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Advice, Guidance And “The Overlooked Middle” In English 14-19 Education

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Work in progress, please do not quote

Abstract
Policymakers in Europe have devoted considerable resources and attention to low achievers in education, especially those who are or who are at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) (Tomlinson 2013:102). At the other end of the spectrum British and American governments, amonst others, have also focused on high educational achievers who are considered to be ‘gifted’ (Balchin et al 2008). In contrast, Roberts (2012: 203) argues, “‘ordinariness’ tends to remain overlooked in contemporary research and policy discourses”. This paper addresses that neglect by specifically focusing on the group of ‘ordinary’ middle attainers in the context of English 14-19 education, who Hodgson and Spours (2013) have termed “the overlooked middle”. It draws on an analysis of statistical data from the government-funded Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) in order to quantify and identify this group of young people. In particular the data is analysed to investigate the relationship between the advice and guidance that these middle attainers receive and the post-16 qualifications that they select.

Advice and guidance has a particularly important role in promoting social justice within the English context, where education and training are characterised by a plethora of highly differentiated courses for young people from 14 to 19. This diversity is the result of what Higham and Yeomans (2011: 217) refer to as “the hyperactivity of English policy and provision for 14- to 19-year-olds." The qualifications to which many of these courses lead are, however, of uncertain

equivalence and uneven value, especially in vocational education and training (VET). Some of these qualifications have proved to be very short-lived. Data collection for the LSYPE covered a period (2004-2010) when new VET qualifications were being introduced in England with much publicity and when advice and guidance services were undergoing significant change.

This paper uses the rich LSYPE dataset to address three research questions:

- How many young people fall into the group of middle attainers and what, if anything, characterises them?
- What formal advice and guidance does this group of young people receive?
- What is the relationship between this advice and the post-16 qualifications they select?

Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used

The LSYPE dataset sheds light on how many young people fall into this overlooked middle category, whether they constitute a coherent group and if so, how we might characterise them. The study collected information from a panel of young people in seven waves between 2004 (when they were 13 or 14) and 2010 (when they were 19 or 20). 15770 young people were involved in the first wave, dropping to 8682 by the final wave. The LSYPE provides data on areas including:

- the young person's family or household background;
- personal characteristics, attitudes, experiences and behaviours;
- attainment in education; parental employment and income;
- family environment; type of school(s) attended;
- sources of advice and guidance.

This paper builds on the work of Hodgson and Spours (2013), who used existing administrative data, survey data from 2400 young people from six 11-18 schools and a large further education college in the south of England as well as

interviews with samples of students in Year 9 (age 13 or 14) and Year 11 (age 15 or 16). They estimate that middle attainers make up 40 per cent of learners, judged on the level of their qualifications when they entered high school at age 11 and on the number at age 16 who are not taking academic A level qualifications, are not on an apprenticeship and are not NEET. Informed by the approach of Hodgson and Spours, this paper analyses data from the LSYPE to initially estimate the size of the overlooked middle in England. Furthermore, this study uses a multiple regression model of relevant variables in the LSYPE dataset to identify how relevant characteristics might contribute to the likelihood of individuals being part of this group of middle attainers, hitherto neglected by researchers. It then examines what formal advice and guidance that group receive and how this relates to the qualifications they pursue, with the implications for their individual progression and wider social justice.

Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings

The group of middle attainers is heterogeneous. Their access to and perception of the advice and guidance available to them was found to be widely discrepant and this may have exacerbated the risk that they would pursue qualifications which, even if completed, proved to have low status in the workplace or in higher education. The government's Wolf Report (Wolf 2011: 13) accused schools of "gaming": that is, persuading students to take courses which benefit schools in their position on national league tables but which are of doubtful use or value for the students themselves. The overlooked middle are particularly vulnerable in this regard since, unlike their more gifted or troubled peers, there have been no targeted initiatives tailored to their particular needs.

This study is situated within England but the implications for social justice for middle achievers are much wider. The European Union has the goal of reducing early school leaving to below ten per cent by 2020, which again ignores the middle achieving learners in education or training who may not be well served.

The paper suggests what policymakers at a national and European level might do to address the large "overlooked middle" category of learners.

