

Moving Towards Inclusion

A Picture of Disadvantage in the South West

Young People at Risk of Exclusion

March 2003



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1. DEFINITION

This report will mainly focus on young people aged between 15 and 24 years. However, young people at risk of exclusion from the labour market include many young people who are younger than this and who face exclusion from school and/or have difficult home circumstances.

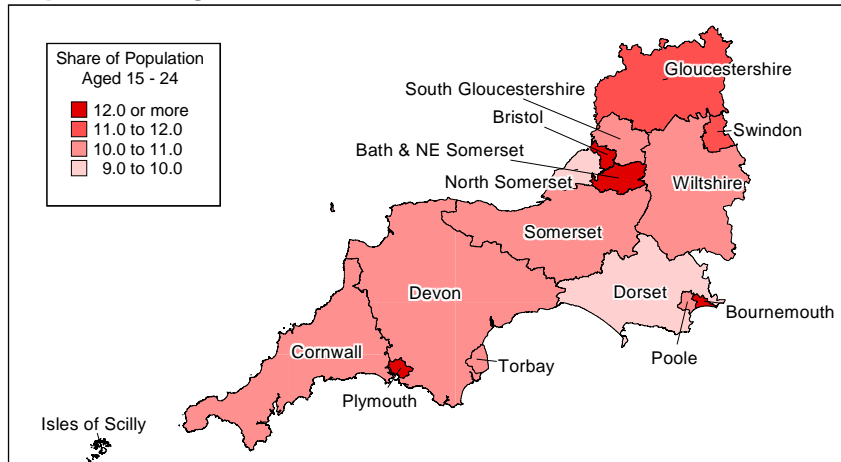
A number of Government initiatives including Sure Start, Connexions, Excellence in Cities and New Deal for Young People have been designed to tackle the issues that face many groups of young people. For example, Connexions is the new youth support service aimed at 13-19 year olds, whilst the New Deal for Young People is aimed at young people aged 18-24 years.

It is important to maintain some degree of flexibility when defining this group. In essence, the key issue is that young people face difficult decisions and pressures as they make the transition from compulsory education to the increasingly flexible and competitive labour market. For some, this transition is straightforward, but for others, it can be a protracted and difficult time in which many young people have in the past been lost to the system and have fallen through the net of support agencies. This is most commonly the case for those who leave full-time education with few or no qualifications and who face a number of disadvantages.

2. YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND

According to the 2001 Census, there are 557,600 young people aged 15-24 years in the South West region. This is 3.5% of the 15-24 year old population in England. The map and Table 1 below show the profile of 15-24 year olds in the South West region by upper tier local authority districts and unitary authorities.

Population Aged 15 to 24



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Source: 2001 Census, ONS

This age group accounts for 11.31% of the South West resident population. This is a marginally lower proportion than is the case in England (12.2%). Some parts of the South West region have higher proportions of this age group than others. Unsurprisingly, it is the urban areas that have a higher proportion of 15-24 year olds. The City of Bristol (15.79%) and Plymouth UA (14.09%) have the highest proportion of 15-24 year olds, whilst Dorset (9.53%) and North Somerset (9.84%) have the lowest proportion of 15-24 year olds. More than one third of all 15-24 year olds in the South West region live in three local authority areas: Devon (13.8%), Gloucestershire (11.2%) and City of Bristol (10.8%).

	15-24 Year olds	Share of Population	Share of South West 15-24 Year Olds
South West	557,600	11.31	100.0
Bath & North East Somerset	22,849	13.52	4.1
Bournemouth	22,126	13.54	4.0
Bristol, City of	60,091	15.79	10.8
North Somerset	18,562	9.84	3.3
Plymouth	33,921	14.09	6.1
Poole	14,256	10.31	2.6
South Gloucestershire	26,583	10.82	4.8
Swindon	20,536	11.41	3.7
Torbay	13,001	10.02	2.3
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	51,146	10.20	9.2
Devon	76,757	10.90	13.8
Dorset	37,268	9.53	6.7
Gloucestershire	62,253	11.03	11.2
Somerset	52,516	10.54	9.4
Wiltshire	45,735	10.56	8.2

Source: 2001 Census

3. LABOUR MARKET CONTEXT

3.1 Young people, unemployment and training from the 1920s

Youth unemployment and the transition from education to work has been a thorny political issue throughout the twentieth century. On the one hand, young people have been encouraged to become independent and to learn self-reliance, whilst on the other, policy has often meant that young people have continued to be dependent upon their families for longer than they would like.

Between 1921 and 1947, young people were able to enter the labour market at the age of 14 years, but the Unemployment Insurance Acts failed to provide unemployment benefit cover to people under the age of 16 years. Parents could only claim additional unemployment allowances for children who were aged under 14 years, so there was no support at all for young people of post-compulsory school leaving age who were part of the labour force, but not able to find employment. Quite extraordinarily, when a change in Unemployment Insurance eventually occurred in 1934, this was to make those aged 14 and 15 liable to pay insurance contributions without giving them entitlement to claim the benefits during periods of unemployment until they were over 16 years of age.

16 and 17 year olds were covered by unemployment insurance – albeit at lower rates – back in the 1920s. However, the same concerns about youthful idleness that sometimes exist today were prevalent then and the recipe for action was also the same – reduce the amount of benefit to which young school leavers were entitled as an incentive to work.

Training also existed for young people in the 1920s, although the take up was poor and the provision at a Course of Instruction was patchy. Nonetheless, a familiar theme of benefit suspension existed for those who failed to attend training courses in the 1920s. Then, as has been the case until very recently, training only became a real issue in periods of high unemployment. Once the economy started to flourish in the mid-1930s young people managed to find work, so training became less of an important issue - as they were learning at work anyway.

