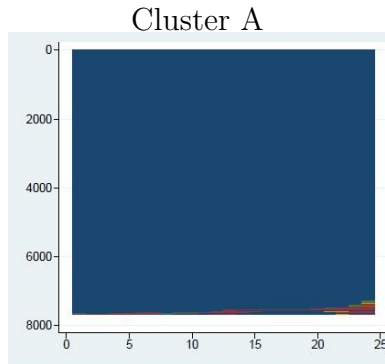
Cluster A

Cluster H

Cluster A

Young people who spent the vast majority of the 24 months in Classroom-Based Learning.
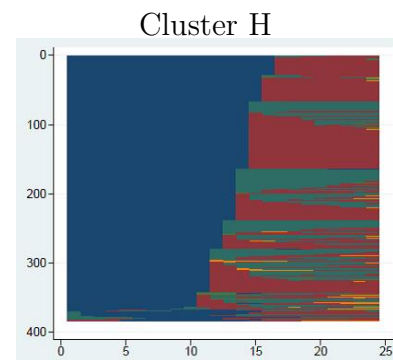
Cluster H

Young people who spent most, if not all, of Year 12 in Classroom-Based Learning and then moved into Personal Development Opportunities or experienced long periods of NEET.
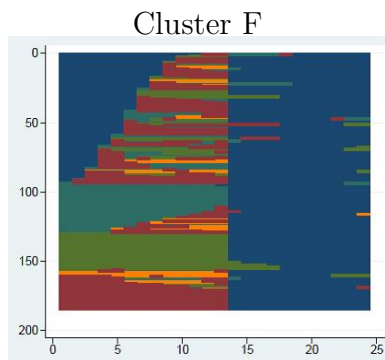
Cluster F

Cluster E

Cluster F

Young people who spent the majority of Year 12 in unstable destinations across all destination types· but who then entered and remained in Classroom-Based Learning for the majority of Year 13.
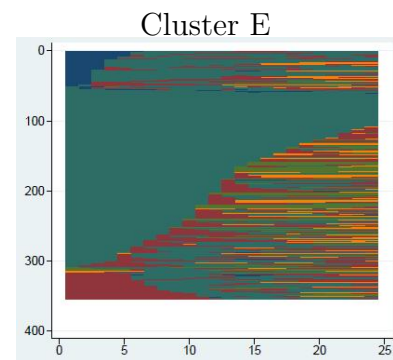
Cluster E

Young people who spent the majority of Year 12 and 13 moving in and out of Personal Development Opportunities.

Cluster A: Sustained Classroom-Based Learning

Cluster A, shown in (Figure 9) includes young people who either spent the whole two years after Year 11 in Classroom-Based Learning, or who only entered a JWT or became NEET in the last two or three months (shown by the different colours towards the bottom right). In the regression modelling, this cluster was used as the base to which all other clusters were compared. It is by far the largest cluster, containing 7680 young people (70% of the cohort), and is broadly representative of the population with regard to characteristics. The main distinctions are a higher than average level of attainment at GCSE and a slightly higher percentage of BME young people than the population as a whole.
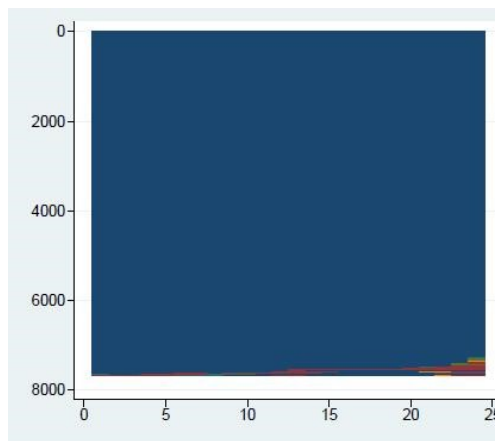
Figure 9: Cluster A

Size of cluster	7680 young people (70% of the cohort)
Sex	52% female and 48% male
Ethnicity	26% from black or minority ethnic groups
Previous Interventions	Less than 1% (16) flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Service
Experience of School	20% had a special educational need (SEN). 66% had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and Mathematics
Deprivation	25% eligible for free school meals while at school. Slight tendency towards living in areas with lower deprivation

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Cluster H: Classroom-Based Learning moving into NEET and short-term learning

Cluster H, shown in (Figure 10) includes young people who spent most, if not all, of Year 12 in Classroom-Based Learning and then moved into Personal Development Opportunities or experienced long periods of NEET. A few young people were in JWTs for small periods of time in Year 13 (shown in yellow towards the bottom). The cluster included 3.5% of the cohort (383 young people) and were characterised by a higher than average level of deprivation and high incidence of special educational needs. At 16%, attainment at GCSE was also a long way below the city average.
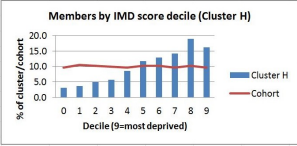
Figure 10: Cluster H

Size of cluster	383 young people (3.5% of the cohort)		
Sex	47% female and 53% male		
Ethnicity	26% from black or minority ethnic groups		
Previous Interventions	4% (17) flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Service		
Experience of School	48% had a special educational need (SEN). 16% had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and Mathematics		
Deprivation		50% eligible for free school meals while at school. Most lived in areas with higher deprivation (12% in the least deprived three and 35% in the most deprived two)	

Cluster F: Unsettled Year 12 moving into sustained Classroom-Based Learning

Cluster F (shown in Figure 11) includes young people who spent the majority of Year 12 in unstable destinations across all destination types but then entered and remained in Classroom-Based Learning for the majority of Year 13. The cluster was one of the smallest with only 1.7% of the cohort (184 young people). It was broadly representative of the population demographically but over-represented by young people from low income households and those with lower academic attainment.
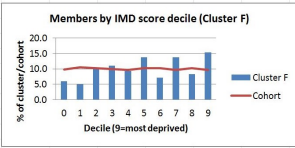
Figure 11: Cluster F

Size of cluster	184 young people (1.7% of the cohort)
Sex	43% female and 57% male
Ethnicity	29% from black or minority ethnic groups
Previous Interventions	2% (4) flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Service
Experience of School	26% had a special educational need (SEN). 33% had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and Maths
Deprivation	39% eligible for free school meals. Spread of deprivation across the deciles although only 11% of the group came from the two least deprived deciles (20 young people).

Cluster E: Short Personal Development Courses with unstable employment

Finally, Cluster E shown in (Figure 12) includes young people who spent the majority of Year 12 and 13 moving in and out of Personal Development Opportunities. Some of the group had experience of short-term Jobs Without Training in Year 13. The cluster included 3.2% of the cohort (354 young people) and was predominantly male with high deprivation and very low attainment at GCSE (only 6% had achieved 5 A*-C grades with English and Mathematics). A large proportion of the group had a special educational need.
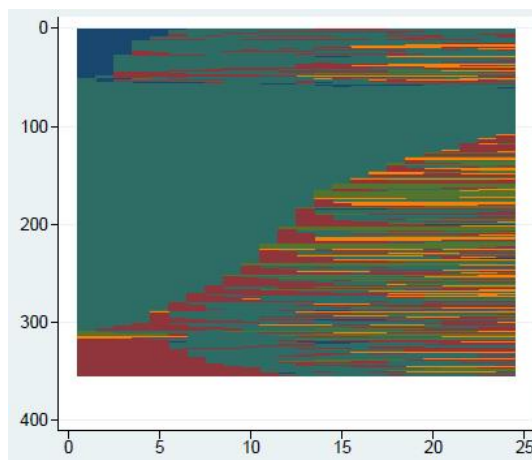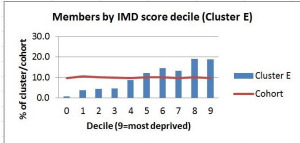
Figure 12: Cluster E

Size of cluster	354 young people (3.2% of the cohort)
Sex	32% female and 68% male
Ethnicity	20% from black or minority ethnic groups
Previous Interventions	6% (21) flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Service
Experience of School	53% had a special educational need (SEN). Only 23 of the group (6%) had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and Maths
Deprivation	High deprivation. 51% eligible for free school meals while at school and 37% were in the two most deprived deciles (compared to 5% in the least two deprived.)

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5.2.2 Employment clusters

Four of the longitudinal clusters included long periods spent in employment. This included Work-Based Learning and Jobs Without Training. They are shown pictorially below.
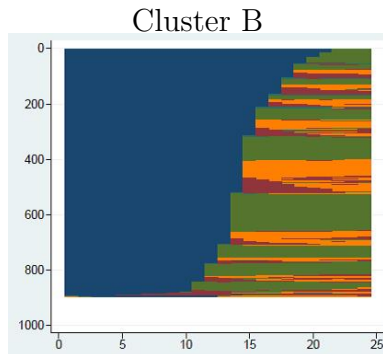
Cluster B

Cluster C

Cluster B

Young people who spent most or all of Year 12 in Classroom-Based Learning and then moved into employment (either Work-Based Learning or a Job Without Training).
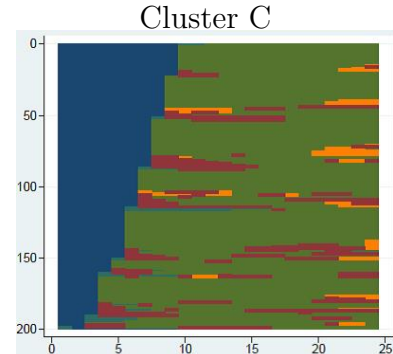
Cluster C

Similar to Cluster B but young people moved from Classroom-Based Learning into employment much sooner (sometimes within two or three months of starting Year 12).
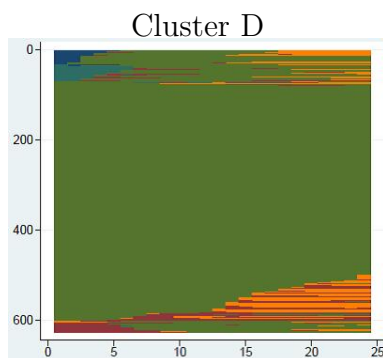
Cluster D

Cluster G

Cluster D

Young people who spent the majority of Year 12 and 13 in Work-Based Learning, although some moved into a Job Without Training in Year 13.
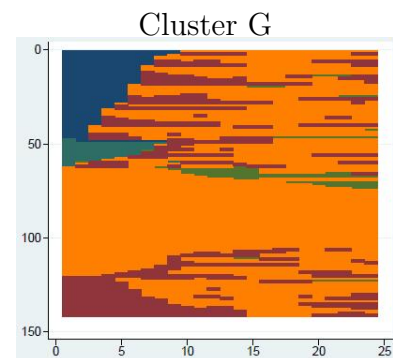
Cluster G

Young people entered a JWT during Year 12 and remained for the majority of the 24 months though with short spells of NEET (an example of 'churn' as referred to by Professor Wolf (2011)).

Cluster B: Classroom-Based Learning moving into Employment with or without training

Cluster B (Figure 13) includes young people who spent the majority of Year 12 in Classroom-Based Learning and the majority of Year 13 in employment. Some of the employment was Work-Based Learning, but the work classified as a Job Without Training was often combined with periods spent in NEET (yellow and red lines). The cluster included 8% of the cohort (897 young people) and was predominantly White British but otherwise broadly representative of the wider cohort.
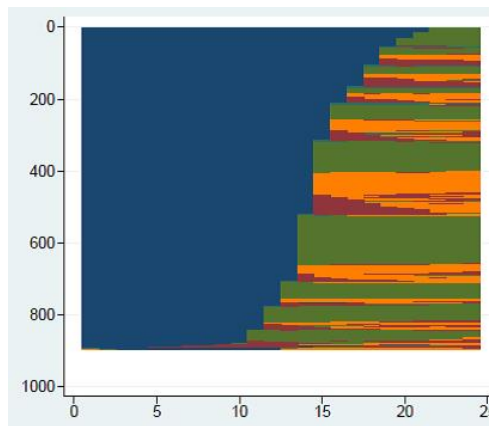
Figure 13: Cluster B

Size of cluster	897 young people (8% of the cohort)
Sex	47% female and 53% male
Ethnicity	12% from black or minority ethnic groups
Previous Interventions	Less than 1% (2) flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Service
Experience of School	29% had a special educational need (SEN). 45% had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and Mathematics
Deprivation	26% eligible for free school meals while at school. Deprivation broadly in line with the wider population, except in the least deprived decile.
Closely aligned interviewees	8 young people: Bianca, Kyle, Naz, Jason, Jade, Ben, Liz, Adrian

Cluster C: Movement from Classroom-based- to Work-Based Learning

Cluster C (shown in Figure 14) includes young people who spent a short time in Classroom-Based Learning in Year 12 before transferring to Work-Based Learning, sometimes including short periods spent in NEET or JWT. Within the RPA legislation criteria, this group would be considered as 'participating' for the majority of the 24 months. Cluster C was one of the smallest with only 199 young people (1.8% of the cohort). It was predominantly White British and was one of only three clusters which contained more females that males.
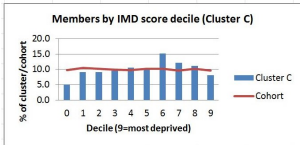
Figure 14: Cluster C

Size of cluster	199 young people (% of the cohort)
Sex	52% female and 48% male
Ethnicity	11% from black or minority ethnic groups
Previous Interventions	2% (3) flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Service
Experience of School	26% had a special educational need (SEN). 50% had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and Maths
Deprivation	34% eligible for free school meals while at school. Deprivation was in line with the wider cohort, though with a higher than expected number of young people in the 7th decile

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Cluster D: Sustained Work-Based Learning with some movement into Jobs Without Training

Cluster D (shown in Figure 15) includes young people who spent the majority of the 24 months in Work-Based Learning, with around a quarter moving into a Job Without Training during Year 13. The cluster included 628 young people (5.7% of the cohort) and was largely male and almost entirely White British. The group had slightly below average GCSE attainment and around average levels of deprivation.
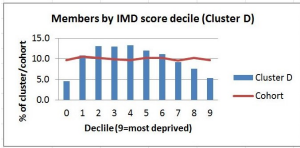
Figure 15: Cluster D

Size of cluster	628 young people (% of the cohort)
Sex	37% female and 63% male
Ethnicity	8% from black or minority ethnic groups
Previous Interventions	1% (5) flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Service
Experience of School	25% had a special educational need (SEN). 43% had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and Maths
Deprivation	22% eligible for free school meals while at school. The majority of the group fell into the middle deprivation deciles with less in the most and least deprived deciles.
Closely aligned interviewees	3 young people: Alice, Jenny, Katie

Cluster G: Jobs Without Training with periods of NEET

Cluster G (shown in Figure 16) includes young people who spent the majority of their time in a Job Without Training but often in unstable employment with some short periods of NEET. 15 of the 28 young people interviewed were most closely aligned with this cluster. With only 1.3% of the cohort (141 young people) this was the smallest of the ten clusters. It was largely male and White British with low attainment and average level of deprivation.
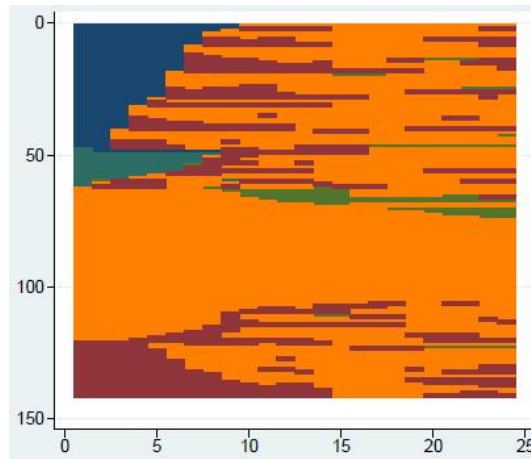
Figure 16: Cluster G

Size of cluster	141 young people (% of the cohort)
Sex	36% female and 64% male
Ethnicity	9% from black or minority ethnic groups
Previous Interventions	4% (6) flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Service
Experience of School	34% had a special educational need (SEN). 20% had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and Maths
Deprivation	35% eligible for free school meals. Even spread across the deprivation except in the least deprived decile.
Closely aligned interviewees	15 young people: Dunya, Emma, Jakub, Aleks, Lukas, Ed, Mark, Rachael, James, Holly, Tanya, Laura, Ellie, Syed, Dika.

5.2.3 NEET clusters

The two remaining clusters represent extended instability, long periods spent in NEET with short periods of time in Classroom-Based Learning or Personal Development Opportunities. They are shown pictorially below.
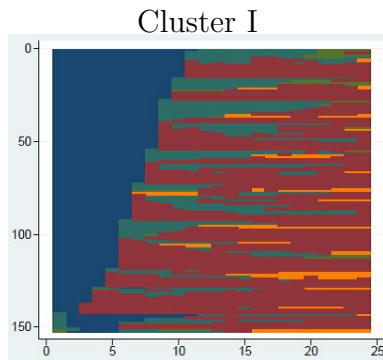
Cluster I

Cluster J

Cluster I

Young people who started Year 12 in Classroom-Based Learning and entered NEET after a few months.
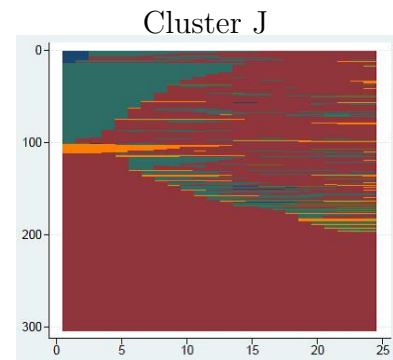
Cluster J

Young people who spent the majority of the 24 months in NEET with short periods in Personal Development Opportunities or JWTs.

■	school/college
■	short courses or personal development
■	work-based learning
■	job without training
■	NEET
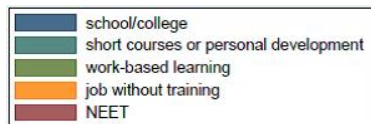
Cluster I: NEET churn following early departure from Classroom-Based Learning

Cluster I (shown in Figure 17) includes young people who moved out of Classroom-Based Learning in the first few months of Year 12 and spent the remainder of the 24 months churning between NEET and Personal Development Opportunities and (less commonly) in JWTs. The cluster included 1.4% of the cohort (152 young people) and members had very high levels of deprivation (61% were eligible for Free School Meals at secondary school) and low attainment at GCSE.
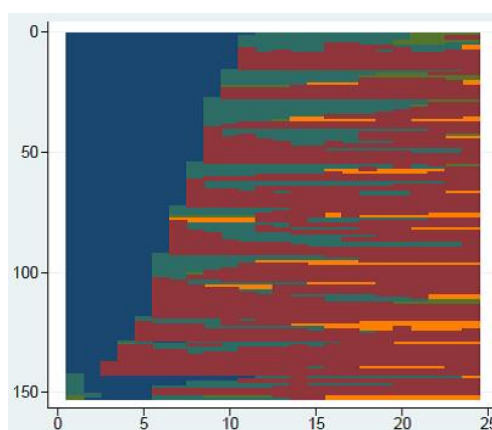
Figure 17: Cluster I

Size of cluster	152 young people (% of the cohort)
Sex	49% female and 51% male
Ethnicity	23% from black or minority ethnic groups
Previous Interventions	7% (10) flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Service
Experience of School	46% had a special educational need (SEN). 15% had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and Maths
Deprivation	61% eligible for free school meals. Only 11% of the young people fell into the 4 least deprived deciles, and 42% were in the two most deprived.

Cluster J: NEET with some short Personal Development Courses and unstable employment

The final cluster, Cluster J, (shown in Figure 18) includes young people who spent the majority of the 24 months in NEET with short periods in Personal Development or employment. The cluster included 304 young people (2.8% of the cohort). Only 13 had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE with English and Mathematics (4%) and there were high levels of special educational need and deprivation.
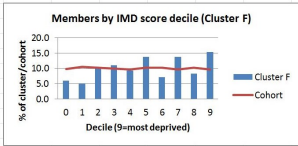
Figure 18: Cluster J

Size of cluster	304 young people (% of the cohort)
Sex	42% female and 58% male
Ethnicity	19% from black or minority ethnic groups
Previous Interventions	13% (39) flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Service
Experience of School	44% had a special educational need (SEN) and only 4% had achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSE including
Deprivation	57% eligible for free school meals. Very high levels of deprivation, with 87% of members living in the five most deprived deciles
Closely aligned interviewees	2 young people: Kirsty, Matt

5.3 Predicting and understanding transitions

The longitudinal clusters presented in Section 5.2 offer a way of exploring the different transitions made by young people from two school leaving cohorts. This final section of Chapter Five uses logistic regression modelling to explore the impact of different factors on membership of each of the clusters and to consider the value of these factors in predicting membership of each cluster for future cohorts. The model outputs (shown on the next page and throughout the remainder of the chapter) show the relationships between independent variables and membership of a particular cluster. The outputs also detail the extent to which factors affecting cluster membership can be defined as statistically significant (i.e. not just down to chance) and which can therefore be applied to future school-leaving cohorts. An argument is made for using this method of Optimal Matching, Cluster Analysis and Logistic Regression Modelling (collectively referred to as sequence analysis) to define and evaluate post-16 learning journeys more effectively than analysing snapshot data, when shaping policy development and service provision. The model incorporates eight independent variables and measures the level of impact they have on the likelihood of being a member of a specific longitudinal cluster. The variables are as follows:

- Being Male

- Being from a BME group

- Being eligible for Free School Meals

- Being flagged for intervention by the Youth Offending Team

- Having 5 A*-C grades at GCSE including English Language and Mathematics

- Having a Special Educational Need (SEN)

- Decile in which neighbourhood Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score falls

- Living in one of Sheffield's seven Service Districts (see page 14)

Young people all have their own stories to tell about what they have done and why they did it. Along with the model outputs the remaining chapters seek to capture elements of those stories to shed light on particular areas of interest.

Var	Clust B	Clust C	Clust D	Clust E	Clust F	Clust G	Clust H	Clust I	Clust J
Male	1.14	0.96	1.80***	1.84***	1.26	1.58*	0.97	0.91	1.05
BME	0.37***	0.32***	0.29***	0.43***	0.94	0.21***	0.54***	0.43***	0.28***
FSM	0.72**	1.23	0.61***	1.43**	1.24	0.58*	1.64***	2.21***	1.60**
YOT Flag	0.87	7.08**	2.52	10.33***	5.35**	13.73***	11.41***	12.84***	32.68***
5 A*-C	0.42***	0.54***	0.36***	0.07***	0.28***	0.13***	0.16***	0.19***	0.04***
SEN	0.99	0.86	0.76*	1.74***	0.79	0.81	1.54***	1.47*	1.17
IMD Dec1	1.45	0.93	1.25	3.15	0.70	11.33*	0.76	1.56	1.25
IMD Dec2	1.71*	0.81	1.53	3.26	1.52	7.69	0.92	4.73	0.77
IMD Dec3	1.96**	0.99	1.63	3.10	1.42	12.73*	1.01	1.77	1.99
IMD Dec4	1.90**	1.15	1.73*	5.90**	1.33	12.10*	1.36	6.46	2.74
IMD Dec5	2.25***	1.03	1.67	6.27**	1.45	10.07*	1.83	8.48*	4.63*
IMD Dec6	2.27***	1.56	1.44	7.43**	0.96	15.43**	1.63	13.44*	5.15*
IMD Dec7	2.34***	1.67	1.81*	8.55***	2.33	17.74**	1.87	12.76*	5.59**
IMD Dec8	2.39***	1.42	1.31	9.61***	1.23	11.25*	1.91	17.66**	3.85*
IMD Dec9	2.00**	0.93	0.91	8.89***	2.33	9.55*	1.79	13.59*	4.14*
AreaB	0.67**	0.78	0.70*	1.07	0.70	0.80	1.26	0.76	0.95
AreaC	0.64***	0.77	0.68*	1.13	0.67	1.08	0.90	0.99	1.00
AreaD	0.75*	0.86	1.02	0.91	1.12	0.64	0.78	1.08	0.75
AreaE	0.59***	0.39**	0.45***	0.98	0.81	0.66	0.96	1.39	0.69
AreaF	0.44***	0.25***	0.31***	0.91	0.84	0.63	0.55*	0.85	0.47
AreaG	0.76*	0.99	0.65**	1.10	0.85	0.62	0.83	1.43	0.73
cons	0.18***	0.06***	0.15***	0.01***	0.03***	0.01***	0.07***	0.00***	0.03***

Number of observations: 10,458, Pseudo R2: 0.1104

5.3.1 Theme one: Personal characteristics

As Chapter Three described, an individual's personal characteristics and experiences influence the way they engage with the world around them and how they form opinions and make decisions. The personal characteristics included in this section are sex, ethnicity and social class. Table 2 below includes an extract of the model output that relates to sex and ethnicity. Social class is explored through interview extracts. Sex is defined as either male or female and ethnicity is divided into the binary 'White British' (WB) or 'Black and Minority Ethnic' (BME) groups as recorded by the school census. There was an approximate 50:50 split in the sex of the population of 16 and 17 year olds included in this model, with a 23:77 split between BME and WB young people respectively.

