

**Work or Study? Gender and the Transition from  
School to Work in England**

**Report for Nuffield Foundation**

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## Executive Summary

Progressing through education and into a good job is key to the prosperity and wellbeing of young adults and society at large. Our research project compares educational trajectories and labour market outcomes for men and women and for those who follow academic and more vocational pathways into work.

We address three core topics:-

- 1) changes in the educational expectations and career orientation of young people;
- 2) pathways taken by young men and women through the education system and into their early career, differentiating between those on academic pathways and those on vocational pathways;
- 3) labour market outcomes, focusing on young people through to their early thirties.

Quantitative data was used from two recent cohorts of young people in England: *Next Steps* – which comprises individuals born in 1989/1990 - and the *Our Future* cohort who were born around 10 years later. This yields large samples of individuals with rich longitudinal data on their social background and education.

The report as a whole sets out in full detail the background and findings from the project. Here we summarise the key findings and conclusions we have reached across all three strands of the project.

## KEY FINDINGS

### EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS

We utilise the data to compare the educational expectations of young people born 10 years apart in 1990 (Millennials or Generation Y) and 2000 (Generation Z) and a broad range of associated predictors. Educational expectations were defined in terms of staying in academic education, studying vocationally at an FE college, or else leaving education. Regarding predictors, we tested the role of family socio-economic resources, young people's health, their parents' educational expectations for them, and their career orientations separately for boys and girls. We found that multiple factors shape educational expectations and that there are potential generational shifts in the influence of these factors.

There were considerable variations in educational expectations by region, with young people in both age cohorts living in London being more likely to expect to stay in education than their peers in other regions - possibly reflecting variations in post-16 provision across the country and over time.

Generally, we found gender differences in expectations - in both cohorts girls were more likely to expect to remain in education than boys. Moreover, there was a decline in the proportion of students intending to leave education after year 11 - possibly reflecting changes due to the raised compulsory education participation.

Across both cohorts, parental socio-economic resources and educational expectations for their children remain strong and consistent predictors, underscoring the importance of the family in shaping young people's expectations regarding educational pathways. Young people from less privileged backgrounds were less likely to aim for 6<sup>th</sup> form college than their more privileged peers. Notably, parental expectations for their child to learn a trade/apprenticeship may steer students away from academic routes, particularly boys.

We also found a significant association between work experience and work values and educational expectations. Here 'work experience' means paid work undertaken by the student in their own time rather than an educational work experience programme. Paid work during term time has a stronger influence in the earlier cohort, suggesting that early exposure to the labour market may have had a more decisive impact on Millennials' educational expectations, in particular regarding expectations of boys to go to FE college. Paid work experience was not a significant predictor in the later cohort, pointing to the decline in part-time work opportunities for secondary students.

We also noted the role of altruistic and entrepreneurial values (e.g. helping others, being one's own boss) as significant predictors of education expectations. However, while the prevalence of being motivated to help others has increased among Generation Z (GenZ), fewer actually aim to be their own boss. Moreover, success expectations (e.g., belief in hard work and equal life chances) matter in deciding about which path to take.

The findings highlight the complex interplay of structural, familial, and individual-level factors in shaping educational expectations. This suggests that interventions to raise expectations must be gender- and cohort-sensitive, addressing both material inequalities and changing cultural attitudes toward education and work.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

A key component of the project was the identification of the various pathways which young people take from education into work in their teens and early twenties. By identifying the pathways we can then answer further questions such as – what are the underlying factors determining which path young people end up on? Are some pathways more likely to lead to successful outcomes, in terms of good jobs, than others? These are some of the core questions which we aimed to tackle in the research.

Based on the *Next Steps* data there was considerable variation in the educational trajectories young people took, and in the combination of education, training and work. We organised young people into categories based on activity states observed between ages 17 and 20. This generated eight distinct pathways in our analyses. The most frequently occurring pathway was A levels then higher education, accounting for about one-third (34%) of the sample. A further 6% had done vocational qualifications (or, in some cases, a mixture of vocational and A level qualifications) prior to entering higher education. Some 16% of the sample

proceeded directly from secondary education to a job; others had studied for qualifications at ages 17/18 before moving into a job: 6.5% A levels, then a job; 10% vocational qualifications then a job; while 11% had been on an apprenticeship. A further 6% were observed to be mainly studying for qualifications in their late teens without moving into either higher education or a job by age 20. About 11% of young people experienced a problematic transition of being mostly unemployed or out of the labour force.

Young women were somewhat more likely than young men to be on the A levels to higher education pathway – 38% to 31% - while males were, perhaps unsurprisingly, more prevalent than females on the apprenticeship pathway. However, variation by some other background variables, notably social class and parental education, was much more substantial than by gender.

Those on the A levels to HE path tended to come from more affluent backgrounds - nearly half of those with parents in the managerial/professional category proceeded via this route but less than a quarter of those whose parents were in the routine/semi-routine working class. A very high proportion – nearly one in five – of those with parents not in work were themselves to be found in the unemployed/out of labour force category. Similarly, 56% of those whose parents had higher education qualifications were on the A levels to HE path themselves compared to some 23% if the parents did not have HE qualifications. Young people whose parents were without HE qualifications were about twice as likely to go directly into jobs after compulsory education as those with parents who did have HE qualifications. The most problematic route – of being unemployed or out of the labour force – was also much more prevalent among those with parents who did not have HE qualifications.

## LABOUR MARKET OUTCOMES

The project investigates whether young people were able to get themselves into good jobs in early career. To measure ‘good jobs’ we construct a measure of job quality. This includes earnings but also incorporates other desirable aspects of a job including pension provision, job security and work-life balance.

In this report we present new research on the careers of adults in their early thirties. Specifically, we consider the *Next Steps* cohort who had reached the age of 32 at the time of the most recent survey. By this age even graduates, who would usually complete education in their early or mid-twenties, should be well-established on their career paths. The objective was to compare labour market outcomes at 32 by (1) gender, and (2) the type of educational pathway young people had followed in their late teens.

The main findings:-

Women had slightly lower job quality, on average, than men. This was mainly due to a gender pay gap in favour of men. Differences between men and women in the non-earnings component of job quality were small. Thus, taking account of other components of job

quality – apart from earnings – did not exacerbate male/female inequality, but nor did it reduce inequality to any significant extent.

Women were more likely to be working part-time at age 32, often in order to combine paid work and childcare responsibilities, and this was the main explanatory factor for their lower job quality compared to males. There was no significant difference on average in job quality between men and women who were in full-time work at 32.

For both males and females, the A levels to HE pathway had the highest mean job quality score, those neither in education nor work in their late teens had the lowest mean job quality at age 32, with the other categories in between. Again, these differences were mainly driven by earnings. Mean hourly earnings were the highest amongst those on the A Levels to HE pathway at £23.71 per hour. None of the other pathways had hourly earnings above £18.50 per hour on average. Differences by pathway for the non-earnings component of job quality were narrower but were still statistically significant.

While educational pathways in late teens provided some explanatory power for how well people were doing at work by their early 30s they did not fully determine it. Some young people who were not doing well in their late teens/early 20s were enjoying career success a decade or more later. Even among the group who were unemployed or out of the labour force at ages 17 to 20, some had managed to get themselves into high quality jobs when surveyed at age 32.

Amongst this cohort of people in their early 30s, job satisfaction was generally high. On a 1 to 5 scale where 1 is ‘very dissatisfied’ through to 4 ‘somewhat satisfied’ and 5 ‘very satisfied’, the mean level of job satisfaction was approximately 4.2. Over two in five of respondents were very satisfied with their job and almost 85 per cent were either very or somewhat satisfied. Only just over one per cent were very dissatisfied. Job satisfaction was marginally higher amongst men than women. But this difference was not statistically significant.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Together the findings point to a number of issues that need to be addressed to facilitate a smooth transition from education to work for all young people.

### **Student Premium for disadvantaged learners**

The findings suggest persisting education inequalities and the need to tackle the structural barriers that prevent young people from progressing in education and work. A potential lever for this objective is the introduction of a student premium for 16–19-year-olds to help disadvantaged students, in particular boys, to access the support they need (Hunt, 2016).

### **Mixed qualifications**

The evidence points to the need to allow post-16 students to combine A Levels, applied general qualifications, and higher vocational qualifications to create more tailored and inclusive pathways to high-quality jobs (see also Tuckett, 2025).

### **Career preparation**

Provide clear information and guidance on pathways and support services and create supportive environments that can target advice based on individual preferences and needs.

### **Gender-sensitive interventions**

Educators, parents and career advisers need to listen and understand the needs of both boys and girls, empowering them to be active participants in their own learning and career development.

### **Foster positive mental health**

Invest in mental health services for youth, addressing the rise in mental health issues and special needs in current cohorts.

### **Regional investment**

Build equal opportunities for education participation, training and employment across regions.

### **Strengthening flexible working and the quality of part-time employment**

There is a need to restructure employment to enable job sharing, and widespread flexible working arrangements need to be implemented to support work-life balance. Support for better quality part-time jobs is also important.

## Work or Study: Introduction

The transition from education to work is one of the major lifecourse transitions, and crucial to the long-term success of individuals in the labour market. This research provides new evidence on this transition and early labour market outcomes, focusing on two main issues. Firstly, we assess differences between the experiences of young men and young women. Secondly, we seek to understand the pathways followed by young people from the time they complete initial education through to young adulthood, contrasting the experiences of those on academic and vocational trajectories through education. While much previous research has focused on gender differences regarding higher education participation, there is less evidence regarding the experiences of men and women on a vocational track. Drawing on large-scale quantitative longitudinal data for England (the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England) we aim to close that evidence gap.

## Background

Compared to other European countries, the UK has had, and still has, a relatively high proportion of young people with below upper secondary education (OECD, 2024b) who enter the labour market directly after compulsory schooling, taking on jobs with or without training (Schoon & Bynner, 2019; Tomaszewski et al., 2025). This trend continues, despite raising the participation age (RPA) in education and learning from 16 to age 18 by 2015, requiring all 16-18 year olds to stay in some form of learning (Dickson et al., 2025). Policy, and social science research, has tended to focus on higher education participation, with less attention paid to the “forgotten half”, i.e. those who do not attend or complete university. Moreover, there are concerns that some graduates are in jobs which do not require degree-level skills (OECD, 2018, 2024a; ONS, 2019). The potential of vocational and technical education is, then, of considerable interest. Indeed, some policy inputs, such as the 2019 Augar report (DfE, 2019), have strongly recommended some rebalancing of resources away from higher education and towards further and vocational education. The reasons why young men and women choose a vocational versus academic path into work are however not yet well understood, neither are the longer-term consequences of this decision.

### *Educational attainment*

Women have in recent decades surpassed men in terms of educational attainment. Among more recent cohorts females have left school with more qualifications and been more likely to proceed to higher education than their male counterparts. This process of catching up and then surpassing men has occurred in many Western societies. Because educational qualifications are so important for young people when competing for jobs it would therefore be anticipated that the kind of gender inequalities observed in the past would have reduced or even been reversed amongst recent cohorts. Female undergraduates outnumber male undergraduates in 30 out of the 36 OECD countries (OECD, 2023). The gender gap in higher education participation has widened over time (DfE, 2023; Hillman & Robinson, 2016), and in the UK, about 1.3 women enrol in an undergraduate degree for every man (DfE, 2018). Some even argue that education has failed young working-class men (Blower, 2025).

### *Employment*

Change in the labour market has occurred only gradually. At labour market entry, males and females have become less segregated over time in the types of jobs which they do. In more recent cohorts, the proportion of men in production jobs has fallen and they have entered service sector jobs in greater numbers, making them somewhat more similar to women in terms of the type of work that they were doing. Nevertheless, there were still considerable (Macmillan et al., 2024; McMullin and Kilpi-Jakonen, 2014) and persisting (Leoncini et al., 2024) occupational differences even amongst fairly recent cohorts, born since the 1980s. As for whether men or women were in better quality jobs, on average, early in their careers – this depends on what we measure. The sociological literature, looking at occupational status and prestige in early career often finds women doing better than men among recent cohorts (McMullin and Kilpi-Jakonen, 2014). This was partly due to the types of occupation which women tended to enter in greater numbers than men, and partly because of education level.

### *Wages and earnings*

For wages and earnings, some studies of young adults report no significant difference, on average, between males and females (McMullin and Kilpi-Jakonen, 2014), but most research suggests men earn more than women (Leoncini et al., 2024; Macmillan et al., 2024), in particular at the start of their working lives. Foliano *et al* (2024) compare the gender wage gap during men and women's early career based on data from four British cohort studies born in 1946, 1958, 1970 and 1989/90 (Foliano et al., 2024). They show that the gender wage gap widened among young graduates over time, but narrowed for non-graduates. As for explanation of these gaps, very little was accounted for by human capital variables but occupational gender segregation played an important role. In other words, men and women tended to select into different types of occupation.

### *Returns to education*

Cohorts of young people entering the labour force in the twenty-first century have been doing so against a background of quite high youth unemployment and a challenging environment for accessing good jobs appropriate to their qualification level. How, then, have young people in recent times been faring in the labour market? Hoskins *et al* (2018) used mainly qualitative evidence for Britain. They compare several groups: graduates in work; graduates not in work (a small group); school leavers in work; school leavers not in work. Obtaining a job (for most) was not that difficult – but a job at the right level was more difficult to acquire. School leavers were doing better than graduates in terms of likelihood of being in work – but this was probably due to the short time scale: they were being interviewed at 22 or 23 so those with university education had only recently graduated. Xin (2022) conducted quantitative analysis on a survey of people in their mid-20s and also found that vocational qualifications were associated with increased chances of being in work. As for the wage returns to vocational qualifications, the evidence is complex but, broadly speaking, it suggests considerable variation both in access to, and in the value of, vocational education

(Cavaglia et al., 2020; Dearden et al., 2002; Matthewes & Ventura, 2022; McIntosh & Morris, 2021).

## Project Aims

Against this background, this study examines 1) changes in the educational expectations and career orientation of young people; 2) pathways taken by young men and women through the education system and into their early career, differentiating between those on academic pathways and those on vocational pathways; 3) the predictors of choosing an academic versus a vocational pathway (with or without training) and 4) labour market outcomes, focusing on young people in their early careers. In each of the sections, we examine gender differences and consider those on various educational pathways, broadening the focus beyond just graduates.

## Data and Methods

### *Data sources*

We draw on data from two recent cohorts of young people: the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE I and II). The cohort of young people in the LSYPE I sample (also known as ‘Next Steps’) comprises over 15,000 individuals born in 1989/1990 (Wu et al., 2024). They were first surveyed at age 13/14 in 2004 with annual follow-ups until 2010 (age 19/20) and then an additional surveys in 2015, when the cohort had reached the age of 25, and in 2023, when they were 32 years old.

The LSYPE II cohort were born around 10 years later. LSYPE II (also known as ‘Our Future’) builds on LSYPE I and tracks a sample of over 13,000 young people from the age of 13/14 with surveys conducted annually since 2013. We utilise data from the first three waves of this survey, which are publicly available. We use this dataset to look at aspirations and subject choices in school and to make comparisons with the previous cohort.

Both *Next Steps* and *Our Future* contain detailed information on family background, including parental education, and post-schooling choices or aspirations for their children, the education and career aspirations of the young people themselves, their academic ability concepts and subject choices, gender and ethnic minority status. Moreover, both studies are matched to administrative data providing information about attainment in school (the National Pupil Database, NPD) enabling us to use data on differences in attainment in maths and English at age 10/11 as predictors of subsequent vocational versus academic track choice.

