
Employment Research Institute

SCHOOL-COLLEGE COLLABORATION: MEETING THE NEEDS OF EXCEPTIONAL ENTRY WINTER LEAVERS

Final report to Careers Scotland

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and background

This report details the findings of research conducted for Careers Scotland by the Employment Research Institute (ERI) at Napier University, Edinburgh, as part of its School-College Collaboration Project. The research gathered information on the characteristics, destinations and progression routes of exceptional entry winter leavers, in order to inform current and future policy.

'Winter leavers' are those young people with a statutory school leaving date in December of the year they become 16. Allowing for early, 'exceptional entry' to college has emerged as a key means of promoting progression in learning for winter leavers. Under exceptional entry rules, some fifth year school students aged under 16 remain the responsibility of their school, but spend most or all of their time (up to their school leaving date in December) attending college. Exceptional entry therefore represents an innovative model of supporting transitions to further education among a specific, potentially vulnerable client group; while also offering lessons for the development of school-college collaboration in other areas.

Aims of the research and methodology

The overall aim of the research was to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into the process by which winter leavers gain exceptional entry; the effectiveness of the support they receive towards engaging with the college sector; and their progression and experiences of undertaking courses through exceptional entry.

The research was conducted in 4 phases: key stakeholder consultation; review of existing Scottish Funding Council data on exceptional entry winter leavers in 2006-07; research with schools, involving an on-line survey to secondary schools in Scotland and case studies with 10 schools across 9 local authority areas; and research with colleges,

involving an on-line survey to all colleges in Scotland and further in a series of case studies undertaken with 9 colleges.

Key findings and implications for policy

The best estimate of the numbers of exceptional entry winter leavers is based upon the Scottish Funding Council, which covers 2,203 young people who entered college through exceptional entry procedures. Fife, Glasgow, Aberdeenshire, North Lanarkshire and Edinburgh accounted for more than two-fifths of these. In general winter leaver entry roughly reflects college entry rates in most local authority areas.

Characteristics of exceptional entry winter leavers

The exceptional entry winter leavers were slightly more likely to be male (53% compared to 51% of all state school leavers respectively) and white (98% and 96% respectively). Data from Scottish Funding Council and research with schools and colleges suggest that some winter leavers share the characteristics of other young people at risk of being not in education, employment or training. They were disadvantaged in terms of:

- approximately 15% reporting some form of physical and/or learning disability (compared to only 2% of all state school leavers), with almost two-fifths of those reported as having a disability being dyslexic;
- 30% having Additional Support Needs (compared to 2% of all leavers). Female students were significantly more likely than males to be reported as having support needs;
- being slightly more likely than other students residing in the most deprived 15% of SIMD datazones (30%, compared to 26% of all state school leavers). In Dundee, Glasgow, Inverclyde over 60% resided in these areas.
- The schools survey also suggests the take-up of free school meals (often used as an indicator of low household income) is significantly higher than the national average.

Any resources to support colleges providing services for exceptional entry winter leavers (for example, through additional *More Choices, More Chances* support) need to be targeted at those areas where there are concentrations of winter leavers and other potentially vulnerable learner groups.

The discussions with schools and colleges suggest that exceptional entry winter leavers are a heterogeneous group of young people. Hence, different approaches may be needed by Scottish Government, Careers Scotland, schools, colleges and other key actors for different types of leavers. A rough typology of the main types of exceptional entry winter is:

- Young people who are clear in their careers aspirations, which requires College training (e.g. many craft occupations, hair dressing etc.);
- Those who may be somewhat disillusioned with high school but who could respond well to a more 'adult' College environment, including mixing with older students;
- Those disillusioned with high school but will 'coast' along in a College environment;
- Those who wish to leave the education system as soon as possible.

School leaving date

Many school and college representatives strongly questioned the value of having different leaving dates for summer and winter leavers. It was suggested that the winter leaving date threatens to further frustrate disaffected learners and adds unnecessary complication to the already challenging process of supporting school-college transitions.

The Scottish Government should review the arrangements for, rationale and value of maintaining two separate school leaving dates, considering the benefits and problems for schools, colleges and learners associated with current arrangements. A comparative study examining arrangements in the other UK nations, where all school students have the same leaving date, may be of value.

Benefits of exceptional entry to college

Schools participating in our research saw exceptional entry to college as providing an important progression route for winter leavers. Benefits include:

- the move to a college environment can encourage winter leavers to re-engage with learning;
- transitional programmes offer 'tasters' for those who are unclear on what specific course of study that they want to pursue;
- college can help prevent those determined to leave formal secondary education from finding themselves not in education, employment or training;

- and the supportive learning environment provided by colleges can help build broader employability (including essential skills) among disadvantaged young people.

There is a need to continue to support schools and colleges to develop effective progression routes for winter leavers, and to 'raise awareness' of exceptional entry as a positive option for young people considering leaving school early.

Subjects chosen

The subjects chosen by winter leavers were strongly influenced by gender. The most popular programme destinations of construction and engineering and personal care and health (including childcare) were dominated by male and female students respectively. While young people need to be free to make their own choices of learning to reflect their own interests and career aspirations, there is clearly a need to continue to challenge gender stereotyping in career choice.

Careers Scotland should continue to work with schools, colleges and other stakeholders to develop careers guidance materials designed to combat 'gendered' views of work and training, encouraging young people to consider the widest possible range of learning routes and jobs.

Progression of exceptional entry winter leavers

The outcomes recorded by exceptional entry winter leavers were generally positive. At the end of academic year 2006-07 Scottish Funding Council data show that 62% had a 'positive' outcome, in terms of: completing their programme successfully following assessment (46%), completing a programme that does not require assessment (2%), not being assessed, but should have been (1%); starting work (8%); continuing studying on the same programme (4%); or withdrawing/transferring to study elsewhere (1%). A fifth of students (22%) 'disappeared' to unknown destinations, and further 16% were not successful following assessment, or failed to complete required assessments.

Completion and progression rates at college were much higher for those (1818 students) taking longer programmes (ending in May, June or July) than for the 385 who took short (August-December) programmes. The former were significantly more likely to report any

positive outcome (67%, compared to just 33% of short programme participants). Only 13% left to an unknown destination (compared to only 56% of those leaving in December).

There is a need for further research on: the different trajectories in learning and the labour market experienced by those winter leavers who ‘leave to unknown destinations’, particularly investigating the relationships between area-based disadvantage, poverty and decisions to leave formal education; the particular problems faced by, and needs of, the least qualified winter leavers, in order to inform future college provision targeting skills gaps and other barriers to learning; and targeted, longitudinal research on the labour market and learning progress made by winter leavers experiencing both ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ outcomes during their transitional year at college would also be useful. This should focus on the progress of leavers over a 2-5 year period following their initial engagement with the college sector, in order to explore the longer-term benefits of exceptional entry on different groups of learners and inform future policy

There is a need for more consistent and sophisticated mechanisms for measuring the ‘distance travelled’ by winter leavers at college (in terms of the development of employability skills and re-engaging with learning) and the long-term benefits of winter leavers’ transitions to college learning.

Good practice in supporting exceptional entry winter leavers

Research with schools highlighted a number of good practice features in supporting winter leavers, including: early intervention (during S4) to explore progression routes with potential winter leavers; collaborative events with colleges to inform and induct those making the transition to college; one-to-one support for winter leavers from guidance and Careers Scotland staff; and strong links to specialist Careers Scotland services. In some cases, school representatives thought that Careers Scotland's role as an ‘all-age careers service’ meant that there was pressure on the time and resources available to careers officers to lend their expertise to supporting winter leavers and other vulnerable learners.

There is a need to ensure that Careers Scotland is resourced to provide both specialist services (such as the successful ‘Activate’ programme) and one-to-one

support in schools to help ensure effective post-school transitions for exceptional entry winter leavers.

Colleges also described creative approaches to engaging winter leavers (and other potentially vulnerable learners) that emphasise 'real life'/workplace settings and innovative approaches to integrating employability skills and essential skills (numeracy and literacy) into more practical/vocational learning formats.

The Scottish Government and relevant local stakeholders should continue to support forums where college learning professionals can share good practice in supporting and delivering appropriate learning interventions for winter leavers and other potentially vulnerable groups.

Schools, colleges and Careers Scotland should continue to work together to ensure that those commencing short-term winter leavers programmes are directed towards agreed progression routes, in the shape of 'January-start' college courses or alternative training provision.

Both specialist programmes, and the support offered to winter leavers integrated into mainstream courses, share 'good practice' features that emphasise holistic approaches to learning (addressing the range of learners' needs) and personalised mentoring and support – continued support is needed in colleges (through additional *More Choices, More Chances* resources where required) in developing innovative approaches to helping these learners.

Good practice in partnership-working

Schools and colleges gave a number of examples of effective partnership-working. Critical success factors leading to effective partnerships included:

- regular (formal and informal) contacts between dedicated, named school and college staff to share information and practice (often facilitated by geographical proximity);
- co-operation on a range of programmes throughout young people's school careers , and the resourcing of 'solid projects' with clear objectives such as the successful *Skills for Work* programme;

- the leadership of senior managers in both schools and colleges who are willing to commit time and resources to school-college partnership-working.

Many colleges would value the opportunity to extend partnership-working with schools beyond their immediate locality and to engage more proactively with a wider range of schools, but resources for school-college liaison work are limited. Given the potential importance of transitions to further education to the *More Choices, More Chances* agenda, there is a need to continue to support and encourage school-college collaboration in this area.

Continuing support and future funding for school-college collaboration should focus on encouraging schools to strengthen links with colleges outwith their immediate locality, but within the reach of public transport. There is also a case to be made for additional resources to develop regional events and on-line forums allowing for the sharing of experiences and dissemination of good practice in school-college collaboration. Clearly, detailed consultation with schools and colleges is required in order to establish what form future practice-sharing activities should take.

Recent moves to develop a local authority-wide winter leavers programme in Glasgow may offer important insights on the potential to co-ordinate such specialist provision within and across local authorities – there is a need to identify and disseminate good practice lessons from this pilot programme and to encourage further co-ordination where appropriate.

The added value delivered by co-ordinating activities at local authority-level – in terms of ensuring that there is sufficient capacity to meet winter leavers' needs and promoting more consistent service provision and monitoring – should provide a focus for future research and practice-sharing. At a basic level, local authorities may have a role to play in helping to improve the flow of information between all schools and colleges on potential numbers of winter leavers who will be seeking exceptional entry in a given year; and the likely capacity of colleges to provide places on popular courses for these students. It is also important that colleges continue to have access to *More Choices, More Chances* funding and other forms of support that allow them to engage with and assist vulnerable young people.

During the period (to December) when schools are still responsible for the leavers, many schools reported that the feedback provided by colleges on attendance, attainment and progression among exceptional entry winter leavers as being adequate, but there were concerns in some cases regarding the resources available to colleges to ensure that reporting is always provided in a complete and timeous manner.

There is a need to ensure that colleges' systems for reporting attendance, attainment and progression among winter leavers are adequately resourced, and that good practice in developing feedback mechanisms is shared among schools and colleges.

Conclusions

Schools and colleges need to be supported to build upon and strengthen both effective partnerships and innovative approaches to engaging with (and delivering learning for) winter leavers. Colleges in particular have a crucial role to play in the *More Choices, More Chances* agenda, and the funding and support that they receive from government must continue to reflect the importance of providing opportunities for, and supporting, potentially vulnerable school leavers.

Careers Scotland and its partners also have a key role to play in: advising young people on progression routes; supporting school-college collaboration; exploring opportunities for co-ordination and information-sharing; and providing forums for the dissemination of good practice. But there is no room for complacency. A relatively small number, but still too many winter leavers fail to achieve positive outcomes or disappear 'off the radar'. A continuing priority for Careers Scotland and partners must be to investigate the issues faced by those not in education, employment or training; gain an understanding of the long-term benefits of effective transitions to college, and the long-term consequences when winter leavers 'drop out'; and inform policy on providing 'more choices and more chances' for these young people.

SCHOOL-COLLEGE COLLABORATION: MEETING THE NEEDS OF EXCEPTIONAL ENTRY WINTER LEAVERS

1. INTRODUCTION

This report details the findings of research conducted for Careers Scotland by the Employment Research Institute (ERI) at Napier University, Edinburgh. The research was undertaken as part of Careers Scotland's School-College Collaboration Project.

As part of its School-College Collaboration Project, Careers Scotland has sought to promote and inform effective interventions meeting the needs of 'winter leavers' – those young people with a statutory school leaving date in December of the year they become 16. Allowing for early, 'exceptional entry' to college has emerged as a key means of promoting progression in learning for Winter Leavers. Under exceptional entry rules, some fifth year students aged under 16 remain the responsibility of their school, but spend most or all of their time (up to their school leaving date in December) attending college. For instance, this may be particularly appropriate for young people who are clearly requiring College training, or for those who are disillusioned with high school but who could respond well to a more 'adult' environment, including mixing with older students. Exceptional entry therefore represents an innovative model of supporting transitions to further education among a specific, potentially vulnerable client group; while also offering lessons for the development of school-college collaboration in other areas.

However, there has been no previous attempt to explore the characteristics, destinations and progression routes of exceptional entry winter leavers, in order to inform current and future policy interventions. Hence:

- This report helps fills that gap;
- It draws on interviews with key stakeholders, analyses existing official data, and presents the results of new survey research with Scotland's schools and colleges and in-depth case studies to discuss the issues faced by exceptional entry winter leavers;
- It identifies both challenges and good practice in supporting these young people.

Careers Scotland (as part of its role within Skills Development Scotland) is committed to ensuring that all young people receive appropriate advice and guidance to develop sustainable learning and career pathways. Careers Scotland's School-College

Collaboration activities have provided additional resources to promote a range of innovative interventions targeted at vulnerable young people at risk of finding themselves not in education, employment or training. Assisting such young people is a key priority for the Scottish Government's *More Choices, More Chances* agenda, which notes the importance of 'expanding choice for work-related vocational learning' through school-college collaboration.¹ Hence services to exceptional entry winter leavers are important.

The key issues addressed by the research were:

- the need to map the number of exceptional entry winter leavers across schools, colleges and areas;
- the need to identify the qualification levels of students who undertake exceptional entry, and consider the implications of low levels of attainment where it exists;
- the need to gain an understanding of the programmes of study pursued by exceptional entry winter leavers and any related variations in sustainability/retention;
- the need to explore associations between levels of qualification, gender, course characteristics and the outcomes achieved by winter leavers undertaking exceptional entry to college;
- the need to identify patterns in the progression routes of winter leavers, in terms of course success rates (course completion and the award of qualifications) and progression to further study;
- the need to identify and explore any evidence of gender stereotyping and/or gender segregation in young people's progression at college through exceptional entry.

Following this introduction, the remainder of the report is structured as follows.

- Part 2 presents the background to and aims of the research.
- Part 3 describes the methodology.
- Part 4 presents an analysis of data provided by the Scottish Funding Council on the characteristics and destinations of exceptional entry winter leavers with a school leaving date in December 2006.
- Part 5 presents the findings of an on-line survey and in-depth case studies with schools, focusing on the issues faced by exceptional entry winter leavers leaving in December 2007, and the strategies developed by schools to support winter leavers.

¹ Scottish Executive (2006) *More Choices, More Chances: A Strategy to Reduce the Proportion of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

- Part 6 presents the findings of an on-line survey and in-depth case studies with colleges, focusing on their approaches to supporting winter leavers making the transition to further education.
- Part 7 reviews key findings emerging from the preceding analysis and considers implications for policy.

2. BACKGROUND AND AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

2.1 Background

2.1.1 School-College Collaboration and supporting transitions for young people

The Careers Scotland 'School-College Collaboration Project', through which they proactively support students involved with colleges, recognises the demand for targeted interventions to address the needs of young people who are (or are at risk of becoming) excluded from positive transitions to education, employment or training.

Careers Scotland's emphasis on supporting school-college collaboration is justified on the basis of the evidence that facilitating successful transitions to college can be an important element of strategies to help young people towards sustained employment, education or training outcomes. The Scottish Government-supported *Employability Framework* emphasises "building more effective pathways from school to positive outcomes by enhancing school and college links", providing appropriate vocational learning options within and beyond *Skills for Work*, and offering personalised learning routes for young people.² Similar priorities are highlighted by the Scottish Government's *More Choices, More Chances* agenda, which seeks to inform a range of strategies to prevent young people from finding themselves not in employment, education or training.³

Young people at risk of experiencing long periods not in education, employment or training can face complex barriers to progression. Recent reviews of the Scottish School Leavers Survey have noted that those not in education, employment or training were significantly more likely to:

- have not achieved at least five SCE Standard Grade passes,
 - have experienced behavioural and/or attendance problems at school
 - have come from households where one or both parents were unemployed.⁴
- Research in England has also noted that disaffection with education and basic skills gaps can act as entrenched barriers to learning for such young people.⁵

² Scottish Executive (2006) *Workforce Plus: An Employability Framework for Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

³ Scottish Executive (2006) *More Choices, More Chances: A Strategy to Reduce the Proportion of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

⁴ Furlong, A. (2006) 'Not a very NEET solution: representing problematic labour market transitions among early school leavers', *Work, Employment and Society* 20 (3): 553-569.

⁵ Pemberton, S. (2008) 'Tackling the NEET generation and the ability of policy to generate a NEET solution: evidence from the UK', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 26 (1): 243-259.

There is a clear and important role for Careers Scotland and its partners in supporting and advising on transitions for vulnerable young people. Indeed, those young people experiencing substantial periods without work or learning often suggest that they have struggled to find appropriate courses or have been unable to 'make up their mind' on career directions.⁶ Careers Scotland's commitment to working in partnership with schools and colleges to promote effective transitions to post-compulsory education for such vulnerable young people is therefore welcome.

2.1.2 Meeting the needs of 'winter leavers'

One group of potentially vulnerable young people targeted by the Careers Scotland School-College Collaboration Project are 'winter leavers'. Arrangements for leaving school in Scotland were laid down in the Education (Scotland) Act 1976 and the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Students are able to leave school at age 16, with two separate date criteria affecting the actual date when a student can officially terminate their school education:

- students whose birthday falls between 1st March and 30th September are entitled to leave school at the end of the school year nearest their 16th birthday;
- students whose birthday falls between 1st October and the end of February leave school at the end of the winter term closest to their 16th birthday.

Official statistics for Scotland show that in 2006-07, 67% of school students in Scotland stayed on beyond Christmas in S5.⁷ With 76% of students starting S5 during that year (the last year where full statistics on the school population pre- and post-Christmas are available) this shows that around 12% of students who start S5 do not finish it. Some will be young people who cannot leave school until the end of the winter term closest to their 16th birthday (i.e. winter leavers).

