Exploring Support for Progression to Higher Education for Young Full-time Vocational Learners in Further Education Colleges

January 2009
Executive Summary

In March 2008 Aimhigher Greater Manchester commissioned research into the transition from further education (FE) to higher education (HE). The research was undertaken with four local colleges, and was designed to generate transferable lessons and conclusions to improve understanding of the transition to HE process for vocational learners on full-time courses at further education colleges.

Aimhigher Greater Manchester aims to raise levels of participation in HE by learners from lower socio-economic groups. The relatively high proportion of 11-16 schools in the area means that most young people who stay in full-time education progress into colleges after compulsory schooling. Work with FE colleges to support progression to HE is a key part of the Aimhigher Greater Manchester approach. In 2007/08 additional funding was given to two projects to enhance Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) on HE progression in the FE sector through partnerships between Aimhigher, Connexions services and two local colleges.

Background

Research studies have shown that progression to HE by learners with vocational qualifications is relatively low compared to other groups. In fact one report estimates that progression by the age of 21 for those with Level 3 vocational qualifications is only half the rate for those with GCE A levels (about 45% compared to 90%) (1). There is evidence to show that vocationally qualified students tend to come from low socio-economic group backgrounds (2). However, in general there is a lack of reliable statistical data locally on patterns of progression from FE programmes and this issue has been flagged up by Ofsted in some recent college inspections.

Barriers and Enablers to Progression to Higher Education

The vast majority of learners identified cost, moving away from home and having to embrace a new life with new friends as the key barriers to HE progression. A significant number also identified the quantity and/or style of work at HE compared to FE. Practitioners' responses generally covered a broader range of potential barriers, including personal and family barriers.

The main enablers to HE progression were identified as:

- information on finance;
- help with the application process;
- learners visiting universities, higher education staff and students visiting colleges, and links with current undergraduate students as part of curriculum delivery;
- support with HE learning styles;
- demonstration of the benefits of HE;
- support and encouragement and use of role models.

Systems and Practices to Support Progression to Higher Education

The types of activities on offer to full-time vocational learners in colleges to support progression to HE included:

- helping learners to assess their skills and set goals;
- raising awareness of HE options;
- supporting decision making between options; and
- supporting applications to HE through the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS).

The consistency of what is on offer to young vocational learners, and the levels of uptake, varied widely both across and within the participating colleges. Therefore not all young learners in vocational cohorts were receiving the support they needed to make informed choices about progression to HE.

Annex 1: Practitioners’ Suggestions for Identifying Areas for Improvement: Checklist
Annex 2: Transition from FE to HE: Supporting the Decision-Making Process
Annex 3: Interviewee Details
Annex 4: References
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\(^1\) Action on Access (2005)
\(^2\) Archer (2004)
the same range of activities. Moreover, mechanisms to co-ordinate different types of activities with particular cohorts of learners were not always in place. Consequently, in some colleges, staff members were unable to identify which individual learners had taken advantage of which types of activities.

Tutors play a key role in advising and supporting learners’ progression decisions. Often learners see tutors as a more important source of support than advice and guidance specialists because they have subject specific expertise. However, there appears to be a high degree of variation in the approach taken by tutors to giving support on progression options.

Areas to Develop and Recommendations

The research report identifies areas to be developed and recommendations for policy and practice around progression support for vocational learners as discussed below.

- **Overall IAG Strategy: Linking Goal Setting, Options Review and HE Applications**

  Whilst examples were given by IAG practitioners of 1st year activities to raise awareness of HE, feedback from tutors on what was accessed did not always reflect this.

  **Recommendation:** Each institution should develop a progression support plan that clarifies the strategy and specifies roles and responsibilities. In particular the plan should clarify the distinct roles and responsibilities of tutors and IAG staff, and how and when the roles complement each other in practice. Once a progression support plan has been developed it needs to be agreed and communicated to all learner-facing staff within colleges.

  **Recommendation:** Work on options choices should be built in from the start of two year programmes. As far as possible it would be desirable for this work to include individual support as well as group sessions.

- **Supporting Delivery of Progression Support Activities by Tutors**

  Examples of well co-ordinated support emerged in relation to the systems in place for ensuring the accurate completion of UCAS forms. However support to choose the most appropriate course and HEI appeared to be more dependent on the skills, knowledge and approach of individual tutors. Lack of clarity on what was required of tutors, lack of monitoring of what was delivered and failure of communication between tutors and IAG staff hindered the consistency and effectiveness of delivery of progression support by tutors.

  **Recommendation:** Build IAG into staff development work for tutors. It may be necessary to deliver training and support for tutors to ensure understanding of their progression role and development of required knowledge and skills. A key element will be raising awareness of the potential benefits of progression work on learner motivation and attainment.

- **Availability of 1:1 Assistance from Careers Guidance Specialists**

  Relatively few learners were found to have accessed 1:1 support from specialist careers/guidance staff to aid their decision-making. There appeared to be limited awareness of the benefits of careers guidance and inconsistent referral systems.

  **Recommendation:** Make the most of Specialist Careers Advisers by clarifying the role of 1:1 assistance by IAG staff as part of an overall progression support plan. Develop a system to monitor the quality of UCAS references and if possible enable learners to have more time to complete the forms.
• **Partnerships with Higher Education Institutions**

The value of contact with university students and visits to universities was highlighted in relation to building self-confidence as well as raising awareness of university courses and student life.

**Recommendation:** Build strong partnerships with HE institutions. The Aimhigher progression framework is a mechanism for securing university involvement with Level 3 learners in the Aimhigher target groups. Colleges should consider organising group visits to/from a wider range of HE institutions and building in elements of course delivery or assessment by existing undergraduate students, and other ways to enable contact between learners and university students, particularly for learners without any student contacts. Bringing in college leavers who have gone onto university level study from your own institution can be particularly effective in demonstrating potential and boosting aspirations.

• **Progression Tracking and Evaluation**

There was a range of views and understanding of what data was currently collected on progression to higher education and on what it is possible to access.

**Recommendation:** Develop systems for the consistent tracking of learners. A starting point would be the systematic recording of UCAS applications and acceptances on a college-wide individual learner record system.
1. INTRODUCTION

Aimhigher Greater Manchester is part of a national initiative to raise levels of participation in higher education (HE) by learners from lower socio-economic groups. Our task is to work together to set up a programme of activities which will encourage people from a range of backgrounds to consider university-level study and help them to succeed in gaining a place. The Aimhigher Greater Manchester partnership encompasses a wide range of compulsory schooling and post-16 education and training providers including general further education (FE) and tertiary colleges.

Funding to the FE sector to support progression to HE is a key part of the Aimhigher Greater Manchester approach. Some colleges receive direct allocation of resources through the Borough leads to support progression. All benefit from involvement in Aimhigher projects and activities. In 2008, an extra allocation was set aside to enhance Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) on HE progression in the FE sector. This funding was allocated to two Connexions services which were tasked to work with partner colleges in providing additional IAG support to learners on vocational Level 3 programmes.

In March 2008 Aimhigher Greater Manchester commissioned research into transition from FE to HE for young learners on full-time vocational courses. The research was undertaken with four local general further education colleges, but was designed to generate transferable lessons and conclusions. In particular:

- to improve understanding of the transition to HE process for young vocational learners;
- to identify the enablers to transition as well as the barriers and strategies to overcome them;
- to develop conclusions and recommendations to improve practice.

1.1 Context for the Research

The FE sector is relatively large in Greater Manchester compared to some other areas, due to the high proportion of 11-16 schools. Eight out of ten secondary schools in Greater Manchester are 11-16 schools - so most young people who stay in full-time education progress into colleges after compulsory schooling. Data provided by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) suggests that just under 21,700 Greater Manchester residents enrolled on Level 3 courses with general FE colleges in 2006/07, and a further 15,700 were with Sixth Form Colleges. Over two-thirds (43%) of Greater Manchester Level 3 learners at general FE colleges were aged 16-18 years.

The post-16 education sector plays a key part in the transition to HE for Greater Manchester learners. Almost a third (32%) of all Greater Manchester applicants via the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) in 2007 gave their previous institution as further or higher education, and a further 43% described their previous institution as a Sixth Form College/Sixth Form Centre.

Levels of deprivation in Greater Manchester are relatively high: 63% of residents are estimated as living in areas within the 40% most deprived nationally. Overall, 66% of Greater Manchester enrolments (all ages) on Level 3 qualifications in 2006/07 at general FE colleges were from deprived areas of Greater Manchester within the 40% most deprived areas nationally. Amongst their counterparts in Sixth Form Colleges, 54% were from deprived areas.

The FE sector performs relatively poorly in terms of the rate of successful UCAS applicants. The acceptance rate from this group has improved over time, but in 2007 only 75% of further/higher education applicants had confirmed acceptances, compared to an overall rate of 81%.