Social researchers have made extensive use of the earlier waves of *Next Steps* to explore such topics as aspirations, educational attainment and initial pathways after the completion of compulsory schooling up to age 25. Little substantive research has been conducted on the age 32 survey as yet since it has only recently been released. With a few exceptions, comparisons of *Next Steps* and *Our Future* are also scarce. Our research makes best use of this comparative data and applies a range of appropriate quantitative methods.

### *Methods:*

The methods utilised include straightforward descriptive statistics and multiple regression analyses. The analyses of LSYPE I and II data focus on gender differences in educational and occupational aspirations and subject choices at ages 13 to 16 as outcomes. Appropriate forms of regression analysis relate these outcomes to explanatory factors including early attainment, gender and socio-economic background. The LSYPE II data enable us to look at a recent cohort of schoolchildren. As the dataset is very similar to LSYPE I we make comparisons between the two cohorts to determine whether pupil aspirations and the factors associated with them have changed in recent times.

We define educational pathways for individuals in the *Next Steps* data. We then investigate how the pathways relate to the type of jobs obtained in young adulthood. In terms of labour market outcomes, previous research has often tended to look just at wages or earnings. We extend this by considering broader notion of job quality, which encompass earnings but also other characteristics of the job. The datasets were weighted to allow for complex sampling design and also for attrition from the surveys.

The rest of this report is divided into three chapters. In Chapter One we compare educational expectations in two longitudinal cohort datasets: *Next Steps* and *Our Future*. Regression models are utilised to understand the range of factors which can influence these expectations. In Chapter Two we seek to characterise the pathways that people are on in post-secondary education. To do this we focus on activity states between ages 17 and 20 – that is whether in education, the type of education, whether in work and so on. Data are broken down to show whether males were more likely to be on some pathways than females and the other factors which help to explain why someone was on one pathway rather than another. Chapter Three then proceeds to consider labour market outcomes which people attain in early career. We analyse job quality, and look at the extent to which men and women, and those on different career pathways (as defined in Chapter 2), were working in good jobs by their early thirties.

## Chapter 1: Educational expectations and career orientation of students in Year

11

This tranche of the project examines the educational expectations of young people when they are still in school, and their preferences for continuing in education or entering the labour force. It focuses on the changing career orientations of two age cohorts of young people coming of age during a time of increasing uncertainty and precarity. We focus on young people born in 1990 (the Millennials or Generation Y) and in 2000 (Generation Z) making the transition through secondary education between 2004-2007 and 2014-2017. The period between 2004 and 2017 is characterised by major social and economic changes, including the raising of the compulsory education participation age from 16 to 18 years (see Dickson et al., 2025), changes to GCSE and A-levels, the requirement for students to resit Maths and English GCSE, a greater focus on vocational qualifications and apprenticeships, the decommissioning of some L2 vocational qualifications, significant increases in university tuition fees, rising precarity regarding youth employment, increasing use of smart phones and digital media as well as increasing mental health problems among young people, in particular following the 2008 recession and more recently the Covid-19 pandemic.

Against this background we ask: 1) what are the expectations young people have regarding their education participation – and have these changed for the two cohorts; and 2) What are the predictors of these expectations? This is one of the first studies to compare and assess the educational expectations of young people born ten years apart, in 1990 and 2000 and a range of potential predictors. The study is guided by a socio-ecological developmental systems model (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019; Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2017a) which aims to understand how individuals and social ecologies define each other. It is informed by sociological life course theory which emphasises the multiple sources of influence on individual development, ranging from the micro- to the macro context (Elder, 1998; Elder & Shanahan, 2007), and psychological developmental models of individual motivation and agency (Brandtstädter & Lerner, 1999; Heckhausen et al., 2010). Within this framework, the wider socio-historical context and social structures within the family, education and employment systems are understood as external, objective forces that can influence individual feelings, expectations and actions.

The focus of this chapter lies on experiences in Year 11 which marks the point at which young people typically complete their GCSE or NVQ courses as part of Key Stage 4 examinations and decide whether to continue in education or enter the workforce, and for GenZ (following the RPA in 2013/5) to consider whether to attend sixth form, college, apprenticeship or work with training. This decision shapes their future career and job prospects. The choices are influenced by a complex interplay of personal, social, and economic factors, including their family socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, previous attainment, as well as their values and self-concepts, which all will have an impact on the transition pathways taken and later outcomes. Given that there is not much prior

evidence regarding potential similarities and differences in the predictors and changing education expectations, this study is explorative.

## Background

The transition from school to work is a pivotal period for young people who must make momentous choices regarding education and employment, which impact their subsequent life trajectory (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). There is persistent evidence to show that the educational choices young people make by the end of secondary education play a critical role in determining future academic and occupational success (Descary et al., 2023; Khattab, 2015; Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2017b). For example, individuals with higher educational qualifications are more likely to participate in the labour market, earn significantly more over their lifetime, and are less likely to experience unemployment (OECD, 2024c).

Given the critical role of young people's education expectations in shaping future academic and occupational outcomes, they have become central to policies addressing socio-economic disparities in attainment (e.g., Australian Department of Education & Relations, 2009; Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force, 2008; DfE, 2014). In the UK, persistently high rates of disengagement from education and training led to the raising of the participation age (RPA) in England to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015. Yet, even in 2019 about 40% of young people in England left school with only minimum qualifications and failed to achieve a general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) in at least 5 subjects (Lupton et al., 2021). The intention of the RPA was to boost the UK's education and training performance and improve young people's economic and social outcomes (Dickson et al., 2025). Young people have a choice about how they continue in education or training post-16, which could be via different pathways: full-time study in a school, college or with a training provider; starting an apprenticeship or traineeship; or spending 20 hours or more in full-time work or volunteering combined with regulated part-time education or training (about one day per week). Only those who obtain a GCSE in five or more subjects are eligible to continue their education in a school 6<sup>th</sup> form or a 6<sup>th</sup> form college. At the same time, there had been a reform of vocational qualifications taken by 14-19 year olds. Following the publication of the Wolf Report (Wolf, 2011) the number of qualifications designed specifically for the lower end of the pupil attainment range, so-called 'equivalent' GCSE qualifications that are approved for young people under the age of 16, were reduced.

Moreover, since 2013, local-authority-maintained schools and colleges have the duty to provide independent career guidance to all students from year 8 to year 13, including technical education and apprenticeships (Long et al., 2024). The importance of career information and guidance in the preparation for the school-to-work transition is increasingly recognized (CEC, 2024; OECD, 2024a), and there is evidence from the UK to suggest that participation in school-based career preparation activities is directly associated with higher levels of career adaptability, lower career-related uncertainty, and higher life satisfaction (Schoon & Henseke, 2023). In addition, in 2020 new post-16 technical qualifications (T

levels) were introduced in England, designed to offer a pathway to employment in specific vocational areas alongside apprenticeships and to rival academic A Levels.

Against this background, we ask 1) have the education expectations of young people changed between 2006 and 2016?; and 2) what is the role of socio-economic and personal factors in shaping education expectations of young people – and has this changed since 2006?

### Comparing the Characteristics of Next Steps (LSYPE I) and Our Future (LSYPE II)

For this analysis we focus on indicators of family socio-economic resources, including parental education, social class, homeownership and area disadvantage (measured with the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)), as well as sex and ethnic minority background of the young person.

Table 1.1 shows the indicators of family background, sex and ethnic minority status of the two age cohorts born in 1990 and 2000. We find that parents in the later born cohort (GenZ) were higher educated with 28.9 % having obtained a degree-level qualification compared to 17.7% in the earlier born cohort (the Millennials). There were also fewer parents that never worked (2.8% versus 4.9%), but slightly more parents in semi/or unskilled occupations (27.4% versus 24.7%). Similar proportions of parents were in skilled (30.4% versus 31.0%) or professional occupations (39.6% versus 39.4%). Homeownership was less prevalent among parents of GenZ compared to those of the Millennials (64.5% versus 71.7%). Among the young people themselves we find slightly more boys in the later born cohort (52.1% versus 50.6%) and more ethnic minority youths (22.7% versus 13.8%).

The findings point to better educated parents in the later born cohort, who are more attached to the labour market – although there are slightly more parents in semi- or unskilled occupations. There is also potentially less family wealth in parents of GenZ, as indicated by the lower percentage of home owners.

Table 1.1: Family background and demographics in both age cohorts (Wave 1) - weighted

|                               | LSYPE1 (n=15,246) |       |       | LSYPE2 (n=12,953) |       |       |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------|-------|-------------------|-------|-------|
|                               | All               | Men   | Women | All               | Men   | Women |
|                               | %                 | %     | %     | %                 | %     | %     |
| Parental education            |                   |       |       |                   |       |       |
| Low                           | 16.2              | 16.7  | 15.7  | 8.6               | 8.5   | 8.6   |
| GCSE                          | 32.0              | 31.5  | 32.6  | 32.2              | 32.8  | 31.6  |
| A-level                       | 17.7              | 17.7  | 17.8  | 13.9              | 14.0  | 13.9  |
| Higher (but no degree)        | 15.5              | 15.1  | 15.7  | 16.4              | 15.7  | 17.1  |
| Degree                        | 18.1              | 18.2  | 18.1  | 28.9              | 29.0  | 28.8  |
| TOTAL                         | 99.5              | 99.2  | 99.9  | 100.0             | 100.0 | 100.0 |
|                               |                   |       |       |                   |       |       |
| Parental social class (NSSEC) |                   |       |       |                   |       |       |
| Never worked                  | 4.7               | 4.5   | 4.8   | 2.8               | 2.7   | 2.9   |
| Semi/unskilled                | 24.7              | 25.1  | 24.3  | 27.4              | 27.6  | 27.2  |
| Skilled                       | 31.0              | 31.6  | 30.4  | 30.4              | 29.8  | 31.0  |
| Professional                  | 39.6              | 38.8  | 40.5  | 39.4              | 39.9  | 38.8  |
| TOTAL                         | 100.0             | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0             | 100.0 | 100.0 |
|                               |                   |       |       |                   |       |       |
| Home ownership                | 71.7              | 71.3  | 71.4  | 64.5              | 64.7  | 64.3  |
|                               |                   |       |       |                   |       |       |
| Young person                  |                   |       |       |                   |       |       |
| Sex                           |                   | 50.6  | 49.4  |                   | 52.1  | 47.9  |
| Ethnic minority               | 13.8              | 13.6  | 14.2  | 22.7              | 22.2  | 22.4  |

### Educational expectations in Year 11

Next, we examine our key outcome: the educational expectations of the young person (YP) in Year 11. Educational expectations were assessed with one question about “What sort of full time education YP thinks they will do when they are 16” and one question about the likelihood that the YP will ever apply to go to university to do a degree (not at all likely to very likely).

Table 1.2 shows that in comparison to the Millennials, more young people of GenZ expect to go to 6<sup>th</sup> form (61.9% versus 53.5%), a similar proportion expect to go to FE college (28.7%), but fewer expect to leave education at age 16 (7.8% versus 16.4%). A small proportion do not know (1.6% and 1.4%) at this crucial stage of their education. Girls are generally more ambitious than boys, and more girls than boys expect to go to 6<sup>th</sup> form.

This gender difference is also reflected in the expressed likelihood of going to university, with 47% of girls in GenZ and 40% in the Millennium cohort saying that they are very likely to do so, compared to 35% of boys in GenZ and 28% of boys in the Millennium cohort. Interestingly, GenZ seems to be less uncertain about this decision than the Millennials (2.6% versus 3.6%).

Table 1.2. Education expectations in Year 11 by gender in both age cohorts (%), weighted

| Year 11 (weighted)              | LSYPE1 (n=12,153) |      |       | LSYPE2 (n=9,797) |      |       |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|------|-------|------------------|------|-------|
|                                 | All               | Men  | Women | All              | Men  | Women |
| Intention for further education |                   |      |       |                  |      |       |
| Do not know                     | 1.4               | 1.4  | 1.5   | 1.6              | 1.2  | 1.9   |
| leave                           | 16.4              | 22.1 | 10.5  | 7.8              | 10.2 | 5.2   |
| Go to FE college                | 28.7              | 26.9 | 30.6  | 28.7             | 29.7 | 27.7  |
| Go to 6 <sup>th</sup> form      | 53.5              | 46.6 | 57.4  | 61.9             | 58.9 | 65.2  |
|                                 |                   |      |       |                  |      |       |
| Likely to go to university      |                   |      |       |                  |      |       |
| Don't know/uncertain            | 3.6               | 3.6  | 3.6   | 2.6              | 3.0  | 2.0   |
| Not at all likely               | 20.6              | 24.1 | 17.0  | 11.6             | 14.9 | 8.1   |
| Not very likely                 | 17.2              | 19.6 | 14.8  | 15.9             | 19.0 | 12.6  |
| Fairly likely                   | 24.3              | 24.2 | 24.5  | 29.1             | 28.1 | 30.1  |
| Very likely                     | 34.2              | 28.4 | 40.1  | 40.8             | 34.9 | 47.0  |
|                                 |                   |      |       |                  |      |       |

Table 1.3 shows that there are considerable regional differences in the educational expectations of young people. In both age cohorts young people living in London are more ambitious than their peers in other regions – although in London we also find the highest proportion of those who are still uncertain (i.e., those who do not know). In both age cohorts those from the South-West are least likely to aim for 6<sup>th</sup> form – but are more likely to aim for FE college. In LSYPE1 we find the highest proportions of young people who want to leave education after Year 11 in the North East, Yorkshire and the East Midlands. In GenZ (LSYPE2) it is young people from the East Midlands who are most likely to want to leave education after Year 11. These findings have to be interpreted against the background of considerable variations in the nature of post-16 provision across the country (Robson et al, 2024).

Table 1.3. Educational expectations in both age cohorts by region (%), weighted

|                 | LSYPE1 (n=12,153) |       |            |                      | LSYPE2 (n=9,797) |       |            |                      |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------|------------|----------------------|------------------|-------|------------|----------------------|
|                 | Don't know        | Leave | FE college | 6 <sup>th</sup> Form | Don't know       | Leave | FE college | 6 <sup>th</sup> Form |
| Total           | 1.4               | 16.4  | 28.7       | 53.5                 | 1.6              | 7.8   | 28.7       | 61.9                 |
| North East      | 0.8               | 26.4  | 24.9       | 47.9                 | 1.2              | 10.4  | 14.7       | 63.7                 |
| North West      | 1.8               | 18.3  | 31.5       | 48.4                 | 1.0              | 10.4  | 24.7       | 63.7                 |
| Yorkshire       | 1.0               | 21.2  | 30.3       | 47.4                 | 1.6              | 9.2   | 33.1       | 56.0                 |
| East Midlands   | 1.7               | 21.1  | 27.3       | 49.8                 | 2.1              | 12.1  | 30.7       | 55.1                 |
| West Midlands   | 0.9               | 13.1  | 30.6       | 55.4                 | 1.5              | 7.3   | 33.0       | 58.1                 |
| East of England | 1.2               | 15.3  | 29.1       | 54.5                 | 1.0              | 5.8   | 27.0       | 66.2                 |
| London          | 1.9               | 8.2   | 23.6       | 66.3                 | 2.5              | 4.4   | 17.4       | 75.7                 |
| South East      | 1.7               | 14.3  | 27.5       | 56.4                 | 1.3              | 6.0   | 27.3       | 65.4                 |
| South West      | 0.7               | 19.9  | 32.6       | 46.9                 | 1.8              | 7.8   | 34.4       | 55.9                 |

In addition, education expectations vary by area disadvantage (see Table 1.4) with those in the most deprived areas being more likely to want to leave education and less likely to continue to FE college or 6<sup>th</sup> form.