To respond to the specific needs of this cohort of students, schools and colleges have developed vocational learning opportunities within the college sector that are aimed at meeting the specific needs of this group. It is worth noting that, in legislative terms, these school students remain the responsibility of their local authority education provider until their statutory school leaving age. As a result, educational provision within colleges has emerged through school-college partnership arrangements, with colleges taking forward

⁶ Anderson, S., Biggart, A., Deacon, K., Furlong, A., Given, L. and Hinds, K. (2004) *17 in 2003: Evidence from the Scottish School Leavers Survey*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/02/25145216/56>

educational provision, while schools retain ultimate responsibility for these students until the end of the winter term when they can officially leave school. The term 'exceptional entry' is often used to refer to this group's participation in college education before they have reached statutory school leaving age.

The Scottish Executive's 2005 'Lifelong Partners' strategy noted that full-time college learning for winter leavers can present options that may be more suitable for some, but also that schools, colleges, local authorities and Careers Scotland should work together to ensure that vulnerable students attending college full-time alongside adult learners receive the support that they need.⁸ Supporting exceptional entry to the college sector is also seen by Careers Scotland as a potentially important means of promoting progression for winter leavers, and the School-College Collaboration Project has promoted this approach among students, parents and learning/careers professionals.

Careers Scotland has also developed targeted interventions that are relevant to the winter leavers client group. 'Activate' delivers an SQA-approved employability skills programme involving group work sessions and individual mentoring, focused on personal development, career planning and career management – considering progression options through college and other routes is an important part of the programme. Activate was highlighted in the work of the Scottish Government *Employability Framework* as successfully combining early intervention with focused individual care, with a 'look and feel' different from school, and therefore better able to engage some vulnerable young people.⁹

However, despite examples of good practice, there remain weaknesses in the evidence base regarding the characteristics of winter leavers, the effectiveness of the support they receive towards engaging with the college sector (where appropriate), and the outcomes achieved by and for young people. Careers Scotland has acknowledged that it is important that its professionals and partners have access to more robust evidence on the characteristics, destinations and progression routes of winter leavers in order to inform the continuing development of current and future interventions.

⁸ Scottish Executive (2005) *Lifelong Partners: Scotland's Schools and Colleges Building the Foundations of a Lifelong Learning Society*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

⁹ Scottish Executive (2005) *Employability Framework for Scotland: Report of the NEET Workstream*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

The research reported here sought to produce information on approaches to, and the experiences of, exceptional entry winter leavers in order to inform continuing School-College Collaboration work, and assist decision-making by professionals within schools, the college (and potentially HE) sector and Careers Scotland towards the development of improved transition and progression routes for young people. Specifically, the research aimed to gather substantial new data and provide new insights on all aspects of the process by which winter leavers apply for exceptional entry, their experience during such courses and their destinations.

2.2 Aims of the research

The overall aims of the research were to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into the process by which winter leavers gain exceptional entry; the effectiveness of the support they receive towards engaging with the college sector; and young people's progression and experiences undertaking courses through exceptional entry.

More specifically, the objectives of the research were:

- To identify the number of winter leavers securing places on college courses through exceptional entry.
- To identify any significant regional and local authority-level variations in numbers engaging with colleges through exceptional entry.
- To identify the qualification levels of students who undertake college learning through exceptional entry.
- To identify and describe the nature of the courses which successful applicants access.
- To identify (where possible) sustainability, progression and outcomes achieved by winter leavers, discussing potential reasons for variations.
- To identify any associations between levels of qualification, gender, course characteristics and outcomes achieved by winter leavers undertaking college courses.
- To identify and explore any evidence of gender stereotyping and/or gender segregation in young people's progression at college through exceptional entry.
- To identify implications for policy and key findings for the consideration of stakeholders in Careers Scotland, government, the college sector and schools.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in 4 phases.

First, the research team undertook a series of consultation meetings with key stakeholders in order to gain a fuller understanding of the policy context and issues of particular importance to the research. Consultation participants included representatives of: Careers Scotland's 'School-College Collaboration Project'; the Association of Scotland's Colleges; the Association of Directors of Education for Scotland; the College Liaison Association with Scotland's Schools; the Scottish Further Education Unit; Scottish Government (Schools Directorate). Further initial interviews were undertaken with representatives of one local authority and one college-based schools liaison officer.

The second phase of the research involved an analysis of existing data on exceptional entry winter leavers entering college during the 2006-07 academic year. These data were analysed to provide insights into the characteristics of winter leavers, and crucially the association between area-based deprivation and school-college transition experiences. These data also provided information on end-of-year outcomes achieved by winter leavers, and we explore the relationship between winter leavers' characteristics, destinations and outcomes in Part 4 of this report.

The third phase of the research involved, first, the distribution of an on-line survey to secondary schools in Scotland. The survey sought to update the data available on exceptional entry winter leavers, taking in the 2007-08 cohort of young people. The on-line survey allowed us to gather new data on winter leavers' characteristics and destinations, combining this information with a large-scale qualitative data-gathering exercise, probing school representatives' views of partnership-working with colleges and Careers Scotland. These issues, and schools' approaches to supporting winter leavers, then provided the focus for a complementary series of case studies undertaken with 10 schools across 9 local authority areas, which involved visits to schools and interviews with senior teachers with overall responsibility for school-college transitions and other staff involved in guidance and student support.

The fourth phase of the research involved the distribution of an on-line survey to colleges in Scotland. The survey of colleges focused on their experiences of recruiting and supporting exceptional entry winter leavers; the destinations (in terms of course selection) and progress to date of the 2007-08 cohort of winter leavers; the rationale for and content of programmes addressing winter leavers' needs; and colleges' approaches to partnership-working with schools. These issues were then probed further in a series of case studies undertaken with 9 colleges in different local authority areas. Colleges were purposively selected to reflect different geographical and labour market conditions and different approaches to engaging with winter leavers. Case study visits to colleges and interviews with school-college liaison staff, support staff, teachers and, in one case, students. These in-depth interviews allowed us to develop more detailed insights into how colleges have developed learning provision and support services to address the needs of winter leavers; the challenges faced by colleges and barriers to learning experienced by young people; and good practice in effective school-college collaboration.

The results of the research are presented below, before we finally discuss key findings, identify examples of good practice, and consider implications for future policy on supporting winter leavers and other potentially vulnerable young people.

4. EXISTING DATA ON EXCEPTIONAL ENTRY WINTER LEAVERS

4.1 Introduction

As part of the methodology for this research, a request was made to the Scottish Funding Council for access to the data that it holds on the characteristics and outcomes of exceptional entry winter leavers during academic year 2006-07.

These data offer useful basic insights on the winter leavers making the transition into college. Unlike the survey data reported in Part 5 of this document, the Scottish Funding Council data cannot be integrated with qualitative information on *how* schools and colleges work with winter leavers to promote positive transitions to further education. However, these data do have two main advantages on our survey work – they can be linked to indicators on whether individual students resided in more ‘deprived’ localities, based on Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)¹⁰; and they contain some information on the outcomes achieved by individual students.

An analysis of the data is provided below, focusing on:

- the location of exceptional entry winter leavers in 2006-07, by local authority and college entered;
- the characteristics of exceptional entry winter leavers;
- programmes entered and their outcomes.

4.2 Location of exceptional entry winter leavers, 2006-07

The Scottish Funding Council holds data on 2,203 exceptional entry winter leavers who entered college through exceptional entry procedures. The local authorities reporting most exceptional entry winter leavers were: Fife; Glasgow; Aberdeenshire; North Lanarkshire; and Edinburgh, together accounting for over two-fifths of all such leavers. In general winter leaver entry tends to reflect college entry rates in most local authority areas. Aberdeenshire, the Scottish Borders and Clackmannanshire had relatively high rates of exceptional entry winter leavers compared to total college entrants (Table 4.1).

¹⁰ SIMD provide information about the geographical distribution of relative deprivation in households based on indicators of: income; employment; health; education; access to services; housing; and crime. The 15% most deprived data zones have often provided a geographical focus for anti-poverty and social inclusion measures in Scotland.

Table 4.1 Exceptional entry winter leavers (EEWLs) by local authority, 2006-07

<i>Local authority</i>	<i>EEWLs to college</i>		<i>Entrants to college (including WWWLs)</i>		<i>Ratio of percentages</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	
Fife	290	13.2	1395	10.5	1.3
Glasgow City	223	10.1	1300	9.7	1.0
Aberdeenshire	183	8.3	668	5.0	1.7
North Lanarkshire	125	5.7	824	6.2	0.9
City of Edinburgh	110	5.0	816	6.1	0.8
Angus	104	4.7	455	3.4	1.4
West Lothian	99	4.5	432	3.2	1.4
Scottish Borders	93	4.2	338	2.5	1.7
Aberdeen City	89	4.0	429	3.2	1.3
Dumfries & Galloway	89	4.0	414	3.1	1.3
Dundee City	88	4.0	508	3.8	1.0
North Ayrshire	81	3.7	512	3.8	1.0
South Lanarkshire	66	3.0	667	5.0	0.6
Renfrewshire	65	3.0	442	3.3	0.9
East Ayrshire	60	2.7	434	3.3	0.8
Perth & Kinross	58	2.6	316	2.4	1.1
Moray	55	2.5	260	2.0	1.3
South Ayrshire	49	2.2	319	2.4	0.9
Falkirk	44	2.0	265	2.0	1.0
East Dunbartonshire	37	1.7	274	2.1	0.8
Highland	35	1.6	484	3.6	0.4
West Dunbartonshire	32	1.5	294	2.2	0.7
Stirling	27	1.2	177	1.3	0.9
Clackmannanshire	26	1.2	103	0.8	1.5
Inverclyde	21	1.0	289	2.2	0.4
East Renfrewshire	11	0.5	226	1.7	0.3
East Lothian	9	0.4	189	1.4	0.3
Argyll & Bute	8	0.4	138	1.0	0.3
Orkney Islands	8	0.4	54	0.4	0.9
Midlothian	7	0.3	212	1.6	0.2
Shetland Islands	6	0.3	35	0.3	1.0
Eilean Siar	5	0.2	60	0.5	0.5
Scotland	2203	100%	13341	100%	1.0

Table 4.2 Exceptional entry winter leavers by college, 2006-07

<i>College</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Adam Smith College	160	7.26
Aberdeen College	158	7.17
Banff & Buchan College	115	5.22
Angus College	105	4.77
Dundee College	100	4.54
Borders College	93	4.22
Forth Valley College	93	4.22
Lauder College	90	4.09
West Lothian College	90	4.09
Edinburgh's Telford College	89	4.04
Dumfries and Galloway College	83	3.77
James Watt College	83	3.77
Kilmarnock College	80	3.63
Motherwell College	68	3.09
Reid Kerr College	62	2.81
Ayr College	60	2.72
Cumbernauld College	60	2.72
John Wheatley College	54	2.45
Perth College	54	2.45
Clydebank College	49	2.22
Moray College	46	2.09
North Glasgow College	43	1.95
Elmwood College	40	1.82
Glasgow Metropolitan	39	1.77
Langside College	34	1.54
Coatbridge College	31	1.41
Stevenson College Edinburgh	30	1.36
Inverness College	29	1.32
Central College of Commerce	27	1.23
Anniesland College	26	1.18
Cardonald College	19	0.86
Stow College	18	0.82
Glasgow College of Nautical Studies	16	0.73
South Lanarkshire College	14	0.64
Jewel and Esk College	8	0.36
Orkney College	8	0.36
North Highland College	7	0.32
Barony College	6	0.27
Oatridge Agricultural College	6	0.27
Lews Castle College	5	0.23
Shetland College	5	0.23
Scotland	2203	100

The colleges attended by winter leavers largely reflected their location, with Adam Smith College, Aberdeen College and Banff and Buchan College reporting the highest totals (Table 4.2).

4.3 Characteristics of exceptional entry winter leavers, 2006-07

The Scottish Funding Council data show that male students were very slightly over-represented in the 2006-07 winter leavers client group – approximately 53% were male (compared to around 51% of all state school leavers). In terms of ethnicity, less than 2% were not white (compared to approximately 4% of all state school leavers).

Approximately 15% of exceptional entry winter leavers were reported as having some form of physical and/or learning disability (compared to only 2% of all state school leavers). Almost two-fifths of those reported as having a disability were dyslexic. Without more detailed data on the nature and severity of disabilities, it is difficult to consider the challenges faced by both students and learning providers. However, it is notable that the proportion of winter leavers reporting disabilities within individual colleges varied considerably. Some (especially smaller) colleges received no winter leavers with disabilities, while more than 30% of one college's in-take did have a reported disability. There may be a need for further research on the experiences of vulnerable learners with disabilities at college, and any additional resources required by those colleges that support considerable numbers of disabled learners.

Among exceptional entry winter leavers, 30% were reported as having Additional Support Needs (compared to only 2% of all state school leavers). Female students were significantly more likely than males to be reported as having support needs, but we are unable to explore what this means due to a lack of more detailed data on students' specific needs.

Exceptional entry winter leavers were only slightly more likely than other students to reside in the most deprived 15% of SIMD datazones (30%, compared to 26% of all state school leavers). However, living in deprived neighbourhoods was understandably more common among winter leavers based in local authority areas where there are major concentrations of area-based disadvantage. Accordingly, in the Dundee, Glasgow, Inverclyde and West

Dunbartonshire local authority area, more than half of exceptional entry winter leavers resided in the 15% 'most deprived' datazones, compared to (for example) less than 9% of Aberdeenshire's winter leavers (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Exceptional entry winter leavers residing in deprived areas, 2006-07

<i>Local authority</i>	Percentage
Dundee	65.52
Glasgow	64.57
Inverclyde	61.90
West Dunbartonshire	53.13
Clackmannanshire	46.15
North Lanarkshire	41.60
Renfrewshire	41.54
East Ayrshire	35.59
South Lanarkshire	34.85
North Ayrshire	34.57
Edinburgh	33.64
Aberdeen	30.34
Fife	25.61
South Ayrshire	24.49
West Lothian	21.43
Angus	17.65
Dumfries & Galloway	15.73
Perth & Kinross	15.52
Stirling	14.81
East Dunbartonshire	13.51
Highlands	11.43
Falkirk	11.36
East Renfrewshire	9.09
Aberdeenshire	8.74
Scottish Borders	8.60
Moray	3.64
East Lothian	0.00
Argyll & Bute	0.00
Orkney Islands	0.00
Midlothian	0.00
Shetland Islands	0.00
Eilean Siar	0.00
<i>Scotland</i>	29.63

Table 4.4 Exceptional entry winter leavers residing in deprived areas, by college

<i>College</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
John Wheatley College	39	72.22
Glasgow College of Nautical Studies	11	68.75
Stow College	12	66.67
Coatbridge College	19	61.29
Dundee College	58	59.18
Anniesland College	15	57.69
Clydebank College	28	57.14
Motherwell College	37	54.41
North Glasgow College	23	53.49
James Watt College	39	46.99
Reid Kerr College	28	45.16
Glasgow Metropolitan	17	43.59
Cardonald College	7	36.84
Adam Smith College	51	31.88
Edinburgh's Telford College	27	30.34
Central College of Commerce	8	29.63
Langside College	10	29.41
The North Highland College	2	28.57
Kilmarnock College	22	27.85
Ayr College	16	26.67
Stevenson College Edinburgh	8	26.67
West Lothian College	21	23.33
Forth Valley College	21	22.58
Lauder College	17	19.10
Dumfries and Galloway College	15	18.07
Angus College	18	17.31
Cumbernauld College	10	16.67
Perth College	9	16.67
Aberdeen College	26	16.46
Elmwood College	6	15.00
Banff & Buchan College	17	14.78
Jewel and Esk College	1	12.50
Borders College	8	8.60
South Lanarkshire College	1	7.14
Inverness College	2	6.90
Moray College	2	4.35
Barony College	0	0.00
Lews Castle College	0	0.00
Oatridge Agricultural College	0	0.00
Orkney College	0	0.00
Shetland College	0	0.00
<i>Scotland</i>	<i>651</i>	<i>29.63</i>

Similarly, winter leavers attending the major Glasgow colleges were more likely to reside in deprived neighbourhoods – more than two-thirds of winter leavers attending John Wheatley College, Glasgow College of Nautical Studies and Stow College came from these areas. Among those colleges receiving more than 100 winter leavers, Banff and Buchan College reported the smallest proportion from disadvantaged areas (approx. 15%) (Table 4.4).

Exceptional entry winter leavers were significantly more likely to be unqualified than the total population of public school leavers, with 74% of those on the Scottish Funding Council database not having achieved Standard Grades (SCQF Level 3). Female students were slightly more likely to be unqualified.

4.4 Destinations and outcomes of exceptional entry winter leavers, 2006-07

4.4.1 Course destinations of exceptional entry winter leavers, 2006-07

Scottish Funding Council data show that the three most popular areas of study among exceptional entry winter leavers were ‘family care, personal development or personal care’ (21% of all students entering college), ‘engineering’ (17%) and ‘construction and property/built environment’ (14%). These three areas of study accounted for more than half of all destinations for winter leavers.

Within these general areas of study certain subjects were particularly popular. For example, more than half of those engaged in ‘family care, personal development or personal care’ were undertaking hair/personal care services’ training. Among those taking ‘engineering’ programmes ‘vehicle maintenance/repair’ was the focus of study for two-fifths of students (with ‘mechanical engineering’ also popular). Within the ‘construction and property/built environment’ study area, more than half of students were undertaking ‘general construction’ courses, with a further third involved in ‘building/construction operations’ programmes.

There appeared to be little connection between area of residence and selection of many of the most popular subjects of study among winter leavers, except for ‘family care, personal

development or personal care', where 37% of students resided in 'most deprived 15%' datazones, significantly higher than the average for all subject areas.

There is, however, clear evidence of the strongly gendered nature of many study choices among winter leavers. As Table 4.5 demonstrates, female students were over-represented in the 'family care, personal development or personal care' subject area (making up more than three-quarters of those studying these subjects), and were even more dominant in 'healthcare, medicine or health and safety' (where many students focus on developing childcare skills). Male students were as, or more, dominant in 'engineering' and 'construction and property'.

Table 4.5 Course destinations of exceptional entry winter leavers, 2006-07

<i>Subject area</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
Family care, personal development, personal care	343	116	459
Engineering	11	352	363
Construction and property/built environment	8	296	304
Catering/leisure/tourism	122	77	199
Healthcare, medicine or health and safety	193	4	197
Business and management	91	30	121
IT & information studies	41	66	107
Sports and recreation	17	59	76
Agriculture and animal care	27	39	66
Performing arts	40	23	63
Media	31	25	56
Arts and crafts	36	11	47
Education and training	17	7	24
Sciences and mathematics	16	8	24
Law and social science	22	1	23
Manufacturing and production	1	17	18
Services to industry	1	16	17
Transport services	0	15	15
Environment and energy	2	6	8
Humanities	6	2	8
Languages	3	1	4
Sales and marketing	2	2	4
Total	1030	1173	2203

These data suggest that winter leavers continue to make choices in accordance with traditional views of gender roles in the labour market. Part 5.3.2 of this report provides

more detailed analyses of gender divisions in course choices based on new survey research with schools, focusing on this year's exceptional entry winter leavers.

