

The Participation of 16-19 Year Olds in Education and Training: Recent Trends

by Paula Surridge and David Raffe

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Since the mid 1980s there have been significant changes in the education, training and labour-market experiences of young people in Scotland. This *Briefing* summarises these changes for the 16-19 age group. It presents the first analyses of the four cohorts of the Scottish Young People's Survey covering the period 1985-1993.

- **More** young people have stayed on to fifth year (S5) of secondary school, and/or entered full-time further education (FE). Participation in sixth year (S6) and in full-time higher education (HE) has increased even faster. The proportion of 19 year olds in HE nearly doubled between 1987 and 1993, from 16% to 31%.
- **The** proportion of 19 year olds in full-time employment fell from almost 60% in 1989 to a little over 40% in 1993. However unemployment remained relatively constant at around 12% of the age group.
- **Sixteen** year olds with the highest qualifications are most likely to continue in full-time education. However, staying-on rates have risen fastest among the lowest qualified.
- **The** higher attainments and more advantaged family backgrounds of 16 year olds explain only a fraction of the growth in participation. Changes in the labour market and in higher education have increased the incentives to stay on and reduced the incentives to leave.
- **A** constant proportion of the age group (and therefore a declining proportion of all HE entrants) has entered HE directly from S5. There has been a sharp rise in the proportions entering HE from S6, or indirectly *via* FE.
- **Although** stayers-on at 16 have become more numerous and more heterogeneous, more have aspired to and entered HE. The new Higher Still courses will need to satisfy these aspirations while at the same time providing pathways into employment and occupational training.

Background

Changes in participation among 16-19 year olds are transforming Scottish education. The larger number and greater diversity of students are changing the character of post-16 study and are stimulating changes in policy and practice. The most significant of these, Higher Still, will introduce a unified system of curriculum and assessment in 1997.

The growth in participation has been documented by official statistics. However we can understand these changes more completely by observing the education, training and labour market experiences of whole age groups. This allows us to contrast those who continue in education with those who leave, and to compare the participation rates of different groups of young people.

The cohort arm of the Scottish Young People's Survey (SYPS) surveyed year groups, from all secondary schools in Scotland, in the spring following the end of S4 (at age 16-plus), and again 30 months later at about 19 years. This Briefing describes trends across the four SYPS cohorts, first contacted at 16-plus in spring 1985, 1987, 1989 and 1991 respectively, and followed up in autumn 1987, 1989, 1991 and 1993 respectively. We refer to them as cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4. The data are based on young people's own reports of their full-time status.

Participation at 16-plus

**Figure 1:
Status at 16-plus, 1985-1991**

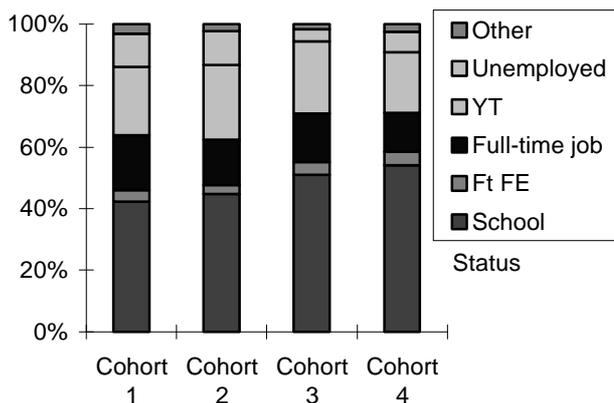


Figure 1 shows each cohort at 16-plus, when virtually all cohort members had completed compulsory education. The proportion who had stayed on in full-time education, excluding winter leavers, rose from 46% of cohort 1 to 58% of cohort 4. Most of these (42% and 54% respectively) were still at school, in S5; the others were in FE. This increase was offset by a decline in the proportion in the labour market, especially in full-time employment or unemployment. The decline in unemployment among 16 year olds may be explained, in

part, by the change in the benefit system in 1988 effectively ruling out 'unemployment' as an option for the under 18's.

