SUPPORTING STUDENTS APPLYING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

In spring 2001, the NFER carried out a number of linked surveys of schools and colleges. These focused on the support and advice provided for students in Years 12 and 13 (or equivalent) who may wish to apply to higher education (HE). The surveys were commissioned jointly by The Sutton Trust and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

The sample of schools was randomly selected from all maintained schools in England, but excluded schools with GCSE results in the top 20 per cent nationally. All 450 colleges of further education listed in the NFER's Register of Schools were approached. Response rates to the survey were 56 per cent from schools and 40 per cent from colleges.

Questionnaires were completed by 186 teachers/lecturers with responsibility for advice on applications to higher education in schools and 182 in colleges (all referred to as heads of post-16 education in this report). Some sections of the questionnaire were also completed by sixth-form subject tutors, heads of KS4 in schools with sixth forms, and heads of KS4 in schools without sixth forms.[1]

This report focuses mainly on the questionnaire responses of heads of post-16 education, although the responses of other groups of respondents are mentioned when they differ substantially from those of the heads of post-16 education. The survey data have been illustrated and, in some cases, extended by the responses of a small number of school/college staff that took part in a follow-up interview programme.[2]

The questionnaires for teachers/lecturers sought their perceptions of:

♦ the adequacy of their own background knowledge about higher education and that of their colleagues involved with 16 – 19-year-olds;

♦ the challenges facing students from disadvantaged areas who may wish to apply for higher education;

♦ the reasons why some able students leave education at 16;

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[1] Questionnaires were completed by 143 sixth-form subject tutors, 151 heads of KS4 in schools with sixth forms, and 104 heads of KS4 in schools without sixth forms.

[2] In autumn/winter 2001, a small number of semi-structured interviews were carried out with nine staff responsible for advising and supporting students regarding application to higher education in seven institutions – two 11 – 16 schools, three 11 – 18 schools, one sixth-form college and one further education college. Interviews were also carried out with ten students in these institutions. The institutions taking part in the interview programme were selected on the basis of their questionnaire responses in order to illuminate some of the findings of the survey.

♦ the reasons why some students in Years 12 and 13 with potential to go on to higher education choose not to do so;

♦ the reasons why some students in Years 12 and 13 with potential to apply to institutions/courses with demanding entry qualifications (other than Oxford and Cambridge) choose not to do so;

♦ the reasons why some students in Years 12 and 13 with potential to apply to Oxford or Cambridge choose not to do so;

♦ the support and advice provided in their schools for students in Years 12 and 13 who may wish to apply for higher education;

♦ the support and advice provided in their schools for students in KS4 who may wish to apply for higher education; and

♦ further education college involvement in the post-16 choices of students in 'feeder' schools.

Appendix 1 summarised the administration of the surveys, and provides information about the participating schools and colleges. Appendix 2 describes the key differences between sixth-form colleges, FE colleges and schools. Detailed tables can be found in the Supplement.

2. TEACHERS' AND LECTURERS' BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION

This section focuses on teachers' and lecturers' background knowledge of higher education: course attendance; personal contacts with higher educational institutions; and perceived adequacy of their knowledge of higher education.

2.1 Courses attended

The majority (over 90 per cent) of heads of post-16 education in schools and colleges had, at some time, attended some form of course or workshop about entry to higher education. About 60 per cent of heads of KS4 in schools had attended such courses compared with about 40 per cent of the sixth-form subject tutors and heads of KS4 in schools without sixth forms.

2.2 Contacts with higher education establishments

The majority of heads of post-16 education (about three-quarters of those in schools and nearly 90 per cent of those in colleges) indicated that they had personal contacts of this nature. They were most likely to mention the 'new' universities (former polytechnics) and civic universities.

2.3 Perceived knowledge about higher education in general

Teachers/lecturers were asked to indicate how much they knew about various aspects of higher education. They were asked to respond on a four-point scale ((almost) nothing; a little; a fair amount; a lot). Their responses are reported in terms of the combined percentages opting for 'a fair amount/a lot'. See Figure 1. overleaf.

The majority (three-quarters or more) of heads of post-16 education in school and colleges felt that they knew 'a fair amount/a lot' about:

♦ the courses offered by different universities;

♦ university application/selection procedures; and

♦ life as a student at university today.

However, it is of interest to note that only about half indicated that they had a similar level of knowledge about:

♦ summer schools available for students considering applying to HE

**Figure 1   Perceived knowledge about higher education:
teachers with responsibility for advice on HE in schools with sixth forms**
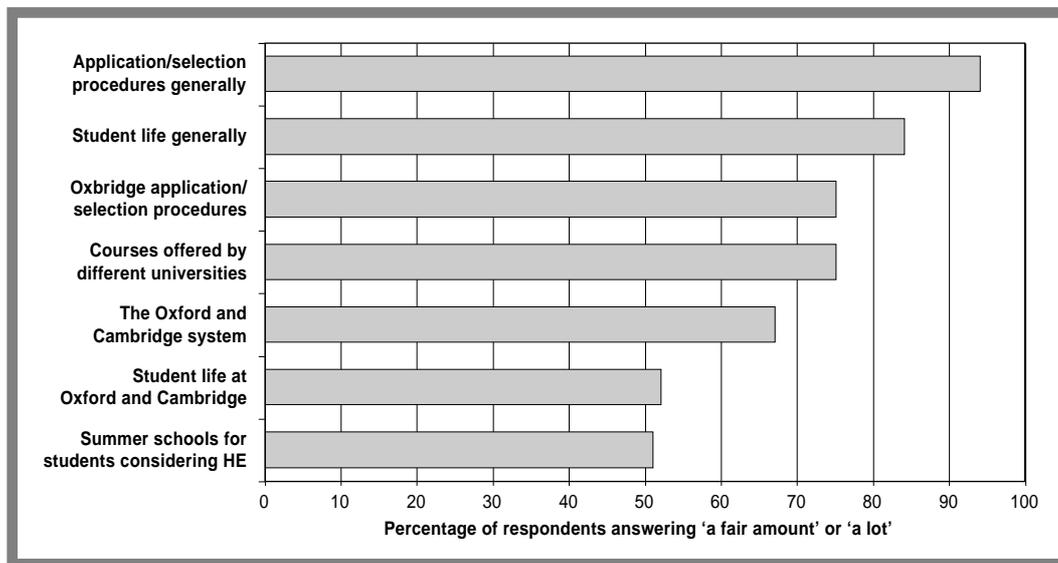
2.4   The level of knowledge of other groups of respondents

The level of knowledge of sixth-form subject tutors and heads of KS4 in schools about all these issues was considerably lower than that of heads of post-16 education. Heads of KS4 in schools with sixth forms appeared to be better informed than those in schools without sixth forms. Within the FE sector, heads of post-16 education in sixth-form colleges appeared to be better informed on the above topics than their counterparts in FE and tertiary colleges.

2.5   Perceived knowledge about universities and subjects/courses (other than Oxford and Cambridge) with demanding entry qualifications

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to name the institutions and subjects/courses with the most demanding entry qualifications. Their responses revealed that Durham, Bristol, Nottingham and Warwick Universities (each cited by 40 per cent or more of respondents) were perceived by heads of post-16 education to have the most demanding entry qualifications. Other institutions cited by more than ten per cent of respondents were: Imperial College London, York, London School of Economics and University College London. Medicine, veterinary science, law, English, physiotherapy, history and dentistry were perceived to be the courses/subjects with the most demanding entry qualifications.

2.6   Perceived knowledge about Oxford and Cambridge

Teachers/lecturers were also asked about their perceived knowledge about Oxford and Cambridge.

♦   About 70 per cent of heads of post-16 education felt that they knew 'a fair amount/a lot' about the Oxford and Cambridge application/selection procedures and about college systems.

♦   However, only about half indicated that they were confident about their knowledge of life as a student at Oxford and Cambridge today.

In response to an open-ended question, heads of post-16 education considered that the main differences between Oxford/Cambridge and other universities were:

●   the tutorial system;

●   the college system; and

●   the selection procedures.

Smaller proportions mentioned that these institutions had:

●   more students from public schools and/or affluent homes;

●   shorter terms;

●   more demanding entry requirements;

●   a privileged environment; and

●   a high reputation/status.

2.7   Perceptions of the proportion of Oxford/Cambridge entrants from state schools

Teachers and lecturers, especially sixth-form subject tutors and heads of KS4, tended to underestimate the proportion of students at Oxford/ Cambridge that came from state schools. Their mean estimates were:

♦   just over 40 per cent (heads of post-16 education);

♦   33 per cent (sixth-form subject tutors); and

♦   about 35 per cent (heads of KS4).

Currently, the percentage of students at Oxford/Cambridge from state schools is about 52 per cent.

2.8   Suggestions for improvement in information and advice provided by higher education institutions

Teachers and lecturers were asked to suggest ways in which all higher education institutions could improve the information and advice they provided for students and schools/colleges. The following suggestions were made by ten per cent or more of teachers and lecturers:

♦ university staff and/or students should make more visits to and contact with schools;

♦ written information about higher education should be made more user friendly.