4.4.2 Outcomes of exceptional entry winter leavers, 2006-07

Perhaps the most valuable element of the data provided by the Scottish Funding Council relates the outcomes recorded by exceptional entry winter leavers at the end of academic year 2006-07. As shown below (Table 4.6), the majority had what can be termed a 'positive' outcome, having: completed their programme successfully following assessment (approximately 46%) or completed a programme that does not require assessment (2%), or was not assessed, but should have been (1%); started work (8%); continued studying on the same programme (4%); or withdrawn/transferred to study elsewhere (1%) – in total 62% of winter leavers. However, a substantial minority of students (approximately 22%) 'disappeared' to unknown destinations, and further 16% were not successful following assessment, or failed to complete required assessments.

Table 4.6 Outcomes of exceptional entry winter leavers, 2006-07

<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Completed programme – successful	1015	46.07
Withdrawn unknown	477	21.65
Completed programme – not successful	355	16.11
Withdrawn to start work	167	7.58
Continuing on programme to next year	89	4.04
Completed programme – non-assessed study	48	2.18
Completed programme – not assessed, should have been	24	1.09
Transferred to another course	20	0.91
Withdrawn – studying elsewhere	8	0.37
Total	2203	100

There were no significant differences between genders with regards to students achieving 'any' form of positive outcome.¹¹ However, male students were significantly more likely to leave college to start work and to transfer to other courses; while female students were significantly more likely to continue studying on the same programme to a second year.

Students residing in the 'most deprived 15%' of SIMD datazones were significantly less likely to have experienced any kind of positive outcome (57%, compared to 63% of

¹¹ The data were tested using a Chi-squared test and a 5% significance level (so we are 95% sure that the result is not due to chance).

students from other areas having positive outcomes). Specifically, students living in these disadvantaged areas were significantly more likely to withdraw to unknown destinations. They were also, however, significantly more likely to withdraw to start work. While job entry can be seen as a positive outcome for winter leavers, leaving college to find work may also reflect the financial pressures on some learners. The reasons for potentially vulnerable young people from the most disadvantaged areas withdrawing from college (whether to start work or for unknown reasons) require further in-depth analysis, either through more focused research or consultation with colleges and young people themselves.

The lowest qualified winter leavers (those not qualified to SCQF Level 3) were significantly less likely to achieve any positive outcome (68% of these students achieved no form of positive outcome, compared to 59% of their higher qualified peers). This was because they were significantly more likely to have withdrawn to an unknown destination or to have completed an assessed course without successfully passing assessments. Accordingly, the same group were also significantly less likely to successfully 'pass' an assessed programme of study (43% of the least qualified winter leavers had achieved this type of positive outcome, compared to 53% of other students). Those students reported as having Additional Support Needs were generally not significantly less likely to have positive outcomes. The main significant difference between the two groups was that those with Support Needs were more likely to have successfully completed non-assessed programmes, but the numbers involved in such programmes were small.

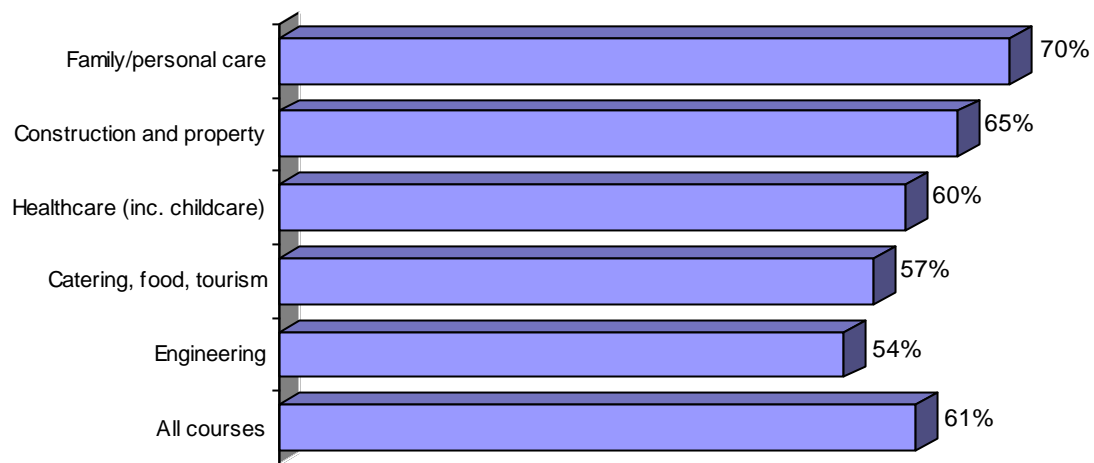
Finally, all the main subject areas reported some form of positive outcome for the majority of exceptional entry winter leavers, but positive outcomes were least often achieved by those engaged in 'engineering' activities (perhaps reflecting the technical demands of these courses). Among students undertaking study in the most popular subject areas, the 'successful completion' and assessment of courses was most often reported in 'healthcare, medicine or health and safety' (52% of all outcomes), compared to, for example, 45% of those involved in 'family care, personal development or personal care' courses and only 40% of those studying 'engineering' (Figure 4.1). Table 4.7 gives full details on the outcomes by subject area.¹²

¹² Subject choices are classified according to Scottish Funding Council 'Superclass II' categories.

Table 4.7 Outcomes of exceptional entry winter leavers, by 'Superclass II' subject area, 2006-07

<i>Subject Area</i>	<i>Withdrew to start work</i>	<i>Withdrew unknown</i>	<i>Transfer to another course</i>	<i>Completed but not successful</i>	<i>Completed successful</i>	<i>Continuing to next year</i>	<i>Withdrew - studying elsewhere</i>	<i>Completed non-assessed course</i>	<i>Completed but not assessed</i>	<i>Total</i>
Agriculture/animal care	7.58	15.15		9.09	66.67				1.52	100
Arts and crafts	6.38	34.04		10.64	46.81				2.13	100
Business/management	5.79	24.79	1.65	19.83	44.63	1.65	0.83		0.83	100
Family/personal care, etc	4.58	18.30	1.53	11.55	44.66	10.46	0.65	7.84	0.44	100
Catering/leisure/tourism	3.02	24.12	0.50	18.59	50.75	2.51	0.50			100
Construction, property	16.12	20.39	0.66	12.17	46.05	2.30			2.30	100
Education and training	8.33	29.17		20.83	4.17			37.50		100
Engineering	7.99	20.94	1.10	24.24	39.94	4.13		0.55	1.10	100
Environment and energy					100.00					100
Health Care	6.60	22.34	0.51	16.75	52.28		0.51	0.51	0.51	100
Humanities	12.50			25.00	12.50				50.00	100
IT & Information Studies	5.61	24.30	0.93	14.02	49.53	5.61				100
Languages					75.00				25.00	100
Law and social science	4.35	21.74		26.09	47.83					100
Manufacturing/production	22.22	33.33		5.56	27.78	11.11				100
Media	12.50	23.21		14.29	48.21		1.79			100
Performing arts	4.76	28.57		22.22	41.27	3.17				100
Sales and marketing		25.00			50.00				25.00	100
Sciences/mathematics	8.33	33.33		20.83	37.50					100
Services to industry		17.65	5.88	41.18	35.29					100
Sports and recreation	9.21	21.05	1.32	10.53	53.95	2.63	1.32			100
Transport services	6.67	26.67		6.67	53.33				6.67	100
Total	7.58	21.65	0.91	16.11	46.07	4.04	0.36	2.18	1.09	100

Figure 4.1 Percentage of pupils achieving any 'positive outcome', by subject area



However, one potentially important factor affecting some young people's completion and progression rates at college relates to the structure and duration of the programmes that they entered. The relatively small number of exceptional entry winter leavers undertaking short August-December courses (385 of 2203 students) were significantly more likely to leave to unknown destinations (56% of these students left to an unknown destination, compared to only 13% of those undertaking year-long courses). Those undertaking year-long courses (ending in May, June or July) were also significantly more likely to report any positive outcome (67%, compared to just 33% of August-December programme participants); and were significantly more likely to successfully complete assessed programmes (52%, compared to 16% of August-December winter leavers).

This means that while short-term winter leavers' transitional programmes may be helpful if providing some young people with an immediate 'taster' of college life, drop-out rates appear significantly higher (perhaps suggesting that many young people see these short-term programmes as a stop-gap in the run-up to their school leaving date in December). We should recall that the numbers involved are relatively small (less than one-fifth of 2006-07 exceptional entry winter leavers transferred to programmes ending in December) but a lesson may be that such short-term provision should be clearly linked to January-start college progression options if completion rates are to be improved. In some cases, winter leavers will justifiably seek to leave formal education at the earliest opportunity (in this

case, at the December school leaving date), but it is important that the benefits of attending and completing courses during the final phase of their compulsory education are emphasised to these young people.

The data provided by the Scottish Funding Council provide a valuable insight into the end-of-year outcomes achieved by exceptional entry winter leavers in 2006-07. The data need to be treated with caution in some respects. For example, while the substantial number of winter leavers leaving college to unknown destinations is a matter of concern, further research is required to establish the extent to which these students are leaving to positive destinations such as work, or find themselves not in education, employment or training for long periods. In more general terms, these data provide only a snapshot of what students had achieved at the end of their college course. These data do not provide information on progression in education after students' immediate transition to college (we present some new data in Part 6). Nor is it clear how immediate successful/unsuccessful outcomes relate (if at all) to longer term engagement in education, career choice or progression in the labour market. Further longitudinal research is required to fully explore these issues.

4.5 Key findings of review of existing data

A number of key findings and implications for policy follow from the discussion above.

- The numbers of exceptional entry winter leavers entering colleges in local authorities in 2006-07 broadly reflected patterns of college entry in general (with a few exceptions). Fife, Glasgow, Aberdeenshire, North Lanarkshire, Edinburgh and Angus reported more than 100 exceptional entry winter leavers. **Resources to support colleges providing services for exceptional entry winter leavers (for example, through additional *More Choices, More Chances* support) need to be targeted at those areas where there are concentrations of winter leavers and other potentially vulnerable learner groups.**
- Some winter leavers share the characteristics of other young people at risk of being not in education, employment or training – they are more likely than other school leavers to have a learning or other disability, Additional Support Needs and relatively low educational attainment. **Winter leavers are a diverse group, but given that**

many face significant barriers to progression (as do other early school leavers) there is a need for continued support for schools and colleges to collaborate on innovative to provide effective learning provision through exceptional entry.

- Gender strongly influences winter leavers' course choices. While young people need to be free to make their own choices of learning to reflect their own interests and career aspirations, there is a continued need to challenge gender stereotyping in career choice. **Careers Scotland should continue to work with schools, colleges and other stakeholders to develop careers guidance materials designed to combat 'gendered' views of work and training, encouraging young people to consider the widest possible range of learning routes and jobs.**
- The majority of exceptional entry winter leavers were reported as gaining some form of positive outcome at the end of the academic year. However, more than one-fifth left college to unknown destinations. There appeared to be statistically significant associations between residing in disadvantaged areas and 'dropping out' both to unknown destinations and to start work. **There is a need for further research on the different trajectories in learning and the labour market experienced by those winter leavers who 'leave to unknown destinations', particularly investigating the relationships between area-based disadvantage, poverty and decisions to leave formal education.**
- The lowest qualified among winter leavers were significantly more likely to leave college to unknown destinations and to be unsuccessful after completing an assessed programme. **There is a need for further research on the particular problems faced by, and needs of, the least qualified winter leavers, in order to inform future college provision targeting skills gaps and other barriers to learning and to inform school support in the years before they leave school.**
- Just under a fifth (365) of exceptional entry winter leavers entered short-term College programmes (August to December). Only a third of them completed their programme, compared to two thirds of those who undertook year long courses. While this may reflect the determination of a certain group of winter leavers to leave education at the earliest opportunity, there is a need to ensure that such young people have access to the required support and guidance. **Schools, colleges and Careers Scotland**

should continue to work together to ensure that those commencing short-term winter leavers programmes are directed towards agreed progression routes, in the shape of ‘January-start’ college courses or alternative training provision.

- Scottish Funding Council data provide a useful ‘snapshot’ of the outcomes achieved by exceptional entry winter leavers at the end of their transitional year, but there is less clear evidence on the longer-term impacts on learning and labour market trajectories and outcomes. **There is a need for further longitudinal research on the progress made in learning and the labour market of winter leavers experiencing both ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ outcomes during their transitional year at college, in order to establish the longer-term impacts of effective provision for winter leavers. Further research comparing the outcomes of all exceptional entry students with those remaining in schools, would be useful.**

5. FINDINGS OF RESEARCH WITH SCHOOLS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 On-line survey of schools

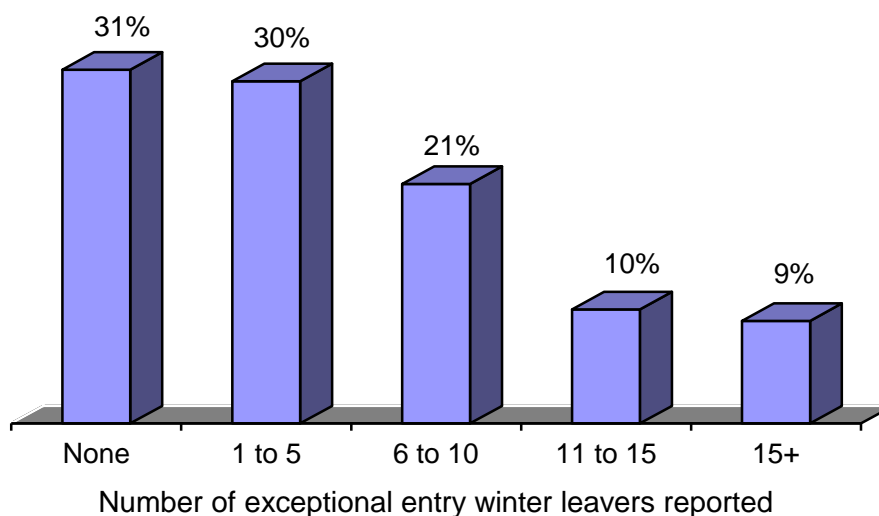
Research with schools was conducted in two phases. First, an on-line survey was sent to head teachers at most high schools in Scotland (386), drawn from contact lists provided by Careers Scotland. Of these, 117 schools provided useable responses (a response rate of 3%), including 96 state secondaries, 19 independent and 2 special schools.

The highest number of responding schools by local authority area were located in the major cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. The number of schools responding in the most frequently-represented 11 local authorities were as follows:

- Edinburgh 17
- Glasgow 13
- Highland 10
- Fife 8
- Aberdeen City 7
- Aberdeenshire 6
- North Lanarkshire 6
- Dumfries and Galloway 4
- Inverclyde 4
- Scottish Borders 4
- South Lanarkshire 4

In total, responses were received from at least 1 school in 29 of Scotland's 32 local authority areas. No useable responses were received from schools in Dundee; the Shetlands; and the Western Isles. Of those schools responding, 36 (31% of all responses) reported having no exceptional entry winter leavers during the academic year 2007-08, while 81 reported having between 1 and 49 students progressing through this route. In total, schools participating in the survey reported having 677 exceptional entry winter leavers (an average of 5.8 students per school responding). More than 60% of schools responding reported having five or less such students.

Figure 5.1 Percentage of all schools responding by number of exceptional entry winter leavers reported



Some schools reported particularly high numbers of exceptional entry winter leavers, so that (for example) the schools responding to our survey in the Aberdeenshire local authority area reported having 121 exceptional entry students, compared to only 81 reported by more than double the number of Glasgow-based schools. The local authorities with schools reporting the 15 highest totals of exceptional entry winter leavers (and all those reporting more than 10 winter leavers) are given below.

Table 5.1 Exceptional entry winter leavers reported by schools, by local authority

<i>Local authority</i>	<i>No. of EEWLs reported</i>	<i>No. of schools reporting</i>
Aberdeenshire	121	6
Glasgow	81	13
Fife	80	8
Edinburgh	61	17
Angus	47	2
North Lanarkshire	42	6
Scottish Borders	33	4
East Ayrshire	30	3
North Ayrshire	28	2
South Ayrshire	27	3
Dumfries and Galloway	23	4
West Lothian	18	2
East Dunbartonshire	16	3
Inverclyde	13	4
Aberdeen City	10	7

Four local authority areas: Aberdeenshire (121), Glasgow (81), Fife (80) and Edinburgh (61) local authority areas contained more than 50% of the total number of exceptional entry winter leavers reported.

The on-line survey asked schools about the characteristics of exceptional entry winter leavers, their educational attainment, and their choices and destinations in the college sector. The survey also provided schools with an opportunity to describe their approaches to supporting winter leavers, and any partnership-working with Careers Scotland and/or the college sector. These are discussed below.

5.1.2 Case studies with schools

Our survey research was complemented by case study visits and in-depth interviews at 10 schools. Schools were purposively selected to reflect learning professionals' experiences of supporting exceptional entry winter leavers across a range of different contexts including:

- different local authority areas (schools were drawn from 9 local authorities);
- urban and rural geographical contexts (based on Scottish Government 'rurality' categories, and taking in 'large urban', 'other urban', 'accessible small towns', and 'accessible rural' areas);
- size of institution (ranging from Scotland's largest secondary to a school drawn from the 'lower third' of schools responding to our survey in terms of school size);
- size of exceptional entry winter leavers client group.

Table 5.2 Schools participating in the case study research

<i>School</i>	<i>Local authority</i>	<i>Total number of students</i>	<i>EEWL reported in survey</i>
Broughton High School	Edinburgh	929	7
Greenock Academy	Inverclyde	847	12
Holyrood RC Secondary	Glasgow	2,020	25
Kilsyth Academy	North Lanarkshire	783	10
Kirkland High School	Fife	644	6
Lockerbie Academy	Dumfries and Galloway	789	12
Loudoun Academy	East Ayrshire	1,049	10
Peterhead Academy	Aberdeenshire	1,359	49
Prestwick Academy	South Ayrshire	1,148	12
St Andrew's High School	North Lanarkshire	1,249	7

Source: Survey

In-depth case study interviews typically involved a senior teacher (usually the Deputy Head Teacher or Assistant Principal with overall responsibility for school-college transitions and/or student support) and other staff members working with exceptional entry winter leavers, including: principal teachers of guidance (and other guidance staff); education welfare officers; pastoral care teachers; student support team teachers; and S4/S5 year heads. In total, the case studies involved interviews with 21 learning professionals.