Youth unemployment was not a major political issue in the post-war years. Young people found work fairly easily and were naturally mobile and flexible, comfortably changing jobs in tight labour markets. The problem of youth support and youth unemployment really began to re-emerge from the mid-1970s. With the raising of the school leaving age to 16 years in 1972-3, young people were now able to claim supplementary benefit immediately they left compulsory education, whereas previously they had had to wait at least a year after leaving school to be eligible to claim. This became an increasing problem as youth unemployment once again re-emerged. It was eventually the Conservative Government that began to remove entitlement to social assistance from young people and to restore many of the pre-war eligibility principles.

Interest in training also returned as a means of tackling youth unemployment. First there was the Work Experience Programme (WEP), introduced in 1976, which was designed to make young people more employable. In 1978, the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) was established as a job creation programme to tackle the then serious issue of youth unemployment. The Youth Training Scheme followed YOP and this coincided with a tightening of social security regulations for young people. The introduction of a 'guarantee' of a place in employment, education and/or training also meant that there was

a return to the threat of benefit withdrawal for non-participation that had existed in the 1930s.

In almost all instances, government-sponsored training for young people has been linked to tackling youth unemployment. If a young person was able to find work (whether with training or not), this was seen as a positive outcome from the training programme. Up until the mid-1980s, full-time education did not provide a sufficiently broad range of options for young people. The subsequent expansion of post-compulsory education and its replacement of large scale youth training programmes has been an effective way of tackling the problems of youth unemployment that re-emerged in the mid 1970s and may still persist today if the numbers of young people remaining in post-compulsory education had not increased so dramatically.

3.2 1979 and beyond

In 1979, nearly half of all 16 year olds left full-time education and entered employment. By 1997 this had fallen to 13%. There are many reasons for these changes. The introduction of the GCSE qualification, with its emphasis on coursework and the removal of the two-tier qualification system at age 16, created greater opportunities for young people to continue in full-time education after compulsory school leaving age.

This coincided with the mass expansion of Higher and Further Education (HE and FE) that occurred over the same period. Just one in eight 18 year olds entered HE in the early 1980s, but by the mid-1990s, more than 40% of 18 year olds could expect to continue in HE. The perception of HE as being for an elite group changed dramatically over this period.

At the same time, structural changes in the labour market removed many of the occupations that might have been entered by young people. Lower and intermediate manual occupations were largely replaced by lower-skilled, customer-facing occupations or higher knowledge-intensive occupations. The former were often part-time and insecure, with few career development opportunities. They also generally required higher level social and communication skills than might be possessed by young people leaving full-time education.

Typically, these new jobs were more suitably filled by older female labour market returners who wanted flexible working arrangements to fit in with their family responsibilities or by more HE students who also favoured flexible working patterns to fit around their studies.

Knowledge-intensive occupations, on the other hand, favoured those who had acquired a higher level of general education. These two labour market developments have meant that the prospects for immediate employment opportunities for young people, particularly those with lower level or no qualifications, have diminished significantly in the past two decades.

As the proportion of young people holding higher level qualifications increased, this created a problem for those who could not keep up. When a large number of people left school with few qualifications, this was seen as the norm. Employers often had a large pool of 16 year olds from which to choose. There was no need for a negative label to attach to early labour market entry. As more people have stayed on in post-compulsory

education, those who leave at the first opportunity have increasingly become those who are easily identified as young people with multiple difficulties that inhibit their ability to compete effectively in the labour market.

Furthermore, an aggressive market system, centred on rationalisation and a contracting culture has meant that long-term investment by (often large and nationalised) businesses in work-based training was in many cases removed. Routes into careers via company-supported traineeships were often weakened in the 1980s, as larger organisations contracted out non-core services to smaller, apparently more flexible enterprises, and competitive tendering made training appear to be more of a short-term cost, rather than a long-term investment. It is worth noting that the supply of training for young people was hardly an issue between 1948 and the mid-1970s, mainly because there was not an unemployment problem amongst this group – young people generally found work and the training of young people was seen as the responsibility of employers.

The advent of the 'flexible labour market' and the removal of the 'security for loyalty' contract between employer and employee weakened the incentive for employers to invest in the training of young people, who, they quite naturally felt, would often use their newly-acquired skills to move elsewhere.

Whilst educational standards (as measured by qualification attainment) have increased significantly, there has been an increasing onus on the individual to take responsibility for their own learning and development to ensure that they are 'job ready' and can 'sell' themselves to the more demanding employers of today's labour market. In tight labour markets, such a competitive culture leads pressurised employers to bemoan the lack of ability of the state-supported education and training system to deliver the quantity and quality of labour that they require. In loose labour markets, young people who may have had to overcome multiple social, economic and psychological barriers to achievement are seen as surplus to the effective functioning of the labour market. They are encouraged to attend social and employability training programmes so that they might have a chance of making a contribution at the lower, insecure end of the labour market.

Non-participation in education, employment and training fluctuates depending on economic circumstances. In 1979, just 6% of 16-17 year olds were non-participants. This low level of non-participation was largely due to the high levels of employment amongst this age group. The severe economic restructuring in the early 1980s made young people particularly vulnerable to labour market exclusion. Within three years, the proportion of young people in employment had fallen from 47% to 21%. More than one in eight 16-17 year olds were not in education, employment or training in 1982.

The Government responded to this 'crisis' by investing heavily in employment training schemes and the proportion of young people participating in Government supported training schemes increased from 5% in 1979 to 24% in 1985. There was little increase in the proportion of 16-17 year olds in employment and the mass expansion of full-time education had yet to materialise fully. Despite this, the proportion of non-participants reduced dramatically as 16-17 year olds were required to attend compulsory training schemes – some of which were of questionable labour market value.

