



The work experience placements of secondary school students: widening horizons or reproducing social inequality?

Richard Hatcher and Tricia Le Gallais

**Faculty of Education
January 2008**

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Dr Richard Hatcher
richard.hatcher@bcu.ac.uk

Dr Tricia Le Gallais
tricia.le.gallais@bcu.ac.uk

**Birmingham City University
Faculty of Education
Birmingham
B42 2SU**

**Research supported by funding from the
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation**

ISBN: 978-1-904839-30-9

January 2008

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Part 1: Introduction

School students at Key Stage 4 are required to undertake work-related learning. For almost all this includes some form of work experience in Year 10, usually of two weeks duration. The question we address in this research is whether the distribution of students to placements is differentiated by social class, and if so, what are the processes which contribute to it.

Current guidance is contained in two publications from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (previously the DfES), *Work Experience: A guide for secondary schools* (DfES 2002a) and *Work Experience: A guide for employers* (DfES 2002b), and two publications from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *Work-related learning for all at key stage 4*. (QCA 2003) and *Work-related learning at key stage 4: Guidance for school coordinators* (2005). The DfES guides include advice about equal opportunities. The guide for schools state that

Schools should pursue a policy of equal opportunities in their work experience programmes. The programme should be considered within the context of the school's own equal opportunities policy, particularly in areas such as countering gender stereotyping, increasing students' confidence and challenging under-achievement. Students should be encouraged and given extra support when choosing non-stereotyped placements for example girls choosing engineering.

As a minimum, schools should check that their programmes are free from both overt and covert stereotyping. Whilst schools will clearly need to be sensitive to the risk that placing students into areas of work in which they feel uncomfortable may be counterproductive, they should, nevertheless, consider how far they should allow their students free choice of placements. Schools should pay particular attention to equal opportunities aspects when briefing students. Students taking up non-traditional placements may need special preparation for the reactions they may encounter and even more careful monitoring during the placement. Where possible, schools should also pay attention to the importance of explaining the policy to employers. (DfES 2002a, p12)

The dominant theme here is gender equality. Previous research studies (e.g. Hamilton 2002; Francis *et al.* 2005; Wright 2005) have demonstrated that, in spite of the guidelines, the distribution of work experience placements among the student population exhibit patterns of gender inequality. The processes which can result in this are illustrated by the following statement in the guide for schools.

Care must be taken to ensure that work experience placements are appropriate to students' needs. Good placements take account of students' choices, as well as an assessment of what is desirable for each student. (DfES 2002a, p12)

Both 'need' and 'choice' are problematic concepts in terms of issues of equality. The guidelines recommend that schools should differentiate work experience provision according to students' perceived needs.

Schools should decide the links, aims and objectives that best meet the needs of their students. These are likely to differ between groups of students. (DfES 2002a, p4)

If perceptions of 'need' are differentiated by gender, this may help to perpetuate patterns of inequality. Student choice can also reproduce patterns of gender inequality. The question we address in this study is whether they can also reproduce patterns of social class inequality, an issue that has received much less attention in both the policy guidance and the research literature.

Some phrases in the DfES guides – 'increasing students' confidence and challenging under-achievement', 'areas of work in which they feel uncomfortable' – can be read as encompassing issues relating to the social class backgrounds of students, though they are perhaps intended more to refer obliquely to ethnicity. (In addition, situating the advice in the context of schools' equal opportunities policies may serve to deflect a social class interpretation, since they tend not to include social class inequality.) The QCA guidance (QCA 2003, 2005) surprisingly makes no reference to equality issues apart from the assertion that work-related learning, which includes work experience, can widen students' horizons.

One of the barriers to participation in higher education is the low self-esteem and limited aspirations of many intelligent 14- to 16-year-olds. Improved knowledge of the labour market and employers' needs will raise the aspirations of some and help others make more informed decisions about suitable learning programmes post 16. (QCA 2003, p3)

It is argued by Osgood, Francis and Archer (2005) that:

Work experience placements have a potentially important role in providing pupils with broader, diverse and/or non-traditional experiences and ideas about the adult workplace. (p307)

Is there evidence that this potential is being realised in terms of social class? Are 'limited aspirations' being challenged, or are work experience placements tending to reflect and reproduce patterns of social class inequality?

Part 2: Research Design

This study is based on research carried out in five schools in one large urban area. The schools were chosen in order to provide a wide range in terms of their social composition. One school, AVON, has an intake selected by ability; the other four are comprehensive schools. We used eligibility for free school meals (FSM) as a proxy indicator of the socio-economic status (SES) of the school populations. The percentages at the five schools in 2006, the year when the student data collection took place, were as follows:

AVON	2.0%
BEDFORD	10.0%
CUMBRIA	17.0%
DEVON	53.8%
ESSEX	63.1%

This figure relates to the whole school. The figure for Year 10 alone may differ slightly, although a substantial variation in social composition is unlikely. The average FSM figure for the Local Authority where the research took place was 33%.

We recognise the limitations of FSM as an indicator of social class. It is a rather crude indicator which can disguise important differences between schools with similar FSM percentages but where one has a significant middle-class intake and another where the non-FSM pupils are only just above the threshold. Nevertheless, it serves our purposes in allowing us to select schools with, taken overall, substantially different social compositions. We will categorise them into three categories:

High SES school – AVON
Middle SES schools – CUMBRIA and BEDFORD
Low SES schools – DEVON and ESSEX

We recognise that the Middle SES schools are closer to the High SES school than the Low SES schools in terms of the percentage of FSM.

The questionnaire data was collected shortly before the work experience placement was undertaken at four of the schools, namely BEDFORD, CUMBRIA, DEVON and ESSEX. This was, however, after the placements of the large majority of students had been arranged. The questionnaires were completed by the students at AVON after their work placement had been completed (see Appendix 1). The interviews were carried out after the students at AVON, CUMBRIA and DEVON had completed their placements but prior to the placements being undertaken by students at BEDFORD and ESSEX

The data was gathered from three main sources. Questionnaires were completed by the Y10 cohort in each of the five schools, amounting to a total of approximately 1000 Year 10 students. Interviews were carried out with 98 Year 10 students, 20 at each of four schools, in groups of five students, and 18 at the fifth, again in 4 groups. And one interview was carried out at each school with the teacher or teachers responsible for their work placement programme. The teachers also selected the students to be interviewed, chosen to provide a gender mix and a range of ability according to the schools' criteria.

Staff from Education Business Links (EBL) and Connexions provided data concerning post 16 education destinations, gender specific data and information concerning the ethnicity of the students. EBL were also able to provide detailed

information about the work placements undertaken by Y10 students at schools involved in this research (the data is for the 2007 cohort, the year after this research was conducted: 2006 data was not available).

Parental occupations

In addition to the school level data on social composition in terms of FSM we have data from the students we interviewed about their parents' occupations. We did not ask for data about parental occupations in the questionnaire on practical grounds: the data it would have generated would have been too imprecise to provide the basis for a reliable categorisation. The interviews enabled us to probe responses and achieve more precise characterisations. We have categorised responses in accordance with Rose and Pevalin's (2001) *Operational Categories of the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification*. Rose and Pevalin's category L.14 (Never Worked and Long-term Unemployed) has been subsumed into 'Unemployed' since, where applicable, students generally stated that family members were not at work without further clarification. It was not felt appropriate to press students for responses where they had not freely given an answer. (In one case a student at AVON, where the majority of students' parents were in professional occupations, was subjected to a bout of laughter from his peers when he said that his family ran a Chinese takeaway.)

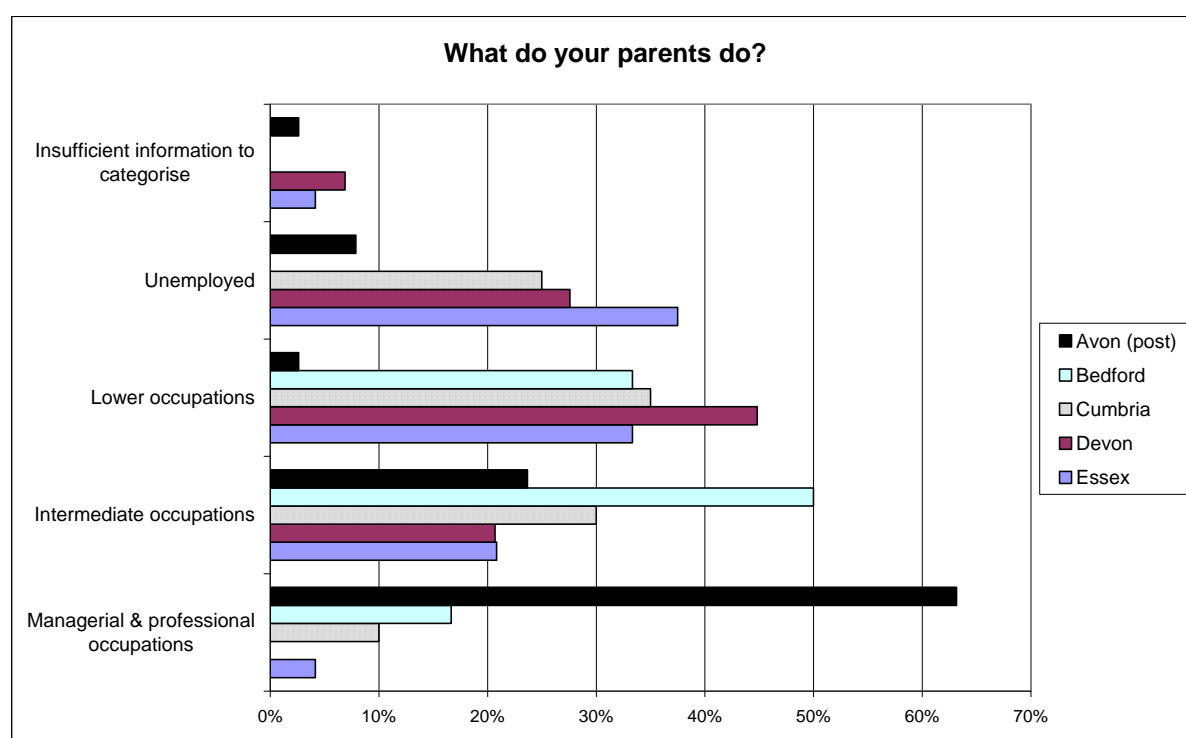


Figure 1: Interview

We have omitted the category 'Unemployed' from the analysis below because it encompasses a range of class positions, ranging from working class long-term unemployed to middle class parent looking after young children before returning to employment.

SES	Schools	What do your parents do? %*		
		Managerial and professional	Intermediate	Lower
High	AVON	63	24	3
Middle	BEDFORD	17	50	33
	CUMBRIA	10	30	35
Low	DEVON	0	21	45
	ESSEX	4	21	33

Figure 2: Interview

*The above figures do not add up to 100% because the categories 'unemployed' and 'insufficient information to categorise' have been omitted.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the relatively much smaller sample of students interviewed (98) compared to the questionnaire respondents (1000), the social class pattern, in terms of parental occupation, of the interviewees aligns closely to the SES of the schools, which means that the social class composition of our interview sample corresponds to the social class composition of our questionnaire sample. This allows us to draw some generalisations from the interview sample and apply them, at least with some degree of confidence, to the wider year group cohort.

Part 3: The distribution of the students in workplaces

We begin by examining the distribution of students in different types of schools. We collected data by asking students to state their workplaces on the questionnaire. The large majority of responses stated a type of workplace (e.g. shop, office). Some named a specific workplace (e.g. Topshop), and in almost all cases the type of workplace was evident from the name. We have grouped the responses into categories.

Hillage, Kodz and Pike (2001) followed a similar process of inviting students to state their type of workplace. They then placed the responses in seven categories: Legal and Medical, Public sector, Banks/offices, Education, Production, Health, Retail and Leisure (p79). Inevitably there are boundary problems with any such categorisation. But in addition, the broader the categories the less discriminating they are in terms of the range and types of workplaces included in each. For that reason we have preferred a larger number of categories.

Education Business Links also provided us with the categories they use to identify work experience placements, of which there are 23 main categories with several sub-heading as shown in the example below:

11	Health & Care
11.1	Clinics & Health Centres
11.2	Dentists
11.3	Doctors
11.4	Hospitals
11.5	Opticians

Figure 3: EBL

This would have been unnecessarily detailed for our purposes and we therefore subsumed the EBL categories into the 16 workplace categories identified below:

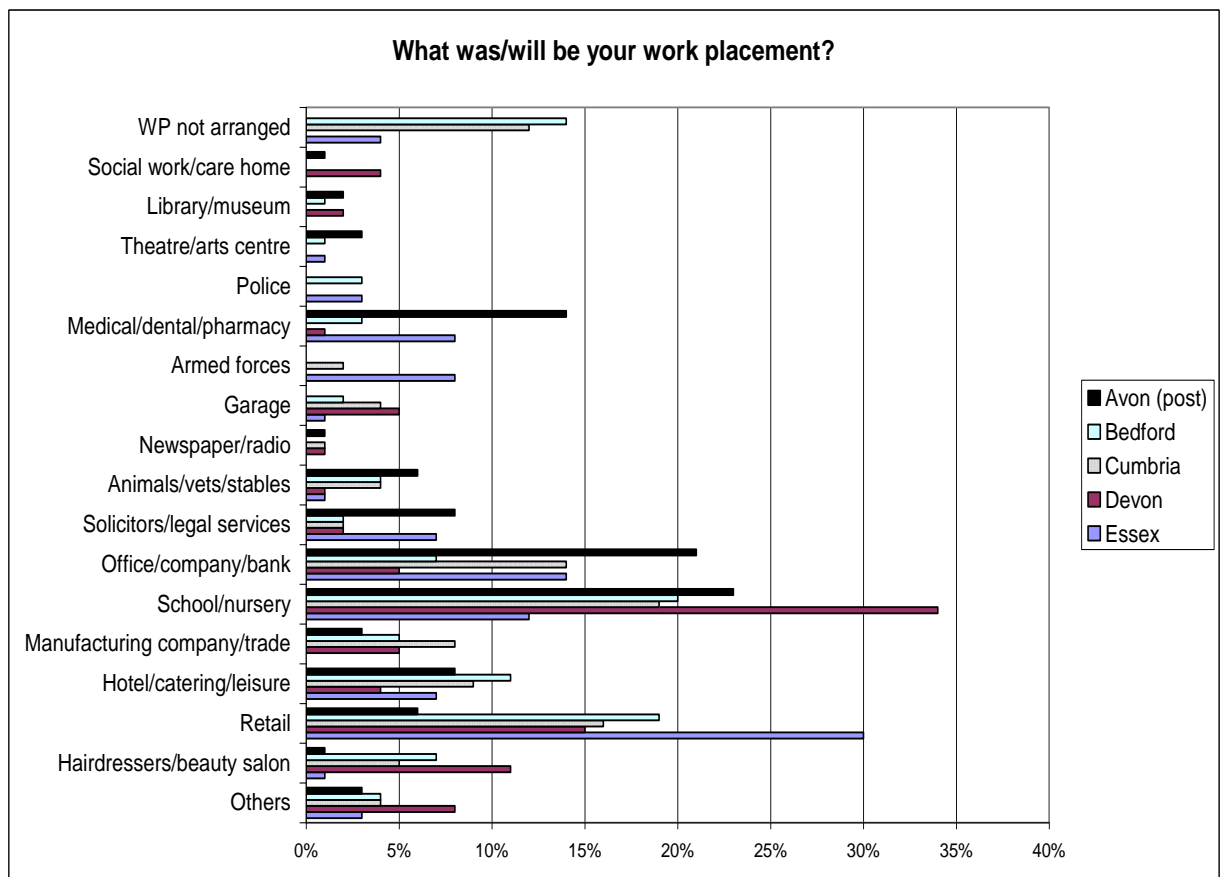


Figure 4: Questionnaire

The first point to make is that some sectors of the labour market are well-represented and others are not. Obviously a major factor is allocatory processes by schools and students, but it is important to note their context in terms of regional patterns of employment. Local fields of available work placements will have their own distinctive specificities, for two reasons.

First, the geographically uneven distribution of types of workplaces: each school is situated in its local work experience area, defined by the distances its students are willing and/or allowed to travel. These local areas are likely to vary in certain respects from other areas, and from the national picture. For example, agricultural workplaces, maritime-related workplaces and the head offices of major financial companies are under-represented in the City as a whole, and within the urban area there is an uneven distribution of various types of workplaces such as car plants or large retail centres. EBL confirmed that geography played an important part in the choices students had with regard to some placements.

Second, certain areas of employment do not offer work placements to school students because of health and safety or other legislation. There are two such sectors which are particularly relevant to our research.

One is the medical sector. A number of students sought work placements in the medical field but were excluded because they were under 16.

Science and medical placements are very difficult to get, and medical won't accept under 16. (Teacher, CUMBRIA)

Well where I wanted to go I wasn't allowed because I wasn't 16. I wanted to go to a doctor's surgery. (Student, CUMBRIA)

And:

The ones that are interested in being medics, they've obviously got problems as regards to their age and what can be done on that one. They can end up in pharmacies with these kind of skills.

Because they're under 16?

They are under 16, but it's as near as they're going to get to medicine is to put on the labels on the pills. (Teacher, AVON)

Similarly, placements with the police also caused difficulties:

I couldn't go into a police station, because I wanted to do forensic science and I couldn't go to a forensic lab. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Francis *et al.* (2005) make the same point:

The local area and labour market influences the range of placements offered to pupils. There are often shortages in particular sectors. The Trident Trust (Norgrove 2004) found Hospital/Nursing/Medical placements to be most frequently noted as a shortage, and these may be compounded by concerns over health and safety issues e.g. in the construction industry. (p15)

The majority of work experience placements nationally are in retail, education/training and business. There are clear shortages in the work experience placements available in certain sectors. For example, there is a shortage of science specific work placements. (Francis *et al.* 2005, p28)

A second area which offered relatively few placements was manufacturing, largely for health and safety reasons but also for reasons of geographical location of suitable placements.

There are plenty of choices if they want to go into retail or if they want to go into hair and beauty but unfortunately students who want to go into engineering and that sort of thing, there is next to nothing.

Why is that?

I think it is the decline of engineering in the Midlands area. But also I think engineering companies tend to be bigger companies and it is down to health and safety. (Teacher, BEDFORD)

A third area concerns workers in trades such as plumbers and electricians if they are working individually.

Our students aren't allowed to go with sole traders anymore. So they can't go and work with Joe Bloggs on their own. They aren't allowed to. (Teacher, BEDFORD)

This point was also raised by EBL. The consequence is a lack of correspondence between local work placement fields and the labour market as a whole. In terms of

manufacturing and trades students are being excluded from work experience in a sector of the economy which industry spokespeople are trying to attract school leavers to enter. It particularly distorts the work experience field in the City where manufacturing is still a significant part of the local economy.

It would require further research to ascertain whether these factors affected the local work placement fields in socially differentiated ways.

There is one further factor which appears to affect the potential work placement field in socially differentiating ways. There was a perception by some teachers that some employers offering professional placements restricted them to grammar school (and private school) students. Teachers at CUMBRIA felt that their students are competing with students from grammar schools and private schools for 'professional' work placements. Some placements preferred to take those students, or had reserved places solely for them.

Teacher A: It just seems that all the vets' jobs and all the high flying jobs, the journalist jobs and things like that, the accountancy jobs and the surveyors' jobs, all the placements are harder to get because those placements have already gone to grammar school students.

Teacher B: I know one hotel where we have only ever had one or two students there, and why, it's because they prefer to take the students from the grammar schools, that's their preference. It isn't like 'we will only take the grammar school students' but the majority of their placements go to the grammar schools. (Teachers, CUMBRIA)

We asked the teacher at AVON, the selective school, if there were some employers who only take people from his school.

We are probably in competition with some schools in some jobs, and in other schools not. It is because you are a grammar school, because some people will know you, you get offers of some jobs that other schools may not, I would imagine, but I don't know. Because you know, they feel they can cope with things that perhaps, other kids from other schools might struggle with, and vice versa to some extent. (Teacher, AVON)

Once links are established between schools and employers they tend to be perpetuated from year to year, making it difficult for a school to break into existing networks.

Teacher A: And if they're already linked into reserving places for potential students. Like we have got our six places at [a garage] and we have got a link at the library and a link here and a link there, so that just perpetuates itself doesn't it. (Teacher, CUMBRIA)

This situation was confirmed in discussion with an EBL spokesperson. This perpetuation of the status quo serves as a barrier for schools seeking to expand their range of placements to include more professional occupations.

Employers' perceptions of students' ability, behaviour and career orientation, and their own personal affinities, could all be factors affecting some employers' preference for grammar school (or private school) students. It would require further research to ascertain if there are other factors which shape the perceptions that employers have of schools and thereby result in their privileging some schools over

others. For example, the gender (there are single-sex schools) and ethnicity of students, the reputations of schools, and previous experiences (positive or negative) of work experience students. Local work placement areas can be conceptualised as fields of competition structured by the socially differentiating offers of placements by employers, based on their perceptions and predilections, perhaps mirroring to some extent local competitive markets of pupil admissions to schools.

Finding 1: Some employers prefer students from high SES schools.

Class patterns in workplace allocation

To what extent can we identify patterns of unequal social class correlations between schools and the workplaces where placements were found?

Overall the most popular work placement was in a primary or nursery school. It accounted for the highest number of placements in four of the five schools, the exception being ESSEX. The EBL spokesperson commented that one reason for the popularity of nursery school placements lies in the fact that they are particularly thorough in terms of meeting health and safety standards and they usually offer a very structured experience for students on placement. This is borne out by the comments of school staff as described in a later section.