Smaller proportions (less than ten per cent) of respondents suggested improvements to: websites; information services for schools; information about interview/selection procedures; and changes to timing of open days. A few respondents indicated that they would like additional printed materials (such as departmental booklets or leaflets), whereas others commented that supplementary materials caused information overload and/or storage problems!

When asked to suggest ways in which Oxford and Cambridge could improve the information and advice they provided for students and schools/colleges, the following suggestions were made by ten per cent or more of teachers and lecturers:

♦ more visits to and contact with schools by university staff and/or students;

♦ provision of more details on admission processes and interviews.

Perceived knowledge about higher education

Those interviewed believed that they were reasonably well informed about higher education since most had been responsible for HEI applications for many years. Nevertheless, several acknowledged that there were gaps in their knowledge with regard to new developments such as the revised UCAS tariff, the UCAS electronic system, and Curriculum 2000. One interviewee said that *'things are constantly changing'*. Whilst welcoming these and other developments, he said that keeping abreast with such changes was time-consuming.

Another interviewee said he was aware that he lacked knowledge about some new courses and disciplines – *'I ought to know more about what computers do when people want to study IT'* and '[Media studies is} *just a word to me'*. Another identified a gap in his knowledge relating to keeping abreast with what universities were demanding of pupils at interview.

Ways in which those interviewed had kept themselves up to date included: workshop-based sessions at a local university involving representatives from local schools and admissions tutors from different departments; a two-day visit to an Oxford college in company with other sixth-form tutors; attendance at relevant conferences (for example, on guiding A-level students through UCAS admissions procedures); and visiting local higher education institutions.

Colleagues' knowledge of higher education

Several of those interviewed were concerned about the lack of knowledge among some of their colleagues involved with Year 12 and 13 students – especially form tutors and course tutors. This echoed the findings of the survey regarding the level of knowledge of subject tutors.

One interviewee believed that many sixth-form tutors held the view that *'Oh, they're the sixth form, they don't need much pastoral care or careers guidance'*. Another was concerned that some course tutors were giving students inaccurate information 'because they thought they were up to date'. She tried to encourage course tutors to accompany her on visits to higher education institutions but, as she said, *'the ones you really want to go along wouldn't go along'*.

Interviewees acknowledged a need for INSET for colleagues. One suggested a couple of twilight sessions focusing on such issues as: the UCAS electronic application system, student finance, information resources available to students (especially electronic ones), and practices and procedures within the school for advising and supporting students. However, it was acknowledged that INSET was not always easy to arrange because of the many other professional demands on colleagues' time.

Personal contacts with higher education institutions

When asked about personal contacts, all interviewees cited local institutions. Several mentioned their involvement in partnership schemes with local universities. Oxford and Cambridge colleges were also mentioned by several of those interviewed, and one interviewee cited the university he had attended as a student. It was notable that, other than Oxford and Cambridge, there were few contacts with more distant universities.

3. THE CHALLENGES FACING ABLE STUDENTS FROM DISADVANTAGED AREAS

This section examines teachers/lecturers' perceptions of the challenges facing students from disadvantaged areas who may wish to apply to higher education. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements regarding the opportunities and challenges facing such students. They were asked to respond in terms of a five-point scale (strongly agree; agree; not sure; disagree; and strongly disagree). Comparisons have been made in terms of the combined proportion that 'strongly agreed/agreed' with each statement. Their responses are shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2   Teachers with responsibility for advice on HE in schools with sixth forms
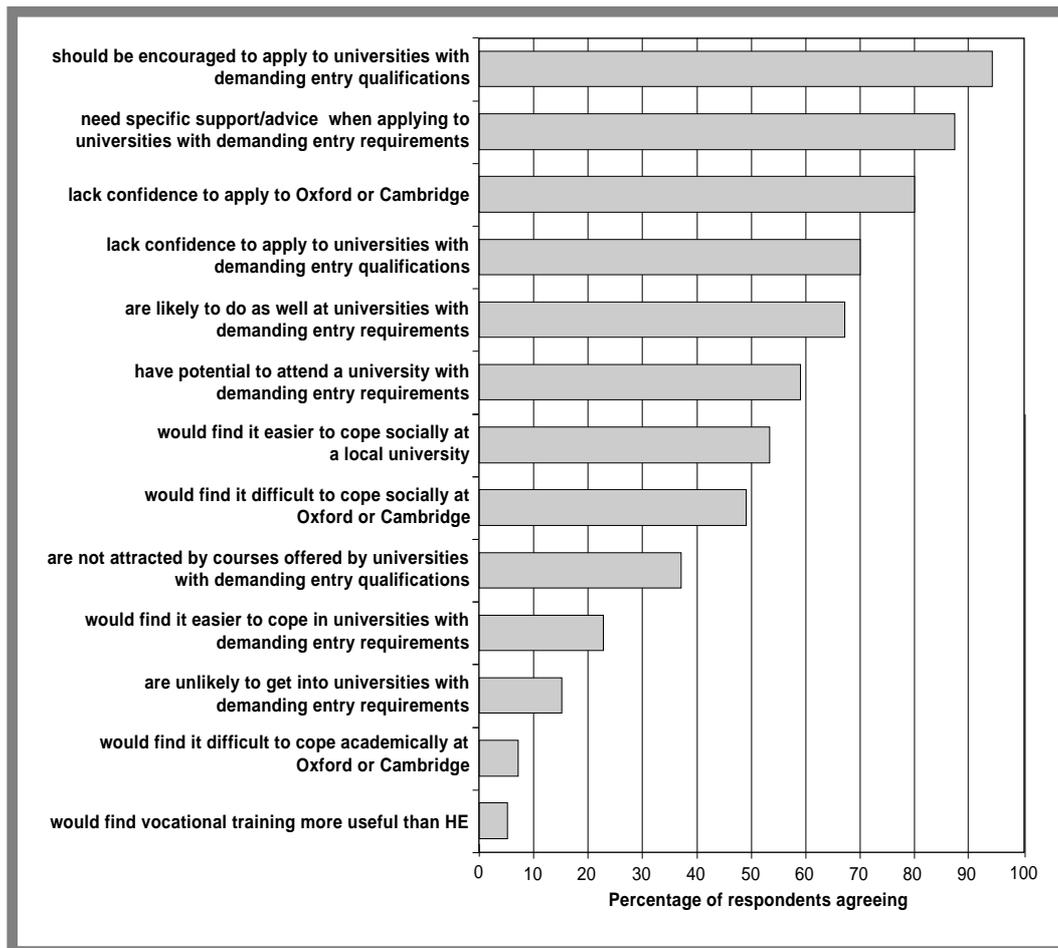
3.1 Universities with more demanding entry qualifications

The majority (around 90 per cent) of heads of post-16 education in schools and colleges believed that able students from disadvantaged areas:

♦ should be positively encouraged to apply to universities with more demanding entry qualifications; but that they

♦ needed specific support and advice when they apply to such institutions.

About two-thirds of the heads of post-16 education believed that able students from disadvantaged areas:

● lacked the confidence to apply to universities with more demanding entry qualifications; but

● were likely to do just as well as those from more favoured areas, should they go to such institutions.

However, a similar proportion believed that, whilst such students had the potential to attend a university with demanding entry qualifications, they were unlikely to do so. Interestingly, only about 15 per cent believed that able students from disadvantaged areas would be rejected by such institutions should they apply.

Only about a third believed that such students were not attracted to the courses offered by universities with more demanding institutions, and very few (about five per cent) believed that such students would find vocational training of some type more useful than higher education. Nevertheless, about half believed that such students would find it easier to cope socially in a local university.

The views of sixth-form subject tutors and heads of KS4 in schools were generally similar to those of the heads of post-16 education. However, slightly higher proportions of sixth-form subject tutors and heads of KS4 in schools without sixth forms were likely to believe that able students from disadvantaged areas were not normally attracted to the courses offered by universities with more demanding entry qualifications.

3.2 Oxford and Cambridge

About 80 per cent of the heads of post-16 education believed that able students from disadvantaged areas lacked the confidence to apply to Oxford or Cambridge.

Although half of the heads of post-16 education believed that such students would find it difficult to cope socially at these universities, less than ten per cent believed that they would find it difficult to cope academically.

The views of sixth-form subject tutors and heads of KS4 in schools were generally similar to those of the heads of post-16 education.

4. WHY SOME ABLE STUDENTS LEAVE AT 16

This section of the report focuses on the responses of heads of KS4 regarding their perceptions of students' reasons for withdrawing from full-time education at the end of Year 11.

About two-thirds of the heads of KS4 taking part in the survey indicated that they were aware of able students in their schools during the past five years who had the potential to go on to HE but who did not continue their full-time education beyond the age of 16.

4.1 Heads of KS4: perceptions of the factors dissuading/preventing able students from remaining in education beyond 16

In a follow-up question, they were asked to say how important they thought each of a list of factors had been in dissuading/preventing these students from going on to higher education. They were asked to respond in terms of a three-point scale (not important; somewhat important; and very important). See Figure 3, where the responses of heads of KS4 in school with sixth forms have been ranked in terms of the percentages opting for 'somewhat important/important'.