Case study interviews focused on: how schools address the needs of winter leavers; the role and importance of exceptional entry as a progression route; partnership-working and information-sharing with colleges; priorities for taking forward school-college collaboration (especially on the needs of winter leavers), and potential future roles for schools, colleges and Careers Scotland.

Evidence from both the on-line survey and case study research is presented together (where appropriate) below, organised according to key themes on:

- the characteristics and needs of exceptional entry winter leavers;
- factors affecting the destinations and course choices of exceptional entry winter leavers, and the appropriateness of college;
- strategies for supporting exceptional entry winter leavers;
- promoting partnership-working.

5.2 Characteristics and needs of exceptional entry winter leavers

5.2.1 Sample profile

Our on-line survey gathered data from 117 schools, which reported having 677 exceptional entry winter leavers during 2007-08. However, schools were able to provide some individualised data on only 407 of these students – nevertheless, this means that we are able to produce a robust analysis based on data on a substantial proportion of this year's winter leavers. As illustrated below, there are strong similarities between our sample of exceptional entry winter leavers and the characteristics of students taking similar progression routes during 2006-07 according to the Scottish Funding Council (see Part 4 of this report).

Compared to all state school leavers, exceptional entry winter leavers were significantly more likely to be male, and to have a declared (physical or learning) disability.

Table 5.3 Characteristics of exceptional entry winter leavers (% of all students)

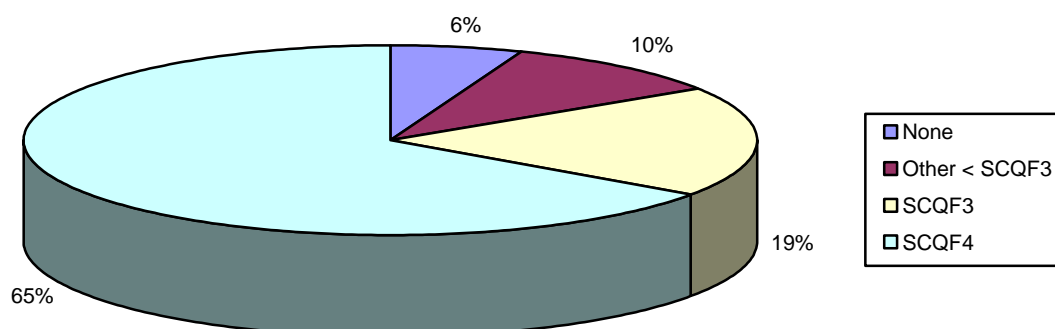
Characteristics	EEWL reported in survey 2007-08	Scottish Funding Council data 2006-07	All state school leavers 2006-07
Gender: male (female)	55 (45)	53 (47)	42 (58)
Ethnicity: white (not white)	98 (2)	96 (4)	93 (7)
Disability (no disability)	11 (89)	15 (85)	2 (98)

Source: Survey

5.2.2 Qualifications

The level of qualification attained by students included in our sample at the point of exceptional entry was relatively low. These data were not available for all students, but among those for whom information was provided 16% were not qualified to SCQF Level 3; a further 19% were qualified at to SCQF Level 3; and 65% were qualified at SCQF Level 4.¹³ Female students were more likely to be unqualified or qualified below SCQF Level 3 (19% of female exceptional entry winter leavers, compared to 13% of male students). These findings concur with previous studies that have suggested that while female students are less likely to leave school at the earliest opportunity, *within* the ‘early leaver’ group they tend to be lower qualified than their male counterparts.¹⁴

Figure 5.2 Level of qualification of exceptional entry winter leavers (n=362)



Source: Survey

¹³ Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 3 is equivalent to Access 3 cluster or Standard Grade at 5-6; SCQF Level 4 is equivalent to Intermediate 1 at A-C, Standard Grade at 3-4 or SVQ1.

¹⁴ Howieson, C., Fairgrieve, J., Croxford, L. and Tinklin, T. (2000) *The Scottish School Leavers' Survey: Destinations of Early Leavers*, Report to The Scottish Executive, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

Some of the students facing more severe barriers to learning appeared to be concentrated in specific areas (perhaps reflecting area-based deprivation). For example, exceptional entry winter leavers reported by schools in Glasgow were significantly less likely to have achieved SCQF Level 3 qualifications than in other local authority areas – more than two-fifths of Glasgow students had not achieved this level of attainment, compared to less than 5% of students reported by schools in Edinburgh. It should again be remembered that these differences are based on relatively small numbers of responses (only 13 Glasgow schools responded, reporting detailed information on only 81 winter leavers), and may not fully reflect wider demographic and deprivation trends.

More generally, these data show that exceptional entry winter leavers, while perhaps not facing barriers that are different from other early leavers, are relatively disadvantaged compared to students in general. The most recent national data suggest that only 7% of all school leavers in 2006-07 were not qualified to SCQF Level 4 – young people included in our survey were 5 times more likely to have not attained this level of qualification.¹⁵

5.2.3 Additional Support Needs

Our on-line survey with schools asked about individual students' 'Additional Support Needs' (as detailed in a Record of Needs or Co-ordinated Support Plan). Data were provided by schools for 355 students (Table 5.4). Approximately 19% of these students reported some Additional Support Need, with male students more likely to face such challenges. The most commonly reported specific support needs were learning disabilities (reported in the case of 10% of students, and almost half of those reporting any support needs); and needs relating to children being in looked after care (3% of cases). Only 1% of students were reported as having a physical disability. It is notable that 'other' needs were reported for a number of students – this may take in recognised Additional Support Needs that were not specifically addressed in our survey, such as family circumstances, homelessness or other 'social/emotional' support needs.

Fewer schools were able to provide data on whether students were eligible for free school meals. However, among those students for whom data were provided (n=293), 26% were eligible for free school meals. There were no significant relationships between eligibility for free school meals and other support needs, or according to gender.

¹⁵ Scottish Government (2008) *SQA Attainment and School Leaver Qualifications in Scotland, 2006-07*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Table 5.4 Additional Support Needs of exceptional entry winter leavers (% of students)

<i>Additional Support Need</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Any Additional Support Need	25	12	19
Learning Disability	16	4	10
Physical disability	1	1	1
In looked-after care	3	3	3
Other (not specified)	6	6	6

Source: Survey. n=355.

Both those with Additional Support Needs and students in receipt of free school meals were significantly less likely to report attainment at SCQF Level 3, suggesting personal and educational barriers can combine to present complex barriers to progression for some exceptional entry winter leavers. The small numbers reported prevent meaningful comparisons on support needs across local authorities.

These data again demonstrate that exceptional entry winter leavers are more likely to face barriers to progression than some other groups. For example, a review of statistics for all school leavers in Scotland suggests that approximately 4% have Additional Support Needs (compared to 19% of our sample). Only 12% of all school leavers were previously eligible for free school meals, compared to 26% among those students for whom we have that information in this survey.¹⁶ While many other (especially early) school leavers face similar challenges, it is likely that winter leavers will often require support and guidance in making the transition from school to college. The statistics suggest that the winter leavers are a heterogeneous group in terms of post academic attainment and learning and other problems.

5.2.4 The needs of exceptional entry winter leavers – the views of schools

Our in-depth case studies with schools sought to probe learning professionals' views of the challenges facing winter leavers and the role of exceptional entry to college in promoting positive progression routes. All the schools participating in our case study research argued that winter leavers could not be seen as a distinctive, homogenous client group. A number of interviewees spoke of having to address the needs of two or three distinctive groups within the winter leavers population.

¹⁶ Scottish Government (2008) *Destinations of Leavers from Scottish Schools, 2006-07*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

For some winter leavers, college offers a route to vocational learning, to access a specific course of study that they want to pursue – schools are happy to support that choice, especially if students' are unlikely to make significant academic progress during a fifth year at school. For others, who may feel that they have 'outgrown school', exceptional entry is about the 'adult environment' offered by college. A number of interviewees spoke of the benefits of exceptional entry to college as a progression route for this group. One Deputy Head noted how some students who have struggled at school 'thrive outside the school environment'. Finally, there are students 'who will do anything to get out of school', often 'school refusers' whose long-standing attendance, attainment and behaviour records are predictors that they will leave school at the earliest opportunity. Many of these young people face complex barriers to progression linked to social or family issues – as one S5 Principal Teacher noted: 'For many school refusers the issue is not school, the issue is an external social factor, and they respond against it at school'.

Schools' representatives noted the challenges faced by both schools and colleges in ensuring that progression routes and student support are sufficiently flexible to address the needs of such diverse winter leaver groups.

There's one group who looking at the options think college is the better option for them. They may be young people who have achieved qualifications at Level 4 and 5, but may struggle to go further and would not gain academically from coming back to school for a year. There's another group who are switched off from school. It's more about them saying that they will not come back to school and maybe even being resentful that they can't leave at the end of fourth year, when many of their friends may have left. College is an option for them. Some will be 'up for it'; for others they will apply for college without having much of a sense of direction, and may struggle to maintain direction. There's a final group who are not really engaged in school at all, who have been absent for long periods and perhaps through Education Welfare Officers have come to the conclusion that college may be the best option.

All the schools participating in our case studies valued exceptional entry to college as an 'important' or 'very important' option for winter leavers. There was an acknowledgement that college routes were appropriate for the range of different learners described above,

and that there were benefits in students leaving early to allow for continuity in the learning experience. Senior teachers took the view that if exceptional entry 'achieved the best learning outcomes' for young people, then it was justified. For 'refusers' who have struggled to engage at school, exceptional entry was seen as a means of reducing the risk of them ending up 'not in education, employment or training'. Several school representatives also highlighted the value of transition courses for winter leavers in providing 'tasters' for young people who are unsure about their future in terms of learning and work. One Principal Teacher of Guidance summed up the importance of the exceptional entry route.

Exceptional entry is used positively.... It is an important option for winter leavers. I would say that recently we have had relatively few winter leavers coming back to school in August. We will generally work something out for them, whether it's exceptional entry or extended work experience.

Two schools welcomed this research as generating new ideas among staff about how to raise awareness of exceptional entry as an option for winter leavers – in both cases, senior teachers were actively considering inviting 'successful' previous winter leavers to talk to S4s about their experiences. However, learning professionals also repeatedly acknowledged that winter leavers 'need a certain level of maturity' to deal with the college environment. There was a concern among some teachers that certain winter leavers lacked the maturity to cope with exceptional entry to college, but it was also suggested that some of those entering further education after their school leaving date faced similar problems.

Indeed, a consistent theme throughout our interviews was that winter leavers face many of the same issues (and are as diverse a group) as other early leavers, irrespective of age. One Deputy Head's argument that 'the only thing that's different with these young people is their date of birth' was supported by senior school representatives at almost all our other case study institutions. This led many learning professionals to query the appropriateness of having two different school leaving dates. A number of school representatives agreed that 'if they have completed four years of compulsory secondary education, young people should be given the choice' [to leave school]. Many teachers considered the enforcement of a separate winter leaving date to be arbitrary and counter-productive.

Changing young people's school career and leaving date on the basis of whether they were born one minute before or after midnight on a certain date doesn't make sense.

There are obviously a number of factors to be considered before policy makers can think about making radical changes to school leaving dates. But from the point of view of many of the learning professional involved in this research, the winter leaving date threatens to further frustrate disaffected learners and adds unnecessary complication to the already challenging process of supporting school-college transitions. At the very least, the reform of current school leaving date procedures should be an area of future, careful study by the Scottish Government.

5.2.5 Feedback on winter leavers' progress – the views of schools

While school representatives felt that exceptional entry was often an effective progression route for winter leavers, it was acknowledged that feedback on the outcomes achieved for students could be variable. Some schools described how local colleges provided detailed, timeous feedback on both attendance and attainment. In some cases, schools worked closely with colleges to monitor the progress of exceptional entry winter leavers (for example, through regular review meetings between the school's Student Support Team, college staff and students). However, other schools noted that information-sharing on winter leavers could sometimes be sketchy.

One Deputy Head at a school with a substantial number of winter leavers suggested that there could be a danger of a 'no news is good news' approach – with the school only hearing about winter leavers if there are attendance or behaviour problems. Another Principal Teacher of Guidance acknowledged that it could be easy for schools to lose track of exceptional entry winter leavers, who are a relatively small group within the S4-S5 roll. This teacher suggested that it could be easy for schools to fall into the trap of thinking that 'they are off to college, we'll not worry about them too much'.

In all cases, schools acknowledged that it was their ultimate responsibility to check on students' attendance and progression, but some felt that limited resources within both schools and colleges meant that the flow of information on (especially) outcomes could be improved.

It would be good to get more feedback on progression and completion. That would help us to make decisions on what type of young person [exceptional entry to college] is successful for.

The majority of all school representatives suggested that there would be benefits in having more (and more regular) feedback on individual students' progress at college. Some also raised the broader issue of evidence on the longer term benefits of exceptional entry as a progression route. One Deputy Head suggested that more information on progression in the years immediately following college was required in order to understand the efficacy of exceptional entry as an option for different learners. Another senior teacher agreed that more longitudinal evidence was required on the long-term benefits of exceptional entry.

For some with few academic qualifications [exceptional entry to] college is likely to be a good option. My only reservation is that they might go to college for a year to get a taster of lots of different things but they are still in the same situation a year later. We need a long-term analysis of what happens to these students between, say, the ages of 15 and 19. Obviously, the hope is that after a year starting with exceptional entry they will be in a better place to progress.

Finally, where non-attendance does arise, schools act promptly to explore other progression routes with young people, but it was noted that there can be difficulties in arranging alternative (and *appropriate*) provision within what is a tight timeframe.

5.3 Destinations and course choices of exceptional entry winter leavers

5.3.1 Destination of exceptional entry winter leavers – evidence from our on-line survey

Our on-line survey with schools identified 36 of Scotland's colleges as destinations for exceptional entry winter leavers (as well as 3 community colleges or colleges outside Scotland). The most-often cited destinations were Banff and Buchan College (receiving 39 exceptional entry winter leavers reported in our survey), Aberdeen College (receiving 37 students), and Ayr, Borders and Fife Colleges (all mentioned in 21 cases).

The 16 most popular destinations for exceptional entry winter leavers are reported below. Together they account for more than two-thirds of the 407 students about whom schools

provided individual-level data. However, it should be noted that college destinations reflect response rates from schools in different local authority areas – they provide an insight into the sample of students for this study, and may not reflect the key receiving colleges for exceptional entry winter leavers nationally.

Table 5.5 Receiving colleges most-often cited in on-line schools survey

<i>College</i>	<i>Local authority</i>	<i>No. of EEWLs reported</i>
Banff and Buchan College	Aberdeenshire	39
Aberdeen College	Aberdeen City	37
Ayr College	South Ayrshire	21
Borders College	Scottish Borders	21
Fife College	Fife	21
Edinburgh's Telford College	Edinburgh	20
Kilmarnock College	East Ayrshire	20
Dumfries and Galloway College	Dumfries and Galloway	15
John Wheatley College	Glasgow	15
Motherwell College	North Lanarkshire	14
James Watt College	Inverclyde	13
West Lothian College	West Lothian	12
Cumbernauld College	North Lanarkshire	11
Jewel and Esk College	Midlothian	11
Adam Smith College	Fife	9
Stevenson College	Edinburgh	9

Source: Survey

5.3.2 Courses selected by exceptional entry winter leavers

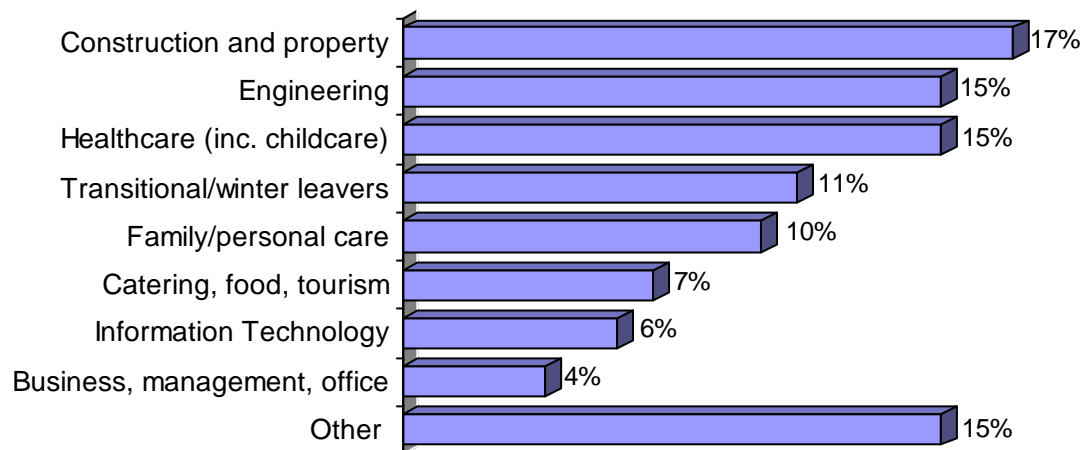
When asked about the courses selected by exceptional entry winter leavers, respondents to our on-line survey most frequently named 'construction and property/built environment' related courses as a destination for students (17% of students).¹⁷ Most of these students were involved in 'general construction' or 'building/construction operations' programmes.¹⁸ A further 15% of students for whom we have information were involved in 'engineering' programmes (with 'vehicle maintenance/repair' most often mentioned). The same proportion (15%) of students had progressed into 'healthcare, medicine or health and safety' related courses. Of these students, almost half were undertaking childcare courses. Approximately 10% of students had entered 'family care, personal development or personal care' programmes, with the majority involved in 'hair/personal care services'.

¹⁷ Course subject choice figures are based on responses for 333 students. Schools were unable to provide data on subject choices for 74 students.

¹⁸ Subject choices are classified according to Scottish Funding Council 'Superclass II' categories.

Finally, 11% of students were undertaking specific transitional, ‘winter leavers’ or ‘access to further education’ provision.