During the 1990s, full-time education replaced vocational training as the main method of ensuring 16-17 year olds' 'participation'. Despite this, there was a persistent non-participation rate of around 9% throughout the 1990s. By 2000, just 8% of 16 year olds

entered Government supported training, whilst 71% of people remained in full-time education.

There is now, of course, a counterbalance to this, as policy-makers wrestle with the problem of having higher qualified people with little work experience and few skills for the labour market, as opposed to having a young workforce with few qualifications, but greater work experience and workplace skills. The 2001 White Paper, *Schools Achieving Success* (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001), looks to tackle the decline in the perceived value of vocational learning, which has been, arguably, more policy-inspired than labour market-inspired. As the former Secretary of State, Estelle Morris, stated:

'Currently, there is not enough recognition of the vocational qualifications that young people are taking. The fact is a lot of youngsters are not yet valued for non-academic work which they find stimulating and valuable. Too many young people are turned off education because of the low-esteem attached to non-academic routes.'

4. WHO ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF EXCLUSION?

4.1 What is social exclusion?

The Government has defined social exclusion as 'a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown.' This is a deliberately flexible definition. Many other dimensions of social exclusion could be added. The most important characteristic of social exclusion is that these problems are linked and mutually reinforcing, and can combine to create a complex and fast moving vicious cycle. The term "social exclusion" includes poverty and low income, but is broader and addresses some of the wider causes and consequences of poverty – except perhaps real structural causes.

There is, arguably, a danger that the over-use of such a flexible term can render it meaningless. It can also serve to undervalue traditional notions of poverty and inequality, which are culturally perpetuated by aspirant consumerism.

4.2 Dangers of over-targeting

'It is tempting, when so many studies identify a minority cluster at the bottom of the socio-economic heap, to focus policies on this group. After all, 'they' are the ones who do not subscribe to the education ethic, truanting and failing to obtain the qualifications 'they' will need; 'they' are the ones most likely to become unemployed in adulthood, or be in low-paid jobs; 'they' are the ones who become teenage parents; 'they' are the ones who leave home 'too soon' and become homeless. 'They' are fairly easy to identify and if 'they' cannot be saved and become full participants in society, then 'they' will pass on their disadvantage to their children and their children's children.' (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

It is important that 'the disadvantaged' are not stereotyped and stigmatised, and that the wider inequalities of young people are also addressed. Many of these may have more to do with labour market and economic and social values than with the values and behaviour of the individuals themselves. It is likely to take more than changing the attitudes and the values of the 'socially excluded' to tackle social exclusion – it will also require changing the attitudes and values of the 'socially included'.

It is further the case that such a focus on an individual's exclusion assumes that the alternative of 'inclusion' is necessarily better. Many young people may be taking major risks by 'opting in' in losing their existing, if precarious, support networks, only to be marginalised later within what might be considered to be a judgemental, competitive and devious work culture that may be seen to be characterised by sophisticated half-truths and pragmatic insincerity.

Much of the discourse around social exclusion is concerned with the difficulties young people have in making an effective transition from education to work. Employers looking for new recruits are often critical of young peoples' attitudes to work – encapsulated in the term 'employability skills' - as well as being critical of their basic literacy and numeracy skills. This is most likely to be aimed at those who leave full-time education at Year 11, but is also aimed at many of those who have completed HE courses. Young people leaving full-time education are an increasingly easy target, for the reasons identified in the

previous section. It is a numbers game and if fewer and fewer people leave full-time education at the earliest opportunity, those that do so are easily identified as being underachievers or problematic. The inverse principle applies to those leaving HE courses. As the numbers increase, so they are no longer seen as high achievers but increasingly the norm. This can lead to a resultant disappointment in the quality of the outputs from HE courses.

4.3 Who are most at risk?

Young people most at risk of labour market and social exclusion often face multiple disadvantages. The report, *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training* (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999), identifies the following groups as most likely to be non-participants in education, training or employment between the ages of 16 and 18 years:

- Young people from ethnic minority backgrounds;
- Young carers;
- Homeless or looked after young people;
- Young people with learning difficulties and/or a disability;
- Young people with mental illness problems;
- Teenage parents;
- Young offenders;
- Drug and alcohol misusers.

Young people who are not participating in education and training between 16 and 17 years are more likely to

- Be unqualified, untrained and unemployed;
- Earn less if they are employed;
- Be a teenage parent;
- Experience depression and/or poor physical health;
- Have a criminal record.

It is worth remembering that there was a very low level of non-participation in employment, education and training amongst young people up until the mid-1970s, whilst the Thatcher Government managed to reduce non-participation to very low levels in the mid-1980s as a result of the introduction of the Youth Training Schemes.

In a strongly competitive environment, there will always be 'losers' regardless of whether they have no qualifications or NVQ level 3 qualifications and regardless of whether they have or have not participated in training between the ages of 16 and 17 years. The 'losers' will still be more likely to 'earn less if they are employed' and will probably also be more likely to 'experience depression and/or poor physical health' if there is little social and economic mobility. It may be as much about how much we choose to reward winners and penalise losers, as it is about raising young people's participation rates.

Young people most in need of support as they begin their adult lives risk being missed, misunderstood or simply ignored by official agencies. Disaffected teenagers from minority ethnic communities and those being 'looked after' by local authorities are especially likely to fall through the net, according to research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Significant numbers of young people in difficulties are unknown to, and unregistered with, the Careers Service and other agencies. It also suggests that too little account is taken of racism and other special difficulties encountered by young people from minority ethnic groups. The reasons for this loss of contact include the following:

- Many vulnerable young people begin to drop out of school from an early age or had been excluded or are 'looked after' by local authorities at some time in their lives;
- Disengagement from school often coincides with major problems at home, including abuse, bereavement and objections to arranged marriages;
- Teenagers from minority ethnic groups often experience racism in school and while in care and young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women often have difficulties at home over attitudes towards arranged marriages;
- Voluntary and community organisations are often the only agencies in contact with the young people.