Table 1.4: Educational expectations in both age cohorts by area disadvantage (IMD) (%), weighted

|                                             | LSYPE1 (n=12,153) |       |            |                      | LSYPE2 (n=9,797) |       |            |                      |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------|------------|----------------------|------------------|-------|------------|----------------------|
|                                             | Don't know        | Leave | FE college | 6 <sup>th</sup> Form | Don't know       | Leave | FE college | 6 <sup>th</sup> Form |
| Total                                       | 1.0               | 16.5  | 28.8       | 53.3                 | 1.6              | 7.8   | 28.7       | 61.9                 |
| IMD_1 <sup>st</sup> quartile Least deprived | 1.7               | 10.8  | 21.5       | 66.0                 | 1.6              | 4.6   | 20.9       | 72.9                 |
| IMD_2                                       | 1.3               | 16.0  | 28.1       | 54.6                 | 1.3              | 6.9   | 27.5       | 64.2                 |
| IMD_3                                       | 1.4               | 19.1  | 33.2       | 46.3                 | 1.6              | 9.7   | 32.0       | 56.7                 |
| IMD_4 <sup>th</sup> quartile Most deprived  | 1.1               | 22.8  | 35.4       | 40.7                 | 1.7              | 10.0  | 34.8       | 53.5                 |

### Predictors of educational expectations

What are the factors that predict the decisions of young people about whether to stay on in education, or not? In the following, we assess the role of different sets of factors, including:

- a) *Socio-economic factors* (including indicators of parental education and social class, home ownership, area disadvantage, as well as ethnic minority status).
- b) *Young people's health* assessed in wave 2 (age 14/15) with a question about the young person's general health in the last 12 months, asking whether their health was very good, fairly good, not very good, or not good at all. In addition, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) was used, which provides a self-reported measure of mental health among respondents in community settings and non-psychiatric clinical settings (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). Given its brevity and desirable psychometric properties, the GHQ-12 is extensively used in psychological, epidemiological, econometric and other social research (Baksheev et al., 2011; Cornaglia et al., 2015).
- c) *School experiences* assessed in wave 1 (age 13/14), based on indicators of emotional school engagement, expectations to go to university, ability concepts (young person things they are good at school work) and truanting.
- d) *Support from parents* (parental education expectations for their children and whether parents pay for private tuition) assessed in wave 1 (age 13/14).
- e) *Career orientation* of young people was measured by 4 indicators in wave 1: Career advice, work experience, work values and expectations of success.
  - 1. *Career advice* was assessed by six variables, asking the young person if they have received career advice from a career advisor, their teacher or their family – and if they found the advice useful. Ratings of usefulness was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1: not at all useful to 5: very useful.
  - 2. The assessment of *work experience* is based on a question asking respondents to indicate whether they had a paid job during term time (yes or no).
  - 3. *Work values* were assessed with four questions asking respondents about how much it matters in deciding on a job: a) to have a job that is interesting; b) to have a job where they can help others; c) to have a job which pays well; d) to be one's own boss or have my own business. Responses were coded as 1: does not matter; 2: matters a little; 3: matters a lot.
  - 4. *Expectations of success* was assessed with 3 questions, asking respondents whether they (dis)agree with the following statements: 'Working hard in school will help me get on later in life' [work hard in school]; 'People like me don't have much of a chance in life' [no chance]; and 'How well you get on in this world is mostly a matter of luck' [luck]. Responses were coded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1: strongly agree to 4: strongly disagree.

For the analysis we used regression analysis to relate the outcomes – expectations of leaving vs FE college vs sixth form – to the explanatory factors. We ran separate regressions for a set of factors before finally combining them all into a single model (see Figure 1.2). Because the outcome consists of three mutually exclusive categories, we used multi-nominal logistic regression analysis. The baseline for comparison was the expectation to go to 6<sup>th</sup> form. As with other types of regression, multinomial logistic regression can have categorical and/or continuous independent variables. The estimates shown are based on the margin plots of the relative risk ratios (RRR), which reflect a one-unit change in X associated with a change in the "risk" of expecting to leave or expecting to enter a FE college compared to the base category (aiming for 6<sup>th</sup> form). Plotting the marginal effects is a way of presenting results as differences in probabilities, which is more informative than odds ratios and relative risks. The margin plots include the 95% Confidence Interval of the estimates. Given the small number of respondents who answered 'do not know' we only plot the outcomes for 'leave' and 'FE college (each versus the reference category 'sixth form'). Most of the associations with the outcome 'do not know' were non-significant.

We did run all models separately for boys and girls to assess potential differences in association. All analyses were conducted in STATA 18.5. We first report the associations between educational expectations and socio-economic factors before we present the full model including all the significant predictors from the separate regressions models to assess the relative importance of different predictors in an overall model.

### *Socio-economic factors*

Figure 1.1 shows that multiple socio-economic factors are significant predictors of education expectations. Compared to students who expect to go to 6<sup>th</sup> form college, students who expect to go to an FE college or leave education at age 16 were more likely to come from less privileged backgrounds. This applies for both cohorts. Specifically, students with less highly educated parents (parents without a degree-level qualification); parents working in skilled, semi-or unskilled (versus professional/managerial) occupations; who live in rented accommodation and in less advantaged areas are less likely expecting to go to 6<sup>th</sup> form. Interestingly, all these indicators of socio-economic disadvantage are significant, suggesting that each indicator has an independent effect on educational expectations of young people. Parental class and education, home ownership and area disadvantage cannot be used interchangeably as indicators of family socio-economic resources. Focusing on parental education as the sole indicator of socio-economic disadvantage can imply that its effect of young people's education expectations is overestimated, while the role of parental socio-economic resources in total will be underestimated. To fully understand socio-economic expectation gaps, it is necessary to consider the role of multiple, interlinked disadvantages.

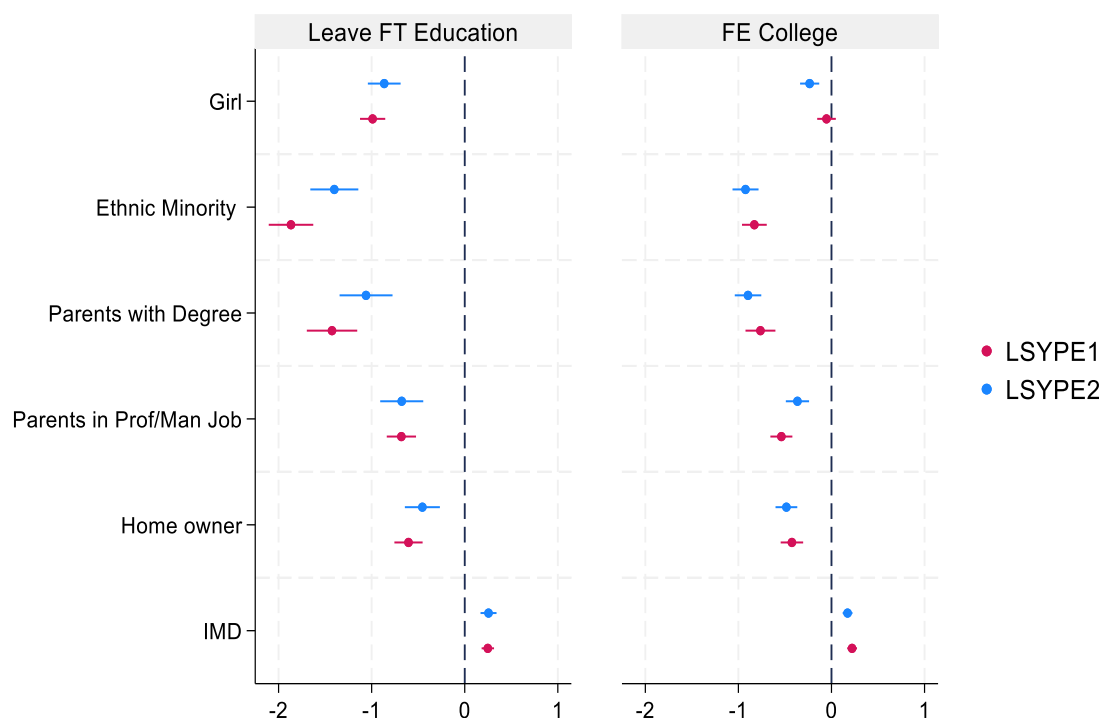
Notably, we also find that compared to their white peers, ethnic minority youth are less likely expecting to leave school after Year 11 or to go to FE college, suggesting evidence of 'ethnic

capital’ (Lee & Zhou, 2014; Modood, 2004; Modood & Khattab, 2016). The finding confirms previous evidence of ethnic minority youth expressing more academically-oriented education expectations than ethnic majority youth (Strand, 2014; Strand, 2021).

Due to the small sample sizes we were not able to provide a more detailed breakdown of variations in educational expectations by different ethnic groups in this analysis. More generally, explanations of evidence of ‘ethnic capital’ refer to the fact that some ethnic minorities, given their perceived relatively disadvantaged position in society, emphasise educational attainment as a possible strategy to conquer anticipated discrimination and to overcome blocked opportunities (Fernández-Reino, 2016; Rudolphi & Salikutluk, 2021).

Regarding gender differences, we find the same pattern for both boys and girls: each of the indicators of socio-economic resources has an independent and significant association with education expectations at Year 11. Girls are generally more ambitious than boys in their educational expectations; they are less likely to expect leaving education or go to FE college than boys, and more likely to aim for 6<sup>th</sup> form.

Figure 1.1: Socio-economic factors as predictors of educational expectations in Year 11 (Reference Category: Aiming for 6<sup>th</sup> Form)



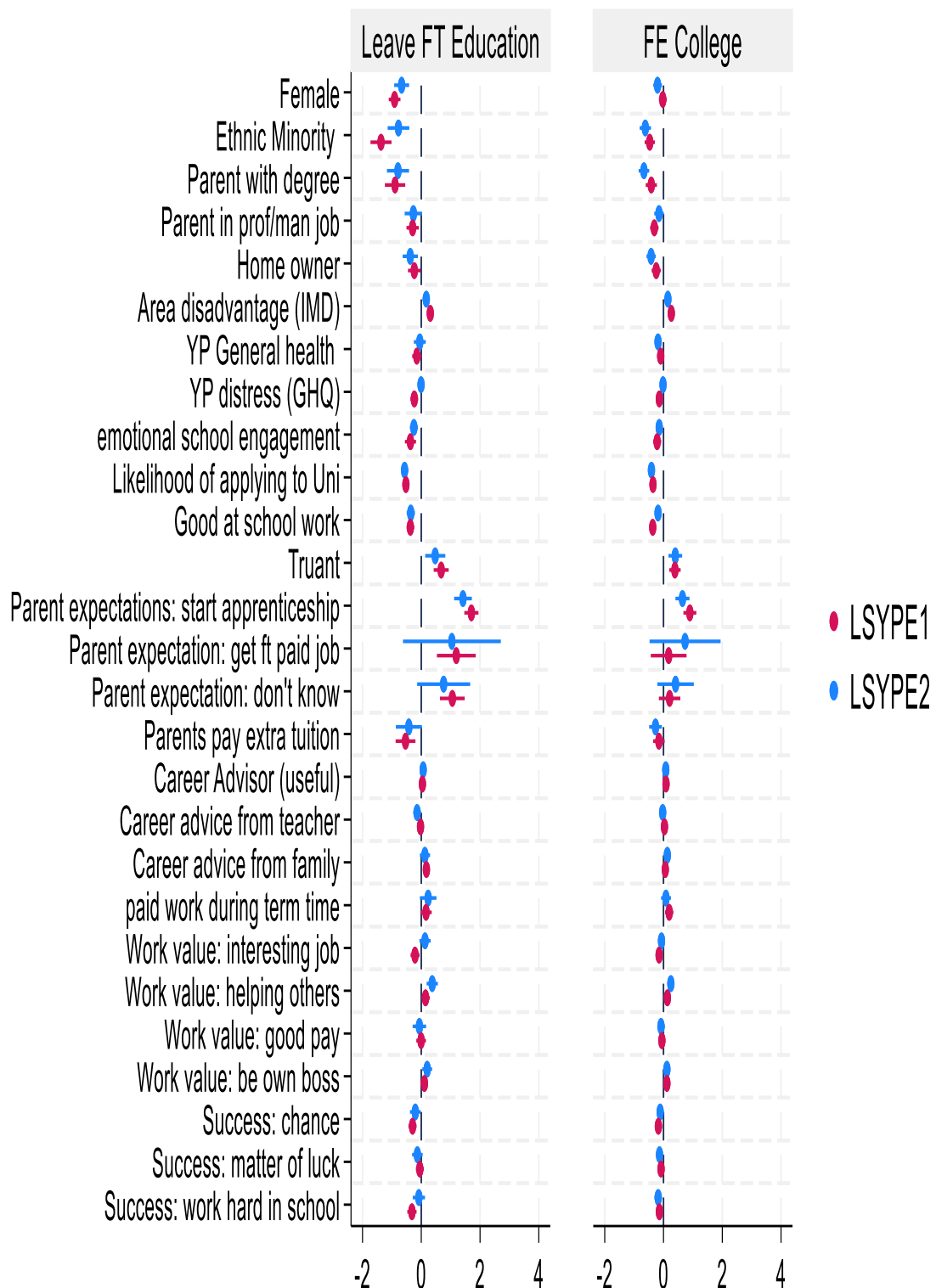
### The full model.

Which of the factors are most important as predictors of educational expectations? To assess the relative relevance of the different predictors, we included all significant predictors jointly into one model. This leaves us with a sample of 7863 students in LSYPE1 and 6175 students in LSYPE2. The reference category is expecting to go to 6<sup>th</sup> form. Figure 1.2 only shows the main findings. The findings hold after controlling for academic attainment at age 11 (Key Stage 2).

#### *Expectation to leave education after Year 11*

For both cohorts (LSYPE1 and LSYPE2) we find an increased likelihood of wanting to leave full-time education at age 16 for boys, ethnic majority students, having parents without degree qualification, no home ownership, high levels of area disadvantage (IMD). In addition, psychological distress (in LSYPE1 only), emotional school engagement, student's perceived likelihood of applying to university, and ability belief (being good at schoolwork) reduce the risk, as do parental expectations that the young person will go to university and in LSYPE1 if parents are paying for extra tuition. When controlling for all the other factors considered here, general health is no longer a significant predictor of leaving education in both cohorts. Truanting increases the likelihood of expecting to leave in both cohorts, as well as parental expectations to learn a trade (apprenticeship). In LSYPE1 (Millennials) receiving career advice from family members increases the likelihood of wanting to leave education, while in LSYPE2 (Gen Z) career advice from a teacher is associated with an increased likelihood of wanting to leave early. Another factor increasing the likelihood of wanting to leave education in both cohorts are work values aiming to help others, and in LSYPE2 (Gen Z) aiming to be one's own boss. Wanting an interesting job reduces the likelihood wanting to leave education in LSYPE1 but not LSYPE2. Regarding success beliefs, the belief in equal life chances reduces the likelihood of wanting to leave early in both cohorts, and in LSYPE1 an additional promotive factor for continuing in education is the belief that hard work in school will bring later success.