1.2 Research Method

The research undertaken for this report comprised the following:

- a review of existing research on progression rates and issues relating to progression to HE for vocational learners in FE colleges;
- a review of data held in participating FE colleges on HE progression by young learners leaving Level 3 vocational full-time courses;

(1) Source: LSC FE04 return 2006/07
(2) Source: Greater Manchester UCAS dataset 2007
(3) Source: Aimhigher NW using Index of Deprivation 2004
(4) Source: LSC FE04 return 2006/07
(5) Applicants who receive an offer of a place and confirmed their acceptance of it. Source: Greater Manchester UCAS dataset 2007
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(1) Source: LSC FE04 return 2006/07
(2) Of applicants with known previous institution. Source: Greater Manchester UCAS dataset 2007
(3) Source: Aimhigher NW using Index of Deprivation 2004
(4) Source: LSC FE04 return 2006/07
(5) Applicants who receive an offer of a place and confirmed their acceptance of it. Source: Greater Manchester UCAS dataset 2007
Interviews with practitioners in four local colleges. This included interviews with data managers, subject tutors, curriculum heads and advice and guidance practitioners. The vocational areas covered by the research included Business, ICT and Creative Arts subjects. The mix of interviews varied in each of the participating colleges. Sixteen practitioners were interviewed in total(1);

- interviews with Level 3 vocational learners on full-time courses. Interviews were undertaken with 31 vocational learners on Business, ICT and Creative Arts courses.

The project focused on four FE colleges in Greater Manchester: Hopwood Hall College, Salford College, Stockport College and Wigan and Leigh College. Within these, the emphasis was on the progression of young full-time vocational learners at Level 3 on BTEC national diploma courses or vocational A levels. The colleges were selected in order to represent a range of experiences within the Greater Manchester context, including those involved in developing new approaches as part of the two ‘Enhanced IAG for Vocational Learners’ projects.

Information on the interviewees included in the research is listed in Annex A.

1.3 This Report

This report outlines the findings of the research as follows:

- Section 2 sets out the findings of the literature review;
- Section 3 lists the barriers and enablers to HE progression identified through interviews with learners and practitioners;
- Section 4 looks at the systems and practices in place to support progression;
- Section 5 discusses the conclusions and provides some recommendations.

The research was facilitated by a range of college staff, whose assistance was vital to its success. Particular thanks go to all learners and practitioners who were interviewed. Their willingness to be open about their experiences and opinions proved invaluable in informing the recommendations.

The research findings are relevant to:

- Senior managers and practitioners in the FE sector in Greater Manchester (and more widely);
- Aimhigher co-ordinators in local authorities;
- Connexions managers and staff;
- Aimhigher Greater Manchester working groups and the Area Partnership Committee;
- Widening participation officers in universities with responsibility for external linkages and partnerships;
- Other agencies with an interest in lifelong learning, including Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA).
2. BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Drawing on the literature review, this section sets out some key findings from recent research reports relevant to progression to HE for young full-time learners on vocational courses.

2.1 Patterns of Progression

Level 3 vocationally qualified entrants to full-time degrees are estimated at about 18% of the overall intake at UK universities. The proportion of vocational entrants varies by type of institution and tends to be relatively low at Russell Group institutions. Rates also vary by subject (higher in maths and computing, business and admin, creative arts and design: lower in humanities and medicine/dentistry[1]).

A number of reports have highlighted differential rates of HE progression amongst learners on different learning trajectories. Results from the Youth Cohort Study (2005), for example, suggest that 84% progress from A levels to HE, compared to 51% from Level 3 vocational programmes[2]. Some writers have sought to argue that the differences are due to varying levels of achievement between A Level and vocational learners[3].

HEFCE analysis (based on matching administrative data for the 2002/3 Level 3 cohort) suggests that 83% of those qualifying for a BTEC qualification went onto further study. Over two-fifths (41%) went on to study degree or other undergraduate programmes. Degrees accounted for 24%. Most go on to full time programmes (76%) and half study in the same subject area as they did for their BTEC award[4]. Amongst registered BTEC students in the cohort who did not qualify for the award, 8% went on to a degree or another undergraduate level qualification.

There is evidence to suggest that most learners progressing from FE to HE choose a local institution. For example, research in Scotland found well over two-thirds (69%) of previous FE students studied in a HEI in the same location or within commutable distance of their FE College[5].

Locally, a study by the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA), found that of over a thousand completers from Level 3 FE courses in 2004, just under half (47%) progressed towards a HE qualification[6]. We have been unable to explore statistically the pattern of progression from Level 3 vocational qualifications to undergraduate level study within the Greater Manchester colleges included in this research due to a lack of reliable central systems of recording progression within colleges. Two of the colleges involved in the research had central systems for recording progression to HE. One college systematically linked UCAS applicant information to the student record. The other collected feedback from tutors on leavers’ destinations during Autumn each year. However, these systems were not considered to be reliable, not least because learners’ intentions to progress are not always followed through. Indeed, progression tracking has been identified as a weakness in the recent inspections which took place at two of the colleges involved. Key issues are:

- There is no imperative on the FE sector to collect HE progression data (i.e. it is not a requirement of LSC funding returns);
- UCAS data tends to be held by careers specialists or in college departments. The UCAS system of referencing does not easily allow UCAS feedback to colleges to be translated onto centralised individual learner records;
- The cost involved in following-up leavers is considered prohibitive. All of the colleges involved mentioned follow-up exercises (questionnaire and telephone), but these have tended to be ad hoc exercises;
- Connexions services in this area do not conduct routine follow-up beyond the age of eighteen.

Table 1: Progression of Registered BTEC Students in 2002/03 cohort by qualification outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification status</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Further Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Any undergrad qual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported as qualifying</td>
<td>34,625</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported as not qualifying</td>
<td>14,677</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>12,382</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61,684</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HEFCE, 2007/35

2.2 Characteristics of Vocational Learners

Several studies have found that vocationally qualified students generally tend to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Analysis by the UCAS Data and Statistics Unit suggests that vocationally qualified applicants to HE are also more likely than A level applicants to be from ethnic minority backgrounds.

There is some evidence that learners tend to have different intentions at 17-18 if they take vocational rather than ‘academic’ qualifications. In a national survey, fewer participants aged 17-18, with 5 or more passes at GCSE at age 15-16 on vocational qualifications intended to apply for a higher education course compared to academic qualifications (90% of those taking academic qualifications intended to apply for a higher education course at some point in the future compared to 70% of those taking Level 2 or 3 vocational qualifications).

Non-academic qualifications are a route associated with employment or college-based provision in association with employment, rather than with progression to HE.

A longitudinal study of humanities and social science students with HNC/D qualifications included research on hopes and fears about HE:

- Hopes centred on the opportunities HE could provide, both as a way of furthering intellectual/personal development and beginning a new phase in their lives.
- Fears centred on perceptions of the higher standards of a university education, worries about study skills and assessment procedures, mixing with bright peers and feeling isolated.

A range of barriers to progression to HE for vocational learners have been highlighted in existing research including a number of personal barriers – such as low aspirations, lack of confidence, lack of understanding of the admissions process and of HE study. Such issues have been found to be more prevalent amongst vocationally than academically qualified learners, and can mean vocational learners may be put off applying to HE.

2.3 Supporting Progression

A review of support for progression for vocational learners concluded that some HEIs have developed effective strategies which benefit learners progressing from the FE sector. These include:

- support for recruitment (eg. outreach, specially designed prospectuses, publicity materials etc);
- work to change attitudes internally within HE institutions through staff development and research;
- development of assessment practices etc to maximise student success irrespective of background.

At the same time, some researchers have been critical of the pattern of relationships, especially as links between FE colleges and HE institutions may be more prevalent at ‘recruiting’, rather than selecting, institutions. Also, studies suggest potential weaknesses in student support at the FE/HE interface, which partly stem from a lack of dialogue between the two sectors. Several studies have identified structural barriers to HE progression for vocational learners, leading to potential unfair treatment of them in the admissions process to universities. These include lack of awareness of ‘non-traditional’ qualifications amongst HEIs, and perceptions about ‘curriculum fit’, problems with parity of esteem and lack of clarity in the presentation of entry requirements (creating confusion, for example, in working out what grades are required) and issues about academic standing and institutional image.

However, a recent research report into changes in practice since 2005 highlights progress in recent years to improve vocational admissions (including the UCAS tariff scheme), progress in terms of the parity of treatment offered applicants with different qualifications, and increasing links between university staff and vocationally related policy and practice such as activities associated with Lifelong Learning Networks and employer engagement. In other studies, HEIs and FE colleges indicate that Aimhigher activities have increased applications to their institutions from students on academic routes.
### 3. BARRIERS & ENABLERS TO HE PROGRESSION

Both learners and practitioners were asked to identify potential barriers for young vocational learners progressing to HE. A summary of these is outlined below.

Some barriers are structural/institutional, other barriers are individual, although there are clear overlaps between these. Replies from interviewees have been organised into themes, although some repetition remains since it was felt that retaining participants’ different and nuanced ways of expressing similar barriers and enablers added to the meaning.