Figure 3   Factors dissuading or preventing able students from remaining in education post-16: heads of KS4 in schools with sixth forms
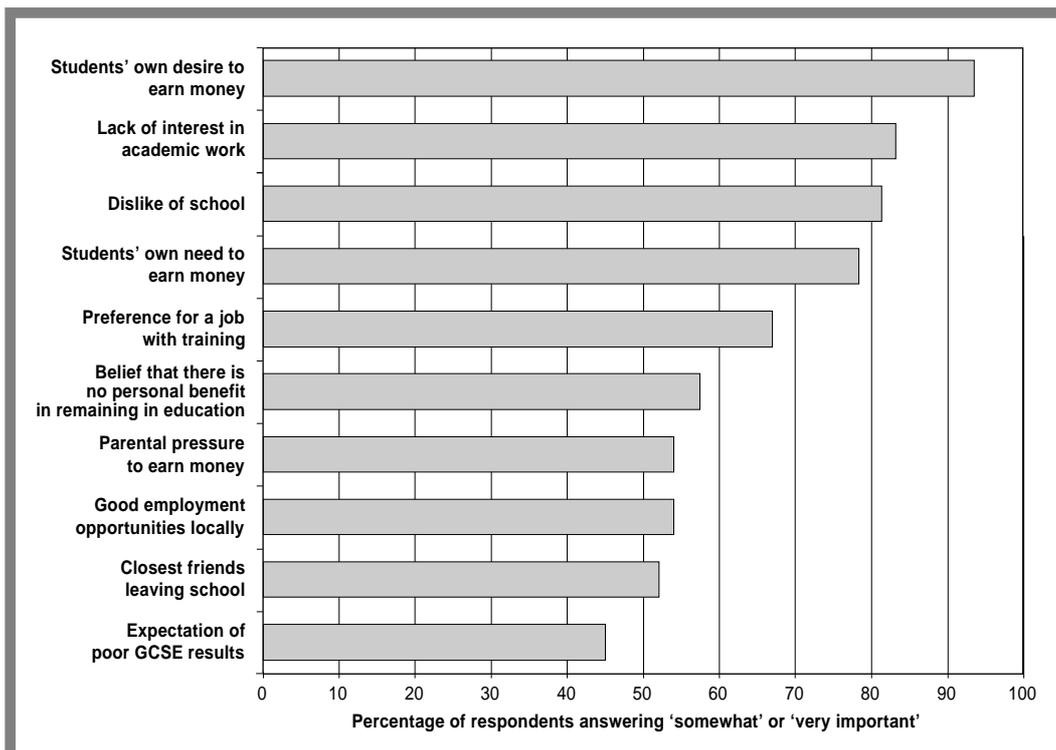
The factors rated as somewhat important/very important by over 70 per cent of respondents were:

♦ students' own desire to earn money immediately (this was the highest rated factor);

♦ students' own need to earn money immediately;

♦ lack of interest in academic work;

♦ dislike of school; and

♦ preference for a job with part-time training.

These factors were rated as somewhat important/very important by 50 – 70 per cent of respondents:

♦ belief that there was no personal benefit in remaining in education;

♦ parental pressure to earn money immediately; and

♦ good employment opportunities locally.

As the results above show, the most highly rated factors fell into three broad groups:

♦ financial factors (considered to be the most important);

♦ negative feelings about school and education; and

♦ employment-related factors.

Parents and home background

In one 11 – 16 school, the head of KS4 raised the related issues of lack of parental support and parental expectation that their children will not remain in education. He said *'we're fighting low parental aspirations… There's not a lot of push from home'*.

He added that the majority of parents did not think in terms other than those that characterised their own lives – leaving school at the first opportunity. He believed that getting work was relatively easy in the area and that *'earning £150 a week at 16 is quite attractive'*. It was difficult to get students to think long term. They *'don't have the role models'*.

He also mentioned poor attendance levels *'It's a low paid area. At key times it suits parents to have their kids helping out in the local factory.'*

Low aspirations

A further challenge identified by one interviewee was the poor local image of the school and consequent low student self-esteem: *'We can't do it. We're from X school.'* It is pertinent to note that the academically able students in the area are creamed off by local grammar schools.

5. WHY SOME STUDENTS CHOOSE NOT TO GO ON TO HIGHER EDUCATION

This section focuses on the perceptions of heads of post-16 education as to the factors dissuading/preventing able students from going on to higher education.

Respondents were asked whether they had been aware, during the past five years, of students in their school/college with the potential to go to a higher education institution but who did not do so. Almost all (96 per cent) of the heads of post-16 education indicated that during the last five years there had been such students in their school.

In a follow-up question, they were asked to say how important they thought each of a list of factors had been in dissuading/preventing these students from going on to higher education. They were asked to respond in terms of a three-point scale (not important; somewhat important; and very important). See Figure 4, where the responses of heads of post-16 education have been ranked in terms of the percentages opting for 'somewhat important/ important'.

These factors were rated as somewhat important/very important by over 90 per cent of respondents:

♦ concern about the financial effects of attending university (this was by far the most highly rated factor);

♦ students' own desire to earn money immediately.

These factors were rated as somewhat important/very important by 60 – 90 per cent of respondents:

♦ lack of interest in schoolwork;

♦ parental pressure to earn money immediately;

♦ likelihood of poor A-level grades;

♦ lack of support from parents;

♦ no close relatives have been to university;

♦ preference for a job with part-time training; and

♦ underestimation of own ability.

These factors were rated as somewhat important/very important by 40 – 59 per cent of respondents:

♦ good employment opportunities locally;

♦ HE courses inappropriate for chosen career.

Figure 4   Factors dissuading or preventing able students from going on to higher education: teachers with responsibility for applications to HE in schools with sixth forms
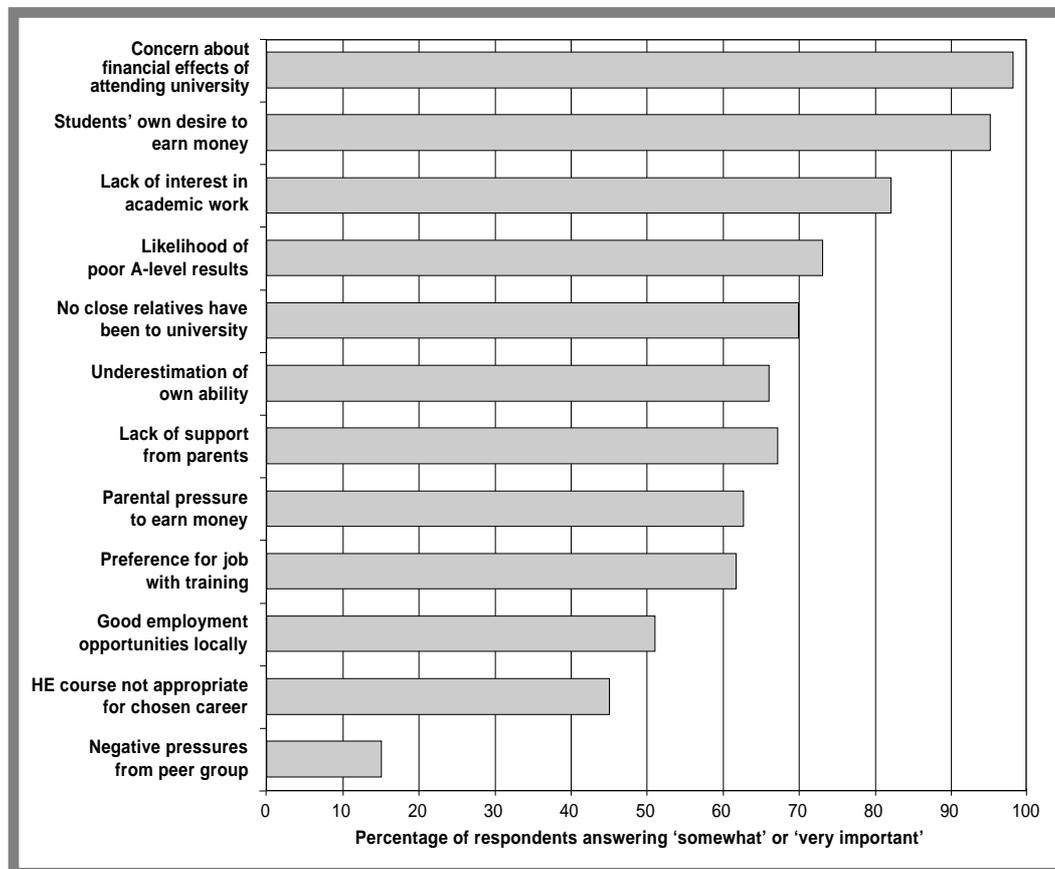
This factor was rated as somewhat important/very important by 15 per cent of those in schools and 37 per cent in colleges:

♦   negative pressure from peer group.

As the results above show, the most highly rated factors fell into three broad groups:

♦   financial factors (considered to be by far the most important);

♦   negative feelings about school and education; and

♦   lack of parental/family support.