Main paper

Introduction

Policymakers in Europe have devoted considerable resources and attention to low achievers in education, especially those who are or who are at risk of becoming NEET (not in education employment or training) (Tomlinson 2013:102). At the other end of the spectrum the British and American governments have also focused on high educational achievers considered to be 'gifted' (Balchin et al 2008). In contrast, Roberts (2012: 203) argues, "'ordinariness' tends to remain overlooked in contemporary research and policy discourses". This paper addresses that neglect by focusing on the group of 'ordinary' middle attainers in the context of English secondary education that Hodgson and Spours (2013) have termed "the overlooked middle".

It draws on an analysis of statistical data from the government-funded Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) between 2003 and 2010 in order to quantify and identify this group of young people. In particular the data is analysed to investigate the relationship between the advice and guidance that these middle attainers receive and the post-16 qualifications that they select. In specific reference to information advice and guidance (IAG), this paper uses these data to address three research questions:

- How many young people fall into the group of middle attainers and what characterises them?
- What formal advice and guidance does this group of young people receive?
- What is the relationship between this advice and the post-16 qualifications they select?

Information Advice and Guidance

This study focuses on careers advice, which the OECD (2004, in Lewin & Colley 2011: 3) defined as:

> services and activities intended to assist individuals of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers.

Lewin and Colley (2011: 2) cite “substantial evidence in England that high quality career guidance can play a crucial role in supporting young people to navigate more successfully the shifting landscapes of education and training systems.” The provision of IAG for young people has been a significant if unstable feature within educational policy for many years. With the Education Act of 2011, the Coalition Government has most recently moved responsibility for independent careers guidance from Local Authorities to individual schools, which have a statutory duty to give careers guidance “in an impartial manner; include information on the full range of post-16 education or training options, including Apprenticeships; and promote the best interests of the pupils to whom it is given” (Education Act 2011 quoted in McCrone et al 2012: 4). As McCrone et al also note, schools have been given this extensive new duty with no extra resources. In addition there is a new on-line and telephone-based careers advice service which the children’s charity Barnardo’s has described as “wholly inadequate” (Evans & Rallings 2013: 3). This major and controversial transformation of IAG policy highlights the need to better understand the effect of policy in this area in England, which is the aim of this paper.

This study on which this paper is based is partly historical though much of what it examines remains in place today, albeit in slightly different incarnations. It focuses on the period between 2003 and 2010 covered by the LSYPE (described more fully below) when there was a New Labour government whose stated “top priority” was “education, education, education” (Blair 2001). In 2001 the then government incorporated all careers guidance as well as other provision of

advice for young people into a new generic national support service called Connexions, which still exists though in a very reduced form. Lewin and Colley (2011: 3) point to a "catalogue of concerns" about the provision of careers guidance at the time this study examines, including within reports commissioned by the government. Although Connexions was to be a national service for IAG, it was always fragmented and in 2008 it was devolved to Local Authorities, which could then contract out the work. Lewin and Colley (2011: 6) listed 72 different organisations in England responsible for providing "Connexions-branded services". In this same period, McGowan et al (2009) found wide variation in the provision of advice and guidance through Connexions. The service was poorly resourced and lost funding even before the public sector cuts implemented by the Coalition government following the economic crisis.

Many of the concerns raised about Connexions derived from the fundamental ambivalence in its mission. Connexions was tasked with addressing social exclusion and specifically with reducing the number of NEET young people, while also providing careers and other guidance for all young people. Watts (2001) found that this led to the extrapolation of measures aimed at the disadvantaged (who were "the primary-target group") to all young people regardless of their need. "In other words, universality was a second-order consideration" (Watts 2001: 167). This is particularly pertinent in regard to the 'middling' students this paper examines.

Though Connexions was a discrete national service, much careers guidance came, and comes, through schools. Foskett et al (2008) examined schools-based careers guidance in the New Labour period through a qualitative study of the provision in 24 schools across nine local authorities in England. They found significant discrepancy between the advice given by schools and in particular that the "academic ethos of the school offers a very powerful influence on post-16 choices and decisions of pupils." Schools with relatively lower social economic status "maintain a rather stronger commitment to vocational pathways" than

those with higher status (p37). Given the lower status of non-academic courses (see *inter alia* Avis 2009 and Pring *et al* 2009), this may suggest that higher status education begets high status education partly through school-based IAG. Both giving advice on courses and providing courses in competition with other institutions may, moreover, lead schools into a conflict of interest.

