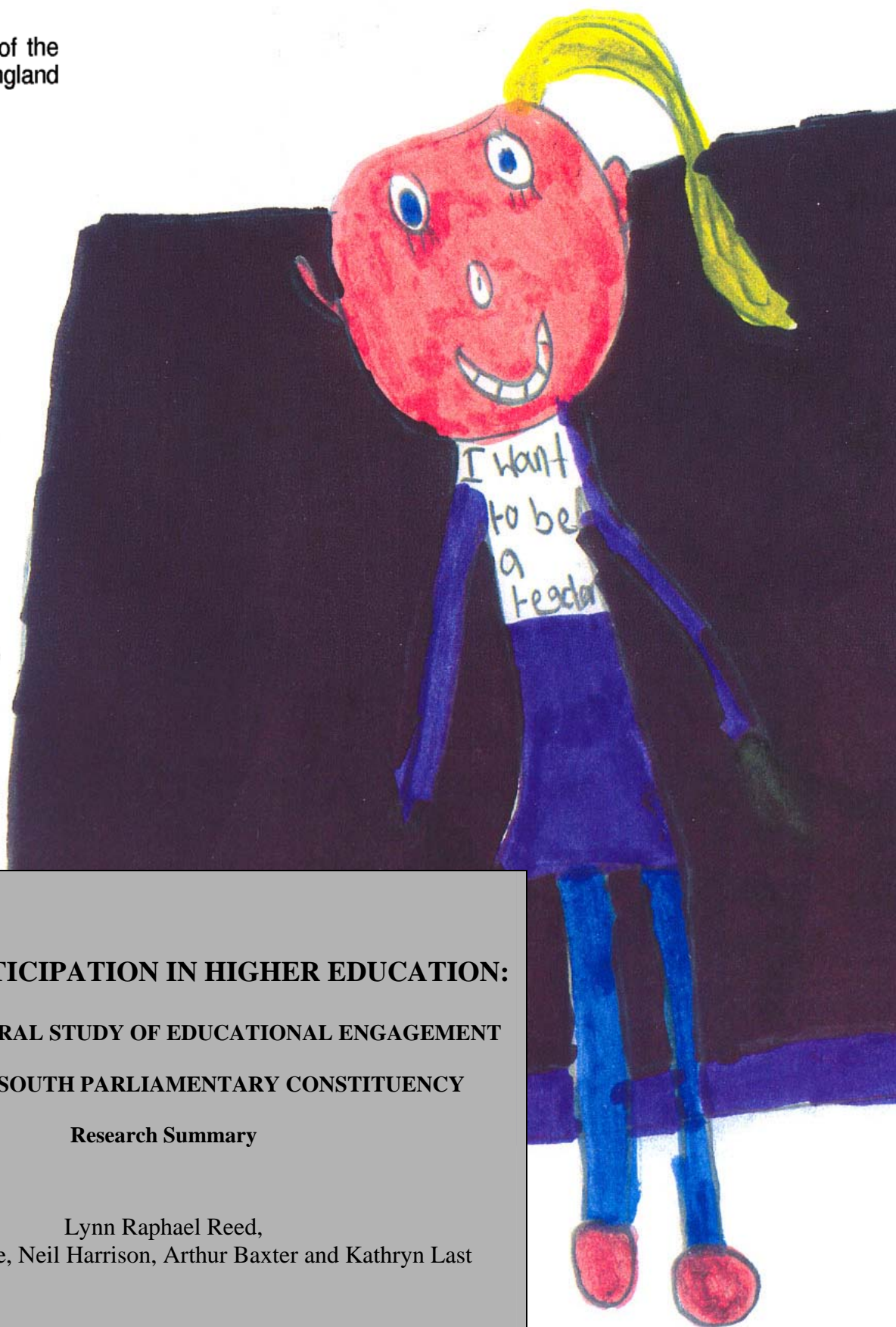




University of the
West of England



**YOUNG PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
A SOCIOCULTURAL STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL ENGAGEMENT
IN BRISTOL SOUTH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY**

Research Summary

Lynn Raphael Reed,
Chris Croudace, Neil Harrison, Arthur Baxter and Kathryn Last

A HEFCE-funded research project

Acknowledgements

The illustration on the front cover arose from an *Aimhigher* project involving Hareclive Primary School in Bristol South and the University of the West of England in July 2006. Permission was given to use the drawing; our thanks go to Jade Delaney.

We are grateful to all members of the Project Advisory Group who willingly gave their time and expertise in support of the study.

Particular thanks are due to the following individuals who facilitated access to key data:
Graham Knight at Bristol Children and Young People's Statistics Unit;
Howard Wilson at Connexions West of England;
Joy Huntington and Judy Stradling at City of Bristol College.

We are also grateful to:

Angela Shaw who supported us in undertaking a number of field interviews;
Sarah Howls at HEFCE for her patience as we completed the study;
Dawn Primarolo MP for dedicated interest and concern about her constituency;
James Wetz for sharing with us the outcomes from his own study;
Members of the research teams working on parallel projects in Nottingham North, Sheffield Brightside and Birmingham Hodge Hill for sharing with us their emerging findings.

Most of all however, we are indebted to all the young people, parents/carers and educational professionals living and working in Bristol South, for sharing with us their experiences and their understanding of the issues under investigation. Without their support this study would not have been possible. We hope that they recognise their voices, and their lives, in this account.

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The research was made possible by a grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. However, the views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not represent those of the Higher Education Funding Council for England or the University of the West of England, Bristol.

Young Participation in Higher Education: a sociocultural study of educational engagement in Bristol South parliamentary constituency

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Chris Croudace, Neil Harrison, Arthur Baxter and Kathryn Last

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Research Summary¹

Introduction

In January 2005 HEFCE published *Young participation in higher education* (HEFCE, 2005a) that set out in detail patterns of young participation in higher education over the period 1994-2000. The report identifies that 'there are broad and deep divisions in the chances of going to HE according to where you live' (p10) and that 'many cities and towns are educationally divided, containing both neighbourhoods where almost no one goes to university and neighbourhoods where two out of three or more will enter HE' (p11). Bristol is presented as a case study city that illustrates such a division but in addition to exemplify the characteristic that high and low participation neighbourhoods may coexist 'cheek by jowl'. The parliamentary constituency of Bristol South was ranked second to bottom out of 529 parliamentary constituencies in England with a young participation rate (YPR) of only 10%.

Whilst the report confirms what might be expected e.g. that people living in areas of low young participation in higher education are also disadvantaged on many other social, economic and educational measures, it also acknowledges that further research is needed to elicit 'a fuller explanation and interpretation of the processes leading to these patterns of participation' (Forward: Sir Howard Newby).

The aim of the research project reported on here has been to establish in-depth and situated insights into the particular processes that underpin the low rate of participation of young people in higher education in Bristol South parliamentary constituency. Whilst we know a reasonable amount about generic reasons for low participation in higher education at a national level, this study attempts to identify and examine the impact of particular local characteristics. The study of Bristol South is complemented by studies of three other constituencies with low rates of young participation in higher education: Nottingham North, Sheffield Brightside and Birmingham Hodge Hill.

Specific research objectives agreed a part of a common research framework across all four constituencies (HEFCE, 2005b) included:

- to establish what is already known through a review of existing local literature;
- to build on existing knowledge to determine attitudes, perceptions and experiences of young people that are not participating in education;
- to establish the availability and the appropriateness of the post-16 educational offer;
- to determine the nature of the information, advice and guidance that young people receive with regard to progression to post-16 provision and subsequently higher education;
- to identify examples of good practice in reaching out and engaging young people in post-16 and higher education provision.

¹ The full report is available from Kathryn.Last@uwe.ac.uk or from <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/research/>

Methodology

Studies on widening participation frequently use the metaphor of ‘barriers’ to participation, citing ‘situational’, ‘institutional’ and ‘dispositional’ dimensions that need to be removed or alleviated for participation to occur. Whilst the concept of barriers is a useful one, it provides rather limited purchase on the *sociocultural* dimensions to understanding behaviours and outcomes (Gorard et al, 2006). We need to understand better from within any specific setting:

- a) the *historical/material context* for contemporary cultural practices;
- b) the *cultural resources* that people are drawing upon in constructing their learning identities and trajectories;
- c) the *interactive* processes by which learning identities and trajectories are sustained or transformed over time;
- d) the *dominant discourses* that shape perceptions of the issues and guide actions in response.

Low participation of young people in higher education in Bristol South reflects levels of aspiration, participation and achievement throughout the years of compulsory and post-compulsory education and training. As such, it is the tip of a much more significant ‘iceberg’. We have enquired into the reasons for this systemic failure to engage many young people at all stages of education in the constituency and sought to understand better how educational outcomes reflect the dynamic interplay of cultural, social and economic factors across space and time. We have also interrogated a number of current and proposed local interventions aimed at enhancing educational engagement, including but not limited to strategies to encourage progression to higher education, to evaluate the extent to which they address the issues that underpin current patterns of participation.

The data used in the study includes socio-demographic and educational statistics for the constituency, identifying key variables at ward level as well as by educational institution, with Bristol wide and national comparators; an attitudinal and experiential survey of all young people in years 8 and 9 in schools within the constituency in 2003, matched to outcomes at KS3 and at GCSE, and compared with schools serving similar communities in north Bristol; and semi-structured interviews with almost 100 young people (under 21) and 50 adults living and/or working in the constituency.

Young people interviewed were from *Aimhigher* cohorts in year 9 and year 11 from two schools and from year 12 and year 13 in one post-16 centre and one further education college that serve the constituency. Further interviews were undertaken with some young people who had disengaged from mainstream education and some who had already progressed into higher education. Adults interviewed included educational professionals working in the constituency, *Aimhigher* tutors and mentors on placement in Bristol South schools, and parents or carers. In addition, an independent and well-regarded community organisation - Knowle West Media Centre – was commissioned to produce a short film recording insights and capturing the ‘voice’ of local people.

Inevitably as a relatively small-scale project certain conclusions need to be considered provisional. However, the main themes appear to have a high degree of validity – tested out through rigorous triangulation of data and verified by the project advisory group and through two consultative events. In addition, the themes resonate with findings from previous studies of the area identified as part of a review of existing local literature.

It is hoped that outcomes from this research will inform the development of interventions that may improve the current situation.

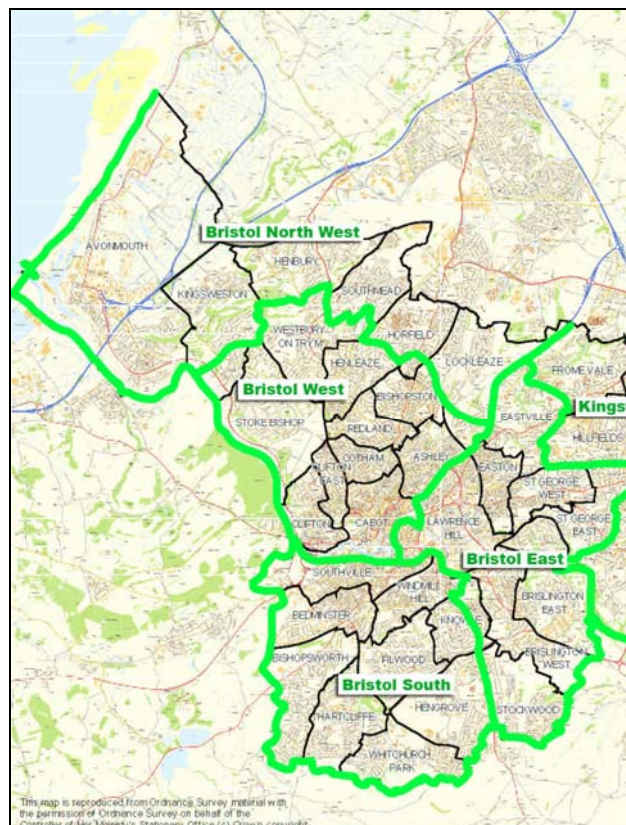
The Local Context

Socio-demographic profile

Although the City of Bristol is a relatively wealthy city, that wealth is unevenly distributed and the city is characterised by extremes of affluence and deprivation. Filwood ward in Bristol South is one of two Bristol wards in the bottom 1% of the most deprived wards in the country; two of Bristol's seven Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) are in Bristol South - Hartcliffe and Withywood (NRA2) and Knowle West (NRA3). At the same time, there are wards of the city that are some of the most affluent in the country e.g. Henleaze ward.

Recent socio-demographic data highlight some distinctive characteristics of the constituency. Bristol South is less ethnically diverse than the city as a whole (4.2% from Black and ethnic minority groups compared with 8.2%). In Bristol South, more people live in rented homes; there is a higher percentage of under-16s and a higher proportion of lone parent households with dependent children. Of the population of 16-74 year olds in the constituency, 40.4% are from socio-economic groups (NS-SEC) 4-7, compared with 32% for Bristol as whole. On the Index of Multiple Deprivation, Bristol South scores extremely poorly on the education, skills and training deprivation domain score (with four of the most education deprived wards in the South West in Bristol South) but less starkly on the employment and income deprivation domain scores pointing to a degree of disjuncture between education and employment. In five of the Bristol South wards more than 30% of the adult population have low levels of basic skills. Census data from 2001 identifies that 36.5% of the population aged 16-74 in the constituency have no qualifications, 18.3% are qualified to level 1, 18.2% to level 2, 6.4% to level 3, and just 14.2% to level 4/5 (6.4% unknown). More adults have no qualifications and fewer people have degree level qualifications or equivalent than for the city as whole.