	Male	BME
Classroom-Based Clusters		
Cluster H: Classroom-Based Learning moving into NEET and short-term learning	0.97	0.54***
Cluster F: Unsettled Year 12 moving into sustained Classroom-Based Learning	1.26	0.94
Cluster E: Short Personal Development Courses with unstable employment	1.84***	0.43***
Employment Clusters		
Cluster B: Classroom-Based Learning moving into Employment with or without training	1.14	0.37***
Cluster C: Movement from Classroom-based- to Work-Based Learning	0.96	0.32***
Cluster D: Sustained Work-Based Learning with some movement into Jobs Without Training	1.80***	0.29***
Cluster G: Jobs Without Training with periods of NEET	1.58*	0.21***
NEET Clusters		
Cluster I: 'NEET churn following early departure from Classroom-Based Learning	0.91	0.43***
Cluster J: NEET with some short Personal Development Courses and unstable employment	1.05	0.28***

Sex

Unprompted, none of the young people interviewed mentioned either their sex or ethnicity as factors that had influenced what they had done after leaving Year 11. The model however, suggests apparent differences in the pathways taken by young people based on these factors. Being male made the most difference to entry into transitions involving unstable employment (raising the likelihood of being in Cluster E by 84% and Cluster G by 58%). Being male also had a significant impact on entry

into more stable work-based learning from the start of Year 12 (Cluster D) whereas it appears to be the case that females were more likely to enter work-based learning later in their transition pathway (Cluster C), though this was not significant.

In interviews with young people there was perhaps an implicit indication that young women had a more time-conscious way of conceptualising their post-16 pathways. Several young women for example explained how their desire to start a family was a barrier to re-engaging with learning or as a reason for pursuing one kind of career over another. One such young person was Dunya who talked extensively about wanting to get married and raise a family, and throughout this discussion appeared to take it as read that this would mean giving up work or further study:

> **Dunya**: I'll probably have a baby and I'm like, do I not want to see my babies to grow up? I'm going to miss that part [if I'm studying]. I know some girls like ... but what about the baby like, you're not going to see it, you're not going to see that bit, that's the most important thing.

Similarly, amongst the young men there was some concensus around their duty to be the main earner should they become parents. It is worth noting that the model considers only the types of destinations that make up transitions and not the pursuit of different areas of study or employment where gendered differences are more evidential (see Chapter Three). These differences are explored in later chapters.

Ethnicity

With all other variables held constant, coming from a BME group decreased a young person's odds of entering all clusters except Cluster A when compared to their White British peers. For example, young people from BME groups were only between about one and two fifths as likely as their White British peers to belong to one of the employment clusters (B, C, D and G). Coming from a BME group had the least impact in Classroom-Based clusters (H, F, and E) although they were still much less likely than White British young people to belong to these. Overall they tended to be more likely to be in clusters that included a combination of learning and NEET rather than sustained employment. Although specific ethnic groups were too small to model effectively, there appeared to be higher proportions of Pakistani,

Bangladeshi, and Black African groups going into JWT during the two years when compared to other groups.

Discussion on ethnicity in relation to learning pathways did not naturally occur in interviews with young people but when asked directly most young people from BME groups said that, aside from language barriers where relevant, their ethnic origin had not influenced their decisions. An exception was a young woman from the Roma community who talked about the bad feelings towards her community from within the groups she encountered, which had directly impacted on her mental health and consequent decision to leave education at the earliest opportunity. Mostly though, two specific elements of ethnicity and culture came out of conversations with young people.

First, some young people talked about their families having come to the UK in search of greater employment options and a better education system. These young people talked about wanting to do well at school but equally wanting to get a secure job as soon as possible. While not unique to migrants, this paradox of highly valuing education and choosing to leave school at the earliest opportunity was particularly common amongst those who had not been born in the UK, possibly because they were perhaps the least familiar with the relationship between the education system and the labour market. Syed, a Pakistani male born in the UK, talked about his ambitions for the future referencing his wish for a 'professional English job', by which he meant finding a job outside the world of restaurant work in which his family and friends were largely employed:

> **Syed:** I would always like to work in a call centre, or like a professional English job, like paying me good, like I wouldn't have to have different rotas would be a nice thing, like on a timetable.

For young people within migrant families and communities who have arrived for economic reasons, finding work and earning a living was seen as a priority but this did not necessarily reflect the wishes of their families. An emphasis on education and becoming more qualified than previous family generations appeared to be a prominent view of parents but young people disagreed with these values and instead talked about their wish to better their standard of living through employment.

There are a whole host of reasons why ethnicity and sex might have an impact on a young person's post-16 transition making but, compared to other factors in

a person's life, neither was discussed in any great depth by young people in their interviews. BME is a problematic way of categorising young people. A young person of Black Caribbean descent born in the UK to British-born parents may well reserve some cultural or religious elements of their Caribbean roots, but undoubtedly has more in common with their White British peers than a White European who has recently arrived in the UK. Discussion related to ethnicity was largely based on more practical aspects of not being born in England, namely issues such as needing to learn a new language and reduced access to certain personal networks.

Social class

Chapter Three discussed the merits of considering social class in the context of post-16 decision making and while perhaps a crude way of grouping people, it nevertheless provides some context for the responses young people gave to various questions. The chapter described the impact of class within a context of three elements: choice, available resources, and values. There were no independent variables in the model to represent social class but an extract from the interview with James, a 17 year old with no academic qualifications working with his dad, provides a good example of the impact it had on perspectives:

> **James:** Well this is the funny thing, one of the things that sort of made me stay on with it all [at work] is that my dad, he never did anything, he did the same things as me, just a be a little shit and all of that and never got any GCSEs or what have you and that. And he's got like a nice house and a nice car and his own business, so it just shows me that you don't need all of that really, but people think you do, do you see what I mean, you just have to put your mind to it and you can do it really, that's the way I see it.

This fairly short passage demonstrates how the key elements of class difference can play out in young people's perceptions of their transition to adult life. First, he argues the reason for his success at work was that he had chosen to see it through and to persevere. Other factors supporting his success such as family support and access to employment (cultural capital) made this choice possible. Secondly, he talks about the lifestyle he sees as desirable (the "nice house, nice car" comment)

which suggests the value based on his job is its ability to provide him with a similar lifestyle. And third, he makes mention of the widely held societal value placed in education ("but people think you do") in reference to his lack of qualifications but success in employment. His portrayal of his lifestyle demonstrates one way in which cultural capital and financial stability, while often associated with middle class lifestyles, are distinct from social class. An interview conducted with Dunya, a 17 year old who had not achieved the GCSE grades required to study for A-levels, offers an alternative manifestation of these elements of social class:

> **Researcher:** Would you still live in Sheffield [in five years]?
>
> **Dunya:** Yeah, I wouldn't want to move out, um, maybe I don't know, depends whether my partner's from a different area, don't know, but I probably think Sheffield, have a family, and I would want a like, I don't know, I like my work at [retail chain], but is that what I want to do for the rest of my life? Or maybe next I'd want to be a manager at [the same place], something like that, or like a bigger firm, a bigger branch of [the company], something like that, I don't know, or maybe a different company, like [a different retail chain], something better.

Dunya was working in a high street retail chain during both of her interviews and her vision for the future included marriage and children, and working in a job that she enjoyed and which would pay sufficiently to support her desired lifestyle.

While James felt his choices would lead him to success, as similar choices had done for his father, the basis of Dunya's decision making had stemmed from what was necessary and what she knew. Choosing work involved finding something that paid enough, was sufficiently easy to get to, and which she knew she was able to do. Choosing where to live involved either staying in an area she knew that was close to her existing support networks, or moving to a new place for the sake of a partner's job or family. The notion that she could (or would want to) expand her life aspirations beyond the small community in which she had grown up or beyond the area of work she had arguably 'fallen in to' at 16, were not deemed as sensible. She, like many of the others involved in the research, understood the notion of FE, apprenticeships and university but held more value in focusing on the here-and-now of the shorter-term benefits and enjoyment of the life she was already accustomed

to. This differs from more traditionally middle class perspectives which promote personal improvement through expanded horizons (Croll, 2008; Atkins, 2017).

5.3.2 Theme two: Personal circumstances

Sex, ethnicity and social class are far from the only factors attached to a young person that influence their choices and pathways. Also important are external factors: the things that have happened (or are happening) to a young person that shape and change the way in which they view the world or make decisions. The young people interviewed described a whole host of personal challenges and experiences they had faced while navigating their transition from education into employment. As young people talked about the aspects of their lives which stood out as particularly challenging or memorable it became evident that these things not only influenced the learning destinations they entered at 16 but also on how they experienced those initial and subsequent destinations. While not presented as a representative sample of the wider JWT population, the range and extent of the personal challenges encountered by the 28 young people who were interviewed does lend some weight to the evidence of difficulties that are faced by young people following non-traditional post-16 routes. The four areas explored in Part 5.3.2 are: financial security, living arrangements, illness and disability, and caring responsibilities.

The model included two independent variables that captured personal circumstances. The first was their eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) during secondary school, a binary measure of low household income. The second was a flag used in the council database to identify young people who were deemed to be most at risk of becoming involved in criminal activity. These young people had taken part, or been invited to take part, in programmes run by the Youth Offending Team (YOT) but had not necessarily already been involved in any criminal behaviour. The YOT flag appeared to make the most impact on membership of clusters that involved significant time spent in NEET (H, G, I and J) but increased the likelihood of membership of all but one of the clusters when compared to following a sustained CBL pathway (Cluster A). This may in part be because in predicting the risk of involvement in criminal activity, some of the same factors were considered as those well documented for being common amongst young people in NEET. An extract of the model output for these two variables is shown in Table 3 on the next page and the FSM output is

included within the discussion of financial security.

Table 3: FSM eligibility and YOT flag: Logistic Regression Output

	FSM	YOT
Classroom-Based Clusters		
Cluster H: Classroom-Based Learning moving into NEET and short-term learning	1.64***	11.41***
Cluster F: Unsettled Year 12 moving into sustained Classroom-Based Learning	1.24	5.35**
Cluster E: Short Personal Development Courses with unstable employment	1.43**	10.33***
Employment Clusters		
Cluster B: Classroom-Based Learning moving into Employment with or without training	0.72**	0.87
Cluster C: Movement from Classroom-based- to Work-Based Learning	1.23	7.08**
Cluster D: Sustained Work-Based Learning with some movement into Jobs Without Training	0.61***	2.52
Cluster G: Jobs Without Training with periods of NEET	0.58*	13.73***
NEET Clusters		
Cluster I: NEET churn following early departure from Classroom-Based Learning	2.21***	12.84***
Cluster J: NEET with some short Personal Development Courses and unstable employment	1.60**	32.68***

Financial security

Coming from a low income family had a significant positive impact on the odds of entering all but three of the longitudinal clusters. What is immediately apparent is that, keeping all other variables constant, coming from a low income family significantly reduced the odds (by up to 42%) of a young person entering a work-based trajectory (Clusters B, D and G) when compared to staying in Classroom-Based

Learning for the whole 24 months. This implies that the young people who enter employment (with or without training) are not those from the poorest households in the city. In the other two groups of clusters (classroom-based and NEET) coming from a low income household increased the odds of following those pathways instead of staying in sustained Classroom-Based Learning.

Money was discussed in some detail in all of the interviews. Inevitably so perhaps given the integral part it has in employment, which formed a key focus of the investigation. A wish to earn money was a common reason that young people gave for dropping out of learning opportunities, but often earning potential was only one of a complex and unrefined web of reasons, as in the example of Jason below:

> **Researcher:** What do you think persuaded you to drop out and get a job, what was it that was the final straw?
>
> **Jason:** I don't know to be honest, if I was going to answer it would be more like money more than anything, because obviously you don't get paid at college.

Improved financial circumstances were often viewed by young people as a means for gaining personal independence. Many young people expressed a desire to stop asking their parents for money or felt they should be earning "their own way" now that they were sixteen.

As Jenny's story (told in the next chapter) will demonstrate, the financial circumstances of a household had had, in some cases, a direct impact on decisions about post-16 learning. In all likelihood Jenny's decision to drop out of her level 3 vocational course, due to being unable to ask her parents for the associated equipment costs, could have been averted by applying for the financial support available to students from low incomes. Jenny mentioned being aware of the existence of this support but that the emotional challenge of asking for the support was beyond what she felt capable of:

> **Jenny:** It was a bit embarrassing so I didn't really want to mention it so I just like, I just said '*I've had enough I'm not coming back*', and maybe if I was a bit smarter I would have maybe sat down and talked about it, but I was just, I was just so embarrassed and so upset that I couldn't do it, I didn't want to be there anymore, so I didn't like tell people what

was going on, maybe thinking about it now I should have probably, but I were a bit stupid and naïve, sort of.

Numerous other young people's stories contained examples of the impact on learning outcomes caused by striving for financial security. Stories such as theirs and Jenny's provide examples of how financial security was not simply about access to resources and accurate marketing of course costs, but also about personal understanding of structures and systems, feelings of pride and the personal desire to be self-sufficient or independent of financial help.

Living arrangements

Living arrangements (where a young person lived and with whom) had, at times, had an impact on the way in which they engaged with learning and employment opportunities. The young people interviewed were for the most part living in their family home with either one or both of their parents and sometimes a step-parent. Three of the young people lived with their grandparents, and one was living independently with friends. None of the young people interviewed were in the care of the local authority.

Several young people talked about their home feeling quite crowded and that this was motivating them to seriously consider the options for moving out. For some this formed part of a general feeling for the near-future about wanting to be more independent, but for others (like Jenny), the desire to secure employment and a wage that would enable them to live independently was a really pressing issue:

> **Jenny:** I've got to push myself more to move out and be on my own feet because there are a lot of people who are living in my house at the minute so getting a job is a top priority for me.

Jakub, on the other hand, had given up his A-levels in order to allow his mother to return to work so his family could cover the rent on their house. He did not mention in either of his interviews about looking for state support with childcare which would have enabled him to continue to attend post-16 education, or about considering any alternative to putting his education on hold to support his family (despite clearly being upset about having to do so). Emma, the only young person living away from the family home, explained that secure employment was vital and

that although she would like to go to university and pursue a teaching career, in the shorter term she needed to pay her rent and other living costs and that she could not afford to give up her job.

Caring responsibilities

As would be expected for their age, nearly all the young people talked about depending extensively on the financial and emotional support of their parents or close family, but for four of the young people interviewed, significant caring responsibilities were reversed.

Kirsty talked about how her mother had left home when she was 12 (she did not know her father) and how she had moved (along with her two siblings) to live with her grandparents, who both now required personal and non-personal care:

> **Kirsty:** [I] cook and clean, and my sister and brother still live there as well so I still get all their clothes ready and do all the washing and stuff like that … my granddad's normally like, he's normally quite fit but my nan's got like arthritis and she doesn't normally like always feel fit enough to do stuff.

While she did not link her caring responsibilities with her decision to work rather than participate in learning, Kirsty did disclose a number of emotional and health difficulties that she had experienced while at school which had ultimately prevented her gaining any qualifications and which had given her a very negative attitude towards pursuing any further education in the future.

Jakub's story, told in Chapter Six, directly linked providing child care for his sister with leaving an A-level course, which led in the longer term to his abandonment of a university career route. Jakub's parents who "kept themselves to themselves" did not speak English and it is entirely possible that they were unaware of the alternative childcare options available to them. Matt, who had struggled since leaving school to hold down any kind of long term employment, talked about how looking after his mum made his existing problems even harder:

> **Matt:** My mum she's got dyslexia herself and she's blind so I have to help her out all the time so it's not easy [finding work] at all.

The data on young people who provide significant care for members of their families (often referred to as young carers) is patchy and massively unreported, although the data available nationally suggests that a large percentage of them are NEET and that only a few continue in learning post-16.

Illness and disability

An exceptionally high number of those interviewed reported experiencing mental health difficulties. In some cases, as in Matt's story, this was mentioned in passing, as a way of expressing a sense of hopelessness about their situation:

> **Matt:** I've had no help ... it's right hard for me to like read stuff and spell stuff. And I've been getting depression thinking of what I'm going to do and that and where I'm going to be ... I'm on my own.

For others, it was implied through descriptions of how they had felt about going to work, as in the cases of Katie and Alice:

> **Katie:** I'm getting like really tired, like I don't want to get up, but as soon as I get there I'm fine.

> **Alice:** It took a while to get used to [working]. I went down a like, a down peak for a while, I felt drained all the time.

For others, severe mental health problems had led to significant impacts on the way they were able to conduct their daily lives. For Kirsty it had led to multiple suicide attempts and time spent in hospital. For Ed a battle with depression-induced agoraphobia had caused him to leave his job and spend six months in NEET. He talked about the impact of sustained bullying by a colleague culminating in an incident at work which had led him to leave. At the time of his second interview Ed was back at work (in a new job) and was a great deal more positive about his situation, but the longer term impact of the depression was still evident in the way he talked about no longer feeling inspired to plan a career, and being "grumpy and old" while he passively "waited for inspiration". Lukas, (whose story will be told in Chapter Six), was the only young person to report a physical illness as a reason for his learning choices, but he too described the emotional toll of recovering from the substantial treatment process and that he had had counselling to help with this:

> **Lukas:** [Sixth form] was just too much, and I just weren't enjoying it,
> and obviously [it was] like the stress of like being tired all the time and
> having to worry about staying up late and doing my work.

Based on the stories told by the young people who were interviewed, the importance
of pastoral care in re-engagement and support work with young people, and in work
places cannot be over-estimated.

5.3.3   Theme three: Place and space

Part 5.5.3 is divided into three areas of interest: experience of places, place
deprivation and experience of travelling between places. As discussed in Chapter
Three the places where young people live, work and socialise are likely to have an
impact on the choices they make in life, including about their learning pathways.
The regression model included two measures of place. The first measure was the
area of the city in which a young person lived. The seven 'Service Districts' used
by the City Council in local service delivery were used for this. They are shown in
reference to their locations on the map below and thereafter are referred to by their
letters alone.
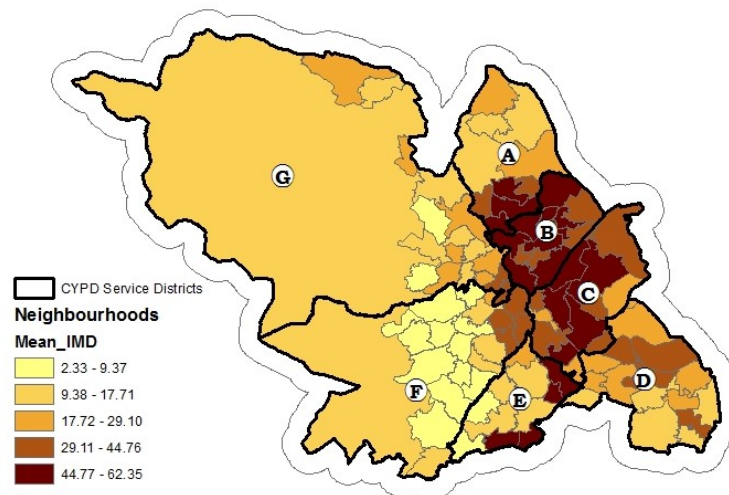
Figure 19: Service District Areas

Figure 19 also shows the scores generated for neighbourhood areas by the Index
of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), and these were used as the second measure of place.
Young people were allocated an IMD score based on their residential postcode and
the scores of all young people in the model were divided into deciles for use in

the model (i.e. Decile 1 contained young people from the least deprived 10% of the cohort's neighbourhoods and Decile 10 contained those from the most deprived 10%.) The IMD includes a range of factors and the use of the score was intended to give some indication of the kind of environment in which each young person lived, as well as giving an indication of their own possible level of deprivation.

The young people interviewed came from different neighbourhoods, had attended a variety of schools and post-16 learning providers and were working in a range of sectors. In addition to the model outputs, this section explores how the young people in JWT experienced their surroundings and how this had impacted on what they had decided to do and how easy they had found it to follow through with those decisions.

Experience of places

The extract of model outcomes shown in Table 4 demonstrates that in many of the clusters, place made no significant impact when compared to the effect of other variables. This is likely to be in part due to the challenge identified in Chapter Three that, in quantitative analysis, places can often act simply as 'containers' for groups of variables and that this disguises or distorts the effect of places themselves (McCulloch, 2001; Smith et al, 2001; Joshi, 2001). This means that clusters of variables like ethnicity, deprivation and educational attainment are often what makes the difference to area outcomes rather than characteristics of the place itself. Notably however, the most visible effects of place were in the employment clusters (B, C, and D), with young people from the western districts being significantly less likely to be in these clusters than young people from the other districts.

The higher odds of employment-centric trajectories in the East of the city could be attributed to the location of the city's largest industrial areas, which may both encourage a culture of industrial work and increase the number of Work-Based Learning opportunities available. Equally, the higher number of 'graduate parents' in the west may mean more young people in the west of the city are encouraged or cajoled into staying in post-16 education.

Cluster	Area B	Area C	Area D	Area E	Area F	Area G
Classroom-Based Clusters						
Cluster H: Classroom-Based Learning moving into NEET and short-term learning	1.26	0.90	0.78	0.96	0.55*	0.83
Cluster F: Unsettled Year 12 moving into sustained Classroom-Based Learning	0.70	0.67	1.12	0.81	0.84	0.85
Cluster E: Short Personal Development Courses with unstable employment	1.07	1.13	0.91	0.98	0.91	1.10
Employment Clusters						
Cluster B: Classroom-Based Learning moving into Employment with or without training	0.67**	0.64***	0.75*	0.59***	0.44***	0.76*
Cluster C: Movement from Classroom-based- to Work-Based Learning	0.78	0.77	0.86	0.39**	0.25***	0.99
Cluster D: Sustained Work-Based Learning with some movement into Jobs Without Training	0.70*	0.68*	1.02	0.45***	0.31***	0.65**
Cluster G: Jobs Without Training with periods of NEET	0.80	1.08	0.64	0.66	0.63	0.62
NEET Clusters						
Cluster I: NEET churn following early departure from Classroom-Based Learning	0.76	0.99	1.08	1.39	0.85	1.43
Cluster J: NEET with some short Personal Development Courses and unstable employment	0.95	1.00	0.75	0.69	0.47	0.73

When asked about their engagement with their local areas, many of the participants talked about spending the majority of their time within a few streets of their home. This varied between general alignment with Jenny's description of being a "home kind of person" to the more extreme cases of Dika and Ed who both talked about suffering from mental health induced agoraphobia leading them to rarely leave the streets where they lived and worked. Going to work had broadened the geographical horizons of some of the sample due to creating a necessity to travel further afield and in some cases right across the city. Spending time away from their residential area often changed the outlook of young people towards their future plans.