Schools and colleges in England are officially judged by their position in league tables based upon how well their students perform in examinations, which can be of existential significance. The government can close down institutions that fail by this measure, but the reliance on examination performance as the single measure of quality is problematic. Wolf (2011: 13) accuses schools of what she terms “gaming”. This involves advising students onto less demanding courses which are ostensibly equivalent to well-recognised qualifications on the league tables but which are of doubtful value for the students themselves. Similarly, after their study of young peoples’ choices at 13 and 14 in England Haynes *et al* (2012: 19) noted, “It was not always possible to tease out whether school advice and guidance reflected the interests of the individual young people or of their school.” A recent study of teachers’ knowledge and experiences of providing IAG is more forthright. Fuller et al (2014: 279) concluded that “[t]eachers knew very little about what other providers offered” and that there was a strong financial incentive in ensuring pupils progressed into the school’s sixth form where there was one. This tallies with the findings of Foskett et al (2008).

This structural inconsistency in careers guidance for young people matters not just because, as Foskett et al (p39) argue, such guidance should provide a counter to received ideas and attitudes, especially for those with limited family experience of post-16 education. It also matters because the choices open to young people reflect a complex and highly differentiated system of qualifications in England where there is robust statistical evidence that the economic return on academic qualifications outstrips that of vocational qualifications (Collier et al 2011: 2). It is that complex system to which we now turn.

The English qualifications framework

In the year they turn 16, after five years of compulsory secondary education, students in England normally take General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations. Introduced in 1988, the GCSE is a single subject examination administered by independent awarding bodies. Students usually take at least 5 GCSEs in a variety of subjects, including English and maths, but as many as nine or ten is normal. They may be combined with other technical or applied examinations such as a BTec extended certificate. Students are given a grade from A* ("A star") to G for each GCSE where A* is the top grade. Only A* to C are generally considered as credible 'pass' grades. Importantly, the government's benchmark for pupils against which schools are measured and compared (which Collier et al 2011 refer to as the "gold standard") is a result of at least five GCSEs, including English and maths, graded A* to C. Most of those who do well at GCSE go on to take two or three A levels. These are highly regarded academic qualifications that were introduced in 1951 (but like GCSEs, now run by independent awarding bodies) and despite changes to their assessment and format, A level examinations are still normally taken after a further two years' study at the age of 18.

At the time of the LSYPE data collection the statutory minimum age for leaving full-time education was 16. Subsequently that has been raised in stages to 18.

In September 2000, the New Labour government made a significant change to A levels by introducing AS levels as intermediate qualifications to be taken after one year of post 16 study. AS levels were independent qualifications but which still formed part of the full A level (sometimes referred to as "A2"). AS levels have never gained credibility as "stand-alone" qualifications, only as the first part of the full A level, and are now being phased out by the government.

During the period this study investigates, the government also introduced 14-19 Diplomas but these had much smaller uptake than planned and are not specifically mentioned in the LSYPE. After barely three years and many millions of pounds these qualifications effectively died in 2011. See Isaacs (2013) for a blow-by-blow account of their failure, about which the government had been well forewarned.

Despite this great variety of qualifications and associated courses, at the government's own admission, "By far the best-known and best-understood qualifications for young people in this country are the GCSE and the A level" (DfES 2005 White Paper, p19). Yet data analysed by the Guardian newpaper in 2013 indicated that only 37% of young people over sixteen take A levels. The extensive Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training (Pring et al 2009:166) argued that young people taking qualifications other than A levels (that is the majority of young people) are disadvantaged:

> because of a lack of full information about entry requirements, the reduced opportunities for progression because of a lack of articulation with some HE [higher education] provision, and, in some cases, academic snobbery.

For those young people who do not follow the straightforward academic route from GCSE to A level to university especially, education in England has been characterised by huge complexity in the range of courses available and the qualifications to which they lead. OCR[*], one of three awarding bodies that dominate the sector, published a guide for parents (2008) with the subtitle *Finding your way through the qualifications maze* which outlines awards on offer. The qualifications this one awarding body offered included:

- 45 General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications
- A range of Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) level qualifications
- A range of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

[*] OCR is the full name of the awarding body.