Bristol: constituency and ward boundaries



Source: Adapted from Ordnance Survey (2006)

Bristol's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy for 2006-2008 has identified South Bristol as one of three priority regeneration areas in the city for strategic resource allocation and the *South Bristol C21 Regeneration Programme* sets out an integrated approach to development of land use, housing, employment, education and training, shopping, community and cultural facilities, and improved transport links. At a regional level, the *Vision for the West of England 2026* expresses similar strategic commitment to the co-ordinated development of South Bristol (The West of England Partnership, 2005).

Whilst some suggest that there has been a significant pattern of previous regeneration failure in the city, it appears that a longer term and more co-ordinated vision characterises recent planning. A number of landmark projects aim to transform the local area. These include a £20 million redevelopment of the Symes Avenue area in Hartcliffe and redevelopment of Hengrove Park – the largest regeneration site in Bristol – to include a new South Bristol Community Hospital (opening 2008). A significant number of new homes and employment opportunities will be created. Together with the planned expansion of Bristol International Airport to the south of the city (with an increase in employment opportunities in FTEs from 2,300 currently to 3,800 in 2015 and 5,700 in 2030) these regeneration plans create a new sense of optimism and energy around future improvements in the local economy. The socio-demographic context for educational aspiration and achievement in the constituency is thereby set to change.

Social and economic history: a tale of two cities

A brief social and economic history reveals how Bristol has become such a polarised city and forms a starting point for understanding the particular characteristics of the constituency. Whilst other areas of the city also experience significant levels of deprivation, Bristol South has developed in such a way that there are more extensive areas of deprivation with fewer accessible educational, training and employment opportunities, less social mix, and greater isolation from the rest of the city. These factors make it distinctive in scale rather than kind when compared to certain other parts of the city.

The decline of city centre heavy industries close to the river (docks, factories and coalmines) in the early 20th century was matched by the establishment of new industries on the northern fringes of the city. Engineering works associated with the automobile and aircraft industries began to congregate along a wide arc around the northern and eastern outskirts of the urban area. These new major employers differed from the older industry in Bristol in demanding skilled labour. The area is now known for its hi-tech and financial services operations, with many major graduate employers. The skilled labour demand in the north of the city in turn sparked a demand for training. The major sites of the two main further education colleges are located in the northern part of the city with Bristol Polytechnic, later the University of the West of England, on the northern fringe. The economic dominance of north Bristol was further assured by the provision of major transport routes (M4 and M5 motorways and Parkway Station with a high speed rail link to London). The south by contrast remains associated with poor transport links with no motorway connection, little suburban rail and a long-delayed ring road project. High travel costs and extended journey times have long acted as a barrier to workforce migration, especially to the northern part of the city.

At the same time as the locus of mass employment in diverse industries was shifting northwards, a significant proportion of the working class population from the city centre was moved southwards into new council estates. Estates were established in Knowle and Knowle West in the 1920s and 1930s, and then on farmland along the southern fringe of the city in Hartcliffe and Withywood in the 1950s and 1960s. The estates were conceived in the modernist tradition as model 'neighbourhood units' with relatively high-quality and spacious housing in a range of configurations, good local amenities and indigenous industry and commerce. Perhaps most importantly, they were intended to house a strong social mix. This

idealist vision, as with many experiments in council housing from this period, was never realised.

The major employer in the Bristol South parliamentary constituency for most of the 20th Century was Wills (later Imperial) Tobacco. Their operation was originally based at a number of sites in Bedminster, close to the river but moved to a new complex situated mid-way between Hartcliffe and Knowle West in 1974. The company employed an estimated 30,000 people at its peak. As with other manufacturing concerns in the city, the workforce began to dwindle and by 1971 the tobacco industry employed less than half this figure in south Bristol, falling to 4,000 in 1988 and slightly less at the time of the site's closure in 1990. It is estimated that a further 20,000 jobs were lost in related industries as a result.

The decline in manufacturing in Bristol South is far from unique, with the same pattern being repeated across the city over the last twenty-five years. Bristol's shift from manufacturing to the service sector however has heightened the south's difficulties further. Little of this new industry has been based within the constituency and the levels of qualification in the local population have made competing for jobs harder still, where good qualifications are vital for securing well-paid service sector employment. With an increasing concentration of graduate level jobs in the occupational structure of the West of England, addressing qualification and skill levels in the constituency remains a key priority.

In fact, employment in the area has been traditionally low skilled but plentiful, breeding a multi-generational disjuncture between education, training and employment. Even the skilled labour has generally been concentrated in small businesses in the construction trades, where family connections are often more important than qualifications in securing work and work-based training tends to be informal.

Youth labour market

Recent labour market statistics for Bristol South, especially for young people, indicate the initial job opportunities for young people in the constituency aged 16-19 are in line with their peers elsewhere in the city. 62% of those entering the workforce at this age are employed in NS-SEC 4-7 occupations with a further 11% never having worked. Jobs are concentrated in retail and wholesale, which accounts for around one third of the youth labour market. However, within this overall similarity with the rest of the city, Bristol South has a distinctive pattern of youth employment with construction and manufacturing (especially for young men) and financial intermediation including call centres (especially for young women) being relatively more important than for the city as a whole.

Equity with the wider city declines as the young people age and they have a very different labour market experience by their mid-twenties. While there is a shift to higher status occupations in Bristol South, this is more marked elsewhere in the city, to the point that 33% of 20-24 year olds in the city as a whole are in professional or managerial occupations, compared with only 24% in Bristol South. In addition, the unemployment rates for 16-24 year olds, and for men in the constituency, have recently been slightly higher than comparable city-wide rates with some unemployment spikes.

It is possible that a pattern of fragility in the youth labour market in the constituency, and particularly amongst men, is closely related to the current and historic importance of the construction and manufacturing industries for young men in Bristol South, which are notorious 'bellwethers' for the economic health of an area. Such an unpredictable or volatile labour market may well send confusing messages to young people – especially about the importance or otherwise of qualifications to their employment prospects. Many young people that we spoke to believed that they could get jobs at sixteen without good qualifications and that these jobs would adequate and dependable.

Ward level differentials

Having drawn a broad profile of Bristol South compared with the rest of the city, it is equally important to acknowledge that Bristol South parliamentary constituency is not homogenous, and differentials at ward level are significant. In a number of ways there is not one single 'community' but multiple 'communities' operating within the constituency boundary. Using data from the 2001 Census, it is possible to present a working segmentation for the constituency into three zones with similar socio-economic profiles:

- a) Northern zone: *Bedminster, Southville and Windmill Hill*². Nearly all private sector housing, with traditionally affluent working class populations being recently supplemented by public sector professionals, with low unemployment and relatively high levels of qualification.
- b) Eastern zone: *Knowle and Hengrove*. Mainly private housing including substantial 'Right to Buy', with mixed employment patterns and qualification levels, low unemployment and low benefit dependency although there are some significant differences between the two wards.
- c) Southern zone: *Filwood, Bishopsworth, Hartcliffe and Whitchurch Park*³. Mainly council built housing estates, much still under council control, with low skill and manual employment, poor qualification levels, above average unemployment and high benefit dependency. This zone contains the two NRAs in the constituency.

Family and community cultures, values and attitudes

Despite a profile of relatively high levels of social deprivation, particularly in some wards in the constituency, this is not clearly associated with resident dissatisfaction. Indeed strong community bonds and stable extended family networks appear to frequently generate positive attitudes to living and working in the area (notwithstanding concerns expressed in a number of surveys in NRAs about crime and drug use). In a number of local studies, the vast majority of people say they do not anticipate moving from the area. An evaluation of Sure Start in Hartcliffe and Withywood NRA shows a successful programme of early years' and family support built upon a strong community infrastructure and deep-rooted tradition of community activism, especially amongst women. Only in one study did a minority of families, with high levels of need and who had recently been re-housed in the area, report feeling disconnected from the wider community.

On the other hand whilst one might see such stable family and community cultures as a positive feature, there is also some evidence that such cultures may be associated with a degree of stasis in relation to social change and may also operate to exclude outsiders and to strongly regulate group behaviours. A number of attitudinal surveys claim an absence of a 'can-do' attitude, sometimes characterised by outsiders as 'complacency' or 'passivity'. Some explanations highlight the culture created by previous intergenerational experience of 'employment for life' in the tobacco industry building dependency on a local 'benevolent employer'. Such attitudes, as reported, reflect some sense of 'absence of agency' i.e. reluctance to take risks or difficulty in exerting control over aspects of one's life, at least in the ways that are assumed by policy makers to underpin social improvement.

² Windmill Hill is anomalous in some respects as it has pockets of high deprivation within the ward, as well as a more ethnically diverse population than the rest of the constituency.

³ Whitchurch Park is anomalous in some respects as it has a degree of polarisation between the east of the ward with greater affluence and the western part of the ward associated with high deprivation.

Such attitudes coalesce with strongly 'tribal' attitudes to identity and place; some parts of the constituency appear predominantly inward looking and self-sufficient with a powerful sense of literal and symbolic boundaries between self and others. This mediates concepts of space and distance. Views of place are sometimes characterised by anxiety about mixing with people outside the community with a strong sense of territory regulated by force. Lack of awareness of the geography of the city and its wider resources is also sometimes an issue. In the southern part of the constituency in particular, this tendency is reinforced by limited transport links with other parts of the city or the cost of travel. There are also for some families well-rooted traditions of supporting self-sufficiency by looking outwards as part of a semi-rural economy rather than inwards to the rest of the city. The enduring impression is one where many people in the constituency live intensely 'localised lives' (Connolly and Healy, 2004).

A further significant dimension is characterised by 'traditional' gender discourses and cultures. In interviewing young people many boys we spoke to saw themselves following in their fathers' footsteps quite literally – often going to work alongside them as employees in manual trades or joining the family business. For many girls a life trajectory of early motherhood, unpaid domestic work and later low skilled employment once their children have grown up reflects their family narrative. Teenage conceptions, the first step of that journey, are generally higher than average across parts of the constituency and in some wards significantly so. When girls we interviewed articulated a vision of future employment it frequently involved 'working with children', 'working with animals' or 'working in health and beauty'. In addition, the number of young people with unpaid caring responsibilities is above ward average in six of the nine wards in the constituency and we know that this is more likely to be undertaken by girls than boys.

It is notable that the educational performance of girls in the area in general does not reflect the 'gender gap' in favour of girls noted as a national trend. Given the significance of gender to the changing face of young participation in higher education, where generally young women are more likely to enter higher education than young men and especially in the most disadvantaged areas (HEFCE, 2005a) this local characteristic may be important and would bear further investigation.

Overall in our interviews, family and peer expectations tended to reflect the dominant life stories of those in their local communities. Where transition to employment and to family life has high value, progression to further and higher education or extended qualification has less appeal. More immediate benefits, including early earning potential, have greater attraction than investing in deferred gratification.

Finally, notwithstanding the generally positive attitudes to living in the area, there is recognition that others from outside the constituency generally view it, and particularly parts of it, in a negative light and that this may lead to lowered expectations and stereotyping of people who come from the area. There is also some evidence that levels of stated satisfaction decline once individuals become aware of the conditions pertaining in other parts of the city e.g. in relation to educational standards.

Economic, social and cultural infrastructures in the area thus inter-relate with each other to configure relatively restricted 'horizons for action' for many young people living there within which 'opportunities are simultaneously subjective and objective' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). This is important in making sense of why so few young people in the constituency aspire to and participate in higher education.

With relatively low unemployment for parts of the recent period (albeit with much employment in low-skill jobs and a degree of fragility in the local labour market) and with pathways into adulthood that do not depend on educational success e.g. employment in small

businesses alongside family and friends, or early motherhood, the motivation to aspire to higher level qualifications is not always obvious. Indeed, with stated high levels of satisfaction with how things are, reinforced by strong social bonds and ‘networks of intimacy’ (Fuller et al, 2006) within well-bounded geographic areas – there is a powerful force field maintaining the status quo.

The Educational Landscape in Bristol South

The Local Authority context

There are currently 160 local authority maintained schools in the City of Bristol including sixteen secondary schools. Many of these secondary schools remain located in the post-war housing estates on the outskirts of the city; six of them are in Bristol South⁴. Education in Bristol has long been affected by the polarisation of the city into areas of affluence and deprivation. At present the city has eleven independent schools serving the secondary age range; many of these schools are of ancient foundation and have a long history. Approximately 25% of the population of secondary age young people living in Bristol are educated outside the local authority maintained schools in either the independent sector or in schools outside the city. The proportion of children with statements of special educational need in the city maintained schools is well above the national average.

One consequence of this contextual situation has been that the local authority maintained secondary schools in Bristol face particular challenges in supporting young people to achieve. For a number of years, Bristol has performed very poorly against national standards and education league tables have consistently placed Bristol as one of the poorest performing authorities.