The table below is based on the questionnaire data in Figure 4. We have grouped the data in three categories: Higher, Medium and Lower. The purpose of this categorisation – which we use in a number of tables in the report – is simply to provide a clearer picture of the pattern of responses. The procedure we have adopted for creating the categorisation is to take the range of responses and divide it into three equal parts. We do not claim that in all cases it is statistically valid but it does provide a useful framework for discerning patterns in the data. However, we do also provide in Appendix 2 a statistical analysis of the data in these tables.

SES	Schools	Nurseries and schools %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON		23	
Middle	BEDFORD		20	
	CUMBRIA		19	
Low	DEVON	34		
	ESSEX			12

Figure 5: Questionnaire

There is a significant difference among the schools but there is no correlation between school composition and work placements in nurseries and schools. The two schools with the lowest SES differ the most in the percentage of students in nurseries and schools. The other three schools all have a roughly similar percentage of students in this sector.

The questionnaire data are supplemented by the data from interviews with students.

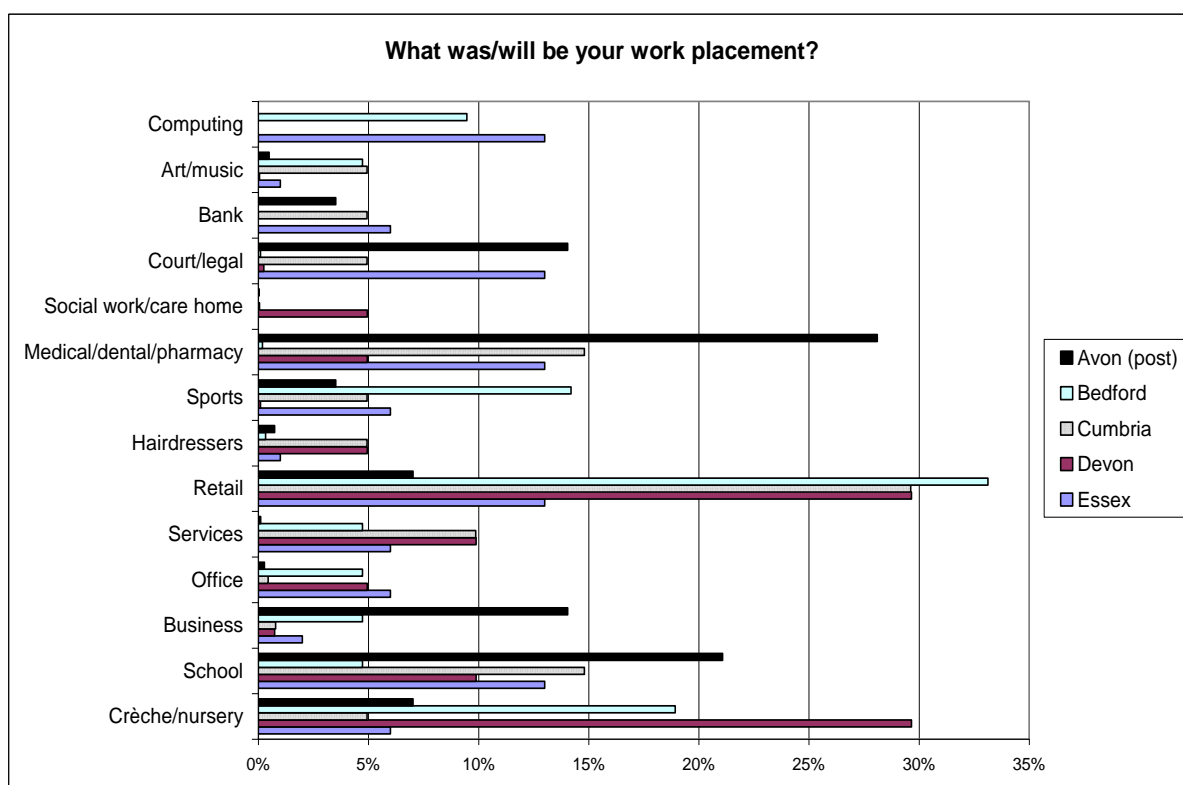


Figure 6: Interview

The interview data do not exactly parallel the questionnaire data. In some cases there are significant discrepancies. For example, 28% of AVON students identified placements in medical/dental or pharmaceutical fields during their interviews compared with only 14% of students giving this response in the questionnaire. On interview 34% of BEDFORD students categorised their placements as 'retail' compared with only 19% giving this response in the questionnaire. There may be three explanatory factors here. First, the sample size of the interviews was relatively small compared to that of the questionnaires. We spoke to the teacher at ESSEX after the student interviews, commenting

Interviewer: I think I was struck that in other schools lots of the girls did hairdressing but here not one did and I think that was because we were talking to Muslim girls with a different set of aspirations.

Funnily enough we have had year 11 doing a hairdressing course off site and apart from two they are all Asian. It must just be the sample that you took. Funnily enough with work experience I don't think any of them are doing hairdressing. It is just this particular year group, but next year I have got nice girls who are going off site to do hairdressing. Quite a few of them are African Caribbean and I think I have four who are Asian and last year seven out of nine were. So it was just the sample. (Teacher, ESSEX)

Second, the categories of workplaces are not entirely precise. And thirdly, students may have given less precise responses to the questionnaire than they gave when questioned in interviews, when the researchers were able to categorise placements more accurately. For example, one student referred to his placement in interview at what appeared to be a retail outlet. However, in the interview he expanded upon his work experience at 'Evolved Sports' as follows:

I'm working at Evolved Sports. It is like sports coaching for young kids. They go around schools and do after school coaching and PE lessons and stuff like that. (Student, CUMBRIA)

This detail reveals a very different character of the type of workplace and the experience this student gained as a result of this placement.

While the interview percentages differ somewhat from the questionnaire responses the pattern is similar, with no class pattern and the two lowest SES schools recording the highest and the lowest percentages.

SES	Schools	Nurseries and schools %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON		28	
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA			24 20
Low	DEVON ESSEX	40		19

Figure 7: Interview

The significant difference between DEVON and ESSEX must be due to factors other than their social composition, though the reasons for students having this allocation, and its meaning for them, may be socially differentiated. We will return to these points later.

Finding 2: Differences in proportions of students finding placements in nurseries and schools were the result of school factors, not SES.

Social class status of work placement sites

Many workplace sectors can be differentiated in terms of their social class status. Our categorisation of workplaces is based on Rose and Pevalin's (2001) *Operational Categories of the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification*: managerial and professional, intermediate, and lower. Of course workplaces comprise jobs of different types. For example, 'professional' workplaces may well include functions in the 'intermediate' and 'lower' categories. Conversely, in workplaces with predominantly 'intermediate' and 'lower' work functions there are likely to be some of 'managerial and professional' status. Nevertheless we can distinguish between what can be called predominantly 'professional' workplaces such as banks and medical and legal offices, and predominantly 'intermediate' or 'lower workplaces', principally shops, on the basis of the character of the principal and defining work process within them. This does not necessarily imply that the students' placement roles correspond to the social class status of the workplace. A placement in a 'professional' workplace can involve no more than menial low-level tasks. (We return to this point later.) But our focus here is on the workplace itself, not on the work experience tasks within it.

The two categories of 'retail' and 'professional' exhibit a clear correlation with school SES in our data.

SES	Schools	Retail including hair and beauty %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON			11
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA	26	21	
Low	DEVON ESSEX	26 31		

Figure 8: Questionnaire

The two lowest SES schools recorded 31% and 26% for placements in retail, while the highest SES school recorded 11%. Conversely, the highest SES school had a significantly higher percentage of students placed in offices, companies and banks than all the other schools. There was however a significant difference between the two low SES schools. ESSEX also placed a sizeable minority of students in offices, companies and banks, in contrast to DEVON, the other low SES school.

SES	Schools	Offices, companies, banks %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON	21		
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA		14	7
Low	DEVON ESSEX		14	5

Figure 9: Questionnaire

AVON students obtained more placements in the medical, dentistry, pharmaceutical and legal fields than students at the other four schools, although one of the two lowest SES schools, ESSEX, also placed a significant number of students in these areas.

SES	Schools	medical/pharmaceutical and legal %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON	22		
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA			5 2
Low	DEVON ESSEX		15	3

Figure 10: Questionnaire

The most likely explanation for the difference between the two low SES schools is that the staff at ESSEX set high aspirations and supported students in finding such placements. This school was identified from student comments to be the most directive of the five schools researched with regard to the organisation of placements, a point we return to later.

Similar class patterns in 'professional' placements and 'retail and hair and beauty' placements emerge from our interview data.

SES	Schools	Retail including hair and beauty %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON			8
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA	33 35		
Low	DEVON ESSEX	35		14

Figure 11: Interview

The interview percentages at BEDFORD, CUMBRIA and DEVON are higher than in the questionnaires and the percentage at ESSEX significantly lower, but the highest SES school remains less represented in this sector than the other schools.

Conversely, while the interview sample is clearly not exactly representative of the questionnaire sample, the highest SES school still has a significantly higher percentage of students placed in offices, companies and banks than all the other schools.

SES	Schools	Business, offices, banks %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON	18		
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA			10 6
Low	DEVON ESSEX		14	6

Figure 12: Interview

Similarly, by far the highest percentage of students who stated that they had medical, dentistry, pharmaceutical and legal placements were from the highest SES school.

SES	Schools	Medical/pharmaceutical and legal %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON	42		
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA		20	0
Low	DEVON ESSEX		26	5

Figure 13: Interview

The school staff perspective on placements and their social status

We turn now to the data from the interviews with staff at the five schools, to see if there is further evidence of a correlation between the social composition of the schools and the social status of work experience sites.

We begin by contrasting the two lowest SES schools – ESSEX and DEVON – with the highest – AVON.

ESSEX was the school with the lowest SES with the majority of its students eligible for FSM. It serves an area of high social deprivation and relatively high unemployment. It has a high ethnic minority population, with over 60% students of Asian descent (figures from Connexions data for school leavers 2006). According to the teacher, students' choices of work placements were limited.

When they are looking for places, or expressing their preferences here, what are the main factors or criteria that they use to decide?

They want to go to the [City centre shopping area], they want to work in a shop and that is pretty much it for a lot of them, or they want to go and work in a garage. They are still quite restricted in their choices, and that again is because we are quite young if you like on the road to helping to point them in the right direction. There are very few of them who have really strong opinions about what they want to do, apart from going to work in a shop. (Teacher, ESSEX)

DEVON Is a predominantly white school with 54% white British and 18% African-Caribbean (data on ethnicity provided by Connexions) with a high level of social deprivation. Its students chose mainly non-professional work placements. Typical placements mentioned were in care homes, the motor trade, and hairdressing.

Some students are quite – I hate to say it – limited, they want to work in sport and they're not really interested in much else. (Teacher, DEVON)

We asked to what extent there were placements in more professional situations.

Maybe in schools as a teaching assistant, that might give them some idea of working in education. We've got one or two in insurance companies, in the Royal Bank of Scotland, one's in a doctor's surgery; it's a receptionist job but still giving them access to the medical profession. There's also one in a care foster home and it can lead into social work and she's interested in social work. (Teacher, DEVON)

The school had been trying to find placements for African-Caribbean students.

Only about half a dozen have come through, one of them is with a newspaper, one is with a local radio station; someone who's interested in music has gone off there. But no I suppose access to middle class placements, no. (Teacher, DEVON)

The pattern of work placements at AVON, the selective school with a very low FSM index, was significantly different to ESSEX and DEVON, with a wider range of workplaces and a much higher proportion of students in professional or quasi-professional placements.

We've got a lot of legal ones; we get a lot of students that see themselves as 'LA Confidential' type of things. You know the ones that are interested in being medics that they've obviously got problems as regards to their age and what can be done on that one. They can end up in pharmacies with these kinds of skills. [...] We get them working in convenience stores; we get them working in the Botanical Gardens; the [Theatre], sports centres. It really is quite broad. [The County] Cricket club have been there, you know all sorts of different things really. (Teacher, AVON)

We asked if students tended to choose places which they might know personally, such as fashion stores and record shops. But at AVON it was more likely to be

Riding centres, you know things that they do for a hobby, sports, riding centres to go and ask if they can work there, you know, those sorts of things.

We get very few shop ones, very, very few. Most people here are...our turnout for university is huge, and most of them are going to consider themselves getting a degree and then doing something with that degree. They wouldn't see themselves as working in a shop. So unless they're thinking of taking a degree in retail or something like that, management or something like that, they wouldn't be that interested in doing it. So they do try and pitch it at something they know, that is going to be related to what they might do or the level that they might do. (Teacher, AVON)

Where ESSEX staff refer to their students wanting to work in shops, the member of staff at AVON makes it clear that his students would only consider such a placement as preparation for a managerial role in retail. The statement below from a student reinforces his observations.

I was at (a large department store) ...I wanted to like, see how it worked behind the scenes kind of thing, of a big company...I learnt how the organisations are structured, and how they work, and the levels of management and stuff...I plan to go into business, and it's just useful to know how these things work. And how big organisations run...Well, I ultimately aim to be a director of a company. (Student, AVON)

We turn now to the two Middle SES schools. We asked if professional work placements were difficult to find. At BEDFORD they felt that it was the more organised and proactive students who tended to get professional placements.

The students that want them don't normally have a problem finding them, but they start early, and perhaps that is the type of student who will go into those roles, they tend to be more organised. I think that is a closed loop as it were, but not normally no and most employers are pretty generous about allowing them. So we have people going out doing legal services and that sort of thing. Vet work, that was already a difficult one. The medical ones are difficult because they can't go into clinics and things like that so those have almost dried up now. (Teacher, BEDFORD)

Figure 13 above shows no students from BEDFORD entering medical/legal placements, in contrast with the figures from CUMBRIA of 20% of the students interviewed placed in these areas and 26% from ESSEX, which is one of the two low SES schools.

Working in shops is a significant marker of class boundaries. At BEDFORD, as with AVON, undesirable working class occupations were exemplified by working in shops.

Not that many of them want desperately to do retail. Many of them doing retail are doing it because they like a particular shop – the shop rather than the career. (Teacher, BEDFORD)

The exception, as with AVON, was one student who saw a work placement in a shop as the first step towards a career in retail.

Well that kind of small scale (i.e. retail sales) the answer would be 'no' but being in charge of like a chain of shops and in charge of more people is more appealing to me. But you have to start somewhere and get good at it there before you can get rich. (Student, BEDFORD)

The range and types of work experience placements undertaken

We end this section with a presentation of data provided by EBL for the 2007 cohort of students on work experience placements at the five schools. Whilst such placements will not be an exact replication of the 2006 cohort's placements, they nonetheless provide a picture of the ranges of types of work experiences undertaken at the five schools.

Students attending the high SES school, AVON, experienced the most unusual and/or prestigious placements as recorded by EBL for the 2007 cohort of students. These include working with a Member of Parliament in London, acting as a veterinary assistant at London Zoo, attending the Jahrhunderthalle in Bochum, Germany and being placed with the Warwickshire Cricket Board. In addition seven students were based at a local redbrick university, three of whom were at The School of Physics and Astronomy and one at the School of Sport and Exercise. Another student attended the Medical School in the Department of Immunology. Five students were placed in hospitals in the local region (standard industrial classification (sic) code 11: Health). There were ten legal placements. One student attended an equestrian centre.

BEDFORD also had a student placed at a local redbrick university in the Archaeology Department and one placed in the Medical School. A further student undertook work experience at another university in their High Performance Centre for Sports Excellence. BEDFORD had two students placed at a hospital (sic code 11: Health). There was one legal placement at BEDFORD

CUMBRIA. had one student placed in the Immigration Advisory Service, one at the Register Office and three at football clubs, two of which are in the Premier Division. One student attended an equestrian centre. Two students had legal placements at CUMBRIA.

Two students at DEVON were placed at a post-1992 university but the sic codes did *not* indicate an educational placement – one was clerical and the other retail. Another student was placed in a hospital but the sic code was Catering *not* Health. A further student undertook a placement at an RAF station. DEVON had three students in legal placements. However, DEVON also had fourteen students attending placements for which the designation was 'manual'. EBL confirmed that the school staff complete the section concerned with 'job description'. None of the other four schools had any students with the job description of 'manual'.

ESSEX had one student at a medical centre but the sic code indicated work entailing professional/business duties *not* health-related tasks. There were seven ESSEX students placed with legal firms.

Key points arising from the above information include the observation that students attending university placements from AVON were involved in educational roles, providing an opportunity to reinforce their expectations and aspirations to attend university in the future.

In contrast, students from DEVON were involved in non-educational roles, thereby forfeiting this opportunity to consider university as a familiar option for their future aspirations. Far more AVON students attended hospitals (with their job role described as health-related) than any of the other four schools. Whilst one student from DEVON and one from ESSEX were placed in hospitals, neither student's work experience was described as linked to health/medical.

Three of the ten legal placements undertaken by students at AVON involved the Law Courts. BEDFORD only had one student placed with a firm of solicitors and CUMBRIA had three students placed with solicitors. DEVON had three legal placements, one with the Crown Prosecution Service. ESSEX had seven legal placements with solicitors' firms.

For the students at DEVON there does seem to be evidence of social class reproduction in terms of working class kids getting working class work experience placements. AVON students, on the other hand, are, for the most part, confirmed in their expectations of more prestigious placements and a more professional future career. Some of ESSEX students have, however, had opportunities opened up to them, in particular those who obtained legal placements. Whilst these were not as prestigious as AVON students attending court, discussing cases and dining with the judge, they nonetheless provided those students with the experience of a professional employment situation.

Finding 3: The distribution of students to workplaces exhibits a combination of social class patterns and school-effect differences. Overall there is a significant correlation between the social status of workplaces and the SES of schools.

Given the well-established correlation between social class and educational attainment, this finding is largely congruent with the finding of Hillage, Kodz and Pike (2001) that type of placement correlated with student ability.

We also found that the type of placement taken varied significantly with student ability, and indeed was the main factor underlying the distribution of placements. Higher ability students tended to be clustered in professional, legal and media and office environments, while students of lower academic abilities are more likely to be found in education and production environments. (Hillage, Kodz and Pike 2001, p79)

Our finding is also largely in agreement with that of Francis *et al.* (2005). They use 'intention to go to university' as a proxy for the SES of students. On that basis they find a correlation between student SES and the social status of workplaces.

4.2 Work experience placements and socio-economic group

In terms of intentions to go to university (as a proxy measure for socio-economic group – see introduction), we found some interesting patterns emerging in the work experience placements undertaken by pupils. For the purpose of clarity, we concentrated only those pupils who 'definitely plan to go to university' and those who 'definitely do not plan to go to university' (because these pupils are arguably more clear-cut in their likely backgrounds as belonging to higher and lower socio-economic groups 3). Some placements were not undertaken by any of the pupils not expecting to go to university. These included IT, legal, media production, science, high status medical jobs and paramedical professionals. Higher percentages of pupils expecting to go to university than those who do not undertook placements in: animal work/veterinarian (6:1), education/teaching (17:4) and office work (25:3). Placements undertaken by higher percentages of pupils not aspiring to university were, predominantly in 'lower socio-economic group' areas of employment, including hair and beauty, leisure and tourism and semi/unskilled manual labour (ONS, 2001). (Francis *et al.* 2005, p30)

Our findings do not wholly substantiate the above observations. The anomalous data comes from ESSEX, the lowest SES school, which had a significant minority of students placed in the legal field, indeed a higher number than for CUMBRIA or BEDFORD, which are comparatively higher SES schools. The explanation is that the distribution of students to workplaces is the product of two factors: social class of student and school-effect factors. While social class accounts for significant overall patterns, schools can also exercise an influence partly independent of their SES, through the choice of policy they adopt. We examine this issue later and identify important implications for future policy.

Gender and placement allocations

The social class patterns we have identified were intersected by patterns of gender differentiation. While this is not the focus of our research, we want to indicate how the two processes of differentiation interact.

The data provided by EBL for students at the five schools undertaking their work experience placements in 2007 are shown below. This is not the cohort involved in this research, for which the data was unavailable, but the general trends are unlikely to differ to any great extent statistically. We have selected placements in five occupational categories for comparison. There is clear gender segregation in Hair & Beauty and Nursery placements with few boys taking up these placement options. A larger number of boys take up placements in schools (primary and above) but girls still dominate these categories.

Reference	Description	AVON		BEDFORD		CUMBRIA		DEVON		ESSEX F + M*
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
10.1. .2	Hair & Beauty	1	-	12	1	11	1	5	2	1
11.1-5	Clinics, Health Centres, dentist, doctor, hospital, optician	16	17	4	-	-	-	1	-	1
14.1-2	Legal	4	7	-	1	1		3	-	6
5.2	Nursery Schools	5	-	15	3	6		16	1	7
5.3	Schools (primary, secondary)	15	8	14	5	18	8	21	4	16

Figure 14: EBL

Data drawn from EBL database of 2007 cohort's work experience placements.

* No gender data available for ESSEX.

Our interviews with teachers revealed a significant difference between AVON and the other four schools with regard to gender differentiation in work placements. According to the teacher at AVON, gender stereotyping was not a feature, with the exception of nurseries.

I am interested in the stereotyping of students going into placements. Do you notice that, for example, girls tend to be gravitating towards nursery?

No not at all.

So you've got lads applying in that area as well?

No, not nursery, but we have them in junior schools. Yes. There doesn't seem to be really, I think the only thing you could say, and I don't think that's really sexist is that you get some interesting work in a fashion environment, or something like that. But no, I think it is fairly evenly split, there doesn't seem to be a problem in that area. No, not that I've noticed. (Teacher, AVON)

The AVON teacher's belief that there is gender equality in placements is borne out by the EBL figures for professional placements for these five schools in 2007. The number of boys and girls accessing these placements is almost even (16 female and 17 male).