The vast majority of learners identified cost, moving away from home and having to embrace a new life with new friends as the key barriers. A significant number also identified the quantity and/or style of work at HE compared to FE. Practitioners responses generally covered a broader range of potential barriers including personal and family barriers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BARRIERS TO HE IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE INTERVIEWS WITH LEARNERS &amp; STAFF</th>
<th>POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND ENABLERS TO HE PROGRESSION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finances:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Suggestions from Learners:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Practitioners and learners mentioned fear of debt, and the high costs involved.</td>
<td>● Information on Finance:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Practitioners and learners felt there was a general lack of knowledge of HE financial systems and the support available.</td>
<td>● Bursaries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Practitioners felt some learners were put off by the need to work whilst studying.</td>
<td>● Lower fees.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Learners said they would be nervous of wasting money on the ‘wrong’ course.</td>
<td>● Show how to get financial help whilst studying.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Financial help with visits.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Information on student loans.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Application process:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Help with the application process:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Learners felt that the way prospectuses are worded is confusing – it’s hard to know you’ve picked the right course. Practitioners said the lack of learners’ research on potential courses, leads to rushed/unhelpful decisions.</td>
<td>● More systematic support to decide; learner experience is ad-hoc and informal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Some learners don’t think there’s a course for them. Others fear they will not get a place.</td>
<td>● Support to make sure you’re doing the right course. Give feedback on courses; show prospectuses/leaflets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The UCAS application form is confusing. As are the different UCAS routes for some subjects.</td>
<td>● Have ongoing deadlines before the final UCAS deadline to get form completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Practitioners also mentioned disorganisation - learners not applying on time, or not following advice on completing forms.</td>
<td>● Offer incentives to apply.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Poor references were identified as an issue by practitioners.</td>
<td>● Practice interviews to help applicants be successful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Loss of motivation over the summer break could also be an issue.</td>
<td><strong>Help with the application process:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fear of starting a new life:</strong></td>
<td>● Close links between tutor and learner throughout UCAS application process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The main issues identified by practitioners were nervousness of going somewhere new/making friends, coupled with not wanting to leave current friends including boy/girlfriend.</td>
<td>● Give pro formas/checklists on how to apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Learners also expressed fear of starting a new life - eg. fear of moving away from home; friends not going and fear of not knowing anyone.</td>
<td>● Give practical help on filling form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Learners mentioned issues with travel.</td>
<td>● Learners doing lots of research – on courses, visits etc. to make informed decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Difficulty in finding a place to live was identified as a potential barrier by practitioners.</td>
<td>● ‘Quality control’ on references.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Reassurance that learners can cope: Get learners to see that they have different college friends than those they started college with - so they are able to make new friends.
### BARRIERS TO HE IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE INTERVIEWS WITH LEARNERS & STAFF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure of HE:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners felt that some learners don’t understand HE. Misperceptions include a lack of help with assignments, that HE is too much work and much harder than college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners expressed a fear of self-directed study/HE teaching style.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some learners were concerned about poor prior achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some practitioners felt there is a HE bias against vocational qualifications, and one person felt that vocational students are “not needed by HE”.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
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<th>HE Awareness:</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Practitioners felt that there is general unawareness of benefits of HE, and this was echoed by learners’ doubts over the value of HE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners felt that some young people believe that HE is not for them. For some it is not a part of home and college culture to go to HE. Many lack family experience of HE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some learners felt HE was not for people like them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learners had been influenced by bad press about ‘what’s the value of having a degree?’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There was uncertainty that having a degree will enable access to a ‘better’ job.</td>
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<table>
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<th>Confidence:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Both practitioners and learners mentioned lack of self-belief - Am I good enough?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE seems like a big jump from FE - Can I do it?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental pressure:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues identified by practitioners included pressure from parents to get a job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners also said that some parents don’t believe the learner is good enough, or feel that HE would be a waste of 3 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners pointed to family responsibilities, including being needed to help with family business.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous education:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners highlighted negative experiences of education as a barrier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This was seen as a particular issue for learners who do not have a ‘full set’ of GCSEs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some learners said they were bored with education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other learners felt they did not have the ‘right’ GCSEs to get into HE.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Personal situations:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some people face individual issues/difficulties, including homelessness.</td>
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</table>

### POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND ENABLERS TO HE PROGRESSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested Solutions from Learners:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HEIs visiting college. Links with current postgraduate students:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know when postgraduate students are in college so you can talk to them;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University staff visiting college, seeing learners and see our strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutors to choose a range of courses and HEIs to come into College, rather than let HEIs choose which come in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students to come in and tell you what’s expected. Follow a student round for a day/go into a lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support with HE learning styles:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More information about what course involves (ie. detail).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build confidence. Ease in to doing assignments.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested Solutions from College Staff:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support with HE learning styles:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build learners’ confidence in assessment methods, i.e. practice open-book tests and practice exams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage learners to see that they have good research skills, and access learning support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage learners to see that they have skills other than academic ones that are vital to succeed.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demonstrate the potential benefits of HE:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point out positive part about university – wider activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make it more appealing – social life, new friends, organisations, new city, good experience.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support with HE learning styles:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raise awareness of HE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutors facilitating visits to HEI open days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good links between tutors and HEIs.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support &amp; encourage:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutor to encourage you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to identify strengths &amp; weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone to talk to 1:1.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support &amp; encourage:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual learner feedback and encouragement by tutors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate IAG into curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support with identifying strengths and weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise confidence/aspirations.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Role models:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use role models - Case studies of different sorts of people who’ve gone &amp; difference it made.</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Links with parents:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build links with parents and demonstrate to them the benefits of HE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role models e.g. using students as assessors, visiting and giving details of work etc.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demonstrate the benefits of HE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help learners to have a vision, a target.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show light and opportunities at the end of the tunnel, ideally through getting ex-students in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify routes for learners to catch-up on qualifications, ideally within college.</td>
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4. SYSTEMS & PRACTICES TO SUPPORT PROGRESSION

Overall there was a high degree of similarity amongst the colleges included in the research, in terms of the range of activities offered to Level 3 vocational learners to support progression to HE. At the same time, however, the consistency of what is on offer across the board to young vocational learners and the levels of uptake, varied widely both across and within the participating colleges. Not all young learners in vocational cohorts had received the same range of activities. Moreover, mechanisms to track participation in support activities were not always in place, and therefore colleges were unable to identify which specific individual learners had taken advantage of which types of activities.

The key findings from the research on the structure of transition support are presented below, along with identification of strengths and potential areas for improvement.

4.1 Helping Learners to Assess their Skills, Set Goals...

The practitioners and learners we interviewed identified a range of activities during the first year of a full-time Level 3 programme, which contribute to decision-making about progression routes after the Level 3 programme. These included activities designed to develop self-awareness of learners' strengths and interests, raise confidence, and help them to set goals. Key objectives were to support and encourage learners to identify a positive future for themselves, and, if necessary, help them to overcome any misconceptions/barriers they have about their own abilities or limitations in relation to further study.

Examples of strategies and specific activities to help learners to assess their skills and set goals included:

- Development of individualised learning plans. It was clear from the research that there is great potential for work on identifying aspirations and planning towards achieving these to be included in the process of developing individual learning plans and subsequent reviews. The colleges included in the research reported attempts to do so, and to embed progress tracking into the delivery of the curriculum.

- Learner interviews to explore future aspirations. In one college learners were interviewed by specially recruited 'Pathway Coaches', who would talk to learners about what they can expect to achieve and look at options for further courses/careers.

- Activities to research career options and enable CV development were also provided (see below), although not always in a coordinated way with work to assess skills and set goals.

Tutors described individual planning with learners including identifying strengths and weaknesses and drawing out areas of interest, alongside a more formal review of attendance and performance. Some talked of supporting learners in deciding whether they were on the right course and how to use feedback to make decisions about future options. Several tutors described how year 1 allowed learners to focus on improving performance and developing self-awareness and that year 2 was the start of more formal work on goal setting. They described enabling learners to recognise their strengths as active and engaged learners, and often to challenge myths about HE and to take steps towards making the transition to HE.

A recurrent theme throughout the interviews was the wide variation of input from tutors. While some clearly saw working on progression as integral to their role and understood the links between motivation, achievement and progression, this was not always the case. Feedback from the student support staff included in the research emphasised the wide variation in approaches from tutors towards HE progression. Comments included:

"Some tutors are on the ball; they understand the system and the links between aspiration building, motivation, achievement and progression. Others don't have this awareness". [IAG practitioner]

"Some tutors are completely unaware of HE. Some are too proud to admit it: some aren't interested but just see getting through the course as the priority". [IAG practitioner]

The range of practice by tutors was reflected in work with learners on individual learning plans. In some cases, tutors appeared to concentrate on logging attendance and achievement, whereas others attempted a more holistic review that included broader skills and aspirations and identified support needs and ways to meet these. Feedback from learners suggests the latter approach is the most effective in supporting progression.
...and Build Key Skills and Confidence

Inputs often included group sessions designed to develop key skills and build confidence. For example, one college engaged a consultant to deliver a group work programme to all Level 3 learners aimed at building self-awareness, alongside team-bonding. Another described a range of enrichment activities, including abseiling, aimed at building broader skills such as team work.

Tutors’ accounts showed the ways in which they recognised the potential barriers for vocational learners which could arise from low self-esteem and feelings of not being capable of higher levels of study. We found examples where tutors had made specific attempts to support learners to overcome barriers by developing self-awareness and confidence as a pre-requisite to considering progression. Careers and guidance staff also identified a role in building confidence and aspirations through group work sessions. Comments included:

“For someone who doesn’t think they’re good enough for HE, it’s about encouraging them and enabling them to see they’re good. Also about getting ex-students in so they see what’s possible”. [BTEC Tutor]

“What works well is the empowerment programme we do – it’s not about applying to UCAS but more about getting them to ask questions, get their point across and believe in themselves”. [IAG practitioner]

In some cases tutors had made contact with parents to give information about the options available. This included the example of one tutor who had been able to make the case for going to university to a young Pakistani learners parents. The tutor said:

“With one student, his father wanted him to go to Pakistan for marriage but he wanted to go to university. I spoke to his father, who was asking if his son was good enough, and explained that he was and also talked about the benefits of university and that it was worth 3 years. Speaking the language also helped. It worked”. [Tutor]

What did learners say?…

Support from tutors had been instrumental for some learners in their decision to progress to university-level education. Indeed, several students who had applied to HE, and who had not considered doing so before starting college, told us how their tutor had played a key role in building their confidence and aspirations. Specific examples of how this was achieved included help with identifying their individual strengths and interests; breaking down work into achievable steps; giving positive feedback and encouragement; developing CVs; demonstrating the benefits of going to HE; explaining the detail of workload on an HE course; demonstrating that a learner has the skills to succeed in HE and breaking down myths about university. In the example of Case Study 1, support from a tutor had been crucial to overcome this person’s doubt about their own abilities. At the same time, some learners reported that they had had little or no input on progression from tutors.