- OCR Nationals (“an exam-free alternatives to GCSEs and A Levels”) at three levels and in nine subject areas
- Over 300 Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC) qualifications at three different levels
- Functional Skills qualifications
- Applied Diplomas in five subject lines and at three levels

Higham and Yeomans (2011: 217) refer to “the hyperactivity of English policy and provision for 14- to 19-year-olds” which reflects this plethora of courses. Competing independent awarding bodies that have a financial interest in young people taking many examinations further exacerbate this hyperactivity. All of this has led to qualifications of uneven value, which are not readily comparable. The comparability of qualifications is crucial, especially given the well-recognised difference in England between vocational courses that are associated with low status and academic courses that are associated with high status. For example, OCR claimed that its level 2 National vocational certificate is equivalent to the academic award of 4 GCSEs at grades C and above. Yet Alison Wolf identified in her influential report on English vocational education (2011) that in practice such vocational qualifications do not have the currency of GCSEs either in the workplace or in higher education. Once again, this suggests the need for high quality IAG to inform young people of the actual value of qualifications, especially those young people with middling attainment who are not NEET but who may not seek to take A levels.

Within this background, analysis of the data from the LSYPE may permit some evaluation of the impact of formal IAG through the New Labour era, as well as permitting some estimation of the size and composition of the ‘overlooked middle’.

The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England

The LSYPE was a major panel survey undertaken by the government which followed the progression of a representative cohort of young people from the age of 13 (school year 9, the third year of secondary education) to adulthood in seven annual waves of data collection between 2004 and 2010.

Schools were the primary sampling unit and the initial sample selection comprised 33,000 young people in year 9 attending maintained state schools, independent schools and pupil referral units. The home-educated were excluded. There was additional stratification to enable the over-sampling of disadvantaged young people (assessed by their eligibility for free school meals) as well as of the major ethnic minority groups. Therefore, the sample size from each school varied according to the ethnic make-up of the school; the mean number of participant young people per school at wave one was 24, which had dropped to 13.2 by wave seven (Anders 2012: 9). This sampling strategy is important since it necessitates the use of weights in certain types of analysis, which are provided in each wave.

Non-response at the level of schools was an issue, especially in inner London. Originally there were returns from 647 schools of 892 selected (73%), so the final sample was considerably smaller than planned (DfE 2011: 9). Indeed, Collingwood et al (2010: 52) estimate that the response rate actually fell to 53% if notional participants from non-responding schools are included in the initial non-response rate. The issued sample for wave one was 21,000 young people born between 1st September 1989 and 31st August 1990 and eventually only 15,770 young people were actually involved in the first wave. This had reduced to 8682 by the seventh and final wave in 2010.

Whether or not these data can be considered as missing at random is important because those who drop out of the survey may be those least likely to succeed though there is weighting for non-response at each wave (DfE 2011: 55-76).

Piesse and Westat (2009) have suggested a combination of imputation in certain areas of the dataset with weighting in order to maintain “the associations between all the items” in the dataset. They concede, however, “weighting inevitably loses some of the partial information that is available” (pii). This strategy was eschewed because of the level of detail that this study requires for relatively small numbers of cases associated with particular courses. Collier et al (2011: 7) employed listwise deletion of cases in their study of young peoples' choices using the LSYPE. The analyses below also employ listwise deletion depending on the number of valid cases in each calculation, which are noted in brackets. This does result in a loss of information from earlier waves but since the statistical patterns are of most interest, this approach is acceptable. There is some evidence, however, that the number of young people taking academic qualifications post-16 may over-estimated in the LYSPE sample. There has been, moreover, documented analysis of the weaknesses within the LSYPE and in particular the differences in how questions about IAG are differently worded between different waves making direct comparison difficult (Collingwood et al 2010: 28). The available variables for IAG at Wave 4 have so many non-valid responses that they cannot be used and in Wave 5 the questions on IAG were only put to young people who were NEET. Nonetheless, the size and richness of the dataset mean it remains a useful source of information, though inference has to be made with caution.

In Waves one to four a parent was interviewed along with the young people in the panel, each for forty-five minutes; in subsequent waves only the young people were involved using a variety of on-line, telephone and face-to-face approaches. Information from these interviews was supplemented with existing administrative data from, for example, the census, school and local authority data returns. The LSYPE provides very rich data on areas including:

- the young person's family or household background;
- personal characteristics, attitudes, experiences and behaviours;
- attainment in education; parental employment and income;

- family environment; type of school(s) attended;
- sources of advice and guidance.

For this analysis data from waves one, two, three, four, five and six were combined using participants' unique survey identification number as the variable on which to link files. Analysis was carried out using SPSS.