5. INDICATORS OF RISK

It is quickly apparent when official sources of data on social exclusion are examined, that the widest range of available figures relates to young people. Local authorities and individual schools are now required to collate a greater number of statistics than ever before. It is frequently argued that time would be better spent actually teaching pupils rather than over-burdening teaching professionals with ever increasing levels of bureaucracy. However, there is little doubt that there is now a comprehensive range of indicators that can be used to help identify young people who are at greater risk of long-term exclusion, both from education and employment and from society in general with higher risks of drugs and alcohol abuse and criminal activity.

Consequently, there are more data tables in this chapter than in those dedicated to other beneficiary groups. These are but indicators, however, and it must be recognised that some have a greater risk attached than others – exclusion, truancy, children in and leaving care should be given greater weight than the number of children taking free school meals.

5.1 Unauthorised school absence

Signs of subsequent disadvantages first emerge at school. Non-attendance at school is likely to be a good predictor of subsequent non-participation and risk of social exclusion.

The table below shows the number and rates of authorised and unauthorised absence from schools in each Local Education Authority (LEA) in the South West of England. The average number of authorised days' absence in the South West region is 7.98 - similar to the average for England as a whole.

However, unauthorised absence is likely to be a better measure of truancy and an indication of young people at risk of subsequent labour market disadvantage. This figure is much lower in the South West region than in England.

National Pupil Absence Tables - Secondary Schools 2001

LEA	No of day pupils of compulsory school age	Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
		% of 1/2 days missed	Average no. of 1/2 days missed per absent pupil	% of 1/2 days missed	Average no. of 1/2 days missed per absent pupil
Bath & North East					
Somerset	10,745	7.6	24	0.6	12
Bournemouth	8,924	8.2	26	0.7	9
Bristol, City of	17,210	9.7	31	2.3	19
Cornwall	29,960	8.9	27	0.4	8
Devon <i>FM</i>	36,838	8.3	26	1.0	15
Dorset	26,514	7.5	23	0.7	13
Gloucestershire	33,786	7.5	24	0.5	12
Isles of Scilly	124	7.9	24	0.0	1
North Somerset	11,013	7.8	25	0.8	19
Plymouth	16,210	8.3	26	0.5	14
Poole	6,956	7.6	24	0.7	13
Somerset	29,902	7.8	24	0.5	14
South Gloucestershire	14,481	7.1	22	1.2	12
Swindon	11,361	9.2	28	0.7	9
Torbay	7,633	8.0	25	1.2	11
Wiltshire	25,426	7.4	23	0.7	11
England	2,956,915	8.0	26	1.1	17

FM: May have been affected by Foot & Mouth
Source: DfES 2001

The average number of full days' unauthorised absence in secondary schools in the South West region was 0.8, compared to 1.1 in England. This pattern is mirrored in half-day absences. The average number of half days missed through unauthorised absence is 13 in the South West region and 17 in England.

Again, this hides wide differences within local authorities within the region. Unauthorised absence rates are higher in City of Bristol (19) and North Somerset (19). Cornwall (8) and Bournemouth (9) had far lower unauthorised absence rates than other authorities within the region.

5.2 Permanent exclusions

Nationally, permanent exclusions rose by 450% between 1990 and 1995 to more than 12,000. They have since fallen back to nearer 8,000. Of those who are permanently excluded, fewer than one in six return to full-time education according to a report issued in April 1998 by the New Policy Institute.

There is substantial evidence to show the links between missing school and getting drawn into crime. One study by the Metropolitan Police shows that 5% of all offences in London were committed by children during school hours. Two-fifths of robberies, a quarter of burglaries and a fifth of criminal damage offences were committed by ten to 16 year olds.

Being thrown out of school is a key 'trigger' leading to homelessness. Children who have been excluded from school are 90 times more likely to end up living on the streets than those who stay on and pass exams. More than a quarter of all those living rough had been excluded from school and 62% had no educational qualifications.

DfES statistics show that girls represent just 17% of permanent exclusions from school, around 1,800 a year. Whilst the data suggests that it is boys who are more likely to truant and be excluded from school, there is a danger that an over-focus on boys' behaviour can lead to an underestimation of the problems that many girls at risk of exclusion face.

There is a widespread belief in education circles that girls are 'not a problem' - not least because they do relatively well in exams. According to a study by Professor Audrey Osler of the Centre for Citizenship Studies in Education at Leicester University, this belief has led to a denial of the particular needs of disaffected girls (*Girls and Exclusion*, Osler, A & Vincent K, Routledge/Falmer, 2002).

LEAs with lower exclusion results have higher pass rates at GCSE. Most permanently excluded pupils are white male teenagers, but children in care are ten times more likely to be excluded and special needs and ethnic minority children six times more likely. African-Caribbean children form nearly half the group of permanently excluded pupils yet they constitute only 1% of school numbers. Research reveals that many permanently excluded black children are underachievers of high or average ability who had not necessarily exhibited disruptive behaviour in earlier years and rarely suffered deep-seated trauma associated with other, white, excluded pupils.

Most excluded children say their parents show little interest in homework and rarely attend parent-teacher evenings. Only half recall being praised by their parents, compared with two-thirds of their non-excluded peers. Excluded children were twice as likely to say they had never been disciplined at home. A quarter had a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and a further quarter was being assessed for one. Excluded pupils have a striking lack of role models. Many said they did not have one and none named their parents among their top three.

Figures from DfES show that the proportion of permanent exclusions from schools in the South West of England is lower than in England as a whole. There were 480 permanent exclusions from secondary schools in the region in 1999/2000. 0.16% of secondary school pupils in the region are excluded from the South West's schools, compared to 0.21% of secondary school pupils in England.