Case Study 1: A young white man who didn’t have a family background of higher education, was studying for a national diploma in ICT and had gained an offer to study for a degree at a local university. He explained that before starting at college he had not thought of going to university, despite his parents encouraging him to do so:

“I thought it was out of my league. Too hard. I couldn’t imagine it as I wasn’t any good at school. But doing this course has shown me that I can…."

“My tutor has pushed me forward, other tutors don’t push you so much, but he’s given me lots of help and has shown me that I can get good marks. He helped me to relax and has broken the work down so it doesn’t seem so much. My tutor last year put me off as he said about having to write about 10,000 words, but this year I’ve been helped to write more and I can now imagine myself doing that”.

This person’s main suggestion was that something was needed to counter the impression given that university was very hard:

“People need to be informed, and motivated. Show them what it’s like, that they can do it. We didn’t get that last year. Some people don’t see it in themselves”.

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4.2 Raising Awareness of HE Options

Practitioners in the research colleges gave examples of a range of activities aimed at raising awareness of HE options, including:

- HE presentations in tutorials (either specifically focused on HE or covering a range of options);
- Visits to one or several HEIs, as part of a specially organised trip or a university open day;
- Building in contact with HE staff and students as part of sessions delivered back in the college;
- Broader activities to develop knowledge and understanding of HE life and courses such as HE fairs.

Although IAG staff told us that HE awareness activities were made available in the first year of a two year programme, feedback from tutors and learners suggested that these types of activities tend to be concentrated mainly in the second year. All of the colleges included in the research offered a presentation to learners about HE and other options, and this was usually arranged for early on in year 2. Inputs designed to enable learners to focus on specific Level 4 providers and courses tended to begin only in the second year of a two year programme. Several interviewees called for earlier inputs on HE options.

Most colleges said a tutorial which included a presentation about HE was compulsory. A typical approach gave general information about the types of courses which are available, terminology, sources of further information and how to apply (including the UCAS on-line application process). The aim being to engage learners with HE as a progression choice and motivate them to research options suitable to their own particular circumstances. In most cases the presentation was delivered by specialist careers/guidance staff, although this was not always the case – sometimes tutors would deliver it depending on their level of interest.

The extent and consistency of other types of HE awareness activities varied significantly between, and to a lesser extent within, colleges. Some followed up an initial HE presentation with a HE fair attended by local universities and/or gave support to students to attend external fairs. Other colleges mainly encouraged learners to attend open days, or organised a group visit to a local university. Tutors and IAG staff worked together in various ways - IAG staff organising HE fairs and visits or feeding information on open days through to tutors.

Awareness raising activities are informed and enabled by a range of links with local and, to a lesser extent, distant HE institutions. Links ranged from a reliance on individual contacts to more formal links/partnership arrangements. One college accessed taster courses provided by a local university to enable learners to try out particular subjects.

The extent to which HE staff and undergraduate students visited college varied widely within and between the colleges. There was some limited use by colleges of ex-college students and/or current HE students as role models, for example, practitioners gave examples of current practices which enabled learners to access undergraduate students in a way that offered a forum for discussions with them. Some colleges had built the use of current university-level students into delivery or assessment of coursework, and these tended to come from local universities.

“Students often come back to be guest assessors and to talk to students about their work. This works well – to see people the same as you – but it works in some areas better than others where staff are less aware of the value of bringing students in”. [Tutor]

“We try to timetable a Level 4 student onto delivery, even if it’s only for 2 hours, they’ll get an idea of life on Level 4. We also have case studies around the building that give examples of the possibilities” [Tutor]

There was widespread agreement on the value of HE awareness-raising activities, but also recognition of the work involved in facilitating this. Some practitioners suggested that this was a primary function of the Aimhigher programme. For example, one tutor commented:

“Aimhigher takes away from tutors all the planning of events – if they didn’t do it, they wouldn’t happen”. [Tutor]

Feedback from tutors suggests lack of awareness of Aimhigher activities and different perceptions of what is offered by Aimhigher and how this supports other types of progression support. Comments included:

“I’m unsure of what the Aimhigher Co-ordinator...
does - there’s no tie up at the moment with the Aimhigher” [IAG practitioner]

“There needs to be better communication about what’s on from Aimhigher and better co-ordination of events e.g. tutors are asked to accompany a visit after it’s been organised and with our timetables you can’t be flexible” [Tutor]

4.3 Supporting Decision Making Between Options

Colleges identified activities with learners designed to enable them to identify and explore a range of options after completion of Level 3. The activities usually involved both tutors and careers specialists, and were taken forward at several different levels including:

- group presentations and small group work;
- one to one assistance;
- using resource packs or web based information to assist learners to research options themselves or with the assistance of student support staff.

A common group activity is a presentation on post-Level 3 options with follow-up tutorial work on completing UCAS forms, and most practitioners said this was compulsory, although a few acknowledged it didn’t always take place. One interviewee suggested that tutorials on progression options are most effective when a tutor takes part to input course-specific information, leading to a session tailored to the needs of the learner group. Some tutors were heavily involved in offering information and advice on subject and university choices, whilst others were more reactive, attempting to answer specific learner queries and signposting to other information sources such as HEI prospectuses and websites.

Practitioners described a range of follow-up group work, such as sessions on personal statements or reflecting on options, delivered by IAG staff or by tutors using materials or lesson plans including those which have been developed by IAG specialists. The types of resources included written case studies and career profiles. Video examples were being used to a lesser degree.

Feedback from practitioners suggests that there is significant variation in both the amount and depth of group work provision. For example, one careers practitioner commented:

“There’s varied levels of involvement (by tutors) – some tutors stay while we do our sessions and input subject-specific information, and some tutors keep...
There are varied levels of involvement (by tutors) – significant variation in both the amount and depth of group feedback. Practitioners suggested that there is one-to-one assistance; some tutors pro-actively offer information and advice on subject and university choices, others are more reactive, attempting to answer specific learner queries or signposting to sources such as prospectuses and university websites. One-to-one support from tutors was identified as being particularly important to learners who are concerned about their ability to cope in HE. Comments included:

“[Learners] are very concerned about the difference at HE – they think that they have lectures where they can’t ask questions or get any help from tutors and will they be able to do it. It’s about explaining the systems, getting them to appreciate their skills and about where they can get support”. [Tutor]

The interviews with practitioners highlighted a range of issues, some subject specific, others college-related, that impacted on their ability to offer effective one-to-one support to students to making their decisions:

“We do get Careers packs at the end of the 1st year which have career profiles of people in the industry. They are useful, but the dust hasn’t settled yet on all the new qualifications e.g. diplomas, so it’s hard to work out the qualifications. It would help if there was some rationalisation of qualifications”. [Tutor]

“There is a difficulty in staff knowing what the options are. Tutors don’t get training on what’s available. They know information about the local universities, but don’t know about new stuff e.g. foundation degrees. How do you get that information when there’s such a wide range of choices? It seems to be left down to individual students”. [IAG Practitioner]

All of the colleges included in the research offered an option to students of 1:1 guidance from careers specialists. Interviewees identified a range of ways in which learners were informed of this 1:1 help, in tutorials during induction, through pamphlets and newsletters, and by tutors. One IAG practitioner described how services and activities interlinked in order to assist learners through a process of decision-making. This included a compulsory ‘Options post level 3’ tutorial and provision of an HE pack, followed up by an HE fair, which got good feedback from learners, and optional tutorials delivered by personal tutors or IAG staff. HE staff were included, for example, through delivering a presentation on personal statements. Personal tutors then continued to follow-up the HE application process with learners and, where appropriate, referred them on to IAG staff.

Case Study 2: A young mixed heritage man who had no family background of HE, was studying for a national diploma in creative arts and had gained an offer of a place on a degree programme at a local university. This person said he’d had a hard time at school, and been spoken down to. He commented “I felt my confidence seep out.” He had not initially envisaged himself going on to university. However, he described how his college tutors were “there for him” and had helped him to identify his interests and strengths, and some potential HE courses that would suit him. He identified how important visiting a university was in helping him to make a final decision:

“Going there, seeing it, getting a vibe, knowing that people are friendly whatever your skin colour… When you go and see it you understand you’ll be OK”.

This person also stressed the importance of the practical help he got from IAG staff in reviewing his personal statement and checking his form.