Figure 1.2: Predictors of education expectation in Year 11– Overall Model (Reference category: 6<sup>th</sup> form college)



### *Expectation to go to FE college*

In both cohorts the likelihood of expecting to enter FE college versus 6<sup>th</sup> form is decreased for ethnic minority youth, those whose parents have a degree qualification, if they own their own home and live in a less deprived area. In LSYPE1 being female is no longer a significant predictor, and in LSYPE2 parental social class becomes non-significant after controlling for all other variables in the model. In LSYPE1 psychological distress reduces the likelihood of wanting to go to FE College, while in LSYPE 2 it is the young persons' general health.

In both cohorts emotional school engagement, the expectation of applying to university, ability beliefs (being good at schoolwork) reduces the likelihood of aiming for FE college versus 6<sup>th</sup> form, while truanting increases the likelihood. In addition, parental expectations about their education transition matter. That is if parents expect that their child will learn a trade the likelihood of opting for FE college rather than 6<sup>th</sup> form increases. Among LSYPE2 parental investment in additional tuition is associated with a reduced likelihood of wanting to leave education versus going to 6<sup>th</sup> form.

In LSYPE1 doing paid work during term time increases the likelihood of expecting to enter FE college rather than 6<sup>th</sup> form, possibly indicating a preference of the young person for work over study. In LSYPE2 doing paid work is not a significant predictor.

Regarding work values, we find that in both cohorts aiming to help others increases the likelihood of aiming for FE college rather than 6<sup>th</sup> form, as does the ambition of being one's own boss. In LSYPE1 aiming for an interesting job reduces the likelihood of expecting to enter FE college versus going to 6<sup>th</sup> form. Belief in hard work and equal life chances reduces the likelihood of expecting to enter FE college versus going to 6<sup>th</sup> form in both cohorts, as does the belief that success largely depends on luck in LSYPE2. The findings suggest that multiple factors shape educational expectations, pointing to different levers for increasing the ambitions of young people by Year 11 – and potential cohort differences.

### **Summary: Educational Expectations among Millennials and GenZ– what have we learned?**

This study is one of the first to examine the education expectations of young people born 10 years apart in 1990 (Millennials) and 2000 (GenZ) and a broad range of associated predictors. In particular, we tested the role of family socio-economic resources, young people's health, their parents' educational expectations for them, and their career orientations as predictors among boys and girls separately. We found that multiple factors shape educational expectations and that there are potential generational shifts in outlook.

We found considerable variations in educational expectations by region, with young people in both age cohorts living in London being more likely to expect to stay in education than their peers in other regions. This finding, indicative of the so-called 'London effect' (Ross et al., 2020) possibly reflects the considerable variations in post-16 provision as well as area (dis)advantages regarding transport, housing, employment and health services across the country and over time.

Generally, there was a decline in the proportion of students intending to leave education after Year 11 – potentially indicating a beneficial effect of the raised participation age. We also identified gender differences in expectations (in both cohorts girls were more likely to expect to stay in education than boys).

Across both cohorts, parental educational expectations for their children remain a strong and consistent predictor, underscoring the importance of family expectations in shaping young people's educational pathways. Notably, parental expectations for their child to learn a trade (apprenticeship) may steer students away from academic routes, particularly among boys. We found a significant association for receiving career advice from teachers among LSYPE2 (Gen Z) and a reduced probability of early school leaving. Talking with a career advisor about future plans increased the likelihood of wanting to go to FE college in both cohorts, as does career advice from parents in LSYPE2. In interpreting these findings it is important to take into account that when LSYPE2 were in Year 11 career guidance provision was in a transition phase from the Connexions service to being overseen by schools and colleges.

We also found a small significant association between work experience and work values as predictors of educational expectations. Here 'work experience' means paid work undertaken by the student in their own time rather than an educational work experience programme. Paid work during term time was a significant influence in LSYPE1, suggesting that early exposure to the labour market may have had a more of an impact on Millennials' educational expectations, in particular regarding the expectations to go to FE college rather than 6<sup>th</sup> form. Paid work experience was not a significant predictor in LSYPE2, pointing to the decline in part-time work opportunities for secondary students.

We also noted the role of altruistic and entrepreneurial values (e.g. helping others, being one's own boss) as significant predictors of education expectations in both cohorts. However, while the prevalence of being motivated to help others has increased among LSYPE2 (Gen Z), fewer actually aim to be their own boss. Moreover, success expectations (e.g., belief in equal opportunities and hard work) were influential in shaping education expectations in LSYPE1 as well as in LSYPE2. This finding points to the important role of personal beliefs about being in control of one's life, a belief that can be fostered through relevant and supportive school experiences.

In summary, the findings highlight the complex interplay of structural, familial, school and individual-level factors in shaping educational expectations. Notably, our analysis is based on cohorts born around 1990 and 2000, not capturing the experiences of adolescents coming of age today. Nonetheless, comparing experiences of two age cohorts enables us to draw some generalisable conclusions that apply to both of them. In particular, interventions aimed to raise expectations must be gender- and cohort-sensitive, addressing material and regional inequalities as well as changing cultural attitudes toward education and work.

## Chapter 2 Educational Pathways

### Introduction

Here we examine the routes taken through post-secondary education by young people, distinguishing broadly between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ pathways. We therefore need to define these academic and vocational pathways. In some countries, such as Germany or Switzerland, there would be very distinct academic and vocational tracks defined by the type of school attended but this is not the case in England. Pathways are therefore defined by what people were doing – studying A levels, studying vocational qualifications, in work, out of work etc – at each wave of the *Next Steps* data between ages 17 and 20. Throughout the chapter we investigate how many are on each pathway and their characteristics. Are young women more likely to be on some pathways than others compared to young men? What other characteristics are associated with each pathway?

### Diversity in Main Economic Activity

In this section we focus on the main economic activity of young people between ages 17 and 19/20. Several studies have used longitudinal data on young people between the ages of 16/17 and the end of their teens or early twenties and applied exploratory techniques to put them into groups based on the states that they occupy over this period – such as being in education or training, being in work, unemployed and so on. There is no particular consensus on how many groups there might be, and the number of groups varies from three up to six plus (Anders and Dorsett, 2017; Furlong and Cartmel, 2005). For example, Anders and Dorsett (2017) analysed four datasets of young people born 1958, 1970, 1980 and 1990 and they looked at the first 2.5 years from age 16 and identified 3 major groups: an “Accumulating Human Capital” group, who remain in full time education; an “Entering the Labour Market” group, who move quickly from school into work without completing much education beyond that which is compulsory; and a “Potential Cause for Concern” group, who appear to leave education but without successfully moving into stable employment. Schoon and Lyons-Amos (2017) examined the role of structure and agency in shaping school-to-work transitions in England. The data source is the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (*Next Steps*) and sequence analysis of monthly activity data was used to identify differences in the timing and sequencing of education and employment transitions up to the age of (approximately) 19. They identified 6 distinct groups, differentiating between those on an academic track, three pathways involving further education and training, a work-focused transition and a group of young people who were over a long period not in education or training (NEET). Other key studies include Hoskins et al (2018) and Duckworth *et al* (2025). Hoskins *et al* gathered their own dataset which began with young children (aged 11/12) with five waves of follow-up including interviews at 17/18, 19/20 and 22/23. They identify four groups: distinguishing graduates and school leavers, each cross-classified as either in work or not in work. Duckworth *et al* used LSYPE2 data and, looking at those who did not enter higher education, identified nine separate groups in the data.

These previous studies distinguish mainly between young people who are in education and enter higher education, those who are mainly in work, those who are perceived to be at risk through lengthy spells of unemployment during this life phase. Techniques used to categorise people may be simple exploratory methods such as tabulating and cross-tabulating the data. Other studies use more elaborate, but still essentially exploratory methods, such as cluster analysis and/or sequence analysis. Most recently, Tomaszewski *et al* (2025), in a cross-country comparison of UK, Germany and Australia, constructed five mutually exclusive categories of activity which covered being at university, being in vocational education, being in higher or lower status work, and being NEET. In this study, we use a somewhat similar and quite straightforward approach, looking at the main activity state at each wave of the *Next Steps* data between Wave 4 (approximate age 17) and Wave 7 (aged approximately 20).

#### *Tabulations of 8 path trajectories and covariates*

A process of exploratory analysis of the data yielded 8 pathways to characterise the various different routes taken by young people between the ages of 17 and 20 (see Appendix 2 for more details of the variables used to construct these pathways). Apart from a few cases with a lot of missing data, all those present up to wave 7 (age 20) were included in this categorisation. According to this tabulation of the data, just over one third of respondents went through the conventional academic route of A levels to HE (Table 2.1). A further six per cent were in HE by the age of 19 or 20 but had got there via following vocational or mixed pathways through post-secondary education. Just over six per cent went from A levels to a job, while 10 per cent had pursued vocational qualifications and then a job. Just over 11 per cent had been on an apprenticeship at some point between 17 and 20. Almost 16 per cent were observed to be in work between 17 and 20, six per cent were mainly studying between these ages but never entered HE or a job. The remaining 11 per cent of respondents were observed to be unemployed or out of the labour force at most or all waves of the survey between ages 17 and 20.

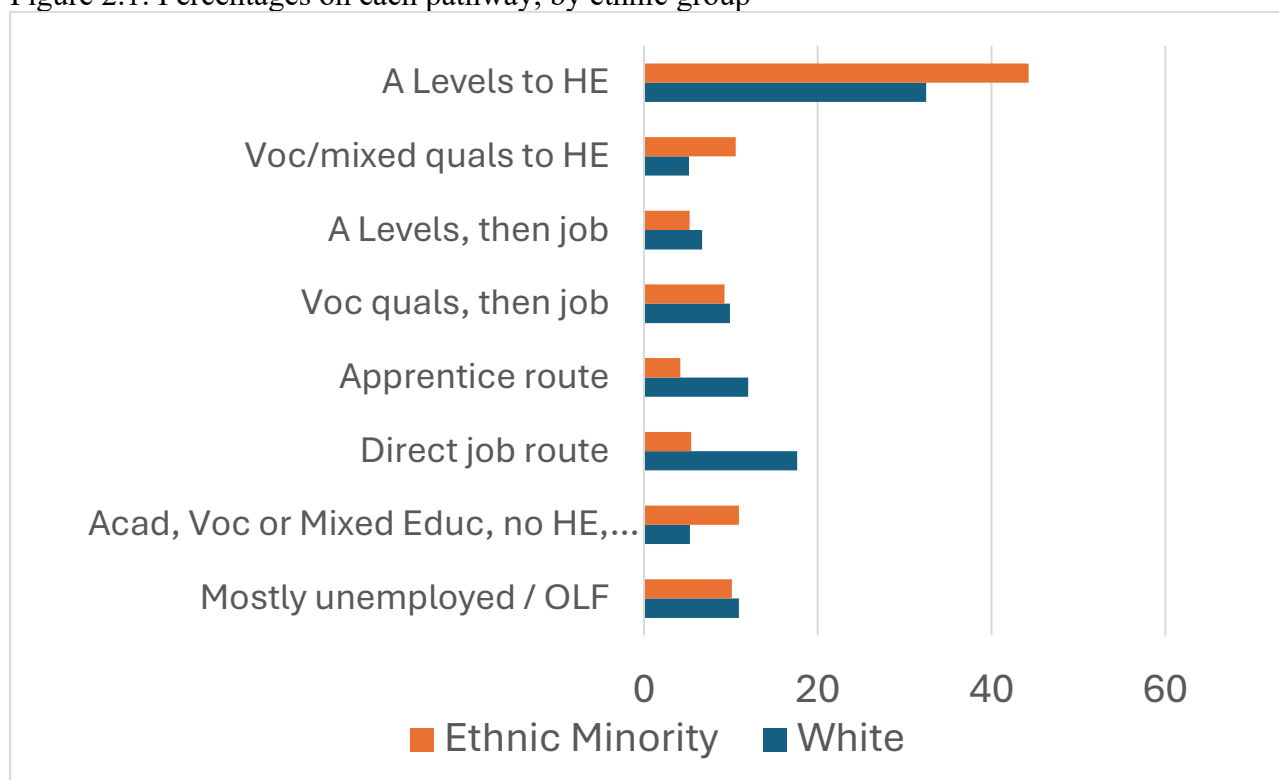
Results broken down by gender are shown in Table 2.1. Women were much more likely than men to do A levels followed by HE. A substantially higher proportion of men had been on an apprenticeship at some point between ages 17 and 20. Other differences by gender were relatively minor.

As for differences by ethnicity, we split the data into two groups – white and ethnic minority (see Figure 2.1). Those from a minority ethnic group were much more likely to be on the A levels to HE path, and also the other path to HE via mixed and vocational qualifications.

Table 2.1: Pathways: an eightfold categorisation (weighted using Wave 7 weights. N = 8,246)

| Pathway                                | Description                                                                                                            | Male  | Female | All   |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|
|                                        |                                                                                                                        | %     | %      | %     |
| A Levels to HE                         | Studying for A levels at 17 and 18, moving to HE study at 19 and 20                                                    | 30.6  | 37.7   | 34.1  |
| Voc/mixed quals to HE                  | Mainly vocational or a mix of vocational and A level at ages 17/18. Then studying for HE qualifications at ages 19+    | 5.8   | 6.0    | 5.9   |
| A Levels, then job                     | Usually A/AS level study at 17 and/or 18; moving into a job by 19                                                      | 5.8   | 7.2    | 6.5   |
| Voc quals, then job                    | Studying for vocational qualifications, followed by a job                                                              | 9.5   | 10.1   | 9.8   |
| Apprentice route                       | Had been on an apprenticeship at some point between 17 and 20                                                          | 13.6  | 8.2    | 10.9  |
| Direct job route                       | Mostly in jobs between 17 and 20                                                                                       | 16.6  | 15.3   | 15.9  |
| Acad, Voc or Mixed Educ, no HE, no job | Studying for qualifications between 17 and 20, but not moving into work or HE                                          | 6.7   | 5.4    | 6.1   |
| Mostly unemployed / OLF                | Mostly observed as unemployed or OLF; also often time on training scheme; some were in education at 17, few thereafter | 11.5  | 10.1   | 10.8  |
| Total                                  |                                                                                                                        | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0 |

Figure 2.1: Percentages on each pathway, by ethnic group



Results for the SEC of the main parent are shown in Table 2.2. A very high proportion – nearly one in five – of those with parents not in work were themselves in the unemployed/out of labour force category. The path from A levels to university path was more prevalent among those from an advantaged background with nearly half of parents having a managerial/professional occupation. The academic route was less prevalent among those from less advantaged backgrounds e.g., with only 23 per cent of those on the academic track having parents in routine/semi-routine work. A similar pattern of disadvantage was also apparent when we replaced parental SEC with parental education.

Table 2.2: Percentages on each pathway, by parental SEC

| Young Person                           | Parents                    |              |                      |             |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------|
|                                        | Professional or Managerial | Intermediate | Routine/semi-routine | Not in work |
|                                        | %                          | %            | %                    | %           |
| A Levels to HE                         | 49.49                      | 34.23        | 22.64                | 26.88       |
| Voc/mixed quals to HE                  | 5.91                       | 6.23         | 5.09                 | 6.18        |
| A Levels, then job                     | 7.28                       | 6.43         | 6.97                 | 5.46        |
| Voc quals, then job                    | 8.31                       | 10.18        | 11.91                | 9.32        |
| Apprentice route                       | 8.94                       | 12.28        | 14.36                | 9.41        |
| Direct job route                       | 11.61                      | 19.35        | 21.11                | 12.51       |
| Acad, Voc or Mixed Educ, no HE, no job | 3.88                       | 4.26         | 5.74                 | 11.56       |
| Mostly unemployed / OLF                | 4.58                       | 7.04         | 12.18                | 18.69       |
| Total                                  | 100.00                     | 100.00       | 100.00               | 100.00      |

### Summary: Educational Pathways

A key component of the project was the identification of the various pathways which young people take from education into work in their teens and early twenties and associated predictors.