The teacher's perception at BEDFORD contrasts strongly with the teacher at AVON.

You talked about the girls going into hair and beauty, where is the dominant area for the lads?

Dominant area? There is always a scramble to find places in music shops and recording studios, that sort of thing, there is always a big scrap over those. Sport, I think what has happened in sport is that over the years a great many of the leisure centre haven't really provided a very worthwhile experience and that washes down. I have noticed this over the past few years, you work at the leisure centre and quite often it is the same as hair and beauty, you are washing out the changing rooms. Local football clubs, to get down there, the football fans end up working in retail because they work in the club shop. This year there has been a scrap over working in [name of car company] and things like that.

Hair and beauty, this is the gender thing, a lot of the girls have got an interest in hair and beauty and there are plenty of shops around and that takes them. They tend to be some of the earlier to find their own placements. They are quite often some of the most disappointed as well. What tends to happen is they think they are going to be a stylist and colourist and what they actually do is sweep up hair and make tea. So they tend to be disappointed if they have not worked in that sort of environment before. Many of the students who have got Saturday jobs in that environment, they stick with it because they see another side to it. But quite often if it is a fortnight sweeping up hair then it does disillusion them.

But the boys really, it is an interesting question...the boys tend to be the ones who haven't organised their own, to be quite honest, the girls tend to have an idea of what they want to do and the boys are picking off the computers and they all want to work with cars, cars and garages. We don't have many train drivers, cars and garages (as placements).
(Teacher, BEDFORD)

At BEDFORD according to the teacher, boys want music shops, recording studios, sport, the car plant, and garages. Girls have clearer aims and are better organised. The EBL figures for 2007 of 12 girls and one boy at BEDFORD taking up Hair and Beauty placements bear out the above comments.

At CUMBRIA there was a similar gender division in work placements undertaken in 2007 with, according to EBL data, 11 girls and one boy taking up Hair and Beauty placements and 18 girls compared to 8 boys being placed in schools.

Teacher A: Girls go into hairdressing or schools.

Teacher B: Yes

Teacher A: There is a general split between computer work, office work, shop work. Boys tend to do leisure

Teacher B: Engineering, leisure and mechanics

Teacher A: Girls tend to do hotels. (Teachers, CUMBRIA)

The CUMBRIA teachers also noted that the girls were more motivated and organised. They also commented on another gender difference in the work placements. Nursery and primary schools were easy to arrange and a 'safe' choice for less confident students, mainly girls. The equivalent for less confident boys, and for those who weren't motivated to search for a placement, was to do their work experience in their own school. Some boys chose primary because they saw it as a potential future career, whereas for many girls it was the security rather than the career aspect which drew them into primary placements.

Teacher A: But I also think that those who might be frightened, and this might be a girl thing, they end up going back to their primary schools. They might have no intention whatsoever of really wanting to work with kids, whether as the nanny or as the teachers they will go back to their primary school because it's safe.

Teacher B: A lot of them do do that, an awful lot of them do.

Teacher A: And also it's an easy option to get organised and to get sorted. Because our primary schools round here are very good at putting together workers for its packages.

Teacher B: They will often take four or five pupils for us and most of those go if they can.

Are there boys who do that?

Teacher B: Some boys, yes. But more of the boys go because they are thinking of going into teaching.

Teacher A: Yeah, whereas the girls it's a safety thing.

Is there a sort of equivalent safety thing for boys apart from schooling...perhaps not?

Teacher A: Well it is the majority of boys that don't, last year

Teacher B: We had more boys in school as the safety comfort zone of staying in zone and some of those were the cheeky charlies.

Teacher A: And the majority of parents that phone up going 'ooh I don't know what to do', they're for boys who aren't sorted. The girls seem to get their heads together.

Teacher B: They're more self motivated.
(Teachers, CUMBRIA)

In view of the statement in the DfES guide for schools (DfES 2002a) that staff placing students should ensure that the students do not feel 'uncomfortable', the comment that being 'frightened... might be a girl thing' may perpetuate the stereotype of girls seeking the 'safety thing'. The DfES guidelines are clear that staff should aim to counter 'gender stereotyping', increase 'students' confidence' and challenge 'under-achievement'. The problem for teachers is how to relate these injunctions to the principle of student choice.

We turn now to the two lowest SES schools. Both schools gave a few examples of non-gender-stereotypical placements.

You would think most girls would want to go to nurseries and hairdressers but we've had a couple of lads go to hairdressers, one quite happy to go to a nursery. That's their choice. One found his own, we've got a very local hairdresser. There's a nursery as well, one girl found her own there and Connexions put another placement on the portal and the boy was very happy to go there. So I'm not fazed by that at all. I remember doing some research where I was reading something about careers people advising students and whether they supported those stereotypical choices and this person said 'well I suppose if they were really sure they wanted to do it'. Immediately we could see that students wouldn't be encouraged into areas which weren't the norm. (Teacher, DEVON)

However, the teacher's comment that 'you would think most girls would want to go to nurseries and hairdressers' indicates the assumptions in play during the allocation process at DEVON.

ESSEX was different from the other schools in its ethnic composition.

How significant is the fact that you have a large Asian population, mainly Muslim, a significant African Caribbean population as well...?

Their aspirations are quite low and the deprivation is quite high and a lot of people don't have jobs, so the kids have no role models apart from perhaps older brothers and sisters. Of course girls aren't allowed to travel and then we do have a small number of girls who aren't even allowed to go to further education college, their parents won't allow them. We do have a small number in the 6th form who do art or English just so they can continue education because they aren't allowed out. (Staff ESSEX)

The school attempted to counter gender segregation by linking their work placements to their vocational courses which were chosen to appeal to both girls and boys.

How much of a gender thing is there in all this, in terms of the sort of choices your students made, the constraints they may be under from parents and the extent to which you are able to perhaps challenge some of those barriers? Is that a big issue, girls choosing 'girls' things' and boys going down the garage?

There are two boys doing hairdressing this year but no girls doing motor vehicle things. But we tend to try and choose subjects in the main that would appeal to both. Like media is both, sport is both, health and social care does tend to be a bit girly but we have got quite a lot next year going out doing an NVQ in business. They are in year 9 at the moment and for their options they have chosen to either do business, admin or retail, but they are going to get a

qualification out of it and they are going on a one day a week placement in work and being assessed through work, so by the end of year 11 they will have a level 2 qualification and they are mixed. (Teacher, ESSEX)

The relationship between gender differentiation and class differentiation in distribution among placements is a complex issue which our research was only able to touch upon. However, there is one finding from our study: it appears that professional occupations are less gender differentiated than working class jobs, and therefore it is in schools with low SES pupil composition that there is more likely to be gender differentiation in the choice of work placements. The data from EBL bears this out in that there is far less gender differentiation in the legal and medical placements than in, for example, hair and beauty placements (Figure 14).

Finding 4: Professional occupations are less gender differentiated than working class jobs, and consequently gender differentiation in work placements was not a factor at the high SES school, in contrast to the other schools.

Part 4: Student and school roles in the allocation process

Previous research on gender and work placements has noted that the allocation process is the product of two factors: student self-allocation and school allocatory processes, in which we include the role of Connexions, Trident and similar brokers. In the study by Francis *et al.* (2005):

Asked about methods of allocating placements, 11 of the 16 work experience coordinators responded. Of these, over half (6) reported that at their school the majority of placements undertaken by pupils are identified by pupils themselves.

Three said that a majority of pupils choose from a list of options presented to them, and one explained that a majority are allocated a place by the coordinator. In contrast, seven said that no pupils have their placements directly allocated by the coordinator, and a further three said that less than half their pupils have their placements allocated for them. This trend for pupils to be allowed to identify their own choices of placement, which is encouraged at EBP level, reflects the 'freedom of choice' ethos which emerged from the questionnaires and interviews with practitioners. Such individual approaches and contacts with employers by pupils were actively supported and viewed as 'entrepreneurial'. Nationally, there are of course different systems for placement take-up and allocation in schools, with the proportions that are chosen by individual pupils varying from school to school. However, individual identification of placements is always evident to some extent and currently appears to be preferred in some locations. (Francis *et al.* 2005, pp19-20)

Osgood *et al.*'s (2006) research similarly noted the range of allocatory practices:

The schools visited rely on third-party brokers, such as Trident and Connexions, to varying degrees. In some schools virtually all placements are arranged through this means. For example, one school we visited relies on the local Education Business Partnership for approximately 80% of the placements, with the vast majority of the rest arranged by the school (which has developed strong contacts with local business). In others, students and/or their parents are active in arranging work experience. (Osgood *et al.* 2006, p32)

Low Directive and High Directive schools

We can place schools on a spectrum from Low Directive to High Directive, ranging from schools which leave allocation for the majority of students to the students themselves to schools which allocate students to work placements selected by the school. How are our five schools located on this continuum? We begin with students' perceptions of the allocation process. The questionnaire asked students to state how they found their work placement.

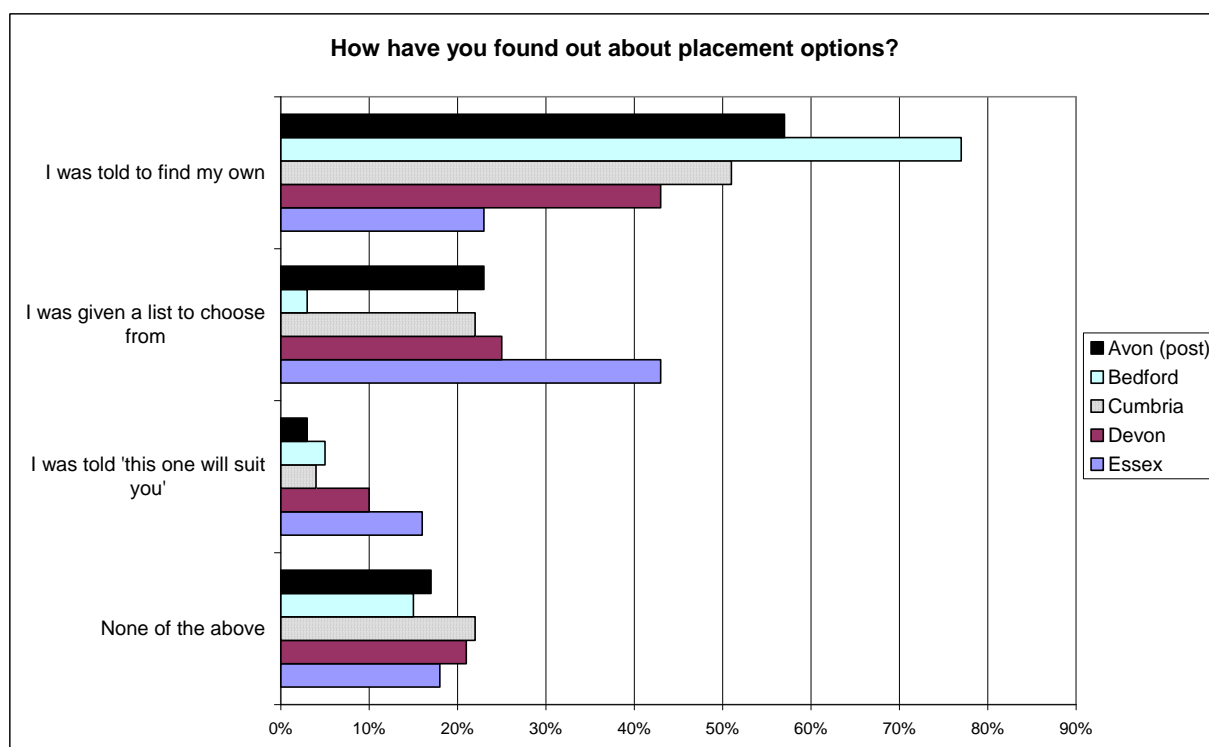


Figure 15: Questionnaire

There were three approaches which the schools took, with significant variations among the schools. One was to invite students to find their own placements without school support. They may of course have made use of contacts, mainly family members. We will call this approach 'Independent'.

A second was to make available a list or database of available placements, either the school's own or one provided by a broker such as EBL or Connexions from which students could choose. We will call this approach 'School Supported Independent'.

A small minority of pupils reported that they had been told that a particular placement would suit them. We will call this approach 'School Directed'. This more directive approach by the school encompasses schools both making strong recommendations and actually allocating specific placements. Student responses do not allow us to distinguish with precision between these two, but in any case even in High Directive schools there tends always to be an element of negotiation.

SES	Schools	%		
		Independent	School Supported Independent	School Directed
High	AVON	57	23	3
Middle	BEDFORD	77	3	5
	CUMBRIA	51	22	4
Low	DEVON	43	25	10
	ESSEX	23	43	16

Figure 16: Questionnaire

(The above figures do not add up to 100% because the option 'none of the above' has been omitted.)

The large majority of placements were selected by the students themselves, either by making contact directly without any assistance from the school, often by using family contacts, or by making use of a database of placements provided by the school and/or Connexions or similar agencies.

The overall pattern shows a correlation of school SES and level of Independence of student choice, but it is qualified by the distinctive school-effect at BEDFORD, with its emphasis on a policy of student choice.

We look now at each approach in turn to clarify the extent to which there is evidence of a pattern of class differentiation. We begin with the students who said that they were told to find their own placement.

(In this and the following tables we have omitted the scores for 'None of the above'. The probable explanation for these responses is that students viewed each category literally and only marked 'I was told to find my own' if those precise words were used. With hindsight a more useful category might have been 'I was encouraged to find a placement on my own or with the help of my family contacts'. Certainly the member of staff at BEDFORD stated that students were explicitly told to find their own placements. This is borne out by the data below.)

'Independent'

SES	Schools	Independent (Told to find own) %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON		57	
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA	77	51	
Low	DEVON ESSEX		43	23

Figure 17: Questionnaire

There is a significant difference between BEDFORD, with the highest Independent score, and ESSEX with the lowest. There is a social class correlation here: the two schools with the highest Independence scores are the two with the highest SES, and the school with the lowest Independence score is the school with the lowest SES rating.

'School Supported Independence'.

SES	Schools	School Supported Independence (Given a list) %		
		High	Middle	Low
High	AVON		23	
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA		22	3
Low	DEVON ESSEX	43	25	

Figure 18: Questionnaire

Three of the schools, across the SES range, record a similar percentage of around a quarter of the respondents. Two schools stand out: BEDFORD, with an almost negligible percentage, and ESSEX, with almost half the responding cohort. The extent to which schools provide support for choice (often through the use of

databases of workplaces) is governed by school-effect factors – i.e. school policy – rather than by school SES status.

‘School Directed’

SES	Schools	School Directed (Told will suit you) %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON			3
Middle	BEDFORD			5
	CUMBRIA			4
Low	DEVON ESSEX	16	10	

Figure 19: Questionnaire

We can contrast the School Supported Independence approach with the School Directed approach which some students experienced. By Directed we mean that the school plays an active role in influencing or shaping students’ choices. We recognise that the boundary between these two categories is not precise. It is difficult to establish precisely when recommendations become so strong that they dictate choices. Nevertheless the distinction is sufficiently clear to enable us to identify a clear class pattern here. The two lowest SES schools adopt a more Directive approach in the view of a significantly higher (though still small) percentage of students. On the part of ESSEX this seems likely to explain how the school has a comparatively higher number of placements in professional areas (EBL figures show that in 2007 ESSEX had more students placed in legal work placements than either of the two middle SES schools.)

The social composition of the catchment area of DEVON is similar to that of ESSEX; however, the work experience programme is organised differently with DEVON expecting its students to find their own placements. The more directive approach of ESSEX staff, as perceived by the students, can be seen to have had a positive impact upon the range of placements their students have undertaken in comparison with DEVON students. This is particularly noticeable with regard to medical, legal and office/banking placements (see Figure 4).

Further evidence is provided by another question in the questionnaire. Students were asked to rank how they perceived their degree of choice about work placements (Figure 20). As the figures for AVON students’ perceptions of their level of choice steadily rise it is noticeable that ESSEX students’ level of choice declines.

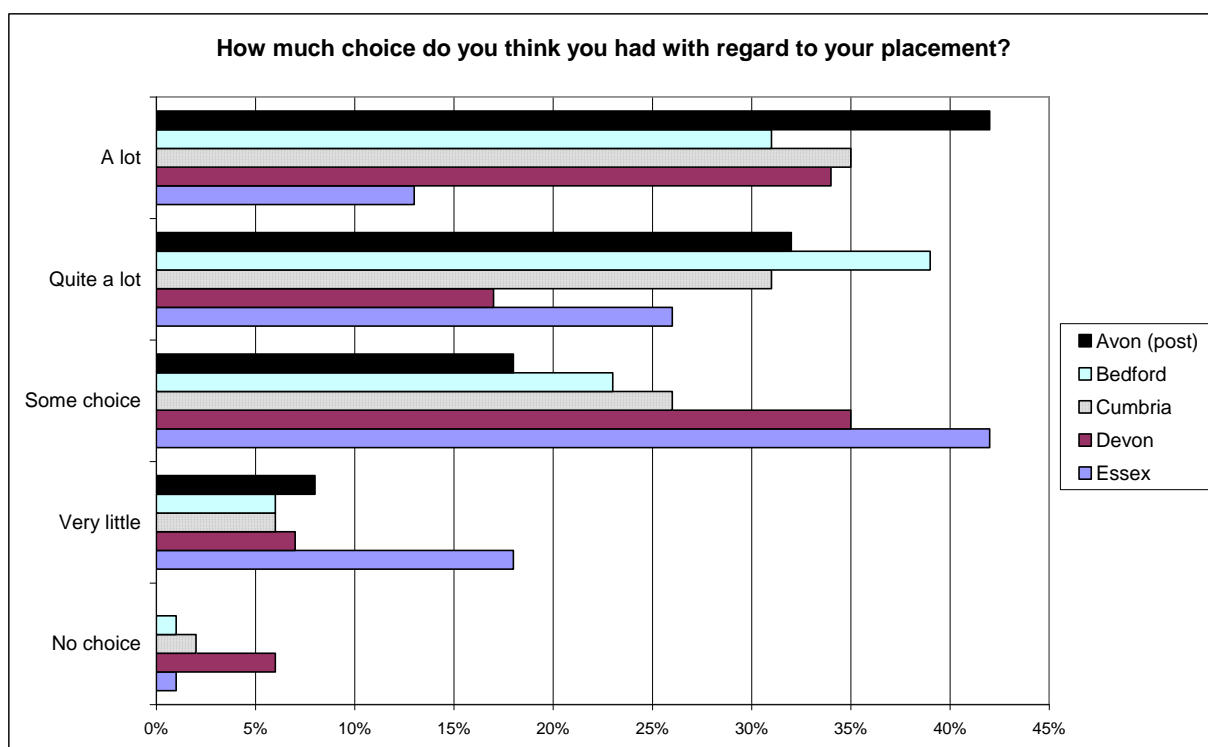


Figure 20: Questionnaire

We condensed the above categories of responses into three, as follows.

SES	Schools	How much choice? %		
		None/very little	Some	Quite a lot/A lot
High	AVON	8	18	74
Middle	BEDFORD	7	26	66
	CUMBRIA	8	23	70
Low	DEVON	13	35	51
	ESSEX	19	42	39

Figure 21: Questionnaire

Again, the class pattern is clear: significantly more students at the two lowest SES schools felt that they had little or no choice, while the students at AVON record the highest percentage stating that they had quite a lot or a lot of choice. There is also a school-effect factor: significantly fewer students from ESSEX felt they had a lot of choice with regard to their placement in comparison with students from the other four schools.

The issues of choice, support and direction were explored further in interviews with students. They were asked how they had obtained their placements. As shown in Figure 22 below, the majority of students stated that they had found their placement on their own and/or with the help of a contact (usually family or friends). ESSEX has by far the highest number of students referring to support from Connexions in arranging their placement. (This is the perception of the students. When discussing the situation with EBL their spokesperson said that they, not Connexions, identify available work experience placements at the request of the school and that ESSEX did not utilise this service in 2006.)