As a young man living in the most deprived ward of Sheffield, in an Eastern European single parent family, Lukas would be considered one of the most 'at risk' of his peers for a whole host of negative social outcomes. He was, however, very academically motivated and talked about his plans for university and building a better life for himself. Two elements of his up-bringing stood out as of particular importance in this world perspective. Firstly, his mother had a professional job and appeared to understand the higher education environment despite not having been herself. Secondly, his attendance at a high performing school in another part of the city had led him to socialise with peers from different social and economic backgrounds. While he talked extensively about his perception of the problems in his area (high crime, lack of cleanliness, high GP waiting times, closure of amenities) he also talked about feeling able to 'escape' the fate of his neighbours by getting a good education:

> **Lukas:** It's just an area that seems to be in decline ... I feel sorry for the people who have to, who don't have any way of getting out.

Place deprivation

Previous research and theoretical work shows that young people's decision making processes (and subsequence decisions) take place within social contexts (France, 2007; Cockburn, 2001; Evans, 2007), suggesting that the level of deprivation a young person is subjected to has an impact both on their access to resources, *and* on the way in which they view and value those resources. Most young people interviewed

lived in areas of relative deprivation and this had both positive and negative influences on the choices they made.

Several young people talked about 'needing' to go to work, or wanting to earn money, but only two explicitly talked about paying rent or the need to earn money in order to pay key living expenses. Lukas talked about wanting to go to university in order to pursue a professional career that would ensure he could always be financially secure enough to choose where to live. His experience of being 'surrounded' by poverty and crime, along with understanding how his mum was 'trapped' by the very low house prices in his area, motivated him to want to do better for himself than his family had been able to. As the extract of the regression output in Table 5 shows, looking at the relationship between living in a deprived area and entry into different learning trajectories revealed that area deprivation had a significant impact on five of the clusters in particular.

Across all the employment clusters, increased deprivation increased the likelihood of cluster membership. The difference between the level of this impact was quite stark with the impact of some IMD deciles increasing the odds of belonging to Cluster G (for example) by over 17 times while the same decile only increased the odds of other employment clusters by 80 or 100%. Cluster G, which combined JWT and NEET, had a relatively well distributed membership across the deprivation deciles but, because of an almost non-existent presence in the least deprived decile, the impact of being in any of the other deciles made a large impact on the odds ratios of being in the cluster. Comparing these results with the effects of eligibility for Free School Meals (in Part 5.3.2) suggests that young people who follow work-based trajectories come from some of the most deprived areas but not from the poorest families.

Table 5: Index of Multiple Deprivation score: Logistic Regression Output

Cluster	IMD Decile 1	IMD Decile 2	IMD Decile 3	IMD Decile 4	IMD Decile 5	IMD Decile 6	IMD Decile 7	IMD Decile 8	IMD Decile 9
Classroom-Based Clusters									
Cluster H: CBL moving into NEET and short-term learning	0.76	0.92	1.01	1.36	1.83	1.63	1.87	1.91	1.79
Cluster F: Unsettled Year 12 moving into sustained CBL	0.70	1.52	1.42	1.33	1.45	0.96	2.33	1.23	2.33
Cluster E: Short PDOs with unstable employment	3.15	3.26	3.10	5.90**	6.27**	7.43**	8.55***	9.61***	8.89***
Employment Clusters									
Cluster B: CBL moving into Employment with or without training	1.45	1.71*	1.96**	1.90**	2.25***	2.27***	2.34***	2.39***	2.00**
Cluster C: Movement from CBL to WBL	0.93	0.81	0.99	1.15	1.03	1.56	1.67	1.42	0.93
Cluster D: Sustained WBL with some movement into JWT	1.25	1.53	1.63	1.73*	1.67	1.44	1.81*	1.31	0.91
Cluster G: JWTs with periods of NEET	11.33*	7.69	12.73*	12.10*	10.07*	15.43**	17.74**	11.25*	9.55*
NEET Clusters									
Cluster I: NEET churn after leaving CBL	1.56	4.73	1.77	6.46	8.48*	13.44*	12.76*	17.66**	13.59*
Cluster J: NEET with some short PDOs and unstable employment	1.25	0.77	1.99	2.74	4.63*	5.15*	5.59**	3.85*	4.14*

In interviews, young people had mixed ideas about the areas in which they lived. They often described their neighbourhood as 'a bit rough' but went on to clarify that it was not as bad as its reputation or that even if some people had problems there it was alright for them because a lot of their family lived there and they knew most people. This mismatch between reputation and personal experience was common and a sense of community was often felt to be an important factor in deciding on the merits of an area. However, young people were all too aware of the reputations of certain areas which were not always based on experience but rather on local knowledge.

In their interviews, young people talked about a range of characteristics that they considered constituted a nice area. Descriptions were repeatedly based on a wider perception of what society sees as positive (affluent, suburban, good schools, quiet roads etc.) but there were also divides in young people's views based on their regional location. For example, young people sometimes made reference to the 'niceness' of the south west of the city but also suggested that the more affluent areas of the city came with other issues including seeming pretentious or attracting large numbers of university students, neither of which was considered as a positive characteristic.

When asked to mark on a map of the city which areas they felt were good, safe or nice and which were bad, unsafe or rough, a few young people said that they so seldom left their own area that they didn't know anything about anywhere else, whereas others qualified their decisions by explaining that they reflected reputation rather than a definite reality. A third group tended towards explaining how the selections they were making were different to how other people would classify areas, because of local networks and a feeling of belonging related to having lived somewhere:

> **Emma:** The thing is, I would be quite happy living here because that's where my family is. I know the area isn't particularly nice, but the houses are big, you get a lot for your money. The gardens are big, I've got a dog. Like, it makes sense, like I consider that to be a nice safe area for me to be.

The mix of views held by young people in JWT are perhaps not so out of line with those of other members of the public. The young people in this research were

for the most part motivated and hard working with ambitions for the future and any friends or colleagues that they mentioned were following similar paths. Generic comments about youthful anti-social behaviour were not uncommon but negative comments made about young people were aimed at anonymous groups of whom the interview participants were aware but did not know personally.

Experience of travel

The final element of place explored in this research was on experience of travel and in particular the use of public and private transport to make journeys to work and education.

In their interviews, many young people talked about only wanting to travel very short distances (one or two kilometres) to work or training although there was a mixed response about acceptable travel distances. More important was the time and difficulty of journeys and in some cases young people explained how this had put them off certain post-16 options or led to them dropping out of opportunities they had originally been quite passionate about pursuing:

> **Emma:** It took me over an hour to get there [to the learning provider]... and by the time, if I got up late, for example, by the time I'd got up, got ready, got there, I'd be like, *yeah I'll just do [the work] from home again.*

In almost all cases there would be a way of negotiating a way of traveling to any destination across the city. As Emma's words reflect however, for those who are less motivated or generally unsure about what they would like to do next, the proximity of providers is likely to play a role in where they choose to go.

> **Alice:** [The bus] used to be like once at morning once at night so you'd catch the one in the morning even if your course wasn't till like twelve and then you'd have to catch the one at night. So it wasn't flexible either and it took ages to get there.

An ability and willingness to travel was also reflected in the way young workers spent their social time. The layout of Sheffield, with a main city centre and its many settlements and communities further afield, made transport a big factor in how young people chose to socialise.

> **Dunya:** Sometimes [people from work will] go for a meal and then obviously go into town afterwards or something, and I always think like how am I going to get back and I'll have to beg for a lift from someone, well not beg them, but you know it's just a hassle.

In describing where they lived lots of the young people talked, unprompted, about public transport links being one of the benefits of their neighbourhoods. However, when talking about getting to work, the (sometimes prohibitive) cost of using this public transport was raised on a number of occasions.

> **Researcher:** I think you mentioned before that transport was quite good, like into town
>
> **Dunya:** Yeah, transport's good, there's loads of bus stops to get places kinda thing
>
> **Researcher:** Ok, do you just want to draw a circle [on the map], just round where you'd travel for work
>
> **Dunya:** Just here [where I live]. Because I don't have a car, so with bus fares I wouldn't be saving much.

Despite the consideration of distance when choosing courses or applying for jobs, many of the young people interviewed did undertake impressively long and complicated journeys to work. Several young people talked about coping with very long working days once travel had been factored in. Travelling across the city in order to get to work on time sometimes involved several types of transport. Such journeys were carefully researched and planned, with various factors taken into consideration including cost, duration, and the availability of a 'plan B' should anything go wrong. Technology including Travel South Yorkshire, bus company websites, Googlemaps journey planner, and even Facebook were all drawn upon in such deliberations.

> **Katie:** We looked at all different options, I mean there were like you've got a tram to [one area] and then you've got to catch a bus from there, but then it were like catching a Stagecoach tram and then a First bus which would cost me a lot more.
>
> **Researcher:** Oh of course because you've got to change tickets don't you?

> **Katie:** Yeah, and then it's like that bus was every half an hour, so if I missed it I've got no chance of getting to work on time, you know, I looked at all different options of how I could get there, and this was the best one even though it were a little bit longer.

Having planned the best method for getting to work on a daily basis, young people also reported the day to day challenges they faced while commuting. For example, Alice, who lived in a rural area of the north west talked about how if her shift at work ran over by only a few minutes she would have to wait another hour for the next bus to come.

Not all journeys to work were made by public transport. Young people working unsociable shift patterns or who worked with family members often reported getting lifts to work and several of the young people who were interviewed had recently learned to drive and acquired use of a car. Having access to personal transport opened up new opportunities for finding employment, as Tanya explains.

> **Researcher:** One of the things people often say is that they pick jobs around how easy they were to get to. Do you think that still affects you or not?
>
> **Tanya:** Not really, because I've got a car to get to work in
>
> **Researcher:** So if you found a job that you were interested in doing in like Doncaster or Barnsley or whatever, do you think you'd travel out of the city?
>
> **Tanya:** Yeah

Having a job enabled the funding of personal transport and being able to drive also added to the growing independence that young workers were so often seeking. This made some more able to start thinking about moving out of their family home and Emma talked about the discussion she and her boyfriend were having about moving to a village outside the city once she had learned to drive. While transport was by no means the only consideration involved in choosing where to study or work, across nearly all of the interviews young people mentioned the need to travel and often the difficulties they had faced as a result of this. Alice made the link nicely between the theoretical and practical aspects of the RPA legislation:

> **Alice:** They're saying you've got to stay in education until you're 18, but it's quite hard with little factors like that putting you off.

5.3.4 Theme four: Family, relationships and networks

Just as the places that they lived featured in young people's story-telling so too did the people with whom they lived, worked and socialised. These people did not always play a central role however. Mention of family members was in some cases limited to simply naming the people in the household, and in a few cases peers or friends were not mentioned at all. In most cases however, family members and specific teachers or support workers were referenced in relation to seeking advice and support in various aspects of post-16 transition-making. This section is divided into three parts. The first relates to relationships with family members and the occasional live-in romantic partner. The second refers to the role of personal networks (including family) in enabling or blocking opportunities, and the third relates to relationships outside the home, covering social groups and work colleagues.

Family structure and values

All of the young people in the study were brought up by their biological families, and in all but three cases this was one or both of their parents. There was some evidence in interviews that family values and experiences had had an influence on young people's longer term career choices, not simply on the type or level of learning destinations they chose at 16. Some had parents who had been to university, some lived in areas of the city perceived as more affluent, and others had families who really pushed on to them the value of education. All of these things were more likely to make them feel that further education or training would be sensible even if they had not chosen to take that route. A lot of young people talked about university, a higher number than would perhaps be expected given how few of them had remained in education past 16. This pursuit of a higher education, traditionally seen as an aspiration of the middle classes, has in all likelihood been influenced by the policy push by New Labour in the 2000s to increase university admissions to 50%. Young people's level of knowledge of what university might involve and the

steps they would need to take to get there was, however, more reflective of their upbringing and family values than merely of their desire to go.

As well as longer-term influences on a young person's values and perspectives, the day to day operation of family life can be heavily influential on a young person's choices at 16. Some of the young people talked about moving into their own houses, but with the exception of Emma none of them had serious plans for doing so in the immediate future. While young people theoretically have freedom over their decision making, in reality those decisions have to be made within a context of physical conditions (money, location, qualifications) and of individual mind-set. While offering multiple benefits (not least financially), living with their families did at times create barriers to realising ambitions, whether that was due to the requirement to care for elderly relatives or younger siblings, or an expectation that they would provide labour for a family business.

Family as role models and careers advisors

> **Kirsty:** My granddad wants me to get a job, he's all like *Mr work*. He worked for all of like from 16 to 70, for his whole life, he's all about work, he's always like 'you need to get a job, you need to work.'

Talking to young people about the post-16 options they had considered revealed significant differences in their knowledge and understanding of the opportunities open to them. Those who were most informed were generally those whose parents had some experience of further or higher education, or who put significant value on education as a means of self-improvement. These families were not necessarily able to provide young people with information about specific routes (they often could not) but they were the most likely to encourage their children to research their options, to look at the longer term progression routes of each, and to weigh up the short and long term benefits of choosing them:

> **Alice:** I asked [my parents] for help and they said I should go for everything that I've gone for so far. Like they've been a big help ... like I probably wouldn't have done most of the stuff if it wasn't for them prompting me.

> **Matt:** [My mum's] not very clever herself, you know what I mean, so she's just been trying to help me out as best as she could. She's been sending me to my aunty's, because she knows what she's doing a bit more.

Some parents seemed to understand and accept their son or daughter was only interested in entering employment, while others put pressure on them to return to education in order to have better life chances in the future:

> **Researcher:** So [your parents] weren't pushing you to go into further learning or anything?
> **Mark:** No, because they know I didn't like school, they knew I didn't want to go to college, I just wanted to be earning money.

> **Katie:** [My parents] said *'just go to college, do a year at college'* but I was so, I didn't, I don't know whether it was through having a bad experience at school, but I didn't want to. I wanted to be out working so there was just no chance they could change my mind, I was apprenticeship all the way.

When asked about how they chose their current destination, young people regularly mentioned the opinions of their parents or other family members. There was a split however, between those who felt this had influenced them to follow their current path, and those who had gone their own way despite the disapproval or misgivings of their families. For those who had steady and relatively stable employment, many remarked that their families were now happier with what they had chosen to do than they had been before.

> **Jason:** [My dad] doesn't like me doing the job that I'm doing now, but he hasn't really said anything like *'when are you going to find a new job'* because like, the job pays well anyway for my age so...

Not all of the young people knew whether their parents or carers had completed post-16 learning, been to university or undertaken any further qualifications for their work, suggesting that such discussions were not routine at home. Parental education seemed to have little influence on whether young people chose to go on

to further study or not, but did have some bearing on whether their parents wanted them to:

> **Holly:** My dad's always had issues where he can't read properly and he can't write properly ... but about five years ago he went back to college and did his gas, so now he's doing his gas, he works on gas and stuff. My dad's really big on education, he wants me to go back to college and all that.

Some young people had followed the example set by their parents in terms of either their area of work, or their general lifestyle choices, despite there being several cases where their parents wanted different things for them: The experiences and knowledge of siblings and boy/girlfriend also played a part in some of what young people thought about doing after Year 11, and their circumstances were sometimes mentioned as a source of information or inspiration. For example, 'my brothers got his own place now' or 'my sister is just about to have a baby so she is not working at the moment' were quite common ways of understanding how these elements of adulthood were managed, and their impact on learning and job opportunities. For some young people this knowledge was 'stored up' as an avenue to pursue in the future should their current plans not work out:

> **Jenny:** When I'm eighteen if I've still not got work by then, I'll probably try to do something like what my boyfriend did and try and get an apprenticeship, a trial, and hopefully get a job from there.

Young people who had younger siblings often talked about them quite protectively and wanted them to learn from the mistakes that they themselves had made. Alice's comment also provided interesting insight into how education was viewed and valued within her family:

> **Alice:** I think that's what's prevented [my brother] from school and obviously choices as well because if he goes to college he'll be thinking like *Oh my god everyone knows I'm going to college kind of thing.*

Opportunity-enabling networks

> **James:** I'm not actually that sure [how to set up a business], I know a lot of people do it, and it's just about knowing people, just like having

the connections and that.

Family connections were an influential factor in finding work. Working for a family business, joining a company where a family member was already employed, or starting work with a family member or friend, were all common ways for young people to start work before the age of 18. Lots of the young people who were interviewed were either working with family members or were working in similar trades, and this was often due to the kind of opportunities available to them through existing networks. Such opportunities were generally seen as appealing to young people in the short term regardless of any plans they had made or longer-term aspirations they had. Taking them up sometimes meant turning down an offer of further education or formal training. The risk they took was, should the job not work out, they would be left without a feasible back-up plan.

Croll's research found that "low achieving and less ambitious children from advantaged backgrounds had very much better occupational prospects than similar children from disadvantaged backgrounds." (2008, p.414) A family's ability to support their children to find work is therefore an important factor in whether they find employment success. This will be demonstrated through the comparison between the stories of James and Matt in Chapter Six. Young people often mentioned a family member's occupation by way of introducing their interest in a career, and three interview participants talked about being taken into their parent's workplace while they were younger. This had given them some experience of helping out part time before they left school which had helped them secure a job later on.

> **James:** If I got excluded or something like that, I'd be, rather than sitting in the house, I'd go to work. And I'd like know everyone at work and that, and they were like *'he does a good job and that, when he comes'* so they were just like *'come to work'* and that.

It would be wrong to assume that taking up a job offer from a family member or friend was necessarily a bad thing, even if it came at the cost of a post-16 learning course or training programme. For many young people the chance to gain work experience, to try out a career before committing to further training, or to do something productive while working out what they would like to do longer-term could be invaluable to them. Many young people talked about how getting a job had caused

them to "knuckle down and grow up": something school life had not inspired in them. Families were not always sources of positive opportunities however and Holly talked about how a dispute between her mother and her friend's mother had led to the two daughters falling out and prolonged bullying and retaliation leading to her eventual expulsion from the school.

Those who talked about job hunting independently, explained how competitive the current labour market was. They were generally well aware of the regular media coverage of high unemployment and the (often very real) prospect of struggling to find employment after completing an FE course, which led a few to remark that they were glad to have secured employment at all, regardless of its quality. They felt they were in a better place for the future than their peers who had gone into post-16 education. This was also often the view of young people who had spent some time in post-16 learning, who explained that they had really only enrolled to pass the time until they could find a job and expressed their opinion that work experience was more important to them than qualifications.

Lukas talked about how going to university would give him more opportunities, and not just in terms of gaining more education. He felt that meeting new people and trying new things would help him to escape the lifestyle that he had had so far, and for this reason he not only wanted to go to university but also to attend one outside of Sheffield:

> **Lukas:** Obviously there are more opportunities when you go to like university, not just like I'm getting a degree but the people that you meet you know.

5.3.5 Theme five: School

Until they are 16, young people spend a large percentage of their lives at school. School experiences are therefore likely to be highly influential on post-16 outcomes and two elements of this influence are explored below. Firstly, attitudes towards school and experiences of the informal aspects of school life, and secondly, academic attainment and its impact on progression.

School experiences

For some, school had been an enjoyable enough time in which they had spent time with friends and put more effort into some lessons than others. For the majority of those interviewed though, school had been an environment into which they never quite felt at home. A lot of the young people, females in particular, talked about having few or no real school friends and three young women in particular talked about having been bullied. Later in the thesis Chapter Seven looks at the notion of fitting in, both at school and elsewhere, and the role of 'belonging' within the experiences of the JWT group.

As well as academic study, school life for some young people was set against other personal challenges. This included physical and mental illness, bullying, learning English as a new language, family breakup, caring responsibilities, moving house and subsequently difficult journeys to school, and undiagnosed learning difficulties. The way in which young people reacted and responded to these challenges was remarkably varied. Some, like Jakub and Lukas, faced significant difficulties but still got to the end of Year eleven with top GCSE grades and a desire to pursue an academic career. Others, like Holly and Kirsty, struggled to settle in mainstream school and ended their school career in alternative provision (a pupil referral unit and a hospital school, respectively.) Another group drifted away from school completely. While Emma home-schooled herself and attained enough GCSEs to go onto post-16 learning, Matt and James gained very little from the few years of secondary school that they had attended, except an adamant rejection of any involvement in further formal learning.

School attainment

Academic attainment at Year 11 is one of the best indicators of whether a young person progresses into learning post-16. This is partly because of the entry requirements for some post-16 courses. For example, A-levels and advanced apprenticeships have relatively high entry requirements and, as two year programmes, encourage sustained participation to 18. Similarly, courses that have lower entry requirements tend to be shorter, which may account for the increased likelihood of entering NEET or employment later on. In the logistic regression modelling two independent variables

were used to represent school experience and achievement: the attainment of Five A*-C grades at GCSE including in English Language and Mathematics (achieved by around 56% of the cohort), and having a statement of Special Educational Need (at any level). The extract of the model relating to these variables is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Education experience: Logistic Regression Output

	5 A*-Cs	SEN
Classroom-Based Clusters		
Cluster H: Classroom-Based Learning (CBL) moving into NEET and short-term learning	0.16***	1.54***
Cluster F: Unsettled Year 12 moving into sustained CBL	0.28***	0.79
Cluster E: Short Personal Development Courses with unstable employment	0.07***	1.74***
Employment Clusters		
Cluster B: CBL moving into Employment with or without training	0.42***	0.99
Cluster C: Movement from Classroom-based- to Work-Based Learning	0.54***	0.86
Cluster D: Sustained Work-Based Learning with some movement into Jobs Without Training	0.36***	0.76*
Cluster G: Jobs Without Training with periods of NEET	0.13***	0.81
NEET Clusters		
Cluster I: NEET churn following early departure from Classroom-Based Learning	0.19***	1.47*
Cluster J: NEET with some short Personal Development Courses and unstable employment	0.04***	1.17

Not surprisingly, the attainment of the 5 A*-C benchmark reduced the odds of entry into any of the trajectory clusters when compared to following a route of sustained Classroom-Based Learning (Cluster A). Interestingly, the attainment of this standard had the least impact on the employment clusters (B, C and D). In these

clusters the higher academic attainment reduced odds of entry by around 45 to 65% whereas for other clusters it was in the range of a 70 to 95% decrease. This suggests that young people entering employment pathways are not forced to do so due to a lack of academic qualifications and that other factors have an important part to play. Young workers' response to the pressure they felt to remain in education and follow academic post-16 pathways is explored in more depth in Chapters Six and Seven.

The impact of having a special educational need (SEN) was also different for membership of the employment clusters. While not statistically significant for all of the clusters, the results suggest that having a SEN reduces the odds of entering an employment route compared to Classroom-Based Learning, whereas it increases the odds of entering the other classroom-based and NEET cluster groups.

In their interviews, two young people talked about having a learning disability. Alice had struggled to be tested for dyslexia during her GCSE years (which was finally confirmed but too late for provisions to be made for taking her exams) and talked about having to put a great deal more time into her school work than her peers.