Financial issues

Those interviewed believed that students were dissuaded from pursuing entry to higher education because of concerns about financial difficulties – *'That's the major one for a lot of the students'*. Some interviewees indicated that many students had turned their back on higher education out of a concern not to add to their parents' financial burden – *'They won't go because they don't want to put their families in debt'*. They believed that many students did not like the being financially indebted to their parents. One noted, for example, that increasing numbers of former pupils had contacted him three, four, or even five years later, requesting a reference as they

planned now to pursue entry to higher education. Aged 21 or 22, they were financially independent of their parents. The introduction of tuition fees and student loans was seen by one interviewee to have been little short of calamitous, particularly when this first arose – *'That knocked our progression statistics from college to university way down – by the order of 50 per cent'*.

Family background and parental support

The head of post-16 education in one 11 – 18 school said that many students in the area had a long history of unemployment in the family stretching back over two and even three generations. He was convinced that students' lack of understanding – or mistaken notions – about careers hindered their aspirations: *'They've got no idea of what people do or why. They probably know no one who's been to university other than a teacher.'* He believed that *'parents want the best for their children but they're very negative in their outlook'*. They tended to find difficulties with any development that threatened the status quo. There was a certain lack of encouragement from home – *'a lack of tradition really'*. Sometimes, parents knew very little about higher education. For example, another interviewee was taken aback when it emerged that one mother's notion of a university was akin to *'a factory where you were taught a skill, like sewing'* and she did not want this for her daughter.

There could also be practical deterrents. One interviewee pointed out that some parents relied on a son or daughter being around for substantial amounts of time – in order to care for a younger sibling for example, or simply to look after the house. It should be noted that, a considerable proportion of students in this school came from single-parent families.

Another head of post-16 education said that almost all of the students who go on to higher education from the school were the first in their family to do so. The school staff had to convince parents that the school believed their child was capable of going on to higher education and should be thinking of doing so. This could be a difficult task since higher education did not form part of parental thinking or expectations.

Another interviewee said that parental thinking and views were one of the greatest obstacles for able students wishing to go on to HE: *'Parents are becoming my block really… We have very supportive parents but generally they don't know what to do.'* She strives to deal on a one-to-one basis with parents – often via the telephone – as the situation dictates, and depending on the particular student's interests and wishes. However, she is considering convening an introductory parents' evening early in Year 12 at which certain basic information could be conveyed, such as the benefits of higher education, and details about financing higher education studies. She felt that this ought to go ahead before she commenced working with the students themselves.

Negative pressures from peer group and community

A careers mentor who was interviewed had noted negative peer pressures – *'wanting to fit into the group'*; *'aspiring to university is not the done thing* [here]. *The school is changing this [view], though it's also to be found in the wider neighbourhood'*.

6. HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND COURSES WITH DEMANDING ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS: WHY SOME POTENTIAL STUDENTS CHOOSE NOT TO APPLY

Heads of post-16 education in schools and colleges were asked to indicate whether, during the past five years, students from their school/college had gone on to any institutions/courses with demanding entry qualifications. A follow-up question asked whether, during this period, they had been aware of other students with the potential to attend such institutions who did not do so. If so, they were asked to estimate the importance of each of a list of factors in dissuading/preventing students from going. They were asked to respond in terms of a three-point scale (not important; somewhat important; and very important).

Figure 5   Factors dissuading or preventing able students from going to universities with demanding entry qualifications: teachers with responsibility for applications to HE in schools with sixth forms
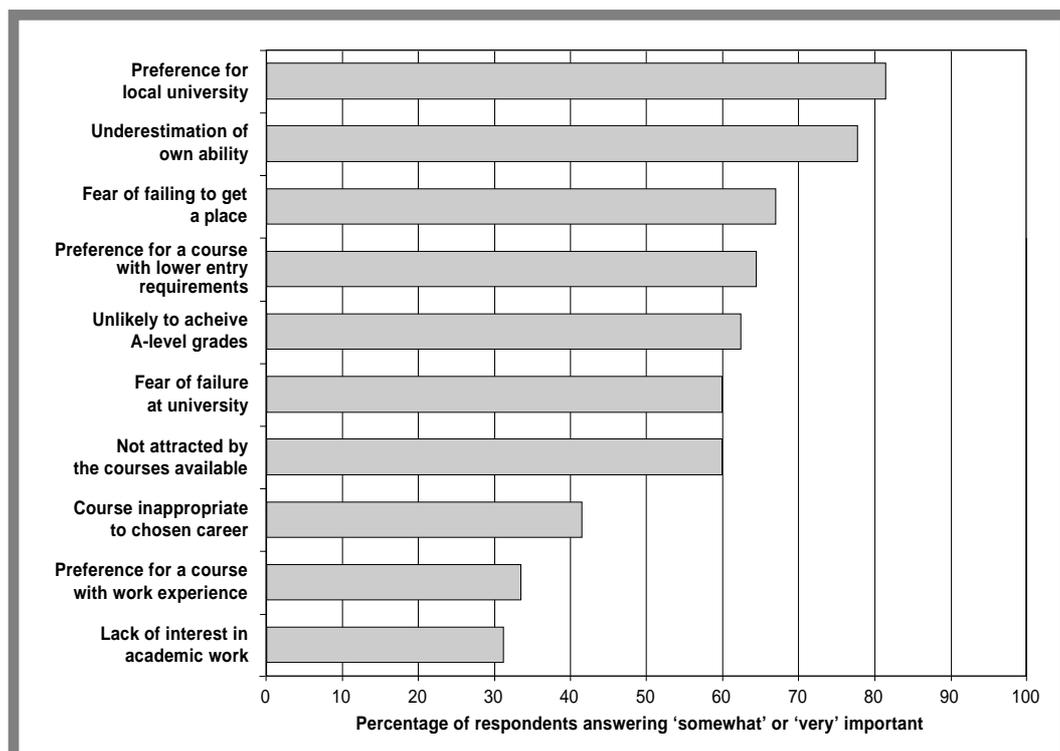
About 90 per cent of the heads of post-16 education said that their schools/ colleges had had at least some students going on to the institutions/courses with demanding entry qualifications during the last five years, and about half indicated that they had been aware, during this period, of students in their school/college who had the potential to attend such a university (or take a course/subject), but did not do so.

Figure 5 shows the responses for teachers with responsibility for applications to HE when asked about factors believed to have dissuaded/prevented able students from going on to such institutions/courses. It should be noted that, although few of the factors were rated as 'very important', many were considered to be 'somewhat important'.

The most important factor was preference for a local university. This was rated as 'very important' by 37 per cent of respondents in schools and 54 per cent in colleges (and 'somewhat important' by 44 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively).

Lack of confidence was believed to be a contributory factor: for example underestimation of own ability; preference for a course with lower entry qualifications; fear of failure to get a place and fear of failure when at university. Although only 14 per cent of heads of post-16 education in schools rated underestimation of their own ability as 'very important', 64 per cent rated it as 'somewhat important.'

The fact that the students were not attracted by the courses available at these universities was rated as 'very important' by about 20 per cent of respondents in schools and colleges and 'somewhat important' by about 40 per cent.

Lack of interest in academic work, preference for a course that included work experience and the fact that the courses were inappropriate to a chosen career were not considered to be important.

As the results above show, the most highly rated factors fell into two broad groups

♦   preference for a local university (considered to be the most important); and

♦   lack of confidence.

Preference for a local university

Several of those interviewed believed that financial concerns had increased the proportions of their students applying to local institutions. One was convinced that this trend was directly related to the abolition of grants and the introduction of student loans – *'Students are not going to risk the huge amount of debt that going away from home entails. This is the challenge'* and *'they feel that they can't afford to go… They're not keen to move away from the local area, partly because it would be cheaper for them to stay'*.

By this stage in their lives, many of the students will have part-time jobs. Having to give up these was seen by one interviewee to act as a further deterrent to going away to university. Indeed, for some families a degree of reliance on their children being able to supplement the family 'income' is part of their everyday reality.

Several of those interviewed pointed out that students seemed fearful of building up substantial debts and would either pass up on the chance to go on to higher education or apply to a local university so that they could live at home. One said that he was aware of another new phenomenon – the growing number who were attending university some distance away from home to which they commuted on a daily basis.

One head of post-16 education identified a tendency for students to think in terms of attending a local higher education establishment and not give due consideration to the possibility of going to a university further away.

7. APPLYING TO OXFORD OR CAMBRIDGE: WHY SOME POTENTIAL STUDENTS CHOOSE NOT TO APPLY

This section focuses on the perceptions of heads of post-16 education in schools and colleges regarding the factors dissuading/preventing able students from applying to Oxford or Cambridge.

Heads of post-16 education were asked to indicate whether, during the past five years, students from their school or college had gone to Oxford or Cambridge. A follow-up question asked whether, during this period, they had been aware of any students with the potential to go to Oxford or Cambridge who did not do so. If so, they were asked to estimate the importance of each of a list of factors in dissuading/preventing them from going in terms of a three-point scale (not important; somewhat important; and very important).