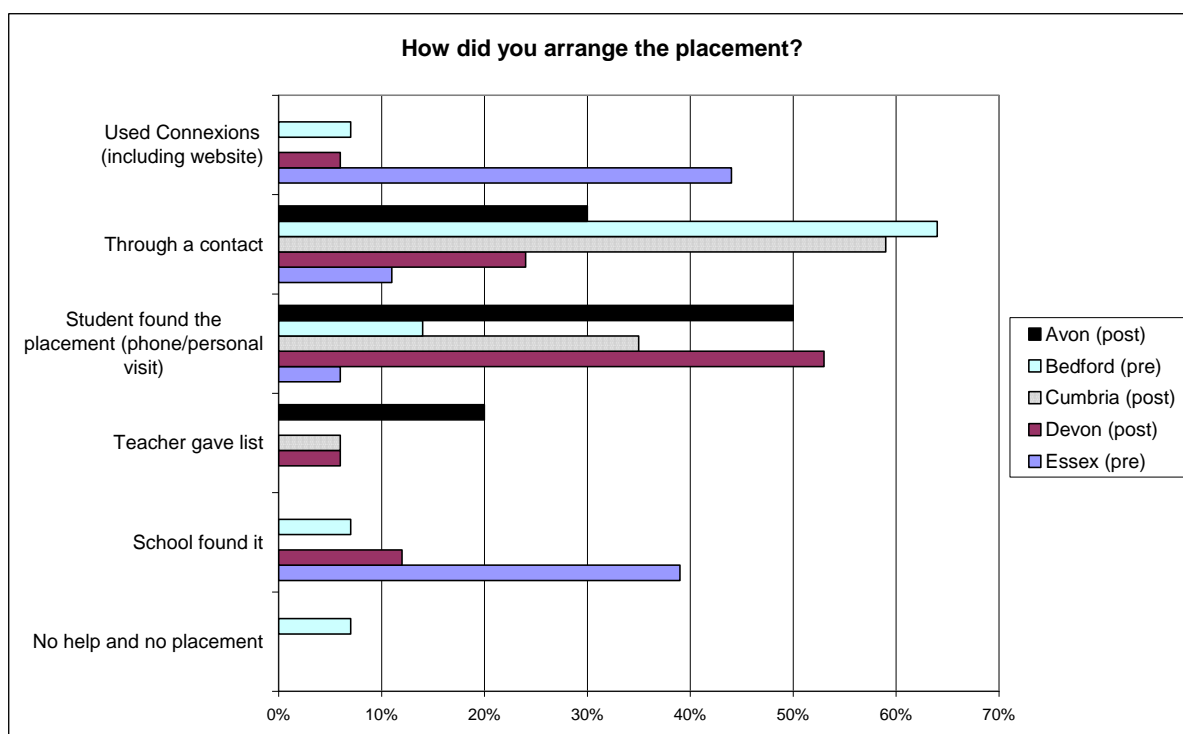


Figure 22: Interview

In order to compare the five schools in terms of their approach to placement allocation, we combined the percentages of the above responses 'Student found the placement' and 'Through a contact' to form the category 'Independent'. Similarly we combined the two responses 'Used Connexions' and 'Teacher gave list' to form the category 'School supported independent'. The response 'School found it' forms the category 'School directed'.

SES	Schools	%		
		Independent	School Supported Independent	School Directed
High	AVON	80	20	0
Middle	BEDFORD (+ 8% no help+no placement)*	78	7	7
	CUMBRIA.	94	6	0
Low	DEVON	76	12	12
	ESSEX	17	44	39

Figure 23: Interview

The proportions differ from the questionnaire sample but the positioning of the two lowest SES schools is the same: significantly more School Directed. Again, ESSEX has a distinctive approach: far more school support and direction and far less independent choice than the other schools.

We can now summarise our findings as follows:

Finding 5: Overall, school SES correlates inversely with how Directive the school is. The higher the SES of the school the more student Independence. However, the extent to which Independence is supported by assistance from the school is a school-effect factor (i.e. a matter of school policy independent of its SES).

The CBI report on work experience

At this point we want to comment on the CBI report entitled *Time well spent: Embedding employability in work experience*, published in 2007. It includes the results of a survey of some 1000 school students in nine schools. One question asked who arranged the placement.

Who arranged the placement?

	School		Parents		Yourself	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Who arranged your work experience?	533	51.5	131	12.7	370	35.8

Figure 24: CBI Table (CBI 2007, p28)

The CBI study is not directly comparable with ours because the questions we asked were worded differently. The CBI results differ from our study. In the CBI study the percentage of students who stated that the school arranged the placement is much higher, and the proportion who stated that they found their own placement is much lower. In our view the explanation for this discrepancy between the studies is that the CBI report reduces the complex process of identification of a range of options, the process of choice and/or allocation, and the process of making the arrangements, to three mutually exclusive options. Our findings demonstrate that the process is much less clear-cut, with various combinations of the three factors (and others such as the role of other relatives and contacts apart from parents, as we will address later).

We cannot directly compare our data with that of the CBI; however, if we examine the interview responses to the question 'How did you find your placement?' we can create similar categories. We have subsumed the responses 'The school found it' and 'The school gave me a list' into 'By the schools'. This indicates an above average directive approach by ESSEX School in sourcing student placements compared with the CBI average. Similarly we subsumed the two responses 'I found it (the placement) myself' and 'I found it through contacts' into 'By students and families'. Clearly this may not be wholly accurate, although most students' comments indicated that such contacts were usually their own, perhaps through a part-time job, or their parents and/or relatives. Four of our five schools were strongly above the CBI average in terms of this category. ESSEX responses to the category ('By a central body') is the only one which almost matches the CBI figures. The other schools appeared to make little use of brokers in sourcing placements.

Source	CBI %	AVON	BEDFORD	CUMBRIA	DEVON*	ESSEX
By the schools	28.5	20	7	6	18	39
By students & their families	26.7	80	78	94	77	17
By a central body	44.4	0	7	0	6	44
By another source	0.2	0	0	0	0	0
No response given	-	-	8	-	-	-

Figure 25: Interview

*Figures have been rounded up

Comments made by school staff confirm some of the above data. For example, a teacher at CUMBRIA stated that the school probably only helps about 20 students out of the 200 seeking placements each year, i.e. about 90% find their own placements, most with the help of their parents.

Similarly BEDFORD staff stated that '86% of our students find their own, so we have been quite successful over the past few years with pushing that and trying to get that'. The school strategy at BEDFORD is to encourage students to find their own placements. This same member of staff also identifies a strong parental involvement.

I have never done a survey but from memory I would say that if we looked at those students who find their own placements I would guess that 60% parents have a big influence, maybe even 70%.

The CBI report also collected data from employers. It is significant that this gives a very different picture from the CBI's student data. No explanation is offered in the CBI report, but in our view the explanation is that the CBI report uses the formulation 'employers identify students' as though it is the employers who are actively seeking and selecting students for work placements, whereas the CBI data (as with our own) show that the employers are actually the passive recipients of approaches from students, either directly or indirectly via employees, schools or brokers.

Exhibit 10: How students are identified

	Number	%
Employee contacts	69	78
Direct applications from students	55	63
Direct links with schools	54	61
Broker (eg EBPs, Trident, Connexions or other similar organisation)	30	34

Figure 26: CBI Table (CBI 2007, p23)

(It should be noted that because many employers identify students for work experience through more than one source the percentages in Exhibit 10 add up to more than 100%.)

We cannot compare our data directly with that of the CBI report because our research brief did not involve collecting data from employers. However, the percentages shown in Figure 22 indicate that in our study a high proportion of students from four of the schools involved in this research gained their placements through contacts or by their own direct contact with an employer. The percentage of students using a broker such as Connexions or EBL in the same four schools is far

lower than the figures given by the CBI. The exception in our study is ESSEX, which has a much lower figure than the CBI for students finding their own placement or obtaining it through contacts, and a much higher percentage of students identifying the use of a broker than the figure recorded in the CBI report. We have not been able to find a national picture of the use of brokers by schools to find work placements. It appears that there is substantial variation among schools (and perhaps regionally). Presumably one major factor is the cost of using a broker service.

The CBI report breaks down the data by size of organisation (SME or large) and by sector (services or manufacturing):

How students are identified – by size and sector

	SME	Large	Services	Manufacturing
Employee contacts	66%	85%	70%	88%
Direct applications from students	45%	71%	57%	69%
Direct links with schools	55%	64%	54%	69%
Broker (eg EBPs, Trident, Connexions or other similar organisation)	21%	41%	24%	45%

Figure 27: CBI Table (CBI 2007, p23)

The CBI report comments on these findings as follows:

The responses varied when analysed by size and sector. Employee contacts are more significant for larger companies (employing over 250), with four in five identifying students by that means, compared to two thirds for SMEs. Unsurprisingly, a higher proportion of larger companies (71%) said direct applications from students were a means of identifying students than their SME counterparts (45%). About two in five larger companies use a broker – twice as many as compared to SMEs. Employee contacts proved more significant for manufacturing organisations, with almost 90% of employers identifying students through this route, compared to about 70% for service sector organisations. Almost half of manufacturing and related respondents used a broker – virtually double the figure for service employers. (CBI 2007, p23)

The CBI report does not break down the student data by class (or gender). Further research would be needed to see if there are significant patterns of differentiation, in terms of how arrangements are made, by social class and gender in relation to size of workplace or sector. (We did not have sufficiently detailed information from the participating schools and other research participants in our study to pursue this aspect.)

Our findings also differ from those of Hillage, Kodz and Pike's (2001) study in terms of the extent to which placements were found by the school or a broker.

Overall, the average number of placements found by each source was reported by schools as follows:

1. by schools themselves – 28.5 per cent

2. by students and their families – 26.7 per cent
 3. by a central body – 44.4 per cent
 4. by another source – 0.2 per cent.
- (Hillage, Kodz and Pike 2001, p43)

However, their finding that school SES correlates with greater independent student choice is congruent with the findings of our research.

In summary, 11 to 16 schools, especially those with high proportions of students eligible for free school meals, are most likely to use a central body to source their placements. Conversely, 11 to 18 schools in more affluent areas rely more heavily on students and their parents/families to source placements. Quite why 11 to 16 schools should act differently to 11 to 18 in providing placements is difficult to ascertain. As one might expect, in areas with a high proportion of students on free school meals, there are fewer possibilities for obtaining placements through family networks. (p44)

We are however puzzled by the following statement, given the well-established correlation between 'higher ability students' and their socio-economic status.

Higher ability students were more likely to have found their placement through their own contacts. 43 per cent compared to 33 per cent overall. However, there was little association with economic status as measured by free school meals. (pp45-6)

Part 5: Student choice

There is a large body of research literature in the field of student choice, for example, primary school pupils' choice of secondary school (Lucey & Reay 2000); choice of post-16 provision (Ball, Maguire & Macrae 2000) and career choice (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997) show a consistent pattern of social class differentiation. Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000, p.145) argue that although most young people in their sample displayed a sense of individual choice, in practice their opportunities were stratified:

Social class differences in the modes, processes and points of engagement with the education and labour market permeate the study ... Too much emphasis given to processes of individualisation may obscure the continuation of common routes and fates.

Student choices comprise two elements: the reasons behind their preferences, and their capacity, in terms of social and personal resources, to translate them into practice. The two were related: reasons for choices could be pragmatically governed by what could be easily arranged.

Reasons for student preferences

This section is concerned with the motivations behind the choices made as expressed by the students both in the questionnaire and in interview. In the questionnaire this was an open-ended question and students could give as many reasons as they wished. We have categorised them in the graph below.

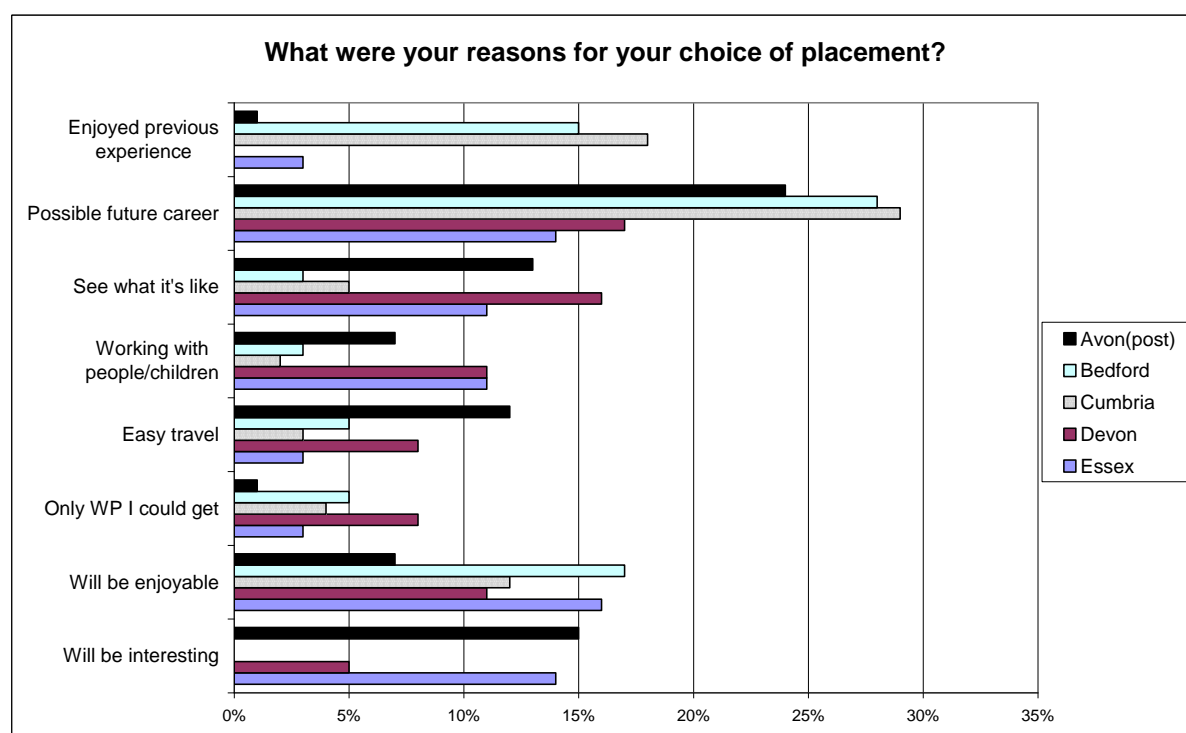


Figure 28: Questionnaire

Link to possible future career

In both the questionnaire and the interview responses on this issue there are some noticeable differences in student responses from the various schools. But the pattern in the interview responses contrasts strongly with the responses given in the

questionnaires. For example, in the questionnaire only 14% of ESSEX students gave 'possible future career' as a reason for their choice, compared to 71% of the students interviewed. For this reason we see the interview data here as illuminating particular issues rather than offering a representative picture.

The highest number of responses from the questionnaires was in the category of 'possible future career'. However, they still represent only a minority of students. For many students relevance to future career was not a factor in work placement choice.

Yes I would like to go to university and study law and history because they are my two interests so I would like to go into something in those two areas. My placement might be something I do as a side career whilst I'm at college or something so it might give me some sort of help but it isn't something I would take up as a career. (Student, ESSEX)

Some parents saw the experience of work as the important thing, rather than its career relevance.

My dad was pleased that I got a placement where I could just experience work. He said that it isn't about going into what you want to do but about learning what you need to do when you get older like getting up on time and knowing how long your lunch break is and stuff like that, it is just a big experience and a wakeup call for what you need to do when you are older. (Student, BEDFORD)

In the case of those students who chose their work placement on the basis of relevance to a possible career, the issue we want to explore is the extent to which there are patterns of class differentiation which might have implications for social reproduction in emerging vocational identities. In a review of the literature Wright (2005) states:

There is a growing body of evidence that occupational preferences start to develop during the early secondary school years (Furlong and Biggart 1999, Marks and Houston 1992) or even at primary school (Foskett and Helmsley-Brown 2000). (p35)

The table below is based on the figures in the graph above (Figure 28).

SES	Schools	'possible future career'. %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON	24		
Middle	BEDFORD	28		
	CUMBRIA	29		
Low	DEVON			17
	ESSEX			14

Figure 29: Questionnaire

There is a significant class difference here between the two lowest SES schools and the others. It is difficult to know how to explain the lower significance given to the 'future career' factor as a reason for choice by the students at the two low SES schools. One possibility is that they have a less developed concept of their employment futures. Another is that links to possible careers were simply less salient in relation to other more immediate factors such as travel distance, to which they gave greater importance than students from the other schools.

I don't know, it was because I knew where it was so I didn't have to spend time looking for it. (Student, DEVON)

A case in point is 'working with children' where students often added a further reason for their choice of placement, namely its proximity to their house.

I wanted a nursery in the first place and that was the closest one to me, so I chose that one. I like working with children anyway and I thought it would be a good experience. (Student, DEVON)

Career relevance is illustrated by the interview responses of school students from AVON:

To gain a valuable insight into the career choice that we plan to make. In imagination one career could be different to actually doing it in practice. (Student, AVON)

Yeah. That's why I chose (my placement) – because I want to be a barrister. (Student, AVON)

Since I was little I've always wanted to do that and I wanted to see whether I would be interested or whether I should just cancel it out as an option. (Student, AVON)

(I chose the area of) retail...mainly because like it was like in the forefront of my mind. I wanted to like, see how it worked behind the scenes kind of thing, of a big company. (Student, AVON)

Students were asked an additional question in the questionnaire as to whether their placement had any similarities to their future career plans.

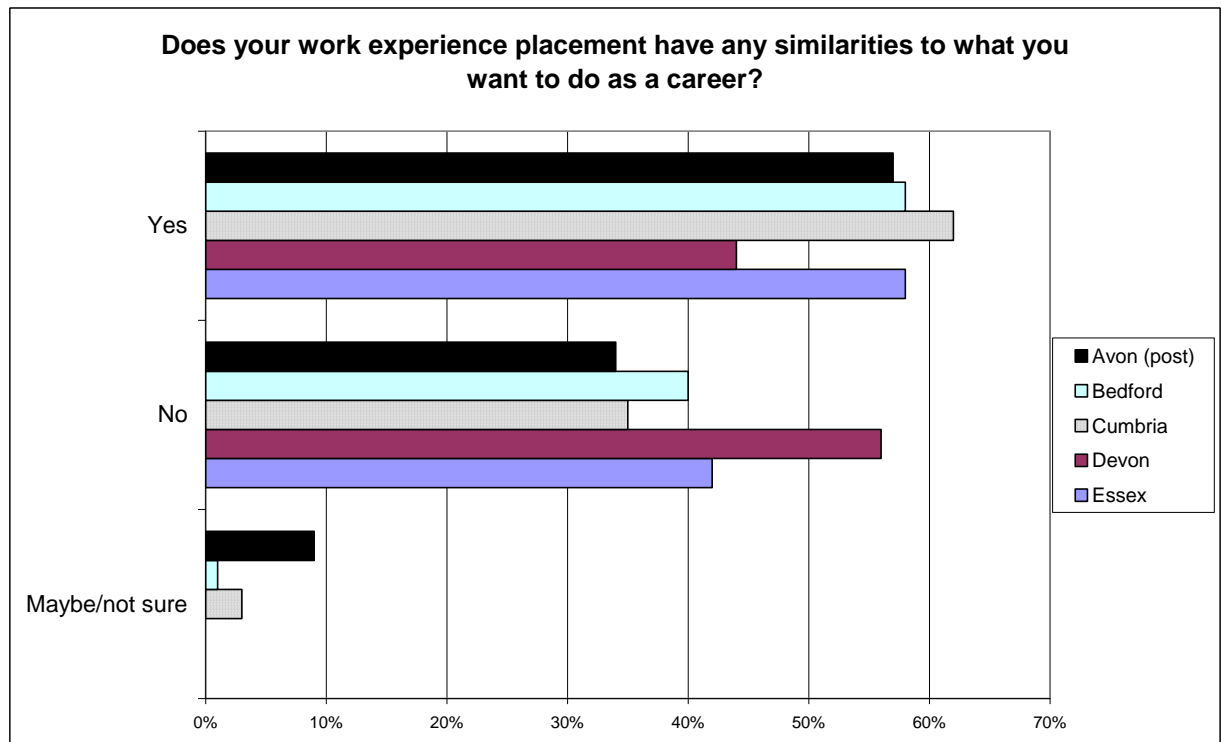


Figure 30 : Questionnaire

Answers fell into three main categories, as shown below together with examples of student responses. The student questionnaire was completely anonymous and therefore only the school's pseudonym appears by these quotes.

Yes, it is the same type of work

All the ESSEX students who chose to add comments were intending to go into law. Clearly for these students the option of a legal placement was very important.

If I go into law having worked in a solicitor's firm will help me if I become a crime scene investigator experience in a forensic lab will help. (Student, ESSEX)

I want to be a lawyer and am going to work with solicitors which I think will be helpful. (Student, ESSEX)

It's a law office and I am determined to learn and understand different ways the lawyers work out problems – I am very interested in this job. (Student, ESSEX)

Yes because I have considered becoming a lab manager or an immunologist. (Student, AVON)

Yes because it will show me what activities I have to do in that work place. (Student, DEVON)

Well I wanted to go into law or teaching and I have got both options as I have already done a placement in court. (Student, CUMBRIA)

This placement will help me to make up my mind about my career

The students at CUMBRIA and BEDFORD show how important work placements can be in helping students to experience different jobs and make informed decisions.

I don't really know what I want to do in the future but I feel this will help me decide. (Student, CUMBRIA)

I'm not sure what career I want to do in the future so I want as much experience of anything as possible so I can see what is right for me. (Student, CUMBRIA)

I used to want to be a teacher but I'm having second thoughts about this so I would like to have the chance to see what it is like. (Student, CUMBRIA)

As my career I want to work with kids so to choose a nursery where I don't know the adults will help me see what it is like. (Student, BEDFORD)

I'm not sure that I want a future career in teaching in a school but hopefully this experience will help me choose. (Student, BEDFORD)

I would like to know what I would do in this desired job. (Student, BEDFORD)

AVON students had already completed their placements and their comments reflect this fact:

This work placement has given me experience of how successful someone can become by being on the property market. (Student, AVON)

It made me think about other careers – therefore changing my view. (Student, AVON)

I found it very helpful that I was allowed to do two weeks – each at a different place. It allowed me to make comparisons and get a much fuller experience. (Student, AVON)

I would now consider a profession in teaching. (Student, AVON)

It benefited me in more ways than I first imagined, and has opened very important doors for me. (Student, AVON)

No, it has nothing to do with my future career

There were several vehement responses here with students making it very clear that they would not want to work in such a job.

(I learnt) That I don't want to work in a supermarket and that even if I don't like something I've got to sometimes do it. (Student, DEVON)

I don't want to do anything to do with kids, although I knew that anyway. I didn't really learn anything particularly about the job. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Nothing really just normal work like how to use a photocopy. I wasn't really too, I was just trying to see. I was just trying to see if it was any good at all or it might interest me a bit but it didn't really. So I learnt that I don't want to do that. (Student, AVON)

Pharmacology isn't quite where I want to go in medicine – I want to go further. (Student, AVON)

I was just trying to see. I was just trying to see if it was any good at all or it might interest me a bit but it didn't really. So I learnt that I don't want to do that. (Student, AVON)

However, when specifically asked in interview if their placement had any similarities to their future career plans, the majority of students answered in the affirmative, the exception being DEVON students with 55% responding that there was no similarity.