The most recent Joint Area Review of children’s services in Bristol confirms the enduring nature of the issues facing Bristol education. The review concluded that although ‘green shoots’ of some well-rooted improvement strategies for children’s services were apparent, ‘the current capacity for the city council to improve outcomes for children and young people on its own were inadequate’. In particular it notes that ‘The council’s track record over many years in improving outcomes in education is poor and deep-rooted problems must be overcome if there is to be sustained improvement’. The education service was graded 1 (inadequate). It was also acknowledged that ‘The weight being placed on the shoulders of the director of children’s services...to raise standards in schools, while moving forward the integration agenda, is considerable’ (OfSTED, 2006a)

Whilst there have been some areas of improvement and success in the authority, the rate of improvement in most measures over the last few years has been less than the national trend, only partially redressed in performance in 2006 as a consequence of intensive interventions. What the emerging evidence in relation to the strategies deployed in 2006 begins to suggest is

⁴ One key feature of the Bristol City Council post-war plan was its decision to provide four types of secondary school: grammar, technical, secondary modern and bilateral (secondary-modern and grammar streams on one site). Bristol was one of only a few local authorities to adopt this approach. Ten bilateral schools were established between 1954 and 1963 to serve the post-war peripheral housing estates. Five of these schools were in Bristol South. Whilst some have claimed the Bristol bilateral schools were an early form of comprehensive schooling, life histories of those who attended these schools reveal how a form of educational apartheid operated. Movement between streams was virtually unheard of. Instead children learned through a complex set of social signifiers and educational practices how to *know their place* in relation to each other in terms of gender and social class. Rather than extending educational opportunities, the bilateral schools in Bristol consolidated fixed, reified and socially constructed concepts of innate ability with stratified access to leaving qualifications and enduring impact on future life choices and pathways. Many of those educated in the ‘modern’ streams of Bristol South bilateral schools have not moved out of the area; family histories have been shaped by these local policies and practices with family members still attending the same school sites (Brine, 2006).

that a significant degree of school improvement is possible in the city's schools. However, the sustainability of such forms of 'educational triage' over time remains to be proven. One interesting feature to notice for example is that whilst standards rose there was an increase in fixed-term and permanent exclusions, especially at Key Stage 3 across the city in 2005-2006. Lack of confidence and competence in literacy and numeracy also remain significant issues to be addressed. The educational challenges facing these Bristol schools may take more than current strategies alone will achieve.

Educational provision in Bristol South

There are currently six local authority maintained secondary schools within the constituency. Five are mixed community comprehensives and one is a mixed voluntary-aided comprehensive; three have 11-16 status and three have 11-18 status, although only one of these has substantial post-16 provision on site. Between 2001/2 and 2003/4 post-16 provision in Bristol was re-organised under the remit of the *Bristol Campus* through five area partnerships located across the city plus a catholic collegiate network, with schools grouped together to help broaden choice and improve post-16 participation. The Bristol Campus reorganisation was in response to concerns about proliferation of level 3 provision in small sixth forms, some extremely poor quality buildings and facilities, low levels of aspiration and attainment in many communities and poor understanding of progression routes amongst many 14-16 year olds especially to work-based learning. The area partnerships of greatest relevance to young people in Bristol South are: the South West Area Partnership; South Central Area Partnership; and South East Area Partnership which includes one catholic sixth-form college.

The main further education (FE) college serving the constituency is *City of Bristol College* that operates through a number of centres across the city. Its main AS/A2 level provision is based in the centre of the city and three sites hosting centres of vocational excellence are in the north of the city. All these centres offer higher education level courses. Within the constituency the college has one centre based in Bedminster with a curriculum offer of entry level, level 1, level 2 and some level 3 courses in IT, hair and beauty, health and social care, food and hospitality, horticulture, administration, light vehicle maintenance and a BTEC introductory diploma in construction. A second centre operates in Hartcliffe offering entry level, level 1 and 2 courses in plastering, IT, teaching assistants, small business development, community volunteering, first step learning, programmes for NEET groups (Not in Education or Employment) plus basic skills programmes. The College also offers a small number of courses in a Local Opportunity Centre based in Knowle West and other community settings. The other major FE college serving the city, *Filton College*, is located on the northern fringe of the city although it does provide a very small number of level 2 and level 3 equine-related courses in Whitchurch. The further education colleges also offer some programmes to 14-16 year olds in the constituency in response to increased flexibility in the Key Stage 4 curriculum and in an attempt to improve motivation amongst learners who are disengaged in school. Both colleges have increasingly strong reputations, with City of Bristol College awarded Learning and Skills Beacon Status in 2004. Finally, the Faculty of Art, Media and Design of the University of the West of England is located close to Ashton Park School in the very north of the constituency.

The current range of educational provision in Bristol South, especially post-16, thereby indicates somewhat limited access to choice in the immediate vicinity. The poorest ward in the constituency does not have a secondary school within the immediate community. Young people from the south of the constituency at sixteen have to travel northwards to continue their education if they have aspirations beyond the limited provision at Hartcliffe and Withywood.

The picture of educational provision in the constituency however is far from fixed. The local authority has a new 14-19 strategy, preparing for effective implementation of 14-19 reform,

with reconfigured forms of regional partnership and collaboration aiming to extend flexibility and choice at key transition points and to ensure young people excluded or at risk of exclusion remain engaged in learning. At the same time there are emergent plans for new forms of secondary school organisation in the constituency, with two schools earmarked for 11-19 Academy status and one planning to become part of a federation of schools as an all-through 3-19 Campus, recently awarded Trust School Pathfinder status. City of Bristol College plans to build a new flagship Skills Academy right in the heart of the constituency serving 14-19 and adult learners. Given these initiatives there is a recognised need to prioritise co-ordinated planning through the South Bristol 14-19 Partnership to ensure that the educational offer in the constituency is viable and appropriate.

Educational outcomes in Bristol South

The evidence from Bristol South supports the argument that the type of neighbourhood where students live strongly affects their educational performance in school (Webber and Butler, 2005). In terms of outcomes one can broadly band the schools: on the one hand those serving the eastern and southern zones including the most deprived wards and with more well-bounded geographic catchment areas (referred to in this report as *Group A* schools) and those drawing numbers of young people from the northern zone and the least deprived wards, as well as young people from outside the constituency (referred to in this report as *Group B* schools)⁵.

The over-riding feature of the educational landscape in the constituency in terms of progression to higher education is that by sixteen the majority of young people have not yet achieved the necessary qualification levels to progress to higher education in two or three years time - only 28.7% attaining 5A*-C in GCSE or equivalent in 2005. Interventions during 2005-2006 saw dramatic improvements in the levels of attainment of 5A*-C in GCSE or equivalent in the Bristol South schools with year 11 students in five of the six schools attaining approximately between 35-38% and students in the catholic secondary school attaining 61%. However, if one includes English and maths GCSE in these results, students in *Group A* schools only attained 11-16% whilst in *Group B* schools the range was between 24-46% (the national average in 2006 was 46%).

In addition, more young people drop out of education at sixteen than elsewhere in the city to go into work-based training or employment. Leaving education at sixteen is especially pronounced amongst young men and amongst learners in *Group A* schools. In 2005 only 62% of young people in Bristol South stayed in full-time education at sixteen compared with 70% across the city as a whole and 77% nationally - with the gender differential 54% male and 70% female. NEET percentages show only a marginal gender difference (9% male and 7% female) and only a slightly higher percentage than for Bristol as a whole, although a higher percentage of young people are classified as NEET on leaving *Group A* schools (11%) than *Group B* schools (5%). Given the evidence of the cultural value assigned to employment versus education in Bristol South, the levels of attainment of many young people and the geographical distribution of multiple deprivation these patterns are not surprising.

This critical outcome at sixteen has a long genesis. Low levels of attainment during the years of primary education mean that many young people enter secondary education in the constituency ill equipped to either cope or succeed. Poor skills in literacy and numeracy

⁵ *Group A* schools comprise Hengrove Community Arts College, Hartcliffe Engineering Community College, and Withywood Community School. *Group B* schools comprise Ashton Park School, Bedminster Down School and St Bernadette Catholic Secondary School, although Bedminster Down shares a number of characteristics with schools in *Group A*. The suggested classification is based on the diversity of the catchment area, levels of attainment, the percentage of students from low participation neighbourhoods, with special educational needs, and on free-school meals, percentage from minority ethnic groups, progression to post-16 education and higher education and attitudinal and experiential data from the 'You and Your Future' survey.

together with high levels of emotional need and challenging behaviour in some schools (especially in wards with the highest levels of multiple deprivation) combine to create an environment within which it is extremely challenging to establish and sustain a learning culture. This appears compounded throughout the constituency, even where behaviour is not overtly challenging, by the low value that some young people and their families place on education. In some educational settings a gender culture is also apparent where girls rather than boys are more at risk of underachieving. This is not ranked entirely by indices of deprivation and indicates a more complex interplay between levels of achievement, gender identities, home and community cultures and school practices. As indicated earlier, this feature would bear further investigation.

Whilst educational standards are generally low, the quality of education in all secondary schools in the constituency, including the quality of teaching, is currently deemed by OfSTED to be satisfactory overall with some areas of strength together with targets for action. Whilst one of the *Group A* schools has recently been in special measures as a result of failing an OfSTED inspection and one has had identified 'serious weaknesses', they are all currently identified as being on an improving trajectory. Recent contextual value added measures partially confirm this. In 2006 four of the six secondary schools in the constituency met or exceeded their Fischer Family Trust (FFT) B estimates; two met or exceeded their FFT D estimates – a significant improvement on 2005. This means that two out of the six secondary schools are still underachieving in relation to this measure; one *Group A* school and one *Group B* school. On published contextual value added measures for 2006, five out of the six schools were below the benchmark of 1000, with two significantly so.

The majority of the young people who stay on in education at sixteen in the constituency progress to college rather than school-based post-16 provision, with City of Bristol College being the main provider. Almost half of those are enrolled initially at level 2. At nineteen the numbers of students who have attained level 2 qualification in the city (64%) is below the national average (70%).

Further work needs to be done to disaggregate the specific outcomes for young people from Bristol South in post-16 education and to evaluate the types of programmes that appear to be yielding the most positive learning gains. Data from City of Bristol College show that students aged 16-18 from Bristol South postcodes for 2005-2006 had a success rate slightly below average for the college. The average ward level pass rate in the constituency across level 1-3 courses was 69%, compared with 80% in the college as whole. However, this gives us no measure of the distance travelled in terms of prior attainment. Value added measures of performance of post-16 institutions are more difficult to gauge, as there is no one agreed national framework for reporting such outcomes.

The UCAS average point score (APS) for candidates in the main post-16 institutions serving young people from Bristol South over the last few years reveal a generally improving trend, and at a faster rate than the national picture. However, although City of Bristol College has a higher level of success compared to other FE colleges in England, outcomes in the majority post-16 providers serving the constituency are below comparative national or regional figures. The trajectory established for young people in Bristol South by the age of sixteen is only partially redressed by their later educational experience. In some wards there still appear to be gender issues impacting on the attainment of some young women. A further notable feature of the city is the relative lack of high quality work-based learning opportunities and variable employer engagement. This is especially significant in Bristol South with its lack of skilled industry/services. Alternative routes into advanced education and training are limited⁶.

⁶ Further work needs to be done to track the progression routes for young people leaving education in Bristol at 17, 18 or 19. Data kept by Connexions from year 12 and year 13 leavers' surveys is only partial and is not easy to analyse by postcode. Further education colleges are no longer required to provide the LSC with annual reports on

At the point of progression to higher education at 17, 18 or 19, it is therefore not surprising to find that Bristol South retains the lowest young participation rate (YPR) in the city, notwithstanding that the YPR for the constituency as a whole may recently have shown some slight improvement. As with other dimensions of experience, the segmentation of the constituency into zones is evident with some wards achieving almost a quarter of young people going into higher education and others, especially in areas of high deprivation, achieving a YPR of just over 5%. Of those who do apply successfully to higher education, a slightly higher percentage are mature learners than the national average - reflecting the more extended pathway to level 3 attainment for some, or the tendency to return to study after early parenthood or experience of work.

Those students at the University of the West of England from a Bristol South home postcode, where information was available, were most likely to have been educated in a Bristol FE or Sixth Form college. This reflects the greater importance of these organisations as post-16 destination of choice for young people in the constituency. However, a significant number of UWE students with Bristol South home postcodes also appear to have been educated outside the constituency (at least 16%) - either in schools or colleges just outside Bristol or in Bristol independent schools. This reflects once again the phenomenon of polarisation in the city, with more aspirant and/or affluent families evacuating the constituency and/or the city to enhance their educational success.

Learning Cultures, Identities and Trajectories

‘You and Your Future’ survey

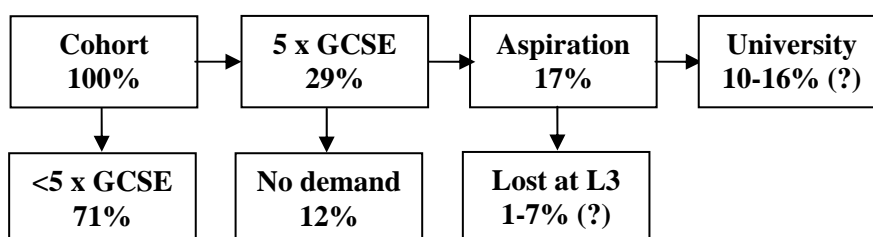
In 2003, ‘You and Your Future’ questionnaires, designed by Raphael Reed and Croudace for Bristol Excellence in Cities, were completed with all students in years 8 and 9 across the city. Results from this survey were correlated by Harrison with subsequent KS3 results and GCSE attainment for these age cohorts, to begin to tease out the interplay of a variety of factors within and outside of schools in the creation of learning identities and trajectories. Attitudes, experiences and outcomes across years 8 and 9 in nearly all Bristol South schools have been compared against two comparator schools in north Bristol that *prima facie* serve similar white working class communities, but have even lower levels of attainment than many of the Bristol South schools.