Case Study 3: A young white man who didn’t have a family background of HE, was studying for a national diploma in ICT and had gained an offer to study for a degree at a local university. He explained how once he had decided to apply to university he had found the application process difficult as there was not a great deal of support. He said that he did get some help from IAG staff in a tutorial and that his tutor consulted other staff for help when they ‘got stuck’. He also explained how he struggled with prospectuses, but that his tutor had helped him to understand them. He had found going to a university Open Day and talking to current HE students particularly helpful:

“It was really helpful to show what university is like. The students who explained it seemed mellow and calm and said that if you go to all the lectures you’ll get through. It appealed to me. I’m confident now that uni is the place I want to go and it’ll make me more employable”.

This learner explained how difficult it was to pick a course - and that it would have been useful to get more help, for example, by selecting a prospectus each week and breaking it down into different courses and units.
What did Learners say?....

It was clear from learner feedback that the views and actions of learners themselves, along with the opinions of family and friends, were key to the decision-making process, but that tutors and IAG practitioners could intervene to enable the process. For most learners there was no apparent process of weighing pros and cons of going on to HE and making an informed decision based on this. Many had always hoped or expected to go to university and thus did not give time to exploring other options. Learners who had not made such a clear decision to go to HE gave mixed accounts of the help they had gained to explore options and come to a decision. One learner described in-depth help from IAG staff to compare career options with and without a degree and others told how tutors helped them to pick courses that particularly suited their learning style and ability, or helped convince them of the long-term benefits of having a degree.

External influences, such as family, friends and the media, were identified as key to decision-making. Several learners said that they had heard, anecdotally, that many graduates were in no better position to access good jobs than non-graduates. Some learners suggested that it would have been helpful to have group discussions that focused on the range of progression options. It was significant that whilst most learners identified cost as a key barrier to HE, few mentioned seeking or receiving information on the financial support available. Several specifically said that they had no understanding of the financial implications of HE, and some said they would address the matter only after the application process was complete.

Case Study 4: Young white man, with no family history of HE, was studying for a National Diploma in media and had been offered a place on a degree course at a local university. He said that he had always thought he would go to university. He described having several tutorials in which his tutor offered help to complete the UCAS form, however he described struggling to identify a suitable course and university:

“I thought about what I wanted from the course, and thought about going to London, but there’s so many universities there and so many courses - how would you decide? There was no help with the course at all. You were just asked if you’d picked one…. We visited X (local university) and it was very useful- they did what I wanted and I saw the wide array of equipment. Also lots of production companies are moving here so it seems a good bet”.

He had also had difficulties understanding the overall picture regarding UCAS application and selection and his suggestions for improvements concentrated on this as well as decision-making:

“Maybe you could have 1 hour classes from the 1st year just to inform you about university so that you’re well prepared – about different universities, even visit them, about courses, the UCAS website, loans, accommodation…. It only started in the 2nd year. I still don’t have a clue about student loans. It would be useful to have a guide to the whole process that gives the overall picture. A subject-based information centre would also be useful – you can find out what universities are best for doctors but not the media”.

Case Study 5: A young white woman who was studying for a National Diploma in I.C.T. and had gained a place on a Foundation Degree. She said that she had not considered going to university prior to going to college but had realised that she would not be able to get a good job without going. She described a range of useful help that she had received from her tutor and IAG staff that had informed her decision making.

“You are encouraged here to go to university and it really helped doing the forms in a group- when you’re all focused on one thing, it gets everyone thinking”.

“The Careers Adviser was very useful – they found lots of IT jobs, got me to look through them and I realised that I did not want the sorts of jobs that I would get now. I saw my brothers doing nothing and thought I want a decent job”.

“My tutor asked me what I was interested in and told me about different courses; I’m not sure what I want to specialise in so will continue to do a range of things. S/he also brought in leaflets and videos about other people who’ve gone to university….Everything I’ve needed or asked for was here”.

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It was not always apparent how learners were supported to access the most appropriate and timely service or activity. In some cases, it appeared that information was often made available to learners without sufficient structure or guidance to enable them to use it in decision-making. Some tutors described doing elements of this in tutorials and referring onto IAG staff, but most said referrals tended to be for learners who were on the wrong course, or who later decided not to apply to HE.

The nature and extent of one to one assistance from careers specialists provided and taken up by vocational learners also appears to vary widely. In some cases the information, advice and guidance services appeared stretched and unable to meet the demands placed upon them. For example, one adviser felt:

“*It’s difficult to deliver your IAG role as there’s such a need to respond to all sorts of issues, such as homelessness*. [IAG Practitioner]

Another commented that:

“*It’s a drop-in service, partly because there isn’t a staff resource to book appointments*. [IAG Practitioner]

Reasons for, and timing of, referrals of learners to careers specialists varied amongst tutors. One course, for example, had a policy of encouraging all students to have 1:1 sessions in the 1st and 2nd year for general ‘review’ reasons. On other courses it appeared that referrals were largely used for learners who wanted to change course or who were not applying to HE. There appeared to be a lack of clarity with respect to the services offered by tutors and IAG staff to learners and how these were used to complement each other.

The interviews suggest that when learners did use individual appointments, it was usually to seek assistance with completing forms. Moreover, even where careers guidance staff in colleges offered opportunities for learners to gain 1:1 assistance, feedback from learners suggests that the offer to support was rarely taken up.

Only one of the institutions had a systematic way of recording, monitoring and sharing information on which learners had benefited from careers interviews. In the other colleges information on who had received different types of advice was not recorded on any of the central systems.

In several colleges learners could seek information and advice by intranet or telephone. For example, resources on an intranet had been developed in one college, and these resources were used in discussions between learners and specialist support staff who had a role in helping learners to set and review goals through a series of in-depth interviews.

In addition to group presentations on HE, access to 1:1 sessions and information on the application process, practitioners also gave examples of project work undertaken by learners that formed the beginning of progression planning, such as:

- initiatives with industry, some of which were interdisciplinary,
- mixing of 1st and 2nd years with Level 4 learners, allowing them to apply their learning to real-life projects.

Several practitioners stressed the importance of strong employer engagement to enhance awareness of the application of learning and particularly of potential progression opportunities. One college was in the process of developing links with a manufacturing company as part of a process of setting up two pilot companies.

**4.4 Supporting Applications to HE Through the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS)**

Practical support for learners with respect to UCAS forms was the area in which the clearest and most effective processes exist for tutors and IAG practitioners to work together. There is significant focus on completing these forms and most practitioners acknowledged the challenge this represents. Comments included:

“*The [UCAS] forms are a massive, massive job*. [IAG Practitioner]

“The 1st term of the 2nd year can be a blur, trying to get UCAS forms in*. [Tutor]

Feedback from interviews suggests that the focus is largely on the administrative task of getting forms completed correctly within the deadline, with much less emphasis on how learners are assisted to make a suitable choice of course and university. The balance of input between tutors and IAG staff varied widely across and within colleges. In some cases IAG staff offered ongoing help within tutorials, as well as individual appointments that focused on the practicalities of completing the UCAS form.
What did learners say?...

Most interviewees felt that advice on HE options is best delivered by a tutor, since they believed that advice and guidance staff have limited subject-specific knowledge. However in practice inputs from tutors were very inconsistent, and often restricted to knowledge of local courses. Some tutors had given in-depth help to identify strengths and interests, based on an understanding of the learner, and linked these to specific types of course, while others offered a more informal approach. The level and depth of 1:1 sessions with tutors varied widely, as did individual action planning. Some tutors appeared to give little or no input. It was apparent that the approach to course selection of some learners was simply ad hoc. Many interviewees said they would have liked more help in choosing courses and universities.

Feedback from learners suggests that both within and between colleges there is inconsistency in the guidance offer and it was sometimes unclear how specialist advice and guidance services accessed by a particular learner related to any wider decision-making process for them. Indeed, although many interviewees did mention help from guidance specialists about completing UCAS forms, few had accessed 1:1 support in deciding between different options. Interviewees who had received individual support were from a small number of courses. Several learners said that they hadn’t considered going to see an advice and guidance practitioner - or had doubts that seeing a specialist might be of help. Others had not followed through the offer of in-depth support. A poor perception of the usefulness of careers advice was more prevalent than might be expected amongst the sample of vocational learners interviewed. Of the learners interviewed who had not applied to HE, all said how hard it was to make a decision and how little help they received. None amongst this group had accessed 1:1 support from guidance staff (and the picture with respect to confidence in their final decision was mixed).

Case Study 6: Young white woman who does not have a family background of higher education, was studying for a media qualification and had applied to study on degree courses at local and distant universities. She had always wanted to go to university (and not “get stuck in a dead-end job”). She described the processes to select a HE course as “very confusing and horrible”. She had been supported by an IAG worker, whom she described as her guardian angel. She described finding the UCAS application process, and particularly the A and B routes very confusing. However, her tutor helped her to look at possible areas for courses and then the IAG worker had assisted her with getting prospectuses and working through options. She stressed the importance of going to visit universities, finding out the details of what courses offer and knowing that the tutors are friendly. She also said that tutorials in the 1st year that focused on developing CVs were very helpful when it came to doing personal statements.

“I was really confused about courses, but I was helped to make lists of what I enjoyed, what I was good at and talked this through. It’s an amazing help to have someone to talk to, who listens and doesn’t push you”.

Case Study 7: A white man who did not have a family history of university, was studying for a National Diploma in ICT and had decided to do a six month vocational course because he thought it would give him a better chance of getting a job than doing a degree. He was also looking for part-time work. He said that he had always thought that he would go to university and that his mother would support him to go, however, he described struggling to make a decision as the deadline approached:

“We did have an interview with IAG staff in year 1, but it was just a computer test that wasn’t really good as the categories it came up with were so big. Other than that there’s nothing in year 1 to start you thinking earlier”.