We turn now to the teachers' views. At AVON the teacher said that the students wanted placements which had some relation to their future career, either in the same occupational sector or at least in a professional setting.

They would like it to be. Obviously they see the great benefit of a work experience, if you can get some experience of what you are considering to do in the future. And that's a big bonus isn't it? If they can't they want something that's as close to it as possible.

We asked the AVON teacher if there were placements in other areas of working life, such as manufacturing industry. The answer revealed how parents saw a class division within the workplace.

It's quite a deep question really, a deep answer to why some of these things don't happen. Some of the parents will have experience of working in an industry and probably mainly in a management role or something like that and we have had people going to places like British Aerospace, Lucas Aerospace, working in a drawing office, that sort of thing and then there is this ceiling of where they would not want their child to go and experience. The other side of things, as it were, because they would never want them in the manufacturing hands-on side of things. I don't think I can remember anybody in that sort of environment, so in a manufacturing type of things, it tends to be a drawing office, in the office as it were, not the production office, accounting that sort of thing, materials in materials out type of environment, so we don't really get them involved in this sort of shop floor, or equally building or anything like that.

[...] There will be an element of certain parents who are quite aspirational who would see it as not something that they would want for their child to be in certain elements of employment.

The staff at BEDFORD also felt that students chose placements on the basis of relevance to possible future careers.

What do you feel are the main things that your students are looking for when they choose a placement?

I think for many of them it is that they would like to go and work in an environment that perhaps has some relevance to what they might do in the future.

In contrast to the assumption on the part of the BEDFORD staff that many of their students selected 'relevant' work placements, the students themselves talked more about having contacts or friends at their placement and stressed the importance of feeling 'comfortable'.

Some of my friends are going there with me which made me a bit more comfortable about doing it. (Student, BEDFORD)

I'm going because my dad works there. I have been there before and I know some of the people so it will be comfortable. (Student, BEDFORD)

At ESSEX student choices also related to future careers, but in contrast to the aspirations of high and middle SES schools shops featured largely in their choices.

I would say probably about half of them have some idea about what they want to do, but most of them want to go and work in JD Sports, you know, or mobile phone shops.

When you say 'what they want to do', do you mean in their future?

Yes, in their future.

However, there were some students at ESSEX with professional aspirations. Some, for example, wanted to become lawyers.

How realistic an aspiration is that?

For some of them I would say very, certainly for something in law, and we have got quite a few places in solicitors' offices and things like that. We are trying to push professions and we do have input from the health service and I think about three girls went off to be nurses and they did placements in doctors' surgeries and things like that.

Finding 6: There is some evidence that work placement link to future career is less significant for students at low SES schools.

We turn now to some of the other reasons, apart from possible career relevance, which students gave for choice of work placement.

Previous experience

Students did not clarify what they meant by 'enjoyed previous experience' in their questionnaire responses. It seems likely that for most it referred to previous experience of part-time jobs. The National Education Business Partnership Network (2003) claims that for most young people their work experience placement is the 'most significant contact with the world of work that they have before entering employment' (quoted in Osgood p307). However, according to Hamilton,

Work experience is one small, but nonetheless important, part of pupils' introduction to the world of work. Many pupils have part-time jobs which provide them with workplace experience: 45% of pupils from the Higher Still study were in part-time paid employment. However, pupils were doing a much narrower range of jobs than was on offer in the work placement scheme. (Retail or hotel and catering work were the most commonly mentioned part-time jobs. (Hamilton 2003, p3)

For some students their response may have referred to their previous experience as a pupil in their primary schools.

(I chose my old primary school because) When I was there I really enjoyed it so I thought it would be nice to go back there and re-live it. (Student, CUMBRIA)

It was my primary school there so I know all the teachers really well and I love to work with kids. (Student, BEDFORD)

Interest and enjoyment were important factors in their decision making for a sizeable minority of the students.

(I chose) the first (placement) because I love sport anyway so I'm really interested in that. (Student, BEDFORD)

I enjoy working with computers and phones and stuff. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Because I like doing computing. (Student, ESSEX)

I was interested in office work. (Student, ESSEX)

Part-time or summer job

Another factor in some students' choices was whether the placement might offer the opportunity of a part-time or summer job.

(I chose this placement) because it would be a job I would like to do through university, a part-time job just to earn some money. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Five students specifically stated that this was the principal reason for applying to a particular placement. Retail placements offered the most opportunities. Some were seeking the discounts that they would obtain as employees from sports, music or clothes shop. In some cases students explained that the reasoning behind seeking a job likely to offer part-time employment was because they wanted to save up in preparation for further study and/or university. The choice of a retail chain store was also mentioned by some students as being deliberate because they felt the chain would be prepared to transfer them to a branch in their future university town. Such comments came predominantly from the higher SES schools.

(I chose) retailing, because I want a part time job, which is why I chose it. (Student, ESSEX)

(I chose retail because it) is something I think I might like to do as a part time job while I was doing further education. (Student, ESSEX)

At CUMBRIA it was reported that some of the more academic girls preferred a hairdressing placement, because of the 'flair' of it, and perhaps also because it may lead to a Saturday job.

Quite a few of our more academic young ladies, even our gifted and talented sometimes might go into hairdressing because they like the artistic and flair of it and customer relations. They might even be thinking that they want a Saturday job, so they don't look career wise but they look at what's open to them at the moment and they want to have a go. (CUMBRIA Staff)

The importance of using a work placement to obtain a Saturday job seemed to be less of a feature of student choices at AVON.

There are people that have applied to do that [...] but there has been a small number, without me looking at the whole database, and seeing where we are all at, but they certainly wouldn't seem to stick out to me that those sort of things are happening very much. [...] I can understand it and I mean and if you've got no other criteria. It's a perfectly good one to do really, isn't it? (AVON staff)

There is insufficient evidence here of class differentiation in the importance attached by some students to the possibility of a part-time job as a factor in work placement or the reasons they gave for it.

Factors constraining student choices

Travel

One factor in students' placement choice was travel distance, a factor also noted by Francis *et al.* (2005):

As travel to work experience placement is for many pupils limited by cost and issues of safety, the geographical spread and location of businesses limits placement opportunities. (p15)

Other things being equal, it is not surprising that students should prefer shorter rather than longer travelling times to their placements.

I wanted a nursery in the first place and that was the closest one to me, so I chose that one. (Student, DEVON)

For some students choosing a local placement was an easy option, requiring less effort to locate and arrange.

It was just down the road, I didn't necessarily didn't want to be a primary school teacher or anything like that. I wanted to go into retail but I couldn't go and this was easy. (Student, CUMBRIA)

It was because I knew where it was so I didn't have to spend time looking for it. (Student, DEVON)

However, in responses to the questionnaire only a small minority of students mentioned travel as a factor in their choices.

SES	Schools	'easy travel' %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON	12		
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA			5 3
Low	DEVON ESSEX		8	3

Figure 31: Questionnaire

There is some variation among the schools, with the highest SES school recording the highest percentage mentioning 'easy travel' as a factor, but there is no clear class pattern. More significant is how few students mentioned travel distance as a factor in choice of work placement compared to the views of teachers. The teachers at the schools saw travel as a significant factor and this is confirmed by the EBL spokesperson who commented that school staff regularly expressed frustration at EBL meetings that their students and/or their parents were so reticent about travelling any distance to placements. DEVON staff commented as follows:

I think parental pressure as well, because if the parents don't want them travelling say into the City centre that will be a deciding factor as well for safety reasons. Last year I spoke to one or two parents who said they don't want them travelling too far and the students don't seem to want to travel too far either, they don't feel comfortable.

So it's not just the city centre, it's travelling outside this area is it?

Yes, I had one lad whose placement had fallen through and I found him a placement for one week and he said 'Can you make it close, I don't want to travel outside of (the local area)?' They don't want to go to (the next town) or to the City.

What do you think the reasons are for this?

Maybe because outside of school they've never really travelled that far themselves. They've never maybe got on a bus and gone so far.

So it's a general lack of confidence really?

Yes, if a parent last year said a placement had been given to their child in the city centre, 'I don't want them to go there', I felt that I had to agree with that and say I'll find you somewhere else.

Does it make any difference whether they're girls or boys, not wanting to travel?

No, I don't think it does. Because it was a boy who actually said to me that he didn't want to travel far. Equally we had one or two girls last year as well. But this year as well we've had one parent who said to a member of staff they didn't really want her to go far because she's not used to travelling that far. Maybe they don't perceive their life travelling far. We try to explain to them that in just over a year's time you will be going to college and will have to travel a bit further.

The comment 'Maybe they don't perceive their life travelling far' is perhaps indicative of the teacher's assumptions about DEVON students' aspirations.

Staff at ESSEX were asked about the issue of parental influence upon students travelling to placements:

How much do you feel that their choices are shaped by their parents' wishes?

Well certainly the travelling is very much so. (Teacher, ESSEX)

At ESSEX it was seen to be a particularly significant factor for the large number of Muslim girls.

Of course girls aren't allowed to travel and then we do have a small number of girls who aren't even allowed to go to further education college, their parents won't allow them. We do have a small number in the 6th form who do art or English just so they can continue education because they aren't allowed out. (Teacher, ESSEX)

Again

We also have problems with them travelling, they don't want to travel and the parents, especially the girls', won't allow them to travel far. So you can basically go into town and back, or somewhere that is around (the local area), or somewhere that is on one bus route and that is about it. (Teacher, ESSEX)

This was also a factor at the more middle class schools. For example, at BEDFORD:

Believe it or not, some of them are influenced by how far they have to travel. That is quite an issue for our 15 year olds and we do have parents who say that is too far for them to travel. (BEDFORD)

There is a difference here in the response of the staff to this situation. The teacher at ESSEX is accepting of the situation ('*Of course girls aren't allowed to travel...*') whereas the teacher at BEDFORD expresses surprise at the students' reticence to travel ('*Believe it or not, some of them are influenced by how far they have to travel.*')

CUMBRIA had tried to find placements the previous year, making use of a broker, for 'gifted and talented' students in science and maths, but the staff found that most students did not want to take them up. The staff said that one reason was that there was an application form and an interview, and another was that most of the placements involved travelling to the other side of the city.

Why did teachers see travel distance as much more significant than the students did in their questionnaire responses? One possibility is that the teachers had stereotyped views of their students in this respect. Another possibility is that students took for granted self-imposed and parent-imposed travel restrictions – in other words, they didn't conceive of work placements beyond limited spatial horizons – and therefore did not register it as a significant factor. This could explain the significantly higher number of AVON students who did actually mention it. For many of them their spatial horizons are wider because the school has a much wider catchment area than local comprehensive schools. Our research does not allow us to draw any conclusions on this issue. If however the teachers' views are accurate it has important implications regarding social equality for the specialist diploma programmes being introduced from September 2008 onwards, where students are expected to travel between institutions to take courses. It seems likely that many students will prefer to stay in an environment with which they are familiar and make do with the courses their school is able to offer, thus restricting the opportunities available to them. This is not likely to have a comparable effect on students at AVON, who are likely to follow traditional academic courses at the school.

Confidence

The travel issue was, in part, one aspect of a wider issue, that of students' confidence in unfamiliar situations. Here we would suggest that there is some evidence that it is class-related. At CUMBRIA

I think some of the young people just find the prospect of going out into the world of work, they just can't bear the thought of it so if they keep putting it off and putting it off they might not have to do it. So that could even be the ones who are quite motivated in school, but the prospect of actually going out into the world of work. And they don't like to say it 'I'm frightened to death, I can't do this, please don't make me do it.' So there are some that would perhaps actually reach into that category. And it was some of those last year that we actually had to keep in school and we just couldn't believe why they weren't actually out there in the world of work, but it was the prospect of going out from the comfort zone of school that just frightened them. And it's not nice to say 'I'm frightened, I can't do it'. (Staff CUMBRIA.)

We see once again how the pressure upon school staff to ensure students feel 'comfortable' (DfES 2002a) obliges staff to draw back from stretching boundaries – as with CUMBRIA's unsuccessful attempt to encourage their gifted and talented students to look further afield. As noted previously, many girls choose primary schools for the comfort factor and boys select their own secondary schools for the same reason.

However, at AVON confidence was not mentioned as a significant factor, perhaps because the middle class habitus of both home (for the large majority of students) and school inculcated in all their students the confidence needed to cope with work placement situations.

Finding 7: There is some evidence that students at higher SES schools tend to be more confident in their choice of work placements.

Influences on student choice

Our focus now shifts from an examination of the types of placements students had chosen and the reasons for their choices to a consideration of the role of others in influencing their choices. This section expands upon our initial examination of the allocation process with regard to the directive nature of the school staff's role.

In the questionnaire students were asked who had influenced them in the identification of their placements, how people had helped them with their choices and the degree of choice they felt they had. This range of questioning allowed us to ascertain to what extent students felt they were making their own choices and to what degree the different schools were interventionist in the allocation of work experience placements.

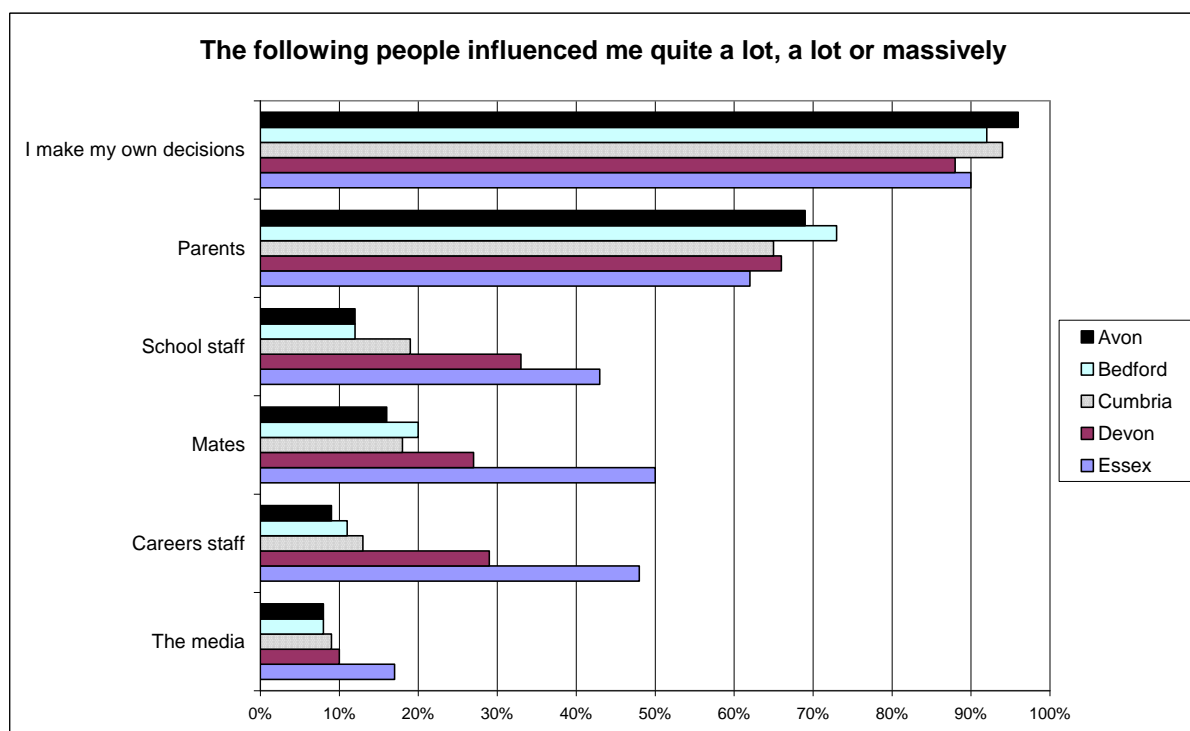


Figure 32: Questionnaire

Students across the five schools believed overwhelmingly that they made their own decisions but over 60% at each of the schools stated that their parents were key influences upon their choices. There were no significant differences between the schools on this issue.

However, there were significant differences between the two low SES schools and the other three schools regarding the influence of school staff, mates, careers staff

and the media. Students at ESSEX in particular mentioned these influences, and also a significant minority of DEVON students.

Influence of school and careers staff

We are particularly interested in how students perceive the role of school staff (in which they tended to include visiting staff from Connexions and other broker organisations). In the table below we have aggregated the influence of school and careers staff.

SES	Schools	Influence of school and careers staff %		
		Not at all/not much	Quite a lot/a lot/massive	
High	AVON	90	10	
Middle	BEDFORD	88	12	
	CUMBRIA	84	16	
Low	DEVON	69	31	
	ESSEX	55	45	

Figure 33: Questionnaire

The table shows very significant differences among the schools. ESSEX has the highest response in the category 'Quite a lot/massive' which is presumably due to its distinctively more interventionist approach compared to the other schools. There are clear social class differences.

SES	Schools	Influence of school and careers staff %		
		Higher	Medium	Lower
High	AVON			10
Middle	BEDFORD			12
	CUMBRIA			16
Low	DEVON		31	
	ESSEX	45		

Figure 34: Questionnaire

Students in the two lowest SES schools say that they are influenced by staff very much more than students in the other schools. 45% of ESSEX students refer to high school/career staff influence compared to only 10% of the students at AVON selecting this category.

The interviews with students revealed a greater degree of influence assigned to staff but a similarly uneven pattern of distribution as shown in Table 8 below.

SES	Schools	Influence of school and careers staff %		
		Massive	A lot	Quite a lot
High	AVON			21
Middle	BEDFORD			23
	CUMBRIA			32
Low	DEVON		62	
	ESSEX	91		

Figure 35: Interview

The explanation of this social class difference would seem to lie in a combination of two factors. One factor is that the two low SES schools, and especially ESSEX, are perceived by their students to operate a more interventionist policy. The other is that

students attending the three higher SES schools possess greater cultural capital in this respect, including a more developed 'career' perspective, and more advantageous social capital through their parents, rendering them less subject to, or perhaps less in need of, the influence of teachers, careers staff, and others.

Finding 8: Students at the low SES schools were more influenced by school staff.

Influence of peers

Continuing this examination of how students perceived the influence of others upon their decision-making, there was a marked difference between the high and low SES schools with regard to the influence of peers as shown in Figure 37 below. Over 50% of ESSEX students felt that their choice of work placement was influenced by their 'mates' compared with only 16% at AVON, the highest SES school.

SES	Schools	Influence of peers/mates %	
		Not at all/not much	Quite a lot/a lot/massively
High	AVON	84	16
Middle	BEDFORD	80	20
	CUMBRIA	82	18
Low	DEVON	73	27
	ESSEX	49	51

Figure 36: Questionnaire

Finding 9: Students at the low SES schools were more influenced by their peers than students at higher SES schools.

Influence of parents on choice of work placements

Our questionnaire responses regarding work experience placements showed that between 62% and 73 % of students said that their parents had substantial influence on their choice of work placement.

SES	Schools	Influence of parents %	
		Not at all/not much	Quite a lot/a lot/massive
High	AVON	32	68
Middle	BEDFORD	27	73
	CUMBRIA	35	65
Low	DEVON	38	62
	ESSEX	38	62

Figure 37: Questionnaire

The two low SES schools have the lowest figures for parental influence but the difference is marginal. The important issue is what the nature of the influence was, and the extent to which social class was a differentiating factor. Previous research findings concerning the influence of parents on the decision-making of young people shows that social class is a significant factor. They are conveniently summarised by Wright (2005).

Most research reviewed has found that the family (and particularly parents) influence the decision-making of 14 to 19 year olds. Family background in

relation to social class has already been discussed. However, the research evidence on how far and in what ways the family influences decision-making processes is mixed. [...]

The nature and level of parental influence and intervention in young people's decision making appears to be affected by the linked variables of social class, academic attainment and planned destination at 16. Middle-class parents/parents of high achievers/parents of those who intend to stay on in education and training were likely to take a more active role in the decision-making process, expressing clear aspirations, helping them gather information on different post-16 options. Working-class parents/parents of lower achievers/parents of those who intend to leave at 16 on the other hand were more likely to cede decision-making to their child, but typically expressed concerns about or backed the decisions made (Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000; Kysel, West and Scott 1992;). Similarly, Wikeley and Stables (1999) found that parental advice on subject options at 14 was most significant for pupils whose parents were in professional occupations. They suggest that this cultural capital was not available for pupils from the lowest social class groups, possibly resulting in the unrealistic aspirations and a lack of knowledge about what level of education was required for certain jobs they found among such pupils. On the other hand, Brooks (2004) found that the fathers of the working-class students in her sample could take an active role in their son's or daughter's decision-making about higher education.

Parents appear to exert influence over some decisions more than others. Foskett and Helmsley-Brown (2000) found that parents often exerted influence over decisions, particularly that of whether or not to stay on in education and training at 16, through implicitly or explicitly excluding certain options (such as leaving education and training altogether at 16). However, within the parameters of the "framed field of decisionmaking" other decisions (for instance over institution, particular qualifications, subjects) were often left to the young person. (See also Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000). Similarly, Helmsley-Brown (1999) suggests that parents are more influential at some stages in the decision-making process than others. She found that during the 'preliminary search stage' young people gathered information from family (and friends) in an 'informal' manner. She also found that the actions and attitudes of parents were significant at this stage: young people were more likely to consider staying on at 16 if their parents believed a college education was worthwhile. (Wright 2005, pp27-8)

Among parents there was a variation, in the view of teachers, in how important they regarded work experience, with BEDFORD parents being described as wanting 'to take advantage of this one off opportunity' in contrast to some DEVON parents who 'maybe don't see the importance of this' work experience'.