Exploratory Data Analysis

The young people in wave one (Year 9) overwhelmingly responded that they themselves had most say in their choice of subjects for year 10, 85% of valid responses (n 6013). Nevertheless, nine per cent identified parents and five percent identified teachers as having 'most say'. 85% of young people in wave one had heard of Connexions before the interview though only 39.5% had ever spoken to an advisor. Only 7.4% had talked about their plans for future study to someone from Connexions quite a lot or a lot but 44.7% and 18.2% respectively found the information from a Connexions Service Personal Advisor or someone else from Connexions quite useful or very useful. How well positioned 13 year-olds in Year 9 are to make that judgement is moot. Information about choices as part of a lesson was found quite useful or very useful by 45% and 10.4% respectively.

In wave two the young people were asked what job or trade they wanted to do or train for and the responses are refreshingly varied, ranging from wanting to work on the Derby Telegraph newspaper to joining the armed forces. As Archer et al (2014) have also found, there is little evidence for the poverty of aspiration that some politicians have highlighted among young people. Only 18.5% had, however, thought about doing vocational courses at Year 10 and Year 11 (n 7003) and only 43% had spoken to a Connexions advisor since the previous wave. By contrast 55.3% had spoken quite a lot or a lot to family members about their plans for future study (n 13,306). By wave 3 (Year 11, the final year of

compulsory education at the time), 69% reported having spoken to a Connexions Personal Advisor in the previous year while over 95% had heard of the service (n 12,230). Apprenticeships were a major feature of the then government's rhetoric around education and training yet only 21.7% had talked to anyone about getting training or apprenticeships after Year 11 (n 13,187).

There is a mismatch between the intentions of the young people at wave 2 and what is to come. 82.1% of those interviewed when they were 14 who intended to stay in education intended to do A level courses after year 11 (n 10,318) and 91.4% of those intended to apply to university (n 7742). In the event, 69% of the sample who went to college or stayed at school after 16 took A level courses and by age 18 in wave 6 just 39.4% of the whole sample were at university (n 9546). Again, this suggests no poverty of ambition, at least at age 14, but rather that there is something else restricting opportunities or progression.

By wave 4 (year 12) there are data to show young people on courses leading to a huge range of different exam subjects, reflecting the diversity of the offer to young people discussed above. 77.1% are going to school or college full time compared to 6.7% in work and 5.1% on a training course or apprenticeship (n 11,252). As noted above, of those still in education, 69% were studying for A, AS levels or A2s in year 12 (n 8685) compared with 59% in year 13 (n 8365) suggesting that 10 per cent had only achieved AS levels or less.

Who are the middle attainers?

"Youth researchers are making a habit of overlooking then discovering a missing middle," according to Roberts (2013). The government does, however, define middle attainers as those at Level 4 in the national Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) at the end of primary education (referred to as Key Stage 2) (DfE 2012), which in 2013 accounted for 72% of children (DfE 2014).

The definition used in this paper is slightly adapted from Hodgson and Spours (2013) who refer to middle attainers as those young people post-16 who are not involved in a full two year A level programme, an apprenticeship or classified as NEET. They indicate the proportion of these middle attainers is around 40%. For this analysis our selection of cases for analysis was based on a definition of middling attainers as those young people who in the year they became 18 (Year 13) were attending school or college but were not taking A level courses. This is a parsimonious if blunt definition and it may be seen to valorise academic courses, which is not the intention. The selection of cases based on A levels is, rather, a reflection of the well recognised valorisation and status of A levels where other qualifications are considered second best. The selection will also include some students among middle attainers who may be on highly selective or specialised vocational courses, including some apprenticeships, though these numbers would be small small. It specifically excludes those who are only doing AS levels (not the full A2). Most importantly, this group cannot be judged either as failures or as 'hard-to-reach'. By definition they are engaged with education and so are not disaffected in any meaningful sense. Within the LSYPE sample there are 6831 full cases of young people at school or college of whom 38.7 per cent are not doing A levels. For the purposes of this study, this group is our 'middle'. Table 1 below sets out the overall figures.

		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	**Doing A levels**	4188	59.9	61.3	61.3
	At college not doing A levels	2643	37.8	38.7	100.0
	Total	6831	97.7	100.0	
Missing	System	162	2.3		
Total		6993	100.0		

Table 1: Young People is in mainstream education but not doing A levels at Wave 5

Analysis of this group indicates that while it certainly reflects England's divided society and its unequal education system, the social background of the group is quite heterogeneous as judged by occupation of the main parent (defined as the parent most involved with the young person's education).