Participation at 19

**Figure 2:
Status at 19-plus, 1987-1993**

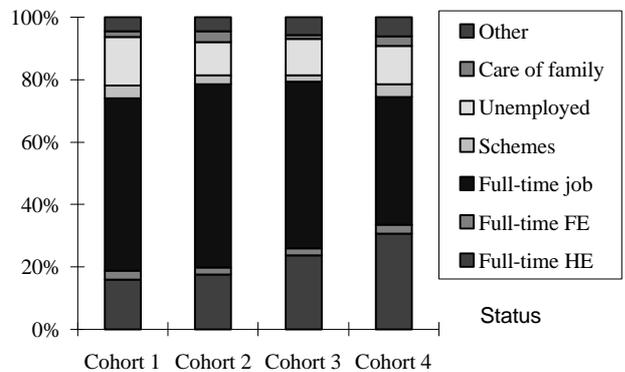
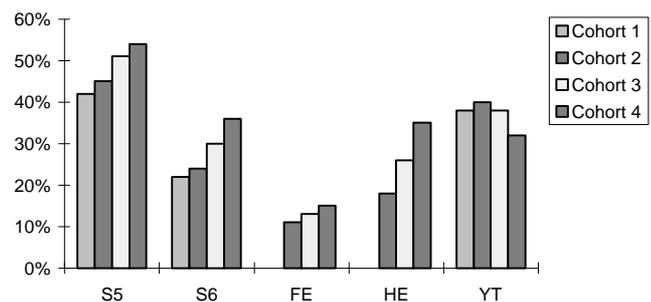


Figure 2 shows each cohort at 19 years. By this stage most people still in full-time education were in HE. Participation in HE nearly doubled between cohort 1 (16%) and cohort 4 (31%). At the same time the proportion of 19 year olds in full-time employment fell from 59% to 41%. The proportion unemployed remained relatively stable at around 12%.

Routes between 16 and 19

**Figure 3:
Percentage of cohort entering
each full-time route**



We identified five full-time routes through post-compulsory education and training: S5 (excluding winter leavers), S6, FE, HE and Youth Training (YT). SYPS sample members completed a retrospective 'diary' stating what they had been doing at 6-monthly time points since the end of S4. Figure 3 shows the proportion who had been on each route at any of these time points. (Data for FE and HE are not shown for cohort 1, as their 6-monthly 'diary' did not distinguish between further and higher education.) Figure 3 shows increased participation in all the 'academic' routes (S5, S6, and HE), and a small decline, mainly in cohort 4, in entry to YT.

Table 1
Percentages of attainment, gender and social class groups entering full-time routes

Cohort	S5				S6				FE			HE			YT			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
S4 Attainment																		
Low	8	13	19	22	2	5	9	13	7	12	16	1	5	10	56	59	57	53
Medium	39	40	43	48	14	16	16	22	17	19	23	7	10	19	43	48	46	39
High	85	86	89	91	54	55	64	72	10	9	8	49	62	74	11	12	11	7
Gender																		
Male	39	41	46	48	20	21	28	34	8	10	12	18	25	33	41	45	41	36
Female	46	49	56	60	24	26	32	39	15	17	19	18	28	37	34	35	34	29
Father's Social Class																		
Non-manual	69	68	74	76	41	42	49	55	13	14	12	36	48	58	22	23	22	17
Manual	33	35	38	41	15	16	19	25	11	13	17	10	15	20	43	47	46	43

Changing participation

Figures 1-3 tell a clear story. Participation increased in all types of full-time education. This increase was most marked in HE where participation almost doubled between cohort 1 and cohort 4. The next most rapid increase occurred in S6, followed by S5 and FE which showed only a moderate increase. Higher participation in full-time education was offset by a decline in the proportion of young people in the labour market. Participation on YT remained fairly stable over the first three cohorts but fell back among cohort 4, in the early 1990s.

Why participation has risen

The current *Oxford Review of Education* publishes an analysis of participation in full-time education at 16-plus across the four cohorts. Only one third of the increase in participation could be explained by 'compositional' factors, that is, by the increasing proportion of 16 year-olds with high O/S grade attainments or social characteristics associated with staying on. Changes in the labour market, and in HE, have weakened the 'pull' of young people out of education at 16 and increased the incentives to stay on.

Differing participation rates

Table 1 shows how participation rates on each of the five full-time routes varied according to young people's educational attainment, gender and social class. It shows the percentage in each subgroup who entered the route in question: for example, 39% of males in cohort 1 entered S5 compared with 46% of females.