Some (parents) are very supportive because they're organised placements within the family or some are ringing around and ringing me saying they can't find a placement or they're very concerned. I obviously maybe don't hear about the ones who aren't so engaged or maybe don't see the importance of this. (DEVON staff)

The perceptions of the teachers we interviewed were that social class background was a significant factor in the ways in which parents influenced students' work experience choices. The teachers all offered accounts which were couched in terms of social class background. We begin with the two low SES schools.

At DEVON the school's catchment area included an estate with a high level of social deprivation and the teachers interviewed felt that that might lead to low expectations by parents and pupils.

I don't know to what extent social-economic factors and parental influences are there upon the students and they're not encouraged to achieve and aim high. We've got (a large council estate) very close and I wonder if the students have a lot of difficult and challenging issues to tackle at home. Sometimes they say their generation is unemployed and there is poverty and they're not expected to aim very high. (DEVON staff)

At ESSEX the school spoke of a link between poverty and aspirations by parents and pupils.

Their aspirations are quite low and the deprivation is quite high and a lot of people don't have jobs, so the kids have no role models apart from perhaps older brothers and sisters

Why are they so keen to work in a shop?

It sounds awful but it is their background. Most of them come from, shall we say, culturally different situations in quite poor areas. (Postcode XX) where most of our students are from is the most deprived postcode in The City, most unemployed, most over crowded, you name it, it is there. So I suppose their aspirations are very low, so to go and work in the (Shopping Centre), in a shop. And for some of them it gets them out of (the local area) and at the moment that is what a lot of them aspire to.

A lot of what they choose is because their aspirations are low and that is because a lot of their parents don't have jobs. Quite a lot of them don't even speak English and they usually aspire to what their older brother or sister is doing, and in a lot of cases that is working in a shop. (ESSEX staff)

However, some working class parents were seen as having higher aspirations. For example, at BEDFORD:

The one young lady I mentioned earlier, mum works in a canteen and she is certainly not an intelligent mum, but I think mum thinks that she could have done better for herself and I think that she is going to make sure that her daughter is going to do as well as she can because she didn't perhaps take advantage of her opportunities. I suspect that mum is actually living her life through her daughter and perhaps removing some of the choices that the daughter would like...'No, this is what is good for you'...the other ones tend to have a less proactive role, they stand back and say 'look I'm working at such and such because I didn't take my chances'...so those are the two that tend to come through. (BEDFORD staff)

Parents with high aspirations seem natural to the teacher at AVON.

...we have had people going to places like British Aerospace, Lucas Aerospace, working in a drawing office, that sort of thing and then there is this ceiling of where (the parents) would not want their child to go and experience. The other side of things, as it were, because they would never want them in the manufacturing hands-on side of things. I don't think I can remember

anybody in that sort of environment, so in a manufacturing type of things, it tends to be a drawing office, in the office as it were, the production, not the production line... (Teacher, AVON)

Finding 10: Teachers perceived social class differences in parents' aspirations and expectations for their children's careers: parents of students at higher SES schools had higher aspirations.

Social and cultural capital and parental help in finding placements

The questionnaire asked if students had chosen a placement where they had a family connection or knew people. This was a relatively minor factor in the questionnaire responses with little difference in the responses from the different schools. In contrast, it was one of the two most common responses in the interviews, with a clear class pattern in the responses which is not apparent in the questionnaire responses.

SES	Schools	'knew someone there' %		
		High	Middle	Low
High	AVON		22	
Middle	BEDFORD CUMBRIA	50 38		
Low	DEVON ESSEX			14 0

Figure 38: Interview

We have commented before on the possibility of interview data being skewed by a sample which does not reflect the cohort. In addition there may be another explanatory factor. Some students seemed unaware of the degree to which their contacts had helped them obtain their placement. For example, when asked how they got their placement these students responded:

By myself. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Later he remarked that his father owned the company.

I found it by myself. (Student, CUMBRIA)

He added later that 'my aunt's boyfriend, his nephew owns the company'.

Such additional information would not have been forthcoming through the questionnaire data alone. These students would have ticked that they had found the placement by themselves and the use of contacts would not have been identified as a factor.

We begin with typical examples of students making use of family contacts.

My dad works there. (Student, BEDFORD)

It is a different department to where my dad works and I asked him to find it for me. (Student, BEDFORD)

My mum works with the trainers there. (Student, BEDFORD)

Um, my auntie knows someone that works there. So I got into it that way. (Student, AVON)

Oh it's quite near to where I live and my dad knows the guy who owns it. (Student, AVON)

There was a significant class difference in the students who referred to links that parents had with managerial and professional contacts. It was almost exclusively students from the higher SES schools who had this social capital. Contrast the comment made by a DEVON student with those by students from the three higher SES schools

I knew people who went there, workers. (Student, DEVON)

I really wanted to do something to get the experience of working as an office job and my dad's friend owns a business in the centre of the City and he said I could work there for two weeks. It is just an experience getting to know the life of work really. (Student, BEDFORD)

My sister is the concert manager there and I know someone else who works there, so they just chose me, so I am pretty happy with that. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Well I was interested in law and my dad helped me find a placement. It's because well the barrister was a friend of my dad and the judge is a friend of a friend of so I got it sort of like that. (Student, AVON)

I went to lots of stables, but they didn't do placements but my Dad had a friend who owned stables and she knew the manager so I got in contact with them. (Student, BEDFORD)

My uncle works in the bank (where I did my placement). (Student, AVON)

My dad owns the company. (Student, CUMBRIA)

The class differentiation in parents' social capital which students were able to make use of in finding placements is indicated by the following data based on interview responses. (The table is based on the data in Figure 1.)

Parental occupations	AVON	BEDFORD	CUMBRIA	DEVON	ESSEX
Managerial & professional occupations	63%	17%	10%	0%	4%
Intermediate occupations	24%	50%	30%	21%	21%
Lower occupations	3%	33%	35%	45%	33%
Unemployed	8%	0%	25%	28%	38%
Insufficient information to categorise	3%	0%	0%	7%	4%

Figure 39: Interview

It is evident that considerably more social capital was available to the parents of AVON students to facilitate their children's search for work experience in managerial and professional occupations.

Parental attendance at university

The social capital which families can mobilise to secure work placements is often linked to their cultural capital. One indicator is whether family members have attended university. Our data comes from interviews with students.

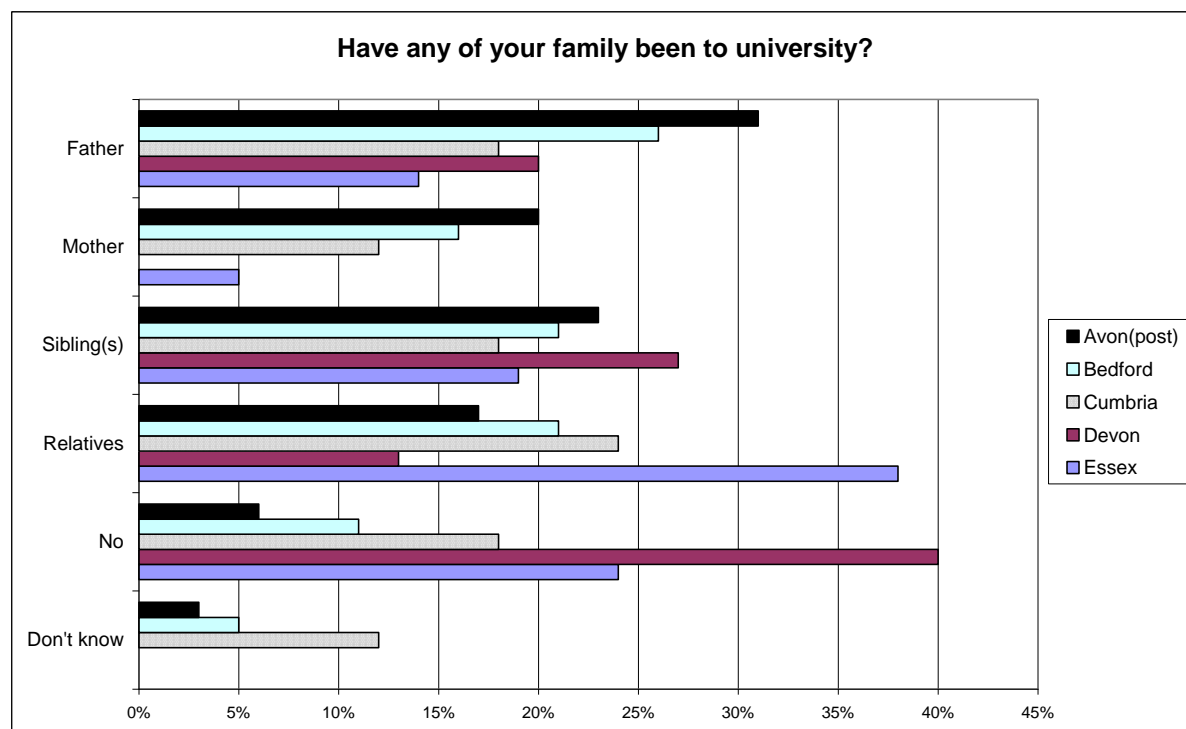


Figure 40: Interview

The pattern corresponds closely to the SES composition of the schools. AVON has the highest percentage of both fathers and mothers who have gone to university. The two low SES schools have the highest number of students with neither immediate family nor relatives having attended university.

University?	AVON	BEDFORD	CUMBRIA.*	DEVON	ESSEX
Parents	51%	42%	30%	20%	19%
Sibling(s)	23%	21%	18%	27%	19%
Relatives	17%	21%	24%	13%	38%
No one	6%	11%	18%	40%	24%
Don't know	3%	5%	12%	0%	0%

Figure 41: Interview

Φηγυρε 7 figures have been rounded up

AVON has 91% of family and relatives who have attended university and 6% with no history of university attendance. These figures offer some indication of the traditional expectations which may be brought to bear on students concerning attendance at university. In the case of the lower SES schools, the lower percentage of parents

having attended university means that siblings and other relatives who go to university can play a particularly important role as role-models.

For some of those with no family history of university there is a certain pride in their statement that 'I am going to be the first one'. Other students make it plain how important certain family members are in encouraging them to consider university or in reducing its unfamiliarity for them:

I'm not sure yet, I'm going to ask my brother because he has been (to university). (Student, ESSEX)

We also note how family tradition encourages some students to follow in the footsteps of their relatives:

My dad got a second degree in engineering, he used to be a manager but he retired and became a taxi driver. My cousin got a degree in law, I'll be the second in my family. (Student, ESSEX)

Findings from student responses concerning class differences in access to placements as a consequence of differences in family social and cultural capital were supported by the perceptions of teachers. They felt that parents in higher SES schools were much more likely to have the contacts to arrange placements in professional workplaces. At AVON:

Some will be better placed for experience than others, but it's always the way, isn't it? It's contacts and things like that. Some will move in circles where perhaps parents, we've got a lot of professional parents around and professional sons and things and they could say 'oh yes, your uncle so and so has got a good place' and others will not be in a position at all. (AVON staff)

Family contacts are particularly vital to access placements in workplace sectors which are often not on school or broker databases, as Francis *et al.* (2005) point out:

As one work experience coordinator pointed out, pupils seeking placements "in a certain field like journalism, and television and music technology type places then they are really going to have to find their own because those employers don't touch us". This lack of employer availability for particular jobs and professions means that only those pupils with the right connections have opportunity to access such placements. (Francis et al 2005, p34)

For students at ESSEX and DEVON managerial and professional placements in general, as well as certain specific employment sectors, were not so easily attainable through parental means. It is at this point where intervention by the school or other agencies becomes essential if the work experience placement is to provide them with the opportunity to expand their horizons.

While most parents at the higher SES schools influenced their children to select managerial and professional placements, class reproduction didn't necessarily entail placements in this category. Some middle class parents wanted to encourage independence in their children and didn't use their contacts. Initiative and independence are also strategies of social reproduction.

I wouldn't like to generalise like that because from the professional parents some will say you are on your own two feet, you sort it out and if it means you

are sweeping the bins at the back of McDonalds because you can't be bothered to sort anything else then that is what you will do for two weeks. That in itself will be a lesson for you. (AVON teacher)

Independent choice without contacts

Without parental influence and contacts the process of finding a placement independently of the school was often more problematic. Where students found their own placements the procedure appears in several cases to have been quite arbitrary with little thought given to the merits of the placement.

I was looking around in shops, I really wanted to work in a sports shop, but I couldn't find one and time was running out so I just picked Superdrug, and I asked if they needed a work placement, and they did. (Student, DEVON)

Yes, I left it until really late so I just asked around loads of shops and Argos said yes. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Yeah I just walked down the road and asked if I could have a placement. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Of those students seeking placements by themselves persistence was clearly a necessary virtue as shown by the two students' accounts below. The random nature of their inquiries indicates a lack of involvement from both school and home:

I just sent off loads of letters to retail outlets and that was the end letter which I got back. I basically just did it all on the phone , because I wasn't planning on going there at all, I sent letters to all the radio stations and the big shops in town like Urban Outfitters but I didn't hear anything. I heard my friends were going to House of Fraser and I thought that would be good experience so I sent one off to there and got it. (Student, BEDFORD)

I tried (local radio station A) and then (local radio station B) but the guy from B said they are not set up yet and A just said no. I then tried theatre companies as well, but I only know a few, not as many as Chris and they all said no and then I tried architect companies but they usually work alone and can't employ people. Then I tried the army base, but I couldn't get through and just got fed up so I just went into a boring one which I am not interested in at all, I am just doing it. (Student, BEDFORD)

Well I still don't have a placement yet. Maybe a theatre group or a primary school because I would like to teach drama when I am older or go into theatre, so I would like to go to maybe (a Local) Theatre or places like that. I tried to do one at a choir at (The City Orchestra) because I sing in one of their choirs and also I have tried at the Youth Theatre which is a drama company that I am in, but I could only get certain weeks...I also tried at the House of Fraser because I thought it would be a good idea but I could only get one week which we are not allowed to do. (Student, BEDFORD)

The above comments are unsurprising from BEDFORD students because the staff made it clear in their interview with us that students were categorically told to find their own placements.

The significant number of students without placements at CUMBRIA is less easily explained; the fact that the emphasis at CUMBRIA is upon the students finding

placements rather than the school could be a factor. However, no AVON or DEVON students who were also expected to find their own placements said that they were without one.

Finding 11: Students at the higher SES schools were much more able to use family contacts to access work placements in professional workplaces.

Part 6: The role of the school in allocating placements

We turn now to the role of the schools in the process of arranging placements. All of them preferred to rely principally on students both choosing and arranging their own placements. All of them also offered various forms and degrees of support. And all of them had to make arrangements for a small minority of students who, for various reasons, failed to make their own arrangements.

Encouraging independent choice

The schools' conception was that work experience was an opportunity to experience something of the world of work, which might be, but was not necessarily, related to any future career. The teacher at AVON described how letters were sent to parents explaining the purpose of the work experience placement.

I think the purpose is really not to particularly get experience of work, because most of them will not be doing the work that they go to and experience as it were. It's just to get them into the idea of perhaps working with people that aren't paid to look after them and enjoy their company, who are doing them a favour and working with other people; getting up on time; arriving, getting some responsibility and getting a bit of feel and change for you know, in 11 or 12 years of schooling they've had. (AVON Staff)

This view that any workplace could provide this experience provided the justification for the relatively Low Direction stance adopted by the five schools. It was reinforced by the view that student independent choice was a key factor in the success of a placement.

I think to an extent that some experiences are more beneficial than others and they do get some, and photocopying for a fortnight and I don't think that is the much good at all. You know, who would want to do photocopying again. Others get very good experiences, I think, and if they can get one that is career orientated in their area than it really is good. Some of them come back a lot wiser, and more focused from work experience, which is where the ones who get their own tend to do better. You know, I mean, we've got two or three that are having interviews at the Rep in the next week because they have very limited places. They actually interview. They make a very big deal out of it, which is fair enough. And of course they really feel as if they've achieved something by getting that far. (Teacher, AVON)

As mentioned previously, CUMBRIA had tried in the past to organise specific placements for their gifted and talented students but this had not been successful.

At the moment we are led by them and try and fit them with something that they want to do because there is no point at this age sending them out and making them do something that they don't want to do because in my opinion any experience is good experience as most of the placements do tend to be very good quality and I just think that you shouldn't make them do something they don't want to do because it won't mean anything to them and they might not even go. (Teacher, CUMBRIA)

For four of the five schools (the exception is ESSEX) the most effective way of meeting student preferences was to encourage them to make their own choices and arrangements independent of the school.

This year we suggested to the Head that as many students could find their own placements as possible

Personally I feel that the students who found their own are hopefully more likely to make a success of it particularly if the student does display challenging behaviours, I found that if they found their own with a relative or friend, somewhere they feel comfortable with then hopefully it will go well for them.

The sense of ownership is theirs?

Yes. (Teacher, DEVON)

However, fostering student independence would only be successful if not only the school but also parents left the student to choose and arrange their placement.

I would like the parents to butt out a bit to be honest; I would like to leave it up to them [i.e. the students]. But then I think our 86% placements would fall to about 14 %. I really do think that would happen because some would decide that they want to do something and do it, and that's great, but as I say, my own son just left it and left it and left it and then it is a case of do as I say. But you can understand why parents take advantage of this one off opportunity. (Teacher, BEDFORD)

As the above comment illustrates, student independence is also in the interests of the school in the sense that it reduces the school's administrative workload. This was the case at ESSEX and AVON

Is that something you encourage or prefer or are you happy to do it for them?

I don't mind really. The way it is working at the moment because it is all new and our bank of employers isn't that big, and I know that fewer employers are doing it now anyway because of the pressures they have got, so if they find their own placement then for me that is a really good thing because they have gone out and looked for it themselves. (Teacher, ESSEX)

Let's be honest, my concern is to get 156 people 156 places. And relax, you know. The more worthwhile they are, great, whoopee. I'm even happier, sort of thing. But there is not enough time provided to go around and check that everybody has got a super placement. All we can do is say that yes, they're insured, and I think to an extent as long as they're insurance-covered then the place would be reasonable. But that might not be the best experience. They might be bored witless after three days, but a lot of them will be very good and I think it's what you make of it. (Teacher, AVON)

Supporting students without placements

We now want to explore in some more detail the ways and extent to which schools exercised influence over the allocation of placements. One group of students for which schools had to make some provision was the small minority who failed to make their own arrangements.

Some students genuinely couldn't find their own. And that was okay, we've tried to help them. I've had parents ring me, children come to me and say I can't find who I've been ringing around so that's fair enough. I do feel sorry

now for about 8 or so students for whom connexions have organised placements for them which have fallen through. (DEVON staff)

CUMBRIA staff discussed whether it tended to be students who were disaffected and whose parents weren't supportive.

Can I pick up on the roughly 20, I know there are probably lots of reasons but do you notice maybe some correlation between those 20 and parents who perhaps aren't as actively involved in supporting them. Is it the students' attitudes? Is there any theme in there for those 20?

Teacher A: I think there is

Teacher B: What would you say the theme was then?

Teacher A: I think it's very often the kids that can't be bothered at school and very often those kids come from parents who don't show any interest in their school work.

CUMBRIA arranged work placements for these students in the school itself.

When they come into school they aren't treated as if they are students because they sign in as an employee, they have an hour's lunch which is different to having the three quarters when they are up in the dining hall. They are allowed to go off site, so long as they sign in and out for health and safety. So all that's explained to them and even that makes their confidence grow a little bit more because they are treated as an employee rather than as a student and that's why sometimes it's more successful if they do that. And that's why we are trying to make the school an employer, rather than their just having to do it in school because they don't know what else to do or where to go.

It was noticeable that this was not a significant factor at AVON

Is there a small number that still can't find...?

My guess is, I'm sure someone is struggling somewhere, but usually from my past experience of people having done it everybody get somewhere. It's the only thing that sometimes goes wrong, some company goes bump on the day that they are meant to take the child and they turn up here sort of thing back at school. But the vast majority seem to be successful in this.

School support for student choice

The principal form of support for students making their own choices was the provision of databases of potential placements. These were either databases compiled by the school itself or ones made available by broker agencies such as Connexions. In the case of databases provided by brokers, further research is needed into the basis on which a list of placements is selected and provided to a school. Are there variations in the criteria according to the perceived needs of different schools? According to the comments made by the students, those at ESSEX made the greatest use of Connexions. This is the account of one student at ESSEX:

When I went to the Connexions room I didn't really know what I was going to do and they were giving me these options, like mostly they just gave people

nursery jobs, but I don't want to do that because I am kind of interested in the medical side. So the Connexions lady said I should try surgeries around my area. So I tried the dental surgery to see how they work there and I have given the forms to them and they will get back to me. (Student, ESSEX)

This comment raises important issues concerning the types of placements which such databases made available. In this case, the database contained nurseries but not surgeries. To what extent did such databases comprise a selective and restricted set of placements which was not fully representative either of students' preferences or of what was actually available in the local area? And insofar as this was the case, to what extent did they perform a socially selective and socially reproductive function, framing the field of choice in ways which tended to steer working class students into working class placements?

If there is some tailoring of databases to individual schools (apart simply from the issue of travel distance) then it may be a form of social differentiation. However, social differentiation may also be the result of the use of self-identification materials by students which tend to confirm existing vocational identities rather than challenge them.

Finding 12: Student choices based on the use of databases of possible work placement vacancies may tend to confirm existing vocational identities rather than challenge them.