Of the students represented in the ‘You and Your Future’ survey, 29% went on to achieve the key threshold of 5 or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C at age 16. Around three in five of these had aspirations at the age of 14 to go on to university. In other words, 17% of the total cohort had the attainment *and* aspiration for higher education by the end of their compulsory education. Without longitudinal tracking of these precise cohorts, who would be 18 in 2007 or 2008, we cannot be certain of eventual outcomes. However, POLAR data, reinforced by later YPR data, suggests that that between 10%-16% of young people in Bristol South go on to higher education. Were these cohorts to perform similarly, this reinforces the key point that level of attainment at 16 combined with levels of aspiration evident at 14 are key determinants of later participation rates, with a degree of further wastage at some point between age 16 and 18. As discussed above, a further 12% has the attainment, but not the

the destinations of their learners in face of the incompleteness and unreliability of the data. City of Bristol College is currently working with the London Institute of Education to try to address this difficulty. One feature that has emerged throughout our research is the value that might accrue if all post-16 learners were identified by a Unique Student Number (as they are pre-16) to facilitate analysis of progression routes and educational outcomes.

aspiration⁷. 71% of these young people were unlikely to demand university entrance at the age of 18 based on their GCSE performance.

Figure 1: Attainment, Aspiration and Learning Trajectories in Bristol South



Three particular findings from the survey help to illuminate the way in which learning identities are constructed during this stage of a young person's educational career.

1. That there is a marked falling away of parental support for education between Years 8 and 9, demonstrated, for example, in help with homework or attendance at parents' evenings. It might be hypothesised that this is the age at which many of the students' own parents became disengaged from school; it may even be the point in some cases at which parents become unable to assist with homework due to their own educational confidence and level of basic skills. This is also a period when students' enjoyment of school declines significantly, impacting on both their future aspirations and attainment. This trend is significantly stronger in *Group A* schools, even when other factors are controlled for.
2. Professing enjoyment of school in Years 8 and 9 has a strong relationship with a wide range of factors relating to students' background, experiences and aspirations. It appears to represent a learning identity underpinned by parental support for education alongside an engaged, active and reflective approach to learning and development. They are also more likely to have visited a university⁸. Young people who enjoy and feel engaged with school at this point are significantly more likely to want to stay in education beyond sixteen, and to have a positive disposition to higher education.
3. Schools in Bristol South are not significantly different from similar schools in other white working class areas of the city. Indeed, levels of enjoyment of school are generally higher, triangulating with the data from the Council's quality of life surveys. Attainment levels are generally also higher than for the northern comparator schools used in the analysis. However, longer-term aspiration for education beyond age 16 is significantly lower in Bristol South. The distinctive impact of the wider cultural context in Bristol South may be relevant here.

The survey analysis thus suggests that young people's experiences during Key Stage 3 are critical to the likelihood of them progressing to higher education and that by the time they reach 14 years of age their learning identities and trajectories have already been powerfully formed. In particular, young people's enjoyment of school across all 'ability' levels declines significantly between years 8 and 9 and especially in *Group A* schools. Whilst 'more able'

⁷ Clearly this is a permeable distinction in reality; some pupils who stated that they didn't want to go to university in Year 9 may change their mind in due course. Research by Golden et al (2006) suggests this is the case. However, other research suggests that learner identities and attitudes to the future evident at the start of secondary education are a good predictor of future trajectories (Attwood and Croll, 2006).

⁸ The original survey did not gather detailed evidence of involvement in wider range of Aimhigher activities. However, other studies suggest that participation in *Aimhigher* in Year 9 is associated with improvements in performance in Key Stage tests (Morris et al, 2005).

students are significantly more likely to enjoy school than 'less able' students, in *Group A* schools they are more likely than equivalent students in *Group B* schools to be bored, enjoy school less and have a lower opinion of the school. However, enjoyment of school is itself a proxy for two semi-distinct components of young people's experiences which are partially independent of their perceived 'ability': the extent of parental support for their education (which also falls away between years 8 and 9 especially in *Group A* schools) and the extent to which young people feel a sense of *agency* as learners - knowing what they are good at and knowing how to improve.

Enjoyment is therefore really about educational engagement and the home and school contexts that facilitate such engagement. Young people who enjoy and feel engaged with school by the end of Key Stage 3 are significantly more likely to want to remain in education beyond sixteen and to feel positive about the possibilities of progression to higher education.

1. Significant themes in perspectives from young people in Bristol South

Throughout the interviews with young people in school, a number of key dimensions to their educational experiences and their perspectives on those experiences became evident. Dimensions that were raised with us by them included the quality of teaching and learning experienced in their education; the curriculum on offer; literacy issues; relationships with teachers and other adults; student behaviour and peer cultures; and future aspirations including attitudes to higher education.

Out of these dimensions a number of significant themes emerged. These were subsequently reinforced through later interviews with young people from Bristol South in post-16 education and those who had progressed to higher education. The synergy of themes emerging across the groups of young people that we interviewed, correlated with the findings of the 'You and Your Future' survey, suggests they have a high degree of validity. These themes also triangulate with evidence from a variety of previous local studies.

As with other parts of this research whilst there was a commonality of both dimensions of experience and themes between young people educated in *Group A* schools and those educated in *Group B* schools, there were also some clear and significant qualitative differences.

1.1. Trust and attachment

For many young people in Bristol South, their cultural identity privileges the importance of social bonds and networks; attachment to family and friends is at the heart of their sense of 'well being'. Learning experiences perceived to threaten such attachments, including potential progression to higher education, cause anxiety and invoke defence mechanisms.

Some young people in the constituency, in particular amongst 'disaffected' young people who fail to thrive in school, demonstrate attachment anxieties arising from the quality of relationships with significant others since childhood. Aspects of poverty, drug use and family breakdown are implicated in these young people's narratives. Such issues of 'affection' impact on their learner identities and their resilience to cope with their schooling experience, especially in secondary school (Wetz, 2006).

Where school cultures communicate a lack of trust in young people and in their parents this further undermines young people's capacity to form an attachment to the learning experience. By contrast, learning environments that establish high levels of affective rapport and that model mutual respect in social interactions provide a necessary if not sufficient basis for successful learning.

1.2. Choice and agency

Engagement in learning depends upon a degree of ‘self-authoring’ i.e. that you can bring yourself into relationship with the learning experience and articulate a degree of control over that experience. Educational engagement thus demands attention to aspects of personalisation and ownership in learning. Young people we spoke to insist that they want to have a higher degree of choice and control over their own learning than schools in Bristol South are currently providing. This emerged as a theme in relation to both *Group A* and *Group B* schools in relation to aspects of the ‘formal’, ‘informal’ and ‘hidden’ curriculum as well as approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. It applies both to students identified as ‘able’ and those who appear ‘disaffected’.

‘Successful’ self-authoring in secondary school in turn depends upon the ability to manipulate a variety of *mediational* tools for learning – and in particular the tools of literacy. Alternative means of self-authoring, especially where confidence with schooled literacy is low, include a range of other cultural and symbolic practices e.g. joking, ‘bunking’, bullying, fighting, f***ing: less productive perhaps in terms of building educational and cultural capital, but more constructive in terms of sustaining social and personal capital.

Young people, especially those who are finding school ‘boring’, or who are struggle with literacy, seek out these alternative means of exerting their agency. This dynamic undoubtedly precipitates a vicious cycle; as young people become increasingly disengaged from school, their behaviour becomes harder to contain and teachers tend to increase levels of adult control to counteract this effect. One corollary is that young people fail to internalise and consolidate the *learning dispositions* that are essential for autonomous and self-directed formal learning in further and higher education.

This also suggests an alternative way of understanding the choices that some young people make or pathways that they follow. The move towards early employment or teenage parenthood exemplifies more than simply an instrumental ‘means to an end’. These actions afford a sense of choice, control and agency, as well as potentially addressing issues of attachment identified earlier. By contrast, where young people remain in full-time education, it frequently masks an absence of purpose or direction.

It may also be relevant to note that virtually none of the young people interviewed articulated a desire for more vocational or work-based learning in the narrow sense of those terms. Rather, they are asking for more creative and kinaesthetic learning opportunities; in the arts, dance, drama, media studies, sports studies, psychology and business education. They also make frequent reference to the significance of their ‘out-of-school’ learning – whether through sport and leisure activities, or through family responsibilities and community actions.

Previous studies, evaluating the impact of innovative curricular, pedagogic and assessment practices in the constituency, reinforce the argument that what is needed are approaches that value learning as *participation* rather than *acquisition* (James and Hamilton, 2004; James and Simmons, 2005) and strategies that promote *creativity* as well as *critical skills* (Raphael Reed and Fitzgerald, 2005). There is also an implication that formal education in the constituency needs to give greater recognition to the importance of *informal learning* experiences and draw more effectively on *community funds of knowledge* (Riddell, 2006).

1.3. Violence and regulation

Experiences of violence permeate the lives of many of the young people that we interviewed. This is reported either as a feature of their direct experience - as part of their friendship group, family history or local community - or as a motif in stories told about dominant peer cultures

and their influence. This was true for students from both groups of schools but was especially stark in the interviews with young people from *Group A* schools.

At the same time, there are powerful accounts of the experience of violence in school – both emotional and physical violence – used to regulate their behaviours and to police their identities. Such forms of violence operate within peer groups through bullying and ‘outcasting’, frequently interwoven with gender and social class dynamics. In particular, these behaviours are used to undermine ‘academic effort’ and aspiration, to normalise attempts to be different and to exert a form of ‘collective agency’ in pursuit of socially valorised goals (Bandura, 2000).

Equally significant are references to ‘violent’ behaviours between teachers and young people. These include references to teachers ‘swearing’, ‘shouting’, ‘bullying’ and ‘crying’ and references to young people ‘locking teachers in cupboards’, ‘pushing them’ and ‘driving them insane’. Some of the young people that were interviewed have particular emotional and behavioural difficulties and so the narratives must be read in that context i.e. they may experience such teacher behaviours more frequently as a reaction to the challenges they present. Indeed young people tend to interpret such adult behaviours as an indicator of teacher stress brought about by the challenging behaviour of students. The emotional costs for teachers working in urban schools serving areas of social deprivation are recognisably high (Riddell, 2003).

However, the view is also expressed from students in the *Group A* school that some teachers are becoming increasingly pressurised, disrespectful and intolerant of young people as a consequence of intensive *performativity* measures being applied. This chimes with other studies that record an increase in symbolic violence and ‘poisonous pedagogies’ where authoritarian versions of ‘zero tolerance’ of failure prevail (Raphael Reed, 1998). For many students, the climate of violence is one more factor that feeds their disengagement from school.

1.4. Effort and risk

A recurrent theme amongst a number of young people is that investment of effort does not necessarily bring reward; indeed their experience suggests that bad behaviour gets rewarded rather than consistency and application. This perspective interconnects with a tendency to eschew deferred gratification *either* because a lucky break is predicted to bring more immediate reward than personal effort *or* because personal effort is too risky given previous experience of recurrent failure.

Such mindsets, identified in a previous study of young people in Bristol (SHM, 2004a), imply the need for different types of strategies. In the first case, young people exhibiting what SHM call a ‘realism-deficiency’ require strategies to ‘change the narrative’ by reframing the consequences of effort and luck i.e. changing their attitude to the benefits of education, or the dangers of disengagement from education. In the second case, young people exhibiting a ‘permission-deficiency’ require strategies for ‘applying the narrative of success to their own lives’ by building self confidence and a sense of self-worth i.e. changing their attitude to themselves. Avoiding the risk of effort by disruptive behaviour or undermining those who attempt to apply themselves may thus in part be understood as a form of self-defence (SHM, 2004c).

Such attitudes to effort and risk may also be an expression of the wider cultural milieu in Bristol South with similarities to certain other white working class communities (Evans, 2006). SHM (2004b) in their comparative study of a group of white working class young people in Bristol South compared with a multicultural group of young people in Birmingham found that the Bristol young people attached a lower value to school than the Birmingham

young people. The Bristol participants saw their world as ‘highly structured: they only had to find their place in it, and achieving beyond the minimum requirement for that place is of no benefit to them’. Their world-view was characterised by ‘unchangingness and complacency’. Activities that motivate them to engage are predicated on ‘pleasure’ and positive social interactions with the teacher or peers. Raising achievement initiatives do not connect easily with their existing world-views.

Birmingham young people saw their world as ‘fluid and uncertain, with educational achievement an important tool for making the most of opportunities and threats throughout life’. Their world-view was characterised by ‘change and agency’. This more performance-orientated model recognises an important role for teachers and schools and raising achievement initiatives easily connect with their existing world-views.

In contradiction to the SHM study however, we also have evidence of young people in Bristol South yearning for change and self-advancement, but feeling the weight on their shoulders of a normalising culture sustained, in part, by the dynamic between teachers and students. We also recognise that almost all young people we spoke to – engaged or disengaged from education – identify or exhibit a desire to exert more choice and agency over their lives. The characterisation of these young people as ‘passive’ or ‘complacent’ is - in our view - a misrepresentation. We need to understand the relationship between attitudes to ‘effort’ and ‘risk’ in a more nuanced way.