In about 90 per cent of the schools and nearly 80 per cent of the colleges, one or more students had applied for Oxford or Cambridge during the past five years, and in about three-quarters of the schools and two-thirds of the colleges, at least one student had been successful in gaining a place.

Factors believed to have 'occasionally/often' discouraged students from applying for Oxford and Cambridge were, in order of perceived importance;

♦ would not feel comfortable in context;

♦ assumption that they would not be offered a place;

♦ the high entry qualifications;

♦ lack of confidence they could cope;

♦ prefer a more local university;

♦ perceived cost;

♦ dislike of courses/syllabuses;

♦ some additional exams; and

♦ interviews.

Few respondents considered the following factors to be important in discouraging students from applying:

♦ earlier closing date;

♦ additional application form;

♦ inability to apply to both Oxford and Cambridge;

♦ lack of information;

♦ lack of a role model on the school staff; and

♦ the college system.

Lack of self-confidence

One head of post-16 education noted that each year there was a group of students with the potential to go to Oxbridge but only occasionally did one submit a formal application to either Oxford or Cambridge. She felt that, in part, this reflected a general lack of self-confidence.

8. SUPPORT AND ADVICE FOR STUDENTS WHO MAY WISH TO APPLY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

This section focuses on the responses of heads of post-16 education in schools and colleges regarding the ways in which schools and colleges support and advise students who may wish to apply for higher education. Heads of post-16 education were asked to indicate the mechanisms used and resources available in the school/college to support and advise students. They were also asked about the ways in which they ensured that able students were made aware of the opportunities available to them at institutions (or for courses/subjects) with demanding entry qualifications. A further question sought information on the availability of financial support for students attending summer schools, open days and other external activities.

8.1 Support and advice mechanisms

The majority of schools and colleges used a range of mechanisms to ensure that Year 12 and/or 13 students were aware of all the opportunities available to them in the future, including higher education.

The following mechanisms were used in 90 per cent or more of schools and colleges:

♦ encouragement to attend HEI open days (or visit HEIs at other times);

♦ advice on careers;

♦ advice on choice of subject for HE course;

♦ advice on choice of HEI; and

♦ attendance at careers fairs.

The following mechanisms were used in about three-quarters of schools and about two-thirds of colleges

♦ information evenings;

♦ talks by university students; and

♦ encouragement to attend HEI summer schools.

The following mechanisms were used less frequently

♦ talks by people in different professions/jobs; and

♦ visits to employers.

Within the college sector, sixth-form colleges were more likely than colleges of further education to arrange open evenings, talks by university students

or by representatives of different professions, or to encourage students to attend HEI summer schools. With one exception (summer schools), the proportion of sixth-form colleges using these mechanisms was higher than the proportion of school sixth forms.

8.2 Specific mechanisms to make able students aware of the opportunities at institutions (or on courses) with demanding entry qualifications

Responses from heads of post-16 education indicated that 94 per cent of the schools and 85 per cent of the colleges had put in place advice and support mechanisms to raise able students' awareness of opportunities at institutions (or on courses) with demanding entry qualifications.

Their responses suggest that virtually all the schools and colleges surveyed encouraged able students to attend open days at these institutions/ departments, and that about two-thirds of schools and half of colleges also encouraged them to attend summer schools. Nearly two-thirds of schools and half of colleges arranged talks by students from universities/courses with demanding entry qualifications.

8.3 Resources

Virtually all schools and colleges made the following resources available to their students:

♦ careers library;

♦ internet to access information on HEIs, courses and careers;

♦ UCAS handbook; and

♦ university and college prospectuses.

Slightly fewer (84 per cent) indicated that alternative prospectuses were available for their students.

8.4 Financial support

Some 43 per cent of schools and 62 per cent of colleges sometimes provided financial support for Year 12/13 students to attend HEI open days but very few (about four per cent) always did so.

Some 30 per cent of schools and 47 per cent of colleges sometimes provided financial support for Year 12/13 students to attend careers fairs and nearly 20 per cent always did so.

Some 32 per cent of schools and 37 per cent of colleges sometimes provided financial support for Year 12/13 students to attend HEI summer schools but very few (about two per cent) always did so.

Nearly a quarter of schools and 40 per cent of colleges sometimes provided financial support for Year 12/13 students to visit employers but very few (about two per cent) always did so.

Raising aspirations: a comprehensive approach

A director of sixth-form studies in an 11 – 16 school believed that every student should be encouraged to apply to the higher education institution(s) with the highest rated course(s) in the desired subject area. He never discouraged applications, although he normally added *'a health warning'* for students he considered to be marginal. He also pushed them hard in the mock interview. Considerable attention was paid to students' projected exam grades, and a student's performance was monitored closely to ensure that s/he was on track. If s/he was thought to be in danger of underachieving, then some form of personal guidance would be initiated. He tried to ensure that very able students were well informed about the university 'league tables' published in *The Guardian* and *The Times*. He encouraged very able students to attend summer schools put on by establishments with demanding entry qualifications. He gave them 'mock' interviews and personalised guidance in completing UCAS admissions form. He also brought in current students from Cambridge to address sixth-formers on the particularities of Cambridge student life. Students from the school visit Oxford through the university's access scheme.

Raising aspirations: a selective group approach

The Vice Principal in a sixth-form college was particularly keen that the very able should think in terms of universities with demanding entry qualifications – not just Oxford and Cambridge but also places such as Durham, York and the LSE: *'I will always try to get the kids to want to match their potential* [to a suitable HE establishment].*'* Some three years ago, the college set up the Aiming High group. Each spring, course tutors and form tutors work together to identify students with the potential to obtain high grades in their AS examinations. These then form the Aiming High group – a name deliberately chosen in an effort to avoid the connotations of *'Oxbridge students'*. The Aiming High group is encouraged to attend a series of meetings during which the staff address the issue of *'the importance of aspiring to the best and not selling themselves short'*. Staff focus in particular on those universities *'which select rather than recruit'* and the professions. They also seek to put the university 'league tables' published in *The Guardian* and *The Times* into some sort of perspective, and *'to generally sharpen their* [students] *focus'.* This group of students also has the chance to visit Oxford or Cambridge on an open day, and some have the opportunity to go on a residential visit in the summer of their first year. In addition, the Vice Principal arranges talks by current students from Oxbridge – preferably former students of the college. The Vice Principal in a sixth-form college noted that, despite their obvious ability, the students tended to undersell themselves, which he perceived was bound up with the local – *'there's a lot of parochialism in this area'.*

Raising aspirations: individualised approaches

An able science student

The Student Services Manager in a further education college said that there were very few students in the college with the potential to apply to Oxford or Cambridge since more able students were *'creamed off'* by other local institutions. She could only recall one such student in the five years she had worked at the college.

The student in question was a very able scientist who had been keen to go to Cambridge to study the natural sciences with a view to specialising in chemical engineering. His father, himself a graduate, regarded Cambridge as elitist and pressed his son to go elsewhere. However, the student's tutors were very knowledgeable about chemistry courses at Cambridge and encouraged him to apply there. The Student Services Manager invested considerable time and energy trying to persuade the parents, father especially, to visit some of the colleges and see what Cambridge really was like. She also had to boost the student's self-confidence – she arranged mock interviews for him and coached him as to how to get across that there was far more to him than academic ability alone. The story had a happy ending. The father changed his mind after visiting Cambridge and the student was successful in his application.

Another able student

This student was invited to attend one of the Sutton Trust summer schools. When the head of sixth form contacted her mother, she met with a great deal of resistance. It turned out that she was fearful, of what might happen to her daughter on the long train journey to Bristol. The head of sixth form recounted how she had spent hours on the phone explaining, striving to reassure, and so forth. She even went to the lengths of equipping the student with a mobile phone and securing an agreement from her that she would call home at regular intervals, both on the journey and whilst in Bristol.

An 11 – 18 school

Personal interview

In one 11 – 18 school, students with higher education potential are identified by means of an individual interview, with a parent in attendance should they so wish. The head of sixth-form takes personal change of this group. Periodic personalised interviews take place as necessary. For example, should an able student elect not to apply to university, the head of sixth form or careers mentor would seek to find out whether this decision was an accurate reflection of their real wishes or whether there was some underlying factor, such as fear of running up debt or of not being able to cope with the workload.

The weekly 'review'

In the same school, there is a weekly review system for advanced course students, many of whom are expected to enter HE, which charts their progress through the UCAS system up until such time as their application has been lodged. Personalised targets are set each week and reviewed jointly by the student and head of sixth form or careers adviser: *'It's very labour intensive but it has worked very well.'*

The enrichment programme

Every sixth-form student attends a weekly period of enrichment covering a wide range of issues designed to make students feel supported and valued. In later sessions the issues of further and higher education and careers are discussed (for example: why people go to university; the advantages it can bring; the salaries people who have been through university can earn; and the sorts of careers that are possible).