More directive school approaches

We have already noted that the boundary between the provision of lists of placements as a resource for student choice and the school using it to make recommendations is a blurred one. At CUMBRIA, for example, they tried to match placements to students in at least some cases.

We also have a number of places secured from the previous year where students have done particularly well and when we go as a visiting teacher we ask if they would be prepared to offer a placement next year, if so 'Same job? What kind of person?' etc., etc., and we keep a bank of those, and as and when we find a student which fits the bill we might well push them in that direction saying 'well actually you can have this placement'. (Teacher, CUMBRIA)

The relationship between vocational courses and student choice

The most prevalent form which schools' more directive approaches took was actively aligning placements with vocational courses. This was the policy at CUMBRIA.

We already offer a BTEC in business and all our students are being encouraged to find placements in the retail sector, because that would support that particular course. We are introducing BTEC leisure and tourism in September and BTEC sport so the students will be expected to find a placement in those areas. And they are pretty well easy to get. But we are also doing an applied science; it will be interesting to see how many students secure a scientific, loosely termed, placement, because they won't do it, and that is our biggest problem. (Teacher, CUMBRIA)

Placements in retail, leisure and tourism, and sport were easy to get, though this was not the case with applied science. At BEDFORD the teacher said 'I teach engineering so I try and get all my students to get relevant jobs, so that is another influence'. At ESSEX too work placements are linked to their vocational courses.

It puts everything they are doing into context and it gives them some reason to do it instead of just coming in and doing a maths lesson. It also gives them ideas earlier and helps them to make the right choices so what they do is sustainable, they don't drop out or realise they have made a mistake; it helps them to make the right choices earlier. (Teacher, ESSEX)

Similarly at CUMBRIA

And we are expanding our curriculum in September to offer more vocational pathways, we already offer a BTEC in business and all our students are being encouraged to find placements in the retail sector, because that would support that particular course. We are introducing BTEC leisure and tourism in September and BTEC sport so the students will be expected to find a placement in those areas. And they are pretty well easy to get. But we are also doing an applied science; it will be interesting to see how many students secure a scientific, loosely termed, placement, because they won't do it, and that is our biggest problem. (Teacher A, CUMBRIA)

Widening students' horizons?

A fundamental issue in terms of work placement allocation and social reproduction is whether schools actively attempt to widen students' horizons and open up options beyond 'traditional' choices. As our research has demonstrated, the lower the SES of the school the less likely placements are likely to be in managerial and professional workplaces. (We recognise that there are other important dimensions of vocational horizons, including gender.) At AVON vocational aspirations were high and for most students their placements corresponded to them. At the other schools students were less likely to secure professional and managerial placements. The issue we examine here is the extent to which the schools recognised this as a problem and, if so, the extent to which they addressed it. The problem for them is how this principle of equal opportunities relates to the principle of student choice.

Is there a sort of tension then between on one hand wanting them to do something that they want to do but on the other hand recognising that low aspirations, limited experience and probably for many of them lack of experience in travelling may really constrain them and not let them go outside the box, as you say?

I wouldn't use the word tension, but I do try and persuade them to do something a little bit more. Especially the brighter ones, who I know are very bright, but I would never force them; there is no point, in my opinion. (Teacher, ESSEX)

At DEVON we asked if the school was trying to raise aspirations.

I think the school ethos as a whole is aware of that and is trying to break that cycle. So this is filtering through, it comes from higher up. I think everybody is aware and try to encourage the students to aim high and to fulfil their potential.

But they also prioritised students' independence in arranging their own work placements.

They seem quite sure sometimes about what sort of area they want to go into. They may be certain they don't want to work in a shop or they don't want to work in retail.

When they say that to you do they give you reasons? Do they say 'well I've seen it' or are they working on what other people have said?

No they don't give me reasons. If they say they don't want to work in care for example I just accept that that's something they're not interested in.

The school could try to widen horizons of available placements, but hasn't.

I suppose in a way it would be useful, and this is something I haven't got or haven't done, is to get contacts with solicitors and those doing law may wish to go there. (DEVON)

And again:

Do you ever look at how the students are achieving academically and perhaps encourage them to look at other avenues than their comfort zone?

To be honest no, I haven't really. (DEVON)

At BEDFORD we asked to what extent the school tries to counter those limits by opening up new horizons.

I don't think we do it explicitly. But we do use Qudos, which is a career planning software, where they put in their own interests and it might guide them to the sort of areas that might be suitable for their personal qualities. So I think that what we do do is more implicit than explicit. (Teacher, BEDFORD)

The picture from our five schools corresponds to the findings from studies by Hamilton (2002) and Semple *et al* (2002).

Teachers appear to take a pragmatic approach. Some staff are more concerned about finding appropriate placements which engage pupils' interest for the duration of the work experience week and ensure their attendance. This is a more important consideration to many than addressing traditional/non-traditional placement issues. As one organiser explained:

Non-traditional has not been a concern in seeking to place pupils. Having everyone placed is sufficiently difficult without worrying about whether placements are traditional or not.

... overall most feel it is pupil preference which is the driving force for placement choice. Outside influences – parents, peer group, social background – are strong and teachers feel they have to respect pupils' choices. (Hamilton 2002, p2)

Similarly, Semple *et al* (2002) noted that work experience did not extend career horizons, in spite of the expectations of employers.

The role of work experience in career decision-making was interesting. It provided a job taster, confirmed career ideas and put students off ideas; however, no-one noted that work experience had given *more* career ideas nor *broadened* or *extended* career possibilities. This latter finding is in contrast to the expectations of employers. Many employers hoped that a by-product of EfW activities (especially work experience) would be that young people would think more positively of their industry and see the range of career opportunities. A number went as far as to say they would hope to attract good school leavers into their industry or their company as a result of their involvement in EfW activities. (Semple *et al* 2002, p5)

The question of whether schools attempted to widen students' horizons through influencing placement selection was posed most sharply by the linking of placements to vocational courses. ESSEX recognised that there was a conflict between linking work placements to vocational courses and wanting to widen students' horizons, but the dominant factor was the perceived benefits of vocational courses.

Well, we are starting to do more BTECs, more vocational subjects which have a work-related element. You see I don't know because I am torn because I know that they have to do work related elements which are preferably linked to their courses so then it would fit in with the diplomas because they would do work-related learning related to the diplomas they are taking, but sometimes I like them to have a go at something a bit different and what is wrong with that? That could link in with, well there is cross curricular stuff and work related skills which go with any job really, key skills for instance and there are elements of key skills throughout the diplomas.

But still in some way you have a feeling that this might limit their horizons, not expand them?

Yes. Let's face it, most schools, certainly for a long time, will not be able to provide all the diplomas are they, and they don't include lots of areas like law, so what do you do with kids who want to do that? (Teacher, ESSEX)

The teacher continued:

You see I don't know which way to go really because the government want all the students to do vocational and they want their work experience to go with that but I want them to look outside the box and not just doing what everyone else does and not just doing what we do in school.

But the decisive factor was the effect of vocational courses on GCSE results: 'Our results have gone up from 18% pass rate four years ago to 50% last year'.

The linking of placements to vocational courses promotes social class differentiation because they are predominantly in lower SES schools. An indication of this can be seen in the Connexions data (2006) concerning students' courses post 16 in our five schools, where the higher SES schools are studying predominantly 'A' levels and the lower SES schools have sizeable numbers following vocational courses as shown below. AVON offers no vocational courses.

% students following full-time courses post 16	BEDFORD 11-18	CUMBRIA 11-18	DEVON 11-16	ESSEX 11-16
NVQ, GNVQ & Vocational A level	26.25	39.43	70.86	24.21
% Advanced level A/AS courses	72.28	56.34	25.98	35.67

Figure 42: Connexions

Adapted from Connexions data for 2006 school leavers. Percentages for NEETS and unknown are omitted from the above table.

A comparison of the figures for BEDFORD and DEVON shows that they are almost mirror images of each other, with vocational courses dominating DEVON and 'A' level course dominating the educational choices for BEDFORD students studying post 16.

Finding 13: No school was effectively widening students' career horizons. Because career aspirations were class-related, the schools' policies tended to confirm class differences in student aspirations rather than raise them.

Finding 14: There was a correlation between lower SES schools and vocational courses. Consequently linking work placements to vocational courses tends to limit opportunities to widen the employment horizons of students in lower SES schools.

Part 7: The work experience placement: student roles and responsibilities

The issue we are exploring here is whether there is any social class differentiation in the roles and responsibilities undertaken by students in their work placements. The data is drawn only from the three schools – AVON, CUMBRIA and DEVON – where the data was collected after the students had completed their work experience. However, these schools do span the range of SES.

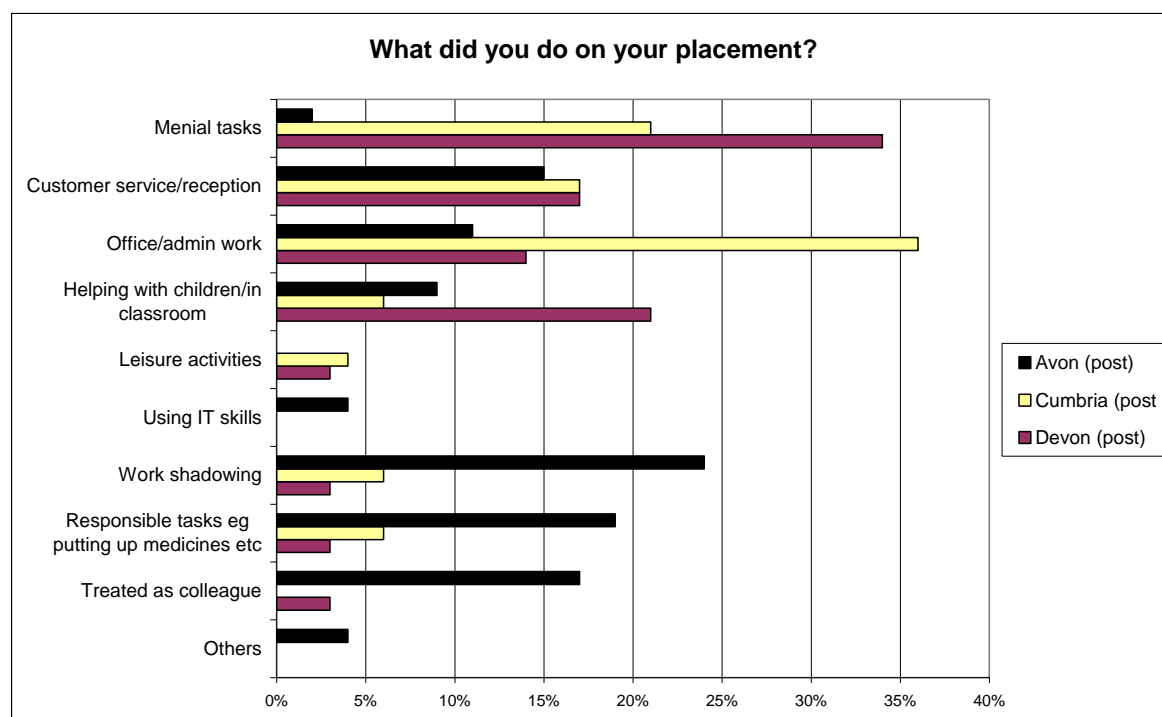


Figure 43: Interview

Job roles	AVON	CUMBRIA	DEVON
Menial tasks	2%	21%	34%
Customer service/reception	15%	17%	17%
Office/admin work	11%	36%	14%
Helping with children/in classroom	9%	6%	21%
Using IT skills	4%	0%	0%
Leisure activities	0%	4%	3%
Work shadowing	24%	6%	3%
Responsible tasks eg putting up medicines etc	19%	6%	3%
Treated as colleague	17%	0%	3%
Others	4%	0%	0%

Figure 44: Interview

There are some striking differences here which are class-related. Only 2% of students at AVON identified the type of work they carried out to be 'menial', compared to 21% of CUMBRIA students and 34% of DEVON students. A much higher percentage of students at AVON than at the other schools reported that they had undertaken responsible tasks and work-shadowing and had been treated as a colleague. Students' comments echo these views:

I felt like I was doing all the petty jobs, like what the kids would have been doing anyway if I wasn't there. Stuff like sticking stamps on every book and loads of photocopying and it's really rubbish because they wanted me to do loads of like double sided things but they didn't show me how or give me any talk on how to use any equipment. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Basically just stacking shelves. We weren't allowed to go on the till because you need months and months of training and we only had two weeks and packing bags for customers and date rotating and stuff like that. Sometimes I was just doing nothing and it was so boring and I don't want to work in a supermarket and I didn't really get on with some of the staff. (Student, DEVON)

Well they expected me to clean the toilets on the last day so I walked out of my placement saying I'm not here as a cleaner because I had already done it three times throughout the week already. (Student, DEVON)

In contrast, AVON students typically described much more educationally challenging experiences which served as an introduction to managerial and professional roles.

Well the first week I was in barristers and I was like and saw what they did in and out of chambers and everyday I went to the City crown courts so and followed the course for a murder trial and rape trial and that was really interesting and just saw the work the barristers do. One day we sat in the judge's office with the judge and spoke to the judge and that. (Student, AVON)

Well initially, it was a lot of just filing, photocopying stuff like that and I have to mark some practice SATS papers and that and the second week I had to like take a few PE sessions and I got to help out in some lessons which was awesome. But the second week was better than the first week but yeah there was a lot of different things really. Well I ran 3 PE lessons and I have to fill in a so many hours of actual running sessions and stuff like that so I'm hoping it will count towards (my leadership award). (Student, AVON)

Well, at the dentist I kind of took on the sort of things a dental nurse would do like um mixing pastes and that. I also worked in reception a bit, sorting out appointments and technical stuff. That one was good I got quite involved in that. (Student, AVON)

I had to (work) in the office design area. I was given a spec for a house design someone wanted building. And I had to design a house for them. So I designed a house on a CAD (program) and they printed it and then they checked it all and it might go into production it might not. (Student, AVON)

The barristers...I'd get there at half nine, in the City, and we would spend about an hour talking to the barrister about the jobs he had to do for today and then we talked to the solicitors and we done interviews with the defendants and the prosecutors and that. And like so we talked about them and we went into the crown court and that and I just looked at the cases and read them and just took notes. (Student, AVON)

Some, but significantly fewer, of the CUMBRIA students reported similar experiences.

I just started off with doing the filing then I took the information off the patients. On my first day I did filing because I didn't really know how to do anything else, but then I started to get more important jobs, such as finding patients on the computers when they first came in and printing it off and asking them to sign. I also used the stamping machine. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Some placement staff not only spent time teaching new skills to the students on placement with them; they also discussed how the students might progress with their interest in that type of work. This mentoring took place in predominantly professional occupations and was reported disproportionately by AVON students. It seems likely that it would advantage these students in future job applications in these employment sectors.

I was talking to the solicitor and he told me all the qualifications that you need. He said well you have to be quite clever as well to take up the job and quite argumentative and you have to persuade loads of people. (Student, AVON)

It was just, I learnt stuff about, at the dentist, I learnt about the qualifications and things that you need and the kind of work that you can do and the branches of dentistry that you can go into work and specialise in and the options. (Student, AVON)

Benefits of work placements

In addition to the issues covered in the preceding section we present here views on other benefits. There are similarities between the responses to the questionnaires and the issues raised in the interviews. In general there are not significant differences between the schools.

Very few students responded that they had learnt nothing from their placement. As shown above a wide range of learning opportunities were identified, even if some students only learnt that they did not want a future career in that type of work:

(I learnt) nothing really; just normal work like how to use a photocopier. I was just trying to see if it was any good at all or it might interest me a bit but it didn't really. So I learnt that I don't want to do that. (Student, AVON)

High scoring categories include learning about work in general and working with adults.

The highest percentage response with regard to their work experience placement strengthening their interpersonal skills is that given by 34% of AVON students. (The next highest percentage mentioning this was 17% at CUMBRIA). This indicates that these students are very aware that though the job itself may not correspond to their future careers they recognise the importance of a range of transferable skills in the market place rather than just job specific knowledge and academic qualifications.

Learning to work with adults

The top response of 35% from DEVON concerning work placement benefits fell into the category of 'learning to work with adults'. CUMBRIA scored 28% on this response with only 14% of AVON students identifying this as a benefit. Bearing in mind the

self-assurance of the AVON student who referred to having lunch with a judge while on placement, perhaps the explanation is that AVON students were, before the placement itself, more confident about interacting with adults.

To summarise, the key areas where their placements were considered to be very beneficial are outlined below. Obviously the selection of students' comments offered below may relate to more than one of the areas highlighted.

Learning job specific skills and acquiring knowledge together with an increased understanding of the job:

Working in a nursery or primary school.

I did some filing; I helped the kids like the special kids who need help. I was treated as a colleague by a lot of people. I was allowed in the staff room and I was doing some teachers' jobs and they talked to me nicely too. Marking children's work and giving them work to do and sitting by them to help them. (Student, DEVON)

Every day was different because of not knowing if we would have children or not. On the days there were children we just occupied them, gave them some food, played with them and cleaned the baby changing rooms, which was done every morning. Then on the days there weren't any children we made displays, checked stock, checked all the toys were there and kept it clean. (Student, DEVON)

That a child who is blond hair and blue eyes who is perfect and reading really well can suddenly change and start throwing pens around and that just talking calmly to someone can calm them down. So if they are shouting around stamping on the floor you don't shout around and stamp on the floor to intimidate them because that will just make it worse. (Student, CUMBRIA)

That there is a lot more work involved in childcare than I thought because I thought it was just looking after the children but there is so much about safety and hygiene and everything. (Student, DEVON)

I learnt a little bit about behaviour and children because you have certain rights as a teacher or teaching assistant what you can and can't do to children and you have to learn about that. I learnt about the pressure of preparing lessons because I had to prepare a lesson plan a hypothetical one, and I found that moderately difficult but it sounded really easy at the beginning but when I started it's really difficult because you have to plan out according to certain objectives and points, it's quite hard. I found out how hard it is now that you can't do anything usually, you have to hold it in. (Student, AVON)

Working in a pharmacy

I learnt a lot about time management I guess the most because I could find it quite difficult to handle all the responsibilities when you've got to unload the queue of people or handle the prescriptions; file all the paperwork; get the prescriptions and everything at the same time but I finally got to grips with it towards the end I found it a lot easier. (Student, AVON)

In an office

From the designs I learnt just like, how much creative it is. It's really creative. Like I learnt how to use different types of creative stuff like. I used cutting tools I used a drawing board just generally. It was really creative. Experience what it was gonna be like when you are older...I mean like the hours and stuff like that. (Student, AVON)

I learnt how the organisations are structured, and how they work, and the levels of management and stuff. I also learnt a bit about journalism, and human resources. Yes, I want to go into business, and it's just useful to know how these things work. And how big organisations run. (Student, AVON)

Oh I learnt a lot. I learnt a lot about the workings of law and how the barristers like for example, the crucial differences between solicitors and barristers and then the second week I learnt how to manage my time and take orders and work as a team; meeting deadlines and things like that. So it was all pretty useful to me. (Student, AVON)

Acquiring and strengthening interpersonal and communication skills with particular reference to working with adults in general.

That I can work well in a team. In school the teachers are always telling you what to do, but in there I was involved. (Student, DEVON)

How to act more responsible and how to communicate with people better now...Well when I first met people I was shy whereas now I just talk to them. (Student, DEVON)

The people that were like, dealing with the arguments they were quite relaxed and they had obviously done it before so they knew what to do. It helped me because a lot of people were very impatient because they didn't had a lot of places to go and they, were kind of like, I was still speaking respectfully towards them and to feel as if they were my first priority to get them sorted out. (Student, AVON)

How to interact with different types of people. So different, there are some children who needed more help than others. Like, working out who needs more help than others. (Student, AVON)

And it was definitely patience with me, because I was quite short tempered before. And you can't get angry with small children. Because it's just not fair with them. It was very much patience with me. (Student, AVON)

Well when I was sitting there watching the cashiers I learnt that you have to be really patient because sometimes customers are ranting and raving about things and you have to know how to deal with situations like that. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Meeting other people. To have a smile, give compliments and to talk to the people, stuff like that. (Student, DEVON)

Several students referred specifically to their acquisition of a deeper understanding of the importance of customer care:

I learnt that I have a lot more patience than I thought I had because I didn't think I had any but you can't just lose your temper at customers. (Student, DEVON)

How to handle customers. The customer is always right, but it's not always the way. It has made me see (things) from the (teachers') perspective more and not always argue back. (Student, AVON)

As one would expect, those who talked about how they learnt the importance of respecting others indicated that this was how they were treated on placement. Feeling and acting more 'grown up' was mentioned by students who were treated as colleagues and given levels of responsibility. This contrasts strongly with some students who spoke of being given menial tasks which the staff did not usually do themselves:

I need to grow up, that is what they said. (S)he also said that me and (my friend) have got a lack of energy, but she never spoke to us, the only time she spoke to us was when she was telling us to do something. (Student, DEVON)

Compare this situation with the comments below:

(I've learnt) that I have more patience with children than I thought and I can work within a team. Well I thought it was better because then you didn't have all the responsibility on yourself, split responsibility...I felt treated as a colleague...It makes you feel really grown up. (Student, DEVON)

About what teachers do in different situations with the kids and that you have to be awake...you are treated like an adult which is better because you are respected. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Increasing self confidence

Being more confident in front of other people, working as a team and having more responsibility. (Student, DEVON)

That I am more confident around the working environment. I can communicate with people more easily – staff and customers. (Student, DEVON)

Being given responsibility

DEVON students in particular valued this aspect of their work experience placement with 30% citing this as an important benefit for them.