5.4   Chapter summary

This chapter considered the ways in which internal and external factors influence the transitions that young people make and where Jobs Without Training fit within those transitions. Transitions are usually defined and measured by local authorities as snapshots. As the chapter explained, most young people in Sheffield finish Year 11 and enter further learning opportunities (between 2010 and 2015 this group made up 95% of the cohort). Snapshots of the data collected in Sheffield between 2010 and 2015 show a decline in the number of young people entering JWT although increased entries to Work-Based Learning meant that the total number of young people in employment remained relatively stable. Compared to the cohort as a whole, young people in Jobs Without Training appeared to move the most from one snapshot to the next. Such analysis however fails to capture the nuances of movements made in the time between snapshots and the chapter reiterated the earlier rationale given for using sequence analysis as an alternative way of modelling

post-16 journeys. Through the statistical techniques described in the chapter, young peoples destination strings were compared to one another and clusters of young people were identified who had made similar journeys over the 24 months. The longitudinal focus of the thesis and use of sequence analysis to capture strings of destinations in their relative order, provide a more comprehensive picture of young people's post-16 progression.

The clusters

The ten longitudinal clusters which were created from the analysis were divided into three groups based on their key components and shapes. The chapter provided details of the make-up of these clusters and cluster groups.

The Classroom-based cluster group contained the most young people (78.4% of the cohort). They were demographically representative of the cohort generally although one had notably more males. Academic attainment varied based on the type of learning involved (those on personal development opportunities did significantly worse academically) and similarly there were lower incidences of deprivation and learning difficulties in the clusters that involved sustained learning rather than personal development and short courses. The Employment cluster group contained a smaller number of young people (16.8% of the cohort) who were predominantly White British and male, although Cluster C bucked this trend by containing more females than males (one of only 3 clusters where this was the case). Deprivation levels were around the average but attainment varied between clusters with the highest achievement among young people who went into Work-Based Learning. The cluster group involving mostly NEET destinations had the highest levels of deprivation, the lowest levels of academic attainment and, with only two clusters, included just 4.8% of the total cohort.

Cluster membership

Using a combination of the regression modelling output and the interviews of young people, five themes emerged as important for predicting membership of clusters and for understanding the experiences of their members. These were: personal characteristics, personal experiences, places and spaces, families and networks, and pre-16 education. Statistical modelling of the transition clusters revealed that

while there were some significant relationships, overall the model only accounted for around 11% of the variance between the clusters, suggesting that the clusters were not entirely homogeneous and that other factors like personal choice and opportunities have a larger part to play in influencing outcomes. However, with this caveat, a number of relationships are still worthy of note.

The first theme, personal characteristics, explored the impact of sex, ethnicity, and social class and found that being male increased the likelihood of belonging to clusters involving unstable employment and early entry into work-based learning. In their interviews young women were more likely to describe the impact of time on their decision making, with respect to starting families. Young people from BME groups were less likely to enter all clusters than their White British peers when compared to staying in Classroom-Based Learning, but ethnicity has the most impact on Employment Based clusters which contained disproportionate numbers of White British young people and in which BME young people were only between a third and a fifth as likely to be members. The words of some of the young people interviewed suggested that elements of social class, including choice, available resources and values had an impact on how they defined success and how they perceived the best paths to get them there.

The second theme, personal characteristics, incorporated financial position and stability as well as living arrangements, caring responsibilities, and illness and disability. The sample of young people interviewed had encountered a great number of challenges related to these areas. The model showed that coming from a low income family reduced the odds of entering a work-based cluster by up to 42% compared to staying in Classroom-Based Learning. During interviews, however, money was discussed in detail as an integral part of some of the participants' decisions to enter JWT. It was financial independence rather than earning money per se which was the priority for young people, though in nearly all cases their comments indicated that this was a personal desire rather than one enforced on them by their families. Similarly, living independently was an aspiration of many of the sample but in all but two examples this did not seem to be a pressing issue but rather one of preference. The health of the young people and their immediate families featured in several of the interviews as challenges and in some cases prohibitive barriers to accessing learning and employment. Poor mental health, in particular, was cited

directly and indirectly as causes of difficulty in transition making.

The third theme, place and space, reflected many of the themes discussed in Chapter Three and considered the geographical area in which a young person lived as well as the deprivation of their neighbourhood relative to the rest of the city. The negative relationship between living in the west of the city and entry into three of the four employment clusters was the most visible of the place effects. In interviews, young people talked about spending most of their time in their local neighbourhood but that going to work had sometimes broadened their geographical horizons. Negative experiences of places sometimes provided motivation for a young person to work in order to improve their personal circumstances. However, most young people talked positively about their local area due to knowing lots of people and having family and other personal contacts living close by. The results of the modelling suggested that young people who follow work-based trajectories come from some of the most deprived areas of the city but not from the poorest families.

The fourth theme (family, relationships and networks) featured young people's experiences of family structures, role models, and contacts that provided opportunities for work and learning. The young people interviewed had often faced difficulties in making friends at school and were more inclined to look to older friends and family members, rather than their peers, for support and advice. For the most part the young people talked about making individualised decisions and trying not to depend too heavily on anyone else. In some cases this was due to wanting to take pathways that those around them disapproved of. There was however some evidence that family values and the day to day operation of family life had influenced the way in which young people conceptualised their future including future careers. Working for a family business, joining a company where a family member was already employed, or starting work with a family member or friend, were all common ways for young people to start work before the age of 18.

The fifth and final theme, pre-16 education, included experiences of school life as well as academic attainment and the receipt of formal careers advice. School had not been a positive experience for many of the young people, even amongst those who had done well academically. Personal circumstances had sometimes made attending and settling into school life difficult for young people and interviews contained reports of truancy and poor attendance. Around 56% of the cohort had attained five

A*-C grades at GCSE including in English Language and Mathematics but most of these belonged to Cluster A (sustained Classroom-Based Learning) and achievement of this benchmark reduced the odds of membership in all other clusters. This impact was smallest for the employment clusters which suggests that young people entering employment pathways are not forced to do so due to a lack of academic qualifications but rather influenced by a range of other factors. Formal careers advice provided through schools had not generally been well received but by their own admission this has often been because of the individual mindset of the young people rather than the type or quality of the support offered. It was felt that careers advice was aimed at entry into further education and they saw little relevance in this if they had already decided to look for employment. Others who *were* interested in further education were more willing to engage with the advice on offer but expressed frustration with the heavy emphasis put on A-levels and University rather than on more job-centric advice about suitable training programmes and career-entry points.

Although they share some characteristics and experiences, young people in Jobs Without Training are far from being a homogeneous group. This chapter has demonstrated that there is a need to better understand the difference within as well as between the groups of young people in different destinations. The method of sequence analysis used and presented in this chapter seeks to promote this as a more effective way of analysing and understanding post-16 progression pathways, which are otherwise hard to quantify and meaningfully compare. This allows policy makers and service deliverers to better understand their target groups and better accommodate their support needs.

Chapter 6

Realising ambition: managing aspiration, motivation and risk in post-16 progression

Chapter Six considers the impact that young people's choices and perspectives have on the final pathways they end up following. 28 young people were interviewed and this chapter tells their stories and examines the nature of the choices and transitions they made: how they were planned and lived out and how their level of success can be measured. It also explores how unexpected events and circumstances cause original plans to be altered and how resilience and flexibility of both individuals and services can support these alterations along the way. The last chapter considered the reasons that certain young people make certain choices, whereas this chapter is concerned with *how* choices are made and played out.

Comparative vignettes are used to illustrate the wider points being made, constructed from pairs of young people who were interviewed during the research project. The young people selected for the comparisons displayed similar characteristics, experiences, or career aspirations, but ended up taking very different routes post-16. Presented alongside the proposed methods of evaluating successful transitions, these comparisons seek to show the differences and similarities between young people's perspectives and how they influence final destinations and pathways. While they serve to provide a comparison of young people's attitudes towards life trajectories and decision making, the vignettes are unique to the young people they feature and do not presume to be representative of the JWT population as a whole.

They do however present good examples of the different perspectives that many young people have towards their current and future destinations.

The chapter is divided into three main parts. Section 6.1 looks at how transitions are conceptualised and how young people use them to develop self-identities and vice versa. Section 6.2 explores the role of structure, agency and critical moments in how original post-16 plans are carried out or adapted. Finally, Section 6.3 considers the way in which young people risk failure in their bid for success, and balance perseverance with the need to be flexible. The chapter concludes by summarising the relationships between a young person's ambitions, the services and institutions they encounter, and the overall pathways they end up following.

6.1 Conceptualising transitions: evaluating destinations as bridges

Young people in Sheffield take a range of routes through their early post-16 years. For the young people interviewed these routes all included paid employment in some way, but they also included time spent NEET and experiences of education and training with which there were varying degrees of satisfaction. Young people had different ways of conceptualising the trajectories they were on and this section considers three elements of these conceptualisations: their current position as part of a longer journey, the level of control they felt, and their feelings towards how their past and present might impact on their future.

6.1.1 Place within a wider trajectory

In describing their time spent in various post-16 activities young people glossed-over (or omitted entirely) some things they had done whilst describing other activities in extensive detail which in some instances had only lasted a matter of weeks. Discussion of school experiences and thoughts on their current activity were give the greatest allocations of time generally, although for some young people plans for the future were of more consequence for them than their current destination. Young people who had been NEET before finding work were more likely to talk in greater detail about school than those in JWT or learning and to refer to their period of

unemployment in a very generic *"it was rubbish"* kind of way. In comparison, young people who had previously been in learning destinations usually gave more detailed accounts of these than of their school life. For example they might talk about a particular incident that occurred while in post-16 learning while talking about generally getting into a lot of trouble while at school. The significance placed on destinations then was related somewhat to the time that had lapsed since they had been left although no doubt the ability to remember details also had a part to play in young people's story-telling. Young people who had moved jobs talked about both in comparative terms (*"this one's much better"*) and were also more likely than the others to talk favourably about school and to regret not appreciating it more at the time or not achieving the grades they were capable of.

Age

Very striking, in interviewing young people about what they hoped to do in the future, was the disparity in their perceptions of the position their current activity held in comparison to their age and the distance that they had progressed through their wider life plans. Amongst those interviewed were young people who felt, at the age of 18, that they had 'missed the boat' and would never be able to do the job that they wanted.

> **Syed:** I would always like to work in a call centre, or like another professional English job ... That's what I wanted to do, but honestly I don't know if I can now, it's too late.

Others complained about feeling rushed into making a decision by their school, post-16 learning provider, or family, and felt that at 18 they still had plenty of time to consider their options. Amongst the JWT cohort there was regular talk of the possibility of pursuing further education and training later on.

> **Lukas:** At the end of the day, you're only 18, you know, you could do your A-levels, or go to college to do your A-levels or an access course or whatever, I mean in one or two years, and have a degree by the time you're 25, do you know what I mean ... you're still young.

The way a young person conceived their age had an impact on the way they viewed going back into education. The majority of young people felt there would

be time later in life to get qualified and work out what to do, but others had an appreciation of matters such as the need to start post-16 education before turning 19 to avoid self-funding their study, or waiting until they were 20 so they could complete a one-year access course to university rather than two years of A-levels. Females expressed a greater inclination to return to education more generally. Knowledge of rules and criteria around funding and accessing education provision was patchy, but young people considering further study were clearly taking these issues into consideration in their deliberations.

> **Dunya:** I'd have been a teacher or something now [if I'd done A-levels], but obviously you can't just be a teacher like that can you, you have to get the qualifications, so...
>
> **Researcher:** Did you want to be a teacher?
>
> **Dunya:** Well I did at *that* point, I *wanted* to be a textiles teacher, or an ICT teacher, or just something like that, like a teacher of summat, but like now that's not happened.

6.1.2   Evaluating destinations as bridges

An underlying theme to many of the young people's narratives was that what a person does in terms of education or employment is less important than what they are doing it for.

> **Lukas:** The main reason [for leaving the job] really was that I really felt isolated, claustrophobic really, the same thing every day. It's not what I was ready for, maybe in like ten years, it's different when you've got like, if I've settled down with like a girlfriend or a family or whatever, and that's fine because you've got like, the goal then is to make sure your family is kept for. But I haven't got a family and I don't want to be working nine till five every day when I'm seventeen.

For example, the need to pay rent or support a family made boring or badly-paid work worth persevering with, while learning only made sense if it paved the way directly to better employment. The potential risk of not having post-16 qualifications was for many of the young people interviewed less daunting than their immediate need (or perceived need) for independence or money. For those considering returning

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to education re-entry was weighed up carefully against the increased independence and income that would need to be sacrificed. *Leaving* education was rarely given the same level of analysis. Choices that might be considered risk-taking by policy makers (like leaving full time post-16 education courses to take up insecure employment) were quite often taken by young people without any great thought for longer-term consequences.

Rather than assessing the quality of JWT as an end destination interviews aimed to establish how young people saw them contributing to a wider career trajectory. Some young people, like Emma, were in relatively well-paid and secure employment but had aspirations to be doing something else. For these young people, the lack of discernible bridge contributed to a feeling that they were heading for a metaphorical dead end, even where they were enjoying their current employment.

> **Dunya:** Like now, I don't think I'm going to go anywhere except this, but at the moment I'm happy with my job, but it's like 'am I going to be happy in the future?' Don't know yet.

Dunya's worry about whether her current occupation could sustain her future happiness and life satisfaction, was one shared by many of the interview cohort. The capacity for a job to act as bridge to other things was clearly important to some young people, as Emma articulates:

> **Emma:** Although the company advertises *'we love to progress people to managers'* and this that and the other, there's not much like progression, like there's nowhere left to particularly go

Also important however, especially for those considering education as their next 'bridge', was a need to be sure of the value of making a change, and not being rushed into decisions without having properly considered their options. Entering education meant giving up a wage packet and they talked with disdain about schools and families who had tried to push them into sixth form or post-16 education courses without providing adequate explanations of what they would be able to do afterwards. In order to make better sense of how effective current destinations are as bridges to desired futures, five key factors have been explored:

- Achieving personal satisfaction;

- Staying hopeful;

- Managing risk;

- Becoming independent;

- Planning for the future.

Evaluating destinations in this way provides an alternative to the more traditional *'learning good, NEET bad'* rhetoric which has existed in post-16 policy rhetoric since the late 1980s. If the aim of such policy is to support young people to make successful transitions into good quality long-term destinations, then it is important to understand the role of destinations on an individual level.

Achieving personal satisfaction

The 'satisfaction' measure captures a young person's general attitude towards their situation. At the satisfied end of the spectrum were people like James, who described how his job brought him a sense of both satisfaction and pride:

> **James:** We've done this like big massive extension, so, that looks really good, it's like it'll always be there.

Young people like James did often have plans for the future to start their own businesses or to work their way up into management, but they were happy in their current field of work and had no immediate plans for change or for leaving employment.

At the other end of the spectrum were young people like Alice, who had plans for the near future which involved returning to education or changing their area of employment. These 'plans' were not always well-formed and a few young people talked simply of wanting a job which paid better with more regular hours and a permanent contract. For Alice and others however, plans were detailed, time-limited, and represented a challenge to the policy rhetoric of young people 'stuck' in low-end employment. While not necessarily unhappy, being 'unsatisfied' meant there was a need to know what came next:

> **Alice:** It's what you're going to do as soon as that's finished kind of thing, that's what I always think about ... like when I wasn't considering

college this September I were thinking *what am I going to do to progress on this [job]*, I can't just do this for the rest of my life.

Of most concern is the sub-group of the 'dissatisfied' classification who have no specific plan for finding job satisfaction. There is an ongoing debate about the level of importance given to subjective wellbeing when compared to other measures of wellbeing, like health or financial security for example (Rees et al, 2010). The main crux of the debate is whether a person's happiness is more important than the likelihood of their future satisfaction with life, and whether the individual or the state is better placed to make a judgement about either.

Staying hopeful

Intrinsically linked with feelings of personal satisfaction were feelings of hope or resignation for the future. The hopefulness measure is really a sub-measure for young people who were 'dissatisfied' with their current destination. It aims to capture the level to which a young person feels able to change things for themselves for the better. Young people classified as 'resigned' were not necessarily unhappy, but had come to terms with the fact that they would probably not get to pursue the career they had originally wanted. At the opposite end, those classified as 'hopeful' did not necessarily have a plan to change their lives, but did feel that the power to achieve their ambitions was in their hands. Young people like Dunya were unhappy with their current situation and resigned about their future.

> **Dunya:** I'm just trying to be happy and I'm just trying not to think about it, I've just got to live for the moment.

They were frustrated and sad about their situation, but felt that various events or decisions made by other people had stopped them from achieving their plans and that they were no longer in a position to reverse this.

The significance of hope is simply this: if a young person no longer believes it is possible to change their situation then they will no longer attempt to do so. Those without hope for the future talked about clashes with institutions, whether that was their school, post-16 education provider, job centre, or apprenticeship provider. While some young people's hope was perhaps misguided, their likelihood

of succeeding in their ambitions was still perhaps greater than their resigned peers' simply because they were still willing to seek and engage with support services.

Managing risk

In policy terms, young people are generally seen to be taking a risk if they deviate from those well-travelled pathways that have a track record of leading to successful outcomes. In the context of post-16 progression, anyone who drops out from education early or who chooses to work in unskilled employment is seen to be gambling with their future. Data about youth employment would support this conclusion, with young people in low-skilled employment the most likely to experience NEET when compared with learning destination groups. On a national or even local authority level, research shows that those with the highest qualifications enter the highest paid and most secure employment (Croll, 2008). However, at an individual level these so-called 'risks' by young people were taken based on weighing up a variety of factors and deciding that, given the options on offer, taking the path with less assurance of success could lead to significantly better outcomes.

Emma actively chose to take a risk based on a relatively well-thought out decision-making process about how best to speed up her career progression. She had some GCSEs (though not 5 at A*-C) and an employer sympathetic to her wish to progress. For another young person in different circumstances the decision to choose a JWT over an apprenticeship may have been inappropriate, but for Emma there was a strong reason for believing this choice was the most sensible one to take.

Becoming independent

Perhaps unsurprisingly given their deviation from the normal post-16 route, the young people interviewed were in most instances fiercely independent and quick to defend their reasons for working rather than learning whether that was a personal ambition to be financially independent or the blaming of a learning institution who had turned down an application to study with them. All the young people had a clear idea of what society expected of people their age, and they often talked about how they had managed to 'overcome' this expectation in order to do what they actually wanted.

It was clear in interviews which young people had made use of all the available sources of support available to them, and who had based their decisions largely on gut instinct or what was easily available. For young people like James, Syed and Matt, support was offered but not taken up. This was in part because they had felt at the time it was not what they needed or that it would not help:

> **James:** I had to do all sorts of stuff, like drugs prevention work and it was all a lot of shit really. Well it's not shit, just at the time that's what I thought.

Some young people had not actively sought support with transition making but had had family members or support workers who went the extra mile to fight their corner. Holly, for example, faced a whole raft of problems at school (including bullying, truancy, and exclusion) finally ending up at a pupil referral unit. She talked however about her gratitude towards her father and towards specific teachers and support staff who had done a great deal to help her during this time. Similarly, Alice talked about the value she'd placed on her parents' support with choosing the apprenticeship route.

> **Alice:** I asked [my parents] for help and they said I should go for everything that I've gone for so far. Like they've been a big help ... like I probably wouldn't have done most of the stuff if it wasn't for them prompting me and saying the ins and outs of everything.

Academic and policy literatures strongly suggest that access to personal support networks are a mitigating factor against poor outcomes, significantly reducing the risks associated with normal risk-taking behaviour. A destination can therefore be better judged against the backdrop of a young person's access to support networks. A willingness to engage with support is equally important and 'hope' is again relevant in young people's attitude towards seeking and accepting the support on offer.

Planning for the future

Many of the young people had got their first or a subsequent job through a family member or a friend, or a contact within their future employer. None of

the young people who had started a job in this way had planned it beforehand within their career plans. As discussed in Chapter Three, the place where a person lives and their access to personal and professional networks significantly impacts on the opportunities they are able to take advantage of. The 'planning for the future' measure is designed to capture the extent to which a young person was in a destination which formed a step on a longer plan to achieve a specific goal, or if it was simply an opportunity they had taken for its accessibility, convenience, or on a whim. Syed, a good example of an opportunist, had been in the same job for two years for no reason other than because he'd started working for his family and had never made a plan to leave:

> **Syed:** [The restaurant] used to be my dad's place and my dad used to take me every weekend, so he trained me up and that. And then when my dad sold it, [my boss] took over, and he told me to stay. So I did, I've stayed with him for more than two years now.

While Syed was keen to move on to better employment, for some young people the result of an opportunist decision consequently led to a plan for progression which moved them towards the 'planning' end of the spectrum. Young people following carefully planned pathways tended to be those with higher academic credentials. This was not always the case however as Holly (an alumnus of a pupil referral unit with no GCSEs) demonstrated with her thorough research and detailed explanation of the ambitious steps she would need to take to pursue a career in forensic science.

6.1.3   Emma and Dunya - Planning a life course

Emma and Dunya both lived and worked in Sheffield. Emma was White British and working full time and Dunya was of Pakistani descent and working part time while helping to take care of her niece and nephew. They were both interviewed twice, first by phone in January 2015 and second in person the following September. At the time of the first interview Emma was 17 and in Year 12 and Dunya was 18 and in Year 13. Both girls were in the same job for both interviews. At the end of Year 11 (aged 16) both girls had wanted to become teachers, and both expressed a wish to marry and start a family within the next ten years. The table below provides a comparison between their circumstances.

Planning a life course	Emma	Dunya
School experience	Attended two schools during Year 7 and 8. Home schooled in Year 9 and 10 and completed one year in further education in Year 11	Attended one school from Year 7 to 11
Academic attainment	5 A*-Cs at GCSE including English and Maths and 2 AS levels	5 A*-Cs at GCSE not including Maths
Work experience	Working full time in an office, earning around 15,000pa	Working part time (12 hours a week) in retail earning minimum wage
Living arrangements	Lives in a shared house in the city centre with her older sibling	Lives with her mum and older brother in the south west of the city

Dunya referenced time constraints multiple times in her narrative about her plans for the future, stating and restating her belief that it was now "too late" to do what she had originally wanted to, and that she could now only try and make the best of her situation. The reasons she gave for this were based on her understanding of how long it would take to undertake training to become a teacher (including the need to take her A-levels), and the incompatibility between that and her desire to have children and be a stay-at-home mother for them. Despite being only 18 (and single) at the time of her interview, she had written off the prospect of re-entering education because she could not finish the training before she reached the age she was expecting to have her first child. The two years that she had 'wasted' since leaving school had created an unsurmountable barrier to realising her career aspirations. It was clearly a decision she had given significant thought to and one based on her wish to have had a career before starting a family. It was however, difficult not to wonder about the difference that two years' delay would really make and whether (based on her own criteria) she would have been able to achieve her ambition even if her school had allowed her to continue into sixth form.

Emma took an entirely different view. She mentioned numerous times that she was 'only' 17 and that she had her whole life ahead of her so she could afford to take a bit more time to ensure her plan went exactly how she wanted it to. Having not got the necessary grades at AS level (which she had taken a year early), she

had decided to put off re-entering education for a further two years so she could do an access course rather than re-take her A-levels. She was less concerned with the time her short-term goals would take to achieve and tended to look instead at how they contribute to her longer-term life plans. Her plan, for example, to pursue a teaching career stemmed in part from her belief that this would enable her to reduce her hours to part time once she had had children.

