

‘What influences vocational choices’

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This research investigated the factors influencing young people’s decisions to pursue post-16 and post-18 vocational courses of study at on Greater Merseyside. Specifically it explores who and what influences young people and why and how their decisions are influenced, and assesses the effect of interventions to support vocational progression routes such as Aimhigher projects. The study further explores young people’s process of decision making, their educational identities, perceptions and awareness of vocational courses and awareness of progression opportunities. The research used a mixed methods approach, which included a literature review of key factors influencing young people’s decisions on progression, a questionnaire survey with 400+ post16 students, focus group discussions with students and staff interviews.

The research finds that young people do not have a developed notion of the academic-vocational dichotomy, especially pre-16. Rather, their views about what and where to progress to after compulsory education are formed incrementally. They are strongly influences by family members, teachers/tutors and friends in their post-16 decision making. Family members have the greatest impact, but they often do not have relevant educational experience to draw on, and the knowledge of teaching staff may not be contemporary or accurate.

It is therefore pertinent to consider how partnerships work with key “influencers” to support young people to progress into further and higher education. For example, teaching staff would benefit from staff development to ensure their knowledge is up to date and comprehensive.

Specific vocational activities and IAG are beneficial, but they only have a limited effect. There is evidence however that more IAG about vocational progression routes and flexible HE options is required. For example, apprentices and work-based learning students have fewer opportunities for campus visits – partly due to lack of time and priority, and also because they may regard themselves as employees rather than students.

Research Report

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Research Report by Angela Daly and Liz Thomas submitted to Aimhigher Greater Merseyside, 8th January 2008

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http://www.ahgtm.ac.uk/uploads/documents/feb_08/aim_1202207929_research_spring08web.pdf