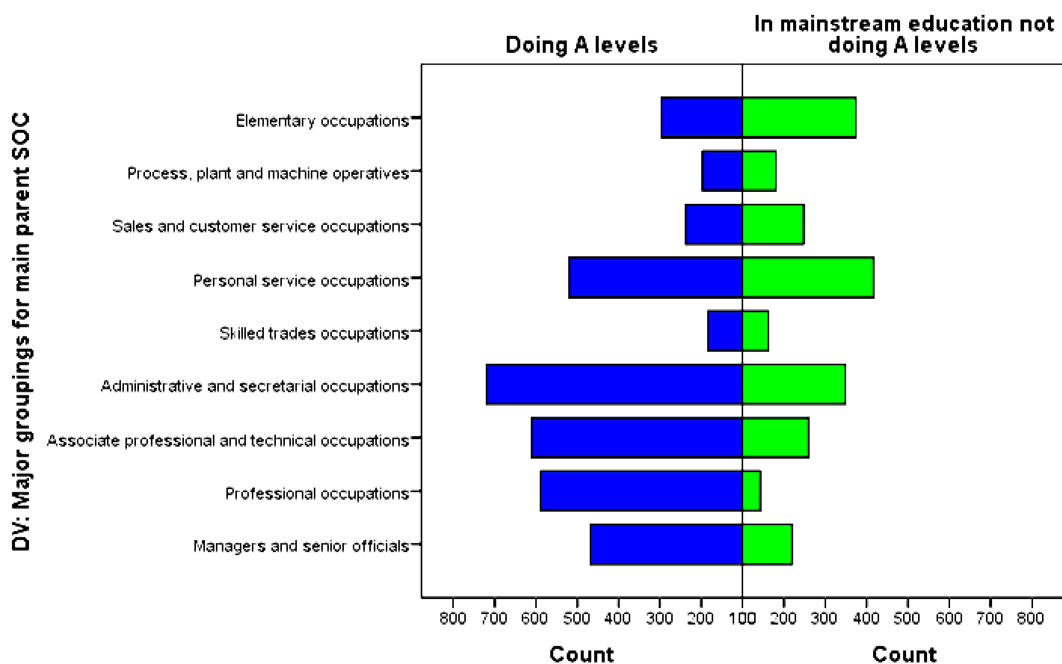

Figure 1: Graph of young people in mainstream education versus their main parent's occupational grouping divided by those doing and not doing A levels.

Figure 1, above, shows the proportion of young people in mainstream education post 16 divided between those doing and not doing A levels against the occupational grouping of the main parent. This graph partly indicates the changing nature and nomenclature of class and inequality in England where, for example, there are fewer people who identify themselves as in skilled trades and where the word manager is attached to all manner of occupations (see Dorling 2014 for a compelling discussion on the understanding of class). Moreover it

shows that those with parents in the professions or who are senior officials are far more likely to be taking A levels. Thus, this graph shows inequality, but it also shows that at each division there are young people on courses that the government has identified as not well-recognised and from which progression to the upper echelons of higher education may be problematic (Hoelscher et al 2008). Similarly, there are some regional differences with a greater proportion of these middle attainers in the North than in London and the South East (see Figure 2)