You've got a lot more responsibility and you get to do something different from school. (Student, DEVON)

You need to help other people who can't do things properly, like some of them couldn't walk so I had to help them. Old people need extra help and people to talk to and that...because some people can't do anything without help, not even move...(Student, DEVON)

The above student was based in the school's Alternative Curriculum Unit due to his disaffection and general level of behaviour yet he is one of very few students who said they would volunteer to go back to their placement and help unpaid. He really

valued the experience and even spoke of going to college to train to work with the elderly. For him, post 16 education would be a first in the family. His mother works in a supermarket and his father 'does something with tyres'.

An increased appreciation of what work is about

It is hard work, the hours and everything but it is worth it with the money and everything. (Student, CUMBRIA)

How much harder it is on a work day. I was so tired on the first day I came home and I was like I need my bed...it was kind of an open plan company so they are all in the same office and working on their own things but like, swapping over and asking someone else to do something so they can do something else. So all their jobs interlink. So that was good (to see) just how people interact. (Student, AVON)

Um is because like this from parents and like I always moan about how hard school is but they are always on about how you should experience what it's like in the real world so it's kind of like going back to that. We've had two weeks just normal work. I never understood the time management a lot from it. Like you have to juggle some responsibilities like in one day and finish your work in one day. (Student, AVON)

I don't know really like I guess it's not as much as being on other work placements but just things like being organised like getting to work on time and things like that and you have to organise like your own lunch hours and making sure you are at places on time and things. I was quite good at (working with customers) so it was just like being polite and that. (Student, AVON)

For some the harsher realities of the world of work became very apparent. The student below soon realised that it was not just the customers who were always right:

Well I got to talk to the girls that work there a lot and I got their opinions of the job and it's not a very good job to work in so it's more of a, they needed a job, so they've got the job there, and it opens your eyes up to the working world. That it has to be done... All the senior management are related and they are all not that nice. They were nice to your face but just a bit funny. But they gave you jobs like cleaning out plant pots and things just menial jobs and you know workers have learnt that you've just got to get on and do it because it's your job. (Student, AVON)

For other students there was the difficult challenge of appreciating the difference between their role as a student and the responsibilities of an adult. The student below, for example, initially appears to resist moving from a student status to a more adult and responsible role. Having said that, s/he is perceptive in terms of avoiding condescension in not talking 'down' to the pupils:

Well at first the kids were all asking me what school's like and stuff and I didn't mind that, I like how they ask a lot of questions. Then I started to really get to know the kids and I really like them. I used to just join in the lessons with them, but now it has come to the end of the year it was all about just playing games with them which I really liked. Well I didn't ever treat them like I was the teacher, I treat them like any other person in this room, like someone

my age. I think that is why they liked me so much, because I don't treat them like children and I don't talk down to them. (Student, CUMBRIA)

Personal enjoyment

There were those students who simply viewed their placement as an opportunity to enjoy themselves away from school. This might have been anticipated from the responses of some students to the questionnaire (see Q Graph 4c) where a sizeable minority of BEDFORD and ESSEX students said they had selected their placement because it would be enjoyable:

What did I learn? Um it was really more about how well I enjoyed it. It was more about enjoying it than actually learning from it. (Student, AVON)

Finding 15: There was a correlation between school SES and the educational value of the placement. Students at the high SES school were much less likely to undertake menial tasks and much more likely to undertake responsible tasks and work-shadowing, and to be treated as a colleague and to receive mentoring in a professional context.

Part 8: Conclusions

Mindful of the current guidelines for work experience placements (DfES 2002a, b), we have explored the type and range of placements open to the students in the five schools participating in this research. We have undertaken an examination of the processes of placement allocation in each of the five schools and analysed these in terms of equality of opportunities for the students concerned. This analysis has involved soliciting the views of both students and school staff. Additional data have been gathered from Connexions and EBL.

We have explored the perceptions, perspectives, aspirations and expectations of students, parents and the school staff with regard to the students' placements and future career plans have been examined. We have investigated the different types of workplaces where placements have been found. We have analysed the factors which have governed student choices. A particular focus has been on the role of family social capital. This has involved us in an analysis of the relationship between parental occupations and the arrangement of student placements. We have also explored the benefits which students have gained from their work experiences.

Summary of findings

Finding 1: Some employers prefer students from high SES schools.

Finding 2: Differences in proportions of students finding placements in nurseries and schools were the result of school factors, not SES.

Finding 3: The distribution of students to workplaces exhibits a combination of social class patterns and school-effect differences. Overall there is a significant correlation between the social status of workplaces and the SES of schools.

Finding 4: Professional occupations are less gender differentiated than working class jobs, and consequently gender differentiation in work placements was not a factor at the high SES school, in contrast to the other schools.

Finding 5: Overall, school SES correlates inversely with how Directive the school is. The higher the SES of the school the more student Independence. However, the extent to which Independence is supported by assistance from the school is a school-effect factor (i.e. a matter of school policy independent from its SES).

Finding 6: There is some evidence that work placement link to future career is less significant for students at low SES schools.

Finding 7: There is some evidence that students at higher SES schools tend to be more confident in their choice of work placements.

Finding 8: Students at the low SES schools were more influenced by school staff.

Finding 9: Students at the low SES schools were more influenced by their peers than students at higher SES schools.

Finding 10: Teachers perceived social class differences in parents' aspirations and expectations for their children's careers: parents of students at higher SES schools had higher aspirations.

Finding 11: Students at the higher SES schools were much more able to use family contacts to access work placements in professional workplaces.

Finding 12: Student choices based on the use of databases of possible work placement vacancies may tend to confirm existing vocational identities rather than challenge them.

Finding 13: No school was effectively widening students' career horizons. Because career aspirations were class-related, the schools' policies tended to confirm class differences in student aspirations rather than raise them.

Finding 14: There was a correlation between lower SES schools and vocational courses. Consequently linking work placements to vocational courses tends to limit opportunities to widen the employment horizons of students in lower SES schools.

Finding 15: There was a correlation between school SES and the educational value of the placement. Students at the high SES school were much less likely to undertake menial tasks and much more likely to undertake responsible tasks and work-shadowing, and to be treated as a colleague and to receive mentoring in a professional context.

Class differences, individual choices and school policies

Work placement distribution is determined primarily by student choices. It is also shaped to a greater or lesser extent by schools, depending on whether they adopt more or less directive policies. (There is also in some cases an element of employer selection, though this is a minor factor.) Our findings cumulatively demonstrate that these processes of individual choice and school policy combine in ways that reflect and reproduce clear patterns of social class differentiation. If work experience is about learning about labour, it is about how working class kids get working class placements and middle class kids get managerial and professional ones.

Selection by employers

The selection of work experience placements is not solely the domain of the school or the students and/or their parents. Employers also play a significant part in offering placements. Our findings indicated that there were employers, usually in professional organisations, which preferred to accept students from the high SES school only.

Distribution of placements

We identified a correlation between the type of work placement and the SES of the school with the high SES school having the highest percentage of professional placements for their students.

However, we did observe that social class appeared to be less significant than the differences in school approaches to the allocation process with ESSEX, the most 'directive' in its approach, obtaining more professional placements for its students than the middle SES schools. This would seem to indicate that a more directive policy may be better for achieving class equality in terms of the status of placements being identified for students from low SES school. Where students were expected to find their own placements they were increasingly dependent upon parental and other contacts for high quality placements. For DEVON, a low SES school, this resulted in

very few professional placements and an appreciably significant number of 'manual' placements.

We observed that the self-identification of placements tended to confirm existing vocational identities rather than challenge them. We were similarly concerned that the use of databases might lead to a skewing in class terms of placements on offer to the different SES schools.

Gender differentiation

Our findings indicate that gender differentiation was not a factor for the high SES school in that professional occupations were less gender differentiated than working class jobs.

Students' aspirations and expectations

Students at the high SES school were more definite about going to university. They expected to go and were reinforced in this view by their parents, of whom a large percentage had been to university themselves. Most parents of the high SES school saw university attendance as a natural progression for their children. The high SES school students were also more knowledgeable about university and any financial implications.

Students from the low SES schools aspired to go to university but had fewer role models in the older generation. Their parents tended to see university as a way for their children to do better in life than they have done.

Examining both the percentage of students from the five schools who stay on in full time education post 16 and the courses they undertake, there was a higher correlation between aspirations and the probable realisation of such hopes for the high SES school than for the low ones, in particular DEVON. There was a definite correlation between the SES of the school and the percentage of parents who had attended university. We also identified social class differences with regard to career aspirations.

Interviews with school staff appeared to indicate that no school effectively tried to raise students' aspirations. However, AVON students' aspirations were already high

The use of social capital

There was clear evidence that students at the high and middle SES schools were able to utilise family contacts to access work placements in professional workplaces. The fact that 63% parents of the high SES school students were in professional occupations compared with 0% and 4% of students' parents in the two low SES school offers a stark contrast between the potential social capital these three sets of parents have available to support their children.

The issue of influence

Our findings showed that students at the low SES schools were more influenced by school staff than at the high SES. Where the staff accept the status quo, these students will not be challenged to think outside their social box. However, where schools such as ESSEX appear to be more 'directive' there may be positive results in terms of higher than anticipated professional placements being made available to their students.

Similarly the low SES school students were more influenced by their peers/mates than the students at the high SES school. Such peers will have little social capital or ability to act as role models to raise aspirations.

Students' views on the benefits of their work experience placement

There was a significant class difference in the type of activities students engaged in and the educational and potential career benefits of them. Students in the high SES school were mentored in their professional placements in terms of preparing them for entry into such professions. They engaged in more work-shadowing than students from the other schools and they were also offered more interesting and challenging tasks to complete during their placements.

Vocational courses

Our findings indicate that there was a correlation between the low SES schools and vocational courses. We found that the linking of work placements to vocational courses tended to limit choice and opportunity in class terms.

Our findings in the context of other research

How do our findings relate to those of existing research studies? A comprehensive review of the literature has been carried out by Sheila Wright (2004). She summarises relevant research as follows:

Social class/Socio-economic status

Evidence on the importance of social class or socio-economic status as a factor in the decision-making of 14-19 year olds is mixed. Bynner, Ferri and Shepherd (1997) found that for their sample of 26 year olds in the 1970 Birth Cohort Study family background as expressed by father's social class exerted a strong influence on school achievements and occupational positions in adulthood. However, the association between social class measured in this way and level of education of the cohort was weaker than it was for the cohort in the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS) (Bynner 2004). Similarly, Furlong (1992) found that young people in Scotland continued to follow highly stratified routes into the labour market, with significant labour market advantages for those from privileged backgrounds (who also tend to have "good" school qualifications). Other authors have found that both the options available to 14-19 year olds and future life chances are strongly influenced by socio-economic status or class (e.g. Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000, Furlong and Cartmel 1997, McDowell 2003), questioning the arguments of authors such as Beck and Giddens who suggest that collective identities, and class in particular, are less significant in people's lives in late modernity than they once were. Furlong and Cartmel (1997, p.109) put it this way: "...economic and cultural resources are still central to an understanding of differential life chances and experiences ... the collective foundations of social life have become more obscure, [but] they continue to provide powerful frameworks which contain young people's experiences and life chances." Gambetta (1987, p.176), however, argues that social class does not influence decision-making in a simple way but interacts with individual preferences: "...within the same social class of origin, more ambitious preferences result in more ambitious educational decisions, but, between classes, the same preference acts in a different direction and with a different intensity."

Our findings are congruent with the balance of evidence cited by Wright: an overall pattern of social class differentiation, but within it differences resulting from individual student, family and school factors. Our findings also confirm those of a study published after Wright's review by Osgood, Francis and Archer (2006).

In UK approaches to work experience it is typical for the onus to be generally placed upon the pupil (with the assistance of their parents) to identify and secure their work experience placements. However, this approach has very serious implications in terms of equity and fairness. The findings from our research lead us to argue that middle class parents, most of whom are networked to other middle class professionals, play a very significant role in negotiating access and securing placements for their children. This situation can be understood as contributing to social class reproduction. Especially if taken alongside the working class children in our research who found that their parents were generally not networked to middle class professionals and as such, where input from parents was received the placement was typically with a close relative, quite often occupying a highly gender stereotyped and 'working class' job with less societal value and fewer opportunities to assume positions of power; working class occupations have long been understood to possess less power in society and a working class identity has been variously theorized as having less 'exchange value' than middle class identities (Skeggs, 2004).

In this paper we argue that the prevalent model for identifying, negotiating and securing work placements with local employers privileges some pupils over others and thus acts as a significant barrier to social justice and equality of opportunity; furthermore it has the serious effect of reproducing class and gender inequality. (Osgood *et al* 2006, p307)

They conclude:

Most notably, and perhaps most concerning, we found that pupils' experiences of the workplace are constrained by gender and social class through work experience practice, and the reproduction of these structural inequalities is masked by the 'freedom of choice' model which dominates the organization of work experience. (p318)

It should be noted however that the conclusions relating to social class are not based on the empirical research reported in the 2006 article by Osgood, Francis and Archer, because the data was collected and analysed solely in terms of gender. No data was collected about the social class of the pupils and their families, only their pupils' genders. For empirically-based evidence regarding social class we need to turn to an earlier report by Francis *et al.* (2005). It concludes:

The onus on pupils to identify their own placements has limitations, and raises equity issues in relation to gender and socio-economic group. Firstly, the approach has implications for the diversity of work placements available, as some pupils have knowledge of, and access to, a limited number. Following from this, there are implications around socio-economic group and ethnicity concerning the sorts of jobs that pupils are aware of, and have access to. (For example, in relation to the sorts of jobs which family members and friends are working in, from which they can facilitate placements). The well-connected pupils from higher socio-economic groups in the case study schools appeared able to secure both more prestigious and often more meaningful work placements than their counterparts in lower socio-economic

groups. Many pupils went on placements with relatives: this satisfied the common concern of parents and some teachers and EBP managers that pupils are 'at risk' when travelling to placements and/or on the placements, but also meant that pupils were more likely to be channelled into professions linked to socio-economic group and gender. (Francis *et al.* 2005, pp20-21)

These findings are confirmed by our own research.

The potential impact of the new Specialised Diploma on students' choice of placements

The introduction of the new Specialised Diplomas (DfES 2005) from 2008 onwards is likely to greatly reinforce the policy of linking work placements to Diploma work sectors. That is certainly the view of the CBI in their recent report on work experience (CBI 2007).

Work experience in the new Specialised Diplomas

Work experience is currently a valued part of the curriculum – and is set to grow in significance with the introduction of Specialised Diplomas from September 2008. The new diplomas, with their greater focus on the world of work, are intended to prepare young people with the skills and flexibility they will need in order to adapt to an ever changing job market. Specialising in a range of areas – from engineering to creative and media, from retail to business administration and finance – young people will have the opportunity to learn in different ways, combining practical skill development with theoretical knowledge. A core curriculum will enable students to master the basics in English and maths required by all employers, and specialisation in particular academic areas will allow them to develop knowledge and skills relevant to their sector of interest. A project will enable them to deepen this sectoral understanding, perhaps drawing on the experience of an extended work placement which will provide a clear purpose for the schoolroom learning. At the heart of the diplomas lies a commitment to ensuring that young people have the essential employability skills to be successful in the world of work.

The diplomas are not considered to be direct preparation for work. Nevertheless they represent a real opportunity to embed employability skills. For the extended work experience it is even more important that young people are clear about the competencies they should be developing for employment in order to get the most out of the diploma as a whole. (CBI 2007, p9)

Tying work placements to Diploma courses could limit students' vocational horizons by restricting their opportunities to experience different fields of work and thereby potentially widen their future career choices. This is a class-differentiated process because it is disproportionately students in lower SES schools who will take Diploma courses, while in higher SES schools students are more likely to be on traditional academic courses with no restrictions on choice of work placements.

Implications of our findings for policy

Work experience in schools, as it operates at present, tends to reflect and reproduce existing patterns of social class inequality in the school system and the labour market. The extent to which work experience actually influences future career choices and destinations is unknown, and beyond the scope of this research. What is

certainly the case however is that as it is presently constituted it does little or nothing to widen students' career horizons by purposefully exposing them to workplace situations beyond those most familiar to their family class backgrounds. Furthermore, the implementation of the Specialist Diploma programmes in schools is likely to further restrict students' range of experiences if schools gear work experience placements, as they seem likely to do, to the vocational courses students are following.

What would a policy on work experience look like which was designed to challenge students' existing class-shaped conceptions, aspirations and emerging vocational identities rather than reproduce them; to widen horizons rather than confirm them? Its fundamental principle would be to expose students to a range of work experiences broadly representing the range of types of workplaces, in terms of their social status and class composition. This would entail students from high SES schools having an experience of low SES workplaces in addition to managerial and professional ones. But more importantly, from the point of view of challenging the well-documented inequality of students from low SES backgrounds in the school system, it would aim to enable all of them to have experiences of high status managerial and professional (as well as high skilled technical) workplaces.

In addition to the limited vocational horizons perpetuated by work experience as it currently operates there is another aspect of work experience which is not part of our research, and which has not been mentioned so far in this report, but which is significant in educational terms. One of the aims of schooling should be to enable students to develop a critical understanding of the world of work. The enterprise curriculum and the citizenship curriculum are two places where this can happen. One element within them should be opportunities to have direct experiences of a range of workplaces.

These two aims – the more narrowly vocational and the broader educational – could be best achieved by providing students with a series of workplace experiences of different types, ranging from work placements as now to short study visits, commencing earlier than Year 10, and integrated into the wider curriculum much more than work experience tends to be at present. (The revised Key Stage 3 curriculum, with more emphasis on cross-curricular and project-based work, and on relevance, provides a very favourable context.)

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Questionnaire**Year Ten Work Placements: A Study of Choices****School Identifier:**

as

Student: Male/Female (please circle appropriate)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research about your work experience placement in Year Ten. As my previous letter explained to you I am interested in the way in which young people choose or are allocated work placements.

Please answer the questions below as fully as you can. In some cases you are asked to select choices or rate your answers. Most questions give you the opportunity to add your own ideas and to make further comments if you wish.

Following the completion of these questionnaires I will be asking for volunteers to take part in group interviews and I hope you will consider being involved in this stage of the research. This study will take about a year to complete and will involve other schools as well as your school. When the research is completed you will receive a summary of my results and I will ask for representatives from your school to attend a conference at the university, where the results will be presented.

1a. Where do you hope to go on your work experience placement in year 10?

.....

1b. What sort of work do you think you will do there?

.....

2. How much are the following people influencing you in deciding which placement to go on? Please tick them according to how you feel.

People	Not at all	Not much	Quite a lot	A lot	Massively
The school staff					
My parents/carers					
My brothers and sisters					
Other relatives					
My mates					
The careers adviser					
The media					
I make my own decisions					
Other? (Who?)					

3. How are people helping you to choose your placement? Please tick the relevant statements.

They are finding/ have found the placement for me	
They are using/have used contacts to help me	
They give me information about different placements	
They support my choice	
I am going with my mates	
Other? (Please explain)	

4a. How much choice do you think you have with regard to your placement? Please tick one of the boxes below

No choice	Very little choice	Some choice	Quite a lot of choice	A lot of choice
------------------	---------------------------	--------------------	------------------------------	------------------------

4b. How have you find out about placement options? Tick the statement that best describes your experience.

I was told to find my own placement	
I was given a list to choose from	
I was told 'this one will suit you'	
None of the above? Please tell us what has happened:	

4c. If you are choosing your own placement what are the reasons for your choice?

.....

.....

.....

.....

5a. Work placements can have a number of benefits and some of them are listed in the table below. Please tick them according to how you feel they relate to your work placement.

Possible ways in which your work experience might have helped you	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
It is a good taste of my future career					
I will learn more about work					
I will learn to work with adults					
It will make me more aware of the career options open to me					
It will help me to think more about my future and what I might do					
I know I can get a good reference from my work placement					

5b. Please tell us about any other benefits you feel you will gain from your work placement:

.....

.....

.....

.....

6. Does your intended work experience placement have any similarities to what you want to do as a career?

Yes / No

Any further comments?

.....

.....

.....

.....

7. Have you had the opportunity to choose the work placement that you most want to have?

Yes / No

8. If your answer to question 7 is 'no', please tell us what your ideal work placement would be:

.....
.....
.....
.....

9. Please tell us why you think it is not possible for you to have your ideal work placement:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions. I will keep in touch with your school and let you know the results of this research project.

Yours

Tricia Le Gallais

UCE Birmingham

		Fig 5	Fig 7	Fig 8	Fig 9	Fig 10	Fig 11	Fig 12	Fig 13	Fig 17	Fig 18	Fig 19	Fig 29	Fig 31	Fig 34	Fig 35	Fig 38
Avon	Bedford	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	I	N	N	N	N	Y
	Cumbria	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	I	N	Y	N	N	Y
	Essex	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Devon	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Bedford	Cumbria	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	I	N	I	N	N	N
	Essex	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	I	Y	Y	Y
	Devon	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	I	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Cumbria	Essex	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	I	Y	Y	Y
	Devon	Y	N	N	Y	I	I	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Essex	Devon	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y

Y = >95% probability that the difference is significant

N = <95% probability that the difference is significant

I = Invalid comparison

Percentage responses from each school were compared with every other school using the chi-squared distribution with a p value of 0.05 to indicate whether there is a greater than 95% chance of the numbers being significantly different (Y) or not (N). For the purposes of this statistical analysis, comparisons were rejected when the E_{ij} (expected value) was equal to or less than 5. Some of the numbers were too small to be valid (I). The table above reveals a substantial number of the correlations identified in the report to be statistically valid. However, the other comparisons, while not statistically valid at this high threshold of probability, still tend to indicate a correlation between social class and aspects of work placements, and the cumulative pattern is clearly in this direction.