What we do see in the evidence here, are a set of contradictions and tensions in the formation of complex and changing learning identities, embedded in particular cultural contexts. For example, Bristol South young people who have progressed to higher education graphically illustrate aspects of ‘risk’, including risks to identity, associated with moving between worlds.

The ‘benefits’ of higher education come with some costs - material, social and psychic - and the effort of ‘identity work’ for these working class students in maintaining a degree of self-worth and a positive learning trajectory whilst in higher education appears significant. As with previous studies (Archer et al, 2003) there is some evidence that this is more problematic for young men than for young women and that this is the case during their post-16 experience as well as during their time in higher education.

1.5. Shame and regret

An interesting theme that emerges in a number of accounts clusters around feelings of shame. Shame is a social emotion i.e. it exists with reference to how we anticipate others may see us and reject us - but it is experienced as internalised disappointment with self i.e. it exists with reference to how we judge our own shortcomings, feelings of failure or inadequacy. Feelings of shame thereby signal issues of self-esteem but also a ‘threat to the social bond’ (Scheff, 2000). Shaming and avoidance of shame operate to maintain both individual identities and social relationships.

In the interviews with young people in Bristol South we see evidence that the ‘social bond’ at risk and social relationships to be maintained are not singular but plural in the context of schooling. Some young people attempt to ‘maintain face’ within their peer groups by countering efforts to shame them. Others adopt a ‘Jack-the-Lad’ persona to avoid the shame of finding learning hard and needing to seek support. However, it is also clear that the ongoing and *regular* experience of schooling – with the constant risk of failure and of being judged by some teachers as ‘lazy’ or worthless – has the potential to induce humiliation and shame. Where education should be about personal growth and the expansion of possibilities, it is too frequently experienced as a ‘shameful’ experience, confirming young people’s inadequacies and undermining their self-respect (Sennett and Cobb, 1993). The Bristol South young people in higher education further exemplify the class-based dimensions of ‘shame’ in

educational contexts - with on-going feelings of personal inadequacy and concerns about possible rejection either from new-found social networks or from original peer friendships.

Parallel to representations of shame we found poignant expressions of regret. This is especially significant since it signals the sense of dissatisfaction with previous articulations of self through 'disaffected' and disengaged actions and behaviours - and disillusionment with the consequences of these actions and behaviours in terms of current and future life chances. Regret here tells us that young people frequently wish that things might have been different. Far from a culture of 'unchanging-ness and complacency' we see evidence of young people seeking *restorative justice* - to be able to make amends for their previous actions, but also to have their own self-respect restored to them. The multiple 'hurts' endured by many participants, both adult and child, in the drama of school failure call out to be healed. In light of this, authentic acknowledgement of what has gone wrong, genuine second chances and respectful opportunities for re-engagement in education are absolutely vital.

1.6. Resilience and resistance

Resilience refers to the capacity of individuals to successfully develop and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances. Previous studies of resilience and learning highlight the fact that some people survive difficult life experiences and variety of risk factors, including the effects of socio-economic adversity, to succeed educationally (Schoon, 2006). A number of young people in our study, especially amongst those who progressed into further and higher education exhibit resilient learner identities. The development of such identities in part appears to be based on family support, or somebody significant believing in them (e.g. a teacher, mentor or partner) or an experience that made them feel good about themselves e.g. working with Knowle West Media Centre, or achieving sporting success. In consolidating resilience, young people also speak of the constructive power of their anger i.e. their refusal to internalise the negative expectations and labels ascribed to them by others, and their determination to prove others wrong. In this, there is evidence of the importance of resistance as well as resilience.

Finally, we return to the quality of the learning experiences these young people have encountered in school. The dynamic of over-dependency on teacher control, and the concomitant lack of student ownership and autonomy in the learning process, undermines the capacity of students to develop their resilience as learners. Resilience here refers to student capacity to tolerating confusion and frustration, and to stick at something even when it is difficult - one of the core dispositions (or 4 'R's) evident in classrooms dedicated to building learning power, along with resourcefulness, reflectivity and reciprocity (Claxton, 2002). Evidence from this study confirms the importance of disentangling the behavioral dynamic and renewing a focus on student agency in the learning process. Where young people have been enabled to develop by KS3 the learning dispositions, or 4 'R's of 'learning power', our analysis of the 'You and Your Future' Survey demonstrates that this correlates with their later achievement and propensity to aspire to higher education.

2. Significant themes in perspectives from adults living or working in Bristol South

Unlike the synergy of dimensions and themes to emerge across the accounts by young people, a more dislocated picture emerges from the perspectives articulated by adults. Dynamic tension is evident between educational professionals and parents/carers with opposing standpoints articulated on certain issues of educational engagement. A number of common dimensions were identified as relevant including the impact of family and community cultures; the centrality of positive relationships; curriculum, literacy and work-related learning issues; and perspectives on further and higher education. Differences emerged however when educational professionals considered orientations to learning; student behaviour and peer cultures; and the profile of the school intake to be important, whilst

parents/carers wanted to talk about parental confidence; teacher expectations; and the need for long-term investment in the area.

Even where educational professionals and parents/carers raised similar issues, they represented and interpreted those issues in distinctive ways, drawing on different discourses to make sense of their experiences. This in part reflects a similar disjuncture between the views of educational professionals and young people themselves. The significant themes in these accounts therefore feel both more *fractured* and *fractious*.

Finally we interviewed three groups of higher education students working as *Aimhigher* tutors and mentors in local schools. This final set of interviews provided observational commentary from an independent if rather inexperienced perspective on interactions between professionals, parents/carers and students in the schools.

2.1. Complacency and confidence

Throughout this study, people living outside Bristol South have characterised the local communities as *complacent* or *comfortable* cultures that are endemically resistant to change. Such a representation elicits ambivalent reactions in educational professionals who work in the area. On the one hand they interpret this through the lens of deficiency and passivity; on the other they articulate a grudging respect for such certainties, whilst at same time acknowledging the limitations and negative aspects of the performativity and achievement culture that they are bound to espouse. Parents/carers by contrast see an absence of parental positive engagement with education as an issue of poor prior experiences and low levels of *confidence* in how to effectively take part. When the rules of the game and the skills to take part appear alien and unattainable then disengagement is a rational response. Alternative actions e.g. encouraging early employment rather than educational progression consequently arise out of familiarity and affinity rather than complacency i.e. social actions coalesce around recognisable norms.

2.2. Dependency and autonomy

A further set of tensions cluster around the themes of *dependency* and *autonomy*. Both young people and adults argue that positive relationships and inter-dependency are a pre-requisite for effective learning to take place. Indeed the wider learning culture of local communities is represented as powerfully social and relational.

This cultural feature is seen to have both positive and negative dimensions; positive in terms of strong and supportive social bonds, and negative in terms of social dynamics and forceful regulation by peers of those who wish to be different. A further aspect of this phenomenon is the recognition that some young people, from families where family relationships may be stressful and where difficulties in attachment to significant others may impact on their lives, require particular attention to the formation of trusting relationships with adults. For whatever reason, teachers deemed to be effective recognisably recruit young people into learning by prioritising the establishment of high trust relationships.

At the same time, the formation of such learning relationships also tends to reinforce a high level of *dependency* of young people on their teachers. This is amplified by teachers themselves deploying strategies that over-control young people's learning - in part as a response to managing challenging behaviours and in part as a response to high stakes assessment regimes where teachers feel compelled to spoon-feed young people towards coping with the test. Both educational professionals and young people recognise the corollary i.e. that young people exhibit an absence of agency in schooled learning. However, each tends to explain it differently. Educational professionals account for this lack of *autonomy* as a consequence of the wider cultural milieu and return to discourses of complacency and

passivity; young people argue that the cultural experience of schooling itself disempowers them. Parents/carers sometimes identify similar disempowerment in their own relationships with the schools.

One further dimension to this tension between dependency and autonomy relates to the class-based valorisation of these terms. The 'ideal learner' in much of educational discourse is constructed around middle class norms where autonomous individual motivation is prized and where dependency on others is considered a sign of vulnerability and weakness. However, within certain working class cultures including those evident in Bristol South, social inter-dependency is prized whereas detached individualism is considered a sign of putative treachery as well as a marker of potential vulnerability and weakness. In addition, certain career trajectories taken by working class young people are characterised as exemplifying dependency e.g. early motherhood connected to welfare dependency. However, other studies have argued that teenage mothers often show great self-reliance and strength, determined to do the best for their children even in difficult circumstances (Cater and Coleman, 2006). Such polarisation in underlying assumptions, in values and in the ways that cultures are represented requires more explicit attention as part of essential learning dialogues between teachers, young people and parents/carers. These conversations could usefully explore the potential to re-frame the concepts in ways that acknowledge, and even celebrate, such differences.

Rather than an equality of understanding, autonomy means accepting in others what one does not understand about them. In doing so, the fact of their autonomy is treated as equal to your own. The grant of autonomy dignifies the weak or the outsider; to make this grant to others in turn strengthens one's own character. (Sennett, 2003, p262)

Indeed the concept of 'character' itself permeates the responses from educational professionals with a tendency to draw unconsciously on deficit discourses around the influences of working class culture in the formation of character.

2.3. Character and capital

As with the concept of the 'ideal learner', the concept of character is profoundly class-based and affected by conditions of inequality. Sennett argues in *Respect: The Formation of Character in an Age of Inequality* that one may develop 'character' in three ways that garner respect in society: firstly, through striving for self-development; secondly, through achieving self-sufficiency; and thirdly by giving something back to the community (Sennett, 2003, p63). However, as Sennett also points out, 'inequality plays a particular and decisive role in shaping these three character types' (p64). The existence of self-developing and more highly realised individuals justifies the withholding of resources from those who are not developing as successfully. The presence of self-sufficient and autonomous individuals may be used to critique those with dependency needs. Most challengingly, Sennett argues that 'the compassion which lies behind the desire to give back' can be distorted by conditions of inequality such that compassion is transformed into 'pity for the weak, pity which the receiver experiences as contempt' (p64).

Each of these dimensions we would argue are present in the educational exchanges and relationships evidenced through our research. The *Aimhigher* programme itself, like programmes for 'gifted and talented' students in school, directs resources towards those self-developers deemed to have 'ability' and thereby potentially further marginalises those anticipated to fail. The expectation of autonomy and self-sufficiency in the idealised learner - especially in further and higher education - destabilises the student who thrives in an inter-dependent and highly relational learning culture. Finally, the emphasis of educational professionals on care quite easily slides into 'compassion which wounds' - with low expectations of teachers meaning to be kind, entrenched within collusive dynamics in the classroom and in relationships with parents/carers.

The implications of such an analysis are that strategies are needed within the constituency that a) reach out and demonstrate belief in all young people and their families even those who present as low achieving and disengaged, b) pay greater attention to the acquisition of autonomous learning skills *whilst also* changing the learning environment (including in further and higher education) in order to respect the inter-dependent and relational styles of learning of those who come from such cultural backgrounds and c) confront an ethic of care which slides into low expectations.

However, within the perspectives articulated by educational professionals there is little attempt to problematise such aspects of the formation of character. Indeed, the clearest references to character in educational professionals' accounts propose that young people and their families have 'spoiled identities' (Reay and Ball, 1997) and that they lack 'backbone' and resolve. In light of these prevailing attitudes it will be interesting to see if planned strategies imported from a very different cultural milieu, such as the introduction of an Army Cadet Force into one of the new Academies in order to 'strengthen character', have impact in this cultural setting.

A connected theme emerges in relation to *forms of capital* (Bourdieu, 1986) and their impact on learner identities and trajectories. Parents/carers clearly articulate real concerns from their perspective about the economic costs of going into higher education and thereby indicate the impact economic capital has on educational decisions. Beyond this, educational professionals and parents/carers both recognise the significance of cultural capital to educational success - embodied as individual dispositions of character, objectified as cultural goods such as books and computers, and institutionalised as academic qualifications. Our interview data evidences the powerful ways in which *misrecognition* presents unequal access to cultural capital as something natural when it is in fact a social construction underpinned by differential access to economic capital. It is however mainly parents/carers who have developed a degree of criticality as a result of their political engagement with the system e.g. working as community activists, who are most clearly able to identify this and to challenge related assumptions e.g. about 'ability'.

Finally, there is an important discussion to be had about aspects of *social capital* within the constituency and the relationship of this to group processes and educational outcomes (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Some argue there is an absence of social capital bonds and networks in Bristol South that might facilitate educational progression. Professionals frequently comment that highly educated individuals tend to move out of the area, especially in the south of the constituency, and their expertise and connections to facilitate the progression of others are lost as a local resource. Part of the rationale for trying to change the profile of the schools as part of the Academies programme or Trust school development, through re-branding and attracting students from more aspirant families, or through new forms of partnership with high status external partners, is that benefit may be derived for young people and their families from more empowered and authoritative social networks in and around the schools.