Emma talked a lot, both explicitly and implicitly, about the high level of control she felt she had over her life course. She held herself entirely responsible for the problems she had encountered during her journey through education (despite having a number of adverse circumstances to negotiate including her mother's multiple health problems). She felt she had the ability and determination to carry out her plan for the future, including re-entering education and completing a degree.

In comparison, the reasons Dunya gave for leaving education at 16 reflected her strong feeling that she had been denied the chance to pursue her chosen career by a third party. While presented as anger during her interviews, the overwhelming impression she gave about her future was a sense of helplessness. At the time of her second interview, the anger she felt towards her school had reduced to a sense of resignation and a wish to make the best of her situation, but her underlying opinion, which she explicitly and repeatedly expressed, was that a central decision about her life course had been taken out of her hands.

6.2 The role of structure, agency, and critical moments in deploying plans

6.2.1 Describing choices and transitions

Young people were not often able to explain why they were in their current positions or why they had made certain decisions. Indeed two young people got quite agitated at being asked why they felt the way they did and simply made statements along the lines of *"that's just how it is"*. However, the way in which young people talked about issues such as financial and residential independence, family and romantic relationships, and future plans of marriage and children, all helped to build a picture of why they had chosen certain routes over others. Generally speaking,

the longer a person had been in employment the more importance they placed on independence and the more likely they were to talk about moving out of the family home and their strive for financial independence.

> **Tanya:** [In 5 years] I'll probably like have a permanent job ... hopefully have got somewhere ... probably have moved out.

Young people who had been NEET previously were also likely to talk about the importance of earning money (having depended on their parents for a long time) but were chronologically behind their 'straight-into-work' peers in their plans for moving out. Young people who had been in learning, often had a more structured plan for the future and saw their move to independence further along their career trajectory. They were pleased to be earning their own money at present but were prepared to sacrifice that for future learning, which would inevitably prolong their dependence on their families.

Attitudes towards education and employment

Most young people had done some learning prior to JWT and while these courses or programmes took different forms and were in different subjects and institutions there were some shared experiences between participants nonetheless. Far fewer young people had been NEET prior to being JWT. In most cases where young people had chosen to leave education without a job lined up, this had been due to non-engagement in school (from as early as Year 9 in some cases) with no qualifications and having had fairly negative experiences of pre-16 education. While, as expected, none of them had enjoyed being NEET their desire to find work was strong enough to prevent them from 'giving in' to the short term courses and personal development programmes they were offered. The restraints of the academic year timetable also played a role, with young people realising that having opted out of education in September there was no way to change their mind after a period of being NEET without waiting a full year, by which time most of them had found work. The few young people who went straight into work after school, without an excursion into anything else first, nearly always went into jobs that they had applied for or started over the summer holidays while waiting for a post-16 education course to start, and which they had then opted to stay in.

The learning and the straight-into-work groups shared some similarities in that they saw education as valuable only in its ability to secure them employment. For the learning group, this allure had been strong enough to make them start and persevere through some quite adverse circumstances, whereas the straight-in group had started applying earlier and had generally taken the first job offered without giving education a chance.

Taking up a learning opportunity

Only a very tiny minority of young people make a linear transition into work or NEET without ever looking back at the possibility of pursuing further education or training. A significantly higher number of young people try, at least for a while, some kind of education at 16 or later in life. There is value in seeking to understand why then initial intentions to gain extra education and training often to do not result in young people gaining extra qualifications or extended career opportunities. It was common for the young people to talk of their future intentions to return to education and some of those who were interviewed twice had enrolled in some form of learning by the time of their second interview. This led to two lines of enquiry: why a young person wanted to enter further education, and what it was that meant some young people followed through with this intention.

The first thing worth noting is that the majority of the young workers saw paid employment as a much harder (and often superior) route to further education. This made their decisions about re-entering education worthy of significant personal consideration.

> **Jenny:** I really wouldn't want to go back [into post-16 education] because I like, I want to be independent, as in the way I just want to go out and be earning my own money. I don't want to have to go and be like I'm being told what to do all the time ... I just want to go out and make my own money really, I don't want to be sat in a classroom all day.

Part of this attitude is because given that many learning opportunities (especially vocational ones) are marketed on their ability to help young people seek employment in the future, young people felt that getting a job without one gave them an edge over their peers. This was particularly clear in their analysis of vocational training

courses and apprenticeships.

> **Emma:** Like for me, I had a choice between an apprenticeship at £2.68 an hour, which although it would have got me skills and a proper job at the end of it, or I can get paid at eight pound, nine pound, ten pound an hour and have a job that's just as secure. In fact probably more secure, because not all apprenticeships guarantee a job at the end of it. And they want to bring in more and more apprenticeships, but what are they going to do afterwards? Like they're promising skills but no jobs.

Emma's dismissal of apprenticeships was not an uncommon one. They were viewed as an easier way into employment than more traditional job hunting, but inferior as a route into stable employment. Kirsty talked about having been "getting it in the head" from her grandfather about finding a full time job and she'd found an apprenticeship online which she'd applied for. Further enquiry revealed that she was unsure what prerequisites the course required, what qualifications it would earn her, or even if it would require a classroom-based element. Her understanding of the differences between an apprenticeship and a JWT was limited, but not unique to only her.

Rejecting learning and finding motivation through work

For Ed, motivation for getting a job had come simply from choosing what he knew (work) over what he did not (post-16 education) and his perseverance to succeed despite health setbacks had required a break for recuperation and some coaxing from an old colleague. Hope for his future was almost non-existent at the time of his first interview, but had become slightly more evident by his second (though still clouded by a kind of bewildered despair).

Bianca on the other hand had opted to take up a post-16 learning opportunity but had left before the end of the first year. She had received an offer of a job in a warehouse that she got easily through family contacts but her motivation for leaving came also from her dissatisfaction with the course for which she said teachers had routinely failed to turn up. In comparison, she found instant enjoyment at her place of work when she worked alongside family and friends in an environment she felt comfortable in. After being made redundant from the role she took on significant

caring duties for three of her grandparents and when she returned to work it was in a care-worker role inspired by her experience of looking after her family. Despite several bereavements, redundancy and a negative experience of education, Bianca explained she remained hopeful about the future because of the support of her boyfriend.

In some cases the choices a young person made were so heavily constrained by personal and social pressures and barriers that they were, in reality, little more than passive movement between pre-determined destinations.

6.2.2 Critical moments and their long term implications

As the transition clusters described in Chapter Five demonstrate, there are key points in a young person's post-16 journeys where changes occur. For the young people interviewed, reasons for these changes were often complicated but based on a final 'tipping point' after a build up of contributing factors.

Dropping out of a learning opportunity

While the majority of young people in JWT had overarching negative or indifferent opinions to learning, some had nevertheless completed courses, or given them their 'best shot' before dropping out. Interviews sought to understand why some young people persevered with their learning placements for longer. Two things quickly transpired from this. First, that for some young people this had not been an active choice at all and they had been forced to leave either through a provider's request or due to personal commitments or challenges. And second, that very rarely did a young person give only one reason for having left a learning destination. Young people had not always wanted to leave their learning place. Sometimes they had been forced to leave by a commitment at home which required prioritising, poor health or at the request of their tutor or manager. In multiple cases young people started by giving a reason for why they had left and then going on to bring one or more other factors into their explanation. Emma talked about how the combination of having to travel a long way to her post-16 education provider and wanting to spend time with her ill mother, fed into her general feeling of being bored with education.

> **Emma:** My house was like over an hour away [from the education provider] again, so it were like *'ah I'll just do it from home again'*, that thing again. It was my own fault I failed [My AS levels], I'll be completely honest, but then it's like, so we used to spend a lot of time with my mum and stuff as well, and sometimes it would be like, *'I've got more important things to deal with right now'.* That's one of the reasons I got a job, because I needed to be, it seemed like I'd spent a really long time ... it was a long time in education.

Her struggle to articulate the motivations behind her decision-making process was reflected in the narratives of a significant proportion of the other participants. Jenny for example talked about leaving her apprenticeship due to a dispute with her manager over sickness leave, but then went on to say that she had been fed up with the whole process of the training because she had been working full time hours on very low pay and had felt unsupported by her learning mentor. She explained that although the dispute with her manager had caused her to quit she had been frustrated with her work for a long time and would most likely have left eventually anyway. Holly, another example of a young person who had left a learning opportunity early, said that having started a part time job alongside her course she had found it hard to juggle both commitments and had begun to realise that she was not enjoying the post-16 education course and could not see its benefit to her in the future. The motivation of earning money from her work coupled with her disinterest in the course made dropping out a relatively easy decision to make. Although she never formally 'quit' the course, Holly stopped attending in the spring of Year 12 and was taken off roll for the following September. This approach was fairly common, with young people talking about dropping out of a variety of provision without speaking with their teachers first.

6.2.3 James and Matt - Aspiration and resources

The comparison of stories explores the role of class and motivation in the post-16 progression of two young people who had left school at 16 with no qualifications. Both young men were White British and 17 years-old at the time of their first interview. James was working full time with his father's building firm. Matt was doing odd jobs for friends of the family interspersed with long periods of unemployment. Neither James nor Matt had got on well at school. For Matt this meant regular exclusion due mainly to the misbehaviour he used to cover up the fact he could not read or write, and for James it involved a combination of criminal behaviour including substance abuse and long periods of truanting. Both young men left education before taking any exams and had no intention of pursuing any kind of further education. The table below provides a comparison between their circumstances.

Aspirations and resources	James	Matt
School experience	Attended mainstream school until around Year 8/9 and then stopped attending	Attended mainstream school, including being out on placements, until a few months before the end of Year 11 when he was excluded
Academic attainment	No qualifications	Illiterate. Had three NVQ level one vocational qualifications
Work experience	Working full time renovating houses with his fathers's company	Doing short term work for family friends (house repairs, gardening etc.)
Living arrangements	Lived with his mum and dad. Had an older sister who lives on her own.	Lived with his disabled mother (not economically active) and an older sister who worked full time

James and Matt had similar experiences of school and both left with no qualifications or job-related training. James was working full time and talked with animation and positivity about enjoying his work and starting his own building company in the next few years. Matt's narrative however was littered with dead-ends and negative experiences of support structures. He talked about the trouble he'd had in finding work and in accessing services who could support him. He had attended a short

course in work skills (including CV building and interview skills) which he'd found helpful but being illiterate and without sufficient qualifications he had been unable to find any secure employment. He was grateful to the people who had offered him short term work but was realistic that this was not a sustainable employment route in the longer term. The cause of difference in Matt and James' stories could perhaps be reduced down to two central elements. The first is in the resources available to them through their families and networks and the second is in how the choices open to them were framed.

Resources

James was the son of a small employer with relative financial security and, in his own words, "no shortage of work on". While he did not appear to live a luxurious life his immediate family were able to support him financially and were also able to cope to some extent with the challenging behaviour he had displayed in his mid-teens. While neither of these things made it inevitable that he would be successful in the labour market they did make it easier for him to achieve success once he had made the decision to 'straighten his act out'.

> **James:** It was just like I was doing nothing, I didn't want to go to school, I didn't want to do anything, I didn't want to go to college or owt like that so [my dad] was just like 'mate you can either come to work or you can do one' pretty much, so I started to go to work.

In contrast, Matt's mother's disability and small income from her disability support allowance not only made it difficult to help Matt overcome his illiteracy but also meant that she relied on him for help herself. Matt's sources of support were therefore mainly professional. This meant that he had to actively ask for the help he needed which he found prohibitively embarrassing:

> **Matt:** All my mates go to that [learning provision] and I don't want to be fucking shouting out 'oh can you help me with this blah blah blah'. It makes me look like a twat if you know what I mean.

While clearly wanting to work and do well in life, the opportunities open to Matt all involved more social risks than those open to James who had, with the support

of his father, been able to learn his trade on the job. Getting help with writing his CV and learning interview skills had not been enough to overcome Matt's lack of education and work experience.

Framing of choices

The second element in the cause of difference between the young men's stories was in how their choice were framed. James could look around at the "big house and nice car" that his dad had achieved through "starting at the bottom and working hard". In contrast, Matt could only see a mother unable to work, an auntie living a modest lifestyle on her income from a cleaning job, and his own limited experience of support services. As a result he did not have quite the same level of faith as James in work as a means of improving his circumstances. It is worth noting here that within Sheffield there are a host of support services for young people, some commissioned by the City Council and other by voluntary groups, learning providers and private suppliers (Sheffield City Council, 2017). Matt's story, told from his perspective, suggested that it was a lack of confidence which prevented him from accessing the support he needed combined with a support structure at home which (while well intentioned) was not enough to motivate or support him to change his circumstances.

As described in Chapter Three, cultural capital is what enables people to make genuine and active choices about the way in which they live. The stories of these two young people demonstrate how long term aspirations and short term choices are bounded by what is perceived as possible as well as by the physical and emotional support and resources available.

6.2.4   Alice and Jenny: support for post-16 learning

This pair of vignettes look at the stories of two young women, both aged 17 at the time of their first interview and who had both opted for following a vocational training route into employment after leaving school. The comparison explores the role that support networks have in overcoming adversity. The table below provides a comparison between their circumstances.

Support for post-16 learning	Alice	Jenny
School experience	Attended mainstream school until Year 11	Attended mainstream school until Year 11
Academic attainment	10 good GCSEs including Maths and English	Five A*-Cs at GCSE
Post-16 education	One-year apprenticeship in Year 12, then a vocational course in Year 14	Two weeks on a vocational course, then four months of a one-year apprenticeship
Work Experience	Studying full time with some part time work in a related field	Working full time
Living arrangements	Lives with her mum, dad, and younger brother	Lives with her mum, dad, boyfriend, and four siblings, the youngest of whom is disabled

Both girls left school with relatively clear ideas of the kind of career they would like to pursue, but with a level of uncertainty about the best way of getting there. Both girls considered vocational education routes: Jenny opted for a level three catering course at a post-16 education provider while Alice settled on a one year level two apprenticeship. Having started their courses both Jenny and Alice faced challenges in their first year.

For Alice this was the impact of travel on her adaption to working life. Her apprenticeship involved three 12 hour shifts a week, along with a shorter day at a post-16 education provider. Her work started at 7am and because of where she lived in a rural community in the north of the city this meant catching a 5.25am bus and often not arriving home until 8pm. Her day at the education provision was significantly shorter but still involved travel that increased the length of her working day by nearly three hours:

> **Alice:** I were shattered. It felt horrible because I had come from school working like nine while three ... I went down a like a down peak for a while, I felt drained all the time.

Jenny's challenge was predominantly financial but was also related to relationships with adults. The post-16 course that she started linked well to the career that she wanted to pursue. She had chosen it based on what it covered and what level was

most suited to her GCSE results, but upon arrival she was presented with a list of equipment that she needed to purchase along with the cost of a compulsory trip abroad. In total this came to around £600 and she described how she had known straight away that her family would not be able to afford it and that she had dropped out of the course so they wouldn't have to.

Drawing on family support

When she first received her offer of an apprenticeship, Alice talked about feeling very anxious about how far away it was and whether she would be able to manage the complex journey involved. To alleviate her worries she had gone with her mother for a dry run the week before it started.

> **Alice:** Once I did that I were fine. Like once I knew where all the stops were and where to catch them and things. Just doing that journey once settled me.

In describing her experience of school and of choosing her post-16 options she also talked about asking her parents for support and on one occasion her father had gone into her school to request a test for dyslexia when she'd not had success at requesting one for herself.

In contrast, Jenny talked about feeling like she had to deal with her problems at her post-16 education provision by herself because talking about money was too embarrassing. She acknowledged that had she talked about it with someone there might have been a way to enable her to stay on the course but that at the time it had all felt like too much to deal with. Her attitude towards financial hardship and personal responsibility for coping with setbacks was an ongoing theme in her interview. After leaving her post-16 education course she had enrolled on an apprenticeship which had not been successful. She talked about working longer hours than she'd anticipated and a poor relationship with her tutor and supervisor but that she had remained in the job for much longer than she had wanted to because she knew her wages reduced her financial dependency on her parents.

The impact of decisions

It would be hard to predict whether, had their situations been reversed, Alice and Jenny would have experienced the same outcomes. The way in which they told their stories suggested that both young women gave considerable thought to the choices they had to make and experienced significant levels of worry in making them. However, while Alice drew on the support of anyone around her who could help, Jenny strove to overcome the challenges she faced single-handedly.

From what information they shared, Jenny and Alice appeared to come from households with similar incomes and had parents with similar levels of educational experience working in similar levels of job. There was no doubt that household finances were more stretched in Jenny's household however. She was one of five children and her boyfriend, unemployed at the time of interview, was also living with them, and she described how money and space were both in short supply. Time too was more thinly spread in Jenny's house with a disabled brother requiring care and younger siblings needing to be entertained. Although they both talked about having supporting families, Alice's parents appeared to have more time to spend on offering emotional support and Alice at no point talked about what impact her decision making would have on her family. Jenny on the other hand made this the central feature of her choices. It was perhaps this that made the most difference to Alice's ability to cope with the demands of her course and the unsurmountable barriers Jenny ultimately faced in trying to overcome hers.

6.3 Risking failure in a bid for success and balancing perseverance with flexibility

This final section of Chapter Six addresses the problem with promoting the status quo in the career trajectories of young people who do not fit the mould for attaining middle class notions of success. Aspiration has become a buzz word in recent policy rhetoric, with constant references made by politicians and the media about the growing 'poverty of aspiration' amongst some social groups and the need to 'raise the aspirations' of the most deprived young people. A prime example of this being the AimHigher scheme in operation in England between 2004 and 2011 which

targeted young people from backgrounds which are traditionally under-represented in higher education institutions. The argument runs that if only young people would aim higher, there would not be such a problem with youth unemployment and disengagement. There is a growing body of evidence however to suggest that it is resources, advice and support that have a far greater stake in someone's future than their aspirations (MacDonald et al, 2005; Nayak, 2006).

6.3.1 Breaking the mould: risk-taking as a form of rebellion and a shot at success

Young people appeared to be very aware of the traditional 'A-level and University' route favoured by the government and their schools as the quickest way to career success. They were equally aware that without either the academic aptitude or motivation to pursue such a route the offered alternatives were somewhat inferior. There were two main reactions to this awareness: acceptance and consequent anger at being denied the chance to do well in life, and a desire to beat the system by rejecting all the 'acceptable' routes on offer.

Aspirations

Young people were asked two questions about aspiration. The first was about what they would like to do in life if there were no barriers, and the second was about what they thought they would be doing in five or ten years' time. Young people's responses to these questions ranged from being in a higher position at the company where they currently worked, to being married with children, to emigrating across the world. A few young people did not have an answer to one or both questions and some were fairly vague with responses like *"in a good job"*, or *"just happy and enjoying what I do"*. Only Kirsty, a young woman with significant caring responsibilities and a part time job working for her uncle, did not want to work at all. Even she, however, appreciated the unlikelihood of this being possible.

> **Kirsty:** I'd rather not work and just stay at home and have someone else bring the money in and me just do my horses, but I don't think it works like that nowadays so I'll probably just have a normal job.

Exploring the link between what young people wanted to do longer term and how they had chosen what to do directly after leaving school revealed that a majority view was of a need to start relatively low down and work their way up. A few talked about university but a more widely held opinion was that education could only help a person so far and that hard work and perseverance were key to achieving personal goals. Amongst some respondents there was also a level of scepticism about the value of any formal qualifications. Others, who had found school challenging for various reasons, talked about not being ready for further education, or expressed doubt in their abilities to do so:

> **Alice:** When the [acceptance] letter came through saying I'd got in [to the apprenticeship], I were doubting myself, saying do I actually want to do this, and I nearly turned it down
>
> **Researcher:** How come?
>
> **Alice:** I think it's because a lot of reviews on the course said it's hard work and I were thinking, because of my age, would I be able to see it through.

6.3.2 Planning a career, and the role of careers advice

> **James:** All I remember is like the careers advisor, or whatever they're called, at school were like 'what do you want to do' and I had a look and was like 'well I don't really want to do owt, but if I wanted to do owt it would probably be mechanics or engineering' so...

A great deal of importance is placed by policy makers on the delivery of careers information, advice and guidance to young people in an appropriate and timely manner (although this is arguably not reflected in its funding arrangements: HoC, 2016). The relationship the young workers had with the IAG they had been offered, however, was very mixed. There were two categories that experiences fell into.

Some young people had been disinterested in pursuing any form of formal learning after Year 11 and for this group, careers appointments had been dismissed as a waste of their time. Some had not attended them, while others said that they had been geared towards post-16 education and vocational training and was therefore not relevant to them. Some also admitted that their plans for post-16 had merely been

to 'not be in education' and that they were therefore unable to positively answer questions about what they wanted to do which limited the ability of careers advisors to help them. James remembered dismissing the advice offered to him, thinking he could just "walk into the world" and that 'real' life after school had subsequently come as a shock to him, and Matt laughed when asked if he'd attended a careers appointment:

> **Matt:** I think I wagged it, I must have wagged it that day when they were doing it.

The second category was experienced by the higher achievers or those more motivated to learn, but who did not wish to take the A-level and University route. These young people rarely had a specific career in mind but had areas of employment that they were interested in pursuing, or at least a subject they particularly enjoyed. This group had been more willing to engage with careers advice but routinely expressed frustration that they felt pressured to take A-level courses or to apply for vocational courses with no clear career lined up at the end. A couple of young people expressed a disappointment that school staff had not done more to physically help them apply for courses, which was the case for Holly who left after her one-year level one course even though she'd been interested in progressing to a level two course.

Young people tended towards one of two types of career planning: focusing on an end point and working towards it, and taking opportunities that appealed to them on a more ad hoc basis. For young people following an ad hoc career route, for example those who had gone to work for a family member or friend in need of an extra pair of hands, this had in some cases led young people to find a career they wanted to pursue longer term. For others it had ruled out certain careers or re-sparked their interest in returning to education.

What was apparent in many of the stories of the young people following the more planned out type of career route was that initial plans could not always be realised straight away, and sometimes it was important to put longer-term goals to one side temporarily in order to make the best use of the opportunities that were available.

> **Katie:** I went into a retail apprenticeship which I didn't want to do. I could have waited a little bit longer and eventually got a childcare

apprenticeship, but I've got that qualification under my belt now.

At times this meant that due to unforeseen circumstances or obstacles, their initial method of getting there has to be tweaked, put on hold, or sometimes changed completely. For young people in the 'planned route' group, qualifications were seen as more important. Regardless of how far along they were on their planned journey, they also seemed generally more optimistic about their future.

6.3.3 Jakub and Lukas: disrupted learning, resilience and adaptability

The chapter's fourth and final comparative exercise explores attitudes to further education and overcoming unplanned hurdles in career routes. The two young men involved are Jakub and Lukas. They were both 18 years old and of Eastern Europe descent, although Lukas was born in Sheffield and Jakub moved to the UK aged 14. At the end of Year 11 (aged 16) both young men had plans to study for their A-levels and go on to university, becoming the first in their families to do so. The table below provides a comparison of their circumstances.

Disrupted learning	Jakub	Lukas
School experience	Attended one school from Year 9 onwards when he arrived in the UK	Attended one school from Year 7 to 11, with a gap of 18 months in Year 8/9 due to a serious illness.
Academic attainment	10 A*-B GCSEs including English and Maths	10 A-Cs at GCSE including English and Maths
Post-16 education	Left his A-level courses before the end of Year 12 to care for his younger sister.	Left his A-level courses at his school sixth form after two months of Year 12 to recuperate from a serious illness. Returned to post-16 education in Year 14.
Work experience	Working full time as a forklift operative at a warehouse, earning around 18,500pa	Working part time (12 hours a week) in the leisure industry, earning minimum wage.
Living arrangements	Lived with his mum, stepdad and younger sister, in the north east of the city.	Lived with his mum, grandmother, and younger sister, in the north east of the city.