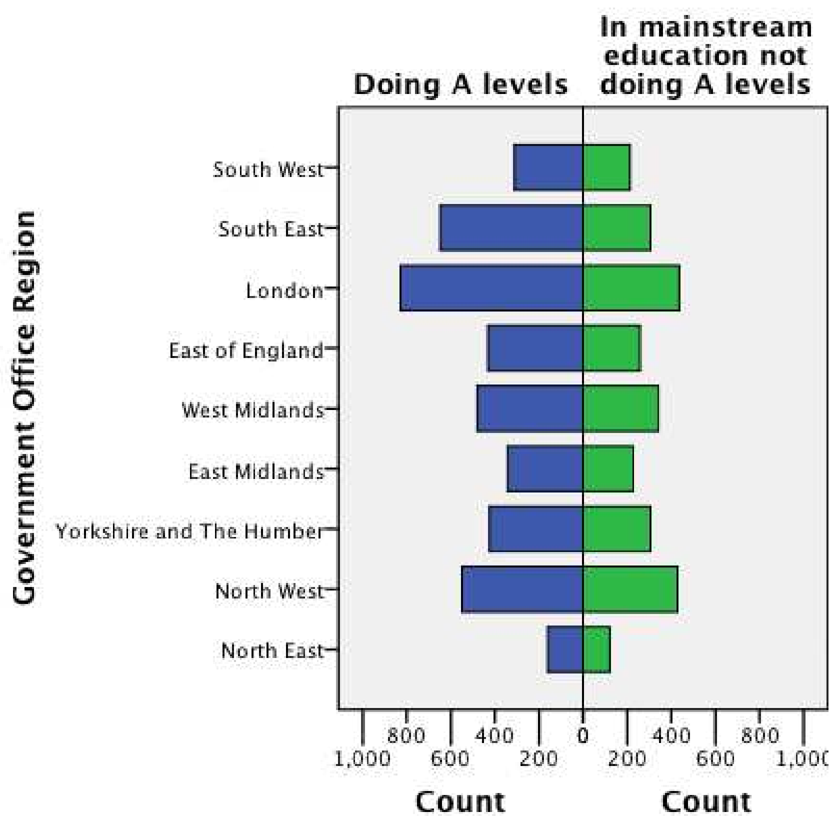

Figure 2 Graph of young people in mainstream education versus their Regions divided by those doing and not doing A levels.

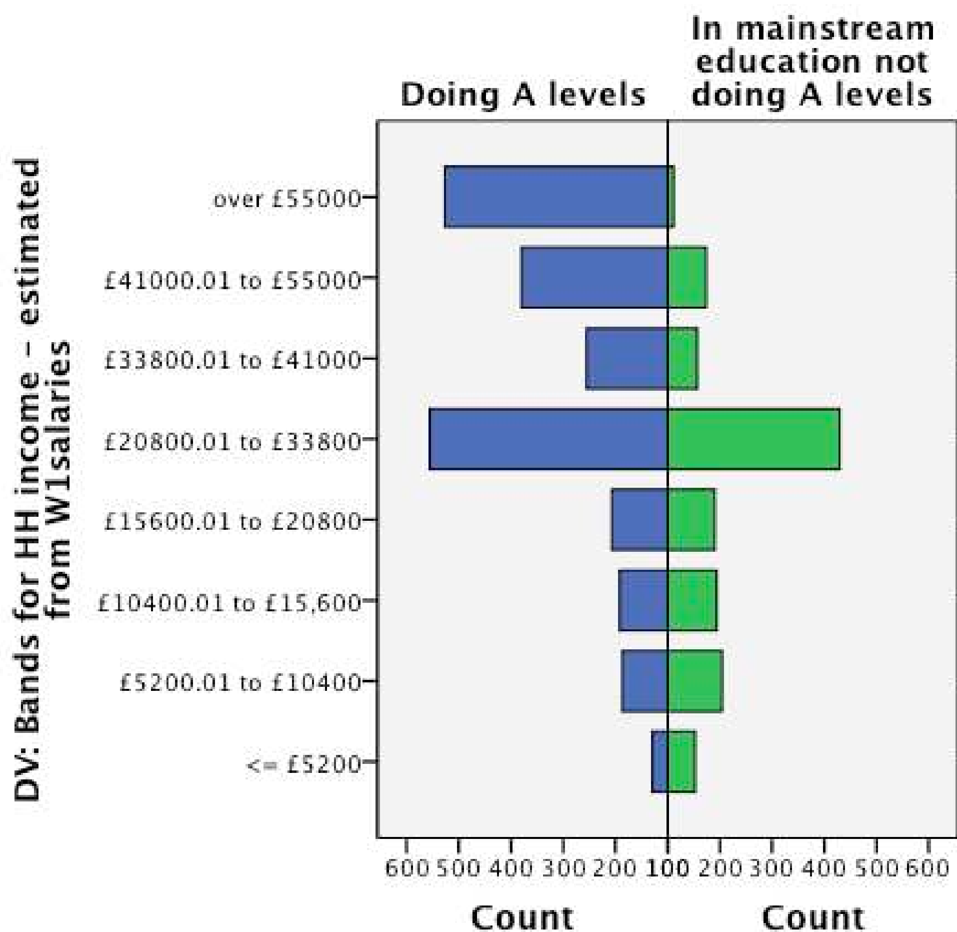

Figure 3: Graph of young people in mainstream education versus their gross household income in bands divided by those doing and not doing A levels.