There was considerable variation in the educational pathways young people took. We identified 8 different pathways characterised by their combination of education, training and work. Only about one in three young people born in 1990 were on an academic track, that is moving from A-levels to higher education. The majority of young people combined different forms of education and training before entering the labour market. A small proportion (about one in ten young people) experienced a problematic transition of being mostly unemployed or out of the labour force. One in ten were on an apprenticeship program, at least for some time, and another 10% studied for vocational qualifications before entering employment.

Around 16% of the cohort were mostly in work directly after completing compulsory schooling at age 16 with only little or no training, while a considerable group (about one in eight) combined academic and vocational training in their late teens, but had not yet moved into either higher education or work by age 20.

Transition pathways were significantly shaped by a range of factors. Young women were more likely than young men to be on the academic track from A levels to higher education – 38% to 31% - while young men were, perhaps unsurprisingly, more prevalent than women on the apprenticeship pathway. Social class was an important explanatory variable for the pathways. A very high proportion – nearly one in five – of those with parents not in work were themselves in the unemployed/out-of-labour-force category. Those on the A levels to university path tended to come from more affluent backgrounds - nearly half of those with parents in the managerial/professional category proceeded via this route but less than a quarter of those whose parents were in the routine/semi-routine working class.

Similarly, 56% of those whose parents had higher education qualifications were on the academic track compared to some 23% if the parents did not have HE qualifications. Young people whose parents were without HE qualifications were about twice as likely to go directly into jobs after compulsory education compared to those with parents who did have HE qualifications. The most problematic route – of being unemployed or out of the labour force was more prevalent among those with parents who did not have HE qualifications.

Broadly speaking, the likelihood of being on specific pathways differed somewhat by gender. But measures of social advantage and disadvantage, such as social class and parental education, were major factors in determining which pathway young people were likely to be on as they made their way from education to the labour market.

## Chapter 3: Labour Market Outcomes

### Background

It is important that young workers are able to establish themselves in good jobs which can provide a foundation for the rest of their career. This is far from straightforward in the current era of precarious and insecure employment and with the growth of the gig economy (Bloodworth, 2018; Bertolini *et al*, 2024; Parry and Brione, 2025). Studies have found increased polarisation in the UK labour market, some of it driven by differences between those with degrees and those without (Salvatori, 2018). Much research has focused only on graduates and whether they earn a good return on their time in degree-level studies. Here we take a broader focus and examine overall job quality. While earnings are an important component of good jobs, job quality is a broader, multi-dimensional concept which encompasses other aspects of work including security, job content, and the physical and emotional conditions of work (Clark, 2005; Green and Mostafa, 2014; Piasna *et al*, 2019). In our analysis we take into account all the various trajectories (as described in Chapter 2) taken by young people through education and into work, not just those on the conventional academic track (A levels to degree). We ask what are the labour market outcomes at age 32 typically associated with the various education-to-work trajectories that we identified in Chapter 2.

The other main topics are gender, and associated outcomes. In particular, the research aims to assess the implications of the different school-to-work trajectories for job quality and the different types of occupation in which males and females are employed. It is well-established that there is substantial occupational segregation by gender (Charles and Grusky, 2004; Blossfeld *et al*, 2015) and that men and women tend to have aspirations for different jobs or careers (Schoon, 2023). This could be explained, at least partially, by differences in socialisation towards gender-typical preferences for certain types of work amongst men and amongst women. For instance, the evidence shows that, as teenagers, females state that they want to do jobs where they can help others more frequently than do males (see also Chapter 1 of this report). Young men were more likely than young women to state preferences for jobs with good pay and also with good promotion prospects (Schoon and Eccles, 2014). If people are able to realise their aspirations for different types of job, then men would be more likely in certain occupations and women in others.

In addition, since women continue to bear the greater burden of home care and family care responsibilities, they may tend to select into occupations which will help them in carrying out these dual roles. It has been argued that women make choices as to how they resolve the conflict between paid jobs and a major investment in family life, differentiating between preferences for a ‘home-centred’, ‘work-centred’, or ‘adaptive’ lifestyle where women seek to combine paid jobs and family work in some way (Hakim, 2000). For example, women might choose the type of jobs which allow some balance between home and work, rather than those which habitually have long hours, as well as preferring jobs which have more flexibility

in employment patterns, enabling time away from work when needed (Petit and Hook, 2009; Polachek, 1976).

The implications for job quality of these supply-side perspectives suggest that, while women might earn less than men, other aspects of the jobs they do might be superior, notably on things such as autonomy and flexibility. We can then hypothesise that, while women earn less than men in the labour market on average, women will do better than men on many other aspects of job quality. The *Next Steps* data can be used to put the plausibility of this hypothesis to the test.

Alternatively, women may face all manner of structural barriers as well as deliberate and/or unconscious discrimination whilst at work. Some of these barriers will, most likely, apply with particular force to those with young children. They will be denied access to better jobs by employers due to their relatively weak bargaining position. Women are pushed into bad jobs and find it difficult thereafter to move to better jobs (Findlay *et al*, 2009; Stier and Yaish, 2014). This is a demand-side perspective with potential implications for job quality. An alternative hypothesis, then, specifies that the quality of women's jobs will (on average) be lower than men's across all aspects of job quality, not just lower wages but worse on a range of other aspects as well.

We analyse these differing hypotheses about job quality using the Next Steps data at age 32. By this stage in the careers of young people we ask, how does job quality vary (a) by gender and (b) according to the trajectories they initially followed through education and into work. It is important to acknowledge that early thirties is around the prime child bearing age and this will have a substantial impact on gender differences in employment. Some of our analyses will therefore control for types of work, specifically part-time work, and for family background variables such as presence of children in the household.

### Measurement

There are many characteristics of a good job which might be missed by only looking at a single factor such as wages or occupational status. For example, does it have a pension? Is it relatively stress-free, does it give the worker some autonomy over the pace of the work? Is it safe? Does it enable a satisfactory work/life balance? Is it secure? Does it have good prospects? And so on and so forth. It is generally accepted that job quality is a multi-dimensional construct (Felstead *et al*, 2019; Leschke and Watt, 2014; Green and Mostafa, 2012). It therefore needs to be measured using a multi-dimensional index approach, encompassing earnings and a range of other, non-pecuniary, indicators. In the last 20 years, there have been numerous analyses which utilise this approach to measurement (Cascales Mira, 2021; Leschke and Watt, 2014; Warhurst *et al*, 2025). In utilising this approach we can distinguish three levels: (a) the *indicator* level, focusing on each of the specific indicators which contribute to the overall index; (b) the *dimensional* level, where a dimension of job quality, such as job security, will usually be comprised of several indicators and (c) the *index*

level – the weighted sum of all the respective dimensions, such as job security, earnings and so on. The overall index measures job quality on a continuous scale with the worst-quality jobs getting the lowest scores and the best-quality jobs scoring highest.

In the UK there have been a number of assessments of job quality (see for example, Dobbins *et al* (2024), Green *et al* (2024) and ONS (2022). Each considers job quality across various different dimensions and there is scope for debate about the indicators to be included in the index. Stephens (2023) provides an overview of all the possible variables which might reasonably be included in a job quality index.

Drawing on Stephens (2023) and based on the information that is available in the *Next Steps* data at age 32 the job quality index (JQI) is measured as follows:-

- Quintile of the earnings distribution; this is given a weight of 30% in the index.

Four other factors are given a weight of 17.5% each:-

- Pensions: lowest score, no pension; highest score, contributing to employer pension scheme;
- Perceived job security: how likely to lose job in next 12 months; whether job temporary or permanent; whether on a zero hours contract;
- Work-life balance: stress at work, excessive hours, shift work;
- Prospects: managerial duties, whether job has prospects for advancement.

### Job Quality and Gender

In this section we focus on two questions. Is there a gender gap in job quality? If males earn more (per hour) than females, is that inequality offset by the other, non-wage, aspects of the job being favourable to females? What the results show is that men had a higher JQI score on average (see Table 3.1). The JQI gap between males and females (with men scoring about 0.72 on the index on average and women 0.69) was moderate, at a little less than a fifth of a standard deviation), but the difference was statistically significant ( $t = 4.74$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This was largely driven by earnings; the non-earnings component was roughly equal on average - men scoring higher on some factors such as career prospects, while women did better on some other things – such as lower work stress and less likely to be working long hours.

Table 3.1: Mean scores by sex on JQI at age 32

|                               |         | Mean score | 95% Confidence Interval for the Mean |       |
|-------------------------------|---------|------------|--------------------------------------|-------|
|                               |         |            | Lower                                | Upper |
| Job Quality Index             | Males   | 0.722      | 0.714                                | 0.730 |
|                               | Females | 0.694      | 0.686                                | 0.702 |
| Earnings component of JQI     | Males   | 0.617      | 0.601                                | 0.633 |
|                               | Females | 0.527      | 0.511                                | 0.542 |
| Non-Earnings component of JQI | Males   | 0.532      | 0.527                                | 0.537 |
|                               | Females | 0.533      | 0.529                                | 0.537 |

### *Predictors of Job Quality (Regression Models)*

Next, we constructed some regression analyses to model job quality. Each model has the job quality measure as the outcome and a set of explanatory variables. Table 3.2 has some ‘basic’ variables which include whether someone has a degree, whether working full-time or part-time, and the broad sector in which they worked.

Table 3.2: Determinants of Job Quality at Age 32: Basic Models

|                                                    | (1)       | (2)       | (3)       | (4)       |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Female                                             | -0.028*** | -0.001    | -0.002    | -0.010    |
|                                                    | (-4.74)   | (-0.23)   | (-0.29)   | (-1.89)   |
| Part-time                                          |           | -0.118*** | -0.118*** | -0.092*** |
|                                                    |           | (-14.96)  | (-14.90)  | (-11.43)  |
| <i>Broad Economic Sector (Ref: Private Sector)</i> |           |           |           |           |
| Public sector                                      |           |           | 0.000     | -0.014*   |
|                                                    |           |           | (0.00)    | (-2.23)   |
| Other/Third Sector                                 |           |           | 0.003     | -0.012*   |
|                                                    |           |           | (0.46)    | (-2.08)   |
| Degree/higher degree                               |           |           |           | 0.102***  |
|                                                    |           |           |           | (19.73)   |
| Constant term                                      | 0.722***  | 0.726***  | 0.725***  | 0.687***  |
|                                                    | (172.28)  | (174.89)  | (155.97)  | (146.50)  |
| Observations                                       | 4,762     | 4,750     | 4,747     | 4,747     |
| R <sup>2</sup>                                     | 0.009     | 0.077     | 0.076     | 0.184     |

*t* statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Then a set of family variables such as the presence of a partner and children in the household were added, and these ‘full’ models are the results reported in Table 3.3.

The key variable of interest here is gender. The most striking result is that gender becomes an insignificant predictor in all specifications which control for working part-time. The implication is that there is no significant difference in job quality between males and females who were working full-time. Or, to express the result another way – any difference in the average job quality between men and women was driven by the greater prevalence of part-time working among women. This result occurred in both the basic specifications in Table 3.2 and the models with further controls in Table 3.3.

The findings for family variables were also of interest. It can be seen that the presence of a partner was positively associated with job quality while children in the household were associated with (slightly) lower job quality, on average. Women with children may have spent more time out of the labour force, or have moved into lower quality jobs. Having a partner may provide support which helps people to remain in better jobs.

Table 3.3: Determinants of Job Quality at Age 32: Full Models

|                                                    | (1)                   | (2)                   | (3)                   | (4)                   |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Female                                             | -0.010<br>(-1.89)     | -0.010<br>(-1.80)     | -0.009<br>(-1.68)     | -0.009<br>(-1.63)     |
| Working part-time                                  | -0.092***<br>(-11.43) | -0.093***<br>(-11.88) | -0.089***<br>(-10.94) | -0.091***<br>(-11.17) |
| <i>Broad Economic Sector (Ref: Private Sector)</i> |                       |                       |                       |                       |
| Public sector                                      | -0.014*<br>(-2.23)    | -0.012*<br>(-2.05)    | -0.011<br>(-1.96)     | -0.012*<br>(-2.05)    |
| Other Sector                                       | -0.012*<br>(-2.08)    | -0.011*<br>(-1.99)    | -0.011<br>(-1.90)     | -0.011<br>(-1.89)     |
| Degree/higher degree                               | 0.102***<br>(19.73)   | 0.097***<br>(19.39)   | 0.095***<br>(18.49)   | 0.094***<br>(17.84)   |
| Partner                                            |                       | 0.058***<br>(11.93)   | 0.061***<br>(12.16)   | 0.057***<br>(11.43)   |
| Number of Children                                 |                       |                       | -0.005<br>(-1.78)     |                       |
| Number of children<br>aged 0 to 4                  |                       |                       |                       | 0.010*<br>(2.00)      |
| Number of children<br>aged 5 to 11                 |                       |                       |                       | -0.019**<br>(-2.93)   |
| Constant term                                      | 0.687***<br>(146.50)  | 0.649***<br>(115.05)  | 0.651***<br>(111.71)  | 0.652***<br>(111.39)  |
| Observations                                       | 4,747                 | 4,747                 | 4,747                 | 4,747                 |
| R <sup>2</sup>                                     | 0.184                 | 0.218                 | 0.218                 | 0.221                 |

*t* statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Good and Bad Jobs

In simple terms, the top quartile of the job quality index are the best 25% of jobs, while the bottom quartile constitutes the worst 25% of jobs. Men were fairly evenly distributed across the four quartiles of job quality, as can be seen in Figure 3.1. About 47 per cent of men were in the lowest two quartiles and about 28 per cent were in the top quartile. Women were somewhat less evenly distributed across the four quartiles. Fewer than 20 per cent were in the top quartile, while 29 per cent were in the lowest quartile, that is women had a somewhat higher share than men of the worst jobs.

Working part-time was strongly associated with being in the poorer quality jobs. More than half of those in part-time jobs were in the bottom quartile of job quality and fewer than nine per cent were in the top quartile. Full-time jobs were fairly evenly distributed across the quartiles. Education level was associated with job quality. Over 36 per cent of those with degrees had jobs in the top quartile of job quality and only 12 per cent were in the bottom quartile. The situation was almost the reverse for those without degrees – just 13 per cent were in the top quartile of job quality and 38 per cent were to be found in the lowest quartile. Managerial and professional jobs tended to be jobs which scored well on the job quality index. Roughly two-thirds of those with jobs of this type were in the top half of the job quality distribution. Conversely, over 50 per cent of those in jobs at age 32 which were not managerial/professional were in the bottom quartile of job quality and just four per cent were in the top quartile. Private sector jobs were more or less evenly distributed across the four quartiles of job quality. Public sector jobs were somewhat clustered in the middle two quartiles, with about 60 per cent of people with public sector jobs to be found there. Only 17 per cent of public sector jobs held by cohort members were in the top quartile.