Jakub and Lukas both fit the profile of high academic achievers destined for university and relatively high-paid professional careers. Continuing along this route was disrupted twice however for both young men by events outside of their control.

For Jakub this first obstacle was his family's move to the UK when he was thirteen. He started school part-way through Year 9 not being able to speak any English and knowing no-one in the city outside of his immediate family. He talked in his first interview about spending considerable time during lessons and breaks reading dictionaries and trying to talk to as many people as possible to learn the language and make friends. The fact that he achieved 10 GCSEs at A-C supports his claim that he was able to learn the language relatively quickly. He was helped in particular by three new English friends he made early on, but felt that the school could have done more to help him. For example, he was not offered any language lessons despite later finding out that this was on offer to other students.

For Lukas the first obstacle (for want of a better word) was being diagnosed with cancer at the age of 14, leading to a disrupted education for much of the following 18 months. He talked extensively in his second interview about the treatment process and how it fitted in to his experience of school during that time. He spoke very highly of both the school and the hospital in making things as straightforward for him as possible but acknowledged that the process of repeated chemotherapy made it difficult to make schoolwork a priority for the majority of this. He returned to school full time at the start of Year 10 and continued on to get 10 good GCSE grades.

Mainly through personal perseverance and support from personal and structural support networks, both young men were able to overcome their significant obstacles to education while at school and after completing Year 11 both started A-level courses.

Making new plans

Despite showing a great deal of personal motivation to do well academically, in Year 12 both young men were faced with obstacles they were not able to overcome. Having completed his cancer treatment at the end of Year 11, Lukas started his A-level studies on what he described as a 'high' that many cancer sufferers get after finishing chemotherapy. He had not however had much time to recover physically

or emotionally following three years of illness and by around November when the 'high' began to wear off he found himself unable to keep up with the demands of full time study. After meetings with his school and the youth support service he decided to withdraw from the course and take a year out to return to full strength.

Jakub also left his studies in Year 12. Since his family's arrival in the UK his sister had been born and to accommodate her the family had moved to a larger house. With this move came a higher rent, and as his mother started a new job in order to generate the required income Jakub was forced to leave post-16 education to provide childcare for his sister. At the time of his first interview, Jakub was clearly frustrated about this arrangement but was strong in his resolve to resume his A-levels the following year when his sister was old enough to attend school.

Despite their set backs both Jakub and Lukas had clear ambitions for going to university in order to create better lives for themselves. Both entered part time low-level employment as a productive way of passing time while they waited for their plans to get back on track.

Changing perspectives

Lukas and Jakub both took part in a second interview in the first few months of Year 14 (at age 18) and by this time their future plans had become much more divided. After doing two short-term jobs on minimum wage Jakub had secured full time employment in a factory and had been promoted to the position of shift manager for which he earned an annual salary of around £18,000. He enjoyed the work and hoped to save enough to start a cleaning business with his mother and to continue pursuing his new aspiration of becoming a professional body builder. While he still saw the longer-term value in education and wished that he was now at university with his friends from school, the thought of returning to post-16 education for two un-paid years of A-levels was not at all attractive to him.

Lukas, however, had returned to education by the time of his second interview and was undertaking a one year access course, an acceptable alternative to A-levels as an entry requirement for the university course he was hoping to start the following year. His girlfriend of four years, who had had to retake her first year of A-levels, was hoping to attend with him. Like Jakub, Lukas had been influenced by the experience of earning money and continued to work part-time alongside his studies.

6.4   Chapter summary

This chapter has been concerned with how young people make choices after leaving compulsory schooling and how those choices play out in expected and unexpected ways. It has looked at how the relationships between individual ambition and external influences lead to differing outcomes for similarly-minded young people. Using a combination of comparative vignettes and the interviews conducted with 28 young people, it has sought to illustrate the wider themes identified while demonstrating a level of individualisation that does not emerge from trend or full-cohort data alone. The chapter was divided into three main sections, summarised below.

JWTs as bridges

The first section looked at the way in which learning destinations could be conceptualised as bridges between different stages of a career. The way in which Jobs Without Training were experienced and understood by the young people in them depending a great deal of their previous experiences and on their ambitions for the future. These differences were captured through five measures used to evaluate a JWT's value as a bridge to a desired future (achieving personal satisfaction, staying hopeful, managing risk, becoming independent, and planning for the future). The bridge model aimed to evaluate the part a young person's current position played in the longer journey they were on. In considering JWTs as bridges a number of points arose.

First was the way in which age was used by young people to evaluate their success in achieving their aspirations. There was no consensus on this (with some young people feeling rushed to make decisions unnecessarily early and others feeling that they had already 'missed the boat' for some career options). However, the use of age rather than life stage to monitor success and progress was interesting in that it is in keeping with much youth and education policy which dictates what people should be doing at different ages and what they should have achieved by when. Compared with adulthood, policy related to children and young people is very specific to age and it was interesting that young people had picked this up themselves.

Second was that sometimes the impact of a specific destination was only significant in its role in reaching the next destination. During interviews, the details

attached to previous destinations reduced the further in the past they had been even if that equated to only a few months. In the majority of cases young people were quick to take lessons from negative experiences and move on. In a smaller number of examples, particularly negative experiences of work or learning continued to have an impact on how young people engaged with their current destinations and seemed likely to have a lasting impact into the future especially where this has exacerbated mental health issues.

Third and finally was the way in which every young person saw value in education only in its ability to help them initially enter employment rather than for any longer term benefits it might afford them. This varied from person to person in that some young people wanted specific careers and knew they would need to return to education to achieve them, whereas others has stayed in learning only long enough to obtain the first job available to them and then trusted in their new work experience and contacts to help them reach the next stage of their career. This differs from the rhetoric of policy and findings from research with young people previously where education is perceived as a valuable use of time while students consider what to do next and that the attainment of qualifications will raise general employability more than personal ambition or luck. Among participants there was a widely held opinion that education could only help a person so far, that employment was a much harder but more rewarding occupation, and that hard work and perseverance were the real keys to achieving personal goals.

The bridge modelling exercise suggested that whether a job met the policy criteria for 'participation' mattered less than whether it brought satisfaction to the young worker in question and whether that young person consequently felt able to face the future challenges they encountered and confident enough to seek the support they might need to realise their aspirations. An argument was made for actions identified in policy as risk-taking (e.g. leaving a learning opportunity prior to completion) to be analysed on a personal level based on what was best for the young person in question. In assessing whether a JWT was likely to lead to success in the future, the other two measures were also important: how supported a young person felt in being able to reach independence at a pace they were comfortable with (i.e. neither pushed into it too far nor held back), and the level of control a young person had over their own career planning (rather than merely taking opportunities at random).

Implementing post-16 decisions

The second section of the chapter looked at the role of structure, agency and critical moments in how original post-16 plans were carried out or adapted. Exploring this centred on how young people described the choices and transitions they had made, their attitudes towards education and employment, and the longer-term implications of events and specific turning points in their post-16 trajectories. One underpinning theme that emerged from exploring these areas was the complexity of decision making and how ambitions for financial independence, marriage and childbearing, and improved social circumstances all intertwined with ambitions to enter particular career areas. The discussion around access to resources and cultural capital is also an important one and is picked up later in Chapter Eight. Another theme was around careful planning growing from opportunism. So many young people had gained their first job through a personal contact but had since made more comprehensive plans based on their experiences of the job they had initially entered with little consideration. The final conclusion to be drawn from the section is that when considering improvements to their circumstances many young people talked about wanting better hours, more secure contracts and better relationships with their managers. Policy rhetoric around youth employment is usually around increasing skills and improving earnings for which qualifications are heralded as the solution. It could however be argued that qualifications or additional time in learning would likely not improve the elements of employment listed above that young people identified as needing improvement.

Aspirations

The third and final section of the chapter looked at how young people could (and did) balance different priorities within their lives and decisions in order to achieve the best or desired end results. The purpose of the exercise was to challenge the policy tendency to promote particular (more common and well-established) post-16 pathways over the needs of individual young people in unique circumstances. The way in which aspiration has become central to post-16 policy was explored and examples were provided of young people who had high aspirations but a lack of faith in the prescribed post-16 routes to allow them to be realised. It was felt by research

participants that the kind of work, training, experience and world outlook valued by young workers are not valued in the same way in policy. This led to a level of skepticism about the value of formal qualifications and many of the young people felt that to find career success there was a need to start relatively low down and work up. The vignettes presented also offered examples of how personal motivation and clear career plans are not always enough to match external factors over which individuals have little or no control.

The main implications of these findings relate to how support services are utilised by young workers and how Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) provision can best be delivered to them. In both approaches to career planning identified in the chapter (focusing on an end goal and planning, and taking up appealing opportunities as they appeared) the success of such policy interventions depend heavily on pitching them in the correct way and at the right time. The next chapter looks at how young people's outlook, experiences and ambitions help or hinder them to fit into and engage with such policy and services.

Chapter 7

Fitting in: JWT as a current and future destination

Previous chapters have looked at the post-16 journeys of young people as destination-strings, set apart by personal characteristics and experiences, and as bridges to future career or life aspirations. The ways in which internal and external factors influence these elements was examined and factors such as locality, ethnicity, and family circumstance were all found to have an impact on what an individual does after leaving school. Chapter seven is concerned less with the reasons that young people find themselves in their various circumstances and instead considers the impact that these situations have on how they find a place for themselves in the adult and working world. It takes a person-centric perspective, drawing on the story-telling of interviews, and reflects on the way in which young workers 'fit in' within their families, communities, and wider society, by exploring the first-hand experiences of young people, how they perceive themselves within their communities, and the impact of early employment and non-participation on their social circles, family relations, and living circumstances.

Part 7.3 of the chapter also includes discussion of the way in which societal and political expectations have an impact on how young workers form and develop their personal identities, and if one policy or type of service can ever meet the needs of every young person moving from education to employment. Chapters One and Two discussed, in varying levels of detail, the effect of policy-change on the perception and educational status of young people in Jobs Without Training. This chapter describes how young people are influenced by such statuses and perceptions, and

thus by policy changes, even if they are unaware of them.

The chapter concludes by arguing that young workers are perhaps the most hidden of transition-makers, which makes them vulnerable to falling between the gaps in services and policy. However, despite receiving neither the re-engagement support offered to inactive young people, nor the progression advice that young people in learning receive through their education providers, the group find positive spaces for themselves in their work and in their communities. The chapter addresses the best approach to conceptualise, describe, and react to the 'rebellious' or 'sacrificial' act made by young people who do not 'fit' well within current policy-thinking.

7.1 The impact of rejecting learning on self-perception amongst young people in JWT

The question is often asked by policy makers and learning providers: why do young people leave education while there are still suitable learning opportunities open to them, easily accessible and free at point of delivery? The answer varies from individual to individual but this section questions the value of seeking such answers. The implication of the question is that learning is the most valuable way of spending time at that age, and stage of life, but there are flaws in such a premise. 'Value' cannot be judged solely on career-enhancing potential and, in practice, the learning opportunities on offer are not always the best option.

A significant number of young workers expressed a feeling that they had never really fitted in to the school environment and that their hopes for the future generally did not align with what their schools had had in mind for them. The remainder of this section explores the reasons that young people gave for valuing (or not) post-16 education, taking as a starting point the observations made by the reviews and subsequent reports of Professor Wolf and Lord Leitch.

7.1.1 Judging value: where young people place their faith

While family and financial pressures, and a dislike of classroom learning environments, were cited by young people as reasons for entering employment, it would be wrong to dismiss the impact that societal expectation and pressure also had on

their choices.

In regards to life satisfaction and future prospects many young people talked about feeling that they were in a stronger position in work than their peers in education. This perceived strength was measured in regards to obtaining good employment and job security in the future, but young people also alluded to being financially better off, more independent, and more in control of their lives.

Unlike a few decades ago when leaving school at 16 to go to work was relatively common, this route is now almost entirely closed off. With legislation to keep young people in learning, apprenticeships and traineeships are the closest alternative but require more qualifications than unskilled work opportunities would once have done.

Vocational courses and apprenticeships

In describing their theory of fashionability, Foskett et al describe "[t]he importance of choosing institutions and programmes which attract 'people like me' or 'people like I aspire to be' " (2003, p.6). Overwhelmingly, for young people who went on to do vocational learning post-16 there was a perception that the kind of people on the courses they had tried were not the same 'kind' of people as them. Mark, for example, described a construction course as being as though "it was full of people on probation", making him feel like he was the only person there who really wanted to learn anything. Similarly, Rachael said she had only attended one morning of a hair and beauty course before 'just knowing' that it was not somewhere she would be able to make friends. Both young people left soon after starting.

Similar stories were repeated time and time again, mostly by young people who clearly placed value in education and had done relatively well at school but who did not want to follow the academic A-level and university route. Having tried these vocational courses they had come to the conclusion that getting a job was a more attractive option, offering the chance to work independently outside of a classroom in an environment where they and colleagues were expected to act professionally. Apprenticeships, at least conceptually, were deemed to be a better alternative to work than vocational training. However, they were dismissed out of hand by a significant number of young people for not paying enough or not providing a good enough guarantee of future employment.

7.1.2 The experience of working over learning

Young people talked a lot during their interviews about their experiences of school and of the challenges and issues they faced while there. For some this involved getting into trouble, truanting and exclusion, for others it was about taking significant periods off for illness and other personal reasons. For others it was about keeping their heads down and working hard to get the qualifications they needed to progress. Mixed up in these stories of school life were tales of bullying, mental health conditions, learning difficulties, and of good and bad relationships with teachers and other support staff.

Stigma and perception in post-16 learning options

> **Lukas:** It's like ingrained into you. It's like if you don't do well you may
> as well [pause], well you're kind of made to feel worthless really.

Lord Leitch's report outlined his belief that in order to adequately compete in the global economic market, 90% of Britain's adult population should be educated to level 2 (the equivalent of 5 GCSEs at A*-C) and that the low level of skills in England was due partly to young people leaving school at 16. A few years previously, New Labour policy had set its sights on achieving a 50% enrollment rate in higher education (Blair, 2001). This thesis does not seek to evaluate the potential merits of New Labour policy. Of more significance, however, is the impact that the change appears to have had on young people's views of education. Young people in this study were still in primary school when Leitch published his report and by the time they were in a position to start seriously considering their post-16 options the view that one could not get anywhere without A-levels and a university degree had become ingrained not only in the minds of high achievers and their families but in those of young people throughout the academic spectrum.

The wish to go to university extended to young people who seemed unlikely to achieve the grades needed to be granted admission. This finding echoed that of Foskett et al who described how among some circles it was normal "to see a place at university as the most prized ultimate goal" (2003, p.7). For those young people who wanted to pursue academic education, continuing on at their school sixth form was sometimes the only form of progress they would consider.

Dunya, for example, had not been at all interested in attending any other institution and had instead spent six months in NEET before finding a job, which she blamed exclusively on her school who she claimed had 'robbed' her of her chance to succeed. Her view that a sixth form/university education was so important that no other route was worthwhile is particularly interesting given that none of her family (including several older siblings) had done A-levels, and the subjects she wanted to pursue (textiles and ICT) may actually have been better served by the facilities available at another post-16 education provider.

For young people without the grades to continue in their school sixth form most demonstrated a willingness to instead drop out of education for low-skilled low-paid unstable jobs, implying that the value they placed on other forms of post-16 education was limited and minimal. This stigma was not entirely unfounded. Professor Wolf's inquiry conducted in 2011 found a 'gulf' between academic and vocational courses and reported how too many young people were forced through courses which gained them few or no valuable skills for working life and instead set them up to fail (Wolf, 2011).

It is interesting to note that as far back as 1996 Ferguson and Unwin found that young people had "very limited knowledge of [youth training schemes] but a widespread rejection of it" (1996, p.74). Lukas's assertion that the policy agenda of pressuring young people into pursuing further education had *"been like this for probably, since like the dawn of schools or whatever"* is probably not too far from the truth.

Rebelling against the pressure: an act of defiance against societal expectation

As well as the group of young people who wanted to continue in education but did not attain the necessary grades, there was a second group. This group contained young people with a good academic track record but who opted to 'rebel' against the pressure from their schools and families to pursue academic pathways. This group chose to 'rebel' against what was expected and make individualised decisions to best suit their personal circumstances.

Examples included Emma, who had taken herself out of school and taken her GCSEs and AS levels a year early, before deciding at 16 that she could better

progress her career through employment than further study, and Alice, who had opted for a level 2 apprenticeship despite having the grades to enroll on a level 3 course, because she had felt stressed at school and wanted to undertake something she could be sure would be manageable. Emma and Alice joined a small group of young people who acknowledged the pressure they had felt to continue in education but felt that they had made the right decision not to give in to it against their better judgment. Interestingly, both girls expressed an intention to pursue higher education later in life on their own terms.

7.2 Entering the working world

7.2.1 Leaving the (middle class) mainstream

Some of those interviewed had worked very hard, got their qualifications, and until 16 or 17 had played by the rules, but they shared the viewpoint of their more rebellious peers that ultimately school could only take them so far before they had to stand on their own two feet. This section explores the impact that leaving the mainstream had on young people.

Nearly all the young people interviewed in this research acknowledged that the societal expectation to study towards further and higher education existed and that the 'life of failure' risk had been made clear to them either through their school, family, or peers. Despite this, no one was able to explain exactly why this fate was guaranteed to young workers or even provide examples of someone who was on such a path. For those living in the more affluent parts of the city, some young workers reported that the people around them (family and friends) found it strange that they had chosen to work early, but that they were generally supportive of their decisions and that managers and colleagues did not treat them differently because of their age.

The widespread belief amongst most 16 year-olds that leaving school and getting a job will lead ultimately to a life of failure is a result of "a heavy national emphasis on learning and higher education" and the fact that among young people's social circles "[e]mployment and vocational options are being pushed further away from acceptable norms" (Foskett et al, 2003, p.7). Young people's interactions with teach-

ers, family members, and the media all serve to reinforce the belief that the only appropriate route post-16 is to continue in learning, and a few young people talked about their classmates, as well as adults, making it clear that leaving school was not the 'done thing'.

7.2.2 Seeking independence and acceptance in the workplace

> **Katie:** I remember my last day of school I was like *'Yep that's it, I'm not seeing any of you again'* [laughed].

Young people frequently talked about difficulties in making friends or getting on with their classmates in general. Having started work, some of the young people who took part talked about how they found it much easier to make friends and socialise than they had with their peers at school. This was especially true for those who had been bullied at school, but equally relevant to those who felt they had never fitted in with their peers.

Regardless of their reasons for entering employment, two elements stood out in comments from all the young people interviewed with regards to what they sought out of employment. They were independence and acceptance. Independence comes in many guises but most desired were financial and residential. Being able to stop asking parents for money and looking forward to a time when they could move out were the most common short-term aspirations of those interviewed. Acceptance was more complex but being taken seriously as a colleague and member of a work-team was important to young workers and many talked about how much better this felt than when they had been at school and unable to speak up for themselves at the same level. Alice for example, talked about her difficulty in requesting a test for dyslexia while in Year 11:

> **Alice:** It were actually [when] my dad came into school to request the test from the manager that they did something about it ... it's horrible thinking that you've got to get a parent in to do something about it, like why can't they just listen to the students speaking for themselves?

Unlike their experiences of school young people nearly always reported feeling like they fitted in at work, getting on with colleagues and in some cases making

new friends to socialise with outside of work. They talked about feeling good about being given responsibility and being treated like adults, and they reported gaining new skills in communication, confidence, and dealing with new people and situations. The perception of having been immature or naive when they left school was a common one amongst those interviewed, and feeling that they had 'grown up' a lot since starting work was viewed as a good thing. On reflecting back many said that they had wished they had been as focused and sensible while still at school, but no-one regretted their decision to start work instead of progressing into further education or remaining in the learning programmes they had abandoned.

> **Holly:** In certain things I wish I had done it differently, but in others like, I don't because I was in a bad place [then].

When talking about their past destinations young people routinely made a distinction between school and 'real life'. This language suggests an underlying belief that attending school could not provide all the knowledge and experience for entering adult life and that some things needed to be gained from extra-curricular or post-16 activities.

> **James:** [They] need to teach more like life skills and stuff, like most of the stuff they taught me like, no offense to them, because I might be wrong, but I think most of that is just a load of shit really, to just get like a GCSE to then move on to something else.

As James' words reflect it was the opinion of several young people that school had not prepared them for the working world, but those interviewed also reported not being 'ready' to enter further education or to make up their mind about a longer-term career. This concept of 'readiness' appears to create a real conflict between policy and individual perspectives. Education policy is based on a balance between developing a future workforce with the required skills for supporting the UK economy, and providing a varied and stimulating curriculum at a level the government deems appropriate for the age of the students in question. The young people in this research based their decisions on arguably the same criteria (what skills they needed to get a job, and what they were interested in learning), but had reached an alternative conclusion. This difference was captured well in James'

comment (shared previously in Chapter Five) which makes a distinction between what he had seen in his personal life and what he knew society wanted him to believe:

> **James:** [My dad's] got like a nice house and a nice car and his own business, so it just shows me that you don't need all of that [education] really, but people think you do, do you see what I mean? You just have to put your mind to it and you can do it really, that's the way I see it.

7.2.3   Managing relationships at school and work

Entering work on a quest for independence and acceptance might have been their original ambition, but not all young people experienced work in quite the way they had expected. Key to this were the relationships they had with peers and figures of authority.

Peers and social groups

> **Katie:** I wouldn't class it as bullying, but I didn't get that set of friends that everyone else kinda gets, so yeah I struggled friends-wise through school definitely, I had a rough time at school.

Young people frequently talked about difficulties in making friends at school or getting on with their classmates in general. This led to some of them to be quite family orientated but for others older partners and circles of (often older) friends, made outside school hours, played an important role in their lives. Foskett et al's theory that young people make choices about their careers that will help them to achieve "acceptability or enhanced status in a chosen social group" (Foskett et al, 2003, p.6) becomes particularly relevant here. Because of the disassociation that many of the young workers had from their class mates, they were more inclined to look to older friends and family members and to model their choices around the desirable lifestyles that they led. This contributed to some young people's desire to leave school and find work in pursuit of the freedom and money enjoyed by older members of their families and social circles which seemed more attractive than any potential benefits of attaining further qualifications:

Emma: I was getting to the point when I just didn't go [to school] I just didn't want to go, I was just a bit consumed in social life at the time and a lot of my friends were either in college or whatever else, and I just sort of was like *meh*.

Despite some such incidences, friends were important in how people viewed the world, and what they chose to do later on. Dunya talked extensively about wanting to go to sixth form but only in one specific school, largely because a friend was going there. She did not achieve the necessary grades and as it turned out, her friend did not complete the course anyway. Ellie described how a lack of social life had become the main motivator for continuing to look for work:

Ellie: I don't know how people do it [unemployment], you know for like a year. I was just fed up of not leaving the house, and, but then I suppose some of them people have got a lot more friends and you know stuff that they go out with ... they don't want to work because they're enjoying life with their friends, whereas I didn't have that, I didn't have any friends from when I left school.