Visits to higher education institutions

One head of sixth form said: *'We do an awful lot to encourage students to go away* [to university]*. We encourage students to visit three to four universities and we pay for the travel... It's critical for our students to go to a university and have a look and not choose from the pages of a prospectus… It's very important for our students to visit the city and feel happy with it, as much as for the course itself.'*

Acknowledging that this amounted to *'a big financial drain on the school'*, she defended the practice on the grounds that *'they won't go to visit them otherwise'*. These visits were seen as so necessary because the students lacked familiarity with university life and people who had been to university, allied to their lack of any real conception as to different careers. Parties of students are regularly taken to three non-local institutions. Going in a party meant that there was safety in numbers (*'There's a security for those students… There's a battle to get them out of the* [immediate] *area'*).

A Vice Principal of a sixth-form college also maintained that nothing could match the value of a personal visit to a HE establishment and *'talking to someone, getting the feel of the place – you can't get this from a prospectus or a virtual reality site'*. Increasingly, however, this was precisely what students were coming to rely on virtual reality open days: *'It's going to depersonalise a lot of this business.'*

Summer schools

Several interviewees mentioned that students had attended summer schools. For example, the Sutton Trust summer schools came to the head of sixth form's attention last year via a flyer. Greatly taken by the idea, after careful consideration she nominated three students who she felt would benefit. She was overjoyed when all three proved successful. The students concerned spent a week each at Oxford, Cambridge and Bristol. However, a Student Services Manager in an FE college thought that, although summer schools were an 'excellent' introduction to higher education, the lure of earning a week's wages was far more of an attraction for the majority of students – *'They tend to think very short-term'*.

Links with Oxbridge

One head of post-16 education said that their main strategy had been to build relations with Oxbridge colleges. She gave two examples.

The first of these was a two-day visit to an Oxford college in the company of four Year 12 pupils early in Year 12. Those who went enjoyed it, even though beforehand they had not anticipated doing so, expecting *'that everyone would be snooty!'* Interestingly, one student refused to take part in the visit (*'I don't want to miss my lessons… I don't know whether I would like it…'*).

The second visit comprised a four-day summer school held at another Oxford college as part of a recruitment drive targeting a particular area. She had been accompanied by eight Year 12 students, two of whom subsequently applied to Oxford. They joined about 100 young people for the four days, which were devoted to sampling different facets of life as a student up at Oxford: attending lectures and tutorials (based around the theme of The Environment); a visit to a nature reserve; a visit to a museum; and social events in the evenings. The students were 'chaperoned' by a current Oxford student who was able to speak with the insider's knowledge about life as a student at Oxford.

She added a caveat – *'I do encourage them to go away but...'* Here she paused for thought, recalling the remark from one of this year's cohort: *'Why would I want to go to X University* [rather] *than* [the local university]*, when I can get a course that's equally good?'* She admitted to not having felt able to counter this argument persuasively, even though she recognised that might not be a thoroughly informed decision.

Links with local universities

The University of X is physically much closer to one of the FE colleges visited and the links are stronger than with Oxbridge. Representatives periodically visit the college to make presentations about the university, student finance and so forth. They also advise on UCAS applications, paying particular attention to what should go into the personal statement in order to make the most favourable impression.

A head of post-16 education described a programme run by a local university by which students from deprived backgrounds across the region can be accepted on to certain courses with lower admissions criteria than are applied in the cases of students from outside the region – subject to their having successfully completed a three-week assessed summer school. Other interviewees mentioned similar schemes run by other universities.

Information resources

Most of the resources – paper-based and electronic – identified by the survey were in use in the schools and colleges taking part in the interview programme. Interviewees mentioned electronic resources, externally produced paper-based resources and school-produced paper-based resources. They praised some of the resources but criticised others as *'dry stuff'* or *'little more than marketing tools'*.

Electronic resources

The teachers/lecturers interviewed were adamant that students preferred to use electronic resources, and that these were being used more and more as many students were unwilling to plough through paper-based resources. A head of sixth form in an 11 – 18 school, for example, saw electronic resources as the future, and said she would far rather spend time and money on creating a distance learning room than a conventional careers resource area. However, it was considered important for websites to be clear and user friendly.

It was noted that increasing use was being made of the UCAS electronic application system. For example, the Vice Principal of a sixth-form college estimated that about 60 per cent of last year's leavers had used it and he expected that figure to be nearer 80 per cent this year.

Paper-based resources

Nevertheless, as one head of sixth form in an 11 – 18 school said, there were certain paper-based resource materials which she considered to be of value and which she employed. She added that one of the most highly used resources was a simple folder giving details of which higher education institutions members of the school staff attended and what they read. The 'league table' guides published in *The Guardian* and *The Times*, and Brian Heap's annual publication [*Choosing Your Degree and University*] were also mentioned.

School/college produced guides

Several of the schools/colleges had produced their own guides to the application process as it was generally felt that it was not always easy to access information in the UCAS materials. For example, the director of sixth-form studies of an 11 – 18 school said that the school had produced its own 'Step-by-Step Application System' guide that encourages students, amongst other things, to make two choices of courses which lie above their projected exam grades, two that are close to their expected grades and two that are below. The interviewee believed that choice of university should be determined primarily by the quality of the chosen course, and not for other reasons.

A one-stop approach

However, as a Student Services Manager in an FE college said, the combination of good IT facilities within the careers centre combined with trained staff *('a one-stop approach')* made for the greatest effectiveness. Students needed to be guided toward the better quality websites – *'the better websites have a good coursework breakdown'* – and prospectuses – she dismissed the majority as little more than *'marketing tools'*. She added that *'students like good, clear sites which can influence their decisions about choice of university'*.

Financial support for visits to higher education institutions

Financial support for visits to higher education institutions was neither substantial nor extensive in the schools/colleges taking part in the interview programme. Several of those interviewed mentioned sources of support for students in need, but, as one interviewee said, only a handful of students in any given year were supported in this way. Students who needed financial support for visits were expected to come forward and ask for help. However, visits to higher education institutions were often subsidised.

9. SUPPORT AND ADVICE FOR STUDENTS AT KS4 WHO MAY WISH TO APPLY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Heads of KS4 in schools with and without sixth forms were asked to indicate the extent to which Year 11 students in their school were made aware of the implications of different A-level subject combinations for entry to higher education.

Schools with sixth forms were more likely than those without sixth forms to advise all their students on the implications of different combinations of A-level subjects for entry to higher education (66 per cent compared with 53 per cent of those without sixth forms). However, most of the remaining schools (of both types) provided this information to students who actively sought advice.

In response to an open-ended question, heads of KS4 indicated that the other types of information provided to students by their schools in Year 11 included:

♦ post-16 options in general (33 per cent of those in schools with sixth forms and 18 per cent of those in schools without sixth forms);

♦ education/training routes, such as different types of college, jobs with training (24 per cent and 35 per cent);

♦ types of post-16 courses (11 per cent and 18 per cent); and

♦ courses available reasonably locally (ten per cent and 14 per cent).

In response to a question on types of support and enrichment activities, heads of KS4 indicated that, during the past five years, their schools had taken part in, or organised, the following activities:

♦ out-of-school-hours learning activities for able students (60 per cent and 74 per cent);

♦ partnerships with HEIs designed to widen participation in HE (62 per cent and 47 per cent);

♦ other enrichment opportunities for able students (52 per cent and 58 per cent); and

♦ summer schools for able students (34 per cent and 38 per cent).

10. COLLEGE INVOLVEMENT IN STUDENTS' POST-16 CHOICES

This section focuses on the ways in which staff in colleges of further education collaborated with their 11 – 16 feeder schools to ensure that potential students made the best possible choices of A-level subjects.

In response to an open-ended question, heads of post-16 education in colleges indicated that their institutions collaborated with 'feeder' schools in the following ways:

♦   visits to schools to talk to year groups (43 per cent);

♦   individual interviews for all applicants (35 per cent);

♦   attendance at open evenings or careers events at 'feeder' schools (30 per cent);

♦   having a schools liaison team/coordinator (26 per cent);

♦   open days/evenings at college (26 per cent);

♦   induction/taster days (18 per cent); and

♦   liaison meetings with 'feeder' school staff (nine per cent).

Nearly 70 per cent of heads of post-16 education indicated that their colleges advised all potential students on the implications of different subject combinations for entry to higher education. Most of the remainder did so if students sought advice.

In response to another open-ended question, heads of post-16 education indicated that the following other information and advice about post-16 options and higher education was given to potential students.

♦   progression routes (25 per cent);

♦   finance and funding (16 per cent);

♦   full range of courses available (14 per cent);

♦   general careers information (13 per cent);

♦   qualifications required for various courses/careers (11 per cent); and

♦   employment opportunities/prospects (nine per cent).

Sixth-form colleges were less likely than colleges of further education to give information about finance/funding (nine per cent compared with 23 per cent).

11. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Students' financial concerns

Financial issues – concern about debt and the desire to earn money – were the most important factors influencing able students to leave full-time education at 16 and 18, according to the heads of KS4 and heads of post-16 education taking part in this study.

♦ To some extent, students' concerns about finance can be addressed by schools and colleges in discussion groups/classes focusing on the financial advantages of having a degree, including comparisons with those without degrees in terms of potential earning power, and on ways of managing for three years on a typical student income. Some of those interviewed provided examples of activities of this nature.