“There’s hundreds of different courses and you can’t tell what they do…sessions with tutors are just 2 minutes and they look at your grades, attendance, not really with what you’re good at or what you’ll do. They don’t help with that…”

“They help with the forms in tutorials and show you how to go on the [UCAS] site, but when I decided not to go they said to go and see the careers adviser. I did go once but there was a big queue. I really need to see them but I’ve just not bothered”
One course specifically used IAG staff to deliver a tutorial focused on advising and checking personal statements. In other cases, assistance with completing forms was largely dealt with by tutors. Some colleges offered checklists and templates to assist with different aspects of the form, and several colleges used key skills sessions to help students develop their personal statements.

The extent, form and usefulness of support from IAG practitioners to tutors and department heads varied widely. Most colleges offered a structured reporting and follow-up service to tutors on the status of their learners’ UCAS application forms, and some offered specific help and advice on tutors’ references, along with redrafting where appropriate. Systems for completing UCAS forms appeared to be the area in which there was most clarity and effective joint working between different staff within colleges. Typical comments included:

“We have very good internal support systems. X [IAG practitioner] collates all the information relating to UCAS forms. S/he keeps in touch with the tutor, is aware of what everybody’s doing and it focuses people”. [Tutor]

“There’s very good internal support systems. IAG comes in and does a general HE tutorial, offers 1:1s and then there’s follow up by tutors on the UCAS forms. IAG then keeps in touch with the tutor, collates references, checks statements, reviews applications and is really on the ball. It’s a great support and works to focus people”. [Tutor]

“I had lots of support from IAG staff with doing the forms (UCAS) – the reference, personal statements, all of that as I hadn’t lots of experience of it. We get a good service, it’s really improved and now we get really good responses, and quick, to any problems”. [Tutor]

The majority of the tutors interviewed during the research were positive about the support they received from IAG staff on the UCAS process. However, IAG practitioners described a broad range of experience and practice amongst tutors that led to inconsistency in the quality of applications.

One college had paired up a new tutor with an experienced tutor to help him support his learners through the UCAS process. While some tutors were recognised as being both skilled and experienced in supporting learners with little input from IAG staff, others were regarded as lacking interest in the process. In most colleges specialist careers staff take on a role in reviewing UCAS applications. A recurring theme was the quality of the references which are provided on learners by tutors, and the suggestion that in some cases poor quality of references was a detrimental factor to vocational learners. Several of the colleges had provided sessions for tutors to support better quality references, however, some tutors appeared reluctant to change their approach. Indeed one adviser said:

“It’s difficult to get tutors to change references even when you know what they’ve written isn’t helpful”. [IAG practitioner]

What did learners say?…

Of the 31 learners interviewed, 24 (77%) had applied to HE (Note: this group is not a representative sample). It appeared that learners were generally encouraged by tutors to register for UCAS and to consider making an application in order to keep their options open. Feedback from learners on the process of applying to HE was mixed. Some people had been well supported throughout the process, however, many interviewees said they felt rushed to make their decision, with little thought given to this prior to the beginning of the UCAS application process. Only a small minority recalled input on progression during their first year, and many suggested that this would be useful to prompt earlier consideration of progression options.

Most learners described getting sufficient help with the practical process of completing the UCAS form correctly from IAG staff and/or tutors, and much less help with making a decision about which course and which HEI. For many learners, rather than the process of applying to HE following on from a period of consideration of what they would study, the two happened simultaneously. Many identified problems with narrowing down their options within the space of a few months, resulting in final choices being made very close to the deadline. Some people, in order to meet the deadline, were found to have applied for a course that they did not feel completely comfortable with. Indeed, several interviewees who had received offers of HE places expressed a lack of confidence in the choice they had made, raising questions about whether they would take up these courses.

Learners who were unsure whether or not to go to university described struggling to make a decision with little help and it appeared that several had simply run out of time to apply. Of the interviewees who had not applied to HE, several said they had been unable to choose a course before the deadline, and with more time may have made a decision to apply. Most of the people we spoke to who had not applied to university had a plan to study further on vocational courses - only a few were looking for work.
**Case Study 8:** A young white man, who did not know anyone who had gone to university, currently studying for a National Certificate in ICT said that he’d never thought of going to university as it cost too much and that he was bored of education. He was unsure about his future plans other than that he would have a gap year, get a job and might go to university next year. When describing his thinking over the previous year, it became apparent that he had given some thought going to university, registering on the UCAS site and getting prospectuses. However, this person said that he had not received help with deciding what to do – and had little encouragement from parents. At interview he explained that 1:1s with tutors were very rare and that he didn’t know about IAG staff. However, he was not critical of the college and felt that there was little that they could have done that would have led him to apply to HE:

“I might have applied. My tutor did ask me but it was too late then. I said I was taking a gap year”.

“If more of my friends were going I probably would have gone. Or maybe if ex-students came in and talked to us. I might go next year but the money is a big hurdle”.

**Case Study 9:** A young white woman who didn’t have a family background of HE, currently studying for a national diploma in creative arts, had gained conditional offers to first degree courses at two local universities. She had been unsure about whether to go to university and described how she had always struggled with her confidence. She explained that her tutors had built her confidence by giving her lots of feedback on her work, and providing guidance on her portfolio - she felt that they knew her well. She had received help from both her tutor and guidance staff on completing the UCAS form. However, she felt that because she hadn’t fully understood the A and B application routes that she had not given enough thought to her university choices:

“I should have waited and thought more so I’d have more interviews to choose from”.

She had found her one interview very helpful, had been able to get detailed information on the course, looked at students’ work and visited several times, however she was at the point of trying to decide between two university offers and was struggling to do so.

**Case Study 10:** Young South Asian man who didn’t have a family background of higher education, was studying for a national diploma in ICT and had gained an offer to study for a degree at a local university. He explained that he had always wanted to go to university, and was encouraged by his father. He described how it would help him to get a good future and make history by being the first family member to go. However he said he had messed about at school and had not passed the required GCSEs to do the course that he wanted. He had received help to complete his UCAS form from his tutor and IAG staff and his tutor helped him to identify a course that would accept his qualifications. He had been studying for a GCSE alongside his Diploma but explained that a change in timetabling had meant that he could not complete it:

“I’d like to have more choices to do what I want. I don’t really want to do this course. I think people need to be helped to do what they want because if they do it as the only option they will struggle”.

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5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Key Findings

The research highlighted clear examples of committed and skilled practitioners raising learners’ aspirations, enabling them to make informed progression decisions and supporting them to make the transition to HE. These examples covered the range of areas identified by learners and practitioners as key to enabling progression to HE:

- confidence building;
- developing self-awareness;
- demonstrating the benefits of HE;
- raising awareness of HE;
- help with decision-making; and
- support with the UCAS application process.

Accounts emerged from this research of young people who had not previously considered going to university being supported to do so by skilled and committed staff. Their feedback demonstrates clearly the impact that a co-ordinated, learner-centred approach by tutors and IAG staff can have in inspiring and enabling young people to access HE.

A number of practitioners pointed to specific college services that they felt were effective, but the feeling was that, in general, some combination of the various elements of support available at different levels proved most effective overall. However, whilst practitioners described a range of activities and help on offer to learners, there appeared to be little monitoring of which of these a particular learner had accessed, and so little knowledge of how individual learners were being supported through their decision-making process. Without monitoring information on the services accessed, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of any particular combination in supporting a student through transition.

Feedback from learners also supports the conclusion that the most effective approach to progression support came from being enabled to access layers of individual and group support through timely interventions from both tutors and IAG staff. In order for this to happen, practitioners at all levels, and especially course tutors, need to understand the strategy towards information, advice and guidance within their organisation, be aware of the links between motivation, achievement and progression, and be supported to embed progression within their role. Many learners identified various offers of information, advice and guidance, from a range of college staff and activities that had helped them to make their progression decision. In some cases, exemplified by learners’ inspiring case studies, the profound impact of gaining a co-ordinated range of timely help was apparent.

The role of course tutors was highlighted in the research as being particularly important. Many learners described useful support from tutors including confidence building, encouragement, help with narrowing down HE course options and help in completing UCAS forms. However, there appeared to be little consistency in tutor input either within or between colleges. Some learners specifically felt that they had received little support on progression from their tutor, whilst others felt that although their tutors made efforts to help them, they did not have the specific knowledge to answer queries especially when it came to choosing between different courses.

In practice there appears to be a wide variation in the support offered and the extent to which activities link together as part of a process of decision-making for the learner. The research suggests that information was often made available to learners without sufficient structure or guidance to enable them to use it to make decisions. This was reflected in learners making choices in a rushed way very close to deadlines and prompted suggestions for more focused work on progression in the first year of two year programmes. Colleges did undertake evaluation of specific IAG sessions and activities, generating useful feedback on one-off events. However there appeared to be no means of assessing how and whether activities complemented each other to aid decision-making. Also, there was acknowledgement of a lack of consistency in the collection of data on progression outcomes, and the extent to which is was used as management information.
5.2 Areas to Develop and Recommendations

There were examples of good practice by tutors and IAG professionals but the research also highlights some areas for development, as discussed below.