For young people who had spent time in NEET prior to entering JWT, the support they had received had been largely focused on re-entry into learning opportunities (a result of the new RPA requirement). The most effective support had come from support workers who had maintained contact with young workers, providing timely careers advice and offering to support them back into learning if and when the time became right for them. Given the desire of many of the JWT group to gain independence and to be left alone, this was not always possible to achieve. Dunya for example complained about not getting adequate help with finding work, but then went on to make the following remark:

Dunya: The man gave me like a slip to come in, to talk about it, do you know like if you didn't get the grades and stuff. But I never went back. And that one [support organisation] they rang me for some reason. I don't know how. I don't know where they got my number from.

School authority figures

While at school young people came into contact with two distinct groups of adults: teachers and support staff. Relationships with teachers, by and large, were seen as one-way. They were there to impart information and while some were better than others, they were largely viewed as distant with a job to do and little understanding of young people's non-academic lives.

> **Researcher:** What is it do you think that makes you optimistic?
>
> **Holly:** I'm just determined I think to just not let them win to be honest. It's like I've always been told I can't do this and I can't do that. All through school.

In contrast, support staff were more favourably viewed. Even if they were equally unable to help, young people acknowledged them to be well-meaning and sympathetic of the situation they were in.

> **Naz:** She really really supported me, so I still have lots of respect for her as well, she supported me everywhere, she was like really helping me with my lessons, making sure I got into school on time.

Outside of school, support staff like careers advisors and youth workers were generally viewed in a similar light. Lukas for example talked about how he had made use of the help offered to him by non-school support workers, while others like Naz were less keen to engage but were still largely of the belief that it was intended for his benefit.

> **Lukas:** I got in touch with my, er, I can't remember her name, but the woman at the [central] office, because she'd phoned before and asked me what I'm doing, like to check on me, and I said 'oh I've left, I don't know whether to go back to [post-16 education], I've not got a job, I need a bit of help really'.

Work relationships

Compared to those with classmates and school staff, the relationships that young people formed at work were generally more positive (with some marked exceptions).

Comments made about being expected to act like adults and being trusted and relied on more were made in several interviews, and for some of the young workers this had completely changed the way in which they behaved and interacted with others. James, whose attendance at school had been at best patchy and at worst non-existent, had occasionally accompanied his father to work prior to formally leaving education. He described how these experiences of a workplace and his relationships with the team there had been a great deal more positive than his experience of school, mainly because the people at work saw that he was competent and willing to work while his teachers saw only his poor behaviour and disinterest in academic work.

For other young workers the newly attained independence and acceptance gained through working had come at more of a price. Conflict with authority figures or peers had been dealt with at school through a structured support and disciplinary system often involving parents and time spent in isolation or exclusion. At work, however, young people had felt more alone and in some cases had ended up terminating their employment rather than managing and resolving conflicts with managers. Jenny for example, worked at a café in the city centre. While she enjoyed the job and felt she learned a lot from being there (picking up skills like communication, time management, and dealing with the public), she had left the job prematurely after a dispute with her manager over a day of sickness leave she had taken and a feeling that she was working more hours than her contract specified. She described "just end[ing] up being sick of it" and choosing to leave rather than entering into a discussion with her manager or other members of the workforce.

7.2.4   Place and Community

The impact that places have on young people's behaviour and decision-making has been discussed in previous chapters, firstly from a theoretical perspective in Chapter Three, and then later in Chapters Five and Six with regard to the destinations entered into by different school-leaving groups. This section considers the effect that entry into employment has on how young people respond to the communities they inhabit and their perceptions of the places they come into contact with. From this line of enquiry, two prominent areas emerged: the change to the distances a young person was prepared to travel, and the way in which they aligned

themselves with community-members of a similar age.

From interview data it started to become apparent that entering employment had expanded the geographical areas considered by young people. Questions relating to their thoughts on their local areas revealed that many of the participants spent the majority of their time within a few streets of their home but that going to work had provided a necessity to travel further afield, in some cases right across the city. Statistical analysis of these phenomena would perhaps yield some interesting results and test whether this was indeed the case for the youth cohort generally.

Longer term, many of the young people talked about how they felt Sheffield had little to offer them but, with few exceptions, most could not imagine wanting to move away from their current neighbourhoods without good reason. No one, for example, talked about moving to more affluent areas of the city should they find themselves in receipt of a greater income. For those who had moved to the UK with their families no one said that they would want to return to their country of origin, though a few young people did talk about wanting to move abroad based on their belief that their skills would be more valued there.

Disassociation from peers

Perhaps predictably, the increased spending power, experience of responsibility and association with older colleagues that all came with entering employment, increased the perceived gap between young workers and their peers in education, who they had already largely felt distanced from during their school days.

Despite most participants feeling that their neighbourhoods were quite quiet, many did comment on young people hanging around or about trying to 'keep their heads down' and staying out of trouble. The implication of this being that they perceived themselves differently to the wider youth population and in particular the more visible presence of teenagers in their communities. Some of those interviewed also referred to their ex-classmates or friends who had remained in education, stating how in comparison they felt 'ahead of the game' with more life skills and better chances for gaining future employment.

7.3 Supporting young workers: can one policy fit everyone?

This final section of Chapter Seven explores the way in which the needs of young workers 'fit in' to the aims of polices and services that are designed to support young people's transition making. It looks at the rationale for these aims and the models in place to deliver them. Around 1 in 10 people of working age in Sheffield are self-employed (SCC, 2015) and this was an aspiration of several of those interviewed, particularly amongst those in the construction trades. Young people's areas of work were broadly in-line with the work done by the adult population, and their aspirations were influenced by the places they had grown up and the people they had grown up with. Earlier sections considered why young workers chose to distance themselves from their peers and from the learning paths expected of them, and the impact that this had on other aspects of their lives, such as relationships with their families, communities and social activities. In making these explorations, some gaps emerged between support needs and the support on offer and Section 7.3 discusses why these gaps might exist and if and how they could be filled.

7.3.1 Difference and its impact on Sheffield's young workers

For young workers, experience of pre-16 school was significantly different to that of their NEET peers. Young workers had achieved higher GCSEs and were less likely to have been in alternative education provision than NEETs (although still more likely than their post-16 learning peers) and less likely to have required additional learning support.

A political think-piece written by Harris in 2016 surmised that political rhetoric around bridging inequalities in society was premised on the suggestion that "the only thing Westminster can offer working-class people is a specious chance of not being working class anymore" (Harris, 2016). As explained in earlier chapters, Sheffield is a city with great diversity in terms of social outcomes like deprivation, health, and education (SCC, 2015). The legacy of its industrial history has arguably had a big impact on the way in which young workers build their working identities in the city, and impacts on the way young people living in more deprived areas of the city form their opinions of success.

In their interviews there were differences in responses from young people on either side of the various inequalities. For example, young people living in more deprived areas were the only ones who felt that Sheffield had little to offer them, and young people from black and minority ethnic groups expressed most strongly the importance of supporting one's family. Such trends were difficult to model significantly given the close geographic link between ethnicity and deprivation but the stories that young people told about family expectation appeared to have more to do with culture than with social class or household income. Similarly, while research has shown that working class families tend to have less understanding of the link between qualifications and employment, this was particularly prevalent amongst those born outside of the UK.

7.3.2 Careers advice and the alignment of young people and jobs

Although they had ended up in employment at age 16 or 17, young people had not always considered this as their only post-16 route and the formal and informal careers advice offered to them at school, and from other sources, was discussed during the interviews. Amongst the young people who did not want to do A-levels but were not sure of the best alternative, there was a clear frustration at their school's inability to advise them. Some young people's responses, to how things could be improved for future cohorts of young people wishing to follow in their footsteps, included wanting more done to explain the different routes that could be taken as an alternative to A-levels, including alternative ways to get into university.

> **Lukas:** There is that sort of emphasis on, *'you need to pass your GCSEs and if you don't then we're not bothered about you, and you're not going to do well for the rest of your life'*, or whatever.

The fact that most of the young people understood the pressure they were under to stay in education showed that unlike bowing to the pressure, they had chosen to follow the path they understood to be most valuable to them regardless of the judgements of others. These understandings were not always based on accurate information or well thought-out plans.

Stemming from the requirements of local industry in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, the culture of apprenticeships is strong in Sheffield and there are a number of well-established apprenticeship providers within the city, offering training in engineering and other manual work related to the steel industry. The model apprenticeship is based around on-the-job training by an employer, and a theoretical knowledge gained through either a classroom-based element or ongoing portfolio work. However, the national policy push to dramatically increase the number of apprenticeships has not by default increased the number of vocational training places for the jobs that Sheffield's labour market needs. Instead, training providers, accessing government funding, set up Work-Based Learning centres, training new hairdressers, child-minders, retail workers etc., who are then expected to find work elsewhere after completing their qualification. While valuable in their own right and enjoyed by many young people as an alternative to classroom-based learning, they are a distance from the apprenticeships of previous decades and many of the young people who had started one of these 'new style' apprenticeships had found it had not met their expectations and had dropped out prematurely.

The way in which young people engaged with formal provision of careers guidance was very variable. Alice, for example, talked about having a structured appointment with an advisor and then using a lunchtime drop-in session on a few occasions to help her finalise her plans:

> **Alice:** I just dropped in if I needed any questions, because mine were only simple questions because I did a lot of research so I was just like 'but what if this happens' kind of thing, it were normally just simple questions like that. A lot of people made appointments.

Jenny, on the other hand, could not remember attending her school careers appointment but had been grateful for the support offered to her by support workers after she had left school and that it had been through this service that she had entered her apprenticeship.

> **Jenny:** They still get in touch with me and ask me if I've got work so I know I can turn to them if I have a problem, I can always phone someone up from [there].

Similar to Jenny's story, many young people were hazy about the careers advice they had received at school, but the promotion of available help from support services outside of school and delivered locally had sometimes made a more significant difference.

7.4   Chapter summary

This chapter has looked at how young people find places for themselves in their learning and work environments, in their communities and social groups, and how the progression routes they take fit within local and national policy agendas. It considered the impact that rejecting learning had on the way that young people saw themselves and how they placed value on education and work opportunities. It then analysed how seeking independence and acceptance in the working world had changed the way they engaged with peers and figures of authority. Finally, it explored the ways in which the young people interviewed set themselves apart from the people they left school with and how they engaged differently with support as a consequence.

The challenge for any policy maker or deliverer or a front-line service is to present a feasible alternative to the post-16 pathways that negatively impact a young person's wellbeing and future prospects. For disengaged young people who perhaps lack the skills, motivation or confidence needed to participate, this might mean a personal development programme or a chance to retake a course in key skills. For a young person with special or complex educational needs, this might mean intensive personal or logistical support with re-entering learning at an appropriate level. For young people who are in employment however, in a job they are happy to continue in, finding an attractive learning alternative presents more of a challenge.

Many young people, upon reaching 16 and still feeling unsure of what to do next, "adopt a line of least resistance by either staying on at school or following one of the pathways that is the norm for their socio-economic group" (Foskett et al, 2003, p.2) but for a range of reasons, young people in JWT break away from these expected norms. It has been shown that in wider populations as a whole the attainment of higher qualifications leads in most cases to higher-paid and a better quality employment. At an individual level however, a young person working in

a job with informal 'on-the-job' learning and a chance to gain relevant experience of an employment area they find enjoyable, is arguably in a much more secure position than their peers in learning courses (especially those of a low level) who have no guarantee of employment when they finish. Simply counting the time spent in education rather than the potential for adding value made little sense for these young people. Young workers did however report being influenced by the way in which their peers, schools and other institutions judged the choices they'd made. This rarely changed their ideas about their current activity but did make them want to challenge societal rhetoric that they would 'never amount to much'. Learning was by no means dismissed out of hand by young people but there was a strong feeling that the value of the qualifications or courses on offer would not add sufficient benefit to their employability.

Young people interviewed seemed surprised by they way in which JWTs had been reclassified as policy-bad and by the knock-on effect this had had of making them rebels against the education system. Instead they felt they were making a valuable contribution to their families and society and that they fitted much more comfortably into the working world than the learning environments they had previously inhabited.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and recommendations

This thesis has examined the experiences and progression pathways of young people who work in Jobs Without Training in Sheffield, through three central research questions:

> *How are the transitions made between education and JWT by young people under the age of 18 influenced by their personal characteristics and circumstances, the relationships they have with their families and peers, and their experience of compulsory schooling?*

> *How do formal and informal sources of information, advice and guidance influence young people's transitions into and out of Jobs Without Training?*

> *How does post-16 education policy and practice influence the participation choices made by 16 and 17 year-olds?*

In answering these questions, a number of key areas have been identified and explored under the broader strands that form Chapters Five, Six and Seven. This final chapter draws the strands together and forms conclusions about: what factors make a difference to post-16 transitions; the extent to which Jobs Without Training act as bridges to realising aspirations and; how young people in JWTs feel that they fit in to society. The chapter seeks to examine the key findings from the research and the implications that these findings have for national policy making and for local practice in Sheffield. The chapter concludes by providing recommendations for

improving the experiences of young people in Jobs Without Training in Sheffield, and with a suggestion that despite taking an alternative route to their peers, young people in JWT are still aiming for the same destination.

8.1   Post 16 transitions: what makes the difference

As demonstrated by the optimal matching analysis in Chapter Five, and despite the policy classification of JWTs as a static destination type, young people move in and out of Jobs Without Training at different stages of their post-16 journeys. Of the ten identified groups, the majority of young people who experienced JWT fell into one of three. In the first group, young people completed around a year of classroom-based learning and then moved into employment. In the second group, young people moved into JWT after completing a paid Work-Based Learning programme. In the third group, young people entered a JWT within the first six months of Year 12 and continued to work for the majority of the remainder of their Year 12 and 13, with occasional interjections of time spent NEET. The group in which a young person fell was correlated to some extent with their personal characteristics and the life experiences they had had. Four broad groups of factors were found to have a noteable influence. They were: characteristics and experiences, places and spaces, family relationships and networks, and school.

All three of the JWT transition groups contained above average numbers of males and white British young people. In comparison with the group of young people who stayed in classroom-based learning for two years, all nine of the other groups displayed lower attainment, higher rates of low income and learning difficulties, and higher numbers of young people living in deprived neighbourhoods. However, young people in the three JWT pathway groups appeared to be relatively less influenced by these factors and had a higher geographical dispersion across the city.

Some options become easier or more attractive to take when a person's identity, circumstances, and opportunities all come together in a certain way (Thomas et al 2002), as encapsulated by the concept of critical moments described in Chapter Three. Evans (2016) found that young people's career decisions are not only influenced by processes that 'push' them but also by preferences that cause them to

'jump'. The influential factors highlighted by the outcomes of the logistic regression analysis were for the most part corroborated by the young people who were interviewed as part of this research. Personal choice, however, also appeared to have a big influence on the outcomes that one individual might experience over another when both are faced with the same options and a similar level of agency. In choosing particular courses of action, structural constraints such as economic needs interacted with value orientations, moral obligations, self-determined goals, and individuals' own perception of their situation and options (Thomson et al, 2002). There are pitfalls therefore in relying on statistical modelling alone to provide a truly accurate prediction of outcomes based on quantifiable and measurable variables.

Young people were, in most instances, fiercely independent and quick to defend their reasons for working rather than learning. A common theme arising from the interviews with young people was that their choices had been influenced by their personal experiences. For some young people, like Jakub and Lukas, this influence was direct and clear: caring responsibilities or illness had led them down one path and ruled out others, at least on a temporary basis. For most of the young people interviewed however, the relationship between the transitions they had made and their experiences and world outlook, was more complex. Defiance against the system from which they had somehow fallen (through either exclusion, poor attainment, or disinterest) combined with external pressures (such as family opinion and resources) meant that decisions were often taken for a multitude of varied but inter-linked reasons.

Amongst the jobs being undertaken, there was some evidence of a gender divide, with young women in caring roles and young men in construction-related employment. This was not a representative sample however, and when asked none of the young people felt that their gender had influenced their job choices. Given that many of the young people had obtained their job through a family or social contact, it was perhaps more likely that gender had played an influencing role in what jobs had been offered with sons being invited to work with fathers and uncles, and daughters entering the vocations of their mothers and sisters.

Financial pressures and influences were also apparent in many of the stories told by young people. While on an individual basis, geographical location did not appear to have an impact on how young people had chosen their job, previous research has

shown that young people who describe the place they lived in terms of deprivation, poor employment, or benefit dependency, are more likely to state their wish to enter jobs that could give them material security (Stahl and Baars, 2016) and this influence *was* apparent. The optimal matching analysis demonstrated that young people in the JWT transition groups did not come from the city's poorest households, but that they were disproportionately represented in the most deprived areas. The significant impact of local neighbourhoods on career decisions was apparent in several of the interviews, with young people either wanting to "escape" the fate of their parents or older family members, or wanting to stay within the safety of the places they knew and in which they had contacts. There was also emphasis placed on the discouraging impact of travel difficulties by young people living in more rural and northern areas of the city.

8.1.1 Implications for policy

The analysis of data from full school-leaving cohorts, and the data collected during interviews, suggests that young people do not act randomly and that choices made about pathways and destinations reflect who they are and what they have experienced. Despite this, current policy rhetoric and the way in which local education and training provision is structured places disproportionate emphasis on young people's decisions and has a tendency to blame individuals for any lack of success due to the assumption that while not everyone is born with equal advantage, the fate of an individual is a result more of their personal efforts and skills than about their personal circumstances (Beck, 1992; Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Roberts, 2012).

Given what is known about social capital, social exclusion, and social vulnerability (see Chapter Three), there are clearly problems with this as a policy approach (Davies, 1987). The flaw in such an approach is that it fails to take into account that significant pressure from family, peers, and institutions, along with personal restraints such as finance, caring duties, and health problems, mean that at the age of 16, very few young people really have total freedom over the options that they take. The pressure that national policy agendas place on young people at the age of 15 or 16 when making their first post-16 decisions (and also later on in their transition pathways), should not be underestimated. Emma for example, as identified in Chapter Six, held herself entirely responsible for the problems she had encoun-

tered during her journey through education (despite having a number of adverse circumstances to negotiate including her mother's multiple health problems).

The findings of this research were in line with Thomson et al's (2012) conclusion that when overcoming personal challenges, a "can do" approach might make the difference to whether a young person succeeds but that "it is unlikely to be sufficient in the face of structural constraints" (2002, p.351). Rarely did a young people give only one reason for having left a learning destination, and in some cases, the choices a young person had made were in reality little more than passive movement between pre-determined destinations. Policy should therefore not become overly-dependent on building resilience and promoting personal agency, without giving sufficient consideration to understanding social environments and structural barriers to rational decision making and personal achievement.

8.1.2 Implications for practice

Throughout this thesis, local and national service structures and objectives have been described with reference to the experiences of young people making post-16 transitions in Sheffield. In their interviews, young people expressed an awareness of the social and policy mantra that the attainment of good qualifications would lead to good quality sustainable employment. In the majority of cases however they remained unconvinced by the merits of undertaking education or training courses if they perceived no discernible career entry at the end of them. In the opinion of those interviewed, the most successful careers advice came from workers who could explain the value of qualifications in relation to explicit job opportunities. Their IAG needs were focused on needing to understand the direct links between a qualification and increased job security or pay, and they were quick to mock their classmates and peers for undertaking education and training courses that they felt would only facilitate entry into the kinds of jobs they themselves had entered at 16.

Despite the logistical challenges that young people mentioned around public transport, distance to learning opportunities, and family support (or lack thereof) to enter learning, these were cited in almost all cases as compounding reasons for leaving or not starting education or training. The young people interviewed often worked long hours and continually displayed a work ethic that would suggest they could rise to challenges and commit to something despite difficult circumstances.

The fact that young people found ways around these challenges in order to access employment, would suggest that in some instances similar 'work-arounds' could have been made had they placed similar value on attending training or education opportunities.

Courses with work attached were far more popular for this reasons and as the optimal matching analysis showed, young people who moved from learning into a JWT were far more likely to have stayed in learning for a year or more if it was work-based, with movement away from classroom-based learning much sooner (generally after a matter of months). As Evans (2016) and others have previously identified, young people who make active choices are more likely to experience both short and longer term happiness and success than those who are pushed into the only option available. While seen as risky in policy terms, the pursuit of Jobs Without Training in the short term did, in the longer term, lead some of the young people to take up education or training opportunities that, by their own admission, they would probably not have succeeded in had they been pushed into them at 16. While just as likely to re-enter learning in Year 13 as their peers in NEET, young people who had Jobs Without Training were much more likely than those in NEET, to enter Work-Based rather than Classroom-Based Learning. Services such as a regular newsletter of apprenticeship information was heralded as a much-used source of reference for young workers, and several talked about finding their apprenticeships through this service.

Finally, the analysis of cohort trend data suggests that personal and neighbourhood deprivation influences post-16 destinations, and the young people interviewed expressed concerns (sometimes founded in experience) of the financial and emotional pressures of undertaking education and training programmes. Young workers talked about their feeling of personal responsibility for coping with such pressures and the provision of information on the support available, delivered on an individualised basis, could help to alleviate such concerns.

8.2 Jobs without training: creating bridges to the future

Jobs Without Training are not static and do not form the end of a single post-16 transition made by a young person. They instead feature in a range of transition pathways that young people take. While only a small number of young people enter and remain in Jobs Without Training for the duration of Year 12 and 13, a far greater number experience JWTs for a shorter period, as demonstrated by the output groups of the optimal matching analysis. To address the variance in the position that JWTs held in young people's post-16 pathways, Chapter Six presented a conceptualisation of Jobs Without Training as bridges between a young person's position at 16 and the realisation of their longer-term aspirations. The purpose of this conceptualisation was to assess the value of Jobs Without Training not for their current merit but for their potential in enabling young people to reach their desired destinations. Three threads running through the evaluation of JWTs as bridges are explored below. They are: priority setting, conceptualising timelines, and the value placed on education.

Priorities: As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, the social expectations in regards to the central structures of western society are largely aligned with middle class values, not least in regards to education, types of employment and family life. This research however, corroborates the findings of previous studies that young people do not make their post-16 decisions based solely on pursing the highest level or most career-enhancing job they are capable of. For many young people, choosing a job was based on current need and existing knowledge of what was available. In their interviews, young people nearly all framed their current activities in relation to what they hoped to do in the future. Some talked about plans for higher-paid jobs or starting their own businesses, while others had ambitions for starting families. A small number had plans to undertake the further education courses and secure a place at university. For those considering returning to education, re-entry was weighed up carefully against the increased independence and income that would need to be sacrificed. Current and future happiness and life satisfaction were considered the driving factors in decision making, rather than career ambition per se (although

the two were often linked).

Timelines: As well as their longer-term priorities in life, young people also assessed the value of their jobs within the context of their life's timeline and how far they felt they were along it. As described in Chapter Six, some young people saw their jobs as a short-term destination while they either decided what to do or until they were old enough to enroll on access courses for higher education. For others, current jobs were viewed as a stepping stone to better, higher paid, more secure employment. The position a young person held on this spectrum influenced their evaluation of the value of their JWT as a bridge.

Value placed in education: Although the general belief that additional qualifications would lead to better and more secure employment seemed to have filtered down to almost every section of society (Evans, 2007), amongst those interviewed there was a widely-held opinion that education could only help a person so far, and that hard work and perseverance were key to achieving personal goals. Despite their reservations, most of the young people interviewed did undertake some post-16 learning, with only around 3% of any given school-leaving cohort in Sheffield not accessing any kind of learning in the first three years after compulsory schooling. The majority of the young workers who were interviewed saw paid employment as a much harder (and often superior) route to further education, and some respondents displayed a level of scepticism about the value of any formal qualifications. Part of their reason for believing this was that without either the academic aptitude or interest to pursue the traditional A-level and University route favoured by the government and their schools, they felt the alternative learning opportunities on offer to them were somewhat inferior. They had two main responses to this: the first was an acceptance (and subsequent resentment) at being denied the chance to do well in life, and the second was a desire to beat the system by rejecting all the acceptable routes on offer. Interestingly, the stigma that young people attached to vocational education did not appear to transfer to work.