The table divides young people into low, medium and high attainment groups, based on the number of O/S grades at level A-C/1-3 in S4: none, one to four, and five or more respectively. The routes followed by young

people were strongly related to S4 attainment. In each cohort, the high attainment group had by far the highest participation in S5, S6 and HE; the medium attainment group was the most likely to enter FE, and the low attainment group the most likely to enter YT. However the low attainment group had the fastest increase in participation in each of the four 'educational' routes: S5, S6, FE and even HE. As a result the routes followed by young people have become slightly less dependent on fourth-year qualifications than previously.

Females had higher rates of participation in all of the educational routes, whilst males were more likely to participate in YT. These differences remained relatively constant; gender gaps persisted despite increases in the overall levels of participation.

Participation increased among young people from both working class (manual) and middle class (non-manual) backgrounds, but significant differences remained.

Combinations of routes

The routes shown in Figure 3 are not mutually exclusive. We examined the differing combinations of routes taken by young people between 16 and 19 years. The 'YT only' combination was the most common among cohorts 2 and 3: 31% and 27% respectively left school after S4 (or winter S5) and entered YT, with no other full-time education by 19 years. By cohort 4 this proportion had declined to 23%, and the leading combination of routes was the academic pathway which led from S5 to S6 to HE, which had risen from 12% of cohort 2 to 26% of cohort 4. By contrast, the proportion of young people leaving full-time education and training after S6 (the S5 + S6 combination), fell from 8% to 5%. Not only has participation in S5 and (especially) S6 risen, but they are increasingly used as staging posts to continued full-time education, rather than terminal stages of education.

Figure 3 (above) showed that the total proportion entering HE rose from 18% of cohort 2 to 35% of cohort 4. The 'royal road' via S5 and S6 remained the principal means of access to HE. The proportion of each cohort entering HE after S5 remained relatively stable, at around 5%, and this pathway into HE became proportionately less important as total entry increased. However the 'FE route' to HE, although small, grew in significance; if we add up all the combinations of routes which include 'FE + HE' we find that the FE route to HE rose from 1% of cohort 2 to nearly 4% of cohort 4.

Where the routes lead - by 19 years

We also looked at the 'destinations' at age 19 of young people who had entered each route. This confirmed that S5 and S6 have increasingly led to continued full-time education, and especially to HE. The proportion of former S5 stayers who were in HE at age 19 rose from 37% in cohort 1 to 56% in cohort 4. Similarly, the proportion of former S6 pupils in HE at age 19 rose from 55% in cohort 1 to 71% in cohort 4. Young people who had been on YT were the most likely to be in full-time employment at age 19; they were also the most likely to be unemployed. However comparisons between routes are affected by the differences between the types of young people who entered each route.

Implications for Higher Still

Our data confirm that the new Higher Still courses will need to cater for young people with more diverse backgrounds and abilities. Staying-on rates have risen fastest among the least qualified 16 year olds, and this trend should continue if Higher Still fulfills its promise to offer 'Opportunity for All'.

However our data also reveal a paradox: despite the larger numbers and greater diversity of S5 and S6 students, more of them have - so far - been heading for further full-time education, and especially for HE. One of the biggest challenges for Higher Still will be to satisfy the needs and aspirations of those aiming for university, while also providing worthwhile routes into employment and occupational training.

Further Details

For further details contact Paula Surridge, Centre for Educational Sociology, Tel 0131 650 4200/4186, E-mail P.Surridge@ed.ac.uk. The views expressed are those of the authors.

About the Study

The trends data in this report are constructed by comparing four cohorts of the SYPS, with first contact dates (and sample sizes) being 1985 (4012), 1987 (4106), 1989 (3727) and 1991 (3174). This work forms part of an on-going programme of research using the SYPS to study the education, training and labour market experiences of young people in Scotland. The support of the UK Economic and Social Research Council (C00 28 004) is gratefully acknowledged. The main SYPS cohort series was funded by the Scottish Office (Education and Industry Departments) and the Employment Department. The 1993 autumn sweep was funded by the ESRC with additional support from BP.

Related CES publications include:

Paterson, L J and Raffe, D (1995) "'Staying on" in full-time education in Scotland, 1985-1991', *Oxford Review of Education* 21 (1), pp 3-23.

Raffe, D (1995) *One System at 16-plus Years*, ACE Briefing No 4 (Poole: BP Educational Service).

Raffe, D and Surridge, P (1995) *The Rising Participation of 16-18 Year Olds in Full-Time Education*, NCE Briefing (New Series) No 6 (London: National Commission on Education), May 1995.

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