5.2.1 Overall IAG Strategy: Linking goal setting, options review and HE applications

Whilst there were examples within each college of work to support learner progression, there was wide variation in the extent to which the activities offered linked together as part of an overall IAG framework and as part of a process of decision-making for the learner. Most practitioners described a flexible IAG offer, within which tutors and IAG provided differing levels of information and guidance. Some interviewees described how this flexibility, combined with a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities led to a less than seamless service. Practitioners in all colleges reported some lack of understanding of the IAG on offer and of the specific roles of colleagues, which clearly hindered effective and timely use of the specific skills of a range of staff. A key issue is how inputs from different members of staff in colleges are co-ordinated, as typified by these comments:

“We all need to know what other people’s roles are. Tutors aren’t clear about the whole process and how it links together. The system isn’t seamless - we need a referral process, for example so we don’t both work on CVs”. [IAG practitioner]

“Students get lost between tutors and Careers – some tutors refer students but they don’t turn up. We don’t inform tutors of this as it’s not mandatory and it might put students off”. [IAG practitioner]

“There’s a programme to embed skills development in the curriculum, with something on progression, however there’s a bit of overlap and confusion. Some tutors deliver it, but there isn’t a link with them”. [IAG practitioner]

Most practitioners identified a need for more focussed work on progression in the 1st year. Whilst examples were given by IAG practitioners of 1st year activities to raise awareness of HE, feedback from tutors on what was accessed did not always reflect this (for example, some cases tutors told us they knew of an activity but were unsure what it entailed). Several practitioners suggested that inputs on options choices and the UCAS process need to start earlier:

“It’s good to flag up the options early. We really try to get [learners] to get the UCAS form in by the deadline, but it’s hard to do”. [IAG Practitioner]

“We’re now going to have a tutorial on HE in the 1st year and bring in ex-students in the hope that when learners come into the 2nd year they’ll have given it some thought. It’s too late by then”. [Tutor]

Recommendation 1: Review IAG strategy

Each institution should consider a process to review the current progression support strategy to ensure co-ordination of activities and services in order to reach a common understanding about:

- the elements of provision which are considered to be compulsory for all students, and those which are additional for some students;
- the individuals or teams which will lead on the delivery of each element;
- the processes whereby learners are identified for inclusion in IAG activities to support decision-making, and for tracking participation in different services/elements of provision.

As a result of the review, develop a progression support plan that clarifies the strategy and specifies roles and responsibilities. In particular the plan should clarify the distinct roles and responsibilities of tutors and IAG staff, and how and when the roles complement each other in practice.

There will be opportunities to build on existing good practice in tutor–IAG staff collaboration e.g. the links and relationships that exist in UCAS form completion, and to encourage other forms of cooperation that actively support learners’ decision-making between different options. The research suggests that in some colleges the procedures for referral and tracking of learners participating in advice and guidance interviews could be improved. The aim should be to ensure a learner-centred approach by clarifying and promoting understanding of how each element of the IAG offer supports a learner’s decision-making process. Once a progression support plan has been developed it needs to be agreed and communicated to all learner-facing staff within colleges.

Recommendation 2: Start Progression Work Earlier

It is clear that there is scope to include more input on progression in year 1. Work on options choices could be built in from the start of two year programmes. As far as possible it would be desirable for this work to include individual support as well as group sessions.
5.2.2 Supporting Delivery of Progression Support Activities by Tutors

While there were examples in the research of tutors who were skilled at, and committed to, delivering aspects of IAG, the amount of IAG work carried out by tutors as a whole varied both within and between colleges. Examples of well co-ordinated support emerged in relation to the systems in place for ensuring the accurate completion of UCAS forms. However support to choose the most appropriate institution and course appeared to be more dependent on the skills, knowledge and approach of individual tutors. Some tutors saw progression support as integral to their role, but this was not always the case. Lack of clarity on what was required of them, lack of monitoring of what was delivered and failure of communication between tutors and IAG staff hindered the consistency and effectiveness of delivery of progression support by tutors. Comments included:

“Tutors can book a tutorial, but it’s not formalised. Some have lots, some have none at all. It depends on the link or relationship with the tutor rather than part of a system. Some tutors are very aware and do all their own stuff. Others do very little”. [IAG practitioner]

“Senior managers need to ensure tutors comply with the programme; although it’s not clear what is compulsory. Also staff need support – currently there are tutors who aren’t interested or capable of delivering the programme”. [IAG practitioner]

Recommendation 3: Build IAG into tutor staff development

It may be necessary to deliver training and support for tutors to develop their understanding of progression support and develop the required knowledge and skills. A key element will be raising awareness of the potential benefits of progression work on learner motivation and attainment. The first stage would be to clarify tutors’ role and responsibilities in the delivery of information/advice in the context of progression to HE support. Other beneficial actions would include ensuring that systems are in place to enable tutors to remain up-to-date on the range of HEI courses, and identifying systems to promote ongoing sharing of information and skills between tutors and IAG staff. Course delivery might also include more focused work with learners on decision-making, including more group discussion, raising awareness of the broad range of HE opportunities and benefits.

5.2.3 Availability of 1:1 Assistance from Careers Guidance Specialists

Relatively few learners were found to have accessed 1:1 support from specialist careers/guidance staff to aid their decision-making - and more importantly there appeared to be inconsistent referral systems and only limited awareness amongst learners of the benefits of careers guidance. Weaknesses were also identified in terms of the lack of effective monitoring of which staff members were providing what kinds of information, advice and guidance to individual students.

Recommendation 4: Making the Most of Specialist Careers Advisers

Better use could probably be made of specialist careers advisers if there was clarity on the role of 1:1 assistance by IAG staff and communication of the benefits of this to learners (ideally as part of an overall progression support plan). Each institution may need to identify the barriers hindering access to 1:1 assistance and address, for example, unclear referral processes or difficulties in making appointments. It will also be important to review the effectiveness of current IAG resources provided to tutors and build links for ongoing dialogue between tutors and IAG staff. Colleges should also look to develop a system to monitor the quality of UCAS references and if possible enable learners to have more individual support to complete the forms.

The following may be useful to FE staff who want to improve HE progression support to vocational learners:

- Aimhigher Greater Manchester Vocational Tutors’ HE Resource Pack: resources designed to help tutors to develop their knowledge and to deliver effective tutorial sessions. www.aimhighergreatermanchester.com
- Uni4Me Website: information and advice about HE options, and gateway to institutional sites. www.uni4me.com
- GMSA Pathways Tool: online tool to match course options with learners’ grade profile. www.pathways.gmsa.ac.uk
- Aimhigher Practitioner Website: programme information, news, examples of Aimhigher activities, communications resources and links. www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/home
- Get into Higher Education Tutor’s resource materials: materials and activities to help students decide which careers and further qualifications are right for them. www.teachernet.gov.uk/aimhigher/tutors/
5.2.4 Partnerships with Higher Education Institutions

The value of contact with HEI students and visiting HEIs was highlighted in relation to building confidence as well as raising awareness of university courses and student life. However, it appears that learners with little (or no) contact with students and limited awareness of HE are not always able to access this type of support.

Whilst some practitioners had strategic links with a range of relevant HEI departments, others acknowledged that they tended to rely on individual contacts with local HEIs rather than being part of any strategic approach.

Partnership with HEIs was identified by practitioners as an area which could be developed further. Comments included:

“It would be good to have closer links with HEIs, some sort of associate deal as it would also give students pride if they know the college is linked to a university”. [IAG Practitioner]

“Bring in HEI admissions tutors – have links with education liaison workers, but get the right people to come and let students know that it’s possible for them to go to university”. [IAG Practitioner]

Recommendation 5: Building Strong Partnerships with HEIs

There is scope for colleges to draw on the skills and expertise of staff in universities, for example using HE staff to train college staff and students on course requirements. Colleges could consider developing formal relationships and progression agreements with a range of HEIs to enable smoother FE-HE access from particular courses. Locally, support for the development of progression agreements is in place under the GMSA.

There is also scope to build more contact with undergraduate students as part of Level 3 programme delivery, particularly for learners without any previous university contact. Bringing in college leavers from your own institution who have gone onto university-level study can be particularly effective in demonstrating potential and boosting aspirations.

The Aimhigher progression framework is a mechanism for securing links between local universities and Level 3 learners in the Aimhigher target groups in FE colleges. At the same time, both learners and practitioners would like to see more input from non-local universities, and consideration should be given to organising group visits to/from a wider range of HE institutions.

5.2.5 Progression Tracking and Evaluation

Practitioners often undertook evaluation of specific activities, generating useful feedback on one-off events, but there appeared to be no means of assessing how and whether activities complemented each other to aid decision-making.

The majority of practitioners gave indications of approximate rates of progression to HE, but acknowledged a lack of consistency in data collection, collation, sharing and the use to which it was put. There was a range of views and understanding of what data was currently collected and what it is possible to access. Difficulties were identified with collecting accurate data on whether learners started and remained on HE courses. One college had conducted a study of learners who had accepted, but not subsequently taken up, an offer of a HE place. The implementation of this highlighted the practical realities and resource implications of following-up individual learners.

Several practitioners stated that plans were in place to implement central systems for recording applicants to HE (to be used from 2008). Others felt that the standards being introduced in the sector by the LSC’s Framework for Excellence will go some way towards addressing the need for better tracking(i).