Figure 5.3 Percentage of known exceptional entry winter leavers entering key subject areas (n=333)



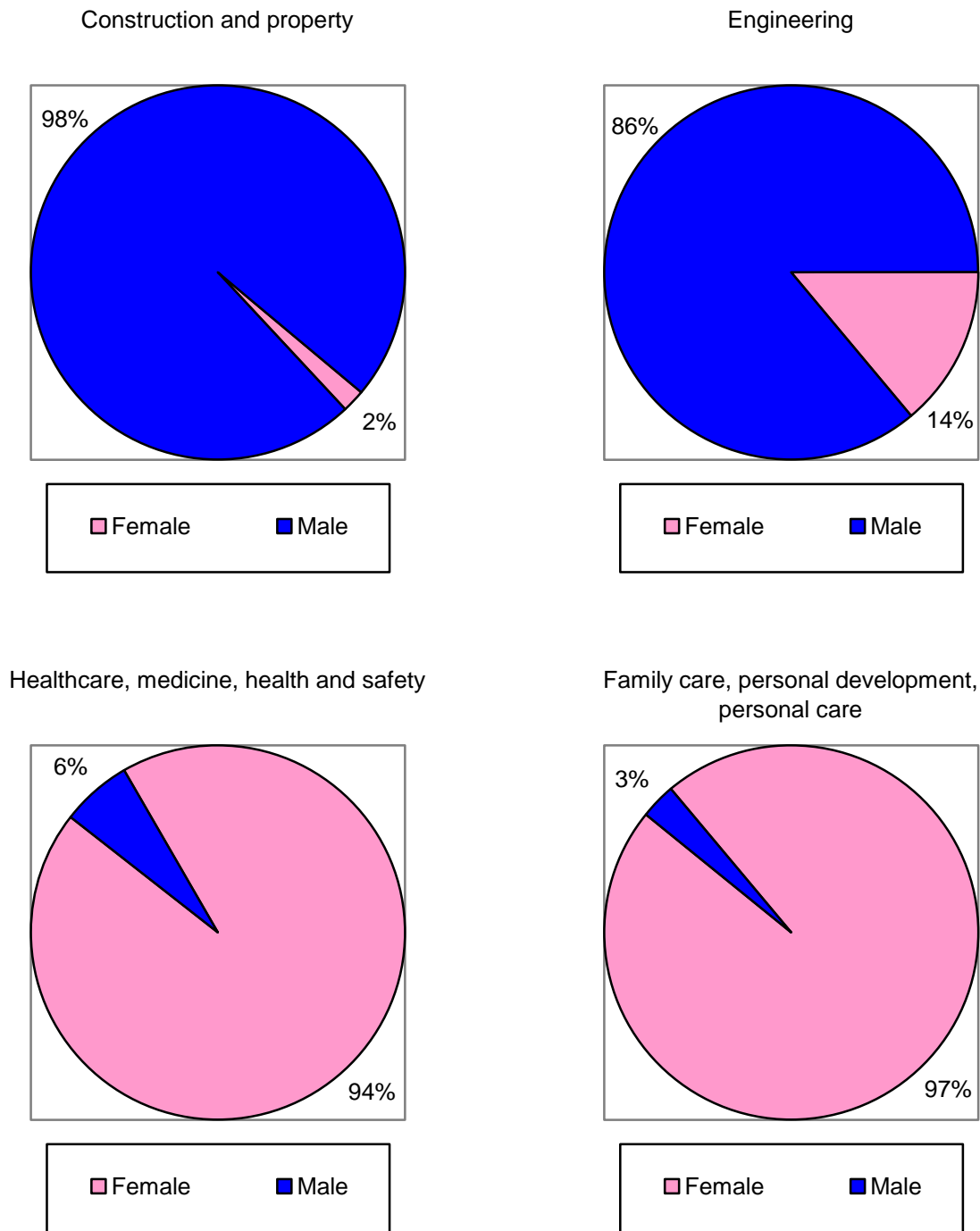
Source: Survey

There is substantial evidence of male and female students selecting programmes along strongly ‘gendered’ lines. Male winter leavers were significantly more likely to select ‘construction and property’ and ‘engineering’ courses – 56% of male students that we have information for had progressed into these programmes, compared to only 5% of female students. Conversely, female students were significantly more likely to pursue ‘healthcare, medicine or health and safety’ courses (32%, compared to only 2% of all male students), and ‘family care, personal development or personal care’ courses (21%, compared to 1% of male students). These stark gender divisions are also highlighted when we look at it from the perspective of gender divisions within subject areas. Male winter leavers dominate among students taking up ‘construction and property’ and ‘engineering’ courses, while female students are as dominant in ‘healthcare, medicine or health and safety’ and ‘family care, personal development or personal care’ programmes. Within this final category all 33 of the students entering ‘hair/personal care services’ were female.

Gender was therefore the dominant factor affecting course choice for exceptional entry winter leavers. There were no significant differences in course choice according to the

level of qualification of students or in relation to any Additional Support Needs. 'Agriculture and animal care' courses more often recruited students from rural schools, but the numbers involved are too small to allow for further analysis.

Figure 5.4 Gender of students selecting key subjects for Winter Leavers provision



Source: Survey

5.3.3 Progression routes for exceptional entry winter leavers – the views of schools

School representatives participating in our case study research generally demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the course options available through their partner colleges. Generally, school representatives considered the balance and content of provision to be appropriate. The majority of interviewees thought that most winter leavers were capable of taking up places in mainstream vocational learning programmes (and believed that mainstream programmes played an important role in keeping young people on routes to achieving qualifications). The minority of schools who had worked with colleges on specialist winter leavers programmes thought that these also played a valuable role for those young people who were unsure which mainstream course they wanted to pursue, or had been unable to secure a place on the programme of their choice. One Deputy Head commended a local college's approach of starting some exceptional entry winter leavers on a 9 week taster programme involving a range of subject options, before signposting students into specific programmes based on their preference and availability.

A number of schools also particularly highlighted how colleges have worked hard to integrate essential skills and employability provision within their practical, vocational programmes. Senior teachers were aware of, and impressed by, vocational programmes that have maintained a strong commitment to literacy, numeracy and core employability skills (often delivered within, or connected to, practical learning sessions in colleges). The same teachers emphasised the need to retain a focus on maintaining essential skills as a fundamental element in vocational programmes for early school leavers, noting that improving literacy and numeracy often opens the way to learning other new skills (a message that has also been prioritised within the Scottish Government's skills strategy).¹⁹

Schools did, however, consistently raise concerns regarding gaps in capacity within the college sector. A number of school representatives said that mainstream courses popular among winter leavers were often massively over-subscribed. As one Deputy Head noted:

For the most popular courses – things like construction and childcare – the college is telling us that they have 10 applications for every place. There is huge demand and not the capacity.

¹⁹ Scottish Government (2007) *Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Learning Strategy*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

The same interviewee acknowledged that local colleges were working to build capacity, but noted that winter leavers were often left disappointed when unable to find a place on a course of their choice. Of course, winter leaver students' failing to gain a place in a course of their choice is particularly problematic, given that (unlike other applicants to mainstream college courses) they remain within the compulsory education system. A minority of interviewees also suggested that in some locations/colleges there are also not sufficient opportunities to take up 'January start' places for those young people leaving school at Christmas or undertaking specialist Winter Leaver programmes until their school leaving date. In these cases, especially for those students delaying their decision until beyond the start of the college year, there are few opportunities to enter further education after leaving school at Christmas.

Senior teachers, Education Welfare Officers and careers advisers are required to quickly develop a 'Plan B' for students who have not been accepted into college, with training options delivered by third sector organisations or extended work placements often provided as a 'second choice' for winter leavers. A Guidance Teacher noted the pressures that followed from winter leavers failing to secure an exceptional entry place.

If they don't get into college and are disenchanted with school, you have a short window before they leave if you are going to avoid them becoming NEET.

Limited capacity raised particular concerns in non-urban areas where there are relatively few alternatives to the local college, but even schools in large towns and cities reported that they were required to encourage students to consider options at colleges outwith the local community (but accessible by public transport). It was suggested that some vulnerable young people remain reluctant to consider travelling outwith their locality.

School representatives generally accepted that colleges were required to recruit students based on their own selection criteria, and it was suggested that colleges were helpful and transparent when asked to explain decisions. However, a number of schools were considering how best to work with local colleges to ensure that winter leavers were well-prepared for interview and selection processes.

These findings raise a number of issues around: the potential (or need) for specific transitional/winter leavers courses to provide intermediate progression routes if winter

leavers are unable to compete for places on mainstream courses with other adult learners; and/or the need for additional capacity within mainstream courses. One clear solution to perceived problems of capacity within individual colleges involves further action to co-ordinate between schools and colleges within (and even between) local authority areas – as noted in Part 4 of this report, such an approach is being tested in the city of Glasgow. Perhaps more immediate, and a point raised by a number of school representatives, is the need for a clear and consistent flow of information between schools and colleges on potential numbers of winter leavers who will be seeking exceptional entry in a given year; and the likely capacity of colleges to provide places on popular courses for these students. Given the potential for placing winter leavers in colleges outwith their immediate locality, there may again be a role for local authorities and other partners in the co-ordination of information-sharing between schools, colleges and Careers Scotland officers involved in supporting winter leavers.

Finally, a number of school representatives noted that the choices made by winter leavers often focused on a relatively small number of courses such as construction and hairdressing and beauty. There was a concern that courses need to reflect the needs of local labour markets as well as the interests of students, and some teachers again called for further research on the extent to which certain vocational options resulted in young people (eventually) finding work in similar areas. One Deputy Head also called for an increasing commitment within both schools and colleges to challenging gender stereotyping in career choices among young people.

The gender issue should be considered and I don't think it is at the moment. Too often, if you are a boy you go towards male apprenticeships. As a school we are required to address gender equality issues and I think that we need to address that issue with colleges in terms of recruitment [to college courses].

Our survey research on winter leavers' destinations (see Part 5.3.2) suggests that these concerns are justified, and that further resources are required to help young people to consider the broadest possible range of career opportunities.

5.4 Strategies for supporting winter leavers

5.4.1 Schools' approaches to supporting winter leavers

Schools responding to our on-line survey highlighted a number of specific methods of supporting winter leavers' transitions to college. For many schools, the need to 'start early' when engaging with winter leavers was an important lesson for good practice. Guidance staff in many schools started working with potential S5 winter leavers before Christmas in their S4 year (and often at the outset of their S4 year). Schools described how guidance staff worked closely with colleges, careers advisers, parents and students to explore potential progression routes (including exceptional entry). One Principal Guidance Teacher noted:

A lot of it is about awareness-raising of what's out there. We start doing that in October-November [in S4]. People will not make a final decision then, but we can start looking at the options, and for winter leavers who we know will not want to come back, we can work with the careers service to help them to apply for training options.

Some schools also described more thorough-going 'student audits' (led by Student Support Teams) conducted 6-8 months prior to students' school leaving date. For these schools, preparation in advance and supporting students through one-to-one guidance and advice on the college application process were seen as vital to successful transitions. One school was also planning to bring prospective winter leavers together in one group for PSHE (personal, social and health education) activities in order to focus on preparation for the transition to college and other progression routes.

Schools consistently mentioned the importance of intensive, one-to-one support delivered by guidance teachers for potential winter leavers (and other students at risk of finding themselves not in education, employment or training). Many schools also mentioned how enhanced careers guidance (delivered by Careers Scotland) was also an important element in broader strategies to support winter leavers and other potentially vulnerable learners.

In January, in liaison with the Careers Scotland Adviser, we identify and interview all potential winter leavers. Where a satisfactory route is not identified and actioned

young people are referred for appropriate extra support delivered by a school key worker. Intensive support is provided for winter leavers with applications to colleges. This is provided as early as possible, so that if unsuccessful in their application we can attempt to find an alternative.

In some cases, structured programmes such as WorkNet and Activate were also seen as important means of helping potentially vulnerable young people (including winter leavers) to consider progression options. Colleges were also involved in helping to engage winter leavers, through ‘induction taster’ sessions, visits to colleges and from college staff, and regular meetings and information exchanges on potential exceptional entry opportunities for winter leavers.

5.4.2 The role of Careers Scotland

A number of schools responding to our on-line survey specifically highlighted the role of Careers Scotland advisers in helping to promote successful school-college transitions. One survey respondent described how Careers Scotland provision fitted with strategies to support winter leavers and other students.

The school careers adviser (employed by Careers Scotland) works closely with winter leavers and provides them with one-to-one guidance and on-going support. There is also a WorkNet employability programme which is delivered by Careers Scotland, in which the winter leavers are invited to participate. Winter leavers are also taken on visits to colleges and training providers, and those who are at risk of needing ‘More Choices More Chances’ support are referred to a key worker for additional support.

Of 42 schools who responded to survey questions on collaboration with Careers Scotland, 32 (almost three-quarters) described formal approaches to partnering with Careers Scotland on winter leavers’ issues. Of the 44 responding to questions on Careers Scotland’s ‘School-College Collaboration Project’, half had been actively involved or were aware of it. As noted above, a number of survey respondents also specifically mentioned the value of Careers Scotland-supported programmes such as ‘WorkNet’ (which is delivered by Careers Scotland Key Workers and Employability Advisers, and helps young people decide what they want from a career, builds their confidence in job seeking and

gives them an understanding of the roles and responsibilities in the workplace); and especially 'Activate' (see Part 2.1.2 above).

Our in-depth case studies with schools confirmed that Careers Scotland often plays an important role in providing advice and guidance for winter leavers. One Deputy Head highlighted the role of Careers Scotland staff in helping exceptional entry winter leavers to consider colleges outwith their immediate locality – an important role given the limited capacity to take on winter leavers at some local colleges.

Our career adviser helped students to consider different course and college options. At that age a lot of young people want to go to college on their doorstep...

Other schools regularly pointed to the value of the alternative progression routes supported by Careers Scotland for those not finding exceptional entry college places, such as the School Non-Attenders Programme (SNAP), which provides students who are not attending school with vocational opportunities and guidance from Careers Scotland Key Workers. In general, schools were satisfied with the level of support provided by Careers Scotland, and many interviewees particularly commended the commitment of local officers.

Our service level agreement with Careers Scotland is strong, and we have been very lucky with the quality of advisers. Our careers advisers have been valuable in raising the profile of different options and advising the bulk of school leavers on progression and moving towards work.

One concern raised by schools was that there were limits to the extent to which career advisers were able to work one-to-one with vulnerable students (including exceptional entry winter leavers). One Deputy Head noted that Careers Scotland's status as an all-age careers service meant that career advisers could find themselves under considerable work pressures 'based on what's going on in the employment market' – for example, there was a sense that career advisers could be diverted from working with young people as a result of service demands arising from major redundancies.

We asked schools participating in our in-depth case studies if Careers Scotland should have a different and/or greater role in supporting winter leavers. For Education Welfare

Officers working with winter leavers at one city school, there was a clear opportunity for Careers Scotland to play a key role in co-ordinating information about college and other vocational options for particularly disadvantaged learners in S4 and S5. A Deputy Head at another school similarly thought Careers Scotland and its officers could play an enhanced role in ensuring that young people 'have a Plan B' if they are unable to find an exceptional entry place at college (for example, by helping students to explore alternative colleges/programmes, work placement opportunities or training with other providers). Career advisers are already involved in helping young people and school staff to consider a range of progression routes, but a number of schools representatives felt that additional support targeted at potentially vulnerable young people was justified. Finally, one senior teacher noted the potential for Careers Scotland to add value by using its strong links with business to connect employers more effectively to the winter leavers agenda (so that young people have a range of options in terms of exceptional entry and/or work experience progression routes).

5.5 Partnership-working and collaboration

5.5.1 Good practice in partnership-working

Schools participating in both our on-line survey and case study interviews highlighted a number of examples of good practice in working in partnership with colleges. While a service level agreement or other partnership agreement covered schools' general relationships with colleges, direct co-operation between senior teachers/guidance staff and colleges' school liaison officers (and sometimes staff in the relevant college departments) was also considered vital. Partnership-working took a number of forms, including:

- regular contacts between school and college staff to share information on potential winter leavers and exceptional entry routes;
- information (and induction) events delivered by college staff at school, so that exceptional entry winter leavers and other students preparing to move onto college receive advice on transitions in a supportive setting;
- visits to colleges arranged for potential winter leavers and other students.

Reflecting on the 'critical success factors' contributing to effective partnerships, a number of school representatives highlighted the importance of having dedicated, named individuals taking the lead on collaboration within both institutions.

We have a Deputy Head who is the named person who liaises with a named person at the college. Having a named person is important for co-ordinating activities and raising awareness of the school's needs. It can be frustrating, there's a lot of financial and organisational navigation. So having a fruitful relationship with the college's liaison officer is important.

Interviewees also noted the value of school-college links through a range of years and courses. The success of *Skills for Work* and other vocational programmes delivered in partnership with colleges means that schools and colleges have been able to build relationships based on 'solid projects' with clear objectives. The mainstreaming of vocational elements throughout many students' school careers also means that many winter leavers are comfortable with the idea of learning in college environments. As one Deputy Head noted:

By the time our current S2 reach S5 something like 25% of them will have extensive experience of vocational options at college.

5.5.2 Practical process of school-college links

On a practical level, proximity was also seen as important to strong partnerships. Many school representatives suggested that being situated near colleges allowed for informal relationship-building, regular visits and meetings between school and college staff, and ease-of-access to discuss problems. Representatives of some schools located in rural areas (or indeed new PPP (Public Private Partnership) schools located in out-of-town developments) identified problems in establishing *informal* relationships due to their lack of proximity to colleges.

However, school representatives also noted that effective partnership-working was often down to individuals on both sides being proactive and committed to collaboration. In the best cases this was backed by colleges' commitment to promoting inclusion in selection of students, and the leadership of senior managers in both schools and colleges who are willing to commit time and resources to school-college partnership-working.

Most schools have a school-college links programme which introduces pupils to the college environment from, in most cases, S3 level. However some, such as an Ayrshire school, intend to extend their school-college links programme to all levels from S1 onwards.

All schools included in the research discuss options with their potential Winter Leavers during S4. This involves early identification of potential Winter Leavers and the involvement of school careers advisors. School staff view college as a better option than school for many potential Winter Leavers. The range and vocational nature of courses, as well as the adult learning environment of college, are seen to be beneficial to this group.

Generally schools said that they work closely with colleges, especially local colleges, to ensure a smooth transition. Often there are three tiers of engagement: senior management representatives have formal meetings at least once a year; management or school-college coordination representatives have formal meetings on a monthly or quarterly basis; and operational staff have weekly or daily contact either by telephone or email. It is seen to be particularly valuable to have a committed local authority to oversee the partnership. For example, Loudoun Academy has regular meetings with the local authority and with college representatives. It is felt that regular contact with partners, and in particular with the local authority, is critical to effective information sharing between the school and local colleges.

A member of the Pastoral Care team at a Secondary School highlighted the role of Careers Scotland in supporting pupils once they move to college:

You also need more people like More Choices More Chances. George this year's been very good. He'll go out, visit homes, [...] try and bring them into the school – we need as much help that way as possible, that's a really good service.

Others stressed the need for continued information sharing and informal contact between school and college staff.

5.5.3 Challenges for partnership-working

In-depth interviews with school representatives also highlighted a number of challenges faced by schools and colleges committed to partnership-working. As noted above, proximity was seen as contributing to effective partnerships, but some school

representatives acknowledged the need to build stronger relationships with colleges outwith their immediate locality, but accessible for students by public transport. It was suggested that there may be scope for partnership-working within or even across local authorities. To that end, schools in different parts of Ayrshire welcomed collaborative forums that have been established between schools, colleges and councils within local authorities, but also on a cross-Ayrshire basis.