♦ However, it is also essential to draw policy makers' attention to the findings of this study concerning the waste of talent among able young people resulting from students' very real concerns about finance. The results of this study suggest that there may be a need for additional resources for students in disadvantaged areas who wish to enter higher education.

11.2 Negative feelings about school and education

Negative feelings about school and education were also considered to be important factors in dissuading able students from entering higher education.

♦ These factors were addressed in some of the schools and colleges surveyed by activities such as: discussion groups/classes focusing on the benefits of higher education in terms of interesting and worthwhile jobs and higher salaries; talks by university students focusing on life as a student; conferences; summer schools; and visits to higher education institutions.

11.3 Lack of confidence among very able students

Heads of post-16 education believed that very able students often lacked the confidence to apply to institutions and courses with very demanding entry qualifications – including Oxford and Cambridge – even though they had the potential to go there.

♦ It would help these students if more schools and colleges developed coherent strategies to encourage very able students to aim high, for example: early identification of target students; confidence boosting;

information on institutions and courses with demanding entry qualifications; individual and group support in school; specific support and advice when applying to these institutions; summer schools, visits, talks by students; and individual approaches to parents where necessary. Some examples are described in Chapter 8 of this report.

11.4 Choice of institution for very able students

Heads of post-16 education believed that some very able students might prefer a local university and, as one of those interviewed commented, this may be the most appropriate choice.

♦　It is, however, essential that such students should be provided with sufficient information about all the options available – including courses at institutions with demanding entry qualifications – so that they can make informed decisions.

11.5 Parents

Heads of post-16 education believed that lack of parental/family support was often an important factor in dissuading or preventing able students in disadvantaged areas from applying to higher education. It was pointed out that, while the majority of parents wanted the best for their children, they did not always think in terms of higher education. Most of the students came from families with no experience of higher education. Frequently, parents were more interested in their children getting jobs and earning money in the immediate future.

♦　It is essential that parents in disadvantaged areas are made more aware of opportunities in higher education, the types of jobs open to graduates, and the likelihood of higher salaries. It is also essential to address parents' concerns about student finance. This information could usefully be provided to parents of younger students, as well as those in Years 12 and 13.

♦　At the individual level, it may be necessary for schools and colleges to convince a parent that his/her child has the potential for higher education. It may be helpful for schools to establish strategies to address this problem.

11.6 Heads of post-16 education

In general, heads of post-16 education considered that they were well informed about higher education (HE), although they acknowledged that it was difficult to keep up to date about issues, such as new courses and subjects, new developments in HE and new sources of information available for themselves and their students.

♦   It is essential that schools and colleges continue to allow heads of post-16 education the time and resources to enable them to take part in relevant workshops, conferences, visits and summer schools.

11.7   Sixth-form subject tutors and heads of KS4

The results of the survey suggest that sixth-form subject tutors sometimes lacked up to date knowledge about many aspects of higher education. In addition, some of the heads of post-16 education interviewed expressed concern about this issue.

♦   It would be helpful if schools/colleges or consortia of schools could arrange short in-service education (INSET) sessions for sixth-form subject tutors, heads of KS4 and others involved in students' choice of A-level subjects focusing on new developments in higher education, the implications of different A-level subject combinations for entry to higher education, and other relevant issues.

11.8   Sources of information

Although heads of post-16 education praised some of the information sources available for students, they were concerned that some were 'dry' or unnecessarily complicated or simply not user friendly. Some of those interviewed had produced their own school-based guides to the application process. It was also pointed out that, whilst paper-based information is necessary, most students preferred electronic information resources.

♦   Higher education institutions and other information providers could usefully produce user-friendly paper and electronic information for students, schools and colleges.

♦   It may be helpful for schools/colleges or consortia of schools to produce their own guides to the application process.

11.9   Summer schools

Many heads of post-16 education felt that they lacked knowledge about summer schools for students.

♦   Providers could usefully seek additional ways of disseminating information about their summer schools for students and teachers.

11.10   Oxford and Cambridge

Some heads of post-16 education felt that they lacked knowledge about Oxford and Cambridge and their admission procedures.

♦   It would be helpful if these universities redoubled their efforts to inform schools and students about themselves and the courses they offer.

11.11   Links with higher education institutions

Although there was praise for the partnerships being developed by several universities, heads of post-16 education indicated that they would like more links with HE.

♦   All higher education institutions could usefully continue to develop and extend their partnerships with schools.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Administration and samples

Administration

The survey was carried out in February and March 2001. A covering letter was sent to each school or college, addressed to the headteacher or principal, enclosing questionnaires and pre-paid envelopes, as follows.

Schools with sixth forms

Questionnaires for:

●   the head of post-16 education (or teacher with responsibility for advice on applications to higher education);

●   the head of KS4 (or teacher with responsibility for advice on post-16 options);

●   a sixth-form subject tutor.

Schools without sixth forms

Questionnaire for:

●   the head of KS4 (or teacher with responsibility for advice on post-16 options).

Sixth-form colleges, tertiary colleges and colleges of further education

Questionnaire for

●   the head of post-16 education (or teacher with responsibility for advice on applications to higher education).

For reasons of cost, reminder letters were sent to a proportion of non-responding schools and colleges, enclosing a duplicate questionnaire.

Content of the questionnaires

The questionnaires contained both closed and open-ended questions, although closed questions predominated.

The questionnaire for heads of post-16 education in schools consisted of the following sections:

●   support and advice for students in Years 12 and 13: strategies and resources used;

●   entry to higher education; perceived factors dissuading/preventing able students in disadvantaged areas from applying;

- entry to universities and courses/subjects with demanding entry qualifications: perceived dissuading/preventing factors;

- entry to Oxford and Cambridge: perceived dissuading/preventing factors;

- respondents' perspectives on HE: courses on entry to HE attended; personal contacts with HE; perceived knowledge about HE; views about the challenges facing able students from disadvantaged areas wishing to apply for HE; and

- improving information and advice on HE.

The questionnaire for heads of post-16 education in colleges included the following additional section:

- college involvement in students' post-16 choices.

The questionnaire for sixth-form tutors consisted of a section on:

- respondents' perspectives on HE.

The questionnaire for heads of KS4 consisted of sections on:

- supporting and advising students;

- respondents' perspectives on HE;

- improving information and advice on HE.

The samples

Schools with sixth forms

The sample of schools with sixth forms was drawn from maintained schools in the NFER Register of Schools in England that had sixth forms with at least 30 pupils in the upper sixth (Year 13) but excluding schools with GCSE results in the top 20 per cent nationally. These higher-attaining schools were excluded as it was thought that generally they would have considerable experience of sending students to HEIs with demanding entry qualifications. There were 1,327 schools in the population from which the sample was drawn. Many of the schools with the lowest levels of achievement at GCSE level do not have sixth forms and so were not included in this population.

A total of 400 schools with sixth forms were contacted. Each school was sent three questionnaires: one for the teacher with responsibility for advice on applications to higher education, one for the head of KS4 (or teacher with responsibility for advice on post-16 options), and one for a sixth-form tutor.

Of the 400 schools with sixth forms in the sample, 232 completed at least one of the three questionnaires, representing a 58 per cent response rate (for at least one questionnaire). Eighty-three schools completed all three questionnaires. The following numbers of each questionnaire were completed:

Teacher with responsibility for advice on applications to HE:	186 questionnaires
Head of KS4 (or teacher responsible for advice on post-16 options)	151 questionnaires
Sixth-form tutor	143 questionnaires
TOTAL	480 questionnaires

The representativeness of the schools that completed at least one questionnaire, with regard to size and region of England, is shown in Tables S1 and S2.

Table S1   Representativeness of the schools completing at least one questionnaire with regard to size of school

	Sample		Population	
Size of school	Number	%	Number	%
Small	75	(32%)	447	(34%)
Medium	79	(34%)	439	(33%)
Large	78	(34%)	441	(33%)

Table S2   Representativeness of the schools completing at least one questionnaire with regard to region of England

	Sample		Population	
Size of school	Number	%	Number	%
North	62	(27%)	338	(25%)
Midlands	86	(35%)	466	(35%)
South	84	(39%)	523	(39%)

The representativeness of the schools completing at least one questionnaire with regard to average number of points scored per A-level entry (in 1998) in five bands is shown in Table S3.

Table S3   **Representativeness of the schools completing at least one questionnaire with regard to bands of average number of points scored per A-level entry (in 1998)**

Average number of points scored per A-level entry	Sample		Population	
	Number	%	Number	%
Lowest 20%	41	(18%)	245	(18%)
Second lowest 20%	53	(23%)	286	(22%)
Middle 20%	39	(17%)	246	(19%)
Second highest 20%	32	(14%)	223	(17%)
Highest 20%	46	(20%)	215	(16%)
Unknown	21	(9%)	112	(9%)

Schools without sixth forms

The sample of schools without sixth forms was drawn from maintained schools in the NFER Register of Schools in England that had no sixth forms, and also excluded schools with GCSE results in the top 20 per cent nationally.