This hides significant sub-regional differences, however. In the City of Bristol, there were 71 permanent exclusion – 0.41% of the secondary school population in the city. The number of permanent exclusions in Poole (4) and Bournemouth (3), by contrast was very low. Those who have been excluded from school are two and a half times more likely than those who were not excluded from school to be outside education, employment and training immediately following Year 11.

5.3 Young people in care

Young people leaving care are particularly likely to be vulnerable to exclusion from the labour market. One survey of 13,000 people leaving care showed that 51% were unemployed, three quarters held no qualifications and less than 20% continued in full-time education after Year 11.

Nationally, 59,700 children were looked after at 31 March 2002, 1.3% more than a year earlier. 38,400 children were under care orders at 31 March 2002, 2% more than a year

earlier. The largest 'category of need' for looked after children was 'abuse or neglect' with an estimated 37,100 children at 31 March 2002 (62% of total). The second largest category was 'family dysfunction' (10% or 6,200 children).

There was very little change in the ethnic origin of looked-after children between March 2001 and March 2002: 48,700 of looked after children were white (82%), 4,400 were mixed (7%), 3,900 were black (7%) and 1,400 were Asian (2%).

The table below shows:

The number of children and young people on child protection registers in the South West region

	2000		2001	
	Number	Rate per 10,000 Population	Number	Rate per 10,000 Population
England	30,300	27	26,800	24
South West	2,485	23	2,155	20
Cornwall	375	36	315	30
Devon	430	29	350	24
Dorset	190	24	155	20
Gloucestershire	160	13	200	16
Somerset	90	8	85	8
Wiltshire	100	10	115	11
Bath & North East Somerset	70	20	45	13
Bournemouth	120	39	165	54
Bristol	330	37	290	33
North Somerset	70	17	55	13
Plymouth	150	26	135	24
Poole	85	28	65	21
South Gloucestershire	125	22	45	8
Swindon	70	17	65	15
Torbay	130	52	75	28

Source: SEU, 2002

The number of young people and children in the South West region who were on the child protection register fell from 2,485 in 2000 to 2,155 in 2001. The rate per 10,000 population fell from 23 per 10,000 population to 20 per 10,000 population. The rate is lower in the South West region than in England. There are significant sub-regional differences, however. The highest rate of registration in 2001 was in Bournemouth, where 54 per 10,000 population was on the register. Other high levels of child protection registrations were in Cornwall, Bristol and Torbay. The highest number of children on child protection registers were in Cornwall, Bristol and Devon. However, it is open to discussion how far this relates to levels of actual abuse. It is more likely due to different policies adopted within different districts.

5.3.1 Care leavers

It is estimated that only 41% of the 6,300 young people leaving care in England and Wales in 2001/2002 had obtained one or more GCSEs or GNVQs on leaving care. This is significantly lower than young people not in care. Just 5% of those leaving care achieved at least five GCSEs at grade A*-C, compared to 50% in England and Wales.

5.4 School leaver destinations

As has already been mentioned, the experiences of young peoples' transitions into the labour market at the beginning of the 21st century are vastly different from those of 20 years earlier. Transitions are much more protracted with higher numbers of people remaining in full-time education for longer periods and increasingly taking part-time employment to fund their studies or to fund a more independent lifestyle whilst they are still learning. In some parts of the country, up to 80% of 16-18 year olds in full-time education also have part-time jobs. Bizarrely, those young people who leave full-time education early to enter the labour market are probably no more likely to find work than those who continue in full-time education, and work to fund it.

The table below shows the destinations of Year 11 leavers in the South West of England in 2000. The first section of the table shows the numbers and proportions of leavers who continued into learning. This includes those who remained in full-time education, those who entered employment with training and those who entered a non-employed government- supported training scheme. The second part of the table shows the numbers and proportion of young people who remained in full-time education and the third part shows the numbers and proportions of young people who entered training and employment with training.

Destinations of Year 11 School Leavers in the South West 2000

Into Learning	All		Male		Female	
England	483,833	84.8	242,429	83.2	241,404	86.5
South West	47,397	86.5	23,753	85.2	23,644	87.8
Careers Service West	9,402	90.5	4,695	90.1	4,707	90.9
Cornwall and Devon	15,908	84.8	7,924	83.0	7,984	86.7
Dorset	6,194	80.6	3,062	78.4	3,132	83.0
Gloucestershire	5,501	88.5	2,800	87.6	2,701	89.3
Somerset	4,614	89.1	2,379	88.6	2,235	89.7
Wiltshire	5,778	87.7	2,893	86.7	2,885	88.8
Full-Time Education	All		Male		Female	
England	406,730	71.3	194,547	66.8	212,183	76.1
South West	40,151	73.3	19,187	68.8	20,964	73.3
Careers Service West	7,750	74.6	3,618	69.5	4,132	79.8
Cornwall and Devon	13,638	72.7	6,506	68.2	7,132	77.4
Dorset	5,547	72.2	2,641	67.6	2,906	77.0
Gloucestershire	4,628	74.4	2,237	70.0	2,391	79.1
Somerset	3,682	71.1	1,823	67.9	1,859	74.6
Wiltshire	4,906	74.5	2,362	70.8	2,544	78.3
Training (inc. with Employment)	All		Male		Female	
England	107,751	18.9	66,728	22.9	41,023	14.7
South West	7,246	13.2	4,566	16.4	2,680	10.0
Careers Service West	1,652	15.9	1,077	20.7	575	11.1
Cornwall and Devon	2,270	12.1	1,418	14.9	852	9.2
Dorset	647	8.4	421	10.8	226	6.0
Gloucestershire	873	14.0	563	17.6	310	10.3
Somerset	932	18.0	556	20.7	376	15.1
Wiltshire	872	13.2	531	15.9	341	10.5

Source: Connexions 2000

The 'into learning' rate in the South West region (86.5%) is higher than in England as a whole (84.8%), but this hides significant sub-regional variations. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the chart above is that in the South West, in particular, the difference between males and females 'into learning' rate is far less than the difference between male and female full-time education participation.