While schools generally commended the work of school-college collaboration staff within the college sector, there was a perception that such liaison activities had relatively limited funding. College-based liaison staff were often seen as having to handle large workloads, which inevitably limited their ability to proactively engage with schools. School representatives valued the way in which colleges were responsive to any problems or queries, but argued for additional resources for colleges to work more closely with schools on the 'winter leavers' and linked agendas. For example, some school representatives felt that there would be value in colleges 'getting involved earlier' with winter leavers, to provide guidance on applying for courses and the interview/selection process. As mentioned above, there were also consistent calls for clearer lines of communication so that information can be shared in advance on potential numbers of winter leaver and predicted capacity within key courses in the college sector. It was acknowledged that local authorities may have a role to play in co-ordinating improved communication across schools and colleges.

Similarly, schools clearly valued the visits made by college colleagues and felt that such events helped college professionals to develop insights into the challenges faced by winter leavers; and left students more confident and informed about progression routes at college. Such examples of intensive engagement should be encouraged, but school representatives were again realistic about the resource constraints on both sides of school-college partnership-working.

5.6 Key findings of research with schools

A number of key findings and implications for policy follow from the discussion above.

- Our updated data on exceptional entry winter leavers entering college in 2007-08 confirms that these young people are more likely to be low qualified, or to report a disability or other Additional Support Need. Our survey also adds data on the take-up of free school meals (often used as an indicator of low household income) among winter leavers with young people claiming this benefit at a rate more than twice the national average. **While it is clear that winter leavers are a heterogeneous group, many such young people face complex barriers to progression – there is a continuing need for Careers Scotland and partners to target resources on supporting the most vulnerable exceptional entry winter leavers to make effective transitions to further education and beyond.**
- Schools participating in our research saw exceptional entry to college as providing an important – and sometimes crucial – progression route for winter leavers. Exceptional entry offers important benefits to some, but not all winter leavers: the move to a college environment can encourage winter leavers to re-engage with learning; transitional programmes offer ‘tasters’ for those who are unclear on what specific course of study that they want to pursue; college can help prevent those determined to leave formal secondary education from finding themselves not in education, employment or training; and the supportive learning environment provided by colleges can help build broader employability (including essential skills) among disadvantaged young people. **There is a need to continue to support schools and colleges to develop effective progression routes for winter leavers, and to ‘raise awareness’ of exceptional entry as a positive option for young people considering leaving school early.**
- Schools saw winter leavers as a similarly diverse learner group (with some facing similar barriers) to other early school leavers. Many school (and college) representatives questioned the value of having different leaving dates for summer and winter leavers. **The Scottish Government should review the arrangements for, rationale and value of maintaining two separate school leaving dates, considering the benefits and problems for schools, colleges and learners associated with current arrangements. A comparative study examining**

arrangements in the other UK nations,, where all school students have the same leaving date²⁰, may be of value.

- Our survey research confirmed clear gender divisions in the subject choices made by young people entering college. The most popular programme destinations of construction and engineering on the one hand and personal care and health (including childcare) on the other were dominated by male and female students respectively. **There is a need for Careers Scotland to continue to work with schools and colleges to challenge gendered attitudes to work and learning among young people, and encourage learners to consider the widest possible range of subject choices.**
- Some schools raised concerns around the limited capacity of local colleges to find places for winter leavers, leaving some young people unable to gain access to the course of their choice. **There may be benefits in colleges, Careers Scotland and education authorities working together to co-ordinate provision for winter leavers at local authority-level, in an attempt to ensure that students can access courses in their chosen area of study wherever possible. At a basic level, local authorities may have a role to play in helping to improve the flow of information between all schools and colleges on potential numbers of winter leavers who will be seeking exceptional entry in a given year; and the likely capacity of colleges to provide places on popular courses for these students. It is also important that colleges continue to have access to *More Choices, More Chances* funding and other forms of support that allow them to engage with and assist potentially vulnerable young people. There may also be scope for better information on the alternative, less traditional, career opportunities especially in their local economies, so as to reduce young people restricting their course choices and to better match career opportunities**
- Many schools reported getting adequate feedback from colleges on the attendance, attainment and progression among exceptional entry winter leavers, but some had concerns about the resources available to colleges to ensure that reporting is always provided in a complete and timeous manner. **There is a need to ensure that**

²⁰ Stationery Office (1997) *The Education (School Leaving Date) Order 1997, Statutory Instrument Number 1970*, London: Stationery Office.

colleges' systems for reporting attendance, attainment and progression among winter leavers are adequately resourced, and that good practice in developing feedback mechanisms is shared among schools and colleges.

- Some school representatives wanted more information on the longer-term benefits for exceptional entry as an option for different learners. Longitudinal evidence on educational and labour market outcomes is required if schools and Careers Scotland are to help young people to make a fully informed choice about the benefits of college. **There is a need for targeted, longitudinal research on the progress of exceptional entry winter leavers in education and the labour market over a 2-5 year period following their initial engagement with the college sector, in order to explore the longer-term benefits of exceptional entry on different groups of learners and inform future interventions.**
- Research with schools highlighted a number of good practice features in supporting winter leavers, including: early intervention (during S4) to explore progression routes with potential winter leavers; collaborative events with colleges to inform and induct those making the transition to college; one-to-one support for winter leavers from guidance and Careers Scotland staff; and strong links to specialist Careers Scotland services. In some cases school representatives thought that Careers Scotland's role as an 'all-age careers service' meant that there was pressure on the time and resources available to career advisers to lend their expertise to supporting winter leavers and other vulnerable learners. **There is a need to ensure that Careers Scotland is resourced to provide both specialist services (such as the successful 'Activate' programme) and one-to-one support in schools to help ensure effective post-school transitions for winter leavers.**
- Schools gave a number of examples of effective partnership-working with colleges. Critical success factors leading to effective partnerships included: regular (formal and informal) contacts between dedicated, named school and college staff to share information and practice; the resourcing of 'solid projects' with clear objectives such as the successful *Skills for Work* programme; and the leadership of senior managers in both schools and colleges who are willing to commit time and resources to school-college partnership-working. The main barrier to broader partnership-working (with a wider range of colleges) and deeper collaboration (with existing partners) was seen

as the limited resources available for school-college collaboration on both sides. **There is a need for the Scottish Government, Careers Scotland, local authorities and other relevant stakeholders to continue to support school-college collaboration. In particular, future funding should focus on encouraging schools to strengthen links with colleges outwith their immediate locality, but within the reach of public transport. There is also a case to be made for additional resources to develop regional events and on-line forums allowing for the sharing of experiences and dissemination of good practice in school-college collaboration. Clearly, detailed consultation with schools and colleges is required in order to establish what form future practice-sharing activities should take.**

6. FINDINGS OF RESEARCH WITH COLLEGES

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 On-line survey of colleges

Two sources of data inform this part of the report: an online survey of Scottish colleges focusing on the characteristics and progression routes of exceptional entry winter leavers in the current 2007-08 academic year; and in-depth case study data collected from 9 colleges working with winter leavers. An on-line survey was sent to 43 Scottish colleges (although it is estimated that only 41 of these colleges are likely to have dealings with exceptional entry winter leavers, based on previous funding data from the Scottish Funding Council). 17 colleges responded to the online survey (a response rate of 37%)

All colleges that responded to the survey had exceptional entry winter leavers participating in courses at their college (see Table 6.1). The number of students varied significantly from 3 at North Highland College, to over 100 students at Dumfries and Galloway, Borders, Forth Valley, and Kilmarnock Colleges.

Table 6.1: Number of exceptional entry winter leavers by college, 2007/08

<i>College</i>	<i>No. of exceptional entry winter leavers</i>
Kilmarnock College	151
Dumfries and Galloway College	122
Forth Valley College	114
Borders College	110
Carnegie College	91
John Wheatley College	74
Stevenson College	71
Ayr College	64
Moray College	43
Clydebank College	32
Central College of Commerce	23
Barony College	22
Cardonald College	22
Langside College, Glasgow	18
South Lanarkshire College	13
North Highland College	3
Anonymous*	18
Total	991

* One college provided data on exceptional entry winter leavers but preferred to remain anonymous.

The college survey asked general questions of colleges relating to the characteristics of exceptional entry winter leavers, progression and attainment within college, and questions on partnership/collaborative working within colleges.

6.1.2 Case studies with colleges

Nine colleges participated in the in-depth case study data collection, involving interviews with key staff within individual colleges to gather richer data relating to the experiences of colleges. Colleges were purposively selected to ensure inclusion of mix of urban and rural based colleges, and including a number of colleges serving deprived areas, in particular those identified as prioritising the More Choices, More Chances agenda (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Case study colleges

<i>College</i>	<i>Local authority</i>
Aberdeen College	Aberdeen City
Adam Smith College	Fife
Angus College	Angus
Banff and Buchan College	Aberdeenshire
Borders College	Scottish Borders
Inverness College	Highland
Jewel and Esk College	Edinburgh/Midlothian
John Wheatley College	Glasgow
Kilmarnock College	East Ayrshire

This in-depth data collection gathered views from school-college liaison staff, support staff, careers guidance staff and teaching staff, senior managers and, in one case, exceptional entry winter leavers. As part of case study research with a College, we also carried out an interview with a senior manager at Glasgow City Council’s Vocational Training unit. Interviewees were identified in collaboration with individual colleges. The central themes explored through the case study interviews were: the provision of services to winter leavers; forms of additional support available to winter leavers; challenges in the delivery of services and support to winter leavers; the approach and rationale for delivering services; progression and outcomes; and issues around partnership-working.

As in Part 5 of this report, evidence is presented together from both the online survey and the qualitative data collection. The key themes explored are:

- characteristics of exceptional entry winter leavers in Scottish colleges;
- the nature and format for college provision for winter leavers;
- progression and outcomes;
- approaches to promoting partnership and collaborative working.

6.2 Characteristics of exceptional entry winter leavers in Scottish colleges

6.2.1 Sample profile

Data collected through the online survey of colleges show similar trends to those identified by the analysis of Scottish Funding Council data and the returns from the school survey. As Table 6.3 shows, there were more male than female students who attended college as exceptional entry winter leavers, with the majority of students white.

Table 6.3 Characteristics of exceptional entry winter leavers (% of all students)

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>EEWL data schools survey 2007-08</i>	<i>Scottish Funding Council data 2006-07</i>	<i>All state school leavers 2006-07</i>	<i>EEWL data college survey 2007/08</i>
Gender: male (female)	55 (45)	53 (47)	42 (58)	54 (46)
Ethnicity: white (not white)	98 (2)	96 (4)	93 (7)	97 (3)
Disability (no disability)	11 (89)	15 (85)	2 (98)	*

* 'Disability' data were not available from the college survey.

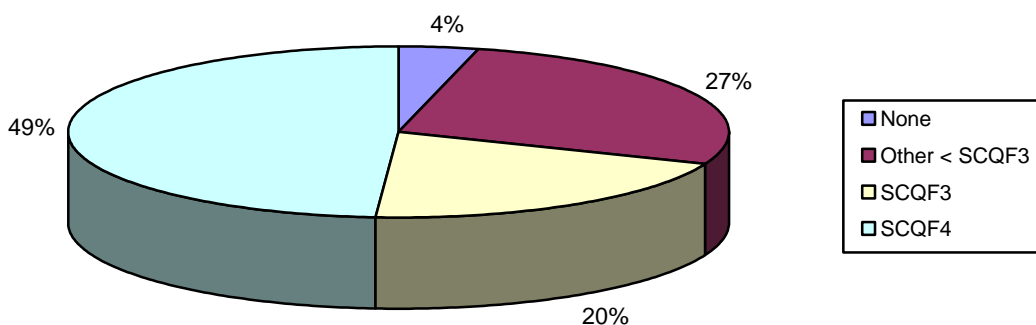
6.2.2 Qualifications

As with the findings from the school survey, the college survey found a relatively low level of educational attainment among the 2007/08 winter leavers cohort (see Figure 6.1). Data from colleges show that 49% of winter leaver students had achieved SCQF Level 4²¹, while 20% had achieved SCQF Level 3 and a further 27% had achieved some other qualification at a lower level. Survey data were not gathered from colleges at the level of the individual student (given that some colleges reported having more than 100 exceptional entry winter leavers, it was impractical to request disaggregated information on each student). As a result, we are unable to identify whether gender, locality or region of residence (or area-based deprivation) was a predictor of low levels of qualification.

²¹ Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 3 is equivalent to Access 3 cluster or Standard Grade at 5-6; SCQF Level 4 is equivalent to Intermediate 1 at A-C, Standard Grade at 3-4 or SVQ1.

Nevertheless, confirming the findings from the school survey, high numbers of exceptional entry winter leavers arrived at college with few or no qualifications.

Figure 6.1 Level of qualification of exceptional entry winter leavers attending all colleges



6.2.3 Additional Support Needs

As with our schools survey, the on-line survey with colleges asked about the Additional Support Needs (relating to a Record of Needs or Co-ordinated Support Plan) of exceptional entry winter leavers attending college during 2007-08. Data were provided by colleges for 748 students. In a similar trend to schools data, 23% of winter leavers attending college were reported to have Additional Support Needs – with 56% of these students having learning disabilities, and a further 30% with ‘other’ support needs.²²

Confirming findings from our schools survey, exceptional entry winter leavers are a group who are more likely to have Additional Support Needs in the college environment than the school leaving population at large. This highlights the importance of support and services being in place to meet the more complex needs of a substantial minority of these students.

6.2.3 Support available within the college environment

The data from case study interviews with college officials highlight that intensive support is a critical element in engaging and assisting more at-risk young people within the college environment. The approach to support differs between colleges. For some colleges, support is discussed as open to all, involving an ‘open door’ approach where a range of

²² As noted in Part 5 ‘other support needs’ may cover issues recognised as Additional Support Needs by the Scottish Government/Scottish Funding Council that were not specifically addressed in our survey, such as family circumstances, homelessness or other ‘social/emotional’ support needs.

specialist services are available if students choose to take advantage of these. In some cases, all students are provided with a named contact that they approach with questions, difficulties or support needs as these arise. This adviser can then refer students to learning support services where specialist provision including counselling, learning support, job search and other services are available.

This approach is often complemented by formal assessment meetings either at the point of application and/or upon entry to college, where discussions are held regarding the support needs of students to ensure that equipment and any specialist services required to participate in learning are made available. Colleges also use a range of 'core skills screening' tools to identify and address any gaps in essential skills or other core/employability skills. This formalised support framework was seen as an invaluable element of the move from school to college, offering the opportunity to assess student needs and ensure that supports are put in place at the start of the academic year. As one college interviewee noted:

The Core Skills Screening highlights any gaps in their skills when they start that can help the college to assess the best course and support that any particular student may need to get the most out of college.

The schools provide the college with feedback on each winter leaver's achievement, attendance, behaviour. We find this transition information critical as it helps with finding out what support the winter leavers need and what the measures the college can take to provide that support.

One college has gone further, using additional *More Choices, More Chances* resources to recruit dedicated support workers who regularly meet with all younger students, including winter leavers, to offer guidance and support where required.

Many college representatives acknowledged that there are difficulties with ensuring that support hits the right note. Many younger students do not wish to be singled out, or find it difficult to ask for help or advice. One approach being adopted in some colleges is for specialist support to be integrated into the body of the course, so being made available to winter leavers on the same terms as other students. For example, sessions can be built into winter leavers programmes that discuss specific forms of support available or open up

discussions about issues that may be arising for the class as a whole, where individual students can potentially raise any issues within the classroom setting. The rationale of this approach is that people who need help and support will get access to it without having to ask or be singled out.

In most colleges, support is thought to be something that is a concern to all potentially vulnerable students:

Many students, regardless of age, come from difficult backgrounds, or have specialist learning requirements. Winter leavers are no different in this regard. The students support services currently on offer are effective in supporting all learners.

As one college official notes, the only potential difference in the support needs of winter leavers relative to other learners is that the former group of students are slightly younger:

I couldn't say that I see a great difference in support needs. What you may be looking at... is, sort of, the age group...

However, with the relative youth and change in teaching style in college relative to school, college is recognised as being a different learning environment – one that some students need time and support to adjust to.

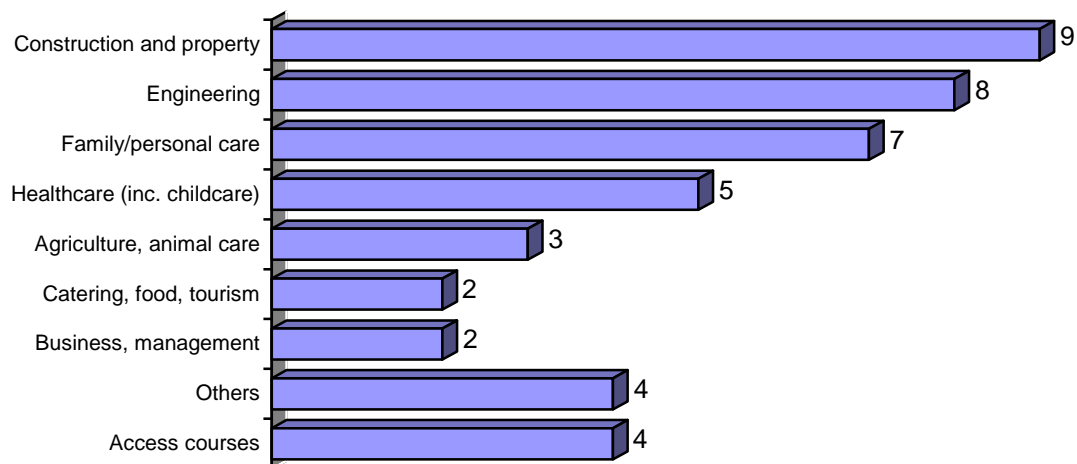
6.3 College provision for winter leavers

6.3.1 Courses selected by exceptional entry winter leavers

Colleges were asked to identify the 3 subject areas most often selected by exceptional entry winter leavers. In line with the findings presented in previous parts of this report, courses in 'construction and property/built environment' (mentioned by 9 colleges) and 'engineering' (8 colleges) were key destinations for winter leavers. Within these 'Superclass' subject areas 'general construction' courses dominated in the former category (mentioned by 7 of the 9 colleges naming construction as a key subject area); while within engineering both 'vehicle maintenance/repair' (named by 4 colleges) 'general engineering' and 'vehicle maintenance/repair' (3 colleges) were important.

The other most popular areas of study among exceptional entry winter leavers were again identified as ‘family care, personal development or personal care’ (named by 7 colleges, all of which identified ‘hair/personal care services’ as a key destination for winter leavers), and ‘healthcare, medicine or health and safety’ related courses (named by 5 colleges, all of which were involved in the delivery of childcare and/or social care courses).