However, as Gewirtz and others remind us in their analysis of the operation of Education Action Zones in England (Gewirtz et al, 2005) there are different forms of social capital that are class related. The 'dense, tight-knit, homogenous social networks of family and friends' (p668) such as are evident in Bristol South provide good examples of 'bonding social capital' prevalent in working class communities. Forms of 'bridging social capital' (horizontal social networks that give access to valuable resources and information outside one's immediate network of friends and relations) and 'linking social capital' (vertical connections that provide links upwards to powerful people, institutions and agencies) appear less well established within communities in the constituency. Given the central importance of both of these forms of social capital in gaining access to economic and cultural capital - and being able to

command associated resources and exert enhanced degrees of control and choice - such absence is significant. The paradox, evident in our study of Bristol South, is that the 'networks of intimacy' associated with bonding networks may themselves predispose individuals to eschew experiences that might build other forms of social capital and precipitate change.

One question then to be asked of current and proposed strategies aimed at enhancing educational engagement, including strategies specifically designed to encourage progression to higher education, is whether they support the development of bridging and linking forms of social capital within these communities *whilst at the same time* respecting and building upon the best aspects of existing social bonds. This requires us to:

pay closer attention to the real, as opposed to imagined, local sociocultural environments within which policies are implemented and to the voices, choices, values and experiences of the people they are designed to help. (Gerwitz et al, 2005, p670)

2.4. Personalisation and proximity

Personalisation references the extent to which public services, including education, put the needs of participants at the heart of provision and enable them to have a voice in the design and improvement of the organisations that serve them. Key components deemed essential to make personalised learning reality are: assessment for learning; effective teaching and learning strategies; curriculum entitlement and choice; creative school organisation; strong links with external partners including parents/carers. Personalisation does not mean individualised learning outside of a social context. Rather it means '*shaping teaching around the way different youngsters learn; it means taking care to nurture the unique talents of every pupil*' (Miliband, 2004). Innovative examples of personalised approaches in education include: harnessing new technologies to revolutionise place, pace and networks for learning⁹; exploring more flexible uses of time for accessing learning opportunities and framing the learning experience; placing students at the heart of the learning process and prioritising their empowerment through the co-construction and co-design of the learning experience; redesign of 'learning spaces' to reflect the more dynamic, fluid and interactive styles of formal and informal learning for the 21st century (The Innovation Unit, 2006).

The theme of personalisation is touched upon in a number of ways across the interviews with educational professionals and parents/carers. This resonates with the theme in young people's interviews related to 'choice and agency'. A number of educational professionals articulate a view that personalisation is at the heart of future school improvement and plans for school change in the constituency. However, both parents/carers and young people argue in reality they experience a singular lack of trust in them as key partners and minimal negotiation in the co-creation of learning opportunities. Such a perception requires urgent attention.

The pedagogic implication of personalisation is that learning must be well connected with the real interests of young people, well matched to their learning needs and constructive of their development. This denotes the importance of *proximal development* and in particular the establishment of interactive, social and collaborative learning experiences that challenge young people and support them in taking the 'next step' in their development (Vygotsky, 1978). Such processes of personal change necessitate engaging dialogues between

⁹ It may be of relevance that in all of our interviews nobody mentioned the significance of access to, and creative deployment of, new technologies for learning. This may have been an unintentional by-product of our lines of enquiry, as we did not ask explicitly about such technologies. However, it would be worth exploring further whether such an absence is indicative of a real issue to be addressed.

participants: teachers and learners; teachers as learners; learners as teachers. They also denote the centrality of enabling young people to appropriate and internalise mediational tools of learning, including multiple forms of literacy. Indeed, they demand dialogic approaches to learning that acknowledge all ‘communicative actions’ – whether disruptive or compliant – that young people manifest in the learning environment. Particularly in terms of literacy development, such a dialogic approach goes well beyond a narrow and reductive focus on functional skills or dependency on phonics as a panacea. Rather it demands sustained attention to meaning and motivation invested in the processes of literacy and especially writing since ‘it is learning through writing that invests the wider dialogue of literacy with meaning and purpose’ (Reed, 2004). In particular, there is a need to explore the *dramaturgical* aspects of writing – the bringing together of writing and identity in specific social and cultural contexts.

Of course, establishing dialogic contexts for learning in ways that can support proximal development is extremely difficult where power and resistance circulate so counter-productively within the teacher-learner dynamic. We heard little reference by teachers to engaging in dialogue with young people about their learning or paying attention to the social practices that inhibit their success. Indeed, quite the opposite. We heard of over-attention in teacher-learner exchanges to presentational issues e.g. non-compliance in the wearing of uniform, or behavioural issues divorced from their relevance to learning, or collusion in sustaining a low risk and low challenge environment. Of course this isn’t to say that such learning dialogues do not take place. An earlier study of the operation of the Critical Skills Programme in the Success @ Excellence in Cities action zone in the constituency described graphically many examples of such a dialogic approach to learning (Raphael Reed and Fitzgerald, 2005).

A greater understanding of how to establish and sustain such a consultative context for learning in these classrooms is urgently needed. In environments such as manifest in Bristol South schools, the understanding of ‘personalisation’ must move beyond the somewhat sanitised versions encapsulated in official documents.

Finally, educational professionals and parents/carers frequently refer to both the significance of *emotional proximity* and *geographical proximity* in supporting the transition of young people from one phase of learning to another. Given the central importance of high trust relationships to young people’s engagement in learning, and given the cultural bias towards inscribing emotions onto familiar and trusted spaces, greater attention to all forms of proximity in more supported transitions is an important priority. This means looking more closely at the relationships that can support transitions, and the physical location of opportunities to progress. It also highlights the importance of ensuring appropriate pathways for progressions, where incremental small steps can eventually take young people from where they are today, into higher education in the future.

2.5. Recognition, relevance and respect

The final theme that emerges through our interviews with adults in the constituency revolves around the nexus of *recognition*, *relevance* and *respect*.

Lack of respect, though less aggressive than an outright insult, can take an equally wounding form. No insult is offered another person, but neither is recognition extended; he or she is not *seen* – as a full human being whose presence matters. (Sennett, 2003, p3)

In talking to both educational professionals working in the area and parents/carers each in their way sometimes articulate a sense that they feel ‘invisible’ and that the conditions of their lives – their presence and actions in the world – go unrecognised or are ascribed little value. A

number of teachers, for example, talk of feeling bullied, intimidated or disempowered by the actions of young people in the classroom or by young people's families. These feelings are intensified by a sense that the education 'system' as a whole, through standardised curricular, assessment and inspection frameworks, fails to recognise the challenges of their working lives. But equally, parents/carers express a view that their humanity and integrity goes unrecognised; that they are judged as inadequate rather than valued for who they are. Such lack of recognition is reflected too in many of the interviews with young people.

In partial response to the issue of recognition, a focus on *relevance* in the educational offer is frequently articulated. Both educational professionals and parents/carers claim the curriculum on offer in many of the schools, and the local pathways for progression are not well matched to the needs and interests of young people in the area. In other words, young people do not feel *recognised by* and do not *recognise themselves within* the putative identities expressed through the educational experiences that surround them. This perspective is confirmed by our interviews with young people themselves.

However, an important disjuncture emerges in propositions about the best remedy for this situation. Educational professionals almost exclusively argue that the curriculum needs to be more focused around vocational, practical and work-based learning, tied in to 14-19 reforms, new employment opportunities in the local area and vocational pathways into higher education. Parents/carers appear more ambivalent about this, sometimes arguing that an over-emphasis on such a vision represents a restrictive and stereotypical view of young people in the constituency and their future lives rather than widening their horizons. This resonates to some extent with the views expressed by young people who are asking both for more creative, expansive and playful learning opportunities, and for greater recognition of their informal and community related learning outside school. Although the current situation (where many young people in the constituency are opting out of education at sixteen to pursue employment or parenting and where professionals note young people becoming more engaged through work-based or vocational curricula) is suggestive that such a set of strategies will make the difference, our research suggests that these alone may not be a sufficient panacea to address the issues of educational engagement, including progression to higher education.

In light of the substantial policy decisions being taken to recast provision in the constituency around vocational and work-based learning, such perspectives from those that the policies are meant to be serving need further exploration through consultation and through negotiation.

Treating people with respect cannot occur simply by commanding it should happen. Mutual recognition has to be negotiated. (Sennett, 2003, p260)

Issues related to information, advice and guidance in Bristol South

One of the specific objectives identified in the original research framework that guided this study was to 'determine the nature of the information, advice and guidance that young people receive with regard to progression to post-16 provision and subsequently higher education' (HEFCE, 2005b). Official assessments of careers focussed information, advice and guidance (IAG) in the six secondary schools and main post-16 provider serving the constituency rate the quality of provision as satisfactory or better. The quality of the local Connexions partnership is also rated highly (OfSTED, 2003).

Of course radical re-organisation in the delivery of IAG is in store with the publication of *Youth Matters* and *Youth Matters: Next Steps* (DfES, 2006). There will be a new set of quality standards for IAG with clear entitlements for all young people and their families. Changes to delivery of IAG through schools and colleges will form a key element of successful delivery of 14-19 curriculum and qualification reform (DfES, 2005).

Developments are already underway in Bristol that reflect the new policy context. The local authority proposes that the Connexions service for the city continues to be provided by Connexions West of England and that its status be changed to a local authority controlled company from September 2007 with a majority vote held by Bristol and the other three local authorities (B&NES, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire) that were previously served by the local Connexions partnership. As a result of a review of IAG across the city in 2002 and as part of the city's current 14-19 strategy, a city-wide web-based guidance and support system - *Plan-it* – has been established, as well as an on-line *Futures4Me* prospectus for all 14-19 courses. Together with Connexions the local authority is piloting a new IAG framework for years 7-9 and an increasing number of schools are using individual learning plans.

In relation to current provision there is widespread recognition amongst educational professionals that the policy of targeting IAG through Connexions on individual young people in priority categories has meant a refocusing of advice on level 2 rather than level 3 provision, with many young people guided into employment and/or training at 16 rather than staying on in post-16 education. The net result for Bristol South, with relatively high numbers of young people in the priority categories, is that much of the Connexions resource has been absorbed by work with young people who have little prospect of progressing to higher education. Whilst some additional resources have been available for work with gifted and talented young people, these students are generally those who would be progressing to higher education with or without intervention. An 'information, advice and guidance gap' is therefore perceived to have opened up for the middle band of young people who have some prospect of achieving 5 A*-C at GCSE and thus of higher education entry if motivated and guided.

In this context schools recognise the value of having other adults who can provide IAG to such students as part of their mentoring role. Many said that the presence of higher education students as tutors and mentors raised awareness of the possibilities and benefits of higher education, as well as encouraging young people to access it – though sustained relationships over time rather than sporadic or one-off connections were seen as having greater potential impact. Links with business mentors were equally seen as having the potential to be a useful resource in terms of IAG for young people. However, there were also some references to concern about schools' capacities to cope with the increasing volume of people coming into the school from a number of sources all aiming to provide 'additional support'. In addition, there was a note of caution expressed about the extent to which external partners as mentors were prepared and informed for an IAG role.

Where careers advice and guidance, including choices for further study, are covered through careers education or PSHE in school there is a concern that many young people find it difficult to transfer that experience into their own individual career planning. Whilst Connexions Personal Advisers (PAs) see a role for themselves in helping to develop the careers curriculum in schools and colleges, they recognise that resources make this difficult. In fact far from being involved in the wider life of the schools, in some of the Bristol South schools Connexions PAs have felt significantly marginalised - not knowing 'who is who' or how best to get their voices heard. This resonates with their current feelings of uncertainty about the future of the service and a degree of cynicism about the ongoing experience of what they called 'living in the swamp'.

In terms of specific IAG about progression into further education and higher education, a number of issues were identified. Staff in some of the 11-16 schools acknowledged that the priority is often the immediate next step i.e. what young people are going to do at 16 rather than looking ahead to higher education and beyond. Staff in college based post-16 provision expressed concern about the need to maintain a fully impartial degree of IAG for young

people choosing post-16 routes, with some belief that individual careers staff in institutions with post-16 provision tend to privilege guidance that encourages the young person to stay on there rather than move elsewhere, despite what may be best for the individual.

Concerns about the costs of going to university were cited by Connexions PAs as growing in prevalence amongst young people and families, and equally, that the provision of Educational Maintenance Allowances were having a positive effect in encouraging young people to stay on post-16. One Connexions PA working in a local sixth form college reported spending more time with young people exploring the financial implications of progression to higher education, including 'budget planning and things like that'. She also referred to an increasing interest in Foundation Degrees 'partly because they are shorter but also because young people are more questioning of whether their degree will prepare them for work'. However, she was the only person we spoke to who mentioned development of such routes in HE.

One Connexions PA identified a need for greater IAG aimed at adults in their early twenties or older that encouraged them to consider higher education. Given the life trajectory of many young people in the constituency who leave school at 16 to go into employment or early parenting, such a 'second chance' approach could be beneficial. Finally, a number of educational professionals and parents/carers raised concerns about the volume of information coming at young people and their families, and whether they were able to mediate or understand it all sufficiently well - especially in light of literacy issues and lack of confidence within families in understanding the education system.

In speaking to young people in one college of further education, they reported variable quality of experience in terms of advice from a Connexions PA in school about progressing into post-16 education. They saw this as depending on the personality of the personal adviser as much as anything, with some reporting a positive relationship where the PA had spent time with them getting to know them and helping them to think through their options and others saying their Connexions PA had only taken a cursory interest and spent little time talking to them. This may also, of course, have reflected the fact that some young people may have been in a priority category in terms of targeted attention by the Connexions Service, and others not. Students who had been at a school with its own sixth form claimed that they had been given no options other than staying on at that school.