The main reason for this is that males are much more likely to choose work-based learning routes than females, whilst females are much more likely to opt to continue in full-time education. Just 68.8% of males continued in full-time education in the region, compared to 77.9% of females. However, only 10% of females entered work-based learning, compared to 16.4% of males. This pattern is repeated across all the sub regional areas and in England as a whole.

There may be many reasons for this, which could include:

- The better educational performance of young females makes it more likely that they will remain in full-time education than males;
- The labour market training opportunities may be more prevalent and relevant in traditionally male dominated sectors;
- The existing full-time education 'offer' may better reflect young women's interests and talents, than it does those of young males;
- Young males may be more likely to seek financial independence at an earlier age than young females.

The sub-regional variations are significant enough to warrant attention. The 'into learning' rate in Dorset is particularly low at 80.6%. However, the proportion of young people remaining in full-time education is not significantly below the national or regional rate. The key issue here is the very low proportion of young people entering work-based learning – just 8.4%, compared to 13.2% regionally and 13.5% nationally. The fact that this region has the highest proportion of 'unsettled' young people (8.4% - see table below) suggests that improvements in participation rates in this area might need to come from enhancing work-based learning, rather than boosting the numbers of young people remaining in full-time education. Much will depend on the structure of the local labour market in Dorset, however, since the value of vocational qualifications is highly sector dependent.

Somerset, on the other hand, has a very high proportion of young people entering work-based learning (18.0%), but a fairly low proportion of people entering full-time education (71.1%). Again, this is not necessarily a problem, but much will depend on the nature of the local labour market. Lower levels of full-time educational participation may well reflect a more highly developed and credible work-based learning route in an area, which has relevance to local labour market needs. Continuing in full-time education can be as much a default option as a positive choice.

Those areas with high proportions of males who have continued in learning – Somerset and Careers Service West particularly - also have a high proportion of males entering work-based learning. In these areas, the proportion of males continuing in learning is almost identical to the proportion of females continuing in learning.

The table below shows the proportion of young people who leaving full-time education who were 'unsettled' at the time of the survey. These young people were not in education, training or employment (with or without training).

Unsettled	All	%	Male	%	Female	%
England	41,913	7.3	23,203	8.0	18,710	6.7
South West	2,951	5.4	1,568	5.6	1,383	5.1
Careers Service West	353	3.4	184	3.5	169	3.3
Cornwall and Devon	1,235	6.6	656	6.9	579	6.3
Dorset	649	8.4	358	9.2	291	7.7
Gloucestershire	231	3.7	120	3.8	111	3.7
Somerset	222	4.3	103	3.8	119	4.8
Wiltshire	261	4.0	147	4.4	114	3.5

Source: Connexions 2000

The proportion of young people who were unsettled was lower in the South West region (5.4%) than in England as a whole (7.3%). These figures exclude those who were not contactable. Males were only marginally more likely to be unsettled than females, although in no sub-regional area was the male 'unsettled' figure lower than the female 'unsettled' figure.

Cornwall and Devon and Dorset had the highest proportion of unsettled young people, whilst Careers Service West (including Bristol), Gloucestershire and Wiltshire had the lowest. Only in Dorset was the unsettled rate higher than in England as a whole. Interestingly, Dorset also has a very low into-learning rate, and it would be interesting to look at research into the possible reasons for this.

Analysis of the ethnic backgrounds of young people leaving Year 11 does not yield any significant information for the South West region. Whilst there are differences in the 'into learning' rates for different ethnic groups nationally, only Bangladeshi, Black Other and Black Caribbean Year 11 leavers have lower 'into learning' rates than Whites – and the differences are negligible. The pattern of the South West region is similar to that of the UK, but sub-regional analysis is inappropriate due to the very small numbers involved.

5.5 Special Educational Needs

People with learning difficulties and young people with disabilities are also more likely to need additional support to help them to make a successful transition to work. Amongst the adult population two fifths of disabled people hold no qualifications, compared to just one fifth of people without disabilities. Young people with Special Educational Needs (SENs) are six times more likely to be excluded from school and much more likely to achieve no qualifications when they leave full-time compulsory education, making them vulnerable to subsequent social exclusion.

There are just under 17,000 young people, as at January 2002, with SEN statements in the South West region. The percentage of young people with SEN statements in the South West region is similar to that in England. 2.5% of secondary school students in the region have them, compared to 2.4% in England.

Cornwall has the highest proportion of statemented SEN students in secondary schools in the region (4.3%). Bristol also has a high proportion of school secondary school students with SEN statements (3.9%). Bournemouth (0.9%) and Poole (1.2%) have the lowest proportion of SEN statemented students in the region.

It is important to recognise that there will be a much larger number of young people in schools with Special Educational Needs who do not have statements. In some senses, these people are likely to be just as vulnerable, as a result of missing out on help and support from agencies, as a consequence of not having been officially identified.

5.6 Eligibility for free school meals

A further measure of potential disadvantage is to consider the number of school pupils who are eligible for free school meals in the region. The table below shows the number and proportion of secondary school students as at January 2002 in the South West region who are known to be eligible for free school meals.