Figure 6.2 Number of colleges identifying subject areas as among three most important for exceptional entry winter leavers



6.3.2 The college context

Colleges offer learning and educational provision to a wide range of people, across a range of subjects and levels of study. A growing element of college provision is vocational learning opportunities for school students, with *Skills for Work* in particular highlighted by many colleges as a central element of the schools-focused activities intended to link up under 16s with vocational learning and the work of the college sector. While most colleges had a specific programme and activities designed to engage S3 and S4 school age children in vocational learning, the provision for winter leavers was more varied. For example, of the 9 colleges that participated in the case study data collection, 4 did not offer any specific Winter Leaver focused programme, while the 5 that did offered a varied programme of activities and approaches to supporting this group of students. This section highlights the range of provision on offer to students who enter college as exceptional entry winter leavers and the reasons for the approach that is taken.

6.3.3 Specialist provision for winter leavers

There was clear recognition within some colleges of the overlapping risks associated with this cohort of young people who wished to leave school at S4 but who have to stay in education until the end of the winter term, and wider policy concerns with the *More Choices, More Chances* agenda, which focuses on ensuring the engagement in education, training and employment of at risk young people. The development of specialist winter leavers programmes in some colleges was clearly informed by an understanding that particular risks face a small cohort of young people who were not positively or actively engaging with school education but who are not able to leave school at the end of S4 and start the process of making the transition into employment or training for employment. There was a concern that in situations where young people are keen to leave school but have no clear plan about what to do once they leave, that the risks of disengagement from education, training and employment are heightened. Specialist winter leavers programmes were seen as providing a valuable activity during this final school term where young people are not able to leave school (in many cases when their peers have left at the end of S4 but they are required to stay until the end of the winter term), and there were a number of perceived advantages to offering these programmes.

Specialist programmes, such as winter leavers programmes, were seen as valuable for younger students to support them to successfully make the transition from school education to the college setting. With school recognised as a relatively structured learning environment, and college requiring much more independent learning, it was suggested that many younger students benefit from having some additional support during the critical early stages of entering college. Notably, issues were raised around the 'age and stage' of younger students in relation to changes to teaching style and management of students:

...the way in which classroom management works is different really, and you know, the way in which lesson planning takes place, and the way in which resources are allocated, these things have to be thought through more because the way in which class works will be really affected by it, whereas, with the older group flexibility can happen because people can think more independently.

For some students then, the view was that a transitional environment offers a valuable stepping stone during which time students can learn the rules of these new college surroundings and can progress into mainstream courses once they have gathered the

skills that they require to successfully participate in this different learning environment. Important here is that many winter leavers programmes offer higher levels of support and intensive teaching environments that are recognised as being valuable to some students who may find the transition from school to college more difficult.

Further, with many school students, including winter leavers, not always being clear about their career path beyond school, specialist programmes were recognised as offering a good opportunity for students to try out one or more course options at a very introductory level. In some colleges, the winter leavers programme offers taster introductions to a wide range of courses, so students are not going to college at this stage to take a specific course, but rather to try out different courses and to learn a wider range of skills. This taster approach will partly inform the development of a local authority-wide winter leavers programme currently being developed by a local College in partnership with Glasgow City Council. The new programme will allow for students to undertake tasters in different areas of study at the start of their time at college, before being 'streamed' into different subject choice areas.

As noted above, many programmes focus centrally on offering skills and support to allow students to positively make the move from school and college, with some emphasis on offering courses in specific subjects of interest to students, but also with a clear focus on developing skills, trying out different course options and learning the various rules of conduct that are required for college life:

...basically we are doing very simple things, like trying to get them to class on time, getting them into college on time... just getting them from one room to another, keeping them together...

Developing a wide range of skills for education and employment was seen in some colleges as central to the purpose of specialist provision for winter leavers. For example, an employability focus is a key feature of many college programmes, with a core aim of winter leavers provision being to ensure that students are equipped with a wide range of transferable skills that will serve them in future employment.

A significant focus of winter leavers programmes is to ensure that this particular cohort of young people who do not wish to stay at school to complete S5, but who cannot leave

school at the end of S4, has a productive option for this final term of schooling. One option taken up by some students is to move at the end of S4 into a mainstream college course, with partnerships between schools and colleges allowing this to occur. Where this is not the preferred option, for example when young people wish to move straight into employment, or where there is no single clear path that the student is able yet to identify, specialist winter leavers programmes are a positive option as an alternative to continuing at school during the winter term:

...we wanted something short and sharp that they could achieve and then when they reach the age when they could leave, they could leave with a qualification as opposed to just leaving with nothing.

Some winter leavers programmes run between August and December, with students able to complete the programme, usually with certification or award for completion, at the time that they are would formally end their compulsory schooling. Offering specialist programmes for this short period is partly about building transferable skills that can be useful for the move into employment, training or post-compulsory education, and is also a way of accrediting the activities that the students have undertaken during the winter term:

As well as an awards ceremony... for completing their course, students are given a Preparing for Employment certificate, which can be the first qualification that they have ever had. This gives them (and others) some record of their efforts to progress their skills.

These winter leavers programmes are therefore intended to target a specific cohort of young people who are recognised as requiring additional support to make the transition from school to college life and employment. An issue raised by college representatives as important to supporting this cohort of young people is related to the specialist skills of teaching staff working with these young people. Several colleges highlighted the importance of effective teaching, and the highly skilled learning professionals who deliver it, to ensuring that students remain engaged in college life:

We want to make sure that the people who teach are people who are the right people – that is what makes the programme successful...

I really think that its quite critical to it, you need to have lecturers who are really interested in that group and who are prepared to be quite flexible...

6.3.4 Benefits of integrating winter leavers into mainstream provision

As noted above, 4 of the 9 case study colleges did not offer specialist winter leavers programmes. The reasons for not offering specialist provision to winter leavers were diverse and based on a range of influences. First, there was a view that winter leavers were not significantly different from other young learners, and that in particular their needs were similar to other early school leavers transferring to college. There was a clear recognition that many early leavers require support and advice in the college environment, and a commitment to ensuring that all students have the same access to college provision:

We don't think that Winter Leavers should be treated any differently from any other potential student.

We see it as important to treat all students the same... [we think that] there are no distinct needs associated with this group.

As part of this view real advantages in directing students onto mainstream courses as the norm were recognised: enabling students to make immediate progress towards qualifications; offering engagement and learning from older, more mature learners who could potentially serve as positive role models for younger students; while also preventing winter leavers from being seen as different from other learners.

In keeping with this approach, the view was that young people who wish to go to college to take a specific programme of learning should do so on the same terms as other students. This means that they enter college in August and stay until completion of the course, so achieving the recognised qualification from completion of a clearly identifiable vocational programme of learning. This was seen as a highly focused way of supporting young people to make the transition to college, with greater prospects for long-term retention than are available through some short-term specialist winter leavers programmes. Indeed, for some colleges this was part of a wider view that colleges should be seen by students as an 'aspirational' environment where progression is based on merit and achievement.

Linked to this, some colleges expressed concern that short-term winter leavers courses – if not clearly linked to January-start mainstream programmes or other clearly defined progression routes – may be seen as a ‘stop-gap’ by some young people, a concern that is also raised through our analysis of Scottish Funding Council data (see Part 4). Those colleges offering short transition programmes for winter leavers shared these concerns and had generally made arrangements to ensure that students had access to progression routes at college following their school leaving date in December (with the idea being that such young people would eventually enter mainstream programmes at the start of the following academic year).

In practical terms, colleges supporting winter leavers to enter mainstream courses acknowledged that the development of specialist (short-term or year-long) winter leavers programmes was seen as less cost-effective. It was suggested that, in many areas, there is not the ‘critical mass’ of winter leavers to make delivering targeted programmes financially viable. Stakeholders in Glasgow acknowledged that the development of a co-ordinated, local authority-wide approach to supporting winter leavers in part reflected these issues (as well as offering the opportunity to develop consistent, high-quality targeted programmes that will eventually be rolled out across the city).

A review of the discussion above may lead us to a number of conclusions. Colleges acknowledged that, despite being distinctive in that they remain subject to compulsory education, most winter leavers faced similar issues as other potentially vulnerable early school leavers. All colleges participating in our case studies integrated some (and in some cases all) of their winter leavers into mainstream provision, and it appears that colleges’ already highly-developed support structures are equal to the task of helping many of these young people to progress in their studies. For some winter leavers, colleges have developed specialist approaches, reflecting: learners’ particular vulnerability (or that some winter leavers are not ready to decide on a specific programme of study); an acknowledgement that some students are committed to leaving formal education at their winter leaving date, so that programmes are designed to build core/employability skills and provide useful, short-term learning; and (an issue that we have not discussed in detail above) the reality that some winter leavers have been unable to secure places on mainstream programmes of their choice.

What is of particular interest is that the support for winter leavers offered within mainstream programmes and through specialist courses shares a number of good practice features:

- immediate access to one-to-one support services from guidance staff for those who need additional help making the transition from school to college;
- delivery of learning by the 'right staff' (experienced teaching staff who are willing and able to be particularly flexible and supportive in how they interact with young people), and through innovative methods (for example, using team teaching or involving Support Workers in classes);
- an emphasis on continuity in teaching and guidance, with a small number of teaching staff responsible for building relationships with winter leavers and similarly potentially vulnerable learners;
- creative approaches to engaging winter leavers (and other learners who might be disaffected) that clearly emphasise practical skills and reflect 'real life' and workplace scenarios where possible;
- innovative approaches to integrating employability skills and essential skills (numeracy and literacy) into more practical/vocational learning formats.

These elements of good practice were to evident in all our case study colleges and offer lessons for supporting winter leavers in future (through specialist programmes where there is capacity and critical mass, or through mainstream courses); and for broader services seeking to engage potentially disadvantaged school leavers in the college sector.

Finally, like our school representatives, many learning professionals in colleges questioned the value of the split school leaving dates that result in winter leavers' special status at college. The concern here was two-fold. First, it was suggested that the anomaly of winter leaving dates imposed a further period of engagement in formal, compulsory learning upon some young people who would prefer to leave school risking making 'disaffected learners even more disaffected'. Second, as noted above, most college representatives saw winter leavers as facing exactly the same challenges as other early school leavers, and suggested that it was unhelpful to create an 'invented' category of students.

Many potential winter leavers will progress at school, and others will progress to college through mainstream college courses, but the remainder are more disengaged... Forcing these young people to continue in full-time education

beyond a time when many of their peers have left is detrimental to everyone concerned.

We never talk about a 'winter leaver'... A 'winter leaver' doesn't mean anything to us... We don't see winter leavers as a species.

The majority of colleges suggested that the status of 'winter leavers' adds little value. Rather, there was a sense that separating out this group of students and not allowing them to leave school at the end of S4 along with their peers can for some more vulnerable young people further complicate post-school transitions. That said, colleges acknowledged that the specific status of winter leavers (i.e. that they remain subject to legislation on compulsory education, so that monitoring and reporting requirements were different), and the particularly vulnerability of *some* of these young people might justify targeted responses – the co-ordination of such responses at local authority-level (or even across local authorities) would appear justified given the resource implications of developing and delivering specialist provision.

6.4 Progression, participation and outcomes

6.4.1 Progression of winter leavers – evidence from our on-line survey

The colleges that took part in our on-line survey reported on the number of students who, having entered college under exceptional entry arrangements, were still participating in learning at the end of December of the same academic year. They were then asked how many of this same student cohort were still participating at the start of the Easter break.

Where data were provided (by 13 of the colleges participating in the survey) 69% of exceptional entry winter leavers were still participating in college courses by December 2007, with 61% still participating by Easter 2008. There was considerable variation in retention rates between colleges, but as we do not have access to disaggregated data on student characteristics it is difficult to offer detailed insights into the factors impacting on progression and retention. At all colleges, the differences between retention rates at December and March were relatively small, suggesting that of exceptional entry winter leavers can be integrated into college life by the end of the year, they are likely to stay on for the majority of their course.

Colleges were also asked about the attainment of exceptional entry winter leavers in terms of the achievement of SCQF credits. Only 11 colleges were able to report these data. Across these colleges, 80% of all exceptional entry winter leavers were reported to have achieved some SCQF credits *at the time of the research*. At least half of students had achieved credits in all colleges, and in the majority of cases at least three-quarters of winter leavers had gained credits. It should be noted that some winter leavers will have been attending non-accredited programmes.

6.4.2 Tracking and assessing winter leavers' progress – the views of colleges

During our case study interviews, issues around progression and tracking students through courses were recognised as particularly challenging for colleges. Some colleges struggled to easily access data on progression and outcomes for those exceptional entry winter leavers joining mainstream programmes (a problem which largely accounts for the limited response rate for the college survey phase of this research). For obvious reasons, those colleges running specific programmes for winter leavers were much more able to assess progression and completion rates among this group of learners. In almost all cases, programme outcomes were described in positive terms in relation to retention and completion, the achievement of learning and credits, and broader issues such as students sustaining commitment to a course of study and the progression of students into other positive outcomes:

Ours end up staying with us, which is roughly about 90% and then the rest, apart from maybe half a dozen, will end up in employment, probably back with us on a day-release format. Might lose one altogether off the radar, but that's about it.

Last year the students on the winter leavers course really enjoyed the course and intended to continue in college in January. Some of the students on the construction course managed to secure apprenticeships, which are very hard to get.

An important issue highlighted in a number of colleges relates to progress made during participation in college (i.e. the 'distance travelled' by learners). There was a sense that more sophisticated monitoring and evaluation systems were needed, so that *all* the forms of progress made by young people could be evidenced. The transition to college often

sees vulnerable young people re-engage with learning, develop core employability and essential skills, prepare for the world of work, and overcome problems around behaviour and attendance. As one college learning professional noted:

More emphasis should be placed on how far the student has travelled between the start and finish of the course. Things like employability, social skills and citizenship should be measured over time so that the college knows that it is making a difference...

Nevertheless, college representatives also noted the complex barriers to progression faced by many winter leavers (which in most cases are similar to the problems faced by other potentially vulnerable school leavers). It was suggested that basic skills gaps; social, behavioural and family problems; a lack of support at home and 'pressure to earn' within households are consistent problems affecting many young people when entering and participating in college. There was also a recognition among college staff that some winter leavers are generally disengaged from formal learning, so that the compulsory nature of their attendance at school/college in this context is always likely to be problematic.

On a more practical level, several college representatives suggested that a barrier to retention and progression of some Winter Leavers is not being able to access Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA). As EMA is not available to students under 16, those who are exceptional entry winter leavers who are attending college during the winter term are not entitled to receive EMA, unlike their peers at college. One college in particular directly linked higher drop-out rates among winter leavers to the lack of EMA support for these students (although it should be noted that financial support with immediate travel and at-college meal costs is available to winter leavers).

6.5 Partnership-working and collaboration

6.5.1 Good practice in partnership-working

Critical to the development and continuation of support for winter leavers within college is the on-going relationships between colleges and local schools. One common approach used by many colleges involved visits to local schools to provide information about available courses and programmes and (later in the process) deliver early induction

activities for those confirmed as progressing to college as exceptional entry winter leavers. Open Days at colleges were also commonly used as a means of allowing students to visit colleges, meet staff and find out more about the course options open to them. Through both of these activities, the aim was to highlight to school students the opportunities available at the college and the procedures that need to be completed to gain entry to college courses. In terms of more specific activities to support vulnerable learners, on-line survey responses again highlighted the importance of student support/guidance staff and school-college liaison specialists within colleges as a means of making the link between schools and colleges (and school and college life for students).

College representatives mentioned a number of issues when asked to identify conditions allowing for good practice in partnership-working with schools. Colleges (like the schools reported in Part 5 of this report) highlighted the importance of frequent contacts between named, known and consistent school-college liaison officers. Where there were strong relationships, this could often be traced to the commitment of liaison officers on both sides in maintaining contact, engaging in both informal and formal networking activities and sharing information.

Every secondary has a school coordinator and I'm in touch with them on a daily basis. As issues arise here we discuss with them individual students who have problems, and we feed back information. So we do have very, very strong working links with each school.

Colleges' responses also reinforced the idea that relative geographical proximity can help to facilitate effective partnership-working; but that there would be benefit in seeking to extend the reach of partnerships with schools within and beyond local authority areas. There was similarly consensus on the importance of co-operation throughout young people's school careers, with the success of *Skills for Work* and other existing college-based vocational provision for school students seen as providing a strong basis and rationale for further partnership-working.

Finally, there was a consistent acknowledgement that school-college liaison work needs resources. Some colleges have been able to access *More Choices, More Chances* funding in order to develop additional specialist support for winter leavers (and other vulnerable learners) in collaboration with schools. However, even in the many colleges

where senior managers have demonstrated a long-term commitment to supporting school-college liaison work, resources are limited. Additional resources to promote broader partnership-working, combined with improved co-ordination within and beyond the local authority level were seen as important to the continuing development of effective school-college collaboration.

6.5.2 Potential for partnership-working between colleges and local authorities

Formal service level partnerships between colleges and the local education authorities are common. A number of colleges noted the value of such agreements in providing the basis for local authority-level co-ordination of arrangements for winter leavers and other vulnerable learners. For example, as noted above, Glasgow City Council and a local College are leading the development of a city-wide approach to supporting winter leavers that will ensure that those who are not ready for (or unable to gain acceptance to) mainstream courses can be supported through programmes offering an alternative curriculum of vocational learning and employability and essential skills provision. The added value delivered by co-ordinating activities at local authority-level – in terms of ensuring that there is sufficient capacity to meet winter leavers' needs and promoting more consistent service provision and monitoring – may be an appropriate focus for future research.

6.5.3 Sharing information on winter leavers – the views of colleges

Colleges responding to our on-line survey and participating in case study interviews acknowledged that one important distinction of the winter leavers client group was that they remain subject to compulsory education, so that effective communication between colleges and schools (who retain the final responsibility for learners until their school leaving date) is essential. Formal agreements provide clarity on the responsibilities of colleges and schools in relation to supporting students and dealing with problems if and when they arise, but many college representatives emphasised the importance of collaboration and regular information-sharing on a range of aspects of the exceptional entry experience.

We see our role as supporting schools. As long as the statutory school leaving age is sixteen, I think we have a role to help schools... to make it as positive an experience as possible to relate what they do in school with vocational areas.

We try to fully acknowledge school systems and procedures. Winter leavers are still technically their responsibilities. We communicate closely on matters of attendance, requests for absence. We are in constant liaison through regular meetings, daily phone calls and school staff coming in.

Colleges were generally confident that they were able to provide attendance and progression data to schools at appropriate times and in appropriate formats. As noted in Part 5 of this report, there may be other colleges where there are sometimes problems in delivering data on winter leavers' progression to schools as regularly as professionals on both sides would like.