Figure 3 shows a similar breakdown against gross household income estimated on salaries. The largest grouping in the middle is indicative of average household incomes (ONS 2013) and so this graph suggests that middle attainers by our definition come from middle are most likely to come from middle or average

income families. So, the ‘overlooked middle’ is more heterogeneous than might be expected but they are ordinary young people.

What formal advice and guidance does this group of young people receive?

Of this middling group 43.5 per cent had achieved the five GCSEs A* to C that is considered ‘the gold standard’ and would usually allow progression to A levels, yet for whatever reason they had not. Great caution is required in any attempt to explain the decisions young people take by making inference from this kind of dataset. We have seen that the great majority of young people consider these decisions to be their own so any influences have been internalised or have gone unnoticed. We can, though, note how frequently if at all they met advisors. In Wave 1 (age 13) 40.4 per cent of this ‘middle’ group had spoken to a Connexions advisor in the previous year rising to 44.3 per cent in Wave 2 (age 14). In Wave 2 35% had spoken “a little” with teachers in lessons about their future plans. 47 per cent had spoken to their teachers in this way not at all or not very often. By wave 3 (age 15) 73 per cent had spoken to a Connexions advisor in the previous year and 18 per cent said the Connexions advisor had influenced their decision to stay in education post-16. The data suggest that the same students are likely to have interviews with Connexions advisors. There is evidence from the data, too, of statistically significant correlations between those who speak to Connexions advisors at each wave so some middle achieving students never get to see one before selecting post-16 courses.

What is the relationship between this advice and the post-16 qualifications they select?

Hutchinson and Parker (2008) reviewed the literature on what influences young people’s decision making on future courses and careers (focusing on England’s North East) and found the existing evidence base to be (p3) “not strong”.

We can attempt to examine the impact of this IAG on choice by carrying out logistic regression modelling using variable ***w5YPatcollnotA*** (W5 Young Person is in mainstream education at age 18 but not doing A level) as the dependent variable. The data is longitudinal (rather than cross-sectional) so this model violates the assumption of the independence of errors because the same people are being measured. Since we are less concerned about change over time than exposure to IAG this is acceptable. In any case the modelling indicates less than three percent of variance can be explained by IAG, and even income explains less than 10 percent. Inferring any causal relation between this group and the formal advice they have received from Connexions, or anyone else, is highly problematic. Good careers advice is certainly better than bad careers advice and we should remember that most of the young people when asked described the advice given as useful. In a small-scale qualitative study the young person's charity, Barnardo's, found that recent policy, which returns responsibility for careers advice in England to schools has meant that:

> The young people most likely to be missing out on careers guidance are not the NEET group, but those just above this group in terms of attainment.
>
> Evans & Rallings (2013: 4)

This group will be amongst the middle attainers that are described above and who are over-represented on vocational courses. Moreover, the OECD's conclusion after its international survey of careers guidance is clear that school-based advice is less effective than independent careers advice. Yet, exposure to Connexions advisors over waves 1 to 3 accounts for much less of the variance between those in mainstream education who do and do not take A levels than household income, which itself accounts for less than ten per cent of variance, for example. Of more importance is the myriad complexity of vocational qualifications on offer, and not just to young people. The United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills review of adult vocational qualifications found "over 19,000 regulated vocational qualifications available through 176 awarding organisations" (Whitehead 2013: 11). More effective careers advice or

better signposting of courses can hardly ameliorate this type of situation, especially where awarding bodies ensure that qualifications for young people expand.

The data from the LSYPE suggest that there is more to the explanation of choices among these middling young people than their exposure to CEIAG. That explanation must acknowledge the inequality of British society, apparent in the data in each wave, where as many MPs attended a single school (Eton) as have come from a manual occupation (Hackett & Hunter 2012) and where the seven per cent of the population who attended fee-paying schools account for 71 per cent of senior judges and 45 per cent of the chairs of public bodies (Milburn 2014). The statistics from the LSYPE show the great majority of young people state that decisions about choices of course are their own. Young people may, however, be misrecognising free choice for what Bourdieu (1984) termed “the choice of the necessary” which reflects the divided society into which they were born. Ordinary young people engaged in education are being let down by the education system, let alone those who are NEET. Once again, more effective careers advice or better signposting of choices, though certainly worthwhile, will not fundamentally affect that inequality.

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