Secondary School Day Pupils

	Number on roll	No. known to be eligible for free meals	Percentage known to be eligible for free meals
England	3,260,931	486,353	14.9
South West	318,833	29,661	9.3
Bath and North East Somerset	12,266	814	6.6
Bournemouth	9,900	1,031	10.4
Bristol, City of	17,873	3,541	19.8
Cornwall	32,313	3,709	11.5
Devon	40,838	3,820	9.4
Dorset	29,742	2,057	6.9
Gloucestershire	39,057	2,787	7.1
Isles of Scilly	87	4	4.6
North Somerset	12,549	909	7.2
Plymouth	18,982	2,363	12.4
Poole	8,327	533	6.4
Somerset	31,487	2,763	8.8
South Gloucestershire	16,479	1,188	7.2
Swindon	11,554	1,133	9.8
Torbay	8,863	1,265	14.3
Wiltshire	28,516	1,744	6.1

Source: DfES 2002

The region has a lower proportion of young people eligible for free school meals than England as a whole. 29,661 (9.3%) of school students in the region are eligible for free school meals, compared to 14.9% in England. As with the other measures, this disguises considerable sub-regional differences. Unsurprisingly, it is again the cities that have higher levels of eligibility. Nearly one in five school students in the City of Bristol are eligible as are 14.3% in Torbay and 12.4% in Plymouth. The greatest numbers of school students that are eligible for free school meals are in Devon (3,820) and Cornwall (3,709). By contrast, there is a much lower proportion of young people who are eligible for free school meals in Wiltshire (6.1%), Bath and North East Somerset (6.6%), Dorset (6.9%) and the Isles of Scilly (4.6%).

6. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH WEST REGION

GCSE attainment is crucial to young people's subsequent life chances and their ability to make an effective transition to post-compulsory education or employment and training.

The threshold of five GCSEs (A*-C) or equivalent is a key to improving the staying on rates in full-time education. It is also considered to be Level 2 attainment – the minimum that is now expected to compete effectively in the labour market. Clearly, GCSEs are not the only way in which people can gain Level 2 qualifications, but they tend to act as a good measure of broad education upon which young people can either pursue additional academic qualifications or more easily acquire skills through a vocational training course.

The table below shows the attainment rate of 15 year old pupils at schools in the South West region for 2000/2001.

Percentage of 15 year old pupils achieving at GCSE or GNVQ equivalents

	5+ A*-C grades	5+ A*-G grades	No passes	Average GCSE point score per 15 year old
England Average ¹	50.0	88.9	5.5	39.3
South West	52.2	91.0	4.4	40.5
Bath and North East Somerset	56.4	92.2	3.9	41.8
Bristol	31.8	80.5	10.8	30.0
North Somerset	50.8	91.3	4.1	40.3
South Gloucestershire	48.7	92.9	3.9	39.4
Cornwall	53.3	92.1	3.8	41.0
Isles of Scilly	70.8	100.0	0.0	52.8
Plymouth	50.3	90.3	4.5	39.6
Torbay	51.7	90.5	5.4	40.0
Devon	51.3	90.5	4.3	40.0
Bournemouth	51.6	88.2	5.8	39.6
Poole	58.5	94.2	2.7	45.1
Dorset	56.4	92.1	4.3	42.2
Gloucestershire	58.3	93.1	2.7	43.7
Somerset	54.7	93.0	2.8	42.1
Swindon	44.5	88.3	6.4	36.3
Wiltshire	55.5	91.7	4.3	42.0

¹ –average includes all schools.

Source: DfES 2001

Attainment in the region is higher than in England. 52.2% of 15 year olds achieve at least five GCSE grades A*-C or more compared to 50% in England, whilst 91% obtain GCSEs A*-G grades compared to 88.9% in England. Just 4.4% of the region's school leavers have no qualifications, compared to 5.5% in England. However, sub-regional analysis reveals a more varied picture. Only 31.8% of school leavers in the City of Bristol gain five or more GCSEs A*-C grades and just 44.5% of leavers in Swindon achieve this standard. More than one in ten 15 year olds in the City of Bristol leaves school without any qualification.

7. POLICY CONTEXT – THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Labour Government of 1997 recognised the multiple difficulties faced by young people in their transition from compulsory education and training to work and has set about introducing a range of initiatives primarily designed to support vulnerable young people at risk of exclusion from education and the labour market. The policy framework is part of the Government's Welfare To Work programme, aiming to tackle social exclusion and raise the skills and productivity of the UK's workforce.

The main initiatives aimed at tackling what had come to be recognised as a major problem were New Deal for Young People, the new Connexions Service and the introduction of a more flexible and relevant education and training system.

7.1 New Deal for Young People (NDYP) 18-24 year olds

The New Deal is part of the Government's Welfare to Work strategy. It gives New Deal jobseekers aged 18-24 a chance to develop their potential, gain skills and experience and find work. The New Deal is a key part of the Government's Welfare to Work initiative. It has been created to help unemployed people into work by closing the gap between the skills employers want and the skills people can offer. The NDYP is for 18-24 year olds who have been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for six months or more. It is a mandatory programme for those aged 18-24 who have been unemployed for six months.

NDYP has 3 phases:

- a Gateway period of intensive tailored advice and guidance for up to four months with additional specialist provision as required;
- Those not finding work during Gateway are offered one of four options each including an element of education or training: a subsidised job with an employer; full-time education or training; work on the Environment Task Force or with the voluntary sector;
- Follow-through provides extra adviser support to ensure that as many as possible move on into jobs.

Although New Deal was originally sold as a way in which to provide skilled and 'job ready' young people to employers seeking higher quality new entrant labour, the central goal was probably to tackle social exclusion and to take a longer term approach to improving young people's life chances. According to an article by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion in 1997:

'The programme for under 24 year olds is designed to reach out to excluded and disaffected young people and decisively change their long term chances of entering or re-entering work - before they are lost to the labour market and to society generally. Excluded young people need to improve their employability through a mix of work experience and learning.' (Working Brief 87 Commentary)

There have been numerous initiatives in the past that have tried to tackle the problem of youth employment and training. Most have foundered in periods of economic turbulence. Thus far, macro-economic circumstances have favoured such welfare to work programmes, so a simple count of the number of people who have been helped back into the labour market as a direct result of New Deal fails to take account of 'dead weight' – ie

the number of young people who would have found work without the additional New Deal support.