Nearly half of individuals with temporary jobs were in the lowest quartile of job quality and less than five per cent were in the top quartile. Since whether a job was permanent or temporary was one component of the job quality index this is unsurprising, perhaps, but is nevertheless striking. It is important to note also that only about five per cent of the jobs were actually temporary in the *Next Steps* cohort at age 32. As for permanent jobs, at least 24 per cent and no more than 26 per cent of these jobs were in each of the four quartiles of job quality. This is as might plausibly be expected given that they account for 95 per cent of jobs in the *Next Steps* data.

Figure 3.1: Quartiles of Job Quality, by Gender

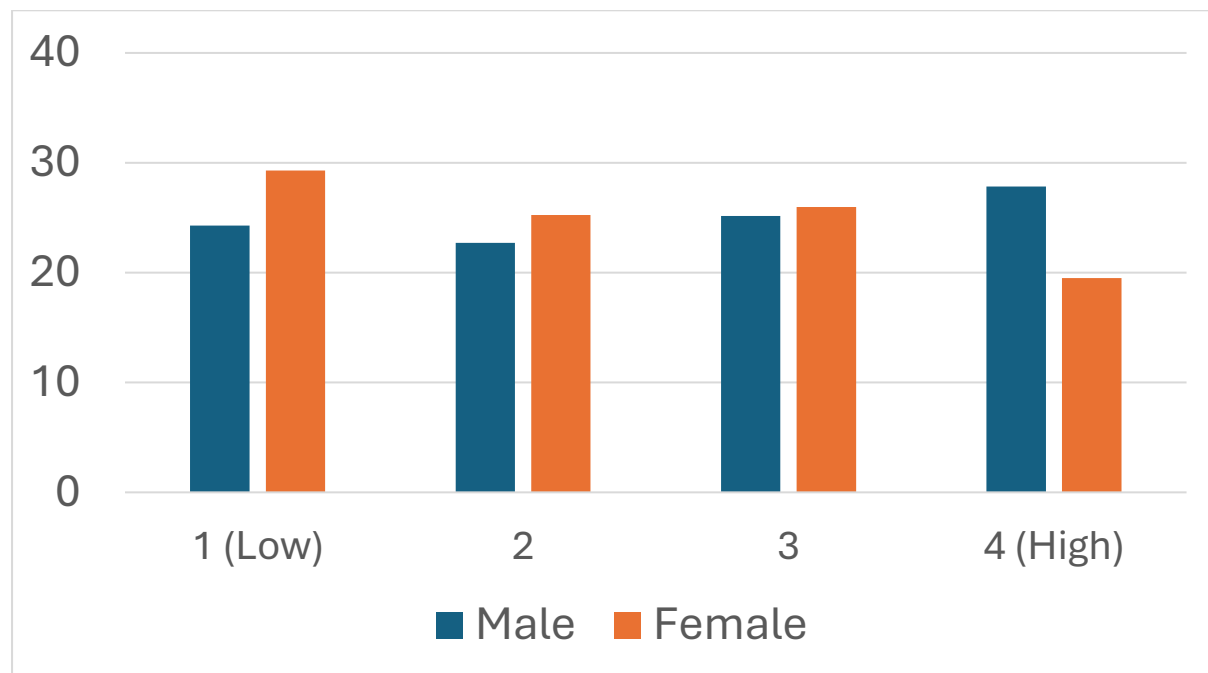


Table 3.4 presents some regression models using all the covariates listed above as explanatory variables to see to what extent they can predict whether people are in the top quartile or the bottom quartile of the job quality distribution. The models confirm that women were less likely to be in the top quartile of the JQI distribution. The odds of being in the top job quality quartile were about 40 per cent lower for women than they were for men. There was no significant difference between males and females for being in the bottom quartile of job quality. Having a degree doubled the odds of being in the top quartile of job quality in the regression model, while having a managerial/professional job raised this by a factor of almost ten. The factors which increased the odds of being in the top quartile reduced the odds of being in the lowest quartile, and vice versa.

Table 3.4: Logistic Regression Models: Quartiles of the Job Quality Index

|                         | (1)<br>Top quartile of the<br>Job Quality Index | (2)<br>Bottom quartile of<br>the Job Quality Index |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Female                  | 0.592***<br>(-5.56)                             | 1.095<br>(0.84)                                    |
| Working part-time       | 0.634**<br>(-3.01)                              | 2.280***<br>(6.45)                                 |
| Has a degree            | 2.269***<br>(8.79)                              | 0.424***<br>(-8.59)                                |
| Managerial/professional | 9.834***<br>(14.03)                             | 0.165***<br>(-17.68)                               |
| Temporary job           | 0.097***<br>(-8.30)                             | 4.494***<br>(9.43)                                 |
| Observations            | 4,750                                           | 4,750                                              |

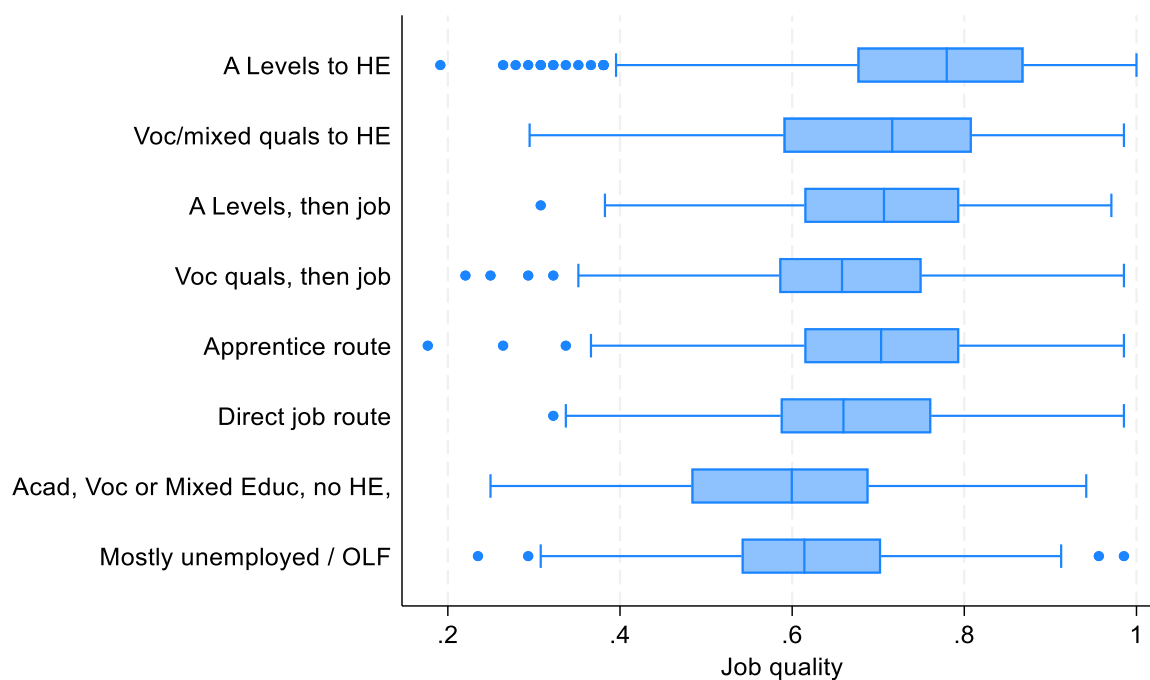
Exponentiated coefficients; *t* statistics in parentheses\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ 

### Analyses by Pathways

In this section we consider how people from each of the eight pathways were faring by age 32 in terms of job quality outcomes. We look at the earnings and non-earnings components of job quality as well as overall job quality outcomes. Figure 3.2 summarises the data on job quality at age 32, by the pathway which people were on between the ages of (approx.) 17 and 20. Job quality varied considerably within all pathways but, on average, was highest amongst those who had been on the academic pathway, moving directly from A levels to HE.

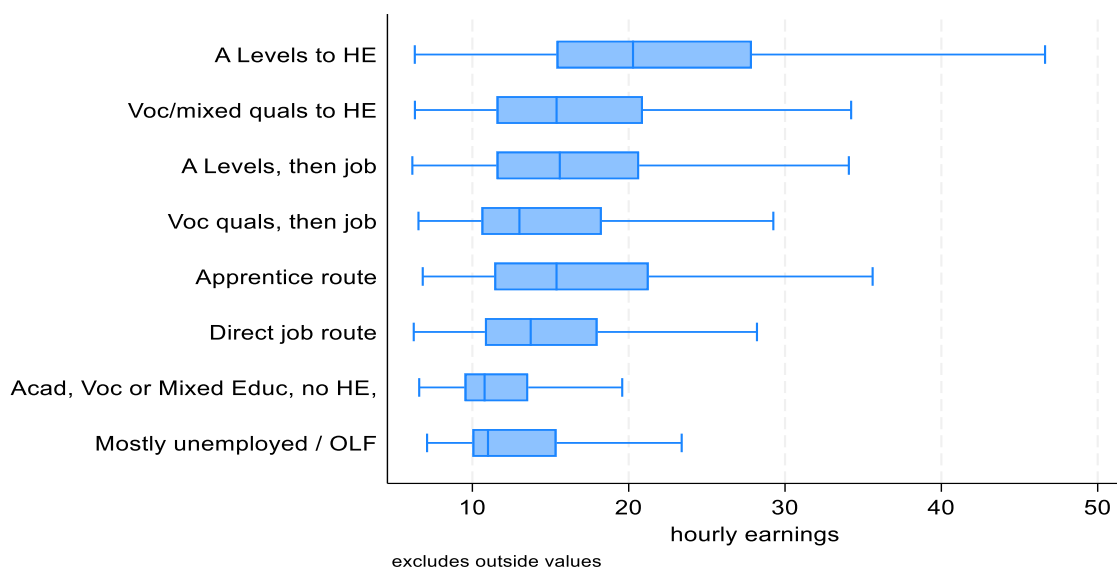
In principle job quality can vary between zero and one. Mean job quality was 0.77 amongst those on the A level to HE pathway. All other pathways had mean job quality significantly lower than this. Path 2, “Voc/mixed quals to HE”; and Path 3 “A levels to job” and Path 5 “apprenticeship route” each had mean job quality in the region of 0.7 on average. Other pathways were lower than this, the lowest being amongst those who had been on pathways 7 and 8, that is unemployed / not in the labour force or else pursuing academic, vocational or mixed qualifications but not proceeding to HE or a job by age 20. These two groups had mean job quality of about 0.6 (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Job Quality score, by pathway



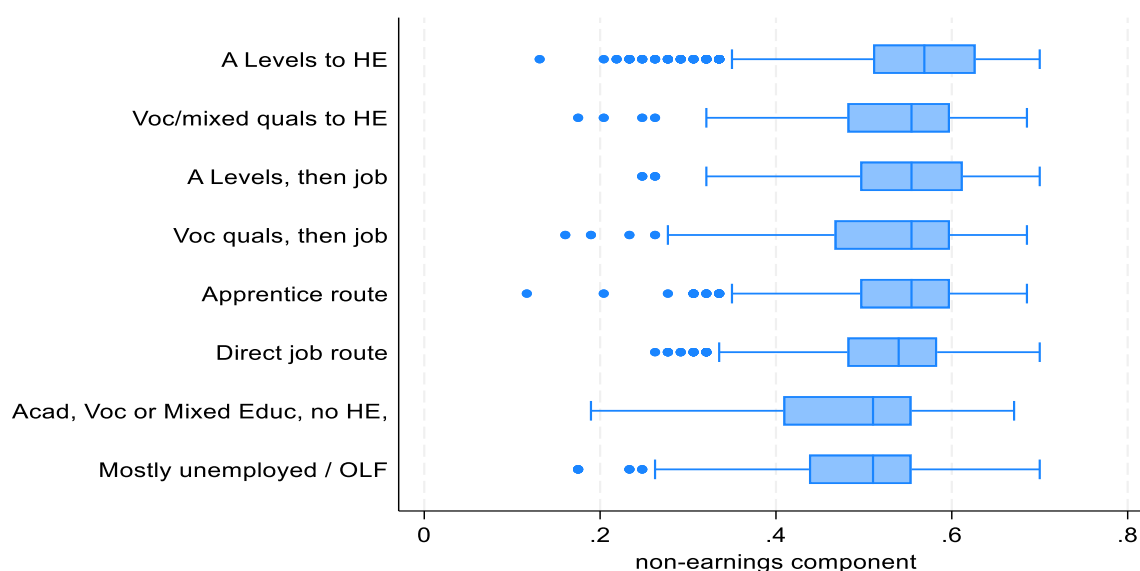
Mean hourly earnings were the highest amongst those on the A Levels to HE pathway at £23.71 per hour. None of the other pathways had hourly earnings above £18.50 per hour. The lowest were for the “Acad, Voc or Mixed Educ, no HE, no job”, (pathway 7) at £13.66 per hour and the “Mostly unemployed / OLF” (pathway 8) at £13.72 per hour. Figure 3.3 summarises.

Figure 3.3: Hourly earnings, by pathway



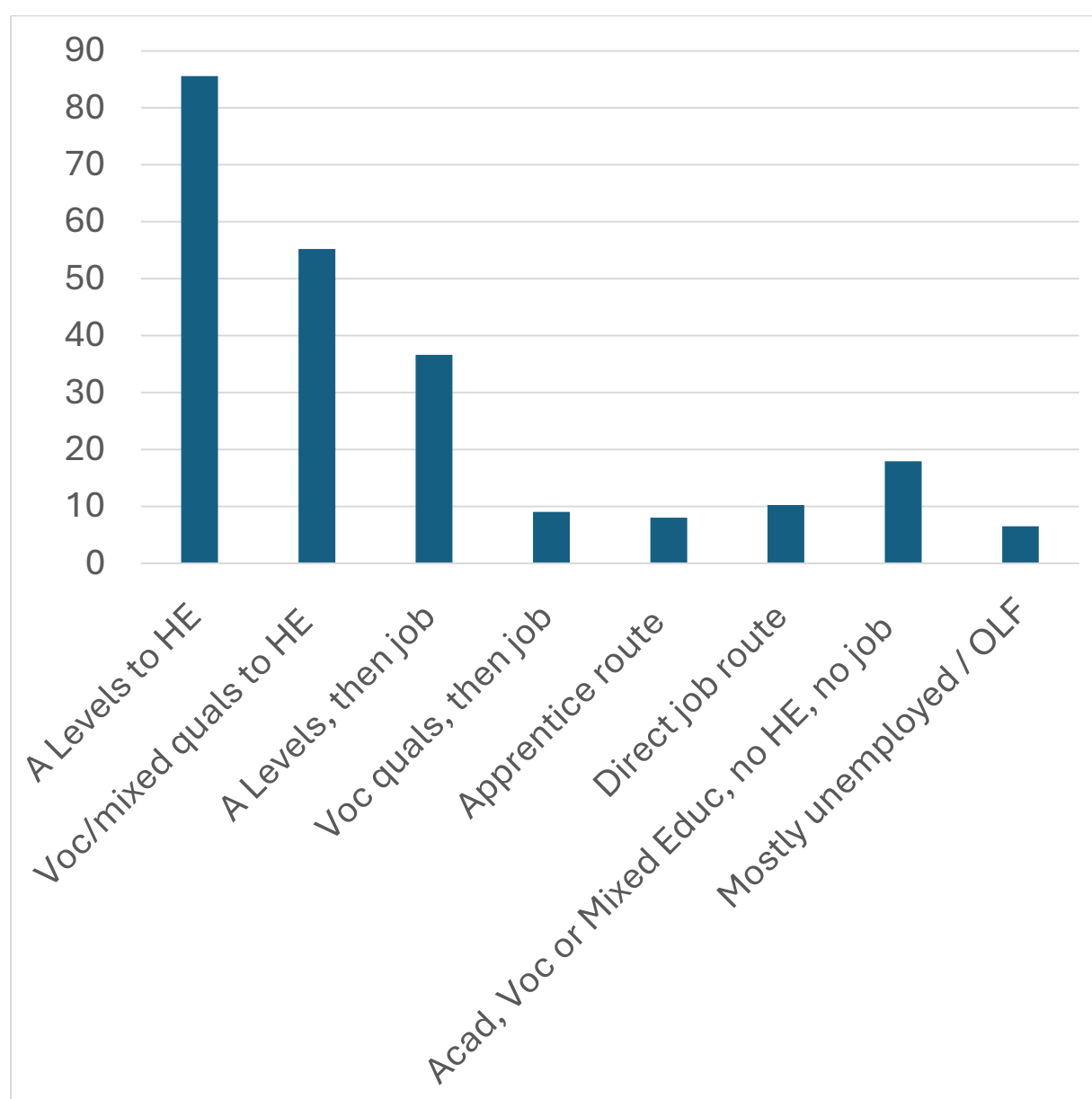
Differences by pathway for the non-earnings component of job quality were narrower (see Figure 3.4) but were still significantly significant. The pattern was similar to other outcomes with pathway 1 having the highest mean score on this variable and pathways 7 and 8 the lowest.