These findings again highlight the commitment of colleges to working with schools to provide effective progression routes for winter leavers and other potentially vulnerable learners. Colleges and schools have been able to build on successful models of partnership-working such as *Skills for Work* to develop strong relationships focused on easing school-college transitions. While winter leavers are not necessarily viewed as facing distinctive barriers to learning, colleges have committed time and resources to ensuring that adequate support systems and communication networks with schools are in place. However, the resources available for school-college collaboration are limited, and there may be a need for additional support if we are to ensure that the most vulnerable learners can benefit from partnership-working between schools and colleges.

6.6 Key findings of research with colleges

A number of key findings and implications for policy follow from the discussion above.

- Colleges' data on the characteristics of exceptional entry winter leavers confirm that some among the client group face potential barriers to progression linked to Additional Support Needs and limited academic attainment at school. College representatives also noted that some winter leavers report other barriers, ranging from gaps in basic skills to a sense of disengagement from learning to financial pressures (which are not helped by their exclusion from Educational Maintenance Allowance payments). However, colleges also agreed that there is no consistent 'winter leavers' profile. Winter leavers range from those keen to leave formal

education at the earliest opportunity to young people strongly committed to developing vocational skills in the college sector.

- Most colleges seek to meet the individual needs of winter leavers through already highly-developed student support structures that are open to all potentially vulnerable learners, offering one-to-one advice, guidance and mentoring. Colleges have also used a range of other support mechanisms, from initial screening exercises to identify support needs to the deployment of Support Workers in classroom settings to help identify and resolve learners' problems.
- Colleges also described creative approaches to engaging winter leavers (and other potentially vulnerable learners) that emphasise 'real life'/workplace settings and innovative approaches to integrating employability skills and essential skills (numeracy and literacy) into more practical/vocational learning formats. **It is important that the Scottish Government and relevant local stakeholders continue to support forums where college learning professionals can share good practice in supporting and delivering appropriate learning interventions for winter leavers and other potentially vulnerable groups.**
- Some colleges have developed specialist courses particularly targeting the most vulnerable winter leavers. This is justified where: young people who have yet to decide on a specific programme of further education would benefit from 'tasters' on different subjects; vulnerable learners need additional support and time to adjust to the college environment; or winter leavers have not been able to secure a place on mainstream programmes. Short-term winter leavers programmes also offer an option for young people who are determined to leave formal education at their winter leaving date and do not want to return to school. However, in some areas there may not be the 'critical mass' of winter leavers to making running such programmes financially viable. **Recent moves to develop a local authority-wide winter leavers programme in Glasgow may offer important insights on the potential to co-ordinate such specialist provision within and across local authorities – there is a need to identify and disseminate good practice lessons from this pilot programme and to encourage further co-ordination where appropriate.**

- Many colleges rely mostly or entirely on mainstream programmes to deliver learning for winter leavers. On a practical level, some colleges argued that they did not have the capacity to deliver (and there was insufficient demand for) specialist winter leavers provision. It was also suggested that there are educational benefits in directing winter leavers towards mainstream provision: it enables them to make immediate progress towards qualifications; older, more mature learners can act as positive role models; and it prevents winter leavers being stigmatised. Integrating winter leavers can help them to feel respected, trusted and part of the college, encouraging them to raise their expectations and ‘take responsibility for their own learning’. **Both specialist programmes and the support offered to winter leavers integrated into mainstream courses share ‘good practice’ features that emphasise holistic approaches to learning (addressing the range of learners’ needs) and personalised mentoring and support –continued support for colleges is needed (through additional *More Choices*, *More Chances* resources where required) in developing innovative approaches to helping these learners.**
- Retention and progression rates varied but were viewed as acceptable by most colleges. However, there is little evidence on the longer-term impacts of college transitions for winter leavers. **There is a need for a longitudinal tracking system and research on the long-term benefits of winter leavers’ transitions to college learning. Also needed is a more consistent and sophisticated mechanisms for measuring the ‘distance travelled’ by winter leavers at college (in terms of the development of employability skills and re-engaging with learning).**
- A number of colleges described effective partnerships with schools. Key features of successful partnerships included: regular formal and informal contacts between named, consistent liaison officers (often facilitated by geographical proximity); co-operation with schools on a range of programmes throughout young people’s school careers; and buy-in and support from senior managers. **Many colleges would value the opportunity to extend partnership-working with schools beyond their immediate locality and to engage more proactively with a wider range of schools, but resources for school-college liaison work are limited. Given the potential importance of transitions to further education to the *More Choices*, *More Chances* agenda, there is a need to continue to support and encourage school-college collaboration in this area.**

7. KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

7.1 Introduction

Exceptional entry to college provides an important – and in some cases and areas crucial – progression route for winter leavers. While exceptional entry winter leavers share many of the same characteristics (and some face many of the same barriers) as other early school leavers, they are distinctive in that, immediately following their transition to college they remain the responsibility of the compulsory education system.

Schools, colleges and support agencies (including Careers Scotland) have made considerable progress in developing partnership-based approaches to promoting effective transitions for winter leavers. However, there is a need to continuously review, share and improve practice in this area. This report has drawn on existing student databases and new research with schools and colleges to identify key issues and areas for continuing policy development. A summary of key findings (with implications for policy consideration in **bold**) is provided below.

7.2 Characteristics and needs of exceptional entry winter leavers

Both 2006-07 Scottish Funding Council data and our new research with schools suggest that the numbers of exceptional entry winter leavers entering colleges broadly reflects patterns of college entry in general (with a few exceptions). Fife, Glasgow, Aberdeenshire, North Lanarkshire, Edinburgh and Angus all reported more than 100 exceptional entry winter leavers in 2006-07.

Any resources to support colleges providing services for exceptional entry winter leavers (for example, through additional *More Choices, More Chances* support) need to be targeted at those areas where there are concentrations of winter leavers and other potentially vulnerable learner groups.

Schools and colleges participating in our research emphasised that the winter leavers client group takes in a range of different learners, from those committed to pursuing a specific course of vocational learning, to others, who may feel that they have 'outgrown

school', and 'school refusers' whose long-standing attendance, attainment and behaviour records are predictors that they will leave school at the earliest opportunity.

Nevertheless, analysis of Scottish Funding Council data and research with schools and colleges suggest that some winter leavers share the characteristics of other young people at risk of being not in education, employment or training – they are more likely than other school leavers to have a learning or other disability, Additional Support Needs and relatively low educational attainment. Our research with schools also suggests the take-up of free school meals (often used as an indicator of low household income) is significantly higher than the national average.

Both schools and colleges saw winter leavers as a similarly diverse learner group (with some facing similar barriers) to other early school leavers. Both also described the most vulnerable winter leavers as experiencing a complex range of barriers to progression, from gaps in basic skills to a sense of disengagement from learning to financial pressures (which are not helped by their exclusion from Educational Maintenance Allowance payments).

The discussions with schools and colleges suggest that exceptional entry winter leavers are a heterogeneous group of young people. A rough typology sets out four main types of exceptional entry winter:

- Young people who are clear in their careers aspirations, which requires College training (e.g. many craft occupations, hair dressing etc.);
- Those who may be somewhat disillusioned with high school but who could respond well to a more 'adult' College environment, including mixing with older students;
- Those disillusioned with high school but will 'coast' along in a College environment;
- Those who wish to leave the education system as soon as possible.

Different approaches may be needed by Scottish Government, Careers Scotland, schools, colleges and other key actors for each.

Winter leavers are a diverse client group, but many face significant barriers to progression as do other early school leavers. There is a need for Careers Scotland and partners to target resources on assisting the most vulnerable and working with schools and colleges on effective, innovative exceptional entry provision.

Many school and college representatives questioned the value of having different leaving dates for summer and winter leavers. It was suggested that the winter leaving date threatens to further frustrate disaffected learners and adds unnecessary complication to the already challenging process of supporting school-college transitions.

The Scottish Government should review the arrangements for, rationale and value of maintaining two separate school leaving dates, considering the benefits and problems for schools, colleges and learners associated with current arrangements. A comparative study examining arrangements in the other UK nations, where all school students have the same leaving date, may be of value.

7.3 Benefits of exceptional entry to college

Schools participating in our research saw exceptional entry to college as providing an important progression route for winter leavers. Exceptional entry offers important benefits:

- the move to a college environment can encourage winter leavers to re-engage with learning;
- transitional programmes offer ‘tasters’ for those who are unclear on what specific course of study that they want to pursue;
- college can help prevent those determined to leave formal secondary education from finding themselves not in education, employment or training;
- and the supportive learning environment provided by colleges can help build broader employability (including essential skills) among disadvantaged young people.

Schools acknowledged the need to positively promote exceptional entry as a potential progression route for winter leavers.

There is a need to continue to support schools and colleges to develop effective progression routes for winter leavers, and to ‘raise awareness’ of exceptional entry as a positive option for young people considering leaving school early.

7.4 Winter leavers' course choices and outcomes

The subjects chosen by winter leavers were strongly influenced by gender. The most popular programme destinations of construction and engineering and personal care and health (including childcare) were dominated by male and female students respectively. While young people need to be free to make their own choices of learning to reflect their own interests and career aspirations, there is clearly a need to continue to challenge gender stereotyping in career choice.

Careers Scotland should continue to work with schools, colleges and other stakeholders to develop careers guidance materials designed to combat 'gendered' views of work and training, encouraging young people to consider the widest possible range of learning routes and jobs.

Scottish Funding Council data for 2006-07 show that the majority of exceptional entry winter leavers were reported as gaining some form of positive outcome at the end of the academic year. However, more than one-fifth left college to unknown destinations. There appeared to be statistically significant associations between residing in disadvantaged areas and 'dropping out' both to unknown destinations and to start work. The lowest qualified among winter leavers were also significantly more likely to leave college to unknown destinations or to be unsuccessful after completing an assessed programme.

There is a need for further research on the different trajectories in learning and the labour market experienced by those winter leavers who 'leave to unknown destinations', particularly investigating the relationships between area-based disadvantage, poverty and decisions to leave formal education. Further research is also required on the particular problems faced by, and needs of, the least qualified winter leavers, in order to inform future college provision targeting skills gaps and other barriers to learning.

Our research with colleges on the 2007-08 cohort of winter leavers confirmed positive outcomes for most, but considerable variations in both retention and the achievement of qualifications. College representatives also suggested that the broader benefits of exceptional entry – in terms of improving employability and essential skills, and helping winter leavers to re-engage with learning – were not effectively captured by existing

evaluation and monitoring systems. Likert scale measurements or other methods might be useful in identifying progress in terms of student attitudes.

There is a need for more consistent and sophisticated mechanisms for measuring the ‘distance travelled’ by winter leavers at college (in terms of the development of employability skills and re-engaging with learning) and the long-term benefits of winter leavers’ transitions to college learning.

While Scottish Funding Council data provide a useful ‘snapshot’ of the outcomes achieved by exceptional entry winter leavers at the end of their transitional year, there is less clear evidence on the longer-term impacts on learning and labour market trajectories. More information on the longer-term benefits for exceptional entry as an option for different learners is required, if schools and Careers Scotland are to help young people to make a fully informed choice about the benefits of college.

Targeted, longitudinal research is needed on the labour market and learning progress made by winter leavers experiencing both ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ outcomes during their transitional year at college. This should focus on the progress of leavers over a 2-5 year period following their initial engagement with the college sector, in order to explore the longer-term benefits of exceptional entry on different groups of learners and inform future policy.

7.5 Good practice in supporting exceptional entry winter leavers

Research with schools highlighted a number of good practice features in supporting winter leavers, including: early intervention (during S4) to explore progression routes with potential winter leavers; collaborative events with colleges to inform and induct those making the transition to college; one-to-one support for winter leavers from guidance and Careers Scotland staff; and strong links to specialist Careers Scotland services. In some cases, school representatives thought that Careers Scotland's role as an ‘all-age careers service’ meant that there was pressure on the time and resources available to career advisers to lend their expertise to supporting winter leavers and other vulnerable learners.

There is a need to ensure that Careers Scotland is resourced to provide both specialist services (such as the successful ‘Activate’ programme) and one-to-one support in schools to help ensure effective post-school transitions for exceptional entry winter leavers.

Most colleges seek to meet the individual needs of winter leavers through already highly-developed student support structures that are open to all potentially vulnerable learners, offering one-to-one advice, guidance and mentoring. Colleges have also used a range of other support mechanisms, from initial screening exercises to identify support needs to the deployment of Support Workers in classroom settings to help identify and resolve learners’ problems.

Colleges also described creative approaches to engaging winter leavers (and other potentially vulnerable learners) that emphasise ‘real life’/workplace settings and innovative approaches to integrating employability skills and essential skills (numeracy and literacy) into more practical/vocational learning formats.

The Scottish Government and relevant local stakeholders should continue to support forums where college learning professionals can share good practice in supporting and delivering appropriate learning interventions for winter leavers and other potentially vulnerable groups.

Short-term, specialist winter leavers programmes also offer an option for young people who are determined to leave formal education at their winter leaving date and do not want to return to school. However, in some areas there may not be the ‘critical mass’ of winter leavers to making running such programmes financially viable. In these areas, and where it is considered that such specialist programmes will be useful, there may be value in colleges and local authorities considering the closer co-ordination of winter leavers provision at the local authority-level. Scottish Funding Council data suggest that drop-out rates within short-term programmes ending in December are relatively high compared to those on programmes lasting a year. While this may reflect the determination of a certain group of winter leavers to leave education at the earliest opportunity, there is a need to ensure that such young people have access to the required support and guidance.

Schools, colleges and Careers Scotland should continue to work together to ensure that those commencing short-term winter leavers programmes are directed towards agreed progression routes, in the shape of ‘January-start’ college courses or alternative training provision.

Many colleges rely mostly or entirely on mainstream programmes to deliver learning for winter leavers. It was also suggested that there are educational benefits in directing those winter leavers able to cope towards mainstream provision: it enables them to make immediate progress towards qualifications; older, more mature learners can act as positive role models; and it prevents winter leavers being stigmatised. Integrating winter leavers can help them to feel respected, trusted and part of the college, encouraging them to raise their expectations and ‘take responsibility for their own learning’.

Both specialist programmes, and the support offered to winter leavers integrated into mainstream courses, share ‘good practice’ features that emphasise holistic approaches to learning (addressing the range of learners’ needs) and personalised mentoring and support – continued support is needed in colleges (through additional *More Choices, More Chances* resources where required) in developing innovative approaches to helping these learners.

7.6 Good practice in partnership-working

Schools and colleges gave a number of examples of effective partnership-working. Critical success factors leading to effective partnerships included:

- regular (formal and informal) contacts between dedicated, named school and college staff to share information and practice (often facilitated by geographical proximity);
- co-operation on a range of programmes throughout young people’s school careers , and the resourcing of ‘solid projects’ with clear objectives such as the successful *Skills for Work* programme;
- the leadership of senior managers in both schools and colleges who are willing to commit time and resources to school-college partnership-working.

The main barrier to broader partnership-working (with a wider range of schools/colleges) and deeper and more regular collaboration (with existing partners) was seen as the limited

resources available for school-college collaboration on both sides. On the specific winter leavers agenda, a number of school representatives said that they would value closer engagement with colleges throughout the process of preparing young people to apply for, and make the transition to, college.

Many colleges would value the opportunity to extend partnership-working with schools beyond their immediate locality and to engage more proactively with a wider range of schools, but resources for school-college liaison work are limited. Given the potential importance of transitions to further education to the *More Choices, More Chances* agenda, there is a need to continue to support and encourage school-college collaboration in this area.

Continuing support and future funding for school-college collaboration should focus on encouraging schools to strengthen links with colleges outwith their immediate locality, but within the reach of public transport. There is also a case to be made for additional resources to develop regional events and on-line forums allowing for the sharing of experiences and dissemination of good practice in school-college collaboration. Clearly, detailed consultation with schools and colleges is required in order to establish what form future practice-sharing activities should take.

During the period (to December) when schools are still responsible for the leavers, many schools reported that the feedback provided by colleges on attendance, attainment and progression among exceptional entry winter leavers as being adequate, but there were concerns in some cases regarding the resources available to colleges to ensure that reporting is always provided in a complete and timeous manner.

There is a need to ensure that colleges' systems for reporting attendance, attainment and progression among winter leavers are adequately resourced, and that good practice in developing feedback mechanisms is shared among schools and colleges.

Some schools raised concerns around the limited capacity of local colleges to find places for winter leavers, leaving some young people unable to gain access to the course of their

choice. There may be benefits in colleges, Careers Scotland and education authorities working together to co-ordinate provision for winter leavers at local authority-level (or in groups of local authorities, where appropriate), in an attempt to ensure that students can access courses in their chosen area of study wherever possible. There may also be benefits associated with encouraging both schools and colleges to broaden the scope of their partnership-working, to strengthen existing links with institutions outwith their immediate locality, but within the reach of local public transport.

Recent moves to develop a local authority-wide winter leavers programme in Glasgow may offer important insights on the potential to co-ordinate such specialist provision within and across local authorities – there is a need to identify and disseminate good practice lessons from this pilot programme and to encourage further co-ordination where appropriate.

The added value delivered by co-ordinating activities at local authority-level – in terms of ensuring that there is sufficient capacity to meet winter leavers’ needs and promoting more consistent service provision and monitoring – should provide a focus for future research and practice-sharing. At a basic level, local authorities may have a role to play in helping to improve the flow of information between all schools and colleges on potential numbers of winter leavers who will be seeking exceptional entry in a given year; and the likely capacity of colleges to provide places on popular courses for these students. It is also important that colleges continue to have access to *More Choices, More Chances* funding and other forms of support that allow them to engage with and assist vulnerable young people.

In conclusion, the ‘exceptional entry winter leavers’ client group is heterogeneous, and it is important that learners are treated as individuals. In some cases, particularly vulnerable winter leavers will need considerable help in college, either through one-to-one support and mentoring (which the college sector is well placed to provide) or entry into specialist transitional programmes (which are valuable for those who are unsure of what course of study they wish to take, or unable to secure a place on the course of their choice). Others will find their way into mainstream college provision, but may again need additional support to sustain successful transitions.

Schools and colleges need to be supported to build upon and strengthen both effective partnerships and innovative approaches to engaging with (and delivering learning for) winter leavers. Colleges in particular have a crucial role to play in the *More Choices, More Chances* agenda, and the funding and support that they receive from government must continue to reflect the importance of providing opportunities for, and supporting, potentially vulnerable school leavers.

Careers Scotland and its partners also have a key role to play in: advising young people on progression routes; supporting school-college collaboration; exploring opportunities for co-ordination and information-sharing; and providing forums for the dissemination of good practice. But there is no room for complacency. Too many winter leavers fail to achieve positive outcomes or disappear 'off the radar'. A continuing priority for Careers Scotland and partners must be to investigate the issues faced by those not in education, employment or training; gain an understanding of the long-term benefits of effective transitions to college, and the long-term consequences when winter leavers 'drop out'; and inform policy on providing 'more choices and more chances' for these young people.