Nationally, 873,600 young people have participated in New Deal since 1998. Of these, 90% have left the programme. Of the starters, 36% have left for sustained, unsubsidised jobs, 26% of the leavers have unknown destinations, 11% have returned to other benefits such as Income Support and Incapacity Benefit, and a further 18% have other 'known' destinations, which includes a return to Jobseekers Allowance.

The flexibility of the labour market appears to remain a problem although this is not the fault of the New Deal programme. 40% of all New Deal job starts have failed to last more than 13 weeks, suggesting that the revolving door of young people's employment may not yet have been closed.

7.2 Connexions

Connexions is the Government's support service for all young people aged 13-19 in England. The service aims to provide integrated advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities for this group and to help them make a smooth transition to adulthood and working life.

Connexions joins up the work of six Government departments, their agencies and organisations on the ground, together with private and voluntary sector groups and youth and careers services. It brings together all the services and support young people need during their teenage years. It offers practical help with choosing the right courses and careers, including access to broader personal development through activities like sport, performing arts and volunteering activities. It will also provide help and advice on issues like drug abuse, sexual health and homelessness.

Connexions is being delivered through local Connexions Partnerships. The Partnerships cover the same geographical areas as the Learning and Skills Councils.

There are six Connexions Partnerships in the South West of England:

- Connexions Cornwall and Devon
- Connexions Gloucestershire
- Connexions West of England
- Connexions Bournemouth and Poole
- Connexions Somerset
- Connexions Wiltshire and Swindon

Connexions offers differentiated and integrated support to young people. All young people will have access to a personal adviser. For some young people, this may be just for careers advice, for others it may involve more in-depth support to help identify barriers to learning and find solutions, brokering access to more specialist support. The personal advisers will work in a range of settings, in schools, colleges, one-stop shops, community centres and on an out-reach basis.

7.3 Sure Start

The Sure Start programmes are aimed at families and children up to the age of 14. Whilst these programmes are not aimed specifically at people who are about to make the transition from full-time education to working life, they remain a central feature of the Government's strategy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion.

The Government invested £452 million in Sure Start programmes between 1998 and 2000 and an extra £580 million has been earmarked for Sure Start programmes between 2001 and 2004. The central aim of Sure Start is to work with families and children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children so that they are able to function effectively at school and at home.

8. THE IMPLICATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION EXPANSION

The change in the nature of HE from being the domain of an elite group of academically gifted young people to being a virtual continuation of compulsory education is one of the most striking aspects of educational change over the past fifteen years.

Participation rates have risen from 5% in 1960 to more than 40% today and the present Government has a target for 50% of people under the age of 30 years to undertake an HE course by 2010. This phenomenon is not peculiar to the United Kingdom. The same pattern has occurred in all the advanced Western countries - France, Germany, the USA, Italy and Japan.

The rationale for such a large expansion in HE is not difficult to find. The assumption is that in order to survive and prosper in today's globalised world, there is a pressing need to ensure that the UK has an innovative, dynamic and skilled workforce. Universities can nurture the talented people whom businesses need in a world transformed by technological advances. Skills and abilities play a major part in competitive advantage.

The expansion of HE has been no gradual increase, but a very rapid increase over a very short period of time. Student numbers increased by 70% between 1989 and 1995 and Government policy insists that this should continue. This mass expansion of HE has mirrored the decline in vocational learning, yet might have little to do with labour market need. Part of the reason for the rapid expansion of HE might be due to a rational choice on the part of young people not to miss out. Where a small number of people follow an HE course then it is less of an issue if a young person chooses an alternative route. However, once it starts to become the expected educational route, it becomes a far greater risk not to follow what everyone else is doing. Alison Wolf makes the following analysis:

'enrolments take off because and when things reach a point of no return: at a certain level of participation potential students are destined – or doomed – to join in.' (Does Education Matter? Myths about education and economic growth, Penguin, 2002)

Wolf suggests that, for this reason, the expansion of student numbers will continue, regardless of labour market need and regardless of the cost of tuition fees and maintenance costs. Young people increasingly cannot afford not to enter HE as those who do not are increasingly outside the norm, different and easily labelled as failures. Instead of HE being seen as providing a great advantage to people later in life, mass HE has meant that it is more the case that not participating in HE is a major disadvantage. This has had an impact on the vulnerability of young people not attaining higher level qualifications and has further downgraded the image of often highly-skilled blue collar occupations, resulting in labour supply shortages in many traditional – mainly male dominated – industries.

Some suggest that employers are simply using a degree as a proxy for 'intelligence, ability and character'. Economic literature has tried to show how HE enhances labour's 'general adaptability and ... capacity for technological advance', but has not been able to demonstrate anything more than that rich countries can afford more HE, not that HE leads to increased wealth.

8.1 The consequences for inclusion

Access to a university education is currently 'exclusive', regardless of the fact that Government policy aims to enable all who want to attend to do so. There is much current debate on the validity or otherwise of Government policy on support for young people. There have been recent moves by the DfES to raise awareness of vocational courses and increase the status of courses in the skilled trades, in which there are currently considerable skill shortages. However, it will take more than a public relations exercise to convince young people – and their parents – that they will be held in the same esteem for embarking on the vocational route as the academic. Even the ridicule to which many university courses are subject and the obvious difference in reputation between the top universities and those which take in students with the lowest examination results has made little impact on the public perception of the gaining of a first degree. A change of culture is required, with parents of much younger children properly informed of the choices available to their children. An acceptance of alternatives in education, based on proper analysis of long term benefit, might lead to a gradual increase in the standing of good quality vocational courses and entry into skilled trades.