Young people in the college of further education also in general felt less clear about the possibility of accessing Connexions support in the college although all felt it would be valuable. Indeed, their lack of clarity about how to access IAG was striking and seemed highly dependent on having a subject tutor that took an interest in them and encouraged them. Where this face-to-face relationship didn't exist there was a lack of confidence about how to seek out appropriate support.

Support in exploring progression to higher education was again very variable amongst the college groups we spoke with - as was their confidence in using ICT to research their options. Where post-19 options had been presented to them, they claimed these were almost exclusively about going to university with a bias towards UWE Bristol. Where they had made a visit to an open day at UWE this had allowed them to pick up specific information about courses at that university but they were unclear about options for pursuing higher education in their own college and most knew nothing about Foundation Degrees, Advanced Modern Apprenticeships or higher level NVQs. Their decisions to enter further education or their plans to progress to higher education were frequently not associated with clear career planning. Their most influential sources of IAG appear to be from family and friends. Where they were considering progression to higher education this was frequently associated with knowing somebody personally who had already made that choice.

In relation to young people in schools and their experience of IAG, many we spoke to had very unclear understanding of the options available to them at various points or felt that what they really wanted to do was not available to them. This resonates in part with a view expressed by staff that young people, even with well-structured careers lessons, often fail to transfer that learning into personal skills and motivation to investigate their own opportunities or interpret these opportunities in terms of their own lives. Where young people were motivated to seek out IAG support, they sometimes felt thwarted in not being able to make contact easily with a Connexions Personal Adviser. This may again have reflected the fact that groups we spoke to were not seen as a priority under current policies.

A sociocultural perspective: implications for action

The rich qualitative evidence in our interview data, triangulated with our analysis of the ‘You and Your Future’ survey, allow us to understand with greater confidence the complex sociocultural processes within the constituency by which young people’s learning identities and trajectories are created and consolidated over time. By listening closely to young people’s voices we can begin to understand more fully *from within the cultural milieu* the relational and interactive issues that impact on the formation of their learner identities and learning trajectories.

This allows us to answer two key questions.

1. What are the cultural, interactive and relational processes that operate to create, sustain or disrupt educational engagement and disengagement for young people in the constituency?
2. In understanding these processes better, what are the implications for actions, including actions specifically related to encouraging progression to higher education?

Figure 6.3 and Figure 6.4 (as numbered in the full report) summarise the dynamic nature of these processes. Figure 6.2 foregrounds that whilst conditions located outside the direct influence of schools impact on young people’s orientations to education, a powerful interactive and relational dynamic operates within schools that sustains the cycle of disengagement. All participants - young people, parents/carers and educational professionals are part of this dynamic. At the heart of the vortex of educational disengagement and underachievement, though by no means the simple or singular ‘cause’ of the dynamic, are deficit beliefs held by some educational professionals about young people, their families and communities. These beliefs are often unconscious and implicit, and are reinforced by the ongoing experiences of working in these schools. However, even without such underlying ontological assumptions, the dynamic of disengagement can mean professionals adopting practices that reinforce negative outcomes. Most surprisingly, we found evidence that even professionals who attempt to ‘care for’ the young people, and who genuinely believe that they have students’ best interests at heart, may find their interventions reinforce long term failure.

Evidence from our study demonstrates how disengaged learning identities, or a particular ‘habitus’, are consolidated for many young people by their experience of schooling, where experiences of violence, humiliation and shame reinforce a sense of worthlessness, and where disengagement and/or disaffection represents in part a strategy for the protection of self-worth¹⁰. Intersecting with their experiences within family and community contexts we begin

¹⁰ Habitus is ‘that system of dispositions which acts as a mediation between structures and practice’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p487) i.e. habitus refers to the interplay between people’s values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and the social, economic and cultural context within which they live.

to see how relatively restricted 'horizons for action' are shaped and reinforced over time. Whilst individual young people are able to resist the inscription of such learning identities and to 'escape' foreshadowed learning trajectories, this has only been possible for the determined few and does not provide a model of engagement that can reach out and empower the majority.

Figure 6.3, by contrast, attempts to capture the generative possibilities of disrupting the cycle of disengagement and disaffection during the years of secondary schooling. We acknowledge that this cannot be achieved without the development of counter-influencing factors - some of which extend beyond the remit or resources of individual schools. At the heart of this new dynamic reside positive beliefs by educational professionals about young people, their families and communities based on *respect*. Such respect finds expression through mutuality, dialogue, recognition and a commitment to empowerment. Rather than suggesting an idealised nirvana where all challenges and tensions in recruiting young people into learning miraculously melt away - this representation tries to articulate the interactive and relational practices that have the potential to work with and transform the experience of schooling *in the direction of* school improvement.

In particular, the approaches suggested here have been identified by young people, parents/carers and educational professionals as having the potential to enhance young people's enjoyment of school, empower them with a greater sense of *agency* in their own learning and build parental confidence to provide their children with ongoing support and encouragement. All three of these conditions are strongly associated with young people developing a learning identity where they want to stay in education at sixteen and have positive attitudes to higher education. They are also closely associated with young people achieving success at level 2 by the age of sixteen and thereby being set on a trajectory that facilitates their progression into higher education.

Such strategies to enhance enjoyable engagement are seen in partial form in some parts of the constituency and in some aspects of practice within all schools. For example, a number of these approaches – especially those that a) prioritise respectful dialogue with young people and their families over the experience of schooling and b) focus on the quality of student learning – characterise recent improvements at Hengrove Community Arts College and have had significant impact as the school has made its way out of 'special measures' (OfSTED, 2006b). There are a number of committed teachers and school leaders across the constituency working extremely hard to sustain such orientations to learning.

We do not mean to suggest that a simple model of school improvement, reduced to a single flow diagram, will easily transform educational outcomes for all young people in the constituency. Indeed, the inter-relationship of sociocultural factors operating between school, home and the wider community makes the transformation of learning cultures and identities extremely difficult to attain. As part of this we recognise the urgent need for more context specific approaches to school improvement in disadvantaged contexts similar to Bristol South (Lupton, 2004). This in turn requires greater understanding from an ethnographic standpoint of the cultural meanings and dynamics operating in such settings (Evans, 2006). Whilst some studies have been done that address the connections between classroom interaction and identity formation (Stables, 2003) and others have looked at the impact of a variety of contextual factors and resources on students' classroom identities (Pollard and Filer, 2005), there are few studies of the interactive contexts that sustain or transform the learning identities and trajectories for young people within classrooms such as those in the Bristol South schools.

Though we feel that this study goes somewhat towards addressing these issues, there is more research work to be done that might inform and support the development of practice.

Evaluating Interventions

In investigating ‘examples of good practice in reaching out and engaging young people in post-16 and higher education provision’ (HEFCE, 2005b) it is hard to disentangle verifiable evidence of good practice from rhetorical claims and aspirational future plans. Indeed, a feature of educational interventions in Bristol South, as in other areas with entrenched underachievement, is a tendency to seek out new ‘solutions’ without fully evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of existing strategies or the evidence base for the benefits of proposed changes. However, based on the evidence in this study we have suggested a set of criteria for *evaluating the potential* of existing and planned interventions to increase educational engagement including young participation in higher education in Bristol South (Table 6.6 as numbered in the full report).

This evaluative framework foregrounds two key issues: firstly, the importance of developing *systemic interventions* that address the dynamics of educational engagement and disengagement at each and every level; and secondly the significance of establishing *respectful and relational practices* that have the potential to transform learning cultures and to enhance emergent learning identities and trajectories. This then establishes an enlarged agenda for the role of higher education in support of such change.

In our final chapter we focus on ten interventions within the constituency that illustrate *inter alia* specific contributions from the higher education sector to improving the engagement of young people in learning and in particular encouraging their participation in higher education. In each instance, we address three questions.

- a) What is the intervention and what specific contribution does higher education make?
- b) How does the intervention line up against the suggested evaluative criteria?
- c) What evidence is there, if any, of positive impact of the intervention in engaging young people in learning across the constituency and in particular encouraging their progression to higher education?

The ten interventions considered are:

1. ABLAZE (A Business and Learning Action Zone for Education)
2. ASDAN
3. *Aimhigher*
4. Gifted and Talented Activities
5. Knowle West Media Centre
6. Success @ Excellence in Cities Action Zone (in particular the Critical Skills Programme and the Family and Schools Together Team)
7. Hartcliffe Education Campus¹¹
8. Merchants’ Academy Withywood
9. Oasis Academy Bristol
10. South Bristol Skills Academy¹²

We also consider two other associated developments which have implications for enhancing progression to higher education for young people in Bristol South: the Western Vocational Lifelong Learning Network; and strategies to enhance the quality of the student experience in higher education.

¹¹ Working title

¹² Working title

In conclusion, we would argue that the evaluative framework we have developed provides a valuable and illuminating tool for testing out the concept of ‘good practice’. Drawing upon other evaluative evidence compliments the use of the framework, although such evidence is rather limited particularly in relation to ABLAZE, but also *Aimhigher* and *Gifted and Talented* activities in the constituency. Where such evaluation exists, it often fails to look at impact over time, appears to be based on questionable quantitative analysis, does not disaggregate the impact on learners in Bristol South, or is not independent. The value of our proposed evaluative framework is that it allows us to consider *in advance* the likely success of planned interventions, and to highlight aspects in current or planned interventions that may benefit from greater consideration or more explicit attention in order to maximise success.

From our analysis of the ten interventions it is possible to identify a certain clustering of attributes. The first four interventions (ABLAZE, ASDAN, *Aimhigher*, Gifted and Talented Activities) are what one might call *programmatic interventions* i.e. ones that focus on specific tools or programmes to encourage engagement, participation and progression. Each has something important to offer, but they necessarily are rather limited in their reach.

The final four planned interventions (Hartcliffe Education Campus, Merchants’ Academy, Oasis Academy, South Bristol Skills Academy) are what one might call *systemic interventions* i.e. ones that focus on systemic change at the level of whole organisations and their practices, subsuming programmatic approaches as useful tools en route, but in particular aligning new forms of extended partnership across school, college, university, local authority, business and the community in support of engagement, participation and progression. These have the potential to have far greater impact but they are as yet untested – at least in the context of Bristol South. Our analysis of each, by use of the evaluative framework, suggests their likely success, as well as indicating areas that may benefit from further attention. Indeed, the constituency currently may be characterised as an experimental test-bed for almost all new major systemic interventions for improving engagement. Whatever happens, we would strongly recommend an ongoing programme of research to evaluate these new developments.

An alternative way to cluster these interventions would be around the extent to which they arise from and evidence respect for communities – valuing existing community funds of knowledge and current forms of social capital – as a starting point for building individual and collective ‘agency’ through social action and educational change. Knowle West Media Centre and the Success@ EiC Action Zone, in particular through the work of the Family and Schools Together (FAST) team but also through the orientation of the Critical Skills Programme, are good examples of this - as to some extent is the work of ASDAN. These we might refer to as *agentic interventions*. None of them have attracted the resources associated with the new systemic engagement activities, they have had limited reach and they have not had progression to higher education as their key purpose – but evidence from our research suggests agentic interventions may offer some important insights into the context-for-action that might empower people within the constituency to engage in the kind of ‘identity projects’ associated with a capacity for lifelong learning (Biesta and Tedder, 2006).

Finally, it is worth acknowledging that the policy landscape impacting on educational engagement in Bristol South continues to change, and even since the inception of this research, the context has shifted considerably. In particular, the Leitch Review of Skills (H M Treasury, 2006) means that widening participation in the future will be more closely associated with the provision of vocational and work-based higher education targeted through the skills and employment agenda, rather than through social inclusion of under-represented groups as such. It also shifts the focus significantly from young participation in higher education, towards higher education for the adult working population. This will be highly relevant in areas such as Bristol South where one might assume the continuation of more extended timescales for gaining level 2 and level 3 qualifications in the first instance, and a tendency to choose employment or early parenthood as an initial pathway into adulthood.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of this research project has been to establish in-depth and situated insights into the particular processes that underpin the low rates of participation of young people in higher education in Bristol South parliamentary constituency.

By adopting a sociocultural approach we have provided a rich and complex picture of the processes involved. Educational outcomes in the constituency reflect the dynamic interplay of cultural, social and economic factors across space and time. These interactive processes are implicated in the formation of learning cultures, identities and trajectories in the constituency. A detailed body of evidence has allowed the development of a well-grounded evaluative framework. This framework is offered as a formative tool that might aid in the development of current and planned interventions aimed at enhancing educational engagement, including those designed to encourage progression to higher education. In particular, we argue for the establishment of *respectful* and *relational practices* as the basis for improving educational engagement.

In conclusion, the research presents a case for higher education institutions to embed their support for widening participation and school improvement directly within the educational provision for Bristol South and to promote situated forms of action, based on a sound understanding of the local area. This, amongst other things, speaks of a different relationship and new forms of partnership between schools, the local authority, further education, higher education, business - and young people, their families and the wider community.