Recommendation 6: Systems for Tracking and Monitoring Progression to HE

Suggestions for improvement include:

- Review systems for monitoring and evaluating the offer and take-up of progression support activities, and ensure clear referral and follow-up processes between different types of support.
- Develop a system for consistent tracking of progression outcomes. A starting point is the systematic recording of UCAS applications and acceptances on the individual learner record system. Differences across departments should be reviewed in order to highlight any issues.
- Work with the LSC and HE partners to identify opportunities for tracking leavers from courses into higher levels of study using the Unique Learner Number (from 2008 onwards).

(i) Learner destinations is a performance indicator within the Framework for Excellence to be used by colleges in 2008/09 (the cohort will be the 2006/07 completers who completed at least one of their learning aims in 2006/07 and were not continuing any into 2007/08). Further information on Framework for Excellence at www.lsc.gov.uk.

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### Areas for Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Overall IAG Strategy:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Is there a clear understanding of how the different information, advice and guidance activities on HE progression link together, and has this been communicated to all staff?</td>
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<td>1.2 Is information on progression options embedded throughout college life?</td>
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<td>1.3 Is there regular communication of IAG activities to learners and staff?</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 Are mechanisms in place to co-ordinate progression support activities between IAG staff and tutors?</td>
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<tr>
<th>2. Support &amp; Training for Tutors:</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Do tutors have awareness of the links between aspiration building, achievement and progression?</td>
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<td>2.2 Does staff development support skills development for personal tutoring?</td>
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<td>2.3 Is there agreed understanding of the overall IAG process, differing roles of staff members and how these link together?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.4 Are mechanisms in place to ensure consistency of delivery of information, advice and guidance on progression options by tutors?</td>
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<th>3. HE Awareness:</th>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Are the roles and responsibilities of different staff members clear?</td>
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<td>3.2 Are links with HE institutions formalised?</td>
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<td>3.3 Do the activities include inputs from a range of HE institutions and courses?</td>
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<td>3.4 Do you have up-to-date case studies illustrating potential progression routes and the opportunities available?</td>
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<td>3.5 Do tutors keep in touch with ex-learners and use these people to raise awareness of the opportunities and realities of HE?</td>
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<th>4. Supporting Applications/UCAS Forms:</th>
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<tr>
<td>4.1 Have links been made with HE admissions tutors to provide information to students on entry requirements?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Do you have a system to identify potential progression routes for different qualifications?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3 Is there a system to monitor the quality of references (and does it work)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.4 Could more time be built in to enable learners to have more time to research options as well as complete applications?</td>
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<tr>
<th>5. Progression Tracking:</th>
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<tr>
<td>5.1 Are applications and acceptances through UCAS recorded on central college systems?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2 Do you have a process for following up leavers and recording destinations?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.3 Is destination information from courses including progression to HE included in management reports?</td>
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Annex 2: Transition from FE to HE: Supporting the Decision-Making Process

A range of decision-making models already exist in relation to careers choices, and elements of these were drawn on to develop a conceptual framework applicable to this project. Some advice and guidance specialists in Greater Manchester are becoming familiar with the Well Informed Realistic Decision (WIRD) model. The model represents a view of the chronological stages which comprise rationale career planning. The continuum is designed to offer a ‘route map’ to those involved (learners and practitioners). The WIRD model was developed by Nottingham Trent University and features as part of the Diploma in Careers Education.

The Table below describes how a theoretical decision making model, such as the WIRD model, could be applied to transition to HE for Level 3 vocational learners on vocational courses at FE colleges.
Applying the Well-Informed Realistic Decision (WIRD) Model to FE to HE Progression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage to be appraised</th>
<th>Key questions</th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>HE Progression support offered/required</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Engaged</td>
<td>Learner is sufficiently motivated to (career) plan, evidenced by autonomous action.</td>
<td>May or may not be considering HE; Not wanting to take responsibility for decision; Avoiding the subject. Feeling demoralized, poor esteem. Fearful of the unknown. Defensive behaviour, rationalisation/making excuses, denial, poor view of further study.</td>
<td>Information giving; Confidence building; Challenge preconceptions; Mentoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Formula</td>
<td>Learner has a conscious method of decision making which demonstrates an understanding of the relationship between knowledge/ awareness of self and of opportunities.</td>
<td>Gaining insight into HE but need support to focus on how it fits with them.</td>
<td>Self assessment – wants/needs for what they have to offer; Understanding of what is offered by different routes/What will be required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Self opportunities</td>
<td>Learner is sufficiently self-aware to address the opportunity structure. Will know: The importance/position of HE in his/her life; What s/he wants and needs from HE; What s/he can offer to HE.</td>
<td>Learning about self; values/skills/interests in relation to career options.</td>
<td>Help with learning styles; Role models.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) Self-awareness</td>
<td>Learner is sufficiently self-aware to address the opportunity structure. Will know: The importance/position of HE in his/her life; What s/he wants and needs from HE; What s/he can offer to HE.</td>
<td>Uninformed or under-informed. Need to research options; Are aware of the pros, but also the cons. Cannot decide between the costs and the benefits. Undecided or assessing short and long term gains/trade-offs</td>
<td>Sources of information; Advice and guidance; Promoting discussion; University presentations and visits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) Opportunity</td>
<td>Learner is sufficiently aware of opportunities and awareness how these relate to his/her knowledge of self. Will know: Whether s/he is considering perceived or legitimate opportunities; What HE offers; What HE demands.</td>
<td>Have already taken some significant steps (eg. getting the right information); Making assessment between a range of options (eg. a range of courses/institutions); Finding out about requirements in chosen field.</td>
<td>Information relevant to the individual; Support with options; Match against interests/skills etc; Information on costs and benefits; Other help to analyse options/support decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vi) Locate opportunities</td>
<td>Learner can identify as wide a range as possible of appropriate HE opportunities (providers and courses).</td>
<td>Making necessary steps/committing to it; Taking required steps eg. applying, seeking funding etc; Getting other people to help them.</td>
<td>Advice and guidance; Making and seeing through an action plan; Help to submit applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vii) Approach opportunity providers</td>
<td>Learner can manage applications, eg application forms and systems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(viii) Selection process</td>
<td>Learner can manage a range of selection processes as required, eg interviews, selection tests, self-presentation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ix) Selection outcome</td>
<td>Learner can manage a range of possible selection outcomes, eg rejection/acceptance, starting course and adapting to this, or need for further choices demanded by the outcomes of multiple applications.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x) Appraise planning</td>
<td>Learner can re-plan in the light of selection outcome(s), changes in personal circumstances/preferences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledge, skills and attitudes to make decisions

Knowledge, skills and attitudes to implement decisions
Annex 3: Interviewee Details

### Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BTEC National Diploma, Business, 2(^{nd}) year</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC National Certificate, Business, 2(^{nd}) year</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC National Diploma, ICT, 2(^{nd}) year</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC National Certificate, ICT, 2(^{nd}) year</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC National Diploma, Art &amp; Design, 2(^{nd}) year</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC National Diploma, Fashion, 2(^{nd}) year</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC National Diploma, Music Practice, 2(^{nd}) year</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC National Diploma, Graphic Design, 2(^{nd}) year</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma in Foundation Studies, Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC National Diploma, Interactive Media, 2(^{nd}) year</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC National Diploma, Film &amp; TV, 2(^{nd}) year</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| HE application | Yes: 24 | No: 7 |
| Gender | Female: 9 | Male: 22 |
| Disabled | Yes: 1 | No: 30 |
| Ethnicity | Asian: 4 | Black: 1 | Mixed: 1 | White: 25 |

### Practitioners

#### Business, ICT and Creative Arts:
- Tutor: 2
- Head of School/ Curriculum Manager: 3

#### IAG:
- Careers Adviser: 1
- Progression Manager: 1
- Head of Careers/Student Services: 2
- Aimhigher Co-ordinator: 1

#### Other:
- Senior managers: 4
- Data/MIS: 2
Annex 3: Interviewee Details

Data/MIS
Senior managers
Other:
Aimhigher Co
Head of Careers/Student Services
Progression Manager
IAG:
Head of School/ Curriculum Manager
Tutor
Business, ICT and Creative Arts:
Practitioners

Ethnicity

Disabled
Gender
HE application

BTEC National Diploma, Film & TV, 2
BTEC National Diploma, Interactive Media, 2
Diploma in Foundation Studies, Art & Design
BTEC National Diploma, Music Practice, 2
BTEC National Diploma, Fashion, 2
BTEC National Diploma, Art & Design, 2
BTEC National Certificate, ICT, 2
BTEC National Diploma, ICT, 2
BTEC National Certificate, Business,
BTEC National Diploma, Business, 2
Diploma, Graphic Design, 2

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Annex 4: References

Action on Access (2005), Progression to Higher Education from Vocational, Work-based and Work-related Learning: Making a Difference, the Impact of Aimhigher.


DfES (2005), Youth Cohort Study 11: The Activities and Experiences of 19 Year Olds: England and Wales.


GMSA (2007), Construction Sector Development Group, Higher Education Destinations of Students with Level 3 Qualifications.


This series of thematic reports analyse data and research commissioned by Aimhigher Greater Manchester or publicly available. Topics are those of relevance to widening participation in Greater Manchester.

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<table>
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<th>Ref.</th>
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<tr>
<td>2008/01</td>
<td>Work-Based &amp; Vocational Learners: Aiming Higher in Greater Manchester - Progression Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/02</td>
<td>The Step-In to HE Project - A report on project activity between September 2007 and July 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/03</td>
<td>Exploring Support for Progression to Higher Education for Young Full-time Vocational Learners in Further Education Colleges</td>
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