Figure 3.4: Non-earnings component, by pathway



Further information about the characteristics of respondents, and the type of jobs that they were doing at age 32, can provide some insight into these differences in job quality. Among those who were on the ‘A level to HE’ (pathway 1) at ages 17 – 20, about 85 per cent reported having a first degree or higher degree when they were interviewed at age 32. The proportions with a degree/higher degree among people who had been on the other pathways were, unsurprisingly, much lower. This is shown in Figure 3.5. Insofar as there are graduate jobs, then, which would tend to have high pay and other desirable characteristics – those on pathway 1 would be much more likely to be in such jobs than other respondents. Just over half of those who had been on path 2, the mixed/vocational route to HE had acquired a degree by age 32, as had about a third of those who had entered a job directly after their A level studies.

Figure 3.5: Percent with a degree/higher degree at 32, by pathway followed at 17 to 20.



There was variation by pathway in the proportions who were in part-time jobs at age 32. Part-time employment would frequently – not always but certainly often – be associated with lower job quality. In the Next Steps data, those who were on path 7, the pathway where studying predominated through ages 17 to 20 but without moving to either HE or a job, had the highest proportion of part-time employment at age 32; those who had been unemployed or not in the labour force between ages 17 and 20 also had a higher than average likelihood of being in part-time work at 32. Some examples of the kind of jobs people from each pathway were doing at age 32 are shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Examples of some typical jobs people from each pathway were doing at age 32 (based on SOC2010 3-digit occupational classification)

| <i>Path way</i>                            | Examples of typical jobs                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| [1] A Levels to HE                         | Teaching/education professionals, sales and marketing associate professionals, health professionals.         |
| [2] Voc/mixed quals to HE                  | Teaching/education professionals, functional managers, nursing and midwifery professionals                   |
| [3] A Levels, then job                     | Sales and marketing associate professionals; Teaching/education professionals; IT and telecoms professionals |
| [4] Voc quals, then job                    | Sales assistants/cashiers; childcare; caring personal services                                               |
| [5] Apprentice route                       | Construction and building trades; Engineering professionals; caring personal services                        |
| [6] Direct job route                       | Caring personal services; IT and telecoms professionals; childcare                                           |
| [7] Acad, Voc or Mixed Educ, no HE, no job | Sales assistants/cashiers; Caring personal services; Admin occupations.                                      |
| [8] Mostly unemployed / OLF                | Caring personal services; cleaning occupations; storage occupations.                                         |

### Job Satisfaction

Amongst this cohort of people in their early 30s, job satisfaction was generally high. On a 1 to 5 scale where 1 is ‘very dissatisfied’ through to 4 ‘somewhat satisfied’ and 5 ‘very satisfied’, the mean level of job satisfaction was approximately 4.2. Over two in five of respondents were very satisfied with their job and almost 85 per cent were either very or somewhat satisfied (Table 3.6). Only just over one per cent were very dissatisfied. Job satisfaction was marginally higher amongst men than women. Mean job satisfaction was 4.20 for men and 4.17 for women. But this difference was not statistically significant ( $t = 1.22$ ;  $p > 0.2$ ). In other words, there was no evidence to reject the hypothesis that mean job satisfaction was the same for men and women in the population from which our sample was drawn.

Table 3.6: Job satisfaction, by gender at age 32 in *Next Steps*

|                                    | Male  |       | Female |       | All   |       |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                    | N     | %     | N      | %     | N     | %     |
| Very dissatisfied                  | 44    | 1.4   | 33     | 1.1   | 77    | 1.3   |
| Dissatisfied                       | 152   | 4.9   | 177    | 6.0   | 330   | 5.4   |
| Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | 291   | 9.3   | 261    | 8.9   | 551   | 9.1   |
| Somewhat satisfied                 | 1277  | 40.9  | 1260   | 42.7  | 2,538 | 41.8  |
| Very satisfied                     | 1361  | 43.5  | 1217   | 41.3  | 2,578 | 42.4  |
| N                                  | 3,125 | 100.0 | 2,948  | 100.0 | 6,074 | 100.0 |

Counts rounded to nearest whole number; note all estimates include both employed and self-employed

As for other covariates, job satisfaction tended to be slightly lower amongst those working part-time compared to those who were full-time, but this difference was also not statistically significant. Perhaps surprisingly, job satisfaction was significantly higher amongst non-graduates than amongst graduates (Table 3.7).

Table 3.7: Mean job satisfaction, by whether has a degree

|                                                              | Mean  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Has a degree                                                 | 4.132 |
| No degree                                                    | 4.227 |
| 95% CI for the difference in means: (0.0426, 0.1472)         |       |
| t-test for zero difference in means: $t = 3.56$ ; $p < 0.01$ |       |

### Summary: Labour market outcomes

This report has presented new research on labour market outcomes for adults in their early thirties. Specifically, we consider the *Next Steps* cohort who had reached the age of 32 at the time of the most recent survey. The objective was to compare labour market outcomes at 32 by (1) gender, and (2) the type of educational pathway young people had followed in their late teens. The main conclusions are:-

#### *Gender and Work*

A job quality index was constructed to measure broader aspects of the job than just earnings. Women had slightly lower job quality, on average, than men. Differences between men and women in the non-earnings component of job quality were small. Thus, taking account of

other components of job quality – apart from earnings – did not exacerbate male/female inequality, but nor did it reduce inequality to any significant extent.

Women were more likely to be working part-time at age 32 and this was the main explanatory factor for their lower job quality compared to males. There was no significant difference on average between men and women who were in full-time work at 32. This has potential policy implications in terms of restructuring employment to enable job sharing or measures to enhance the supply of higher-skilled and therefore better quality part-time jobs. In addition, improving access and the affordability of childcare would enable more people to work full-time.

Regression models were used to predict whether people were in the top quartile or the bottom quartile of the job quality distribution. The models confirmed that women were less likely to be in the top quartile of the job quality index distribution. The odds of being in the top quartile were about 40 per cent lower for women than they were for men. There was no significant difference between males and females for being in the bottom quartile of job quality. Having a degree doubled the odds of being in the top quartile of job quality in the regression model, while having a managerial/professional job raised this by a factor of almost ten.

Most people – more than four-fifths of both men and women in employment at the time of the survey – expressed satisfaction with their jobs. Only a small proportion were very dissatisfied.

### *Educational Pathways and Work*

Average hourly earnings were highest amongst those who had been on the academic pathway leading from A levels to HE at 17/18. Mean earnings at 32 were lower amongst those who had been on more vocational routes to work. There may, then, be scope for policy interventions so that the range of vocational qualifications could provide better pathways to well-paid work. In particular, it suggests that progression to higher-level technical qualifications needs to be improved. This, it is worth noting, is the level at which many skills gaps currently exist.

While educational pathways in late teens provided some explanatory power for how well people were doing at work by their early 30s they did not fully determine it. Some young people who were not doing well in their late teens/early 20s were enjoying career success a decade or more later. Even among the group who were unemployed or out of the labour force at ages 17 to 20, some had managed to get themselves into high quality jobs when surveyed at age 32.

### *Limitations and Further Research*

The main strengths of this research derive from the use of rich, high-quality longitudinal data from the LSYPE cohorts – *Next Steps* and *Our Future*. This has enabled the tracking of young people from teenage years into early adulthood and, in the case of the earlier cohort,

through to the career paths they were following by their early thirties. Such research can also draw on a wide range of variables as explanatory covariates.

There are also, of course, some limitations to our project and scope for further research. Our analyses of the two cohorts – LSYPE I and LSYPE II – have compared them through ages 14 to 16 but there is potential, subject to data availability and access, for other projects to conduct comparisons beyond the age of 16. For this project while we have been able to analyse data at national level there is not sufficient sample size to allow analysis of local area differences in such things as local FE provision for example. Other research has been conducted on this, including research funded by Nuffield such as Lupton *et al* (2021). In addition, we have concentrated on gender and educational pathways as key variables of interest. While we have aimed to control adequately for other factors we have not explored in depth important topics such as differences by ethnic group and the impact of social class. Finally, there is the challenge of putting results for a single country into an international context - but see Appendix 1 for some work which explores this important theme.

## Conclusion

This study provides new and original evidence on educational expectations and career orientations of young people in England, the pathways they took through the post-16 education system and associated labour market outcomes. The report has highlighted gender differences, and made comparisons across the full range of routes taken by young people. We have set out the labour market outcomes in early career associated with each of the distinct paths followed post-16. The findings point to persisting inequalities, in particular for those from less privileged backgrounds, and for those who do not opt for the traditional academic track, from A-levels to higher education.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Further Publications

As well as generating the main results on English data, some additional work on the themes of the research occurred during the lifetime of the project. This work examined social and gender inequalities in the career aspirations of young people (Schoon, 2023), showing that individual agency is an independent resource effect over family socio-economic resources and area disadvantage and can potentially reduce the risk of low attainment for those with low family socio-economic resources, including white boys (Schoon, Mele & Burger, 2023).

In addition, the significant role of schools in preparing young people for an uncertain labour market by providing career preparation activities is illustrated (Schoon & Henseke, 2023). Adopting a comparative perspective, socio-economic and gender differences in post-secondary pathways are examined (Tomaszewski, 2025) and the role of individual agency (as indicated by educational expectations, school engagement and academic self-concept) in shaping school-to-work transitions of disadvantaged students over and above socioeconomic background and academic ability is shown (Descary et al., 2023) in different cultural contexts.

These papers, most of them generated in collaboration with international colleagues, provide important insights and broader context on aspirations, educational trajectories and labour market outcomes. For example, the study comparing youth transitions in the UK, Germany and Australia suggest that compared to the UK, young people from less privileged backgrounds in Germany and Australia are more likely to enter further or vocational education – a finding potentially reflecting that the UK has a relatively high university participation rate.

However, we also note the relatively high likelihood of being NEET in the UK among young people with non-graduate parents, which may also account for the lower likelihood of entering vocational education in this group. In the UK, where young people are more likely to enter the labour market directly after completion of compulsory secondary education, often without further training, enhancing vocational training programs could improve outcomes for those not pursuing higher education. Creating pathways that allow for a combination of study with relevant work experience may enhance the young people's ability to gain valuable work experience while pursuing further education. However, care is needed to ensure that studies are combined with work that provides relevant experience, rather than entrapping students in low-paid jobs.

These five papers (and one currently under review) are summarised below.

Descary, G., Dupere, V., Hebert, S. T., & Schoon, I. (2023). Is Academic Agency Relevant for the School-to-Work Transition of Lower Attainers? Evidence from Canada and England. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 52(12), 2509-2525. doi:10.1007/s10964-023-01843-1

Schoon, I. (2023). Gender Differences in Aspirations and Attainment: Towards an Integrative Socio-Ecological Developmental Systems Approach. *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*, 15(3), 242-263. Retrieved from <https://genderandset.open.ac.uk/index.php/genderandset/article/view/1501>

Schoon, I., & Henseke, G. (2023). Navigating an Uncertain Future How Schools Can Support Career Adaptability of Young People in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Zeitschrift Fur Psychologie-Journal of Psychology*, 231(3), 217-227. doi:10.1027/2151-2604/a000530

Schoon, I., Mele, F., & Burger, K. (2025). Academic agency and educational attainment: The intersection of SES, ethnicity and sex. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 120, 102689. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2025.102689>

Tomaszewski, W., Dietrich, H., Henseke, G., Xiang, N., & Schoon, I. (2025). Socio-Economic and Gender Differences in Post-Secondary Pathways in the UK, Germany, and Australia. 2025, 13. doi:10.17645/si.9601

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Descary, Guillaume, Véronique Dupéré, Sophie T. Hebert and Ingrid Schoon  
Is Academic Agency Relevant for the School-to-Work Transition of Lower Attainers?  
Evidence from Canada and England  
*Journal of Youth and Adolescence*  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01843-1>  
(Descary, Dupere, Hebert, & Schoon, 2023)

### *Abstract*

Academic agency is recognized as an important predictor of higher education attainment among the general population during the school-to-work transition. However, there is little evidence on whether (a) academic agency is associated with higher education attainment among young people facing education difficulties (i.e., lower attainers), (b) academic agency is associated with a smooth entry in a meaningful job among lower attainers, and (c) these associations vary across educational contexts. This study draws on longitudinal data from lower attainers in the province of Québec (Mage =16.31, SD =0.98; 48% females) and in England (Mage =15.86, SD =0.72; 42% females), two regions with similar education

systems, yet different vocational training provision. In both samples, fewer than one in four participants reach higher education by age 20. Also, in both countries academic agency is associated with a greater likelihood of being in higher education compared to other employment and education outcomes at age 20, but not with rapid entry into meaningful employment. Thus, focussing on higher education attainment and academic-related factors such as academic agency is of limited relevance for understanding lower attainers' success over school-to work transitions. For them, understanding this transition also requires considering rapid entry in meaningful employment, as well as non-academic forms of agency supporting such work-oriented outcomes.

Keywords: Academic agency; School-to-work transition; Meaningful employment; Educational attainment; Lower attainers; International comparisons

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Schoon, I. (2023). Gender Differences in Aspirations and Attainment: Towards an Integrative Socio-Ecological Developmental Systems Approach. *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*, 15(3), 242-263. Retrieved from <https://genderandset.open.ac.uk/index.php/genderandset/article/view/1501>

### *Abstract*

Significant progress has been made regarding educational and occupational opportunities for women. Yet, gender segregation continues to exist in many domains, including occupational choices, division of household responsibilities, and differences in paid and unpaid labour. A number of explanations have been made to account for the enduring gender inequalities, including gender essentialism, socialisation experiences, prevailing stereotypes, as well as downright discrimination. In this paper, I consider an Integrative socio-ecological Developmental Systems Approach (INDESA) and argue that for a better understanding of and to effectively address persisting gender inequalities, one must consider the multiple influences that shape individual development over time and in context. Gender differences become evident in early childhood and are perpetuated through everyday interactions with significant others and the wider social context. Small biasing effects can accumulate across different situations and over time, resulting in distinct behavioural pathways for men and women, even for those with similar abilities and social backgrounds. To initiate change in perceptions and behaviour, it is crucial to address multiple interlinked inequalities that occur across the life course and to actively foster policies and institutional reforms that promote equality.