Going forward, the priority...for institutions...is to move progressively beyond isolated widening participation interventions to a planned programme, integrated with the activities of the wider learning community of schools and colleges. (HEFCE, 2006, p4)

We hope that this study goes some way towards providing the in-depth understanding that will be necessary to facilitate such a process of change.

As a consequence of this study, we advise that **further research** be undertaken in the constituency on the following agendas.

1. The relationship between gender identities, cultures and educational outcomes, especially in relation to the underachievement of girls.
2. Parental perspectives on educational engagement, for themselves and for their children – and the development of innovative strategies to support their engagement.
3. An ethnographic account of the interactive contexts that sustain or transform learning identities and trajectories for young people in Bristol South.
4. The impact of new *systemic* interventions on engagement and progression, their relationship to each other, and their relationship to *programmatic* and *agentic* interventions.
5. A longitudinal study of a cohort of young people from Bristol South, from primary school into early adulthood.
6. A comparative study of issues of educational engagement in other white working class areas of Bristol, or elsewhere.

Recommendations

1. Promote a sociocultural understanding of the dynamic development of learning cultures, identities and trajectories in Bristol South.
2. Develop a set of *respectful and relational practices* for enhancing the educational engagement of young people and their families.
3. Challenge deficit beliefs and encourage dialogue with young people, their families and communities about the means by which educational engagement may be improved.
4. Build ‘agency’ in the learning process as a priority for all learners - including at points of transition, at critical periods where disengagement occurs and in relation to ‘information, advice and guidance’.
5. Explore new ways of engaging with parents and carers, and of enabling them to engage with their children’s learning.
6. Recognise the powerful emotional, social and relational dimensions to experience that impact on the learning identities of young people in Bristol South, and adapt learning environments - including those in FE and HE - in response.
7. Acknowledge the significance of all forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) to the lives and learning pathways of young people in Bristol South – and promote financial support for learning, links to wider employment opportunities, access to new technologies, expanded pathways to qualification and enhanced social networks.
8. Raise awareness of re-conceptualised and diversified forms of higher education, including higher education in further education colleges, work-based learning and Foundation Degrees, and mature entry.
9. Utilise the evaluative framework (Table 6.6) devised out of this research to develop effective *programmatic*, *systemic* and *agentic* interventions¹³.
10. Improve data to facilitate analysis of progression routes and educational outcomes for individual young people aged 16-24 in the constituency.

¹³ *Programmatic interventions* focus on specific tools or programmes to encourage engagement, participation and progression; *systemic interventions* focus on change at the level of whole organisations and their practices, but in particular aligning new forms of partnership in support of engagement, participation and progression; *agentic interventions* value community funds of knowledge and current forms of social capital in building individual and collective ‘agency’ through social action and educational change.

Figure 6.2 The Dynamics of Educational Disengagement in Bristol South Secondary Schools: **Feeding the Cycle**

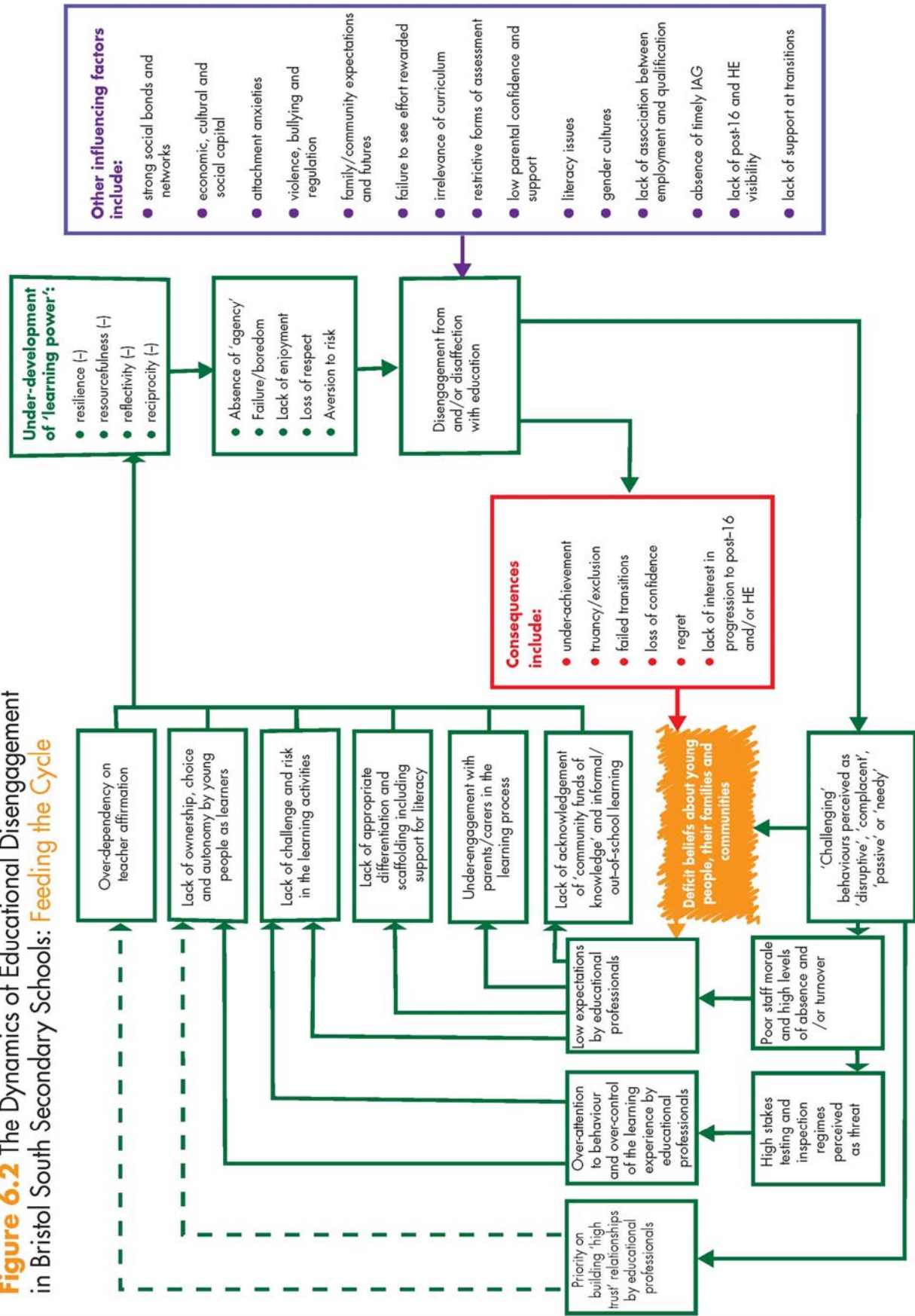


Figure 6.3 The Dynamics of Educational Engagement in Bristol South Secondary Schools: *Breaking the Cycle*

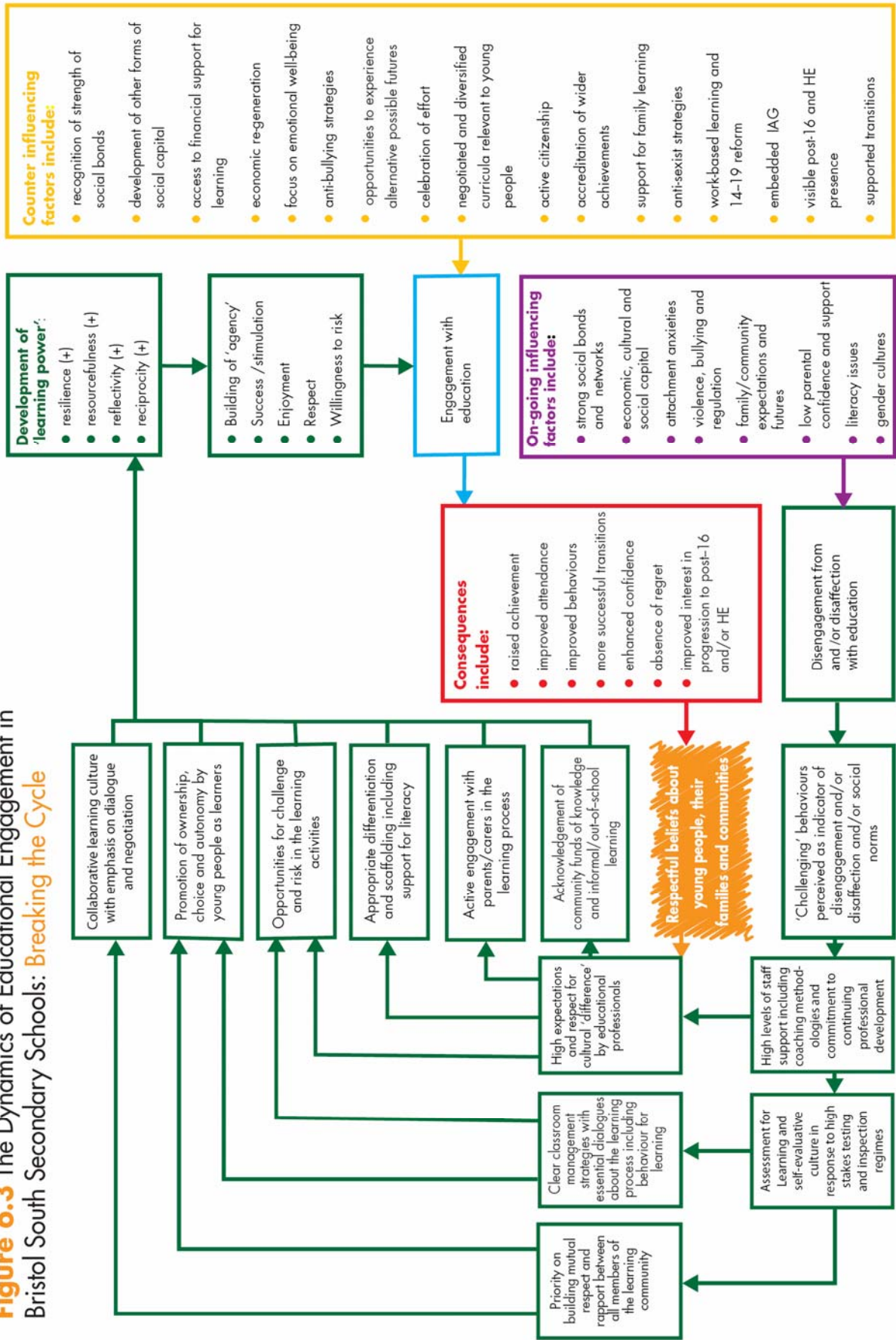


Table 6.6: Criteria for Evaluating the Potential of Existing and Planned Interventions to Increase Educational Engagement including Young Participation in Higher Education in Bristol South

Successful interventions will:

1. recognise that one size will not fit all as there are different needs and motivations within different parts of the constituency, between different groups of young people and at different stages of their lives;
2. communicate high expectations and belief in young people's capacity to achieve in every aspect of their educational experience, and challenge preconceptions based on restrictive gender and class stereotypes;
3. promote as a priority the creation of dialogic contexts for learning and listen to, engage with and learn from the voice of young people and their families and communities, modelling respect and empowerment;
4. reach out to parents/carers of young people, aiding them to raise their own educational expectations, confidence and skills, and engage them proactively as partners in their children's education;
5. build on community funds of knowledge, recognise the significance of informal and out-of-school learning, and develop a culture of active citizenship through education;
6. develop positive and stable relationships as the basis for effective learning including attention to emotional literacy, and aspects of attachment and affect;
7. develop a sense of enjoyment, 'agency' and active ownership in the learning process including through negotiated and personalised elements of the curriculum, use of new technologies as a tool for learning, and interactive pedagogies;
8. develop 'assessment for learning' so that young people know how to improve, and use assessment practices that reward participation and key skills development as much as acquisition of subject knowledge;
9. develop learning dispositions and strategies to build 'learning power' and enhance young people's capacity to face learning challenges and risks;
10. support literacy and numeracy development for young people and adults, engaging them through social and personal identity projects not just technical and functional skills development;
11. enhance the development of decision-making skills and enable access to high quality and well-informed IAG available in various ways and at various times to best fit a variety of needs;
12. target interventions at critical points where disengagement occurs e.g. between years 8 and 9, and enhance social, emotional and study skills support for young people at key points of transition;
13. recognise the significance of social bonds and networks, acknowledge the importance of relational rather than individual learning to young people and adapt the learning opportunities in FE and HE in recognition;
14. increase opportunities for choice in educational pathways, including creative and kinaesthetic opportunities, high quality academic and vocational programmes and multiple points for re-entry to learning;
15. connect vocational and work-based learning to aspirational futures, including new employment possibilities and vocational programmes in higher education, Foundation Degrees, and HE in FE;
16. locate a wider choice of academic and vocational learning opportunities at every level within the constituency, housed in quality buildings;
17. provide a range of opportunities to experience positive learning situations outside the locality, raising awareness of alternative possibilities;
18. promote positive role models, including from within the community, who build sustaining relationships and enhance linking and bridging forms of social capital;
19. align educational, community and business interests in extended forms of partnership in support of educational improvement, including a visible presence for FE and HE in the constituency;
20. ensure clear access to all forms of financial support for learning;
21. provide professional development support for staff in schools and colleges that builds their capacity as reflective and extended practitioners to meet the challenges.

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In addition to this Research Summary, the following material is available:

- Executive Summary (9 pages)
- Full Report (338 pages plus Appendices)
- A short film from Knowle West Media Centre

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