A total of 200 schools without sixth forms were contacted. A questionnaire was sent to the head of KS4 (or teacher with responsibility for advice on post-16 options). Of the 200 schools in the sample, 104 completed the questionnaire, representing a 52 per cent response rate.

FE/tertiary/sixth form colleges

All 450 colleges of these types in the NFER Register of Schools were included in the sample. A questionnaire was sent to the lecturer with responsibility for advice on applications to higher education. Of these colleges, 182 completed the questionnaire, representing a 40 per cent response rate. Of the 182 completed questionnaires, 65 were from sixth-form colleges, 33 from tertiary colleges and 84 from FE colleges.

Appendix 2 The main differences between sixth-form colleges, FE colleges, and schools with sixth forms

A2.1 Mechanisms used by the school/college to ensure that Year 12 and/or Year 13 students are aware of all the options available to them in the future, including higher education

- Eighty-eight per cent of sixth-form colleges held information evenings for Year 12 and/or Year 13 students about future options, including higher education, compared with 54 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 76 per cent.

- Eighty-five per cent of sixth-form colleges arranged talks by university students, compared with 35 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 74 per cent.

- Sixty-nine per cent of sixth-form colleges encouraged Year 12 and/or Year 13 students to attend HEI summer schools, compared with 44 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 71 per cent.

A2.2 Extent to which the school/college provides financial support for Year 12/13 students to attend HEI summer schools

- Fifty-five per cent of sixth-form colleges said they **sometimes** provided financial support for Year 12/13 students to attend HEI summer schools, compared with 23 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 32 per cent.

- Thirty-two per cent of sixth-form colleges said they **never** provided financial support for Year 12/13 students to attend HEI summer schools, compared with 46 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 57 per cent.

A2.3 Types of contact the college has with potential students in its 11 – 16 'feeder' schools – groups of students (comparison between sixth-form colleges and FE colleges)

- Thirty-nine per cent of sixth-form colleges said they held open days/ evenings for potential students in its 11 – 16 'feeder' schools, compared with 17 per cent of FE colleges, with regard to **groups** of students.

- Fourteen per cent of sixth-form colleges said they attended school careers events in the 'feeder' schools, compared with 27 per cent of FE colleges, with regard to **groups** of students.

A2.4 Types of contact the college has with potential students in its 11 – 16 'feeder' schools – individual students (comparison between sixth-form colleges and FE colleges)

- Thirty-one per cent of sixth-form colleges said they had contacts with **individual students** regarding admissions interviews/process, compared with 14 per cent of FE colleges.

A2.5 Subject of other information and advice given by the college to potential students about post-16 options and higher education (comparison between sixth-form colleges and FE colleges)

- Nine per cent of sixth-form colleges gave potential students information and advice about finance/funding with regard to post-16 options and higher education, compared with 23 per cent of FE colleges.

A2.6 Mean number of students per year going on to higher education

- The mean number of students per year going on to higher education was 327 from sixth-form colleges, compared with 257 from FE colleges. The corresponding number for schools (with sixth forms) was 60.

A2.7 Estimate by respondent as to the approximate number of students each year who had the potential to go on to higher education in the last five years, but who did not do so

- The mean number of students per year who had the potential to go on to higher education but did not do so was 56 from sixth-form colleges, compared with 80 from FE colleges. The corresponding number for schools (with sixth forms) was 8.

- Fifteen per cent of students from sixth-form colleges with the potential to go on to higher education did not do so, compared with 24 per cent of such students from FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 8 per cent.

A2.8 School's/college's experience over the past five years regarding students going to universities, or courses/subjects, with demanding entry qualifications

- One hundred per cent of sixth-form colleges said that over the past five years some students had applied to universities, or courses/subjects, with demanding entry qualifications, received offers and gained places, compared with 80 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 94 per cent.

A2.9   Average number of students from school/college **who gain places at universities/ departments with demanding entry qualifications each year**

- The mean number of students per year who gained places at universities/ departments with demanding entry qualifications was 59 for sixth-form colleges, compared with 17 for FE colleges. The corresponding number for schools (with sixth forms) was 10.

- Forty per cent of sixth-form colleges had an average of 41 or more students each year gaining places at universities/departments with demanding entry qualifications, compared with ten per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was one per cent.

- Eighteen per cent of students from sixth-form colleges who go on to higher education go to universities/courses with demanding qualifications, compared with seven per cent from FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 17 per cent.

A2.10   **View as to whether the school/college has any mechanisms to ensure that able students are aware of the opportunities available at the universities (or for courses/subjects) with demanding entry qualifications**

- Ninety-seven per cent of sixth-form colleges said that they had mechanisms to ensure that able students were aware of the opportunities available at the universities (or for courses/subjects) with demanding entry qualifications, compared with 76 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 94 per cent.

A2.11   **Mechanisms used by the school/college to ensure that able students are aware of the opportunities available at the universities (or for courses/subjects) with demanding entry qualifications**

- Seventy-one per cent of sixth-form colleges said that they had talks by students from universities/courses with demanding entry qualifications, compared with 30 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 63 per cent.

- Sixty per cent of sixth-form colleges said that they encouraged students to attend summer schools at these universities/departments, compared with 41 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 65 per cent.

A2.12 View as to whether respondents were aware of any students in school/college in the last five years who had the potential to attend a university (or take a course/subject) with demanding entry qualifications, but did not do so

- Sixty-three per cent of sixth-form colleges were aware of students in college in the last five years with the potential to attend a university (or take a course/subject) with demanding entry qualifications, but who did not do so, compared with 49 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 49 per cent.

A2.13 Extent to which factors have dissuaded/prevented able students in school/college from going to universities/courses with demanding entry qualifications

- Thirty-seven per cent of sixth-form colleges rated the factor 'fear of failure to get a place' as not important, compared with ten per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 30 per cent.

A2.14 School/college experience of sending students to Oxford/Cambridge over the past five years

- Two per cent of sixth-form colleges said that no students had applied to Oxford and/or Cambridge over the past five years, compared with 38 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was eight per cent.

- Ninety-seven per cent of sixth-form colleges had the experience of students applying to Oxford and/or Cambridge, receiving offers and gaining places over the past five years, compared with 39 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 74 per cent.

- The mean number of students gaining places at Oxford or Cambridge each year over the last five years was 7.2 for sixth-form colleges, compared with 0.9 for FE colleges. The corresponding number for schools (with sixth forms) was 1.4.

A2.15 View as to whether the school/college has any specific mechanism(s) for identifying potential Oxford and Cambridge applicants

- Ninety-seven per cent of sixth-form colleges had specific mechanisms for identifying potential Oxford and Cambridge applicants, compared with 33 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 76 per cent.

A2.16 Extent to which factors have discouraged students in school/college from applying for Oxford and Cambridge

- The factor 'earlier closing date for UCAS forms' was rated as never discouraging students by 60 per cent of sixth-form colleges and by 38 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 75 per cent.

- The factor 'additional application form' was rated as never discouraging students by 69 per cent of sixth-form colleges and by 44 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 77 per cent.

- The factor 'perceived cost' was rated as often discouraging students by 17 per cent of sixth-form colleges and by 38 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 25 per cent.

A2.17 Extent to which the school/college provides financial support for students to attend summer schools at Oxford or Cambridge

- Forty per cent of sixth-form colleges never provided financial support for students to attend summer schools at Oxford or Cambridge, compared with 58 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 63 per cent.

A2.18 Extent to which the school/college provides financial support for students to attend open days at Oxford or Cambridge

- Twenty-nine per cent of sixth-form colleges never provided financial support for students to attend open days at Oxford or Cambridge, compared with 50 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 55 per cent.

A2.19 Extent to which the school/college provides financial support for students to attend interviews at Oxford or Cambridge

- Thirty-nine per cent of sixth-form colleges never provided financial support for students to attend interviews at Oxford or Cambridge, compared with 54 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 62 per cent.

A2.20 Extent of respondents' perceived knowledge about higher education

- Seventy-five per cent of sixth-form colleges said they knew a lot about university application/selection procedures, compared with 54 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 63 per cent.

- Fifty-one per cent of sixth-form colleges said they knew a lot about Oxford and Cambridge application/selection procedures, compared with 18 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 31 per cent.

- Forty-eight per cent of sixth-form colleges said they knew a lot about the Oxford and Cambridge system, compared with 11 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 28 per cent.

A2.21 Agreement with statements on able students from disadvantaged areas

- Fifty-five per cent of sixth-form colleges strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'able students from disadvantaged areas have the potential to attend a university with more demanding entry qualifications – but are unlikely to do so', compared with 75 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 59 per cent.

- Twenty per cent of sixth-form colleges strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'able students from disadvantaged areas are not normally attracted to the courses offered by universities with more demanding entry qualifications', compared with 41 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 37 per cent.

- Thirty-nine per cent of sixth-form colleges strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'able students from disadvantaged areas would find it difficult to cope socially at Oxford or Cambridge', compared with 57 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 49 per cent.

- Fifty-six per cent of sixth-form colleges strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'able students from disadvantaged areas lack the confidence to apply to Oxford or Cambridge', compared with 85 per cent of FE colleges. The corresponding figure for schools (with sixth forms) was 63 per cent.