8.2.1   Implications for policy

Policy relating to young people still largely prescribes to the assumption that "any variation [from the norm, is] risky or dangerous" (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003, p.196). In this policy context of post-16 progression, anyone who drops out from education early, or who chooses to work in unskilled employment instead of undertaking a vocational qualification, is perceived to be gambling with their future. Sustained participation in learning is seen as good for individuals, good for the labour market, and good for the nation's purse strings.

However, policy focused on destinations and not on journeys means that an individual's past and current circumstances are routinely ignored, and returning to education as soon as possible replaces the potential benefits of JWT as stepping stone for re-engagement. There is also a risk that other aspects of young people's support needs are overlooked. For example, some Jobs Without Training are good quality and a valuable step for young people into the world of work. Local training schemes, or unofficial "apprenticeships" with family members or friends can be equally, if not more, valuable to young people entering their chosen career path, and a blanket policy on increasing participation in nationally recognised education or training dismisses this value. Similarly, for some young people, Jobs Without Training are of low quality and potentially exploitative, and policy does little to address the requirement to turn such positions into more positive experiences for the employees involved (beyond encouraging young people to leave). Were young people better paid and better treated, with greater stability and easier journeys to work, Jobs Without Training could be just as valuable, if not more valuable, than some vocational learning programmes.

What emerged from the interviews was that the concept of a job without training was merely a construct of policy and meant very little to the young people who were in them. The rationale and justification for legislating against exit from education and training until the age of 18 was that early entry into employment was too risky and that the two-year extension in learning would increase skills, reduce unemployment, and give young people more options in their future working lives. The term JWT however, sheds little light on the kind of work a young person is engaged with or the quality of that work, and any blanket policy, such as the RPA legislation, comes at the cost of preventing some young people from entering the good quality

employment opportunities available to them. The reality is that qualifications do not always lead directly to a vocation (with some notable exceptions) and, academic or vocational, they are often as much about skill-building as they are about offering a direct bridge to a specific job.

The desire to enter Jobs Without Training could be explained as merely an inevitable response to the reduction in low skilled employment and the increased pressure to enter higher education in order to compete in the labour market (Evans, 2016). Young people not wishing to take the HE route felt more secure entering the labour market as soon as possible, trusting work experience rather than vocational or low-level academic courses to give them a competitive edge over their peers at 18. One solution to this would appear to be the development of a good quality and well respected vocational education alternative. Among those interviewed there was a wealth of experience of vocational education programmes. Apprenticeships were the most respected of these, where reasons for rejection lay largely in their delivery than in the programmes themselves. Young people enjoyed the work, and the feeling of independence they got from having a job and being paid and treated as adults, but felt that the learning element did not live up to their expectations and chose in the end to opt for the work-only route. Less respected learning options were Classroom-Based Learning routes with young people acknowledging that the classes were suitable for *some* young people but that they saw more value in getting work experience than in learning about the job theoretically. The subsequently shorter period of time spent trialling this type of opportunity was demonstrated in the comparison of the relevant optimal matching groups.

8.2.2 Implications for practice

Policy relating to post-16 careers advice and transition support relies on a combination of advising young people not to leave learning before 18, explaining to them the negative consequences of doing so, and positively and extensively marketing the post-16 courses and programmes on offer. For the young people interviewed, this was not enough and it was important to them to be convinced by the added value of making any suggested choices and not being rushed into decisions without having properly considered their options, (especially for those considering education as their next bridge). Although long term financial and career-progression gains might

be considerations, so too are other values placed on other areas which differ from person to person (Evans, 2016). Practice should therefore be flexible in not assuming objective rationality in decision making without also considering the context of young people's social, cultural and personal circumstances (Evans, 2016).

Young people with clear ideas about their destinations understood that there were different routes they could take to reach those destinations, but were often unsure of which would be the best route for them or how to go about evaluating the available options. Given that many learning opportunities (especially vocational ones) are marketed on their ability to help young people seek employment in the future, young people felt that getting a job without one gave them an edge over their peers. Learning options had often not been rejected outright but had instead by disregarded in favour of Jobs Without Training because they seemed more complicated with less certainty for entering the labour market when compared alongside direct employment opportunities. The implication of this for practice would therefore appear to be a need to target careers advice not only on *what* a young person wants to do, but in clarifying *how* and *why* some routes should be considered higher value options. One significant finding of the evaluations of NEET policy was that regardless of the breadth of support on offer, the quality of relationships between young people and career advisors were an important factor in the success of IAG provision (Maguire and Thompson, 2007; Coles et al, 2004). In shaping how young people think about their journeys, the success of policy interventions depends heavily on those relationships and pitching post-16 options in the correct way and at the right time.

8.3 Fitting in and standing out

One of the conflicting pressures that pushed and incentivised young people into different destinations, was the perceived appropriateness of the learning opportunities on offer. In Sheffield, there are more learning opportunities on offer each year than there are young people to take them up, and as a result, only a very tiny minority of young people fail to have access to something that would suit them. Most of the young people interviewed had had some experience of post-16 learning but, as demonstrated by earlier sections, there was a level of skepticism amongst the young

people interviewed about the value of some post-16 education programmes, partly due to the kind of classmates that such courses attracted.

This feeling of not being able to identify well with their classmates was a common one. As discussed in Chapter Seven, short personal development courses, and low level vocational classroom-based programmes are often used as an entry point for re-engaging young people in NEET back into learning. This thesis does not explore the merits of such a strategy, but one side-effect is that the young people interviewed who wanted to take short courses to increase their employability, found themselves sharing classes with young people who displayed more challenging behaviour and less perceivable commitment to the programmes. These differences of priorities led them to feel isolated within their study programmes and less in receipt of the tutor's time than their more 'needy' classmates.

As well as having different learning needs, for many of the young people this feeling of isolation from their peers stemmed further back than post-16 learning, and several participants, (most notably females) talked about never having had close friends while at school or being bullied. In contrast, they talked about their colleagues far more favourably. Work relationships were far from trouble-free, and several young people talked about leaving their jobs due to work-based disputes, but young people overwhelming talked about feeling as though they fitted in to their workplace in a way that they had not felt like they had fitted into school or post-16 learning programmes.

Unlike in policy, from a young person's perspective becoming an adult does not include taking an active part in the world. It instead implied discovering a place for oneself in that given world (Cuzzocrea and Manich, 2016, p.562). The young people who were interviewed did not necessarily conceptualise this discovery in work, but rather in their families and responsibilities at home. For some young people initial career plans could not be realised straight away and sometimes it was important to put longer-term goals aside temporarily in order to deal with more pressing concerns in other areas of their lives. This prioritisation was generally at odds with the prioritisation of post-16 policy and this formed the final strand of young people's ability or wish to 'fit in' with wider society.

8.3.1 Implications for policy

In some ways, the central issue in how young people fit in to their communities and wider society is more about how they choose to stand out than about the requirements of policy to meet their needs. For the most part, social policy is designed to cater for the majority of people it is likely to effect with an embedded degree of flexibility as a catch-all for the remaining minority. In policy terms, the young people included in this research (both in interviews and in the cohort analysis) should be considered as members of such a minority and the implication of the research findings on policy are therefore on the degree of flexibility in post-16 policy rather than in the content of the policy itself (although clearly these things are interlinked).

The classification of working-class aspirations as low aspirations fails to consider the value individuals put on elements of employment choices such as "security, masculine validation, alignment with localized, [and] classed identities" (Stahl and Baars, 2016, p.314). The pursuit of unskilled or manual work by working class young people is often viewed by policy makers as an act of rebellion against the education system (Stahl and Baars, 2016) whereas young people have a lot of different reasons for the paths they choose to take and the central debate in the development of policy is whether the individual or the state is best placed to make a judgement on the most effective way of entering the labour market and stable sustainable employment. Faith in the effectiveness of learning and employment pathways comes from the lived experiences of others including older siblings, parents, and portrayals in the media and wider society.

The final implication for policy comes from distinguishing genuine learning options from 'holding pens' used for young people who require personal support before being ready for further progression. In policy rhetoric, and in the minds of many members of society, academic learning routes and qualification hold more value than their vocational equivalents, and this is compounded by a strategy of placing disengaged young people in low-level learning placements. Such a strategy runs a risk of conflict between the attitudes of the ex-NEET young people who end up enrolled on these courses and the young people who specifically chose the course as part of their career plan.

8.3.2 Implications for practice

Both pre- and post-16, young people expressed a feeling of not getting on well with their peers but of fitting in better with older circles of friends, colleagues, and adult members of their families. While not necessarily academically advanced, they exhibited alternative social understandings than those of their peers that left them unwilling or unable to relate well to young people of their own age. In school they had dealt with this through either focusing almost solely on their studies or through conflict and disengagement leading to exclusion from mainstream education. In both strategies, the natural break at 16 was gladly welcomed as a chance to break away and take more control over their lives. While it is probably unrealistic for schools and pre-16 learning establishments to address this feeling of isolation, it *does* seem important to discuss with young people the likely differences and similarities between the education settings being proposed with their current school experiences and to provide information not only on the content and progression-potential of education options but also the kind of classmates they could expect to have.

The other implication for practice is that young workers are in danger of falling between the gaps in youth support services, neither receiving the re-engagement support offered to unemployed or inactive young people, nor the progression-support that young people in learning receive through their education or training providers. While Sheffield City Council continues to successfully track the majority of the young people in their jurisdiction, the austerity-driven post-16 support agenda has had a detrimental impact on many Local Authorities' ability to collect and maintain meaningful destination data and "unknown" destinations have significantly increased nationally since 2010. Similarly, while several local authorities (including Sheffield) have maintained some form of holistic post-16 support service for young people, the impact of severe cuts to service funding has had a wide-reaching detrimental impact on the level and scope of services available to young people outside of educational establishments and this inevitably hits young people in employment and in NEET the hardest. This is exacerbated further in an environment where learning providers are financially incentivised to keep young people studying with them, meaning that the careers advice given to young people is likely now to reflect the priorities of their school rather than necessarily the priorities of the individual (Foskett et al, 2008).

The vulnerabilities experienced by JWT extend further than simply the immediate risks of unemployment (DfEE, 1998; Anderson et al, 2006; Spielhofer et al, 2009) and practice is focused often on helping young people to change destination rather than on supporting them to operate better within their current circumstances. Focusing on destinations, rather than on young people, means that the challenges of the JWT group are contextualised in terms of the addition of training as a solution, rather than other issues like worker rights, pay, and transport.

8.4 Same ambitions, different journeys: how things could be different in Sheffield

8.4.1 What could be different?

This final chapter has covered: the different factors that make a difference to the outcomes young people experience and the kind of work they do, the way in which jobs can (and do) act as effective bridges to more desirable destinations, and how Jobs Without Training help young people to find their place in the world and fit into their surrounding in a way that they were unable to do in education or learning.

Sections 8.1 to 8.3 have addressed the key findings of the research and the implications these might have on policy and practice. This final section seeks to draw some over-arching conclusions and make suggestions for how things could be different for young people in and entering Jobs Without Training in Sheffield.

Perhaps the most important of these is that sometimes things cannot be changed. This is not necessarily negative. Sometimes things happen for a reason and simply the passing of time will resolve them. But other things *can* be changed and improved and starting locally to enable them to become accepted nationally is a conceivably possible option.

JWTs in theory and practice

The first conclusion is that the focus of policy (and indeed of this research) on destinations means that other aspects of Jobs Without Training are less considered. There is nothing to suggest that the jobs that young people enter at 16 have to be exploitative, badly paid, or leading to dead-ends. Were young people employed in

well paid, good quality jobs with set hours and permanent contracts, and employers prepared to support and nurture them into trained and efficient employees, then Jobs Without Training would undoubtedly be more worthwhile than many learning programmes. It is not the concept of a JWT then that is problematic, it is the way in which individual JWTs materialise.

Destinations are not final

In a context of policy and post-16 progression measures based around destinations rather than journeys, the past and current circumstances of young people and their individual perspectives of the future, are routinely ignored and the emphasis on returning to learning neglects to acknowledge the potential benefits of JWTs as a stepping stone into education, for example after illness or becoming a young parent. Promoting learning as success, also risks ignoring the needs of young people in education but in need of support with other areas of their lives

Choice is important

Whatever the potential risks of leaving education at 16 and entering the labour market, it has been demonstrated in both this research and in the findings of other research that success of personal ambition is more likely amongst those who have had the freedom to choose their circumstances. Regardless of the benefits of post-16 education (proven or otherwise), young people who are forced into it against their will and better judgement (either by policy or by personal circumstance) will never do as well as their peers who chose to be there.

The choices made by 16 year-olds are rarely made freely

The individualisation of post-16 education and marketisation of the sector means that individual choice has become a central factor in what young people go on to do after finishing Year 11. However, the notion of choice is a flawed one. Pressure from family, peers, and institutions, along with personal restraints such as finance, caring duties, and health problems, mean that at the age of 16, very few young people genuinely have the freedom to do as they wish.

Same ambitions, different context

It was not so long ago that the majority of 16 year-olds left school and entered work as a matter of course. Just as there were young people during that time who would have preferred to stay on in education, so there are young people today who want to enter work rather than staying in learning. The context of the labour market has changed dramatically in recent decades and without post-16 qualifications, work is harder to come by in the way it was previously. However, there are still young people who seek out such work, and those fortunate enough to come by it may well find themselves better off than their peers who stay on in learning.

The impact of stigma should not be underestimated

Young people do not enter JWTs through ignorance. Everyone interviewed was aware of the societal approval of taking the traditional A-level and University route favoured by the government and their schools as the quickest way to career success. However, not surprisingly, this route does not suit every young people leaving Year 11 and the alternatives available are too often seen as inferior options. Entry into employment did not appear to carry the same stigma as entry into low level vocational training and without faith in the learning opportunities on offer to them, it is unlikely that young people currently entering JWTs would opt for learning instead.

Simple stories can't be told about post-16 pathways

By telling and re-telling the story of how an event or decision came about, the storyteller learns to make sense of it, drawing on the influence of hindsight and framing it within their current understanding of the world. The way in which a story is told presents an individual's interpretation of events and provides a window into their understanding of what happened (Bruner, 1987). However, transitions from school to work are complex, non-linear, and at times chaotic. However well they are told, such stories cannot be rationalised into a few key elements with direct links made between variables and outcomes. Young people in Jobs Without Training are far from being a homogeneous group and while there is value in the analysis of whole cohort data and in grouping young people with shared experiences and characteristics, any intervention strategy needs to be personalised and implemented

in relation to individual circumstances.

8.4.2 Entering JWT: an act of rebellion or a shot at success?

Starting work at 16 or 17 does not preclude young people from all other activities. The young people interviewed talked about learning new skills and undertaking training courses such as forklift training and food hygiene. Their destination is a construct of policy which has limited use for classification by practitioners but very little meaning for the young people themselves. Good employment to them is the end point and entry into employment is therefore a positive first step to this. Young people's focus on gaining key skills and competencies is therefore largely same as that of employers (improved ability to do their job and increased chances for progression into higher-level roles) but differs from the learning and policy sector who tend to rank qualifications and structured courses as the key determinant of value. For young workers, certificates and job-specific training are valuable only for their capacity for finding work in the future and in rising up into higher paid jobs with more responsibility.

The implication of this on the way in which young workers are understood is extensive. Young workers break the norms of modern youth transition-making and their choices go against current education policy, but it is problematic to assume that these choices are negative or will lead to a poor quality of working life in the future. The attainment of good GCSEs including English and Maths is well established as the safest way to acquire good quality and long term employment, while leaving school at 16 with no or few qualifications is likely to lead to a life of labour market disadvantage. However, for the small number of young people who find work early on, as those in JWT do, this may not apply, due to the combination of work experience, key workplace skills like customer service and good timekeeping, and a motivation to continue to earn money and maintain their independence. The education system is not necessarily better equipped to help them do this. Regardless of other potential benefits of attaining any qualifications, if the purpose of raising the participation age to 18 was to increase skills in the labour market and give young people more chance of finding success there, then the alternative route taken by young people in JWT, while breaking the norm, can ultimately lead them to the same destination.

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Appendices

1: Multinomial Logistic Regression Output

2: Interview Topic Guide

Appendix One: Multinomial Logistic Regression Output

Var	Clstr B	Clstr C	Clstr D	Clstr E	Clstr F
Male	1.14 (0.075)	0.96 (0.785)	1.80*** (0.000)	1.84*** (0.000)	1.26 (0.144)
BME	0.37*** (0.000)	0.32*** (0.000)	0.29*** (0.000)	0.43*** (0.000)	0.94 (0.754)
FSM	0.72** (0.004)	1.23 (0.315)	0.61*** (0.001)	1.43** (0.008)	1.24 (0.283)
YOT Flag	0.87 (0.853)	7.08** (0.003)	2.52 (0.110)	10.33*** (0.000)	5.35** (0.010)
5 A*-C	0.42*** (0.000)	0.54*** (0.000)	0.36*** (0.000)	0.07*** (0.000)	0.28*** (0.000)
SEN	0.99 (0.885)	0.86 (0.405)	0.76* (0.011)	1.74*** (0.000)	0.79 (0.201)
IMD Dec1	1.45 (0.079)	0.93 (0.860)	1.25 (0.377)	3.15 (0.083)	0.70 (0.440)
IMD Dec2	1.71* (0.014)	0.81 (0.625)	1.53 (0.096)	3.26 (0.077)	1.52 (0.325)
IMD Dec3	1.96** (0.002)	0.99 (0.979)	1.63 (0.055)	3.10 (0.088)	1.42 (0.407)
IMD Dec4	1.90** (0.003)	1.15 (0.741)	1.73* (0.032)	5.90** (0.005)	1.33 (0.502)
IMD Dec5	2.25*** (0.000)	1.03 (0.943)	1.67 (0.051)	6.27** (0.004)	1.45 (0.392)
IMD Dec6	2.27*** (0.000)	1.56 (0.299)	1.44 (0.174)	7.43** (0.002)	0.96 (0.922)
IMD Dec7	2.34*** (0.000)	1.67 (0.260)	1.81* (0.035)	8.55*** (0.001)	2.33 (0.058)
IMD Dec8	2.39*** (0.000)	1.42 (0.445)	1.31 (0.347)	9.61*** (0.000)	1.23 (0.671)
IMD Dec9	2.00** (0.004)	0.93 (0.880)	0.91 (0.752)	8.89*** (0.001)	2.33 (0.056)
Area B	0.67**(0.004)	0.78(0.364)	0.70*(0.045)	1.07(0.769)	0.70(0.251)
Area C	0.64***(0.001)	0.77(0.345)	0.68*(0.030)	1.13(0.577)	0.67(0.195)
Area D	0.75*(0.023)	0.86(0.531)	1.02(0.872)	0.91(0.708)	1.12(0.703)
Area E	0.59***(0.000)	0.39**(0.005)	0.45***(0.000)	0.98(0.924)	0.81(0.513)
Area F	0.44***(0.000)	0.25***(0.001)	0.31***(0.000)	0.91(0.771)	0.84(0.604)
Area G	0.76*(0.036)	0.99(0.974)	0.65**(0.006)	1.10(0.691)	0.85(0.603)
cons	0.18***(0.000)	0.06***(0.000)	0.15***(0.000)	0.01***(0.000)	0.03***(0.000)

Var	Clstr G	Clstr H	Clstr I	Clstr J
Male	1.58* (0.014)	0.97 (0.758)	0.91 (0.600)	1.05 (0.724)
BME	0.21*** (0.000)	0.54*** (0.000)	0.43*** (0.000)	0.28*** (0.000)
FSM	0.58* (0.040)	1.64*** (0.000)	2.21*** (0.000)	1.60** (0.002)
YOT Flag	13.73***(0.000)	11.41***(0.000)	12.84***(0.000)	32.68***(0.000)
5 A*-C	0.13*** (0.000)	0.16*** (0.000)	0.19*** (0.000)	0.04*** (0.000)
SEN	0.81 (0.292)	1.54*** (0.000)	1.47* (0.042)	1.17 (0.288)
IMD Decile1	11.33* (0.021)	0.76 (0.511)	1.56 (0.721)	1.25 (0.761)
IMD Decile2	7.69 (0.059)	0.92 (0.832)	4.73 (0.158)	0.77 (0.739)
IMD Decile3	12.73* (0.016)	1.01 (0.979)	1.77 (0.631)	1.99 (0.321)
IMD Decile4	12.10* (0.019)	1.36 (0.425)	6.46 (0.085)	2.74 (0.134)
IMD Decile5	10.07* (0.032)	1.83 (0.105)	8.48* (0.047)	4.63* (0.020)
IMD Decile6	15.43** (0.010)	1.63 (0.198)	13.44* (0.015)	5.15* (0.013)
IMD Decile7	17.74** (0.007)	1.87 (0.103)	12.76* (0.019)	5.59** (0.010)
IMD Decile8	11.25* (0.025)	1.91 (0.089)	17.66** (0.008)	3.85* (0.045)
IMD Decile9	9.55* (0.038)	1.79 (0.127)	13.59* (0.016)	4.14* (0.033)
Area B	0.80 (0.499)	1.26 (0.250)	0.76 (0.395)	0.95 (0.807)
Area C	1.08 (0.805)	0.90 (0.622)	0.99 (0.987)	1.00 (0.988)
Area D	0.64 (0.145)	0.78 (0.272)	1.08 (0.819)	0.75 (0.259)
Area E	0.66 (0.229)	0.96 (0.871)	1.39 (0.324)	0.69 (0.186)
Area F	0.63 (0.258)	0.55* (0.045)	0.85 (0.748)	0.47 (0.069)
Area G	0.62 (0.147)	0.83 (0.426)	1.43 (0.320)	0.73 (0.266)
cons	0.01*** (0.000)	0.07*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.03*** (0.000)

Appendix two: Interview topic guide

Tell me a bit about yourself

    Prompts where you live, who you live with, what you enjoy doing

Tell me about what you did after leaving school

Tell me about work

    Prompts What do you think makes a good job?

Tell me about your plans for the future

    Prompts What things are most important to you in life?

Tell me about the people who help you make decisions about education and jobs

    Prompts What could have been done differently to help you?

Tell me about what school was like up to year 11

    Prompts What qualifications did you get?

Tell me about your family and friends

Information to gather before or after:

- Ethnicity

- Location

- School attended

- Area of employment

- Course name and type (if relevant)

Phase one:

Tell me about what you've done since leaving school.

What made you choose that?

Who did you ask for help?

How have you found it?

Would you have changed anything?

Phase two:

Where do you work?

How did you get the job?

Did anyone help you?

Have you had other jobs before this one?

What other things did you consider doing?

Did you consider going to college/doing an apprenticeship?

Phase three:

What are you doing now (job etc.)?

What did you do after you left school?

How did you find out what things were available?

What information do you think you need to make good decisions?

Why do you think your original choice didn't suit you?

Phase four:

How did you find out information about the route you took?

Did you get all the information you wanted?

Were you persuaded to follow your final route by any particular information?

Are you aware of the rules about what you can and can't do after school?

Themes to cover: Education Employment IAG Decision making