### Keywords

Gender; aspirations; attainment; integrative socio-ecological developmental systems approach

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Schoon, I., & Henseke, G. (2023). Navigating an Uncertain Future How Schools Can Support Career Adaptability of Young People in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Zeitschrift Fur Psychologie-Journal of Psychology*, 231(3), 217-227. doi:10.1027/2151-2604/a000530

#### *Abstract*

Young people navigate an increasingly uncertain and precarious employment market. They have to mobilise and use psychosocial resources necessary to adapt to a changing career landscape and employment opportunities. Guided by career development theories, this study asks if school-based career preparation activities can support the development of career adaptability and career-related cognitions of young people in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research draws on a nationally representative sample of 16 to 25 year-olds who participated in the Youth Economic Activity and Health (YEAH) online survey conducted in the UK between May 2021 and May 2022 (n=4040). The findings highlight the malleability of career adaptability and the importance of school-based career preparation activities in supporting adaptive career-related cognitions as well as life satisfaction among young people in times of economic uncertainty and upheaval.

#### *Keywords*

Career adaptability, uncertainty, life satisfaction, school-based career preparation activity, young people, Youth Economic and Health Monitor (YEAH), United Kingdom

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Henseke, G & Schoon, I, 'How well do education providers facilitate career preparation'. Submitted for review.

#### *Abstract:*

Employer engagement during secondary education can serve as a valuable resource during the transition to work, complementing existing skills, knowledge, and attitudes. This study analyses school-mediated employer engagement using nationally representative longitudinal survey data from 19-25-year-olds (N = 3,730/ N = 2,001) collected May-2021-Nov-2022. The study makes three key contributions. Firstly, it documents that participation in employer engagement activities in UK schools and colleges remained unequal, with variations by socio-demographic characteristics and by region. While some differences show efforts were made to target disadvantaged groups, the results indicate partial success. Secondly, the study finds that work-based employer engagement, as opposed to school-based engagement, is associated with a faster transition from education to work and higher-level jobs. This effect was particularly noticeable during the slack labour market until July 2021. Lastly, the research suggests that work-based employer engagement may increase job search engagement and success rates, partially explaining its positive impact on work uptake. Furthermore, young individuals who engage in school-mediated work-based employer activities exhibited greater confidence in their career prospects during the pandemic and more positive long-term career expectations. These findings confirm the potential positive

contribution of work-based employer engagement in helping young people succeed in uncertain job markets.

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Ingrid Schoon, Francesca Mele, Kaspar Burger

Learning and Individual Differences

### *Abstract*

This study examines the extent to which different indicators of academic agency (an aspect of social-emotional skills) play a role in enabling disadvantaged youth to complete key benchmark qualifications. This study draws on a national representative Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE;  $n=15770$ ) to examine the effectiveness of education expectations, ability concept, and school motivation in supporting educational attainment of socio-economically disadvantaged youth. The findings suggest that academic agency shows an independent resource effect over family socio-economic resources and area disadvantage. There was also evidence of resource substitution, i.e., academic agency reduces the risk of low attainment for those with low family socio-economic resources, including white boys. Moreover, there is evidence of ‘immigrant optimism’ as ethnic minority youth with high academic expectations were more likely to achieve key benchmark qualifications. The results are discussed regarding interlinked inequalities of sex, minority status and family socio-economic resources.

Keywords: Social inequality; key benchmark qualifications; educational expectations; academic agency; school engagement.

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Tomaszewski, Wojtek, Hans Dietrich, Golo Henseke, Ning Xiang, and Ingrid Schoon. 2025. “Socio-Economic and Gender Differences in Post-Secondary Pathways in the UK, Germany, and Australia.” *Social Inclusion* 13. doi:10.17645/si.9601.

### *Abstract*

This study investigates variations in school-to-work transitions (SWTs) by socio-economic status (SES), gender, and socio-cultural context. Leveraging data from three nationally representative longitudinal panel studies, we compare the experiences of young people coming of age in the 21st century (2011 to 2023) in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia. We examine the role of different support systems that scaffold the SWT process along various post-secondary pathways, including university, further education/vocational training, and employment tracks, with a particular focus on variations by parental education and gender. Utilizing longitudinal data from the Understanding Society Panel in the UK ( $N = 15,692$  observations), the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP;  $N = 5,464$ ), and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey ( $N = 5,759$ ), we track synthetic cohorts born between 1993 and 1995 from ages 18 to 27 in the three countries. We employ linear probability models to conduct a cross-national comparative analysis,

identifying variations in post-secondary pathways across the three country contexts. The choice of countries is motivated by their shared status as developed economies with distinct features in their SWT systems—contrasting the neoliberal deregulatory frameworks of Britain and Australia with Germany’s employment-focused dual system. The findings reveal significant effects of parental education on post-secondary transitions, as well as the differing roles of gender across various educational policy contexts. These results underscore the complexity of SWT when considered in different national settings. The insights generated by this analysis highlight the importance of dedicated policies to support low-SES youth and promote gender equality in education and employment outcomes.

## Appendix 2: Coding educational trajectories to 8 pathways

One of the major components of the research project was to map the trajectories that young people typically follow from education to work. In this appendix we set out in more detail how responses were coded to the eight trajectories described in Chapter 2 of the report.

At Wave 4 the following variables were utilised to code people to what they were doing at (approx.) age 17:-

|              |                                                        |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| W4empsYP     | DV: Employment status of young person                  |
| W4InSchoolMP | What YP is currently doing (Main parent questionnaire) |
| w4act1       | DV: Current activity                                   |
| w4saim       | DV: Main study aim                                     |
| w4ed_tr1     | DV: Education and training detail                      |
| W4Apprent2YP | Whether YP is currently doing an apprenticeship        |
| W4MainActYP  | Current main activity of YP                            |

These were used to code to the following categories:-

- 99 Unknown/No information
- 1 In Education, studying for HE qualifications
- 2 In Education, studying A levels
- 3 In Education, studying GCSE
- 4 Apprenticeship
- 5 Job, with training
- 6 Job, no training
- 7 Education, vocational qualifications
- 8 Training scheme
- 9 Unemployed or OLF

A similar process was used to code to the same categories at Waves 5, 6 and 7. Below are the (unweighted) numbers and percentages at each wave – for all cases present at Wave 7.

| Activity status at <b>Wave 4</b>     | Freq.        | Percent       |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Unknown/No information               | 41           | 0.49          |
| In Education, studying A levels      | 4,947        | 59.03         |
| In Education, studying GCSE          | 189          | 2.26          |
| Apprenticeship                       | 292          | 3.48          |
| Job, with training                   | 356          | 4.25          |
| Job, no training                     | 250          | 2.98          |
| Education, vocational qualifications | 1,646        | 19.64         |
| Training scheme                      | 210          | 2.51          |
| Unemployed or OLF                    | 450          | 5.37          |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>8,381</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

|                                  |       |         |
|----------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Activity status at <b>Wave 5</b> | Freq. | Percent |
|----------------------------------|-------|---------|

|                                      |       |        |
|--------------------------------------|-------|--------|
| Unknown/No information               | 89    | 1.06   |
| In Education, studying A levels      | 3,968 | 47.35  |
| In Education, studying GCSE/Other    | 67    | 0.80   |
| Apprenticeship                       | 436   | 5.20   |
| Job, with training                   | 952   | 11.36  |
| Job, no training                     | 900   | 10.74  |
| Education, vocational qualifications | 1,282 | 15.30  |
| Training scheme                      | 121   | 1.44   |
| Unemployed or OLF                    | 566   | 6.75   |
| Total                                | 8,381 | 100.00 |

| Activity status at <b>Wave 6</b>        | Freq. | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Unknown/No information                  | 148   | 1.77    |
| In Education, studying for HE qualifica | 3,085 | 36.81   |
| In Education, studying A levels         | 536   | 6.40    |
| In Education, studying GCSE             | 27    | 0.32    |
| Apprenticeship                          | 376   | 4.49    |
| Job, with training                      | 974   | 11.62   |
| Job, no training                        | 1,321 | 15.76   |
| Education, vocational qualifications    | 886   | 10.57   |
| Training scheme                         | 126   | 1.50    |
| Unemployed or OLF                       | 902   | 10.76   |
| Total                                   | 8,381 | 100.00  |

| Activity status at <b>Wave 7</b>        | Freq. | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Unknown/No information                  | 23    | 0.27    |
| In Education, studying for HE qualifica | 3,981 | 47.50   |
| In Education, studying A levels         | 88    | 1.05    |
| In Education, studying GCSE             | 8     | 0.10    |
| Apprenticeship                          | 218   | 2.60    |
| Job, with training                      | 1,735 | 20.70   |
| Job, no training                        | 891   | 10.63   |
| Education, vocational qualifications    | 383   | 4.57    |
| Training scheme                         | 115   | 1.37    |
| Unemployed or OLF                       | 939   | 11.20   |
| Total                                   | 8,381 | 100.00  |

By means of tabulations and cross-tabulations these were coded to categories across all 4 waves. We aimed for the minimum number of distinct categories which would adequately characterise all cases. We focused particularly on outcomes (at Wave 6 and 7), such as whether they were studying at HE level, or whether they had a job, and relating that to what they doing at Waves 4/5, such as studying A level or studying for vocational qualifications. We were able to code to 8 groups as follows:-

Table A3.1: Pathways: an eightfold categorisation

| <i>Pathway</i>                                | <i>Description</i>                                                                                                               | <i>Per cent on this path*</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| A Levels to HE                                | Studying for A levels at 17 and 18, moving to HE study at 19 and 20                                                              | 34.1                          |
| Vocational/mixed qualifications to HE         | Had studied mainly vocational or a mix of vocational and A level at ages 17/18. Then studying for HE qualifications at ages 19+; | 5.9                           |
| A Levels, then job                            | Usually A/AS level study at 17 and/or 18; moving into a job by 19 .                                                              | 6.5                           |
| Vocational qualifications, then job           | Studying for vocational qualifications, followed by a job                                                                        | 9.8                           |
| Apprenticeship route                          | Had been on an apprenticeship at some point between 17 and 20.                                                                   | 10.9                          |
| Direct job route                              | Mostly in jobs between 17 and 20                                                                                                 | 15.9                          |
| Academic, vocational or mixed qualifications. | Studying for qualifications between 17 and 20, but not moving into work or HE                                                    | 6.1                           |
| Mostly unemployed / OLF                       | Mostly observed as unemployed or OLF; also often time on training scheme; some were in education at 17, few thereafter.          | 10.8                          |

Present at Wave 7, weighted using Wave 7 weights.

The unweighted numbers are shown in Table A3.2:-

Table A3.2: Pathways: an eightfold categorization

| Path from 17 to 20                     | Freq. | Percent |
|----------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| A Levels to HE                         | 3,535 | 42.18   |
| Voc/mixed quals to HE                  | 617   | 7.36    |
| A Levels, then job                     | 575   | 6.86    |
| Voc quals, then job                    | 747   | 8.91    |
| Apprentice route                       | 723   | 8.63    |
| Direct job route                       | 979   | 11.68   |
| Acad, Voc or Mixed Educ, no HE, no job | 539   | 6.43    |
| Mostly unemployed / OLF                | 666   | 7.95    |
| Total                                  | 8,381 | 100.00  |

Let's try to describe each of the eight paths in a bit more detail.

The **first path**, A levels to HE, is the largest of the eight. Over a third of respondents followed this path. All of them were in HE at either Wave 6 and/or Wave 7 (age 19 or 20), about 97 per cent at Wave 7 and 76 per cent at Wave 6. Some 97 per cent of them were studying two-plus A/AS levels at Wave 4 (age 17).

All of those on the **second path**, vocational/mixed route to HE were also in HE at Wave 6 and/or Wave 7, with 87 per cent being observed in HE at Wave 7 and 61 per cent at Wave 6. The most typical trajectory for this group was to be in vocational education at Waves 4 and 5, and to be studying for HE qualifications at Wave 6 and Wave 7. About 20 per cent were studying A levels at Wave 4 (age 17) and some 13 per cent were studying them at Wave 5 (age 18). Far more of them were studying mainly or solely for vocational qualifications – around two-thirds had this as their activity status at Wave 4 and just over 60 per cent at Wave 5. Nearly 70 per cent were recorded as studying for Edexcel, BTEC or LQL qualifications at Wave 5; nine per cent for NVQs and seven per cent for City & Guilds.

The **third path** was to be studying for A levels but then to proceed to a job without any study at HE level (as observed in Waves 6 or 7). At Wave 4, 94 per cent were studying A levels and 84 per cent were doing so at Wave 5, but just 13 per cent at Wave 6 and less than 2 per cent at Wave 7. Over two-thirds (68 per cent) were in a job at Wave 6, and 89 per cent at Wave 7.

The **fourth path** was to be studying for vocational qualifications usually at Wave 4 and/or Wave 5 and then to be observed in a job at Wave 6 and/or Wave 7. Again none of these cases proceeded to any study at HE level (as observed in Waves 6 or 7). At Wave 4, 62 per cent were in education studying for vocational qualifications and about 56 per cent at Wave 5. Some 53 per cent were in jobs by Wave 6 and about 79 per cent at Wave 7.

All the cases on **path five** had studied towards an apprenticeship for some time from Wave 4 to Wave 7. Not all of them had completed an apprenticeship, although most of them had. The proportions with apprenticeship as their current activity were: Wave 4 – 40 per cent; Wave 5 – 60 per cent; Wave 6 – 52 per cent; Wave 7 – 30 per cent. Among those who had been on an apprenticeship for at least one wave, 23 per cent were there for 3+ waves, 29 per cent for two waves and 48 per cent for one wave. At Wave 7 as mentioned, 30 per cent were (still) on their apprenticeship at that time, 52 per cent were in work, 10 per cent were unemployed/OLF and the remaining few cases were in one of the other possible statuses, including three per cent in HE.

The **sixth path** is what we have termed the direct job route. It consists of cases who spent little time in full-time education beyond the age of 16/17 and were mainly in work between the ages of 17 and 20. About 40 per cent were in a job at age Wave 4 (age 17) rising to around 95 per cent at each of the following three waves (ages 18 to 20). We can also

distinguish between jobs with training and jobs without training – at each wave rather more were in jobs with training than without.

As for **path seven**, some people spent their time between Wave 4 and Wave 7 mostly in education, studying sometimes for academic qualifications and sometimes for vocational qualifications but not making a transition to higher education or to a job. These cases were assigned to the seventh of the pathways. At Waves 4 and 5 about one-third were studying for academic qualifications and around a half for vocational qualifications. By Wave 6 two-thirds were studying for vocational qualifications and only just over a fifth for academic qualifications. By Wave 7 about one-half were studying for vocational qualifications, only one in ten for academic qualifications, while approximately a third were unemployed or out of the labour force (OLF) by this point.

The **eighth pathway** consists of those cases who were found to be unemployed or out of the labour force (usually with caring responsibilities) at all or most of the timepoints between wave 4 and wave 7. About 40 per cent of cases were unemployed/OLF or else on a training scheme at Wave 4, rising to about half at Wave 5 and more than 80 per cent at Wave 6 and Wave 7.